

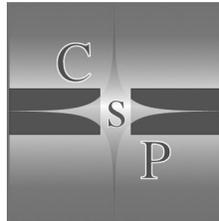
# Recovering Memory



Recovering Memory  
Irish Representations of Past and Present

Edited by

Hedda Friberg, Irene Gilsenan Nordin  
and Lene Yding Pedersen



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## INTRODUCTION: MEMORY AS RE-COVERING

HEDDA FRIBERG, IRENE GILSENAN NORDIN  
AND LENE YDING PEDERSEN

In a cabinet in Dumbledore's office at Hogwarts, Harry Potter finds an interesting object the likes of which he has never seen before: it is a stone vessel, with runes and symbols carved around the edge, containing a strange, bright, whitish silver substance, which to Harry seems like light made liquid or wind made solid.<sup>1</sup> What Harry has found is a "pensieve": a magical receptacle used for storing memories. The pensieve works in such a way as to allow a character to extract his or her memories, place them in the pensieve, and examine them later. In contradistinction to a diary—another memory storing device also found in the Harry Potter books—the pensieve enables the characters to examine the stored memory from a third-person point of view, which means that they can see things beyond what they remember. Furthermore, since anyone can access the memories stored in the pensieve, a character can examine past events not experienced by him/herself. It is even possible to take another person's memories (stored in little crystal bottles), pour them into the pensieve and re-experience them there. In this way memories become valuable objects that can be hidden, stolen or destroyed. It is apparently also possible for a character to edit and manipulate the extracted memories in the pensieve. Thus even though this magic storing vessel offers a way of recovering past events— one's own as well as others'—those events may have been tampered with.

Apart from allowing memories to be kept and recovered, the pensieve also offers a way for characters to repress or erase memories. Thus, Dumbledore explains to Harry that he sometimes finds himself with too many thoughts and memories on his mind, and that he then uses the pensieve to purge his mind. Dumbledore also warns Harry that even though curiosity about the past is not a sin, it should be exercised with caution. This stresses the importance of the pensieve as a magical means of forgetting as well as of remembering.<sup>2</sup> For example, in the case of what psychologists refer to as "post-traumatic stress

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<sup>1</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 506-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, 518-20.

disorder,” where a person experiences uncontrolled/involuntary memories of traumatic events, the pensieve could—in the realm of fiction—be used to erase such memories.

The pensieve has a thematic function as well as a plot function in the Harry Potter books. On the one hand it is a magical object thematizing such general aspects of memory as how to keep memories and how to avoid them, aspects which are clearly not restricted to fantasy fiction or fiction at all. On the other hand, the pensieve may be considered, above all, a *literary* device allowing for the gradual completion of the plot by showing past events in Harry’s experience without changing his point of view. Yet the need to construct coherent plots out of memories—stored, repressed or forgotten—from a certain perspective goes beyond narrative fiction and literature, and is found within theories of psychology, sociology, history, and other disciplines. Thus the features of the magic storing vessel are desirable outside the magical world of Harry Potter—and fiction in general)—with regard to thematizing the workings of memories as well as those of plot construction. The problem outside the fictional world is, of course, that so far no one has constructed a non-magical object like the pensieve, which means that human beings (individually and collectively) still have to rely on other ways of collecting, storing and recovering memories.

Various ways of collecting, storing and recovering memories have been the focus, then, of the most recent research project carried out by a group of scholars from The Nordic Irish Studies Network (NISN). The aim of this project has been to examine the concept of memory in an Irish context, and the outcome of the project is this collection of essays. The title of the volume, *Recovering Memory: Irish Representations of Past and Present*, is intended to highlight the various workings of memory explored by the group—workings illustrated by the pensieve: In its intransitive form the verb “recover” relates to the idea of returning to a “normal” condition after a period of trouble or difficulty, or of getting better after an illness, shock or accident. In its transitive sense the verb “recover” means to get back something that was taken from one, something that was lost or almost destroyed—the idea of regaining an ability, a sense or control over one’s feelings, movements etc, after a period of absence or loss. If the word is hyphenated as “re-covering,” the prefix makes the verb mean to “cover again” or to bring back to the former state of being covered. In that event the memories that have been “re-covered” end up covered as before. Recovering memories, thus, can refer to memories that help one, individually or collectively, to recover from a difficult state, as well as to memories that are being recovered (from someone) by someone (else)—and perhaps re-covered.

In whatever way one chooses to look at the idea of “re-covering” and all the ramifications of that word in relation to memory, this collection of essays sets out to examine the general theme of memory in Irish literature and culture

against the theoretical background of the philosophical discourse of modernity. The collection takes as its starting point two general theoretical categories of memory, namely, collective memory and personal memory. Collective memory is examined in the sense coined by Maurice Halbwachs, as a set of ideas and beliefs collectively shared, constructed, and passed on by a group. Thus, memories are derived from the shared myths, literature, history, culture and traditions of a society and in a collective sense are seen as fundamental to the building of national unity and identity.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, collective memory can be considered in a negative sense as excluding those who are not members of a particular group—an idea which is developed by Antonio Gramsci in his concept of cultural hegemony, whereby control is maintained ideologically, by means of a hegemonic culture.<sup>4</sup> A number of the studies in the collection draw on the theories of Paul Ricoeur, who in his much acclaimed work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, studies the production of historical narrative and discusses collective memory in terms of the reciprocal relationship between remembering and forgetting. He explores the question of how major historical events, such as the Holocaust, can capture the imagination of the collective consciousness while other events do not.<sup>5</sup>

In the field of critical and cultural studies Paul Connerton's theories are also applicable to the study of memory and are used by a number of the contributors below. Connerton widened Halbwachs' ideas of collective memory to include socially negotiated practices, which are seen as *locii* where memory is stored. In his book *How Societies Remember*, he deals with memory as a cultural faculty, and studies bodily practices—such as gestures, clothing, manners—and how these are passed down as traditions. He argues that memories and knowledge of the past are sustained by ritual performances which are bodily in nature. Thus, he claims, bodily social memory is closely related to social memory.<sup>6</sup> The cultural theorist Pierre Nora is also important in the context of collective memory for his contribution to the study of space and place in relation to shared memory. In his monumental work on the *loci memoriae* of France, entitled *Realms of Memory*, he uses the term “history of symbolism” and studies the past, not as events, but as ways in which the past has been remembered or

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<sup>3</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Bob Lumney, *Gramsci's Writing on the State and Hegemony, 1916-35: A Critical Analysis* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1976).

<sup>5</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

forgotten through history. According to Nora, a *lieu de mémoire* (place of memory) is a site, or landscape of consciousness, where cultural memory is “crystallised.” These are located in places such as ancient monuments, museums, cathedrals, cemeteries, etc.<sup>7</sup> Below, Nora’s theories are explored in the Irish context by, for instance, Michael Böss and Hedda Friberg.

Another aspect of memory which is relevant to the theme of the present volume is personal memory. Here, in contrast to collective, cultural memory, or external memory related to history, memory is seen in the context of events related to the private individual—memories of the self, including memories of experiences and personal facts of one’s life. Autobiographical or personal memory comes naturally into this category, and is characterised by one’s recollection of events, and how one interprets memories of episodes of one’s own life. Personal memory is also related to the construction of selfhood. John Locke, for instance, considered human memory as essential in the construction of personal identity, and in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* he stressed the power of memory in the construction of self. Self-identity, which relies on the continuity of consciousness, is constructed by reflection on sensations and thoughts, both past and present, where memory is an important continuous link.<sup>8</sup> For Freud, on the other hand, memory is episodic, and the self is constructed by fragments of memory which are selected by the ego. The conscious mind represses memory, thus the formation of identity is the result of interaction between the unconscious id and the conscious ego.<sup>9</sup> Freud’s ideas in relation to repressed memory and the construction of self identity are further developed by some contemporary theorists, who see memory as remnants of perception which are triggered by certain events from the past. In the chapters which follow, theories of critics such as Irigaray, Deleuze, Guattari, and others, are explored in relation to the construction of personal identity in the context of Irish representations of past and present.

Offering a wide range of perspectives on a plurality of Irish representations of past and present, *Recovering Memory: Irish Representations of Past and Present* is divided into five sections, each of which focuses on one broadly defined aspect of memory. Within these sections, the individual writers find themselves engaged in a fruitful dialogue with each other. Examining the relation between memory and history, the first section of this volume takes as its

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<sup>7</sup> Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past*, edited by Lawrence D. Kritzman, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1921).

point of departure Richard Kearney's chapter on memory and forgetting in the context of Irish culture. Exploring relationships between private and public, individual and collective memory, Kearney links existential memory to literature. In the second part of his chapter, Kearney explores the remembrance of Irish history through place by offering the example of Brian Tolle's Irish Hunger Memorial in Battery Park in New York City. Kearney shows that the complex dialectic of remembering that is brought to bear on Irish historical events is not merely a question of remembering, but of doing so in the "right" way.

In a further investigation of relationships between memory and Ireland's past, Michael Böss discusses various philosophical, psychological and sociological theories of memory with special reference to the significance of individual and collective memory for personal and social identities and for the construction of political culture. Taking as his point of departure Seamus Heaney's essay "The Sense of the Past," Böss proceeds—with references to Bruner, Ricoeur, Halbwachs and Carr—to examine how the narrativisation of remembered experience produces individual and social memory and thus contributes to individual and collective identifications. The chapter also explores the treatment of social memory in oral history and modern historiography. It ends with comments on the recent debate among historians about the "ethics of memory" and relates the discussion to the "culture of commemoration" in Ireland in the 1990s.

The discussion of memory in relation to history is concluded by Shane Alcobia-Murphy's chapter in which he addresses the question of how to tell the story of Bloody Sunday. This chapter explores the ways in which a number of Northern Irish artists problematize the notion of "truth" with regard to the Bloody Sunday events. Alcobia-Murphy argues that the visual and literary texts which he analyses in this chapter demonstrate an awareness of their own limitations and the way in which they ideologically frame the events of Bloody Sunday. He concludes that a shared narrative is possible, but this "must be alive to the subjective nature of perception and to the ways in which different discourses change the nature of the event itself."

Questions of memory and autobiography are raised in the second section of the volume. Here, Britta Olinder traces evidence of childhood events, professional experience and political developments in John Hewitt's autobiographical works. In her chapter, Olinder discusses questions about the relation of actual facts to what is remembered, about conscious or unconscious selection of details or angle of vision along with comparisons of the same event remembered at different times and in different contexts. Of special interest to Olinder is the comparison of John Hewitt's version of a particular incident with that of his wife, who kept a diary for some years. Olinder finds that it becomes

apparent that it is in the nature of memory, as with autobiography or life writing, to balance between reality and fiction.

In his exploration of links between memory, autobiography and national history, Billy Gray turns to Joseph O'Neill's *Blood-Dark Track: A Family History*, which he considers an invaluable and timely contribution to the understanding of the selectivity of national memory and the indelible link between familial remembrance and its communal counterpart. O'Neill, in this work, examines what he calls "a remote and terrible spot in the ethical landscape"—the massacre, by the Irish Republican Army, of Protestant residents in County Cork in 1922. This chapter studies how O'Neill shows that Protestants suffered a demographic cataclysm that has gone totally unmentioned in dominant histories of the period and claims that this is because the pogrom represents the very antithesis of the type of nationalist vision that has appropriated and monopolised the restricted space of political and cultural memory in Ireland.

In Chapter Six, Heidi Hansson discusses Dave Duggan's 2003 play *Scenes from an Inquiry*, which is a fictional treatment of the Tribunal set up to investigate the events known as Bloody Sunday, and focuses on the differences between the kind of memory desired by the law and the personal memories of the witnesses. The play raises questions about the nature of truth by showing how different paradigms produce different versions of the same event, and how personal memories may appear obstructive in the eyes of the law. Duggan's critique, Hansson argues, is aimed at the law as sense-making system, and this distrust of totalising systems connects his play to other Irish descriptions of Bloody Sunday, such as Eamonn McCann's *Bloody Sunday in Derry: What Really Happened*, where—despite the title—memories of the victims take precedence over a factual account.

Section III of this volume addresses aspects of memory in relation to place. In the first chapter of this section, Carmen Zamorano Llena explores the memory of place and a redefinition of identity in a postnational—perhaps postnationalist—context in the poetry of Derek Mahon. By focusing on his latest work, especially *The Hudson Letter* (1995), *The Yellow Book* (1997), and *Harbour Lights* (2005), the chapter shows how Ireland's transformations in a postnational(ist) situation and its inevitable participation in the global village have provided a more welcoming context to Mahon's internationalism, enabling him to find a vantage point from which to articulate a "new coinage"—to quote Louis MacNeice—for his understanding of the dialogical interrelationship between identity, memory, and Irish history.

In Chapter Eight, Róisín Keys explores the ways in which the language of photographic images can be seen to shape the ways a culture remembers past events—the events of Bloody Sunday—in Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the*

*City*. Keys argues that photographic aspects in the play encourage the audience to think about the past in terms of fleeting moments that nevertheless leave indelible traces in a culture's memory. As such, cultural memory can be said to refute the official history of an event and open up the possibility for alternative views of the past. In this vein, Friel employs a photographic trope to evoke moments of standstill that interrupt the notion of history as linear or causal and such instances of arrest can be linked to Walter Benjamin's concept of history as the image of the fleeting moment.

The mediation of memory in reference to language, the national literary tradition, and storytelling are addressed in Chapter Eight, by Anders Olsson. The chapter explores these three aspects of Colm Tóibín's *The Master and Beauty in a Broken Place*. The "broken place" is the common denominator of the three aspects. Throughout his chapter, Olsson uses two metaphors to describe the functions of memory: the palimpsest and the turlough. Finally, he situates Tóibín's texts both in an Irish and a transnational context and suggests that the juxtaposition of the three mediations of memory adds to the interpretation.

In the final chapter of Section III, Åke Persson suggests that Colm Tóibín's *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999) can be read as an educational novel, aiming at enlightening the Irish public about gay experience, while simultaneously resisting hegemonic values and norms. Furthermore, Persson argues that through the personal memories, or oral histories, of Larry and Paul, the reader takes part of a world that has been taboo and ignored in the construction of Irish identity. In the process, by giving voice to previously suppressed, gay, experience, the novel seems to suggest that Irish history needs to be rewritten. Thus, in this project, the novel allies itself with central concerns in queer theory, which problematises "normal" behaviour and identity, and which insists on increased tolerance.

Opening Section IV, in which issues of memory and identity are addressed, Irene Gilsenan Nordin asserts that in the plays of Brian Friel memory acts as a mediator in a complicated dance between past and present, between fact and fiction, between ourselves and others—how we perceive ourselves, and how others perceive us. Drawing on the theories of Hannah Arendt, who sees memory in an ethical sense as a "recounting of our lives," this chapter examines the theme of memory in three plays of Brian Friel, where memory is seen not as a burden from the past that betrays, deceives, and haunts us, but rather as an empowering, liberating, force which brings together experiences in a unified whole.

Brynhildur Boyce explores the workings of memory in Samuel Beckett's work and argues that memory operates, in Adorno's words, as a "positive nothingness" and a "negative imprint" of itself. Memory is a potential source of

identity—the stable narratives allow for the construction of a solid self—but simultaneously offers oblivion, in an avoidance of the self. The stories break down, identity fails, and yet there is no escape from this intolerable present-tense infinity; history in Beckett's work is barren, yet is a very present absence. The self-negation of the characters leaves a similarly positive trace: in maintaining their insubstantial and failing memories, they both erase the self and keep it going.

In Chapter Thirteen, Anne Karhio examines the ways in which Paul Muldoon's poetry views place and space as a process of experience and estrangement. She proposes that the sense of place in Muldoon's work is frequently created by transformative exchanges, and is transitional and questioning rather than stabilizing and affirming. Rather than render his poetry merely nihilistic or evasive in its investigation of place and space, as is sometimes suggested, this can be seen to lead to a poetics which foregrounds the fluctuating and productive nature of the formation of place in human communication. Thus, Muldoon's poetic language is engaged in showing how fragments and remains from history become a crossroads in every encounter with experience.

Ulf Dantanus, in Chapter Fourteen, demonstrates how in the lives and works of W.B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney the horse can be read as the site of a radicalised struggle in a divided tradition, and, at the same time, as a private memory trace laid down in the individual hippocampus. The focus of Dantanus' chapter is on the various memoried images of equus in the two writers' work, and the anxiety of this equine influence is measured in each case. For Yeats, the horse seems to be an anxiety-free zone, at his beck and call as literary subject and symbol in his voluntary memory. For Heaney, the horse is a complex memento of lost rural innocence, an iconic memory activating the retrieval of an involuntary, traumatic and guilty remembrance.

In the fifth and final section of this volume, aspects of memory as they appear in novelist John Banville's work are explored. Hedda Friberg examines the sites of memory in John Banville's *The Sea* in the light of Pierre Nora's classification of sites of memory, Paul Ricoeur's suggestion that memory's affinity to the imagination renders it quasi-hallucinatory, and Jean Baudrillard's image of a continental divide. In Banville's novel, the narrator/protagonist Max Morden is seen to attempt to stop time and withstand the work of forgetting by constructing sites of memory—as book and building, on a beach and in the waters of a bay. Here, on memory's continental divide, where Morden negotiates spaces between the past and the present, atonement seems possible and forgiveness partially achievable.

The city of Prague, as it appears in two books by John Banville—the novel *Kepler* (1981) and the non-fiction book *Prague Pictures* (2003)—is discussed

by Lene Yding Pedersen in Chapter Sixteen. This chapter studies how Prague is constructed not primarily as a geographic location but as a nexus of discourses and discursive memories. Exploring the different kinds of memories underpinning Banville's Prague in *Prague Pictures*, Yding Pedersen introduces the notions of "personal memory," "cultural memory" and "postmemory," and examines the manifestations of and relations between these different kinds of memory. *Prague Pictures* includes Banville's own memories of constructing Prague in *Kepler*, which makes Prague a site for recovering self-conscious as well as self-reflexive memories of writing.

Concluding the volume is Joakim Wrethed's chapter on elements of mnemonic air in John Banville's Science Tetralogy. Wrethed suggests that postmodern aspects of Banville's four works automatically draw attention to the human being's active *re*-presentations of the past in the form of historical narrativity. Such characteristics tend to emphasise the alterity of the past and its dependence on the creative process through which the past is accessed. Wrethed argues that akin to nothingness, air is part and parcel of the seemingly irrelevant beckoning of the past in the tetralogy texts. Air's constitutive role in these mnemonic processes places focus on the strength of life as an autonomy, indifferent to subjective creativity and active participation.

Among the questions which are addressed in this volume are: What is memory? How, or what, do we remember? In what way do we retrieve the past? Is it possible at all to do so? The study of memory is a huge area encompassing many different disciplines and theories. As Jennifer Cole points out in "Memory and Modernity," it is simply not possible to encompass this vast area in any one theory, since the study of memory is a "historically situated, individual, cultural, and social phenomenon."<sup>10</sup> Against this background, the studies below examine some representations of memory, both public and private, and the intersection between collective memory and individual memory in modern Ireland. The relation between memory and identity, both national and private, is focused on, as well as questions of subjectivity and the construction of the self. Given Ireland's tragic past and its long history of colonisation, various aspects of memory in terms of nationality, post-colonialism, and politics, are also examined. As this collection of essays shows, memory is a complex phenomenon, which has various, and at times contradictory, implications for individuals, cultures and nations. Memory recovers and re-covers, it hurts and it heals, it haunts and empowers. Memory brings together the past and the present. But it also leads us towards the future: As the Queen wisely proclaims in Lewis

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<sup>10</sup> Jennifer Cole, "Memory and Modernity," in *A Companion to Psychological Anthropology: Modernity and Psychocultural Change*, edited by Casey Conerly and Robert B. Edgerton (Malden, MA.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 112.

Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*: "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards." Memory works both ways— it leads us forward too.

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**PART I:**  
**MEMORY AND HISTORY**

CHAPTER ONE

MEMORY AND FORGETTING IN IRISH CULTURE

RICHARD KEARNEY

“Too much memory is a form of madness.” So speaks Hugh Mor, the schoolmaster in Brian Friel’s *Translations*, a play about Irish-British relationships on the eve of the Great Famine. Friel’s point is that if often it is good to remember, there are times when it is better to forget—and move on. This delicate balance between remembering and forgetting can have an extra moral and political charge when it comes to Irish history.

It is interesting to recall that one of the first books published in Ireland was the *Book of Invasions*. This recorded the genealogy of incursions and settlements which made up the earliest annals of Irish history. But already we note a mixing of history—telling it *as it happened*—and fiction—telling it *as if it happened*; for in those ancient times the boundary between empirical fact and cultural imagination was often blurred. Historical remembrance, in short, has been a founding moment in Irish national culture, but it is, from the outset, a matter of hermeneutic interpretation. When one begins a manuscript with the words, *In Illo tempore*, *In the Old days*, *Fado Fado*... one is already encountering a particular narrative take on the legacy of the past. Historical memory always involves some measure of interpretative selection or conflict—depending on who is telling and who is reading the narrative. History and story were never clearly separable in ancient literature. And many would argue that, in spite of all the advances in modern historiography, it is to some extent still true today. For as Nietzsche provocatively remarked, “there are no facts, only interpretations of facts.”

Philosophers have made various attempts to discriminate between different kinds of historical memory. Nietzsche made a famous distinction between “critical” and “monumental” memory in his influential essay, *On the Uses and Abuses of History*. Kierkegaard distinguished between what he called “repetition” (repeating past moments forward in a liberating way) and “recollection” (repeating the past backwards in regressive fashion). Later again,

Freud urged his readers to find a way of moving beyond the obsessional neurosis of repetition compulsion (which he termed “melancholy” or the inability to let go of the lost object of the past) in order to embrace the difficult and patient “working through” of “mourning” (letting go of the lost object). Finally, in his recent book, *History, Memory and Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur draws on such precedents to develop a crucial distinction between “blocked memory” (*mémoire empêchée*) and “emancipatory memory” which opens up a future for our history, at a personal or collective level.

These various critical attempts to discern different ways of remembering and forgetting all acknowledge the stakes involved in any attempt to come to terms with one’s national or cultural past. And given Ireland’s complex history of violence and struggle such stakes are high indeed. Interpreting the wounds of history is never a simple matter. One need only recall the controversies surrounding questions of reliable and disputed memory in the Truth Commission on Bloody Sunday or the various commemorations of events like the Battle of the Boyne, the 1916 Rising or the 1840s Famine, to be reminded of just how sensitive and contentious such issues can be.

Let me begin with some reflections on the role of memory in Irish literature before moving on, in the second part of this paper, to a consideration of the ethics of “exchanging memories” in relation to the great Irish Famine.

## Part One

One of the first lines uttered (in English) by an Irishman is Captain Morris’ famous question in Shakespeare’s *Henry V*: “What ish my nation?” From the word go, we find the perennial Hibernian questioning of identity and belonging. An Irish person, as the bard of Stratford knew well, is someone who asks what it means to be Irish. Indeed we find a curious echo of this in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* when the King returns from a trip to Ireland, puzzled and bewildered as to his one and indivisible sovereignty: “I had forgot myself, am I not King? [...] Is not the King’s name forty thousand names?” In other words, the Monarch’s traversal of the island of Ireland signals an experience of estrangement from his unitary identity. Ireland plays the role of deconstructive alter-ego, or cracked mirror, to England’s Imperial selfhood. The King cannot remember himself as sovereign without remembering himself as multiply non-sovereign. He falls into a thousand pieces and cannot put himself back together again. His sense of nation involves alien-nation.

To return to the Irish literary tradition proper, one finds a complex play of remembrance and retrieval in the debates of the Literary Revival at the turn of the twentieth century. At the outset, we find a call for a radical de-Anglicization by Douglas Hyde and the founders of the Gaelic League, issuing at times in an

exclusivist brand of cultural nationalism. This was brought to an extreme by propagandists like D.P. Moran with his purist distinction between the “Irish Irish” (meaning Gaelic and Catholic) and the “non-Irish Irish.” But this sectarian and separatist attitude was countered by a more pluralist and dialectical notion of cultural memory, represented by great modern Irish writers like Yeats, Synge, O’Casey and Joyce.

Yeats’ sophisticated retrieval of Irish myths and legends in light of a certain Nietzschean modernism was a case in point. Synge’s *Playboy* offered a further gloss on the complex retelling of one’s history, with the hero, Christy Mahon, reinventing himself as a storyteller who realizes that the past is not some predetermining set of facts but an occasion for creative reinterpretation. “I was made a man by the power of a lie”, he concedes at one point; a concession which does not prevent him from acknowledging the “mighty difference between a gallous story and a dirty deed”. Samuel Beckett continued this modernist scruple of reinvention in plays like *Krapp’s Last Tape* where the protagonist replays the tape of his birthday at ten-year intervals, each time struggling with the conundrums and paradoxes of a past which constantly deludes and eludes him. But it is probably in the literary works of James Joyce that the conundrum of Irish cultural memory is most dramatically interrogated.

From the beginning of *Ulysses* we realize that the young Stephen Dedalus is seeking to escape from the “mothers of memory”—Mother Church (mariolotrous Catholicism), Mother Tongue (Gaelic revivalism) and Mother Land (ethnic nationalism). Stephen is crippled by a recurring pang of conscience—“agenbite of inwit”—due to the fact that he did not pay due obeisance and honor to his mother on her death bed. So both culturally and personally, Stephen is seeking to escape the nets of memory which “hold his soul back from light.” He is desperately trying to “awaken from the nightmare of history.”

In the pivotal National Library episode, this theme is revisited when we witness Stephen rehearsing the case-history of Shakespeare’s Hamlet as, in significant respects, a prefiguration of his own. The ghost’s opening summons of “Remember me, Remember me,” echoes throughout Stephen’s attempt to explain the great play in terms of Shakespeare’s own life history of betrayal, child loss (the untimely death of his young son Hamnet) and painful sundering from his family and peers. But the lesson which Bloom ultimately helps Stephen to learn is that the past does not have to always be lived backwards as a matter of regret, remorse, resentment and revenge; it can also be lived *forward*. And literature, for Shakespeare as for Joyce, is, we learn, just that: a way of granting a future to the past. The Mothers of Memory return with Molly’s final soliloquy—but with a difference. Not as a nightmare of history repeating itself obsessively in violence or neurosis. But rather as an invitation to epiphanic

retrievals and reinventions, a process which enables one's personal and collective history to be woven, unwoven and rewoven—like Penelope's tapestry—so as to deliver history into hitherto undreamt of possibilities. Molly's "yes" to the past opens it to a new future.

"It is a brave man would invent something that never happened." So says Joyce about his writing. And it is arguable that Joyce's *Ulysses* was, in important respects, an attempt to remember moments of his own life-history in a manner which not only saved him from serious psychosis (as Jung believed) but enabled him to create one of the most innovative works of modern literature. I would like to suggest that there are three particular episodes in Joyce's own life which might be said to prefigure crucial "epiphanies" in the novel. In each case, a significant moment in Joyce's last year in Dublin—1903-1904—is recalled many years later in terms of a creative memory which enables the author to live his history forwards rather than backwards.

First, and most obviously, we know from Joyce himself that his first "going out" with Nora Barnacle on June 16, 1904, lies at the core of the book.<sup>1</sup> This is the very day and date for the setting of the whole story, subsequently commemorated as "Bloomsday." If this is so, by the author's own admission, then it is probably fair to conjecture that Molly's climactic phantasia is, in some respects, an epiphanic "repetition" of this moment—the existential past being given an open future through the *kairos* of the literary moment. Here the human eros of space and time is celebrated in an epiphany of sacredness. "What else were we given all those desires for I want to know [...]" Molly asks. And as Joyce suggests in a letter to his Paris friend, Valéry Larbaud, we can take Molly at her word: "*Pénélope, le dernier cri.*"

Second, it is possible that a particular experience that Joyce had of being rescued after a mugging in Dublin was at the root of his motivation to invent Leopold Bloom. As he relates in a letter from Rome to his brother, Stanislas, dated Nov 13, 1906, a brutal mugging in Rome in 1906 which left him robbed and destitute, recalled the earlier mugging in Dublin when he found himself rescued by a Dubliner called Hunter, who took him back to his home and gave him cocoa. The Hunter in question, as Joyce's biographer Richard Ellmann explains, refers to a "dark complexioned Dublin Jew [...] rumored to be a cuckold whom Joyce had met twice in Dublin." In his letter to Stanislas, Joyce reveals that this same Hunter is to be the central character of a planned new story called "Ulysses." Ellmann comments: "On the night of 22 June 1904 Joyce (not yet committed either to Nora or to monogamy) made overtures to a girl on the street without realizing, perhaps, that she had another companion. The

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<sup>1</sup> The following two paragraphs have appeared in a slightly different version in an online article "Memory and the Inner Life" in *New Arcadia Review* 3 (2005). The editors wish to thank *New Arcadia Review* for permission to re-publish this section.

official escort came forward and left him, after a skirmish, with ‘black eye, sprained wrist, sprained ankle, cut chin, cut hand...’ He was dusted off and taken home by a man called Alfred Hunter in what he was to call ‘orthodox Samaritan fashion.’ This was the Hunter about whom the short story ‘Ulysses’ was to be projected.”<sup>2</sup> Curiously, however, it was not until the second mugging in Rome triggered the forgotten memory of the first mugging in Dublin that Joyce resolved to create Bloom. Epiphanies seem to have something to do with a certain *anagnoresis* which coincides with a creative repetition or retrieval of some “inexperienced experience”—a sort of *ana-mnesis* which in turn calls for a particular *ana-aesthesis* of literary epiphany. We might even propose the neologism, *ana-phany*, to capture this curious phenomenon of doubling reminiscence.

And Stephen? I would hazard a guess that the existential memory which lies at the root of the invention of Stephen relates to some pivotal event of awareness-through-sundering which the young Joyce experienced in a Dublin library. Such a moment would most likely have entailed a break with his Dublin literary rivals (for example, Oliver St John Gogarty and Vincent Cosgrove, who falsely claimed to have slept with Nora)—a break which finally prompted Joyce to take the route of exodus and exile. At least, that is what might be inferred from the National Library exchange. As Declan Kiberd remarks about this decisive Library episode: “Written in 1918, but dealing with a day fourteen years earlier, this section includes lines which predict its future composition, implicitly uniting the young graduate of 1904 with the mature father and artist of 1918 [...] Already Stephen sets himself at an aesthetic distance from events.”<sup>3</sup> The recurring phrases which young Stephen addresses here in 1904 to his future authorial self—“see this. Remember” and “You will see” etc—indicate the criss-crossing of past and future which epitomizes the singular temporality of epiphany (identified by Paul as *kairos* and by Kierkegaard and Heidegger as *Augenblick*). Moreover, the fact that a key epiphanic moment in *A Portrait* also takes place in a library—Stephen’s revelation of the power of words in the famous “tundish” exchange with the Jesuit Dean of Studies—might further point in this direction. As indeed might the National Library incident in 1903-1904 concerning Joyce’s exchange with a literary companion (Skeffington) about the untimely demise of his young brother: an incident, let us not forget, which Joyce entered as the first of his fifteen numbered “epiphanies” recorded in his Paris Notebooks. The place of this epiphany is explicitly stated: “Dublin: in the National Library.” In this respect, might not young Hamnet’s demise, as

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Ellmann, Appendix to the 1968 Penguin Edition of *Ulysses: With Ulysses: A Short History*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 705.

<sup>3</sup> See Declan Kiberd’s note to the Penguin Annotated Students Edition of *Ulysses*, (London and New York: Penguin, 1992), 1013.

interpreted by Stephen, be a literary transposition of Joyce's own brother's demise? "O he was very young ... a boy," writes Joyce in his Notebooks. "Still it hurts," replies Skeffington. The traumatic loss, perhaps, of a young child whose "hurt" and "sundering" could only find healing in literature?

All such attempts to link literature to life remain, of course, a matter of conjecture and surmise. Though the fact that pivotal experiences in Joyce's life around the time of 1903-1904—being rescued by Hunter, being separated from his friends in the National Library, being embraced by Nora Barnacle—were later revisited fictionally in the form of three epiphanic magi (Bloom, Stephen, Molly) cannot be dismissed as irrelevant. In any case, if one is looking for some kind of historical genesis for Joyce's epiphanies in his own life experience, these singular memories of 1904—recollected while in exile in Pola, Trieste, Paris and Zurich—would be where to begin.<sup>4</sup>

## Part Two<sup>5</sup>

In the second part of this chapter I want to explore the remembrance of Irish history through place. I take as my guide here the hermeneutic model of "exchanging memories" advanced by my friend and mentor Paul Ricoeur.<sup>6</sup> So doing, I will suggest that certain topographical memorials of historical trauma can epitomize an ethics of hospitality, flexibility, plurality, transfiguration and pardon. My chosen example will be the Irish Hunger Memorial in Battery Park in New York City, an interactive monument designed and installed by Brian Tolle in 2001 to commemorate the Great Irish Famines of the 1840s and the subsequent immigrations to North America.

### i.

First, a word about the memorial itself. The installation basically consists of an Irish stone cottage transplanted from the west coast of Ireland to Battery Park City at the very heart of downtown New York, not far from where the twin

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<sup>4</sup> As I have analysed these three epiphanies elsewhere I will not delay further on them here. See Richard Kearney, "Epiphanies in Joyce," in *Global Ireland*, edited by Ondrej Pilny and Clare Wallace, (Prague: Litteraria Pragensia, 2005), 147.

<sup>5</sup> Part Two of this chapter has previously been published as Chapter 19, "Exchanging Memories: New York Famine Memorial," in Richard Kearney, *Navigations: Collected Irish Essays, 1976-2006* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 310-18. *Navigations* is co-published with Lilliput Press, Dublin.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe" in Paul Ricoeur, *The Hermeneutics of Action* (London: Sage, 1996), 3-14.

towers once stood.<sup>7</sup> The memorial does not attempt some nostalgic retrieval of a quaint Irish past—so often represented by picture postcard versions of the traditional thatched cottage. On the contrary, it seeks to re-imagine the past in its present condition of destitution and ruin. As such, Brian Tolle’s installation might best be described as a hybrid construct which serves as both a) a commemoration of the great Irish famine of the nineteenth century and b) a site-specific art installation in metropolitan New York in the third millennium marking the on-going tragedy of world hunger. This double fidelity to separate moments in time provokes a sense of disorientation which prevents the act of memory regressing to some kind of sentimental fixation with the past (what Ricoeur calls “blocked memory”).<sup>8</sup> By the same token, it also prevents the exhibit from serving simply as an exotic curiosity of tourist voyeurism in the present.

This is a famine memorial with a difference. Whereas most conventional commemorations of the Famine featured “people without land” (usually leaving on ships from Ireland or arriving off ships in the new world), we are confronted here with an uncanny experience of “land without people.” Though the installation is located at the very heart of one of the world’s most populous cities, there are no human beings represented here. As such it recalls the “deserted village” of Slievemore in Achill Island, County Mayo, which was one of the artist’s primary sources of inspiration for the work. A haunting depopulated row of abandoned and decayed stone huts facing out towards the Atlantic. And it is also reminiscent in its way of other monuments of historical rupture and ruin—e.g. the bare walls of Machu Picchu in Peru or the floating

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<sup>7</sup> I am very grateful to my Boston College colleague, Robin Lydenberg, for her illuminating and instructive essay on this work, “From Icon to Index: Some Contemporary Visions of the Irish Stone Cottage,” in *Eire/land*, edited by Vera Kreilkamp (Boston College: McMullen Museum, 2003), 127-33. Lydenberg also kindly brought my attention to the following relevant and informative literature on the topic: Philip Nobel, “Going Hungry,” *Metropolis Magazine* (NY, November 2002); Margaret Kelleher, “Hunger and History: Monuments to the Great Irish Famine,” *Textual Practice* 16.2 (2002), 249-76; Yvonne Moran, “Taking Mayo to Manhattan,” *The Irish Times* (Sept 1, 2001); David Dunlap, “Memorial to the Hunger,” *The New York Times* (15 March, 2001); Marita Sturken, “The Wall, the Screen and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial” in *The Visual Culture Reader*, edited by Nicholas Mirzoeff (New York and London, 1998); James Edward Young, “Daniel Libeskind’s Jewish Museum in Berlin: The Uncanny Arts of Memorial Architecture” in *Jewish Social Studies* 6. 2 (2001); Vivian Patraka, “Spectacular Suffering: Performing Presence, Absence and Witness at U.S. Holocaust Museums,” in *Spectacular Suffering* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *La Memoire, L’histoire, L’oubli*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2000), 82f.

hulk of the Marie Celeste. It is a far cry in any case from the idealized portraits of rural Irish cottages by romantic landscape painters like Paul Henry or James O'Connor.

Tolle's installation resists mystification and mystique by presenting us with a powerful and disturbing sense of material "thereness." As we enter the site we are confronted with a fieldstone cottage, transplanted stone by stone from Ireland, and here reconstructed on its own quarter acre of soil in New York City. But it is impossible to feel at home here. This could never be a dwelling for us, contemporary visitors to the cottage. The most obvious reason for this is no doubt its location at the core of a bustling metropolitan cityscape where it is clearly *out of place*, misplaced and dislocated literally and symbolically. And the fact that the cottage and surrounded potato drills are themselves planted on a suspended limestone and concrete base doubly confirms the sense of not belonging. This sentiment of spatial disorientation provokes us, in turn, to reflect on the paradox that our sense of identity and placement in the world often presupposes an acute sense of loss and displacement. As when the Irish Captain McMorris asks "What is my nation?" in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, his question betraying the fact that he is preoccupied with his national identity precisely because he has *forfeited* it—he is speaking in the English language and wearing an English army uniform. Likewise, it has often been noted by Irish critics like Declan Kiberd, Roy Foster and Luke Gibbons that Irish tradition is in many respects an *invention* by modernity.<sup>9</sup> Just as our sense of the past is almost always constituted and reconstituted by our present historical consciousness.

This sense of spatial and temporal inversion is compounded here by the fact that the roofless cottage remains un-restored and is exposed to local weather conditions. Unlike most works of art, this installation is half construct and half nature—it is an artificially contrived synthesis of "real" stone and soil and architectural-sculptural design. The underground tumuli and passage ways, by which one enters the cottage from beneath, are further reminders that the cottage has a dark and buried history—recalling not only the neolithic Irish burial chambers of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth in Country Meath but also the unmarked mass graves of thousands of famine victims in Ireland and elsewhere. The fact that these subterranean passageways are themselves paneled with glass panes covered in various texts and subtexts—historical, political, fictional, rhetorical, spiritual, apologetic, testimonial—further adds to the sense of a plurality of voices and interpretations. Tolle's memorial refuses to yield any

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<sup>9</sup> Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland* (London: Vintage, 1996); R.F. Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* (see especially his critique of famine heritage parks and the cult of "Faminism" for foreign export, 23f) (London: Allan Lane, 2001); and Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996).

quick fix. There is no single, assured access to this placeless place, this timeless time. It cannot be “naturalized” in the sense of celebrating some literal recovery of a landscape. Yet it cannot be explained away either as a purely “aestheticised” sculpture residing in some museum space—for the site alters continually with the surrounding weather and climate, one season covered with weeds, potato shoots and wildflowers, another with snow or mud, and at all times registering the odors, reflections, shadows and sounds of the surrounding city. We are thus palpably reminded of the passing of time, of historical fluidity and transience which no monumental fixation can bring to a full stop. The myth of an eternal Celtic-Mist landscape is demystified before our very eyes.<sup>10</sup>

Not that there were not efforts by certain officials and politicians to perpetuate the myths. On opening the site, for example, Governor Pataki of New York spoke of the opportunity offered here “to touch the sod of our heritage”; while Mayor Giuliani concluded his inaugural speech with the words: “May this beautiful Memorial, like Ireland itself, be forever free, forever green.” And some members of the Irish tourist board praised the installation’s capacity to evoke the “rolling hills of old Ireland”—conveniently forgetting that the quaint potato field is planted over a slab of concrete and surrounded by High Rises! Certain Irish-American societies and groups were also quick to contribute their own gloss to this sentimentalising process. Even the Irish government weighed in at one point offering an authentic “stone” from every county in Ireland (thirty two in all along with an ancient pilgrim standing stone). While Tolle initially resisted such appropriations he soon came to acknowledge that these readings should not simply be dismissed as inappropriate or misguided. Instead he realized that any *interactive* installation of this kind must learn to incorporate such views into the actual process of the work itself as an open text of interpretation and re-interpretation.<sup>11</sup> Tolle decided, accordingly, to inscribe the deep aspiration of many visitors to relocate the old counties of Ireland by accepting the stones and then placing them at random throughout the landscape. The stones scattered throughout the site thus served to reiterate the role of the stones in the walls and lintels of the cottage itself—that is, to function as “indices” for the lost meanings and bearings of forgotten dwellers rather than as “icons” which claimed to restore the fetish of an original presence.

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<sup>10</sup> Robin Lydenberg, “From Icon to Index” 131.

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting here that discontinuous readings of the Irish Famine in terms of rupture and trauma are always dialectically linked to continuous readings of the Famine in terms of an unbroken historic past which is still somehow present, or at least representable. Whereas Romantic interpretations tend to stress the later approach and postmodern interpretations the former, most contemporary memorials (including Tolle’s) signal some sort of balance or tension between the two.

Tolle's installation is an invitation to "mourning" (acknowledging that the lost object is lost) rather than "melancholy" (refusing to let go of the lost object by obsessively fixating on it).<sup>12</sup> By soliciting visitors' active involvement with the site, as part of an on-going drama of semantic and symbolic reinvention, Tolle manages to insure that the work remains a work in perpetual progress, intertextually open and incomplete by definition. The fact that new readings and reactions are regularly included onto both the audio sound track of voices (which visitors hear as they traverse the underground tunnel) and the visual inscriptions on the glass panels, is a powerful token of Tolle's determination to maintain a process of active and responsible memory. Robin Lydenberg captures this radically hermeneutical sense of Tolle's design in her essay "From Icon to Index: Some Contemporary Visions of the Irish Stone Cottage":

Tolle designed the memorial to invite and incorporate the viewer's active engagement with the land and its history rather than with vague nostalgia or the iconography of fixed and sentimentalized stereotypes. One entrance into the memorial leads visitors through an underground passageway up into the ruined cottage [...] The walls of the passageway are constructed of alternating sedimented bands of stone and frosted glass on which official and unofficial testimonies from those who experienced the Famine are cast in shadows. This sculptured layering evokes the geologically and historically sedimentary aspect of the Irish landscape. Hunger is not naturalized or aestheticised here but contextualized historically and politically, giving forceful articulation, for example, to the failure of British officials to alleviate massive starvation. Entering the quarter acre of Ireland through this buried history, viewers cannot simply delight in the landscape as idealized icon: the cottage interior is cramped and exposed, the 'rolling hills' are the remnants of uncultivated potato furrows. Visitors may enter the installation by stepping directly onto the sloping earth and climbing up through the landscape to the ruined cottage and its prospect; there they discover, belatedly, the textual history buried below. Whether the memorial is entered from above or from below, the charm of the landscape and its violent history exist in productive tension.<sup>13</sup>

By deterritorializing the stone cottage from rural Ireland and reterritorializing it amidst the alien urban bustle of New York, Tolle is reminding us that the place of trauma is always haunted by a no-place of mourning. Such mourning calls for a letting go of the literal landscape of the past in order to give this past a future, in order to open it to new possibilities of interpretation. In this we could say that the artist is conjuring up the emancipatory potential of the "Fifth Province". Ireland, as everyone knows, has

<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholy" in *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 2 (London, 1984), 251-68.

<sup>13</sup> Lydenberg, 131.

four provinces—Munster, Ulster, Leinster and Connaught—but the Irish word for province is *coiced*, meaning a fifth. So where, one might ask, is the fifth fifth since there are only four actually existing as geographical places? The Fifth Province is a placeless place, a place of disposition rather than of position, of detachment rather than attachment. And it has been acknowledged since the beginnings of Irish myth and folklore that it is precisely this Fifth Province which provides a dimension of peace, wisdom and catharsis to the otherwise warring parts of Ireland.<sup>14</sup> Tolle's memorial might thus be said to remind us that all our lives—whether we are Irish or not, emigrants or natives, survivors or victims—are always haunted by an irretrievable sense of absence and loss, ghosted by a longing for some “irrecoverable elsewhere.”<sup>15</sup>

Tolle attests to the Fifth Province by insuring that his poetical text—the site as work of art—remains answerable to an ethical context of responsibility. And he brings this about by turning his famine memorial into an intertextual play of multiple readings and perspectives. The hold of a single Meta-narrative of Irish history is thus loosened and liberated into a polyphony of discontinuous and competing narratives. Tolle, in both the written and audio commentaries juxtaposes statistics about the Irish Famine with equally perturbing facts and figures about other famines and word hunger generally. He mixes snatches of Irish history and politics with snippets of song and poetry. He blends together a variety of vernacular and postmodern art styles—Naturalism, Folk Craft, Conceptual Art, Hyper-Realism, Landscape Architecture, Theme Sculpture, Pop

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<sup>14</sup> See “The Fifth Province” in Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 99-100: “Modern Ireland is made up of four provinces. And yet, the Irish word for a province is *coiced* which means fifth. This fivefold division is as old as Ireland itself, yet there is disagreement about the identity of the fifth. Some claim that all the provinces met at the Stone of Divisions on the Hill of Uisneach, believed to be the mid-point of Ireland. Others say that the fifth province was Meath (*mide*), the ‘middle.’ Both traditions divide Ireland into four quarters and a ‘middle,’ though they disagree about the location of this middle or ‘fifth’ province. Although Tara was the political centre of Ireland, this fifth province acted as a second centre, which if non-political was just as important, acting as a necessary balance. The present unhappy state of our country would seem to indicate a need for this second centre of gravity. The obvious impotence of the various political attempts to unite the four geographical provinces would seem to warrant another kind of solution [...] one which would incorporate the ‘fifth’ province. This province, this place, this centre, is not a political or geographical position; it is more like a disposition.” For an illuminating application of this concept of the Fifth Province to contemporary Irish-British literature and politics, see Aidan O'Malley's doctoral dissertation *In Other Words: Coming to Terms with Irish Identities through Translation*, (European University Institute at Florence, 2004), especially 20-41.

<sup>15</sup> Lydenberg, 132.