

**Speaking Back: Queerness, Temporality, and
the Irish Voice in America**

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DECLARATION

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SUMMARY

This thesis examines the intersections of Irishness and queerness in the work of five contemporary American writers and cultural figures: Alice McDermott, James McCourt, Peggy Shaw, Eileen Myles, and Stephanie Grant. Despite the wealth of critical scholarship in the areas of Irish-American literature and culture, the queer Irish voice in America remains almost entirely neglected. The thesis argues against the mutual trends in Irish-American and gay and lesbian cultural, social, and historical discourses that centralise “progressive” narratives in terms of socio-economic and legal advances. In so doing, the project privileges the bilateral backward glance in the writing of queer scholars such as Heather Love, José Esteban Muñoz, Elizabeth Freeman, Benjamin Kahan, Jack Halberstam, Judith Butler, and David L. Eng, and in the critical interventions of Irish and Irish-American critics who challenge the truncated “success” story of the Irish in America. The authors in this thesis speak back to an oppressive present by feeling backward toward the past as a means through which to trace alternative routes for the future.

Firstly, the introduction maps out the contentious cultural geographies and queer exclusions performed at the St Patrick’s Day parades in New York and Boston, presenting the conflict as an attempt on the part of the Irish queer organisations to write non-normative sexual identities into the narrative of Irish-American identity. The impossibility of Irish queerness on the streets has been by and large matched in the literary and cultural archives. This gap in scholarship is addressed in the introduction, and the thesis is presented as a step towards including queerness as a mode of reading Irish-American texts. Crucially, the trope of backwardness is utilised as a key reading strategy that opens up alternative ways of interpreting representations of Irishness in America.

Reading Alice McDermott’s Irish-American historical fiction, with a particular focus on her 2013 novel, *Someone*, chapter one coactivates discussions around the bachelor and spinster in both queer and Irish studies, examining the ways in which the histories emerging from each have overlapped and have been intimately intertwined. While the queer potentialities of the bachelor and spinster are numerous, McDermott’s handling of the figures produces lace-curtain veiled characters left lurking behind windows or in the folds of the heteronormative family cell, sexless and left behind. Chapter two explores the themes of orality and Irish storytelling in James McCourt’s third book of prose, *Time Remaining* (1993). Written at the height of the AIDS crisis in the

United States, McCourt's narrative meditates on the issues of memory and mourning in the wake of the epidemic, and storytelling becomes a crucial strategy of memorialisation.

Chapter three of the thesis examines the queer performance work of Peggy Shaw. Drawing on Jack Halberstam's notion of "female masculinity," José Esteban Muñoz's theoretical concept of "disidentification," and Elizabeth Freeman's work on "temporal drag," this chapter discusses Shaw's staging of Irish-American lesbian gender. In her 1994 solo production, *You're Just Like My Father*, Shaw both invokes and torques the historical and cultural iconography of the "Fighting Irish," challenging the gender, sexual, and ethnic assumptions undergirding that image. Applying the psychoanalytic phenomenon of melancholia, Freud's premier theory of loss, chapter four examines the ways in which Eileen Myles's autobiographical fiction represents twentieth-century working-class Irish-American ethnicity as an identity profoundly structured by loss and mourning. Myles's construction of Irish diasporic and cultural identity in their writing traverses the spatial, ideal, and bodily remains of histories of loss, and produces, in emotional and imaginative forms, the obsessive refusal to leave the dead behind.

Reading Stephanie Grant's 2008 novel, *Map of Ireland*, an imaginative return to the scenes of Boston's 1974 school desegregation plan, the final chapter illuminates the ways in which the legacies of Irish racialisation and Irish-black relations in the United States since at least the mid nineteenth century are intimately bound up in shifting discourses of gender and sexuality. The chapter sets out to ask the contentious question of whether lesbian subjectivity and same-sex desire in particular can provide the radical potential to challenge ideologies of white supremacy and whether queerness has the power to redraw lines of solidarity in the history of Irish-Black relations. Finally, the conclusion simultaneously takes a backward glance at the discussion in the thesis and looks forward to future cultural engagements with the intersections of queerness and Irish-American identity. With increasingly neoliberal strategies of kinship becoming the political goals of gay and lesbian groups, queer backwardness remains a crucial tool with which to challenge the straight temporalities of the present and future. The conclusion suggests additional routes along which to trace articulations of queer Irish-American identity in literature and culture, pointing to future projects that would do well to feel backward in order to forge ahead.

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INTRODUCTION

Backwards March

Queering Irish America, In the Archives

By way of opening his discussion on the rewards of rescuing Irish queer cultural forms from obscurity in “Queering Ireland, In the Archives,” Ed Madden borrows a powerful claim from Irish writer Emma Donoghue that appeared in her seminal 1995 essay, “Noises from the Woodshed: Tales of Irish Lesbians, 1886-1989” from *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland*. In that latter piece, Donoghue writes that “[s]crabbling around in libraries for glimpses of our history and literary heritage is just as important as the more obvious kinds of activism.”¹ In his own essay, Madden describes his selected archive as one that is “textually driven” towards literary artefacts (as opposed to ephemeral items equally vital in accounting for queer experience in the archives).² Likewise, this thesis is a textually-driven endeavour to explore and recover a queer Irish-American literary and cultural archive that has been until now largely overlooked in the study of Irish-American cultural production. “Rooted in the eighteenth century, proliferating in the nineteenth, and flourishing in the twentieth,” Charles Fanning writes in the opening to his canon-defining volume, *The Irish Voice in America*, “Irish-American literature is one of the oldest and largest bodies of ethnic writing produced by members and descendants of a single American immigrant group.”³ Despite such a prolific output, met with equally abundant critical examination in at least the last three decades, representations of queerness in Irish-American literature have been largely ignored by critics.

It was not until 2000, in the second edition of his book, when Fanning introduced Eileen Myles as the only explicitly queer-identified cultural figure among the rich collection of authors examined in *The Irish Voice in America*.⁴ Writing in 2008, in her introduction to the critical volume of essays on Irish-American women’s writing, *Too Smart to Be Sentimental*, Sally Barr Ebest proclaimed that “Irish Americans would be hard-pressed to

¹ Emma Donoghue, “Noises from the Woodsheds: Tales of Irish Lesbians, 1886-1989,” in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Íde O’Carroll and Eoin Collins (London: Cassell, 1995), 169.

² Ed Madden, “Queering Ireland, In the Archives,” *Irish University Review* 43, no. 1 (2013): 184.

³ Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 382-83.

name even one Irish-American writer who has explored lesbian themes in her work.”⁵ Ebest’s more recent book, *The Banshees: A Literary History of Irish American Women Writers* (2013), attempts to break new ground as the first serious review of lesbian fiction in the Irish-American literary canon. *The Banshees*, however, while providing a useful socio-historical framework in which to position Irish-American (queer) women’s fiction, is more an index than a close reading of the authors represented therein.⁶ Focusing on the work of five writers, namely Alice McDermott, James McCourt, Peggy Shaw, Eileen Myles, and Stephanie Grant, this thesis provides the first comprehensive consideration of the intersections of queerness and Irishness in American literature.

Born in the years just before and after the middle of the twentieth century, each of the cultural figures featured in the thesis came of age and began a creative career during a time of monumental change in the United States. The 1950s and 1960s were dominated by the effects of the Civil Rights Movement, while the Second Vatican Council in the early-to-mid 1960s transformed the face of Catholicism in the United States and beyond, turning the *lingua franca* of the Church from Latin to English and liberalising relations between clergy and parish. The end of the Vietnam War in the 1970s witnessed the birth of both second-wave feminist campaigns and the aftershock of the Stonewall Riots that inaugurated the modern gay and lesbian movement. At the same time, literary postmodernism, which had already surfaced in the 1950s, became an important force of creative production in the early 1970s. Both oppositional and overlapping, the relationship between modernism and postmodernism was one based on the former’s connection to Enlightenment ideals of reason and selfhood and the latter’s alignment with deconstructive modes of thought that questioned the self-evident nature of culture.⁷ Feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, as Robyn Warhol has shown, “paralleled postmodernism in critiquing the master narratives underwriting dominant ideology, and in the

⁵ Sally Barr Ebest, “Writing Green Thoughts,” in *Too Smart To Be Sentimental: Contemporary Irish American Women Writers*, eds. Sally Barr Ebest and Kathleen McInerney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 15. *Too Smart to Be Sentimental* includes, in a section entitled, “Sexuality,” a short essay on Myles’s writing: Kathleen Ann Kremins, “Blurring Boundaries: Eileen Myles and the Irish-American Identity,” 189-98.

⁶ See Sally Barr Ebest, *The Banshees: A Literary History of Irish American Women Writers* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013). Ebest dethrones Myles as “the first lesbian Irish-American writer” in her book, and includes a lengthy catalogue of work from eight writers she identifies as Irish who write about queer issues from the 1980s alone (135). While Ebest is to be commended for her efforts to locate lesbian Irish-American fiction, her inclusivity runs the risk of being, at best, essentialist and, at worst, entirely inaccurate. She seems to take surname as a reliable indicator of ethnicity, regardless of the significance of Irishness as imagined in the work of the authors. Other times, her application of the ethnic label of Irish proves baffling. Take, for instance, the opening of chapter four, which labels Margaret Atwood as “the Irish Canadian” (117). Finally, while Ebest includes both Myles and Grant, both of whose work constitutes two separate chapters in this thesis, she fails to read critically the writing of these figures, and the Myles material is a word-for-word reproduction of passages from *Too Smart To Be Sentimental*.

⁷ See Brian McHale and Len Platt, General Introduction to *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. Brian McHale and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1-14.

1980s and 1990s feminism joined postmodernism in dismantling the idea of the unitary subject.”⁸ Just as feminist and queer studies embraced the developments of postmodernism, women writers and gay and lesbian authors produced work that questioned assumptions about gender, sexuality, and identity. From the five authors explored in this thesis, McCourt, Shaw, and Myles have most actively integrated postmodernist conventions into their performance work, poetry, and fiction.

The same period witnessed the widely reaching ripple effect of an American “ethnic revival,” whose culmination and force were best exemplified by the 1976 publication of Alex Haley’s *Roots*.⁹ One of the clear effects of Haley’s book and the subsequent television adaptation the following year, according to Stephanie Rains, was a cross-ethnic and cross-racial fascination with family history and genealogy.¹⁰ As Matthew Frye Jacobson writes in *Roots Too*:

Ethnic traces and trappings that had been lost, forgotten, or forcibly cast off by prior generations in their rush to Americanize were now rediscovered and embraced by a younger generation who had known nothing but “American” culture. Polish and Gaelic language lessons; *The Joys of Yiddish*; klezmer records and folk dancing; a hunger for Old World history; the elaborate recreation of family genealogies—take this individualized identity quest and multiply it by a few million, and there is the ethnic revival.¹¹

The ethnic revival machine was manufactured and maintained by a number of intersecting industries in the post-Civil Rights era, namely the cultural arena (Hollywood, television, and publishing houses), academic institutions, advertising and merchandise, and even the state, which “became engaged in the construction and celebration of ‘immigrant heritage’ in projects like the Ethnic Heritage Studies Program and the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island restorations.”¹²

McCourt, Myles, and Shaw, each producing prose, poetry, and performance since the 1970s, were not only aware of these nationwide developments in the United States but were also actively creating cultural forms within and out of the same creative networks enmeshed in the widespread ethnic revival of the period. Largely, however, this thesis is concerned with the work produced in what might be observed as a second revival of Irishness in the 1990s,

⁸ Robyn Warhol, “Second-Wave Feminism and After,” in *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature*, ed. Brian McHale and Len Platt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 230. On gay and lesbian literary developments in the wake of postmodernism, see Martin Dines’s “Gay and Lesbian Subcultures from Stonewall to *Angels in America*” in the same edited volume (247-62).

⁹ Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976). Haley’s book was made into an equally successful television adaptation in 1977.

¹⁰ Stephanie Rains, “Irish Roots: Genealogy and the Performance of Irishness,” in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 131-32.

¹¹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

when Dinitia Smith, writing in the *New York Times*, claimed that “in almost every realm of culture there is a resurgence of things Irish.”¹³ In the 1990s, argues Diane Negra, “Irish-oriented writing proved a staple category on the best-seller lists, with Frank McCourt’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Angela’s Ashes* (1996) generating a powerful origin myth for corporate Irish America ... Irish-interest magazines such as *Irish America* are now stocked regularly at newsstands and bookstores, while Celticvision is among the offerings for U.S. cable subscribers.”¹⁴ In fact, in a review of the gay short story collection *Chasing Danny Boy: Powerful Stories of Celtic Eros* in an issue of the *Bay Area Reporter* in 2000, Jim Nawrocki was compelled to comment on how Irish culture remained a “hot commodity” in the US: “From *Riverdance* to *Angela’s Ashes* (the book and the movie), it’s difficult to turn a corner and not bump into something Celtic.”¹⁵ McDermott and Grant are part of this newer generation of Irish-American authors writing into the global interest in Irish production. Despite the commercial incentives for Irish-oriented fiction and cultural forms, however, most of the authors presented in the proceeding chapters actively and regularly write against such commercially viable presentations of Irishness—this is not only visible in the content of their work, but also in the fact that much of the individual texts were or are still out of print.

Products of wider post-war American cultural transformations that dramatically changed the lives and histories of many Irish Americans in the United States, these authors form a particular generation of writers of Irish-American identity. As this thesis evidences, many of the authors discussed in the thesis have frequently crossed paths, either working directly with one another, or aware of each other’s work, or even drawing intellectual and emotional inspiration from one another. Take Myles’s work at the WOW Café Theater in New York, or McCourt’s mention of Myles in his memoir-cum-social history book *Queer Street* as part of a new queer voice in American letters.¹⁶ At one point in Grant’s novel *Map of Ireland*, Irish-American lesbian Ann Ahern sits watching the 1951 cinematic adaptation of Tennessee Williams’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, attracted to and identifying strongly with the figure of Marlon Brando as Stanley Kowalski. In fact, Grant was inspired by Peggy Shaw’s performance of masculinity in Split Britches’ queering of Williams’s play (and Elia Kazan’s subsequent film), *Belle Reprieve*, in which Shaw struts across the stage in a subversive act of butch gender and desire.¹⁷ In the acknowledgements to her book, Grant

¹³ Dinitia Smith, “The Irish Are Hot in the U.S. Again,” *New York Times*, October 3, 1996, B1, B4.

¹⁴ Diane Negra, “The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture,” in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 4.

¹⁵ Jim Nawrocki, “Get Your Irish Up,” *Bay Area Reporter*, March 16, 2000, 37. See Mark Henry, ed., *Chasing Danny Boy: Powerful Stories of Celtic Eros* (San Francisco: Palm Drive Publishing, 1999).

¹⁶ James McCourt, *Queer Street: Rise and Fall of an American Culture, 1947-1985; Excursions in the Mind of the Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 241.

¹⁷ Stephanie Grant, *Map of Ireland* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 196.

thanks Myles, while Myles earlier offers their own dedication to Grant in *Cool for You*. While these collaborations and inspirations do not draw directly on any Irish connection as such, they provide evidence of an intellectual link emerging from wider queer literary and cultural developments in which each of the writers have been placed. McDermott, on the other hand, has become a significant figure in canonical Irish-American writing. Yet, the author's regular engagement with issues of gender and sexual trouble is entirely overlooked. While the latter four figures in this thesis represent a collective built on generational connections and interactions on the queer cultural scene, McDermott, while within the same generational group, is an exception. Her work in the thesis proves the future need to develop a project on reading queerness in less-obviously queer forms of Irish-American cultural forms. Together, McDermott, McCourt, Shaw, Myles, and Grant offer engaged literary and cultural works on how queerness and Irishness intersect in diverse ways.

The investigative terrain of this thesis traces the topographical peculiarities of the cities in which queerness has been most publicly elided from the significant sites of Irish pride, namely the St Patrick's Day parades in New York City and Boston. While this has meant certain discursive exclusions of cultural production from arguably less explored sites of Irish-American experience beyond the East Coast, the intent has been to work within the parameters of the spatial limitations of the thesis and to produce focused analyses of no less important creative engagements with the intersections of Irishness and queerness. Both McCourt and McDermott were born and raised in New York, the former in Queens and the latter in Brooklyn and Long Island, while Myles, Shaw, and Grant come from the Boston area (Belmont, Arlington, and suburban Boston, respectively). Each of the cultural figures in this thesis was raised in a Catholic family, with the exception of Shaw, whose Congregationalist family traces its Irish roots to Anglican Protestantism in Donegal. The St Patrick's Day parade and the conflicts over the queer exclusions since the 1990s echo throughout each of the subsequent chapters, becoming at times an obvious reference point for cultural performance for some and a site of contention and political awakening for others. Given that the annual event is an exemplary text of Irish identity in the United States, it is no surprise that the narratives and authors in the next five chapters touch upon the event. This thesis regularly returns to the parade in divergent ways, haunted by its effects and affective legacy. Before moving on to a reading of the cultural exclusions at play at the parades in New York City and Boston, a clarification on key terms as they are used throughout this thesis, as well as a brief commentary on the chosen authors and theoretical frameworks, will clearly frame the direction of the thesis as a whole.

“Queerness” is used in this thesis first as a broad term to describe a diverse collection of non-normative sexual practices and identities, dissident gender performances, desires, bodies, and subjectivities commonly associated with, but also at times existing without, the umbrella term of LGBTQ. While “queer” often stands in as a casual synonym for any one of the letters-cum-identity categories represented under this umbrella term, this thesis works to unsettle such automatic connections. While McCourt, Shaw, Myles, and Grant produce writing from and about—although not always necessarily without questioning—gay male, lesbian, and transgender identity positions, the discussion on celibates and the unmarried in McDermott’s fiction brings attention to the least queer aspect about queer theory: its insistence on alloeroticism. Thus, as Benjamin Kahan’s work shows, the history of American celibacy reorients queerness from same-sex desire and attachments to radically alternative political and emotional kinship. Furthermore, the five chapters that follow consistently tackle the effects of and resistance to social and cultural forms of queerphobia that serve to marginalise individuals and groups who perform and engage in acts of gender and sexual troubling.

Secondly, this thesis continues Michael Warner’s early call for a critique of wider practices of gender and sexual normalisation. In this sense, the critical reach of the thesis extends far beyond mere visibility or representation in terms of LGBTQ subjectivities and desires. In his introductory essay from the foundational 1991 special issue of *Social Text*, Warner noted that the political power of the term “queer” “as a naming strategy lies in combining resistance on the broad social terrain of the normal with more specific resistance on the terrains of phobia and queer-bashing, on one hand, or of pleasure on the other.”¹⁸ Since its inception as academic, political, and cultural term in the early 1990s, “queer” has experienced semantic and theoretical proliferations and has become a site of contestation and debate.¹⁹ At times, the term signifies specifically “gay” or “lesbian”; while at other times, the radical potential of “queer” lies in its detachment from those identity categories entirely. “Despite its political advantages,” writes Sharon Markus, “*queer* has been the victim of its own popularity, proliferating to the point of uselessness as a neologism for the transgression

¹⁸ Michael Warner, “Fear of a Queer Planet,” *Social Text* 29 (1991): 16, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/466295>. The collection of essays in this volume were later published together in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

¹⁹ For a helpful overview of the debate around what exactly “queer” and “queerness” has come to mean and how it has signified differently in theoretical discussions since its inception, see chapter three of Nikki Sullivan’s *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 37-56.

of any norm (queering history, or queering the sonnet).²⁰ Butler, on the other hand, celebrates this very indefiniteness as the substance of the term's political viability.²¹

David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, in a 2005 special issue of *Social Text*, collectively revisited and redoubled Warner's political instructions on the radical viability of queerness as a deconstructive force. "What's queer about Queer Studies now?" they ask, in a time when gay and lesbian identity has entered the mainstream and become commercially appropriated, while gay and lesbian politics is largely centred on achieving marriage equality. This thesis is both a contribution to and a further expansion of such a demand for "a renewed queer studies ever vigilant to the fact that sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent."²² Queerness, then, as deployed throughout this thesis denotes both forms of gender and sexual dissidence and non-normative practices and identities, as well as a key theoretical lens through which to challenge the social and cultural norms that shape and maintain heterocentric and heteronormative narratives of Irishness in the United States.

This thesis is a critical investigation of the intersections of queerness and Irishness in the writing and cultural productions of a number of key American authors and one influential performer. While the work of Ed Madden and Tina O'Toole, in particular, has taken important steps in opening an examination of queer Irish migrant and diaspora literature and culture in Britain, Europe, and Canada, this thesis is concerned specifically with the literary and cultural representations of ethnic Irish-American identity shaped largely by historical migration and socio-cultural changes since the nineteenth century.²³ All of the material analysed in the thesis has been produced by a collection of writers drawing on, reimagining,

²⁰ Sharon Marcus, "Queer Theory for Everyone: A Review Essay," *Signs* 31, no. 1 (Autumn 2005): 196 (emphasis added), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/432743>.

²¹ On the potential efficacy, even necessity, of the term's polysemy, Butler writes: "If the term 'queer' is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes ... That it can become such a discursive site whose uses are not fully constrained in advance ought to be safeguarded not only for the purposes of continuing to democratize queer politics, but also to expose, affirm, and rework the specific historicity of the term." See "Critically Queer," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 1, no. 1 (1993): 19-20.

²² David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, "What's Queer About Queer Studies Now?" *Social Text* 23, no. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 2005): 1. For an excellent application of such a renewed sense of "queer" in the place of Irish cultural studies, see Fintan Walsh, *Queer Performance and Contemporary Ireland: Dissent and Disorientation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). In his introduction, Walsh outlines a similar application of "queer" being carried out in this thesis, i.e., "as a capacious index for a range of non-normative sexualities, bodies, desires and subject positions typically housed within the LGBTQ umbrella," as well as a mode through which to identify both the performative (via Butler) and intersectional nature of all identity (2).

²³ See Ed Madden, "Queering the Irish Diaspora: David Rees and Padraig Rooney," *Éire-Ireland* 47 no. 1&2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 172-200. <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2012.0008> and Tina O'Toole, "Cé Leis Tú? Queering Irish Migrant Literature," *Irish University Review* 43, no. 1 (2013): 131-45.

and often queering the historical and cultural narratives of particular forms of Irish identity in the United States since this period, a significant moment in Irish migration history and American socio-cultural, political, racial, and ethnic transformations. While the experiences and cultures of the queer Irish-born migrants in the United States are yet to be fully engaged with critically, this thesis does not presently take up this ambitious challenge. Future research must focus on the literature and culture of this group, and this thesis can provide significant theoretical models, archival resources, and socio-cultural and historical contexts through which to begin this project. Irish-American identities, then, are multiple and particular to periods of time and places. Thus, “Irish(-)American” in this thesis is not definitive, neither is it exclusive. Future work on queerness and Irish-American identities must expand on the meaning of the term, as well as on the cultural, political, and sexual experiences produced within and across a variety of intersecting histories. In fact, the singular work of Christopher Dowd has shown the need to consider the constructions of Irishness in American culture not only in the work of Irish-identified writers, but in the writing of non-Irish-identified authors.²⁴ How Irish-American sexuality and forms of queerness have been or might be imagined in such cultural productions remains to be examined, and provides, therefore, further avenues for future critical investigation.

While all of the five figures discussed throughout claim Irish ancestry, the thesis is more concerned with how the literary and cultural forms produced by each draws on, reconstructs, challenges, and queers dominant narratives of Irishness in the United States. Of course, the presence of an Irish genealogical connection is not inconsequential; in fact, such a claim to Irish parentage or ancestry can become an important source of creative production. The point is, however, that Irish-American identity is not a fixed or stable category in and of itself. Rather, as the work discussed in this thesis evidences, the writing or performing of Irishness emerges from, engages with, and often rearranges previously understood forms of identity. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall challenges traditionally conservative interpretations of diasporic consciousness, rejecting an essentialist notion of primordial ethnicity, presenting, instead, a pluralist conception of identity. For Hall:

diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return, even if it means pushing other people into the sea . . . The diaspora experience as I intend it here is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of “identity” which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*.²⁵

²⁴ Christopher Dowd, *The Construction of Irish Identity in American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

²⁵ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 235 (emphasis in the original).

Irishness in America is thus constituted not in an eternally existing source of primordial essence, but rather in the complex web of discursive ideologies which endeavour to describe it.²⁶ As Werner Sollors argues, “ethnicity is not so much an ancient and deep-seated force surviving from the historical past, but rather the modern and modernizing feature of a contrasting strategy that may be shared far beyond the boundaries within which it is claimed.”²⁷ Such notions of cultural identity greatly inform the work carried out in this thesis.

“Authentic Irishness is the script,” writes Thomas Sullivan, “a discourse that is not only followed by us actors but by which is also being continually reinforced and sometimes reinvented. Our drive to be what we consider to be ‘really’ Irish, our striving toward an ideal of Irishness that we help to construct, however, allows room for the modification of this discourse.”²⁸ Sullivan’s remark on the performativity of Irish identity speaks well to the usefulness of queer theory as a lens through which to read the Irish-American cultural productions selected for analysis as part of this thesis. The cultural forms explored throughout can be described as Irish in content not because they are the work of Americans who claim Irish ancestry, but rather because the textual matter and staged performance (in the case of Shaw) examined actively appropriates and radically reconfigures familial, historical, and cultural narratives of Irish-American identity in a variety of complex ways. From the twentieth-century Irish-Catholic enclaves of New York City, to Irish pugilism, alcoholism, class struggle, racialisation and inter-racial relations, the themes arising from the subsequent analyses are part of larger Irish-American chronicles. The unique theoretical approach of queer theory, however, allows for modes and motifs of queerness to recalibrate these dominant narratives of Irish-American history and culture. Similarly, the texts examined are examples of queer production not because they might be the work of queer-identified authors (as if that disclosure were ever fully possible). McDermott, McCourt, Shaw, Myles, and Grant, albeit to differing degrees, have all produced literary and performance pieces that both foreground non-normative desires, genders, and sexual identities and deliver significant critiques of wider systems and practices of normalisation.

²⁶ In fact, Rogers Brubaker has called for such a deconstructive move in the study of diaspora, suggesting critics consider the concept as a state of doing rather than being. Diaspora in this sense is a performative project as opposed to a stable entity. See “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (January 2005): 1-19, EBSCOhost.

²⁷ Werner Sollors, introduction to *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), xiv.

²⁸ Thomas Sullivan, “‘I Want to Be All I Can Irish’: The Role of Performance and Performativity in the Construction of Ethnicity,” *Social & Cultural Geography* 13, no. 5 (August 2012): 439, EBSCOhost. Sullivan’s own theory of Irish performativity is expressly drawn from the queer work of Judith Butler, whose *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) was a key text in the inauguration of queer theory and whose collective work appears as an influential touchstone throughout this thesis.

“The Irish Voice” in the title of this thesis both calls on and critiques Fanning’s canonical survey of Irish-American literature, acknowledging the path-breaking work of the critical volume, as well as its pivotal place in academic discourses in Irish-American literary studies, but, crucially, also filling the evident gap in sustained scholarship on queerness in Irish-American cultural forms. Furthermore, the title signals the generic-bending cultural output of some of the writers discussed in the thesis, particularly Myles, Shaw, and McCourt, whose work regularly engages with issues of embodiment and the presence of voice. Indeed, while critics have paid particular attention to Shaw’s regional Eastern New England-Boston accent in an effort to sketch the performer as a personification of the working-class Irishness constructed in her work, Myles’s poetic presentation of an Irish working-class identity knowingly incorporates a Boston accent, the most obvious example being the author’s best-known poem, “An American Poem.”²⁹ “Well I didn’t ever want to be a poet, per se,” Myles told Morgan Parker in 2014, “It was something I sort of fell into, but I always wanted to do something with my voice.”³⁰ In the case of McCourt, the thesis focuses specifically on the author’s writing of an Irish oral tradition in his book, *Time Remaining*. Thus, the construction and inscription of a self-consciously fashioned “Irish voice” is, as the thesis shows, a key element in the work of many of the authors herein. Finally, despite the singular use of “voice,” this thesis evidences clearly that there are, on the contrary, many ways of articulating Irishness, and combined, each of the figures in the thesis forms only a small part of a much broader and polyphonic chorus of Irish cultural expression.

The St Patrick’s Day parade conflicts have become flashpoints in discussing Irish-American identity since the 1990s, yet the retelling of that conflict continues to embody a struggle of verisimilitude, of Irish-American conservatism against Ireland’s alleged progressiveness, and of “finding one’s feet” as an Irish queer abroad. Especially in New York, the struggle has been conceived as a clash between conservative, Catholic, Irish-American natives and a group of young LGBT Irish immigrants. This conceptualization of the conflict, however, problematically conflates “Irish American” and “heterosexual,” thus invariably denying a space for queer Irish Americans. Such a view sees Irishness in America as a somehow counterfeit identity, or “Eiresatz,” to use a term from Irish-American journalist

²⁹ See, for example, Peggy Shaw, interview with Craig Lucas, *BOMB*, Autumn 1999, 35. In introducing the performer, Lucas writes, “[Shaw] speaks in Southie-inflected, aggressive bursts (she’s actually from Belmont, Massachusetts) [...]” Craig’s (somewhat discriminatory) remark misidentifies Shaw as a South Boston local, incorrectly placing her in the Irish-Catholic enclave of Southie instead of the suburban town of Belmont, where Shaw is really from. Thus, accent becomes a marker of ethnic identity as well as place of origin.

³⁰ Eileen Myles, interview with Morgan Parker, *Literary Review* 57, no. 4 (Autumn 2014): 180. Myles makes this statement in response to a question from Parker about the place of performance in the poet’s work.

Maureen Dezell.³¹ “There is a certain irony here given the extent to which Irishness has been assumed by those within Ireland to be the preserve of the Irish nation-state,” argues Marc Scully, “given that St. Patrick’s Day parades held in Ireland were seen as inauthentic copies of the ‘real thing,’ which was presumed to be happening on the streets of New York or Boston.”³²

Gayatri Gopinath has usefully turned to queer theory as a particularly salient interpretive lens through which to observe the disruptive potential of diasporic cultural productions. In her book on queer South Asian diasporic culture, Gopinath, echoing the gender troubling work of Butler, writes:

A queer diasporic framework productively exploits the analogous relation between nation and diaspora on the one hand, and between heterosexuality and queerness on the other: in other words, queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation. If within heteronormative logic the queer is seen as the debased and inadequate copy of the heterosexual, so too is diaspora within nationalist logic positioned as the queer Other of the nation, its inauthentic imitation. The concept of a queer diaspora enables a simultaneous critique of heterosexuality and the nation form while exploding the binary oppositions between nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality, original and copy.³³

As Scully points out, St Patrick’s Day “is still perhaps the one time of the year where territorialised versions of Irishness do not have the upper hand. This may, at least in part, account for some of the hostile reactions to ‘inauthentic’ versions of Irishness performed as aspects of St. Patrick’s Day parades outside of Ireland.”³⁴ The following section details the histories of these parade conflicts and considers deconstructive measures to create a discursive space for queerness in Irish-American identity. Since the parade is examined subsequently in relation to its imagining in critical discourses in distinctly literary terms, it is well placed in a thesis of literary criticism. While the parade is a popular and public text, this thesis does not focus on wider popular culture. A future project might work to unravel such forms of creative expression. This thesis, however, is interested specifically in the literary, or textual, properties of the parade.

³¹ Maureen Dezell, *Irish America: Coming Into Clover* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 2. The term is a compound made of “*Ersatz*,” the German word for “substitution” and “*Éire*” the Irish for Ireland.

³² Marc Scully, “Whose Day Is It Anyway? St. Patrick’s Day as a Contested Performance of National and Diasporic Irishness,” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 12, no. 1 (2012): 120, EBSCOhost.

³³ Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 11.

³⁴ Scully, “Whose Day Is It Anyway?,” 120.

Impossible Subjects

When the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) filed an application on October 5, 1990, to march in the annual St Patrick's Day parade on Fifth Avenue in New York City, the organisers of the event, the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), turned down the group's request. The AOH replied with a rejection letter citing "physical and municipal restrictions" as the reason for turning down ILGO's petition to participate in one of the nation's largest displays of Irish-American cultural heritage.³⁵ What had initially emerged as an issue of physical capacity in the public processional event on March 17, however, was quickly uncovered as a deeply homophobic imperative on the side of the Catholic fraternal organisers to exclude gays and lesbians from the symbolic space of the parade. Backed up by the Supreme Court, the AOH not only removed ILGO from the parade, but also succeeded in barring the organisation's right to protest against its own exclusion on the basis that, in Katherine O'Donnell's words,

as the parade was a celebration of Irish ethnicity, the AOH had the right to discriminate against the ILGO, based on the tacit acceptance that an a priori condition of being Irish was an active intolerance of homosexuals, and therefore no expression of an identity that was simultaneously Irish and homosexual was possible.³⁶

In her own account of the conflict, Anne Maguire, co-founder of the ILGO, recalls that marching under the banner of Irish lesbian and gay individuals at the Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade in Manhattan provoked much confusion among many: "Self-identified Irish lesbians and gay men seemed to come as a surprise to many in the gay community and jokes were made about how our existence was an oxymoron."³⁷

When ILGO members, accompanied by then mayor, David Dinkins, marched alongside the Manhattan-based Division 7 of the AOH at the invitation of the latter group, they were permitted to appear as long as they participated without their own banner, and the group was met with violent abuse from the sidelines of the parade's procession up Fifth Avenue. Maguire remembers when ILGO stepped out at 46th Street, from where the parade begins its march, "a low rumble of indignation erupted from the sidelines and grew to a full

³⁵ Anne Maguire, *Rock The Sham! The Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization's Battle to March in New York City's St. Patrick's Day Parade* (New York: Street Level Press, 2005), 49.

³⁶ Katherine O'Donnell, "St Patrick's Day Expulsions: Race and Homophobia in New York's Parade," in *Irish Postmodernisms and Popular Culture*, ed. Wanda Balzano, Anne Mulhall, and Moynagh Sullivan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 136.

³⁷ Maguire, *Rock the Sham!*, 13. Later in her book, Maguire reiterates this point in more detail: "The idea that there were Irish people who were lesbians or gay men seemed funny or odd for some reason. I laughed the first few times I heard, 'Irish lesbians and gays! No way!' But the friendly jibes became tiresome, and I began to feel angry. That some people thought the existence of Irish lesbians and gay men was a joke haunted me" (41).

thunder within seconds. ‘Die faggots! Get AIDS and die.’”³⁸ Meanwhile, in Boston the comparable exclusion of the Irish-American Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Pride Committee (GLIB) from the St Patrick’s Day parade in South Boston at the hands of the organisers, the South Boston Allied War Veterans Council, was upheld in a landmark Supreme Court case in the summer of 1995, ensuring the continued embargo on queer participation in the annual celebration of Irish-American cultural identity. When GLIB first marched in the 1992 parade, they were confronted, much like ILGO in New York, with antagonism and taunts from locals who “saw this as an invasion of their neighbourhood, and thus an affront to their own identity, defined as Irish-American, Catholic and heterosexual.”³⁹ The attempt on the part of GLIB to remake an Irish-American space conjointly into a queer space was disavowed by the parade organisers and onlookers, and subsequently legally blocked by the Supreme Court. The last twenty-eight years have included annual queer exclusions in New York and Boston; court battles and rulings; sideline protests; countless arrests; and shamrock-pinned onlookers screaming, “Faggots! Queers! You’re not Irish. Your parents must be English!”⁴⁰ “Symbolically,” Tim Davis writes in his analysis of the Boston case, “the very existence of alternative sexualities was a threat to the locally prevailing notion of what it meant to be Irish.”⁴¹

In both New York and Boston, Irish lesbians and gay men were perceived, to borrow a term from Gopinath, as “impossible subjects.” For gays and lesbians in other parts of the United States, these scenes in New York and Boston were peculiar. A March issue of San Francisco’s *Bay Area Reporter (BAR)*, one of the country’s oldest surviving gay periodicals, for instance, declared in 1993: “Here in San Francisco it may seem inconceivable, but St. Pat’s has turned into a battleground on the East Coast: Irish thugs who run the parades in Boston and New York have been fighting in court to keep lesbians and gays away from the festivities.”⁴² Throughout the 1990s, the *BAR* ran a number of responses to the East Coast conflict. In 1994, for example, William M. Reilly wrote: “In direct contrast to all the problems back east, our local ILGO (Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization) chapter marched in San Francisco’s annual St. Patrick’s Day Parade without challenge or incident and was warmly received by both parade officials and onlookers.” In fact, Reilly goes on to extend the open embrace of Irish gays and lesbians to Chicago, where Mayor Richard M. Daley blasted

³⁸ Maguire, *Rock the Sham!*, 10.

³⁹ Tim Davis, “The Diversity of Queer Politics and the Redefinition of Sexual Identity and Community in Urban Spaces,” in *Mapping Desires: Geographies of Sexualities*, ed. David Bell and Gill Valentine (London: Routledge, 1995), 297.

⁴⁰ Maguire, *Rock the Sham!*, 17.

⁴¹ Davis, “The Diversity of Queer Politics,” 301.

⁴² “A Season’s Greeting,” *Bay Area Reporter*, March 11, 1993, 6.

the Veterans Council decision to cancel the Boston parade in 1994 rather than welcome GLIB into its ranks: “Everybody’s welcome in this parade ... The gay and lesbian community has been a strong community here in the city and they’re great citizens and we’re really proud of them.”⁴³

The following year, another article in the *BAR* proclaimed, “Local Irish Make Statement to Bigots in Boston, New York City,” reiterating the peculiarity of the treatment of Irish queers on the other side of the country. Reilly continues:

When the St. Patrick’s Day Parade marches down Market Street, setting off from the Civic Center to the Embarcadero at noon on Sunday, March 12, it will include scores of gay and lesbian marchers. Unlike Boston and New York, where rancor between parade organizers and gay and lesbian citizens has been increasing in recent years, the San Francisco parade gladly welcomes everyone to participate, without regard to sexual orientation.⁴⁴

A 1997 issue of the newspaper included a humorous cartoon by Joe Hoover entitled, “The Open Prairie,” which showed two male Irish leprechauns dressed in stereotypical garb, looking longingly into each other’s eyes under a banner and next to a short text explaining, “NYC: Once again banned by the ‘Ancient Order of Hibernians’ as a group organized for their sexual preference, radical fairies, Shannon and Seamus form a parade constituency that is inclusive of the sexuality of all Irish.” Shannon and Seamus, “radical fairies,” stand proudly under a banner proclaiming the name of their group: “Ancient Order of Irish Wankers.”⁴⁵ The specific regional histories of Irish-American communities across the country explain the particularities of the New York and Boston cases. As O’Donnell suggests, “Irish-American identity in the major east coast cities, particularly Boston and New York, has an added and defining dimension: the memory of surviving systematic sectarian oppression at the hands of the Protestant oligarchies there.”⁴⁶

In *Wearing the Green: A History of St Patrick’s Day*, Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair trace the origins of celebrations of Ireland’s national religious and cultural commemoration of its patron saint in the United States to the eighteenth century, when the holiday was practised not by Irish Catholics, but rather by elite groups of Protestant Irish men in colonial Boston and New York. While the first formal vigil was held in Boston on March 17, 1737, New York celebrations came later in 1762, when the first recorded festivities took place in the home of

⁴³ William M. Reilly, “NYC Celebrated St. Pat’s By Arresting Over 100 Gays, Lesbians But the Mayor of Chicago Speaks Out for Gay and Lesbian Inclusion,” *Bay Area Reporter*, March 24, 1994, 21.

⁴⁴ Kent Brandley, “Leprechauns and Fairies March Here for St. Patrick,” *Bay Area Reporter*, March 9, 1995, 5.

⁴⁵ Joe Hoover, “The Open Prairie,” *Bay Area Reporter*, March 13, 1997, 6. “Radical Fairies” is a play on the name of the queer activist group, Radical Faeries.

⁴⁶ O’Donnell, “St Patrick’s Day Expulsions,” 129.

John Marshall, an Irish Protestant immigrant in New York.⁴⁷ According to Kenneth Moss, it was in the Famine and post-Famine period of 1840-1870 in the face of Anglo-Saxon hostility when Irish-American identity, “defined by sectarian Catholic nationalism,” was forged, and the parade provided the ideal space, “the ‘memory-site’ *par excellence*,” in which this identity could be constructed and presented to the American public.⁴⁸ Moss writes:

The St. Patrick’s Day Parade became the focus of commemorative activity in the Irish-American community because it met the *present* needs of that community in a way that small, genteel banquets could not. In the first place, faced with nativist animosity, the community needed to demonstrate both its cohesion as an ethnic community and its loyalty to the U.S. simultaneously; in this sense, the parade was a public demand for respectability by Irish Catholics who found themselves in a materially promising but hostile environment. It provided a visible, public venue for the physical and symbolic enactment of Irish-American strength and cultural/national cohesion: yearly processions of tens of thousands of Irishmen through the city trailed by cheering onlookers had a sheer physical power that was itself a challenge to nativist attitudes ... the parade was a chance to show that Irish-Americans were not the disorganized, brutish drunkards which Anglo-America imagined them to be.⁴⁹

At the time Moss wrote his article on nineteenth-century Irish-American identity at the St Patrick’s Day parades, the Supreme Court had already succeeded in supporting the exclusion of gays and lesbians from the physical and symbolic space of Irish cultural performance in the United States. Founded in May 1836, the Ancient Order of Hibernians first participated in New York’s parade in 1853, and the organisation’s presence on the day and its swift growth around this time was, as Cronin and Adair argue, largely a response to the city’s anti-Irish rhetoric among nativist movements.⁵⁰

In the first half of the twentieth century, the parade in New York, by this time under the control of the AOH, continued to embody the growing power of the Irish presence in politics and maintained a link to a newly independent Ireland, which continued to provide the United States with waves of arriving immigrants.⁵¹ Despite these close connections to Ireland,

⁴⁷ Mike Cronin and Daryl Adair, *The Wearing of the Green: A History of St Patrick’s Day* (London: Routledge, 2002), 10.

⁴⁸ Kenneth Moss, “St. Patrick’s Day Celebrations and the Formation of Irish-American Identity, 1845-1875,” *Journal of Social History* 29, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 127, 130, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3788712>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 137 (emphasis in the original). For a further discussion on parading Irish respectability on St Patrick’s Day during this period, see Cronin and Adair, 31-70: “The post-famine years are central in understanding the charitable and respectable themes that were so important to the Irish diaspora communities. The famine had cast the Irish across the globe, and they had been met, despite their hardships, by much opposition and discrimination. St Patrick’s Day was an important forum for stressing their identity, for reminding the host population of the strength of the Irish, and also for offering proof, if such was needed, of the innate respectability and devout nature of the immigrant communities” (50). For an account of Irish identity at the St Patrick’s Day parade in Canada during the same period, see Michael Cottrell, “St. Patrick’s Day Parades in Nineteenth-Century Toronto: A Study of Immigrant Adjustment and Elite Control,” *Historie Sociale-Social History* 25, no. 49 (May 1992): 57-73, <https://hssh.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/hssh/article/viewFile/16699/15557>.

⁵⁰ Cronin and Adair, *The Wearing of the Green*, 37.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 146.

however, the St Patrick's Day parades in the US were about the trials and triumphs of the Irish *in America*. As Cronin and Adair put it, "St Patrick's Day events, whether in New Orleans or Erin, are an American-invented tradition. They tend not to commemorate a distant, even reminiscent Irish ancestry, instead celebrating 17 March as a local, Irish-American entertainment extravaganza."⁵² This has been particularly true since the twentieth century, when Irish-American identity has relied less on Irishness in Ireland as a "source" of production and more on the complex network of socio-historical, political, cultural, and religious systems which interlace and interact to produce identity: "St Patrick's Day celebrations were the historical product of their location, not a homogenous product delivered from and arbitrated by Ireland."⁵³

More recently, the St Patrick's Day parades have become secular and commercial events associated less with the seriousness of Irish-American history and more with drunken spectators clad in leprechaun hats and shamrock-printed t-shirts onto which badges proclaiming "Kiss Me, I'm Irish" are pinned. As Sally Munt and Katherine O'Donnell point out,

St. Patrick's Day falls neatly halfway through the American college students' second semester and is beloved by generations of American students as a riotous drinkfest. The commercialization of the day is long established in America: Green beer, maudlin songs, the traditional fare of corned beef, cabbage and potatoes, gaudy green decorations for the body, the ubiquity of 'Kiss Me, I'm Irish' buttons, plastic leprechauns, and made in China shamrock further increase its appeal as a national party day on the streets.⁵⁴

And yet, in spite of the message on St Patrick's Day that "everyone is Irish," the conflict waging since the early 1990s has proven that Irish queers are excluded from this tall tale of inclusivity and openness.

In *Ritual, Politics and Power*, David I. Kertzer suggests that the ritualised procession of such public displays as the St Patrick's Day parade "serve as important means of channeling emotion, guiding cognition, and organizing social groups."⁵⁵ For the imagined community of Irish America, a collective built on "a deep, horizontal comradeship," to use Benedict Anderson's phrase, the parade has served as one of the most crucial sites of public

⁵² Ibid., 211.

⁵³ Ibid., 172.

⁵⁴ Sally Munt and Katherine O'Donnell, "Pride and Prejudice: Legalizing Compulsory Heterosexuality in New York's Annual St. Patrick's Day Parades," *Space and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2007): 98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331206296379>. Even in 1971, as John T. Ridge records, the parade had developed into an opportunity for students and young people to drink heavily. See John T. Ridge, *The St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York* (New York: AOH Publications, 1988), 161.

⁵⁵ David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 9.

cultural performance, where community ideals and identity are forged and staged.⁵⁶ As Moss writes, “rituals are not mere expressions of existing ideas: they concretize, direct, and shape such ideas.”⁵⁷ The issue of incorporating ILGO, GLIB, and the more recent group, Irish Queers, into the space of the parade revolves around anxieties over the image of Irish-American identity ritually enacted on March 17 before national and international onlookers. For Sallie A. Marston, the struggles “are about policing the boundaries of the cultural territory which, at the moment, is particularly hostile to group norms about sexuality.”⁵⁸ Kathryn Conrad argues that the inclusion of gays and lesbians posed a profound threat to the parade organisers precisely because “sexuality is so often an un(re)markable category,” a troubling category which does not confine itself within set boundaries and borders. As Conrad contends,

to accept ILGO means accepting the possibility that members of ILGO already exist within the sanctioned confines of the parade and of “Irishness.” To deny ILGO access is implicitly to assert that gay men do not exist in the AOH; that no women who came to work in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia in the nineteenth century were lesbians; that no Irish-American priests or nuns are gay or lesbian; that the whole history of Irish emigration to the USA is not already inextricably bound up with gay and lesbian history. ILGO is an “otherable” group, conveniently enough, and by excluding it physically from the parade, the AOH hopes to exclude the people it represents from the narrative of Irish and Irish-American identity.⁵⁹

Against the airbrushing of Irish-American identity carried out by the organisers of the St Patrick’s Day parade, Conrad gestures towards the radical notion that queerness might have always already been at the core of the history of the Irish in the United States.

As Kertzer notes, while the formal quality of ritual action serves to engender and consolidate communal beliefs and identities, it is also inevitable that even such standardised strategies can be subject to change.⁶⁰ “The parade,” Joseph Roach declares,

however obdurately resistance to integration it may see itself as being—and many parades have seen themselves in just that way—is nevertheless vulnerable. It is vulnerable because the participants literally succeed themselves before the eyes of the spectators. As the sound of one band dies, another arrives to lift the spirits of the auditors. Generations of marchers seem to arise and pass away. Because it is an additive form, passing by a point of

⁵⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 7.

⁵⁷ Moss, “St. Patrick’s Day Celebrations,” 140.

⁵⁸ Sallie A. Marston, “Making Difference: Conflict Over Irish Identity in the New York City St. Patrick’s Day Parade,” *Political Geography* 21 (2002): 390-91, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0962629801000518>.

⁵⁹ Kathryn Conrad, “Queer Treasons: Homosexuality and Irish National Identity,” *Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (2001): 133, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380010012630>.

⁶⁰ Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*, 9.

review in succession, its ending is always an anti-climax, a provocation, and an opening.⁶¹

More recently, that opening seemed to widen enough to finally include a gay and lesbian-identified group for the first time since ILGO's dramatic appearance at the parade in 1991 with the incorporation of representatives of Out@NBCUniversal in the 2015 St Patrick's Day parade on Fifth Avenue. On the morning after the decision was announced in September 2014, Niall O'Dowd, editor of *Irish Central*, made the hyperbolic statement: "It was 6:24 pm on September 3, 2014, in New York City, and the Irish American community and the St. Patrick's Day parade would shortly never be the same again after 253 years."⁶² Writing for *The Huffington Post*, however, Mary Emily O'Hara was less convinced:

The decision to allow only one LGBT-identified group—which happens to be part of the network that televises the parade—smacks of boardroom-deal striking and concession. There will be no Irish Queers, no Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization, no banner or representation of any Irish LGBT community group. That's hardly because the Irish LGBT community doesn't care about marching; in fact, this announcement came as a shock to groups that have spent decades trying to persuade parade organizers to compromise.⁶³

With the memory of Guinness and Heineken's withdrawal of sponsorship in 2013 in response to the continued exclusion of gays and lesbians from the parade still fresh, the organisers' "inclusive" move ought to be critically viewed as obligation over choice. Moreover, the inclusion of one corporate LGBT group does not ameliorate the enduring feeling of rejection experienced by those Irish queer groups still banned from self-identifying under a banner within the physical and symbolic space of the parade. In a statement following the announcement that Out@NBCUniversal would march in the parade, Irish Queers declared: "We welcome this small victory, but our call remains the same—the parade must be open to Irish LGBT groups, not 'in subsequent years' but now."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 285

⁶² Niall O'Dowd, "Cardinal Dolan Strongly Backs Gays in St. Patrick's Day Decision," *Irish Central*, September 4, 2014, <http://www.irishcentral.com/opinion/niallodowd/Cardinal-Dolan-strongly-backs-gays-Patricks-Day-Parade.html>.

⁶³ Mary Emily O'Hara, "Wednesday's St. Patrick's Day Parade Announcement Isn't Progress –It's an Insult to New York's Irish LGBT Community," *The Huffington Post*, September 5, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mary-emily-ohara/wednesdays-st-patricks-da_b_5774594.html.

⁶⁴ "Statement on St Patrick's Parade/OUT@NBC announcement," September 3, 2014, <http://irishqueers.blogspot.com/2014/09/statement-on-st-patricks-paradeoutnbc.html>.

Not In This Family!

*“Ethnicity and sexuality are strained, but not strange bedfellows.”*⁶⁵

While the organisers of the St Patrick’s Day parades in New York and Boston have laboured intensely to suppress articulations of (queer) sexuality from these platforms of ethnic representation, the panicked response of the conservative AOH and its Irish-American supporters perversely reveals a seemingly paradoxical truth: the parade, as well as the ethnicity being paraded, is entirely entrenched in sex and sexuality. According to Joane Nagel, normative heterosexuality is crucial in maintaining racial, ethnic, and national ideologies and regimes, and adherence to these norms and the prohibition against deviation are essential to the endurance of such systems. The boundaries of Irish-American ethnicity, particularly in the public displays of ethnic pride, are fiercely policed and protected from external, as well as internal enemies and others who cause a threat to the stability of the community’s contours. In order to know “who we are,” we must know who “they” are and know that we are not part of the same family. “Unlike racism and prejudice that seek targets *outside* ethnic boundaries,” writes Nagel in relation to the GLIB case in Boston, “homophobia can be directed *inside* ethnic communities as well, and used to create an internal sexual boundary that excludes or ‘disqualifies’ a group’s own members.”⁶⁶ Recalling being hit with smoke and stink bombs, food, bottles, and abuse, GLIB member Cathleen Finn says, “Seeing people who remind you of people in your own family condemning you and yelling at you was really hard.”⁶⁷

Irish newspapers and periodicals in New York offer an illustrative sample of voices from the Irish and Irish-American community responding to the parade conflict.⁶⁸ In a March issue of the *Irish Echo* in 1991, a “parade of letters” expressed a variety of opinions on the issue. James M. McCullough in the Bronx, for instance, wrote, “Frank Beirne and his parade committee chose confrontation over conciliation.” Yet, McCullough expressed more concern over the spectacle of the struggle rather than the exclusion itself: “It is a sad commentary that instead of 1991 being remembered as the year the parade was dedicated to the Freedom

⁶⁵ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 26 (emphasis in the original).

⁶⁷ Maguire, *Rock the Sham!*, 111. Cathleen Finn is spelt Kathleen Finn in Maguire’s book.

⁶⁸ Research on responses to the St Patrick’s Day parade debates in Irish-American newspapers, specifically the *Irish Echo* and the *Irish Voice*, was conducted in the Archives of Irish America Periodicals Collection, 1811-2008 at the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, housed in the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library at New York University, on September 29, 2016. For issues of the *Irish Echo* cited here, see AIA 004, box 35, folder “Oct 25, 1990-Mar 26, 1991” and box 36, folder “Mar 27, 1991-Nov 12, 1991.” For issues of the *Irish Voice* cited here, see AIA 004, box 123, folder “Mar 16-May 26, 1991.”

Fighters of 1916 and the 75th anniversary of the Easter Rising, it will be remembered as the year the gays marched. We have no one to thank for this except Francis P. Beirne, parade chairman.”⁶⁹ In fact, Beirne paid for allegedly putting the parade in crisis by being removed from the AOH, only to be later readmitted on his deathbed in 1996. Michael Geraghty, another Irish American from the Bronx, was less ambiguous about his views on the debate: “The parade is not a Catholic parade, but for all Irish ... and gays and lesbians who were jeered are the sons, daughters, nephews, nieces and cousins who have come here from Ireland’s families.”⁷⁰ While Susan O’Donnell in Sunnyside, Queens, accused the AOH of being “unchristian” to ILGO, other responses blasted Mayor Dinkins and expressed outrage at the “Irish Perverts,” seeing the participation of the ILGO as an “attack on decency” and “sabotage.”⁷¹ “Surely the gays and lesbians are just trying to annoy everyone from the Catholic church from New York to Ireland and back. Shame on you,” wrote one Irish-American parade-goer to the *Irish Voice* in New York in 1991.⁷² For Godfrey S. Williams, the reaction of homophobic Irish Americans “is analogous to parents’ disbelief—‘Not in my family!’—upon learning of their child’s homosexuality.”⁷³

The fear of homosexuality felt by conservative Irish Americans, however, is as much rooted in American culture as in a simplified and heterosexualised view of Ireland or Irish identity in the United States.⁷⁴ The arrival of ILGO coincided uncomfortably, at least for conservative Irish Americans, with the intensification and contentious American response to HIV/AIDS. Perceived as a foreign threat to the nation during the Cold War, the homosexual in the 1980s and 1990s was now a contagious threat to the health of the national body. Anti-gay sentiments and aggression were nationwide realities, but the staunchly Catholic heterosexual (and homophobic) Irish Americans, in particular, embodied by New York City Cardinal John Joseph O’Connor, stood along the parade barricades taunting the ILGO members and queer activists, screaming, “Die faggots! Get AIDS and die” and “AIDS! AIDS!” as if their words had the power to infect the group.⁷⁵ In the year before ILGO applied to participate in the St Patrick’s Day parade, ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power)

⁶⁹ James M. McCullough, letter to the editor, *Irish Echo*, March 27-April 2, 1991, 10.

⁷⁰ Michael J. Geraghty, letter to the editor, *Irish Echo*, March 27-April 2, 1991, 10.

⁷¹ See Susan O’Donnell, letter to the editor, *Irish Voice*, March 23, 1991, 10 and letters to the editor, *Irish Echo*, March 27-April 2, 1991, 11.

⁷² Madeline C. Burns, letter to the editor, *Irish Voice*, March 30, 1991, 10.

⁷³ Godfrey S. Williams, “Blarney from the Hibernians,” *The Harvard Crimson*, March 12, 1991, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1992/3/17/blarney-from-the-hibernians-pbpbarades-in/>.

⁷⁴ Maguire, for instance, has written on the profoundly systemic issues at play in the debates: “The clearest message that the New York parade struggle has highlighted over the years is the extent of homophobia that runs through the powerful institutions of government, church and law.” See Anne Maguire, “The Accidental Immigrant,” in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Íde O’Carroll and Eoin Collins (London: Cassell, 1995), 207.

⁷⁵ Maguire, *Rock the Sham!*, 10

and WHAM! (Women's Health Action and Mobilization) staged their first "Stop the Church" protest on December 10, 1989, at St Patrick's Cathedral against the Catholic Church's stance on safe sex education, homosexuality, and abortion. Up to 4,500 protesters demonstrated and 111 people were arrested. As Munt and O'Donnell argue:

For many Irish Americans, the protest of ACT UP was read as a pollution of the most sacred rite of communion in their beloved St. Patrick's Cathedral and was felt deeply as a personal and communal injury; their memory of being victims of sectarian violence was aggravated. This memory was still fresh and raw when ILGO applied to march in the parade.⁷⁶

In December, 1990, two months after ILGO filed their application, ACT UP staged a second peaceful protest outside St Patrick's, an event which no doubt influenced the decision of the AOH.⁷⁷

The NYPD Emerald Society, an Irish-American police organization established in 1953, became embroiled in controversy in the embryonic years of the struggle when New York State Assembly member Deborah Glick wrote a letter to NYPD commissioner Lee Brown arguing against the organisation's open support for the exclusion of gays and lesbians from the parade.⁷⁸ A member of the group wrote to the *Irish Echo* in August, 1991, explaining the decision:

The St. Patrick's Day Parade is a private religious celebration that honors a holy man who united pagan Ireland and established the traditional Irish religious and family values that helped us overcome conquest, slaughter, famine, persecution and ridicule. By using political clout, members of various extremist homosexual groups, who call themselves the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization, muscled their way into the last St. Patrick's Day Parade for the purpose of degrading the spirit and intent of the parade and thumbing their noses at Cardinal O'Connor. A number of those malcontents also participated in other demonstrations against St. Patrick's Cathedral, including the Dec. 10, 1989 action in which the Holy Eucharist was desecrated. By adopting this or similar resolutions, and submitting them to the Parade Committee, the Irish fraternal marching organizations will both direct and back up the St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee in its legal and just opposition to these and future extremists who would subject us to further threat and ridicule.⁷⁹

For this Irish American, ILGO was an imposter group, a gay "extremist" organisation bent on terrorising the parade's participants, spectators, and message. Maguire remembers one member of the FDNY stepping away from his platoon in order to be closer to ILGO at the barricades only to hold out a flagpole and shout, "How would you like this rammed up

⁷⁶ Munt and O'Donnell, "Pride and Prejudice," 104. See also, Maguire, *Rock the Sham!*, 139.

⁷⁷ For coverage of this second demonstration, see John A. Byrne and John O'Mahony, "AOH, Activist in Standoff: Peaceful Protest at St Patrick's," *Irish Echo*, December 12-18, 1990, 1.

⁷⁸ Feargal Cochrane, *The End of Irish-America? Globalisation and the Irish Diaspora* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2010), 120.

⁷⁹ James Wilson, letter to the editor, *Irish Echo*, August 7-13, 1991, 10.

you?”⁸⁰ The incident is particularly poignant as it reveals that homophobic attitudes go beyond the confines of one conservative, religious institution, the AOH, and are expressed by other traditionally Irish-American groups and the community itself.

The Writing’s On The Streets: The Parade as a Literary Text

Clifford Geertz has famously argued that the function of performing cultural identity at public events such as the St Patrick’s Day parades is distinctly “interpretive.” According to Geertz, what is read is “a story [a people] tell themselves about themselves.”⁸¹ In her analysis of the nineteenth-century American parade, in which she terms the processional practice “the characteristic genre of nineteenth-century civic ceremony,” Mary Ryan provides an interpretation of the parade that frames the public enactment of cultural consciousness in which groups march “into the public streets *to spell out* a common social identity” in distinctly literary terms.⁸² “Because this ceremony permitted countless Americans to write their identities on the streets in full public view,” Ryan argues, “the parade can posit answers to basic questions of concern to social and cultural historians.”⁸³ She immediately goes on to elaborate on the textual nature of the parade and its significance to the construction of cultural identity:

To historians then, the parade constitutes the public, ceremonial language whereby nineteenth-century Americans made order out of an urban universe that teemed with diversity and change. By choosing to join the march in specific contingents, paraders acted out a social vocabulary, impressing their group identities on the minds of countless bystanders. Their words were also strung into sentences—the order of the line of march—that adumbrated social ranks and relationships among the contingents. In the composition and order of the parade, historians can read both the vocabulary and the syntax by which social and cultural order was created out of urban multiplicity.⁸⁴

In the case of queer Irish exclusion from the St Patrick’s Day parade, these textual structures underpinning the genre of parading have most often been unpacked not in the arena of literary discourse but rather in the work of legal scholars.

In “Authorship and Autonomy as Rites of Exclusion: The Intellectual Propertization of Free Speech in *Hurley v. Irish-American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Group of Boston*,”

⁸⁰ Maguire, *Rock the Sham!*, 116.

⁸¹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 448.

⁸² Mary Ryan, “The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order,” in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 132-33 (emphasis added). Ryan takes the St Patrick’s Day parade as a key illustrative example in her discussion, tracing the rise of Irish presence in New York City to the point where, in 1858, the *New York Herald* was able to claim that “parading had become almost synonymous with the ethnic label Irish-American” (146).

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

published in 1996, Madhavi Sunder provides the first textual analysis of the Supreme Court decision to uphold the legal exclusion of GLIB from the parade in South Boston, a decision reached in 1995. “Contrary to the media inspired image of the Supreme Court sanctioning exclusion of the marchers from the parade’s physical space,” Sunder argues,

Hurley heralded a much more unique type of exclusion under the umbrella of the First Amendment: the denial of gay and lesbian individuals of access to *discursive space*. Parade organizers prevented gays and lesbians from marching unless they masked their sexual orientation or identity. Gays and lesbians were excluded from using the *idea* of the parade to contest the heterosexual image of Irish-American identity rather than from the parade itself. In *Hurley*, free speech, cloaked in the rhetoric of speaker autonomy, functions as a new property, albeit as *intellectual* property rather than *real*.⁸⁵

Since the St Patrick’s Day parade was deemed the “property” of the South Boston Allied Veterans Council, the Supreme Court was able to successfully argue that, as authors, the Council had the right to dictate the “message” of the parade, and the meaning that GLIB threatened to introduce to the narrative of Irish-American identity was to be written out or consigned to the margins of the heteronormative text of that identity. In a review sharply at odds with Sunder’s approach to the issue, Dwight G. Duncan concludes that “GLIB was interested in the confrontation, and while it takes two to make a fight, it only takes one to start one ... Fortunately, the story has a happy ending. The First Amendment won.”⁸⁶

In 1998, Carl F. Stychin, continuing the discussion, suggested that “the dispute between the Veterans Council and GLIB underscores how the parade, like national culture and identity, is a ‘contentious, performative space’ wherein alternative narratives of nationhood (and belonging) can serve to challenge the dominant narrative of, in this instance, the heterosexualized national identity.”⁸⁷ For Stychin, the rights of a “minority” group not to be discriminated against by the organisers of the parade in the case were directly at odds with a converse legal imperative: “the right of those organizers to conduct a march which ‘speaks’ (or does not ‘speak’) a particular statement, without being legally coerced into expressing a message which conflicts with their viewpoint.” As he concludes, “speech and equality *seem* to collide directly.”⁸⁸ In defining public space as private intellectual property, the Supreme Court

⁸⁵ Madhavi Sunder, “Authorship and Autonomy as Rites of Exclusion: The Intellectual Propertization of Free Speech in *Hurley v. Irish-American Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Group of Boston*,” *Stanford Law Review* 49, no. 1 (November 1996): 144 (emphasis in the original), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229374>.

⁸⁶ Dwight G. Duncan, “Parading the First Amendment Through the Streets of South Boston,” *New England Law Review* 30, no. 3 (Spring 1996): 693-94, https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?collection=journals&handle=hein.journals/newlr30&id=673&men_tab=srchresults.

⁸⁷ Carl F. Stychin, “Celebration and Consolidation: National Rituals and the Legal Construction of American Identities,” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 281, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/764638>.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 279.

withdrew GLIB's ability to speak back to the conservative organisers and the queer exclusions enacted by them. In David Lloyd's words,

what is at issue here is effectively a matter of verisimilitude: which narrative of 'Irishness' comes to seem self-evident, normative truthful. Control of narratives is a crucial function of the state apparatus since its political and legal frameworks can only gain consent if the tale they tell monopolizes the field of probabilities."⁸⁹

Homosexuality does not fit within the narrative of Irish-American identity since, as Conrad suggests, "it threatens the reproduction of the heterosexual familist narrative of the Nation/State."⁹⁰

In response to the *authoritative* absolutism represented in the image of the homophobic parade organisers, Sunder and Stychin gesture towards a more postmodern, deconstructive strategy in writing the text of Irish-American identity. As Sunder illustrates in her essay, the rights of intellectual property have been profoundly influenced by the emergence of the romantic author figure in Western literary and artistic arenas.⁹¹ Citing Jessica Litman's description of the idea of the romantic author as "the charming notion that authors create something from nothing,"⁹² Sunder calls on the work of cultural studies in general and on the writing of Michel Foucault in particular in order to argue for the unmaking of the romantic author myth. In "What Is an Author?" Foucault denounces the prized position of the individual author in society and, instead, privileges what he terms a "transdiscursive" position, by which textual production "does not refer, purely and simply, to an actual individual insofar as it simultaneously gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy."⁹³ Indeed, already in 1989, Ryan advocated for the understanding of the American parade as a multiply authored literary document:

It has multiple authors: the thousands of marchers who carried their own chosen symbols into one composite ceremony. If there is any overarching meaning, any capsule summary of a culture embedded in this text, it was not the design of the *auteur* but the creation of specific individuals and distinct

⁸⁹ David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 6. Quoted in Conrad, "Queer Treasons," 125.

⁹⁰ Conrad, "Queer Treasons," 125.

⁹¹ Sunder, "Authorship and Autonomy," 142. As a key discussion on this point, Sunder cites Peter Jaszi, "On The Author Effect: Contemporary Copyright and Collective Creativity," *Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal* 10, no. 2 (1992): 293-320.

⁹² Sunder, "Authorship and Autonomy," 143. See Jessica Litman, "The Public Domain," *Emory Law Journal* 39, no. 4 (1990): 965-1023.

⁹³ Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 130-131.

groups who operated within the social constraints and political possibilities of their time.”⁹⁴

In this sense, the parade has no single author; it is rather a document discursively produced by the socio-historical, political, and cultural contexts in which it is enmeshed.

Seeing the *Hurley* case as an example of legally sanctioned speech protected under the myth of the romantic author, Sunder declares that the “modern First Amendment law assigns property values to identity and speech that are based on the principles of exclusion and despotic dominion over discourse and symbolic images.” In the working against the consecration of the sacred single author in the First Amendment, Sunder sees the possibility instead “to view individual and collective speech as contested fora, and the critical arena of speech as not only an end but a *means* of social change.”⁹⁵ Similarly, Stychin considers replacing the “authentic message” paraded at the St Patrick’s Day event with a more collective effort in producing Irish-American identity. He suggests:

[I]f the parade is envisioned as a series, then the better analogy in American law might be to a common carrier, such as the operator of a railroad, telephone, or telegraph company ... The Veterans Council becomes, not a composer of original speech, but a conduit or common carrier, delivering the messages of a diverse range of groups forming a series. Thus, national identity and culture might also be reconceived, not as based on a common purpose or project, but as providing a space for the performance of a wide range of different projects, with no single, authentic way of relating to that national space.⁹⁶

In his deconstruction of the author, Foucault goes even further, writing that “the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analysed as a complex and variable function of discourse.”⁹⁷ In fact, Ryan makes a passing allusion to the removal of the author in the production of meaning at the parade in her discussion. According to her, “the parade is like a text in its susceptibility to multiple interpretations,” thus shifting the means of production from the author to the “reader.”⁹⁸

Roland Barthes’s influential 1967 essay, “The Death of the Author,” which signalled his move from structuralism to poststructuralism, deconstructs authoritative and definitive interpretations of texts.⁹⁹ “In the multiplicity of writing,” he argues, “everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*.”¹⁰⁰ Barthes’s work is important in this discussion on the

⁹⁴ Ryan, “The American Parade,” 133 (emphasis in the original).

⁹⁵ Sunder, “Authorship and Autonomy,” 171.

⁹⁶ Stychin, “Celebration and Consolidation,” 290.

⁹⁷ Foucault, “What Is an Author?,” 138.

⁹⁸ Ryan, “The American Parade,” 133.

⁹⁹ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image-Music-Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 143.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 147 (emphasis in the original).

symbolic space of the parade because he views the text not as a unified and obvious site of cultural meaning but as a “multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash.”¹⁰¹ In the case of the St Patrick’s Day parade, as Stychin proclaims, this leads to meaning that can be imagined “as cacophony rather than harmony.”¹⁰² Elsewhere, Linnell Secomb critiques the “totalizing unity” often demanded within communities, arguing instead in favour of diversity, difference, and disagreement: “Disagreement ... holds a space open for diversity and freedom. It is not disagreement, resistance, and agitation that destroy community. It is rather the repression or suppression of difference and disagreement in the name of unity and consensus which destroys the engagement and interrelation of community.”¹⁰³

Disagreement can exist within as much as between groups with opposing ideologies. Indeed, disagreement was a key feature of ILGO’s internal structure, as Maguire recalls, manifesting often as animosity between Irish-born and Irish-American members (and even non-Irish individuals), as well as between gay men and lesbian women in the group. These differences, however, while sometimes creating stumbling blocks, also resulted in building community. “Essentially,” Maguire writes, “ILGO was like any other group—full of contradictions. We had our ups and downs that first year, and we also had some remarkable moments throughout our time together. The best were making new friends, watching people transform, feeling safe, and laughing together.”¹⁰⁴ And it was the shared project of being both queer and Irish communally that acted as a means of reparative respite from the struggle against the AOH: “My particular favourite ILGO activity of all time was our céilí’s [sic], which were so much fun. It never mattered what had happened at the previous meeting because the céilí was always about enjoyment and laughter.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 146.

¹⁰² Stychin, “Celebration and Consolidation,” 290.

¹⁰³ Linnell Secomb, “Fractured Community,” *Hypathia* 15, no. 2 (Spring, 2000): 134, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810660>. Indeed, the St Patrick’s Day parade, particularly in New York City, has regularly been the site of disagreement, from its early days in the nineteenth century as a performance of Irish resistance against nativist hostility through to political schisms in relation to members of the Irish Republican Army marching as Grand Marshal in 1983, seven years before ILGO’s name was known to anyone. For a short history of disagreement within the ranks of the parade, see Jane Gladden Kelton, “New York City St. Patrick’s Day Parade: Invention of Contention and Consensus,” *The Drama Review* 29, no. 3 (Autumn, 1985): 93-105, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1145656>.

¹⁰⁴ Maguire, *Rock the Sham*, 44.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. Similarly, in “The Accidental Immigrant,” Maguire declares that “ILGO’s primary function was ... to provide a safe place for Irish and Irish-American lesbians and gay men” (204). ILGO was profoundly active in political and social terms. Considering the group was established first as a community-building exercise for Irish queers in New York, it is apparent that social organisation in the form of Irish dancing fundraisers, called “Riverprance,” film screenings, gay and lesbian Irish literature workshops, “Queer and Green” Irish history presentations, bingo, and holiday céilís were crucial to the group’s activity and activism. Copies of the aforementioned promotional and ephemeral material, as well as stamps, badges, t-shirts, and “Irish Queers Belong” stickers, is stored in both Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization, Special Collection, 200104, Lesbian Herstory Archives, New York and Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization/Anne Maguire, Special Collection,

A more recent disagreement between LGBT Irish groups in New York has pitted the Lavender and Green Alliance, founded by former ILGO member Brendan Fay, whose departure from the latter and establishment of the former was sparked by conflict over the direction of ILGO's public action,¹⁰⁶ against the more radical Irish Queers. Since 2000, Fay has held the "St. Pats For All" parade in Sunnyside, Queens, an event that "welcomes all to celebrate Irish heritage and culture regardless of race, gender, creed or sexual orientation."¹⁰⁷ While Irish Queers continue the fight against the Fifth Avenue organisers, the Lavender and Green Alliance has produced an alternative venue in which to stage the forging and representation of Irishness. The parade in Queens, Adrian Mulligan contends,

represents an attempt to denaturalize Irish American nationalism and its entire associated heterosexual, patriarchal, and ethnically exclusivist norms, as naturalized through the symbolic space and time that is Fifth Avenue on St. Patrick's Day. By emphasizing multiple strands of Irishness in the world of interconnected spaces, the "St. Pats for All" parade theme also challenges territorialized narratives of Irishness, and proves that the story of the Irish diaspora can be used to break down barriers between communities, rather than to erect and reinforce them in the style of the AOH.¹⁰⁸

"St Pats for All" changes the story and reorients the narrative, creating new avenues for reading Irishness in the United States and beyond. Before moving forward to the chapters, it might be constructive to first take pause and proceed in a backward turn.

Turning Back

Against the progressive march of the St Patrick's Day parades, the story being told in the procession of Irish pride hinges on an encounter with what has gone before. As Moss argues, it was on St Patrick's Day in nineteenth-century New York "that Irish-Americans rhetorically and symbolically grounded their present in a remembered and constructed past: in sermons, speeches, and in the form of the festivities themselves, alternative conceptions of Irish-American identity were validated by linking them through commemoration with an 'Irish past.'"¹⁰⁹ The reconstruction of the past remains an integral part in the annual festivities. For Munt and O'Donnell, however, it is such a "backward-looking aspect" that has positioned the

200401, Lesbian Herstory Archives, New York. Research for this section was conducted at the Lesbian Herstory Archives on September 22 and October 5, 2016. Equally, copies of the same material, including ILGO's newsletter, are stored in the Archives of Irish America Vertical File Collection, AIA 013, box 12, folder "Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization," Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University. This material was consulted on September 29, 2016.

¹⁰⁶ Maguire, *Rock the Sham*, 72.

¹⁰⁷ "About Us," <https://www.stpatsforall.org/aboutus>.

¹⁰⁸ Adrian N. Mulligan, "Countering Exclusion: The 'St. Pats for All' Parade," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 15, no. 2 (2008): 163, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09663690701863265>.

¹⁰⁹ Moss, "St. Patrick's Day Celebrations," 130.

parade organisers as a source of ridicule in the eyes of more “progressive” onlookers and Irish people elsewhere.¹¹⁰ The perspective of the St Patrick’s Day parades in New York and Boston is both retroactive and retrograde. Between such an out-dated aspect in the space of Irish America and Ireland’s swiftly developing European modernity, argue Munt and O’Donnell, “a temporal fissure can be seen to emerge across the geographic space.”¹¹¹ In his history of Irish America, William Shannon warns against feeling backward. He writes:

Irish life in America begins with a sharp and tragic rejection. To “come out” to the new country meant thrusting behind the old, usually forever, unless in a few instances success brought enough money to visit the old country once more ... It would be a journey back in more than one sense, a journey back into the house of their father, into the womb of old memories and long-forgotten sadness. To return would be to reconsider the crucial decision that it was no use to reconsider. The pleasure of nostalgia would not be worth the pain.¹¹²

Shannon seems to be suggesting (in a language that peculiarly foreshadows gay liberationist rhetoric) that to face the past would produce in the Irish in America negative feelings not worth the journey back.

In a March issue of the *Irish Voice* from 1991, the first and last year ILGO participated in the St Patrick’s Day parade on Fifth Avenue, Patrick Farrelly recalled for readers a ludicrous scene from that year’s event:

The image is now infamous. It shows five men in top hats, morning suits and sashes on the St. Patrick’s Day Parade reviewing stand with their backs to the parade. They were Aides to the Grand Marshal, five of the twelve who were chosen every year. They turned their backs when Division 7 of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) led by Mayor David Dinkins passed the reviewing stand. In fact all six men turned their backs but it seems that curiosity got the better of Suffolk County’s John Hennessy who had turned his back on the marchers but couldn’t help snatching a quick look. He was later referred to by the other aides as the “Pillar of Salt.”¹¹³

Maguire recounts the same image in *Rock the Sham!* and details further how the same averted gaze occurred among spectators: “When our eyes met there were two responses only, either the person stopped screaming, or continued but with eyes lowered or cast in another direction.”¹¹⁴ The scene in the reviewing stand inversely reorients the backward gaze away from the unfolding spectacle of gays and lesbians parading publicly, literally turning backs

¹¹⁰ Munt and O’Donnell, “Pride and Prejudice,” 108.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹¹² William V. Shannon, *The American Irish*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 25.

¹¹³ Patrick Farrelly, “Why They Turned Their Backs On The Parade,” *The Irish Voice*, March 30, 1991, 8.

¹¹⁴ Maguire, *Rock the Sham!*, 19.

and views away from a present-day Sodom. One of the aides, however, like Lot's wife, is drawn to the sinful scene, thus becoming, like Lot's wife, a "pillar of salt."

"Whether understood as throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development or as children who refuse to grow up," writes Heather Love, "queers have been seen across the twentieth century as a backward race. Perverse, immature, sterile, and melancholic: even when they provoke fears about the future, they somehow also recall the past."¹¹⁵ In this sense, it is not the homophobic antics of the Irish-American organisers that are somehow untimely from the perspective of outside eyes; it is, rather, that the queerness of ILGO transforms its members, in the eyes of Irish-American spectators, into ciphers of backwardness, regressive bodies of sinful sexuality and, in Love's words, "a drag on the progress of civilization."¹¹⁶ Despite such damning judgments of the taint of backwardness in both the Irish-American and queer cases expressed on either side of the debate, this thesis moves to consider the ways in which a turn backwards, far from the conservative aspect of the reviewing stand on Fifth Avenue and from the reactionary view of Irish Americans as instinctively retrograde, might alternatively produce more radical and queerer aspects of sexuality, sociality, and cultural politics intimately bound up in understandings of Irishness.

In *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity*, David Lloyd notes the ways in which Irish culture is routinely posited as backwards in a number of ideological discourses: "From the sentimentalization of its picturesque survivals to the violent repression of its bloody-minded and irrational violence, these responses have sought over and over again to fix, with all the ambiguity of that term, the remnants of other times that appear as the signs of Ireland's incivility."¹¹⁷ Speaking about the globalised image of Irishness, Negra claims elsewhere that:

While associations of Irishness with antimaterialism and whimsy have existed at least since the publication of Yeats's *The Celtic Twilight: Faerie and Folklore* [in 1902], these associations are now ironically hyper-commercialized. Virtually every form of popular culture has in one way or another, at one time or another, presented Irishness as a moral antidote to contemporary ills ranging from globalization to postmodern alienation, from crises over the meaning and practice of family values to environmental destruction."¹¹⁸

As Negra points out, it was from the 1990s when Irishness became such a commercially viable object of interrogation, production, and consumption, more often than not for conservative uses. For her, in Irish-American narratives in the 1990s and 2000s, "Irishness

¹¹⁵ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁷ David Lloyd, *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day in association with Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2008), 1.

¹¹⁸ Diane Negra, "The Irish in Us," 3.

serves as a point of access into a purified vision of family and community life that specifically compensates for the exigencies of contemporary U.S. culture.”¹¹⁹ In the United States, Irishness has routinely been both associated with and utilised by conservative trends of political and cultural expression, from the homophobia widely espoused in the parade debates to problematic articulations of whiteness in the wake of the terrorist attacks in New York City on September 11.¹²⁰ Turning away from these deployments of Irishness, while always remaining attuned to their effective and affective resonances, this thesis views the interaction between queerness and Irishness through a lens of backwardness.

In his 1967 book, *The Backward Look*, Frank O’Connor proposes that Irish literature is distinctly touched by the mark of backwardness, “a certain stubbornness about the past.”¹²¹ Each of the authors explored in the subsequent chapters, to varying degrees and to divergent ends, is deeply invested in the past: Alice McDermott’s turn to Irish-American identity and experience in the past in her historical fiction; James McCourt’s obsessive return to mid-century queer experience in his on-going saga of his Irish-Czech opera diva and her fantastical realm; Peggy Shaw’s and Eileen Myles’s ritualistic occupation with the traumas and losses of growing up queer in Boston in tragic familial circumstances during the 1950s; and, finally, Stephanie Grant’s imaginative reconstruction of the 1974 desegregation scenes of Boston’s Irish-American enclave, “Southie.” That Grant’s book was published over a decade after an excerpt appeared in an anthology of Irish-American writing in 1995 is a testament to the sense of belatedness that is often attached to the composition of these cultural forms. What this thesis proposes is that queerness becomes an important way to reimagine, or reorient, Irish-American perspectives on identity. The trope of backwardness provides the productive tools and theoretical underpinnings of the discussions on the intimate encounter between Irishness and queerness in this thesis.

Are We Queer Yet?

On March 17, 1970, Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* was one of many across the United States to attend the cinema release of William Friedkin’s adaptation of a 1968 Broadway play that has been unevenly remembered as both a landmark in the birth of the modern gay movement and as a backward relic unfit for inclusion in the canon of gay literary production. Reflecting on his viewing of *The Boys in the Band* the previous evening, Canby

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹²⁰ See Diane Negra, “Irishness, Innocence, and American Identity Politics Before and After September 11,” in *The Irish in US: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 354-71.

¹²¹ Frank O’Connor, *The Backward Look: Survey of Irish Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 7.

wrote of “a feeling of time disorientation, as if, in 1970, I were looking at a well-made Broadway play from the late thirties or early forties, something on the order of Clare Boothe’s ‘The Women’ or Joseph Field’s ‘The Doughgirls.’”¹²² In their preliminary statement prefacing an issue of *Gay* the following month, editors Lige Clarke and Jack Nichols express an opinion that spoke for many gay men looking back at Mart Crowley’s play about a group of gay men gathering for a friend’s birthday party, first performed in 1968, and now watching its adaptation for the screen in 1970. Clarke and Nichols write:

We believe that *The Boys in the Band* is, without a doubt the most vicious and insidious anti-homosexual plot on today’s circuit. It will be applauded by insecure, psychiatrically brainwashed homosexuals, but those who do not suffer from socially-induced inferiority complexes will recognize it for what it is: an attempt to perpetuate old myths. It would delight us if the Gay Activists Alliance would picket theatres where this bitchy movie is being shown.¹²³

In fact, when the movie debuted, the Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front answered Clarke and Nichols’s call to action, staging a picket in protest against the movie’s depiction of homosexuality. The group carried signs with slogans such as, “Boys in the Band—Best Gay Movie of 1949.”¹²⁴ In his review of the movie, Peter Ogren writes in *Gay* that “*Boys in the Band* is the slickest straight-world, anti-homosexual piece of celluloid around. I can only say that this movie will set the image of the homosexual in America back twenty years, for all of its pretensions to modernity.”¹²⁵

Since its theatrical debut in 1968 and its cinematic adaptation two years later, Crowley’s *The Boys in The Band*, framing the immediate pre- and post-Stonewall period, with its feelings of shame and anger and sense of backwardness, has become both the harbinger of gay liberationist modernity and the unpleasant drag on the affirmative turn of that modernity. Opening the year after the Sheridan Square Riots in the Greenwich Village, Friedkin’s adaptation of *The Boys in the Band* sat uncomfortably within the emerging discourses of pride central to the liberationist politics of the embryonic gay movement at the time. In his seminal work, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, for instance, Dennis Altman dismisses *Boys* as nothing more than a story of “unredeemed misery.”¹²⁶ In its afterlife, the story continues to provoke negative responses, but it has also become an anachronistic text that seems to act as a counter-discourse to today’s climate of gay marriage and increasing visibility for LGBT groups. As Michael Schiavi learned while showing the film to his class of undergraduate

¹²² Vincent Canby, “‘Boys in the Band’: Crowley Study of Male Homosexuality Opens,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1970, 36.

¹²³ Lige Clarke and Jack Nichols, “The Editors Speak,” *Gay*, April 13, 1970, 2.

¹²⁴ “Pickets Denounce ‘Boys in the Band,’” *Gay*, April 20, 1970, 15.

¹²⁵ Peter Ogren, “The Bores in the Band,” *Gay*, April 13, 1970, 17.

¹²⁶ Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: Avon, 1971), 29.

students at New York University, *The Boys in the Band* “jibes ill with millennial queer politics.”¹²⁷ On March 17, 2015, forty-five years after the film’s debut, Sascha Cohen, in a *Time* magazine article, comments on the temporal juncture presented in reviewing *Boys* for the contemporary observer:

To the generation of gay Americans who came of age amidst the positive imagery of the contemporary LGBT rights movement—pride, love, rainbows and the message that “It Gets Better”—the plight of these men can look unrecognizable. With its bitter angst and grim outlook (the film’s most famous line is “show me a happy homosexual and I’ll show you a gay corpse”) *The Boys in the Band* feels like something of a relic.¹²⁸

This sense of the story as anachronistic was strikingly evidenced in a recent temporally faithful revival in London’s West End. At the beginning of the first act, a song could be heard playing in reverse, a technical device employed to transport audience members back in time to the late 1960s. The set was decorated with portraits of female stars of the era such as Judy Garland, Joan Crawford, and Bette Davis.¹²⁹ Crowley’s *Boys in the Band* has endured as a premier narrative of queer backwardness.

According to Love, while representations of queerness as backward have been the ideological work of homophobic discourses, backwardness, nonetheless, has also been reclaimed as a vital structural element of queer culture. “Over the last century,” she writes, “queers have embraced backwardness in many forms: in celebrations of perversion, in defiant refusals to grow up, in explorations of haunting and memory, and in stubborn attachments to lost objects.”¹³⁰ In opposition to the image of Lot’s wife transforming into a pillar of salt in her backward gaze towards the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19, Love privileges Walter Benjamin’s figure of the angel of history. In section nine of his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin writes:

A Klee painting named “Angelus Novus” shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the

¹²⁷ Michael R. Schiavi, “Teaching the ‘Boys’: Mart Crowley in the Millennial Classroom,” *Modern Language Studies* 31, no. 2 (2001): 75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3195338>.

¹²⁸ Sascha Cohen, “How One Movie Changed LGBT History,” *Time*, March 17, 2015, <http://time.com/3742951/boys-in-the-band/>.

¹²⁹ *The Boys in the Band*, dir. Adam Penford, Vaudeville Theatre, London, UK, February 18, 2017. This revival ran in the Vaudeville Theatre from February 7-18, 2017.

¹³⁰ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 7.

future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.¹³¹

For Love, Benjamin's angel of history is "a preeminently backward figure, an emblem of resistance to the forward march of progress."¹³²

Queerness has been a crucial disruption to the tyranny of heteronormativity. At the same time, it has also worked to unravel the assimilationist and neoliberal agenda of contemporary gay and lesbian identity politics, which Lisa Duggan terms "homonormativity," that is, "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."¹³³ Homonormative strategies not only succeed in reifying sanitised notions of homosexual identity in society, but, in the guise of "advances" such as gay marriage and positive media representation of "good gays," also "threaten to obscure the continuing denigration and dismissal of queer existence."¹³⁴ Crowley's play, as Cohen argues in his retrospective review of the film adaptation, confirms how "stories of suffering can evoke empathy and offer a sense of historical perspective. The problem only comes in assuming that violence and intolerance are situated safely in the past."¹³⁵

For Richard Dyer, queerness, despite its contemporary association with the emergence of queer theory in the early 1990s, is a backward formation still enduring in the present. By way of introducing his collection of essays in *The Culture of Queers*, Dyer helpfully maps out the discursive divergences in the terms "Queer" and "queer." While the former is a conceptual and theoretical practice most closely associated with the academic turn towards queer theory and the inauguration of Queer Studies, the latter signifies a more "fixed and exclusive sexuality" rooted in the period between the mid-nineteenth century and the mid-to-late-twentieth century (Dyer cites the years 1869-1969, marked on the one end by the publication of Károly Mária Benkert's pamphlet in Leipzig calling for a repeal to laws against sex between men and on the other by the Stonewall riots in New York).¹³⁶ The June riots in Greenwich Village are synonymous with the rise of a contemporary LGBT political and cultural awareness in the West, so much so that pre-Stonewall queer social and sexual

¹³¹ Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn and ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 257-58. Citations refer to the Schocken edition. Quoted in Love, *Feeling Backward*, 148

¹³² Love, *Feeling Backward*, 147.

¹³³ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50

¹³⁴ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 10.

¹³⁵ Cohen, "How One Movie Changed LGBT History."

¹³⁶ Richard Dyer, introduction to *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3.

identities are plagued with the representational discourse of either invisibility or “the closet.” Before “gay” there was “queer,” and while post-Stonewall LGBT identity politics rely on the subordination of the queer as the pathetic predecessor of the postmodern “liberated” sexual subject, Dyer is not convinced the transition has progressed so seamlessly. As he proclaims: “I remember being a queer and have never been entirely convinced that I ever became gay.”¹³⁷

In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz points not to the here and now of gay and lesbian social, sexual, and political experience, but rather to the “then and there” of queer futurity:

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future.¹³⁸

Muñoz’s utopian hermeneutics call upon what he names “the no-longer conscious” of the past in the hopes of finding glimpses of unfulfilled queer potentiality that resists the straight temporalities of the present and offer avenues to queerer futures: “The present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds.”¹³⁹

Muñoz’s intervention is an important progression in the backward turn towards potentialities for queer futurity in the past, and it is his work to which this thesis is greatly indebted. Responding to the anti-relational turn in queer theory, embodied in the work of both Leo Bersani’s *Homos* and Lee Edelman’s *No Future*, Muñoz’s queer utopian theory privileges the possibility of collectivity over the anti-social drive of some queer criticism.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the introduction to Muñoz’s book, “Feeling Utopia,” is an allusion to and reorientation of Love’s *Feeling Backward*. In place of the negative feelings of shame and isolation Love associates with backwardness (although also not entirely eschewing feelings of disappointment altogether), Muñoz offers collectivity and pleasure. On the other hand, Love, too, distances herself from the anti-relational stance of Bersani and Edelman, professing to be “more interested in the turn to the past than . . . in the refusal of the future itself,” placing her in “dialogue with critics working on shame, melancholia, depression, and pathos—the experience of failure rather than negativity.”¹⁴¹ This thesis owes its theoretical approach to

¹³⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹³⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁴⁰ See Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) and Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

¹⁴¹ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 23.

both Muñoz and Love, in particular, as well as to a number of other influential works invested in the backward turn of queerness, which provide a point of access to the texts explored throughout. These include Elizabeth Freeman, Benjamin Kahan, David L. Eng, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Jack Halberstam, and Judith Butler.

That Crowley's *Boys in the Band* made its cinematic debut on St Patrick's Day is particularly appropriate for a story whose main character Michael Connelly is a gay Irish-American Catholic. Indeed, the play's tortured character is drawn from Crowley's own life. Edward Martino Crowley was born on August 21, 1935, in Vicksburg Mississippi to Edward Joseph, a staunch Irish Catholic and alcoholic, and Pauline Crowley.¹⁴² While responses to the play have universally equated Michael's self-loathing drunken spiral with internalised homophobia, they have hardly ever focused on the Irish-American textures of *Boys*. Vito Russo, in his review of the film in *The Celluloid Closet* provides an exceptional response: "The internal chaos of Michael, a guilt-ridden Catholic, forms the focal point of the reaction to the gay lifestyle throughout the story."¹⁴³ Crowley revisited this context later in 1973 with the play *A Breeze from the Gulf*, in which a younger Michael deals with his father's alcoholism and death, a scene that appeared in the final moments of *The Boys in the Band* five years earlier. In 1993, Crowley returned to a further moment of trauma in his biography, namely his abuse as a child, in the play, *For Reasons That Remain Unclear*, a performance of conflict and redemption between a man and the Irish-American priest who sexually abused him.¹⁴⁴ This trilogy weaves together a continuing backward glance toward both the queer and Irish-American past for Crowley, a past riven with trauma, abuse, loss, and hurt. This intersection of sexuality and Irishness in Crowley's retrospective view is a crucial, yet entirely ignored, lens through which to examine the landmark 1968 play.¹⁴⁵

In *Textures of Irish America*, Lawrence McCaffrey describes the "Irish journey in the United States from the unskilled working-class ghettos to the middle-class suburbs as a success story in [sic] acquisition of material prosperity if not necessarily a spiritual or intellectual achievement."¹⁴⁶ Similarly, Jay P. Dolan argues that, by the 1960s, the Irish "had

¹⁴² Jon Fraser, "Mart Crowley," in *The Gay & Lesbian Theatrical Legacy: A Biographical Dictionary of Major Figures in American Stage History in the Pre-Stonewall Era*, ed. Billy J. Harbin, Kim Marra, and Robert A. Schanke (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 114.

¹⁴³ Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), 177-78

¹⁴⁴ For an anthology of Crowley's work, see *The Collected Plays of Mart Crowley* (New York: Alyson Books, 2009), as well as the earlier *3 Plays by Mart Crowley* (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 1996), which brings together *The Boys in the Band*, *A Breeze from the Gulf*, and *For Reasons That Remain Unclear*.

¹⁴⁵ Due to spatial and discursive limits, the Irish-American context of Crowley's cultural output does not feature prominently in the subsequent chapters. In the case of McCourt and Myles, Crowley's work resurfaces as both an influence on and appropriate comparison. As chapter two shows, McCourt shares with *The Boys in the Band* an affection for camp aesthetics and the culture of pre-Stonewall queens. In chapter four, Crowley reappears in relation to Myles's engagement with the melancholic survival of alcoholism among Irish Americans.

¹⁴⁶ Lawrence McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), xi.

become one of the best educated and most prosperous ethnic groups in the nation.”¹⁴⁷ In the preface to his book, McCaffrey takes issue with a school of Irish-American historical analysis, epitomised in the work of Kerby Miller, for its stubborn attachment to negativity in the story of the Irish in America. “In describing Irish-American alienation in the past,” McCaffrey argues, “they are expressing more of their own present-day ambivalences about their country than the sentiments of the Irish in the United States.”¹⁴⁸ In a scathing review, Miller blasts the critical volume, *The Irish in Chicago*, which features McCaffrey’s essay “The Irish-American Dimension,” as a “neoliberal, consensual thesis,” which places “an ahistorical overemphasis on the ultimate suburbanization and embourgeoisement of the Chicago Irish that trivializes the immigrant and even the second-generation experiences,” ignoring “the pain of exile; poverty, exploitation, and conflict (both inter- and intraethnic); the strains and disappointments of assimilation; and what [James T.] Farrell called ‘the tragedy of the worker.’”¹⁴⁹

Dolan at least acknowledges that the image of the middle-class Irish in America does not fully represent the whole story: “The other side of the Irish story is of those who were never able to make it. Boston was especially notable in this regard. Despite the prominent presence of the Irish in the city’s business and banking communities, another segment of the Irish community lived in an entirely different world.”¹⁵⁰ For him, it seems that these two narratives of Irishness in America run on opposite sides from one another and in antipodal directions, one facing the forward march to middle-class respectability, the other facing backward towards socio-economic paralysis and intellectually stunted world views. In gay Irish-American author John Gilgun’s 1989 novel, *Music I Never Dreamed Of*, Stevie Riley, reluctant member of Boston’s South End Irish community, pinpoints the hypocrisy inherent in the St Patrick’s Day parade’s display of Irish-American triumph in the face of the bleak realities of life in working-class Irish Boston:

Saint Patrick’s Day was the big event of the year, the affirmation of our national identity, our culture, our collective life. Our collective life was going to work every day for minimum wage, worrying about being laid off, voting the straight Democratic ticket and getting drunk to numb the pain. But once a year we were Captain Lightfoot, fighting the British. We were Saint Patrick, driving out the snakes. We were the Blarney Stone. We were Barry Fitzgerald. What more did we want?¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), xi.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xiii.

¹⁴⁹ Kerby Miller, review of *The Irish in Chicago*, by Lawrence J. McCaffrey, Ellen Skerrett, Michael E Funchion, and Charles Fanning (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), *American Historical Review* 93, no 5 (December 1988): 1393-94, EBSCOhost.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 279.

¹⁵¹ John Gilgun, *Music I Never Dreamed Of* (New York: Amethyst Press, 1989), 48-49.

Despite the repetition of “our” in this passage, Gilgun’s text presents two dissonant images of Irishness in the city, one paraded publicly as the “official” portrait of a stage Irish-American identity embodied by the Irish actor Barry Fitzgerald, while the other revealing the paralysing conditions experienced among the Irish working class.¹⁵²

Lloyd has provided a convincing call for refusing to disavow the feelings of backwardness associated with Irish identity in the forward march towards modernity. Injecting a postcolonial perspective into Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s discussion of modernity and industrialised societies, Lloyd turns to Ireland, which shows remaining “forms of unevenness that call into question the historicist narrative that understands modernity as the progress from the backward to the advanced, from the pre-modern to the modern.” While his critique centres on Ireland, with an analysis of emigration, to which the thesis returns in relation to Myles’s writing, the demands of modernisation have played an important role in the narrative of the Irish in America. According to Lloyd the progressive perspective of conventional historicism:

views social and cultural elements that resist modernization as residues of ideas and practices that belong to the past and remain to be overcome. Symptoms of an obstinate backwardness, these elements are stuck in a past that is opposed to the inevitable advent of progress and accordingly have no future ... From such historicism, the idea that residual elements of the past might persist into the present with some real differential significance is utterly remote. The very fact that they have been damaged in the brutal march of progress becomes a judgement against their potential to bear any human value, to conserve, even in that damage, the outlines of utopian desires that might challenge the dogmas of modernity.¹⁵³

The above passage shares remarkably similar cadences with the utopian hope of Muñoz’s work, as if Lloyd is speaking forward to *Cruising Utopia*, while Muñoz is feeling back to *Irish Times*. For this reason, a reading of Irish and queer backward glances in literature is an appealing venture, one that holds a potentially fruitful outcome and transformative outlook.

As Mark W. Turner suggests in *Backward Glances*:

Queer approaches to writing and other cultural production seek less to define a specific agreed upon historical narrative than to offer possible, contingent ways of reading the past in order to engage with the present in ways that do not rely on normative ideas and behaviours. Indeed, to ‘queer’ history is to challenge, undermine, refute and reconfigure the very notion of norms in ‘history.’¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² For a discussion on the ways in which Fitzgerald’s role in Hollywood in the 1940s enacted a socially and culturally palatable performance of Irishness, see Ruth Barton, *Acting Irish in Hollywood: From Fitzgerald to Farrell* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 21-43.

¹⁵³ Lloyd, *Irish Times*, 3.

¹⁵⁴ Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), 45-46.

Speaking back, in this sense, denotes an appeal to past forms of sexual, social, and cultural modes, as well as a call for inclusion within such a revisionist historical strategy. The five chapters in this thesis examine this relationship between Irishness and queerness closely, moving from feeling backward to feeling utopia, touching on failure as well as hope.

The first chapter of this thesis explores the representation of the bachelor and spinster in Irish-American Catholic culture. These figures have been constructed in Irish-American literature and culture as off-kilter anachronistic caricatures entirely out-of-synch with modern forms of heterosexual family life. And yet, in spite of that fact, they figure prominently in historical and cultural narratives of Irish-American experience from the late nineteenth century up to at least the 1960s and 1970s. In her 2013 novel, *Someone*, Alice McDermott provides arguably the fullest engagement in Irish-American literature with these subaltern figures. The bachelor and spinster have each been positioned in close relation to discourses of queerness, sometimes uneasily, while other times radically. This chapter coactivates discussions around the bachelor and spinster in both queer and Irish studies of the figures, examining the ways in which the histories emerging from each have overlapped and have been intimately intertwined. While the queer potentialities of the bachelor and spinster are numerous, as Sedgwick, Kahan, Love, Laura Doan, and Nina Auerbach have demonstrated, McDermott's handling of the figures produces lace-curtain veiled characters left lurking behind windows or in the folds of the heteronormative family cell, sexless, and left behind.¹⁵⁵

The second chapter explores the themes of orality and Irish storytelling in the writing of James McCourt. McCourt, despite receiving praise from cultural figures such as Susan Sontag, Harold Bloom, and J. D. McClatchy, has received relatively little critical attention since his debut in 1971, "Mawrdew Czgowchwz," the story of mid-century New York and the bygone realm of the opera world, first published in the *New American Review* and later expanded to become a full-length book in 1975. This chapter examines how Irish storytelling and practices of queer oral history intersect at a time of crisis in gay identity in the early 1990s in the wake of AIDS in McCourt's third work of prose, *Time Remaining* (1993). McCourt introduces a strategy of queer Irish folkloristics in his book, which takes the linear progression of a midnight train from Manhattan to Montauk, Long Island, as the position from which to delve into the circular, digressive account of a pre-Stonewall identity consistently consigned in the wake of gay liberationist politics to the dustbin of queer history

¹⁵⁵ While there are numerous ways of observing the histories of bachelors and spinsters in Irish-American culture, particularly non-Catholic Irish instances of prolonged or life-long singlehood, this chapter focuses on the literary reconstruction of Catholic Irish-American celibates and bachelors in the work of one prominent author of Irish-American identity. A future and more extended project on Irish bachelors and spinsters might expand on the experiences and circumstances of the unmarried in Irish-American culture to include, for instance, the role of the never-married in Irish Protestant culture.

as backwards and outdated. McCourt's book turns towards the past as a political move against the present, and in so doing, cruises the queer futurity glimpsed in past potentialities.

The third chapter examines the queer performance work of Peggy Shaw, whose work with Lois Weaver and Deb Margolin as part of the lesbian theatre troupe Split Britches as well as the Women's One World (WOW) Café Theatre in New York City, has been instrumental in the emergence and evolution of American queer performance since the early 1980s. Since the mid-1990s, Shaw has been bringing her brand of radical queer performance art to audiences across the United States, Canada, and Europe. In each of her solo productions, this performer draws from her personal history as a "sixty-plus-year-old, second-generation Irish, working-class, grand-butched-mother"¹⁵⁶ in order to construct a series of radical interrogations of hegemonic conceptions of class, gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. This chapter explores the ways in which Shaw presents the intersection of ethnicity and class in the construction of her gender identity in her debut solo performance, *You're Just Like My Father*, first performed in 1994. In this performance, Shaw draws on her childhood and adolescent years in working-class Belmont, Massachusetts. Drawing on theories of performativity and drag, particularly the work of Judith Butler, Elizabeth Freeman, Elin Diamond, and Jack Halberstam, this chapter discusses the ways in which Shaw invokes the pugnacious figure of the lesbian pugilist, an image inspired by a family and ethnic history, in order to stage the struggle of the butch body and to queer the Irish-American narrative. Both Muñoz's notion of "disidentification" and Freeman's theory of "temporal drag" provide important theoretical lenses through which Shaw's work can be read as a concomitant disruption to straight time and a privileging of feeling backward.

Notwithstanding her reputation as one of the most electric contemporary voices on sexuality, queer identity, and the ecstatic adventures of a tenacious poet in New York—a notoriety belatedly celebrated in a recent increase in popular recognition—a striking sense of loss casts a shadow on much of Eileen Myles's writing in their four works of autobiographical prose and immense poetic output of eleven volumes to date. Applying the psychoanalytic phenomenon of melancholia, Freud's premier theory of loss, to two of the author's most popular works of autobiographical fiction—*Chelsea Girls* (1994) and *Cool for You* (2000)—the fourth chapter examines the ways in which Myles represents twentieth-century working-class Irish-American ethnicity as an identity profoundly structured by loss and mourning. As this discussion shows, Myles's construction of Irish diasporic and ethnic identity in their

¹⁵⁶ Peggy Shaw, "On Being an Independent Solo Artist (No Such Thing)," in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 41.

writing traverses the spatial, ideal, and bodily remains of histories of loss, and produces, in emotional and imaginative forms, the obsessive refusal to leave the dead behind.

Since at least the publication of Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* in 1995, the roots and routes of what Peter O'Neill and David Lloyd have called the "Black and Green Atlantic," the intersections and interactions of the Irish and African diasporas, continue to attract abounding interdisciplinary critical engagement within and beyond the globalised discourses of Irish Studies.¹⁵⁷ Revisiting the tangled connections explored in these multiple scholarly enterprises, the fifth chapter illuminates the ways in which the legacies of Irish racialisation and Irish-black relations in the United States since at least the mid-nineteenth century are intimately bound up in shifting discourses of gender and sexuality. The chapter explores Stephanie Grant's 2008 novel, *Map of Ireland*, in which the infamous scenes of Boston's school desegregation in the 1970s are observed and chronicled through the weary eyes of a young Irish-American lesbian, who is transported across both sexual and racial boundaries, from the troubled Irish environment of South Boston to the predominantly black neighbourhood of Roxbury, and further to the fringes of the Black Nationalist movement. The chapter draws on the novel's retrospective treatment of intersectional networks of feminist, queer, racial, and working-class politics quickly forming during the historical period in which Grant's book takes place, and which continue to shape the possibilities of national belonging today. The chapter asks the contentious question of whether lesbian subjectivity and same-sex desire, in particular, can provide the radical potential to challenge ideologies of white supremacy and whether queerness has the power to redraw lines of solidarity in the history of Irish-black relations.

Finally, the conclusion takes both a backward glance toward the discussion presented across the thesis and a look forward to future cultural engagements with the intersections of queerness and Irish-American identity. With increasingly neoliberal strategies of kinship becoming the political goals of gay and lesbian groups, backwardness remains a crucial tool with which to challenge the straight temporalities of the present and to remap alternative, queerer futures. The conclusion suggests additional routes along which to trace articulations of queer Irish-American identity in literature and culture, pointing to both earlier and more contemporary historical moments. As Madden points out, the literary archive is a significant and rich resource, "not just for histories that document the possibility and place of same-sex identities and communities in the past, but also as a resource for identity formation, for community formation, for affective pleasures and political reflection, for utopian visions that

¹⁵⁷ Peter O'Neill and David Lloyd, eds., *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

predate our assimilationist moment, for revised queer sensibilities and re-engaged
activisms.”¹⁵⁸ Many of the texts explored in this thesis are part of such a queer archival
resource. To the extent that these queer Irish-American voices, to use Negra’s words, “‘speak
back’ to evermore consolidating and repressive political and economic systems, they may
signify an important way forward.”¹⁵⁹ Speaking back thus holds the potential for looking
forward.

¹⁵⁸ Madden, “Queering Ireland,” 188.

¹⁵⁹ Negra, “The Irish in Us,” 16.

CHAPTER ONE

Confirmed Bachelors: Celibates, Spinsters, and the Never Married in Alice McDermott's Irish-American Fiction

Introduction

“Somewhere in the Bronx, only twenty minutes or so from the cemetery,” the deceased Billy Lynch’s family in Alice McDermott’s 1998 novel, *Charming Billy*, gathers in a small venue to celebrate and remember the life of this loveable drunk.¹ The family members have just revealed a tragic fact of Billy’s life: the death of an Irish girl Billy loved and wished to marry many years before in the dead man’s young life. The apparent truth of Eva’s death, however, is shortly thereafter exposed as a buried lie, told to Billy by his cousin and friend, Dennis, father of the novel’s female narrator. Billy eventually married someone else, his now widowed wife Maeve. “He was lucky to find her,” concedes Billy’s sister Rosemary. “My mother always said there was nothing more pathetic than an old bachelor who’s not a priest.” Only then does she realise her middle-aged bachelor cousin, Daniel Lynch, is in earshot of the conversation. “No offense, Danny,” she offers.² The blush across Danny’s bald head reveals the degree of embarrassment, even shame, felt by the ageing bachelor in Irish-American culture. Moreover, Rosemary’s denouncement of the non-religious bachelor announces a wider feeling of disdain for the unmarried “old boy.” The only figure more pathetic or suspect than the old male bachelor, however, at least in the eyes of the narrator’s father, is the old Irish spinster, the “girl wedded to the widowed father.” “Speaking of Maeve,” says the novel’s narrator, “my father had once said that although the joke is always the Irishman, the Irish bachelor, ever faithful to his dear mother, take a look at an unmarried Irishwoman’s attachment to her old dad if you want to see something truly ferocious.”³

Such commentary on the “pathetic” bachelor and the “ferocious” spinster, cruelly voiced by the characters in McDermott’s novel, is a product of a wider social position on the nomadic existence of the old boy and girl, as well as these figures’ curious state of presumed permanent celibacy and lifelong singlehood. Bachelors and spinsters became a particular

¹ Alice McDermott, *Charming Billy* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998), 3.

² *Ibid.*, 21.

³ *Ibid.*, 153.

cause for concern and sites of social anxieties in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hasia Diner, for example, has illustrated how these figures were directly blamed by the mostly Irish-American Catholic prelates for the low birth rate in nineteenth-century Irish America, which was significantly outpaced by other immigrant groups such as the Italian, French-Canadian, and Portuguese Catholics.⁴ This low birth rate continued into the twentieth century, and in the 1920s the Catholic publication *America* even released a series of articles mourning the “Disappearing Irish in America” and “The Suicide of the Irish Race,” while asking “Are Irish Catholics Dying Out in This Country?”⁵ These misgivings about the old maid and bachelor endured for much of the twentieth century, and, in some ways, survive into the twenty-first.

The historical roots of the unmarried Irish in America stretch back to post-Famine Ireland’s reconstitution of family and land inheritance, which reintroduced a single-inheritance and stem family system. Ellen Horgan Biddle notes that the son was often 40 or 50 before inheriting the land, thus delayed marriage, spinsterhood, and ageing bachelors were common in rural areas of the country.⁶ Richard Stivers has shown how, between the 1870s and 1930s, so-called “bachelor groups” emerged in rural Ireland, working “to unite the different male generations in support of the new economic and familial relationships.”⁷ “Only in Ireland is a single man or woman of thirty the rule rather than the exception,” wrote Conrad M. Arensberg as late as 1937.⁸ During a time when Ireland was devastated by agricultural deterioration and economic collapse, the reinstated stem family system further propelled young Irish men and women to immigrate to an industrialising nation such as America. More often than not, these men and women were single and emigrated alone.⁹ The trend of late or delayed marriages among the Irish survived the journey across the Atlantic and persevered in their new urban environments away from the familial and agricultural constraints of Ireland. Irish-American reluctance to enter matrimony was infamous, and, as Stivers puts it, the Irish

⁴ Hasia R. Diner, *Erin’s Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 53.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶ Ellen Horgan Biddle, “The American Catholic Irish Family,” in *Ethnic Families in America: Patterns and Variations*, ed. Charles H. Mindel and Robert W. Habenstein (New York: Elsevier, 1976), 94.

⁷ Richard Stivers, *Hair of the Dog: Irish Drinking and its American Stereotype*, rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 77.

⁸ Conrad M. Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman: An Anthropological Study*, rev. ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1988), 96.

⁹ See, for instance, Diner, *Erin’s Daughters*, xiv; Janet Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women’s Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 69; Íde B. O’Carroll, *Models for Movers: Irish Women’s Emigration to America* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1990), 18; and Deirdre Mageean, “To Be Matched or to Move: Irish Women’s Prospects in Munster,” in *Peasant Maids-City Women: From the European Countryside to Urban America*, ed. Christiane Harzig (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 57. As all of these critics show, women migrated in greater numbers than men in the immediate post-Famine period.

“were the standard against which ethnic celibacy was judged.”¹⁰ In *Erin’s Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century*, Diner writes that:

[T]he life histories of Irish-Americans, those who grew up to be famous and infamous as well as those whose lives remained obscure, rescued for a brief moment from anonymity by a historian or journalist or parish chronicler, abound with unmarried relatives and friends. The vast majority of prominent Irish women—labor leaders, schoolteachers, religious leaders, and actresses—never married. Moreover, the presence of unmarried sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins made the Irish-American social fabric unique. Unmarried women and men dotted the Irish-American landscape, clearly and unabashedly. Community studies and parish histories, biographical sketches and autobiographical memoirs, church bulletins and charity reports yield over and over again the profusion of the unmarried in Irish life in the American cities. Few Irish-Americans did not have unmarried aunts or uncles, brothers or sisters, friends or neighbours.¹¹

In *Reading Irish-American Fiction*, Margaret Hallissy notes the enduring pervasiveness of both the spinster and bachelor in twentieth-century Irish-American life and literature. “The Irish heritage of hunger and deprivation, combined with their allegiance to the strictest norms of Catholic morality,” Hallissy argues, “combine to produce ... a habit of celibacy. The custom of late marriage, or no marriage, produced a character type called the ‘old boys’ or ‘old girls,’ those who live in their parents’ home and, to all appearances, remain virginal beyond the usual time and sometimes their whole lives.”¹² This chapter reads McDermott’s Irish-American fiction as a cultural engagement with the social misgivings among this imagined community about the bachelor and spinster, and considers specifically the gender and sexual trouble projected onto the bodies of these figures.

Alice McDermott was born in Brooklyn in 1953 and raised in an Irish-American family on Long Island.¹³ Her novels, as Patricia Coughlan declares in her nuanced study of the author’s writing, “are widely acknowledged as works of great aesthetic and emotional power that also deliver exceptional insights into the character of ethnic culture and identity.”¹⁴ McDermott’s place in the canon of Irish-American fiction is indisputable to Charles Fanning, who, in the second edition of *The Irish Voice in America*, provides his own interpretations of the author’s *oeuvre* and, indeed, positions McDermott as the culmination of his canon-defining book.¹⁵ As Charlie Reilly asserts, McDermott’s “riveting plots, intricate use of point

¹⁰ Stivers, *Hair of the Dog*, 116.

¹¹ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters*, 49.

¹² Margaret Hallissy, *Reading Irish-American Fiction: The Hyphenated Self* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 28.

¹³ Ramin Ganeshram, “A Long-Ago Island Inspires Her Fiction,” *New York Times*, February 23, 2003, L116.

¹⁴ Patricia Coughlan, “Paper Ghosts: Reading the Uncanny in Alice McDermott,” *Éire-Ireland* 47, no. 1&2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 123, <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2012.0005>.

¹⁵ Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 385-91. Coughlan makes this observation in her essay (124).

of view, and vivid re-creation of the Irish American communities of the mid-twentieth century have earned her an international reputation and made her one of the most admired fiction writers of our time.”¹⁶ As evidence of her valuable contribution to American letters, McDermott’s *Charming Billy* was awarded the National Book Award in 1998. Since the publication of her novel *At Weddings and Wakes* in 1992, however, McDermott’s subject has been, in Fanning’s words, “the imaginative reconstruction of the lives of lower-middle-class New Yorkers, mostly children and grandchildren of immigrants, who came out of World War II into the possibilities opened by the GI Bill of Rights.”¹⁷ Imaginatively historical in content, McDermott’s realist fiction takes a backward glance toward Irish-American Catholic life and death since the early decades of the twentieth century through to the present day.

McDermott’s Irish-Catholic fiction abounds with unmarried brothers, sisters, aunts, and uncles. In *At Weddings and Wakes*, there is what Margaret O’Brien Steinfelds has called the “gaggle of spinster aunts,”¹⁸ as well as the sensitive bachelor character of Fred who marries one of the Towne spinster aunts, only to lose her to a fatal illness four days later. Seemingly, May’s sudden death sees Fred transform into the more age-appropriate grieving widower. In reality, though, the character’s brief stint as a married man and his newfound situation, which could be described more aptly as a regression rather than an evolution in terms of marital status, find him back in the position of the life-long “bachelor son, an Irish mother’s loyal boy.”¹⁹ In *Charming Billy*, there is Daniel Lynch and Rosemary and Mac’s unseen son, Michael. In *After This*, Mary Keane comes close to living out a spinster life in her family home along with her bachelor brother until, at the age of thirty, and shortly after asking for God’s intervention in the novel’s opening, she meets her future husband. Pauline, Keane’s co-worker and regular source of benign frustration in the narrative, acts in the role of surrogate spinster aunt to the latter’s children in the novel, and is ultimately adopted by the youngest of the children, Clare.²⁰

It is in her more recent novel, *Someone*, published in 2013, however, that McDermott has most energetically brought to life the bachelor and spinster characters of the Irish-American community. Moving from the early to the late twentieth century, *Someone* is narrated through the blurred vision of Marie, the daughter of Irish immigrants. Like all of her Irish-American fiction, McDermott’s *Someone* traces the rise and fall, the ebb and flow of

¹⁶ Charlie Reilly, interview with Alice McDermott, *Contemporary Literature* 46, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 557, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4489136>.

¹⁷ Fanning, *Irish Voice in America*, 385.

¹⁸ Margaret O’Brien Steinfelds, “The Archeology of Yearning: Alice McDermott,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 23, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 100, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25154967>.

¹⁹ Alice McDermott, *At Weddings and Wakes* (London: Penguin, 1993), 129-30.

²⁰ Alice McDermott, *After This* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

ethnic and religious identity among the Irish in America throughout the twentieth century and beyond. Introduced early in the novel is the tragic character of Dora Ryan, “not a young bride, perhaps thirty or so,” whose marriage manages to disintegrate even quicker than that of Fred and May’s in *At Weddings and Wakes*, lasting only one day, and creating a local scandal among the Irish in her Brooklyn neighbourhood.²¹ For, as Marie learns, Dora’s husband turns out to have been a woman in disguise, a possibility beyond the comprehension of the novel’s community. There is, too, the sympathetic Mr Fagin, the local funeral parlour owner who lives unmarried and alone with his mother on the floor above his business. Darcy Furlong, a spectral character recalled intermittently throughout the narrative by Marie’s husband Tom Commeford, is an analogical figure deployed to solve the problem of *Someone*’s most mysterious character, Marie’s brother Gabe, the failed priest and forever suspect bachelor brother-uncle.

The existence and endurance of the bachelor and spinster in Irish America is routinely interpreted as an effect of strict Catholic morality, or as residual kinship practices from the ancestral homeland of Ireland, or, indeed, as a purely Irish-American phenomenon of economic freedom and professional ambitions. Neither historical nor literary scholarship has attempted to bridge the social realities of the Irish-American bachelor and spinster and the social anxieties surrounding the murky sexuality of these characters in the wider American context from the nineteenth century to the twentieth.²² Whereas the ecclesiastical figure of the priest has been one key focal point of scholarly attention, particularly in the wake of the sexual abuse scandals in the Catholic Church from the middle of the 1980s and, most effectively, in the *Boston Globe* reporting in 2002, this chapter shifts the critical lens towards the more neglected figures of the bachelor and spinster in Irish-American literature and culture. At the same time, however, the relationship between the unmarried layperson and the celibate clerical figure in Irish-American culture is a mutually productive one, shading the response to each and engendering the anxiety around both.

Eccentric, anachronistic, and obscure, bachelors and spinsters are a queer lot. The Irish-American playwright, journalist, and children’s book writer, Mary Chase (néé Coyle), distilled the idiosyncratic nature of the bachelor in her 1944 Pulitzer Prize-winning play, *Harvey*. To the horror and embarrassment of his sister Veta Simmons and her daughter

²¹ Alice McDermott, *Someone* (London: Bloomsbury Circus, 2013), 33.

²² In fact, in an essay on family in the history of Irish America, Marion Casey suggests a particularly limited scope for the study of the unmarried in Irish-American culture. A study of “singleness,” she writes, “perhaps, for example of the critical role of the unmarried in the financing of Irish American private education—would be no less illuminating.” See Marion R. Casey, “Family, History, and Irish America,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 4 (Summer 2009): 112. In an article for *Harper’s Magazine*, Doctor-turned-author, Richard Selzer, insists that such education relied crucially on the work of the Irish spinster in the past. See Selzer, “The Spinsters of Eld,” *Harper’s Magazine*, December 2003, EBSCOhost.

Myrtle, Elwood P. Dowd, the play's affable bachelor, insists on introducing everybody he meets to his closest friend, the eponymous six foot, three inch invisible rabbit. Chase's *Harvey* was inspired by stories of the "púca" (or "pooka"), a "fairy spirit in animal form" from Irish folklore, passed on through one of her many bachelor uncles.²³ A sore point for his sister, Dowd's eccentricity often stands in the way of finding for her daughter Myrtle a suitable male suitor. "That's Myrtle Mae Simmons!" local boys in the town declare. "Her uncle is Elwood P. Dowd—the biggest screwball in town. Elwood P. Dowd and his pal."²⁴ Dowd, an Irish mother's loyal son, has been left the family home after his mother's death, and, while guests in his house, Veta and Myrtle are determined to institutionalise their brother and uncle, who constantly upsets their place within the respectable *milieu* of their local community. Alan Sinfield situates *Harvey* alongside a number of cultural productions in the early twentieth century that expressly engage with the sexual anxieties surrounding the bachelor figure, and he places this offbeat, queer character within emerging discourses of McCarthyism and medical-clinical categorisation of homosexuality. Sinfield suggestively describes Chase's *Harvey* as a performance "in which the gentle and eccentric bachelor Elwood P. Dowd is attended by a partner who causes respectable people to shun him and psychiatrists to try to cure him; the partner is a big, invisible rabbit."²⁵

Meanwhile, in his 1989 memoir, *Harp*, the late Irish-American author, John Gregory Dunne, reflected on the curious figure of his unmarried aunt, Harriet Burns, who, while briefly entering the Church as a nun in her twenties, abandoned her religious role, and lived out her life as a spinster and dutiful daughter to her ageing father. An almost spectral character in Dunne's book, Aunt Harriet appears sporadically as a marginal figure in the author's recollection, until toward the end of *Harp* Dunne finally and explicitly expresses the sense of mystery surrounding this celibate woman. "In the family," he writes,

Aunt Harriet's brief tenure as a nun was never discussed. My mother would sometimes allude to it obliquely, but when pressed for further details would change the subject; I never knew Aunt Harriet even to allude to it. That year was the dark hole in her life, the source after she died of endless idle and often lurid family speculation.²⁶

²³ Mary Chase, *Harvey*, in *Best American Plays, 1918-1958, Supplementary Volume*, ed. John Gassner, 1961 (New York: Crown, 1973), 572, 589. See also, Herbert Mitgang, "Mary Chase, 74, Playwright Who Wrote 'Harvey,' Dead," *New York Times*, October 23, 1981, D18.

²⁴ Chase, *Harvey*, 574.

²⁵ Alan Sinfield, *Out On Stage: Lesbian and Gay Theatre in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 211. Sinfield notes the following plays as examples of such social and cultural misgivings: W. Somerset Maugham's *Mrs. Dot* (1908) and *Jack Straw* (1908), Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* (1927), and Mordaunt Shairp's *The Green Bay Tree* (1933).

²⁶ John Gregory Dunne, *Harp* (London: Granta Books, 1989), 217.

Unlike Aunt May in McDermott's *At Weddings and Wakes*, whose decision to leave the order is based on a pious sense of self-sacrifice, Aunt Harriet's exodus excites scandal and provokes gossip. Lurid in nature, this family hearsay reveals the equally sexually questionable view of the spinster as that observed in the case of the bachelor figure. The sense of queerness surrounding these figures is the subject of this chapter.

The first two sections of the chapter chart both the cultural-historical representation and McDermott's fictional rendering of the spinster and bachelor, a topography revealing equally interlacing and divergent discursive landscapes. As Herman Melville's story, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," demonstrates, the ways in which these figures have been written and spoken about have been noticeably dissimilar.²⁷ While the bachelor has carried the burden of social anxiety, the spinster, in many ways, is a much more maligned character, existing as she does independent of marriage and men. These sections explore the gender and sexuality trouble attached to the often unruly, unmarried person in society. Following this, the chapter turns briefly towards the figure of the Catholic religious in Irish-American culture, specifically in relation to the clerical abuse scandals and the public panic in their wake in the early 2000s. McDermott's novel, while committed mostly to the bachelor and spinster laypeople, is also invested in the debates around the darker image of the paedophile priest, a figure conflated with male homosexuality in conservative discourses.

The third section presents a reconsideration of celibacy as a legitimate identity category consistently occluded from the purview of "queer" in academic and popular discourses. Celibacy, the identity that refuses to be in or out of any closet (arguably, even eschewing the trope entirely) turns out to be the bachelor and spinster's most troubling act in the drama of gender and sexual performance. Finally, the chapter concludes with a reconsideration of family and kinship, introducing, with reference to Eve Sedgwick's urge to "think about your uncles and your aunts," the idea of an avuncular utopia.²⁸ Ultimately, however, while the chapter alludes to radical forms of sexual and cultural expression in the figures of the bachelor, spinster, and celibate, the closing section offers an apologia for the unfulfilled promise in Irish-American constructions of these groups in general and in McDermott's novels in particular.

²⁷ Herman Melville, "The Paradise of Bachelors and the Tartarus of Maids," in *Billy Budd, Sailor and Selected Tales*, ed. Robert Milder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 74-96. Against the idyllic homosocial environment of the bachelor paradise in London, Melville describes the New England spinster scene as devoid of all joy and community.

²⁸ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), 59.

Unfortunate Ones: The Irish-American Spinster

In a touching tribute to her mother, appearing in *The New Yorker* magazine in December 2015, the American author Stephanie Grant, whose work is the subject of a later chapter in the thesis, briefly turns her attention toward four idiosyncratic figures in her family portrait whose ubiquity among the Irish in America has made them cornerstone characters in the historical and literary narratives of Irish-American experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In “Postpartum,” Grant recalls the “maiden aunts” on both sides of her mother’s Irish-Catholic family. “They lived together in pairs,” she writes, “in garden apartments in Brockton, until they died or went to nursing homes. Gert and Helen. Grace and Mary.” Mary was “perpetually angry,” while Helen was “mad,” institutionalised on numerous occasions. In her role as caregiver to Helen, Gert never married, while Grace was the anomaly as the widow of the bunch. Giggling at the thought of a black Barbie doll, even a young Grant “could see how out-of-date” these maiden aunts, these “unfortunate ones,” were. “How left behind.”²⁹ Grant’s recollection offers a particularly vivid example of how these figures have been and continue to be imagined in contemporary culture. Anachronistic, out-of-date, and left behind, the spinster is the preeminent figure of backwardness.

Similarly, in Eileen Myles’s *Cool for You* the novel’s narrator remembers the rotating list of spinster lodgers who lived in a small room in the back of a friend’s house in Arlington, Massachusetts, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. These women, Eileen recalls, “alone in their forties and fifties and sixties, had rooms full of beads and old clothes and pictures of men.”³⁰ Speaking about one Irish-American lodger in particular, Eileen remarks that she “came from the beginning of the century, the 20s or the 30s. She was like Arthur Godfrey, or especially, Franklin Delano Roosevelt ... So she was left from his time.”³¹ Again, the woman alone, wearing the past on her body, becomes an anachronistic icon. Writing about Monument Avenue in Charlestown, Massachusetts, during the Second World War, J. Anthony Lukas articulates both the backwardness and obsolescence of the unmarried Irish. In some of the converted dwellings on the Avenue, he notes, “Irish spinsters and their bachelor brothers passed their declining years in a clutter of Victorian geegaws and dusty house plants,” thus becoming one of the many relics of the past collected in their solitary lodgings.³² Like Grant’s aunts, the spinster women in *Cool for You* are unfortunate ones, women alone with

²⁹ Stephanie Grant, “Postpartum,” *New Yorker*, December 21, 2015, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/postpartum>.

³⁰ Eileen Myles, *Cool for You* (Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2000), 82.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 83-84.

³² J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 140.

neither a past nor a future worth bearing: “the whole gang spooked me because they were all women and women wind up in little rooms, women wind up alone.”³³ Both Grant and Myles present images of the Irish spinster as both out-of-date and out of time, left behind in the forward progress of life, yet persistent reminders of the precarious place of the Irish-American woman alone.

In a contemporary climate in which women can choose to marry or remain single, it might seem unfashionable to invoke the figure of the spinster. “Although the circulation of a knowing feminist sensibility has not eradicated the stigma of unmarried women,” Heather Love suggests, “‘spinster’ no longer necessarily means unwanted; women themselves are now quite often in the position to determine its meaning.”³⁴ In the past, however, as Bridget Hill points out, “women who did not marry were regarded as at best ‘failed’ women to be pitied or derided, at worst, ruined women whose presence ‘contaminated society.’”³⁵ As Amy Froide has illustrated, the spinster’s roots lie in the emergence of a distinct social group of what she terms “never-married” women in the Early Modern period that appeared in court documents in Medieval England, came to be attached to negative notions of gender and sexuality in the literature of eighteenth-century Protestant England, and subsequently migrated to other European nations as well as on to North America.³⁶ Once never-married status shifted from being a consequence of circumstance to a situation of choice for women in the eighteenth century, spinster women “upset the patriarchal model of heterosexual marriage and reproduction,” and this understanding of the “old maid” figure accounts even for contemporary misgivings about the woman alone: “The necessity for women to marry and produce the next generation may well account for the staying-power of the ‘old maid’ stereotype up until the present day.”³⁷

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, middle-class, white spinster women such as Susan B. Anthony and Jane Addams were disproportionately represented in movements towards social reform in Britain and the United States.³⁸ Yet, while the Victorian period witnessed a reclaiming of the title by first-wave feminists and a devaluation of the rite of marriage, particularly at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth century, the spinster became a figure of ridicule and anxiety. In her introduction to

³³ Myles, *Cool for You*, 83.

³⁴ Heather Love, “Gyn/Apology: Sarah Orne Jewett’s Spinster Aesthetics,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 55, no. 3-4 (2009): 307, <https://doi.org/10.1353/esq.0.0042>.

³⁵ Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England, 1660-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 1.

³⁶ Amy Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 154-56.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁸ Trisha Franzen, “Spinsters,” in *Lesbian Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Bonnie Zimmerman (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 726.

the critical volume, *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel*, Laura L. Doan traces the enduring historical prejudice against the spinster since the nineteenth century:

Victorians labeled her “surplus”; 1920s sexologists diagnosed her as sexually deviant; in the aftermath of both World War I and World War II women were hurriedly scuttled back into domesticity; the familial ideology of 1950s American and of Britain’s welfare state excluded the single women; and the 1960s and 1970s style of feminism found her uncomfortable and anachronistic, out of step with the so-called sexual revolution. Most recently, the call for the return to “family values” cloaks an unconscious desire to retie all of these women who have elected singleness or life outside of marriage.³⁹

In the 1970s, however, there was a strand of radical feminism that recurred to the spinster figure as a sign of political power and feminist freedom. Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* is the most obvious example of this turn.

In *Gyn/Ecology*, Daly rescues the Spinster alongside other castigated female figures, such as the Lesbian, the Hag, the Harpy, the Crony, and the Fury. Against the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition of the spinster, or “old maid,” as anachronistic and virginal, “a prim nervous person of either sex who frets over inconsequential details: FUSSBUDGET,” Daly celebrates her as a radical feminist icon of strength and social transformation.⁴⁰ The spinster, she writes, is “she who has chosen her Self, who defines her Self, by choice, neither in relation to children nor to men, who is Self-identified.”⁴¹ In a similar vein, Maureen Dezell claims that “while unmarried females are woefully undervalued in a male-centered society that casts a wary eye on women who seem not to need men, the ‘maiden lady’—call her ‘Aunt Mary’—has long been a respected, pivotal figure, sometimes even the matriarch, in Irish American families.”⁴² Indeed, in her mention of McDermott’s *At Weddings and Wakes*, Dezell points out that Aunt Agnes, one of the Towne spinster sisters, is “an executive secretary who owns every book, newspaper, and record album in her family home and whose stock-in-trade, as far as her nieces and nephew can tell, is knowing things.”⁴³

Such an arguably overgenerous summation of the spinster in Irish-American culture is in fact subsequently rebuked in Dezell’s own book, when historian Lawrence McCaffrey is later cited complaining about the claustrophobia of the Irish-Catholic experience, arguing how traditional parish life was “very defensive, puritanical, often alcoholic. There was a great deal of gender segregation, a lot of late marriage, spinsters, and bachelors. All of it was great

³⁹ Laura L. Doan, introduction to *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters: Unmarried Women in the Twentieth-Century Novel*, ed. Laura L. Doan (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 7.

⁴⁰ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), 392-93.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴² Maureen Dezell, *Irish America: Coming into Clover* (New York: Anchor, 2000), 109.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 110.

material for great American novels, but less so for life.”⁴⁴ By the 1980s and 1990s, the radical feminist invocation of the spinster was out of step with the class, race, and queer politics of the movement. As Love puts it, “the spinster is no longer at the center of feminist struggle; in fact, for many, she is long gone.”⁴⁵

“Good luck, Dora!” the neighbourhood children shout in the first part of McDermott’s *Someone* as Dora Ryan, a public school teacher, “not a young bride, perhaps thirty or so,” makes her way to the local church with her old father in arm on her way to being a married woman, waving, Marie recalls, “like a queen from behind our own reflections in the car window.”⁴⁶ Like Aunt May, Dora is a late bride, and the enthusiasm of her Irish friends, family, and neighbours betray a sincere wish for this never-married spinster to succeed in her belated role of wife. If the spinster is observed as an anachronism, a figure from the past, McDermott’s historical fiction serves to literally place her in that bygone era of the early twentieth century. When Dora and her new husband, “chubby and squarely built in his dark suit, much like Dora herself,” emerge from the church, Marie’s and the children’s excitement is quickly diminished: “It was a disappointment: round and smooth-cheeked, with little chin and a small mouth stretched into what was, even to our eyes, an awkward smile. He ducked into the car beside his bride and gave us only his profile, which was not promising, as the car drove away.”⁴⁷ At such an early stage, the impending disappointment of Dora’s nuptials seeps into observations of the event on the day.

When Dora appears without her new husband in the local parish church the next day, Marie catches her mother bless herself, look around, and sigh, “No good can come from that.”⁴⁸ Father Quinn, to no avail, works hard to keep the attention of his congregation, who cannot take their eyes away from Dora Ryan, who is now nestled in between her brother and sister on a church pew. On her wedding night, it is revealed shortly afterwards by the local group of gossiping girls, “Dora Ryan discovered that the man she had married wasn’t a man at all.” Dora Ryan had, in fact, married a “woman dressed up like a man.”⁴⁹ A “mean trick,” merely a “mean schoolyard trick,” was the best the group of girls could come up with to explain the peculiar facts of spinster Dora’s wedding. Marie continues:

A lousy mean trick to pull on poor fat Dora Ryan, a woman pretending to be a man, dressing up like a man and fooling her right through her wedding day. Standing in front of the priest like that. Kissing her on the lips. Putting her hands on Dora Ryan’s hand when they cut the wedding cake together. And

⁴⁴ Ibid., 173.

⁴⁵ Love, “Gyn/Apology,” 307.

⁴⁶ McDermott, *Someone*, 33.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 41.

then laughing, the way they figured it, laughing right in her face when they took off their clothes.

Marie's contemporaries, like *Charming Billy's* Dennis, observe spinsterhood with feelings of pity and disgust—it is Dora's less than desirable physical attributes that have made her an easy target for this act of “simple meanness.”⁵⁰ In their eyes, Dora Ryan was betrayed by a malicious outsider, who was unknown to their community. Dora's active part in the story is unthinkable, and her queerness is an impossibility.

In a concomitant display of innocence and ignorance, Marie wonders whether Dora's “happiness could have been preserved if the bride and groom had merely stayed in their clothes,”⁵¹ thus naively suggesting a celibate marriage between two women could ‘pass’ as superficially normal/normative. Deviant gender and sexual conduct is permitted, though only as long as the fact remains concealed, or clothed, and celibacy is strictly maintained. While queer identity is ambiguously accepted, queer expression is impossible. Without even catching a glimpse of a “torn piece of bridal veil or a white stocking waving beneath a battered lid,”⁵² Marie, as she does many times throughout *Someone*, goes to her plain-talking mother, hoping she can offer her daughter her usual conclusion: “Nonsense, as was her way, and thus restore the world.”⁵³ In the end, Marie's hopes of disavowing the unspeakable truth of Dora's “catastrophe” are never fulfilled,⁵⁴ and the curious case of this queer old girl remains unsolved. McDermott's narrator leaves Dora Ryan's trouble, proof of how “strange and terrible life might prove to be,” forever unresolved.⁵⁵

The histories of lesbianism and spinsterhood are, as the character of Dora Ryan suggests, intimately intertwined, and rather than exploding this connection, the silent disavowal of the Brooklyn Irish in *Someone* serves only to further fasten the discursive link between the two identities. “The similarities between the spinster and the lesbian are striking,” writes Doan, “both reject the primacy of heterosexual marriage and choose a lifestyle that, in threatening patriarchy, signals some measure of social deviancy.”⁵⁶ Sheila Jeffreys, for instance, argues in *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930*, that, in rejecting patriarchally-defined gender and sexual roles, as well as the heteronormative institutions of marriage and family, the spinster has posed a particularly destabilising threat to male-dominated political and social order.⁵⁷ While the spinster is

⁵⁰ Ibid., 42.

⁵¹ Ibid., 44.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 45.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁶ Doan, introduction to *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters*, 4.

⁵⁷ Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality, 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1985).

imagined, on the one hand, as a “drag on the present,”⁵⁸ Kathryn R. Kent has argued, on the other, that, in late-nineteenth-century literature spinsters represented a leap forward, embodying “emblems of impending modernization,” as opposed to a backwards woman left behind. In writing of the period, Kent claims, spinsters “are often represented as unable to keep private and public spheres separate, and in their promiscuous mixing of the home and market are connected to the dangers of capitalism.”⁵⁹ In living without children and husband, while also being “useless” in relation to domestic labour, the spinster of the nineteenth century provides a possible site of queer or protolesbian identity, a potentiality seized upon in the twentieth century by modernist writers such as Gertrude Stein. According to Kent, “it may be the case that the spinster offered an alternative to sexology for imagining and representing a modern lesbian identity.”⁶⁰

In *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, Jeffreys connects the anti-spinster rhetoric of late-nineteenth-century feminist voices to the emerging sexual “science” of sexology in the work of Iwan Bloch, Havelock Ellis, Richard Kraft-Ebbing, and Otto Weininger at the time. In this discourse, male homosexuals were described as “a class of individuals who are born with the sexual drive of women and who have male bodies,” while female inverts signified the reverse situation.⁶¹ The literature of the 1920s reflected the monumental influence of sexology studies. British writing at the time, for instance, such as Winifred Holtby’s *The Crowded Street* (1924), Rosamund Lehmann’s *Dusty Answer* (1927) and, most famously, Radclyffe Hall’s fiction presented lesbian characters who conformed to the sexologists’ view of the female homosexual as a “pseudoman.”⁶² Hall, who read and accepted Ellis’ work on inversion, wrote *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself* in 1926 and *The Well of Loneliness* two years later. In many ways, Dora Ryan in McDermott’s fictional depiction of 1920’s Brooklyn echoes these sexological notions of sexuality endorsed in the literature in the early twentieth century. When Dora appears in her local church the day after her wedding, Marie describes her as “broad-bottomed, thick-ankled, and in her dark suit and hat without any of the dreamy girliness that her wedding gown had lent her just the morning before.”⁶³ This description echoes Hall’s depiction of her melancholic “invert,” Miss Ogilvy, who stands tall with an

⁵⁸ Heather Love, “Failure Camp” (lecture), Villanova University, February 27, 2013, YouTube video, 1:05:16, April 29, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5MHYTcF_DU&t=2244s.

⁵⁹ Kathryn R. Kent, *Making Girls Into Women: American Women’s Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 41-42.

⁶¹ Joseph Bristow, *Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1997), 21.

⁶² Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, 106.

⁶³ McDermott, *Someone*, 35.

“awkward body ... flat bosom and thick legs and ankles,” exhibiting a “queer look of strength.”⁶⁴

While the wedding gown allows the “square shouldered and broad-faced” Ryan to temporarily occupy the space of a young bride, it also affords her a degree of femininity, to be momentarily reflected in her wedding car window as a “lovely” queen.⁶⁵ Once the undisclosed revelation, confrontation, or mere disappointment occurs on the wedding night, Dora is stripped of her wedding dress, and forfeits the fantasies of “dreamy girliness” and normative femininity.⁶⁶ Her “mannish” physical characteristics are accentuated by the “masculine simplicity”⁶⁷ of her garments (“dark suit and hat”).⁶⁸ For Jack Halberstam, Hall’s misunderstood heroines in her books are embodiments of what he calls “female masculinity,” closer to transgender identity than lesbianism.⁶⁹ Dora and her “husband” carry the markers of these identities on their bodies, in their gait, and in the clothes they wear. Whether Dora’s nuptials are an early show of non-heterosexual marriage goes unarticulated, but published two years before gay marriage became legal across the United States, McDermott’s *Someone* stages a contemporary response to the impossibility of legitimate queer matrimony in the imagined historical past of her novel.

In fact, considering the current climate of marriage equality and lesbian visibility, it might appear passé or unfashionable to revisit the figure of the queer spinster in a 2013 novel. Arguably, however, McDermott’s historical narrative approach allows readers to consider forms of sociality, identity, and ways of being in the world which fail to endure in the present time. As Love’s work clearly demonstrates, however, even twenty-first century configurations of family and LGBT identities in Western culture have not made the unmarried woman redundant. In fact, these developments in political, social, and cultural representation have made the woman alone a much timelier figure. “Have we moved beyond the spinster stereotype,” Love asks, “or have we simply forgotten her?”⁷⁰ In an essay in which she proposes a form of reading attuned to “spinster aesthetics,” Love notes:

One of the major developments in the decreasing attention to the spinster has been the increasing visibility of a sexual lesbian community. Lesbian weddings, lesbian soccer moms, lesbian sex radicals, lesbians on TV, lesbians in *People*: all of these developments significantly lessen the chances that women who love women will be confused with old maids. Given that the

⁶⁴ Radclyffe Hall, *Miss Ogilvy Finds Herself* (London: Hammond Hammond, 1934), 1.

⁶⁵ McDermott, *Someone*, 33.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁷ Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies*, 106.

⁶⁸ McDermott, *Someone*, 35.

⁶⁹ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998). See, in particular, chapter three, in which Halberstam examines Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* and its representations of female masculinity and transgender embodiment in light of Havelock Ellis’s sexological theories at the time.

⁷⁰ Love, “Gyn/Apology,” 307.

stereotypical image of lesbians as isolated pathetic, sexless creatures is an effect both of women's real lack of social power and the pathologizing of female agency and sexuality, this dissociation of lesbianism from the spectacle of the lonely old woman is no doubt to be celebrated. And yet, before wholeheartedly applauding the transformation, we need to consider what is lost as we overcome the "historical sisterhood" between the lesbian and the spinster.⁷¹

Love's study, conforming to her own backward critical lens, illustrates how Sarah Orne Jewett, writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, attaches insurmountable affective leanings toward loneliness and melancholia to both the unattached woman and women sharing female intimacies in her fiction.

Mindful of the burdensome necessity to excavate the positive in historical representations of non-normative forms of desire and sociality crucial to the affirmative turn in LGBT studies, Love offers an "apologia" for the old maid in the closing words of her discussion on Jewett's spinster aesthetics. This apologia, however, is strategic. Love closes:

Insofar as gays, lesbians, queers, and transgender people are still on the outside, these experiences remain relevant. There is an ineradicable loneliness in the figure of the spinster; rather than trying to cure that loneliness, we need to incorporate it into the genealogy of queerness. Part of the problem, of course, is that feelings of the spinster have always been deemed beneath notice; we may need, now more than ever, to learn how to attend to them.⁷²

More recently, Love has expanded on her notion of spinster aesthetics to move beyond the nineteenth century and early twentieth century to incorporate into the genealogy of queerness twenty-first century representations of the spinster. In a commentary on the 2006 British film, *Notes On A Scandal*, adapted from Zoë Heller's 2003 novel of the same name, Love describes the enduring image of the lonely and unfashionable woman alone. "While stigma of the woman alone has been mitigated," she says, "it hasn't been eliminated."⁷³ For Love, the spinster in present-day society is in a much more vulnerable position in light of the neoliberal agenda of LGBT political presence; when the political goal is marriage and the nuclear family, the state of aloneness becomes increasingly more problematic. Thus, it is no longer the taint of lesbianism touching against the body of the spinster that is disavowed or repugnant to a heterosexual gaze. Rather, the figure of the spinster is suspiciously viewed through all eyes as out of step with the neoliberal needs of contemporary Western social systems of belonging. Pauline, Dora, and the Towne sisters collectively inhabit a space in McDermott's Irish-American world in which they spook rather than speak back. In a world

⁷¹ Ibid., 308-9.

⁷² Ibid., 329.

⁷³ Love, "Failure Camp."

where family is the cornerstone of social and emotional wellbeing, these spinster women survive only as unfortunate ones.

Thrilled by the Dora Ryan scandal, which had by then enveloped the whole close-knit community, a curious Marie and her friends wander over to the Ryan household “with the hope of meeting her coming home from the subway, or seeing her at a window, with the veil of a lace curtain over her shamed face.”⁷⁴ Through this evocative phrase, McDermott envisages Dora’s predicament as particularly scandalous to Irish-American respectability. Traditionally, wedding veils were made out of lace, but the phrase “lace curtain” has specific currency in the history of Irish America. The term “lace-curtain Irish” was used to describe an emerging middle class among Irish immigrants and their children from around the 1890s.⁷⁵ Assimilation into the middle-class American mainstream for Irish Americans was achievable only through displays of loyal nationalism to the United States as well as impeccable social and moral behaviour. The source of Dora Ryan’s shame is the staunchly Catholic sensitivities and assimilative aspirations of this Irish-American community.

When he learns about Dora Ryan’s appearance at the local community Catholic Church without her new husband, Marie’s father teases, “the poor fellow wouldn’t be the first groom to find himself under the weather the morning after the big day, not to mention the big night, and winked at Gabe, who smiled and nodded to show he understood, but then looked at my mother and blushed solemnly.”⁷⁶ This scene early on in McDermott’s novel suggests two things: that sex is not spoken about directly and that allusions to sex should cause shame and embarrassment. “Nonsense,” replies Marie’s mother,⁷⁷ succeeding in what Stivers sees as her maternal role as a protector of a “puritanical sexual code” and the purveyor of morality and decency.⁷⁸ While Gabe and Marie’s mother quashes talk on sex, she nonetheless acknowledges it. On her wedding night, for instance, Marie wears the white satin and lace gown her mother had sewn for her. Marie, surprised by the “provocative way [her] mother had worked the lovely lace into its bodice,” comes to an unexpected understanding: “My mother, it seemed, knew things she had never spoken of.”⁷⁹ This realisation is later reiterated after Marie barely survives the birth of her first child, when her mother offers essential tips on keeping a husband with the wrong idea in mind at bay: “keep a soup spoon under your pillow and give him a whack with the back of it—I don’t have to tell you where.” Marie laughs at the

⁷⁴ McDermott, *Someone*, 43.

⁷⁵ See, for instance, Timothy Meagher, *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 103.

⁷⁶ McDermott, *Someone*, 35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁷⁸ Stivers, *Hair of the Dog*, 141.

⁷⁹ McDermott, *Someone*, 170.

suggestion and understands again that her mother “knew things she had never spoken of before.”⁸⁰ For an Irish-American family in the first half of the twentieth century, the Church’s teachings on sin and sexual immorality were known, but they were rarely, if ever, spoken of. Marie’s mother possesses the knowledge and, indeed, the experience of sexuality. She is, after all, married with two children. Yet, Marie’s mother stops short of communicating expressions of sex and sexuality, because, as is revealed by an old Irishwoman earlier in the novel, “the devil uses dirty words.”⁸¹

Towards the end of *Someone*, at a later stage in her life, Marie revisits the image of lace curtain, which Donna Seaman imagines as both “shield and camouflage” for her Irish-American neighbourhood in Brooklyn,⁸² when she confronts the possible causes for Gabe’s mental breakdown several decades later. Watching her brother at her kitchen table after he has been released from a psychiatric institution following a breakdown, Marie ponders:

I briefly entertained the notion that the lace-curtain pretensions my parents had taught us might well have been meant as a way (frail at best, but a way nonetheless) of cosseting, corraling, patting down, and holding in, whatever it was that had undone him last summer.⁸³

Marie’s failure, or her unwillingness, to see and speak potential cases of queerness, particularly that of her brother Gabe’s, is not only a product of her family’s discomfort with articulating sex, but also, and even more precisely, a habit of the larger Irish-American culture in which she finds herself. The airs and graces of the lace-curtain Irish are, Marie concedes, not the reason for her brother’s breakdown, but rather the root of the suppression or “holding in” of what could have been the cause of that which had “undone” him. In other words, the inability to articulate, and, in Dora’s case also, the shame attached to non-normative behaviour and identity, both intimately bound up in Irish-American respectability, led to Gabe’s mental collapse. McDermott’s allusion to lace-curtain pretensions also marks one of many attempts throughout the narrative made by Marie to better conceptualise Gabe’s trouble.

Like Fred in *At Weddings and Wakes* and Mr Fagin in *Someone*, Gabe conforms to what Howard P. Chudacoff describes as the “often stereotyped phenomenon of a bachelor son, such as Dick Butler or Al Smith, remaining at home to live with and support his widowed Irish mother,” left behind in the onwards march of time.⁸⁴ Indeed, the duty to remain at home in his family’s Brooklyn apartment with his widowed mother and younger sister is cited as the reason Gabe has left his first parish and the priesthood entirely after just one year:

⁸⁰ Ibid., 185.

⁸¹ Ibid., 123.

⁸² Donna Seaman, review of Alice McDermott’s *Someone*, *Booklist*, July 2013, 30.

⁸³ McDermott, *Someone*, 214.

⁸⁴ Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating An American Subculture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 101.

“I couldn’t see leaving my mother, and your mother, to live alone. Someone had to be there.”⁸⁵ Gabe’s vigil survives long after Marie has left their Brooklyn home for the suburbs as a married woman and mother, outlives his widowed mother, and even sees the decay of their enclave in the 1970s and 1980s. As Marie reveals, “when the neighbourhood as we had known it had crumbled and was no more, it was Gabe who would not leave.”⁸⁶ “What else could a loving son do?” Gabe’s mother defensively declares in response to her Irish-American neighbours’ gossiping interrogation of the situation.⁸⁷ Her justification, however, might equally serve as a protective distraction from the possibly more adumbral story of her son’s lost vocation.

Bachelor Trouble

In 1901, Rev. Fr. Thomas Scully of St. Mary’s Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, proposed an annual “Bachelor Tax” of twenty-five dollars for all unmarried men aged between twenty-five and thirty-five, as well as a one-off fee for those over thirty-five in response to what he observed to be an alarming number of single Irish-American men.⁸⁸ What Father Scully’s proposed tax says about the state of bachelor affairs in Irish America at the turn of the twentieth century is that the large number of unmarried and single individuals, as an empirical fact, posed an existential nuisance to the clergy and representatives of the Boston diocese. Unease over the bachelor extended beyond the Irish in America, however, developing into a national and international issue of contention.⁸⁹ Even as early as 1835 in Britain, the bachelor was looked upon unfavourably. In the anonymously written *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties, Characters, and Conditions*, the author proclaims: “The man who

⁸⁵ McDermott, *Someone*, 218.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁸⁸ Catherine M. Burns, “The Courtship of John Rooney and Katherine Cusack, 1887-93: Obligations and Marriage Ideals in Irish-American New England,” *New Hibernia Review* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 43, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2012.0047>.

⁸⁹ For a helpful overview of American national anxieties about the bachelor in the nineteenth and twentieth century, as well as a detailed overview of taxes proposed specifically for bachelors as bachelors, see Marjorie E. Kornhauser, “Taxing Bachelors in American: 1895-1939,” in *Studies in the History of Tax Law, Volume 6*, ed. John Tiley (Oxford: Hart, 2013), 467-88. Analysing over 700 articles in American periodicals and many more in the Irish and British press, Kornhauser evidences the ways in which members of the public held bachelors in contempt, arguing that “bachelors deserved to be taxed because they were failing their moral, social and civic duty to settle down, marry and produce future citizens” (487). Furthermore, Kornhauser suggests that the increased call for bachelor taxes was not only means of reorienting the unmarried into the reproductive domestic spheres, but, actually, an anxious expression of Anglo-Saxon fears that “lesser” classes of Americans, primarily non-Protestant and working-class immigrants—of which the Irish formed a large proportion in the second half of the nineteenth century—would overpopulate and replace the “better class” of white Anglo-Saxon citizens (*ibid.*).

voluntarily devotes himself to a Bachelor's life, has undoubtedly a wrong estimate of humanity."⁹⁰

As Katherine V. Snyder and Chudacoff have demonstrated, the bachelor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries became associated with a myriad of images, nearly all of which were negative. For many, unmarried men were viewed as “degenerates, social outcasts who were socially or sexually repugnant and who had no choice but to remain single because they were physically or psychologically unacceptable to women.”⁹¹ With the rise in average marriage age and the concomitant decline in the rate of marriages, the bachelor, as well as his spinster sister, was a serious social concern in Great Britain and North America in the nineteenth century.⁹² Elsewhere, Colleen McDannell shows that in the last three decades of the nineteenth century Catholic clergy, fiction writers, and social critics “stroved to incorporate the large numbers of single men and women into the nuclear family structure which they perceived as the ‘nursery of the nation.’”⁹³ Outside this ideal of healthy gender behaviour and the wholesome home were the old boy and old girl who refused to marry for whatever reason. For the Catholic Irish-American clergy and laypersons constructing a masculine ideal among the community, the fear came especially from unmarried and unchecked men and women, and a redirection into the family cell was the most effective measure to buttress acceptable gender roles. The political and public move to frame American national power and international supremacy in terms of manliness and masculine virility—bolstered, as George Chauncey explains, by Roosevelt's claim that the only way to win both was “manfully”—exposed a fear of “overcivilisation” and feminisation in the United States at the turn of the century.⁹⁴ According to Chauncey, “men who did not do their part to uphold the manly ideal were subject to growing ridicule.”⁹⁵ At the heart of the contempt for the rogue bachelor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly after World War I, were anxieties over acceptable expressions of gender and sexuality. “Bachelor trouble was,” as Snyder argues, “fundamentally, gender trouble.”⁹⁶

In a curious scene in McDermott's *Charming Billy*, there resounds “the echo of an ongoing argument” between Rosemary Lynch and her husband Mac about their thirty-two-year-old son's bachelor status. “I think my Michael wants to follow in your footsteps,

⁹⁰ *Old Bachelors: Their Varieties, Characters, and Conditions* (London: John Macrone, 1835), 1.

⁹¹ Chudacoff, *Age of the Bachelor*, 4.

⁹² Katherine V. Snyder, *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 1850-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.

⁹³ Colleen McDannell, “‘True Men As We Need Them’: Catholicism and the Irish-American Male,” *American Studies* 27, no. 2 (1986): 27.

⁹⁴ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1980-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 113-14.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁹⁶ Snyder, *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel*, 3.

Danny,” Rosemary says to her bachelor cousin. The insinuation here is that Michael, too, is heading for life-long bachelorhood. While Rosemary regularly chastises her son for his permanently single status and aversion to marriage, Mac insists, “He shouldn’t be in any hurry ... There’s still time for all that.” The end of this brief scene sees Rosemary stand firm on her opinion and against her husband until the narrator notes, before passing on as quickly as she entered the discussion, “[h]er husband, putting pressure on the silver nutcracker, would not meet her eye.”⁹⁷ Mac’s evasiveness could arguably be read simply as an unwillingness to engage any further in what has apparently become a tedious grumble about their son’s choice to remain unmarried. Rosemary’s emphasis on Michael’s age, which might seem entirely ordinary to modern readers and younger generations, also hints at existing generational conflicts and differences.

There is, however, an alternative, even queer, interpretation to be extracted from the scene. Mac’s deliberate dodging of the discussion at this point potentially signals an unspoken, or unspeakable, recognition of his son’s queer sexuality as the reason for his prolonged bachelorhood. Whether Michael is merely a man about town, or indeed a certain kind of man, is never revealed in the narrative, and no more is spoken about this absent character in the novel after this moment. In one fleeting episode, buried in an overarching narrative about silences, secrets, and unspeakable truths, an unremarkable instance of discomfort points towards the unease over the sexually eccentric lifestyle of the Irish-American bachelor. These queer textures imprinted on the figure of the unmarried in McDermott’s novel are fully realised in *Someone*, in which Marie’s brother Gabe embodies the cultural projections of queerness visible on the body of the ageing bachelor.

“Gabe had lost his vocation.”⁹⁸ Soon after his ordination into the priesthood, and only still in his first parish, Marie’s brother Gabe abandons what had seemed from an early age to be his calling and returns home to live with his widowed mother and younger sister. Gabe begins as every Irish-American Catholic mother’s dream, set for the priesthood, but ends up living life as another stock character of Irish-American fiction, the old bachelor. The figure of the disappointed priest is echoed in Mary Gordon’s short story, “The Deacon,” in which a pitiful failed priest, Gerard Mahoney, admits, “My mother wanted a son as a priest more than anything. All those years being a housekeeper in the rectory. I really disappointed her. I just couldn’t cut it.”⁹⁹ Gabe, on the other hand, simply alleges, “the priesthood was not for him.”¹⁰⁰ What Marie deems the “puzzle of Gabe’s lost vocation” haunts the heart of this

⁹⁷ McDermott, *Charming Billy*, 163.

⁹⁸ McDermott, *Someone*, 78.

⁹⁹ Mary Gordon, “The Deacon,” in *The Stories of Mary Gordon* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 80.

¹⁰⁰ McDermott, *Someone*, 74.

narrative, intermittingly touched on and slowly unravelled, until finally edging towards a level of clarity at the novel's conclusion.¹⁰¹ Marie is particularly perplexed by the mystery of her brother—from wishing Gabe could be “a simpler kind of man” early in her own life to ultimately grappling with accepting the possibility that he might be “simply a certain kind of man” later as a married middle-aged woman.¹⁰² In a novel heavily imbued with religious allusions to divinely inspired light, there are glimmers of Gabe's queerness caught in subtle moments and silences between conversations.¹⁰³

“While the homosexual was not ‘called into being’ until 1869 and the term would not gain social currency until the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,” John Potvin argues, “the bachelor was identified as a decidedly queer type, one whose gender performance and sexual identity were at best dubious and at worst immoral given how he reneged on his obligations to serve wife, home and nation.”¹⁰⁴ In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Sedgwick reveals the ways in which the middle-class bachelor figure in late-nineteenth-century literature became representative of those heterosexual and closeted homosexual men who were plagued by “endemic male homosexual panic”—that is, the “threat” of homosexuality—in the wake of the “homosexual” as a classification type during the same period.¹⁰⁵ While Sedgwick's exploration of the bachelor as an emblem of the “strangulation” of male homosexual panic is firmly set in the late nineteenth century, it does suggest, however, that the figure is not an exclusively Victorian character, but, rather, one still visible in twentieth-century society and literature: “To refuse sexual choice in a society where sexual choice for men is both compulsory and always self-contradictory, seems, at least for educated men, still often to involve invoking the precedent of this nineteenth-century persona—not [William Makepeace Thackeray's] Mr. Batchelor himself perhaps, but, generically, the self-centered and at the same time self-marginalising bachelor he represents.”¹⁰⁶ For Sedgwick, then, the

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 81.

¹⁰² Ibid., 227.

¹⁰³ See Paul J. Contino, “Gleams of Life Everlasting in Alice McDermott's *Someone*,” *Christianity and Literature* 63, no. 4 (Summer 2014): 503-11, EBSCOhost.

¹⁰⁴ John Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort: Queer Aesthetics, Material Culture and the Modern Interior in Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 2. In his study, Potvin draws on Catholic rhetoric to produce what he calls the “Seven Deadly Sins of Bachelorhood,” which he lists as: “queerness (sexual and socio-spatial aberration); idolatry (the unhealthy worship of a female diva, which today has intensified into celebrity culture); decadence (the excessive drive of luxury and sensory stimulation); askesis (the unnatural training of the self); decoration (feminine propensity toward ornamental and non-functional); glamour (the over-stimulated attraction toward one's self, body or environment); and finally, artifice (superficial indulgence in the realm of unnatural aesthetics)” (27).

¹⁰⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 188. See also Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), 43: “The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology.”

¹⁰⁶ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 193.

taxonomy of the bachelor is intimately bound up in notions of sexual transgression, or, more accurately, sexual regression.

In *Gay New York: The Making of the Gay Male World, 1880-1940*, Chauncey reveals how the bachelor character not only became closely aligned with the perverted figure of the homosexual in the late nineteenth century and in the period before the Second World War, but actually how he, as part of a wider “bachelor subculture,” fostered the multiplication of queer desire and experiences in New York City. For Chauncey, the emergence and mushrooming of an urban gay New York was built on the thousands of young single gay men (Chauncey deals exclusively with gay male culture) who left their oppressive rural communities and migrated to New York City, the “City of Bachelors,” throughout this period. The emergence of this urban bachelor culture, suggests Chauncey, “facilitated the development of a gay world.”¹⁰⁷ As in Ireland, Irish male homosocial bonding in the United States was fostered by this bachelor subculture, regularly, as Chauncey’s study shows, slipping into homosexual intimacies. This subculture, flourishing within “bachelor flats,” saloons, speakeasies, and cafeterias “was the primary locus of the sexual dyad of fairies and trade, and its dynamics help explain the sexual culture not only of Italian immigrants but also of many Irish, African-American, and Anglo-American working-class men ... It was a highly gender-segregated social world of young, unmarried, and often transient laborers, seamen, and the like, the ‘rough’ working-class men.”¹⁰⁸

Ultimately, however, the urban bachelor subculture provoked negative responses and hostility from “social-purity forces” which became increasingly concerned about those who traversed the boundaries of the family and threatened the social order.¹⁰⁹ The bachelor positioned himself outside the compulsory reproductive system of the nuclear family, thus aligning himself, mostly unwittingly, with the most socially dangerous personality of the time: the homosexual man. As Potvin explains, “every sexual activity that did not lead to procreation became increasingly conflated with an ever-expanding definition of homosexuality, and gradually the once seemingly innocuous term bachelor was progressively deployed as an index pointing to homosexuality.”¹¹⁰ Bachelor trouble, then, was also certainly sexuality trouble. Given the solidification of the “homosexual” as a scientific and social category in the twentieth century, “bachelor” was increasingly interpreted as code for a

¹⁰⁷ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 136.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

¹⁰⁹ As Chauncey explains, “the men of the bachelor subculture who gathered without supervision in the ‘dissipating’ atmosphere of the saloons; the women whose rejection of conventional gender and sexual arrangements was emblemized by the prostitute; the youths of the city whose lives seemed to be shaped by the discordant influences of the streets rather than the civilizing influences of the home; and, on occasion, the gay men and lesbians who gathered in the niches of the urban landscape constructed by those groups” (139).

¹¹⁰ Potvin, *Bachelors of a Different Sort*, 3.

homosexual individual, typified by the figure of the “confirmed bachelor,” a common, sometimes derogatory, phrase used in the twentieth century to covertly describe a gay man.

Unlike the sexually opportunistic fairies, trade, and working-class immigrant men of Chauncey’s New York in the early twentieth century, though, McDermott’s bachelor figures appear rather to conform more to Sedgwick’s idea of “sexual anaesthesia.”¹¹¹ Rather than an image of sexual exploration among the unmarried men in McDermott’s novels, the reader observes flashes of castrated individuals living not in the socially supportive environments of the rooming houses or cafeterias, but rather lurking around in the family home. While Chauncey paints an ostensibly more progressive picture of gay bachelor life in early to mid twentieth-century New York, McDermott’s fiction provides a desexualised existence for her lonely old boys, in which the Irish-American family and community can hush, suffocate, and extinguish sexually dissident behaviour. In the words of Sedgwick, “the bachelor is housebroken by the severing of his connections with a discourse of genital sexuality.”¹¹²

In part one of McDermott’s *Someone*, Marie climbs into the bed next to her older brother Gabe in an early concurrent display of the sibling affection and the perplexing mystification that will structure Gabe and Marie’s relationship for the duration of the book:

His features were a blur, although our faces were only inches apart. And yet the handsome, high-colored, precisely featured boy who was my brother during the day, the brother I saw with my glasses on, was far less familiar to me than this one of uncertain edges and soft darkness, with a spark of wet light in his mouth or his eye when he said that if I was good and didn’t kick, I could stay.¹¹³

Marie’s familiarity with and preference for the clouded vision of her brother’s “uncertain edges and soft darkness” are echoed later in the text, when Gabe attempts to console her after she has been discarded by her first boyfriend. In order to wipe the tears from her eyes, Marie has removed her glasses. “Here he was again as I preferred him,” she says, “the red gold of his hair and skin, the familiar blur of his profile seen through my distorted vision: the way I’d known him when we were young, when we had shared that single bedroom.”¹¹⁴ Marie’s obscured vision nostalgically recalls a private and intimate scene from her youth before love was painful and her brother, still in line for ordination, was a simpler, if still nonetheless reticent, kind of man. She prefers to imagine him in this light, and, consequently, overlooks the mystery of his trouble.

¹¹¹ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 194.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 190.

¹¹³ McDermott, *Someone*, 20.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

The evening Gabe attempts to console Marie after Walter Hartnett ends their relationship, she meets a young man, her future husband Tom Commeford, who is almost entirely unnoticed by the grief-stricken Marie, except for a momentary understanding between the two strangers “by the puzzle of Gabe’s lost vocation.” Marie recalls feeling closer to this outsider from Gabe’s past than to her own flesh and blood:

It was the sensation of standing on a pier with a stranger, watching a familiar face disappear over the water’s horizon and knowing suddenly that all kinship now was determined by the fact of earth beneath your feet or only at sea. For a moment, I was more kin to this florid young stranger than I was to my brother, the failed priest, at my side.¹¹⁵

The second time Marie meets Tom, several years later when she is already working in Mr Fagin’s funeral parlour, it is without her brother Gabe. The absence of Marie’s brother is, however, marked by a conversation concerning Gabe’s lost vocation between the two—it is what had initially united them and remains, at least in the beginning, a curiosity for Tom and a sore point for Marie. “Would it be impolite of me to ask what happened?” Tom says Marie.¹¹⁶ Marie reluctantly entertains Tom’s question: “It wasn’t for him ... He once said it was because they threatened to throw him out of the seminary for smoking. He said after that he couldn’t light up without questioning his vocation.”¹¹⁷ Each time Gabe indulges in this forbidden and clandestine activity, he is forced to question his commitment to his religious vocation. In this anecdote, being queer and religious is an imaginative impossibility.

Most evidently, however, it is in Tom’s reaction immediately after, when he finds out Gabe has never married despite being relieved of the celibate vows demanded by his ordination, the reader is offered a glimpse of Gabe’s questionable sexuality:

“Married?” he asked, and when I said, “Not yet,” he nodded as if he understood something I might not. “Once a priest, always a priest,” he said, with more wisdom than I was willing to allow him.¹¹⁸

Tom’s unspoken gesture, an early instance of his ability to offer Marie greater insight into the character of her brother, clearly hints at the possibility of Gabe’s queerness, the real truth of his lost vocation. McDermott’s *Someone*, written in the wake of the *Boston Globe* reports and at the heels of John Patrick Shanley’s remarkably successful 2004 play, *Doubt*, and its

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 81.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 151.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 152.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 153.

subsequent cinematic adaptation in 2008, reintroduces analogous issues of (homo)sexuality, clerical crisis, and the ambiguities of what Mary Gordon calls the “priestly phallus.”¹¹⁹

On January 6, 2002, the *Boston Globe*'s “Spotlight” team published the first in a series of articles surrounding criminal charges of abuse brought against five Catholic priests in the Boston archdiocese, which, in the words of Elizabeth Cullingford, “was the tipping point in America, ushering in a torrent of scandalous revelations and expensive lawsuits.”¹²⁰ Irish-American Catholic priest, Andrew Greeley goes so far as to call 2002 “the Year of the Pedophile” in his *Priests: A Calling in Crisis*.¹²¹ The subsequent international hysteria attached to what rapidly became a global pandemic compelled Gordon to complain in 2004, “My head has ached and spun with the words, words, words, spoken and written about pedophile priests.”¹²² In 2015, Tom McCarthy’s biographical film about the *Globe* reports, *Spotlight*, winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay, ensured that the story would continue. While the Catholic Church and its conservative parishioners immediately blamed the liberal changes and moral breakdown after the Second Vatican Council, as well as the alleged spread of homosexuality within the Church’s ranks for the abuse, more liberal critics ascribed the crimes to Church corruption and compulsory celibacy among the clergy.¹²³ “Because the Catholic priesthood is an all-male institution and

¹¹⁹ See John Patrick Shanley, *Doubt: A Parable* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2005) and *Doubt*, directed by John Patrick Shanley (Los Angeles: Miramax, 2008). Mary Gordon, “The Priestly Phallus: A Study in Iconography,” *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 5, no. 1 (2004): 103-11, EBSCOhost.

¹²⁰ Elizabeth Cullingford, “*Evil, Sin, or Doubt?* The Dramas of Clerical Child Abuse,” *Theatre Journal* 62, no. 2 (May 2010): 247, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40660605>. For two discussions in dialogue about the dramatic shifts in the reception of the Catholic cleric in the United States, see Lawrence J. McCaffrey, “*Going My Way* and Irish-American Catholicism: Myth and Reality,” *New Hibernia Review* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 2000): 119-27, reprinted in *Screening Irish-America*, ed. Ruth Barton (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 180-90, and Timothy J. Meagher, “Cops, Priests, and the Decline of Irish America,” in *Catholics in the Movies*, ed. Colleen McDannell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 227-49. In the former, McCaffrey seems desperate to recall an image of the parish priest in Irish America long gone in the wake of the seismic shifts of the 1960s. For McCaffrey, Bing Crosby’s Father Chuck O’Malley not only eased national anxieties about recent economic depression and war in Europe and Asia but also served to positively change the public image of the Catholic Church in the United States. As Ruth Baron argues in *Acting Irish in Hollywood: From Fitzgerald to Farrell* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), “the preferred view of the Irish was as hard working, integrated members of long-established, working-class communities, with the priest and the policeman acting as guarantors of that group’s stability and conformity” (35). In his analysis of the 1981 crime drama, *True Confessions*, adapted from John Gregory Dunne’s 1977 novel of the same name, however, Meagher torques these representations of the priest and policeman and charts the downfall of Irish-American Catholic identity, which had slipped by the time of Dunne’s novel into images of financial and moral bankruptcy: “In *True Confessions* the Irish American Catholic church of the 1940s has sunk into financial corruption and sexual depravity because of the very Americanization of the church lauded in *Going My Way*. The new Catholicism, supposedly at home everywhere in America, has proved to be a middle-class nightmare rather than the fulfillment of an immigrant dream” (238).

¹²¹ Andrew Greeley, *Priests: A Calling in Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1.

¹²² Gordon, “The Priestly Phallus,” 103.

¹²³ For discussions on the decline of the Catholic Church and the presence of the Irish in that institution since the Vatican II developments, see Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Meagher, *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History*, 160; Thomas J. Shelley, “Twentieth-Century American Catholicism and Irish Americans,” in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J.J Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 574-608; Irene Whelan, “Religious Rivalry and the Making of Irish-American Identity,” in *Making the Irish*

81 percent of the victims were boys,” Cullingford explains, “media representations of the scandal frequently reinforce the idea that gay men are more likely than heterosexuals to abuse children.”¹²⁴

These discourses undoubtedly influence an interpretation of McDermott’s failed priest character Gabe. That his possible homosexuality flavours responses to the novel, rather than the potential case of sexual interaction with a minor, is surprising considering the historical climate out of which McDermott’s *Someone* emerges. At the same time, the fact that the queerness of the forsaken priest is read at all as homosexual might prove that the conflation of priestly paedophilia and homosexuality continues to shape readings of priestly male sexuality from the outset. As *Charming Billy*’s bachelor Dan Lynch says,

let the talk turn to Catholic priests and everybody’s smiling behind their hands. Snickering. They’re all out to make it something perverted ... They say, It’s an unnatural thing, giving that up, a man can’t give *that* up, not for the sake of what’s really only a pretty story.¹²⁵

McDermott’s novel introduces doubt and ambiguity in relation to sexuality and identity. Moreover, it is the figure of the priestly bachelor Gabe which allows her to incite such overlapping and contentious readings of impossible desire in the book. “Gay,” “bachelor,” and “paedophile” collide in the subtextual realm of *Someone*, producing endless engagements with the workings of sexuality and social responses to un(re)markable desire. McDermott’s most recent novel, *The Ninth Hour*, published in 2017, turns in reverence to the figure of the Irish-American nun, primarily portrayed as a selfless idol in the community.¹²⁶ Unlike Dunne’s Aunt Harriet, also a former nun arousing lurid gossip among her Irish-American family, McDermott’s Sisters are disassociated from licentiousness and the spectre of lesbianism. Even while shedding light on a cloistered life in *The Ninth Hour*, McDermott reserves sexual ambiguity for the priestly male in her writing.¹²⁷

The invisibility of Gabe’s queerness is closely connected to the inability, or indeed, the reluctance, of his sister—the eyes and voice of the experiences and behaviours of a

American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States, ed. J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 271-85; and Marian Ronan, *Tracing the Sign of the Cross: Sexuality, Mourning, and the Future of American Catholicism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

McDermott’s *After This* provides a particularly salient fictional meditation on the same trend. At one point in the book, McDermott alludes to the historical decline of the Church in the literal dismantling of a corroding church in a Catholic community on Long Island (105-10). *After This* encapsulates the historical shifts of the period during which the ideals of American life to which Irish Catholics had aspired were remade in an era of civil rights, gay liberation, women’s rights, and the Vietnam War. See Ronan, *Tracing the Sign of the Cross*, 3.

¹²⁴ Cullingford, “The Dramas of Clerical Abuse,” 247.

¹²⁵ McDermott, *Charming Billy*, 199-200.

¹²⁶ Alice McDermott, *The Ninth Hour* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

¹²⁷ For a discussion on the representation of nuns in the wake of both the clergy abuse scandals and the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland since the early 2000s, see Elizabeth Cullingford, ““Our Nuns are *Not* a Nation”: Politicizing the Convent in Irish Literature and Film,” *Éire-Ireland* 41, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 2006): 9-39, EBSCOhost.

clannish Irish enclave in Brooklyn—to see. In the second part of the novel, Marie, now in her twenties, begins work at the local funeral parlour for Mr Fagin, another Irish bachelor who lives alone with his mother above his business. Tucked away on the third floor of the building are the ancient figures of Fagin’s tiny mother, religious Sisters (of Charity and the Sick Poor), and a host of other “old immigrant ladies of all shapes and sizes.”¹²⁸ It is from this gaggle of gossiping women that Marie learns of the “neighborhood’s ability to leave unspoken whatever it was that one of our members wished to remain unspoken.”¹²⁹ When these women discuss the particularly scandalous lives and misfortunes, “too delicate for the old lady’s ears,” of those being buried and mourned on the parlour floor below them, “in their sorting out of recollection and rumor, of gossip, anecdote, story,” they do so more often than not wordlessly “with a series of gestures and nods and sudden silences.” Marie explains how “eyebrows raised and words falling off into a long nod indicated sex ... eyebrows, nod, and all the other women would cluck their tongues in sympathy.”¹³⁰ Communicated through the gesture of hands and implied in nods and clucks, sex is generally inexpressible through words.¹³¹

Marie’s failure to recognise her brother’s queerness is, most likely, a result of her subconscious attempt to avoid what even the old immigrant women on the third floor of Fagin’s funeral parlour would see in the “mystery” of Gabe—“the clear-eyed truth of it”—rather than the progressive deterioration of her vision. Imagining what Mrs Fagin and her Sister companions would say about Gabe, “a handsome boy, his parents’ pride, and only a year at his first parish before he came back home without his collar,” Marie envisages “tiny Mrs. Fagin and her lace-curtain friends, the Sisters in wimples or their caps—raising their eyebrows and letting their words fall off into that long nod,” thus alluding to sexual scandal in her brother’s life. Of course, it is not the ancient figure of Mrs Fagin, nor the Sisters of Charity and the Sick Poor, who weave Gabe’s curiously queer past, it is Marie. Though she “couldn’t say then what it might have meant,” hindsight brings her knowledge.¹³²

Through her husband’s recollection of a figure from his past, the gender-deviant Darcy Furlong, a “nice guy ... but a window dresser, if you know what I mean,”¹³³ Marie appears to finally confront her vision of Gabe. A former colleague of Tom’s and a victim of

¹²⁸ McDermott, *Someone*, 120.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 125-26.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹³¹ While heterosexuality is hushed in the language of McDermott’s novel, it is nonetheless expressed: Marie speaks about her wedding night, the births of her children and the intimacy between a married man and woman. The desire between Marie and her husband Tom is representative of what priest, sociologist and author, Andrew Greeley, sees as sacramental, or sacred, desire according to Catholic doctrine. Queer desire, however, impossible to imagine positively if at all, within the Catholic logic of sacred desire, is most often an unnamed atrocity and threat to the social and spiritual self. See Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 86.

¹³² McDermott, *Someone*, 131.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 173.

gossip among his other male colleagues, Furlong, an Irish-American bachelor from the South, was rumoured to have enjoyed knitting in the office lunchroom, to have possessed a tube of lipstick, and to have worn polish on his toes—sure signs of his queerness to these blue-collar New York men. “Whatever Darcy Furlong was,” Tom adds, “fairy or window dresser or momma’s boy, or just a lonely guy who liked fancy socks and his own routine—what good was to come of all us talking about him?”¹³⁴ This appearance of Furlong comes immediately after Gabe, on the night he is released from Suffolk psychiatric hospital and has come to stay temporarily with Marie’s family, receives a visit from an old friend “from his days at IT&T,” Matt Cain, whose name evokes a suggestive biblical link to the murderous exile child of Adam and Eve and his mark of disrepute on humanity.¹³⁵ In an intimate moment between the two friends, Gabe takes a cigarette and leans “forward from the other side of the couch as Matt Cain held the match to it.”¹³⁶ This interaction between the two proves too much for Marie, who excuses herself and goes into the kitchen. Cain’s presence causes Marie obvious and great discomfort, but she is less able to decipher the root of this uneasiness: “I was being rude, I knew. Purposefully. And I wasn’t sure why,” she says. Cain, sensing Marie’s unease, decides to leave, a gesture she is convinced conveys “a thousand meanings.”¹³⁷ Leaving Gabe to say goodbye to Cain, the disgruntled sister goes to her husband in bed in search of answers she is seemingly unable to provide for herself:

I had not liked Gabe’s friend, and in my distaste, I had gone into the kitchen and lost out on what Gabe had said, about his routine at Suffolk. About what had brought him there. I had turned the fan down low enough so that I could now whisper, “Who was that guy, that friend of his?”¹³⁸

To Tom, both Gabe and Cain are most vividly imagined in the reincarnated figure of an old, long-gone queer bachelor: “Do you remember Darcy Furlong?”¹³⁹

It is in the aftermath of Matt Cain’s unexpected and uninvited presence, and in light of the curious case of Furlong, that Gabe is revealed to Marie as a “certain kind of man”:

My brother was a mystery to me, but a mystery I always associated with the sacred darkness of the bedroom we had shared in Brooklyn, or the hushed groves of the seminaries, or the spice of the incense in the cavernous church, even with his lifelong, silent communion with the words he found in his books. Incomprehensible, yes, but in the same way that much that was holy was incomprehensible to me, little pagan. And now my heart fell to think that the

¹³⁴ Ibid., 226.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 221.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 222.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 224.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 225.

holy mystery of who my brother was might be made of flesh, ordinary flesh,
by the notion that he was simply a certain kind of man.¹⁴⁰

Even so, Marie remains unable to overtly articulate what exactly kind of man Gabe is. Later in the novel, five years after the death of her husband Tom, and eight years without her brother Gabe, Marie is taken home by her daughter Susan from what turns out to be a mismanaged cataract operation at a local suburban clinic. Marie's children, whose voices are heard closer to the end of the narrative, are an indication of the changes in attitudes, beliefs and identities of the later-generation Irish-American community. Susan's language, in particular, also bespeaks a new way to articulate queerness. When Marie recalls a saying routinely spouted by her late brother, Susan snaps, "Jesus, Mom . . . Don't quote me Uncle Gabe Blade, tell me what you want to do." "Gay blade," a common derogatory American term used to describe a gay person, is the first most direct attempt in McDermott's narrative to "out" the old bachelor. For Marie, the pronouncement is hurtful: "I had heard my children use the phrase before, joking between themselves. I knew they meant no harm."¹⁴¹

Susan's brash language, a symptom of her generation, not only alludes to the loosening grip of the Catholic vernacular and Irish pretensions of Marie's day, but also heralds a contemporary language used to express gay identity. Earlier in the scene, Marie explains:

I had long ago stopped reprimanding my children for their language—quoting Mrs. Fagin with my finger raised. The world was a cruder, more vulgar place than the one I had known. This was the language required to live in it, I supposed.¹⁴²

Susan's crude and vulgar description of her uncle as "Uncle Gabe Blade" replaces the resounding silence of her mother's generation, a group clasped by the strict ideologies of the Church and haunted by the aspirations of lace-curtain Irish pretensions, with a more contemporary, but no less destructive, conception of homosexuality. While there are no dates mentioned, Susan's opinions are most likely born out of the era of the 1980s and 1990s. In this momentary outburst, McDermott's novel hints towards a linguistic shift in Irish America, embedded in the generational differences and distances of an ethnic group, that witnesses the liberation of the unspeakable queer from the shackles of an oppressive religious rhetoric, yet, most unsettlingly, a re-containment of queer desire and subjectivity within an equally repressive vocabulary. Relatively uninjured by Susan's choice of words to describe her uncle's queer nature, to her daughter's slur, Marie consoles herself: "I knew they meant no

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 226-27.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 148.

¹⁴² Ibid., 147.

harm ... It was how they looked at the world,” she resigns.¹⁴³ Later, Susan admits, “We’re all pretty sure he was gay.” To this, Marie dismissively insists, “I don’t see the world the way you kids do,” while her daughter, without losing the irony of the situation, responds: “Sometimes you don’t see at all.”¹⁴⁴

“The Time Has Come to Think About Celibacy”

There are women who are unmarried by accident, and others who are married by option; but Olive Chancellor was unmarried by every implication of her being. She was a spinster as Shelley was a lyric poet, or as the month of August is sultry.¹⁴⁵

In an interview with Tom Ashbrook on St Patrick’s Day in 2014, McDermott, in response to a question regarding the roots of queer exclusion in the parade’s history, says that,

there’s also the reluctance to define any one of us by a single thing. Whether it be alcoholism or sexuality or any of the broad definitions we like to give people ... that reluctance to say any one of us should be defined by one thing, that we are too complex, that there’s too much we’ll never know about one another, and we need to have the dignity of a full breath of lives and possibilities in any individual.¹⁴⁶

Eschewing a direct response to the homophobic exclusions in New York and Boston, McDermott provides, instead, a taciturn commentary on Irish-American identity and sexuality, one emphasising, however, the complexity of identity itself. Speaking out on the *Diane Rehm* show the previous year about her novel and on the point of Susan’s “outing” of her uncle Gabe, McDermott scoffed at a paranoid reading of Gabe’s sexuality: “Of course. The bachelor failed priest uncle, clearly he must be gay.”¹⁴⁷ In his *History News Network* review of *Someone*, Jim Cullen reasserts McDermott’s suspicion of a somewhat predictable response from modern readers, which, in the words of the novel’s Tom Commeford, energetically attempts to “reduce everything to a couple of easy words about sex.”¹⁴⁸ He does, however, resituate a queer reading of Gabe’s “trouble” within its early twentieth-century Irish-American context in an effort to highlight the impossibility of articulating such an

¹⁴³ McDermott, *Someone*, 148.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁴⁵ Henry James, *The Bostonians*, ed. R.D. Gooder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 15.

¹⁴⁶ Alice McDermott, interview by Tom Ashbrook, *On Point*, March 17, 2014,

<http://www.wbur.org/onpoint/2014/03/17/alice-mcdermott-irish-american-fiction-st-patricks-day>.

¹⁴⁷ Alice McDermott, interview by Tom Gjeten, *Diane Rehm*, September 9, 2013,

<https://dianerehm.org/shows/2013-09-09/alice-mcdermott-someone>.

¹⁴⁸ McDermott, *Someone*, 227.

interpretation: “Nowadays, we’re almost surprised to encounter a priest who is not obviously or likely gay, but in Marie’s day such realities were unspeakable.”¹⁴⁹

To be sure, this last point becomes eligible only when one assumes, as this chapter has been arguing thus far, that the bachelor and spinster might indeed be encased within the epistemology of the closet. In this final part of the discussion, it might prove productive to consider the ways in which these figures pose a threat to heterosexual systems of social organisation not through that which is concealed, but, rather, precisely through the absence of any concealment in the first place. In other words, the trouble with bachelors and spinsters perhaps lies not in the open secret of homosexuality; on the contrary, it hinges on what Benjamin Kahan calls “an epistemology of the empty secret.”¹⁵⁰ In *Celibacies*, Kahan critiques the empty promise of queer theory as a methodology through which understandings of sexuality, sex, and identity are deconstructed, transformed, and reformulated for the purpose of social and political freedom and equality. Instead, he argues, the “political configuration” of contemporary LGBT visibility “points us toward the *least* queer aspect of queer theory: its tendency to turn other sexualities into same-sex alloeroticism.”¹⁵¹

Rewriting Gayle Rubin’s appeal to “think about sex,” Kahan opens his book, proposing that “[t]he time has come to think about celibacy.”¹⁵² Recurring to queer readings from Sedgwick, Foucault, Leslie Fielder, and René Girard in particular, Kahan provides a general and generative practice of celibate readings, or of “celibate plots,” through which to consider alternative ways of being productive in society without conforming to heterosexual and LGBT reproductive forms of sociality.¹⁵³ In a chapter on the American poet and writer, Marianne Moore, Kahan designs a theory of celibate temporality that embraces rather than rejects the anachronistic and arrested associations attached to the aged unmarried individual. Celibates, he suggests, “feel old-fashioned or out of synch to us, in part, because queer theory’s revolutionary force grows out of the sexual revolution, which connects sexual expression and freedom.” Utilising the backward strategies of queer theory key to the discussions in this thesis, Kahan resists this move in queer theory and introduces celibate

¹⁴⁹ Jim Cullen, review of Alice McDermott’s *Someone*, *History News Network*, September 23, 2013, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/153366>.

¹⁵⁰ Benjamin Kahan, *Celibacies: American Modernism & Sexual Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 3.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 3 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 1. See Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge, 1984), 267-319.

¹⁵³ Kahan, *Celibacies*, 9.

temporality as a radical “tool for critiquing heteronormative and [heterosexual and homosexual] couple-oriented understandings of time.”¹⁵⁴

Since celibacy’s etymological roots do not divide the single and sexless individual, this produces unmarked ambiguity and uncertainty to the outside world. “Bachelors need to be ‘confirmed,’” Kahan writes, “but even such a confirmation is only partial in its containment of the threat of indeterminacy.”¹⁵⁵ In fact, Kahan’s study serves to eschew the unavoidable trappings inherited in the terms “bachelor” and “spinster,” which carry with them meanings of “the marriage market and the desirability of marriage.”¹⁵⁶ As a position, celibacy opens a path beyond such obsessive ties to the oppressive state of matrimony. In conventional treatments of the figures from the likes of Snyder, Potvin, Kent, Sedgwick, Chauncey, and Love, Kahan claims that “[t]he bachelor and spinster become the historical precursors *par excellence*—appropriated as feminist foremothers, queers *avant la lettre*, or marital exemplars—but seem never to have their own history, never being their own precursors.”¹⁵⁷

In fact, Doan had already suggested an alternative narrative for the unattached literary spinster, “a figure who cannot be accommodated by the ideology of the traditional romance plot, whether that plot is within a heterosexual or lesbian context,” in 1991, envisaging a radically disruptive figure who “breaks out of the confines of conventional narrative strategies and demands that both the writer and reader invent new, alternative literary forms.”¹⁵⁸ In other words, to incorporate bachelors and spinsters into the less determinate identity of the celibate recovers the subversive potential of these figures who, in conventional approaches, have been effaced in their exclusive figuration within the history of homosexuality. In this sense, Kahan’s queer project reorients previous scholarship on singleness “that has up until now misrecognized the proximity of the history of representations of same-sex eroticism and the history of representations of celibacy as identity.”¹⁵⁹

Celibacies offers a convincing argument for the political and cultural viability of celibate plots and practices, and, remarkably, American Catholicism, particularly Irish-American Catholicism, is credited in Kahan’s book as the cultural force that influenced

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 61. Kahan draws in particular on the theory of “temporal drag,” devised by Elizabeth Freeman, a significant intervention in the future-oriented view of conventional theories in queer studies that will be revisited and appropriated in a discussion on the works of Peggy Shaw and Eileen Myles. See Freeman’s “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 727-44, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2000.0046> and *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), chapter two, 59-94.

¹⁵⁵ Kahan, *Celibacies*, 6.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 11.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Doan, Introduction to *Old Maids to Radical Spinsters*, 10.

¹⁵⁹ Kahan, *Celibacies*, 10.

celibate public policies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁶⁰ In late nineteenth-century America, Kahan argues, “Protestant women borrowed on and learned from the strategies of Catholic celibacy in order to create a culture of celibate reform, encompassing Protestant men and women, Catholic men and women, as well as individuals operating outside the aegis of religious institutions.”¹⁶¹ The culture of celibacy emerging from these developments produced an array of political and intellectual reform and performance: from suffrage movements in the nineteenth century; to the Mugwumps who led Democratic candidate and bachelor Grover Cleveland to the White House in 1884; and to the literary and artistic efforts of Henry James, life-long celibate Moore, Father Divine in the Harlem Renaissance, and the countercultural figure of Andy Warhol in the 1960s. Essentially, Kahan is suggesting that, contrary to the Right’s appropriation of abstinence, “historically celibacy was a choice, and this choice was a site of radical politics, of feminist organizing, of black activism, queer citizenship, and other leftist interventions.”¹⁶² The question is whether celibacy as a radical practice is at least glimpsed or at best endorsed in McDermott’s rendering of the unattached bachelor and spinster.¹⁶³

Although, ostensibly at least, the absence of full sexual disclosure in McDermott’s narrative could conceivably be read as a radical intervention into the pleasure of/in knowing, speaking, or seeing sexual identity as a predictable and permanent state of one’s being, or even as a nod to celibacy’s even greater threat of indeterminacy, on closer inspection, these arguments ultimately flounder. The same conclusion can be drawn when attempting to conceptualise the bachelor and spinster categories as sites of safety from familial and social

¹⁶⁰ For a theological account of the significance of Catholic celibacy to social movements, see Grant Kaplan, “Celibacy as Political Resistance,” *First Things*, January 2014. Kaplan, drawing on the writing of Johann Möhler, suggests that celibacy among Catholic clergy works against the state’s imposition of marriage as part of its political and social apparatus, thus ensuring a separation between Church and state. In a recent article, Martin B. Lockerd advances Kaplan’s discussion in an analysis of Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* and the text’s representation of “queer celibacy.” Lockerd cites and critiques Kahan’s book for its apparent neglect of Catholic celibacy. As outlined here, however, Kahan clearly engages with the role of American Catholicism in the political movements emerging from celibacy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. See Martin B. Lockerd, “Decadent Arcadias, Wild(e) Conversions, and Queer Celibacies in *Brideshead Revisited*,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 239-63, <https://doi.org/10.1353/mfs.2018.0019>.

¹⁶¹ Kahan, *Celibacies*, 14-19. For a discussion on the uses of celibacy in nineteenth-century feminist movements, see Frances Power Cobbe, “Celibacy v. Marriage,” *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, February 1862. For Cobbe, celibacy provides not only a legitimate form of female experience, but acts as a preferable state to the burdens of marriage in which women are subordinated below the husband. “The ‘old maid’s’ life may be as rich, as blessed,” Cobbe writes, “as that of the proudest of mothers with her crown of clustering babes. Nay, she feels that in the power of devoting her *whole* time and energies to some benevolent task, she is enabled to effect perhaps some greater good than would otherwise have been possible” (233).

¹⁶² Kahan, *Celibacies*, 153.

¹⁶³ In fact, in an interview with Charlie Reilly, McDermott speaks about the relationship between Billy and Maeve in *Charming Billy* as a marriage based on celibacy. The title of the novel and its celibate content is, as the author reveals in this interview with Reilly, inspired by the folk song, “Billy Boy”: “Think about that chorus: ‘She’s ... fit to be a wide, but she ... is too young to be taken from her mother,’ and ‘I have been to seek a wife, ... she’s a young thing who cannot leave her mother.’ If you take it far enough, it’s a song about a celibate marriage, which, of course, is what Billy and Maeve wind up with” (566).

rejection. McDermott's queer old boys and girls do not pursue or experience sexually, socially, or politically fulfilled lives in the indeterminable interstices of sexual and gender categorisations, but rather endure life-long passive celibacy and romantic isolation, most often as recluses in the nuclear Irish-American family home—Dora Ryan, for example—or as permanent guests in the family homes of relatives—such is the case for Marie's Gabe, who remains in his family's Brooklyn apartment until it crumbles from beneath him before moving into his sister's suburban family home until death.

“Think About Your Uncles and Your Aunts”: Toward Avuncular Utopias

In *At Weddings and Wakes*, McDermott briefly gestures towards a way of positioning the Irish-American spinster aunt outside of mere caricature, in essence, turning misfortune into potential resource. The narrator, through the eyes of the youngest of the Dailey children, glimpses such a moment of promise:

Veronica was unfortunate. It was the single word that seemed to follow any mention of her name. Unfortunate to have never known her mother or her father. Unfortunate to have such poor skin. Unfortunate never to have married. She had once worked for a man who had left her some money (“a small fortune, in those days,” it was said), but even this, somehow, had proved unfortunate. Unfortunate. The word alone could elicit a knowing sigh whenever her name was mentioned, although it seemed to the youngest child, who had given her her loyalty, that it implied something the other sisters lacked, and that was a fortune that might have been found. Unfortunate had, at least, the fortune, if only a small fortune, somewhere in it and the youngest child imagined that it was lost in that dark room, somewhere among the cottons and the silks that draped the bed and the floor and the embroidered chair and the glass-topped dressing table. Lost, but existent nevertheless, a fortune some inches away, just under the sand, just under her sleeping hand.¹⁶⁴

In the “future-oriented” figures of both Bob Dailey, the children's father, and Aunt May, one of the spinster Towne sisters and ex-nun who marries at middle age, Patricia Coughlan distinguishes a way beyond what she describes as the unmarried women's “share of resentment, anger, and scorn.”¹⁶⁵ McDermott similarly seems to privilege marriage as the site of futurity and joy in her novel. Drifting away from spinsterhood, May is presented as a fortuitous model for one of the young children: “And now there was a new thought: perhaps for the girl to resemble her was not so bad after all. A new thought that had at its origin a dozen red roses in a cream-colored vase.”¹⁶⁶ Shortly thereafter, May, too, is seduced by the image of herself as a bride, “an enviable figure” approaching a life “with some promise of joy

¹⁶⁴ McDermott, *At Weddings and Wakes*, 31.

¹⁶⁵ Coughlan, “Paper Ghosts,” 133.

¹⁶⁶ McDermott, *At Weddings and Wakes*, 69.

in it.”¹⁶⁷ Aunt Agnes and Aunt Veronica, however, are seemingly left behind. Ultimately, though, May’s wedding leads to her untimely wake in the novel, when she dies four days after marrying Fred. And yet, Coughlan reads one of the young Dailey girls’ subsequent retelling of May’s death as a moment of creative and psychological release, a letting go of the dead.¹⁶⁸ Coughlan’s interpretation of McDermott’s novel clearly attaches futurity to the state of marriage and the figure of the married woman, Aunt May in this case. What the above passage from McDermott’s novel offers, however, is a glimpse of the spinster as more than mere misfortune; instead, she stands for undiscovered potentiality.

“Think about your uncles and your aunts.”¹⁶⁹ This invitation, put forward by Sedgwick in her rereading of the family dynamics in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is an attractive call, for it shifts the interpretive lens away from the “Name of the Father,” both in Wilde’s play in particular and in the drama of sociality and kinship more generally, toward the avuncular figure, groping further toward the aunt and uncle’s disruptively queer potential. As Sedgwick reminds her readers, “aunt,” or “auntie,” and “uncle” bear in their meanings a queer genealogy with roots in the nineteenth century, when the former often signified a “passive sodomist,” or “any man who displays a queenly demeanor, whatever he may do with other men in bed,” and the latter was a term “for a male protector in a sexual relation involving economic sponsorship and, typically class and age transitivity.”¹⁷⁰ She continues:

Because aunts and uncles (in either narrow or extended meanings) are adults whose intimate access to children needn’t depend on their own paring or procreation, it’s very common, of course, for some of them to have the office or representing nonconforming or nonreproductive sexualities to children. We are many, the queer women and men whose first sense of the possibility of alternative life trajectories came to us from our uncles and aunts—even when the stories we were allowed to hear about their lives were *almost* unrecognizably mangled, often in demeaning ways, by the heterosexist hygiene of childrearing.¹⁷¹

Since the terms “aunt” and “uncle” carry multiple meanings, not least referring to figures of queer patronage and entanglement, individuals who bear these titles embody an eccentric possibility beyond the confines of the heterosexist functionality of the family cell.¹⁷² The “no-

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 79.

¹⁶⁸ Coughlan, “Paper Ghosts,” 136.

¹⁶⁹ Sedgwick, *Tendencies*, 59.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 59.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 63.

¹⁷² As Sedgwick argues in *Tendencies*, “the fact that we don’t in English so much as have names to distinguish our mother’s from our father’s brother (or sister), or any of those from an aunt or uncle related to us only by marriage to a parental sibling, shows that a far less specified set of avuncular roles and relations now obtains—to the extent that, first, the term ‘avunculate’ actually does seem usable for both men and women who occupy these relations to us; and, second, many geocultural settings allow us to call ‘aunt’ or ‘uncle’ people older than

longer-conscious” traces of a spinster utopia, to paraphrase José Esteban Muñoz, are barely buried in the image of Aunt Veronica.¹⁷³ On such a radical feminist utopia, Daly writes:

We do not know exactly what is on the Other Side until we arrive there—and the journey is *rough*. The charting done here is based on some knowledge from the past, upon the present experience, and upon hopes for the future. These three sources are inseparable, intertwined. Radical feminist consciousness spirals in all directions, dis-covering the past, creating/dis-closing the present/future.¹⁷⁴

Spinsters, in Daly’s vision, are survivors, “not merely in the sense of ‘living on,’ but in the sense of living beyond.”¹⁷⁵ In bounding poetic language, *Gyn/Ecology* presents spinster feminists “learning to Spook/Speak back” against their silence and marginalisation.¹⁷⁶

As the young author/surrogate narrator of Myles’s *Cool for You* discloses, however, the unattached old Irish spinster is a frightening figure. Facing the darkness surrounding the spinster lodgers in a suburban family home, Eileen shudders, “the whole gang spooked me because they were all women and women wind up in little rooms, women wind up alone.”¹⁷⁷ Such an image of the woman alone has become the overriding picture in public consciousness, and McDermott is equally unable to divorce her own fictionalised spinster characters from this enduring understanding. Pauline, Mary Keane’s colleague and cause of constant frustration in *After This*, succumbs to acute psychological distress in the novel, suffering from a breakdown—an event McDermott reintroduces in *Someone*—and, without family of her own, is taken in by one of the Keane daughters: “Long after all of them had scattered, Jacob, Michael, Annie, their mother and father, scattered—as their parents would say—to the four winds, Clare would have Pauline, still a royal pain in the ass, in her care.”¹⁷⁸ In Annie Keane’s eyes, the eccentric spinster should be treated with both ridicule and pity. “Let’s put Pauline in the attic,” she quips to her mother when Mary announces Pauline’s imminent release from the hospital and her decision to take care of her for now. “Like Grace

ourselves who aren’t related to us by either blood *or* marriage” (62-63). For an insightful response to the important role of the spinster-avunculate, see Briallen Hopper, “On Spinsters,” *Los Angeles Review of Books*, July 12, 2015, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/on-spinsters/#!>. In her article, Hopper, a nineteenth-century scholar and self-identified spinster, celebrates and reverentially acknowledges the formative role unmarried women played in her own performance of spinster aesthetics: “It was the spinsters who made me ... Who are my readers and editors and muses and collaborators and confidants. Who are my loves. Who know that although in the eyes of the world and the law we are alone, we are not alone.”

¹⁷³ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

¹⁷⁴ Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*, 1.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 318.

¹⁷⁷ Myles, *Cool for You*, 83.

¹⁷⁸ McDermott, *After This*, 78

Pool.”¹⁷⁹ Later in the book, Annie further reveals her contempt for dependent Pauline, blasting her as “a mouldering virgin.”¹⁸⁰ If the attic is the site of containment for the spinster in *After This*, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* suggests the unmarried “mouldering virgin” embodies that site of decay and neglect: “And, in truth, cellars and attics, no longer entered, of no use, become full of unseemly mystery; phantoms will likely haunt them; abandoned by people, houses become the abode of spirits.”¹⁸¹

Despite the productive claims for an avuncular utopia, this discussion on the Irish-American bachelor, spinster, and celibate in McDermott’s fiction concludes, in the same vein as Love’s meditations on negative spinster aesthetics, with an apologia for these figures. In a passage from *After This*, before her nervous collapse, Pauline vocalises the familial incorporation of the woman alone. To the sales assistant in Lord & Taylor: “‘Something for my niece,’ Pauline had said, a little white lie that she had been telling salesclerks and strangers for so long now, she no longer noticed it herself, or questioned its meaning. Something for my little niece, for my nephew in college, for my sister’s boy in Vietnam.”¹⁸² In the end, Pauline becomes a surrogate member of the Keane family, and to Annie, a child of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, her new aunt’s temporal solecism is contagious: “Now that both her brothers were gone from the house, Pauline’s presence at dinner made Annie think of them all, her father included, as old maids.”¹⁸³ Later living with Clare and her family, Pauline is true to the etymological roots of the spinster, a woman who weaves and spins wool, teaching the young mother to sew. This pastoral function, however, aids the workings of the heterosexual reproductive family, and rather than Daly’s Spinster, Pauline is a dutiful aunt to the heterosexual nuclear cell.

In writing that is committed to the traditional, heterosexual family, even if that institution’s stability is tested, the Irish-American bachelors and spinsters of McDermott’s constructed world are repeatedly enveloped in the nuclear family—Pauline is taken in by Clare and her husband, Gabe lives out his final years with his sister Marie and her husband Tom, and the shamed Dora is hidden behind the veil of lace curtain in her Brooklyn family home. Rather than stretching the elasticity of the family structure to dismantle its nuclear, neoliberal function, the Irish-American avunculate is complicit in the advancement of that

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 197. In actuality, it is Bertha Mason, Edward Rochester’s first wife, who is the mad woman in the attic in Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, while Pool is her sometimes drunk, negligent carer, begging the question as to whether Mary is to care for Pauline, or, indeed, whether the direction of responsibility is inverted. Still, it is Pauline who requires care, not Mary, even in the wake of losing her youngest son in Vietnam.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 231.

¹⁸¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (1949; repr., London: Vintage Books, 1997), 187.

¹⁸² McDermott, *After This*, 191.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 188.

function and eventually left behind. As Love argues, however, perhaps such negative attachments in the figure of the single individual might be instructive to the writing of queer history in the present and future.

Conclusion: Forever Suspect

In a final comment on the social and sexual ambiguity of the bachelor brother-uncle figure, McDermott writes a unique beacon of the real world into her fictional universe in the form of Alfred Hitchcock's Film Noir classic, *Shadow of a Doubt* (1942). Marie's daughter Helen and Uncle Gabe, on the night of his release from the Suffolk asylum, sit down together to watch Hitchcock's psychological thriller. *Shadow of a Doubt* tells the story of young Charlie Newton who receives an unexpected visit from her estranged uncle and namesake, Charles Oakley. Young Charlie soon realises that her uncle harbours a dark secret: he is one of two suspects in the Merry Widow Murderer case, and eventually turns out to be guilty of the crimes. Bachelor Uncle Charlie is an impeccably dressed, woman-hating sociopath, who kills rich widows not for the money, but for the sheer pleasure of putting "wheezing, fat animals" out of their misery.¹⁸⁴ In Robin Wood's reading of Hitchcock's characters, the figure of bachelor Uncle Charlie is interpreted as either incestuous or simply homosexual, but always queer. While Wood acknowledges that queer readings of certain Hitchcock characters might actually be heterosexist interpretations of homosexuality, he admits that the director probably shared these views.¹⁸⁵ Whether he is queer or not, this old bachelor is definitely criminal. Gabe is sensitive to such an unforgiving representation of the unmarried uncle: "Not very fair to the bachelor uncles of the world ... I'll be forever suspect, I'm afraid."¹⁸⁶ Gabe's comment could allude to his sexual ambiguity as much as his state of mind. In the end of Hitchcock's film, after successfully defending herself from her murderous uncle, and killing him in self-defence, Charlie Newton chats with the young detective assigned to the Merry Widow Murderer case, Jack Graham, who has, incidentally, asked for her hand in marriage—thus saving her from becoming something she dreads early in the film: the "pathetic old maid." Uncle Charlie, she recalls outside the church where her uncle's funeral is taking place, "said that people like us had no idea what the world was really like." Graham offers back: "Sometimes it needs a lot of watching. Seems to go crazy every now and then ... like your Uncle Charlie."

¹⁸⁴ *Shadow of A Doubt*, DVD, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Los Angeles: Universal Pictures, 1943).

¹⁸⁵ Robin Wood, "The Murderous Gays: Hitchcock's Homophobia," in *Hitchcock's Films Revisited* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 336-57.

¹⁸⁶ McDermott, *Someone*, 213.

Shortly after Gabe agrees to abandon his plans with Cain and live with his sister's family, Marie proclaims, "I might have saved my brother's life that night."¹⁸⁷ This statement, full of good intentions, if not really arising from a naïve understanding of Gabe's situation, suggests that Marie views a domesticated celibate life rather than—what she interprets as—a lonely queer bachelor life as a more enriching existence for her brother. Gabe could indeed have had plans to begin, for the first time, a romantic and sexual engagement, a possibility that would see Marie as thwarting his queer independence. In the end, Gabe remains with his sister, her husband, and children, in the name of sexual anaesthesia to live out a seemingly celibate life until death. The time for the spinster and bachelor, for the aunts and uncles of this world, has yet to come. Uncle Gabe reaffirms his relation to Hitchcock's figure once more in a private moment with Marie before Matt Cain appears: "'Uncle Charlie's come to town,' he said, and it took me a few seconds to realize he was referring to the old movie. 'Another bachelor uncle with a shadowy past,' he said. 'Forever suspect.'"¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ McDermott, *Someone*, 231.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

CHAPTER TWO

“’Tis the Queerest Trade We Have”: AIDS, Orality, and Irish Storytelling in James McCourt’s *Time Remaining*

Introduction: The Bard of Queens

“In a certain way,” proclaimed Michael Silverblatt, the host of *KCRW*’s literary talk show, *Bookworm*, in 2014, “my friend James McCourt is the bard of Queens.”¹ For the broadcaster, McCourt, author and queer sage, should be lauded alongside another of New York City’s most beloved literary sons, Walt Whitman, the celebrated “bard of Brooklyn” and “bard of Democracy.” At the time of his slightly irreverent, though no less sincere, proclamation, Silverblatt had begun dissecting the complex arterial system of social, cultural, and sexual references running throughout McCourt’s then recently-published memoir, *Lasting City: The Anatomy of Nostalgia*, a book that lyrically tracks the author’s life from early childhood in 1940’s Jackson Heights, Queens, to later years as a seasoned storyteller entrusted with the task of “telling everything” by a mother on her deathbed.² And yet, such a grand pronouncement speaks less to the book of the hour than to Silverblatt’s palpable reverence for McCourt’s overall and enduring creative effort to capture and reconstruct the image, style, and argot of a particular caste of urban queer male culture throughout a forty-year writing career. In the words of Richard Canning, “nobody conveys the insiderness of our nonce gay languages better than McCourt.”³ Elsewhere, in praise of the author, Maureen McLane writes that the “postwar generation of queer New York has found a sophisticated bard singing ‘the elders’ history.’”⁴

Since the publication of his debut book, *Mawrdew Czegowchwz* (pronounced “Mardu Gorgeous”),⁵ in 1975, McCourt has penned five books of fiction, a queer social history

¹ James McCourt, interview with Michael Silverblatt, *Bookworm*, KCRW, January 9, 2014, <https://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/bookworm/james-mccourt-lasting-city>.

² James McCourt, *Lasting City: The Anatomy of Nostalgia* (New York: Liveright, 2013).

³ Richard Canning, introduction to *Between Men: Original Fiction by Today’s Best Gay Writers*, ed. Richard Canning (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2007), xxx. Alongside works from Andrew Holleran, Edmund White, Ethan Mordden, and Dale Peck, this anthology of gay fiction includes McCourt’s “Thermopylae” (107-30).

⁴ Maureen N. McLane, “To Be Young, Gifted and Gay,” *New York Times*, December 14, 2003, 7.

⁵ McCourt revealed in the opera zine, *parterre box*, in 2001, that *Mawrdew* was the author’s “camp name” among friends in college, inspired by the author’s young obsession with Jack Kerouac, whose 1958 novella, *The Subterraneans*, featured a character based on the African-American Beat writer Alene Lee named “Mardou Fox.” James Jordan, “Hello, Czegowchwz! An Interview with James McCourt,” *parterre box: the queer opera zine*, 48 (2001), n.p. As McCourt reveals to Jordan, “I chose ‘Mawrdew’ because that was my camp name. (I had

compendium and a belletristic memoir, as well as fictional and cultural reportage for *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, *The Yale Review*, and *The Recorder*—the journal of the American Irish Historical Society.⁶ As Timothy Krause suggests, the “great theme” of McCourt’s writing “is the magnificence of 1950s gay New York and its passing, the latter due to the newfound sense of identity and political awareness experienced by many members of the gay community following the Stonewall Riot and the AIDS epidemic.”⁷ Born in 1941, McCourt, as George Chauncey puts it, “is just old and precocious enough to have known and lovingly inhabited the older ways of being gay, and he has some scores to settle.”⁸ As if speaking directly about McCourt, Michael Gross describes a style of queer effeminacy now looked upon with pity and as anachronistic, a way of being “that in previous generations was integral to the popular image of gay men—witty, frowsy, fussy old queens who memorized every minute of *All About Eve* and poured their hearts into antiques and opera and, perhaps most damnably of all, Judy Garland.”⁹ In the Stonewall mythos, Garland’s funeral on June 27, 1969, is credited as the spark that ignited the subsequent riots in the early morning of June 28, and McCourt, who was present at the bar in Greenwich Village earlier in the evening, has even actively added to this queer folklore.¹⁰ Significantly, McCourt embeds his literary narratives in the pre-Stonewall cultural mythology of the “anachronistic” queen of Garland’s heyday rather than in the social and political shifts emerging in the moment of her death, and, as Gross would have it, the final days of the queen altogether, in 1969.¹¹ McCourt, in his literary *oeuvre*, eschews the present of contemporary gay social, political, and cultural experience, and instead dazzlingly “elegizes the campy, closeted queer culture of the ’50s and ’60s, most particularly its cultural signs and detritus.”¹²

this incredible case on Jack Kerouac and used to stalk him, though with no real success.)” Box 41, folder “Mawrdew Czigowchwz,” James McCourt and Vincent Virga Papers, Gen MSS 845, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, June 29, 2018.

⁶ In addition to *Lasting City*, McCourt’s books consist of *Mawrdew Czigowchwz* (1975; repr., New York: New York Review Books, 2002); *Kaye Wayfaring in “Avenged”* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984); *Time Remaining* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993); *Delancey’s Way* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000); *Wayfaring at Waverly in Silver Lake* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002); *Queer Street: Rise and Fall of an American Culture, 1947-1985*; *Excursions in the Mind of the Life* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004); and *Now Voyagers: The Night Sea Journey; Some Divisions of the Saga of Mawrdew Czigowchwz, Oltrano. Authenticated by Persons Represented Therein. Book One* (New York: Turtle Point Press, 2007).

⁷ Timothy Krause, “Twentieth-Century Catalogs: The Poetics of Listing, Enumeration, and Copiousness in Joyce, Schuyler, McCourt, Pynchon, and Perec” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2012), 179, https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2456&context=gc_etds.

⁸ George Chauncey, “Yes, Dahling, Pre-Stonewall Has Been Given a Bad Rap,” *New York Times*, December 31, 2003, E18.

⁹ Michael Joseph Gross, “The Queen is Dead,” *Atlantic Monthly*, August 2000, 62.

¹⁰ See McCourt, *Queer Street*, 336-38 and *Time Remaining*, 24-26.

¹¹ In a particularly representative example of this turn towards the past in *Time Remaining*, the book’s narrator, Danny Delancey (drawn partly from McCourt real-life experiences) leaves the Stonewall Inn bar before the riots begin, finding refuge, instead, “at the hour of decision on that Friday night” in the booths of the Everard baths, a bastion of pre-Stonewall and pre-AIDS gay male sexual and social culture in McCourt’s world (26).

¹² Krause, “Twentieth-Century Catalogs,” 179.

In his review of *Lasting City*, Canning, who heralds McCourt as an “idiosyncratic Irish-American genius,” proclaims the author as “among America’s most important and profound living writers.”¹³ Despite such praise and additional adulation from some of the twentieth century’s most influential literary and cultural figures for his substantial contribution to American letters, including Susan Sontag, Harold Bloom, J.D. McClatchy and Dennis Cooper, as well as scores of positive reviews in national periodicals, McCourt’s writing has yet to receive any sustained critical attention. There are as of yet no full-length studies of his work, and, with the exception of a handful of pieces, McCourt’s archive remains largely unmined for its significance to queer American literature. As Canning’s review of McCourt’s work suggests, part of the reason for this is McCourt’s literary idiosyncrasy and difficult, digressive prose, which have led many readers to review the author’s work as “obscure and infuriating,” or even unreadable.¹⁴ Take, for instance, Thomas Long’s summation of McCourt’s 1993 book, *Time Remaining*:

Mccourt’s allusive style is at its most virtuosic in this third book, which tends to exclude from its reading community those who are not adepts in opera, cinematic trivia, Irish Catholicism, and the New York cabaret circuit. Even some members of the gay men’s book group that I belong to, for example, found the book frequently obscure and inaccessible, despite our numbers’ including college professors, a psychiatrist, an ex-priest, and a hair stylist, “types” you would ordinarily assume to be among the queer cognoscenti. By excluding some readers, these allusions construct a reading community with shared values, interests, and history, specifically (mostly white and middle-class) urban gay men at midlife who have (so far) survived despite having done it all and seen it all.¹⁵

Additionally, however, McCourt’s backward glance to this mid-century urban queer experience is out-of-synch with much of today’s assimilative gay and lesbian politics and social systems, making the author’s cultural milieu barely recognisable to many younger readers nowadays.

In his singular study of McCourt’s writing, Krause notes the author’s apparent obscurity, proposing that

Mccourt’s marginality is also borne out by his uncertain, liminal place in the literary canon: as of [2012], of the fiction only *Mawrdew Czegowchwz* and *Now Voyagers* are currently in print; *Queer Street* was well-received by critics but often dismissed as a curiosity ... indeed, even among teachers, critics, and other cognoscenti, he remains unknown, unread, remembered, if at all,

¹³ Richard Canning, “An Irish Novelist Lands in New York,” *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 21, no. 1 (January-February 2014): 44, 45. EBSCOhost.

¹⁴ Ibid., 44.

¹⁵ Thomas Long, *AIDS and American Apocalypticism: The Cultural Semiotics of an Epidemic* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 55.

mistakenly, confused with his far more popular namesakes, Frank and Malachi [sic] McCourt (to which he bears no relation, familial, stylistic, or otherwise).¹⁶

Elsewhere, introducing a new book from McCourt in 2000, Elissa Schappell, pre-empting unfamiliarity, assures *Vanity Fair* readers, “no, not one of *those* McCourts.”¹⁷ Stylistically, McCourt’s campy, effervescent work differs from the bleak realism of the Brooklyn-born and Limerick-raised McCourt brothers, particularly the dreary poverty and desperate family life portrayed in Frank McCourt’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Angela’s Ashes* (1996). True, too, is the fact that these literary figures share no relation, neither in blood nor law. What unites the three American McCourt men, however, is a life-long emotional and creative connection to Ireland, as well as to the complexities of Irishness and Irish identity in the United States. Formed primarily on both the eastern seaboard of the United States and the western coast of Ireland in Crossmolina, County Mayo, James McCourt’s writing is discernibly marked by the literary influences, dialectal diversities, and cultural idioms that traverse the intellectual and cultural cross-currents of the “green” Atlantic.¹⁸ For the American playwright, William M. Hoffman, it seems clear that Ireland would be the generative site from which the author’s imaginative work would emerge: “Where else could an Irish-American cross between James Joyce and Bette Midler have found the spiritual nourishment to plumb his unconscious for a monumental vision of drag queens and opera divas from the ’40s to the age of AIDS?”¹⁹

In focusing on McCourt’s third book of fiction, *Time Remaining*, this chapter explores how strategies of Irish storytelling that were already key to the author’s creative practice take on a sense of urgency in a time of crisis, namely in the still early years of the AIDS epidemic. *Time Remaining* was published in the midst of a newly emerging gay identity predicated on loss and mourning. On July 3, 1981, on the eve of McCourt’s fortieth birthday, *The New York Times* reported on a “rare cancer seen in 41 homosexuals” in New York and California.²⁰ Dwarfed by an advert from the International Savings Bank for that year’s Independence Day celebrations, this slim article described the highly unusual appearance of a cancer called Kaposi’s sarcoma (KS) (typically showing up in dark purple lesions anywhere on the body), a disease more common in men over fifty, which had resulted in the death of at least eight

¹⁶ Krause, “Twentieth-Century Catalogs,” 183.

¹⁷ Elissa Schappell, “Hot Type,” *Vanity Fair*, March 2000, 258.

¹⁸ This particular use of the phrase is not meant to invoke a connection to Paul Gilroy’s idea of the “Black Atlantic,” whose influence on imagining a “Green Atlantic” has been seen recently in Irish Studies, a point this thesis returns to later in chapter five. Here, the term is used merely to signify a circulation of Irish culture between Ireland and North America.

¹⁹ William M. Hoffman, “The Interior Landscape of James McCourt,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, October, 31, 1993, 30. Hoffman carried out the interview for this article at McCourt’s home in Mayo. *The Irish Times* even made an announcement of Hoffman and McCourt’s trip to Dublin as part of the interview in July 1993. See Robert O’Byrne, “On the Town,” *The Irish Times*, July 31, 1993, 2.

²⁰ Lawrence K. Altman, “Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals,” *New York Times*, July 3, 1981, A20.

young gay men. In the United States alone, the first 1,000 cases had been reported by early 1983, and within eight years that number had reached 100,000. By 1995, over 50,000 people had died from AIDS-related illnesses in the United States.²¹

The relationship between sex and death was both a fraught and too familiar analogy in public discourse in the early decades of the epidemic. “Via the relay of AIDS,” argued Stuart Marshall in 1990, “the image of the gay man has been woven through with some of the most terrifying representations of degenerative disease. Death and homosexuality are now inseparably linked in public consciousness.”²² “Didn’t you tell me your friend Yeats told you that to the intelligent mind there are only two subjects of real interest, sex and the dead?” asks one character to another in *Time Remaining*.²³ For Michael Bronski, writing at the height of the epidemic in the late 1980s, the relationship between sex and death was one to be acknowledged fully in the effort to de-moralise the metaphors of AIDS: “When death—like sex—remains taboo, clouded behind moralism, abstractions, sentimentality, fear, and inadequate notions of politics, we will not be able to claim it as another aspect of our openly gay lives.”²⁴ The relationship between AIDS and writing, on the other hand, extends beyond the insistence of the former as a constant presence in the latter. AIDS is literary by nature. “Far from being a phenomenon that we can grasp simply as a set of biomedical facts,” argues Sarah Brophy in *Witnessing AIDS: Writing, Testimony, and the Work of Mourning*, “the AIDS epidemic is fundamentally cultural, its meanings created through language and visual representation.”²⁵ In his 2013 memoir, McCourt recalls the equally burdensome and cathartic experience of writing *Time Remaining*, suggesting fiction as “the great consolation for the terrible sorrow of remembering.”²⁶ *Time Remaining* is an elegiac text in the wake of AIDS as well as a moving eulogy for one of McCourt’s favourite poets and close friends, James Schuyler, called “the Skylark” in McCourt’s book, who died in 1990.

The book is composed of two interlinked tales, “I Go Back to the Mais Oui” and a second longer section, “A Chance to Talk.” Although “I Go Back to the Mais Oui” first appeared in 1987 in an issue of the gay magazine *Christopher Street*, and was again reprinted

²¹ Dennis H. Osmond, “Epidemiology of Disease Progression in HIV,” *HIV InSite*, January, 3, 2004, <http://hivinsite.ucsf.edu/InSite?page=kb-00&doc=kb-03-01-04>.

²² Stuart Marshall, “Picturing Deviancy,” in *Ecstatic Antibodies: Resisting the AIDS Mythology*, ed. Tessa Boffin and Sunil Gupta (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1990), 21.

²³ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 6.

²⁴ Michael Bronski, “Death and the Erotic Imagination,” in *Personal Dispatches: Writers Confront AIDS*, ed. John Preston (New York: St. Matrin’s Press, 1989), 144. Two years earlier, Simon Watney had already warned that such taboos around sex in the early years of AIDS were responsible for impeding the progress of sexual affirmation among gay men. See *Policing Desire: Pornography, AIDS and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1987), 18: “Thus, whilst individuals are vulnerable to HIV infection, the entire reproductive machinery of gay subjectivity is also vulnerable to the ideological fall-out of the representational crisis triggered by the virus.”

²⁵ Sarah Brophy, *Witnessing AIDS: Writing, Testimony, and the Work of Mourning* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 3.

²⁶ McCourt, *Lasting City*, 104.

in 1988 in *Men on Men 2: Best New Gay Fiction*, the story was nominally revised and joined in *Time Remaining* by the second connected tale.²⁷ McCourt's *Time Remaining* introduces one his most memorable creations, the retired dancer and sometime drag queen, Danny "Odette" O'Doyle, an Irish-American polymath, gifted storyteller, and "earnest deviant from the other side of Tremont Avenue in the Bronx."²⁸ "I Go Back to the Mai Oui" revolves around a retrospective performance piece by gay Irish American, Danny Delancey, in which America's post-war and post-Stonewall queer urban culture in New York is remembered. In "A Chance to Talk," Odette documents on her midnight companion's tape recorder, among scandalous recollections of mid-century queer life, a recent pilgrimage to Europe, where she has disseminated the ashen remains of deceased friends and members of the Eleven Against Heaven group, of which she and Delancey are the two sole survivors in the wake of AIDS.

While McCourt's work has been profoundly invested in issues of Irish literary and oral culture from the beginning, with the arrival of Mawrdew Czegowchwz in the early 1970s, the gravity of AIDS in the 1980s produced a shift in the use of such cultural traditions.²⁹ By the 1990s, Irish storytelling offers a vital strategy of remembrance and preservation in the face of loss and death. Considering the fact that AIDS in Irish-American literature and culture remains an entirely neglected subject, this chapter provides McCourt as a premier example of how these seemingly opposed topics can begin to be addressed. As the author's most sustained engagement with the effects of AIDS, *Time Remaining* is an ideal book through

²⁷ James McCourt, "I Go Back to the Mais Oui: *A Winter's Tale*," *Christopher Street*, 109, 1987, 45-52 and James McCourt, "I Go Back to the Mais Oui," in *Men on Men 2: Best New Gay Fiction*, ed. George Stambolian (New York: Plume, 1988), 191-210.

²⁸ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 74. In both the 1987 and 1988 versions the character Odette O'Doyle is absent.

²⁹ As Wayne Koestenbaum points out in his meditation on the unreadable title of McCourt's first book, *Mawrdew Czegowchwz*, "from the obstreperous outset, this novel about opera—perforce devoted to the oral—presents the written as foreign, as obtuse, as a screen" (vii). The book's heroine, after all, turns out to be the orphaned daughter of the fictional Irish nationalist and Easter 1916 heroine "Great Flaming" Maeve Cohalen, "Ireland's Joan of Arc," the country's "own Boadicea," as the narrator puts it (127, 130), and the Czech philosopher-poet Jan Motivyk. In his debut book, McCourt mixes fairy tale, Irish folklore, and queer urban culture. In a recent essay on McCourt's story, Marcin Stawiarski writes that Mawrdew's "very name is bedecked with multiple semantic echoes: while her first name hints at the Irish exclamation *mar dhea*, which expresses disbelief, her family name phonetically conveys magnificence and graphically alludes to the vocal intricacies of diagraphs and unpronounceable consonant clusters in Slavic languages." See Marcin Stawiarski, "Eccentric Voices and the Representation of Vocal Virtuosity in Fiction: James McCourt's *Mawrdew Czegowchwz*," *Elope* 13, no. 1 (2016): 70, <https://doi.org/10.4312/elope.13.1.69-79>. In references to mumming, Irish sagas, and Irish literature in the Gaelic Revival, McCourt makes clear his commitment to imbuing his queer realm with Irish textures. The ultimate aria of the book, from *Tristan and Isolde*, appropriately resurrects the amnesiac heroine's Irish roots. Richard Wagner's opera, *Tristan und Isolde*, was based on the medieval tale of *Tristan and Iseult*, itself a reinterpretation of the older Celtic legend, *The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne (Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne)*, which, from Lady Gregory's translation, George Moore and W.B. Yeats had adapted into a 1901 play. *Tóruigheacht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* forms part of the collection within the Fenian Cycle, the *Fiannaíocht*. See Muireann Ní Bhrolcháin, *An Introduction to Early Irish Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 56-66. McCourt continues his interest in the Fenian Cycle in 2002 with the publication of *Wayfaring at Waverly in Silver Lake*, a collection of interlinked tales that includes "In Tir na nOg," an allusion to the well-known eighteenth-century text about the Land of Youth. "Time out of mind it was—*fado, fado*, the Irish say—that night in Tir na nOg." In McCourt's tale, however, the Land of Youth is Los Angeles and Mawrdew Czegowchwz relates the story to her grandchildren, carrying on the tradition of Irish storytelling (51).

which to read McCourt's merging of Irish cultural and literary textures and the socio-cultural climate of gay male life in the height of the epidemic. While a further project might focus on the overarching themes of Irishness in McCourt's collective works, this chapter attends to *Time Remaining* in particular as the key literary tackling of the AIDS crisis in the author's *oeuvre*.

While the title of "bard" has developed in popular discourse enough elasticity to cover diverse cultural, national, temporal, and creative ground, the poetic practice held particular importance in Irish society before its disappearance in the wake of British imperial projects in the seventeenth century. In his famous lecture, delivered in Dublin on April 15, 1912, Osborn Bergin explains that "the Bardic order existed in prehistoric times, and their position in society is well established in the earliest tradition."³⁰ Elsewhere, James Carney suggests that "the bardic tradition was the most characteristically Irish phenomenon that differentiated Irish from European society."³¹ In "Synge, Yeats and Bardic Poetry," Declan Kiberd writes on what he observes to be a "conscious imitation of the function of the ancient bard" in the work of J.M. Synge and W.B. Yeats, arriving two centuries after the decline of the ancient Irish *filí*. According to Kiberd, Synge

believed that the potentials latent in past moments of the Gaelic tradition was not a set of canonical texts so much as a *medium* by which past moments might be retransmitted, their energies made once again current. He had no wish to revive the past, but every wish to repossess its still-available energies.³²

Kiberd goes on to state that, far from unique to the work of either Synge or Yeats, a "strong sense of social vocation and the public tone ... is the logical inheritance of every Irish poet who writes in the wake of the bards."³³ Accordingly, McCourt's likeness to the figure of the bard might tap into a much less incidental, or coincidental, connection, which is, on the contrary, rooted deeply in the imaginative invocation of a distinctly Irish poetic and cultural tradition in a more contemporary literary form. In fact, McCourt is aware of the historical tradition of the bard, and he actively situates himself within that tradition, both genealogically and creatively. Before visiting Ireland, as he recounts in *Lasting City*, for instance, McCourt is told by his father of an Irish poet in the family tree, "a blind poet called Seamus Dal—Seamus the Blind—who wrote bardic verse according to the old rules, in Irish, in County Armagh."³⁴ This genealogical connection endures in the author's imagination and forms an important part

³⁰ Osborn Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1970), 3.

³¹ James Carney, "Society and the Bardic Poet," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 62, no. 247/248 (Autumn/Winter 1973): 239, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30088047>.

³² Declan Kiberd, "Synge, Yeats and Bardic Poetry," in *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 71.

³³ *Ibid.*, 74.

³⁴ McCourt, *Lasting City*, 68.

of his literary aesthetic. McCourt is both an Irish bard from Queens and a bard of “queens,” those camp, effeminate, and queer figures in gay male culture.³⁵

A valuable accomplishment of rich international cultural production, McCourt’s expansive queer literary tapestry, covering over four decades now and still unfolding, is vibrantly infused with intricate patterns of Irish historical, cultural, and linguistic textures. McCourt’s signature style of camp sensibility and his remembrance of the queer past in his complexly layered writing are bound up with entangled invocations of Irish and Irish-American historical narratives, religious rituals, and literary allusions, which both draw on and radically reconfigure representations of Irish-American identity. These connected realms are articulated through a literary style that is reliant on the modes and motifs of orality. McCourt’s books of fiction, autobiography, and social history, in varying ways, engage with orality in both content and form, bringing together opera, folk narrative, oral history, camp discourse, queer argot, poetic verse, and, crucially, strategies of Irish oral tradition and storytelling. McCourt’s annual pilgrimage to Ireland’s west coast since 1988 contributes to his knowledge of local Irish culture and lore. On his first visit to Ireland in 1966, “to walk the walk of Ulysses,” McCourt recalls finding people “whose habit of mind and expressions (albeit in the original accents) seemed to me identical to those I had grown up with.”³⁶ Elsewhere, in conversation with Dylan Foley, McCourt suggests that it is the “verbal culture” of this part of the country that is particularly “conducive to writing.”³⁷ As critics have pointed out, “the oral mode is one inextricably connected with the literary in Ireland, a country with one of the oldest vernacular literary traditions in Europe.”³⁸

In place of the bardic figure, McCourt might more accurately be described as a present-day queer *seanchaí* (or *shanachie*), “a historian of his community,” to use Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s phrase.³⁹ “When the bard vanished from the scene,” wrote Mrs. Morgan John O’Connell in 1886, “the *shanachie* preserved whatever traditions of song and story still linger in the land.”⁴⁰ In Irish storytelling tradition, there existed essentially two branches of types of

³⁵ For a queering of the Irish bardic tradition, see Sarah McKibben, “Queering Early Modern Ireland,” *Irish University Review* 43.1 (2013): 169-83.

³⁶ Knopf Q&A, circa 2002, box 46, folder “Reviews,” James McCourt and Vincent Virga Papers, Gen MSS 845, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, July 3, 2018.

³⁷ Dylan Foley, “James McCourt on His Writing Process, His Opera Classic ‘Mawrdew Czgowchwz’ and His new 3200-page Fiction,” interview with McCourt, *The Last Bohemians*, October 19, 2011, updated 4 Feb 2018, <http://lastbohemians.blogspot.com/2011/10/james-mccourt-on-his-witing-process-his.html>. Foley’s interview with McCourt was originally published in *The Recorder* in 2007.

³⁸ Nessa Cronin, Seán Crosson and John Eastlake, “The ‘Sea of Orality’: An Introduction to Orality and Modern Irish Culture,” in *Anáil an Bhéil Bheo: Orality and Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Nessa Cronin, Seán Crosson and John Eastlake (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 7.

³⁹ Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, “‘They Made Me Tea and Gave Me A Lift Home’: Urban Folklore Collecting 1979-80,” *Béaloides* 73 (2005): 69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20520878>.

⁴⁰ Mrs. Morgan John O’Connell, “The Last of the Shanachies,” *The Irish Monthly* 14, no. 151 (1886): 27, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20497354>.

tales and tellers. The *sgéalaí*'s “*sean-sgéal*”, or international tale, was ranked more highly than the tales of the *seanchaí*, who usually specialised in “local tales, family-sagas, or genealogies, social-history tradition, and the like, and can recount many tales of a short realistic type about fairies, ghosts, and other supernatural beings.”⁴¹ McCourt’s writing privileges the latter style of storytelling, and is concerned with the social-history traditions of his queer tribe, making him “a master of wisdom and knowledge who ... serve[s] as an instructor of the young, and whose duty [is] to preserve important lore,” as Georges Zimmermann describes the figure of the Irish storyteller.⁴² In trying to find a literary voice, one of the principal characters in *Now Voyagers* proclaims: “What is wanted is what modern mathematics came up with: new methods for rapidly convergent iterations. The seanachai knew how. The old-told tale.”⁴³

In an interview for the *Los Angeles Times Magazine* in 1993, McCourt assures William M. Hoffman that

I don’t write novels ... The novel is an English middle-class product ...
Myself, I write tales. They go on and on, then just stop. I belong to the Irish
tradition of storytelling.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding a general critical assumption that McCourt is a writer of novels, each of his written works is actually a book of tales or stories, and McCourt has been quick to resist the classification of his books as novels.⁴⁵ After *Mawrdew Czgowchwz*, McCourt’s *Kaye Wayfaring in “Avenged”* (1984), *Time Remaining*, and *Wayfaring at Waverly in Silver Lake* (2002) all claim to be collections of stories. The last of these even includes a page of contents, a technique usually employed by the writer of the short story. Published in 2000, *Delancey’s Way* admits to being a novel, but also a “debriefing” at the same time.⁴⁶ The most recent work of fiction, *Now Voyagers: The Night Sea Journey* is a Joycean saga full of formal coalescence, and the author’s 2013 memoir, *Lasting City* and the earlier *Queer Street: Rise and Fall of an American Culture, 1947-1985* (2004) mix autobiography, fiction, and social history.

⁴¹ J. H. Delargy, *The Gaelic Story-Teller: With Some Notes on Gaelic Folk-Tales* (London: Cumberlege, 1945), 6.

⁴² Georges Zimmermann, *The Irish Storyteller* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), 34.

⁴³ James McCourt, *Now Voyagers*, 28.

⁴⁴ Hoffman, “The Interior Landscape of James McCourt,” 34.

⁴⁵ See, for instance, Tom Ferrell, “His Tribe Increases,” *New York Times*, July 8, 1984, BR12. McCourt reminds Ferrell that “[n]owhere on the book [*Mawrdew Czgowchwz*] ... does it say it’s a novel. In a novel something is wrapped up, it finishes. But my stories just stop. Sure, “*Mawrdew Czgowchwz*” is an extended fiction, but it never wraps up. Normally at the end of a novel you think, “Now the writer can leave the characters alone.” A novel is something I don’t get around to doing or don’t want to. I’m writing about this extended tribe of people, instead of writing about a family as J. D. Salinger does.”

⁴⁶ Indeed, McCourt’s debut book about his Irish-Czech opera heroine was first published as a story in the *New American Review* in 1971. See James McCourt, “*Mawrdew Czgowchwz*,” *New American Review* 13 (1971): 11-28.

In an oft-cited piece, Kiberd argues that a certain strand of Irish literature, specifically in the form of the short story, arises from the interaction between a traditional oral culture and an emergent literary tradition.⁴⁷ In a more recent discussion, Pádraic Whyte writes on the invocation of an Irish storytelling tradition in the overlooked children's literature of the Irish-born American author, Padraic Colum, whose work uses landscape as a means to retrieve and preserve lost traditions.⁴⁸ Angela Bourke has argued that "Irish writing in English is distinctive linguistically, and in its sense of place and community—often achieved, even by Joyce, through invocations of oral tradition."⁴⁹ In the same breath, Bourke embraces the place of the diasporic space as a generative site of Irish oral tradition, thus simultaneously questioning essentialised understandings of Irish cultural traits and querying the hierarchy of homeland and diaspora in the production of valuable literary and cultural expression.⁵⁰ The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in America, as Charles Fanning details in his *The Irish Voice in America*, marked an age of American Celticism, a period during which narratives of Irishness bound up with fantastical notions of the folk and fairies proliferated in the United States among publishers of the period.⁵¹ The Irish-born writer Seumas MacManus, who presented himself as a modern-day Irish storyteller, was a prominent figure during this period and he spoke directly in his literary work to readers among the Irish diaspora in America.⁵² McCourt follows in this tradition in many ways. Yet, queering the pitch, he makes a unique contribution set apart from conventional wisdom. This chapter examines the ways in

⁴⁷ Declan Kiberd, "Storytelling: The Gaelic Tradition," in *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 42. While Kiberd's essay proposes one interpretation of the success of the short story form in Ireland, it nonetheless takes a narrow view of the form's influences, thus ignoring a rich British tradition of short story writing and excluding the examples of Irish short story writers removed from any connection to an oral tradition. For an earlier and similar, though at times divergent, discussion on the influence of oral culture on the Irish short story, see Vivian Mercier, "The Irish Short Story and Oral Tradition," in *The Celtic Cross: Studies in Irish Culture and Literature*, ed. Ray B. Browne, William John Roscelli, and Richard Loftus (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 98-116.

⁴⁸ Pádraic Whyte, "'Firing for the Heath': Storytelling, Landscape and Padraic Colum's *The Big Tree of Bunlahy*," in *Children's Literature Collections: Approaches to Research*, ed. Keith O'Sullivan and Pádraic Whyte (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 145-161.

⁴⁹ Angela Bourke, foreword to *Folklore and Modern Irish Writing*, ed. Anne Markey and Anne O'Connor (Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2014), 1.

⁵⁰ Bourke, foreword to *Folklore and Modern Irish Writing*, 3. According to Bourke, "storytellers and singers, and children of singers and storytellers, emigrated to London, Glasgow, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago, New York and Sydney throughout those years [1922-1935], because there was nothing for them at home. It was in cities like those that Irish music, dancing and singing continued, developed and grew most strongly. Legends, anecdotes and jokes—short narratives that could be told as easily and effectively in English as Irish—survived transplantation too ... Irish immigrants to British and American cities were the ones who organised gatherings, classes, competitions, performances and recordings to keep music, song and dance alive, and fuelled the revivals and commercial triumphs of the last fifty years" (ibid).

⁵¹ See Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 167-73. "By the century's end," Fanning writes, "the trickle of 'Celtic' texts had become a stream. The fairy and folk dimension had by then already become established as a money-making publishing area, and it has been a major piece of the respectable/romantic Irish-American literary market ever since" (173).

⁵² See Brian McManus, "Darby O'Gill and the Construction of Irish Identity" (PhD diss., Trinity College Dublin, 2017), 69-70.

which Irish oral traditions and storytelling have not only survived in the Irish-American consciousness but have been adapted and transformed in the work of McCourt to serve less traditional, queerer means of artistic expression. McCourt complexly layers Irishness and queerness in the tapestry of his crafted creative aesthetic in a move to both queer the Irish-American canon and to bring Irish textures to the queer archive.⁵³

McCourt's camp aesthetic creates a comic rupture in the solemnity of the historical context from which *Time Remaining* emerges, offering a defiant and defensive voice rooted in humour as well as pain.⁵⁴ As Krause writes in his study of McCourt, the author's "primary linguistic and stylistic tools" consist of "irony, detachment, performativity, gesture; camp; *copia*, breathiness, plenitude, surplusage; [and] a privileging of the comic and carnivalesque over the tragic and serious."⁵⁵ As Heather Love states in *Feeling Backward*, camp, "with its tender concern for outmoded elements of popular culture and its refusal to get over childhood pleasures and traumas, is a backward art."⁵⁶ Camp's effect, then, Andrew Ross adds, "is created not simply by a change in the mode of cultural production, but rather when the products ... of a much earlier mode of production, which has lost its power to dominate cultural meanings, become available, in the present, for redefinition according to contemporary codes of taste."⁵⁷ In fact, McCourt's use of camp as an aesthetic and disruptive mode in his writing was itself a belated turn, emerging at a time when Sontag, whose "Notes on Camp," first published in 1964, was McCourt's encyclopaedia of camp, had long departed from her interest in the subject.

In the words of David Halperin, "*camp works to drain suffering of the pain that it also does not deny*."⁵⁸ More than mere escapism, camp humour is a defiant act in the face of human devastation such as the rapid disappearance of lovers and friends in the ravages of HIV/AIDS. "How else can those who are held captive by an inhospitable social world

⁵³ The title of this chapter is taken from a poem from the Irish-American poet, teacher, and Jesuit priest, Michael Earls. The opening lines read: "'Tis the queerest trade we have, the two of us that go about,/ I that do the talkin' and the little lad that sings,/ We to tell the story of a Land you ought to know about,/ The wonder land of Erin and the memories it brings." Michael Earls, "Two Seanachies," *The Irish Monthly*, 43, no. 500 (February 1915): 120, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20503692>.

⁵⁴ For discussions on camp and its uses, see Christopher Isherwood, *The World in the Evening* (London: Meuthen, 1984), 125-26; Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp," in *Against Interpretation* (London: Vintage, 2001), 275-92; Esther Newton, *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 106-11; Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 135-70; and Richard Dyer, "It's Being So Camp as Keeps Us Going," in *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002), 49-62.

⁵⁵ Krause, "Twentieth-Century Catalogs," 184.

⁵⁶ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 7.

⁵⁷ Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals & Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 139.

⁵⁸ David Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 186 (emphasis in the original).

derealize it enough to prevent it from annihilating them?” Halperin asks.⁵⁹ In a 1993 interview with Silverblatt, in which the *Bookworm* host deemed McCourt’s first three books an “anthology of camp” and *Time Remaining* a commemoration of a passing culture and style, McCourt celebrated the political power of camp aesthetic against the epidemic: “AIDS is a medical problem which has invaded the space, if you like, the way a comet would, or a war would; it does not arise from camp, but camp is the response, the defiance that we offer, and I think it’s a damn good one.”⁶⁰

“Folklore is predicated on the death of tradition,” writes Diarmuid Ó Giolláin⁶¹ Combining studies of Irish storytelling tradition, the first section of this chapter considers the ways in which orality and its relationship to preservation and transmission are crucial to McCourt’s writing in the age of AIDS and its decimation of a gay community, during which he draws on the “still-available energies” of the past to critique the present. Drawing on the work of Zimmermann, Seán Ó Súilleabháin, Séamus Ó Duilearga (James Hamilton Delargy), Walter Benjamin, and Peter Brooks, the chapter considers the survivals of Irish storytelling traditions in McCourt’s queer literary work of the late twentieth century. The chapter considers the historical and political context of the epidemic from which McCourt’s *Time Remaining* emerges, as well as the narrativising strategies deployed in medical and social discourses of AIDS, which is imagined as a text or story itself. In 1993, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis published *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*, a study of mid-century lesbian bar culture in Buffalo, New York, that has since become a landmark text in the emergence of queer oral history. In the twentieth-anniversary edition of the study, published in 2014, Kennedy remarks in her preface that the motivation for the project was to “record and share these stories, so that this world would not be lost.”⁶² Indeed, even before *Boots of Leather*, groundbreaking work by John D’Emilio, Allan Bérubé, and Lillian Faderman had oral history at the core of its methodology.⁶³

⁵⁹ Ibid., 200. In the works of David McDiarmid, Tom Shearer, and Beowulf Throne, in particular, Halperin finds the political viability of camp as an aesthetic response to AIDS, a reaction that finds humour in tragedy without evacuating the injustices producing or perpetuating that suffering: “This explains why horror can cohabit with hilarity in the poetics of gay male discourse, and human calamities like the HIV/AIDS epidemic can become vehicles of parody without the slightest implication of cruelty, distance or disavowal—without that ‘momentary anaesthesia of the heart’ which the philosopher Henri Bergson thought all comedy required” (186).

⁶⁰ James McCourt, interview with Michael Silverblatt, *Bookworm*, KCRW, August, 30, 1993, <https://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/bookworm/james-mccourt-time-remaining>.

⁶¹ Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, *Locating Irish Folklore: Tradition, Modernity, Identity* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2000), 8.

⁶² Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), xi.

⁶³ See John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Free Press, 1990); and Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991).

Before this work, there was a short-lived trend among American anthropologists interested in the nuances of “gay urban folklore” in the 1970s. These studies oscillated between insightful and voyeuristic. In any case, the focus of each of these approaches was to capture the voice of a queer generation. The ways in which McCourt’s book engages with these ideas is also considered in the chapter. McCourt’s *Time Remaining* is a staging of the Irish, or Irish-American, wake on the page. In the wake of AIDS, McCourt’s book becomes an important strategy of mourning and commemoration. The third section of the chapter considers Irish waking traditions and identifies the usefulness of the trope in remembering lovers and friends dead in the epidemic. Finally, the concluding section provides an exploration of temporality and death in the book in an attempt to trace the signs of what José Esteban Muñoz calls “cruising utopia,” a backward glance toward the past as a political means of both critiquing the present and finding a path to queer futurity.⁶⁴

While Leo Bersani has famously argued that the rectum in the epidemic becomes the site of passive anal sex and the disintegration of the subject,⁶⁵ Diana Fuss has shown the ways in which the mouth has served analogously to produce homosexual anxiety in the public imaginary. Drawing on the psychoanalytical insistence on homosexuality as the result of an exclusive fixation on the oral and anal zones, Fuss’s “Oral Incorporations” exposes the manifestation of the fear of homosexuality in cultural and cinematic examples of the convergence of same-sex eroticism and cannibalistic murder, which serve to imagine male homosexuality as a form of serial killing.⁶⁶ In a 1993 review of McCourt’s *Time Remaining*, Thomas Mallon wrote that “AIDS has been a slow-motion catastrophe, providing, in the dozen years since it opened its jaws, ample opportunity not only for pain and dread and dementia, but for all the rituals of mourning and remembrance.”⁶⁷ Thus, the stakes are high in the representation of orality in gay male fiction. Contrary to ideologies that would strive to posit the “gay” mouth as a grave, Wayne Koestenbaum’s *The Queen’s Throat*, a lyrical account of the gay opera queen and his decline in which McCourt’s *Mawrdew Czegowchwz* features prominently, has provided a way to conceive of the mouth as a site of pleasure.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

⁶⁵ Leo Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?,” in “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” ed. Douglas Crimp, special issue, *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 197-222, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3397574>.

⁶⁶ Diana Fuss, “Oral Incorporations: *The Silence of the Lambs*,” in *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 89.

⁶⁷ Thomas Mallon, “Voices of the Older Generation of Gays,” *New York Newsday*, June 23, 1993, 52.

⁶⁸ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat: Opera, Homosexuality and the Mystery of Desire* (London and New York: Penguin, 1993), 31. For Koestenbaum, McCourt provides a key example of diva worship and the opera queen in Koestenbaum’s study. See, for instance, 17, 44, and 48. In this way, Koestenbaum’s book, which “explains the ways in which opera divas were crucial identificatory loci in the public sphere before the Stonewall rebellion, which marked the advent of the contemporary lesbian and gay rights movement,” produces, to use

“The throat, not the ears,” writes Koestenbaum, “receives the diva: the throat, organ from which ‘I’ speak.”⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Elizabeth Freeman, through a strategy she calls “erotohistoriography,” reclaims the mouth as the receptive site not of an authoritarian message, but rather of receptivity itself, becoming the place “of a certain pleurably porous relation to new configurations of the past and unpredictable futures.”⁷⁰ In fact, Mallon’s review of McCourt’s book celebrates the author’s execution of a tone in *Time Remaining* that relies on bodies and voices from the past. Freeman’s latter theory of temporal relations, what she also calls “bottom” historiography, is useful in imagining the profoundly queer structure of oral narration and storytelling in McCourt’s tale, in which the transmission of experience flows from mouth to ear (or to throat) back through mouth to ear: “in short, holes beget holes.”⁷¹

The Stories Within the Stories

At the beginning of his essay, “De-Moralizing Representations of AIDS,” Douglas Crimp lingers on a scene from Jonathan Demme’s 1993 film, *Philadelphia* (one of the earliest mainstream cinematic representations of AIDS), in which the main character, a gay lawyer with AIDS portrayed by Tom Hanks, plays an aria from Umberto Giordano’s *Andrea Chénier* for Joe (Denzel Washington), the straight legal representative to Hanks’s character in the unlawful, discriminatory dismissal case unfolding throughout the narrative. The memorable scene shows Hanks dancing with an IV stand and interpreting the lyrics of “La mamma morta,” “sung by every homo’s favorite diva, Maria Callas.” Watching Andy Beckett’s trancelike performance, Joe moves from being bored to stunned, finally enlightened: “You can just watch him thinking, ‘It doesn’t matter whether you’re black or white, healthy or ill, straight or gay ... love is love.’”⁷²

Crimp, however, criticises the film’s move to then pander to its anticipated viewer, “constructed by Demme’s film as straight and unaffected by AIDS.” The film abandons its queer character and follows Joe to his home, where he kisses his newly-born child and climbing into bed next to his wife, looking visibly affected by the spectacle of AIDS and Andy’s mortality, still to the sounds of Maria Callas singing. “Demme steals Callas from the

Muñoz’s phrase, performances of queer “disidentification.” See José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999), 31.

⁶⁹ Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat*, 16.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Freeman, “Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography,” *Social Text* 23, no. 3-4 (Autumn-Winter 2005): 64.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁷² Douglas Crimp, “De-Moralizing Representations of AIDS,” in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 255. Crimp first presented his essay as a paper at the conference for AIDS and Activism in Yakohama, Japan, on August 12, 1994, the year after Demme’s film was released in cinemas.

dying opera queen, who reveals his subjectivity through his identification with her,” argues Crimp, “and gives her away—to Joe and his wife and baby, and thus implicitly to every ‘normal’ family unity.”⁷³ Such are the perils of mainstream homophobic and demoralising representations of queer sexuality and AIDS that betray the very subjects they claim to portray. “If I feel betrayed by the sequence,” Crimp continues, “it is because this single signifier of Andy’s queerness, once displayed, is divested of its queer specificity.”⁷⁴ Queerness needs to be sidestepped if the straight viewership is to feel anything for the queer dying of AIDS. Crimp also implicitly speaks not only to the connection between queerness and opera, but also to the fact that the opera queen and his cohort were acutely affected in the early days of the crisis.

“This book is an elegy for the opera queen,” Koestenbaum says mournfully in *The Queen’s Throat*. “I am an opera queen, but I am also mourning him.”⁷⁵ Koestenbaum’s study, published the same year as McCourt’s *Time Remaining*, is an elegiac tribute to the lovers and friends Koestenbaum lost in the wake of AIDS, which, in the twelve years between its identification and the appearance of Koestenbaum’s book, had led to the death of thousands of people, straight and gay, men and women, young and old, opera queens and otherwise. “As AIDS changed my sense of gay life-span, gay pleasure, and gay politics,” Koestenbaum goes on, “it made me revere the objects that have given gay people pleasure, the relics that have created gay ambience, gay atmosphere—that have created, in the boy listening to *Lohengrin* in 1965, a resonance, even if the spark couldn’t yet be explained or excused.”⁷⁶ This culture of mourning became an important emotional inspiration for McCourt’s third book, *Time Remaining*, which, like Koestenbaum’s *The Queen’s Throat*, is an elegy to the opera queen and his cultural and sexual milieu.

Upon its publication in 1993, *Time Remaining* was met with positive reviews as well as high critical praise. In a letter to McCourt in February 1993, Harold Bloom wrote that he considered the book a “sad and beautiful elegy,” and he later included it in a list of “permanent works” in his best-selling volume, *The Western Canon*.⁷⁷ In a piece for the *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Alexander Theroux writes, “nowhere, except perhaps in Ronald Firbank, can be found writing more arch or wickedly precious. McCourt is a master of observation and obloquy,” and he commends the author’s use of what he terms the “Queen’s

⁷³ Ibid., 256.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Koestenbaum, *The Queen’s Throat*, 41.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Bloom to McCourt, 26 January 1993, box 11, folder “Time Remaining Letters,” James McCourt and Vincent Virga Papers, Gen MSS 845, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, June 15, 2018. See Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), Appendix D: The Chaotic Age: A Canonical Prophecy, 566.

Vernacular.”⁷⁸ Anne Fullam, in a *New York Times* review of the book called *Time Remaining* “a Joycean-style memorial to the dead,”⁷⁹ and Fran Lebowitz called it “the best American fiction in recent years.”⁸⁰ The book, however, is now out of print. In his contribution to a collection of essays on influential gay fiction out of print, Timothy Young proclaims *Time Remaining* “a book about faggotry—the celebration of the best qualities of gay life—self-amusement, defiance, an aggressively earned comfort with the world.”⁸¹ Most recently, in early 2018, on the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Time Remaining*’s publication, Michael LaPointe wrote a compelling article in the *New Yorker* magazine that makes an urgent call for McCourt’s book to be remembered (even reprinted). “For readers like me, without firsthand experience of the pandemic,” he writes, “the book delivers a blast of entombed air, at once sweet and fringed with decay.”⁸²

Reviews of McCourt’s book were quick to draw on both the author’s use of orality. “*Time Remaining* is a spoken text,” wrote Steven Moore, “loose, improvisatory . . . McCourt here seems to be feeling his way toward a poetics for fiction that resembles the way drag queens talk: stories within stories, numerous asides and cutting characterizations, flippant allusions and in-jokes.”⁸³ The rich Irish textures of his writing were particularly highlighted in responses, often amounting to basically the same thing. “Like Joyce,” suggests Justin Spring, “[Mccourt] tries to capture the essence of a place in the words of its people”.⁸⁴ As McCourt himself says, “I like to capture accents, styles of talk.”⁸⁵ Bertha Harris comes closest to the link between McCourt’s literary style and Irish storytelling culture. What Harris deems the “Celtic ascendancy over English prose” in McCourt’s work remains firmly intact, indeed even “risen to new heights.” *Time Remaining*’s “two narrative voices must be given, in turn,” she continues, “a stage-center chance to dominate the talk: in the Irish manner, ‘the primacy of the spoken tale over the written story is an absolute,’ an absolute that Mr. McCourt converts, in his accustomed way, into bravura arias.”⁸⁶ McCourt’s writing style is in many ways reflective of the author’s reputation for verbosity and anecdotal digressions. As J. D.

⁷⁸ Alexander Theroux, review of *Time Remaining*, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13, no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 207-8.

⁷⁹ Anne C. Fullam, “A Joycean-Style Memorial to the Dead,” *New York Times*, September, 12, 1993, 21.

⁸⁰ “Friends of the Store Recommend,” Books & Co Summer Newsletter, New York, 1993, 4.

⁸¹ Timothy Young, “James McCourt *Time Remaining*,” in *The Lost Library: Gay Fiction Rediscovered*, ed. Tom Cardamone (New York: Haiduk Press, 2010), 129.

⁸² Michael LaPointe, “A Vibrant, Elegiac Novel of the AIDS Pandemic That Shouldn’t Be Forgotten,” *The New Yorker*, January 30, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/a-vibrant-elegiac-novel-of-the-aids-pandemic-that-shouldnt-be-forgotten>.

⁸³ Steven Moore, “Eleven Against Heaven,” *Washington Post*, June 20, 1993, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/entertainment/books/1993/06/20/eleven-against-heaven/a22a941c-dcac-4ec1-8292-e28908b1bede/?utm_term=.6c60c68af2d4.

⁸⁴ Justin Spring, “A Singular Author Sets a Novel on the LIRR,” *The Southampton Press*, May 13, 1993, 18.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Bertha Harris, “In a Pink Sequined Straitjacket,” *New York Times*, June 13, 1993, 27.

McClatchy wrote in 1987, “It isn’t hard to get James McCourt to talk. He has the voluble wit of his Irish heritage, a native New Yorker’s intensity, a novelist’s curiosity and flair.”⁸⁷ In *Time Remaining*, Delancey refers to such verbosity as “an Irish affliction.” “Did you ever hear an Irishman start to tell a story?” he quips. “You want to shout, ‘Get to the *verb!*’”⁸⁸ Despite Delancey’s reservations, McCourt peppers his narrative with many Irish proverbs and expressions, and these are accredited to Delancey and Odette, as well as the unnamed folk of Ireland.

In an essay on the autobiographical writing of Irish storyteller Peig Sayers, Irene Lucchitti extrapolates on the more than mere colourful textures engendered through the use of traditional Irish sayings in Sayers’s life writing. Lucchitti argues:

The oral tradition is deeply embedded in Peig’s psyche, enmeshed in her thoughts and in her conceptualisation of her written self. This is evident in her generous sprinkling of proverbs and wise sayings which further demonstrate the intertwining of life and tradition.⁸⁹

Time Remaining, too, articulates its Irish-Catholic textures through both Irish sayings and the sayings of the Irish: “Irishmen speak in dark-blue-fire-at-heart-of-emerald riddles,” says Delancey about the poet O’Maurigan at one point;⁹⁰ to his long-time lover Delancey teasingly declares, “there’s an Irish expression: a shut fist never caught the bird”;⁹¹ “as Mrs. Behan said of the Irish, very popular among ourselves,” quips Odette later in the story, speaking about Irish author Brendan Behan;⁹² “As they would say in the west of Ireland,” Odette offers elsewhere between her tales on the antics of her companions, “ferocious women we *were* for *trolling*;⁹³ and later a common Irish phrase is added in the drag queen storyteller’s recollection of Ireland at the end of her journey, “with the sun splitting the rocks,” from the Irish, “*Bhí an ghrian ag scoilteadh na gcloch.*”⁹⁴

Lucchitti goes on to describe the ways in which far from mere embellishment, Sayers’s use of Irish proverbs and expressions serve particular important functions in her narrative. “First of all,” she writes,

they add to Peig’s self-representation as a woman of tradition. They are also sometimes used to contextualise an event or a phenomenon as a recognisable recurring part of human existence or of island experience, thus taking the sting

⁸⁷ J. D. McClatchy, “The Mind of James McCourt,” *Christopher Street*, 109, 1987, 39.

⁸⁸ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 8.

⁸⁹ Irene Lucchitti, “Spent in the Telling: Peig Sayers and Her Life,” in *Folklore and Modern Irish Writing*, ed. Anne Markey and Anne O’Connor (Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2014), 136.

⁹⁰ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 49.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 53. The Irish phrase is, “*Ní ghabhann dorn druidte seabhac,*” which actually translates as, “A closed fist never caught a hawk.”

⁹² *Ibid.*, 114.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

out of the experience being recounted, excusing a wrong-doer and softening the judgment inherent in the telling of an unflattering tale ... There is more than narrative strategy at work here, where the proverb is used not only to reinforce Peig's discussion of her own distressing circumstances, but also to imply that this is not an uncommon situation ... Other proverbs, such as the oft-repeated "the help of God is nearer than the door," sometimes express a grateful reaction to a random serendipity but more often help Peig endure something that would otherwise be unbearable.⁹⁵

The use of proverbial sayings and expressions in McCourt's *Time Remaining* intertwines both Irish tradition and queer experience, suggesting that Irishness becomes an important vehicle through which Odette's life and lore are articulated. Folk idiom provides the means through which the queer quotidian is voiced.

Comparable to the case of Peig Sayers's life writing, McCourt's account of Odette and her tribe draws on proverb and idiom not only to add an Irish texture to his story, but also, and significantly, to express meaning in his text about the impact of the AIDS epidemic on queer community, kin, and culture. Taking pause before diving further into her story, parked before a train journey to Barcelona, Odette says to Delancey:

The situation of all the boys and girls and men and women dead of AIDS—and, why the hell not, of everything else as well: all the old things as well as all the new things killing people in damned new ways, or as was once said in Ireland many years ago of a certain new strain of influenza that was decimating the rural population: *There's people dyin' now that never died before!* You could call the story that—with the metaphor of the slow dance and all: call it *That Never Died Before*.⁹⁶

In this scene, McCourt's Odette makes analogous an Irish national epidemic, most likely the "Spanish Flu" in 1918-1919, and the contemporary crisis of AIDS. It is the words of an anonymous Irish voice expressed in equal measures of humour and horror—nobody can die twice—that resonates in the early 1990s at a time when illness continues to spread at such a rapid and seemingly unstoppable rate to confound the medical community and general public. The familiar image of the young, most often gay, emaciated man dotted with the purple lesions of KS in a hospital bed transmitted through televisions and published in newspapers in the first two decades of AIDS, while a visual confirmation of sin to many conservative onlookers, produced helplessness and fear among those groups most affected, who looked on wondering how perfectly healthy friends and lovers had suddenly fallen ill and died within a few years, or even months, of first finding the signs of KS. A final Irish expression Odette delivers at the close of her chronicle reveals the sense of helplessness felt by many at the time, "God between us and all harm," she says, "until the return journey, and Himself protect

⁹⁵ Lucchitti, "Spent in the Telling," 136-37.

⁹⁶ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 158.

everyone's rearing."⁹⁷ McCourt, redoubling Peig Sayers's self-assurance, reminds wary readers that God is nearer than the door in times of crises.

There are two further Irish proverbs, which, although not included in McCourt's story, speak well to the architecture of *Time Remaining*, particularly in "A Chance to Talk," Odette's "report to the committee of two."⁹⁸ Firstly, the Irish proverb, *Giorraíonn beirt bóthar*, which translates as "Two shorten the road," and, secondly, *Bíonn siúlach scéalach*, which translates as "He who travels has stories to tell." Each of these proverbs communicates the significant place of storytelling in Irish culture. That storytelling and travel go hand in hand, and that ability to create interpersonal connection is at the heart of the art of telling stories are reflected clearly in McCourt's written tale. Folk idiom, proverbs, and expressions establish the Irish tones of McCourt's *Time Remaining*, but they also advance his strategy of storytelling in the age of AIDS.

"Familiar though his name may be to us," writes Walter Benjamin, "the storyteller in his living immediacy is by no means a present force."⁹⁹ In his seminal essay, Benjamin laments the decline of the tradition of storytelling and its power to transmit experience, a demise he observes sharply in the rise of the novel form:

What differentiates the novel from all other forms of prose literature—the fairy tale, the legend, even the novella—is that it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it. This distinguishes it from storytelling in particular. The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes the experience of those who are listening to his tale.¹⁰⁰

Against the figure of the isolated novelist, Benjamin's storyteller lives in and draws from the experience of communication and community, and his valuable "gift" is "the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to tell his entire life."¹⁰¹ Peter Brooks's 1987 essay, also titled "The Storyteller," takes up some important implications in Benjamin's meditations in order to trace the enduring preoccupation among writers most comfortably embedded in written and print cultures with strategies of orality in their work. Alongside the novel, "which appears to be wholly aware that it is a purely bookish phenomenon, dependent on the new industrial processes of printing and distribution," he claims,

there is also the tale, short story and novella, that appears to insist, somewhat perversely, on its authentic relation with a tradition and a communicative situation that are clearly obsolete ... an urban literature, self-consciously a

⁹⁷ Ibid., 255. The Irish phrase is, "*Dia idir sinn agus an t-olc.*"

⁹⁸ Ibid., 162.

⁹⁹ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 2007), 83.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 87.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 108.

commodity in a marketplace, which nonetheless returns again and again to fictive situations of oral communication.¹⁰²

For Brooks, Benjamin is not pushing for a return, if that were even possible, to the mythic situation of the vanished storyteller. Rather, Benjamin is forming a critique of the text of the isolated and solitary reader in the modern world.

The remedy to the novel's sequestered setting is a type of literature that is, as Brooks suggests, the embrace of "a certain attitude of reading that would more closely resemble listening."¹⁰³ In Zimmermann's words, "storytelling is essentially a social—co-operative—activity; to narrate is to act on listeners, and an audience's sense of sharing an experience and thus belonging together may be as valuable as individual imaginary release."¹⁰⁴ Ruth Finnegan helpfully defines a story as "essentially a presentation of events or experiences which is told, typically through written or spoken words."¹⁰⁵ Storytelling, however, advances the mere transmission of experiences to the realm of communicable experience, to the exchange of counsel and wisdom. McCourt's aversion to the novel as a form reveals an affinity to a strategy of writing which is less concerned with the isolated habit of the reader and more in tune with the sociable and interactive energies of the listener.

In the first part of *Time Remaining*, the reader learns that Delancey has been performing "I Go Back to the Mai Oui" every night except for Sundays, and after one performance is joined by an older friend, part-time drag queen and chronicler of queers, Danny "Odette" O'Doyle, in a taxi from Second Avenue to Penn Station, where both take the 12:32 train from Manhattan to Bridgehampton, Long Island. The Irish poet, Jameson O'Maurigan, first introduced in *Mawrdew Czgowchwz*, offers the following summary of Delancey's performance: "It's the story ... of a blithe heart-of-gold tough who made good ... Whose reminiscences are as bright as paint—or acid—and more than an exercise in nostalgia. They are about the force of memory, the melodrama of remembering."¹⁰⁶ As Benjamin argues in "The Storyteller," reminiscence, in contrast to the novelistic taste for remembrance, which tells the history of "*one* hero, *one* odyssey, *one* battle," through its privileging of "*many* diffuse occurrences," is keenly suited to the art of storytelling.¹⁰⁷ The night-time performance between narrator (Odette) and narratee (Delancey) in the second story, "A Chance to Talk,"

¹⁰² Peter Brooks, "The Storyteller," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1987): 21. See also Peter Brooks, "The Tale vs. the Novel," in "Why the Novel Matters: A Postmodern Perplex," conference issue, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 21, no. 2/3 (Winter-Spring 1988): 285-92, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1345496>.

¹⁰³ Brooks, "The Storyteller," 28.

¹⁰⁴ Zimmermann, *The Irish Storyteller*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Ruth Finnegan, *Tales of the City: A Study of Narrative and Urban Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.

¹⁰⁶ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 50.

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 98.

remains committed to the power of reminiscence and the epic side of storytelling. The former story acts as the frame narrative for the unfolding of the latter, longer tale, which serves to chart Odette's experiences in Europe, where she has just distributed the ashes of dead friends throughout the rivers, fjords, and wells of the continent.

According to Benjamin, the storyteller who excels in the tradition has usually gone away and come back with a series of tales. Esteemed also, however, is "the man who has stayed at home, making an honest living, and who knows local tales and traditions."¹⁰⁸ Odette comes prepared with both fantastical tales of her travels in Europe as well as a wealth of local queer urban history in New York. McCourt, in an unpublished ending to his book, gestures toward the creative potential embedded in the relationship between departure and return in the symbolic movement of the Atlantic's waves "breaking against the shore." He concludes this early draft of the tale with the suggestion that the "stories and the stories within the stories were the waves and the waves within the waves within the Time remaining."¹⁰⁹ In an intertextual move, McCourt alludes to the work of another important literary idol of his, Virginia Woolf, whose *The Waves* also meditates on temporality and subjectivity through the image of the increasingly marked shoreline.¹¹⁰ Yet, in *Time Remaining* the waves concomitantly grope towards the image of receding and returning, like the storyteller, who comes back to the shore carrying objects of wisdom and experience to impart to the community.

"Storytelling is a going forward and a turning back," Roberto Calasso writes in *The Ruin of Kasch*, "a wave-like movement in the voice, a continual cancelling of borders, a dodging of sharp spears."¹¹¹ Thus, storytelling is a recuperative, accumulative, and restorative practice that brings together disparate temporalities, revealing the ways in which the past and present constantly crash into each other. In the ebb and flow of the storyteller's words, one hears the ever-present force of the past. Indeed, McCourt was inspired enough by Calasso's evocative and formally polymorphic book and its thoughts on the art of storytelling to include the same quotation as a preface to one of the chapters in *Queer Street*.¹¹² McCourt is indeed

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹⁰⁹ Box 6, folder "Time Remaining," James McCourt and Vincent Virga Papers. Gen MSS 845, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, June 13, 2018.

¹¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *The Waves* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1960). Additionally, Bernard is the storyteller of the assemblage of characters in Woolf's novel: "'And now,' said Neville, 'let Bernard begin. Let him burble on, telling us stories, while we lie recumbent. Let him describe what we have all seen so that it becomes a sequence. Bernard says there is always a story. I am a story. Louis is a story. There is the story of the boot-boy, the story of the man with one eye, the story of the woman who sells winkles. Let him burble on with his story while I lie back and regard the stiff-legged figures of the padded batsmen through the trembling grasses'" (27).

¹¹¹ Roberto Calasso, *The Ruin of Kasch*, trans. William Weaver and Stephen Sartarelli (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994), 133.

¹¹² McCourt, *Queer Street*, 19. In fact, the conflicted consensus that has greeted much of Calasso's formally heterogeneous aesthetic has also generally informed the reactions to the work of McCourt.

familiar with Benjamin's essay, revealing this fact through the mouth of his Irish-American Catholic turned existentialist drag queen chronicler of queers, Odette. "*Exalted is the storyteller who can let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his tale,*" she says to Delancey, directly quoting from the closing line of Benjamin's "The Storyteller."¹¹³ Odette, however, in the typical camp fashion of McCourt's story, puts her own spin on the passage. "With me, darling," she adds, "it's more like trying to keep my *hair* from catching fire from my own flamethrower mouth!"¹¹⁴

In the early years of the epidemic, then President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, failed to even utter the word "AIDS" in public, and continued to do so until the death of his friend and fellow Hollywood actor, Rock Hudson in 1985, one year after Reagan's pilgrimage to his ancestral Ballyporeen in Ireland. Homophobia, racism, and conservative views on sexuality ensured that AIDS was either left unspoken or talked about in relation to specific bodies and parts of the population. According to Catherine Waldby, "gay masculinity has been so intensely medicalised and so closely associated with the AIDS epidemic that gay men are effectively treated by much public health discourse *as if they themselves were the virus*, the origins of infection."¹¹⁵ Within a social hierarchy of risk, where the lowest threatens the health of the highest, White, middle-class heterosexual men come out on top, largely untouched by the marks of the epidemic and its associated stigma.¹¹⁶ "AIDS is understood in a premodern way," writes Sontag, "as a disease incurred by people both as individuals and as members of a 'risk group'—that neutral-sounding, bureaucratic, category which also revives the archaic idea of a tainted community that illness has judged."¹¹⁷

While Hudson's death marked the beginning of more mainstream attention, emic reactions to the growing epidemic were present from the beginning.¹¹⁸ A watershed year in the literary response to AIDS was 1988, when, adding to the informational literature and pamphlets circulating in the earliest years, significant written fiction began to emerge. "It was

¹¹³ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 119. See Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 108.

¹¹⁴ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 120.

¹¹⁵ Catherine Waldby, *AIDS and the Body Politic: Biomedicine and Sexual Difference* (London: Routledge, 1996), 13.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁷ Susan Sontag, *Illness and Its Metaphors and AIDS and Its Metaphors*, (London and New York: Penguin, 1991), 132. As Jeffrey Weeks similarly argues in *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths & Modern Sexualities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985): "In the fear and loathing that AIDS evokes there is a resulting conflation between two plausible, if unproven theories—that there is an elective affinity between disease and certain sexual practices, and that certain sexual practices cause disease—and a third, that certain types of sex *are* diseases. In the climate produced by such assumptions, rational thought is very near impossible" (46).

¹¹⁸ In his introduction to the anthology, *Vital Signs: Essential AIDS Fiction*, for instance, Canning writes that "the American public was indeed first forced by the media to look at AIDS head-on in the year 1985, when the story of Hudson's illness broke." *Vital Signs: Essential AIDS Fiction*, ed. Richard Canning (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2007), xviii.

as though before 1988 there was a hesitation to respond to AIDS with fiction,” writes Monica B. Pearl.¹¹⁹ During that year, Paul Monette’s *Borrowed Time* and Edmund White and Adam Mars-Jones’s short story collection, *The Darker Proof*, were published, thus “marking the beginning of a serious and lasting AIDS literature.”¹²⁰ McCourt’s “I Go Back to the Mais Oui,” though originally less invested in the impact of AIDS, appeared first in 1987, and again in 1988, before *Time Remaining* was published in 1993. Sontag’s story, “The Way We Live Now,” was an exception, having been published in *The New Yorker* in 1986, three years before she wrote the essay *AIDS and its Metaphors*.

“In a gay culture now rightfully obsessed with a killer plague,” John Clum wrote in 1990, “remembering becomes a central act, and it is how and what one remembers that defines much of AIDS literature, art, and film.”¹²¹ In *Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis*, Suzanne Poirier argues that “AIDS has irremediably changed the way that gay literature can be either written or read, whatever the reader’s or writer’s feelings about the epidemic or the homoerotic.”¹²² In the tradition of writing about AIDS, the epidemic not only emerges as the subject of its fiction. Rather, as a signifier, AIDS itself is aptly understood as a text, as a tale. “Whatever else it may be,” argued Paula Treichler in a landmark special issue of *October* in 1987, “AIDS is a story, or multiple stories, read to a surprising extent from a text that does not exist: the body of the male homosexual ... AIDS is a nexus where multiple meanings, stories, and discourses interject and overlap, reinforce, and subvert one another.”¹²³ For Lee Edelman,

“AIDS,” then, resists our attempts to inscribe it as a manageable subject of writing—exceeding and eluding the medical, sociological, political, or literary discourses that variously attempt to confront or engage it—to the extent that as a historical phenomenon in the so-called Western democracies it has itself taken shape (has been given shape) as that which writes or articulates another subject altogether: a subject whose content is suggested but not exhausted by reference to “male homosexuality.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ Monica B. Pearl, *AIDS Literature and Gay Identity: The Literature of Loss* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 5.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹²¹ John M. Clum, “‘The Time Before the War’: AIDS, Memory, and Desire,” *American Literature* 62, no. 4 (December 1990): 648-67, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2927073>.

¹²² Suzanne Poirier, “On Writing AIDS,” introduction to *Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis*, ed. Timothy F. Murphy and Suzanne Poirier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 3.

¹²³ Paula A. Treichler, “AIDS, Homophobia, and Biomedical Discourse: An Epidemic of Signification,” in “AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism,” ed. Douglas Crimp, special issue, *October* 43 (1987): 42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3397564>.

¹²⁴ Lee Edelman, “The Mirror and the Tank: ‘AIDS,’ Subjectivity, and the Rhetoric of Activism,” in *Writing AIDS: Gay Literature, Language, and Analysis*, ed. Timothy F. Murphy and Suzanne Poirier (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 10.

Edelman refers elsewhere to the ideological minefield undergirding the inscription of meaning in the writing of “AIDS” as a “plague of discourse.”¹²⁵ Considering its discursive architecture, it comes as no surprise that AIDS and its related “epidemic of signification,” to use Treichler’s evocative phrase, were keenly suited to imaginative exploration in the fiction facing the approaching Millennium.

The interlacing textual layers of this cultural epidemic profoundly inform the structural parameters of McCourt’s tale. *Time Remaining* is written by a sage storyteller and centred on the practice of oral narration between two fictionalised tellers of tales, a device which, as Zimmermann writes, “is as old as literature itself.”¹²⁶ As Odette O’Doyle summarises the programme of the midnight milk train to Long Island, “The stories . . . the stories—and the stories, dear, *within* the stories . . .”¹²⁷ The urn containing the cremated remains of the Eleven against Heaven stands as a metaphor for the interpolation of narrative within narrative in the written story. “I suddenly saw the thing whole, as it were,” Odette says to Delancey, “the metaphor, live, of all the girls, the one invested in the other—the way we all were: the Eleven against Heaven.”¹²⁸ In the wake of AIDS, the act of storytelling is a vital source of community, collectivity, and queer kinship. Such an act becomes a means through which groups are made and remade from the shared collective memory and experiences narrated from one generation to another. In writing the epidemic, McCourt joins ranks with authors such as Edmund White and the late Paul Monette, whom Clum aptly christens “the bard of AIDS.”¹²⁹

Arriving at Penn Station, Delancey and Odette enter through the side entrance, “between Madison Square Garden and Felt Forum tower and the Amtrak escalator,” the access point, or “portal,” to the lower levels of the Long Island Rail Road, and with that, the underworld of the dead resurrected in the unfolding stories within stories.¹³⁰ According to Zimmermann, in the tradition of Irish storytelling the hero “may bring back stories from some incursion into the Otherworld.”¹³¹ Delancey follows Odette to the lower levels from which he hopes to record and capture tales. At the same time, Odette herself is fresh from a journey into another world, the Old World, where she has scattered the ashes of dead friends in the rivers

¹²⁵ Lee Edelman, “The Plague of Discourse: Politics, Literary Theory, and AIDS,” in *Displacing Homophobia*, ed. Ron Butters, John Clum, and Michael Moon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 289-305.

¹²⁶ Zimmermann, *The Irish Storyteller*, 517.

¹²⁷ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 73.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹²⁹ Clum, “AIDS, Memory, and Desire,” 650. Indeed, Monette’s 1991 novel, *Halfway Home* details the volatile relationship between two Irish-American brothers, one of whom has AIDS. Monette, who was not Irish, wrote the novel as a dedication to his lover, Stephen Kolzak, who had an Irish background. Paul Monette, *Halfway Home* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1992).

¹³⁰ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 68.

¹³¹ Zimmermann, *The Irish Storyteller*, 25.

and waters of Europe. Train travel in McCourt's book acts as both a metaphor and vehicle for the transmission of stories. Benjamin, too, was invested in the relationship between reading and the train journey. In "Detective Novels, on Tour," for instance, he states, "Reading is as related to rail travel as stopping at train stations is."¹³² Additionally, that there is a correlation between the successive stops at train stations along the LIRR line and the ritualistic pause for prayer and reflection at each of the Stations of the Cross in Christian doctrine seems clear in a book deeply enmeshed in Irish-Catholic imagery and ritual. Indeed, laying bare *Time Remaining's* postmodernist self-awareness, Odette reaches for the same link as a structural mechanism for the tale, upending the metaphor in a defiant camp act of blasphemy. "The other metaphor I had in mind was the stations—of the cross," she reveals to Delancey as the pair change trains at Jamaica, "but there are too many—like the men. 'I went to him for confession. He told me for my penance, *do the stations*—but I got arrested at Forty-second.'"¹³³ This anonymous gay folk tale of public sexual encounters queers Catholic religious practices, turning sacred penance into scandalous profanity.

In *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema*, Laura Marcus traces modernist obsessions with train travel through the prism of two particularly salient lenses: psychoanalysis and storytelling, focusing specifically on the writings of both Freud and Benjamin. In the case of the latter, Marcus tracks the rise of the railway novel in the mid-nineteenth century. Most crucially, however, in bringing together personal biography and theory in the case of the former, Marcus locates events in Freud's life which led the father of psychoanalysis to connect desire and trauma to the experience of travelling on a train, prompting her to assert that, in fact, the discipline "could be said to draw its most fundamental concepts from the supposed effects of railway travel and railway accidents."¹³⁴ In her commentary, Marcus alludes to an important fear introduced through the modes of rail travel in a psychoanalytical frame: the fear of dying. "'Departing' on a journey is one of the commonest and best authenticated symbols of death," she writes.¹³⁵ In December 1993, the grave relation between train travel and death resurfaced tragically, when Colin Ferguson entered the LIRR and began shooting at fellow passengers, killing some and injuring many more.¹³⁶ McCourt, in fact, was aware of Freud's meditations on train travel, and even includes a passage from a letter Freud wrote to Wilhelm Fliess in 1897. In the letter, Freud writes: "I

¹³² Walter Benjamin, "Detective Novels, on Tour," in *The Storyteller: Tales out of Loneliness*, trans. and ed. Sam Dolbear, Esther Leslie, and Sebastian Truskolaski (London: Verso, 2016), 111.

¹³³ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 102.

¹³⁴ Laura Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 43.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹³⁶ See James Barron, "Death on the L.I.R.R.: The Overview; Portrait of Suspect Emerges in Shooting on L.I. Train," *New York Times*, December 9, 1993, A1.

am gripped and pulled through ancient times in quick association of thoughts; my moods change like the landscapes seen by a traveler from a train.”¹³⁷ McCourt, however, stops short of including a reference to a poem from Goethe that Freud includes in his letter: “And the shades of loved ones appear, and with them, like an old, half-forgotten myth, first love and friendship.”¹³⁸ For Freud, as well as McCourt, the train travel is a journey “through the scenes and episodes of the past” and an opportunity to glimpse the faintly visible outline of friends and lovers lost.¹³⁹

Benjamin connects the decline in the art of storytelling to the disappearance of death in society since at least the nineteenth century. He writes:

Dying was once a public process in the life of the individual and a most exemplary one; think of the medieval pictures in which the deathbed has turned into a throne toward which the people press through the wide-open doors of the death house. In the course of modern times dying has been pushed further and further out of the perceptual world of the living. There used to be no house, hardly a room, in which someone had not once died. Today people live in rooms that have never been touched by death, dry dwellers of eternity, and when their end approaches they are stowed away in sanatoria or hospitals by their heirs.¹⁴⁰

AIDS, however, brought death into the everyday, into the realm of the still and barely living, as a constant reminder of fragile mortality. Reading AIDS literature, or viewing AIDS-themed cinema or television, one quickly witnesses the ways in which the disease crowded almost entirely the social, domestic, and sexual spaces of the urban and rural landscape across the United States and beyond. Since AIDS not only touched gay men but every corner of the population, the epidemic reintroduced death as a familiar presence for many families and communities. “Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell,” writes Benjamin.¹⁴¹

In 2010, however, Canning suggested that with the development of antiretroviral therapies in the mid-to-late-1990s, HIV had become virtually forgotten culturally.¹⁴² “Not surprisingly,” writes Cormac O’Brien elsewhere,

the American media went into overdrive with the cover of *Newsweek* heralding ‘The End of AIDS,’ while *Time* magazine named Dr David Ho, the leading virologist working on protease inhibitors, ‘Man of the Year.’ David Sanford of

¹³⁷ Sigmund Freud, letter to Wilhelm Fliess, 27 October, 1897, in *The Complete Letters of Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Fliess*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 274. Quoted in Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity*, 53. This line appears in the preface to “A Chance to Talk” in McCourt’s *Time Remaining*.

¹³⁸ Marcus, *Dreams of Modernity*, 53.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” 93-94.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹⁴² Richard Canning, “The Literature of AIDS,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*, ed. Hugh Stevens, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 134.

the *Wall Street Journal* penned a front-page article, ‘Last Year, This Editor Wrote His Own Obituary,’ and the *New York Times Magazine* ran a cover story by HIV-positive journalist Andrew Sullivan, ‘When Plagues End.’”¹⁴³

This was followed by the announcement of “No Obits” in the San Francisco *Bay Area Reporter* two years later, the first time the paper had not received an obituary for a person who had died from an AIDS-related illness, since 1981.¹⁴⁴ Such rhetoric, however, ignores the fact that AIDS remains a global pandemic.¹⁴⁵ “Paradoxically,” Canning reminds us, “although there have been fewer fatalities, the number of HIV-infected people in most Western populations has risen significantly, whilst their presence in Western cultural narratives—from soap operas to stage plays and beyond—has diminished sharply.” In turn, Canning’s concern is that “HIV/AIDS threatens to become a non-story.”¹⁴⁶ Revisiting McCourt’s novel, therefore, reminds readers of the enduring impact of HIV and AIDS, despite the general disappearance of the pandemic from Western eyes in the pages, on the screens we watch, and in the stories we hear.

Telling Tales: *Time Remaining* and Queer/Irish Oral History

Early in McCourt’s *Queer Street* the young narrator and author surrogate is initiated into the realm of gay urban New York culture. This introduction is at the hands of an aged queen, Prudence, “pronounced the French way,” an echo or perhaps an historical model for *Time Remaining*’s Odette O’Doyle.¹⁴⁷ After providing important queer pedagogical advice to an

¹⁴³ Cormac O’Brien, “Performing POZ: Irish Theatre, HIV Stigma, and ‘Post-AIDS’ Identities,” *Irish University Review* 43, no. 1 (2013): 74.

¹⁴⁴ Timothy Rodrigues, “No Obits,” *Bay Area Reporter*, August 13, 1998, 1, 17. In fact, as early as 1993, ACT UP openly criticised the sidelining of the issue of AIDS within gay and lesbian political agendas, which by that time had shifted towards other concerns, such as the military and marriage. In one particular poster, alongside the lines “You can’t wear a red ribbon if you’re dead” and “You can’t serve in the military if you’re dead,” ACT UP blasted, “You can’t march in the Saint Patrick’s Day parade if you’re dead.” Such a phrase not only indicates that the ILGO and AOH debates rippled further out into the wider gay and lesbian communities in New York City, but, more to the point, that at times the political energies invested in inclusion in Irish cultural public performances were admonished by ACT UP members, who thought those energies would be better redirected into AIDS activism at the time. Alessandro Codagone’s 1993 poster for ACT UP New York is reprinted in Douglas Crimp’s essay “Don’t Tell” in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 222.

¹⁴⁵ As Canning notes in his introduction to *Vital Signs*, “[i]f anyone were disposed to think of AIDS as yesterday’s news, consider this: in 2006, it claimed an estimated 2.8 million lives; at least 40 million people are thought to be HIV-positive across the planet, with about 4 million new infections occurring annually” (xii).

¹⁴⁶ Canning, “The Literature of AIDS,” 134. See also David Román, “Not-About-AIDS,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 6, no. 1 (2000): 1-28, <https://must.jhu.edu/article/12125>. In this essay, Román writes that “claims for the end of AIDS and a post-AIDS discourse might be best understood not as markers of a definitive and identifiable moment of closure but as the latest developments in the discursive history of AIDS. Both the ‘end of AIDS’ and the post-AIDS discourse participate in a larger social phenomenon that encourages us to believe that the immediate concerns facing contemporary American culture, including queer culture, are not-about-AIDS” (6).

¹⁴⁷ McCourt, *Queer Street*, 173.

inexperienced and over-eager novice, Prudence finally makes an urgent plea to the narrator that both identifies a talent for storytelling and demands that such a gift be used to preserve a culture threatened with obsolescence and erasure. She exclaims,

You can whistle up a story yourself—that much is clear. In fact as I sit here listening it occurs to me you are probably capable of whistling up some version or other of the story of all of us here this afternoon, and holding on to it for years—so that, long after we’re gone, you may end up representing us in the manner that Shakespearean sonnet, concerning giving life to the beloved. Yes, you might—putting such words in as will by then be old dead mouths that people will wonder, “Did anybody ever really talk that way?” And you must tell them we did. You must go on talking the way you do, and tell them once upon a time we all talked that way. This way—because, of course we all know this way is fast becoming obsolete. There aren’t ten years left—there may not be so much as five—in the era of this discourse.¹⁴⁸

Such a direct entreaty clearly encapsulates the enduring impulse obvious to a reader entering the Czgowchwz universe of McCourt’s collective creative efforts. Throughout his body of work, the author is committed to the reconstruction of the folklore of a queer community on the brink of disappearance. The men and women of the early-twentieth-century queer subcultural New York world, as Chauncey records, “forged a distinctive culture with its own language and customs, its own traditions and folk histories, its own heroes and heroines.”¹⁴⁹ These traditions and folk histories survived among mid-century participants of a queer urban subculture, eventually becoming undermined, denigrated, even made obsolete by the emerging identity politics of liberationist discourses in the post-Stonewall era.

Delancey records his interview with Odette not on the 1940’s Dictaphone he uses for his own solo performance, but with Odette’s pocket-sized Sony device, which, as it turns out, she had been using to orally document the history of her own life in New York City before being interrupted “by the Great European Excursion.”¹⁵⁰ As Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy has argued, “Oral history has been central in creating knowledge about lesbian and gay male life before Stonewall.”¹⁵¹ The practice has more generally been crucial to the work of bringing “new social facts to the historical record” as well as exploring the individual understanding of the past.¹⁵² Indeed, Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Jason Ruiz have more recently pointed toward the historical path shared by both oral history and gay and lesbian studies,

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 176.

¹⁴⁹ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1980-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 1. Indeed, in a section on “Sources” in Chauncey’s study, he comments the centrality of oral history to his project: “Early in my research it became clear that oral histories would be the single most important source of evidence concerning the internal workings of the gay world [...]” (370).

¹⁵⁰ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 73.

¹⁵¹ Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, “Telling Tales: Oral History and the Construction of Pre-Stonewall Lesbian History,” *Radical History Review*, 62 (1995): 58, https://read.dukeupress.edu/radical-history-review/article-pdf/1995/62/59/465502/ddrhr_1995_62_59.pdf.

¹⁵² Ibid.

suggesting that these disciplines “were animated by the same imperative to interpret the uneven and contradictory social and political histories of marginalized subjects.”¹⁵³ Thus, queer oral history challenges the dominant historical narrative. “Since the nature of most existing records is to reflect the standpoint of authority,” writes Paul Thompson in his seminal study, *The Voice of the Past*,

[o]ral history by contrast makes a much fairer trial possible: witnesses can now also be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account. In so doing, oral history has radical implications for the social message of history as a whole.¹⁵⁴

While queer oral history certainly speaks back to a history from which gays, lesbians, and queer bodies and voices have been excluded, that any effort to redress this silencing would be “more realistic,” is, however, less convincing. McCourt recognises the impossibility of objectivity in narrating experience. “Freud says,” Delancey tells O’Maurigan early on in the story, “that when we talk about the past we lie with every breath we take.”¹⁵⁵ The narration of queer experience, historical and fictional, might indeed serve to challenge the dominant historical voice, but what is recalled is always a product of imperfect memory and creative recollection.¹⁵⁶ As Nan Alamilla Boyd has suggested, “narrators’ voices must ... be read as texts, open to interpretation, and their disclosures should be understood as part of a larger process of reiteration, where identities are constantly reconstructed around very limited sets of meanings.”¹⁵⁷

According to Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz, interviews and first-person accounts were particularly significant to early writing on the AIDS crisis in the 1980s.¹⁵⁸ In her account, Odette blasts the conservative political and religious organisations and figures whose hypocrisies and negligence contributed to the growing death toll in the early years of the

¹⁵³ Kevin P. Murphy, Jennifer L. Pierce, and Jason Ruiz, “What Makes Queer Oral History Different,” *Oral History Review* 43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2016): 5, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/615536>. Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz are drawing in their title on the seminal work of Alessandro Portelli, specifically his essay, “What Makes Oral History Different,” in *The Death of Luigi Tratsulli and Other Essays: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 45-58.

¹⁵⁴ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

¹⁵⁵ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 5. In fact, McCourt later reproduced this line in the preface to his memoir, *Lasting City*, in 2013.

¹⁵⁶ See Kennedy and Davis’s *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* in which they argue: “Oral history has been criticized as a basis for historical study, on the grounds that memory is too subjective and idiosyncratic. Whether the more conventional sources for historical and sociological studies—letters, newspaper accounts, court records, or observation—provide a sounder base than rich oral narratives for the constructing of community history is in our minds a moot question. Although such sources do not introduce issues about the distortion of memory, they do raise other kinds of problems, such as the limited representation of community participants’ own views, or the lack of multiple perspectives” (15).

¹⁵⁷ Nan Alamilla Boyd, “Who Is the Subject? Queer Theory Meets Oral History,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 2 (May 2008): 180, EBSCOhost.

¹⁵⁸ Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz, “What Makes Queer Oral History Different,” 18.

epidemic. She reserves, however, biting criticism for even those within the affected communities, particularly the zealous activist group ACT UP (which Odette refers to as “ACT OUT,” “Aggrieved Children Throwing One Uncut Tantrum”). As Michael La Pointe writes, Odette “has grown alienated from the queer culture that’s emerged during the pandemic, and her estrangement sometimes expresses itself in an ugly resentment . . . But, like [*All About Eve’s* Margot] Channing, her rage emanates from a sense of rejection.”¹⁵⁹ Odette aligns herself instead with the camp Catholicity of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a gay activist group whose history dates back to the 1970s and whose parodic, performative antics appeal to Odette. Her distrust of ACT UP’s style of presentation is rooted in a protectiveness of pre-Stonewall styles of sexual and social being in the world that are now viewed negatively. “What if I agreed not to put down ACT/OUT if they would agree to stop calling me and my kind retro masochistic self-loathing detritus of the bad old days?” she offers sardonically.¹⁶⁰ “History is written by the winners, dear,” she says to Delancey, “and in this case by the survivors—a history that contains all the abreactions, all the compensations for disallowing the complicated feelings of the actual losers, the dead.” As Benjamin reminds us in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” “*even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.”¹⁶¹

According to Thompson, the tape recorder “not only allows history to be taken down in spoken words but also to be presented through them.” That these words are idiosyncratic enlivens rather than stunts the historiographical motivations of oral history: “They breathe life into history.” In America, he goes on, the tape recorder has allowed for urban folklore to develop into its own flourishing genre.¹⁶² In the 1970s, one strand of the anthropological study of urban folklore was rooted in the gay subcultural enclaves of the city. In a 1974 essay, for example, Norine Dresser explores gay folklore produced in bars in the Los Angeles area. The gay bar, she argues, “is a market setting for the exchange of sexual services, providing also a place for the induction, training, and integration of homosexuals.”¹⁶³ Focusing on verbal and facial expressions, certain jokes, and styles of behavior,” Dresser describes what she observes as a unique style of communication specific to gay men that is important in the expression of membership.¹⁶⁴ Joseph Goodwin’s *More Than You’ll Ever Be: Gay Folklore and Acculturation in Middle America*, published in 1989, was the most comprehensive study

¹⁵⁹ LaPointe, “A Vibrant, Elegiac Novel of the AIDS Pandemic That Shouldn’t Be Forgotten.”

¹⁶⁰ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 188.

¹⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn and ed. Hannah Arendt (1969; New York: Schocken, 2007), 255.

¹⁶² Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, 21.

¹⁶³ Norine Dresser, “‘The Boys in the Band is Not Another Musical’: Male Homosexuals and Their Folklore,” *Western Folklore* 33, no. 3 (July 1974): 207, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1498995>.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

of this kind. Goodwin's examination similarly studies verbal and nonverbal communication and humour, as well as drag and personal experience narratives. According to him, "such traditions serve the gay subculture as means of communication and identification, as an aid to subcultural cohesion, and as ways of coping with conflict both within the subculture and between the gay community and the straight world."¹⁶⁵ While these works might today appear archaic in their essentialising rhetoric, gay, lesbian, and queer folk traditions offer important insight into the study of urban traditions and cultural structures, and McCourt's work can be said to contribute to the articulation of such a queer urban argot and style. Odette stands as an ideal chronicler in this process.

A similar reparative impulse that informs much of McCourt's writing, published in the latter part of the twentieth century, was a key driving force in the cultural nationalist efforts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as the subsequent establishment of the national folklore bodies in the 1920s and 1930s, in Ireland. In January 1927, inspired by recent work in Scandinavia, the Folklore of Ireland Society (An Cumann Le Béaloideas Éireann) was established, with Douglas Hyde among its founders. In the first issue of the Society's journal, *Béaloideas*, editor Séamas Ó Duilearga (James Hamilton Delargy) explained the task of the independent enterprise was "the collection of the traditional folklore of Ireland, of which a considerable amount still remains unrecorded, and is fast being lost with the passing of the old people in all parts of the country."¹⁶⁶ In 1930, aided financially by the Irish Government, the Irish Folklore Institute (Institiúid Bhéaloideas Éireann) was set up until it was soon after replaced, in 1935, by the Irish Folklore Commission (Coimisiún Béaloideas Éireann). The Commission continued to take as its object the collection, preservation, and study of Irish folklore traditions from throughout the island of Ireland, and remains committed to this project in its current form as the Department of Irish Folklore at University College Dublin, the site of this work since 1971.¹⁶⁷

McCourt was aware of the Folklore Department's efforts. In fact, he was inspired enough to keep a clipping of an *Irish Times* article by Elgie Gillespie (published on 25 July, 1985) on a collaboration between UCD, RTÉ, and the National Museum on a video project that aimed to capture the traditions of the surviving *seanchaí* of Ireland.¹⁶⁸ "The graveyards of

¹⁶⁵ Joseph P. Goodwin, *More than You'll Ever Be: Gay Folklore and Acculturation in Middle America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), xiv.

¹⁶⁶ J.H. Delargy, "Ó'n bhFear Eagair," *Béaloideas* 1, no. 1 (1927): 4.

¹⁶⁷ Zimmerman, *The Irish Storyteller*, 385-386. For a helpful account of these developments, see also Kelly Fitzgerald, "From Product to Process: The Emergence of the National Folklore Collection," *Folklore and Modern Irish Writing*, ed. Anne Markey and Anne O'Connor (Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2014), 21-32.

¹⁶⁸ Box 41, folder "McCourt Notes," James McCourt and Vincent Virga Papers, Gen MSS 845, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, June 29, 2018. See Elgie Gillespie, "Video Keeps the Story Going," *The Irish Times*, July 25, 1985, 1.

the Irish country-side contain more folk-tales and traditions than we can ever hope to collect,” Delargy grimly states at one point in his treatise, “The Gaelic Story-Teller.”¹⁶⁹ For McCourt, the connection between Irishness and the technique of queer literary historiography utilised in his work is apparent. “I’m a sort of garbage can of information,” McCourt told Patsy Southgate in an interview for *The Easthampton Star* in 1998. “I think it’s an Irish thing,” he added, “an aural thing. It’s like being a tape recorder. You hear things and remember them; who can say why?”¹⁷⁰ In evoking both the oral-aural as a cornerstone of Irishness and the tape recorder as the device through which the author collects and stores the material for producing cultural forms, McCourt inadvertently reproduces the conditions of the typical folklore collector. The urban gay folklore of twentieth-century New York is the culture and traditions McCourt attempts to collect and present in his work.

When she was still among the living, Diane DeVors, one of the now deceased Eleven against Heaven tells Odette, “Darling, when you die ... it really will be as if a library has been burned down.”¹⁷¹ This phrase, derived from an African proverb, captures Odette’s role as a valued historian of the community and storyteller.¹⁷² Curiously, Odette connects her encyclopaedic erudition to reading books from childhood, an act she knows did not sit well with her ethnic background: “It was more or less gently said—in spite of the fact that in an Irish family, for every good reason, the primacy of the spoken tale over the written story is an absolute.”¹⁷³ At play here, however, is the interaction between the written and oral word, both of which are entwined and never as entirely divorced as many would seem to believe. As Ní Dhuibhne argues in her recollection of the Dublin Urban Folklore Project (1979-1980), “[t]he point of collecting [folklore] is that a record, either mechanically taped or, even more usefully, written, exists and ordinary human memory, the original repository of folklore, is no longer the main source of information.” In turn, she continues, “The archive replaces memory.”¹⁷⁴ When Delargy completed his work with the seasoned storyteller Séan Ó Conaill, the ageing man turned to this young scholar contently declaring:

¹⁶⁹ Delargy, *The Gaelic Story-Teller*, 30.

¹⁷⁰ Patsy Southgate, “James McCourt: On Divas and Drag Queens,” *The East Hampton Star*, January 22, 1998, III-4.

¹⁷¹ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 75. Tellingly, in the 1988 version of “I Go Back to the Mais Oúi” in *Men on Men 2*, the role of Odette as wealth of historical and cultural knowledge had before her materialisation in the later book been filled literally by a book. Delancey, speaking about the *kouros* of Melanes says, “I’m remembering from a book I found once left behind on the ballet line” (198). In *Time Remaining*, however, speaking about the same topic, he says, “I’m remembering what Odette O’Doyle, polymath drag-queen diva, told me, explaining the photographs I took of the statue” (19).

¹⁷² Amadou Hampâté Bâ has been credited with coining the phrase. See *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, 2nd ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), ix.

¹⁷³ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 76.

¹⁷⁴ Ní Dhuibhne, ““They Made Me Tea,”” 66.

I suppose you will bring out a book of these stories some day. I have told you now all the tales I can remember, and I am glad that they have been written. I hope that they will shorten the night for those who read them or hear them being read, and let them not forget me in their prayers, nor the old people from whom I myself learned them.¹⁷⁵

McCourt, however, also challenges the easy assimilation of orality into the written form within his own tale, instead privileging the former over the latter.

When Miss Faith Healy, fellow member of the Eleven gang and fellow Irish American, dies from an AIDS-related illness, Odette carries out a clandestine act, replacing Healy's cremated remains with the charred fragments of the dead friend's diaries. Odette tells Delancey, "I substituted at the fifty-ninth second of the twelfth hour the ashes of the incinerated diaries, after sitting up all night the way we're doing now, putting them, in a weird neutral voice, on cassette *et-cetera*."¹⁷⁶ Here, it is the written word that becomes obsolete, while the verbal recording and preservation of Faith Healy's story takes precedence. As Kennedy and Davis write, "oral history, an invaluable method for documenting the experience of the invisible ... allows the narrators to speak in their own voices of their lives, loves, and struggles."¹⁷⁷ In this scene, however, it is Odette who becomes a substitute voice in place of Healy's own. Yet, she remains committed to rendering visible, or audible, the life, loves, and struggles of a departed friend. As Alessandro Portelli puts it, "the narrator, from the outside of the narration, is pulled inside and becomes part of it."¹⁷⁸ Healy's true remains are scattered in Ireland, "half of her in the Liffey, on her mother's side of the Old Country, and the other half with the father's people, in the saint's well at Ballintuber."¹⁷⁹ "Storytelling, the most basic ingredient to oral history," argue Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, "is an embodied practice."¹⁸⁰ Odette's verbal dictation reintroduces the body and places it at the core of oral history.

If Delancey and Odette's account of urban queer experience acts as one important contribution to an oral history of American social and cultural life, the other explored in McCourt's book is Irish-American experience. Delancey and Odette, after all, reflect on the expansive timelines of their lives, from childhood to the present, from Irish-American roots to

¹⁷⁵ Delargy, *The Gaelic Story-Teller*, 12.

¹⁷⁶ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 129.

¹⁷⁷ Kennedy and Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, 15.

¹⁷⁸ Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop* 12 (Autumn 1981): 105, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4288379>. In this essay, which puts forward the importance of including history "from below" in critical historiography, Portelli opens up the connection between oral history and narrative, arguing that "the analysis of oral history materials must avail itself of some of the general categories developed in the theory of literature" (98).

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, introduction to *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, ed. Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8.

queer cultural routes. For Delancey, orphaned as a child, his story is fractured, beginning with his early life at a Catholic correctional home for boys. Odette is more equipped to provide insight into early twentieth-century Irish-American life. Declaring that addiction, not AIDS, is the “Great Plague of the age,” Odette meanders into a memory of a drug-addicted Irish relative, Charley Fahey, whom she visits as a child at a hospital for addiction on Roosevelt Island, then called Welfare Island. “They’ve put my release on the long finger, Dan,” Fahey says to his cousin, Odette’s grandfather, “It’s just as well—where would I go? What would I do? At least here I can stand up in the ward room and say, ‘Do you want to end up like me?’”¹⁸¹ This harrowing image haunts Odette’s dreams during her journey in Europe and intermingles with the equally caustic pictures of bed-ridden dying friends in AIDS wards at Manhattan’s St Vincent’s and Saint Clare’s Hospital, which Miss Faith Healy describes as “the original almshouse,” housing the “aged, the infirm, the unruly, and the maniac.”¹⁸² Irish-American social history is intimately interwoven in McCourt’s book with the cultural and medical history of AIDS in America, each feeding into one another and informing the recollection of both. Daniel Marshall has claimed that “[o]ral history can be a powerful methodology to enable intergenerational enquiry and negotiate intergenerational queer kinship.”¹⁸³ *Time Remaining* can be seen in this sense as a literary engagement with the intersubjective and intergenerational communication of queer and Irish memory, culture, and identity.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 200.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 123. Saint Clare’s, despite the Archbishop’s feelings towards gay sexuality, had the city’s first designated AIDS ward in New York, which had been one of the most affected cities in the country since the emergence of the syndrome in the early 1980s. Healy, Odette informs Delancey, blasted the hospital as “Cardinal O’Connor’s death camp,” and compared it with the concentration camp Dachau (123).

¹⁸³ Daniel Marshall, “Gay Teachers and Students, Oral History, and Queer Kinship,” in *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History*, ed. Nan Alamilla Boyd and Horacio N. Roque Ramírez (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 173.

¹⁸⁴ Oral history has, indeed, been a significant methodological approach in the study of Irish-American history in a number of universities. The Glucksman Ireland House, for example, led by Linda Dowling Almeida, Marion R. Casey, and Miriam A. Nyhan, has been interviewing New York authors actors, journalists, activists, and community members since 2005. The Archives of Irish America at the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive in the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library at New York University houses the Ireland House Oral History Collection, which contains many of these interviews. Since 2014, the Irish Studies Programme at Queens College in New York has also been engaging in oral history projects, interviewing Irish immigrants in New York. See Carmel McMahan, “The Irish in America: Oral History Project at Queens College New York is gathering stories from Irish Immigrants,” *Irish Times*, September 11, 2018, <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/abroad/the-irish-in-america-i-arrived-unloved-unskilled-and-ready-to-take-on-the-world-1.3620914>.

The Wake of AIDS

In McCourt's 2007 saga, *Now Voyagers: The Night Sea Journey*, it is noted that there were "four poetic genres upon which the Irish bards had founded their reputations, and only one, the aisling was of a keening, dreamy nature, mourning the loss of something precious, seeing it come again in a dream."¹⁸⁵ Indeed, the bards were known for two types of poetic verse: satirical attacks on their enemies and eulogies of their patrons. *Time Remaining* distinctly reproduces one of the fundamental duties of bardic elegy, which, to use Kiberd's words, is "the listing of the warrior dead."¹⁸⁶ In a 1983 piece in the *New York Native* that effectively ignited AIDS activism, Larry Kramer points to an epidemic of silence among America's state and government officials around the growing numbers of deaths from the still then hardly understood structure and effects of HIV and AIDS.¹⁸⁷ Gearóid Ó Cruaíaoich has more recently identified orality in modern Irish cultural traditions such as reading "Dead Lists" before a congregation at church, where the names of the recently deceased are communicated on All Souls' Day.¹⁸⁸ The Irish-American activist and author, Michael Patrick MacDonald, begins his memoir, the aptly titled, *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie*, with reading such a Dead List at a Catholic church in South Boston.¹⁸⁹ Elsewhere, in his book about Irish mourning rituals on Achill Island in County Mayo, Kevin Toolis notes the local radio station's three-times-daily announcements of the recently deceased: "Listeners tune in to know who has died in their village, in the rest of Mayo, in the Connaught region, or in far-flung outposts of exile: Cleveland, Ohio, Los Angeles, California, Preston, England, Auckland, New Zealand."¹⁹⁰ These examples illuminate the communal practices enacted by a

¹⁸⁵ McCourt, *Now Voyagers*, 120.

¹⁸⁶ Kiberd, "Synge, Yeats and Bardic Poetry," 78.

¹⁸⁷ Larry Kramer, "1,112 And Counting," *New York Native*, March 14-27, 1983, 1, 18, 19, 21, 23. "Enough," Kramer states firmly at the end of his article. "I am going to close by doing what Ron Grossman did at GMHC's [Gay Men's Health Crisis] second Open Forum last November at Julia Richman High School. He listed the names of the patients he lost to AIDS. Here is a list of 21 dead men I knew" (23).

¹⁸⁸ Gearóid Ó Cruaíaoich, "Orality and Modern Irish Culture: A Personal Strand of the Weave," in *Anáil an Bhéil Bheo: Orality and Modern Irish Culture*, ed. Nessa Cronin, Seán Crosson, and John Eastlake (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 19.

¹⁸⁹ Michael Patrick MacDonald, *All Souls: A Family Story From Southie* (London: Little, Brown, 2000), 1. In a chapter entitled, "Exile," MacDonald details not only his mother's compassionate volunteering on AIDS wards in Boston, where she told stories, played music, and gave makeovers to the patients: "Ma said she wanted to help the dying patients prepare to 'cross over to the other side,' and she figured some makeup and a few laughs were as good as the Rosary any day" (200). Later in the same chapter, MacDonald describes his participation in a group for those in South Boston and Charlestown who had had friends and family who had "died too young." There MacDonald recalls meeting many Irish-American mothers whose sons had of AIDS-related illnesses. This experience redeems South Boston ("Southie") for MacDonald: "At those meetings, I learned even more how much I loved the real Southie, the good Southie. It all came home to me when one mother, explaining how her son who'd died of AIDS hadn't been allowed a funeral at a local church, and how she'd had to take him to a gay church, brought the lone father in our group close to tears (260).

¹⁹⁰ Kevin Toolis, *My Father's Wake: How the Irish Teach Us to Live, Love and Die* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2018), loc. 500 of 2685, Kindle.

group commemorating and bearing witness to the death of kin and community. “Let’s see,” Odette says, catching her breath:

so far we’ve succeeded in the way of numbering ourselves, you and I, the gay DeVors, Miss Charity, Miss Faith, Miss Mercedes, and the two Magyars: Miss Worthington—commonly known as *Miss Thing*, and later in her career, when she was the co-doorman with Dorothy Dean at Max’s Kansas City, and had had her head shaved so as to turn herself into a ringer for Mayakovsky as photographed by Rodchenko, a bizarre and even hilarious turn for a refugee of the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary and sometime disciple of Ayn Rand to do, as *Mister Miss Fierce Thing*—and Mrs. Claudia Caswell DeWitt, called *Miss Cass*. That’s eight all told, to whom were added, in the Fullness of Time, *Miss Hildegarde Dorsay*, *Miss Hope Chest Tone—Hojo*—and *Miss Mary Garden Gates—Mae-Mae*.¹⁹¹

In *Time Remaining*, the Dead List forms an important part of Odette’s unravelling theatrics in which the Eleven against Heaven girls are part of an unruly cast.

McCourt’s book professes to be akin to an Irish, or Irish-American, wake, and the author himself has advanced this charge in interviews. In 2007, for example, McCourt told Dylan Foley, that *Time Remaining* “was a wake with stories, like an Irish wake. The bodies weren’t there. They were distributed all over in the text.”¹⁹² According to Conrad M. Arensberg, “[i]n the flashes of poetic genius which seem so prone to trip from an Irish tongue, death acquires a deeper and more poignant meaning than many another racial tongue could give it.”¹⁹³ A long-held tradition in Ireland, particularly in rural parts of the country, the wake, observes Arensberg, was the purest demonstration of community values: “In the crowds that come to the wake-house to pay their respects to the dead and condole with the living; in the long lines of marching figures, traps, jaunting cars and motorcars that make a slow procession over the open roads from wake-house to church and from church to graveside, the observer glimpses an epitome of rural life in which all its values are mingled.”¹⁹⁴

As Seán Ó Súilleabháin details in *Irish Wake Amusements*, the wake had, by the 1960s, dramatically transformed in its appearance. What had previously been a busy, sometimes raucous, and merry event, has since evolved into a solemn affair. According to Ó Súilleabháin, “wakes in Ireland and in other countries in former decades were far from being the solemn occasions which they now are.”¹⁹⁵ It was not uncommon to encounter loud conversation, drinking and various games and contests among guests to the wake-house. Games included “Lifting the Corpse,” where not the deceased but usually a stout man would

¹⁹¹ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 116.

¹⁹² Dylan Foley, “James McCourt on His Writing Process.”

¹⁹³ Conrad M. Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman: An Anthropological Study*, rev. ed. (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland, 1988), 189.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 189-90.

¹⁹⁵ Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1967), 26.

lie down on the floor while fellow mourners attempted to lift him; games of hide-and-seek; catch games; and even fighting.¹⁹⁶ In *Irish Folkways*, E. Estyn Evans explains that these “cathartic extravagances of the wakes not only served to dissipate overcharged tensions but were closely concerned with ancestral spirits and the perpetuation of the life of the community.”¹⁹⁷ The scenes of the wake-house were also at times sexual and bawdy in nature, so much so that the practice faced opposition from the Church since at least the seventeenth century.¹⁹⁸ “As regards unseemly behaviour at wakes,” writes Ó Súilleabháin, “the Synod [of Armagh in 1614] declared that the pious feelings of devout people were outraged by the singing of lewd songs and the playing of obscene games by silly fellows, conduct which would not be permissible even on occasions of merrymaking.”¹⁹⁹ In a recent study of death in the Irish novel, Bridget English maintains that the Irish wake since the nineteenth century has been “both a site of opposition to Catholic control and a place where pagan and Catholic beliefs coexist.”²⁰⁰

Storytelling was a cornerstone of the waking procedures of Irish culture. Delargy suggests that storytelling in the Irish tradition was most often performed at night, and the same applied to storytelling at wakes.²⁰¹ “The storytelling was carried on everywhere in Ireland,” explains Ó Súilleabháin, “and followed an informal pattern; in one corner of the kitchen, a storyteller, usually an elderly man, sat surrounded by a group of interested listeners, while another recited his tale to a different group elsewhere.”²⁰² McCourt’s narrative, too, unfolds in the middle of night and involves the transmission of tales between two characters. Storytellers, Ó Súilleabháin adds, “were welcomed at wakes, as the stories helped to while away the long night hours and kept listeners from becoming drowsy or falling asleep towards dawn.”²⁰³ Reaching the end of their train journey, Delancey begins to succumb to tiredness in the short time remaining in his and Odette’s quest. “Meanwhile,” he says, “undeterred, she rattled on—I decided, in the manner of a comrade on the beach at Normandy, keeping another awake to stay alive in the coming battle.”²⁰⁴ Once the weary travellers make it to Delancey’s home on Long Island, Odette, who has been promised a cup of hot cocoa on arrival, begins a

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 40, 116-23, 102-15, 56-74.

¹⁹⁷ E. Estyn Evans, *Irish Folk Ways*, (London: Routledge, 1989), 292.

¹⁹⁸ For an insightful study of such taboo activities at the wake, see Gearóid Ó Cruaí, “The ‘Merry Wake,’” in *Irish Popular Culture 1650-1850*, ed. James S. Donnelly, Jr. and Kerby A. Miller (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1998), 173-200.

¹⁹⁹ Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements*, 146.

²⁰⁰ Bridget English, *Laying out the Bones: Death and Dying in the Modern Irish Novel* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2017), 6. In chapter five of her book, English considers the modern wake in Anne Enright’s novel, *The Gathering* (150-79).

²⁰¹ Delargy, *The Gaelic Story-Teller*, 7.

²⁰² Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements*, 27.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 250.

game of tarot cards. Card playing, too, was a common practice at wakes in Ireland, particularly when the person who had died was older and the group of mourners small.²⁰⁵

In the absence of the bodies, McCourt's stories, which he began writing on long sheets of paper in County Mayo around 1989, already eight years into the crisis, might in the end be closer to the elegies and dirges of the Irish poetic tradition. Ó Súilleabháin indicates in his study of the Irish wake that these were not generally "recited over the corpse, but were composed at some later stage. They may be termed literary compositions."²⁰⁶ Reciters of the oral lament, Bourke writes, "were grief therapists, as well as inciters of public outrage."²⁰⁷ Odette's part in McCourt's book is, following this logic, twofold: her camp tales are at once respite from the stultifying political atmosphere and the effects of loss and, conversely, a confrontation of such political responses which refuse to acknowledge the impact of the loss of life and community in the epidemic. As Ó Súilleabháin points out, the scant record of the tradition of the wake in Europe was made possible only through a series of plagues which hit populations on the continent in the Middle Ages, such as the Plague of 1349. "In recording the many deaths and general misery caused by these plagues," he writes, "some contemporary writers of the period have occasionally referred to the wakes held over the dead and the amusements associated with them."²⁰⁸ In the case of the AIDS epidemic, now global pandemic, *Time Remaining* stands as a reminder of the devastating effects of what had first been labelled as a "gay plague" and "gay cancer," as well as the grief and resilience of those most affected.

As Bourke has argued, and as this chapter has already explained, the folk traditions of Ireland migrated with those who left the country throughout the centuries of emigration. The traditions of the wake were part of this cultural migration. "Even when the Irish emigrated to other countries," Ó Súilleabháin argues, "they took with them many of their customs, moulded by their traditional way of thinking. Thus, so far as we know, Irish wakes abroad resembled a good deal those held in the homeland."²⁰⁹ In his story, "Going to America," Éamon Kelly, recalling a childhood gathering in rural Ireland for a member of the community emigrating across the Atlantic, writes that "the best American wakes they say were in Ireland—and the best Irish wakes in America!"²¹⁰ The "American wake" was a commonplace

²⁰⁵ Ó Súilleabháin, *Irish Wake Amusements*, 31.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁰⁷ Angela Bourke, "Lamenting the Dead," in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Volume IV (Irish Women's Writing and Traditions)*, ed. Angela Bourke, Siobhán Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, et. al. (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002), 1366.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 160.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 161.

²¹⁰ Éamon Kelly, *Ireland's Master of Storyteller: The Collected Stories of Éamon Kelly* (Dublin: Marino Books, 1998), 18.

practice in Ireland in the periods of mass emigration during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and these events mourned the loss of loved ones, who were set to depart the shores of Ireland without plans to return.²¹¹ According to English, the persistence of the American wake into the twentieth century, even in the era of air travel, suggests “how strongly the wake persisted as a mode for negotiating death and departure.”²¹²

If the American wake in Ireland became the cultural articulation for the loss, or metaphoric death, of Irish people through emigration, Eamonn Wall in a short story from the 1993 collection, *Ireland in Exile: Irish Writers Abroad*, presents the idea of what might be considered an “Irish burial,” the reintegration of the diasporic subject in America back into the literal land and soil of Ireland. Wall’s “Four Paintings by Danny Maloney” tells the story of an Irish-American woman’s memories of her former lover and recently deceased Irish friend, Danny, who has just died from an AIDS-related illness in New York. The arrival of Maloney’s parents and sister in New York to bring their son and brother back to Ireland after his death punctures the otherwise serene atmosphere of the narrator’s meditation on the man she knew—the story is framed by each of the four paintings by Maloney, which depict a distance from the homeland and peacefulness attached to home in America—with grave notes of Irish-Catholic shame and guilt.²¹³

Like her sisters, Faith Healy had requested to be scattered in European waters after she had passed. Healy was the youngest of the Eleven Against Heaven and last to die, and the order of her place in the group mirrors the order of Odette’s ashen offerings to the rivers, fjords, and wells of Europe. Dublin is the first port of call on Odette’s adventure overseas, while Mayo is the last. “Only an Irish girl would have come up with the Healy proposition for the disposition of the only true remains—half of her in the Liffey, on her mother’s side of the Old Country, and the other half with her father’s people, in the saint’s well at Ballintuber,” Odette tells Delancey.²¹⁴ According to Odette, Healy’s “father threw her out of the house on Staten Island after Lillian Law entrapped her in the ferry terminal tea room.”²¹⁵ The Irish condemnation of queer desire from Wall’s story resounds here in McCourt’s narrative, producing an echo chamber of Irish-Catholic shaming that infects both sides of the green Atlantic. Faith Healy is taken in by an Irish aunt, May, and eventually finds a home within the Eleven Against Heaven. In the wake of inevitable and fast-approaching death, however,

²¹¹ See Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 556.

²¹² English, *Laying out the Bones*, 14.

²¹³ Eamonn Wall, “Four Paintings by Danny Maloney,” in *Ireland in Exile: Irish Writers Abroad*, ed. Dermot Bolger (Dublin: New Island Books, 1993), 69-76.

²¹⁴ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 129.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

Healy makes peace with a hostile family life from the past and asks to be scattered in the waters of the ancestral homeland.

In a study of AIDS in Irish-British David Rees's 1986 novel, *The Hunger*, Ed Madden describes what he terms the "foreign origin story" in Irish AIDS narratives, whereby HIV infection has occurred beyond the national boundaries of Ireland, usually in the United States or Britain. "Danny Maloney" reproduces this motif common to Irish AIDS literature. In a reference to Gaye Shortland's *Mind That 'Tis My Brother*, however, Madden illustrates a case that radically "defuses foreign threat through its rich and careful attention to language and community in Cork, as well as through the reintegration of the dead man within the Irish community, literally when his ashes are accidentally mixed with the post-memorial service tea, and the community drinks his ashes in a Eucharistic parody."²¹⁶ Martin Sixsmith's *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee*, unlike the later film based on it, centres on the life and death of Irish-born American lawyer Michael A. Hess, who had been sold by the Catholic Church as a child and, upon being diagnosed with AIDS as an adult, revisits his Irish background in the hopes of finding his mother Philomena. Hess's eventual return in death to Ireland, where his body is buried, becomes a spiritual and psychological cleansing for the Irish American, who finally returns to the soil of his homeland. Sixsmith, however, does nothing to disintegrate the enduring connection between stigma, shame, and HIV in an Irish context.²¹⁷

McCourt's *Time Remaining* echoes Shortland's novel, reintegrating the Irish-American Faith Healy into the waters and well of Ireland in a darkly camp scene of diasporic return. To be sure, Odette, too, experiences, a sense of pathos returning to Ireland at the end of her journey. Instead of going back to the Mai Ouis, she returns "to May-o, perhaps in the name of, or in the stead of, my people—forebears—and realizing that in the entire universe of beautiful sorrows, both general and particular, there is none more beautiful than memorial Ireland."²¹⁸ Irishness and melancholia are intimately linked in Odette's mind, evidenced later in the tale when she asks if the Irish, like drag queens and the characters in Dostoevsky, "have an inveterate longing for voluptuous suffering?" an observation this thesis will return to in a discussion on melancholia and Irish-American identity in the work of Eileen Myles.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Ed Madden, "AIDS and *The Hunger*: Fiction, Biopolitics and the Historical Imagination," in "Biopolitical Ireland," ed. Niamh Campbell and George Legg, special issue, *Irish Review* 53 (2016): 66.

²¹⁷ Martin Sixsmith, *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee: A Mother, A Son and a Fifty-Year Search* (London: Pan Books, 2009). Sixsmith's highly literary account of Hess's diagnosis problematically connects being adopted and separated from mother and Mother Ireland with engaging in risky sexual behaviour that exposes him to infection.

²¹⁸ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 244.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 249. The link between the Irish and melancholia has in the colonial projects of British imperialism also been ideological, serving to disqualify Irish self-determination and rule. See L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971), 94-96.

Not Yet Dead

In storytelling there is something profound that resists the sentence of death, that goes beyond its coercive aspect, that escapes the downward thrust of the knife.²²⁰

Conforming to the tone of the traditional Irish wake, however, McCourt's book refuses to end on a sombre note:

As the train eases into the final station, one might expect the book to assume a tragic arc ... But *Time Remaining* upends those expectations. Against a vast darkness, Odette's humor glimmers heroically, like a fragile vein of gold in heavy stone. In the months and years after the book was published, several people told McCourt that they read it aloud to their dying lovers, and together, in what time remained, they screamed with laughter.²²¹

In the closing moments of McCourt's *Time Remaining*, Delancey, in the darkness of the remaining night, having already seen Odette to her own bed, asks, "Am I really going to tell more stories—put more of it down?"²²² Odette, who has told him when the train arrived in Bridgehampton, "Your mother's stories don't end, dear, they just stop," would probably insist there is no choice in the matter.²²³ "Then," Odette wonders much earlier in the narrative, "when I've finished telling the Saga of the Eleven against Heaven—what? For can I bear to *conceive* of myself not telling somebody *something*?"²²⁴ In "The Storyteller," Benjamin argues that "there is no story for which the question as to how it continued would not be legitimate. The novelist, on the other hand, cannot hope to take the smallest step beyond that limit at which he invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life by writing 'Finis.'"²²⁵ In other words, the story might stop but it does not end. Indeed, in an early draft of the story, McCourt includes a Sunday morning scene in which the previous evening's storytelling session continues on into the morning, when, thinking he is hearing his lover Phil running the tapes from the Sony recorder, Delancey finds Odette reciting the same tales over pickled aubergine at the kitchen table.²²⁶

The power of AIDS literature, like McCourt's *Time Remaining*, rests in its ability to dwell not merely on the devastating losses brought about not only through disease but political incompetence, scapegoating and homophobia; fiction dealing with those affected by the epidemic allows for a resurrection of the lives and desires vital before HIV's emergence.

²²⁰ Calasso, *The Ruin of Kasch*, 133.

²²¹ LaPointe, "A Vibrant, Elegiac Novel of the AIDS Pandemic."

²²² McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 271.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 255.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

²²⁵ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 100.

²²⁶ Box 6, folder "Time Remaining," James McCourt and Vincent Virga Papers, Gen MSS 845 General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, June 13, 2018.

As the Irish poet, O'Maurigan, says in the face of sex and death, "I prefer the sex and the resurrected."²²⁷ In Clum's words,

what is remembered in this barren land in which love has become death is not the neurasthenic dry couplings of Eliot's rainless land but a lost idyll which no water can restore. In this world memory and desire take on new meaning as new links to the past must be forged. The present is sad and terrifying, and the future is drastically foreshortened. Affirming the past is affirming the power of sexual desire; affirming the foreshortened, uncertain future is affirming the possibility of love in the face of death.²²⁸

As Delancey himself affirms in the book's epilogue, "I can *think them not yet dead*, and if I write this down—although they are dead, as I've said right at the beginning—that there will be in the telling a point at which *they will not yet have been dead*."²²⁹ "There are no dead," says Odette, echoing the words of Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck, "there are no dead ... we simply go through life imagining the unlikely, and occupy the time remaining in re-editing, categorizing, and canonizing the attributes and performances of the seemingly disappeared."²³⁰

The storyteller's recourse to death, Benjamin argues, serves not to disclose any grand insight into the meaning of life, but rather to lead listeners to the moral of the story.²³¹ McCourt, too, eschews the quixotic and totalizing need to unearth the meaning of life in an age of disease and death. In fact, Delancey confirms this early on in the story. "One thing I know," he stresses, "is that my telling the stories of the dead is in no way bringing order to any kind to a mass of experience the better to preserve it—or anything like that malarkey you still sometimes hear literary theorists peddle." Delancey's understanding of the task of recording the chaos of AIDS conforms, in his own words, more with the art of Jackson Pollock and Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, in which he declares: "Thus the heat expelled by the computer's cooling fan means that when a computer records an item in memory, the total amount of disorder in the universe still goes up."²³² "If it is thus the 'meaning of life' which is at issue in the novel," writes Brooks, "we must on the other hand talk of the 'moral of the story,' that is, of a participation and a sharing in wisdom between the storyteller and his listener."²³³ Unlike the death drive of the novel, which reaches its neat

²²⁷ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 6.

²²⁸ Clum, "AIDS, Memory, and Desire," 648.

²²⁹ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 271.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

²³¹ Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 99.

²³² McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 67.

²³³ Brooks, "The Storyteller," 26.

conclusion, the story unsettles closure and appeals to dialogue.²³⁴ For Brooks, this is the concern of many postmodernist prose works, which replace the “authoritative narrative voices” of the novel with “idiosyncratic and engaged narratives.”²³⁵ *Time Remaining* is part of this literary tradition, relying on the communion of orality and the wisdom of storytelling. In a 1964 essay on the enduring connection between Irish oral traditions and the story, Vivian Mercier urged authors to remap the paths of their creative inspiration in order find a way “back to drama and the speaking voice” that would positively transform their aesthetic.²³⁶ It is no wonder, then, that McCourt ends his tale with Delancey, a performance artist, sailing on a train through a barrier-free Penn Station. “And that’s why I suppose I feel my story won’t end crashed into a wall,” he says. “In the old days we used to say, *I can’t kill myself, I have tickets. I said, I can’t die in my sleep—I have a performance to give . . .*”²³⁷

Someday: Then and Now and Tomorrow

Taking its name from the medical diagnostics test routinely used to detect the presence of HIV antibodies in human blood, Robert Farber’s *Western Blot Series*, a collection of panels primarily constructed between 1991 and 1994, is a poignant artistic response to HIV and AIDS in the (then) present of the early era of the epidemic juxtaposed with voices from Europe’s Black Death in the fourteenth century. *Western Blot # 19* fuses together the words of Irish friar and chronicler, John Clyn of Kilkenny, who perished in the Great Plague of the mid-fourteenth century, and Vito Russo, the American gay film historian and LGBT and AIDS activist, who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1990 at the age of forty-four.²³⁸ To the right of Clyn’s parchment Farber leaves his own handprint, which is intersected by a graph displaying the decreasing level of the artist’s T-cell count. The word that separates an excerpt from Russo’s powerful speech at the Department of Health and Human Services, Washington DC, in 1988 and Clyn’s urgent account of the death that surrounded him is the utopian

²³⁴ See Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 140. For Brooks, the concomitant desire for ending and resistance to the end of desire in the novel’s design signifies an enactment of Freud’s death drive.

²³⁵ Brooks, “The Tale vs. The Novel,” 292.

²³⁶ Vivian Mercier, “The Irish Short Story and Oral Tradition,” 115.

²³⁷ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 273.

²³⁸ Clyn writes: “I, as among the dead, waiting till death do come, have put into writing truthfully what I have heard and verified. And that the writing not perish with the scribe. I add parchment to continue it, if by chance anyone be left in the future, and any child of Adam may escape this pestilence and continue the work thus commenced.” At the end of Clyn’s account, the words “Here it seems the author died” are written in in another’s handwriting. *Western Blot #19*, 1993, mixed media on wood panels, 60 x 81 inches, Collection Patrick Moore. Displayed in Carl Belz, “Someday: Then and Now and Tomorrow,” in *Someday: Then and Now and Tomorrow*, Robert Farber: *A Retrospective*, ed. Carl Belz (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University, 1997 and Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1998), 34. For a recent translation and edited version of Clyn’s writing, see Bernadette Williams, ed. and trans., *The Annals of Ireland by Friar John Clyn* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007).

utterance: “someday.” This is itself a hopeful reiteration of Russo’s own turn to the future in his 1988 speech: “Someday the AIDS crisis will be over, and when that day has come and gone, there will be people alive on this earth who will hear that once there was a terrible disease and that a brave group of people stood up and fought, and in some cases died so that others might live.” Extending beyond the prophetic call from both Clyn and Russo is a blank canvas and a horizontally spanning strip of wood, Farber’s “version of the added parchment where his own story will someday be continued.”²³⁹ As Carl Belz writes in the programme for a 1997-1998 retrospective show on Farber’s AIDS art, *Someday: Then and Now and Tomorrow*, “*Western Blot #19* is a trenchant picture: in excavating the past, it draws the past into the present and thereby projects the present into the future.”²⁴⁰

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz calls for a productive theory of utopia that, while enacted in the present, is “squarely the past and in its queer relationality promises a future.”²⁴¹ In order to achieve this, Muñoz focuses on queer cultural forms emerging before, during, and shortly after the Stonewall Inn riots in 1969. In these productions Muñoz locates a “not-yet-conscious” promise of political, social, and sexual utopianism. In “I Go Back to the Mais Oui,” Delancey provides a meditation that sits remarkably well with Muñoz’s thoughts. Delancey quotes a passage from a book he has read:

The past’s unchallengeable facts account as much as the present’s uncontrollable accidents for the tragedies of human fortune. Faith in the fixed idols of anteriority, whether personal or social, serves as well as the ruins of past authority to disorder the conduct of present life.²⁴²

Delancey produces in this instance a remedy for the conditions of present life—a time of illness, death, stigma, and silence—rooted not in an abstract and unrealistic fantasy of the future, but instead in the ruins of the past, where the “not-yet-conscious” material for a queerer futurity resides. In his preface to the anthology, *Vital Signs: Essential AIDS Fiction*, Dale Peck suggests that “fiction and memoir serve first and foremost as memorials: to worlds lost or worlds that never were.”²⁴³ In McCourt’s *Time Remaining*, the reader is met with the memorialisation of a world that was, as well as a world that never was, or, more aptly, a world that remains to be in the era of AIDS.

For Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz, queer oral history, which crucially “reflects disparate desires and memories and engages a shared imagining of future possibilities,” is key to such a

²³⁹ Belz, “Someday,” 39.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 6.

²⁴² McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 30.

²⁴³ Dale Peck, “Preaching to the Converted,” foreword to *Vital Signs: Essential AIDS Fiction*, ed. Richard Canning (New York: Carroll and Graf, 2007), viii.

utopian project.²⁴⁴ Such a methodology is equally vital in pedagogical and intergenerational terms. As Anne Markey and Anne O'Connor have shown, the Irish word for “folklore,” a term introduced in 1846 by William Thomas, manages in many ways to capture an important element left out in the English word. “*Béaloideas*” translates most closely to “oral wisdom or knowledge.”²⁴⁵ Wisdom, for Benjamin, is the prized gift of the storytelling tradition. McCourt’s gift is a literary practice profoundly attuned to the educational and interpersonal power of orality and storytelling encapsulated in the Irish term *béaloideas*. Exasperated by the condescension of the “ACT/OUT children” of AIDS politics, Odette identifies a possibility for queer futurity in the words of “one of the last of the poets who behaved like a poet,” W. H. Auden:

In yester times it
was different: the old could still be helpful
when they could nicely envisage the future
as a named and settled landscape their children
would make the same sense of as they did
laughing and weeping at the same stories²⁴⁶

“No More,” she concludes. In this passage from Auden’s poem, the exchange of stories between generations acts as a vital connection between historical experience and what might be thought of as *béaloideas*. The second division of Irish oral storytelling, Delargy explains in an early essay, is “the story which is an exemplification of belief or custom, or enshrines some other lore or teaching—the purpose of which is to explain, to instruct or to inform.”²⁴⁷ It is this form of intergenerational exchange of wisdom and knowledge that McCourt is most interested in, and, as this chapter has demonstrated, intersecting traditions of queer and Irish folklore provide the means through which the author enacts this exchange. McCourt has even recently become a participant in an oral history project that aims to preserve the stories of lore imaginatively constructed in his own written work.²⁴⁸ As Elgy Gillespie foreshadowed in her 1985 article on UCD Department of Folklore’s storytelling preservation project, “Video keeps the story going.”²⁴⁹

In a review of McCourt’s *Queer Street*, American historian of gay culture, George Chauncey, whose *Gay New York* is cited in McCourt’s book as one of the most influential

²⁴⁴ Murphy, Pierce, and Ruiz, “What Makes Queer Oral History Different,” 8.

²⁴⁵ Anne Markey and Anne O’Connor, introduction to *Folklore and Modern Irish Writing*, ed. Anne Markey and Anne O’Connor (Kildare: Irish Academic Press, 2014), 5.

²⁴⁶ McCourt, *Time Remaining*, 138. Odette recites Auden’s “Epistle to a Godson,” published in the eponymous 1972 collection, the poet’s last published volume before his death in 1973. W.H. Auden, *Epistle to a Godson* (New York: Random House, 1972).

²⁴⁷ J. H. Delargy, “Irish Stories and Storytellers: Some Reflections and Memories,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 31, no. 121 (March 1942): 32.

²⁴⁸ Dylan Foley has recorded several videos of McCourt for a grassroots oral-visual history project, available on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2Q-ty2VCpo>.

²⁴⁹ Elgy Gillespie, “Video Keeps the Story Going,” *The Irish Times*, July 25, 1985, 1.

texts to his own social history compendium, positions McCourt as the last in his line of storytellers, a queer *seanchaí*. He writes,

“Queer Street” reads like a long conversation with a gay uncle who insists on occupying center stage. He can be frustrating at times, because he won’t stop for questions or let you interrupt his long and seemingly pointless digressions. But then he takes your breath away by raising the curtain on a world you barely knew existed, and you can only gaze in wonder.²⁵⁰

As of writing this chapter, the next instalment to McCourt’s Czigowchwz Saga is in progress, and the Dalkey Archive Press’s next issue of its literary magazine *Review of Contemporary Fiction* is devoted to critical essays on the author’s prolific literary output. McCourt carries on weaving tales of a realm edging more closely to obscurity, but his work continues to shed light on the wisdom and knowledge to be gained from feeling backward and cruising utopia.

²⁵⁰ George Chauncey, “Pre-Stonewall Has Been Given A Bad Rap,” E18.

CHAPTER THREE

A Queer Contender: Drag, Disidentification, and Irish-American Masculinity in the Performances of Peggy Shaw

Introduction: Against the Ropes

In their analysis of the St Patrick's Day parade debates, Sally Munt and Katherine O'Donnell identify the AOH's position as symptomatic of a wider Irish-American cultural stereotype, one that has particular currency in the United States. According to them, "Irish men in the United States are in/famous for their fighting spirit/readiness to brawl (perhaps most aptly symbolized in the football team, the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame."¹ The association between pugnacity and Irishness in American culture and the public imagination has been diversely performed in history and culture, from, for example, James Cagney's thuggish criminality in *White Heat* (1949) to the "Fighting 69th" infantry regiment, tracing its roots back to the Civil War. "One of the traits of the very Irish is that the fight is paramount," said one anonymous reader of *New York* magazine.² It has been in the arena of prizefighting, however, that the link between Irishness and fighting has most obviously and spectacularly played out. Nathaniel Fleischer, founder of the popular American boxing magazine, *The Ring*, for instance, has noted the prominence of the Irish in the development of the sport in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: "American ring history from the middle of the nineteenth century through the early part of the twentieth is primarily a history of Irish supremacy. In every division, the headliners were, with few exceptions, either immigrants from the land of Erin, or native sons of Hibernian parents."³

In his study of sports in nineteenth-century America, Ralph Wilcox points out that "a veritable library of biographies, novels, films, manuals, and newspaper and magazine accounts has, over time, built a reputation of mythical proportions for the Irish-American

¹ Sally Munt and Katherine O'Donnell, "Pride and Prejudice: Legalizing Compulsory Heterosexuality in New York's Annual St. Patrick's Day Parades," *Space and Culture* 10, no.1 (2007): 101, <https://doi.org/10.1177/126331206296379>. Munt and O'Donnell claim that this image distinguishes Irish-American men and masculinity from the historical image of men and masculinity in colonised Ireland. In Ireland, they suggest, Matthew Arnold's portrayal of the "Celt" painted Irish manliness as "romantic, mystical, emotional, and infantile" (ibid.). Although, whether this image of Irish masculinity in Ireland has endured into the late twentieth century and early twenty-first is certainly debatable.

² Quoted in Ray O'Hanlon, *The New Irish Americans* (Niwot, CO: Roberts Rinehart, 1998), 114.

³ Nathaniel Fleischer, *The Heavyweight Championship* (London: Putnam, 1949), 55. For a concise history of the Irish of Ireland and, to a much lesser extent, America in the ring, see Patrick Myler, *The Fighting Irish* (Dingle: Brandon, 1987).

prizefighter.”⁴ Wilcox identifies a host of Irish and Irish-American fighters from the antebellum period, including Sam O’Rourke, Cornelius Horrigan, John C. Heenan, James “Yankee” Sullivan, and John Morrissey. From the post-Civil War period, he lists Paddy Ryan, Jake Kilrain, John L. Sullivan, the “Boston Strong Boy”, and “Gentleman Jim” Corbett. Sullivan was a particularly formidable character who, indeed, played a leading role in the constitution of the bachelor subculture of the saloons in the United States alluded to in the first chapter of the thesis.⁵ Patrick Myler has argued that the Irish-American Sullivan had been inspired by the “stirring tales” of the legendary Irish pugilist, Dan Donnelly, the bare-fist boxing champion of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁶ Facing nativist hostility, the positive image of the Irish “noble fighter was at least an escape from being lampooned as squabbling apes.”⁷ According to Patrick Redmond, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, twelve of the thirteen heavyweight champions in American were either Irish-born or had at least one Irish parent.⁸

Larry McCarthy continues Wilcox’s study into the twentieth century, when “the reputation of the Irish or Irish-American boxer had virtually eclipsed that of the Irish in any other sport.” The public image of the Irish immigrant and Irish American as drunken fighters and champion boxers, McCarthy argues, “coalesced and seemed to validate the common epithet—‘Fighting Irish.’”⁹ Two prominent figures during this period were Jack Dempsey and Gene Tunney. Dempsey, in particular, “gained celebrity by combining success in the ring with a sensationally masculine public image.”¹⁰ Prizefighting, as Wilcox reveals, was in many ways a crucial catalyst for class mobility among the Irish in America, “promising them a rapid escape from poverty and discrimination.”¹¹ As conventional histories of the Irish in America conclude, this rise into the middle class was largely a success story. As Peter Quinn notes, by the outbreak of the Second World War, “the association of Irish and fighting, once so basic to Paddy’s disruptive image, had become a rallying cry for American patriotism.”¹² For Ray O’Hanlon, in the ring the Irish were offered the possibility of self-definition, which had been

⁴ Ralph Wilcox, “Irish Americans in Sports: The Nineteenth Century,” in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J. J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 444.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Patrick Myler, *Regency Rogue: Dan Donnelly, His Life and Legends* (Dublin: O’Brien, 1976), 149.

⁷ O’Hanlon, *The New Irish Americans*, 115.

⁸ Patrick R. Redmond, *The Irish and the Making of American Sport, 1835-1920* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 8.

⁹ Larry McCarthy, “Irish Americans in Sports: The Twentieth Century,” in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J. J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 457.

¹⁰ Ibid., 458.

¹¹ Wilcox, “Irish Americans in Sports: The Nineteenth Century,” 444.

¹² Peter Quinn, “Looking for Jimmy,” in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J. J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 667.

denied to them in colonised Ireland: “Irish ‘civilization’ was like a boxer on the ropes, arms held up in defensive posture, eyes half-closed, trapped in a small place with nowhere to run and damn little time to contemplate the glories of creation.”¹³ Ironically, entering the ring the Irish in America found a way out of the bind of barbarity engineered through British imperial and American discourses of incivility and savagery.

Gerald G. Gems has shown that, while Irish Catholics dominated the sport of boxing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were succeeded by Jewish fighters, then African Americans, and Latinos.¹⁴ Writing in 2006, Eoin Cannon claims, “Irish America’s boxing glory is inscribed not in today’s professional rankings but in the annals of boxing history.”¹⁵ Despite the material decline of the Irish-American prominence in American prizefighting since the 1930s, literature and film have played and continue to play a role in perpetuating the image of the Irish-American boxer and fighter. In 1931, Wallace Beery starred as Andy “Champ” Purcell in King Vidor’s *The Champ*, which was remade in 1979 with Jon Voight in the leading role. In the later version, Purcell was changed to Billy Flynn. The classic Irish-American Hollywood motion picture, John Ford’s *The Quiet Man* (1952), as a further example, stars John Wayne as a traumatised Irish-born American boxer who seeks respite and refuge in rural Ireland, eventually finding romance with Maureen O’Hara’s character, Kate Danaher. In 1954, Marlon Brando starred as Terry Malloy, aspiring fighter and a pawn in the network of corruption permeating a community of crooked Irish Americans, in Elia Kazan’s *On the Waterfront*, which has arguably become one of the quintessential boxing movies in American cinema. In literature, Joyce Carol Oates’ 1994 novel, *What I Lived For* plays out the conflicting ambitions of Irish-American Jerome Corcoran, who is torn between a working-class fighting Irish background and a promising political career for the future.

More recently, Clint Eastwood’s *Million Dollar Baby*, released in 2004, was recognised with critical acclaim and awards. In 2005, Russell Crowe took on the biographical role of Irish-American boxer James J. Braddock in Ron Howard’s *Cinderella Man*. Mark Wahlberg and Christian Bale starred in David Russell’s 2010 biographical sports drama, *The Fighter*, as boxing brothers George Michael Ward Jr. and Dicky Eklund in working-class Lowell, Massachusetts. “Irish” Micky Ward (Wahlberg) is a retired professional boxer who previously held the World Boxing Union light welterweight title. The endurance of the Irish

¹³ O’Hanlon, *The New Irish Americans*, 115.

¹⁴ Gerald R. Gems, “The Politics of Boxing: Resistance, Religion, and Working Class Assimilation,” *International Sports Journal* 8, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 89, EBSCOhost.

¹⁵ Eoin Cannon, “The Heavyweight Champion of Irishness: Ethnic Fighting Identities Today,” *New Hibernia Review* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 2006): 92, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20558088>.

male boxer in the centre of the ring proves there is still cultural and financial currency to be earned from the trope of the fighting Irish.

In their framing of the conflict between the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) and the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO), O'Donnell and Munt manage to align the Fighting Irish image with patriarchal bigotry, heterosexual defensiveness, and homophobia. Furthermore, they firmly situate pugnacious masculinity within the bodies of Irish-American males in their discussion, leaving no space for the possibility of female masculinity. On March 16, 1996, the ILGO celebrated its sixth year in New York City by holding its by then annual protest march against its exclusion from the parade on Fifth Avenue. The promotional poster for the group's demonstration, designed by Carrie Moyer and Sue Schaffner of Dyke Action Machine! depicts a young, masculine female-bodied individual with arms held high in a pugilist pose, hands poised inside leather boxing gloves set against her chest, and eyes gazing defiantly down the lens of the camera. "I'd Rather Fight Than Switch!" declares this tough female fighter in her pugnacious pose.¹⁶ ILGO's image of the pugnacious lesbian fighter radically contradicts traditional representations of Irish-American pugilistic masculinity put forward in conventional cultural images and even in Munt and O'Donnell's reading of the parade struggle.

This chapter explores the solo performances of lesbian artist, Peggy Shaw, whose instrumental work has been influencing queer cultural production since the 1970s. "Before Holly Hughes, before The Five Lesbian Brothers, even before gender-bending Madonna," Maria De La O declares, "there was Peggy Shaw."¹⁷ In response to the continued erasure of lesbian, queer, and female masculinities from representations of Irishness in the United States, this chapter takes Shaw's work, specifically her debut solo performance, *You're Just Like My Father* (1994), and the later, *To My Chagrin* (2001), as exemplary counter-narratives that disrupt ideologies of gender and sexuality in Irish-American cultural discourses. As a tomboy in working-class Irish Belmont in the 1950s, Shaw regularly raised fists against juvenile Italian gangs in playground brawls.¹⁸ Moving to New York in the late 1960s, she experienced

¹⁶ Anne Maguire, *Rock the Sham! The Irish Lesbian & Gay Organization's Battle to March in New York City's St. Patrick's Day Parade* (New York: Street Level Press, 2005), 145. To cite an additional troubling of this link between fighting Irish and heterosexual masculinity, the *Bay Area Reporter* in San Francisco announced in 1994 the founding of a gay and lesbian alumni group at the University of Notre Dame and St. Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana. The title of the notice, "Fighting Queer 'n' Irish," both draws on the iconography of Notre Dame's sporting collective and poses a direct challenge to the homophobic ideologies of the AOH in New York, where queerness and Irishness are presented as mutually exclusive signifiers. See "Fighting Queer 'n' Irish," *Bay Area Reporter*, June 23, 1994, 23.

¹⁷ Maria De La O, "Daddy's Girl: Peggy Shaw in *You're Just Like My Father*," *Bay Area Reporter*, August 24, 1995, 36.

¹⁸ Peggy Shaw, interview by Eleanor Blakeslee-Drain, April 12, 2010, transcript of audio recording, Documenting Lesbian Lives Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA, 4.

routine verbal and physical assaults and aggressive homophobia from members of the heterosexual public enraged by her proud display of lesbian gender and sexuality. Shaw writes this combative legacy into *You're Just Like My Father*, and, through a defiant butch gesture, stages a queer intervention into the cultural discourses of Irishness in the United States. This chapter draws attention to this queer reconfiguration of Irish iconography in Shaw's work, which redresses the canon of Irish-American cultural expression through the signifier of the Fighting Irish.

In a preliminary section to her collected solo performances on the page, Shaw writes, "I make performance and theater, for those interested in hearing the poetry or point of view of a sixty-plus-year-old, second-generation Irish, working-class, grand-but-mother."¹⁹ Born into a working-class Irish Congregationalist family, Shaw was raised in Belmont, Massachusetts, "[o]n the wrong side, the Irish side of the tracks."²⁰ Shaw's childhood was difficult; her mother suffered from multiple nervous breakdowns and was routinely institutionalised, while Shaw and her six siblings were left to fend for themselves. Shaw's Irish-American father was a tenor in their local church.²¹ The Irish side of Shaw's family migrated from Donegal in the late nineteenth century. Her grandfather was born in Corkmore in 1871 into a Church of Ireland land-owning farming family, and moved over to the United States at some point in the late nineteenth century after the disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Ireland.²² Shaw has been excluded from the canon of Irish-American cultural forms for a number of reasons: her chosen form of cultural expression (performance art has been grossly overlooked in Irish-American studies, which prefers to incorporate high-brow drama and theatre); her Protestant background (Irish-American historical discourses have until recently neglected the experiences of Irish Protestant culture in the United States); and her sexuality, since Irish-American scholarship still struggles to survey and engage with the prolific body of queer Irish-American cultural forms.

In his discussion on masculinity without men, Jack Halberstam positions Shaw's *You're Just Like My Father*, "in which Shaw shadowboxes onstage while telling her story of growing up a masculine woman," alongside a growing body of lesbian pugilism narratives emerging in the 1990s.²³ "The boxing ring," writes Halberstam, "provides a nice metaphor for the power of dominant masculinities and their relations to subordinate masculinities."²⁴

¹⁹ Peggy Shaw, "On Being an Independent Solo Artist (No Such Thing)," in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 41.

²⁰ Peggy Shaw, interview with Craig Lucas, *BOMB*, Autumn 1999, 38. Shaw reiterates this line in her interview with Blakeslee-Drain over a decade later (1).

²¹ Shaw, interview by Blakeslee-Drain, 2.

²² Personal communication with the author, October 30, 2017.

²³ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 273.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

Rather than privilege the glorified figure of the male boxer embodied in the figure of Jake La Motta in Martin Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, Halberstam champions the victorious raging bull dyke. For Camilla Fojas, the gaze of butch boxer, Billie "The Blue Bear" Osterman in Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby*, a text to which this chapter returns, "registers as sinister and dangerous rather than confident and liberatory," thus perpetuating a negative view of the intersection of femaleness, masculinity, and power.²⁵ Counteracting the self-destructive brutality welcomed by the body of the heroic male pugilist, as well as the link between queer female masculinity and malevolence, Halberstam presents the butch gaze of the raging bull dyke: "This look, the look of a raging bull, the stare down, the challenge, lets the viewer know that this is the stage where the bull can rage, and though she can fight ... she'd rather recite."²⁶ Peggy Shaw's performance of the masculine fighter, "routed through a butch lesbian body short-circuits this natural history of masculine transmission and recognizes the quotidian, surprising, but not wholly unexpected ways in which female masculinity can form the basis for rather than the repudiation of active identification."²⁷

Firstly, the chapter reads Shaw's debut solo performance, *You're Just Like My Father*, through the historical and cultural connection between Irish-American identity and the image of the pugilist. Whereas Halberstam situates Shaw's show within a burgeoning body of lesbian boxing narratives in the 1990s, this section identifies the family and cultural links articulated in the performance. The Irish place in the history of prizefighting in the United States has produced a plethora of cultural representations of Irish pugilism throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. These texts, however, consistently place the figure of the male fighter at the heart of the narrative, as well as in the centre of the ring. In this section, Shaw's *You're Just Like My Father* is presented as a queering of this canon and as a disruptive take on notions of heroism, combat, and resistance. In order to unpack the subversive drive of Shaw's performance, the chapter draws on theories of drag, both gender and temporal, to illustrate the strategies of disidentification and performativity at play in this queer performer's repertoire. These theoretical frameworks combine to produce nuanced interpretations of identity and temporality in *You're Just Like My Father*, and allude to alternative ways of being queer and Irish in the nexus of social, political, and cultural discourses in the United States.

²⁵ Camilla Fojas, "Sports of Spectatorship: Boxing Women of Color in *Girlfight* and Beyond," *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 1 (Autumn 2009): 104.

²⁶ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 277.

²⁷ Judith Halberstam, "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: Men, Women, and Masculinity," in *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New Directions*, ed. Judith Kegan Gardiner (New York: Columbia University Press), 363.

“Within Hollywood film and media culture,” Fojas argues, “we have little practice in watching women of color exerting physical and symbolic power, and little idea of how to look at these same women sporting powerful bodies and an assertive gaze, most especially if they are placed right in the middle of our zones of identification.”²⁸ The history of preferential commercial and media treatment of white fighters in the ring, often hailed as “Great White Hopes” by the press and public, over black male boxers has been repeated in the story of female pugilism in the twentieth century.²⁹ In Eastwood’s *Million Dollar Baby*, for instance, it is the sinister black female fighter who underhandedly deals Maggie Fitzgerald the fatal blow in the end of the match, and, in a narrative in which whiteness is the dominant force, it is unbridled blackness that is presented as the murderous violence in the story. Blackness terminates the dreams of any Great White Hope. These representations are ideological and racist. While Shaw’s challenging disidentification in *You’re Just Like My Father* reconsiders forms of masculinity in order to create a space for queer female masculinity, the third section considers the racialised underpinnings of such a performance. In drawing on Kate Davy’s interrogation of the underlying whiteness at the heart of early performances at New York’s Women’s One World (WOW) Café Theater, co-founded by Shaw, the chapter “outs” the implicit assumption of whiteness attached to the butch body in *You’re Just Like My Father*. It is in her later 2001 performance, *To My Chagrin*, in which, to quote Robin Bernstein, Shaw “asks the astonishing question, how can a white, butch grandmother pass on the gift of masculinity to her beloved biracial grandson, across their differences of sex, age, and race?”³⁰

In his introductory remarks to the collection of performance scripts in *O Solo Homo: The New Queer Performance*, in which Shaw’s *You’re Just Like My Father* appears, David Román makes an instructive comment on the autobiographical impulse in performance as well as in literature. For Román, that autobiographical work in performance culture since the 1970s would become a cornerstone in gay and lesbian cultural expression makes sense considering the climate of identity politics on which the modern gay and lesbian movement has been established and the continued need to excavate a culture in the progressive move of revisionist history. Despite this fact, however, as Román insists, “queer autobiography is far from trapped in the seventies or tied to an outmoded model of queer representation and politics.” Since the form of solo performance is as inexhaustible as the regeneration of the meanings in the terms “gay,” “lesbian,” and “queer,” autobiographical exposures on the stage

²⁸ Fojas, “Sports of Spectatorship,” 104.

²⁹ Halberstam, for example, in *Female Masculinity* cites the case of Cathy “Cat” Davy and black fighters, Marian “Lady Tyger” Trimiar and Jackie Tonawanda, the first three women to receive boxing licenses in the United States in 1977. While Davy was bestowed celebrity status, Trimiar and Tonawanda “faded into obscurity” (271).

³⁰ Robin Bernstein, “Staging Lesbian and Gay New York,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of New York*, ed. Cyrus R. K. Patell and Bryan Waterman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 206.

will, as Román contends, ensure that the mark of historical, cultural, and social changes touches any articulation of the individual self in a performance. “Queer solo artists can’t help but bring this mix into their performances, animating their work within the context of the larger culture and history in which they live.”³¹ As this chapter illustrates, Shaw is at the forefront of this engagement with the cultural, social, and political forces colliding in the construction of queer Irish identity.

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor privileges performance as the premier site of cultural memory and the intersubjective transmission of identity and ideas. Arguing that the theory of identity performativity has been largely divorced in critical scholarship from performance, entrenched rather in the strategies and effects of “discourse,” Taylor argues for a reclamation of performative practices within the field of nondiscursive acts. The “performatic,” Taylor writes, denotes such nondiscursive practices central to the cultural significance of embodied performance. “Instead of focusing on patterns of cultural expression in terms of texts and narratives,” she suggests, “we might think about them as scenarios that do not reduce gestures and embodied practices to narrative description.”³² In place of the textual archive, Taylor presents the ephemeral embodied repertoire, which encompasses an array of cultural expression defined as “embodied practice/knowledge” (such as spoken language, dance, sports, and ritual).³³ Rather than further sever the association between the archive and repertoire, however, this chapter considers the ways in which textual readings as well as embodied performance coexist in a mutually productive relationship.³⁴ Shaw exemplifies the mutually productive relationship between both the ephemeral nature of the performance repertoire and the enduring corporeal signs of cultural memory. Indeed, at an event organised by the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics in 2014, Shaw confirmed her place in the genealogy of queerness to a packed audience, declaring, “I *am* an archive.”³⁵ In fact, as explored in this chapter, an exemplary model for Judith Butler’s notion of gender performativity in her seminal 1990 book, *Gender Trouble*, which Taylor accuses of solidifying the relationship between performativity and discourse, is the exteriorised

³¹ Holly Hughes and David Román, “O Solo Homo: An Introductory Conversation,” in *O Solo Homo: The New Queer Performance*, ed. Holly Hughes and David Román (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 4-5.

³² Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 16.

³³ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁴ While this analysis of Shaw’s *You’re Just Like My Father* draws on the printed script in this published collection of the performer’s work, this textual reading is enhanced by a viewing of a recording of Shaw’s show: See, Peggy Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, October 22, 1994, The Rep, Santa Fe, New Mexico, Hemispheric Institute. <http://hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/enc07-interviews/item/926-britches-like-my-father>.

³⁵ Alexis Clements, “I am an Archive: Tracking the Continuing Legacy of Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver,” *American Theatre*, January 2014, 74.

performance staged by the figure of the drag queen.³⁶ In an examination of the work of Eileen Myles, chapter four extends Butler's focus on the corporeality, or "morphology," of gender identity to consider her later work in *The Psychic Life of Power*.³⁷

Finally, the concluding section of the chapter argues that Shaw's work can be considered as part of the utopian turn in critical scholarship. "Queerness is not yet here," writes José Esteban Muñoz in the opening of *Cruising Utopia*, his study of queer futurity. "The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic," Muñoz argues, "frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity."³⁸ In her theory of the "utopian performative," Jill Dolan suggests that the material conditions of production and the intersubjective experience in performance create the idea

that it's even possible to imagine a utopia, that boundless 'no-place' where the social scourges that currently plague us—from poverty, famine, cancer, AIDS, inadequate health care, racial and gender discrimination, hatred of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered people, the grossly unequal distribution of wealth and resources globally, religious intolerance, xenophobia expressed in anti-immigrant legislation, lack of access for the disabled, pay inequity, and of course a host of others—might be ameliorated, cured, redressed, solved, never to haunt us again.³⁹

While Dolan is not interested in producing a utopia in any real sense—indeed, her utopian performative is rooted in the live performance of emotionally generative practices—Muñoz, on the other hand, looks to the past for the "blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity." To conclude, the chapter looks back at Peggy Shaw's performances and considers the ways in which the past and its enduring use in the present are at the forefront of her feminist and queer performative work.

³⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990, repr., New York: Routledge, 2007), 186-89.

³⁷ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), chapter five, "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification," 132-66.

³⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University, 2009), 1.

³⁹ Jill Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative,'" *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 3 (October 2001): 456-57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25068953>.

**In The Right Corner: Disidentification, Female Masculinity, and Irishness
in *You're Just Like My Father***

What do you think of fighters? I used to like to fight. I used to hang out by the little path that opened up into the ballpark, and I'd say, "I can take you!" I'd say that to every boy who passed by. We'd wind up rolling in the dirt, getting burrs all over our socks, and sometimes I'd make boys cry. I didn't hit them in the face, I never wanted to hurt them and I frightened myself when I made them cry. I only wanted to dominate them. I wanted to sit on their stomachs and pin their arms back and say, Okay, do you give? And unless they said yes they could not get up. Those were my rules.⁴⁰

When, during the opening scene of *You're Just Like My Father*, Shaw wraps her breasts and hands in bandage, she not only enacts a process familiar to butch lesbians and trans men as "passing," but also binds the visual acting out of this process to the iconography of the boxer in popular American culture. The stage instructions for the show, reproduced in the collected scripts, confirm this connection:

Lights come up on Peggy sitting on a chair on a bare stage with bare breasts and boxer shorts, bare feet. She wraps her breasts with an Ace bandage and goes over to a suitcase on a table and opens it ... She takes another bandage from the suitcase and wraps a hand the way a boxer would ... drops her head into her hands and growls like a wolf.⁴¹

Throughout the performance, Shaw bounces on the stage, at times shadow boxing and at other times raising both fists in a defensive pose familiar to many prize fighting spectators acquainted with the promotional material for amateur and professional prize fighting events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁴⁰ Eileen Myles, *Feeling Blue*, in *Memories of the Revolution: The First Ten Years of the WOW Café Theater*, ed. Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 175.

⁴¹ Peggy Shaw, *You're Just Like My Father*, in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 47.



Figure 2. Shaw binds her breasts and hands in a performance of butch pugilism. Courtesy of Eva Weiss.

Whether with the gay drag troupe Hot Peaches in the 1970s, with Spiderwoman in the same decade, or Split Britches and the WOW Café Theater in the 1980s and early 1990s, Shaw traditionally performed as part of gay and lesbian collective productions in New York, and did not mean to write a solo show in 1994. As she explains: “I didn’t want to write a solo show, it’s just that I was the only one left in town. I had to do it to survive.” When Hampshire College contacted Shaw and her long-time professional and romantic partner, Lois Weaver, to stage a production of their *Lesbians Who Kill*, Weaver was by then living and working in London, and Shaw was forced to think quickly: “So I said, ‘Lois won’t be here, but I have a solo show’ (a lie). They said, ‘Great, what’s the name of it?’ and I said, ‘What’s it for?’ They said, ‘Parents’ weekend,’ so I said, ‘It’s called *You’re Just Like My Father*.’ So I had three months to make it.”⁴² Shaw claims that the title was based on her confrontational behaviour in

⁴² Peggy Shaw, “Notes on *You’re Just Like My Father*,” in *O Solo Homo: The New Queer Performance*, ed. Holly Hughes and David Román (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 177. Despite such claims that *You’re Just Like My Father* was first commissioned in 1994 by Hampshire College, Shaw and Weaver had, in early 1992, submitted a grant application form to the ASTRAEA Lesbian Foundation for Justice requesting funding for, among other things, a proposed performance called “You Remind Me of Your Father.” Weaver and Shaw write in their application that this piece “will explore the theatrics and humor of butch-femme relationships, as well as the subject of ‘passing’ women.” On the genesis of “You Remind Me of Your Father,” Shaw adds: “In the 18 years that I have been doing lesbian performance, my primary goal has been to make up for lost time; in the early days when people asked if I found political lesbian theatre limiting, I would say that I feel it gives me unlimited possibilities ... My intention is to promote notions of ‘lesbian’ and particularly ‘butch lesbian’ as norms against the backdrop of heterosexual culture. I am dedicated to humor as a means of communication, a way to communicate our sorrow.” Box 7, folder “Press and Promo Materials,” Split Britches Archives, 1978-

the early days of the Women's One World (WOW) Café Theater collective in the 1980s. She recalls,

I always took the abrupt, confrontational ... I didn't hold myself back. Eventually, I had to get a chiropractor and blood pressure pills and wrote a show, because everyone was saying, "Shut up Peggy, you sound just like my father. I eventually made a show called *You're Just Like My Father*, because I cause arguments all the time because I'm so stupid and opinionated and I'm an asshole and I say everything on my mind ... I cause disruption, I'm abrupt and make people fight me. A lot of my role was that, that kind of abrupt behavior, or aggressive behavior, or opinionated things that made other people have to stand up to me.⁴³

In her critical introduction to Shaw's collected scripts, however, Dolan points out the autobiographical history at the heart of the performance, writing that, in *You're Just Like My Father*, "Shaw considers the legacy of family relationships that have brought her to the brink of the boxing ring in which she stages her contest with the dominant culture."⁴⁴

In a review article for the *Bay Area Reporter*, De La O provides a neat summary of Shaw's performance at Josie's Cabaret and Juice Joint in San Francisco in 1995:

You're Just Like My Father is a celebration of butchness, a peek into the emotional cauldron of 1950s family life, and, ultimately, a rear-view mirror look at the last 40 years of a tough-talking lesbian who calls herself "Eddy." It's a poignant and at times hilarious character sketch seemingly drawn from the depths of Shaw's own early life experiences. As she binds her breasts and dresses in her dead father's clothes—boxing drag, an army uniform, and a freshly pressed suit—Shaw relates fond memories of her dead father and of a conflicted, almost incestuous relationship with her mother.⁴⁵

Shaw has since elaborated on this interplay of desire and identification in her show. "So I wrote a show I thought was about my father," she admits, "and it was about my mother, which I didn't know until I had performed it. The part about my father—the smell of his shirts, the feel of his cheeks, his shiny shoes and creased pants (he said if a man had shiny shoes and a crease in his pants, no one would notice his poverty)—was a catalyst to my relationship to my mother and to my relationship with her husband's clothes that I loved so much."⁴⁶ In considering Shaw's performance of lesbian gender in *You're Just Like My*

2000, MSS 251, Fales Library and Special Collections, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University, September 28, 2016.

⁴³ Peggy Shaw, Lois Weaver, and Susan Young, "WOW Women in Their Own Words: As the World Turns; Twenty Years Later (2004)," interview with Carmelita Tropicana, in *Memories of the Revolution: The First Ten Years of the WOW Café Theater*, ed. Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 191.

⁴⁴ Jill Dolan, introduction to *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 22.

⁴⁵ De La O, "Daddy's Girl," 36.

⁴⁶ Shaw, "Notes on *You're Just Like My Father*," 178.

Father, this chapter pays attention to both of these interlacing ideas of desire and identification.

“My father told me that his father knocked out Joe Louis with his bare hands,” Shaw proudly asserts in *You’re Just Like My Father*.⁴⁷ Dolan’s introduction expands on the anecdote:

The show draws from Shaw’s family history. Her grandfather was an Irish boxer and fruit seller in a Boston market, who knocked out Joe Lewis when Lewis stole fruit from his stall. “That’s what I heard,” Shaw says. “[I]t doesn’t even matter if it’s true or not.” That family history of combative protectiveness haunts all of Shaw’s performances. “I think I’m a really protective person,” she says. “I like to nurture people and keep them safe.”⁴⁸

Regardless of whether the incident is factually accurate or merely the product of family lore, Shaw points to the preservation of such stories and their significance in the construction and performance of identity. In this way, Shaw remains the titular “you” of the performance, yet the “my” is spoken by her own father who sees his Irish father in the image of the butch lesbian daughter. Moreover, when she proclaims that the story has been handed down from her grandfather to her father, Shaw not only inserts herself into that linear transmission of family history, she also serves to disrupt the patrilineal progression of family and ethnic genealogy by asserting her own claim to that legacy.

In 2004, Eastwood’s *Million Dollar Baby* was released to widespread critical acclaim and public praise, going on to win five Academy Awards the following year. Despite its depiction of a tenacious female pugilist protagonist, played by Hilary Swank, the film was targeted by female boxers and disability activists for its concluding scenes, in which Swank’s character, Maggie Fitzgerald, in a final fight is left paralysed, and finally aided in an act of suicide by her guilt-ridden trainer, Frankie Dunn, played by Eastwood. As Ellexis Boyle, Brad Millington, and Patricia Vertinsky point out, “both Hollywood films and the sport media, in their unabashed celebration of *male* boxing and its concomitant masculine heroism (consider, for example, the *Rocky* series and the more recent *Cinderella Man*) have helped sustain popular rhetoric that ignores or trivialises boxing’s female competitors.”⁴⁹ In spite of such neglect of women in the ring, conventional entries in the genre of the boxing film, which have followed the lives of male fighters, have, since at least the early 1990s, been joined by films that focus on the figure of the female pugilist—*Blonde Fist* (Frank Clarkey, 1991), *Shadow Boxers* (Katya Bankowski, 1999), *Girlfight* (Karyn Kusama, 2000), *Knockout*

⁴⁷ Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, 49.

⁴⁸ Dolan, introduction to *A Menopausal Gentleman*, 23.

⁴⁹ Ellexis Boyle, Brad Millington, and Patricia Vertinsky, “Representing the Female Pugilist: Narratives of Race, Gender, and Disability in *Million Dollar Baby*,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 23, no. 2 (2006): 100.

(Lorenzo Doumani, 2000), *Honeybee* (Melvin James, 2001), and *Million Dollar Baby*.⁵⁰ “The cinematic boxing scene has changed irrevocably,” Camilla Fojas declares, upsetting a whole history of looking, desire, and identification.”⁵¹

Million Dollar Baby proves that the fantasy of such a radical rupture in the celluloid projection of female agency and masculinity is just that: a picture yet to be imagined and imaged on screen, or, indeed, on the page. The short story collection from which Eastwood adapted his cinematic narrative, Irish author F.X Toole’s (Jerry Boyd) *Rope Burns: Stories from the Corner*, had already contained the anxieties about gender, sexuality, and patriarchal control *Million Dollar Baby* visually propelled in 2004. In a preface to his volume of stories, Toole cites Joyce Carol Oates’s declaration from her 1987 book, *On Boxing*. “Boxing is for men,” Oates proclaims, “and is about men, and *is* men.”⁵² In the “sweet science,” women have historically been present merely as card girls in bathing suits and high heels, objects of desire and light distraction from the brutality of the ring. According to Oates, “raw aggression is thought to be the peculiar province of men, as nurturing is the peculiar province of women ... [a] female boxer violates this stereotype and cannot be taken seriously—she is parody, she is cartoon, she is monstrous.”⁵³ “Although women have boxed for almost as long as the sport has existed,” as Sarah Brown argues, “female fighters have been effectively outlawed for most of boxing’s history, with athletic commissioners refusing to sanction or issue licenses to women boxers, and most nations officially banning the sport.”⁵⁴ Women’s participation in the sport, however, goes back at least to the eighteenth century, and while the decline in female pugilists coincided with the rise of Victorian ideologies of femininity, by the time Oates wrote her own study, women had been training alongside men for over a decade.⁵⁵ Since the bar on women in boxing in the United States was lifted as late as 1977, women in the sport continue to face discrimination and public derision.

At the opening of “Million \$\$\$ Baby,” the short story that inspired Eastwood’s film, Irish trainer Dunn educates a male boxer on the double-edged nature of being a fighter. “Instead of running from pain, which is the natural thing in life,” he says,

⁵⁰ Films that centre on male pugilists have included *The Champ* (King Vidor, 1931) and its remake in 1979, *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954), *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (Ralph Nelson, 1962), *Fat City* (John Huston, 1972), *Rocky* (John G. Avildesen, 1976) and its subsequent sequels, *Raging Bull* (Martin Scorsese, 1980), *Cinderella Man* (Ron Howard, 2005), *The Fighter* (David Russell, 2010), and *Warrior* (Gavin O’Connor, 2011).

⁵¹ Fojas, “Sports of Spectatorship,” 104.

⁵² F.X. Toole, *Rope Burns: Stories from the Corner* (London: Vintage, 2001). See Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing* (Bloomsbury: London, 1987), 71-72.

⁵³ Oates, *On Boxing*, 73.

⁵⁴ Sarah Brown, “Against the Ropes,” *bitch*, Summer 2014, 46.

⁵⁵ Boyle, Millington, and Vertinsky, “Representing the Female Pugilist,” 101-2.

in boxing you step to it, get me? So now, once you've made the decision to *be* a fighter, now you gotta know *how* to fight, because no matter how tough you are, my friend, these dudes with the big dicks will knock you out.⁵⁶

This violent, phallic masculinity is soon interrupted by the arrival of Maggie Fitzgerald, a young working-class woman from southwestern Missouri who wants to be trained by Dunn. Maggie's appearance in the story is starkly distinguished from the male machismo at the Hit Pit, the downtown Los Angeles training gym she has walked into and where Dunn is a trainer: "Two thick braids of deep auburn hair hung down behind each ear, framing a freckled face and a pair of agate eyes, like Frankie's daughter's."⁵⁷ In both the book and the film, Dunn assumes the role of father figure to Maggie, who quickly rises through the ranks of national and international amateur boxing championships. In her ascent, Maggie is taken more and more seriously by observers, and her initial image of feminine innocence is quickly transformed. "That ain't a girl," Dunn says, "that's a fighter."⁵⁸ At the World Bantam-Weight Championship in Las Vegas, the narrative swerves towards tragedy, when Maggie falls victim to foul play during a match against another female boxer, Billie "The Blue Bear" Osterman, and is left quadriplegic, until Dunn ultimately agrees to his protégé's desire to end her life, a task Dunn performs reluctantly in the final scenes.

For Boyle, Millington, Vertinsky, and Richard Letteri," the climactic removal of this heroine through suicide in the film (and book) "has the effect of marginalizing her story and re-centering Frankie as the white male patriarch and primary protagonist."⁵⁹ For Letteri, "the film returns agency to Frankie, who re-establishes patriarchal rule and gender norms by assisting in Maggie's death."⁶⁰ Against the villainous and sexually abhorrent figure of Blue Bear, Maggie's challenge to normative gender performance is punished. Letteri, Boyle, Millington, and Vertinsky, in their analyses, map out the precarious terrain of performing female masculinity in a culture dominated by images of male heroism. As Halberstam has argued, "female masculinities are framed as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing."⁶¹ In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam suggests that the figure of the lesbian masculine female-bodied subject has been most targeted as an icon of ridicule and anxiety. As he writes in a later piece, "[I]esbianism has long been associated with female masculinity and female masculinity in turn has been figured as undesirable by linking it in essential and unquestionable ways to female

⁵⁶ F.X. Toole, "Million \$\$\$ Baby," in *Rope Burns: Stories from the Corner* (London: Vintage, 2001), 61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵⁹ Boyle, Millington, and Vertinsky, "Representing the Female Pugilist," 101.

⁶⁰ Richard Letteri, "Dirty Baby: The Gender Politics of *Million Dollar Baby*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 28, no. 3 (May 2011): 205, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10509200802641101>.

⁶¹ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 1.

ugliness.”⁶² Indeed, in the concluding chapter of *Female Masculinity*, in a personal anecdote, Halberstam describes how boxing was the site for both the performance and disavowal of masculinity as a young girl.⁶³ In narratives such as *Million Dollar Baby*, one hears echoes of the same social prohibitions, but since the female protagonist has reached an age when she should know better, her performance of masculinity is violently punished with a fatal outcome.

While Letteri, Boyle, Millington, and Vertinsky focus on Maggie’s female masculinity in favour of Maggie’s “Irishness,” Hamilton Carroll, conversely, chooses to think about the ways in which Maggie “becomes” Irish in the narrative in place of a discussion on her female masculinity and the film’s punishment of that performance.⁶⁴ In bringing both arguments together, however, it is possible to conceive of Maggie’s death not merely as a repudiation of female masculinity, but, even more crucially, as a rejection of Irish-American female masculinity and lesbian sexuality. For Carroll, a crucial precondition of Maggie’s transformation into a figure of Irish purity is the necessary abrogation of all libidinal impulses: “If the white trash body is always a problematic body, Maggie’s transformation from trash to Irish requires her to harness her body’s impulses, to control its urges.”⁶⁵ In Toole’s story, Billy “the Blue Bear” Astrakhov is depicted as a “big-busted, masculine-looking Russian girl living in Hamburg, who grew a faint mustache [sic] and dated fashion models.”⁶⁶ Described as a “bulldagger,” Astrakhov’s monstrosity is rooted not simply in her female masculinity, but most insidiously in her *lesbian* masculine gender.⁶⁷ In the film, Billy becomes a black German ex-prostitute renowned for her illicit behaviour inside and outside the ring.

Whereas Eastwood’s film draws on a father-daughter relationship and desexualises Maggie entirely, Toole’s narrative not only explicitly states Maggie’s sexuality, but reveals it as a negative response to accused queerness: “I ain’t no lezzie ... I can lay a little pipe with the best of ‘em.”⁶⁸ Thus, lesbian sexuality, particularly butch lesbian sexuality, is either entirely foreclosed—as in the film adaptation—or openly ridiculed—as in the short story. Either way, it is subjected to a heteronormative disavowal. In either desexualising or heterosexualising Maggie, a process crucial to her becoming Irish, the texts work to show the impossibility of being both Irish and queer. Maggie’s removal at the climax is necessary in a

⁶² Halberstam, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” 359.

⁶³ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 267.

⁶⁴ Hamilton Carroll, *Affirmative Reaction: New Formations of White Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), chapter five, 131-56.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁶⁶ Toole, “Million \$\$\$ Baby,” 80.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

narrative that not only aims to reaffirm the privileged position of the heterosexual patriarch in the ring, but that also violently executes the coexistence of Irish identity and female masculinity. Thus, Maggie's "becoming" Irish is also her undoing in both Toole's original narrative as well as Eastwood's cinematic adaptation.⁶⁹

Like the defiant image of the butch Irish boxer on the poster for the ILGO's protest march, Shaw's artistic mode in *You're Just Like My Father* functions as a subversive example of what Muñoz has called "disidentification." According to Muñoz, the process of disidentification describes the act of "read[ing] oneself and one's own life narrative in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to 'connect' with the disidentifying subject." Muñoz continued in his study to outline the political stakes at the heart of such a practice that works both on and against cultural icons:

Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this "working on and against" is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles.⁷⁰

Disidentification argues that minoritarian subjects such as queer, black, and Latina/o individuals forge identity through the adoption and radical reconfiguration of dominant cultural images conventionally unavailable to them.

In a study that strives to represent faggotry and effeminacy as radical sites of political intervention, Muñoz provides an unambiguous rejection of any attempt to glorify masculinity. "Masculinity is, among other things," he writes, "a cultural imperative to enact a mode of

⁶⁹ The subject of Eastwood's film became the material for an episode of the American comedy television show, *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, co-created by Robert McElhenney, an Irish American from South Philadelphia. *It's Always Sunny* follows a group of amoralistic, narcissistic friends, most of whom are Irish American, and the morally bankrupt schemes devised by them. The "gang" is composed of Charlie Kelly, Dennis Reynolds, Ronald "Mac" MacDonald, Deandra "Sweet Dee" Reynolds, Dennis's sister, and their father (although this is later revealed to be untrue) Frank, played by veteran actor Danny Devito. In the fifth episode of the second season, "Hundred Dollar Baby," the "gang" decide to take an interest in self defence and underground fighting after they are mugged at night on the streets in the city. Frank, who had a boxing career forty years earlier as "Frankie Fasthands," attempts to train his daughter Dee in a local gym. At the beginning of the episode, Dennis derides Eastwood's film, saying, "*Million Dollar Baby* is totally unrealistic; girls can't fight and they don't have muscles." Dee begins to take performance enhancement drugs and her outwardly feminine appearance is quickly transformed into, what the audience should hold as, a grotesque image of masculinity. While the episode, in line with the show's conventional move to deconstruct and parody popular culture images, demeans male masculinity, revealing the male friends to be the embodiment of failed masculinity, female masculinity is far from safe from accusations of undesirability and monstrosity. Dee's moustache and "roid rage" are temporary aberrations, but the denigration of female masculinity is more enduring, communicating the message that markers of female strength and pugilism are egregious. As Frank asks Dee when she mentions attending boxercise classes at the gym, "What kinda queer shit is that?" *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, season two, episode five, "Hundred Dollar Baby," directed by Daniel Attias, written by Rob McElhenney, Glenn Howerton, and Charlie Day, aired on July 13, 2006, on FX.

⁷⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 12.

‘manliness’ that is calibrated to shut down queer possibilities and energies” and “a regime of power that labors to invalidate, exclude, and extinguish faggotry, effeminacy, and queerly coated butchness.” The exception of Muñoz’s anti-masculine position is Halberstam’s theory of female masculinity. According to Muñoz, “Halberstam dislodges masculinity from biological maleness, and in doing so opens up and reterritorializes the concept. Such a reterritorialization of masculinity can be understood as a disidentification with the sign of masculinity, which is to say a critical recycling of the term.”⁷¹

“Female masculinity,” Halberstam writes,

disrupts contemporary cultural studies accounts of masculinity within which masculinity always boils down to the social, cultural and political effects of male embodiment and male privilege. Such accounts can only read masculinity as the powerful and active alternative to female passivity and as the expression therefore of white male subjectivities. The term *female masculinity* stages several different kinds of interventions into contemporary gender theory and practice: first, it refuses the authentication of masculinity through maleness and maleness alone, and it names a deliberately counterfeit masculinity that undermines the currency of maleness; second, it offers an alternative mode of masculinity that clearly detaches misogyny from maleness and social power from masculinity; third, female masculinity may be an embodied assault upon compulsory heterosexuality, and it offers one powerful model of what inauthentic masculinity can look like, how it produces and deploys desire, and what new social, sexual and political relations it can foster.⁷²

That female masculinity might appear as “counterfeit” does not suggest that it is any less “the real thing” than male masculinity; instead, it throws the ideal of realness into crisis altogether. As Judith Butler notes, performing gender incorrectly can incite hostility and punishment, while performing gender in accordance with social sanction provides reassurance that gender is natural after all. That such prohibition and reassurance is required in the first place, however, as Butler goes on to state, “should be sign enough that on some level there is social knowledge that the truth or falsity of gender is only socially compelled and in no sense ontologically necessitated.”⁷³ Shaw, the embodiment of lesbian butch gender *par excellence* in Halberstam’s formation of female masculinity, performs the mode of disidentification on the stage, working on and against understandings of Irish masculinity and performing a queer reterritorialisation of gender and cultural identity. Shaw’s *You’re Just Like My Father* both calls on and queers these historical and cultural narratives of Irish male heroism in the boxing ring, focusing instead on the butch body, and introducing a radically feminist contender who would rather recite than fight.

⁷¹ Ibid., 58.

⁷² Halberstam, “The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly,” 345.

⁷³ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (December 1988): 528, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0192-2882%28198812%2940%3A4%3C519%3APAAGCA%3E2.0.CO%3B2-C>.

Conflict, struggle, and resistance have formed a crucial part of the life and work of Peggy Shaw for the best part of the last seven decades. While Shaw has been heralded as an icon of butch embodiment, defined succinctly by Gayle Rubin as “a category of lesbian gender that is constituted through the deployment and manipulation of masculine gender codes and symbols,”⁷⁴ the path to this status has been littered with discursive battles and contentious debates. The 1970s and 1980s were fraught with what Rubin described in her seminal 1984 essay, “Thinking Sex,” as the border wars being fought between the strands of liberal, radical, and lesbian feminism and what could be described now as transgender or genderqueer politics.⁷⁵ During this time, the “woman-identified woman” ideology of the movement resisted the inclusion of masculine and butch lesbians, arguing that they merely reproduced patriarchal conceptions of gender in their performance of masculinity. As second-wave feminism rallied for the liberation of (mainly middle-class heterosexual white) women, men and all things masculine became enemies to the cause.⁷⁶ As Minnie Bruce Pratt puts it: “Often a lesbian considered ‘too butch’ was assumed to be, at least in part, a male chauvinist.”⁷⁷ Working-class female masculinity, in particular, has been the object of scorn and ridicule.⁷⁸

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, explains Judith Roof, “a new generation of young lesbians, influenced by the women’s movement, rejected butch-femme as a heterosexist imitation of the oppressive gender roles of patriarchy.”⁷⁹ Shaw and Weaver’s staging of butch-femme dynamics in the 1970s and 1980s was a challenge to these assumptions, as well

⁷⁴ Gayle Rubin, “Of Calamities and Kings: Reflections on Butch, Gender, and Boundaries,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, ed. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle (New York: Routledge, 2006), 472.

⁷⁵ Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 267-319.

⁷⁶ Radicalesbians, “The Women Identified Woman,” (Pittsburgh, PA: Know Inc., 1970).

⁷⁷ Minnie Bruce Pratt, *S/He* (Ithaca, NY: Fireband, 1995), 19. There is a plethora of commentaries on the historical disavowal of the butch lesbian, from the 1950s to the radical lesbian movements of the 1970s, and further into the twenty-first century. See, for instance, Esther Newton, “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian: Radclyffe Hall and the New Woman,” *Signs* 9, no. 4 (Summer 1984): 557-75, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173611>; Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country: Documents of Desire and Resistance* (London: Pandora, 1987), 90; Elizabeth Smith, “Butches, Femmes, and Feminists: The Politics of Lesbian Sexuality,” *National Women’s Studies Association Journal* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 398-421; Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of A Lesbian Community*, 20th anniversary ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 11-13; Judith Roof, “1970s Lesbian Feminism Meets 1990s Butch-Femme,” in *butch/femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, ed. Sally Munt and Cherry Smyth (London: Cassell, 1998), 27-35; Judith Halberstam, “Between Butches,” also in *butch/femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, 57-65; Shane Phelan, “Public Discourse and the Closeting of Butch Lesbians,” also in *butch/femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, 191-99; Cat Moses, “Queering Class: Leslie Feinberg’s *Stone Butch Blues*,” *Studies in the Novel* 31, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 74-97; Sue O’Sullivan, “I Don’t Want You Anymore: Butch/Femme Disappointments,” *Sexualities* 2, no. 4 (1999): 465-73; and Sara L. Crawley, “Are Butch and Fem Working-Class and Antifeminist?” *Gender and Society* 15, no. 2 (April 2001): 175-96, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3081843>.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Lisa Walker, “How to Recognize a Lesbian: The Cultural Politics of Looking Like What You Are,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 4 (1993): 875, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174910>. Smith has argued that there was in the cultural feminism of the 1970s and 1980s “often unacknowledged class-based conflict” (“Butches, Femmes, and Feminists” 399).

⁷⁹ Roof, “1970s Lesbian Feminism Meets 1990s Butch-Femme,” 27.

as an influential lesbian and feminist aesthetic.⁸⁰ Shaw, “as a butch lesbian,” writes Kate Davy, “spent most of the [1970s] appraising feminists with a jaundiced eye, returning feminism’s disapproving gaze on butch/femme roles.”⁸¹ Elsewhere, Karen Allison Hammer writes that the butch, the “masculine lesbian who confronts the world with an impenetrable gaze,” offers “a rough-and-tumble stance and often harbors a hair-trigger instinct to fight back when threatened, either with words or fists.”⁸² In *You’re Just Like My Father*, Shaw targets the cultural feminism of the 1970s that relegated her to the wrong corner in the ring of the identity politics struggle surrounding claims to lesbian community and culture. She does this, however, by turning the seriousness of the raging political battles of the time on its head in one swift comical allusion: “Feminists made me hate dolphins, I mean dildos/ They tried to make me hate boxer shorts,” she quips.⁸³ Shaw recalls how when she performed in London in the late 1970s, for instance, “the feminists in London would throw tomatoes at me because I would talk about butch, being butch and those words were very working class ... the working class people were all from the bars, like me.”⁸⁴ As an Irish working-class butch lesbian, Shaw’s political awareness was formed not through the discourses of second-wave feminism, but rather in the working-class arena of the lesbian bars: “I didn’t really learn anything from feminism,” she declares, “I learned from the bars.”⁸⁵

Despite the fact that cultural feminism observed Shaw’s butchness through weary eyes, as Halberstam reminds incredulous onlookers, “butch does not essentially and necessarily partake in the privileges assigned to masculinity in a male supremacist society,”

⁸⁰ In *Re-Dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1997), Alisa Solomon writes: “Decidedly queer—refusing heterosexuality, fracturing conventional narratives, exposing the mutability of social roles, juicily displaying lesbian desire—Split Britches’ work is also resolutely feminist (though its naughty sensuality and butch-femme imagery have long put it beyond the pale of cultural feminism). It pointedly examines—and reimagines—the place of women within material and representational economies” (156). Likewise, theatre critic, Sue-Ellen Case has been a long-time advocate of Split Britches’ subversive feminist, lesbian, and queer performance work: “Their work has become an icon of lesbian and feminist performance for the grassroots communities who make up their audiences across the United States and Europe. More than any other group, Split Britches has set the stage of lesbian and feminist performance in the United States, during the past fifteen years.” Sue Ellen Case, ed., *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice/Feminist Performance* (London, Routledge, 1996), 1.

⁸¹ Kate Davy, *Lady Dicks and Lesbian Brothers: Staging the Unimaginable at the WOW Café Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 17. Later in her book, Davy reiterates Shaw’s views, recalling how she “considered feminists no less than the enemy, having met with disapproval from feminist who thought butch lesbians like her represented little more than a pathetic attempt at male impersonation” (29).

⁸² Karen Allison Hammer, “Butch Life Writing: Private Desires and Public Demands in the Works of Gertrude Stein,” *Feminist Formations* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 28-29, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/593531/pdf>.

⁸³ Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, 51.

⁸⁴ Shaw, interview by Blakeslee-Drain, 10.

⁸⁵ Dolan, introduction to *A Menopausal Gentleman*, 16. For a seminal study on the significance of bars in the construction and maintenance of a lesbian identity, particularly among working-class women, see Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis’s *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold*, in which the authors argue that by the end of the 1950s, the butch lesbian, who was both “street-wise and fought back physically when provoked by straight society or by other lesbians ... was found in all the lesbian bars, and by the early 1960s, she was a leading force in all the bars that opened. To document the history of the lesbian community in the 1950s and early 1960s is to write her history” (68).

because butches “also suffer sexism, butches also experience misogyny; butches may not be strictly women but they are not exempt from female trouble.”⁸⁶ Shaw has exposed the bigoted and homophobic abuse she and her queer companions faced in New York during the years both prior to and even after the so-called gay and lesbian liberation in the aftermath of the Stonewall riots in the city. In Dolan’s introduction to the collected scripts, for instance, Shaw describes a common conflict in the subway against a group of young male aggressors. She details the process as such: the first rule is to ignore them, the second rule is to move, and the third is to punch your way out of the situation. “When forced into the third option,” Dolan relays, “Shaw let her anger fly, putting her fists into action and scaring the boys enough to send them running out of her subway car.”⁸⁷ Through the figure of the pugilist in *You’re Just Like My Father*, Shaw confronts this history of denigration from the heterosexual gaze in the 1950s as a young butch in the making, from the sceptical observations of lesbian feminism in the 1970s, and from the continued violence against and refusal to take seriously performances of female masculinity in the 1990s.

As Elin Diamond points out in her analysis of the performance, while she raises her fists at each mention of her mother’s castigation and in identification with her pugilist genealogy, “Shaw mimes receiving more hits than she dishes out, less from feminists who want her to abandon her dildo, than from the phallic Other whose regulations for ‘perverts’ might send her to ‘sex jail.’”⁸⁸ This is an important point because it challenges the male aggression and self-destruction privileged both inside and outside the boxing ring. Against the ropes, Shaw’s fists are raised in defence of her mother’s damning chastisement and the homophobia of wider society, unevenly affecting Shaw’s mother’s mediated view of her butch daughter. “She said I’d go to hell if I didn’t get married,” says Shaw.⁸⁹

Later, wearing an army uniform, Shaw mimes the roll of a drill instructor, reciting her mother’s often-absurd condemnations:

My mother said, “You’ll go to hell if you keep this up.”
My mother said, “You’ll die if you run in the street.”
My mother said, “A bear will eat your child if you leave it unattended on the back porch.”
My mother said, “If you bowl on Sunday, you’ll go to hell.”
My mother said, “If you swear, you’ll be like Catholics.”⁹⁰

Shaw’s mother’s staunchly anti-Catholic views resurface later in the performance, when Shaw remembers, “She told me I couldn’t have Coca-Cola until I was sixteen, and/ When I had one

⁸⁶ Halberstam, “Between Butches,” 64.

⁸⁷ Dolan, introduction to *A Menopausal Gentleman*, 9.

⁸⁸ Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (London: Routledge, 1997), 151.

⁸⁹ Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, 51.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

at a lunch counter, she said Catholics/ Made me do it.”⁹¹ In this study, Shaw is an anomaly, being the sole Irish-American cultural figure not emerging from a Catholic background. In this sense, she stands as an important disruption in the truncated narrative of Irish-American identity in the United States, an identity almost universally conceived of as one based on a Catholic family and community background.

During the earliest phases of Irish migration to colonial American in the eighteenth century, Irish Presbyterians became part of the “Scotch-Irish” subgroup. “It was not until the 1830s that Catholics constituted a majority of the Irish influx,” Patrick Ireland explains, “and Protestants continued to arrive during and after the Famine.”⁹² As Donald Akenson has shown, the conventional story of Irish America, when Protestants have been included, has been grossly misinterpreted and misrepresented. In *The Irish Diaspora*, he notes, “notice that an equation which runs through much of the New World conventional wisdom about the Irish diaspora is wrong: the identification of ‘Irish Protestants’ with ‘Irish Presbyterians.’ The Anglicans (that is, adherents of the Church of Ireland), not the Presbyterians, were the largest Protestant denomination.”⁹³ Shaw’s family is part of this latter group of Irish Protestant migrants to the United States, leaving Ireland in the late nineteenth century. As J.J. Lee argues in his introduction to the critical volume, *Making the Irish American*, the history of this group as been almost entirely ignored in historical and cultural scholarship. “This may be partly because they were able to fit into, or disappear into, established American Protestant society,” Lee suggests, “rising without trace, so to speak, and being sufficiently affluent, educated, and religiously correct not to have to cluster in a way that would make them conspicuous contemporaries.”⁹⁴ While sharing the migration and religious history of this group of Anglican Irish Protestants, however, Shaw’s family was positioned firmly within the working class in Belmont, and her parents, while absorbing the anti-Catholic environment of Yankee America, nonetheless failed to achieve the economic success Lee is citing in his discussion.

In the sense that Shaw’s performance presents a staging of disidentification based on a radical reterritorialisation of masculinity, it can also be observed as a form of Irish-American disidentification, in that the image of the Irish pugilist emerges from the Catholic narrative of the Irish in the United States, a story that has exclusively omitted Irish Protestants from the polymorphic chronicle. “Few would dispute that boxing is a working class sport,” writes Gems in his essay, “The Politics of Boxing: Resistance, Religion, and Working Class

⁹¹ Ibid., 58.

⁹² Patrick R. Ireland, “Irish Protestant Migration and Politics in the USA, Canada, and Australia: A Debated Legacy,” *Irish Studies Review* 20, no. 3 (August 2012): 268, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2012.695613>.

⁹³ Donald Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Toronto: P.D. Meany, 1996), 29.

⁹⁴ J.J. Lee, “Interpreting Irish America,” introduction to *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 4.

Assimilation.”⁹⁵ According to Wilcox, boxing has been historically most popular among “oppressed minorities,” and in his study, Wilcox traces the nineteenth-century Irish position in the United States, when boxing provided an escape from nativist hostility and promised the Irish “a rapid escape from poverty and discrimination.”⁹⁶ Conventionally, however, studies of Irish pugilism have focused on the Irish Catholic story, eschewing admittance of Irish Protestants to the prizefighting Hall of Fame. Gems’s 2018 article, “Sport and the Assimilation of American Catholics,” extends this truncated narrative of Irish-American identity.⁹⁷ Akenson even suggests that the term “Irish-American” might not be a suitable one for what, in his opinion, should properly be termed “Anglo-Irish.”⁹⁸ Still, the less defined, and thus more expansive term, “Irish,” denoting an Irish identity in the US that does not necessarily align itself automatically with any religious denomination, regional location, class, or race, might actually prove to be more helpful. To this end, the queer performance of Irishness on stage in Shaw’s performance art discovers multiple forms of disidentification which bring together configurations of gender and Irish cultural logic, sending them up and turning them into more egalitarian forms of living and being in the world. In Diane Negra’s words, “by turning current concepts of Irishness inside out, it is possible that they might generate the kind of Irish clichés we can live with.”⁹⁹

Irish-American Drag: Performance and Performativity

According to Diamond, performance art and theatre in the 1970s and 1980s worked to challenge the ontological notion of identity as that which names a stable “I,” whose unadulterated experience is staged truthfully before an audience. As she puts it, “performance art affirmed postmodern subjectivity as a precarious assumption of an ‘I-place,’ a coded blip in a network of language games and social discourses.”¹⁰⁰ Shaw conforms to such understandings of the “I” speaking on stage, declaring her own performance work as a form of “creative truth,” defined as “when you take a basic impulse or a fact and try to make it poetic.”¹⁰¹ In her solo performances, as this section indicates, Shaw gestures towards experience as performance and the ways in which identity is performatively constituted as a

⁹⁵ Gems, “The Politics of Boxing,” 89.

⁹⁶ Wilcox, “Irish Americans in Sports: The Nineteenth Century,” 444.

⁹⁷ Gerald R. Gems, “Sport and the Assimilation of American Catholics,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2018): 33-54, EBSCOhost.

⁹⁸ Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora*, 252-53.

⁹⁹ Diane Negra, “The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture,” in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 151.

¹⁰¹ Shaw, “On Being An Independent Solo Artist,” 40.

narrativised and embodied process. In her inaugural discussion on the theoretical concept of gender performativity, Butler, in explicitly dramatic rhetoric suited to the readership of *Theatre Journal* in which the essay appears, writes:

The act that one does, the act that one performs, is in a sense an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it, but which requires individual actors in order to be actualized and reproduced as reality once again ... Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives.¹⁰²

Drag, in particular has offered Butler a model through which she has been able to illustrate her theory of gender performativity. In “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” Butler writes that:

[d]rag constitutes the mundane way in which genders are appropriated, theatricalized, worn, and done; it implies that all gendering is a kind of impersonation and approximation. If this is true, it seems, there is no original or primary gender that drag imitates, but *gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original*; in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself.¹⁰³

As Diamond puts it in relation to *You're Just Like My Father*, in donning the costumes of her father's era and reciting the cultural iconography of the twentieth century, Shaw “demonstrates not only the theatricality of drag, but also the drag of the gender binary.”¹⁰⁴

For Butler, “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.”¹⁰⁵ “My mother used to watch me getting dressed,” Shaw says in her performance:

I used to let myself take forever getting dressed.
My mother watched me.
She loved me, my mother.
She recognized me.
“You look just like your father,” she said.
I put on a starched shirt
And I was my father.¹⁰⁶

For Román, drag is not only a form of entertainment; it is “sometimes a queer survival skill as well.” He continues to suggest that, while drag is most often imagined in relation to gay men,

¹⁰² Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” 526.

¹⁰³ Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 21.

¹⁰⁴ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 156.

¹⁰⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰⁶ Shaw, *You're Just Like Your Father*, 61.

Shaw's work exemplifies in his view the ways in which "drag always seems to signal both a peculiar form of gender acquiescence *and* a specific form of gender resistance."¹⁰⁷ Shaw admits:

That's why I chose to be a boy.
So I could wear starched shirts
To keep the ugly world away from girls,
And so girls could hold my hand
And rest their head on my shoulder
My clean white shoulder, stiff with pleasure.¹⁰⁸

Masculinity for Shaw is an anti-aggressive, protective feminist category of identity, and lesbian desire is inscribed into the "stiff" white shirt, now a symbol of affection and female pleasure.

Whereas Maggie Fitzgerald in *Million Dollar Baby* must repudiate libidinal excess to become Irish, Shaw's performance defiantly binds queer sexuality, female masculinity, and Irish ethnicity, locating this interaction within her hands. In an earlier scene, Shaw confides, "I like to touch things and people."¹⁰⁹ She continues:

Once a shrink asked me where my desire comes from.
I said 'From my hands.'
She told me to keep my hands to myself.
She didn't mean to say it.
It just came out and embarrassed her.
I guess shrinks aren't supposed to be so direct.
But I knew what she meant.¹¹⁰

Shaw explicitly understands her hands as integral to her queer sexuality and dissident gender performance: "It has to do with my arms/ My fingers/ My hands/ These are the butch queer feminine parts/ Of me."¹¹¹ Later in the performance, Shaw literalises the intimate connection between her hands and desire through an act of fisting. She says,

I'm down in Pele, reaching for her womb, keep my hands to myself. Keep these big, old cow-milking, queer hands to myself. Let them hang at my side or behind my back, or slip into my own pants and stay there. Big old hands that want to get sucked into you, sliding uncontrollably up into you, too big to get in, like a newborn baby, ready for the womb, but not the world.¹¹²

Shaw plays with the prohibition and pleasure attached to her hands, on the one reciting the demand to keep her hands to herself, to keep her desire in check, while on the other relishing in the pleasure of her "big" butch hands. Moreover, the reference to her "big, old cow-

¹⁰⁷ Hughes and Román, "O Solo Homo: An Introductory Conversation," 6 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁰⁸ Shaw, *You're Just Like My Father*, 62.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 61.

milking” hands reaffirms a connection to her father, whose wife, was particularly drawn to his large muscles from farming and milking cows—a likeness both projected onto and assumed by Shaw in the performance.¹¹³ Further to this, Shaw has already made a firm connection between her father and herself when she remembers, “He had big hands. I have his big hands.”¹¹⁴

In the scene that follows, Shaw displaces the penis as a sign of power and pleasure, saying, “I can hardly look at the real ones/ That look like real dicks/ I can look at the dolphin ones/ Dolphins don’t have veins./ It’s the veins./ That vanity in men.”¹¹⁵ In this moment, Shaw deflates the penis and, instead, presents the butch body as pleasurable force and, to use Butler’s phrase, a “lesbian phallus.” Returning to the phantasmatic properties of the sexed and sexual body in Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories of subjectivity, Butler, in a chapter entitled, “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary,” from *Bodies That Matter* asks whether the primacy of the male phallus can be dethroned through the radically disruptive figure of the lesbian phallus. If the phallus is purely discursive and imaginary, its corporeality must not automatically recur to the penis: the lesbian phallus can equally be symbolised by “an arm, a tongue, a hand (or two), a knee, a thigh, a pelvic bone, an array of purposefully instrumentalized body-like things.”¹¹⁶ Shaw’s desiring hands, then, in her performance of butch gender in *You’re Just Like My Father* invokes the lesbian phallus, thus dislodging the penis as the privileged site of power and pleasure.

¹¹³ Ibid., 64.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 50.

¹¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (1993; repr., London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 55.



Figure 3. In this image from *Menopausal Gentleman*, Shaw draws on and subverts the symbolic power of the phallus. Courtesy of Eva Weiss.

Indeed, for Halberstam, Butler's lesbian phallus owes a debt to the figure of the transgender butch female-bodied subject: "Butler's ability to finally, after years of debate among feminist psychoanalytic theorists, disassociate the phallus from the penis owes everything to a submerged but readable investment in the viability of nonmale masculinity."¹¹⁷

Shaw, however, impossible to firmly place within gender categorisation, defies the enduring phallocentricism of Butler's and Halberstam's celebration lesbian of desire and identification. Shaw declares,

I got really excited when I realized my sexuality was also in my lips. I got that from Elvis Presley ... The man I am today still thinks all desire starts at the mouth. It comes from right inside the lip, the inside part of the lips that are always moist.¹¹⁸

In her theory of "erotohistoriography," Elizabeth Freeman challenges the phallocentrism of Butler's own queer reterritorialisation of the signifier of the phallus, arguing instead for an imaginary morphology attuned to "a certain desire to be filled up," one that in place of the lesbian phallus offers the orifice—and Freeman draws on the mouth as the premier orifice in

¹¹⁷ Halberstam, "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly," 357.

¹¹⁸ Shaw, *You're Just Like My Father*, 59-60.

her essay—as a site of pleasure and connection: “in short, holes beget holes.”¹¹⁹ Shaw’s work can be seen to straddle both of these theoretical interventions, never aligning singularly with one or the other.

On female masculinity and with Shaw’s performance of lesbian gender in mind, Alisa Solomon explains that “[a]dopting and often transforming traits traditionally associated with men, butches threaten masculinity more than they imitate it; they colonize it. Making aggression or toughness or chivalry or rebelliousness their historic own, butches reveal the arbitrariness with which such traits are said to belong to men. Rather than copying some ‘original’ image of masculinity, butches point to the embarrassing fact that there is no such thing: masculinity is an artifice no matter who performs it.”¹²⁰ In his summary of Shaw’s show, Halberstam writes,

Shaw moves easily back and forth between various personae: she is the fighter, the crooner, the soldier, the breadwinner, the romeo, the patriarch. In each of these roles, she makes it clear that she is a female-bodied person inhabiting each role and that each role is part of her gender identity. To play among a variety of masculine identifications, furthermore, Shaw is not forced to become her father or to appropriate his maleness; she is already ‘just like’ her father, and their masculinities exist on parallel plains.¹²¹

In place of the phallic fists of the male pugilist, who embodies “the spectacle of a battered white male masculinity that always finds a way to win,” Shaw, a raging Irish bull, concomitantly employs the lesbian phallus and labial desire, becoming “a new champion, a legitimate contender, ready to fight all corners and determined to go the distance.”¹²²

In the fast-paced opening monologue of *You’re Just Like My Father*, Shaw announces the intersecting issues to be explored in her one-hour staging of butch identification and lesbian desire. She begins:

Hey!
I’m Eddie.
My father wouldn’t call me Eddie, he called me Margaret.
Margaret means pearl.
I was his pearl of a girl.
But pearl didn’t match my outfits.
This is my face. It’s sharp like my father.
You look just like your father, my mother would say.
I look like my father when I’m in a good mood.
Most lesbians I know really like their fathers, me included.
My father was a Leo, he had a heart condition;
he had to count to ten before he hit us.

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Freeman, “Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography,” *Social Text* 23, no. 3-4 (Autumn/Winter 2005): 62-63.

¹²⁰ Solomon, *Re-Dressing the Canon*, 168.

¹²¹ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, 32.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 43.

He gave me the same heart condition
simply because I knew him so well.¹²³

Her narrative of masculine identification through corporeal likeness unsettles rather than reasserts essentialist notions of inheritance. Familiarity rather than strictly familial genetics produces what Butler terms the “imaginary morphology” of gender identity for Shaw.¹²⁴ In her 2008 show, *Must—The Inside Story*, Shaw continues to cite her father’s influence on her butch body: “My upper arms are big, ‘cause my dad said life is hard, so he made us lift our weight every day before we went to school.”¹²⁵ In so doing, Shaw concomitantly suggests the difficulties of a working-class experience (“life is hard”) as crucial to the constitution of her masculine body. “In the images of her storytelling,” Diamond writes, “Shaw wrenches the oedipal story, turning resemblance into identification, identification into mimesis.”¹²⁶

In her 1998 production, *Menopausal Gentleman*, Shaw ostensibly conceives her butch masculinity as the expression of an ontological truth:

I was born this way.
I was born butch.
I didn’t learn it at theater school!
I’m so queer I don’t even have to talk about it, it speaks for itself.¹²⁷

However, what initially appears as a form of gender and sexual essentialism in her performance, is, upon closer inspection, exposed as evidence of the socially contingent and performative structure of gender and sexual identities. Firstly, when Shaw candidly suggests to her audience that she has seemingly acquired her father’s heart condition, she, in turn, supports that assertion not through an endowment of biological inheritance, but rather through a social transmission: “He gave me the same heart condition simply because I knew him so well.”¹²⁸ Likewise, Shaw does not claim that her face is sharp in the same manner as her father’s. In actuality, she makes a subtle, yet crucial distinction. “This is my face. It’s sharp like my father,” she says in *You’re Just Like My Father*, thus a replica not of his face specifically, but rather the sharp masculinity that her face embodies.

Subsequently, when she declares, seemingly with bold anatomical insight, “I was born butch,” Shaw is not supporting a “born this way” ideology, despite her very citation of that phrase here. In proclaiming that her queerness “speaks for itself,” Shaw seems to be appealing directly to Butler’s notion of performativity and the discursive construction of identity, which

¹²³ Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, 48.

¹²⁴ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, xxii.

¹²⁵ Peggy Shaw, *Must—The Inside Story*, in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 145.

¹²⁶ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 155.

¹²⁷ Peggy Shaw, *Menopausal Gentleman*, in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 84.

¹²⁸ Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, 48.

shows how subjectification is not a process by which the self employs language to express an inner gender identity; rather, it describes how the fabrication of that gendered subject is established through the very utterance of language that this subject is said to speak: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results.”¹²⁹ Thus, Shaw draws attention not to the biological inheritance of genetic features as meaningful facts *per se*. Instead, she highlights the ways in which those features become inscribed with social and cultural meaning on the corporeal surface of the body.

In *Menopausal Gentleman*, Shaw describes a conceptualisation of identity not as individual or internal, but rather as holistic and socially contingent. She exclaims, “I’m just thousands of parts of other people mashed into one body, I am not an original person.”¹³⁰ She subsequently introduces James Dean and Marlon Brando as inspirations for her own production of masculinity. As Solomon says about this gender citation:

Shaw’s declaration ‘I was born this way’ assert[s] a ... butch essentialism, which [is] immediately distanced and commented upon by the pieces that make [her] costume ... Butch and femme are not just the costume; but they’re nothing without the costume.¹³¹

Solomon does not argue that butch and femme lesbian genders are imitative replicas of heterosexual models. Instead, she demonstrates how this “repetition of heterosexual constructs within sexual cultures both gay and straight may well be the inevitable site of the denaturalization and mobilization of gender categories” more generally.¹³² Butch and femme genders are no more socially dependent than all genders, both heterosexual and non-heterosexual. Indeed, in place of a reification of the “naturalness” of heterosexual genders, dissident performances of gender produce, as Marjorie Garber suggests, “not just a category crisis of male and female, but the crisis of category itself.”¹³³ In his own Butlerian philosophy of butch identity, Shane Phelan argues that, like all gender, butch lesbian gender is the product of social and cultural discourses:

Butches are made, not born, by the same confluence of social process that produces other social positions and consciousnesses ... Butchness is imbricated in the same performative fabric within which late moderns of every stripe negotiate their lives; it is neither the expression of a true essence, nor a voluntary ‘performance,’ nor a compulsory production.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34.

¹³⁰ Shaw, *Menopausal Gentleman*, 84.

¹³¹ Solomon, *Re-dressing the Canon*, 176.

¹³² Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 43.

¹³³ Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (London: Penguin, 1992), 17.

¹³⁴ Phelan, “Public Discourse and the Closeting of Butch Lesbians,” 191.

Anne Fausto Sterling describes this network as “that array of happenings that covers everything from music videos, poetry, and rap lyrics to sports, beer commercials, and psychotherapy.”¹³⁵ As Halberstam also argues, masculine lesbians “produce wildly divergent masculinities in many different cultural arenas.”¹³⁶

While performance serves to gesture towards the imitative structure of gender identity, it provides, concomitantly, an opportunity to witness the loci at which gender intersects with and emerges from other identifications. As Butler herself puts it in the open pages of *Gender Trouble*, “because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities ... it becomes impossible to separate out ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained.”¹³⁷ In this sense, Butler’s radical reconfiguration of gender identity as performatively constructed opens up new ways to think about the ways in which all forms of social and cultural identifications are assumed, embodied and performed. Drawing on Paul Connerton’s work on habitual memory and incorporating practices, whereby “the past is, as it were, sedimented in the body,”¹³⁸ as well as Butler’s theory of performativity, Anne Marie Fortier’s study of Italian ethnicity in *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* highlights the ways in which “cultural ethnicity may be ‘incorporated’ through repeated performative acts, the result of which is to produce the imaginary effect of an internal ethnic ‘essence.’”¹³⁹ This move in Fortier’s study to draw attention to “the mutual construction of social categories through performative acts of gender and ethnicity” has important implications for a study of Shaw’s performance of Irishness on the stage.¹⁴⁰ Simply put, Fortier’s crucial intervention allows for the formulation of a theory of ethnic, or Irish, performativity, through which that identity is not merely represented but produced.

Irish Times and Queer Temporalities

In her productions, Shaw reveals reticulated identifications of butch gender and Irish ethnicity. Moreover, her performance illustrates the ways in which the constitution of such an

¹³⁵ Anne Fausto Sterling, “How to Build A Man,” in *Constructing Masculinity*, ed. Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson (New York: Routledge, 1995), 127.

¹³⁶ Del Lagrace Volcano and Judith “Jack” Halberstam, eds., *The Drag King Book* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1999), 140.

¹³⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 4-5. In her own discussion of queer gender, Rubin writes that “[f]orms of masculinity are molded by the experiences and expectations of class, race, ethnicity, religion, occupation, age, subculture, and individual personality. National, racial, and ethnic groups differ widely in what constitutes masculinity and each has its own system for communicating and conferring masculinity” (“Of Catamites and Kings” 474).

¹³⁸ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72.

¹³⁹ Anne-Marie Fortier, *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

identity is complicated by temporal shifts, collisions and interactions. In her analysis of *You're Just Like My Father*, for instance, Diamond employs Walter Benjamin's "dialectical image" in order to illustrate the ways in which Shaw manages to "bring past and present into collision" and provides a productive way to "read history against the grain—and read the body against the grain ... recovering its transgressiveness."¹⁴¹ In a critique of the "progressive" rhythm of Butler's queer performativity, Freeman asks why must subversive identifications be future-oriented in their performative production, and offers, instead, the notion of "temporal drag," a modality that resuscitates "the interesting threat that the genuine *past-ness* of the past sometimes makes to the political present."¹⁴² In the opening of her essay, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," Freeman recalls a confrontation with a former student as a young graduate student and teacher in 1993. Offended by Freeman's dismissal of a certain type of lesbian, one who gives potlucks and fixes cars, this student, wearing this 1970's lesbian "style" across her own body, took issue with what she felt to be a critique of the image with which she identified as retrograde and oppositional to the newer forms of lesbian gender performed by Freeman, then only a few years older. "I was telling a story about anachronism," Freeman recognises, "with 'lesbian' as the sign of times gone by and her body as an implicit teaching text."¹⁴³ In fact, as Freeman goes on to point out in her study, the lesbian feminist has often been viewed as "the big drag, drawing politics inexorably back to essentialized bodies, normative visions of women's sexuality, and single-issue identity politics."¹⁴⁴

Temporal drag in Freeman's writing challenges the implicit argument in Butler's performativity claims that repetitions with a "backwards-looking force" can only serve to perpetuate the phantasmatic notion of an original of which that citational repetition is a faithful copy. "Might some bodies," Freeman asks, "in registering on their very surfaces the co-presence of several historically-specific events, movement, and collective pleasures, complicate or displace the centrality of *gender-transitive* drag to queer performativity? Might they articulate instead a kind of *temporal* transitivity that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other 'anachronisms' behind?"¹⁴⁵ Shaw's *You're Just Like My Father* is invested in a staging of Irish-American gender and temporal drag as a means of both rescuing clandestine countermemories of a past historical era and performing a viable queer articulation of ethnic identity in her own here and now. In *Time Binds*, Freeman expands on her earlier discussions

¹⁴¹ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 154.

¹⁴² Elizabeth Freeman, "Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations," *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 2000): 728, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2000.0046>.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 727.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 728.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 729.

of queer temporality in a study that makes nuanced readings of how capitalist society enforces a mode of “chrononormativity” in order to ensure maximum productivity in the organisation of human bodies. For her, class, gender, and sexuality intersect as key constituents in the state’s organisation of bodies, and, for this reason, forms of queer temporalities can successfully work against the classist, chronobiopolitics of capitalist economies.¹⁴⁶

“With queers and/of the working class,” Freeman writes, “the synchronic aspect of habitus out of joint meets the diachronic aspect of generationality,” and that “these two sometimes but not always overlapping subject-positions, queer and working class, also confront time longitudinally.”¹⁴⁷ In *Feeling Backward*, Heather Love illustrates the ways in which, in the movement toward modernisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, gender and sexual misfits, as well as “women, colonized people, the non-white, the disabled, the poor, and criminals were marked as inferior by means of the allegation of backwardness.”¹⁴⁸ In a Benjaminian stroke, Freeman gestures towards the misgivings about the queer and/of the working class and places this anxiety in their unruly potential to “not only reject the future but also turn back toward the suffering of their forebears.”¹⁴⁹ This is the challenge presented by Shaw in her performance: against the “advances” of capitalist modernity and the forward “progression” of gay and lesbian politics in the late twentieth century, she turns backward toward the family as a site of conflict and suffering, toward a deeply religious mother with mental health issues, a father dead by the time Shaw was seventeen, and an environment hostile toward a young butch lesbian.

In abandoning the parent-child dynamic, Freeman’s temporal drag allows her to trace the residue of lost political histories and collective cultures on the body and in contemporary feminist practices.¹⁵⁰ As the family’s structure is constructed on the absorption of and (dis)identifications with wider social and cultural logic, however, it continues to be a generating site of the effects of the past on the constitution of the self in the present. “I don’t want to be like my parents,” Shaw says in *You’re Just Like My Father*. “In any way/ Unless, of course,/ I can’t help it. You should never take your parents personally.”¹⁵¹ As Diamond suggests, in this moment, Shaw sends up and critiques psychoanalytic discourses that privilege the Oedipal crisis central to desire and identification.¹⁵² “On the other hand,”

¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 3.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴⁸ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6.

¹⁴⁹ Freeman, *Time Binds*, 19.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 64-65.

¹⁵¹ Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, 51.

¹⁵² Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 155.

Diamond writes, “not taking one’s parents *personally* urges us to take them *socially*,” a conclusion more in line with Freeman’s temporal drag. Shaw elaborates on this later in her performance:

My mother said quotation marks change the meaning of things; make them more important, just like the meaning of the written word. They frame meaning, like the name that tries to frame being. It’s a simple out, naming me reminds you of your father, as if there are only two choices in life, mother and father. But I’ll take that on if that’s your only way of describing it. It’s a simple out, merely an imitation of a man we all know. Guilt by association.¹⁵³

Performed in the early 1990s, Shaw’s *You’re Just Like My Father* seizes many of the critical interventions that would become a cornerstone of queer theory in the same decade, with the publication of Butler’s *Gender Trouble* and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *The Epistemology of the Closet*. In this sense, these scenes in which she interrogates the viability of gender and sexual categories, as well as the recurring trope of the triadic family cell in the genealogy of sexual identity, suggest Shaw’s performative interventions were ahead of their time. As Román writes, with Shaw in mind, “queer solo performers are often at the frontiers of new social identities and more inclusive community formations.”¹⁵⁴

Shaw’s sartorial shapeshifting in the performance highlights an additional convergence: the connection between Irish-American identity and class-consciousness. Since the mass immigrations to the United States from Ireland in the nineteenth century, the Irish-American narrative has been represented as a vertical progression in upward class mobility as well as an outward move from urban ghetto to suburban deracination. In his 1989 autobiography, *Harp*, Irish-American author John Gregory Dunne summed up this phenomenon as “from steerage to suburbia.”¹⁵⁵ Dunne’s account of how his family’s history was marked by generational progression into middle- and upper-middle-class assimilated life in the United States is not unique. John Kelleher traces the emergence of an Irish-American middle class to one particular moment in time: September 7, 1892. The scene Kelleher commemorates is intimately tied to the developing image of the sport of boxing in America, and he relates this evolution to the assimilation of the Irish into the ranks of the middle class. On September 7, 1892, “Gentleman Jim” Corbett defeated former champion and icon of the post-Civil War boxing game John L. Sullivan. While Sullivan’s art of prizefighting was a boisterous and hard-drinking display of masculine bravado, Corbett marked a dramatic shift in the public image of the Irish in America. According to Kelleher, Corbett was “slim, deft, witty, looking like a proto-Ivy Leaguer with his pompadour, his fresh intelligent face, his

¹⁵³ Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, 56.

¹⁵⁴ Hughes and Román, “*O Solo Homo: An Introductory Conversation*,” 6.

¹⁵⁵ John Gregory Dunne, *Harp* (London: Granta Books, 1989), 26.

well-cut young man's clothes. He was, as it were, the paradigm of all those young Irish-Americans about to make the grade."¹⁵⁶

The rise of the Irish-American middle class continued in the twentieth century, propelled in the 1940s in the wake of the Second World War. "Irish America's greatest progress came after World War II," argues Lawrence J. McCaffrey.¹⁵⁷ McCaffrey goes on to say that the G.I. Bill "completed the Irish-American economic and social evolution from unskilled working to middle class."¹⁵⁸ The role performed by the Irish in World War II was a test of loyalty, patriotism, and respectability, and for most historians of Irish America, the Irish passed this test, moving rapidly into middle-class respectability and, accordingly, initiating a new era in the history of Irish identity in America. "Well that's one thing I've always admired about you Irish-Americans," says Franklin Roosevelt to George M. Cohan in the 1942 Hollywood classic, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*. "You carry your love of country like a flag, right out in the open. It's a great quality."¹⁵⁹

Indeed, the Fighting Irish iconography in Shaw's repertoire extends beyond the pugilist to include the army officer. "In the dialectical image of the soldier," Diamond declares,

Shaw brings camp theatricality and butch stylistics into mimetic relation with a romanticized image of state power. The romanticization is surely undeniable. World War II was the USA's happiest war, immortalized in scores of war movies, musicals, and famous photographs, not to mention untold numbers of black-and-white family snapshots in the drawers of ageing parents. After the Depression, World War II was the defining moment of Shaw's parents' generation, even as the baby boomers of Shaw's generation ushered in the conspicuous consumption and cold-war conservatism of the 1950s.¹⁶⁰

While Diamond fails to connect this wider American narrative to the specificities of Irish-American history, she nonetheless astutely professes the subversive power of Shaw's military drag: "With the laser accuracy of the practiced drag performer Shaw lovingly inhabits, and mockingly frames for critique, her GI-typical guy."¹⁶¹ On February 28, 1994, in the year *You're Just Like My Father* debuted, the Clinton Administration instituted the "Don't ask. Don't tell" policy on gay and lesbian individuals in the army, protecting closeted gays and

¹⁵⁶ John V. Kelleher, "Irishness in America," *Atlantic*, July 1961, 38-40. Quoted in Charles Fanning, *The Exiles of Erin: Nineteenth-Century Irish-American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chester Springs, PA: Dufour, 1997), 12-13.

¹⁵⁷ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 172.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

¹⁵⁹ *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, DVD, directed by Michael Curtiz (Burbank, CA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1941). James Cagney, who starred in the role of George M. Cohan in *Yankee Doodle Dandy* was in fact an additional figure of disidentification in Shaw's performative repertoire. See, for instance, *You're Just Like My Father*, 59: "Every time someone hurts me, I want to become famous/ and buy a 1962 Corvette and get all dressed up/ with a beautiful woman next to me./ and drive past them on the street./ just so they can catch a glimpse of me/ and how happy and successful I am./ I got that from Jimmy Cagney."

¹⁶⁰ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 157.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

lesbians from discrimination, yet also banning openly gay and lesbian people from entering the service. “I would have joined the army in the early sixties if *Life* magazine hadn’t published their latest test for detection for homosexuals in the army,” Shaw reveals, bringing yet another era’s homophobia into the temporal constellation of her performance.¹⁶²

Disrobing the army officer’s uniform, Shaw is once again the fighter in boxer shorts and bandages, this time acquiring a silk robe reminiscent of the boxer before she enters the ring. In the final scenes of the performance, Shaw’s donning of her father’s starched white shirt and 1940’s film noir suit jacket is accompanied by her mother’s ambivalent affection towards her daughter’s display of masculinity. Despite this ostensible transformation from the Irish immigrant fighter figure into the assimilated white-collar descendent of struggling immigrant parents, Shaw poses defensively once more as the still combative boxer when her mother provides a familiar refrain, “Do you know you look just like your father?”¹⁶³ Indeed, Shaw’s boxer costume is never fully dismantled; rather, it remains integral to each of the personae she performs on stage—at all times uncovering a resistance to a neatly progressive transition. “If Shaw’s drag is deliciously successful,” Diamond adds, “we never forget the ace-bandage wrapping underneath.”¹⁶⁴

Shaw disidentifies with the image of Irish embourgeoisement suggested in the progression of her performance, from immigrant pugilist to middle-class gentleman not only through a reterritorialisation of gender, but also through a torquing of assumptions about Irish-American class-consciousness. After all, the already abridged narrative of Irish *Catholic* embourgeoisement does not apply identically to Irish Protestants in America. Summarising results from the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago from the 1960s and 1970s, Akenson writes that people descending from this group in the United States “were lowest in terms of average family income, lowest in occupational prestige, and ninth out of twelve identifiable white groups in their educational level.”¹⁶⁵ When asked, “[w]hat is one of the most unexpected influences on your art?” Shaw responded, “[b]eing dirt poor, being working class, having nothing to lose.”¹⁶⁶ As Freeman points out, there are temporal issues at play in the inability to “keep up” with the socio-economic advances of the groups

¹⁶² Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, 55.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶⁴ Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis*, 157.

¹⁶⁵ Akenson, *The Irish Diaspora*, 251. See also, Fred Boal, “Who Are the ‘Irish’ Americans?” *Fortnight* 155 (October 1977): 4-5, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25546412>. On the same research findings, Boal writes that “Irish Protestants surveyed had family incomes of less than \$10,000 a year—for the Catholics this was only 36 per cent. On the other hand almost 40 per cent of the Irish Catholics had family incomes over \$15,000 a year while this applied to less than 30 per cent of the Protestants. In addition the Protestants were more likely to identify themselves as ‘working class’ of ‘lower class’ than the Catholics” (4).

¹⁶⁶ Peggy Shaw, “Eight Questions for Peggy Shaw,” in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 159.

with which we identify. “In turn,” she writes, “failures or refusals to inhabit middle- and upper-middle-class habitus appears as, precisely, a synchrony, or time out of joint.”¹⁶⁷ For this reason, queers share eccentric relations to time alongside other subjugated communities whose lives resist the progression of chrononormativity.

“While liberal histories build triumphant political narratives with progressive stories of improvement and success,” writes Halberstam, “radical histories must contend with a less tidy past, one that passes on legacies of failure and loneliness as the consequences of homophobia and racism and xenophobia.”¹⁶⁸ In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Halberstam provides a compelling case for the potentiality of failure in a world where success is consistently understood in strictly capitalist and heteronormative terms. Thus, for him, the notion of queer failure becomes a crucial departure point for a reconsideration of how loss itself can produce “other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.”¹⁶⁹ Through an “archive of failure,” Halberstam focuses on an alternative collection, an anti-canon of texts, cultural productions and creative actors in order to present a movement of resistance against oppressive neoliberal, heteronormative, and patriarchal structures. For Halberstam, “the queer artist works with rather than against failure and inhabits the darkness. Indeed the darkness becomes a crucial part of a queer aesthetic.”¹⁷⁰ Within this alternative, queer archive of failure, Halberstam firmly places, alongside a diverse collective of subversive figures (ranging from Jamaica Kincaid to SpongeBob Squarepants), the work of Eileen Myles.¹⁷¹

Myles, on the other hand, has identified failure as a key political strategy in the work of WOW: “To be a female human talking about loving (or hating, but mainly obsessing on) other female humans is to ultimately derail the greater purpose of the birth process which is to create men. WOW is an abysmal failure on an historic scale in that it has ultimately produced decades of dangerous and vital women.”¹⁷² From WOW to *You’re Just Like My Father*, and even further to her most recent performance, *Ruff*, in which the effects of a stroke in 2011 become the material from which the production itself emerges, Shaw continues to embody a repertoire of failure on stage.¹⁷³ In a provocative call for failure, Halberstam seems to also be

¹⁶⁷ Freeman, *Time Binds*, 19.

¹⁶⁸ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 98-99.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁷² Eileen Myles, “WOW Women in Their Own Words,” in *Memories of the Revolution: The First Ten Years of the WOW Café Theater*, ed. Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 181.

¹⁷³ In *Ruff*, which debuted in 2013, Shaw regularly forgets lines, a consequence of the stroke, and relies on both director Lois Weaver and audience members to become part of the performance, providing support throughout the show. In this sense, the notion of a “solo” show is exploded. Shaw’s *Ruff* is a unique performance of collaboration between performer and audience, and evidences the intersubjective power emerging from failure.

thinking of the figure of Shaw as the fighter he found critical to a formulation of female masculinity in 1998, when he calls for a form of “punk pugilism” as part of “a truly political negativity, one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate.”¹⁷⁴ In *Feeling Backward*, however, Heather Love asks whether such a call to action might indeed be unimaginable for some. “While feeling bad *can* result in acting out,” she writes, “being fucked up can also make even the apparently simple act of ‘fucking shit up’ seem out of reach.”¹⁷⁵ Less confrontational than Halberstam’s image of punk pugilism, Shaw poses a striking figure that remains at once in opposition to and emotionally injured by the homophobic culture which has brought her to the ring.

Inhabiting the figure of the “menopausal gentleman” in her 1998 performance, Shaw playfully deconstructs the socio-economic histories attached to that figure, engendering in her mimetic disidentification a queer and class-conscious image of an ageing working-class butch. Echoing Taylor’s work on the transmission of cultural memory in the “performatic,” Freeman writes that the repertoire “is a corporeal mnemonic, whose work is to reincarnate the lost, nondominant past in the present and to pass it on with a difference.”¹⁷⁶ Gender and cultural ethnic drag and disidentification in Shaw’s performance work exemplify such interactions with the past in the present, and this staging of nondominant identity becomes the site of intersubjective exchanges of cultural memory and meaning. As Fintan Walsh has noted, queer performance, in particular, “articulates experiences of oppression, exclusion and displacement, while imagining and cultivating more accommodating, inclusive and sustaining modes of interpersonal intimacy, social support, public participation and cultural belonging.”¹⁷⁷

Drag Race

While the subversive potential in Shaw’s performance to interrogate the gendered, classed, and even religiously-inflected iconography of Irish-American identity has been thus far comprehensively traced, this section asks whether such disruptive queering either ignores or challenges the racial assumptions undergirding the representative power of that iconography.

For the script to *Ruff*, see Peggy Shaw, *Ruff*, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 40, no. 2 (May 2018): 108-32, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/693181/pdf>.

¹⁷⁴ Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure*, 110.

¹⁷⁵ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 161.

¹⁷⁶ Freeman, *Time Binds*, 71.

¹⁷⁷ Fintan Walsh, *Queer Performance and Contemporary Ireland: Dissent and Disorientation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1.

Historically, boxing provides a gauge not only for the shifts in class position among particular groups in the United States but also for the continuing racial dynamics inside and outside the ring. The marketing phenomenon of the “Great White Hope” in professional boxing, as Cannon argues, “is a transparent appeal to race.”¹⁷⁸ As Will Cooley points out in an analysis of the coverage of Italian-American Arturo “Thunder” Gatti and “Irish” Micky Ward’s fights between 2002 and 2004, the so-called “ethnic revival” of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States both drew from and attempted to override the social and political developments of the Civil Rights movement at the time. Sport, and boxing in particular, played a significant role in the assertion of white pride. The media and public response, Cooley argues, proved that “White boxing fans felt secure showing their Irish or Italian pride, whereas it was socially unacceptable and politically incorrect to exhibit ‘White’ pride when hailing the exploits of Ward and Gatti.”¹⁷⁹ Promoters’ drive to increase revenue from boxing as a commercial sport has led to both a devaluing of black fighters and a concomitant backing of white, often Irish, names in the ring, whether or not these fighters claim Irish identity or background.¹⁸⁰ In an era when the place of the Irish pugilist is more a throwback to past glory, Micky Ward, a Massachusetts native, Cooley argues, “embodied the White-ethnic toughness so lacking in many modern, assimilated White men.”¹⁸¹

The question is whether Shaw’s performance of white female masculinity in her staging of the Fighting Irish contributes to the problematic racial projects about which Cooley and Cannon are speaking. Indeed, it might be argued that these unsettling racial politics undergird the narrative to which Shaw attaches her contemporary performance of pugilist identity in *You’re Just Like My Father*: her grandfather’s victory over African-American boxer Joe Louis. The fact that this story slips between historical fact and family fantasy begs the question as to whether that which Shaw stages in the early 1990s affirms assertions of white ethnic “pride.” In fact, in a 1995 essay on the WOW Café Theater, co-founded by Shaw, Kate Davy questions the assumptions of whiteness and exclusions of non-whiteness performed in the shows of the production’s lesbian community. WOW’s membership in the

¹⁷⁸ Cannon, “Ethnic Fighting Identities Today,” 101.

¹⁷⁹ Will Cooley, “‘Vanilla Thrillas’: Modern Boxing and White-Ethnic Masculinity,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 34, no. 4 (2010): 420, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723510379992>.

¹⁸⁰ Cannon, “Ethnic Fighting Identities Today,” 101, 107. Indeed, Cannon describes in his essay the long history in boxing of appropriating Irish names. “In the case of Irish boxing identity,” he argues, “the process of grafting it onto a fighter is often transparent. In the first half of the twentieth century, this could be as simple as adopting a ring name that spoke to a dominant local ethnic group. Fighters identified as Irish had varied ancestries, and their Irishness was mediated, even wholly fictionalized, by the desires of promoters, press, and consumers (98).

¹⁸¹ Cooley, “White-Ethnic Masculinity,” 426. For an additional commentary on representations of “white grievance” in cultural forms, see, Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 95-110. Jacobson reads the *Rocky* films and Scorsese’s *Raging Bull* as exemplary “white grievance” texts that both equate working-class white ethnicity with the socio-economic deprivation of Black Americans and express misgivings about losses to black fighters in the boxing ring.

early 1990s, as Davy points out, was “made up predominantly of middle-class, white lesbians, a few working-class, white lesbians, and an occasional heterosexual women.” Despite the fact that the company embraces and celebrates the “diversity of women,” “very few women of color have participated in its productions and still fewer have belonged to the collective itself.”¹⁸² In her recollection of the early days of WOW in the 1980s and 1990s, Latina performer, Carmelita Tropicana, argues that “WOW mirrored the segregated gay community and New York City at large.” Today, however, she goes on, “WOW is finally diverse.”¹⁸³

This diversity, however, had not touched WOW when Shaw was still active in the company, and as Davy’s significant intervention into the racial politics of the white lesbian performance art in the 1990s suggests, *You’re Just Like My Father* ostensibly fails to address these issues. While WOW’s primarily white lesbian performers successfully interrogated assumptions of heterosexuality and patriarchal gender proscriptions embedded in the historical category of “true womanhood,” since race was crucial to the discursive production of that ideal, the whiteness of these women guaranteed that such a reading would be possible in the first place. In this sense, the radical rupture of the gender binary through a performance of the bad girl who rallies against ideals of piety, purity, passivity, and domesticity by white lesbian women does less to challenge the representation of non-white women, whose sexually excessive identities have historically been imagined as the inverse of the ideals of true womanhood. In Davy’s words, “at the same time that they challenge white womanhood, they depend on it and once again circumscribe and consign to erasure those bodies white womanhood has nullified historically and continues to negate.”¹⁸⁴ The issue with Shaw’s representation of the undutiful daughter in *You’re Just Like My Father* is its implicit dependence on the recognition of this act as subversive in the first place, and this assumption rests on the unmarked presence of whiteness.

As Davy compellingly points out, performance practices that interrogate the institution of white womanhood, with all of its demands of gender and class conformity, are never inherently or automatically anti-racist. “In order to function in ways productive to an anti-racist project,” she continues, “challenges to white womanhood must be foregrounded as such; that is, they must be marked in such a way that the institutional apparatus of white

¹⁸² Kate Davy, “Outing Whiteness: A Feminist/Lesbian Project,” *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 2 (May 1995): 190, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3208483>. See Davy, *Lady Dicks and Lesbian Brothers*, chapter six, 146-78, for a slightly extended commentary on the same issues. In this later iteration, Davy provides Cuban-American Carmelita Tropicana’s performances at WOW as a critical challenge to prevailing assumptions of whiteness on stage in the collective’s early work.

¹⁸³ Carmelita Tropicana, “Liberté, Egalité, Lesbianité,” introduction to *Memories of the Revolution: The First Ten Years of the WOW Café Theater*, ed. Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 12-13.

¹⁸⁴ Davy, “Outing Whiteness,” 199. For a discussion on “true womanhood” and its ideals, see, Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151-74.

womanhood in its effacing, obliterating mode is, at the very least, exhumed from its status as unremarkable to be re-marked.”¹⁸⁵ In 2001, in the solo performance *To My Chagrin*, Shaw finally addresses these issues, confronting racial injustices and making whiteness visible. This performance explores Shaw’s relationship with her biracial grandson Ian, named after the drag queen and performer Ian McKay of Hot Peaches who helped Shaw raise her own daughter in the 1970s.¹⁸⁶

In *To My Chagrin*, Shaw negotiates the act of passing on her brand of masculinity as a white butch lesbian to her grandson. She proudly tells her grandson, “I’m your butch grandmamma/With way too much to say/You keep acting like me.”¹⁸⁷ In these moments, Shaw displays a key attribute of female masculinity: the power to highlight the ways in which masculinity across female bodies is not only not a display of male mimicry, but, more productively, to illustrate how butchness is in fact a model for the construction of masculinity for men. *To My Chagrin* explodes any understanding of racial or ethnic identity as always already “pure” and unmediated by the intersection of other categories, such as class and gender. Shaw attaches Irish-American identity to her conception of gender identity, that is, to an image of hybrid, queer embodiment. “I’m a mixed up second generation/First cousin combo/Inbred Irish grand-but- mother,” she declares.¹⁸⁸ Shaw’s “mixed up” sense of ethnic identity not only provides a stark departure from conservative notions of ethnic purity key to certain configurations of Irish-American exceptionalism in the United States, as explored in chapter five, but also presents a queered narrative of that ethnic identity—her subjectivity emerges from the interaction between forms of sexual, gender and ethnic hybridity. For Shaw, her grandson, whom she describes as a “dual-heritage, bi-racial, mixed metaphor,” inherits his grand-but- mother’s “mixed up” sense of discursively produced and embodied self in place of a conservative configuration of gender and racial purity.¹⁸⁹ Ian’s cultural and racial identities, American, Jamaican, and Irish are shot through Shaw’s unsettling of essentialised bodies and boundaries.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Davy, “Outing Whiteness,” 200.

¹⁸⁶ Shaw, interview with Lucas, 38.

¹⁸⁷ Peggy Shaw, *To My Chagrin*, in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 121.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ In this sense, Shaw joins the likes of Ishmael Reed and Gish Jen, whose work meditates on the erasure and representation of mixed-race Irish identity in the United States. See, Ishmael Reed, “The Celtic in Us,” *Comparative American Studies* 8, no. 4 (December 2010): 327-36; Gish Jen, “An Ethnic Trump,” *Essence*, July 1999, 68; Gish Jen, *Who’s Irish? Stories* (London: Granta Books, 1999), 3-16. “No one cares whether he speaks Gaelic or wears green on St. Patrick’s Day,” Jen writes about her Chinese-Irish-American son, “for though Luke’s skin is fair and his features mixed, people see his straight black hair and know who he is” (“An Ethnic Trump” 68). For a critical engagement with Black Irish identity, see, Sinéad Moynihan, “*Other People’s Diasporas*”: *Negotiating Race in Contemporary Irish and Irish American Culture* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), chapter five, in which Moynihan explores Eugene Brady’s 1998 film, *The Nephew*,

Shaw spins tales of her own butch experiences as well as cautionary advice directed towards her biracial son, her “mixed grandbaby,” who must grow up in a society where public and police brutality are an everyday occurrence. She urges him to:

Keep your hands in sight.
No hands in pockets.
No hands moving.
No hands in motion.
Do you want me to be like you when I grow up? you said
...
Do not move
If you move you're over
You could die if you move.
You could be killed for moving.
Don't reach for anything you could be killed for.¹⁹¹

The demand for Shaw to keep her hands where the homophobic gaze can see them in *You're Just Like My Father* transforms in *To My Chagrin* into a call to keep Ian's hands up and where the piercing racist gaze of the law can see them. While Shaw's performance was produced fifteen years ago, it speaks to more contemporary cases of police brutality against the bodies of black males across the United States, a devastating reality that has faced little legal justice, yet one that has sparked national and international outcry and political mobilisation. The Black Lives Matter organisation, for instance, is the most visible group to demonstrate publicly against a legal, cultural and social system in which black bodies matter less than white bodies. It is black bodies, as Shaw demonstrates in *To My Chagrin* and anti-racist political groups today continue to evidence, that either fail to materialise as culturally intelligible at all, or are treated with less significance and protected less than the bodies of white people.

While Shaw's performance traces similarities between her gendered body and the body and actions of her bi-racial grandson, she remains keenly aware of the divergent racial trajectories she, as a white woman, has experienced and Ian, as a young black man, will follow in a society that suffers from wide-reaching systemic problems of racism. The concomitant display of sameness and difference is most expressly imagined through the hands of white grand-butcher-mother and black “son of grand.” Shaw describes an interaction between the two:

My hand is so much bigger than yours
For now
And so much whiter
We compare hands

which follows a Black Irish-American teenager who has moved to rural Ireland after the death of his Irish mother.

¹⁹¹ Shaw, *To My Chagrin*, 123.

We contrast our hands
We take pictures of our hands¹⁹²

In this production, Shaw's hands become the visible marker of difference between her white body and her grandson's black body. Shaw's projection of Ian's future poignantly illustrates the ways in which his body becomes racialised and observed with suspicion through the watchful gaze of the law. Furthermore, Shaw acknowledges her own role in a white, racist society that subordinates the lives and bodies of racial "others" when she admits, "I've been a King ... a Drag ... a Racist."¹⁹³ In the closing of the performance, Shaw reiterates a clear understanding of her privileged racial position in relation to her grandson by observing the internalisation of dominant white ideologies: "It's bright, it's white/So much white in my head."¹⁹⁴ While she resolutely objects to the treatment of black bodies in white American society, a terrifying fate facing her own grandson, Shaw avoids slipping into uncritical appropriation or blind sentimentality in *To My Chagrin*. On the contrary, she recognises the unjust consequences of growing up in a society in which one's black body fails to matter beyond likely oppression and even possible murder. Yet, at the same time, she sees her own role, whether active or automatic, within that racist system.¹⁹⁵

Conclusion: Performing Utopia

For Jaclyn Pryor, Peggy Shaw embodies the important task of transmitting lesbian feminist and queer histories to successive generations in need of finding a place in the genealogy of that elided history: "Such embodied forms of pedagogy are vital in a United States where 'straight' history is archived in public institutions of memory (memory, museums, libraries, film, popular media), but the always already marginalized lives of queer and trans people slip from history because there are few institutions devoted to collecting, protecting, and trans/mittting their history and collective memory."¹⁹⁶ Pryor subsequently heralds Shaw an essential "trans/cestor" to emerging groups of queers, butches, and transmasculine individuals.¹⁹⁷ Watching a production of Shaw's *Must-The Inside Story*, Pryor marvels in the

¹⁹² Ibid., 121-22.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 113.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 129.

¹⁹⁵ For an additional reading of race in Shaw's *To My Chagrin*, and one that guided my own interpretations, see Je Hye Kim, "Performing Female Masculinities at the Intersections of Gender, Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality" (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2007), especially 55-84, <http://www.library.utexas.edu/etd/d/2007/kimj78314/kimj78314.pdf>.

¹⁹⁶ Jaclyn Pryor, "'When Elephants Are in Must: Peggy Shaw, Acts of Trans/fer, and the Present Future of Queer Desire,'" *The Drama Review* 58, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 69, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/561938/pdf>. Pryor is drawing on the work of Taylor in *The Archive and the Repertoire* in her essay.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 71.

ageing performer's ability to still excite audiences and push the boundaries of gender and sexuality. Both exhausted and still exhilarated at the performance's conclusion, Pryor writes, "Peggy Shaw held out baby butch trunks in hers—and taught us, brought us, in and out."¹⁹⁸ In a review of *You're Just Like My Father* in *DIVA* magazine, Spike Pittsberg writes: "An actor, survivor, lover, fighter, painter and prince of mayhem, Shaw has used this piece to enlarge the family tree of all lesbians."¹⁹⁹

Jill Dolan's critical work in the early 2000s moved towards the political efficacy of performance art to suggest the possibility of utopianism. In *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*, Dolan writes that "live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world."²⁰⁰ According to Dolan's logic, the "present tenseness" of performance lends itself to the affective and emotional workings of utopian performatives, staged in the here and now before a receptive audience. Dolan's utopian vision looks not to the future but to the now, "in the interstices of present interactions, in glancing moments of possibly better ways to be together as human beings."²⁰¹ Like Pryor, Dolan looks to the live performance of Shaw as an embodied example of the utopian performative. In her words, "Shaw's story makes something from nothing; hers is a tale of unbridled faith, freedom, and possibility" and her "utopian vision pictures a world where people comingle, where there's plenty for everyone." In Shaw's presence, Dolan continues, "I see utopia."²⁰² Shaw's storytelling, however, is, as Diamond sees it, a collision of the past and the present, and, as Freeman would see it, a necessary drag on the presentness and futurity of contemporary queer identity. Indeed, this discussion, in line with the methodological approach of the thesis as a whole, takes Shaw's performance and the narrative within that performance as a text of the past. While Shaw remains an active performer, this chapter has been more interested in representations and projections of pastness rather than the here and now. This does not mean, however, that Shaw's presence invalidates the positive effects of feeling utopia.

In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz introduces, in direct opposition to Dolan's point of view, a "backward glance that enacts a future vision."²⁰³ Rather than slip into the critical turn towards negativity, Muñoz, instead, rejects the

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 78.

¹⁹⁹ Spike Pittsberg, review of Shaw's *You're Just Like My Father*, *DIVA*, April 1994.

²⁰⁰ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 38.

²⁰² Ibid., 52.

²⁰³ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 4.

heteronormative and homonormative impulses in the present “straight time” while maintaining the radical potentiality for alternative futurity in queer relationality. According to him:

Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life. The only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality, the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction.²⁰⁴

Queerness’s time, on the contrary, suggests a “stepping out of the linearity of straight time” and uncovering the traces of failed past projects of political intervention that create hopes for a more inclusive and egalitarian future.

For Pryor, Shaw’s queer performance art “presents time not as linear but as a postmodern palimpsest, a serializing swirl of public culture.”²⁰⁵ Orbiting this swirl of public culture are the colliding identity categories of lesbian, feminist, queer, working class, and Irish. In not only reversing time, but also actually allowing the past to thoroughly permeate the present, Shaw rejects a narrative of social, political, and economic progresses central to dominant accounts of both LGBT identity and Irish-American history. Instead, she continues to draw on the relevance and, indeed, the centrality of that experience in her performance of identity on and off the stage. “If identity is always in temporal drag,” Freeman concludes, “then perhaps the shared culture making we call ‘movements’ might do well to feel the tug backwards as a potentially transformative part of movement itself.”²⁰⁶ This manipulation of sequence allows Shaw to radically disrupt the classist and heterocentric formulation of history in an effort to install a version of what Halberstam calls “queer time.” If, as Halberstam argues, “queer” signifies “nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time,” then queer time offers “models of temporality that emerge within postmodernism once one leaves the temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance.”²⁰⁷

On marriage, Muñoz’s position is clear. For him, the “aping of traditional straight relationality,” the apex of which is marriage, “for gays and lesbians announces itself as a pragmatic strategy when it is in fact a deeply ideological project that is hardly practical.” Muñoz outright condemns what he sees as the modern LGBT movement’s “goal of ‘naturalizing’ the flawed and toxic ideological formation known as marriage.”²⁰⁸ Lisa Duggan has been one of the most vocal critics of the institution of marriage and its abutment among

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁰⁵ Pryor, “Acts of Trans/fer,” 75.

²⁰⁶ Freeman, *Time Binds*, 93.

²⁰⁷ Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

²⁰⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 21.

gays and lesbians, a support for the state's neoliberal project she has helpfully termed "homonormativity." Homonormativity, as Duggan describes it in *The Twilight of Equality?* "is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption."²⁰⁹ "In a bid for equality," Duggan writes elsewhere, "some gay groups are producing rhetoric that insults and marginalizes unmarried people, while promoting marriage in much the same terms as the welfare reformers use to stigmatize single-parent households, divorce and 'out of wedlock' births. If pursued in this way, the drive for gay-marriage equality can undermine rather than support the broader movement for social justice and democratic diversity."²¹⁰ Marriage is merely one strategic model in the age of neoliberalism and state control of sex and sexuality. Confronting the structural injustices of American society, Shaw's performance work tackles issues of gender conformity and normativity, sexual expression and oppression, class consciousness and warfare, and, more recently, discursive racialisation and racist violence.

In a suggestive reference to her early obedience to the heteronormative familial and social pressures she experienced before moving to New York—her marriage to a man and the subsequent birth of her daughter from that union—to live as a lesbian single mother, Shaw presents in *You're Just Like My Father* a possibility for stepping out of straight time and into the disruptive pleasures of queer time. She announces:

I caught on to my legacy.
 I caught on to the game in time.
 There was life before I knew about the ring,
 and my life after the ring.
 My mother brought me up to be polite
 so I try not to ask women to marry me unless I mean it.²¹¹

A combative legacy of fighting transforms into a queer resistance of the heterocentric logic of kinship and community in this scene. On the one hand, Shaw fully understands the expectations of heterosexual marriage and reproduction she is demanded to fulfil. And, indeed, she failed initially to find the courage to overcome them. On the other hand, however, Shaw exclaims that there is "life after the ring," there is a possibility for her butch body and

²⁰⁹ See Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50.

²¹⁰ Lisa Duggan, "Holy Matrimony!" *The Nation*, February 26, 2004, <https://www.thenation.com/article/holy-matrimony/>. See also Richard Kim and Lisa Duggan, "Beyond Gay Marriage," *The Nation*, June 29, 2005, <https://www.thenation.com/article/beyond-gay-marriage/>. In the last of these, Kim and Duggan urge that "progressive Democrats and gays must come together to reframe the issue as part of a larger campaign for household democracy and security, a campaign that responds to the diverse ways Americans actually structure their intimate lives."

²¹¹ Shaw, *You're Just Like My Father*, 55.

desire to endure in a queer time and place. The legacy and time she has caught onto, in the end, are the opportunities for alternative forms of kinship, community and heritage.

CHAPTER FOUR

Trans-Generational Blues: Eileen Myles, Gender Melancholia, and the Loss of Irish-American Identity

*The melancholic's past never passes*¹

*Gender is a matter of life and death*²

Introduction

In a short essay included at the close of *I Must Be Living Twice*, Eileen Myles's anthology of their³ poetic output since the 1970s, the author offers brilliant insight into their creative process. Myles proclaims in that essay:

I think being a poet or a writer you've spent so much of your time processing, consuming, really creating an alternative self that is entirely composed of language so that there are precise speeds or toxins or organs in it that work in concert with the state that you are in and can only neutralize your own pain by vanishing into a song composed of exactly that timbre, or something. I don't know what it is. It's just that I've vanished into kind of a not trance but dictation that utterly resembled the circumstances I found myself in but by enumerating them I evacuated even from my own pain and wasn't so much out of my body but in it in some other way, deciphering the details around me like a breathing tapestry.⁴

Myles's meditations in the essay "Twice" speak evocatively to the author's trademark creative style, a kinetic practice that traverses the body and embodiment, the visceral and the performative, and the experiential and the imaginative. A reflection occasioned by the dissolution of a romantic relationship, Myles's commentary concomitantly unearths the productive role played by loss in the author's confessional form of imaginative production.

¹ Julia Kristeva, "On the Melancholic Imaginary." *new formations* 3 (Winter 1987): 11.

² Christina Wald, *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia: Performative Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 161.

³ This chapter respects Myles's use of plural pronouns "they" and "their" to identify their preferred gender identity. For clarity, the chapter uses "they" when speaking about the author (in interview, for instance), and the pronouns "she" and "her" when referring to the fictionalised character of Myles's writing in their poetry and prose.

⁴ Eileen Myles, "Twice," in *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems, 1975-2014* (New York: Ecco, 2015), 349.

The poem to inspire Myles's reflection, "What Tree Am I Waiting," brings together diverse articulations of separation and division, expressed in sexual, emotional, national, and political terms, in order to dramatise the speaker's sense of loss and mourning. Furthermore, the longing for the lost lover intersects sharply with the political partition of the island of Ireland, "the hurt country," in the poem.⁵ Myles's sombre composition is not only constructed from the ruins of loss, but energized by a widening gyre of suspended grief: "when morning comes/ and it's still morning ... in eternity there is this ache/ there is this wakefulness."⁶ This play on the homophones "morning" and "mourning" casts a shadow on the bright promise of curative daybreak. Both the emotional power of "What Tree Am I Waiting" and Myles's reflections in "Twice" on the creative endowments of loss serve as illustrative examples of the sorts of themes and issues to be explored in this chapter on Myles's construction of Irish-American identity in their writing.

In *Irish-American Autobiography*, James Silas Rogers remarks that "Irish identity in America has largely moved out of the quantifiable—census returns, membership in churches or fraternal organizations, voting behavior, and the like—and into the slippery realm of the imagination and the psyche."⁷ Thirty years earlier, Michael M. J. Fischer had, indeed, already proposed that late-twentieth-century articulations of ethnicity in autobiography and autobiographical fiction shifted away from previously dominant expressions of "group solidarity, traditional values, family mobility, political mobilization, or similar sociological categories" towards distinctly metaphysical formulations of cultural identity. "Insofar as ethnicity is a deeply rooted emotional component of identity," Fischer observes, "it is often transmitted less through cognitive language or learning (to which sociology has almost entirely restricted itself) than through processes analogous to the dreaming and transference of psychoanalytic encounters."⁸

Irish diasporic narratives have certainly conformed to this trend. In his 1979 essay, "Imagination's Home," for example, Irish-Australian writer Vincent Buckley claims that the connection between the ancestral homeland (which he terms a "source-country") and later-generation Irish ethnics appears as "a knowledge which goes very deep into the psyche, and ... has an almost superstitious integrity."⁹ Most recently, Patricia Coughlan's reading of the

⁵ Eileen Myles, "What Tree Am I Waiting," in *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems, 1975-2014* (New York: Ecco, 2015), 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁷ James Silas Rogers, *Irish-American Autobiography: The Divided Hearts of Athletes, Priests, Pilgrims, and More* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 8.

⁸ Michael M. J. Fischer, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Art of Memory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, 25th anniversary ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 195-96.

⁹ Vincent Buckley, "Imagination's Home," *Quadrant* 140 (March 1979): 24.

uncanny in Alice McDermott's Irish-American fiction through Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's psychoanalytic theory of the "transgenerational phantom" firmly situates itself within and extends the critical approach adopted by scholars of ethnicity such as Fischer and Kathleen Brogan.¹⁰ According to Coughlan, McDermott's work distinctly "dramatizes the psyche of Irish Americans formed before the 1960s as a ground of perpetual struggle where the past is constantly present, reaching out to haunt possible futures with its burden of loss and mourning."¹¹ Continuing in and contributing to this productive tradition, this chapter presents Myles's autobiographical fiction as a body of creative literary work that further articulates the relationship between Irish-American identity and the affective experiences of loss and mourning.

Notwithstanding their reputation as one of the most electric contemporary voices on sexuality, queer identity, and the ecstatic adventures of a tenacious poet in New York—a notoriety, indeed, belatedly celebrated in a recent increase in popular recognition—a striking sense of loss casts a shadow on much of Myles's writing in their four works of autobiographical prose and immense poetic output of eleven volumes to date. "Here is a tough, credible voice, and its strength grants moving emphasis to the infrequent admissions of vulnerability and pain," writes Charles Fanning in *The Irish Voice in America* on Myles's writing.¹² Similarly, Gary Lenhart has noted how Myles's writing often "expresses a lot of pain and anger rising from oppressive ethnic, gender, class, and aesthetic hierarchies."¹³ Over and over again, it is Myles's family that produces the most significant number of casualties in the author's reservoir of lost loves in their writing of working-class life in mid-century Middlesex County and Boston, Massachusetts (primarily the areas of Cambridge, Somerville, and Arlington).

Born in Cambridge in 1949, Myles was raised in a working-class family and educated in Catholic schools and later at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. In 1974, Myles left the Boston area for New York, where they joined the city's creative culture as an emerging poet among denizens of the New York School. While Myles is of both Polish and Irish background, the complexities of Irish immigration to and identity in the United States largely dominate the author's engagement with ethnicity, primarily organising itself around the figures of Myles's Irish immigrant grandmother, Nellie Riordan Myles, and Irish-American

¹⁰ See Kathleen Brogan, *Cultural Hauntings: Ghosts and Ethnicity in Recent American Literature* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

¹¹ Patricia Coughlan, "Paper Ghosts: Reading the Uncanny in Alice McDermott," *Éire-Ireland* 47, no. 1&2 (2012): 129, <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2012.0005>.

¹² Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2000), 383.

¹³ Gary Lenhart, *The Stamp of Class: Reflections on Poetry and Social Class* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 119.

father, Terrence “Ted” Myles: “My grandmother and my father were both surrounded by a magic feeling,” stargazes the fictionalised narrator of Myles’s non-fiction novel *Cool for You*.¹⁴ “Ireland is the mystery,” Myles writes elsewhere, “Ireland is gone but like magic, it calls me home.”¹⁵ Accordingly, this chapter orbits the emotional and psychological connection between these three generations of the Irish in America.

This chapter explores this intimate intersection of gender and ethnicity through psychoanalytic and cultural discourses of loss and mourning in the writing of Eileen Myles, with particular reference to their first two extended works of autobiographical fiction, namely *Chelsea Girls*, first published in 1994, and *Cool for You*, first published in 2000, and asks what the value of melancholia is to an understanding of the construction, embodiment, and performance of Irish identity.¹⁶ Myles’s work is often accented with the traumatic experiences of growing up butch and queer in working-class Catholic Boston. On Myles’s treatment of that early life, Kathleen Kremins writes that “[a]ny longing for the past seems to rest solely on the loss of a loved one rather than a desire to return.”¹⁷ This discussion pays particular attention to how Myles routinely expresses a sense of embodied queer gender in their work as an identificatory process, a response to the ungrievable loss of Irish identity.¹⁸

Following the significant renewal of the concept in psychoanalytical discourse at the beginning of the twentieth century, the concept of melancholia has developed into a particularly fruitful issue across a number of disciplines. From at least the early 1990s, the subject of melancholia passed on from strictly psychoanalytical discussions into the disciplines of social and cultural studies. In 1996, Naomi Schor commented on this growing mainstreaming of the concept in *One Hundred Years of Melancholy*:

Affects are back: queer theory has retrieved shame; new historicism has revisited wonder; at least one eighteenth-century scholar has written on

¹⁴ Eileen Myles, *Cool for You* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2000), 27.

¹⁵ Eileen Myles, *Afterglow (A Dog Memoir)* (London: Grove Press, 2017), 9.

¹⁶ In fact, Myles had previously published some of the stories that would eventually be collected in *Chelsea Girls* in 1994 as early as 1987. *Bread and Water* (Madras: Hanuman Books, 1987) features, for instance, “Light Warrior,” “21,21,21 ...,” “Merry Christmas, Dr. Title,” “Bath, Maine,” “Bread and Water,” and “Everybody Would Go Play Cards at Eddie and Nonies.” The versions featured in this pocket-sized 1987 edition, which shows a photo of Myles taken by Chris Felver on the cover, were expanded and altered (most notably, names were changed) before being republished in *Chelsea Girls* in 1994. *1969* (Madras: Hanuman Books, 1989) features the titular story, which was also later reissued in *Chelsea Girls*. The photo featured on the cover of *1969*, taken by Donna MacAdams, shows a long-haired Myles on the roof of a New York City apartment building, with the backdrop of the skyline behind them. *Bread and Water* and *1969* are now rare and difficult to source. Copies of both were consulted in the Books and Monograph General Collection at the Lesbian Herstory Archives, New York, on September 22, 2016.

¹⁷ Kathleen Ann Kremins, “Blurring Boundaries: Eileen Myles and the Irish American Identity,” in *Too Smart To Be Sentimental: Contemporary Irish American Women Writers*, ed. Sally Barr Ebest and Kathleen McInerney (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008), 192.

¹⁸ For an earlier version of this chapter, see Gavin Doyle, “Diaspora Blues: Eileen Myles, Melancholia, and the Loss of Irish-American Identity,” *Irish Studies Review* 26, no. 1 (2018): 80-97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2017.1404688>.

boredom; and even, or perhaps especially, melancholy—yes, melancholy—, has been reclaimed by deconstruction, holocaust studies, feminism, and gay studies, among others.¹⁹

Schor goes on to describe this seemingly universal engagement as a sort of “melancholy of the disciplines.”²⁰ “Like hysteria at the turn of the last century,” David L. Eng claimed in a 2000 article, “melancholia at the turn of this one has come largely to define how we think about our subjectivities.”²¹

As Freud’s leading theory of loss, melancholia provides a particularly fruitful lens through which to observe the metaphysical workings of Irish identity in Myles’s autobiographical texts. In his inaugural 1917 essay on the topic, Freud presents the phenomenon as the pathological extreme of mourning, as the subject’s condition of improperly mourned and perennially suspended loss. In refusing to “let go” of a once loved and now lost object, “the melancholic becomes instead haunted by it.”²² Since Freud delineated mourning as a response to “the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one’s country, liberty, an ideal, and so,”²³ the theory of melancholia offers a uniquely fertile interpretation of the emotional and metaphysical processes endured in the constitution of an Irish diasporic and cultural identity in Myles’s work. Regarding the first two major texts of prose autobiography by the author, namely *Chelsea Girls* and *Cool for You*, both recently republished, in 2015 and 2017

¹⁹ Naomi Schor, *One Hundred Years of Melancholy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ David L. Eng, “Melancholia in the Late Twentieth Century,” *Signs* 25, no. 4 (Summer 2000), 1275, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175527>. Freud’s theorization of melancholia has greatly influenced a divergent body of scholarship in psychoanalytic and cultural discourses. See, for instance, Melanie Klein, “Mourning and its Relation to Manic-Depressive States,” *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 21 (1940): 125-53; Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel, Volume I*, trans. and ed. Nicolas Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1989); Juliana Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); José Esteban Muñoz, *Dissidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, eds., *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003); Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2004); Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia Press, 2005); Darian Leader, *The New Black: Mourning, Melancholia and Depression* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008); Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); David Lloyd *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin: Field Day in association with Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2008); Greg Fortier, *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Martin Middeke and Christina Wald, eds., *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Sanja Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Countermourning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²² David L. Eng, “Melancholia/Postcoloniality: Loss in *The Floating Life*,” *Qui Parle* 11, no. 2 (Autumn/Winter 1999), 140, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20686100>.

²³ Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916)*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1957), 243. Freud’s essay was first published in German in 1915.

respectively, as exemplary articles of melancholic cultural production, this chapter proposes that the author's work profoundly demonstrates the ways in which particular forms of Irish identity in America are, to use Eng's phrase, "based on a structure of mourning."²⁴

"From the fissures of a wound," writes Dina S. Georgis, "life in the diaspora is inaugurated."²⁵ In charting the institutionalised life through the scant and often inconsistent medical records from the state psychiatric hospital in Massachusetts where her Irish immigrant grandmother spent the last seventeen years of her life, the buoyant narrator of Myles's nonfiction novel *Cool for You* uncovers the acute psychological effects produced through the losses attendant to the experiences of migration. Eng's work, in particular, has offered a useful way to consider the relationship between melancholia and migration. In an essay on twentieth-century Chinese diasporic melancholia, he writes:

When one leave[s] one's place of origin—voluntarily or involuntarily—there are a host of losses both concrete and abstract that must be mourned. These include homeland, family, language, identity; the list goes on.²⁶

If mourning marks the ordinary experience of immigration, whereby the loss of one's connection to homeland, family, and community is redressed in the gradual replacement of one loved object with another, immigrant melancholia describes a perpetual libidinal investment in one's original homeland which casts a lingering shadow on the psyche of the subject.

The ruins of diasporic loss, though, are not confined to the immigrant generation. Through the portrait of an alcoholic, working-class Irish-American father, Myles's first extended work of prose, the story collection *Chelsea Girls*, reveals Irish-American melancholia to be the psychic introjection of the ambivalences attached to an unattainable ideal—yet another cause for mourning in Freud's theorisation of impassable grief—of a particular (Irish-) American dream. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923), Freud radically revised his own theory of melancholia, reversing the understanding that the phenomenon is pathological and peculiar in condition; on the contrary, Freud conjectures, the melancholic incorporation of a lost object is the precondition for the establishment of the ego itself. Such a revision allows for a nuanced reading of the relationship between loss and Irish-American identity in Myles's autobiographical writing, one that views this connection in equally destructive and productive ways.

²⁴ Eng, "Melancholia/Postcoloniality," 138.

²⁵ Dina S. Georgis, "Cultures of Expulsion: Memory, Longing and the Queer Space of Diaspora," *New Dawn: The Journal of Black Canadian Studies* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2006), 4, <http://dawn.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/dawn/article/view/4998/1832>.

²⁶ Eng, "Melancholia/Postcoloniality," 138.

In the opening moments of her 2001 performance, *To My Chagrin*, lesbian performer Peggy Shaw traces a clear line between the experience of loss and the constitution of an Irish consciousness. “I thought I was Scottish till my father died and everyone at the/ funeral was Irish,”²⁷ she quips. Shaw’s comment makes an uncanny connection between the death of her father and the emergence of an ethnic identity, and she reaches this point of identification at the primary site of public mourning, the funeral. Indeed, the historical event that serves to activate the butch coming-of-age narrative and the incestuous lesbian family romance in Shaw’s earlier performance, *You’re Just Like My Father*, is the loss of her Irish-American father.²⁸ Shaw’s commentary further evidences the psychic and spectral textures of cultural consciousness, which, to use Salman Rushdie’s phrase, is often “haunted by some sense of loss.”²⁹ On stage, as the previous chapter explored, Shaw performs a lesbian gender that is embedded in distinctly class-inflected Irish-American iconography—as the queer Irish pugilist in *You’re Just Like My Father*, for instance, or a butch James Cagney in *Menopausal Gentleman* (1998).³⁰ Her exploration of Irish-American identity materialises in the form of a theatrical show of Irish-American drag and a queer feminist reterritorialisation of historical and cultural emblems of Irish-American masculinity. At the same time, the mournful meditations staged in Shaw’s performances of Irish-American female masculinity might also be interpreted as the acting out of the psychoanalytical processes precipitated by loss and crucial to the constitution of (a gendered and Irish) subjectivity.

The sense of loss in Shaw’s work echoes an earlier observation made by the Mexican-American author, Richard Rodriguez, who detailed in a 1987 essay how his cultural ethnic past “survives in [his present] life, though in mysterious ways, deeper than choosing.”³¹ “Unconsciously,” Rodriguez writes, “I gesture with my hands in imitation of relatives who lie with hands folded under the ground. There may be a legacy in my speech.”³² In this evocative image, Rodriguez points to the ways in which an unconscious connection to a cultural ethnic past is acted out in the present in particularly corporeal modes of expression. Moreover, the imitation of ancestral bodily practices comes about through the literal loss of those ancestors,

²⁷ Peggy Shaw, *To My Chagrin*, in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 104.

²⁸ Peggy Shaw, *You’re Just Like My Father*, in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 48.

²⁹ Salman Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands,” in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981-1991* (London: Vintage, 2010), 10.

³⁰ Peggy Shaw, *Menopausal Gentleman*, in *A Menopausal Gentleman: The Solo Performances of Peggy Shaw*, ed. Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 71-96.

³¹ Richard Rodriguez, “An American Writer,” in *The Invention of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 8.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

who now, long gone, lie buried in the ground.³³ In death, Rodriguez's ethnic kin manifest in/as cultural life. Both Rodriguez's essay and Shaw's performances reveal the remarkable effects of loss on the psychic constitution of the self's cultural identity. Concomitantly, they conceptualise the impression of that formative response to loss in decidedly corporeal and embodied ways as the consequence of what could be described as the "incorporation" of cultural identity. Ed Madden alludes to the embodied nature of Irish identity when he says that cultural belonging "is a *process* of internalization and incorporation, subject to transformations both corporeal and imagined."³⁴ To this end, cultural ethnicity is conceived of as the outcome of a comingling of psychic, social and cultural processes rather than being rooted in any essentialised notion of identity and belonging.³⁵

Myles's brand of what Jack Halberstam terms "transgender butch," or "gender-queer"³⁶ identity, like Shaw's, is most often understood in their writing as connected to a sense of Irish identity.³⁷ In *Cool for You*, for example, Eileen laments being excluded from the shared name among the men in her family that functions to express a collective Irish-American genealogy among its privileged bearers: "I had always been envious of [my brother]. I wanted to be a Terry. To have the name my father had and his father had, way on back to Ireland."³⁸ This desire to "be a Terry" both positions Eileen in relation to her father and situates her within the wider ethnic lineage from which they are excluded. In a 2016 interview, Myles explains that "part of [their] gender shift is definitely dispersed over ethnicity ... [and that they] utterly affiliate a masculine way to Ireland." In the same

³³ For a more detailed analysis of the intra-group bodily practices of ethnic communities, see the final chapter of Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 72-104. Connerton, citing a study by David Effron of the unique "gestural vocabulary" of East European Jews and Southern Italians living in New York, details the ways in which ethnic identity and belonging can be embodied (80). Through an archive of what he terms "incorporating" practices, Connerton outlines how "habitual memory of the past," that is, an acquired practice whose moment of learning is not directly remembered, is "sedimented in the body" (72).

³⁴ Ed Madden, "Queering the Irish Diaspora: David Rees and Pdraig Rooney," *Éire-Ireland* 47 no. 1&2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 174 (emphasis in the original), <https://doi.org/10.1353/eir.2012.0008>.

³⁵ For an additional salient discussion on this, see Anne-Marie Fortier's *Migrant Belongings: Memory, Space, Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), especially 5-7, 133-153, and 169-172. Fortier draws on Butler's performativity and Connerton's incorporating practices in order to "unpack the mutual construction of social categories through performative acts of gender and ethnicity" (5). In analysing the social and religious practices of the Italian diaspora, she highlights the ways in which "cultural ethnicity may be 'incorporated' through repeated performative acts, the result of which is to produce the imaginary effect of an internal ethnic 'essence'" (6).

³⁶ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 143.

³⁷ In many ways, Peggy Shaw and Myles share an early biographical trajectory (both were born in the 1940's in two neighbouring Boston towns in working-class Irish families) and have also managed to collaborate in overlapping artistic circles throughout their prolific careers as artists of subcultural feminist and queer cultural forms in New York City. Myles, for instance, regularly attended performances at the Women's One World (WOW) Café Theatre, established by Shaw with long-time partner Lois Weaver in the early 1980s in Downtown Manhattan. In 1988, Myles staged their own performance at WOW, a production whose title, *Feeling Blue*, signalled Myles's penchant for artistic expressions of lugubrious sensibility. The performance was published for the first time in 2015 in *Memories of the Revolution: The First Ten Years of the WOW Café Theater*, ed. Holly Hughes, Carmelita Tropicana, and Jill Dolan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 172-79.

³⁸ Myles, *Cool for You*, 155.

interview, Myles displaces their wish to bear the collective moniker of the Irish men in their family (“Terry”) with a desire to identify with another, more ancient name of a lost Irish relative. They say:

I’ve even started to create a character, “Ed Myles.” I’ve sort of abandoned Terry. And of course, I went to the graveyard in Ireland and Edward was the father of [my grandfather] Terrance, and it’s sort of like the older name was Ed ... I’ve thought about letting Ed write a book about Eileen. It occurs to me that that could be my autobiography, like Alice B. Toklas. It could be another angle on autobiography.³⁹

That the confluence of a transgender and Irish identity for Myles is reached at the site of the grave in Ireland (much like the awakening of Shaw’s Irish-American consciousness at her deceased father’s funeral) speaks to the entombed nature of the melancholic incorporation of loss and the identification with that loss. The psyche’s collection of identifications is both spatially and temporally expansive, allowing for multiple incorporations across objects (bodies) and time. Indeed, while Judith Butler’s discussion on melancholia, as discussed in this chapter, focuses on early examples of socialisation and subjectification, her interpretation of the theory forms a part of her larger thesis on the performativity of gender. In the same way gender is never arrived at in any final sense, but is rather the sign of an on-going process of “becoming,” the melancholic foundations of an embodied gender are permanently shifting and never stable enough to indicate any ontological truth to its appearance.

As Heather Love has pointed out, the lugubrious queer has been a particularly present figure in the genealogy of queerness. In her analysis of Radclyffe Hall’s Stephen Gordon, “[t]he stereotype of the melancholic butch—freak of nature, failed woman or failed man, rejected lover—is so powerful and so affectively charged that debates about cross-identification in queer and lesbian circles are often drawn irresistibly to it.”⁴⁰ Elsewhere, Richard Dyer writes: “When I was growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, I assented that the lot of queers like myself was a melancholy one.”⁴¹ As both Love and Dyer illuminate in their discussions on queer melancholia, such representations, while ideological, are also to be considered seriously as indicative of historical and contemporary experiences among many queer people. For this reason, a discussion on Myles and melancholia in relation to both Irishness and queerness is a compelling site of enquiry. In this sense, the author’s work uncovers the stubborn place of melancholia, loneliness, and trauma in the queer life.

³⁹ Personal communication with author, September 19, 2016.

⁴⁰ Heather Love, “‘Spoiled Identity’: Stephen Gordon’s Loneliness and the Difficulties of Queer History,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 7, no. 4 (2001): 505, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/12188/pdf>. See Love’s expanded discussion of Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness* in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), chapter four, 100-28.

⁴¹ Richard Dyer, “Coming Out As Going In: The Image of the Homosexual as a Sad Young Man,” in *The Culture of Queers* (London: Routledge, 2002), 116.

In their introduction to the critical volume, *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, Eng and David Kazanjian proclaim that “the dawn of the twenty-first century is a moment when the pervasive losses of the twentieth century need to be engaged from the perspective of what remains.”⁴² Thus, the chapter crucially thinks about the survival of loss as a formative force in Irish-American subjectivity, and asks how might the melancholic remains of the dead in the living make visible the states of injury endured in the past and preserved in the present. The organisational structure of *Loss* provides a useful map on which to trace the psychic landscape of Irish diasporic and ethnic melancholia in this discussion. Drawing on Freud’s initial work in his 1917 essay, Eng and Kazanjian divide their collection of essays along the lines of “bodily,” “spatial,” and “ideal” melancholic remains. Similarly, Myles’s texts sketch out that which remains as subjectivity from the aggregated losses of homeland, American ideals of assimilation, and cherished loved ones.

Sara Clarke Kaplan has outlined the political stakes at the heart of a project focused on the remainders of diasporic loss. She remarks that such an investigation into the states of injury,

offers insights for contemporary efforts to understand melancholia not as a private, backward-looking phenomenon of paralyzing psychic conflict, but as an embodied individual and collective psychic practice with the political potential to transform grief into the articulation of grievances that traverse continents and cross time.⁴³

In *The Literature of Melancholia*, Martin Middeke and Christina Wald describe this “backward-looking phenomenon” of melancholia as symptomatic of a negative relation to time and temporality. According to them, “a melancholic experience of time and temporality unveils itself as a pathological sadness, a paralysing anxiety and, particularly, as an agonizing (if sometimes comforting) insistence on the past.”⁴⁴ Unlike Middeke and Wald, who maintain that such “insistence on the past entails the loss of the future,” creating “the impression, as it were, of a standstill of time,”⁴⁵ however, this chapter uncovers the ways in which a backward glance toward losses and traumas of the past can be a necessarily productive view, refusing to abandon the enduring affective and psychic traces of that past in the present, and offering the material from which a more critical future can be arrived at. In the creative literary productions of Myles, Irish-American identity is played out in the “tension between the past

⁴² David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, “Mourning Remains,” introduction to *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 2.

⁴³ Sara Clarke Kaplan, “Souls at the Crossroads, Africans on the Water: The Politics of Diasporic Melancholia,” *Callaloo* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 513, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30129761>.

⁴⁴ Martin Middeke and Christina Wald, “Melancholia as a Sense of Loss: An Introduction,” in *The Literature of Melancholia: Early Modern to Postmodern*, ed. Martin Middeke and Christina Wald (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

and the present, between the dead and the living.”⁴⁶ This chapter proposes, as Georgis so evocatively puts it, that “it is in the literary that we have access to the emotional landscape of diasporic loss ... and in the literary, the garbled residues of loss are re-articulated in language.”⁴⁷

Literature provides one of the most useful forms of “proof” of the cultural, historical and psychological transmission enacted through melancholia precisely because, as Greg Forter explains, “it performs a special kind of work: it dynamically encodes in formal structures a set of historical and psychic realities that at one level precede even ‘cause’ a given textual configuration, but at another, exists *as such* only in and as that specific, highly ramified configuration.”⁴⁸ Indeed, autobiographical writing such as Myles’s is uniquely attuned to the workings of melancholia. As Freud observes on the melancholic in his 1917 essay, “[o]ne might emphasize the presence ... of insistent communicativeness which finds satisfaction in self-exposure.”⁴⁹ Recently, when asked why the repetition of personal memories in multiple texts and narrative forms, a defining feature of the author’s creative production, has become a preferred mode of articulation, Myles candidly responded, “I’m totally a traumatised person so I just repeat myself constantly ... I mean, my dad died when I was young and I’ve written about his death so many times and it’s an endlessly interesting event and story for me.”⁵⁰ As Julia Kristeva suggests in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, “[f]or those who are racked by melancholia, writing about it would have meaning only if writing sprang out of that very melancholia.”⁵¹

The Melancholia of Irish-American Identity

In an analysis of Isaac Julien’s celluloid queer revision of the Harlem Renaissance, *Looking for Langston* (1989), José Esteban Muñoz points out two key moments in the film’s opening that firmly establish it as one of mourning in memoriam to Hughes, as well as to the Harlem movement of the 1920s through a black gay perspective more broadly. The first, Muñoz explains, occurs seconds into the film, when an announcer speaks, “In Memoriam Langston Hughes.” The second is a visual marker, projected immediately after this aural declaration, which announces, “dedicated to the memory of James Baldwin.” Both of these examples

⁴⁶ Eng and Kazanjian, “Mourning Remains,” 1.

⁴⁷ Georgis, “Cultures of Expulsion,” 5.

⁴⁸ Greg Forter, *Gender, Race, and Mourning in American Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 12, (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁹ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 247.

⁵⁰ “Eileen Myles and Kris Kraus Read From Their Work,” *92nd Street Y*, YouTube, April 26, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_WK3rBvG_Y.

⁵¹ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 3.

compel Muñoz to proclaim: “Grief is the precondition of this film.”⁵² In a similar vein, Myles announces mourning as that which structures the two narratives that most expressly engage with the loss of these two figures, namely *Chelsea Girls* and *Cool for You*. In the opening pages of *Chelsea Girls*, Myles makes a dedication: “For Ted Myles.” In *Cool for You*, it is “For Nellie Riordan Myles.” Thus, in the same way *Looking for Langston* makes clear the centrality of loss and mourning to the film’s narrative, grief is the precondition for Myles’s novels. In their dedications, the novels reveal the ways in which they are built upon the ruins of loss, mourning, and death.⁵³

Over the course of their prolific forty-year literary career as poet, novelist, performance artist and essayist, Myles has written just one blues poem. “Harmonica,” first published in Myles’s 2001 volume *on my way*, is structured by the repetition of a sombre, melancholy refrain utterly characteristic of a genre whose form has evolved from the articulation of African-American suffering in music since the end of the nineteenth century. The fatalistic speaker in the poem laments in the opening lines:

Don’t want to put my glasses on
Cause I don’t want to see
Don’t want to move again
Because I don’t want to
Live⁵⁴

Myles’s “Harmonica” reveals the lasting influence of Hughes, the most significant literary entrepreneur of the genres of blues and jazz in poetic form. Hughes’s 1925 poem, “The Weary Blues,” arguably the first to combine music and poetry, remains one of the most lasting in his poetic legacy.

“Harmonica” continues: “Don’t want to know my family/ Anymore because I don’t want/ To remember me.”⁵⁵ In particular, the author’s parents, both orphaned in one way or another, provoke the most poignant instances of melancholy in their poetry and fiction. “My parents were/ sad and funny/ and strong,” Eileen laments in “To the Maiden of Choice” from the 1995 poetry collection, *Maxfield Parrish*.⁵⁶ Myles’s Polish-American mother Genevieve was orphaned at a young age, going on to live with her older sister Anne, who had married an Irish-American husband and moved to the Somerville area. In *Cool for You*, Myles explores the devastating emotional response to two equally significant losses for Genevieve: mother

⁵² Muñoz, *Dissidentifications*, 73.

⁵³ Extending this connection, Myles dedicates *Afterglow* to their mother, Genevieve Hannibal, who has also since died.

⁵⁴ Eileen Myles, “Harmonica,” in *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems, 1975-2014* (New York: Ecco, 2015), 271.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁵⁶ Eileen Myles, “To the Maiden of Choice,” in *Maxfield Parrish: New and Early Poems* (Santa Rosa, CA: Black Sparrow Press, 1995), 46

and mother tongue.⁵⁷ Still affected by the early loss of mother and father, Genevieve must eventually endure the redoubled loss of closest friend and only sister, when Anne, seven years Genevieve's senior, dies. Reflecting on her aunt's wake, Eileen exclaims, "Never has a person's presence been so absent."⁵⁸

Myles's poem "Harmonica" not only employs a structural style that is characteristic of the blues form, but also, in its very title, utilises an instrument typical of the music genre. The titular instrument is one that is intimately bound up with sentiments of melancholia, both in sound and symbolism. For the harmonica has particular emotional value for Myles's autobiographical character Eileen in their poems and novels. At the same time it connects Eileen specifically to her Irish heritage, since she inherits the item from her Irish-American father Ted, who proudly tells his daughter that his own mother played the instrument in another life far from the one she now lives at a state asylum:

For a long time I wanted to play a musical instrument and one day when I came home from school I found a Hohner harmonica sitting on the kitchen table. It was like a discovery, more than the present.⁵⁹

In their poetry and fiction, Myles laments not merely the loss of individual loved ones, such as their father, grandmother and aunt, but also the wider decline of Irish community. In *Cool for You*, for instance, Eileen wistfully ponders on the passing of ageing relatives: "So fragile, the white ones, dwindling, honoring one of their own, and there'd be less of them each time, all going home, not Ireland or Poland but somewhere."⁶⁰ This melancholic musing, brought on at the scene of her Irish-American uncle's funeral, speaks to the wider disappearance of ethnic elders in Eileen's family tree. What she honours in this eulogy is the passing on of the ethnic cultures those family members signify.

The black sun around which the loosely linked encounters with the emotional fragilities of social life orbit in Myles's *Cool for You* is the disconsolate portrait of Nellie Riordan Myles, the novel's picaresque heroine's Irish grandmother. Suffering profound and multiple losses of homeland, ideals of socio-economic success, and, finally, her twenty-seven-year-old daughter, Nellie is admitted to Westborough State Hospital in 1940, where she spends the final seventeen years of her life until her death in 1957. In the opening of *Cool for You*, Eileen, a recent college graduate grafting as a cab driver in the Cambridge area of Massachusetts, miraculously lands herself a job at the Walter E. Fernald School in Waltham. A breeding ground for controversial medical experiments throughout its operation, the

⁵⁷ Myles, *Cool for You*, 181.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

Fernald State School had been an institution for individuals, mainly boys and men, with developmental disabilities since the nineteenth century until its doors finally closed in 2014. For Eileen, working at Fernald brings her closer to what she thinks of as the “insider” status of her grandmother:

I was delighted to be inside an institution and not because I was nuts. My father’s mother, Nellie Myles, had spent the last seventeen years of her life at Westborough State Hospital. My parents would never let me go in when we visited her. They would just make faces because it was so horrible ... They said Nellie’s hands were clenched tight for years.⁶¹

“It seems people go nuts from a number of things,” Eileen later says, “being too smart or someone being gone,”⁶² thus echoing the classical and psychoanalytic legacies of melancholia as a contributor to psychological dis-ease. Consider the oft-cited remark in Aristotle’s *Problems*: “Why is it that all those men who have become extraordinary in philosophy, politics, poetry, or the arts are obviously melancholic?”⁶² While classical considerations of melancholic genius have historically taken men as the subjects of its purview, the later psychoanalytic theory of the phenomenon has taken female subjectivity as its exemplary model.⁶³

“My father’s mother went crazy because her daughter died,” Eileen continues. Nellie’s daughter, Helen, died from peritonitis on the operating table during a routine appendectomy, after which Eileen’s grandmother was admitted indefinitely to Westborough State Hospital in Massachusetts. “My grandmother would walk the streets crying, Helen, Helen. So they put her away in the State Hospital where she spent the rest of her life.”⁶⁴ The narrative arc of *Cool for You* develops from Eileen’s desire to retrieve the records of her grandmother’s institutionalised life, and twists around diverse spaces of human confinement—a bleak school for developmentally disabled and abused boys, a gloomy hospice for the ageing, and the wider history of female madness and incarceration—recollected unflinchingly by the novel’s protagonist. The task of social control extends beyond these obvious institutional spaces to include the sorting of bodies in the religious sphere of the Catholic Church, the disappointing intellectual space of the state university, and, most acutely, in the traumatised domestic life of a working-class family: “It’s definitely why I was able to work in one shitty institution after another. It didn’t matter where I was. The world was a little like home.”⁶⁵ In her review of

⁶¹ Ibid., 3.

⁶² Aristotle, *Problems*, trans. and ed. David C Mirhady (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 277.

⁶³ For a helpful outline of this gendered history of classical melancholia, see Schiesari’s *The Gendering of Melancholia*. On women as subjects of melancholia, see Eng, “Melancholia/Postcoloniality,” 137 and “Melancholia in the Late Twentieth Century,” 1275.

⁶⁴ Myles, *Cool for You*, 27.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 31.

Myles's novel, the author Chris Kraus writes: "Though she [sic] begins with a description of the sanctioned squalor of the state asylum, really Myles is looking at the big picture: the processing of people into grades and schools and genders, cliques and classes."⁶⁶

In "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud outlines and differentiates between two responses to an individual's experience of loss. The first, mourning, describes a by and large routine and universal reaction to loss—of a loved one, for instance—whereby the subject initially struggles to rescind libidinal attachment invested in the once loved and now lost object, but eventually succeeds in releasing that libidinal investment from the abandoned object, subsequently reinvesting cathectic energy in a different object.⁶⁷ The second, mourning's pathological extreme, melancholia, emerges from the subject's inability to give up the attachment to the lost love object. Freud's thesis argues that the inability to "get over" the loss of a loved one results in the internalisation, or more accurately, *incorporation*, of that love object into the subject's ego. Instead of foreclosing the attachment to the lost object over time, the melancholic, in her struggle to overcome the loss, incorporates that lost loved one into her own ego and forms an identification with that object.⁶⁸

"I would gladly settle for a clear description of how they lobotomized, hydrotherapied, electroshocked Nellie," Eileen determines. "But probably it's just a death certificate and a scrawled doctor's note. 'Patient is melancholic. Refuses to speak, eat.'"⁶⁹ The melancholic, Freud tells us, exhibits profound "cessation of interest in the outside world" and an "inhibition of all activity."⁷⁰ As she begins to unravel her grandmother's biography through the complementary, if at times inconsistent, records of state documents and family memory, however, Eileen reveals in Nellie's background a well of melancholia whose source runs deeper than the loss of her daughter. The record later states that Nellie, even before losing her daughter, was already "inclined somewhat to look on the dark side of things."⁷¹ When Eileen receives the slim, yellow manila envelope from Westborough in which she finds her grandmother's records, she provides a scant biography:

My Nellie Riordan, my grandmother Nellie, was born in Ireland in 1880. The state gives me facts. Her story is the saddest in the world. Sadder than my house. Nellie was born in Ireland, a beautiful place. Her father was a farmer ... She came to America in 1900. To a Boston port, it said.⁷²

Prior to the loss of her daughter Helen, Nellie had endured the loss of homeland.

⁶⁶ Chris Kraus, "Girls, Interrupted," review of Myles's *Cool for You*, *The Nation*, January 1, 2001, 32.

⁶⁷ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁶⁹ Myles, *Cool for You*, 58.

⁷⁰ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

⁷¹ Myles, *Cool for You*, 143.

⁷² *Ibid.*

As Kerby Miller's work on the Irish diaspora has shown, immigrants to America routinely expressed an unrelenting longing for family and home that might be thought of as a form of diasporic melancholia. According to Miller, "many letters and memoirs indicate that parents and emigrants alike frequently mourned their separation for many years, often until death."⁷³ These diasporic diaries revealed a state of "inconsolable homesickness," while immigrant ballads and songs sounded a "pervasive note of sadness."⁷⁴ "I want to go home," Nellie tells her doctors at Westborough, "I want to go home."⁷⁵ On 29 October 1888, Mary Ann Rowe, an Irish domestic servant near Boston, wrote of the unshakable crisis of this melancholia: "I cannot banish the thought of home out of my mind ... nothing could cheer and Strange to say I am growing worse every day."⁷⁶ The consequence of such emotional attachments to home was a pathological fixation that emerged most often in nightmare flashes and ghostly hauntings. As Miller writes,

there is no doubt that homesickness sometimes assumed pathological proportions. Many immigrants like Rowe and Cathy Greene, a young servant in Brooklyn, were tormented nightly by vivid dreams of home: sometimes by 'sweet illusion(s)' but more often by harrowing premonitions of parents' or siblings' deaths, which perhaps reflected guilt felt for having emigrated, as well as consciously repressed longing for home.⁷⁷

Symptomatic of the refusal to grieve the loss of a love object, argues Freud, is the melancholic's degradation of "the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings," and this ultimately "culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment."⁷⁸ The feelings of guilt experienced by the Irish immigrant women Miller cites conform to Freud's delineation of the state of melancholia. In her own grandmother's records, Eileen discovers a similar instance of guilt and self-reproach; according to Westborough's documents, Nellie "believed that she had done something in her life that was wrong and she could never be forgiven for it."⁷⁹

"She came here in 1900, famine," Eileen goes on, both reproducing the Famine as the dominant organisational trope of Irish-American diasporic genealogy more generally and offering the same event as a traumatising experience of loss for Nellie:

⁷³ Kerby Miller, "Paddy's Paradox: Emigration to America in Irish Imagination and Rhetoric," in *Ireland and Irish America: Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), 114.

⁷⁴ Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 5.

⁷⁵ Myles, *Cool for You*, 146.

⁷⁶ Kerby Miller, "Assimilation and Alienation: Irish Immigrants' Responses to Industrial America, 1870s-1920s," in *Ireland and Irish America: Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008), 340.

⁷⁷ Miller, "Assimilation and Alienation," 340.

⁷⁸ Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 244.

⁷⁹ Myles, *Cool for You*, 147.

We don't hear much about this, that they were starved out of their country, because the Irish were ashamed. They just came here and forgot what it was like to see your family die of hunger.⁸⁰

Despite, or, indeed, precisely due to the unspeakability of the catastrophe, as David Lloyd argues, the Famine “reappears as a kind of displaced memory that haunts the afterlife of Irish culture, not directly but in images and tropes that form its traces.”⁸¹ Lloyd defines this endurance of the Famine as a ghostly trace in the metaphysical realm of Irish subjectivity in his book as “melancholy survivals.”⁸² In actual fact, however, by the time Nellie Riordan left Ireland for America, it was not famine—Great or small—that necessitated emigration, but rather the rapidly changing socio-economic landscape of the island in the post-Famine period, when Ireland experienced the highest number of emigrations.⁸³ As previously outlined earlier in chapter one of this thesis, a ruling system of impartible inheritance among a population still primarily rural and living on farms, as well as a dramatically deteriorating socio-economic status among Irishwomen, ensured that many young and single women abandoned Ireland for better prospects in Britain, Australia, Canada, and America.⁸⁴

In an analysis of Máirtín Ó Cadhain's “An Bhliain 1912” (“The Year 1912”), Lloyd draws attention to the story's use of the closed mouth as a silent site of ungrivable loss. In this tale of a mother's inexpressible anguish in the face of her daughter's departure for America, Lloyd notes how “the sealed mouth refuses to lose this unbearable loss, a loss that resumes past losses.”⁸⁵ While Ó Cadhain's narrative shifts the scene of emigration from the 1840s to 1912, Lloyd observes in this temporal distance the remnants of a past history of inadmissible grief. Moreover, “The Year 1912,” in focusing on the relationship between mother and daughter, pays heed to the particular experience of women's emigration from Ireland when women, in particular, especially unmarried women, were offered few choices in Ireland in the post-Famine period other than the church or emigration. Ó Cadhain's tale and

⁸⁰ Ibid., 143-44.

⁸¹ Lloyd, *Irish Times*, 6.

⁸² Ibid., 29.

⁸³ See, for instance, Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 345-53 and chapter four of Kevin Kenny's *The American Irish: A History* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 131-79 for outlines of figures and statistics for the post-Famine period of emigration from Ireland.

⁸⁴ There is a rich body of scholarship exploring the occupational, social, and domestic lives of Irish immigrant women in America since the mid-nineteenth century. See, for instance, Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Janet Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1920* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1989); Íde B. O'Carroll, *Models for Movers: Irish Women's Emigration to America* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1990); *Peasant Maids-City Women: From the European Countryside to Urban America*, ed. Christiane Harzig (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Breda Grey, *Women and the Irish Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁸⁵ Lloyd, *Irish Times*, 71.

its American Wake lament the loss of a loved one not to the afterlife but to the Atlantic passage from which she might never return.⁸⁶

Compounding the emotional turmoil arising from the emigration process for Nellie is an American life marked by the sort of poverty and disappointing family life and marriage Hasia Diner suggests were characteristic of many Irish immigrant women's experience.⁸⁷ Like many other women of her generation, Nellie entered the domestic service industry, which came to define female Irish immigrant experience in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁸⁸ According to Breda Gray, Irish immigrant women like Eileen's grandmother were largely subjugated through church, family, and state as reproducers of American mores and citizenry; these women were "incorporated into nation-building and modernisation projects in Ireland (through migration, correspondence and remittances) and in the US (via their civilising of Irish America and the reproduction of ambitious 'white' US citizens)."⁸⁹ As Eileen blankly describes her grandmother's accepted role in American life, "low-value wife, a worker and a breeder."⁹⁰

The post-Famine Irish were peculiarly prone to a state of melancholic homesickness "because of their marked unpreparedness for urban-industrial society," as well as their attachment to "close-knit, parochial, intensely familial communities" back home in Ireland.⁹¹ Despite the fact that many of the Irish in America during the period 1870-1920 were steadily enjoying improvements in their socio-economic status, as late as 1904, Irish Americans remained a disproportionately large section (11%) of the nation's casual labourers, and a significant number of Irish women remained in domestic and personal service.⁹² "The Myleses were poor," Eileen's mother tells her. "They were always moving and I think that's why. Couldn't pay the rent."⁹³ If a debilitated economic position left Nellie financially lacking, her domestic life simultaneously failed to provide any emotional enrichment. Nellie's

⁸⁶ On this sombre affair, Jay P. Dolan writes in *The Irish Americans: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008) that the custom "developed from the traditional wake of the dead, when relatives and friends of the deceased would sit up all night in the company of the body, mourning the person's passage" (76). For a more detailed history, see Miller's conclusion in *Emigrants and Exiles* (556-68). Indeed, the wake was a key trope emerging in James McCourt's novel on AIDS and loss discussed in chapter two.

⁸⁷ Diner, *Erin's Daughters*, 110.

⁸⁸ For more a more detailed history of Irish immigrant women in the domestic service and the invention of the "Bridget" stereotype, see, for instance, Diner's *Erin's Daughters in America*, 70-105; *Peasant Maids-City Women: From the European Countryside to Urban America*, especially Deirdre Mageean's contribution to the collection, "Making Sense and Providing Structure: Irish-American Women in the Parish Neighborhood," 223-60; Kenny's *The American Irish*, 110-11, 152-54; Miller's *Ireland and Irish America*, especially "For 'Love and Liberty,'" 316-17; and Christine Palumbo-DeSimone's essay, "'Kitchen Queens' and 'Tributary Housekeepers': Irish Servant Stories in Nineteenth-Century Women's Magazine Fiction," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 33, no. 2, (Autumn 2014): 77-101, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/564230/pdf>.

⁸⁹ Gray, *Women and the Irish Diaspora*, 3-4.

⁹⁰ Myles, *Cool for You*, 143.

⁹¹ Miller, "Assimilation and Alienation," 340-41.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 331.

⁹³ Myles, *Cool for You*, 167.

husband, Terrance, “was a mean one ... Sending money back to Ireland all those years when he had six kids,” Eileen’s mother adds, also suspecting extramarital affairs.⁹⁴ Eileen imaginatively adds an unemployed, directionless son to the heap of her grandmother’s growing disappointments. Instead of transforming the city around him in his mother’s name, “John stunk like Old Thompson (Rye), hadn’t a woman in his life or a pot to pee in and after all the years of taking guff from his father, Nellie just wanted to kill the slimy bastard, her son John, how she rued the day she had popped him out of her own pained guts.”⁹⁵

Diner argues that “as late as 1908 it was estimated that two-thirds of all Irish insane were women, and even at that late date the Irish made up the largest group of foreign-born in American insane asylums.”⁹⁶ While she rejects the process of migration alone as a cause of mental illness among Irish immigrant women, since other immigrants generally suffered less than the Irish, Diner does go on, however, to suggest that perhaps “the ways in which Irish females migrated, without parents and without full community structures, compounded the usual problems.”⁹⁷ Thus, the loss of homeland, family, and community contributed greatly to the common case of psychological dis-ease among Irish immigrant women. Echoing Freud’s theorisation in “The Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence” (1938) and what Eng and Shinhee Han in their essay on Asian-American melancholia call a “cleaving of the psyche,”⁹⁸ Miller observes schizophrenia, the most common illness among the Irish in America, as an “ironic symbol of both the extreme disparities in Irish-American society and the still enormous gaps between new immigrants’ often naïve expectations and the unpleasant realities

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 57.

⁹⁶ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters*, 110. In histories of mental illness and the life of the asylum in North America, the Irish are remarkably overrepresented. See, for instance, E. Fuller Torrey and Judy Miller, *The Invisible Plague: The Rise of Mental Illness from 1750 to the Present* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 167, 239-41, 274 and David J. Rothman, *The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), 284. Torrey and Miller illustrate in their study that, in mid-nineteenth-century Canada, while the Irish on Prince Edward Island only accounted for 10% of the population, “Irish-born patients were disproportionately represented, constituting between 27 and 33 percent of admissions each year from 1848 through 1864” (167). In fact, the 1850 census showed a rapid increase in admissions, increasing up to 31% (ibid., 235). That this increase occurred at the height of Famine-era migration from Ireland to America is particularly suggestive, as it goes some way to link the increase in asylum admissions and the growing number of Irish immigrants to North America. In Ken Kesey’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, the lead character is the Irish-American Randal Patrick McMurphy, whose insubordinate antics have brought him to the state asylum. Additional Irish-American examples of madness in literature include Eugene O’Neill’s *A Long Day’s Journey Into Night* and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s literature. Indeed, Peggy Shaw’s *You’re Just Like My Father* opens with the institutionalisation of Shaw’s mother, who, as the previous chapter explored, suffered several mental collapses in her lifetime. On the construction of the historical link between madness and women, see Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virgo, 1985) and Phyllis Chesler, *Women and Madness* (1970; repr., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Myles was inspired by Showalter’s text, which had a profound effect on the author, encouraging them to consider the issue that would materialise as *Cool for You*. Personal communication with the author, September 19, 2016.

⁹⁷ Diner, *Erin’s Daughters*, 110.

⁹⁸ David L. Eng and Shinhee Han, “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia,” *Psychoanalytical Dialogues* 10, no. 4 (2000): 675.

they frequently encountered in the supposed ‘land of promise.’”⁹⁹ For Eileen, Nellie’s melancholic malady is the precipitation of experiences unique to female social, cultural, and domestic life, in which the immigrant ideals of marriage and family come apart. “She walked around and around,” Eileen says. “Lost interest in everything. Stayed in bed a great deal of time. Then Helen died.”¹⁰⁰ When Helen dies, “Nellie begins to go outside at night with nothing on and calls her daughter’s name again and again. Her girl is dead.”¹⁰¹

In his survey of Irish-American autobiography, Rogers provides a nuanced reading of contemporary ethnic engagements with the work of genealogy. Against the traditional narrative purported by the likes of Stephanie Rains, Catherine Nash, and Julia Watson, Rogers interprets Irish examples of a creative literature of genealogy which demonstrates a more melancholic approach to national and diasporic belonging.¹⁰² He writes:

Unlike the models of genealogy that place the individual at the teleological end point of an unbroken line of succession, the recent literature of genealogy has little to do with filling the gaps in a family tree. Rather, it finds its subject matter in dead ends, dislocation, and a sense of loss.¹⁰³

While *Cool for You* is directed towards “filling the gaps” of Eileen’s grandmother’s personal history, Myles’s narrative nonetheless endures the genealogical dead ends of Nellie’s record; indeed, Myles deploys this “incertitude and disruption as a source of art” which, according to Rogers, has become a cornerstone of contemporary Irish-American autobiography.¹⁰⁴ In this sense, *Cool for You* unravels spectacularly as a deeply fractured narrative of loss, one that mourns both “what remains of lost histories as well as histories of loss.”¹⁰⁵

In a crucial extension of Freud’s own theory, Eng and Han suggest that if melancholia is not overcome by the first generation, the symptoms of the affliction can be transmitted to subsequent generations. According to them, “mourning and melancholia are re-enacted and lived out by the children in their own attempts to assimilate and to negotiate the American dream.”¹⁰⁶ If Nellie Myles’s story in *Cool for You* best exemplified the melancholic response to the loss of one’s country, the figure of Ted Myles in *Chelsea Girls* expresses the same process in a distinctly different fashion; his case supremely evidences a second-generation

⁹⁹ Miller, “Assimilation and Alienation,” 335.

¹⁰⁰ Myles, *Cool for You*, 144.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁰² See Julia Watson, “Ordering the Family: Genealogy as Autobiographical Pedigree,” in *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography*, ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 297-326; Stephanie Rains, “Irish Roots: Genealogy and the Performance of Irishness,” in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 130-60; and Catherine Nash’s *Of Irish Descent: Origin Stories of Genealogy, and the Politics of Belonging* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

¹⁰³ Rogers, *Irish-American Autobiography*, 84.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Eng and Kazanijan, “Mourning Remains,” 1.

¹⁰⁶ Eng and Han, “Racial Melancholia,” 680.

melancholic reaction to the ruined loss of an unattainable cultural and social ideal. For Myles, the expectations of a working-class immigrant family to both aspire to and successfully achieve the (Irish-) American dream, to conform to the liberal political ideals of self-improvement and self-determination, prove destructive for those in precarious socio-economic and debilitating personal circumstances which exclude them from the dominant “lace-curtain” narrative of Irish-American embourgeoisement.

Nearly eighty years after the mass arrival of Irish Catholics to the shores of America in the wake of the Famine, the Boston of Myles’s father’s youth in the 1920s “remained the most ethnically riven, class-conscious city in the Northeast; throughout the economic boom of the decade, the city’s unemployment often reached as high as 15 percent.”¹⁰⁷ Despite the continued socio-economic success of many Irish in America, the Myles family remained behind economically. Generational distance between the immigrant and second generations produced little change in this outlook. As Charles Fanning observes, the G.I. Bill of Rights “provided higher education and a leg up to solid middle-class status for thousands of Irish Americans,” and the election of John F. Kennedy marked a “dramatic and valid symbol of Irish-American post-war accomplishment.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, Myles has expressed the fact that, for their father, being in the war “was the adventure of his life.”¹⁰⁹ Yet, even before the dramatic demise of Irish-Catholic religious orders and institutions in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council proceedings in 1962, Ted Myles died an alcoholic with a disappointing war record and in equally deprived socio-economic conditions. As Eileen puts it in *Chelsea Girls*, “My father was really sad that he didn’t get to be a pilot in the war. He failed an eye exam. He washed out.”¹¹⁰

In 1961, when Myles was eleven, their father fell from the roof of the family home: “my father fell/ instead of the dresser/ it was the family/ joke.”¹¹¹ Weeks after the event, Myles watched Ted die on the couch in the family’s living room, a harrowing experience reconstructed in *Chelsea Girls* in a section entitled “The Kid,” and later again in *Cool for You*.¹¹² Ted Myles’s struggle with alcoholism in his own lifetime, and the impact of his death on his daughter’s life, haunt the pages of Myles’s poetry and prose, from the publication of their debut poetry volume, *The Irony of the Leash*, in 1978 to their most recent book,

¹⁰⁷ Rogers, *Irish-American Autobiography*, 32.

¹⁰⁸ Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America*, 313.

¹⁰⁹ In a three-page leaflet from October 1, 1992, in which they encouraged people to vote for them in a “write-in” campaign in a bid for the American presidential election at the time, Myles writes: “My father was in the Air Force. He drove a jeep in something called the Red Ball Line which meant they delivered munitions.” Folder “Eileen Myles,” Subject Files, Lesbian Herstory Archives, New York, September 22, 2016.

¹¹⁰ Myles, *Chelsea Girls*, 207.

¹¹¹ Eileen Myles, “Merk,” in *I Must Be Living Twice: New and Selected Poems, 1975-2014* (New York: Ecco, 2015), 195.

¹¹² Myles, *Chelsea Girls*, 23-8 and *Cool for You*, 146.

Afterglow, in which the author writes a memoir for their deceased pit bull Rosie, whom Myles imagines as a reincarnated form of their deceased father.¹¹³ In a 2015 interview, Myles articulated the on-going significance of their father to their literary and creative practice, describing him as “a fetish in [their] dream story.”¹¹⁴

Myles’s depiction of twentieth-century life for second-generation Irish Americans in their work goes against the grain of celebratory accounts of ethnic ascension, and poignantly illustrates the painful survival of transgenerational blues among the disappointed class of dreamers and the dejected. In an interview for *Dialogue Talk*, they speak candidly about what they perceive to be a great sense of loss in their parents’ lives, a loss they align with both the trauma of losing parents and siblings, as well as feelings of trauma produced by disappointing class positions and cultural legacies. They explain,

I feel like both my parents had huge capabilities, but no capacity ... I mean it’s like the myth of exceptionalism in America is, that you’re supposed to be able to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. But what if your parents are dead by the time you’re eight? What if your dad is a brutal alcoholic who beats you up and your mother goes into a mental hospital when you’re in your 20s, and just when you’re coming of age, everybody around you—what if your sister dies?¹¹⁵

According to Eng and Han, these discourses of American exceptionalism and the ungrievable loss of the democratic myths they espouse are assumed as a “psychic amnesia that can only return as a type of repetitive national haunting—a type of negative or absent presence.”¹¹⁶ Far from an individual pathology, this melancholia not only opens up into a collective experience, but it also comes to describe the condition for the establishment of diasporic identity itself.

In his 1923 review of melancholia in *The Ego and the Id*, Freud dissolves the distinction between mourning and melancholia, thus depathologising the latter, and acknowledging its role in the constitution of the ego. He explains:

We succeeded in explaining the painful disorder of melancholia by supposing that [in those suffering from it] an object which was lost has been set up again inside the ego—that is, that an object-cathexis has been replaced by an

¹¹³ *Afterglow* includes a chapter entitled, “My Father Came Back Again as a Dog” (81-87). That the melancholic attachment to Ted would persist and express itself, as Alice A. Kuzniar has shown, is not entirely unexpected considering the relationships humans have formed with the *canis lupus familiaris* in Western society. Although another species, Kuzniar argues, integrated into a human’s everyday life means that the dog occupies an owner’s psychic space, and that the loss of a pet can result in melancholic attachments that are bound up with an often unspoken and sometimes taboo expression of love for the dog. See Alice A. Kuzniar, *Melancholia’s Dog: Reflections on Our Animal Kinship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). At the end of *Afterglow*, Eileen says goodbye to her dog Rosie, but whether this farewell enacts in the psychic bond between father (as human or dog) and daughter the same therapeutic process remains unwritten.

¹¹⁴ “Michelle Tea, Eileen Myles, and Jill Soloway in Conversation,” *Jewseum*, Soundcloud, May 7, 2015, <https://soundcloud.com/jewseum/michelle-tea-eileen-myles-and-jill-soloway-in-conversation>.

¹¹⁵ Eileen Myles, “Annihilation in My Blood.” *Dialogue Talk*, <http://dialoguetalk.org/eileen-myles-interview/annihilation-in-my-blood/>.

¹¹⁶ Eng and Han, “Racial Melancholia,” 673.

identification. At that time, however, we did not know how common and how typical it is. Since then we have come to understand that this kind of substitution has a great share in determining the form taken by the ego and that it makes an essential contribution towards building up what is called its “character.”¹¹⁷

This “character” of the ego is, Freud reveals, “a precipitate of abandoned object-cathexes” that contains “the history of those object-choices.”¹¹⁸ In this sense, as Eng explains, “the turning inward that marks the melancholic response to unavowable loss produces the ego as a psychic entity.”¹¹⁹ The profound implication of such a shift is that the loss which comes to characterise much of Ted Myles’s working-class life plays a distinctly formative role in the constitution of Irish-American identity. Moreover, in taking in the lost other, the self assumes the “features” of the person, object or ideal in a corporeal form. Thus the subject both takes in and takes *on* that lost other.¹²⁰

Melancholic Incorporation and Gender Melancholia

In “Anne,” Eileen, the poem’s speaker, describes a moment in which she watches her aunt don the clothes of her deceased mother. Eileen paints the scene:

Aunt Anne put her mother’s
clothes on for Halloween
her mother’s wig
her dead mother’s
glasses.¹²¹

The uncanny effects of Anne’s maternal drag are foreshadowed in the temporal setting of the poem: Halloween, during which the lines between the living and dead are blurred. On Halloween, the dead are not only remembered, they are in many instances resurrected through costume. The living literally embody the images of the departed. Anne’s display in Myles’s poem provokes horror in Eileen’s mother, who watches her sister eerily transform into the ghostly image of her dead mother:

She never resembled
the woman
but she became
her. It’s a
facet of my aunt
which terrifies my mother
but I find

¹¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 23.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Eng, “Melancholia/Postcoloniality,” 140.

¹²⁰ Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, 24.

¹²¹ Eileen Myles, “Anne,” in *Not Me* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), 122.

it powerful
& strangely beautiful¹²²

“Anne” is a striking example of Myles’s preoccupation with death and loss. Moreover, the poem manages to weave together a number of key processes that are crucial to this chapter’s investigation on mourning, melancholia and identity in Myles’s work.

The spectral figure being remembered (by Anne) and mourned (by a terrified Genevieve, Eileen’s mother) is the spirit of Eileen’s maternal Polish grandmother. Anne’s magical re-remembering of her dead mother is engendered by a literal donning of her mother’s clothing and glasses. Myles, however, rejects the notion of a genetic family resemblance in her poem; instead, she alludes to the presence of something less apparent and altogether more phantomatic at play. Eileen tells the reader, “She never resembled/ the woman,” but in this moment Anne becomes her mother. This haunting scene of “becoming” in Myles’s poem reveals a connection between the experience of loss and the construction of gender identity. “Anne” describes the process through which the image of a lost loved one can be magically taken on and embodied as a response to the loss of that object of affection. In fact, the title of the collection in which this poem is included—yet, incidentally, absent from in the table of contents at the beginning—is appropriately entitled *Not Me*, a title that echoes the poem’s engagement with the unsettling absence of self and the uncanny dissolution between the self and other. In the notion of “melancholia,” psychoanalysis has provided a way to explain the largely unconscious psychic activity that functions to negotiate an individual’s response to the often times traumatic circumstances of loss.

Unlike her mother, Eileen relishes the strangeness and uncanniness of her aunt Anne’s peculiar transformation into her deceased mother, which she celebrates as something beautiful:

like looking
death in
the face
and saying
okay,
get going.¹²³

This last stanza in Myles’s poem confirms a crucial stage in Freud’s conception of melancholic incorporation, whereby the loss of a love object is negotiated psychically through identification with that object. Anne’s melancholic incorporation of her mother in the scene enables the ego’s triumph against the grave grip of death by taking in the lost loved one and, thus, preserving its presence indefinitely within the psyche.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

In her own radical reterritorialisation of melancholic incorporation and the constitution of gender identity, Butler suggests that gender itself might be the result of rigid social prohibitions on desire and the forced relinquishment of a love object. Criticising Freud's abandonment of the child's polymorphous perversity and his equivocal heterosexualisation of the Oedipus crisis, Butler insists that a social taboo against homosexuality forecloses the possibility of a homoerotic attachment to the same-sex parent, "which produces a domain of homosexuality understood as unlivable passion and ungrievable loss."¹²⁴ And so, Butler urges, "heterosexuality is produced not only through implementing the prohibition on incest but, prior to that, by enforcing the prohibition on homosexuality."¹²⁵ Since melancholia is, as Butler points out, "both the refusal of grief and the incorporation of loss, a miming of the death it cannot mourn," the prohibition on homosexuality produces a melancholic identification with that embargoed same-sex love object.¹²⁶

Butler's theory presents gender itself as "the 'acting out' of unresolved grief."¹²⁷ Further to this, she advances Freud's view that "the ego is first and foremost a bodily ego ... the projection of a surface"¹²⁸ in her attempt to account for the materiality of gender. Since, as Butler has argued elsewhere already, gender is a form of drag, an imitation that serves to conceal its own origin, the illusionary performance of its organicity depends crucially on a connection to the subject that is defined in distinctly corporeal terms.¹²⁹ As she puts it, gender "produces the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic core; it produces on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait (that array of corporeal theatrics understood as gender presentation), the illusion of an inner depth."¹³⁰ More recently, Christina Wald's work proves not only that there is clearly a continued interest in the textual exploration—for Wald examines her chosen narratives as dramatic scripts as well as plurimedial performance texts—of melancholia as a significant cultural phenomenon, but also marks an enduring effort to account for the ways in which gender identity is a consequence of a melancholic incorporation. In *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia*, Wald proposes the term "performative maladies" in order to demonstrate how the texts she examines can be read as "tropes for the performative quality of gender identity," often leading to cross-gender (dis)identifications

¹²⁴ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 135.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹²⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990; repr., New York: Routledge, 2007), 87.

¹³⁰ Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss, (New York: Routledge, 1991), 28 (emphasis in the original).

emerging past the site of the primal crises of subjectivication.¹³¹ “Struggling with the experience of bereavement,” Wald writes on her selected performances, “the protagonists are unable to accept the loss of their loved ones, but resurrect the dead in their imagination and thus psychically preserve their presence.”¹³² If the bodily ego can physically assume, as Butler argues, a “gendered morphology,”¹³³ and, indeed, as Shaw’s performance of Irish-American female masculinity shows, it must also be the point at which other identifications, not separate from, but intimately bound up with gender, such as class, race and ethnicity, are, too, expressed corporeally as physical manifestations of psychic morphologies.

In *Chelsea Girls*, in a section entitled “My Father’s Alcoholism,” Eileen opens with a series of both fictional and real-life men, from the Irish-American actor Tyrone Power to a collection of characters from comic books, who have been a source of identification for her since as early as childhood. The particular site of identification for the narrator is, appropriately, saturated in darkness. She begins:

All through my childhood I was a devotee of the dark-haired men. There was Tyrone Power, there were endless boys in comic books: Super boy, Reggie, Walter in Little Lulu. Obscure brunet boys who I based my fantasy life on.¹³⁴

Eventually, Eileen’s network of beloved black-haired men leads her to the most lasting figure of affection and identification in her life: her Irish-American father, Ted Myles. “My father’s name was Terrence,” she says. “He had black hair.”¹³⁵ The spectral presence of Terrence Myles is resurrected in the story as a central image in Eileen’s own “fantasy life” as a member of this dark-haired boy clan. Unlike the cinematic and fictional images of the string of these men and boys, “[c]rowned with a head of blue-black hair in a world in which darkness was cop,”¹³⁶ though, Eileen establishes a link between father and daughter, which extends beyond the screen and leaves the comic book pages, fusing together the pair through a distinctly psychological encounter:

There was a clear line from him to my dream world and back. My father insisted from the get go that he was in the same frame as me. He elbowed his way into my consciousness. That’s Eileen. That’s Eileen. As if the world were a school about me.¹³⁷

Ted’s death actuates a severe crisis of identity for his daughter: “When he died I began watching myself all the time, for fear of being pitched into blackness,” Eileen reveals in

¹³¹ Wald, *Hysteria, Trauma and Melancholia*, 4.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 161. Wald focuses on David Auburn’s 2000 performance, *Proof*; Marina Carr’s 1996 performance, *Portia Coughlan*; and Sarah Kane’s 2008 performance, *Cleansed*.

¹³³ Butler, *Psychic Life*, 132.

¹³⁴ Myles, *Chelsea Girls*, 197.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

Chelsea Girls.⁹³ Yet, even earlier in the same novel, an adult Eileen literally re-frames the continuing connection between her father and herself after his death. Moreover, she reveals the ways in which far from bringing about the dissolution of self, the event of loss has, in fact, transformed into a constitutive element of their presentation of embodied (gender) presentation: “I tend to wear a lot of clothes like that. Also clothes I see my father wearing in photographs from the forties. Or even the thirties. Chinos white teeshirts.”⁹⁴

In *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, Marianne Hirsch remarks on the power of photography to perform the melancholic work of preservation and identification. Speaking about the image of a lost loved one, she writes: “The referent is both present (implied in the photograph) and absent (it has been there but is not here now). The referent haunts the picture like a ghost: it is a revenant, a return of the lost and the dead other.”⁹⁵ Hirsch continues to claim that such an encounter “can combat the narrative of death, leaving time—death and life—suspended, signalling irreplaceable loss and interminable mourning.”⁹⁶ The framed photographic image, then, both illustrates and conspires in the process of the preservation of ungrievable loss. In *Afterglow*, the voice of Eileen’s dead dog Rosie declares, “Fatherless boys!” in a moment of epiphany. She, too, was fatherless, abandoned by the father and taken away from the mother as a puppy. “And the masculine women walking their pit bulls in the 90s when I came around,” she continues. “Such a lesbian moment for dogs.” Finally, Rosie considers the fatherless lives of these 1990s lesbians with dogs: “None of you had dads. You became them. Somebody had to do it.”¹³⁸ Like Shaw, Eileen is represented as a lesbian who looks just like her father. As the rest of the chapter examines, however, Myles’s writing troubles the unilateral direction of such identifications. In fact, as already argued, if Eileen is “just like her father,” then he, too, yearns to be just like his butch daughter. The identificatory process is mutual and reciprocal.

“Creative Misery”: The Irish Art of Melancholia

As Aristotle’s question cited earlier suggests, melancholia has long been connected with the tortured picture of the male literary and creative artist. In the section heading for the “Causes of Melancholy” in his seventeenth-century text, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, the *magnum opus* textbook on the origins and affects of the phenomenon, to use an additional salient example, Robert Burton includes the subtitle, “Love of learning, or overmuch Study. With a

¹³⁸ Myles, *Afterglow*, 163.

Digression of the Misery of Schollers, and why the Muses are Melancholy.”¹³⁹ Juliana Schiesari’s *The Gendering of Melancholia* traces this protracted legacy to Aristotle, Ficino, Tasso and Burton, who, in Schiesari’s words, each expressly viewed melancholia “as the disease of great men, if not the secret of their inspiration.”¹⁴⁰ As Jennifer Radden explains, the “melancholy man was one who felt more deeply, saw more clearly, and came closer to the sublime than ordinary mortals.”¹⁴¹ In her book, Schiesari argues that, “the *discourse* of melancholia legitimates that neurosis as culturally acceptable for particular men, whose eros is then defined in terms of a literary production based on the appropriation of a sense of lack, while the viability of such appropriation seems systematically to elude women.”¹⁴² In this sense, the discourses of melancholia have explained the phenomenon as both a cause for great creativity *in* men and a productive force unique *to* men.

John Ibson has suggested that Irish-American manhood, in particular, has historically and culturally been closely linked to a melancholic response to the developments of modernity since the nineteenth century, and has noted that in literature there “has been an on-going fascination with death in the cultures of both Ireland and Irish America.”¹⁴³ In one particularly illuminating scene from Djuna Barnes’s 1936 modernist and queer classic, *Nightwood*, the melancholic Irish drag queen, Dr Matthew O’Connor, unearths in his doleful digressions a particularly Irish preponderance for composing mournful cultural forms. In conversation with Felix Volkbein, the helpless imitator of a noble legacy denied from birth but no less (falsely) assumed and performed, the doctor offers his own observations on the miserable state of Irish creativity. He blasts, “[t]he Irish may be as common as whale-shit ... but they do have imagination and ... creative misery, which comes from being smacked down by the devil, and lifted up again by the angels.”¹⁴⁴ In this scene, O’Connor insists on the art of melancholia, the transformation of misery into productive creativity, as a distinctly Irish trait.¹⁴⁵

In “My Father’s Alcoholism,” from *Chelsea Girls*, Eileen explains her father’s own penchant for sartorial play. She describes how Ted would often dress himself in the designer

¹³⁹ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy, Volume I*, ed. Thomas C Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 302.

¹⁴⁰ Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, x-xi.

¹⁴¹ Jennifer Radden, introduction to *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva*, ed. Jennifer Radden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15.

¹⁴² Schiesari, *The Gendering of Melancholia*, 15 (emphasis in the original).

¹⁴³ John Ibson, “Irish-American Manhood,” in *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*, ed. Bret E. Carroll (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2003), 240.

¹⁴⁴ Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 28.

¹⁴⁵ Indeed, O’Connor, an early portrait of transgender identity in American literature, as this chapter suggests, further reveals the ways in which melancholia, gender and ethnicity can come to be embroiled in the longing for queer embodiment and identification. For a reading of Barnes’s novel as an early example of transgender identity in literature, see Heather Love, “Transgender Fiction and Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing*, ed. Hugh Stevens (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 148-63.

outfits of the affluent student body of Harvard University, where he worked as a mailman.¹⁴⁶ This act of dressing “up” inverts the notion of what Eileen describes as “economic drag” in Myles’s 2010 novel *Inferno*—whereby the struggling middle-class artist lives momentarily in the guise of lower class drag for creative “authenticity,”¹⁴⁷ presenting instead the portrait of a working-class man who aspires to present himself to the world as a member of the upper-class elite. Much in the same way as economic drag, though, the portrait Ted attempts to paint is that of the literary artist. “My father looked like F. Scott Fitzgerald,” Eileen recalls.¹⁴⁸ She then continues to describe her father’s own artistic ambitions in life: Ted steals “Aqua-bee” drawing pads, “half drawn on” with students’ doodling from Harvard.¹⁴⁹ This leads Eileen to reconstruct in the narrative her father’s own romantic writing aspirations:

Once my father wrote a story. He wanted to write my mother said as if that was the problem. He always read books on the nights he was good. Big historical novels. It was part of the writer pose: dark-haired man in a soft chair with pipe in his mouth, reading a book. He wrote this story and she sat him down. Your father wants to read you his story. She stood behind him, wanting us to be serious.¹⁵⁰

The articulation of dressing “up” in the case of Ted Myles, however, reveals an additional layer to his performative aspirations.

In becoming an image of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Eileen’s father draws not only on Fitzgerald’s class and creative character; in addition to these positions, Ted’s play in his daughter’s eyes concomitantly exhibits a form of imitation that is explicitly built on a markedly ethnic image: “My father liked to look like F. Scott Fitzgerald, that was the idea, an Irish Ivy Leaguer.”¹⁵¹ For this reason, Ted’s economic drag expresses an *Irish-American* working-class desire to ascend into the ranks of the middle- to upper-class American elites, to which Fitzgerald belonged. In an interview, Myles describes their father’s class costuming:

He wanted to be something else. He was a good-looking, well-dressed, dreamy guy, who drank himself to death ... But he hated Irish Americanness because it represented his cage ... And he wanted to be a writer. And so he was sort of posing ... he would have loved to have been a WASP, which was part of what I grew up with too. It was sort of a working-class ambition around Boston.¹⁵²

Myles continues to claim that their father’s dressing “up” was a form of “Stockholm syndrome,” an aspirational desire to be part of a dominant class culture from which he was excluded. There is in this revelation a sense of loss for a socially dominant identity that is

¹⁴⁶ Myles, *Chelsea Girls*, 208.

¹⁴⁷ Myles, *Inferno*, 104.

¹⁴⁸ Myles, *Chelsea Girls*, 209.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁵² Personal communication with the author, September 19, 2016.

embedded in nativist notions of class and ethnic respectability, and the compensatory internalisation of these unattainable ideals.

In “A Dialogue of Racial Melancholia,” Eng and Han propose a psychoanalytical model through which to account for the “everyday conflicts and struggles with experiences of immigration, assimilation, and racialization” of the Asian-American population.¹⁵³ Citing Freud’s essay on melancholia, Eng and Han argue that the loss “of a more ideal kind” for Asian Americans is the loss of the ideal of whiteness in the United States, from which they are excluded. While Eng and Han apply their theory to the case of Asian Americans, they suggest nonetheless that the collective melancholic response to a group’s exclusion from the American dream can account for the experiences of other equally marginalised groups, such as queer communities and the lower and working classes.¹⁵⁴ Indeed, their model of melancholia provides a useful lens through which to think about the working-class Irish-American experience, particularly as it pertains to the case of Ted Myles’s transformative aspirations and their subsequent failures.

Ted’s dressing “up,” his dragging of Fitzgerald, suggests the entanglement of multiple identifications through a performance of sartorial and corporeal theatrics; his display of the upper-class Irish-American male literary genius, embodied by Fitzgerald, appears to speak to a notion of what could be termed “ethnic drag,” as much as it could be imagined as Myles’s economic or Butler’s gender drag. Moreover, the performance of ethnic drag in this case arises precisely from the unattainability, or loss, of the ideals of an Irish-American dream. Thus, the loss of this fantasy initiates an internalisation of that dream, as well as the magical preservation of that ungrievable ideal within the psyche. Myles’s father’s drag, then, is a melancholic incorporation of an unattainable Irish-American fantasy. His response to this exclusion was to present an image of himself as a sort of “mimic man,” which Homi Bhabha describes in colonial terms as “a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.”¹⁵⁵ In the end of “My Father’s Alcoholism,” Ted’s aspirations to succeed F. Scott Fitzgerald as a great American writer are smashed by his daughter, who ends the chapter and, at the same moment, their father’s artistic ambitions with candid honesty: “His story was terrible. And naturally he was drunk.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Eng and Han, “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia,” 669.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 670.

¹⁵⁵ Homi Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 126, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778467>.

¹⁵⁶ Myles, *Chelsea Girls*, 214. A similar example of autobiographical fiction that presents the spectral presence of Fitzgerald as an ideal of gender performance in the face of personal feelings of inadequacy is Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), in which Bechdel revisits the ambiguous life of her dead father, whose death the author decides was a case of suicide. Bechdel suggests that her father’s Fitzgerald drag might have served to conceal his homosexuality and his nonconforming gender

Cultural Spirits: Irish Alcoholism and the Incorporation of Irishness

Critical attention to Myles's work from Irish-American scholarship almost singularly explores the theme of alcoholism in their fiction. These discussions are usually filtered through the figure of Myles's father, Ted. Caledonia Kearns's *Cabbage and Bones* collection of Irish-American women's fiction, for example, includes the chapter "My Father's Alcoholism" from Myles's *Chelsea Girls*.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps for this reason, Kathleen Ann Kremins, in her essay on Myles's fiction, regards *Chelsea Girls* as the author's most sustained engagement with the issue of alcoholism.¹⁵⁸ In *New World Irish: Notes on One Hundred Years of Lives and Letters in American Culture*, Jack Morgan, again drawing on "My Father's Alcoholism," reads Myles's work primarily as an engagement with the powerful cultural connection between Irishness and intemperance. Morgan writes, "it is difficult to read [their] story without feeling, in addition to its specific, personal registration, an historical Irish echo."¹⁵⁹ Indeed, Myles has even suggested that their father comfortably assumed the role of the Irish-American drinker, offering in relation to his time in the Air Force in the Second World War: "I fought the war from pub to pub!"¹⁶⁰

The figure of the inebriated Irishman is a familiar trope in both the critical and popular histories of Irish national and diasporic cultures. "This dark shadow of Ireland in America, in the form of drink," Morgan observes, "is of course a running theme in Irish American literature, a curse that haunted the ethnicity to a degree perhaps without par except for the case of Native Americans."¹⁶¹ Literary and cultural examples of Irish-American alcoholism include Eugene O'Neill's posthumously published *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), in

identity: "I think what was so alluring to my father about Fitzgerald's stories was their inextricability from Fitzgerald's life ... Such suspension of the imaginary in the real was, after all, my father's stock in trade" (65). *Fun Home* is imbued with analogous traces of loss, mourning, and psychic preservation found in the work of Myles. In fact, Myles has recently suggested that their father might have been either bisexual or gay, and while this has yet to be fully excavated in their literary work, such a conceptualisation of Ted's sexual dissidence might explain his own drag performance of Fitzgerald as an exteriorisation of lost sexual, as well as gender and ethnic, ideals. Personal communication with the author, September 19, 2016: "And I think also my dad, who was a bisexual, at least, if not a homosexual ... he was a mailman, he was working class. He wanted to be something else ... I think there was a thing for the men of that generation, whether they were queer or not, part of male bonding was minstrel shows ... and various men would dress up as women, but when I look at the pictures, there's my dad dressed up as a woman and several other guys who aren't. You know, so it was clear my dad was really into it." This adds additional layers to reading a moment in *Chelsea Girls* in which Ted dons a costume not unlike his institutionalised mother, a scene returned to later in the chapter.

¹⁵⁷ Eileen Myles, "My Father's Alcoholism," in *Cabbage and Bones: An Anthology of Irish American Women's Fiction*, ed. Caledonia Kearns (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 199-213.

¹⁵⁸ Kremins, "Blurring Boundaries," 195.

¹⁵⁹ Jack Morgan, *New World Irish: Notes on One Hundred Years of Lives and Letters in American Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 43.

¹⁶⁰ Myles writes this in a three-page leaflet from October 1, 1992, in which they encourage votes for their "write-in" bid in the presidential election of 1992. Folder "Eileen Myles," Subject Files, Lesbian Herstory Archives, New York, September 22, 2016.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

which male members of the Tyrone family are alcoholics, while the play's matriarch is addicted to morphine; Pete Hamill's 1994 memoir, *A Drinking Life*, which sees the author recall drinking alcohol as a formative ritual of masculinity and manhood; the alcoholic father of Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* (1996); and the psychologically traumatised Irish-American fire fighter, Tommy Galvin, who drinks himself to the brink of destruction, in FX's *Rescue Me* (2004-2011). In a scene from gay Irish-American playwright Mart Crowley's *For Reasons that Remain Unclear* (1993), one character quips to another, "Do you know what an Irish queer is? A fellow who prefers women to drink."¹⁶² The image of the lugubrious Irish-American alcoholic was immortalised most memorably in Irish-American author Alice McDermott's National Book Award-winning novel *Charming Billy* (1998). Indeed, Coughlan's discussion of Irish-American loss and psychic trauma in McDermott's fiction pays particular attention to the eponymous wistful alcoholic. In her essay, Coughlan argues that McDermott's novel "makes explicit the destructive intertwining in Irish-American culture between romantic and religious idealism, the imperative to suppress emotional expression, and the opiate uses of alcohol."¹⁶³ In her conclusion, Coughlan rounds up with a statement on McDermott's fiction's "gendered inflections" that solidifies a deep connection between Irish-American intemperance and masculinity (by which, however, Coughlan explicitly means men).¹⁶⁴

For Myles, alcoholism and melancholia have a lasting legacy within their Irish-American family. As Eileen soberly states at the opening of a chapter in *Cool for You*: "It's called alcoholism. It runs in my family. We have a genetic disposition towards it and depression."¹⁶⁵ This seemingly inescapable, ingrained history of alcoholism is expressly peculiar to the Irish men in Eileen's family, even stretching back to the ancestral homeland of Ireland. As Myles explains in an interview:

I mean honestly, I just saw some real deterioration and ruination in my family, in my childhood. My dad was an alcoholic. He died at 44. All his brothers—none of his brothers made it to 50. And when I went to Ireland, it turned out the last Myles in the area, where we were from, was found dead in what they called the wee house ... His body was found several days after his death and he was an alcoholic in his 40s. And I thought, "Oh my God." So, I just have

¹⁶² Mart Crowley, *For Reasons that Remain Unclear*, in *The Collected Plays of Mart Crowley* (New York: Alyson Books, 2009), 357. In a note on an unpublished work entitled, "Toom," James McCourt similarly jots on a piece of paper, "Definition of an Irish queer: somebody who prefers women to horses and drink." Box 41, folder "Notes," James McCourt and Vincent Virga Papers, Gen MSS 845, General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, June 29, 2018. Like McCourt, Crowley was an alcoholic for many years, and both met at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in Los Angeles, personal communication with the author, August 17, 2018.

¹⁶³ Coughlan, "Paper Ghosts," 143.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁶⁵ Myles, *Cool for You*, 151.

this kind of annihilation in my blood by means of alcohol for sure, but I think the whole kit, mental illness and then poverty and all—the whole cocktail.¹⁶⁶

Like the name “Terrence,” a weakness for drinking among Myles’s relatives is passed patrilineally through the male members of the Myles family. Yet, Myles disrupts this line of a seemingly congenital affliction connecting the men of their family by inserting themselves into that legacy. In the poem, “My Childhood,” from their 1991 poetry volume, *Not Me*, Myles, again, introduces the harmonica as a harbinger of melancholy mood, and brings to it an identification with their father’s alcoholism: “I sentimentally also/ sat in the parlor/ playing cowboy songs/ on my harmonica/ and wishing I was/ drunk.”¹⁶⁷ “Like my father who swore he’d never drink because of his father . . . I was adamant,” Myles writes later in *Cool for You*. Ultimately, though, Eileen fails in her abstinence. “I was an alcoholic at 23,” they reveal in *Chelsea Girls*.¹⁶⁸ While Myles’s alcoholism might be perceived as a symptom of a deep depression brought about by a series of traumatic events (their father’s death, issues with sexual identity, and the financially precarious life they lead in New York as a struggling artist), this speculation ignores the intense identificatory processes at the heart of the performative malady of alcoholism and its relation to ethnicity. Myles’s engagement with alcoholism in their writing reveals the performative play of Irish-American identity as the product of a melancholic incorporation of loss.

In *Inferno*, Eileen maintains this father-butch daughter identification through alcoholism in a particularly revealing way. She recalls:

By the end of his life (1961) his drinking was so bad guys from the post office were calling my mother. Gen we can’t keep him. People at Harvard are complaining. Harvard was my father’s Bowery. He collapsed and pissed his pants. He was the mailman passed out in the halls.¹⁶⁹

Eileen’s description of their father is a particularly devastating portrait of the darker side of the popular image of the loveable Irish-American drunk. Critically, though, her re-remembering of her father in this brief passage presents a moment of identification between the two, which Eileen discernibly establishes through an allusion to eating and oral consumption. “Greeditly,” she says, “I wanted to leave myself dead there in his honor.”¹⁷⁰ In his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud argues that the first stage in the development of sexual organisation in the child is the oral phase. According to Freud, this phase is “the prototype of a process which, in the form of identification, is later to play such an important psychological

¹⁶⁶ Eileen Myles, “Annihilation in My Blood.”

¹⁶⁷ Eileen Myles, “My Childhood,” in *Not Me* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991) 117.

¹⁶⁸ Myles, *Chelsea Girls*, 140.

¹⁶⁹ Eileen Myles, *Inferno: A Poet’s Novel* (New York: OR Books, 2010), 104.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

part.”¹⁷¹ Later, in his 1921 work, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud consolidates and develops this point. He suggests that identification “behaves like a derivative of the first, oral phase of the organization of the libido, in which the object that we long for and prize is assimilated by eating and is in that way annihilated as such.”¹⁷² In fact, in “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud likens the melancholic’s incorporation of a lost love object to this initial oral or cannibalistic phase, during which the individual becomes the object for which she/he mourns “by devouring it.”¹⁷³

In *Hair of the Dog: Irish Drinking and Its American Stereotype*, Richard Stivers observes the role of consumption in the constitution of Irish-American ethnic identity. In his study, Stivers argues that since at least the 1950s, heavy drinking among Irish Americans has drastically evolved from its symbolic value of ethnic identity in the nineteenth century into “a means of consuming one’s ethnic identity and heritage” in the late twentieth century.¹⁷⁴ This development is marked by the social shift from an Irish response to rapid modernity in America in the nineteenth century to a late-capitalist culture of consumerism since at least the second half of the twentieth. For Stivers, the consumption of alcohol among Americans of Irish heritage since the middle of the last century has been a significant means through which ethnicity for this group literally becomes ingested as a means of quenching their cultural appetites. The oral incorporation of Irish-American ethnicity, Stivers suggests, followed the evolution of ethnicity from an existential to a more symbolic association. In this sense, drinking filled a cultural gap brought about by the apparent loss or decline of an ethnic culture. The oral incorporation in Myles’s writing might be imagined as serving to internalize the disembodied figure of their lost alcoholic father, while simultaneously functioning to consume the Irishness his image signifies.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume VII, (1901-1905)*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1953; London: Vintage, 2001), 198. Citations are from the Vintage edition.

¹⁷² Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1959), 47.

¹⁷³ Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 250. See Diana Fuss, “Oral Incorporations: *The Silence of the Lambs*,” in *Identification Papers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 83-105, in which Fuss explores the mouth, in place of the critically favoured anus, as a ferocious site of same-sex eroticism and cannibalism, as imagined in homophobic popular culture.

¹⁷⁴ Richard Stivers, *Hair of the Dog: Irish Drinking and Its American Stereotype*, rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 197.

¹⁷⁵ For a similar discussion, see Diane Negra’s “Consuming Ireland: Lucky Charms Cereal, Irish Spring Soap and 1-800 Shamrock,” *Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (2001): 76-97. Through the advertisement campaigns of popular US brands that have profited from the sale of Irish-themed goods, Negra writes, “we are made to understand that this symbol of Irish culture is meant to be taken on, taken over, in short, consumed” (82). She even describes how the children of the Lucky Charms advert, through capturing the cartoonish leprechaun, Lucky, “become” Irish (82). In John Gilgun’s novel, *Music I Never Dreamed Of* (New York: Amethyst Press, 1989), to cite a literary example, the young gay Irish-American narrator, Stevie Riley, similarly notes the relationship between drinking and the performance of Irishness at the city’s St Patrick’s Day parade: “After all,

Trans-Generational

In an interview with Noel Black for *Brooklyn Rail* in 2013, Myles, while closely aligning their own “blended” sense of gender variance with Kate Bornstein’s “rainbowy” conception of gender identity, nonetheless admits to once considering transitioning from female to male. Most crucially, though, this transition is imagined in explicitly cultural ethnic terms. Myles explains, “I did have a fantasy of transitioning male and also becoming Irish (I have done the latter, I got citizenship) and writing a book of poems and seeing how *he’d* do.” Myles’s concluding remarks in their discussion with Black firmly places Ireland, where the author wrote much of *Afterglow*, as the geographical backdrop for a philosophical engagement with what it might mean to “live differently” and “[t]hrough another body.” “I think living in Ireland will help,” they continue. “I look forward to looking back to here, and further back for a while.”¹⁷⁶ More recently, Myles continues to imagine their transgender embodiment in ethnic terms. They say, “part of my gender shift is definitely dispersed over ethnicity ... [and] I utterly affiliate a masculine way to Ireland.”¹⁷⁷ To be sure, Myles’s description of gender-queer embodiment across their prolific output of poetry and fiction routinely reveals an intimate connection between a masculine gender and an Irish-American consciousness.

Like Peggy Shaw, Myles’s sense of dissident gender identity belies the allegedly neat relationship between the triangulated configuration of sex, gender, and sexuality, which, as Butler points out, serves only to support the legitimacy of a “heterosexual matrix.”¹⁷⁸ Since their earliest works of poetry and prose, Myles has contemplated their experiences growing up a tomboy in their Irish-American Catholic community in the 1950s and 1960s, as well as their adult life in New York City, which see them move from butch lesbian to “wrong body” conceptions of their gender variance. In a 2012 interview, Myles recalls how, when they were coming up in their working-class Irish community in Boston, “I remember feeling that I was not a girl.”¹⁷⁹ In *Inferno*, Myles’s 2010 novel, Eileen, author surrogate, explains that the very reason she has decided to employ an autobiographical approach to writing poetry and prose in her art lies in her identification as a boy: “Well I got the idea from Truffaut. All these boy coming-of-age movies.”¹⁸⁰ Myles’s poetry, prose and performances routinely express the

everyone got drunk on Saint Patrick’s Day. It was the thing to do. It meant you belonged. You fit in. You were part of the group” (48).

¹⁷⁶ Eileen Myles, interview with Noel Black, *Brooklyn Rail*, May 3, 2013, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2013/05/poetry/eileen-myles-and-noel-black>, (emphasis in original).

¹⁷⁷ Personal communication with the author, September 19, 2016.

¹⁷⁸ See Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” 26.

¹⁷⁹ Eileen Myles, Interview by Brittini Hayes, March 30, 2012, transcript of video recording, Documenting Lesbian Lives Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA, 4.

¹⁸⁰ Myles, *Inferno*, 169.

author's feelings of queerness growing up a tomboy convinced, as Eileen puts it in *Cool for You*, that the "whole world was a plot to turn [her] into a femme."¹⁸¹

In a more recent article for *The New Yorker*, however, Myles is cited as embracing a new perspective on a more recognizably transgender identity that has since become part of their personal gender expression: "I'm obsessed with that part in the bible when Jesus is given the opportunity to cure a person possessed by demons, and Jesus says, 'What is your name?' And the person replies, 'My name is legion.'" Ariel Levy adds how Myles "liked the idea of a person containing more than one self, more than one gender."¹⁸² In *Afterglow*, Myles's most recent book, published in 2017, Eileen says, "Gender is an untrustworthy system and at the deepest point of its waters are pure myth ... [it] is a place you have parked your car one day and one day only. That day is your life."¹⁸³ Later, Eileen clarifies: "I'm a man but there's a woman in it."¹⁸⁴ Indeed, Eileen's gender identity, the outward sign of psychic incorporation, is developed in Myles's writing diversely through identifications not only with her father, but also with her grandmother Nellie in both *Chelsea Girls* and *Cool for You*.¹⁸⁵

At the conclusion of Myles's "My Father's Alcoholism" in *Chelsea Girls*, Ted engages in a dressing-up game of a different variety to his previous displays of drag. Eileen explains:

My father would put on a show. He had a skimpy little muscle man bathing suit. He would slick his hair back and come out in that and lift his arms and flex his muscles. I felt like I didn't get it.

¹⁸¹ Myles, *Cool for You*, 65.

¹⁸² Ariel Levy, "Dolls and Feelings: Jill Soloway's Post-Patriarchal Television," *The New Yorker*, December 14, 2015, 45. This article notes the professional and romantic relationship between Myles and Soloway, creator of the Amazon show, *Transparent*. In Soloway's *Transparent*, Cherry Jones plays a character based on Myles. In fact, Myles has made several appearances on the show, playing a friend to Jones's character. Named "Rae Riordan," Myles's character on *Transparent* reveals the lasting influence of the author's grandmother, Helen "Nellie" Riordan, on their identity. See *Transparent*, season two, episode five, "Mee-Maw," episode nine, "Man on the Land," and episode ten, "Grey Green Brown & Copper," directed by Stacie Passon, Jill Soloway, and Andrea Arnold, written by Our Lady J, Ali Liebgott, and Micah Fitzerman-Blue and Noah Harpster, featuring Jeffrey Tambor, Judith Light, Gaby Hoffmann, and Amy Landecker, aired on December 11, 2015, on Amazon Video.

¹⁸³ Myles, *Afterglow*, 108.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁸⁵ In "Jim Fahey," an essay from their non-fiction book, *The Importance of Being Iceland: Travel Essays in Art* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), Myles recalls visiting a psychiatrist who diagnoses Myles as a possible transsexual, an analysis they at first find revelatory: "We're men," Myles writes, "we're just fucking men, I thought. It's not that nobody knew the word butch at the time, but this was an eye-opener, this felt real ... it was just kind of like a landscape unfolding, all my own. I'm a man" (259). Myles even made this discovery key to a subsequent performance they stage, in which Myles holds up a crudely self-made book entitled, *Not Gay: The Story of a Transsexual*, by "Dr. Elsa Von Myles," on which Myles pasted a picture of themselves "in second grade with braids and a Catholic school uniform" (260). "I felt sad for what the girl would be going through in the upcoming years," Myles writes. "But at least she wasn't gay. She was a man" (*ibid.*). Despite such apparent clarity, however, Myles eventually comes to understand the constructive power of medical and psychiatric discourses, which serve to produce the identities they are believed to "diagnose." "I just felt weird after a while and decided that his specialty was transsexuals and somehow that was the direction my intake had led me" (*ibid.*). Myles's sense of gender identity remains in the end clinically undiagnosed and socio-culturally undefined.

Following this exaggerated display of Elzie Crisler Sega's Popeye-inspired theatrical masculinity, Eileen's father finishes the performance by turning it on its head and coming out to his family in the form of a woman not unlike his own Irish mother, Nellie. Eileen writes:

I remember a big pink coat that may have been my mother's, and a tight little scarf around his head. I don't remember any makeup, maybe some rouge on his cheeks. It was like he was doing Grandma, his mother who was in a mental hospital.¹⁸⁶

This act of disidentification in Myles's *Chelsea Girls* suggests the ways in which the constitution of gender through melancholic incorporation are multi-directional and varied. Eileen's cross-identification with her father is matched here with a form of cross-identification between Ted and his mother, Nellie. In fact, in *Cool for You* Eileen's journey into the institutions of confinement is an attempt to not only come closer to her grandmother's history, but is, rather, a process through which the young narrator forms an identification with the figure of Nellie. "Eileen backwards is Nellie," the narrator notes in *Cool for You*. "If you turn one of the e's into an l."¹⁸⁷ Even in her very name, Eileen sees the inscription of her grandmother's presence and identity. Helen, Nellie, Ellen, Eileen: "It's all the same. Least in Irish," Eileen explains in *Afterglow*.¹⁸⁸ Myles advocates in their writing that identity is complex and multiple. As Butler writes in "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," that "the psychic subject is ... constituted internally by differentially gendered Others and is, therefore, never, as a gender, self-identical."¹⁸⁹

In Hirsch's influential theorisation of postmemory—"the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" in the absence of that experience—cited earlier, Irish-American consciousness, in particular, emerges as a premier site of the transference of family and cultural traumatic memory from one generation to the next.¹⁹⁰ Myles's writing complexly engages with the profoundly postmemorial construction of Irish cultural identity among later-generation Irish Americans in the present through the imaginative and material re-membering of ancestors in both narrative and image. The conclusion that follows considers the melancholic remains inherited by the next generation and asks whether these remains in their stubborn endurance deserve a place in the genealogy of Irish-American identity.

¹⁸⁶ Myles, *Chelsea Girls*, 205-6.

¹⁸⁷ Myles, *Cool for You*, 166.

¹⁸⁸ Myles, *Afterglow*, 177.

¹⁸⁹ Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 27.

¹⁹⁰ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 5. See also, Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile," *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996): 664, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1773218>.

Conclusion: Melancholic Remains

“My dream is that history is backwards.”¹⁹¹

In an interview for *Dialogue Talk*, Myles speaks candidly about what they perceive as a great sense of loss in their parents’ lives, a loss they align with both the trauma of losing parents and siblings, as well as feelings of trauma produced by disappointing class positions and cultural legacies. They reveal:

I think that my parents were actually really great, really smart, really beautiful, very kind of wistful ... And I feel like both my parents had huge capabilities, but no capacity ... I mean it’s like the myth of exceptionalism in America is, that you’re supposed to be able to pull yourself up by your bootstraps.¹⁹²

After this, Myles claims the intersecting pursuits of their artistic life and queer desire disappoint the class aspirations of their parents’ generation: “I think just the fact that I got out of college and began traveling, and then in a few years, landed in New York, and then threw the gauntlet down as a poet, and then later on was queer, my life is so many things that don’t resemble what would represent success to my family.” Myles reveals how the sense of loss in their parents’ lives installed a desire in their own future to break out of this particular pattern of social disenfranchisement. They admit, “I mean I’m the child of their pathos, and so I think I had a very steely thing from very early on, that I was not going to be like that, that I was not going to be disappointed in my life, that I was going to do what it was that I wanted to do.”¹⁹³

Butler’s own critical shift from queer performativity to melancholic incorporation has allowed Elizabeth Freeman to restructure the implicitly future-oriented vision of queer theory towards “the interesting threat that the genuine *past*-ness of the past sometimes makes to the political present.”¹⁹⁴ Discussed earlier in chapter three, Freeman’s notion of “temporal drag,” “with all of the associations that the word ‘drag’ has with retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past upon the present,” chimes with the productive politics of mourning Eng and Kazanijan describe in *Loss*, which proceeds precisely from the tension between “the past and the present, between the dead and the living.”¹⁹⁵ This conflict survives in Myles’s writing in the image of their autobiographical narrator, whose emotional and psychological life is haunted by her immigrant family’s accumulated histories of loss in ways that materialise in

¹⁹¹ Myles, *Afterglow*, 104.

¹⁹² Eileen Myles, “Annihilation in My Blood.”

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Elizabeth Freeman, “Packing History, Count(er)ing Generations,” *New Literary History* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 2000), 728, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2000.0046>. See also Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), chapter two, 59-94.

¹⁹⁵ Eng and Kazanijan, “Mourning Remains,” 1.

acutely destructive forms—most expressly in the obsessive tropes of alcoholism and melancholy.

Far from the inheritance of a genetic disposition, though, such melancholic survivals of what Lloyd calls “obsessive repetitions in Irish culture,”¹⁹⁶ or what Garrett O’Connor recognises as the afterlife of Irish “cultural malignant shame,”¹⁹⁷ alert us to the political imperatives underpinning the tensions produced in the collision of the past and the present, where the “therapeutic modernity” of the latter demands the former be properly mourned and overcome.¹⁹⁸ “If the function of therapeutic modernity is to have us lose our loss in order to become good subjects,” Lloyd argues, “then the very process of mourning the dead is at once their condemnation, their devaluation ... seen as a haunting of memory that we must throw off because it continues to hold us back; our history, a nightmare weighing upon our brains, a mortal coil to be shuffled off.”¹⁹⁹ Thus, such Irish-American drag in Myles’s writing presents the melancholic survivals, or remains, of multiple histories of loss as key formations of subjectivity and creativity that offer counterintuitive measures of “volatile potentialities and future militancies.”²⁰⁰

Inferno’s heroine and aspiring poet inherits a device from her father that will come to provide her with the tools to negotiate the hell of anguished family life in Arlington and ascend to the heaven of artistic providence and queer bliss in New York: a typewriter. “At the same time as many people acquire their first typewriter,” suggests author Ken Worpole, “they also acquire their first suitcase.”²⁰¹ In this sense, the typewriter embodies an artistic futurity that hinges crucially on leaving the often painful past behind. The question is whether Myles invokes the typewriter in their novel to achieve the same result for Eileen. Ignited with desire for a university teacher, Eva Nelson, a young Eileen races home to compose her own interpretation of Dante’s *Inferno* as a writing-out of their sexual need for Nelson. “I remember her holding something I wrote, a gleaming page, mine, that rolled out of the sad typewriter on the kitchen table at 33 Swan Place,” Eileen recalls.²⁰² Yet, the sense of sadness embodied in the typewriter is met with Eileen’s burning queer desire and creative ambitions. She continues:

¹⁹⁶ David Lloyd, “The Memory of Hunger,” in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 219.

¹⁹⁷ See, for instance, Garrett O’Connor, “Breaking the Code of Silence: The Irish and Drink,” *Irish America*, February/March, 2012, <http://irishamerica.com/2012/01/breaking-the-code-of-silence-the-irish-and-drink/>.

¹⁹⁸ Lloyd, “Memory of Hunger,” 220.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ Eng and Kazanjian, “Mourning Remains,” 6.

²⁰¹ Ken Worpole, *Dockers and Detectives: Popular Reading; Popular Writing* (London: Verso, 1983), 94. Quoted in Michael Pierson, *Writing Ireland’s Working Class: Dublin After O’Casey* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30.

²⁰² Myles, *Inferno*, 13.

My father had given us that typewriter, it wasn't even mine yet, it was ours, the family. It would be mine when I left home. I was already gone, I would take it with me, but everyone sat in class now listened while Eva Nelson stood there and read my inferno. The waves rolled on and on.²⁰³

Eileen engages in a profoundly transformative act in this scene, whereby the material symbol of her father's own artistic failings is redrawn as a productive instrument of his daughter's burgeoning life as a lesbian poet. The *Künstlerroman*, or "the novel of the artist," as Bonnie Zimmerman has argued, describes the intertwined trajectories of the discovery of self and the creation of art central to much lesbian fiction since the late twentieth century. According to Zimmerman, in lesbian fiction since the representational changes introduced in the wake of modern gay liberation in late 1960s, "the quintessential hero is an artist or a writer."²⁰⁴ *Inferno*, which bears the subtitle, "a poet's novel," continues in this tradition, charting both the development of this particular poet's identity and the evolution of her artistic career.

Crucially, Eileen inherits the melancholy of her father's losses, while also thoroughly rewriting the conditions of that loss as an agency of creative productivity and sexual desire. Later in the same novel, in a chapter entitled "a lesbian thing," Eileen, now living as a poet in New York, articulates this imaginative intersection of literary creativity and dissident desire, and to that productive configuration she crucially adds both melancholic and Irish textures: "I also contributed Irish poems written in dialect keening about the married poetry teacher I had cut loose from. If I was ever coming out, it was now."²⁰⁵ The expression of queer desire is closely coupled with an Irish ethnic identity and the traces of the psychic effects of mourning. At the same time, this feeling blue is positively transposed into sexual and creative affirmation. Myles's exodus from the painful pasts of their family tragedies has led to a literary practice that distinctly delineates a metaphysical retention and creative restoration of lost loved ones. Myles's construction of Irish-American identity traverses the spatial, ideal, and bodily remains of histories of loss and produces, in emotional and imaginative forms, the obsessive refusal to leave the dead behind.

²⁰³ Ibid., 14.

²⁰⁴ Bonnie Zimmerman, *The Safe Sea of Women: Lesbian Fiction, 1969-1989* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1992), 60.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 227.

CHAPTER FIVE

Tangled Routes: Race, Desire, and Ethnosexual Frontiers in Stephanie Grant's *Map of Ireland*

Introduction: Irish-American Fictions of Race

Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy.¹

On 12 September, 1974, on the first day of term for the city's public high schools, Phase I of the court-ordered desegregation plan, which had been passed in June that year by the appointed Judge W. Arthur Garrity, saw the transportation of many of Boston's black and white pupils across neighbourhood lines into schools perceived to be unfairly segregated. In an effort to redress this segregation, Garrity ordered that nearly seventeen thousand students be transferred across neighbourhood and community boundaries at the end of the summer holidays in 1974. The areas most affected by the decision to formally desegregate the public school system that year were the predominantly black neighbourhood of Roxbury, whose population was eighty-percent black,² and the largely working-class Irish-Catholic enclave of South Boston, home to what the media commonly labelled "the white underclass capital of America."³ Phase II of the desegregation plan launched the following academic year, introduced bussing across the city and brought other racially divided neighbourhoods into Boston's tumultuous drama. The predominantly working-class Irish enclave of Charlestown, the subject of J. Anthony Lukas's best-selling and Pulitzer Prize-winning *Common Ground* (1985), was one of these Phase II zones.⁴

While the June 1974 decision was the direct result of a federal suit filed two years earlier by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) against

¹ Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987; repr., San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999), i.

² "School Desegregation in Boston: A Staff Report," US Commission on Civil Rights, 1975, 24, <https://www.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr12sch618.pdf>.

³ Jay P. Dolan, *The Irish Americans: A History* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2008), 279.

⁴ J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Vintage, 1986).

the Boston School Committee in the case of *Morgan v. Hennigan*, the battle for racial equality in residential, employment, and educational matters in the city had been raging decades before Garrity's court-ordered desegregation plan. In 1954, twenty years before forced bussing began in Boston, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that it was unconstitutional to segregate students along racial lines in the nation's public schools. Despite this historic decision, the NAACP pointed out in 1963 that the Boston School Committee continued to ignore the deeply segregated state of the city's public schools.⁵ "The Boston School Committee, however," writes Thomas O'Connor in *The Boston Irish: A Political History*,

insisted that there was no deliberate segregation in its public school system. The fact that some schools were predominantly white and others predominantly black was simply the result of parents wishing to send their children to the nearest neighborhood school. Committee chair Louise Day Hicks and the other members of the school committee, all of whom were white, denied the charges of de facto segregation.⁶

The Boston School Committee, which for most of the twentieth century had been headed not only by white members but mainly by white Irish Catholics, "virtually ignored the terms of the *Brown* decision, as well as the implications of the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act, which stated that any school that was more than 50 percent black would be designated as racially imbalanced."⁷ When the state Board of Education, provoked by ongoing pressure from Boston's black parents and pupils, demanded that a number of white students be moved to a newly constructed school in Dorchester in an effort to install racial balance, the Boston School Committee refused, consequently losing millions in funding from state aid.⁸ In 1972, the NAACP filed the lawsuit that would bring Judge Garrity to his final decision in the summer of 1974.

The court-ordered move to desegregate the Boston Public Schools (BPS) in 1974 remains a controversial subject in the city's racial and political history. More than this, though, the drama of the period endures as a deeply uncomfortable chapter in the story of the Irish in America. While the crisis enveloped a number of diverse black and white ethnic groups and communities across the city, the legacy of this turbulent time is routinely observed in cultural and political spheres, as well as in scholarly discourses, as the sour burden of

⁵ Thomas O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Old Saybrook, CT: Konecky and Konecky, 1995), 256.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ See, for example, O'Connor, 257 and Jeanne Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South': How Boston's School Desegregation Complicates the Civil Rights Paradigm," in *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, ed. Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 137.

white, working-class Irish-American identity in particular. “In the mid-1970s,” writes Lawrence J. McCaffrey in *Textures of Irish America*, “television viewers all over the United States and in Europe saw angry Irish faces and heard hate-filled Irish voices shouting obscenities and racial insults at frightened African-American teenagers exiting buses that had transported them from the South End and Roxbury to schools in Charleston and South Boston.”⁹ Elsewhere, Lauren Onkey writes that, in Boston, “opposition to busing had an Irish face.”¹⁰

O’Connor has argued that the bussing question “created a major schism, not only between white people and black people, but also between working-class Irish Catholics and their more affluent friends and relatives who had moved away to the suburbs.”¹¹ Likewise, Maureen Dezell claims that:

Because class conflict is almost never acknowledged in the United States and because dramatic black-white battles were taking place in Boston, the so-called cradle of liberty and a supposed liberal bastion, images of violent race hatred defined the bussing crisis: a black lawyer in a three-piece suit pummeled with an American flag in City Hall Plaza; South Boston mothers clutching rosaries in one hand and giving the finger to a bus filled with black children with the other; political leaders—future Boston mayor Ray Flynn among them—proudly marching in Southie’s St. Patrick’s Day parade at the head of the antibusing forces.¹²

While working-class Irish families in the city, particularly in the areas of Southie and Charlestown, were, indeed, counted amongst some of the poorest white groups in Boston, such interpretations of the situation, as Jeanne Theoharis urges, “obscure the ways race and class were inseparable and how ‘the wages of whiteness’ motivated the actions of anti-desegregation whites.”¹³ Theoharis’s work, in particular, has been instrumental in recuperating the grassroots activism of black Bostonians that had been at the forefront of the struggle for educational, employment, and housing equality in the city.

At the height of the conflict, one South Boston parent and member of the anti-desegregation group, Restore Our Alienated Rights (ROAR), put forward his own concerns about increased interracial encounters between black and white students: “The question is,” asks Thomas O’Connell, “Am I going to send my young daughter, who is budding into the

⁹ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 43.

¹⁰ Lauren Onkey, *Celtic Soul Brothers: Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 113.

¹¹ O’Connor, *The Boston Irish*, 260.

¹² Maureen Dezell, *Irish America: Coming Into Clover* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 150.

¹³ Theoharis, “I’d Rather Go to School in the South,” 140. Theoharis is referring here to the work of David R. Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991; rep., London: Verso, 2007), which, drawing on Marxist and psychoanalytical discourses, traces the rise of a white American working-class identity that was marked distinctly in opposition to a black American identity.

flower of womanhood, into Roxbury on a bus?”¹⁴ While conventional interpretations of Irish resistance to the bussing order have focused primarily on parochial racism and/or white working-class grievance, O’Connell’s concern unearths an often unspoken actor on the stage of this racial drama: sexuality. “Sex is the whispered subtext in spoken racial discourse,” writes Joane Nagel.¹⁵ In *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers*, Nagel outlines clearly the ways in which “sexual matters insinuate themselves into all things racial, ethnic, and national.”¹⁶ In this sense, race matters are also sexual matters, and sexuality matters to issues of race as much as racial issues are articulated, either explicitly or implicitly, in all things sexual. Race, ethnicity, and sexuality, then, to quote Nagel, “are strained, but not strange bedfellows.”¹⁷ The intersecting points at which these categories merge to produce meaning and conflict are what Nagel terms “ethnosexual frontiers.”¹⁸

In *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, Onkey writes that the “roots of the Irish/African-American connection are tangled, disputed, and recursive.”¹⁹ In fact, even a decade before Onkey’s observation, MaryAnn Matthews and Tom O’Brien had already begun to compile diverse historical data for a project on the intersections of the Irish and African-American diasporas in the United States that eventually evolved into the “Tangled Roots” initiative, an online set of resources maintained by Yale University’s Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition.²⁰ “I’m Irish-American,” Matthews explained to the *Irish Echo*’s Cahir O’Doherty in a feature on the project, “and the more I learned about the history of the Irish and the African Americans, the more I realized that there was more common ground between us than I had ever been taught in American schools.”²¹ The legacy of Irish-African-American relations in the United States attests to the unfulfilled promise of a radical political alliance based on mutual labour exploitation and socio-cultural discrimination. This chapter asks whether queer Irish-American cultural forms in particular can work to recuperate this failed project of solidarity and equality. In crossing the Atlantic and facing the racial dynamic in the burgeoning American Republic, the Irish place in the oppression of a dispossessed and disenfranchised group was subject to what Theodore Allen calls a “sea-change” transformation that repositioned these Irish immigrants as collaborators

¹⁴ “Southie Fights On,” *TIME*, September 23, 1974, EBSCOhost.

¹⁵ Joane Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality: Intimate Intersections, Forbidden Frontiers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁹ Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, 5.

²⁰ “About the Project- Tangled Roots,” The Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, Yale University, <https://glc.yale.edu/about-project-tangled-roots>.

²¹ Cahir O’Doherty, “Common Ground,” *Irish Echo*, July 23-29, 2003, 11.

in the workings of the racial state rather than the victims of that socio-political system.²² The Irish, on the political, labour, and cultural stages of racial formation in the United States in the nineteenth century, to use Noel Ignatiev's words, "faded from Green to white, bleached by, as [Daniel] O'Connell put it, something in the 'atmosphere' of America."²³

No other event in American history provides such straightforward associations between the Irish and anti-black violence than the 1863 New York City Draft Riots, when, over the period of five days, beginning on July 13, a crowd of lower-class and poor whites, predominantly immigrant and primarily Irish Catholic, attacked members of the black community, savagely beating many, murdering several, and even mutilating the dead bodies of some.²⁴ The riots, however, were both the culmination of already existing racial tensions between the Irish and other ethnic groups in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century and the most explosive (but by no means the only) incident in a long-standing legacy of ethno-racial conflict. The Irish were a dominant faction in the Democratic party's anti-abolition stance in the nineteenth century, much to the horror and dismay of Ireland's "Liberator," Daniel O'Connell; they were instrumental in the passing in 1882 of the Exclusion Act, which

²² Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume 1: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (1994; rep., London: Verso, 2012), 159.

²³ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 31. While there is not enough space to explore the issue here, much has been written in critical scholarship on the racialisation of the Irish in Britain and the United States, as well as the relationship between the Irish and African diasporas. See, for instance, L. Perry Curtis, *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971); Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, especially chapter seven, "Irish-American Workers and White Racial Formation in the Antebellum United States," 133-63; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (1993; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), especially 97-98; Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), especially 52-56; Eithne Luibhéid, "Irish Immigrants in the United States' Racial System," in *Location and Dislocation in Contemporary Irish Society: Emigration and Irish Identities*, ed. Jim MacLaughlin (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 253-73; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), especially 42-53, 70; Steve Garner, *Racism in the Irish Experience* (London: Pluto Press, 2004); Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), especially chapter seven, "How the Irish Became White (Again), 120-35; Peter O'Neill and David Lloyd, eds., *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Sharrona Pearl, "White, with a Class-Based Blight: Drawing Irish Americans," *Éire-Ireland* 44, no. 3 & 4 (Autumn/Winter 2009): 171-99, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/382656/pdf>; "The Celtic Nations and the African Americas," ed. Daniel G. Williams, special issue, *Comparative American Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2010); "The Irish," ed. Harry L. Watson, special issue, *Southern Cultures* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2011); Bronwen Walter, "Whiteness and Diasporic Irishness: Nation, Gender and Class," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 9 (November 2011): 1295-1312, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1081/1369183X.2011.623584>; and, most recently, Peter O'Neill, *Famine Irish and the American Racial State* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

²⁴ See Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). In literature, Charles Halpine's popular eponymous stage Irishman from *The Life and Adventures, Songs, Services and Speeches of Private Miles O'Reilly* (1864) offers, according to Charles Fanning, a cold-blooded satirising of those who opposed the enlistment of African Americans into the Union Army the year before. O'Reilly's sardonically titled song, "Sambo's Right to Be Kilt," includes the lines: "Och, the coalition,/ For a fair divishin/ Of the city spoils, that was lately made;/ It now proves a shwindle,/ Which but sarves to kindle/ Into fiercer fury min of every shade." Quoted in Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 86.

prohibited the immigration of Chinese labourers to the United States;²⁵ they were disproportionately represented among the European immigrant groups protesting black advancement after the Great Migration in the Chicago Race Riots of 1919; and, more recently, the Irish-black conflict became a contentious site of post-Civil Rights racial tensions in the United States during the Boston school desegregation events in the 1970s, when children were bussed across neighbourhood and community lines.

In a 1999 essay, Catherine Eagan takes stock of what she terms the effects of a “racial politics of Hibernophilia” in the 1990s across the colluding discourses of popular culture and critical scholarship. Eagan launches her discussion with a scene from Alan Parker’s *The Commitments* (1991)—a film that endures as a pivotal text in most critical studies on how racial discourse has been used to define Irishness. In one memorable scene in the film, Jimmy Rabbitte, the manager of a North Dublin soul band proclaims the Irish as “the blacks of Europe.” *The Commitments*, a surprise hit in the United States, Eagan suggests, curiously “enabled Irish-Americans to link ‘Irishness’ with a heritage of oppression that seemed very distant from their middle-class lives.”²⁶ According to Onkey, “one of the most persistent tropes of Irish and Irish-American identity formation is a comparison between Irish and African-American experiences of oppression.”²⁷ In a later essay, Eagan suggests that the defining characteristic of literary reconstructions of historical Irish-black relations is a focus on romantic and sexual entanglement as a site of interracial connection. According to her, “novels that plumb the depths of Irish-black connections frequently have a common thread—they are set in the past, centered on events that crystalize the complications of the Irish-African-American relationship, and interested in interracial love relationships.”²⁸ Eagan goes on in her discussion to cite a number of indicative texts published from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, including Peter Quinn’s *Banished Children of Eve* (1995), Colum McCann’s *This Side of Brightness* (1998), Kate McCafferty’s *Testimony of an Irish Slave Girl* (2002), Kevin Baker’s *Paradise Alley* (2002), and Pete Hamill’s *Forever* (2003).²⁹ In her estimation, these works unevenly draw on and, for the most part, unsuccessfully challenge embedded

²⁵ As Dolan has shown, anti-Chinese sentiments among the Irish were most visible in California, where, in San Francisco, for example, Denis Kearney, with much support from working-class Irish Catholics, was instrumental in the eventual passing of the Exclusion Act by Congress in 1882, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese labourers to the United States (180).

²⁶ Catherine M. Eagan, “‘Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud’: Irish Americans, Irish Studies and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia in 1990s America,” *Working Papers in Irish Studies* 99, no. 1 (1999): 1.

²⁷ Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, 2.

²⁸ Catherine M. Eagan, “Still ‘Black’ and ‘Proud’: Irish American and the Racial Politics of Hibernophilia,” in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 35. Many of the essays in Negra’s critical volume tackle the reticulated issues of Irishness, and race, particularly Irish claims to blackness or otherness, across popular culture, in literature, film, marketing, and music.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

assumptions about black sexual subjectivity, interracial intimacies, and the role of the Irish in the American architecture of ethnosexual frontiers.³⁰ Twentieth-century Irish-black intimacies, particularly between the time of the Second World War and the Civil Rights era, were subject to wider national white supremacist schemes that informed acceptable sexuality, eroticism, and kinship.³¹

Noticeably absent from Eagan's list of fictional Irish-black intimacies, however, is any mention of literary representations of a non-heterosexual interracial relationship. Filling this gap, this chapter introduces the work of American author Stephanie Grant, whose 2008 novel, *Map of Ireland*, provides such a queering of the heterocentric focus on Irish-black interracial sexual and romantic entanglements on the page. In many ways, Grant's *Map of Ireland* is a significant reterritorialisation of the racial concerns of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Her own adventure narrative, however, uniquely replaces the heroic boy protagonist of *Huck Finn* with a female counterpart facing a different variety of outsider status in her community. Additionally, Grant's book uses the more contemporary scenes of the Boston bussing crisis in order to revisit interracial relations and the issues of territory, boundaries, and ethno-racial divisions. The author's interest in returning to *Huck Finn* was particularly inspired by reading Russell Banks's *Rule of the Bone* (1995), a reiteration of Twain's nineteenth-century classic that introduced similar themes of working-class identity

³⁰ These cultural forms no doubt draw on a taboo surrounding interracial relationships in the United States in general that reach as far back as the colonial period, when racial amalgamation provoked a major crisis among the white majority population. For helpful studies on the history of American panic over interracial sexual relationships, see Anonymous, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro* (New York: H. Dexter, Hamilton, 1864); *Race/Sex: Their Sameness, Difference, and Interplay*, ed. Naomi Zack (New York: Routledge, 1997), especially Naomi Zack, "The American Sexualization of Race," 145-55; Rachel F. Moran, *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). *Miscegenation* was co-written by an Irish American, David Goodman Croly, and the satirical pamphlet targeted Irish-black sexual relations in particular, drawing on theories of racial inferiority evoked in political and cultural renderings of Irish immigrants during the period. This caustic framing of the Irish was a sharp attempt to capitalise on Irish insecurities in a climate of fierce nativist and anti-Catholic hostility. While labour history has provided well-worn accounts of how the Irish "became" white, the ways in which sexuality and interracial intimacy became a touchstone for the racialization of the Irish in the United States has received less attention. Irish-American fictions of interracial intimacy emerge from this history. For discussions specifically about Irish and Black sexual encounters and the racial anxieties produced by these pairings, see Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, chapter seven, 150-56; Graham Hodges, "'Desirable Companions and Lovers': Irish and African Americans in the Sixth Ward, 1830-1870," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 107-24; Hazel V. Carby, "What is this 'Black' in Irish Popular Culture?" *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 3 (2001): 344; and Virginia Ferris, "'Inside of the Family Circle': Irish and African American Interracial Marriage in New York City's Eight Ward, 1870," *American Journal of Irish Studies* 9 (2012): 151-77, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23333101>. For a comparative discussion on Irish-Chinese sexual and romantic relations, see John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Quimbo Appo's Fear of Fenians: Chinese-Irish-Anglo Relations in New York City," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 125-52.

³¹ See, for example, Nagel, 115 and Amy C. Steinbugler, *Beyond Loving: Intimate Racework in Lesbian, Gay, and Straight Interracial Relationships* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

and black-white interracial relations Grant would later explore in her own book.³² Migration and movement across boundaries—geographic, sexual, cultural, and ethno-racial—form the key thematic issues structuring *Map of Ireland*. The novel revisits the scenes of Boston’s school desegregation in the 1970s through the weary eyes of a young Irish-American lesbian who is transported across both sexual and racial boundaries, from the troubled Irish environment of South Boston, or, “Southie,” to the verboten predominantly black neighbourhood of Roxbury, and further onto the fringes of a separatist Black Nationalist movement. Ann Ahern’s queer desire drives her movements across these multiple boundaries.

The first section of the chapter introduces Grant’s novel as an engagement with the historical racial complexities of the 1974 desegregation events in Boston, and reads Grant’s book alongside another significant literary handling of the same issues, namely Michael Patrick MacDonald’s 1999 memoir, *All Souls: A Family Story From Southie*. The chapter regularly returns to MacDonald’s book, which influenced Grant’s writing of her own novel. The second section considers the place of sexuality and desire in the construction and maintenance of ethnic and racial identities and boundaries in *Map of Ireland*. This part of the discussion on cultural geographies of sexuality and race in Boston’s landscape reintroduces the issue of the St Patrick’s Day parade and the exclusion of queers from that site of Irish-American performance. Ann Ahern’s challenge to and perpetuation of conservative racial assumptions are examined for signs of a politics of transformation. Desire allows Ann to escape the physical boundaries of her neighbourhood and the constraints of the desegregation conflicts, yet, as the third section shows, same-sex entanglements do not always hold the potential for cross-racial identification and solidarity. The final section confronts Ann’s failure to overcome the loyalty of her Irish-American neighbourhood, while the conclusion opens up such a moment of failure in Grant’s novel to consider how failure, as previously suggested earlier in this thesis, can be the means through which future interracial collaboration is imagined.

According to Diane Negra, Irishness, particularly between the 1990s and 2000s, appeared to oscillate between “a quasi blackness and a politically insulated whiteness.”³³ The greatest risk of such expressions of Irishness, as Negra warns, is that they “may well act to displace and/or neutralize the identity claims of blacks and Latinos.”³⁴ Indeed, already since the transformations of the Civil Rights era, when ideals of American individualism were supplanted by the political currency of group identification, the “ethnic revival” in the 1960s

³² Personal communication with the author, November 2, 2017. The influence of Banks’s book is clear from Grant’s mention of it in her acknowledgements in *Map of Ireland* (New York: Scribner, 2008), 195.

³³ Diane Negra, “The Irish in US: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture,” in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

and 1970s, solidified most profoundly in the publication and success of Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* in 1976 and the television adaptation the following year, produced unsettling discourses of multiculturalism and white grievance. As Matthew Frye Jacobson has shown, the widespread embrace of ethnic exceptionalism in the 1970s, on the one hand, allowed white ethnic Americans to situate themselves within an emerging multicultural context as distinct from dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant identity in the US. "If European ethnics were indeed white," Jacobson writes, "they weren't *that* white."³⁵ On the other hand, however, a more troubling effect of this growing public interest in ethnic identity was a dissociation from the forms of race privilege from which white ethnic Americans had undoubtedly benefited. Often employing the language of the Civil Rights movements, white ethnic Americans challenged, too, the structural forces of oppression that continue to limit the social, economic, and educational advancements of black Americans.

This "bootstraps" myth continues to colour American ideologies of success and ideal citizenship. During a live broadcast on St. Patrick's Day 2016, for instance, Irish-American Fox News presenter Kimberly Guilfoyle exposed the conservative misappropriations of the Irish cultural memory of discrimination in the United States. In response to a fellow presenter's allusion to this history of nativist intolerance, Guilfoyle exclaimed, "and the Irish got over it. They don't run around going 'Irish Lives Matter.'"³⁶ The ongoing "Irish slave" debate waging in popular and academic discourses shores up many of the same disturbing trends of the bootstraps dogma that still dominates conceptions of ideal citizenship in America.³⁷ In her own discussion of blackness and transatlantic Irish identity, Onkey provides the following cautionary note: "Any project engaging the politics of race and the Irish has to simultaneously recognize discrimination Irish immigrants faced and also the ways they

³⁵ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 20.

³⁶ Guilfoyle made this statement during a segment in the daily *Fox News* panel discussion on "The Five," March 17, 2017, *Fox News*. The establishment of the Black Lives Matter movements in the wake of increased police violence against black bodies in the United States has been met with a counterdiscourse embodied in the Blue Lives Matter project, which supports the position of the police force in the country. Considering the historical Irish presence in the ranks of police officers, it might be unsurprising that Irish-American white masculinity has become a particularly salient object in the representational policies of Blue Lives Matter. For an insightful discussion on the connections between Irish-American identity, American whiteness, and Blue Lives Matter, see Karen Reshkin, "Even Racists Get the Blues," *The Geeky Gaeilgeoir* (blog), September 6, 2017, <https://thegeekygaeilgeoir.wordpress.com/2017/09/06/even-racists-got-the-blues/>.

³⁷ For contemporary commentaries on this appropriation of the "Irish slave" myth, see Liam Hogan, Laura McAtackney, and Matthew C. Reilly, "The Irish in the Anglo-Caribbean: Servants or Slaves?" *History Ireland*, March/April 2016, <https://www.historyireland.com/volume-24/the-irish-in-the-anglo-caribbean-servants-or-slaves/>; Liam Stack, "Debunking a Myth: The Irish Were Not Slaves, Too," *New York Times*, March 17, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/us/irish-slaves-myth.html>; and David M. Perry, "No, the Irish Were Not Slaves Too," *Pacific Standard*, March 15, 2018, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/the-irish-were-not-slaves>. Noticeably, most of these pieces appear on or around St Patrick's Day.

participated in the denigration of African Americans.”³⁸ In light of these caveats, this chapter pays particular attention to how queer cultural engagements with race might serve to mitigate the experiences of non-white groups, or, conversely, confront the privileges of Irish whiteness and take steps towards acknowledging the fruitfulness of what Hazel Carby has called Irish-black “cultural miscegenation.”³⁹

For Eagan, writers “who explore the issue of Irish-Black connection in a more extended fashion are to be congratulated for endeavoring to imagine the personal connections and conflicts between Irish and black people that undoubtedly have occurred and yet always seem to fly under the radar of mass movements and political blocs.” Elsewhere, Elizabeth Cullingford identifies the stakes of recuperating analogies between the Irish and historically oppressed minority groups for diverse political ends. “Analogies,” she writes,

are slippery things: one man’s sympathetic identification is another woman’s ‘cannibalistic’ appropriation, and the construction of aesthetic parallels that elide historical differences or asymmetries of power may appear racist or falsely totalizing. The same analogy may also be deployed to opposing political ends. On the positive side, however, imaginative connections between emerging cultures can be used to demonstrate that the post-colonial condition is widely shared, to destabilize essentialist conceptions of national identity, and to energize political action.⁴⁰

In constructing interracial intimacies, *Map of Ireland* confronts the histories of social and cultural connections in the legacy of racial formation in the United States that continue to define contemporary national identity. Indeed, Grant has spoken about the historical events surrounding the emergence of her novel in 2008, when Barack Obama began a successful campaign to become the first black president of the United States. Far from an indication of a “post-racial” America, though, Grant is weary of the uncritical view of racial dynamics in a post-Obama nation.⁴¹ While published before this shift, *Map of Ireland* offers a careful treatment of the realities of systemic racism and oppression too powerful to be undone by a single individual. Moreover, her engagement with Irish-black relations challenges the romantic idealism affecting much creative imaginings of such connections.

Queerness, since its scholarly and political inception in the early 1990s, has been celebrated as a subversive tool with which to challenge heteronormative and patriarchal structures of oppression and violence. At the same time, gay and lesbian politics have also been invested in assimilationist strategies to the point of political exhaustion. In *Beyond Loving: Intimate Racework in Lesbian, Gay, and Straight Interracial Relationships*, Amy C.

³⁸ Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, 11.

³⁹ Carby, “What is this ‘Black’ in Irish Popular Culture?,” 346.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Cullingford, *Ireland’s Others: Gender and Ethnicity in Irish Literature and Popular Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2001), 133.

⁴¹ Personal communication with the author, November 2, 2017.

Steinbugler makes a vital inquiry, which guides the following discussion: “Can intimate relationships bridge racial boundaries, or do they inevitably reproduce the tensions that characterize broader racial hierarchies?”⁴² Rather than creating race equality, interracial marriages have often served to reproduce the gender inequalities at the heart of the institution. Similarly, for gays and lesbians attempting to cross ethnosexual frontiers, there has been a tendency to regenerate much of the racism found in heterosexual culture, despite the history of political and social marginalisation experienced by the former groups. “For the most part,” Steinbugler writes, “race-based power differences between Whites and Blacks endured across gay, lesbian, and heterosexual relationships.”⁴³ The failure of *Map of Ireland*’s Ann Ahern to overcome the painful Heraclitus dictum, “Geography is fate,” marks Grant’s success in rejecting easy equivalences between working-class Irish and black experiences still produced in popular cultural and academic projects dealing with the Irish-black connection. At the same time, it calls for a viable politics of intersectionality that is attuned to the needs of a class-conscious, anti-racist, feminist, and radically queer movement for social equality and justice.⁴⁴

That Grant chooses to revisit the scenes of this historical moment through the perspective of a teenager at the centre of the unfolding events is not merely a characteristic move for an author whose work has so far fallen under the category of Young Adult (YA) fiction, but is rather a particularly appropriate choice of perspective. “Given the centrality in the debates over and enactment of Boston’s busing ruling,” writes Lynell L. Thomas,

children’s literature offers an important lens through which to examine how the popular memory of busing is constructed and disseminated. Children’s literature is, after all, by its very nature, nostalgic: the recuperation of youth and youthful consciousness by an adult author writing for and about children. Children’s literature, then, also provides a window onto adult desires, goals, and politics.⁴⁵

For Thomas, an “active, activist civil rights children’s literature places the individual’s story in its community and organizational context.”⁴⁶ More than this, such a form of literary

⁴² Steinbugler, *Beyond Loving*, xiii.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁴ Nikki Sullivan helpfully defines intersectionality, coined by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, as “the complex interaction between a range of discourses, institutions, identities, and forms of exploitation, that structure subjectivities (and the relations between them) in elaborate, heterogeneous, and often contradictory ways.” Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 72. See Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1.8 (1989): 139-67.

⁴⁵ Lynell L. Thomas, “Civil Rights Gone Wrong: Racial Nostalgia, Historical Memory, and the Boston Busing Crisis in Contemporary Children’s Literature,” in “Rethinking the Boston ‘Busing Crisis,’” ed. Matthew Delmont and Jeanne Theoharis, special issue, *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2 (2017): 258, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0096144216688282>.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 266.

engagement “portrays racism and segregation, not as social problems that have already been resolved, but as persistent issues that need our attention.”⁴⁷ While Thomas is critical of the literary reconstructions of the era—taking issue with two particular texts in her essay, namely Chris Lynch’s *Gold Dust* (2000) and Richard Michelson’s *Busing Brewster* (2010)—for their truncated retelling of the political and social developments both leading up to and at play during the events, Grant’s novel, in many ways, succeeds in tackling the problematic remembrances of the time.

Rejecting Lee Edelman’s anti-social dismissal of the future as “kid stuff,” this discussion moves more in the productive direction of Kathryn Bond Stockton’s work, which imagines the queer child as an important site of futurity.⁴⁸ As Michelle Ann Abate and Kenneth Kidd point out in the critical volume of essays on queerness in children’s literature, *Over the Rainbow*, the unwillingness in society to acknowledge childhood sexuality has particularly devastating consequences for children that exhibit queer desire. “If society is unwilling to imagine the sexual nature of young people more generally,” Abate and Kidd write, “then it is surely not ready to consider their tendencies toward nonnormative sexualities.”⁴⁹ Thus, the impossibility of childhood queerness and the conflation of paedophilia and homosexuality produce in popular and academic cultures a blind spot when it comes to recognising non-normative gender and sexual identities in the genre of children’s literature. The constellation of these concerns “has made children’s literature the final frontier for queer theory in some ways.”⁵⁰ This discussion contributes to this growing body of scholarship in queerness in children’s literature.⁵¹ While Peter C. Kunze has argued that often

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004) and Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

⁴⁹ Michelle Ann Abate and Kenneth Kidd, “Queering the Canon,” in *Over the Rainbow: Queer Children’s and Young Adult Literature*, ed. Michelle Ann Abate and Kenneth Kidd (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 13.

⁵⁰ Abate and Kidd, “Queering the Canon,” 14. For a helpful early overview of sexuality in Young Adult fiction, see Christine Jenkins, “From Queer to Gay and Back Again: Young Adult Novels with Gay/Lesbian/Queer Content, 1969-1997,” *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 68, no. 3 (July 1998): 298-334, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4309229>.

⁵¹ Another Irish-American writer who deals with working-class life in Irish Boston, and, indeed, at times with the historical effects of bussing is J. G. Hayes, whose fiction charts the lives of gay boys and men from Irish-American neighbourhoods in Boston. Hayes has so far published two short story collections and a novel that tackle these concerns: *This Thing Called Courage: South Boston Stories* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002); *Now Batting for Boston: More Stories by J. G. Hayes* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2005); and *Map of the Harbor Islands* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2006). In a moment of surprising recognition, Timothy Meagher, in *The Columbia Guide to Irish American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), places Hayes’s work alongside MacDonald’s memoir, suggesting that these texts manage to describe how “scores of young adults in places like Southie felt locked into a no-win world of drugs and crime” (156). While Hayes’s writing provides additional insight into the experiences of queer Irish Americans in working-class Boston, his fiction is often misogynistic, privileging homosociality over positive representations of women and girls. Focusing on Grant’s book, this chapter is concerned with imagining social and sexual intimacies that do not occlude women’s experiences and voices.

“an implicit white privilege obscures race in most queer young adult fiction,” this chapter shows how Grant foregrounds rather than neglects the issue of race.⁵²

In his now seminal essay on the complexities of diaspora and identity, Stuart Hall writes that cultural identities “are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture.”⁵³ Hall further suggests that cultural identity is not an essence “but a *positioning*.”⁵⁴ In a similarly anti-essentialist move, James Clifford’s influential work on theories of the diaspora has interrogated the insistence on the central position of homeland and return at the core of dominant discourses of diaspora, offering instead a shift towards the “decentred,” or “lateral connections” which may produce more significant expressions of identity.⁵⁵ Inspired by both Hall’s conceptualisation of cultural identity as a positioning and Clifford’s “lateral axes of diaspora,” the chapter privileges what Paul Gilroy deems the “promiscuous” potentialities of tangled routes in place of roots.⁵⁶ The routes explored in this chapter are both troubled and possibly troubling to dominant configurations of gender, sexuality, and race in conventional narratives of Irish-American identity.

Unapproved Roads

Grant discloses the socio-political context of *Map of Ireland* on the book’s first page, where her narrator immediately pulls the reader back into the time of the story’s setting, saying:

if you read the paper you know what happened the first day of school in South Boston in 1974; or even if you don’t read the paper you probably know because it made the six o’clock news: There was film footage of the White parents lining Day Boulevard, throwing rocks at the buses, people we knew, Patty Flynn’s ma—just the back of her head—but we recognized her from the bright red car coat.⁵⁷

Yet, Ann’s remembrance of those publicly observed events is intimately bound up in recalling a private attraction to the newly-arrived French-Senegalese teacher, Mademoiselle Eugénie, “the blackest person [she’d] ever seen.”⁵⁸ Thus, from the opening lines of her novel, Grant forewarns her reader of the tumultuous collision of desire and race forming the social and

⁵² Peter C. Kunze, “Jacqueline Woodson and Queer Black Fiction for Young Adults,” *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 4, no. 1 (2015): 75, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/581328>.

⁵³ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), 226.

⁵⁴ *Ibid* (emphasis in the original).

⁵⁵ James Clifford, “Diasporas,” in *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1999), 234-35.

⁵⁶ Paul Gilroy, “Diaspora,” in *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 1999), 298.

⁵⁷ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

emotional landscape mapped out in her narrative. Uniquely, these queer crossings of ethnosexual frontiers can be observed as what Onkey declares a progressive move to “follow and restore an unapproved road.”⁵⁹ These unapproved roads are those paths that have been concealed or condemned by dominant forms of hegemonic sexual and racial belonging. Queer subjects traverse these boundaries at their own peril, and face exclusion from their own communities for such passing. An analysis of Irish-black queer interracial entanglements asks the contentious question of whether queer subjectivity and desire can provide the radical potential required to challenge ideologies of white supremacy, and whether queerness has the power to redraw lines of solidarity in the history of Irish racial relations in the United States.

While *Map of Ireland* marks Grant’s most sustained engagement with the historical legacy of Boston’s school desegregation efforts in the 1970s, as well as with the larger issues of race, sexuality, and Irish-American identity, the novel is not the author’s first creative articulation of the social, cultural, and political nuances embedded in these events and themes. Aside from a brief interracial sexual encounter in Grant’s debut 1995 novel, *The Passion of Alice*,⁶⁰ the short story, “Posting-Up,” first published in the anthology of lesbian fiction, *Tasting Life Twice*, in 1995, had already introduced some of the key issues Grant would later explore in detail in her 2008 novel, namely the racial dynamics of Boston in general; the desegregation efforts in particular; the relationship between sexuality, race, and ethnicity; basketball as a site of sexual and racial interaction; and queer female embodiment. The story’s narrator, Theresa Meagher, at odds with the parochial views on propriety and race expressed by some of the white Irish students on her Catholic school’s girls’ basketball team, migrates across district lines to join a team in the predominantly black area of Dorchester, where she finds social and sexual connections on the court amongst an interracial community of queer women.

The historical context in which Theresa’s story seems at first to be a close blueprint for Ann’s adventure in *Map of Ireland*. Yet, while Ann is in the centre of the crisis, Theresa’s experiences of the events are formed tangentially in the relatively untouched confines of a private parochial Catholic school—which bears the befitting name of “Immaculatta”—outside the affected areas. Despite this more marginal position, Theresa’s schooling and social life still feel the ripple effects of the period’s developments. “My senior year,” Theresa reveals,

everything changed. Busing doubled the enrollments of Boston’s Catholic schools. Even though we were technically outside the neighborhoods

⁵⁹ Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, 27.

⁶⁰ Stephanie Grant, *The Passion of Alice* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996).

designated for desegregation, we were close enough to absorb the shock of white students leaving the public schools.⁶¹

Theresa's perspective reflects more closely Grant's own personal experiences. The granddaughter of an Irish immigrant, Grant was born in 1962 in the suburban city of Randolph, twenty-five kilometres from the city of Boston. Her suburban upbringing, the typical consequence of middle-class advancement among many white ethnic groups after the Second World War, kept Grant away from the direct effects of public school desegregation. Nonetheless, the author has described bussing as the most "formative political experience" of her early life, and the scenes of the 1970s continue to be a salient topic for reflection and fictional representation.⁶²

In the book's opening chapter, Ann Ahern begins to narrate the events to unfold from a place that is both spatially and temporally removed from the South Boston scene of 1974. Writing twenty months later from St. Joseph's Home for Girls, which, "don't be fooled by the name," she tells the reader, "is a state facility for juvenile girls,"⁶³ in which the hapless protagonist has been placed for, at this point in the novel, an unknown misdemeanour, Ann recalls the moments that have led to her incarceration. In the last term before the summer holidays, the calm pause before the storm of court-ordered bussing on the first day of the 1974 school year, two key moments mark both the mapping of community boundaries and the need to protect those boundaries. Learning that she is to be sent to Paris on a teachers' exchange, Ann's French teacher at South Boston High School, Mademoiselle Kit, spends hours with her students on France's capital, its maps, its cuisine, and the city's culture. "Every day in class," Ann scorns,

we ate Pillsbury Crescent Rolls that Mademoiselle Kit baked herself and we pretended that we'd just gotten back from the goddamn Louvre and were on our way to the goddamn Tuileries, which the whole class got in trouble for pronouncing Tool-eries. *Où est Didier? Didier est au Jardin du Luxembourg*, wherever on earth that is.⁶⁴

Ann has little patience for Mademoiselle Kit's make-believe, which only more profoundly reveals the deep schism between the cultural possibilities of Paris and the realities of working-class life in a parochial enclave on the verge of major crisis.

In a further effort to recreate the cultural and geographic landscapes of Paris in a remote Boston classroom, Ann's teacher tasks her students with learning the French capital's districts, or *arrondissements*, by rote. Such attention to city boundaries, despite Ann's own

⁶¹ Stephanie Grant, "Posting-Up," in *Tasting Life Twice: Literary Lesbian Fiction by New American Writers*, ed. E. J. Levy (New York: Avon Books, 1995), 14.

⁶² Personal communication with the author, November 2, 2017.

⁶³ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

failings to comprehend the differences between the Parisian districts, prophetically marks the contentious issues of geographic and community lines to be debated and defended in the oncoming climate of racial tension in the city. Ann explains:

I kept getting the left and right banks confused, which was stupid, I admit, but she took it like a personal insult, my inability to *feel* the difference between the two banks, like they meant anything at all to me, like they were anything but a bunch of squiggly lines on a page.⁶⁵

Ann's blunder is not merely mistaking one bank for the other, but rather failing to somehow emotionally comprehend or intuitively connect with what the lines on a map signify in deeply felt ways. Fredrik Barth's theory of ethnicity (under which race as a classificatory category is subsumed) moves away from conventional understandings of the organisation of ethnic "difference." For Barth, it is the ethnic/racial "*boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses."⁶⁶ "According to this view," writes Nagel, "ethnicity is a matter of who is inside and who is outside an ethnic boundary."⁶⁷ The Boston desegregation "crisis," imaginatively reconstructed in Grant's novel, inscribes ethnic boundaries into the city's physical boundaries as a metaphor for both the deeply material and, yet, entirely constructed nature of those social and sexual frontiers. While Ann is unable to make a connection with the geographic points on the map of "over there," this moment is immediately succeeded by a scene that firmly stresses precisely that which is at stake in taking for granted the significance of understanding, or "feeling," difference "over here."

Mademoiselle Eugénie's arrival at South Boston High School on the final day of term is met with the parochial conservatism and white ethnic resistance which characterised much of the grievances of the working-class, largely Irish, communities in the city the following year. In disbelief, the school's principal makes this black outsider sit patiently in a room decorated in the faces of South Boston's famous sons and daughters, some of whom—Louise Day Hicks and Ray Flynn—were resounding voices and active players in many anti-desegregation initiatives, while he confirmed "that she was the right French teacher, the same one we were expecting, the very same Mademoiselle Eugénie Martine, from Paris, France."⁶⁸ Far from a simple case of white presumption, the white supremacist ideologies at the core of the community's response to the invasion of a black outsider is announced in the chapter's

⁶⁵ Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

⁶⁶ Fredrik Barth, introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (1969; rep., Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998), 15 (emphasis in the original).

⁶⁷ Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, 44.

⁶⁸ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 7.

closing line: “Instead of singing ‘*La Marseillaise*’ like we were supposed to, we sang ‘Southie Is My Hometown.’”⁶⁹

“Like the home,” argues Gill Valentine, “the school is also a highly regulated institution with its clearly delimited boundaries and moral geographies.”⁷⁰ In the history of Boston’s desegregation, the school not only formed its own internally segregated divisions but also crucially became the site where the city’s wider racial, ethnic, and community boundaries were reinforced and defended. The panicked decision to perform “Southie Is My Hometown” on the day the black Mademoiselle Eugénie arrives in South Boston can be seen as an instinctive tribalistic threat against a figure perceived to be an outsider. Such tribalism prefaces the physically violent resistance that became commonplace only months later on the first day of term in September 1974. The ensuing protests and riots, Onkey suggests, “echoed the violence and ethnic and racial complexities of the New York draft riots [of 1986] and the Chicago race riots [of 1919].”⁷¹ “It was us against them,” recalls South Boston native Michael Patrick MacDonald, “as the neighborhood closed off more and more to the outside world.”⁷²

MacDonald’s 1999 memoir, *All Souls: A Family Story From Southie*, while published after Grant’s earlier 1997 draft of her 2008 novel, provided much of the historical, psychological, and emotional material for *Map of Ireland*.⁷³ *All Souls* remains one of the most compelling accounts of working-class life in South Boston from the 1970s to the end of the twentieth century. Such challenging experiences, dominated by poverty, drug addiction, crime, and the deaths of many of the neighbourhood’s children and neighbours, were, MacDonald contends, profoundly compounded by the introduction of court-ordered bussing in 1974. In order to fully describe the scenes of the time, MacDonald inhabits the perspective of his younger self, witnessing with equal measures of angst and exhilaration the violence surrounding the events. “The whole neighborhood was out,” MacDonald recalls:

Mrs. Coyne, up on the rooftop in her housedress, got arrested before the buses even started rolling through the neighborhood . . . She ran up to the roof and called the police ‘nigger lovers’ and ‘traders,’ and started dancing and singing James Brown songs. ‘Say it loud, I’m black and I’m proud!’⁷⁴

Six years earlier, Brown had famously quietened racial unrest in Boston, performing a televised concert at the Boston Garden on the evening following Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination on April 5, 1968 in Memphis. “At the time,” Nelson George argues, Brown’s

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Gill Valentine, “Contested Terrain: Teenagers in Public Space,” in *The Cultural Geography Reader*, ed. Timothy S. Oakes and Patricia L. Price (London: Routledge, 2008), 396.

⁷¹ Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, 112.

⁷² Michael Patrick MacDonald, *All Souls: A Family Story From Southie* (London: Little, Brown, 2000), 78.

⁷³ An early excerpt from Grant’s novel was published as “The Map of Ireland” in *Cabbage and Bones: An Anthology of Irish American Women’s Fiction*, ed. Caledonia Kearns (New York: Henry Holt, 1997), 314-23.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 81.

performance “served its purpose, keeping the historically tense relations between whites and blacks in that ‘liberal’ city cool, at least for the evening.”⁷⁵ Released in the summer of that year, Brown’s “Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud,” which, with its assertive message of black pride, “was viewed as a call to arms by many whites,”⁷⁶ is hurled back mockingly from the mouth of an enraged white Southie resident making both her resistance and racism clear. More than this, though, the derisive appropriation of Brown’s line in this scene makes the sentimental solidarities in Roddy Doyle’s *The Commitments* a decade later, as well as the subsequent claims to blackness made by middle-class Irish Americans since the 1990s, appear all the more preposterous.

When the buses finally arrive on the scene, they are greeted with racist taunts, bricks, and bottles, as well as threatening chants of group insularity (“Here We Go Southie, Here We Go”).⁷⁷ According to Jeanne Theoharis “black students desegregating South Boston High were met by a mob of whites throwing rocks, bottles, eggs, and rotten tomatoes and yelling ‘Niggers Go Home.’”⁷⁸ One black student, Phyllis Ellison, who attended the first day of school in September, recalled, “And there were people on the corners holding bananas like we were apes, monkeys. ‘Monkeys get out, get them out of our neighborhood.’”⁷⁹ Often through anti-British Irish folk songs, revised lyrically to reflect the current context of bussing, Southie’s residents reserved their most vitriolic indictments for what they viewed to be two of the worst traitors of the Irish in Boston, Judge Garrity and the city’s major, Kevin White, who was often unfavourably referred to as “Mayor Black” by disgruntled fellow Irish and other white residents against desegregation.⁸⁰

MacDonald marks a clear shift in expressions of Southie community grievance in the replacement of anti-establishment signs—such as “Restore Our Alienated Rights” and “Welcome to Moscow America”—with explicitly anti-black racial slurs: “I saw BUS THE NIGGERS BACK TO AFRICA, and one even said KKK.”⁸¹ In the following passage, the voice of a young MacDonald innocently identifies the contradictions at the heart of much white Irish resistance to the desegregation efforts:

The people in my neighborhood were always going on about being Irish, with shamrocks painted on the brick walls and tattooed to their arms. And I had always heard stories from Grandpa about a time when the Ku Klux Klan burned Irish Catholics out of their homes in America. I thought someone should beat up the guy with the KKK sign, but no one seemed to mind that

⁷⁵ Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm & Blues* (New York: Plume, 1988), 103.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ MacDonald, *All Souls*, 83.

⁷⁸ Theoharis, “I’d Rather Go to School in the South,” 141.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ O’Connor, *The Boston Irish*, 262.

⁸¹ MacDonald, *All Souls*, 86.

much. I told my friend Danny about the Ku Klux Klan burning out the Irish families, and that the guy with the KKK sign was in the wrong town. He laughed. He said he'd never heard that one before. 'Shut up,' he said. 'They just hate the niggers. What, d'ya wanna be a nigger?' Jesus no, I thought to myself.⁸²

Later, MacDonald reaffirms the conflicting feelings surrounding the events. "We all wanted to stop the busing," MacDonald laments,

but sometimes it was confusing. One days you'd be clapping and cheering the inspirational words of Louise Day Hicks and Senator Billy Bulger, and the next day you'd see the blood on the news, black and white people's blood ... Ma said she didn't know where to turn, what to belong to, and neither did I.⁸³

Ultimately, many in the community turned towards Senator William Bulger's more infamous brother, Whitey, whose criminal activity brought drugs, gang violence, and high suicide rates into South Boston, forcing the surviving members of MacDonald's family, including himself, to flee the neighbourhood. *Map of Ireland*, while lacking the bleakness of MacDonald's memoir, still reconstructs much of the turbulent psychological and emotional responses portrayed in *All Souls*.

In the year of the bussing, Ann Ahern's mother joins ROAR, established in response to Judge Garrity's order by the former Chairwoman of the Boston School Committee and passionate anti-desegregation campaigner, Louise Day Hicks. "Louise was not an outsider," Ann reveals, "she was a daughter of Southie, plump and grandmotherly in a stern sort of way, her father a judge with a street named after him, Day Boulevard."⁸⁴ As O'Connor has shown, Hicks's role in advocating for neighbourhood schools and an unmoving denial of unequal treatment of black children in the public school system quickly made her "the champion of Boston's white working class."⁸⁵ Hicks was both a figure of reverence for the white Bostonians against desegregation and one of ridicule for many others. This was no more evident than in a caricature in the *Boston Globe* depicting her "as a bloody Bitch of Buchenwald bestriding the city."⁸⁶ In *Newsweek*'s 1967 cover story, Hicks was described as a "homegrown Mamie-made-good" for the South Boston locals, referred to condescendingly as "characters out of Moon Mullins."⁸⁷

"By claiming to defend the interests of 'the little people' of the neighborhoods against the unreasonable demands of black 'outsiders' and their liberal, Ivy League allies," writes O'Connor, "Hicks gathered enough support in Irish-Catholic and other white ethnic

⁸² Ibid., 87.

⁸³ Ibid., 118.

⁸⁴ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 15.

⁸⁵ O'Connor, *The Boston Irish*, 249.

⁸⁶ Lukas, *Common Ground*, 136.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

neighborhoods to become the first serious female contender in a Boston mayoral contest.”⁸⁸ While she was unsuccessful in her bid against another Irish-American politician, Kevin White, Hicks nonetheless became a central voice in white resistance to desegregation, which strategically was consistently framed as “bussing” in order to conceal the white supremacist ideology at the core of that resistance. Hicks’s opportunistic appeal to working-class grievances, specifically her dismissal of middle-class suburbanites whose “white flight” effectively released them from interactions with the Boston’s black population and from the raging bussing war in the city, resonates with Ann’s mother. A week before joining ROAR, Ann explains:

Ma had argued with her sister about the busing, and Aunt Helen had made her feel prejudiced and Ma wasn’t low class, despite her—our—circumstances. And when Mrs. Hicks said that about the people who lived in the suburbs, Ma realized the liberals who’d moved out of the city to live in Milton and Newton and Needham, and all the other towns along Route 128, the expressway that circled the city like an expensive belt, she realized they were all hypocrites. Why, they’d left the city precisely so they wouldn’t have to deal with Blacks. Not in a million years would Aunt Helen have let my cousins go to school in Roxbury and Ma knew it, but Mrs. Hicks said it first, had spoken Ma’s suspicions out loud, and because there was no sin worse than hypocrisy in Ma’s books, she became a staunch supporter of Mrs. Hicks.⁸⁹

Significantly, though, Ann’s mother, a distinct echo of what Shirley Kelly calls the “loud but lovable” figure of MacDonald’s similarly single mother,⁹⁰ renounces the racist violence erupting in the crisis: “Ma never used the word *nigger*, she said *colored* or sometimes *Black*, and she pretty much approved of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., she thought all the segregated bathrooms and bubblers down South were completely unfair, completely un-American.”⁹¹ When desegregation comes to her door and threatens to question the community loyalties of one of her own children, however, Ann’s mother’s unvoiced racial prejudice is clearly expressed.

Unlike her older brother Hap, who joins the South Boston Liberation Army (SBLA), “which was made of kids too militant for ROAR,”⁹² and her outwardly prejudiced friend Patty Flynn, Ann removes herself from both the violence of the regular riots at South Boston High and the local community initiatives organised to end desegregation in the neighbourhood. “Me, I tried not to think about the busing,” says Ann. “I found it mostly embarrassing.”⁹³ South Boston group solidarity in the novel is often literally inscribed in and on the bodies of

⁸⁸ O’Connor, *The Boston Irish*, 249.

⁸⁹ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 15-16.

⁹⁰ Shirley Kelly, “The Downwardly Mobile Irish of South Boston,” *Books Ireland*, April 2001, 93.

⁹¹ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 16.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 27.

its members. Hap, for example, carries the emblem of the SBLA: a green armband, a clear display of both Irish pride and Irish anti-black prejudice.⁹⁴ Flynn, on the other hand, proudly displays the “Southie dot” on the back of her wrist; “she’d gotten the tattoo two years ago,” Ann says, “but I’d refused.”⁹⁵ This tattoo, like a pinpoint on a map, engraves visibly South Boston’s cultural codes into community “insiders” in order to mark them off from those perceived to be “outsiders.”⁹⁶

When two black girls arrive at Ann’s school and, wearing South Boston High’s traditional team jerseys, play basketball with the other girls, they are met with an explosive outburst from Flynn, whose accusations of foul play against the two are couched in language particularly appropriate for a story about traversing forbidden frontiers. “Isn’t anyone going to call her for traveling?” she blasts about one of the girls. “Doesn’t anyone here have the balls to call that nigger for traveling?”⁹⁷ In this moment, Grant calls on a trope common to her writing, the sport of basketball, to produce a site of racial interaction, which either creates conflict or glimpses cooperation. In this case, claims of foul play in the game become a way to articulate Flynn’s barely submerged contempt for the two black girls who have travelled across neighbourhood boundaries to the white Irish enclave of South Boston, where they are not welcome as outsiders. “Those sweatshirts were so strange,” Ann comments, locating the point of the two black girls’ out-of-placeness, “so unnatural on the girls, they looked like costumes.”⁹⁸ Before she throws down her own team sweatshirt, Flynn condemns the team’s Coach Curry, who attempts to placate the situation: “‘Fucking traitor,’ she said, under her breath, but loud enough so that everyone could hear. ‘Fucking Benedict Arnold.’”⁹⁹ The figure of Arnold, the eighteenth-century American Revolutionary war general who defected to the British Army, recurs throughout Grant’s novel as an uneasy reminder to Ann of the consequences of betraying the loyalty of Southie and its values as her own adventure leads her to near treason.

Cartographies of Desire

In June 2008, Stormfront.org, founded by a former Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard, published a slew of racist attacks on Belinda Brown, a young woman of Irish-Jamaican parentage selected to represent London in Ireland’s Rose of Tralee competition. “The London entrant for this year’s Rose of Tralee is a half-caste mongrel. What the hell are the organisers thinking of?”

⁹⁴ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ For an additional example of the “Southie Dot” tattoo, see MacDonald, *All Souls*, 93.

⁹⁷ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 26.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 25.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 27.

asked one poster. “Last time I checked our women were pale-skinned maidens from our Emerald Isle, not some mud from London,” remarked another.¹⁰⁰ Meanwhile, when novelist Pat Conroy was offered the chance to write the official sequel to Margaret Mitchell’s Southern classic, *Gone With the Wind*, the story Irish Scarlett O’Hara, he was under strict regulations from the estate, which presented three conditions: no killing off Scarlett, no miscegenation, and no homosexuality.¹⁰¹ Such examples illuminate the treacherous racial politics—albeit from a small and extreme group—at play in the production and deployment of Irish whiteness in the United States. More than this, though, these examples indicate the ways in which (hetero)sexual purity both ensures and endangers the racial boundaries of Irish identity. Racist anxieties in such thinking are fuelled by the need to police the intersecting boundaries of gender, sexuality, and race. As Anne McClintock points out in *Imperial Leather*:

The idea of racial “purity,” for example, depends on the rigorous policing of women’s sexuality; as an historical notion, then, racial “purity” is inextricably implicated in the dynamics of gender and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power ... these categories converge, merge and overdetermine each other in intricate and often contradictory ways.¹⁰²

Richard Dyer similarly argues that, because ideologies of race are most often centred on visibly differentiated bodies and the reproduction of those bodies, heterosexuality “is the means of ensuring, but also the site of endangering, the reproduction of these differences.”¹⁰³

The political and social transformations of the Civil Rights era produced increasing cases of interracial relationships across the white-black colour line. In the wake of the Civil Rights movements, black and white groups “began to view one another as potential sexual partners through lenses colored by the sexual fantasies, stereotypes, and meanings associated with skin color.”¹⁰⁴ As Nagel suggests, however, this sexual contact was invariably “pregnant with sexual, political, social, and cultural meanings.”¹⁰⁵ That is, since race is, as Michael Omi and Howard Winat argue, “a fundamental organizing principle of social stratification,” what they call a “master category,”¹⁰⁶ sexual encounters across deeply embedded racial divides are always touched by cultural imaginings of these differences, no matter how socially

¹⁰⁰ Sinéad Moynihan, “‘Other People’s Diasporas’: Negotiating Race in Contemporary Irish and Irish American Culture (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 26.

¹⁰¹ Geraldine Higgins, “Tara, the O’Haras, and the Irish *Gone With the Wind*,” in “The Irish,” ed. Harry L. Watson, special issue, *Southern Cultures* 17, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 42, <https://doi.org/10.1353/scu.2011.0004>.

¹⁰² McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 61-62.

¹⁰³ Richard Dyer, *White* (1997; rep., London: Routledge, 2010), 20.

¹⁰⁴ Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, 119.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Michael Omi and Howard Winat, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 106-7.

constructed these assumed characteristics might be. As the prominent queer theorist and historian of sexualities, David Halperin, put it, “there is ... no orgasm without ideology.”¹⁰⁷

If the reproduction of bodies through heterosexuality has been key to the fictions of racist ideology, queer desire has played a different part in the drama of racial formation. Since homosexuality, as Nagel argues, “does not fit easily into ideologies stressing traditional family life as the cornerstone of [racial and] ethnic community,” queer subjects are often excluded from the discourses and systems of social, cultural, and national belonging. “Unlike racism and prejudice that seek targets *outside* ethnic boundaries,” she continues, “homophobia can be redirected *inside* ethnic communities as well, and used to create an internal sexual boundary that excludes or ‘disqualifies’ a group’s own members.”¹⁰⁸ For her, the case of the Irish-American Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Group’s exclusion from the South Boston St. Patrick’s Day parade acts as a model example for such homophobic exclusions of queer subjectivity and sexuality from the boundaries of ethnic belonging. Furthermore, crossing community lines of sex and race, especially for non-white individuals risks compromising not only their “sexual respectability, but their racial reputability as well.”¹⁰⁹ As Ian Barnard argues in his essay “Queer Race,” however, “race and sexuality are not two separate axes of identity that cross and overlay in particular subject positions, but rather, ways to circumscribe systems of meaning and understanding that formatively and inherently define each other.”¹¹⁰

“People liked to say that my neighborhood was close-knit,” says Ann from the more cosmopolitan surroundings of Northeastern University, between Fenway-Kenmore and South End, “everyone looking out for everybody else, which was precisely what they liked, and precisely what I didn’t.”¹¹¹ It is Ann’s lesbian desires that have not only brought her to the geographic point of Northeastern beyond the physical district limits of South Boston at this precise moment in the book, but also forced her to flee the societal and cultural limits of her Irish-American enclave. Her exodus to the more urbane environment of the university grounds emerges after Ann is discovered in the family’s bathroom burning letters she has

¹⁰⁷ David M. Halperin, “Historicizing the Sexual Body: Sexual Preferences and Erotic Identities in the Pseudo-Lucianic *Erôtes*,” in *Discourses of Sexuality: From Aristotle to AIDS*, ed. Domna C. Stanton (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 261.

¹⁰⁸ Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, 26.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹¹⁰ Ian Barnard, “Queer Race,” *Social Semiotics* 9, no. 2 (1999): 200. For discussions on the representational difficulties attached to Black male homosexuality in particular, see Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994) and Darieck Scott, “Jungle Fever? Black Gay Identity Politics, White Dick, and the Utopian Bedroom,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1 (1994): 299-321. According to Scott, “in most images of African-Americans which circulate in American culture, ‘blackness,’ especially male blackness, is almost definitionally masculine and constitutively heterosexual; and in the overwhelming majority of gay self-representations and images of gay men, the image of ‘gayness’ corresponds to that of white men” (301).

¹¹¹ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 21.

failed to send to the intended recipient, Mademoiselle Eugénie. Finding her daughter on the bathroom floor, Ann's mother immediately suspects the correspondence to be "dirty letters." A slap across the mouth from her mother sends Ann out the door and to Northeastern. Subsequently, Ann's sense of isolation from her neighbourhood's apparent cohesiveness, too, is brought about by the hostility she faces for being a lesbian. She explains:

In Southie, since word got out about me and Laura Miskinis, I couldn't look at a girl very long without her noticing. And when she did, that meant a stupid fight with her stupid boyfriend, brother, or what have you. I found myself trying not to be in a fight almost every other week.¹¹²

Despite the fact that Ann's Irishness and whiteness appear to provide automatic admission to the ranks of Southie "insider," her queerness provokes internal friction and the psychological sense of otherness. Indeed, sexuality as the point at which racial, ethnic, and community boundaries are formed and defended both in the desegregation case in particular and in the construction of accepted South Boston Irish identity has been hotly contested. Aside from the examples proving the matter of the former already explored in this chapter, a few additional incidents shed further light on the issue.

First, Grant's *Map of Ireland* details the imagined ethnosexual line that works to secure the heterosexual reproduction of a visible white Irishness in South Boston. In a chapter in which Grant reproduces an Irish-American tale of paternal absenteeism, Ann, whose father, like Flynn's, abandoned his family, reveals the origin story of her parents' ultimately doomed relationship. She explains:

He grew up in Southie, and everyone in the Town knew him from when he ran track for Southie High ... He said he fell for Ma because she had a fresh mouth—not swears, she didn't swear then either—but she was sharp, and he liked that, plus the orange hair, which was prettier then, and she had a great figure, which meant skinny with big boobs. Ma said Dad was a peacock, used to turning heads.¹¹³

Ann paints a figure in her father that is not only athletically loyal to the neighbourhood; he is, in addition to this, also sexually faithful to his own kind. In her essay, "'Does the Rug Match the Carpet?': Race, Gender, and the Redheaded Woman," Amanda Third explores the ways in which red hair, as part of British colonial projects in Ireland, "became one clear physical marker, among others, of Celtic or Irish difference."¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the racial peculiarities of red headedness in more contemporary times have produced a discourse in which the redheaded Irish woman is objectified and sexualised. "Redheads are hot-tempered," she

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 35.

¹¹⁴ Amanda Third, "'Does the Rug Match the Carpet?': Race, Gender, and the Redheaded Woman," in *The Irish in Us: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 221.

writes, “hot-blooded, hot-headed, and hot under the collar. They have flaming passions and burning desire.”¹¹⁵ With this in mind, Ann’s father’s attraction to her mother bring these discursive productions together to shape and limit heterosexual male desire. More than this, though, while red headedness has been imagined as a physical emblem of Irish difference, as Third points out in her essay, in *Map of Ireland*, heterosexual desire for the red-headed Irish woman ensures the “intraethnic” reproduction of sameness. Additionally, Ann’s own flaming passions, brought to material reality in her pyrotechnic obsessions, might be imagined as a continuation of such logic, as well as a crucial break away from the terms of its heterosexual framework.¹¹⁶

In *All Souls*, as a second example, MacDonald recalls the threats issued to white Irish families from their own South Boston community in order to dissuade crossing the picket line by sending students across neighbourhood lines to the black area of Roxbury during the early months of bussing. “We’d all heard about the kids who’d gone to school during boycotts and who were threatened over the phone with getting their things cut off,” MacDonald remembers.¹¹⁷ Such threats of castration (however serious) make clear the sexual anxieties surrounding the physical and reproductive crossing of racial lines, which threatens to destabilise both the literal and cultural white Southie body, and recall historical echoes of such violent displays of racial panic from the 1863 New York Draft Riots.¹¹⁸

Tim Davis’s work has examined the cartography of queer sexualities in the city of Boston through and against politically motivated discourses of the quasi-ethnic “community” narrative and the notion of the “gay ghetto” that had dominated conceptions of (urban) spaces of queerness since the 1970s. Davis’s study on the “connection between group identity and the cultural production of spaces and places by social movements,”¹¹⁹ provides useful ways to consider how queerness and Irish-American identity are represented as divergent in cultural as well as geographical terms. Indeed, the political differences formed around the issue of sexuality dividing the Irish-American South Boston neighbourhood and the neighbouring South End, the traditionally “gay” quarter of the city, as well as the debates around the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 225.

¹¹⁶ The cover of Grant’s novel draws on this association between red hair, Irishness, and burning desire, showing Ann’s freckled face shrouded in deep hair on the front. As Ann’s red hair runs to the back of the book cover, it is suddenly transformed into deep, red licking and unruly flames.

¹¹⁷ MacDonald, *All Souls*, 86.

¹¹⁸ Bernstein, *The New York Draft Riots*, 29. Bernstein describes a particularly horrific scene in which a young Irishman named Patrick Butler “dragged the body [of a Black man] through the streets by the genitals as the crowd applauded” (ibid).

¹¹⁹ Tim Davis, “The Diversity of Queer Politics and the Redefinition of Sexual Identity and Community in Urban Spaces,” in *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities*, ed. David Bell and Gill Valentine (London: Routledge, 1995), 288.

exclusion of gays and lesbians from the St. Patrick's Day parade in South Boston, dominate much of Davis's discussion.

In relation to the former issue, a demographic restructuring of the city's districts was fought for on both sides in an effort to effectively segregate, at least in voting terms, an apparently parochial majority in South Boston under the thumb of vocally homophobic and anti-bussing politician, James Kelly—a ridiculed figure for the most part in MacDonald's memoir—from the supposedly more progressive and cosmopolitan “gay” and interracial population of South End. As Davis points out, the move to shift demographical boundaries, supported by Greater Boston Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance, served to both essentialise sexuality within a discernibly distinct group and to railroad the significance of another district, Jamaica Plain, in the history of the city's queer politics. The subsequent example in Davis's discussion, after the life of Queer Nation in Boston, considers the heterosexist image of South Boston's Irish communities and specifically the homophobic responses of the St. Patrick's Day parade organisers and many of its observers following the seemingly miraculous appearance of a Irish men and women who were also gay and lesbian—and looking to demonstrate mutual allegiance to both identities simultaneously. For Davis, the exclusion of the Irish-American Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Committee (GLIB) from the parade in the Irish neighbourhood demonstrates “an extremely important moment in the ongoing process of the definition and control of spaces.” He includes a striking photo of a Southie resident at the parade wearing a sweatshirt emblazoned with a large, green shamrock in the centre of the absurd claim: “90 Years Without the Queers: South Boston Parade.”¹²⁰

Crucially, though, disgruntled locals framed the “invasion” of the gay and lesbian “outsiders” in a rhetoric that resurrected the resistance in the 1970s to bussing as an effort of desegregation in the racially divided city. “South Boston residents saw this as *Southie's* parade,” Davis writes, “and any attempts to change it were seen as another attack on the neighborhood—similar to past battles over housing and busing.”¹²¹ He includes a number of commentaries from South Boston locals, one of which featured in the *South Boston Tribune* in 1993, is particularly revealing:

First the courts took our schools away with forced busing. Then the courts took our housing away with forced housing. Now they're taking our streets away with forced association. America has to wake up. Put down that TV clicker and take to the streets.¹²²

¹²⁰ Ibid., 299.

¹²¹ Ibid., 300.

¹²² Ibid., 301.

“This is geography,” the parade organiser, John “Wacko” Hurley, put it in the *Boston Herald* in March, 1992.¹²³ Each of these examples—from the racialisation of heterosexual desire and sexuality in the case of Ann Ahern’s parents in Grant’s novel, to the castration threats in MacDonald’s *All Souls*, and, finally, to the anxieties around queer sexual identity articulated through the area’s contentious racial past and present in the parade debates in South Boston—evidence clearly the collaboration of sexual and racial panic in the construction of community boundaries and borders. *Map of Ireland* tackles the legacies of these overlapping histories while also resigning to the often-inescapable forces of social, cultural, and racial structures that both constitute and constrict the social subject.

The point at which Ann becomes enveloped in the consequences of the desegregation battles waging in the city and more marginally involved in the radical Black Nationalist politics quickly unravelling her emotional and sexual world, a defining moment in the book, occurs when she takes the train to Jamaica Plain, on the other side of Roxbury, where Mademoiselle Eugénie lives. Finding her teacher’s door open, Ann decides to trespass, and in doing so, begins a chain of events that will lead her to the state correctional facility from where she opens the story. In the house, Ann is forced to historicise the object of her desire, Mademoiselle Eugénie. “I didn’t think of Mademoiselle Eugénie as Black ... She was different, her own person.”¹²⁴ For Ann, Mademoiselle Eugénie, while dark skinned, is not read as “black” in a time and place where racial designations are key to identifying familiar and unfamiliar subjects. Realising she has found herself in a “Black house,”¹²⁵ Ann’s sense of illicit excitement colours her environment and conceptualises her actions in particularly revealing ways:

Beyond the living room, there were two doors. I figured, maybe, the Black bedrooms. I crept along. I felt inexplicably sad. In ninth grade, when I got in trouble for tonguing Laura Miskinis in the ear, the headmaster had called me a pervert. I knew then, he had the wrong word. Perverse means twisted. What’s I’d done was simple, straightforward: a tongue, an ear, a current of feeling. What I was doing now, in Mademoiselle Eugénie’s house, was perverse. Sneaking around. A lone White in a Black house. Trespassing.¹²⁶

Ann’s desire for Mademoiselle Eugénie, which has led her beyond her neighbourhood to this “Black house,” is twisted in its sexual abnormality as well as in its geographic deviation. The presence of a postcard with the iconic 1967 photograph of Huey P. Newton, co-founder of the

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 49.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 48.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 49.

Black Panthers, pushes Ann further towards explosive emotional turmoil: “I remembered who the man was. I felt in my pocket for matches.”¹²⁷

In the section between her trespassing in Jamaica Plain and the moment in which she is discovered in Mademoiselle Eugénie’s house by her teacher and a group of friends, two of whom are the black girls Flynn accused of “travelling,” Ann remembers a conversation between her and the newly arrived French-Senegalese teacher in a classroom suddenly emptied out following the news of a stabbing in the school. The incident involving a white South Boston High School student, Paulie Fahey, in Grant’s book recalls an historical incident from December 1974, when Michael Faith, a white student at the school, was stabbed by a black pupil. “I want to travel,” Ann reveals to Mademoiselle Eugénie. “I mean, I don’t want to spend the rest of my life here. In South Boston.”¹²⁸ Yet, in the same breath, Ann laments a feeling of rootlessness in the wake of bussing. “I think I have *nostalgie* for South Boston before the busing,” she tells Mademoiselle Eugénie—“*nostalgie*” being the French word for “homesickness.”¹²⁹

Much of Ann’s emotional struggle in the novel is the inability to reconcile her desire to transcend the social limitations of South Boston with the discomfiting challenges desegregation has introduced. Inevitably, the ideologies of race that structure Ann’s environment are too strong to overcome, and traversing geographic boundaries beyond South Boston fails to diminish the psychological wages of whiteness. Once Ann is faced with the dilemma of betraying Southie loyalty, when Mademoiselle Eugénie tries to identify one of the red-haired and freckled culprits in South Boston who set her car on fire, she succumbs to the community honour: “I didn’t want to be a Benedict Arnold. I *couldn’t* be. It just wasn’t in me,” she says.¹³⁰ Moreover, the confrontational moment means contextualising a desire for Mademoiselle Eugénie that Ann had resisted placing:

I hated them for making me see Mademoiselle Eugénie the way that they did. For making me place her, so to speak, geographically. I’d always thought of her as different, unique. Outside of what was happening. An oasis of pleasure. Honest to God, I had to get out of there.¹³¹

Grant’s narrative in this scene emphasises that, since sexuality is produced precisely in the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and class, it is, therefore, never free from the social and political conditions of its construction. “I wanted to have my feelings separate, one at a

¹²⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 61.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 73.

¹³¹ Ibid.

time. Was that too much to ask?”¹³² Ashamed, Ann runs from the “black house” back to Southie.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said puts forward a theory of “imaginative geography,” which he describes as a “universal practice of designating in one’s mind a familiar space which is ‘ours’ and an unfamiliar space beyond ‘ours’ which is ‘theirs.’”¹³³ According to Said,

geographic boundaries accompany the social, ethnic, and cultural ones in expected ways. Yet often the sense in which someone feels himself to be not-foreign is based on a very unrigorous idea of what is “out there,” beyond one’s own territory. All kinds of suppositions, associations, and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one’s own.¹³⁴

The shifting parameters of Boston’s geographic areas as a consequence of ethnic social and cultural evolutions are clear to Ann, who explains at one point in the novel that:

Dorchester used to be all Irish. Now it’s Irish east of Washington, heading toward Southie, and Black west of Washington, heading toward Roxbury. Roxbury used to be all Irish too. Everything, it seems, used to be all Irish at one time or another in the city of Boston.¹³⁵

Ann is mapping out both the socio-economic developments in the Irish-American community through time, as well as the wider history of black migration to the city since the early twentieth century in the Great Migration and after the Second World War. In more complex, and often troubling ways, however, the imaginative geography Ann traces onto the neighbourhood of black Roxbury and its residents advances what Said is describing in *Orientalism*. Two moments in the novel are particularly revealing in this regard.

The first of these scenes occurs after Ann has invaded the home of her French teacher and failed to seize an opportunity to challenge her community’s racism. At Dorchester Heights in South Boston, from where a panoramic view of the city’s harbour and downtown area is available, Ann stands with her younger brother Timmy, one of the white students bussed to Roxbury for school. “You could see the rest of the city from Dorchester Heights,” Ann explains, “and I liked going up there to sort things out.”¹³⁶ Gazing over the city, Ann recognises “Carson Beach and the inner harbor, plus downtown, and the expressways north and south ... Back Bay and the Public Garden, Beacon Hill,” until visibility blurs: “you could probably even see Roxbury, although I was never able to find it.”¹³⁷ Roxbury’s imaginative geography in this sense is not only unfamiliar as the object of an orientalist gaze; the

¹³² Ibid., 101.

¹³³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978; repr., London: Penguin, 2003), 54.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 43.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 91.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 93.

neighbourhood is entirely cropped from Ann's view of the city. Roxbury is not "out there" beyond the territory of South Boston—it is, from Ann's perspective, nowhere.

The second, more detailed view of Roxbury as a veritable anti-Shangri-La or inverted Oasis comes later in the book, when Rochelle, one of the new black students at South Boston High and friend of Mademoiselle Eugénie convinces Ann to take the late bus for black students to Roxbury, where she would meet the now disappeared French teacher before a planned departure from Boston. Ann's excitement over the meeting imagines a common ground made more poignant in the context of increasing racial tension during the bussing scenes, as well as given the historical context of Irish-black relations. "I mean, it was thrilling," Ann recalls, "as if we shared things in common—ideas, acquaintances, a belief in the impossible. The past. But it was also nauseating."¹³⁸ Despite Ann's reservations and momentary lapses into an internal monologue that reveals entrenched racist assumptions ("Was it true Blacks couldn't swim?" she asks herself at one point,¹³⁹ while the next moment she feels "uncomfortable" at the thought of Rochelle's aunt Colleen's racial unruliness: "She did not talk Black, not at all."¹⁴⁰), Rochelle attempts to neutralise the tension with jovial humour: "You're traveling incog-Negro now," she says to Ann.¹⁴¹ In the proceeding sequence, Ann's racist ideologies are revealed in both subtle and sexual ways. Crouched on the floor of the bus in hiding, Ann rests on her knees against the seat cushion in a parody of the protest prayers the white Irish mothers enact earlier in the novel¹⁴² —"*And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.*"¹⁴³ —while Rochelle provides a running commentary on Roxbury as they pass through the neighbourhood onto Jamaica Plain. In this moment, Rochelle's report is both coloured and confounded by Ann's imaginative geography. "It is enough for 'us' to set up these boundaries in our own minds," writes Said, "'they' become 'they' accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as different from 'ours.'"¹⁴⁴

Ann does not underestimate the gravity of her current situation. "I thought of those maps the explorers used where the ocean stopped and the sailors sailed off the edge of the earth," she imagines.¹⁴⁵ "I wanted to sit up and look out. I wanted to see. But at the same time, I was, well, reluctant. I remembered Lot's wife."¹⁴⁶ For Ann, Roxbury has always been a "no-

¹³⁸ Ibid., 99.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 100.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 103.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 103.

¹⁴⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 54.

¹⁴⁵ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 104.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

man's-land, unknowable."¹⁴⁷ And given the opportunity to make visible the no-man's-land excised from her vision, she refuses to see. "Perhaps it should stay that way," she proclaims:

Besides, who on earth wanted to be Lot's wife? Not me. Forever caught. Not me. Forever standing still ... I inched over to the window and put my mouth at the crack between Rochelle's seat and mine. I tasted salt.¹⁴⁸

Ann's repeated return to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction in Genesis 19, and to Lot's wife in particular, who, when offered the chance to flee the city's destruction on the condition she never look back, turns to face the downfall of the allegedly depraved place and transforms into a pillar of salt, invokes a profound sense of what Heather Love has called "feeling backward."

"Lot's wife clings to the past and is ruined by it," writes Love in her book on the politics of loss in queer history.¹⁴⁹ As she points out in *Feeling Backward*, whether as "throwbacks to an earlier stage of human development or as children who refuse to grow up, queers have been seen across the twentieth century as a backward race."¹⁵⁰ Yet, black people have also been subject to similar atavistic labels of primitivism. In *Imperial Leather*, for instance, McClintock writes that it was the body of the African woman in the nineteenth century, in particular, which became "the prototype of the Victorian invention of primitive atavism."¹⁵¹ Racial slurs identifying arriving black students to South Boston during bussing were poised as brutal reminders of the endurance of such primitivist imaginings of African Americans. As McClintock continues to demonstrate, this atavism was expressed in relation to sex and sexuality.¹⁵² In *Map of Ireland*, Ann's obsession with the biblical tale of Lot's wife reveals an underlying fear of falling victim to what she implicitly imagines as the racial and sexual backwardness of black Roxbury and its population. Thus, seeing this Sodom and Gomorrah in New England threatens to regress Ann to a level of black sociality and sexuality, from which her Irish-American community has struggled for over a century to dissociate in the arduous task of "becoming white."

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 106.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 9.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵¹ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 41.

¹⁵² Ibid., 42.

“White Niggers” and Travelling “Incog-Negro”

The “map of Ireland” from the title of Grant’s book not only evokes the topographical concerns that frame the racial and sexual crossings of Ann Ahern. As she reveals in her conversation at school with Mademoiselle Eugénie, the phrase concomitantly denotes a corporeal mapping of ethnic identity onto the surface of its assumed and “natural” members. “That’s where my family’s from,” Ann says to her teacher, pointing to Ireland on a world map. “Can’t you tell? Most people can tell.” She continues:

They say I have a face like the map of Ireland ... It’s an expression. It means I look Irish—the red hair and freckles. You can tell where I’m from just by looking at my face ... Everyone has red hair in my family.

In response to Ann’s observations on the apparent genetic inheritance of Irish traits, Mademoiselle Eugénie poses a challenge to such essentialised and white assumptions which underpin racial, ethnic, and national identity: “And would you say ... *C’est moi, là?* The map *de la France?* ... *C’est moi, le visage de la France!*”¹⁵³

Indeed, Irishness in Grant’s novel is consistently marked in ways that might be described as racially categorised. From red hair to freckles, Irishness is made visible in *Map of Ireland* in ways that dominant conceptualisations of whiteness are not. “More Irish, I see,” says one black character in Grant’s short story “Posting Up” at the arrival of Irish-American teenager Theresa Meagher.¹⁵⁴ In fact, even accounts of the violent protests during bussing assume an identifiable Irishness in the crowd of angry mobs. Recalling two examples from the beginning of the chapter, Lawrence J. McCaffrey’s depiction of “angry Irish faces” and “hate-filled Irish voices” at the time is reiterated in Lauren Onkey’s summation that “opposition to bussing had an Irish face.” Yet, Grant manages to circumvent popular efforts in Irish-American cultural forms to replicate Irish racialization as a reflection of oppression on the basis of religion and social behaviour. In subduing Ann’s hysterical reaction to crossing into Roxbury on the late black bus, Rochelle makes Ann’s whiteness, even if her Irishness is what Jacobson might term “whiteness of a different colour,” visible: “Oh keep your panties on! You survived, didn’t you? You’re still here! Still White!”¹⁵⁵

In *All Souls*, MacDonald recalls a hierarchy of categorisation before the introduction of bussing in the mid-1970s that, while using the racially pejorative term “nigger,” reveals more about the class position of both black and white residents in South Boston. This

¹⁵³ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 60. Translation from French: “That that’s me? The map of France? ... That’s what I am, the face of France!”

¹⁵⁴ Grant, “Posting-Up,” 30.

¹⁵⁵ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 113.

convoluted scheme of stratification, shifting in its application according to the observer's position in Southie, maps out a hierarchy with white at the top and "black nigger" at the bottom. MacDonald remembers learning that the residents on D Street are "white niggers." "I'd never heard the term before," he admits,

and I ran it around in my head over and over again, trying to picture what it might mean, and wondering whether white niggers were friendly with the black niggers of Columbia Point, where we were also never to cross through.¹⁵⁶

"White niggers," however, MacDonald learns are not the same as "black niggers," who are relegated to the margins of this charm circle. In the more upwardly mobile area of City Point, on the east side of South Boston, where residents "still had the Irish faces" but "wore turtlenecks and chino pants, pressed and cuffed just right," Old Colony's Irish—MacDonald being one—are viewed as "project rats" and, indeed, as "white niggers."¹⁵⁷

Complicating matters further, MacDonald writes, "I wondered if the Point kids might be niggers to people who'd really made it, like out in tidy West Roxbury or the suburbs that everyone talked about moving to when they won the lottery." Blackness itself can either be absent of or qualified by the term "nigger," which, when fastened to "black" produces the lowest faction of this stratification. "I soon found out that there were a few black families living in Old Colony," MacDonald says, "and everyone said they were okay, that they weren't niggers but just black." Conversely, "the ones in Columbia Point ... were both black and niggers."¹⁵⁸ That this schema relies nonetheless on a racialised qualification ("nigger") only highlights the racist ideologies of white Boston, and this is confirmed once the bussing begins, when being black equates to being a "nigger." "While Old Colony kids were niggers in City Point, and D Street kids niggers in Old Colony," writes Onkey, "they were united in their whiteness (and Irishness) against attending school with African-American children, showing the power of the racial appeal in times of crisis."¹⁵⁹

When MacDonald questions the barriers erected to protest social amalgamation between black and white residents of Boston, his questioned allegiance to Irish Southie is perceived as a threat of such racial crossing.¹⁶⁰ In *Map of Ireland*, Grant reproduces the anxieties surrounding race loyalty and the threat of social and sexual "miscegenation" MacDonald notes in his recollections. At the same time, though, Grant is anxious to diminish the complexities of the racial ideologies that underpin white supremacist fears. Ann is pressed

¹⁵⁶ MacDonald, *All Souls*, 60.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁵⁹ Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity*, 119.

¹⁶⁰ MacDonald, *All Souls*, 87.

to confront on two key occasions in the novel the consequences of mixing socially and sexually with the “other side.” In the first scene, on Dorchester Heights in South Boston, Ann’s brother Timmy innocently warns his sister of the growing tensions in her own home, where her older brother Hap, a member of the militant South Boston Liberation Army, condemns Ann for mixing with black students at school on the basketball team and across enemy lines in Jamaica Plain on the night Mademoiselle Eugénie falls victim to an outburst of Southie’s anti-black hostility. “Hap says—he says you’re a white nigger,” Timmy proclaims, ignorant of the meaning of the term.¹⁶¹ “Do you even know what that means?” asks Ann in response.¹⁶² Unlike MacDonald’s use of the term to produce a class-based hierarchy among white and black South Boston residents—a stratification still entrenched in racist idiom—in Grant’s novel “white nigger” is not merely a means of describing lower-class or Southie whites on state welfare. Instead, the term “white nigger” is an indictment against perceived traitors, against Southie’s own who enact cultural or social miscegenation and threaten the white-black binary. “Hap says the SBLA is going to chase all the white niggers out of Southie,” Timmy says.¹⁶³

According to Nagel, “sexual ethnic boundary crossing has the capacity the generate controversy since ethnic groups almost always encourage members to ‘stick to your own kind,’ and since ethnic ideologies often contain negative stereotypes of outsiders ... ethnosexual travelers of any type or motivation are seldom welcomed with open arms.”¹⁶⁴ It is not simply the treasonous act of travelling across constructed racial boundaries that generates hostility from Ann’s brother; aware of his sister’s sexuality, Hap’s distrust of “white niggers” in South Boston finds particular expression in ethnosexual anxieties. Later in the novel, when Ann and Rochelle travel to Provincetown in Colleen Washington’s car to meet Mademoiselle Eugénie, who plans to go “underground,” Ann’s mother makes explicit the consequences of betraying the community, Over the telephone, she scorns:

“What I can’t understand, Ann, what I find so hard to fathom is why you’d rather spend your time with a bunch of niggers than be here with us. With your own family ... You’d rather be with them, than be here with us? ... What I can’t understand is, why you treat total strangers better than you treat your own family.” Ma had a way—always, always—of making you choose sides.¹⁶⁵

Ann’s racial unfaithfulness is then immediately brought into collision with what her mother condemns as unacceptable sexual deviance. “Ma said, ‘Anything but this.’”¹⁶⁶ Queerness and

¹⁶¹ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 94.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Nagel, *Race, Ethnicity, and Sexuality*, 14-15.

¹⁶⁵ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 119.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

racial “mixing” converge in Ann’s mother’s mind to engender the ultimate act of family, community, and ethnic treason. For Ann, such travelling across sexual and racial boundaries produces, at first, opposite effects, until the lines of ethnic and community loyalty test Ann’s commitment to and capability of transcending the barriers in the way of white Irish-black solidarity.

In the fourth section of the novel, “Traveling Incog-Negro,” Ann and Rochelle journey to Provincetown to meet Mademoiselle Eugénie. Grant continues her grappling with the possibly transformative effects of social and sexual companionship across the white Irish-black colour line. At a pancake house across the Bourne Bridge, Ann begins to relish a newly felt sense of possibility brought about through her budding romantic relationship with African-American Rochelle. Next to Rochelle, Ann feels as if she “can get from point A to point B,” like she has the “wherewithal to move through the world as an adult.”¹⁶⁷ To the archive of films and television shows about exploration, espionage, and interracial adventure (*I Spy*, *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, and *The Defiant Ones*), Ann adds her own imaginary contribution: “The movie is about a White girl from South Boston who becomes friends with a Black, a girl from Roxbury.”¹⁶⁸ The movie, of course, is Ann’s life. “For the first time in my life,” she continues,

I can feel everything that is happening to me: every molecule of air that brushes my skin; every stare or frown from every White customer [in the pancake house]; every movement toward and away from us; every smile and grimace of Rochelle’s. But instead of being disturbed by this rush of feeling, I am—what’s the word?—enlarged by it. As an actress in the movie of my life, I will be known for my ability to contain and express many feelings at once.¹⁶⁹

The parochial devotion to her white Irish community and her resistance to embracing this transformational experience seemingly wash away in an opportunity for social and sexual entanglement. “Now the horniness is free-floating,” she goes on, “huge.”¹⁷⁰ Furthermore, the parameters to which Ann was previously bound seem to have shifted dramatically. “Suddenly I am on the inside of something I’ve been watching from the outside my whole life ... It feels good to be on the inside, at last.”¹⁷¹ Tellingly, the longest and most explicit sexual scene in Grant’s novel occurs as Ann and Rochelle travel from the centre of a desegregation struggle in Boston to the placid surroundings of Provincetown in a car.

In describing their journey, an emotional and sexual exploration, Grant narrates in Ann and Rochelle an echo of what Lynda Hart has called “fatal women.” Historically, Hart

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 126.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 123.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 124.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 125.

writes, collaboration between the white lesbian and single black or non-white woman (and mother) has been viewed in patriarchal fantasy as a truly horrific prospect. “They share the opprobrious charge of ‘mocking the importance of fathers,’” she argues, “and where one is implicated, the other is not likely to be far away.”¹⁷² The consequence of such patriarchal angst over threats to masculine interests in the reproduction of men, according to Hart, has been to ensure a discursive division between the two, so much so that “lesbian” has been almost universally constructed as “white.”¹⁷³ Thus, the “effects have been to enforce a racial segregationism of sexual preference.”¹⁷⁴ Grant, however, foregrounds lesbian desire as the site where these two racially differentiated characters come together, and, to use Hart’s phrase, the point at which “these bodies might perform together.”¹⁷⁵ “No matter how far we went,” Ann says, “there was no finishing, no end.”¹⁷⁶ Unsettled and on the move, Ann and Rochelle venture through a literal no-man’s-land, where sexual desire eclipses phallographic notions of heterosexual sex bound to male orgasm. In an analysis of Ridley Scott’s 1991 female criminal road movie *Thelma & Louise*, Hart recalls the final moments in which the female leads drive into the expansive and unending space of the Grand Canyon—alluded to in the final freeze frame shot of the movie.¹⁷⁷ Thelma and Louise are fatal women, she writes, “because they are *together*, seeking escape from the masculine circuit of desire.”¹⁷⁸ In *Map of Ireland*, Ann and Rochelle’s “criminality,” or their status as “fatal women,” is also tied to their togetherness, which is forged in the seemingly liberated space “on the road” and outside Boston.

“I was climbing out of my own skin,” Ann declares at one point in the girls’ adventure.¹⁷⁹ In a novel about the complexities of interracial relations, such a declaration could be read as a desire for a form of transcendental metamorphosis that either entirely circumnavigates race or alludes to a transformation in racial identity. “I’m traveling incog-Negro now,” Ann says with a hint of panic in her voice as they arrive in Provincetown.¹⁸⁰ “I’m like those White girls in the projects with Black babies who nobody even sees as White anymore.”¹⁸¹ Again, sexuality marks the point at which the frontiers of racial and ethnic identities are potentially disrupted and crossed. While Ann observes the case as one of social degradation, however, the anecdote raises serious questions about the ontological, or

¹⁷² Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women: Lesbian Sexuality and the Mark of Aggression* (London: Routledge, 1994), 112.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 112-3.

¹⁷⁶ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 129.

¹⁷⁷ Hart, *Fatal Women*, 67-80.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁷⁹ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 126.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 133.

biological status, of racial identity. As Laurie Shrage argues, such instances “indicate the potential that racial and ethnic cross-identifying has for rendering visible the socially constructed nature of our associations between body type or family ancestry, on the one hand, and social identities or cultural traits, on the other.”¹⁸²

Despite the radical progressiveness implied in such ostensibly transformative experiences, however, the frontiers of interracial or interethnic sexual alliances can also fail to unravel the limits of cross-racial and cross-ethnic solidarity and equality. In *Black Looks*, for example, bell hooks argues that the commodification of blackness “has created a social context where appropriation by non-black people of the black image knows no boundaries.”¹⁸³ Such appropriations, most often white uses of blackness, when they fail to critically evaluate the perspective from which they produce this relation, “simply recreate the imperial gaze—the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and colonize.”¹⁸⁴ This commodification and colonisation of the racial or ethnic “Other” by white people is nowhere more visible and contentious than in instances of cross-racial and cross-ethnic sexual relations. Speaking about mass culture, hooks writes that “there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference.”¹⁸⁵ She argues further that commodity culture in the US:

exploits conventional thinking about race, gender, and sexual desire by ‘working’ both the idea that racial difference marks one as Other and the assumption that sexual agency expressed within the context of racialized sexual encounter is a conversion experience that alters one’s place and participation in contemporary cultural politics.¹⁸⁶

Often times an example of postmodern primitivism, sexual contact with a racial or ethnic “Other” promises to rescue white subjects from the blandness of modernity through the commodification and erotic consumption of the racial/ethnic Other.¹⁸⁷ “When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure,” hooks suggests, “the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other.”¹⁸⁸ Irishness has played a particularly significant role in this process of commodification since the period hooks explores in her discussion.

¹⁸² Laurie Shrage, “Passing Beyond the Other Race or Sex,” in *Race/Sex: Their Sameness, Difference, and Interplay*, ed. Naomi Zack (New York: Routledge, 1997), 186.

¹⁸³ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 7.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

According to Elizabeth Cullingford, Irish identity has often been part of an Orientalist attempt, “by invoking analogy (my culture and my colonial predicament resemble yours) or genealogy (my culture originates with yours) to create an alternative and exotic Self.”¹⁸⁹ Negra, too, has meditated on the efficacy of using the trope of Irish alterity in consumer cultures. “Recruited for global capitalism,” she writes, “Irishness has become a form of discursive currency, motivating and authenticating a variety of heritage narratives and commercial transactions, often through its status as a form of ‘enriched whiteness.’”¹⁹⁰ Elsewhere, Negra writes that:

commercial exploitation of Irishness in everything from popular music and print fiction to coffee and cholesterol-medication advertisements and chain restaurants marked its emergence as the most marketable white ethnicity in late-twentieth-century American culture. The strikingly anodyne nature of the Irishness conceptualized in such formats indicated its use value as a consoling ethnic category. The tendency, above all, to use Irishness as a way of speaking a whiteness that would otherwise be taboo was well underway before the events of September 11 [in 2001].¹⁹¹

Indeed, Eagan had already explored the problematic racial politics of this 1990s production of “Hibernophilia” in American consumer culture in an article from 1999, in which she argues that, for many Irish Americans “getting in touch” with their Irish heritage, “part of the draw to Irish cultural production is undoubtedly the realization of past hardship and injustice, and the related desire to rectify the sense of loss of relevance and identity in modern, multicultural America.”¹⁹² This effort becomes deeply problematic in the moment when the desire to claim “otherness” in the face of American multiculturalism “often lapses into a shoring up of this reassuring identity of whiteness.”¹⁹³

As hooks stresses, “the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, *via* exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other’s history through a process of decontextualization.”¹⁹⁴ The question remains, then, whether Grant’s iteration of interracial encounters in her novel ends up perpetuating racist forms of sexual connection, which only serve to cannibalise black culture as a transformative force and to camouflage the colonising privileges of whiteness. On the other hand, *Map of Ireland* might conversely illuminate the ways in which Irish identification with blackness can

¹⁸⁹ Cullingford, *Ireland’s Others*, 7.

¹⁹⁰ Negra, “The Irish in Us,” 1.

¹⁹¹ Diane Negra, “Irishness, Innocence, and American Identity Politics Before and After September 11,” in *The Irish in US: Irishness, Performativity, and Popular Culture*, ed. Diane Negra (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 355.

¹⁹² Eagan, “‘Say it Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud,’” 4.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁹⁴ hooks, *Black Looks*, 31.

create “a politics of imaginative solidarity with the potential for practical action.”¹⁹⁵ The next section of the chapter explores the ways in which Grant’s novel cautiously approaches the latter of these political endeavours. In her attempt to call for action, however, Grant points to the failures of imaginative solidarity in her queer interracial tale. Challenges to anti-black and racist ideologies, *Map of Ireland* suggests, are yet to be articulated.¹⁹⁶

On the Wrong Side

In a 1996 article from *Harper’s Magazine*, American novelist Jane Smiley took issue with the canonisation of and widespread reverence for *Huck Finn* and condemns the book’s deeply problematic treatment of race. Ernest Hemingway, despite his adulation of the novel, had skirted around the problematic nature of the novel, providing the following recommendation to readers: “If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But it’s the best book we’ve had.”¹⁹⁷ “As with all bad endings,” Smiley argues in her discussion, “the problem really lies at the beginning, and at the beginning of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* neither Huck nor Twain takes Jim’s desire for freedom at all seriously; that is, they do not accord it the respect that a man’s passion deserves.”¹⁹⁸ On her own desire to revisit Twain’s novel and enact her own feminist reinterpretation, Grant says,

I really wanted to have a young girl inhabiting that kind of big American voice ... The difficulty is complicating that kind of voice. Huck’s voice gets to be heroic in a way that Ann’s doesn’t and I think for good reason because of acknowledging the restrictions her gender places on her and also perhaps maybe acknowledging the consequences. So much of the criticism of Huck Finn revolves around the consequences for that journey; the consequences for

¹⁹⁵ Cullingford, *Ireland’s Others*, 99.

¹⁹⁶ While Grant’s novel manages to acknowledge the insurmountable odds facing Irish and black political, social, and sexual collaboration, other queer Irish-American articulations of interracial desire have been less successful. In Aoibhean Sweeney’s *Among Other Things, I’ve Taken Up Smoking* (New York: Penguin, 2007), for example, a lesbian entanglement between a white Irish-American woman, Miranda Donnell, and a Latina woman from the Dominican Republic suggests that not only is interethnic intimacy a possibility, but that this encounter transforms the unmarked whiteness of the Irish-American lesbian, who, by the end of the novel, aligns herself with the working-class immigrant culture of Ana’s friendship circle, transforming in essence from good to bad girl. As already outlined in the third chapter, however, this “good girl gone bad” logic, as Kate Davy has evidenced, while establishing cross-class and queer sexual relations, fails to make whiteness visible, to “out” whiteness. See “Outing Whiteness: A Feminist/Lesbian Project,” *Theatre Journal* 47, no. 2 (May 1995): 189-205, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3208483>. *Among Other Things* introduces this development in the figure of the white Irish-American lesbian at the expense of the immigrant woman, who remains a bad girl unredeemable in her non-white identity.

¹⁹⁷ Ernest Hemingway, *The Green Hills of Africa* (1935; repr., New York: Scribner, 1963), 22. In Hemingway’s estimation: “All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*” (ibid).

¹⁹⁸ Jane Smiley, “Say it Ain’t So, Huck,” *Harper’s Magazine*, January, 1996, 63.

Jim were not taken in as seriously as the consequences for Huck, that the boy's adventure story diminished the seriousness of the situation that Jim was in.¹⁹⁹

Map of Ireland moves girls and women from the limited domestic space of the home and from the domesticating narratives of marriage and heterosexual propriety. The critical lens through which Smiley views Twain's novel, which, indeed, Grant has cited as a key influence on her own response to *Huck Finn*, is crucial to the reformulation of gendered and racial alliances presented in *Map of Ireland*.²⁰⁰

Christopher Dowd has written on the Irish textures of *Huckleberry Finn*, which he reads as a parable of the alterity of Irishness in nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon America. "Given the scholarly obsession with racial dynamics in *Huck Finn*," he writes in *The Construction of Irish Identity in American Literature*,

it is surprising that few studies ever acknowledge Huck's Irishness. Scholars almost universally build their ethnic analyses on a black-white binary, with many presuming Huck and Pap Finn to be unambiguously white and lumping them together with the Anglo characters in opposition to the novel's slaves and freed blacks. Others seem to sense that Huck and Pap are not quite the same kind of white, but lack the terminology to describe the phenomenon. And some, faced with this racial ambiguity, even suggest that Huck is black. Few critics consider the possibility of a black-white polarity that might explain Huck's racial position in society.²⁰¹

In his discussion, Dowd attempts to map a history of Irish racialisation in the United States to show that the Irish identification of Huck "accurately signals a character who does not seem to be fully white, but at the same time cannot be considered black."²⁰² For Dowd, *Huck Finn* is ultimately a "manual for resisting assimilation,"²⁰³ and this resistance culminates in the Irish boy hero rejecting the Protestant assimilationist ideals of St. Petersburg and, instead, "lighting out for the Territory." Grant's contemporary queer, female, working-class echo of *Finn*, however, proves the consequences for challenging structures of domination are often too powerful to overcome. As Love puts it, "it is one thing to light out for the Territory and quite another thing to live there."²⁰⁴

Rather than reproduce a trend in Irish and Irish-American cultural forms that fantasises about an Irish-black socio-cultural and historical equivalency, or an interracial cooperation hinging on the fallacious principle of what Rachel Moran terms "romantic

¹⁹⁹ Personal communication with the author, November 2, 2017.

²⁰⁰ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 195.

²⁰¹ Christopher Dowd, *The Construction of Irish Identity in American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 64.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 65.

²⁰⁴ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 53.

individualism,”²⁰⁵ Grant takes a more politically nuanced and sobering path in her novel.

“There was, for me,” Grant admits,

a kind of romantic version of being Irish that I wanted to resist, or a romantic claim to an Irish-American identity that felt kind of kitschy and false to me. And it was something I wanted to be really careful about ... a claim of difference ... I think for white folks in America, ethnicity has been a way to find a way to inhabit a whiteness that isn't only pejorative. I have felt at times sensitive to Irish-American claims of disenfranchisement and oppression and as a way of eliding responsibility or privilege.²⁰⁶

That Grant was aware of the cultural currency of enriched whiteness among Irish Americans is apparent from a reading of her novel, which confronts the romanticism of Irish-black tangled routes and makes visible the incommensurate differences between the two groups to the point of breakdown in politically viable forms of collaboration. At the moment Ann vocalises her “incog-Negro” status at the end of their journey to Provincetown, Rochelle’s facetious response, “Don’t worry ... You’re definitely still White,”²⁰⁷ both playfully assuages Ann’s implicit anxieties about racial regression as a result of sexual crossing and, at the same time, undermines any notion of romantic idealism espoused by discourses of Irish “blackness.”

At the geographic end point of Cape Cod, the tip appropriately named Race Point, Ann weeps prophetically like the Irish banshee in her mother’s folk tales in the shadow of the collapse of her relationship with Rochelle and any chance of interracial political alliance that that connection promised. In the scenes leading up to a car crash on the side of the road that splinters irreparably Ann and Rochelle’s relationship, Mademoiselle Eugénie pushes Ann to reveal the name of the boy who set fire to her car back in South Boston. “In my world,” Ann thinks to herself, “telling on someone—especially someone you knew—was pretty much the worst thing you could do.”²⁰⁸ In his discussion on MacDonald’s *All Souls*, James Silas Rogers poignantly captures the effects of Irish allegiances in South Boston whose calls for unbroken loyalty for the community have had particularly devastating consequences over the years. The South Boston of MacDonald’s memoir, he writes, “is a community in massive denial of its own misery ... the people of Southie cling to the illusion that they live in a benign and self-regulating community.”²⁰⁹ The notion at the core of MacDonald’s account, that “Southie takes

²⁰⁵ Moran, *Interracial Intimacy*, 14.

²⁰⁶ Personal communication with the author, November 2, 2017.

²⁰⁷ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 133.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁰⁹ James Silas Rogers, *Irish-American Autobiography: The Divided Hearts of Athletes, Priests, Pilgrims, and More* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of American Press, 2016), 115.

care of its own,” results in a denial of racist parochialism, crippling poverty, high levels of crime, and some of the highest suicide rates in the city.²¹⁰

When Mademoiselle Eugénie, having read the letters Ann wrote to her, promises that Ann’s writing will rescue her from South Boston and its insularity, Ann scoffs at such displays of flattery and resigns herself to the limitations of her socio-economic position and the power of her neighbourhood’s hold: “The truth was,” she says, “I’d never leave fucking Southie my whole useless life, no matter how far I went.”²¹¹ The emotional and psychological weight of her community’s cultural outlook pulls against her own personal possibilities of political, social, and sexual transformation. In her refusal to offer the name of the South Boston boy who harassed Mademoiselle Eugénie, Ann fails to act against racism and permanently severs the line of interracial solidarity. “You think you’re not like those Southie mothers,” Rochelle blasts in a climactic confrontation after the crash. “Here’s the thing,” she adds, “I don’t care what you *feel*. I care what you *do!*”²¹²

In “Say It Ain’t So, Huck,” Smiley cuts to the crux of white ignorance in the face of systemic anti-black racism in American culture:

The sort of meretricious critical reasoning that has raised Huck’s paltry good intentions to a “strategy of subversion” ... and a “convincing indictment of slavery” ... precisely mirrors the same sort of meretricious reasoning that white people use to convince themselves that they are not “racist.” If Huck *feels* positive toward Jim, and *loves* him, and *thinks* of him as a man, then that’s enough. He doesn’t actually have to act in accordance with his feelings. White Americans always think racism is a feeling, and they reject it or they embrace it. To most Americans, it seems more honorable and nicer to reject it, so they do, but they almost invariably fail to understand that how they *feel* means very little to black Americans, who understand racism as a way of structuring American culture, American politics, and the American economy.²¹³

This failure on the part of white Americans to justly act in solidarity with African Americans against a state-wide suppression of black lives and experiences, which Smiley exposes clearly and profoundly in her essay, informs *Map of Ireland*, in which Grant critically questions the political validity of queer desire and interracial intimacies. The limits of interracial solidarity are drawn sharply once Ann risks becoming what her brother Hap calls a “white nigger,” a traitor to her community. Seconds before the crash, Ann thinks, “it was awful to be on the

²¹⁰ See, for instance, Sara Rimer, “For Old South Boston, Despair Replaces Hope,” *New York Times*, August 17, 2018, 1, 24. Rimer’s article reports on the suicide of Kevin Cunningham, a Southie teenager, who had hanged himself on his family’s porch. As she writes, Cunningham was “the sixth young man from fiercely proud, mostly white, mostly Irish South Boston to commit suicide since the end of December” (1). An image featured in the article shows a shamrock etched into a wooden cross at Tommy Mullen’s graveside, onto which the names of family and friends are also written (24).

²¹¹ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 149.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 178-79.

²¹³ Smiley, “Say it Ain’t So, Huck,” 63.

wrong side.”²¹⁴ In the explosive conclusion of the novel, Ann finally forsakes the transformative possibilities of her cross-racial contact, reducing to ashes any potential for an interracial sexual entanglement that is based in effective political solidarity. “I didn’t want to travel incog-Negro anymore,” she says, setting alight to Mademoiselle Eugénie’s house in Jamaica Plain.²¹⁵

Conclusion: Towards Unmapped Routes

Stephanie Grant’s *Map of Ireland* presents a promising treatment of Irish-black relations, not in spite of its failure to produce an interracial connection that is free from external societal systems of racial difference and oppression, but precisely because of that failure. As Thomas emphasises in her study of literary treatments of Boston’s school desegregation as an historical flashpoint in America’s enduring racial crisis, an “active, activist civil rights children’s literature places the individual’s story in its community and organizational context. It portrays segregation, not as social problems that have already been resolved, but as persistent issues that need our attention.”²¹⁶ Grant’s novel does not ignore this need, but rather foregrounds it and challenges contemporary notions of a “postracial” American culture in her fictionalisation of 1970’s racial dynamics. Furthermore, Grant challenges the tendency in Irish-American cultural production to uncritically imagine Irish-black relations as exterior not only to the historically contentious tangled routes of these groups but also to the profoundly systemic forces of racism, sexism, and classism which continue to shape the socio-economic, political, and cultural experiences of these communities.

Since the 1970s, critical accounts of Boston’s school desegregation have worked to interrogate conventional scholarly and popular framing of the events. Theoharis’s invaluable study of the period provides a significant challenge to the truncated cultural, media, and scholarly framings of racial segregation and the struggle for equality in Boston as well as North America more generally.²¹⁷ The restorative work of Theoharis has produced a more nuanced and politically astute reading of the fight for desegregation and social and economic equality in the North. Moreover, such a revision of the events in Boston in the early-to-mid 1970s challenged assumptions still made about the role of Boston’s black communities throughout bussing. The most egregious popularisation of the myth of black passivity during

²¹⁴ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 166.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

²¹⁶ Thomas, “Civil Rights Gone Wrong,” 266.

²¹⁷ In addition to her own work on the subject, see “Rethinking the Boston ‘Busing Crisis,’” ed. Matthew Delmont and Jeanne Theoharis, special issue, *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2 (2017) for significant critical renewals of bussing and its place in the history of racial segregation and desegregation in the United States.

the turbulent years remains Lukas's *Common Ground*, which, Thomas argues, "has set the tone and parameters for the 'failed experiment' genre of Boston civil rights history." *Common Ground*, Thomas contends includes "the portrayal of African Americans as passive and disorganized politically and pathological and deficient socially."²¹⁸

Grant's fictionalisation of the period largely overlooks examples of sustained black activism in Boston. There are no black parents or students instrumental in the desegregation efforts in the city. Instead, the book's black students reluctantly and passively observe the legal decisions imposed upon them by the abhorred Judge Garrity, "a tyrant—a tryant!—who ruled by decree."²¹⁹ According to Theoharis, black Bostonian "struggles for educational justice in Boston complicate the prevalent dichotomy made between integrationists and Black Power strategies."²²⁰ *Map of Ireland*, however, ignores these historical struggles and, instead, reproduces the dichotomy between politics of integration or Black Power. Justifying the radical and separatist efforts of her Black Nationalist group, Mademoiselle Eugénie exclaims that "the moment for desegregation, it is over. Past ... It is time for something else, another strategy."²²¹ Additionally, despite no sign of such solidarity, as Theoharis points out, white-black cooperation during school desegregation did occur, and the Roxbury-South Boston Parents' Biracial Council was set up by parents on both sides of the colour line seeking to bring about educational justice and equality.²²²

Map of Ireland is set during a period of not only heated racial debate in Boston and across the nation in the ongoing Civil Rights movements but also of seismic transformations in public and political engagement with feminist and gay and lesbian issues. Ann is certainly aware of the developments in gender politics of her time, but Grant's novel excludes cross-racial solidarity in the gay and lesbian liberation efforts in the city. In fact, Elaine Noble

²¹⁸ Thomas, "Civil Rights Gone Wrong," 257. In fact, as early as 1951, Ruth Batson became the first Black person to run for a seat on the Boston School Committee. Although she was ultimately unsuccessful, Batson became a key force in subsequent activist movements in the city during the debates around desegregation in the public school system. See Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" 134. In 1967, the number of students bussed peaked at 600, decreasing to 500 the following year with the introduction of the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity (METCO), which transported black students from their neighbourhoods in the city to primarily white suburbs. See, Susan E. Eaton, *The Other Boston Busing Story: What's Won and Lost Across the Boundary Line* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). The late 1960s and early 1970s also witnessed the foundation of the Black Student Federation, the Black Students Alliance, and the Black Student Union, formed due to growing frustration with the racial division at the core of the BPS system. The latter of these organised a citywide boycott of school in protest against continued segregation. See Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" 136. Elsewhere, Tess Bundy has elaborated on the forgotten history of Black student movements in the Boston public school system in the six years leading up to Garrity's order in 1974. See Tess Bundy, "'Revolutions Happen through Young People!': The Black Student Movement in the Boston Public Schools, 1968-1971," in "Rethinking the Boston 'Busing Crisis,'" ed. Matthew Delmont and Jeanne Theoharis, special issue, *Journal of Urban History* 43, no. 2 (2017): 273-93, <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0096144216688277>.

²¹⁹ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 17.

²²⁰ Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" 128.

²²¹ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 163.

²²² Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" 143.

served as the first openly lesbian or gay elected official in the Massachusetts House of Representatives during the period represented in the novel. Receiving much public attention in 1974 during her campaign, Noble was both aware of and actively engaged in desegregation efforts.²²³ Gay and lesbian community politics across the city and their relation to the contentious desegregation debates are missing in Grant's reconstruction of the social, cultural, political, and racial environments of the time.

Despite these shortcomings, Grant's novel is a crucial corrective to the narrative of innocence conventionally framing working-class white resistance to desegregation. "White resisters," writes Theoharis, "capture the historical record, seen as working-class ethnics denied of political power in the city who struggled to preserve their neighbourhood."²²⁴ *Map of Ireland*, however, confronts the anti-black ideologies underpinning Irish resistance to desegregation. Furthermore, in moving beyond the geographical boundaries of Southie, Grant suggests the wider systemic racial issues facing America more generally. In the concluding lines of the novel, Rochelle condemns Ann's failure to confront her own entrenched white supremacist perspective. She tells her that "White people were always asking Black people to bear witness to their lives, to their humanity ... it was the oldest story in the universe, the oldest story in the whole swirling galaxy."²²⁵ "Whether or not desire for contact with the Other, for connection rooted in the longing for pleasure, can act as a critical intervention challenging and subverting racist domination, inviting and enabling critical resistance," hooks writes, "is an unrealized political possibility."²²⁶ The power of queerness as a political tool of subversion has in many respects succumbed to the sanitising efforts of an assimilationist gay and lesbian agenda. In its inability to imagine the terms of cross-racial sexual and social equality, however, Grant's *Map of Ireland* emphasises more urgently the need to address enduring structures of oppression that prevent the viability of a queerness that is attuned to the intersectional demands of an effective class-conscious, anti-racist, and feminist politics. The terrain of such a future remains unmapped.

²²³ See, for instance, John Kifner, "Sexuality Issue Put to Rest, Elaine Noble Is Ready for Office," *New York Times*, November 14, 1974, 60. Kifner writes: "Boston's crisis over court-ordered school busing for integration was at full peak during the campaign, and, typically, Miss Noble spent much of her time working to ease tensions rather than politicking." In 2017, the *Advocate* honored Noble in a piece during Women's History Month, in which Noble connects (seemingly unfair) assumptions of Irish-Catholic homophobia, her own cross-racial political solidarity, and racism within the gay and lesbian community, saying, "I was elected in a largely Irish Catholic town ... in spite of being gay. In the height of desegregation in Boston, I was riding on the buses with children of color. The gay community was just as racist as the straight community. So I had a lot of issues around race." Trudy Ring, "Queer Women Who Paved the Way: Political Pioneer Elaine Noble," *Advocate*, March 8, 2017, <https://www.advocate.com/women/2017/3/08/queer-women-who-paved-way-political-pioneer-elaine-noble>.

²²⁴ Theoharis, "'I'd Rather Go to School in the South,'" 144.

²²⁵ Grant, *Map of Ireland*, 193.

²²⁶ hooks, *Black Looks*, 22.

CONCLUSION

Feeling Backward and Looking Forward

Feeling Backward

“From shared critical dissatisfaction we arrive at collective potentiality.”¹ This call for critical intervention appears as the closing line in the final chapter of José Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, published four years before Muñoz’s untimely death in 2013. Such a compelling occasion for the recalibration of the subjects of shared scholarly investigation based on a sense of disappointment and dissatisfaction has been the instructive force behind much of the work carried out in this thesis. As previously mentioned in the introduction, Charles Fanning has noted that “Irish-American literature is one of the oldest and largest bodies of ethnic writing produced by members and descendants of a single American immigrant group.”² This vast body of literary expression has been met with equally abundant scholarly attention, particularly across the United States, where Irish Studies institutes, schools, and centres remain significant contributors to, and often curators of, what matters in the canon of this genre of American literature and culture. Despite the wealth of critical work on Irish-American literature, culture, history, and experience, of which only a fragment has been touched upon in this thesis, the lives and literature of queer Irish-American writers and cultural figures have, with rare exception, been overlooked.

In his foreword to the short anthology, *Queer & Celtic: On the Irish LGBT Experience*, Wesley J. Koster considers the hidden textures within the recipe of Irish cultural identity. He asks,

what of ingredients that are found in the mix, apparently always there, but never really recognized as such, at least not until very recently? What about the lesbian poets, the gay storytellers, the bisexual playwrights, and transgender journalists, all just as Irish as any other, but only newly venturing to claim their voices as such. What are their stories? What do they have to tell us about their roles in that recipe?³

¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 189.

² Charles Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America: 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 1.

³ Wesley J. Koster, “Tribulations & Celebrations,” foreword to *Queer & Celtic: On the Irish LGBT Experience*, ed. Wesley J. Koster (Minneapolis: Squares and Rebels, 2013), 1.

This thesis has examined some of the queer Irish voices in America. By the time Koster was suggesting that queer Irish authors and cultural figures were “only newly venturing to claim their voices,” many of those featured over the five chapters in this thesis had been producing poetry, fiction, performances, and plays for nearly fifty years. Queer Irish Americans are not only now claiming a voice. Rather, those voices are only now, and still reluctantly, being listened to. This thesis has been one step in filling this gap in scholarship. The usefulness of a project that explores the intersection of Irishness and queerness in American literary and cultural production extends beyond merely hearing the voices of those who speak back against their exclusion from expressing simultaneously an Irish-American and gay, lesbian, trans, and queer identity. Not only has this thesis illustrated clearly the ways in which Irishness and queerness productively interact in the cultural, sexual, and political arenas mapped out across the body of work from each of the figures explored herein. More crucially, the thesis has, in investigating the cultural output of some of the most celebrated voices in American queer culture since the early 1970s, also gestured towards the place of Irishness in wider national projects of queer interest.

Gayatri Gopinath’s 2005 study of queer South Asian diasporic culture in *Impossible Desires* provided a compelling investigation of the ways in which “the deep investment of dominant diasporic and nationalist ideologies” produced gay and lesbian subject positions “as impossible and unimaginable.”⁴ Only two years later, however, Heather Love pointed out the fact that, in the early twenty-first century, “same-sex desire is not as impossible as it used to be.”⁵ From the nation-wide legalisation of gay marriage across the US to mainstream media visibility, exemplified most recently in Netflix’s reboot of the television show, *Queer Eye*, gay and lesbian desire and identity has moved from being a social and legal impossibility to a culturally and economically productive spectacle. These “advances” in gay and lesbian legal rights and social and cultural visibility, however, as Love cautions in her book, only insist upon the ongoing marginalisation of the lives and desires of those who refuse or are unable to comfortably sit within the parameters of those newly emerging subject positions in the twenty-first century. As she puts it, “the survival of feelings such as shame, isolation, and self-hatred into the post-Stonewall era is often the occasion for further feelings of shame.”⁶

For David Halperin, these “gains” in the legal, social, and cultural spheres, far from merely intensifying an enduring sense of backwardness among queers, barely conceal more

⁴ Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 16.

⁵ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*

sinister motives that undergird the movement toward state-sanctioned and mainstream-approved representations of “good” gays, as opposed to “bad” queers. He asks:

And who nowadays wants to feel powerless, who wants to think of himself as a victim? Who even wants to admit to vulnerability? Liberalism is over, people! It’s no longer fashionable to claim you are oppressed. Our society requires its neoliberal subjects to butch up, to maintain a cheerful stoicism in the face of socially arranged suffering. It teaches us not to blame society for our woes, but to take responsibility for ourselves—to find deep, personal meaning in our pain, and moral uplift in accepting it.⁷

Love’s work in *Feeling Backward* is particularly compelling in its reframing of the debate, moving the focus away from present concerns of gay and lesbian visibility in the eyes of the state to considering the past as a salient site of subversion and rupture. Love’s book, a key study in the investigation across the five chapters in this thesis, examines backwardness “both as a queer historical structure of feeling and as a model for queer historiography.”⁸ In both privileging representations of negative feelings and feeling backward directionally in terms of temporality, Love’s study acts as an intervention in the modes of neoliberal homonormativity. From the single spinster and bachelor of Alice McDermott’s fiction to Peggy Shaw’s and Eileen Myles’s performances of temporal drag and melancholic incorporation on the stage and page, further to the tug of the past in James McCourt’s literary *oeuvre* and Stephanie Grant’s reconstruction of contentious race relations in 1970’s Boston, this project has been indebted to the generative work of Love’s backward glance, as well as the theoretical possibilities put forward by the likes of Freeman, Eng, Hirsch, Butler, and Muñoz.

In the concluding section of *Feeling Backward*, Love maps out a queer futurity that remains acutely attuned to feelings of negativity, shame, regret, isolation, and loneliness—in other words, a “backward future.”⁹ She writes:

Queers are intimately familiar with the costs of being queer—that, as much as anything, makes us queer. Given this state of affairs, the question really is not whether feelings of grief, regret, and despair have a place in transformative politics: it would in fact be impossible to imagine a transformative politics without these feelings. Nor is the question how to cultivate hope in the face of despair, since such calls tend to demand the replacement of despair with hope. Rather, the question that faces us is how to make a future backward enough that even the most reluctant among us might want to live there.¹⁰

Shame is a structural issue not a personal burden, and feeling backward in queer historiography ensures not only that the losses of the past be incorporated into the genealogy of queerness, but also that enduring feelings of outsidersness be read against dominant

⁷ David Halperin, *How to Be Gay* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 219.

⁸ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 146.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 162-63.

discourses of gay and lesbian inclusion within the limits of a future based on “the reproductive imperative, optimism, and promise of redemption.”¹¹ Shame, after all, as Sally Munt suggests, “has political potential as it can provoke a separation between the social convention demarcated within hegemonic ideals, enabling a re-inscription of social intelligibility” and “instigating social, political and cultural agency amongst the formerly disenfranchised.”¹²

In *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame*, Munt devotes a chapter to the shaming practices at the heart of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization’s exclusion from the St Patrick’s Day parade on Fifth Avenue in New York City.¹³ “Contrary to the commonsense view,” Munt argues, “nationalisms are not invested solely in pride, sometimes they are intractably linked to feelings of shame.” Furthermore, ideologies of nationalism are embedded in practices of shaming, “shaming those it considers to be external to its real and imagined borders,” but reserving “special regard for the repudiation of its internal others, those who are considered to be supplementary to the nation’s needs, that it would prefer to make invisible or expulse.”¹⁴ Munt’s discussion of shame at the St Patrick’s Day parade fails to account for the debates without privileging Ireland as the national centre of Irish-American identity and, consequently, relying on a narrative of exile as the source for homophobia among the parade organisers, the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), and conservative voices against queer inclusion. Nonetheless, her suggestion that displays of Irish-American pride at the parade turn against abject feelings of shame, embodied in the disavowed queer collective, goes some way to unravel the effacement enacted in the celebration of group “advancement” and “progression” in terms of social and class mobility. As previously remarked in the introduction, the parades in the United States have always been a site of Irish-American demonstrations of “good” citizenship and national assimilation.

The displays of Irish-American pride and prejudice in New York and Boston reveal an unwillingness to consider the missteps in the historical narrative of the imagined community invoked in the public ritual on March 17. In Halperin’s view, performances of gay pride nowadays serve to enact the same historical effacement. Gay pride, he argues, “is incompatible with an identity defined by failure, disappointment, or defeat.”¹⁵ According to Love:

¹¹ Ibid., 147.

¹² Sally Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 4.

¹³ Ibid., chapter two, 55-77. This chapter contains fragments of Munt’s earlier essay with Katherine O’Donnell, in which both discuss the parade issue. See Sally Munt and Katherine O’Donnell, “Pride and Prejudice: Legalizing Compulsory Heterosexuality in New York’s Annual St. Patrick’s Day Parades,” *Space and Culture* 10, no. 1 (2007): 94-114, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1206331206296379>.

¹⁴ Munt, *Queer Attachments*, 55.

¹⁵ Halperin, *How to Be Gay*, 219.

One may enter the mainstream on the condition that one breaks ties with all those who cannot make it—the nonwhite and the nonmonogamous, the poor and the genderdeviant, the fat, the disabled, the unemployed, the infected, and a host of unmentionable others. Social negativity clings not only to these figures but also to those who lived before the common era of gay liberation—the abject multitude against whose experience we define our own liberation.¹⁶

This evocative final line in the passage from Love's *Feeling Backward*—"the abject multitude against whose experience we define our own liberation"—speaks specifically to queer subjects, yet its interpretative reach is not contained to the experiences of queers alone. Thus, such a denigration of social negativity accounts for what Munt calls "a defensive retrenchment into pride" in her discussion of the St Patrick's Day parade issue.¹⁷

In her conclusion, Love cites a passage from Muñoz's *Disidentifications*, in which he relates a joke he and a friend tell each June, the season of gay pride parades, that hinges on the replacement of pride with shame. Muñoz writes:

This parade, unlike the sunny gay pride march, would be held in February. Participants would have to deal with certain restrictions if they were to properly engage in the spirit of gay shame day: Loud colors would be discouraged; gay men and lesbians would instead be asked to wear drab browns and grays. Shame marchers would also be asked to carry signs no bigger than a business card. Chanting would be prohibited. Parade participants would be asked to parade single file. Finally, the parade would not be held on a central city street but on some backstreet, preferably by the river. We have gotten a lot of laughs when we narrate this scenario. Like many gags, it is rooted in some serious concerns. Although we cannot help but take part in some aspects of pride day, we recoil at its commercialism and hack representation of gay identity. When most of the easily available and visible gay world is a predominantly white and male commercialized zone (the mall of contemporary gay culture), we find little reason to be "proud."¹⁸

For Love, this "gay shame parade" is an ideal model of "backwards activism."¹⁹ If the onwards march of the dominant St Patrick's Day parades in New York and Boston signal the "progressive" move of the Irish in America, perhaps what is needed is a counterparade that employs the strategies of this backward activism Love identifies in Muñoz's gloomy camp reterritorialisation of the gay pride parade. Indeed, as Munt points out, there is much to unite the historical impetus of both the St Patrick's Day parades and the gay pride parades in the United States, each embedded in histories of exclusion and, more recently, in networks of consumer capitalism.²⁰ Elsewhere, Richard K. Herrell has traced the influence of Chicago's

¹⁶ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 10.

¹⁷ Munt, *Queer Attachments*, 56.

¹⁸ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 111.

¹⁹ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 152.

²⁰ Munt, *Queer Attachments*, 62.

ethnic parades, particularly the St Patrick's Day parade, on the invention and evolution of the city's gay pride parade.²¹ The recent addition of OUT@NBCUniversal, the company's LGBT and Straight Ally Employee Alliance, to the Fifth Avenue parade evidences the growing commercialisation of both Irish and LGBT identity in the United States.

The annual protests held by the now defunct ILGO and the still-active Irish Queers group, however, form at least part of Love's backward activism, being both reminders to the Irish-American community of the "abject multitude" against whose experience heterosexual Irish America defines its own liberation and as political expressions of on-going queer marginalisation within the imagined Irish-American community. This circuit of shame has been utilised by the queer Irish groups protesting their continued exclusion from the public displays of Irish cultural pride in the United States. Eileen Myles was part of these annual protests, and their participation in the resistance against the homophobia of the parade organisers brought about an Irish-American identity based on the convergence of a past and present entwined in feelings of shame that nonetheless produces a powerful political agency:

I was part of a group called ILGO, which is the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization and it was about letting gay people march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade and that was so much about confronting my own past ... And so, when we stood there and pointed our fingers at the cops and said, "Shame, shame, shame, shame," I could throw my voice out there with everybody else in a way that I'd never felt before and it was really great ... I always thought if there is such a thing as activism, that's what my work is.²²

In Myles's recollection, the signs of shame are reversed, directed towards those who serve to maintain the exclusion of queer bodies from the sanctified space of the parade's physical and symbolic boundaries. This is not merely a defensive rebuttal, however; in turning pride into shame, ILGO clings to its own attachment to negative feelings of exclusion and calls out the sense of shame in which Irish-American homophobia (and American homophobia more generally) is entrenched. More than this, though, Myles admits that such backward activism, embedded in notions of shame and exclusion, is central to their own literary production. As this thesis has shown, in Myles's writing, as well as in the work of each of the figures explored, feeling backward can be both a way to confront negative affect and a means through which to propose a schema for challenging present modes of social, sexual, cultural, and political collectivity. While Myles and Shaw wear the traces of historical and psychic losses across their bodies, Grant's Ann Ahern embodies the historical failure of Irish-African-American collaboration and connection.

²¹ Richard K. Herrell, "The Symbolic Strategies of Chicago's Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade," in *Gay Culture in America: Essays from the Field*, ed. Gilbert Herdt (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 225-52.

²² Eileen Myles, Interview by Brittini Hayes, March 30, 2012, transcript of video recording, Documenting Lesbian Lives Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA, 37-38.

Since shame itself can be transposed and turned into the material for social and political transformation, an exploration of how such negative feeling is adopted in the emotional landscape of queer Irish-American literature and culture can offer new ways of thinking about Irish-American identity more generally. If the dominant narrative of Irish-American identity privileges the “progressive” story of embourgeoisement, then a project that brings queer shame, failure, isolation, and exclusion to the forefront unlocks complementary narratives of Irish-American disappointment and loss. The five chapters in this thesis have each engaged with backwardness as both a structure of feeling and as a tool of queer historiography. Rather than antithetical to one another, queerness and Irishness in these works, from McDermott and McCourt to Myles, Shaw, and Grant, converge temporally, spatially, and emotionally, producing queer cultural work that draws on Irish-American identity as a crucial category through which to consider issues of the past and their continued place in the present.

In *Feeling Backward*, Love endorses a backward future, while in *Cruising Utopia* Muñoz maps out a terrain of futurity that is anchored not in the here and now but in the “then and there.” While Love is sceptical of utopian projects for their insistence on overriding despair in the history of queerness, Muñoz declares that disappointment is a key component in the construction of queer futurity. As he puts it, “the negative becomes the resource for a certain mode of queer utopianism.”²³ In order to illustrate this point, Muñoz calls on Myles. He revisits the final scene of Myles’s *Chelsea Girls*, in which Eileen works as an assistant to the American poet James Schuyler, who has been living in the Chelsea Hotel in New York. In Eileen’s interaction with the ageing poet, Muñoz identifies the “anticipatory illumination of the utopian” that, far from emerging from simple euphoric affirmation, “is filled with all sorts of bad feelings, moments of silence and brittleness.” Yet, through the negativity in the encounter, Muñoz observes something else: “a surplus that is manifest in the complexity of their moments of contact.”²⁴ The musical relationality described in Myles’s story, for Muñoz, exemplifies the blueprint for queer utopianism.

Love’s backwardness and Muñoz’s utopianism share a common interest in finding in the past material with which to arouse present social, cultural, political, and sexual ideologies into crisis in the hope of imagining alternative ways of being and becoming both in the past and future. “We must vacate the here and now for a then and there,” Muñoz concludes.²⁵ The here and now out of which the works in this thesis emerge—of AIDS in McCourt’s *Time Remaining*, of enduring racial inequalities in Shaw and Grant’s work, and of the melancholic

²³ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 185.

remains of class disappointment in Myles's writing—are abandoned temporarily in a temporal shift that looks to the past for both the alternatives to and the conditions of the not-yet-queer present. Speaking backward enacts a form of cultural and political activism that reroutes the path of futurity and produces the tools with which to look forward.

Looking Forward

The discursive limits of this project, while necessary, have, nonetheless, produced their own exclusions. In this final section of the conclusion, it would be useful to gesture toward future projects that have emerged during the research of this thesis. First and foremost, there remains no comprehensive critical study of any one of the authors examined in this thesis. Their prominent and celebrated roles in their respective cultural and literary milieu alone should warrant in-depth analyses and investigation. Whether in the form of a literary volume, a singular study, or critical volume of essays, these influential figures, particularly McDermott, McCourt, Shaw, and Myles, should inspire enough interest to produce extended explorations of their cultural output, some of which extends over the past fifty years.

While much of the literature explored in this thesis creates temporal shifts and offers imaginative reconstructions of the past, namely from the embryonic years of the twentieth century up to the more recent past, cultural forms embedded in that past, *in situ*, have yet to be considered within Irish-American scholarship. Indeed, the continued neglect of queer Irish-American cultural forms in general means that the ways in which critical studies can engage with these productions are undefined and, consequently, abundant. Imaginative constructions of the past in contemporary literature and culture are, as this thesis has outlined, significant for many reasons, least of all because members of an older generation of queers are the few who can recall the social, cultural, and sexual systems of the past which are unknown to many today. More than this, though, as creative reconstructions of these pasts, the work explored herein reveals the ways in which the past is both useful for and endures in memory and as a ghostly presence in the present. Limited to a study of literature and culture emerging in the early 1970s and flourishing since the 1980s, the selected timeframe of this thesis has necessarily left unexamined, despite regularly drawing on, the historical and cultural environments of earlier periods. For this reason, looking further backward provides one salient site of future critical study.

As Kathryn Conrad points out in her essay on homosexual exclusions in expressions of Irish identity at the St Patrick's Day parades in New York, the queer exclusions serve to assert "that no women who came to work in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia in the

nineteenth century were lesbians; that no Irish-American priests or nuns are gay or lesbian; that the whole history of Irish emigration to the USA is not already inextricably bound up with gay and lesbian history.”²⁶ The history of the Irish role in the evolution of homosexual identity in the late nineteenth century and the emergence of gay and lesbian identities in the twentieth century remains an untouched topic. George Chauncey’s work on the “City of Bachelors,” as explored in the first chapter of this thesis provides a significant point of departure in such a project. In the vast collection of letters and memoirs in his *Emigrants and Exiles*, Kerby Miller makes no mention of same-sex desire or relationships in the period of late-nineteenth-century Irish immigration to the United States.

Trans Irish-American playwright, Terence Diamond, an active contributor to the WOW Café Theater and former member of the ILGO, imagined such impossible desire in his unpublished play, *Rose Toibin*, performed at WOW in 2003 and 2004. Diamond’s play is set in 1840 and the present day, switching between two interconnected tales: the story of an Irish domestic servant, Rose Toibin, and her sexual and romantic relationship with a fellow female servant in the home of an affluent Dutch family and the present affair of university professor Charlotte, whose lesbian entanglement with a colleague reopens the hidden history of Toibin.²⁷ The question is whether literary or historical evidence of such same-sex relations among Irish immigrants exists. If homosexual desire dipped into an underground, albeit profoundly flourishing, scene, as Chauncey shows, a literary approach that is sensitive to reading coded signs might offer a new perspective on expressions and representations of sexuality and gender in the late nineteenth century in fiction, poetry, plays, and personal letters.

Moving toward the early-to-mid decades of the twentieth century, as George Chauncey, John D’Emilio, and Allan Bérubé, among others, have shown, the Stonewall rebellion in 1969 did not activate a newly-formed scene of queer subcultural and sexual practices, nor did the events in June of that year create the modern gay and lesbian movement. Rather, the political and social networks thriving in the early part of the century laid the groundwork for future collectivity in the early 1970s, even within the stringent, suffocating environment of the Cold War and its comingling Red and Lavender Scares, McCarthy’s witch hunts, and the narrowing proscriptions which funnelled appropriate performances of gender and sexuality into the heterosexual family cell in the wake of the war’s disorientating effects.

²⁶ Kathryn Conrad, “Queer Treasons: Homosexuality and Irish National Identity.” *Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (2001): 133, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380010012630>.

²⁷ Theresa M. Diamond, *Rose Toibin*, unpublished theatrical script, 2007. I am incredibly grateful to Diamond for sending me the unpublished theatrical script of his play. For an article in which Diamond traces the origins and issues of the play, see Davida Singer, “Intimacy and Struggle Among Irish Women,” *The Villager*, March 17-23, 2004, http://thevillager.com/villager_46/intimacyandstruggle.html.

The Second World War was such a significant event in the consolidation of gay and lesbian groups that D'Emilio has argued that "World War II created something of a nationwide coming out experience."²⁸ World War II was also a crucial turning point in the image of Irish-American identity. "After 1945," Fanning writes, "the G.I. Bill of Rights provided higher education and a leg up to solid middle-class status for thousands of Irish Americans, many of whom then moved from the old city neighborhoods out to the suburbs."²⁹ Similarly, Lawrence J. McCaffrey declares that "Irish America's greatest progress came after World War II."³⁰

Indeed, McCourt's Odette O'Doyle claims to have been on the frontline during the Second World War, and was thereafter a beneficiary of the Government's financial and education reforms: "I was a G.I. Billy who speed-read," she tells her late-night travel companion, Danny Delancey, in her tales of bygone times.³¹ A largely forgotten author who deals precisely with these issues is the Irish-American novelist John Horne Burns. Born in Andover, Massachusetts, in 1916, Burns is most known for his 1947 novel, *The Gallery*, a series of vignettes capturing the voices of military personnel and civilians in Allied-occupied Naples and North Africa during the war. Burns eventually died an alcoholic and struggling writer, but his work provides an unexplored perspective on the complexities of national and ethnic identity, sexuality, and Catholicism. His biography and literary works place queerness at the centre of an Irish-American war narrative.³²

The personal and creative trajectories of both Myles and Shaw converge continuously throughout their careers as cultural workers in New York City. As Terence Diamond evidences, the influence of Irish queer issues bleeds into the work performed at the WOW Café Theater, a key site of lesbian and trans cultural output since Shaw and Weaver established the venue in the 1980s. Myles has been an active contributor to this scene since its inception, as this thesis has shown. A clearly productive future study should situate both Shaw and Myles within a wider network of Irish lesbian, trans, and queer authors and cultural figures central to the intersecting performance, poetry, and literary scenes of New York City, suggesting the interaction between Irishness and queer identity as a generative site of production. Furthermore, a study of lesbian literature from the 1970s and 1980s to the present

²⁸ John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 24.

²⁹ Fanning, *The Irish Voice in America*, 312.

³⁰ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Textures of Irish America*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 172.

³¹ James McCourt, *Time Remaining* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 75.

³² Originally published in 1947, Burns's *The Gallery* was more recently published by the *New York Review of Books* in 2004. For an insightful biography of the author's life, see David Margolick, *Dreadful: The Short Life and Gay Times of John Horne Burns* (New York: Other Press, 2013). "Every page is a little queer, at least to an initiated reader," writes the author Edmund White in a review of Margolick's book that reads more like an homage to the long-dead Burns: Edmund White, "The Lost Novelist," review of David Margolick's *Dreadful*, *New York Review of Books*, August 15, 2013, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/08/15/john-horne-burns-lost-novelist/>.

would extend such a project, and even expand it out to include several disparate geographical locations across the United States. The place of this thesis has been on the East coast of the United States, the contested cartography of the St Patrick's Day parade conflicts. There is, however, no centre of Irish-American life and identity, and while this project has focused on the, admittedly, familiar terrain of the New York and Boston areas, Irish-American scholarship more generally has much work to do in uncovering the multiplicities of regional Irish-American identities. Irish America as an imagined place is actually a polymorphously perverse web of overlapping and divergent identity positions. While her survey is at times reductive and essentialising, Sally Barr Ebest, in *The Banshees*, has at least provided a catalogue of American lesbian writers whose work could—and, indeed, some do—engage with the complexities of being an Irish queer in America.³³

While McCourt's *Time Remaining* is a significant Irish-American articulation of the emotional and cultural effects of AIDS, it does not exist within a literary and cultural vacuum. The relationship between AIDS and Irishness in America remains to be examined. A study of AIDS and Irish America might include McCourt's *Time Remaining*, alongside the works of other queer Irish-American authors, such as Richard McCann's *Mother of Sorrows*, Patrick Ryan's *Send Me*, or Mart Crowley's 1993 play, *For Reasons that Remain Unclear*, and even Martin Sixsmith's journalistic novel, *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee*, adapted for the screen in 2013.³⁴ Indeed, it would have to consider the ways Irishness has been represented in texts written by American cultural figures outside the identification of "Irish American." Pace Christopher Dowd, such a study of Irishness in wider American cultural productions provides greater insight into the history of Americanness more broadly, as well as into the specific

³³ See Sally Barr Ebest, *The Banshees: A Literary History of Irish American Women Writers* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 135. Ebest's comprehensive list includes eighteen works from nine lesbian writers published between 1981 and 1988. While authors such as Maureen Brady and Patricia Murphy have written on the intersections of lesbian desire and Irish-American identity, some of the featured writers in Ebest's list are merely mentioned without further discussion. Whether these lesbian authors with Irish-sounding names (Nisa Donnelly, Diana McRae, and Evelyn Kennedy) render in their texts a lesbian Irish-American identity is unclear, and Ebest's decision to include these figures based on assumed Irish background creates its own host of problems, least of all an essentialising of both ethnic and sexual identity.

³⁴ See Richard McCann, *Mother of Sorrows* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 2005). Patrick Ryan, *Send Me* (New York: Dial Press, 2007). Mart Crowley, *For Reasons That Remain Unclear* in *The Collected Plays of Mart Crowley* (New York: Alyson Books, 2009), 323-83. Martin Sixsmith, *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee: A Mother, A Son and a Fifty-Year Search* (London: Pan Books, 2009). McCann's "My Mother's Clothes: The School of Beauty and Shame," later republished in *Mother of Sorrows* had appeared alongside McCourt's "I Go Back to the Mais Oui" in *Men on Men 2: Best New Gay Fiction*. ed. George Stambolian (New York: Plume, 1988), 13-31. In fact, McCourt reviewed McCann's book of stories for *Gay City News* in 2005, writing, "I am telling you that in the Irish tradition of the told-tale, McCann a recognized and accomplished poet, succeeds in a memorable way, and entirely though what are today called language strengths, in a strong, authoritative, yet kindly voice, letting that voice, in spare telling ... make "Mother of Sorrows" a success." See James McCourt, "Spare Portraits of Family Life," *Gay City News*, June 1, 2005, http://gaycitynews.nyc/gcn_421/spareportraitsoffamily.html.

figuration of Irishness in the United States.³⁵ Included within this canon are William Hoffman's *As Is*, first produced in 1985 and heralded as one of the first major plays to confront the growing epidemic, whose co-leading character happens to be Irish,³⁶ and Tony Kushner's *Angels in America*, whose HIV-positive WASPy Prior Walter tells his nurse how he refuses to go to the funeral of a friend who was Irish Catholic for fear of having to see the body in the open casket.³⁷ To these, a cultural study of AIDS and Irish America would embrace Irish émigré narratives, from the St. Patrick's Day parade debates of the 1990s and its place in American AIDS activism back to Mary Mallon, or "Typhoid Mary," in the early twentieth century, a case that launched the enduring social hygiene rhetoric at play during the AIDS crisis and still ongoing.³⁸

In an essay written to illuminate the less explored annals of Irish-American social history, of which the place of genealogy is central, Marion Casey moves beyond census and civil records to less familiar historical resources which reveal the experiences of life and death among the Irish in America. Oral history, she argues, could be crucial in guiding research on the practices of mourning and burial traditions.³⁹ The future of the study of Irish-American social history, Casey continues, relies on "mining a reservoir of untapped sources, such as the forgotten necrologies in the back pages of the *Journal of the American Irish Historical*

³⁵ Christopher Dowd, *The Construction of Irish Identity in American Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 15.

³⁶ William M. Hoffman, *As Is* (New York: Vintage, 1985). One half of the leading couple in the play is named Rich Farrell, and the text makes frequent reference to his and his brother's Catholicism.

³⁷ Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, Part One; Millennium Approaches* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1992), 74. In act three, scene three, Prior tells his nurse, Emily, "a friend died two days ago of bird tuberculosis; bird tuberculosis; that scared me and I didn't go to the funeral today because he was an Irish Catholic and it's probably open casket and I'm afraid of ... something, the bird tuberculosis or seeing him or ... So I guess I'm doing OK. Except for of course I'm going nuts" (ibid.). While short, Kushner's addition of an Irish Catholic dead from an AIDS-related illness emphasizes the widespread reach of death among young gay men, and the image of an open casket instills a sense of dread and disbelief in the play's audience, readers, and Prior.

³⁸ For discussions on the case of Mary Mallon, the construction of "Typhoid Mary" as an identity, and how both her Irishness and unruly gender contributed to public opinion on this image, see Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public's Health* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) and Priscilla Wald, "Cultures and Carriers: 'Typhoid Mary' and the Science of Social Control," *Social Text* 15, no. 3 & 4 (Autumn/Winter, 1997): 181-214, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466739>. Leavitt's study examines the afterlife of Typhoid Mary in narratives of HIV/AIDS since the 1980s and provides an anthology of cultural forms which carry the trope of this nineteenth-century contagious character in the image of marginalised HIV-infected groups in more contemporary times (202-25). As she points out in her book, when the medical community and the media invented "Patient Zero" as the contaminated body from which the infection supposedly spread, the individual in question, Gaetan Dugas, a French-Canadian flight attendant, suffered the same stigma as Mary Mallon in the preceding century (235-36). In his polemic against Randy Shilts's egregious witch hunt of Dugas as the origin of HIV in North America in *And the Band Played On*, Douglas Crimp asks, "Is this not, in fact, the recounting of a story that we already know? the story of Typhoid Mary?" See "Randy Shilts's Miserable Failure," in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 123-24.

³⁹ As already explained in chapter two, oral history has become a key strategy of recovery and preservation in Irish-American academic studies in the United States (Glucksman Ireland House and Queens College in New York, for instance).

Society.⁴⁰ Family genealogy for queer people, however, often serves as a measure of exclusion and omission rather than recovery and inclusion. Adding to this, who makes it into the necrologies of established Irish-American journals and periodicals hinges on renown and respectability. Against this dominant necrology of the adored dead, Irish-American scholarship would be richly enhanced by focusing on the narratives of the occluded, ignored, and disreputable dead of its imagined community.

An untapped resource in the history of Irish-American life and death is the obituaries of those lost to AIDS-related illnesses since the early 1980s. Digitized and accessible, the *Bay Area Reporter's* AIDS obituaries reveal the lives of many Irish and Irish Americans cut short by the epidemic since its emergence. Obituaries perform the task of tracing a queer Irish and Irish-American diaspora in ways other sources are unable to. The significance of a study of Irish AIDS necrologies is evident in Michael Bronski's commentary on the genre:

But despite the terrors of writing and reading obits, there is also the satisfaction, however incomplete, that something is being done. Someone's life has been noted. Some attention is being paid. Someone else may read and understand a little more of how large, how inclusive and diverse the gay world is. Most importantly, though, it is the very act of doing something, anything, in the face of AIDS that matters.⁴¹

AIDS obituaries not only helpfully record collectivity among queer communities. As Bridget Fowler has shown, obituaries produce the very collectivity for which they are imagined to account.⁴² In addition to obituaries, a similar tapestry of commemoration and memorialisation, the NAMES AIDS Quilt, provides an additional resource for tracing a queer Irish community in life and death.⁴³ These historical resources are literary texts, and, thus, can be counted toward a larger literary study of AIDS and the Irish diaspora.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Marion R. Casey, "Family, History, and Irish America," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 4 (Summer 2009): 114.

⁴¹ Michael Bronski, "AIDS, Art and Obits," in *Personal Dispatches: Writers Confront AIDS*, ed. John Preston (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 166. For additional commentaries on the significance of obituaries in accounting for the effects of the AIDS epidemic, see Horacio N. Roque Ramírez, "Gay Latino Histories/Dying to Be Remembered," in *Beyond El Barrio: Everyday Life in Latina/o America*, ed. Gina M. Pérez, Frank A. Guridy, and Adrian Burgos (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 103-28 and Dagmawi Woubshet, *The Calendar of Los: Race, Sexuality, and Mourning in the Early Era of AIDS* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), chapter two, "Archiving the Dead: AIDS Obituaries and Final Innings," 57-84.

⁴² Bridget Fowler, *The Obituary as Collective Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁴³ For a singular study of the AIDS Quilt project and a queer Irish diaspora, see Gisele Eugenia O'Connell, "Cultural and Political Geographies of the AIDS Crisis in Ireland" (MLitt diss., Maynooth University, 2017), 72-79, <http://eprints.maynoothuniversity.ie/8766/> Robert Dawidoff, in his chapter, "The NAMES Project," in *Personal Dispatches*, 153-60, writes on the political efficacy and emotional impact of the AIDS Quilt. For a further suggestive commentary on the narrative voice and perspective of such memorial practices and forms as the obituary and quilt, see Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's chapter, "White Glasses," in *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), 264-65.

⁴⁴ Judith Butler, for instance, has referred to "the genre of the obituary" when speaking about the politics of mourning and the effacement of queer lives. See "Violence, Mourning, Politics," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 4, no. 1 (2003): 20, EBSCOhost.

The last chapter of this thesis contributes to the wider and on-going discussion of Irish whiteness and relations between the Irish in America and other racialised groups with which they interact, socially and sexually. There remains much work to be done in this area, particularly in the current climate of increased anti-black violence and racism, and the troubling intersection of white supremacy and Irishness embodied in the Blue Lives Matter movement. Both Shaw and Grant are keenly attuned to these discourses circulating in the American media. What needs to be further explored is how literature and cultural forms more widely have represented interracial intimacies, cross-racial collaboration, and the Irish role in either perpetuating or challenging the systemic structures of racial oppression in the United States. While Grant proves that queerness can fail to offer such a disruption in the conditions of cross-racial encounters, her book nonetheless calls for an Irish-American identity that both remembers its own marginalisation in American history and confronts its race privilege in contemporary culture. Only then will supportive rather than appropriated forms of cross-racial political alliance be productive.

Crucially, it is the backward glance integral to Grant's narrative that makes these assertions relevant to the present in order to conceive of a then and there not yet imagined in the here and now. As this thesis has made clear, such a backward look has been integral to much of the work produced by the writers presented herein. Future projects of queer Irish-American literary, cultural, and historical studies might follow in the lead of this thesis and its backward glance, observing such explorations, to further cite Muñoz, "as necessary modes of stepping out of this place and time to something fuller, vaster, more sensual, and brighter."⁴⁵ If narratives of Irishness in the United States and elsewhere are produced alongside and through constructions of gender and sexual identities, then a questioning of the structures which give meaning to those identities and offer legitimacy to their place in the world is a critical opportunity to reimagine modes and motifs of "Irishness" fashioned in the cultural realms of literature and culture. This thesis has been one step in the direction of this engagement with Irish-American culture and identity. Far from definitive, this thesis provides a point from which the polymorphously perverse nature of Irishness and Irish identity in the United States can be viewed, torqued, challenged, and queered in profuse ways.

⁴⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 189.

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