

Father Boyce, Lady Morgan and Sir Walter Scott: a study in intertextuality and Catholic polemics¹

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Fr John Boyce (1810–64) is known to students of Irish–American literature as the most intellectually sophisticated novelist of the ‘famine exile’ generation. His three novels, and his dispute with the didactic Catholic apologeticist Orestes Brownson, have attracted significant attention, notably from Donna Merwick² and Charles Fanning.³ Their analyses, however, neglect important aspects of Boyce’s worldview, while Merwick’s polemic against intellectualist Catholic apologetics and the ultramontanism of later Boston Catholic clergy produces serious misreadings, adopted by Fanning.

This brief account of Boyce’s life and his three novels stresses three keypoints. First, the principal target of his defence of the role of emotion and sentiment in religious faith is bibliocentric evangelical Protestantism, particularly the ‘second reformation’, the early nineteenth-century attempt to convert Irish Catholics to evangelicalism. Boyce shows some sympathy for religious tolerance, especially in his last novel *Mary Lee: or the Yankee in Ireland* (1859), but is significantly more anti-Protestant than previous accounts suggest. Secondly, Boyce’s novels include collages of borrowings from other writers and recycled material from his own earlier works. The most significant borrowings are from Sir Walter Scott and Lady Morgan, whom one obituarist calls Boyce’s favourite writer, possibly because of the Fanad setting of her novel *O’Donnell*. Thirdly, this essay discusses the portrayal of women in Boyce’s novels, with particular reference to Queen Elizabeth I, in his historical novel, *The Spaewife* and the Madonna-like Mary Lee.

Boyce was born in Donegal town, son of Jerome Boyce, a Catholic hotelier and ‘moderate upholder of the English administration’ who owned the older part of the town and became a magistrate in later life. His brother James inherited their father’s property: James’s descendants remained prominent in Donegal clerical and political life.

¹ Thanks to James McGuire and Breandan MacSuibhne, neither of whom are responsible for my interpretation. ² Donna Merwick, *Boston priests 1848–1910: a study of social and intellectual change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1973) pp 40–59. ³ Charles Fanning, *The Irish voice in America: Irish-American fiction from the 1790s to the 1980s* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1990) pp 97–113; Charles Fanning, (ed.), *The exiles of Erin: nineteenth-century Irish-American fiction* (1987; Chester Springs, PA: Dufour, 1997), pp 97–100, 137–44.

The youthful John was well-known as an athlete; nostalgic descriptions of peasant cabins and a station mass in his first novel *Shandy Maguire* (1848) reflect youthful wanderings. The 1822 famine shaped his political outlook.⁴ Boyce attributed the post-Napoleonic economic depression to the union; he believed that had the Irish parliament survived to encourage trade and commerce, alternative employment would have been available to those displaced from agriculture. *Shandy Maguire* figuratively describes how the cow Drimeendhu who supplied the family with milk (the Irish parliament) was stolen and dismembered; her guardians (the MPs) were blinded by a 'plaster' (bribes).⁵ Boyce wrote verse from the age of ten; his first publication (aged seventeen) was a verse satire on an unpopular official. He studied classics locally before preparatory studies for the priesthood at St Finian's Catholic Academy, Navan, Co. Meath. He was an outstanding student at Maynooth.

Boyce was ordained in 1834 and served as curate in Glenties (1834–6), and Fanad (1836–45). In 1841 Boyce represented his parishioners in opposing construction of a constabulary barracks at Doaghbeg in north-eastern Fanad.⁶ *Shandy Maguire* criticizes official attempts to suppress illegal whiskey distilling which was a major Donegal industry in the pre-famine era.⁷ Boyce claims police ignored the complicity of magistrates and even legal distillers, who bought illegal spirits for resale, and that the force existed to provide jobs for Protestants and repress Catholics. One comic scene depicts a police officer receiving orders – forged by the trickster Shandy Maguire – to raid the house of a clerical magistrate for illegal spirits. His discoveries are hushed up by the authorities to keep this supporter of Protestant Ascendancy on the bench.⁸ *The Spaewife* humorously attributes the English reformation to beer, contrasted with Irish loyalty to Catholicism and whiskey;⁹ *Mary Lee* ridicules temperance societies as Yankee mean-mindedness and penny-pinching.¹⁰ Boyce had a drink problem in later life; his fatal liver disease was possibly alcohol-related.

Boyce was an occasional contributor to the *Nation*; his novels contain appeals for Catholics and Protestants to work together for Ireland, usually implying that patriotism would also lead Protestants to Catholicism. *Shandy Maguire* denounces lay and clerical O'Connellites for opposing rebellion even when faced with the famine.¹¹

Boyce's political views may have speeded his emigration in 1845, but he also realized famine emigrants needed priests. After a year in Eastport, Maine, Boyce

4 John Boyce, *Shandy Maguire* (1848; Boston: Patrick Donahoe, 1853), p. 99. 5 *Ibid.*, pp 33–5.

6 Hugh Dorian, *The outer edge of Ulster: a memoir of social life in nineteenth-century Donegal*, ed.

Breandan Mac Suibhne & David Dickson (Dublin: Lilliput, 2000), pp 15, 47. 7 David

Dickson, 'Derry's backyard: the barony of Inishowen, 1650–1800', in William Nolan, Liam

Ronayne and Mairead Dunlevy (eds), *Donegal: history and society* (Dublin: Geography, 1995),

pp 425–9. 8 Boyce, *Shandy Maguire*, pp 165–83, 190–3. 9 John Boyce, *The Spaewife* (Boston,

MA: Noonan, n.d. [1868]), pp 610–12. 10 John Boyce, *Mary Lee* (1859; Baltimore: Kelly,

Hedian & Piet, 1860), pp 68, 155–8, 255–65. 11 Boyce, *Shandy Maguire*, pp 247–8.

moved to Worcester, Massachusetts, remaining parish priest of St John's church until his death and traversing central Massachusetts on missionary work. *Shandy Maguire, or, Tricks on Travellers* (1848) began as a short story in the *Boston Pilot*; the bishop of Boston commanded Boyce to extend it to novel length. It was extensively reviewed by British journals and translated into German. An 1851 stage adaptation by James Pilgrim was popular in America, where Shandy was played by the comedian Barney Williams, and in Europe, where Tyrone Power took the part. Boyce's literary fame was a source of pride to New England Catholics; his biographer claims he corresponded with writers including Dickens, Lever, Thackeray and Eugene Sue. This is unproven; Boyce destroyed his papers before his death. Boyce became a popular preacher and lecturer for charitable Irish and Catholic causes.

The book was, however, criticized by the influential New England Catholic convert publicist and literary 'gatekeeper' Orestes Brownson (1803–76), who accused Irish-American Catholics of subordinating Catholicism to Irishness, criticized Young Ireland, and argued that the Irish should work for reform through Westminster. Boyce's 1851 lecture 'The satisfying influence of Catholicity on the intellect and senses' defends devotional Catholicism against Brownson's emphasis on logic, stressing its multifarious appeals to different levels of understanding and its accessibility to the poor and illiterate. He had made this point, too, in *Shandy Maguire*. This view implies intellectual pursuits are reserved for an elite; Boyce believed in a hierarchical society and was disturbed by American social fluidity.

The Spaewife appeared in 1853 to mixed reviews; Boyce never completed a proposed sequel. During the 1850s Boyce found life increasingly difficult. His parish provided only a small income; he quarreled with his curate. His literary earnings were spent on charity; his finances were in disorder at his death. He also had to defend his parishioners against nativist mobs. In *Mary Lee* an emigrant's letter declares Irish Orangemen 'decent' compared with Yankee nativists, since they make no hypocritical pretensions about treating all religions equally.

Fr John Boyce died on the night of 1–2 January 1864. He is buried in the communal grave of the Jesuit community of Holy Cross College, Worcester; his biographer was a younger Donegal-born, Holy Cross Jesuit who knew him in later life.¹²

¹² The memoir, principal source for Boyce's life, is prefixed to an 1868 reprint of *The Spaewife*. In 1941 Boyce's grand-nephew, Fr Charles Boyce (PP Termon and Gartan) anonymously published a 'new and revised edition', omitting a few embarrassing details but giving additional information on the Boyce family and extracts from the novels. See Charles Boyce, *Biographical sketch of Rev. John Boyce, D.D. (1810–64)* (Dublin, Juverna, 1941). G.M. McNamara, 'Rev. Dr John Boyce – "Paul Peppergrass" – 1810–64', *Donegal Annual*, 6: 2 (1965), pp 141–9 combines the nineteenth-century memoir and the critical writings of the early twentieth-century Boston Jesuit, Fr Michael Earls. Merwick, *Boston priests*, has information on Boyce's pastorate in America not available elsewhere.

Shandy Maguire is set in Donegal Town in 1828–9 during the final struggle over Catholic emancipation. It begins as Ribbon documents are planted on the young tenant farmer Frank Devlin by an agent provocateur instigated by land agent Archy Cantwell. Cantwell has caused the death of one girl, Mary Curran, and wishes to seduce Frank's fiancée Mary Connor by threatening her family with eviction. Boyce's idealized view of Irish womanhood cannot admit Mary Curran might actually have yielded; she dies of shame because Cantwell falsely boasted of seducing her. Cantwell is foiled by the Ribbon leader Shandy Maguire, a master of disguise who subjects local oppressors, including Cantwell's father, the significantly-named Reverend Baxter Cantwell, and the evangelical landlord Colonel Templeton to humiliating practical jokes.

Shandy's exploits interact with a second plot, drawing on Morgan's novels *O'Donnell* and *The O'Briens and the O'Flaherties*. Ellen, last descendant of the O'Donnell dynasty, whose painter father brought her up in Italy, like the heroine of *O'Donnell*, has returned to the ruins of her ancestral glories. She is supervised by the Spanish-educated parish priest, Fr Dominick, unbeknownst to her, her paternal uncle. Ellen, 'the Irishwoman as she ought to be', broods over the ruins of her ancestral castle and sings to her own harp accompaniment, like Glorvina in Morgan's *Wild Irish Girl*: 'the red spot on her neck, the "Baldearag" of the O'Donnells, glowed and smarted as if conscious of the indignant thoughts that burned within.'¹³ Ellen loves Captain O'Brien, a Protestant officer of Irish descent, and prays for his reversion to faith and fatherland. O'Brien, disgusted with the oppression he witnesses, exposes Archy Cantwell's machinations and the Government's use of agents provocateurs. After Fr Dominick's house and chapel are destroyed by an Orange mob O'Brien renounces his commission and embarks for Spain with Ellen and Fr Dominick, now also converted to physical force.

Morgan's typical marriage plot symbolizes reconciliation of native and settler through Whig politics and enlightenment principles. Boyce celebrates reversion to Gaelic and Catholic roots. The name O'Brien derives from William Smith O'Brien but also from Morgan's *The O'Briens and the O'Flaherties*, where a young liberal Protestant of Gaelic descent discovers his senile father's involvement in a bizarre conspiracy to restore the High Kingship, spearheaded by a Jesuit uncle returned from Spain. The priest-uncle in *The O'Briens and the O'Flaherties* is a shadowy figure whose fanaticism destroys his brother and himself. In Boyce he is saintly and self-sacrificing, based on fond memories of Boyce's old parish priest. Merwick claims he is also inspired by the Spanish-educated Archbishop Daniel Murray of Dublin, who saw his house and chapel destroyed in 1798. Morgan's O'Brien escapes from demented ancestral traditions and government oppression to become a Napoleonic general; Boyce's O'Brien expects speedy return as a messianic deliverer. Ellen's birthmark refers to the widespread millenarian belief

¹³ Boyce, *Shandy Maguire*, p. 104.

that Ireland would be freed by an O'Donnell with the Balldearg; Boyce wrote while the Young Ireland revolt hung in the balance.

Boyce emphasizes the poverty, hunger and nakedness of the peasants and passionately denounces landlordism. He catalogues the vices of identifiable Donegal landlord families, such as Marchioness Conyngham's career as mistress to George IV, and the origins of union titles. Catholic middlemen are conspicuously absent, though symbolically presented as heirs to the old Gaelic aristocracy, just as Fr Dominick possesses artworks by Michelangelo and Rubens to link Irish Catholicism with continental civilization.¹⁴ Boyce's views were not necessarily palatable to his own class; his father criticized *Shandy Maguire* as too anti-landlord.

The arrogance and pretensions of the landlords are encapsulated by the second reformation, which was underpinned by the view that landlords ruled tenants as a father rules his children, and were entitled – nay, obliged – to dictate their religion.¹⁵ The Revd Baxter Cantwell acquires three permanent converts, all expelled from the Catholic Church for immorality; others revert to Catholicism, taunting the rector as they attend mass in new clothing supplied by him. Even his termagant English wife, portrayed as a conclusive argument for clerical celibacy, despises convert priests, including the Orange intellectual, the Revd Mortimer O'Sullivan.¹⁶ Archy Cantwell mocks his father, declaring the Catholic faith so deeply intertwined with the lives of the peasantry they will never accept 'the bare Bible'; the only solution is extermination.¹⁷

The solemn dress and formal language of the Bible-reader Ebenezer Goodsoul are unsparingly satirized. Bible-readers were travelling evangelists – usually converts, employed to preach in a more popular style than patrician clerics and often in the Irish language. Merwick and Fanning treat Goodsoul as a sincere eccentric, overlooking Boyce's explicit statements that he was expelled from the Catholic Church for immorality, acts as pandar to Archy Cantwell, and uses evangelizing visits to seduce vulnerable women. His claim to Cantwell that his supposedly numerous converts attend Methodist meetings because their clothes are too shabby for the Church of Ireland reflects Catholic accusations that Bible-readers fabricated conversions to encourage donations.¹⁸

The landlord Colonel Templeton, based on E.M. Connolly who held a large estate in the Rosstown and Ballyshannon areas, and served as Conservative MP for Donegal, 1831–49,¹⁹ also receives excessive sympathy from Fanning and Merwick. Templeton is indeed more sincere than his underlings, 'an honest and upright magistrate' who never evicts a tenant 'without some legal cause – trifling, perhaps, it might often be'. This is faint praise, as is Boyce's remark that

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 244. ¹⁵ Patrick Maume (ed.), Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, *Irish recollections* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2004). ¹⁶ Boyce, *Shandy Maguire*, pp 291–3. ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 59–61. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 53–64, 229, 302–3, 331. ¹⁹ James Anderson, 'Rundale, rural economy and agrarian revolution: Tírúgh 1715–1855', in Nolan, *Donegal*, pp 447–70.

Templeton, unlike 'charlatan' evangelists, realizes that Irish Catholicism is not produced by priestly coercion but represents genuine popular commitment – hence, we are told, the colonel relied on 'his power to bribe the pliant and persecute the stubborn'.²⁰

Boyce's mockery of the second reformation extends beyond portraying its practitioners as heartless hypocrites. He ridicules its cerebral and bibliocentric approach to poor and ignorant people, and its insistence that those not saved according to evangelical formulae have no Christian faith whatsoever. Colonel Templeton evangelizes a woman with five children in a roadside hut. She has been evicted from his estate; her husband is dying in Lifford jail after attacking a tithe-proctor who seized the blankets from the bed where she lay in advanced pregnancy. Boyce claims '[w]e state the facts as given in evidence before the court'. After discoursing elaborately on the valuable gift he is giving her, he presents a Bible. She explains she cannot read, except for the crucifix on the wall:

'And what benefit, my good woman, do you derive from *reading* the cross, as you term it?'

'Why, when we luk at him there, we see our blisssed Saviour, stripped a'most naked lake ourselves; whin we luck at the crown i' thorns on the head we see the Jews mockin' him, jist the same as – some people mock ourselves for our religion; whin we luck at his eyes, we see they wor niver dry, like our own; whin we luck at the wound in his side, why we think less av our own wounds an' bruises, we get 'ithin an' 'ithout, every day av our lives [...]

'Unfortunate woman [...] you do not believe on Christ [...] You don't depend sufficiently on the merits of the great atonement. You want faith to *regenerate* you [...] Do you know what *spiritual regeneration* is? [...] Do you understand what is meant by *justification by faith*?'²¹

Satisfied he has done his best, Templeton decides to demolish her hut as an eyesore.

Boyce points to the sexual vices of many aristocratic defenders of the Protestant constitution and claims the doctrine of justification by faith alone produces oppression, immorality and hypocrisy. He calls London more immoral than any Catholic city. He admits Paris approaches it in vice, but attributes this to proximity to London.²²

If *Shandy Maguire* rewrites Morgan, *The Spaewife* draws on Scott. Like Scott, Boyce attributes his story to a persona who contributes an editorial introduction. In an 'Apology for a Preface' 'Peter Peppergrass' describes a quarrel with his uncle Tobias Drippindale, a 'stoop-shouldered, snarling old bookworm' who affects superiority because 'he sends me the reviews second-hand, and pays two-and-six-

pence a week for the attic', where Peppergrass lives. Drippindale sneers at the new novel, declaring Peppergrass barely equal to 'an olla podrida [mixed stew] such as *Shandy Maguire*'. Peppergrass shows Drippindale his manuscript preface; Drippindale destroys it contemptuously and Peppergrass cannot write another.²³

The setting is England in 1561 after the return to Scotland of Mary Queen of Scots. Queen Elizabeth is persecuting English Catholics, dividing the Catholic powers by insincere marriage-negotiations, trying to prevent the marriage of Mary, whom she fears as rightful heir to the English throne, and plotting with Scottish rebels. Her position is complicated by her attachment to the earl of Leicester.

This echoes Scott's *Kenilworth* – Boyce frequently mentions Amy Robsart – but goes far beyond Scott. Citing a suggestion by the English Catholic historian Lingard, Boyce claims Elizabeth's lasting attachment to 'the man who often treated her with scorn, and repeatedly flouted her favours [...] even when old age came to bring its wrinkles and gray hairs, and her favorite, once so handsome, became the bald and palsied libertine' suggests Leicester had a secret hold over her.²⁴

In Boyce's telling, Elizabeth has a child by Leicester. Elizabeth seeks its death, but Leicester arranges its preservation. He carelessly entrusts it to the Spaewife, an old Scotswoman and reputed witch called Nell (Eleanor) Gower living in the woods near Wimbledon. Her principal Scottean original is Meg Merrilees from *Guy Mannering*. Boyce apparently intended her as a 'demented prophetess' found in several Scott novels, insane from oppression and thirsting for revenge. Nell's husband and sons were killed by Protestants in Scotland; Elizabeth hanged her brother. However, Nell's role as resourceful resistance leader makes her an overwhelmingly sympathetic figure; Boyce can only gesture towards the darker view – and incidentally explain her failure to expose Elizabeth – by having her confessor declare God commands her not to harm another's reputation by divulging a secret entrusted to her, however unworthy the beneficiary; he withholds absolution when she refuses. Boyce is thus forced to assert that a promise to a murderous tyrant outweighs thousands of lives and millions of souls.

Meanwhile Sir Thomas Plimpton, one of Elizabeth's confidential servants, seeks the estate of the recusant Sir Geoffrey Wentworth and the hand of Wentworth's daughter Alice. Plimpton physically resembles a conventional stage-puritan; close-cropped, ungainly, and a parvenu – his father hung for piracy. Elizabeth, initially reluctant, assents when Plimpton hints that Leicester is interested in Alice. Sir Geoffrey Wentworth is a pathetic pedant who immerses himself in the Church fathers and entomological studies as his co-religionists are persecuted and his steward plunders the estate. The innocent Alice, incidentally given a long reflecton on the emotional and aesthetic power

of Catholic sacramentalism which rehashes Boyce's own rejoinder to Brownson,²⁵ naively decides that the queen, as a woman, will not tolerate such injustice. She goes to London to plead with her, like Jeanie Deans in *The Heart of Midlothian*. 'Elizabeth would have granted her prayer, had she still retained a single sympathy for human kind.'²⁶ Despite the endeavours of his clever and faithful Irish servant Reddy Conner, from Tubbernasiggart in Donegal (mentioned in *Shandy Maguire*), Sir Geoffrey is dispossessed; Reddy and Sir Geoffrey go to London seeking Alice. Alice is assisted by Nell and Rodger O'Brien, sent by Mary to offer refuge in Scotland. O'Brien, born in Ireland but brought up in France, speaks Wardour Street English rather than Reddy's Hiberno-Irish dialect. After various intrigues the characters appear before Elizabeth in open court. Sir Geoffrey dies making a brave and futile plea to Elizabeth; he joins the hands of Alice and Rodger O'Brien. The child of Elizabeth and Leicester is smuggled to Spain by Nell Gower, who forces the queen to allow her and her friends to leave for Scotland. Plimpton, who guessed Elizabeth's secret and foolishly tried to blackmail her, goes to the Tower.

Sir Geoffrey is regarded by some commentators as a critique of Brownson's intellectualized version of Catholicism. Merwick and Fanning even call Sir Geoffrey the real villain and suggest Elizabeth's vices are those of the heart. This is ridiculous. Sir Geoffrey is not a portrait of Brownson but a literary descendant of Baron Bradwardine in *Waverley*, whose pedantic antiquarianism leads to his Jacobitism and dispossession. Scott implies that such religious and political loyalties themselves reflect dangerous detachment from the world, hardly Boyce's intention. Sir Geoffrey is not a heartless calculating machine; his loyalties are reinforced by pride in the traditions of his family, founders of a ruined abbey where he takes refuge, and memories of his dead wife and her faith. These are the attachments Boyce praises in *Irish-Americans* and Brownson derides as irrelevant to true faith.²⁷ He brings his house to financial ruin trusting a dishonest steward; this is done partly from selfish obsession with his studies, but also from misplaced trust and generosity to the poor. He does neglect and even spite his friends – notably his daughter and the faithful Reddy Connor – but he also displays and attracts genuine love and loyalty, and dies asking forgiveness.

Elizabeth receives all the anger and venom lavished on the Protestant Ascendancy in *Shandy Maguire*. Her vices are inborn. 'Bastard offspring of perjury and lust,' she inherits 'the vilest passions of Henry, her father, and the levity of her unfortunate mother, Anne Boleyn.'²⁸ Boyce repeatedly asserts that as a bastard Elizabeth has no right to the throne. The sympathetic characters publicly disown the temporal as well as spiritual authority of Elizabeth.²⁹ Her usurpation unsettles the whole moral order; one of Plimpton's followers calls

25 Ibid., pp 147–9. 26 Ibid., p. 117. 27 Ibid., p. 251. 28 Ibid., p. 57. 29 Ibid., pp 474, 702–4.

marriage 'a device of the cozening monks and priests to grow rich [...] what hath wedlock now to do with the rights of sovereigns and princes?'³⁰ Without the supervision of Catholic clerics, Protestant belief in justification produces moral chaos. Sir Geoffrey's English servants loot his house before deserting him, proclaiming:

[t]hey're only Protestant sins [...] mere trifles [...] Shoulst thou rob a church, or kill thy neighbour, or burn a house, or steal thy master's gold, why, thou'rt only to wait patiently for the grace of repentance, and give thyself no concern for thy soul's welfare, since thou canst not [...] do any good work of thyself [...] compare that with the old religion [...] nothing but penance, and prayers, and fastings, and alms, and pilgrimages, and contritions, and restitutions.³¹

Boyce emphasizes Elizabeth's *politique* religious compromises and her command of public relations to present her as a hypocrite cultivating popularity to gain power:³² her intrigues destroy the good name, and ultimately the life, of the naively honest and straightforward Mary:³³

She was so far Protestant as to love its freedom from religious restraint; it gave her an independence, a peculiar reliance on self, that accorded well with her natural disposition [...] had Elizabeth then been placed in any inferior position in life, she would have endeavoured to reason herself into infidelity.³⁴

Elizabeth is driven less by political expediency than personal jealousy of Mary.³⁵ She is 'as cunning as a serpent, and as revengeful as a tigress [...] with the heart of a Jezebel, and the vulgarity of a courtesan' bound by sheer animal lust to a man whom she hates, who is blackmailing her. 'Elizabeth was enamoured of the person of the earl, and the earl enamoured of the throne of the queen.'³⁶ Boyce insinuates that the favourites and ministers who lavished her with praise were her lovers in every sense of the term. Elizabeth rages over her relationship with Leicester to her only confidante:

I surrendered my whole being to him. I sacrificed what the world calls honor to appease his godship, and which was dear to me in life, because in losing it I knew I should lose his respect [...] now am I debased and degraded at his feet [...] a woman in whom no drop of tame blood ever ran; whose passions, wild as her father's, have never once been bridled but to deceive those pious fools who surround my throne and call me

30 Ibid., p. 332. 31 Ibid., pp 424-5. 32 Ibid., pp 54-5, 264, 684. 33 Ibid., pp 16-17. 34 Ibid., pp 62, 64-5. 35 Ibid., pp 10, 264. 36 Ibid., p. 398.

virgin [...] I laugh at the thought [...] I'm a woman, and greedy of men's homage as of their love. I would draw all that could minister to my passions around me [...] let the highest of them betray but a semblance of indifference to my favours, and I cut off his head as I would a poppy, or send him to feed rats in the Tower dungeons.³⁷

When Elizabeth sees Rodger O'Brien she lusts after him; Boyce declares himself ashamed 'that there ever raged in the female bosom so gross and fierce an element.'³⁸ The ranting nymphomaniac portrayed by Boyce would have lost power in six weeks; but he revels in prurient delight at heaping humiliations on a Protestant icon.

A subtext implies that the apostacy of England reflects racial unworthiness. Reddy Conner denounces

the lazy,beef-eatin', beer-drinkin' Sassenaghs [...] The smell av mate afther two days' fastin' id make [them] forswear the pope, if they wur sure of bein' hung two hours afther they got their bellies full [...] mate ivery day in the week's a mighty strong argument against Popery in this country [...] give me ould Ireland still [...] that] niver sould her faith to fill her belly [...] it's too deep rooted down in her sowl to barter it for beef, beer, and Bibles.³⁹

Catholic Ireland is presented as sole heir to pre-reformation England as well as to pre-reformation Ireland; this is symbolized by the union of Alice and Rodger. Nell Gower employs Irish labourers as muscle in streetfights. Several scenes echo Irish Catholic iconography of the penal days. Catholics worshipping in a cavern are attacked by royal forces, who shoot a priest at the altar; another priest proclaims 'resistance is no longer a crime, but a duty.'⁴⁰ The ruined abbey reflects Boyce's memories of Donegal Abbey.

Boyce promised readers a never-completed sequel set in Edinburgh. *The Spaewife* prefigures elements of this sequel. Elizabeth orchestrates the forgery of letters attributed to Mary. Boyce thus implies that the casket letters, which supposedly proved Mary's adultery with Bothwell and complicity in the murder of her husband Darnley and whose authenticity is widely questioned, were also forged by Elizabeth. Darnley's jealousy of Rizzio is kindled by Elizabeth and her Scotch protégé the earl of Murray, whose soliloquies echo Macbeth. John Knox appears as a demented fanatic, loudly denouncing Elizabeth and Murray when they most require secrecy.⁴¹ Nell Gower prophesies that she herself will live to see the death of Elizabeth, and the queen's bastard child will come between its mother and the angel of mercy on her deathbed.⁴² Presumably

37 Ibid., pp 555-6. 38 Ibid., pp 727-8. 39 Ibid., pp 442-3. 40 Ibid., p. 413. 41 Ibid., pp 516-23, 525-50. 42 Ibid., pp 377-9.

Elizabeth would have killed it. The novel fails because Boyce cannot come to terms with the triumph of Elizabeth over Mary.

Mary Lee is noticeably better-written than its predecessors. A Scottean preface attributes it to Peppergrass's old schoolfriend Peter Pinkie, based on Peter Pattieson of the Waverley novels. Pinkie is a spoiled priest expelled from Louvain after throwing a volume at the philosophy lecturer to save himself from dying of boredom; he dies of rheumatic fever in St Louis, receiving the last rites from a cousin of Fr Prout. A letter entrusts his manuscript to Peppergrass and pleads unsuccessfully for his body to be shipped to Bunrana. Where the preface to *The Spaewife* is simply a disconnected defence of the book, this echoes the novel's wider theme of devotion versus intellectualism and Boyce's awareness that he would die and be buried in exile.

The novel is set in the Fanad of Boyce's early pastorate; Boyce lingers lovingly on the scenery and on the parlour where 'Fr John' relaxes.⁴³ The central plot concerns the 'matrimonial speculation' of Ephraim Weeks, Yankee cousin of the evangelical landlord Robert Hardwinkle. Having discovered that Mary Lee, a locally-brought-up survivor of the shipwreck of the *Saldanha*,⁴⁴ is the missing daughter and heiress of a wealthy Virginia planter, Weeks decides to marry her before she uncovers her true identity. Foolishly confident of his ability to outsmart the despised Irish, he employs the wisewoman Else Curley as a go-between. Else, an effective rewrite of Nell Gower as Scottean 'demented prophetess' sees Weeks as a pawn to secure vengeance on Hardwinkle, who evicted her. Hardwinkle's father seduced her sister – it is noteworthy that the sister was indeed seduced – and sent her brother to die in Lifford jail.⁴⁵ The Hardwinkles are Presbyterians rather than Anglicans, allowing Boyce to denounce Calvin as the 'subtle betrayer of the human conscience [...] dark plotter of treason against the human soul.'⁴⁶ Else has abandoned her religious duties for thirty years to avoid being diverted from revenge; only fondness for her foster-child Mary Lee restrains and redeems her. Mary loves the fugitive Young Irelander Randall James Barry, based on Thomas D'Arcy McGee, hidden by Boyce's brother during his 1848 escape, and is defended by Lanty Hanlon, another version of Shandy Maguire, given the rabbit-skin cap of Carleton's Phelim O'Toole – Patrick Magill's 1922 novel *Lanty Hanlon* may echo Boyce. Weeks suffers some of the same humiliations as the Orangeman Dumpy Dowser in *Shandy Maguire* at the hands of peasants, aware of the treatment their compatriots received in New England, who acknowledge American help during the famine but complain that Yankees take all the good out of it by 'boastin' an' puffin' [...] like an auctioneer sellin caligoes at a fair'.⁴⁷ Barry is eventually freed, and Hardwinkle acci-

⁴³ Boyce, *Mary Lee*, pp 319–20. ⁴⁴ The action takes place c.1850 and Mary is eighteen; the real-life *Saldanha* was wrecked in 1811! ⁴⁵ Boyce, *Mary Lee*, pp 129–30. ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp 106, 150, 154.

dentally killed, in a courtroom riot where Else plays the same role as Nell Gower, waving a dagger and proclaiming resistance no longer a crime but a duty. After vengeance is accomplished by providence, Else is reconciled to the Church. Even the celebrated passage where Boyce describes a graveyard and pours scorn on those who believe Irish-Americans should blot out such hallowed memories and assimilate to a land which persecutes them is expanded from *Shandy Maguire*.⁴⁸

Like *The Spaewife*, the novel centres on the repeated humiliations of its villain. Weeks gazes on Mary Lee's mementoes of Ireland's past with 'a cold, prying curiosity', and glimpses her rosary with 'a contemptuous smile' over cross and crucified.⁴⁹ He reads Paine's *Age of reason* and ignores classical and modern literature.⁵⁰ When a servant is compared to Caleb Balderstone, the faithful retainer in Scott's *Bride of Lammermoor*, Weeks asks if this is one of the Balderstones of Skowhegan, to be told '[h]e was born of a wizard, and shall live as long as the world lasts'.⁵¹ Weeks was once a Methodist class-leader but sees Unitarianism as the most sensible religion. 'It don't suit men in trade to spend whole hours at prayer, and neglect their business [...] business is a sacred thing and must be attended to.'⁵² His experience of Protestant sects convinced him that those who profess religion are mostly hypocrites. Hardwinkle protests, but his own miserliness and oppression illustrate Weeks's thesis. Catholicism, on the other hand, places too much restraint on business practices; Weeks thinks the gospel should be watered down to avoid injuring trade.⁵³ He is so flexible, it transpires, that even his name is not his own. Boyce emphasises that Weeks does not represent all Protestant New Englanders, but only the commercial class; women, labourers, and farmers are more religiously observant.

Weeks's frankly avowed amoralism and generous acceptance that others are just as much entitled to cheat him as he is to cheat them make him more sympathetic than the canting Hardwinkles, but commentators exaggerate Boyce's tolerance by seeing the book too exclusively in an American context. In Weeks's departure to denounce the Irish in American newspapers, Boyce expresses the hope that the Catholic Donegal of his memories will be preserved from the Yankee commercialism and irreligion which surround him.

Mary Lee is mellower than *Shandy Maguire*, partly because Boyce's hopes for millennial deliverance have been replaced by patient trust in the eventual triumph of moral force. One striking difference is the presence of unequivocally sympathetic Protestant characters, the benevolent Leveresque paternalist landlord Captain Petersham, who denounces game-laws, sympathizes with rebels, and loves a good drink,⁵⁴ and his high-spirited sister Kate. Brownson is satirized as Dr Henshaw, a converted Scottish writer for the *Edinburgh Review* – notoriously associated with arrogant philistine rationalism – who thinks the best way

48 Ibid., pp 223–5. 49 Ibid., p. 45. 50 Ibid., pp 57–8. 51 Ibid., pp 66–7. 52 Ibid., p. 201.
53 Ibid., pp 268–9. 54 Ibid., pp 275–6.

to convert Protestants is to tell them all non-Catholics will be damned, then bully them with logic. When Henshaw discovers that Kate reads Swift he denounces him while she praises Swift's patriotism, wit and humour. Commentators rightly point out that this acceptance that literature has non-didactic functions makes Boyce unique among Irish-American literary polemicists of his generation. His admiration for Swift, however, is not unrestrained; he specifies that Kate dips into Swift's works rather than reading straight through.⁵⁵ Henshaw is rebuked by Fr John, who accuses him of egotism and tells him the intellect cannot be converted without the heart. The devotional writer Fr Faber does more than Henshaw/Brownson because he writes for the millions and seeks their salvation rather than intellectual vainglory.⁵⁶

Boyce's devotional Catholicism is encapsulated in the heroine Mary Lee, compared to the Madonna in Raphael's *Espousals of the Virgin* and to the central figure of Richard Dalton Williams' poem 'A Sister of Charity'.⁵⁷ While nursing a shipwrecked cabin-boy, confident that the Virgin Mary will protect her from typhus, she explains Marian doctrine to Kate, who tells Mary she has just encountered the best book of apologetics, namely Mary herself.⁵⁸ Kate is converted by the example of Mary and of 'Uncle Jerry' Guirkie, an eccentric Dickensian philanthropist inspired by the charitable spirit of Catholicism. Merwick bizarrely presents the dispute between Henshaw and Fr John over the best means of conversion as Boyce displaying pluralism by 'defending Kate's Protestantism'. Henshaw remains unimpressed.

Although not Catholic, Randall is attracted by the image of the Virgin; Else predicts marriage to Mary Lee will convert him. Captain Petersham remains Protestant, but accepts his sister's conversion to 'a decent religion'; he despises 'the hypocritical twaddle' of evangelicals and would sooner see Kate peddle eggs than turn Methodist.⁵⁹

A shipwrecked 'negro' plays a significant though minor role in the plot, which displays disturbing ambivalence on slavery. Jerry Guirkie feels particular sympathy for blacks; Boyce frequently compares the plight of the Irish peasantry to that of slaves, and we are told 'Sambo' was repeatedly flogged, yet he appears a stereotypical faithful slave with no desire for permanent escape. Boyce, apparently, denounces the treatment of the Irish as blacks because the Irish were not blacks. Weeks' remark that New England abolitionists who persecute Irish Catholics display 'a half sentimental, half benevolent kinder squeamishness, with a slight dash of the religious in it for seasoning' towards blacks while secretly despising them reflects the speaker's moral deformity – he has been overseer on a plantation – and contains a painful degree of accuracy.⁶⁰ It is, nonetheless, a disquieting reflection of the Irish-American alliance with the antebellum Democrats that the novel, published in the slave state of Maryland, ends with

55 Ibid., pp 162–8, 175–6. 56 Ibid., pp 325–7. 57 Ibid., pp 81, 361. 58 Ibid., pp 191–9. 59 Ibid., p. 186. 60 Ibid., p. 233.

the departure of the idealized Mary Lee, her rebel lover and Lanty Hanlon to share her fortune as heiress to a slave plantation.

Boyce was not a great novelist, but remains interesting. Constrained by discrimination and witness to famine, he became an exile seeking wholeness in memories, devotions, and alcohol and patching together texts to find expression for his experiences. His insistence that the lived faith of the Irish people represented an argument for Catholicism more formidable than any intellectual treatise prefigures later priest-novelists, such as Canon Sheehan, who blended devotional Catholicism with nostalgic images of a pious rural Ireland for emigré audiences and worried about the role of the priest amid the breakdown of older social hierarchies.