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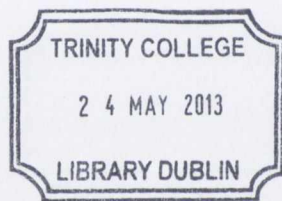
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Escaping her Biography:
Maeve Brennan's 'Nomadic Consciousness'

Dolores McLoughlin

A Thesis submitted to the School of English at the University
of Dublin, Trinity College, in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August 2012



Thesis 9823

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ABBREVIATIONS

When referring to the published works of Maeve Brennan, the following abbreviations are used throughout this thesis:

The Visitor – V

The Long-Winded Lady – LWL

The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin – SA

The Rose Garden – RG

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Summary

The introduction of the thesis makes clear the vital need for this study and explains how its methodology privileges theoretical positions over biographical narratives as it centres on close readings of some of Brennan's work and private papers. The introduction also defines what is meant by the, often ambiguous, term "autobiographical" and explains the manner in which the thesis proceeds by replacing this reductive biographical model with a more inclusive and precise one that links the postcolonial concerns of place, belonging and displacement, with contemporary ideas of spatiality, to identify a nomadic consciousness in the work of Brennan. Brennan's work is then interrelated with existential thought, which is applied in a sustained way throughout Chapter One.

Chapter One examines *The Visitor*, Brennan's first piece of writing on exile, belonging and place. It focuses, in particular, on how in this, her first work, Brennan was attentive to existentialism, considerations of location-bound identity, emigration and dislocation. It examines her reflection of Irish society in the context of the encyclical *Humani Generis, some false opinions threatening to undermine the foundation of Catholic doctrine*, promulgated by Pius XII, in 1950. This chapter is highly important in the vital way that it turns the focus away from the biographical detail and directly onto Brennan's writing, illuminating early stirrings of a nomadic consciousness.

Chapter Two moves across to America and examines Brennan's journalistic work, *The Long-Winded Lady*. Particular focus is given to her use of a persona and the way it may be seen as having enabled her to address issues of major concern to residents of New York City. What emerges is the manner in which Brennan discusses redevelopment and gentrification, the experience of dwelling during a prolonged period of dislocation and disruption, occurrences which would cast a long shadow on into the future of New York City. The chapter ends with a sustained examination of the trope of *flânerie* and the *flâneuse*

in Brennan's writing and calls on a wide range of theorists to open up Brennan's work beyond limiting, critical viewpoints and simplistic readings of her sketches for *The New Yorker*.

Chapter Three returns to Ireland and expands the scope of the first chapter by engaging with Brennan's *Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* and Joyce's idea of the claustrophobic horror of Irish life. Particular focus is placed on Brennan's engagement with the socio-cultural character of early twentieth century urban and rural Ireland, the conditions of early independence and the resulting position for women. Sustained close readings of her stories broaden the study to include her poetic and realistic representation of life in mid-twentieth century Ireland and the importance of a sense of place in her writing.

Chapter Four posits an engagement with the collection, *The Rose Garden*. The chapter moves through a close consideration of the Irish domestic servant in both America and Ireland. In terms of its transnational impetus and theoretical approach, it brings to light a demonstration of subaltern agency and facilitates further elaboration on the various aspects of Brennan's discussion of place and belonging and her engagement with postmodernity.

The Conclusion expands on Brennan, a figure sparking interdisciplinary debate, gesturing, beyond the thesis, to other types of contemporary and academic engagements with her work. It situates the research within what may be seen as the beginnings of a new phase in Brennan studies, as well as setting out the hope that, through its inclusive and wide-ranging approach, it will broaden the study of Brennan beyond reductive binaries and restrictive categories.

Introduction

“What is this place where Chaos stretches and sits down and makes himself at home? We live here, and we become part of the mystery” ~*Maeve Brennan*

While there has been a considerable revival of interest in the work of Maeve Brennan in recent years much of the criticism concerning her written material remains biographically-oriented. Critical studies of Brennan’s writing can be found in Angela Bourke 2004, Patricia Coughlan 2004, Anne Peters 2005, Heather Ingman 2007, 2009, Abigail Palko 2007, 2010, Madeleine Lyes 2008 and John Menaghan 2008. Paradoxically, because Brennan remains such an enigmatic personality, considerations of her work continually focus, to a large extent, on the memoir or autobiographical impulse of her writing. However, the elements of her work do not have to be read in a biographical way and it is flawed to think that everything in Brennan’s writing is an enhanced record of the author’s own experience. While her work does indeed appeal to nostalgia for mid-century glamour, calling up images of the genteel Irish woman and the fashionable magazine writer, these present less than a complete picture. Notwithstanding that Brennan’s cosmopolitan world was not the same as today’s, her writing anticipates current issues surrounding emigration, settlement, and concerns unfolding in a world where “Chaos stretches and sits down” (*LWL* 142). Repositioning Brennan as emigrée and journalist enables us to think about ways in which her writing engages with debates concerning the individual in today’s globalised world, the human experience of dislocation and the meaning of belonging. Central to any understanding of Brennan is the recognition that she used her writing to identify with the events shaping the changing nature of both Dublin and Manhattan, specifically, their cultures and the impact of these locations on Irish and American society during periods of immense social change. As a journalist and writer, she recognised her role in protecting the material and spatial

manifestations of history. This thesis argues Brennan's writing contributes to an increased understanding of both Dublin and her adoptive home, New York City, in the mid-twentieth century, leaving behind her an enhanced awareness of the cities and the lives of those who lived there.

Upon reviewing existing studies on Brennan, one quickly perceives a sense of interpretive strain. While some readers herald her work as an instrument in the solidification and advancement of a specific artistic practice, Edward Albee claims "to mention her in the company of Chekhov and Flaubert is only proper" (*V* Back Cover), yet others overlook this aspect of her work. Indeed Brennan's "genius", her "meticulous, disturbing and unforgettable" fiction, (*V* Back Cover) is simultaneously, and often with considerable accord, underscored as a lack of success in mediating many of these conventions of responsiveness and intelligence. Reading Brennan as if her writing reflects the inability "to develop a rooted grown up life" (Bourke, 2005: 218), to homesickness, or to the enigma of her "disappearance into the shadows" (Boylan, 2006: xiii), imposes a constraint that needs to be corrected and exceeded. We need look no further to see evidence of this interpretation than Angela Bourke's *Maeve Brennan: Homesick at The New Yorker* (2004), the only long monograph on Brennan that has been published and to date the most comprehensive, which is the foundation for most of the existing criticism on Brennan. Bourke recognises Brennan as a woman who "wrote some of the finest and most widely read English prose of the twentieth century" (Bourke, 2005: 1). Moreover, Bourke also notes approvingly, as have other critics (Peters 2005, Ingman 2007, Palko 2007, 2009, Lyes 2008, Menaghan, 2008), that Brennan's way of seeing was with a trained, observant eye marked by imperatives generally assigned to anthropologists, folklorists, sociologists and geographers (Bourke, 2005: 2). Yet she appears perturbed by Brennan's critical engagement, especially by the manner in which Brennan's characters, "stories and

conversations [are] preserved in the amber of a troubled nostalgia”, linking this “nostalgia” to “homesickness” and the “tragedy” marked by mental illness (Bourke, 2005: 2).

Heather Ingman also claims Brennan’s writing “may have been prompted by an autobiographical impulse” (Ingman, 2009: 175). Ingman is unsettled by the fact that Brennan did not diverge from “the genre that predominated at *The New Yorker*”, which was “reminiscence” (Ingman, 2009: 174). She maintains that “Brennan’s early short stories dealing with her Dublin childhood suited *The New Yorker’s* emphasis on realism and setting, as well as the personal interest of Brennan’s editor, William Maxwell, in autobiographical fiction” (Ingman, 2009: 174). Certainly no one could deny that Brennan’s narratives are, as Ingman appreciatively writes, concerned with “Dublin childhood” (Ingman, 2009: 174), especially her novella *The Visitor* which recreates a return to a childhood home. Additionally, some of her narratives do seem to be almost “as much memoir as stories” (Ingman, 2009: 174). Ingman, like Bourke, also notes the use of “borrowed characters and names from Brennan’s own family” (Ingman, 2009: 175). Significantly, she identifies how Brennan’s writing conveys “the repressive nature of Irish society at this time”, including the internalising of “guilt-filled religion” and a “chilling imitation of adult repressive reactions”, which no critic could argue with (Ingman, 2009: 175). Notwithstanding the scholarship of both Ingman’s and Bourke’s criticism, much may be added to extend their study of Brennan and her work. A work in progress presentation at the Project Arts Centre, in October 2011, provided a glimpse into a play, *The Talk of the Town*, written by Emma Donoghue and directed by Annabelle Comyn. The “Maeve Brennan Project” explores the life and work of Brennan and draws heavily on Bourke’s biography. Using some of Brennan’s contributions to *The New Yorker* magazine and her Dublin stories, Donoghue and Comyn appear once again to focus on the

connection between Brennan's childhood and her position as a glamorous American writer. The five-piece ensemble which appeared on stage reading from scripts, enacted a few snippets from which could be identified fragments of stories from *The Rose Garden* Collection and *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* intertwined with cameos of Brennan as a cosmopolitan writer at *The New Yorker*, struggling to find a verb for a piece she was writing. Donoghue and Comyn discussed the ongoing development of the piece and the manner in which Bourke's biography acts not only as the inspiration to their drama, but as background material to their production. Both Donoghue's and Comyn's positioning of Brennan as a witty, yet tragic woman, is representative of the approach to Brennan. This mix of praise and reservation, typical of Brennan's reception, work jointly to identify certain aspects of Brennan's fiction that make her reception uncommonly difficult to conceive, describe and evaluate, while also making the terms of appreciation and analysis unusually recalcitrant to apprehend and apply.

That Brennan's work has been considered worth reading since the publication of her first collection of short stories, *In and Out of Never Never Land* (1969), has never been doubted. However, while her interpreters have concurred with Ingman's praise, that "Brennan's achievement is substantial and, in its best moments, absolutely stunning" (Menaghan, 2008: 84), there has been a reluctance to fully engage with that achievement. In a similar manner critics have considered "Brennan's novella an extraordinarily resonant reflection of Irish women's position during the period when many young women chose emigration over the limited opportunities available to them in Ireland" (Ingman, 2009: 176), yet they have also invariably been less enthusiastic to view this work as any more than "memoir" or "autobiographical impulse". What is especially dismaying and has been echoed by almost all of Brennan's critics, is that, while reviewers have noted the power of individual stories, not only do they link her focus merely to the

“autobiographical”, but her novella *The Visitor* receives only a cursory amount of literary study, the most recent being Abigail Palko’s focussing on the intersections between Dorothy Macardle’s *The Uninvited* and *The Visitor* (2010). A dissertation by Madeleine Lyes in 2008 goes some small way towards a non-sentimental and critical reading of *The Visitor*; however, she is using Brennan’s work to support her thesis for the influence and ethos of *The New Yorker* magazine. Ellen Bryant Voigt, on the other hand, resists the temptation to focus on the more romantic elements of Brennan’s writing – as daughter of revolutionary parents, glamorous writer at *The New Yorker*, mentally ill and ultimately destitute – eschewing these vicarious details in favour of a more nuanced analysis of her writing and use of syntax in *The Springs of Affection*. Just as in her defence of women writers at *The New Yorker*, Ann Peters’ article “A Traveller in Residence: Maeve Brennan and the last days of New York” provides critical examination of some of the issues contained in Brennan’s journalistic writing.

In summary, what is perceived by the majority of Brennan’s critics is that while some elements in the study of her fiction assure an unproblematic representation for critical analysis, others interrupt such a critical assessment. Reading her work through the lens of her own biography appears to make it “equally difficult to know how to describe her key works”, while also overshadowing her “more substantial achievements” (Menaghan, 2008: 84). In other words, the minute amount of literary criticism on Brennan due to the existing compulsion to focus on the memoir or autobiographical impulse of her *oeuvre*, not only renders her writing provincial, with no examination of what that provincial aspect might reveal, but it also obscures many of the possibilities for her contribution to literary influence. In addition, the romanticization of Brennan as a figure, the creation of the allure surrounding her, further contributes to the inadequacy of her reception and this becomes a type of endlessly repeated preliminary engagement for

critics who do take her up. Consequently this approach to the work of Brennan maintains a lack of sustained critical range that is precisely what is needed to expand the interpretive field of this writer. It is particularly this extra charge that lends to her work its most crucial lack of penetrating influence, constitutes its most baffling conundrum and gives to Brennan's work its most protean strength and allure, which is not sufficiently explained by existing exegesis.

Reading Brennan as if everything in her writing is an enhanced record of her own experience denies the intersections which, when combined, create a more complex understanding of the less familiar and more provocative nuances in her work. Placing these elements together reveals some of the less transparent and potentially subversive currents available in Brennan's fiction. Evaluating Brennan's fictional narratives across an ideological spectrum bounded by cultural ideologies of nationalism (pursuant to Brennan's family's fight for independence) at one end, and more progressive but coded feminism at the other, interpretations range from those that regard Brennan's writing as a veiled approach to memoir, to those that steer a middle course between feminist theory and cultural theory. Arguably, such readings carry considerable weight and have done much to stimulate interest in Brennan's work. However, by interpreting Brennan's writing as being either social or semi-autobiographical, such readings make her *oeuvre* answerable to given contexts. As such, these consistently gravitate towards the regulation of the sentimental and the personal in her fiction, over and against any other prospects they may hold. In fact, it may well be this paradox which has contributed to what can only be termed an impairment of her reception.

Diverging from the biographical and taking a theoretical approach, this study examines the complete *oeuvre* of Brennan. It focuses on her engagement with, and reaction to, ideas of residence and exile and the manner in which she questions the

narrative of the traditional Irish home. Her novella *The Visitor* will be discussed at length as an explicit and striking narrative of exile and displacement, both on an individual and a social level. One of the tasks of this project is to examine Brennan's column for *The New Yorker* and her impulse to capture the essence of Manhattan; her form of translating and communicating the feelings and thoughts inspired by its fabric, which is at the heart of her magazine journalism. As many of Brennan's Irish stories deal with characters marginalised within their own community, a discussion of the exilic mind is the point of departure for the study of her short stories. This discussion is related to concepts of residence and internal exile and the constrictive religious and social morality of Ireland. Analysis will concentrate on the particular ways in which versions of displacement emerge as a primary trope in all of Brennan's writings. Close examination of her work provides evidence that this writer engages with traditional concepts of dwelling, but also extends its meaning further, strategising a mode of relationship and belonging that does not rest upon notions of home as an unchanging environment in perpetuity.

By focusing on issues of spatiality, a concept which has been extensively interpreted, and drawing upon a new geographical awareness in the work of critics such as Michel Foucault (1980), Michel de Certeau (1988), Edward Soja (1989), Henri Lefebvre (1991), and Doreen Massey (1994, 2005), I consider the role of displacement in Brennan's work together with the thoughts and reflections of a variety of philosophical and theoretical practitioners, for instance Fredric Jameson (1990), Rosi Braidotti (1994), Edward Said (2001), and Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2004). While criticism has noted the importance of specific physical locations and their imaginative and psychological implications in Brennan's writing (Bourke 2005, Menaghan 2008), relatively little attention has been paid to the complexities of space – physical, temporal, emotional, social, mental and creative – she has opened up in her fiction. Consequently,

Brennan's topography has so far been left untouched by research, her excessive concern with place, when it is not linked to the autobiographical, remains unexplored. A re-examination of her work enables us to think about ways in which her writing engages with significant debates concerning the individual in today's globalised world, the human event of dislocation and the meaning of belonging. Brennan's writing shows clearly how her geographical imagination perceived space as productive, active, and a revealing context for critical social theorisation, more accommodating of addressing wider contemporary issues of community and belonging.

This study brings together contemporary debates about identity, globalisation and the sociological perspectives contained in the work of Greg Madison (2009), together with the postcolonial feminist criticism of Caren Kaplan (2000), and Inderpal Grewal (2005), which use metaphors and ideas of space and terms like "nomad", "map", and "travel" to critique or contrast a static limiting traditional patriarchal standpoint.¹ Paul Tabori's discussion on internal exile, *The Anatomy of Exile* (1972), in concert with Michael Seidel's *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (1986), are also points of departure for this study. The postcolonial concerns of displacement of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) are interrelated with these debates to develop Brennan's use of nomadism together with a model of space in line with Soja's "thirdspace" (Soja 1996), which refuses conventional identities in favour of those formed from more complex processes, such as a historical, social and spatial nexus. The close critical analysis of the interaction and interrelation of space is accompanied by a study of the figuration of the nomad and the *flâneuse* in Brennan's writings.

¹ Caren Kaplan's understanding of "looking for some relief from the rooted realities of dailiness" and her "metaphors of travel and displacements" (Kaplan, 2000: viiii, 1), provided insight in my initial readings of Brennan's work. Additionally, Inderpal Grewal's thought on "travel and displacement – (as well as their oppositional counterparts, home and location)" (Grewal, 2005: 2) informed some of my analysis of the primary texts.

The methodology for this study is adapted from several different theoretical perspectives. It is my contention that any productive study of Brennan's work must be undertaken within an interdisciplinary framework. Therefore, Brennan's work is discussed in conversation with various theories and philosophies. Brennan obviously considered existential philosophy as valuable in terms of understanding the role of humans as agents in a fluid social setting. An enthusiastic admirer of Albert Camus, having read *The Fall* many times, she writes:

When I first read the Fall [sic], the first few times, in 1957 I realised the work was not a novel but a puzzle, constructed according to the Chinese box principle... a serious piece of work... each time you finish the book it snaps shut and you have to pry it open and start all over again each time you read it. (Brennan Papers, Box 1, FF10)

In a letter to William Shawn dated "9-17-63", Brennan describes *The Fall* as "complete in its incompleteness, self-generating, a phenomenon" (Brennan, Papers Box 1, FF1). Attentive to the ethics of Camus' existentialism, she states "There is no involvement except total involvement. There is no limit to our responsibility for one another. Nothing, not even the greatest work of art justifies the betrayal of another human being. Indifference is the worst crime" (Brennan Papers, Box 1, FF 10). Implicit in Brennan's writing is the issue which Camus is wrestling with; it resounds on several levels within her narratives. Camus, like many of his contemporaries, saw the potential flaw in existentialism. In a philosophical movement that flaunts the ultimate freedom of the individual one finds a disturbing lack of direction. In his search for ethics, Camus attempted to find whether or not there is a foothold in existentialism for a statement of "while everything is permitted, not everything is acceptable" (Oaklander, 1996: 342). *The Fall*, a work steeped in Christian imagery and Catholic symbolism, gives the impression

of a profoundly autobiographical book, which many commentators at the time of the book's publication took as a direct description of Camus' state of mind (Todd, 1997). *The Fall* questions not only the self-absorbed worldview of existentialism, but the notion of an essentially meaningless universe devoid of absolutes. In the uncertain days of the early and mid-twentieth century and the many changes being experienced by people, social institutions and nations, change was affecting the individual at every level of society. Brennan's writing demonstrates a concern for moral issues within the modern chasm of unknowing and points to the search for meaning in an increasingly meaningless world. Brennan identified with the ethics of Camus' existentialism. In a brief and undated note to William Shawn she states: "I do not think I can go on 'reading' books by people who ignore or are unaware of the existence of conscience. I think I will go mad" (Brennan Papers, Box 1, FF 3). In her letters to Shawn, Brennan expresses her views on Irish history and the work of authors such as Camus and David Stacton, in addition to her thoughts about New York City's social scene for her "Long-Winded Lady" column at *The New Yorker*.

Brennan's writing describes a changing world as it impacts on everyday lives. She reflects Martin Heidegger's opinion that there is a relation between dwelling and thinking; that there is a certain thoughtfulness necessary in dwelling. Heidegger claimed that to be capable of dwelling, man must be mindful of meaning in terms of space and location.² Mirroring Heidegger's contemplations, Brennan suggests that the individual must not only be mindful about the relation between location and space, but also about the relation of the individual to space. Her journalistic sketches show clearly that dwelling cannot properly happen if the individual is forgetful of her/his relation to the world. The

² Martin Heidegger. *Poetry, language, thought*. Trans. Albert Hofstadter. New York: Harper & Row (1971).

construction of edifices alone will not suffice; the individual must take into consideration the spaces in which they build “the relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling” (Heidegger, 1971: 335). When “a famous, good old house is torn down”, Brennan “thinks it is silly to memorialize it by putting a plaque on the concrete walls of the superstructure that takes its place” (*LWL* 2-3), for inscribed metal or stone can never capture the consideration necessary to dwelling, nor the sacredness of the existence experienced there. Brennan considers the major social and psychological changes that accompany urbanisation and the development of capitalism in America. She sees the city as Georg Simmel saw it, as “a sensorium that assaulted the urbanite with a cacophony of sights and sounds, including advertising, commodities, pedestrians, and vehicular traffic” (Lin and Mele, 2005: 2). Reflecting a general understanding of existentialism and the rise of individualism, Brennan’s work emphasises the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining his/her own development through acts of will and draws attention to the negative consequences of modernity and the onset of social problems such as crime, racism and homelessness as a result of the gentrification of New York in the 1950s. She defines belonging as the state of being accepted and feeling comfortable in a place or group or in a language. She captures the despair of leaving one’s native language, the difficulty of learning English and the effort required to pronounce “Hotpoint” instead of “Ottpoyn” (*LWL* 7) and links notions of belonging to the experience of place and space. In the sketch “They were both about Forty” (1968), Brennan describes “two full-grown-city children – middle-aged people – walking together on Sixth Avenue” (*LWL* 4), as they take new words into their mouths “like foreign foods; suspicious, acquired tastes” (Michaels, 1998: 21).

Not many ideas are both as critical and as slippery as the issue of identity. Many identity theories recognise that personal identities are socially constructed by gender, race

and ethnicity, class and sexual orientation. An example of one such identity issue is provided in *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*. In “An Attack of Hunger”, first published in 1962, Brennan focuses on a couple’s troubled marriage and specifically Rose Derdon’s struggle for identity. Defining herself exclusively as a wife and mother, Rose Derdon constructs her identity through physical representations of domesticity. The actions and objects of domesticity are shown to be stifling and oppressive, but provide a sense of control and stability that ultimately traps her into perpetuating the domestic role that society has created. Brennan’s talent as an author lies in her ability to present the inherent dualities of life through both a critical and compassionate lens, explaining the complexities of Rose’s domestic identity without condemnation or acclaim. Additionally, some theorists have found that social identity theory can be further developed to include aspects of place, with place being broadly defined as a social entity or a membership to a group providing identity. Brennan’s writing demonstrates the manner in which a place can often be associated with a certain group of people, a certain lifestyle or social status in the *The Rose Garden* collection. When taken together, these approaches to the idea of selfhood impact on our understanding of identity formation and belonging. An exploration of Brennan’s writing highlights aspects of identity issues facing mostly women, but also men, offering a fuller picture of her transatlantic contribution to the debate about the status of women in the newly formed Independent Irish State, while at the same time focusing on identity issues faced by the inhabitants of the more cosmopolitan city of New York.

This dissertation also draws on the scholarship of the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman best known for his analyses of the links between modernity and the Holocaust, and of postmodern consumerism. Bauman has monitored the changes in personal identity formation since early modern times, and has much to offer us in understanding the

formation of personal identities, modern and postmodern. While his perspective contains elements of other theorists, he offers these principles in an easily comprehensible framework. In his essay "From Pilgrim to Tourist" he claims that, while the matter of identity continues to be of concern, the postmodern dilemma with identity differs from the problem it was throughout modernity. Bauman categorises the early moderns as pilgrims, as identity builders, having a linear view of life and leaving a coherent story behind them. However, he claims the rise of individualism enticed people away from this fixed way of life, resulting in the collapse of community.³ Brennan's work also shares in this metaphor for a postmodern identity, (Bauman, 2009: 18-35); her approach is that of the traveller, who shares her space with vagabonds and strollers. The detached and capricious urban cosmopolitanism of the "postmodern... stroller" (Bauman, 2009: 27) is her excuse and explanation for being wherever she found herself. Her suitcase, "recognizable in any language", would, she judged, translate her "to everybody's satisfaction and especially to" her "own satisfaction" (*LWL* 119). Similar to Bauman, Brennan views modernity as fluid. Her writing illustrates the oscillation between freedom of choice and the experience of being tied to locality.

Corresponding to Bauman's metaphor of the tourist (Bauman, 2009: 29),⁴ Brennan implies a less linear and more rhizomatic approach to identity, which is dominant in her conception of belonging. While Brennan's mode of connection is that of a "traveller" (*LWL* 2) and not a tourist, they both represent movement and are disconnections from

³ In his essay "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity", *Questions of Cultural Identity* (ed.) Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, 2009. Bauman suggests the catchword of modernity was creation, and similarly in the case of identity. When the issue of identity entered the modern mind, he claims, it was seen from the beginning as an individual task, that of the pilgrim. It was constructed on the model of the puritan phase of reformation, which shaped generations to live as if life were a project to be advanced. The main identity-bound anxiety of modern times was the worry about durability. Whereas the catchphrase in postmodernity is recycling, its concern is with commitment and avoidance.

⁴ Additionally, "Bauman on Metaphors; A Harbinger of Humanistic Hybrid Sociology" Michael Hviid Jacobsen and Sophia Marshman, 2008, adds to the discussion of Bauman's use of metaphors for a postmodern identity.

hierarchical systems of power. Her concept of belonging mirrors the Deleuzian model, which develops a sense of belonging to many places while not having a sense of total ownership of any. It is not defined by the points it connects with, but what it becomes in the in-between or milieu that it traverses.⁵ Brennan's notion of the traveller can mix and overlap in several ways with the tourist or nomad. Given the relationship between theory (the generalised or abstract), and literature (the particular or concrete), these ideas can appear slightly speculative. Yet what is clear among these numerous theories is that identity becomes an issue for the individual when movement is involved and she/he are not sure of where they belong. These many-sided concepts also illustrate the manner in which Brennan's engagement with the topic of belonging while comprehensive and challenging, also manifested itself in an extremely progressive and contemplative manner.

While some of the features of Brennan's writing derive from nineteenth-century Realism and are rooted in a pre-modernist tradition, other elements, particularly the existential darkness that pervades narratives like *The Visitor* and *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*, "look forward to what critics like Georg Lukács and others perceive as the "ontological view of leading modernist writers" (Bullen, 2010: 21). This is a view taken by Lukács, in which man 'is by nature solitary, asocial, unable to enter into relationships with other human beings" (Lukács, 1963: 117). A form of "nomadic modernism" (Patey and Cianci, 2010: xvi),⁶ which reaches towards the fringes of

⁵ In chapter 12 of *A Thousand Plateaus*, "1227; Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine", Deleuze and Guattari distinguish the manner in which "nomads and migrants can mix in many ways, or form a common aggregate; their uses and conditions are no less distinct for that" (p. 361). They also point to the fact that their nomad is exterior to the State apparatus and does not provide a favourable terrain for religion (pp. 361-367). This concept proves particularly helpful in providing insight into the nomadic consciousness of Brennan's writing.

⁶ Drawing upon the work of critics such as Michel de Certeau, Henri Lefebvre, Arjun Appadurai, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey in their "Introduction" to *Transits: The Nomadic Geographies of Anglo-American Modernism*, Giovanni Cianci, Caroline Patey invite the reader to explore the disrupted territories of Modernism. Their study offers readings of places as diverse as William Faulkner's Mississippi, Virginia Woolf's Thames, Ford Madox Ford's Romney Marsh, W.H. Auden's islands, Christopher Isherwood's alternative Berlin and Rubén Martínez's *Transfrontera*.

postmodernism, is Brennan's attempt at something new. Her response to the void that exists at the centre of the existential experience is the development of a nomadic consciousness. The nomad is her variation of being at home in the permanent homelessness of a globalised world, her response to conventional modernist themes, to the experience of dislocation, migration, diaspora and exile. Considering the radical turbulence of mass emigration from Ireland, the often traumatic dismantlement of spatial culture, the usual distinctiveness of home and abroad, appearing blurred and confused for many emigrants, Brennan's image of the nomad seems appropriate in defining as it does the conjunction between impermanence and disrupted space. Brennan's novella *The Visitor* is an acceptance that it is no longer possible for the individual to claim the original geographical territory of home or the homogeneous peer group of family as the shelter and origin of one's sense of belonging.

The original modernist dilemma required the pursuit for new representational devices, since traditional forms of representation were no longer deemed to express what was thought of as individual, alienated identity. Metropolitan living was associated with alienation due to the ubiquitous encroachment of technology. The self was explored as something "other" to the external world and identity was affirmed through assertion of difference. However, Brennan's representation of the modern dilemma shows a bias towards a more de-centred form of modernism and anticipates what Christopher Schedler sees as the "modernist predicament". This predicament is that "of modernity itself", as the devices of modernism are used to express an individual alienated through an internalised view of the urban world (Schedler, 2002: xii-xiii). However, Schedler's "bounded" view of identity, with its emphasis on the internal world of the individual and that individual's distance from the external world, is how modernism's approach, in Fredric Jameson's

This volume of essays explores the geography of edges, borders and trails and investigates the aesthetic modes fashioned by nomadic practices.

terms, isolates the text from its historical context. The “spatial disjunction” described by Jameson in his essay “Modernism and Imperialism” is a void at the centre of First World modernism. As a result, it fails to “grasp immanently... daily life and existential experience” (Jameson, 1990: 51). Brennan, to some extent, shares this “bounded” conception of identity; however, hers is constituted in relation to the external world and through association with others, while placing an emphasis on historical context. This poses one of the difficulties in classifying Brennan’s writing, and points to the spatial disjunction that Jameson identifies in the meeting point or gap between First and Third World modernism, what Jameson terms the “changed space”, which can be transformed while still retaining “a distant family likeness” (Jameson, 1990: 60-61). Brennan’s modernism is indeed transformed, yet retains the modernist family resemblance. Consistent with Jameson’s argument that “the colonial experience is to be found at the root of western modernism” (Wurtz, 2010: 120), in that all texts must be interpreted through an understanding of their historical moment and political implications, I want to suggest that Brennan’s ‘provincial’ aspect, her representations of house and home, together with “the centrality of place and its discontent” (Towheed, 2009: 113), and her excessive concern with location are in fact focal points for understanding Brennan’s relationship to modernism.

In his *New World Modernisms*, Charles Pollard writes of how Eliot’s modernism has been revised to further the aesthetic projects of Caribbean writers like Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite. What was the modernist ideal has been reoriented; the ideal that recognised the fragmentation and diversity of contemporary culture now seeks to bring those fragments together to form new provisional, transnational cultural wholes. Referencing James Clifford, Pollard tells us that modernism has become a “traveling culture”, because it reflects the “discrepant cosmopolitanism” (Pollard, 2004: 6) of the

twentieth century. I would argue that Brennan also recasts modernism and the idea of tradition. Her nomads and beggars are illuminating points of contact between these modernisms. Brennan's story world in which people are paradoxically migratory yet rooted, international yet local, sits comfortably with Pollard's description of a New World "discrepant cosmopolitan modernism" (Pollard, 2004: 13). Brennan's sensitive balance of "the specificity of historical experience and place and a macro-interdependency" that encompasses the "local particularity", with a "cosmopolitanism that is always suspicious of its imperial tendencies" (Pollard, 2004: 6), is a version of "modernism's discrepant cosmopolitanism" (Pollard, 2004: 179). Her addendum, "A lot of poor men and women came asking at the basement door. Sometimes they sang outside first, with quick eyes searching the upper windows; or they carefully unwrapped a tin whistle or a violin and played for a while" (*V* 21-22), offers a postscript to the high modernist ideal – the clear distinction between art and mass culture. Brennan gives a mix of multiple voices, a fusion of personal anguish with historical experience, riveting imagery and layered allusiveness, all of which were the hallmarks of the literary response to modernity, while also bringing issues of the private or personal into the public arena. Brennan's nomads are welcomed; there is a home for them, just not the traditional one. Brennan plays off the modern concept of breaking with tradition while also making a preliminary encroachment on the postmodern free-for-all style. She rejects the possibility of any single focused coherent framework from which to assess and evaluate the world and culture. Her nomadic consciousness re-imagines a sense of wholeness and a response to the demands of living in a world on the cusp of moving from, what we today distinguish as, the modern and the postmodern world.

Beyond the acknowledgment of the important background of several different theoretical perspectives on this project, it will become apparent that knowledge and

insights gleaned from several disciplines will feature in the chapters ahead. The dissertation explores the manner in which Brennan anticipates, what Edward Soja terms spatiality, which includes a “thirdspace”, or space which can be both real and imagined, and has impact on both people and places. Spaces, as described by thinkers such as Soja, are physical as well as imaginary sites in which different voices converge. Soja challenges the precedence given to historicism in social theory; he discusses theorists, such as Michel Foucault, who continue to consider space as fixed, dead and un-dialectical, while his project treats space as a shaping force of social life. In a similar, albeit fictional, manner to Soja, Brennan engages with the idea of how the consequences of power relations can be hidden from view in the apparently innocent spatiality of social life. In his key work *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989), Soja argues that a postmodern reorganisation of space has emerged that has not only radically altered the way people live, but also the way individuals view the world. He observes how Western ways of seeing space have blocked from critical interrogation an interpretive geography that recognises spatiality as simultaneously a social product and a shaping force in social life. Much of Brennan’s fiction develops out of a careful watching and recording of this phenomenon as it happens. Equally, as a study of her writing proves, Brennan considers cities as important arenas for the contemplation of the existential human condition and the individual struggle for self-expression.

Space can be seen as a timeless, absolute dimension, while place might be thought of as space integrally intertwined with time. Conceived of in this way, place becomes a situated practice constructed of social relations. Such a view is phenomenological in as much as the observer is inevitably within the world being observed. This particular aspect of Brennan’s writing is discussed in detail in Chapter Two. Brennan’s collection *The Long-Winded Lady* demonstrates how place becomes animate because it is composed of

its interactions with the living beings that help to create it as it, in turn, works to create them. Such an understanding of place allows for the placement of living beings in relation to one another in such a way that new social effects may be produced. More specifically, this conception of place allows for the consideration of how a place might permit the creation of identities that are particular to it. This study both examines the manner in which Brennan's work anticipates current ideas of space and explores the individual's relationship to the modern landscape, posing questions of belonging. It looks at the extent her writing provokes questions concerning the individual in today's globalised world, questions such as: does the human individual in their search for meaning abandon the traditional notion of home altogether?; do they in fact engage with a new concept of belonging? It also probes Brennan's endeavour to portray the rootlessness of modern society as an abiding feature of a modern culture and the manner in which she makes the connection between people and place. It interrogates her understanding of the relationship between the human individual and the term 'home'; does where the individual resides sometimes collide with who they are? Brennan's writing explores the metropolis as a terrain of social inequality, from the decline and deterioration of disadvantaged and marginalised areas of New York City to the affluence of the prime spaces of Midtown Manhattan and wealthy suburban communities. She provides a window on the character of post-industrial society and the rising inequality that leads to a climate of fear. She points to the way in which urban planning of the 1950s has contributed to the plight of the socially and economically disenfranchised in New York City. Writing in the second half of the twentieth century she states "the dark shadow in New York is cast not by the past but by the future" (*LWL* 158). Similar to "The New Girls On West Forty-Ninth Street", published in September, 1967, several of Brennan's Long-Winded Lady sketches envisage a time that has yet to come.

Equally, Brennan's writing, most notably her novella *The Visitor*, along with both of the short story cycles from *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*, are very much in touch with the shift in critical theory from what Michel Foucault termed "the little tactics of the habitat... the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, in which the erosion of our lives, our time and our history occurs, the space that claws and gnaws at us" (Foucault, 1980: 23).⁷ Foucault saw history unfolding within its adherent spatiality, which he identified as community spaces and which he termed "heterotopic" (Foucault, 1986: 24). Foucault's "heterotopic" spaces of "otherness" are made up of spaces which are neither here nor there, that are simultaneously physical and mental, which can exist within the space of a phone call or the moment when we see ourselves in a mirror. In *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*, Brennan provides the intimate details of the home's interior, carefully presenting them for the reader at moments when Rose Dardon, questioning her own identity, looks in the mirror, to see how "she has become invisible" (SA 150). As Rose looks in the mirror, searching for her own reflection, the physical face she expects to see is replaced by the tangible objects of the room around her. The home is the physical manifestation of her work as a wife and mother, and the mirror reflects it is all that defines and validates her existence. In her concept of place, Brennan's social spaces also bear a resemblance to Foucault's concept of heterotopias. For example, her understanding of certain real spaces, like a home or a church, are similar to Foucault's "heterotopic" sites that relate to larger cultural structures of crisis, deviation, incompatibility, juxtaposition, compensation or community: "How can you be putting me out of the church like this?" asked Anastasia in a thin voice. "Because you are not fit to be here" (V 74-75). *The Visitor* makes a smooth, almost invisible transition from a young woman returning home seeking refuge, attempting to

⁷ In 'The Eye of Power', published as a preface to Jeremy Bentham, *La Panoptique* (1977) and reprinted in *Power/Knowledge* (Foucault, 1980, ed. Gordon, p. 149).

make peace with the past, to a discussion which incriminates the Church, an institution that so greatly shaped Irish mores, as incapable of offering sanctuary and support to women in need, women like Anastasia. *The Visitor*, similar to much of Brennan's writing, has its greatest strength in its ability to suggest the larger schisms and rumblings that lie beyond and below the apparently slight movements of its plot. The theme-and-variations relationship of *The Visitor* might seem, in theory, like an autobiographical exercise but in practice it is not. Brennan is a great stylist, but technique is the starting-point of her writing, not its object, which is to write gravely and with a humanity so carefully considered as to have the appearance of memoir, about the errors, regrets and dire misunderstandings of human life: what can be forgiven and repaired and what cannot. This research studies the subtlety and power of Brennan's writing style, which examines the fraught relationships of family dynamics within their adherent spatiality. It clearly identifies the cadences of Brennan's prose and their resonant authority, which Voigt describes as more like that of great music than language (Voigt, 2003: 144-162). The study will show Brennan demonstrating an intersection of space and power, showing how space can be made to hide the relations of power that are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, and how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology. In this way, place is studied as it inscribes the social order and as a location which can concretise the forces of history.

Making and using the connections between these critical theories and exploring the possibilities of nomadology in Rosi Braidotti's study of *Nomadic Subjects* (1994) and Deborah Parsons' *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (2000) facilitate a fresh approach to Brennan's writing. By reflecting on Braidotti's study and working with her concept of nomadism, her conceptualisation of the subject as multiple combinations of interconnected essences, enable reconsideration on the questions of

home, *émigré*, the immigrant, dislocation and belonging in the work of Brennan. Braidotti's idea of the nomadic subject is a philosophical concept, an existential condition and a non-structured form of individual identity. Braidotti's project on the nomadic subject lies at the intersection of political theory, cultural politics, gender theory and ethnicity studies. It emerges from feminist philosophies, postcolonial philosophies and anti-racist philosophies, critical theory and social theory. This writer's concept of the nomadic subject is developed by her into an analytical tool to look at three classes of problems. Firstly, what is happening to identities and concepts of belonging in a world that is becoming more technologically mediated, ethnically mixed and continually changing? Secondly, as a political project, she rethinks other ways of being globalised and individuals' interconnections with each other. Finally, she examines the ethical issues of the nomadic subject: what are the values of subjects that are not unitary but split, complex or nomadic? Her model of nomadic citizenship is pragmatic and grounded. Instead of being abstract and based on nationality, it "reflects the existential situation as a multicultural individual" (Braidotti, 1994: 1). Drawing upon this new nomadic awareness in the work of critics such as Braidotti, I use these ideas as a starting point from which to draw inferences that demonstrate how Brennan maps out ways and means for a process which includes multiple transformations and multiple ways of belonging. These are not dependent on where an individual in a particular location is and how the individual grows, so as to purge the idea that there are subjects that are completely unitary, belonging entirely to one location. This thesis argues that Brennan rethinks what it means to belong, what it means to be alienated and what it means to move between place/space boundaries. It finds that Brennan's concept of existence indicates alternative understandings of home, not-being-at-home and belonging, which take into account the narratives of migratory experiences and the lived experience of migration. Consequently, a reassessment of

Brennan's work offers unfamiliar ways by which we might re-conceptualise the relationship between the individual, the home and the assumption of belonging. The trope of the waif, which has developed in much of the previous criticism on Brennan and which characterises her as a tragic wanderer who wrote only out her own history, obfuscates these connections and her contribution as a writer of depth and imagination.

This research will at the same time look at the way Brennan's work explores issues surrounding geography, belonging and home, as well as how she represents the voice of the marginalised. Even on a cursory reading of her work, it is immediately obvious that she was not only attentive to the theorisation of belonging, place and space, but also to the manner in which all of these things are tied into the human mode of existence on earth. Therefore in examining the writing of Brennan, I am seeking something more than the critical assessment of a literary text. It is my belief that it is only through an interdisciplinary methodology that the crux of her artistic exceptionality can be fully assessed and her insight into the human condition of "dwelling on earth" (Heidegger, 1971: 218), decoupled from the image "categorising her as a tragic stray, part of the flotsam and jetsam of urban life, buffeted by forces beyond her control" (Lyes, 2008:78).

It is no coincidence that Brennan's short stories are filled with marginalised and grotesque characters. Her stories are full of outsiders like Mary Lambert, from "The Rose Garden", who are unable to articulate or act on their desires or fulfil their emotional needs. Mary Lambert is just one of Brennan's misshapen and emotionally damaged characters who cannot articulate the sexual yearnings prompted by the secret pleasure she takes in her annual summer walk when a Catholic order of nuns open their rose garden to the public on one day of the year. Throughout the course of her career, Brennan returned to several themes and characters in her writing. She explored issues surrounding the

suppression of female sexuality and many of her stories contain understated criticism of the sexual repressions of Irish life. Her novella *The Visitor* portrays Ireland as a reclusive, patriarchal society with a narrow definition of femininity, where Norah Kilbride, a lonely spinster, has been forced to suppress her sexuality. Yet it is not only Ireland where Brennan finds those who do not belong. Among Brennan's papers, which are held at the University of Delaware, there is a several-hundred page draft for a novel.⁸ In the main, the focus of this draft is the character Charles Runyon, who the reader will meet in the "Herbert's Retreat" cycle published in *The Rose Garden* collection. Runyon is a poverty-stricken theatre critic, whose only connection to community is the weekends he spends as the guest of the wealthy Leona Harkey at Herbert's Retreat, while during the week he lives an austere, disconnected and wretched life in a rundown New York City hotel. Runyon's story is finally cast in the episodic form instead of being stretched over the longer length of the novel. Given this work was never developed for publication, it would appear that Brennan found the short story form the vehicle best suited to her writing purpose which focuses on the marginalised and outcast in society. Short story theorists, from Frank O'Connor, *The Lonely Voice* (1963), and Charles May, *The New Short Story Theories* (1994), to Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), have long argued that the short story format provides an ideal vehicle for the representation of the isolated or alienated in society. James Nagel, in *The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle* (2001), also explains the choice of the short story as a means of representing ethnic difference. O'Connor sees the genre of the short story as a means of representation for the lone figure in society, the outsider, the individual who is without connection to a community. He recognises the role the short story has to play in expressing the difficulties of reconciling immigrant identity with an

⁸ Robert Brennan and Maeve Brennan Papers, University of Delaware Library, Newark.

unfamiliar society and it is this element, he claims, which has contributed to the success of the short story form in the United States. Brennan reflects these ideas in her stories, which are always a site of struggle with the theme of identity and imprisonment from the past, but also of exile, bereavement and loss, running through them.

As a writer, Brennan appears a measured assessor of imperial modernist culture. Her method of employing both existential and postcolonial tropes of homelessness and wandering and the centrality of psychological and pathological characteristics in her texts point to the way in which she saw her project as a writer within the modern world, as one of colonial analysis, even while adopting the sometimes prescriptive house style fostered at *The New Yorker*. Growing up as the child of two revolutionary Republicans, two presences loomed large in her life – “the Catholic Church and the fight for Irish freedom” (SA 57). Although her writing “avoids all the national politics about which she knew so much” (Bourke, 2005: 169), she engages deeply with issues arising from both. In a letter to William Shawn she gives her view of Irish nationalism and colonisation:

The Irish struggle went on too long. If they had stopped fighting several hundred years ago, as they were expected to do, they would now be obliterated as a people instead of being as they are ineffectual, sometimes amusing, and a little bit foolish in their pretensions to nationality and in their determination to recover the quarter of their country that was stolen from them in negotiation and that was the direct cause of the Irish Civil war, which was tragic and wasteful but not senseless. All of the Irish wars were small, but if more small peoples through the centuries had fought back stubbornly against the forces that sought to absorb them, our world now, in my opinion, would be a nicer and more understandable place to live in, even though we might not have advanced as far toward civilisation as we have

done. And I cannot endure the implications of that new word comeuppance, no matter who or what it is applied to. (Brennan Papers, Box 1 FF2).

Brennan places her focus, not so much on the larger national issues raised by the politics of Irish Independence, but “on the microlevel of the personal, illuminating the effect they have had on individuals’ lives” (Palko, 2010: 25). Her opinion of imperialism is rendered more as a tyranny of progress that results in chaos, while nationalism is viewed by her as an affected dubious behaviour.

Although postcolonial debates, or at least their theoretical underpinnings, had not emerged when Brennan was writing, yet her creative expression and response to Irish culture anticipate postcolonial academic considerations. Aware of the shortcomings of the new Irish State, Brennan explores the psychological stresses that the newly formed Independent State imposed on people without mentioning Ireland’s revolution or Civil War. While questions of identity have always been part of the human condition, postcolonial literature challenges any understanding of the smooth unfolding of identity formation and selfhood. Despite the fact that Brennan’s alignment with postcolonial literature may not be self-evident, her writing is concerned with what occurs after the end of colonial rule and the conditions that arises out of political independence. The powerful emotions of her characters in *The Visitor* and *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin* depict the sterility and paralysis of people’s lives – particularly women – exerted by the patriarchal forces of Church and State. Brennan interrogates a contemporary culture which increases these questions of selfhood and identity, making the issue of personal identity a highly contested area. Her prose registers a core sense of the self as being central to the navigation of both public and private lives, while also holding the position that individual identity is actively constructed through engagement with other people and the wider world. However, her writing also illustrates the increasing difficulty of

constructing any unity of the self within a world filled with ideological turmoil and social convulsion, where the individual is constantly bombarded with shifting cultural stimuli and fragmenting social phenomena, as well as the complicated mayhem which has been thrown up by the political history of colonisation.

Within the contemporary world traditional definitions and categories, based on fixed assumptions about place, space, community and individual identity, have all come under scrutiny. The condition or state of migration is itself receiving increased attention. Displacement and dislocation, with the resulting sense of psychological disorientation, are basic characteristics of migrant experience and Brennan's writing anticipates the situation of the migrant which has moved from the margins to the centre of the postmodern debate. Instead of stressing authentic categories of identity – being born in a particular place, or born into a particular and fixed culture, the terms, syncretic and/or "hybrid identity" (Bhabha, 2008: 55) have entered into contemporary discourse. Thus Brennan's writing finds a relevance within current debate. Walter Benjamin's reading of Charles Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life", as a figure scathingly symptomatic of urban capitalist modernity, may be adopted to consider Brennan as representing a city consciousness as a constituent of identity. A writer who captures the character of her era on both sides of the Atlantic, within both Irish and American society, the distinctive qualities present in all her writing provide a unique perspective on the questions of belonging, and place in a globalised world. One of the difficulties of placing Brennan but, perhaps one of the strengths of her work, is this sense of fluidity and open-endedness. Her writing refuses to lend itself fully to any single cut and dried definition. Therefore this study pretends to be neither definitive nor totally comprehensive, rather it sets out to provide useful points of entry and orientation to her work. It suggests Brennan may be situated as a modernist writer, who in place of the constructive literary precepts of high

modernism chooses the social power of writing in an older realist tradition, while also anticipating aspects of postmodernism. This research analyses and positions her as an author of modernist literature who moves between Irish and American geographic locations and also as a writer who is influenced by postmodern aspects of a changing world. Her writing signposts how much in touch she was with the perils and possibilities emerging in a restructured contemporary Ireland and a multi-ethnic America and the epochal transition that was taking place in both critical thought and material life leading to the restructuring of modernity. In reading her work, it is my understanding that Brennan takes the shift from modernism to postmodernism to indicate the decline of traditions and socio-symbolic systems based on the State, the family, religion and patriarchal authority.

Nomadic consciousness is adopted as Brennan's passport for her imaginative travels, indicating a nexus of association within the modern and postmodern contexts. Her nomadic consciousness signals the elimination of any unifying control so as to allow her characters the freedom to discover their own meanings in the world – the conscious rejection of the possibility of a single focused coherent framework from which to assess and evaluate the world and culture is played out through her use of different writing styles.⁹ She accepts the complex plurality of daily experience and is happy to reflect this in her writing. Living and writing in New York, a city comprising a multitude of diaspora and containing a flowing population who move freely from place to place, at a time of great social change and travelling back and forth across the Atlantic, Brennan was well placed to consider the individual's relationship to place. Bourke claims Brennan was an "anthropologist" in the sense that she observed and this is evident throughout her work. However, her writing clearly exhibits more ambition than merely fitting into Heather

⁹ Braidotti states "Nomadic consciousness is a form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity" (Braidotti, 1994: 23).

Ingman's description of "reminiscence" at *The New Yorker*. As a writer, Brennan engaged with the individual's journey from the past to the present and, living in a modern city, she was strategically placed to do so.

Engagement with and reaction to notions of home and exile have underwritten much of Irish literature written by Irish émigrés. Like writers such as Samuel Beckett and James Joyce, Brennan critiqued her Irish homeland from the vantage point of self-imposed exile. Thus extending Brennan's position in Irish studies, with her awareness of issues of identity and belonging in postcolonial literature and her perception of space, both physical and imaginary, makes her work a particularly fertile ground for future scholarly research. In providing a critical study on the complete corpus of Brennan's work, which draws together her engagement with the theorisation of space and location, the nomadic subject, modernism and postmodernism, this thesis both addresses a lack in contemporary research and opens up a newly developed methodology for the study of Brennan's work. The thesis attempts, therefore, to establish a theoretical framework for an enhanced adaptation of existing postcolonial theory to literature.

Chapter One

The Visitor

“Home is a place in the mind” ~ Maeve Brennan

In considering the nature of her own writing Maeve Brennan saw herself manifestly as a writer for whom places loom large. In a statement she describes her writing as a “slow journey not through but in the most cumbersome, most reckless, most ambitious, most confused, most comical” (*LWL* 1) of cities. Although the specific reference here is to New York, place plays an equally significant role in her other writings. In her curiously idiosyncratic way and documentary style, she claims that inside cosmopolitan cities like New York “there is a Wooden Horse struggling desperately to get out” (*LWL* 1), suggesting that writing constitutes an attack on cultural strongholds. According to Brennan, locations such as New York are “[h]alf-capsized... with the inhabitants hanging on, most of them still able to laugh as they cling to the island that is their life’s predicament” (*LWL* 1). While Brennan makes no such obvious statement a propos of Dublin, *The Visitor* attests to a similar appreciation of the importance of place; many of her concerns coalesce in this early novella’s focus on characters under pressure in terms of their links to particular locations. While Brennan’s position as emigrée and Irish writer with *The New Yorker* may inform some of her work’s deep uncertainty about identity, home, and fascination with belonging, those insecurities are also evident in her writings about Ireland, suggesting a more fundamental dislocation between place and an assured sense of identity. The experience of cultural and personal disorientation, first explored in *The Visitor*, will become an abiding theme of her later work.

The Visitor focuses on the notion of home; what it is, where it can be found and the manner in which it affects individuals when it changes in their absence. Brennan’s

novella tells the story of Irish womanhood after Independence, when the “Roman Catholic Church held sway over the nation... and when the construct of women as wives and mothers was in full force” (Ingman, 2007: 14). Although never published in her lifetime, Brennan obviously intended her novella for the public domain, sending it to the publishing house Sheed and Ward at an unspecified time in the 1940s. The only extant copy is now held at the Hesburg Library, University of Notre Dame, where Christopher Carduff, the novella’s editor, discovered it in 1997. Although both Angela Bourke and Carduff date the novella’s completion to the mid-1940s, the novella’s provenance remains largely a matter of conjecture.

In terms of provoking debate, Brennan’s story of homecoming and exile is evidence that novellas require authors who can harness the power of brevity.¹⁰ *The Visitor* illustrates the manner in which novellas challenge writers to use words as scant commodities, with care and thought and that extra level of creative attention required to ensure that the miniature is just as satisfying as the larger form of the novel. Given that most critics do not engage with the difference in the form, the questions contained in Carduff’s editor’s note are revealing: “Why did you never publish this, was it too short for a first book, too long for a magazine story, did you misplace your only carbon copy of the original?” (Carduff, 2006: 106). However, the more interesting question is why Carduff does not consider that Brennan may purposely have chosen the novella as a more effective vehicle to convey her subject matter. In fact, his editorial comments are symptomatic of the ambiguity surrounding Brennan’s uncertain reception.

Defining the novella proves surprisingly resistant to critical effort. There is no large corpus of novella theory in the Anglophone context,¹¹ with Leibowitz’s study being

¹⁰ A description of this type is offered in Judith Leibowitz’s *Narrative Purpose in the Novella*, p19.

¹¹ Leibowitz references several German studies and these can be found in *Narrative Purpose in the Novella*.

the most comprehensive analysis available.¹² Compared to the short story, the novella has had considerably less theoretical attention devoted to it in the English-speaking world. Leibowitz details Carduff's dilemma regarding the problems associated with the genre and agrees with Frank O'Connor's claim that "the difference between the two forms is simple enough to perceive but much more difficult to describe" (O'Connor, 2004: 50). However, Leibowitz manages to define the essence of the genre as a concentration of unity of purpose and design, which produces an effect that is generically distinct from that of either the short story or the novel, and which she terms "the double effect of intensity and expansion" (Leibowitz, 1974: 16).

As all the motifs in a novella are usually part of a closely associated cluster of themes that are interrelated, this enables the novella to achieve a concentrated and constant focus on its subject and allows for a limited idea to be explored more intensively than would be possible with the short story and without the commitment demanded by the longer form of the novel. In her attempt to isolate the narrative objectives that distinguish the novella from the short story or short novel, Leibowitz provides ample evidence for the use of a theme-complex and repetitive structure as a way of shaping this shorter fiction.¹³ The themes of Brennan's novella – homecoming, alienation, death, conflict and despair, the inward struggle for identity, separation and transformation – often combine and clash with one another in *The Visitor*. Although Leibowitz does not deny that these techniques may be found both in the novel and the short story, she does point to the fact that they do not operate as shared dependent devices in either form. In the short story and novel they perform different functions in relation to the overall narrative aesthetic effect. It is their

¹² The only other studies available are Graham Good's "Notes on the Novella" *The New Short Story Theories*, ed. Charles E. May, and a short piece by Jeremy Hawthorn in *Studying the Novel*. P. 51-55.

¹³ Leibowitz does not state that these, or indeed any given techniques are exclusive to the genre. Her consideration is that rather than characteristics particular to the novella, these are techniques which when used together produce a combined effect.

mutual dependence on each other, rather than their presence, which is important for the novella. Brennan's novella provides ample evidence of this interdependence. The main protagonist, Anastasia, encounters death several times in the novella; it is not only the deaths of her parents that Anastasia must experience, she is also drawn into the death of her grandmother's friend, Norah Kilbride. Anastasia is forced to deal with death as a facet of life and the light it shines on existence, with "only the quiet looping ripples to satisfy" (V 88). Death and loneliness, whether it is Anastasia's state of being alone, feeling lonely, or experiencing solitude, are portrayed as essential aspects of human existence and inescapable facts of life. Correspondingly, Leibowitz emphasises these techniques – theme-complexity and repetitive structure – on the manner in which they function in the novella to distinguish it from other forms of short fiction.¹⁴

The Visitor reflects that which the novella most often shows: the gradual deterioration of a character into social isolation or death – events that are beyond their control. Norah Kilbride suffers both in the final scene of the novella. Brennan's use of the repetitive structure technique of the novella is evident in the way Anastasia is revealed to be just as uncompromising as her grandmother, which also makes use of the conflict between religion and existentialism. Leibowitz argues the novella's repetitive structure permits a pattern of exposition, complication and resolution similar to that of the short story, but followed by a re-examination, in different terms, of the same situation, although the development is not as extended as it would be in the novel (Leibowitz, 1974: 14-19).

¹⁴ Graham Good believes the novella is "bedevilled for theorists by its adjacency to the longer form" (Good, 1994:147), but agrees with Leibowitz that intensity is the recognised principle of the genre. While Jeremy Hawthorn warns "against making large generalisations", he does agree that "the novella often has a dominant symbol or complex of symbols at its heart and it is these rather than the complexity of its plot that give the novella its depth and significance" (Hawthorn, 2005: 52). Thus the open-ended thematic nature of *The Visitor* is well suited to the thought-tormented point of view of the typical novella. Thomas Loe claims "the creation of a deliberate distance through point of view which places the emphasis on theme is one of the most easily recognisable and consistent features of the novella" (Loe, 1991: 487).

The restriction or limited length of the work is supplemented by a sense of greater depth not available in the short story. Brennan intends Anastasia's return to be symbolic, a return to the historical archive in order to learn from, break with and reinvent herself. For Brennan, it is not only an investigation into what consolation or healing is available to the exile through the act of return, she also highlights the difficulty and the impossibility of reinstatement. Anastasia's return simultaneously works to reveal both what is lost and what is hidden. That which haunts the historical archive is made visible again by the act of her return. Her grandmother's involvement in her parents' marital breakdown and the subjugation of her mother are revealed through the act of her return. In this way, her return is a form of exorcism of old ghosts in order to facilitate new beginnings and new departures. For Anastasia, her grandmother's house is not only the ancestral family home, but the house of history and a symbol of stagnation. Anastasia returns in order to understand and make peace with the past, to reclaim it after the separation and loss of childhood. The family home is the intimate space where the working out of the binary opposites of love and hate, fear and hope, are coloured by the wider social canvas.

The Visitor is a work that both expresses the mores of time passing and prefigures preoccupations which have yet to come. Georg Lukács in his analysis of Alexander Solzhenitsyn's novella, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1953), points to the manner in which novellas often appear at the end of a historical period or at the beginning of a new era (Parkinson, 1977: 43). As Lukács characterises the novella, it is through its focus on a single character and situation rather than on the totality of a society, together with its economy of presentation that the novella summarises the essentials of a period which is just ending, while also providing an initial exploration into attitudes just forming. In light of Lukács' statement, it is possible Brennan may consciously or even unconsciously have found the concentrated quality of the novella best suited to express a

moment of transition, from Anastasia's past to her new sense of belonging. The telescopic moments contained in *The Visitor* are vignettes concerning an Irish girl's reaction to being rejected by her home community and her search for self-actualisation.

The twin threads of dwelling and gender find equal treatment in Brennan's writing, where gender collides with home and disturbs identity. The protagonist's search for belonging is threatened by the very boundaries of home. Given the fact that Brennan was the daughter of two revolutionary parents it is hardly surprising that she references the two presences that loomed large in her childhood – “the Catholic Church and the fight for Irish Freedom” (SA 57) in her work. As Bourke suggests, the “wearisome discontent” (SA 128) to be found in *The Visitor*, portrays “something that struck or troubled her about the emotional landscape of Ireland” (Bourke, 2005: 172). Somewhat controversially, Ireland's new 1937 Constitution recognised the special position of the Catholic Church. Other areas of controversy included Article XL1, which stated that a woman's place was “in the home” and that economic necessity should not be allowed to drive women into employment where this would be to the neglect of “their duties within the home” (Madden, 2005: 142-143). These components of the Constitution had a disempowering effect on Irish women that has long been recognised.¹⁵ The nature and structure of the family unit in Ireland during the period of Brennan's writing underwent major changes. As in other societies, modernisation and industrialisation had enormous impacts on the traditional Irish family, bringing changes in family relationship patterns, kinship and the conjugal relationship itself. Thus, it is from a variety of perspectives that Brennan's writing explores the complex intersections between culture, politics, nation and state, that are both peripheral and central to Irish life. As a writer, she is rethinking key concepts of tradition and modernity, gender and class and the understanding of Ireland during a key

¹⁵ In her Introduction to *Twentieth-Century Fiction by Irish Women*, Heather Ingman documents the position of women in both public and private life during this period.

period in its history. It is through her characters' tortured relationships to place that these invisible threads are picked apart.

The world of 1940s Ireland contributes significantly to the dark vision of *The Visitor*. Brennan's perception of this society is generally disenchanting and disheartening. She suggests that a repressive Catholic Church helped generate its grimness and intolerance. 1940s Ireland was, on the whole, male-orientated and, although the world of the novella is controlled by women, they are determined by the world around them. The patriarchal nature of Irish society in the 1940s is well documented. Declan Kiberd, for example, in his critical study *Inventing Ireland* explores the manner in which male privilege was embedded in the practices and processes of the country following Independence (Kiberd, 1996: 182-3, 389-91, 408-409). Sex and sexuality were also taboo subjects in 1940s Ireland due to the influence of the Church, and Brennan shows how the lives of women were dominated by an institution which offered them no support and contributed to the repressed nature of Irish society. Brennan's novella casts a fierce light on what was a hidden Ireland in the 1940s, a world of female dissatisfaction and loneliness. Juxtaposing the complexity of an emigrant's return with the hostile atmosphere of Dublin and the difficulty of maintaining an individual personality within the confines of a stereotyped social role in an exclusively masculine society, Brennan's novella is an exposé of long-suffering female loneliness. Anastasia's mother, Mary, is the stereotypical, demure, submissive 1940s wife. Yet similar to Ibsen's character Nora from *A Doll's House*, Mary shows strength of character by finally leaving her husband John. Mary's mother-in law, Mrs King, is aggressive, forceful and dangerous and contravenes stereotypes of the mild, gentle grandmother. She is unbending, and defiantly strikes out against her granddaughter Anastasia, while Anastasia struggles to find her place in the

world against the life of hopelessness and loneliness that awaits her on her return to Dublin.

Corresponding to the period of Brennan's writing, the impact of existential philosophy and its effect on mainstream, popular thinking was seen "to undermine the foundation of Catholic doctrine" (Pius XII, 1950: 1).¹⁶ Existential thought had been introduced to the world at large by writers such as Sartre, Camus and Beckett, as well as the writers of the Beat Generation, and "by 1950, there can have been few self-respecting intellectuals... who had not dipped their minds in this murky spring" (Trower, 2012: 1). This philosophy, which was new and fresh in the beginning of the twentieth century and "which the Church had been told she must adapt to" (Trower, 2012: 1), is considered to have transformed accepted wisdom both inside and outside the Catholic Church. Brennan, conscious of reflecting these considered ideas, used her powers of observation to probe the polarisation of such thought and the conservative position of the Catholic Church in Ireland, while also illuminating the universal problems faced by women in a society built by men. Given that in the middle of the 1940s and early 1950s Alfred C. Kinsey published two surveys of modern sexual behaviour, one of the "new questions" (Pius XII, 1950: 43) that liberal thinking was bringing to the forefront of modern debate was human

¹⁶ Taken from the title of: Pius XII, Encyclical *Humani Generis, some false opinions threatening to undermine the foundation of Catholic doctrine*, Vatican City, 1950. *Humani Generis* generated much discussion in its time; the encyclical holds firm distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad and reflects the many conservative positions of the Church. It reflects the belief that it is the primary duty of a Christian, to convince those who consider themselves modern, that human nature should not be interpreted in such a way as to transgress conservative Catholic doctrine, nor assume, should such transgressions arise, that forgiveness would be forthcoming. While the encyclical allows for restrained engagement with modern ideas, it emphasises the threat of expulsion should a believer engage in promoting any of the ideas or beliefs connected to such modern thought, section 43 in particular. Notwithstanding that the main points of the encyclical are Philosophy and Theology; it extends into the realm of culture and science. The papal document presents a stern warning against the dangers of embracing "modern culture" and the difficulty of return for an "erring" (Pius XII, Enc. Human Generis, 43) believer. The encyclical cautions not only against trying to reconcile liberal ways of thinking on modern issues with the narrow view of the Church, but also the difficulty of return for anyone who tries to advance such a philosophy.

sexuality. During this period, under the influence of psychological research, and with support from existentialism, Catholic teaching throughout the modern world about the basic sexuality of men and women underwent enormous transformation. If Freud was correct in considering the individual as an essentially sexual animal, then it followed that happiness must therefore lie in giving these energies release, as unhappiness, not to mention damage to one's health, could result from the control or repression of human sexual energies. In considering that sexual experience was one of the elements in an individual becoming a fully developed person, both psychiatry and existentialism supported this new wave of thinking and conflicted with the views of the Catholic Church on the subject. Brennan was reading the works of existential writers like Camus and, living and working in a society where such ideas were widely and openly debated, while being mindful of the difficulty of such a progressive approach taking root in a religion dominated Ireland, she considers the conjunction of these matters in her novella. *The Visitor* uses the relationship between the characters Anastasia King and Norah Kilbride to contrast the Church's teaching with the supposed "corruption" and "diminution" (Pius XI, 1950: 43) of existential thought. As 1940s Ireland was a priest-dominated society, the novella engages with the difficulty of return, not only to one's place of residence, but to a church which is resistant to change. Brennan's intellectual insight – her writings contain much that is psychologically penetrating and provide useful arguments against modes of outdated thinking – takes for granted the existential assumption that reality outside us is essentially unknowable. Foregoing Roman Catholic teaching, Brennan demonstrates that it is only through self-awareness that the individual has direct contact with the inner nature of the real and, that reality can only be understood by analysing inner feelings and states of consciousness.

It is against this background of the conflict between new waves of thinking and the traditional doctrine of the Catholic Church that Brennan makes the boundaries between place and space permeable. She fictionalises an existential approach to freedom and focuses on the manner in which dwelling is created and maintained through personal attachment. Brennan's concept of home engages with the humanistic tradition developed by existential thinkers like Heidegger who defined space as constituted by individuals. As stated by Andrew Thacker, Heidegger prioritised "the nature of place over space... in his insistence that a kind of static dwelling in a particular location is the fundamental core of the relation between human beings and space" (Thacker, 2009: 14). As Thacker describes it, dwelling "is a particular characteristic of being human, a basic ontic state, whereby one's very being is located in a particular place" (Thacker, 2009: 14), wherever that place may be. Thacker claims that, Heidegger's sense of dwelling implies that "we should not think of space as something external to human beings, since space is intrinsically linked to the dwelling experience of human beings" (Thacker, 2009: 14): "To say that mortals *are* is to say that *in dwelling* they persist through spaces by virtue of their stay among things and locations" (Heidegger, 1971: 157).¹⁷ Although attachments and meanings may be shared, Brennan shows that a place can mean different things to different people; in this respect, similar to Heidegger, she defines space as place experienced by individuals.

Brennan's first engagement with what would become her lifelong concern with issues of belonging, identity and place, centres around the character Anastasia King. Aged twenty-two, an only child, and an orphan haunted by the break-up of her parents' marriage, the novella begins with her return to Ireland following her mother's death in Paris. *The Visitor* opens on the night train as it rushes towards Dublin, carrying Anastasia back to her grandmother's house where she grew up, after spending six years in Paris with

¹⁷ Similar to Thacker, many literary texts and critics seem indebted, consciously or unconsciously, to Heidegger's conception of place.

her mother. Still in mourning only a month since her mother's death, Anastasia considers her best course of action is to return to the house in which she was raised to live with her paternal grandmother, Mrs King, who is grieving over the death of her son John – Anastasia's father. The Victorian suburb where her grandmother lives with her kind housekeeper, Katherine, is presented as fixed and unchanging. It is obvious from the beginning of the novella that this writer is no Irish emigrant describing a much loved home, softened with memory and longing, the text blurred by a glowing reminiscence.¹⁸ In fact, the only blurring described in the novella is the train "windows all cloudy with breath and smoke", although Anastasia rubs "a clear spot in her window... in the rushing darkness only a few stray lights were discernible" and these were "blurred by the rain" (*V* 1). *The Visitor* is a strangely disturbing and alienating piece of writing and much of the text deals with the alternating states of hope and desperation accompanying Anastasia's quest to re-settle back in her childhood home in Ireland. The "cloudy" and "blurred" images of Dublin, eschew the comforts of nostalgia to augment a sense of estrangement and isolation. From the beginning of the novella, Anastasia is anxious about her homecoming, but it is hard to imagine what idea of home she envisages in such a melancholy and unhappy place as she describes.

All the houses on the square were tall, with heavy stone steps going up to the front doors. They were occupied by old people, who had grown old in their houses and their accustomed ways. They disregarded the inconveniences of the square houses, their dark basements and draughty landings, and lived on, going tremulously from

¹⁸The work of Mary Lavin extending as it does from 1939 to the late 1970s, has been described by Declan Kiberd as holding "no desire to dig society up by its roots" (Kiberd, 1996: 409). The work of Lavin demonstrates that, while for "some women writers the family was a trap, for others it remained what it had been during the time of the British occupation: a zone of resistance in which intense love and small kindnesses were still possible" (Kiberd, 1996: 408). Equally, while many of Edna O'Brien's heroines leave Ireland in search of new identities, in many cases they are still found "hankering after the proverbs and accordion music and a statue of the Virgin hewn from blackthorn wood" (O'Brien, 1965, 122).

one wrinkled day to the next, with an occasional walk between the high stone walls of their gardens. (*V* 13-14)

It is difficult to see how such a dismal ancestral residence might provide the fulfilment of a long-lost memory of home for a young woman who is a returning emigrant. *The Visitor* is the first instance of Brennan's unsettling of the traditional notion of home as the only hope for belonging and a sense of security, which she would go on to develop in her future work. These houses with their "dark basements and draughty landings" where people merely exist "from one wrinkled day to the next" are unlikely to fulfil a nostalgic emigrant trope of the home.

The few critical analyses of *The Visitor* tend to focus on the personal connection of a young woman, and her failed attempt to return to the family home. In her Foreword to the 2000 edition of the novella, Clare Boylan states: "Brennan doesn't just write about loneliness. She inhabits it. She exhibits it. She elevates it to an art form" (Boylan, 2006: ix). In her review of *The Visitor*, Jane Gardam describes it as a "study of intense interior loneliness... but loneliness so exquisitely described that it becomes a thing of beauty. It is also a study of quiet evil, resentment that poisons and erodes the soul" (Gardam, 2001). Less biographically inflected than Boylan and Gardam, Heather Ingman connects the "type of conflict" (Ingman, 2007: 71) played out in *The Visitor*, with the classical archetypal, anti-patriarchal daughter Antigone. Luce Irigaray's reading of this classical daughter who is embraced by feminists as a bearer of true feeling, possessed of a true ethical compass, powerful and, disobedient to tyrannical patriarchal law (Whitford, 1991: 164), is referenced as replicating Mrs King's "campaign of cruelty... against Anastasia's mother" (Ingman, 2007: 71). In her analysis, Ingman claims "Anastasia has been punished for choosing her mother over her father by exclusion from the family home, bearing out Irigaray's argument that, by identifying with the mother and her world, a

daughter risks exclusion from the patriarchy” (Ingman, 2007: 72). Angela Bourke also focuses on the homeless aspect of the text and reads this aspect as the “book’s whole message, as it will be the central motif in all Maeve’s best writing” (Bourke, 2005: 153). John Menaghan suggests that Brennan’s use of “Paris may simply be a fictional stand-in here for New York, a device by which she could simultaneously explore and disguise her own conflicted sense of both belonging to and having become a ‘visitor’ to her native land” (Menaghan, 2008: 82). Most recently Abigail Palko claims “it is not improbable to suggest this personal context” (Palko, 2010: 20), given Brennan’s personal history.

There is no doubt that Brennan’s experience as emigrée finds its way into several of her works. This early work of empathy with home-comers finds equal but opposite delight and difficulty encountered by many other Irish writers in the middle of the twentieth century. As in Kate O’Brien’s texts – *The Flower of May* (1953) and *As Music and Splendour* (1958) – homecoming becomes impossible, however much the wanderer might yearn for it. Brennan’s sense of journeying from one place to another, and from country to country, may have its basis in her own cultural and personal concerns. Yet it also reflects the nomadic nature of Irish culture, and those movements between places and reversals of emigration undertaken by fellow Irish country women in the middle of the twentieth century. Brennan is careful not to romanticise the homecoming because of the centrality of the journey theme as a metaphorical and structural device in national imagery and its function in historical mobility.¹⁹ Instead, she infuses her representation of the journey home with the potency of quest, pilgrimage, and the passage of life itself. Brennan essentially translates the emigrant’s return into the context of modern life. For her, *The Visitor* represents an Ireland which is part imaginary and part historical.

¹⁹ The Famine and its causes became a major platform for emigrant anger. The Famine was viewed as a direct consequence of colonisation and the main cause for the majority of Irish people being emigrants. Significantly, modern historians regard it as a dividing line in the Irish historical narrative referring to the preceding period of Irish history as pre-famine.

In the beginning of the novella it is hoped that Ireland will offer shelter. Anastasia, a weary traveller, is overcome with emotion when the train's arrival is announced. Brennan's initial preoccupation in *The Visitor* is with movement, a frequent element in much of her writing. From the opening lines we know that Anastasia is on a journey and that journey will take her to Dublin – "The mail train rushed along toward Dublin, and all the passengers swayed and nodded with the uneven rhythm of it and kept their eyes fixed firmly in front of them as though the least movement would bring them to the end of their patience" (V 1). Thoroughly forward-looking in outlook, "eyes fixed firmly in front" (V 1), Brennan's passengers have reached the end of their endurance. Anastasia is clearly uncertain and in a state of mental conflict as she looks at her suitcases. Through a cloudy train window, the future looks "wearisome" and the past "a long dream" (V 3). Like a disorientated observer in an absurd universe Anastasia's state of mind can only be described as one of suspended identity. From the beginning of the novella, Brennan establishes a conflicted sense of return and an ambivalent relationship to place. Anastasia's "indifference heightened by the deafening clatter of the train" (V 1), makes her confused and ambivalent about her return: "I might be leaving too, she thought, instead of coming back" (V 3). The desire for a sense of belonging, together with the fact of having become a "visitor", causes a conflict in Brennan's young emigrée.

From the opening pages of *The Visitor* Anastasia can be seen striving to establish herself and her individuality through the conception of geographically-based identity. Yet the condition of exile, the separation and distancing from her homeland and the death of her parents make the homecoming problematical. Although she is ambivalent about it, Anastasia's return to Dublin is a search for acceptance, a sense of belonging and an answer to the question of where this sense of acceptance and belonging might be found. Arriving in a very obscure and indistinct Dublin where "in the rushing darkness only a

few stray lights were discernible” (V 1), it is made immediately obvious that Anastasia feels alienated and cannot comprehend her surroundings as she finds the faces around her are all “shadowed and withdrawn” (V 1). There is an immediate awareness of a significant distance between her and the people surrounding her, constituting “a barrier of hostile irritation” (V 2). Wandering and unknowing are the experiences of Anastasia as emigrée, who, on her return to Ireland finds herself with no voice, no place and no rights, possessing only desolation and an unmoored life.

Brennan’s writing constructs a story of the existential individual and a quest for belonging onto textual settings wholly dependent on the fabrication of an imagined community and she does so in a way which deepens the resonance of her work as it operates with the imagined community and against the societies which fostered it. In his essay “Imaginary Homelands”, Salman Rushdie explains his experience of the plural and partial tensions of diaspora that encouraged his rethinking of nation, resistance and representation.²⁰ Rushdie’s return to the lands of his birth and childhood to write of a world where politics and the individual are inseparably connected, manages to stand both inside and outside the world of a developing nation, while telling its story. Rushdie claims it was the very discontinuity of his present, being in a different place from his past, which shaped his narratives in seminal ways. Rushdie sums up the condition of diaspora as predicated on “the very experience of uprooting disjuncture, and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which ... can be derived a metaphor for all humanity” (Rushdie, 1991: 394). For Rushdie, this is the cornerstone for his imagined communities. Brennan’s fictional representation of displacement and homecoming, finds a certain resonance with this statement. Anastasia’s

²⁰ Speaking at the 7th Annual Dublin City Libraries Readers’ day in 2008, Salman Rushdie discussed his essay “Imaginary Homelands”, his experience of exile, home, diaspora and the writing of *Midnight’s Children*. His discussion informs this statement.

thoughtful contemplation after arriving back in her grandmother's house, the "disappointment that had been spreading coldly over all the homecoming" (V 8), presents an insightful glimpse into her psychological state. Anastasia quickly realises that she is still alone and that the Ireland to which she has returned offers only the frighteningly sterile existence of Mrs King, with her jealous prejudices lacking even a semblance of Christian charity, the barren existence of Miss Kilbride or the terrifying, emotionally subjugated life of her mother. Brennan's heroine illustrates the existential predicament. Feeling trapped in an unfathomable existence, Anastasia is a symbolic nomad looking for a land to call home.

In a narrative which moves between past and present, the novella gives an account of not only a young woman returning to her childhood home, but the tension between two women of different generations, producing a feeling of disconcerting unease. There is an ugly, malevolent edge to the strained relationship between Anastasia and her grandmother. When her mother Mary dies, Anastasia returns to Dublin expecting to find a home and although desperate to return to the house where she grew up, family politics come between the bewildered and grieving Anastasia and her resolute grandmother. When Anastasia's mother left her husband and his domineering mother six years earlier and fled to Paris, Anastasia agreed to go with her. However, her grandmother viewed her decision as an added abandonment of her much adored and cosseted son. Because of this, Anastasia's desire to return to Dublin to find a home is thwarted by her grandmother's resentment and pride. A grotesque and cruel character, Mrs King has long ago chosen malice over love and Anastasia fails to penetrate her isolation and loneliness. Mrs King rules over her powerless housekeeper Katherine, her friend Norah Kilbride and her granddaughter with the most unyielding and hard aspect of her nature. However, Anastasia is shown to be neither innocent nor blameless in these events; she is now called

to account and must take responsibility for her actions. The destruction of the family unit and her decision to go with her mother to Paris is linked to her father's demise and his eventual death. In her tale of emigration and return, Brennan offers a discriminating and acute insight into the fates of Irish women caught up in loveless marriages, lonely spinsterhood, and a set of social expectations to which they either try to conform or resist. Brennan shows clearly the consequences of these social imperatives in each case for the lives of her characters and their struggle for acceptance, happiness and fulfilment in a changing world.

The Visitor demonstrates alertness to what is involved in living an independent existence and attentiveness to what makes human living both possible and difficult. Brennan demonstrates awareness that the terms home, dwelling and belonging have several connotations to their structure: "Somewhere in her mind a voice was saying clearly, "Ireland is my dwelling place, Dublin is my station" (V 5). The novella maintains that humans do not so much inhabit as dwell, and that dwelling takes place not in a site or environment, but in a world. Anastasia is fixed, embedded and immersed in the physical, literal and tangible day-to-day world. Her individual existence has four aspects: experiencing the surrounding world; the complicated arena of social relations; together with becoming aware of self; and the intensely personal side of human existence. These, combined, render her "dwelling on earth" (Heidegger, 1971: 218) more precarious. For Heidegger, this forced the question "what is the state of dwelling in our precarious age?" (Heidegger, 1971: 218).²¹ *The Visitor* echoes this question and Brennan forces her character to define herself in relation to the constantly changing space of "two worlds":

²¹ Heidegger argued that modern times have brought about confusion in understanding the relation between building and dwelling. He believed that place is the locale of Being. Andrew Thacker claims "Heidegger's argument is that the true nature of space - whether of the external environment, or of the body - is conditioned by this existential experience of dwelling" (Thacker, 2009: 14).

One world has walls around it and one world has people around it. The second world is outside, with the late-winter sky and the bare trees and hard pavements that stretch in every direction, and with the bright shining shop windows and the chattering crowds. This world has a sightless malicious face, which is the face of the crowd. The face of the crowd is not immediately to be seen, it only becomes apparent after a while, when it shows itself in wondering sidelong looks and sharp glances... One goes to stand alone on a city bridge, to look over at the water, and suddenly one's eyes are sliding from right to left, from left to right, to see if some person is watching, some stranger who thinks it odd to stand alone, looking over the bridge with nothing to do. One must be about one's business. There is no patience for solitary aimless wistful hangers-on who want to sit and watch, or who ludicrously join the crowd in its rush to the end of the street, and then pause at the corner, confused, direction-less, stupid. (*V* 76-77)

Wandering through Dublin city, Anastasia experiences no sense of community, connection or belonging. As a wistful hanger-on she, instead of experiencing a sense of homecoming and safety, feels threatened and alienated by the city where she grew up.

In addition to her exclusion from the wider community, Anastasia is on several occasions driven out of home. Throughout the novella Anastasia is continually confronted by those who have made prior demands upon the spaces she attempts to enter. Even when she seeks the solace of her father's old bedroom she is driven out by her grandmother. She is constantly confronted by those who refuse to share a space through fear of change or loss, so that home is something she can no longer possess. Anastasia is also driven out on one occasion from the Catholic Church. As Carduff describes her, Anastasia is a "motherless daughter who sometimes sees ghosts" (*V* 104). Following the final rejection by her grandmother, Anastasia's heightened state of distress leads her to believe that she

has seen her mother's ghost and her father's dead body: "it was her mother who walked along with her" as "she saw her father in his coffin with his eyes closed against them all" (V 71). When Anastasia enters the church in search of comfort, her distress leads several local women, including a nun, to believe her to be under the influence of alcohol and they request her to leave. As Anastasia's network of family support unravels, she equally receives no nourishment from the church. Marginalised and made to feel like an outsider and an "ugly intruder" (Trower, 2012: 1), Anastasia's experience of multiple rejections from both home and Church anticipates the shift and decline of traditional socio-symbolic systems based on the Church and the family in Ireland.

In the introduction to her father John B. Keane's play *Sive*, Joanna Keane O'Flynn discusses the manner in which the play "does not overtly condemn the Catholic Church, but rather subtly brings to light the dominant, controlling influence this powerful bastion brought to bear on Irish life" (Keane O'Flynn, 2009: 109). Equally, the intersections of Brennan's political and humanistic concerns are deeply woven into the narrative threads of her novella. Her engagement with issues relating to both family and religion illustrate a concern with the conjunction of modern cultural progress and conservative values and traditions. *The Visitor* reveals an early contribution to the debate regarding the status of women not only in the newly formed Independent Irish State, but also the cultural forces that would continue to shape women's lives on in to the next generation.

For Anastasia, Dublin is now a place of impediment and boundaries, as her ability to access either home or church has become restricted. Her assumptions about daily life and her return are challenged. Brennan draws attention to a specific dilemma of emigration. Caught between "two worlds", emigrants sometimes do not integrate in to the new place and when they return they are unable to settle back in to the old. Anastasia's return to her home country does not paper over the past and her reasons for leaving, but

rather results in a restlessness that needs to be acknowledged and explored. Taking a subjective consideration of ultimate questions and beliefs, Anastasia understands her own existence in terms of her experience and her situation, her “station” (*V* 5). The significance placed on Anastasia’s beliefs, hopes, fears and desires, her need to find a purpose and her will to determine her own actions, reveal the importance of self-determination. Throughout the novella Anastasia experiences the value of difference and foreignness as a stimulus to achieving her own personal awareness, her need to live fully and her need for freedom within a sense of belonging.

Brennan explores the obsession to belong; Anastasia can no longer see Dublin as her home, describing herself as a wistful hanger-on. In strategizing a mode of connection and self-location, Brennan recognises that the modern dweller cannot depend on the strategies employed in the past to secure a sense of belonging. The values that Anastasia perceives to exist in the traditional concept of home – a sense of place and belonging, continuity, safety and predictability – are shown to be illusory. Instead, there is the possibility of a different kind of self-location for her character; if all goes well she may hopefully culminate in “dwelling on earth” (Heidegger, 1971: 218) and escape the “sudden melancholy that was on her” (*V* 5). In Brennan’s words:

Home is a place in the mind. When it is empty, it frets. It is fretful with memory, faces and places and times gone by. Beloved images rise up in disobedience and make a mirror for emptiness. Then what resentful wonder, and what half-aimless seeing. It is a silly state of affairs. It is a silly creature that tries to get a smile from even the most familiar and loving shadow. Comical and hopeless, the long gaze back is always turned inward. (*V* 8)

This meditation reflects an extended and serious study of her topic and Brennan's conviction that a home cannot be given by others, "I have no home to offer you" (V 19). As a result, home is something that is generated and experienced as such from the perspective of involvement. Reflecting Heidegger's argument, buildings, thinking and dwelling in the novella are all occurrences which are tied into the human mode of existence on earth.

Anastasia's story describes a process of migration which has only recently been recognised, a process described by Greg Madison as existential migration: "Unlike economic migration, simple wanderlust, exile, or variations of forced migration, existential migration is conceived as a chosen attempt to express something fundamental about existence by leaving one's homeland and becoming a foreigner" (Madison, 2009: 1). Madison's discussion in relation to emigration includes the importance of trying to fulfil individual potential, the significance of freedom, independence and openness to challenging experiences, together with the valuing of difference and foreignness as a stimulus to personal awareness and broadening of perspectives. Madison's research draws attention to a world community entering an age of global homelessness and points to the problematic condition of return, that is returning home can seem to resemble yet another migration due to the subsequent changes in both the person and the home environment since the original leaving.²²

²² Existential migration is a concept derived from phenomenological research carried out by Greg Madison into the lives of voluntary migrants who have chosen to leave their country of origin. The research was originally published in a peer-reviewed journal and generated much interest amongst existential practitioners, migration scholars and psychologists. A book based on Madison's research on the subject entitled *The End of Belonging: Untold Stories of Leaving Home and the Psychology of Global Relocation* was published in 2009. Additionally, *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls and the Search for Home*, by Pico Iyer examines how the traditional exile, previously viewed as an outsider, "worrying at private issues of divided loyalty and homesickness, that distance him even further from the rooted people all around" (Iyer, 2000: 164) has changed into the experience of self-world interaction – as a foreigner they both belong and also maintain distance and independence.

The portrayal of the irresolvable conflict as produced by conflicting loyalties in *The Visitor* calls attention to the fact that Anastasia chose to emigrate. As her experience illustrates, the return home resembles a further migration and tends to bring into sharp focus what she remembers, what she does not and what has changed in the meantime. Anastasia's feeling of home arises from specific interactions with her surroundings that could potentially occur anywhere. Brennan's definition of home as interaction contrasts with the usual definition of home as geographical space. The themes of Brennan's novella overlap with existential themes: alienation, anxiety, fear, dread, absurdity, nothingness and death. Anastasia sees her life as part of a "long dream", together with a future which is "wearisome" and impossible to "imagine". However, she must awake from her "dream" (V 3) and acquire self-knowledge by questioning her beliefs and values to arrive at a new understanding of herself by becoming conscious of the world around her, a world which has "no patience for solitary aimless wistful hangers-on" (V 77).

Brennan's novella rolls back the legacy of history, creating a dialogue between the past and the present in the character of Mrs King. Much is made of Brennan's method of naming (Bourke, 2005: 152). Mrs King is named after a male sovereign who rules over an independent state, and Brennan's heroine continues to be subjugated by the past as is revealed by the rule of influence of her grandmother. Anastasia mirrors the nomad and the foreigner; she is seen as a threat and an enemy capable of penetrating the homogeneous and sealed space of her grandmother's family unit. Yet Brennan's even-handed representation shows Mrs King to be just as anxious about Anastasia's return as Anastasia is herself. From a sense of fear her grandmother screams: "I wish to God, and wish this every day of my life, that you would go away and leave me alone here" (V 81). Anastasia disrupts the sealed body of her grandmother's society through her role as returning immigrant to reveal that everybody is a prisoner in this family cell.

In mid-twentieth century Ireland it was not unusual for three generations to live in the same house. This system worked relatively successfully so long as mothers and their daughters-in-law got along. However, it did not work well in *The Visitor* due to the ongoing friction between Mrs King and Mary her daughter-in-law. In Brennan's description, Mary felt isolated and separated from her husband because of her mother-in-law's influence and this created an unpleasant atmosphere in the home. Feeling diminished and speaking in subdued tones, Mary expresses her unhappiness: "“You're trying to belittle me, she uttered in a disappearing voice”" (V 11). John King also finds the hostility between his wife and his mother intolerable: "“Great God...You'll drive me mad”" (V 11). The exposé of long-suffering loneliness and the emptiness of the marital bed is epitomised when we learn Mary "“crept into Anastasia's bed at night”" (V 10). John articulates both the despair and the anguish of the situation:

“Why on earth was that necessary, Mary?” “Ah, John, don't be angry. I was only cold.” “I'm not angry, for God's sake. Haven't you enough blankets on your bed without disturbing the child in the middle of the night?” “Ah, I was lonely, that's all.” She began to cry, stirring her tea. (V 10)

The Visitor is infused with religious expressions and images that were part and parcel of the vernacular of the people. Yet while the characters seem to be deeply religious and guided largely by the principles and rigid ethos of the Church, the relationship between Mrs King and Mary is malicious. They show nothing but contempt for each other. Mrs King is jealous of Mary, feeling her relationship to her son threatened by this younger woman from a different economic class. Mrs King's tone is condescending and superior: "“you're making a fool of yourself”" (V 11). She constantly takes her son's side, undermining her daughter-in-law. Mrs King is opposed to change, resistant to any attempt to take power from her. Brennan conjures up a world of privilege and class divide in an

effective and economic way, the “way she was brought up” (V11), referring to a general class of people. In contrast, Mrs King’s relationship with the young Anastasia is warm, loving and gentle. In the early years both grandmother and granddaughter show great affection for each other, although this changes when Anastasia returns as a grown woman. Equally, John King is unsympathetic to his wife’s situation: “I never know how to take her. I never know what to say. Whatever I say is wrong” (V 13). Caught between his mother with her “prayer book in hand, from early mass” (V13) and a young wife’s need for intimacy, he displays no understanding of Mary’s emotional turmoil or the difficulty of their family arrangements. While Mary is prevented from expressing herself in life, in death, evidence of the life she led is still visible. Any abilities or potential she might have had were eclipsed not only by the male presence in her life but also by Mrs King and her “prayer book”. Brennan paints this picture in a calm matter-of-fact manner, but at the same time highlights the tragedy of Mary’s life – a life lived in quiet desperation. Brennan quietly expresses the tragedy of Mary’s life, letting the images do the work, pulling back the “blankets” which were traditionally thrown over feminine issues and silenced women such as Mary.

Brennan’s prose demonstrates that she is adept at depicting the insidious hold that the past and family structures have on the present. Her novella engages with the psychological and emotional complications of living in a changeable world, where the capacity for place-bound identity formation has become unsettled. Brennan’s returning protagonist brings with her a threat to the force of her grandmother’s class-based ideological structure, which was upheld and perpetuated by the Irish State and the Catholic Church. Her discursive practices are connected to the struggles of both women and men for autonomy, independence and self-expression, which reflect the imperatives attributable to history and the social forces surrounding them.

As a writer, Brennan is attuned to the perspective of journeying, the sense that the country is to be passed through and arrived at, as well as lived in. Brennan's anxiety about the individual's place in a new historical period, is concerned solely with the present, rejecting anything that collides with history and tradition; all her passengers keep "their eyes fixed firmly in front of them" (*V* 1). In the opening pages of the novella, Brennan conjures up images of people braced for difficulty and change who are holding something unnamed together. It is the uncomfortably confined and cluttered images, "luggage had been piled hastily out in the corridor" (*V* 1), together with the uncertainty of direction, "I might be leaving too" (*V* 3) which turn the homecoming encounter into an experience of emotional dislocation. Through a preoccupation with internal and external ghosts – Anastasia's father "faded out through the hotel door that opened inward" (*V*3) – together with her use of space as a source of confusion and loss, Brennan sends Anastasia in search of connection with the rest of the world, allowing her to yield "for a moment to the disappointment that had been spreading coldly over the homecoming" (*V* 7). Anastasia "thought of her mother, who had been dead only a month, and the glass became hot with her forehead, and she pressed her hands to her face and tried to forget where she was, and that she was still alone in her home" (*V* 8).

Fictional orphans are often known to formulate a threatening force that disrupts and disturbs the conventional social and domestic space. The figure of the orphan in fiction often symbolises a rebellion against prevailing paradigms, with mutability becoming an important facet of survival. As Nina Auerbach points out, "the orphan is born to himself and establishes his own social penumbra" (Auerbach, 1975: 395). In raising the issues of a diasporic identity, Brennan's fictional adult orphan must embrace the absence of the most primary and basic unit of society. Anastasia's orphaning is the triggering point for her journey and struggle for survival. The valorisation of her identity

is in question. Brennan shows the inevitable tension between the orphan and society as she develops her orphan character's purposeful separation from her domestic history and the pursuit of her self-reformation, which requires the rejection of social and cultural interference. Brennan's adult orphan's return demands social and political negotiation and this communication is crucial for any possibility of success. Brennan also opens up a conversation between the repressive nature of Irish society and the need not only to forge a new individual identity, but to move towards a more modern identity for Ireland.

The Visitor is, as its editor Christopher Carduff suggests, the perfect place to begin with Brennan's work, "for not only does it show where she set out from but it also explores so much of her later fictional world in small compass" (Carduff, 2006: 103). Brennan's novella makes visible her ability to theorise home as space, and the conception of identity formation as a geographically based project. In several ways, this text illustrates the manner in which her work was ahead of its time, in line with the more current shift in human geography and the investigation of spatiality and place. In the beginning of the novella, Anastasia's sense of belonging is linked to the framework of the family home. The only space she can conceive of as home is the house of her childhood; her starting point for an integrated sense of self-identity is invested in the ancestral place. This is echoed in several passages throughout the text. As she battles with her grandmother for the possession of space within the home, she must also do battle with the city and the Church. *The Visitor* is in many ways an example of Brennan's early conviction of the difficulty of location-based identity in the modern world, a judgment that can be seen developing throughout her work. Her later writing continues to acknowledge the inadvisability of tying the individual sense of self to any particular location, be it family, home or country. In this way, Brennan foresees, and tries to guard against, postmodernist concepts of fragmented, performed and shifting identity. In

Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World, Madan Sarup discusses the manner in which identity takes on new meaning in a postmodern world. He questions ideas of belonging and the assumption that “a sense of place, or belonging, gives a person stability” (Sarup, 2005: 1). By not tying identity to something physical – something that will inevitably change in a modern world – in her first work, Brennan explores a sense of unified identity not rooted in a singular geographical place.

Home and place are constituted by, and the outcome of, multiple intersecting social, political and economic relations, which give rise to a myriad of spatialities. Home and the social relations within and between Anastasia and her grandmother are particular arrangements of power: individual, imaginative and material. Brennan recognises the open and porous boundaries of home as well as the myriad inter-linkages and inter-dependencies that constitute them. Her approach draws attention to the way in which it is the socio-spatial that defines place and home – “blank faced houses”(V 5) that “were busy with politics” (V 13) – which results in overlapping and intersecting sites with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusion. Her structure of home is contrived through power relations, and the fictional Mrs King creates the rules which define the boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial; they define who belongs and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience.

Throughout her work, Brennan represents a variety of spaces and places, from the urban to the rural, and from small rooms in the suburbs to large hotels in the city. Her interpretation of life is a provocative one hidden under a patina of metropolitan and country living. Adopting a nomadic consciousness with which to explore the nature of Brennan’s writing, and raising questions as to the manner in which her characters stand or move in relation to a web of discourses, practices, subject positions and spaces, allows for

a more developed sense of the nature of belonging in Brennan's writing. In order to communicate something as abstract as the person's need to belong, not surprisingly, Brennan's first focus was the time-honoured family home. Her starting point is the need for an assumption of belonging that can capture the dynamic and mutually influencing nature of the individual experience within the institutions of family and religion. Through her engagement with the theme of homecoming, Brennan throws a singularly unfamiliar light upon the family unit in Ireland. *The Visitor* questions whether in fact the traditional family structure as the concept of home is perhaps an outdated and problematical structure. Anastasia lives in "two worlds" (V 76) and between two countries in which she cannot settle and cannot metaphorically enter, as she is told to go back to where she came from. This is the question which frames the novella: where does she come from? The answer to Anastasia's bewildering question is that she simply cannot go home again: "the owner of the wrinkled hand, who was the mistress of the house, came out, and with her came her two aged sisters, and they all stood together on the steps of the house. They were all old, with thin hostile faces, and they told Anastasia to go away" (V 84). Anastasia is repeatedly told, "It is really better all round if you go back to Paris as soon as possible" (V 81).

The "themes of exile, emigration and travel have a long tradition in Irish culture, which stretches back across the centuries to include many of the key figures in Irish writing" (Delaney, 2008: 4). Moreover, when the first wave of Irish immigrants arrived in America "they brought with them the Irish literary tradition... creating one of the oldest and largest bodies of ethnic writing produced by members and descendants of a single American immigrant group" (Ebest & McInerney, 2008: 1). Thus the idea that the individual could negotiate a conception of the self and a sense of belonging within the ancestral home has a long and continuing tradition in both Irish and Irish-American

literature. Writing after Brennan, novelist and short story writer Elizabeth Cullinan (b. 1933) is only one of many writers who offer descriptions of the challenges involved in defining the self within and against cultural categories and the legacy of diaspora for Irish-Americans. Cullinan, who worked and wrote for *The New Yorker* shared a close friendship with Brennan and her fictional characters are also of different generations. They are the children and grandchildren of immigrants. Like Brennan, transit and movement always surface as thematic elements in their lives, with both home and homeland being fraught with multiple meanings (McInerney, 2008: 99). Like *The Visitor*, several of Cullinan's stories from the collections, *In The Time of Adam* (1971), *Yellow Roses* (1977) and her novel *A Change of Scene* (1982) present the interior life of a young woman subjected to or practicing a series of displacements or placements in her attempt to locate self-realisation (McInerney, 2008: 100). In *A Change of Scene*, Cullinan too placed the ancestral home at the heart of her writing. Her character, Ann Clark, analogous to Anastasia, is presented with an evolutionary and incomplete sense of self. Ann's evolving identity maps the manner in which an Irish-American woman experiences identity within and beyond home and family. Ann travels to Ireland to study Irish language and literature at Trinity College Dublin in an effort to define her ethnic identity. Like Anastasia, Ann discovers that travelling to Ireland is not a homecoming; however, unlike Anastasia, Ann returns to her Catholic traditions for identity and a sense of belonging. Upon finally discovering that her journey has provided her with neither an enriched sense of her own ancestry nor a feeling of belonging to Ireland, Ann is left with an awareness of a fissured identity.

Reflecting a nomadic heritage, many Irish-American writers revisit the Irish culture out of which they emerged, positioning their narrators on the margins between past and present and between Ireland and America. Indeed Beatrice Jacobson claims that

the narrative voice from the margins resonates both with the contexts of Irish-American literature and more generally with Irish-American female writers (Jacobson, 2008: 116-117). Similarly, Mary Gordon (b.1949), another Irish-American writer, journeys back to Ireland in her first publishing success. *Final Payments* (1978), also tells the story of a young woman who, like Anastasia, needs to rebuild her life after the death of a parent and religion gone awry. Comparable to Brennan, many of Gordon's fictional characters grapple with concepts important to Catholic women, as these women struggle with the doctrine of Catholicism, a faith which both sustains and stifles them. Sharing several of the same characteristics as Brennan, Gordon's work displays awareness of the relation between place and identity, demonstrating what Charles Fanning in *The Irish Voice in America* describes as a characteristic of Irish-American literature. In certain respects, Brennan's work in *The Visitor* both disrupts and echoes the tradition which places the ancestral home as the place and habitat that allowed generations the base from which to locate a sense of identity and of self. Irish-American writers like Cullinan and Gordon represent the experience of exile and separation from home, family and Ireland, of previous generations, but also demonstrate how this loss evolved to reflect other forms of alienation, the search for belonging by the generations which came after, and the perception of this dilemma as experienced in Irish-American culture.

Due to historical events, many of the descendants of nineteenth century Irish society no longer reside in Ireland, but in England, America, and Australia. In fact, the Irish, in order to survive, were forced to journey and consequently are scattered to all points of the globe.²³ Perhaps because of this, Brennan presents a sense in which nomadic consciousness and the search for home may suggest not just nostalgia for the old place,

²³ In an interview on the RTE John Murray show on the 16th March 2012, Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Eamon Gilmore stated that while the population of Ireland currently stood at four million, the Irish diaspora presently stands at seventy million.

but also a felt lack of belonging in the new. In place of the ancestral home, Brennan went in search of the redemptive possibilities of displacement, to appreciate the manner in which the individual finds a sense of belonging in a new setting. It could also explain the importance of Ireland as a dominant subject in Brennan's work and as a principal condition of its production and why her representation of Ireland in fictional form is more than a rehashed autobiography or memoir. Ireland, like Catholicism, gave her a well-established rubric, a ready-made template from which she could write. It also gave her Irish-American readers at *The New Yorker*, unfamiliar with this aspect of Ireland, a glimpse of another side of the country. In moving beyond the autobiographical context of Brennan's writing, what appears is the manner in which the emphases fall equally on what her work reveals about Ireland and on what her treatment of Ireland tells us about her work.

The Visitor offers no poetic consolations of landscape; the narrator's view is obscured and space is restricted. The stranger whom Anastasia meets on her arrival in Dublin makes her nervous, and symbolically describes Ireland as unchanged and like Joyce's Ireland, still paralysed by its past: "You know, if I wasn't sure I'd been away I might think I hadn't gone at all. It was exactly like this the day I left" (*V* 2-3). While Ann Clarke sees her journey to Ireland as a pilgrimage and a source of spiritual renewal, where an Irish name might bring a "treasury of Gaelic custom and Celtic lore", in the midst of "stern beauty" and "amber mountainscapes" (Cullinan, 1981: 7, 35), Brennan signals the inaccessibility of such a romantic idea of a nation and a people whose identity is rooted in landscape and custom. What is enacted in Brennan's eviscerated narrative is a clear-sighted realism that does not address a mythologised Ireland, but rather probes at the question of geography, journeying and identity, exploring where and in what, a sense of belonging might reside. From the beginning of the novella, her description of Dublin is

presented as fixed and unchanging, the landscape is “blurred by the rain” (V 1). The home she describes is dismal with “dark basements and draughty landings” (V 14). Unlike Eveline in Joyce’s *Dubliners*, who can envisage change, but cannot achieve it, Brennan allows Anastasia not only to envision transformation, but also to deal with the anxiety surrounding return and the difficult process of creating a new life. Reflecting Frank O’Connor’s view that the modern experience of dislocation is an “intense awareness of human loneliness”, Brennan’s character struggles in a society “that has no sign posts, a society that offers no goals and no answers” (O’Connor, 2004: 18-19). Anastasia experiences no sense of community, connection or belonging to Ireland; feeling “stupid” and “aimless” (V 77) she finds no guidance for the “confused” and “direction-less” (V 77). The sense of disaffection in *The Visitor* functions in two ways: it bears out the thesis that Brennan’s writing is expressive of more than a reductive autobiographical reading, for it encapsulates the modern sense of isolation, while also providing the context for her story, as disintegration and fragmentation were already part of Irish history as a result of colonisation and famine.

The relationship between self and nation has long been a complex one for Irish authors, with different writers dealing with different motivations, conditions and limitations in their writing. Within both Irish and American literary history, the construction of the concept of home as the site of identity formation has always been a compelling one, with homecoming constituting an attempt at self-establishment. Homecoming and leave-taking are probably the most elementary narrative motifs or movements to be found in writing. However, personal identity is no longer linked to identification with the nation in the writing of Irish writers. Contemporary Irish writers do not have the same need to tell the same Irish story. There is a move toward a more private identity with the self. An example of this can be found in Colm Tóibín’s novel, *Brooklyn*,

published in 2009. Like *The Visitor*, it is a story of departure and return, with a focus on female loneliness and belonging. Tóibín's work explores several themes including the depiction of Irish society in the 1950s and emigration. Yet there is a broader point being made here. The emigrant Irish try to recreate Ireland in their new home. They try, in a sense, not to be emigrants, yet despite their efforts they realise they are not home any more. Mrs Kehoe's house and Father Flood's church are surrounded by another world. Although the Irish endeavour to remain within an Irish community, around them are Africans, Italians and people of other nationalities. While all of them to a degree try to cling to their own identity, as they move past each other on the streets of Brooklyn the edges of their identities are dissolving. This points to a peculiarity in Brennan's treatment of personal identity. While the movement of homecoming is the simplest and most easily available motif of fiction, the larger movement in Brennan's novella is a circling backwards, a leave-taking, a departure, implying the cancellation of the attempt at self-establishment which homecoming had enacted. Anastasia knows "her decision had been made for her" (V 90). Thus the movement of homecoming is never here dealt with as if it were an end or an achievement. Something comes after our heroine's less than triumphant return. And what comes after is what really matters: the reality which homecoming and self-establishment have desperately tried to dissimulate.

Homecoming for Anastasia is an attempt at beginning and newness, but what it achieves is merely a semblance of innovation and progress. Given "the miserable gate of her defeat" was "already open ahead, there only remained for her to come up to it and pass through it and be done with it" (V 68). What really progresses is an unavoidable deathward circumnavigation, as Anastasia travels inwards, "by degrees to some place where the mind has no anchor, and the heart ceases to complain, and beats privately back and backward, toward some endlessly distant and gentle beginning" (V 91). Brennan's

objective is not a homecoming, but a movement towards autonomy. Anastasia's inward journey is a journey of transformation and release, the abandonment of current circumstances that characterise her life in a particular place, country and society.

Throughout *The Visitor* all the important recurring motifs in the novella are interconnected. Dislocation and exile are linked to anxiety, loneliness and marginality. Movement and memory overlap with exile, dislocation, subjectivity, death and religion. *The Visitor* illustrates perfectly the novella's concentration of unity and purpose, symbolic revelation and epiphany. Brennan writes her conclusion as an epiphany and not a fatalistic ending; Anastasia does not "spiral into a breakdown" (Lyes, 2008: 75). Rather, she is forced to deal with the impossibility of return. However, the author has warned of this difficulty from the opening of the novella. Anastasia acknowledges she "might be leaving ... instead of coming back" (*V* 3), undercutting any romantic idea of homecoming from the start. The concern with the theme of loneliness and the apparent ambivalence of meaning is what sets *The Visitor* apart from Brennan's short stories and makes it such a speculative source for interpretation. Notwithstanding Charles May's categorisation of "The Dead" as a short story,²⁴ which is testimony in itself to the ambiguity surrounding the novella as an independent genre, Joyce's "The Dead" is perhaps the clearest and most subtle example of the epiphany technique (May, 2002: 57). As pointed out by Leibowitz, this technique is not exclusive to the novella, as short story writers other than Joyce use it. Brennan appropriates the epiphany as her method of closure and structural device in *The Visitor*. The indistinct and blurry surroundings described in the opening passages, give way at the ending to realisation and understanding, undercutting the emigrant trope of return and geographical notions of identity. In the same manner as the west of Ireland is imbued with the memory of the dead which come to haunt Gabriel in the closing scenes

²⁴ Thomas Loe claims "The fact that *The Dead* is a novella has been too long neglected or casually noted" ("*The Dead*" as Novella" p. 485).

of “The Dead”, Anastasia confronts the irony that she does not belong, yet it is Katherine and her Grandmother who are “the ones sailing away” (*V* 100). In an unexpected leap, Anastasia takes on the image of a vagabond, a person in transit, with no fixed address and no roots, yet she sings a happy song of a land far away. In what amounts to both a dramatic and a symbolic demonstration, Anastasia’s sense of self becomes open and malleable. Rather than a geographically-based identity generating her sense of belonging, for Anastasia belonging becomes “an achievement at several levels of abstraction” (Bell, 1999: 3).²⁵ Family becomes permeable, and, defined by the family, Anastasia realises the self is a hall of mirrors:

Anastasia looked suddenly up at the mirror that hung over the mantle. It did not lie flat against the wall but hung out slightly at the top. It reflected the fringed hearthrug where she had played when she was a little child, hearing the conversation go to and fro over her head. She looked hard at it, thinking that somewhere in its depths it must retain a faint image of the faces it had reflected. She had often looked up and seen her father and mother stirring there, faces half in shadow and half in light, and sometimes one of them had looked up and found her watching. (*V* 14-15)

Brennan uses the reflective nature of the mirror to symbolise her protagonist’s moment of reflection on the past. Anastasia’s contemplation maps the journey between her childhood and the present: the mirror now “reflected only empty chairs, and the firelight played indifferently on polished furniture” (*V* 15), it is only the “background” (*V* 16) which remains the same. The mirror is, as Foucault described a “placeless place” (Foucault, 1986: 2). Brennan uses this idea as a metaphor for the duality and contradiction, the

²⁵ Vikky Bell insists, “one does not simply or ontologically ‘belong’ to the world or to any group within it” (Bell, 1999: 3)

reality and unreality of Anastasia's utopian project of home. For the adult Anastasia, home is now a "placeless place". She realises the home she remembers no longer exists. Her moment of self-reflection shows an absent sense of self which is at risk from the tyranny and domination of her grandmother. The moment of "recognition", and the only moments when Brennan considers "we are real" (*LWL* 3), makes Anastasia realise she must become self-reliant for her own identity.

The individual stories of Anastasia, Mrs King and Norah Kilbride provide a range of options and choices, whether complicit, resistant, or both, to the dominant order and the larger mosaic effect of familial and cultural histories. The unities and divisions of life in a social system regulated by the Church in the face of wider social changes and political movements are further explored in the unravelling tragedy of Norah's life. Norah is given no release from her feelings of guilt; even death does not bring the peace and forgiveness she desires. Unaccepting of the existential condition, hers is a fruitless cry of loneliness, which Anastasia cannot, and will not, answer. Brennan conceives the existential loneliness of Anastasia in positive terms, as inherently valuable, a source of creativity and a means of reconciliation and revelation. Paradoxically, Norah's loneliness is a response to the absence of a particular type of relationship and attachment. Norah's emotional loneliness is shown to have occurred through the domination of her mother and the loss of a close emotional bond to her lover Frank Briscoe. In her search for belonging, Anastasia fails to break through the wall of loneliness and isolation which surrounds her grandmother. Mrs King remains isolated in her dismal residence behind a wall of loneliness from which she is unable to escape. As Anastasia's efforts to reach her fail, the same loneliness threatens to envelop her, making her as cruel and bitter as her grandmother. In her representation of loneliness, Brennan even marshals inanimate

objects effectively to her cause, personifying them with a form of uncanny life, for even the “lights of the street lamps” are lonely (*V* 26).

Brennan regards loneliness as playing a vital part in the lives of her characters. In writing emotional turmoil, she evokes the wrenching fear and panic that true loneliness induces. Her characters are made to discover and accept who they are, and to reconcile human finitude with their need for personal connection and spiritual transcendence, together with an existential perspective, which regards loneliness as intrinsic to what it means to be human. In her description of the death of Norah Kilbride, Brennan argues against a religious solution to the alienation and meaninglessness of the world. She allows no possibility of the redemptive representation of the self by another; the individual self is fated to go to its last resting place alone. Brennan denies the idea that one might find one’s completion through one’s relationship to another; her fictional world is full of pitiless non-religious finitude, as even a sexual union is unable to carry the burden of meaning which Norah expects from it. Although belonging is taken as fundamental to human existence, it is never just one single experience. For Brennan, to belong is to move beyond oneself. Hers is no Heideggerian philosophy of belonging which demands that the individual be dependent on something, be it family, geography or tradition. In this manner, she moves beyond Heidegger whose conception of place implies stability (Thacker, 2009: 31-37).

The Visitor’s description of Norah Kilbride is of a humiliated and heartbroken woman, whose love affair did not end in marriage. The novella’s descriptions of Norah’s past lay bare the sexual needs of young women so decisively hidden behind social propriety and Catholic repressive attitudes in Ireland during this period. Norah Kilbride has lived as her mother’s slave, a mother who addressed her as “Other Self” (*V* 48). She dreams of marriage, a “deathly union with her long-lost hero, with whom she had once

struggled in valiant, well dressed immodesty on a small settee, for love's sake" (*V* 64-65). Norah, now seventy years of age, yearns to be released from the feelings of guilt and shame which her young love-making engendered. She dreams of a reunion not only with her dead lover, but also a posthumous sacramental blessing from the Church. Although this means more to Norah than "Extreme Unction" (*V* 62),²⁶ Anastasia consigns the wedding ring to the deep oblivion of the old quarry. Norah is a desolate soul, not only irrevocably damaged by her long-ago love affair, but also because as a young woman she was dominated by both her selfish mother and the Catholic Church, and finally she is not even allowed this last absolution:

Anastasia took Miss Kilbride's wedding ring from her purse. It was still wrapped in tissue paper, a tiny package. She tossed it into the water. It made no sound, going. She hardly knew that it had left her hand. There it would fall forever with the falling stones, past and to come. She backed away from the edge and stood a moment abstracted in a stare. Poor little Other Self, she thought, and contemplated the cold thankless water, which shook a little in the wind. (*V* 89)

Norah's ring falls forever into existential nothingness. For Anastasia the act of discarding the wedding ring is a negation, representing the freedom to say no. Although it appears a cruel act, this is a representational step for Anastasia, where nothing structures her or defines her, and death is shown to be the final form of nothingness. The futility of Norah's request gives Anastasia a certainty that nothing else can give her, fear in the face of death allows her to claim back her individuality. Humbled by the knowledge of mortality, life is given back to her in a new way.

²⁶ Extreme Unction is a Catholic term for one of the seven sacraments - the Sacrament of the Anointing of the sick, which is administered both to the dying and to those who are gravely ill.

Anastasia's existential loneliness is her way of being in the world, a way of grasping for and confronting her own subjective truth. It resides in her innermost being, expanding as she becomes aware of and confronts the ultimate experiences of life: upheaval, tragedy, change, the passage of time and death. Through the life of Norah, Brennan plays off the themes of respectability and reputation which were the constraint structures that Irish women struggled under in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In her critical analysis of women's fiction, Heather Ingman comments on the reason for the repression of female sexuality in Ireland and the consequences for women such as Norah: "A certain female behaviour, based on chastity and purity, guaranteed the purity and alterity of the Irish nation...The sexually loose woman was not only shocking, she was seen as anti-Irish or 'foreign'. Very often she had to be expelled, if not from her own country, at least from her family or community" (Ingman, 2007: 7). Norah has been forced to smother her sexuality under a veneer of respectability for fear of exile. However, Anastasia rejects Norah's values, the values of Church and State, as she consigns them to a subterranean nothingness, violently refusing the possibility of becoming like her.

The story world of the novella is conceived of as a space in which women are either repressed or marginalised, and this reflects the conditions of successive waves of social and political change. It is within the struggle and the differing perceptions of the older and younger generations of women in the novella that we find conflict with the social mores of the day and the evolving values of a younger Irish generation. The negotiation of acceptable behaviour, that which was socially and culturally acceptable, involves a move from a Catholic-dominated society to a more secular one. Intent on shaking up old, congested ways of thinking, Brennan's framing concept in the novella is a state of existential becoming; her concepts of place and displacement demonstrate a

complex interaction of history with environment and the importance of space and location in the process of identity formation in the experience of a previously colonised people. The novella, as an inquiry into the notion of belonging, ponders whether the concept of belonging is more psychological than social. Is it political, or might it be a product of how Anastasia internalises and responds to the obligations of culture or the demands of social life?

An “anatomist of deracination” (Coughlan, 2004: 438), Brennan locates human existence in a changing world, and portrays human individuals growing in their individuality by questioning or negating their beliefs and values. Throughout the novella, Brennan continues to acknowledge the inadvisability of tying an individual sense of self-formation to a particular location. *The Visitor*, her first contemplation of individual existence in Ireland during a specific period in the country’s history, examines the manner in which individuals might take responsibility for their own actions and shape their own destinies, together with the boundaries and possibilities afforded by the changing nature of Irish society at the time. The ideas and preoccupations featured in *The Visitor* act as an illustration of an existential authorial reflection rather than as a sentimental one. Brennan’s novella recognises that we can never release ourselves from the reality of our lives, even though we can choose our position in relation to it. An examination of Anastasia’s experience and her motivations for leaving home reveal a different story than has hitherto been told. An exploration of Anastasia’s life illustrates a process of voluntary migration, which has much relevance to our contemporary world. In leaving her home and culture because she did not feel at home in the first place, her choice to leave eventually results in her not being at home anywhere in the world, which leaves her within a state of homelessness that includes a complex mix of inconsolable loss, exploration and self-discovery. Brennan employs Anastasia’s return to raise interesting

questions concerning definitions of home and belonging that find a resonance in a contemporary globalised world. Is home where we are most ourselves, or is home the very thing that exiles us from ourselves? Interestingly, *The Visitor* shows a marked preference for the strange and foreign and a consistent contempt for the conventional and easy life of a settled community and this draws attention and provokes consideration.

Brennan actively engages with the opportunities and dangers that arise as a consequence of the dramatic and shattering transformations taking place in Irish culture which affected self-identity, sexuality and one of the characteristically defining features of modernism, the self-conscious break with tradition. Anastasia is forced into a crisis of the self, involving significant pain, loss and mourning upon the breakup of her parents' marriage and the death of her mother. Charting both the territory of the past, where things went wrong for her parents and the alternative possibilities for them, and chances for self-actualisation in the future, Anastasia experiments with a new sense of self. The changes involved in the story are not just external to Anastasia; against the irredeemable breakdown of her family unit, rejection by the Church and under imposed exile, Anastasia must abandon the unsatisfactory situation she finds herself in and choose instead the difficult process of creating a new life. Through this process, Brennan leads her character to emotional growth, new understandings of her desire to belong and a strengthened faith in herself.

Finally forced to end her "visit" and depart, Anastasia "without warning finds a voice in some public place" (*V* 99). Anastasia achieves not only a degree of retribution, but, more importantly, the relinquishing of investment in a system she regards as outdated. Divesting herself of "her hat and her gloves", putting "them down on the path in front of her", taking "off her high-heeled shoes" and pulling "off her stockings" and, tucking them "carefully into her shoes" (*V* 99), she performs a symbolic rebellion from

subjugation. The public removal of her outer garments as she stands in the public square outside her grandmother's house is a representational stripping back, of both submission and defeat and a public flouting of convention and expectation. As "she stepped back barefoot into the street", she sings a schoolgirl song concerning "a happy land" far away (V 99). The text tells us that even "the rowdy errand boys became instantly silent, and so did all the place around, and a passing motorist came to halt, for a look" (V 99). When Anastasia finally sees the faces of her grandmother and Katherine appearing in the window, she calls out to them: "'Goodbye, Grandmother. Goodbye, Katherine. You see, I haven't gone yet...'" (V100). Rather than allowing herself to be driven out, Anastasia chooses instead to inhabit a nomadic consciousness, as, freeing herself from subjugation, she prepares for a journey to "a happy land" (V 99). If taken at face value, we, as readers, are meant to believe Anastasia will succeed. Through setting a radical individualism in conflict with established institutions, Brennan ridicules the tyranny, power structures and absolute rule of the Church, the relation among classes and the interactions between the sexes. In different ways, Brennan resists "assimilation or homologation into dominant ways of representing the self"; her novella enacts "a rebellion of subjugated knowledges" (Braidotti, 1994: 25) There is recognition that home and place are not romanticised pre-political entities. Rather home and place are shaped by oppressive institutional forces and social relationships. They are contingent and tied into a broader context. Brennan's concept of home is created and situated in social, political, and historical contexts, which in turn it helps to shape. Brennan seeks to disrupt the notion of place as central to belonging, offering a new mode of existence that is no longer constrained within closed boundaries. She offers a more individual sense of belonging which is fluid, partial and dynamic.

Exploring the nomadic connections in Brennan's text finds her main protagonist at a transitional point in her life. For Anastasia, freedom is a process of becoming, and the concept of nomadism establishes and provides new images of thought about what potentially exists outside marginalised social subjectivities. A nomadic consciousness invites multiple ways of experimenting with thoughts and ideas, opening up freedom for previously unthought-of connections to be made, and enabling experimentation with what Brennan expresses on the significance of place and belonging. Anastasia's experience therefore can be better viewed as rhizomatic, a moving from hierarchal types of experiences arising from gender, class, ethnicity and locality, to a more nomadic consciousness. *The Visitor* suggests a different approach to life, a less settled existence. In *A Short History of the World*, H. G. Wells puts forward a positive view of such a life:

A different way of living, the nomadic life, a life in constant movement... The nomadic peoples were on the whole hardier... they were less prolific and numerous, they had no permanent temples and no highly organized priesthood... but the reader must not suppose that theirs was necessarily a less highly developed way of living on that account. In many ways this free life was a fuller life... The individual was more self-reliant; less of a unit in a crowd. (Wells, 1922: XV1)

Wells describes the manner in which, the nomad, because he is unattached to any particular piece of land, takes "a wider view of life" (Wells, 1922: XV11). Similarly, Brennan's ontology indicates alternative understandings of home, not being at home and belonging, which take into account the narratives of migratory experiences and the lived experience of the migrant and the nomad. Brennan's reflections on journeying, her "travellers in residence" (*LWL* 2), anticipate what Edward Said views as the paradox of modernity, where the individual must adjust to life within a "generalised condition of

homelessness” (Said, 1992: 61-2). Consequently, a reassessment of Brennan’s work offers unfamiliar ways by which we might re-conceptualise the relationship between the individual, the home and the assumption of belonging. Despite the fact that Brennan’s map of existence may be contested and revised, it nevertheless asks important questions about people and belonging in a globalised world and it certainly provides more thought-provoking interpretations of her work.

In its rejection of boundaries, *The Visitor* maintains, as Edward Said puts it, that: “there is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be” (Said, 2001: 186). Brennan anticipates Said in exploring a sense of place – when that place is internalised – she will have found a home. Her view of exile is “a condition of terminal loss” and a “motif of modern culture” (Said, 2001: 173). Equally she does not try to “obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical: that it is produced by human beings for other human beings; and that, like death but without death’s ultimate mercy”, it tears “people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography” (Said, 2001: 174). Brennan’s re-positioning does not put forward a definitive conclusion, it does not provide closure, but it does provide release. Brennan implies that home becomes intertwined with belonging, but home need not be the traditional container which can be problematic. Her concept of home is something which the individual can take with them, it “is a place in the mind” (V 8). Her emigration and returning emigrée narrative provide the ground to delve into the situation and difficulties at home. When Anastasia returns, Irish society remains locked in its past, but it is this very past which prevents her assimilation. Because everything is different, she can go back, but she cannot belong. Anastasia has become an outsider, with a suspended identity, rejected by the host society.

Brennan projects into the public arena issues that might normally have remained sealed off in a “tiny hotel room of memory” (*V* 3), as personal or domestic. She makes the home operate as a locus for deep, affective ties, which enables Anastasia to re-figure the boundaries of public and private space. Brennan represents the singularity and strangeness of the familiar. Home is the place where Anastasia learns that one is not at home or at peace and that a return to the security of the past is no longer possible. Brennan’s movement is towards an existential condition where individuals are solely responsible for giving their own life meaning, thus reasserting the importance of human individuality and freedom. This involves a crucial sense of self being investigated and a removal of various forms of hierarchal authority, which brings with it moments of possibility. Brennan’s first work challenges previous readings of her writing in an indisputable way, because it problematizes the grounds of our most important determinations and choices, and confers a sense of significance on the presence of the individual in a particular place and time.

Chapter Two

The Long-Winded Lady

“Moments of kindness, moments of recognition” ~ Maeve Brennan

The Long-Winded Lady (1997), first published in book form in 1969, contains fifty-six sketches written by Maeve Brennan for *The New Yorker*. When Brennan first began writing articles for the “Talk of the Town” section in 1954, individual pieces appeared anonymously alongside those of other writers. Her first Long-Winded Lady sketch, which appeared on January 23rd, 1954, changed the pattern and the character of the section. Entitled “Skunked”, the piece described the Lady’s failure to gain a shop assistant’s attention when taking a purse to a dress shop to have a matching collar made. Geoffrey Hellman, a regular contributor to *The New Yorker*, introduced the piece: “A rather long-winded lady has just given us an example of the death of the faculty of attention, which she believes is rampant. Let her present it in her own heart-rending words...” (Hellman, 1954: 26). Taking her pen-name from this description, Brennan provided, irregularly at first, then more consistently through the late 1950s and early 1960s, a series of articles on New York and its inhabitants.

In seeking to establish the existential purpose of Brennan’s writing, the correlation between the spatial configurative structures of the city and the manner in which she used the urban space in her writing comes into view. Her conception of household, “the home fires of New York” (*LWL* 2), which provides the urban citizen with reassurance and a reality of belonging, requires a focus on one of the most significant elements in Brennan’s *The Long-Winded Lady*: her method of reading the built landscape of New York and her particular vision of it. Significantly, Brennan’s writing drew her out on to the streets of New York. Her walks through the city landscape were not simply leisure activities.

Brennan's walks provided the material for her Long-Winded Lady column. Her journalistic pieces describe a walk from start to finish, a street from end to end. Her renderings of the city are marked by a fixation with the specificity of the landscape and the people she sees there. Her sketches are characterised by a detailing of daily life. She describes a couple having lunch at the "University Restaurant, on West Eight Street" (*LWL* 192), two lovers walking down "Sullivan Street" (*LWL* 65), a tourist riding a bus down Fifth Avenue, "a Californian visiting New York for the first time" (*LWL* 255), and a man "who is always combing his hair" (*LWL* 94). A "traveller in residence" (*LWL* 2), Brennan walked through the city looking for material and spatial manifestations of its inhabitants' interactions with the urban landscape.

Brennan's sardonic observations of New York life are written in a humorous, often wistful, and sometimes melancholy manner. Eavesdropping in restaurants, in bars, and on the streets, Brennan renders the human condition with deceptive simplicity. Observing two "opulently shaped girls" at the Adano Restaurant on West Forty-eighth Street, she notes, "Their walk was sedate, as it might well be... their dresses did all the work" (*LWL* 101). Brennan's Long-Winded Lady dislikes aggressiveness and ostentation, critiquing the Empire State Building for "trying to be on nudging terms with every other building in the city" (*LWL* 12). Many of Brennan's excursions around New York City narrate pleasurable experiences. Brennan at times revels in the sensual delights and exhilaration of a large bustling city, "she believes that small inexpensive restaurants are the home fires of New York City" (*LWL* 2), and how "lighthearted" and "delicious" it is to be "reading a description of Balzac's favourite food" (*LWL* 17). Yet, at other times she reveals the loneliness of individuals who are cut adrift from the crowd, who seek the comforts of mass existence, but who also feel threatened and alienated by this very

existence, and who feel increasingly that they have lost their bearings, and are no longer able to control the environment in which they find themselves.

Equally, not all of Brennan's writing holds appeal, and several of her pieces do not date well. Ruminating on "Movie Stars at Large", the Lady recounts the time she watched Elizabeth Taylor filming a scene in *Butterfield 8*, and then tells of a dream of hers involving Greta Garbo. However, while some sketches seem more dated than others, even these can offer a window into important historical happenings. In "Just a Pair of Show-Offs" (1969), she documents the plight of young women forced into prostitution, while also capturing the nature of a changing demographic:

The familiar theatres and restaurants are still going strong, but the streets they stand on have taken on the appearance of slums. There have been a lot of changes. As the streets became ravaged, an army of new girls, of all shades and colors, arrived to walk around on them, and for over a year now Sixth Avenue has been monopolized by young - very - young black girls in huge gold and silver wigs who are so theatrical and new-looking that when you see them posing around the edge of the smelly ruins and excavations you begin to wonder if the entire city is rehearsing for some mad extravaganza that will end by launching us all into Bedlam. (*LWL* 256)

As Brennan describes drunks, frightened people, anti-war protesters, business men, people wearing strange clothes, women in "gold and silver wigs", and women in Chanel suits, she captures the multiplicity of city life. This piece not only documents the plight of young women forced into prostitution, it also captures a changing urban landscape. The shops in some cases are "closed and in some cases barred" (*LWL* 256). The Long-Winded

Lady also tracks the evolution of “this midtown area” into an inner city slum in the “two years since the wreckers moved in on the neighboring streets” (*LWL* 255).

The manner in which Manhattan is delineated through the Long-Winded Lady portrays the city as a conduit for Brennan to decipher and depict the meaning of life through different forms of subjectivity. Brennan’s Lady describes how the individual who dwells in this landscape no longer has the confident certainties and contours of a more optimistic age, in a century overshadowed and struggling to recover from the Depression, World War Two and the collapse of traditional values. Instead, individuals find themselves increasingly submerged within a deteriorating urban landscape. Her collection of journalistic pieces explores her literary treatment of the city, but also documents the urban environment’s shifting values in the middle of the twentieth-century. Many of her sketches survey her reasons for valuing the city as an arena of stimulation, a place which promises anonymity and freedom from familial demands, an environment which continually challenges complacency. The streets bombard the Long-Winded Lady with question after question regarding family, politics, religion, economics, language and even culture itself. Yet the city is also turned into an oppressive environment of concrete yards where nothing can grow, and dimly lit streets where women are sexual prey.

Brennan’s Irish background, an integral element of her fiction, scarcely impinges on her journalism, except perhaps that as an immigrant her outsider’s perspective was more observant of the character of the city and the foibles of its inhabitants. In “Lessons and Lessons and Then More Lessons” (1962), there is only a brief reference to Dublin as her place of birth and her education in a Catholic boarding school (*LWL* 220-4). However, old habits are hard to break, and when the sophisticated Lady sees two Irish nuns she hides her martini glass under the table, although she claims to have experienced “no apprehensiveness, no wild survey of panicky conscience” (*LWL* 222).

A study of Brennan's sketches demonstrates the manner in which individuals are shaped profoundly by their interactions with the city. Of all the spaces in the city which hold most significance for Brennan, the one she writes of consistently is "the space connecting all the others – the New York hotel" (Peters, 2005: 69). When studied together, *The Long-Winded Lady* pieces tell of the experience of a single woman who lives in hotels, travels through the city and prefers to dine alone. It also tells the story of the rupturing of neighbourhoods, the plight of New Yorkers losing their homes and the demise of the residential hotel:

Brennan's work addresses the significance of the hotel for women in the first half of the twentieth-century – census reports from 1920 show that for the first time in American history women made up almost half of its long-term inhabitants, a trend that continued into the thirties – and points to the destruction of hotels as one more example of the cultural shift at mid-century toward the reinstallation of women within the home. Her work also foretells, however unwittingly, the homeless crisis of the 1980s. Amid the rubble of the fifties and sixties lay not just the remains of the middle – and upper-class hotels... but boarding houses, cubicle hotels, and single room occupancy hotels... The destruction of so many hotels in the sixties – as well as the conversion of many residential hotels into tourist accommodation or co-op apartments in the seventies – would be one of the core factors contributing to the housing crisis that would devastate so many lives in the decades to come. (Peters, 2005: 70)

Anne Peters' essay, "A Traveller in Residence; Maeve Brennan and the Last Days of New York", draws attention to Brennan's ongoing concern with the issue of dwelling as exacerbated by the demands of a big city. A writer of transitions, always writing from the edge, Brennan's work identifies a shift taking place in the cosmopolitan society of New

York City. As a journalist, Brennan documented the material and spatial manifestations of New York's history. Her observations stress the displacement of the individual, as well as the disenfranchisement of entire communities as a result of urban planning and the redevelopment of New York during the middle of the twentieth century.

Brennan's Long-Winded Lady sought to mediate the experience of the city for her readers. The work of this chapter lies in the examination of that mediation, in analysing the gap between the concrete reality of the city and the images disseminated by her writing for the magazine, *The New Yorker*. This is one of the most eulogised literary publications in American history and a literary phenomenon which successfully cornered the market in aspirational writing, moulding itself into "trend-setter, opinion-maker and the ultimate embodiment of all that was best about urbanity" (Lyes, 2008: 8). An American magazine of reportage, commentary, criticism, essays, fiction, satire, cartoons and poetry, *The New Yorker* began as a weekly magazine in the mid-1920s. Its hallmark is its attention to modern fiction, its rigorous fact checking and copyediting, its journalism on world politics and social issues and its single-panel cartoons which are scattered throughout each issue. Founded by Harold Ross and his wife Jane Grant, who sought to create a sophisticated humour magazine – in contrast to the trite unsophisticated publications such as *Judge*, where Ross had previously worked, it debuted with its first issue on February 21st, 1925. The magazine, which has never lost its touch of humour, quickly established itself as a pre-eminent forum for serious journalism and, up to the 1960s, had a long history of writers using pseudonyms. Many contributors worked for other magazines and newspapers and used pseudonyms to conceal the fact that they were writing for the competition, while others like Brennan chose pennames as a device to allow them to write in a different voice (Yagoda, 2000: 369-371).

The New Yorker has of course had its share of criticism, and has been labelled “sentimental bourgeois, a totem of good breeding”, only catering “to educated women with large homes and solid hubbies and a fondness for expensive things” (Peters, 2005: 66). Indeed, since its inception in 1925, the magazine has prided itself on its elite cosmopolitan flavour, although it is open to inquiry whether it was only “edited for the urban sophisticate, the doyen of the intelligentsia, the dilettante” (Lyes, 2008: 8). In fact, *The New Yorker* has been written about and talked about in every way imaginable. Since its inception, the dandy with the monocle on its front cover has been its mascot, and it has become part of a group of New York images – a skyline, the statue of liberty and an apple – that have been used as symbols to represent the New York metropolis. The most famous cover was Saul Steinberg’s “View of the World from Ninth Avenue” published on March 29th, 1976, which humorously depicted the New Yorkers’ self-image of their place in the world. In the front cover picture, New York takes up two-thirds of the image as it stretches out to the Pacific Ocean and then fades into the horizon. Browsable and literary, *The New Yorker* touches on all topics related to New York: the people, transportation, architecture and parks, arts and leisure, business, politics and government, crime, disasters, food, sports and neighbourhoods, terrorism, the treatment of prisoners, life and death, some of them “unquestionably first-rate” pieces that constitute “the bulk of the magazine from week to week” (Yagoda, 2000: 107). What is more, *The New Yorker* gives a compelling analysis of what is considered the world’s greatest city as seen through the eyes of its most respected journalists and recorded on the pages of its most storied magazine.

Brennan’s introduction to *The Long-Winded Lady* collection offers only a hint of the boldness and depth of what is to come. The Long-Winded Lady:

... thinks the best view of the city is the one you get from the bar that is on top of the Time-Life Building. She also likes the view from the windows of street-level restaurants. She hates being a shut-in diner. She wishes all the old Long-champs restaurants would come back with all their oranges and mosaic Indians and imitation greenery. She wishes Tom Costello hadn't died. She likes taxis. She travels in buses and subways only when she is trying to stop smoking. When a famous, good old house is torn down she thinks it is silly to memorialize it by putting a plaque on the concrete walls of the superstructure that takes its place. She regrets Stern Bros. Department store, and Wanamaker's and all the demolished hotels, including the Astor. When she looks about her, it is not the strange or exotic ways of people that interest her, but the ordinary ways. (*LWL* "Author's Note")

Noticeable from the start is "a determinedly sophisticated lightness, a silvery urban tone" (Remnick, 2001: viiii) that was true to the magazine's signature. The "Author's Note" has barely enough room to contain all of the topics Brennan wrote about, all of which relate to the city's "busy, funny, angry, joyful, carping and canny inhabitants" (Remnick, 2001: xiii) and their "ordinary ways" (*LWL* 3). The larger than life characters that parade across Brennan's pages are a singularly New York bunch, in turns charismatic, idiosyncratic and pragmatic. Brennan loved New York City and her Long-Winded Lady column chronicles the sights and sounds and the harmony and dissonance of Manhattan. Brennan's Lady paints a picture of New York that is both tough and friendly, and terrifying and comfortable. This collection of fifty-six sketches taken from the pages of *The New Yorker*, written at mid-century, captures the vibrancy of New York's streets, people, and neighbourhoods while highlighting some of the events that made it the city it is today.

As the Long-Winded Lady column began to appear more regularly in the magazine, Brennan dropped her fashionable suburban persona to reveal herself more as a “traveller in residence” (*LWL* 2) and a *flâneuse* of daily life in mid-century New York. Ann Peters describes how she “began to seem less interested in shopping sprees than in a city under siege” (Peters, 2005: 68). Notwithstanding Hellman’s first sardonic introduction, Brennan’s initial piece allowed her to consolidate a by-line and prove a female subjectivity. By introducing the piece as written by “A rather long-winded lady”, and by allowing her to present it “in her own heart-rending words” (Hellman, 1954: 26), Hellman makes it immediately evident that this is a gendered piece, a female perspective, and the reader is made aware that he/she will be seeing New York through the eyes of a female correspondent. As a reporter and an observer, the Long-Winded Lady prefers to walk alone and dine alone, always carrying a book in her handbag when visiting a restaurant, “because it diverts me when there is nothing to listen to and camouflages my eavesdropping when there is something to listen to” (*LWL* 190). Brennan’s connection to the art of flânerie is not only based on her obvious and documented presence as a walking, writing subject in the city it also involves female agency. Her particular way of seeing and interpreting the urban landscape resonates with the central theoretical texts which discuss the role of the *flâneur* and are considered in the second part of this chapter.

Brennan’s persona, the Long-Winded Lady, records and redeems a tangible history, one based on her physical movement through the city, experiencing and exploring built elements of the urban landscape. The Lady recognises and chronicles the pieces of New York City’s spatial history that are being lost. Brennan writes and records experiences of New York’s past through her explorations of place and space, thus preventing the essence and cultural richness of her era from being lost in the progression of time and urban renewal. In a vindication of the quality of writing for *The New Yorker*

magazine, Ann Peters gives a detailed account of Brennan's eulogy of New York's residential hotels and their demise, and, more importantly, she critiques her writing in a defence against the charge of the "whicky thickets of its prose" (Peters, 2005: 66). Drawing attention both to Brennan's literary skills as a writer and to the rich substance of Brennan's work, Peters' essay engages with Tom Wolfe's attack on *The New Yorker* and the accusations regarding tone and content of which it stood accused. One of the most commonly levelled criticisms of *The New Yorker* during this era was of its tendency to strive toward a lighter end of discourse, a blasé wit and disaffected nonchalance and "not infrequent excursions into the out-and-out dull" which was a practice that resulted in a body of writing being labelled all style and no substance (Yagoda, 2000: 282). The other criticism levelled by Wolfe was of women writing for women. He attacked "the abundance of stories by women in the magazine" (Peters, 2005: 66) which he claimed amounted to nothing more than reminiscences of their childhoods. But as Ben Yagoda points out, at a certain point it was "decided that the moment had come for *The New Yorker* to make some waves" and, in the early 1960s, the "New Yorker published a series of articles that, in their social and political reporting and impact, are probably unmatched in the history of magazines" (Yagoda, 2000: 313).

From as early as 1955, Brennan had dropped her determinedly light approach, revealing herself as a "traveller in residence" (*LWL* 2), and "a flâneur of daily life" (Peters, 2005: 68). In his review of *The Long-Winded Lady*, John Updike credits Brennan "with having helped put New York back into *The New Yorker*" (Bourke, 2005: 249). Brennan's evocation of New York holds a special significance within her *oeuvre*. Her sketches reflect some of the moods and crises of a major world city over almost a thirty year period, a city which was transforming itself in the grip of a building boom. What emerges in examining Brennan's vision of the city is that the city experience is both

pleasurable and painful. It allows her to access her creativity and autonomy. The city means her home and her books. It is a place where she can be quiet and free. Yet New York City can also exclude women; it is a cultural community in which men alone transact business, govern the nation and enforce laws on urban planning that destroy a community centre providing the space and cultural tools with which women have been allowed to transcend enforced domestic servitude through education and employment. Brennan's urban environment therefore is both hostile and nurturing to the self.

In her examination of both literary and critical writing within the magazine, as well as the ethos, advertising and editorial strategies of its editors, Madeleine Lyes examines Brennan's contribution in relation to the problem of home-making in the metropolis. Lyes examines the growing disparity of urban New Yorkers and the vast increase in suburban living, focussing not just on Brennan's particular vision of the city, but on those of John Cheever whose fiction straddled the city and the suburb at a crucial stage in its development, of Lewis Mumford, one of the fathers of twentieth-century urban theory as well as of Donald Barthelme in his work with the magazine. Her study offers a distillation of urbanity and provides a perspective both on Brennan's contribution to *The New Yorker*, and on questions of plurality, diversity and the urban public. The critical studies of both Peters and Lyes mediate a sense of Brennan's contribution during an era of immense upheaval in societal and urban issues, and provide a forum for the expansion of Brennan's urban thought.

As an urban walker, Brennan developed a unique relationship with New York City and its history in the mid-twentieth century, one different from writers whose primary interest rests in communities and urban planning. Where urban theorists tend to focus on a comprehensive critique of urban design, with influential manifestos for the social, economic and political dangers inherent in urban planning and how the underpinnings of

the social structure might suffer irreparable damage, Brennan's writing is much more deeply rooted in the material and corporeal experience of the city and its inhabitants. As a walking viewer, a *flâneuse*, The Long-Winded Lady is ultra sensitive to the material aspects and the tenuous existence of this landscape. As a *flâneuse*, she sees the inseparable connection between the people and the spaces where she is walking, and, like the *flâneur*, Brennan brings to light the hidden stories, practices and representative resonances that are attached to the material arrangements in the city's landscape.

The particular significance the city holds for the Long-Winded Lady is the city as a cultural artefact. Its social habitat allows her to experience the city directly and is central to her survival as a writer. In writing about the city she reveals her response to culture itself – a cultural realm from which her gender has been traditionally barred. Women's experience of the city had traditionally been mediated by men, whether husbands, fathers or male columnists. Yet the city has provided the Lady with the space and cultural tools with which to transcend enforced domestic servitude, with a room of her own, and a job. Brennan is not just recording the transformation of the landscape, not merely the changes in the city's demographic that occurred when she lived there, but also the experience of modern urban existence and the reality of living in an environment which changes so rapidly, as illustrated by the trees like "the ailanthus" (*LWL* 139) that spring up quickly and unexpectedly in the gaps where individual houses used to stand. Her gothic rendering of New York City makes it appear transient and unnatural. Her observation that, "at home or away, we are homesick" (*LWL* 142) directs her reader to the difficulty of finding a space for the individual, a space to which everyone can belong, to displacement, disenfranchised communities and the changing nature of belonging.

Brennan's description of Broadway in "The Ailanthus, Our Back-Yard Tree", written in 1968, engages with the breaking up and displacements of community, together

with the challenge to keep a sense of home, when the “blocks, as far as you can see, offer nothing except the threat, or the promise, that they *will* come tumbling down” (*LWL* 124). Her understanding of urban policy is clear: “There is no appealing the decisions of the ogre called Office Space that stalks the city and will not be appeased” (*LWL* 158). For the Lady, the dismemberment of Broadway marks the end of a social world and the end of a community, making her “reflect an extremity of loneliness – that mechanical city loneliness” (*LWL* 128).

The side streets off Broadway have always been crammed with small enterprises of every description, and with small restaurants. There used to be hundreds of restaurants, of every nationality and of varying degrees of charm and atmosphere and price. What all those restaurants had in common was that each place was owned by the man who stood behind the bar, or by the man who stood behind the cash register, or by the man who came forward to meet you when you walked in. We ordinary New Yorkers were kings and lords in all those places, even where the owner pretended to be surly, even where he really was surly. We could pick and choose and find our favourites, and so enjoy one of the normal ways of making ourselves at home in the city. (*LWL*141)

In this sketch, Brennan speaks “of survival and of ordinary things” (*LWL*141), and she writes of the annihilation of vibrant communities torn apart by the bulldozer – “whole neighbourhoods were razed under the National Housing Act’s Title I provisions for slum clearance, providing new homes for some but forcing many, mostly minorities, to seek affordable housing elsewhere” (Peters, 2005: 71-72). Brennan characterises the struggle to find a sense of belonging and the difficulty for the individual of finding a place to belong in a constantly shifting landscape and a city which Brennan describes as crumbling beneath her feet as she walked. This new “noseless architecture” (*LWL* 152)

displaces both people and businesses. It destroys a tangible, felt sense of connection and place. The “new Office Space giants” have nothing to do with the “daily lives” of people or with the “ordinary things” which constitute meaning in their lives (*LWL* 141). The new buildings “have about them nothing of the past and nothing of the future, no intimation of lives spent or to come, but only a reminder of *things* that should not have happened and a guarantee of *things* that should not come to pass” (*LWL* 124). The “ailanthus stands up like a sign of reality”, a spectral tombstone similar to the memorial stone of John D. Rockefeller Jr, who believed “in the supreme worth of the individual and in his right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (*LWL* 14). The existence of the ailanthus fills “the empty hole left by the brown-stone where the gypsies used to be” (*LWL* 139). The idea that architecture and geography hold our lives in place, as identities built into the location of a house, for example the status of an address, are all put under pressure by displacement. The recognition of gypsies, fellow travellers embarked on a journey, is a way of looking at the world, a different way of perceiving things, and a different attitude to accommodation. Yet it is not just the loss of the architecture that troubles the Lady. The Lady’s elegy is for that intangible space, the “strip of common ground” (*LWL* 146), she shares with others and the city. What has been lost is the city’s humanity, all that separates the individual “from the Machine” (*LWL* 146).

Brennan describes the experience of living in a disordered world: “the city was tottering around me; the floor beneath my feet was already shivering under the wreckers boots” (*LWL* 219). Her portrayal in “The Last Days of New York City” published in 1955, describes how the Lady is “scurrying out of buildings just ahead of the wreckers” (*LWL* 219). In her first person narrative, Brennan describes the fundamental changes taking place in the landscape of New York City including the building of “an underpass through Washington Square” (*LWL* 216). She draws attention to the debate around the

mid-century “of women fighting to save the city” (Peters, 2005: 69) and the fierce opposition to the policies of Robert Moses, the “master builder who used his enormous powers in the middle of the last century, to give shape to the Big Apple’s roads, beaches, parks and housing” (Kennicott, 2007: 1):

It was often middle-class women, in the years following the destruction of Penn Station, who would be some of the most vocal opponents of the policies of Robert Moses: armed with baby carriages, the women of the Upper West Side march to save the playgrounds of Central Park, for instance, or join together, under the leadership of urban activist Jane Jacobs, to oppose Moses’ plans to build a highway through the West Village. (Peters, 2005: 69).

This was a decade of intense urban activism and the speed of change in the material fabric of the city was unprecedented. Moses’ plan to extend Fifth Avenue through Washington Square Park caused uproar across the city.

The consequences of the dismemberment of New York City are clear to Brennan as shown by her description of Broadway, an example of the de-humanisation of the city. In “I Look Down from the Windows of This Old Broadway Hotel”, published in 1967, she describes Broadway as an unfamiliar and alien wasteland: “what joviality and good fellowship exist here are thin; the atmosphere is of shabby transience, and its heart is inimical... the irregular roof lines have a stoical despondency, and the blank windows reflect an extremity of loneliness” (*LWL* 128). Brennan’s portrayal of New York is of a space which constantly confronts its denizens with the futility of any attempt at settlement. The preoccupations of Brennan’s writing reflect the social change and political currents of her day. The Lady’s description, of urban life includes, not only an account of the entropy that exists as a result of re-development, but also the problems of

isolation and loneliness that the urban landscape can pose for the individual. One sketch, written quite late in Brennan's oeuvre, describes the Lady standing in the middle of the road on a small traffic island on Broadway, waiting for the lights to change, watching "a respectably dressed middle-aged woman" drunk and loudly singing "Bei Mir Bist Du Schon," and "from the sullen expression on her face... she wasn't enjoying herself too much" (*LWL* 258). Brennan's description of a lone female, helpless and out of control, is an image not only of the urban nightmare, but a frightening image of what might happen to any individual who fails to negotiate this dystopian environment. It is also an uncanny premonition of what eventually happened to Brennan.

In a piece published in 1966, entitled "West Eight Street Has Changed and Changed", Brennan describes Manhattan as a place of ferocity and inhumane temperatures, of freezing winds that tear through Greenwich Village forging a canyon through what was once a more "hospitable" (*LWL* 141) city:

I thought the towering concrete canyons of the middle of Manhattan, where I was working, served to funnel and strengthen the fury of the winds, but even in the Village, where at that time the majority of the buildings were still low, the winds seemed to proceed from a hard ferocity that had nothing in common with ordinary weather or with ordinary times. (*LWL* 195)

The presence of the extraordinary, the uncertainty, the conflict and despair in the Lady's view of city life, is reflective of a growing sense of unease surrounding the future of New York. Brennan's view of New York contains a complexity of viewpoints, which comprehend both the exceptional and the commonplace. Her writing not only recognises the elements of urban living which are formed by personal human practice, but also those which seem completely beyond any individual's control. Her sketches mediate a sense of

change during an era of immense upheaval in societal and urban issues and a newly divergent populace.

In her writing Brennan continuously tackles the subjects of home, belonging and identity, and continues to acknowledge the difficulty of tying one's sense of self to any particular location. While also examining the societal issues affecting women, she stresses the transience and unreliability of the urban fabric as a source of belonging and a place of dwelling. In "The New Girls on West Forty-ninth Street" the Lady breaks the "bad news" that the restaurant "Le Steak de Paris... is coming down... the little restaurant is to be swept away, just like that, after more than twenty-six years of hardy life" (*LWL* 157). Even her friend "Nicholas has his apartment by the month, no lease and no assurance that he will still be here a year or even three months from now" (*RG* 251). There is no "permanence here – there is only the valiant illusion of a permanence that is hardly more substantial than the shadow that touches it" (*RG* 251). The relationship of personal identity to urban space continues to be a central concern for Brennan and she articulates an emerging awareness that individual experience cannot be arbitrarily separated from its public context, that physical space has a profound effect on the definition of self and the individual sense of belonging. Brennan's stories about New York are characterised by a detailing of the daily reality of living in a neighbourhood "with too many buildings half up and half down, and too many temporary sidewalks, and too many doomed houses with big X's on their windows" (*RG* 250). These urban landscapes encrusted with layers of culture – theatres, museums, public squares and historical houses – function as the settings for the Lady's individual emotional development. Brennan raises a set of issues surrounding displacement and belonging so integral to personal identity:

Demolition has begun, but there are still several of the brownstones in a row – tall, thin nineteenth-century houses that stand as straight and plain as ever they did but

seem to slant backward they are so out of line with the rest of the street. It is a broken-down, mis-matched, patched-up street, and for many years it has existed in the extraordinary vacuum created by the city planners, who cast whole areas into limbo for long periods – for decades, sometimes – before the demolition workers actually move in. At the moment the dark shadow in New York is cast not by the past but by the future, and too many streets wear a dull air of “What’s the use?” (*LWL* 158).

As the Lady walks, overtaken by a melancholic mood, she considers the manner in which, “all is makeshift on Forty-ninth Street”, that “even the old brownstones, so beautifully proportioned and presenting such a pure out-line against the high, calm evening sky of summer, seem part of a stage set designed to illustrate the shaky and vanishing side” (*LWL* 159) of New York City.

In describing the view from her hotel window on Washington Square in July 1955, the Long-Winded Lady draws attention to the extension of Fifth Avenue and the large-scale development taking place in New York City:

The Holley was torn down this year, and lately, when I pass that way, I see the narrow gap – surprisingly narrow – where the little old hotel used to crouch between its tall apartment-building neighbours. At the time I lived there, only twelve years ago, a row of worn-looking studio buildings stretched partway across the south side of the Square. I thought those buildings were beautiful and romantic, and I used to long for an apartment, or even a room, in one of them, but they were always full up. Now they are gone, and a dull-faced educational edifice stands in their places. At that time and later, I tramped in and out of most of the handsome old houses on the north side of the Square, looking for a place to live.

Some of those houses were demolished to make way for a set of brand-new, drearily uniform apartments, and most of the rest have been turned into offices. (*LWL* 216-217)

Yet even as Brennan's focus is on the large-scale development which is taking place, her centre of attention on the fate of these residential buildings is a concentration on a more human emotional level. Her incisive style presents a rendering of how these regeneration policies affect the "ordinary" New Yorker: The "beautiful and romantic" buildings which characterise the city so integral to the inhabitant's sense of place are being lost and replaced with "dull-faced educational edifices" and "drearily uniform apartments". These streets and homes have "separate personalities" (*LWL* 123). They impress themselves "so insistently" that she needs to "make a few remarks about them" (*LWL* 123). Even displaced dwellings are found deserving of a mention. One of her sketches relates to the rescue of a two hundred year old wooden farmhouse from imminent destruction, its removal and re-location downtown in Greenwich Village. "The farmhouse was about to be demolished, because it was in the way of a new building plan" (*LWL* 43). Others are reminiscences about what has already been destroyed – department stores, restaurants and bookstores that have "moved or closed because of the high rents imposed in the sixties" (Peters, 2005: 69). The Lady herself feels displaced by the new buildings and architecture:

... more and more the architecture of this city has nothing to do with daily lives. The Office Space giants that are going up all over Manhattan are blind above ground, and on the ground level they are given over to banks and to showrooms, and to businesses run by remote control by companies and corporations rich enough to afford the staggering rents. The smooth, narrow thoroughfares created

by the office skyscrapers are deadly to walk through in the daytime, and at night they are silent and dangerous. (*LWL* 143)

This new architecture provides fewer opportunities for Brennan's Lady to participate in the activity of the city. She regrets the lack of family run restaurants "where we make ourselves at home" (*LWL* 142). She has difficulty finding a safe corner from which to observe others. The new restaurants, although "bright and cheerful", have "the vaguely institutional air common to restaurants run by remote control" which she terms "a benign institutionalism" (*LWL* 143). While her meditations of displacement admits "architecturally, very little that was notable has been lost in the destruction" (*LWL* 145), her excursion into the fraught politics of belonging in a city where "all is makeshift" (*LWL* 159) concludes that, most importantly, "what has been lost is another strip of the common ground we share with each other and with our city – the common ground that is all that separates us from the Machine" (*LWL* 146).

In many of her sketches, this "capsized city" (*LWL* 1) which is quickly disappearing is the backdrop to what in Brennan's view are most important – the city's inhabitants. The inhabitants of New York risk losing their homes, identities and sense of self in an increasingly incomprehensible and disordered world. For the Lady as for the city's populace existence has become fragmented and disjointed. This more serious aspect of Brennan's writing addresses some of the more important issues which affected urban life for New Yorkers during this period. When the sketches are read together, *The Long-Winded Lady* takes "the reader on an extended walking tour" of Manhattan, "a tour that is not intended for sightseers, but for those who know the city only too well" (Peters, 2005: 69). When the Lady watches a Vietnam anti-war protest from a window in her apartment she notes the manner in which "at the east end of Washington Place, on the south corner, where the old Holley Hotel... used to stand... real estate agents speak of ocean frontage"

which “you have to be lucky and rich to get some of” (*LWL* 58-59). The backdrop to the piece, written in April 1967, also reports the movement against the involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War, which began with demonstrations in 1964 and grew in strength in later years. It not only reflects the confusingly fragmented nature of the world, but demonstrates the polarisation between those who advocated continued involvement in Vietnam, and those who wanted peace. This is only one instance of the manner in which Brennan the journalist combined local issues with more universal concerns.

Although the demolition of the buildings that contained the events of the Lady’s life destroys her tangible past, the sight of the broken-down, mis-matched, patched-up streets, and “the rows of ill-matched, ill-assorted houses” (*LWL* 226) paradoxically creates the nascent understanding that she cannot rely on external forms to validate her personal history. Ultimately this awareness enables the Lady to fully embrace her nomadic consciousness. The Lady’s opinions are what Brennan the serious reporter offers. This is no “chatty, cocktail-talk journalism” (Pecora, 2007: 1), rather these are insightful glimpses of the difficulties facing both the Lady, and all the “inhabitants” who are “hanging on, most of them still able to laugh as they cling” (*LWL* 1) to a city under siege. Brennan’s version of New York City makes it problematic to know where to live or how to live; she unsettles any certain outcome to the nature of dwelling. She highlights the ripping apart of a city structure, the ensuing difficulties and problems for both the Lady and the inhabitants of the city, the arduous challenge they face and the felt sense and spatial experience of living and walking in New York during a prolonged period of displacement and transition. The un-settling nature of living on “a stage set designed to illustrate the shaky and vanishing” (*LWL* 159) poses major questions over how the individual is to find a sense of belonging when all is “makeshift” and “crumbling” and an itinerant way of life is all that is available.

Brennan's work stands in the same era as that of Jane Jacobs, the American-Canadian writer and activist. Jacobs' opposition to Moses' planning policies was instrumental in the eventual cancellation of the Lower Manhattan Expressway. Jacobs argued that modernist urban planning rejects the very concept of a city because it rejects human beings who live in a community characterised by layered complexity and seeming chaos. Moses had been hailed as the saviour of New York City – his projects were considered by many to be necessary for the city's development after being hit hard by the Great Depression, and he is often compared to the French civic planner Baron Haussmann and his 'second empire' redesign of Paris. However, Jacobs claimed Moses' policies destroyed communities and innovative economies, and in their place created isolated, unnatural urban spaces "which have all the attributes of a well kept, dignified cemetery" (Jacobs, 1993: 157).

Jacobs never denied that there were "ample reasons for redoing downtown – falling retail sales, tax bases in jeopardy, stagnant real-estate values, impossible traffic and parking conditions, failing mass transit, encirclement by slums" (Jacobs, 1993: 158). However, "with no intent to minimize these serious matters", she claimed it was "more to the point to consider what makes a city centre magnetic" (Jacobs, 1993: 158). Jacobs argued that businessmen had become too "solemn" and that they were "seized with dreams of order... scale models and bird's eye views" (Jacobs, 1993: 158). She claimed their "design philosophy" was "the logic of egocentric children, playing with pretty blocks and shouting 'see what I made'" (Jacobs, 1993: 158), a viewpoint much cultivated at the time in schools of architecture and design. This view is echoed by Brennan when she states, "the People who decided to put this street to use... behaved with the freedom of children playing in a junkyard" (*LWL* 226). Jacob's seminal work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), frequently cites New York's Greenwich Village as an

example of a vibrant urban community and her book has been credited with influencing the spirit of the times. Brennan's writing engages with this debate. In "The Last Days of New York City", the Long-Winded Lady sits contemplating the walls of her hotel room, wondering if they are bright enough to "really assert themselves... if the walls will speak up... when the hotel comes down, as it seems bound to do", and concludes her meditation by congratulating her room on making "a creditable corpse" (*LWL* 218-219) appropriate to Jacobs' "dignified cemetery" (Jacobs, 1993: 158). Brennan's exposed interiors embody a metaphorical subtext of impending ruin. She draws attention to walls "lest they someday be forgotten" (Peters, 2005: 69). The image of a building stripped of its exterior, showing walls painted in bright colours magnifies the fear and distress of the Lady at the city's destruction, the sight of shredded wallpaper and brightly painted walls creating this nascent understanding.

The darker note in Brennan's writing, and many of the preoccupations of her city writing, reflect the social and political currents of her day and "often give way to elegy" (Peters, 2005: 74). She mourns the loss of Stern Bros. Department store, Wanamaker's, the Eight Street bookstores, "all the demolished hotels" (*LWL* 3), "the Brevoort and the Lafayette and the Holley" (*LWL* 196) and "small enterprises of every description" (*LWL* 141). Brennan's pieces about New York's transformation are characterised by a detailing of daily life; they frequently reveal the "gap" that suddenly appears "where you can't remember ever having seen a wall... to see people all over the city sitting in doomed apartments" (*LWL* 218-219). Her sketches draw attention to issues facing the inhabitants of this developing city, where they might find a sense of belonging, identity and home, as familiar and loved buildings are torn down, when old neighbours move away and the street where you have lived all your life becomes "tentative, transient" and "ill at ease" (*LWL* 164). Brennan's meditation on the concept of home is intricately linked with the

autobiographical because she lived in this city, moving numerous times over a number of years, and experiencing directly the homelessness and itinerant nature of dwelling due to the environmental changes taking place. However, she could never have foreseen the impact these changes would have on her own future. Perhaps the truth lies closer to the fact that, in a similar manner to Jacobs, Brennan reflects the concerns of a society and a century with issues of homelessness.

Jacobs believed that in order to find the heart of a city, planners and designers needed to “get out and walk” (Jacobs, 1993: 159), and that in walking the city it would become obvious that many of the assumptions on which their projects depended were visibly wrong. Brennan’s “indefatigable walking through New York’s streets” (Bourke, 2005: 218) provides a window into the consequences as they affected New Yorkers’ sense of belonging, so perilously under threat as their homes were being knocked down, forcing them “into underground streets” (Jacobs, 1993: 161). What Brennan and her Lady persona achieve is a refocusing of Jacobs’ large-scale concerns of urban planning to a more human, individual level. The Lady exemplifies the perspective of the urban citizen’s personal attachment and the demise of the residential hotel – often the only affordable housing for single women. The Lady is a woman amidst the crowd, she emphasises the perspective of the woman who wishes to “escape the confines of the domestic environment, coupled with a wanderlust expressed through forays into the city” (Parsons, 2000: 27). New York’s urban renewal marks the end of her way of life; the loss of her home and the extinction of the residential hotel. Brennan’s representation of the city is a description of the transience and instability of the urban fabric. The picture she renders is of a city disintegrating before her eyes. Her Long-Winded Lady sketches concentrate on the effects a constantly shifting landscape had on the mindset of the city dweller:

Mr. Gregory, the proprietor of the University Restaurant, watched the destruction, day by day, with a sort of unemotional disgust...For Mr. Gregory, the abandonment of the Whitney house as a museum was the *worst*, and it is from that event that he dates the decline of West Eight Street from a Pleasant Place into a Wild Place. For me, the worst was the day Mr. Joseph Kling packed up his International Book & Art Shop, four doors east of the restaurant... because he couldn't afford the new, high Eight Street rents. Mr. Kling's shop was below street level, directly across from the three houses that have just come down. (*LWL* 194)

Engaging with the psychological and emotional ramifications of living in an unstable environment, she conveys disgust and fear of a space wherein the capacity for geographically-based identity formation had become drastically unsettled. Brennan gives a voice to the inhabitants of the city, but also personifies condemned buildings. Watching her "doomed neighbours" come tumbling down the condemned Whitney Museum like "a poor old woman pulling her shawl around her shoulders in wintertime" (*LWL* 193) says, "I may not be what I used to be... but I don't want to go just yet" (*LWL* 193). Brennan's work highlights the individual struggle for a sense of belonging and the threat that what is most familiar might at any moment vanish, the existential challenge facing the modern city dweller when a familiar landscape suddenly turns "into a flat and heartless plain" (*LWL* 195). Brennan writes the city as a frightening place, the redevelopment transforming ordinary streets into sinister and violent places at night. New York streets, she says, take "on a dead, menacing air at night" and appear "more than ever like an outpost, or a frontier street" (*LWL* 45).

Brennan's column observes and monitors the social reality and "endless tearing down of the familiar" that were permanent qualities of everyday life for the inhabitants of Manhattan during a "particularly traumatic period in the city's history" (Peters, 2005: 70).

The transformation that Brennan draws of New York is of a “capsized city” with its “inhabitants hanging on, most of them still able to laugh as they cling to the island that is their life’s predicament” (*LWL* 1). While Brennan perceives New York City as a limitless horizon of unrestricted space and the centre of great events, she also recognises it as a bounded and familiar topography. The city is not merely a casual backdrop for the unfolding fortunes of its inhabitants but is itself a profound presence in her writing, an environment which exerts a powerful hold over those who occupy it. New York City manifests as a postmodern collage of “personalities” which are “cumbersome... reckless... ambitious... confused... comical” (*LWL* 1). One of the striking features of her pieces is the geographic precision of the areas included. Brennan’s precise naming of streets and places the Lady and her fellow urbanites encounter reflects the view of Benjamin, that this naming is no less important than the life of this city’s layout, “in fact, street names are like intoxicating substances that make our perceptions more stratified and richer in spaces” (Benjamin, 2002: 518). The synthesis of wandering, in “submitting to the monotonous, fascinating, constantly unrolling band of asphalt” is to know “how much at home we are” (Benjamin, 2002: 519).

As she walks, Brennan’s path intersects with the traditional figure of the *flâneur*, an accomplished urban wanderer and restless observer. Brennan’s importance as a *flâneuse* places her as part of a *flâneur* community, a female urban walker whose very existence Deborah Parsons claims is at the centre of an ideological controversy (Parsons, 2003: 1-17). Among critics, the existence of the *flâneuse* is debatable. Writers like Janet Wolff claim that she cannot exist, because she cannot show the same behaviour as the *flâneur*, wandering aimlessly around town (Wolff, 1985). As stated by Parsons, the *flâneuse* does exist, but in a different form from the *flâneur*. Parsons claims the *flâneuse* was simply not noticed by male writers, and has existed in different forms since the

nineteenth century. Brennan keeps good company with this literary and theoretical figure – the significance of the *flâneur* has been part of urban literature for centuries. The importance of the *flâneur* as a figure who reads and interprets the urban landscape has featured in works such as Charles Baudelaire's *Le Spleen de Paris – Paris Spleen* (1869) and Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk – The Arcades Project* (1982). Meanwhile, the figure of his female counterpart, the *flâneuse*, is to be found in works such as Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), Jean Rhys's *Good Morning Midnight* (1939) and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Demon Lover* (1945). *Flâneur*, a French word for a detached pedestrian observer of a metropolis, was a gentleman stroller of city streets, first identified by Baudelaire. Both Baudelaire and Benjamin used the term *flâneur* to denote a modern man who could evocatively describe social life in urban areas. The *flâneur* was used to poetically describe the ephemeral nature of modern urban life, but without acting as a consumer. However, the *flâneur's* traditionally anti-consumer stance is endangered by Brennan, in that New York has been commodified to provide city-like experiences to people who ultimately pay to engage in practices traditionally associated with *flâneurs*.

In considering traditional art inadequate for the new dynamic of modern life and the social and economic changes brought about by industrialisation, Baudelaire called for artists to immerse themselves in the metropolis and become analytical connoisseurs of the urban fabric. Benjamin adopted Baudelaire's concept of the urban observer both as an analytical tool and as a lifestyle. He considered the *flâneur* as a metaphorical manifestation of the aesthetic and economic forces of modernity and his study forms the cornerstone of academic discourse on this subject. Benjamin's work participates in the description and development of the *flâneur*, and important discussions of the *flâneur* and the art of flanerie are to be found in *The Arcades Project*. Deborah Parsons claims:

Benjamin is the self-acclaimed historiographer of the city of modernity, basing his influential surrealist methodology in a range of epistemological and scopic metaphors of which the paradigms are the bourgeois *flâneur* and his vagrant counterpart the rag-picker. Both are historical phenomena of nineteenth-century Paris, yet for Benjamin and the contemporary cultural critics who draw upon him they become retrospective concepts for intellectual debate on the city and modernity. Both are itinerant metaphors that register the city as a text to be inscribed, read, rewritten, and reread. (Parsons, 2003: 2-3)

Whilst there are numerous writings, in many languages, and by various authors,²⁷ studies such as Parsons' *Streetwalking The Metropolis* have further developed and redefined the characterisation of the *flâneur* while at the same time constructing the social and literary genealogy of the *flâneuse*. In considering the various ways female authors have experienced or imagined specific urban territories, Parsons' study examines and reassesses Benjamin's motif of the *flâneur* and the writing of urban modernity. Using the *flâneur* as a way to approach issues of the psychological aspects of the built environment, the central questions of Parsons' research is "can there be a *flâneuse*, and what form might she take?" (Parsons, 2003: Back Cover). Assessing the cultural and literary history of the concept of the *flâneur* that is traditionally gendered as masculine, Parsons advances critical space for the discussion of a female *flâneuse*, focused around a range of female writers from the 1880s to World War Two. Her study offers accounts of works by writers including Woolf, Rhys and Bowen, highlighting women's changing relationship with the social and psychic spaces of the city, and drawing attention to the ways in which the perceptions and street experience are translated into the dynamics of literary texts.

²⁷ Examples are, *The Invisible Flâneuse?: Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*. Eds. Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough (2008). *The flâneur*. Ed. Keith Tester (1994).

Brennan's persona of the Long-Winded Lady is appropriate to Parsons' description of the *flâneuse*. Her experienced specific urban territories are linked to a nomadic consciousness, to bring attention to the streets and sidewalks of New York – liminal spaces where worlds meet. These are spaces where inter-class contact happens, where sexuality sparks to life or where a sex trade might occur. In reading the literary map of Brennan's magazine journalism, her literary strategy highlights issues regarding the broad terms of woman's social and cultural relationship with the city of New York, but also depicts her relationship with that city. Her urban walking follows in the *flâneur's* footsteps, and, like the *flâneur*, her activity is quite unique – she walks without a goal in mind, and in her meanderings she sees forces at work in the city while following her interests and being drawn from one spectacle to another. Like the *flâneur*, her eye is attracted to whatever interests her, especially when it pertains to people, and her mission is to sense and feel a world that cannot be seen.

In her seminal article, “The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity”, Janet Wolff argues that as a result of the identification by French intellectuals of the *flâneur* as a male, bourgeois intellectual, they reaffirmed and perpetuated a patriarchal vision of Parisian life within their works, thereby eliminating any recognition of a feminine counterpart. In response to Wolff's claim that a “strict division” (Wolff, 1990: 47) of public and private life made the existence of a respectable, public bourgeois *flâneuse* literally and figuratively “impossible” (Wolff, 1990: 47), several different schools of thought have emerged subsequently to debate the meaning and importance of the *flâneuse*. Collected in *The Invisible Flâneuse?: Gender, Public Space and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris* are essays by eleven scholars, set out over twelve chapters, which contribute fresh new insights on the construction of Parisian modernity and offer “a new model for understanding women's experience of

public space” (D’Souza & McDonough, 2008: 1-2). This study enables expanded analysis of Brennan’s writing. The notion that *flânerie* constituted an urban practice that was not exclusive to any one sex or class, is affirmed by Tom Gretton who argues that the rise of the modern press broke down real and imagined barriers by encouraging readers to adopt an intertextual position of neutrality in relation to the *flâneur/ flâneuse* (Gretton, 2006: 94-113). Additionally, Ruth Iskin demonstrates how Parisian commerce served as a catalyst for the construction of a modern femininity often associated with the New Woman. Commercial posters encouraged female viewers to identify with idealised images of women as confident, self-aware participants in city life (Iskin, 2006: 113-129). Consequently, what emerges from a study of *The Long-Winded Lady* collection is the manner in which Brennan, in providing “snapshots” (*LWL* 1) of the city, moves the debate forward and suggests a postmodern *flâneuse*. By creating her own partial visions to describe the unique experience of inhabiting the contemporary city, rather than “an instantiation of patriarchal power, positioning women as objects of an erotic and covetous look” (D’Souza & McDonough, 2008: 10), her female mobility has an emancipating effect. Brennan uses the destabilising tactics of place, margins, edges, borderlands and the absence of home, all of which are premised on the fact of dislocation from a given patriarchal culture. Brennan’s streets and sidewalks come to signify everything that a capitalist administration seeks to control or expel. In her sketches, the streets and pavements often become a place of contact between multicultural subjects that the dominant system may not be able to assimilate.

Recognition of Brennan’s awareness of urban space is crucially important, for it allowed her to understand the changing dynamic taking place within the city. The streets of Broadway are no longer a suitable grazing ground for the *flâneuse*’s imagination. The pavements are too narrow; hanging around or stopping once in a while to look around is

becoming physically impossible. There are no streets and houses flanking it to allure those who, like the *flâneuse*, have the time or the urge to stroll and capture the sights. Benjamin's archetype of the big Parisian city, his arcades with their glass covered, marble-panelled passageways, lined with the most elegant of shops, was a fit dwelling place for the *flâneur*. His arcades were spaces to be in, not just to pass through. In the arcades the *flâneur* was at home. The passer-by was beautiful, and all the more beautiful for the beautifying work he/she allowed the *flâneur* to perform in his free-floating fantasy.

By contrast Brennan's *flâneuse* with her nuanced urban viewpoint is grounded in reality. She must traverse the narrow sidewalks of Moses' New York as opposed to Haussmann's wide boulevards of Paris. The street is no more the *flâneur's* hunting ground; it is, as Hannah Arendt pointed out, but a traffic-flow-support nexus. The Long-Winded Lady's public space is transformed into a frightening uncontrolled space, an arena to move through, not to dwell in. Brennan's sketches demonstrate the streets of New York turning into that from which one hides, for example at home or inside a car, behind security locks and burglar alarms. The street level of the city changes into Jacob's dead space; it is only a means of passage to the interior.

For Brennan, as for the *flâneur*, nothing in the city is unconnected. Her nomadic perceptiveness sees the connection between all facets of the city. While there remain "issues to be addressed in any discussion of the definition of a female *flâneur* or separate category of *flâneuse*", these consist in the paradoxes and categories, into which women have been placed as either "morally questionable" female urban walkers or their "identification with a male point of view" (Parsons, 2003: 81).²⁸ As a *flâneuse*, Brennan's

²⁸ Parsons points to some early initiatives taken by women in the nineteenth century; the "feminine muse" strolls around, her domain having moved from the interior of her home to the interior of the department store and sometimes even to streets. Shopping, art and day trips contributed to her developing a certain viewpoint by the end of the nineteenth century. Although still objectified by men and patriarchal institutes, by the beginning of the twentieth century she was discovering art forms like the cinema and the theatre. As women changed their lives and had an opinion about the society they lived in, and as they gained respect as

Long-Winded Lady moves through the built, lived, inhabited spaces of the city and connects seemingly unconnected parts to each other. Everything in the urban environment can be related, joined and juxtaposed – any connection is possible. Yet her built-in mobility is representative, not only of Benjamin's *flâneur*, but also of Rosi Braidotti's nomadic consciousness and is born of a sustained project to re-map and therefore revolutionise the concept of belonging. However, unlike Benjamin's "masculinist" and "omniscient view" (Parsons, 2003: 7), Brennan's understanding of New York as a contemporary city – is not "the increasing fragmentation of a still-coherent whole" (Parsons, 2003: 7), but a consideration of that "omniscient vision and its exclusions" (Parsons, 2003: 7). Where Benjamin's male mobility was related to patriarchal economic factors, Brennan's Lady and the space in which she finds herself can never be domesticated, appropriated or fully understood. The city space of New York is forever adjustable and multidimensional, and Brennan herself claims she is simply "showing snapshots taken during a long, slow journey" (*LWL* 1). Brennan's geography of the city is not Benjamin's "obsessive attempt to know the city in its entirety, a surrealist desire to penetrate the fantasies of its phantasmagoria, and a determined project of reacquisition of its fragments" (Parsons, 2003: 7). Brennan's Lady "has never felt the urge that drives people to investigate the city from top to bottom. Large areas of city living are a blank to her" (*LWL* 2). Rather, Brennan presents a female city consciousness, and argues not for the geometrically ordered modern city of Robert Moses, an environment more suited to a rational and purposive figure, but for a postmodern, informal and flexible city, as proposed by Jane Jacobs. Brennan's Lady is no resolute, determined figure suited to the

artists, the image of women as "feminine muse embodying what is beautiful, fleeting, and inspiring" (Parsons, 2003: 81) had to disappear. As woman had to claim an active role and develop her individuality the city was not experienced, but reduced to a place to be consumed. The *flâneur* was often interlaced with other characters - passersby, artists, dandies and badauds. The *flâneuse* also often interlaced with other figures similar to these and therefore often shifted between these roles, but distinguished herself by her independency and distance. She became a symbol of postmodern urban life: a wanderer in many shapes (Parsons, 2003: 43-81).

fixity of the modern, but a “nomad and lover of the picturesque” (Parsons, 2003: 8), which allows for philosophical reflection on a complex, colourful and shifting scene, a postmodern “kaleidoscopic myriad” (Parsons, 2003: 8).

Brennan’s framing metaphor for a contemporary subjectivity is that of a nomadic subject, which she obviously considers an appropriate political stance in her concern with developing a new kind of figuration and an escape from the recapitulation of problematic modes of past epistemological representation. Brennan is primarily concerned with the act of writing which, according to Braidotti, is “a process of undoing the illusory stability of fixed identities” (Braidotti, 1994: 15). In working with the figuration of the nomad, she finds a position, similar to that of the *flâneuse*, of nonchalant detachment, a luxury available only to people who, like her and the nomad, are able to reposition their home. Brennan’s Lady persona attempts to “explore and legitimate political agency, while taking as historical evidence the decline of metaphysically fixed, steady identities” (Braidotti, 1994: 5). Brennan’s engagement with displacement is not only displacement from one country to another; as like other New Yorkers, she too is susceptible to displacement. The whole point to Brennan’s unbounded or ungrounded movement is to resist a fixed self, “even after more than twenty-five years the long-winded lady cannot think of herself as a ‘real’ New Yorker” (*LWL* 1-2). The act of walking places her in the position of a contemporary nomad. Her Lady is rooted in the knowledge that the journeying itself is home and that to which she aspires. “As a traveller” (*LWL* 2) Brennan offers nomadism as a virtue together with a model of space in line with Soja’s “thirdspace”. Her female nomad may be placed at an intersection between feminism and postmodernism, both of which critique the notion of the unitary subject. In adopting the persona of the *flâneuse*, and a nomadic consciousness, Brennan states, “the long-winded lady is real when she writes” (*LWL* 3), thus embracing diversity and contradiction. By rejecting the rigid gender

boundaries of the *flâneur*, she provides a specifically feminine postmodern picture of identity. Because of the changes taking place in the topography of New York City, the act of wandering into unknown territory has the potential for a different positive reading of events: The assertion that movement, a defiant gesture in the wake of such colossal demolition in which the streets are unavailable for the kind of leisurely walking associated with the *flâneur*, renders the need for such walking to be an important cultural and spiritual experience. This is affirmed in her sketch “The Traveler” (1963) where her description of “Sunday quiet” (*LWL* 120) bears a striking resemblance to people meeting and conversing after a Sunday religious service. Brennan indicates both a readiness for departure and an inner or spiritual necessity to keep in mind that “there is nothing like a short walk through this city to remind us of the accidental nature of our lives”, to remember that life “is a miracle” (*LWL* 117).

Brennan’s Lady shares Michel de Certeau’s notion of the *flâneur/nomad* as “user of a city” (de Certeau, 1988: 98), who as an itinerant figure escapes from the disciplinary strategy imposed by urban planners and architects by following her own desires and inclinations. In keeping with the theories of Braidotti, Deleuze and Guattari, the nomadic walker sees the city as a boundless stage where the self can be sacrificed and shattered and where new identities can be experienced. As a nomad, Brennan is, in terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s nomadology,²⁹ inherently political; she destabilises the disciplinary structures that fix and regulate the city’s identity. She shifts across the space of the urban, using points and locations to define paths rather than places to be, and making the most of circumstance. As Braidotti points out, “the concept of ‘becoming’ is central to Deleuze’s philosophical concerns” (Braidotti, 1994: 111). The movement in Brennan’s writings from *The Visitor* through her later work in the “Long-Winded Lady”

²⁹ Giles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, “Treaty on Nomadology: The War Machine” *A Thousand Plateaus*, (2004), pp. 437-490

column shows the development in her project of dwelling. Her moments of empathy and recognition can be seen to progress her project of existential belonging. Her project of the nomadic subject reflects Braidotti's idea of cultural mutations: what is happening to bodies, identities and belonging, in a world that is technologically mediated, ethnically mixed and changing very fast in all sort of ways? Brennan identifies modernity as the site from which extrapolations of present and future modes of social being originate and depart; modernity itself is both "context and conjecture" (Soja, 1989: 25). To map and excavate the ambiguity of the present engages Brennan in an exercise whereby the search for the vital elusiveness of the spatial environment becomes her guide to redrafting the conceptual framework for her perception of space and place: "Broadway is dying" (*LWL* 67) and she has only "temporary residence" (*LWL* 70), but Brennan's writing indicates a reflex to want to imagine a "post" to modernity, to experience disappearance or absence in the living moment, which carves out a desire for a future while containing a nostalgia for things past. Her "permanent transients" (*LWL* 227) travel to both map and search for the vital elusiveness of the spatio-temporal environment.

The Long-Winded Lady takes part in a spatial politics as a sort of everywoman producing infinite spatial possibilities, "neither migrant nor exile" (Braidotti, 1994: 21). The nomad "does not stand for homelessness, or compulsive displacement; it is rather a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all ideas, desire, or nostalgia for fixity" (Braidotti, 1994: 22). Braidotti points out the manner in which the figuration of the nomad "expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity" (Braidotti, 1994: 22). Brennan's "moments of recognition" (*LWL* 3) are "not feminized by female group collectivity so much as an existential connection of spirit; her concentration being on moments of empathy experienced between otherwise isolated individuals" (Parsons,

2003: 19). Parsons points to the manner in which “it is a tendency of postmodern and feminist critics to celebrate the nomadic existence of the urban wanderer, acclaiming the non-static perspective as an alternative to what they regard as fixed and limiting traditional and patriarchal standpoints” (Parsons, 2003:189). As Virginia Woolf claims in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), the experience of looking is gendered, because men and women see things differently. Brennan’s urban city is the province of the *flâneuse*, her act of wandering identifies with imagery from the city landscape that Parsons describes as “aspects of life” which “stand out with vision-like significance” (Parsons, 2003: 199).

Brennan’s use of a persona makes possible a collective, inter-subjective switch to another mode of everyday perception that can be characterised by a form of instantaneous memory capable of generating “snapshots” (*LWL* 1) of the heterogeneous realities continuously produced by any given place. The Long-Winded Lady’s strolling around Manhattan becomes a type of postmodernist movement that echoes Henri Lefebvre’s “lived space” and which, in turn, allows a glimpse of a replenished present and a meaningful journey comprised of a juxtaposed series of “moments of recognition” (*LWL* 3) or empathy. In what may be seen as a utopian move, Brennan’s sense of belonging is retrieved, paradoxically, out of the factors of disruption or shock in modern life which first precipitated the crisis in the individual’s ability to shape meaning from the material of fragmentation and modernity.

Brennan’s project of belonging is based on the destruction of the foundations of traditional concepts of home and belonging. The traditional idea is a static concept which implies fixed roots, or the place where our ancestors lived. Brennan’s project of belonging, which is developed in her writings from the ancestral home in her earlier work, *The Visitor*, to her later columns in *The New Yorker*, concern more than an elaboration of her earlier considerations. Brennan used her Long-Winded Lady column to develop

insights into the difficulty of location-based identity, but also to hypothesise an alternative relationship to place and space. The relationship which Brennan develops between the Lady and the city is a relationship defined by her observations, her “moments of kindness [and] moments of recognition” (*LWL* 3), which connect and bind her to the urban fabric and, most importantly, to the people who live there: “When she looks about her, it is not the strange or exotic ways of people that interest her, but the ordinary ways, when something that is familiar to her shows” (*LWL* 3). When she sees “A Little Boy Crying” she knows she “will never forget” the young boy’s “lament”, his ““Aaaaaaaah!”” because his big brother moved him out of his way “with a good push” (*LWL* 148), and she feels similar in watching helplessly “a pair of young lovers quarrelling” with no hope of reconciliation (*LWL* 64). The Lady’s relationship with the city is a dialogue that does not reside in the traditional form of dwelling because of the changing nature of the urban fabric, where entire blocks can alter their character without warning and spectral appearances like the ailanthus trees spring up and take their place. Instead Brennan posits the potential for a different form of connection and belonging. Her “moments of recognition” are validation of a different relationship and a more meaningful form of connection with the world and the project of dwelling.

Contained within Brennan’s partial visions are versions of the idea of the postmodern, an awareness of its critical versatility and potential in providing a place from which to establish a historically disengaged perspective and a reorganisation of social relations. Her Long-Winded Lady shows a desire to shift emphasis away from the wish for homogeneity towards an acceptance of diversity. Brennan’s *flâneuse*, her postmodern wanderer, is on a journey to re-embodiment a space previously abstracted, her goal to reclaim the contemporaneous experience of spatiality from the non-experience of that which is merely mechanically produced and capitalistically juxtaposed. Brennan’s critical dialogue

with the economic and cultural premises of everyday modernity is in fact anticipating Braidotti's "nomadic subject". Hers is a movement of recollection, an attempt to recall a nomadic means of coping with modern embodiment which could be capable of unmooring, of liberation for the individual from the specific spatial conditions of the crumbling landscape of New York. Placing Brennan's persona within Braidotti's theoretical context illuminates the manner in which Brennan attempts to reclaim the contemporaneous experience. Benjamin's *flâneur* and Braidotti's nomadic subject are concepts articulated in order to populate the views constructed by these thinkers. The point of inhabiting a "nomadic consciousness" (Braidotti, 1994:23) is about "crossing boundaries, about the act of going, regardless of the destination" (Braidotti, 1994: 23). No matter which term we use – *flâneuse*, nomad or urban wanderer – the experience of Brennan's Long-Winded Lady, her nomadic consciousness, no longer forms itself in strata produced by a continuous meaningful encounter with the world, but flashes in and out of consciousness in a series of juxtaposed moments of exchange with the city and its inhabitants.³⁰

In her introduction to Benjamin's essay, "The Work Of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), Hannah Arendt reveals how his life and work was a prism of his times. She identifies and contrasts urban redesign, such as Moses' redesign of New York with Haussmann's Paris, and her account mirrors the sentiments of both Jacobs and Brennan in their descriptions of the de-humanisation and social reality of Moses redesign:

To this day Paris is the only one among the large cities which can be comfortably covered on foot, and more than any other city it is dependent for its liveliness on

³⁰ Brennan's focus on the instant, on that which is imminently local is differently motivated from that of a modernist representative such as the *flâneur*, whose temporal narrowness of view proceeds from the gap in his experience of the long view or the long term. Brennan looks to the "future" and the outcome for the inhabitants of New York City.

people who pass by in the streets...The wasteland of an American suburb, or the residential districts of many towns, where all street life takes place on the roadway and where one can walk on the sidewalks, by now reduced to footpaths, for miles on end without encountering a human being, is the very opposite of Paris. What all other cities seem to permit only reluctantly to the dregs of society – strolling, idling, *flânerie* – Paris streets actually invite everyone to do. (Arendt, 1999: 26-27)

In his essay, Benjamin discusses how even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. The unique existence of the work, he claimed, reflected the history to which it was subject throughout the time of that history. Brennan's interiors, her exposed coloured walls, which "speak up after the room has been laid open" (*LWL* 219) embody both a building's impending ruin, and existence at the place where human living occurred. As well as the various changes in its ownership, including the changes which it may have suffered over the years, she draws attention to the "architectural remnants, architectural mistakes, and architectural experiments" (*LWL* 226) that might "someday appear in an old photograph" (*LWL* 228). Similar to Benjamin, the presence of the original is the prerequisite to her concept of authenticity. Benjamin examined the meaning of art at a time when it could be easily manipulated – his work a prism of his times. In her observations, Brennan brings the very new into shocking conjunction with the very old, thereby providing a history of place, one which clings to the fragment, the miniature and the stray, but which impacts these fragments, one upon the other, to political effect. Her extracts of the individual's changing relationship with the social and psychic spaces of the city, draw attention to the ways in which the perceptions and experiences of the street are translated into the dynamics of a human mode of dwelling.

In a piece dated July 13th 1968, Brennan writes “there are times when this city seems actually to disapprove of people...I think we are allowed to stay alive here but not to live... the people crowding the sidewalks... like sheep in a pen that has no end” (*LWL*, 67). The Lady’s discussion of the modern urban landscape presents a pessimistic picture. New York is a giant concrete and glass symbol of everything wrong with the world and society, a place of suffering that can only be endured for so long before it swallows you whole. Brennan’s New York is no longer portrayed as the magical place of bustle, commerce, and unlimited potential of her initial pieces for *The New Yorker*:

New York City is not hospitable. She is very big and she has no heart. She is not charming. She is not sympathetic. She is rushed and noisy and unkempt, a hard, ambitious, irresolute place, not very lively, and never gay. When she glitters she is very, very bright, and when she does not glitter she is dirty. (*LWL* 142)

The Lady implies the city allows no space for individuality, it is “meant for merchandise, not for human beings” (*LWL* 260). It is a life of forced adjustment and mimicry, the modern urban landscape makes individuals “sheep in a pen” and “dubious, discolored copies of one another” (*LWL* 260). Brennan is not the first to draw attention to the manner in which isolation linked with alienation,³¹ in its most subjective sense, surfaces most intensely when individuals are crowded together like “sheep” in the limiting space of a modern city. The Long-Winded Lady’s urban space is a social product. It exists as a result of past decisions and practices, situated in particular relations of power and wealth. In that sense, it cannot be conceptualised as an unchanging structure in which human interaction takes place. Brennan’s observations mark an altered social fabric, but also highlight the concomitant psychological results, together with the depersonalising effects of this city consciousness.

³¹ *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), written by John Dos Passos, places its focus on the development of urban life in New York City. In his novel, Dos Passos attacks the consumerism and social indifference of contemporary urban life that subsumes and crushes the individual.

The utopian space of the *flâneur* has gone and it has been replaced with the dystopian space of contemporaneity, something more fitting for a postmodern nomadic subject. Brennan's Lady moves from the patriarchal space of the *flâneur* and makes of it her own twentieth-century female version. Her presence as a woman on a city street is not questioned as she walks alone in her desire to follow her curiosity and discover the many components of her city. The Long-Winded Lady belongs to a community of strangers "she is not a sightseer" (*LWL* 2). The urban landscape gestates her stories and these stories bring her back to the sites of its history. She finds a sense of belonging on the city's streets. Brennan implies a desk or an office is no place for her to think about the large-scale issues which are affecting the city's inhabitants in such a profound way. Her urban footsteps, her search for a coherent self-identity, offer an interrogation of the value of urbanity in New York. Her very movement challenges notions of home. Once again Brennan places an emphasis on the importance of having a number of different roots – a rhizomatic connection – rather than an attachment to a singular place. Deleuze and Guattari describe the manner in which the nomad has a rhizomatic relation to place that defies the very idea of settlement; it is an endless, haphazard multiplicity of connections that is not dominated by a single centre or place, but is decentralised and plural. Brennan continues to develop the idea that strong notions of home and belonging seem to lead to instability and impermanence. Connection and belonging are revealed as intangible and complex concepts, which are based upon insights and a developing sense of identity. Brennan's perception that "we are real only in moments of kindness, moments of recognition" (*LWL* 3), indicates the manner in which she links identity through empathy and the relationships between individuals and their relationship to the city, their culture and society.

The Long-Winded Lady establishes the extra-ordinary times in which Brennan was writing. Her work contains a complexity of viewpoints. Amidst her portrayal of urban

chic, she also reveals an awareness of the city's ferocity when she notes "the truth is not in triumphing. It is merely what remains when everything else has been squandered away" (*LWL* 197). The geography of New York emerges as heavily symbolic and stratified in the walks taken by the Lady. Brennan demonstrates, through various interactions, that buildings and places play their part in shaping both the people and the text. By naming and fore-fronting streets and buildings, Brennan incorporates these as an important part of the culture of the city. The geography and historical specificity of Brennan's city iconography is closely linked with the psychological portrait of the people who live there.

In "Ludvik Vaculik" dated September 7th 1968, the diverse stands of Brennan's metropolitan vision are played out against a narrative dealing with the Long-Winded Lady reading *The New York Times*. The sketch is named for the Czech author of the "Two Thousand Words" manifesto of 1968. It documents the power of the free press amidst the Soviet invasion of what was then Czechoslovakia, and the removal of the government of "Alexander Dubček and other high officials" (*LWL* 198) – during the Prague Spring as well as the distressing report that "some Czech citizens are trying to stop advancing Russian tanks with their bodies" (*LWL* 198). In continuing to read through the morning newspaper the Lady learns:

all about the Democrats getting ready for their Convention... the Londoner who saved his pet goldfish, George, from drowning and may receive an award from the Royal Society... and another Londoner a cleaning lady in St. Alban's Cathedral, who picked up a rumpled brown paper bag from under one of the pews and found inside not the stale sandwiches she expected but seventy-five hundred dollars' worth of gold and platinum, diamonds, bloodstones, and onyxes – a dazzling haul. On page 2 of the *Times* there was a photograph of Count Carl-Gustav von Rosen,

the Swedish aviator who broke the Nigerian blockade of Biafra and got food in to the starving Biafran people. (*LWL* 199)

Finally, the Lady's attention is captured by a picture of two white South African students being bombarded with white paint as they protest against a government veto on the appointment of a black African lecturer at Capetown University. Finished with the process of reading the newspaper, and wanting "to see if any kind of early-morning service was being held at the Jan Hus Presbyterian Church" (*LWL* 200) on Seventy-fourth Street and Second Avenue, the Lady leaves her apartment to walk the city and see the effect the news of the Soviet invasion has had on the Czech and Slovak communities of New York. However, in the culmination of the piece, "a peaceful big-city scene, dominated by St. Patrick's Cathedral", the Lady states "there was no sign around that a blow had been struck that might smash the globe and would in any case leave deep and lengthening fissures in it" (*LWL* 201). Instead, "a little crowd of people gathered around a shop window" (*LWL* 202) – not as the Lady guessed, to watch the news from Czechoslovakia, but rather as part of a movie being filmed from across the street. The group, comprising some actors and passersby drawn by the sight of an interested crowd, are staring at a "gray-haired lady sitting by a large organ and smiling" for "the familiar moviemaking truck" (*LWL* 202). The crowd is performing an urban scene for a camera, playing an unsuspecting part in the creation of a typical New York film. In this piece, the Long-Winded Lady presents a pen picture of a cosmopolitan city, both affected by and unreceptive to the disturbance in the political, social and cultural conditions of New York City impacting on the inhabitants. Brennan's view that there is a powerful interaction between life and the city is embodied in the remark, "we all suddenly realized whatever it was we realized, and we scattered hastily, going our different ways" (*LWL* 203). The piece demonstrates the coming together and social interaction between people, city, and

the outside world, together with the connections which can offer comfort and support if the individual chooses to seek them out.

Disconnecting from a biographical reading of Brennan and connecting with her nomadic consciousness, a close engagement with her movement around Manhattan is telling in the way it establishes her place within and her love of the cityscape. The narrative of her pieces interweaves the Lady's thoughts with her surroundings and exemplifies those recurrent "moments of recognition" which Brennan instantiates in *The Long-Winded Lady*. Brennan's personal statement, "I think the long-winded lady is real when she writes here, about some of the sights she saw in the city she loves" (*LWL* 3), supports this view. Brennan links the Lady's sense of self with her interaction in Manhattan. Brennan's intertwining with the city is further reinforced when she imagines that her basic survival is dependent on it, and on the people who inhabit it, that somehow they would all "cling to the island" (*LWL* 1), in the face of any adversity. The city impinges on the consciousness of The Long-Winded Lady, on her journeying and in its everyday happenings. Brennan's many adventures through New York's spatial landscape leads to a retelling of the city's multifaceted history. In doing so the culture and society of New York's past come into view and Brennan's own words reinforce the way that attention to the space of a city allows for the elucidation of history. Implicit in her writing is the desire to save living, inhabited spaces of the city from oblivion and nothingness. In "A Blessing", the final sketch in the collection and the last piece that Brennan wrote for *The New Yorker* in January 1981, she states:

Yesterday afternoon, as I walked along Forty-second Street directly across from Bryant Park, I saw a three-cornered shadow on the pavement in the angle where two walls meet. I didn't step on the shadow, but I stood a minute in the thin winter sunlight and looked at it. I recognized it at once. It was exactly the same shadow

that used to fall on the cement part of our garden in Dublin, more than fifty-five years ago. (*LWL* 267).

Brennan endows temporal artefacts like shadows with a redemptive living quality as she remembers them. The Long-Winded Lady's walks lead to encounters with history and, as her writings remember the various temporal relics of the Manhattan landscape, urban history is re-endowed with a living quality. Forgotten and dying space, and the human history tightly connected with that space, are salvaged from nonexistence. Brennan has succeeded in her task. In walking through the city and in describing the various spatial pieces of architecture, rooms, and streets; in exploring and interacting with the stories and figures tied to place, Brennan exhibits qualities indicative of the *flâneuse*, a postmodern wanderer. Through her collection of sketches for *The New Yorker* magazine, she reveals herself to be dedicated to focusing on and analysing the material and spatial manifestations of New York City during a very important period in the city's history, regardless of their visibility or clarity in the modern urban setting.

As a journalist, Brennan recognised her role in protecting the material and spatial manifestations of history. Her writing demonstrates that spaces are actually places which preserve the human touch in the form of intellect, spirit and even like the ailanthus tree, ghosts. Her recognition of built and lived space leads to a clearer understanding and an increased appreciation of the human history connected to the city, and a sense of belonging. Through her sketches, the darker shadows of urban life are illuminated and made readily visible. We are left with a clear understanding of the impact of the city, on the people who belonged there and their lives. The last piece Brennan wrote for *The New Yorker* is about community and the immense challenge to the human spirit that the changing nature of dwelling in the modern world demands. It concludes with "blessings" for all who wander and leave their house.

Chapter Three

The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin

“The common practices of family life” ~ Maeve Brennan

The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin is comprised of three cycles of stories published posthumously in 1997. With the exception of “The Poor Men and Women” (1952), which was printed in *Harper’s Bazaar*, all the stories originally appeared in *The New Yorker* and were later published in two collections, *In and Out of Never-Never Land* (1969) and *Christmas Eve* (1974). The title story, “The Springs of Affection” (1972), is considered “in form, if not quite in length, a novella” and is regarded as one of the finest stories Maeve Brennan ever wrote (Maxwell 1997: 10). In William Maxwell’s opinion, this story belongs with the great short stories of the twentieth century (Maxwell, 1997: 10). In this collection, Brennan draws on her deep familiarity with the socio-cultural character of early-twentieth century urban and rural Ireland to trace the conditions of early independence and its effects on three middle-class families as citizens in the newly formed independent Irish state. Corresponding to *The Visitor*, this collection also registers a disenchantment and cynicism about Ireland, a country represented as a provincial backwater, dominated by an ultra-conservative Catholic clergy and by a political culture still in thrall to values and practices rooted in the nineteenth century. In *The Springs of Affection* Brennan returns once again to the themes of isolation, anxiety and despair that she introduced in her first work. Brennan’s attention to domestic detail and implied tragedy is not unlike her treatment in *The Visitor*.

In the first group of stories, told from the first-person perspective of a female child, the narrator/character recounting childhood experiences is part of a traditional Irish family. This includes a father and mother, but also several siblings living in what appears,

in its best moments, to be a fairly happy family, at least in comparison to the emotionally and metaphysically paralysed figures populating the two subsequent sets of stories. The first three stories, "The Morning after the Big Fire" (1953), "The Old Man of the Sea" (1955) and "The Barrel of Rumors" (1954), show a steady progression of the narrator from eight to twelve years of age. While in the next two, "The Day We Got Our Own Back" (1953) and "The Lie" (1953), the narrator is five and nine, respectively. In the penultimate story "The Devil in Us" (1954), she is nearing the end of her thirteenth year and in the final story "The Clever One" (1953), she is an adult casting her mind back to recall a forgotten moment of childhood. These stories of childhood are, for the most part, appealing and evocative, while, at the same time, they hint at certain less savoury aspects of twentieth-century Irish life. These include female subjection to male authority; the disruptions to family life produced by the war against the British and the Irish Civil War; unfair treatment by Catholic nuns for ostensibly being a troublemaker; and a young girl being put in her place for daring to entertain "notions" (SA 60) of achieving worldly success.

The second and third cycle of stories abandon first for third person narration. Many of the stories are written in a simple, direct style. Several are quietly poignant and silently tender, while some are satirical and much darker in tone. Striking images of the feminine are invoked in order to provide a means of discursive information on Irish society. The characters are often emotionally unreachable, leading moribund lives in a society which remains paralysed by both history and religion. They involve a detailed and multi-faceted exploration of the marriages of two separate middle-aged, middle-class Dublin couples: Rose and Hubert Derdon and Delia and Martin Bagot. The second cycle is devoted to exploring the somewhat happy courtship and mostly miserable marriage of Rose and Hubert Derdon. The third cycle focuses on the, to some extent, less desolate

marriage of Delia and Martin Bagot. Despite the fact that Brennan's father served with Eamon de Valera in the fight for Independence, and notwithstanding that de Valera enshrined the family and placed marriage at the centre of Irish life through a series of small, but well placed, events in the lives of these two families, Brennan shatters de Valera's myth of the happy Irish family.

Brennan's *Stories of Dublin* question not only the idea of the homely seclusion of an autonomous family living space, but the historically important link between domestic privacy and respectability in Ireland. Her consideration of the familial home serves to interrogate the politics of place in such a way as to satirise de Valera's vision of a country "bright with cosy homesteads... and the laughter of happy maidens" (de Valera: 1945).³² These *Stories of Dublin* throw this cosy image of tranquil domesticity into sharp relief and question the mores traditionally associated with the Irish home and family. Eamon de Valera's government policies, which provide the social and political backdrop to Brennan's Irish stories, highlighted the importance of home-owning as part of Ireland's postcolonial future. The concept of home ownership became an indication of permanence and stability, while the notion of homelessness developed into a symbol of failure and great humiliation.

In his Introduction to the collection, William Maxwell claims that these are clearly Brennan's "finest stories" (Maxwell, 1997: 6). He also points to the autobiographical element of the collection, the manner in which these "stories do not read as if they were fictitious... since the narrator is called Maeve and the narrator's brother and sisters have the same names as Maeve's brother and sister" (Maxwell, 1997: 3). Brennan often returned to Dublin in her writing and in particular to a house in Ranelagh similar to the

³² RTE Libraries and Archives, Irish Public Services Broadcasting – 1940s: De Valera and Broadcasting. Taken from Eamon de Valera's speech delivered on St Patrick's Day 1943.

one she grew up in. This is evoked with such clarity that the reader is apt to forget she was free to invent details and shape reality to her fictional needs. Arguably, while Maxwell's comments may contain a certain legitimacy, they curb a more comprehensive understanding of the collection; his conflation of the personal with the fictional means that his analysis of the work does not result in the erudite and thought-provoking introduction that it might have. Because Maxwell links the writing of "what are clearly her finest stories" (Maxwell, 1997: 6) with Brennan's divorce in 1959 and her later decline and eventual homelessness, such preoccupations miss the originality and significance of the stories composed during a period of great social change in Irish society. Maxwell's sentimental representation of Brennan as a bohemian artist overtaken by the events of her personal life is representative of much of the criticism of Brennan's writing and overshadows critical assessment of her work. Brennan's aesthetic of the home is not the usual notion of the dwelling place more often associated with a sentimentalised representation of the childhood home: instead an anxious engagement with her concept of home can be discerned: it is not always a place of nurture and safety but one of restriction and limitation. Yet while these ideas of house and home may be linked on one level to Brennan's own biography, more tellingly, it may be argued, her engagement is a reflection of a journalistic and discerning mind, occupied with the politico-cultural formation of her homeland as an emerging postcolonial society, which she was able to critique from a distance.

Placing her focus on the connection to Brennan's family background and Irish heritage, Heather Ingman reads these stories against what Angela Bourke claims was "Brennan's own rage against her mother's weak and cringing behaviour" (Ingman, 2007: 77). Drawing on Bourke's biography, Ingman claims that, "Brennan described her mother as a pale patient and suffering cipher" who failed to provide her with a "positive role

model” (Ingman 2007: 78).³³ By contrast, in her review of Bourke’s biography, Patricia Coughlan sees no sign of this lack of a positive role model in Brennan’s writing. She maintains that Brennan successfully navigated “the complexity of the balancing act she was required to perform between the feminine mystique and the life of a professional writer” (Coughlan, 2004: 437). Coughlan makes the point that Brennan worked and socialised “in an overwhelmingly masculine literary and social milieu, she wrote with severe elegance, produced witticisms, drank, and generally functioned as an honorary man, while simultaneously maintaining her quintessentially feminine position” (Coughlan, 2004: 437). These stories are, as Coughlan claims, a “nicely polished mirror” (Coughlan, 2004: 437) representing what it was like to grow up in the postcolonial space of Dublin in the early part of the twentieth century:

The Derdon and Bagot stories, taken together as a group, deserve to take their place in literary tradition after *Dubliners* as an important portrait of urban and urbanizing Ireland, and of the Irish family, in the first decades after independence. They have a kinship with Joyce’s “nicely polished mirror” in that they represent this society as dismayingly hollow within, and always implicitly, by showing rather than telling. Their devastating quality makes them a quiet heart of darkness, and they differ from *Dubliners* in focusing mainly on the domestic. (Coughlan, 2004: 437)

Patricia Coughlan is not alone in drawing a comparison between Brennan’s exploration of the “reality of human attachment” (Coughlan, 2004, 437) and Joyce’s “nicely polished mirror”. John Menaghan suggests, “Brennan is clearly a writer it makes perfect sense to

³³ Heather Ingman’s analysis is based on a letter from Maeve Brennan to William Maxwell describing a visit home to Ireland in 1957. Details of the letter can be found in Bourke, 2005, pp. 196-197.

mention in connection with Joyce” (Menaghan, 2006: 8).³⁴ Indeed Brennan often uses a version of Joyce’s technique, the “free indirect style which, purporting in the third person to offer the objective account, in fact enters the consciousness of a protagonist and makes that character’s habitual formulations the stuff of narrative” (Menaghan, 2006: 7). Brennan’s exploration of Irish society is contained in the agonisingly unexpressed lives of her characters and if “the precise manner in which she deploys such techniques is not identical to Joyce’s practice in *Dubliners*, the debt to him is clear and the ultimate effect no less devastating” (Menaghan, 2006: 7).

The theme of emotional abandonment and the withholding of love, the gap that opens up in adulthood between the security of childhood and the failure of love between grown-up people is at the centre of Brennan’s domestic emptiness. In her *Stories of Dublin*, Brennan’s nomadic consciousness engages with Joyce’s idea of the “claustrophobic horror” (Menaghan, 2006: 4) of Irish life, the betrayal and “hemiplegia or paralysis which many consider a city” (Ellman, 1966: 22). Menaghan claims, that not only did “Brennan like Joyce before her” turn her back on her “native land only to spend the rest of her life writing about the world she left behind” (Menaghan, 2008: 82), but, notwithstanding the sorts of transformations the writing of fiction involves, the stories in both Brennan’s *The Springs of Affection* and Joyce’s *Dubliners* “have clearly autobiographical elements and dimensions” (Menaghan, 2006: 2). Besides the fact that both *Dubliners* and *The Springs of Affection* contain stories set in Dublin in the early years of the twentieth century, both volumes begin with a set of stories involving a child protagonist. Resonant of Joyce’s tripartite division of *Dubliners*, the initial stories in

³⁴ At the 2006 IASIL conference at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, John M. Menaghan, Loyola Marymount University, presented the paper “The Female Joyce? James Joyce, Maeve Brennan and the Begetting of Fictional Dublin”. I am grateful to Professor Menaghan for sharing his, as yet, unpublished paper with me from which I am quoting. Personal communication to the author, emails dated, 30th March, 2012, and 3rd of April 2012.

Brennan's collection are narrated by children as protagonists and, as the stories continue, they deal with the lives and concerns of progressively older people. Beyond this point however, the two collections diverge. Joyce himself designed and re-designed the *Dubliners* to achieve a particular set of purposes, whereas Brennan's volume of stories were composed over the course of her career and, with the exception of one story, were published first in *The New Yorker*. Additionally, Brennan herself published these stories in two volumes during her lifetime without any apparent design beyond that appropriate to a miscellaneous collection. However, more significantly, the striking comparison between these two writers is the manner in which, like Joyce, Brennan was faithful to her own country, seeing it unflinchingly and challenging every precedent and piety that disturbed her about its emotional landscape in her writing.

By addressing the impact of religious and political practice on the lived experience of contemporary family life, Brennan's stories call forth an understanding of what is at stake for a postcolonial modern Ireland. Understanding the characteristic features of her writing – the nostalgic concern with past, place, space and images of home – can be a way both of considering the effects of the politics of the new state and also exploring a more progressive sense of place, which is not limited by the acceptance of tradition and belief. The stories exemplify the extent to which the limits of tradition are no longer acceptable because they threaten a liberal and nomadic consciousness. Although Brennan focuses on just three families living in similar houses in suburban Dublin, her stories speak more generally of social constraint and Irish malaise in the wake of Independence.

The first seven stories of the collection, written in the first person, are generally considered a cycle of autobiographical pieces dealing with Brennan's early childhood (Maxwell, 1997: 3). These are narrated from the viewpoint of a young girl called Maeve

whose obsessive curiosity leads her to ask questions regarding religion, the mystery which lies at the heart of the Catholic Church and the secrecy surrounding the living arrangements of a community of Poor Clare nuns. In "The Barrel of Rumors" (1954), this young Catholic girl considers her vocation to the religious life and the veiled mystery of a community of women closed off from the larger world. As a girl considering a vocation, she has a vested interest in such knowledge, for she risks vanishing "forever into the commonest crevasse in Irish family life" (SA 148).³⁵ She therefore seeks some information of what life on the other side of the "barrel" might hold, the "turn" of the barrel being the only point of communication between the two worlds of the secular and the religious (SA 35). However, only her young brother Robert may enter the nuns' world and return. Unfortunately, as he is only a baby, Robert is unable to articulate what he observes on the other side of the "turn" and the young Maeve realises she will never know "for sure if the nuns slept in their coffins with stones for pillows" (SA 36). Brennan's reference to nuns in their coffins not only draws attention to the rules surrounding enclosure in the private sphere, but those "interred in life" as Gabriel García Márquez has it in his novel *Of Love and Other Demons* (1994) when he is referring to the life of nuns. Brennan points out the anomaly between the private (female) and the public (male) sphere which Irish independence worked hard to maintain.

The second cycle of six stories is much darker in content and comprises a disturbing representation of a traumatic and harrowing marriage. Rose and Hubert Derdon have been married for forty-three years. In "A Young Girl Can Spoil Her Chances" (1962), Hubert blames Rose for ruining their only child and "disliked being reminded of the fact that John was now Father John Derdon" (SA 73). Neither Rose nor Hubert are

³⁵ The Poor Clare nuns had no contact with the outside world apart from seeing mass attendees through a metal grill.

happy about their son's vocation but, although "he had been disappointed when John joined the priesthood" (SA 73), Hubert is at least resigned to John's decision. In his opinion, "John was a poor example of a fellow, weak and timid and with no aptitude for anything and no inclination toward anything" therefore "becoming a priest was as good an answer as any" (SA 73). The phenomenon of paralysis which lies at the centre of Rose and Hubert's life finds its first cause in religion. John, an envoy of religion and transcendence, "his collar back to front and his carefulness about himself" (SA 74), is described as more of an "actor" than "a priest" and gives no positive meaning to either his calling or to their lives. In "The Poor Men and Women" (1952), John represents all that is dark and uncreative both in the landscape of their family life, and in Irish life in general. John is so caught up in what he considers the glory conferred upon his "consecrated hands" (SA 138) that he cannot respond to the natural love and affection offered to him by his mother.

These stories demonstrate the manner in which both cultural and social issues impact on all members of the familial space. Brennan's description of Rose as "bedraggled, servile, and not far from witless" (SA 140) captures a claustrophobic female situation. She establishes that convention prevents a space for individualistic and free-spirited people, women in particular, and that it can create a trauma leading to mental illness. The portrayal of Rose, an emotionally damaged woman, "squaring back" with "eyes staring up from under a scalding water of pain and rage" (SA 138), at an emissary of the Catholic Church, embodies the collective "pain and rage" felt by women in relation to the church. The sulphurous relationship between mother and son communicates the sad irony that all three characters are consumed by religion, yet submerged by the absence of any real spiritual considerations. Brennan's writing conveys the enclosed and restrictive world which many men and women inhabited during the period. The Derdon stories draw

attention to a social system which not only marginalises women, but also devalues male feelings of self-worth, and this, in turn, creates social conditions that foster unhappy familial relationships and emotional and metaphysical paralysis.

Brennan's focus concentrates on a range of represented spaces within the home that are used to imply the psychological state of the story's characters. She devotes many passages to her protagonists' emotional states as they are inflected through small moments of physical change. While Hubert goes off every morning to work in the city, the house is where Rose is contained, "she only left it to do her shopping or to go to mass" (SA 150). Left prey to her fantasies, she spends most of her time brooding over her son's absence, yet when he does visit she is "straightened like a housekeeper" (SA 138). The opening of "The Poor Men and Women" describing Rose as the "priest's mother" (SA 128), robs her of any sense of her own identity. It might be described as a story in which Brennan takes as her point of inspiration the figure of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's woman narrator in *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892). Brennan's portrait of Rose echoes Gilman's haunting and passionate protest, in a story which is "a modern feminist classic, a paradigmatic text for critics and historians looking at the relation between sex roles, madness, and creativity" (Showalter, 1985: 143).³⁶ Rose struggles against the depression which threatens to overwhelm her. Her nervous disorder and depression express the insoluble conflict between her desire to act as an individual, with an internalised obligation to submit to the needs of family and to conform to the cultural model of self-sacrificing female behaviour. Rose's emotional life is subjugated by the social role she has been forced to play. It is only "a matter of pride" which stops her crawling under the bed to "put her face down on the floor and sleep" (SA 154). Forcing herself to be "up and

³⁶ Elaine Showalter's *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (1987) discusses hysteria, which was once known as the "female malady" and, according to Showalter, is called depression today. Showalter demonstrates how cultural ideas about proper feminine behaviour have shaped the definition and treatment of female insanity from the Victorian era to the present.

dressed and downstairs before Hubert opened his eyes, and to have his breakfast ready and waiting for him and part of her housework done by the time he came down to the kitchen” (SA 157) is to triumph over him. It is only hostility that stops her from crossing the line to enter the realm of madness. Although she admits “there was no hope for her inside the house, her entire life was in the house” (SA 150). The house in which she spends most of her time is Hubert’s choice and to go against him is to have “gone mad” (SA 134): “She had never made up her mind about anything. Decision was unknown to her. Her decisions, the decisions she made about the food she put on the table and about various matters about the house, were dictated by habit and by the amount of housekeeping money Hubert allowed her” (SA 148-149). Hubert admits he is “ashamed of his wife” and considers it best if Rose remains exiled from the public sphere “at home” (SA 151). Brennan conveys the nature of the claustrophobic domestic space and restrictive world that many women inhabited and makes several references to female madness. She wonders “how many people were abroad in the world who should by rights be locked up out of harm’s way” (SA 341). In the ultimate story, “The Springs of Affection”, one long-suffering female finally enters the realm of madness and is “locked up in the Enniscorthy lunatic asylum” (SA 341).

These Irish stories show Brennan exploiting both form and content to engage with a discourse of inferiority, a discourse which had dominated Ireland’s colonial history for centuries. Brennan’s portrayal of stricken females recognises that the concept of home is a gendered one, which is produced by the cultural and social climate of Ireland in the middle of the twentieth century. As the poet Ellen Bryant Voigt has pointed out, Brennan’s virtuosity with the use of language is poetic (Voigt, 2003: 149-151). Her sentences are expressive arrangements of words, placed in provocative relation to other sentences. Her syntactical rhythm is built up by a succession of unpredictable repetitions

that combine in various ways; “stopping in the middle” (SA 128), it hangs in exquisite balance for her “to clench her fingers tight” (SA128):

The Priest’s Mother was distracted with herself, wakeful, impenitent, heated in every part by a wearisome discontent that had begun in her spirit very young. She wore herself out cleaning her house, going over her rooms with her dry violent hands, scraping and plucking and picking and rubbing the walls and floors and furniture, and stopping in the middle to clench her fingers tight, tight, tight, but not tight enough, never enough to satisfy her. Therefore she continued in want. (SA 128)

The intense inner conflict revealed here touches on the experience shared by so many women at the time, the strange, sometimes enraging sense of living in a culture that rarely reflected female priorities, concerns and desires. Brennan places a list of simple participles – “scraping and plucking and picking and rubbing” preceding a string of parallel nouns – “the walls and floors and furniture” – which then seem to generate a relentless explosion of emotional release, which is never “enough to satisfy her”, to create this intense image of the feminine. Brennan’s elaborate sentence structure is typical of her prose style which exhibits a huge variation in sentence length – the length of the long middle sentence is countered by the final short assertion “Therefore she continued in want”. In shaping the paragraph into an arc with an abrupt denouement that resembles an emotional discharge, Brennan offers no foothold to contentment but records a state of both dormant panic and interior exile. The Bagot and Derton stories construct two social positions; the individual need for expression is countered and restricted by the need for social acceptance in a country that clung to traditions steeped in the Church and strict convention. Restrictive routines and the repetitive, mundane details of everyday life mark the lives of Brennan’s characters and trap them in circles of frustration, restraint and

passive aggression. When taken together as a collection, Brennan's stories of place contribute a significant representation of characters marginalised both within their homes and the larger community.

Brennan's stories present us with another of her fictional voices, herself as created entity, similar to her "Long-Winded Lady" as a textual or narrative persona. While it is not possible to read Brennan's stories as straightforward autobiography, it is nonetheless the case that their reliance upon the use of personal memory achieves an effect of searing authenticity. It would be wrong to suggest that all these stories should be read as unquestionably about Brennan's own life and experiences, rather it is the case that they *could* be and that they have been constructed in such a way as to seem so. What emerges from the study of this collection is the manner in which Brennan develops characters, defined by tropes, as embodiments of place, confinement and the "sickness" of the home place. Rather than being "homesick", as in the sense of nostalgic, wistful or, longing, the stories paint a picture of home that is of an unsound, damaged and impaired condition, much in need of attention. Brennan rarely uses hyperbole or emotive language, relying on simplicity and close detail to create a realistic setting. As Maxwell explains:

There is much to admire in these ferocious stories – the story-telling art; the prose, which is plain and exquisitely precise, at times passing over into poetry without ever becoming "poetic"; the gift for dramatic confrontations; the ability to suggest something devastating while seeming to be making an innocuous statement; the at times almost clinical descriptions of states of mind. (Maxwell, 1997: 8)

Brennan's description of the intense hostility and unspoken anger between Rose and Hubert Derdon is so intense as to be almost palpable. In "Family Walls" (1973) she gives an uncompromising, unsentimental rendering of the emptiness which sits at the heart of

this family structure. The ambiguity of response is as artistically complex as it is emotionally profound: “When Rose appeared in the doorway Hubert felt such dislike that he smiled” (SA 174) suggests the bitter acrimony and hurt feelings experienced by Hubert. Routine in these stories affects characters that face difficult predicaments, but it also affects characters like Rose and Hubert who have little open conflict in their lives. The prose in this cycle of stories compels attention to its portrayal of a married couple inhabiting the “family walls” and enduring, to a great extent, emotionally diminished lives, and on the manner in which Brennan’s writing controls the sense of the truths of human experience. A great admirer of W. B. Yeats, Brennan adopted his belief that “only that which does not teach, which does not cry out, which does not persuade, which does not condescend, which does not explain, is irresistible” (Maxwell, 1997: 3). Relying on simplicity and close attention to detail to create a realistic setting, Brennan ties the reader’s understanding of people to their environments.

The story “Family Walls” takes the reader back to a time when Rose and Hubert were happy but only in order to reveal the true depths of their present misery. At the end of the story as Hubert watches Rose work in the garden, her only refuge, we are told:

The day was almost worn out. The light was thin – fading light that left everything visible. That evening’s light was helpless, the day in extremity, without strength enough left to dissemble with sun and shade, with only strength enough left to touch the world as it withdrew forever from the world. The evening light spoke, and what it said was, “There is nothing more to be said.” There is nothing more to be said because what remains to be said must not be said. It is too late for Rose.
(SA 192)

Brennan expresses inner reality by describing outer reality, and frequently focuses on the human dilemma of trying to articulate that which it is impossible to say. This concentrated focus describes a type of Joycean paralysis; as Hubert surreptitiously watches Rose we realise that it is also too late for Hubert, though he appears not to know it. Hubert is oblivious to the fact that he shares responsibility for a marriage gone terribly wrong, and the question of who betrayed who remains unresolved at the end of a tale which examines, in excruciating detail, marital dysfunction and devastating disappointment. Using the Joycean epiphany, Brennan distils a moment in life that is “pregnant and implicit with meaning” that she has, so to speak, “distilled from the vast flow of phenomena that makes up the diurnal round” (Menaghan, 2006: 7). Thus the real epiphany occurs for the reader and not for the characters.

Brennan’s literary technique insists on a detailing of objects and places. In “A Free Choice” (1964) her treatment of Rose’s girlhood in Wexford when she first meets Hubert opens out the memories and agonies of adolescence and gives the background to childhood loss. The curtains and furniture of the room conjure up both sad and happy memories of her father’s role in the decoration of the house. The past and the present remain in dialogue, so that objects retain story and memory. Through objects, such as “a looking-glass table” and the material memory of home, the history of the family is accessed, including that of family members who are now deceased: “The curtains comforted Rose” (SA 103), although “she understood at once that it was not the velvet curtains or the masks that had made the room familiar to her but the impression that had remained on it of her father’s hand” (SA 107). Ironically, the title of this story, “A Free Choice”, demonstrates not only the experience, but also the fate that shaped the lives of many Irish women during this period – marriage or domestic service. By making the choice to marry Hubert, Rose acquires what seems to be a “ticket of passage” (SA 126),

which enables her to escape from the other fate which might have awaited her, the “uniform” (SA 117) of a domestic servant, similar to the one worn by her friend Mary. For even though “they were hiring very up-and-coming girls” at Ramsay’s, “she had no job” (SA 103). Brennan’s stories rewrite the domestic space as inhabited by turmoil and a tapestry of influences on individual families in the decades following Independence.

The concerns of the home and family have long exerted a scholarly pull both on feminist criticism, and on postcolonial theory. In *Spatial Politics in the Postcolonial Novel*, Sarah Upstone demonstrates the manner in which what happens inside the home is an important barometer of residual colonial order and that “literature is always central to a political strategy of the postcolonial citizen” (Upstone, 2009: 19). Designating Brennan as a postcolonial writer is a description applied on the basis of her concerns with Ireland’s own unique postcolonial identity and the legacy of colonialism in an independent nation. Two of the topics relevant to the discourses established around postcolonialism are religion and gender, both of which create issues of difference and otherness. If, as the new Irish Constitution announced, home was a sacrosanct space eclipsed only by the Church in the national consciousness, then the miasma of which Brennan writes says much about the health of the society in which the people of Ireland lived in the early part of the twentieth century. The Church was integral to the experience of Irish family life; religion was something the family did together through the rituals of prayer and the Mass. Religion, it was deemed, would not only “unite the nation on a macro level”, but would also join the family on the “micro level” (McKenna, 2006: 48). Yet this religion was based on fear, predominantly of hell, but also of the authority of the Church and its messenger, the priest. When the Derdon’s son leaves home for the seminary, his absence is a source of anxiety for Rose: “The realization that John was gone and would not be back took different shapes inside her”, making her “feel sick” and a “delirium of loss” (SA

154). Yet his return brings no joy or release from the hollowness that lies at the centre of both Rose and Hubert's lives. The relationship between Mother and Son is such that it both binds and divides:

“Mother, Mother, how often must I caution you. My hands, Mother, my hands.”
“Ah, Glory be to God, the consecrated hands,” she cried, covering her mouth with her fingers, mocking him with her dismay. She screamed with laughter, squaring back on the floor with her knees spread out and her eyes staring up from under a scalding water of pain and rage. “I forgot about your hands, son. Wasn't it naughty of me. Wasn't it *naughty*. Such impertinence, touching the almighty hands of a priest. I know you dislike me to touch your precious hands. “Oh, I know it very well.” “Not only you, Mother. Anyone... (SA 138)

In this passage, Brennan captures the nature of a religion that created a climate of anxiety and oppression, an environment in which people would have had little space to question its authority. Brennan mocks this “otherworldly authority” (McKenna, 2006: 51) of priests who were powerful figures in Irish society. The phenomenon of paralysis which lies at the centre of the lives of the Derdon's finds its first cause in religion. All three characters have been forced into a particular inner way as a result of the collective culture around them. Both Hubert and Rose are trapped in a static conventional way of life, emotionally exiled from each other in a relationship which is dissatisfactory for both of them, while John, a symbol of religion and transcendence, is shown to be “troubled” (SA 137). Brennan delineates the gap that existed between family and Church; her characters exist, rather than live, in an Ireland paralysed by its past and in a society which condemns them to a form of inner exile.

A central paradox of any domestic space is that the home is intensely private and yet simultaneously a public arena. Richard Gill declares “like a great stage, it quite literally gathers people together and shows them meeting, separating, colliding, uniting” (Gill, 1972: 15). In “Family Walls” Brennan pinpoints the manner in which allowing access to the home is an intimate and potentially precarious act, rendering the inhabitants vulnerable and visible; a gesture is enough to convey a lifetime’s history. As Rose’s hand fastens on a doorknob, Hubert recognises that it is women who control the domestic space and that men must move outside this space or run the risk of being engulfed or suffocated by it. As Rose closes the kitchen door against Hubert, Brennan delineates the fundamental difference which exists between the home as it is experienced by its creator and shaper and the home as it is experienced by those who gain entry to it, whether they are intimates or strangers:

There was no possible way for Hubert to ignore what went on in the house. He would have liked to be able to shut his eyes. Then he could control his temper. Rose was not ashamed that she had closed the door against him; she was only frightened because she had been caught. (SA 175)

A mere glimpse of Rose shutting the kitchen door as her husband enters the house makes Hubert understand that barriers are erected against him everywhere, both literally and figuratively. While Hubert navigates his way around Rose’s domesticity, she is engulfed and suffocated by it, spending her adult life entangled in its net. The doors and windows through which family and strangers, invited or not, may gaze or enter physically, are fundamentally important. “Family Walls” steers a course between the sharp edges of a masculine and feminine world. The spatial politics in Brennan’s stories, the well-ordered space of the home her family walls, represent turmoil and a variety of influences that only a multiplicitous space such as the short story cycle can provide. (Nagel, 2001: 1-18).

Both the *Derdon* and *Bagot* cycles give a glimpse of a patriarchal social order and how much more severe the struggle and anxieties of both males and females are within the subjugated territory of the domestic space. In various ways, Brennan's fictional house becomes an occupied territory which her characters inhabit in "heroic silence" (*SA* 155): "When Mrs Derdon turned away from the mirror that reflected her hopelessness, she saw the walls of her house, and its furniture, the pictures and chairs and the little rugs and ornaments, and the sight of all these things hurt her, because she had tried hard... and she began to think that all she would do for the rest of her life was sweep up time (*SA* 151-152). Mrs Derdon's "heroic silence" speaks volumes about a woman suffering a long endured male-ordered world to the point that she has become complicit in her own passive projection of it. Brennan draws attention to the house as both symbol and location, and as a metaphor for containment. The house as place within Brennan's fiction is a primary subject in her Dublin stories. In her preference for the intensity of the short story form, Brennan exploits the distinctive features of this medium to construct narratives which illustrate her accounts of domestic experience in confined spaces. In his essay "Householders: Community, Violence and Resistance in Three Contemporary Women's Texts", Peter Childs exemplifies the manner in which women writers frequently show "the domestic home as a prison-house" (Childs, 2006: 175). Brennan explores figurations of the house and home in order to examine the relationships between refuge, incursion and estrangement. She demarcates the most vulnerable places and spaces within the home, the boundary lines that divide the inner from the outer world, the walls and doors, even, for example, "the letter box" (*SA* 26). In "The Old Man of the Sea" (1955), through this, the smallest of openings, she challenges the presumption that home is a natural place of shelter where the individual can lock the door against misfortune and the world. Her stories show an increasing preoccupation with the lack of potential contained

within the home space, spaces where belonging and identification are apparently refused, yet spaces which represent the very intimacy of the individual's life. Her stories in this collection develop a sense of dwelling that is either static or regressive, and anathema to a nomadic consciousness.

Brennan's stories about homes, how individuals settle in them and how dwellings and *space* affect the individual, find a certain resonance in Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space*. First published in French in 1958, with its first English translation in 1964, *Poetics of Space* is a prism through which one of the most appealing and lyrical explorations of home combine both the worlds of literary creation and the domestic space to illustrate how perceptions of houses and other shelters shape human thoughts, memories and dreams. In her investigation of these ideas, Brennan, like Bachelard, is concerned with the manner in which inhabited space transcends geometrical space. Sharing some qualities with, but not identical to Bachelard, she presents for consideration a study of the outward appearance of intimacy and of culture through an examination centred on the domestic space. Brennan's contemplation of the family space is reflective of Bachelard in the way in which the house image "would appear to have become the topography of our intimate being" (Bachelard, 1994: xxxvi), providing her with reason for taking the house "as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul" (Bachelard, 1994: xxxvii). Bachelard's "phenomenological analysis" (Bachelard, 1994: 22), of the house is as a metaphorical embodiment of memory and identity. For him, "the house image" is the "veritable principle of psychological integration" (Bachelard, 1994: xxxvi). While Brennan resists the patriarchal premises of Bachelard's analysis, his insistence on the spatialisation of memory and on the potential benefits of what he terms, "topoanalysis" seems a valuable way of understanding her inscription of its effect in space, "beginning at the micro level

of the spatial structure of the childhood home, as the trellis on which early memory is woven” (Morley, 2000: 19).

The domestic interiors that litter Brennan’s narrative landscapes challenge the desire for rootedness and authenticity. In “A Free Choice” (1964), Rose’s emotional space, first shattered by the death of her father, recalls the time she spent with him as a child choosing curtains for Mrs Ramsay’s drawing room. Mrs Ramsay’s house represents retreat, security and secrecy, yet it is a structure whose physical and symbolic fabric must weather the storms of history. The house is a repository of Rose’s historical archive, what Bachelard calls “abodes for an unforgettable past” (Bachelard, 1994: xxxvi), a dwelling-place of the past which “remains in us for all time” (Bachelard, 1994: 6). Rose’s memories drawn from her childhood past retain the power to startle her with their closeness and latency; the return of the past defamiliarises her sense of the present and demands that she reconceive her cherished notions of domestic space. Rose’s sense of the unhomey is tied up with the experience of immediacy, the sense of inhabiting this house at this time, now, even as the weight of other moments crowd for attention. In connecting memory with place, Rose struggles to wrest a sense of belonging from objects of childhood play and imagination, of calendar events and of affection. The curtains undergo constant metaphorical transformation, whether as a lesson in design and colour or the reassurance she “had not been forgotten” (*SA* 103): “There were the curtains her father had told her about, and they were exactly as he had told her they would be” (*SA* 100). Inhabiting the space of the home is not only a matter of empirical living it is also a matter of feeling, remembering and imagining. Brennan’s figurations of the house deal with a range of issues which respond to Bachelard; she too is “hypnotized by the gaze of the solitary house” (Bachelard, 194: 36). The predominant affiliation in this collection of stories is to buildings rather than landscape and it engages with a number of key issues

raised by the troubled relationship between the cultural and natural environments of what was a newly emerging modern Ireland.

The intimate space of family life and the role of women dominate this collection. With the home being such a central plank of Irish life, by setting her characters within the domestic space Brennan describes how the state of the social place relations in Irish culture tend to be faulty. In "An Attack of Hunger" (1962), Mrs Derdon can "hardly bear to look in the mirror, because the face she saw there... was the face of one whose courage has long ago been petrified into mere endurance" (*SA* 150). This story reflects not only the barren landscape of the Derdon's marriage, but also a home so devoid of love and sensuality that even "a simple appetite for food seems shameful" (Bourke, 2005: 226). By juxtaposing the individuality of the male characters with the suppressed identity of the female character, Brennan presents a hierarchal difference in gender. From the moment Brennan introduces "Mrs Derdon" who has the "face of woman who had a good deal to put up with" (*SA* 148) she is already placing her in the role of spouse. Brennan purposely neglects to mention that her first name is Rose until halfway through the story; instead she presents her only as a husband's wife.³⁷

Hubert also feels trapped by the intimate space of domesticity. A repressed man, he does not like to have his routines disturbed. In "A Young Girl Can Spoil Her Chances" (1962), he is upset by the fact that Rose is going to Mass on a weekday: "The anniversary of her father's death, was always a queer day" for Hubert, and even now, "after forty-three years" (*SA* 66), he did not "like to have his breakfast all topsy-turvy, and he didn't like seeing his wife running around the house at the early hour of a weekday morning

³⁷ Megan McGuire makes a similar point in "The Delirium of Loss": An Exploration of Female Identity in Maeve Brennan's "An Attack of Hunger", written as part of a Masters thesis in 2004. Additionally, she notes, "the personal and reflexive form of the short story also structurally mirrors the interior space of women's confinement" (Maguire, 2004: 12).

with her hat and her gloves on and her big bulging prayer book in hand” (SA 72). The intrusion of religious ritual into his domestic routine upsets Hubert. Brennan’s writing conveys the enclosed and restrictive world which many men and women inhabited. By focusing intently on the private relationships of individuals, while simultaneously commenting on social inequalities, Brennan depicts the sad reality of a woman’s place in Irish society.

Ellen Bryant Voigt draws attention to the way Brennan “scores her paragraphs”, her characteristic “arrangements of pattern and variation, balance and asymmetry, repetition and surprise” (Voigt, 2003: 19), and to the manner in which she uses these for dramatic revelation and epiphany. In comparing the rhythm in Brennan’s arrangement of language to the poetic pentameter, Voigt discusses the way it has “a distinct musical shape” (Voigt, 2003: 19). In the final Derron story, “The Drowned Man” (1963), Rose has died and Hubert’s sister has come to look after him. Painfully, Hubert is forced to pretend that grief overwhelms him. But, in a moment of unnerving clarity, he realises that it “was not Rose’s fault that he had been mistaken in her. She had shone at a distance, but close to she had ceased to shine. Still, she was gone, she had been good, and he wished he could miss her” (SA 209). Through a series of long paragraphs, Brennan articulates Hubert’s inner thoughts on the death of Rose and the grief he wishes he could feel:

The tears hurt him. They hurt his chest and his eyes and they seemed to be tracing sticky wooden lines all over his face and neck and they hurt his brain and made it ache. The tears did not run down his face and away. They poured all over him and stayed on him and encased him, and when he tried to stop crying, because he was afraid he might smother in them, imprisoned in them, they poured out all the more and there seemed to be no end to them. The tears had him in a straitjacket, and he could not speak. Now that he could not speak, he wished he could speak. (SA 210)

A man bewildered at his own emotional response to the death of his wife, Hubert's emotion is registered in and on the body; the "sticky wooden lines all over his face" express the difficulty he is experiencing in trying to articulate a perceived emotional state. In this final Derdon story, Brennan passionately scores the idea of vacancy and emotional emptiness. Her meditation on the complex relations between memory and grief considers a male response to how the domestic space has been modified by the death of a spouse, a life which was intimately enmeshed with that space: "She had seen other men like that – so buried in habit that their lives were worth nothing to them when the wife was gone" (SA 342). Hubert is completely bewildered at Rose's death: "he could not believe that even a human being as ineffectual as she had been could vanish from life without leaving any trace of herself at all. Any trace would be a sign that might guide him to the grief he wanted to suffer for her" (SA 206). Hubert does not experience Rose's loss as a sad event from which he would move on, but as the kind of life-shattering trauma that leads to a review of both his own and Rose's life. Eventually coming to understand that their individual lives were of little significance, the house represents little beyond the sentiments with which Rose had cloaked it and these are reduced to the contents of a "chocolate box" (SA 205). The sweetness of Rose's life, her personal effects stored in "chocolate boxes", reveal to Hubert "a mind given over entirely to trivialities and makeshift, always makeshift, making do, making last, putting to use somehow, wasting nothing except her time and her life and his time and his life" (SA 205). The summation of restrictive routines and mundane details representing a spent life which lacked importance or seriousness, Rose's life is defined as undetermined and non-productive. In deconstructing de Valera's myth of happy maidens, Brennan not only reveals a subjugated Irish woman, suffering in "heroic silence", but highlights how men themselves are scarred by this dominant ideology.

The third group of eight stories recount yet another unhappy marriage, although this one lacks the desperate and relentless unhappiness of the Derdons. Delia and Martin Bagot live with their two daughters and the memory of their first child in the same suburb of Dublin. Given that “affection” is of central concern to Brennan, the home frequently acts as a locus of love, or the lack of it, in the lives of her characters. The first story in the cycle “The Twelfth Wedding Anniversary” (1966) reveals that Martin sleeps not with his wife, but in their “small extra room” (SA 218), that he hates the animals loved by his wife and children and that everyone – the animals included – are happier when he is not at home. Martin has remembered their wedding anniversary but, “wanted no sentimental reminders” (SA 225) of it; what he wants, in fact, is simply “to be left alone” (SA 255). He becomes upset when Delia puts flowers in the little room where he sleeps apart from her each night. Delia’s gesture only makes him angry, symbolising for him all the love and caring he cannot return in kind, his most powerful feeling in relation to her being a deep disappointment. Inexplicably and ironically, “it was her care for him that was driving him to despair – the ceaseless care that he understood, and could not return, and did not want, and could not avoid” (SA 228). In the end, he inadvertently breaks the flower bowl and feels a terrible remorse that culminates in the resolution to buy her a new one, not out of love, but because he “knew Delia was no more anxious for a scene than he was, and in any case they both had the children to consider” (SA 231). Like the Derdons, Delia and Martin Bagot are locked in shared patterns of interaction, or the lack thereof, and in marriages that began in love but have produced mostly disappointment and estrangement as the years have progressed. Brennan’s examination, in excruciating detail, of marital dysfunction, devastating disappointment and daily misery remains unresolved even at the end of these two groups of tales. She points to the fundamental difference between a house and a home; a house is merely a repository for personal and cultural artefacts, a

space wherein to perform primary functions, whereas a home is a place bound together by the “springs of affection” (*SA* 350), by love and mutual respect. These stories constitute a meditation on the interaction between individuals within a built house that determines the extent to which it is a home, which in the purest sense means a place of safety, of refuge, the site of emotional grounding and warmth, though often it is not.

Like most modern short stories Brennan’s stories represent an approach to life – they are lyrically charged fragments, or “slices of life” (May, 1994: 199). Similar to the *Derdons*, the *Bagots* are ill-suited to marriage; Martin is a loner who cannot accept his wife’s domesticity. Martin “never knew for sure whether Delia and the children were his anchor or his burden” (*SA* 304). Of a similar remote disposition to Hubert, when he “dresses in the morning the last thing he puts on is a garment of lies, which do not, even so, conceal the fact that where there should have been feeling there is none – only the desire for privacy and solitude” (Maxwell, 1997: 8). Brennan’s states of consciousness, which are at times almost “clinical descriptions of states of mind” (Maxwell, 1997: 8), portray the failing but inescapable histories and everyday realities of these relationships, occupying the point of view of each character in turn. Like Joyce, Brennan often relies on a version of free indirect discourse which, intending in the third person to offer the objective account, often takes us, the reader, into the mind of her protagonist and makes that character’s habitual thoughts the substance of narrative. In a similar manner to Joyce, she leads her reader to a, more or less, complete understanding of her characters thwarted hopes and defeated desires as well as an understanding that it is too late for each of them – there is, “nothing more to be said” (*SA*192), nothing more to be done, and no accessible agent of change other than death. Like Gabriel Conroy, in “*The Dead*” Delia Bagot is overwhelmed by her feelings, which tower over her “like ancestors, like reminders of a

past that she could not remember” (*SA* 222). Similar to Gabriel, Delia cannot apprehend this “wayward and flickering existence” (Joyce, 1996, 255).

Brennan’s depictions of the often fraught nature of human relations offer a lucid chronicle of life in Ireland when the rules between men and women were becoming less clear. Eamon de Valera’s dream of an inward-looking, economically self-sufficient and culturally distinct nation is epitomised in Brennan’s viewpoint. The central paradox which lies at the centre of her representation of suburbia betrays a nostalgic longing for communal identification and an eruption of unfulfilled desires. Home is a problematic space and privatisation is not without its own contradictions. Becoming a householder is akin to being condemned to solitary confinement; the neighbourly interface is forestalled by the containing gesture of four walls:

Beyond the wall Mrs Bagot and Mrs Finn shared, a row of identical walls stretched off into the distance. All the gardens were attached, like all the houses. A grove of trees, forty diminishing walls away, completed the view of the sky. It was a narrow side street, a dead end, in the suburbs of Dublin... Schoolteachers, shopkeepers, and minor civil servants lived on the street, and a policeman had recently moved into one of the houses with his family... Mrs Bagot hated the garage when it was first put up, because it cut off her view of the open fields, but she had got used to the high end wall now...There was a sense now of being shut in. (*SA* 216-217).

Delia, who grew up “by the Slaney in a very big farmhouse, whitewashed, with a towering thatched roof” (*SA* 337), feels “shut in” living in this “dead end” (*SA* 216) street in Dublin. Like many of the tales, “The Twelfth Wedding Anniversary” is filled with nostalgia. Delia finds herself wondering if the shape of their lives could have been

dictated by the house; “if the little room had never existed”, Martin might never have had “the idea of shutting himself away from her” (SA 220).

In “The Eldest Child” (1968), Delia meditates on the loss of her three-day-old son: “Mrs Bagot had lived in the house for fifteen years, ever since her marriage. Her three children had been born there, in the upstairs front bedroom, and it comforted her to think that she was still familiar with what had been his one glimpse of earth” (SA 264). Over the years, Delia has become ineffectual and given to falling asleep during the day. What keeps her from slipping over the edge into insanity is her other two children’s need for her. Delia grew up on a farm in Wexford and has a love of animals and flowers. Like Rose Derdon, Delia lost her father when she was very young and has also been living in Dublin since her marriage. Yet “she couldn’t see any connection at all between herself as she used to be and herself as she was now, and she couldn’t understand how with a husband and two children in the house she was lonely and afraid” (SA 306). The move to suburbia cements the feeling of exile for both the Derdons and the Bagots. Delia, interred in life in the enclosed and restricted world of suburbia, is dominated by internalised obligation and “her appointed direction” (SA 290). Martin, too, longs to be free of his family; he shows little interest in his marriage and he talks “about the wild Mayo coast as though wilderness were a sort of virtue” (SA 344). Martin considers being alone, separated from other people, as a welcome freedom and nomadic wandering as welcome retreat from domesticity:

He liked to recall the adventures he’d had on the holidays he used to take by himself in Connemara and Kerry long ago. He used to go on long walking tours by himself. He’d stay away for a week at a time. He liked to recall those days when he was on his own. He seemed proud of having gone off on his own, away from this house and from Delia and the children, away from all he knew. (SA 343)

Martin moved “to Dublin in anger” (SA 330) when he married Delia and he longs to escape the claustrophobic nature of his existence, the restrictive routines and repetitive, mundane details which mark his life in the city; he yearns for travel and adventure. Every year of his married life he takes off on his own for weeks at a time wandering the Irish countryside. At weekends he makes shorter trips, walking Dun Laoghaire pier and in the evenings he does not return home until late, when he retreats to his own room. The idea of forced relocation and the lack of community are used by Brennan to describe individual situations. Similarly, in the *Derdon* cycle, while Hubert does “not mention the dislocation” (SA 126) he experienced when he married and moved to Dublin, he does feel as though he had to give “up his passport” (SA 126) when he married Rose. As Brennan dissects, layer by layer, the nature of her characters’ moribund and claustrophobic lives, the absence of freedom is turned inwards where it festers and is suggested in all manner of passive aggressions, such as Martin’s pride at going “off on his own”, or Hubert smiling in anger at Rose. Indeed, there is a porous quality, not only between both cycles, but also between the collection and *The Visitor* since they develop and clarify ideas expounded by Brennan in her first work. Brennan’s consideration of the condition of home and Irish domestic space again reflects a deep pre-occupation with the question of dwelling and its impact on human experience. However, in this collection, Brennan’s focus is upon places which do not change, where individuals are paralysed by tradition, places which have turned into spaces of un-pleasurable belonging, such is the *Derdons* and *Bagots* sense of domesticity. Their “true realities” are heterotopias (Foucault, 1986: 25), which give no consolation in their troubled images of a perfect order. Foucault’s notion of the “heterotopia” is a hybrid space that is “a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space we live in” (Foucault, 1986: 24). Brennan demonstrates the unreality of de Valera’s utopian image of “cosy homesteads” (de Valera: 1945). She

challenges the illusion of such an idealistic vision of the domestic space. Escape from such un-pleasurable belonging is something which can only be imagined by the next generation. In "The Carpet With The Big Pink Roses On It" (1964), Delia's daughter Lily dreams of a magic "carpet", that could take her "from Paris" and then on to "Spain" (*SA* 239), but for her Mother asleep upstairs the only form of escape is death.

Being more moderate and gentler in force, Brennan suspends the limitations placed on Rose Derdon in this third cycle to allow Delia Bagot to pull the "pins" from her hair, where it cascades "onto the pillow where it loosened out, tumbling sleepily to its full length", (*SA* 238) and allows no one to knock on the door to call her "a madwoman" (*SA* 239). Besides caring for her children, Delia manages to derive short intervals of happiness from decorating and furnishing her house, tending to her garden, and when a close friend of her father's – a retired Bishop – comes to tea, the agreeableness of his visit, his empathy and his understanding restore to her some sense of her own identity. In "Stories of Africa" (1968), the Bishop has returned home to Ireland to die: "All struggle had vanished from the old Bishop's eyes, and Mrs. Bagot saw that he was close to death" (*SA* 283). The Bishop tells Delia of his own boyhood and the time he spent on her family's farm in Wexford. "I think of the days when I used to walk down the lane from the village of Oylegate to Poulbwee. It is a mile walk. You know it as well as I do. You must have walked that lane thousands of times" (*SA* 291). Delia, who "couldn't see any connection at all between herself as she used to be and herself now" (*SA* 306), contemplates the difference between who she was back then and her life in the present moment. She finds herself feeling that "although she had walked the path" of life "without assurance, she had kept to her appointed direction, and she had not trespassed, and she had made no undue demands, and she had not spoiled anything along the way" (*SA* 290). This small Joycean

epiphany brings a strange sense of consolation to having lived her life in such an enclosed and restricted world.

Brennan's uncompromising, unsentimental rendering of the emptiness in the lives of her characters is underpinned by the manner in which the whole apparatus of the State's bureaucracy depended on the notion that women remain in the home and men work, pay taxes, live and vote in a fixed location, so that "mobility itself comes to be seen as a form of geographical deviance" (Morley, 2000: 33). David Morley maintains, the "definition of mobility as deviance derives from the positive valuation of roots in a place-bound, property-owning society where mobility appears to be a kind of super deviance (Morley, 2000: 33). After Independence the numbers of men and women entering Catholic religious orders rose dramatically, reaching a peak in the 1960s, thus presenting an anomaly to their primary place within the home.³⁸ Many men and women felt their attraction to the religious life in terms of a desire for adventure, which was associated with going on the missions. The influence of mission films such as *The Nun's Story* (1959), and literature, such as *The Messenger of the Sacred Heart*, an Irish Catholic periodical founded by Irish priest Fr. Paul Cullen SJ in 1888, were particularly inspiring as were missionary visits to schools and seminaries, bringing with them the opportunity for adventure and heroism. As "warriors of Christ" (McKenna, 2006: 56), missionary life represented an alternative to life at home and a sacrifice which was highly regarded. Morley suggests, the "over-valuation of home and roots has as its necessary correlative the suspicion of mobility" (Morley, 2000: 33). The Bishop, a "very shabby old man" (*SA*

³⁸ While not usually included in the category of Irish migrant or considered in discussions of Irish emigration, religious missionaries were certainly part of the Irish national consciousness in the early part of the twentieth century. Though living elsewhere, Irish missionaries were a fundamental part of Irish society; in order to survive they needed support in the form of money and personnel and were much involved in promoting themselves and their work in Ireland: "Their message was at once urgent, idealistic, romantic and heroic", for outside of the Church there was no salvation therefore the souls of millions hung in the balance. (McKenna, 2006: 36).

282), who has been a missionary exile for all his adult life describes the acute loneliness of missionary life and the complex emotions associated with the experience:

But the kind of exile he felt, living inside his own body and dragging along while the priest within him strode proudly, that was an entirely different kind of exile – somebody inconsolably and stubborn who was not intelligent enough to understand the earthly sameness between his own and other countries and who therefore in bewilderment tormented himself about the *difference*. Or you could say that an exile was a person who knew of a country that made all other countries seem strange. (SA 295-296)

Brennan juxtaposes the Bishop's consideration of missionary exile against Delia "talking about herself". Home for Delia is not only the womblike place of safety and shelter, but also a place of dark secrets, of fear and danger that she can only inhabit furtively. The Bishop emphasises the loneliness of exile and gives utterance to a cry which is repeated by Delia:

She was amazed to find how much there was to be said about this person, herself, who had come into the conversation from nowhere and who was now becoming more real, although still invisible, with every word that was spoken. In response to the Bishop's trust in her she spoke as though in Braille, feeling her way eagerly and with confidence along a path that she found she knew by heart, every inch of it, even in the dark. As she spoke, that path, her life, became visible... from far away. (SA 289-290)

As the Bishop shares his experience of exile and listens to the description of the death of their three-day-old son Jimmy, Delia is consoled by his ability to embrace both the living and the dead. In a moment of insight she realises that, much like the Bishop, she has

lived a kind of exile, interred in a house she only rarely leaves. Brennan examines the ordinary events, the small exhilarations like the visit of a Bishop, and the larger disappointments, such as the death of a child, that happen to Dubliners like the Bagots who, in trying to find fulfilment, frequently encounter instead the emptiness that lies at the heart of the lives of those who dwell in a city not unlike Joyce's, a city of paralysed souls and unexpressed love.

Each of the stories in this collection confronts, at some level or other, an inherent ambivalence informing the idea of the house, its function as a site of peace and sanctuary on the one hand and of restriction and incarceration on the other. Brennan's focus on the claustrophobic nature of people's lives, particularly women's, informs post-Independence social discourse. One such discourse is gender. Because of its prevalence as a more or less universal space, the ambivalence underpinning the concept of dwelling in each story is an image of the house as a site in which female identity is always on the point of formation, and yet also on the point of dissolution. As with all of the *Stories of Dublin*, Brennan's message is that any honest endeavour to understand and express the human condition must involve a consideration of domestic space for it is there in the attitudes towards house and home, that the human subject is constantly constructed and deconstructed.

As her novella *The Visitor* demonstrates, the theme of exile forms the principal narrative underlying the work of Brennan. For her, the exilic mind was one that refused to habituate itself to accepted pieties, to the satisfactions of power and to the comforts of surrender to some transcendental force.³⁹ Many of Brennan's Irish stories deal with characters, who like the Bagots, often find themselves marginalised within their own

³⁹ My reading of the exilic mind is informed by Paul Tabori's *The Anatomy of Exile* (1972), which considers the condition of exile as a discontinuous state of being that leads to a crisis of identity. Also, Michael Seidel's *Exile and the Narrative Imagination* (1986), where the focus is upon literary representations of exile, especially when exile is foregrounded as a narrative action.

community, suffering internal exile and the constrictive religious and social morality of Ireland. Characters are, due to circumstances, often either prevented from moving to a life outside their original environment or, on the other hand, forced to take a leap into the unknown world of Dublin. Those who move to Dublin are unable to develop their lives in a personally satisfying direction and are caught in an existence that may look satisfactory on the outside, but hides a discontent that is often revealed by insignificant events, like a husband opening the kitchen door or a broken vase of flowers. The constrictive nature of the Ireland that is reflected in the stories causes much suffering for those required to live by its conventions, who are forced into a form of internal exile. The narratives of the stories suggest that Brennan's characters are subversive according to the dominant ethos of the restrictive Catholic Ireland that she writes about. Brennan's women – incarcerated in their homes – who endeavour to fulfil their enforced social roles of wife and mother, and her men who desire to wander and return home only to want to wander again, are in fact exiles battling to impose an individual will against an enforced collective consensus.

When Brennan discusses the Bagots' relationship she also conjures up images of resettlement. The problem of housing for the working classes had festered throughout the nineteenth century with the result that only large-scale suburban developments could hope to meet the needs of the twentieth century. The vision of small "cosy homesteads" would, it was believed, foster a stable and conservative society of property owners at all social levels, the result of which meant that "[l]arge numbers of young people were beginning to set up house at a distance from where they had grown up" (Bourke, 2005: 62). As the middle-class expanded, "schoolteachers, shopkeepers, and minor civil servants" (SA 216), similar to the Bagots and the Derdons, moved to Dublin, buying new house designs and offering "a reassuring metaphor of what came to be known as the nuclear family, gathered

around its hearth, resisting difference and intrusion for the foreseeable future” (Bourke, 2005: 63).

Brennan’s work anticipates what Wendy Wheeler terms “postmodern nostalgia”: specifically, “the desire for communal identification” (Wheeler, 1994: 99). Wheeler argues “nostalgia isn’t nasty”, it “turns us toward the idea of the individual as non-alienated, as knowing and being known by others in the commonality of the community which is identified as home” (Wheeler, 1994: 99). Wheeler suggests “the fixity of identity and place symbolized by notions of home is imaginary” (Wheeler, 1994: 99), yet expresses the desire for community rather than a yearning for a fixed idea of home. Brennan’s imaginary home place anticipates Wheeler in that it is also an exit from “immaturity” and from the “tutelage” of others in order to “produce a new notion of the subject as a mature and critical citizen who refuses the childlike condition of allowing others to do his thinking for him and asserts instead the right to critical, and by implication and eventually, political freedom” (Wheeler, 1994: 95). Similar to Wheeler, Brennan questions not only stasis, but the power of tradition in relation to place and space. Additionally, in her “alternative approach to space” (Massey, 2005: 9), Doreen Massey is in “sympathy with Wheeler’s thesis at its broadest level” (Massey, 2005: 124). Massey, it could be claimed, would also approve of Brennan’s approach to space. She recognises a nostalgia which allows for change and not a nostalgia which “robs others of their histories” (Massey, 2005: 122). Challenging the oppositions between home and nostalgia addresses the impact of political practice on the lived experience of contemporary Irish life. Brennan calls forth an understanding of what is at stake for a postcolonial modern Ireland. Her writing, if viewed in this context, is not regressive and sentimental but is the affective expression of a continued need for community rather than a yearning for a fixed idea of home.

Understanding the characteristic features of Brennan's writing, the nostalgic concern with past, place, space and images of home can be a way both of making sense of her view in relation to the failure of the politics of the new state, while also exploring her more progressive idea of home, which is not limited by the acceptance of tradition and belief. Brennan's writing exemplifies the extent to which the limits of tradition are no longer acceptable because they threaten an enlightened and rational consciousness. She anticipates both Wheeler and Massey in understanding nostalgia as a "kind of return of the repressed of modernity" (Massey, 2005: 124) challenging "easy assumptions" which were made about the "correspondence between community and locality, between community and place" (Massey, 1994: 110). Although Brennan's stories are about two couples who live in similar houses in the same suburb of Dublin, her work, like that of Joyce, speaks of a universal human experience. When she speaks of home, her examples tacitly point to its location in the specific historical conjuncture brought about by Independence.

In *The Springs of Affection: Stories of Dublin*, Brennan intertwines gender, religion and politics to reflect an arena of political struggle, while domesticity, community and the battle against patriarchy are themes leading to what may be regarded as a multilayered inquiry into postcolonial feminism. Many women experienced a social and emotional exile in Ireland during the early part of the twentieth century and Brennan's character Min in the "The Springs of Affection" is a grotesque portrait of just such a woman, one who feels she has been outlawed by the state. In this, the title story, the Bagot marriage is re-imagined by Martin's twin sister Min after his passing. She had come to Dublin from Wexford, a rural town, to look after him after Delia's death, and now he is dead too. She is triumphant, the last survivor: Min, "standing alone as always, had lived to sum them all up" (SA 309). In William Maxwell's opinion, this story

“belongs with the great short stories of the century” (SA 10) and his summary merits citation:

Both Delia and Martin are dead and the whole sweep of their lives is dealt with in a masterly fashion by moving in and out of the mind of Martin’s sister, Min, who kept house for him after Delia died and who is now a very old woman. She hated Delia. She wears Martin’s wedding ring on her finger. She has brought back to Wexford as much of the Bagots’ books and furniture as she can crowd into her flat and sits in happy possession of it. What in the earlier stories was an at times almost unbearable sadness is now an unflattering irony. Dominated by false pride, ungenerous, unreachable, unkind, the old woman is the embodiment of that side of the Irish temperament that delights in mockery and rejoices in the downfall of those whom life has smiled on. (Maxwell, 1997: 10)

As Maxwell describes her, Min is ferocious and cruel and a grotesque characterisation of the feminine. Min is also a complex and intelligent woman who has been “sentenced to a lifetime of sewing, when she had her heart set on going to college and becoming a teacher” (SA 326). Isolated from education and the body politic, her “happy possession” of the left-over scraps from the lives of Delia and Martin throws into relief the manner in which, for all their paucity, their lives were defined by not having fully realised their ambitions or potential and, although similarly characterised, were more fulfilling than her own. The experience of being exiled within Ireland, exiled by virtue of the patriarchy of everyday life and the strong anti-feminist tendency in government, was a situation which carried its own economic consequences for women like Min:

She had an awful feeling of being in disgrace with somebody she had never seen and who had never liked her very much, never, not even when she was a little mite

trying to help her mother with the younger children. No, wherever it came from, this impersonal dislike had been lying in wait for her all her life. (*SA* 312)

Brennan's focus on women's private lives, their concerns and actions, places her among the "great, if neglected, Irish writers of the 20th century" (Menaghan, 2006: 8). This collection of stories serves as a manifestation of the author's voice as she looks into her characters' hearts and minds. The continuing focus placed on women's experiences and value systems and the examination of women's roles as well as the price they paid – isolation, alienation, anger and despair – make this collection unique and deserving of more than an autobiographical interpretation. Brennan may well have been "expressing her general disillusion at what Irish womanhood had become after Independence" (Ingman, 2007: 81), but just as in her *Long-Winded Lady* sketches, her concern centres on the factors contributing to the condition of people's lives, rather than just the manifestation of personal emotion.

A central theme of feminist philosophy is that women's biological role in the reproduction of the species gave men a practical advantage by affording them the opportunity and the power to determine that the organisation of society would further their interests.⁴⁰ Up until the 1950s, Irish women's emigration was variously constructed as a loss of national breeding stock, a threat to female purity and a potential undermining of national and religious identities. Although primarily a response to economic factors, "Irish women's migration throughout the twentieth century was also a response to the regulation of women's sexuality...Irish femininity was recognised only in so far as it was separated from the sexual" (Gray, 2004: 2). With marriage being perceived as necessary

⁴⁰ While different feminists interpret women's subordinated condition in different ways, many feminists would agree "that women's biology does disadvantage them" (Stone, 2007: 8). Though some argue that "recent technologies such as the contraceptive pill allow women to overcome" these biological limitations (Stone, 2007: 8).

only for procreation and with economic pragmatism taking precedence over personal fulfilment, it therefore comes as no surprise that celibacy was exalted over sexuality. Brennan's women-centred stories demonstrate a concern for sexual personhood. In "The Springs of Affection", Brennan explores the general atmosphere in Ireland which was resistant to the expression of male and female sexuality. The main character of the story Min, in a stream of consciousness, tells us that "she was the only one of the lot of them who hadn't gone off and got married" (SA 309) "a born old maid" (SA 340), she "had never needed to assert herself like that" (SA 309). Her brother and sisters "didn't seem to care what any-body thought of them when they got caught up in that excitement, like animals. It was disgusting" (SA 309). With marriage being "largely a matter of economics, the relationship most often romanticised, spoken and sung about with nostalgia, was that of brothers and sisters, and the best-loved place was one's childhood home" (Bourke, 2005: 14). Brennan observes and explores ideas of homelessness and displacement, but also investigates the notion of home as that "best-loved place". In addition, she also examines a more depressing side of marriage and sexuality, the manner in which economic factors impacted on sibling relationships, how repressive attitudes could lead to the "springs of affection" (SA 350) becoming corrupted and how these may be all bound up together.

This story, one of the last that Brennan wrote, refers indirectly to how marriage among large families required an elaborate choreography, which would allow a sister to exit as a bride entered. However, most of these difficulties were overcome if siblings simply stayed together. This also safeguarded inheritance rights. Min reflects on how Martin, who "was the family silver" (SA 333), had disrupted this ideal and abandoned the family: "They all went down in value when he went out of their lives" (SA 333):

But it was not likely that Martin would ever have belonged to any family except his own, or that he would ever have had sisters who were not Min and Clare and Polly, or that he would ever have had another woman for his mother than their own mother, who had sacrificed everything for them and asked in return only that they stick together as a family, and build themselves up, and make a wall around themselves that nobody could see through, let alone climb. What she had in mind was a fort, a fortress, where they could build themselves up in private and strengthen their hold on the earth, because in the long run that is what matters – a firm foothold and a roof over your head. (SA 313)

Ireland's late and sudden industrialisation brought with it huge changes to its class structure. The pre-industrial class structure was transformed, bringing with it new lines of class distinction. Min views Martin's wife Delia and her family as belonging to a different class and comments on the different class structures pertaining to the urban-rural divide: "Delia came from another class of people altogether. They were a different breed, more coarse-grained" (SA 315). Not her "sort at all", Min considers Martin's marriage to Delia "worse" than if he "had married a girl from a foreign country" (SA 335). Brennan considers the vested interest in cultivating the desire to belong, to be part of a recognisable family that will provide a relatively stable anchor for identity in an uncertain and changing world. As McDonald points out, family members were more dependent on each other, economically and emotionally, in the early decades of the twentieth century, this was especially the case as there was no welfare system and the State did not provide support. Men performed an instrumental role, that of economic provider, or breadwinner, whilst women's role was as nurturer and emotional provider (McDonald, 2006: 68). Marriage, defined as a legally sanctioned relationship regulated sexual activity and maintained kinship and property rights.

Brennan uses metaphors of the Roman Empire and the Second World War, normally associated with funerals, to describe the effects of Martin's marriage on his twin sister Min. Min remembers her brother's wedding as a gladiatorial battle, with her own family grotesque in defeat: "They could call it a wedding or anything they liked, but she knew it was a holocaust and that she was the victim" (SA 351). In reviewing her life lived in the shadow of their marriage, the pain of Min's exclusion is faithfully transmuted into spiteful cruelty. When Martin and Delia married and moved to Dublin, Min felt betrayed, seeing herself as the only "one who was always faithful to the family" (SA 309). With the familial unit in Irish society being regarded as one of the most basic and important institutions, where society is reproduced in its most basic form, this is hardly surprising. Martin is viewed as a traitor to the cause of family, being described as "out of his head...mad... all decency gone", and Delia, "mad" and "something the matter with her" (SA 309). Aligning their sexuality with insanity and feeling only contempt for their sexual personhood, Min perceives Martin and Delia as being both powerless and vulnerable, both of them crippled by any expression of their sexual being. During this period, spinsterhood was regarded as an unfortunate situation foisted upon a woman, not a condition she might willingly choose. Min is a spinster, which tended to be seen as a situation that did not "make good women" (McKenna, 2006: 55), and Brennan's most psychologically damaged and grotesque character embraces this sentiment. Min is a study in miserliness, a character whose petty economies stand for a shrivelling soul, who places material possessions above human warmth.

In this collection, Brennan makes the "ordinary" dynamic and a conduit of particular significance in her stories. She teases out the contradictions and picks out with care the eccentricities lurking just under the surface of the everyday. Brennan tells us that the ordinary is a passageway "to the common practices of family life" (SA 307). Her use

of the familial space can serve as both refuge and the site of morally and spiritually grounded resistance. This implicit rendering may be seen playing out in her representations of domesticity, everyday events and the daily lives of her characters. The intimate space of family life is of special concern to her. She is astute in identifying that there is no homespace without the bodies that sustain and vivify it and, accordingly, there are no lived bodies without the places they inhabit and transverse. Regulated by the Irish State, body is to place as place is to space: particular, gendered, relational and areas of unpleasurable belonging.

Chapter Four

The Rose Garden

“The view from the kitchen” ~ Maeve Brennan

The Rose Garden, a second posthumous collection published in 1999 by the Houghton Mifflin Company, is a companion volume to *The Springs of Affection*. *The Rose Garden* restores the remainder of Maeve Brennan’s short stories to print, with six stories appearing in book form for the first time: “The Holy Terror” (1950), “The Bride” (1953), “The Anachronism” (1954), “The Daughters” (1955), “The Beginning of a Long Story” (1961) and “The Bohemians” (1962). The preface was originally published as “Notes and Comment” in *The New Yorker* and later reprinted, under the title “A Daydream” (1976) in the second expanded edition of *The Long-Winded Lady* (1997). “A Snowy Night on West Forty-ninth Street” (1967) also appeared in the *Postscript* to *The Long-Winded Lady*. Five of the stories about a Labrador dog “Bluebell”, as well as “I see You, Bianca” (1966), are reprinted from *In and Out of Never-Never Land* (1969). The remaining eight stories are reprinted from the collection *Christmas Eve* (1974). With the exception of “The Holy Terror” (1950), which was first printed in *Harper’s Bazaar*, all of the stories originally appeared in *The New Yorker*. The opening seven stories of this uneven collection are set in a rich enclave north of New York City, while the stories in the second group are, with one exception, set in Dublin. The exception, “The Bride”, bridges the two worlds of Ireland and America. The next three stories are set in Manhattan. Of the final five stories, all but one are set in East Hampton; “The Door on West Tenth Street” (1967) is set in New York.

Given that Brennan was a woman and a writer moving between Irish and American places, her bifurcated views are best captured in this collection. *The Rose*

Garden identifies and engages with moments of cultural and historical transition, in both American and Irish society in the mid-twentieth century. Aspects of belonging are explored in a variety of ways, with the themes of power, wealth and prestige together with the breakdown of community life, revealed to varying degrees throughout. These stories explore many aspects of belonging, including the potential of the individual to enrich or challenge a community. As is a common feature of most of her writing, Brennan's characters are a somewhat defeated lot, who hide their pain, suffering a lack of peace and contentment behind an outwardly stoic existence. Trying to find a spiritual and emotional space within family or small communities, they sometimes discover they are alienated from the very community or family they seek to connect with or impress. A particular strength of these stories is the attention Brennan gives to the relationship between the Irish domestic servant, her American employer, and the household where she works. Brennan links a maid's verbal assertiveness to part of a larger discussion on power and the subaltern.

Many of the stories offer a study of Irish women who carved their niche in America as domestic servants. Historians have frequently observed (Foster, 1989, Ferriter, 2005) that, in addition to nineteenth-century emigration, twentieth-century emigration from Ireland was remarkable because of the high numbers of women who chose to depart. The vast majority of those women settled in the United States, where many who entered the paid work force took service positions in American households (Lynch-Brennan, 2009: 40). Since Irish-born women comprised the largest percentage of foreign-born servants in America during the early part of the twentieth century (Katzman, 1981: 66), it was perhaps inevitable that, as a journalist, Brennan would engage with issues surrounding domestic service, emigration and the diaspora. Additionally, the maid situation was a continuous problem that exercised the upper middle-class American

suburban housewife on a daily basis. Free weekly newspapers kept local residents up to date with the domestic service situation. In “The Anachronism” (1954), Brennan satirises the suburban housewife’s obsession with their domestic workforce: ““Speaking of maids, as we do all the time,” Arabelle said, “Clara, I loved your cute little story in this week’s *Flyaway* about that maid in White’s Hotel!”” (RG 25). In her usual sardonic tone, Brennan mocks such papers; the “*Flyaway*”, a weekly publication circulated at the Retreat, reports on whose maid is currently flying in or out of Herbert’s Retreat. Brennan draws “the most extraordinary, wonderful caricature” (RG 25) of just how exercised the housewives of the Retreat became over the maid situation: ““Oh, just once, to have a good maid!””(RG 25), they exclaim. So obsessed are the housewives by their domestic arrangements, they write and compare stories about it.

Similar to the structure in *The Springs of Affection*, recurring characters link the first seven stories of *The Rose Garden* and contribute to the novel-like nature of the cycle. This series of linked stories, a study of life in “Herbert’s Retreat”, an enclave of rich, smug, vaguely artistic social-climbers, are all set in an exclusive community located thirty miles north of New York City. The self-satisfaction of these privileged suburbanites is matched only by their malice and envy of one another’s river view, stone hot-water bottle, kitchen fireplace and live-in Irish help. William Maxwell dismisses these “Herbert’s Retreat” stories, labelling them “satirical in tone...heavy-handed” and lacking “the breath of life” (Maxwell, 1997: 5). Maxwell’s praise of Brennan’s other work – both earlier and later – suggests her writing suffered as a consequence of her marriage: “After she was living alone again”, he concludes, “Maeve began to write what are clearly her finest stories” (Maxwell, 1997: 6). This opinion is of course open to question. These sardonic tales alternately adopt the perspectives of this exclusive community’s privileged residents and their mostly scornful Irish maids: “As such, they are perhaps the most Irish American

of Brennan's stories" (Menaghan, 2008: 90). Brennan's small fictional world of Herbert's Retreat is populated, not only by a community of American social-climbing suburbanites, but also by Irish émigrés and live-in housemaids:

It was seldom that one of the houses at Herbert's Retreat was not in uproar with a maid just gone or about to go, a dinner planned and the hostess frantically phoning her neighbours to discover which of the remaining maids would be available to help out for the evening. All this gave the maids a great sense of power, of course. For some of them, the power was satisfaction enough. Those were the ones who stayed on year after year. The others flew in and out of Herbert's Retreat like birds, carrying their baggage with them, entering service there with misgiving and leaving with rancor. (RG 24-25)

Collectively, the first seven stories tell of a community of Irish women in domestic service who have emigrated from Ireland and struggle to find a sense of belonging in the New World, and within an existing diaspora.

In her review of *The Rose Garden* for the *New Criterion* in 2000, Brooke Allen notes that this collection demonstrates that, whether writing about Ireland or America, Brennan was "one of the most affecting and subtle artists of her generation, clear, unsentimental, and occasionally heartbreaking" (Allen, 2000: 75). Like Allen, a number of reviewers of *The Rose Garden* value Brennan's skill at characterisation and her accurate portrayal of Dublin and New York City life. On the other hand, some take Bourke's literary biography as their point of departure, seeking clues to Brennan's personal tragedies in her fiction. For example, the literary correspondent Eileen Battersby's review for *The Irish Times* in 2010 features the cover of Bourke's biography, underscored with the caption: "Exile on main Street", and continues in the piece to

remark on the manner in which, after leaving Ireland, Brennan, “spent the rest of her, often lonely, life recapturing her childhood city in a series of masterfully executed stories”.⁴¹ Bourke’s writing on this collection recreates Brennan’s time in Snedens Landing, linking the stories both to the breakdown of Brennan’s marriage and to her relationships with close friends, Gerald and Sarah Murphy (Bourke, 2005: 181-187). Snedens Landing, the model for Herbert’s Retreat, was a type of arts enclave, with such famous residents as Gerald and Sara Murphy, the Riviera expatriates who served as the models for Dick and Nicole Diver in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night* (1934). Bourke draws a pen picture of Brennan’s friendship with the Murphys, going as far as to claim the “description of Charles Runyon mixing drinks probably owes something” to this friendship (Bourke, 2005: 185). Predictably, a number of troubling questions are raised by such statements, not least of which is the assumption of knowledge regarding Brennan’s private emotional landscape, a woman, who Bourke admits, “had always been protective of her privacy” (Bourke, 2005: 270). In her effort to grasp the rhythm of Brennan’s mind, Bourke interweaves the stories with Brennan’s life to recreate her time in the East Hamptons, “putting fear in the reader’s mind that the author is simply reaching too far and wide” (Deignan, 2004: 27). Nevertheless, Bourke selects her topic well when drawing attention to Brennan’s ability to bring to her stories “the ironic insights of the undetected outsider”, hiding “coded messages within them” (Bourke, 2005: 170). Drawing on Bourke’s reading, Abigail Palko in her essay, “Out of Home in the Kitchen: Maeve Brennan’s Herbert’s Retreat Stories”, approaches these stories as “continuing the literature that attends a familiar figure throughout much of American history, the Irish maid” (Palko, 2007: 74). Palko identifies the manner in which “the locus of power and the

⁴¹ Eileen Battersby, “Home is where the fiction is,” *The Irish Times*, September 29th, 2010

site of its transference hold interesting implications for issues of identity, migration, and memory, issues that preoccupied Brennan” (Palko, 2007: 77).

Exploring the human desire to belong, in lives where the individual has been separated from where they previously experienced a sense of belonging, was obviously a subject which intrigued and fascinated Brennan. From her earliest work in *The Visitor*, Brennan considered the nature of belonging, the returning emigrant and the failure to be accepted back into the host community. In *The Rose Garden*, she extends this discussion to include diaspora and assimilation into a new country. Both of these works engage with characters who inhabit lives where the nature of belonging has been sundered and the longing for home brought under scrutiny. “The Bride” (1953) focuses on Margaret Casey, an Irish maid in Scarsdale, reflecting on her life in Ireland and the issues surrounding return to her native land. Brennan’s positioning as an Irish woman and a writer living and working in America, placed her in a unique setting from which to observe and comment on both Irish and American societies. Despite her privileged upbringing, Brennan would have understood the experiences that shaped the lives of a great number of Irish women who, like Margaret Casey, were forced to leave Ireland to find work in America. As an emigrée, Brennan knew what was involved in the decision to leave one’s native home, about the nature of the migratory process and about the forces of adaptation in the marketplace. As Bourke points out, she also understood the strong commitment of Irish women to the values and practices of their home country, (Bourke, 2005:183-186). The Herbert’s Retreat cycle reflects the manner in which Irish women responded to the perplexing difference of American society, as Irish, as Catholics, as poor and unskilled labourers and as newcomers. Women’s unique position in Irish culture, particularly in its family life and in its passionate commitment to Catholicism, despite the savage

repressions of Catholic doctrine, together with a collective memory, are mirrored in the group values and daily realities as re-created in the fictional world of Herbert's Retreat.

Brennan's "View from the Kitchen" (RG 3) is not merely the introduction to the cycle; it also acts as a visual exercise of control of a house, allowing the reader to consider what kind of vision of the interior has been put forward. Is the interior a safe, warm enclosure, or is it rather an isolating, threatening space? Brennan uses the interior on the one hand, in Bachelard's terms, as a place where one can turn away from the other, encountered both inside and outside. The enclosing walls of the house provide silence and separation, and the optimal place for daydreaming. Bachelard wrote "the places in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time" (Bachelard, 1994: 11). The preface to *The Rose Garden* is titled "A Daydream". It is a poetic evocation of a "warm, sunless day, with a cool breeze blowing in from the ocean", it is a re-creation of "sand and sea and roses" and a "beach in East Hampton", prior to its return to the "nubbly white counterpane" (RG Preface) the dreamer is lying on. In "A Daydream", Brennan offers a juxtaposition of poetic images, descriptions of spaces, memories and moments that have affected the speaker through experience. Brennan uses memory as a spatial tool. She remembers what it was like to walk along a "walled rose garden" and recalls "a number of places" (RG Preface) where she has walked and which go to form an image of home. Brennan, as an artist, uses memory to seek a spiritual homeland that has nothing to do with ownership, but is a place where authenticity can be found and affirmed.

As Brennan meditates on her time in the East Hamptons, her memories of spaces open out to tell stories of other places. Bachelard considers this revisiting of memories as having qualities usually associated with poetry, especially in being gracefully expressive

in the creative process of writing. He takes the poetic image and treats it spatially within the imagination, considering memory as part of this poetic image. He claims the human subject holds memories as daydreams that are poetic as they think of them. What they have stored in these memories are simply aspects of the spaces they have inhabited, what they found poetic, or what gave them a better awareness of place. Memories, for Bachelard, develop into a type of ritual or narrative. For Bachelard, ritual is the impression we receive from the nature of space; it is what happens in that space, for example the ritual of a kitchen space is to prepare and store food, a bedroom is for relaxation and sleep and a bathroom to refresh and cleanse (Bachelard, 1994: 6). As Foucault details it, "Bachelard's monumental work and the descriptions of phenomenologists have taught us that we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but on the contrary in a space thoroughly imbued with quantities and perhaps thoroughly fantasmic as well" (Foucault, 1986: 23). When reading Brennan's *Herbert's Retreat* stories through such a prism, the way in which Brennan's mind was sensitised to this poetic imagery of domestic space becomes increasingly apparent. It also brings into focus the manner in which it frequently features in a variety of her writings, and to what extent it exists as an element within her narratives, irrespective of derivation or context.

It is this positive, poetic idea of the interior as shelter that Brennan contrasts with the interior as a kind of prison cell, in which power and control play a role. The interior, in this case, disadvantages the individual and has a negative influence on his or her wellbeing. This demonstration that something is absent is foregrounded and strengthened by the presence and viewpoint of Irish maids. Brennan reveals a powerful cultural clash between the Irish maids and their employers; together they offer a "view" on the world which creates a contrast between the values of two very different worlds. Incompatible views of the interior are represented by both the owners and the maids. Warm, cosy,

intimate and accessible, as it is depicted in our most recognisable mythologies about houses and homes, the kitchen features as the central place in the home. The kitchen exerts a powerful hold in Brennan's East Hampton stories, evoking images of cultural preferences and the distinguishable differences in aesthetic preferences according to social class. The housewives are never happy with what they "have to put up with in" their "kitchens" (RG 26). The emergence of new social groups and the distinction between economically dominant and culturally dominant, is used by Brennan to highlight an arena of social power play that influences social standing and social relationships. Different tastes are held in defiance of the social and cultural elite. The virtue of the home-making woman is implicitly contrasted here with the qualities of women whose wealth is manifested in a preoccupation with ornamentation and display of social position.

From the opening of "The View from the Kitchen", Brennan's ubiquitous Irish maids provide a running commentary on their mistresses' preoccupations; their observational wit dissects Leona Harkey's relationship with her second husband George and the malicious, martini-swilling snobbish theatre critic Charles Runyon. Runyon is a social fixture at the Retreat, whom the maids refer to as "Mr God" (RG 7). The maids, Bridie and Agnes, shrewdly appraise their employers: "He's her *admirer*" (RG 8), the cynical Bridie says in explanation of Runyon's countless weekend visits, "he admires her, and she admires him. They *admire* each other" (RG 8). Brennan's maids never miss an opportunity to artlessly expose the narcissistic triviality of the lives of the residents of this well-to-do retreat. "The View from the Kitchen" narrates the first meeting of George Harkey, new to Herbert's Retreat and to the world of his new wife Leona. The socially aspiring newly widowed and recently re-married Leona, a parvenu who tries nervously to "fit in" (RG 13), is so irritated by the unsightly cottage that blocks her view of the river that she has married its unsuspecting owner, George, so that she might take possession of

it and raze it to the ground. One characteristic that all the houses in Herbert's Retreat have in common is that they "all eye the river... this does not mean that they all face the river... but in every house the residents have contrived and plotted and schemed and paid to bring the river as intimately as possible into their lives" (RG 3): "Those fortunate enough to have houses facing directly on the river had no problem, since the view was theirs for the taking" (RG 4) but, unlike the other "occupants", Leona has been particularly "ingenious in devising ways to trap and hold" (RG 4) her own particular glimpse of the water. As the title suggests, Brennan plays off of the idea of "the view", but it is ultimately not the view of the river that takes centre stage in the narration but the "view from the kitchen". In the kitchen, Bridie and Agnes, the maids, recognise the vested power in observing their employers through the kitchen window. Hidden behind the kitchen curtain, Bridie the family maid, and Agnes, who is on loan from another household for the afternoon, observe the politics of their employers' role-play, while the employers are defenceless and unable to check the maids' ability to monitor them. From the outset, Brennan asserts rights over this one room in the house. Moving the maids into a position of power, she gives them control over their employers, thus reversing the more usual servant/employer inequality.

Brennan's "Bridie" (RG 5) is representative of the Irish immigrant domestic service girl who worked in American homes from the second half of the nineteenth century into the middle decades of the twentieth. Brennan gives voice to these Irish women, and celebrates their contribution to the ethnic history of the United States, by penning a portrait of the lives and experiences of Irish domestic servants – albeit a sardonic one. Large numbers of socially marginalised Irish immigrant women of this era made their living in domestic service. These women lived and worked in close contact with American families, while maintaining a community with their fellow Irish men and

women. In *The Irish Bridget: Irish Immigrant Women in Domestic Service in America, 1840-1930*, Margaret Lynch-Brennan reveals the essential role this unique relationship played in shaping the place of the Irish people in America today.⁴² Such women, she claims, were instrumental in making the Irish presence more acceptable to earlier established American groups. It was through the experience of domestic service that many of the Irish were acculturated; women working in domestic service absorbed the middle-class values of their patrons and passed them on to their own children (Lynch-Brennan, 2009: 235).

The milieu of the Herbert's Retreat stories is different from the rest of Brennan's work. These stories, filled with social gatherings and divorces, offer the reader a satirical commentary on the foibles of the inhabitants of this fictional enclave, although beneath the surface exists a darker depiction of their idiosyncrasies. Brennan's focus here is on the class-conscious interactions between the Irish servants and their mistresses. Her portrayal of the mistress-servant relationship asserts a claim on the kitchen of the mistress's home, effecting a reversal of discrimination. As Palko notes:

Brennan's intercultural negotiations are enriched by an inherent irony, ambivalence, and deviousness... They treat of seemingly trivial incidents in the world Brennan has created; beneath the surface, however, lurks a darkly comic expose of the foibles of the women the Irish have been employed to serve and a poignant revelation of the servants' strength. (Palko, 2007: 79-80)

In the first story, Bridie, the maid provides a sharp commentary on her mistress's numbed emotional response to the death of her first husband:

⁴² Although Lynch-Brennan's title limits her study to the years 1840-1930, she does update it to the 1980s.

He was dead drunk and ran himself into a young tree. Destroyed the tree and killed himself. She had to get a new car. He was all over the windshield when they found him, and the front seat, and bits of him on the hood - blood, hair, everything. Ugh. I often wonder did they get both his eyes to bury him. His face was just pulp, that's all-all mashed. The police were mystified, that he could do himself so much damage against such a small tree. He must have been going awful fast. She never turned a hair. I was here when she got the call. Not a feather out of her. (RG 7)

This graphic rendering is a nuanced imparting not only of Tommy Finche's pointless death, but of his wife Leona's lack of concern at his passing. The power to destroy oneself and others, the scant regard for human life, is indicated by this explicit translation given by Bridie the maid. Describing the indifference of his wife to such an act of wanton violence, Bridie explains "She never turned a hair...Not a feather out of her...That rip hasn't got a nerve in her body"(RG 7). Over and over the maids artfully expose their employers' vanity, as well as their narrow emotional range. Every character below stairs lives for the delight of recounting their mistress's disasters. Working within a community of other Irish women, maids like Bridie and Agnes share both their memories and aspirations, viewing the decadent behaviour of their American employers from a strongly ethical Christian viewpoint, although some-times this spills over into being just plain spiteful. Brennan places her focus on the interactions between Irish-American Catholic servants and their psychologically insecure, nouveau-riche upper middle-class employers. Her Herbert's Retreat stories demonstrate some of the worst aspects of human nature, such as selfishness and greed. Brennan's intercultural negotiations, enriched with inherent irony, engage on increasingly intimate terms with the lives of the Herbert's Retreat inhabitants, ruthlessly exposing morally offensive behaviour.

Most significantly, Brennan's stories provide glimpses into both the working world and the social world that Irish domestic servants constructed and inhabited during the early part of the twentieth century in New York. Through the unfolding daily life of upper middle-class American households, Brennan provides an insight into the values and expectations of the mistresses of these houses as viewed through the eyes of their Irish maids. Her portrayal of Irish maids and trivial incidents within a domestic space constitute nothing short of a meditation on the subversive ability of the subaltern to observe and outmanoeuvre their employers. Brennan's women encompass a range of different subject positions; this is a domestic world of American mistresses as well as of Irish women workers. Despite their time-consuming live-in duties, Brennan's maids celebrate their origin and ethnic identity through a range of activities, which include dances and church visits. Their social lives give the maids the excuse to indulge in their love of fashion; out of uniform, the maids can pass for middle-class American women. "The Servants' Dance" details the annual dance given by the mistresses of the Retreat for domestic servants and the maids' subversive activities to "boycott" (RG 133) their employers by refusing to dance with them. Asserting a collective power, the servants' refusal to dance with their employers at the event is not only a demonstration of subaltern agency and resistance, but also a reversal of power.

The term subaltern, first derived from the work of Antonio Gramsci, entered postcolonial studies through the work of the Subaltern Studies Group, a collective of South Asian historians, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, a public intellectual who was committed to articulating the lives and histories of disempowered subaltern groups.⁴³

⁴³ Spivak argues that the subaltern is not just a fashionable word for "other" and should not be used in a general sense to refer to marginalised groups and lower classes, which she disagrees with. On the other hand, mainstream development discourse is critiqued by Victoria Lawson as recreating the subaltern, because of its disengagement from local communities and its lack of recognition of regional, class ethnic and gender differences between places. Lawson claims that development discourse continues to treat

Seeking to find an appropriate methodology for articulating the histories and struggles of these marginalised groups, Spivak found the term useful because of its flexibility to recover a history of subaltern agency and resistance from the perspective of the people, rather than of the State. Spivak takes into account the manner in which the term subaltern can accommodate social identities and struggles which otherwise are mediated through the State. She considers how, in order to be heard, the subaltern must adopt Western thought, reasoning and language. Because of this, Spivak argues, the subalterns can never express their own reasoning, forms of knowledge or logic; they must instead form their knowledge from Western ways of knowing (Morton, 2003: 47-50). The claim that the subaltern cannot speak means she cannot speak in a way that would carry authority or meaning for non-subalterns without altering the relations of power and knowledge that constituted the subaltern in the first place.

Throughout the collection, Brennan satirises the traditionally subordinate role of the Irish domestic, and highlights the continual struggle to find a voice. Because of their ethnicity and their position as domestic servants, Brennan's maids are at a "double disadvantage" (*RG* 5). In the Retreat stories, Brennan overturns this situation and demonstrates transference of power between maids and employers. The maids are subversive in their observation and scornful of their employer's authority. From the opening of "The View from the Kitchen", Agnes, a maid on loan to the community for the evening recognises that power rests in her ability to observe her employers. In addition,

subjects of developing countries as subordinate and lacking knowledge, by not including subjects' voices and opinions in development policies (Lawson, 2007). My use of the term is prompted by Brown's discussion of Spivak's argument "that one must examine the fact that 'at the crossroads of sexuality and ideology, woman stands constituted ...as object. As subject, woman must learn to 'speak otherwise', or 'make audible what ...suffers silently in the holes of discourse'" (Brown, 1986: 68). Additionally, Gillian Whitlock's discussion of the subversive, angry and defiant nature of the little-examined area of women writing humour was informative. Whitlock draws attention to the manner in which a realistic technique is not the only avenue open to the feminist novelist and that a more stylised, satirical and self-conscious structure can be equally powerful in stressing the incongruity in language and appearance, allowing the writer to lampoon pretension and hypocrisy and the norms of patriarchal dominance (Whitlock, 1986: 123-131.)

being new to the house and the community she knows she has not yet mastered an appropriate way to do this:

Agnes worked and lived at the Giegler's, up the road, and had come to help out for the evening. Bridie, who liked heat, had planted her broad self on a chair beside the stove. Agnes, hovering inquisitively around the strange kitchen, was at a double disadvantage. Not only was she relegated, for the time being, to the position of helper but she was new to the community, having come out from New York City only the week before. She longed to stand at the kitchen window, to watch the antics of Mr. and Mrs. Harkey and their guest, whose voices she could hear outside, but the balance of amiability was still uncertain between her and Bridie, and she feared to put herself in a position that might prove embarrassing if Bridie chose to make it so. However, Bridie's unwavering stare finally drove her to drift with a show of unconcern to the window, where she saw enough to give her courage to make a remark. (*RG 5*)

Although new to the Retreat, as a domestic servant, Agnes identifies potential situations of resistance. Like Bridie, she immediately recognises that power rests in her ability to observe. Through their satirical observations, the maids resist the supremacy which would create them as inferior other. Bridie tells Agnes: "That crowd takes care of their own drinks. Out of shame, if nothing else, so we won't see how much they put down. As if I didn't have to carry the empty bottles out" (*RG 8*). Bridie's response demonstrates the manner in which the Harkeys are powerless to check their maids' inquisitive observation. Neither upstairs nor downstairs, the contemporary New York home and the complex domestic situation was a disconcerting issue for upper middle-class homeowners. Throwing employers' culture into distorted contrast with that of their mass-going maids and mocking the mistresses' snobbish materialism, Brennan captures a time of transition

in the American domestic environment. Through precisely phrased glimpses of both Irish and American women, she allows the reader to locate the point of view of the stories among the homeowners she wrote about. Even though Brennan satirises the mistress/servant situation, her sequence of upper middle-class mistresses would have been instantly recognisable to her American readers.

Not the first to write about the domestic situation in New York but perhaps the most sardonic, Brennan's stories add to discussions surrounding the concerns of New York society and the servant problem, which follow from "Daniel Defoe in the early eighteenth century to commentaries in the late twentieth century" (Katzman, 1978: 225). David Katzman's use of historical sources, federal and State reports together with autobiographies, memoirs and scholarly monographs look at domestic service – both employers and employees – in America from 1870 to 1920. Katzman's work highlights a period of rapid industrialisation, which meant other occupations were opening to women, ultimately leading to the end of live-in domestic service. Historically, much of the literature on the servant problem focused on the treatment of workers and the quality of their living environment: "The long, irregular hours, the meanness, unpleasantness, disorganisation, or arbitrariness of mistresses, the inadequacy of diet and paucity of amenities" (Katzman, 1978: 233), which were troubling to servants and reflected individual employers' characteristics. However, he observes one of the main concerns for domestics "was the atomization of work. Working without the company of fellow workers, many servants felt alone and isolated on the job; in the case of live-in servants, this feeling persisted around the clock" (Katzman, 1978: 233). While the growing national influence of organized labour and the support of federal government led to improvements in living and pay conditions, "the problem of atomization was truly insurmountable" (Katzman, 1981: 235). At every level of domestic service, a maid faced reminders of her

subservient role and the distinction between mistress and servant. Brennan engages with this situation, showing not only a reversal of power, but the manner in which Irish maids cleaved together forming their own small communities.

Sensitive tone paintings, Brennan's stories reveal the behaviour and wrongdoings of a community's privileged residents who hold dearest to their hearts "the care and beautification of their eighteenth-century houses" (Allen, 2000: 73), together with their status in the community. In "The Anachronism" the newcomer Liza Frye throws the community into turmoil with her "severely modern furniture" (RG 16): "Right off, her modern furniture outraged all the other women, who had been concentrating on Early American" (RG 17). The story details Liza Frye's search for a housekeeper and her practice of attempting to outdo and show she was superior to her rivals at the Retreat. Liza who tries to rise in status by associating with people of a higher class is guided by the pithy principle "that the only way to impress one's personality on people is to deprive them of something they want" (RG 17). Liza translates her philosophy into depriving her mother, Mrs Conroy, of the comforts of home, including proper food, tea in her room and an easy chair to sit on in the kitchen:

Liza was a rigid housekeeper. Her furniture had all been designed for her, and she hated to see anything out of its appointed place. Her mother, Mrs Conroy, who lived with her, had been begging for years for an old-fashioned cozy armchair, but Liza was adamant. Liza and Mrs Conroy detested each other, but it suited them to live together – Liza because she enjoyed showing her power, and Mrs Conroy because she was waiting for her day of vengeance. (RG 18)

Liza, an ambitious woman, who marries into money, tries to outdo her snobbish neighbours by hiring the perfect English maid who, it transpires, could possibly be Irish,

only to have the maid join forces against her with her vengeful mother Mrs Conroy.⁴⁴ As the story progresses, Brennan exposes, through the maid's observations, the vulnerabilities of the social-climbing Liza and her husband Tom, who are consumed by insecurities and unattainable yearnings. With scathing wit, she invariably turns the tables on their pretentious and competitive behaviour. The denouement of the tale sees Liza driven from the kitchen by the derision of her new maid Betty and Mrs Conroy who have joined forces against her. Brennan is cruel when criticising her characters, particularly those who engage in petty tyrannies, but she also exercises a compassion that is shrouded in a shrewd sense of justice. The story ends with Liza and her husband Tom "sitting in sepulchral silence...first startled, then appalled, by the sudden screeches that came at them from the kitchen – screeches of laughter that was rude and unrestrained, and that renewed itself even as it struck and shattered against the walls of the kitchen" (RG 38). Betty's and Mrs Conroy's hilarity shatters Liza's power, over not only the kitchen and Betty, but Mrs Conroy as well.

Brennan's Herbert's Retreat stories reject any attempt at a single, unified or universal notion of selfhood and look instead to the manner in which both determined and free versions of self-construction interact with and affect each other in variable ways according to changing social situations. Her characters, overly concerned with image of both themselves and their homes, display different conceptions of self-identity. The changing nature of the self and the construction of postmodern identity are captured by Brennan in the privileged individuals who inhabit the rarefied atmosphere of Herbert's Retreat. Life at the Retreat is more complex than that portrayed in her other works.

⁴⁴ In his study "The New Vanishing Irish: Social Characteristics of 'New Wave' Irish Emigration", Jim MacLaughlin claims "that from 1941 to 1950, some 85,000 Irish women entered England to work as domestic servants" (MacLaughlin, 1997: 139), therefore Liza's recruitment of a maid from England could very well mean she ended up with a maid originally from Ireland. Bourke claims, her "surname, of course, reveals that she is Irish" (Bourke, 2005: 186).

Brennan demonstrates the demands placed upon the postmodern individual as possible identities are paraded before the reader. The mistresses have to juggle a rapidly expanding number of roles in this society. They are portrayed as mannequins, living bizarre lives, dominated by greed, excess and moral bankruptcy. All the inhabitants at the Retreat strive for a common status, group consciousness, common values, and a defined posture within the overall society. For Leona Harkey and Liza Frye, image is now all that matters. These stories are a performance of disintegration, fragmented desires, superficiality, and identity as something you shop for. Fashion statements, shopping and lifestyle choices have pushed authenticity out of the equation. Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) is considered an important precursor of the postmodern self because he studied people in terms of how they performed in social situations. His work caught the postmodern imagination of many theorists because of his insistence on the centrality of what he called "image management" (Goffman, 1959: 209). Goffman's "dramaturgical" perspective is mainly concerned with the manner in which people act out social roles in particular circumstances, the way the individual in ordinary situations "presents himself and his activities to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him" (Goffman, 1959: xi). Only Clara Longacre is described as comfortable with her life, Clara Longacre: "having grown up there... was the recognised social leader at the Retreat" (RG 21). As the name suggests, Clara's ancestral history extends a considerable distance into the past, giving her both a "natural sense of superiority" and an innate sense of belonging, making "it impossible for her to doubt herself" (RG 21). Unlike Leona Harkey or Liza Frye, Clara is secure in her position at the Retreat (RG 21). In some form or other, similar to Leona, other characters try to solve the problem of belonging with clever adaptations and by trying to make a social fit within the community of the Retreat. Liza Frye is a young woman who previously lived in different

circumstances that have changed to remarkable fortune; however, unlike Clara Longacre, she must constantly strive to maintain recognition and success after a period of anonymity and the absence of achievement. Yet Brennan shows that, while these tactics may work for a while, eventually they fall apart because they lack the security of self-containment and any experience of completeness.

The final story in the cycle (“The Servants’ Dance”) is a story of one-upmanship between the social classes. Released from their customary servility the maids shun the upper classes, inflicting much comical discomfiture by refusing to dance with them. This ultimate transference of power between the privileged classes of the American employer to the working class Irish maid is indicative of the servant’s assimilation and appropriation of American values but also of their discomfort with some of those values. It also holds interesting implications for the issues of identity and belonging. Brennan’s model of cultural sophistication presents a social critique of those who populated the small communities surrounding New York. Many postmodern thoughts on identity seem to be addressed specifically to city life. In this respect, the postmodern attitude can be said to amplify rather than radically depart from the experiences and conditions which were in place since early theories of modernity. Commentators like Mike Featherstone approach the postmodern self by arguing that certain social conditions have produced in people a heightened awareness of appearance and style, “new middle class and new rich live in enclaved areas of gentrification and redevelopment which are designed to exclude outsiders” (Featherstone, 2007:107). In following this line of enquiry, he traces how the making of identity became increasingly related to what the consumer bought or wanted to buy. *The New Yorker*’s “advertisements for elite consumer goods” which mingled “amiably with the magazines more substantial fare”, offered a “distinctive mixture of elements which appealed alternately to the reader’s aspiration to know about things and a

desire to possess them” (Corey, 1999: ix). Advertising in *The New Yorker* created a dream world of ideal lifestyles for its reader to fantasise about and identify with. Because Brennan’s stories feed into this aestheticisation of life, her readers may have missed the reality of the issues she was dealing with in her writing. Although Mary Corey’s *The World through a Monocle* (1999) refers only to stories which discuss African-American maids, her analysis holds useful implications when considering Brennan’s stories. The inhabitants who populate Brennan’s fictional village on the periphery of New York city are the target market for these consumer goods. Moreover, her stories draw attention to the immigrant status of the maids who work and socialise closely in a community of other Irish women with whom they share both memories and the process of assimilation into American life. Brennan raises interesting questions about the maids’ experiences, throwing light on the push and pull of domestic power structures within middle-class American households and the problem of atomisation, which readers of the magazine may have missed.

Essentially a gendered critique of sexual roles in Western American society, the story “The Gentleman in the Pink-and-White Striped Shirt” comically utilises cross-dressing and role-doubling to explore the relationship between male power and oppression in mid-twentieth century America. Brennan introduces ideas here, which are later developed by Judith Butler. Butler presents ideas regarding identity and the relations between gender and sex, together with the notion of gender as performance or gender performativity in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). She argues that those everyday actions, speech utterances, gestures and representations, dress codes and behaviours as well as certain prohibitions and taboos all work to produce what is perceived as an essential masculine view of feminine identity. She deconstructs the notion of integrated, stable sexual identity as the extension of an inner essence, and the

illusion of the sexual body, which are in her view repressive and dangerous but also undermineable (Butler, 1999: 1-25). Butler questions the extent to which a given individual can be said to constitute him/herself, to what extent our acts are determined for us. Affected behaviour intended to give the appearance of greater importance and status spreads through Brennan's tale. The story introduces the pathetic nature of Leona Harkey's fascination with "Mr God Runyon" (RG 7). An ironic sketch of good taste becoming absurd, the tale centres on Runyon's pink-and-white striped shirt and Leona's adoring copy. This story deals explicitly with the double colonisation of women by both their male counterparts and a dominant Western belief. As the superior male, Runyon imposes his ideals on Leona and determines the role she must play – his created mannequin. This is, however, overturned by the end of the story: "Charles occupied a unique and privileged position" (RG 41), and Leona and her friends "regarded him as their infallible authority on the rules of gracious living and on the shadowy and constantly changing dimensions of good taste" (RG 41). Leona, Runyon's dotting and self-effacing friend, admits not only that she is "afraid of him", but also that she does "not know how she ever existed before she met him" (RG 41). Runyon's civilising mission involves, amongst other things, allowing Leona to use his "tailor" and "his special cloth" (RG 42) to make a suit exactly like his. Gender boundaries are crossed as Leona, foregrounding her gender as a fiction constructed by his male gaze, dresses in a matching outfit of a suit, bow tie and "pink and white striped shirt" to celebrate the anniversary of their meeting. Throughout the story, Brennan satirises the traditionally subordinate role of women and highlights a sense of continual struggle to maintain individuality against the odds. She demonstrates the manner in which images and stereotypes can acquire a depressive power over people and that female identity is a cultural construction and a colonisation of women by their male counterparts. Brennan investigates the movements which bring

these stereotypes to prominence; she is concerned with the victimisation of women and the destruction of a female sense of selfhood. In this collection, there is the recognition that patriarchal western culture diminishes the opportunity for identity formation in both male and female subjects.

Continuing to be alert to disparity, "The Joker" tells the story of Isobel Bailey's annual Christmas dinner for "waifs". As the story develops, the narrator steadily unfolds details that reveal Isobel's contempt for the waifs. "The Joker", which appeared in the December 27 1952 issue of *The New Yorker*, fulfilled the seasons of the year "calendar quality" (Bourke, 2005: 173): "It was the *New Yorker's* practice to assign publication dates based on seasonal references in the text" (Palko, 2007: 80). Brennan's portrait of Isobel Bailey shows a contemporary, female Pharisee who fulfils the letter, if not the spirit, of Christian, seasonal goodwill:

[Isobel] believed strongly in organized charity. She gave regular donations to charity, and she served willingly and conscientiously on several committees. She felt it was only fair that she should help those less fortunate than herself, though there was a point where she drew the line. She never gave money casually on the street, and her maids had strict orders to shut the door to beggars. "There are places where these people can apply for help," she said. (RG 53)

Brennan's description of Isobel bears more than a passing resemblance to Charles Dickens' character, Mrs. Jellyby from *Bleak House* (1853), another woman in favour of helping the poor in the abstract, but lacking any real social conscience. Like Mrs Jellyby, Isobel's sense of philanthropy springs from misplaced pride, she exhibits little compassion for the forces that brought the "Christmas waifs" (RG 53) to their present state, or appreciation for what makes them human beings in the first place.

Brennan's sentences, dense with detail, summon a world of gentility, inherited wealth and unconscious condescension: "The tablecloth was of stiff, icy white damask, and the centrepiece—of holly and ivy and full-blown blood-red roses—bloomed and flamed and cast a hundred small shadows trembling among the crystal and the silver" (*RG* 60). From Isobel's point of view:

It was a shameful thing to be a waif, but it was also mysterious. There was no accounting for it or defining it, and over and over again she was drawn back to her original idea – that waifs were simply people who had been squeezed off the train because there was no room for them. They had lost their tickets. Some of them never had owned a ticket. Perhaps their parents had failed to equip them with a ticket. Poor things, they were stranded. During ordinary times of the year, they could hide their plight. But at Christmas, when the train drew up for that hour of recollection and revelation, how the waifs stood out, burning in their solitude. Every Christmas Day (said Isobel to herself, smiling whimsically) was a station on the journey of life. There on the windy platform the waifs gathered in shame, to look in at the fortunate ones in the warm lighted train. Not all of them stared in, she knew; some looked away. She, Isobel, looked them all over and decided which ones to invite into her own lighted carriage. She liked to think that she occupied a first-class carriage – their red-brick house in Herbert's Retreat, solid, charming, waxed and polished, well heated, filled with flowers, stocked with glass and silver and clean towels. (*RG* 53)

In Isobel Bailey's opinion, waifs simply do not fit in anywhere and, by the end of the paragraph, Brennan portrays this self-centred almsgiver, a woman who makes generous but well-publicised charitable donations, in a very satirical light. Isobel and her neighbours share an innate need to prove their superiority and it is this which actually

motivates Isobel's Christmas dinner for the waifs. Brennan's psychological profile of Isobel and the other mistresses of the enclave consider how their sense of emotional security is founded on a supercilious superiority.

Although the setting is different, there are threads to be found in the "The Joker" that are similar to *The Visitor*. In both, a beggar knocks on the door offering to sing in return for a charitable gift. However, in "The Joker", the maids have strict orders to shut the door to beggars. Only invited "Christmas waifs" are welcome at Isobel's table and the other guests comprise the self-conscious and pretentiously artistic dressmaker Amy Ellis, the newly arrived to town Jonathan Quinn, a young reporter and a childhood friend of Isobel's, Irish poet Vincent Lace, who "like all decent-minded gentlemen of leisure" liked "to dabble in writing" (RG 61). A once popular poet and wit, his glory days long behind him, Brennan endows Lace with real pathos. Lace is portrayed as a disorganised failure, whose language is pompously literary but his small speech in retaliation to Isobel's mocking, his description of someone who has "a reputation for standing treat and giving" (RG 64) is enough to expose the thin veneer of Isobel's Christmas feast. However, it is only Delia, the "bony Irish maid" (RG 61), who fully appreciates the absurdities of both Vincent's rhetoric and his exposure of the Bailey's charity. Brennan's Irish characters are constantly alert to economic inequality and to the power relations negotiated through alms giving.

"The Joker" is an extended and critical study on the meaning of Christian compassion and charity, which Brennan represents as value-ridden and highly judgemental. The key moment in the story is the arrival of a beggar at the kitchen door, a rupture of Isobel's controlled generosity. In a burst of anxious generosity by the Baileys, the beggar is allowed into the kitchen for something to eat as the Christmas dinner, punctuated by discussions of appropriate charity, continue in the main dining room.

However, “this stranger, the classical figure of the season, who had come unbidden to her feast” (*RG* 66), refuses Isobel’s value-laden version of Christmas goodwill. After she visits him in the kitchen so that he can see her, in her “Christmas red” (*RG* 66), he departs leaving “his dirty old cigar butt stuck down in the hard sauce” (*RG* 66). The beggar’s contemptuous act totally disrupts the running of the kitchen, causing great merriment for the maid Delia and Alice the cook. The beggar’s act of defiance not only exposes Edwin and Isobel Bailey’s pretensions, it also lays bare the essential elements necessary for an attitude marked by unselfish concern for the welfare of others.

Superior airs and egotism feature once again in “The Stone Hot-Water Bottle”. Brennan’s matchless repository of Irish wit mocks the class-consciousness and rival snobberies of Charles Runyon and Leona Harkey during a visit from the titled Lady Ailesbury-Rhode. The story recounts a weekend visit of Runyon and Lady Ailesbury-Rhode, an English woman named for one of Dublin’s exclusive residential streets, to Leona Harkey’s house. The comedy turns on Bridie the maid’s self-appointed role as observer and her ever increasing power over her mistress as Leona faces a crisis of major proportions over who will get nightly custody of the antique stone hot-water bottle, Lady Ailesbury-Rhode or Charles Runyon. The stone hot-water bottle, a social absurdity, finally pushes Leona into a nuanced, but distinct, rebellion against her idol Runyon. Leona is dominated by Runyon and her happiness depends upon his approval of her. However, Runyon is petty in a vicious sort of way and he selfishly manipulates the situation for his personal comfort. Leona constantly fears his abandonment of her as he is her only claim to fame in the community. When Runyon realises she has given the hot-water bottle to Lady Ailesbury-Rhode, he threatens to leave, throwing Leona into a state of panic and emotional turmoil. However, as the plot thickens, Leona realises he is toying with her and is in fact only too anxious to stay. Her moment of epiphany reverses the

status quo, giving her much needed control over him. Enjoying the reversal of power, she delights in ignoring him all evening and noting his discomfort.

The transference of power between Charles Runyon and Bridie's employer hold interesting implications for the maid. Without pity or mercy, she reveals both Leona's insecurities and emotional dependence on Runyon, which are ironic and pitiful in light of his emotional neediness of her, all of which have been revealed in the preceding stories. Bridie's power over her employer is affirmed when Leona, in distress, enters the kitchen appealing for assistance. Leona nervously throws herself on the mercy of Bridie in an attempt to unravel the dilemma as to who should get possession of the status symbol, the stone hot-water bottle, for the night. Mindful of the power this will give her over her employer, Bridie agrees to help. As she listens to Leona, she thinks: "Wait till I tell the girls about this. Oh, Lord, this is the best yet!" (RG 86). Bridie's immediate response is the contemplation of the story she now has to share with her fellow Irish colleagues. All the way through the story, Brennan not only throws the life of the privileged into grotesque relief, but also draws attention to the importance of storytelling in the lives of these Irish emigrants.

Storytelling holds great importance for the maids; a story is not just a story. The maid who has the best tale to tell raises her position within the group as it circulates amongst the maids in the community. Stories act as connections to others; they define the maids' ethical perspectives, cultural constructions and identities. Maids, a traditionally powerless group in society, use their stories as the primary data for making meaning out of their encounters. The penultimate story in the cycle, "The Divine Fireplace", relates another disastrous dinner party. The climactic moment in the story, the destruction of the kitchen, represents a reversal of authority in the subaltern world of the domestic and bestows on Stasia, a forty-seven year old Irish maid, the power to tell a story. The act of

storytelling in “The Divine Fireplace” makes visible the greed, excess and moral bankruptcy of the privileged as seen through the eyes of yet another Irish maid. Stasia was “famous for her sense of humour, which she brandished like a tomahawk. And she was a great storyteller” (RG 96). Stasia is the maid of Debbie and Harry Tillbright and, like Bridie, can think of nothing but boarding the bus that will take her and her fellow Irish maids to mass on Sunday:

The maids looked forward to these Sunday-morning rides, which gave them the chance of a great gossip. And the ride gave them a chance to escape from the monotony of their uniforms. Their positive, coaxing voices rose and fell, but rose, mostly, in an orgy of sympathy, astonishment, indignation, furious satisfaction, and derision. Not one of them was calm, or thinking about saying her prayers... (RG 94-95)

Stasia’s excitement is unbounded as she relishes the reaction of her fellow Irish workers to her recounting of the wild behaviour that took place in her house the previous night.

The dramatic events of the story Stasia has to tell once again take place in the kitchen. When Harry Tillbright’s second wife discovered there was a closed-off fireplace in the kitchen, she drunkenly insisted that the equally intoxicated Harry open it up immediately. As a result, not only was the dinner ruined, the house turned into a building site and the electricity shut down but the reindeer meat in the deep-freezer was spoiled. Because of their Irish background, where a fireplace was not a matter of style but a dirty and difficult necessity, the maids find this tale thoroughly entertaining. Recounting the events of the previous evening to the “thirty-eight Irish noses” which “were pointed at her in implacable demand” (RG 99), Stasia creatively expresses her thoughts and opinions in a safe, respectful environment. In this manner, Brennan gives the maids an opportunity to

express and explore their own intuition and thinking. She makes good use of the act of storytelling to strengthen the collective and social knowledge of the maids. The art of “story-telling in Ireland goes back over a thousand years” (Kiberd, 1979: 2) and Brennan shows how the practice of storytelling is part of the maid’s Irish culture; as *seancaithe* and *scéalaí*, the tradition bearers and storytellers, passed stories down through generations. Exploring new places for storytelling in public spaces like the bus, the maids’ storytelling reveals the manner in which it is also an intimate and interactive art. The listener is an essential part of the storytelling process. In order for the stories to live, the maids need the hearts, minds and ears of their fellow listeners.

The stories, a blend of satire and farce, remain at one level true to the milieu and the mores they describe. Yet on another reading, they signal once again Brennan’s attention to the house, as both physical location and concept of home. Brennan’s concern with the nature of perception and reality, her interest in space and place, is again evident in her treatment of the homes in “Herbert’s Retreat”. Brennan equates being home with a feeling of peace, of connectivity within one’s body, as well as a feeling of belonging within a house. As long as one is safe “with both feet on the familiar floor of a familiar room” (*RG* 252) when “all that is familiar is inside and all the discontent is outside”, one “can stand at his windows” and contemplate “the noise and confusion” of the world with “the cheerful interest of one who contemplates a puzzle he did not create and is not going to be called upon to solve” (*RG* 252). Brennan ascribes belonging to the feeling or sensation of comfort and warmth; it is a palpable sense of being home. On the other hand, her description of alienation, estrangement of body and spirit, brought on by “technological evolution” (Smyth and Croft, 2006: 15) is portrayed as a condition of spiritual homelessness: when redevelopment threatens neighbourhoods; when “new buildings too tall for the streets they stand in and the older, smaller buildings” are “out of

proportion to everything except the past” (RG 257); when “there is no permanence...only the valiant illusion of a permanence that is hardly more substantial than the shadow that touches it” (RG 251); when people change into “waifs, right before your eyes”; when “girls suddenly become old maids”; or at least they develop “an incurably *single* look” and “cheerful, bustling women” become “dazed widows” and men “lose their grip” and become “unsure-looking” (RG 52-53). Brennan’s suspicion that contemporary consciousness was particularly susceptible to alienation, to existential homelessness, leads her to espouse no romantic attachment to home; her stories offer social commentary, presented in her distinctive, inimical and satirical style.

As is evident from *The Visitor*, many of Brennan’s Irish stories reflect a modernist period and authoritarian regimes. However, “Herbert’s Retreat” is devoted to difference, to calling values into question, and is much more avant-garde in a way that symbolises dissent rather than making any demands for change. Brennan’s message is to recognise the autonomy of the “other” as transformed by the maids into fragmented proclamations of a more positive difference. Her deconstructions of dominant attitudes are attacks on stereotypical judgements. These stereotypes are often challenged by their assertion in parody form. Brennan satirises the manner in which stone hot-water bottles, open fires and pots of tea, basic necessities of 1950s life in Ireland, become, in the centrally-heated homes of post-war America, luxuries and status symbols. The irony of the opening up of the “divine fireplace” means “every bit of electricity in the house is dead” (RG 109), making all the new technology in the house redundant. All the modern American conveniences – dishwasher, toaster, rotisserie, deep freeze – the maids list them all in their narrative, become superfluous. Human folly and values are held up to scorn, derision, and ridicule, with the mass-going maids providing the moral touchstone. In the magnified world of the Retreat, everything takes on new levels of complexity and

imperfection, demonstrating that the truth about objects and people is heavily influenced by the observer's perspective. Through her use of satire, Brennan explores the separation between the maids' experience of Ireland, their lack of wealth and material possessions, and their Catholicism, contrasting this sharply with the more affluent modern American homes of their mistresses. She parodies all the perfections that the residents of this supposedly utopian enclave strive to achieve and turns this imaginary model of an ideal community into a dystopia of irrational and decadent behaviour. She examines the situation of women who carved their niche in America through domestic service, the ubiquitous Bridie, Agnes and Stasia. Brennan is a comic and satirical writer despite the tragic effect of some of her passages and the use of irony in the sketches adds to the comic effect at which she aims.

Besides the comedy and lampooning of the Herbert's Retreat stories, what emerges from this collection is the manner in which Brennan's focus centres on the tragedy produced when the individual is spiritually disenfranchised, their need for fulfilment countered and restricted by the need for social acceptance and a sense of belonging. The irony of the stories concerning the relationships of Irish domestics and their American mistresses sheds light on suburban life and the meagre possibilities available to upper middle-class wives left to care for large empty houses with their domestics as their only witnesses. The disturbing subtext to the stories shows the middle-class suburban housewife to be more isolated and lonely in her social domestic function than her poorer Irish domestic counterpart. Brennan exposes the pretence of a society where people have become so encrusted with the hard veneer of "eternal self-satisfaction" (RG 21) that they are indifferent to the death of a young man. While her maids find laughter a cure for the disease of servility, their laughter serves to turn the "untouchable" (RG 21) back into flesh and soul.

Of the five stories, which are placed at the centre of the collection, "The Bride" (1953) bridges the two worlds of Ireland and America. It focuses on Margaret Casey, an Irish maid living in Scarsdale, who reflects on the life she lived in Ireland as she is about to marry a man she does not love. A tale of emigration and exile, "when her uncle in New York wrote offering to lend her the passage over, she accepted at once, believing up to the last minute that the mother would come to her senses and forbid her to go" (RG 155). As the story unfolds, we learn that Margaret has "worked as a maid for ten years" (RG 153) in America. A live-in housemaid, she has used her earnings firstly to clear her debt to her uncle, and subsequently found "great satisfaction in the money orders she sent home weekly" (RG 155). Yet Margaret has long cherished "a dream of saving enough to go back and start a little business, enough to support her mother and herself, or to go back with a comfortable nest egg and find some good man to marry" (RG 155). Indeed many women, like Margaret, spent several years in domestic service in the United States to save money for a dowry in order to marry well at home. Again in common with Joyce's *Dubliners*, this is a tale of paralysed hope; Margaret is a dreamer whose hope of return has never arrived. Her mother has died, and her sister has inherited the family home leaving her to marry Carl, a plumber of German origin, whom she does not love.

Like most American servants who lived in their employers' homes, Margaret's complex interrelation with her mistress has remained "rooted more in the ways of the eighteenth century" than in the twentieth (Katzman, 1981: 95). Yet after World War II, "modernization, urbanization, and technology" (Katzman, 1981: 95) altered the structure of service, and Margaret's life is shown to be caught up in this transition. Margaret "wasn't much inclined to marry" (RG 154), recognising that, because of "the German in him", Carl "would never fit in with the crowd back home" (RG 156). Longing for change and aware of the difficulty of assimilating back into Irish culture, Margaret had intended

“just to steal away to another town and find a new job” (*RG* 154). However, the “sight of Mrs. Smith’s stricken face was too much for her, and to ease her guilt she blurted out that she was going to marry Carl, settle down, stop working, and have a home of her own” (*RG* 154). However, what Margaret really seeks is independence and autonomy; she wishes to find employment where she does not have to live with the family she works for but can have a home of her own. Brennan contrasts the indebtedness and complex personalised relationship between Margaret and the Smiths, with the pressure this could exert on women seeking independence and a change of employment.

Brennan’s use of a “charabanc” (*RG* 157) is not only as an image of emigration, but also as a metaphor for Margaret’s life:

The driver of the charabanc knew where he was going, but the passengers had to guess, and never could be sure of their destination until they arrived there. The people going off on the mystery tours seemed even gayer than the usual charabanc crowds. Margaret longed to go with them, although she had a half fear that the mystery charabancs never came back at all. She might just as well have gone on one and not come back, for all the good she had made of her life. (*RG* 157)

This story is a mere six pages in length; however, in its short space Brennan locates an entire world and unearths a wrenching poignancy. With her dreams of returning to Ireland lying in ruins and about to marry a man she does not love, Margaret embarks on marriage, fully realising: “all of her hopes had turned into regrets; only the hurt, strained feeling in her heart was the same. Everything had turned out wrong” (*RG* 156). This passage draws us back to the themes driving many of Brennan’s stories. Like so much of her writing, this short tale engages deeply with issues of home, emigration and belonging.

Never a sentimentalist or a single point author, Brennan writes of people who have never learned to manage their dreams. Inserting herself into transitional spaces, her stories document change. Several of the tales contained within this collection record domestic service changing from what had traditionally been a major form of female employment to an occupation of less significance among Irish women. Once a field dominated by immigrants in cities like New York, or by native-born girls from smaller Irish towns and rural areas, these stories record the shift brought about through modernisation in both America and Dublin. Yet the decline in the domestic industry deprived women of a traditional source of income. Few women could now earn a living by working in the home. As the level and source of emigration began to shift, the number of Irish-born women in service began to decrease. As shops and offices opened to women, fewer Irish-born women entered service, while child labour laws and compulsory education reduced the number of young girls entering into domestic service. At the same time, day-work and live-out employment was beginning to replace live-in domestic service (MacLaughlin, 1997).

Set in Dublin, Brennan's first published short story, "The Holy Terror" (1950), is a perfect focus on the changing, physical and emotional world of Mary Ramsey, a disagreeable, bitter, long-serving domestic in a smart Dublin hotel and an irascible "ladies'-room lady" (RG 159) who outlives her usefulness. Mary takes a petty, but ineffectual, revenge on her tormentors. She controls her territory from a "shabby, low-seated bamboo chair" (RG 160) and watches the women who visit her "kingdom" with undisguised contempt. Mary is a wretched character whose rudeness passes "for independence and even for wit" (RG 161): "It was a miracle, they all said later, how she lasted so long at the hotel, especially in that job, where you usually look to see someone neat and tidy, even if she isn't so young" (RG 159). Early into the story we learn that the

modern world, in the form of an educated, professional new assistant manager, is encroaching and Mary's days are numbered. As Mary sits "renewing her contempt for life both in and out of her kingdom... Miss Williams, the new assistant manager, was nerving herself to take a bold step" (RG 163). Miss Williams, unlike Mary, has "an economical little body, a strong undaunted stomach, and a very thin nose, shaped like the blade of a scythe" (RG 163). She has "been at the Royal only six weeks – having been brought in to pull it together" (RG 163). As in *The Springs of Affection*, Brennan draws striking images of the feminine; ungainly and grotesque, Mary with "that great swollen rump of hers" which "rolled and heaved across the floor" (RG 159) is described as a grotesque anachronism, a throwback to history and out of place in a modern Irish hotel. However, Brennan reaches behind Mary's shroud of "self-protecting malice" (Bourke, 2005: 170) to demonstrate an erosion of spirit through need and the lack of love. Mary "bore in her heart a long, directionless grudge, a ravenous grudge" (RG 162). Mary mercilessly stores up "negative capital" as she saves "the tips she receives daily, and never spends", along with "the nuggets of shameful information collected over thirty years" (Bourke, 2005: 169), which she relies upon to keep her safe. Her sense of revenge is similar to Mrs King, but instead of "Mrs King's dry gentility, she has a Rabelaisian bulk and lack of inhibition" (Bourke, 2005: 169). Brennan juxtaposes Mary's struggle to continue to live and work in the hotel, with a newly emerging modern Ireland, that was making a serious effort to develop its tourist industry. Like many of Brennan's characters in this collection, Mary is an ordinary woman navigating change within the area of domestic service. In the concluding epiphany, however, Brennan reveals the impossibility of resistance and the moment when security and a sense of belonging are torn apart. Reflecting a new approach to market forces and labour, Mary is forced to accept changes to her working conditions and to job share with Mona Casey, a "young strap" (RG 166). Unable to withstand the

annihilating force of Miss Williams, Mary must also surrender the room where she lives to the economic forces of the tourist market. Finally out of home and “out of a job” (RG 167), resembling Anastasia in *The Visitor*; Mary “realized she had no way of going back” (RG 171).

This section of the collection reflects a changing external world. It brings the reader more directly into the contradictory, shifting and fragile areas of experience that connected characters to the worlds they inhabited. Yet to understand this world one had to understand the history of Ireland with its religious, sexist, political, and economic repressions, which Brennan codes with irreverence and parody. She mocks any idea of the picturesque, instead portraying an Ireland which American readers may not have fully understood. The disruption of the picturesque in “The Holy Terror” and in many of her stories, suggests an advocacy of a less idealised view of Irish life, yet, ironically, the apparent emphasis on non-sentimental realism is dependent on the reader appreciating both the convention that is being upset and the alternative with which it is juxtaposed. Brennan uses the same dramatic irony in this story as in *The Visitor*. With the introduction of the five-day working week in the 1960s and the move towards more modern working methods, unskilled workers like Mary, would become redundant in the Irish domestic service industry. The vast number of workplaces in the service industries differentiated it from other occupations and, in this story, Brennan illustrates the move within the hotel industry to bring it into line with these other industries. An older, unskilled workforce, would be replaced with younger, more educated and skilled employees like Miss Williams. In the 1950s, labour law was not used to impose employment conditions other than the basic minima in such areas as protection from unfair dismissal, organisation of working time and occupational safety and health. Reflecting this approach, Miss Williams and Mr Sims lay a trap for Mary which she unknowingly walks into. Mr Sims, the

manager of the Royal, is prepared to leave Miss Williams to her own devices so long as she works within the letter of the law, manoeuvring Mary into leaving her job rather than giving her a case for unfair dismissal, all of which is carried out with no regard for the human aspect of Mary's plight. In the final analysis, Mary inspires sympathy rather than reproach and is a victim of a narrow view of society.

The title story of the collection, "The Rose Garden" (1959), tells of yet another one of Brennan's Marys, of which there are several named women in this collection reflecting the Irish proclivity for naming daughters after the Catholic Virgin Mother: "Mary Lambert, an Irish shopkeeper, was left a widow at the age of thirty-nine, after almost ten years of marriage" (*RG* 184). Mary has two children: "Rose, seven, and Jimmy, two" (*RG* 184). Mary is yet another of Brennan's grotesques, described as misshapen in a strange and disturbing way. Mary's body is malformed with one leg "shorter than the other, so that she had to walk crookedly, leaning forward and sideways" (*RG* 185). However, it is not only Mary's body that has an ungainly and unusual shape. The house in which Mary has spent all her life is really:

two corner houses that had been knocked into one. The houses had been thrown together, and the staircase twisted determinedly from one house up into the other, although it was impossible to tell whether it had been built from the first floor up or from the second floor down, the construction of it so ungainly and uneasy. The stairs thrust its way, crooked and hard, up through the house, and some of its steps were so narrow it was difficult to find a foothold on them, and some started wide and narrowed to nothing at the other side, so that they could not be depended on going down as they could going up. (*RG* 185)

Mary shares some of the defining features of the house: there are two sides to Mary which have been knocked into one; her character is both twisted and determined; and she views her relationship with other people and the wider world as “treacherous” (RG 185). Similar to the stairs, her personality “forced respect and attention, and people guarded themselves” (RG 186) when around her. Mary has a horror of being patronised or pitied. Like her “black boots laced tightly”; she is “solid and hard-looking” (RG 185), and she is “unsmiling” (RG 195):

She believed that people only smiled in order to curry favour. People like herself, at any rate. “People like us”, she was always saying, “people like us” but she did not know what she meant, unless it was that the rest of the people in the world were better off, or that they had some fortunate secret, or were engaged in a conspiracy in which she was not included. (RG 195-196)

As a result of a childhood disfigurement, Mary has always fought a lonely battle of not being good enough, not having enough and not belonging enough. Due to her physical shortcomings she has experienced exclusion from the larger world. Mary’s vulnerable subjectivity shows through in the behaviour she has acquired over time. For example, “she developed a habit in the street, of whirling around suddenly to discover who was looking at her ungainly back, and often she stood and stared angrily at people until they looked away, or turned away. Her rancor was all in her harsh, lurching walk, in her eyes, and in the pitch of her voice” (RG 186-187). Mary’s dignified rebellion allows her to cope with life and her own personal history. Brennan’s engagement with the issues surrounding the individual’s need to belong, and the barriers to the fulfilment of this need, whether as a result of emigration and resettlement, or as in Mary’s case, resulting from physical revulsion, is comprehensive.

“The Rose Garden” is a portrayal of the inner life of Mary Lambert. Given that Brennan consistently grapples with challenges to individual sovereignty by placing her emphasis on personal survival she stresses the uniqueness of that existence and the problems that can arise from that reality. By placing the emphasis on individual subjectivity, she allows Mary Lambert to find her own moral perfection. Women’s pain and the trauma of personal experience together with a constant embodied sense of shame are concealed beneath a veneer of sarcastic malice and bitterness in the character of Mary Lambert. “The Rose Garden” visits the darker side of Irish society and female sexuality. Brennan elicits two kinds of shame: dishonour and unworthiness. Firstly, she touches off the conventionally considered taboo of incest. Memories of Mary’s early life experience point to the shadow of incest which lies over her relationship with her father. Although surprised when a commercial traveller who lodged in her home climbs wordlessly into bed with her, she knows “by the feel of the shirt he had on him” (*RG* 194) it is not her father. Secondly, she draws out the hidden shame which played such a significant and damaging role in Irish women’s lives; sex was often infused with negative connotations and cultural taboos. She challenges the dogmatism of the church, “for did it not forbid and condemn all vanity and the sins of the flesh” (*RG* 162). This is especially significant in view of later revelations regarding family, church and Catholic sexual abuse. Brennan consistently probes the problems of the social passivity assigned to women in a male-oriented society. Time and again her work anticipates issues arising in the contemporary world. This culture of shame was a highly effective mechanism for the social regulation of female sexuality because it was so easily internalised. The incorporation of shame into female sexuality is implicit in her representation of both Mary and the nuns’ conflicted sexual awareness.

The one consolation in Mary's life is the walled rose garden opened to the public once a year. Owned and run by "the nuns of the Holy Passion" (RG 187), the garden is the one place Mary allows herself to experience the "great feeling" she possesses "in all parts of her body" (RG 185). However, the parts of the body which Brennan devotes attention to are all below the waist. When Mary enters the garden, it is not a "holy passion" that she registers but a particular physical and emotional state:

Mary loved that burning garden. From one summer to the next, she never saw the nuns, nor did she think of them. She had no interest in them, and there was not one among them who as much as knew her name. It was their urgent garden she wanted. She craved for the sight of the roses. Every year she made her way up the hill, alone, and went into the garden, and sat down on a stone bench, covering the bench with her skirt so that no one would offer to share it with her. She would have liked to go in the early morning, when few people would be there and she would have a better look at the garden, but she was afraid she would be too much noticed in the emptiness, and so she went in the middle of the afternoon, when the crowd was thickest. (RG 189)

Mary Lambert rarely leaves her house, most of her "life was spent in the kitchen" (RG 194). Similar to the nuns, she lives a partially enclosed life. Pulling aside the veil on different aspects of sexuality, Brennan uses the rose garden to provide a glance at the lives of women possessed of "great feeling" (RG 185). The garden is "altogether a stirring place, warm red, even burning red, the way it filled the nostrils and left a sweet red taste in the lips, red as the tongue, red as the heart, red and dark... as the treacherous parting in the nuns' flesh, where they feared, and said they feared, the Devil yet might enter in" (RG 188). Although the garden possesses all the "passionate instruments of worship" (RG 188), the nuns fear the devil may enter them there. The garden possesses the possibility

for “the treacherous parting” (*RG* 188) of their flesh, where they breathlessly consider what the devil might do to their bodies. Like so many of her Irish stories, this tale is about 1950s concepts of sexual repression, frugal comfort and morality. Brennan uses the garden both as a symbol of the nuns’ perpetual virginity and as a garden of pleasure. For Mary, the interior of the garden represents a spirit of excitement when compared to the exterior mundanity of her everyday life. Brennan’s walled garden offers Mary shelter and a space for imaginative escape. For Mary, the garden is a place of renewal and self-discovery set away from history and grief. However, while the nuns’ virginal delight in the garden is articulated in “gentle excited voices” and images “gentle and diminutive” (*RG* 189), Mary expresses a much stronger reaction to the garden. For her it as though “a great heart had begun to beat under the earth and was sending living blood up” (*RG* 190). Safe and enclosed within the garden, both the nuns and Mary delight in their sexuality, releasing repressed longings and stifled frustrations. Brennan fashions out of the rose garden a powerful reflection of desire and sensuality. The story is an assertion of female sexuality, “located at a maximum remove from the feminine mystique that reserved the pleasures of the flesh for childlike, passive women (Bourke, 2005: 212).

Mary’s narrative provides an explicit rendering of women and the complexity of individual expression. She describes the difficulty of articulating her “dreadful longing” (*RG* 202):

In all her life, there was no one had ever wanted her. All the want was hers. She never knew, or wondered, if she loved or hoped or despaired. It was all the one thing to her, all want. She said every day, “I love God,” because that is what she had been taught to say, but the want came up out of herself, and she knew what she meant by it. She said, “I want the rose garden. I want it,” she said. “I want to touch it, I want it for my own.” She could not have said if it was her hope or her

despair that was contained in the garden, or about the difference between them, or if there was a difference between them. All she knew was what she felt. All she felt was dreadful longing. (RG 201-202)

Like the roses that “opened themselves and spread themselves out, arching and dancing” (RG 189), Mary opens up to the experience of the garden. While the nuns are alarmed by the experience, Mary’s piercing cry is sensuous: ““I want it, she said. I want to see it, I want to touch it, I want it for my own”” (RG 202). Brennan turns the garden into a refuge, where women can explore and enjoy their femininity, whether it is holy or not, and without fear of condemnation or shame.

The remaining tales of the collection focus on children, animals and “little” people (RG 130), characters marked for life by their “ravenous” (RG 172) hopes, characters similar to Mary Ramsey who are vulnerable to both changing personal circumstances and the simple passage of time. Similar to *The Springs of Affection*, a couple of these stories tell of paralysed souls and unexpressed love. They trace the downward arc followed by characters who perversely throw away their best chances for happiness. “A Snowy Night on West Forty-ninth Street” (1967) is a freeze-frame of desperation and the desire to belong. It takes the reader back to a restaurant on Broadway populated with characters that have nothing to share except silence. A silence “that grew and turned into a lifeline between Betty and Mrs. Dolan, because their silence arose from a shame so deep that it was a peace for them to sit in its silence” (RG 247).

As a staff member of *The New Yorker*, Brennan was accustomed to working within an established patriarchal system; however, in many of these stories she satirises the supposed supremacy of masculine power, and a phallogocentric, supremacist ideology that subjects and dominates women. The stories share views on the individuality and

disparity of women as well as using strategies of resistance against oppressive forces. Several of them are constructed to exemplify a male-centred prejudice that wrongly defines women as passive and subsidiary inferiors. Additionally, her writing in this collection questions whether it is socio-economic influences or patriarchal oppression of particular places that is the more significant political factor in women's lives.

Conclusion

What emerges from this study of Brennan's work is the profound contribution her writing makes to the universal themes of dwelling, exile, belonging and place, to postcolonial literature, and the many different forms that these creative engagements have taken. This new consideration of Brennan's writing, through corrective readings of her work, eschews the reductive biographical and pathological approaches that have prevailed in critical narratives. Her writing, as this thesis has shown, refuses the compartmentalisation it has received through the privileging of biographical and pathological or psychoanalytical approaches to it. Devoid of nostalgia, Brennan's clear, unsentimental approach adds much to discussions of place, dwelling and belonging. It is clear that in *The Visitor* Brennan was at the beginning of a lifelong fascination with the theorisation of home as space, with the conception of identity-formation as a geographically-based project, and that her work anticipated the more recent shift in critical social theory and the investigation of spatiality and place within evolving conditions of a globalised society. This early text is highly important in the vital way that it illuminates Brennan as a writer engaged in a careful consideration of existential and urban values. The expansive range of Brennan's themes and concerns is revealed through examining her writing with a wider array of contexts in mind and, in doing so, alongside a range of theoretical positions. Thus, her work, through this sustained re-engagement, is enlarged, realigned and recontextualised in vital ways and the numerous possibilities of interpreting her writing are thereby brought to light. The theoretical underpinning of this thesis suggests the need for a complete reconsideration of Brennan and her work in ways that will allow it to reveal its rich artistic scope. This research attests to the ways in which Brennan's work necessitates wider contexts and

interpretations and so is very much part of a new phase of Brennan scholarship that is beginning to emerge at the present time.

Future areas for studies suggest themselves from this study. For example, much more research is needed into the manner in which Brennan's narratives involve the movement of characters through space and time. Brennan maps the four dimensional storyworld in readers' minds from a myriad of spatial and temporal references throughout her texts. Her spatial referents are frequently built objects in the environment. Houses, roads, churches and boundary markers all provide locations and focal points for character interaction and they are an essential component of her narratives. Brennan uses concepts of buildings in a broad sense to include, not only constructions, but also smaller man-made objects such as fireplaces, interior decoration, food and household equipment, and these are deployed throughout her narratives. Her work contains references to famous New York landmarks and also to some of Dublin's prominent locations: for example, St Stephen's Green, Grafton Street and O'Connell Bridge. Her writing focuses attention on places, architecture, city planning, dwelling and their bearing on happiness or belonging and what can be learned from those who create, embrace or reject certain manifestations of community. A rigorous thinker, Brennan defines her subject always in relation to space, including the communal aspect of strangers coming together to eat, converse, or sometimes merely to observe or sit in silence.

Buildings are an indispensable component of her narratives; they form boundaries across and around which her characters move and interact during the course of the narratives. In *The Springs of Affection*, the action takes place over many years in two small terraced houses, in the city of Dublin, and two others, in Wexford Town and county. The progressive decline in the fate of the residents is mirrored in the descriptions of the buildings. The house where Delia Bagot spent her childhood lies "in ruins" after

her death, it stands “empty with the roof falling in”, the open doors displaying “the vacant rooms and the cold hearth in the kitchen” (SA 345). In this collection, as in others, Dublin features in a sequence of narratives in which buildings and their fates over time, form social points around which the different narrative strands weave and circle. Equally, the consequences of the urban redevelopment of New York City and the fate of its buildings are “moments of recognition” between people and places, in what Brennan considered the de-humanisation of a city. She demonstrates the manner in which gentrification favours the rich and further marginalises the less advantaged in society. The relationship of personal identity to urban space is of central concern to Brennan, and she records the transfer of emotion to the original shock of displacement which arises from the transformation of the landscape and the changes in a city’s demographic. She examines historical landmarks and presents portraits of their fates, positioned as they were to undergo significant change. Her confluence of space and time creates stories about external frontiers, where opposites or enemies collide, and internal borders as sites of subjugation, subversion, resistance and rebellion, while a decaying domestic space, or the arrival of a piece of household furnishing can gesture towards escape, or hope and optimism for the future.

For Brennan, cities are places of contemplation and community that bring together people from different backgrounds and encourage them to be more trusting and accepting of one another. On the one hand, in a city like New York or Dublin, that is sociable, in the sense that there are people gathering in churches, restaurants and streets, she shows that, although the individual can partake of these experiences, on the other hand, they remain isolated from the crowd. As demonstrated by Brennan, anxieties associated with cities and crowds have been recast as anomie by female writers and draw attention to the emergence of the crowd as a key phenomenon of urban existence in her writing. In *The Visitor*,

Anastasia defines herself by reference to the ebb and flow of Dublin and its crowds, sometimes mingling effortlessly with the latter while at other times she remains wary, detached and on the margins. Brennan's *Long-Winded Lady* also reflects this occurrence. The idea of place and, in particular, the city in which she lived are of critical importance for Brennan. In a similar manner to New York, she equates Dublin with a source of creativity and she views her walks about its streets as material to be conveyed by her into its equivalent language. Likewise, she grasps that the individual is increasingly subordinate to, and dependent on, the pervasive reality of mass existence and, like Anastasia, her shipwrecked inhabitants of New York continue to be increasingly subsumed by the crowd and the vast complexity and anonymity of urban life. For Brennan, the city was the focus of an intense, sometimes ambivalent, lifelong scrutiny. Her work identifies the manner in which modernity is comprised of both the circumstances and events that form the environment and the formation of judgements or opinions. It can be understood as the specificity of living in the world at a particular time and place; it possesses a vital individual and collective sense of contemporaneity. Her elegy is, in almost all cases, fuelled more by distaste for the manner in which it influences human behaviour and consciousness than by any hatred of the idea of modernity itself.

For Brennan, every story is a travel story or a spatial experience. Like de Certeau, those stories "traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them" (de Certeau, 1988: 115): "She has a reporter's eye for details of the street, and at times her prose meanders, following the contours of a city stroll" (Peters, 2005: 74). She maps a city delimited by residential hotels for women and writes the hotels and inexpensive restaurants of Greenwich Village, often tracing the same route from the Hotel Earle to the University Restaurant, while also writing the upscale midtown hotel. Brennan makes a distinction between place and space in her narratives.

Place marks a single spot, whereas space is “composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it” (de Certeau, 1988: 117). In other words, it is created by the narrative. It is “the partition of space that structures it... there is no spatiality that is not organised by the determination of frontiers” (de Certeau, 1988: 123). Brennan also marks undifferentiated space; she subdivides it into smaller and smaller partitions formed by cities, towns, streets, houses, rooms and the interpersonal space between bodies. Her ideas become even more complex when she adds the interior spaces of her characters’ minds. The house in Brennan’s “imagination’s home” (Maxwell, 1997: 3) functions as a cultural palimpsest, or heterotope that can bring into focus the interrelationship of other spaces and “slices of time” (Foucault, 1986, 24-7). The house recurs repeatedly through the Irish stories of Brennan. It functions metonymically as a heterotopic space that brings “into focus the social, cultural, and political systems that form identities” (Stanford Friedman, 2008: 199).

Brennan’s notion of space opens up new possibilities for social being. Her coexisting and representational constructions constitute the fragmented, delimited, reified and transparent environment of modernity as an “other” space that hides itself in plain sight, a space that she demonstrates is the locus of “multifaceted inclusiveness and simultaneities of lived social space” (Soja, 1996: 59). Her exposure of this space is made possible by a collective, inter-subjective switch to another mode of perception compatible with the profile of the *flâneuse* and the nomad, because it is characterised by a form of instantaneous memory capable of generating “snapshots” (*LWL* 1) of the heterogeneous realities continuously produced by any given place. Her idea of space is a paradigm shift that straddles the breach between reality and ideality, conceived and lived. Her move to postmodernity, her spatial turn, is an endeavour to re-map the basic terms of the

contemporary experience of everyday life, her writing is illustrative of this vision. Brennan's persona, her nomadic consciousness, is a narrator who is fluent in the vocabulary of visual culture; it is an insightful and non-nostalgic appropriator of public spaces for creative and political purposes. Her narrative technique allows her to appear unintrusive and objective, as though she is simply there to observe her surroundings. Furthermore, she provides opportunity for subaltern agency by allowing her characters to take over the narrative. She describes a possibility of dwelling that does not presume an arrogance of domination but a respect for life that concerns all human beings. She gives agency to children and animals, presenting a view of the world from their viewpoints. She writes characters relinquishing and reclaiming independence and, drawing on her knowledge of Irish culture, she demonstrates reasons why Irish immigrant women preferred domestic work to other available alternatives. The fictional world of "Herbert's Retreat" mirrors a world of maids who usually worked in the company of other servants, mostly other Irish women, with whom they could share both memories and aspirations (Diner, 1983: 90, 116-118). In *The Rose Garden*, Brennan examines the highly personalised mistress-servant relationship, effecting a literary reversal of power. The site of transference, the kitchen, traditionally a female domestic stronghold as illustrated by Brennan in *The Springs of Affection*, suggests further study.

Although the focus here has been on a theoretical engagement with Brennan's work in twentieth-century society, its purpose has been, above all, to enlarge the contexts in which Brennan has been placed and so it is important at this point to broaden the view further and to show how her work has stimulated further forms of engagement. Brennan is becoming a presence in contemporary culture and academic scholarship. The addition of her work into current anthologies has been described by Anne Enright, as "a matter of national pride" (Enright, 2010: xiii). Equally, Eileen Battersby's review of her work in

The Irish Times ⁴⁵ for Dublin's naming as a Unesco City of Literature in 2010, alongside Swift, Goldsmith, Wilde, Bowen, Yeats, Beckett, Joyce, O'Casey, Kavanagh and Kinsella, to name but a few, demonstrates her growing recognition within the canon of Irish writers. That peculiar verbal culture, captured by Brennan in her work, is what is recognised as making Dublin a true City of Literature. In her investigation of poetry and syntax, Ellen Bryant Voigt identifies the musical patterns available in English by setting passages from Robert Frost alongside that of Brennan. The manner in which Brennan's prose style sensitively catches a fearful, urgent movement of words opens up the study of her writing within the composition of poetry and syntactical patterns of music. Voigt's engagement with Brennan's work brings out important aspects of the poetic in terms of its sound and structure. These engagements are highly significant in the way that they testify to Brennan's enduring power and point up aspects of her work that have been overlooked elsewhere.

Again, it is the dynamism and rhythm of Brennan's words that inspire the Irish actor Eamon Morrissey. In his a *Work-in-Progress; Maeve's House*, a one-man show based on Brennan, and similar to *Joycemen* which features various characters from James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Morrissey identifies the similarity in style between Brennan and Joyce that allows characters to take over the storytelling. Growing up as he did in the same house as Brennan – his parents bought the Brennan's house in Ranelagh – he is a knowledgeable witness to her use of interiors and is intrigued by her writing style. He notes from his writing and performing of *Joycemen*, the manner in which her writing style is one which works well from an actor's point of view.⁴⁶ The production, commissioned by the Abbey Theatre, and directed by Oonagh Murphy will be staged as part of the

⁴⁵ Eileen Battersby, "Home is where the fiction is," *The Irish Times*, September 29th, 2010

⁴⁶ Personal communication to the author, emails dated, 11th February, 2011, 17th February 2011, and the 19th February, 2011.

Dublin Theatre Festival in October, 2012. Indeed, Brennan's influence on contemporary culture has been as profound and multiform as her influence on theatre. Her continuing existence into the present day has been described by Emma Donoghue (writer) and Annabelle Comyn (director) of the forthcoming production *The Talk of the Town*, which will also be staged during the Dublin Theatre Festival in 2012, as the story of an extraordinary woman possessed of a "brilliant, unusual, fragmented mind" (Dennehy, 2011). Beyond question, the inclusion of two productions relating to this one single artist in this Irish theatre festival is quite remarkable.

Brennan continues to be a vibrant, living presence and a highly valued figure into the present moment and this is no more evident than in the ways in which her work has continued to provoke discussion at a number of major conferences worldwide. At the 2005 IASIL conference in Prague, Brennan's work featured on two panels. Three papers on her work were presented by Wanda Balzano (Wake Forest University), "Maeve Brennan's Transnational Identity and The Barrel of Rumours" which Balzano is developing for inclusion in a forthcoming book of essays.⁴⁷ John Menaghan (Loyola Marymount University), presented "Moments of Kindness, Moments of Recognition; The Achievement of Maeve Brennan", and his published essay "Moments of Kindness, Moments of Recognition", originated from this paper and features in this thesis. Patricia Coughlan (University Cork) gave a paper titled "Home is a Place in the Mind: Maeve Brennan and the Failure of Domesticity". Additionally, Menaghan also presented his paper "The Female Joyce" at the conference at the University of New South Wales in Sydney in 2006, and this is drawn upon in the third chapter. Furthermore, Patricia Coughlan opened the New Voices conference, which took place in Limerick in 2010, with a paper on Brennan. In this way, the scholarship on Brennan is being expanded in very

⁴⁷ As stated in personal communication from Wanda Balzano, email dated, 15th June, 2012.

important and enriching ways and this thesis embodies the new, more inclusive and pioneering spirit that is emerging in Brennan criticism at the present time. Inclusion of her texts on college syllabi and critical readings of her work on databases such as the *Literary Encyclopaedia* encourage and further develop academic study of Brennan's work.⁴⁸

Indeed, one of the most significant points made throughout this thesis is the fact of Brennan's preoccupation with the political and social realities of her age and, in particular, her growing interest in the position of women in urban culture. Only one sustained examination of Brennan and her work exists, and it is referred to throughout this thesis,⁴⁹ but recent developments in Brennan scholarship, such as "A Traveller In Residence; Maeve Brennan And The Last Days of New York" (2005), are beginning to point up this important fact and how it relates to her art. As Peters has outlined, speaking of the relationship between Brennan's artistry and her political and social concerns, she "stands between street and skyscraper, and as such, between the two antagonistic forces of urban redevelopment" (Peters, 2005: 72). A believer in the integrity of community and neighbourhood, Brennan aligned herself with the preservationist cause in New York and the notion that "people cannot take root when they live more than six or eight stories off the ground" (Peters, 2005: 72). Equally, the limited life options for women, and the marriage of religious and patriarchal cultures during the 1940s and 1950s for example, are summed up by Brennan when she says, "it should not be a problem to have shelter without being shut away" (RG 256). Similar to postcolonial feminists, Brennan sees the parallels between the recently decolonised nation and the state of women within patriarchy; she takes the perspective of a socially marginalised subgroup in their

⁴⁸ Also, an unpublished paper "The Delirium of Loss": An Exploration of Female Identity in Maeve Brennan's "An Attack of Hunger" written in 2004, by Megan McGuire as part of a Masters Dissertation, at Wake Forest University, was found during the course of this research and is referenced in this thesis. Personal communication with the author, email dated, 23rd June, 2012.

⁴⁹ (Bourke Angela, *Maeve Brennan* London: Pimlico, 2005).

relationship to the dominant culture. So much of Brennan's work is rooted in the domestic, setting many of her stories within the home, she explores in depth the relationships and experiences of women within these societal roles. While Brennan's political awareness has not been overlooked by critics, the extent of her energetic interest in feminism, politics, philosophy and creative endeavour must be granted further close and considered attention. This thesis has proved the influence of existentialism in her work, but Brennan's philosophical interests and humanistic concerns warrant further investigation. Nor can the force of her influence, as it traverses boundaries of nationality, gender and tradition, be ignored any longer. In this way, this thesis makes apparent that the way forward for Brennan scholarship, for the study of literature in general, necessitates broader contexts and closer readings of the work itself. There is a very vital mutuality between Brennan and postcolonial studies; Brennan is a writer of this moment as much as of her own, and an innovative, interdisciplinary and transnational figure. The vast scope, sophisticated technique and unending possibilities of her *oeuvre* must continue to be examined and appreciated.

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