DISPLACEMENT IN FRANK MCGUINNESS AND MICHAEL LONGLEY

A PLACE ELSEWHERE:

DISPLACEMENT

IN

FRANK MCGUINNESS' AND MICHAEL LONGLEY'S

RESPONSE TO THE NORTHERN IRISH 'TROUBLES'

By

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ABSTRACT

To date, Northern Ireland's Frank McGuinness and Michael Longley have received meagre critical attention from scholars. Although it has often been assumed by certain artists and critics that the mixing of art and politics is merely a tool for propagandists, McGuinness' plays, *Carthaginians* and *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, and Longley's poems concerning the Troubles illustrate a healthy intersection of literature with politics. This thesis attempts to analyze how these writers use displacement or imaginative distance as a strategy for illuminating the political and cultural contexts of the North. This indirect engagement in its myriad of forms reflects McGuinness and Longley's quest for a creative realm of displaced perspectives--a place elsewhere. Longley and McGuinness write about their own conscious experiences and those of their various communities through frameworks that are mythically, historically, geographically, and intertextually remote. Both artists seek to render conditions in Northern Ireland symbolically and, thereby, circumvent political ideologies and posit alternative visions to conflict and violence.

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"...what is intractable when wrestled with at close quarters becomes tractable when addressed from a distance."
--Seamus Heaney, *The Place of Writing*, 46.

Invariably any discussion of Northern Ireland touches upon the Troubles which have come tragically to symbolize the province. An euphemistic understatement, the Troubles denote the low-grade guerilla war being waged between Republican nationalists and Loyalist paramilitaries. Republicans seek to oust the British military in order to propel the six British-held counties of Ulster into eventual unification with the neighbouring Republic of Ireland, while Loyalists vehemently oppose such a fundamental political rearrangement. Since the Troubles began twenty-five years ago, nearly 3200[1] people have died and tens of thousands have been injured or maimed. Approximately sixty per cent of the population of Northern Ireland or over 900,000 people are Protestant, the other forty per cent, or nearly 700,000

[1]Just over 3,000 fatalities over two and half decades may not seem particularly momentous considering the recent carnage in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda, or Azerbaijan; however, in a province the size of Connecticut with a population of 1.6 million the number is substantial. A corresponding percentage of casualties translated into Canadian statistics would top 50,000 or, in American terms, the death toll would approach 500,000.

people, are Catholic (Belfrage viii-ix). Seamus Deane accurately assesses the situation:

> We are not witnessing in Northern Ireland some outmoded battle between religious sects that properly belong to the seventeenth century. We are witnessing rather the effects of a contemporary colonialism that has retained and developed an ideology of dominance and subservience within the readily available idiom of religious division. (8)

Generally, tribal allegiances are strictly adhered to; the vast majority of Protestants are adamant that Ulster remain British while most Catholics perceive themselves as Irish, many of whom support the aspiration of a united island.

The British 1920 Government of Ireland Act, which partitioned the country, granted a devolved form of government to the six counties in the northeastern corner of the island. Protestant politicians, with the support of the Protestant majority, managed the province as a one-party authoritarian state in which Catholics were second-class citizens in theory and practice. After nearly five decades of undemocratic rule along sectarian lines, a younger, better-educated generation of Catholics who shared the rising expectations of the 1960s demanded equality and basic rights. In 1967, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (N.I.C.R.A.), modelling itself after the pacifist civil rights movement of Afro-Americans, marched

and agitated for an end to discrimination in employment, housing, social welfare, and for the abolition of unfair political representation at all levels of government entrenched by rampant gerrymandering and special voting qualifications. Civil rights activists also wanted reform of the all-Protestant police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (R.U.C.), and the disbanding of its auxiliary paramilitary arm, the B-Specials, who exacerbated sectarian bigotry against the Catholic minority (Hachey, Hernon, and McCaffrey 230-35).

Although frequently banned by the government, the civil rights marches attracted thousands of Catholics, liberal Protestants, socialists, and university students throughout 1968-69. Attacked by Orange extremists, Northern Irish Catholics suddenly thrust themselves onto the world stage as television newscasts broadcast images of young men and women being savagely beaten. The marches escalated and riots erupted across Ulster. August 1969 proved to be the breaking point, when British Prime Minister Harold Wilson was compelled to deploy the army on the streets of Belfast and Derry to quell the unrest and protect Catholics from bloodthirsty rioters who forced thousands to flee by setting fires to homes in Catholic neighbourhoods. The introduction of the military was a critical turning point as the civil rights demonstrations swiftly ceased and the Irish

Republican Army (I.R.A.) re-emerged as the self-proclaimed defender of minority interests. Catholics very quickly perceived the British army not as a protector but as an occupational force sent to bolster the Stormont regime in Belfast (Harkness 152-64).

During the period spanning 1969-1972, Northern Ireland came apart at the seams as shootings, beatings, bombings, arson and mortar attacks, robberies, and riots became almost daily occurrences. The introduction of internment of suspected nationalists, the random and frequent raids on Catholic homes, the regular harassment of Catholic civilians by the army, and the horrific shootings on Bloody Sunday[2] culminated in the suspension of Northern Ireland's Stormont parliament and the imposition of Direct Rule (Harkness 168-73). For the past twenty-two years, the troops, now 20,000 strong, have functioned as a buffer between the hostile factions. Since 1972, the situation has

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[2]On January 30, 1972 British paratroopers shot dead thirteen Catholics involved in an illegal civil rights demonstration in Derry. A fourteenth victim died later in hospital. The I.R.A. dubbed the killings "Bloody Sunday" to capitalize upon the sacrificial overtones of another Bloody Sunday in 1920, when a squad of British agents opened fire without warning on a Gaelic football match in Dublin. Following the massacre in 1972, 30,000 people watched the burning of the British Embassy in Dublin three days later, and another 20,000 attended the funerals of the Derry victims. Bloody Sunday inflamed nationalist opposition and, less than two months later, Westminster suspended the province's parliament (Hachey, Hernon, and McCaffrey 236-237; Lee 440; Kearney, *Transitions* 233).

remained, essentially, one of stalemate; until just recently the I.R.A. has persisted in its terrorist outrages, begetting reprisals and further atrocities by Protestant paramilitary organizations such as the U.D.A., U.F.F., or U.V.F.[3]

Peace talks brokered by politicians have ended repeatedly in failure, and the outcome of the most recent initiative, the Downing Street Declaration, remains uncertain. Indeed, no constitutional arrangement appears feasible, for xenophobia and dogma reign in Belfast. Protestant Unionists believe they are under siege by Catholic insurgents and, to a degree, by Irish Catholic culture; they fear revenge for centuries of ruthless oppression by successive British governments. Conversely, many Catholics regard Ireland as one nation, having been "the first colony of England ...[and] now the last" (Belfrage xi); accordingly, Republican nationalists cite the British as the true enemy, not the Protestant people of Ulster. Protestants rarely register, if at all, in nationalist ideology, the exception being the bipartisan 1798 uprising. As John Wilson Foster states, part of the problem in the North is the "racialist withholding of Irishness *from* [Ulster Protestants] by the majority culture"

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[3]Ulster Defence Association, Ulster Freedom Fighters, and the Ulster Volunteer Force.

(249; emphasis Foster's) on the island by solely defining the term 'Irish' synonymously with 'Catholic' and thereby eliding the Ulster Protestants' unique and varied identities. Because the Troubles are cast in mutually exclusive terms, the political situation remains intractable (Belfrage ix-xii, 294):

> The major communities in the North, Protestant and Catholic, unionist and nationalist, are compelled by the force of circumstances...to rehearse positions from which there is no exit....Each community sees the other as a threat to its existence....The structural similarities of their positions, their vacillation between feeling themselves a threatened minority or a powerful majority, their powerlessness in changing the situation and their power to sustain it, their demonizing of one another as a people natively given to violence, bigotry, and prejudice all combine with economic frailty to produce the sectarian dynamic. (Deane 15, 16)

In recent years, many in Ulster have experienced increasing alienation as neither British nor Irish governments wish to increase their involvement in any meaningful or effective way. The conflict costs the British treasury more than $ 5 billion (U.S.) every year in order to maintain Britain's military presence and to rebuild infrastructure destroyed or damaged by acts of terrorism (Wheatcroft A25). Consequently, the British government and the public would happily have the armed forces leave Northern Ireland, and wash their hands of the whole messy circumstance. Yet as long as the majority of Ulster's people want the British to remain, London is committed to staying.

On the other hand, in spite of official pronouncements to the contrary, the Republic of Ireland is interested in containing the violence within the North, having neither the political, economic, nor military strength to absorb approximately a million hostile citizens if unification occurred. In essence, there appears to be no political settlement acceptable within Ulster capable of restoring civil normality to the region, and the imposition of a satisfactory solution from the outside is out of the question (Belfrage xvi; Wheatcroft A25).

The failure of the political imagination in Northern Ireland ironically coincides with the invigoration of the artistic imagination; the production of art functions as a nobler objective in the face of kneecapping, CS gas, petrol bombs, and plastic bullets. Neither Protestant[4] poet Michael Longley nor Catholic playwright Frank McGuinness has garnered much critical attention. In Longley's case, he has published only four full-length collections of poetry from 1969-79 until his fifth volume *Gorse Fires* appeared in 1991.

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[4]Following the example set by Anthony Bradley, I designate the religious backgrounds of the two writers as an "unsatisfactory shorthand to indicate the two separate cultural traditions" (36) from which the men hail. Such separate traditions extend, "historically, into virtually every aspect of life--not only one's religion, education, place of habitation, politics, interpretation of Irish history, but also which foot one uses to lever a spade, and in the popular mind, at least, one's pronunciation of the letter 'h'" (Bradley 37).

Overshadowed by the international prominence of Seamus Heaney and, increasingly, Paul Muldoon, Michael Longley has hitherto been ignored. By contrast Frank McGuinness' work debuted in the Irish theatre only in 1982; however, over the following decade, he has written twenty original works or adaptations for the stage or for television. Due to his prolific output and his winning a surfeit of prestigious awards, McGuinness has established himself as one of Ireland's leading dramatists (Lawley 436).

McGuinness' dramas also have attended to an evident void in contemporary Irish theatre. At a Canadian Association of Irish Studies conference held in Vancouver in 1979, fellow dramatist Stewart Parker bemoaned the absence of two varieties of playwriting: "experimentalism, and politically committed work (in the socialist sense)" (Parker 8). A politically conservative theatrical milieu avoided, for the most part, dramatizing the Troubles in the 1970s. Additionally, Parker remarked that the crucial ingredient missing in Irish drama was the "mystery of *play*" (Parker 10; italics mine) itself, where seriousness and comedy converge. McGuinness attempts to confront the deficiencies cited by Parker through his poetic and surreal dramas and through his spontaneous mixing of hilarity and solemn urgency. Emelie Fitzgibbon characterizes this playwright's work as a "break away from naturalism and...[as representing] the emergence

of a strong and individual voice"; furthermore, McGuinness displays a "fluid, innovative and exciting approach to the medium" ("Change" 41).

Numerous treatments of the Troubles had been written and performed since the time of Parker's paper, but, as Philomena Munizer observes regretfully, "most of them do little to analyze the events" (44). Instead, many Troubles plays choose to ignore the complexities of the conflict by employing stereotypical metaphors that "merge into a single artistic and political cliché" (Munizer 62). Emelie Fitzgibbon contends that

> [f]undamentally, modern theatre with avowed political intent requires the audience to engage in a dialectic process with the material of the theatre event, both its content and its mode. It insists on this engagement as a prelude to action or active thought, its purpose to agitate or question rather than lull a passive audience. ("Sleeves" 307)

McGuinness engages his audience by virtue of his colourful characters, dexterous narratives, and distinctive sense of humour, involving spectators and readers in the political analysis of Ulster polemics explored in his productions.

The incorporation of the Troubles by McGuinness and Longley into their work raises the contentious question of blending art and politics. In spite of the fact that politics has frequently been a principal theme of Irish literature, Conor Cruise O'Brien remarks that "'the area where literature and politics overlap'...[is an] 'unhealthy

troublesome, for "though it recognizes differences, it seeks to minimize them and render them innocuous or merely useful" (Foster 241). In effect, pluralism re-institutes another model of hegemony. The essence of the dilemma lies in the plural definitions of pluralism as interpreted within the Irish context:

> [P]luralism when promoted by nationalists...is seen by unionists as republican, and when promoted by unionists...is seen by nationalists as anti-unification. There is Ulster pluralism and there is Irish pluralism, both mere blueprints, and highly undetailed. (Foster 237-38)

Kearney's assumption that Ulster Protestants aspire to be '*Irish*men' or '*Irish*women' is fraught with obstacles.

Edna Longley concurs with John Wilson Foster's criticism of Richard Kearney, for she feels that "[p]oetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated" (Longley, *Wars* 185). Longley explicates her position on this issue by acknowledging the dangers posed to the unspoiled and truthful imagination by "improper expectations" (*Wars* 185) being placed on poets in Northern Ireland. Sceptical of pluralism and dialectical thinking due to their tendency towards monolithic cultural discourse, Longley rejects what she believes is "black-and-white" literature and similar style criticism from the Irish academy (*Wars* 195). Longley prefers to envision the honest

creative imagination as "[z]ig-zags of energy" (*Wars* 200) not attuned to Ireland's traditional cultural binarisms.

Despite the valid criticisms by Longley and Foster of the worth and efficacy of dialecticism and the hegemonic propensities of pluralism in the world of day-to-day reality, Kearney's concept of positive reconstruction has merit within literature itself, for it proposes a strategy by which writers are able to respond to the Troubles:

> But we do have a choice about the way we acknowledge this received world. Our way can be critical or uncritical. The latter says that there is nothing I can do....The critical way, by contrast, challenges this acquiescence. It recognises that even if history is irretrievably past, its meaning is still in the process of becoming. It holds things at a certain distance and suspends the paralysing immediacy of facts, by examining their roots and their reason for being there in the first place. (Hederman, "Editorial" *Crane* 11)

In the shaping and unfolding of conceptions of the historical 'event' from a critical distance, the artist interacts positively with politics and constructs alternative aesthetic worlds.

For an artist living in a society as profoundly polarized as Northern Ireland, guarded distance is important in order to avoid legitimate as well as invalid charges of propaganda and bias. Distance, in the form of displacement, transposition, or, in Edna Longley's phrase, 'zig-zag', involves taking a matter such as the Troubles out of its natural environment, altering it by means of poetic and

dramatic media or lenses, and relocating it within other contexts. Displacement is nothing novel as the writings of, for example, Spenser, Swift, Dryden, T.S. Eliot, and Thomas Pynchon illustrate. A broad concept, displacement imparts to the artist a great deal of room for manoeuvring and creating. Longley's and McGuinness' displacement of politics functions within the specific context of Northern Ireland and the Troubles. Indeed, numerous writers from the North, aside from McGuinness and Longley, have written about the Troubles from displaced perspectives.[5] As Seamus Heaney notes, Irish writers, "stretched between politics and transcendence" (*Displacement* 8), must reticently exercise detachment and disengagement from the explosive world of Northern Irish politics. As the Troubles continued unabated in the 1970s and 1980s, the once noble desire of the Irish Literary Revival to "redress the impositions of cultural imperialism" (Heaney, *Writing* 38) became suspect and untenable for Ulster writers to imitate. Writers have been caught in the debate over questions of "political rights and cultural loyalties" (Heaney, *Writing* 36) and have

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[5]Other examples of Northern Irish literature which utilize displacement include Paul Muldoon's volumes of poetry *Quoof*, *Meeting the British*, and *Why Brownlee Left*; Seamus Heaney's bog poems in *North* and *Field Work*; Tom Paulin's play *The Riot Act* and volumes of poetry *The Strange Museum* and *Liberty Tree*; Brian Friel's *Translations* and *Making History*; and Stewart Parker's *Northern Star*.

experienced the resulting expectant pressures to speak out. When addressing the Troubles, however, artists must resist having their sympathies and sensibilities pre-programmed or otherwise co-opted by factional social, religious or political agendas for the purpose of exacerbating the protracted crisis. A poet's or playwright's first and foremost allegiance is to his or her artistic self-expression.

Writers such as Frank McGuinness and Michael Longley contribute to contemporary cultural and political debates however, by wrestling with the rendering of conditions in Ulster symbolically. Through imaginative distance from the harsh reality of life in the province, artists refract their own conscious experiences and those of their various communities from mythically, intertextually, and historically remote contexts. Through such indirect engagement with issues, writers strive to effect a symbolic resolution of the conflict within their own imaginative worlds, reflecting an all-encompassing sympathy for all who suffer. Contemporary Northern Irish authors share a penchant for irony, satire, parody, allegory, and elegy, while at the same time an aversion to romantic epics, rhetoric, and revelation, in order to negotiate the minefield of hypersensitive loyalties and any suggestion of tacit support for the atrocities perpetrated by terrorist organizations such as the I.R.A. or

the U.D.A. (Heaney, *Writing* 38; Schuchard 6). Both Michael Longley and Frank McGuinness are

> at odds with the dominant culture in the North--that Calvinistic blend of religion and politics that not only characterises the more extreme manifestations of public life....but also the other more subtle manifestations...that result in the crippling possibilities for the human spirit.... (Bradley 37)

Politically, Longley and McGuinness share a non-partisan attitude when addressing sectarian violence in their respective genres.

Frequently, the displaced consciousness of those looking in from the outside remains a prevalent theme in Northern Irish verse and drama, for it permits the artist to scrutinize detail from differing vantage points, deriving a fresh vision out of the raw material observed (Heaney, *Tongue* 105). The technique of displaced consciousness challenges both audience and readers to think in novel ways about old problems as the artist deftly reveals the operation of powerful, yet absurd, ideologies hitherto accepted at face value, and thereby challenging irrational intransigence and offering a new and different perspective on issues. Such poetry, drama, and fiction may be considered subversive to the discourse of politics in itself, for the play of the imagination within this literature extends the context and the relevance of identity, ideology, power, justice, nationalism, heritage,

colonialism, and violence far beyond the shores of Ireland. By traversing cultures, geography, and time "in the rift between what is going to happen and whatever we would wish to happen, ...[art] holds attention for a space" (Heaney, *Tongue* 108), casting critical concentration back upon ourselves and illustrating the culpability and complicity of all people for the outrages in the North.

Recently, in an attempt to find just such a transcendent space, Mark Patrick Hederman, co-editor of the now defunct Irish journal, *Crane Bag*, posits the concept of a 'fifth province'--"an aesthetic analogy which describes a space which is neither physical, geographical, nor political. It is a place which is beyond or behind the reach of our normal scientific consciousness" (Hederman, "Fifth", 111). The notion of a 'fifth province' derives from the speculative theory that Ireland was, in ancient times, divided into five provinces instead of the traditional four.[6] Though the precise location of this long-vanished region is debatable, its import lies in its symbolic association with balance, peace, and neutrality. Hederman views the 'fifth province' as a paradigm for

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[6]The four provinces of Ireland are Connaught, Munster, Ulster, and Leinster. The fifth province, according to some commentators, was Meath (Mide). For further discussion see Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1961).

intuitive inspiration where art and politics intersect without degeneration into worn-out formulaic rhetoric. Within this imaginary realm, the poet rejects the diametric polarities of artistic solitude and political solidarity and embarks upon

> an inner journey through the labyrinth of the poet's own history and situation to a point of release onto the open space of otherness....The 'exile' of the poet is symbolical and always represents, paradoxically, a 'homecoming', because the journey he undertakes is one whereby he comes into his own ground.... (Hederman, "Fifth" 112)

Despite the criticism[7] levelled at what was regarded as a noble and stimulating idea, the quest of many Irish writers for a similar creative realm of displaced perspectives--a site neither here nor there but a place elsewhere--has been a productive enterprise.

Displacement in its myriad of forms manifested in McGuinness' plays, *Carthaginians* and *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, and Longley's 'Troubles' poems demonstrates the healthy intersection of literature with politics. Eschewing the snares of hegemonic pluralism, respecting difference, and appealing to a deep sense of human morality beyond

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[7]Hederman's notion was attacked by Eavan Boland, Gerald Dawe, and Edna Longley not for its sentiment but for its association with Field Day, in particular, the implicit "green nationalism" of the theatre company's pamphlets. As well, the absence of Protestant/Unionist voices in Field Day and in *Crane Bag* made the debate over the 'fifth province' to a large extent one of navel gazing (Dawe, "Getting" 107-9; Hederman, "Fifth" 113-16).

contemporary constructs of identity and allegiance, the craft of both artists involves exemplary performances of positive reconstruction. McGuinness and Longley assimilate the social realities of Belfast, Londonderry and Enniskillen, and defamiliarize the perceptions and experience of such places through their artistry.

Chapter One

> Then cover the wound with cuckoo-sorrel
> Or sphagnum moss, bringing together verse
> And herb, plant and prayer to stop the bleeding.
> --Michael Longley, from "Finding a Remedy",
> "Lore", *Poems 1963-1983*, 159.

Born on July 29, 1953 and raised Catholic in Buncrana, Co. Donegal in the Republic, less than ten miles from the border with the North, Frank McGuinness, like Seamus Heaney, is acutely aware of the oppression suffered by Northern Ireland's minority Catholic population as well as the fears of the province's Protestant majority (Lawley 436). McGuinness's poetic play, *Carthaginians*, expands upon Heaney's idea of displacement as a central feature of Northern Irish writing. McGuinness employs displacement not only in terms of the physical setting and literary subtexts, but also through an exploration of the politics of sexual identity and consciousness. The characters themselves both individually and collectively engage in displacement as a defense and coping mechanism for coming to terms with the events of Bloody Sunday.

McGuinness sets the action of *Carthaginians* within a Catholic cemetery[1] on the outskirts of Derry (or Londonderry). The play's title summons to mind the ancient city of Carthage, which the playwright lays like a palimpsest over the town. McGuinness reflects on the reasons he chose to set his play in a 'Carthaginian' cemetery: "It is a city with ruins, and the only way you can find out about it is from its ruins and its graveyards" (Penny 12). Cemeteries have served as traditional refuges for "outcasts, lepers, fugitives, the insane...[and were] shunned by the living because of their fear of the dead" (O'Dwyer 112). Moreover, burial grounds resonate with symbolic political

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[1]*Carthaginians* echoes and resembles the novel *Cré na Cille* by Máirtín Ó Cadhain, the chief Irish language writer of the *Gaeltachtaí* (Gaelic-speaking areas along the western seaboard of Ireland). Ó Cadhain's novel also takes place in a graveyard in the rural West of Ireland, where all the characters are "dead, buried, and unhappily rotting away" (Ó Corráin 143). Through a series of self-revealing monologues, the grave dwellers communicate their psychological states of mind to the reader, who must piece together the narrative of this Irish community. Samuel Beckett's influence upon both McGuinness and Ó Cadhain is manifest in the absurd settings, the fragmented colloquial dialogue, and the bizarre and dark sense of humour--exemplified by the traditional Irish pastime of 'slagging' in which the internees in the graveyard hurl insults and abuse at one another. Ó Cadhain's characters, similar to the men and women in *Carthaginians*, await some event, perhaps the final judgement; however, this event remains ambiguous as does McGuinness's resurrection at the end. *Cré na Cille* also subverts both the romantic notion of Yeats' pious Irish peasantry, who speak in a sacred Celtic tongue, and also the nationalist mythology of a heroic Gaelic civilization (Ó Corráin 143-146).

significance in a country where the remembrance of dead generations borders on a national obsession. In 1915, Patrick Pearse, the leader of the 1916 rebellion, delivered a speech over the grave of prominent Fenian Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa in a bid to sway public support for the Republican revolutionaries' "splendid and holy cause[]" of driving out the British (quoted in Lee 27). Furthermore, the killings in Northern Ireland have made funerals social commonplaces for both Catholics and Protestants. Funerals afford ripe opportunities to parade publicly and to display tribal solidarity.

A row of seven graves appears on stage in *Carthaginians* resembling "*in shape and symbols those of the grave chambers at Knowth*" (McGuinness, *Carthaginians*[2] 4). Akin to the nearby site of Newgrange in Co. Meath, Knowth is a megalithic chamber mound where ancient inhabitants housed their dead, echoing an age before the arrival of Christianity and the Anglo-Normans in Ireland. Additionally, the large pyramid of discarded objects and rubbish on stage calls to mind not only the grandeur of the ancient Egyptian pyramids at Giza, but also the human cost entailed in the construction of such monuments--the lives of thousands of slave labourers.

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[2]Frank McGuinness, *Carthaginians* (London: Faber and Faber), 1988; hereafter cited by the abbreviation *CNS*.

McGuinness' title, *Carthaginians*, renames and inscribes the populace of Derry and those in the cemetery with an allegorical subtext, displacing and filtering the play through a classical frame of reference. Access to ancient Carthage is through Virgil's *The Aeneid*, alluded to in several instances, and through the opening music of *Dido and Aeneas*, a seventeenth-century opera composed by Henry Purcell. The myth of Trojan prince Aeneas and Carthaginian Queen Dido underpins *Carthaginians* and extends the play's Northern Irish narrative to a more universal plane. Following Aeneas's betrayal and abandonment, Queen Dido curses relations between Rome and Carthage, exclaiming in a fit of passionate hatred moments before self-immolation:

> 'Neither love nor compact shall there be between the nations. And from my dead bones may some Avenger arise to persecute with fire and sword those settlers from Troy, soon or in after-time, whenever the strength is given! Let your shores oppose their shores, your waves their waves, your arms their arms. That is my imprecation. Let them fight, they, and their sons' sons, for ever!' (Virgil 116)

The sentiment of Dido's curse remains, sadly, an apt characterization of Anglo-Irish relations historically and the current fratricidal warfare in Ulster. Though rather flamboyant, McGuinness' Dido is far more cynical and shrewd than the ancient queen and far less likely to passionately follow fanatic beliefs to the point of self-destruction.

The Battlements of Carthage metaphorically evoke the Walls of Derry, symbolizing a city and its inhabitants under siege. McGuinness draws parallels between the imperialism of the Roman Empire, which culminated in the Punic wars and in the utter destruction of Carthage, and the religious imperialism of the Roman Catholic Church as well as Britain's political domination in Irish affairs:

> PAUL:....What city did Rome destroy?
> GRETA: Carthage.
> PAUL: Correct. Two Points. Carthage.
> GRETA: How are we in Carthage?
> PAUL: Tell them you saw me sitting in the ruins, in the graveyard. I live in Carthage among the Carthaginians, saying Carthage must be destroyed, or else--or else--
> GRETA: What?
> PAUL: I will be destroyed.
> *(Silence.)*
> I would like to go to Carthage.
> GRETA: I would like to go to Rome.
> PAUL: I would like to see the pyramids. I'm building a pyramid. But I'm no slave. I am a Carthaginian. This earth is mine, not Britain's, nor Rome's. Mine. Am I right? (*CNS* 17)

Paul diagnoses what he, like James Joyce, believes to be at the heart of Ireland's predicament: the unflinching allegiance to the Catholic Church by the bulk of the populace. Paul's statements set up an opposition between the individual and the collectivity of the city--one must prevail over the other. In constructing the pyramid, Paul attempts to assert a degree of power and agency in a world in which he seems to have no control. Paul's quiz question and answer, "Who wrote *The Aeneid*? An Irishman wrote it"

(*CNS* 17), implies that only those living under analogous circumstances (literally or imaginatively) would be capable of comprehending the complex and horrendous forces at work within twentieth-century Ireland that spawn classes of victims. The play's epigraph by Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz reads: "It is possible that there is no other memory than the memory of wounds" (*CNS* 1). McGuinness' dramatization of the grave watchers' "inner private hurts and grievances in the public arena" (Pine 30) testifies to the deep scars acquired by living with the Troubles everyday. Sadly, in many cases, individuals are rendered dysfunctional or crippled for life; however, McGuinness' view is not wholly pessimistic, for the potential of healing, of other 'memories', exists (Pine 30).

As he invites Carthage's destruction, Paul's words betray an ambiguous underlying tone of Republican rhetoric. This tone potentially reflects a certain fatalistic inevitability or, perhaps, punishment for Ireland's long history of allowing Britain and the Roman Catholic Church to control and to shape the country's political, social, and economic destiny. Of all those in the cemetery, however, Paul suffers the most from psychological instability; though indicative of a process exorcising pain and guilt, Paul's mental state undermines any charge of perceiving McGuinness' own politics behind the specific import of Paul's vaguely

nationalist attitude. Richard Pine claims that McGuinness' plays ask the Catholic community to examine itself in terms of "Protestant individualistic socialism" as a "creative solution to the Troubles" (30). McGuinness, in an interview for the *Irish Literary Supplement* in 1991, reflects upon the difference between Protestant and Catholic consciousness:

> In the Protestant culture no matter how much of the weight of history you inherit, ultimately you stand alone before your Maker and you are judged on what you alone have done in life. The Catholic tradition is very different, you judge yourself not according to your own life but according to the tribal inheritance...and you are shaped physically and spiritually far more by that simple authority of Rome....*Carthaginians* looks at the acceptance of that authority in Ireland, at what happens to a people who move the center of authority away from their own country to...a much broader organization that spreads through Europe, and inevitably...can lead to the shying away from responsibility for one's own life. When you do that you are handing authority to an empire which will destroy you ultimately unless you can confront what's being done to you. (Pine 30)

The process of confronting such a cultural upbringing is a painful and difficult journey--one reflected in the cast's movement through public confessions, from isolation to reintegration into a new community, albeit one displaced and outside the Walls of Derry.

The seven characters gradually disclose secrets to one another, revealing the brutality of their own lives and the buried guilt over Bloody Sunday, which remains constantly in the background while the grave dwellers await

the fruition of the women's vision. Maela refuses to accept the loss of her young daughter to cancer; Dido's "happiest day of his life" (*CNS* 28) is a very brief bittersweet encounter with John, a reprieve from the hardship of being gay in Ireland; Seph is a 'supergrass' (a local term for paid informer) against the I.R.A.; Hark served as a look-out man for the paramilitaries; Sarah lived as a drug addict in the Netherlands; Paul suffers from a mental breakdown; and Greta has endured the neurotic paranoia of her repressed mother. To survive and to cope with their own personal and collective tragedies, the grave dwellers develop psychological defense mechanisms to circumvent reality from the displaced province of the cemetery (Foley, "Guardians" 36; Wilcox 6-7). By displacing his play not only into an unexpected physical environment but also to the "fringes of...national consciousness", McGuinness explores

> violence, sexuality, dislocation from affection, inadequate gender roles, the fear of aging, and of dying. It is a struggle with threat by means of unconscious fantasy....[which] is a natural tactic for dealing with the distance between the needs of the person and the reality of their situation. It can help people under great stress to move towards healing. Yet there is a tendency to marginalize fantasy by the stigma of madness. (O'Dwyer 100)

Indeed, Dido brings news from the outside world to the visionary watchers in the graveyard, informing them that "Your own kind think you're mad, but the Prods think you're Martians" (*CNS* 17); this witty remark underscores the

townspeople's incomprehension and the characters' status as outcasts.

Internally, the characters displace themselves from their current state through the imaginary construction of fantasy worlds manifested in the telling of dirty jokes, playing quiz games, singing songs, performing a parody of a cliché-ridden play about the Troubles--*The Burning Balaclava*--and even holding an affable celebration in the graveyard (Wilcox 7; Foley, "Guardians" 36). Both author and characters engage in a process of creating fictional worlds as a method of evading the material and political realities of the North and, paradoxically, as a way of approaching these realities from a safe distance and under the guise of 'art'. Maela knits and dresses an empty grave while engaging in imaginary conversations with her daughter, and Paul obsessively builds his pyramid as both a gateway to the afterworld and as an escape from Derry (*CNS* 7, 9, 15).

McGuinness uses some of the cast's sundry diversions to hilarious effect; he believes in the critically ameliorative potential of humour: "It is the ultimate weapon against tyranny--laughing at it" (quoted White 24). Television, the contemporary master of displaced reality, offers to McGuinness the perennially popular American cartoon series "The Flintstones". Hark and Paul's singing of the cartoon's opening and closing theme songs compounds

culture, yet it also exhibits how far afield this playwright travels in order to comment upon his homeland.

McGuinness strews his plays with other comparably bizarre and outrageous moments. The Irish talent for storytelling plays an important role in *Carthaginians* as any act of artistic creation itself may be deemed a displaced representation of life. The male cast shares a devastatingly funny tale of how a cat, named Mustard Arse, precipitated the closing of a local pub. According to the men, a patron spread mustard on the cat's behind, causing the cat to react by leaping into an alcove where a stag's head hung above on a wall:

> SEPH: Cat starts rubbing its arse on the head.
> HARK: The rubbing dislodges the nail.
> SEPH: The head falls on these three old fellas.
> HARK: They're sitting in their usual corner under the head.
> PAUL: Kills one outright.
> SEPH: Knocks the other two senseless.
> HARK: The cat's still going bananas.
> SEPH: Send an ambulance.
> PAUL: Send a priest.
> HARK: Send a fucking vet.
> PAUL: All arrived at the one time.
> SEPH: The vet got the place closed down. (*CNS* 54)

Despite the refreshingly ridiculous nature of such a tall tale, the art of storytelling brings the characters together, as is evidenced by the division of the narration among the three men in contrast to the first half of play, where they seldom speak to one another. Laughter creates a healthy release of strain; it encourages healing and a

breakdown of barriers, and generates a communal sense of humanity.

Even amongst the ribaldry and silliness, McGuinness never loses sight of the gravity of his subject matter. For example, when the women and Hark break into the American civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" adopted by Northern Irish Catholics in their struggle for equality, Hark imitates Rev. Martin Luther King's famous "I have a dream" speech: "Catholics shall stand with Catholics, Protestants with Protestants--" (*CNS* 26), states Hark. "Should it not be 'Catholics will stand with Protestants'?" (*CNS* 26), Maela asks logically. Hark's reply reduces the Troubles to a savage anatomical analogy that expresses profound anger, bitterness, and despair:

> I speak of dreams, sister, not of insanity. Let us be like the asshole and let us be apart. Let us live apart as we choose to live apart. Let us hate as we wish to hate. Let us wander forth into the wilderness of bigotry and let us spread more bigotry. Let us create a nation fit for assholes to live in, for as assholes are we known to each other and like the asshole let us for ever remain apart. (*CNS* 26-27)

In a different vein but with similar effect, Maela begins to tell Seph a joke, but quickly she recounts the heartbreak of losing her daughter, who underwent chemotherapy for cancer and consequently lost her hair: "Isn't that a great joke? Isn't it?" (*CNS* 22). McGuinness' humour also has its bleak

aspects as he satirically addresses the North under a guise of sustained and, at times, searing irony.

The stories, jokes, games and other distractions function to fill a void of silence which runs throughout the drama. Characters often speak to themselves or leave long unsettling pauses between lines. Seph barely utters a word during most of the play and does not converse until Scene Four, when he reveals that he was an informer and breaks the group's self-imposed silence concerning Bloody Sunday. Seph, possibly, is following the simple advice best articulated in the title of one of Seamus Heaney's poems: "Whatever You Say Say Nothing" (Heaney, *Selected* 78). Silence operates on manifold levels in Northern Ireland: the Catholic Church's stake in begetting fear and obedience leads to an imposition of silence upon the Catholic community from within, and the political establishment imposes silence upon Catholic discourse from without. The silences in *Carthaginians* coincide at those moments where the private agonies and memories of Bloody Sunday seep through as the cemetery watchers bring an arsenal of displacement techniques to defer braving the seminal event that brought them to the graveyard. *Carthaginians* is a theatrical therapeutic exercise, as the characters increasingly grow stronger and more capable of confronting their city's recent history. During the production of *The*

Burning Balaclava, Maela asserts that "[t]here's a place for people like us....a different place....a new place...a new province" (*CNS* 39). It is an assertion which McGuinness engenders within the parameters of the graveyard--a mental and spiritual zone where the cast confront and overcome the crippling horrors of the Troubles as the drama moves toward fulfilling the recurring motif of rebirth.

The catalyst for a substantial amount of the play's action and for the positive changes within the grave dwellers is the gay figure of Dido, the "queen of Derry" (*CNS* 57) who, with maternal-like instincts, runs errands for those living in the cemetery, bringing food, cigarettes, and alcohol. Dido vibrates with a life-affirming force and sensitivity stylishly presented with astute cynicism, colourful camp, and sexual double entendres. Homoeroticism is a constant thread throughout most of this playwright's work;[3] it is not surprising that McGuinness, who is himself gay, would incorporate sexual issues into his writing. What is daring and unique is the priority accorded to the perspective of gay consciousness which lies at the heart of his plays. In a country as traditionally conservative as

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[3]For example, note Dido in *Carthaginians* (1988), Pyper and Craig in *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* (1985), Michael, Adam, and Edward in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (1992), and Caravaggio in *Innocence* (1986).

Ireland in its stance on particular social and sexual issues such as abortion, divorce, contraception, and homosexuality, and with the converse influence of strict Presbyterian fundamentalism in the North's Protestant demographic, one would be hard pressed to find a more displaced consciousness outside the conventional 'norm':[4]

> Homosexuality tends to move through definitions and across lines of conceptual demarcation. Because it perpetually questions the social order and is always in question itself, homosexuality is other....this otherness [offers] a privileged instrument for analysis... to explore sexual differences, to test morality and metaphysics,...to expose social and political myths, to reinterpret literary conventions, to pose the problems of authenticity and sincerity, to chart the secret channels of desire. (Stambolian and Marks 26)

By transgressing boundaries because of inherent biological or psychological composition, gay men and women are, by definition, "existential outsider[s]" (Mayer 7, 9). Helen Lojek points out the value of an existential perspective in challenging "adherence to a closed society and a closed set of values" ("Difference" 58) in her discussion of Pyper, the

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[4]Overall this statement is true at face value; however, there are signs that the situation is slowly changing. Anne Courtney, the mayor of Derry, proclaimed Ireland's first ever Gay Pride Week in June 1993. "In the Bogside, on the obverse of the wall bearing the 'Free Derry' mural, a new mural appeared. Painted by two local (heterosexual) men, it is a large pink triangle with a logo in Irish and English" (Smyth 45). Additionally, on July 7, 1993, the Republic of Ireland decriminalized homosexuality and passed anti-discrimination legislation (Rose 36).

gay character from McGuinness' *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme*.

Although paradoxically at the center of the play, Dido, kindred to Pyper, qualifies as an unequivocal outsider. Hark represents the voice of social condemnation when he attacks Dido in Scene One: "You are known as a queer in this town. I do not like being seen with queers. I do not like queers. I do not like you. Fuck off" (*CNS* 13). Dido, a seasoned survivor of such abuse, takes it all in stride: "Some people here fuck with a bullet and the rest fuck with a Bible, but I belong to neither, so I'm off to where I belong. My bed. On my own. My sweet own" (*CNS* 21). A non-conformist in appearance--long pink scarfs, Doc Martens, and, occasionally, in drag--as well as in mannerism, speech, and sexual orientation, Dido is self-conscious about the sense of identity he is responsible in constructing. His is an identity not without political implications, for, unlike the traditional patriarchal hegemony of Irish society dominated by religious institutions and the male cult of tribal virilities--best illustrated during the summers' marching season--Dido's sense of integrity bars him from forcing conformity upon others. Dido continually makes the audience aware of his attempts to question the social order through his camp mien-

-a style antithetical to tragedy and underlain with sincerity:

> It is Dido's honesty with the audience--the only member of the cast to tell the truth frankly and unadorned--which convinces. McGuinness feels that this may mark 'a small step forward' because survival, the dominant theme of the play, is possible in Dido's case because of, rather than despite, his homosexuality (Pine 30).

Dido mocks the nationalist ethos of the 1916 Easter rebellion, claiming that his "ambition in life is to corrupt every member of Her Majesty's forces serving in Northern Ireland" (*CNS* 11):

> It's my bit for the cause of Ireland's freedom. When the happy day of withdrawal comes, I'll be venerated as a national hero. They'll build a statue to me. I'm going to insist it's in the nude with a blue plaque in front of my balls. *(Holds an imaginary plaque before himself.)* This has been erected to the war effort of Dido Martin, patriot and poof. (*CNS* 11)

Dido strews his language with graphic sexual innuendo and self-deprecating comedy; in tying Dido's language to politically grave matters, McGuinness undermines politics' socially-accorded inflated sense of importance. McGuinness mentions Oscar Wilde as an influence, and he cites Wilde's essay, *The Soul of a Man Under Socialism*, as an example of a "playful attitude to politics" (Pine 29), accurately characterizing the *modus operandi* of *Carthaginians* and Dido's satirical viewpoint.

In Scene Two, Hark cruelly strikes an infatuated Dido in the face and launchs an interrogation which resonates with the rather questionable tactics of Northern Ireland's security forces: "Tell me the truth. Tell me who you're involved with. Give me names, Harkin. Give me addresses....That's all we're looking for. You can walk out of here if you give me one name and address" (*CNS* 20). McGuinness implies an analogy between the arrest and interrogation of thousands of Irish Catholics[5] (including, it appears, Hark himself) by the Ulster police and the British military attempting to procure information about paramilitary activities[6] and the periodic McCarthy-like witch hunts against gay men and women in the United States and Europe by government agencies interested in keeping

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[5]Internment, initiated in August 1971 and phased out in 1975, involved the raiding of thousands of Catholic homes by army and police forces, the arrest of those believed to be members of the I.R.A. or sympathizers, and incarceration in Long Kesh (Maze prison) and other internment camps. In the first six months of the policy 2375 people were interned and interrogated, the overwhelming majority Catholic. Protestant paramilitaries were exempt in practice, if not in theory (Hachey, Hernon, and McCaffrey 236; Lee 438).

[6]In certain cases, false confessions were illegally obtained through beatings and psychological torture by the British military. An inquiry led by Sir Edmund Compton refused to accuse the army of 'torture', instead preferring to describe ill treatment simply as 'brutality'. The European Court of Justice concurred with the Compton inquiry in a case brought by the Irish government against the United Kingdom on behalf of those interned 'British' citizens of Ulster (Lee 438-39).

track of so-called 'subversive' elements. As in the case of Dido, a witness to overlapping persecution for being gay and Catholic, McGuinness believes that bigotry, injustice, and violence are as heinous when aimed against people like Dido Martin as when directed at the marchers on the streets of Derry.

McGuinness explicitly extends the connection between the politics of sexual identity and those of Ulster's sectarian variety when Hark, burdened with his own sense of guilt for his involvement with both the paramilitaries and the authorities, continues his assault upon Dido's sexuality by raising the spectre of AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) and demanding a confession of 'guilt':

> Tell me what's between your legs. Is there anything between your legs? Is there one between your legs? Is the united Ireland between your legs? What happens when cocks unite? Disease, boy, disease. The united Ireland's your disease. Does your cock want a united Ireland?...Tell me your disease. Tell me. Tell me. (*CNS* 20)

Although not mentioned by name, AIDS, a blood-borne disease that functions as an ideologically-loaded discourse, intersects and displaces the specificity of centuries-old tribal hatreds. By questioning Dido's masculinity (an assumed sign of heterosexuality) through a humiliating fixation upon male genitalia, Hark symbolically emphasizes the incompatibility of Ulster's two patriarchal yet separate societies. Hark attributes to Dido the disease of "a united

Ireland", although neither the context of the scene nor the gay man's personality warrants a caustic Hark foisting a Republican label upon him. The emphasis upon disease indicates from a societal standpoint a threat to the general populace. Dido remarks that the soldiers at the army checkpoint suspected him of being a "health hazard" (*CNS* 11). This echoes the assignation of disease to other social undesirables during the 1930s and 1940s as justification for discrimination in the name of the health of the body politic.[7] McGuinness' socially conscious and symbolic foregrounding of disease draws attention obliquely not only to the real menace of a pandemic, but, much more importantly, to the Northern Irish disease that afflicts the mind: siege mentality. Such a mentality involves a psychological 'disease' the symptoms of which include paranoia, solipsistic discourse amongst groups, or an utter dearth of discourse at all.

One of the foremost lyrical moments in *Carthaginians* involves Dido's anecdote of his encounter with the mysterious John, who bequeaths to Dido a bunch of red roses and his moniker. "'Listen, listen to the earth. The earth

[7]In 1986, Belfast city councillor, "Burn-'em" George Seawright, recommended the incineration of Catholics and members of the clergy (Belfrage 161). Though easily dismissed as a sensationalist crackpot, Seawright serves as a reminder of the persistence and the depths of ideologically-based hatred.

HARK: Did you ever hear two's company?
DIDO: Yea, but three's practical. (*CNS* 58)

Dido's wit shines through as the three share a tender and comic moment in this burlesque *ménage à trois*, deviating considerably from Hark's hostility exhibited in Scene Two. An affinity between the gay and the heterosexual man has developed, demonstrating the viability of friendship across boundaries of difference and the potential for surmounting prejudice; furthermore, Dido's position between the newly amorous couple, Sarah and Hark, is indicative of his personality and spirit in bringing closer together those in the graveyard.

In *Carthaginians*, one discerns a movement from fragmented communication, exemplified by the disjointed Beckettian-style dialogue and the pervading silence of the intervals between speech, towards genuine communication and healing within the shattered community. A yearning for a new dispensation expresses itself in Dido's reminder to Maela that the name "Derry" in Gaelic is derived from "*Doire Colmcille*" a reference to the Irish word *colm* meaning 'dove' or "bird of peace" (*CNS* 50) as well as the sixth-century Irish saint Colmcille. Furthermore, Dido's answer "New City" (*CNS* 57) to the question, "What does Carthage mean?" (*CNS* 57), furnishes a measure of hope through the symbolic media of language, semantics, and translation.

Richard Pine writes that "the playwright's commitment must be equal to the trauma" (29); in other words, McGuinness takes an activist role in transforming his commitment to Dido's gay consciousness and to the tormented souls of the cemetery. "It is the rough edges of this kind of drama that makes McGuinness such a subversive, dangerous, unpredictable, uneven and necessary presence in the Irish theatre" (Pine 29). Indeed, in recent decades, the Irish theatrical milieu has been characterized, for the most part, by a lack of experimentation in both content and presentation when dealing with political drama: "Irish theatre has been literary, illusionist, naturalistic and that is what audiences have come to expect. It has been middle-class, middle-aged, and comfortable" (Fitzgibbon, "Sleeves" 309).

In Scene Seven, as a result of the performance of *The Burning Balaclava*, the cast confronts the pain of Bloody Sunday:

> Seph: Would it have been better to have been shot on Bloody Sunday? Did I want that to happen? Why did I want that? Why did we all want it? Did we want Bloody Sunday to happen?
> PAUL: How did we want Bloody Sunday?
> SEPH: To make sense of it all, make sense, Paul. *(Starts to wrap the tricolour around the guitar.)* Thirteen dead on Bloody Sunday. (*CNS* 61)

To make sense of the suffering endured by the Catholic community and to justify hatred and retaliation against the

British soldiers or the Protestant community seems an impossible task. Seph, having the wisdom to inform on those planning reprisals, recalls, "They said after Bloody Sunday they wanted to avenge the dead but they wanted to join them" (*CNS* 61), illustrating that not only does a desire for eradication of the enemy drive the cycle of violence in Northern Ireland, but also the concomitant desire for self-annihilation.

Delivered incantation-style, Paul recites the names, ages, and addresses of those who fell in the streets of Derry on Bloody Sunday. Lurking in the background here is Yeats's ambivalent poetic eulogy "Easter 1916". Notwithstanding his abhorrence of violence, bloodshed, and anarchy, Yeats remains awestruck by the transformation of the executed rebels from ordinary men into heroic martyrs. McGuinness mirrors Yeats' listing of the dead, "[t]o murmur name upon name" (Yeats 288):

> I write it out in a verse--
> MacDonagh and MacBride
> And Connolly and Pearse
> Now and in time to be,
> Wherever green is worn,
> Are changed, changed utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born. (Yeats 288-89)

By the same token, McGuinness' eulogy to the young civil rights marchers elevates them to a rarefied station, not because of their revolutionary actions but, instead, because of their peaceful resistance to inequality and injustice.

In the graveyard, Seph acknowledges "In a way we all died" (*CNS* 66) on Bloody Sunday, echoing Yeats' lines "Too long a sacrifice/ Can make a stone of the heart" (288), both constructing impressions of those that have become the 'living dead'. In the climactic liturgy, the entire cast prays for forgiveness and invokes the simple magical formula of transformation, "Change" (*CNS* 68), reiterating Yeats' famous refrain of "Easter 1916". In this instance, however, the anticipation of resurrection and rebirth remains far less ambitious and far more personal:

> *(Light begins to break through the graveyard's standing stones. At first its beam is narrow, golden and strange, like a meeting of the sun and moon. Birdsong begins. The light increases in power, illuminating them all. The birdsong builds to a crescendo. Looking at each other, they listen, in their light.)* (*CNS* 69)

Dido, who believes in the magical power of dead flowers, casts a spell over the others, pondering, "Why am I talking to myself in a graveyard? Because everyone in Derry talks to themselves. Everybody in the world talks to themselves" (*CNS* 70). Indeed, everyone talks to himself or herself instead of to each other, accounting for McGuinness' incorporation of Walter de la Mare's poem "The Listeners", which has been "beat into" (*CNS* 67) the characters as school children. "The Listeners" serves as an appropriate allegorical portrait of Ulster, a silent place where the Traveller's greeting is registered only by "a host of

phantom listeners/ That dwelt in the lone house" (quoted in *CNS* 67). The poem underscores the dire lack of communication and connection between individuals and communities in Northern Ireland (Schneider 90). Dido's repeated injunction to "Watch yourself" (*CNS* 70) to those asleep places responsibility upon individual people to "make [their] own resurrections here, in this world" (Wilcox 8), to shape their own destiny outside of and, indeed, against the prevailing winds of ideology, societal convention and fear.

As Dido places Seph's guitar, wrapped with the Irish flag, upon the pyramid of junk, he utters the final word in *Carthaginians*: "Play" (*CNS* 70). Being the philosophical heart of McGuinness' drama, the word *play* functions both as a self-reflexive reference to the theatrical performance with its political implications of transgressing boundaries and as a command for Mendelssohn's "Song without Words", *Op. 19 No. 6*, to commence as the grave watchers sleep. Indeed, McGuinness opens and closes his drama with pieces of classical music as well as incorporating numerous snippets of songs performed by the cast such as "We Shall Overcome", "The Town that I Love So Well", and "Happy Birthday".[8]

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[8]In *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, the three cast members also perform an assortment of songs, including "Someone to Watch Over Me", "Run Rabbit Run", "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang", "Amazing Grace", and "The Water is Wide".

Music shatters the disturbing silence that runs like a thread through the play, providing an outlet for the emotional intensities inherent in the subject matter. The music of Mendelssohn and Dido's ritualistic actions on stage affirm the healing and transformational power of theatre and of *play*.

In *Carthaginians*, Dido asks the audience "What's the world?" (*CNS* 70), and he responds straightaway with street names in Derry, where the events of Bloody Sunday transpired. But if Derry is the world, then so is Beirut in McGuinness' 1992 play *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*. The playwright again constructs a place with a specific set of spatial and temporal coordinates while maintaining a displaced focus on Northern Ireland. As Robert King remarks, "McGuinness makes the existentialist horror urgent and edgy by locating it in a recognizable political reality" (41). McGuinness sustains his techniques of displacement through the allegorical setting of the cell in Beirut, the three hostages' adoption of imaginative inventions for the purpose of preserving their sanity, and the metaphorical clash of national cultures between Ireland and England.

An anonymous holding-cell in Beirut serves as a allegorical location to critique the driving forces behind terrorist actions, for within the confines of the cell analogous dark forces operate. Not unlike Northern Ireland,

Lebanon has suffered for decades the torments of civil war between Moslem and Christian factions, often confounded by the interference of powerful neighbouring states such as Syria and Israel. Without difficulty the audience translates terrorist violence and kidnapping in one society rife with division into the symbolism of conflict in another. Edward, a journalist originally from the North, provides explicit commentary on the Troubles in his reflections about the one topic fixated in the minds of all three men--'home'. Unfulfilled in Ireland and "wondering what it would be like to be here" (McGuinness, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*[9] 3), Edward's wanderlust lands him in his current predicament:

> EDWARD: ...The heat, the dust, the smell. It's a bad hole. But I will say one thing. It's better than being in Strabane.
> ADAM: What's wrong with Strabane?
> EDWARD: If you ever want proof there's no God, go to Strabane. Hell on a stick, sweet Strabane. It's not as bad as Omagh. Omagh, Omagh, God protect us all from Omagh. (*SWM* 3)

Edward's ambivalent recollection illustrates that home remains a problematic notion. For Adam as well, his distressed whispers recall the American's feelings of neglect by his parents--custodians of several foster children--and "all the fights" (*SWM* 20) he endured at home.

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[9]Frank McGuinness, *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* (London: Faber and Faber), 1992; hereafter cited by the abbreviation *SWM*.

For the third hostage, Michael, the twin losses of his wife in an automobile accident and his university post in England have exiled him to the Middle East (*SWM* 12). Whether home is in England, Ireland, or the United States, for the hostages it is simultaneously an entity desperately desired and yet painfully remembered.

Reminiscent of the amusements in the Catholic cemetery near Derry, the cast of *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* internally displace themselves from their imprisoning environment through the construction of fantasies and avoid straightforwardly addressing their grim prospects. The three men grasp that "language is their only commodity" (Charles 86) in their effort to sustain each other, "the creative imagination ...[being] simultaneously futile and indispensable" (King 41). Adam, Michael, and Edward take turns improvising horse races, composing letters to relatives, holding a party replete with imaginary martinis and marijuana, and pretending to pilot a flying car over Europe. The three formulate film scripts together to distract themselves and to arouse a sense of the joyous carnivalesque. McGuinness blends a satirical treatment of popular culture, cinema, and Northern Ireland in Edward's scenario of the Pied Piping nun:

> EDWARD: A nun comes to Beirut. She has come to do her Christian duty to the orphans of that troubled city. She first befriends a goat

wandering through this war-torn town. She greets the goat as a long-lost ally, singing to it on her guitar. Little children hear her song and join in, miraculously learning English. Our happy band join forces, they fight the cruel foe, they convert the whole of Lebanon to the great task in hand--love thy neighbour. Not everyone is pleased with Sister's success. She is shot, as is her guitar. One of the little children presses the bullet-strewn instrument to her body as they carry away the corpse of the dead nun.
ADAM: Played by Madonna. (*SWM* 15)

McGuinness piercingly mocks the self-righteousness of those who preach peace as well as the parallel clichés of recurring sectarian violence in the North.

Amid the bleakness following Adam's murder, Michael reconstructs in his mind the "1977 Wimbledon Ladies' Final" (*SWM* 42) attended by Queen Elizabeth II. Edward enters Michael's charade-like musings as the two men's interpersonal relationship matures to the point where Michael becomes Wimbledon champion Virginia Wade and Edward ironically adopts the role of the Queen--the symbolic quintessence of British power:

EDWARD: I'm now the Queen?
MICHAEL: Yes.
EDWARD: Hello.
MICHAEL: Hello.
EDWARD: Here you are.
MICHAEL: Thank you.
EDWARD: And what do you do?
MICHAEL: What do you mean, what do I do? You've just seen me win Wimbledon.
EDWARD: Oh yes, it was very nice.
MICHAEL: Thank you.
EDWARD: You must sweat a lot playing tennis.
MICHAEL: I must, yes.

> EDWARD: Is this your racket? It's quite sweaty, I like a little sweat. (*SWM* 44)

The camp humour with which Edward caricatures Queen Elizabeth signals not only a healthy and humorous release but also a noticeable improvement in relations between the Englishman and the Irishman, who are frequently belligerent with one another throughout most of the performance.

As James Doan points out, McGuinness "demonstrates a canny sense of staging by placing the three figures in their appropriate geopolitical settings: the Catholic Irishman between the American and the Protestant Englishman, with shifting alliances created between them" (19). The three men function as "national cultural representatives" (Foley, "Observed" 36) within the cell but not as derivative and superficial stereotypes. From the moment Michael regains consciousness in Scene Two and it is apparent he is English, Edward expresses antagonism towards the new cellmate, attacking what he presumes is an air of class privilege. "Do you not recognize me? We were at school together", taunts the Irishman, "Eton, wasn't it? Or Harrow?" (*SWM* 9). As the shock of what has happened unfolds, Michael naturally demands a reason for his abduction. "Because you're an Englishman. How dreadfully unfair. Not cricket," retorts Edward (*SWM* 10). The Irish journalist wrongly assumes that, because of Michael's British background, he necessarily is a

pampered man harbouring an attitude of condescension towards others.

An English professor by occupation, Michael makes the blunder (perhaps intentionally) of branding Edward's Ulster-accented speech as a dialect of the English language. Edward predictably retaliates by launching into Irish nationalist discourse:

> EDWARD: ...One time when you and your breed opened that same mouth, you ruled the roost, you ruled the world, because it was your language. Not any more....We took you and your language on, and we won. Not bad for a race that endured eight hundred years of oppression, pal, and I speak as a man who is one generation removed from the dispossessed.
> ADAM: Edward, you had a university education. You live in a more than comfortable home. You earn a large salary. How in hell are you dispossessed?
> EDWARD: One generation removed, I said. And there are those I hold responsible for that dispossession. Him, being one.
> (EDWARD *points at* MICHAEL.)
> MICHAEL: There is not much historical validity to that charge.
> EDWARD: Remember the Famine? The Great Hunger?
> MICHAEL: The Irish Famine was a dreadful event. I don't dispute its seriousness. But I'm sorry. How can I be personally responsible for what happened then? It was a hundred and fifty fucking years ago.
> EDWARD: It was yesterday.
> MICHAEL: You are ridiculous, Edward.
> EDWARD: I am Irish. (*SWM* 30)

McGuinness exposes the reductive nationalist interpretation of Irish history as, in Michael's words, 'ridiculous'. Adam consistently mediates between his fellow cellmates, "English Arab? Irish Arab?...Jesus, these guys don't need to

tear us apart. We can tear each other apart" (*SWM* 25). The American psychologist reminds his companions of the absurdity in quarrelling over historical iniquities in their present circumstances and, by implication, in other contexts. Faced with the exigencies of extreme deprivation and isolation, however, the prisoners collectively bond together for survival like the grave watchers in *Carthaginians*.

The commonality of the three men's plight and the growing closeness between them dissolve national and ideological barriers as the play progresses. Edward reiterates Michael's word "ridiculous" (*SWM* 46) in response to the Englishman's honest heart-felt query, "Is it really our fault for your troubles at home? Is it the English people's fault?" (*SWM* 46). McGuinness' juxtaposition of the hostages' dilemma and that of the Troubles symbolizes the foolishness of hate and bigotry.

If one of the closing injunctions of *Carthaginians* is to "Watch yourself" (*CNS* 70), to assume responsibility for one's destiny, then in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* McGuinness shifts the onus onto *someone* else to safeguard those living in powerless circumstances. The closing scene illustrates the love that has developed during Michael and Edward's months of confinement together. "For what it's worth, I'm watching over you" (*SWM* 58), says Edward as he

prepares to be released. The final exchange between the two captives involves a symbolic combing of each other's hair, recalling Michael's father's tale of the bond shared by Spartan warriors as they groomed one another before battle in ancient Greece (*SWM* 50). Not without homoerotic overtones, this ritual act reaffirms the mutual devotion of Michael and Edward and offers hope of a new understanding and political accord between the two nations they consider home.

Someone Who'll Watch Over Me concludes sentimentally with Michael quoting a Biblical line from the medieval romance *Sir Orfeo*, where a knight voyages to Hades and back to retrieve his love: "Whither thou goest, I will go with thee, and whither I go, thou shalt go with me" (*SWM* 58). The imaginative union of Michael and Edward reflects the "profound faith in human happiness to triumph over despair" (*SWM* 37), and this faith is representative of Frank McGuinness' dramas. The demonstrated perseverance of the hostages in Beirut and the grave dwellers in Ulster attests to the tenacity of the human spirit to survive and to transcend uncivilized conditions.

Chapter Two

...we shall wait for centuries
Before hurtling to places we have never seen.
--Michael Longley, "Couchette",
Gorse Fires 26.

Michael Longley was born on July 27, 1939 in Belfast, the son of Protestant immigrants from England. A former student of classics at Trinity College, Dublin, and a contemporary of Seamus Heaney, Longley was an intermittent member of Philip Hobsbaum's informal group of poets at Queen's University, Belfast, in the 1960s (Donnelly 307; Johnston 20). Longley, noted for his attention to formal precision and poetic craftsmanship as well as his focus upon love, landscape, botany, and zoology, favours a taciturn posture in regard to the North. The overwhelming majority of Longley's work steers free of political issues and even, for the most part, Ireland. Suspicious of the alliance between the sentimentalization of Irish culture and the prophetic rhetoric of the I.R.A., best embodied in the Gaelic slogan *Tiocfaidh ár lá* ("Our day will come"), Longley broaches the question of his strife-torn homeland in a relative handful of poems. The poet does not intend to "evade issues that sometimes appear both pressing and clear,

but is instead attempting to experience them in a different way, to let them sink in to the deepest level of personal concern at 'home'" (McDonald 78). As Frank McGuinness approaches the Troubles from various displaced perspectives through outside consciousness, unusual physical settings, intertextual analogies, and allusions to popular culture, Longley writes from a great remove in the poems where he touches upon the ongoing struggle in Ulster. He has asserted in an interview that absolute disinterestedness is not desirable:

> The artist's first duty...is to his imagination. But he has other obligations, surely--and not just as a citizen. He would be inhuman if he didn't respond to tragic events in his own community, and an irresponsible artist if he didn't seek to endorse that response imaginatively. This will probably involve a deflection or zigzag in the proper quest for imaginative autonomy--an attempt under pressure to absorb what in happier circumstances his imagination might reject as impurities. But, then, who's interested in pure art anyway? (quoted in Brown 210-11)

History, myth, and literature cede space from which Longley encodes the Troubles symbolically and allegorically, expanding the context and relevance of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Longley's poetry scrutinizes the ideology and aesthetics of violence, the fragile security of home, and the drive to integration and wholeness that is ceaselessly assaulted by the forces of fragmentation and dissolution. Moreover, the overriding issue for Longley

remains the question of what constitutes a fitting poetic response in a society whose dominant political discourses stymie artistic creation.

Two of Longley's most frequently cited and critically glossed poems, "Wounds" and "Wreaths", deal most explicitly with sectarian hatred and murder, in spite of the poet's aversion to the nearly three-decade-old crisis. Longley arranges the disturbing "Wounds" into two stanzas: the first at the Battle of the Somme in France during World War I and the second in contemporary Ulster. Reflecting on his father's war stories, Longley recalls the older man observing with "admiration and bewilderment"[1] the offensive anti-Catholic bigotry and the peculiar divided allegiances of the troops:

> First, the Ulster Division at the Somme
> Going over the top with 'Fuck the Pope!'
> 'No Surrender!': a boy about to die,
> Screaming 'Give 'em one for the Shankill!'
> (*P* 86)

The irony of this generation of Protestant Ulstermen affirming their loyalty to the Crown by fighting for England in the trenches of World War I so as to refrain from fighting the English if London implemented Home Rule

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[1]Michael Longley, "Wounds", *Poems 1963-1983* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991), 86; hereafter, all citations will be specified by page number and abbreviation: *P* for *Poems 1963-1983* and *GF* for Longley's latest book *Gorse Fires* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1991).

legislation[2] for Ireland is not lost on Longley. Old world heroism of glorious sacrifice melded together with factional enmity leads to the horror of a "landscape of dead buttocks" (*P* 86), where a Scottish padre endeavours to restore a modicum of dignity and respect to those exposed by straightening their jumbled kilts. While today in Northern Ireland some make sacrifices for 'Queen' while others for a romantic version of 'Country', Longley's father, a "belated casualty" (*P* 86); ironically perishes fifty years later from wounds received in battle: "'I am dying for King and Country, slowly'" (*P* 86) quotes the poet.

The second stanza shifts to the present and the slaying of "[t]hree teenage soldiers, bellies full of/ Bullets and Irish beer, their flies undone" (*P* 86)--the last detail reinforcing the indignity and exposed vulnerability of the young men. The second stanza ironically undercuts

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[2]British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith's maintenance of Liberal power in Parliament depended upon the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party; accordingly, Asquith introduced in 1912 a Government of Ireland bill granting autonomous Home Rule to the island. Incensed Protestant Unionists and the powerful Orange Order demanded that the province of Ulster be excluded from the provisions of the bill. Fearing what they dubbed 'Rome Rule', 90,000 men formed the Ulster Volunteer Force vowing to fight Britain for the right to remain British citizens. With the advent of Irish nationalists (overwhelmingly Catholic in composition), forming their own armed militias, civil war seemed imminent in Ireland; however, the outbreak of war in Europe necessitated in 1914 the suspension of the government bill and gave Unionists the opportunity to prove their steadfast loyalty to the Crown (Fitzpatrick 189-93).

the first, for the heroism as defined at the Somme dissolves as another nonsensical murder ensues. This time a bus conductor is shot through the head

> By a shivering boy who wandered in
> Before they could turn the television down
> Or tidy away the supper dishes.
> To the children, to a bewildered wife,
> I think 'Sorry Missus' was what he said. (*P* 86)

The invasion of the conductor's home and the young assassin's ludicrous apology illustrate the discrepancy between the reality of assassination and the banal politeness with which it is executed. Longley's innocuous inclusion of the dirty dishes and the television which render domesticity and its subsequent violation foregrounds the stark contrast between Belfast and the mud, shells, and carnage at the Somme; nevertheless, both realms bear marks of resemblance insofar as killing is a progeny of politically inspired idealism. As in the case of the "dead children" killed "[n]ear the crazy circles of explosions" (*P* 87) or as in "The Civil Servant", the first part of the triptych "Wreaths", where an innocent man is gunned down while preparing breakfast, Longley admits that "'home' is changing, that it is open to the disruptions of loss" (McDonald 77-78). Longley's emphasis on the fragility of the human body and of 'home' life enables readers to relate on a personal level with events in a province by casting them in familiar terms. Such poetic strategies subvert the

distancing from the blood, gore, and anguish evidenced in abstract, articulate, and sanitized notions of nationalism and loyalism.

In "Wounds" the past and the present merge and connote one another through an historical legacy of violence, where, in many respects, both circumstances function as interchangeable examples of ideological blindness and futile aggression. Although "Wounds" expresses sympathy for all victims from the poet's father to the "shivering boy" (*P* 86), the poem does not proffer any "easy avenue to redemption" (Roulston 110). In an interview Longley commented how important it was to him

> to try and think oneself into...[a terrorist's] shoes, as it were, and to imagine how one can be so brain-washed or so angry or in a sense perhaps even so innocent that one can drive in a car and go into somebody's house and shoot that person stone dead. It seems important to imagine that. (Johnston 20)

The closing "Sorry Missus" (*P* 86) registers almost a sense of embarrassment and regret, perhaps evidence that the youth is partially conscious of the outrage of his actions, hinting thereby at a capacity for change.

"The Linen Workers", the third and last section of "Wreaths", envisions the roadside massacre by the I.R.A. of a busload of Protestant workers in the early 1970s (Heaney, *Writing* 50). The poem's first stanza opens from the

displaced and surreal perspective of a vaguely blasphemous and unsettling focus upon Jesus' teeth during his Ascension:

> Christ's teeth ascended with him into heaven:
> Through a cavity in one of his molars
> The wind whistles: he is fastened for ever
> By his exposed canines to a wintry sky. (*P* 149)

Longley's highlighting of the canines, the teeth utilized foremost in hunting, accentuates the link between humanity and the animal kingdom. Consequently, the stanza transforms the Resurrection and Ascension, the crucial zenith and belief of Christianity, into "a howling animal death...rub[bing the] readers' noses in the physicality and extremity of Christ's cry and banish[ing] all the stock-response consolation...of redemptive death" (Heaney *Writing*, 51). The invoking of the carnality of Jesus's death and those of the linen workers undermines the archetypal association of transcendence and rebirth:

> When they massacred the ten linen workers
> There fell on the road beside them spectacles,
> Wallets, small change, and a set of dentures:
> Blood, food particles, the bread, the wine.
> (*P* 149)

Longley's detached urbane tone and dry documentary-style regard for detail depict violence's capacity to dissolve human beings into waste and component parts. Notwithstanding the ironic reference to the bread and wine, integral to the Christian sacrament of Communion, "Wreaths"

father, symbolically restoring identity and meaning to the dead man:

> Before I can bury my father once again
> I must polish the spectacles, balance them
> Upon his nose, fill his pockets with money
> And into his dead mouth slip the set of teeth.
> (*P* 149)

Longley's response to such horror is a ritualistic attempt to restore dignity, identity, and a sense of wholeness to the disassembled individual (Heaney, *Writing* 51). The son blends contemporary acts of respect such as replacing the false teeth and returning his father's glasses to their proper place, with the ancient rite of lining the dead man's pockets with money as payment for his voyage across the river Styx in the afterlife. Tjebbe Westendorp observes that many of Longley's poems "turn on an opposition between a desire for union and unification, on the one hand, and a drive, which becomes almost obsessive at times, towards separation, fragmentation and annihilation, on the other" (25). Conceivably the only sensible alternative open to the poet or to anyone in the face of such atrocity is to be found in the empathetic ritual as response in "Wreaths".

Not without displaced personal, historical, and religious frames of reference, "Wounds" and "Wreaths" are, nevertheless, somewhat anomalous in Longley's poetry insofar as they focus sharply upon the Troubles. More consistently, a single image or allusion in a entirely different

historical or mythical context directs the reader back, however obliquely, to Ireland and to the North, realigning the poem's other specific details to reveal the "symbolic and allegorical substrata running beneath the formal surfaces" (Schuchard 7). In Longley's latest collection, *Gorse Fires*, he explores Nazi-occupied Poland and the Holocaust, and, by broader implication, the crisis in Ulster in a loose series of interconnected pieces. The poet imagines a world historically and geographically separated from Northern Ireland where violence has become an institutional pillar of the state in a civilization gone mad. Though located specifically in Eastern Europe, the poet endows Theresienstadt and the Warsaw ghetto with a universal resonance.

The powerful couplet entitled "Terezín"[3] lyrically

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[3]Terezín is a small town in the Czech Republic thirty-nine miles north of Prague. From 1941 to 1945 under the German name Theresienstadt, the Nazi Third Reich designed a privileged "model ghetto" for Europe's Jewish elite: highly decorated war veterans of World War I, the elderly, prominent academicians, artists, musicians, politicians, scientists, and business men. Conditions being immeasurably better there than in other concentration camps, Theresienstadt was showcased by Nazi propaganda as evidence of their racist, yet benevolent intentions. Of the 154,000 Jews that resided in the ghetto, 118,000 perished, the majority later transferred and exterminated in Auschwitz (Berkley 8-10, 267). Theresienstadt is renowned for the ghetto's astonishing outpouring of paintings, music, and literature, particularly that of children. George Berkley acknowledges the "amazing ability of cultural activity to survive and even thrive under such seemingly adverse conditions....[and] the way such activity

addresses the enormity of the Holocaust and the immense silence left in its wake:

> No room has ever been as silent as the room
> Where hundreds of violins are hung in unison.
> (*GF* 39)

The unearthly quiet of the violins, instruments most capable of approximating the sound of the human voice, parallels the consequences following the musicians' extirpation; moreover, "Terezín"'s brevity reinforces this ghostly silence. The subsequent poem in *Gorse Fires*, "Ghetto" (40-43), recounts the forced deportation of Jews to the Warsaw ghetto and the physical and emotional ordeals they faced once there. The first line of "Ghetto", "Because you will suffer soon and die" (*GF* 40), establishes a phonetic pattern in which the voiceless fricative [s] is repeated throughout the poem: "choices", "potatoes", "flame-throwers", "toys", and "fences" (*GF* 40-43). All serve to underscore by both sound and semantics the theme of suffering and silence introduced in "Terezín". Longley's documentary-style catalogues of everyday possessions serve as relief maps of Jewish lives as he ominously reminds them: "You are packing now for the rest of your life" (*GF* 40) as they embark upon their final journey.

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can help maintain some semblance of civilization under uncivilized conditions" (Berkley 267).

Orphan children inhabit the ghetto: "a little girl without a mother behaves like a mother/ with her rag doll to whom she explains fear and anguish" (*GF* 41). The speaker, from the comfort of a train car, imagines a little boy outside in the winter: "Away from that world of broken hobby-horses and silent toys. / He turns into a little snowman and refuses to melt" (*GF* 41). A detached, yet not indifferent observer of detail, the speaker is troubled by his conscience which etches the image of the boy into his mind, refusing to dissolve away and be forgotten as yet another miscellaneous item one views from a moving window. Longley, born in 1939, would have been approximately the same age, perhaps, as the figure he imagines behind the "barbed-wire fences" (*GF* 41) (Murphy 4). The destruction of the family unit, the consequent suffering of children, and the overall process of dehumanization recorded in *Gorse Fires* are vividly haunting.

Stanza five of "Ghetto" introduces the symbolic Irish context--albeit removed from the Troubles--of the Great Irish Famine of 1846-1852, in which the island lost half its population due to starvation, infectious diseases, and mass exodus:

> ...there are not enough root vegetables,
> Beetroots, turnips, swedes, nor for the leather-
> stitchers
> Who are boiling leather so that their children may
> eat;

> Who are turning like a thick slice of potato-bread
> This page, which is everything I know about
> potatoes,
> My delivery of Irish Peace, Beauty of Hebron, Home
> Guard, Arran Banners, Kerr's Pinks, resistant to
> eelworm,
> Resignation, common scab, terror, frost, potato-
> blight.
> (*GF* 42)

Longley's juxtaposition of the starving and exhausted people of Warsaw with historical echoes of the Irish famine--the references to "root vegetables", "resignation", and "terror" (*GF* 42)--is appropriate and points to the never-ending cycle of misery and injustice visited upon humanity.[4] Powerless in the face of such calamity, the delicate poetic gesture of listing varieties of potatoes is all the speaker is able to manage.[5] The heaviness of the leather and the gravity of

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[4]Jan Karski, a courier for the Polish underground, wrote of conditions in the Warsaw ghetto in 1942: "These were still living people, if you could call them such. For apart from their skin, eyes, and voice there was nothing human left in these palpitating figures. Everywhere there was hunger, misery, the atrocious stench of decomposing bodies, the pitiful moans of dying children, the desperate cries and gasps of a people struggling for life against impossible odds" (quoted in Marrus 120). This description uncannily matches those of nineteenth-century reports of the Famine in Ireland.

[5]James Murphy comments that Longley's sequences of lists in many of his poems suggests that "for the poet the inherent beauty of words can help to lighten the weight" (4) of a situation. In another poem in the collection, after the murder of the ice-cream man and the resulting incapacity of the speaker's companion to "rhyme off the flavours" (*GF* 49), Longley substitutes a list of twenty-one species of "wild flowers of the Burren" (*GF* 49) as a soothing poetic rejoinder (McDonald 79).

the poet's page extend referentially to the Irish past, touching subtly upon the fact that the Famine was not only an ecological disaster but also a human one, created in part by the ineffectual and apathetic response of the British government.[6] Comparably, the Nazi leadership pursued their genocidal policies with the cooperation of large segments of the population in Europe and the apathy of the outside world.

"Ghetto" concludes with the depiction of an illegal rudimentary school run clandestinely by those interned in Warsaw:

> There were drawing lessons, and drawings of kitchens
> And farms, farm animals, butterflies, mothers,
> fathers
> Who survived in crayon until in pen and ink
> They turned into guards at executions and funerals
> Torturing and hanging even these stick figures.
> There were drawings of barracks and latrines as well
> And the only windows were the windows they drew.
> (*GF* 43)

The nightmarish transformation of memories of family and home into those of brutality and extermination portrayed within the children's art reflects the precarious nature of their existence. Longley universalizes the dilemma of how to respond artistically to human tragedy by looking at the

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[6]Whereas no historical evidence exists indicating the British government ever systematically planned or engaged in the extirpation of the Irish, the Victorian *laissez-faire* attitudes of the ruling elite accepted the deadly consequences of its government's ideologically-based relief efforts (Ó Gráda 11, 50-58).

drawings of these children living under intolerable circumstances, faintly echoing the presence of children caught in a reeling Ulster.

Longley's poetry operates not only from displaced historical perspectives to address the Troubles but utilizes poetic lenses supplied by the canon of European literature from Irish mythology to Shakespeare, from Homer to Tibullus. In "On Slieve Gullion" Longley turns to the ancient Irish tale, *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*, to underscore the poet's own sense of being out of place as well as the intrusive presence of the British military in this archetypal Celtic setting. Slieve Gullion is a mountain in Co. Armagh near the border with the Republic, and, in mythical tales, the magical home of Celtic heroes. Gullion epitomizes the timeless nature of the Irish landscape beyond human mutability. It has been a site of violent conflict down through the ages as the poem records:

> On Slieve Gullion 'men and mountain meet',
> O' Hanlon's territory, the rapparee,
> Home of gods, backdrop for a cattle raid,
> The Lake of Cailleach Beara at the top
> That slaked the severed head of Conor Mor:
> (*P* 198)

The first stanza catalogues various periods of Irish history and Celtic myth: references from powerful deities like Cailleach Beara--an Irish goddess--to the Ulster Cycle's central epic *Táin Bó Cuailnge* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley),

from the story of the doomed King Conor Mor of Ireland during the early Christian era to the Gaelic chiefs who once controlled the region in the early Middle Ages. The mythical subtext underpinning the poem is furnished by *The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel*, which tells the story of King Conor Mor's last stand[7] against the fíanna, a group of independent mercenary warriors commonly present in the Finn or Ossian Cycle. Longley incorporates the poem recited by Conor Mor's magically resuscitated head: "'Noble / And valiant is MacCecht the cupbearer / Who brings water that a king may drink'" (*P* 198). Reflecting the supernatural beliefs of the Celts, the Irish myth attributes magical properties to both the cup and the sources of water, the cup as a prototypical Holy Grail capable of regenerating life.

The poem switches focus in the next stanza to present-day Ulster where the British military patrol the region and unsuccessfully strive to maintain peace and order in some peculiar recurring pattern of Irish history:

To the south the Border and Ravensdale

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[7]Exhausted from the siege of battle, the King requests that his foster-son and chief warrior, MacCecht, fill a gilt cup with water so that he may drink. Because the hostel's water supply has been utilized to combat the marauders' efforts to burn out the King and his men, MacCecht travels around the countryside to accomplish his task. Upon his return, MacCecht witnesses the beheading of Conor Mor. After slaughtering the executioners, MacCecht pours water into the King's throat, miraculously restoring the power of speech (Gantz 102-105).

> Where the torturers of Nairac left
> Not even an eyelash under the leaves
> Or a tooth for MacCecht the cupbearer
> To rinse, then wonder where the water went.
> (*P* 198)

Partition, terrorism, and brutal death remain realities in this picturesque locale as SAS Captain Robert Nairac discovered. Nairac, a member of a Commando unit of the British Army, disappeared in May 1977, and no trace of his body has ever been found (McIlroy 62; Longley, *Poems* notes 206). In the mythological world of MacCecht consolation is possible to an extent through faith in the cup's and water's power; nonetheless, today no compensatory myth is at hand to alleviate the horror surrounding Nairac's demise.

In "On Slieve Gullion", the speaker witnesses "through a gap in the hazels / A blackened face, [and] the disembodied head /...[of] A paratrooper on reconnaissance" lugging "forty pounds of history on his back" (*P* 198) as the landscape engulfs and absorbs the man. The soldier carries with him Britain's colonial legacy of occupation as he roams over the hallowed ground of the mountain. Longley establishes their status as outsiders, when he claims of himself and of the soldier: "Both strangers here, we pass in silence / For he and I have dried the lakes and streams" (*P* 198). The presence of the British military and, to a certain degree, the Protestant element in Ireland have

intruded on and destroyed an ancient way of life by metaphorically depleting the water's life-sustaining sustenance extant during the time of Ireland's Celtic high kings. The speaker's feelings of guilt and uncertainty register his alienation in these environs. Because of his family background, Longley feels "slightly ill at ease....[being] neither English nor Irish completely" (Johnston 20); consequently, the poet does not entirely identify with the "solidarities" of Northern Unionist culture (Heaney, *Writing* 48-9). The predicament *ipso facto* of belonging simultaneously to both cultural traditions is apparent in the poet's respectful yearning for the words of Conor Mor "said too long ago" (*P* 198), for, it appears, no one will perform the role of the loyal MacCecht in bringing physical and spiritual regeneration back to Northern Ireland.

In Longley's latest collection, *Gorse Fires* (1991), the poet translates several passages depicting Odysseus' ironic homecoming from Homer's epic, *The Odyssey*, and integrates these interpretations into his poetry. Previously, Longley had used the "mythic paradigm of home and homelessness" in his first volume *No Continuing City* (1969) (McDonald 79), and returns to it again in the final poem of *Gorse Fires*, "The Butchers". Echoing "Ghetto", "The Butchers" is a world of savagery and retribution executed

with extreme efficiency and organisation by the Greek hero. Stretching the densely detailed and weighty lines of the poem into a single sentence, Longley graphically traces the mutilation and slaughter of the usurping suitors, "heaped in blood and dust / Like fish... [in] fine-meshed nets...hauled / Up gasping for salt water" (*GF* 51); furthermore, Odysseus hangs the "disloyal housemaids" from a "hawser" (*GF* 51) for carousing with the suitors.[8] Originally designed for mooring Odysseus' sailing ships upon arrival, the hawser serves a more lethal function under the adventurer's order.

The victims of "The Butchers" are reduced and dehumanized in their comparison to animals: fish, doves, thrushes, bats and even the 'hero' himself is "like a lion dripping blood" (*GF* 51). Odysseus, "seeing the need for whitewash and disinfectant" (*GF* 51), embarks on cleansing his household of all traces of the former denizens. "These versions of passages in *The Odyssey* mark a deepened sense of 'home' as a place of both reunited family and the most brutal horror" (McDonald 80). The noble centre of Odysseus' existence--his home and family--has been thrown

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[8]Longley's incorporation of Odysseus' hanging of the unfaithful serving women echoes the less stringent punishment of public tarring and feathering meted out to Ulster women for betraying the Catholic community by courting British soldiers. Both ancient and contemporary incidents recall Seamus Heaney's poem "Punishment" (Heaney, *Selected* 71-72; Schirmer 145).

into disarray, violated and dishonoured. The restoration of that stable nucleus must be achieved at any cost. The title itself, "The Butchers", serves to address any ethical qualms by the poet regarding whether or not the suitors and housemaids received their just desserts.

The poet expresses a degree of sympathy towards those slain as he depicts Hermes "round[ing] up the suitors' souls" and delivering them to that "dreamy region / ...a bog-meadow full of bog-asphodels / Where the residents are ghosts or images of the dead" (*GF* 51). The white bog flowers subtly introduce Ireland into this allegorical tale of homecoming and revenge. Compared with Seamus Heaney's archaeological approach to the Irish bog as a repository of historical atrocity, the correlation for Longley between the Irish bog and the Elysian fields is a poetic response informed by hope. The Irish recontextualization extends interpretive strategies to the conflict in the North: "The parallels with Longley's own home are both unstated and unmistakeable. The double consequence of imaginative return, for Longley, remains a mixture of delight and horror" (McDonald 81). The poems "Laertes", "Anticleia", and "Argos" (*GF* 33, 35, 45) further reiterate this ambivalence where the ravages of time reduce Odysseus' parents and erstwhile canine companion to withered shells of their

> One bullet with my initials on it--
> And that got stuck in a property tree.
>
> I would have caught it between my teeth
> Or, a true professional, stood still
> While two poetic murderers
> Pinned my silhouette to history
> In a shower of accurate daggers. (*P* 136)

The poem blurs the distinction between the imaginative world of acting and the treacherous fact of Northern Ireland. Longley develops the theatre illusion by referring to Fleance's magical disappearing act:

> I escaped--only to lose myself.
>
> It took me a lifetime to explore
> The dusty warren beneath the stage
> With its trapdoor opening on to
> All that had happened above my head
> Like noises-off or distant weather. (*P* 136)

Fleance ventures to comprehend the mysteries beneath the stage, a network of narrow passages and a repository of the buried past, though never arriving at any conclusions as *Macbeth* correspondingly does not answer the cardinal question of why men do evil. The artificial realm of intertextuality collides with the veritable conditions in Ulster when Fleance, still (disguised?) with make-up, "[h]urried back to the digs where Banquo / Sat up late with a hole in his head" (*P* 136). It is a case where life imitates art instead of vice versa: a paramilitary's bullet in place of an on-stage murder with a dagger.

Michael Longley articulates the dilemma of the Northern Irish artist and contemplates the roles poets should play in "Altera Cithera", "Peace", and Letters" (*P* 102, 169-71, 76-85). Consciously modelling "Altera Cithera" and "Peace" after Roman love elegists, Propertius and Tibullus, respectively, Longley feels comfortable in adopting a similar stance of indirect engagement with politics and with expressing his own uneasiness. Having studied classics at Trinity College, Dublin, Longley skilfully adapts the writing of anti-imperialist Propertius to examine his own position as a poet within contemporary society (Peacock 65-67):

> A change of tune, then,
> On another zither,
> A new aesthetic, or
> The same old songs
> That are out of key,
> Unwashed by epic oceans
> And dipped by love
> In lyric waters only? (*P* 102)

Longley poses the question whether poets should refrain from writing love lyrics to tackling epic topics, and, if so, whether or not the poetics necessarily should also alter (Kerrigan 245). Longley's veiled cynicism towards "[t]he same old songs / That are out of key" (*P* 102) dissuades him from altering his poetry to accommodate the Troubles, opting instead to handle the issue on his own artistic terms like his ancient poetic precursors. As opposed to armalite

rifles and plastic bullets, Longley perceives poetry as a different type of weapon--a "sling...aimed at history":

> Bringing to the ground
> Like lovers Caesar,
> Soldiers, politicians
> And all the dreary
> Epics of the muscle-bound. (*P* 102)

The rhyming of "history" and "dreary", "ground" and "muscle-bound" (*P* 102) underscores the poet's avoidance of epic tales in a country divided by just such romantic conceptions of the past.

When the Peace People[9] of Belfast approached Longley for a poem in the late 1970s, he turned to Tibullus I.x for inspiration and re-created a line-by-line "'imitation'" of one of the Latin writer's works (Peacock 64). Through Longley's incorporation of twentieth-century diction, colloquialism, and frames of reference into Tibullus' original piece, "Peace" addresses philosophical issues of war and violence throughout human history beyond

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[9]The Peace People were a brief grass roots movement on the Northern Irish scene in 1976-77. A member of the I.R.A., who had been shot dead by security forces while driving a vehicle, crashed into four young children and their mother out walking. Three of the youngsters lost their lives. In revulsion to the killings, ten thousand people attended the funerals and marched through Belfast. The deceased children's aunt, Mairéad Corrigan, along with Betty Williams, formed a group of Catholic and Protestant women to campaign for an end to the violence. In 1977, the Peace People received the Nobel Peace Prize; however, shortly afterwards the movement, which had earned more sympathy abroad than at home, lost its energy and fell apart (Lee 452-53; Belfrage 186-87).

any determinable setting or Irish context. The reworking of Tibullus' poem imagines alternative ways of living, in contrast to Ulster's *status quo*:

> Who was responsible for the very first arms deal--
> The man of iron who thought of marketing the sword?
> Or did he intend us to use it against wild animals
> Rather than ourselves? Even if he's not guilty
> Murder got into the bloodstream as gene or virus
> So that now we give birth to wars, short cuts to
> death.
> Blame the affluent society: no killings when
> The cup on the dinner table was made of beechwood,
> And no barricades or ghettos when the shepherd
> Snoozed among sheep that weren't even thoroughbreds.
> (*P* 169)

The poem intermingles the pastoral ("shepherd") and the modern ("arms deal", "virus", "gene") and hence "the formula of the poem is established: a semi-playful exploitation of incongruities as first-century B.C. ideas are forced through twentieth-century linguistic registers" (Peacock 71; cf. Kerrigan 246). A harkening back to a distant rural past and traditions, a disdain for the modern, and an affirmation of peaceful idealism remain constant throughout "Peace"'s seven stanzas:

> I want to live until the white hairs shine above
> A pensioner's memories of better days. Meanwhile
> I would like peace to be my partner on the farm,
> Peace personified: oxen under the curved yoke;
> Compost for the vines, grape-juice turning into
> wine,
> Vintage years handed down from father to son;
> Hoe and ploughshare gleaming, while in some dark
> corner
> Rust keeps the soldier's grisly weapons in their
> place;
> (*P* 170)

Longley's sublime vision of plenitude, simplicity, reintegration of the human and the natural worlds, and of family, faith and hope is as powerful a symbolic statement against the world of politics and violence as one may devise. Religious worship is simple and humble with no traces of Christian sectarianism: "a handmade statue / Carved out of bog oak.../ ... / in a narrow shrine" (*P* 169). "Peace" has a folksy, common-sense, rambling tone that offers a "non-tragic approach to conflict" (Peacock 64); however, neither Longley nor Tibullus believes discord will entirely disappear, but "only lovers quarrelling" (*P* 170) affords a disruption to the serenity. "But punch-ups / Physical violence, are out: you might as well/ Pack your kit-bag, goose-step a thousand miles away" (*P* 171), avows the poet. The reader is cognizant that the speaker yearns for a time and a place not of this world; however, the vision is crucial in stimulating others to share in such poetic imaginings.

In Longley's "Letters" (*P* 76-85) to fellow Ulster poets James Simmons, Derek Mahon, and Seamus Heaney, he reflects on their collective artistic response to the Troubles. "Letters" envisages "the possibility of a literary community to set against social discord and violence" (Allen 135), a place elsewhere, more favourable to writing and creativity. Unequivocally rejecting his work

becoming the "Baedekers of the nightmare ground" (*P* 78), Longley writes "To James Simmons":

> That poetry, a tongue at play
> With lip and tooth, is here to stay,
>
> To exercise in metaphor
> Our knockings at the basement door,
> A ramrod mounted to invade
> The vulva, Hades' palisade,
> The Gates of Horn and Ivory
> Or the Walls of Londonderry. (*P* 80-81)

Analogous to Propertius' sling in "Altera Cithera", poetry is a forceful and assertive weapon as the suggestion of sexual invasion signifies. The power of language is metaphorically capable of breaking down the stone walls surrounding the city; moreover, poetry is capable of bursting the siege mentality of those who live behind Londonderry's walls. The classical reference to the Gates of Horn and Ivory reflects, potentially, the dream worlds of delusion and of truth transformed into ideology which Londonderry's inhabitants doggedly cling to. Such optimistic bravado breaks down in the letter "To Derek Mahon", where Longley remarks that the poets must face "the failures of our trade" (*P* 82) in suitably handling their quandary.

Poets in Northern Ireland realize an alternative strategy is to seal themselves off from the outside world, but Longley warns that such a withdrawal is an impossibility:

> Disinfecting with a purer air

That small subconscious cottage where
The Irish poet slams his door
On slow-worm, toad and adder:
Beneath these racing skies it is
A tempting stance indeed--*ipsis*
Hibernicis hiberniores--
Except that we know the old stories,

The midden of cracked hurley sticks
Tied to recall the crucifix
Of broken bones and lost scruples,

We sleepwalk through a No Man's Land
Lipreading to an Orange band.
("To Seamus Heaney", *P* 84)

History, tradition, and unpleasant memories haunt men and women of conscience as the beat of the lambeg drum intrudes upon their poetry and reminds all of the inefficacy of artistic isolation.

Longley settles for trying to find common ground by searching for spiritual and creative renewal partially in the island's landscape, often in the West, a place which initially inspires the epistolary project:

Now that the distant islands rise
Out of the corners of my eyes
And the imagination fills
Bog-meadow and surrounding hills,
I find myself addressing you
(*P* 77)

"The west of Ireland is seen as an embodiment of some kind of alternative life, a fictional life that compensates for certain values and attitudes missing in the real, given, historical world" (Dawe, "Icons" 230). It is a place existing "*in between* reality and the imagination, 'a dream

world' as [Louis] MacNeice called it" (Dawe, "Icons" 231; emphasis Dawe's).

In spite of Longley's regard for the West, in the letter "To Derek Mahon" recounting an Easter trip to Inisheer (the smallest of the Aran Islands and firmly within the *Gaeltacht*), a sense of alienation is felt by the "[t]wo poetic conservatives": "We were tongue-tied / Companions of the island's dead /.../ Eavesdroppers on conversations / With a Jesus who spoke Irish--" (*P* 82). Incapable of identifying with and accessing Catholic Gaeldom and the ancient traditions and beliefs of the Aran Islanders, Protestant poets like Longley and Mahon are able only to admire from a distance. Yet in the final letter to Heaney, Longley claims both Heaney and himself "would have it both ways" (*P* 85) by seeking a common ground in the Irish landscape, but resisting the delineation of too restrictive a definition of Irish identity within pastoral terms (Brown 209):

> Body with soul thus kept afloat,
> Mind open like a half-door
> To the speckled hill, the plover's shore.
>
> So let it be the lapwing's cry
> That lodges in the throat as I
> Raise its alarum from the mud,
> Seeking for your sake to conclude
> Ulster Poet our Union Title (*P* 85)

The desired integration of body and soul through receptivity to nature creates a displaced state from which Irish

identity is so diversely defined, becoming "almost as much a symbol of cultural heterogeneity as of cultural confluence" (Allen 135). As a result of such a displacement the poet has the capacity and the grounding to contend discretely with the political quagmire of Northern Ireland and simultaneously to communicate empathy.

This empathy, generated from interacting with the displaced realm of Ireland's topography, informs all of Longley's poetry. The poet places classical references, historical allusions, and mythical figures within the twentieth-century context of Northern Ireland in order to shed light on the pernicious legacy of the region's history. These various forms of self-effacement convey Longley's poetic response to his beautiful, yet troubled homeland, and enables him to avoid poems that make explicit political statements, choosing, instead, subtle and tactful implications to register outrage, and, more importantly, to touch upon human suffering.

Conclusion

"In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil--no lyric has ever stopped a tank. In another sense, it is unlimited."
--Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue*, 107.

Through displacement Michael Longley and Frank McGuinness address the Troubles, enabling them to confront issues from a guarded distance and conceivably, at times, to transcend the conflict. Displacement offers a temporary escape from the constrictive dualism of societal expectation and artistic self-expression without evading the fact that armed conflict continues to polarize the citizenry of Northern Ireland. This thesis has attempted to analyze how these two writers have used displacement in differing genres as a way of illuminating the specific political and cultural contexts of the North. Granted, my "reading of those political implications is", as Seamus Heaney reminds us, "in itself a political activity, separate from the processes that produced" the work (Heaney, *Displacement* 8).

The writings of McGuinness and Longley represent an imaginative quest for a new reality or, as I call it, a place elsewhere. Authors from Ulster are forever approaching this imaginative realm, struggling artistically

to transform and to incorporate Northern Ireland's miserable state into their work, and then proceeding on again. For each writer the place elsewhere is different and perpetually in flux as are the symbols and allegories in their art.

Northern Irish artists remain acutely sensitive to the historical consciousness of their fellow countrymen and countrywomen and the ideologies that inspire someone to burst into a stranger's home in Co. Tyrone and slaughter a woman seven months pregnant in front of her children as happened this past week. Neither Longley nor McGuinness advocates some variant of pluralistic cultural fusion; both remain sufficiently pragmatic to understand the infeasibility of such a notion as well as the healthy desire for and value of individual difference.

Frank McGuinness' art differs most significantly from Longley's in style. McGuinness' plays are outwardly more political and challenging in his stand against numerous *status quos*. Often obscene, irreverent, provocative, quirky and at turns poetic, profound, and wildly humorous, McGuinness subversively defies categories of religious-political identity, gender, and sexual orientation in order to shatter the fictitious, constructed category of '*Irishman*', directly challenging his audience in a urgent appeal for some sense of humanity. A controversial figure himself, McGuinness' very success testifies to the slow, yet

quickening pace of change in Irish culture as a whole. On the other hand, Longley, older and more conservative than McGuinness, tends to be subtler and diffident in his poetry. Frequently, Longley favours generalities and universals when confronting the North, avoiding specific abhorrent incidents like Bloody Sunday and leaving the religious backgrounds of murderers and victims unspecified in his poems.

Nevertheless, the work of Longley and McGuinness remains essentially comparable in several respects. Both writers approach the Troubles from displaced and unexpected settings: from the graveyard in *Carthaginians* to the Lebanese cell in *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me*, from war-time Poland in Longley's "Ghetto" to the Battle of the Somme in "Wounds". The prevalence of outsiders is common to both writers: McGuinness' Dido Martin and Michael Watters, the estranged voice in "On Slieve Gullion", and Longley himself visiting *an Oileáin Árainn* (the Aran Islands) in "Letters". In addition, Longley's poetry exhibits a cool detached tone: note the speaker in "Wreaths" as he calmly and collectedly restores his father's glasses and dentures, or the matter-of-fact timbre in "The Butchers". Outside consciousness grants a valuable vantage point from which to perceive any given situation and is politically wise in the context of Ulster where allegiances are endlessly suspect.

A critique of ideology and its handmaiden politics is a common characteristic of both men's work. *Someone Who'll Watch Over Me* and *Carthaginians* expose and mock Irish Republican ideology and its narrow understanding of history as well as the ideological heterosexism of Northern Irish society which transects tribal parameters. Longley depicts the results of racist ideology in "Ghetto" and "Terezín" and catalogues, more generally than McGuinness, the ideological-based violence in "Wounds" and in "Letters". Against such forces of destruction and death both authors posit the worth of ritual as a ameliorative response: the grave dwellers' elegy to the victims of Bloody Sunday, Edward's combing of Michael's hair, and the 'reassembling' of the victims in "Wreaths".

The reader discerns a profound sympathy these men embrace in their art; however, this expression of empathy does not signify consolation or notions of Christian redemption. The casualties of the Troubles remain dead in the ugliest sense of the word; for many their fatal wounds are still fresh and open:

> The poetry that deals with violence is more concerned with its *own* compulsions than with the expectations of others. It will not flatter or comfort or console; it will disturb, challenge, even threaten. Above all, it threatens our complacency. And, in a world that seems hell-bent on its own destruction, that threat to complacent unawareness is a valuable service. (Kennelly 28)

The brutal realities recorded by Longley and McGuinness endeavour to counteract the customary responses of assent and apathy often present in a society which neatly foists the euphemism, the 'Troubles', upon the tragedy.

Art is efficacious in its power to transform and modify sensibilities, though it does not purport to be instrumental or politically effective in any practical sense. Yet the imaginative arts "verify our singularity, they strike and stake out the ore of self which lies at the base of every individuated life" (Heaney, *Tongue* 107). It is excruciatingly apparent that political solutions to the Northern Irish conflict are not going to materialize in the foreseeable future; consequently, the place of art in Northern Ireland's war-zone is a necessity. Literature very slowly changes one individual at a time in the private place between the printed text and the reader or between the theatrical production and the spectator. Ulster, and Ireland as a whole, may be regarded as a microcosm of the modern world; because of the island's historical experience of nationalism, religious dissension, rapid modernization, colonialism, and political violence, the poems and the plays of the Troubles speak to a worldwide audience (Bradley 72).

The argument that there exists art and criticism that are purely objective and free from politics is specious, since the most successful works of literature and

critical approaches conceal their own inherent political underpinnings and ideological assumptions. If art reflects lived social realities to any degree, then it is impossible to evade the pervasiveness of politics that exists in all our institutions and in our unconscious; to profess otherwise is hypocrisy (Rabey 1-2). Crucially, Longley and McGuinness remain true to their own artistic self-expression and that includes their implicit and displaced 'political' self-expression. Longley and McGuinness are critical of Northern Ireland's *status quo* and the communities to which they belong, for, if there is any finger-pointing, then it is at the writers themselves. The uneasy union of art and politics in Northern Irish writing is not a jingoistic medium with a message, but literature that creatively engages with society's most profound perplexities. Neither to debunk contradictions by which individuals and societies govern themselves nor to posit alternatives amounts to an act of omission and a disservice to one's audience. The alternatives of hope, tolerance, empathy, and perseverance that find expression in the aesthetic worlds of Michael Longley and Frank McGuinness are of critical value in that they force us to re-examine ourselves.

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