ANGLO-SAXONICA

REVISTA DO CENTRO DE ESTUDOS ANGLÍSTICOS
DA UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

Série II - nº 27 - 2009

À memória de Paulo Eduardo Carvalho

(7de Julho de 1964 – 20 de Maio de 2010)

Edições Colibri

ULICES • CEAUL
University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies
Centro de Estudos Anglísticos da Universidade de Lisboa

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DIRECÇÃO

João Almeida Flor
Maria Helena Paiva Correia

COORDENAÇÃO

Isabel Fernandes
Maria Teresa Malafaia

REVISÃO DE TEXTO

Ana Raquel Lourenço Fernandes
Duarte Patarra

DESIGN, PAGINAÇÃO E ARTE FINAL

Inês Mateus ❧ inesmateus@oniduo.pt

EDIÇÃO

Centro de Estudos Anglísticos
da Universidade de Lisboa
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FUNDAÇÃO PARA A CIÊNCIA E A TECNOLOGIA

À memória de Paulo Eduardo Carvalho

(7de Julho de 1964 – 20 de Maio de 2010)

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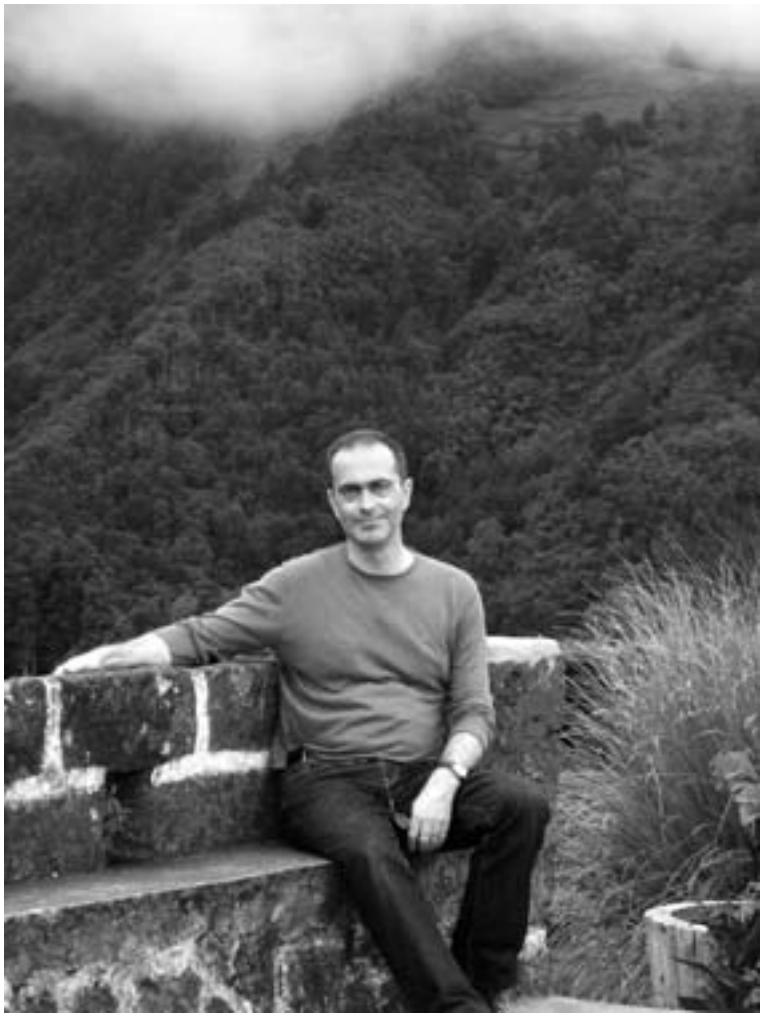

Nascido no Porto a 7 de Julho de 1964, Paulo Eduardo Carvalho concluiu, na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, em 1984, a Licenciatura em Línguas e Literaturas Modernas /Estudos Portugueses e Ingleses), bem como, em 1990, o Curso de Tradução de Línguas e Literaturas Modernas. Completou o Mestrado em Estudos Anglísticos na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa em 1993 com a dissertação *A História no Território da Imaginação: A Irlanda de Brian Friel e Field Day,* e, em 2007, o Doutoramento em Estudos Ingleses na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto com a dissertação *Identidades reescritas: Figurações da Irlanda no Teatro Português*, um estudo de notável consistência documental, teórica e crítica, entretanto publicada pelas Edições Afrontamento em 2009.

Para além de cursos breves que frequentou no estrangeiro (Inglaterra, Irlanda e Itália, sobretudo), destacou-se como conferencista em múltiplas iniciativas internacionais no âmbito da Association Internationale des Critiques de Théâtre - International Association of Theatre Critics (AICT-IATC), da English Society for the Study of English (ESSE), da Fédération Internationale pour la Recherche Théâtrale / International Federation for Theatre Research (FIRT-IFTR), tendo ainda feito intervenções públicas no Trinity College Dublin (1999), no Dublin Theatre Festival (2003), em alguns dos Congressos da IATC-AICT e em várias universidades europeias para que foi convidado.

Foi responsável por actividades culturais em importantes instituições na cidade do Porto como o Teatro Nacional São João e o Rivoli Teatro Municipal, tendo colaborado ainda com a Fundação Serralves, a ESMAE e a Fundação Eugénio de Almeida, entre outras.

Interveio como orador principal em múltiplas conferências e colóquios (no país e no estrangeiro), animou debates em torno do teatro, literatura, cinema, música e artes plásticas, colaborou com várias instituições na organização de colóquios, publicações, cursos e exposições, entre outras inúmeras actividades culturais e artísticas.

Era membro activo do Centro de Estudos Comparados Margarida Losa (Universidade do Porto), do Centro de Estudos de Teatro (Universidade de Lisboa) e do Departamento de Estudos Ingleses e Americanos (Universidade do Porto), dinamizando colóquios, seminários, conferências, exposições e publicações variadas.

Integrou a Direcção da Associação Portuguesa de Críticos de Teatro de 2004 a 2009, representou-a (até ao seu falecimento) no Comité Executivo da AICT-IATC, e era Director dos Estágios para Jovens Críticos dessa Associação Internacional, tendo redinamizado este sector promovendo a publicação de curtos textos críticos no sítio electrónico da Associação.

Foi co-fundador, em 2004, da revista *Sinais de cena* (da Associação Portuguesa de Críticos de Teatro em colaboração com o Centro de Estudos de Teatro da Universidade de Lisboa), integrando desde então o seu Conselho Redactorial, e para a qual contribuía regularmente com vários artigos, recensões e traduções. Integrava também o colectivo dos Cadernos de Literatura Comparada do Instituto Margarida Losa da Universidade do Porto).

No campo do teatro, foi co-fundador da companhia Assédio (do Porto), apoiou o trabalho dramatúrgico de vários encenadores e traduziu mais de quarenta peças de autores tão diversos quanto Brian Friel, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter, Martin Crimp, Martin MacDonagh, Marina Carr, Athol Fuggard, Caryl Churchill, Wallace Shawn, Frank McGuinness e Thomas Kilroy, entre outros.

De uma cultura vastíssima e dotado de uma inesgotável energia e de uma rara sensibilidade artística, Paulo Eduardo Carvalho foi uma figura importante no campo do teatro e dos estudos de teatro em Portugal, tendo estabelecido um patamar de exigência notável na abordagem às questões do teatro em quase tudo o que escreveu no campo do ensaio e da análise crítica, como bem documentam os livros *Ricardo Pais: Actos e Variedades* (Porto: Campo das Letras, 2006) e *Identidades reescritas – Figurações da Irlanda no Teatro Português* (Porto: Campo das Letras, 2009).

Viveu de forma generosa, dedicando-se amorosamente a todos os que precisavam do seu conselho e da sua inestimável ajuda.

Deixou-nos no dia 20 de Maio, numa tarde quente em que o mar o arrastou tragicamente. A todos quantos o conheciam deixa uma infindável e dolorosa saudade.

Maria Helena Serôdio

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Introductory Note

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The Irish Literature Festival, whose proceedings are gathered in the present volume, derived from the activities of Research Group 4 of ULICES – University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies, a group aimed at connecting the traditions of English-speaking Literatures in Great Britain and Ireland with writings by authors belonging to non-European and/or non-British cultural traditions emphasising an innovative Inter-art and Intercultural dialogue without ignoring post-colonial perspectives. It was within this project that we started a continued relationship with the Irish Embassy in Lisbon whose commitment and support led to the organisation of the Irish Literature Festival, which took place during three days in November 2007, at the Faculty of Letters.

Apart form the invaluable support of the Embassy, greatly due to the indefatigable commitment, trust and encouragement of Ambassador James Brennan, a word of thanks is here in order to those other institutions and persons, who were directly involved in the organisation of the event, and especially the Centre for Theatre Studies, in the persons of Maria Helena Serôdio and Rui Pina Coelho. As had happened back in 1991, when she promoted the Irish Culture Week, Professor Serôdio was first among the organisers in enthusiastically endorsing this new initiative; her energy and devotion were contagious to the rest of the team, greatly contributing to overcome the unavoidable obstacles and difficulties. The event also counted on the support of the Department of English Studies and the General Library of the Faculty.

Externally, we owe a lot to the collaboration of Casa Fernando Pessoa (that hosted a poetry reading with Derek Mahon and an unforgettable musical evening), Museu Nacional do Traje (that made possible the photo exhibition on "Irish Writers in the Portuguese Theatre"), Artistas Unidos (that staged *Disco Pigs*, at Sociedade de Instrução Guilherme Cossul), and this company's director, Jorge Silva Melo, who agreed to interview Enda

Walsh on the spot and allowed us to use the text of the interview in this issue.

The event brought together some of the leading artists in today's Irish cultural scene. Special thanks also to the writers Jennifer Johnston, Derek Mahon and Enda Walsh and to our Irish guest scholar, Professor Nicholas Grene who shared stage with some of the Portuguese leading scholars in the field of Irish Studies, as was the case with Rui Carvalho Homem, Teresa Casal and Paulo Eduardo Carvalho. João de Almeida Flor, Scientific Coordinator of ULICES at the time, also gave us the privilege of listening to his reflections on James Joyce, as well as to his excellent translations of poems from *Chamber Music*.

Last but not least, our thanks go to our main sponsor, Culture Ireland. Without its financial support, nothing would have been possible.

The academic year 2007/2008 in which the Festival took place was of particular significance for the history of Irish Studies at the University of Lisbon since it witnessed the emergence of a newly created course unit: Irish Literature and Culture, which was lectured for the first time in the Department of English Studies, thus granting a new status and visibility to what was previously subsumed under the label of English Literature. This was, indeed, something to celebrate and this certainly was one of the reasons for calling this event: *Irish Literature Festival*, since the root meaning of Festival is precisely feast, the idea of celebration being inherent in the word's etymology. This spirit of joyful celebration led us to make this occasion the opportunity for bringing together different arts forms, namely literature, theatre, music and cinema (we screened two films based on Jennifer Johnston's writings), and also for encouraging our students to participate by dramatising excerpts from Irish literary texts and thus making our working sessions more lively and enjoyable. Thanks are due to André Pais Leme for directing them and to Luísa Falcão and Joana Frazão for the translation work. Our thanks go also to Mário Jorge Torres for having chaired the debate on the films.

Unfortunately in the written pages of a scholarly periodical like *Anglo-Saxónica* these aspects of the Festival are hardly manifest, but even so, we hope that the inclusion of some of the photographs of our exhibition as well as some other photos from the *Disco Pigs* performance may give the reader a sense of what the actual experience was like.

We also decided to take this opportunity to make this issue of *Anglo-Saxónica* a thematic one, in the sense of its being entirely devoted to Irish Culture, and thus ended up by including essays, reviews and other material not originally presented at the *Festival* or in anyway connected to it, but having to do with things Irish. This is the case of Adriana Bebiano's essay on Emma Donoghue's short stories, Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff's essay on Eavan Boland's poetry and Ana Raquel Fernandes's essay on Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net*. During one of the Festival's sessions, Jennifer Johnston read her unpublished monologue *Seventeen Trees*, which she has generously allowed us to publish now; it is featured alongside *I Have Desired to Go*, a thematically related monologue that the author contributed to the commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights in 2008. We feel deeply grateful and honoured by such permission. This volume also includes the so far unpublished Portuguese translation of two earlier and interconnected monologues by Jennifer Johnston, *Mustn't Forget High Noon* and *O Ananias*, *Azarias and Miseal*, translated by Teresa Casal and staged as *Billy e Christine* by the Oporto-based theatre company ASSéDIO. A discussion of this 2004 stage production is to be found in Paulo Eduardo Carvalho's essay.

A last word of thanks to Maria Helena Paiva Correia, the Principal Investigator of our Research Team, for her trust in our work and support to this project.

Lastly, my heartfelt gratitude to the Organising Committee of this Conference: Angélica Varandas, Catherine Cotter, Maria Helena Serôdio, Mick Greer, Rui Pina Coelho, Teresa Casal and Vincent Herlihy. Working together with such a group of devoted, enthusiastic and imaginative people made this experience not only rewarding but enriching and unforgettable.

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While this issue was in the final stages of proofreading we received the brutal news of the premature tragic death of our colleague Paulo Eduardo de Carvalho (7.7.1964 - 20.05.2010), one of our guest-speakers at the Irish Literature Festival and a contributor to this volume. We therefore decided to dedicate this issue of *Anglo-saxónica* to the memory of this distinguished scholar in the fields of Irish and Theatre Studies. The author of *Ricardo Pais: Actos e Variedades* (2006), a monograph on the Portuguese

theatre director, and of *Identidades Reescritas: Figurações da Irlanda no Teatro Português / Rewritten Identities: Figuring Ireland in Portuguese Theatre* (2009), Paulo Eduardo Carvalho was also a remarkable translator of Samuel Beckett, Brian Friel, Tom Murphy, Caryl Churchill, Martin Crimp, and Harold Pinter, among many others. An actor in his youth, and a co-founder of the theatre company Assédio in 1998, he ventured into new terrain in 2009, when he both translated and directed Friel's play *Cartas Íntimas* (*Performances* in the original). In human terms, Paulo Eduardo was a truly generous person and will be missed by those of us who had the privilege to know him.

Isabel Fernandes

COLÓQUIOS

IRISH LITERATURE FESTIVAL IN LISBON

Da vida das mulheres infames. A história segundo Emma Donoghue

Adriana Bebiano
Grupo de Estudos Anglo-Americanos e Estudos Feministas
Centro de Estudos Sociais, Universidade de Coimbra

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Da vida das mulheres infames. A história segundo Emma Donoghue

Desde a década de 1970 que os Estudos Feministas têm vindo crescentemente a denunciar o silenciamento das mulheres no arquivo ocidental[1]. Da consciência deste silenciamento, decorre a necessidade de dar visibilidade às mulheres, num processo que implica, num primeiro momento, uma releitura do passado e, num segundo momento, uma reescrita da história e do cânone literário que procure colmatar, na medida do possível, as lacunas detectadas.

De um ponto de vista feminista, a revisão do passado é um acto absolutamente necessário, como defende Adrienne Rich: "Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (Rich, 1979: 35).

Trata-se de um acto de sobrevivência na medida em que o passado define, de alguma forma o presente. A politização da memória, ou uma contranarrativa da memória, alternativa à memória hegemónica (patriarcal),[2] tem consequências no presente e no futuro das mulheres na

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[1] "Arquivo" é aqui usado no sentido Foucaultiano: não apenas um registo passivo de dados sobre o passado, mas um sistema de enunciação activo, que cria simultaneamente vozes e silenciamentos. Veja-se *A Arqueologia do saber*, *passim*.

[2] A revisão do passado é objecto de discussão e estudo na área dos "estudos da memória" (Memory Studies), que não vou discutir. Veja-se, a propósito, Marianne Hirsh and Valerie Smith, "Feminism and Cultural Memory: an Introduction. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28: 1 (Fall 2002), pp 3-12.

medida em que potencialmente cria novos modelos para comportamentos e práticas sociais e culturais.

O primeiro objectivo desta "revisão" é dar às mulheres a voz e a visibilidade que lhes tem sido historicamente negada. Este trabalho tem vindo a ser feito em todas as áreas do saber, mas para efeitos deste ensaio interessa-me particularmente a historiografia e a ficção literária, com particular ênfase no campo dos estudos anglo-americanos.

Para uma reflexão sobre este processo em curso dois conceitos são incontornáveis como ponto de partida: o conceito de "Herstory", cunhado por Robin Morgan em 1970, e que pode ser usado ainda com proveito para descrever o projecto de uma historiografia feminista, que procura devolver as mulheres à história e a história às mulheres; e o conceito de "Female Line", ("linhagem feminina"), de Margaret Ward, cujo trabalho procura explicitamente estabelecer uma matrilinearidade alternativa, ou uma contranarrativa da memória, apagada pela narrativa patrilinear hegemónica.

Na historiografia anglo-saxónica, Margaret Ward é um exemplo notável, com o seu projecto de reconstituição de "The Female Line" que inclui revisão historiográfica, narrativas de vida, e ainda um manual que ensina às mulheres comuns – isto é, sem formação na disciplina da história – a escrever uma história da família centrada na linhagem feminina (veja-se Ward, 1991 e 203; e Ward & Ryan, 2004). No entanto, se "Herstory" é um projecto reconhecido principalmente na área da historiografia – em ensaios, mas também em trabalhos biográficos, e ainda em livros de "divulgação histórica" com um impacto ainda por estudar – e na história da literatura, onde o cânone está ser interrogado e reconfigurado, parece-me que pode ser alargado, com proveito, à escrita criativa, nomeadamente à ficção.

De facto, as lacunas no arquivo colocam muitos limites ao trabalho da historiografia feminista: os traços deixados por muitas mulheres de existência histórica real são escassos e não se compadecem com a metodologia da escrita da história, obrigada à verificação documental. Nas últimas décadas, tem vindo a ser feita que tem vindo a ser feita uma reflexão sobre a proximidade entre a história e outros tipos de narrativa, cujo início convencionalmente se situa em *Metahistory* (1973), de Hayden White. Esta investigação problematiza os limites da possibilidade do acesso ao passado

"tal como aconteceu" e aborda a historiografia como sendo (também) uma poética[3]. Mas se a história é uma poética, será sempre uma poética vigiada, uma vez que a proximidade criada pelo uso da narrativa enquanto forma de criação de conhecimento não conduz à equivalência entre história e a ficção na relação que cada uma destas formas narrativas com o referente empírico. Na formulação de Eric Hobsbawm, "if history is an imaginative act, it is one which does not invent but arranges *objects trouvés*" (Hobsbawm, 1997: 272).[4]

Ora, no caso da história das mulheres, os traços deixados são frequentemente escassos. Há, no entanto, casos em que *objects trouvés* que permitem a recriação, pela ficção, da vida dessas mulheres, criando uma narrativa que, não sendo história, não deixa de ser uma "verdade" alternativa. No caso da ficção a autoridade da reconstituição do passado é criada seguindo estratégias diversas, nomeadamente um aparato paratextual legitimador do que se conta, ou a reconstituição detalhada do quotidiano e das práticas sociais e culturais do momento histórico em causa, fundamentada na historiografia atinente. Acresce que a inclusão de detalhes aparentemente insignificantes – um sino de uma igreja que toca em "The Necessity of Burning", uma taça de cerejas em "Figures of Speech", contos que adiante analisarei – criam aquilo que Barthes chama "efeito do real" (Barthes, 1968) – isto é, produzem um efeito de autenticação do que (inventando) se conta. Se a história assim contada não é a "verdadeira", no sentido de ser "tal como aconteceu", é a verdade possível: podia ter acontecido assim.

Na proliferação de romances contemporâneos sobre figuras femininas do passado podemos encontrar exemplos da devolução às mulheres da voz e da capacidade de acção. Relembrando Rich, "Looking back with fresh eyes", a ficção histórica que pode ser classificada de "feminista" – e que é pujante nas culturas anglófonas – tem vindo a proceder a uma releitura e reescrita da história através da (re)invenção da vida das suas protagonistas. Esta reescrita conduz a uma resignificação do significado de "feminino" –

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[3] Para uma discussão deste assunto, veja-se Bebiano 2000 e White 1973.

[4] Em francês na versão original inglesa.

não já equivalente com conceitos como abnegação, silêncio ou sacrifício – e, simultaneamente, dos próprios eventos históricos referidos, questionando e criando alternativas às narrativas hegemónicas.

O trabalho de Emma Donoghue é disto exemplo. Dramaturga, ensaísta e romancista irlandesa, é na área da ficção que tem ganho maior reconhecimento internacional, tendo vários dos seus livros recebido ou entrado na lista de finalistas de prémios importantes a sua escrita é polivalente e abrange vários subgéneros. A reescrita feminista da tradição literária Ocidental começa, em Donoghue, com *Kissing the Witch* (1997), uma reescrita de contos de fadas tradicionais, subgénero já consagrado no contexto das reescritas feministas.

Donoghue iniciou-se na reescrita da vida de personagens com existência histórica real com *The woman who gave birth to rabbits* (2002). Para além de obras de outras categorias, a sua ficção histórica inclui *Life Mask* (2004), *Slammerkin* (de 2000) e *The Sealed Letter* (2008). O processo criativo de que está na génese destes romances – e que é semelhante a autoras de ficção histórica contemporânea – constitui-se no que Donughue define como o uso de "memory and invention together, like two hands engaged in the same muddy work of digging up the past." (Donughue, 2000: foreword). Trata-se da reinvenção, sustentada em investigação histórica, de vidas que se encontram documentadas apenas em "a scrap of history".

Este processo está claramente exemplificado em *Slammerkin*: de Mary Saunders, a protagonista, conhecemos a existência apenas porque há registo da sua condenação à morte pelo assassínio da patroa em Monmouth, País de Gales, em 1763. A partir deste fragmento da história Donoghue constrói dezasseis anos de uma vida paradigmática das vidas de cuja existência apenas conhecemos – na famosa formulação de Foucault – o "encontro com o poder".

Foi justamente a Foucault que fui buscar o meu título, mais exactamente ao ensaio "A vida dos homens infames", ensaio esse que descreve o projecto de recolha de retratos de personagens "obscuras":

> que não tenham sido dotadas de nenhuma das grandezas como tal estabelecidas e reconhecidas – as do nascimento, da fortuna, da santidade, do heroísmo ou do génio; que pertencessem àqueles milhões de existências que estão destinadas a

> não deixar rasto; que nas suas infelicidades, nas suas paixões, naqueles amores e naqueles ódios, houvesse algo de cinzento e de ordinário aos olhos daquilo que habitualmente temos por digno de ser relatado; e, contudo, tenham sido atravessados por um certo ardor, que tenham sido animados por uma violência, uma energia, um excesso na malvadez, na vilania, na baixeza, na obstinação ou no infortúnio (…) uma espécie de medonha e lamentável grandeza (…) Aquilo que as arranca à noite em que elas poderiam, e talvez devessem sempre, ter ficado, é o encontro com o poder (Foucault, 1992: 96-97).

Este projecto de Foucault – que só fala de homens, naturalmente – encontramos concretizado em muitas das histórias de Emma Donoghue, seja em romances de maior fôlego seja em contos, que, a partir de fragmentos da história, arrancam à noite as vidas de mulheres infames: nem santas, nem génios, nem notáveis por nascimento fortuna ou feitos. Notáveis apenas por um acto de transgressão.

The woman who gave birth to rabbits é uma série de 17 contos, publicados em revistas várias entre 1993 e 2001 e reunidos em livro em 2002. São todas histórias baseadas em caos verídicos, fragmentos mais ou menos longos da história que a autora foi encontrando ao longo de dez anos. As heroínas, de perfil muito diverso, são justamente caracterizadas por uma diferença ou acto de transgressão – desde participar numa queima de livros à indulgência num afecto ilegítimo, seja um amor lésbico seja um adultério. Há apenas duas histórias de vítimas: "Cured", que narra um caso de excisão do clítoris, de uma paciente identificada como P.F., em 1861, e que é baseado em relatos médicos de um hospital Londrino, e "A Short Story", a história de Caroline Cramachi, uma criança anã exibida como freak na primeira metade do século XIX. Se estas duas mulheres são vítimas cuja única "transgressão" foi o terem sido (por acaso ou sorte) diferentes da "norma", todos os outros contos rejeitam a figuração da mulher enquanto vítima: em todos há capacidade de acção e escolha pela transgressão da norma social e dos limites impostos às mulheres e ao "feminino".

Mary Toft (1703-63), por exemplo, a mulher do conto que dá o título a *The woman who gave birth to rabbits*, é uma vigarista que durante algum tempo enganou a nata da sociedade londrina, com a sua história fraudulenta de andar parir coelhos. Elspeth Buchan (1738-91), do conto

"Revelations", é uma profeta fundadora de um culto milenarista que deixa os seus seguidores, incluindo crianças, adoecer e morrer de fome enquanto ela própria secretamente se empanturra. Na galeria de heroínas de Donoghue cabem cortesãs, vigaristas e assassinas – não apenas as heroínas clássicas, ou as eticamente exemplares segundo os novos paradigmas de consciência feminista.

O acto de transgressão que caracteriza as mulheres infames pode tomar diversas formas. Cabe aqui uma reflexão sobre o que caracteriza uma "heroína", ou melhor, que tipo de heroína nos será útil, no sentido de poder servir como modelo emancipatório para as mulheres do nosso momento histórico. Cada uma de nós, de acordo com as suas circunstâncias e escolhas, terá sua linhagem própria de mulheres rebeldes. Se o herói clássico é caracterizado por se situar entre o humano e o divino, por ter capacidade para realizar feitos "acima do humano", não tenderemos nós, por imitação do modelo, a construir uma galeria de heroínas distinguidas por grandes feitos, moralmente sancionados, se não pela moralidade normativa de um passado que nos foi adverso, por uma nossa contemporânea, politicamente correcta e igualmente normativa? Assim, procuramos as guerrilheiras, sufragistas, resistentes anti-franquistas em Espanha ou militantes antifascistas em Portugal, cientistas, escritoras e artistas em todo o lado.

Quero dizer: a celebração dos feitos extraordinários e do sacrifício pessoal ao serviço de causas nobres é fulcral na reescrita da história de e para as mulheres. No entanto, existe o perigo da construção de uma hagiografia que excluí da linhagem feminina uma componente importante – o crime, por exemplo, e o lado negro do ser em qualquer caso – que nos permita pensar o feminino como o plenamente humano, em toda a sua complexidade. Queremos nós excluir Lady Macbeth da nossa linhagem? Sustento que Grace Marks, de Margaret Atwood (*Alias Grace*, 1997), Eliza Lynch, de Anne Enright (*The Pleasure of Eliza Lynch,* 2002*)*, ou Mary Saunders de Donoghue (*Slammerkin*, 2000), personagens que na figuração do feminino incluem tudo o que é humano, são parte da nossa linhagem.

Este argumento pode ser qualificado de perigoso; é, com certeza, ambivalente, na medida em que pode ser lido como contribuindo (ainda) para a demonização do feminino. Cortesãs ou prostitutas, por exemplo, podem ser recusadas como heroínas, justamente porque se encaixavam na

dicotomia mulher–anjo *versus* puta, dicotomia essa dominante nas representações do patriarcado. Concretizando: fazer de uma prostituta heroína – como Donoghue faz com Mary Saunders em *Slammerkin* – pode ser treslido como forma de cumplicidade com essas representações dicotómicas misóginas.

E seria, ou poderia ser, fosse a personagem construída de forma estereotipada. No entanto, na obra de Donoghue as figuras de mulheres infames adquirem um potencial subversivo: já não são estereótipos, mas figuras complexas. A dramatização assumida de um lado eticamente questionável – e mesmo imoral, em alguns contextos – destas personagens contribui para pensar as mulheres no contexto do plenamente humano, pelo que me parecem figuras potencialmente emancipatórias.

De entre os contos do livro em apreço, escolho para uma análise mais circunstanciada "The Necessity of Burning" (pp. 184-199) e "Figures of Speech" (pp.125-131), porque ambos partem do que é, literalmente, "a scrap of history", para reescrever, pela imaginação, não apenas a vida das mulheres suas protagonistas, mas o próprio significado de dois eventos que ficaram na história, a saber: a Revolta Camponesa de 1381, na Inglaterra, e o episódio conhecido como "The Flight of The Earls", na Irlanda de 1607.

O paratexto de "The Necessity of Burning" diz-nos que quando, a 15 de Junho de 1381, no contexto da Revolta Camponesa, os livros foram queimados na Praça do Mercado de Cambridge, "an old woman called Margery Starre is said to have scattered the ashes and shouted 'away with the learning of the clerks, away with it'." (Donoghue, 2001: 199). Apesar desta Revolta – que é, na verdade, uma série delas – estar historicamente muito bem documentada, nada mais se sabe dessa mulher: não consta da lista das prisões ou das execuções que se seguiram à repressão da Revolta. É pois, literalmente, a partir de um "farrapo de história", que Donoghue inventa a heroína, sustentando-se, como é habitual em narrativas deste género, em documentação e estudos especializados sobre os eventos e as condições sociais e económicas do tempo.

O dia é reconstruído ao longo de dezasseis páginas a partir da consciência de Margery, uma viúva sem filhos, antiga serva da gleba que conseguira comprar a liberdade e estabelecer-se como taberneira ao ficar viúva. Fechada em casa, com as portadas fechadas e as portas trancadas,

tem esperança que a confusão que reina nas ruas passe sem a tocar. Está resignada com a sua vida, que nos vai sendo contada em analepses entretecidas com casos de vidas de outras mulheres. A revolta que grassa lá fora é, segundo ela, obra de arruaceiros, chefiados pelo seu vizinho Philbert Carrier, o único homem nomeado no conto. Habituada a uma vida de submissão, imagina-se "better of keeping to herself and brewing her ale" (p.187).

Partindo de uma caracterização estereotipada de "feminino" e de "masculino" – homens activos e destemidos, mulheres submissas e cautelosas – o conto vai mostrar o processo de consciencialização da opressão que conduzirá Margery ao acto transgressor pelo qual se constitui como agente da história. A traço grosso, as razões históricas que conduziram à Revolta Camponesa de 1381 terão sido o estado de miséria e a (literal) servidão em que viviam os camponeses, tendo sido despoletada pela criação de novos impostos. Ora, as razões pelas quais Margery se irá juntar à rebelião são pessoais; e se não desmentem a versão global da história, vão introduzir nuances e as particularidades da opressão das mulheres dentro da classe.

No rosário de injustiças que vai desfiando sobressai a memória de ter sido impedida de enterrar o filho bebé em solo sagrado, porque o padre da terra – que não chegara a tempo de baptizar a criança, por estar bêbado e na cama com uma mulher – declarara inválido o baptismo efectuado *in extremis* pela própria mãe. Aos seus ressentimentos pessoais acrescenta os de outras mulheres, como a de uma outra taberneira de Cambridge que fora submetida à tortura por ter vendido cerveja adulterada aos estudantes da universidade. Sendo o conflito político que serve de motor à acção o que opõe a cidade à universidade – o clássico town *versus* gown – muito mais do que a classe, a comunidade que emerge do conto é uma comunidade de mulheres: são elas que têm por inimigo padres e homens do saber,"men of the cloth, men of the book":

> What do they do all they, these scholars and their masters who lord it over those who feed and clothe them? What's their honest work, their valuable trade? Books, that's all! (…) What good ever came out of a book, she wonders sometimes? She doesn't need to read them to know what's in them; she's heard enough. Tales of lickerous widows who force men to lie with them; tales of clever young men who trick girls into lying with

> them; whole books full of wicked wives (…) No wonder, Margery reckons, seeing it's men who write the books. (pp.186-187)

É porque os livros são escritos por homens e contam mentiras sobre as mulheres que a sua queima é uma celebração. Num crescendo de excitação e festa, Margery acaba por juntar-se aos que atiram livros à fogueira: "The flames lick lovingly. (…) She scatters the ash into the air like rice at a wedding, like blossom at the end of Spring." (p.198). O fogo é purificador e as cinzas são regeneradoras: como o arroz nos casamentos, propiciam um outro tipo de fertilidade ou recomeço.

A queima de livros é um acto bárbaro de grande peso simbólico; no entanto, aqui é é celebrado e justificado. A Revolta de 1381 é resignificada, de um ponto de vista feminino, como uma revolta contra um saber equivalente a poder que exclui e oprime as mulheres. O conto termina num momento de metaficção: "The churchemen will tremble when they hear of Margery Starre – read of her, even, maybe. (…) they'll pause to think of how fast paper burns." (pp.198-199). Os homens do livro hão-de ouvir falar de Margery Starre porque Donoghue disso se encarrega.

Em "Figures of Speech", encontramos uma reescrita de um episódio importante na narrativa nacionalista irlandesa, "the Flight of the Earls". Em 1607, no seguimento da derrota de mais uma rebelião contra a Coroa Inglesa, um grupo de nobres herdeiros da Irlanda gaélica – o mais célebre dos quais é Red Hugh, ou "The O'Neill" –, fugiu para o continente europeu, onde permaneceu no exílio. Não sendo uma vitória mas uma derrota, trata-se, no entanto, de um episódio que se presta a ser configurado como feito romântico em narrativas nacionalistas, particularmente numa história como a irlandesa (gaélica), maioritariamente narrada como sendo constituída por oito séculos de derrotas são celebradas como actos de resistência. A importância simbólica deste acontecimento para a Irlanda ainda hoje pode ser comprovada pela série de eventos comemorativos que tiveram lugar em 2007, por ocasião do seu 4º centenário.[5] No conto de Donoghue

[5] A título de curiosidade: eu própria participei no que teve lugar na Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, a 30 de Novembro de 2007: "Evasion, Dispossession: Transit and Trauma in the Irish Imagination / A Seminar to commemorate the Flight of the Earls (1607)"

encontramos a versão deste evento na voz de Mary Stuart O'Donnell, sobrinha de Hugh O'Neill.

De acordo com a nota de autora, sobre a Mary O'Donnel histórica há apenas uma entrada biográfica no *Dictionary of National Biography* e um romance espanhol de 1627, que ficcionaliza a sua vida de aventuras de forma desmedida. O conto tem por missão – na voz da protagonista – repor a verdade, que teria sido falseada tanto no romance espanhol como nas narrativas nacionalistas irlandesas. O paradoxo de uma ficção que se diz ficção mas que se autolegitima com a função de repor a verdade é encontrado frequentemente na fissão histórica, constituindo, para além da óbvia estratégia de autenticação e criação de credibilidade, um momento de metaficção e reflexão sobre a complexidade das relações entre "história", "ficção" e "verdade".

As narrativas nacionalistas tendem a conter e ocultar as narrativas dos grupos subalternos no corpo da nação – que é representada como homogénea –, e esse parece ser o caso da Irlanda. Se autores como David Lloyd defendem o nacionalismo como uma força libertadora para todos (veja-se Lloyd, 1993), outros, como Margaret Ward ou Colin Graham, denunciam o silenciamento de problemas de classe, sexo e de outros grupos subalternos na narrativa hegemónica da nação (veja-se Graham, 2001 e 2003; Ryan & Ward, 2004).

Em *Soldiers*, *New Women and Wicked Hags. Irish Women and Nationalis* (2004), Louise Ryan e Margaret Ward seguem o argumento que as narrativas nacionalistas irlandesas silenciaram a participação das mulheres nessas lutas, reunindo uma série de estudos de caso – que vão desde a rebelião de 1641 até as lutas republicanas na Irlanda do Norte das últimas décadas do século XX – que demonstram, de forma bastante convincente, a contribuição de várias figuras femininas, devolvendo assim à história estas mulheres.

O que a historiografia e os estudos culturais feministas fazem nesse livro é também feito por Emma Donoghue pela ficção. Em *Figures of Speech*, pela voz de Mary O'Donnel os heróis das narrativas nacionalistas – o pai e o marido, o visconde de Tyrconnell – não são heróis, mas cobardes, bêbados e frequentadores de bordéis. A fuga dos ditos heróis é resignificada como um acto de cobardia, uma vez que abandonaram mulheres e filhos.

As memórias invocadas dizem de um pai e de um tio cobardes, e de actos de valentia por parte de Mary. Por ser filha e sobrinha de traidores, Mary fora prisioneira da coroa em Londres, tendo escapado acompanhada de Bell, ambas disfarçadas de homem. Esta valentia, supostamente própria de macho em corpo feminino, é já convencional numa "história como aventura", subgénero tradicionalmente sobre e para "rapazes", que prolifera agora com figuras femininas.[6] Um outro traço aproxima a personagem de Mary dos heróis masculinos: ela foge do cativeiro não por medo mas porque quer regressar à Irlanda, incluindo-se assim no romance da nação que se quer também sua. Isto é, a narrativa patrilinear da nação é "corrigida, e substituída por uma narrativa matrilinear. Trata-se de apenas de o início de um projecto: Bell, a criada, incita Mary a escrever a sua própria história, de forma a corrigir os erros do registo histórico:

> 'You should write your family's history, if you don't write your own. That would make a stirring tale.' Bell's voice is only faintly mocking. 'Who has not hear of the O'Donnell and the O'Neill, the glorious Flight of the Earls?'
> 'Ha! When I was a child, no one ever told me that was just a figure of speech (pp. 126-127).

O projecto da reescrita da história da nação é partilhado pelas duas mulheres. De facto, a relação mais importante de Mary não é com o marido – ausente, a tratar dos seus prazeres – com Bell. Estabelece-se entre as duas mulheres uma forte cumplicidade, tanto no presente como nas aventuras passadas relatadas,[7] uma cumplicidade que ultrapassa as barreiras de classe social. De resto, o conto expõe como ilusória a suposta situação de privilégio de Mary, uma vez que a gravidez a coloca ao nível de todas as outras mulheres, como recorda Bell: "Aren't the Irish famous breeders?

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[6] Vejam-se as narrativas sobre mulheres piratas. No caso da Irlanda, por exemplo, *Granuaille Ireland's Pirate Queen, Grace O'Malley c.1530 – 1603*(2006), de Anne Chamber, ou *Grania: She-King of the Irish Seas* (1986), de Morgan Llywelyn.

[7] Este é um traço comum nas histórias de Donoghue, desde as de cariz histórico às do maravilhoso, onde a mulher mais velha – as figuras de "witches", "hags" e "crones" dos contos tradicionais – é uma figura protectora e por vezes amante da mulher jovem.

We're known for it as rabbits! You'll live to drop a dozen children or more."(p. 126) O corpo, a condição de parideira – e o medo pela possibilidade da morte no parto – surge aqui como o factor comum que permite pensar uma condição comum – a categoria "mulher", como a condessa reconhece perante as dores do parto e o medo da morte: "I thought I was above the lot of womanhood. (…) I, a hero's daughter, am going to die like a any ordinary woman, in a bed of sweat and blood and shit." (pp.129-130).

Seguindo a convenção, que não é exclusiva da cultura irlandesa, encontramos o culto da mãe como símbolo poderoso da nação. Trata-se de uma idealização que corresponde a uma subalternização e uma regulação das mulheres na realidade política e social, e à censura e ocultação de qualquer gesto que não se encaixe nos papéis que constroem a ideia de "feminino". Por isto é relevante a forma como, neste conto, são representadas a gravidez e a maternidade: A gravidez de Mary é figurada como grotesca – no corpo disforme, no suor e no inchaço, nas garras da criatura que vai nascer. Diz Mary a certa altura: "this creature has claws" (p.129). Donoghue substitui a Mãe simbólica por uma mãe empírica, disforme, encharcada em suor e apavorada pela possibilidade – muito real à época – da morte no parto. Que se revolta contra o papel que a história lhe atribuiu e denuncia a narrativa hegemónica da história como "a figure of speech", a necessitar correcção, uma outra versão, mais verdadeira.

Estamos de novo perante o paradoxo da ficção que vem repor a verdade. Tanto em "The Necessity of Burning" como em "Figures of Speech" se diz que os livros – escritos por homens – mentem, e que é preciso escrever tudo de novo. Se a historiografia feminista, com a metodologia adequada à disciplina, tem um papel fundamental na devolução das mulheres à história e da história às mulheres, apenas a ficção pode penetrar e arrancar à noite muitas delas. A ficção tem também, portanto, um papel importante na escrita de Herstory.

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Irish Drama: Views Across Borders

Paulo Eduardo Carvalho
University of Oporto

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Irish Drama: Views Across Borders

My first words are naturally an expression of gratitude for the invitation to participate in this "Irish Literary Festival": that's why I would like to address a deeply felt "thank you" to the organizers among which I find so many colleagues and friends that have been part of my academic life at least since December 1991 when, at this same Faculty, I attended a similar event, then more simply titled *Irish Culture Week* – at a moment in which I was just preparing my first research project dedicated to Irish drama and culture, more precisely on Brian Friel and the Field Day Theatre Company.

I would like to start with some pictures that, I hope, will be able to function both as an introduction to the subject of my talk here today and as a multiple tribute to many different people, foreign and Portuguese: to the members of the organization of this Irish Literary Festival that put together the fabulous photographic exhibition of Irish drama performed in Portugal that is in the entrance hall of this Faculty; to the Portuguese actors, directors, set designers, translators, and many other theatre artists represented there, because of their involvement in the staging of Irish modern and contemporary drama; to my friend and colleague Teresa Casal who some years ago draw my attention to Jenniffer Johnston's moving plays; and, finally, to the novelist and playwright herself for her creative work and for her presence among us.

So, first I will show you a whole sequence of seven photographs but then I will go back to the first one because it's on that one that I would like to take some more time.[1]

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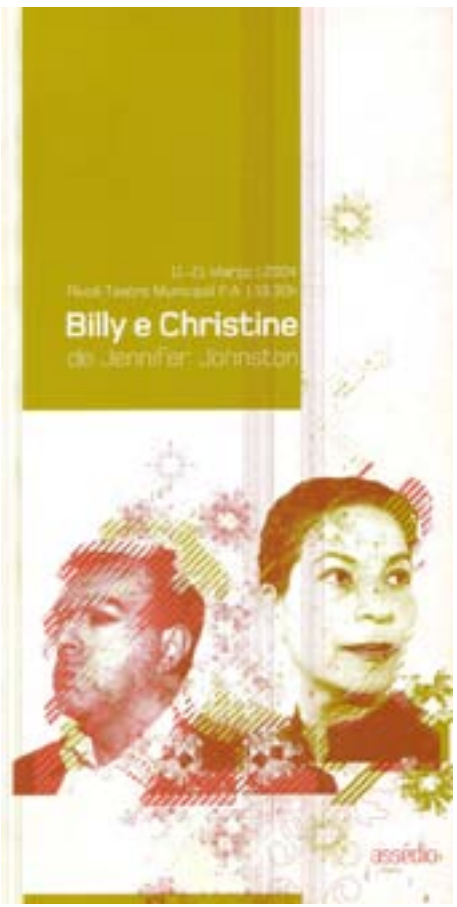
[1] All the photographs, plus the cover of the programme, are from *Billy e Christine*, produced by ASSéDIO, directed and performed by João Cardoso and Rosa Quiroga, premiered in Porto, at the Rivoli Teatro Municipal (Pequeno Auditório), the 11th March 2004. The photographs are by Ana Pereira.

Billy e Christine [*Mustn´t Forget High Noon + O Ananias, Azarias and Miseal*], de | by Jennifer Johnston, enc. | dir. João Cardoso / Rosa Quiroga, Assédio – Associação de Ideias Obscuras, 2004, fot. Ana Pereira.



Programa de | Programme of *Billy e Christine* [*Mustn´t Forget High Noon* + *O Ananias, Azarias and Miseal*], de | by Jennifer Johnston, enc. | dir. João Cardoso / Rosa Quiroga, Assédio - Associação de Ideias Obscuras, 2004.

What I have shared with you is a brief sequence of photographs from a 2004 Portuguese stage production of two monologues written by Jennifer Johnston back at the end of the 1980's originally titled *Mustn't Forget High Noon* and *O Ananias, Azarias and Miseal*. The need for a common Portuguese title for this production led the company – called ASSéDIO and located in Porto – to opt for the less inspired but somehow fair solution of *Billy e Christine* [*Billy and Christine*], the names of the two characters that constitute the couple that is at the centre of this story doubly told. In the text she wrote for the programme, Teresa Casal, who also translated the plays into Portuguese, characterized that story as one of personal secrets and misunderstandings reflecting a larger and more collective history of confrontations. Almost all the events of these two interconnected monologues take place in Northern Ireland during deeply troubled times that tragically affect the destiny of both Billy, who ends up killed and speaks to us after his own death, and Christine, still alive but partially referring to the same events that led to Billy's death.

The speech of these two characters is filled with references to the social, political, religious and cultural life of the protestant communities – and I would stress the plural – of the Republic of Ireland and particularly of Northern Ireland, a fact that naturally complicate both its translation or rewriting and its theatrical figuration in such a different cultural context like Portugal. Few members of a Portuguese audience would be prepared to identify the meaning of all the references to "orange streamers", the "Boyne", the "Twelve of July", "King Billy", the "Orange Order" and the "Orange marches", or to seize all the reverberations and implications associated with the "Maze", "Fenians" and "Taigs" or even with names like Derry or Enniskillen, and would perhaps be even less prepared for a full awareness of the differences between the "Church of Ireland" and the "Presbyterian Church". The many spatial occurrences, especially in Christine's speech, of "down there" and "up here" point to a special experience of place, strongly determined by the existence of a border, which is, interestingly enough, only explicitly referred to by Billy when he is talking about one of his closest friends and adds the comment that he "wasn't a bit averse to smuggling the stock backwards and forwards across **the border**" (Johnston 43, bold added).

The translational strategy adopted by Teresa Casal, in accordance with the artistic decisions of the company, insisted on the preservation of many of these different references, trying not to overload the text with additions or explanations, and thus giving more room to the emotional intensity of the events and experiences narrated by the two characters and to the autonomous expressiveness of the theatrical signs used in that production. A passage from Billy's speech allows us to exemplify not only the significant number of some of the references I mentioned above but also the solutions adopted by the Portuguese translator:

I used to march beside him in the procession wearing a wee cocky cap over one eye with **orange streamers** flying down my back. He carried one of the poles of our **banner**.

That was a great honour. And I'd march beside him proud as a peacock. We had a great wee band here… still do… **the Aughnacloney Silver Band**. They play all those great marching tunes.

On the green grassy slopes of the ***Boyne****… dedadadadadade…*

We'd march through the village and then round and up the Back Street just the old man said to give **the Taigs** a tune or two… and we'd play loud and sing loud too, so they could hear through their closed windows.

Just a bit of fun really.

I wonder does he think of those days now or what goes on in his head as he lays there?

I wonder does he see heaven as one great sunny **Twelfth of July**?

That man, he said to me once, pointing to **King Billy** on his white horse, *that man, my son brought freedom to this country and don't you ever forget it.*

Eu desfilava ao lado dele na marcha com um bonezito a tapar-me um olho e **fitas cor-de-laranja** caindo pelas costas. Ele levava um dos nossos **estandartes**.

Era uma grande honra. E eu desfilava ao lado dele vaidoso que nem um pavão. Temos cá uma bandazita que é uma maravilha … mesmo hoje … **a Aughnacloney Silver Band**. Tocam aquelas marchas todas.

Nas encostas verdejantes do ***Boyne*** *… dedadadadadadade …*

Desfilávamos pela aldeia e depois dávamos a volta pela Rua de Trás e o velhote dizia para brindarmos aqueles **papistas** com umas marchazitas … e tocávamos e cantávamos alto e com garra para que eles nos ouvissem bem mesmo com as janelas fechadas.

Só para nos divertirmos.

Às vezes pergunto-me se ele se lembrará desses dias ou no que pensará ele agora ali deitado?

Será que para ele o céu é um **Doze de Julho** cheio de sol?

Aquele homem, disse-me ele uma vez apontando o **Rei Billy** no seu cavalo branco, *aquele homem, meu filho, foi*

His voice was filled with quivers when he said it.

I think he had a bit of drink taken.

I told Christine that one time… oh, yes, she'd make some rude joke about my bowler hat and told her right out that she'd no call be jeering at the Lodge. If it hadn't been for the Orange Order, we'd all be lackeys of Rome.

What's the difference, she said, *between that and being lackeys of the English?*

(*Ibidem* 35-36, bold added)

ele que tornou este país livre, nunca te esqueças disso.

A voz tremia-lhe quando dizia isso.

Acho que já teria uns copitos a mais.

Disse uma vez à Christine … ah sim, ela fez uns comentários pouco simpáticos sobre o meu chapéu de coco e eu disse-lhe logo que ela não tinha nada que dizer mal da Loja. Se não fosse a Ordem de Orange, seríamos todos lacaios de Roma.

E qual é a diferença, disse ela, *entre ser lacaio de Roma ou dos Ingleses?*[2]

(bold added)

However, in some other cases, Teresa Casal felt the need to add subtle pieces of information to foreign cultural realities: And I say "subtle" because whenever those clarifications were added an effort has been made to respect the coherence of their use by the characters in the play. A good example is, for instances, "Maze" to which the translator added the information regarding its function: "a cadeia de Maze". A different case of interference was the transformation of the "B-Men" into "Polícia Especial", thus trying to overcome the clearly codified nature of that original expression. More interesting to the purposes of this talk were the clarifications she added to Christine's already mentioned spatial references: to frequent expressions like "up here" or even to longer sentences like "Only my granny wouldn't come up from Carlow" (*Ibidem* 60), the translator added a geographic precision that surely enhanced the Portuguese audience's own understanding of the importance of place in that monologue: "aqui no Norte" in the first case and "Só a minha avó é que não pôde vir de Carlow aqui ao Norte". These solutions proved completely

[2] The translation of these two monologues by Teresa Casal has not yet been published, so I'm quoting from a printed copy.

coherent with the character's other expressions like "We had to go down there" and "Down there in Carlow" (*Ibidem* 61, 62). That geographical precision was, at the same time, a political precision, quite valuable to understand Christine's deep sense of homelessness and her particular kind of feminine resilience.

Christine delivers her monologue when she is leaving, after the natural death of Billy's father and the more violent death of Billy, although she goes not back to the South, where she clearly feels that she no longer belongs, but to a small flat in Belfast, where she never lived before: "I'm a bit afraid of Belfast, but as my mother would have said you can get used to anything if you try" (*Ibidem* 78). The feeling of non-belonging, almost of an identitary dilution, characterizes her whole speech, permeated by many of the same references found in Billy's monologue – like the Orange Order, the marches, the Regiment, etc. –, completed with others that better express the more domestic experience reserved to women in that social context, like the talks with neighbours, with the Pastor, the differences between the Presbyterian and the Irish Church, as well as the experience of Billy's infertility and the acknowledgement of fear.

It's also in her speech that the more cruel reality of a militarized daily life emerges, with road blocks and sectarian killings, not necessarily as the cause of more violence – as it happened with Billy, after the killing of his best friend Sammy – but more intimately associated with a passive perplexity regarding something larger that seems to seems to overcome her. The more public and mediatic nature of the events that so tragically altered her personal destiny is crucially clarified in the play through the reference to the television in a powerful passage, directly addressing the audience, in which Christine's sense of identity is expressed at her weakest point, because it seems to depend on her presence on a piece of news:

> You probably saw the funeral on the telly.
> I sat and watched it that evening on the news after everyone had gone home… how strange I thought to see myself there on the telly.
> I really do exist, that's me there, walking, standing, shaking hands… that's me. I am a real person.
> If I'd a video, I'd have taped it.
> I could have looked at it over and over again. I could have

> said Christine Maltseed, that's you there on the telly with the eyes bursting out of your head with pain.
> … and then I cried, when I saw myself there with all those people. (*Ibidem* 77-78)

These two monologues by Jennifer Johnston are a clear dramaturgical attempt to convey a personal sense of a public violent situation. Fully aware of the cultural and historical importance of the political context in which the events narrated in the play take place, and at the same time sensitive to the scenic possibilities opened up by the dramaturgical fictions devised by Jennifer Johnston, the directors and interpreters of the Portuguese stage production decided to add an initial sequence to the two plays that was not anticipated by its author – the two monologues are, in fact, completely devoid any stage directions, thus offering themselves as completely open to the invention of theatre directors and actors.

The Portuguese *Billy e Christine* opened with an edited sequence of moving images extracted from newsreels about violent events in Northern Ireland that were projected on the white shirt and the interior white padding of Billy's jacket. Placed at the front of the stage, left, the actor playing the character of Billy opened his jacket and became for some minutes a temporary human screen of contemporary history: some well known images of protests and marches, banners and other insignia, police and military interventions, trivialized by their presence in the media, particularly during the seventies and the eighties, were projected on Billy' body, thus anticipating the dramaturgical experience of listening to the narration of political facts affecting the life of individuals. At the same time, on the right, at the back, the audience could see the silhouette of Christine seated on a sofa with her face turned towards a TV screen from which light was coming out.

That was a peculiarly powerful way not only to connect visually those two characters, but also to disentangle their existences from the more trivial but distant reality of a televised tragic event, making them closer to the live experience of a Portuguese audience that, through that device, was informed, even before the first lines were spoken, that the fiction they were about to share regarded a well localised experience. If I may dare to suggest, the original crossing of borders proposed by Jennifer Johnston's texts – and it would be important to remember that Christine's monologue

O Ananias, Azarias and Miseal premiered at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin, in 1989, and so presented itself as a more than needed reminder that Irish identities are larger and more complex than sometimes overstated simplifications tend to insist – was transformed by that Portuguese production into a different kind of intercultural experience.

These two brief monologues by Jennifer Johnston are only a part of the much wider contribution that Ireland has made to world's drama. Curiously enough, opposite to what Christopher Murray once suggested the concern of modern and contemporary Irish playwriting with history or with issues of identity never seemed really to function as a "turn-off" to the attention of foreign stages (cf. Murray 18).[3] The situation we find is quite the opposite: if we consider only the dramatic tradition inaugurated by Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge and O'Casey in the first decades of the 20th century, the attraction exercised, in different cultures and theatrical traditions, by successive generations of Irish playwrights is quite impressive, particularly in relative and comparative terms. In Portugal, between 1957 and 2007 it is possible to identify the translation of nearly 40 different texts and a much bigger number of stage productions. Among the names of the playwrights, we find not only the already aforementioned Yeats, Synge and O'Casey, but also Brian Friel, Jenniffer Johnston, Edna O'Brien, Frank McGuinnes, Dermot Bolger, Marie Jones, Marina Carr, Mark O'Rowe, Conor McPherson, Martin McDonagh, and Enda Walsh. If, to this list, we added the names of Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw and Samuel Beckett, that number would significantly increase. However, in these last three cases the presence of Irish issues or perspectives raises much more complicated questions.

With some significant exceptions, it's not difficult to agree with Nicholas Grene suggestion that "externally" – although it's not always clear if the "exterior" he is referring to means the world at large or only

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[3] Christopher Murray's whole comment is like this: "Identity, then, is a turn-off as a theme, in terms of international, commercial success. Yet, tedious though it might perhaps be for outsiders, the Irish, for good historic reasons, must always be picking at the sore of national identity. It is an obsession, and it has resulted in some of our finest writing" (Murray 18).

those countries with important diasporic communities, like England, the United States, Canada or Australia, that share the English language – that "[e]xternally, Irish drama is regarded as a thing apart, defined by its national origins rather than by its style or techniques" (Grene 266). Despite Brian Friel's insistence, back in the still recent decades of the seventies and eighties, that Irish playwrights needed to talk to their most immediate Irish audience – "talking to ourselves" became a famous formula[4] –, the undeniable fact is that Irish drama achieved an extraordinary international dimension.

All the experiences involving the translation and staging of Irish plays became a phenomenon that is relevant to the different theatrical traditions that welcome, rewrite and refigure those plays and simultaneously to the history of Irish drama itself. It would be fair to say that even among Irish theatre scholars it's becoming clear the need for a larger perception of the many different ways Irish drama has been received internationally. The project coordinated by Nicholas Grene and Christopher Morash about the Irish Theatrical Diaspora, which has been stimulating research, organizing seminars and conferences and publishing groundbreaking essays, is a clear sign of a wider understanding of the contribution of Irish drama to the world theatre and an unequivocal demonstration that research on this domain has crossed borders.[5] But even some recently published collections of essays, dedicated to so different playwrights like Marina Carr or Martin McDonagh, display a new willingness to include contributions beyond the traditionally more self-enclosed circle of strictly Irish concerns, making visible the productive transformations that a play by Marina Carr or Martin McDonagh might go through in the hands of,

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[4] Cf. "We are talking to ourselves as we must and if we are overheard in America or England, so much the better", from an interview with Paddy Agnew, at the time of the premiere of *Translations*, originally published in *Magill*, December 1980 (Friel 86).

[5] The project on the Irish Theatrical Diaspora has already found expression in two volumes: *Irish Theatre on Tour*, ed. Nicholas Grene and Chris Morash (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2005), and *Irish Theatre in England*, ed. Richard Cave and Ben Levitas (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2007).

for example, a Dutch director and a Dutch company for the benefice of a Dutch audience.[6]

The fact that some Irish plays and playwrights have travelled better than others demands a complex understanding capable of taking into account not only the more intrinsic literary and dramatic achievement of any single play, but also a wide variety of cultural, critical, academic, political, even economical factors that might exert some determining effect on the work that is being done by all those agents responsible all over the world for the selection of some plays and not others. The original critical acclaim of an Irish play has always been and still is undoubtedly an important factor, but from the point of view of a country like Portugal that critical acclaim would have a much larger repercussion if it reaches the London or the New York stages than if it stays only limited to Dublin. For instances, the rapid internationalization of the plays by Conor McPherson and Martin McDonagh is also due to the extraordinary presence that at a given moment they have had on the London stages – which might also lead us to suggest that Irish drama, particularly Irish contemporary drama crosses more borders than those that are part of its cultural and political ongoing self-definition, regardless of their symbolic or physical expression.

A similar complex set of interconnected factors explains the strategies adopted in the rewriting and the stage configuration of any Irish play, largely beyond its more specific dramaturgical features. Between a radical disfiguration or a careful adaptation and a more respectful effort dedicated to the preservation of an Irish play's sense of otherness, there's a wide spectrum of possibilities determined not only by the subjective choices of the different artists involved, but also by more systemic factors, among which the conventions of the literary and theatrical target system. To negotiate the ostensive otherness of many Irish plays, particularly those more involved with issues of cultural or national self-representation is

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[6] The examples are *The Theatre of Marina Carr: "before rules was made"*, ed. Cathy Leeney and Anna McMullan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2003), and *The Theatre of Martin McDonagh: A World of Savage Stories*, ed. Lilian Chambers and Eamonn Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2006).

always a complex phenomenon. For instances, the total obliteration of the Irish set of references in the Portuguese adaptation of McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmaan* – transported in a rather crude fashion to of the most remote islands of the Azores – didn't affect the expression of the playwright's peculiar combination of comedy and almost pathetic compassion, although it might have suggested the original existence of a lighter set of comic devices that were somehow the result of that radical experience of rewriting and reconfiguration.[7] The same way, the much more laborious and subtle adaptation of McPherson's *This Lime Tree Bower* to a Portuguese sea-side town or of *The Weir* to a remote southern Portuguese village led to the total disappearance of an almost exotic set of street and place names as well as other cultural references, but it kept intact the astonishing and even seductive story-telling capabilities demonstrated by the playwright.[8]

As someone passionately interested in Irish drama and its contemporary destinies as well as on the complex workings of theatre translation, it has become an enriching experience for me to explore and to understand those different processes of negotiation, but as someone who also dares sometimes to be more actively involved in helping some Irish plays to cross their original borders I have to confess a clear inclination for experiences that allow me – and the audience – to deal with foreign cultural or political realities inscribed in the bodies and on the stages of Portuguese actors and theatres. That's an experience that presents itself not only as more challenging, but also as more enriching.

However, it's important to acknowledge, again for the benefit of Irish drama that even in those cases in which the preservation of a given set of original circumstances and events is decided, the motivation to translate

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[7] I'm referring here to the production with the title *O Aleijadinho do Corvo*, produced by the theatre company Visões Úteis, translated, adapted and directed by António Feio, and premiered in November 1997, in Porto.

[8] The two first Portuguese productions of Conor McPherson's plays – respectively *This Lime Tree Bower* and *The Weir* – were *Água Salgada*, in December 1997, and *Lucefécit*, in March 2000, both translated and adapted by Vera San Payo de Lemos and João Lourenço, and produced by Novo Grupo / Teatro Aberto, in Lisbon.

and to stage a foreign play is always connected with a feeling of the relevance of its fiction and situations for a foreign audience. And that is something intimately connected with the more intangible notion of universality, a complex consideration frequently at odds with the more localised features that originally assured that same universal appeal. Again, what seems to be so fascinating in the translation, performance and study of a foreign, and – specifically for the sake of my argument – an Irish play is precisely that more liminal condition of the Portuguese actor that allows himself to have Ireland – or a particular experience of Ireland – projected all over his body, inviting the spectator to share that same experience, which seems so central to theatre, of being and non-being, in a more permanent back and forward across borders.

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“He said Ireland has more than one story”: Multiple Belongings in Perspective

Teresa Casal
ULICES - University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies

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"He said Ireland has more than one story": Multiple Belongings in Perspective

Preamble

In Oscar Wilde's story "The Happy Prince," the prince lived all his life "in the Palace of Sans-Souci, where sorrow was not allowed to enter". He was the happy prince who played in the daytime, danced in the evening and "never cared to ask what lay beyond" the "very lofty wall" that ran round the garden. So it is only when he dies and is set up "so high that [he] can see all the ugliness and all the misery of [his] city," that "though [his] heart is made of lead yet [he] cannot choose but weep" (Wilde *Works*, 272). Death liberates the prince from his constricted perception sheltered by the garden wall and, by affording him insight into others' lives, changes his former happiness, "if pleasure be happiness," into compassion and attending ethical responsibility.

Focusing on non-fictional and fictional memoirs, respectively Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People* (2003) and *The Sailor in the Wardrobe* (2006), and Jennifer Johnston's *The Gingerbread Woman* (2000), this paper addresses the experience of those who find themselves perceiving the world from outside the walls of the Palace of Sans-Souci, and who as a result try to work out how their perception may both belong to, and change, the prevailing picture of the world they inhabit. As shown in Wilde's story, the Palace of Sans-Souci is an equivocal place where life without cares (sans-souci) is also a life without caring, and where unawareness of one's situatedness in the world is directly linked to unawareness of others' existence and respective situation in the world. In turn, the prince's care and awareness of diversity proceeds from the gap between his perceptions outside the palace and his former perception inside the palace, which had remained uncontaminated by extramural contact. In Hamilton's memoir and Johnston's novel, this gap consists in the

narrators' painful realisation that their experience deviates from dominant monological narratives of identity, specifically of Irish national identity. In both cases shaping their stories is inextricably linked to listening to others' stories. Personal identity is therefore developed within an interpersonal dialogical context, and rendered as a process that sharpens the narrators' and the readers' alertness to perspective and awareness of diversity. Hamilton's memoir and Johnston's fictional memoir thus enact the challenge to broaden ethical possibility by overtly exploring aesthetic possibility.

Introduction

"He said Ireland has more than one story" is a quote from Hugo Hamilton's first volume of memoirs *The Speckled People* (2003). Born in Dublin in 1953, the son of an Irish father and a German mother, Hamilton tells about "the language war" (as he calls it) in which he and his siblings grew up: at home, children were only allowed to speak their mother's language, German, and Irish, the language that their nationalist father believed ought to be Ireland's language; the language spoken outdoors, English, was strictly forbidden indoors, while the languages spoken indoors, particularly German, raised suspicion outdoors.

It is the boy's Irish uncle Ted, a Jesuit, who says Ireland has more than one story. He gives the boy a book about "changing skin", about trying to see what life may be like for people on the side of the losers. The book's metaphor of "changing skin" and the uncle's notion of a home spacious enough to accommodate "more than one story" provide an enabling conceptual framework for Hamilton's self-perception:

> Onkel Ted came out and gave me a book called *Black Like Me*, about a man who changed his skin from white to black, just to see what it was like for other people. He said you have to be on the side of the losers, the people with bad lungs. You have to be with those who are homesick and can't breathe very well in Ireland. He said it makes no sense to hold a stone in your hand. A lot more people would be homeless if you speak the killer language. He said Ireland has more than one story. We are the German-Irish story. We are the English-Irish story,

> too. My father has one soft foot and one hard foot, one good ear and one bad ear, and we have one Irish foot and one German foot and a right arm in English. We are the brack children. Brack, homemade Irish bread with German raisins. We are the brack people and we don't just have one briefcase. We don't just have one language and one history. We sleep in German and we dream in Irish. We laugh in Irish and we cry in German. We are silent in German and we speak in English. We are the speckled people.
>
> (Hamilton, *Speckled*, 282-3)

It is worth examining the reasoning within which Uncle Ted's mind-opening remark occurs. Acknowledging that "Ireland has more than one story" is presented as a vital alternative to "the killer language" predicated on power and the exclusion of "the losers." Indeed, "the killer language" relies on the equivocal assumption that there is "just one language and one history," that individual and collective identities are predicated on a single belonging, and that some belongings are worthier than others, so that some place you on the side of the winners, while others categorise you as a loser and leave you with little "breathing space". The "killer language" thus "makes no sense" because it relies on an assumption that proves destructive and leaves people homeless. Acknowledging the co-existence of multiple histories carries the liberating power of acknowledging the multiple belongings that go into the making of any sense of identity. This is a liberating gesture in that it expands the social "breathing space," making room for the histories that are censored and silenced by the "killer language" of "murderous identities" (Maalouf, *Identités* 1998),[1] that is, of tribal identities based on the equivocal notion of single belongings.

To abandon the "killer language" and acknowledge that we are

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[1] In his essay on "murderous identities," *Les Identités Meurtrières* (1998), the Lebanese-born writer Amin Maalouf examines the perils of the notion of sameness applied both to one's relation to the other, and to one's relation to the self: he contends that murderous "tribal" identities issue from notions that equate identity with "a single belonging" and therefore fail to acknowledge one's multiple and diverse belongings, be they linguistic, religious, ethnic, national, or others, including "*le sentiment d'appartenir aussi à l'aventure humaine*" (Maalouf, *Identités* 188).

"speckled people" involves exploring the challenges and possibilities of a language as self-questioning and alert as "speckled people" are forced to be. This requires that we "change skin," or change perspective as the main character in *Black Like Me* needs to do.

In this paper I propose to look at Hugo Hamilton's memoir, *The Speckled People* (2003) and *The Sailor in the Wardrobe* (2006), and at Jennifer Johnston's novel *The Gingerbread Woman* (2000), and examine how they respectively address the challenges and potentialities of multiple belongings. If, according to some critics, Hamilton's memoir reads like a novel,[2] *The Gingerbread Woman* is a novel that casts itself as a fictional memoir and features its protagonist's attempt to confront memory by overtly shaping it into story. Without overlooking the distinct ethical import between non-fictional and fictional remembrance, I suggest that the novel's self-questioning structure illuminates the narrative process undertaken in Hamilton's memoir insofar as it exposes, and draws the reader's alertness to, the ethical role and the aesthetical procedures of narrative itself.[3]

There are two issues I wish to consider: first, how these narratives do not glamorise the notion of multiple belongings, but are prompted by the difficulties attending the experience thereof in a society governed by tribal notions of identity and by the fear that contact may amount to contami-

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[2] Like Wieland Freund (2004) and Uwe Pralle (2004), Andrew Riemer (2003) argues that, "Though a memoir, *The Speckled People* reads like a novel". Similarly, Trevor Butterworth (2003) claims that "the lyrical power of [Hamilton's] writing stamps his story not as journalism but as literature – and great literature at that. *The Speckled People* is an astonishing achievement, clearly a landmark in Irish nonfiction".

[3] Relevant to my point is Richard Kearney's argument on the ethical role of the aesthetics of storytelling, which facilitates the shareability of experience through empathy: "Sometimes an ethics of memory is obliged to resort to aesthetics of storytelling. Viewers need not only to be made intellectually aware of the horrors of history; they also need to experience the horror of that suffering *as if* they were actually there" (Kearney, *Stories* 62). He also defends the "crucial ethical import" of distinguishing between fictional and non-fictional remembrance: while for fiction "the role of reinvention is what matters most, (…) in cases of psychotherapeutic and historical testimony (…) the function of veridical recall claims primacy" (69).

nation; secondly, how Hamilton's and Johnston's narrators resort to story-telling to put experience into perspective and thereby make it intelligible to themselves and shareable with others. By addressing the difficulty, as well as the necessity, of acknowledging multiple belongings and devising means of negotiating them, these narratives contribute to expand the breathing space wherein Ireland's stories may be told and shared.

Hugo Hamilton's memoir: Multiple belongings as a challenge

Both Hamilton's memoir and Johnston's novel feature narrators who are acutely aware of their multiple belongings because their experience does not fit into dominant narratives. In Hamilton's case, this marginality has to do with the "cultural mixture" of his Irish-German background. As he explains in an essay, writing in the forbidden language becomes a means of working through[4] the "confusion" and "cultural entanglements" experienced as a "speckled" child:

> In many ways it was inevitable that writing would become the only way for me to explain the deep childhood confusion. The prohibition against English made me see that language as a challenge. Even as a child I spoke to the walls in English and secretly rehearsed dialogue I heard outside. I wanted to be like everyone else on the street, not the icon of Gaelic Ireland that my father wanted us to be, nor the good German boy either. My mother dressed us in 'lederhosen' and my father, not to be outdone, bought us Aran sweaters from the west of Ireland. So we were Irish on top and German below. We were

[4] The traumatic past can neither be escaped nor safely contained and its ostensible or subterranean permanence requires instead that it be subject to the "working through" that Greene advocates for feminist metafiction (Greene, *Changing the Story* 14), and Kearney proposes as part of "a hermeneutics of action [that may] respond to the aporias of evil" through practical understanding, working through and pardon (Kearney, *Stories* 100). If, for Freud, psychoanalysis was the process whereby "*Durcharbeiten*" could be effected, Hamilton's and Johnston's works present writing as the self-reflective process whereby the narrators work through and come to terms with the disparate and conflicting elements in their life stories.

> 'the homesick children,' struggling from a very early age with the idea of identity and conflicting notions of Irish history and German history.
> We were meant to be speckled, a word that my father took from the Irish or Gaelic word *breac*, meaning mixed or coloured or spotted like a trout. But that idea of cultural mixture became an ordeal for us, full of painful and comical cultural entanglements out of which we have been trying to find some sense of belonging ever since. There were no other children like me, no ethnic groups that I could attach myself to.
>
> (Hamilton "Speaking to the Walls")

If belonging is a basic need, multiple belongings may turn it into an ordeal, as the Hamilton children precociously sense given their peculiar "cultural mixture". Confusion then results from their exposure to conflicting allegiances so that, in the absence of an available model, they have to figure out for themselves how to deal with their speckled heritage. Their experience of how their disparate belongings set them apart from a mainstream sense of identity renders them homesick, and it is as homesick children that they sense and long for the notion of home that tacitly shapes society: as a given single belonging. Yet, as Hamilton excavates his family's Irish and German histories, he realises that although as a child he was called Nazi by his Irish peers, his mother's family "actually stood against the Nazis in the Third Reich"; similarly, when he discovers that the photograph of the sailor hidden in the wardrobe is his Irish grandfather's, he realises that his father, who prohibited English in the house, had himself grown up in the English language as the son of John Hamilton, who had an English name and served in the Royal Navy. Confusion thus arises not only from the need to negotiate the hyphen between Irish and German, but also to uncover the plurality within each term of that relation. As it turns out, neither the word "German" nor the word "Irish" stand for a single stable allegiance and each term is "impure," to borrow the title of the French translation, *Sang Impur*.

Writing for Hamilton is therefore the means of "liberating [him]self from th[e] silence" and sense of homelessness that marked his childhood. As he argues, "I never thought I had a story until I began to write it down"

(Hamilton, "Speaking to the Walls"). Writing enables him to work through his heritage of "painful and comical cultural entanglements" by recapturing the boy's sensorial and cognitive experience of the world.[5] Engaging with narrative further amounts to honouring his mother's legacy, namely her trust in words and her diary of remembrance: first, it is the mother who explains the world as a struggle between "the fist people" and the "word people", instructing her children not to "fight back" because, "We are the word people and one day we will win them over. One day the silent negative will win them over" (Hamilton, *Speckled* 223)[6]; secondly, the mother's diary provides the form that shapes Hamilton's narrative by setting family history alongside world history, as indicated at the beginning of the second volume of memoirs, *The Sailor in the Wardrobe* (2006):

> My father and mother taught us how to forget and how to remember. My father still makes speeches at the breakfast table and my mother still cuts out pictures and articles from the newspapers to put into her diary when she has time. She wants to make sure that we remember how we grew up and don't repeat what happened to her in Germany. She wants everything to be fixed and glued into her book. Our history and the history of the world all mixed together. There is a lock

[5] As the author explains in an interview, "Ganz am Anfang habe ich anders, mehr als Erwachsene geschrieben. Aber ich bemerkte dabei, dass ich voller Urteil und auch voller Änger schrieb. Nach und nach erkannte ich, dass die Geschichte nur durch die Stimme des Kindes überhaupt zu erzählen ist. Die Verwirrungen, diese Auseinandersetzungen zwischen zwei Kulturen, zwischen den verschiedenen Geschichten meiner Mutter und meines Vaters, wären sonst zu einem ganz dicken Brei verrührt worden" (Hamilton, "Sprache der Rettung"). [At first, I tended to write more as a grown-up. But then I noticed that I was writing out of prejudice and anger. Time and again I realised that if the story was to be told at all, it had to be told through the child's voice. The confusion, these clashes between two cultures, between my mother's and my father's different stories, would otherwise have become a big mess.]

[6] As Patricia Craig notes, "*The Speckled People* sticks for diversity and principled dissent ("the silent negative"), while satisfactorily extending the scope of the Irish memoir" (Craig, Review).

> of blond hair on one page and a picture of Martin Luther King on the next. School reports and pictures of tanks in the streets of Prague facing each other.
>
> (Hamilton, *Sailor* 11-2)

Piecing her diary together requires agency, for it is up to the diarist to decide what to include and what to exclude and how to link and align the included bits and pieces of individual and collective experience. This is also what the narrator of Hamilton's memoir does in his narrative. By narrating history, he realises that he is also interpreting it, devising links and relations, as happens when the German who tried to kill Hitler and the Irish nationalist hero Patrick Pearse are held face to face under the narrator's gaze:

> I looked at the books and noticed that the picture of the man who put the bomb in a briefcase for Germany looked a bit like the picture of the man who started the Easter Rising for Ireland. I had to bend the books a little bit, but when I put the pictures together they looked alike. And they were facing each other, as if they were talking. Patrick Pearse was looking to the right and Claus Schenk Graf von Staufenberg was looking to the left. They seemed not to be even surprised to be in the same room together. (…) They looked like brothers. Claus and Patrick. I sat up in bed and held the two photographs together. (…) They met for one last time in my room with the foghorn still going outside.
>
> (Hamilton, *Speckled* 271-2)

The Speckled People concludes with the narrator's realisation that,

> Maybe your country is only a place you make up in your own mind. Something you dream about and sing about. Maybe it's not a place on the map at all, but just a story full of people you meet and places you visit, full of books and films you've been to. I'm not afraid of being homesick and having no language to live in. I don't have to be like anyone else. I'm walking on the wall and nobody can stop me.
>
> (Hamilton, *Speckled* 295)

Hamilton's memoir testifies to Richard Kearney's argument that,

> We are subject *to* narrative as well as being subjects *of* narrative. We are made by stories before we ever get around to making our own. (…) Moreover, it is because of our belonging to history as story-tellers and story-followers that we are *interested* by stories – in addition to being merely *informed* by facts. (…) This interestedness is essentially ethical in that what we consider *communicable* and *memorable* is also what we consider *valuable*.
>
> (Kearney, *Stories* 153-4)

Apart from illustrating this interestedness, *The Gingerbread Woman* also exposes how history needs story, for, as Kearney argues, "truth is not the sole prerogative of the exact sciences. There is also a truth, with its corresponding understanding, that we may properly call 'narrative'. We need both" (Kearney, *Stories* 148).[7]

The Gingerbread Woman: Story-telling as "structuring the truth"

If Hamilton's memoir tells "the German-Irish story and the English--Irish story," *The Gingerbread Woman* (2000)[8] addresses the risks and fears of contact within and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The novel acknowledges the trauma that results from the experience of contact as contamination, and proposes a non-fusional relatedness

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[7] Kearney makes the point by referring to "testimonial truth" and the Holocaust: "To counter negationism effectively, I believe that the Holocaust needs to be told as *both* history *and* story. (…) The best way of respecting historical memory against revisionism is (…) to combine the most effective forms of narrative witness with the most objective forms of archival, forensic and empirical evidence. For truth is not the sole prerogative of the exact sciences. There is also a truth, with its corresponding understanding, that we may properly call 'narrative'. We need both" (Kearney, *Stories* 148). He adds: "what narrative promises those of us concerned with historical truth is a form of understanding which is neither absolute nor relative, but something in between. (…) It is closer to art than science; or, if you prefer, to a human science than to an exact one" (149-50).

[8] Henceforth quotations from the novel shall be referred by the abbreviation GW followed by the page number.

that enables the telling and sharing of the various stories North and South. At plot and structural level, story-telling emerges as a tentative yet vital process of "structuring the truth" and of making shareable what is "sometimes untellable" (GW 60). Just as Hamilton's mother organised her diary by setting family history alongside world history, so does Johnston's novel present individual histories as permeable to collective history, hence the characters' interestedness in story-telling and in becoming "not only subject *to* narrative," but "subjects *of* it" (Kearney, *Stories* 153).

The Gingerbread Woman (2000) depicts the relations between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland through the casual encounter of two strangers: Clara, a Protestant woman from the Republic, and Laurence, a Catholic man from the North, so both from the minority communities South and North of the Irish border. They are in their mid-thirties, she makes her living by teaching Irish Literature abroad and is recovering from the hysterectomy that followed a disastrous love affair with a New York stockbroker; he is a Maths teacher whose wife and baby daughter were killed accidentally in an attack aimed at an Army truck two years earlier and who struggles with the anger and sense of guilt and betrayal that accompany his now fading memories of wife and daughter. Each reacts differently to their respective loss: while Clara tries to recover from her forced infertility by devising alternative courses for her life, Laurence does not want to be healed, for fear of forgetting; while she decides to write in order to put her experience into perspective, he leaves home and locks himself in his vanishing memories to honour the beloved dead.

The novel that we read is the novel that Clara is writing, which tells her story alongside Laurence's. In both cases, trauma is associated with the imagery of the infected body. The two bodies are respectively individual and collective: Clara's has been infected with gonorrhoea by a charming and callous American stockbroker, and Northern Ireland suffers from "terminal hatred – infectious, contagious, hereditary. A bit like AIDS – incurable" (GW 39), as Clara unsparingly words it.

By interweaving individual and collective trauma, the novel suggests how individual responses to trauma are an integral part of possible collective responses to it, and invites, among others, a political reading of its characters' predicaments. Thus, Clara's busyness teaching Irish Literature abroad hints at the Republic's openness to foreign investment in the 1990s,

and at the extent to which Ireland and Irish culture have themselves become trendy commodities. On a political level, the Gingerbread Woman's story may then read as a cautionary tale for a Republic thriving on foreign investment but, like Clara, risking falling gullibly into the exploitative lure of American capitalism.

Northern Ireland's predicament is, in turn, referred by Laurence as being "gutted by history" (GW 78, 80), being "a gutless people" who have "allowed [themselves] to be collectively bullied" (80).[9] His syntax suggests that those who are bullied are co-implicated in the process for failing to react creatively against the powerful forces of history. In his account, gutlessness translates as voicelessness against the "bull[ying]" and "unreasonable behaviour" of Unionists and Republicans:

> We are a gutless people, not just my family, who don't speak, but the whole damn lot of us. We allowed ourselves to be collectively bullied. (…) We subscribed seriously to the "whatever you say, say nothing" philosophy. We didn't raise our voices against the unreasonable behaviour of the Unionists and now we're having a problem raising our voices against the unreasonable behaviour of the Republicans. Our voices disappeared years ago with our guts, out our backsides. (GW 80)

The imagery of the infected body powerfully indicates the extent to which contact is feared, while silence is presented as colluding in a self-destructive state of affairs. Yet both Clara and Laurence initially regard escape from contact as a self-protective response to fear. She is the cosmopolitan academic who has consistently run away from "that disease called love" (GW 100); he and his wife had each longed to escape from Northern Ireland before their acquaintance, and had afterwards tried to escape from their "gutted" (78, 80) country by insulating themselves in a

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[9] If the body's exposure to invasive contamination was literal in Clara's case, the imagery of the entrails re-emerges here to yet again suggest permeability to external abuse and its destructive effects: gutted and gutless people are left devitalised and therefore incapable of "having the guts" to resist and react against such an assault on their integrity.

family haven, which is then shattered when Caitlin's car collides with her country's history. Yet Clara realises in hindsight how misleading such escapades are, and regards her having "become a non-fugitive" (212) as a symptom of recovered health. Rather than escaping and silence, *The Gingerbread Woman* proposes narrative as a means of unfreezing mutual suspicion and engaging in vital and judicious relatedness.

This tentative but committed movement from isolation to relation and from silence to narration is enacted in the novel's dialogical structure.[10] It inserts individual stories within a dialogical frame, exposes the writing process, foregrounds the role of the interlocutor, and highlights the therapeutic role that narrative plays in Clara and Laurence's encounter.

By overtly exposing the writing process, the novel shows how narrative uses the tools of fictionalisation, namely detachment, perspective and shared imaginative frames. As Clara realises when she starts writing her "notes" (GW 69), framing experience into story requires some degree of detachment "from cruel reality" to enable perspective: "I need to fictionalise him in my mind now, remove his cruel reality which has left scars not just on my body, but on my heart and mind as well" (83). Fictionalisation includes resorting to shareable frames of meaning, such as translating painful adult experience into the widely recognisable version of children's cautionary tales about encounters with dangerous strangers: she summarises her story as "The Gingerbread Woman meets the fox – or was it a wolf? It hardly matters. It was some predator or other, dressed slyly in the clothes of a New York stockbroker" (69).

As a tentative and self-examining narrator,[11] Clara requires an interlocutor both in writing and in her exchanges with Laurence. If writing

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[10] Instead of a conventional homogenising narrative structure orchestrated by a single voice, *The Gingerbread Woman* features Clara's notes for her novel, interspersed with a first-person account of her present circumstances and a third-person narrative of Laurence's experiences and memories, which are presented in italics.

[11] Clara writes to "perhaps anchor [her]self" (GW 67), to "look with a certain coolness at how [she] allowed [her]self to be duped and then (…) 'damaged'" (128), to "vent her] spleen" and "move on" (73), having "salvaged something from the wreck" (203). Her attitude towards writing is not that of a master of her trade but of an apprentice,

is an introspective task which requires a confrontation with her inner voices,[12] Clara's prose also adopts a conversational tone and explicitly addresses her readers.[13] Besides, she begins to write her notes while Laurence is staying in her house and she often prompts him to "talk to [her]" for "[she has] become too self-absorbed" (GW 78), thus proposing talking as a mutually liberating practice: "I am a total stranger. You can tell me everything or nothing, lies or truth. It doesn't matter. It's of no consequence what you say to me" (64). Despite her flippant tone, talking is for both a way out of self-absorption and the word becomes a means of re-articulating their connection to the world.[14] Like Hamilton's narrator,

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who is self-critical and aware of the tricks and traps of "moulding reality into fiction" (89). Sometimes she feels that she is "inventing" (89) her memories, at other times she realises that she will have to "invent" (117) initially overlooked details which slipped from her memory. Similarly, to "use" Laurence's story, she needs to "invent" the third-person sections focused through him.

[12] Both Clara and Laurence entertain monologues in their minds, as she points out to him: "You talk to yourself a lot, (…) I've noticed that. Perhaps not yourself, but some person sitting in your head. I do too, I have to say, but I quite enjoy it. I can make myself laugh. You don't seem to enjoy it" (GW 77).

[13] Clara's addressee features recurrently through the pronoun "you": "As you may gather" or "I suppose I should tell you at this stage" (GW 3); she thus bears in mind her intelligibility to an interlocutor whom she casts as "you people [who] always want to know so much irrelevant stuff. *What?* you ask? *How? Why? When exactly did this happen? What was her motivation? Who? Whom? Whither?*" (…) Writers tell you as much as they wish – that should be enough for you, but it seldom is" (3). The outburst, which reads as a caricature of literal minded critics, is in itself an explicit piece of dialogue with readers addressing basic protocols involved in writing and reading.

[14] Twice in the novel, both times in passages related to Laurence, the word "word" is printed as "world" (GW 78; 96). The seeming misprint points, in an apparently inadvertent fashion, to Ricoeur's notion of the poetic dimension of language leading to the "disclosure of possible worlds" (Ricoeur, "Poetics" 125). It also evokes Rob Pope's description of the relation between "stories" and "histories" as he borrows Deleuze's philosophy to comment on creation myths, from that of the Fulani related by Achebe, to the Biblical Gospel of St John: "what is at issue is a complex sense of *wor(l)d be(com)ing*, where *words* bring *worlds* into being (and vice versa), and apparently static *being* is realised as fluid *becoming* (and vice versa)" (Pope, *Creativity* 142).

listening to stories also places Clara in the role of the active reader "trying to work out the truth from the fiction," for story is a "*structuring*" of the truth which "is never structured in reality. It's all over the place; sometimes untellable" (60). Clara's alertness to the "structuring" and potential manipulation of the truth is in tune with Kearney's thinking on "narrative and the ethics of remembrance":

> Narrative memory is never innocent. It is an ongoing conflict of interpretations. (…) Every history is told from a certain perspective and in the light of specific prejudice (in Gadamer's sense). Memory (…) is not always on the side of the angels. It can as easily lead to false consciousness and ideological closure as to openness and tolerance. This distorting power is sometimes ignored by contemporary advocates of narrative ethics – MacIntyre, Nussbaum, Booth – who tend to downplay the need for a hermeneutic of critical suspicion (*à la* Ricoeur or Habermas). Nor is it properly appreciated by those disciples of Nietzsche's *Second Untimely Considerations* who believe it is sufficient to 'actively forget the past' in order to have done with it.
>
> (Kearney, *Questioning Ethics* 27)

Aware of the intricacies involved in "structuring the truth", Clara never tries to offer a definitive, totalising version of hers or anyone's history.[15] Yet, she does not hesitate in her assessment of the benign effect of Laurence's and hers facing up to their respective traumas and concludes that "[she is her] own person" (GW 212) and that, "He too is his own man. He may not know it yet, but that is his fate" (213). Sharing their narratives despite their mutual ignorance and suspicion does not precipitate any fusional outcome, such as marriage, but leaves each of them capable of envisaging future possibilities for their lives.[16]

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[15] Her reluctance towards assertive conclusions is anticipated in her early remark on "This Be Another Verse" by Roger McGough: "I like the notion of a poem ending with a bracket" (GW 4).

[16] In Clara's case, these include "take to making jam" like her mother, "go to Oughterard with the doctor" and overall "become a non-fugitive" (GW 212). She further realises

The Gingerbread Woman illustrates Ricoeur's claim that "the work of narrative constitutes an essential element of the work of mourning, understood as the acceptance of the irreparable" (Ricoeur, "Narrative" 37). This is deemed a "creative process" that entails "suffering" (41) but may prevent the "[t]wo great sufferings" of "hate and revenge" (42). Mourning is therefore "a way of giving people the right to start anew by remembering in such a way that we may overcome obsessive or compulsive repetition. It is a matter of the right balance between memory and forgetting" (42). This is the process intuited by Hamilton's mother as she keeps her diary, and undertaken in Hamilton's memoir and in Johnston's novel. While Hamilton's memoir accounts for the history of stories and the lineage of story-tellers that enabled him to work out a conceptual framework within which to tell and share his story, Johnston's novel self-questioningly displays the tentative handiwork of narrative remembrance, and indicates to what extent it may be assisted by the tools of fictionalisation. In their respective alertness to the role and workings of story-telling, Hamilton's and Johnston's works suggest that judicious narrative remembrance and understanding contribute to energise the social breathing space, so that opening up to the multiple stories of the past also opens up present and future possibilities.

Ultimately, both the non-fictional and the fictional memoir show that perspective is as much a matter of ethics as of aesthetics, and that the ability to "change skin" requires first of all the ability to perceive oneself in a relational context. Telling stories, including one's own, is thus presented as a tentative dialogical process requiring active alertness to oneself and others, no less than to the common but complex ground of language wherein singularity and shareability need to be carefully negotiated.

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that she "will have to invent [her] own immortality", and will have to rely on words rather than on biology for it, thus expanding the sources of female identity beyond procreation to include other forms of creativity. She describes her relation to words in the following terms: "Words leap and fall in my head, stumble and rush, fight and chatter, like the children I will never have" (212). If one takes the analogy literally, then, like children whose future their parents can neither control nor predict, so will the afterlife of her words elude her self-deprecating authority and remain open to readers' responses.

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"It's just one of the wonders of the world": James Donaghue in *Under the Net*

Ana Raquel Fernandes
ULICES - University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies

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"It's just one of the wonders of the world": James Donaghue in *Under the Net*

> There is only outward activity, ergo only outward moral activity, and what we call inward activity is merely the shadow of this cast back into the mind.
>
> Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970)

Introduction

Opening Iris Murdoch's novel *Under the Net* (1954) the reader faces an epigraph: it is an excerpt from *The Secular Masque* by John Dryden (1631-1700). This brief dramatic piece, mythological in character, celebrates the end of the century – hence the 'secular,' from the Latin *saeculares*.[1] The verses that follow, performed by the Chorus, are the end of the play; they echo Momus's satire directed at the gods: Diana ('Thy Chase had a Beast in view'), Mars ('Thy Wars brought nothing about') and Venus ('Thy Lovers were all untrue'), and epitomize the main theme of the masque, the end of one century ("'Tis well an Old Age is out") and the beginning of another ('And time to begin a New').

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[1] John Dryden's *The Secular Masque* was first published in: John Fletcher, *The Pilgrim, a Comedy [in five acts and in prose]: as it is acted at the Theatre Royal, in Drury Lane. Written originally by Mr. Fletcher, and now very much alter'd [by Sir John Vanbrugh]; with several additions. Likewise a prologue, epilogue, dialogue and masque, written by the late great poet Mr. Dryden, just before his death, being the last of his works* (London: Benjamin Tooke, 1700). For a recent publication see: John Dryden, *The Poems and Fables of John Dryden*, ed. by James Kinsley (1962; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980): 836-839.

All, all of a piece throughout:
Thy Chase had a Beast in view:
Thy Wars brought nothing about;
Thy Lovers were all untrue.
'Tis well an Old Age is out,
And time to begin a New.

The epigraph, representative of changing times, illustrates not only the metamorphosis suffered by the novel's main character, Jake Donaghue, but also the placing of Murdoch's style in a new literary context: that of post-war Britain.

Under the Net: The Picaresque Plot

> The first-person novels, then, cause the reader to reflect on his or her interpretive role […]: all the time the narrator is voraciously reading what goes on around him, someone else is reading him.
>
> Bran Nicol, *Iris Murdoch: the Retrospective Fiction* (1999)

Indeed Iris Murdoch's first novel, *Under the Net*, has often been linked to groundbreaking fictional works such as John Wain's *Hurry On Down* (1953) and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim* (1954).[2] The novel follows a picaresque structure, recounting a series of episodes narrated in the first person by James Donaghue, known as Jake. Moreover, London becomes the central setting of the main character's adventures (particularly Holborn and the financial districts), together with brief but important scenes that take place in another great and enigmatic city, Paris (for instance, Madge's

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[2] Cf.: Kingsley Amis, 'Laughter to Be Taken Seriously,' *New York Times Book Review* (7 July 1957): 1-13; Kenneth Allsop, *The Angry Decade: A Survey of the Cultural Revolt of the Nineteen-Fifties* (1958; London: Peter Owen Limited, 1969) 51-103; Angela Hague, 'Picaresque Structure and the Angry Young Novel,' *Twentieth Century Literature* 32.2 (Summer 1986): 209-220.

offer of a job to the central character as a film scriptwriter and Jake's dream-like chase of Anna through the Tuileries gardens on the night of the 14th of July). From the very beginning, Jake remains an outsider in the society he depicts. Steven G. Kellman explains: 'Jake is perpetually homeless and on the move. A recurrent element in the novel is his quest for a place to spend the night.'[3] Indeed, in Jake's itinerary the nights are of particular significance, acting as moments of transition from one episode to another. As for the central character, Jake describes himself in the following manner:

> My name is James Donaghue, but you needn't bother about that, as I was in Dublin only once, on a whiskey blind, and saw daylight only twice, when they let me out of Store Street police station, and then, when Finn put me on the boat for Holyhead. That was in the days when I used to drink. I am something over thirty and talented, but lazy. I live by literary hack-work, and a little original writing, as little as possible. [...] What is more important for the purposes of this tale, I have shattered nerves. Never mind how I got them. That's another story, and I am not telling you the whole story of my life. I have them; and one effect of this is that I can't bear being alone for long. That's why Finn is so useful to me.[4]

Jake is a failed artist, who has stopped doing original work (he once composed an epic poem, entitled 'And Mr. Oppenheim Shall Inherit the Earth,' and published a philosophical dialogue, *The Silencer*) and earns his living by translating the novels of the French writer Jean Pierre Breteuil. At the very start of the novel Jake has finished translating Breteuil's *Le Rossignol de Bois* (*The Wooden Nightingale*). As the reader soon learns, there are striking similarities between the plot of this novel and the action in *Under the Net*. The former, according to Jake, is about 'a young

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[3] Steven G. Kellman, 'Under the Net: The Self-Begetting Novel,' *Iris Murdoch*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) 98.

[4] Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net*, introduction by Kiernan Ryan (1954; London: Vintage, 2002) 23. Henceforward all quotations will be signalled by *UTN* followed by the number of the pages quoted.

composer who is psychoanalysed and then finds that his creating urge is gone' (*UTN* 22). Although Jake does not acknowledge Breteuil's talent, he confesses that this particular novel is entertaining ('I enjoyed this one, though it's bad best-selling stuff like everything that Jean Pierre writes'; *UTN* 22). Perhaps part of the enjoyment comes from the empathy he feels for the protagonist of *The Wooden Nightingale*. Jake is not psychoanalysed but it is after recording in *The Silencer* the conversations he had had with Hugo Belfounder (while at a cold cure clinic) that he stops writing creatively. It turns out that Hugo, or rather his philosophical ideas about truth and language, are the main subject matter of *Under the Net*. Jake explains: 'I omitted to mention earlier that I am acquainted with Belfounder. As my acquaintance with Hugo is the central theme of this book, there was little point in anticipating it' (*UTN* 60). This revelation bestows on Murdoch's novel a philosophical dimension, overtly related to moral concerns, which is less foregrounded in the first novels of other 'angry young men,' such as John Wain and Kingsley Amis. Nevertheless, Jake's major quest for Hugo Belfounder and for his love, Anna Quentin, together with the search for a home and money, are clear marks of a picaresque structure, reinforced by a comic form.

Indeed, throughout the novel, often with his friend Finn, Jake gets involved in the most awkward situations. In search of a place to live, he accepts the job of housesitting Sadie's home. However, he soon discovers that he has been deliberately locked in. He decides to pick the lock of the kitchen door and not finding a suitable tool he asks for the help of his friends, Dave and Finn:

> It was a simple lock. I am in general not too bad at picking locks, a skill which was taught to me by Finn, who is very good at it. But I could make nothing of this one, largely because I couldn't find a suitable tool. [...]
> I had been leaning there some while [...] when I saw two familiar figures coming down the other side of the street. It was Finn and Dave. [...]
> "I can't come out," I said calmly, "and I can't ask you in either."
> [...]
> Finn and Dave looked at each other, and then they collapsed helplessly. Dave sat down on the kerb choking with laughter

> and Finn leaned weakly against the lamp-post. They rocked.
> [...]
> "Look here," I said, impatiently, "stop laughing and get on with getting me out of here." (*UTN* 97-99).

On another occasion Jake and Finn break into Sam Starfield's flat in a failed attempt to recover Jake's translation of Breteuil's novel. Indeed, after overhearing a conversation between Sadie and Sammy, Jake is furious to find out that they plan to use his translation as the basis for a film, without telling him. This episode becomes one of the most comic scenes in the novel. Inside the flat the two friends find a cage with a large Alsatian dog (the Marvellous Mister Mars, a star of animal movies). Since they do not find the typescript Jake decides to kidnap the dog:

> "Finn," I said slowly, "I have an absolutely wonderful idea."
> "What?" said Finn suspiciously.
> "We'll kidnap the dog," I said.
> Finn stared at me. "What in the world for?" he said.
> "Don't you see?" I cried, and as the glorious daring and simplicity of the scheme became even plainer to me I capered about the room. "We'll hold him as a hostage, we'll exchange him for the typescript." (*UTN* 142)

After taking pains to move Mr Mars and his cage down the stairs and into the taxi, the scene ends, after absurdly lengthy efforts to open the cage, with Jake and Finn celebrating Mr Mars' freedom. But the climax of this episode only really comes with the intervention of a third character, who has witnessed the efforts to free the dog:

> As we talked, the taxi-driver was looking at the thing thoughtfully. "Unreliable," he said, "these fancy locks. Always getting jammed, ain't they?" He put his hand through the bars and pressed a spring on the underside of the roof. One of the sides of the cage immediately fell open with oily smoothness. That put an end to that discussion. Finn and I studied the face of the taxi-driver. He looked back at us guilelessly. We felt beyond making any comment. (*UTN* 151)

It is in the company of Mr Mars that Jake carries on the search for his philanthropist friend, Hugo. A. S. Byatt describes him in the following

way: 'a curious combination of pacifist, capitalist and craftsman.'[5] Indeed, after having inherited an armaments firm, he converted it to the fireworks business, viewing pyrotechnics as a kind of momentary art. Later, Hugo goes into films and his studio becomes very successful. Eventually, he abandons these activities and by the end of the novel he becomes an apprentice to a watch-maker in Nottingham.

The destruction of the Bounty Belfounder Studio, in South London, is directly related to Jake. In the film studio the protagonist will find a reconstruction of the city of Rome (the Catilinarian Conspiracy is being shot); he will also witness the meeting of the N.I.S.P. (the New Independent Socialist Party), recognising 'Lefty' Todd, the character who throughout the novel advocates the alliance between theory and practice in politics. Jake will finally meet Hugo but their encounter is abruptly interrupted by a riot (the United Nationalists break up the meeting and are followed by the police). In a successful attempt to escape, Hugo sets off a Belfounder's Domestic Detonator, destroying the structure of the whole city. Lefty and Hugo escape but Jake is left behind. Eventually, he eludes the police but only with the help of Mr Mars, who plays dead in what constitutes another extremely comic episode:

> Imagine my dismay when I saw that between me and the railway line, across the piece of waste ground from one side to the other, there now stretched a thin but regular cordon of police. [...] I addressed Mars. "You got me in to this," I told him. "You can get me out." [...] "Sham dead,' I said. "Dead! Dead dog!" [...] As I approached the main gate I came into a focus of attention [...]. The police barred my way. They had their orders to let no one out. [...] I strode resolutely on [...]. "The dog's hurt! I must find a vet! There's one just down the road." [...] I walked through the gates. The crowd parted with respectful and sympathetic remarks. As soon as I was clear of them [...], I could bear it no longer.
> "Wake up! Live dog!" I said to Mars; as I knelt down he

[5] A. S. Byatt, *Degrees of Freedom. The Novels of Iris Murdoch* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970) 28.

> sprang from my shoulder, and together we set off down the road at full pelt. Behind us, diminishing now in the distance, there arose an immense roar of laughter. (*UTN* 170-172)

Examples of comic situations abound in *Under the Net*. And one could easily refer to other episodes, such as the escape from the hospital towards the end of the novel.[6] The three excerpts quoted above are reminiscent of well-known scenes in other novels of the period. Some examples may be found in Wain's *Hurry On Down*: the unpleasant interview between the protagonist, Edith and Robert Tharkles (the sister and brother-in-law of Charles Lumley's girlfriend, Sheila); the meeting with Charles's old headmaster, Mr Scrodd, who is outraged by the main character's proposal to work at the school as a window-cleaner; and the tricks Charles plays on George Hutchins at Mr Braceweight's home (in Sussex). Moreover, in Amis's *Lucky Jim*, there are many examples of humorous scenes: Jim's accident with the bedlinen at the Welches', his attempt to deceive Mrs Welch and her son Bertrand on the telephone and the drunken lecture on 'Merrie England' are just a few.

Kenneth Allsop, in his study *The Angry Decade*, considers Wain's *Hurry On Down*, Amis's *Lucky Jim* and Iris Murdoch's *Under the Net*, among others. After quoting a passage from the latter, in which Finn rescues Jake from Sadie's apartment, Allsop remarks: '[t]hat Lucky Jimmish situation, familiar in its tone of moral bigandry, is from one of the early chapters of *Under the Net* by Iris Murdoch, which came out in 1954 – about a year after *Lucky Jim* and Wain's first novel.'[7] Furthermore, he affirms that judging from Jake's 'rootless and restless' lifestyle ('[c]adging, scrounging, pinching and sleeping around'), he is undoubtedly a character born of the fifties: 'Jake's existence is instantly recognisable in the context of the novels of the early Nineteen-Fifties.'[8] Moreover, according to Richard Todd, *Under the Net* is decidedly: "a novel of its time, its central character an 'outsider' figure, its form a tale of picaresque adventure –

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[6] *UTN* 242-266.

[7] Allsop 97.

[8] Allsop 97.

a form itself raising questions about the way in which 'necessary' and 'contingent' elements go into the making of novels."[9]

Nevertheless, the comparison between Murdoch's Jake Donaghue and Wain's Charles Lumley as well as Amis' Jim Dixon is not without controversy. Peter Wolfe, for example, has suggested that Jake deviates from the picaresque tradition precisely because he is too meditative. Wolfe argues:

> The strong satirical interest and wide social sweep generally associated with the picaresque novel demand that the hero be roguish and cunning, but not meditative. If he reflects deeply, narrative movement is choked and the social panorama diminished and blurred. Jake's defect is that he is simply not rascal enough.[10]

Wolfe is accurate when he suggests that the main character of the picaresque novel is roguish and cunning. And since the picaresque follows an episodic structure he is also right when he affirms that action prevails over meditation. However, moments of meditation abound in both the picaresque novel and the rogue novel. The latter was much influenced by the former, but slowly managed to secure a definite position in the

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[9] Richard Todd, *Iris Murdoch* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984) 26.

[10] Peter Wolfe, *The Disciplined Heart: Iris Murdoch and her novels* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1966) 64.

Furthermore, Hilda D. Spear explains this deviation contextualizing Murdoch's first novel in the whole of the author's oeuvre: "Iris Murdoch repeatedly concerns herself in her novels with art and artifice and it is this aspect of them, perhaps, that denies the appellation 'Angry Young Woman' that was foisted upon her in the 1950s. The picaresque character of Jake's adventures and the apparent rootlessness of his own character encouraged the critics to see him as a kind of 'Lucky Jim' (his adventures could never, surely, have been equated with those of John Osborne's Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger*, the original 'angry young man'). Murdoch has always denied the association and the further we travel from the 1950s, the clearer it is that, whilst the novels of the 'Angry Young Men' were the forerunners of the disillusioned 'University novels' of today, Murdoch was in process of creating a novelistic world unique to her own art, a world which attempts to grapple, not with the so-called social realism of the 1950s and 1960s, but rather with the malaise that lies at the heart of life […]." Hilda D. Spear, *Iris Murdoch* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) 23-24.

development of the British novel. The solipsistic view of life presented by the first person narrators of both the picaresque and rogue novels demonstrate the ambiguity that fills these narratives. And the comedy of situation, the humour and wit proper to these novels do not in the least obliterate the moral dimension that lies beneath. Even if not explicitly, the picaresque and the rogue novels present characters that think about the world they live in, who survive in adverse circumstances, denouncing society's hypocrisy and contradictions, and eventually prompting the reader to reflect. The main character of *Under the Net* is certainly a rogue and may therefore be linked with the celebrated novel protagonists of the fifties, such as Lumley and Dixon, as well as with previous examples of roguish characters in British literature, such as Gulley Jimson in Joyce Cary's *The Horse's Mouth* (1944). Indeed both Gulley and Jake are excellent illustrations of the rogue depicted as an artist and as such, they meditate on the way art can accommodate life.

Under the Net: The Humanistic Tradition

> The end is in the beginning and yet you go on.
>
> Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (1957)

"I am not telling you the whole story of my life" (*UTN* 23), Jake informs the reader at the beginning of the novel. What is *Under the Net* all about, then? In his introduction to the novel (2002 edition), Kiernan Ryan explains:

> In a nutshell, *Under the Net* is Jake Donaghue's account of how he became the writer who wrote *Under the Net*. It's Murdoch's portrait of the artist as a restless, feckless, penniless young man on a quest to find out what he thinks, who he loves, and where his life is heading.[11]

[11] Iris Murdoch, *Under the Net*, introduction by Kiernan Ryan, ix.

Jake's adventures cover a period of one week and they start and end in the same location: the mysterious Mrs Tinckham's newsagent's shop. However, during this interval of time the main character radically changes his attitude towards life. If at the beginning of the novel Jake states: 'I hate contingency. I want everything in my life to have a sufficient reason' (*UN* 26); at the very end he is open to the randomness of the world. When asked about a very simple circumstance, the difference between Mrs Tinck's kittens, Jake reacts in the following way:

> "Oh, but that's how it always is. It's quite simple," I said.
> "Why is it then? said Mrs Tinck.
> "Well," I said, "it's just a matter of…" I stopped. I had no idea what it was a matter of. I laughed and Mrs Tinckham laughed.
> "I don't know why it is," I said. "It's just one of the wonders of the world." (*UN* 286)

Steven G. Kellman suggests that this scene reveals the protagonist as a complete being, ready to accept reality as it is: '[h]is final comment, "It's just one of the wonders of the world," is an indication of Jake's progress as human being and artist in embracing the untidy dappledness of the world.'[12] Indeed, Jake's final words are illustrative of his metamorphosis and are also an echo of Iris Murdoch's ideas on reality. She discusses this subject at length in her essay 'Against Dryness.' Commenting on the inadequacy of existing theories of personality (mostly inherited from Romanticism), she opposes imagination to fantasy and advocates the need for a Liberal theory of personality. According to Murdoch, art and literature in particular play an important role in conveying the truth about the density of life:

> [R]eality is not given whole. An understanding of this, a respect for the contingent, is essential to imagination as opposed to fantasy. […] Real people are destructive of myth,

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[12] Steven G. Kellman, 'Under the Net: The Self-Begetting Novel,' *Iris Murdoch*, edited and with an introduction by Harold Bloom (New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986) 101.

> contingency is destructive of fantasy and opens the way to imagination. […] But since reality is incomplete, art must not be too much afraid of incompleteness. Literature must always represent a battle between real people and images; and what it requires now is a much stronger and more complex conception of the former.[13]

At the end of the narrative Jake is ready to undergo an artistic regeneration, realizing that he can, in fact, write a novel.[14] This is only possible because the main character is impelled, apparently randomly, to further explore reality. Jake's enlightenment is mainly due to his (re)encounter with two main characters: Anna Quentin and Hugo Belfounder. It is Anna who leads Jake to Hugo (though Jake will only actually search for him after meeting Anna's sister, the actress Sally Quentin). The episode in the Riverside Miming Theatre in Hammersmith is highly significant: the protagonist finds the woman he loves, Anna, a former singer, now committed to the philosophy of silence. The description of the theatre is dominated by dream-like imagery:

> [A]nd then in an instant I understood. I was in the gallery of a tiny theatre. The gallery, sloping and foreshortened, seemed to give immediately onto the stage; and on the stage were a number of actors, moving silently to and fro, and wearing masks which they kept turned toward the auditorium. These masks were a little larger than life […]. (*UTN* 40)

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[13] Iris Murdoch, 'Against Dryness: a Polemical Sketch,' 20.

[14] As Steven Kellman suggests, *Under the Net* can be linked to the tradition of the self-begetting novel, a major sub-genre of the twentieth century. The self-begetting novel finds its paradigm in French literature, more specifically, in Marcel Proust's *À la recherché du temps perdu*: 'It is an intensely reflexive novel, employing, in addition to the nascent artist Marcel, such figures as Vinteuil, Bergotte, and Elstir in an effort to keep the reader conscious at all times of the problematic status of art.' Kellman 95.

Like Marcel, Jake is a writer concerned with language, truth and art. Furthermore, he is surrounded by characters, such as the singer Anna Quentin, the philosopher Dave Gellman and the philanthropist Hugo Belfounder, all of whom will help him in his quest.

In his analysis of the novel Malcolm Bradbury alludes to the surrealistic features found in *Under the Net*, mentioning some of the possible literary influences on Murdoch: '[t]here can surely be no doubt that surrealistic is the right word to use here; the dedication to Raymond Queneau should remind us that […] there is a very modern vein of fantasy at work here too.'[15] Jake's two crucial (mis)encounters with Anna – at the Mime Theatre and his unfruitful chase at the Tuileries gardens in Paris – are good illustrations of Bradbury's argument. Indeed the two scenes are permeated by an atmosphere of reverie.[16] A.S. Byatt further explains Jake's relationship with this female character, Anna, emphasizing her naturalness:

> [S]he is seen as pure art, divorced from social distortions, divorced as far as possible from the distorting effects of speech. Her theories of art resemble those of Hugo, although they are not identical, and it is not her 'philosophy of silence' that Jake finds attractive in her or pursues […].[17]

When the protagonist first meets Anna, she elucidates the relationship between art and life: she refuses singing because it is corrupt,

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[15] Malcolm Bradbury, Iris Murdoch's 'Under the Net,' *The Critical Quaterly* 4:1 (Spring, 1962): 53. And indeed right from the beginning of the novel there are direct allusions to Raymond Queneau's *Pierrot mon ami* as well as to Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, which hold a place in Donaghue's bookshelf.

Also according to Richard Todd: 'Early reviewers of *Under the Net* were prolix in their comparisons, reading affinities with Cocteau, the Marx brothers, the Crazy Gang, Joyce Cary, Henry Green, E. M. Forster, Kafka and Dostoevsky. But the fruitful comparisons remain with Beckett and the dedicatee, Raymond Queneau.' Todd 29.

[16] For the scene at the Riverside Miming Theatre see *UTN* 38-54; for the episode in Paris (at the Pont Saint-Michel and the Tuileries gardens) see *UTN* 213-220.

[17] Byatt 23. Also according to Byatt: "The relationship of Anna and her view of art to Jake's freedom becomes clearest, perhaps, if we examine her relation to Miss Murdoch's study of Sartre's *La Nausée*. […] Anna, in *Under the Net*, is surely related to the world where 'circles and melodies retain their pure and rigid contours'. The last scene in *Under the Net* where Jake, in Mrs Tinckham's shop, hears Anna on the wireless, singing 'an old French love song' is surely a deliberate parallel of the final scene in *La Nausée* […]." Byatt 25.

choosing rather mime as a 'very simple' and 'very pure' form of art:

> "What is this place, Anna?" I asked.
> "That's one of the things that would be hard to explain, Jakie, […] It's a little experiment."
> This phrase grated on me. It didn't sound like Anna at all. There was some other voice here. I thought I would pick my way round this.
> "What about your singing?" I asked.
> "Oh, I've given up singing," said Anna. "I shan't sing any more." […] "The sort of singing I do is so" – she searched for the word – "ostentatious. There's no truth in it. One's just exploiting one's charm to seduce people." […]
> "How about the theatre?" I asked. "How does that come in?"
> "This is pure art," said Anna. "It's very simple and it's very pure." (*UTN* 46)

Eventually Jake recognises in Anna's experiment the influence of a former acquaintance, Hugo Belfounder. And indeed, once the nature of the relationship between the two characters (Jake and Hugo) becomes clear – after the narrator/protagonist introduces the reader to Belfounder – the novel's focus shifts. *Under the Net* evolves into a reflection on the relationship between language and reality: how truth can only be obtained in silence and how all acts of theorizing are flights from truth.

Jake and Hugo's acquaintance goes back to the time in which both characters participated in a cold-cure experiment. They engage in a philosophical discussion about the nature of communication:

> "But suppose I try hard to be accurate," I said.
> "One can't be," said Hugo. "The only hope is to avoid saying it. As soon as I try to describe, I'm done for. Try describing anything, our conversation for instance, and see how absolutely instinctively you…"
> "Touch it up?" I suggested.
> "It's deeper than that," said Hugo. "The language just won't let you present it as it really was." […]
> "So we never really communicate?"
> "Well," he said, "I suppose *actions* don't lie." (*UTN* 67-68)

Hugo will have such a tremendous influence upon Jake that the latter will feel compelled to produce a book entitled *The Silencer*. In it, and through the fictional characters of Tamarus and Annandine, he gives voice to both his and Hugo's points of view. However, Jake never shares this with his friend and once the book is published, he feels he has betrayed Hugo and vanishes (until the moment he meets Anna again). This episode creates difficulties for Jake, which he will try to solve throughout the novel. Within this context, the title *Under the Net* becomes extremely significant, pointing to the central problem of the book.[18] To begin with, the expression 'under the net' is employed by Hugo (Annandine):

> All theorizing is flight. We must be ruled by the situation itself and this is unutterably particular. Indeed it is something to which we can never get close enough, however hard we may try as it were to crawl *under the net*. (*UTN* 91, my emphasis)

It is Hugo who raises the dilemma of the novel and it is Jake, the artist, who will have to find a solution for it: 'picking one's way between the opposed camps of theory and silence, the "unutterably particular quality"

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[18] According to Byatt: "Miss Murdoch has said that the image of the net of which she was thinking when she wrote the book was that of Wittgenstein (*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.341). Here Wittgenstein uses the net as a picture of the way in which concepts, ideas, connections of thought, can be used to 'bring the description of the universe to a unified form'. (He instances Newtonian mechanics.)" Byatt 15.

Marijke Boucherie further explains the relation between Wittgenstein's philosophy and Iris Murdoch's fiction: 'A separação ascética entre facto e valor que Wittgenstein preconiza em *Tratado Lógico-Filosófico* constitui o termo contrastivo da arte de Iris Murdoch que tenta fazer nos romances o que o pensador austríaco diz ser impossível na filosofia: "Acerca daquilo que se não pode falar, tem que se ficar em silêncio". [...] Ao contrário de Wittgenstein, Iris Murdoch não se cala e, romance após romance, cria personagens cujos pensamentos, actos e reacções perante pessoas e objectos são imbuidos de medos, paixões, obsessões, alegrias e prazeres. Em Murdoch, o silêncio puro de Wittgenstein é paradoxalmente criado por *reductio ad absurdum* da tagaralice caótica da contingência humana que os romances colocam em cena.' Marijke Boucherie, '"Joie de Vivre": A Arte Romanesca de Iris Murdoch,' *Actas do XVI Encontro da Associação Portuguesa de Estudos Anglo-Americanos* (Vila Real: Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, 1996) 312.

of human situations and the social presentation of them in art.'[19] Thus, it is no mere coincidence that the title of the book Jake is producing (as he narrates his story, taken from the conversation that he includes in *The Silencer*) and the title of Murdoch's novel are the same. Iris Murdoch explains:

> [*Under the Net*] plays with a philosophical idea. The problem which is mentioned in the title is the problem of how far conceptualizing and theorizing, which from one point of view are absolutely essential, in fact divide you from the thing which is the object of theoretical attention.[20]

Jake's great achievement by the end of his adventures is his capacity to accept that contingency is intrinsic to life and that one ought to be open to different interpretations of reality. Indeed, throughout the novel Jake suffers delusion after delusion until he is free from all misconceptions and ready to become a true artist. His final meeting with Hugo at the hospital towards the end of the novel helps the protagonist to understand that he has often formed hasty and false impressions of people and situations around him. Hugo, against Jake's assumptions, praises *The Silencer*: 'Your thing was so clear. I learned an awful lot from it' (*UTN* 250), and clarifies the love rectangle in which Jake takes part (clearly showing Jake that he had got it all the wrong way around): 'I'm terribly sorry about all this, Jake; it's like life, isn't it? I love Sadie, who's keen on you, and you love Anna, who's keen on me. Perverse, isn't it?' (*UTN* 256). As Widmann further explains:

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[19] Bradbury 50.

[20] Frank Kermode, 'The House of Fiction. Interviews with Seven Novelists (1963),' *The Novel Today. Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (1977; London: Fontana Press, 1990): 117-144. [Frank Kermode's 'The House of Fiction' was first published in the *Partisan Review* 30 (1963): 61-82).]

In the novel (*Under the Net*) the reference to the title appears in the following excerpt: 'ANNANDINE: […] All theorizing is flight. We must be ruled by the situation itself and this is unutterably particular. Indeed it is something to which we can never get close enough, however hard we may try as it were to crawl under the net' (*UTN* 91).

> Jake, in actuality, is the person bound by nets of delusion. He is mistaken about almost everything. He thinks Finn will never go back to Ireland; Finn goes to Ireland. When he finds Anna again he plans a reunion: Anna will not allow it and escapes him, in London and Paris. He thinks that Jean Pierre Breteuil is a no-good hack; Jean Pierre wins the Prix Goncourt. Jake thinks Sammy is completely dishonourable; Sammy sends him the check for horserace winnings. Jake thinks Mister Mars will be useful for blackmail; precisely the reverse occurs, because Jake has to pay for Mars. Jake thinks that Hugo is a philosopher; Hugo disclaims responsibility for philosophizing.[21]

Thus the end of *Under the Net* is contained in its beginning; to be precise, in its epigraph. Just as in Dryden's final verses in *The Secular Masque*, Jake will find out that it is time to begin anew ("'Tis well an Old Age is out" / "And time to begin a New"). As Kellman so accurately argues: '[t]he sense of rebirth, rededication, and liberation at the conclusion of *Under the Net* derives from the promise of a work which will succeed in understanding the contingent world and thereby uttering what is "unutterably particular."'[22] Furthermore, Murdoch's adoption of the picaresque structure (highlighting contingency and discontinuity) and of the corresponding rogue character is a clear indication of her philosophical ideas as expressed in her novels.

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[21] R. L. Widmann, 'Murdoch's *Under the Net*: Theory and Practice of Fiction,' *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction* 10.1 (1968): 14.

[22] Kellman 101.

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A Prelude to Joyce's *Chamber Music*

João Almeida Flor
ULICES - University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies

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A Prelude to Joyce's *Chamber Music*

James Joyce's first published book, *Chamber Music* (1907), is a sequence or a suite of thirty-six short pieces that revisit several traditional themes and topics in European love poetry and reshape them in the light of late 19th century sensibility and musical taste.

Ominously enough, the manuscript had been rejected by no less than four publishers (Grant Richards, John Lane, Heinemann and Constable) before Elkin Mathews agreed to have it printed. In fact, professional critics later echoed such an apparent lack of spontaneous interest and for the past hundred years the book's place in Joyce's canon has often been controversially discussed.

Several early reviewers bitterly regretted that Joyce's lyrical inspiration was mainly of a literary nature and clearly out of touch with the cultural and political reawakening of contemporary Ireland. For all his enthusiasm about a fellow countryman's work, even Yeats later remarked that Joyce had never anything to do with Irish politics, extremist or otherwise, because he seemed to have only literary and philosophic sympathies. Furthermore, later day critics have not been particularly enthusiastic about the somewhat retrospective character of *Chamber Music* and its tribute to allegedly exhausted literary clichés, especially when compared to the challenging, groundbreaking achievement of Joyce's mature masterpieces, namely *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*.

Nevertheless, while conceding that there is some indisputable truth in a comparative assessment of *Chamber Music* as a minor work by a major author, we should guard ourselves against the sheer dismissal of Joyce's early verse as an uninspired prologue to higher achievements. In fact, Joyce's life and artistic career are a sustained continuum where, more often than not, the existence of dark holes and false starts should be ascribed to the

misguided critical judgement of biographers or literary historians, who fail to establish the links between the various stages in the development of the artist's work.

As a matter of fact, it seems appropriate not to overlook the documentary value of *Chamber Music* in so far as it might be profitably approached as a kind of aesthetic laboratory where Joyce experimented with various styles, forms, and modes of expression. In particular, the book documents an early Joycean attempt to explore the interaction between sound and meaning, with a view to the ideal blending of two complementary discourses, i.e. poetry and music. Such a revaluation would redress the balance in establishing the literary interest of *Chamber Music*, which might then emerge as a significant step both in the progress of Joyce's art and in the development of the poetry and poetics of the pre-modernist generation.

In fact, Joyce's plan to publish a volume of poems dates back to 1902-03, when a number of pieces had reached their final version but it took the author another five years to complete the whole, rearrange the sequence and overcome his hesitation in submitting the manuscript to would-be publishers and finally seeing it through the press. Somehow, he was probably aware that the politically uncommitted tone of his poems would hardly meet the taste and expectations of both the public and the critics. Besides, the impersonal undertones of the text's outmoded amatory art seemed to show through the surface of his lyrics, turning them into a kind of period pieces, possibly apt to be published and set to music as a suite of songs after the model of Elizabethan composers. In fact, a letter to Stanislaus (February 1907) reads:

> I don't like the book but wish it were published and be damned to it. However, it is a young man's book. I felt like that. It is not a book of love-verses at all, I perceive. But some of them are pretty enough to be put to music. I hope someone will do so, someone that knows old English music, as I like. [1]

The title chosen, *Chamber Music*, obviously announces the enclosed, intimate atmosphere that normally surrounds the performance of a very

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[1] Stuart Gilbert (ed.), *The Letters of James Joyce*, London, 1957, I, 45.

limited number of string instruments. It also stresses the predominance of rhythmical and melodic effects over the general argument of the lyrical sequence and over the verbal substance of each particular poem. Nevertheless, let me add in parenthesis that in his characteristically ironic, scatological vein, Joyce has later given rise to the belief that the title simply alluded to the sound of young lady's urine while she made use of a chamber pot. The misnomer requires no further comment here, but readers will probably notice that references to bodily excretions or any obscene associations have no place in *Chamber Music* that in fact excludes every substandard language register.

The macro-structure of *Chamber Music* follows the fashion of Renaissance sonnet sequences, since the final arrangement of poems illustrates the fictional narrative of the various stages in the personal involvement of young lovers and their initiation into the exhilarating pleasures and inevitable shortcomings of erotic experience.

It is worth noticing that Joyce had delved into Elizabethan literary conventions and symbols to the point that even the metaphorical structure of *Chamber Music* reflects the influence of Shakespearean imagery. The sequence encompasses the cycle of the year's seasons and the periods of the day, as a means of evoking the cosmic counterpoint of human life, as the episodes of the love story alternate from intense euphoria to deepest melancholy. The very choice of the English bard as a model may sound slightly puzzling but on closer look two complementary explanations can be offered. First, in spite of the fact that his plays unmistakably hinted at the supremacy of England and her Empire, Shakespeare's genius had been hailed since the Romantic age as the supreme example of the way in which the great classics do supersede all polarities and lie beyond the boundaries of time and space, as signposts of the world literary heritage. Secondly, in line with cultural nationalism and the nostalgia of primitive lore that were being transmitted to the younger generation at the turn of the century, Joyce may have used Shakespeare as a universal model for all who called upon themselves the task of fostering literary production and enhancing the cultural alertness of a new Ireland.

As for the inner structure of the sequence of poems in *Chamber Music*, Joyce briefly comments in one of his letters:

> The central song is XIV after which the movement is all downwards until XXXIV, which is vitally the end of the book. XXXV and XXXVI are tailpieces just as I and III are preludes.[2]

Literary analysis confirms Joyce's tripartite pattern (ouverture, development, and finale) but if you disregard poems *per se* and use a structural grid to identify the major thematic clusters, each section can be extended and made rather more comprehensive.

Accordingly, the first movement (Poems I-XIII) is dominated by the often-uncoordinated moves of each lover in the absorbing, all-embracing search for the possession of the other. This is further complicated by the conflict between the desires of reunion and the idealistic need to preserve solitude, in order to live up to the poet's responsibility towards intellectual life. After lyric XIV – the central song in the series, in Joyce's own words – the second movement (Poems XIV-XXII) expands the clash between love and creative imagination and suggests the limitations of heterosexual involvement, an option that precludes the poet's solitary destiny but excludes the otherwise vital stimulus of male companionship. The final movement (Poems XXIII-XXXVI) shows a way out for the earlier dilemma crisis, by recognising the fickleness of women and the inconstant, *false ingénue* passion that once enticed the poet and threatened his freedom.

The poet thus hails the triumph of the creative imagination over human concerns and struggles to accept his exile on the fringes of society, as the radical condition of any artist doomed to pay a heavy price for reaping his aesthetic harvest. In the wider context of Joyce's work, this attitude of exile evidently foreshadows *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where the hero's awareness of the paradox between the sweet imprisonment of passion and the unrestrained love of freedom triggers his escape from political and religious institutions.

However true this may be, it does not necessarily follow that *Chamber Music* should be primarily read as a series of autobiographical, wordsworthian confessions that reflect the growth of a poet's mind. On the contrary, the collection documents Joyce's elaborate irony and

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[2] Stuart Gilbert (ed.), *op. cit.*, I, 67.

detachment as part of his reaction against the romantic theory of literary production, which had led critics to believe that their main task was to comb poetry in search of the master key that would unlock an author's heart, and disclose the personality of the man behind the words.

In truth, both the mid-Victorian dramatic lyrics composed by Browning, Tennyson and by their successors Swinburne or Yeats at the turn of the century had long challenged the premises of authorial sincerity and Joyce's generation followed suit in undermining the autobiographical fallacy that identified a man's life with a poet's work. In the case of *Chamber Music* the vagueness of the time and space setting, the non-referential denotation of characters and their interaction and the conventional themes and images add to the impersonal effect that was about to be explored in similar terms by early 20th century modernism. In order to reinforce the significance of such links, it should be stressed that Joyce's place as a virtual modernist poet was publicly acknowledged when Pound decided to include one of his poems in the famous anthology *Des Imagistes* (1913).

As a kind of compensation for its remoteness from everyday reality, *Chamber Music* constantly draws inspiration from the fictional world of other literary works and Joyce again anticipates both Elliot and Pound in the practice of relying on quotation, witty pastiche, parodic forms and other intertextual devices to revisit their common mythical heritage. The latter makes up a choral framework that both amplifies the poet's single voice and echoes the European literary tradition, thus weaving a fabric of cultural cross-references that can carry subtle undertones and raise the level of the reader's enjoyment. In this way, the wheel turns full circle, as the detachment effect, obtained by quoting from heterogeneous sources, inversely secures the reader's empathy, by assigning him the task of deciphering references, identifying voices, unveiling allusions, and sharing in the experience of collective history, that poetry has made his own.

In this sense, *Chamber Music* is a historical repertoire of styles and forms and an experimental text where the poet tries his hand at the art of writing and feels free to test a variety of rhetorical figures, similes, images, symbols, as well as different metres, stanzas, rhythms and rhymes. This eclecticism could be interpreted as homage paid to Joyce's predecessors in the sense that modernists believed that a regeneration of past literary conventions was fully justified in deriving innovative energy from traditional

sources, since avant-garde aesthetics involved a reactivation rather than a rejection of history.

Accordingly, when we try to establish the intertextuality of *Chamber Music*, it is no wonder that the Bible should have provided Joyce with so many episodes and quotations, either taken from various passages of the Gospels or strongly reminiscent of the passionate eroticism of the Old Testament's *Song of Songs*. Additionally, medieval literature also proved a never-ending source of poetic materials ready for adoption. These ranged from technical structures – such as the consonantal rhymes and the alliterative prosody of Early English literature – to the revival or even subversion of staple themes and conventions of courtly love, as developed by ancient troubadours in their exquisite roundelays and villanelles. Furthermore, Joyce's literary inclinations made him a poet akin to the holistic, allegorical sensibility of Renaissance neoplatonic circles, as reflected in the works of Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Pico Della Mirandola and Giordano Bruno. On the one hand, these affinities may partly explain Joyce's poetics of obscurity, based on a concept of meaning as something to be grasped (if at all), after a strenuous process of piercing the surface of words to decode the deeper layers of sense. On the other hand, his familiarity with Renaissance culture further accounts for the influence of 16th and 17th century love poems upon *Chamber Music,* mainly the lyrics of Shakespeare and Herrick, as well as the rhythms of songwriters like Henry Lawes and John Dowland.

Considering that Joyce tended to ignore the contribution of neoclassical literature, we can conclude our mapping of his selection of past paradigms by noticing that the poetry and poetics of late 19th century Symbolism, mainly Paul Verlaine, rank high amid the intertextual references of *Chamber Music.* In fact, Verlaine's famous dictum – *De la musique avant toute chose* – reinforced Joyce's post-romantic belief that a poem is the product of unconscious powers and stems from powerful feelings that spontaneously overflow under the form of verbal music.

In fact, the inherent melody of Joyce's words dominates the text so overwhelmingly that *Chamber Music* has been open to criticism for allegedly failing to provide enough sense to such a wealth of sound. Be that as it may, such a lack of balance between the relative weight of message and medium can hardly be considered an aesthetic flaw, since modern

poetic trends have long dismissed dualistic theories that relied on sharp distinctions between form and content and tend to stress the intimate combination of both elements. Moreover, Joyce, himself an occasional amateur musician, belonged to the late 19th century neo-Elizabethan generation that admired the art of the lute song and praised the achievement of 16th and 17th century court composers, so that music can claim to be one of the poet's favourite arts and the natural companion of his words.

In addition, as his entire work progressed, Joyce gradually became aware of the limitations of words as too concrete, denotative, and referential instruments that fell short of conveying the immaterial ties that bind creatures together. Accordingly, when in the process of Joyce's poetic composition, emotions are so exacerbated that words cease to perform their expressive function and become what Browning once termed 'the filthy rags of speech', only two alternative paths lay open. The first path would be to compose wordless poems, a silence pregnant with inner meaning yet lacking the ability to communicate it. The second (and Joycean) path negotiates a compromise solution by downgrading semantic values and prioritising signifiers as musical sounds, in an attempt to turn them into vehicles for conveying those moods and emotions that lie too deep for words.

In more than one sense of the phrase, the poet's voice is thus available to recapture the original sense of song, as lyrics set to music. Indeed, Nora is reported to have said once that "Jim should have stuck to the singing", hereby praising her husband's near professional musical accomplishment and particularly the quality of his tenor voice. This artistic training made him undertake the task of composing a tune for Poem XI of *Chamber Music* ("Bid adieu to girlish days") and the sound workmanship of his verse has been a welcome challenge to a number of Irish composers.

The first was Geoffrey Molyneux Palmer (1882-1957), whom Joyce himself encouraged to set his thirty-six poems to music. The outcome of this incomplete project shows the composer's overall fidelity to the lyric and rhythmical features of Joyce's language with the occasional inspiration from Renaissance lute songs. Joyce has more than once expressed his satisfaction with Palmer's work, which he rated higher than other early attempts by Moeran, Bliss and Charlotte Milligan Fox. Indeed, in a letter to Palmer in 1909 Joyce remarked: "(…) you may set all of *Chamber*

Music in time. This was indeed partly my idea in writing it. The book is in fact a suite of songs and if I were a musician I suppose I should have set them myself."[3]

This permanent convergence of music and words makes the literary translation of *Chamber Music* a possible but highly improbable task, considering the extreme difficulty in transposing the semantic features of Joyce's poems into another language and keeping them singable at the same time. Translators face a similar crux whenever music is by definition an essential part of the overall meaning to be communicated – as in the case of an opera libretto – which implies a number of inevitable adjustments in the target text to reduce the level of distortion.

However, it is possible to adopt a tentative position of compromise by selecting several tools available in the target culture to recreate the musicality of Joyce's verse, as expressed in diction, tone, rhyme, alliteration of consonant sounds, assonance of vowels, onomatopoeic effects, etc. This equipment may include not only the entire present-day phonological repertoire of prosodic options but also some of the stylistic resources that have been instrumental in various periods of literary history.

The truth is that any translator will have to pay an extremely heavy price for venturing into the task of importing Joyce's poems into the context of an alien culture and one remark will make my point clear. While in *Chamber Music* constant allusion is made to objects, works and figures that belong to the heritage of English culture, a literary translator should be fully aware of the fact that, in order to be shared and enjoyed by foreign readers, this referential paraphernalia must be rewritten, transposed, and culturally recoded with materials drawn from the target system.

This is the reason why the forthcoming first translation of Joyce's *Chamber Music* in this country contains clear echoes of Portuguese popular literature, as well as inspiration drawn from our medieval troubadours, Renaissance poets, mainly Camoens, and allusions to the poetic diction of late 19th century symbolists. But then, how else could we possibly comply with Ezra Pound's famous order to aspiring translators of poetry: "Make it new!"?

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[3] *Loc. cit.*

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Place in Irish Drama

Nicholas Grene
Trinity College, Dublin

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The Home Place, Brian Friel's most recent play (2005), is set in Ballybeg. This is, by my count, the thirteenth play that Friel has set in or about his fictional small town in Donegal. It all began with *Philadelphia Here I Come!*, his first major stage success in 1964, the study of the stagnant little community that drives the central character Gar O'Donnell to emigrate. Since then Friel has kept coming back to Ballybeg. There have been plays that demanded a setting elsewhere: *The Freedom of the City*, a fictionalized version of the terrible events of 1972 known as Bloody Sunday, had to be set in Derry; *Making History*, concerned with the Elizabethan Gaelic chieftains O'Neill and O'Donnell had to be in Rome where they lived in exile. And Ballybeg does not always appear to be the same place. In *Philadelphia* the focus is on the small town itself, S.B. O'Donnell's general store, the priest, the schoolteacher, the local politician Senator Doogan. In *Aristocrats* Friel's attention turns to the Catholic big house at some distance from the town. In *Dancing at Lughnasa* the five sisters also live some way out of Ballybeg – the poster for the film of the play showed them walking down a long stretch of road headed by Meryl Streep – and theirs is no big house. Frank Butler in *Living Quarters* is returning to his own home town of Ballybeg, but it seems it is only by accident that Frank Hardy fetches up in Ballybeg in *Faith Healer*. In the nineteenth-century Irish-speaking *Translations*, it is still Baile Beag, not yet Anglicized to Ballybeg. What's the point of Friel's insistent return to this one fictitious locale? And how does his practice relate to that of other Irish playwrights and their treatment of place?

In so far as Ballybeg has a real-life original it is the small town of Glenties in Donegal. That identification at least can be deduced from the dedication of *Dancing at Lughasa* to 'the memory of those five brave

Glenties women'. These were Friel's own aunts, the sisters of his mother, who were the models for the fictional Mundys in the play. The geographical directions in *Faith Healer*, 'a village called Ballybeg, not far from Donegal Town' (Friel, *Selected Plays* 338), would confirm this location. But Ballybeg is not Glenties, even if it may have been his childhood experience in this part of Donegal that gave Friel the imaginative milieu for a play such as *Lughnasa*. It is any and every small town; that is literally what its name means: Baile beag = small town. To that extent it is like *Our Town*, Thornton Wilder's landmark American play of the 1930s. The fictional Grovers Corners is given a quite precise imagined location down to a map reference with its exact degrees of longitude and latitude. Yet the title invites an audience to write in their own home into this dramatisation of what it is like to live in 'our town'. In a similar way Friel's Ballybeg is everyone's Ballybeg.

There are, however, crucial recurrent features of Ballybeg that define the small town it is, apart from its smallness. One is its remoteness from the capital, indeed from any major town or city. The army officer Frank Butler, at the start of *Living Quarters*, is enormously excited at the prospect of a promotion that will bring him a transfer out of the backwater of Ballybeg barracks. Ballybeg pier, where the assembled party of Dubliners in *Wonderful Tennessee* wait in vain for transport to the legendary offshore island, is literally about as far out to the edge of Ireland as you can go without falling off. Ballybeg is a marginal community, and it is an isolated community. Repeatedly we hear of Lough Anna and the back hills, the place where Rosie, the mentally handicapped sister in *Lughnasa*, goes with the disreputable Danny Bradley, and where the pagan rites of the festival of Lughnasa still continue. Ballybeg is close to an unregenerate natural world which the devoutly Catholic and conformist Ballybegers fend off as best they can.

Friel's creative re-deployment of his imagined Ballybeg can be used as a way into the place of place in a range of Irish playwrights from the nineteenth-century practice of Dion Boucicault in the nineteenth century, through the rural peasant settings of J.M. Synge, the inner-city Dublin of Sean O'Casey and Brendan Behan, to the contemporary practice of playwrights such as Sebastian Barry, Martin McDonagh and Marina Carr. That at least is the strategy of my essay here.

I. From Boucicault to Synge

It was Irish scenery that Boucicault had to sell. The story is told of how he came by the inspiration for his first highly successful Irish melodrama, *The Colleen Bawn* in 1860. A New York theatre manager, Laura Keene, desperate for a new play to fill a gap in her programming, called upon Boucicault, already a formidably experienced actor/manager/ /playwright. Initially he had no ideas. Then walking down Broadway one rainy night, he picked up a copy of Gerald Griffin's novel, *The Collegians*, when sheltering in Brentano's Bookshop. The next day he wrote Laura Keene, 'I have it! I send you seven steel engravings of Killarney. Get your scene painter to work on them at once. … I shall read act one of my new Irish play on Friday: we rehearse that while I am writing the second, which will be ready on Monday' (Morash 89). Griffin's novel was actually set in Limerick. In his stage version, Boucicault did not bother to change this nominal setting. *The Colleen Bawn* has the subtitle, *The Brides of Garryowen*: Garryowen, near Limerick, is miles away from Killarney, but what did Boucicault care about such topographical pedantries. The well-known beauties of the lakes of Killarney would feature as picturesque backdrop to the thrilling story of *The Colleen Bawn*. It was in one of these same lakes that the dastardly boatman Danny Mann would try to murder Eily O'Connor and the comic hero Myles-na-Coppaleen (played inevitably by actor-manager Boucicault himself) would dive dramatically to save her. Shaw was to remark caustically of a later revival of the play, 'I have lived to see *The Colleen Bawn* with real water in it; and perhaps I shall live to see it some day with real Irishmen in it' (Shaw 28).

For Boucicault place is important in so far as it is eye-catchingly Irish. He is selling what are already famous views – Killarney in *The Colleen Bawn*, Glendalough with its Round Tower in *Arrah-na-Pogue*. The stories of these plays have no necessary connection with the places where they are set – they are generic melodramatic plots, country cousins to the French sources that Boucicault plundered so frequently. What is important is that the audience will immediately recognize the scenes as Irish, with all the romantic associations of their Irishness. Shaw, for all his dismissive attitude towards Boucicault, borrowed from him in the second act of *John Bull's Other Island*, which opens with a Round Tower at

sunset, icon of Ireland. In this, as in so much else, the practice of Synge and the other dramatists of the early Abbey, was to be in marked contrast to Boucicault.

One resource, crucial to Boucicault's theatre, was not available to Synge. Even before Boucicault had started writing *The Colleen Bawn*, he set Laura Keene's scene-painter to create the set that would show the audience the beautiful views of Killarney. This was typical of Victorian theatre, which was heavily dependent on the visual effects of elaborate painted scenery. But the Abbey Theatre from its establishment in 1904, for reasons of necessity as well as aesthetic preference, preferred simple interiors – the three walls of a peasant kitchen or pub. Where there was a backdrop, it was to be abstract and atmospheric rather than fully representational. So, for instance, Yeats writes approvingly of the scene for Synge's first full-length play: 'While I write, we are rehearsing *The Well of the Saints*, and are painting for it decorative scenery, mountains in one or two flat colours and without detail, ash-trees and red salleys with something of recurring pattern in their woven boughs' (Synge, III 68). Synge's plays were to be recognizably, distinctively Irish, but not by showing audiences views of familiar Irish places. Instead they were to be convincingly authentic in representing what was typical in Irish country life.

Synge, in fact, never names the exact setting of a single one of his plays. *Riders to the Sea*, we are told, is set on 'An Island off the West of Ireland' (Synge, III 3). There are hundreds of such islands – there is nothing to indicate Synge had in mind Inis Meain, the middle one of the Aran Islands. The scene for *The Tinker's Wedding* is even vaguer – 'a roadside near a village' (Synge, IV 5). *The Well of the Saints* is equally imprecise on date as well as setting: 'Some lonely mountainous district on the east of Ireland, one or more centuries ago' (Synge, III 68). *The Shadow of the Glen* at least supplies a county: we are in 'the last cottage at the head of a long glen in County Wicklow'(Synge, III 31), but it is not revealed which glen, any more than we are given directions to the shebeen in *The Playboy of the Western World*; all we know is that it is 'near a village, on a wild coast of Mayo' (Synge, IV 55).

And yet, paradoxically, within the text of the plays themselves, there are detailed references that give a very specific location for the action. Synge set all three of his Wicklow plays in the one long valley of the Avonbeg

River running down from Glenmalure. This is the 'long glen' with the Burkes' cottage of *The Shadow* at its head; it is at the crossroads of Greenane, the turn in the road by the bridge over the Avonbeg, that Martin and Mary beg in the first act of *The Well of the Saints*; and *The Tinker's Wedding*, takes place within easy distance of Ballinaclash, the little village lower down the valley. *The Playboy* can also be clearly located, out on the Belmullet peninsula, in the very far north-west corner of Mayo; it takes Christy Mahon and his father a plausible eleven days to walk there from their family farm in Kerry down in the south-west. Virtually every place referred to in the play, both those close at hand, as in the Owen River and Carrowmore Lake, and those farther away, Crossmolina, Castlebar, Ballina, make sense for people living in the neighbourhood of Belmullet. The Wicklow plays and *The Playboy* seem to be given a very precise 'local habitation and a name'.

And yet there are a few odd exceptions. There are several references in *The Shadow of the Glen* to a place called Rathvanna: 'There's no one can drive a mountain ewe', says Nora Burke à propos of her would-be lover Michael Dara's inability to manage hill sheep, 'but the men do be reared in the Glen Malure, I've heard them say, and above by Rathvanna, and the Glen Imaal' (Synge, III 47). Most of this makes sense for a play set up in Glenmalure in so far as the Glen of Imaal is the next-door valley. But there is no such place as Rathvanna. There is an Aughavanna, which is a townland on the road between Glenmalure and the Glen of Imaal, and this indeed the place that Synge first used in a manuscript draft of the play. But evidently he did not like the sound of the name or its rhythm, so he changed it here and elsewhere to the completely made up Rathvanna.[1]

It is perhaps unsurprising that not all the place-names in Synge's plays stand up to strict topographical scrutiny; these are plays, after all, not guidebooks for walkers in Wicklow or Mayo. What makes the matter significant is the way in which the settings of the plays are imagined. Synge evidently needed to anchor his dramatic action in a place he knew. He

[1] I have examined this issue in more detail in my essay 'Synge, Reality and the Imagination of Place' in Breyfogle 243-55.

wanted to think himself into the lives of his characters as they inhabited a very specific location. But he was not necessarily concerned with literal fidelity to fact. So, for instance, in *The Playboy* the publican Michael James refers to a local landmark as the Stooks of the Dead Women. That is actually a place in West Kerry, nowhere near Belmullet; but it sounded picturesque to Synge, so he moved it some 200 miles up the coast. To that extent, he is like Boucicault moving the Limerick-based action of Griffin's novel to Killarney. The difference is that everyone in the audience of *The Colleen Bawn* is intended to be able to recognize Killarney, whereas no-one will have heard of the Stooks of the Dead Women and will just assume that it is a familiar place in the neighbourhood where Michael James lives.

Synge was not like Joyce, who took such elaborate pains over the Dublin details of *Ulysses* that he boasted if the whole city were destroyed it could be re-built stone by stone, brick by brick, from the pages of his novel. Synge did not feel that his settings had to be able to pass muster with actual inhabitants of Glenmalure or Belmullet who would no doubt have scratched their heads in surprise at the made-up Rathvanna or the imported Stooks of the Dead Women. What he wanted to create was the sense of a local community embedded in its own locality, whether the placenames correspond to actual topography (as they very often do) or are introduced because they sound euphonious. The crucial feature of the locale in each of these plays of Synge is not exactly where it is but its remoteness. *Riders to the Sea*, by virtue of the very fact that it is an island off the west coast of Ireland, is separated from the mainland, itself an island off the west coast of Europe. *The Shadow* takes place in the 'last cottage at the head of a long glen', as far into the mountains as human habitation goes. Similarly, *The Well of the Saints* is in a 'lonely' mountainous district, *The Playboy* is on a 'wild' coast of Mayo. The communities that live in these places are separated, isolated in their wildness and loneliness from what is understood to be the normal lives of the audience who will watch the plays, in the first instance the middle-class Dubliners who regularly attended the Abbey Theatre. I want to keep coming back to this idea of the separate, distinctive community in my consideration of place in Irish drama.

II. O'Casey and Behan.

For the first twenty years of the Abbey Theatre's existence, the setting for their plays was almost always in the country. Out of some 179 plays produced by the Abbey from its opening in 1904 to 1923, there are astonishingly only two that are set in inner-city Dublin. There were plays set in Belfast; there a few plays set in the suburbs; there were mythological plays set nowhere in particular. But the overwhelming majority took place in a small town or village in the country, most often in the west of Ireland. That was what was so remarkable about the production of Sean O'Casey's play, *The Shadow of a Gunman*, first staged in 1923. Here was a play set in Hilljoy Square, a transparent pseudonym for the actual Mountjoy Square, just five minutes walk from Abbey Street where the theatre itself was located. This was one of the very first times that audiences at the Abbey had seen the theatre's own neighbourhood represented on the stage.

What is more, O'Casey could claim the authority of a native in representing this neighbourhood. The only previous plays about the slums of Dublin had been written by outsiders – the Scot Andrew Patrick Wilson, and the comfortably middle-class Oliver Gogarty, Joyce's one-time friend and original of Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses* – and tended to take the form of Shavian problem plays of ideas. But here was O'Casey, who came from the tenements himself, showing what life there was like from the inside. In fact, the material for *The Shadow of a Gunman*, the dramatisation of a raid on a tenement house by the infamous Black and Tans during the Irish war of independence, was drawn from O'Casey's brief time as a lodger with a friend in a flat in Mountjoy Square. Most of his life he had lived in a much smaller house in the East Wall area of the city, quite some distance from the teeming tenements of Gardiner Street and Mountjoy Square. But this became his own distinctive dramatic territory, best evoked in the opening stage direction to *The Plough and the Stars*, the third in his so-called Dublin Trilogy: 'The home of the CLITHEROES. It consists of the front and back drawing-rooms in a fine old Georgian house, struggling for life against the assaults of time, and the more savage assaults of the tenants' (O'Casey 105). These are grand five-storey houses, come down in the world. What was originally the imposing double reception area, front and back drawing-rooms, in a whole house belonging to a single upper-class

family is now the home not only of Nora and Jack Clitheroe but of their two lodgers, Uncle Peter and the Covey as well.

On the face of it, nothing could be less like Synge's country cottages in the most remote parts of Ireland than these crowded slum dwellings in the very centre of Dublin. But in one sense they are curiously similar. It has been cynically said that the Abbey had to make very few adjustments to its standard set to change the country cottage kitchen into the tenement flat. The community of the tenement house is its own place, enclosed within its own concerns, looking on as if from a distance even at events in their own city. *Juno and the Paycock* set during the Civil War of 1922-3 opens characteristically with Mary Boyle reading out from the paper details of the murder of a neighbour: 'On a little by-road, out beyant Finglas he was found' (O'Casey 47). Admittedly Finglas, which is now very much part of Dublin, might have been almost a separate village in 1924 when the play was first produced. Still, the impression is of something unimaginably far off – 'out beyant Finglas'. When it comes to *The Plough and the Stars*, O'Casey's play about the Easter 1916 Rising, we never actually see the epoch-making action taking place, we only hear feverish reports from the ghoulish Mrs Gogan, always one to relish a catastrophe: 'I hear they're blazin' away out o' th' GPO. That th' Tommies is sthretched in heaps around Nelson's Pillar an' th' Parnell Statue, an' that th' pavin' sets in O'Connell Street is nearly covered be pools o' blood' (O'Casey 144). O'Casey's tenement characters are bystanders, onlookers at the great drama going on in their own city. All it means to them is a glorious opportunity for looting, a chance to get their hands on the goods in big department stores like Clery's where they could normally not afford to shop.

In one sense, O'Casey was representing to the Abbey audiences the immediate and the familiar, the very streets and houses round the corner from the theatre itself. At another level, he is showing a community as different, as exotic for those Abbey audiences as the Aran or Wicklow cottages of Synge. As a joke, O'Casey wrote in a small part in the third act of *Plough and the Stars* for a nameless 'woman from Rathmines', who has got caught up in the disturbances and asks helplessly for someone to take her home: 'Could you possibly come and pilot me in the direction of Wrathmines?' (O'Casey 150). It was his revenge on the actress Eileen Crowe who refused to play the part of Mrs Gogan because she objected to

the vulgarity of the language: she was type-cast as the genteel middle-class woman from Rathmines instead. But the audience at the Abbey was much more likely to come from the comfortable south-side suburb of Rathmines than they were from inner city Gardiner Street or Mountjoy Square. O'Casey takes his audience where they would never have been, shows them the view of the city from inside the tenements. He estranges the Dublin that his audience would have known by his representation of the separate working-class sub-culture and its distinctively different way of looking at things.

One of the primary impulses of the national theatre movement was to represent what had not been represented before, to recover otherwise lost lives. Yeats sent Synge on a mission when he urged him to go to the Aran Islands: 'live there as if you were one of the people themselves; express a life that has never found expression' (Synge, III 63). This is part of what Synge's plays had to offer, and O'Casey's after them. They showed on the stage places in Ireland, communities that had never before been voiced theatrically, whether the fishermen of Aran, the country people of the more remote parts of Wicklow or Mayo, or the tenement-dwellers of inner-city Dublin. Brendan Behan had something even less known or visible to offer, the inside of prisons. In 1939 Behan invaded England as a 16-year-old IRA man on a self-appointed bombing mission, was immediately arrested in Liverpool and sent to British reformatory, the so-called Borstal, for the next two years. He came back to Ireland, was free for some six months before trying to shoot two policemen. For this he was sentenced to fourteen years penal servitude, of which he served four. The early part of his sentence was in the Dublin city prison Mountjoy, and it was this experience that gave him the background for his first produced play *The Quare Fellow*.

Mountjoy is on the north side of Dublin not more than a mile from the area where Behan grew up. In a sense, therefore, he remained close to home in his time in the jail. What *The Quare Fellow* brings out, though, is the gulf between the world outside the prison and the self-contained world within. Mountjoy is in Dublin but not of Dublin. As one of the country's best-equipped and most secure prisons, it necessarily contains men from many parts of the country. In *The Quare Fellow* this includes the young Irish-speaking prisoner from an island off the coast who gets some consolation in speaking Irish with a warder who comes from the same

part of the country. The prison community is based on place; we are intensely aware throughout *The Quare Fellow* of the shared space of the jail intimately known by its inmates. But it is not a normal neighbourhood community. It brings together people of different social classes, people from different regions, levelled and homogenized by the fact of their exclusion from society outside. Although it is set in what is identifiably Mountjoy, and Behan makes a running joke out of the fact that the independent Free State had to bring a hangman over from Britain, the language of the play is not uniformly written in an Irish dialect of English. The prisoners use Cockney rhyming slang – 'flowery dell' for 'cell', 'china' for 'mate' ('china plate' = 'mate'). This may be a habit of speech Behan himself picked up in British Borstal or it may be that other prisoners, like the one in *The Quare Fellow*, who boasts of his time in the English prisons Dartmoor and Parkhurst, have introduced it into the Irish prison population. The point is that the language marks the difference between this group and the extramural Irish.

The characters in Behan's other highly successful play *The Hostage* are even more obviously hybridized. The house where it takes place, an IRA safe house cum brothel, was apparently based on a house in Nelson Street in Behan's home territory of north Dublin, and the first version of the play was written in Irish as *An Giall*. But by the time it was translated/adapted for production by Joan Littlewood's London Theatre Workshop company as *The Hostage*, it became a camp hangout of whores and gays that could as easily have been in Soho as in Nelson Street. Irish critics have condemned Behan's English director for (literally) tarting up his play for the London market and have argued that *The Hostage* is no longer really his work. Whether this is literally the case or not, *The Hostage* can be said to be true to the spirit of Behan's writing as a whole. He is concerned throughout to represent an underclass of dissidents, deviants and dropouts who occupy a place apart in any conventional mapping of a country or a city. This is different from the plays of Synge or O'Casey whose characters do belong in identifiable places and show us what it is like to live in those specific localities. What Behan shares with Synge and O'Casey is the need to represent people off the map of social recognition, to recover their lives from invisibility, to express a life that has never found expression.

III. Contemporary practice.

Playwrights are writers of fictions, like any other. Their material has to come from somewhere, and many of them will draw on their memories of places they have lived, when imagining settings for their plays. In doing this, childhood memories often have particular importance. Friel's Ballybeg is not actually the Donegal town of Glenties; but it is not just by coincidence that Michael, the narrator of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, recalls the events of 1936 as a child of seven, the exact age at that date of Brian Friel, born in 1929, who used to spend childhood holidays with his aunts in Glenties. Michael remembers the summer of 1936 as something like a fall into adult consciousness. He says in his opening monologue: 'even though I was only a child of seven at the time I know I had a sense of unease, some awareness of a widening breach between what seemed to be and what was, of things changing too quickly before my eyes, of becoming what they ought not to be' (Friel, *Lughnasa* 2). Sebastian Barry is another contemporary playwright who has drawn heavily on childhood memory in his work, only in his case (remarkably) it is from a time when he was only four.

Barry was born in 1955 and in 1959 was sent to spend a summer with a great-aunt who lived in south county Wicklow in the neighbourhood of Kiltegan. An ancestor of his had been steward of the big house of Humewood in the area. In his so-called 'family' plays, he has set out to imagine the lives of long dead relatives. The most successful of these plays to date is *The Steward of Christendom*, figuring Barry's great-grandfather who had been a senior officer in the Dublin Metropolitan Police. When Barry wrote the play he knew next to nothing about his great-grandfather, not even his first name; he called him Thomas Dunne, where it turned out subsequently he was James. So in representing the central character as an old man, senile and rambling in the County Home in Baltinglass, he dubbed in his own memories of his summer in Kiltegan as the memories of Dunne growing up there. And he used those same vivid countryside images for an earlier play *Boss Grady's Boys*, even though it is set on the Cork/Kerry border.

Barry's memories of his four-year-old summer are not by any means all happy ones. There are emotions of anger, terror and humiliation that he

lends to Dunne in the recollection of the character's childhood. And yet in Barry's play, as in Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, the past retrieved from the playwright's own experience, is a kind of paradise lost from which adulthood has shut the characters out. It is perhaps significant that in both cases, the childhood recollections are of visits to rural relatives remote from the writers' own family home. As a result, there is a suggestion of idyll, or nostalgia, what Friel renders theatrically at the end of *Lughnasa* as the play of 'a very soft, golden light' (Friel, *Lughnasa* 70).

Martin McDonagh writes in sharp reaction against this sort of view of rural Ireland. McDonagh, as the child of Irish immigrants growing up in South London was brought to Ireland quite frequently on holidays, to the areas of Galway and Sligo where his parents came from. To judge by his plays alone, he did not enjoy these visits, and it is perhaps not surprising that, when his parents went back to live permanently in Ireland when he was sixteen, he did not accompany them. He made his name with the *Leenane Trilogy*, all based in and around the Galway small town of Leenane. According to Garry Hynes, who directed the first productions of those plays, the only reason for choosing Leenane was the euphony of the first title, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. When an earnest researcher came to Galway to do fieldwork on the Aran Islands as background to McDonagh's second trilogy, Hynes had to tell him that she was ahead of the author there. The playwright of *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* had never set foot on Aran: it was just a handy place to set the plays. McDonagh, forced to spend long boring family holidays in the rural West of Ireland, takes a spectacular revenge on mother Ireland and the whole notion of a paradisal place of origin. His Leenane is a place where matricide, fratricide and uxoricide are the local indoor parlour games, the only diversion that stops the locals from dying of sheer tedium. In *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, the eyes of the natives are glazed over watching the romanticized images of themselves in Robert Flaherty's romantic 1930s film *Man of Aran*. A supraviolent alternative view of Aran is given in the black grotesquerie of *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* whose heroine earns her reputation as a marksman shooting out the eyes of cows, and a whole sequence of grisly murders turns on the life or death of a cat.

Marina Carr's plays could also be seen, in some sense, as a reaction against earlier representations of rural Ireland, the dark other to more

romanticized images of the country community. Certainly a play such as *On Raftery's Hill*, with its incestuous patriarch who ends the first act with the onstage rape of his daughter, is no Irish Tourist Board picture of the little grey home in the west. But Carr makes detailed use of her own Midlands background in setting the plays. Most of the places referred to in plays such as *Portia Coughlan* or *By the Bog of Cats* are real, even though the plots are wholly imagined. There is a sense in which Carr's insistence on her Midlands setting is a bid to do for her home county of Offaly what Synge did for Wicklow or Aran, what O'Casey for the Dublin tenements. In the view of most visitors to the country, and not a few Irish people as well, the Midlands of Ireland are the country God forgot. All the beautiful, picturesque bits of the island are on the edges, the Wicklow hills, the mountains of Mourne, the Glens of Antrim, Connemara and Kerry. The flat Midlands are the stretch you try to drive through at speed to get to the pretty countryside in the west. There is a kind of defiant local patriotism in Carr's use of the 'unpoetic' Midlands speech, the 'unromantic' Midlands setting. Offaly lives matter too, she seems to be saying.

At the same time, her use of plots derived from Greek tragedy, *Medea* in *By the Bog of Cats* or *Iphigenia in Aulis* in *Ariel*, retain the association of the rural Irish community with the primitive and the pagan. Synge was the first playwright to detect beneath the Christian faith of the Irish country people a substratum of pagan belief and custom. *Riders to the Sea* was hailed within a very short time of its first production as a Greek tragedy in little, even if James Joyce typically claimed it did not meet his exacting Aristotelian standards for true tragedy. This tradition lives on in Carr's work, the sense that in the primal passions of the tightly-interlocked country circles close to the land, in its myths and folkore, Greek tragedy finds its fitting modern reincarnation.

Playwrights are of course writers of fiction. They have to imagine the scenes they write inside their heads using whatever materials come to hand. But unlike novelists, they must imagine always with a view to what an audience will actually see on stage, the translation of their internal imaginings into an external reality. For a playwright like Boucicault this was a matter of getting the scene-painter to work on recreating the engravings of Killarney. Those famous landscapes would provide the romantic backdrop for Hardress Cregan crossing the lake to his secretly married

peasant wife Eily O'Connor. For Synge and his successors it was more a matter of creating the sense of a place by the way the characters talk about it, the locatedness of their speech and actions. And though Synge might go to considerable pains to put in specific place names, it was not in the end to authenticate the setting, to make his audience recognize where they were, but rather what it felt like for the characters live in a given neighbourhood. What is offered is not so much a community as the paradigm of a community; this is a microcosm that reflects what a society is in its essentials. There is a paradox here. Places in Irish plays are typically represented for their difference. The audience watches Synge's peasants, O'Casey's inner-city Dubliners, Behan's prison inmates, because their lives are unlike their (the audience's) own. They are the unrepresented others of society. And yet there is the supposition that somehow these other, different lives are closer to the quick of the human condition than the more 'normal' experience of the middle-class urban spectators who watch them.

Underlying this is a broader sense of what Ireland represents for the rest of the world. Where in Ireland Dublin audiences at the Abbey may see the marginal figures of Friel's Ballybeg, Barry's Kiltegan or Carr's Midlands as representing some sort of deep truths of their past or their origins, outside of Ireland audiences attribute the same primal authenticity to the fact of the Irishness that makes them different from the worlds of London or New York. What I have been trying to come at in this essay is the way in which the internal and the external, the literal and the metaphoric, the specific and the universal play in and out of the representation of place in Irish drama.

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Writing Back: Eavan Boland, a Contemporary Irish Case Study

Gisele Giandoni Wolkoff
Centro de Estudos Sociais, Universidade de Coimbra

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Writing Back: Eavan Boland, a Contemporary Irish Case Study

Much of the way in which postcolonial theory has reinscribed the Other's response to the metropolitan centre has been read within the feminist and/or women's studies' context. The works of Pillar Villar-Argáiz (2007), Inés Praga Terente (1996) and Cristina Pérez Valverde (1997) recover the need to look at contemporary (from the 1960's on) women poets as regards their positioning in relation to tradition. In other words, they highlight the need to observe the way these poets have dealt with all the legacy that has preceded them and what role tradition plays in their own writing. In this case, the state of marginality no longer applies exclusively to the nation (Ireland as the colonized and subordinated space of discourse) but, rather, to women as the counter hegemonic gender.

1– Irish women poets: an identity issue

An initial moment of this brief study, then, reports us to the connection between identity and tradition. In order to present Eavan Boland as a key figure in the recreation of women's space in Irish writing, we have to initially examine the atmosphere in which her writings appear and from where she started speaking as "*the lady of situations*". This allusion to T.S.Eliot's 50th line in "The Waste Land" can be taken as a tribute to tradition, here meaning poets that appeared before Boland and who have provided her with a sense of (lack of) belonging to tradition, which is *sine qua non* to understand the context of the emergence of women poets in Ireland, with Boland's 1967 publication of *23 Poems*. To better understand such context, we first need to examine the role women had played in the Irish poetic scenery so far.

One of the fundamental elements in postcolonial theory which also helps us follow the various discussions surrounding Irish Studies is that of

identity and how it is both represented and constituted by works of art, namely Poetry, which is this article's concern. Following Stuart Hall's (1992) concepts of identity after the Enlightenment, from where the notion of the subject and that of the individual come, both the social and the private spheres of existence pertain to identity, which is constructed within (and in constant dialogue with) tradition. This fact also helps us comprehend how belonging is articulated in terms of promises of rupture, renewal, everlasting dialogue and reassessment of new (or not so new) possibilities of social and political positioning. In the Irish case, belonging and bearing an identity (or a multiplicity of them, as is the case of fragmented, postcolonial identities) can only take place as long as they establish connections with tradition and, therefore, end up making visible issues such as the local and the cosmopolitan, the public and the private spheres of existence, politics and religion and the relationship between the writing of poetry and that of criticism. There can only be rupture, as long as there is (some) tradition and some dialogic response to it. In this sense, the (re)appropriation of the past by contemporary writers translates the need to look at both the environment from where poets speak, and their response to authors who have (in)formed them, particularly when such authors had motivated them in rather subversive, oppositional ways of speaking (belonging, feeling and existing their own literary worlds) such as the case of the 1960's emerging, women poets. Either way,

> The representation of Ireland is a textual fabric in which ideological climate and discursive convention are the warp and the woof. Both dimensions, the contextual and the intertextual, should be taken equally into account when studying Irish literary history. (Leerssen 1996: 5)

For Boland's generation of poets and, to some extent, for the ones that followed it, existing as women, occupying the space of womanhood entails embracing the literary past that has given rise to a/some national tradition(s). Therefore, being an Irish woman poet has to do with reaching identity recognition and/or searching for it.

2– Breaking up with tradition

In the case of Irish poetry, we must notice how women are both represented and constituted discursively through time and how this is to change with the 1960's movement of women poets. Notwithstanding, it is also important to Irish literary studies to observe how all the other aspects involved in the context of Irish writing are articulated by the emergent poets from Eavan Boland onwards – namely, the local and the global; the country and the city; religiousness (Catholicism or Protestantism); the north and the south of Ireland, speaking from, towards or in regard to tradition.

Also, identity in Ireland – and in postmodernity – understood as fragmented, dispersed in its various forms, as mentioned above, exists in dislocation, the unfixed space of belonging, the moveable feast of the margins, never (in)appropriate, but in constant search for processes of conscience and social visibility. Thus, gender, space and belonging help create some sense of identity in terms of both literary representation and constitution (that is, by means of literary texts, senses of identity are constructed and not merely represented). In this sense, we can think of how both the nation and gender work as basic features in the redefining of tradition. The classic example of literary representation in Ireland surrounding women has to do with how they are represented through the literary history, traditionally, by means of their association to the idea of the country and the dimension of such representation in the establishment of "a voice" as started occurring in the 1960's. Women and the nation have been an almost indissociable image in Ireland: from William Butler Yeats' *The Countess Cathleen* to Padraic Colum`s poem "I shall not Die for thee" or from Michael Hartnett's "Death of an Irishwoman" to Eavan Boland's "Mise Eire", this latter poem already subverts the order of tradition, even though it contrastively approximates the traditional image of the woman as a reified metonym of the nation to the reinvented one. Indeed, there is no way of going beyond tradition, reinscribing it, without going back to it, making reference to it, remembering it as a starting point for change. The denegation process, a double denial, which happens in the appearance of the same line ("I won't go back to it") twice (the first and sixteenth lines) confers to the poem's lyrical-I the power of language building, through the

recovery of the past in the lady's discourse and the inevitability of what has happened into the present

> a new language
> is a kind of scar
> and heals after a while
> into a passable imitation
> of what went before. (Boland 1996a: "Mise Eire")

Curiously, the new language is an old one, reinvented, spoken with a previously less audible "accent", the voices of women and the attention to the error of exclusion and silencing. Probably most women writers in the Western world suffer from the same crisis of invisibility, which leads us to a universal topic, that of women's public space, and voice(ing), dealt with by contemporary women writers in Ireland(s) – and the plural form refers to the multiplicity of Ireland(s) visible from outside the country, within its plurality of perspectives, in a movement that goes from the particularized global spectra to the publically restricted particularities[1]. The "new language" is also connected to the movement that goes from the private sphere to the public one – women speaking of issues restricted to their everyday lives into poetry – as well as from the public domain of life to the private one, as is the case of the influence of politics on one's private realm. In both cases, language emerges as a deeply incomplete intermediacy, which is congruent to the issue of dislocation and fragmentary belonging. Therefore, it is not only the nation (Ireland) and women writers who share the state of exile, but language itself.

After examining the dialogue that Eavan Boland and the generation that rises with her establishes with tradition, we shall return to the way Boland deals with language and its everlasting inadequacy, which is rendered in her work as a means towards self-revelation, through lyrical expression and as a social response to the masculine dominion of the publishing market, hers is also a response to Yeats' *The Countess Cathleen*,

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[1] "*Particularized global spectra*" refers to all that is seen of the world within someone's specific and personal viewpoint. The "*publically restricted particularities*" have to do with the personal realm of life that is made public.

Colum's verses "O woman, shapely as the swan,/ On your account I shall not die" that pay tribute to the national patriarchalism with which Irish literature has traditionally been embedded: men shall no longer die for their country. Exile may be the solution. And for the poets, the exile of language may be a less complicated business. Be as it may, in Colum's poem "I shall not die" also appears twice, as to confirm (deniably) the lyrical-I's choice of not going into war for the beauty of the country, personified in the figure of the woman (which is itself reified). These repeated lines of splendid vividness are reinforced by the lines "And yet I shall not suffer death" and "I cannot die", so as to make explicit how language can save if not the poet, the lyrical-person there, once the woman (country) is long dead (yet, also loved) for the lyric-I in Michael Harnett's poem "Death of an Irishwoman":

> "I loved her from the day she died."
>
> She was a summer dance at the crossroads.
> She was a cardgame where a nose was broken.
> She was a song that nobody sings.
> She was a house ransacked by soldiers.
> She was a language seldom spoken.
> She was a child's purse, full of useless things."

In short, the initiative of literary (and social) change, from the part of the emerging 1960's generation of women poets, accompanies the recuperation of all that compounds the (literary) life of such poets today, including that which precisely needs revision, in this case, namely, patriarchalism and its effects upon the representation and constitution of women's identity.

3– *Writing back* as strategy

The examples of women figuring as the nation are numerous and writing back to the heavy load of male-oriented poetic discourse may have been quite a task for the emerging poets who have seen Eavan Boland as an icon. According to John Goodby "the emergence of women poets then challenges perhaps the major basis on which much Irish poetry is founded" (2000, p.228). At this point, we must notice that one of the most recurrent

and important claims made by poets such as Boland is that the place and space of and for women in Irish poetry have always been minor and ignored. It is against this usual kind of poetic attitude which described and located women as objects and basically metonyms of the nation that Boland and the generation that was to appear with her works and actions have struggled. Eavan Boland was one of such artists involved in creative writing workshops for women throughout the country, run by institutions such as the Women's Education Bureau, which in 1980 – a decade after the publication of the first challenging volumes by women poets – organized writing groups for women. Such action has certainly promoted a new kind of Irish literary production, focused on the reinventing of women's image and voice. No longer were women to be portrayed exclusively by men and as objects of observance, but rather as subjects of their own histories and authors of their own selves. (Re)constructing the self, both in its social dimension and in its rather intimate, private sphere requires negotiation with the past, the basis for what it is to be (re)born, as mentioned by Cristina Pérez Valverde:

> One of the first tasks of the female poet – as felt by Boland, McGuckian or Meehan, for instance – is the coming to grips with the ideal mythic, which they have accomplished through their own demythologizing and remythologizing of the national icons. (Valverde 1997: 406)

The fact that "now" (from the 1960's on) women poets make space for their own rooms – to allude to Virgina Woolf's *A Room Of One's Own* – brings up other preoccupations that intersect with the discussion of dislocation, such as the issue of tradition and how the transition between the past and the present occurs. It is at this point that we see Boland's *writing back* strategy, in a movement that inverts the order of power. The past is no longer the center, but one of the junctions with which the present establishes connections. This does not make the past minor, but reiterates the values that had long been hidden from the centre, namely, women's voices as subjects of history. It is Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of carnavalization of forces that are both centripetal and centrifugal, according to time and occasion. Attributing voice to what had been so far silenced by legitimated history, Boland thus specifies her commitment to the history of the nation

as follows:

> This piece is about the past and our right as women poets to avail of it. It is about the art and against the silence. (…) The past needs us. That very past in poetry which simplified us as women and excluded us as poets needs us to change it (…). The only way to change a tradition was to go to the sources which had made it in the first place: but what were they? Intuitively I felt that the way to touch them was by reaching back into my own imagination, attempting to become not just the author of the poem but the author of myself. (Boland 1997)

Initially, the inversion of that which "*needs us*", the past (and not the present, in need of the past) authorizes the present to speak and its (women) authors to exist, to become (visible). "Reaching back into one's imagination" can be understood as going back to all that background of readings, maps of the soul and of the intellect, and retelling the (socially accepted) story one's own way, with one's own voice, in a process of the imagination and of making the imagery touchable by words and discourse, given that the sense of negation amongst women surrounding the 1960's was still way too strong to allow for the rupture of silence. One of the many other prominent writers, contemporary to Boland, Medbh McGuckian, signals the need for speech, the word as the counterdiscoursive practice possible for women to *write back* (to) the tradition, as follows:

> I know being a woman for me for a long time was being less, being excluded, being somehow cheap, being inferior, being sub. I associated being a woman with being a Catholic and being Irish with being from the North, and all of these things being not what you wanted to be. If you were a woman, it would have been better to be a man; if you were Catholic, it would have been a lot easier to be Protestant; if you were from the North, it was much easier to be from the South; if you were Irish it was much easier to be English. So it was like everything that I was was wrong; everything that I was was hard, difficult and a punishment. (Temple, 1999)

Clearly, the sense of dislocation, while being the cause of social and personal disadjustment for the poet here, also works as a motivation for

writing, to surpass the limits of the *establishment*. This same understanding of dislocation as part of women's belonging (ironically) reflects that of the nation's: "not quite/ not white" as predicted by Homi K.Bhabha (1994). The Irish people seem neither to be at home, nor at ease, even when international capital starts coming in and making of the local village a global space in socioeconomic terms only (when Ireland enters the European Community in 1973) for the idea of exile and distance take long to become inverted. One could argue that from the end of the 1980's Ireland turned itself into the country of accelerated, industrial production and, therefore, an ideal geography for Eastern European immigrants to find themselves a homeland – and finally allow for an inversion of order of the exile "project" of Ireland. Yet all those writers who have been "back-up vocals" for the history of the country and the literary history have written from a diasporic perspective, as is the case of James Joyce and some of his followers.

It is, then, in the same direction that the nation seeks to (re)adapt to the neoliberalism in which economy and society are embedded. Following the chain of social modifications that took place from the late 1960's, women as writers and founders of a network of voices start telling their own stories as subjects and no longer as mere, passive objects.

4– A multiple tradition

The above reflection leads us into the next troubling issue, which is that of tradition: in which terms tradition can be defined and why. In the Irish case, tradition has long been associated with two trends in contemporaneity: James Joyce and William Butler Yeats – and their specific followers. One must wonder, however, where the space of and for women has been. Or, at least, this is the question that has been rediscovered in the movement of poetry publication and literary workshops run by and for women writers from the 1960's on.

Robert Garratt, the well-known Irish cultural critic, while signalling to the relationship between identity and the nation in his 1986 *Modern Irish Poetry: Tradition and Continuity from Yeats to Heaney* calls our attention to the values that haunt Irish poetic imagery as being those related to (dis)continuity, coherence and fragmentation, in such a way that

Irishness turns out to be a condition of *being* from a locality seen from around the world:

> (…) A 'nation' can be conceived of, not implicitly, in itself, but only in contradistinction to others. I put it then, that it is more fruitful to consider the question of nationality in its relational aspects, to approach it from a strictly supranational, comparative point of view, to consider nationality, not as a discrete, self-contained idea, but as the expression of an international relationship. (Leerssen 1996: 24)

From women studies' perspectives, the nation is "not just geographical but a country of the mind" as defined by Seamus Heaney, who also states that "it is this feeling, assenting, equable marriage between the geographical country and the country of the mind (…) it is this marriage that constitutes the sense of place in its richest possible manifestation." (1984:132). And it seems that Boland's "country of the mind" has to do with the feminine and the domestic spheres of life, which is present not only in her poetic work, but also in her critical essays. Together with the universe of women are metalanguage and the concern with the artistic craft of writing, even though politics also constitutes the poet's discourse. Writers such as Mahon (1993), McGuckian (2000) and Brown (1993) agree in pointing out to the influence of poets from Romanticism to Yeats on the work of Boland, whose innovative dialogue with tradition consists of both going against Yeats' vision of a national unity and criticizing the positioning of poets such as Patrick Kavanagh who elaborated on the idea of parochialism, a unitary community, without divergence or dissent. To Boland, the only plausible unity would be that of the self's own dismembering, that of individuality.

5– Eavan Boland's work

We shall briefly comment on the poet's books now. A transitional book, *The War Horse* brings images of (social and subjective) violence as well as its effects upon the feminine imagery, which shall reappear in her forthcoming volumes, particularly, the 2007 *Domestic Violence*. In her 1980 volume *In Her Own Image*, the poet breaks apart the silence on women's suffering and, therefore, condenses fundamental arguments for

the space of women in literature and culture. Then, Boland's following book, *Night Feed*, which came out in 1982, brings up the themes of motherhood and aging. It also continues to delve into personal interiority, as if the revelation of personal experiences worked as a metaphor for the world of social experience. Indeed, the private and public worlds intersect and dialogue throughout Boland's work. Although *In Her Own Image* already reflects upon the space occupied by women and their social and artistic role(s), *The Journey* rediscovers the need to talk of artistic control and the making of art; it is a book of "quest and vision" in the words of Augustine Martin (1993, p.75) and the 1990 Norton anthology *Outside History selected poems 1980-1990* completely innovates, as it condenses the deeply historical and mythical intertextuality with tradition (the literary and artistic one, as other media interplay with words, as to compose poetry). In this sense, *writing back* to tradition (and not necessarily against it) has to do with the (re)creation of space for women writers and the voicing process through what Boland calls "the rhetoric of imagery" (Boland 1995: 128). This strategy consists of "a fusion of the national and the feminine" (ibid idem) and it is gradually revealed along her poetic work, by means of intermediality or, more precisely, the use of two different types of ekphrasis – the notional and the real – to reach a less incomplete level of discoursive communication. We must bear in mind that by *notional ekphrasis* we mean a detailed, elaborate (word) description of a purely fictional work of art, being it painting or sculpture and *actual ekphrasis*, a verbal representation of a real representation. In both cases, ekphrasis can be understood as a tool towards language encounter, one way the poet deals with language's inadequacy.

6– Going beyond language's inadequacy

Let us now look into a few of Boland's poems that are related to (female) identity dislocation and the rediscovery of the space of speech. Moreover, the choice of the poems relies on the attempt to read Boland's use of ekphrasis as a strategic, *writing back* device on the encounter of the private world, through language, always incomplete but less so in the intersection of media. Moreover, by the end of such reflections, we should be able to conclude that the artistic integration of poetry and painting, for

example, provides a broad answer to the issue of incommunicability by allowing for a more thorough on-going communication, integrated in the dialogue between pictorial and verbal art, allowing for language to be less deficient. Notwithstanding, textualizing the visual enables poets to address political questions, and look forward to obtaining some kind of political negotiation.

Therefore, the poem that most clearly depicts the metaphor of speech repossession by women poets is "Silenced". It is published in the book *Domestic Violence* and it tells the Greek, mythic story of Philomel that was raped by her sister's husband, Tereus, who required silence by removing Philomel's tongue. However, she found her way with tapestry, words and image. The metaphor of the Irish poet finds its way in the intersection of verb tenses (past and present) in lines 13th and 19th of the poems respectively: "she was weaving alone" and "now she is rinsing the distances". The power of image here is that of the image that speaks: women become empowered as long as they can tell their own stories. So here is an example of what Boland called "the rhetoric of imagery" (Boland, 1995a, p.128) which is able to unite the private and the public, make public that which is private by means of notional ekphrasis, as we can see the image of the characters involved in the narrated (fictional) story through the words on the page. There is a considerable amount of poems that follow the notional ekphrastic pattern, and "Distances", "In Exile" and "Exile! Exile!" are the ones that most evidently highlight the importance of issues such as history, memory and belonging for the recovery of (female) identity.

On the other hand, *New Territory* provides Boland's readers with a notable series of real ekphrastic poems that help deterritorialize women as objects and silenced, invisible subjects, as they make reference and allusion to painters' works of art. While transposing the paintings' characters' stories into words, these poems recreate the space of (and for) women. One of these poems is entitled "From the Painting *Back from Market* by Chardin" and it alludes and refers to the painting *Back from Market* by Jean Baptiste Simeón Chardin, from 1739. One must notice here what difference the differences and similarities between the painting and the poem make, as most readers are prompt to take the poem as some kind of "perfect description" of the painting and this latter as "an exact",

imagetic representation of the words on the page. However, the two experiences are more than interchangeable, they are complementary in the attempt to elaborate discourse more thoroughly, as is the case of another of her poems called "Dega's Laundresses", which allude to a series of three paintings by Edgar Degas: "Woman Ironing", "Two Laundresses" and "Scene in a Laundry". In the two above mentioned examples of real ekphrasis, intermediality can be taken as a metonym to both metalanguage and the reflection on the condition of women, as in lines 14-16:

> "(…) I think of what great art removes:
> Hazard and death. The future and the past.
> A woman's secret history and her loves …"

In this sense, reinscribing gender in society seems to be a key factor in Eavan Boland's *writing back* attitude. According to Rui Carvalho Homem (2006), building the poetic self destabilizes the frontiers of a medium and questions the defining marks of gender and of genre. Boland's perception of the distance between her everyday life, writing and publication has motivated her into writing and denouncing:

> (…) It was not exactly or even chiefly that the recurrences of my world
> – a child's face, the dial of a washing machine – were absent from the tradition, although they were. It was not even so much that I was a woman. It was that being a woman, I had entered into a life for which poetry has no name. (Boland 1995: 18)

Therefore, making room for women in writing signifies, for Boland, creating space in discourse, searching (without necessarily finding) home. Indeed, the awareness of the condition of exile is originated in the distancing of (poetic) language in this case, at the same time that it opens up for more linguistic possibilities – the poems on the page.

In 1998, another book by Boland, called *The Lost Land*, is published and it discusses the nation and the motherland and how these are perceptions of personal (mis)encounters. One of the book's most significant poems is "Home", which is a drawing of cosmopolitanism, of the cosmos' image as seen by the lyrical-I in California's geography, with its shadows and colours' alterations, a metonym of one's own transformation in (or

because of) exile. In this sense, home is almost an exile, similar to that of the writer, the speaker. Writing is consciously inhabiting the space of exile. There is another one of Boland's poems entitled "In Exile" and its senses of utopia and distopia surrounding geography intersect those of the self and of language:

> "This is the hour when every ornament
> unloads its atoms of pretence. Stone.
> Brass. Bronze. What they represent is
> set aside in the dark: they become again
>
> a spacious morning in the Comeraghs.
> An iron gate; a sudden downpour; a well in
> the corner of a farmyard; a pool of rain
> into which an Irish world has fallen.
>
> Out there the Americas stretch to the horizons.
> They burn in the cities and darken over wheat.
> (…)
> O land of opportunity, you are
> not the suppers with meat, nor
> the curtains with lace nor the unheard of
> fire in the grate on summer afternoons…" (Boland 2001: 32)

The Americas stretch to the horizons of language in the utopian constructions of diaspora, present in Boland's poems. The only way out when everything else seems to fail is to take language as salvation, to voice those who have been silent or/and had been silenced for too long. In this sense, the revitalization of history, with all its multiple, decentred selves gives rise to a new tendency in the Irish poetic writing context: that of women writers speaking for themselves, and on their own behalf.

7– Poetry as negotiation

The poetic examples chosen here may lead us to believe that Poetry works as a vehicle for the dialogic discussion of politics and existence, that is, it is able to negotiate worlds: the private and the public, the inner and the outer worlds that come to a confluence or a series of them. At last, it is important to remember that such negotiation occurs within the

rediscovery of tradition by means of its rupture, as well as it manifests areas of life long neglected by Irish, poetic discourse: the domestic atmosphere. In the poem "Woman In Kitchen", we find the metaphor of the poet in the image of the domestic woman, in charge of cleaning and washing:

> Breakfast over, islanded by noise,
> she watches the machines go fast and slow.
> She stands among them as they shake the house.
> They move. Their destination is specific.
> She has nowhere definite to go.
> She might be a pedestrian in a traffic.
> (…)
> The wash done, the kettle boiled, the sheets
> spun and clean, the dryer stops dead.
> The silence is a death. It starts to bury
> the room in white spaces. She turns to spread
> a cloth on the board and iron sheets
> in a room white and quite as a mortuary.
>
> (Boland, 1991: 121)

This lady portrayed in "Woman In Kitchen", similarly to Philomel that innovates in the art of telling, by means of all the work ("she turns to spread/ a cloth on the board and iron sheets…") narrates her own story and by doing so, engages into the craft of poetry, because her voice breaks the long lasting "rule" of silence – this is the story inside a story, that of the lyrical-I in women poetry. This woman in the poem, then, incarnates the voice of freedom, the search for speech by means of the dialogue between the private and the public spheres of life. Here is where poetry meets politics and we find that Boland's strategic policy of *writing back* works in favour of women's visibility.

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ESTUDOS

Byron, Lamartine e Alcipe num Soneto Português (1844)

João Almeida Flor
CEAUL - Centro de Estudos Anglístico da Universidade de Lisboa

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Integrado em reflexão desencadeada a propósito do segundo centenário da viagem de Lord Byron a Portugal, o presente trabalho visa contribuir para preencher uma lacuna na linha de continuidade que caracteriza a recepção criativa de *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) na cultura portuguesa oitocentista. Com efeito, propomo-nos comentar questões relativas a um soneto de interesse byroniano, até agora negligenciado, apesar de haver sido composto pela Marquesa de Alorna (1850-1839), entre os poetas conhecida por Alcipe, e publicado no volume IV das *Obras Poéticas* (1844), postumamente dadas à estampa por suas filhas, com o apoio editorial de Carlos Manuel Soyé. Como se este aliciante não bastasse, tal soneto constitui ainda o paratexto autoral introdutório, anteposto à tradução, também efectuada por Alcipe, de uma das célebres *Méditations Poétiques* (1820) de Alphonse de Lamartine, justamente aquela que, nessa colectânea inaugural do romantismo francês, o autor dedicara à controversa figura de Lord Byron. Daqui se concluirá como, a partir de um passo de *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, as reverberações do byronismo dentro do macro-espaço anglo-franco-português, descrevem trajectórias de fluxo, refluxo e intersecção que demonstram a centralidade da figura de Alcipe como mediadora intercultural, na transição para o romantismo oitocentista.

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* *

Comecemos por notar que os episódios e o significado genérico da passagem de Lord Byron, no verão de 1809, por terras portuguesas, em trânsito para a Andaluzia e rumo ao Mediterrâneo oriental, podem ser reconstruídos, em termos histórico-biográficos, com base em materiais de índole diversa, a carecerem de estudo crítico contextualizante e relativizador do valor documental respectivo.

A fonte historiográfica principal é constituída por um conjunto de apontamentos memorialísticos manuscritos, em latim e inglês, preparatórios da publicação de um relato da viagem por John Cam Hobhouse, amigo íntimo de Byron que o acompanhou em quase todo o trajecto.[1] Além disso, em registo mais íntimo e com cópia de pormenores pitorescos, a visita a Portugal também surge referida na correspondência epistolar do poeta, datada do verão de 1809.[2] No entanto, importa reter que todos estes materiais foram disponibilizados mediante publicação, só em data muito tardia, razão pela qual o seu contributo para a construção da imagem de Byron entre nós se pode considerar de importância secundária.

Na verdade, para a recepção de Byron, iniciada ainda em princípios do século XIX, o texto determinante consistiu na verbalização poética de algumas impressões de viagem, subjacentes às estrofes de *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812), dedicadas à geografia física e humana do nosso país e, em particular, à cidade e região de Lisboa. Nos leitores portugueses, o tom depreciativo do passo provocou ressentimento imediato e duradouro, pela denúncia da pretensa incultura e falta de polimento civilizacional dos habitantes e naturais, em contraste com o louvor entusiástico, suscitado pela beleza natural de um conjunto de lugares amenos e paisagens edénicas dos arredores da capital. Com efeito, lido na estrutura superficial da sua literalidade, o passo tem sido entendido como insultuosa afronta aos valores da auto-estima portuguesa, para mais em tempo de protonacionalismo romântico. Assim, logo a partir da recensão e tradução parcial do poema, promovidas pela primeira geração de exilados criptoliberais em Inglaterra,[3] os portugueses têm procurado tirar desforço da alegada insolência byroniana, publicando sucessivos desagravos, réplicas, e repúdios poéticos, assinados por inúmeros autores. O mais curioso talvez seja observar como boa parte destes, a despeito das polémicas luso-britânicas, não logrará eximir-se à influência exercida pela voz de Byron, romântico por anto-

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[1] Cf. João Almeida Flor, "A propósito de um manuscrito do Museu Britânico sobre a viagem de Byron a Portugal ", RFLUL, 4ªsérie, I (1976-77).

[2] Por exemplo, em cartas dirigidas a sua Mãe e a alguns amigos.

[3] João Almeida Flor, "An early Portuguese review of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*", *Byron / Portugal*, Lisboa, 1977.

nomásia, que a Europa coeva se habituara a aclamar, pelo seu exemplo geracional de fulgor poético, subjectivismo exacerbado, titânica rebeldia e pessimismo existencial, amiúde condimentado pelos escândalos da sua assumida luxúria.

Deste modo, a princípio difundidas sobretudo pelas traduções francesas de Benjamin de la Roche e também de Amédée Pichot, a poesia e a reputação byronianas transformam-se, em Portugal, numa espécie de grande liça literária que anima a imprensa periódica da época e se aviva em volumes publicados durante todo o século XIX. Entre os autores dispostos a defender, com pundonor, a dignidade da nação vilipendiada, contam-se os nomes de Almeida Garrett (1824), Alexandre Herculano (1829), Camilo Castelo Branco, Bulhão Pato (1857), António Pedro Lopes de Mendonça (1858), Rebelo da Silva e Guerra Junqueiro (1874).[4] Em contrapartida, outros literatos, como sejam João de Lemos (1859), Alberto Telles (1879) e D.G.Dalgado (1919), esforçam-se por atenuar o efeito negativo das estrofes de *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, tomando uma posição conciliatória que tende a julgar procedentes alguns dos reparos de Byron em relação a Portugal, ou então, a congeminar explicações e atenuantes para a animosidade do poeta. Entretanto, no decurso do século XIX, tal apaziguamento será reforçado mediante publicação de um número crescente de traduções portuguesas de poemas byronianos, primeiro em periódicos e depois em livro, tema por nós já estudado noutro lugar.[5]

A propósito deste conflito de opiniões, recordemos a síntese clarividente, elaborada por Fernando de Mello Moser, primeiro Presidente da Secção Portuguesa da International Byron Society e autor de um ensaio sobre a reputação do poeta entre nós:

> [...] the story of Byron's reputation in Portugal until the later nineteenth century is, to a great extent, the story of a grievance, stressed by those on one side who repeatedly showed

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[4] Maria Leonor Machado de Sousa, "Tempting Demon": the Portuguese Byron, *The Reception of Byron in Europe*, London,2004.

[5] João Almeida Flor, "Byron em português: para o estudo histórico-cultural da tradução literária", *Dedalus*, 5, 1995.

> that Byron had grossly exaggerated and had, in fact, been prejudiced in his remarks concerning the Portuguese people, and attenuated by those on the other side who tried, not too successfully to justify Byron's ways to their compatriots. [6]

Ora, transposto que foi já o limiar do século XXI, como poderemos nós aqui equacionar tal problema que tem alimentado a vitimização dos portugueses, injustiçados por acintosos versos? Em boa verdade, estamos em crer que tal questão sempre derivou e deriva da identificação do protagonista Childe Harold com o próprio Byron, motivo pelo qual conviria ultrapassar, em definitivo, as polémicas serôdias e estéreis, travadas em torno de ressentimentos e desafectos recíprocos, no intuito de transferir a discussão para o campo da hermenêutica literária e inscrever o passo famoso no seu contexto histórico, literário e cultural.

Em primeiro lugar, sublinharemos como a posição teórica das poéticas anglófonas (pós)modernistas encara a identificação tendencial do autor empírico (neste caso, o homem Byron) com o sujeito lírico ou narrativo (aqui, a personagem Harold) como um pressuposto metodologicamente pretérito, em óbvia concordância com a estética romântica da sinceridade confessional e intimista mas insusceptível de fundamentar, sem reservas, uma leitura literária actualizada. De facto, em sintonia com a adopção de modelos sócio-económicos de inspiração demo-liberal, a profunda crise da consciência individual e colectiva, ocorrida na transição para o século XIX e acentuada no apogeu do chamado período vitoriano, originou um fenómeno de gradual fragmentação, dissociação e multiplicação do sujeito discursivo que, no paradigma pré-modernista então emergente, foi corroendo a noção de escrita como expressão plena e imediata da personalidade autoral. Em nossa opinião e de harmonia com esta viragem, justifica-se, então, propor hoje que a lusofobia tradicionalmente imputável ao homem e ao poeta Byron seja, antes, interpretada como estratégia discursiva, no quadro de uma poética singularmente receptiva a atitudes histriónicas de fingimento e simulação. Além disso, exprimindo a

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[6] F. de Mello Moser, "Byron and Portugal: the progress of an offending pilgrim", *Byron's political and cultural influence in 19th century Europe: a Symposium*, NJ, 1981 e João Almeida Flor, "Lord Byron", *Biblos*, I, Lisboa, 1995

revolta prometeica e a disforia romântica de toda uma geração, o texto logra desempenhar essencialmente três funções complementares. Primeiro, documenta o potencial desdobramento polifónico e dramático da escrita lírica byroniana; depois, remete para a especificidade de uma situação narrativa e descritiva concreta e condicionante do sentido geral do poema; finalmente, dá voz à sensibilidade peculiar do protagonista Harold, figura ficcionada como *persona* literária, num palco onde contracenam outras alteridades (pré)modernistas.

Em segundo lugar, numa perspectiva histórico-política, o leitor de hoje recordará como os episódios bélicos da primeira invasão napoleónica, referidos em *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* e, em particular, o seu controverso desfecho na chamada Convenção de Cintra (1808), considerada ignominiosa pela opinião pública coeva, concorreram para que Byron e os liberais britânicos verberassem esse capítulo da Guerra Peninsular, e, por extensão abusiva, o país onde ele decorrera.

Em terceiro e último lugar, a interpretação actual das estrofes problemáticas poderá fundamentar-se no facto de o universo simbólico do poema denotar a marca rousseauista, herdada por certas antinomias românticas. Com efeito, em *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, deparamos, por um lado, com a celebração apoteótica das categorias paisagísticas do pitoresco ou do sublime, quer como emblemas da idade áurea e sua harmonia edénica, quer como sinais de uma energia criadora, natural e transcendente. Por outro lado, no extremo oposto, assinalamos a denúncia da indesejável presença e acção humana (no caso vertente, portuguesa) cuja pecaminosa desmesura ameaça macular, degradar e contaminar espaços indevidamente civilizados.

Indicados sucintamente três argumentos que nos obrigam hoje a formular objecções à leitura linear e biografista do passo em questão e suas justificações fantasiosas, aproximamo-nos agora do texto byroniano de Alcipe, intitulado "Soneto (que não serviu) dedicando uma obra poética ao autor de Childe Harold", aqui transcrito com grafia actualizada.[7]

Não me arrasto ante Heróis nem Potentados
Para ofrecer-lhe os frutos do juízo;

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[7] Marquesa de Alorna, *Obras Poéticas*, vol IV, Lisboa, 1844, p. 227.

Acolham-nos as Musas de um sorriso
Ou só por elas sejam castigados.

Tu, que sem compaixão dos Lusos Fados,
Deste as cores do Averno ao Paraíso,
Aplaque-te esta ofrenda; acho preciso
Que te sejam meus versos dedicados.

Se eles são bons, se a par do Venusino
Colho flores nas bordas do Permesso,
Desagravo a Nação de um desatino.

Se são maus, indulgência não te peço:
É de humanos errar, não temo ensino;
Da glória que te dou não me entristeço.

Centralmente interessados no valor documental do poema, deixaremos de lado a apreciação de eventuais valores estéticos, para concentrar atenções nos aspectos julgados pertinentes, em termos da recepção de Byron pela cultura portuguesa.

Importa notar como, em lugar de ser mencionado pelo nome, Byron é evocado no título apenas enquanto criador de *Childe Harold*, quer dizer, através de uma táctica de circunlóquio que indirectamente revela a identidade do destinatário mas logo focaliza as atenções num único poema, precisamente o que documenta incidências portuguesas. A corroborar tais palavras, a apóstrofe da segunda quadra demonstra ser justamente a alegada lusofobia byroniana ("Tu, que sem compaixão dos Lusos Fados / Deste as cores do Averno ao Paraíso") o alvo que Alcipe pretende atingir.

Em complemento, também numa nota de pé de página, pode ler-se a seguinte explicitação da autora:

> "Lord Byron quando, no 1º canto do sobredito poema de *Childe Harold*, descreve os sítios de Portugal, e os seus costumes, trata despiedadamente os Portugueses; e isto quando eles sofriam grandes calamidades na época da invasão de Bonaparte."[8]

[8] *op.cit.* p.227.

Assim sendo, com o objectivo genérico de cumprir os ritos do desagravo nacional, a argumentação do soneto de Alcipe desenvolve uma tópica que engloba várias noções conexas, envoltas ainda em múltiplas referências culturais greco-latinas, caras à poética do neoclassicismo setecentista. Igualmente se salientam a concepção não-utilitária da poesia e a respectiva função sacrificial, restauradora da harmonia cósmica, bem como a sua capacidade de proporcionar ressarcimento moral aos injuriados e de conceder imorredoura glória a quem for nomeado como objecto ou destinatário do canto. Daí deriva a necessidade redundante de incorporar no próprio texto a dedicatória a Byron ("Aplaque-te esta ofrenda; acho preciso / Que te sejam meus versos dedicados.").

Além disso, o soneto apresenta-se-nos como poema prefacial a um texto mais extenso que, para Alcipe, funciona igualmente como réplica ao autor de *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. Curiosamente trata-se de uma tradução do francês, a "Epístola a Lord Byron, imitada da II Meditação de Alphonse de Lamartine, intitulada O Homem" e, à primeira vista, pode causar estranheza que Alcipe tivesse confiado a função de dar livre curso ao seu próprio pensamento, através da versão de um texto alheio. No entanto, talvez seja este um dos sinais da elevada dignidade atribuída pela autora à tradução, ou melhor à imitação literária, que, embora pertença à categoria metatextual das escritas derivativas e de segundo grau, consente certas modalidades de intervenção estética, pela apropriação subjectivante do sentido.

Noutro plano, com os materiais actualmente disponíveis, não parece fácil determinar a data de composição do soneto em estudo nem da tradução mencionada mas será possível situá-los em fase tardia da produção literária de Alcipe, necessariamente posterior a 1820, ano da primeira edição de *Méditations Poétiques* de Lamartine. Escasseiam igualmente os dados sobre os modos e a ocasião que propiciaram o contacto da tradutora com a citada colectânea, uma das obras inaugurais do romantismo europeu, mas a consabida familiaridade de Alcipe com a língua francesa e o seu relacionamento duradouro com literatos cosmopolitas como sejam Mme de Stael e Filinto Elísio, longos anos exilado em França, pode ter facilitado o acesso ao original. De resto, a proximidade de Lamartine ao círculo de relações de Alcipe comprova-se pelo facto de o autor francês haver dedicado a Filinto um extenso poema, intitulado "La Gloire: à un poète exilé",

que veio a lume no ano de 1827, em edição bilingue, donde respigamos a citação seguinte:

> Ton destin, ô Manoel, suivit la loi commune,
> Ta muse t'enivra de précoces faveurs,
> Tes jours furent tissus de gloire et d'infortune !…
> […]
> Ni l'exil, ni les fers de ces tyrans du Tage
> N'enchaîneront ta gloire aux lieux où tu mourras;
>
> Lisbonne la réclame, et voilà l'héritage
> Que tu lui laisseras.[9]

Note-se que o anónimo tradutor português deste encómio lamartiniano, publicado nas páginas de um periódico, acrescentou-lhe palavras prefaciais onde lamenta a pouca atenção entre nós atribuída às belas-letras, concluindo nestes termos:

> "Esta maneira de proceder exemplifica-se mui bem e o leitor inteligente [...] nos poupa o desgosto do seu desenvolvimento, não menos assassino do amor próprio nacional que a descrição do porto de Lisboa de Lord Byron e as queixas de um verdadeiro patriota no epifonema do poema *Camões*." [10]

Importa ainda completar a presente exposição, com observações relativas ao significado da tradução do poema byroniano de Lamartine, assinada por Alcipe.

A primeira edição de *Méditations Poétiques* (1820) contém vinte e quatro poemas mas, em datas sucessivas, estes sofreram grande número de emendas, aditamentos e alterações que tornam singularmente árduas as tarefas da crítica textual contemporânea. Por seu turno, a resistência dos poemas à leitura interpretativa provém, não só da sua heterogeneidade formal, cronológica e temática mas igualmente das constantes remissões para um quadro cultural de feição complexa e quase sincrética. Com efeito,

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[9] Fernando Moreira (ed.), *Obras Completas de Filinto Elísio*, Tomo V, Braga,1999.

[10] *Novos Anais das Ciências e das Artes*, nº2,(Março), Paris, 1827.

no timbre de Lamartine coexistem a tradição e a inovação discursiva, o universo mental judaico-cristão e as posições agnósticas, bem como a resignação do estoicismo a par da insurreição prometeica contra a ordem estabelecida. Vale a pena frisar o facto de tais antinomias manifestarem profundas afinidades e relações intertextuais com a obra byroniana então em voga, factor que contribuirá para explicar o êxito imediato de Lamartine junto do público e da crítica, materializado nas nove edições da colectânea, em apenas três anos.

Por sinal, embora sejam também detectáveis em outras obras como *Le Dernier Chant du Pélérinage d'Harold*, *Nouvelles Méditations*, *Harmonies Poétiques*, *Jocelyn* e *Vie de Lord Byron*, as afinidades e dependências de Lamartine em relação ao seu modelo inglês são explicitadas precisamente no segundo poema da colectânea de 1820 ("Méditation Deuxième: L'homme, À Lord Byron") e num extenso comentário, incluído no final do volume:[11]

> Lord Byron est incontestablement à mes yeux la plus grande nature poétique des siècles modernes. […] Je devins ivre de cette poésie. J'avais enfin trouvé la fibre sensible d'un poète à l'unisson de mes voix intérieures. Je n'avais bu que quelques gouttes de cette poésie, mais c'était assez pour me faire comprendre un océan. […] Je m'assis au coin d'un petit feu de ceps de vigne, que je laissais souvent éteindre, dans la distraction entraînante de mes pensées; et j'écrivis au crayon, sur mes genoux, presque d'une seule haleine, cette méditation à lord Byron.

Resumidamente, este poema lamartiniano, traduzido por Alcipe, constitui uma apóstrofe ao próprio Byron cujo orgulho conduzira à revolta contra Deus, na inútil tentativa fáustica de ultrapassar a debilidade e as limitações da condição humana. Desta premissa decorre que a aceitação resignada dos desígnios da omnipotência divina seja a única atitude consentânea com a lei interior que sempre preconiza o imperativo da esperança. A concluir, Lamartine exorta Byron a cantar inspiradamente a providência

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[11] Alphonse de Lamartine, *Méditations*, (ed. F. Letessier), Paris, 1968, 327 ss.

divina, a submissão humana e os afectos do coração. Na tradução de Alcipe:[12]

> Ser homem, e querer saber é crime:
> Ignorar e servir é lei severa,
> Mas lei do nosso ser. Dura verdade!
> Sofre-a, ó Byron, pois sobre nós impera.
> [...]
> Quer amar, mas é frágil quanto ama!
> Todo o mortal parece-se na terra
> C'o degradado do Éden, quando irado
> Do celeste jardim Deus o desterra.
> [...]
> Silêncio, ó minha lira!… E tu, ó Byron,
> Que os corações imersos na agonia
> Tens nas mãos e avalias os humanos,
> Extrai dela torrentes de harmonia.
> [...]
> Precederás os génios mais sublimes
> Com que brindou o mundo sabiamente
> O Criador de tudo : fez o Vate
> Para cantar e crer e amar somente.

Que conclusões servirão de remate a esta exposição, iniciada e terminada em Byron, após excursos e digressões que se revelaram necessários?

Procurando ultrapassar o horizonte factual e biobibliográfico, a nossa reflexão orienta-se para enquadramentos comparatistas, exemplificativos da rede triangular de migrações textuais, registadas entre a Inglaterra, a França e Portugal, na longa transição para o século romântico. Por um lado, tal intercâmbio constante testemunha o crescente fenómeno de globalização cultural europeia e, por outro, origina a produção e circulação de imagens e contra-imagens identitárias, como as de Portugal em Byron, que afirmam e reivindicam as irredutíveis especificidades locais, regionais e nacionais, legadas pelo pensamento de Herder, Fichte e Humboldt à antropologia romântica.

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[12] Marquesa de Alorna, *loc. cit.*

Neste ponto, afigura-se adequado sublinhar como a exploração sucinta de uma rede de relações literárias, estabelecidas entre intelectuais da Europa oitocentista, acabou por nos proporcionar o encontro textual de figuras poéticas tão marcantes como Byron, Lamartine, Filinto Elísio, Alcipe e até Garrett que, de uma ou de outra forma, intervieram na (des)construção do retrato lusitano, extraído das páginas de um dos mais celebrados românticos ingleses.

Finalmente, em termos de história literária, a tradução dos poemas referentes a Byron / Lamartine por Alcipe, publicados nas *Obras Poéticas* em 1844, marca justamente o arranque da fase ascendente na reputação de Lamartine em Portugal, que atingirá a apogeu na década seguinte, para entrar em declínio a partir de 1860-65.[13] Podemos, pois, sugerir que a obra de Lamartine, difundida entre nós a partir da década de quarenta, (ou seja, com o intervalo de uma geração após o sucesso de estreia de *Méditations Poétiques*) terá desempenhado papel de relevo como veículo introdutório da tópica byroniana na cultura portuguesa contemporânea. Com efeito, ao trabalho pioneiro de Alcipe ficamos devendo tal forma de recepção criativa indirecta, manifesta no comprazimento em glosar a sintomatologia da chamada síndrome romântica, desde os infortúnios do amor até ao refúgio em isolamento, desde o peso de antiquíssima transgressão inominada até aos refrigérios da natureza, desde o sentimento elegíaco da transitoriedade humana até ao recolhimento contemplativo e jubiloso, pela esperança na regeneração final.

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[13] Maria de Fátima Outeirinho, *Lamartine em Portugal: alguns aspectos da sua recepção* (1840-1890), Porto, 1992, *passim*.

DISCURSOS DIRECTOS

Enda Walsh, Finalmente[1]

(Entrevista conduzida por Jorge Silva Melo)

Foi em Outubro de 2007 que conseguimos estrear um dos autores que há anos perseguimos, Enda Walsh. Já cá tinha estado (ver revista Nº13), já escrevera para nós uma pequena cena (para o espectáculo *Conferência de Imprensa e outras Aldrabices*), íamos trocando notícias. E conseguimos estrear *Disco Pigs* na histórica Sociedade Guilherme Cossoul, com Cecília Henriques e Pedro Carraca, numa encenação de Franzisca Aarlflot assistida por Paulo Pinto, com cenografia e figurinos de Rita Lopes Alves, luz de Pedro Domingos, som de André Pires e Dinis Neto, direcção de produção de Andreia Bento e Pedro Carraça, tradução de Joana Frazão.

E logo a seguir pegámos em *Acamarrados*, com estreia a 27 de Março de 2008 no Centro Cultural Malaposta. E a seguinte técnica: tradução de Joana Frazão, com Carla Galvão e António Simão, cenografia e figurinos e Rita Lopes Alves, luz de Pedro Domingos, direcção de produção de António Simão e assistência de Pedro Carraca. Já era altura. É que Enda Walsh é particular, é um caso muito isolado dentro do teatro britânico, é um autor. E com ele vamos continuar.

Eu sou esta história, mais esta, mais esta

Conversa com Enda Walsh.

No dia 15 de Novembro de 2007, na Faculdade de Letras, fez-se uma conversa com Enda Walsh e Jorge Silva Melo, que foi apresentada por Maria Helena Serôdio – integrada no Festival de Literatura Irlandesa

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[1] Entrevista publicada na revista Nº20 (Dezembro de 2007) dos Artistas Unidos, gentilmente cedida para efeitos de publicação no presente número da *Anglo-Saxónica*.

"Rising to Meet you". No mesmo dia, na Sociedade Guilherme Cossoul, depois do espectáculo *Disco Pigs*, houve também um encontro com os espectadores – e também com a encenadora, Franzisca Aarflot.

Jorge Silva Melo – ***Eu começaria por falar da Walworth Farce – que vi este ano em Edimburgo, pela Druid Theatre Company. O Francisco Frazão e eu, no fim da representação, dissemos: "Uau!" Foi o grande acontecimento do Festival. E dois ou três dias depois, recebi um email da Franzisca Aarflot – eu tinha-lhe perguntado se tinha gostado de alguma coisa, e ela disse: "Gostei da Walworth Farce"… Estão aqui três pessoas que a viram este ano…***

Enda Walsh – Eu também a vi…

JSM – ***É uma peça em duas partes, uma peça grande para o Enda Walsh, que é conhecido por ser um autor sucinto, que escreve peças com uma hora. E aqui temos duas horas e um quarto, quatro personagens, muito diferentes entre si, um cenário realista – pelo menos nesta produção. Como é que chegaste a esta peça, depois de dez anos de peças...?***

"um ambiente tipo panela de pressão"

EW – … depois de dez anos… Eu ando a escrever a mesma peça há dez anos, e de facto levou-me dez anos a ganhar alguma confiança para escrever uma peça com intervalo. A sério. Quando vejo uma peça mesmo boa, detesto ir-me embora do teatro, faço esse luto por perder um mundo que é muito mais interessante do que a merda do meu mundo e da minha vida. Todas as minhas peças tendem a ser sobre personagens que estão presas em padrões de comportamento, ou de linguagem, e chega a um momento em que dizem: "Pronto. Não posso continuar a viver assim, preciso de viver de outra maneira." Acabam por detestar esse mundo que criaram, e têm de se livrar dele – enquanto que nós, enquanto público, ficamos a gostar delas e desse ambiente, mas é no momento em que temos de nos despedir. Mas é sempre a mesma peça, exactamente. Acho que escrevi umas oito ou nove peças com essa estrutura, o que é terrível, mas para mim há lá coisas suficientes.

The Walworth Farce é sobre um pai e dois filhos que vivem num apartamento em Walworth (Walworth é uma rua no Sul de Londres).

E existem mil e uma peças sobre irlandeses a viver em Londres, a sonhar com o regresso à Irlanda, "ah, se ao menos eu pudesse voltar à Irlanda…", e depois bebem mais *Guinness* e discutem uns com os outros, esse género de coisa. E eu detesto esse tipo de peças. Não têm qualquer ligação comigo, nem com a minha geração de irlandeses. E, no entanto, eu queria mesmo escrevê-la, e gostava mesmo dos temas… Portanto a peça é sobre o pai e os dois filhos que vivem no topo de um bloco de apartamentos, e levantam-se todas as manhãs, põem bigodes postiços e perucas, mascaram-se, desligam as luzes, voltam a ligar as luzes e representam uma farsa. E a farsa começa a desmoronar-se. E a peça é sobre porque é que eles estão a representar esta farsa, e a viver neste padrão. E à medida que se desmorona, começamos a ver que o pai, basicamente, obriga os filhos a representar uma versão do passado dele, que é uma mentira ridícula. Mas ele contou-a tantas vezes ao longo dos últimos vinte anos que ganhou os ritmos da farsa. Basicamente é uma tragédia, mas representada segundo o ritmo e os conceitos da farsa. E para o público – espero eu – à medida que se põem e trocam os bigodes e as perucas, cada vez mais depressa, e tudo cada vez mais enlouquecido, vamo-nos apercebendo de que uma das personagens tem de morrer, e tentamos adivinhar qual delas vai ser.

Artistas Unidos

Acamarrados

Como o Jorge disse, eu nunca tinha escrito uma peça com intervalo e… Em relação a tudo o que escrevi até agora, sentia que o podia dizer numa hora; as peças tendem a ser um ambiente tipo panela de pressão, e é por isso que as personagens dizem: "pronto, preciso de sair, de sair daqui!" Então escrever uma peça com intervalo foi um grande, grande salto para mim, garantir que o público volta depois do intervalo… E eu quero mesmo que eles voltem, e não é voltarem do género

"oh, estou no teatro, é melhor voltar, e ver o que é que acontece". Era tentar determinar o tipo de conversas que teriam no intervalo, aqueles 15 minutos eram eles a dizerem: "ok, onde é que estamos, nesta peça, de que é que se está a falar, estamos a perder alguma coisa? Pronto, vamos voltar lá para dentro."

Não sei porque é que nunca tinha escrito uma peça com intervalo, mas suponho que a estrutura da farsa exige esse intervalo de 15 minutos – e certamente nesta peça, por causa dos temas, da linguagem, do ritmo, o público precisava desesperadamente de sair da sala por 15 minutos, "pronto, não faço ideia do que se está a passar, vamos voltar." Espero que tenhamos conseguido, e que a pausa de 15 minutos seja merecida…

"uma pessoa do mundo real dentro da peça"

JSM – ***E essa pausa acontece, na peça, quando os níveis se misturam. Na primeira hora, começas com uma farsa muito dura e, nos últimos 7 minutos da primeira parte, a realidade entra na peça, a rapariga preta bate à porta, vinda do supermercado, e entra nesta família maluca… E o ambiente muda; mas vem logo um intervalo, o que é um achado. Esse quarto elemento, a rapariga, o que é?***

EW – A rapariga é completamente a realidade. Acho que em qualquer peça há uma iniciação a certas regras teatrais – e fazemos todos isto enquanto público, sentamo-nos ali e demoramos algum tempo a perceber o ritmo e a linguagem que acontece na peça. E a farsa exige verdadeiras regras, regras completamente desprovidas de emoção, matemáticas, e é mesmo preciso obedecer-lhes – "pronto, já fiz isto, já fiz aquilo." Por isso aprendi como é que se escrevia uma farsa, mas é uma farsa muito depurada. E depois não existe farsa na Irlanda, não temos farsas. Quando a peça foi apresentada na Irlanda, não sei o que as pessoas pensaram… "Porque é que ele está a usar aquela estrutura?" A minha ideia ao usar essa estrutura é que ela não permite personagens, não tem nada a ver com emoções – e por isso quando as personagens e a emoção acontecem dentro desta equação matemática que é a farsa, as coisas explodem, precisam de sair para fora. E saem para fora sob a forma de uma tragédia, ou lá o que for…

E eu de facto nunca tive uma pessoa real, do mundo real, numa das minhas peças, por isso foi um choque: "oh meu Deus, ok, isto é mesmo uma pessoa." Acho que as personagens têm tendência a ser criaturas emo-

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Disco Pigs

cionais. Não caricaturas, não grotescas, mas personagens que precisam de falar de forma emocional o tempo todo – coisa que nós não fazemos como pessoas, porque é esgotante como o caraças. Mas no palco pode-se fazer isso, pode-se permitir às pessoas serem emocionais, e quererem proclamar quem são. Portanto escrever uma verdadeira personagem, eu nunca tinha

feito isso antes. Foi uma lufada de ar fresco, e ancora a peça não no teatro, mas no mundo propriamente dito. E devo dizer que foi mesmo uma grande lição para mim.

JSM – ***Parece que, durante uma hora, estamos nesta peça que é bigger than life, com todos os efeitos vulgares da farsa, e quando ela entra – e é uma boa entrada – pensamos: não, ela é uma amadora, não representa como os verdadeiros actores, que estão na peça. A realidade começa a ser o amadorismo, e a profissão corresponde à mentira. O que é um tema muito irlandês* – O Valentão do Mundo Ocidental** ***de Synge conta exactamente isso. Tu és um autor irlandês?***

EW – Sim, sou definitivamente um autor irlandês. Claro que não se tem consciência disso quando se está a escrever, é só retrospectivamente… Eu adorava ler peças quando era miúdo, o Tom Murphy foi uma enorme influência para mim; quando tinha 16 ou 17 anos não queria ser escritor, queria ser uma *pop star*, mas isso nunca chegou a acontecer… Nunca se sabe. E todos estes escritores irlandeses; eu tive muita sorte em ter o Roddy Doyle, que é um romancista, como professor de inglês no liceu; o Paul Mercier, que para mim é um dos nossos maiores dramaturgos… não é muito conhecido na Europa, mas para mim é o O'Casey dos nossos tempos. O fôlego das peças dele é inacreditável, e é uma pena que não tenha sido muito traduzido e representado, mas isso é uma questão de sorte, muitas vezes.

Artistas Unidos

Acamarrados

Consigo identificar agora nas minhas peças, e em particular na *Walworth Farce*, todas as referências, e não estava consciente delas na altura – os fantasmas de escritores que já desapareceram, esse tipo de coisas. Mas suponho que foram filtradas pelo meu próprio cérebro, vazio, estúpido e ridículo, e depois

escarrapachadas na página sob outra forma. Mas estão todas lá. E tenho muito orgulho nisso, no facto de estarem lá, e os temas estarem lá, e tudo misturado, e há estes ecos de… Beckett, claro, mas certamente ecos do trabalho de Tom Murphy, e alguns toques de Synge… Tem de haver.

"eu ainda não saí da cozinha"

JSM – ***O que nós, em Portugal, pensamos do teatro irlandês é que eles adoram contar histórias – e beber*** **Guinness.** ***E de facto*** **Acamarrados,** ***a tua terceira peça, é uma peça em que se contam histórias. Como é que inventaste estas duas personagens?***

EW – Acho que é um estilo muito antigo – e irlandês – de contar histórias, em que as personagens se levantam e pronto, contam uma história. O que é uma coisa extraordinária, e muito bonita de se fazer. Quer dizer, os irlandeses falam que se fartam. Não há dúvida sobre isso, e são capazes de ficar a falar até de madrugada. E eu tenho a sorte de vir de uma família grande – enfim, para os padrões irlandeses é pequena, uns seis – mas suficientemente grande para se terem discussões mesmo boas. Eu tenho uma relação muito forte com a minha família, e grande parte dela baseia-se em estarmos para ali sentados na cozinha, a contar as mesmas histórias vezes sem conta. Sei que para os meus irmãos – há quatro irmãos e eu, mais um par de irmãs – eu defino-me por cinco histórias. Eu disse-lhes isto, disse: "eu sou esta história, mais esta, mais esta", e eles "pois és, é isso que tu és". E é mesmo assim. O meu pai tinha uma loja de móveis, e o meu irmão John vai sempre contar a história de como ele estava na parte de trás da carrinha, o meu pai ia a conduzir, as portas abriram-se, ele ia na cadeira, caiu e foi parar à rua… É uma boa história. E eu conheço-lhe cada pormenor, o modo como vai crescendo, como é que a piada vai surgir. E adoro isso. É incrivelmente reconfortante definirmos a nossa família nestes termos: "tu és cinco histórias", "ele é três histórias", "eu sou quatro histórias". Mas é assim, e tenho a certeza que não é só comigo, que isto acontece em todo o lado. A diferença é que, num contexto irlandês, eu estou profundamente integrado nessa tradição. Talvez isto pareça ridiculamente romântico e absurdo, mas eu sinto que ainda não saí da cozinha, são duas da manhã, e aqui estou eu a contar outra história.

E essa peça é completamente isso: são só personagens a dizer "isto sou eu e isto sou eu, e isto não faz parte de mim, e depois fiz aquilo porque

aquilo sou eu". Isso para mim é real. E é o tipo de ligação que quero ter com as personagens. Quero poder sair e dizer: "Uau! Estive nesta relação mesmo forte com esta personagem durante uma hora, e agora acabou, mas eu sei tudo sobre ela, ela contou-me tudo." Porque acho que ansiamos por esse tipo de ligação na vida, alguém que fale connosco e nos conte tudo… Ou pelo menos eu…

peças filtradas pelo cérebro das personagens

JSM – ***É uma definição muito bonita de Acamarrados – que é muito diferente de* Disco Pigs*, a tua primeira peça, não é?***

EW – Sim, muito diferente… Mas não sei bem em que aspectos. Eu olho para o *Disco Pigs* agora e parece-me uma peça incrivelmente ingénua. Mas que veio de um sítio muito forte, muito emocional. Das peças que eu escrevi, é a que tem a estrutura mais ingénua, de A a Z. É uma noite, um dia e uma noite, na presença deste dois jovens de 17 anos, e eles levam-nos para a cidade… Na verdade eu nunca mais fiz isso numa peça, eles estarem vivos – não estão a falar do passado, estão a viver o momento, o agora mesmo.

Bom, mas esta peça é sobre a minha relação com a minha namorada, nós acabámos, e depois escrevi isto e saiu assim. E *Acamarrados* é uma espécie de conversa com o meu pai, uma conversa que eu nunca tive, comigo a fazer o papel da rapariga e ele uma versão terrível dele próprio. Vêm portanto as duas de uma espécie de sítio familiar, mas em termos de estrutura e estilo, uma parece-me muito ingénua (certa para aquela idade e para aquelas personagens) e a outra precisa de ter uma estrutura completamente diferente, estilhaçada – porque estamos a viver com um homem de meia-idade, que teve um esgotamento nervoso terrível; é como se a peça tivesse de ser reestruturada pelo cérebro de um homem destroçado.

JSM – ***Acho que a principal diferença é que em* Disco Pigs*** ***as personagens estão ali a viver, à nossa frente. Em Acamarrados estão a contar a história, depois estão não a contar, mas a viver, há vários níveis.***

EW – Há imensas coisas misturadas. A última coisa em que eu penso é como é que as personagens vão falar, ou o que é que vão dizer, coisas desse género. O que faço é atirar o máximo possível de coisas para o meio, em relação à psicologia ou à geografia onde eles estão. E peço desculpa anteci-

padamente se isto parece ridículo ou pretensioso, mas em *Acamarrados* o pai construiu paredes e mais paredes dentro de casa, até a filha estar numa caminha; pôs paredes à volta, e entrou também ele para a cama. E a história é: por que raio é que ele fez isso? E em termos da linguagem ou da estrutura da peça, isso precisa de ser filtrado pela cabeça dele, pela loucura dele. As frases… Se estivermos numa sala grande, eu posso continuar a falar sem parar, mas num espaço mais pequeno, se houver uma parede, tenho uma imagem visual das falas que voltam para trás. Por isso as frases têm de ser mais curtas, tem de haver mais *staccato*. Este tipo de coisas. Eu penso muito nos efeitos que o ambiente vai ter na linguagem, na psicologia das personagens, na estrutura da peça.

"nunca consigo dizer a um actor "agora caminha até ali""

JSM – ***Foi a primeira peça que dirigiste. Foi porque querias dizer mais do que o texto dizia e pô-lo nas tuas mãos, ou um acaso?***

EW – Acho que foi… Eu tenho muito medo de actores, não gosto particularmente de salas de ensaio, e digamos que sou uma pessoa que não se expressa com muita clareza, e penso sempre: "oh meu Deus, o que é que eu vou dizer a um actor?" Porque de certeza que tenho de saber as respostas todas … E depois houve alguém que me disse: "Não, não saibas as respostas, faças o que fizeres, não saibas as respostas, isso mata o processo de ensaios!" E eu: "Claro, claro!" Porque a partir do momento em que se diz "Eh pá, não sei, não tenho bem a certeza", isso abre as coisas. E foi uma lição – um bocado óbvia para quem seja encenador, as pessoas já devem saber isso tudo.

Era uma peça sobre mim e o meu pai, e ele morreu durante os ensaios. Eu queria mesmo que ele a visse, mas sabia que estava a morrer. Foi duro fazer a produção, para o Festival de Teatro de Dublin; mas sabia que tinha de estar na mesma sala que a peça. Com tudo aquilo a acontecer… pareceu-me que era o que devia ser feito.

Do ponto de vista da encenação, estava a explicar ao Jorge há bocado, nunca consigo dizer a um actor "agora caminha até ali", fazer os actores andar é muito confuso para mim. "Tu agora senta-te, levanta-te, vai até ali", não sou capaz de fazer esse tipo de coisas… Em *Acamarrados* eles estão só ali, na cama. Eu consigo ouvir bem o ritmo de uma coisa, oralmente, mas visualmente muitas vezes não os consigo movimentar.

JSM – ***E encenaste mais peças tuas?***

EW – Acabei por fazer *Acamarrados* algumas vezes, encenei-a em Nova Iorque, e foi uma grande lição, mas tenho tendência a não o fazer. Não acho que seja particularmente bom, e também gosto muito da colaboração com um encenador, ou um dramaturgo. Muitas vezes escrevo bastante depressa, e surpreendo-me a mim próprio, então preciso de alguém que me diga "não és tão estúpido como estás a queres fazer parecer, isto até faz sentido".

fora da tradição realista

JSM – ***Tu escreveste duas peças muito estranhas, invulgares no teatro britânico. Uma escreveste-a para a Alemanha*, The New Electric Ballroom*, e a outra é* The Small Things*, escrita para o Plaines Plough.***

EW – Não sei, explica tu isso, é verdade… Neste momento há muita nova escrita a acontecer na Grã-Bretanha – eu vivo em Londres – e grande parte dela é muito realista. Não é que não seja boa, mas uma pessoa pensa "isto dava uma excelente série de televisão", ou assim. O que me interessa é a construção de novas personagens que pertençam ao palco – não podiam trabalhar na televisão, ou no cinema. Há uma linguagem… E eu adoro ser espectador de teatro, e aprender um novo mundo e a construção de uma peça. Quando a peça acaba, ou quando as personagens desistem da construção desse mundo, sente-se muita coisa, o que não acontece com o raio da televisão. São pessoas verdadeiras, pessoas super-humanas, emocionais e a contar grandes histórias, e isso é fantástico.

Mas enfim, eu e os meus contemporâneos na Irlanda, seja como for que olhem para nós no estrangeiro ou na Grã-Bretanha, não encaixamos nessa tradição realista, de todo. O Connor McPherson, mesmo que situe as peças em *pubs* e casas, com tipos a conversarem e assim, não são conversas normais, é como se fosse tudo intensificado, e misterioso. O Mark O'Rowe, a Marina Carr… o trabalho dela é muito invulgar. O que acontece muito com o teatro irlandês na Grã-Bretanha é que tem bastante sucesso, mas as pessoas olham para aquilo e dizem "os irlandeses são malucos". Por exemplo, *The Small Things* foi bastante bem sucedida junto da crítica, mas acho que o público pensou "isto é mesmo erudito", ou "inteligente" – como se não fosse do mundo, como se eles estivessem longe destas coisas.

"aquelas senhoras do teatro alemão a suar"

JSM – ***Uma das coisas, desde* Acamarrados*, em que desafias as convenções do teatro normal é que tens muitas vezes papéis muito bons para actores mais velhos, o que não é suposto… Um autor jovem devia escrever para os da sua idade. Como é que surgem estas pessoas mais velhas nas tuas peças?***

EW – Acho que me vem de uma coisa muito básica. A minha mãe costumava ter manhãs de café. Eu ia à escola, voltava à hora do almoço, e estavam ali todas as velhotas do bairro, com bolinhos e biscoitos. Durante a minha infância estiveram sempre lá, a casa cheia destas mulheres, a darem opiniões sobre isto e aquilo. Isso teve uma grande influência em mim. Mas no teatro, suponho que… É bastante óbvio, mas escrever personagens desse tipo, dessa idade… Em *The Small Things*, as personagens são muito velhas e chegaram a um ponto nas vidas delas em que se apercebem de que não viveram. E nós ficamos a pensar: "será que, neste momento, estou a viver a vida que queria estar a viver? E de que é que me vou arrepender? …" O meu avô contou-me uma vez uma história tristíssima: estava em Dublin, nos anos 20 ou assim, e viu uma rapariga, uma tarde, na Parnell Street, e ficou loucamente apaixonado por ela. E disse-me que pensava nela todas as semanas. Por esta altura a minha avó já tinha morrido, e ele continuava a pensar naquele dia. Eu fiquei tão chocado, achei que era horrível. Como é que ele podia fazer aquilo à minha avó, ainda a pensar naquela mulher, que versão da própria vida é que estava a viver dentro da cabeça dele… Acho que gosto de ver personagens velhas em cena, restos daquela parte ainda jovem, muito inocente deles, fechada algures lá dentro, que olha para trás e vê os erros… E também gosto de ver actores velhos a fazerem grandes esforços em peças muito difíceis. *The New Electric Ballroom* – que é a peça que faz par com *The Walworth Farce* –, é sobre uma irmã mais nova, quarenta e picos, que chega a casa e veste as irmãs mais velhas em fatos dos anos 50, perucas e isso, depois tem um sistema de som e luzes, liga tudo, e põe-as a representar a noite em que o cantor de uma banda lhes deu um grande desgosto. Porque quer saber como é, sentir emoções. Quando a fizemos na Alemanha foi fantástico, ver aquelas senhoras do teatro alemão a suar, numa peça que estruturalmente é muito difícil, e nós pensamos: "meu Deus, elas vão morrer! Vão ter um colapso à nossa frente!" E elas vão

escavando cada vez mais fundo, e têm toda a experiência do que fizeram no teatro, por isso há muita coisa a acontecer em cena, para o público.

tentar não pensar na linguagem

JSM – ***Umas das coisas que os críticos dizem sobre ti é que lidas muito bem com a linguagem, desde*** **Disco Pigs.** ***Qual é o papel do estilo, da linguagem, na tua escrita?***

EW – Eu no início costumava escrever uma linguagem muito, muito difícil, para disfarçar o facto de não ser capaz de escrever uma peça. E as pessoas diziam "uau, que bem escrito", e assim. Mas as peças não eram nada fantásticas. O meu primeiro trabalho em direcção à clareza chama-se *The Ginger Ale Boy*, que foi antes de *Disco Pigs*. É uma peça muito terna, terrivelmente falhada… As palavras, a escrita dos diálogos, a linguagem das peças… isso agora é a última coisa em que eu penso, estou a ir em direcção à forma, à estrutura. Tento não pensar demasiado nisso. Quando se está a pensar demasiado nisso, a peça torna-se demasiado autoral, tem-se a sensação "bom, lá está o Enda Walsh a pensar: eles que esperem até ouvir esta!". É lixo. As personagens precisam de criar a estrutura da peça, criar o mundo, definir o que vão ser as palavras e passar-nos isso a nós, partindo daí. Aprendi a tentar a esquecer, a afastar-me um pouco da linguagem.

JSM – ***Tens estado dentro da profissão de dramaturgo nos últimos dez anos, mais ou menos. Que mudanças é que sentes no mundo do teatro? O modo como surgem as produções, as relações com teatros…***

EW – Muda de ano para ano. Eu fui atirado para a categoria de… já não me lembro do que é que nos chamavam, era do género "novo teatro britânico"…

JSM – ***Teatro "in-your-face".***

"Cada um faz aquilo que faz e pronto"

EW – Era? Eu na altura sentia mesmo que aquele movimento, em grande parte, era comandado pelos agentes e pelos produtores. Tinha uma visão muito cínica de tudo aquilo. Nós éramos todos dramaturgos a começar, e não fazíamos puto de ideia do que é que estávamos a fazer. Tínhamos êxito e pronto.

Mas acho que agora, vivendo em Inglaterra, uma pessoa consegue identificar movimentos, para onde é que os produtores e directores artísticos estão a ir. "Sabes de que é nós precisamos?" – e isto é mesmo verdade – "Precisamos de imensas peças negras." E em Inglaterra precisam mesmo, e peças paquistanesas – lá vive-se nesse tipo de sociedade. E depois há imensas peças sobre deficiências. Vêm os directores artísticos a dizer: "vamos mas é arranjar um monte de cadeiras de rodas." Vamos fazer isso, encher o palco. Sentem-se estes movimentos. Ou "vamos buscar os irlandeses". E depois os críticos começam a torcer o nariz, arrefece tudo um bocado e passam a outra coisa.

O que me safou ao longo dos anos foi ignorar esse disparate completo, e perder-me nas personagens, e no mundo. Cada um faz aquilo que faz e pronto.

JSM – ***Hoje à noite, vamos ver uma peça que escreveste há onze anos, e que não vês já há cinco. Mas viste bastantes produções…***

EW – Vi umas tantas, e feitas de maneiras muito diferentes. Vi uma na Dinamarca, e foi definitivamente a pior produção que alguma vez vi na minha vida, então agarrei no encenador e no produtor depois da peça, e obriguei-os a tirar o meu nome do cartaz. E depois despedi o meu agente na Dinamarca. Por isso estou com imensa vontade de ver a peça hoje à noite. [*Risos*.]

JSM – ***Eu gosto muito da peça, mas consigo perceber a surpresa que provocou quando apareceu. Porque é uma peça tão simples, é uma balada de dois miúdos numa cidade. E essa simplicidade não existia antes no teatro.***

EW – Não, é muito recente. E apareceu como uma espécie de resposta; eu andava a ler o que se fazia na altura, eu não era contemporâneo de ninguém, ninguém sabia quem é que eu era… Mas li o *Shopping and Fucking*, *Blasted* [*Ruínas*] (que é um ano anterior a *Disco Pigs*) e *Trainspotting*, e achava incrível a violência, a agressividade nas peças. Aquela negatividade horrível, e pensei: "vou escrever uma história de amor", seja qual for a forma que tomar. E olho para ela agora, esta relação de gémeos, eu tinha acabado uma relação com uma rapariga que era gémea… E também é sobre Cork, sobre ser um homem de Dublin a viver em Cork, talvez seja uma relação

semelhante que Lisboa tem com o Porto, ou Londres com Liverpool, Cork é a segunda cidade, e se uma pessoa vier de Dublin passa um mau bocado quando se muda para lá. Tem de se aprender a linguagem, e os ritmos de como as pessoas falam, é como se fosse um raio de um país estrangeiro… E é por isso que a peça tem o ritmo que tem, era assim que eu ouvia Cork na altura… tornou-se essa linguagem construída.

Tradução de Joana Frazão

INÉDITOS

Jennifer Johnston's Monologues: Introductory Note

Teresa Casal
ULICES - University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies

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Jennifer Johnston's Monologues: Introductory Note

This section features four monologues by Jennifer Johnston, none of which has been published previously in book form. Two of them, *Seventeen Trees* (2007) and *I Have Desired to Go* (2008), are published in their original versions, while the remaining two, *Billy e Christine* (2004), are the Portuguese translations of *Mustn't Forget High Noon* and *O Ananias, Azarias and Miseal*, both premiered in 1989.

Seventeen Trees was Jennifer Johnston's generous and original contribution to *Rising to Meet You*. It was written after a visit to France in 2007, where the memorials and scars of World War II imprinted on the landscape of Normandy prompted the writer to delve into the emotional and sensorial imprints left in the mindscape of those who experienced and witnessed the terror of warfare: "I know what terror is. It was in my mouth, in my head, in my belly, in my mother's hand that held mine." It is both as witnesses to terror and reminders of life that the seventeen trees stand: they honour lives irrevocably lost, just as they embody life's renewal; they remind us of life's resilient power, as well as of its utter fragility; they face us with our options: nurturing life or crushing it, bearing in mind that life, like terror, is embodied, and bodies are frail and precious homes.

Jennifer Johnston's imaginative and empathic trajectory, from mindscape to landscape and back again, from national histories to personal life stories, and from the present to the past and back to the present via "terror," is further undertaken in her next monologue, *I Have Desired to Go*. Written in January 2008, it was Johnston's contribution to an initiative jointly launched by Amnesty International, Ireland, the *Irish Times*, and Irish Aid to mark the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights in December 2008, and was entitled *From the Republic of Conscience: Reflections on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by 31 Irish Writers with an Introduction by Seamus Heaney* (*Irish Times*, 9 Dec.

2008; http://www.amnesty.ie). In response to Article 15, that states that "Everyone has the right to a nationality," Jennifer Johnston plunges again into the mind of someone who survived the losses of family, home and country during World War II to find herself in old age devoid yet again of a home, though kept in a place called home, which is in fact "a storage unit; a place to keep unwanted people, people who are no longer needed, if you can call us people." Set against the backdrop of WWII concentration camps, these places called homes where people are stored in our aging western societies point to contemporary paradoxes and subtle forms of exclusion: "We have no voice. I don't mean of course that we can't speak… no, no, no. Just that no one listens. Even if we shouted, no one would listen." Just as it is our common humanity that is dishonoured when terror is inflicted in the context of warfare, crime and abuse in various forms and shapes, so it is, Johnston's survivor suggests, our humanity that is at stake when we fail to care for one another in the very institutions designed to care for us in the seemingly benign environment of post-war welfare societies. And caring, she implies, involves listening – having a voice to speak and an ear to listen. With her "home" confined to books, this survivor's monologue consists in her listening to, and dialoguing with, the voice of Gerard Manley Hopkins's poem, which resonates with her own longing for a life-enhancing home. And that attentive listening, as shown by the author's memorable delivery of *Seventeen Trees* at *Rising to Meet You*, as well as by João Cardoso and Rosa Quiroga's performances of *Billy e Christine* in 2004, is what Jennifer Johnston's monologues ask of her audience: the ability to listen carefully to the words and silences and trail of associations that they trigger. In that sense, listening to those intimate voices enhances our ability both to listen to them, and to listen to the voices and associations that they awaken in us.

Home, family, nationality, and the violent traffic of history impinging on personal lives also feature prominently in Jennifer Johnston's earlier monologues set in Northern Ireland at the height of the Troubles. They are presented here in the Portuguese translation used for the 2004 stage production of *Billy e Christine* by the Oporto based theatre company ASSéDIO, which is discussed in Paulo Eduardo Carvalho's essay in this volume. Billy, the Presbyterian school bus driver from Northern Ireland, and Christine, the Anglican teacher from the Republic, are the names

of the husband and wife delivering these interconnected monologues, originally entitled *Mustn't Forget High Noon* and *O Ananias, Azarias and Miseal* (1989). As Jennifer Johnston explains in her Introduction to *Selected Short Plays: Moonlight and Music, Mustn't Forget High Noon, O Ananias, Azarias and Miseal, The Nightingale and Not the Lark* (Dublin: New Island, 2003), *O Ananias* was the first written of the two and "re-titled *Christine* by a director who couldn't cope with [the author's] title" (ix); *Christine* was indeed the adopted title when it was first published in *Three Monologues: Twinkletoes, Mustn't Forget High Noon, Christine* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 1995). Christine, Johnston admits in her Introduction, "spoke to me; quite intimately, she spoke, like some bewildered kindly woman who had just popped in for a cup of tea. I listened for a while before I settled at my writing machine and then it was as if she inhabited me" (*Selected Short Plays*, pp. ix-x). It is just as intimately that Christine speaks to her audience, it is that quality of listening that she asks of us, as she welcomes us into the house that she is leaving behind for good – and that was certainly how Rosa Quiroga embodied her and addressed us.

However, as Jennifer Johnston further explains in her Introduction to *Selected Short Plays*, so bound up to Ireland's history is Christine's life that when the play "went from the Peacock Theatre in Dublin to the B.B.C. […] they asked me to write more so that listeners in England might have the nooks and crannies filled in and be able to understand Christine better" (x). Ironically, the specifics of Irish history that begged for further explication were intimately linked to the close intersections between Irish and British history, apparently lost to British memory and painfully alive to the Irish one. More inclined to proceed by implication rather than explication, the author "resisted" the request of "shining light in murky corners" until Christine's "dead husband Billy resurrected himself in my head […] I was charmed by him into writing *Mustn't Forget High Noon*. The B.B.C. liked it and both pieces were broadcast in 1989. Each play illuminated the other" (xi).

If, in Jennifer Johnston's novels, dialogues often amount to juxtaposed monologues, thus foregrounding characters' failure to listen to each other, in these two mutually illuminating monologues it is up to the audience to detect the gaps, draw the connections, and become aware of

the intricate web of silences and complicities, fears and affections, and the crucial role of communication in interpersonal relations.

With Jennifer Johnston's *Selected Short Plays* dedicated to "all the men, women and children who have been victims of violence and intolerance, for so long, in this country, Ireland," the Portuguese premiere of *Billy e Christine*, on 11 March 2004, coincided with the Madrid bombings. Between the maiming effects of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland depicted on the stage, and the initial discussion in Spain as to whether the Madrid bombings were the work of national(ist) or international terrorism, one thing seemed painfully clear: although the origin of violence is politically relevant, its effects remain irrevocable and unredeemable. Against the abstract ideals used to justify the enormity of violence and depersonalise its "legitimate targets," these monologues devolve the voice to the "men, women and children" who are the victims of such abstractions, and ask us to listen and respond to them as persons too.

Seventeen Trees

Jennifer Johnston

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Seventeen Trees

Jennifer Johnston

Silence.
Whisper.
Tears.
I am always here.
By the side of the road.
I'm always to be found here.
I speak the words in a whisper so low that no one can hear, unless, that is, they really want to.
My old voice. Yes. Tears.
Men.
Boys.
Girls.
Friends.
These are some of the words in the glass box.
There for you to read.
14th May 1944.
That was the day. I think it was a Tuesday.
14th May 1944 is written on a big polished stone.
Carved in deep clefts of writing.
It was a beautiful day.
Full of spring.
Full of green and bursting flowers.
A great day for happiness.
Our house gave directly onto the street.
The door was open and the sweet smells of spring crept into our rooms.
At least I presume they did. I have no absolute recollection of such a thing.
I was but five.

I could skip.
I remember that so well, the pride of my skipping.
That morning my mother had bought me a red rope of my own.
"You must not skip in the house Baba" she had said to me and given me a little push towards the door. "Go on, out with you."
Tap. Tap. Tap. Cross hands. Tap. Tap. Open arms. Cross once more.
It was a sleepy kind of day.
Distant cow bells.
Laughter from a house across the road and the sound of the rope tapping on the ground and the bouncing of my feet.
That is also why I whisper, so as not to disturb the sleepy peace of the place.
I sleep now at the graveyard at the top of the town, on the right, past the Church.
Beside old Joe. Everyone called him old Joe and they called our son young Joe and our grandson Joseph. He was one of the children who wrote words on pieces of paper and dropped them into the glass box by the side of the road.
Bird. He wrote B-I-R-D.
I know because he showed it to me… He was so proud of that word.
B-I-R-D.
He had no help with writing it.
BIRD.
It flew into the box as he opened its fingers.
I stood and watched as each child dropped their words into the box.
Flying birds.
Then the mayor mixed them round with a stick and the children watched and I stood there and watched them and thought of that spring day, when I like them was also five.
I was skipping and the sun sprinkled the ground with silver through the branches of the trees and my friend Julie leaned from her bedroom window across the road and watched as I tapped and tapped, arms crossing and uncrossing and I was happy to be watched by her.
Tap.
Tap.
And in the distance the sound of mosquitoes.

Wasps.
Bees.
Ants.
Flies.
Drone.
Drone.
Louder.
My mother came to the door and stood there for a moment, a slight frown on her face…
I wondered had I done something wrong.
I crossed my arms again.
"Look mama," I called to her. "Look at me."
She put out her hand and took my shoulder. Roughly. She wasn't usually rough with me.
"Come." She said. She pulled me into the house and closed the door.
She stood silently, her head bent, listening.
The droning sound grew louder.
Growl.
Snarl.
Anger.
Her hand on my shoulder shook.
I dropped my rope on the floor as she pulled me into the kitchen.
The air was steamy and fragrant.
A lorry whined past the door. Then motor bicycles.
Such a noise they made, their engines revving.
"Soldiers." She whispered the word as if they might hear us through our door and walls.
Soldier.
Sailor.
Beggarman.
Thief.
The noise of the engines in the street stopped and we could hear the soldiers' feet slapping the roadways. Voices shouted orders. Voices that I could not understand.
I ran towards the door. I wanted to see what they were doing, these soldiers. We had no soldiers in our village, no uniforms except for our policeman.

She caught me by the arm.
"No."
"I want to see them."
"No."
Her gripping fingers hurt my arm.
"No. No."
There was the sound of a loud speaker.
Everyone in the village out into the square.
Quick.
Hurry.
Run.
Everyone out.
My mother sighed… A loud dolorous sound. A sound without end. I hear her sigh even now in the wind blowing through the trees, in the breath of the earth as it receives the rain.
Sighs.
Moaning.
Silence.
She opened the door and we went out into the street.
Across the road Julie and her mother mirrored our movements.
Hand in hand we moved towards the square. Soldiers lined the street.
Hands. The whole village. Holding hands.
Mothers.
Fathers.
Sons.
Daughters.
Julie. Me.
All moved with care.
Grandmothers.
Grandfathers.
The soldiers watched with care.
Eyes watched.
Guns.
Helmets.
Boots.
I know what terror is. It was in my mouth, in my head, in my belly, in my

mother's hand that held mine.
Suddenly the shouting started again and she pulled me towards her.
She buried my face in her red skirt. She covered my ears with her hands.
We stood quite still for what seemed like hours. My eyes hitched and burned with the redness of her skirt.
The lorry started up again. The motor bicycles revved and they left the village. Down the long hill.
Became once more mosquitoes.
The sound was soon gone.
Bereft.
Mourning.
Sorrowful. Gone forever.
Auschwitz,
Mauthausen,
were written on our stones in deep clefts of writing.
The spring remained with us.
The red skipping rope lay on the hall floor.
Spring.
Cowbells.
Uncaring.
Turned into
summer
autumn
winter.
Seventeen trees.
High, healthy trees.
One of them named for Julie.
My friend.
Julie. And in the spring the sunshine sprinkles the ground with silver trough the branches of the trees.
Seventeen trees.

I have desired to go

Jennifer Johnston

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I have desired to go[1]

Jennifer Johnston

Article 15 of the Declaration of Human Rights

1. Everyone has the right to a nationality.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of their nationality nor denied the right to change their nationality.

I SIT HERE and most of the time I look at the wall. I read, but never for long, my eyes get tired, my head droops forward, the words on the page dance in front of my eyes.

Sometimes I just sit with my eyes shut, not asleep, just staring at the insides of my eyelids.

Even in bed at night I sleep little, half an hour perhaps at a time. I am afraid of dreams. I toss and turn. I really feel the time has come for me to die. I toss and turn. I quote to myself bits and pieces I have learnt from books. Books are my home.

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[1] This monologue, written in January 2008 and first published in the *Irish Times* on 17 May 2008, is Jennifer Johnston's contribution to an initiative launched by Amnesty International, Ireland, in collaboration with the *Irish Times* and Irish Aid, to mark the 60th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, celebrated on 10 December 2008. The initiative, entitled *From the Republic of Conscience: Reflections on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by 31 Irish Writers with an Introduction by Seamus Heaney*, featured each of the 30 articles of the Declaration, alongside original responses to them by Irish based writers. It was published serially by *The Irish Times* between 15 March 2008 and 24 October 2008, and assembled in a supplement published by the *Irish Times* on 9 December 2008. It can be accessed online at http://www.amnesty.ie/amnesty/live/irish/action

I have no other home.

I never have.

Of course they call this place a home but that to me is laughable. It is a storage unit: a place to keep unwanted people, old redundant people, people who are no longer needed. If you can call us people.

We have no voice.

I don't mean, of course, that we can't speak – no no no. Just that no one listens.

Even if we shouted no one would listen.

I do remember, a long time ago, I had a home; the memory flickers like a candle flame in my head.

There was a song my mother used to sing; a melancholy song, which I can summon into my head from time to time.

I have desired to go where springs not fail
To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail
And a few lilies blow.

My father wrote the music and after they had taken him away she used to sing that song.

I don't remember my father, only the few things I have been told about him. His music is here though, songs to be sung, short pieces to be played on the piano. I, alas, do not have the skills.

And I have asked to be
Where no storms come
Where the green swell is in the heavens
dumb
And out of the swing of the sea.

I was only three when they took him away and my brother Max with him.

I dream of their shadows, my father tall, Max, twelve, with a loud voice and sparking eyes.

I presumed always that when my mother sang that song that she wanted to go where they had gone, be with them. I would have liked that too.

Where springs not fail. Home.

We had no home after my father was taken.

We lived in the darkness of other people's homes.

They were kind, but sombre.

I did not play with the other children, for fear.

For fear of what? I asked my mother.

She shook her head. She pressed her finger to her lips.

For fear.

I have no fear, I said to her. I want to go out and play. What is fear? She pulled me against her, wrapped her arms around me, held me so close to her beating heart that I felt it to be my heart pounding.

That is fear, she whispered, my heart beats like that because it is full of fear.

And sadness.

What is sadness? It is what I feel, she said, when I think of Max and Papa. It is what I feel when I consider how we have to live, in other people's shadowy places. It is what I feel when I think about what may happen tomorrow...

I was quiet then.

At that moment I did not want to ask her any more stupid questions.

But the questions crept and crept back into my mind like tiny animals, nibbling and devouring my thoughts. Questions that I knew I could not ask, questions that I knew she would not answer.

She taught me to read books and to add up numbers and subtract and multiply.

No point, she said, in you growing up without knowledge. You will find knowledge in the books, dear child. All the knowledge of the world is there and you can find it out for yourself when I am gone.

Why will you go, Mama? Why will you leave me? She shook her head.

She looked angry.

Everyone has to go sometime. That is a truth.

What will I do without you?

How do I know? Live. I hope you will be able to live.

One day she went out to get some messages. It was a bright day. The sun was shining and even the dark corners seemed full of light. I longed to go with her, I longed to feel the sun on my pale face, to feel the

breeze touching my body with its fingers. I begged her to let me go with her. She shook her head. Once more she pressed her finger against her lips. Her scarf was black and green.

One day, she said, and left the room.
That was the end.
I never saw her face or heard her voice again.
They had taken her.
I suppose.
We never knew for sure.
We could only suppose.
I was six.
I could read.
I could add up and multiply.
I could sing the song my mother used to sing.

I have desired to go where springs not fail

To fields where flies no sharp and sided hail

And a few lilies blow.

That will be my home.

Billy e Christine

Jennifer Johnston

Tradução: Teresa Casal
Encenação: João Cardoso e Rosa Quiroga
Produção: ASSéDIO – Associação de Ideias Obscuras
Estreia: Porto, Rivoli Teatro Municipal, 11 de Março de 2004

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Billy

[*Mustn't Forget High Noon*]

Jennifer Johnston

Mustn't Forget High Noon foi transmitido pela primeira vez pela BBC Radio Ulster a 27 de Abril de 1989. O papel de Billy foi desempenhado por Oliver Maguire. A transmissão foi dirigida por Jeremy Howes.

A estreia portuguesa ocorreu a 11 de Março de 2004, no Rivoli Teatro Municipal, Porto, com encenação de Rosa Quiroga e interpretação de João Cardoso.

Sim.
Sim senhor.
Tou só a dar uma passazita.
Já vou só em quinze por dia. Nada mau. O doutor diz que podia ser pior. Eu fumava quarenta mas de há uns anos pra cá baixei a dose.
Via-me aflito com a bronquite no Inverno.
Novo demais para morrer!
Disse isso ao doutor.
É Billy, disse ele, *demasiado novo*.
Achei que era melhor aparar um pouco a sebe antes de ficar tudo uma selva.
O tempo está a pôr-se mau.
A bem dizer, apeteceu-me sair de casa por um bocado e não podia dizer-lhe que queria ir tomar ar por isso disse-lhe que vinha aparar a sebe.
Vais ter de te haver com o Pastor, disse ela, a aparar a sebe ao domingo.
Ela não vai com a cara do Pastor.
Aquilo que ele não sabe não há-de fazer-lhe mal, disse eu.
Deus ainda te mata um dia destes, disse ela.
De vez em quando ela é assim.
Hoje de manhã fui à missa.
Canto no coro.
Canto no coro desde que era miúdo.
Já a minha mãe cantava no coro.
Foi a primeira igreja a deixar as mulheres cantar no coro … era o que a minha mãe dizia.
Iluminada, dizia ela.
Agora todas deixam.
A Christine não pôde vir hoje de manhã, não que se importasse muito, acho eu.
O velhote já não pode ficar sozinho e não temos vizinhos a quem pedir para tomar conta dele.
Lá em casa cheira a doença por todo o lado. Não que ela não tenha tudo limpo… nada disso… só que é impossível vermo-nos livres daquele cheiro.
Mal se entra em casa já se sente o cheiro. Acho mesmo que basta chegar alguém ao pé de mim para sentir o cheiro.
O tabaco mata o cheiro.
Não lhe quero mal, mas seria bom voltar ao normal.

É uma canseira para ela. Nota-se. Tem andado sem genica nestes últimos tempos. Sem garra.
Não sei o que seria de nós sem a televisão.
Ela passa muito tempo a ver televisão. Sentada ali na sala pode estar atenta aos sons dele.
Passam filmes ao princípio e ao fim da tarde e depois séries.
Sempre a distrai.
Há noticiários a mais.
Essa é a queixa que eu tenho a fazer.
Às vezes acho que devia escrever uma carta a reclamar.
Noticiários a mais.
Ela fica deprimida depois dos noticiários.
Eu digo-lhe para não se preocupar… mais vale ficarmo-nos pelas séries.
Para que é que havemos de nos incomodar?
Eu não me incomodo.
Consigo digerir melhor as coisas do que ela.
Consigo traduzir as notícias.
É.
É isso que é preciso fazer.
É preciso traduzir tudo o que acontece.
Traduzir para a nossa própria língua… percebem?
Eu tento fazer isso por ela mas ela nem sempre me ouve.
Claro que é diferente para mim. É a minha própria língua.
Desde que me lembro, costumava ir ao Campo com o velhote. A minha mãe despachava-me com ele desde que comecei a andar. Acho que ela pensava que talvez lhe travasse os ímpetos se ele não pudesse beber e tivesse de me trazer para casa antes de o dia nascer. Mas se calhar isso são maus pensamentos.
Eu desfilava ao lado dele na marcha com um bonezito a tapar-me um olho e fitas cor-de-laranja caindo pelas costas. Ele levava um dos nossos estandartes.
Era uma grande honra. E eu desfilava ao lado dele vaidoso que nem um pavão. Temos cá uma bandazita que é uma maravilha… mesmo hoje… a Aughnacloney Silver Band. Tocam aquelas marchas todas.
Nas encostas verdejantes do Boyne… dedadadadadadade …
Desfilávamos pela aldeia e depois dávamos a volta pela Rua de Trás e o

velhote dizia para brindarmos aqueles papistas com umas marchazitas… e tocávamos e cantávamos alto e com garra para que eles nos ouvissem bem mesmo com as janelas fechadas.
Só para nos divertirmos.
Às vezes pergunto-me se ele se lembrará desses dias ou no que pensará ele agora ali deitado?
Será que para ele o céu é um Doze de Julho cheio de sol?
Aquele homem, disse-me ele uma vez apontando o Rei Billy no seu cavalo branco, *aquele homem, meu filho, foi ele que tornou este país livre, nunca te esqueças disso*.
A voz tremia-lhe quando dizia isso.
Acho que já teria uns copitos a mais.
Disse uma vez à Christine… ah sim, ela fez uns comentários pouco simpáticos sobre o meu chapéu de coco e eu disse-lhe logo que ela não tinha nada que dizer mal da Loja. Se não fosse a Ordem de Orange, seríamos todos lacaios de Roma.
E qual é a diferença, disse ela, *entre ser lacaio de Roma ou dos Ingleses? E já agora o que é um lacaio*, perguntou ela e demos uma gargalhada.
Diga-se em abono da verdade que ela gosta de uma boa gargalhada.
O velhote costumava levar-me ao cinema.
A minha mãe tinha de se ocupar das duas miúdas e ficava aliviada por me ver pelas costas uma vez por outra.
Às vezes, antes do filme dávamos um pulito até ao bar ao lado.
Eu nunca disse à minha mãe.
Sabia que ele nunca lhe diria.
Os homens têm de se apoiar uns aos outros, meu filho.
Sempre pensei que havia de ter um filho.
É duro pensar que não há no mundo ninguém para nos suceder.
Ninguém para se lembrar de nós quando nos formos.
Já não fazem filmes como os de antigamente – fáceis de compreender.
Nesse tempo sabia-se o que era bom e o que era mau.
Já não é assim.
A Cidade Turbulenta.
Jimmy Stewart … um bom tipo.
Vê o que é que os rapazes lá atrás pediram e pede o mesmo para mim.
Lembro-me de o velhote ficar todo preocupado no princípio do filme…

atafulhava a boca de rebuçados… pensava que o filme ia ser impróprio para mim.
Mulheres da vida.
A minha mãe ficava numa fúria se soubesse que ele me tinha levado a ver um filme com mulheres da vida.
Ele nunca dizia nada quando saíamos da sala… a não ser quando chegávamos ao portão de casa e ele dizia *Aquele Stewart é um tipo muito bom. Contamos isso à tua mãe, certo?*
Boca fechada sobre…
Franciú, dizia eu para ele perceber que eu entrava no jogo.
Franciú.
Tínhamos sempre de lhe contar a história do filme quando chegávamos a casa, acho até que ela havia de gostar de vir connosco se não fosse pelas miúdas.
Ela gostava de ouvir histórias.
Nós costumávamos como que representá-las para ela.
Ele gostava mesmo de se imaginar a fazer de Jimmy Stewart.
Gostava de se imaginar um herói.
Eu tinha sempre de fazer os papéis de mau. Dos que são mortos. Os Índios, os ladrões de gado, os maus da fita.
Enfim.
Deixou-me ser o Chefe Sitting Bull.
Dessa vez ganhei.
A minha mãe nunca acreditou que os Índios tinham ganho a batalha de Little Big Horn.
Devem estar enganados, disse ela depois de acabarmos a representação.
É a história, disse o velhote. *É a História.*
Bem, acho que vocês devem estar enganados, é o que acho.
Acho que esses selvagens não podem ter ganho.
Nunca me constou que tivessem ganhado fosse o que fosse. Isso são só filmes.
Lembro-me de estar sentado ao lado dele uma noite a ver um filme … *Entre Índios e Brancos* e no ecrã aparece um tipo num cavalo branco e eu perguntei …
Paizinho, aquele é o Rei Billy?
Ele agarrou-me um braço como se o fosse partir.
Santo Deus, bico calado, meu filho. É o General Custer e vê lá se não me

envergonhas a fazer perguntas tão disparatadas. Onde é que foste buscar semelhante ideia aos onze anos?
Eu gostava de ter visto o Rei Billy nos filmes.
A batalha do Boyne daria um grande filme.
A minha mãe dizia sempre que tinha pena dos cavalos.
Eles não podiam escolher, pois não? Não escolhiam ser mortos assim?
Suponho que ninguém escolhe ser morto e prefere viver até cair de maduro.
Será que o General Custer escolheu?
Imagino que não tenha sido um fim muito agradável lá em Little Big Horn.
Belo nome.
Little Big Horn. Pequeno Grande Corno.
Batalha do Boyne.
Derry, Enniskillen e Boyne.
Uma vez no Natal o velhote deu-me um conjunto de *cowboy*.
Um chapéu e uma estrela e dois coldres num cinto com dois revólveres prateados lá dentro.
Eu costumava brincar a puxar depressa os dois gatilhos com o meu amigo Sammy.
Bem queria usá-los no Doze de Julho mas a minha mãe não me deixou…
onde é que pensas que vais, disse ela quando eu ia a sair. *Para o OK Corral ou coisa assim? Não vais usar semelhante coisa no Campo.*
Já lá para cima e veste umas calças limpas e põe o teu boné bonito.
Mas eu levei os dois revólveres sem ela saber e durante os discursos eu e o Sammy escapámo-nos e jogámos os nossos jogos.
O Sammy era o meu melhor amigo.
Andámos juntos desde a escola.
Era rijo.
Passava a maior parte do tempo à porta do Reitor à espera de mais um raspanete.
Na aula ouvíamo-lo a assobiar marchas de Orange.
O assobio dele era agudo e ouvia-se a milhas.
Acabaram por ter de o tirar da turma da Miss McMullan porque ela não conseguia ter mão nele.
Puseram-no na turma do Sr. Barrett.
Ele tinha mão nele. Se tinha!
Também era rijo.

Ainda bem que eu nunca lhe passei pelas mãos.
Bruto mas…
A minha mãe costumava dizer… aqueles Barretts foram sempre uns brutos.
Deram cabo dos tímpanos de dois rapazes do meu tempo.
Hoje em dia não se pode levantar a mão aos miúdos.
Se por aí andasse, o Sr. Barrett ia direitinho para a prisão.
É o lugar certo para ele… a cadeia de Maze.
Há por aí uma data de selvagens à solta que deviam era estar presos.
O Sammy não fazia mal a ninguém. Só era um bocado travesso em miúdo… só isso.
Entretanto assentou.
Toda a gente acaba por assentar… se tiver meia oportunidade que seja.
Deixei de ir ao cinema com o velhote quando tinha aí uns catorze anos.
Passei a ir com o Sammy.
Era mais divertido com o Sammy.
Costumávamos alisar o cabelo para trás e esticá-lo com água e de vez em quando comprávamos uns cigarritos e dávamos umas passas.
Até fazíamos de conta que tínhamos dezasseis anos e pagávamos bilhete inteiro.
Os filmes de guerra não eram maus mas melhores eram os de cowboys.
Ná.
As raparigas sentavam-se todas juntas mas se ficássemos na fila atrás delas podíamos sempre inclinarmo-nos para a frente e dar umas baforadas de fumo para o pescoço delas.
Algumas usavam perfume. Só um bocadinho atrás da orelha.
James Dean.
É.
O bom do velho Jimmy Dean.
Acho que todos o adorávamos.
Só o velhote é que não havia de gostar tanto dele como do James Stewart.
Ele não era um verdadeiro herói.
Só fazia de conta que era.
Dava para ver na cara dele.
Não era como o Rei Billy Custer.
O nosso estandarte tinha umas borlas douradas em baixo.
Era vê-las a esvoaçar ao vento… e as cordas esvoaçavam ao vento e o velhote

tinha de se haver com o seu mastro quando o estandarte ficava a ponto de levantar voo. Dar às de vila-diogo.
Eu imaginava o Rei Billy no seu cavalo voador, a galopar pelas nuvens fora, com as borlas douradas esvoaçando.
Lembremos, dizia em letras grandes.
Lembremos Derry, Enniskillen, e o Boyne e lá voava o estandarte, enrolando-se e desenrolando-se, borlas, cavalo voador, a espada brandindo com bravura, cruzando as nuvens e o céu azul até flutuarem rumo à terra e repousarem no cimo do Vaticano.
Eram esses os sonhos que eu tinha quando marchávamos pelo Campo.
Mesmo no cimo do Vaticano.
A basílica de São Pedro envolta no estandarte da nossa Loja… e teriam de arranjar o melhor operário de torres de campanário para o tirar de lá.
Entre Índios e Brancos.
Nunca disse essas coisas a ninguém, guardei-as sempre para mim.
Até aos dezasseis ou mesmo dezassete anos costumávamos levar os meus revólveres para o cinema.
Pavoneávamo-nos pela rua abaixo fazendo-os girar na ponta dos dedos. Conhecem o estilo. É preciso muita prática.
As raparigas davam gritinhos e faziam de conta que se assustavam.
Meu Deus, como éramos inocentes!
Do not forsake me O my darling …
Cantava ele.
Ele tinha um irmão mais pequeno e eu dei-lhe os revólveres numa tarde de Verão … e os coldres. O chapéu é que estava em pior estado por causa do uso, por isso não lho dei. Deitei-o fora.
Já estamos crescidos, Billy, não estamos? disse a minha mãe quando viu.
O miúdo delirou… desatou a galopar pelo campo até ao lago.
Pum. Pum. Pum. Ia disparando para um lado e para o outro.
Nunca os apontes a ninguém ou tiro-tos, gritei-lhe eu.
Aos miúdos tem de se dizer essas coisas. Como o velhote me disse no Natal em que me deu o conjunto.
Se te apanho a apontá-los seja a quem for, dou cabo de ti.
Há mais de dois séculos que vivemos aqui.
Uns campitos para cultivar, alguma coisa para pescar no rio, o pomar e o paul no cimo do monte.

De pai para filho.
O terreno do Hickson é maior.
O Sammy tinha olho para o gado… e para raparigas jeitosas.
Um bom olho vagabundo. Ah ah ah.
De pai para filho.
Não tinha problema nenhum em contrabandear o gado de um lado para o outro da fronteira.
Apanhou-lhe o jeito com o pai.
É.
Pais e filhos.
Assim é que é.
Contamos a nossa história aos nossos filhos.
A nossa vida, o nosso falar.
Eu não tenho ninguém a quem contar a minha história.
Ninguém a quem falar dos canais de rega no campo de baixo ou de quando se sulfatam as macieiras, ou de *Entre Índios e Brancos* ou de como eu queria casar com a Grace Kelly.
Ambos queríamos casar com a Grace Kelly.
Saímos de *O Comboio Apitou Três Vezes* e caminhámos rua abaixo sem dizermos uma palavra. Nem sequer olhámos para as raparigas. Montámos as bicicletas e continuámos sem dizer uma palavra e depois enquanto pedalávamos por entre a escuridão dos campos ele começou a cantar.
Do not forsake me O my darling …
Nunca poderás ter uma mulher daquelas, disse-lhe eu, nem quando o rei fizer anos.
… on this our wedding day …
Nunca.
Do not forsake me O my darling …
Nunca.
Gente como nós …
Do not forsake me …
E eu tinha razão, não tinha?
Ela casou com aquele príncipe francês.
Pois é.
E de qualquer maneira é uma papista.
Disse-lhe isso e ele só se riu.

É americana, disse ele.
Vimos o filme quatro vezes.
Eu nunca conseguia lembrar-me da letra daquela canção… mas ele sabia-a de cor depois da segunda vez que vimos o filme.
Gary Cooper – esse sim, um bom tipo.
Contei ao velhote do filme mas eram maus tempos nos anos cinquenta e ele fazia parte da Polícia Especial e não tinha tempo para ir ver filmes.
Na altura ele tinha a sua arma.
Eu costumava vê-lo a limpá-la.
Costumava olhar para aquelas balas frias e imaginá-las a rasgarem-nos.
Ele nunca me deixou tocar-lhe.
Nunca a limpava à frente das minhas irmãs… ou da minha mãe.
Uma vez eu disse-lhe… acho que devia estar com uns copos a mais… sim… uma noite eu tinha estado lá em baixo no bar com o Sammy e a malta… quando cheguei ele estava para sair para a patrulha. Estava de pé na entrada apertada mirando-se ao espelho. Segurava a arma meia solta na mão, como se fosse o velho Jimmy Stewart e mirava-se ao espelho como que a admirar-se, a imaginar coisas na sua cabeça.
Eu disse, se agora tivesses um cavalo branco e um chapéu grande podias dizer que ias salvar o mundo… como o General Custer… como o Rei… e não só a meter o nariz por estradas escuras à cata de Fenianos.
Ele apontou-me o punho, deu-me um murro na boca e saiu de casa.
Foi a única vez em que me bateu.
O meu lábio sangrou.
Eu só estava a brincar.
Há brincadeiras e brincadeiras, disse depois a minha mãe.
Não pensas?
A água salgada fez-me arder tanto o lábio que quase chorei.
Nunca pensas.
Ela deu-me um pano embebido em remédio.
Isso evita o inchaço.
Vais ficar uns dias sem poder beijar a tua namorada.
Eu não tinha namorada.
Não conseguia deixar de pensar na Grace Kelly.
O Sammy não se importava.
O Sammy batia o terreno.

Trabalhava como negociante de gado com o Coronel Bradley e ajudava o pai nas horas vagas… e nas suas horas vagas saía com todas as raparigas da terra… do condado inteiro. Se calhar até da província.
Não sei. Perdi-lhe o rasto por uns tempos.
Fui para Londres.
Olhó Paddy.
Era o que me diziam todas as manhãs durante quatro anos.
Nunca dei com a Grace Kelly nos salões de baile de Kilburn.
Olhó Paddy.
E ergui o punho e atirei-o ao chão e lembrei-me do punho do meu pai quando me bateu e disse, eu tenho nome seu filho da puta inglês e deixei as obras e vim-me embora.
Billy Maltseed.
Esta é a minha casa.
Tal como as árvores, cresci desta terra.
Ou não se desse o caso de me chamar "seed": semente.
O Sammy estava casado quando eu voltei, com dois miúdos.
Uma rapariga bonitinha, mas não…
Teve um descuido e ficou preso pró resto da vida.
Prisão perpétua disse-me ele uma vez no pub.
… a Grace não…
Em pouco tempo voltei a engrenar na vida.
Arranjei este emprego a conduzir o autocarro escolar aqui da zona e ajudava o meu pai nas horas vagas.
Nessa altura era eu que levava o estandarte no Doze de Julho. Fincava o mastro contra o vento. A minha mãe trazia sandes e um termos com chá e o Sammy trazia cerveja e divertíamo-nos.
É uma coisa curiosa isto do Doze de Julho… Naqueles tempos era um dia animado… uma festa. Cantávamos as nossas canções, tocávamos os nossos tambores e uns velhotes faziam discursos.
Bandeiras e tambores e serpentinas, lembro-me, e entoávamos os nossos nomes sagrados e cantávamos as nossas sagradas canções. O Rei Billy tinha-nos trazido a liberdade, como o meu pai dizia.
O que é que festejávamos?
Não me lembro.
Só me lembro que era divertido e as raparigas enfeitavam-se com os seus

melhores vestidos e eu e o Sammy bebíamos montes de cerveja e ficávamos de ressaca no dia seguinte.
Já não é assim.
É duro agora.
É violento agora.
É como o dia em que o meu pai me bateu.
O Sammy só teve aqueles dois filhos.
Um deles está na universidade… do lado de lá do mar.
Será que lhe chamam Paddy?
Prisão perpétua.
A Christine tinha dezoito anos quando a conheci… bem, quando reparei nela.
Diz ela que passou dois anos a entrar e a sair daquele autocarro antes de eu reparar nela.
Nessa altura já tirara da ideia a Grace Kelly.
Não que a Christine não fosse uma rapariga bonita. Era, mas não… bem não… Nunca havia de pôr o mundo em brasa.
Naquele dia ela ia apanhar o autocarro e estava sem o uniforme.
Menina… disse-lhe eu… desculpe, Menina, isto é um autocarro escolar e ela desatou a rir e passou por mim a correr até ao fundo do autocarro onde estavam as amigas dela que passaram o resto da viagem até à escola a dizer-lhe *Menina*, *desculpe*, *Menina*. E eu a ouvir.
Quando ia a sair, parou junto a mim e sorriu. Justiça lhe seja feita, tinha um belo sorriso e naquele mesmo instante pensei que se não podia ter a Grace Kelly, bem podia ter esta.
A minha mãe não gostou por ela não ser presbiteriana.
Não podias ter arranjado uma boa rapariga da tua religião?
Casamentos mistos não dão bons frutos.
Vais meter-te em problemas com uma rapariga anglicana.
Têm a mania que são superiores.
Nunca tive problema nenhum com ela… só aquilo.
Estéril é uma palavra tão feia.
Nunca lha disse.
Nunca lhe disse nada de desagradável.
Hoje em dia arranjam-se vídeos desses filmes antigos todos.
Era o que eu havia de fazer.

Trazia um por semana e sentávamo-nos ali os dois, pai e filho, e víamo-los todos como eu fazia com o velhote.
Cavalgada Fantástica.
E Todos Morreram Calçados.
Duelo de Fogo.
Ouvem-se Tambores ao Longe.
A Cidade Turbulenta. Sim. *A Cidade.*
Os cinemas já não são a mesma coisa hoje em dia.
Havíamos de ficar bem em casa.
O velhote também podia ver os filmes.
Havia de gostar.
E *O Comboio Apitou Três Vezes*.
Não esquecer *O Comboio Apitou Três Vezes.*
Do not forsake me O my darling.
Tinha uma voz meiga.
Tinha.
Os filhos dele já não vêm cá.
Estão cheios de estudos.
Ficam por lá.
Hão-de aprender outra língua.
Hão-de passar a chamar a gente como nós Paddy.
Acho que se pode dizer que eu e a Christine somos felizes.
O Sammy costumava passar por cá amiúde, depois de uns copitos… ou mais do que uns copitos… por exemplo depois da festa de Natal do Regimento… pediu a um colega para o deixar junto ao nosso portão. Ouvimo-lo subir o caminho até à porta a praguejar e a cantar e a tombar… a desassossegar tudo. Desatou a bater à porta.
Por amor de Deus abre a porta e deixa aquele maluco entrar antes que ele acorde o velhote.
Nas encostas verdejantes do…
… e dos O'Kanes.
Abram, são ordens.
Ele tinha a arma na mão e por um instante pensei que ia disparar.
A mão tremia-lhe e apontou-a certeira à minha barriga.
Do not forsake me O my darling.
Foi a única coisa que me ocorreu.

Sussurrei-lhe as palavras.
On this our wedding day.
Do not forsake me O my darling.
Ele abanou a cabeça. Entregou-me a arma.
Bom velho Rei Billy, disse ele.
Estava quente da mão dele. Pousei-a na mesita junto à porta e ele pura e simplesmente caiu de sono… ali mesmo no degrau. Caiu como uma pedra.
Arrastámo-lo para dentro de casa.
Não havia maneira de o acordar.
Tinha apanhado uma valente bebedeira.
Deitámo-lo no sofá junto à lareira e a Christine cobriu-o com um cobertor.
Vai estar com uma valente ressaca amanhã de manhã, disse ela.
Pobre Sammy.
Da mulher dele é que eu tenho pena, disse ela.
Peguei na arma e mirei-a.
Estava carregada e pronta a disparar.
Não disse à Christine.
Tirei as balas e pousei-as na mesita.
Mirei-me ao espelho… com a arma à vontade na mão.
Sorri, endireitei as costas, voltei a sorrir, ergui ligeiramente a arma…
Quem é que pensas que és?
Ela estava de pé junto à porta a olhar-me.
Gary Cooper? James Stewart? John Wayne*?*
Assim como assim ela também não era a Grace Kelly.
Deixa-te desses disparates e vai mas é dormir.
Claro que ele não se lembrava de nada no dia seguinte.
Quando o levei a casa veio-me uma ideia à cabeça… o que é que teria acontecido se ele tivesse ido ter à casa errada. Se tivesse ido ter aos O'Kanes mais acima.
São as únicas casas por estes lados.
As únicas…
Agora eu sou o homem armado nas redondezas.
É. Tenho-o aqui no bolso.
Auto-defesa dizem eles.
Deve andar-se sempre armado dizem eles.
Não serve de muito por estes lados.

Não serviu de muito ao Sammy.
Acho que ele não estava armado.
Estava lá no seu campo de baixo a pôr uma vaca doente no camião quando o apanharam.
Quinze balas cravadas no corpo dizia o relatório…
Há um ano.
Também era domingo.
Como hoje.
Dia santo.
Ainda hoje é esse o dia em que tenho mais saudades dele.
O meu companheiro.
A quintita dele está à venda.
Os filhos não a querem e a mulher vai para a terra dela em Enniskillen.
Não era de esperar que ficasse aqui sozinha.
Não depois do que aconteceu.
Fica uma sensação esquisita no lugar onde alguém foi morto.
Desde o princípio que aquilo não foi um bom casamento.
Ele não devia ser o melhor dos maridos.
Prisão perpétua.
Agora ela está livre disso.
Ele também, claro.
É uma maneira de ver as coisas.
Eu e a Christine temos um bom casamento. Nada mau.
A não ser por uma única coisa.
Nunca falamos disso.
Não é fácil para ela ter de tomar conta do velhote.
Já não há-de ser por muito tempo.
Há pessoas que parece que se arrastam para chatear os outros.
Já não está no seu juízo.
As minhas irmãs não dão ajuda nenhuma.
Temos os filhos para criar dizem elas.
Lá isso é verdade. Nada a dizer.
Agora não tenho com quem falar.
Alistei-me no Regimento quando mataram o Sammy.
Ela não queria.
Chorou.

Não gosto de a ver chorar.
Mas ela não entende.
Não pode entender.
Eu podia tirá-la daqui quando isto acabar.
Não é fácil arranjar tempo com a quinta e o emprego e…
Pois.
Ela queria ir a Viena há uns anitos.
Fazer o quê num sítio desses?
Eu pensei muitas vezes em ir à América.
Ao Oeste.
Ver aqueles lugares todos.
Arizona, Texas, o rio Mohawk, o Álamo, Little Big Horn.
Uma semanita ou duas.
Estar nesses lugares.
A Grace Kelly já morreu.
E o Sammy.
Ela chorou.
Dever.
Esta é a minha terra.
Há mais de vinte anos que a cultivo… e antes de mim cultivou-a o meu pai.
Não é por dever.
Deus sabe o que nos vai na alma.
Quando estava ali a vê-los a enterrar o Sammy pensei… vou arranjar um chapéu grande e um cavalo branco e uma arma.
Disparate, não é?
Esta é a minha terra.
Não é por dever.
Os meus terrenozitos.
A minha casa com o velhote às portas da morte e a Christine.
Estéril.
Não faz mal.
Tenho de lhe dizer isso um dia destes. Não faz mal.
Os nomes sagrados protegem-nos.
Jimmy Stewart. Gary Cooper. Randolph Scott. Burt Lancaster. Kirk Douglas. General Custer… Destry… Billy the Kid… Billy the King.
Sammy Hickson.

Ei, Sammy.
Aí em cima com a Grace, não é Sammy?
Pregaste-me uma boa partida, não foi?
Hahhaha!
Do not forsake me O my darling …

Christine

[*O Ananias, Azarias and Miseal*]

Jennifer Johnston

Intitulado pela autora *O Ananias*, *Azarias and Miseal*, e rebaptizado pela sua primeira encenadora como *Christine*, este monólogo foi representado pela primeira vez no Peacock Theatre, em Dublin, em 1989. O papel de Christine foi desempenhado por Rosaleen Linehan. A encenação foi da responsabilidade de Caroline FitzGerald.

O monólogo foi mais tarde difundido pela BBC Radio Ulster a 20 de Abril de 1989. O papel de Christine foi desempenhado por Stella McCuster e a produção foi dirigida por Jeremy Howe.

A estreia portuguesa ocorreu a 11 de Março de 2004, no Rivoli Teatro Municipal, Porto, com encenação de João Cardoso e interpretação de Rosa Quiroga.

É.
Ora aqui está.
Tudo arrumado.
Há quem pura e simplesmente vire as costas e se vá embora… bata com a porta. É.
Há quem seja assim… não pensam mais no pó que deixam para trás… na fuligem.
É.
Fuligem.
Eu não sou capaz.
Não sou capaz de deixar que estranhos aqui entrem e encontrem coisas a que apontar o dedo.
Estranhos.
Sabe Deus quantos por aí têm passado nestas últimas semanas.
Paspalhos.
Não há dia que os não veja a passar de carro pela estrada estreita e a abrandar quando passam pelo portão.
Uns poucos chegam mesmo a parar, param mesmo junto ao portão e esticam as cabeças para fora da janela.
Sinto-me insultada.
A curiosidade matou o gato.
Apetecia-me abrir a porta e gritar-lhes isso.
A curiosidade matou o gato.
A minha mãe dizia-nos muito isso quando éramos pequenos.
Eu não acreditava.
Nunca vi assim tantos gatos mortos por aqueles lados.
Lembro-me que uma vez o meu irmão disparou contra um com uma pistola de pressão de ar.
Matou-o.
Não foi lá muito bonito.
Não se apercebeu… da morte, sabem? Não que ele quisesse fazer-lhe mal, percebem? Achou só que… Não sei o que é que ele achou, só sei que não queria fazer-lhe mal.
Não voltou a tocar na pistola de pressão de ar.
A minha mãe desatou a chorar quando viu o gato.
Ele ficou abalado.

Ela nunca lhe disse nada sobre o assunto… só chorou.
Manso.
O meu irmão era manso.
Não quero dizer manso no juízo, simplório… não, nada disso… mas era um homem manso.
Temo-nos visto pouco ao longo dos anos.
A mulher dele é boa pessoa mas não lhe sobra muito tempo. Ela trabalha e entre o trabalho e os pequenos fica cansada.
Percebem… estafada.
Justiça lhes seja feita, vieram ao enterro.
É. Justiça lhes seja feita.
Não sei como é que… ah pois… gatos… engraçado como a nossa cabeça funciona. Anda às voltas… ou se calhar é só a minha.
Deve ser só a minha. Nunca fui lá muito esperta.
Há muitas coisas que não percebo. Parece que não consigo controlar o que me vai pela cabeça.
Não entendo grande coisa dos livros, isso é verdade. Nunca entendi. Nunca tive muito tempo para livros.
Mas gosto da televisão.
Gosto de ver a cara das pessoas. Aqui na sala. Às vezes fica cheia da cara das pessoas.
Nunca se está sozinho quando se tem a televisão. Isso era o que eu pensava.
Mas não é assim.
Não nos vêem, aquelas pessoas.
Não nos ligam.
Afinal de contas, por que é que haviam de ligar?
Têm as suas vidas… os seus problemas.
Quer dizer, algumas delas mandam no mundo.
É estranho ver essas pessoas que mandam no mundo aqui na nossa sala.
As caras delas não me dizem nada.
Às vezes pergunto-me como é que elas têm aquelas coisas todas dentro da cabeça.
Números e coisas que tais.
Palavras compridas.
Ideias.
Informação.

Tanta informação.
Fazem parecer tudo tão importante… e depois eu sinto-me estúpida por não perceber nada daquilo… sobre o Médio Oriente e coisas assim… não percebo… também, que eu perceba ou não pouco deve importar.
Engraçado, os sapatos não fazem barulho hoje em dia.
Quando eu era pequena, os sapatos faziam barulho.
Isso quer dizer que não foram pagos, dizia a minha mãe.
Não se podia levar a sério tudo o que ela dizia.
De certeza que os sapatos da Sra. Thatcher fazem barulho.
Não sei porquê. Quando a vejo na televisão, tenho sempre essa sensação, penso cá para comigo, aposto que os teus sapatos fazem barulho.
Uma vez contei ao Billy…
Ao Billy.
Ele riu às gargalhadas.
Fartou-se de rir.
Adorava rir.
O Billy.
Divertir-te é fácil.
Eu costumava dizer-lhe isso.
Billy Maltseed, divertir-te é fácil.
Chamo-me Christine.
Billy e Christine.
Mandámos escrever os nomes em letras prateadas nos nossos convites de casamento. Ficou muito bem… e sininhos… sabem, daqueles como que a tocar para o lado… e dois anjinhos… muito bonito.
Sim.
Foi um dia bonito.
Tenho as fotografias… toda a gente a sorrir.
Só a minha avó é que não pôde vir de Carlow aqui ao Norte. Disse que podia levar um tiro.
Meu Deus, como nos rimos à conta disso.
Mas eu fiquei um bocado triste.
Gostava muito da minha avó.
Pensava que ela havia de aproveitar a oportunidade.
Velha demais para aventuras, disse o Billy.
Nunca chegou a conhecê-la.

Havia de gostar dela.
Uma mulher de fibra. Velha mas divertida.
Havia de o fazer rir a bandeiras despregadas.
A minha mãe também queria que ela viesse.
Durante todos os anos em que a minha mãe viveu aqui no Norte, nunca a minha avó a veio ver.
Uma vez tivemos de ir lá abaixo.
Não que eu me importasse, mas a minha mãe importava-se.
Acha que temos cornos ou coisa assim, perguntou ela uma vez à mãe dela.
A avó costumava rir-se do meu sotaque… sem gozar… só uma brincadeira de vez em quando.
A minha mãe nunca perdeu o seu sotaque do Sul, mas eu não conseguia deixar de falar como falava.
Disse-lhe isso uma vez. *Avozinha, não consigo deixar de falar como falo.*
Eu sei, cachopa.
Ela dizia isso.
Cachopa.
Muito antiquado. Ninguém diz tal coisa hoje em dia.
Cachopa.
Nunca sabemos quando estamos felizes.
Muitas vezes pergunto-me se a Sra. Thatcher será feliz… ou a Rainha. Não gosto dos óculos que ela tem de usar… dão-lhe um ar zangado.
Gosto de a ver com a coroa e tudo isso mas os óculos estragam-na.
Será que ela sabe?
Será que ela se vê na televisão? Se calhar não tem tempo.
A minha avó contava que se lembrava da Rainha Vitória mas o Billy dizia que ela estava a pregar-me uma peta. Dizia que ela era velha mas nem tanto.

Velha Vitória Rainha,
Caminha com uma caninha,
Corre ou inda te põe a mãozinha.
Foge, foge bem depressinha.

Não é lá muito respeitoso, pois não?
Ela costumava gritar-me isso quando eu era pequena.
Lá no Sul, em Carlow.
Escrevi à minha prima Doreen, que foi uma das minhas damas de honor…

bem, escrevi-lhe noutro dia a dizer que talvez fosse para lá viver perto dela. Ela é casada e tem dois meninos, bem eram meninos da última vez que os vi, agora… devem estar uns rapazes… o marido dela trabalha no banco em Kilkenny. Simpático… Uma vez fui lá visitá-los, já há uns anos. Foi o Billy que insistiu que eu fosse… para me distrair, disse ele. Foi no Verão em que eu fui ao hospital fazer os exames. A Doreen tinha os dois meninos na altura, muito queridos que eles eram.

Vê-los pôs-me triste. Disparate, não é?

Nunca tive coragem de dizer ao Billy o que é que eles disseram no hospital… deixei-o pensar que a culpa era minha…

Sabem como são os homens… ficam muito sentidos com coisas dessas, envergonhados. Não sei bem porquê. Os homens são mais envergonhados do que as mulheres. Acho eu.

É por isso que nunca lhe contei a verdade.

Às vezes não era nada fácil não deitar tudo cá para fora… quando tínhamos uma discussãozita ou coisa assim.

A mãe do Billy passava a vida a falar do assunto.

Então Christine, ainda não há novidades?

Eu limitava-me a sorrir mas às vezes sentia que podia magoá-la.

Era uma mulher dura… é verdade que teve uma vida difícil, aqui nestes montes, a tentar esticar os tostões, olhando pelas coisas.

Nunca havia uma ponta de pó nesta casa. Podia pôr-se a mesa no chão, se preciso fosse.

Não havia comodidades naqueles tempos.

Fomos nós que fizemos o quarto de banho… Imaginem só! Sem quarto de banho e só com uma retrete lá fora no quintal quando para cá viemos… e não foi assim há tanto tempo… quero dizer, é do nosso tempo!

Não sou capaz de viver assim, disse eu ao Billy.

Podes estar habituado mas eu não… e tinha o velhote para tomar conta e… e toda aquela roupa extra para lavar.

Lençóis. Todos os dias havia lençóis para lavar e pijamas… isso foi mais tarde claro. Não ao princípio. Na altura eu não sabia como as coisas iam ser com ele.

Verdade seja dita que ele trabalhou muito enquanto pôde.

O Billy também ajudou… arranjou aquele emprego na Câmara a conduzir o autocarro da escola e além disso ainda continuava a trabalhar no campo…

nunca foi preguiçoso, nunca do género de se sentar e deixar que as coisas levassem a melhor.
Nunca fizemos mal a ninguém.
Foi isso que eu disse na minha carta à Doreen.
Não consegui perceber por que é que ela não quis que eu fosse.
Umas feriazinhas talvez, disse ela, *passada a confusão… mas depois vais ter de te aguentar pelo teu próprio pé*.
Nunca pedi para me pôr no dela, pois não? Ah ah … ah ah.
Foi como se ela pensasse que eu tinha uma doença terrível que ia espalhar à minha volta, contaminar a família dela, aqueles rapazes simpáticos… o Fred… a cidade de Kilkenny… o Banco Irlandês Unido… se calhar o país inteiro.
Contaminar.
Não quero lá ir se é isso que ela pensa.
Escrevi-lhe a dizer isso.
Nunca fizemos mal a ninguém.
Vivíamos no nosso canto.
Não quero dizer que não tivesse amigas… Tinha. Tinha amigas sim senhor.
Não conversávamos muito mas éramos amigas.
Isto aqui é muito solitário no Inverno.
As noites são muito compridas.
O Billy era boa companhia, há que o dizer, e havia a televisão.
Tinha uma boa amiga que era…
A Dolores O'Kane.
Vive já ali ao fundo da rua.
A casinha de telhado vermelho ao fundo do monte.
Ele era um bocado distante mas dela eu gostava.
Tínhamos o mesmo problema… o sogro.
Podem rir-se.
Era o que nós fazíamos… dar uma gargalhada. É preciso uma boa gargalhada de vez em quando. Não rirmo-nos uns dos outros, claro, mas… enfim, das coisas, em geral.
Era isso que fazíamos, um bom chá e uma boa gargalhada.
Ela tem filhos… isso ajuda… Faz-nos olhar para o futuro… ter um pouco de… esperança?
Se calhar eu não devia falar em esperança.

Acho que teria alguma esperança se tivesse filhos.
Talvez não.
Costumávamos falar dos filhos que havíamos de ter.
Bem, no princípio costumávamos.
Depois pensei em adoptar… mas depois pensei, será que eu ia gostar do filho?
Será que podia dar-lhe aquilo de que ele precisasse?
Será que ele ia gostar de mim… e do Billy.
Nunca se sabe de onde vem o bebé… se for adoptado, claro.
Parece disparatado, mas a minha mãe costumava dizer-nos… não ponham isso na boca, sabem lá de onde isso vem.
Era um bocado isso que eu sentia em relação a adoptar.
Acho que o Billy sentia o mesmo.
Eu costumava falar com a Dolores sobre isso… depois de eu saber… depois de ter ido ao hospital. Nunca lhe disse a ela que o problema não era meu.
Achei que não seria justo. Ela podia comentar isso com alguém e o Billy vir a saber.
Não devemos confiar demasiado nas pessoas.
Se calhar foi melhor assim, dadas as circunstâncias… melhor não termos tido filhos.
Basta pensar como eles ficariam agora.
Órfãos.
Não… não seriam órfãos… tinham-me a mim.
Se tivesse filhos ficava aqui.
Havia de trabalhar até mais não poder.
Como a minha mãe costumava dizer, o trabalho nunca fez mal a ninguém.
Assim como assim, vê-se tanta gente destruída pela falta dele.
Eu gostava de ter tido uma menina.
Às vezes à noite eu segurava-o no meu colo e embalava-o.
Se fechasse os olhos podia imaginar que ele era um…
Ele nunca soube o que é que eu pensava.
Tantas coisas que não dissemos um ao outro.
Deve ser a mesma coisa com toda a gente.
Cheia de segredos.
O médico disse só para lhe dizer para ir à clínica.
Não deve ser muito difícil Sra. Maltseed, disse ele.
Era simpático.

Não tive coragem de dizer ao Billy.
Ele gostava de se fazer de valentão. Sabem… o valentão do Billy Maltseed. Era por isso que gostava da Loja… todos aqueles homens… a aperaltarem-se. Dava-me vontade de rir para dentro só de os ver, tocando os seus tambores, marchando, com as bandeiras e toda aquela parafernália.
Eu ficava a pensar como eles seriam por dentro, por baixo de todas aquelas roupas e insígnias.
Uma vez disse-lhe: vira um chapéu de coco ao contrário e imagina para que podia servir.
Ele não achou graça nenhuma.
Não tem graça nenhuma, dizia a minha mãe quando eu fazia um disparate qualquer.
Não tem graça nenhuma.
Eu pus as insígnias nos caixões deles… Dele e do velhote. Não queria voltar a vê-las. Pensei que o Pastor fosse dizer alguma coisa mas não disse. Talvez não soubesse.
A minha mãe era da Igreja Anglicana.
Eu acho que não sou verdadeiramente de coisa nenhuma.
Quando era pequena adorava a Igreja Anglicana.
Que a terra bendiga o Senhor: – a Ele a glória e o louvor eternamente!
Desse eu gostava.
Ananias, *Azarias*, *Misael*, *bendizei o Senhor:*
Não cantam cânticos desses na Igreja Presbiteriana.
– A Ele a glória e o louvor eternamente!
Uma vez perguntei ao Billy por que é que não cantavam os cânticos e ele disse… há muito tempo que nos livrámos dessas tretas. Falamos directamente com Deus.
Foi o que ele disse.
Não acreditei.
Eu sentia a falta de Ananias, Azarias e Misael.
Fossem lá quem fossem.
Nunca soube quem eram mas conseguia vê-los, caminhando ao meu lado com as suas grandes asas dobradas atrás das costas.
Grandes asas de penas.
Sinto a falta da sua companhia.
Mateus e Marcos e Lucas e João

Abençoem a cama onde me vou deitar.
Todas as noites, ao deitar, digo isto.
E se a morte vier e me levar
Nunca disse ao Billy.
…Rogo para ao Senhor
A minha alma entregar.
Não vejo mal nenhum em dizer isso.
A minha mãe costumava dizer isso baixinho quando vinha deitar-me… depois dava-me um beijo… agora ficas bem dizia ela… eles tomam conta de ti.
Têm de tomar.
Acho eu.
Não me queixo.
Já sabem qual o trabalho deles, tomar conta de todos aqueles que dizem isso ao adormecer.
Mesmo quando eu o tinha no meu colo e fazia de conta que era o meu menino… mesmo aí eu costumava cantarolar mentalmente… *Mateus e Marcos… E se a morte vier e me levar, rogo para ao Senhor a minha alma entregar*… Ele nunca soube.
Ele pensava que eu pensava como ele, acreditava como ele.
Escutem… ouvem os filhos da Dolores a brincar no campo?
Eu costumava dar-lhes maçãs da nossa macieira… Eles não tinham nenhuma.
Também tínhamos peras e ameixas caranguejeiras. O velhote plantou a ameixieira no fim da guerra.
A criançada costumava vir roubar a fruta de noite.
Achavam mais graça assim do que quando eu lhes dava a fruta.
As crianças são mesmo assim!
Eu ia estudar para ser professora quando conheci o Billy.
Pra quê perguntou ele.
A minha mãe tinha descoberto o cancro nessa altura e estava muito fraca.
Só disse é contigo minha filha mas não te esqueças do siso que Deus te deu.
Nunca soube bem qual era.
Ela havia de gostar que eu fosse professora, se havia. Isso eu sabia.
Via-se na cara dela.
O Billy era tão divertido.

Não posso ficar eternamente à espera, dizia ele.
O que não falta é peixe no mar, dizia a minha mãe, mas eu gostava do Billy. Nunca discutimos em todos estes anos. Enfim, quase nunca discutimos, não como as outras pessoas.
Vinte.
Maio que vem.
Sim.
Vinte.
Ele disse que havia de me levar a passear.
Para festejar, percebem?
Vinte anos é muito tempo.
Trouxe uns livrinhos da agência de viagens.
Deitei-os ao lixo outro dia.
Pra quê ficar com eles agora?
Eu não havia de querer ir sozinha.
A Dolores foi a Espanha no ano passado.
Contou que era muito bonito… desde que não se tocasse na comida.
Eu não cresci à beira-mar.
O mar assustava-me.
Deve depender daquilo a que estamos habituados.
Achei que a Suíça havia de ser bonito mas ele disse que era caro… ou Viena.
É onde têm aqueles lindos cavalos.
Vi-os na televisão.
Sabem dançar.
Eu gostava de ir ver os cavalos… mas foi na altura em que o velhote piorou e não pudemos ir a lado nenhum.
Eu achava que devíamos tê-lo posto num lar… lá estaria bem tratado.
O sogro da Dolores está num lar.
Eles vão visitá-lo uma vez por semana. Ela leva-lhe bolachas.
Ele gosta de bolachas de gengibre. Molha-as no chá.
A minha mãe nunca me deixou fazer isso.
Hão-de apodrecer-te os dentes se engolires coisas dessas, dizia ela.
Ele não gostava de usar a dentadura.
Quando ele estava em casa a Dolores via-se grega com ele para o obrigar a usar a dentadura.
O Billy não queria ouvir falar de tal coisa.

O meu pai não vai para lar nenhum.
Nós podemos muito bem cuidar dele.
Nós!
Ri-me quando ele disse isso… pra dentro, claro.
Não tem muito tempo de vida, cá havemos de nos arranjar. Foi o que ele disse ao Pastor.
Havia um lar pequenino e jeitosinho que pertencia à Igreja e recebia pessoas de idade como ele. Mas o Billy já tinha decidido.
Uma vez fui com a Dolores ao lar quando ela foi à visita. Estavam seis num quarto. Acho que ele havia de ter gostado. As enfermeiras eram simpáticas. Brincalhonas, percebem?
Ele ainda está forte.
Quem sabe se o Sr. Maltseed ainda estaria forte se…
Se passássemos a vida a chorar sobre o leite derramad …
Ela também costumava dizer isso.
Se…
Foi o choque que o matou.
Se pelo menos…
Eu tinha de lhe dizer…
Não havia mais ninguém.
Pensei pedir ao Pastor mas achei que não estaria certo.
Não é bom ouvir tais coisas da boca de um estranho.
Há duzentos anos que há Maltseeds nesta casa.
Alguém deve ter achado que era altura de mudar.
Isto é uma piada, caso não tenham dado conta.
Não estou a falar a sério.
Disse isso à Dolores no dia a seguir aos dois enterros.
Ela não achou graça nenhuma.
Depois, claro, percebi que não devia dizer-lhe tais coisas.
Tem sido uma boa vizinha.
Uma boa amiga, digam o que disserem.
Há alturas em que devíamos manter o bico calado.
Bico calado.
Quando a minha mãe dizia isso, eu fazia um bico com a boca e segurava os lábios entre o polegar e o indicador… assim, toda a gente deve lembrar-se de fazer isso.

Ela ria-se.
Sua malandreca, dizia ela.
Era a única a chamar-me assim.
É uma boa palavra, não é?
Malandreca.
Uma palavra divertida.
Se eu tivesse filhos chamava-lhes…
A Dolores diz que tudo é a vontade de Deus.
Eu não vejo as coisas bem assim.
Por que é que ele havia de me deixar em tal tristeza?
O que é que eu lhe fiz?
Sou tão pequena. Acho que ele nem deve ver-me quando olha lá de cima cá para baixo. Não sou como aquelas pessoas que aparecem na televisão.
Perguntei isso à Dolores… ela também não sabia a resposta… a não ser que seja por eu ser protestante… mas também não deve ser por isso porque há tantos outros a sofrer.
Não perguntei ao Pastor porque acho que ele não gosta muito de mim.
É a minha sensação.
Fui falar com ele quando o Billy disse que ia alistar-se no Regimento.
Pedi-lhe para dar uma palavrinha ao Billy… dizer-lhe qualquer coisa… mas ele não se dispôs a isso. Disse que achava muito bem que o Billy se alistasse…
Eu disse-lhe… mas, Reverendo, a Bíblia diz que não devemos matar pessoas. Eu não disse exactamente assim mas era isso que eu queria dizer.
Minha cara Sra. Maltseed, disse ele numa vozinha seca, *espero que nunca cheguemos a tal ponto. Tenho a certeza*, disse ele, *que o Billy saberá comportar-se dentro dos limites do dever e não agirá movido por fanatismo ou excesso de zelo*.
Lembro-me disso… *excesso de zelo*.
Engraçado como certas pessoas falam.
Deve ter ido buscar tais palavras à Bíblia.
O Bom Livro, como ele lhe chamava.
Às vezes falam de certa maneira para esconder coisas.
Acho que o nosso Pastor gosta bastante de ouvir o som da sua voz.
Vozinha seca, como se lhe custasse falar.
Imagino que agora eu podia voltar para a Igreja Anglicana.

Não me tinha lembrado disso.
Ó Ananias, Azarias e …
Vou ter de arranjar emprego.
… Misael.
O dinheiro da casa não vai durar sempre.
Talvez eles voltem a caminhar ao meu lado.
Nunca tive um emprego.
É uma casinha bonita, depois de todas as obras… e cinquenta acres.
Ninguém quer viver aqui.
O marido da Dolores ofereceu-se para ficar com o terreno… mas quem é que ia querer comprar a casa sem o terreno?
Tudo bem estimado ao fim destes anos todos.
As pessoas têm medo hoje em dia.
As pessoas como nós têm medo.
Foi por isso que ele se alistou no Regimento.
Muitos dos amigos dele alistaram-se há anos mas só quando o Sam Hickson foi morto é que ele decidiu alistar-se.
Pra quê?, perguntei-lhe eu.
Quero dizer, ele não foi feito para ser soldado.
E pra quê metermo-nos em trabalhos.
Pra quê ser herói?
Ele ficou transtornado quando mataram o Sam.
O Sam era um bom amigo.
Andaram juntos na escola.
Faziam parte da mesma Loja.
Tinha o problemazito da bebida e passou umas quantas noites aqui quando estava demasiado tocado para ir para casa para a mulher. Quando não era capaz de dar com o caminho para casa, digamos assim. Mas era um bom homem.
Vivia lá em baixo ao pé do lago.
(*Monstros marinhos e tudo o que se move nas águas, bendizei o Senhor.*)
Não contei a ninguém que o Billy tinha entrado para o Regimento… Por exemplo, à minha prima Doreen, nunca lhe contei.
Eles têm umas ideias esquisitas lá no Sul… mas depois ela leu nos jornais e ficou toda aborrecida. É por essas e por outras que eles não me querem por lá… pelo menos acho que é.

Também não disse à Dolores… mas um dia ela veio ter comigo… e saiu-se logo com isso…
O teu Billy não está no Regimento?
Assim mesmo, tal qual, estava eu a tomar um chá na cozinha dela.
É… está.
Não podia mentir-lhe.
A tempo parcial, disse eu.
Ela não disse nada.
Só me olhou com um ar esquisito.
Não há mal nenhum nisso, disse eu.
Eu achava que não havia mal nenhum.
Acho que o Billy também achava que não havia mal nenhum.
Um dever. É.
Um dever.
Acho que também se divertiam um bocado.
Como miúdos.
Não imaginava o teu Billy a fazer semelhante coisa.
Disse-me ela uma semana depois.
Semelhante coisa como?
Perguntei eu, apesar de saber.
Sabes muito bem, disse ela.
Bloqueiam ruas e coisas assim, disse eu.
Ela olhou-me outra vez com um ar esquisito e passou-me uma fatia de bolo.
Tem uma boa mão para bolos.
Veio cá trazer-me um bolo inglês na véspera do enterro.
Um bolo inglês escuro e cheio de fruta… como a minha mãe fazia.
À moda antiga.
Desses não há nas lojas.
A minha mãe nunca comprou um bolo em toda a sua vida.
Nada nem ninguém havia de a convencer a tal.
No dia em que eu não puder fazer um bolo, deixamos de comer bolos.
Claro que nos últimos meses de vida não havia nada que ela quisesse comer.
Perdeu o apetite.
Murchou.
Olhos esgazeados e sem conseguir segurar os dentes na boca.
Eu ficava doente de cada vez que a via.

Vós, filhos dos homens, bendizei o Senhor.
Era boa pessoa.
Partia-se-me o coração ao vê-la assim a morrer.
Pelo menos o Billy não teve de passar por isso.
Não soube o que é que o atingiu.
Pelo menos foi o que disseram os médicos.
Sabe-se lá.
Sabe-se lá se não foi por milagre que nenhum dos miúdos do autocarro ficou ferido.
Imagino que quem quer que fez o que fez pouco havia de se importar.
Não devia dizer isto.
Não devia sentir estas coisas mas às vezes não consigo evitar.
Pedi a Deus que me enchesse de caridade mas ele ainda não teve tempo.
Tive de identificar o corpo.
Achei disparatado, pois se toda a gente sabia que era o Billy Maltseed que conduzia o autocarro escolar.
Eu não queria vê-lo.
Disse-lhes isso mas eles não ligaram.
É a lei minha senhora.
Uma lei disparatada é o que eu acho… perseguir alguém assim.
Eu não queria mesmo nada vê-lo. Só queria que o fechassem no caixão para que eu pudesse recordá-lo assim, enroscado no meu colo como um bebé.
Já não consigo ver isso.
A outra imagem mete-se pelo meio.
Pensei e tornei a pensar se havia de dizer ao velhote mas tive medo que com aquela confusão toda e gente a entrar e a sair e jornalistas a bater à porta ele ficasse agitado. Ele costumava ficar agitado e chorar quando não percebia o que se passava.
Por isso fui lá acima ao quarto dele e disse-lhe.
Acho que ele não percebeu bem a princípio, continuou ali a sorrir e a fazer fosquinhas… Era o que eu lhes chamava… fosquinhas. Ele abanava a cabeça de um lado para o outro e fazia uns sons esquisitos.
Queria dizer qualquer coisa, mas era preciso tentarmos perceber o que era.
Pare lá de fazer fosquinhas, dizia-lhe eu às vezes, mas só quando estava cansada ou quando havia qualquer coisa boa na televisão que eu queria

ir ver.
Mas deve ter percebido o que eu disse porque, meia hora depois, deu-lhe uma coisa terrível. Quando o médico chegou, já não havia nada a fazer.
Quando a Dolores veio trazer o bolo contei-lhe.
Dois pelo preço de um, disse eu.
Não devia ter dito aquilo.
Às vezes uma brincadeira ajuda a levantar o ânimo.
Ela ficou muito incomodada.
Não devias dizer semelhantes coisas, disse ela.
Por que é que não choras e deixas que saia tudo cá para fora, perguntou ela.
Não conseguia.
Pura e simplesmente não conseguia chorar… não que não quisesse, só que as lágrimas não se me soltavam dos olhos.
As irmãs do Billy choraram. Vieram ao enterro e fartaram-se de chorar.
Eu nem uma lágrima chorei.
Sentia-me o pior possível.
É muito corajosa, Sra. Maltseed.
Vozinha seca e miserável e foi naquela vozinha seca e miserável que ele disse as orações e eu continuava de olhos secos e todos aqueles polícias e Orangistas e o deputado do nosso círculo estavam ali e todos eles falavam para mim e parecia que os olhos me saltavam da cabeça de tanta dor e continuava a não conseguir chorar.
Devem ter visto o enterro na televisão.
Eu sentei-me e vi-o nessa noite no noticiário depois de todos se terem ido embora… achei muito estranho ver-me ali na televisão.
Existo de verdade, sou eu ali, a caminhar, de pé, a cumprimentar as pessoas… sou eu. Sou uma pessoa de verdade.
Se tivesse vídeo teria gravado.
Assim podia ver aquilo quando quisesse. Podia dizer Christine Maltseed, és tu ali na televisão com os olhos a saltarem-te da cabeça de tanta dor.
… e então chorei, quando me vi ali com aquela gente toda.
A Dolores não veio ao enterro.
Não que fosse de esperar que ela viesse.
Mas tem sido muito minha amiga desde então.
Quer dizer, passa por cá todos os dias para ver se estou bem. Traz-me bocadinhos disto e daquilo… um naco de presunto, um pedaço de empadão.

É boa pessoa.
Vou ter saudades dela.
Vou ter saudades desta terra.
O meu irmão arranjou-me uma casita em Belfast.
Para ti chega, disse ele.
Tenho um bocado de medo de Belfast mas, como a minha mãe dizia, a gente habitua-se a tudo desde que se esforce.
Pensei que se calhar podia arranjar trabalho no Marks & Spencer ou num sítio assim bonito.
Com a indemnização e o dinheirito da casa hei-de governar-me por uns tempos.
Não gosto de abandonar o Billy.
Espero que ele não se importe.
Assim como assim, por que é que havia de se importar – agora terá Ananias, Azarias e Misael por companhia.
A Dolores diz que há-de vir ver-me quando for a Belfast.
Vai ser bom.
Pode levar-me notícias daqui.
Dei uma libra a cada um dos filhos dela hoje de manhã.
A Dolores disse que eu não devia ter dado.
Eles pareceram contentes.
Eu disse-lhes agora vão poder roubar maçãs à vontade.
Eles sorriram mas acho que não acharam lá muita graça.
Acho que é um amigo do marido da Dolores que vai comprar a casa.
Foi o que ouvi dizer.
Vai ser bom para as crianças. Vão ter outras crianças com quem brincar.
Isto aqui é um bocado solitário.
Ananias, *Azarias*, *Misael*, *bendizei o Senhor:*
– a Ele a glória e o louvor eternamente!
É tempo de partir.
O autocarro passa ao fundo da rua daqui a dez minutos:
Não quero perdê-lo.
Espero não lhes ter tirado muito tempo.
Adeus.

RELEITURAS

Duas vezes Enda Walsh[1]

A dramaturgia do autor irlandês Enda Walsh (n.1967) foi introduzida em Portugal pelos Artistas Unidos (AU) que em 2005, integrada no espectáculo *Conferência de imprensa e outras aldrabices*, apresentaram a pequena peça *Lyndie tem uma arma* (*Lyndie's Gotta Gun*). Com este texto, Walsh, juntamente com diversos autores europeus, respondia ao apelo dos AU em criar uma obra de homenagem a Harold Pinter, tendo como mote o texto *Conferência de imprensa* (*Press Conference*).

Contudo, ainda em 2002, na 19ª edição do Festival Internacional de Teatro de Almada, o reputado encenador alemão Thomas Ostermeier trazia ao Fórum Municipal Romeu Correia (Almada) a sua feérica encenação de *Disco Pigs*, com a Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz.

Não obstante estas presenças avulsas, as estreias mais significativas (e em português) da dramaturgia de Walsh foram feitas pela mão segura e cúmplice dos Artistas Unidos que em 2007 e 2008 estrearam, respectivamente, *Disco Pigs* e *Acamarrados* (*Bedbound*), ambos com traduções assinadas por Joana Frazão.

Vão sendo cada vez mais infrutíferos os esforços para catalogar a invulgarmente singular dramaturgia deste irlandês – lembramo-nos da pele de Beckett e sabemos que existe depois da crueza de Bond ou de Burgess, da poesia de Pinter, do arrepio de Kane e que vai esgrimindo forças com o olhar pós-irónico de Ravenhill. Mas olhando para os seus textos, fica uma sensação de que há algo que sobra a uma mais tranquila arrumação.

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[1] Este texto revisita e reformula três críticas de teatro publicadas no jornal *Público*: Rui Pina Coelho, "Pulga e Porco na cidade", *Público-P2*, 06-11-07; RPC, "De regresso a Cork City", *Público-P2*, 11-04-08; e RPC, "Uma violência absurda e real", *Público--Ipsilon*, 02-01-2009.

O primeiro espectáculo foi apresentado no pequeno palco da Sociedade Guilherme Cossoul, tendo estreado a 26 de Outubro de 2007, com encenação de Franzisca Aarflot, assistida por Paulo Pinto, com cenografia e figurinos de Rita Lopes Alves, luz de Pedro Domingos e interpretação de Pedro Carraça e Cecília Henriques. Neste espectáculo, Aarflot apanhava-nos com a electricidade da escrita do irlandês e com o breve relato de dois jovens encurralados num bairro social em Pork City, numa Irlanda distante e ela própria encurralada perante o avanço do mundo. Pulga e Porco, à beira dos seus 17 anos, inseparáveis desde a nascença vão criando um mundo imaginário onde juntos são a rainha e o rei da cidade, ignorantes do rasto de violência, roubo e egoísmo que vão deixando. Vão furtando bebidas, provocando brigas e descobrindo sítios onde dançar… – e em breve se tornará aflitivamente óbvio que para sobreviverem terão que se separar. (Terá também interesse notar que com este espectáculo os AU davam continuidade a uma linha repertorial que parece já ter uma história própria no seu percurso: os ritos de passagem na adolescência ou a desadequação de corpos jovens num mundo adulto.)

Apesar de este texto abrir (escancarar?) a porta a leituras onde se poderiam sublinhar as tensões sociais presentes; ou explorar a temática da falência da cidade ocidental; ou enfatizar a violência no comportamento de uma urbanidade jovem; Aarflot abordava *Disco Pigs* pela via da história de amor/amizade e construía um espectáculo que oscilava entre a violência e o amor, entre a obscenidade e a poesia, e entre o íntimo e o circense – com efeito, Pedro Carraca e Cecília Henriques, à semelhança da partitura corporal que inventaram em *A mata*, contagiavam os momentos de grande intensidade dramática com acrobacias e números físicos, o que dava a tudo um carácter mágico.

A implantação cenográfica de Rita Lopes Alves transformava a pequena sala da Guilherme Cossoul nas atrofiantes ruas de uma imaginária Pork City com apenas dois muros: grafitados e com imensos cartazes colados (de Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, Pearl Jam, Green Day...) – que denunciavam o ímpeto iconoclasta de *Disco Pigs*. Contudo, a intimidade da sala e os *posters* faziam das ruas da cidade o próprio quarto destes dois adolescentes – o que denunciava a ausência de uma estrutura familiar. Assim, Pulga e Porco são filhos da cidade. E de uma cidade de horizontes curtos e que lhes deixa somente como hipótese de fuga o mundo fantástico

das *Marés Vivas* ou a fabulosa discoteca *Palace* – oásis de classe num mundo degradado e pobre.

Para além das duas paredes cenografadas, existia somente uma mesa com uma aparelhagem, onde os actores iam passando os discos que davam som à sua vertiginosa viagem (The Chemical Brothers, The Prodigy, No Doubt, etc). Era uma banda sonora nostálgica mas que ajudava a convocar a electricidade necessária para alimentar os vorazes dínamos que são as duas personagens.

Acamarrados estreou a 27 de Março de 2008 no Centro Cultural da Malaposta, tendo sido posteriormente apresentado no Convento das Mónicas (Abril e Maio) e no Teatro Municipal de Almada (Janeiro 2009), num trabalho magnífico de António Simão e Carla Galvão. A propósito deste texto de Walsh escrevia a crítica Benedict Nightingale nas páginas do *The Times*: "Pensemos de novo em Beckett, mas um Beckett com uma garrafa partida na mão e com ocupado com problemas pessoais e sociais em vez de metafísicos". Em Março/Abril de 2008, o espectáculo *Acamarrados* passou relativamente despercebido. A modéstia da proposta disfarçava uma portentosa experiência teatral. Walsh levava-nos de novo para Cork City, depois de por lá havermos andado na companhia de Pulga e Porco, o perigoso par amoroso de *Disco Pigs*. *Acamarrados* forçava-nos a testemunhar a relação de um fracassado vendedor de mobílias (António Simão) com a sua filha fisicamente inválida (Carla Galvão) e prostrada numa cama, "acamarrada". Claro que, à medida que a história se ia desvelando, ficava óbvio que também o pai estava amarrado àquele leito trágico (e, no final, também os espectadores estavam "acamarrados"). O pai, um violento e nervoso psicopata que não olha a meios para preservar o seu império mobiliário, batendo e matando, está preso pela culpa e pela vergonha à sua filha, doente de poliomelite por ter caído numa fossa. Falam ambos vorazmente e sem tréguas, como se só as palavras pudessem substituir o vácuo emocional em que estão – e a palavra de Walsh é poética, vibrante, poderosa e brutalmente violenta.

Alternando entre narração e diálogo, o texto de Walsh propicia uma experiência breve e brusca, como um atropelamento. Todo este passeio por um mapa de brutal violência é retratado de uma maneira estranhamente empolgada e teatral e é feito, sobretudo, sem morais apressadas, como uma terrífica fantasia.

Para Jeanette R. Malkin, em alguma da dramaturgia contemporânea "a linguagem já não é absurda ou isolada: é antes utilizada para ser activamente dominadora e perigosa, uma força que controla e manipula o Homem, tornando-se a essência do seu ser e o limite do seu mundo" (*Verbal Violence in Contemporary Drama*, 1992, t.m.). E em poucos textos da moderna dramaturgia se encontrará esta marca tão visível como neste de Walsh. A violência que assola e aflige as personagens é antes de mais nada explicitada pelo uso de uma linguagem dura, obscena e escatológica. Contudo, a torrente de palavrões e a descrição de acções violentas camufla a humanidade das personagens.

Assim, este imaginário que deve muito ao universo do Absurdo e, em especial, a Beckett, desloca-se para um realismo poético (mais próximo de Pinter). Da metáfora que é a situação inicial o espectáculo vai ganhando uma dimensão cada vez mais literal e mais realista.

Claro que esta arquitectura só se suporta porque é servida por dois actores superlativos. António Simão, mesmo não abdicando totalmente do registo auto-paródico com que normalmente joga, carrega a sua personagem de uma densidade inabalável, servindo-a também com uma dose de humor que em tudo ajuda ao espectáculo; Carla Galvão cria molduras plásticas com a sua voz e corpo de uma maneira impressionante, oferecendo uma interpretação memorável.

O "dosear de realidade" de Walsh é também servido pela extraordinária cenografia de Rita Lopes Alves: a cama onde as personagens se encontram está dentro de uma caixa, ladeada, à tangente pelas paredes. No início, baixa uma parede, descobrindo a cama e as duas figuras. No final, subirá para de novo os esconder, deixando somente à vista um pesado armário de madeira. A sinalização de que se trata de uma história escondida, que não deve ser exposta, é por demais evidente. Mas, à medida que vamos descobrindo a história deste pai e desta filha, vamo-nos apercebendo da brutal realidade que toda esta metáfora encerra.

"Às vezes, não fazer nada é a coisa mais violenta que se pode fazer", afirma Slavoj Zizek, em *Violência* (t.m.). A arrepiante escalada proposta em *Acamarrados* parece inscrever-se precisamente nesta asserção.

Rui Pina Coelho

Escola Superior de Teatro e Cinema
Centro de Estudos de Teatro, Universidade de Lisboa