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Celtic Arrivals: Globalization and Irish Literature, 1907-2007

by

Sarah Lynn Townsend

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Abstract

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My dissertation constructs a literary history of global aspiration in twentieth and twenty-first-century Ireland. I show how the sense of having arrived at global modernity recurs in the literary record, emerging during periods of economic expansion and generating feverish anticipatory desires. Narratives of arrival coincide with the physical arrival of foreign goods and people to a long-impooverished, insular Ireland: imported commodities enter the marketplace, former emigrants return home, or new immigrants arrive. Yet the expectations unleashed in these moments of possibility consistently outstrip what the material landscape can sustain. In my readings of fiction and drama, I examine arrival as a structure of feeling whose fitful longings are as fundamental to Irish modernity as are its certain letdowns.

Arrival narratives assume various forms over the twentieth century as they become implicated in discourses about sovereignty, social reproduction, domesticity, and multiculturalism; yet they are united by a common sense of historical “catch up.” If belatedness is a persistent condition of the colony and postcolony, then arrival offers to remedy the effects of uneven development in a manner that seems miraculous. The narrative of miraculous arrival extends from literary works to literary-critical, cultural, and economic interpretations of Irish modernity. The literary scholar Pascale Casanova considers Irish modernism a “miracle” and a paradigm for minor world literatures because its emergence from peripherality to world renown occurs so rapidly. Casanova’s account of unlikely literary triumph echoes with the diffuse proclamations of economic and cultural triumph that emerged during the Celtic Tiger boom of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The Celtic Tiger was championed until the recent financial downturn as a sudden, unprecedented developmental telos; but as my dissertation shows, the narrative structures underwriting the period’s expectations and subsequent collapse have a long literary history that must be excavated.

In titling my dissertation “Celtic Arrivals,” I call attention to the global-capitalist interests of the Celtic Revival and its heirs, thereby challenging the exceptionalist claims that appear in many nationalist accounts of Irish literature and in more recent postcolonial interpretations of Irish culture as a site of alternative modernities. My dissertation shows instead that the spasmodic desires unleashed by the prospect of global arrival are crucial to understanding the Irish national

narrative, as are the failures of those desires to materialize. In Irish literature's many thwarted hopes, I chart another national narrative that develops dialectically with the narrative of arrival. It articulates modernization's ruptures, exclusions, and manifold violence. In my dissertation's trajectory from J.M. Synge's 1907 premiere of *The Playboy of the Western World* to the play's multicultural centennial adaptation, I engage with theories of nationalism, globalization, and transnational agency to chart the evolving fictions and failures of Irish arrival.

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CHAPTER ONE

Toward a Theory of Irish Arrival

Martin McDonagh's 1996 play *The Cripple of Inishmaan* contains a running gag that begins earnestly enough. In the play, the real-life director Robert Flaherty comes to film his 1934 feature *Man of Aran* on the island of Inishmore, and the whole region is abuzz. McDonagh's characters, who live on the neighboring island of Inishmaan, decide to travel to Inishmore to become extras in the filming. The event is exciting because the arrival of a Hollywood filmmaker serves as confirmation that Ireland—or more precisely, its remote Aran islands—are a place worth depicting on film and a site worth filming in. As the town gossip Johnnypateenmike declares, "Ireland mustn't be such a bad place so if the Yanks want to come to Ireland to do their filming" (14).

The expectations wrapped up in the event are soon dashed. In the first place, the news is old: by the time the characters arrive to Inishmore, the filming has already wrapped. McDonagh's islanders also quickly recognize the sentimentality and flat-out inaccuracy with which Flaherty's so-called "documentary" has depicted their home: for instance, the film includes a long scene of a primitive shark hunt over half a century outdated. Rather than introduce Ireland as a modern place through a modern film technology, Flaherty simply recapitulates timeworn clichés that one of McDonagh's characters summarizes as "some oul shite about thick fellas fecking fishing" (72). As the promise of Flaherty's film dissipates, Johnnypateenmike's anticipatory expression—"Ireland mustn't be such a bad place so if the Yanks want to come"—devolves into a comedic refrain that reveals just how unworldly these characters and the country really are. The list of rumored arrivals becomes increasingly ludicrous: Ireland mustn't be so bad if "a French fella" reportedly settles Rosmuck (21), or "a colored fella" lands in Dublin (37), or sharks arrive to the country's west coast. Johnnypateenmike is left to conclude, quite satisfied, that "[t]hey all want to come to Ireland, sure. Germans, dentists, everybody" (53).

In *The Cripple of Inishmaan* McDonagh parodies the very real sense of anticipated arrival, of waiting for modernity to arrive, that recurs in twentieth-century Irish writing and functions as one of modern Ireland's constitutive structures of feeling. The literary record is filled with characters who wait like Johnnypateenmike for footsteps, a boat, car, or plane to bring modernity to them, or to offer some sign that Ireland is indeed continuous with the wider modern world. The narrative of arrival offers an imaginative antidote to the emigrant ship and the steady historical exodus of citizens. It articulates a consistent desire that survives the many grim realities of Irish modernity like famine, rural depopulation, censorship, and political and economic insularity. Seán O'Faoláin writes in 1939, from a neutral and isolated Ireland, of longing for some sign of modernity's vitality to break up the "total darkness of the mind" engendered by wartime censorship, the sight perhaps of "a 'plane from the aerodrome, with its red-and-green wing-tips, white tail-light, throbbing across the sky" (2). There is undoubtedly a touch of danger mixed up in the vitality of O'Faoláin's description, for the plane—like the ship, tank, or submarine—is an instrument of war, a reminder that modernity's innovations often double as technologies of massive destruction. But we can't miss in O'Faoláin's depiction the "throbbing" anticipation, the hopeful watching for any sign of arrival.

In this dissertation I will examine the narrative of Irish arrival as it unfolds in twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature and literary criticism. Arrival, I argue, constitutes a fundamental narrative apparatus by which Irish modernity has been and continues to be imagined. It develops alongside a disparate, more melancholic tradition of writing and scholarship that understands Irish modernity primarily in terms of loss. That tradition might be traced from post-Famine writers like John Mitchel and Matthew Arnold—both of whom lamented the long-term effects of colonization on the Irish, but from opposite ends of the political spectrum—through strands of the Celtic Revival centered on recovering a long-suppressed national culture, and forward to the nationalist historical scholarship of the mid-twentieth century. Following the revisionist turn in the Irish academy, new literary and critical perspectives—from minority writers to psychoanalytic, feminist, postcolonial, and postnational theories—have assumed the task of examining the traumas of Irish modernity, and of resurrecting what has been lost from or deliberately written out of the national record. I do not wish to supplant this literary-critical narrative, nor to deny its imaginative hold and continued importance. Rather, I want to argue for the equal significance of an arrival narrative that is intimately related to the narrative of Irish loss and departure, but which has not been theorized in a rigorous or comprehensive critical manner. In this dissertation I will show how the story of Ireland’s arrival develops dialectically with the story of Irish loss. Arrival narratives emerge during periods of economic expansion, generating feverish anticipatory desires that coincide often with material arrivals: of imported commodities to the marketplace, of former emigrants returning home, or of new immigrants to Ireland. Yet the expectations unleashed in these moments of possibility consistently outstrip what the economic landscape can sustain. In my readings of fiction and drama, I will examine arrival as a structure of feeling whose fitful longings are as fundamental to Irish modernity as are its certain letdowns.

The Miracle of Arrival

If the narrative of Irish arrival is animated by the desperate optimism that McDonagh parodies in *The Cripple of Inishmaan*, it is also conditioned by a persistent sense of devastating departure that is both imaginatively circulated and historically determined. A literary history of arrival, like a literary history of departure, must begin with the Irish Famine of the mid-nineteenth century. Although demographic patterns of rural depopulation had been developing well before the Famine, as the historian Kerby Miller has shown, the Famine effected unprecedented rates of death and emigration that radically transformed Ireland, and particularly the Irish west. The emigration rate would remain high throughout the twentieth century. Although the causal link between the Famine and emigration would weaken over time, in the cultural imaginary the two have remained inextricably connected; the trauma of Famine resonates throughout the twentieth century through the continuous exodus of Irish emigrants. We can see this imaginative connection at work in John A. O’Brien’s 1953 edited collection *The Vanishing Irish: The Enigma of the Modern World*, which reprises Famine-era worries about depopulation and the possibility of Irish extinction. O’Brien’s contributions to the collection are particularly alarmist, offering a sensationalized and highly stylized portrait of Irish decline. O’Brien writes, “The Famine started the exodus more than a century ago,” and since then “the Gael has presented to the modern world the most amazing spectacle of a wild, frantic, unbroken flight from his native land” (19). Historians subsequently have challenged the severity of O’Brien’s historical analysis.¹ Nevertheless, in the image of “a wild, frantic, unbroken flight” we

see encapsulated the traumatic narrative of modern Irish departure; and we can begin to understand why it is that Irish modernization offers to reverse national flight by taking the particular narrative form of arrival.

In each of the texts that I will examine in this dissertation, someone arrives on the scene and, in so doing, signals a bigger arrival: Ireland's arrival to modernity. The history of emigration accounts in large part for the manic joy of these arrival narratives. But arrival is also conditioned by the experience of peripherality. Stories of arrival appear so miraculous because they stage not only an unlikely reversal of emigration but also because they offer a rare encounter with the time-space of modernity, from which Ireland is otherwise isolated. Historians have debated fiercely over the extent of Ireland's development under British control and whether it can be considered properly colonial; but they generally agree, as do literary and cultural critics, that Ireland's experience of modernity was deeply uneven. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Ireland served as what F.S.L. Lyons calls a "social laboratory in which Englishmen were prepared to conduct experiments in government which contemporary opinion at home was not prepared to tolerate" (74). This meant that Ireland witnessed some of the most novel (and violent) modern innovations (and impositions) in technology, education, and governance without experiencing concomitant economic advances. The uneven pattern of development—hypermodernity on the one hand and chronic backwardness on the other—has shaped the way modernization has been felt and narrated in Ireland.

Arrival proves so alluring because it promises to alleviate the effects of uneven development. The narrative offers a miraculous antidote to the condition of belatedness that Frantz Fanon describes in *Black Skin White Masks*, and which postcolonial scholars have taken up in recent years.² Fanon reproduces the white voice that thrusts belatedness upon the Negro as such: "You have come too late, much too late. There will always be a world - a white world - between you and us" (122). What Fanon captures in these lines is the fundamental relationship between geopolitical peripherality and temporal lag. Postcolonial narratives vibrate with this knowledge—a knowledge that is imperially disseminated and yet also grounded in material fact—that those who live on the margins of metropolitan modernity run the risk of coming to modernity "too late" or not at all. Underwriting Fanon's mimicked statement is an Enlightenment theory of stadial history, which maintains that societies evolve through developmental stages that resemble those of human development. According to this model of history, the most advanced and enlightened societies thrive; slower societies can still catch up by following the correct path of development (and often by conceding to an imperializing "parental" authority); and those who cannot develop quickly enough fall in danger of becoming extinct. The stadial view of history has influenced colonialist enterprises from Malthusian economics to Victorian racial theory, and it has specifically Irish applications as well. In 1867 Matthew Arnold wrote the essay "On the Study of Celtic Literature," which reads essentially as an elegy for the Irish. In the essay, Arnold laments the demise of an admirable Celtic spirit that nonetheless is not fit for the modern world and must be subsumed under a composite English character. He writes:

And as in material civilization he has been ineffectual, so has the Celt been ineffectual in politics. This colossal, impetuous, adventurous wanderer, the Titan of the early world, who in primitive times fills so large a place on the earth's scene, dwindles and dwindles as history goes on, and at last is shrunk to what we now see him. For ages and ages the world has been constantly slipping, ever more and more, out of the Celt's grasp. "They went forth to the war," Ossian says most truly, "*but they always fell.*" (346)

The stadial theory of history allows Arnold to celebrate and even envy the beauty of Celtic culture because it poses no material or political threat. In Arnold's essay, the "composite English genius" succeeds in advancing its civilization because it has amalgamated the best characteristics of several races: Germanic industry, Norman strenuousness, and Celtic sentimentality (351). Meanwhile, the Germans, Normans, and Celts each devolve when left unchecked by other racial influences to what Arnold considers their respective weaknesses: prosaic commonness, insolence, and temperamentality. But it is the Celt for whom racial shortcomings prove most devastating. Arnold describes the Celt (quoting Henri Martin) as "always ready to react against the despotism of fact" (344). Fundamentally ungovernable, the Irish can be granted only the compensatory realm of art befitting a culture that "dwindles" and "slips" behind the modern world of fact and soon will exist only as a museumized relic (344).

In *The Vanishing Irish*, O'Brien echoes Arnold's sense of imminent Irish extinction. He writes, "Everywhere [in Ireland] the discerning traveler sees signs of abandonment, decay, and incipient death creeping like paralysis over what was once a great and populous nation" (40). O'Brien supplies a series of colorful metaphors for national death, but it is in his final haunting image that he seems most to have conceded to a stadial theory of historical progress:

Ireland's sons and daughters in other lands...are brokenhearted at the prospect of the Irish becoming an enervated minority in a land occupied by foreigners—and, even worse, to be found like the vanished Mayans only in mausoleums, tombs, and graves of the buried past. (41)

O'Brien substitutes "mausoleums, tombs, and graves" for Arnold's museums and libraries, but the sentiment is the same: the antiquated Irish are not long for the modern world and soon will be reduced to mere artifact. O'Brien's recapitulation of Arnold nearly a century later reveals how effectively this imperialist view of world progress was disseminated, and how deeply it continued to structure Ireland's understanding of itself even after independence. In his chapter "Race Against Time: Racial Discourse and Irish History," Luke Gibbons argues that temporal characterizations of the Irish—as primitive and childlike, a designation they shared with Native Americans—allowed the English to mark a racial difference that could not easily be established by skin color. This racial imagination trickled down to certain movements in the Celtic Revival that, Gibbons argues, "owed as much to eighteenth-century primitivism and the benevolent colonialism of Matthew Arnold as it did to the inner recesses of the hidden Ireland" (156). These Revivalists, however, put colonialist primitivism to quite the opposite anticolonial end. They turned a racial flaw of backwardness into a virtue, claiming Celtic antiquity in order to argue against the ill effects of colonial modernization (154-6). That is one very powerful response to the charge of backwardness.

In Irish arrival I see another, more common response to that same charge. The narrative of arrival constructs a fantasy of miraculous catapult into the time of modernity. It offers to replace Arnold's sober colonialist developmental path with a homegrown trajectory that is dizzying in pace, global in scope. And if arrival's immense promises—to bring a dying nation back to life, to lift the curse of belatedness—strike us as highly unlikely, that may be the point. A miracle seems fitting recompense for a very long wait.

The Hazards of Arrival

Arrival narratives cluster around particular moments in twentieth-century Irish history when economic and political development seems possible. My project begins at the turn of the

twentieth century with J.M. Synge's 1907 production of *The Playboy of the Western World*. I consider *Playboy* a foundational Irish text in two respects. First, its revolutionary articulation of an autonomous, vigorous national culture challenged the parameters and the pieties of early Irish cultural revivalism. The Celtic Revival would not look quite the same after *Playboy*'s controversial, riot-provoking premiere. Second and equally as important, Synge's play stages one of the first imaginative expressions of Irish global thinking since the Famine. In *Playboy*, the young peasant Christy Mahon kills his overbearing father and then transforms himself into a folk hero by narrating his story of patricide, which resonates in the desolate post-Famine west. The play stages the nationalist development of an articulate, sovereign Irishman; but it also dramatizes, in Christy's ultimate departure for the wider world, how one might escape the socioeconomic confines of village, region, or even nation. As Synge's characters fashion Christy into the titular Playboy, they begin imagining new horizons for their hero and by extension for themselves. They crown Christy not the Playboy of Mayo, or of Ireland, but the Playboy of the Western World. It is an expansive gesture. It is also telling that this latter geographical reference goes without precise definition in Synge's play. Synge's Mayo villagers are just beginning to think beyond their immediate locality, a bereaved Irish west still suffering the long-term effects of the Famine. In their very basic geographical imaginary, the Eastern World houses exotic figures like "Jew-m[e]n with ten kegs of gold" (137). The Western World includes the Western States (America) but may not be coextensive with them; it is, however, marked certainly as the space of self-reinvention. At one point in the play, Christy's sexual rival Shawn tries to bribe him into leaving town with a one-way ticket to America and a new suit. These proffered items are meant to appeal specifically to Christy's vanity and worldly ambitions. Indeed, Shawn's accomplice, the local widow, muses, "If you seen yourself now [in the new suit]...you'd be too proud to speak to us at all, and it'd be a pity surely to have your like sailing from Mayo to the Western World" (124). In *Playboy*'s Western World, I think we are offered a hazy glance at the space of western capitalist self-fashioning. This is an argument that I develop at length in Chapter Two. But what is immediately significant is the fact that Mayo is excluded explicitly from that Western World. Christy Mahon reinvents himself as a modern and autonomous Playboy in Mayo, but at play's end he must depart in order to complete his developmental trajectory. In Synge's play, we witness a stunning paradox: Ireland functions as a site wherein modern global thinking is produced—indeed, where a modern global self can be produced—all the while it is denied the condition of modernity.

The tension between national space and global space, between national forces and global ones, resonates in each of the texts my dissertation examines. That tension stems from a logic of arrival that is fundamentally conflicted. If arrival narratives announce the emergence of an Irish nation that is autonomous and modern, they nonetheless rely for proof on Ireland's recognition by other autonomous, modern nations. That is, the arrival narrative depends upon the country's connections to and inclusion in a wider global and capitalist modernity. One danger of this interdependence (which is disavowed at times, acknowledged openly at others) is that national culture, that ephemeral entity which the narrative of arrival attempts to secure, can easily be watered down or emptied out altogether by capitalist commodification. Over the course of my dissertation's historical trajectory—from the Celtic Revival, through Irish independence, postwar economic expansion, and the recent Celtic Tiger boom—we can trace the symbols of Irish cultural nationalism as they devolve into kitsch. If Synge's Christy Mahon capitalizes in 1907 on timeworn clichés of the Revival's romantic nationalism, Joyce proceeds to empty out the symbols of cultural nationalism in the run up to independence, to strip them of their totalizing

power. By the 1960s milieu of Patrick McCabe's novel *The Butcher Boy*, signs of the nation have been reduced to the kitsch items that the young protagonist consumes: a souvenir-shop woodcarving of "an old woman in a red shawl rocking by the fireside" (44), or a book of Irish music titled *Emerald Gems of Ireland* which bears on its cover "an ass and cart going off into green mountains" (48). And in Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle's 2007 adaptation of Synge's *Playboy*, Irishness has devolved into the globally recognizable, reproducible paraphernalia of the ubiquitous Irish pub—Guinness signs, photos of Roy Keane and *Riverdance*—and tourism-board clichés of Irish friendliness that the play's immigrant protagonist recites by rote. As nationalism devolves into commodities, its affiliative power does not necessarily weaken but gets entangled in, and often confused for, consumer desires. In each of the works I examine, the Ireland that characters imagine to have arrived proves a simulacrum into which they nevertheless buy. What's more, several of my dissertation's texts and authors themselves have become objects of a commodified, exportable Irish literary culture. Michael Malouf has written compellingly about the unresolved ambivalences laced into the circulating image of James Joyce on Irish currency during the early years of the Celtic Tiger. And in Chapter Five I consider the implications of exporting Christy Mahon as a postcolonial literary blueprint through global *Playboy* adaptations. In both cases, the author's global circulation proves lucrative because it tells an appealing, reassuring story about Ireland's definitive arrival; but in the process, the revolutionary content of each author's writing runs the risk of being attenuated or transmuted.

The arrival narrative's dependence upon global recognition also inadvertently maintains cultural hierarchies that keep Ireland in a deferent position. In 1892 Douglas Hyde delivered his address "The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland" to the National Literary Society, calling on Ireland to develop its own cultural inspirations, drawn from its own language and ancient history, instead of turning to England for its cultural models. Hyde and his contemporaries aimed to wrest Ireland culturally from England's hold as a first step toward wresting it politically. But if the Revival was in theory to have generated an autonomous Irish culture, in practice that culture has looked continuously outward, especially to the continent and to America, for models and for validation. Joyce records this deference in his many Dubliners who yearn to go elsewhere but cannot, and also in characters like Gabriel Conroy who brandish continental pretensions as a measure of superiority over their more provincial counterparts. In the postwar period, the hierarchy of cultures shifts as the American global capitalist model gains traction in Ireland; we witness this change in McCabe's protagonist Francie Brady, who consumes American comics, television, and films in an effort to trump his Anglophilic neighbors. By the time of the Celtic Tiger, the paradigm shifts once again as Ireland copies a global model of multicultural capitalist prosperity.

During the Celtic Tiger the tensions between Ireland's cultural self-sufficiency and its deference to foreign models become most pronounced. On the one hand, the economic miracle announced itself as the apotheosis of Irish development. The nation had arrived, finally, to the world scene. Yet Ireland's very recognition as a world power was foreign-generated. The investment firm Morgan Stanley coined the term Celtic Tiger in 1994 to describe how the Irish boom resembled the Asian Tiger economic miracles of the postwar period. The very coining of the term commends Ireland for fitting into the Asian Tiger model of rapid capitalist development—which in its turn had commended the economies of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan for adhering with tremendous success to a western model of capitalist development. The global economic powers that disseminated the story of the Celtic Tiger miracle, like the Asian Tiger one before it, may have used the language of exceptionalism—for

what is the term “miracle” if not exceptionalist?—but they were praising Ireland’s ability to conform to a capitalist model. Furthermore, during the years of the Celtic Tiger, Ireland was regarded as an exemplary model (or more precisely, a model of a model of a model) to be passed on elsewhere: a World Bank report by F. Desmond McCarthy in 2001 drew from the model of Irish growth a series of lessons for other developing countries, and in a more sensationalist manner the *Economist* hailed Ireland as “Europe’s Shining Light” on the cover of a 1997 issue. The extending of the Irish example to other developing countries seemed to confirm Ireland’s own definitive arrival. So too did the mass arrival of refugees and immigrants to Ireland in the 1990s and early 2000s: the wave of immigration, which has by now ground to a halt, marked Ireland as a destination at long last rather than a point of departure. The immigrant, especially the nonwhite third-world immigrant, became a crucial feature of the Celtic Tiger arrival narrative. He or she provided a source of difference that could be used to advance the story of Irish transformation in a variety of configurations: as marker of Ireland’s transition from recipient of aid to provider of aid; as proof of Ireland’s liberalism and tolerance—in Gavan Titley’s terms, its multicultural “badge of global modernity” (21); or as sign of Ireland’s newfound role as a solver of global problems like refugee resettlement. The 2007 *Playboy* adaptation exposes these burdens that immigrants have been made to bear in confirming Irish arrival. The adaptation replaces Christy Mahon with Christopher Malomo, a Nigerian immigrant seeking refuge and fame in contemporary Dublin. This particular substitution implies that Ireland no longer needs a Christy Mahon to liberate it from poverty and underdevelopment; instead, capitalist opportunity is handed benevolently to a third-world immigrant who dreams of becoming a global celebrity. But as I argue in Chapter Five, Adigun and Doyle’s adaptation undermines such assumptions, showing how the arrival narrative is predicated on foreign models of global capitalist success that not only are unsustainable, but also fail many of Ireland’s new immigrants and longtime citizens.

Finally, because the chance at modernity feels so precarious, arrival narratives very often prompt strict social policing and social exclusion. In the introduction to their co-edited collection *Reinventing Ireland*, Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons, and Michael Cronin describe arrival’s stringent all-or-nothing logic:

As recent past, history is used as a bogeyman in a kind of rhetoric of binary terror. Either you accept the deregulated ruthlessness of the market or you will be cast back into the eternal night of emigration and high unemployment. Better dead than Dev [DeValera]. In this either/or scenario, economic destiny is equated with political fate so that oppositional forces who contest the equation are variously presented as naïve, retrograde, irresponsible or ungrateful. (7)

Kirby, Gibbons, and Cronin are talking specifically about the logic of contemporary Ireland, but their analysis of arrival’s exclusions cuts across all of the periods and texts I examine. The long wait for arrival generates a desperately felt need to prove Ireland’s readiness for modernity, and at any cost, so that those unable or unwilling to meet its demands become branded as “naïve, retrograde, irresponsible or ungrateful”—or worse, are deemed wholly inadmissible and relegated to the institutional margins of the state.

The effort to prove Ireland’s modernity can be witnessed in the ideological work of IDA Ireland (Industrial Development Agency) and the tourism board, both of which sanitize and “tame” Ireland, argues Michael Malouf, “for TNCs [transnational corporations] and tourists.” IDA Ireland’s website, in particular, boasts a “Young, Talented Workforce” as one of its attractions under the tab “Why Ireland,” and the page goes on to list specific traits of the

(importantly, English-speaking) Irish workforce, including its exceptional youth, effective educational system, and potential to expand through population growth. The page concludes with a series of testimonials about the workforce from TNC executives. The IDA's promotion of Ireland's modern, industrious youth reminds us of two things: first, that it is always the youth who are made disproportionately to figure and bear modernity, and second, that a developmental narrative like arrival is by definition imbricated in models of *bildung*. In each of my dissertation's texts, arrival brings with it new models of development to which the characters, especially the young ones, must assimilate or risk being left behind. And in each text, someone is indeed left behind. In Synge's *Playboy*, Christy Mahon's lover Pegeen remains trapped with her Mayo counterparts in the dead-end economy of the provincial west while Christy, who has mastered a swift proto-capitalist education, departs for a promising wider world. In the post-independence period of Elizabeth Bowen's novel *The Last September*, the young Anglo-Irish characters become exiled, in a sense, to England and the continent where they will have to undergo yet another identitarian rupture and hyphenated suture; meanwhile the older generation remains to see their Big House culture meet its violent end. In McCabe's fictional postwar period, Francie Brady's inability to manage a process of bourgeois education sends him to a series of state institutions, where he joins the other inadmissible citizens—the poor, illegitimate, and insane—who violate the state's domestic ideologies. Finally, in the contemporary adaptation of *Playboy*, Christopher Malomo fashions himself as a model global (and capitalist) citizen; meanwhile the play seethes with the absent presence of Ireland's unwanted, less “model” immigrants—imagined as “sponger milking the system”—who remain cordoned institutionally, disavowed culturally.

David Lloyd's remarkable *Anomalous States* offers us a way to theorize the social violence that is endemic to the arrival narrative. Lloyd argues that states, through historiography, create a monopoly on violence; they “absorb[] or transform[]...justifiable but nonetheless irrational acts of resistance into the self-legitimizing form of a political struggle for the state.” Within nationalist history, “what was violence becomes, in Walter Benjamin's terms, ‘sanctioned’ and thereby ceases to be violence insofar as bloodshed is subordinated to the founding of the state” (126). After independence, state violence continues, of course, and it must be channeled into another teleological national narrative. As I will argue throughout this dissertation, that post-independence narrative is the narrative of modern arrival. Indeed, so too was the pre-independence national narrative also, simultaneously, an arrival narrative. The teleology of arrival justifies the institutionalization or ejection of whatever the nation cannot accommodate, and it does so by turning the terms of violence. The arrival narrative effaces its own ruthlessness through what David Lloyd calls a “legitimizing teleology” and casts instead its inassimilable others as perpetrators of a violence that undermines the nation's progress. This projection proves effective because, as Lloyd explains, violence absent of some telos like independence or arrival is “radically counter-historical, even against narrative, always represented as an outburst, an ‘outrage’, spasmodic and without a legitimating teleology” (126). It is no accident, then, that so many characters in my dissertation's texts are attempted killers. Francie Brady is the only successful murderer, but Christy Mahon and Christopher Malomo attempt patricide—twice each—and Synge's Mayoites as well as Adigun and Doyle's Dublin gangsters plot to kill their respective Playboys. The various characters' motives differ, but taken together these outsiders undermine the “legitimizing teleology” of arrival. Through their acts of brutality they show that it is the state that inaugurates, even cultivates, their violence by thrusting upon them models of personal and national *bildung* that are fundamentally intolerable.

Critical Considerations

Throughout this dissertation I will be arguing for the centrality of arrival in the modern Irish national narrative. But the conditions that generate the narrative of arrival in Ireland are the conditions of coloniality and postcoloniality: belatedness, geopolitical peripherality, uneven modernization, and material want. This begs the question of arrival's applicability: is it just an Irish narrative? Or does it cross over to other spaces as a shared structure of feeling? I would suggest that arrival is a narrative common to many sites of uneven development and to many people who feel they have been denied access to the time-space of modernity. The language of arrival also structures the developmental theories of the core: we hear often about nations arriving on the global scene through economic growth or political emergence. However, because arrival is such a material phenomenon, its contours will vary necessarily from one site to another. Whether arrival shapes specifically national narratives elsewhere as profoundly as it does in Ireland is a question I am not able to answer at this time.

I find the Irish arrival narrative particularly compelling because Ireland consistently has been imagined, and has imagined itself, in miraculous and exceptionalist terms. This occurs not only at the level of literary and cultural narrative, but also in scholarship. Joe Cleary has identified exceptionalism in the work of historians who, if and when they admit that Ireland was a British colony, almost always add the qualification that it was an exceptional one that cannot be compared to other, more typical colonies (19).³ In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd furnishes a similar argument to Cleary's in his reading of Synge's *Playboy* as a "blueprint for a new species of Irish artist" and a seminal, exportable model for nationalist development (187). According to Kiberd, Synge's play is "almost effortlessly translated" to other colonial or postcolonial settings (188). Yet Kiberd's chosen paradigm of a "blueprint," and his hasty chapter-closing turn to *Playboy*'s Trinidadian adaptation, demonstrate how Irish national literature influences other postcolonial literary cultures without considering how it might be transformed in turn by those sites. Kiberd's study, like the histories Cleary identifies, emerges from and in many ways promotes the turn to comparative postcolonial studies all the while excluding Ireland as ordinary or singular and beyond compare.

The tendency toward Irish exceptionalism exceeds the parameters of the Irish Studies field. A wider body of literary criticism has taken up Ireland's writers as exemplary models for emergent literatures. Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* is perhaps the best-known work in this critical body. There Casanova considers Irish modernism a "miracle," given the country's colonial impoverishment in the early twentieth century, and she claims, "the Irish case furnishes a paradigm that covers virtually the entire range of literary solutions to the problem of domination—and these in almost perfectly distilled form" (320). In Casanova's study we find the same paradox that animates Kiberd's reading: a comparativist critic (in Casanova's case, a proponent of world literature) presents Irish literature as a paradigm for global writing, all the while holding it out as somehow exceptional. For Casanova, Ireland's literary history can serve as a model for other minor literatures seeking to improve their positions in what she calls "world literary space"; but the country's own trajectory, from the ranks of minor literature to the realm of autonomous art, is already complete. Once again, Ireland's miraculous influence is allowed to travel in one direction only. The tendency to make exceptionalist claims for Ireland proves a consistent and problematic feature both of literary writing and of critical scholarship. My dissertation grows out of a desire to make sense of such a widespread attraction to Irish miracle.

My dissertation also seeks to expand the parameters of conversations in Irish Studies about globalization. As recent conferences and publications have shown, the field has become invested in identifying a “Global Ireland” in tune with current theories of post- and trans-nationalism, multiculturalism, and world systems. Such scholarship has focused largely either on the Irish diaspora or on the recent influx of immigrants and refugees to Ireland. The effect has been to produce a limited conception of Ireland’s worldliness: either the term “Global Ireland” is reserved for the Irish abroad, as if global thought could not be produced within the nation, or it is used to reinforce a premature congratulatory historical demarcation between the impoverished, insular past and a diverse, global-capitalist present and future (an end point that has been destabilized by the collapse of the Celtic Tiger but that has not by any means disappeared). A growing body of criticism has begun to analyze the structural and cultural problems of the Celtic Tiger global model; Joe Cleary’s work on the neo-naturalist writing of the 1990s is especially illuminating.⁴ But to date there is no comprehensive study that examines global thinking—both in its exuberance and its failures—as it develops in Ireland from the Famine to the present. My dissertation aims to fill that gap.

My project works in the juncture where theories of the Irish nation meet theories of globalization. One of my dissertation’s tenets is that both bodies of theory are necessary to understanding Irish arrival, and neither is sacred. I take my cue from the literary characters in the arrival narratives I study. They fashion ambivalent, complex marriages of worldly aspiration and nationalist attachments that allow them to survive coloniality or postcoloniality, and to attain some measure of freedom in whatever slapdash, imperfect manner necessary. In that spirit, my dissertation aims to engage with the ambivalences of Irish nationalism under capitalism, and to understand the deeply desiring subjects who produce and consume the narrative of arrival. This means stepping away from the fashionable and, I think, still compelling thesis of alternative modernities that has shaped much of the postcolonial scholarship about Ireland. David Lloyd describes the sites of alternative modernity using the term “non-modern”:

The *non-modern* is a name for...a set of spaces that emerge out of kilter with modernity but none the less in a dynamic relation to it. It is...a space where the alternative survives, in the fullest sense of that word, not as a preserve, or an outside, but as an incommensurable set of cultural formations historically occluded from, yet never actually disengaged with, modernity. (*Ireland 2*)

The thesis of alternative modernities develops from postcolonial theory and argues that there is more than one path to, and space of, modernity. In practice, it has led at least in part to the proliferation of nationally bound cottage-industry cultural fields, each of which offers a new site of alternative modernity. There are several problems to such a proliferation, as Bruce Robbins has shown: problems with the institutional appropriation of other cultures in the name of recovery, but also the problem of isolating local non-modernities (to borrow Lloyd’s term) to the point where challenging capitalist modernity becomes infeasible (“Comparative” 246-7, 252-3). To these I would add another problem: an over-confidence in postcolonial cultures’ alternative agency. I am speaking primarily about scholarship on Irish culture, with which I am most familiar, though many critics have noted the fascination with agency elsewhere. In their introduction to *Semicolonial Joyce*, Marjorie Howes and Derek Attridge locate in postcolonial Irish scholarship “a certain fetishizing of ‘resistance,’ whose recovery can become the reductive goal of every reading...and a relative neglect of the massive material power and effects of imperial structures in favor of an overly textualist reading of their instabilities” (7). That is to say, current scholarship on Ireland can tend to overestimate the sheer power of national culture in

combating imperial and, later, global hegemony. In my dissertation I aim to show instead that earnest engagement with material global forces is a fundamental part of constructing the national narrative throughout Irish modernity, as is coping with their inevitable disappointments. I also hope more modestly to offer, through my work on arrival, a way to think methodologically about how looking directly at uncritical, non-alternative embraces of global capitalism can produce its own critical agency.

The desiring subjects who produce and consume Irish arrival narratives in the texts I will examine desire two things at the same time: some version of the nation, however much a commodified facsimile, and some sense of worldly, modern possibility. The two cannot be teased apart. If nationalist exceptionalism proves a critical hazard in examining Irish arrival, so too does a misplaced faith in hybrid freedom. In recent years, scholars of postcolonialism, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism, and globalization have advanced affirmative models of hybridity to empower those marginalized by nation-states and the global economic order. But as Pheng Cheah has warned, hybridity theory's fantasy of pure freedom divorces itself from material realities. Cheah writes, "[H]ybridity is a closet idealism. It is...a theory of resistance that reduces the complex givenness of material reality to its symbolic dimensions" (302). The virtue of hybridity theory—Cheah has in mind specifically the work of Homi Bhabha and James Clifford—is that it makes possible the otherwise impossible by abstracting agency away from limiting "given" conditions, both material and political. Yet its perpetual shortcoming is the fact that it offers freedom in only the most rarified of forms. Cheah warns, "emancipatory consciousness cannot subsist on linguistic dynamism or cultural-symbolic flux alone" (299).⁵ We must continue to consider the intense power that material culture holds, in both its nationalist and global capitalist forms, over desiring subjects.

I follow Geoff Gilbert in seeking the "constituency of possibility" found within Irish modernism's more embarrassing desires. In *Before Modernism Was*, Gilbert examines the modernists' gestures of "limping, smoking, haunting, adolescent sulking, Polish action, [and] nervous scrutiny of...dogs." These are, he explains, all signs of "damage [that] come[] from a surrounding and irresistible context; but [that] also signal[] a refusal to turn the individual into a subject of history which will render him negligible" (166). To Gilbert's list of damaged gestures, I would add something that looks on the surface quite the opposite, but which functions similarly and proves equally as embarrassing: the wholehearted, enthusiastic embrace of Ireland's prospective modern and global arrival. This embrace is embarrassing culturally because it prompts expectations that later appear foolish when arrival fails to materialize. It is embarrassing also to literary and cultural theorists committed to resisting global capitalist hegemony. But the anticipation of arrival structures the experience of Irish modernity all the same. We ought to engage with that anticipation, to understand how global desire insinuates itself into the inner recesses of its subjects, the better to critique it.

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter Two, "Speculating Sovereignty: Articulacy, Commodification, and the Celtic Revival in J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*," I examine the 1907 inaugural production of Synge's play. *Playboy* premiered at the new Irish National Theatre and staged the arrival of a sovereign and articulate Irishman, thus marking the Revival's departure from British representations of the stage Irish. In the protagonist Christy Mahon, Synge presents a distilled fantasy of autonomy: Christy kills his overbearing father and escapes from rural poverty to a

Mayo village in the west of Ireland, where he becomes a folk hero and future son-in-law to the well-off local publican. The play presents a blueprint for nationalist transformation in the Oedipal symbolism and Fanonian implications of Christy's patricide; in his development of linguistic and physical prowess; and finally in his triumphant departure from Mayo as "master of all fights from now." Yet Synge's 1907 Dublin audience rejected his vision by rioting. My chapter locates the audience's discontent in the economic aspects of Christy's development. Christy Mahon achieves his freedom at the expense of his fellow countrymen: he manipulates a post-Famine reproductive crisis by inspiring sexual mania in the Mayo village and by offering in his highly sought loins a lucrative—and fraudulent—fantasy of racial renewal. His swift education in capitalist value effects his liberation from Mayo's dying peasant economy, but it also troubles a conception of Irish nationalism as heroically pure, materially uninterested. Reading the economics back into the play, I query the 1907 audience's inclination to construct Synge's protagonist and the Celtic Revival—and the ongoing critical desire to reconstruct postcolonial literary nationalisms more generally—as outside or above economic concerns.

Chapter Three, "Contaminating Form: Joyce, Bowen, and the Upheavals of Irish Independence," turns to the novels of James Joyce and Elizabeth Bowen to chart the contested development of newly independent Ireland. In *Dubliners*, Joyce modifies Synge's grandiose arrival narrative to suit the more tedious business of constructing an independent society through literary forms of nation-building. He hollows out the symbolic structures of British imperialism and of stringent Irish nationalism by infecting ritual forms of thought, speech, and behavior. Joyce replaces national symbols with the more mundane and heteroglot minutiae of Irish society. But despite his efforts to expand the parameters of national belonging, the narrative of the new Irish nation necessarily excludes the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, whose divided loyalties it cannot accommodate. Later in the chapter I turn to Bowen's 1929 novel *The Last September*, which registers the cost of independence in the violently thwarted development of Ascendancy society. The novel's Big House burns in Bowen's "abortive" final scene, and the *Bildungsroman* of the young female protagonist goes unfinished, to be completed perhaps on the continent to which she flees (303). By juxtaposing Joyce's and Bowen's fiction, I consider how Irish independence prompts two very different formal infections: one that opens into radical social and literary possibility, the other that devolves to violent destruction.

In Chapter Four, "Domestic Securities: Cold War and Cold Cash in McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*," I examine the domestic ideologies of the early 1960s. The new Lemass administration had reversed decades of protectionist policies, generating in Ireland a sense of what finance secretary T.K. Whitaker termed "an atmosphere of enterprise and progress" (86); yet the period's possibility was mitigated by the prospect of nuclear war. Patrick McCabe's novel captures this tenuous historical moment through the Nugent family, former emigrants who have returned to their Irish hometown desperate to secure their narrative of homecoming—and the nation's—through conspicuous consumption. In *The Butcher Boy*, the home becomes site and sign of the drive toward modern prosperity. The town's housewives, led by Mrs. Nugent, fashion their homes with the latest consumer goods and stand on guard against the protagonist Francie Brady, who hails from a slovenly domestic background and represents all that must be jettisoned in the name of progress. In my chapter I show how the women's acts of domestic surveillance take their direction and urgency from the state's Cold War vigilance against dissidents and internal enemies. Francie is shuttled through a series of abusive institutional "homes" that stunt his development; and through the boy's thwarted maturation, McCabe indicts the profound

surveillance that underwrites, while simultaneously betraying, the domestic ideologies of the Irish nation.

Chapter Five, “Playboys and Other Late Arrivals: Immigration, Freedom, and the Irish Economic Miracle,” takes up the Abbey Theatre’s centennial adaptation of *The Playboy of the Western World*. Co-written by Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle, *Playboy* (2007) finds a latter-day counterpart to Christy Mahon in Christopher Malomo, a young Nigerian man seeking refuge in Dublin. By bequeathing the Playboy’s narrative to a third-world asylum seeker, Adigun and Doyle stage a new type of arrival—immigrant arrival—while treating Ireland’s own global success as if it were a *fait accompli*. In my chapter I show how *Playboy* (2007) both reproduces and undermines the post-developmental discourses of the Celtic Tiger wherein Ireland bequeaths economic opportunity to immigrants from developing nations. Adigun and Doyle’s adaptation attempts to narrate a tale of globalization’s triumph in which prosperity and multiculturalism facilitate Christopher’s seamless social integration, his rise to fame as a media sensation, and his ultimate Syngean departure. Yet, as my chapter shows, the play’s restaging stalls out in the unresolved tensions of contemporary Irish culture. Christopher Malomo must navigate a heavily guarded criminal Dublin underworld and the harrowing material conditions of transnational existence. Through his disillusioning developmental trajectory, *Playboy* (2007) presents an alternative narrative of the Irish economic miracle, one that reveals its exclusions and abuses even as it stages an unlikely escape from them.

CHAPTER TWO

Speculating Sovereignty: Articulacy, Commodification, and the Celtic Revival in J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World*

The peasant must be desacralised, derided as a parasite and a reactionary, a grim relic from the Ireland that ate its farrow. The West is now the rural nightmare from which the young urban modernist seeks to awake.

—Michael Cronin

But, so soon as [an object] steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent.

—Karl Marx, *Capital*

In Act Three of *The Playboy of the Western World*, Synge's inebriated patriarch Michael James Flaherty reappears after a long period offstage to perform a telling about-face. Reneging on his daughter Pegeen's intended husband, Shawn Keogh, Michael blesses Pegeen's marriage to the wandering murderer turned folk hero Christy Mahon. His change of heart hinges less on his daughter's wishes than on his own self-interest and on national interest. Claiming that "it's the will of God that all should rear up lengthy families for the nurture of the earth," Michael declares to Christy and Pegeen,

...I'm a decent man of Ireland, and I'd liefer face the grave untimely and I seeing a score of grandsons growing up little gallant swearers by the name of God, than go peopling my bedside with puny weeds the like of what you'd breed, I'm thinking, out of Shaneen Keogh. [*He joins their hands*] A daring fellow is the jewel of the world, and a man did split his father's middle with a single clout should have the bravery of ten, so may God and Mary and St. Patrick bless you, and increase you from this mortal day. (3.420-27)⁶

Michael James's blessing articulates his personal hereditary dream of begetting "little gallant swear[ing]" descendants but also, and crucially, a national eugenic agenda demonstrated in his desire as "a decent man of Ireland" to reinvigorate the species through selective breeding, at whatever personal danger or cost, for the good of the nation and the "nurture" of the Irish land. With Christy Mahon's genetic fodder, God's will and nationalist will for "lengthy families" and humble agrarian idyll can be met. The about-face marks a fictional moment of triumph over the desolate landscape of the post-Famine Irish west: Michael James chooses his racial destiny instead of accepting what the vicissitudes of colonial history—famine, poverty, agricultural reform, and emigration—have left him: namely, Shawn Keogh's substandard loins. Michael James's blessing also engenders a literary moment of triumph for the fledgling Irish National Theatre, on whose stage *Playboy* premiered. The scene articulates both genetic and artistic self-determinism. It demands that the Irish—who in the words of the Theatre's founders W.B. Yeats

and Lady Gregory are “weary of [their] misrepresentation” on foreign stages—represent (and thus produce, and reproduce) themselves (Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* 20). But Michael James’s demand for self-determinism merely echoes Christy’s earlier, transformative declaration of autonomy. By killing his father and subsequently narrating himself into existence as the titular Playboy in Mayo, Christy Mahon claims the sovereign right to represent himself. Literary critics have made much of Christy’s coming into articulacy, locating in him a prototype both for the cultural nationalist project of the Celtic Revival and for an Irish politics of liberation. In *Inventing Ireland*, Declan Kiberd declares Christy’s newfound autonomy “the first act in any revolutionary agenda” (184).

What so often goes unnoticed in *Playboy* criticism is the economic dimension of Christy’s transformation. The omission happens for good reason: as an emblem of cultural nationalism, Christy Mahon is meant to transcend the mean, material transactions of everyday life. The legendary hero must not, to quote Yeats, “fumble in a greasy till” (108). Such an assumption draws upon an old antithesis of material life and art, to which Yeats and his fellow revivalists had vexed and vacillating responses.⁷ The critical silence around the economics of *Playboy* suggests that the antithesis continues to shape our understanding of Irish literary nationalism. But economic considerations are present everywhere Christy Mahon is. The language of value permeates Michael James’s marital blessing, which catalogues the Playboy’s worth in his valuation as a “jewel of the world” (ten times the bravery of the ordinary man!) and in his projected output of “a score of grandsons.” The Playboy’s value proves no small consideration given the financial ramifications of this moment: Michael James’s blessing grants to Christy his daughter’s hand, as well as her inheritance of his pub and adjoining property. What’s more, unlike Shawn Keogh, who had boasted a bride price of a “drift of heifers and [a] blue bull from Sneem,” the impoverished Christy brings nothing financially to the union (3.395-6). But Michael deems Christy a sound investment anyway; indeed, he has done so all along. Michael invests in Christy because he sees considerable promise in the young man’s patricidal bravery and in his loins. The former prompts Michael and his friends to house Christy and protect him from the law, for according to their logic, Christy’s violence will frighten away the colonial police who want to subject Michael’s pub to licensing laws. Christy’s latter promise of good genetic payoff for the family and the nation prompts an even larger investment from Michael: his property and daughter. Far from remaining untainted by the mean considerations of modern economics, Christy becomes the object of speculative capital.

Michael James’s investment allows Christy Mahon to attain a social mobility not otherwise allotted to peasants of his squatter class. Christy abandons his lowly position in an abusive post-Famine colonial economy and reinvents himself as a playboy, local hero, and prospective husband and property owner. The fact that he gains the villagers’ investment confidence through deceit renders the scene following Michael’s blessing all the more violent. The blessing is a pivotal moment in the play and one of dramatic irony, for the audience knows—as does the local meddler, the Widow Quin—that Christy’s supposedly murdered father has arrived in town to expose his son as a liar. No sooner does Michael James’s benediction receive an “Amen, O Lord!” from the happy couple than Old Mahon breaks upon the scene; and when the Mayo villagers learn the truth about Christy Mahon—that he has not killed his father—they turn on their Playboy with all the venom of the defrauded. The play’s *dénouement*, which is famous in no small part for its sudden shift from revelry to communal violence, stages the unraveling of the town’s investment. Christy is almost hanged by the villagers but ultimately leaves town with the father he tried twice to kill. He departs triumphantly for a wider world and a

future of storytelling, proclaiming himself “master of all fights from now” (3.636-7). Meanwhile, Pegeen is left devastated; and the seemingly unperturbed, barely sobering Michael James puts down the noose and raises a glass in his pub, happy to “have peace now for [his] drinks” (3.646). Having failed first to secure Christy as his own and, then, to hang him, Michael James contents himself with running the fraud out of town. Pegeen is left the more difficult task of processing this brief encounter with the savvy, modern confidence man. Her lamentation, which also comprises the play’s final lines—“I’ve lost him surely. I’ve lost the only playboy of the western world”—expresses all that the villagers lose along with Christy: lover, folk hero, new Irish progenitor, and perhaps most importantly, investment confidence (3.653-4). Set in a post-Famine landscape in which colonial modernizing policies were estranging the Irish from their land, Synge’s *Playboy* stages a financial transaction that leaves the Mayo villagers decidedly not at home in the economic world they inhabit.

In the course of this chapter I want to argue that to read economics back into *Playboy*, and into a character that supposedly spurns or transcends such mean concerns, is not to deny Synge’s play its liberating gesture; but it is to situate Christy’s liberation within material history, not outside it. It is to take into account the material conditions of post-Famine Irish life and to understand Christy’s transformation from peasant to playboy as shaped by socio-historical forces. It is also to attend to a complex spectrum of anti-imperialist thought and to recognize Christy Mahon as more than just a dirty, capitalist con man if less than a transcendent, economically unburdened nationalist hero. Reading economics back into *Playboy* also provides a fuller picture of Synge and the Revivalist project. As David Lloyd reminds us, “the apparent freedom of the aesthetic realm from politics is in itself a crucially political conception” (*Anomalous States* 19). Beneath Christy’s seeming transcendence we must look for the political mechanisms of literary nationalism. This is not to indict the revivalists for wanting to have it both ways—for that would just reinvokethe material-aesthetic antithesis—but, rather, to shuttle with Synge and his contemporaries between the lure of the playboy’s glamorous “freedom from” and the necessary engagement with the exigencies of modern colonial life.

* * *

Despite or perhaps because of the riotous reception that the play first received at the National Theater in 1907, *Playboy* has become a seminal text in Irish literary study, particularly in postcolonial interpretations of the field. The play offers a convenient shorthand for assessing the Celtic Revival. Asserting that *Playboy* succeeds or fails in its depiction of a proto-postcolonial literary, or political, or psychological departure often stands in as an essential report card for the Revival’s cultural agenda. Critics largely agree that the development of the character Christy Mahon over the course of the play enacts a Revivalist rebirth of the colonized Irishman, the emergence of an articulate and liberated figure. As Declan Kiberd puts it, “by the end [of the play], indeed, [Christy] can proclaim himself master of those forces which have been mastering him” (185). However, less consensus surrounds the question of whether Christy is as liberating as he is liberated. Whereas Kiberd goes on to praise the play’s revolutionary power—he points to the Trinidadian adaptation *The Playboy of the West Indies* to suggest *Playboy*’s universal postcolonial applicability—other critics are more cautious in their enthusiasm. Seamus Deane, for instance, argues that Christy Mahon’s development does more harm than good to his audiences, both onstage and theatrical. Deane, like Kiberd, cannot help but admire Synge’s staging of linguistic self-liberation: he marvels that “[p]eople talk themselves into freedom. No

longer imprisoned by sea or cottage, by age or politics, the Synge heroes and heroines chat themselves off stage, out of history, into legend” (*Celtic Revivals* 58). Yet Deane concedes that such liberation comes at a hefty price. In his wake, the hero “leaves the community empty and exhausted,” and “more hopelessly imprisoned than ever” (58). After Christy departs triumphantly at the end of *Playboy*, Michael James returns to his drinking, and Pegeen may eventually return to Shawn Keogh. However, both must do so with a newfound understanding of their own impoverishment. This imbalanced trade-off between Christy and those he leaves behind is deliberate, claims Deane: *Playboy* offers an insightful meta-commentary on the Celtic Revival, both “affirm[ing] and den[y]ing the value of [its] heroicizing impulse” (58). And yet, Synge can offer no alternative to such Revivalist heroics. This failure to convert artistic heroism and freedom into its political equivalent is, for Deane, the Revival’s inherent and limiting weakness. In the Celtic Revival, he writes, “we discover a whole series of ideologies of writing...in which politics is regarded as a threat to artistic integrity.” But the Revival’s consequent turn to aesthetic freedom is hampered by the fact that “[poetic] freedom is almost always realized as an interior freedom, with no political repercussions whatsoever” (15). Art cannot make up for material impoverishment, and for Deane the Celtic Revival represents a misguided attempt to hitch Irish fortunes, political and cultural, to the very old, emptied-out star of romantic nationalism.

The shift in *Playboy*’s Mayo community, from regenerated national hope to profound loss, captures for Deane the failures of the Celtic Revival:

In Synge the cause is always lost. The order of things is not regenerated. Traditional Irish life, in Wicklow or in the West, is changed only to the extent that it becomes conscious of its bereavement from authentic value. In *The Playboy of the Western World*, Pegeen Mike’s desolate cry of loss brings to an end the prospect of a glorious future with Christy Mahon, one which Christy had invoked by articulating a vision of pastoral romance which properly belongs to the old Gaelic past. (53)

Deane is right to note the sheer futility of nostalgia in Synge’s play. Pegeen’s hope for a better personal and national future—and, as I have been arguing, her father’s hope as well—is rooted in the nostalgia of a romantic nationalism that is by definition “always lost.” He errs, however, in assuming that the Mayoites’ hoped-for return to pastoral simplicity represents the only type of “authentic value” that the west can claim. Deane fails to take into account the very crisis in value that Synge stages in *Playboy*. Like the fictional Mayo community, or the rioting theater audiences of 1907, Deane mistakenly believes that Romantic Ireland’s value depreciates the moment Christy Mahon departs. However, as I will show, Christy does not simply take off with the west’s, and the Revival’s, timeless conception of itself. He escapes subsistence farming with an overbearing father and, then, settled agrarian life with Pegeen by changing the terms of value in the Mayo community. Transforming himself into a commodified Playboy, Christy leaves in his wake a new capitalist value system that the west and those who believe in it must embrace to stave off their own obsolescence.

Acknowledging this shift in value should not diminish our sense of *Playboy*’s capacity for critique. For Synge’s play does not simply operate within a capitalist value system to which it has acquiesced; rather, it proposes engaging with capitalism in order to escape, or transcend, its strictures. That is to say, Christy’s ends—his ultimate escape and freedom from a desolate post-Famine society—are wholly consistent with the reified capitalist means by which he sells his fantasy of racial renewal. This reading of Christy falls in line with Joe Cleary’s assessment of the

Celtic Revival which, he claims, advantageously managed the waning of traditional Irish culture and the rise of modern mass culture. Cleary argues,

one way to read the Revival would be to see it...not as the backward-looking movement its detractors usually take it to be, but rather as an opportunistic move to insert into the space between a dying popular and an expanding commercial zone a form of nationalist high literary culture that had previously lacked the social conditions and institutional vehicles to secure it. (55)

The Revivalists, like Christy Mahon, work through capitalist culture in order ultimately to work against it, and to formulate a viable national culture capable of challenging colonial rule.

* * *

The success of Christy Mahon's linguistic, commodified self-invention stems in large part from the melancholic conditions of the post-Famine Irish west. Studies of pre- and post-Famine Ireland tend to borrow from the language of psychoanalysis, and particularly from the concepts of mourning and melancholia.⁸ In *Playboy*, hints of a traumatized landscape appear briefly and periodically, but the melancholia of the post-Famine Irish west manifests itself more obviously through the related but symptomatically opposite condition of mania. Sigmund Freud's 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia" explains the connection between melancholia and mania. Melancholia—characterized by "profoundly painful dejection, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings"—develops in response to a significant psychic loss that cannot be processed through the normal grieving of mourning (165). Mania, which sometimes but not always accompanies melancholia, stages the ego's triumph over that loss and is characterized by a euphoria that ensues as "the whole amount of anti-cathexis which the painful suffering of melancholia withdrew from the ego and 'bound' [becomes] available" (176). In other words, mania presents itself as euphoric alleviation, a joy so profound that it eclipses completely the original loss. Christy Mahon's arrival in Mayo prompts such a manic energy, and it gestures toward the melancholic conditions of the characters' milieu only through melancholia's absent presence.

Kerby Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles* helps to historicize this aporia. His study describes the mass Irish emigrations of the eighteenth through twentieth centuries in melancholic terms, focusing on the motif of exile that permeates accounts of this massive social phenomenon. I want to consider the social realities that Miller describes as a primary source of *Playboy*'s repressed melancholia, and one that becomes figured by Synge in sexual terms. *Emigrants and Exiles* details the widespread effects of colonial Ireland's transition from traditional agricultural practices to capitalist ones, which began roughly in the mid-eighteenth century. In Miller's estimation, this shift drastically altered the nature of Irish society and familial relations because it left the majority of the Irish with "two logical alternatives: permanent emigration abroad or rural pauperization at home" (35). Neither alternative proved particularly attractive, according to Miller, and both had severe consequences for the social, sexual, and marital relations of those who remained in Ireland. Many young, single men and women, those most readily able to leave, emigrated. Those who remained faced fewer opportunities for sexual and marital fulfillment, not only because so many potential partners emigrated, but also because the struggle for economic survival forced many farmers to make choices about their property that proved detrimental to their children's social and sexual maturation. Farmers with small holdings, who were the most

susceptible to market fluctuations, were forced to abandon the traditional system of partible inheritance, leaving their farms instead to their eldest sons. This created a large pool of noninheriting sons, young men left without income and therefore unable to marry. Many emigrated; those who did not were “treated as mere ‘boys,’ regardless of their age, forb[idden] to marry, and considered [] incompetent to handle money or do other than drink with similarly frustrated bachelors” (405). Economic pressures also affected farmers’ daughters: Miller describes the brutality of the “match,” the forced marriage of a lucky daughter to a man of her father’s choosing, which functioned essentially as an economic transaction between fathers. Girls who were not so fortunate—for many farmers could not afford dowries for their daughters—found themselves in worse conditions, “spending their adult lives as maiden aunts or, if Catholics, as nuns” (57). These cumulative changes had a sterilizing effect on Irish family life. In addition to the consequent emigration and celibacy, marriage rates and the average age at which individuals wed both declined; age differentials between partners rose; and marital birthrates fell significantly. These demographic shifts combined to, in Miller’s Yeatsian echo, “transform[] post-Famine Ireland into ‘an old man’s country’” (403).

Synge figures these economic and demographic phenomena as a deterioration of sexual promise, the emasculation of the national body. *Playboy*’s Pegeen does not face the problem of dowry shortages; indeed, her inheritance of Michael James’s property, including the pub, renders her engagement to the orphaned Shawn Keogh a reversal of gender roles: hers is the inheritance, his “drift of heifers” and “golden ring” a mere dowry (3.367-8).⁹ Nonetheless, Pegeen sorely lacks viable marriage partners. Her desperation and shortage of options leads her to the man perhaps most ill-suited to be her husband. Shawn Keogh is timid, a laughingstock whom the local men taunt in the opening scene as he shies away from the sexual advances of his fiancée. Shawn proves no match for Pegeen, who is described by her father’s friend as “a fine, hardy girl would knock the head of any two men in the place” (1.106-7). Shawn’s reluctance to spend the night with Pegeen, under the guise of protecting her while her father goes off to a wake, stems as much from his nervous sense of propriety as it does from his fear of the local priest. He must defer to religious authority, for he happens to be Pegeen’s second cousin and is so unfit a partner that he must await a dispensation from the Catholic Church in Rome in order to wed his betrothed.

Pegeen takes Shawn’s timidity in stride until she is offered a point of comparison in the figure of Christy Mahon; once Christy enters the scene, her amiable raillery at Shawn turns to disdain. Christy Mahon enters the Flahertys’ pub inauspiciously enough, a “slight young man” according to Synge’s stage directions, “very tired and frightened and dirty” (1.166). Yet, upon confessing his act of patricide, he is transformed in the villagers’ eyes. The men praise him as “a daring fellow” endowed with “the sense of Solomon”; his bravery, as “a treasure in a lonesome place” (1.262, 1.299, 1.304). When they welcome him wholeheartedly as a pot-boy (domestic servant) to stay the night and protect Pegeen, Shawn Keogh protests by calling Christy “a bloody-handed murderer the like of...” before he is cut off by an angry Pegeen (1.317). This insult comes back to bite Shawn, for it provides Pegeen with the terms by which to establish a fundamental, even ontological, difference between her soon-to-be two suitors. Pegeen turns Shawn’s words against him, retorting, “Whisht, I’m saying, we’ll take no fooling from *your like* at all” (1.318-9, my emphasis). Christy Mahon’s obvious categorical difference from Shawn Keogh reintroduces the Mayo village to a long-lost sense of potency and thereby brings Shawn’s unsuitability—and the entirely too narrow set of Pegeen’s marital possibilities that his unsuitability signifies—into sharp relief. Pegeen’s reference to Shawn’s “like” conjures a

societal condition that is captured in a 1907 review of the play by Patrick Kenny, known better as “Pat” of the *Irish Times*. Kenny addresses the issue of Pegeen’s limited choices in the face of mass social change, claiming that

...in all his unfitness, [Shawn Keogh] is the fittest available! Why? Because the fit ones have fled. He remains because of his cowardice and his idiocy in a region where fear is the first of the virtues, and where the survival of the unfittest is the established law of life. Had he been capable, he would have fled...poor “Pegeen” personifies a nation in which the “Shaneens” prevail, and in which strong, healthy men can stay only to be at war with their surroundings. (38-9)

Kenny contrasts Shawn to “strong, healthy men,” picking up on a motif of socio-sexual sickness that permeates *Playboy*. In Synge’s play, emigration and post-Famine patterns of sexual and marital sterility emerge as a condition of cultural emasculation, figured by Shawn and experienced by the victimized Pegeen. Kenny reads this emasculation as a signal of impending national apocalypse:

...the “Shaneens” remain to reproduce themselves in the social scheme. We see in him how the Irish race die [*sic*] out in Ireland, filling the lunatic asylums more full from a declining population, and selecting for continuance in the future the human specimens most calculated to bring the race lower and lower. “Shaneen” shows us why Ireland dies while the races around us prosper faster and faster. (38)

Kenny’s Darwinian language bears traces of late Victorian racial theory and concerns about *fin de siècle* degeneracy. Kenny echoes Matthew Arnold’s stadial view of history, which proposes that cultures develop according to stages that resemble human development; civilized cultures advance at a faster rate, while those more primitive cultures risk being left behind by modern progress. In his 1867 essay “On the Study of Celtic Literature,” Arnold figures the Irish as a backward and doomed race unfit for the modern world. The fact that Kenny recapitulates Arnold in 1907 shows how deeply the colonialist theory of stadial history had ingrained itself in the Irish psyche. The same sense of developmental futility slips out in Michael James’s eugenic fantasy when he describes Shawn’s prospective progeny as “puny weeds.” It is no surprise, then, that Christy Mahon’s arrival onto the scene ushers a state of mania, a euphoric sense of having been given another chance at a more glorious racial destiny. No wonder, too, that the characters figure their manic interest in Christy in predominantly sexual terms.

The females of Synge’s fictional village rush to express their sexual interest in Christy Mahon. The largely indistinguishable local girls spy on Christy and bring him gifts, confining their advances to coquettish giggles and mild flirtation. The lascivious Widow Quin invites Christy to her bed, posing herself as his equal in sexual experience and a “wiser comrade” than Pegeen for a man of “great temptation” (1.525, 1.532-3). Pegeen, true to her “hardy” and non-sense characterization, is more guarded in expressing her attraction to Christy; nonetheless, her romantic interest in the young man becomes evident through her jealous attacks on her sexual rivals and in her stern guarding of Christy. Pegeen’s sexual attraction also emerges in her erotic fixation on Christy’s violence. Immediately after learning that Christy is unmarried, Pegeen muses, “I never killed my father. I’d be afeard to do that, except I was the like of yourself with blind rages tearing me within, for I’m thinking you should have had great tussling when the end was come” (1.405-8). Synge’s stage directions indicate that Pegeen is “putting sack on settle and beating it up” as she makes Christy’s bed, adding a physical complement to her orgasmic language (1.405). (This delightfully suppressed desire becomes diffused once the prospect of its

fulfillment increases: later in the play the couple's overtly romantic conversations, and Christy's displayed sweaty body, obviate the need for more coded sexual language).

Michael James also draws a direct correlation between Christy Mahon's violence and his virility. Michael's description of Christy in Act Three as "a little frisky rascal" demarcates the latter's sexual threat (3.343). At this point in the play, Michael has not yet permitted Pegeen's marriage to Christy; rather, he wants his daughter to marry Shawn quickly before Christy can get her into sexual trouble. It is important to note that Christy's perceived threat here is based entirely on the fact that he has murdered his father. Michael James has spent the entire time between Christy's confession (in Act One) and this moment either drinking at a wake or passed out. He sleeps through even the athletic games in which Christy excels. More than any of the characters, who all witness gradually the development of Christy's eloquence and self-awareness, Michael James demonstrates the Mayoites' direct, automatic correlation of violence and sex. Moreover, he cannot resist joining in the sexual mania: Michael James's desire for "a score of grandsons growing up little gallant swearers by the name of God" registers yet another heteronormative articulation of lust for Christy's loins. Michael's brand of desire is in one sense deeply paternalistic: the redirection of Christy's and Pegeen's sexual desires into marriage and a rooted existence bears all the traces of patriarchal containment. Indeed, he precedes his marital benediction by musing, "What's a single man, I ask you, eating a bit in one house and drinking a sup in another, and he with no place of his own, like an old braying jackass strayed upon the rocks?" (3.415-8). Yet at the same time Michael's desire is nationalist, as we have seen, eugenic and grandiose; and these two very different responses do not always make for an easy fit. The imagined "gallant swearers" that Christy will beget are, like their father, a prototype for violent action that is often at odds with all things settled.

Put differently, Christy's sexual appeal is made political insofar as it is, for the Mayoites, alternately restorative and transformative. His vigor promises to restore Irish pastoral life by revitalizing the family and by breeding sons with the fortitude required for peasant life. His marriage to Pegeen, unlike the bulk of post-Famine unions that Miller describes, will be productive and reproductive. In the midst of this desolate and ravished post-Famine landscape, Christy seems to offer renewed hope, not new hope. He promises to restore familial glory—for, his ancestors "were great surely, with wide and windy acres of rich Munster land"—and to recuperate a timeless national agrarian idyll, an historically continuous Romantic Ireland that was merely interrupted by blight, bad luck, and colonial mismanagement (1.370-1). This restorative dream articulates an *a priori* Irish existence, so crucial to anti-colonial thought. Indeed, the Irish literary revival built itself upon a claim to an illustrious ancient culture; in his 1892 address "The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland," Douglas Hyde called on the Irish to resurrect their "national life of nearly eighteen hundred years," a life that nearly had been stamped out by English colonization (530). Yet Christy delimits until play's end the larger political implications of his restorative dream by situating his act of familial renewal locally, planning a settled life with Pegeen in Mayo. While Pegeen expresses dreams of a future marked by freedom from geographical and civilized limits—she imagines roaming the countryside with Christy by starlight, taking "easy shelter in a narrow bush"—Christy can only envision his marriage as literally and metaphorically housed (3.285). His dream becomes hyper-particular as he details the minutiae of their dwellings, "every jackstraw [Pegeen] ha[s] roofing [her] head, and every stony pebble is paving the laneway to [her] door" (3.289-91). He prepares to become master of the Flaherty house, even offering to the Widow Quin, well in advance, certain goods and rights pertaining to the property that he will obtain through marriage. There is good reason to

believe Christy's expressed desire to escape a life of what he often calls lonesomeness, to dwell in a home "with the lights shining sideways when the night is down" instead of looking from without (2.250-1).

Nevertheless, Christy's virility and sexual appeal do carry larger transformative political implications, for his act of patricide grants him a privileged status above the other men of Mayo and outside the law. Although the young man enters the play as a familiar figure, the Irish rebel on the run and in search of a safe house, the implications of his arrival in *Playboy* prove a reversal of the usual paradigm. Instead of bringing danger and legal repercussions upon the house that shelters him, Christy will grant protection. Michael James's friend Philly O'Cullen declares, "The peelers is fearing him, and if you'd that lad in the house, there isn't one of them would come smelling around if the dogs itself were lapping poteen from the dung-pit of the yard" (1.301-3). Michael James hires Christy immediately, envisioning the prospect of freedom from licensing laws. Pegeen, meanwhile, conceives of Christy's arrival as a form of vigilante protection from threats more ominous than the local police: she declares, "if I had that lad in the house, I wouldn't be fearing the loosèd khaki cut-throats, or the walking dead" (1.307-8). Her reference, the Oxford edition of *Playboy* notes, is to the discharged British soldiers of the Boer War, the colonial campaign in South Africa that ended just five years before *Playboy* took to the stage. This is not the play's first reference to that war, and Pegeen's comment is anything but casual. While Michael James reads the implications of Christy's extralegal status rather straightforwardly—he will provide protection from the law—Pegeen considers Christy in symbolically and historically laden anti-colonial terms: that is, as a bodyguard of sorts with all the makings of a felon. Lady Gregory's essay "The Felons of Our Land" illuminates the social and political dimensions of this figure, placing the felon within a tradition of plebeian nationalism. She writes that a felony is

a crime in the eyes of the law, not in the eyes of the people. A thief is shunned, a murderer prompted by brutality or personal malice is vehemently denounced, a sheepstealer's crime is visited on the third and fourth generations; but a "felon" has come to mean one who has gone to death or to prison for the sake of a principle or a cause. In consequence, the prison rather lends a halo than leaves a taint. (256)

Gregory's essay describes the clear distinction that is maintained in Ireland between necessary anticolonialist violence and gross crime, and it does much to explain the powerful appeal of Christy Mahon. As Kerby Miller documents, the Famine and subsequent Irish emigration coupled to "provid[e] for the rapid attrition of those groups and individuals most resistant to new socioeconomic and cultural patterns," thereby weakening the prospect of vital political resistance (128). Christy arrives on the scene as a long-lost source of recalcitrance and thereby inadvertently gestures toward a nationalist dream of constitutive violence, however faint and deferred. This suggestion runs, of course, quite counter to Christy's role as restorer of an ancient Romantic Ireland. Christy Mahon becomes implicated in the twinned but contradictory impulses of nationalism, between a desired return to a glorious ancient Ireland—articulated in the *longue durée* approach to Irish history, which considers colonialism an aberration in an otherwise continuous past—and a revolutionary violence which ruptures that narrative in its effort to, in Walter Benjamin's terms, "blast" open "the continuum of history" (261).

Neither of these nationalist dreams, though, will materialize in Synge's Mayo: the villagers' fetishization of violence never amounts to anything politically because they value felony more as a form of celebrity and hero-worship than as a mode of collective resistance. In

Playboy, felony emerges not as a programmatic set of political actions but rather as a story to tell, an epithet attached to such legendary characters as “Daneen Sullivan knocked the eye from a peeler, or Marcus Quin...got six months for maiming ewes” (1.48-9). The list continues, therein suggesting the characters’ deep attachment to and investment in notorious acts of violence: Jimmy Farrell once hanged his own dog; Sarah Tansey drove ten miles to see a famous criminal; the Widow Quin killed her husband (presumably the aforementioned ewe-maimer) and “reared a black ram at [her] own breast, so that the Lord Bishop of Connaught felt the elements of a Christian, and he eating it after in a kidney stew” (1.549-51). And despite whatever eugenic, restorative, or anti-colonial hopes that Christy provokes, one imagines that should he remain in Mayo, his felony will amount to little more than a glorious epithet—say, “Christy Mahon killed his da”—immortalized by “the penny poets singing in an August Fair” (1.515-6). Christy, though, capitalizes on the vagueness of the Mayoites’ fetishization of violence, a fetishization that primes them to fall for the magical glamour of the commodified *Playboy*. Released from the pesky trouble of politics, he can turn his attention to cultivating symbolically his virile masculinity.

Early in the play, Christy learns that he can profit from his act of patricide and all that it connotes. When Michael James and the other men react to his confession by praising his virtues and hiring him as pot-boy, Synge’s stage directions have Christy “swelling with surprise and triumph” as he exclaims, “glory be to God!” (1.310). He is “overcome with wonder” when his confession proves lucrative, granting him shelter, protection from the law, and caretakers eager to “do all and utmost to content [his] needs” (1.320-1). While there is some small talk of work to be done and wages to be paid, it is quite clear that the men hire Christy for the protection they assume he can offer simply by virtue of having killed his father. Indeed, just before Christy enters the scene, Pegeen has been chastising her father for failing to hire a pot-boy “to stand along with [her] and give [her] courage in the doing of [her] work,” which sounds more like a plea for companionship and protection than for an extra set of hands (1.154-5). Christy clearly profits from the deal: he is paid in shelter, food, drink, and protection from the law well in advance of the labor that he never ends up needing to perform. Pegeen does assign him some small chores in Act Two, but Christy fails to complete much work, and why should he? By the morning after his arrival, Christy receives copious amounts of food from the village girls and an offer from the Widow Quin to house him. There is a high demand for his company, which frees him from having to perform labor to meet his basic needs.

Christy quickly realizes that he can trade solely on his masculine charm and reputation, and accordingly he begins to cultivate his *Playboy* persona, embellishing his tale of patricide and attempting to sweet-talk his way out of tricky situations. There is a learning curve to this cultivation—for instance, his tale of patricide improves only gradually with each re-telling. His first attempt at cash-free bargaining, too, is not quite successful: Christy tries bribing the Widow Quin to keep silent about his father’s return and to help him wed Pegeen. Yet without monetary assets all he can offer her is the power of prayer. He declares, “Aid me to win [Pegeen], and I’ll be asking God to stretch a hand to you in the hour of death, and lead you short cuts through the Meadows of Ease, and up the floor of Heaven to the Footstool of the Virgin’s son” (2.557-9). Beneath the seeming naiveté of this offer lies Christy’s growing confidence in the brokerage power of his charm. He disguises here and elsewhere the mechanisms of his self-commodification, to which I will turn shortly, as mere economic obliviousness. In this particular case, the divine offer proves insufficient because Shawn Keogh—who also wants the Widow to help him woo Pegeen—has presented her with a real kind of “short cut,” the “right of way across

[his] rye path” (2.376). The Widow Quin subsequently asks for and accepts from Christy a material offer, one that provides her with far less than she would have received from Shawn. Christy consents only to giving the Widow a “right of way” on his future property, “a mountainy ram, and a load of dung at Michaelmas” (2.565-6), whereas Shawn would have provided, in addition, a “red cow” and “turbary upon the western hill” (2.375, 377-8).

Christy’s and Shawn’s similar offers to the Widow Quin remind us that the two men are in some respects not so different. Each man enters the play from out of the dark night, nervous and deferential. Each man is dominated over the course of the play by the woman he nonetheless aspires to marry. We must also bear in mind Christy’s less glorious past, which is conveyed through Old Mahon’s account. Before arriving in Mayo, Christy seems as emasculated as Shawn: he behaves awkwardly around women and abstains from drinking, the latter of which is a particularly important marker of outsider status in the masculinist pub culture of Ireland. Indeed, even the ontological difference that the characters establish between Shawn and Christy—Shawn’s unfitness contrasted to Christy’s fitness, with all the corporeal, sexual, and political suggestions those terms imply—winds up being deconstructed in Kenny’s 1907 review of *Playboy*. By claiming that “in all his unfitness, [Sean Keogh] is the fittest available,” Kenny presents the two men as opposite ends of a spectrum of fitness that has shifted with time. Christy is the more obviously and physically fit of the two; he presents an older conception of fitness lost through the emigration of “strong, healthy men.” However, Shawn is also fit insofar as he is a survivor in a brutal post-Famine landscape. This, to Kenny’s chagrin, is what fitness has come to in the wake of the Famine. And although Kenny cannot help but chide Shawn for his “cowardice” and “idiocy,” those characteristics accompany and perhaps even mask a savvy survivalist ethos, and one that differs from Christy’s not in its aims but merely in its means, in its desperate conniving. Shawn wheels and deals himself through a life whose ultimate goal, it seems, is to wed despite an historical setting inhospitable to marriage. He first attempts to bribe Christy into abandoning Pegeen and leaving town by offering him a ticket to America and a new wardrobe. When this fails, he wheedles the Widow Quin into assisting him. Shawn is an eager trader, at times overly so: in the trade with the Widow, he agrees to her initial demands and then throws so many additional incentives on the table that the Widow cuts him off, saying, “That’ll do, so” (2.385).

Nevertheless, Shawn operates entirely in a barter economy, trading good for good according to an assumed equivalence of their use values: in the trade with Christy, a fare to America and a new wardrobe in exchange for a wife, pub, house, and land; in the trade with the Widow Quin, farm animals, property rights, and wedding favors in exchange for her assistance in helping him to secure a wife (and, thereby, a pub, house, and land). This trade of like for like recalls a comment by Karl Marx in his section on commodity fetishism in Volume I of *Capital*: “The social relations of the individual producers,” writes Marx, with reference to a separate but similar economic situation, “[...] are here transparent in their simplicity” (172). Marx imagines a community that shares in common the means of production, and whose total product is divided amongst individuals according to each person’s contribution of labor. The situation in *Playboy* differs from Marx’s hypothetical situation (and his example is certainly hypothetical, portions of which are dreamed up “merely for the sake of a parallel with the production of commodities”) (172). In Synge’s fictional Mayo, there are no centralized and all-encompassing means of production; but Marx’s comments are nevertheless instructive for us here because the simplicity and, indeed, intelligibility of the exchanges in both his imagined scenario and in *Playboy*’s barter economy differ significantly from the obfuscations of a capitalist exchange of commodities.

Christy Mahon attempts just one transaction in this barter economy, during the aforementioned deal he makes with the Widow Quin, ultimately distinguishing himself from Shawn instead by drawing on the obfuscations of capitalism. It is this ability to negotiate a capitalist value system—and not strength, or violence, or virility—that distinguishes Christy crucially and indelibly from the likes of Shawn Keogh. Eschewing the Mayoites' exchange of goods and services (an exchange of use value), Christy comes to cultivate himself as a commodity: the Playboy. As Marx explains in Volume I of *Capital*, "The mystical character of the commodity does not arise...from its use-value" (164). Accordingly, Christy manufactures a lucrative genetic fantasy, endowing his Playboy with the pure exchange value that is the hallmark of commodification. Historical conditions, as well as Christy's labor, remain hidden by the magical quality of the commodity, which bestows value on objects independently, ignoring the mechanisms of their production. Thus the Playboy—or metonymically, Christy's loins—accrues a value that is made to seem absolute and immanent.

Some of the Playboy's aura is produced by labor that is shown onstage, in Christy's storytelling, flirting, and feats of athletic prowess. But the Playboy is also a product of historical circumstances, of the desperate post-Famine socioeconomic conditions that drive Christy to kill his father and to run away. Christy's family, we learn, has suffered under the British agricultural policies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which Miller tells us were implemented to make Ireland more profitable in the capitalist marketplace. Though the Mahons' ancestors were once powerful landholders, Old Mahon and Christy are impoverished squatters. Their poverty makes for a tumultuous relationship between father and son that is culturally and historically specific. Christy complains that he is overworked by his father and given no pay; Old Mahon, in turn, fears being "driven out in [his] old age with none to aid [him]" (2.445). Miller's study shows that both situations were common historically. He describes a cycle of intra-familial control and dependence: as farmers came to rely upon the unpaid labor of their sons in order to survive, "mature offspring [would] refuse assistance to aged parents in spite of communal opprobrium"; in turn, "farmers [became] more determined than ever to retain their holdings and keep their sons in suspenseful submission as long as possible" (60). This is how it comes to be that Christy remains subservient to his father until he is forced into an arranged marriage to an old, ugly, and extremely wealthy widow. Christy kills his father in order to escape the marriage; this marks his first step toward freeing himself from the brutal effects of imperial economic policy.

Christy's next step toward economic liberation involves hiding his history of victimization, which he manages to great effect. In fact, we learn of Christy's past only through Old Mahon because Christy keeps such details under wraps, lest they detract from the Playboy's appeal. He has one early slip-up: during Act One, in a fit of naïve confidentiality, Christy confesses to Pegeen that he had always been "a quiet, simple poor fellow with no man giving [him] heed" (1.418-19). Pegeen's disappointment is instructive. She responds, "And I thinking you should have been living the like of a king of Norway or the Eastern world" (1.426-7). Christy learns to keep silent about the material conditions of his past and to cultivate an aura of virile masculinity that is without origin or occasion, seemingly autotelic. He is so convincing that Shawn Keogh comes to attribute Christy's Playboy status simply to his act of patricide. In a comically literalist moment of self-pity, Shawn bemoans the fact that he does not have a father to murder: "Oh, it's a hard case to be an orphan and not to have your father that you're used to, and you'd easy kill and make yourself a hero in the sight of all" (2.367-9). Shawn's logic offers an absurd encapsulation of the historical and social amnesia that commodification begets: the

patricidal Playboy is simply a Playboy who committed patricide, and no longer the “tired and frightened and dirty” young man who entered Michael’s pub from out of the dark with a history to narrate.

The success of Christy’s self-commodification is perhaps best expressed by Old Mahon, who upon hearing about his son’s impending nuptials marvels, “That man marrying a decent and moneyed girl!” (3.167). Marriages between poor squatters’ sons and “decent and moneyed girl[s]” simply do not occur in his economic world, and Old Mahon cannot believe his son’s good fortune. Unlike Shawn, who conceives of marriage as “making a good bargain”—a fair and equal bargain—Christy trades for a “moneyed” wife using nothing except the exchange value of his Playboy persona. This is an arbitrary value that transcends Christy’s use value in a strict sense (he does not perform labor for anyone, nor does he own property) as well as in a loose sense (his capacity to labor for the good of the family, community, and nation by breeding sons and by protecting the Mayoites from the law remains untested and purely speculative). The magical value system of commodification allows Christy to convert the “good bargain” of a fair marital transaction into what is for him a veritable steal.

The Mayo villagers concede fully to this uneven bargain; indeed, they do not even recognize it as such until Old Mahon arrives to reveal his son’s deception. Their violently disappointed response to learning that Christy has not killed his father, I want to suggest, stems not just from having been duped but also from seeing their own fetishism for what it is: complicity with a modern value system that is quickly and surely devastating their way of life. Christy places the blame squarely on the Mayo community, claiming, “you’re after making a mighty man of me this day by the power of a lie” (3.500-1). This is the passive grammar of evasion. Rather than admit to fashioning himself as Playboy, Christy claims to having been made against his will into a “mighty man” by a fetishistic community. This redirection of blame, as well as Christy’s subsequent departure, does indeed “leave[] the community empty and exhausted” (Deane, *Celtic Arrivals* 58). It also leaves some characters warily self-critical. For while the Shawn Keoghs of Mayo continue undeterred and unfazed in a barter economy that eventually will be obsolete, Pegeen and Michael are left to comprehend their own commodity desires. Michael drinks away his unease: he marks Christy’s departure by asking Pegeen to fill their glasses, happy to “have peace now for [his] drinks” (3.646). A lifer in a town that glories in outlaws dead or long-since gone, Michael mitigates his disappointing confrontation with capitalist commodification—and with his own desires, which Christy exposed—just as he has coped again and again with the perpetual intangibility of virile socio-political liberation. He turns to drink and companionship, denying having ever desired Christy or, consequently, having lost anything. Christy Mahon has done nothing but interrupt the peace. Pegeen, though, keens at play’s end because Christy offered the promise of her own liberation. Left behind in a still-emasculated provincial west, she, unlike her father, cannot deny her desires. She has been and continues to be seduced by the Playboy’s virility despite having seen the lies and obfuscations at its heart. The episode with Christy serves as a lesson in economics for Pegeen. She learns not only about the changing economic landscape of rural Ireland, but also about the psychic economy of modernity: that euphoria and loss operate in a dialectical relationship; that modernity’s abuses often accompany its most alluring promises; and that the desires unleashed by its processes of reification cannot simply be keened or drunk away.

This privileged comprehension of the encounter with modernity gives rise to Pegeen’s most famous line, a phrase that sums up perhaps better than anything else the mechanisms of Christy’s transcendence. Pegeen declares, “there’s a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty

deed” (3.572-3). We might read that gap as capitalist reification. It is what allows Christy to transcend servitude to father, landlord, and colonizer, and to proclaim himself “master of all fights from now” (3.631-2). Christy will escape the business of mean subsistence to “go romancing through a romping lifetime” with his father in tow; meanwhile, Pegeen and her father will, according to Old Mahon’s spiteful parting prediction, spend the remainder of their days in a dying peasant economy, “picking cockles till the hour of death” (3.644, 3.630).

Taken in isolation, Christy’s transcendence of the local Mayo economy is a liberating moment. Christy Mahon manufactures, from out of the wreckage of post-Famine poverty and anomie, a lifetime of “romancing” and “romping,” of trading in on the exchange value of the *Playboy*. His personal freedom from economic hardship and bare subsistence is undeniably seductive. Christy’s transcendence is also liberating for early twentieth-century cultural nationalism. The *Playboy*’s refusal simply to bow to forces of modernization functions as a foundational gesture for the anticolonial project of the Irish National Theatre. Christy does not wait for the inevitable capitalist transformation of the landscape, either with passive resignation or futile resistance; rather, Christy beats capitalist modernity to the punch. What’s more, he does so by borrowing its very own weapons of obfuscation and commodified magic.

Christy’s escape becomes more complicated, though, when we begin to probe it for any actual transformative power, either within the world of the play or for *Playboy*’s ever-expanding audiences. Christy Mahon’s symbolic gesture may have resonated with Abbey (National Theatre) audiences, and it may continue to resonate with audiences, particularly post-colonial audiences, today. But is there a contradiction between the play’s message of liberation and Christy’s commodity-capitalist means? Can the encounter with capitalist modernity be considered as liberating as the symbolism of Christy’s dramatic refusal? In one sense, it seems that the Mayo villagers are made to pay the price of Christy’s liberation: they become the victims of commodification when the object of their investment skips town for good. Nevertheless, the encounter amounts to very little material damage for the Mayoites. The community and the local economy appear at play’s end to be no worse than they were before Christy’s arrival, though, it must be added, no better. The price of Christy’s liberation will have to be sought elsewhere, in social, cultural, and psychological costs.

The tabulating of damages, however, may lead us astray in determining Christy’s ultimate liberationist value. Such an approach suggests that his freedom comes at a significant cost, and that to evaluate Christy’s net effect we must make a fraught decision: do the liberating—indeed, anticolonial—ends outweigh and justify the commodity-capitalist means? In reducing the matter to an either-or scenario, we risk neglecting what earlier in this chapter I called the complex spectrum of anti-imperialist thought. We must attend to that broader spectrum because Christy Mahon falls somewhere between a liberating anticolonialist hero and a complicit capitalist. Reading *Playboy* responsibly means owning up to the fact that Christy’s glamorous brand of anti-imperial transcendence leaves much to be desired; but it also opens up the possibility of resisting colonialism through capitalism, not just in spite of it.

The postcolonial critic or reader would like nothing more than for Christy to use commodity-capitalist logic against the persons responsible for his previously impoverished existence: the imperial government, or the collusive landlord. This does not happen, and his direction of capitalist obfuscation against his fellow colonized Irish peasants is and must remain troubling. But Christy’s act of commodifying of himself remains anticolonial insofar as it becomes a means of not acquiescing to the fate handed to him by imperial economics. Christy Mahon’s marriage of capitalist logic and anticolonial politics is instructive, and it may prove to

be *Playboy*'s greatest contribution to a theory of liberation. Within the fictional Mayo, Christy acquaints the villagers with a value system that they will necessarily confront sooner than later; and he reveals to them—and to audiences from 1907 to the present—that the most effective means of resisting colonial and neocolonial rule may be to become intimate with its mechanisms, to use its capitalist logic to one's own anti-colonial advantage. This suggestion moves into dangerous territory for the postcolonialist, the Marxist, and those skeptical of global capitalism, and it may be all the more unpopular at this historical moment when the failures of Irish acquiescence to global capitalism seem all but cemented. Nonetheless, I want to suggest that *Playboy* manipulates capitalism to achieve its liberationist purposes. It admits the possibility of multiple, sometimes seemingly contradictory or politically fraught paths to the same anti-colonial, even anti-capitalist, end. That reminder is crucial perhaps now more than ever, when in Ireland, as Joe Cleary reminds us, "all serious alternatives to liberal capitalism have been eliminated from the world stage," (2) and when economic growth has been accompanied by "a drastic narrowing of the parameters within which contemporary politics are articulated" (71). As this chapter and, indeed, this project suggests, the surest way of combating the abuses of capitalist modernity—and of redirecting or diffusing its enormous appeal—may be to become better acquainted with its inner workings.

* * *

We come, finally, to *Playboy*'s enduring status as a representative text of the Irish literary renaissance. The famous riots surrounding *Playboy*'s first production, over which much ink has been spilled, contribute in large part to the play's legacy. Accounts of the riots tend to focus on the audience's conviction that they and their countrymen had been misrepresented on Synge's stage: thus, *Playboy* presents characters that violate the moral standards of "real" Irish daughters, who do not marry coarse fugitive murderers; of "real" Irish fathers, who do not wed their daughters to coarse fugitive murderers; of "real" Irish peasants, who do not protect and worship coarse fugitive murderers. Most critics attribute the riots to the fact that Synge's play indicts the audience's idealizations of the west and of Irish peasant life, idealizations that led to cries on January 26, 1907 that "This is not Irish life!" (Holloway 81) and, in subsequent performances, "That's not the West of Ireland!" (Kilroy 43). If these critics are right, it is no wonder that Christy's offending comment in Act Three set the rioting into full swing: Christy tells the Widow Quin, "It's Pegeen I'm seeking only, and what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself maybe, from this place to the Eastern World" (3.531-3). Christy's mention of ladies' undergarments marks his, and the play's, deviation from proper Irish, Christian, and peasant morality—presumably, real Irish men do not utter such vulgar profanities. Such a blatant breach of national morality could not be tolerated. The audience's desire to distinguish themselves from a character who offended their sensibilities also says something about the hopes and expectations that the Abbey's bourgeois constituents held for the new national theater, a theater that could properly be called theirs and where they could recognize themselves represented onstage. *Playboy*'s first audience was willing to riot in order to protect that fledgling theater from a playwright who had similarly offended their sensibilities.

I want nevertheless to consider the possibility that the riots arose not just out of the audience's perceived difference from the play and its characters, but instead—or perhaps simultaneously—from elements in *Playboy* that were too close, and with which they found themselves unexpectedly identifying. Nicholas Grene attributes the furor over *Playboy* to the fact

that the play challenged the Abbey audience's "orderly middle-class construction of the world in which east is east and west is west" (103). He argues that

the more pervasively destabilizing quality of *The Playboy* was its refusal to observe the proper separateness of [morally loaded categories]. If we accept Mary Douglas's thesis in *Purity and Danger* that the idea of impurity arises from a confusion of categories, then *The Playboy* was a very impure, a very dangerous, play indeed. As the repressed physicality of the sexual was allowed to appear from under the normal decencies of its covering, so sex was proximate to violence and both made manifest in the actuality of a specific location. Again and again necessary distinctions, differences and the ideological labeling that went with them were jumbled in unsorted contiguity. Such contamination of confused categories was a deeply disturbing affront to the middle-class nationalist community whose self-image depended on just such moral classification. (86)

Greene's argument that *Playboy* contaminated what were for the 1907 audience sacred categories goes far in explaining the play's enduring place on Irish and Postcolonial Literature syllabi and in the national literary canon. What it fails to account for, though, is why the Abbey audience that rioted took so long to do so. If the audience did indeed find *Playboy* too impure, too socially unsettling, why did it tolerate Christy's sexual language and violence for the better part of three acts? It is telling to note that the audience did not riot until after Old Mahon returns to expose his son as a fraud, precisely at which point Christy's lascivious language is no longer justified or mitigated by his violent felony. In other words, Christy can signify sex as long as he maintains his Playboy aura of virile resistance—that is the euphoric amnesia that the commodity begets. But the *dénouement* of Synge's play forces audiences to recognize their own complicity with Christy's fraudulent commodification of sexual prowess. For the Abbey audience, that recognition must have involved acknowledging the extent to which their moral standards had been subdued so easily by the Playboy. They, like the fictional Mayo community from which they wished to divorce themselves, had been romanced by Christy Mahon. They had been made to accept, even desire, violent sexuality because it had been packaged by the Playboy as romantic nationalism. Christy trades in on the audience's heroicizing impulses and eugenic fantasies as much as he does on those of the characters. For the 1907 audience, the riots may have been sparked by a flash of recognition in the Mayoites' bitter disappointment; and perhaps, in the days and months ahead, that disappointment turned to an estranging guilt as individuals recognized that they had rioted not because Christy Mahon was a violent murderer, but because he was not.

Patrick Kenny's contemporary review of *Playboy* corroborates my theory that audiences responded not to the play's difference but to its frightening familiarity. He describes the experience of cultural self-recognition: "[Synge] shot his dreadful searchlight into our cherished accumulation of social skeletons... and revealed to us there truly terrible truths, of our own making, which we dare not face for the present" (37). For Kenny, Synge's play is too truthful about Ireland's racial degeneration. It is also too truthful, I want to suggest, about the complacency and stasis of the revivalist movement. *Playboy* indicts the more pithy sentiments of revivalism, its replacement of forward-looking political sentiment with backward-looking heroics. Romantic nationalism comes to naught in the end for the Mayoites and for the audience. In this respect, *Playboy* is telling as a representative text of the Celtic Revival: it engages with the national desire for a heroic, virile masculinity of yesteryear but understands that resurrecting such a legendary figure in modern mass-culture Ireland will require a kind of commodity magic. Synge calls into question an elitist or purist revivalism that attempts to disengage from the

political complexities of modern life, or to stage a simple return to a glorious ancient past. His play models a relationship to modernity that falls somewhere between simple antagonism and uncritical acceptance. Eugenic fantasies or romantic ideals alone would not resurrect for the revivalists a national culture: too much had been lost, and too much had been changed. Just as Christy Mahon draws on the modern changes in value at his disposal, Synge and his contemporaries utilize the resources at theirs: the English language, bourgeois theater, the modern publishing industry and its modes of dissemination. Indeed, it is one of the great ironies of the Celtic Revival that the movement achieves its greatest success at the moment when its ostensible object, traditional Irish life, seems most lost. As Joe Cleary notes, “Not until the force of [traditional] popular culture had diminished, perhaps, could this national ‘literature’...achieve the national authority to which it aspired” (55). While the revivalists may not have celebrated or abetted the dying out of traditional culture, they did not hesitate to harness the mechanisms of the newly commercialized cultural zone to their own advantage.

We might also borrow usefully from Grene’s contention that *Playboy* contaminates categories to probe our own critical relationships to Synge’s play and to the work of his contemporaries. For to read the play in the manner that I am suggesting—as paradigmatic of the birth of commodity fetishism, and of Synge’s accession to increasingly capitalist modes of cultural production—renders *Playboy* a very impure and dangerous work for those committed to a theory and a practice of minor literature. Theorizing minority has become an increasingly popular critical enterprise, traveling from Deleuze and Guattari’s influential definition of “minor literature,” through postcolonial studies and, more recently, to theories of world literature. In *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova praises the literature of early twentieth-century Ireland, which she calls an “Irish ‘miracle’” (304). For Casanova, all literatures eventually become autonomous; but first, minor writers like the Irish Revivalists must struggle for literary recognition and acceptance. It is in the period of struggle that literature becomes most innovative, political, and capable of challenging the literary hegemony, for “lucidity, and the impulse to rebel against the existing literary order, are at the very heart of [the minor writer’s] identity” (44). Casanova is quick to note that political and economic domination are not identical to literary domination, and her claims about minority pertain strictly to literary hegemonies. Nonetheless, the study fits into a larger critical enthusiasm for all things minor. I wonder if we run the danger, however, of valorizing minority to the detriment our long-term critical vision. What insights can Deleuze and Guattari’s account, or Casanova’s account, offer once a literature is no longer minor? How can we theorize a practice of critical cultural production from within a prosperous global capitalist space like contemporary Ireland, the recent downturn notwithstanding? *Playboy* offers the “impure” conjecture that engaging with capitalism may be more effective than longing for a simpler pre-capitalist moment. That impure suggestion is necessary now perhaps more than ever. Synge’s play reminds us that the “minor” writers of Irish modernism did contend with, borrow from, and balance the increasingly capitalist culture in which they worked and lived; and it opens up the possibility that rigorous and critical artistic output can emerge from within the present capitalist culture of Ireland. *Playboy*’s impurity—the cause of the famous Abbey riots one hundred years ago—may prove to be its greatest long-term asset, and the most effective antidote to the mania of Irish modernity.

CHAPTER THREE

Contaminating Form: Joyce, Bowen, and the Upheavals of Irish Independence

In early 1907, as the battle over *The Playboy of the Western World* waged in Dublin, James Joyce was writing “The Dead” in Trieste. This seems a strange temporal coincidence. Although *Playboy* and *Dubliners* are set more or less contemporaneously—and the settings of some *Dubliners* stories predate the action of Synge’s play—the two works evoke very different time-spaces. Synge’s fictional Mayo remains suspended in the post-Famine era, as I argued in Chapter Two. The characters in *Playboy* continue to suffer the long-term socioeconomic effects of the Irish nineteenth century: colonial agricultural reform and its attendant poverty, emigration, diminished reproductive and political possibilities. Synge presents an Irish west in which very little has transpired since the Famine. His Mayo villagers set their sights perpetually backward, to the heroic legends of the past, until Christy Mahon arrives to shake them briefly from out of their temporal and geographical vacuum. But the *Playboy*’s transformation is short-lived, and in the wake of Christy’s departure the Mayoites settle back into their debilitating nostalgia. Synge’s Mayo recapitulates the timeless quality of the idyllic Revivalist west, but with a critical and savage twist. In *Playboy*, Synge shows that the west of Ireland is timeless not intrinsically, but because material forces have ground progress to a halt. The people who stay in his Mayo live a life of mean, flattened subsistence: they do not make anything new and, furthermore, they cannot recognize their own complicity in perpetuating the myths that tether them to the past.

Joyce’s *Dubliners*, by contrast, operate in a modern milieu. Their capital city may remain stagnant in its own right—fitting for a country Joyce called the “afterthought of Europe” (*Stephen Hero* 53)—but unlike Synge’s Mayoites, the *Dubliners* characters have sufficient contact with the wider world to recognize their own peripherality and to look, consequently, outward and future-ward. The young characters in the early stories of Joyce’s collection do so most forcefully. The narrator of “An Encounter” longs for the escape he reads about in westerns, detective stories, and boys’ magazines, concluding that “real adventures...do not happen to people who remain at home: they must be sought abroad” (*Dubliners* 13). The titular character in “Eveline” echoes this sentiment in her awkwardly romanticized visions of married life with a sailor in Buenos Aires, though in the end she cannot bring herself to leave home. And the Cambridge-educated Jimmy Doyle fulfills his father’s aspirations in “After the Race” when he mingles with his wealthy continental companions who have descended upon Dublin for the Gordon-Bennett automobile race; but Jimmy remains on the outskirts of the Europeans’ interactions and cannot sustain the tempo of their social and financial dealings. Indeed, as the collection progresses through the life stages that Joyce labeled “childhood, adolescence, maturity and public life,” characters’ glances outward turn increasingly furtive and are overshadowed by their counterparts’ refusals to consider anything that lies beyond what is immediate (*Selected Letters* 83).

With “The Dead,” the last story of *Dubliners* and also the last to be written, Joyce rescues the collection’s spiral inward. The tempered national vision presented in the story’s closing image of “snow [falling] general all over Ireland” comes to replace characters’ exotic imaginative destinations as a locus of hope (194). As Gabriel Conroy recognizes the futility of his continental aspirations in “The Dead,” he also begins looking ahead to the future time and

space of the Irish nation. This is a reading whose intricacies and consequences I will examine later in this chapter. But Gabriel's tentative glance forward is significant here because it cuts against both the brazen, insubstantial futurity of Synge's *Playboy* and the debilitating nostalgia of Christy's Mayo counterparts. At the end of *Playboy*, Christy Mahon declares a rupture in his personal history, a definitive break with his lowly past and a "master[ing] of all fights from now" (146); but his tenacity cannot make up for the fact that his future remains materially insecure, nor that in his wake the abandoned Mayoites root themselves more firmly in the past. Gabriel Conroy, in turn, undergoes a more hesitant transformation at the end of "The Dead." His image of the future, like Christy Mahon's, is imprecise. Yet Gabriel disavows neither the frightening vagueness of the approaching "gray impalpable world" nor his own ambivalence toward it (194).

How is it that *Playboy* and *Dubliners*—two works written at roughly the same time—produce such divergent versions of national space and time? What does it mean that *Dubliners* moves from the young individual's audacious telescoping outward to the adult Gabriel's cautious vision of a collective national future, whereas *Playboy* starts and ends with the same condition of cultural stasis, Christy's singular transformation notwithstanding? And what do the differences in these works say about how they should be read?

In the first place, the contrast between Joyce's turn-of-the-century Dublin and Synge's turn-of-the-century Mayo reflects the difference between the Irish east and west. That difference lies partly in the symbolic distinction that Raymond Williams describes in *The Country and the City*, wherein a mythologized and Edenic country is made to compensate for the ills of urban modernity. Synge draws upon such an authentic, sacred Irish west only to expose its suppressed violence. But the difference between east and west is also material, generated by geographic patterns of colonization. Colonial governance and its institutions of modernization had long flowed from the eastern ports westward, creating a boundary between the English-controlled Dublin-area Pale and the unpredictable areas beyond the Pale. The juxtaposition of Joyce's and Synge's works reveals that geographical difference, which is simultaneously a temporal one; and moving westward from the city in *Dubliners* to *Playboy*'s Mayo involves moving back in time virtually to an earlier phase of historical development.

The difference between the two works also reveals the generic distance between *Playboy*'s grandiose dramatic vision and Joyce's naturalistic mode of writing, something he called "a style of scrupulous meanness" (*Selected Letters* 83). While Synge defends the verisimilitude of *Playboy* in the Preface he wrote after the Abbey riots, claiming to "have used one or two words only, that [he] ha[d] not heard among the country people of Ireland," he chooses from within those confines dramatic material taken from "the rich joy found only in what is superb and wild in reality" (96). This is why Synge's "realistic" play carries, nonetheless, a sense of the legendary and the unreal. Joyce's *Dubliners*, meanwhile, presents a more mundane picture of urban reality. The discrepancy emerges not just from the authors' stylistic priorities, but also and more importantly from the type of national feeling each was trying to evoke in his work. Synge's play reflects in part the priorities of the fledgling National Theatre, whose aim was to replace the stage Irishman of the English theater with articulate Irish characters created by an articulate body of national drama. However controversial he proved to be, Christy Mahon brought to the Abbey stage an invigorating version of Irish agency that matched the literary revival's symbolic project. Joyce's thinking about the nation, by contrast, is more practical and decidedly not symbolic. Mundanity is the very point: in *Dubliners* and his later writings, the exiled Joyce carves out a nation—and a nationalism—with which individuals can live.

I want to argue that although *Playboy* and *Dubliners* are written contemporaneously, the two works participate in different moments of literary history and should be read within separate contexts. *Playboy* emerges from the Revivalist moment and takes part in the project of forging a cultural nationalism through the revolutionary power of language itself. Joyce's *Dubliners*, especially "The Dead," points instead to the questions that literature would take up around the time of Irish independence, more than a decade later. In "The Dead," Joyce experiments with the literary forms of nation-building that he would articulate more fully in *Ulysses*. Joyce's central concern in both works, I think, is to hollow out the symbolic structures of nationalism and to replace them with something more scattered and inclusive. Joyce does so by infecting the ritual forms of thought, speech, and behavior that sustain both British imperialism and stringent strains of Irish nationalism. In this chapter I will read *Dubliners*, which was conceived and written well before independence, as a prescient work of the new Irish nation. It modifies Synge's grandiose arrival narrative to suit the more tedious business of constructing an independent society. But despite Joyce's efforts to expand the parameters of national belonging, the narrative of the new Irish nation necessarily excludes the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, whose divided loyalties it cannot accommodate. At the end of this chapter I will turn to the 1929 novel *The Last September*, where Elizabeth Bowen documents the post-independence collapse of her Ascendancy society. Like Joyce, Bowen figures the arrival of Irish independence as a kind of formal infection; but in her novel, form devolves not into social and literary possibility but, rather, into violent destruction.

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At the end of "The Dead" as Gabriel Conroy looks toward the future, he finds himself unable to conceptualize the coming times. Moments earlier he had envisioned his Aunt Julia Morkan's funeral in full detail, concluding, "Yes, yes: that would happen very soon" (193). His admission confirms the recurrent sense throughout the story that a generational turn is imminent, and that the hospitality of the maiden Morkan aunts is becoming outdated. But when Gabriel tries to picture the impending societal transition, he cannot come up with any concrete words or images, heading instead into an imaginative tailspin:

His soul had approached that region where dwell the vast hosts of the dead. He was conscious of, but could not apprehend, their wayward and flickering existence. His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself which these dead had one time reared and lived in was dissolving and dwindling. (194)

Death functions here to anchor Gabriel's anxiety about the intangibility of the future. It provides a model for the dissolution of all he has known into a "gray impalpab[ility]." It also allows him to forestall, if only momentarily, the approach of future time: Gabriel entertains a comforting fantasy of his own death that is figured in vague spatial terms rather than temporal ones. Instead of confronting what is to come, Gabriel's soul approaches the "region" of the dead, and his identity fades with theirs into an "impalpable world" as the "solid world" melts away.

The solid world of time catches up with Gabriel, however, in the next (and the story's last) paragraph when he decides that "the time had come for him to set out on his journey westward" (194). What begins for Gabriel as a kind of formal crisis, wherein the usual structures of language used to conceptualize phenomena fail, becomes in the final sentences of "The Dead" an occasion for him to rethink the formal construction of national space and time. That Gabriel is a writer makes all the more significant not only his earlier inability—or perhaps unwillingness—

to focus his anxious glimpse of social change into precise language, but also his eventual commitment to reconceiving the national future. Gabriel's conversion marks an important turn in Joyce's own thinking about the role of language in constructing a new national society, which he would develop further through the formal experimentation of *Ulysses*. But this is not the first point in his oeuvre where Joyce considers the possibilities and dangers of language. Gabriel Conroy's formal panic is preceded in *Dubliners* by instances in the earlier stories where Joyce renders suspect his characters' formulaic conventions of speech and thought. I want to focus on several of these moments because they destabilize language as a mechanism of unity in ways that enable Gabriel's epiphany at the end of "The Dead."

Throughout the collection, Joyce's *Dubliners* affect voices and manners that are not their own for varied motives. Money proves one consistent source of motivation. In "A Mother," Mrs. Kearney channels her daughter's classical musical training, and her own class ambitions, into the newly fashionable cultural revival: "When the Irish Revival began to be appreciable Mrs. Kearney determined to take advantage of her daughter's name [Kathleen] and brought an Irish teacher to the house" (117). Mrs. Kearney's financial interests are already apparent in her calculation of "advantages" and Kathleen's "appreciable" worth, and her efforts pay off quickly. The narration continues, "Soon the name of Miss Kathleen Kearney began to be heard often on people's lips. People said that she was very clever at music and a very nice girl and, moreover, that she was a believer in the language movement. Mrs. Kearney was well content at this" (118). From this point onward, the story turns to sums and contracts as Mrs. Kearney negotiates a series of concert engagements for Kathleen. What's interesting is that throughout the financial haggling that transpires, Kathleen's worth as a musician never comes into question, nor does her commitment to the Revival. Indeed, Joyce shows that the latter quality—her commitment to cultural nationalism—determines Kathleen's value in the eyes of the nationalist community as much as does her musical ability. For Kathleen is a good musician "and, moreover," speaks the Irish language. Grammatically the two attributes are made equivalent even though they are not logically interdependent (Kathleen is an accompanist; it matters not for the concert if she can speak Irish). But Kathleen was already a capable, academy-trained musician. Her engagement in the concerts hangs on her newly honed ability to perform her nationalism linguistically, and in this she proves utterly convincing—so convincing, in fact, that the reader never needs to witness her speech. It is enough for Joyce's narrator to state that Kathleen and her nationalist friends chatted after Mass and "said goodbye to one another in Irish" (118). The story focuses, rather, on Mrs. Kearney's defiant speech acts which betray the insincerity of her family's Revivalist fervor by showing that they privilege their monetary interests over the cultural aims of the movement.

In "Two Gallants" the reader similarly misses the romancing undertaken by an unemployed police inspector's son, Corley. The story is structured to shut the reader, along with Corley's accomplice Lenehan, out of the main action. Corley plots with Lenehan to woo a slavey who "thinks [Corley is] a bit of class"; then he disappears with the woman while the narration follows Lenehan, who anxiously awaits his friend's return (40). At the story's end, the reader is surprised when Corley appears and reveals triumphantly, as proof of his success, a "small gold coin" (49). The men's sexual innuendoes about what they call, among other things, a "ticklish job" lead the reader to miss, until this moment, what the "gallants" know all along: that Corley is trading romance not for sex but for money (42). Rebecca Walkowitz reads this twist as the last in a series of scams whereby "[Joyce] invokes and withdraws generic expectations of romance, chivalry, and moral concern" (61). I think she is right, but it is worth noting that the reader again does not get to witness the central act of romancing. The generic expectations that Walkowitz

mentions are suggested only in the story's ironic title, and yet the reader knows full well the types of things Corley will say to his slavey—so much so that, like in “A Mother,” reproducing the speech would be tedious and redundant. In both stories the main action is enabled efficiently by acts of parroting so successful (Kathleen's, a parroting of nationalist rhetoric; Corley's, of gentlemanly courting) that they fade to the background, supplanted narratively by the ends to which language is placed: making money, scamming others. Language is rendered suspect here in its intentions. But the status of language, the ability for words to communicate their desired meaning, is as stable as ever for Kathleen and Corley.

Elsewhere in *Dubliners*, borrowed conventions of language become less stable as they are made to bear more narrative weight, both for the stories themselves and for the characters in them. We see this process of destabilization play out in “Clay,” which adopts and struggles with a style of effusive manners. In the story's opening paragraphs the narrator charts the protagonist Maria's many skills as a maid in a charitable laundry, mixing descriptions of her accomplishments with bits of recorded praise that she receives from her superiors and charges. Already present are verbal cues signaling that the narrator is not standing at a wholly disinterested remove. The fire is “nice and bright”; Maria “always” speaks soothingly, “always” is sought to settle people's quarrels, and “always” succeeds (82). The narrator betrays some bias toward Maria, yet the language of the narration remains relatively objective and grounded in specific accomplishments, especially compared to the other characters' effusive praise. This distinction changes at the end of the section when, before turning to Maria's thoughts, the narrator concludes, “Everyone was so fond of Maria” (83). The comment stands out because the modifier “so” is not only excessive but also colloquial: the word “so” conveys an informality that analogous terms like “very” avoid. With this line, the tenuous stylistic separation between the narrator's description and the characters' liberal praise breaks down. The language of effusive manners invades the story.

The narration turns in the fourth paragraph to capture Maria's inner thoughts, and the language of manners follows. Maria is headed to the Hallow Eve party of a man, Joe Donnelly, for whom she had cared as a longtime nanny, and her thoughts about the coming evening echo the effusiveness of the earlier narration: she thinks of “what a nice evening they would have,” and of “Joe's wife [who] was ever so nice with her” (83), and of her plans to bring “something really nice” from a bakery to share with the hosts (85). As the story progresses, this excessively amiable language continues to structure Maria's thoughts, producing two conflicting effects. On the one hand, the accumulation of adverbs—so, really, very—amplifies, even insists upon, her earnestness. On the other hand, a different type of repetition, the repetition of stock pleasantries, hollows out meaning and begins to undermine the sincerity of her effusiveness. What does a term like “nice” signify when everything is described as such? How does an expression like “such was life” account for the fact that Joe does not speak to his brother (85)? Indeed, what the reader witnesses in the layering of Maria's formulaic thoughts is an effort to will language into smoothing over painful reality, even while language resists the task. For, embedded among the niceties throughout the story are troubling details, like Joe's feud with his brother, that threaten to disrupt the pleasant surface of the evening. Maria's effusiveness clusters especially around such details, as if she bids language to rush in and circumvent the disruptive thought, or compensate for its damage. It is especially telling that, more often than not, the disruption and its subsequent linguistic rescue occur only at the level of Maria's thoughts. One might expect quite the opposite: the impulse to speak pleasant words aloud during moments of crisis would be natural, especially for someone described by her employer as “a veritable peacemaker” (83). But

Maria's speech is reproduced throughout the story indirectly, and without any of the effusiveness I have been describing. That effusive speech appears, rather, in her private thoughts. Notice the difference between two instances where language comes to calm a situation, one spoken aloud and one merely thought. In the first instance, Joe becomes angry when Maria mentions his brother, and "Maria said she was sorry she had mentioned the matter" (87). The apology is simple, even curt, though Maria may have said more than is reported to the reader. However, in the second instance, only moments later, the children propose games that lighten the dark mood Joe has created, and "everything was merry again. Maria was delighted to see the children so merry and Joe and his wife in such good spirits" (87). The effusiveness returns; it is as if Maria reserves her most reassuring language not to manage social situations but to manage her own thinking.

The brief narrative hazards that stand out stylistically from Maria's mannered and formulaic expressions in such sharp relief signal for the reader just how much is being left unsaid. The story begins in an institutional setting, a charitable laundry for wayward women that doubles as Maria's workplace and home. Maria professes to like the laundry, despite some misgivings about working among Protestants ("she used to have such a bad opinion of protestants but now she thought they were very nice people, a little quiet and serious, but still very nice people to live with") and a buried admission that she finds the women she oversees to be rather coarse (83). The reader learns that Maria landed at the laundry when her employment with Joe's family ended, following an ambiguous "breakup at home" (83). Maria's circumstances are less than ideal and say something about the desperation of unmarried, aging women in Joyce's Dublin. Maria lives a life of hard work, as small details in the narration reveal, and is quite poor: over the course of the story she calculates several times how much her trip will cost, and "she nearly crie[s] outright" when she misplaces an expensive piece of cake intended for the party (87). Maria's conditions match up to the real-life circumstances of Irish women in Joyce's time that Florence Walzl discusses in her essay "*Dubliners: Women in Irish Society.*" Walzl examines statistical data and women's professional guides from the period to conclude that "economic opportunities for young women were extremely limited, and marriages were few and late" (33). The situation is all the more dire for Maria, who spends her best working years with the Donnelly family and then must procure later in life, following the ominous "breakup at home," a new career at the laundry. Although Maria proves successful at the laundry and "become[s] accustomed to [its] life," she retains nostalgic memories of her longtime service with the Donnellys; she recalls that Joe used to say, "Mamma is mamma but Maria is my proper mother," a bold declaration of surrogacy that accounts for Maria's significant attachment to the family (and that hints, perhaps, at the larger familial strains behind the "breakup" and the brothers' feud) (83). Margot Norris describes Maria as "a figure who...embodies total desire," and who, according to Norris's argument, must compensate for lacking the ordinary markers of social significance: "family, wealth, or social standing" (206). The Donnellys—or rather, Joe, his wife, and children—serve as one remaining, tenuous link to a group of people who were at one time almost like family. It is no wonder, then, that Maria invests Joe's party with so much nostalgia and anticipatory desire. But the party threatens to unravel at every turn. Maria forgets the cakes on the tram; Joe has been drinking, as she feared he would; Maria angers him by mentioning his brother. As the evening progresses, potential disappointments threaten increasingly the surface of Maria's pleasantness; and what began as a primarily effusive narrative interrupted occasionally by perceived threats becomes something much more erratic. The story begins swinging rapidly between the party's cheerful tempo and Joe's angry outbursts,

lending a desperate and manic quality to Maria's "laugh[ing] and laugh[ing] again till the tip of her nose nearly met the tip of her chin" (86).

Over the course of "Clay," we see Maria's efforts to smooth over social reality through good manners become increasingly desperate. This occurs not only at the level of action, as Maria works to placate the volatile Joe and to join in the party's merriment, but also at the level of thought. The climax of the story occurs when the children invite Maria to play a Hallow Eve game where blindfolded participants choose from a series of saucers whose symbolic contents predict their future. Maria selects a saucer with "a soft wet substance," the titular clay which, like so many other things, the story and its characters refuse to name (88). For the clay signifies, according to most interpretations of the story, death. It also conveys in its invisible "soft wet[ness]" an excremental association. Margot Norris corroborates this latter interpretation in her original and convincing rereading of "Clay," where she argues that the saucer bears not a premonition of death but the children's resentful effort to prank Maria into believing she has touched shit (and also suggests, says Norris, how Maria's "only 'family' —like the rest of the world—treats her like shit") (212). In either case, the adults rush to stifle the clay's suggestiveness and to cover the unfortunate moment:

[Maria] felt a soft wet substance and was surprised that nobody spoke or took off her bandage. There was a pause for a few seconds and then a great deal of scuffling and whispering. Somebody said something about the garden and at last Mrs Donnelly said something very cross to one of the nextdoor girls and told her to throw it out at once: that was no play. Maria understood that it was wrong that time and so she had to do it over again: and this time she got the prayerbook. (88)

In this passage the reader witnesses Maria witnessing Joe's wife as she enacts the very same kind of cover-up that Maria has been constructing mentally all along. Maria assents to this cover-up, revealing just how shrewd she is. Earlier in the story, Maria's repetitive pleasantries had made her appear childish and somewhat naïve; but here, in this moment of "underst[anding]" that the game has been mishandled, she reveals the calculating effort it takes to hold the evening—and her narrative—together. Maria "understand[s]," rather than simply "says" or "agrees," that "it was wrong that time." The word implies, in part, that she is assenting to some explanation given to her by Mrs. Donnelly since the definition of "understand" carries a pedagogical association. But there is also a willfulness laced into Maria's act of understanding. She does not just agree aloud that the game must be restaged—and that she will banish any inklings she has about her previous selection—but also wills her thoughts to follow suit.¹⁰

The distinction I have been drawing between Maria's external effusiveness (speech, laughter) and her internal effusiveness, though, requires further refinement. We cannot say that the narration separates the words Maria speaks aloud from the words she thinks privately. In the first place, the reader never actually hears Maria's words directly—aside from the unilluminating phrases "*Yes, my dear*" and "*No, my dear*" in the second paragraph—until she sings a song the end of the story, the lyrics of which are reproduced on the page (82). Other more minor characters (the matron of the laundry, a young Joe, a bakery salesclerk, the partygoers) are quoted directly, but nearly all of Maria's speech is presented to the reader indirectly by a narrator. Yet "narrator," too, proves an insufficient term for describing the narrative perspective of "Clay." Joyce's story is not told by the voice of a removed third party who reports what people say and do to one another. Instead, much of "Clay" is written in the style that Ann Banfield calls "represented speech and thought" (*Unspeakable* 68) and that is known more generally as "free indirect style."¹¹ Through represented speech and thought, the reader is offered

privileged, direct access to Maria's subjectivity unbound from the communicative constraints of speech. Banfield argues, "Represented speech and thought is neither an interpretation of the reported speech or thought which implies an evaluating speaker, nor a direct imitation or presentation of the quoted speaker's voice" (*Unspeakable* 108). This definition has two important consequences for how we read "Clay." First, it confirms that the narration comes not from an autonomous, inviolable voice through which the narrative's information is filtered. Put differently, we can rest assured that Maria is not held out—or in Banfield's terms, "evaluat[ed]"—as an object of the narration. We don't receive her speech or thoughts secondhand, or tampered with in some fashion. Second, because the narration is also not a "direct imitation or presentation" of Maria's voice, the reader is offered a true glimpse of Maria's subjectivity. As Banfield continues, "...the speech or thought of the SELF represented"—here, Maria—"retains all its expressivity without suggesting that its grammatical form was that uttered by an original speaker, whether aloud or silently" (108). This means that the reader of "Clay" is privy to the expressive content of Maria's speech or thought *without it becoming constrained by silently or audibly spoken language*—that is, without Maria formulating the expression in words she thinks silently to herself (if ever she does) or utters aloud.

This latter proposition, that Maria's speech and thoughts are being expressed without the constraints of spoken language, seems paradoxical since the reader receives the thoughts through language. But Banfield means to suggest exactly this, and she finds something particularly freeing in represented speech and thought:

In speech, subjectivity is always linked to expression in what is formally an act of communication, and its particular nature is masked by the social role it dons in discourse. Through narrative, language is revealed to contain another sense of subjectivity than the one directly displayed by the act of saying 'I.' The particular expressive elements and constructions are in the sentences in which they appear the traces of this subjectivity. When they are no longer spoken but are represented, then the SELF, through the E [expression] to which it is referred, can be seized in its own right. (97)

Represented speech and thought, then, stylizes in language subjective expressions which exist independently of the words one speaks aloud to others, or silently to oneself. This latter proposition brings us to a peculiar situation when reading "Clay" because Maria's represented speech and nonverbalized thoughts, which according to Banfield's theory should be liberated from the social constraints of communication, are nevertheless so demonstratively mannered. We might interpret Maria's persistent decorum as proof of her wholesale inculcation in the ideological and linguistic structures of social form. According to this reading, Maria's cheerful effusiveness organizes her speech and thoughts before they are even formulated (or without their ever being formulated) into language that she speaks aloud or silently to herself. I think this interpretive impulse is right, and there may be a psychoanalytic argument to be made about how social linguistic forms are being used to manage Maria's psyche. Later in this chapter I will argue that Joyce works against just such a wholesale dependence on social forms of speech and thought, especially when it comes to nationalism. But there is something else for which we must account in "Clay": the perspective of the narration, which we have already discredited as a "narrator."

Reapproaching the first three paragraphs of "Clay" armed with the theory of represented speech and thought allows us to clarify some of the story's early narration. In the third paragraph, the comment "Everyone was so fond of Maria" can be taken plausibly to express the

collective “SELF” of the laundry; indeed, Banfield’s theory allows for represented expressions of a plural “SELF.” Banfield explains that an

E [expression] with a plural SELF represents a single point of view, perhaps even, in some cases, a collective or class consciousness...[and] need [not] be construed...as a case of speaking or thinking in unison. Instead, it is a representation of a single point of view held by more than one individual. (96)

We are also corroborated in interpreting the comment “Everyone was so fond of Maria” as the expression of the laundry’s plural “SELF” since the preceding sentences accumulate endorsements of Maria by various individuals in the laundry: first, a sentence identifies which of the laundry’s higher-ups overheard the matron’s compliment about Maria’s abilities; then, the next sentence represents one of the worker’s spoken praise about her. The theory of represented thought also allows us to read much of the first paragraph as expressions of Maria’s subjectivity. Banfield writes, “What marks represented speech and thought off from [direct and indirect] modes of reporting speech is that in them expressivity may be attributed to the referent of a third person pronoun” (88). So as Maria “look[s] forward to her evening out,” she examines the products of her labor: “The kitchen was *spick and span*...The fire was *nice and bright*...The[] barmbracks...had been cut into *long thick even slices*...Maria had cut them herself” (82). At least two features mark these lines as represented thought: first, the words I have italicized in the previous quotation are what Banfield calls “evaluative adjectives” that offer “an expression of the judgment of some third person as opposed to the speaker’s judgment” (89). That third person is Maria; she bookends the lines quoted above. Second, the final sentence of the first paragraph, “Maria had cut them herself,” presents a reflexivized third person pronoun (“herself”) that represented thought (and speech) permits (Banfield 91). We should also qualify further all these aforementioned moments of represented thought. They present, more precisely, instances of what Banfield terms “non-reflective consciousness,” a subset of represented speech and thought which defines itself against “reflective consciousness.” Reflective consciousness bears certain syntactical features that prove the SELF is reflecting upon what is being described in the represented expression (Banfield 203-6). By contrast, non-reflective consciousness, explains Banfield, captures “things which we are consciously aware of but are not the object of reflection” (197). This means that Maria is conscious of these details about her work but is not specifically reflecting upon them. The only other subjectivity captured in the first paragraph is that of the cook: “the cook said you could see yourself in the big copper boilers” (82). But these lines sounds very much like the “evaluative” language attributed to Maria elsewhere in the first paragraph, and the cook’s comment might be read as further expression of Maria’s consciousness of her good work.

Yet the second paragraph of the story still resists being interpreted as represented speech and thought:

Maria was a very, very small person indeed but she had a very long nose and a very long chin. She talked a little through her nose, always soothingly: *Yes, my dear*, and *No, my dear*. She was always sent for when the women quarreled over their tubs and always succeeded in making peace. (82)

The narration’s voice is particularly stylized. It sounds not unlike the speech of the laundry’s matron and the workers; it also sounds not unlike Maria’s cheerful thoughts elsewhere in the story. However, the voice of the laundry is developed later, after this paragraph; it cannot yet be the subjectivity that is expressed here. The story thus offers no textual indication as to whose voice or consciousness is being represented in this second paragraph. In particular, the first

sentence feels disjointed. The repetition of the word “very” makes the statement sound different from something someone would think about him- or herself. Furthermore, the sentence offers no suggestion that Maria thinks about herself in this very stylized manner, unlike the young Stephen Dedalus who, in the opening lines of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, recites a third-person story he has been taught to tell about himself, or Mr. James Duffy in “A Painful Case” who “ha[s] an odd autobiographical habit which le[ads] him to compose in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense” (90).¹² Indeed, later in the story when Maria does examine her reflection, her thoughts are presented much more straightforwardly: “. . .she looked with quaint affection at the diminutive body which she had so often adorned. In spite of its years she found it a nice tidy little body” (85). It is in lines like “Maria was a very, very small person. . .” that I think “Clay” admits the possibility of something like a narrator, even though elsewhere in the story the style of represented speech and thought replaces that narrator. The narrative voice in the opening three paragraphs captures at times what seems like Maria’s thoughts; at times what seems like the other characters’ thoughts or words; and at times—as in this description of Maria—what cannot be attributed to any consciousness but its (very slippery, impressionable) own.

Why is it, then, that this independent narrative voice “speaks” the same effusive language we witness in Maria’s counterparts in the laundry, and also in Maria’s nonverbalized thoughts? What does it mean that all three sources of speech and thought in the story share common linguistic features like the hyperbolic repetition of unnecessary adverbs (so, really, very, always)? The stylistic consistency generates a story that feels triply guarded from threat. It suggests a wholly interpellated environment in Althusser’s sense of the term, where subjects have already been “hailed” and constituted by ideology, and consequently where their speech and thought are arrested before articulation and redirected into socially acceptable forms. We cannot, of course, confirm this hunch. But we can and should note that even though “Clay” contains perspectival gaps—between Maria’s thoughts and words, the other characters’ speech, and the elusive narrative voice—those gaps go unmarked by stylistic shifts, sealed instead by a persistent style of good manners. The effect is a kind of collusion, a sense that the façade of pleasantness is guarded from every angle.

Joyce’s story, nevertheless, cannot withstand the onslaught of circumstances that threatens its effusively mannered narration. It is telling that “Clay” closes by focusing on a drunken and nostalgic Joe, whose “eyes filled up so much with tears that he could not find what he was looking for and in the end he had to ask his wife to tell him where the corkscrew was” (89). Maria’s thoughts rushed in, elsewhere in the story, to rescue disruptive moments like this; but here Joe’s debilitating condition receives the last word. By refusing ultimately to sublimate the party’s fissures through language, Joyce engenders what I want to call a crisis in formulaic language. In many of the *Dubliners* stories but especially in “Clay,” Joyce identifies and undermines the kinds of formulaic thinking and speaking that are used to smooth over narratives, to obfuscate difference. This crisis in formulaic language paves the way for, but should not be confused with, the crisis in form that Joyce stages later at the end of “The Dead.” In this earlier crisis of formulae, Joyce calls attention to particular structures of language that cover or defuse the unpleasant social truths of turn-of-the-century Dublin. In Maria’s case, the language of effusive manners could come from any of a number of sources; Margot Norris suggests that the narration expresses Maria’s poor approximation of proper bourgeois speech (209), but it also bears distinctly literary traces of the novel of manners and of Victorian girls’ primers. I think the latter sources are important to the narration of “Clay,” even though the story makes no direct

suggestion that Maria has read such works, because they speak to the diffuse messages that she would have absorbed in her upbringing, and which she continues to witness in the rhetoric of the *Dublin by Lamplight* charitable laundry (where the message of Victorian moral improvement is inscribed onto the institution via “tracts on the walls”) (84). In Maria’s insistent language of effusive manners we see at work a host of familiar gendered ideological messages that uphold the social order (for instance, that women and girls should speak and act like proper ladies, or should comport themselves pleasantly, whatever their private feelings). It is then especially ironic that this mannered language emanates from the environment of the laundry itself, which houses two kinds of women—maiden “matrons” and the fallen women they rehabilitate—who must be shunted to the institutional outskirts of society because they have failed (or have been failed by?) the ideological expectations of normative womanhood. This does not mean necessarily that Maria and the laundry’s other women endorse such ideology. We should not read them as powerless victims; nor should we follow Hugh Kenner in interpreting, similarly, Eveline Hill’s romance-novel fantasies in “Eveline” as evidence that she has been thoroughly duped by romantic conventions (20-21). In both cases the protagonist wields borrowed conventions of thought and language as a desperate mechanism of survival: Maria, to carve out through pleasantness an accepted place in a family and an institution that might otherwise have little regard for her; Eveline, to counter her late mother’s deferent and unhappy home life with the only other language she knows, that of sentimental romance. These are awkward imitations; indeed, the ill fit is precisely Joyce’s point.

In “Clay” and other *Dubliners* stories, Joyce unsettles the borrowed conventions of thought and speech by which his characters voice what the narrator of “After the Race” calls “the cheer of the gratefully oppressed” (32). Vincent Cheng has made much of this line in his study *Joyce, Race, and Empire*, using it to set up his argument that the *Dubliners* characters submit to their colonial masters through a process of Gramscian hegemony (103-27). I am also interested in this cheer of consent; but I read that cheer quite differently from Cheng, as a symptom and not a cause of the Dubliners’ oppression. Maria, Eveline, and their fictional counterparts reproduce—“gratefully,” perhaps—ideological formulae of good manners and romantic sentimentality not because they are consenting to colonial oppression but, rather, because it is the only alternative (however poor an alternative) to sheer oppression that they are granted. Whereas Cheng traces a direct causal link between colonialism and the characters’ condition of paralysis, I want to suggest that the effects of colonialism are more diffuse, sedimented in but also inextricable from many structures of economic, social, political, and ideological oppression. Speaking the language of feminine acquiescence, or mimicking exoticized romance narratives, or in the case of Little Chandler in “A Little Cloud,” fashioning oneself as the melancholic Celt that Arnold both romanticized and disparaged: though they look like signs of colonial consent, these speech acts signal, rather, the characters’ attempts to think differently from what is expected of them, and to demand more than is allotted to them.

Joyce highlights the strangeness and failures of his Dubliners’ formulaic parroting in order to rob conventional language of its hegemonizing power. That language is not—yet—specifically national, and the dismantling does not—again, yet—affect the aestheticizing powers of the nation. But “Clay” and other *Dubliners* stories anticipate the manner in which Joyce’s later writings unravel national aesthetics by contaminating literary form. As David Lloyd argues, “The political function of aesthetics and culture is not only to suggest the possibility of transcending conflict, but to do so by excluding (or integrating) difference...insofar as it represents a threat to an image of unity whose role is finally hegemonic” (19). In the early *Dubliners* stories, Joyce

launches a first attack on the formulaic language that smoothes over social reality by stifling what is incommensurable. In “The Dead,” as I will show in what follows, Joyce follows this up by refusing a distinctly national aesthetics its representational claims.

* * *

Readings of “The Dead” tend to concentrate on the story’s ending, and in particular on Gabriel’s reaction to Gretta’s tale about Michael Furey, his sense of “fading out into a grey impalpable world,” and his subsequent turn to the snow, which is also to say his turn “westward” (194). There is a general critical consensus that Gabriel Conroy reaches some epiphany at the end of “The Dead”; however, the nature of his transformation remains up for debate. In recent years, critics increasingly have interpreted Gabriel’s turn “westward” as a nationalist conversion. This tendency reflects a larger critical body of work that has endeavored to locate a more political and more “Irish” Joyce who if not nationalist—at least not in a way that was consistent with the revivalist politics of his day—was nonetheless nationally engaged. Influenced by developments in minority and race studies and postcolonial theory, this diverse subset of Joyce studies has endeavored to situate the author’s works within their historical, political, and specifically Irish contexts.¹³ Gabriel Conroy’s ultimate conversion from pretentious cosmopolitan to budding nationalist becomes especially important to this kind of critical work: Gabriel’s rescue redeems the otherwise shallow, debilitated, and self-serving forms of nationalism that *Dubliners* catalogues.

Gabriel’s conversion is typically signaled by two textual figures: the newspapers reporting that “snow was general all over Ireland” and the specter of Gretta’s late lover, Michael Furey (194). The newspapers enable a nationalist reading by recourse to Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, which links the rise of nationalism to the development of print culture. Newspapers are especially important to Anderson’s theory of how nations are imagined because they generate on a daily basis what he calls an “extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption (‘imagining’) of the newspaper-as-fiction” by people who do not know, but nonetheless can imagine, one another (35). Such “ceremonies” produce in turn “that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the hallmark of modern nations” (36). The newspaper is especially pertinent to Gabriel Conroy’s final nationalist transformation because earlier in the story he is exposed as the “wrong” kind of newspaper man. He writes literary reviews for the conservative *Daily Express*, a clandestine activity (he publishes only under his initials) that embarrasses Gabriel when it is discovered by his fervently nationalist acquaintance and fellow teacher, Miss Ivors. In Gabriel we encounter a writer who contributes to a pro-British nationalist organ—likely reviewing works by English authors, if his piece on Browning’s poems is any indication—all the while disavowing the political ramifications of doing so. When he is confronted by Miss Ivors, “[Gabriel] want[s] to say that literature [is] above politics” but knows that such an appeal to the aesthetic will not suffice, so he consequently “murmur[s] that he [sees] nothing political in writing reviews of books” (163). Gabriel’s earlier defensiveness about his contributions to the *Daily Express* enables his conversion at the end of “The Dead” to a different relationship with the national press. In the final paragraph of the story, Gabriel watches the snow falling outside his hotel window and muses, “Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland” (194). It is the newspaper—or rather, a collection of Irish newspapers—that allows snow to morph in Gabriel’s consciousness from simply a phenomenon he observes (he watches “sleepily” as the flakes fall against the lamplight) to a

conceit by which he imagines the geography of the nation. Thinking about the national press reporting phenomena “general all over Ireland” to readers like himself all over Ireland, Gabriel conjures the nation, traveling imaginatively westward from his own Dublin to the central plain, the Bog of Allen, the Shannon River, and on to Galway on the western coast. Buried, too, in the reference to the newspapers and in the story’s meticulously crafted, poetic closing lines is a suggestion that Gabriel’s writing will also transform so as to bear in some fashion his new nationalist calling.

This reading of the newspapers hardly permits an airtight interpretation of Gabriel’s conversion. In the first place, it presents a remarkably incomplete vision of the nation. If the newspaper in Anderson’s theory constitutes an imagined community through individuals who read about and alongside fellow readers, then Gabriel’s final act of reading the national landscape stands out as troublingly solitary. He does not picture any people in his imaginative journey across Ireland, only places that, furthermore, do not even house social activities that could suggest people. These are not cities, or shops, or villages that Gabriel envisions, but simply an unpeopled series of geographical sites linked by a meteorological phenomenon—hardly Anderson’s imagined community. In the second place, imagining the nation through print culture itself proves problematic, especially within the still-colonized setting of “The Dead.” As Luke Gibbons has argued, Anderson’s print culture is constitutive of a particular type of nationalism, one “driven by state formation of the Western kind, characterized by centralization, unification, and, one might add, colonial expansion” (“Identity” 359). Even if the newspapers to which Gabriel assents at story’s end—which are, in fact, the newspapers that his cousin Mary Jane has read that morning, and whose forecast she shares with Gabriel and others as the party winds down—are nationalistically inclined, they represent a particular and necessarily limited version of the nation. That version almost always omits the oral and popular traditions that, in Gibbons’s reading of “The Dead,” reverberate through the folk song “The Lass of Aughrim.” The song, Gibbons argues, reanimates Gretta’s deep personal ties to Galway, thus supplanting the “hollow, transverse relationship to the west” that Gabriel betrays in citing only official organs of national culture (358).

But the category of buried traditional cultures in “The Dead,” which Gibbons and, elsewhere, Kevin Whelan have examined in its many manifestations and historical contexts, becomes more problematic when it is made to bear the burden of proving Gabriel’s conversion. For, in addition to the newspapers, nationalist readings of the story have focused on the figure of Michael Furey as a catalyst to Gabriel’s ultimate embrace of the traditional Irish culture he has heretofore disavowed. According to this reading, Michael Furey signals the inadequacy of Gabriel Conroy’s own cosmopolitan pretensions, thereby opening up both for Gabriel and for the collection as a whole “the redemptive possibilities implicit in the resurgence and recovery of a native Irish ‘spirit’ lost to foreign imposition, the return of the racial-cultural repressed” (Valente 69). This reading, like the reading that relies overmuch on the “redemptive possibilities” of the newspaper, places too much weight on a figure that cannot bear it. The very fact that Michael Furey is dead implies that Gabriel’s conversion will be to an antiquarian nationalism predicated on relics of the dead past. Critics have taken up this problem by examining the limitations of the revivalism to which Gabriel supposedly converts. Emer Nolan argues in *James Joyce and Nationalism* that Michael Furey offers Gabriel access to the imagined community of the nation through his very death. Drawing on Anderson’s model of the imagined community—which stages “a secular transformation of fatality into continuity”—Nolan argues that the late Michael Furey shows Gabriel how his own death might be made significant within the cohesive society of

the nation (Anderson 36). In Gabriel's "intensely solitary, but yet shared" realization, Nolan locates a kind of nationalism where the reassuring realm of "tradition" gets emptied out, and consequently whose only "redemptive possibilities" lie in the possibility of a meaningful death. Nolan writes, "The form of *Dubliners*, then, retains something of the folktale, but with none of its consolations" (36). But although Nolan refuses to grant Gabriel Conroy's nationalist conversion any of the usual "consolations" that critics assign to it, she still holds out Michael Furey as an emblem of hope, however faintly. Joseph Valente, meanwhile, dismantles even the intentions of Furey himself. Comparing the boy's romantic pursuit of Gretta to the "Araby" narrator's fetishized love for his friend's sister, Valente argues that "Furey's action takes on the color of a romantic idealization that is part and parcel of the masculinist, colonizing ideology to which he appeared an alternative" (70-1). For Valente, Michael Furey's fetishistic "reading" of Gretta is no different than her fetishistic, revivalist "reading" of him (Valente points out that she nearly quotes Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* when she says, of Michael, "I think he died for me") (Valente 72). In his estimation, "The Dead" presents a series of empty revivalist gestures that culminates in Gabriel's own inadequate nationalist vision, characterized by the "fading out" of particularities into the universalizing sameness of the snow "general all over Ireland."

I find Valente's reading compelling in several ways. The figure of the sacrificial Michael Furey is indeed prompted by a revivalist paradigm at every turn: from the boy's modeling of himself as a devotee to a woman he imagines in terms not unlike the nation, to the romanticized way Gretta and Gabriel memorialize him. But I do not agree that this renders Gabriel's final vision hopeless. In Gabriel's closing thoughts in "The Dead," and particularly in what earlier in this chapter I called his formal crisis, I think we catch something between the hollow revivalism of his *Dubliners* counterparts and the commitment to praxis that many critics want to find but still fail to locate. To get at the nature of Gabriel's ultimate transformation, we need to go back in "The Dead" to a moment of failed nationalist conversion: Gabriel's encounter with Miss Ivors. As a fervent cultural nationalist, Miss Ivors offers Gabriel an earlier encapsulation of the national community that Michael Furey comes to stand in for at the story's end. As a professional counterpart to Gabriel, Miss Ivors presents a version of the national community imagined through print culture, which the newspapers later take over. (Joyce writes that "their careers had been parallel, first at the university and then as teachers"; and though he does not confirm if Miss Ivors writes for a nationalist paper, her academic and professional background places her nevertheless in the sphere of literary nationalism) (165). However, Miss Ivors fails to inspire the nationalist conversion that Michael Furey and the newspapers prompt in Gabriel, suddenly, at the end of "The Dead." What accounts for this difference? Why does Gabriel's encounter with Miss Ivors's nationalism elicit an angry retort—he exclaims, "I'm sick of my own country, sick of it!" (165)—and a pompous, defensive after-dinner speech, whereas later the newspapers and the memory of Michael Furey drive him to "generous tears" (194)?

Certainly Miss Ivors's cultural nationalism appears flimsy, all show and little substance. She bears the same superficial markers of nationalist zeal, like issuing greetings in Irish or donning Celtic adornments, that Kathleen Kearney assumed for calculating reasons in "A Mother"; indeed, Joyce links the two nationalists when Miss Ivors lists Kathleen as one of a group with whom she will travel to the Aran Islands. Miss Ivors is also aggressive and outspoken, pronouncing Gabriel a west Briton, whereas Michael Furey cannot speak. But is this enough to explain Gabriel's angry response to the former and his transformative response to the latter? For as Valente has shown, Michael Furey's sacrificial death contains its own kind of revivalist superficiality. Furthermore, his appearance might prove even more inconvenient and

embarrassing than Miss Ivors's accusation. Furey surfaces as a suddenly discovered sexual rival, spoiling Gabriel's plans to seduce his wife and making Gabriel reevaluate his entire marriage. How is it, then, that the dead boy inspires—when Miss Ivors could not—Gabriel's "generous" nationalist conversion?¹⁴

Gretta's story about Michael Furey appears at the end of a long evening that has upset Gabriel repeatedly. Throughout his aunts' party, Gabriel encounters signs of his own waning social role as a well established middle-class patriarch. Although not quite the patriarchal tyrant that Vincent Cheng takes him to be, Gabriel nonetheless is used to being the center of attention. His maiden aunts fawn over him, can hardly start the party before he arrives; and he assumes his duties in turn, managing the men at the party, carving the dinner goose, and delivering the after-dinner toast to his aunts. But scattered throughout the evening are signs that the old-fashioned social milieu of his aunts' generation, within which Gabriel has comfortably situated himself, is drawing to a certain close. In the opening scene Lily, the caretaker's daughter, resists Gabriel's flirtatious teasing with a bitterness that confuses him, and furthermore she tries to refuse the Christmas tip that he proffers as a compensatory gesture. Her snub is seconded by Miss Ivors, who insists upon berating Gabriel's politics as the two dance, despite his best efforts to steer the conversation back to amiable pleasantries. These two unmarried women who fall prey neither to Gabriel's charms nor to his patriarchal authority—Lily, in fact, seems quite indisposed to being married—stand in as the female successors to his aunts and cousin Mary Jane, an earlier generation of maiden women who very much observe both. Other threats to what Gabriel calls "the tradition of genuine warmhearted courteous Irish hospitality" accumulate over the course of the party to suffuse the evening with both a sense of elegy (exhibited especially in Gabriel's toast to Aunt Julia, Aunt Kate, and Mary Jane) and a sense of imminent societal descent (176). For the eligible bachelors at the party prove as unpromising as the ladies: Mr. Browne leers at the women; the drunken Freddy Malins must be corralled; and although the tenor Bartell D'Arcy speaks up for tradition by lamenting the death of great opera, he also proves racist, combative, and rude over the course of the evening—hardly a fitting successor for Irish patriarchy.

Gabriel recognizes as the evening winds down not only the impending obsolescence of his aunts' generation, but also the kinds of illusions he has held about them. Publicly he hails his aunts and his cousin Mary Jane as "the three Graces of the Dublin musical world," upholders of genteel hospitality (178). Privately he calls his aunts, at his nastiest moment, "only two ignorant old women" (167). These two discrepant sentiments—adulation on the one hand, dismissal of "only" two old women on the other—do not just reflect Gabriel's very different public and private personas, but capture something of a tension in the aunts' lives. As the narration explains early in "The Dead," the unmarried aunts left their family home in a lower-class neighborhood thirty years earlier, after the death of their brother. The two scraped together a modest living by singing and teaching piano, and managed to put their niece Mary Jane through the musical academy. The adult Mary Jane, in turn, supports her aunts and leads a single, hardworking, sober life that looks very much like theirs. In the three Morkan ladies, Joyce presents comfortably middle-class counterparts to the maiden sisters in "The Sisters" or to Maria in "Clay." But the difference is slim and precarious, resting upon the Morkans' social reputation (otherwise modest, the sisters become known widely for the "splendid style" of their annual parties) and long careers of catering to their "better class" pupils (152). The fundamental features of their lives, the scarcity of marital opportunities or social advancement, are the same as they were for many of Joyce's Dubliners. So too are their pretensions, their lavish compensations, and Gabriel's as well. As Gabriel begins to recognize the truth of his aunts' and cousin's social position, and by

extension his own, he sees his life for what it is. If Gabriel indeed undergoes a conversion at the end of "The Dead," that conversion accompanies an intense moment of personal reflection.

Gretta's tale about her dead lover catalyzes the last in a series of devastating realizations for Gabriel. It is for this reason that Michael Furey should be considered a final straw, rather than a singularly transformative figure. The story of Michael Furey unfolds after the party, across town at the Gresham Hotel. In the journey between the two locales, Gabriel's thoughts turn to the mid-life meditations that would preoccupy Joyce's characters in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*. In his rekindled lust for his wife, Gabriel glimpses one last chance at a passion that might arrest his inevitable aging and social decline: "He longed...to make her forget the years of their dull existence together and remember only their moments of ecstasy. For the years, he felt, had not quenched his soul or hers. Their children, his writing, her household cares had not quenched all their souls' tender fire" (186). And moments later, as they enter the hotel, he concocts a fantasy (not unlike Eveline Hill's romance-novel fantasies in "Eveline") in which "they had escaped from their lives and duties, escaped from home and friends and run away together with wild and radiant hearts to a new adventure" (187). Gabriel's seduction fantasy signals a desperate attempt to reassert his virile authority, so thoroughly assaulted by the evening's events; but it is also a strikingly writerly fantasy.

He has already been consuming his wife in aesthetic terms. As Gretta pauses in the hall of the Morkans' home at party's end to listen to Bartell D'Arcy sing "The Lass of Aughrim," Gabriel stands at a distance watching his wife as if she were an object for him to paint. Joyce writes, "There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude" (182). The imaginative structure of a painting grants Gabriel a fresh perspective on his wife, a new way to comprehend her as a subject. Still, she eludes his complete gaze; Gabriel does not manage to pinpoint exactly what it is that she symbolizes. But why does he turn in this moment to the conceit of a painting? Why does Gabriel engage a different medium than writing in his (failed) attempt to transform his wife into an aesthetic object? I want to argue that this moment of aestheticization is linked intimately to a writerly memory recounted several pages later as Gabriel concocts his romantic fantasy of renewing his passion for his wife. Gabriel recalls a letter he sent to Gretta long ago during the early days of their relationship, in which he had written, "*Why is it that words like these seem to me so dull and cold? Is it because there is no word tender enough to be your name?*" (186). In this memory, Gabriel recalls the long-lost feeling of a romantic passion so powerful that it renders language inadequate. That the memory flashes up shortly after his fantasy of painting Gretta's portrait suggests to me that the two moments are related insofar as they revive Gabriel's physical passion and his artistic passion. The moments occur at the end of a long evening during which he has felt his social authority outmoded and his writing, besieged. In fantasizing that he might somehow master a mysterious Gretta, Gabriel becomes reinvigorated by the prospect of experiencing again the kind of rapture capable of challenging his aesthetic capabilities—and also, the exhilarating prospect of making aesthetic form meet a nearly impossible task.

This is why Gretta's story about Michael Furey proves so devastating and transformative for Gabriel Conroy: it interrupts an attempted seduction and an attempt at aesthetic mastery, both of which he imagines as a last chance. As Michael Furey's unmatched passion throws into relief the self-serving flimsiness of his own, Gabriel concedes through "generous tears" that "he had never felt like that himself towards any woman but he knew that such a feeling must be

love” (194). Gabriel’s own passion will have to direct itself toward an object other than Gretta, using an aesthetic method other than mastery. That recognition sends Gabriel into what earlier in this chapter I called an imaginative tailspin, wherein the formal structures of language and image refuse to obey their representational functions and melt, instead, into “a grey impalpable world” (194). When Gabriel is shaken from his reverie by sounds outside, his language has undergone a noticeable change.

In the final, lyrical paragraph of “The Dead,” Gabriel turns his aesthetic impulses outward, tracing the snow he sees outside his hotel window westward across Ireland in a sweeping imaginative journey:

Yes, the newspapers were right: snow was general all over Ireland. It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen and, farther westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling, too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard on the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. (194)

Gabriel’s survey of Ireland cuts against the newspapers’ totalizing pronouncement that “snow was general all over Ireland.” As organs of official nationalism, the newspapers privilege general, shared conditions. Gabriel’s imaginative journey, by contrast, lists particular locales linked through the phenomenon of snow and the repeated image of its “falling.” This is an important difference. Some scholars have criticized Gabriel’s vision of the nation for being essentialist: Joseph Valente, in particular, argues that it effaces differences “much as the softly falling snow effaces the lineaments of the countryside” (72). Valente’s critique and others like it stem from the warnings that globalization theory and area studies have issued, quite rightly, about how local particularities come to be erased by structures of nationalism. But these critiques miss several important features of Gabriel’s national imaginary. First, while Gabriel’s itinerary charts a relatively straight path from Dublin to Gretta’s and Michael Furey’s native Galway, it remains remarkably incomplete as an encapsulation of the nation. The list does not pretend to be comprehensive. It also mixes vast, general geographical areas (the central plain, the treeless hills) with locales that bear proper names, and iconic geographical features (like the Shannon River) with the “lonely” and forgotten resting place of Michael Furey. In Gabriel’s incomplete geographical catalogue, we witness the scalar confusion that Marjorie Howes finds elsewhere in “The Dead” and in Joyce’s later works. According to Howes,

The ambiguous modernity of rural Ireland and the concomitant porousness of local and regional geographical scales posed a problem for the cultural nationalism that appropriated the Irish countryside, and especially the West of Ireland, symbolically, as an ahistorical and antimodern repository of Irishness. (65)

Joyce’s fiction, Howes continues, manipulates in turn these ambiguities between geographical scales (local, regional, national), and between metaphorical and material registers, in order to problematize the narrating of the nation. Howes’s argument is compelling, and it goes far in explaining how two features of Gabriel’s imaginative journey, which appear to operate at cross-purposes, work in fact toward the same goal. Gabriel names locales one by one, jumping between scales of geographical particularity; but he also joins disparate parts of the Irish nation through the incantatory, repeated image of “falling” snow. Both features work to prevent a privileging of any one place as symbolic metonym for the nation: the first, by recognizing each site as distinct and particular; the second, by refusing through a blank, overarching meteorological phenomenon to grant any one locale an exceptional status.

In Gabriel's final imaginative journey in "The Dead," Joyce counterbalances the more obfuscating forms of nationalism that are scattered throughout *Dubliners*. These include the brooches, picture postcards, and Irish-language greetings that Miss Ivors and Kathleen Kearney brandish as proof of their nationalist zeal. But they also include all types of symbolic destinations that are made to represent the nation, like the Aran Islands of Miss Ivors's summer excursion. If Gabriel runs the risk of flattening out the nation through the enveloping image of snow, he is also redeemed by it: for snow doesn't stop at the borders of the nation, as many critics have noted, but moves as does Gabriel's vision beyond the nation to the "universe" (194). This latter broadening of scope opens up in turn the possibility of quite the opposite hazard: universalism. I think that possibility is slim and well worth the risk. For Gabriel negotiates in his final vision between a superficial cultural nationalism like Miss Ivors's that can be donned all too easily and a memorializing nationalism so traumatic, says Bruce Robbins, that "it cannot be borne—cannot, it seems, be lived with, or lived with consciously" (for Gretta falls into a state of unconsciousness after relaying her memory of Michael Furey) ("Newspapers" 106). Gabriel's compromise between the two might be considered Joyce's first attempt to articulate through literary form a livable nationalism befitting a yet-to-be independent nation.

* * *

While Joyce's *Dubliners* forecasts the formal crises of Irish nation-building more than a decade before independence, Elizabeth Bowen's 1929 novel *The Last September* engages those same crises from the far side of independence. *The Last September* unfolds in 1920 amidst the civil war that would follow Ireland's war for independence and from within an Anglo-Irish Ascendancy culture that differs sharply from the urban milieu of Joyce's *Dubliners*. Bowen was herself a member of the Ascendancy, the collective term for descendants of transplanted English landowners who became a ruling class in Ireland in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries; and like the other Anglo-Irish, she led a kind of hyphenated existence with hyphenated loyalties, considered too English by the Irish and too Irish by the English. Bowen divided her time between London and her Dublin ancestral home, Bowen's Court, preserving ties to both places. *The Last September* registers the steady decline of Bowen's Ascendancy class, one that begins before the time of the novel's opening and continues long after its violent close.

In *The Last September*, Irish independence brings with it the militarization of the Irish countryside surrounding the protagonists' County Cork estate, Danielstown. Civil war curtails the carefree social journeys of Danielstown's owners, Sir Richard and Lady Myra Naylor, their assorted houseguests, and their neighboring social counterparts; and it brings the possibility of other potential reprisals from paramilitary organizations or from Irish tenants. What's interesting is that the manifold dangers of the period are registered in Bowen's novel as a type of arrival. Whereas *The Playboy of the Western World* staged the arrival of a violent virility that was promisingly regenerative, and "The Dead" confronted the coming of a nation whose frightening imprecision opened up formal possibilities, *The Last September* presents the arrival of an independence whose brutal violence cannot be—must not be, insists Bowen—sublimated in the narrative of the Irish nation. Political independence arrives for Bowen's Anglo-Irish characters with an inescapable violent shock: it comes too close, landing literally upon the doorstep of the Ascendancy Big House.

The Naylor and their neighbors hear rumors constantly, throughout the summer in which the novel unfolds, of paramilitary raids upon other estates in the area. They also glimpse small

signs of clandestine paramilitary activity on or near their property that hint at the vast scope of unseen activity, and at the violence to come. Vehicles creep quietly past the house under the cover of night; shadowy men roam the property after dark; neighbors' cars disappear for what they surmise are "nefarious purposes," and then mysteriously return (62); an armed man is found napping in an abandoned mill near Danielstown. The Naylor's nephew Laurence uses an arrival metaphor to describe the sense of impending political violence: he declares, "Things... seem to be closing in... Rolling up rather" (28). Like his hosts, Laurence seems to foresee the ultimate destruction of Danielstown, which transpires in the closing pages of Bowen's novel. There are fictional precedents scattered throughout the novel for what Bowen calls Danielstown's "execution"; there are also countless historical analogues. Agrarian destruction of Ascendancy homes, usually by fire, was common at the time. Yeats drew upon the image to convey the decline of his Anglo-Irish class in his 1927 poem "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz." Reminiscing at the start of the poem about the titular sisters amidst "The light of evening" in their "old Georgian mansion," Lissadell House, Yeats turns in the final lines to an embittered resignation. He writes,

Arise and bid me strike a match
And strike another till time catch;
Should the conflagration climb,
Run till all the sages know.
We the great gazebo built,
They convicted us of guilt;
Bid me strike a match and blow. (233-4)

Bowen's characters never say nearly so much. In *The Last September*, impending violence is more often ignored or brushed aside. But the climate of threat permeates literary form. As the Naylor's await the near-certain destruction of their home, Bowen's language takes on a violent metaphoricity. Potential harm lurks everywhere, dripping from Bowen's descriptions of even the most innocuous objects or actions. Music from a silenced gramophone "br[eaks] off with... a tingling calm as after an amputation" (155). A discarded rug "sprawl[s] like a body across the polish[ed] [floor]" (43). The danger crystallizes particularly in moments of arrival and departure, so that neighbors' vehicles "score" the driveway (50) and "crush" the road (85), and the otherwise "romantic" sound of horse-hoofs that carry away a visiting neighbor become "smothered" at a distance (96). In a particularly horrific image, an armored car comes to collect a British soldier who has been paying a social visit to Danielstown. The soldier's visit is friendly; indeed, the British infantry remain in the country ostensibly to protect the Anglo-Irish from republican violence, and the Naylor's and their peers invite the young soldiers to their social events. But Sir Richard's niece Lois, the novel's adolescent protagonist, watches in horror as the armored car carries away the soldier, with whom she is romantically attached:

The last [she] saw of [Gerald] was a putteed leg being drawn in carefully.
Something steel slid to; [she] waved, but never a hand came out. The machine
seemed already to be digesting. [Gerald] was swept from them with martial
impersonality. (137)

In this moment, and in others like it that depict harmless enough travel or visitation, the violence is purely formal. Language of danger jumps viscerally from otherwise pleasant scenes but remains marked and held apart from reality by the structure of metaphor. Nevertheless, figurative violence is distinguished from real violence by an increasingly tenuous line, and each threatens to spill over into the other. The characters live, after all, in an historical period where travel is

becoming unsafe, and where even friendly military vehicles bear, like Gerald's armored car, "martial," "impersonal[]" reminders of their destructive functions. It becomes so difficult to distinguish what is safe from what is unsafe that the British patrol lorries, making their nightly rounds to protect the local estates, are perceived by the characters as something dangerous and furtive, moving, as they do, "like someone running and crouching behind a ledge" (38).

There is, however, another type of formal violence at work in Bowen's novel. It is not simply that the dangers of political independence invade the Ascendancy characters' lives, disrupting their tennis parties with talk of death, or entering their private thoughts with metaphors of destruction. Rather, the violence of independence takes on the very form of the class's social structure: of seasonal houseguests, of jubilant arrivals and elaborate departures. In other words, the violence that is figured initially "like" or "as" a type of arrival takes over and eventually infects the whole social ritual of visiting that is so vital to the Naylor's Anglo-Irish class. And the visits are indeed integral. As Sir Richard mulls over the summer's houseguests toward the end of the novel, he notices that "Visitors took form gradually in his household, coming out of a haze of rumour, and seemed but lightly, pleasantly superimposed on the vital pattern till a departure tore great shreds from the season's texture" (200). Sir Richard's surprise lies in finding that his guests, far from being "superimposed" and superficial design elements, become a fundamental part of the house's social fabric—so integral, in fact, that to remove them is scarring.

Visitors structure the summer's division, and the novel's division, into three distinct parts: "The Arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Montmorency," "The Visit of Miss Norton," and "The Departure of Gerald." This particular organization suggests that the novel functions as an elaborate guest book or social log. And it is here, in the practiced rituals of Ascendancy society like maintaining the guest book, where violence laces itself inextricably to the culture: for the last of these entries, "The Departure of Gerald," refers not to the soldier's return home to England but to his death. He is shot and killed in an ambush while on patrol. We might read the section's title as euphemistic parody, the musings of a housekeeper with a wicked sense of humor; or, following Declan Kiberd, we might chalk it up simply to the Anglo-Irish insistence on good form. Kiberd writes, "All [the Anglo-Irish] had to protect themselves against the avenging masses was an attitude, an assumed style...an ideal of courtly behavior and *sprezzatura*...a semblance of defiant decorum" (367). But rather than attribute Bowen's phrase "The Departure of Gerald" to parody or an evasive decorum, I think we have to acknowledge the intimacy that develops in this novel between violent death and social ritual. What began as arrival metaphors for violence—like Laurence's expression that "Things...seem to be rolling up"—become by novel's end a social reality so wholly mired in destructive politics that analogy is impossible. Gerald's "departure" is, simultaneously, his death; his release from the Anglo-Irish social set (which, however friendly, does not quite approve of him and treats him rather badly when he tries to marry Lois); the relinquishing, as the armored car foretells, of his life to the "machine" of war; and a tragic event that nonetheless constitutes a vital part of the Naylor's summer at Danielstown. To tease apart these meanings, and to separate political arrival from social arrival, political hazards from social ones, is a misplaced exercise. For in the end, the "exposures of the journey," which Lois and her friend must endure while traveling home one afternoon from a party, denotes not only the exposures' most immediate referent, rain, but surely and at the same time the exposure of young ladies of a certain class journeying through unsafe territory (106).

The Anglo-Irish protagonists have no viable future in the independent Ireland that has arrived. The novel's young characters move on, Laurence to Oxford and Lois to France, where their *Bildungsromans* have the possibility of attaining narrative fulfillment; the older generation like the Naylor's tether themselves to a decaying Anglo-Irish culture until the bitter end. But Laurence's and Lois's departures cannot offer the dazzling hope of Christy Mahon's exit in *Playboy*, nor are they of a kind with the expansive travels of the modernists in the 1920s and 1930s. As Marina MacKay argues, restless travel constituted not only the subject of modernist writing in the period but also a fundamental part of the literary culture, as many of the major modernists traveled far from home. Laurence's and Lois's journeys, instead, carry the flavor of the late modernism of the 1940s, which MacKay describes as "another kind of modernism, a modernism that cannot leave home" (1601). Of course, the two do travel to England and the continent; they are not hampered by the wartime travel restrictions of the 1940s. But their itineraries are imbued with something resembling the stasis of MacKay's late modernism.

Indeed, Bowen's novel challenges MacKay's periodization of high and late modernism. *The Last September* is set in 1920 shortly after World War One; is written in 1929 firmly between the wars; but also seems very much at home with the late modernism that MacKay describes as "going nowhere...in the sense that it is imaginatively looking backward...rather than orienting itself toward a future that might not arrive" (1609). If Lois, Laurence, even the perpetually homeless Mr. and Mrs. Montmorency manage to venture out to what Lois halfheartedly calls "somewhere nonchalant where politics bore[s] them," it will be, paradoxically, out of sheer political necessity (143). The spatio-temporal orientations of high and late modernism collapse in Bowen's Ireland: looking outward and to the future coincides with psychological and cultural retrenchment; looking future-ward, with looking back.

At the turn of the century, Joyce's Gabriel Conroy looks ahead, hesitantly, toward the formal reconfigurations of an independent national culture that would not materialize until nearly two decades later. In 1929 at the height of high modernism, Bowen's novel shows the violent social and epistemological consequences of an independent Ireland that, despite the formal experimentation of Joyce and others in reimagining structures of nationalism, could not accommodate the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Laurence and Lois cannot help but "imaginatively look[] backward." Their alienation is the price of Ireland's national refashioning; they can only complete their development, if they ever do, elsewhere. The young Ascendancy protagonists are caught in the collision between the energetic opening up of a high Irish modernism that does not include them and the premature late-modernist retrenchment of their decaying social class. The temporal juxtapositions produced by that collision explain how for them "going nowhere" comes to be a condition—perhaps the necessary condition—for going anywhere else.

CHAPTER FOUR

Domestic Securities: Cold War and Cold Cash in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*

As a recent past, history is used as a bogeyman in a kind of rhetoric of binary terror. Either you accept the deregulated ruthlessness of the market or you will be cast back into the eternal night of emigration and high unemployment. Better dead than Dev.

—Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons, and Michael Cronin

...then the door clicked shut real soft, all these doors clicking shut and it was starting to rain.

—Patrick McCabe, *The Butcher Boy*

Through the boyish slang of its candy-chewing, commercial-quoting adolescent murderer Francie Brady, Patrick McCabe's 1992 novel *The Butcher Boy* delivers a searing appraisal of early Cold War Ireland. McCabe traces a watershed moment in which a newly emerging commodity culture meets the stultifying terror of nuclear politics. That he does so through a seemingly benign depiction of houses, though, is unexpected, and it reveals the violently domestic form that both economics and politics take in early 1960s Ireland.

For Francie Brady, the traumatic and defining moments of life take place at doorsteps. Doors to respectable houses close frequently before McCabe's fictional delinquent, while institutional doors lock behind him. Through the proliferation of doors and houses, the novel depicts Francie's path to violence as an unfortunate product of the ideologies structuring the imagined home of the Irish nation. During the scene from which the epigraph is taken, Francie begins to recognize—in his turn from “the door” to “all these doors”—that closing doors signal some larger pattern of social and material exclusion.

The Butcher Boy tells the tale of young Francie, who overhears his stuffy neighbor Mrs. Nugent likening his family to pigs. Francie subsequently becomes convinced he is an actual pig, and he eventually butchers Mrs. Nugent like a pig. The novel examines the literal and figurative valences of this porcine comparison, suggesting a precedent in colonialist physiognomic studies and in the comic Irish pig of the British racial imagination.¹⁵ That it does so by following Francie's movement in and out of houses, though, raises hard questions about the nature of Ireland's cherished domestic ideal. It has become something of a critical commonplace to analyze the exclusions of national ideology through Irish literature, and work on *The Butcher Boy* presents no exception. Several critics have noted the ways in which McCabe's novel attests to the dark side of the Irish domestic ideal.¹⁶ I agree with the assessment but not with the general approach, for many of these studies treat ideology as mutually constituted by state and citizen and thus—I think, inadvertently—as a monolithic construct. I want to show, rather, that domestic ideology, both generally and especially in McCabe's novel, is structured by diverse and often incommensurable material, social, and political conditions. *The Butcher Boy* lays bare the

competing layers of fear and desire that contribute to an Irish investment in domesticity, and that make it all the harder to resist.

The domestic fervor depicted in *The Butcher Boy* stems from the curious historical crossroads of the early 1960s, when in Ireland money and politics began to intersect in a particularly new way. Recent economic growth created by Sean Lemass's administration had begun to bring Ireland up to speed with the modern capitalist world. Gone were the days of protectionist economics: imported commodities and foreign investment flowed, albeit gradually, into Lemass's Ireland (Lee 186-201). Meanwhile, the nation's neutral stance in the Cold War ensured that, despite their increased access to the international marketplace, citizens remained politically and psychologically isolated. This convergence created an Ireland in which dizzying consumption of new products and values took place within a politically immobilized, paranoid society.¹⁷ McCabe traces the domestic valences of this phenomenon. His fictional community's newfound prosperity sparks a particularly consumerist competition in bourgeois homemaking: the town's housewives fill their homes with the latest commodities in a desperate attempt to remove pernicious traces of a less gentrified recent past. The domestic monitoring is accompanied by an unconscious political knee-jerk: faced with reports of impending nuclear annihilation it is powerless to stop, the town turns its energy toward policing internal enemies. *The Butcher Boy* indicts these two related exercises in domestic surveillance because each achieves its sense of security only by ostracizing social deviants like Francie Brady. McCabe's novel discloses the fictions and exclusions laced into the very notion of domestic security.

Domestic Politics

The Butcher Boy takes place during the early 1960s, and its climax occurs during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Despite this tense historical setting, the novel devotes little overt attention to the outside world. McCabe's characters are not as disinterested politically as Ireland's foreign policy of neutrality might mandate; some harbor general predilections for one side or the other. But the characters are removed, nonetheless, from the atmosphere and action of the Cold War. Whether their isolation is historically accurate remains a matter of some debate. As Clair Wills's study *That Neutral Island* demonstrates, Ireland was certainly isolated during World War Two (called the Emergency in Ireland). Wills details the culture of political neutrality, and in her discussion of Ireland's strict wartime censorship she challenges F.S.L. Lyons's famous likening of the wartime Irish to a population "condemned to live in Plato's cave" (551). In his book *Ireland Since the Famine*, Lyons concludes, "when after six years [Irish citizens] emerged, dazzled, from the cave into the light of day, it was to a new and vastly different world" (551). In Wills's account, Ireland was not quite so culturally marooned. The Irish government was unable to censor foreign radio broadcasts as it had censored print media, so citizens thereby received some war news and propaganda from abroad (180-219). Dublin also experienced a modest wartime influx of artistic and intellectual energy from overseas; Wills recounts, "an international atmosphere was fostered by genuine refugees, conscientious objectors, artists and musicians" (282). Nevertheless, Wills concludes that wartime Ireland was largely an intellectual and political vacuum, reliant upon an intelligentsia that over the course of the war became increasingly self-sufficient but also stale. This vacuum fed a more general psychological isolation that came to characterize an Irish culture of neutrality well into the Cold War.

In order to mitigate the psychological impact of political isolation and to gain widespread support for neutrality, Irish politicians waged a wartime propaganda campaign that appealed to

its citizens' morality by arguing that neutrality was the inherently ethical choice. Wills labels this attitude of superiority "sacred egoism," a term that she borrows from Joseph Lee.¹⁸ In both Lee's and Wills's estimation, sacred egoism had devastating postwar consequences. Lee and Wills are particularly captivated by Irish reactions to early reports of Nazi atrocities that filtered into the country once censorship was lifted. Many in Ireland dismissed the accounts as figments of British propaganda or brushed them aside with a practiced indifference (Lee 266-7, Wills 396-401). By war's end, the Irish state seemed to have succeeded in securing popular consensus for and moral belief in neutrality.

Postwar Ireland remained neutral in word if not in deed. Irish foreign policy decisions frequently compromised the country's strict neutrality, but citizens were seldom aware of the fact. The government maintained a public face of consistent neutral politics throughout the Cold War.¹⁹ The state's efforts were bolstered by its refusal to join NATO in 1949, which cemented Irish moral investment in a neutral foreign policy punctuated occasionally by bouts of international humanitarianism, like joining peacekeeping initiatives with the UN.²⁰ One key difference, however, distinguished postwar neutrality from wartime neutrality: the political censorship that had isolated Ireland during the Emergency did not continue into postwar life. Neutral Ireland experienced the Cold War no longer as people in Plato's cave; this time around, the impending devastation was in plain view.

The Butcher Boy fictionalizes the terror of nuclear war experienced by an isolated populace that has been robbed of the ignorant bliss of censorship. The novel's characters discuss the developing Cuban Missile Crisis and read newspaper reports, but their reactions betray a political and emotional disconnection from the events at hand. The citizens who do take sides in the Cold War give unsatisfying reasons for their allegiances: a minor character in a chip shop sides with the communists because "they're no worse than the rest of them" (40) while an old woman that Francie encounters characterizes the missile crisis as a comical Manichean stand-off between the "baldy fucker" Khrushchev and Ireland's beloved JFK (184). Francie generally eschews politics except for a brief scene in which he glimpses a newspaper headline about Cuba and subsequently fantasizes about hunting communists as, alternatingly, a comic book hero, a Hollywood gangster, and John Wayne (186-7). The various characters' misplaced bravado suggests their significant removal from the action.²¹ By dint of Ireland's neutrality, they stand so outside the events of the day that they are reduced to mimicking politics through a series of borrowed conventions and clichés.

The rest of McCabe's fictional town responds to the threat of nuclear annihilation in a manner perhaps more appropriate for a self-righteous neutral populace: they take the religious high road. Everyone in town becomes convinced that the Virgin Mary is coming to save them from nuclear devastation through the medium of the local TV salesman's daughter. Their makeshift vigil for her arrival, complete with signs that read "AVE MARIA WELCOME TO OUR TOWN," is charmingly provincial (207-8). Political helplessness is reconstructed here as sacred egoism: for the townspeople, divine salvation seems an appropriate reward for standing above and outside the political squabbles of the Cold War.

Sacred egoism, however, comes at the cost of severe paranoia. Historically, Ireland exorcised such paranoia by turning on dissidents. To compensate for its woefully underdeveloped defense forces, the Irish state often manufactured a false sense of security by policing its internal enemies. According to Eunan O'Halpin, "One of the unrecognized costs of the state's maintenance of [wartime] neutrality was an extraordinary level of domestic surveillance and control, together with robust measures against proven and suspected

subversives” like fascist sympathizers, labor unionists, socialists, and members of the IRA (253). Although many Irish intelligence-gathering practices were kept classified during the Emergency, the popular Local Security Force (LSF) was established in 1940 and turned civilian surveillance into a familiar aspect of wartime life. LSF members patrolled towns, the countryside, and particularly the coast for signs of enemy activity.²² In addition, as Wills recounts, ordinary citizens were asked to serve as the state’s “eyes and ears” and to report any suspicious activity (166).

The atmosphere of wary internal surveillance is distilled into a muted domestic vigilance in *The Butcher Boy*. While the experience of Irish isolationism structures the community’s reaction to Francie’s various social sins, which I elaborate in the following section, foreign politics remains in the background.²³ McCabe depicts Irish domestic surveillance by tracing the townspeople’s preparation for divine salvation from nuclear war. The community’s moral housekeeping prompts an overinvestment in its literal counterpart—actual homes—and ignites a furious policing of domestic spaces. The town exorcises a political fear it can barely articulate by expelling “pigs” like Francie Brady. McCabe presents Francie’s exclusion as the price the town willingly pays for its own deluded sense of security.

Home Economics

Domestic surveillance also emerges in *The Butcher Boy* as the product of economic growth during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The Lemass administration, which came to power in 1959, reversed decades of protectionist economic policies, pursuing instead a modernizing agenda that involved attracting foreign investment and fostering what Finance Secretary T.K. Whitaker called “an atmosphere of enterprise and progress” (86). As Terence Brown has noted, this economic watershed hastened the development of two tenuous social phenomena in Ireland: the modern nuclear family, and a firmly established middle class (199). The effects of national growth appear everywhere in *The Butcher Boy*, as longstanding Irish domestic ideologies meet, finally, their enabling material conditions.

In McCabe’s novel, the home becomes both site and sign of the new economic progress. The housewives in McCabe’s fictional town adorn their homes with the latest consumer products in an effort to produce and display their modern, gentrified families. They are led in their efforts by Mrs. Nugent, the uppity matriarch of a family that has just arrived from England. Mrs. Nugent and her husband serve as exemplary instantiations of the Lemass economic miracle, not only because they are wealthy but also because they are former emigrants who have returned to their Irish hometown to raise their son. The family quickly becomes the community’s most enthusiastic consumers. McCabe never details the Nugents’ reasons for leaving Ireland, but it is likely that they left in search of work, a motivation that is consistent with Irish demographic patterns in the postwar period and which also accounts for the family’s conspicuous consumption upon their return. Investing in their home allows the Nugents to compensate for the shame of having been forced to emigrate, but it also confirms, in a sense, their narrative—and the nation’s narrative—of homecoming. The familial home comes to absorb, in McCabe’s novel, widespread anxieties about Ireland’s precarious transition to a prosperous modern economy capable of sustaining its citizenry.

Newly armed with the money and *nouveau riche* values that their name connotes, the Nugents (“New Gents”) work to cultivate two signifiers of their success: their son Philip and their home. Philip dresses, likely at his parents’ insistence, in his English private school uniform,

replete with a “blazer with gold braid and a crest on the breast pocket” (2). The uniform renders him conspicuously out of place in his new school. Meanwhile, the Nugents adorn their home with a litany of bourgeois domestic goods: a television, mahogany piano, stocked refrigerator, cake stands, coordinated china, framed family portraits, and the like. Most striking for Francie, though, is the seeming ease with which the Nugents achieve this domestic perfection. He marvels, “It was as if just by being the Nugents it all came together as if by magic not a thing out of place” (47). The family’s house betrays no signs of domestic effort.

Francie’s lower-class home life looks very different from the Nugents’. His depressed mother labors obviously to maintain her home, which Francie’s father vandalizes during his frequent drunken, abusive sprees. Mrs. Brady’s greatest period of domestic productivity, when she prepares for the visit of Francie’s Uncle Alo, is characterized by a frantic energy that prompts Francie to nickname her “Ma Whiz” (21). In contrast to the leisurely, agent-less narration with which the Nugents’ house is depicted—“The [Nugents’] table was set for breakfast,” but we never see who completed the task (47)—Francie describes his mother’s housekeeping through unpunctuated, hurried language: “...there was no holding ma, talking nineteen to the dozen whiz here one minute, there the next, it wasn’t just the floor you could see your face in but everything” (19). Mrs. Brady’s housekeeping requires an expenditure of energy that matches the expenditure of breath with which Francie narrates it. Both exercises quickly result in exhaustion.

The difference between Mrs. Brady’s housekeeping and Mrs. Nugent’s rests not in the women’s respective financial resources. Mrs. Nugent does not belong to a class that can afford to hire domestic help; in fact, during one unannounced visit to the Nugents’ house, Francie gleefully catches Mrs. Nugent in the unglamorous act of cleaning her home. He notes, “She had a raggy old apron with forget-me-nots scattered all over it and a heart-shaped pocket bulging with clothes pins...She must have been washing for she had on rubber gloves and was pulling at the fingers” (55-6). The difference between the two women, rather, rests in how they present their respective households. Mrs. Nugent is able to maintain the illusion of domestic effortlessness that characterizes the new Irish home and a reified modern life; what’s more, she uses domestic consumer goods to manage her own output of labor. In a telling detail, Francie and his mother continually swat flies away from their baking; Mrs. Nugent, on the other hand, allows pristine glass domes to do the job for her.

Mrs. Nugent quickly acquires a celebrity status among the neighboring housewives and becomes the primary arbiter of propriety and belonging in the town. Her unofficial role as the community’s domestic watchdog surfaces in the novel’s first pages, after Francie and his friend Joe wheedle comics from her precious Philip. The boys’ act is not so much theft as bullying; but Mrs. Nugent is incensed by the incident and responds to the infringement upon her family and private property. She appears at the Bradys’ doorstep and delivers to Mrs. Brady a scathing indictment of her family as pigs. Francie overhears and narrates,

She said she knew the kind of us long before she went to England and she might have known not to let her son anywhere near the likes of me what else would you expect from a house where the father’s never in, lying about the pubs from morning to night, he’s no better than a pig. You needn’t think we don’t know what goes on in this house oh we know all right! Small wonder the boy is the way he is what chance has he got running about the town at all hours and the clothes hanging off him it doesn’t take money to dress a child God love him it’s not his

fault but if he's seen near our Philip again there'll be trouble. There'll be trouble now mark my words! (4)

Mrs. Nugent's diatribe strays quickly from its ostensible purpose. Even though the exchange is occasioned by an affront to her home, Mrs. Nugent's response quickly turns the focus onto the Bradys' home. In that shift, her bourgeois ideological assumptions come to the fore. She seems more affronted by Francie's slovenly appearance than by his bullying: the boy's real crime is that he "run[s] about the town at all hours [with] [his] clothes hanging off him," a crime that is more his parents' fault than his own, and which is part and parcel of his father's "lying about the pubs from morning to night." Mrs. Nugent's rant turns into a disturbing classist critique as she links the Bradys' parental negligence to their more general lowliness. In the turn from "a house where the father's never in" to Mrs. Nugent's diagnosis of the family as pigs, classism brushes up against racist essentialism. Indeed, Mrs. Nugent's comment about knowing the Nugents' "kind...long before she went to England" presents an updated version of colonialist racial typing, which itself is predicated on the notion that less developed human "kinds" stand in the way of progress and must be conquered or civilized. That Mrs. Nugent presents a social and domestic articulation of this belief makes it no less insidious.

The difference between the Nugent and Brady families transcends money. Mrs. Nugent notes that "it doesn't take money to dress a child" (though certainly it takes money to dress one like her Philip). The Bradys are deemed inferior, rather, because they lack social aspiration. The family's behavior reflects what are for the Nugents the wrong values. While Mr. Brady drinks his family's money away, Mr. Nugent remains a teetotaler, thereby freeing up funds for Philip's music lessons and boarding school tuition. Class here becomes less a matter of financial capital than of cultural capital. It is also worth noting that the difference between the Nugents and the Bradys at the time of Mrs. Nugent's "pigs" rant is relatively slim, though it widens over the course of the novel as Mr. Brady slips into alcoholism and illness. At the beginning of the novel Mr. and Mrs. Brady can still feed their family with change to spare for Francie's candies, and their home also contains bourgeois domestic commodities, though ones that prove inferior to those of the Nugents.²⁴ In material and cultural terms, they are much closer to the Nugents' social standing than is Mrs. Nugent's own brother Buttsy who lives, according to Francie, "up the mountains...in a cottage that st[inks] of turf-smoke and horsedung" (60-1). (Francie obviously harbors classist sentiments of his own). Mrs. Nugent's ostracization of the Bradys reminds us that class is interested in perceived, rather than actual, standards of living, and that the most significant differences are the ones that strike closest to home.

The Brady family's domestic troubles also reveal a longer history of the state's failure to provide for the welfare of its most vulnerable citizens. Francie's father Benny harbors emotional scars from having been raised in an orphanage, dubbed "the home," with his brother Alo. Suggestions of abuse lurk between Benny's tense silences about his institutional past: Francie notes that "when you said [the word *home*] even when you weren't talking about orphanages, da went pale sometimes he even got up and left the room" (34). Benny's traumatic childhood has a devastating afterlife, damaging his relationships with his wife, with Francie, and with Alo. As Benny reproduces his abandoning father's domestic shortcomings in his own adult life, he also reveals the orphanage's failure, indeed the failure of state institutions more generally, to rehabilitate its constituents. Nevertheless, Benny's early trauma prepares him from the inevitable letdowns of his adult life; meanwhile, his wife Annie endeavors slavishly to maintain her domestic idealism through a bad marriage, depression, a trip to the sanitarium, and finally,

suicide. After Annie's death, the Brady house falls into a state of literal and figurative decay, paving the way for Francie's eventual incarceration in various institutional "homes" of his own.

What we are presented with throughout McCabe's novel are the inconsistencies of the Irish nation's domestic ideologies. For the frenzy of domestic consumerism in *The Butcher Boy* attaches itself to and gains its legitimacy from a longstanding ideological discourse of home and hearth. The Brady family's fate exposes the dark side of that domestic ideal. Nostalgic rhetoric of Irish domesticity had long figured as a cornerstone of nationalist ideology. Éamon de Valera codified women's roles within the home in the 1937 Irish Constitution, and rhetoric of domestic simplicity accompanied many political battles during his tenure as Taoiseach. De Valera's 1943 St. Patrick's Day speech articulates his dream of an Irish countryside "bright with cosy homesteads...the romping of sturdy children...the laughter of comely maidens" (qtd. in Lee 334). This ideology, though, has fallen under particular critical scrutiny since the 1990s, when Irish literary, documentary, and academic work began to devote substantial attention to redressing state-inflicted injuries of the past. The period produced a body of work, including McCabe's novel, devoted to exposing Ireland's institutional silencing of citizens who were deemed threatening to the national domestic ideal. In his study *Outrageous Fortune*, Joe Cleary traces such work to the success of the Celtic Tiger, arguing, "In many ways, the recurrent return in the 1990s to the dark age of de Valera's Ireland acted as a backhanded validation of the present, which was clearly understood as a lucky escape 'from all that earlier business'" (162). In Chapter Five I will consider the limitations of the Celtic Tiger's attachment to an idea of "lucky escape." But here, the time lag between the traumas of mid-century Irish nationalist rhetoric and their articulation at the latter end of the century is significant to McCabe's novel because it provides a long view of institutionalism's effects.

Through Francie's boyish narration of his childhood story from an institution several decades later, McCabe fictionalizes the Brady family's entrapment, from generation to generation, in what James M. Smith calls the "architecture of containment." As Smith explains, the Free State and later, the Republic placed social deviants in institutional spaces at the margins of Irish society like orphanages, reform schools, laundries, mental hospitals, and prisons. It is no accident that most of these institutions managed persons who transgressed the nation's domestic ideals: abandoned or delinquent children, abused women and children, unwed mothers. The architecture of containment performed two key functions: first, it "confine[d] and render[ed] invisible segments of the population whose very existence threatened Ireland's national imaginary" (Smith 112). Yet, these deviants were never really invisible, for their removal from society turned them into an absent presence that "functioned as a constant reminder of the social morals deemed appropriate in post-independence Catholic Ireland and of the consequences awaiting transgressors of that morality" (113). Such silent deterrence is the architecture of containment's second function. Recently the abusive practices of particular institutions, many of them run by the Catholic Church, have been brought to light. In that expository fever, though, we must not allow individual institutions, especially the increasingly unpopular Church, to become scapegoats for the failures of the Irish state system—interested in containment rather than rehabilitation—to provide the direction and oversight needed for institutional success.

Reading Francie Brady through the lens of Smith's "architecture" renders the boy the unfortunate victim of a conservative bourgeois nationalism. Such a reading, however, neglects to address the fact that Francie buys willingly into the Irish domestic ideal. Ideology functions by its manipulation of desire and thereby constitutes beings—in Althusserian terms, interpellates them—into ideological subjects. Francie operates as a fully interpellated subject, and his longing

for domestic bliss renders him complicit with the very ideology that comes to destroy his family. The boy reveals his attachment to the ideological domesticity of de Valera's Ireland when he purchases a gift for his mother in Dublin. Francie selects a wood carving of "an old woman in a red shawl rocking by the fireside," upon which is carved the phrase "*A Mother's love's a blessing no matter where you roam*" (44). The souvenir draws on reassuring nationalist tropes—the Sean Bhean Bhocht rocks in her simple peasant dwelling while her emigrant children "roam"—and transforms political ideology into a gift shop commodity. The national ideal of home and hearth devolves here into kitsch, although not of the promisingly subversive variety that David Lloyd has examined (89-100).²⁵ Rather, this kitsch item reveals the incommensurability of two domestic ideologies at play in 1960s Ireland: the rhetoric of humble domesticity, and a more recent commercial frenzy that takes as its form domestic spending and investment in the home. The convergence of these two ideologies in the early Cold War period produces a seemingly urgent need for good Irish homes, yet the precise nature of that domestic ideal remains hopelessly vague and riddled in contradictions. McCabe captures the problematic layering of a new internationalist economic doctrine atop a conservative and inward-looking nationalist ethos. The result is an imperfect fit, captured in the contradictory souvenir that Francie buys. Having run away from home, Francie turns to a commodified domestic facsimile that cannot substitute for the real thing. He and his family remain caught between the muddled ideal of Irish domesticity and the (now, more than ever) material conditions of achieving it.

Francie does not go to his ultimate institutional "home," however, without learning a few lessons in the new economic values of the 1960s. Nor is he the only child in town to receive such an education. Young children in the neighborhood play regularly as bourgeois producers and consumers, setting up imaginary shops, hosting tea parties, and selling used comics. In fact, it may be argued that Francie simply learns about economics all too late. Francie's first lesson teaches him to privilege objects' exchange value over their use value. Initially, he and Joe collect comics and steal Philip's comics for reasons having to do entirely with use value. The boys genuinely enjoy reading comics; also, their social standing among the other children seems to hinge on this pastime. Thus, when Philip arrives in town with foreign comics that bring into relief the poverty of their own collections, the two boys stage a "swopping session" in which they take Philip's comics and leave him with their own (3). They are motivated by the social worth of such rare commodities and also by personal pleasure—in other words, by the comics' use value. For Francie and Joe, comics are to be enjoyed and bragged about. The boys are shocked, then, when they witness the manner in which Philip preserves his collection: "He had them all neatly filed away in shirt boxes not a crease or a dog-ear in sight. They looked as if they had come straight out of the shop" (3). It is clear that Philip has learned how and why to care for his belongings from his mother, who admonishes the other boys "not to damage any of those [comics] now they cost money" (3). Mrs. Nugent has taught her son to channel his interests into a long-term investment: his pristine collection will continue to accrue exchange value long after the comics cease to interest the boys or to earn them social standing.

Francie also learns the value of imported goods in Lemass's Ireland and that there is a new hierarchy within imports: American goods trump British goods. The pressure to own imported products reveals the reach of global capitalism. The America-England-Ireland hierarchy to which the town adheres combines an older England-Ireland imperial relationship and Ireland's more recent capitulation to American economic imperialism, which Tom Nairn has described.²⁶ Francie attains a type of social credit by bragging to Philip about his own nonexistent American comics. He brandishes the persuasive tactics of a seasoned salesman,

advertising the comics' rarity ("you couldn't get these in England or anywhere, oh no—only America") and increasing the comics' perceived worth by feigning high demand (he tells Philip, "I might have to swop or sell these comics very soon") (50-1). The comics do not materialize, though, and Francie cannot claim the social rewards of his invented imports.

He does cash in on the social value of his Uncle Alo, who emigrated to England and is rumored to have achieved economic success there. Toward the beginning of the novel, Alo's impending visit bestows a momentary celebrity upon the Brady family, as the town ladies fawn over Francie and rehearse Alo's many accomplishments. Francie mocks their fawning as "The History of Alo programme" but takes secret pleasure in their approval, adding his own refrain about his uncle's professional success: "Ten men under him" (15, 18). Once Alo arrives, Francie regards him as a cherished commodity, ogling the man fetishistically: "I couldn't stop looking at [Alo], the gold tiepin and his polished nails, the English voice. Nugent's was only half-English. The more you thought it the harder it was to believe that Nugent had ever been anything worth talking about" (29). The list of Alo's traits finds direct parallels in the Nugents (Philip's private school blazer and the family's "half-English" accents), and Francie's comparison is structured by the language of economic value. Using Alo as currency, Francie can declare the Nugents no longer "worth talking about."

Francie's success is short-lived, however, and during Alo's visit the boy learns a devastating lesson about neocolonial economics. At the end of Alo's welcome party, Francie's drunken father vitiates his brother's vaunted success: "Ten men under him, said da, that's right. Closing a gate in a backstreet factory that's what he's been at from the day he landed there, tipping his cap to his betters in his wee blue porter's suit. Oh Alo went far, make no mistake!" (36). Benny's outburst suggests the wishful delusion behind the town's desire to read Alo as an exceptional case in the otherwise depressing history of Irish emigration. He diagnoses his brother's posturing as mere cover for a desolate situation: Alo emigrates from postcolonial Ireland only to find himself at an economic dead end. Benny's description of his brother's deference—"tipping his cap to his betters"—exposes the neocolonial nature of Alo's relationship with his English employers. Francie learns a lesson from his father about the nature of Alo's British airs and, by extension, of his own desires. If Alo's speech patterns and attire are compensations for being made a continual victim of uneven economic development, then Francie's very economic desire for Alo become misplaced and indirectly exploitative.²⁷ Alo joins the ranks of the many Irish excluded from, or duped by, the promises of a national domestic ideal. Shuttled overseas from an Irish boys' home to a backstreet London factory, where he works as a "wee" underling, Alo must compensate materially for having been excluded and then expelled from the ideological home of the Irish nation.²⁸

Most devastatingly of all, Francie learns that by violating the ethos of Mrs. Nugent's economically motivated domesticity, he invites his own social exclusion. The town copies the Nugents' spending habits and accompanying social aspirations, and even Joe Purcell's parents—with whom Francie was once close—come to consider Francie a dangerous companion for their son, an obstacle standing in the way of Joe's proper social development. In their change of heart, the Purcells join their counterparts in adopting the collective amnesia of progress, in forgetting the poverty of Ireland's recent past and casting aside the poor and dependent as hindrances to modernity. Out-spent and out-classed by his neighboring betters, Francie must be ultimately outcast and relegated to the institutional margins of the state.

The Economics of *Bildung*

Francie's cultural poverty and bouts of institutionalization shut him out of key developmental stages in his social and sexual maturation. The novel takes place during the boys' late childhood and early puberty, and it stages the transition from the homosocial bonds of boyhood friendship to heterosexual energies. Francie misses out on this key transition when he is sent away to a boys' industrial school. After he returns two years later, his classmates have advanced to their second year of secondary school while he is held back in primary school; the humiliation and boredom of being schooled among younger children leads Francie to end his education. In the intervening time, Joe has acquired new friends and interests. Francie attempts to recreate their idyllic boyhood camaraderie by restoring their abandoned old hide by the river and buying Joe candy and, now, cigarettes too. But Francie becomes increasingly irrelevant to his friend. His irrelevance is marked in the novel as cultural impoverishment, a consumption of outdated media and goods. When Francie begs Joe to "put on the cowboy voices like he used to," Joe obliges reluctantly, and only after protesting that "he couldn't do them any more...that [it was] a long time ago" (116). Cowboys and Indians serves an embarrassing, outmoded relic of boyhood for Joe, a fact Francie only recognizes when he sees Joe and Philip on a double date at a café, listening to a record on the jukebox that Francie has never heard (Johnny Kidd and the Pirates' "Shakin' All Over"). Francie registers his exclusion as a lack of cultural capital: "I said to myself: All you know about is John Wayne Francie" (144).

Sexual interest in this novel, like class and domesticity, is a significantly material matter. Joe reveals to Francie that being sexually attractive to girls requires cultural currency, having access to the right material goods and social resources. Whereas earlier in the novel Francie's broken television presented an unfortunate but surmountable setback in the boys' competition over media, his stint in the industrial school leaves him at a more irreparable disadvantage when he approaches the sexual market. Francie emerges socially stunted and, therefore, sexually stunted from his period of cultural isolation. The precise nature of Francie's sexual desires (if he can be said to have them) remains difficult to discern. The reader is assured that Francie is at least capable of sexual stimulation if not sexual desire—he notes, almost in passing, a moment of physical pleasure: "Whee away down the hill and your mickey going *man that's great keep doing that*" (167). Francie's close homosocial friendship with Joe complicates a diagnosis of his burgeoning sexual interest, for his fantasies about picking up girls with his friend suggest that Joe may actually be his ultimate object of desire. (Certainly, too, Francie's abuse at the industrial school by Father Sullivan leads in complicated ways to his sexual latency.) I am less interested in this character's sexual drives, however, than in the novel's portrayal of sexual attraction as an inherently socioeconomic construct.

Francie comes to blame Joe's departure for boarding school on his own sexual irrelevancy; and he understands his sexual irrelevancy as cultural impoverishment. Setting out to win back his friend, Francie plans a revised version of Joe and Philip's café double date. This time around it will be Francie who brandishes cultural references with finesse. After buying a new white jacket "like what you'd see Cliff Richard wearing" (168), Francie prepares to strut into the café:

I was going to go right in and say hello to Joe and them all sitting there and if they wanted me to sit beside them then all the better...

Then I'd smile and sing a bit of the song: *When you move in right up close to me!*

I knew a good bit of it now from hearing it on the radio.

Then I'd get up and walk down to the jukebox. I'd lean over it for a minute and drum my fingers on the sides thinking over what I was going to put on. If the blondie one or the other one looked down at me I'd grin at her or maybe wink. Then the record would be selected and on it would come. I bought fags so that I would be able to flip one out for her when I sat back down again... (169)

This fantasized scene is structured entirely by citation: Francie dresses like Cliff Richard, quotes from the song, and copies the nonchalant cool of young '50s Hollywood. John Wayne stoicism gives way to a James Dean swagger for, as Francie states, "there's to be no more about John Wayne or any of that, that's all over. Everything's changed now it's all new things" (168-9). In abandoning John Wayne, Francie gives in to sexual pressure. He leaves behind the familiar homosociality of westerns and comics in order to adopt the heterosexual conventions of rock and roll culture. I disagree with Elizabeth Butler Cullingford's reading of *The Butcher Boy* as presenting a glorification of the Hollywood western. She indicts the boys' cowboys-and-Indians games as misogynistic. For Cullingford, it matters not if the boys play the troubling part of cowboys (an identification which "ought to be, from a postcolonial point of view, the 'wrong side'") or the more postcolonially acceptable "revisionist" role of Indians (ideally, an Irish identification with a kindred "dispossessed tribe") since both versions of the western exclude women ("John Wayne" 161, 173). I want to suggest, however, that the novel is in no way blind to this exclusion. In fact, the western's disregard for women is McCabe's very point. It is precisely the homosocial mentality of the western and the comic that Joe and Francie must outgrow in order to become heterosexual mature men. Francie's failure to transcend this boyhood world reveals not his inherent misogyny but, rather, the very materiality of the adolescent transition that Francie cannot negotiate. Francie accumulates obstacles—the stigma of coming from a notorious home and of having been sent to industrial school, his poverty and lack of education—that conspire to hold him in a state of social and therefore sexual latency.

Not surprisingly, Francie's rehearsed café scene never comes to fruition, and Francie compensates for his unattractiveness by teaming up with another social misfit, known only as "the drunk lad," and starting fights at local dances. Francie's companion lashes out with crude, sexually violent comments about the girls who refuse to dance with them; Francie, however, simply rebuffs the girls and redirects his violence toward their boyfriends, his ostensible sexual rivals. Once again, Francie imagines cultural currency as the difference between these young men and himself, and he targets the suitors who most flaunt their cultural know-how, boys "dancing away with [their] girlfriend[s] shouting into [their] ear[s] about liking Cliff Richard or saying the guitar player in the band was [their] cousin..." (148). Francie responds to the boys' wistful name-dropping in the only manner he can, with his fists.

Francie's isolation in the cultural vacuum of the industrial school renders him the fictional counterpart to the real-life sexual victims of Smith's architecture of containment. As Smith details, the strict religious, single-sex, and often abusive programs of many state institutions likely thwarted its inhabitants' healthy sexual development. In addition, certain institutions, particularly mental hospitals and the laundries for prostitutes and unwed mothers, attended to the eugenic goal of sterilizing deviant sexual drives. Francie's father enjoys limited success in breaking out of this systematized containment: he finds a wife after being raised in the boys' home, though he cannot maintain the pristine family life mandated by a modernizing Ireland. Francie, on the other hand, spends his adult life institutionalized and celibate, clinging to nostalgic memories of what he imagines was a prelapsarian boyhood. The novel's final pages

show Francie, still incarcerated “twenty or thirty or forty years” later (230), hacking at an ice puddle with a fellow inmate he wishes was Joe:

Then he said give me a bit of that stick there like a good man and the two of us started hacking away together beneath the orange sky. He told me what he was going to do when he won his money then I said it was time to go tracking in the mountains, so off we went, counting our footprints in the snow, his with his bony arse clicking and me with the tears streaming down my face. (231)

By novel’s end, Francie’s oft-repeated memory of first meeting Joe at a frozen neighborhood puddle has become rote. Francie is permanently stuck in a nostalgic pre-adolescent fantasy, and it is fitting that his final words in the novel recall the “tracking in the mountains” game that he and Joe once played before the pressures of heterosexual desire came into play. Of course, even the seemingly prelapsarian moment to which Francie clings, the day he first meets Joe, is structured by consumer desire. Francie breaks the ice by asking Joe, “what would you do if you won a hundred million billion trillion dollars?” (43). The boys’ friendship was always marked by their mutual material desires, and it is only inevitable that their childhood consumption of westerns, comics, and candy should turn for Joe into more (hetero)sexually motivated consumer desires.

The boys’ transition from childhood to heterosexual adulthood is shaped by the improving economic conditions of the historical moment. The Lemass economic miracle offered Irish citizens material and financial liberation from years of hardship; it also marked a departure from the dimly celibate landscape of the early- and mid-twentieth century, where poverty had prevented many Irish from marrying. To understand the promising nature of adolescence for the characters in *The Butcher Boy*, we must place the novel’s fictional young men alongside the generations of unmarried Irish men and women that Kerby Miller describes in *Emigrants and Exiles*. Miller explains that the many young individuals in the pre- and post-Famine period found themselves without inheritances or dowries and, therefore, without the means to marry; and even inheriting sons were forced to “endure[] demeaning periods of prolonged adolescence” from parents reluctant to hand over their holdings in such a harsh agricultural economy (405).²⁹ Celibate bachelors and maids continued to feature in Irish society well into the twentieth century and have become a hallmark of Irish writing, captured memorably in the frustrated Paddy Maguire of Patrick Kavanagh’s poem “The Great Hunger” and the maiden Morkan aunts of Joyce’s “The Dead,” and described in John A. O’Brien’s 1953 collection *The Vanishing Irish* as “[w]ithout doubt, the strangest species...on the face of the earth today” in its refusal to marry (29). The 1960s, however, ushered welcome transformations in Irish family life. The young men and women who came of age during the Lemass era found themselves able to escape the inevitable celibacy of many of their forebears. As Lee notes, marriage rates rose significantly from the late 1950s through the early 1970s, and people began to marry earlier. This phenomenon, accompanied by falling emigration rates, managed to “reverse the trend of more than a century” (360). In other words, the financial boom resulting from Secretary of Finance T.K. Whitaker’s *First Programme for Economic Expansion* raised the standard of living to the point where it could support Irish families. Lee credits Lemass with being able to recognize that the national domestic ideal was only achievable through material means: “Lemass prated little about the sanctity of ‘the family’. But 4 per cent economic growth and a rise of about 50 per cent in material living standards during the 1960s at last made it feasible for the number of families to increase” (360). These demographic trends emerge as a sense of marital possibility in *The*

Butcher Boy: Francie's generation can afford to remain in Ireland to marry and raise families, whereas many of their parents' generation were forced to emigrate. Joe's and Philip's education, and their inculcation in new bourgeois models of *Bildung*, become especially important because it is likely they will neither move abroad nor remain bachelors, but rather, will become husbands, fathers, and professionals in a modern Ireland.

But as Terence Brown argues, Irish growth under Lemass created "victims as well as...beneficiaries" (202). Francie becomes one of these victims, exempt from both economic liberation and heterosexual, marital fulfillment. What's more, he reveals the interdependence of these two elements in modernizing Ireland: sexual and marital success is predicated on having access to new goods and cultural resources. That sex and marriage have an economic dimension is no new discovery, but McCabe exposes the particularly consumerist form that the two take in the increasingly commodified 1960s society. Francie Brady reveals that the new sexual liberation is restricted to those who have already been liberated materially. The modernizing state and its stewards like Mrs. Nugent conspire to ensure that, unlike his parents, Francie Brady will not procreate or, in turn, recreate his substandard Irish home and family. Francie's permanent celibacy serves as an ultimate confirmation of Mrs. Nugent's domestic triumph and proves that, in this community, social engineering begins and ends in the home.

Genre and Agency

Francie's permanent relegation to an institutionalized condition of boyhood raises questions about genre and narrative possibility in Ireland. *The Butcher Boy* draws a parallel between Ireland's historical transition to a more prosperous global-capitalist future and the characters' fictional transition to adulthood. Together these pivotal moments should indicate a concurrent opening up in both the material world and in the world of narration. However, Francie's exclusion from adolescent maturation highlights the disparity between those individuals who are allowed to graduate to this new consumerist adult world and those who are barred from it. All indicators suggest that Joe and Philip will complete their educations, enter a profession, marry, and join the ranks of middle class adulthood—in other words, that they will complete the developmental progression of the *Bildungsroman*. Francie is denied this personal and narrative telos. His process of *Bildung* remains incomplete, trapped in a perpetual repetition of his pre-adolescent past. The novel's final pages echo the opening lines: we learn that "twenty or thirty or forty years" have passed, and Francie remains in the institution (230). McCabe offers indication neither of Francie's immanent release nor of his ultimate rehabilitation. Instead, time remains suspended in the final lines as Francie plays out yet another wan replica of his and Joe's childhood rituals.

The truncated *Bildungsroman* is nothing new in Irish literature. Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* presents the most obvious example, but thwarted development proves a common trope throughout Irish literature. Irish writing's interest in the *Bildungsroman* emerges in part from the contradictions of modernism, which according to Geoff Gilbert correspond to "the style of the developing body" (57). For Gilbert, modernism presents itself as a condition of adolescence that calls into question the ethos of the adult social world to which it refuses to acquiesce. In this refusal, it offers the promise of a yet-to-be-materialized future. But in Ireland, fictional adolescence seems less to refuse the adult world than to expose its limiting material and social conditions. Taking a cue from the real-life emigration of many Irish adolescents, the other unfinished *Bildungsromans* that my dissertation examines—those of Synge's Christy Mahon (for

Playboy is a *Bildungsroman* if we are willing to be liberal with the term), Joyce's Stephen Dedalus; and Elizabeth Bowen's Lois Farquar—all finish with a departure to someplace where developmental and narrative completion is possible.

Terry Eagleton has argued that the turbulent colonial status of Ireland prevented an Anglo-Irish literary tradition in the realist novel from developing. His argument also helps to explain why one of realism's most common narrative structures, the *Bildungsroman*, remains absent or unfinished so often in Irish literature. Just as "an Irish *Middlemarch* is difficult to envisage," so too is an Irish *David Copperfield* (150). The failure of both genres can be attributed to Ireland's underdeveloped middle class, for as Eagleton explains, "the [realist] novel...is born of the middle class's dawning awareness that their own quotidian experience can be dramatically exciting" (149). How curious, then, that *The Butcher Boy* should document the rise of a sturdy middle class but still deny Francie Brady the narrative fulfillment of the *Bildungsroman*. Indeed, McCabe depicts socio-historical conditions that should render the genre finally possible. The consumer culture he describes in his novel is not simply a limited urban phenomenon but, rather, spreads to outlying areas like Francie's hometown. We witness in *The Butcher Boy* the newfound "settlement and stability" of Eagleton's realist novel (147), the widespread "predictable, pedantic suburbanism" that McCabe describes in his 2006 novel *Winterwood* (15). Yet, McCabe documents this social shift by narrating *The Butcher Boy* as a Gothic tale.

In one respect, the Gothic mode seems an obvious fit, given the Cold War setting. *The Butcher Boy* can be said to extend the Protestant Gothic tradition of writers like Charles Robert Maturin, Sheridan Le Fanu, and Bram Stoker. McCabe's novel brings the "psychic alienation and anomie" of the Anglo-Irish Gothic up to date with Cold War terror, the religious "guilt and self-torment" of the nineteenth century up to date with the moral conundrums of political neutrality (Eagleton 188-9). Jameson's political unconscious, which Eagleton invokes in his description of the Protestant Gothic, resurfaces in the uncanny return of the surveilled but uncontainable Francie Brady.

However, the fictional town of *The Butcher Boy* is not quite the "stagnant backwater secluded from the mainstream of history" that, according to Eagleton, characterizes the typical Gothic tale (188). Once again we are faced with the paradoxical situation of 1960s Ireland: political isolation tempered by, but also complicated by, economic admission to the global capitalist market. While the political situation of Cold War Ireland maps obviously onto the terror of the Gothic mode, we must also consider seriously the quite different Gothic traces of this remarkable economic moment. For an isolated non-player in the Cold War, the economic growth of the early Lemass years must have felt like a precarious second chance at global modernity. Ireland could not afford to be held back by atavism or recalcitrance: a sharp break had to be made with those unwilling or unready to go along for the ride. The perceived demands of modernization also explain why social containment of deviant individuals was so often presented in morally laden, indeed, even Gothic terms. For if "economic destiny is equated with political fate [then] oppositional forces who contest the equation [must] variously [be] presented as naïve, retrograde, irresponsible, or ungrateful" (Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin 7). The unique euphoria of this economic moment renders such exclusions difficult to recognize and even harder to critique; and so Francie Brady must bide his time with the all the others whose residual and repressed demands cannot be channeled into capitalist euphoria.³⁰

The Butcher Boy is no typical Gothic tale, though; for one, it is funny—irreverently and seductively so. Francie's disarming humor remains the most consistent challenge of reading the novel, for to root for this protagonist is to be forced ultimately with a choice: condone, justify,

and perhaps even celebrate his grisly murder of Mrs. Nugent, or turn on him by joining the ranks of his loathsome neighbors. This is troubling not because it presents a moral conundrum. Surely we have rooted for other fictional killers before; furthermore, McCabe's one-sided narrative leaves the reader very little reason to sympathize with Mrs. Nugent. Rather, the murder is troubling because it accomplishes very little. There is to be neither institutional reform nor political redress for Francie Brady. We are faced with a situation in which a gross expenditure of violence yields naught. That simply makes bad economic sense. We cannot read Francie as a viable voice of resistance, no matter how much we might like to. Francie's rage remains untenable for any larger assault on capitalist ideology because he is so implicated in, and drawn to, its material allure. Perhaps it is just as well that he is never forced to choose between the domesticity that Mrs. Nugent espouses and any type of political subversion. It is difficult to imagine that, given the choice, he would choose resistance over "black and white tiles in the scullery and a twenty three inch television" (97).

With both narrative fulfillment and political agency forestalled, all that remains at the end of *The Butcher Boy* is a Gothic inkling that all is not well. That suspicion, though, is worth more in this particular setting than it might at first seem: it serves as an antidote to a culture seduced into complacency by foreign investment and foreign pleasures. The fictional townspeople are lulled by a type of Freudian mania, a euphoric sense of having been released from the melancholic conditions of the past. For them, the mania of consumer culture provides an anesthetizing function: it prevents them from remembering a depressing colonial history but also, perhaps more devastatingly, from recognizing its vestiges in the neocolonial economics of the present. Francie, however, intimates rightly that the economic "miracle" of global capitalism has not lived up to its promise, and furthermore, that it is exploitative in a familiarly colonial manner. As Joe Cleary reminds us, "the most emancipatory developments can sometimes collude with or be commandeered by the regressive" (7); and indeed, *The Butcher Boy* exposes the Brady family's poverty, abuse, madness, and institutionalization as the dirty secret that lies beneath the seemingly emancipatory economic euphoria of 1960s Ireland. This awareness cannot save Francie from permanent incarceration. Nevertheless, he remains better off than his misguided neighbors who in copying the compensatory consumption of Mrs. Nugent—former emigrant and capitalism's latest stooge—never recognize that there is anything to mourn.

CHAPTER FIVE

Playboys and Other Late Arrivals: Immigration, Freedom, and the Irish Economic Miracle

In recent accounts of Irish history, the Celtic Tiger appears as a developmental telos that puts to rest the feverish aspirational desires I have been charting in this dissertation. In 1997 the *Economist* declared Ireland “Europe’s Shining Light” and, eight years later, the country with the highest standard of living in the world (“Economist Intelligence Unit” 3-4), thereby constructing a rags-to-riches story recited by Irish politicians, the Industrial Development Agency, the tourism board, and in popular culture. What laces together the disparate narratives of Celtic Tiger triumph is a firm conviction that Ireland has arrived, finally, at the vanguard of global capitalism. Economic success does not obviate the drive for continued development—many such narratives about Ireland’s rapid growth and enviable quality of life aim expressly to woo new investment—nor does it halt ambition, as prosperity produces feverish desires of its own. However, ambition must be refashioned to suit the Celtic Tiger’s public face of stability and certitude. National aspiration in contemporary Ireland becomes predictable, no longer accommodating demands for radical social change, but rather following standard models of economic expansion and an inherent belief in capitalism’s good.

Critics of the Irish success story worried long before the recent economic collapse about the conformist implications of the Celtic Tiger’s perceived finality. In their 2002 co-edited collection *Reinventing Ireland*, Peadar Kirby, Luke Gibbons, and Michael Cronin take issue with narratives that proclaim the country’s “break with the [poor, underdeveloped] past and the coming-of-age of an enlightened, tolerant and liberal Ireland” (2). By framing contemporary economic expansion as a transformation that can exorcise the considerable ghosts of Irish history, they claim, proponents of the Celtic Tiger inspire uncritical acceptance of the global capitalist model in exchange for a curative promise upon which it cannot deliver. This uncritical acquiescence to the narrative of arrival has stultifying effects on cultural production and scholarship where, Joe Cleary argues, “the ‘end of history’ structure of feeling weighs” heavily (2); and it obliterates arenas of political dissent by “drastic[ally] narrowing...the parameters within which contemporary politics are articulated” (Cleary 71).

The fantasy of certain, predictable prosperity and the concomitant stultifying effects of that fantasy collide in Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle’s centennial adaptation of J.M. Synge’s 1907 *The Playboy of the Western World*. Adigun and Doyle’s play, which bears the same title as Synge’s original, updates *Playboy*’s early-century tale about colonial escape to accommodate the seeming certitude of contemporary Ireland. Synge’s play, an early offering from the Irish National Theatre, had staged the rebirth of an articulate and sovereign Irishman through the development of Christy Mahon, a young rural squatter who kills his father and escapes from poverty to Mayo, where he becomes a folk hero and future son-in-law to the well-off local publican. Christy’s linguistic and physical development from a lowly peasant to the town’s virile “playboy” models national development; and at play’s end, after his supposedly dead father turns up alive to reveal him as a fraud, Christy departs triumphantly from the town, proclaiming himself “master of all fights from now” (3.636-7). *Playboy* (2007)³¹ reconciles Christy Mahon’s desperate improvisational sensibility to the seemingly inevitable prosperity of contemporary Ireland by taking as its protagonist Christopher Malomo, a Nigerian man seeking asylum and

celebrity in Celtic Tiger Dublin.³² By identifying a third-world immigrant—and not a native Irish citizen—as the modern-day counterpart to Christy, Adigun and Doyle present Ireland’s own arrival as a foregone conclusion. Indeed, the very mark of its global arrival rests in the fact that Irish society becomes the stage for Christopher’s rise to fame. Nevertheless, *Playboy* (2007) mitigates the triumphalism of contemporary Ireland by revealing the ambivalences and immense failures of the global capitalist developmental model that Christopher attempts to follow.

Christopher’s aspirations first come into focus during the mirror scene that opens Act Two, where he primps alone in the pub (his newfound home and workplace), admiring his reflection in a mirror that contrasts sharply to the one he had at his father’s house in Nigeria. Christopher declares that from this moment forward, he will be an attractive man. In both this play and in Synge’s original, the moment signals an important transformation in the protagonist: throughout the remainder of the scene Christy/Christopher begins performing his new persona, retelling and embellishing the tale of patricide while waving a chicken leg as prop. In each case, the young man reflected in the mirror walks, speaks, and carries himself differently from the “slight” and “very tired and frightened and dirty” man who enters the pub in Act I (Synge 1.166).³³ Declan Kiberd has made much of this moment in Synge’s *Playboy*, proclaiming that Christy’s glance in the mirror “points forward to that moment when Christy will form a conception of himself, rather than existing as a conception of others. This is the first act in any revolutionary agenda” (184). As I argued in Chapter Two, Kiberd generally reads Synge’s play as more hopeful politically than I think is warranted. He traces in Christy the Fanonian developmental script, from the romantic finery of nationalism to the violent political efficacy of liberation, hence his connection of *Playboy*’s mirror scene to revolution. But Kiberd is right to single out this moment as transformative. Christy Mahon looks at his reflection in the looking glass (a physical object imbued with the town’s adoration), likes what he sees, and begins envisioning new social horizons for himself. “Didn’t I know rightly I was handsome,” he muses, “and I’ll be growing fine from this day, the way I’ll have a soft lovely skin on me and won’t be the like of the clumsy young fellows do be ploughing all times in the earth and dung” (2.15-19). Christy’s logic remains hazy here; it is not yet clear if “soft lovely skin” is the cause or the effect of a life free from hard labor. Nonetheless the young man is certain that he has undergone some ontological transformation, one that involves both physical attractiveness and social betterment.

Christy’s latter-day counterpart Christopher also finds looking at his reflection an occasion for rethinking his social standing. In *Playboy* (2007) the scene marks Christopher’s movement from third-world bodily standards to first-world ones. He notes that in Nigeria, obesity is valued in men since it signifies their affluence. Christopher is relieved that his slimmer physique will be appreciated in Ireland. At the end of this private reflection, right before he is interrupted by the local girls, Christopher announces, “Henceforth, it’s forward ever, backward never.” His sentiment expresses the immigrant’s sense that his or her personal history has undergone a rupture—the future will be definitively better than the past; and, given its origin as an African political slogan, the statement might corroborate Kiberd’s thesis about *Playboy*’s revolutionary potential were Christopher’s application of it not so flimsy. Christopher takes the slogan of an anti-colonial revolutionary movement (the phrase is Kwame Nkrumah’s and was adopted by his Ghanaian Convention People’s Party) and uses it not to comment on social inequality or Africa’s continuing development but, rather, to further a neocolonial narrative of first-world progress and opportunity. An anti-colonial rallying cry is here reduced to expressing, at best, Christopher’s relieved escape from the stringent social posturing of his fellow Nigerians;

at worst, his pleasure in his newly discovered prettiness and the possibility of making it in Ireland.

Relieved of its revolutionary import, though, “forward ever, backward never” holds up as a summation of the story about postcolonial success that *Playboy* (2007) attempts to narrate, wherein Ireland—now basking in the success of globalization—exports its blueprint for liberation to other still-developing world sites. Mustapha Matura’s 1984 *The Playboy of the West Indies*, set in 1950s decolonizing Trinidad, follows this translational and transnational model. *Playboy* (2007) follows suit, trading Christy Mahon for Christopher Malomo in a sweeping multicultural gesture. The decision to cast a Nigerian immigrant as the new Playboy also reflects the particular function that immigration served in the new national narrative of Celtic Tiger prosperity. The large-scale arrival of foreign-born migrants to Ireland during the 1990s and early 2000s seemed to signal a reversal in the country’s history of emigration, thus marking Ireland doubly as a viable space: native Irish citizens could not only survive at home but finally thrive, and newcomers offered Ireland a flattering image of itself as the fitting repository for immigrant hopes. The immigrant, I want to argue, offers a convenient and problematic figure for the post-developmental discourses of contemporary Ireland. He or she appears to affirm Ireland’s ascension to first-world status, to mark its developmental trajectory as complete. We can see this fantasy emerge in *Playboy* (2007) through the characters’ benevolent welcome of Christopher and the local girls’ eagerness to plot out a star-studded future for their new arrival. Adigun and Doyle’s characters advance a liberal, tolerant, life-affirming and tourism-friendly version of their country that the critic Gavan Titley calls “Ireland™” (12). Contemporary Ireland appears to be the place where fortunate new immigrants can inherit the all-but-cemented success of Ireland’s native populace.

Adigun and Doyle confound that narrative, however, by setting their play in Celtic Tiger Dublin. *Playboy* (2007) moves Synge’s action not to some remote third-world society needing a dose of Christy Mahon’s liberation, but simply across the country to a rough west Dublin neighborhood bustling with the crime and global pop culture familiar to a contemporary audience. This distinguishes it from the Pan Pan Theatre Company’s 2006 Mandarin adaptation of *Playboy*, set in the seedy margins of contemporary Beijing. While both adaptations use Synge’s play to imagine how one might attain economic freedom amidst globalization, Adigun and Doyle’s version commits the heresy of suggesting that the modern-day analogue to Synge’s stifling backwater Mayo exists at home within or, more precisely, beneath the exuberant prosperity of Celtic Tiger Ireland. *Playboy* (2007) unfolds in the gang-run alleys of Dublin’s outskirts and is peopled with characters who stand outside the mass of hardworking, law-abiding citizens. Synge’s drunken publican Michael Flaherty becomes a dangerous drug lord in the adaptation who agrees to hide Christopher from the police in exchange for some dubious-sounding security work. (For, Christopher has entered the country illegally. He and Michael both assume that the Irish government will search for Christopher once they get word from Nigeria of his father’s murder; they do not learn until later that Malomo Sr., like Christy Mahon’s father, survived his son’s violent attack). The remaining characters follow suit as the children, widows, and underlings of various criminals. This group of law-breaking outsiders, coupled with the illegally residing Christopher, presents an alternative narrative of new Ireland, one that reveals the Celtic Tiger’s exclusions and excesses. Illicit activities take place on Adigun and Doyle’s stage behind locked doors and beneath the watchful eye of the pub’s closed-circuit television. And while those activities have clear beneficiaries and victims—Michael and company profit from Christopher’s desperate circumstances—the threshold of deadbolt and surveillance camera

reveals both parties' shared lot: the invisibility of those who stand outside the economic miracle. Hiding from the authorities and omitted from the national narrative of homogeneous middle-class prosperity, the inhabitants of Adigun and Doyle's Dublin suburb reveal the lives and abuses that take place "under the belly" and in spite of the Celtic Tiger (Crowley and McLaughlin).

Playboy (2007) unfolds a set of social conflicts unleashed by Ireland's rapid economic transformation, where prosperity exists alongside unacknowledged victimization; where the global opportunity of the jet-set confronts the stasis of other citizens; and where congratulatory multiculturalism is undergirded by latent xenophobia.³⁴ The play's unlikely tale of instantaneous immigrant success attempts to transcend these conflicts but is engulfed ultimately by them. In what follows, I consider the limitations placed upon Christopher's transformative escape by examining the fantasy of freedom that features in recent postcolonial, transnational, and hybridity theories. That fantasy fails Christopher, whose immigrant success is hampered by the suppressed but persistent disparities of New Ireland. The heady aspirations of Adigun and Doyle's characters, coupled with the play's sense of their failing and being failed, expose messily the contradictions, inequalities, and crises in abundance that characterized what in hindsight we can recognize as "the last days of the Celtic Tiger."³⁵

* * *

Synge's *Playboy*, of course, staged its own crises in abundance. In Chapter Two, I traced several of the long-term effects emanating from the most devastating of all such crises in Ireland, the Great Famine. These included rapid emigration, tapering marriage and birth rates, and the increased modernization of agriculture. Synge, I argued, figures these social phenomena as the emasculation of the national body. Christy Mahon restores Irish virility by supplying sexual and reproductive energy and also by promising, through his act of patricide and his outlaw status, some anticolonial resistance. In Christy, Freud's killing of the Father meets Fanonian revolutionary violence. And while that resistance fails onstage to materialize—by the end of the play, little has changed except for Christy's triumphant departure and the broadened horizons of his abandoned lover Pegeen—its conception of freedom proves revolutionary.

Linguistic dexterity enables Christy Mahon to liberate himself from the geographic and socioeconomic confines within which he is trapped. The act of patricide may have freed the young man from his father's abuse, but it is the story he tells about himself which ingratiates him to Michael James and his daughter Pegeen, and which transforms him economically from an impoverished squatter and tramp to the virile Playboy and future master of Michael's property. Coming into linguistic self-awareness also enables Christy to flee once more, at play's end, from a settled life in Mayo as Pegeen's husband to an unbound existence. Christy and his father will head toward a future of "romancing through a romping lifetime," free to roam as they choose because they are no longer tied by necessity to a local economy (3.644). While Michael James and Pegeen "pick[] cockles til the hour of death," according to Old Mahon's final and vicious portent, father and son will travel to unspecified locales, "telling stories of the villainy of Mayo" (3.630-2).³⁶

So Christy reclaims father but renounces *patria*. His triumphant escape is particularly significant given the play's colonial setting, the still-colonized Dublin that housed the play's first audience, and the nationalist aims of the Irish National Theatre, on whose stage *Playboy* premiered. Removed from the sordid affairs of an underdeveloped colonial economy, Synge's hero can liberate himself despite actual political and material conditions. In Chapter Two of this

dissertation, I pondered the critical response to Synge's staging of transcendence by considering Seamus Deane's mixed feelings about the play. Although Deane regrets the imbalanced exchange upon which Christy Mahon's liberation depends—the Mayo villagers pay the price for Christy's freedom by remaining in the provincial west at play's end, more trapped than ever—he nonetheless admires Christy's escape through articulacy. I want to return to Deane's comments about *Playboy's* staging of freedom, which I examined in Chapter Two, because they are pertinent in different but important ways to the new adaptation. Deane writes, "People talk themselves into freedom. No longer imprisoned by sea or cottage, by age or politics, the Synge heroes and heroines chat themselves off stage, out of history, into legend" (*Celtic Revivals* 58). Deane admires Christy's manufactured escape because since there is little possibility for materialized freedom in *Playboy*, Christy's dematerialized transcendence offers a next-best option. On Synge's stage, characters become liberated from geographic peripherality—"[n]o longer imprisoned by sea or cottage"—and from social boundaries like "age," from "politics," even from "history" itself.

Deane's comments convey the seductive fantasy of pure cosmopolitan freedom that Pheng Cheah has located more recently in certain forms of hybridity theory. Cheah writes, ...accounts of radical cosmopolitan agency offered by hybridity theory obscure the material dynamics of nationalism in neocolonial globalization. This foreclosure occurs because hybridity theorists subscribe to the same concept of normative culture as the old-style philosophical cosmopolitanism they reject: the understanding of culture as the realm of humanity's freedom from the given. (292)

According to Cheah, hybridity theorists like Homi Bhabha and James Clifford are lured by the attractions of a hybrid culture that masquerades as freedom. While such theorists disagree fundamentally with canonical Hegelian and Kantian understandings of culture, which become implicated in colonialist aspirations and in which the individual develops in conjunction with universal historical progress, their attachment to a notion of freedom undermines their critique. For Cheah, these theorists' blind spot is their failure to consider fully the material conditions of postcolonial life, clinging instead to the belief that hybridity alone can provide individuals with agency adequate to combating stifling national cultures. "Indeed," he continues, "we discover that in essence, hybrid cultural agency consists of physical freedom from being tied to the earth. Such freedom is the phenomenal analogue and material condition of possibility for endless hybrid self-creation and autonomy from the given" (301).

"Freedom from being tied to the earth": in Cheah's formulation we can locate Christy Mahon's enduring appeal. By extracting himself from the concentric local and national circumstances that oppress him—the father who overworks him, the landlord who overworks his father, a colonial economy that maintains the power of the landlord—Christy narrates himself "out of history, into legend." At the end of *Playboy*, Christy Mahon sets off for some unspecified territory beyond Mayo, outside of colonial "given" circumstances. His future is global insofar as it is tied to neither local nor national conditions, and yet Synge refuses to give this vague global culture any material substance. Christy's unbound future remains entirely uncertain; for all the audience knows, he may wind up living more like a wandering tramp than a worldly cosmopolitan. Contemporary hybridity theory is more precise than Synge about what a global culture might entail (and here we should keep in mind the significant historical distance between the two), and it bears out what Synge's play merely suggests—that the "autonomy" of global culture can ameliorate the abuses imposed by nations.

This shared premise, though, presents several problems. First, transnational and global networks hold no transformative power without the material structures that animate them. As Cheah argues,

though culture is not reducible to empirical determinations such as politics and economics, it is not entirely autonomous or free from the taint of such determinations because it emerges from its relationships with these forces....To claim otherwise is to commit the most absurd of idealisms: it is to deprive culture of any effectivity by dematerializing it. (299)

Playboy does not go so far in its idealization of freedom; as I showed in Chapter Two, Synge registers clearly the economic forces of the agricultural world that Christy must escape, even if he cannot envision the materiality of what follows. But Christy Mahon offers no transformative power within Synge's fictional Mayo: his departure proves enunciatory but singular, certainly not programmatic or practically sustainable. The same critique can be leveled at *Playboy* (2007), a point to which I will return. Second, this fantasy of unfettered freedom depends in large part upon money and privilege. This is a matter that Synge's play, through Christy's impoverished history, manages to avoid, but it does plague the forms of hybridity theory that Cheah takes to task. Cheah argues that hybridity theory often proves untenable because most postcolonial subjects do not have the means by which to reject given culture and to seek "endless hybrid self-creation." The very logic of hybridity theory is predicated on a tautology. To reinvoké Cheah's formulation, "Freedom from being tied to the earth"—that is, the privilege of being free from material worry—"...is the material condition of possibility for endless hybrid self-creation and autonomy from the given." In other words, material freedom enables material freedom. Cheah's hybridity theorists declare that the losers in the economic world order need the autonomy of hybridity to escape given culture, but they fail to recognize that those who can attain such autonomy are not on the losing end of neocolonialism.³⁷

The third problem presented by recent manifestations of hybridity theory and by Synge, and the one that most concerns us here, is the narrow focus on the migrant individual who leaves the postcolony for the metropolis as a locus of agency. As Cheah argues, not all postcolonial migrants are privileged individuals who choose to travel. Besides James Clifford, whose work he considers exceptional, Cheah finds recent hybridity theorists too narrowly focused on migration, which is only one facet of postcolonial life. He claims that they fail to address the other victims of neocolonial globalization: individuals who do not or cannot migrate. "Everything happens as if there are no postcolonials left in decolonized space," Cheah writes (301). We can see this detrimental fantasy at work in *Playboy* as well. In Synge's play, Christy departs while the Mayoites remain in the colony, "more hopelessly imprisoned than ever" (Deane, *Celtic Revivals* 58). In order to read *Playboy* as emancipatory, audiences must either forget conveniently the supporting players, focusing narrowly on Christy's bright future; or they must find a way to blame the Mayoites for their own stasis. Both impulses have featured repeatedly in *Playboy* criticism. Deane, of course, is not impervious to *Playboy*'s problematically uneven liberation, but he cannot envision a suitable alternative. He concludes, "Those who walk away from society"—the hybrid, the migrant, the cosmopolitan—"and those who remain within it represent two kinds of value which are not reconcilable" (58).

Dematerialized liberation or material suffering, autonomous culture or brutalizing economy: are these the only options available in the colony and the postcolony? Deane is right to say that these are irreconcilable positions, but they are not the only choices possible. Indeed, *Playboy* offers a broader spectrum of possibility. As I showed in Chapter Two, Christy Mahon's

liberation is anything but dematerialized. Christy doesn't escape economics but, rather, manipulates an historical crisis in economic value. His swift education in capitalist value precipitates his liberation from Mayo's dying peasant economy. Synge actually refrains from staging Christy's escape as pure transcendence and should be distinguished, at least in part, from Cheah's hybridity theorists. While the details of Christy's cosmopolitan future remain hazily non-material, and while his fellow Mayoites do remain trapped in the colony, a careful reading of *Playboy* reveals that the play does expose the capitalist means by which Christy escapes. In other words, Christy's future is dematerialized, but his transformation is not.

This is how Synge avoids the illusion of culture-as-transcendence against which Cheah warns. David Lloyd anticipates Cheah's warning in *Anomalous States*, where he criticizes Seamus Heaney's poetry for mystifying the traumas of Irish history. Lloyd writes that in Heaney's poetry, "the realization of human freedom is deferred into [a] transcendent domain" (33). According to Lloyd, aesthetic sublimation is both the product and alibi for Irish identity politics. He reminds us that "the apparent freedom of the aesthetic realm from politics is in itself a crucially political conception. The political function of aesthetics and culture is not only to suggest the possibility of transcending conflict, but to do so by excluding (or integrating) difference" (19). Synge avoids such troubling transcendence, thereby resisting the aesthetic smoothing-over against which Lloyd warns. By ending his play with Pegeen's miserable expression of lost love, he refuses to sublimate either her dismal future or post-Famine inequality more generally. Synge ensures that we do not, in the face of Christy's dazzling departure, conveniently forget those left behind in the colony; but he also sidesteps the delusions of transcendent freedom by making his hero into a calculating capitalist who preys on the Mayoites' fetishism. This, surely, is not the alternative to transcendence that Lloyd has in mind. Christy's economically enabled freedom renders him an ambivalent figure, one who troubles a simple narrative of colonial malice versus heroic, fundamentally good Irish resistance—the very narrative, I suggested in Chapter Two, that the 1907 Abbey audience expected to play out on Synge's stage, and in defense of which they rioted.

The issue of material conditions returns a century later to complicate *Playboy* (2007) and its attempts at transcendence. At first glance, escaping from the economic world seems unnecessary in the Celtic Tiger Ireland that Adigun and Doyle portray. Indeed, it appears that for Christopher Malomo and his Dublin counterparts, especially the Widow Quin, a notorious husband-murderer turned tabloid star, the Celtic Tiger economy functions as a solution to economic hardship, not its source. The widow offers Christopher a model for achieving fame through modern media, and the local girls Sarah, Susan, and Honor plan out his future as a pop singer or some other marketable global celebrity. Yet beneath the façade of triumphant diversity and captured in characters' brief xenophobic slips, we glimpse the material realities of the Celtic Tiger: persistent inequality, uneven access to goods and services, and the perceived sense of competing for increasingly scarce national resources. Like its predecessor, *Playboy* (2007) is haunted by the material conditions of the culture it depicts, conditions that trouble persistently the course of postcolonial cosmopolitan freedom.

* * *

The first indication that Christopher's escape at the end of *Playboy* (2007) will not be as liberating as Christy Mahon's is the fact that Christopher has little from which he needs to be rescued. The MBA-wielding son of a successful businessman in Lagos, Christopher departs

significantly in circumstances and in future prospects from his economically desperate Syngean counterpart. Chief Malomo extracts from his son the same hard work and unquestioning obedience that Old Mahon demands of Christy, but he is the only obstacle standing in the way of Christopher's independent success and happiness. Christopher faces none of Christy Mahon's entrapment in an immobile class of peasant squatters.

Like Christy, Christopher fights with and ultimately kills his father because he does not wish to be forced into an arranged marriage. In *Playboy* (2007), however, the argument between father and son begins with the matter of a generous gift. As Christopher explains to the Widow Quin, his father gave him a piece of land for his birthday with the stipulation that Christopher would marry and begin a family. Christopher refuses the gift, asking instead to sell the land so he can travel abroad. Herein lies an important difference between Synge's play and the Adigun-Doyle adaptation. Synge's *Playboy* stages the argument between father and son as a moral fissure: Christy rejects the survival tactics of Old Mahon, who has no qualms in marrying his son to the Widow Casey, a wealthy hag who nursed Christy as an infant. *Playboy* (2007) stages the same argument as a much more commonplace generational rift between an overbearing parent and a spoiled, tantrum-throwing child. Christopher seems less bothered by marital expectations than by the fact that his father forbids him to travel: he opens his tale of patricide by complaining about his father's gift and does not even mention the arranged marriage—nor his bride-to-be—until the Widow Quin asks questions. And while Christopher's objections to his intended bride do match Christy's objections to the Widow Casey (Christopher takes issue with the woman's age, appearance, and her sexual reputation), they come second to his complaints about his father's gift. Christopher refuses to accept the plot of land under Chief Malomo's terms and conditions; instead, he kills his father and takes his desired trip abroad by purchasing a flight to London. Certainly, his journey is more harrowing than he might have wished. Christopher details a convoluted itinerary from Nigeria to Dublin. Nevertheless, his trials arise from circumstances of his own making. A father's conditional gift and marital pressure do not match up to the abusive circumstances that grant narratives of postcolonial liberation, like Christy Mahon's, their justification.

The fact that Christopher chooses his circumstances renders him a less sympathetic figure than he appears at first, though of all the play's characters, only Michael seems to recognize the young man's complicity in his own demise. When Michael witnesses his motherless daughter taking pity on the orphaned Christopher, he reminds her that their situations are different: Christopher has made himself an orphan. Far from brutal, Christopher's former life in Nigeria had been rather enviable. By his own admission, the political climate was stable there, and his father's wealth and status placed him in a national elite. The circumstances that drive him to the UK and eventually to Dublin are chosen, not forced upon him. It is for this reason that Christopher does not qualify as an asylum seeker. Section 2 of the 1996 Irish Refugee Act defines a refugee as

a person who, owing to a well founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his or her nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his or her former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it, *but does not include a person who—*

...(d) has committed a serious non-political crime outside the State prior to his or her arrival in the State... (Refugee Act, my ephasis)

Christopher cannot seek the protection of the Irish State, whose sanctuary does not extend to ordinary criminals who wish to escape punishment. As a reviewer for *The Dublin Quarterly* puts it, “Christopher...is a young man genuinely on the run; a fugitive[,] not an Asylum seeker” (Anny-Nzekwue). Yet he should not be confused with the figure of the fugitive felon who appears throughout Irish literature and culture, and who Lady Gregory describes in her essay “The Felons of Our Land.” In that essay, Gregory details the Irish popular distinction between ordinary crime and felony, the legitimate, necessary, even heroic use of violence for nationalist ends. Her distinction between the two echoes, though anachronistically, with the Refugee Act’s exclusionary clause: “but does not include a person who...has committed a serious non-political crime outside the State.” In both cases, the difference between illegitimate and legitimate uses of violence seems to hinge upon whether one chooses violence or is driven to it by socio-political circumstances.

Christopher cannot qualify as the desperate victim of postcolonial globalization celebrated by hybridity theory. Adigun and Doyle’s protagonist is simply a young Nigerian man who makes disastrous choices that force him to take a less-than-leisurely version of his post-MBA travels abroad. Indeed, his circumstances resonate uncomfortably with the leisurely gentleman-traveler variety of cosmopolitanism, which “spring[s] from the capitalized ‘virtues’ of Rationality, Universality, and Progress” and which champions “the myth of the nation writ large in the figure of the citizen of the world” (Pollock et al. 582). Despite appearances to the contrary, Christopher does not model the more liberating variety of transnational engagement described in recent resuscitations of the term cosmopolitanism.³⁸ Christopher Malomo’s awkward proximity to the old-fashioned cosmopolite should stand as evidence of his failure to envision genuine postcolonial freedom and to think outside a culture of privilege. His search for liberation can only begin much later in the play, once his privileged status begins to fail him.

* * *

Just as Christopher’s privileged culture of origin presents a stumbling block for a straightforward narrative of postcolonial liberation, so does his transcendent escape to contemporary Dublin. Christopher Malomo chooses Ireland for his adopted culture in part because he holds the Dublin address of a distant cousin, but his decision likely is influenced by the widely publicized economic success that transformed Ireland in the late 1990s and early 2000s into one of the most desirable destinations for immigrants and asylum seekers.³⁹ For the legitimate asylum seeker, a category to which Christopher decidedly does not belong, Irish prosperity does present a genuine escape from extreme poverty and its legal refuge, an escape from persecution. But *Playboy* (2007) stages a best-case immigration scenario where modest quality-of-life improvements pale beside the exceptional success stories in which the characters believe, and to which they introduce Christopher.

The local girls consume pop-culture fantasies of celebrity through tabloid magazines and American films like *Bonnie and Clyde*. They admire the Widow Quin, who manufactures a name for herself as a husband-killer through sensationalistic tabloid reports. Having failed in their own attempts at stardom—Pegeen notes that the girls auditioned unsuccessfully for a singing competition—they cling to the notorious widow as their closest link to fame. Everything changes once Christopher comes to town. Upon hearing his tale of patricide, the girls begin fashioning

their new arrival into a marketable global media superstar. They plot out Christopher's fame by drawing on a series of incongruous models—a slick modern-day Clyde Barrow, a singer for a pop group, a solo artist like R. Kelly, whose music the girls sing, even (in an ignorant racial elision by the Widow Quin) a “slam-dunking” African-American sports star—all in the hopes of profiting from his success. Pegeen remains wary, for she views the girls as mere connivers eager to siphon off Christopher's celebrity at any cost. She explains to Christopher that the girls are more interested in the prospect of his celebrity than they are in him; she imagines them crying dramatically for the cameras as Christopher is deported. But more dangerous than the girls is the Widow Quin, whom Pegeen claims is desperate to remain a tabloid sensation at any cost. Pegeen is correct, but she knows only half of the widow's story. In a twist wholly original to the adaptation, the Widow Quin reveals to Christopher that her husband-killing persona is completely fabricated. Michael and his men have murdered her husband and continue to extort her for cash. In her case, turning to tabloid culture really does amount to making the best of circumstances, especially if her prospective tell-all book is published. In Christopher's case, the hyper-visibility of his potential celebrity proves more problematic. The very capacity to imagine a Nigerian immigrant as a media sensation reveals his, and the girls', inculcation in a palatable fantasy of Irish multiculturalism. Yet the dream stalls out in the concomitant realities of Christopher's situation: the invisibility necessitated by his illegal status and reinforced by racial prejudice.

Sarah, Susan, and Honor are drawn immensely by the exoticism of the Flahertys' new security man. When Christopher invites the girls to touch his styled hair, shortly after meeting, the three oblige and comment about how different it feels. This is clearly the first African hair they have touched, and they do not censor their eager response. However, their interest in Christopher extends beyond the curiosity of an Irish populace encountering large-scale nonwhite immigration for the first time. The girls are surprisingly shrewd about consumerism in contemporary Ireland. Confident of a secure market within which Christopher's appealing difference will sell, the girls tap intuitively into the discourse of multiculturalism that, according to Gavan Titley, sublimates contemporary Irish anxieties about difference. Titley argues that the growing popularity of a feel-good strand of multiculturalism has foreclosed genuine discussions about race, instead harnessing both citizens' interests in and worries about diversity into acts of consumption. With the girls' finagling, Christopher is poised to become the newest product in what Titley identifies as the “national brand”: the black Irish whose “emblematic arrival...colorful[ly] authentic[cates]” Ireland's arrival to global success (16). (Never mind the fact that most of Christopher's celebrity models come from American culture). Titley considers multicultural discourse in Ireland a kind of “ideological franchise” that sells modern, tolerant lifestyles replete with “sushi and set-dancing” and “a neo-liberal notion of shopping as a radical political act” (20). This discourse, captured in Christopher's perceived profit potential, offers neither an authentic embrace of difference—Debbie Ging likens wan multiculturalism to “Benetton's ethnic palette”—nor a transcendent escape from it (190).

The Widow Quin expresses the same type of congratulatory multiculturalism in a manner quite different from the girls. Amidst her efforts at the end of Act Two to deter the recently-arrived, not-dead Chief Malomo from finding Christopher, the widow nonchalantly tosses off the line, “Ah, sure, we have all sorts of Africans around here now, it's hard to know who's who.” It matters not if she actually believes this statement. Independently of her intentions, the sentiment captures the affected boredom of Celtic Tiger arrival. Having “all sorts of Africans around” stands as a badge of honor and a sign that Ireland has turned the corner definitively from a

history of rampant emigration to a future characterized by waves of immigration. Yet, the conclusion to her comment—“It’s hard to know who’s who”—belies the attempted casualness signified at the outset by “Ah, sure.” The widow’s purported and perhaps feigned difficulty in telling Africans apart carries with it the lazy rhetoric of racism (they all look the same) as well as the serial identitarian logic by which difference becomes abstracted: an African is an African. In *The Spectre of Comparisons*, Benedict Anderson locates the origins of such seriality in governmental institutions, particularly the census whose function is to identify and categorize “serial, aggregable, counterposed majorities and minorities” that consequently can be managed (38).⁴⁰ However, in the widow’s expression seriality carries the latent danger of illegal immigration, not the assurance of control. The Janus face of globalization reveals that Ireland’s international success comes with an increased difficulty in distinguishing illegal immigrants from law-abiding citizens.

The common assumption that lurks beneath the widow’s comment about not knowing “who’s who” is that immigration, legal and illegal, admits foreign bodies into the metropole that subsequently can go underground and haunt the public undetected. The “haunting” usually carries some implication of criminality. *Playboy* (2007) upturns that narrative. The invisible threat in Adigun and Doyle’s play comes from native Irish criminals, not from the Nigerian immigrant that they employ. Christopher, in fact, offers no initial indication that he will be anything but law-abiding, excepting of course his illegal entry. It is only upon meeting the Flahertys, and agreeing to exchange his undocumented labor for Michael’s money and shelter, that Christopher becomes implicated in criminal activity. As one of the terms of his employment—which, in addition to security, includes delivering euphemistically described “packages”—Christopher must submit his passport to Pegeen. Michael capitalizes on Christopher’s need to remain invisible, finding in the young man the perfect accomplice. Arriving to Dublin without contacts, Christopher is undocumented and untraceable, desperate, and most importantly, disposable.⁴¹

Through Christopher’s invisibility, *Playboy* (2007) exposes the visual logic of the social contract. Citizenship entails an individual’s submission to state authority in exchange for civil rights and protections. That is, the state gets to watch its citizenry in exchange for watching over them. Illegal residence affords no such reciprocity. Christopher is watched for by the state’s technologies of surveillance—which carry with them the legal powers of deportation and extradition—but can never hope to be recognized in return. The Dublin citizens Christopher encounters extend state surveillance into the social realm, where they stare at but never acknowledge him. Thus, it is no accident that Christopher turns for protection to Michael, the one figure who offers him a distilled version of the social contract. In exchange for loyal service, Michael promises that he and his men will “look after” Christopher. Yet, like the state, Michael’s looking after Christopher will involve constant surveillance, a point that the pub’s imposing CCTV drives home.

Ultimately Christopher Malomo is granted the opportunity to look back, slyly, at the Irish state, though only by making himself more invisible.⁴² Early in the play, Michael promises Christopher freedom from the law: he brags that his gang “looks after” the police, suggesting an arrangement of reciprocal favors while conveying, too, a threat of violence toward institutions of the state. But Christopher’s satisfaction in looking back at the police employed, at least in part, to ferret out illegal immigrants like himself proves an inadequate payoff for the hazards of invisibility. Not for him is the farfetched dream of celebrity. As Pegeen warns Christopher, becoming famous will likely lead to his deportation. *Playboy* (2007) denies its audience a

transcendent postcolonial escape. Christopher's experience gives the lie to Celtic Tiger visions of transformative immigrant success, exposing it as deluded multiculturalist fantasy, an exploitative fiction. The fantasy begins like the play's characters as hopefully naïve, but it winds up promoting a self-congratulatory version of immigration that fails to match up with realities. In fact, the danger of promoting an exceptional case like Christopher is that it encourages a potential abnegation of responsibility. Put in Titley's terms, purchasing a product (say, a CD) from the "national brand" (here, the black Irish) proves harmful, not helpful, to overall immigrant well-being if it alleviates the buyer's racial guilt or social responsibility. For Adigun and Doyle's characters, welcoming Christopher serves a similar function, if their sustained racism—which stands uncomfortably alongside their tolerance—is any indication. Indeed, it is Christopher who grants them an easy out when his supposedly dead father turns up alive. His fraud provides them with an excuse to release their pent-up animosity toward, in Pegeen's terms, all "spongers milking the system." The characters' passive xenophobia, cloaked by their enthusiastic promotion of Christopher, turns active in the violent final scene: Michael's henchmen sneer at the young man who had tried to usurp their position, while the girls propose to kill Christopher. Though the play attempts to evade the racist valences of the scene by turning to physical comedy, the men's paranoia about immigrant takeover—and the specter of lynching mobs raised by girls' suggestion—haunts the scene. Christopher Malomo continues to inspire joy in the characters, though the nature of that joy slips from the giddy prospect of his celebrity to the pleasure they take in seeing him put back in his proper place.

* * *

Chief Malomo's arrival to Dublin sets the stage for his son's execution. By revealing him as a fraud, he drives Christopher into a second patricidal attack, for which Michael—wary of attracting police attention—will not stand. But just as Michael and his men are preparing to take Christopher away to where he will be killed, Chief Malomo reappears, farcically bloodied but again clearly not dead, and he saves his son's life. The senior Malomo proceeds to approach Christopher, unbind his hands, and announce the duo's departure. In Synge's *Playboy*, Old Mahon's very same actions catalyze Christy's final transcendence: with a grandiose declaration, sweeping in both space and time, Christy delineates his future of "romancing through a romping lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the judgment day" (3.644-5). *Playboy* (2007) struggles to match Christy's gesture. In Adigun and Doyle's adaptation, Chief Malomo proposes to his son that they return to Nigeria together, and Christopher concedes with a simple "Fine," collects his passport, and leaves.

The sobriety of the Malomos' departure stems in large part from the fact that very little will change for the two. Christopher does demand autonomy and his father's respect, but he displays none of Christy's impassioned violence, no pushing or silencing his father, no demands for lifelong servitude from the Chief. The elder and younger Malomo are set to return to the exact life they left, lodged safely in the nation-state—one in which Chief Malomo, an ex-politician and prominent businessman, holds considerable clout—as well as in the securities of class. Christopher's language in this final scene forecasts the nature of his future in Nigeria. Despite the fact that he, like Christy Mahon, develops linguistic dexterity over the course of the play, Christopher's final transformation is marked with terse, efficient speech. The lazy son of Chief Clement Malomo becomes, in his Dublin adventure, no "likely gaffer" (Synge 3.643) but a "hard man," cogent, assertive, better prepared to conduct his father's business affairs back home.

Perhaps this is why the senior Malomo grins as he departs the stage one final time, saying “Jesus Christ, this is fantastic.”

Playboy (2007) offers no stunning escape to a transcendent, hybrid global realm. In fact, the adaptation renders incongruous the very title it retains. In the final line of Synge’s play, Pegeen crowns Christy “the only playboy of the western world,” and the epithet signals Christy’s ascension to a realm beyond her comprehension (3.653-4). The “western world” is distinct from the exoticized “eastern world” about which Pegeen has fantasized—she used to dream of “sailing the seas till [she]’d marry a Jew-man with ten kegs of gold”—but filtered through her provincial frame of reference, its contours are just as hazy (3.299-300). As a contemporary analogue to Pegeen’s “western world,” we might posit the supposedly borderless economy of the global west, but Christopher is no playboy of this west either since immigration restrictions make such boundlessness unthinkable. The adaptation must constantly balance the prospective freedom of its characters against the realities of migration. Thus in Act Two, Adigun and Doyle’s Sean Keogh—Christopher’s rival for Pegeen—bribes Christopher with a ticket not to America but to Belfast, where his asylum application might be more successful. This is a pragmatic if not dazzling offer. Christopher, too, struggles to envision a life beyond Ireland: when Pegeen declares that only America is big enough for her lover’s ambitions, Christopher merely equivocates. His version of the future, which takes place in shopping malls and on the streets of Dublin, remains comically local, hopelessly prosaic, perfectly consumerist. Boggled down by the limitations of borders, Christopher Malomo cannot attain the global vision and escape that Synge stages. By play’s end, the returning playboy of Lagos has conquered the western world only insofar as he sharpens his business skills in Dublin, the better to serve it.

Playboy (2007) restages Synge’s liberating play in a contemporary Ireland where “everything [and everyone] moves,” (Titley 11) and where globalization is touted as the cure to all social ills.⁴³ Yet the adaptation imposes grave limitations upon its protagonist’s ultimate freedom. Christy Mahon’s gallant departure is certainly singular, exclusive, troublingly dematerialized; but if *Playboy* (2007) aims to grant material substance to postcolonial liberation, it fails in the attempt. And it fails tellingly. Beneath the surface story of capitalist transformation, the play reveals the invisible lives, inequalities, and abuses omitted from the national narrative of economic miracle. It is no accident that Michael and Christopher meet underground; in fact, it is possible to trace in the two a common exclusion from the Celtic Tiger narrative and a funny kind of common ambition, despite very different trajectories and outcomes, in seeking fortune underground. The play offers no direct explanation for Michael’s drug running, but it is clear that his wants, like Christopher’s, have not been and likely will not be satisfied by Ireland’s newfound prosperity. Celtic Tiger Ireland, *Playboy* (2007) shows, is no stage yet for transformative immigrant arrival. Ireland’s own development is ongoing. Meanwhile, even in the exceptionally privileged case of Christopher Malomo, freedom can be secured only within a system of extralegal exploitation or with a passport, guarantor of national return.

¹ Timothy Guinnane's study *The Vanishing Irish* makes pointed reference to O'Brien, borrowing his title to "signal[] a basic difference in approach and method." Guinnane argues that "some aspects of Irish depopulation were unusual but...the basic forces leading to depopulation were similar to those at work all across Europe in the late nineteenth century." Guinnane adds that population trends since the publication of O'Brien's study suggest "little danger that the Irish will disappear" (xv).

² See in particular Bhabha's conclusion, "'Race', Time and the Revision of Modernity" (236-56) and Behdad's introduction, "The Predicaments of Belatedness" (1-17).

³ Cleary writes, "The conception of Ireland as somehow anomalous or exceptional rests on the untenable assumption that there is such a thing as a standard colonial experience, a classic colonial order of things replicated almost everywhere across the world" (19). Cleary's chapter "Irish Studies, Colonial Questions" debunks this assumption and sets out to do the difficult comparative historical work that his targeted Irish scholars avoid.

⁴ See in *Outrageous Fortune* the chapters titled "Capital and Culture in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Changing Configurations" (58-84) and "Modernization and Aesthetic Ideology" (156-77).

⁵ Cheah's comment recalls not only the biblical aphorism "Man cannot live by bread alone" but also Homi Bhabha's chapter "By Bread Alone" in *The Location of Culture*, where Bhabha argues that "the *circulation* of the chapati [in the Indian Mutiny]...initiates a politics of agency negotiated in the antagonisms of colonial cultural difference" (200). In his title, Bhabha plays on the biblical line, suggesting that man cannot live on material substance alone but needs symbolic freedom; Cheah, in turn, switches Bhabha's terms.

⁶ References to Synge's play indicate act and line numbers.

⁷ For a comprehensive history of presumed antithesis between art and material life (or utility) in the Irish literary imagination, see Rubenstein 18-40.

⁸ Marjorie Howes reframes Paul Gilroy's "Black Atlantic" to describe post-Famine Irish national culture—which "intimate[ly] incorporat[es]" the global Irish diaspora—as a "communit[y] of mourning or melancholy...resembling an Irish Atlantic" (165). Kerby Miller argues that post-Famine emigration was understood by the Irish in melancholic terms, as "involuntary exile" or "forced banishment" (103).

⁹ This is not technically the case: the orphaned Shawn does own land, a fact the audience learns when he purchases the Widow Quin's assistance in driving Christy away from Pegeen by offering her various goods and rights from his property (2.375 ff). Nevertheless, it is significant that Michael James and Shawn discuss the marriage in these reversed terms. Shawn construes betrothal as "making a good bargain" (1.35), and he uses his property as leverage with Pegeen's father: when Michael James refuses to fight Christy at the end of the play, Shawn warns Michael

that he will “lose [Shawn’s] drift of heifers and [his] blue bull from Sneem,” reinforcing comparisons to a bride’s dowry (3.395-6).

¹⁰ This is where I part ways with Norris’s interpretation. Norris argues that Maria does not “get” the children’s prank and that neither does the narrative voice which, according to her interpretation, expresses Maria’s desire (212). I would argue instead that Maria does not miss the associations behind the saucer of clay but, rather, wills herself to smooth them over through good manners. Norris reads Maria’s psyche—driven by her “total desire”—as impervious to threatening reality, whereas I find in her proliferating signs of pleasantness (laughing, language) evidence that she is anything but impervious, and that she is working especially hard to defuse threat.

¹¹ See Banfield, “Narrative Style” (3).

¹² Banfield presents this quotation about Mr. Duffy as an epigraph to Chapter 2 of *Unspeakable Sentences*, confirming that Joyce was interested in questions of narrative style (64).

¹³ For a brief history of this critical turn and its representative texts, see Howes and Attridge 13-17.

¹⁴ Vincent Cheng makes much of the word “generosity” in his reading of Joyce’s story, arguing that it is “a charged term in Joyce’s personal vocabulary, suggesting a collective social conscience” (147). Cheng continues in an endnote, “In my own reading of ‘generosity’ (as derived from *genus*, *generis* just as ‘kindness’ is derived from “kind” and “kin”) as a desirable, socialistic breaking-down of hierarchy and individualistic status-formation, I am conscious of the phrase Joyce had himself used...in describing socialism as ‘the generous idea’...” (308).

¹⁵ The Irish pig keeps close company with the simian Irish discussed in L. Perry Curtis, Jr.’s *Apes and Angels*. See also Michael de Nie’s *The Eternal Paddy*. In a comic turn, the family in Flann O’Brien’s novel *The Poor Mouth* scams those who believe in the stereotype. They dress their pigs up in human clothes to obtain extra money from a government inspector who pays households cash for each child who speaks English (the joke is that the inspector cannot tell the Irish children and the pigs apart), and one of those pigs in turn brings home money and favors from a lauded ethnographer who mistakes its pig grunting for a distinctive Gaelic dialect.

¹⁶ For James S. Brown, the failure of the Brady family allegorizes a national failure, embodied in Church and state. Cullingford’s more directed reading locates this national failure in the figure of the Virgin Mary statue, played by Sinéad O’Connor, that comes to life in Neil Jordan’s film adaptation. Considering O’Connor’s outspoken criticism of the Catholic Church’s abusive practices, Cullingford reads Jordan’s casting choice as a critique of the Irish religio-domestic ideal; it vitiates the iconography of the de Valera government, specifically its codification of traditional feminine domesticity through “a Constitutionally approved aura of Marian sanctity” (“Virgins” 193). In other words, Francie is abused by the false domestic ideals promulgated by both Church and state; and yet he finds comfort in a radically revised version of religio-domestic

iconography, O'Connor as an alternative version of the Virgin Mary statue gracing the traditional Irish Catholic home.

¹⁷ The Irish case stands in contrast to the American Cold War experience, in which domestic consumption functioned as an addendum to, or redirection of, the arms race; this is articulated most vociferously in the Nixon-Khrushchev Kitchen Debate of 1959. The Irish case differs, which is not to suggest that Americans did not feel immobilized or paranoid during parts of the Cold War. But during the Cold War, the U.S. was long familiar with the world stage as an economic and political superpower. If the American consumption war was a natural extension of its political prowess, in Ireland economic consumption becomes a frenzied celebration of partial admission to the pantheon of modern powers (to its money but not its might) and a compensation for having not achieved comparable political participation. My thanks to Alaina Bryen for reminding me of this.

¹⁸ Wills notes in her bibliographical essay that she is indebted to Lee's account of Irish moral attitudes regarding neutrality. She labels these attitudes "sacred egoism," a phrase that Lee uses several times in *Ireland 1912-1985*, although never to describe neutral politics.

¹⁹ Recent historical work has collectively argued that the Irish foreign policy of neutrality since WWII has been at best, inconsistent; at worst, entirely undeserving of the label "neutrality." See Hachey's and FitzGerald's articles, Salmon's book, and Fanning's chapter in *Irish Foreign Policy*.

²⁰ Ireland actually refused the NATO invitation not as a calculated isolationist move, but because its politicians had botched negotiations. Irish politicians had hoped to sweeten the NATO deal by securing British assistance in ending partition; when this backfired, the state attempted to save face by declining to join. In the Irish public consciousness this decision only added to the moral veneer of neutrality.

²¹ The political reminiscences and fantasies of two other minor characters, the gardener at the industrial school and an old man in Bundoren, reaffirm this sense of Ireland's political removal. The two men cling to memories (or perhaps, in the case of the gardener, a mere fantasy) of fighting in the Irish revolution and the civil war. The men's wishful reenactments of their glory days stand in stark contrast to the political vacuum of the novel's setting (the gardener shoots at imaginary Black and Tans, while the other man claims that he would still "give [Free Staters] two in the head apiece") (189).

²² The activities of the LSF remind us that insularity is a geographic as well as social and psychological condition. Ireland's island status was seen both as the nation's greatest protection against wartime enemy invasion (hence the policing of the shores) but also a liability: if invaded by Axis powers (or an England desperate for Irish ports and resources), who would come to the remote and neutral island's rescue? For more see Wills, especially Chapters 4 and 5. This literal insularity seems less pronounced during the early Cold War since Ireland's Shannon Airport served as a major Transatlantic hub, and since the Irish government (unbeknownst to its citizens)

colluded with the U.S. during the Cuban Missile Crisis by searching Eastern-bloc planes that came through Shannon.

²³ Neil Jordan's film departs from McCabe's novel in its foregrounding of the Cuban Missile Crisis. (McCabe co-wrote the screenplay with Jordan, so this departure cannot be said to violate the novelist's vision). The film incorporates contemporary video footage and radio programs from the period, and characters regularly tune into news reports. In addition, several of Francie's dream sequences in the film depict atomic blasts and post-apocalyptic devastation. This is a different and not inferior reading of Ireland's experience in the Cold War; but what the film misses is the almost unconscious turn in Irish society to domestic security. In the novel, the society's fear and sense of vulnerability are unspeakable, and can only be detected in the severity of the town's turn inward. Jordan's film and its characters pay explicit attention to international politics, however. The Cold War backdrop and Francie's domestic battles are presented as two unrelated story lines, linked only by the common thematic of a syncopated countdown to disaster.

²⁴ Despite their attempts, the Bradys cannot keep up with the spending habits of the Nugents; what's more, they appear worse off for trying. The Bradys own a television that breaks shortly after the novel begins. Mr. Brady becomes so angry that he throws a shoe through the screen, and Francie confronts the man who sold it to them, Mickey Traynor, several years after the fact. Part of the Brady men's anger may stem from the fact that purchasing a television was the family's rare foray into middle class consumption. When the television breaks after only six months, Benny feels he has been swindled out of his "hard-earned money" by Traynor and duped by consumer culture (11).

²⁵ National imagery also turns to kitsch on the cover of Philip Nugent's music book *Emerald Gems of Ireland*. The book serves as an obsession for Francie until he obtains "a much better book," *A Treasury of Irish Melodies*. Francie figures the competition as a showdown between the clichéd subjects of the books' covers: *A Treasury's* "old woman in a shawl standing at a half-door staring at the sun going down behind the mountains" readily triumphs over *Emerald Gems's* "sadeyed ass pulling the cart and away off into the misty green mountains" (196).

²⁶ In the introduction to the 25th Anniversary edition of *The Break-Up of Britain*, Tom Nairn describes the turn toward American global capitalism in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. He reads the new self-imposed subordination of these "knaves of globalism" as being of a kind with a slightly longer tradition of English (and Irish) deference to the international economics of "modernity's American sorcerer" (xxii-xxiii).

²⁷ Benny resents more than Alo's attire and airs, though. He becomes enraged when Alo, who is married, reunites and flirts with his onetime (and still single) love, Mary; he chastises his brother for "carrying on with her like a schoolboy halfwit" and accuses him of "never even ha[ving] the guts to ask her out straight till it was too late" (35). The gendering of this encounter—an "English" male and an Irish female—adds a colonial valence to Alo's futile seduction. Part of Benny's frustration may stem from the fact that the rather impotent Alo (who marries in England "the only woman he ever laid a finger on...[a woman] twenty years his senior...[who] hates him

from the day she marrie[s] him”) restores his virility by rehearsing a familiar colonialist paradigm, the feminine Ireland’s repeated “rape” and abandonment by its masculine colonizers (35).

²⁸ In Francie’s mind Alo joins other deluded individuals cast out of the domestic ideal like Packy, the emigrant son of the old woman Francie meets on his way to Bundoren (Packy, too, according to his mother, “did well for himself” in England), or Father Sullivan, the priest who molests Francie in the industrial school (185). Father Sullivan (or Father Tiddly, as Francie dubs him) dresses Francie in women’s bonnets and plays house with the boy, his imaginary wife and “best little girl” (86). Tiddly sullies Francie’s experience in the religious “home” as he acts out some domestic and sexual damage of his own.

²⁹ Miller’s account of post-Famine Ireland as an “old man’s country” (403) should stand as a corrective to illusory depictions of Ireland as a masculinist haven. In an essay that attempts to depict women’s hardships in early twentieth-century Ireland, Florence Walzl erroneously underplays men’s social difficulties. Walzl describes Joyce’s Ireland as “a land made for the male—card playing, horse racing, coursing, fishing” and claims, “‘It [was] a paradise’ for men” (45-6). What this assessment misses is the likelihood that masculinist sociality compensates for emasculating economic and societal forces.

³⁰ McCabe continues exploring modernism’s repression of inadmissible atavistic energies in his recent novel *Winterwood*, which situates a Gothic return amid the bustle of Celtic Tiger Dublin. Unlike the townspeople in *The Butcher Boy*, the modern Irish characters of *Winterwood* fetishize the relics of their “authentic” Celtic past, which they believe will be swept away but not forgotten by the tides of modernity. Their patronizingly “tolerant” antiquarian tendencies render them entirely unprepared for the Gothic return of these energies.

³¹ I identify the Adigun-Doyle adaptation as “*Playboy* (2007)” to distinguish it from Synge’s play of the same title.

³² Although both protagonists share the given name Christopher and the nickname Christy, I distinguish them throughout this chapter as “Christy” Mahon and “Christopher” Malomo.

³³ References to Synge’s play indicate act and line numbers.

³⁴ For a cogent analysis of the disparity between different groups’ mobility in contemporary Ireland, see Michael Cronin, “Speed Limits.” Cronin argues that speed and mobility are economically determined, pointing to the opportunities of the Irish jet-set and the simultaneous immobility of refugees, asylum-seekers, and the poor.

³⁵ I refer, obliquely, to the Ross O’Carroll-Kelly play of the same name, which premiered at Dublin’s Olympia Theatre in November 2007 and ran concurrently with *Playboy* (2007).

³⁶ Christy’s prospective tales of “villainy” and “fools” problematically recapitulate timeworn clichés of the Irish national character. As Seamus Deane has shown in *Strange Country*, the

English literary tradition fixates on Ireland as radically inhospitable to normality, veering between the poles of uncontrollable violence and hapless ineptitude. In perpetuating this stereotype for his own profit, Christy undermines the very representative aims of literary nationalism that he had appeared to inaugurate.

³⁷ The problem of privilege also places academics in an awkward position when championing hybridity. Bruce Robbins questions the academy's exaltation of cosmopolitan intellectuals as exemplars of postcolonial agency; he suspects that this obsession with agency may have much to do with critics' guilt about their social privilege and worries about their own professional usefulness. He writes, "What [agency] does legitimate is the public representativeness of criticism as such, its responsiveness to the active voice or will of the people. When the academic humanist pulls this particular rabbit from his or her text, the point is both that the people make their own history and, however implicitly, that the academic who is representing them as so doing, by transmitting this tidbit of the cultural heritage, is himself or herself acting in the interests of the people thereby" ("Comparative Cosmopolitanisms" 252).

³⁸ Pollock, Bhabha, Breckenridge, and Chakrabarty go on to distinguish today's cosmopolitans—"often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism's upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging"—from older instantiations of the cosmopolite, linking varied contemporary cosmopolitans through the shared experience of what they term "a minoritarian modernity" (582). See also Lionnet and Shih's *Minor Transnationalism*, and Cheah and Robbins's *Cosmopolitics*.

³⁹ Ireland also witnessed a spike in its population of asylum seekers in the late 1990s and early 2000s partly because of its liberal immigration policy. Until 2004, when a national referendum put an end to the practice (the new legislation went into effect January 1, 2005), Ireland granted citizenship to any child born on Irish soil, regardless of the parents' citizenship; furthermore, until a landmark 2003 Supreme Court decision reversed the policy, the state also granted residency to the non-national parents of Irish-born children. Since 2005 Irish-born children of non-nationals are still eligible for citizenship if their parents can prove residency in Ireland for three of the four years preceding the child's birth. These particulars of immigration policy, though, are less pertinent to Christopher, who does not seem to be thinking that far ahead, than they are to Ben, the Nigerian protagonist of Roddy Doyle's story "Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner." Ben declares, "I want my children...to live as children do here. I want them to take comfort for granted. I want money in my pocket. Is that wrong, do you think?" (23-4).

⁴⁰ See also Anderson's chapter "Census, Map, and Museum" in *Imagined Communities* (163-86).

⁴¹ Christopher's disposability resurfaces at play's end when Michael and his men are arranging to have the young man taken somewhere remote and killed. While in Synge's play the Mayoites attempt to subdue Christy and take him to the police, where he will be hanged, Adigun and Doyle's underground criminals must take justice into their own hands. This task is made less daunting since Christopher has so few ties.

⁴² In calling Christopher's gaze "sly," I invoke the crises in colonial authority and surveillance that Homi Bhabha describes in his chapter "Sly Civility" in *The Location of Culture* (93-101).

⁴³ Luke Gibbons identifies a trend in Irish scholarship and popular culture, wherein global capitalism is presented as a "cure" to the traumas of post-revisionist historicism ("Global Cure").

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