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**Identity and Authenticity: Explorations in Native
American and Irish Literature and Culture**

by

Drucilla Mims Wall

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Jonis Agee

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Abstract

IDENTITY AND AUTHENTICITY: EXPLORATIONS IN NATIVE
AMERICAN AND IRISH LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Drucilla Mims Wall, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2006

Advisor: Jonis Agee

This collection explores some of the many ways in which Native American, Irish, and immigrant Irish-American cultures negotiate the complexities of how they are represented as "other," and how they represent themselves, through the literary and cultural practices and productions that define identity and construct meaning. The core issue that each chapter examines is one of authenticity and the means through which this often contested and vexed notion is performed. The Irish and American Indian points of view which I explore are certainly not the only ones that shed light on this issue, but these are the ones I know best from my own life and studies. I have sought to combine main stream scholarly rigor with the ways of theorizing that reside within these two cultures, ways that have been excluded from the academy except in very limited and very recent forms. Literary criticism is combined with elements of personal essay in some chapters. In addition, the final chapter explores authenticity and identity through a chapbook collection of original poetry.

Acknowledgements

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Essays: "Personal Reflections on American Indians Commodified as Pathways to the Sacred: European and American Popular Culture and Nature Writing," in *True West: Authenticity in the American West*, eds. William Handley & Nathaniel Lewis, U. of Nebraska Press, 2003; and "1998 Constructions of Irish Identity in Enniscorthy: Personal Reflections on the 1798 Uprising and its Legacies." *Eighteenth Century Life*, College of William and Mary, Johns Hopkins U. Press, 1998.

Poetry: "Invisibility Lesson #1" first appeared as "Indian Invisibility Lesson #1" in *The Scaldy Detail*, Enniscorthy Launchpad, County Wexford Arts Council, Ireland, 2005; "Invisibility Lesson #1" and "Invisibility Lesson #2" forthcoming in *Eating Fire, Tasting Blood: Breaking the Great Silence of the American Indian Holocaust*, ed. MariJo Moore, Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006; "Grandfather's Lost Farm" and "Dirty Hands at the Gateway to the West" forthcoming in *The People Who Stayed: Southeastern Indian Writing After the Removal*, eds. Geary Hobson and Janet McAdams, U of Georgia Press, 2006; "Cat Revelation" and "Blue Marker Landscape" in *Times of Sorrow/Times of Grace: Writing by Women of the Great Plains/High Plains*, ed. Marjorie Saiser, Backwaters Press, 2002; "Matthew Depressed at Age Ten" in Flint Hills Poetry Society's *Sunflower Anthology*, Kansas State U., 1998; "Closet Cleaning" in *Plainsong*, May 1997; "Nebraska Widow's Walk" in *Kalliope*, Fall 1997; an earlier version of "Dancer" in *Indefinite Space*, Spring 1997; "Deer Woman at

Fifty" in *Red River Review*, August 2002; and "Dirty Hands at the Gateway to the West" in *Cream City Review*, Spring, 2003.

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Introduction

This collection explores some of the many ways in which Native American, Irish, and immigrant Irish-American cultures negotiate the complexities of how they are represented as "other," and how they represent themselves, through the literary and cultural practices and productions that define identity and construct meaning. The core issue that each chapter examines is one of authenticity and the means through which this often contested and vexed notion is performed. The Irish and American Indian points of view which I explore are certainly not the only ones that shed light on this issue, but these are the ones I know best from my own life and studies. I have sought to combine main stream scholarly rigor with the ways of theorizing that reside within these two cultures, ways that have been excluded from the academy except in very limited and very recent forms.

The most challenging aspect has been finding the appropriate voice. There have been moments when I had doubts about my right to speak at all. Other times I have felt completely at home in the role of cultural translator and literary critic. I do not mention my doubts as a form of personal confession, but rather as a means to illustrate how the politics of identity have impacted my project. In order to write something of merit, something of use, about American Indian issues of authenticity, I must first make clear who I am as a voice on the

page. For someone like me, who comes from mixed heritage and is not part of a traditional Native community, I must be sure that I am not claiming more tribal authority than I should. In terms of Irish identity issues, similar concerns apply. I must be equally careful to position myself clearly and not claim some sort of essentialized expertise that I do not have. To neglect clarifying the authorial voice would be to risk becoming just one more practitioner of colonialist abuse, cultural appropriation, and general intellectual dishonesty.

In addition to the challenges of writing about othered identities and cultural authenticity, I have also attempted to build a bridge or two between Native world views, Irish world views, and those of main stream white America. After all, I live in main stream America and am awash in its routines. I don't always understand my fellow travelers in this landscape of urban sprawl and nostalgia, but I do have sympathy for them. Perhaps even the Native writers most harshly critical of dominant culture share some of this sympathy or why else write for a broad audience at all. As this one small "perhaps" shows, it can be difficult to prevent oneself from falling down the proverbial rabbit hole of ongoing colonial struggle for Native writers, or the postcolonial negotiations of Irish writers. I have sought to approach this complex condition with some freshness and without too heavy a burden of theoretical jargon.

One unifying element in this collection is the relationship between landscape, people, and a sense of the sacred that lives in this connection. Sometimes this connection expresses itself culturally as disconnection, diaspora, and longing; sometimes as hope, resistance to oppression, and survival itself. The links between people, written

texts, oral narratives, and public performance of identity serve as the foundation for each chapter. It has become clear to me from the work involved in the production of this study that individuals of both Native and Irish world views consider themselves formed in vital ways by the places from which they have emerged. Land, including its inhabitants of the animal and plant worlds, is not a commodity for this way of being. To look through such eyes is to see the condition of post modernity, with its supposed death of the authentic, as a monumental act of hegemonic vanity, and an excuse for the continued threat of destruction to the sacred in the delicate landscapes which support it.

I have chosen a variety of four forms of writing so that each can serve its specific material most effectively. The first two chapters combine personal essay with more scholarly critical analysis; the next two chapters follow a more straight forward literary criticism; the fifth employs pure personal essay; and the last offers a chapbook of poems. In the spirit of the Native and Irish oral traditions that privilege narrative as a form of critical theory itself, these essays and poems are built with strong narrative elements.

The opening essay, "Simulations of Authenticity: Imagined Indians and Sacred Landscape from New Age to Nature Writing" examines just what the title promises. With the help of Gerald Vizenor's incisive take on how the faux Indians represented in main stream culture have caused actual Indian presence to be ignored to the point of a strange erasure, this essay travels through imagined versions of Indigenoussness in unexpected places, such as on top of a sacred mountain in Ireland. It continues from a discussion of New Age

longings for the authentic, through a close look at imagined Indianness in American nature writers, ranging from William Bartram to Annie Dillard. In every instance, the authentic is eclipsed by the imagined, sometimes with humorous results, but always with an accompanying sense of loss and puzzlement from a Native perspective. The narrative attitude that such things are so absurd as to be laughable exists simultaneously with the awareness that such simulations are a form of cultural genocide willfully denied by the main stream purveyors. That does not sound funny, but I think the humor resides in the pain. Recognition of such humor is one cultural practice Native and Irish people seem to have in common, in so far as any such huge generalization can be applied. Humor can be used as a tool of resistance, and often is in both Irish and Indigenous American cultural practice.

In response to the bicentennial commemoration of the 1798 uprising in Ireland, I wrote the second essay as a means to find out how the people in my adopted home town of Enniscorthy, County Wexford, had chosen to represent themselves. I grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and am old enough to remember the celebration of the bicentennial of the 1776 Declaration of Independence. That was a very big deal in the city that considers itself to be the cradle of liberty, and I wanted to find out how Irish identity would be interpreted. Philadelphians trumpeted victory in every way they could think of. Enniscorthians had a more difficult task. They had lost. They had declared and defended the first free republic of Ireland, but could only hold out for a month before the English defeated them and instituted a bloody aftermath of reprisals. How do

you organize a parade out of that story? And how do you prevent such public performances from becoming an us-versus-them re-inscription of sectarian violence that was still a real part of Northern Ireland that lay within a four hour drive to the north? I have combined written text with interviews and observations on the scene to capture how the town defined how the past informs its sense of itself.

In "Authenticity and Otherness in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets: Stephen Crane's Stage Irish Vision," I explore how Crane's canonical novel distorts Irishness of the immigrant community of his time. Among other factors, a comparison to the presentation of the urban Irish underclass by writers inside the culture highlights how Crane's version of Maggie's world invokes an imagined Irishness that serves his purpose, but lacks the empathy of one who knows the culture. This not a question of which writer gets it right or wrong, but rather an investigation of how differences in representation function inside and outside an othered ethnic group.

The next essay seeks to find some common literary ground between the work of Creek poet Joy Harjo and Irish poet Paula Meehan. Contemporaries who have developed without knowledge of each others writing, each is a leading poetic voice. Both grapple with the "language issue" as it is called most often in an Irish context. This issue refers to the colonial suppression of the Creek and Irish Gaelic. Both Harjo and Meehan have English as their first language and write in English, but their poetry is enriched by the influence of Creek and Irish respectively. Politics, history, and art intersect in the stylistic elements of the poetry, as much as in the content. Both poets employ traditional cultural material--what is often referred to dismissively as

"myth"--interwoven with contemporary scenes and events.

Chapter five, "The Othering of Home: Identity and Community in a Time of Eminent Domain," employs a purely personal essay form to explore how concepts of home and concepts of development demonstrate more than simply the latest conflict in the legal arena of property rights and land use. It was strange in the extreme to experience an imminent threat to our home and neighborhood. It was stranger to see how the middle class homeowners were easily positioned as potentially dangerous "wild Indians" of sorts in the disputes with developers and city council that ensued. Aspects of how authenticity as the American Dream of home and neighborhood takes shape are examined from the point of view of one who carries the ancestral memories of dispossession. A sense of irony threads its way through the essay, and is highlighted in the scene at city hall.

Some of the same poetic elements discussed in the Harjo and Meehan essay come into play in the last chapter of this collection, which is the chapbook "The Geese at the Gates." In addition to the incorporation of Creek and Irish tricksters, and other mythic beings, in the quotidian landscape of Midwestern America, I also seek to reveal the conflicting, and often simultaneous states of mind that accompany the double and triple consciousness of poetic voice emerging from my own multiple traditions. States of radical doubt, grief, depression, anxiety, and longing share poems with playful celebrations of nature, family life, and landscapes that are just as often at the mall as they are in more natural settings. The mall, the overbuilt river front, the kitchen, or humble backyard garden offer revelations. History mixes with current life, unexpectedly and

ironically. Moments of epiphany come and go tinged with a self-deprecating sense of the absurd. The poems explore a nagging sense of loss and a continuing search for authentic connection to the sacred heart of the created world. Authenticity is veiled, elusive, and under threat from the negative aspects of post modernity that would reduce it to simulacra. But authentic meaning endures; it resists extermination just as the Irish banshee or indigenous deer woman insist on asserting themselves. To paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of their deaths are greatly exaggerated. .

In the process of writing this collection, I have received much appreciated mentoring and encouragement. Professor Shari Harris served as my Ph.D. committee chair at the start of my studies at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. She oversaw my work on Stephen Crane and early American nature writers, such as William Bartram, among other things. Her generosity of spirit and good humor buoyed my confidence at the start of my studies, when I needed it most. After Professor Harris left the University of Nebraska, Professor Susan Rosowski became my committee chair. Her mentorship and guidance allowed me to develop the essay form that I use in the first two chapters of this collection. She encouraged me to combine scholarly research and analysis with personal essay and literary journalism techniques to be able to most fully explore my material. I am grateful for her confidence in me and her willingness to support my point of view and style which differed from more traditionally scholarly forms. Her passing was a great loss to me personally and to everyone who worked with her. I would like to offer my greatest thanks to Professor Jonis Agee, who became my committee chair and showed me the way

to integrate and complete my work. Without her mentorship, I would never have been able to complete this collection. Where I saw problems, she saw opportunities. She taught me how creative and scholarly elements can work together in a unified and meaningful totality.

The issues of identity and authenticity that this collection engages cannot be resolved, yet they can be productively explored in the search for new and better understanding of how their inherent complexities interact. This interaction of world views often takes the form of conflict, but just as often takes the form of creative expression in pursuit of a greater good.

Chapter One

Simulations of Authenticity: Imagined Indians and Sacred Landscape from New Age to Nature Writing

I have found it a rare experience to speak with anyone in the U.S. who feels they are truly living in their home place, who lives not on the land but of the land. In the United States, the question "where are you from?" appears as frequently in ordinary conversation as comments on the weather. So many of us are from somewhere else within our own lifetimes that the ubiquitous, and more important, subsequent question can be predicted as well, "Where is your family from originally?" Such narratives of personal immigration or migration history allow us to define ourselves as we would like others to understand us, as if we could carry a smidgen of the land of our origin with us. If one has an ironic turn of mind, this custom could be seen as the verbal equivalent to the box of home soil hauled around by the vampire's helper in so many old horror movies. "The Count must sleep on his home soil or die." And tempting as it might be to argue the vampire as emblem of European conquest and settlement of the Americas, it would be an unproductive oversimplification. Let's acknowledge that some shadow of the vampire may be seen behind European and Euro-American

consumer society so bent on devouring land and resources. But I will not focus on the hunger and thirst of the market-driven consumer for material things, but rather on what I have noticed lying in the consumer's heart--an unexamined acknowledgment of something needed, something lost which forms an intense longing for meaning, for connection to the authentic sacred in landscape which is simultaneously revered and degraded on an ongoing basis. I have further noticed the curious form this longing often takes. Europeans and Euro-Americans have of late intensified their long established predilection for representing American Indians as the human embodiment of the sacred in "Mother Earth." This phenomenon is as old as first contact but is receiving increased contemporary currency through nature writing, eco-tourism, alternative religious pursuits, and environmentalism generally. The non-Indian seeking imagined Indian connections to authentic truth and sacred wisdom strikes me as an area that can provide important insight into how main-stream Euro-American culture performs its continuing ambivalence about the land and its native people. Not so long ago white settlers wanted to Christianize Indians to save them from what whites saw as ignorance and savagery. Now the counter-strain in white culture (that was always there to a lesser extent) seems to have become dominant, and Europeans and Euro-Americans want the Indians to save them. But save them from what?

What is really happening here? In examining these processes of seeking and claiming authentic connection to a sacredness of place, I believe that my particular vantage point on Indian-white cross-cultural interaction can be of use because I come from both traditions. Through

some of my father's side of the family, I belong to the Southeastern Creek (Muscogee) Indians of what is now south central Alabama. The indigenous members of my family never left during removal times, when most southeastern woodland people traveled the Trails of Tears to Oklahoma Indian Territory. For generations those relations have intermarried with fellow mixed-bloods, full-bloods, and whites. Our Indian identity was known to us and our neighbors, but not considered something to be shared casually with government officials or other outsiders. We had survived the bloody Creek Red Stick Civil War which eroded trust among some of our bands. We survived the subsequent harsh removal policies pushed by Andrew Jackson; and the continuing pressures of rural disenfranchisement and poverty. Even up to the times of the Civil Rights Movement and after, Indian identity in the South could be a very private matter, complicated by racist laws such as the "one drop" rule, that stated any person with one drop of Indian or African blood was to be classified as "colored" and treated accordingly. Violence and betrayal have seemed a lingering possibility, a frightening price that might be exacted unexpectedly, whether or not that threat was real. But the home land base has remained alive and enduring. The old farm that housed my great-great grandmother down to my father is now paved under Ruckers Airforce Base. Some of woods where my grandfathers hunted and the creeks where they fished are there and some have passed into suburbia. Some of us live near the old stomp grounds and some are scattered from Arizona to Philadelphia. We don't know the old language, but we still tell the stories that bind us to the place of origin, only in English now.

Of the seven state-recognized bands of Creeks/ Muscogees, only

one--the Poarch band--is federally recognized. The Southeastern Creeks have no reservation lands, are struggling to recover much of our Indian culture, and often find our authenticity as Indian people questioned by other Indian groups who experienced white contact hundreds of years after we did. But we have always known who we are, however embattled and compromised that knowledge may have become. Scholar Frank W. Porter offers an informative overview of the current situation in his 1986 book *Strategies for Survival: American Indians in the Eastern United States*.

As a Southeastern Creek of mixed heritage, I have learned to be comfortable being uncomfortable in both traditional Indian and mainstream white culture. Being an insider of neither, and being an outsider of neither, I am an intensely interested observer of both. I also understand what it is to experience longing for recovery of what has been lost culturally and spiritually.

* * *

I began looking into the representation of Indians as symbolic of sacred landscape in an unlikely place--among the misty mountains and deep lakes of County Sligo in the west of Ireland. I can attest to the powerful presence of the sacred in that landscape. In July of 2001, I was descending from the cloud-softened crest and neolithic tomb site of Knocknarea, ancient mountain whereon stands the stone cairn of Queen Mebhdh (pronounced *maeve*). My sister-in-law Susan, whose family has lived in the area for generations, chatted with me as we trod grassy turf that cushioned us from black granite and stepped over

rushing rivulets shed by the rain saturated ground. She had explained one of the sites many powers, that of making people feel stronger and more energetic after spending just a short time on that low peak. I agreed. I felt charged with life and ready for a big dinner at her house. I asked about the odd bunch of skinny wooden poles we had found near the tomb. Someone had set poles into the frame of a tepee about five feet high--no covering, just long twigs, really, that couldn't have served as broom handles, let alone a tepee structure. I felt deeply unsettled seeing that phony tepee frame set on a sacred site of ancient Ireland, as if someone had tried to exploit imagined trappings of spirituality mixed up in some kind of New Age stew.

Susan had lived in Germany for several years before returning to her home area in Ireland, and she explained to me that in many countries on the Continent, especially Germany, people pursued American Indian traditional spirituality very seriously. She figured that a tourist of this type had set up the tepee shape to celebrate the special earth powers believed to emanate from sacred places such as Knocknarea. She further told me that you can have special Indian ceremonies performed in Europe to cleanse your spirit and restore your body. You could have a sweat lodge, a water lodge, an air lodge, a pipe lodge, a leather lodge; there seemed to be no end of lodges. For a minute I wondered if I had missed something I ought to know about in actual American Indian cultures. What was a leather lodge, for instance, and what kind of faded-out fake Indian was I for never having heard of it? Susan elaborated that you could have ceremonies in real tepees and everything. She wondered if any Indians back in America still lived in tepees. Although she doubted it, Susan said many

Europeans believed that Indians did prefer tepees. I explained that even historically, many Indians had never lived in them. The tepee was a Plains Indian invention. As we neared the bottom of the trail, I imagined all these recent European simulations of Indian spirituality might well be the legacies of earlier simulations performed by touring Wild West shows and dime novels. The Noble Savage was alive and well in the trappings of the Shaman.

I forgot about the phony tepee until shopping in Enniscorthy far southeast from Sligo in the rich Irish farmland of County Wexford. Among aroma-therapy candles, greeting cards, pottery, Celtic design jewelry, and gift-packaged gourmet condiments, I was surprised to find a large, locked glass case full of American Indian-style items. Medicine bags, pipes, arrows, tomahawks, porcelain dolls, kachina figures, jewelry, each item dripping beadwork and feathers, shimmered artfully on small fur pelts of what looked like rabbit. Rabbit is the trickster figure in Creek oral tradition. His presence felt appropriate. This was the only case in the shop secured with a lock.

In a related incident I recalled a story a Lakota friend had told me about a visit to her reservation by a German "Indian Club" group. After three or four days of pow wow, including traditional dancing and the ubiquitous fry bread, one of the German guests confided to a Lakota man, "This visit has been wonderful, but I must tell you that we are really better Indians than you are."

The Lakota man smiled and replied, "Yes, that is true. But give us a year, and we'll be better Indians than you."

European fascination with their perception of American Indian authentic connection to the sacred earth reflects, among other more

dubious things, what I believe is a well-intentioned, increasing awareness of ecological concerns that are, by their nature, intrinsically tied to issues of the sacred in landscape. At the heart of the environmental crisis of our exterior landscape is an analogous crisis of our internal, spiritual landscape centering on the longing for meaning and authenticity. Perhaps Indian approaches to land conservation and respect for sacred presence will help redeem people of the European tradition. There is evidence of scientific interest in the environmental management potential of Native American approaches to nature (Booth). But what I have seen of European and Euro-American engagement with Indianness remains a representation or simulation--to use Gerald Vizenor's term--of Indianness, not anything to do with actual Native Americans.

Euro-Americans, more so than Europeans, have been engaged in Indian tropes, both in literature and popular culture since colonial times, and commonalities between popular culture and high culture simulations of Indianness abound. Although those representations found in the high culture of nature writing, which is the type of writing that concerns me here, are more subtle and sophisticated than those of mass culture, they function in the same way. There is something about the idea of the Indian so deeply embedded in the non-Indian American psyche that it remains the largely unacknowledged, seemingly a "normal" part of the way nature gets written about. One can trace the cultural legacy from earlier writers such as William Bartram, Henry David Thoreau, and Mark Twain, through a parade of modernists (most notable among them being William Carlos Williams's *In the American Grain*), and culminating with Gary Snyder, and Annie Dillard among

others. Before delving into how the links between Indianness and sacred landscape function literarily, let's consider the context for both high and mass cultural expressions through Indian eyes.

For a moment consider how movies and television have treasured the figure of the Indian for dramatic, often contradictory, purposes. We all know well the violent savage, tragic half-breed, and beautiful princess. Interestingly, Indian writer Sherman Alexie's recent film, *Smoke Signals*, plays with the romantic construction of Indianness as presented in *Dances with Wolves*, setting it at odds with the actual life of two Indian boys becoming men as they search for a father who disappeared. Alexie's characters are more complex and alive than the Kevin Costner creation, but I doubt box office sales will compete with *Dances*. The movie-going public has hung out its sign: "No Realistic Indians Need Apply."

Not surprisingly, the appropriation of Native American cultural and religious material has long been a sore point for Indians. Recent writings on this phenomenon include Wendy Rose's eloquent indictment of whitemanhood and Jimmie Durham's polemic on representations of Indianness in American art, literature, and culture in *The State of Native America* (Jaimes). Phillip Deloria's book *Playing Indian* explores the exploiting of imagined Indianness by American white males in particular. Ward Churchill discusses the emotionally charged issue of literal threat of extinction for Native people in his article "A Little Matter of Genocide: Native American Spirituality and New Age Hucksterism." The anger underlying the irony of that title alone speaks volumes for the depth of controversy surrounding this topic. One of the more curious written replies to Indian protests about

religious appropriation appears in *Woman of the Dawn: A Spiritual Odyssey* by "Wabun Wind" (Marlise James), a white ex-New Yorker and New Age follower of the man Wendy Rose describes as "the notorious 'Sun Bear' (Vincent LaDuke), Chippewa by blood, who admitted to members of Colorado AIM that he never participated in or attended bona fide native activities" (414). Wabun Wind portrays herself, "Sun Bear," and a large gathering of their white followers as victims of a "disruption" of their "sacred gathering" by an Indian activist who shouted at them about cultural imperialism. She claims to have silenced and dismissed the disrupter by refusing to engage in his argument and that everyone joined her at the "Medicine Wheel" for such procedures as the "Rainbow Crystal Healing Ceremony" (Wind xi-xiii). There must be hundreds of books mapping similar spiritual quests by non-Indians, not to mention what appears to be an industry involving various types of healing implemented by whites through "channeling" supposed Indian spiritual guides (Brown).

Those appropriating authors who are Native American draw equal fire from Indian critics. Ed McGaa (Eagle Man), Oglala Sioux, is one. His 1990 book published by main-stream press Harper Collins, *Mother Earth Spirituality: Native American Paths to Healing Ourselves and Our World*, targets the market in longing for meaning and authentic spiritual communion with the sacred in landscape expertly. In short easy-to-read chapters, McGaa lays out a spiritual all-you-can-eat buffet of ceremonies, including "Receiving Your Earth Name and Finding Your Wotai Stone," "Healing Mother Earth in Your Own Community," and my personal favorite, "Sweat Lodge Checklist."

It is tempting to dismiss such goings on as just the latest

permutation of a nut fringe, but we shouldn't. These instances I have mentioned are just a few in a multi-million dollar industry. I wonder how many industry dollars go to actual Indian Nations. More important than the unethical profiting involved is the deflecting of serious inquiry away from the functioning of the figure of the Indian deeply embedded in the Euro-American, as well as European, psyche. It may well be that increased desire among non-Indians for a respectful and meaningful relationship with the earth reflects something very sane. The Green Party movement in Europe shows promising advances in environmental policy at the most practical level. Even the mayor of Dublin, Ireland, is a Greenie who prefers a bicycle to a limo. But before we can explore just what it is that non-Indians believe the mythic Indian can save them from, we must face clearly the illusions, simulations, and representations of Indianness that obfuscate real spiritual and ecological issues. Such removals of actual Indians in favor of simulated ones, in nature writing as well as popular culture, works to erase Indians, reducing them to controllable, sanitized, virtual Indians. And when spiritual/ecological issues are contained by this method, they become just as easily manipulated and dismissed as the phantom Indian figure used to represent them.

Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor offers the most complex and playful examination of simulated Indianness in *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. He explains how the overwhelming nature of representations of Indianness as something mysterious, tragic, nostalgic, wise, and in the past tense effectively constructs the absence rather than the presence of any distinct Native culture. Dominant culture wishes the difficult and complex Native to

disappear so that the constructed, controlled, and purely simulated Indian can conceal Indian people rather than reveal them. Vizenor calls for Indian people to turn to what he calls Native transmotion--a creative transforming force at the heart of Native world views--to overturn entrenched notions of the dominant culture. Recent abundance of interest in Native American writing and performance offer many opportunities to accomplish this, but the old constructions die hard.

They die hard because they are treasured images of something more true of Euro-American Selfhood than anything truly Indian. A careful look at patterns of representation in American nature writing provides some fruitful insights. The romantic, modernist, and postmodernist notions that permeate American nature writing have become so spread throughout mass culture that they crop up in the exported American pop culture that is fueling the current European fascination with Indian sacred wisdom. The simulated Indianness I encountered in Ireland is not much different from consumption of American rock music, blue jeans, or movies. We must look at American culture to find what the Europeans are mirroring back at us now.

* * *

One of the foundational influences on European concepts of Indianness can be traced to the 1792 book by Quaker Philadelphian William Bartram. This fascinating volume, *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida*, greatly admired by Thoreau, did much to establish the representation of the Indian as the human aspect of the wild American paradise for flora and fauna.

Having been commissioned and published first in England by Englishman, John Fothergill, *Travels* received much wider circulation and more popular reception in Europe than in America (Carr 53). In his introduction to the 1928 Dover edition, Mark Van Doren notes that poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge read *Travels* avidly, and that significant influence can be seen in the nearly parallel descriptions of landscape in *Travels* and "Kublan Khan" (2). Perhaps Bartram's, and others', reports of Indians hunting and taking their leisure as only nobility could do in Europe also influenced Coleridge's construction of the figure of Kubla Khan, as well as his landscape. Such reports definitely contributed to the formation of the Noble Savage stereotype still active in Euro-American nature writing (Moffitt 133).

Bartram worked to present conscientious observations, scientific standards of inquiry foremost in his mind. Even though we now regard such attempts at objectivity to be just more phantasms of colonialism, Bartram used these limited techniques much better than many of his contemporaries. The Creeks and Cherokees, among others, were portrayed forthrightly as unpredictable or threatening at times, but Bartram took pains to present them as people, not savage beasts in the way many of his contemporaries did. He strove to be accurate in his writings and drawings of people as well as plants and animals. So Bartram's general depiction of Indians living in close harmony with nature and as knowledgeable about local plants and animals is not surprising.

The 1980 facsimile edition offers an important new introduction by Gordon DeWolf that contextualizes Bartram in both his British and American milieu. DeWolf sees Bartram's text as "the most important

and beautiful description of the southeastern United States of the eighteenth century," as not merely a "technical work" of natural history, but also "an intensely poetic one" (3). In many ways Bartram serves as a touchstone for European and Euro-American conceptualizations of wild American landscape with Indian people as integral parts of that landscape. This idea continues to permeate the nature writing drama--a drama which I see as a European or Euro-American search for the authentic and sacred as manifest in non-Euro-settled American land.

However, Bartram 's rhetorical stance is one of interested observer, rather than one who seeks spiritual answers from Indians. He offers a wonderful window on the Southeast of my own ancestors (Creek Indians, Spanish, and English settlers) in the important sense that he tried to observe closely and accurately but with little of the troubled moralizing of later missionary or land-hungry types. He embraces a joy and tolerance in his observations. Perhaps this can be at least partly attributed to his Quaker background from his native Philadelphia. Interestingly, some of his opening lines reflect a view of divine creation not unlike the Indian view as I generally know it from my own father's stories. Bartram states: "This world, as a glorious apartment of the boundless palace of the sovereign Creator, is furnished with an infinite variety of animated scenes, inexpressively beautiful and pleasing, equally free to the inspection and enjoyment of all his creatures" (28). The bitter wilderness of the Puritans is absent; Bartram wrote against the grain of the growing settler hostility toward Indians and wilderness. For example, he reports that Indian women, who were described by other whites as dirty savages used as beasts of burden by their men, appeared to be no more or less happy than their white counterparts in

Europe or Euro-America. Annette Kolodny comments that the negative depiction of Indian women began to be more and more prevalent "after the seventeenth century. . . . [when] the excitement that greeted John Rolfe's marriage to Pocahontas, in April of 1614, [ended] due to the fact that it had failed to serve, in some symbolic sense, as a kind of objective correlative for the possibility of Europeans actually possessing the charms inherent in the virgin continent" {172}. Bartram writes against this possessive strain as well as showing no interest in converting Indians to Christianity. Thoreau would later provide an updated--and romanticized--variation on this theme.

The nature writer can be reasonably positioned as the essential American writer. After all, many critics have argued that the encounter with wilderness (read nature in its least familiar form), and the individual's struggle to "tame" it, defines American writing generally. And although in this sense nearly every American writer can be read as a nature writer, the master narrative was shaped by Henry David Thoreau, whose influence is pervasive. Bartram may have shaped Thoreau, but it is Thoreau who most people think of when they think of the founder of Euro-American nature writing.

In one of many evocations of the Indian, Thoreau expresses admiration for the simplicity with which Penobscot Indians build their homes in the "Shelter" chapter of *Walden*: "Consider first how slight a shelter is absolutely necessary. I have seen Penobscot Indians in this town living in tents of thin cotton cloth, while the snow was nearly a foot deep around them, and I thought that they would be glad to have it deeper to keep out the wind" (345). He saw their shelter as a reflection of Indian ability to be happy simply, rather than any reflection of having

to do without. This is to his credit, but he neglects to ask any Indians for their thoughts on shelter; Thoreau leaves them silent, their voices unnecessary to his conclusions about their lives. In continuing his argument for inexpensive housing for all people, especially poor whites, Thoreau explains:

Though the birds of the air have their nests, and the foxes their holes, and the savages their wigwams, in modern civilized society not more than one half of the families own a shelter. In the large towns and cities, where civilization especially prevails, the number of those who own a shelter is a very small fraction of the whole. The rest pay an annual tax... which would buy a village of Indian wigwams.... It is evident that the savage owns his shelter because it costs so little. (346-47)

An opposition between the problems of "civilized" shelter and "savage" shelter develops further, as Thoreau makes his rather confused point that although civilized ways are superior generally, savage wigwams are cheaper and possibly set a good example for poor white people on how to live more independently and simply. The problem of who owns the land on which the shelter is pitched is not broached. Land ownership is the problem for both Indians and poorer whites, not shelters built on land, as the Penobscot Indians could have no doubt explained if they had been asked.

Earlier in *Walden*, Thoreau imagines that he is stepping in the footprints of Indians who are now gone. He walks along the pond and

praises the beauty of nature, imagined to be almost as lovely as when the vanished Indians walked there. Treading "like" an imagined Indian, Thoreau imbues himself with authenticity of appreciation for the place. His tone combines the wistful romantic with the didactic preacher, with an effect approaching moral nostalgia for those people who really knew how to live in harmony with nature.

In *The Maine Woods* Thoreau flavors much of this kind of appreciation for Maine's semi-wilderness with the reported perceptions and behavior of his Penobscot Indian guide. Although he has a name--Joe--Thoreau mostly refers to his guide as "the Indian." When the guide sings one evening, Thoreau writes: "His singing carried me back to the period of the discovery of America . . . when Europeans first encountered the simple faith of the Indian. There was, indeed, a beautiful simplicity about it; nothing of the dark and savage, only mild and infantile. The sentiments of humility and reverence chiefly were expressed" (730). A page later he adds in response to the guide's explaining what a will-o'-the-wisp was: "they [Indians] are abroad at all hours and seasons in scenes so unfrequented by white men. Nature must have made a thousand revelations to them which are still secrets to us" (731). Here is Thoreau representing Indian secret wisdom complete with wonder and nostalgia. Again, his fancy of bonding with the footsteps and perceptions of Indians helps Thoreau claim an authenticity as interpreter of Nature that he would otherwise lack.

During the time both Bartram and Thoreau were writing, Indian people were losing more and more land, and their population continued to suffer brutal decline through disease and war. The forced removal of the five southern tribes under the Indian Removal Act of 1830

happened about sixteen years before Thoreau first visited the Maine woods, for example. Euro-American sentiment was overwhelming unsympathetic to Native peoples. Indian women, a group that had been romanticized in the figure of Pocahontas, and other aristocratic type "princesses," were being portrayed as dirty, sullen, and sexually promiscuous (Tilton 22). Indian wars were fought regularly in an east-coast-to-west-coast progression for all of the 19th century, and would have been a familiar piece of background context for Thoreau, and even more so for Mark Twain--another writer who wrote against the grain. But unlike Bartram who wrote against Puritan attitudes, or Thoreau who wrote as promoter of Noble-Savage romanticism, Twain wrote with an anti-romantic stance in creating the character of Injun Joe.

The figure of the noble savage fading into a western sunset, the consummate vanishing American, served well as a safe emblem for the romantic spirit of nature. The Indian could be comfortably written about as an ancient, a possessor of sacred wisdom, victim to the regrettable but inevitable march of progress in the new Euro-American nation. Mark Twain chose to write another type of simulated Indian--the figure of Injun Joe in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. There is no doubt that Injun Joe is associated with nature. He lives as a shadowy, animal-like criminal in caves or woods removed from "civilized" society. I have reason to believe that Injun Joe represented an exaggeration of real Southeastern woodland Indian people, such as my own Creek relations, who refused removal from their ancestral homes to Oklahoma Indian Territory. These Indian communities did live isolated rural lives on land considered undesirable by whites (Porter 54). I know also from my own family's oral histories that such Indians would have been tough

fighters, survivors resistant to the laws of a society that had treated them so badly, and frightening figures in the imaginations of white land-takers--perfect material for Injun Joe. He, like the actual Indian refusers, embodies the dark threat of justice or vengeance--the repressed, violent truth about whites' enforcement of Indian removal.

Mark Twain's depictions of human nature often struck close to the bone, and Injun Joe is no exception. A recent Disney film based on *Tom Sawyer* removed Injun Joe completely, replacing him with an outrageously drunken, dirty, white man. I am not sure what that says about continuing stereotypes about Indians, but I am sure that once again the Indian disappears. That film was sanitized to rid it of a racist stereotype, but in the process, any Indian presence was removed as well. No "bad" Indians need apply. We see a variation on Vizenor's idea of absence again.

Thoreau's and Twain's opposing uses of Indian constructions point to the enduring tension and ambivalence toward the Indian in Euro-American literature and culture. Often the writer's method for dealing with the tension is to translate it into something else, most often a struggle to discover an authentic identity as an American writer as opposed to a European, or Euro-American writer. Hart Crane concludes the "Quaker Hill" segment of *The Bridge* by evoking the "tribal morn" where we may find Pocahontas before she meets any white men, or take part in an Indian corn dance. Here the longing for some meaningful connection to the land is clearly evident. Later, William Carlos Williams would continue the search for what defines American writing. In *In the American Grain* he insists: "The land! Don't you feel it? Doesn't it make you want to go out and lift dead Indians tenderly from

their graves, to steal from them as if it must be clinging even to their corpses some authenticity..." (57).

Many may like to think this phenomenon is passing. In answer to this, I offer an example of how digging authenticity from the American land continues to be a common expression of this longing. Emerging nature essayist Lisa Knopp, in her sensitive and contemplative 1996 *Field of Vision* collection, includes a section in which a naturalist whom she admires pursues a hobby of finding Indian arrowheads embedded in the Iowa soil. The arrowheads speak of a magical connection to a sacred past when the land was unspoiled by over-cultivation. Knopp seems compelled in establishing herself, unconsciously perhaps, to claim her part of the nature writing traditional pie by--at least once in her first published book--get down in the dirt and dig for Indian cultural remains. How emblematic the Indian arrow is--weapon of defeated and removed enemy no longer a threat, link to the unmediated hunt for animals as food source, evidence of life and work unalienated by a market-driven, urban economy. But what happened to the memories of all the arrows that must have been shot for centuries in Europe? I suspect that those arrows are tainted by memories of class inequalities, land lost, people subjugated. But those are European people's sufferings remembered, unconsciously perhaps and unacknowledged certainly, and not Indian people's sufferings remembered as Indians remember them. It is a luxury of the colonizing group to play with imagined memories of the subjugated Other. Even when that colonizing group has the best intentions, as ecologically and politically sensitive nature writers do, they still enjoy the benefits, advantages, and casual use of power that allows for such imagined

evocations of Indian-arrow symbolism.

Annie Dillard, an established and respected nature writer with deep Christian spiritual bent, describes herself in great detail as an Indian arrow that will carry her words to the reader in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. The shaft of this arrow is carved by "certain Indians" with grooves resembling lightning. Dillard claims a shaman-like power from this arrow symbol, elaborating that "if the arrow fails to kill the game" the lightning marks will "channel" blood to "spatter to the ground, laying a trail . . . that the barefoot and trembling archer can follow I am the arrow shaft . . . and this book is the straying trail of blood" (12). Does that make the archer the reader, or the author, or some invoked Indian of the "certain Indians"? Logic dictates that the one following the trail is the Indian archer. So are we made into Indian hunters as we read the trail of blood that is the book? There is no doubt that *Pilgrim* deals with matters sacred intertwined with nature. Is part of the appeal that the reader can become conjoined with the mythic Indian, holder of authentic sacred knowledge of the native land? Is another part of the appeal of this symbol for the author that she can imagine herself as the instrument of the mythic Indian hunter, since she describes herself as the arrow shaft? Is this a variation on serving as an instrument of the Christian God? Such questions are thorny indeed, especially when considering the logical next step that would join the mythic Indian and the Christian God.

Gary Snyder, eco-poet of substantial white following, has encountered more than his share of criticism from Indian people for his extensive use of Indian "symbolic" material. *Turtle Island*, Pulitzer Prize winner for 1975, serves as the most widely read example of his work.

Snyder directly embraces his idea of Indianness right from his "Introductory Note": "Turtle Island [is] the old/new name for the continent, based on many creation myths of the people who have been living here for millennia." He adds his ecological focus, explaining that the title should help us "see ourselves more accurately on this continent of watersheds and life-communities The poems speak of place, and the energy pathways that sustain life." He concludes by encouraging all people "beached up on these shores" to "see our ancient solidarity." But even though the Native people have inspired his title, Snyder does not include them in the list of peoples. They are the invisible ones who inspire but do not participate in the life celebrated in the poems. I am sure this was not Snyder's intention, but good intentions are the point really. All the representations of imagined Indianness I have included so far, as well as hundreds of others, are created with the best intentions. But they nevertheless leave the Indian as nothing but a series of Vizenor-esque "fugitive poses", absent from the heart of the matter.

Snyder invokes the old ones in his opening poem, "Anasazi." He links them beautifully to the desert landscape, but with the same free floating nostalgia that he will touch upon again and again. Indians offer pathways to the sacred in the landscape, but only in the past tense. The speaker operates as one who wishes to call up the past and connect with its mystery. The technique is simple and elegant. "Anasazi, / Anasazi," the speaker calls in invocation of the spirits. The next and longest stanza places the speaker in the Anasazi world reporting:

tucked up in clefts in the cliffs

growing strict fields of corn and beans
 sinking deeper and deeper in earth
 up to your hips in Gods
 your head all turned to eagle-down
 & lightning for knees and elbows. (3)

Imaginative quality is clearly here with crisp, lean lines. The romanticism of the description is so beguiling that it is easy to forget that the ghostly Anasazi figure is purely a figure and not something based on reality. The connection between the Indian and the land is also packed into the poem. After writing the curious lines "women / birthing / at the foot of ladders in the dark." Really? Giving birth at the foot of ladders, and in the dark no less?! This is Snyder's imagined female Anasazi?! Snyder drops in "trickling streams in hidden canyons / under the cold rolling desert." The word "hidden" captures much of the thrust. These Indians are literally hidden under the desert in the form of bones, I suppose. They are hidden by time, hidden by the inaccessibility of their dwellings, hidden by cultural distance also. And that is the attraction, the magic that resides in imagining the long-gone Indian (and Snyder does use the singular, not the plural) who can be the object of poetic play in any way the poet pleases.

Such ghostly Indians can be controlled. "Control Burn" (19), and "Prayer for the Great Family" show the poet's control in action. In "Control Burn," no specific Indians are named, as though all Indians were the same, instead of the multi-cultural beings Indians have always been. Snyder tells how "the Indians" used to "burn out the brush every year in the woods up the gorges" in order to prevent the kind of wild fires that even now devastate large areas of the western United States

every year. His ecological point is well taken, but why does Snyder choose anonymous Indians from the past?

"Prayer for the Great Family" (24) ends with the aside "after a Mohawk prayer." Gratitude is repeatedly stated to all aspects of the natural world, each stanza devoted to a different element. The poet's concept of unity between Native American spirituality and nature couldn't be clearer. This is the same idea dispensed by Wabun Wind and many other popular culture New Agers. Why is it palatable from Snyder, but poison from Wabun Wind? Where do we locate aesthetic accomplishment in the complex phenomena of imagined Indianness? How do we protect artistic freedom and also protect the actuality--the real existence--of Indian people, none of whom want to be absented from the world in which real issues of sovereignty and land use are matters of life and death? I wonder if some recent developments in tourism, of all things, point toward positive change.

For all the simulations, appropriations, and exploitations of Indianness--well intentioned or not--there is also a major change evident. Indians themselves are making their own presence felt--taking back control of representations and experiences of the spiritual on their own lands. The front page headline of the *New York Times* from September 21, 1998, reads "Indian Reservations Bank on Authenticity to Draw Tourists" (Egan). German and Dutch visitors (American visitors are also present, but Europeans were focused on) paying to sleep on a dirt floor in a real tepee, exclaim in statements such as, "When I sleep in the Tepee, I feel a lot of connection to the earth," "I have had a fire every night and I have been able to walk over the prairie. It has a very special energy," or "It is so interesting to see how these people live

today." Photographs show tepees on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana at the "high drama nexus of the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains." At last a specific Indian nation gets mention. These are not theme parks built around the fantasies of non-Indians. Authenticity may be an actual possibility in this context. Visitors are just that, welcomed guests in another country, an Indian country, and control of cultural representations is in the hands of Native people.

In addition to tours of Indian lands, Egan notes that record numbers of people, about 600,000, have visited the National Museum of the American Indian in Manhattan in the 1998. Other such museums report the same trend. In addition, the Museum of the Plains Indians in Montana notes that almost half their visitors in 1998 have been from Europe. Although the Blackfeet Nation expresses concern over holding the line between sharing culture and exploitation, the issue is under Indian control.

N. Scott Momaday addresses this phenomenon in his 1997 book, *The Man Made of Words*. He presents himself as a cosmopolitan world traveler and spiritual pilgrim in search of sacred experience at sites in Europe and elsewhere. His Indianness informs his experience just as the identities of non-Indians informs theirs. In the chapter "Sacred Places," Momaday and an Indian friend take a wrong turn on their way to the Medicine Wheel sacred site in the Big Horn Mountains. The layering of history and irony become particularly enjoyable when the two friends encounter another pilgrim who has taken the same wrong turn on his way to the same site. Momaday tells us that this third man's name is Jurg and that he is from Switzerland. The three continue together and later part after sharing a deep spiritual communion with

the divine power of place at Medicine Wheel. Indian and European travel as equals, part as equals. Momaday emphasizes his positive feeling about the adventure. Again we see an Indian in control of the means of representation.

In the storyteller section of the book, Momaday offers a humorously illustrative narrative about knowing one's true place: "The Indian Dog." He tells of buying an Indian Dog which, in spite of being tied and locked in a shed, nonetheless escapes to return to follow his original master's wagon:

The Indian dog had done what it had to do, had behaved exactly as it must, had been true to itself and the sun and moon. It knew its place in the scheme of things . . . in the tracks of the wagon. . . . *Caveat emptor*. But from that experience I learned something about the heart's longing.
(173)

What of the longing in the human heart? Have we lost sight of our path behind the master's wagon? Momaday writes, "To encounter the sacred is to be alive at the deepest center of human existence. Sacred places are the truest definitions of the earth . . . if you would know the earth for what it really is, learn it through its sacred places" (114). The answer to the longing for authenticity resides in the sacredness of place, not in imagined Indians, nor in any purchased piece of imagined authenticity. No one can buy or borrow rightness of being in the sacred by grabbing a piece of "Indianness". Both native and non-native traditions hold that certain places hold a special share of that deep, divine power. I would expand that idea to include all places as imbued with the sacred; that is part of the important work of the environmental

movement, to help us all realize this and act to celebrate and preserve the integrity and authenticity of all of the earth. The purely scientific approach to land that has dominated the ecology movement of mainstream European and Euro-American cultures is inadequate.

* * *

Perhaps the non-Indian obsession with how simulated Indianness can save them asks the wrong question. It is not what can Indians save non-Indians from, but rather by what process and for what reasons do we all experience the heart's longing for the sacred in landscape. Only through the pursuit of this question's implications can we honestly and authentically locate ourselves in our sacred place-- here, now, and within our own cultures.

One of the strengths of Momaday's book is that it offers a reversal of the non-Indian view of whatever is imagined to be Indian so common in the popular culture and nature writing I have discussed. He accomplishes this reversal with a grace and humor that makes clear how the encounter with the sacred Otherness of place and its people can happen anywhere one is not at home. Indians have no more special connection to the earth in, say, Bavaria, than any other non-Bavarian.

Sometimes, if we allow ourselves to be open and respectful to the possibility, sacred places will reveal themselves. Sometimes the human spirit of the place is someone familiar, rather than imagined. That is what the sacred in landscape can do, make the familiar new, strange, and just beyond the edges of language. I remember a night last July when, as an outsider, an American, an Indian, and a relative of local

natives, I became a Momaday-esque pilgrim visiting Lough Arrow, one of the deep island-dotted lakes in the hills of County Sligo in the west of Ireland. I didn't go looking for the sacred; it found me.

Even at ten o'clock at night the lake, under the still-bright sky, flicked small waves like silver conchos upon its illuminated body. Strong, diffuse twilight endured until nearly midnight. It felt like early evening light would feel back in Nebraska. Trout broke the surface here and there, and a plentitude of frogs sang along the banks before plunking under water at my footfalls. This would have been a good time for fishing, but that was not our reason for boating. My husband, two children, and I had returned to my husband's native Ireland for the summer and were visiting his youngest brother Michael, his wife Susan, and their two children who live beside the lake. Michael and Susan use water directly from the lake in their home; that's how clean it is.

Knocknarea Mountain, where Susan and I had wondered about the "teepee" sticks the day before, shadowed the horizon to the north. Oak, ash, and whitethorn gathered shadows beside me in the whisper of field grasses, as the stiff reeds used for centuries to weave St. Brigit's crosses waved from their advance into the lake's edge. Behind me sounded heavy wellington boots across bog meadow. Surely my husband and his brother Michael, never trained to be light on their feet, had brought the old outboard motor for the boat. Our children ran over from the road where they had been arguing over naming a cat that had taken an interest in their shoelaces. We tumbled into the boat, Michael set the motor down and took the oars, speeding us out toward the largest island perhaps a mile away or more.

He smiled, saying, "Now you'll really see something," and we did see. We saw Michael rowing, his strength in perfect balance, his smile, his health, his love for the lake combined in perfect balance, propelling us over the silver glow of deep cold smoothness that splashed us as the wind increased on open water. We slipped into silence, unable to articulate our excitement. My husband managed to say, "The distances are longer than you'd think." I offered something like, "The light is so beautiful," and fell silent again under the inadequacy of our words. The children let their hands plow the water over the sides. Michael rowed. His oars curled waves of black unbroken by froth--the only sounds the steady wind and voluminous water. The island moved nearer. A little silver fish jumped close to our daughter's hand and we all exclaimed at such an amazing event. Twilight deepened. The low mountains that cradled us in the lake darkened to pine greens and black. Silhouetted against the still bright western sky atop Knocknarea Mountain we saw the ancient stone cairn of Queen Medhbh's tomb. No cars stirred on the distant roads. Few lights winked from houses on hillsides. Michael swung the boat toward the island and pulled the oars again. His motion flowed into the yielding lake water itself, into the darkening shore, the air wet with spray, the grassy turf blanketing the granite of Knocknarea, the Neolithic tombs as common as farm houses all over Sligo. Under the silent oncoming stars, my husband's little brother had become the native spirit of the place, the human conduit for the sublime and sacred land of Ireland's "Wild West".

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Chapter Two

1998 Constructions of Irish Identity in Enniscorthy:

Reflections on the 1798 Uprising and its Legacies

Enniscorthy, County Wexford, Ireland, will be the center for all activities in the 1998 commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion. It is a fitting location for remembrance. Here is the heart of a victory which lasted only about one month for the Irish rebels of '98, but which endures as an integral part of Irish national identity to this day. The ordinary people of Wexford won and held a free Irish republic for a long, bloody month against the rising might of the British military, and they are not likely to forget it. I can tell you that after spending many summers among friends and family in Enniscorthy over the past fifteen years, I have become an American with an Irish home. Every street and field is dear to me now, and so it felt natural to set out in the summer of 1996 to discover just what 1798 means to the people living in the Slaney Valley at the foot of Vinegar Hill today. How might they shape their sense of Irishness in terms of their fellows who fought two hundred years ago? After all, it was a people's rebellion--even more so than my own American Revolution had been--and it was the people's conceptions and representations of it that I wanted to know. I also knew that Irish people in general, and Wexford people in particular, would be well educated, literate, and lively conversationalists.

I chose Enniscorthy to focus my efforts for reasons stronger than

my personal fondness for the town. You see, by the time the sun set on the May 28th, 1798, poorly armed rebel forces had routed the garrison and taken the town of Enniscorthy, County Wexford, Ireland. As historian Daniel Gahan explains, "The Battle of Enniscorthy, as it soon would be called, was one of the most important engagements of the rebellion. It gave the rebels command of the entire central section of the country and provided their campaign with almost irresistible momentum. In addition, hundreds of men and women from the town joined their ranks [at the main camp] on Vinegar Hill" (54). Less than a month later, on June 22nd, the people in nearby Wexford Town could hear the rumble of British artillery hammering into the rebels on those same exposed hillsides. In the extended and fierce battle of Vinegar Hill, thousands died, the majority of them "noncombatants" or "camp followers," as they are referred to impersonally by many history books. The residents of Enniscorthy today who have shared their thoughts with me speak of them differently. When asked, they talk of those who died as flesh-and-blood men, women, and children who color the town's memory with their presence, an enduring presence which helps shape the citizenry's sense of themselves.

Anyone there will tell you that even in July, the wind cuts through jackets and sweaters as though they were tissue paper on the top of Vinegar Hill. I know, because I have stood there often over the past fifteen years, scrambling over spongy turf and bare granite outcroppings or trotting worn paths through heather, brambles, blackberries, and wild roses. I have taken photos of my children, father-in-law, nephews, friends, and my husband. Every picture features either hats pulled down to the eyes or hair blown outlandishly, the rich, earthy checkerboard of

Wexford farms rolling to the silvered Slaney River and the winding streets of Enniscorthy below. We smile in the pictures. We clown. Adults brace one hand on a child's shoulders and point with the other to landmarks in the distance. My twelve-year-old son frowns at me, and I remember his asking, "What do you mean by Needham's Gap? There's no mountain over there." We button our shirts to the neck, and sometimes we tell the stories of the place.

Vinegar Hill is one of those rare places where layers of time and human history tumble around us in the vigorous wind, a place that demands its stories be told. The story most insistent began in 1798 and continues to reverberate today. Nearly two hundred years ago a brief but pivotal Irish victory died here, along with more than a thousand of the men, women, and children who farmed and worked in the same land I set so prettily in photographs. Everyone will tell you that the Irish rebels mistakenly relied on holding the high ground. Whole families were camped there. I have heard from local residents that husbands and wives (sometimes with children present) fought back-to-back during the eventual hand-to-hand, pike-to-bayonet massacre that followed. That is a startling image, to say the least--just the sort of image that intrigues me most in my research into current conceptions of the Rising. For one thing, it places the family in the center of battle. The expected subtext is to demonstrate British brutality, but it equally reveals a sense of an entire people participating in their fate--not just the rebel men alone. I looked further for more images which would illuminate the current nature of Irish identity by the beautiful Slaney's side.

I remembered the first time I climbed Vinegar Hill in 1984. I had leaned against the ruin of a stone tower where, unknown to me at the

time, loyalist prisoners had been held until brought out and executed. I asked my husband Eamonn, a native of the town, why it felt so odd and wistful up there with the wind and the view. He suggested it could be memories embedded in the spirit of the place itself, that maybe the horror of battle on the hill was soaked into it just as the blood of the dead surely was. This little speech shocked me. A reserved man who ordinarily prefers Bob Dylan's music and abstract expressionist art to Irish ballads and folklore, a man who scoffs at any sort of romanticism, my husband was unabashedly relaying narrative in the oral folk tradition. And instead of emphasizing the Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity which I assumed had sprung from the American and French revolutions (Hart), he was representing 1798 with a decidedly nineteenth-century mode of Romanticism.

"Sure, they were blowing people to bits with artillery and skidding through their guts coming up the hill to bayonet any poor gobshites left breathing," he elaborated with a sweeping gesture taking in the whole expanse of the hillside. I knew him well enough to laugh. The moment for romantic musings had passed.

"Ask me father. He's an expert on all that. And if there's anything he doesn't know, he'll give a good answer anyway. That's the purist form of Irish history." Eamonn laughed, and I knew his dad would laugh as well.

Mixed in with humor lay the surviving truths of the terrible trauma that had been 1798. I was to find that a good rule of thumb concerning conversations with many individuals about the Rising. Humor can temper the rougher facts of history. It's also difficult for many modern people to describe their views on 1798 in the essentially romantic

nationalist terms that have defined it since the time of the Young Irelanders. Contemporary Wexford people can feel uncomfortable expressing a nationalist romanticism that could be misconstrued as sectarian triumphalism. It seemed to me that the meaning of 1798 would have changed in representations fashioned by the needs of the following generations. One consistent thread I felt sure I could follow was the desire for independence at the core of the Rising, which had resonated for more than a hundred years through the traumas that finally, in 1921, won a republic for all of Ireland but the still partitioned area of the North.

In seeking an appreciation of current local sensibilities, I can attest that it is very important to note that the sense of time itself is different in Enniscorthy and other Irish towns like it. And I do *not* refer to the tourist's idea that things are scheduled more casually than in "efficient" America. I refer to a state of consciousness that is important and quite subtle. I refer to what I have become accustomed to as the simultaneity of time in Enniscorthy. Past, present, and future intermingle naturally in conversation, in public events, even in the physical architecture of the town itself. Allusions to historic events and figures--often with comic intent--spice chat over dinner or drinks in the pub. And no one thinks anything incongruent about ennui-faced teenagers sporting nose rings and black leather jackets lolling on the Market Square at the foot of Oliver Sheppard's grand 1898 bronze of Father Murphy guiding a croppy boy toward Vinegar Hill--the boys' hair styles uncanny facsimiles of the croppy's.

As preparations for *Comoradh* (Irish for commemoration and pronounced "commorah") swung into high gear that summer, I determined to seize my best opportunity to discover more precisely how

the traumatic events of 1798 remain meaningful to Enniscorthy. Much has been written about how history has shaped the Irish, but this was surely the perfect time to explore how the Irish people of my adopted Enniscorthy were choosing to shape their history in the public sphere of *Comoradh*.

The logical place to start was with a visit to the Wexford County Museum housed in the castle (yes, it's a real castle) just off the Market Square. It is a museum rich and complex in its collections as well as in the eccentricity with which many things are displayed. Ancient grinding stones or medieval carved figures may grace the deep-silled, small windows of the winding tower staircase. No security alarms, mind you, just a polite card here or there asks that you not touch the displays, but it's hard not to touch at least one grinding stone. What hand first touched it? How long ago? The 1798 room in the rear of the second floor offers more temptations.

Rebel pikes festoon the walls on two sides. Bagenal Harvey's sword beckons from over a door. I stretched up wishing I was just an inch or two taller. An oil portrait of Father Murphy tops a glass case full of weapons, including cannon balls recovered from the barrage of Vinegar Hill. Maps, British regimental buttons, and tattered diaries are labeled on small cards in an elegant hand, not with what they are, but rather with the names of the people who donated them. It is assumed that we, the viewers, already know the details of every artifact. After all, they are representations of collective Wexford identity, and every viewer is embraced on some unconscious level into the fold of Wexfordness. Visitors feel comfortable trundling over the wide pine board floors of the Castle Museum. They smile. There is a mood of familiarity.

I asked the curator, David Carberry, if we could talk for a few minutes about the bicentenary. He surprised me by immediately explaining his misgivings. Although enthusiastically in favor of the commemoration generally, Mr. Carberry worried that the whole thing would be over-commercialized and over-promoted into something like Walt-Disney-Does-Vinegar-Hill.

"You know, thousands of people died in Wexford. I believe it was nearly one-third of the population of the whole county," Mr. Carberry said and added, "I think we should be careful not to forget that in some rush for tourist trade."

There seemed to have been minor friction between Mr. Carberry and some of the other people working on preparations. I gathered that there might be a philosophical split between those who thought of themselves as purists in the accurate representation of history and those who focused more on how to make those representations visitor-friendly. Mr. Carberry expressed doubts, for example, about a proposed multi-media tour of the Rising. He added that over fifty thousand people were expected to pass through the area in early June of 1998 alone. Just the thought of accommodations seemed daunting to him. I could see his point, but asked if Enniscorthy hadn't dealt with large numbers of visitors in the past. He quipped that he couldn't say for sure about recent events, but he knew there had been quite a crowd in 1798. Before we parted laughing, Mr. Carberry explained that many of the things from the 1798 room would be part of displays at the new Visitors' Center under construction a few streets away. He advised me to speak with someone involved in that project, which is just what I did (Carberry).

From the offices of the Urban Council, I could see a beautiful view

across the Market Square, sweeping along the eighteenth-century shops to Castle Street with Vinegar Hill in the distance. Mr. Bernard Browne, Administrator for the National 1798 Visitors' Center, pointed to the statue of Father Murphy and the croppy in the Square, "They did a brilliant job refurbishing the area. Really lovely. But why didn't they put the monument in the center of the Square? It's off to one side, and it isn't really a square, is it? It's a triangle."

The Market Square has a triangular shape all right, but from the vantage point of the audience during the many performances held there during Strawberry Fair and other festivals, it's perfectly clear why the statue is off to one side. It would block the stage otherwise. I didn't mention this, and we returned to the large conference table to sit, so I could hear more of the Visitors' Center plans.

I mentioned that Mr. Carberry had sent me, and Mr. Browne responded, "Oh, you know he could have gotten in on some really super funding for the museum, but he refused. We thought at first to use the Castle as the Visitors' Center, but Mr. Carberry had so many objections that we moved the site completely. Too bad really."

Mr. Browne gave me a copy of a map of existing and proposed monuments around the county. A list of possible events appeared on the back. He asked me to let him know if I thought of any other events that could be included, especially things for children to do. I complimented him on the fine examples of pikes propped in two corners of the room, and he was reminded of certain design controversies concerning a fountain for the front of the Visitors' Center.

"We had thought that the pike would be a natural decorative element for the fountain. Perhaps decorative is not the right word. A sort

of circle of pikes, or something like that. But some individuals have questioned the more sectarian or triumphalist side of that image, so now it's up in the air" (Browne).

At that moment the phone rang, and our talk was cut short. I found my way out of the Urban Council offices and over to Murphy-Floods Hotel just across Main Street on the Square (which is really a triangle). A certain amount of dissension concerning an anniversary as important as the bicentenary seemed normal enough, but things were shaping up to be more contentious than I had expected. Even the pike was in question as an emblem for the People's Rising that had employed it as the staple weapon. Sectarian conflict still made itself felt, even in the Sunny Southeast, as Wexford is often called.

The bar in Murphy-Floods Hotel on that cool, wind-blown afternoon offered its quiet pleasures: soft light, a comfortable seat, a toasted cheese sandwich, the perfectly worn oak bar on which to rest elbows while savoring truly excellent coffee, and the gentle art of conversation. Pints of stout or lager could wait until a later hour; this was a softer time.

I noticed that as it had grown, the hotel had incorporated Oneighboring eighteenth-century and older buildings into itself. The bar swept from the upper lobby level down two levels to the lower bar, and will be further expanded to include a luncheon carvery soon. These layers of buildings and their times cobbled gracefully together echo in architecture much of the Enniscorthy attitude toward history. They blend into the present time, each layer still present and accepted, still of use.

I hailed my brother-in-law Niall Wall, as he walked over to greet me. I hoped to hear about his impressions of 1798 and the plans for

Comoradh. Niall, along with his brother David, manages the hotel. It has been in the family for three generations now, and Niall had grown up surrounded with its convivial links to the community, immersed in some ways in the collective life of Enniscorthy itself. I knew he had studied history in university and held a graduate degree in business administration, but I have always been most impressed with Niall's interests in traditional music. He has a real feeling for the history and attitudes expressed in the old songs. He has also won All-Ireland trophies for his skill in the *sean nos* style of ballad singing.

Niall explained the most notable aspects of the Rising in his opinion. He explained that County Wexford was the only place where poorly armed, ordinary country people successfully defeated the British army and held them at bay for over a month. Even though they were eventually crushed with great brutality, that brief victory for the colonized Irish became emblematic for their continuing resistance and ultimate independence over one hundred years later in 1921.

I asked why I hadn't been able to find any songs from immediately after the Rising. There were plenty of United Irishmen songs, to be sure. Then later into the nineteenth century, people such as Thomas Davis, in the 1840s, promoted ballads about 1798 in his famous newspaper *The Nation*. But there was nothing following the event itself, it seemed--no contemporaneous commemoration in song.

Niall smiled and patiently explained again, saying, "As far as I know, there is no recorded folk memory of the time itself. It was just too devastating. Don't forget, something like 20,000 people were killed in the space of one month. And that was just in the Southeast. I think that represents about one-third of the population at the time. Now how do

you sing about that?"

"Only the famine was a worse disaster, and that happened over a period of years. 1798 went from start to finish here in about one month. And that does not take into account the terrors of the aftermath. There were some very nasty reprisals against survivors labeled as rebels. And there had been a certain amount of neighbor killing neighbor, burning houses and farms, settling scores and the like. It took really two generations of living with the aftermath of '98 before the ballads you know as popular today were written. Like 'Kelly the Boy from Killane' and those," he continued.

In *The Harp Restrung*, Mary Helen Thuente amplifies this idea in her chapter examining the influence of "United Irish literary nationalism" on the Young Ireland movement of the 1840s. She explains: "Young Ireland songs imitated the United Irish practice of writing new, politically charged words to traditional Irish melodies" (193). In summing up the United Irish legacy in popular culture, Thuente reminds us that the often divisive and sectarian nature of popular songs from Young Ireland times onward nevertheless traces their conception to the pluralistic ideals of the United Irishmen of the late eighteenth century (230).

Niall Wall explained an interesting more recent twist on the practice of using traditional tunes for new lyrics. I learned that the "national anthem" of County Wexford, "Boo-lavogue," was published with a different melody sometime in the 1920s or 30s, and its popularity took off as never before. We were quiet for a moment, as I struggled for the right words to ask one more question.

I gave up and spoke directly, "Do people still love those poems and ballads today?"

He looked down and stirred his coffee. "Many people," he said with a tone of mild disapproval, "prefer to move on, to listen to R.E.M., to forget the past. I can't blame them. Some say that in Ireland, the past never really seems to pass."

Later in the summer, I would hear Niall sing the old songs that have since won him an All-Ireland award. And it was at the end of that evening that I believe I came to my truest understanding of the shape and form of modern Romanticism in Wexford. But before I can let that unfold, I must elaborate on the history of representation of 1798. Romantic representations of the spirit of '98 are very public in nature. They carry a collective focus that combines nationalist pride with a sense of sadness and loss over the defeats of the past.

Perhaps the best known popular piece commemorating 1798 is the Young Ireland poem, "The Memory of the Dead," written by John Kells Ingram in 1843. Using a heavy-handed Romantic nostalgia for those who fell, it first appeared in *The Nation* and later on broadsides. Although Ingram later became a Unionist against violence, his six stanzas are consistent with the many less enduring songs of the same type from this time (Zimmermann 227).

I have often seen its first line lampooned in both print and conversation, but the poem does capture an attitude of resistance to colonialism crucial to the formation of a nationalist identity:

Who fears to speak of '98?
 Who blushes at the name?
 When cowards mock the patriot's fate,
 Who hangs his head for shame?

.....

They rose in dark and evil days

To right their native land;
 They kindled here a living blaze
 That nothing shall withstand.
 Alas! that Might can vanquish Right...
 (Zimmerman 226)

Several songs of the mid-nineteenth century elaborate, if not improve on, the raw propaganda of this one. They survive as classic ballads because they celebrate the human spirit as much as the patriot's zeal: "The Croppy Boy" by Carroll Malone (c. 1845), "The Rising of the Moon" by John Keegan Casey (c.1865), and "A Nation Once Again" by Thomas Davis (c. 1843) are just three examples (Zimmerman).

Of the many songs devoted to this theme, "Boolavogue," written by P. J. McCall in the centennial year 1898, is the most important for Wexford people. It narrates that part of 1798 particular to Wexford, including the death of rebel leader Father John Murphy, whose portrait hangs prominently in the County Museum in Enniscorthy castle. Boolavogue is a town where some of the first battles were won by the rebels. I include all the lyrics here because of its status as the anthem of County Wexford, and also because of the key role it played in my gaining better understanding of the meaning of 1798 for Wexford people today :

At Boolavogue as the sun was setting
 o'er the green May meadows of Shelmalier,
 A rebel hand set the heather blazing,
 and brought the neighbors from far and near.
 Then Father Murphy of old Kilcormack,
 Spurred up the rocks with a warning cry--
 "Arm! Arm!" he cried "for I've come to lead you--
 Now priest and people must fight or die."

He led us on 'gainst the coming soldiers,

and the cowardly Yeomen we put to flight;
 Down at the Harrow, the Boys of Wexford
 Showed Bookey's regiment how men could fight!
 Look out for hirelings, King George of England,
 Search every kingdom that breeds of slave!
 For Father Murphy, of the County Wexford,
 Sweeps o'er the earth like a mighty wave!

We took Camolin and Enniscorthy
 and Wexford storming drove out our foes
 'Twas at Slieve Coilte our pikes were reeking
 with the crimson stream of the beaten Yeos.
 At Tubberneering and Ballyellis
 Full many a Hessian lay in his gore!
 Ah, Father Murphy, had aid come over,
 A green flag floated from shore to shore!

At Vinegar Hill o'er the pleasant Slaney,
 Our heroes vainly stood back to back,
 And the Yeos of Tullow took Father Murphy,
 And burned his body upon the rack.
 God give you glory, brave father Murphy,
 And open heaven to all your men;
 The cause that called you may call tomorrow
 In another war for the Green again.
 (Zimmermann 290)

One noticeable element of Romantic influence, other than the nostalgia for the righteous war, is in strong evidence. That is the resonant significance assigned to place. Each place name in the song (there are 13 in all) evokes a fierce connection to native soil. Actually, there are also echoes of the centuries old Irish epic poetic use of the naming of places, animals, and people as a near act of conjuring their spirits. Irish people have told me on at least three separate occasions that the air itself feels purer to their lungs upon returning to their native County Wexford, after even the briefest trip away. The fact that the rebellion was first won, only to be later lost entirely, on home ground anchors "Bookey's" power. The effect is unequivocally Romantic. The spirit of place is an undeniable

force in all representations of 1798.

Thomas Davis's newspaper *The Nation*, part of the Young Ireland movement of the 1840s, made the case for Irish self-determination through songs that were precursors to "Boolavogue." Each of the songs I have mentioned, except for "Boolavogue," appeared first in print in *The Nation*. Davis did not embrace the utilitarianism of the parliamentarians, but rather a "deep, historically rooted sense of cultural difference from Britain" (Turpin 136). He perceived this difference to be rooted in Romantic (and non-sectarian) notions of identity and history which I was seeing alive and well in 1996 Enniscorthy. Critic John Turpin summarizes Davis's appeal:

It was an emotional, Romantic argument instead of a rational, Enlightenment one. Influenced by German Romantic writing, Davis saw the centrality of art and literature in the expression of a nation's "soul" or cultural identity. (136)

If we turn for a moment from ballads to the visual arts, nothing embodies the Romantic spirit of representations of 1798 as fully as the sculptures done by Oliver Sheppard for the County Wexford centennial commemoration in 1898. Wexford town has its pikeman on a pedestal in the town center, and Enniscorthy has the even more ambitious piece in its market square. At the heart of Enniscorthy stands the huge bronze figures of a stalwart Father Murphy throwing a guiding arm around the shoulders of a young croppy boy rebel. Both gaze off toward Vinegar Hill, their garments wind-blown, the croppy's chest partly bared to expose heroic muscles matching those of his strong arm that steadies a pike. These monuments are of excellent quality and have the dramatic

presence strong enough to stop casual passers-by for a moment or two of unplanned contemplation. Yet, certain locals express criticisms of these same dramatic qualities.

One secondary school teacher, and lifelong resident of Enniscorthy, commented to me, "If I see one more huge statue with a big crow-thumping, bare-breasted croppy pointing a pike to heaven, I think my head will explode." He added, "Triumphalism is holding back the Irish. Sure, be proud, but let's put the effort into things like high technology and education. Those are the strengths of our future. That's what our kids need, not more monuments and speeches."

Historian and Wexford man Kevin Whelan discusses the problematic nature of representations of 1798 in depth in his book *The Tree of Liberty*. The title itself has Romantic resonance because Whelan took it from the Robert Burns poem of the same name that he quotes. Romantic ideals were fought over in some ways more vigorously after 1798 than during the uprising itself. Whelan explains how the "politics of memory" operate to interpret history according to the agenda of whoever is doing the interpretation:

The struggle for control of the meaning of the 1790s was also the struggle for political legitimacy.... Interpretation of 1798 was designed to mold public opinion and influence policy formation: the rebellion never passed into history because it never passed out of politics. {quoting French historian Robert Gildea}"What matters is myth, not in the sense of fiction, but in the sense of a construction of the past elaborated by a political community for its own ends." The construction of collective memory is one of the primary

tasks of the historian. (133)

I would add that it is also the task of the public who, in the end, choose how they want their memories represented. In the midst of these efforts at organizing *Comoradh*, what surprises many Americans, when told of current problems like the pikes for the fountain design in Enniscorthy, is the fact that this process of constructing Irish identity is ongoing, not neatly resolved with shamrocks and rainbows. People are not in agreement about how the past should be represented/constructed, even in something as innocuous as a visitors' center fountain. The bitter sectarianism that flared during 1798 continues to boil in Northern Ireland. Even as I collected interviews with Enniscorthy people, I often watched television news reports of violence in the Drumcree area of Belfast. I was unnerved by the video taped interview of a Catholic woman terrorized, while alone in her home with her eight-year-old daughter, by men trying to batter down her front door because she had moved into a Protestant neighborhood. Families were still located at the center of battle, it seemed. I wondered which century I had fallen into, until I realized that I was living simultaneously in the last four or so. I then considered that I might be nearing a better understanding of the heart of Irish identity.

When I need solid answers about Irish culture and politics, I turn to the two people I respect most in Ireland, my mother-in-law and father-in-law. They seldom agree on these subjects, and thereby offer me a balanced perspective that is better informed than most. Nancy Wall told me, when I asked what 1798 means to her, that she thinks too much is made of the suffering of the past. She would prefer to move on to more crucial issues for Ireland's future, such as its role in the European

Community and the world marketplace. I agreed with her that the continuing troubles in the North had wearied many people of the images of war. EC membership was building Ireland's economic strength and giving young people hope for a more affluent and cosmopolitan future. I could see that in the younger generation's fashions. It was difficult to say whether I was in New York or Enniscorthy if I judged by kids' clothes alone. Nancy Wall seemed to feel just a little tired of Irish romanticism.

"Ireland is now in a very promising position for economic progress that will do a lot of good for the generations coming up. More and better jobs. Fewer will have to emigrate. But, tell me, how can you see where you're going, if you are always looking back," she said, succinctly, and I agreed.

Mike Wall, on the other hand, told me wonderful stories of the rebellion itself. He made the conflicts come alive as he recounted local history and lore. I knew there had been terribly bloody fighting in the streets of Enniscorthy, but I had not realized that a man had been piked to death at the very doorway of the Wall family home. The house appears to be easily one of the older stone structures in the town center--seventeenth century, judging from its general design and the over two-foot thickness of the outer walls. I wondered who had sunk down and bled to death at the door I had passed through so thoughtlessly, so often. Mr. Wall discussed the importance of remembering those who had died trying to free Ireland. It would be an awful thing to forget them in the midst of current concerns and successes.

"After all," he reminded, "where would we be today if they had not bothered to stand up and fight, and die if need be." He was right, of course.

Michael and Nancy Wall captured contrasting popular attitudes perfectly. Enniscorthy felt ambivalent about how to construct the past so it could inform the future in a meaningful way. I had not yet found the heart of 1798 in the current town.

Perhaps representing the past in a post-colonial environment like Ireland was a matter of balance--neither emphasizing past glories nor future ambitions too much. But collective memory of such traumatic nature is not given to bland balance. Interestingly, in a packet of 1798-related items I received one year after my visit from my father-in-law in 1977, the pike had been elevated to nearly iconic status. A pike, complete with the special improvement of a slicing hook that was invented by a Wexford blacksmith, graced the front of the brochure promoting *Comoradh*. Little gold pike lapel pins had been designed by a local jeweler and were selling well. Even the cover of the tape *Memories of '98*, on which school children sang and offered a closing "Peace Prayer," featured a pikeman. All the pikes looked natural and appropriate in their contexts.

And then, one warm evening toward the end of that summer of 1996, Niall Wall and his wife Mary Codd invited me to join them at a lovely old pub out in the country. There was to be a traditional singing session. They each have beautiful voices, and I share their love of the old songs, so I was pleased to go along.

As I was getting ready to go, my fifteen-year-old niece, Yvonne, stopped by to visit. I had not yet asked any teens about their perceptions of 1798, so I took the chance to ask her. What did she think of the preparations for 1998's commemoration? How did she feel about the twenty thousand people who had died during the uprising of 1798?

Yvonne paused a good minute before responding. She then smiled, turned the hem of her T-shirt up a little, and exclaimed, "Look! I got my belly button pierced. What do you think?"

I thought it looked cute but painful. This pleased her. She giggled and told me she had to go. And as she left through the door where the man had been piked to death in 1798, I understood that, in her own charming, goofy, teenaged way, Yvonne's assertion of her independence by getting a belly-button ring fit nicely with the spirit of '98. I was just glad she hadn't gotten a tattoo; you can remove a naval ring much more easily.

Within an hour, Niall and Mary settled us at a table in the country pub, as our section filled with music lovers from their 20s into their 80s. We enjoyed a few pints of Guinness and people began to take turns singing their favorite "party pieces." Mary's lyrical voice performed beautifully in a favorite of hers called "The Maid of Allendale." Most people sang unaccompanied in the plaintive *sean nos* style of Irish folk ballads. Many renditions reminded me of American Appalachian singers I had heard. They came from a Scottish tradition not unlike the Irish. As it got later, the crowd of non-singers grew larger.

Smoke and background talk increased. There was what could have been construed as a volatile mix of youngsters sporting pierced eyebrows and odd hairstyles, older farmers in fraying tweed jackets taking their pints seriously, well-dressed women chatting with their friends, and the music lovers still singing away. Once in a while someone off in a corner would erupt in laughter over conversation we couldn't hear. Someone would shout a drink order. Glasses would clank and bar stools scrape the wooden floor. By closing time, the crowd was tiring of traditional

music and a restless undertone of conversation made it difficult to hear.

Tension between traditionalists and those who preferred something more like rock 'n roll was becoming more apparent. The barman shouted last call. And in true Romantic style, Niall Wall stood up at our table and extended his arms outward from his sides, as if he would embrace the air around him. He hadn't sung more than one ballad the whole evening, though Mary had delivered beautiful renditions of three love songs to much applause. Niall stood there the personification of the Romantic, Byronic hero in the swirling smoke of the pub. He wore his white shirt and black pants, and the dim light made his shirt glow in comparison to the rest of us seated in our darker attire. And he stood there a few long seconds more at six feet in height and built solidly well, like an American football player. His black curling hair accentuated his fair, Celtic skin, and he looked confident, really in his element. But all that was nothing once he began to sing. A powerful baritone, his voice must have been easily heard three pubs down the street. His song was "Boolavogue."

I was half expecting one of the scoffers in the back to shout out some taunt. But the pub had become silent. Niall finished the first verse, and slowly people began to stand and join in. By the end of the first chorus, we were brothers and sisters of Wexford. We looked at each other and at Niall and knew that we were the very same people who had littered Vinegar Hill two centuries ago. And we lived again. We sang--all of us. The guys with odd hair styles and pierced eyebrows sang. The old fellas in tweed jackets with pants shiny from wear sang. The young women in designer jeans chatting with their friends sang. The barman sang. We shook the floor. And the Romantic representation of 1798

ceased to be a representation, ceased to be a construction. "Boo-lavogue" didn't *represent* anything; it transformed from symbol to the thing in itself. The song breathed with the collective being of all of us together in a pub in County Wexford in 1996, and 1898, and 1798. We were the United Irish, one soul that night. I had found the Romantic heart of Irish identity.

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Interviews conducted in Enniscorthy, County Wexford in the summer of 1996: Bernard Browne, David Carberry, Edward Creane, Yvonne Kelly, Michael Wall, Nancy Wall, and Niall Wall. Special thanks to everyone who discussed these matter with me, some of whom are directly quoted, and to everyone who kindly put up with my questions, especially to my husband, Eamonn Wall.

Notes

1. For a fuller account of the treatment of rebel non-combatants during and after the final battle of Vinegar Hill, see Whelan (27-30 in *The Mighty Wave: The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford*). Among other details, the multiple rapes and wholesale killing of women and children, after the surviving rebel soldiers had escaped through Needham's Gap, are discussed. For interesting first-hand accounts of the fighting and the reprisals that characterized the aftermath of the rebel defeat, see Folley (*Eyewitness to 1798*).

2. As part of the assault on the rebels at Vinegar Hill on June 21, 1798, General Lake ordered Lt. General Francis Needham to bring his troops to bear on the eastern flank, while other troops covered the north and west. They would then come together and meet at the southern side, cutting off any rebel retreat. The rebels prevented Lake's better armed forces from completing their encircling maneuver long enough for many to escape to the south through what is now called Needham's Gap. Needham was unable to bring his troops up in time, thereby allowing a path of escape for the surviving rebel soldiers. Unfortunately, the numerous non-combatants were not able to move as fast as the rebel troops, and were massacred by the British. Current local lore insists that Needham stopped in a pub along the way just long enough so that he could avoid the rebel pikemen he feared. For a detailed account of the fateful Battle of Vinegar Hill, see Gahan (ch. 13): Bartlett (ch. 12).

3. No conversation about '98 transpires without some discussion of

atrocities committed by both sides. The people I spoke with in Enniscorthy consider themselves squarely on the rebel side, yet they consistently go to great pains to admit feelings of bitter regret over the innocent loyalists who were killed at the two most notorious rebel atrocities, Scullabogue and Wexford Bridge. I would like to add that, although I am sure other rebel acts of cruelty happened on a small scale, loyalist atrocities occurred on a vastly larger scale and with official sanction and praise from the leadership. Whelan notes in his chapter in *The Mighty Wave: The 1798 Rebellion in Wexford*, "Of 20,000 casualties nationwide, a maximum of 3,000 were inflicted by the rebels" (28). See Whelan and Gahan for a full account.

4. Starting in the 1840's, the Young Ireland movement, led in great part by Thomas Davis, reflected growing nationalist sentiments even in the midst of the Great Famine. The Young Irelanders celebrated the United Irishmen of the 1790s and considered themselves to be cut from the same revolutionary cloth. An interesting exploration of this and other legacies of 1798 can be found in Whelan's final chapter to *The Tree of Liberty*.

5. The pike could be a formidable weapon, especially in practiced hands at close quarters. I was told on numerous occasions that the Wexford pike was of a superior design due to the innovation of a local blacksmith. He added, to the straight spear, a hook and axe element which can be seen, among other places, on the cover of the *Comoradh* brochure as well as on the pike held by Father Murphy in the Market Square statue in Enniscorthy. For example, with the hook, a rebel could cut a horse's

bridle or reins, rendering the rider vulnerable and unable to control his mount.

6. Bagenal Harvey was one of the commanders of the rebel forces in County Wexford. He had been active in the United Irishmen before the Rising. He was also one of many Protestant rebels who led what became largely a Catholic cause. One of the founding ideas of the United Irishmen was just that, to unite all Irish men, whether Catholic or Protestant, in the cause of political liberty and equality. These Enlightenment ideals succumbed to various sectarian pressures at the time, and the representations of the Rising that followed in the 19th and 20th centuries have followed a decidedly Romantic, nationalist, and Catholic emphasis. When I asked one Catholic Enniscorthy friend why the Protestant leaders of the Rising are spoken of now as though they were Catholics, he corrected my misunderstanding of the way people talk about men such as Bagenal Harvey. He explained that everyone knows they were Protestant, and everyone respects and accepts them as such. But they are considered to be *our* Protestants. There's that edge of humor again.

7. *Sean nos* singing refers to a plaintive and beautiful style of traditional Irish folk ballad presentation. It is performed without musical accompaniment, features a slightly nasal voice intonation, and allows great possibilities for individual expression of feeling. Considered one of the oldest forms of balladry, it links to the ancient Irish oral traditions of presenting and preserving history through the narrative song. A distinct category of competition is devoted to *sean nos* in the All-Ireland for

traditional music.

8. The 1898 centennial commemorations of 1798 were on a grand scale generally. In my biased opinion, the Sheppard sculpture in Enniscorthy is probably the best of any monument to the Rising. For more information on 1898 centennial, see Turpin ("Portraits of Irish Patriots by Oliver Sheppard, 1865-1941"); O'Keefe ("Who Fears to Speak of '98:' The Rhetoric and Rituals of the United Irishmen Centennial, 1898").

Chapter Three

Authenticity and Otherness in *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*:

Stephen Crane's Stage-Irish Vision

Something about the stereotypical stage Irish figure endures. With origins dating back to fourteenth-century England in general usage, and the seventeenth century as a definite figure on the English stage (and soon to be a transplant to the American colonies), stage Irish men, and less often women, continue to offer a kind of dark comic relief even in contemporary Irish-American literary texts. Frank McCourt's best-selling *Angela's Ashes* and Michael Stephens's *Season at Coole* and *The Brooklyn Book of the Dead* offer three cases in point. However, the most instructive examination of this character type looks at how representations differ between writers who create from either inside or outside Irish culture. Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, although not the first literary work to exploit Irish stereotypes, is important in that it creates a world under the auspices of the Realist and Naturalist literary movements and not sentimentalism or comedy, employs the authorial voice of a distanced outsider posing as a reliable observer, and retains canonical status in American literature. Crane's serious interest in creating an authentic Bowery slum environment (the main thrust of *Maggie* depends upon it), the innovative and aesthetically powerful quality of the prose, along with the problematic

nature of Crane's construction of his Irish-American characters as "Others" or outcasts of the society from which he himself came, combine to call for a careful contextualizing of *Maggie*. Cultural and literary currents that led up to *Maggie*'s creative moment at the turn of the century, the concurrent writings by Irish-Americans inside the culture, as well as some late twentieth century texts handling related material and vernacular language converge here to offer some instructive contexts.

In taking a moment to better define the origins of the stage Irish type, it is important to note that, for obvious reasons, the English colonizers of Ireland felt comfortable, even vindicated in their control of Irish lands, through imagining the Irish as racially distinct and inferior to themselves. Just as later American slave owners created the figure of the happy, childlike Africans singing and behaving amusingly, the English chose to construe the agrarian Irish as simple country buffoons in need of looking after by their betters. In American cultural history, similar treatments of American Indian, Jewish, Italian, and Latino characters could be listed as well. The common factor in such supposedly comic representations is, of course, the inferiority and unambiguous otherness of the figures. By the time Stephen Crane wrote *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* in 1891, the stage Irish stereotype seemed so natural to his eyes that he saw objective evidence of it everywhere in the economically depressed Bowery section of New York City. Crane felt secure in using Irish characters and dialect to convey his personal vision of the tragic consequences of a brutal slum environment. It is true that the Bowery housed great numbers of poor Irish Americans, but Crane's reduction of the people

he observed to the limits of the, by this time, centuries old racial stereotypes is particularly interesting when we consider that he intended to write a true-to-life, realistic text--not a throw-away comedy for the newspaper or the stage. The elements of parody that nuance *Maggie* are aimed at undercutting the sentimental novel tradition, not the stage Irishman tradition.

The phrase "the wild Irish," applicable to both men and women, can be traced to as early as fourteenth century England (Duggan 108). Before exploring Crane's interpretation, a sketch of the classic Celtic personality is helpful. C. G. Duggan's history of the Irish stage offers this summary:

The Stage Irishman habitually bears the general name Pat, Paddy, or Teague. He has an atrocious Irish brogue, perpetual jokes, blunders and bulls in speaking, and never fails to utter, by way of Hibernian seasoning, some wild screech or oath of Gaelic origin at every third word: he has an unsurpassable gift of blarney and cadges for tips and free drinks. . . . His face is one of simian bestiality with an expression of diabolical archness. . . . His main characteristics are his swagger, boisterousness, love of drink, and pugnacity. (288)

All these characteristics could be said to be stereotypically colored by a highly strung, emotional temperament, as likely to lapse into melancholy as hilarity. This is a heady mix for dramatic behavior, and contains great potential for the type of lurid scenes and grotesque characterizations that make Crane's *Maggie* such an attention-grabbing read. Pete, Jimmie, and Maggie's mother and father each fit

this description well. Maggie herself fits a different stereotype that, I believe, came to the fore more recently in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and was crystallized by the Famine. I refer to the long suffering, beautiful, lost woman as victim. W. B. Yeats made this figure famous in the character of Eileen Ni Houlihan, a personification of Ireland itself. Much has been written about the implications of such constructions of Ireland as a raped or otherwise victimized woman.

Yet, it is not Crane's presentation of stage Irishness itself that problematizes his text, but rather it is his authorial voice as outsider posing as expert insider. Voice and voices lie at the heart of *Maggie*. In this, Crane is true to the description in Duggan's history; note how important verbal habits are in the construction of the stage Irish stereotype. Crane uses Irish-American vernacular dialect liberally in his characters' dialogue. In fact, the characters' pidgin-flavored, ill-educated speech marks them as inhabitants of the lowest social strata. Their inability to speak well, or even to communicate at all, functions as a key element in the sad degradation each faces as an ordinary part of daily life. On the other hand, I doubt that Crane saw his own third-person omniscient, authorial voice as just as vital to the world of his novel. The narrator speaks with sympathy at points, but most often with a tone of condescending fascination with the low life he describes. By the last chapter, the characters have been reduced to nameless figures in a grotesque tableau of hypocritical mourning--their humanity nearly lost. In as much as the inability to communicate defines the dysfunctional family relationships of the greatest part of the book, a contrasting great outpouring of verbal expression frames the last chapter. Crane only allows this outpouring

because it provides fodder for his parting scene of the negative Irish mother, another variant of the stage Irishman. The ritualistic mourning by the mother and her female companions shows them as doubly alien and other, repellent, yet grotesquely fascinating because they are both an active part of the communal women's culture of mourning (something I will explore in detail later) and they are members of the slum Irish general culture.

However we choose to read or categorize Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, the author has left us sufficient evidence indicating that he intended to create a work of serious realism--an honest and accurate portrayal of Irish-American slum life of New York at the end of the nineteenth century. Part of his aim in choosing this subject matter undoubtedly arose from Crane's artistic reaction against the popular sentimental novels of the time, in which adversities such as poverty, violence, and ignorance were routinely overcome by young heroines exerting the sheer force of their innate goodness and determination. Indeed, our contemporary popular romance novels persist in following this same formula. Crane appears to have bristled at the hypocrisy inherent in these sentimental depictions and took the iconoclast's road to irony and what would have been considered shock-realism in his construction of Maggie's world. In one way, Crane parodies and completely reverses the sentimental best-sellers of his time. A few popular titles Crane would have scorned were written by such authors as Susan Warner, Maria Cummins, E. D. E. N. Southworth, and E. P. Roe (Solomon 23). Crane scholar Edwin Cady comments that "the sentimentality, artistic self-pity and gush which characterize too much of the writing about

Crane since his death, would have appealed to him not at all. He meant his vision to be sharp, clear, and hard . . . and he meant to be absolutely faithful to it" (75). "Vision" is the important word here. Crane wanted to create a work through which the reader would "see" Maggie's world in as clear and unvarnished a fashion as Crane believed himself able to see.

Crane embraced the Impressionist painters' philosophy that the world can only be represented as a view or impression from the artist's mind, and accepted the Kantian world view that asserts objective reality as an illusory concept (Nagel 21). Yet, Crane also seems to have held the Romantic concept that the artist's role must be that of the shaman, whose vision of reality was superior to the rest of ours, and who must strive to bring his Promethean, liberating version of reality to struggling, benighted humanity. Additionally, Crane has offered some more direct clues to his sense of mission as a writer in certain letters and notes. Concerning his use of realism in creating *Maggie*, he wrote to Catherine Harris that "I had no other purpose in writing *Maggie* than to show people to people as they seem to me. . . . If that be evil, make the most of it" (Beer 140). Further elaborating in a famous letter to John Northern Hilliard, Crane explained:

I understand that a man is . . . not at all responsible for his vision--he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this honesty is my supreme ambition. . . . I merely say that I am as nearly honest as a weak mental machinery will allow. This aim in life struck me as being the only thing worth while. A man is sure to fail at it, but there is something in the

failure. (Stallman 180)

This assertion of such a youthful, romantic, and earnest rhetorical pose cannot help but bring a wistful, perhaps nostalgic, smile to readers in our current age of post-modern, radical doubt concerning any possibility of achieving an "honest" rendering of anything. As we read *Maggie* almost exactly one hundred years after Crane struggled to publish it against the opposition of a readership actively dismissive of the dark realism he strove to employ in service of his "honesty," we might well think of Crane as quaintly idealistic in thinking he could provide a clear vision of Bowery life. Most critics treasure Crane these days as a gifted stylist and tragic figure who died too young to achieve his mature art (not unlike John Keats the English Romantic poet of nearly a century earlier). But this critical attitude offers a serious disservice to Crane and his *Maggie*.

I think most contemporary writers would agree that Crane was on the right track in his quest for authenticity in his stripped down prose and brooding use of color adjectives to capture mood and attitude. Many of Crane's descriptive passages move beyond impressionism to anticipate the expressionism of the Fauvists, such as painter Franz Marc with his disturbing "Blue Horses," or the lean sentences of Modernist writer Ernest Hemingway, or the later minimalist Raymond Carver. Crane's reduction of the main characters to nameless figures by the close of the novel also anticipates the sense of ambivalence and loss captured by recent pop artists. Maggie could be thought of as an early pop-culture icon not unlike those used by Andy Warhol in his large-scale, repetitive photo displays of Marilyn Monroe or Elvis Presley. Maggie shares their larger-than-life, tragic-

erotic stature, certainly. She is reduced to much the same significance as the repeated Campbell's soup cans that gained Warhol such notoriety. Our industrial, mass-produced culture posits people as disposal resources. The social determinism and Marxism that was so new a flavor in Crane's time lingers with us now as a tired given. We even refer to business offices that deal with employment as departments of "human resources," as though we can use people like we would fuel. Even though Crane's artistic vision differs, obviously, from a Warhol or a Carver, does it differ so much really? Bitter irony is the stock and trade of all, and the unpitying world where no God intervenes and no human kindness can be relied upon emerges in work of contemporary artists and writers from the field plowed first by Crane.

The closing paragraph of chapter seventeen offers one important example of Crane's powers. Here is Crane as what critics called "the first dark flower of American Naturalism" (Knapp 1). Although this short clip can't do justice to the breadth of *Maggie*, it does glimpse Crane's vision as "somber, tragic, but always authentic: his finely honed language bone-hard, incantatory, deeply sensual in its rhythmic patternings and auditory effects" (Knapp 1). Maggie has just, or is about to, jump into the East River and drown herself. In three sentences, Crane captures, not only the mood of the time and place, but also the subtle resonances of the metaphoric and symbolic levels offered by the river. These three sentences could be said to sum up the mud-puddle world of the entire novel:

At their feet the river appeared a deathly black hue. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a

moment the waters lapping oily against timbers. The varied sounds of life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly and died away to a silence. (*Portable* 68)

The red or blue mentioned repeatedly earlier in the book in association with strong emotions are replaced here by the black and yellow of the dispiriting night scene. The mud puddle of chapter five, with its manageable scope, from which Maggie had emerged as that "most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, pretty girl," has been usurped by the oily, suffocating river, that had only appeared on the margins of the narrative before. For example, during a sleepless childhood night of terror after her mother has beaten her, "out at the window the florid moon was peeping over dark roofs, and in the distance the waters of a river glimmered pallidly" (15). "A river" has become "the river." A distant glimmer has become an enveloping presence. The factory from which Maggie fled as a killing dead end reasserts itself as a partner in the scene of her demise. The sounds of life fade to Maggie's ears as we seem to sink with her under black water. Just as Maggie has been an outsider to the "joyous" sounds of life throughout the book, she stays true to her role and perceives these sounds as unapproachable to the end. Crane imagistically summarizes Maggie's essence in the three sentences devoted to her moment of death. Now that's writing.

Yet underlying the powerfully Spartan writing style that so deftly evokes the both materially and spiritually impoverished environment of Maggie's brief life, Crane lays hints of sympathy for his otherwise supremely unsympathetic characters, an authorial tone that

hints that things might have been--could have been--otherwise had circumstances been better. Environment seems to be the source of Crane's deterministic and naturalistic world of desperation. Yet his very passion in revealing his vision of this hell betrays a certain implied authorial desire that things be reformed. This contrapuntal note of the lesson being offered through the horrifying tale of squalor and despair appears strangely more like a church minister's example story for a sermon than the naturalistic reporting of life-as-I-see-it that Crane wanted to paint in broad strokes. At every step of Maggie's sad journey from abused child, to rejected lover, to prostitute and suicide, we can't help but hear the implication that this "flower blooming in a mud puddle" could have been just like any "respectable" woman had she had the right environment--certainly better parents at least.

In his friend Hamlin Garland's first copy of *Maggie*, Crane inscribed, "For it [the book] tries to show that environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes lives regardless. If one proves that theory, one makes room in heaven for all sorts of souls (notably an occasional street girl)" (qtd. in *Portable* 1). Perhaps Crane could not completely escape his own upbringing as the son of a Methodist minister father and a mother descended from same. Even as he strove to live the life of the writer/journalist on the edge, Crane preserved his sense of moral outrage, not at the downtrodden street girl, but at the environmental factors that sealed her in such misery.

Another handwritten inscription in a copy belonging to his friend, Arthur D. Ferguson, Crane wrote, "who does not hesitate to comprehend that an occasional conscience may appear in very strange places" (Katz xxi). The Bowery is one such "strange place" that surely

crushes the Maggies of the world, and Crane offers no solutions to Bowery life. The question that hangs in the air about any text presenting a situation of despair is what purpose does the author have in mind for his depiction. Crane claims that he simply wants us to see it and clearly, unfettered by pop romance or religious, moralizing nonsense. This is what it is really like, he claims, for even the best (i.e. a pretty girl) of the Irish-American slum dwellers. Look and know the truth of the human condition, Crane seems to say. I would like to challenge his vision, not on artistic grounds, for I have long loved and admired Crane's artistry, but on his own terms of authenticity. And I want to further clarify that I do *not* simply want to let some air out of yet another canonized dead, white, male American writer. Whatever else can be said about such men, they are our literary fathers and there is little profit in bashing one's own family. I think there is profit in revising the contexts in which we read Crane's *Maggie*. In light of the importance Crane himself placed on authenticity in his writing, it is instructive to place *Maggie* in a larger context of Irish-American writing at the time, also taking a few appropriate glances before and after the 1890s.

Biographers of Crane explain that he wrote his first draft of *Maggie* in 1891 while student at Syracuse University. Through the influence of fraternity buddies, Crane moved to what is now called New York's Alphabet City or Lower East Side (Knapp and Stallman). He shared a room in a boarding house overlooking the East River and Brooklyn where he wrote the final draft in 1892, and also from where he ventured with his friends to test his draft for accuracy and realism by "observations and adventures in the Bowery" (Stallman 66). I

wonder if Crane happened to interview any "girls of the street." The biographers do not mention it, but it seems logical that he might well have had some sort of conversations along these lines. I wonder if any Irish-American "Maggies" told him any sad old stories of how they came to be in the life. There is an established oral tradition among prostitutes of having a repertoire of such stories to please the sympathies of their clientele. What's that old line: "What's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?" And there is also a strong oral storytelling tradition among the Irish generally.

To give Crane his due in terms of authenticating research he must have conducted as an outsider preparing to create a posed insider's creation of Maggie's world, there can be no doubt that Crane would have had plenty of contact with the Irish in the Bowery area. The 1870 census of the Sixth Ward, which encompasses much of the Lower East Side including the Bowery, stated that, of the total population of 21,153, the Irish comprised 11,709--over half the people. This proportion probably stayed about the same or may have increased by the 1890s (Hodges 110). The area south and east of city hall, known as Five Points and very near if not inclusive of Maggie's neighborhood, enjoyed notoriety dating from mid-century. Five points exuded a "carnavalesque" atmosphere, "which excited and appalled moralistic New Yorkers" (Hodges 112). Hodges further explains that its five main streets converged in what was called Paradise Square, a center for working class and immigrant boarding houses (such as the one Crane stayed in), groceries selling liquor, taverns, dance halls, and brothels:

Gleanings from contemporary observers suggest that the

Five Points was an early version of the Black and Tan bars of Harlem in the 1920s, around Times Square in the 1950s, and later in the East Village. Like their descendants, Five Pointers were ripe for casual violence, carousing, and open love making. Many were black and Irish men and women. (Hodges 112)

The close association of Irish and African Americans is a wonderful topic unto itself, but in this context I will simply call attention to the figurative convergence of representations of the "white" Irish in the same derogatory racist terms as those applied to blacks. Popular press cartoons bestial simian features for both groups, for example. There seems to have been a need on the part of nativist Americans at the turn of the century to work even harder constructing the Irish as racial other than they did for blacks. This racialization of the Irish is something the nativists shared with their British counterparts. Crane appears to have embraced this view *de facto* by emphasizing Maggie's milieu as luridly exotic, an underworld of people pitifully separate and radically different from his hoped-for mainstream readership.

By the same token, tenement life, for any group forced to cope with it, was and remains oppressive. Irish neighborhoods around the turn of the century were rife with the health and social ills associated with poverty. For a young man like Crane, from a Protestant, middle class, privileged upbringing, the squalor must have been particularly dramatic, taking on the scale of a romantic adventure. Lawrence McCaffrey includes an account of Bowery commonplaces as part of a family memoir:

Husbands sodden with drink beat wives who often

retaliated with fists or skillets. Men frequently deserted families. Youngsters ran wild in the streets. A few young women became prostitutes or petty thieves. Street gangs proliferated, some connected with volunteer fire companies or Tammany politics. (218)

Whatever Crane's experiences on the Lower East Side might have been, they would have been filtered through the mind of one who was a decided outsider to the culture. Some gaps in Crane's basic understanding of the scene become immediately apparent in his use of dialect. The "yeh," spoken in place of "you" gets confused with its plural form, "yehs." This may sound trivial, but it is a first indication that the author was not a comfortable speaker of the dialect.

Chapter nineteen, the last in the novel, presents more vexed possibilities for Crane's misreading of Irish Bowery culture. There is an unsavory hint of anti-Catholicism starting the chapter, as the mother is described as follows: "In a room a woman sat at a table like a fat monk in a picture" (72). This line alone would not be disturbing, but the farcical mourning scene that follows is laden with misrepresentations of real Irish customs. The mother's initial response to the news of her daughter's death is to begin listing her memories of Maggie as a baby. Crane may, indeed, have heard something like this in the Bowery, because there is an ancient oral tradition of recounting the life of the deceased by the mournful listing of concrete, detailed memories of them. This is especially appropriate culturally for the mother of a dead child of any age. It is not intended as a farce, but could be read as a vulgar, public display of feigned emotion by a native-born American of a Calvinist-laced background.

Crane continues with "A dozen women entered and lamented with her. Under their busy hands the room took on the appalling appearance of neatness and order with which death is greeted" (73). The charitable act of vocally mourning with the bereaved is also a commonplace in traditional Irish women's culture. This community activity might look contrived or insincere to an outsider. And the sudden appearance of "the woman in black," or "Miss Smith" as Crane unaccountably names her, is clearly a send-up of Irish caoining (pronounced keening). Crane writes: "The mourner sat with bowed head, rocking her body to and fro, and crying out in a high, strained voice that sounded like a dirge on some forlorn pipe" (73). He adds at the end of the next paragraph that "The other women began to groan in different keys" (73). It is not so much that Crane chooses to depict caoining, but that he uses it to illustrate something negative that calls his authentic understanding of Irish Bowery culture into question.

There are few customs more strange and unnerving than the funeral customs of any group felt to be *Other* and alien to one's own. Crane supports this conjecture as he continues to present the conversation and behavior of the mother and the woman in black as a revolting travesty of grief. That Maggie's mother would embody travesty fits well with her character as constructed in the book, but the particular use of Irish cultural parlance to portray false mourning is something that an Irish-American writer would not do. It also seems odd that Crane chooses to mention that the woman in black's "vocabulary was derived from mission churches" such as there were in the Bowery, when it would have been more likely that any religious language would have come to the woman from the Catholic Church.

The status of Other, with all its conflicted connotations, had been assigned to the immigrant Irish Catholics of the Famine generation of the 1840s and 50s, and still resonated loudly in main stream American culture of the East Coast in Crane's time. One entry in George Templeton Strong's famous New York diaries connects interestingly to Crane's treatment of Irish mourning in *Maggie*. Although this entry comes from July 7, 1857, the sentiments of the Yankee author would have been familiar to people of Crane's generation:

Yesterday morning I was spectator to a strange, weird, painful scene. [At a construction excavation site on a city corner] the earth had caved in a few minutes before and crushed the breath out of a pair of ill-starred Celtic laborers. They had just been dragged, or dug, out and lay white and stark on the ground. Around them were a few men who had got them out and fifteen or twenty Irish women, wives, kinfolk or friends who had got down there in some inexplicable way. [The women] were raising a wild, unearthly cry, half shriek and half song, wailing as a score of daylight Banshees, clapping their hands and gesticulating passionately.... It was an uncanny sound to hear.... Our Celtic fellow citizens are almost as remote from us in temperament and constitution as the Chinese. (Nilsen 252)

Grouping the Irish with what dominant American culture considered the otherness of Chinese people, or African or American Indian people was not uncommon. Strong presented an attitude that categorized the

Irish as alien to what he considered normal behavior, yet he wrote his account with an open-minded curiosity rather than the open hostility that characterized other nineteenth century, English language writers.

For members of England's colonizing class, the whiteness of the Irish in Ireland only made them that much more problematic. The need to convince themselves of Irish otherness made constructions of that group particularly vicious. As I mentioned, the challenge of racializing the Irish, along with other people considered a threat, the New York Yankee nativists of the time also railed against the Irish for the same reasons, often constructing both Irish and African American citizens in similarly animal-like terms. Here is an example from English travel diarist Charles Kingsley's notes on his visit to Sligo, Ireland in 1860, when the aftermath of the Famine would have been evident everywhere:

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe [their condition] is our fault. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful. If they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins are as white as ours. (qtd. in Watson 17)

In a later context, in his novel *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, D. H. Lawrence offers this description of an Irish man. It is interesting to note how these words could apply to any group designated as racially other:

He had the silent enduring beauty of a carved ivory negro mask with rather full eyes, compressed mouth, queerly-arched brows; that momentary immobility, a

timelessness which a Buddha aims at... something old, old, and acquiescent in the race! Aeons of acquiescence in race destiny like rats in a dark river. (qtd. in Gibbons 149)

The Irish seem to end up in dark rivers on both sides of the Atlantic. But for sheer no-nonsense shoving of the Irish into the pernicious cage of the racialization, author Thomas Carlyle surpassed all. He suggested with evident impatience concerning the Irish question: "Black-lead them and put them over with the niggers" (qtd. in Hackett 227). We should be careful not to dismiss a Carlyle as an example of British attitude and not American. We certainly cannot claim a kinder, gentler concept of the racial other in our representations of Africans, American Indians, or Latinos, Asians. But is it unfair to put Crane in the company of such as Carlyle?

Although Crane's depiction of Maggie, her family, and associates has some basis in historical fact, he paints them without any of the saving humor or self-inclusion in the overall scene that comes through in the writing of Finley Peter Dunne, for example. Crane does use humor, but it of a distanced, bitterly ironic sort. The famous sketches of Irish-American life in Chicago that Dunne contributed regularly to newspapers. Writing at roughly the same time, Dunne also shares Crane's journalist background, making their differing treatment of immigrant Irish life particularly instructive. In addition, Critics group Dunne with the Realist school of writing, as they often do with Crane.

Dunne, most notably, created the popular and memorable character of Mr. Martin Dooley of Archey Road, Chicago. Although Mr.

Dooley is not as well known today as Crane's Maggie, he was immensely more popular at the time, and deserves careful attention as an important character in American literature. Theodore Dreiser wrote that "as early as 1900 or before," Mr. Dooley "had passed into my collection of genuine American realism" (Elias 949). In a weekly newspaper column of about 750 words, Dunne delved into the urban, local color world of the Bridgeport section of Chicago as observed through the Irish eyes of Mr. Dooley. As a sketch artist of Irish immigrants and their close descendants, he "affirmed that the lives of common people were worthy of serious literary consideration" (Fanning 15). Mr. Dooley commented on life in Chicago Irish dialect of greater complexity than the New York version Crane attempted to capture.

As in Crane, the voice was at the heart of the matter. The characters' poverty of soul was revealed through their paucity of language in *Maggie*, but in Dunne dialect became a vehicle for complexity, richness, and the kind of ironic humor that had a warm, instead of bitter, dimension. Warmth and humor were present in every piece, but there was also an absence of any shamrocks and rainbows Irish-American sentimentalism that can be seen on parade in the 1990s, if not also in writing, every St. Patrick's Day in Chicago, where they dye the Chicago River green.

One of the most memorable Dooley pieces is the haunting story of Mother Clancy, a stoical immigrant from Galway who finds herself destitute. For remaining aloof and independent--taboo in a community still operating with strong echoes of the tribal society of its past--she is feared by her neighbors. For speaking Irish (Gaelic), she is branded a

witch and her house is stoned. When she reaches the point where she may starve, Mother Clancy turns to the pompous Dougherty, chairman of the "Society f'r th' Relief iv th' Desarvin' Poor." He proceeds to insult her by offering only to "sind a man to invistigate," thereby implying that she might be lying about her need.

Dougherty forgets to send anyone. He remembers maybe five days later, rushes over himself, and Dooley comments:

They was a wagon in th' sthreet, but Dougherty took no notice iv it. He walked up an' rapped on th' dure, an' th' little priest stepped out. . . . "Why, father," he says, "ar-re ye here? I jis come f'or to see." "Peace," said th' little priest, "We were both late." But twas not till they got to th' foot iv th' stairs that Dougherty noticed th' wagon come fr'm th' county undertaker. (Fanning 230)

The greater sensitivity of the writer's ear in conveying dialect is immediately apparent here. What might not be as apparent is that the true sadness and irony of the piece lies in the fact that everyone in it is Irish. In striving after assimilated respectability and an American, rather than Irish, identity, her neighbors have betrayed Mother Clancy. There is a hint of what we refer to today as the internalizing of the racism by the oppressed group.

Dunne also explored infighting, corruption, criminality, and hypocrisy, but presented each facet of Bridgeport as a gem of the quotidian. The humanity of the people and their locale remained the foremost impression Dooley conveyed. Where Crane took a cool, detached, superior stance toward his material (an outsider's stance), Dunne took an intimate stance through the first-person narration of

Dooley (an insider's stance).

Not all Irish-American writers of Crane's time were as free of class bias as Dunne. The conflict between emerging middle class and working class or poor Irish receives significant play in the work of Maurice Francis Egan. Not as lively a writer as either Dunne or Crane, Egan did produce at least one novel with interesting intersections with *Maggie*. In Egan's 1890 book, *The Disappearance of John Longworthy* Longworthy, the protagonist, is a wealthy and respected writer on social issues. He disguises himself so that he can go slumming in the Bowery and directly observe life there. Although Egan uses realistic detail to an extent, the book also falls into such conventions as the sentimental deathbed scene. In common with Crane's *Maggie*, one tenement house serves as a microcosm of the slum environment, and children of the poor are discussed as flowers emerging from bad conditions. Critic Charles Fanning notes that there may be evidence of enough similarities to make one wonder whether Crane borrowed from Egan (*Irish Voice* 369).

Notably absent from Dunne's work is the stereotypical stage Irish drunks and buffoons, although he unblinkingly includes violence and pointless death that would meet with Crane's iconoclastic approval. In one sketch, a star firefighter vows to his wife that he will retire after one last good fire, and of course he dies in that fire. Egan's presentation of unsavory slum life is balanced by a middle class values and respectability, the same bugaboo that precipitates Pete, in fear for his job, throwing Maggie out of the bar where he works. Perhaps Dunne and Egan, as insiders to the culture, felt realism was better served in their less lurid style. They also seemed to lack any

deterministic axe to grind. But the old stereotypes were there, just in softer, more complexly human form. As writers moved from realism into modernism and then postmodernism, the Irish stock type have continued to play an important part in the evolution of Irish and Irish-American literature since Crane. Following the 1893 publication of *Maggie* by just two years, James W. Sullivan's 1895 "Slob Murphy," part of his *Tenement Tales of New York*, rings many of the same realist bells.

Sullivan came to New York from a small town in Pennsylvania to work as a proofreader, printer, and then as a journalist and social reformer. Enjoying a long and productive life from 1848 to 1938, he nonetheless never demonstrated the literary gifts of the short-lived Crane. His *Tenement Tales* was Sullivan's effort to "fictionalize the lives of the Irish, Jewish, and Italian immigrants whose problems engaged him as a sociologist and labor leader" (Fanning *Exiles* 206).

"Slob Murphy" is the story of the life and death of an eight-year-old street urchin. Pat Murphy dies after being run over by cart horses. Included is the traditional, if ironically undercut, Catholic deathbed scene, and an over-the-top wake scene in which the behavior of Pat's "drunken, brutalized father is as chilling as the more famous scene of Mrs. Johnson's histrionic keening at the end of Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*." (Fanning *Exiles* 206):

Indicting the "poisonous atmosphere" that has produced this miniature tragedy, the narrator, a steamboat worker, recognizes that "dirty, ragged, bad, Slob had had goodness in him which ought to have had a chance."
(Fanning *Exiles* 207):

Although lacking Crane's brilliance in descriptive effects, Sullivan sums up Crane's attitude toward Maggie succinctly in the narrator's closing remarks about Slob. One interesting difference between Crane's writing and that of his Irish-American contemporaries is Crane's use of the extremely distanced third-person omniscient narrator, in contrast to the Dunne's and Sullivan's frequent employment of first person vernacular narration set up through a character intimately part of the cultural scene depicted. The narrative structure's distancing mirror's Crane own real-life distance from his subject matter. The resulting texts differ greatly in tone.

To touch on the specific issue of dialect again for a moment, it is instructive to note that the dialect used Irish-American insider writers, such as Dunne, was much more varied and complex than what Crane used in *Maggie*, *George's Mother*, or his other tenement sketches. Yet, Crane continues to draw praise from critics for his "realistic" use of vernacular Irish dialect to capture the local color of the Bowery. Alan Slotkin repeats this idea and manages to sanitize Crane's dialect of any reference to the Irish. Dialect becomes exclusively a marker for class, which is a flawed argument when one considers how active speech identifiers were, and continue to be, in the racialization as well as the class identification for the Irish. "Yeh" for "you" is commonly spoken in Ireland today with no stigma attached, as are other typically Hiberno-English expressions that harken back to the grammar and syntax of Irish (Gaelic), which is after all the first Irish language. Slotkin, as yet another cultural outsider, misses the point of Crane's dialect, although class is undoubtedly a factor in *Maggie*, it is not the key point. Slotkin shores

up his argument through quotes from leading non-Irish critics of Crane's time, citing William Dean Howells assessment of the "Chimmie Fadden" stories' language as "tough' New York dialect" (Slotkin 18). Tough it was, and is, but it is more importantly Irish and not some generic lower class patois.

The persistence of Hiberno-English speech patterns has been cause for labeling its speakers as ignorant, at best. Since the English forbade, by law, the use of the Irish language in colonial Ireland, the Irish have had political, religious, and social reasons for persisting in their subversive form of English. To give an hint of just how persistent a cultural voice Hiberno-English remains, I recall a recent visit to the Irish-American working class neighborhood in Philadelphia where I grew up. There are few new immigrants to influence speech patterns, yet I heard familiar constructions such as "*I'm after crushin' my foot with the vacuum cleaner,*" "*Would yeh be goin' up Rita's house this afternoon,*" the sigh of exasperation followed by "*Where would yeh be goin' with no bell on yer bike,*" and "*Come 'ere whilst I murdther yeh,*" delivered with loving tones to a child. Such native Irish idioms become even more lively when used well for literary purposes, because they then have passed from ephemeral oral culture to historicized and preservable print culture. The political subtext operating in this claiming of native idioms for artistic purposes turns the exploitive nature of stage Irish cultural appropriation on its head. Irish critic and writer Eamonn Wall of County Wexford has contextualized this phenomenon as follows:

For Irish Catholics in Ireland before independence/partition, to write and speak the "King's

English" was impossible. To speak in that way indicated assenting to the right of the English to rule Ireland. . . . Initially, the English language symbolized the domination of the Irish by the English, but eventually it [Hiberno-English] became a tool used by the Irish to defend themselves. (69)

This use of language as self-defense extends into the counter-appropriation of stage Irish stereotypes by contemporary Irish-American writers answering some of the literary questions raised by Crane in his realist/naturalist experiments in *Maggie*.

The memoir/novel, *Angela's Ashes* by Frank McCourt, sets up these sodden character types for darkly ironic hilarity on his first page:

When I look back on my childhood, I wonder how I survived at all. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish Catholic childhood. . . nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years. Above all—we were wet. (1)

I can't think of a more succinct placement of reader into time, place, and circumstance than that? McCourt keeps his promise and explores each stereotype listed, with liberal amounts of gritty reality. The family has moved from Brooklyn back to Limerick in a desperate attempt to

improve their extremely impoverished conditions. The children are often without food, or only with bread and jam to eat. A baby sister dies of crib death, probably complicated or even brought on by parental incompetence and neglect. The setting is grim, but there is life-giving humor laced throughout. The bitter-sweet flavor of authenticity pervades from cover to cover. Crane captured the bitter, but as an outsider, he missed the value of the sweet. Angela, the mother, is depicted with ambivalence, but never with condescension:

It's a gray day, the church is gray and the small crowd of people outside the door of the priests' house is gray. They're waiting to beg for any food left over from the priests' dinner. There in the middle of the crowd in her dirty gray coat is my mother. This is my own mother, begging. (288)

The narrator's clear, first-person voice is shaped softly with Irish speech habits, but it is presented as an educated, cultured voice. The direct dialogue indulges in more colloquial Irishisms as appropriate to the scene--school rooms, shops, etc. The text is designed for us to laugh, cry, and wretch with the narrator, as participants in his life, as sympathizers. Reading *Angela's Ashes* makes me wonder what *Maggie* would have been like if Crane had let Maggie tell her own story. But then, she would have had to survive in her harsh environment; it's difficult to sell a first-person narrator who is recalling events that happened prior to her suicide. McCourt's narrator is a survivor, and Crane's Maggie is not. That is a key to the difference between insider and outsider representations of marginalized cultures. Writers inside such a culture want to emphasize what Native American

writer/theorist Gerald Vizenor calls survivance. They may not consciously plan their survivance stance any more than outsiders like Crane plan theirs. Embattled characters surviving, however scarred, however many loved one's or enemy's bodies litter the path, is what telling the authentic, insider's story is all about.

Brooklyn, New York, writer Michael Stephens addresses the stereotype question in the introduction to his 1994 collection of personal essays, *Green Dreams: Essays Under the Influence of the Irish*:

These are essays about private obsessions; and these obsessions often verge on stereotype, that is, the drunken, brawling Irishman with the heart of a poet, if I can put it in so many kind words. All aspects of this stereotype, at one time or another, have fit me to a "T." Yet sitting across from you on a subway car, being Irish is the last thing in the world you would take me for. It is that old Lenny Bruce line that in New York you're Jewish until proven otherwise. So I have spent my life being taken for a Jew or an Italian. (xv)

Stephens doesn't seem to be mistaken for a Wasp at any time. His dark looks guarantee him a spot in one immigrant group or another. He explores his embrace of and subsequent from alcoholism. This fits neatly with his other Irish stereotypical identity as a writer as well. The brawling part of the picture evolves into Stephens's becoming a serious amateur boxer of some ability, evidently. The table of contents is wittily divided into "Fighting," "Writing," and "Drinking" sections.

In his memoir/novel, *Season at Coole*, Stephens begins with a

telling epigram from Samuel Beckett: “All is not then yet quite irrevocably lost.” A quiet, delightful irony slowly expands and resonates with this quote as each chapter of the book progresses. On one level, the idea of surviving is embedded here. Even if some is lost, maybe possibly not quite all is lost and maybe even more than hoped for can be saved. The Coole family saga, more of an anti-saga really, opens with quick portraits of the parents in all their bitter, dark hilarity. The Coole family has somehow missed the boat for the American dream. They have not assimilated, not succeeded, and display great heaping portions of the most negative Irish stereotypes. Yet Stephens, like McCourt, grabs the terrible stereotypical truths of his life and reclaims them from the vicious destructiveness they carried when they had been applied to racialize the Irish in nineteenth century America. Stephens counter-appropriates the stage Irish figures that are his family and turns his prose to salutary effect. Although the healing effects of Stephens’s stark humor may not be immediately apparent, the act of telling the story in all its facets allows for acceptance of his angst-afflicted family for better or worse. They may not be the American dream family, but Stephens’s clan is full of contradictory, destructive, and creative life. By way of introducing his father, nicknamed “the Chief,” Stephens sets the scene at the dinner table with a dispute unfolding involving a brother, Leland:

“Is Leland going to the hospital again for his head?”

Dierdre asked her mother, and the father broke in. “Not another word about that maniac or I’ll have you all locked up tonight.!” “She only asked a simple question,” Sam said. The father got up, pulled off his belt, his pants

falling down, he held them up in one hand, as he chased his oldest daughter around the table, finally giving up the fourth time around, and instead slapped Terry, who was laughing. (14)

That bit of farce is followed closely by a confession of the family's general status as misfits in their genteel neighborhood on Long Island:

Irish beggars surrounded by the tacky elegance of newly rich, almost rich, and the rich, they had roosted in this run down house for the last twenty-five years, since they left Brooklyn, but never poor enough or humble to collect welfare. (14)

The father hopes he can stay “drunk enough to endure the noise [of the] nine plus children he created so he could name his house Bedlam” (14). The daughters are pot heads, at least one son is a drunk, but the mother beats them all for abysmal alcoholic scenes. The laundry room scene strikes as so absurdly sad that it is absurdly funny. Rose settles herself on the pile of dirty laundry, drinks her secret bottle of vodka dry, talks with the Virgin Mary and Rose Kennedy, curses each member of her family soundly, then urinates on the laundry and passes out. All this is vaguely commented on by the drunken Leland, who is secretly drinking in another room of the basement, hears his mother pattering, and slurringly describes her “like the fifth wound in Jesus’ side, fuck them all” (15). The commonplace “hells” and “Gawds” of Crane’s dialect have become the even more commonplace “fucks” of contemporary vernacular parlance. The destructive and violent mother of *Maggie* has become equally destructive, but not violent, in the figure of Rose.

The Physically and verbally aggressive Irish woman is a stereotype little discussed. One interesting possible origin for this type might be the historically real existence of Irish female soldiers. I have heard oral accounts of women warriors either fighting beside male partners or defending a town more fiercely than the men. But the mothers in these books do not exhibit heroic qualities. They seem to serve as figurative canaries in the coal mine of their societies. If the mother is reduced to a travesty of nurturance, what does that say of every other element in her children's world?

The visions of decay, struggle, and failure that pervade Crane's *Maggie* are also present in the Irish-American writers' vision of his time and after, but with a difference. Although Crane presents his text as an authentic glimpse into Irish Bowery life, he misses the subtlety and complexity, the contradictory, illogical energy that also exists simultaneously with the destructive slum milieu. The figures drawn from the wild Irish and the stage Irish have transformed themselves here at the end of the twentieth century, but they persist somehow in spite of decades of American efforts at assimilation of "white" ethnic groups. I cannot offer any reasons why something in these representations of Irishness persist, not just in art but in the lived life of family and community. But there is a qualitative difference between otherwise similar representations of poor, urban Irish. Those created by writers outside the culture may be aesthetically brilliant, as Crane's work truly is, but they will lack a certain life, a certain quality of having real blood in the characters' veins, that writers inside the culture--like Dunne, McCourt, Stephens, and the others--are able to make believable. Of all the possible reasons for this qualitative

difference, I can only be certain of one. Writers who know the “slum” in their bones write about it with the will to survive and prevail as their most basic literary foundation. At the silent margins of the most grim accounts of poverty and abuse, the insider writers place an irrational will to say something like, “fuck ye all, I’m living me life my way in spite iv ye.” Even willfully self-destructive characters have their own agency operating in their demise. Such agency could be argued to be an illusion, a form of denial of crushing environmental forces, and maybe that is true, but it doesn’t matter what’s true. It only matters what is believed to be true. The realism of the Irish-American writer includes agency--sometimes evil, sometimes laughable--but present. Crane’s Maggie is too passive and mute to find a place in the insider texts of his time or ours.

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Chapter Four

The Liberatory Power of Words: Intersections of Native American and Irish World Views in the Poetry of Joy Harjo and Paula Meehan

Both the Irish and Native North American peoples have experienced colonialism at the hands of either the British or culturally British Euro-Americans. Although there are obvious differences separating the Irish and American Indians, certain commonalities reflected in current creative literature are intriguing, offering insight into ways by which both peoples have come to terms with colonialism, as a legacy and as a current reality. In searching for these commonalities I have asked myself what two peoples could be less alike than Native North Americans and the Irish? They have different histories, come from different parts of the world, have spoken different languages, and are racially different as well. But this view has proved too limiting. There is a far more interesting, lively, and complex story here--one centering on the poet's use of the colonizers' language, which was forced upon her people, for her own anti-colonial purpose. This poets' subversion of the English language of the dominant culture operates with appealing irony. And, in my opinion, two of the best contemporary poets writing in English have provided me with a

doorway through their works into their people's shared experience in our current post-colonial context. These two poets are Native American Joy Harjo (Creek/Muskogee) and Irish Paula Meehan (of Dublin City).

In contextualizing the particular brand of post-colonial reality operating for Harjo and Meehan, it is important to note that colonialism may be officially past in the Republic of Ireland, but its economic, social, and psychological effects are still present. For Native Americans who continue to struggle for sovereignty guaranteed by treaty but denied in fact, colonialism often defines life on a daily basis. For Harjo, it plays a central role, however subtly presented, in the text of her art. For the Irish, who won their sovereignty as recently as 1921 and still suffer colonial status in the northern section of their country, the insistence on their unique identity as Irish people, as well as their pursuit of economic independence, is paramount. Meehan applies these issues to her poetry, often in the most personal and intimate situations. History, myth, and ancestral memory define the innermost structures of the best poems by each author.

While exploring the possibilities of intersections between these two cultures, I have been delighted by the tremendously vibrant current renaissance in poetry for both. Within this literary flowering, women poets and intellectuals of both peoples are enjoying a unprecedented amount of recognition and appreciation by an increasingly international audience. There is something in their voices that touches a meaningful chord for this growing audience both within and outside their respective cultures. I believe that this is true in part because, in edging closer to the new century, we find ourselves

in a dissonant world fraught with uncertainty and fragmented experience. Whereas many contemporary writers of all heritages write incorporating these post-modern forces into their work, Harjo and Meehan write against the grain of much of this movement.

Both women write within a context commonly labeled post-modern (in addition to post-colonial), a kind of cultural and political vortex swirling with confusing fragments of current and past experience, yet they present an alternate world view. Unity and the continuing simultaneity of layers of time, memory, and meaning form recurring motifs for both. Of the many aspects that the poets share, a distillation of the most important yields these three: (1) a struggle to overcome having been designated "Other" and "Inferior" by the colonizers, combined with a resulting determination to seize control of the means of artistic representation, thereby claiming the position of author instead of subject of art, (2) an interest in subverting the language of the colonizers and using it as an anti-colonial tool for claiming intellectual and artistic autonomy, and (3) an oral tradition of storytelling that has served to preserve culture, along with an accompanying world view that includes a strong sense of the interconnectedness of all things, the simultaneity of history, and the continuing presence of ancestral memory--and ancestors themselves. The poetry of Harjo and Meehan, who, although separated in terms of history, culture and geographic distance, share significant concerns, provides vital insight into the contemporary world views of their peoples.

Harjo sums up the role of the poet, when she states in *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, "If I am a poet charged with speaking

the truth (and I believe the word poet is synonymous with truth-teller), what do I have to say about all of this?" (19). I agree that the poet's voice, with its faithful focus on concrete particularities and its concise summation of attitude, state of mind, state of soul, has the power to reveal ourselves to ourselves. Meehan takes this concept and applies it to her own development as a poet. She discusses overcoming the self-censorship and confusion that British world views had imposed on her creative impulses. For Meehan, as for many women in post-colonial cultures, the overcoming of limitations of colonialism also involved overcoming the prejudices her own Irish male poet-contemporaries had internalized from the colonizers. She summarizes: "In retrospect the pattern of my life makes sense [I have struggled to be] free enough to let the poems come through. I turned to poetry because I felt it was a place where I had control" (Dorgan 269).

This telling of truth and this control of the medium of the telling are not simple givens for these poets. They are features of a liberation hard won, because until recently neither poet would have had access to a publisher or audience, except on a small scale. Neither poet would have been taken seriously as an artist. But each has had generations of experience in being manipulated as the subject of art work both literary and visual. Think of the many clichéd representations of Indians--especially Indian women--in art by whites: Hiawatha, Pocahontus, and the myriad images on postcards, beer labels, and the like. Think of the many poems, movies, tourist brochures, and even history books in which Irish women are iconographed as symbols of muses, witches, flirts, mothers of the

nation, victims, anything but actual women in authority.

Irish poet/critic Eavan Boland explores this issue of control over the means of representation in her book of essays, *Object Lessons*. She explains:

. . . over a relatively short period of time--certainly no more than a generation or so--[Irish] women have moved from being the objects of poems to being the authors of them. It is a momentous transit. It is also a disruptive one. It raises questions of identity, issues of poetic motive and ethical direction (126)

Boland's statement could apply as accurately to Indian authorship--or authorship by any colonized people. She explores this very possibility as she continues her discussion of ethical concerns for writers.

Implied within the shift from subject to author, lies the joy of seizing control of the very language the colonizers have used to deny the colonized their full humanity. What more ironically just weapon against racial, cultural, and gender stereotyping than the words that have been used for generations to reinforce such destructive bigotry?

Joy Harjo comments with succinct humor that she enjoys using "the language that was meant to destroy us" (90). When I read that, I thought that must be the exact feeling of every Irish writer who has won a British literary prize--and there are many. Yet the separation from the original language of one's people must leave an abiding sense of loss that infuses the poetry written in English. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux) provides an encouraging point of view on this issue of authorship and language in her review of Ray Young Bear's *Black Eagle Child: the Face Paint Narratives*. Not a critic who gives

praise easily, Cook-Lynn asserts that Young Bear's book is a stunning break-through:

. . . such autobiographical works as *Black Eagle Child* make the stodgy, Euroamerican, translated folkloric tradition and the genre of as-told-to life stories forever obsolete. . . . We encounter an articulate, bilingual, tribal Phaedrus wrestling with his imperfect life vis-avis his own value system without intervention of a Christian monitor or omniscient literary interpreter, and it is an inspiring event. (*Why I Can't*. . . 17)

In claiming control of the narrative of his life, Young Bear moves from subject of story to author of story. He freely represents himself and his tribal context with his distinctively native voice in both Mesquakie and Mesquakie-flavored English. It is interesting to note that much of Young Bear's book is written in free verse form, a means that further captures the Indian rhythms of language and helps transport the reader into his world view. This attention to speech rhythm and quality is something he shares with both Harjo and Meehan. In fact, the English spoken in Ireland is called Hiberno-English because of its particular imposition of native Irish-language structures on English. This style of English has traditionally been stigmatized as inferior, and only recently, beginning perhaps with James Joyce's use of such idioms, have Irish writers embraced their version of English with literary pride. It seems that similar claiming of styles of Indian-English is unfolding for Native American writers. When performing her poetry at readings, Harjo captivates audiences with her strong, chant-like treatment of English; she effectively invokes the Indian world view

woven through her poems in this way.

The political subtext in this claiming of native idioms for artistic purposes has been explained in terms of Irish and Irish-American writing by Irish poet/critic Eamonn Wall of County Wexford:

For Irish Catholics in Ireland before independence/partition, to write and speak the "King's English" was impossible. To speak in that way indicated assenting to the right of the English to rule Ireland. . . . Initially, the English language symbolized the domination of the Irish by the English, but eventually it [Hiberno-English] became a tool used by the Irish to defend themselves. (69)

As Cook-Lynn asserts concerning Young Bear, and as Harjo demonstrates in her poetic style, the use of English as a tool for defense against colonialism is finding equally successful use among Native American writers. In calling for intellectual sovereignty for Native Americans, Cook-Lynn puts the English language to good use herself as a weapon of anti-colonialism. And yet she cautions us against the kind of criticism that assigns any Native American writer the role of spokesperson for their people. And certainly this applies to Harjo as well as Meehan, when Cook-Lynn states:

The idea that poets can speak for others, the idea that we can speak for the dispossessed. . . is indeed one of the great burdens of contemporary American Indian poets today, for it is widely believed that we, "speak for our tribes". . . . I don't know very many poets who say, "I speak for my people." ("You May Consider. . ." 58)

Poets speak for themselves first; that is all any writer is able to do. And although Harjo and Meehan cultivate their individual artistic visions and voices, they also can be seen as emblematic of important trends in culture and poetry for their respective peoples.

Along with their claiming of the English language as their own authorial tool, Harjo and Meehan also mine collective ancestral memory and its connections to mythic consciousness. This flows directly from the oral tradition of literature strong in both Native American and Irish cultures. The sense of a collective history that informs present individual experience plays a central role in tribal world views. The unity and interconnectedness of all things and all times frames Harjo 's lyrical love poem "The Myth of Blackbirds" set in Washington D.C., an ironic place to find love in view of its history of betrayal of human rights for American Indians:

This is the world in which we undressed together. . . .
 Memory was always more than paper
 and cannot be broken by violent history
 or stolen by thieves of childhood.
 We cannot be separated in the loop of mystery
 between blackbirds and the memory of blackbirds. . . .
 And I loved you in this city of death. (28)

As readers, we have entered a world of the mythic, where the flowing rhythms of Harjo's prose poem form compliment the psychological movement from linear reality into a circularity and simultaneity of time and space, complimenting the flow of the Potomac River in the poem, as well. Memory extends into ancestral time, coloring the present, as "our ancestors appear together at the shoreline of the

Potomac in their moccasins and pressed suits of discreet armor." Time here has collapsed as past and present people step to the shoreline "from the cars of smoky trains, or dismount from horses" (29). This overlapping circularity of time and space dictates the structure of the poem itself., beginning with metaphoric blackbirds that are "hours we counted" and ending with actual blackbirds "who are exactly blackbirds."

Harjo's blackbirds--simultaneously actual and metaphoric--appear in the midst of the city's chaos, spiraling levels of meaning above or below one another. The literal city of taxis and cafes and noise exists within and also outside of the city of memory of the Native "children who became our grandparents." The loathsome world of governmental "skewed justice, of songs without singers" (29) lumbers on simultaneously with the grace-laden world of the lovers and blackbirds. I do not know if there is a traditional myth of blackbirds, but I do know that a story of love in a "city of death" is powerful. The city landscape offers additional ironic elements. It resonates with the sense of exile many Native Americans living in cities feel today. As Cook-Lynn points out, "over fifty percent of American Indians now live in cities away from their homelands" (*Why I Can't* . . . 102). Critic Nancy Lang summarizes these issues of memory and survival:

Harjo's ongoing circularities of memory, story, history, and ancestral voices all work together to create and explain the interconnectedness of life itself

landscape and story often merge into an individual voice tied simultaneously to memories of a traditional past, as well as to the life of the present; and it is this voice that

helps one to survive in the city. (46)

The city is also the setting for much of Paula Meehan's poems. The interconnectedness of all things past and present combines with themes of loss and survival also, but in a different manner.

In *Pillow Talk*, Meehan collects poems concerning love, but love in a broad sense. As Harjo encapsulates it: ". . . *though it doesn't often appear to be so at the ragged end of this century . . . being in love can make the connections between all life apparent--whereas lovelessness emphasizes the absence of relativity*" (italics hers) (30). Meehan takes the idea of loss and resulting isolation--Harjo's absence of the inter-relatedness of all things--and presents it in spare couplets in "The Rain Makes One Word" In place of the Harjo's figure of St. Coincidence, we find an unnamed woman described only in terms of her worn boots:

The rain makes one word . . .

Her boots let in
but they got her through the winter.

The rain makes one word that drops
in the silence when it stops

and the window weeps
beads--each a convex mirror

of the room where
she's polishing her boots.

Loss: the rain made
Loss. She stares

at the boots
that have got her through the winter. (PT 70)

The simplicity of these lines contrasts with the opulence of Harjo's prose poems. Meehan writes with meticulous craft and control. In this

poem the minimalist style fits the subject perfectly. We have an ordinary scene of a woman quietly polishing her worn and leaky boots, while the rainy Irish weather underscores her sadness. Exterior conditions and interior state of mind blend. The circularity and simultaneity of time and space are here, just as in "The Myth of Blackbirds," only here it is just as important to understand what is *not* being said, as it is to comprehend the lines written.

The unnamed woman figure partakes of every woman too poor for decent boots in a country where cold, ubiquitous winter rain that chills to the bone carries with it a sense of just not having enough--enough warm clothes, enough food, enough sleep, enough company, enough money--of having lost something more spiritual as well, something irretrievable. In the Irish oral tradition, this theme of loss often is coupled with the mythic Poor Old Woman (*An tSeanbhean Bhocht* in Irish). She is emblematic of dispossession and resonates with ancestral memories of eviction, famine, exile of younger family members, and general impoverishment. I cannot be sure absolutely whether or not Meehan set out to write a poem evoking this figure of the ancient stories, but I think the poet would agree that the Poor Old Woman has made her presence felt, bidden or not. The ordinary woman overlaps with the mythic woman. Time present with leaky boots in the rain overlaps with layers of time past and the successive losses suffered under colonialism.

Meehan's vision is not simply one of loss, she also explores the tenacious power of the dispossessed to survive and paradoxically progress. Star imagery often underpins these poems, just as it does for Harjo in *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*. In Meehan's poem

"She-Who-Walks-Among-The-People," Meehan connects directly to storytelling by presenting the situation of a child asking Granny to tell her the one "about the kind lady who became a great warrior in the old days." When asked at the end if "the people live happy ever after," Granny replies that they don't, but that "The people will endure. They are scattered/ over the face of the earth like those stars/ above you over the face of the heavens" (PT 62). This reference to the Irish diaspora unfolds again in "Home by Starlight:" Meehan's narrator takes us through "lifetimes" of prehistory as we "gazed at the same constellations. . . Do you remember how it was? The seasons of study in the star school/ scanning for portent." She continues:

How our arts were eclipsed and many
gentle comrades tortured and burned?
How the songs we had crafted for travel
were lost, language itself lost, when we
were scattered like sparks to the wind?
(Man Who Was Marked . . . 47)

The Irish continue to be scattered like sparks across the globe, as Native Americans are scattered as well. But if there is to be a continuance of a people with a sense of their full identity, their poets must tell the old stories, the people's history, for the demands of the current context. Both Meehan and Harjo do this. This is the truth-telling that Harjo speaks of as the poet's duty. Eavan Boland explains it in terms of the generational interconnections of survivance:

If a poet does not tell the truth about time, his or her
work will not survive it. Past or present, there is a
human dimension to time, human voices within it

Our present will become the past of others. We depend on them to remember it with the complexity with which it was suffered. As others once depended on us. (153)

Again the claiming of control over the narrative of history is linked to the survival of the people's identity. Cook-Lynn goes further in asserting that it is more than survival of culture at stake; it is survival of the people themselves:

While it is true that any indigenous story tells of death and blood, it also tells of indigenous rebirth and hope, not as Americans or as some new ersatz race but as the indigenes of this continent. ("Amer. Ind. Intellectualism" 74)

Both Harjo and Meehan tap into the old stories to illuminate contemporary situations, often painful but significant ones. The mythic sense of the continuing action in the present of the ancient beings of the past, such as Tie Snake for the Creeks or the Banshee for the Irish, fuels not only the simple narrative level of a poem, but also allows it to refract spiritual and political implications through that narrative.

Harjo's poem "The Flood" does this with such complexity, it is difficult to separate the contemporary speaker of the poem from her many previous and current-simultaneous incarnations. Beginning with the death drowning of a sixteen-year-old girl and ending with an encounter with a crazy woman in a grocery store, Harjo weaves stories of the Tie Snake water monster who seduces and kills women. He appears as "the most handsome man in the tribe," as the flood water itself, or as the self-destructive impulse to get too drunk and drive

your car into the lake. The interconnecting imagery of sexual taboos, literal flood destruction, living presence of myth, and ordinary daily routine--just to name a few--serves to capture a specifically Creek take on modern life within the overlapping influence of the mythic/historic. (I have seen actual watersnakes in Alabama, where Creek people originated, and I can tell you that Tie Snake is not hard to find in his human form, especially in a certain frame of mind when sitting in certain bars.) That being as it may, the tone of "The Flood" evokes great sadness and sympathy for young women who lose their way in Harjo's "ragged world." The loss of young women is the loss of beauty in the Navajo sense of the word; it is the loss of the future. This positioning of the speaker's voice as one of bearing witness to loss unites it in spirit with Meehan's "The Rain Makes One Word" Harjo ends her poem unifying the living speaker with the many drowned girls of past generations:

. . . for I could not see myself as I had abandoned her
 some twenty years ago in a blue windbreaker at the edge
 of the man-made lake as everyone dove naked and drunk
 off the sheer cliff, as if we had nothing to live for, not
 then or ever. (17)

Harjo has captured a negative force of myth and its intersection with the contemporary nihilism that assaults the youth of colonized peoples. But within the negative figure of Tie Snake is the positive sense of the sheer power and force of the mythic in a modern world that denies it. Meehan captures a similar mythic force in her title poem from *The Man Who Was Marked by Winter*.

Meehan's poem also centers on a drowning and a seductive

mythic figure, but her victim is a young man and the seducer is a blending of the female figures of Winter and the Banshee. She describes his broken body found down stream from where he slipped on ice and was swept away. There is an implication that the price is great for the modern denial of the mythic forces still alive among us. Winter claims the youth as her own and marks him: "She made her mark/ below his heart, a five-fingered gash--*Bondsman*" (her italics) (53). The Banshee, a traditional harbinger of death, often leaves a stripe of deep scratches at the slightest touch of her fingers. She, like Tie Snake, is complex, but resonates with ancient associations concerning, sex, death, and risk-taking. She warns that the price of post-modern denial is death, both metaphoric and literal.

Any discussion comparing post-colonial contexts for Irish and Native peoples must at some point deal with the issue of race. As Cook-Lynn has pointed out, racial assimilation continues to be a thorny issue for American Indians. Even attempts to clearly define who is Indian and who is not are extremely volatile. The Irish, on the other hand, have both assimilated British culture and resisted it. If that sounds paradoxical, then all I can say is welcome to Irish culture, where paradox is a long-proved weapon of resistance. For many Native American people, I think it is hard to see the Irish as a race separate from the English colonizers. After all, they are both European White people. And for many Irish, I think it is difficult to see American Indians as all that different from Euro-Americans. After all, many Indians are of mixed blood and very fair-skinned, even full bloods are certainly not as different looking racially as African Americans. Neither view point is correct.

As any person who has experienced racism can attest, it is not so much who you are that is at the core of it, as who you are perceived to be. There is a long history of the English regarding the Irish as of a distinct and inferior race. And the Irish are proud of their genetic heritage as a tribal Celtic people, as opposed to the Anglo-Saxon ancestry of the English. For the English colonizers, the whiteness of the Irish only made them that much more repugnant. Here is an example from Englishman Charles Kingsley's notes on his visit to Sligo, Ireland in 1860:

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe [their condition] is our fault. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful. (150)

He goes on to comment on how it would so much better if they were black. Much more recently, respected English author D. H. Lawrence offers this description of an Irish man. Notice how it could apply to any colonized race designated "Other:"

He had the silent enduring beauty of a carved ivory negro mask with rather full eyes, compressed mouth, queerly-arched brows; that momentary immobility, a timelessness which a Buddha aims at . . . something old, old, and acquiescent in the race! Aeons of acquiescence in race destiny . . . like rats in a dark river. (as qutd. in Gibbons 149)

Contemporary variations on this often can be found in the British press, albeit in a more veiled form. More importantly, Irish people believe that the British think these things about them. Reclaiming

their history, culture, and dignity was a first priority at the time of independence/partition in 1921. Irish language mastery is required in the schools. The arts are encouraged and often well-funded by the government in an effort to support the kind of truth-telling Harjo asserts. The national embracing of traditional ways is so well-established that young people can feel comfortable joking about it and rebelling against it at times. Ireland has one of the fastest growing economies in Europe today, and recent tourist board meetings have sought to harmonize traditional romantic images of Ireland with a more up-to-date flare. Ireland is working out a harmony of traditional and contemporary elements in itself. But it can do this only because Ireland has established its sovereignty, both literal and intellectual. American Indians do not enjoy the same status.

The more extreme post-colonial struggle of Native Americans is reflected in their art. Harjo's poetry is one powerful example. Her style is highly elaborated, her prose poems opulent with rich imagery and rhythms straining to do justice to her subject matter. The poems leave the impression of great force and urgency. Meehan's, by contrast, embrace a more formal restraint. Her treatment of struggle and violence is no less frequent than Harjo's, but it is rendered with a cooler touch. We are more distanced from the subject matter and made more aware of the crafting of the form. Neither approach is superior to the other. They simply reflect different attitudes by the poets. I believe the greater intensity and urgency of Harjo's work grows not just from individual poetic temperament, but also from the acute immediacy of Native Americans' anti-colonial struggle. Perhaps there is potential for alliances, both artistic and political, between Irish

and American Indian people. There is so much shared by just these two poets. So much more common ground still needs to be explored.

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Chapter Five

The Othering of Home: Identity and Community in a Time of Eminent Domain

In the 2005 aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the resulting levee breaks in New Orleans, amid heat, fetid debris, and rising outrage, one building in particular claimed an imaginative link with certain ideas of the old American West. That building served as a base for police operations (such as they were) and also as a makeshift jail. The police and local citizens dubbed it Fort Apache. I doubt they were recalling the actual Fort of western frontier times, but rather it seems more likely the people were re-inscribing the sense of siege represented by films about Fort Apache. But not even that. The more recent and most familiar link would be the 1970s film of that name that dramatized life at a police station in the South Bronx area of New York City, a place considered at that time the most dangerous assignment in the metropolitan area, and possibly in the whole Northeast. Why everyone felt it necessary and natural to highlight the violent nature of the South Bronx with anything Western is a curious notion. To my mind, it would have made more sense to name that temporary police headquarters in New Orleans something like South Bronx Precinct. But nobody thought of that.

Nobody thought to allude to Eastern violence because the powerful memory of the old West runs deep through American popular culture. That imagined memory displays new interpretations of the master narrative of frontier struggle and conquest in ways that challenge the notion of the West as a discreet region. The West as imagined in the story of manifest destiny and its glorious triumph over the roughest toughest wilderness, animals, and Native peoples has broken free of its landscape. It floats on the wind and sometimes comes to earth right on top of us, threatening to re-conquer frontier that we now call home. The type of mindset and legal machinations that made the euphemistic term "Indian removal" roll trippingly from the tongues of those who set some of my ancestors on the Trail of Tears, is coming to call again. Only this time the Indians are main stream American home owners who never thought of themselves as displaceable. Of course, neither did my Creek relatives in the Southeast of the mid-nineteenth century. And what Indian policy did for them, eminent domain is now doing for all us descendents of those settlers who were so happy to get that wide open, not-being-used-for-anything Indian land of the recently past frontier.

The remembered story of the West infuses contemporary border disputes, confrontations, and small wars with repeated rhythms of past centuries but without conscious context. Although these shoot outs over land rights are more paper than six guns, they nonetheless involve serious and very real consequences. Ideas of a land ethic, for example, originally conceived for application in the rural landscape by such cultural leaders as Aldo Leopold and N. Scott Momaday, now haunt the contested ground of urban,

suburban, and exurban places impacted by overdevelopment and sprawl. For most Americans wide open natural spaces have become interiorized; we can find nostalgic re-digested versions of them at the mall, the MacMansion, theme park, and mega church. But we must pay money for the privilege. As saddening as this feels to me, I am more interested in the contested borderland that surprised me with how it touched upon ancestral memory. How memory lives in the land unexpectedly. How my own neighborhood could become both frightening and dear to me. How ancestral voices of other frontiers can rise up, even when uninvited, and offer help of a sort.

Just up the rocky hill overlooking the flood plain of Deer Creek a pair of plump healthy groundhogs strips mulberries from bushes in the wooded lot between our house and the main road. They trill comments to each other, and if you are lucky enough to drive past them during mulberry time, they appear to stand on their back legs and wave at you with up stretched arms. They are actually reaching for higher berries, but the effect is the same. People are either delighted with this honor, or else they wish to kill the animals. I have never heard a neutral comment. Ambivalence toward the natural world is no surprise around here. The groundhogs, or woodchucks as they are sometimes called, appear as Other in the human consciousness of Webster Groves, Missouri, to be enjoyed, ignored, or destroyed at will. But the groundhogs do not concern themselves with human frailty, especially during the warm autumn days rich in mulberries and each other's company in what remains of woodland by the network of creeks that mark this landscape that lies within twelve miles of the western bank the Mississippi River at its

midpoint.

Late afternoon spreads warm golden light among the long shadows, and the scent of dry earth rises. I am walking through our neighborhood, thinking of a favorite quote from Wisconsin poet, Jim Hazard: "Nothing moves too slow for me." Yet another small brown rabbit pauses at the edge of the russet chrysanthemums, and I step as silently as possible. He looks at me and then quickly away into a frozen pose. I respect his invisibility. Judging from the contours of a neighboring lawn, the moles have devised an underground steeple chase, and so far have eluded the owl who sings from a distant treetop near the railroad tracks. Before the houses of the 1890s and onward were built for holiday homes away from the downtown, this hill was oak forest. Every yard has massive oaks, some tower like indulgent giants right next to homes. Others jut chaotically in far corners or in parks like arguments no one can counter. Eastern red cedars pierce the under story here and there, as redbuds and dogwoods fill the gaps closer to the ground. All must compete against Asian honeysuckle that once was brought here to provide forage for birds, but has proved way too aggressive. Not that the cardinals care, nor the blue jays, sparrows, wood doves, thrushes, finches, and the rest, who loudly enjoy its red berries just as much as the native hackberries and haws.

The hummingbirds have left for this year, but butterflies still flutter unpredictably and fat bumble bees hover in slow motion among red salvia and chocolate cosmos. As I wander along the railroad line past the tall grass and black-eyed susans, I can hear the mockingbird. I haven't heard him for weeks it seems, when he had

been my constant companion all spring, singing even by our bedroom window through the night. And now he works his way through the variations, each call clear-throated and plaintive. "Every heart," he tells me, "every broken heart". "Every broken heart," he tells me, "every broken heart, can mend." Can mend, can mend, can mend," he repeats from the top of a utility pole. I cross the bridge and check the stand of Osage orange. The large rippled fruits have not fallen yet and hang like golden brains among the yellowing leaves. A little way off, I can hear light traffic on Big Bend Boulevard, the original Osage Indian trail that curves all the way to the Meramec River. The Osage people live mostly in Oklahoma now. Big Bend is wider and paved with a bright yellow line down its center, and is a lesser road for all of that nonetheless.

A fox has been seen darting from this thorny shelter, but I see no sign of her. The raccoons, possums, bats, and other night loving creatures are hidden in their homes, and I must return to mine. Tonight I attend my first city council meeting as a representative for our Tuxedo Park Neighborhood Association, and I feel unnerved at the prospect of speaking to this gathering that feels foreign to me in my deepest core. One of the odd characteristics of the Saint Louis metropolitan area is that each little townlet clinging to the city borders has declared itself a city in its own right. In accordance with this custom, our neighborhood is part of the city of Webster Groves, complete with its own mayor, police department, fire department, and city council. Quaint in a slightly creepy semi-suburban way, our municipality prides itself on its trees and parks, and has even earned official; national designation as a "tree city." But Webster

Groves also has what can be called "tax revenue envy." And this has proven a dangerous thing for us home owners, and for all our neighbors of the plant and animal worlds.

Three or four furtive meetings had already taken place between city officials and developers, with accompanying small quiet postings in the local paper that plans for beatification of North Webster's main road corridor were being discussed. Then came the leak. It warms my heart to think of how much the simple straight forward acts of telling the story of something, in contrast to the drawing up of contracts for something, had a determining impact on events. One council member told a friend in our area that the discussions for beauty were in fact negotiations for clearing an enormous swath of homes, small businesses, and nature preserves from the "corridor" so that a development consortium could replace all that with something called mixed use. Our neighborhood nestles on wooded hills on the north side of Webster, much of which can claim credit as one of the oldest free African American communities in the U.S. In spite of this rich history (and some might say, because of it), we had been targeted (and that is the term developers used in press releases) for land clearance, complete with removal of all inhabitants.

I did not believe it was possible, and doubted the reliability of the leak. But, to be on the safe side, I helped canvas door-to-door and invited people to join a neighborhood association so we could be properly represented collectively. The envelope came at some point: plain, white and with the official return address for the city. The sinking feeling began at my solar plexus and radiated down into the

earth. I held it unopened and let the ancestral memory beyond the personal percolate up into the present. Forced migrations. The second sons of England, the clearances of Highland Scotland, the Famine ships from Ireland, the evictions, inquisitions, ghettos, and Holocaust of the European Jews, and the Creek War that had set the stage for Indian removal from the Southeast. All my relations. Those houses, fields, forests, animals, waterways, and sacred places denied. Another *Kaddish*. And something more. Shame. Fear. A weary, rising anger. And at once the flood of mental images undercut the nausea with practical responses to this problem, all starring me in a cinematic world of the absurd: me, lying in the road in front of the bull dozers; me, pointing a shotgun out the window at the developer; me, tied to the big oak in our front yard, singing "Cume By Ya" with a battalion of attack squirrels causing construction workers to run screaming, as if they were in a Hitchcock movie.

The letter merely announced in predictably dull prose that a meeting about the "improvement and development" of our neighborhood was scheduled. I could attend if I so chose. I calmly explained to my husband, who is a native of Ireland, that I felt we should pack up and run to the swamps. They were coming for us. That was the way the Creeks who resisted removal had survived. It made sense.

"Wasn't that in Alabama something like a hundred and fifty years ago?" He wondered.

"You remembered," I replied, delighted. At times he hadn't seemed to listen to me that well.

"They can't do this kind of thing in Ireland anymore. I thought

this was America. What happened to the shaggin' American dream? Private property. Big-arsed flags everywhere. That city council is nothin' but a shower of gobshites," he explained, adding, "Oh, and I forgot to tell you. Anne down the street phoned, and the association wants you and a couple other people to speak at this meeting."

So I tucked my tail between my legs and went to city hall with Anne and many other neighbors. We filled the council chambers to standing room only. I had to fill out a card before I would be allowed to speak. I could only speak for two minutes. The card demanded to know who I was, and where I lived, and what exactly I planned to say. I wasn't sure of the last part. I was supposed to say something about how the increased value of the real estate would make any buy-out project untenable, and the use of eminent domain to declare our neighborhood blighted was ridiculous. Anyone could see that with even a cursory look around. I would not mention that there were a good few properties in poor repair, nor the many small less expensive homes that were mixed in with the pricier ones. Maybe a buy-out was possible. Maybe there were even a few home owners who wanted to sell in this way.

The council members sat behind a semi-circular long counter on a raised platform looking down on us in our stiff folding chairs. Various members went through excruciatingly slow and boring statements about past business and other tedious matters, while the audience shifted on their impatient back sides. I imagined the ceiling lifting off and God flicking the ears of each odious councilor who conspired against us. This helped pass the time. One man rubbed his ears in mid-speech which was a satisfying sight, almost a prayer

answered. And the members who supported the so-called development spoke viciously about increasing taxes for the good of the whole city. For the children. For the old people. Why there might even be a retirement community put where our houses are now. The speakers were convincing, if a bit oily in their delivery.

My name was called as "Citizen Wall" (which made me feel like I had been swept up in the French Revolution) and I stepped to the podium, identified myself, and looked at the crowd. We had a lumpy Midwestern look that cut across all ethnic and racial lines. Some of us were dressed up from the office; others wore the department store casual uniforms of middle-class-dom. And we appeared worried, middle-aged, and in need of the comfort of a big barbecue buffet and some decent beer.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the city council, we are here to show you how serious we are about preserving our neighborhood in its entirety. We are not cowed, and we are not discouraged. Would everyone who has come here tonight from the North Webster Tuxedo Park Association please stand," I said with conviction I hadn't known was in me.

With a great stirring of large shoes, creaking of chairs, and labored hefting aloft of a hundred or so wide Saint Louisan frames, people lumbered to their feet like bears. And as this process proceeded, I could hear a collective gasp, a sharp inhalation of breath, from the council platform. We were impressive, no, we were formidable. My mind swelled with the moment, as I envisioned the crowd armed with pikes or maybe hedge trimmers.

I continued, "And for every one of us here tonight, there are

spouses and neighbors at home who could not be here. Look at us and triple the number you see. We demand a stop to secret deal making. We demand a public vote on this issue. Thank you."

Others had similarly glorious moments at the podium that night, but we had not won anything. Nothing came to a public vote. In the wrangling that ensued it seemed the developers somehow lost interest. We heard only rumors that they had discovered it was, after all, too expensive to buy out the properties. Or that there were too many underground springs. Or that they were scared off by the threat of expensive law suits and possible vandalism. The project mysteriously scaled down to include modest improvements to the main road. These improvements were only partially implemented. The last leak of information simply said that our area was "off the table". For how long, we do not know. I want to believe we have escaped for good.

Our experience predates the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision supporting the use of eminent domain to take over private property for the profit of private developers, with a supposed tax revenue benefit for the local municipality. This strengthening of what seems to be an obvious misuse of the original intent of the law keeps us on edge. Nobody talks about it, but our neighborhood has its own sense of siege, our own identification with the Fort Apache feeling.

The website *Eminent Domain Watch*, which keeps track of such hot spots across the country, currently includes 93 pages of full text newspaper reprints containing 64 articles from 60 communities in twenty-two states, and that are just for the month of October, 2005. One of these troubled locations is within five minutes

of us in a less organized and less historic older suburb of modest homes called, of all things, Sunset Hills. Land grabbing is in vogue in a new way.

Although government sanctioned land confiscations and removal of people has roots as early as the Revolutionary War, until recently, land taking solely for making money has taken on new dimensions within the last few years. This expansion of the legal grounds for claiming land owned by others raises the ironic possibility of threats to small private property owners hitherto almost exclusively applicable to American Indian people. Loyalists in post-Revolutionary War era America had their lands and property confiscated for political reasons. American Indian Nations had seen their lands taken through treaties about which they had little choice, through military force, and through underhanded debt practices since colonial times. These land seizures were motivated as much by political and racial reasons as they were for economic gain. The opportunities and benefits for Euro-American settlers still resonate in the landscape as it does in the national consciousness. Cheap land. Free land. Open spaces. Freedom to build and grow unencumbered by the suffocating class systems of old Europe. That part of the national master narrative felt comfortable to most Americans until the possibility that someone else's opportunity would be exploited at the expense of your private house, your piece of the American dream. The descendants of those who benefited from Indian removal were now being threatened with removal themselves. Among those who have forgotten their ancestral struggles with dispossession are those of us who have those events

close to living memory.

In neighborhood meetings around endangered dining room tables, we have talked about it. The stories begin to surface. Rural land clearances and urban ghettos of Europe. Indian wars and African American free towns. Some compare the current targeting of communities like ours to a gold rush just for development corporations. But these companies are too powerful to appear as beleaguered miners hoping for a lucky break, a flash of color in the pan. This shift in the application of eminent domain more closely resembles a re-emergence of the nineteenth-century notions of manifest destiny in the American West.

To that world view it is not enough to take land, eradicate animals and plants, and kill or remove people. The story must also be one of the triumph of good over evil, of order over chaos, of doing good and getting one's just reward. Removal of people, especially, must be dressed in the clothes of the greater good. Removal of Indian people from the Southeastern frontier of the young American republic of the early nineteenth century, for example, claimed to be for their own good, to protect them from the white interlopers whose land expansions were seen as inevitable--an early showing of manifest destiny. Within a few decades and farther to the west, the more ruthless taking of the Black Hills had to assume the rhetorical stance of furthering the national good. The eventual dynamiting of giant faces into sacred rock had to be the faces of national triumphalism, a celebration of national identity, rather than a trumpeting of conquest. The monumental scale of the project, perhaps more than any other feature, echoes in the contemporary

development proposals that are creating a new, if quieter, land war that reflects conflicting ideas of national character.

Resistance to recent invocations the "blighted" designation used to prepare the way for clearance of existing structures and neighborhoods could be seen as a misguided, although understandable, obstructionist attitude toward improvements that benefit both developers and municipalities. However, this view usually imagines development on a much smaller scale: perhaps construction of a new hotel, maybe a strip mall, office building or grouping of new homes. Just as the faces on Mount Rushmore far exceed the size of any other statue of the men represented there, so the developers drawing community fire, have been proposing and implementing projects encompassing hundreds of acres that they intend to completely clear and reshape into facsimiles of "mixed use" communities where such communities already exist. Equally huge profits and tax breaks accompany the projects.

These threats to communities are disturbing in themselves, but there is an additional element in current disputes. Not only is property at stake, but also the stories that define what that property means. As brutal and unjust as Indian removal was, at least those being removed were acknowledged as different, as other, as some kind of threat to the master narrative of national progress and, possibly, Christian faith. The current removals deny not only the existence of any sense of meaning in the land and its residents, but also deny any damage. Only good comes according to the new rhetoric of development. Consciousness of the particular nature of area, a bio-region, a community, does not exist. The stories of who

we are and how we connect with our complex environments of both built and natural aspects are erased. This is not a completely new method of forgetting, but it is being applied to the "frontiers" of development that, until recently, thought of themselves as the American Dream made manifest.

Irony abounds, of course. Not so long ago the disputed real estate was Indian land, and those who live on it now under threat of developers enjoy the benefits gained from the original land taking, whether or not they are directly descended from those settlers. The land grabbing that followed the Indian Allotment Act was not so different in effect. "Blight" replaces "allotment" in the discourse of dispossession. The effects are not as catastrophic, but loss permeates the experience. Payment is never enough to compensate for this.

At the core of this latest revision of the old frontier land wars lies, not greed alone, but rather competing stories of who we are, or want to be. The simulacrum of an instant mixed-use townlet, such as those put forward by the various new urbanism developers, feels inauthentic. The recently completed, massive project in the St. Charles, Missouri, is a case in point. It is called New Town with no sense of irony or post-modern self-reflection whatsoever. New Town's presence in the land is one of absence. Every house stands like a monument to the death of small town America. The scale of it is too big, too empty, and too clean. Walmart looms at the end of one street. The library is painfully well lit. The selves have no books, not yet. The shops have names full of nostalgia: Ye Olde General Store, Grandpa's Hobby Shoppe, and the like. The colors are light and

bright, a cheerful statement so calculated that the absence of authentic community evolved naturally over time is palpable. A sense of mourning floats invisibly on the air, an undeletable subtext.

Thomas King writes: "The truth about stories is that that's all we are." Leslie Marmon Silko adds: "They are all we have you see, all we have to fight off illness and death." These Native authors are writing about indigenous consciousness of the power of stories, but I believe their point can be applied more broadly, not in a tribal sense, but rather in the sense that certain types of stories define a collective sense of who we are as communities and what we find meaningful in our connections to each other and the environment around us--our home place.

Of course, we can survive dislocation by development. We can "move on" with our lives, and not suffer trauma on the scale of Indian removals of the past. And yet, there is an attitude of a dark and poisonous manifest destiny in these development encroachments. A nasty profit motive that undermines the greater good it claims to serve. There is a wearing thin of the fabric of civic life; a lessening of our ties to the natural world and the accompanying hope that we can learn to live more harmoniously with it. Without the mocking bird at my window in the night, I am less. That harmony cannot be manufactured. Without the dawn through the particular oaks bordering my neighbor's house, I am diminished. Without my neighbor leaping with her children on the trampoline just visible over the fence, a wave of her hand now and then, I am poorer. These routine connection must develop slowly over time on there own terms. The small ceremonies of a walk

through the neighborhood are those of mindfulness, observance, and acknowledgment of those who share the world in this actual place. The sacred lives here, not just on the wild mountains or in the churches. Such ceremonies, in the words of Linda Hogan, "take us toward the place of balance, our place in the community of all things." And I would add, toward a state of being and of living with what Joy Harjo has called, "the blessing of animals and song."

My neighbors do not speak about home in this way, but they breathe it. They practice it without thought in the quotidian beauty of our neighborhood: car wheels catching gravel at the corner, freight trains passing at night, the distant owl, the cedars shifting with their cargo of finches, and the mockingbird singing close. Sometimes it smells like barbecue and beer. Sometimes it smells like rain. Not even one squirrel, not even one sagging garage is forgettable. And now that we know the bulldozers can be closer than we think, nothing here is disposable.

Steeped in main stream American culture, my neighbors believe home and neighborhood community is sacred in the national narrative of American identity. They come from a range of Euro-American and African-American heritage. I do not know whether they all share what Jace Weaver has described as "a Native consideration for the wider community of nature" in the same way that I do, but I have a feeling that they approach that Native sensibility through their performance of what home means. I have seen signs of that.

Tonight fireflies in their multitudes loop the dark air of every yard on our block. From our front window I can see the two little

girls across the street laugh as they chase them, plastic safety jars in their hands. Their dad sits motionless and unsmiling on their porch watching them. He is not a friendly man and rarely says hello. One of his daughters runs up with her glowing catch, puts the jar on the step, and faces him. In the stillness I can hear her singing "I'm a Little Teapot." He looks around carefully and then joins her. I never knew he could carry a tune.

Chapter Six

The Geese at the Gates: A Poetry Chapbook

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The Geese at the Gates

Deer Woman at Fifty

One misty night on the road
from Wentzville, a doe cut across
the headlights and vanished
kicking gravel chips
from the edge of the woods,
her provoking rump
giving the last flash.

I used to be that woman,
luring men to their deaths,
or so they liked to think,
when each carried his death
like a second heart
already within him.

Dirty Hands at the Gateway to the West

My steel trowel slices a Holland bulb—
 that hateful sound of waste.
 Maybe it will bloom anyway, blending
 with the native species. Lance-leaved coreopsis,
 bluestem, prairie cordgrass, butterfly weed
 wait in their holders from wild-ones.com—
 the authentic prairie sampler.

I place them first, as shown on cable TV,
 then dig spots for nodding onion,
 thimbleweed, wild indigo, and switchgrass.
 They will flourish as guaranteed.
 Butterflies will come disport themselves
 and tease the cats. Song birds will approve.
 Will tricky rabbits know the flowers are native?
 Are they native rabbits? Do the moles
 destroying the lawn know tall fescue
 is an exotic invader? Do moles know?

Yesterday, we took our children
 and their friends downtown.
 We walked to the Mississippi
 and stood on the western shore.
 The river lapped its concrete banks
 and our son's friend Dana shouted,
 "How many corporate executives
 does it take to screw up a river?"
 Matthew got one foot soaked
 and the girls shouted, as only younger
 sisters can, "Your shoe is polluted.
 Get away. Get away." Traffic whooshed
 over the Martin Luther King Jr. Bridge,
 recorded jazz whined from a paddle boat
 docked next to the floating MacDonalds.
 Could we please eat lunch there?

The Mississippi flipped its waves,
 exhaling fresh water smells like lost
 ancestral tongues in the September sun
 under the bright steel Gateway Arch,
 and we felt happy in our drumming hearts
 that beat with the jack hammers, buses,
 parks department lawn movers,

and river waves of our dwindled world.

In the shadow of the Arch, I leaned down
and touched the wet brownness showing
clearly, after all, how slim and clean my hands
wavered under water. Could it be
dioxins caressed the palms? Sparkling
juices from submerged cars and corpses?
Or was I baptized at the threshold,
the gateway to the West?

In the immense ladies room
of the Westward Expansion Museum
deep in the bunker under the arch,
I blinked into the mirror and hesitated
at the row of blinding white sinks.
I should wash the river from my hands,
should ride the egg-shaped pod to the apex
of perfect metal for the view. Everyone
was waiting by the lobby fountain
that hurled bright blue dye up and back
to its square pond. The kids were tossing
pennies, a wish with every splash.
Beyond them a stuffed grizzly posed,
a red stage coach hugged a wall, both real.
At the outermost circle of the spiral displays,
a life-size bronze of Thomas Jefferson
gestured toward a tepee set with genuine
artifacts and polyurethane Indians.

I turned from the sink to rejoin them,
the Mississippi still stuck to my hands,
rivulets of blue veins swelling in the heat.

Spike TV Is for Men

The Front Row Bar has nine TVs
and everywhere you turn tonight
there's dead guys firing one last shot,
horses screaming, tanks rolling,
and fast cars blowing up.

"Football's next," a man
in a triple extra-large Rams shirt
comments by way of reassurance
to his wife, who sips a Bud Light
and does not look at him.

Five men at a table laugh loud
and call the waitress
"Brenda-where's-the-catchup"
which, outside of work,
has become her screen name.

Spike TV is for men in a bar
with nine TVs, and the women
they try not to worry about too much,
because not too much can be done
about it, whatever it is with women.

Spike TV is for men,
and every Thursday night at ten
Body Work comes on.
In the Front Row Bar doctors
with bloody gloves jam a hose

into some guy's gut and suck
fat into a big glass jar.
Medical hands using a sharpie
draw lines on another guy's face;
an expert scalpel slices under his eyes.

The Front Row Bar steadies itself
in hushed attention. Beer bottles
rise and slowly fall, reflecting
the ice blue flicker of nine TVs.
Cosmetic surgery, we are told,
has come to macho land,
claiming a sizeable audience.

Invisibility Lesson #1

Daughter:

This is the way Indians walk in the woods.

This is the way human beings

walk in the woods.

Your weight on the outer edge of the foot,
like a blade in the earth.

Roll heel to toe,

each step in the print of the last.

Bend the knees; relax the shoulders so.

Eyes follow four directions:

down, ahead, left, right.

Faster now and silent:

down, ahead, left, right;

ears more open than eyes.

You'll know when you get it right

by the deer ignoring you,

and the arrowhead hunters,

with their shovels and sieves,

shouting your obituary

right across your path.

Invisibility Lesson #2

Our sacred towns
are names of rivers.
The one drop rule
bled us white, or black.

Our trickster rabbit
sells breakfast cereal.
Ruckers Airforce Base
covers Grandmother's farm.

Uncle Stuart's parole
leaves him homeless in Dallas.
The New York Times
proclaims us fake.

Grandfather's Lost Farm

Standing up like a man in Beaumont, Texas,
 at the cookin'-with-gas stove, Saturday
 kitchen, no bugs in no more wood piles,
 three frypans hopping mad with beans, rice,
 eggs, shaker of Cajun red to hand, and ready
 to slap on the table--was never a problem.

Drinking was never a problem.
 "Not that kind of Indian," you'd joke,
 when you weren't saying you're white,
 "just tanned from plowin' and pickin'
 and having no luck at all." Never
 heard of you drunk. Wasn't like that.

The problem was more like never
 saying, "Mornin', Son," before Daddy
 left for school. "You havin' toast with
 your eggs? Any homework, Hotshot?"
 without the acid from the dirt on that
 Alabama farm spitting into the eyes
 looking up from the table.

Your Granny promised you that land,
 relic of the cheated past; promised that
 acid red earth you wrestled mules to plow,
 child muscles lashed to reigns; promised
 you, until she lied you two years older
 and into the army, then sold it all.
 "Coverin' your Uncle Dee's gambling,"
 she said like nothing. Left you sweating
 red furrows through the barracks sheets,
 sweating chickens, cotton mouth rivers,
 shotguns by a flaking kitchen door.

You grew three inches, saw seven nations,
 and cussing seven languages, stayed the hell
 away in Beaumont. Waited seven years
 to show your son. Gawking crows screamed
 you the last two miles down the road to Granny.
 That night you scared Daddy to peeing
 the bed, telling him crows was what happened
 to ancestors who killed their own: crows
 hungry forever in the damned trees.

Shouting, "Stay clear of Granny,
Hotshot," so she could hear it, even old
and deaf, "just an old Indian woman,
give you a good lick of that cane,
you get in her way," was your only revenge.

Reading linotype upside down
and backwards was never a problem,
setting the *Beaumont Daily News*,
proud to be the one with a paycheck.
They needed some sent home regular:
crop shares thin; Porter lost his truck route;
Iretha's coughing blood; Haddie's talking to Jesus.
Can you send some store-bought soap?

Driving to the police to pick up Hotshot
was not a problem, not a surprise. Only
a matter of time before Daddy got arrested
for something. He's not too big to cut a switch.
Maybe a night in jail. "What the hell is wrong
with you? Stealing dumbass library books?
Last time I checked they give them out free.
Never amount to chicken shit that way.
I thought it'd least be grand theft auto."

The problem is, Grandfather, I am standing
up here in Omaha. Out here, the cicadas
are almost finished; central air rushes on
against summer. Out here, I couldn't name
a fish in the river, never owned a shotgun,
and the keyboard creaks more than the crickets.
I'm cooking electric, no flame on the pot.
Out here, it's just two tomato plants.
Some crank reached over the alley fence
and broke the heads off the sunflowers,
only stalks now tall as the garage.

The problem is that I crouch by the porch,
hidden in cardinal bush and cedar. Darkness
rises, and a squirrel brushes past. Neighbors laugh,
start a mower, and bees flash the old stomp tune.
How can it be, Grandfather, every time I stand,
the acid of that Alabama farm boils in my mouth?

Creek War: White Stick Survival Song

Another colonial evening abides
 in the white air. Fireflies shift
 like backward glances, squash lies
 on the ready vine, and cedars host
 chickadee armies in flickering song.
 The small raccoon sniffs in the oak,
 deer walk uphill into shadows, Night
 hawks hunt in pairs by the highway,
 as rabbits move to higher ground.
 Hard scattering of leaves continues,
 blowing in drifts up the porch steps,
 and we reckon how the dawn will run
 against us. Outer bands of the hurricane
 ram rain into the red and piney clay,
 and we return to the creek bottom,
 like stones skipped to their limit.

The earth wrapped in sweet moss
 by the rushes at Horse Shoe Bend
 holds fast the spent rounds
 and bloody arrowheads.
 "We be, we be, we be,"
 the frogs call their stomp dance.
 By midnight they change their song:
 "Pay up, pay up, pay up."
 The Red Stick War, that footnote,
 took us so far, but not to Oklahoma.
 Through the pines, the treaties whisper,
 if you can't beat them,
 if you can't run them,
 if you can't cheat them,
 then make them hate themselves.

We were so good at death,
 red sticks and white sticks
 by the sacred fire, so generous
 we gave it back and forth
 like a great trade at Fort Mims.
 But Andrew Jackson took it to the bank.
 I'd like to make that movie:
Dances with Cottonmouths,
Gator Rider, Tear Dress Diaries,
Corn Pone and Pistols.
 Roll credits. Fade to white.

Snake Shadows

Past the Pyramids of Mexico City,
white stones in the dry pan
of the sun resist nothing,
offer shadows for snakes.
Dust older than stones colors
your white ankles gold.

I quicken you to the summit,
breathing yucca, wind, and distance.
Two hawks flute the updrafts, dive,
and the century slips to my waist.
Along the ruined wall,
camera, glasses, cell phone
surrendered to the sun,
I sing out, recalling short horses
agile in the rocks.

But you take back my wrists.
The pink and green of your face
turn gold above the stones.
You tell me you fear snakes.
Blue Ireland never knew
God of scales and feathers.
There are snakes in these rocks,
brown and spotted as the path
at your feet. They cannot
be converted to doves.

This morning in the shadowed
room of the Hotel Isabella,
my arms coiling your chest,
my hands diamond heads,
my tongue water over rock,
your sounds the prayers of stones
in the spring creek of Teotihuacan;
I saw in your eyes that green candle
you lit to Saint Patrick
in the cathedral of the plaza
still burning, stuttering now
in the four directions.

Sock Romance

Everyone thinks I'm foolish
since I wore these socks
you gave me to work.
They shake hands with my feet
at the conference table.
Pinky purple and yellow
people, their green pets
holding hands, parade
along a cobalt stripe, around
and around my springtime ankles.

I wore them, and now
they all know I'm in love.
They see my socks
and slowly they are falling,
all falling, for you.

Hellos come in the corridors,
waves from the graying boys,
smacking their shoes along,
a credit to their tailors.
And the stories I hear
in the ladies' room--salaries,
vacations, men who can cook.

Calls come right through;
my extension blinks and beeps.
My mail hits the chute for free
on the company meter.
My trash gets emptied first.

You are their sweetheart now,
hero of the favorite novel read
late at night, next to the lover
who earns good money
getting very tired.

Matthew Dreaming at Age Twelve

Third time you've tossed
your covers and I've fixed them.
Curled on your side,
sheets grabbed 'round like King David,
you run hard in this vigorous dream.

Bones of your jaw and shoulders
have thickened, protruding
where muscle has yet to fill the hollows.
You lift your right fist,
clenching the hero's sword,
and hammer it into the mattress,
orders flying in a tongue too old for me.

Shocked at this battle rage,
I wonder which army follows.
Seizing or defending?
Cannon or pike?
Turtle, Harp, or Torah?
Your eyes flash open blind.
Counter thrusts and kicks
dash blankets to the floor.

Holding you fast, I chant the lie,
"You're safe, safe in your bed.
It's only a dream, a dream,
only a dream."
Sinking back, you answer,
Blinking, disappointed,
"Only a dream?"

Matthew Depressed at Age Ten

In the silence
of the garden,
my son waits,
head in hands.
When will the green
snake return?
The little house of twigs
stands empty.

Come in, Son,
for your dinner.
Tomorrow's sky may coax
the garter back to its rock
by the gate, just for love
of your milky laugh, your
dirt-happy shouts.

In the longing
of the garden,
my son pinches sage,
no breeze to raise the scent.
From the marigolds,
a sudden cricket blurts.
Take heart.
Dusk, and God, are near.

River Husband

When I was a girl, my father told me
that as a youth he had known
only one thing for sure about women.
He knew he needed to choose a wife
who could ride the river.
No matter how rough or deep,
she would be right by his side,
strong enough to tilt the rudder,
pole off the rocks, or haul him out,
her stance secure, her supplies stowed
and lashed, her gaze stalwart
against the unknown.

I nodded, yes, with downcast eyes.
Someday I'd find a man like that,
oh yes, a husband just like my mother.
And the brave volunteers lined up
to my right and left, blonde hair or black,
strong arms and willing. And each had
a river map, a compass in his hand.
And none had to ask which way.
And none ever saw, until you,
my river at his feet.

Vernal Equinox with Sue Reclining

Brown coneflower stalks, freed
 from their carapace of frost,
 blow over, clattering their seed
 heads toward the westering sun.
 The vernal equinox arrives kicking.

Warmed on the concrete steps
 by the door, my friend, you and I
 recline to admire our new shoes.
 Whitening streaks in your hair
 burn red now in the sun.

My surfer girl, you fill my heart,
 as I fill your glass with California wine.

Dianthus surprises us, its many-fingered
 leaves greening above the leaf mold
 where you stained your slender hands
 in mulching last September.
 Manicures only last in winter.

My dirty nails cradle
 leather-rooted chrysanthemums
 into coffee cans for the terrace
 behind your house. Where have our
 daughters run to, the neighbor's fat

retriever pulling the leash?
 Was it last Easter I could wear
 my son's boots? The one before?
 How many shoe sizes ago?
 Your claret lips repeat
 the wine's deep color in the sun.

My brown-eyed harvest rose, how have
 you learned to bloom so well in spring?

September 11th: War Protest

A woman standing
in her slender youth
on the wall
at Speakers' Circle
reads the names
of the American dead.
Some must be hard to pronounce,
their ranks more simple.
The campus bell tower sounds
behind her generous hair
looped and bound up in a clip
slipping lower in the wind
that carries her round
contralto voice away to us,
gathering like geese at sunset.
The fountain chuckles
between bells,
and six ROTC men,
boys still really,
shoulder up to jeer.

The tallest strides
right to her face,
demanding who does
she think she is?
We shuffle our nervous feet,
and her hair unfurls
to her waist,
the wind curling it
in the lowering sun.
In the space between
their eyes' meeting,
she sees his name
on next year's list
and steps back,
open-mouthed,
into a new quiet.
He turns to the crowd
and shouts, "What are you
looking at? Haven't you ever
seen red hair before?"
The evening freight
train screams

from the tracks behind
the student union.
Sometimes the banshee
calls ahead of schedule.

Mrs. Dunbar Sends for Milk

What is the measure of a life,
 its length and breadth a mist
 of small actions, lives touched
 and touching others, gentle cascade
 of connections elusive as a spray
 of holy water? I did not know her well.
 We met once. Saw the inside of her pub,
 ate a cheese sandwich she made
 and drank a cup of tea, listened to her
 laugh serving pints and trading news.
 Heard she could make things difficult.
 Perhaps she made demands,
 smoked too much,
 spoiled her favorite son.

Fighting hard against her lungs,
 she made it through the summer.
 The doctors lowered their eyes,
 but she breathed into the harvest.
 A full plate warm before her,
 clank of silver, spuds and roast beef
 wafting, the son's face near,
 daughter-in-law's voice from the kitchen,
 grace about to be said,
 like that,
 like that,
 the other table spread before her.
 Stroke of the clock, of the drum,
 of the blood, the measure of a life.

We who must meet again at the groaning
 board consider how to answer
 our empty middles no food can fill.
 I offer a story for Mrs. Dunbar,
 small counter-measure to the great denial,
 as clouds shape light that defines them.

One day last summer, from her sick bed,
 she sent her grandson and his cousin
 to the shop for milk. Shop closed,
 they hiked to another. Closed. They climbed
 the long hill to the farthest edge of town
 and got the milk at last, the younger
 boy so tired his tall cousin carried him home.

He felt grown and strong to heft a relative
on his back and stride along the street,
milk cartons swaying into his hip.
The younger, loved and important
to be bounced along like a sack of potatoes,
the milk found, the grandmother
soon to be given the perfection of tea,
only possible, as everyone knew,
with fresh whole milk.
That slim task a gift of lives
hooked lightly as another row added
with the sure click of knitting needles.

Legs swung measure for measure
along the Ferns-to-Gorey road.
The seventeen-year-old wished they could
walk forever in their balanced state,
the chill of evening a blessing on his face,
no plans ever to be made, no school
work to be done. The nine-year-old
wished they could walk forever
in their closeness, time present swallowing
future and past, pigeons cooing
on the petrol station roof,
grandmother waiting,
and breathing..

Closet Cleaning

Ghosts of the grandmothers
 prod me to the back of my closet.
 Another box unlabeled, left over
 from the last move. So there's
 the old house keys, sunglasses,
 doll house furniture, silk scarves,
 my old eyes that first saw you
 in a doorway in Milwaukee,

my throat that drank your health
 'til closing time at Axel's on the frozen
 blue corner of Oakland and State,
 and these curling letters tied
 with string. Shovel it all away
 labeled 1992. Far back and taped
 against its splitting sides. I can't
 even spell whispers hurled at me
 as the vacuum roars matted dust
 from corners: *"Yi yee stonem!* So much
 dirt it flies out the ass of this machine."

"Gutt en himmel, if tears could settle
 dust, you could breathe in here."
 Be still. Here are the shiny red shoes
 I wore that New Year's I took you
 by the hand and didn't we dance,
 even after the little ankle straps
 rubbed me raw. And here's
 the twist-tied plastic bag of junk
 jewelry I'm saving for Caitlin.
 This black velvet remnant bought
 for half nothing at the Second Chance
 will make her hat for sporting
 the huge rhinestone star.
 Just seven and her face outshines
 the generations--even Aunt Louise
 in her photo as a girl.
"Cana horah," echoing grandmothers
 rock behind my head,
"give the child a chance."

These are the leather jeans
 that used to fit, empty chocolate box

too pretty to toss. That sneaking cat
has slept gray hair all over my sweater,
clotting the green deep as the pines
along Lake Michigan that set off
my eyes to make you hold me
your fuzzy sweetheart.

But where are my silk wedding pumps,
clean and burning like lamp light
on a release of wings?
I have lost them.
They were never here.

Nebraska Widow's Walk

Outside my window the widow's walk curls an iron
 semicircle under the eaves. Black Georgian optimist,
 it commands the pillared entranceway, yearns
 seaward past tossing lawns fossiled over
 Mesozoic fish and shells. Prairie wind flicks
 hail like pearls to pyramid the balcony floor—
 Captain Kidd's treasure chest, cold as Davy Jones.
 It's a long way to Charleston.

Isn't it daffodil time in Carolina?
 Shouldn't the beaches be churned with pink shells,
 the dunes stroked by our shadows intertwined?
 Remember the ineluctable rugosa roses swelling
 their meaty buds in the suntrapped dooryard
 of the public library? And what of white voile
 curtains blowing leeward--suddenly a cocoon
 of lace to confuse our long slow kiss?

Oh well, if I can't tip my tongue
 in daffodils, dewy, salt-sprayed,
 erect, at least I have this thunder spitting
 big ice balls to dent those unbearable
 Saabs and Cadillacs nextdoor, their flaccid
 pouts sangfroiding all over the medical
 center parking lot. Bounce on, pop,

pop, pop. Stumble me onto the balustrade
 gaping up, bird-like, for enough to gargle,
 enough to bruise my lips. Hit me
 cold with everything you've got.

Dancer

The earth turns with a sound
we long to hear.

Under the lights,
the elongated hurt--stubborn
clay--turns within the force
that is your will,
beyond any choosing,
to each smallest rounding
of the elbow, slightest
declination of the fingers;
builds gesture to gesture,
circling more and greater
space into fire.

Turn and turning repeat
and spiraling repeat,
making obedient
what can't obey for long.
Leap and leaping suspend
air and time as the pattern
breaks free of earth's turning
with sound we believe to be
chalked slippers on wood.

Burn thin the veil.
Your dance
that is our dance
makes us possible again.

Cat Revelation

I know a thing or two about cats,
 and that scrawny black skeleton with dirty socks
 curled in the empty flower pot on the porch
 was one fine haven for bugs and stink.
 Ball of running sores, why cling to our yard
 for two weeks under threat of animal control,
 then vanish? Three days into my blissful relief
 and a new potted geranium, the neighbor's daughter,
 best friend of our own, knocked at the door
 cradling that sack of cat piss, child weeping,
 cat dripping and reeking of gasoline.

"My mom's at work and my dad's in the shower,
 and I thought you'd know what to do,"
 and I thought, oh you lucky man in the shower;
 me with a house full of children and a known
 oversized bathtub at the top of the stairs.
 I have resisted moments of truth—
 sled rides on thinly iced ponds,
 candy from strangers, oysters from New Jersey,
 St. Patrick's Day night in sports bars—
 and I know how to say no to destiny.,
 but I said, "Give me the cat and we'll wash it."

Kneeling by the tub where a tall woman
 can stretch out and enjoy a good soak,
 I reddened my hands through twenty sloshing
 shampoos, the last six using laundry detergent.
 Five visiting children and two of my own
 leaned over me shouting advice, falling onto
 my aching shoulders or into the tub.
 Fumes watered my eyes, as I kneaded
 that paltry body that never mewed
 scrambled, scratched nor bit, but stood
 in the frothing waves and took whatever I sent
 her way--head above water, eyes heavenward.

There's nothing more certain than this:
 no one can wash a cat twenty times in front of children,
 dry it, and watch it eat a can of tuna intended
 for dinner under a patch of late sun angling through
 the kitchen door, reflecting gold in the cat's left eye,
 without something turning over in the soul,
 without the cat revealing its true name.

Spider Woman

A funnel spider, long as my finger,
weaves yards of thick silk
by the basement window.
More still than the English ivy,
legs arched like church windows,
she waits for the vibration.
Murder is in my heart.

What's one spider more or less?
I must finish cutting this carapace
of vines that snarls the cedar boards
of our house and smothers garden walls,
its ropy torrents encroaching
the driveway. I must finish slashing
this intruder choking its way up
native locusts and laurel oaks.

Fat queen, you block my progress,
flickering on territory that is mine.
My hands blister, an acrid green
stains the sheers. But look
how symmetry makes slow advance,
clean as new linen. My parents visit
in under a week for their first view
of the property, and even at my age,

I'd kill to impress them.
My silhouette shapes the basement window,
web of black hair framed by a lattice
of shrubby branches, my shadow
dulling the light on your brown body
against the pane. And a question creeps
almost to mind.

This last corner, spider-fortified,
still damp from the night's storm,
exhales a darker chaos. Under bridal
wreath, azalea, and honeysuckle,
infusing our standoff under
the noonday sun, a sting of fear.
How many spiders living here?

Wound

This afternoon,
the world a broken thing
separated
from the home
I never knew,
I wish the world could be
a broken thing;
I grow old
and never see
Alabama.

Conversations with White Cat

Every morning to my pillow, white cat,
ordinary on your paws, you step on me
the length of the quilt to slouch body-hot
on my head. Smelling of car oil, earth,
cat belly toast, you purr burbling in my ear:

*My brothers and sisters are cold.
My brothers and sisters are hungry.
My brothers and sisters are beaten.*

Breathe on for me, white heart, rumble drum.
This is the way we are made. That bawling
from the street; did you think it was
the scratching and biting of cats?

Tell them all for me. To build this house
is nothing. Bankers' paper jaws.
To cut this ground for corn is nothing.
Even the crows neglect my fields.
To stand on the line and knock
down dogs of war is nothing.
The meek want only bigger dogs.

The mail delivers nothing,
no stamps like wishes through the slot.
The small walk to the shop, milky fog
streaming up from the snow, empties me.
At every corner I meet my ravening self.
Leave me to the stone cutters.
Let them chip the shape they like.

Yet every morning on my pillow, white soul,
faithful in your breath, you sing, nose in my ear:

*Yes, but this day is good.
This day is good. Rise up, Mother.
This day is good. Hear my prayer.
This day is good. Rise up, Mother.
Your white cat loves you this day.*

The Geese at the Gates

Sundown comes by six already.
The fat geese should be slicing
the heavy clouds, heading south.
In the last heat of these afternoons
I should hear them exclaiming
on their way. But the geese remain
all winter. Having forgotten themselves
and changed their story, they talk
all day to each other, happily shitting
from the rooftops of the university
and along the path to the parking garage.

From classrooms high in the Honors College
we can see our cars wiggle their
steely asses under the laurel oaks.
All that shiny potential,
the metallic glint, makes us want
to heave our feathered bodies,
with their weight loss programs,
into bucket seats and roll out
to somewhere along that packed
and lonesome highway, some place
that would keep its promise for once.

If only there were a way to get back
Home again, or failing that,
the Galleria will do. The shelves
in Dillard's Department Store
glitter red, gold, and green
with shrink-wrapped sheets
of Egyptian cotton, seventy-five percent
off the original price for these fruits
of the giant broadlooms of China that,
after resting here from that long migration,
will end in the Mississippi River
waters of my washing machine.

At the cash register the sales lady
loves a bargain, and soon will fly
west to Denver and her grandchildren.
They email her their photos,
and she replies with virtual
kisses you can download free.
I should do that, too, what with

all my relations so far from me.
Beside us stands a tower of boxes
holding hundred-dollar pillows.
The sample chimes and repeats,
"Try me," in the voice of a child,
"Try me: pure white goose down
wraps a core of memory foam."

She hits the total key, confessing,
"If you ask me, those pillows feel just
like God's tits." She is right about that.
Maybe they cost so much because the sweet,
white foam of memory arrives in dreams,
carrying the questions we have folded away
into cedar chests, and shakes out stories
in the mother tongues that long ago paid
the original price of those migrations
that left us here to smile and wave
our fierce American flags.

Pulling into driveways, opening fridges,
booting computers, entering passwords
on the farthest edges of the gateway city
by man-made lakes, we hunker down for the night.
In the television glow we drift downward
to sleep, hearing geese at the gates.
We float, heads on the breast of pillow God,
wondering how to rid ourselves
of these fat, honking angels here among us.