

REDEEMING PATTERNS OF EXPERIENCE:  
JOHN MONTAGUE'S TEXT AND TRADITION  
1949 - 1989

By

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**JOHN MONTAGUE: REDEEMING PATTERNS OF EXPERIENCE**

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## ABSTRACT

The informing and animating principle behind John Montague's critical, editorial, and creative agenda has been his unremitting search for "redeeming patterns of experience." As a Northern poet coming of age in Dublin at mid-century and bearing witness to both the Republic's far-reaching cultural revolution in the early 1960s and the re-emergence of the Troubles in Ulster later that decade, Montague has sought to create for himself a fertile literary context where there had once been only acrimony and discontent, to redefine the traditions handed down to him and understand their relevance to the world at large, and to reintegrate and re-member the communities, both large and small, of which he is the self-appointed spokesman. In reassessing tradition and reformulating his context, Montague has also undertaken an ongoing revision and full-scale reordering of his body of work.

Early in his career, Montague participated in the cultural debates enforced by the tension between Joycean and Yeatsian imperatives. The rise of Liam Miller's Dolmen Press and the generation of poets it brought to attention (including Montague) acted as a mitigating and liberating force on the Irish literary scene, and helped to resolve

this long-standing debate and bestride its intractable categorizations. Montague has come to fulfill his own belief: "A man's life-work can be seen as a pattern, with individual works existing not so much in themselves but as part of a total elaboration and investigation of themes...." The multivalence of individual texts arising from their canonical reordering helps to illustrate and reinforce the creative tension between fixity and flux that informs and cements Montague's vision. The precarious atemporality of memory and the poet's mnemonic function is another aspect of this tension, yet it is also part of Montague's palliative and therapeutic art where the act of remembering, of confronting the past, history, or history's most immediate form--politics--works towards the re-remembering of communities as well as towards a healing of the wounds by which they have fallen into division or obscurity.

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## INTRODUCTION

John Montague is in an unique position among both poets of the North of Ireland and Irish poets of his own generation. Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1929, relocated early in childhood to his father's native parish of Garvaghey, County Tyrone, and taking up long-term residence in both the Republic and France, he is, by birth and background, the rightful beneficiary and claimant of at least four literary traditions. Like another prominent Irishman of American birth, Eamon de Valera, he has had a hand in the creation; or, more precisely, in the re-creation of Irish consciousness in the years of the South's transition from colonial backwater to aspiring competitor on the world stage. Yet quite unlike the perennial autocrat of the Fianna Fail, whose determination to "resign Ireland from the twentieth century" resulted in the entrenchment of old orthodoxies and chronic hardships, Montague's intent has been to raise Irish consciousness, to open it up to the enabling range of possibilities that reside within it and lie only slightly beyond it.<sup>1</sup> Where de Valera, in prescribing a formula for artists to match his political agenda of insularity and courageous self-sufficiency, looked inward to the reassuring recesses of ruralism and

religion, Montague's multiple allegiances allowed him to look backward to Ireland's pre-Revolutionary, pre-Cromwellian, and pre-Christian pasts as well as outward to more permissive and enlightening cultural models. In addition, he found room for exchange and, ultimately, points of contact between these traditions that would speak for the conceivability of a United Ireland (the symbol for which, the newly strung harp, Montague takes as his own) and, beyond that, for the underlying unity of global culture and human experience.<sup>2</sup>

Montague's integrating vision--his willingness to entertain and allow for "richness and narrowness, the world and [his] province"--makes him, in Irish terms, not so much a transitional writer as the catalyst, architect, and executor of that transition.<sup>3</sup> Montague was in the vanguard of those who sought not merely to fly by the nets of race and religion, as Joyce had done in exile fifty years earlier, but to turn those nets to their advantage. "One explores an inheritance," Montague has said, "to free oneself and others."<sup>4</sup>

Yet such declarations were not always part of Montague's artistic strategy. His early career, up to and even following the publication of his first full collection of verse, Poisoned Lands (1961), found him caught between the contradictory claims of iconostasis and iconoclasm, between what his country and province wanted from him and

what he wanted for himself. For an Irish writer at mid-century, this was familiar, if inhospitable, territory. Notwithstanding the overwhelming pressures towards conformity, state censorship not the least of them, Montague, along with most other dissatisfied and disaffected young writers of his generation, made every conscious attempt to distance, divest, and disengage himself from the "emotion," "deliberate Irishism," and "ruralism," that might be construed as acquiescence to the status quo.<sup>5</sup> Montague's early criticism, through which he first undertook to come to terms with and understand the traditions to which he was heir made no attempt to hide the continental, cosmopolitan, and pluralistic inclinations and allegiances of its subjects.<sup>6</sup>

Only by taking in hand and redefining the traditions that had been handed down to him, by seeing them not as "anachronistic defence[s] against experience," but as a richly creative and enabling means of addressing his own experience, could Montague achieve the "fertile balance" of conflicting demands, a compromise made without compromising his own artistic integrity.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the example set by French contemporaries and by the resurgence in Gaelic language verse, Montague has also had recourse to a vitalizing and liberating American tradition through the writers with whom he studied and associated at the American Seminar at Schloss Leopoldskron (1950), the Indiana Summer

School (1954), the Iowa Writers Workshop (1954-55), and the literary circles of San Francisco and Berkeley in the fifties and sixties.<sup>9</sup> This wider perspective and range of experience no doubt provided Montague with the wherewithal to distinguish between what was authentic and valid within his own literary context and its more restrictive and debilitating malformations. Montague's interrogation of tradition--his questioning of the value, motives and directives of the Irish Literary Revival and the nationalist objectives of the Revolution and its aftermath--has been transferred and translated into the demythologizing impulses and deconstructive treatments central to his numerous collections of verse, his novella, The Lost Notebook, and his book of short stories, Death of a Chieftain.<sup>9</sup>

Able disposed, not only by allegiance to his many 'parishes' but by his curious status as "the missing link" among Northern Irish poets, to assess and negotiate the extremities of Ireland's literary past, Montague has, in his capacity as editor, critic, anthologist, and translator, redeemed the reputations of his literary progenitors who had fallen out of favour or currency.<sup>10</sup> While remaking their legacy, often, it seems, in his own image, Montague has also created for his own contemporaries a fertile literary context that accepts the past and admits the outside world. As an interpreter, exponent and

disseminator of Irish tradition--enforcing its permanence but also renewing it into relevance--Montague has become a major participant in the process Seamus Deane has "brilliantly diagnosed" as "the attempt to describe what we have yet to build."<sup>11</sup>

For Montague, the past has no assured monumental life, any more than the art which addresses it can be rendered in a definitive text or can be fixed by a definitive reading.<sup>12</sup> "The only unchanging thing," he has said, "is change itself."<sup>13</sup> Given the primacy of process and mutability among his poetic preoccupations, Montague has set about proving the autonomous integrity as well as the 'multivalence' of individual poems by submitting his canon to constant revision and re-ordering.<sup>14</sup> Each of Montague's verse collections--but most of all the second edition of Poisoned Lands (1977) and the landmark ten-year achievement of The Rough Field (1962-1972)--can in some way be regarded as a 'selected poems,' a ransacking, re-assignment and accretion of all his previous work. Hence, Montague is committed not only to remaking his literary progenitors or to easing the progress of his most promising successors, but, in what might be described as an unremitting program of self-analysis and interpretation, to re-fashioning and creating afresh the tenor and scope of his literary achievement. In this regard, each recapitulation or textual re-alignment provides a valuable

insight not only into the growth of his poetic consciousness and artistic sensibility, but into the development of his political (and political here is used in the widest sense possible) conscience, what might be seen as his heightened responsibility towards the past and towards its impact upon the community.<sup>15</sup>

Inasmuch as Montague is a self-appointed assessor and custodian of Ireland's cultural memory, he is also fascinated, even obsessed, by its precarious atemporal preservation of the living moment and the living community.<sup>16</sup> "By Memory Inspired," to quote the patriotic ballad of the nineteenth century, Montague makes appreciable the presence of the past.<sup>17</sup> While that mnemonic or retrospective dimension necessarily enhances the theme of loss on which so much of his work is predicated, it also acts in defiance of the cruelty and divisions which are its cause.<sup>18</sup> Remembering thus becomes a means of 'remembering,' of reasserting kinship, of re-creating, within an imaginative context, lost but once shared worlds, and of healing or easing the divisions which brought about their collapse.

From the young writer who once sought to disengage himself from his "sickening community," Montague has elected himself to the status of its spokesman.<sup>19</sup> More than that, however, he has become an architect of integration, seeking to reconcile or at least contain seemingly

incompatible claims and ideologies, to see "Modernism," as his friend Robert Duncan had done, "as another wave of Romanticism," to reassert continuity where mere fragments remained, to create a fertile literary context, for himself and for other Irish writers, where there had once been only acrimony and discontent.<sup>20</sup> Montague's success has been in finding authentic and "redeeming patterns of experience" with which to embrace the totality, rather than a reductive stereotype, of Irish reality.<sup>21</sup> In reaching back to Ireland's past and its enabling repository of traditions while remaining sensitive to the relevance of international voices and universal themes, Montague has found the balance, the optimum intermediation, from which to address and better understand contemporary Ireland and the dynamics--personal and historical--which went into its making.

## NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>"One sometimes feels that Mr. De Valera's real wish for Ireland is that she might be able to resign from the twentieth century," Montague has written in "The First Week of Lent: A Political Snapshot," Threshold 1, no. 2 (Summer 1957), p. 71; De Valera, along with Ian Paisley, is cited by Montague as an example of what he calls "the partitioned intellect" in "The Unpartitioned Intellect: Dante, Savonarola, and an Old Sign," Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 12, no. 1 (June 1986), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>According to Montague the harp of the United Irishmen "is swathed in a motto: It is newly strung and shall be heard. My purpose is that we should realize its various tones. I would link it remotely with the Harp of Aeolus, the murmuring breath of romanticism, but more immediately to the events in my own country." John Montague, "The Unpartitioned Intellect," p. 8; the seal of the United Irishmen is featured at the end of "Patriotic Suite" (The Rough Field, fourth edition, Portlaoise: Dolmen Press, 1984, p. 70), a sequence about the dangers and ramifications of Irish nationalism, and, in the most recent edition of The Rough Field, it appears after the apocalyptic and surreal vision poem, "An Ulster Prophecy" (The Rough Field, fifth edition, Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1990, p. 29), a placement which, however ironically or remotely, reinforces the possibility of a united Ireland.

<sup>3</sup>Montague, "The Unpartitioned Intellect," p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Montague, "Preface" to The Rough Field, fourth edition, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup>Montague, "Introduction" to Poisoned Lands, second edition (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1977), p. 10.

<sup>6</sup>Montague's early studies of George Moore ("The Tyranny of Memory") and William Carleton ("Tribute to William Carleton"), for which he was awarded a Master of Arts in Anglo-Irish literature, take a less than traditional approach to these figures in identifying them with the arch-exile and heresiarch of Irish literature, James Joyce. Together, Moore, in his appropriation of "the French analytical approach" (p. 20), and Carleton, in writing [without sentimental falsification] of [the Irish] as they were, confronting the grim reality and giving it

form" (p. 14), afforded Montague the models and priorities for his own Janus-faced, sophisticated, yet authentically rural, sensibility. John Montague, "The Tyranny of Memory: A Study of George Moore," The Bell 13, no. 5 (August 1951), pp. 12-24; John Montague, "Tribute to William Carleton," The Bell 28, no. 1 (April 1952), pp. 13-24.

<sup>7</sup>John Montague, "In the Irish Grain," The Faber Book of Irish Verse (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 38; Montague, "The Unpartitioned Intellect," p. 8.

<sup>8</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "Biographical Notes" to The Figure in the Cave and other essays by John Montague (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989), pp. 222-223.

<sup>9</sup>According to Douglas Sealy, "this demystification had already begun in Forms of Exile...[Yet] if one dispenses with old mythologies it may be necessary to find other mythologies to take their place." Douglas Sealy, "The Sound of a Wound: An Introduction to the Poetry of John Montague from 1958 to 1988," Irish University Review: John Montague Special Issue 19, no. 1 (Spring 1989), pp. 9-10.

<sup>10</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," Irish University Review 19, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 79.

<sup>11</sup>Montague, "The Unpartitioned Intellect," p. 8.

<sup>12</sup>Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry Since Joyce (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 190.

<sup>13</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll (Dublin, 30 November 1988), Irish University Review 19, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 64.

<sup>14</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," Irish University Review 19, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 33.

<sup>15</sup>Montague has made a statement to the effect that "I don't see why poetry shouldn't be involved in politics--politics, that is, in the broadest sense of that word. When we look at poetry in the twentieth century from Spain through South America to Greece we see that in many situations the poet has served as the conscience of his race." John Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael: Interview with John Hewitt and John Montague on Northern Poetry and the Troubles," interview by Timothy Kearney, Crane Bag: The Northern Issue 4, no. 2 (1980), p. 88; Montague has also said that "to declare poetry to be apolitical seems to me a failure of nerve." John Montague,

"Global Regionalism: Interview with John Montague," interview by Adrian Frazier, The Literary Review 22, no. 2 (Winter 1979), p. 163.

<sup>16</sup>Montague has made the somewhat exorbitant claim, "it is I who am the possessor, and with the older people, the guardian, of what had been there." John Montague, "Global Regionalism: An Interview with John Montague," p. 165.

<sup>17</sup>"By Memory Inspired," in Anthology of Irish Verse, ed. Padraic Colum (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), pp. 105-106.

<sup>18</sup>The dinnseanchas, or indelible lore of place, is for Montague one means of overcoming history's trauma: "No rock or ruin, dun or dolmen / But showed memory defying cruelty / Through an image-encrusted name." John Montague, "A Lost Tradition," The Rough Field, fourth edition, p. 35.

<sup>19</sup>John Montague, "The Young Writer," The Bell: The New Writer--A Symposium 18, no. 7 (October 1951), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup>Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," Irish University Review 19, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 70.

<sup>21</sup>John Montague, "Pastorals," Poisoned Lands, second edition (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1977), p. 49.

**PART I**

**BROTHERS IN THE CRAFT: MONTAGUE AND THE CREATION OF CONTEXT**

## CHAPTER ONE

### JOHN MONTAGUE IN THE ERA OF INHIBITIONS

In the creative generations there is often a conspiracy of the mature and the brilliant young: a taking in hand, in hopes of a handing on....

Again and again, in the Fifties, 'we' attended Austin Clarke. He murmured in mild malice and directed his knife-glance curiously among us.

Out in the dark, on a tree branch near the Bridge, the animus of Yeats perched.

Another part of the City,  
Tonio Kröger, malodorous, prowled Inchicore.<sup>1</sup>  
(Thomas Kinsella, "Brothers in the Craft")

The literary scene of the newly-declared Republic of Ireland (1949) on to which John Montague arrived and sought to establish himself from the late 1940s to the early 1950s was one of almost unparalleled animosity, hostility, and intolerance, for the most part uncomprehending of any Northern context, harshly critical of any challenge to De Valera's "Holy Ireland," and, by and large, stubbornly resistant to literatures other than its own.<sup>2</sup> With the collapse of Maunsel and Roberts in 1926 and with the rapid deterioration of the more specialized Cuala Press after 1942, when it issued in a privately printed edition its last landmark publication, The Great Hunger, Ireland was left without the inimitable publishing houses that had supported and, in fact, made possible the great

Literary Revival earlier in the century.<sup>3</sup> With the possible exception of established firms like Gill & Macmillan or more limited and largely private operations like The Three Candles Press, the Bridge Press and Maurice Fridberg, reliance on the foreign markets of New York and especially of London became nothing short of absolute.<sup>4</sup> With the enforcement of British Board of Trade restrictions on the importation of Irish books, already risk-conscious Irish publishing houses were forced to recognize that, under these conditions, their markets would rarely extend beyond the borders of the country.<sup>5</sup> What literary life remained was relegated to the pages of the literary supplements of the daily press and periodicals like The Bell and The Dublin Magazine, where the energies of editorialists and commentators, that might otherwise be devoted to the actual creation of literature, were expended in bitter debates: over censorship, which had stymied literary activity since it was first instituted in 1929; over the "puritanism" implied in its principles and its operation; over the chronic lack of recognition for living writers; and, perhaps most of all, over the essence of "Irishness" as it had been decreed by Yeats and his opponents.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout the Second World War, the South had maintained its isolation through an uneasy policy of neutrality, the cost of which could be measured in the severity of Ireland's commodity shortages.<sup>7</sup> No matter how

stridently Ireland asserted its independence, in the years which followed the 'Emergency' it could not escape altogether the debilitating psychological and social ramifications, often referred to as "the malaise," associated more readily with Great Britain and its enforced program of austerity.<sup>8</sup> The spiritual paralysis diagnosed by James Joyce at the turn of the century and the voracious 'gombeenism' cited by W.B. Yeats shortly thereafter were now not only tolerated but condoned through the arms and offices of what was rapidly becoming a nationalist theocratic state. The public role of the artist and what was seen as his requisite duty to the values of the community threatened to overtake, if not eclipse, more personal concerns. Dissent or divergence from the established literary code not only meant public disfavour resulting in a form of internal exile, but often the necessity of seeking permanent refuge through exile.<sup>9</sup> The deaths of the two literary giants, Yeats and Joyce, shortly before and during the war, had left their bequests and precedents for younger writers: two opposing artistic strategies, neither of which could be appropriated according to the tenor of the times, neither of which could be enacted again with the same success and precision. Throughout the 1940s, there was the sense that the halcyon days of Irish literature, known to the world through the achievements of the Revival and the Revolutionary poets,

had run their course, and that the mainstream of Irish literature had in fact died out or was on the verge of extinction.<sup>10</sup> For what works, great or small, that had been produced since the foundation of the Free State, there were few critics of any distinction to assess them or to place them in the context of what had gone before.<sup>11</sup>

All these factors--social, political, and cultural --conspired at mid-century to make the lot of the young writer an especially unenviable one. Coming from rural Tyrone, where the sense of any sustaining literary context or tradition was even less appreciable, John Montague entered the melee of Dublin and its literary circles at a time when 'the young writer', if he could be found, distinguished himself not so much by his talents as by his vocal partisanship in the ongoing debates over Modernism, pluralism, censorship, or the artist's role within society.<sup>12</sup> The literary in-fighting of the time, while polarizing the community, produced an undue sense of anxiety, insecurity and, most of all, isolation, underscoring an absence, rather than excess, of influence.<sup>13</sup> With the Revival, apart from its newest malformations, long over and few writers able or permitted to flourish after its demise, young writers like Montague were forced, out of necessity, to look elsewhere, beyond Ireland, and even back, beyond the Revival, for the imaginative vitalism and models of cohesiveness crucial to

their own creative survival. Much of Montague's editorial and critical work since that time has been directed towards the compensatory recreation of a "fertile context"--a deliberate program of redrafting and reassessing the traditions, both within and without, Irish literature--undertaken not only for his own sake, but on behalf of those who had been unfairly overlooked and those who were about to launch their careers.<sup>14</sup>

During his lengthy literary apprenticeship, extending from the appearance of his first efforts in The National Student to the publication of Forms of Exile (1958), Montague was exposed to both the contrary impulses and general asperity of the Dublin milieu and, through the intercession of his mentor, Roger McHugh, to the mitigating influence and inciting ferment of the American poetry scene as it emerged in the early fifties at the Indiana Summer School, the Iowa Writers Workshop, and the more informal writers' gatherings at Berkeley. To say, however, that Montague's early years as a student and writer in Dublin were passed in complete adversity might be something of an overstatement. Though he was dismissed and shunned by the literary cliques at U.C.D., then controlled by Anthony Cronin and Pearse Hutchinson, he was, at the same time, the recipient of honours in a poetry competition judged by Austin Clarke and appointed film critic for The Standard and, from time to time, for The Bell.<sup>15</sup> Outside of these

film and theatre reviews, the issues and obstacles which Montague found it necessary to confront and investigate in his earliest articles and which have continued to engage his interest were those that had likewise been sources of discontent and defiant objection since the 1930s. Under siege, writers like Samuel Beckett and Mervyn Wall had dared to define and espouse a sensibility radically at odds with the narrow guidelines for the role and prerogatives of the artist as they were enforced by "the holy alliance between the Church, the new businessmen, and the politicians."<sup>16</sup> That Montague, writing in Dublin in the late forties and early fifties, made his reputation primarily as a critic and commentator rather than as a poet was entirely in keeping with the literary dynamics of the time. When, in the 1930s and 1940s, few Irish writers were able<sup>to</sup> find outlets for their creative ventures, periodicals and literary supplements offered what were perhaps the only outlets for creative expression (or creative frustration) of any kind.

That periodicals like Ireland Today (1936-38) had arisen to accommodate those voices of dissent in itself underscored how much the artist's place in society had changed in a period of less than twenty years.<sup>17</sup> The Irish Civil War had in fact been a "revolution of poets," a movement mobilized and sustained by their heroic, if at times jingoistic, idealism and by their belief in what

Seamus Deane has described as the common destiny of the individual and the community.<sup>18</sup> The prevailing sensibility of those years, which had proven to be a powerful antidote to British imperialism, marked the last stand, as much as the apotheosis, of romanticism in Irish literature and politics.<sup>19</sup> In the years that followed the foundation of the Free State, the legitimization and legislation of a cultural nationalism bordering on what Terence Brown has called "xenophobic suspicion," made the poet, and all artists for that matter, extensions, rather than instigators, of a dominant or popular ideology.<sup>20</sup> The officially condoned "national mode," with its "deep reverence for the Irish past," its rural bias, its iconographic identification with the Irish peasant in all his purity and simplicity, and its marked, at times almost Stalinist, intolerance for any aesthetic, such as Modernism or Surrealism, which presented a challenge to the idea of Irish self-sufficiency and cultural purity, was by and large a corruption or more plebeian version of the rustic romanticism Yeats had popularized at the turn of the century and later abandoned.<sup>21</sup> By the 1930s, the only option available to the Irish writer, as Terence Brown has observed, amounted to nothing less than an ultimatum:

he could furnish the new order with an art which, whether in its self-conscious nativism or idyllic celebration of the rural folk tradition, would nourish the dominant essentialist ideology of the State, or, disgusted with the unreality of such

programmatic artistic endeavours, he might seek to define his artistic identity in terms of opposition and dissent.<sup>22</sup>

Adherents to a state-approved artistic agenda, like Robert Farren, doyen of the literary establishment and author of the aggressively anti-modernist survey The Course of Irish Verse in English, explained their collective initiative, by degrees, as "immersion in Irish life; suffusion by Irish life; reaction on Irish life--and finally, a reaching from Irish life to the universal."<sup>23</sup> By Austin Clarke's way of thinking, Modernism could be understood only in terms of a disillusionment which posed a serious threat to the sanctity of Irish literary traditions, disciplines and conventions.<sup>24</sup> In levelling these criticisms, both Farren and Clarke were no doubt indebted to the prejudices of W.B. Yeats who, at a time when W. H. Auden and his fellow Pylon poets in England were embracing the vicissitudes of urban industrial society, discounted the efforts of those "determined to express the factory, the metropolis, that they may be modern...[defending] their type of metaphor by saying that it comes naturally to a man who travels to his work by tube."<sup>25</sup>

Against this capitulation to a nationalist, nativistic identity, which drew its strength from a Catholic, Gaelic, and rural mandate, were the objections voiced by Samuel Beckett in his article for The Bookman,

"Recent Irish Poetry" (1934):

Contemporary Irish poets may be divided into antiquarians and others, the former in the majority, the latter kindly noticed by Mr. W.B. Yeats as 'the fish that lie gasping on the shore'...This position, needless to say, is not peculiar to Ireland or anywhere else...But it is especially acute in Ireland, thanks to the technique of our leading twilighters.... The device common to the poets of the Revival and after in the use of which even beyond the jewels of language, they are at one, is that of flight from self-awareness, and as such might perhaps better be described as a convenience. At the centre there is no theme...And without a theme there can be no poem...But the circumference is an iridescence of themes--Oisín, Cúchulainn, Maeve, Tír-na-nóg, The Tain Bo Cuailgne, Yoga, the Crone of Beare....The poem of poems would embrace the sense of confinement, the getaway, the vicissitudes of the road, the wan bliss on the rim...What further interest can attach to such assumptions as those on which the convention has for so long taken its ease, that the first condition of any poem is an accredited theme, and that in self-perception there is no theme, but at best sufficient vis a tergo to land the practitioner into the correct scenery, where the self is either most happily obliterated or else so improved and enlarged that it can be mistaken for part of the decor?<sup>26</sup>

Mervyn Wall, ruminating on the Thirties, recalled not only the pressures towards conformity, but the actual hostility and revulsion towards writers among the ordinary people of what Benedict Kiely called "the Grocer's Republic." As he said, "there seemed to be no room in the new state for the intellect or the imagination; the atmosphere was oppressive."<sup>27</sup> Together, Yeats's maxims for the preservation of "the indomitable Irishry", issued

in "Under Ben Bulbin" where he admonished,

Sing whatever is well made,  
 Scorn the sort now growing up  
 All out of shape from toe to top...  
 Sing the peasantry, and then  
 Hard-riding country gentlemen  
 The holiness of monks...  
 Sing the lords and ladies gay...  
 Cast your mind on other days

and Joyce's injunctions to do precisely the opposite, established a level of expectation for young writers which few, even in their most ambitious attempts at imitation or technical virtuosity, could fulfil.<sup>28</sup> After the deaths of Yeats in 1939, of Joyce in 1941, and of Yeats's most obvious successor, F. R. Higgins also in 1941, the literary controversies of the time were heightened by an ineffable insecurity that there were few young writers on the horizon who could uphold, much less advance, the achievements which had begun with the Young Ireland movement in the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> With this burdensome legacy of prodigious achievement it was, as Seamus Deane has argued,

difficult for an Irish poet of the thirties and forties to see his function as anything less than redemptive. It was as though every poet was compelled by circumstances to see himself as a major poet if he was to become a poet at all. This stress on creativity had to be damaging. Much Irish poetry after Yeats would have been more remarkable if it could have settled for being less ambitious. This, I think, is at the least part of the truth about Denis Devlin, Brian Coffey, and Austin Clarke.<sup>30</sup>

The antagonistic sensibilities informing the controversies which raged throughout the thirties and forties were not merely intensifications of the older and more universal debates over the claims of tradition and the efficacy of the individual talent or, for that matter, over the validity of heroic as opposed to realistic renderings of experience, or even over the relative merits of Yeats and Joyce. More significantly, they were the result of a subsumption of all these issues and arguments according to the State's often self-serving understanding of them. Among those most severely disadvantaged by Ireland's post-revolutionary cultural 'chauvinism' was John Ryan, editor of the avowedly 'continental', though frequently esoteric, journal Envoy (1949-51). In his memoir, Remembering How We Stood, he charged:

Ingrown would be a fitting description of Irish culture since the birth of the Irish Free State back in 1922. The need to protect this delicate little green plant from the fresh winds of opinion and the germs of new ideas was considered paramount in the order of priorities by the Gaelic mandarins, who behaved as if this was their own private aspidistra. This self-appointed and self-perpetuating oligarchy saw to it that all windows and doors were securely locked and bolted.<sup>31</sup>

The Free State's cultural and political isolation throughout the war may have contributed, as Dillon Johnston claimed, to an "intellectual miasmus," but at the same time it also forced Irish writers to look at themselves, their publishing industry, and their society with a vociferous

self-scrutiny and inaugurated a decade of assessment where the most important questions raised centred on whether there was, or ever could be, such a thing as an Irish writer, on what his commitments to the community should be, and, given the shortage of young writers, on whether Irish literature had a future.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the Emergency and in the years of financial stagnation and cultural enervation which followed, writing became, more than anything else, a social issue--the source of endless stock-taking and prognostication. The premier literary periodical of the decade, Sean O'Faolain's (later Peadar O'Donnell's) The Bell (1940-54) was first and foremost a magazine dedicated to the interrogation of social issues and to the examination of Irish life "before any abstraction," with poems and short stories supplementing rather than dominating its quarterly ninety-page format.<sup>33</sup> The primary sociological dimension to The Bell, which gave way to a more diffuse eclecticism in its declining years, was duly noted by one-time staffer Anthony Cronin in his satiric roman-à-clef, The Life of Riley:

The Trumpet had been a smart literary and sociological magazine during the war, when it had been edited by a peasant historian rather more sophisticated than Prunchios, and when Ireland itself had been the home of flourishing movements. It had carried a deal of documentary reportage and statistics about fishing, as well as poems like abattoirs, full of bones and sinews and thighs and hearts, and jerky short stories about unevenly

articulate peasants whose utterances varied from monosyllabic grunts to phrases like, 'when you shook out the bright scarf of your laughter.' ...It was hard indeed to muster up enthusiasm for the extension of the carrigeen moss industry, or the possible utilisation of the various parts of the herring's anatomy, down to the tail and fin, in portable, prefabricated factories, themselves made out of herring-bone cement.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from the irrelevancies which, inadvertently, lent themselves to comic treatments like Cronin's, by far the most ubiquitous articles published in The Bell bore the titles "Poetry in Ireland To-Day" or "The Future of Irish Poetry" and offered varying perspectives from poets like Iremonger, Hewitt, McFadden, Clarke and Kavanagh on the old obstacles and fresh reservoirs for poetic activity at a time when economic hardships made luxuries of artistic, literary and intellectual pursuits and when, in the words of Sean O'Faolain, "our task has been less that of cultivating our garden than of clearing away the brambles."<sup>35</sup> Within the same period, similar surveys were undertaken in The Bell's rival, Envoy, the "organ of Ireland's rebellious writers," and, for an English readership, in Cyril Connolly's Horizon.<sup>36</sup> While agreeing on the fundamental diminution of Irish poetry as a force to be reckoned with on the international scene and making a unanimous acknowledgement of its weakening influence on Irish society, each sought out and isolated different reasons for the gradual disappearance and foreseeable demise, following the death of Yeats, of a mainstream Irish

literature.<sup>37</sup>

No matter how irremediable the division between traditionalists and continentalists, exemplified in broadest terms by the rivalry between The Bell and Envoy, a consensus existed on the issue of what the future held for Irish literature. Other than Austin Clarke's confident assertion (The Bell, Oct. 1946) that Irish poetry, while relegated to a precarious position through neglect at home and "a quiet boycott" in England, was nevertheless "both vigorous and lively," most assessments, including those by Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain, tended to concur with Patrick Kavanagh's cynical, if more clear-sighted, view:

The condition of Irish poetry is depressing just now. There is too much adulation for the well laid-out corpses on the slabs. Too many people are hugging death and getting angry at those who call upon them to come out into the living day. These are the optimists who create in me the most awful pessimism.<sup>38</sup>

For O'Faolain, an even deeper unease about the vitality and validity of prevailing modes and conventions manifested itself in the prediction that Irish literature would soon disappear altogether for lack of support and substance: "the Irish people are so satisfied with their Pattern that they have no interest in Destination. Like all peoples who have accepted a rigid ideology, they are frustrated by the completeness of their own conventions" (The Bell, Summer 1953).<sup>39</sup> Beyond the entrenchment of this formulaic or

programmatic approach, there was, as John Hewitt complained, a failure among writers to "move beyond the limits of the lyrical...towards the epic, the drama, the contemplation."<sup>40</sup> Frank O'Connor, writing for Horizon in 1942, saw this arrested growth not only as a signal to the "end of a period" resulting from the collapse of the framework of the Revolution after its ultimate success, but as a clear indication that Irish literature was, essentially, directionless and without a future.<sup>41</sup> While the parochialism of 1901 had been richly creative, the parochialism of 1951 was sterile.<sup>42</sup> A common complaint centred on the fact that Irish literature, by then produced by writers of almost exclusively "Catholic Irish stock," had ceased to have even a remotely compelling relationship to "any form of life."<sup>43</sup> Even Northern writers like Roy McFadden, who enjoyed what was, by comparison, a more vital milieu drawing its strength from Queen's University and its magazine, The Northman, believed that "literature should be an expression of new experience" and that the past, insofar as it had romanticised "the mists on the bogs," had "no virtue except as a moral for the present" (The Bell, July 1943).<sup>44</sup>

Though satire was known to have flourished best in "periods when ethical and rational norms were...not so powerful as to compel absolute conformity," the success of novels like At Swim-Two-Birds (written by Flann O'Brien and

published in 1939) was of some encouragement to writers like O'Connor who called for a return to satire as a means of combatting Ireland's sagging romanticism.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the most insightful commentary on the period came from the American critic John V. Kelleher, who identified the fundamental separation of a literature from its context. Kelleher believed the problem resided in the fallacy of realism, that what writers were asked to apprehend or replicate had either been exhausted and overworked long ago, or bore little resemblance to any form of life in the country at that time:

for forty years the Irish artist very seldom had to think of what to write about. He had only to reach out and take all he could from the common stock. Today the situation is different. He writes of a diminished reality. His Ireland is a little country in the butter and beef business. And if he is to make his material interesting, he must study it a great deal and then sustain his interpretation of it with a durable style. It is no wonder that the number of Irish artists has fallen off so sharply, or that so many of those left are historians. Pioneers are hell on resources....In so far as there is any large public for Irish literature it is a public with a decided taste for the romantic and the Celtic, however spurious....The others are not well-off. They are not, then, realists and students of history for profit. Their motives are artistic, their resolution, moral. They are trying to give Ireland a literature wholly expressive of itself as it is today, in the belief that good health begins with candid self-recognition. And because most of them cannot see in standard romanticised Irish history any living roots of the country they know, they are trying to discover the history that actually did produce the small familiar democracy.<sup>46</sup>

Apart from expatriation or a deliberate courting of

obscurity, the routes open to poets of the forties and early fifties were either to fabricate what Kavanagh called "a synthetic Irishness" or to risk being "regarded officially as a dangerous underworld type," in the process of finding a new poetic vocabulary.<sup>47</sup> Yet when the social concept of the function of literature was threatening to overtake and replace the individual concept and when adherence to the past was compromising acknowledgement of the present, there was little critical reaction or interplay between artist and audience to reward the writer for his acts of 'public service.'<sup>48</sup> As Kelleher noted, literary output was at an all-time low simply because there were few incentives to counterbalance the overwhelming problems which faced most writers.<sup>49</sup> Where, for poets like Valentin Iremonger, "the imminent defeat of the individual" was implicitly in the "elegiac note in recent Irish poetry," the "drift towards a more personal and real poetry" became all the more crucial.<sup>50</sup> Beyond the search for artistic self-awareness and self-determination, there was neither a "stability of mental atmosphere" or "a centralizing force"--"a Coole Park"--around which writers and intellectuals alike could rally.<sup>51</sup> "Irish poets are scattered," Iremonger complained, "they work out of reference to each other."<sup>52</sup>

If anything, the sense of a creative vacuum in Ireland was intensified by access and proximity to a

preponderant English poetry. Given A. Alvarez's theory of negative feedback, British poetry since Eliot could be mapped out as a succession of movements, each reacting, in some way, to its immediate predecessor.<sup>53</sup> Ireland, by comparison, had no literary movements because it could not accommodate or tolerate the sort of cultural dialectic necessary for their creation. New creative directions were inevitably forced underground. In John Kelleher's estimation,

The death of F. R. Higgins, following so closely the death of Yeats, suddenly revealed the scarcity of poets in a country where poets had been as plentiful as journalists elsewhere. And those who are left do not coalesce into a school. Their poems appear individually, with little reference to each other; and the absence of interplay and mutual criticism threatens a return of that provincial idiocyncrasy that plagued Irish poetry before Yeats taught it collaboration.<sup>54</sup>

Even the forums established to help sustain that sporadic and disparate activity--magazines like Lagan and Rann in Belfast, Poetry Ireland and Irish Writing in Cork, and Envoy in Dublin--were incapable of surviving more than a few years and all but Irish Writing had ceased operation by the time The Bell (which suspended operations for two years in the late forties) published its final issue in 1954.<sup>55</sup> At issue, however, was not the brevity or intermittence of the magazines' careers, since, as Hubert Butler noted, "Irish journals were like sorties from a besieged city--their effects could not be measured by

their duration."<sup>56</sup> Instead, magazines like Irish Writing, Poetry Ireland and The Bell, with their professed allegiance to no school or ideology, afforded poets like Montague, Murphy and Kinsella a neutral testing-ground for their earliest efforts.<sup>57</sup> Peadar O'Donnell was the first to publish Richard Murphy, while Anthony Cronin, working as assistant editor of The Bell, was the unlikely accessory to Thomas Kinsella's first published poems.<sup>58</sup>

Yet despite these milestones, the literary journals of the day, either alone or together, could not suffice as stimulus for an identifiable school or movement.<sup>59</sup> This deficiency was recognised, with a mixture of resignation and relief, by David Marcus in his introduction to the Young Writers Issue of Irish Writing (1953):

It may be asked if there is, otherwise, any marked connection between the work of these young writers, or whether the poets herein presented raise a recognisably Irish voice or show any evidence of the high tradition to which they belong. It would be hazardous, if tempting, to define any kind of formal link. No literary movement is current just now in Ireland--unless it be that of Mr. Clarke and of Mr. O'Farachain [Robert Farren] in poetry, and the question arises whether its absence is quite the advantage or, at any rate, the matter of indifference it could appear to be from the purely individual standpoint.<sup>60</sup>

Bounded by the ardent socialism lurking beneath The Bell's so-called non-alignment and the irascible pluralism of Envoy, the new Irish writer, according to Robert Greacen's view in 1947, negotiated these extremes and "sought neither

to deny nor accept harp or sickle or hammer."<sup>61</sup>

After Sean O'Faolain made his dire pronouncement that "no young men were appearing" to replace the likes of Yeats, AE, Higgins, Moore, Joyce and Gregory, there was launched a desperate yet very deliberate cultivation of the young talents who, up to that point, had been "so completely ignored by Irish publishing houses."<sup>62</sup> If Irish literature were to have a future, at least according to the prognostications of its remaining writers, the young writer would, necessarily, have to answer to a multitude of conflicting demands. He would need to develop a satiric voice, to move beyond the lyric, to dispense with the advice of his elders, to inaugurate new artistic directions with or without the added security of a corresponding movement, to cultivate and maintain an audience without catering to popular tastes, and to look outward, to Europe and America, and yet maintain a balanced perspective on his most influential Irish predecessors.<sup>63</sup> The very possibility that young writers, even those who could meet a few of these demands, would cease to emerge elicited a wave of response from Ireland's literary journals, each of which not only espoused the cause of the young writer as an inalienable feature of editorial policy, but put those overtures to the test in special numbers devoted to both the creative output and critical input of Ireland's fledgling writers.<sup>64</sup>

From the start, journals like Envoy and The Bell were the nominal, if not actual, supporters of rising talent. O'Donnell, whose motives were, by many accounts, suspect, sympathized that young writers were "badly in need of a day of hope."<sup>65</sup> The editors, however, promised more than they delivered. To Anthony Cronin's way of thinking, O'Donnell "may have stormed on about the young, but when it came down to practical preferences, he seemed to be heavily in favour of the compositions of their elders."<sup>66</sup> In the spirit of competition, Envoy made it among its prime objectives to help and nurture young writers, to afford them a perspective on "the relative importance of their predecessors," and, with characteristic prejudice, to allow them to gain this perspective for themselves so long as their discussions disregarded all questions of "Irishness."<sup>67</sup> From the initial "rallying point" Envoy provided for young writers, Kavanagh's pretense of benevolence was soon superseded by a conviction that "charity which condones mediocrity was a lesser literary virtue than truth."<sup>68</sup> However limited Envoy's impact over a period of three years, its failure in 1951 struck a blow to the few young writers active at the time, exacerbating their already appreciable dissatisfaction and paranoia, and provoking more radical forms of protest, such as The Bell's October 1951 symposium issue on the young writer.<sup>69</sup>

More a forum for outspoken and inflammatory

viewpoints than an accurate reflection of creative ability, the Young Writer's Issue, along with Anthony Cronin's preliminary remarks in the September 1951 issue of The Bell, provoked controversy for its glaring indictment of the literary establishment and the conspiracy of forces, both social and political, which kept it in place. The New Writer - A Symposium included essays from Valentin Iremonger, Mary Beckett, John Ryan, James Plunkett, and, not least of all from Montague himself.<sup>70</sup> This issue concluded with a final rejoinder from Frank McManus, doyen of Radio Eireann, defender of the dogmas of orthodox Catholic scholasticism and the memory of a racial past.<sup>71</sup> Rather than establishing new criteria for their creative agendas, its contributors used the platform offered by the issue to register the external causes of their grievances and to rehearse the old dilemmas that had both plagued and restricted Irish writers for over a quarter-century.

In what was part apology, part repudiation, the contributors inveighed against the traditional nemeses of the artist--what James Plunkett called "Chauvinism" or nationalism gone sour, the domination of the Irish bishops and their inquisitorial power over the Censorship Board, the influence of "the professional peasant," and what was seen as the conspiracy of the political parties to control the national dailies.<sup>72</sup> Deprived of external stimulus and denied the power to speak forthrightly or with any degree

of self-determination through their own newspapers and journals, the young Irish writer was destined to an existence circumscribed by what John Ryan called a triad of "poverty, obscurity, and hatred."<sup>73</sup> Resentment toward literary elders, had, by that time, deepened into a resentment of the energies that were expended in the very act of repudiation.<sup>74</sup> Solutions, when they were proposed, called for a more impartial encouragement of young talent through the foundation of magazines intended especially for the dissemination of their work and for the exorcism of what James Plunkett called "The National Ghost" through the continued discussion between "haunted" established writers and those for whom the past had less authority.<sup>75</sup> If these would not suffice, there remained the implacable alternatives of collaboration with "the Irish corpse clique" (the so-called literary establishment) and outright insubordination, the last of which brought with it its own compromises and consequences including loss of social status and exile.<sup>76</sup>

If The New Writer - A Symposium was any indication, the young writer was becoming an extremely useful, if precious, commodity. Ironically, participants in the project were made the unwitting but none the less expedient instruments of the very bodies, ideologies, and institutions they sought to reform. Commenting on his own unofficial stewardship of the issue, Anthony Cronin cited

the underlying sense of betrayal:

The wretched symposium had materialized at last, but what my contribution to it cost me, in expense of spirit, in wastage of shame, I dread even now to think. To allow the word young to be used of one; to use it oneself, as if unblushingly; to flounder in the geographer's terminology, as if one cared; to be induced to play the role of member of a generation in order that the fiction might be maintained that something of public importance happened in the wretched place every so many years: all this agency, for God only knows what reason I endured...I sank rapidly, I don't deny it, and that awful symposium marked a definite stage in my downfall.<sup>77</sup>

For Montague's own part, his acumen and outspokenness in the piece titled "The Young Writer" cost him his reviewing job with the orthodox and conservative Standard and aligned him unalterably with the outsiders and independent thinkers for whom his admiration had already been expressed in his previous soundings, in a report on an American cultural seminar, and on George Moore in The Bell.<sup>78</sup> The Montague who emerged in that brief eight-page essay was one almost totally at odds with prerogatives of the past and its complicity with the community as well as with the artistic uniformity those agencies had enforced. In nothing short of manifesto, Montague argued,

No complete rejection of the past will suffice but a ruthless severing of dead branches that black out the sunlight....It would appear that Ireland needs a contemporary literature, that any attempts to develop any past tradition of writing, beyond insisting on a basis of observation, and some sense of the line of past achievement, is harmful....Under savage pressure

from the sort of people responsible for Censorship Board, and the atrophy of the Abbey Theatre, The Bell has developed an argumentative complex, and by constantly keeping in mind the social angle or problem has tended to lead writing away from its real purpose at the present time, the imaginative and honest expression of the writer's own problems, not those of his sickening community, though one will indirectly be reflected in the other."<sup>9</sup>

Though far removed from the mature writer who would later appoint himself the mediating voice of the community, Montague's primary concern as a young writer was with the way in which other writers, including O'Connor and O'Faolain, continued to "hanker after the easy give and take of village life" and to enshrine "the mind of the smaller community" without rethinking or taking into consideration their relevance to any real form of Irish life. "They would rarely write about a tractor, a cinema, a fight in a dance-hall, or a carload of drunken young men riding to a seaside resort."<sup>10</sup> In his adulation for the Auden group in England, and in recognition of Ireland's awkward "semi-stage between provincialism and urbanisation," Montague insisted that new writing, "should deal with the problems of the individual against this uneasy, semi-urban setting"--like John Osborne or Alan Sillitoe in England.<sup>11</sup>

As far as Ireland's prevailing "'existentialist feeling,' mood of apathy, and intellectual weariness" were concerned, Montague found equal fault with the "failure of

talent among young writers and a decline in creativity among their elders."<sup>82</sup> Post-Emergency Ireland was, for Montague, pervaded by a general malaise resulting from an isolation that was not only a political condition, but, in purely literary terms, the side-effect or aftermath of "a conscious attempt to create a specifically Irish literature."<sup>83</sup> Not surprisingly, the imposition of such constraints after 1922, at least by Montague's reckoning, could produce no other literature than one dominated by the theme of frustration.<sup>84</sup> Given the choice between "the undoubted achievements of an exhausted tradition and the retarded growth of a real contemporary Irish literature," neither of which was wholly acceptable, Montague saw the possibility of exile as not only beneficial but necessary.<sup>85</sup> Beyond his injunction that the serious writer should write out of his own experience, Montague rested his hopes for the survival of a literary culture on the retrieval of a long-displaced satiric sensibility, on the development of a more objective and necessarily wary attitude to elders who had sought to proselytize creed or nationality through their writings, and on the wherewithal simply to get on with work at hand, avoiding, at all costs, the conflicts and eccentric showmanship that had blighted the careers of Kavanagh and Behan.<sup>86</sup> New magazines were also part of Montague's agenda, especially ones of critical relevance that would welcome works, however difficult or

experimental, by new Irish writers, and that would raise the standards of those works by placing them on a par with work from elsewhere. Not least of all, Montague admonished his contemporaries to avoid the very sort of controversy incited and embodied by the special issue itself.<sup>87</sup>

"The Young Writer" not only amounted to an apology for the developing sensibility also in evidence in Montague's earliest published poems, but also served to forecast and explain his prolonged absences from Ireland over the next twenty years, and to introduce the as yet inchoate outlook of global regionalist that would later become his hallmark and presiding aesthetic.<sup>88</sup> Around the same time, Montague outlined in less polemical terms his poetic intentions and modernist inclinations in a letter to Seumus O'Sullivan, editor of The Dublin Magazine:

I admire Rilke, Ezra Pound, Austin Clarke, and Wallace Stevens more than most modern poets, but I realize the danger of such subtle complex models for a young writer seeking to express himself in a more compressed, more direct, yet still clearly lyrical form with the images as method, clear controlled thought as the aim.... I would like to think I had learned something from the lyrical directness and musical smoothness of poets as separate as Éluard and F.R. Higgins -- certainly I never strain a line to gain a rhyme but work by a developed sense of vowel and consonant structure.<sup>89</sup>

Even at this early stage, the poems which Montague wrote as an undergraduate and post-graduate student, and which appeared in The National Student, The Dublin

Magazine, and The Bell between 1949 and 1952 accommodated what Honor O'Connor has observed as a swirling or spiralling "movement from daily experience inwards to quiet reflection and deep introspection on the one hand; and movement, courageous and life-loving, outwards from the centre of consciousness to the uncertainties of the future on the other."<sup>90</sup> The earliest of these, poems like "Sermon for Sunday" and "Daily I Awake," are the accretions of the aspiring poet's search for self-awareness and self-discovery, circumstanced by loneliness, sophomoreic confusion, uncertainty, and an estrangement arising from a sense of urban displacement.<sup>91</sup> What redeems them from mere self-indulgence and self-absorption is an incisive fidelity to experience and to exact detail, and an affirmation of the mnemonic and restorative capacity of poetry itself: "I can mould my memories into words / And feel along my sinews the electric of song."<sup>92</sup> Slightly later poems, including "Poem," "Rejoicing Children in the Morning Make," and an early version of "Rome, Anno Santo," "Poem (for Francis Stuart--Paris, July, 1950)," far from the mere experiential, register the benefits of a broadened experience and, in O'Connor's words, "reach out beyond his own search for identity to the wider issues of preserving one's identity and integrity 'From treacherous things, from things unstable.'"<sup>93</sup>

Nowhere are the pressures enacted upon the writer

clearer than in "Poem," which not only touches upon Montague's entry into the literary melee of the time, but also offers insight into his later preoccupations with place and the artistic process:

A man creates his world, call this one  
 A friend and that an enemy;  
 Making this particular inch of sky and space  
 His heart's rare territory;  
 Calling on his own strange gods to bless  
 Rough device of chair and chimney.

And yet, position taken, every stone  
 Deliberately weighed with certainty;  
 Swearing daily that the crowd beyond  
 Compel us to all savagery:

Knowing that others whom his heart must now  
     mock to live,  
 Each in his individual way, has trust and  
     love to give.<sup>94</sup>

An unimpeachable sense of deprivation, where "in learning hunger one learns other things," of displacement and of dispossession--the awareness that "we must persevere in loving / In each loss discovering strength"--underlies all these poems.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, it is counterpoised by a resolve, strengthened by the knowledge gained elsewhere, by the "wisdom" like "counterbrand smuggled in / In many strange ways" to overcome, if not reverse, that sense of loss.<sup>96</sup> Here and, in particular, in "Poem (For Francis Stuart)," the figure of the poet is, like Stuart himself, the consummate outsider whose courage and perseverance, as O'Connor has observed, "are tested to the utmost" by the social and intellectual climate of post-war Europe.<sup>97</sup>

These early poems, devoid of any sense of his Ulster background and absorbed in the quest for identity, literary or otherwise, still manage to present the chrysalis of Montague's later themes and preoccupations. Already, there is the informing creative tension between flux--the heightened awareness of "the hour's brevity" and of "things unstable"--and fixity, represented in one of his poems by the certitude and security of "the burnished future" which "rests like unbroken honey on its shelf."<sup>98</sup>

By no coincidence, Montague's first full collection of verse was published in the year that he left Dublin to take up residence in Paris for what would be an extended exile of close to ten years. Poisoned Lands (1961) is perhaps the fullest expression of Montague's dissatisfaction with Ireland, "the sheltered edge of Europe," and its puritanical, debilitating, and often mean-spirited insularity.<sup>99</sup> Reflecting on the period, Montague has said, "what prevailed in the poetic world of Dublin was acrimony and insult; a poem was to be kicked, not examined; the begrudgers ruled."<sup>100</sup> Capturing the spirit of miasma and disaffection he also dwells upon with unfond retrospection in The Lost Notebook, Poisoned Lands is a bleak testament to the ways in which the Irish Revolution betrayed itself, the Irish people, and any hopes for "renewed activity" in the speciously nationalistic and "casual, graceless unheroic" years following the Civil

War.<sup>101</sup> The "Irish dimension" to experience is "to always be at the periphery of event," to watch world events unfold at the cinema--as the speaker juxtaposes his own sheltered childhood with the childhoods of Nazi death-camp survivors in "Auschwitz, Mon Amour"--with a vague sense of detachment and unreality.<sup>102</sup> The memory of Yeats and his nationalism are invoked to surprising effect in the sequence, "The Sheltered Edge." In writing "A Meditation in Time of Civil War," Yeats never foresaw the post-revolutionary malaise-- "The greater task of swimming / Against a slackening tide"--intimating the heroic gone horribly wrong in Montague's "Incantation in Time of Peace" (1953):<sup>103</sup>

At times in this island, dreaming all day  
 In the sunlight and rain of attained revolutions,  
 We are afraid, as the hints pile up, of disaster  
 Enlarged as a dinosaur, rising from the salt flats,  
 The webbed marshes of history, making the hand  
     tremble  
 Hardly knowing why.

At times, we watch the gradual progress of days  
 In this last casual fortress, separate by sea  
 And by choice from all men's fears and alarms,  
 All signs of shattered unity referred  
 To the benign and exclusive care of the Trinity,  
 Who today in our hour of need, seems  
     indifferent....  
 ("Incantation in Time of Peace," PL, pp. 32-33)

Montague's concern in the 1961 edition of Poisoned Lands is with Irish life and its current condition of decay and corruption, not as it had been romanticized in previous decades. So, even when he writes about 'traditional subjects' where "eyes are rheumy with racial

memory" ("The Sean Bhean Vocht," p. 16), he proceeds to dismantle those myths and prescriptives that have been handed down to him. "Old Mythologies," with its "impossibly epic morning," demonstrates how the imagination cultivates the heroic and how the heroic, in turn, falsifies.<sup>104</sup> W. B. Yeats's injunctions to "sing of peasantry and hard-riding country gentlemen" are exposed as fanciful conceits by the "chillingly detached parable of the cycle of violence" of "Wild Sports of the West" and its revisionist reading of class conflict in colonial Ireland.<sup>105</sup> While its title recalls W. H. Maxwell's book about hunting, shooting, and fishing in the West of Ireland, the predatory spirit here is anything but recreational:<sup>106</sup>

Not so beautiful the bandy bailiff,  
Churlish servant of an alien will:  
Behind the hedge a maddened peasant  
Poises his shotgun for the kill.

Evening brings the huntsman home,  
Blood of pheasants in a bag:  
Beside a turfrick the cackling peasant  
Cleanses his ancient weapon with a rag.  
("Wild Sports of the West," PL, p. 29)

The rural orthodoxies prescribed by Montague's immediate predecessors are shown in a less than favourable light in "Regionalism, or Portrait of the Artist as a Model Farmer" (Poisoned Lands, p. 56), a poem which brings into focus the "extreme positions" of provincialism and continentalism which had denied each other since the beginning of the century.<sup>107</sup> Montague's distrust of art arising from the

local alone is underscored by his use of doggerel rhyme, "deep," "sleep," and "keep," and by his allusion to the "muttering" "small voice" of the doggedly parochial artist which needs to be amplified by a "microphone" in order to be heard. Here, continentalism and pluralism are equated with contamination, a poisoning of closely-guarded and enshrined native traditions:

Wild provincials  
 Muttering into microphones  
 Declaring that art  
 Springs only from the native part;  
 That like a potato it best grows  
 Planted deep in local rows....  
 Shield[ed] from all might harm her...  
 My tiny sput will comfort me  
 In my fierce anonymity.

The search for less constraining artistic strategies and modes of thinking enters into "Rome, Anno Santo," Montague's revision of "Poem" (published in The Bell, 1952) written in dedication to Irish literary outsider Francis Stuart, in which wisdom, at least within a Irish context, is revealed as "contraband" that must be "smuggled in." Here, the poet's secular pilgrimage to Italy in search of knowledge is pitted against the "girded" Irish matrons' "ignorant" religious pilgrimage during Holy Year. Even the characteristic architectural styles of the Holy See and Dublin counterpoint the extremes of release and restriction.<sup>10\*</sup> While exile proves beneficial for Montague himself, it affords anything but freedom to "Murphy in

Manchester," whose life as a factory-worker, after the initial euphoria of escape from Ireland wears off, merely enforces his sense of displacement:

He finds his feet and hands  
 Enlarged, become like foreign lands.  
 A great city is darkness, noise  
 Through which bright girls move  
 Like burnished other children's toys.  
 Soon the whistling factory  
 Will lock him in:  
 Half-stirred memories and regrets  
 Drowning in that iron din.  
 ("Murphy in Manchester," PL, p. 15)

Poems which Montague suppressed in the original edition and others to which he made subtle and substantial changes with its re-issue in 1977 tell quite a different story about his evaluation of the efficacy of his native traditions and rural background. Reflecting on the editorial decisions that he had made sixteen years earlier, Montague has said:

I still suppressed poems in a way that now seems part of the malaise of the period, an unconscious censorship, a fear of emotion, of deliberate Irishism, of ruralism. How could we anticipate that the harshness of factory farming would revive the bucolic dream?<sup>109</sup>

The revision of Poisoned Lands "became not so much the case of an older writer wishing to correct his younger self as of trying to release that earlier self from the chains of time and place."<sup>110</sup> That time-honoured customs like mumming can be nurturing is suggested by the "womblike" atmosphere

of the farmhouse in the revised version of "The Mummer Speaks" (PL, p. 36). Perhaps afraid, like the narrator of The Lost Notebook, that his poems would fall into the hands of unsympathetic readers who would "righteously destroy the sinful documents," Montague originally withheld the Paddy Maguiresque poems of rural claustrophobia and sexual frustration, "Midland Village" and "Song of the Lonely Bachelor."<sup>111</sup> The desire to appear a 'Citizen of the World' and to emulate "the kind of modern poetry [he] admired" perhaps accounted for Montague's flaunting of French poetry and for his countervailing suppression of poems like "Tim" (1960-'76), a Hughesian elegy to the memory of his first horse, and "A Drink of Milk," a poem which holds in perfect balance both the factory farming and cat's "radar" representative of the "transistor" age and the "old fashioned relish," presiding statuary of the Virgin Mary, and the sense of familiarity (the farmer, after all, has a name--"Sean") that speak for an earlier age.<sup>112</sup> Montague's initial censorship of his own manuscript exposed the pressures incumbent upon the young writer of his time: to reject or repudiate what was expected of him by his literary elders and not to appear over-zealous where assimilation of his rural experience was concerned. These were precisely the things which Montague admired about Thomas Kinsella and, in a gesture of mutual adulation, which Kinsella admired about Montague.<sup>113</sup> Reviewing

Kinsella's Another September in 1959, Montague wrote:

[it] is one of the most purely poetic books I have read by a contemporary. A few place-names apart, it gives little indication of time or location, while religion and nationalism, our famous local nets of the soul, seem irrelevant. And yet, even this seems oddly appropriate: that a country so racked by religion and political bias should breed a young poet so totally uninterested in either is a neat revenge of history.<sup>114</sup>

In praising Kinsella for his evasion of Irishism, Montague also found room to praise their joint publisher, the Dolmen Press, as "a shining light."<sup>115</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "Brothers in the Craft," Quarry: British and Irish Poetry Issue 39, no. 1 (Winter 1990), p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Frank O'Connor, "The Future of Irish Literature," Horizon 5, no. 25, (January 1942), p. 60; Sean O'Faolain, "Ireland After Yeats," The Bell 18, no. 11 (Summer 1955), p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>Terence Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922-1985 (London: Fontana Press, 1985), p. 124.

<sup>4</sup>Liam Miller, "The Heirs of Saint Columba: Publishing in Ireland," The Times Literary Supplement, 3655, 17 March 1972, p. 316.

<sup>5</sup>Peadar O'Donnell, "The Bell Suspends Publication," The Bell 16, no. 1 (April 1948), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup>Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, pp. 73, 196; John Ryan founded Envoy on the premise that "far too much has been made of this quality [Irishness] to the exclusion of normal values and works of art." John Ryan, "Mid-Way," foreword to Envoy 1, no. 2 (January 1950), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, pp. 175-176.

<sup>8</sup>According to Anthony Cronin, "Dublin in the late nineteen-forties was an odd and, in many respects, unhappy place. The malaise that seems to have affected everywhere in the aftermath of the war took strange forms there, perhaps for the reason that the war itself had been a sort of ghastly unreality." Anthony Cronin, Dead as Doornails: a chronicle of life (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1976), p. 2; shortly after the war, Valentin Iremonger wrote, "the malaise in European society was so advanced that it was obvious any attempt to cure it must commence with the surgeon's knife." Valentin Iremonger, "Aspects of Poetry To-Day," The Bell 12, no. 3 (June 1946), p. 246.

<sup>9</sup>Sean O'Faolain, writing in 1953, said that "the social concept of the function of literature was beginning to replace the individual concept." Sean O'Faolain, "Ireland After Yeats," The Bell 18, no. 11 (Summer 1953),

p. 42; Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, pp. 167-168; writing for The Bell in 1951, John Montague declared "the serious young writer will inevitably have to face the problem of exile...it is difficult to feel that Ireland...has any real claim on him." John Montague, "The Young Writer," The Bell: The New Writer--A Symposium 18, no. 7 (October 1951), p. 11.

<sup>10</sup>Patrick Kavanagh compared poems currently being written to "perfectly laid-out corpses on a slab" in "Poetry in Ireland To-Day," The Bell, no. 16 (April 1948), p. 37; John V. Kelleher had, three years earlier, referred to Sean O'Faolain's justifiable fear that "Irish literature will virtually cease to exist within ten years" in "Irish Literature To-Day," The Bell, 10, no. 4 (July 1945), p. 338.

<sup>11</sup>Anthony Cronin, "The Literary Pages of the Daily Press," The Bell 17, no. 4 (July 1951), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>Montague has remarked of his status as a Northern writer: "there was no tradition for someone of my background to work in; except for the ahistorical genius of Kavanagh just across the border, there had not been a poet of Ulster Catholic background since the Gaelic poets of the eighteenth century." John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," Irish University Review 19, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 79.

<sup>13</sup>Kelleher, "Irish Literature To-Day," The Bell 10, no. 4, p. 348.

<sup>14</sup>Montague, "Preface" to Figure in the Cave and other essays, ed. Antoine-te Quinn (Syracuse: Syracuse Univeristy Press, 1989): x.

<sup>15</sup>John Montague, Interview by author, 23 May 1987, Buffalo, N.Y., tape recording. To Montague's advantage, he found a mentor in Roger McHugh, a memeber of the faculty at U.C.D. Montague's work was also selected for radio broadcast by Austin Clarke.

<sup>16</sup>Sean O'Faolain, "Ireland After Yeats," The Bell 18, no. 11 (Summer 1953), p. 40.

<sup>17</sup>Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, p. 169.

<sup>18</sup>Mervyn Wall, "Michael Smith asks Mervyn Wall Some Questions about the Thirties," interview by Michael Smith, Lace Curtain 4 (1971), p. 74; Valentin Iremonger, "The Young Writer," The Bell 18, no. 7, p. 14; Robert F.

Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry: Tradition and Continuity from Yeats to Heaney (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 4.; Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea," Ireland's Field Day (London: Hutchinson, 1985), p. 52.

<sup>19</sup>Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea," p. 52.

<sup>20</sup>Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, pp. 312-313.

<sup>23</sup>Robert Farren, The Course of Irish Verse (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947), p. 133.

<sup>24</sup>Austin Clarke equated Modernism with a mood of disillusionment in Poetry in Modern Ireland, second edition (Dublin: The Three Candles Press, 1961), p. 58.

<sup>25</sup>W. B. Yeats, Essays and Introductions (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 525, quoted by Robert F. Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, p. 40.

<sup>26</sup>Samuel Beckett, "Recent Irish Poetry," Lace Curtain 4 (Summer 1971; reprinted from The Bookman, 1934), pp. 58-59 (page references are to reprinted article).

<sup>27</sup>Mervyn Wall, "Michael Smith asks Mervyn Wall Some Questions About the Thirties," p. 84.

<sup>28</sup>W. B. Yeats, "Under Ben Bulbin," Collected Poems, second edition (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 400.

<sup>29</sup>Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup>Seamus Deane, "The Appetites of Gravity: Contemporary Irish Poetry," Sewanee Review 84, nos. 1-2 (1976), p. 200.

<sup>31</sup>John Ryan, Remembering How We Stood: Bohemian Dublin at Mid-Century (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p. 17.

<sup>32</sup>Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup>Sean O'Faolain, "This Is Your Magazine," The

Bell 1, no. 1 (October 1940), p. 8.

<sup>34</sup>Anthony Cronin, The Life of Riley (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), pp. 113, 115.

<sup>35</sup>Sean O'Faolain, "Ireland After Yeats," p. 45.

<sup>36</sup>Hubert Butler, "Envoy and Mr. Kavanagh," The Bell 17, no. 6 (September 1951), p. 33.

<sup>37</sup>John V. Kelleher stated in 1945 that "there is no longer a mainstream Irish literature." "Irish Literature To-Day," The Bell 10, no. 4 (July 1945), p. 339.

<sup>38</sup>Austin Clarke, "Poetry in Ireland To-Day," The Bell 13, no. 1 (October 1946), pp. 157, 155; Patrick Kavanagh, "Poetry in Ireland To-Day," The Bell, no. 16 (April 1948), p. 42.

<sup>39</sup>Sean O'Faolain, "Ireland After Yeats," The Bell 18, no. 11 (Summer 1953), p. 45.

<sup>40</sup>John Hewitt, "Some Notes on Writing In Ulster," The Bell 18, no. 4 (July 1952), p. 202.

<sup>41</sup>Frank O'Connor, "The Future of Irish Literature," Horizon 5, no. 25 (January 1942), p. 61.

<sup>42</sup>Hubert Butler, "Envoy and Mr. Kavanagh," p. 36.

<sup>43</sup> Frank O'Connor, "The Future of Irish Literature," pp. 59, 62.

<sup>44</sup>Roy McFadden, "Poetry in Ireland: A Discussion," The Bell 6, no. 4 (July 1943), p. 343.

<sup>45</sup>Robert C. Elliott, "Satire," Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 739; Frank O'Connor, "The Future of Irish Literature," p. 63.

<sup>46</sup>John V. Kelleher, "Irish Literature To-Day," pp. 340-1.

<sup>47</sup>Patrick Kavanagh quoted by John Ryan, "Mid-Way," p. 9; Kelleher, "Irish Literature To-Day," p. 344.

<sup>48</sup>Anthony Cronin quoted W.B. Yeats' complaint, made in 1936, that "we have no critical press in this country." "The Literary Pages of the Daily Press," p. 5.

<sup>49</sup>John V. Kelleher saw the situation as especially uncongenial: "In Ireland the artist and independent thinker must stand alone, comforted by no popular sympathy and understanding, drawing steadily on his own incremented morale." "Irish Literature To-Day," p. 347.

<sup>50</sup>Valentin Iremonger, "Aspects of Poetry To-Day," The Bell 12, no. 3 (June 1946), pp. 246, 248.

<sup>51</sup>Valentin Iremonger, "Poets and Their Publishers," The Bell 14, no. 1 (April 1947), p. 79; Kelleher, "Irish Literature To-Day," p. 343.

<sup>52</sup>Valentin Iremonger, "Poets and Their Publishers," p. 79.

<sup>53</sup>A. Alvarez outlines the principle of negative feedback in "The New Poetry or Beyond the Gentility Principle," Introduction to The New Poetry (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1962), p. 21-22.

<sup>54</sup>John V. Kelleher, "Irish Literature To-Day," p. 348.

<sup>55</sup>According to Terence Brown, Irish Writing, edited first by David Marcus and Terence Smith and later by Sean J. White, published its final issue in 1957. Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, p. 226.

<sup>56</sup>Hubert Butler, "Envoy and Mr. Kavanagh," p. 33.

<sup>57</sup>In 1954 the editor of Irish Writing, S.J. White wrote "Irish Writing has tried to be unfashionable. We said in issue no. 1 'our concern lies with what is vital in Irish letters and this we hope to give--may our symbol be the cornucopia!--in all its abounding variety.'" "Editorial," Irish Writing, no. 28 (September 1954), p. 5.; in the first issue of The Bell, editor Sean O'Faolain wrote "The Bell has, in the usual sense of the word, no policy." "This is your Magazine," The Bell 1, no. 1 (October 1940), p.5; John Jordan, editor of the revived Poetry Ireland (1962) declared that his magazine was "committed to no school, no fashion, no ideology." "Editorial," Poetry Ireland, second series, no. 1 (Autumn 1962) p. 3.

<sup>58</sup>Richard Murphy, interview by author, 4 April 1990, Toronto, Ontario, tape recording; Anthony Cronin, interview by author, 4 March 1989, Fredericton, New Brunswick, tape recording.

<sup>59</sup>Kelleher, "Irish Literature To-Day," p. 348.

<sup>60</sup>David Marcus, "Introduction," to Irish Writing: Young Writers Issue, no. 24 (September 1953), p. 5.

<sup>61</sup>Robert Greacen, "The Two Voices," Irish Writing, no. 3 (November 1947), p. 91.

<sup>62</sup>Sean O'Faolain quoted by John V. Kelleher, "Irish Literature To-Day," p. 338; Valentin Iremonger, "Poets and Their Publishers," p. 79.

<sup>63</sup>Sean O'Faolain warned young writers to "despise" their literary elders however much they "unwillingly and ungratefully" learned from them. "Ireland After Yeats," p. 48; John Montague said he remembered Sean O'Faolain writing in the early 1950s "that he hoped a new generation of Irish writers would learn to look outwards. Finally assured in their nationality, they would be able to take an interest in everything." John Montague, "Outward Bound," Threshold 4, no. 2 (Autumn-Winter 1962), p. 68. Arguing for the recognition of Irish tradition, John Ryan wrote "our young writers, whom it is Envoy's policy to help and nurture, cannot know where they start from, or what they are aiming at, until such times as they know the relative importance of their predecessors." "Mid-Way," p. 9.

<sup>64</sup>The following issues of Irish literary journals were devoted to the young writer: The Bell 18, no. 7 (October 1951); Irish Writing, no. 24; Poetry Ireland, no. 9.

<sup>65</sup>Peadar O'Donnell, "And Again, Publishing in Ireland," The Bell 18, no. 10 (March 1953), p. 181.

<sup>66</sup>Anthony Cronin, Life of Riley, p. 136.

<sup>67</sup>Ryan, "Mid-Way," p. 9.

<sup>68</sup>Though Kavanagh's name was absent from the masthead, his influence upon the editorial policies and decisions of Envoy was unmistakable. His "Diary" columns appeared regularly.

<sup>69</sup>Valentin Iremonger, "The Young Writer," The Bell 18, no. 7, p. 15.

<sup>70</sup>The Bell: The New Writer--A Symposium 18, no. 7 (October 1951).

<sup>71</sup>Denis Cotter, Jr. "Francis MacManus," in Macmillan Dictionary of Irish Literature, ed. Robert Hogan (London: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 415-417.

<sup>72</sup>James Plunkett, "The Young Writer," The Bell 18, no. 7, pp. 24, 25.

<sup>73</sup>John Ryan, "The Young Writer," The Bell 18, no. 7, p. 20.

<sup>74</sup>Valentin Iremonger complained "so much energy of the young writers has been recently expended in the necessary but wasteful and futile occupation of spitting in their elders' eyes." "The Young Writer," The Bell 18, no. 7, p. 15.

<sup>75</sup>John Ryan believed that national dailies were controlled by political parties and run by their yes-men: "all conform at a level of dull mediocrity and the young writer who does not subscribe to the orthodoxy will shortly find himself an outcast if not a hunted man." John Ryan, "The Young Writer," The Bell 18, no. 7, p. 21; Plunkett, "The Young Writer," The Bell 18, no. 7, p. 28.

<sup>76</sup>Plunkett, p. 27.

<sup>77</sup>Anthony Cronin, The Life of Riley, pp. 145, 146.

<sup>78</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "Biographical Notes," The Figure in the Cave and other essays, p. 222. Montague's experiences at the American Seminar at Schloss Leopoldskron, Salzburg were recounted in "Fellow Travelling with America," The Bell 17, no. 3 (June 1951), pp. 25-38; his study of George Moore was published as "The Tyranny of Memory," The Bell 13, no. 5 (August 1951), pp. 12-24.

<sup>79</sup>John Montague, "The Young Writer," The Bell, 18, no. 7, pp. 12, 7, 6.

<sup>80</sup>Montague, "The Young Writer," p. 6.

<sup>81</sup>Montague, "The Young Writer," p. 7; where he had once lionized English models, in particular the Auden group he thought remarkable for its esprit and influence, the mature Montague has spoken disparagingly of "the little Englandism of the Amis generation." "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," Irish University Review 19, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 86.

<sup>82</sup>Montague, "The Young Writer," pp. 9, 8.

<sup>83</sup>Montague, "The Young Writer," p. 8.

<sup>84</sup>In identifying the palpable mood of alienation which prevailed in Ireland at the time, Montague substantiated his view: "If anyone thinks I am exaggerating

at the mild horror of it, let him observe the heavy, almost neurotic shadows that lie over the best Irish writing of the last fifteen years: Dutch Interior, for instance, of Watergate, or Tarry Flynn, or Bird Alone, all good works that we have no reason to be ashamed of, but almost always on the single theme of frustration, the sensitive striving to exist within an unsatisfactory society, where the intellect and the flesh are almost regarded as ancient heresies." "The Young Writer," p. 11.

<sup>85</sup>Montague, "The Young Writer," pp. 12, 10.

<sup>86</sup>Montague suggested "perhaps Ireland needs one fearless critical writer and satirist, another Swift, though preferably a Catholic, to clear this apathy from the air, his only reward, however, for his singlemindedness would probably be humiliation, the kind of humiliation which Newman suffered in the boasted Catholic atmosphere of Ireland." "The Young Writer," p. 10.

<sup>87</sup>Montague's initial response to the past and to tradition is contradictory. While demanding that "no complete rejection of the past will suffice but a ruthless severing of dead branches," he also believed that "the young writer should be able to estimate his heritage without hastiness or bias." "The Young Writer," p. 12.

<sup>88</sup>Montague has said, "I think the real position of a poet is to be a global regionalist. He is born into allegiances or particular areas or places and people, which he loves, sometimes against his will. But then he also happens to belong to an increasingly accessible world." John Montague, "Global Regionalism: Interview with John Montague," interview by Adrian Frazier, The Literary Review 22, no. 2 (Winter 1979), p. 174.

<sup>89</sup>John Montague to Seamus O'Sullivan, quoted by Terence Brown, Northern Voices: Poets from Ulster (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), p. 152.

<sup>90</sup>Honor O'Connor, "The Early Poetry of John Montague," Etudes Irlandaises, no. 2 (December 1977), p. 63.

<sup>91</sup>Poems quoted by O'Connor, pp. 65-66, 66-67. "Sermon for Sunday" was originally published in The National Student in May 1949; "Daily I Awake" appeared in The Bell in March 1952.

<sup>92</sup>"Sermon for Sunday," quoted by O'Connor, p. 65.

<sup>93</sup>"poem," "Rejoicing Children in the Morning Make,"

and "Poem (for Francis Stuart--Paris, July 1950)" were published in The Bell 18, no. 5 (October 1952), pp. 275-277; O'Connor, p. 69.

<sup>94</sup>John Montague, "Poem," The Bell 18, no. 5, p. 276.

<sup>95</sup>Montague, "Poem (for Francis Stuart)," The Bell 18, no. 5, p. 277; Montague, "Rejoicing Children In the Morning Make," The Bell 18, no. 5, p. 275.

<sup>96</sup>Montague, "Poem (for Francis Stuart)," p. 277.

<sup>97</sup>O'Connor, p. 71.

<sup>98</sup>Montague, "Rejoicing Children In the Morning Make," p. 275.

<sup>99</sup>John Montague, "The Sheltered Edge," Poisoned Lands (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1961), pp. 30-33; John Montague, The Lost Notebook (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1987), p. 27; apart from the insularity of Irish life, Montague, in his early review criticism, identified "isolation" as the "chief characteristic of Irish verse." "Isolation and Cunning: Recent Irish Verse," Poetry 94, no. 1 (April 1959), p. 264.

<sup>100</sup>John Montague, "Introduction" to Poisoned Lands, second edition (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1977), p. 9.

<sup>101</sup>John Montague, "Speech for an Ideal Irish Election," Poisoned Lands (1961), p. 31.

<sup>102</sup>John Montague, "Auschwitz, Mon Amour," Poisoned Lands (1961), pp. 42-43.

<sup>103</sup>Montague, "Speech for an Ideal Irish Election," p. 31.

<sup>104</sup>Montague, "Old Mythologies," Poisoned Lands (1961), p. 36.

<sup>105</sup>Edna Longley, "Searching the Darkness: Richard Murhphy, Thomas Kinsella, John Montague, and James Simmons," in Two Decades of Irish Writing: A Critical Survey, ed. Douglas Dunn (Cheadle Hulme, Cheshire: Carcanet Press, 1975), p. 137.

<sup>106</sup>Douglas Sealy, "The Sound of a Wound: An Introduction to the Poetry of John Montague from 1958 to 1988," Irish University Review 19, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 11.

<sup>107</sup>Robert F. Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, p. 204.

<sup>108</sup>Montague, "Rome, Anno Santo," Poisoned Lands (1961), p. 25.

<sup>109</sup>Montague, "Introduction" to Poisoned Lands, second edition (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1977), pp. 9-10.

<sup>110</sup>Montague, "Introduction" to Poisoned Lands, p. 9.

<sup>111</sup>Montague, The Lost Notebook, p. 93.

<sup>112</sup>Montague, "Introduction" to Poisoned Lands, p. 9; Montague, "A Drink of Milk," Poisoned Lands, second edition, p. 17.

<sup>113</sup>For Kinsella, Montague's book was an indication of a watershed in Irish literature and consciousness: "in accepting Poisoned Lands as a significant book, important in its context, one deals (I hope) a hard blow at the jovial, capering kind of Irishness for which James Stephens, as much as any one, was responsible, and which has contributed a dash of sourness to the outlook of later Irish writers." Thomas Kinsella, "Some Irish Poets," rev. of Ewart Milne, John Montague, and A James Stephens Reader, Poetry 102, no. 4 (July 1963), p. 329.

<sup>114</sup>Montague, "Isolation and Cunning: Recent Irish Verse," rev. of Another September by Thomas Kinsella, Poetry 94, no. 1 (April 1959), p. 270.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

## CHAPTER TWO

### JOHN MONTAGUE AND THE DOLMEN PRESS GENERATION

Montague, along with his New Writer's issue confreres, were by no means alone in their disillusionment with the atrophied status quo. Members of the same generation--not necessarily writers--had in recent years been arriving at similar conclusions. Of those who took action, undoubtedly the most successful and, in the end, profoundly influential was Liam Miller, founder and architect of the Dolmen Press. In the vanguard of the campaign on behalf of Irish poetry as well as the most permanent expression of the young writers' crisis, the Dolmen Press commenced operation in mid-1951, "with the idea of publishing the young writers and so establishing an outlet in their own land for a group who were aware of Ireland's twentieth-century emergence as a nation."<sup>1</sup> Miller explained,

My press began due to a discussion with some young people with whom I had been at college. I myself am an architect by training, but I went through my college years in Dublin in the Forties with people who wanted to be writers and for whom in the Dublin at that period there were no outlets whatever. I met one of these writers early in 1951 and said to him 'I will print your book.' ...My special concern is for the poets and my list has preserved itself and developed with a predominantly poetic context. The development of such a list in this century is a hazardous venture, but it is one that I like to feel might

have its worth....My firm is also devoted to that tradition [the private press movement exemplified by the Cuala Press and the Three Candles Press] as I believe that we must in our small way serve the needs of our country's emerging writers and in so doing open channels of communication abroad.<sup>2</sup>

Miller, like Montague, believed that literary nationalism, if it can be called that at all, could be expansive and beneficial rather than implosive and parochial. The inception of the Dolmen Press was a watershed in Irish self-understanding: it marked the redefinition of the Irish writer not simply as a citizen of Ireland but as a citizen of the world. Ireland became part of Europe and European literature by coming into its own once again.<sup>3</sup> Not since the Cuala Press enlisted the expertise of Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain in the early 1940s had a press sought to involve its writers directly in aspects of editing or production.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps more out of financial necessity than anything else, Thomas Kinsella hand-set two of his earliest Dolmen pamphlets, including The Starlit Eye (March 1952), and in so doing contributed not only to the Dolmen Press' growing reputation for literary excellence as a writer's press, but also to the sense of prestige commonly associated with letter-press publications.<sup>5</sup> The Dolmen Press was revolutionary because it brought about an amalgamation of the imaginative act of creating literature and the labour-intensive process of crafting and building the actual book. Liam Miller's very

deliberate and perhaps architecturally inspired marriage of text and typography, even in the most crude and amateur ventures from the Press's fledgling years, raised the standards by which those works were brought to attention and made it rewarding, for the first time since the demise of Cuala Press, for an author to publish his work in Ireland.<sup>6</sup> Response to the Dolmen Press initiative was both instantaneous and heartening: some offerings sold out in a matter of days.<sup>7</sup> In addition to books, many of the earliest Dolmen publications were ballad sheets or broadsheets, some of which were illustrated by Irish artists like Louis Le Brocquy.<sup>8</sup> Affordable and cheap to produce, these broadsheets were not only collectible, but had an implicit populist appeal. As the press grew in reputation, experiments in book design, format and decoration were all part of the "aim to produce each work in the manner inspired by the text."<sup>9</sup> Other related projects Miller undertook in those early years, including the typographical and design duties for David Marcus's Irish Writing, revealed the depth of his commitment to new writers.<sup>10</sup>

The Dolmen Press's most obvious ancestor and model was the Cuala Press which, earlier in the century, under the influence of designer Emery Walker and under the literary directorship of W. B. Yeats, had made a similar commitment in its editorial policy "to search for new writing by Irish writers."<sup>11</sup> Unlike the Cuala Press, whose

corresponding renaissance "tended to look internally" and whose sales figures had rarely exceeded one hundred copies for any single edition, the Dolmen Press necessarily reflected Miller's belief "that we in Ireland must look to the world."<sup>12</sup> Its official policy "to publish works of Irish writers, as well as works of Irish interest by writers from other countries, was tempered by a realization that for the Irish publisher in English the main market must be an export one."<sup>13</sup> With translations of old Irish texts like The Breastplate of Saint Patrick numbering among its earliest publications, the impulse to look towards Ireland's past was as strong as the simultaneous need to reach beyond its shores.

While John Montague did not publish with the Dolmen Press until May 1959, owing to his studies and other sojourns in America from 1953-56, he typified, along with earlier Dolmen poets as different as Thomas Kinsella and Richard Murphy, the Press's dual imaginative allegiance to Ireland and the rest of the world.<sup>14</sup> What these three major Irish voices of the sixties share with each other is understood equally in what they share with the editorial outlook of the press which brought them first to attention and later to acclaim. Despite their differences in background and artistic lineage, each has developed an historic sense--and has come to terms with the past and with the nature of their inheritance--without neglecting

the exigencies and diverse sensibilities of the modern world. As Richard Murphy has said,

I think that poets who are contemporaries, or very near-contemporaries, inevitably influence each other. Some absorb the influence better than others....My life in Connemara was dedicated to putting down roots, to establishing contact with the native Irish tradition, in making as profound a connection as I could. I was reclaiming the Irish part of my heritage from which I had been secluded by my Irish Ascendancy birth, by Ceylon, and by my education at Protestant schools.<sup>15</sup>

Both the specialized nature of many Dolmen publications, especially its limited editions and critical series, and the co-publishing ventures Miller entered into with Oxford University Press in England and Dufour Editions in the United States, made it possible for Irish authors to circumvent the once peremptory categories of success at home and attention abroad.<sup>16</sup> In its first ten years of operation, the Dolmen Press altered the course of Irish literary history not only by its "quiet war on behalf of Irish poetry" or by its vindication of the young writer, but even more so by the inroads it helped to make with a foreign readership no longer buying those works for the sake of their "Irishness" alone.<sup>17</sup>

If Montague could still complain in 1959 that "the chief characteristic of modern Irish verse is isolation" or "that on a dark night it is hard to tell [most Irish poets] apart," he could do so in the pages of Poetry

(Chicago) rather than within the narrow circumference of Dublin and its under-subscribed literary journals.<sup>16</sup> Where Montague had once felt outrage at the TLS's blatant negligence in reviewing new Irish poetry collections, he could, within a matter of years, find satisfaction in the appearance of Denis Donoghue's essays in The London Magazine and in his own opportunity to review Dolmen Press poets for prestigious American magazines.<sup>19</sup> For Montague, these concessions could not hide the fact that

Recent Irish poetry is rarely represented in general anthologies; while reviewers in England and America can hardly be expected to appreciate the special context from which it springs.<sup>20</sup>

Long before Montague emerged as a major poetic voice, he took it upon himself to explain this "special context" and to make the new breed of Irish poet, "so totally uninterested in either religion or nationalism," intelligible to an audience accustomed to precisely the opposite.<sup>21</sup> In reviews like "American Pegasus" or "Contemporary Verse: A Short Chronicle," written for the Irish interdisciplinary journal, Studies, Montague at the same time sought to open lines of communication between an Ireland "whose isolation paradoxically made it more free," an England whose verse was in decline, and an America whose verse "had finally come of age."<sup>22</sup> Through the works of Berryman, Lowell, Penn Warren, Rexroth, and others, Montague came to admire "the diversity of American poetry,

its daring directness in pursuit of a language to accommodate modern experience." Montague wrote:

The American works closer to experience and natural speech than his British contemporary: he can tackle a subject frontally without that horror of naivety which forces the average Oxbridge talent into defensive literary reflexes. He is also, generally, much more trained in tradition, even if it is only to discard it; witness William Carlos Williams....In the general return to sanctioned forms and diction we find Americans, like Wilbur, Anthony Hecht, W. S. Merwin, writing the most graceful lyric poetry since Tennyson.<sup>23</sup>

Given what Montague regarded as the increasing predominance of American poetry as the older Eliot-Pound axis began to crumble, expatriation became an issue not just for Irish writers, but for European artists in general. As far as the cutting edge of creative writing was concerned, America was the place to be.<sup>24</sup> The ideal, then, to which Montague aspired was informed by a rejection of "the orthodoxy implicit in various pioneer anthologies and studies" and entertained in its place "a wider and more fluid view, hospitable to the idiosyncratic talent, like Stevens or Williams or Robert Graves."<sup>25</sup> Within this broadened spectrum, tradition was something to be created afresh and to be made out of the "living elements" in a writer's background.<sup>26</sup> For Montague, however, poetry had "temporarily lost its role of emotional pioneer" and its recovery was especially incumbent upon Irish poetry who, as a whole, had yet to exploit their "privileged position as

observers outside the mainstream of modern history and experience."<sup>27</sup> In the years leading up to the publication of his first book, Forms of Exile (1958), Montague's outlook as cultural observer underwent a striking reversal whereby its original crusading tenor and repudiation of the malformations of community were refined and redefined in an affirmation of "a kind of classless humanism which is slowly rotting the fabric of our favourite intellectual cliches."<sup>28</sup> "Outward Bound," a 1960 review Montague wrote for Threshold, encapsulated, even by its title alone, his maturing sensibility and growing belief that "if, under the shadow of the Bomb, alienation becomes general, then the artist is restored to humanity. The new mood in poetry, for instance, is a daring of simplicity which risks awkwardness in the service of caritas."<sup>29</sup>

The literary careers of John Montague, Thomas Kinsella and Richard Murphy have, since the beginning of the 1960s, been bound together by some unalterable and, at times, highly arbitrary law of critical response. By the end of the 1950s, all three were well on their way to establishing reputations for themselves both at home and abroad, each having published at least one collection with the Dolmen Press, and each having received an award or special designation for his efforts.<sup>30</sup> In making an imaginative grasp at identity for themselves, they were beginning, as John Montague would later say, to write

"without strain a poetry that was indisputably Irish...but also modern."<sup>31</sup>

Yet apart from this apparent breakthrough, together with their initial success, there was little to suggest that they constituted anything so organized or holistic as a movement, like those which had recently taken shape in England, or that they shared anything more compelling than a common publisher. The later achievements of Montague, Kinsella and Murphy might have resisted the tendency by critics to perceive them as interrelated and might have remained the accretions of what Kinsella has described as "a scattering of incoherent lives," had not all three poets been summoned to read in the ballroom at The Royal Hibernian Hotel (rented for the princely sum of £10) on Friday 3 February 1961.<sup>32</sup> From the favourable first announcements of the reading in Quidnunc's "Irishman's Diary" to the review notices which pronounced the event "a revelation," a rebuke to "all the 'we've-never-had-it-so-bad' moaners and groaners," positive public reaction and press coverage both signalled and helped to effect what was soon to become a noticeable change in the stagnant literary climate of Dublin.<sup>33</sup> Poetry readings, especially those devoted to single authors, were not an unfamiliar feature of the Dublin scene. Due in large part to Liam Miller's efforts at Richard Murphy's instigation, however, the Royal Hibernian reading was, with its share of Dublin literati,

including Patrick Kavanagh, as well as with its "unexpectedly large" attendance, an unqualified success.<sup>34</sup> More than that, however, it marked the auspicious debut of a new generation of Irish poets, a major turning point in the declining fortunes of Irish literature, and the beginning of the decade of the most intense literary activity Ireland had seen since the end of the Revival.<sup>35</sup>

That any new aesthetic or sensibility lacks authority without a corresponding forum to articulate its aims and intentions was an indisputable fact of cultural dynamics not easily lost on either Liam Miller, sponsor for the reading, or its host Peadar O'Donnell. Together with Kinsella and Montague, they repaired to the Gresham Hotel to hammer out the details of a project which would cultivate and consolidate what the Hibernian reading had both intimated and initiated. By unanimous agreement, what was to become The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing was born, the first in a proposed series of reviews devoted to new poetry, fiction, and criticism by young writers.<sup>36</sup>

The "gathering," as Montague called it, was to serve as "the first public declaration that a new and ardent generation of writers had arrived in Ireland."<sup>37</sup> Yet it was also to become, by extension, not only a reflection but a product of the new cultural and economic openness advanced by Sean Lemass and enacted through the progressive policies of his finance minister, T. K. Whitaker.<sup>38</sup> By

including poetry, for years Ireland's most 'embalmed' and neglected genre, alongside short fiction, a form which had continued to receive acclaim and exposure in America, the editors sought to bring attention to a new and more cosmopolitan generation of poets who were not only aware of 'outside standards' but, for the first time since the death of Yeats, deserving of "outside interest." For many of the contributors to the Miscellany, that "outside interest" had in fact already manifested itself in the form of overseas publishing contracts: Kinsella had signed with Atheneum in the United States; Montague with MacGibbon & Kee; and Murphy, the first defector, with Faber & Faber. The inroads which these poets had made with foreign readerships were sufficient to convince those behind the Miscellany of its export potential and led the way for distribution agreements with Oxford University Press in England and Sheldon Meyer in the United States.<sup>39</sup>

The Miscellany was, by and large, a product for export, but more ironic than the diversion of the collection from its home audience were the circumstances under which it was actually produced.<sup>40</sup> As a Henri Cartier-Bresson photograph of a Paris planning session between Montague, Miller, and Kinsella illustrates, the Miscellany was, ostensibly, produced and edited in exile.<sup>41</sup> Most of the negotiations for content were conducted from John Montague's apartment on the rue Daguerre and many of the

contributors lived outside Ireland: Brian Moore in Canada, Desmond O'Grady in Rome, and Valentin Iremonger with the foreign service in London. With the flood-gates opened between Ireland and the rest of the world, the Dolmen Miscellany was both "a record and impetus" for cultural and economic revitalization, a signal that Ireland's "reluctant isolation" was over, and that it was now expedient "to present Ireland to the world again, through the eyes of a new generation."<sup>42</sup>

The Miscellany was also, in theory, a groundbreaking venture inasmuch as it represented a collaborative and co-operative effort joining the considerable talents of Ireland's foremost publisher of poetry with those of its two most promising poets. Unlike earlier Irish anthologies which had been published by English presses, such as Donagh MacDonagh's and Lennox Robinson's Oxford Book of Irish Verse (1958), Miller's project actively enlisted and engaged the editorial expertise of Kinsella and Montague, just as in the previous decade he had called upon their typesetting skills. Moreover, with the endorsement and financial sponsorship of the Irish Academy of Letters secured under the patrimony of Peadar O'Donnell, doyen of the Literary Establishment, the project symbolized the hope for reconciliation, if not a permanent truce, between the long-warring factions of young and old, between the 'modernists' or internationalists and the hangers-on to the

Gaelic League, the nationalist-socialist mystiques of Irishness, and other preserves of 'the professional peasant.'<sup>43</sup>

When the euphoria which surrounded the inception of the Miscellany had dissipated, however, it became clear that the editorial process, especially where responsibilities were concerned, would not always be consistent with the policies formulated at the beginning of the project. Richard Murphy claimed to have been excluded from the editorial decisions after having been invited to participate at the outset.<sup>44</sup> Peadar O'Donnell soon lived up to his almost legendary reputation for conveniently "vanishing from the scene" as soon as serious business was at hand, but not before he had exercised his patrimonial prerogative to delegate the lion's share of responsibilities to the editors.<sup>45</sup> In a letter to John Montague he was unequivocal:

My position in all this is very simple. You have charge of editorial content. You would select the material and pay for it and pass it on to Miller. His job was to print and publish and I only came into his end of it in so far as I had to help financially--partly personally and partly for the Academy.<sup>46</sup>

Ten years after its publication, Montague revealed how minimally any collaborative effort entered into the making of the Miscellany:

it was soon clear that unless I took on the assignment, there would be no one to do the editing. Although Tom Kinsella gave moral support, he was more a useful figurehead than an active participant: most of the poetry was selected by me, with his approval....The miracle was, of course, that Liam and I were able to work together so closely....If one studies the material I think one sees that I was the only writer in my generation not yet totally absorbed in his own work: I was still interested in the emerging vision of others.<sup>47</sup>

The foresight and astute literary sense Montague demonstrated in compiling the Miscellany made him, in many respects, the unofficial architect of his generation. Of its twelve contributors, including Brian Moore, James Plunkett, Aidan Higgins, and John McGahern, virtually all Miscellany authors were to figure prominently in the literary history of the sixties or would at the very least become, like Arena editor James Liddy, prime agents of literary activity.<sup>48</sup> What Montague chose to publish and even what he chose to censor stood as reflections of his developing sensibility as it responded to and reacted against the contradictory claims of an Ireland in transition.

Montague's foreword to the Miscellany, a document Robert Garratt has described as "a quiet manifesto," functioned not only as an assessment of his contemporaries, but as an attempt to negotiate, if not reconcile, the extremes of outlook which had polarized Ireland's literary community for more than a generation.<sup>49</sup> In the original

unedited proof copy, Montague could say that for writers of his generation, "politics are not seen to be an issue...their careful individualism, however, suggests a close awareness of the texture of local life."<sup>50</sup> At the same time as he made a case for their creative independence, he could also claim for them "an awareness both of tradition and other literatures."<sup>51</sup> That so mute an argument would not suffice was evident in the declamatory tone of the revision where Montague proposed an accommodating artistic strategy, which "stopped short of a collective blueprint," but which answered his own demands for "proper ambition and a professional preoccupation with the job."<sup>52</sup> Montague wrote:

In recent years, a new generation of writers has begun to emerge in Ireland, probably the most interesting since the realists of the 1930s. While not forming any sort of movement, they do reflect a general change of sensibility, and this Miscellany is an attempt to provide them with a platform. They are, in general, more literary than their predecessors: many of them are poets, and the prose-writers seem to be working towards a more experimental form of story. The main link between them, however, is their obvious desire to avoid the forms of 'Irishism' (whether leprechaun or garrulous rebel) which have been so profitably exploited in the past. In such a context, a little solemnity may be a revolutionary gesture.<sup>53</sup>

In embracing self-appointed subjects and approaches of their own choosing, Montague and his contemporaries were not breaking with the past so much as they were dispensing with its more debilitating and prejudicial prescriptives,

the stereotypes and what he deemed ludicrous stage-Irish properties Yeats had bequeathed to younger writers in "Under Ben Bulbin."<sup>54</sup> The dilemma of adherence and independence Montague diagnosed in 1962 has continued to occupy a pre-eminent place in both creative writing and its critical reception. Writing two decades later in his essay "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea," Seamus Deane observed,

A literature predicated on an abstract idea of essence --Irishness or Ulsterness--will inevitably degenerate into whimsy and provincialism. Even when the literature itself avoids this limitation, the commentary on it reimposes the limitation again....The oppressiveness of the tradition we inherit has its source in our own readiness to accept the mystique of Irishness as an inalienable feature of our writing and, indeed, of much else in our culture. That mystique is itself an alienating force. To accept it is to become involved in the spiritual heroics of a Yeats or a Pearse, to believe in the incarnation of the nation in the individual. To reject it is to make a fetish of exile, alienation and dislocation in the manner of Joyce or Beckett. Between these hot and cold rhetorics there is little room for choice.<sup>55</sup>

The determination both to transcend the myths of the Literary Revival and the stock heroic vocabularies of literary nationalism and to seek out an imaginative bedrock "unblemished by Irishness, but securely Irish," governed decision-making at almost every stage of the editorial process.<sup>56</sup> Montague's plea for "a little solemnity" was in fact a "revolutionary gesture" since it necessarily called for a "revision of the prevailing idea of what it was that

constituted Irish reality" and implied the need for a corresponding re-adjustment of standards of expectation by which creative works were received.<sup>57</sup>

Nowhere was the collective effort of the emerging generation to disassociate itself from the unwelcome aspects of its inheritance more in evidence than in the debate over what to call the Miscellany. As Sean O'Faolain had pointed out in his first editorial for The Bell, the selection of a title for any Irish publication was necessarily complicated by the risk that it would acquire doctrinaire or ideological connotations. O'Faolain explained:

That was why we chose the name The Bell. Any other equally spare and hard and simple word would have done; any word with a minimum of associations. If you begin to think of the alternative you will see why we could not have used any of the old symbolic words. They are as dead as Brian Boru, Granuaile, the Sean Van Vocht, Banba, Roisin Dubh, Fodhla, Cathleen ni Houlihan. These belonged to the time when we growled in defeat and dreamed of the future. That future has arrived and, with its arrival, killed them. All our symbols have to be created afresh...We refused to use the word Irish, or Ireland, in the title.<sup>58</sup>

The provisional working title for the Miscellany had been "The Tower," a shibboleth which, because of its obvious Yeatsian associations, was considered commercially viable but which, for the same reason, caused Montague considerable distress.<sup>59</sup> Writing to Montague, Kinsella voiced his own objections:

I seem to feel a little tired, even in advance, at the way everyone would fasten on the name and compare us all with Yeats and AE and the rest--I need hardly say to what effect.<sup>60</sup>

Montague's misgivings about the proposed title culminated in his request that the OED entry for 'tower' be included on the back page to "soften the literary implications," an idea which Liam Miller vigorously rejected:

Tom has suggested IRISH WRITERS as title to the piece which I think too generalised and also reminiscent of the S. J. White venture [Irish Writing]. If THE TOWER is the title, I think the dictionary definition lays the thing open to facetious critical attack and I think would be better without. If the title is taken as having echoes of traditional Irishry and older generations it is the less evil.<sup>61</sup>

Valentin Iremonger, who had been the "main opposition to the new Gaelic lobby during and after the war years," together with Montague came up with several alternatives including FORGE ("forge the uncreated consciousness") and SMITHY ("unforged consciousness") which suggested that they were unopposed to a title evoking the memory of older generations so long as its reverberations were emphatically Joycean.<sup>62</sup> Writing four years later, Montague claimed that "Yeats's direct influence on Irish poetry had been disastrous," insofar as his followers absorbed from him "a catalogue of subjects that could only be legitimately treated in parody" but could not escape, as Yeats had done, the "stereotyped antitheses of the Irish

mode" because they lacked his "primary concern for the human imagination, for the human drama in all its complexity" and his awareness of "the tradition of the language he worked in, and the tradition of poetry itself."<sup>63</sup> Joyce, while no less exempt from misreading and misinterpretation by subsequent generations, stood for pluralism learned rather than rehearsed. As Montague later pointed out, "Joyce learnt from Flaubert and he applied it most intensely to his own local world."<sup>64</sup> As a model of social and artistic detachment, Joyce represented the potential for escaping the "religion and nationalism" which Montague had once identified as "our famous local nets of the soul."<sup>65</sup>

In the search for a title, other, more neutral, possibilities included 'Prospect' and Mary O'Malley's offering, 'Searchlight,' both of which spoke for the emergence of a new generation.<sup>66</sup> But these, in turn, were also rejected. Perhaps the most mordant commentary on the title controversy came from Thomas Kinsella, whose half-serious, half-mocking recommendations, ranging from 'Writing in Ireland,' and 'Prospects,' to 'The Crozier,' 'Hiburbia,' 'The Island,' 'The Gombeen,' 'Boffins,' and even 'Peadar,' isolated and identified the demi-urban consumer-capitalist mentality of the New Ireland and came closest to acknowledging the real but somewhat dubious forces at work as the nation forged towards modernization

and a new role in a unified Europe.<sup>67</sup> The title arrived at through compromise, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, gave little sense of a new generation of writers on the rise.<sup>68</sup> By trading on its Irishness, the press guaranteed its overseas marketability at the expense of what its editors were determined to avoid.

As much as Montague aspired to present "a unified front" and "representative cross-section" of a new generation, the Miscellany was, unofficially, very much "an anthology of ourselves."<sup>69</sup> Yet even with this private admission of collusion, if not unity, the project was forever on the verge of exposing the serious and, at times, profound differences between its contributors and of betraying how tenuous and nominal their affiliations actually were. The attempt to form a community was an act of last resort, underscored by John McGahern's desperate declaration: "I am growing jealous of other poets and we will all grow jealous if we don't know each other and share in each other's trouble."<sup>70</sup>

The Irish literary world had long been the preserve of homogenous and hegemonic groups, each with its own millennial or restorative vision, from the almost exclusively Protestant-Ascendancy Revivalists to the predominantly Southern and Catholic generation which succeeded them.<sup>71</sup> With the arrival of yet another generation of writers, all that could be said for their

cohesion as a group was that they held in common a more cosmopolitan outlook than their predecessors, a more enlightened attitude to the past, a desire for professionalism, and a healthy resistance to categorization.<sup>72</sup> They had no common vision. They were not even of the same age. All but Weber, McGahern, and Liddy had been writing and publishing for over ten years. They had 'arrived' on the scene in the late 'forties and early 'fifties, yet the announcement of their arrival had been postponed for more than a decade.

If the material which Montague attempted to secure for publication was any indication, their line of descent, if any, stemmed from the outsiders of the 'thirties, from experimentalists like Myles na Gopaleen (Flann O'Brien/Brian O'Nolan), whose new novel Montague reviewed for the Miscellany, and from exiles like Denis Devlin, a writer Montague regarded as a practitioner of "pure poesie" as well as "the first writer of Catholic background to take the world as his province."<sup>73</sup> The absence of Devlin and na Gopaleen was less symptomatic of an unwillingness to profess allegiance than of the on-going struggle to secure content and to retain it in circumstances where the commercial and financial considerations of its authors often took precedence. With James Plunkett's withdrawal of his story, "The Trout," and the offer of inferior work in its place, the Miscellany had lost one of its three

centrepieces.<sup>74</sup> The effort to "recover lost ballast" and "restore the balance" resulted in the publication, after protracted wrangling over payments and disputes over a Third Programme broadcast of Richard Murphy's long narrative poem, "The Cleggan Disaster."<sup>75</sup> Of all the pieces in the Miscellany, the "Disaster," with its intense localism and overpowering sense of loss, rehearsed most effectively the old allegiances and obsessions which were still welcomed, with considerable acclaim, by foreign audiences but which were beginning to come under the scrutiny of native Irish critics.

The greatest test of the efficacy of the new sensibility and the stability of the "united front" came not with the inclusion of Murphy's poem but with John Jordan's review of his earlier work in "Off the Barricade: A Note on Four Irish Poets."<sup>76</sup> Jordan's unmitigated indictment of "The Last Galway Hooker" took issue with Murphy's abuse and exploitation of Yeats, with the out-and-out "silliness" of his similes and metaphors, and with the alleged impairment of his critical sense. Worse censure was reserved for "The Woman of the House," Murphy's "long elegy to his grandmother's memory":

Amid the universal praise my own was, I think, the only voice to suggest dissent. I did so less because of the poem's shameless echoes (from Yeats and Betjeman) than because (a) it struck me as being bad and (b) it was bad for a very bad reason.

Mr. Murphy had coddled himself into re-enacting a ritual celebration that no longer bore any relation to reality.<sup>77</sup>

Apart from his protestations of clemency and his denial of personal bias, Jordan's justification for his vilification of Murphy had a precedent in long-standing complaints that Ireland had failed to cultivate critics equal to its poets and novelists.<sup>78</sup> In challenging Murphy, an author whose work was only short of sacrosanct, Jordan was at the same time striking at the foundations of Ireland's critical coterie. In the same review, he complained,

Only in Dublin perhaps is it necessary to announce that there can be such a thing as criticism unloaded with personal animus. And Dublin too is so ingrown in its literary alliances that the little verse-reviewing which is done is often pocked with timidity and noncommittal. There is indeed, in the whole Irish literary world, a loathsome freemasonry of backscratching and reviewer's perquisites. I too have lived in Arcadia.<sup>79</sup>

Montague's decision to suppress all references to Murphy and his work, a decision endorsed by Miller and Kinsella as the only way, short of cancelling the piece, to avoid potential embarrassment, militated against the new and, by implication, more enlightened sensibility espoused in the Foreword.<sup>80</sup> Murphy, if asked, would have spoken in favour of the article appearing in its original form since the excised version made him virtually "non-existent."<sup>81</sup> Even without the powerful intervention of the state, the

impulse towards self-censorship, whether for moral or, as in this case, for practical reasons, was deeply ingrained and not easily overcome. Jordan's final remarks in the heavily edited "Off the Barricade: A Note on Three Poets" (Kinsella, Montague, and Desmond O'Grady) supplied an ironic postscript to the entire episode. He wrote, "our poets nowadays are far more hep, and they deserve critics less kindly and more rigorous than myself."<sup>2</sup>

The effort to maintain the illusion of a "united front," at least in print, concealed the flagging enthusiasm, the acrimonious exchanges and misunderstandings about rights and content which prolonged production time to a period of over twenty months. With charges of "self-interest" inveighed against Montague and counter-charges of Murphy's "commercialism," what was surprising, Kinsella admitted, was that "the anthology ever saw the light of day."<sup>3</sup> At one point, he complained,

this is a tired generation; no one seems to be able to whip up the kind of enthusiasm which, say, even 'Horizon' can produce. We are being outpaced in all directions, by pin-striped gombeenmen, white-aproned scientists, even great-crested guitar players. All have zip, zest, etc. The poetasters, etc, are flattening against the wall, looking significantly at each other, as if to say 'when this element gets out of the way we'll be able to get down to things properly.'<sup>4</sup>

Kinsella's discouraging prognosis for like-minded members of his milieu was hardly consistent with Terence Brown's later contention that the years 1958-1963 marked a period

of "renewed national self-confidence" leading to a "far-reaching cultural revolution."<sup>85</sup> If those years were "almost legendary in Irish self-understanding," the Dolmen Miscellany to some degree recorded that process through the works-in-progress and independent investigations of its authors.<sup>86</sup>

If the Miscellany was auspicious in any way, it was by that fact that it offered a first glimpse of what were among the most significant literary works of the 'sixties. Reflecting on his editorial work ten years after the fact, Montague recalled,

we finally agreed on the opening chapter of The Barracks so that I had the beginning of both of the major novels of the 1960's in Ireland in the Miscellany [the other was Higgins' Langrishe, Go Down], as well as two of the longer poems [Kinsella's 'A Country Walk' and Murphy's 'The Cleggan Disaster']. In retrospect, that seems to me good editing, and the whole issue fell into the pattern I was hoping for, with the reviews backing the creative material: even the placing of the essay on 'The Deserted Village' beside 'The Cleggan Disaster' was intentional.<sup>87</sup>

Thematic alignments and textual interplays that might have otherwise gone unnoticed were enhanced by Montague's very deliberate ordering of the collection. That one work could comment implicitly on another proved especially salient with two seemingly dissimilar works, Kinsella's "A Country Walk" and Higgins' "Helen Langrishe Goes Home," one a long meditative poem ranging over the course of Irish history to

more personal reflections, the other a resuscitation of the Big House genre.

What permeates both works is a sense of loss proceeding from a disaffection for the modern world and a disappointment at the failure or degeneration of two consecutive utopian programs for Irish self-realization. For Higgins and Kinsella, the once prevailing ideologies of the Ascendancy and the Revolution have been subverted into their social pejoratives. In both instances the defeat of the past by the present is filtered through the consciousness of the speaker/protagonist as he/she journeys through Dublin and its environs. In "A Country Walk," a disaffection for post-Emergency Irish society is registered through the poem's cumulative downward movement ("Down the sloping square," "a car plunged/pitching downward") and by more ubiquitous emblems of urban decay, the "endless debris," and "a urinal."<sup>88</sup> Much the same, Helen Langrishe's distaste for a post-Revolutionary Ireland which has left her and her sisters impoverished and dispossessed becomes evident on her horrific and thoroughly uncivilized bus ride home and culminates in her conclusion that the Big House was finished, that "a long phase was ending, the old life was ending."<sup>89</sup> For both Higgins and Kinsella, it is the petty consumer capitalism of the middle-class gombeenmen which effects the downfall of the Ascendancy and of the republican ideals which usurped it.<sup>90</sup>

In a deliberate parody of Yeats, Kinsella underscores the subversion of republicanism and its heroics into the voracious 'gombeenism' of those seeking to cash in after the Revolution:

they return  
 To take their town again; that have exchanged  
 Their trench coat playground for a gombeen jungle  
 Around the corner, in an open square,  
 I came upon the sombre monuments  
 That bear their names: MacDonagh & McBride,  
 Merchants; Connolly's Commercial Arms...  
 Their windows gave me back my stolid self....<sup>91</sup>

While Kinsella reflects on the demise of the republicanism by which Ireland gained its independence, Higgins stikes a similar death knell for the period of its colonial domination and encapsulates the Ascendancy's lost political, social and cultural authority through images of blindness and impotence, the traditional metaphors for a depleted culture or for what Montague has called "the plight of a subject people":

the tabby and the black tomcat...they were old; old  
 and fat and far from healthy: one suffered from an  
 abcess of the right eye and the other from an  
 ingrown testicle.<sup>92</sup>

Likewise, by juxtaposition with Montague's essay, Murphy's "Cleggan Disaster" acquires the support and resonance of a tradition. By the association with Auburn in Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village," the community of Cleggan becomes a symbol of the dispossession and fall of

the rural order and operates as a rural microcosm where, as Kavanagh would have it, the local tends towards the universal.<sup>93</sup> In arguing for both the essential Irishness and modernity of Goldsmith's themes, Montague was at the same time making a case for his own very similar epic-in-progress, The Rough Field, the beginnings of which he withheld from the Miscellany but published in Threshold in the same year.<sup>94</sup> Montague's critical work, "A Sentimental Prophecy," to some extent stands in for his creative work at that time.

James Liddy's poem "By the Western Seaboard" takes up similar themes of displacement and estrangement as they express themselves in the dichotomy of Ireland's twentieth-century urban and nineteenth-century rural contexts. In seeking to bridge the cultural and linguistic gap widened through the enforcement of "the Education Act/And the University Acts" and the influence of "that bit of American money," the speaker finds he must reach beyond the abstraction of that "primitive" society as a stereotypical "Abbey potboiler" to ascertain and understand the more profound forces which both bind and separate past and present.<sup>95</sup> Elsewhere in the Miscellany, the successful and less successful evasions of Irishness rebound only to surface again in a variety of 'Irish' subjects ranging from the jocular and booze-saturated pub-crawl of John Jordan's "First Draft," to Pearse Hutchinson's revisionist reading

of Dublin's class conflicts, to Brian Moore's bitter and stylistically innovative indictment of the conspiracy of Church and society to suppress creative ambition and spiritual growth.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, a "change in sensibility" does emerge in the predominance of urban contexts (reflecting the new demographics), in the attempt, as with Kinsella and Liddy, to cultivate a genuine if discontinuous historical sense, and in the seven pieces which probe the artist's relationship to his society.<sup>97</sup> Still, the Miscellany is not entirely without reference to the old preoccupations; the late marriages, emotional restriction, and psychic defeats that once formed a subtext to the literature. While the Miscellany may have stopped short of outright controversy or iconoclasm, its fiction, with the possible exception of Jordan's story, remained relatively uncoloured by caricature, by any abiding ethnicity or by a sense of camaraderie between writer and audience. Gone, too, were the stories of childhood, of coming of age in rural Ireland, which had remained popular since the 1930s. The excerpts and stories by McGahern, Plunkett, Higgins, and Moore were, instead, narratives of old or middle age marked by disillusion and distrust and made remarkable by their stark prose and psychological intensity.

The collective achievement of the Dolmen Miscellany resided in the ability of its authors to move beyond the polarities of Yeats and Joyce--that is, beyond the

contradictory and incompatible demands of provincialism and modernism or romanticism and pluralism--and to distinguish authentic tradition, whether in the mainstream or on the periphery, from its more anachronistic malformations. They were the first generation for whom 'reconciliation' did not necessarily entail compromise, and to whom 'tradition' could be a resource rather than a restraint. Comparing his own generation with the one which immediately preceded it, John Jordan wrote in his Miscellany review:

eighteen years later I do not believe that young Irish poets feel a similar sense of psychic oppression...Thomas Kinsella is a Dubliner...there is little to suggest the imaginative claim of any of the numerous masks of Ireland. So far he has shown no signs of participation in the immemorial struggle between sow and farrow....To date Ireland seems to have mattered to Montague. "Like Dolmens" shows a working resolution of the tension between the pull of roots and the questioning of knowledge. But Montague's erstwhile or resolved Irish-angst is not objectionably egocentric. It is chastened by awareness of being human, both in the country itself and beyond the great divide of the English channel. It is time that someone re-asserted that "Irish" themes as such are not aesthetically or morally unjustifiable."<sup>a</sup>

Ireland was very much at the forefront of the Dolmen Miscellany. Its contributors defied the irresolvable dialectic set up by Corkery's and Joyce's imperatives by escaping not from the nets of family, place and religion so much as through them."<sup>a</sup>

For Montague, the reward for his labours came with "the good reviews and letters of appreciation."<sup>100</sup> Response

to the Miscellany in the daily literary pages was, for the most part, favourable and, in some cases, enthusiastic. Terence de Vere White, writing for the Irish Times, hailed it as "a notable event in Irish publishing" and "the most ambitious literary publication that has come out of Ireland for many years."<sup>101</sup> A reviewer for Hibernia called it "a needed record of the new work in progress...worth its not too modest price."<sup>102</sup> While Sean O'Faolain, the self-professed "literary godfather" to the Dolmen authors, praised the collection for its "tokens of mental clarity, the one thing Irish writing has always been short in," he questioned whether "too many of this new generation were still making 'Ireland' their subject." O'Faolain concluded "to hell with Ireland," a sentiment echoed by The Listener's Keith Harrison who suggested "some of these writers might profitably become less Irish about their Irishness, and just write."<sup>103</sup> Detractors cited the collection for being too Irish, but there was still the consolation of Samuel Beckett's letter to Montague where he justified the Miscellany as "well worth doing."<sup>104</sup>

Given the exorbitant cost of the collection, then the equivalent of about two novels, mixed or even good reviews were insufficient to ensure healthy sales. If the Miscellany, by its "spiritual or literary content," fulfilled Liam Miller's first imperative for publication, it failed to meet his second standard as a piece of

"merchandise."<sup>105</sup> Miller was later to dismiss the Miscellany as "a form of publication which would have met with better success in the 1930's."<sup>106</sup> More than poor sales, however, the possibility of a second Miscellany was precluded by Miller's failure, in a Guardian interview, to give Montague due credit for his editorial work.<sup>107</sup> While the association between Montague and Miller was strained temporarily, Montague could still comment years later that the working relationship he found with Kinsella and Liam Miller "was based on the thrust of common ideals...Liam especially had a rich generosity which transformed work in adventure and Tom [Kinsella]...was devastatingly funny, hard-working but hilarious, sharing my taste for those who had prematurely baptised themselves as poets, 'the knowingness of them.'"<sup>108</sup>

Notwithstanding the cancellation of the second Miscellany, all but MacIntyre shortly found an equally viable outlet for their work through the revived second series of Poetry Ireland, which made its debut in the autumn of 1962 under the auspices of the Dolmen Press and under the editorial guidance of Miscellany alumnus John Jordan and fellow board members James Liddy, James J. McAuley and Richard Weber. Close to the Miscellany in its resolve to uphold "commitment to no school, no fashion, no ideology" and likewise to "abhor mere opinion," Poetry Ireland in many respects picked up where the Miscellany

left off, publishing in its span of seven issues not only Seamus Heaney, whose "End of a Naturalist" appeared in its third number, and Michael Hartnett, who was featured in the first issue, but other emerging poets from the North and South, among them Michael Longley, Macdara Woods, Derek Mahon, and Paul Durcan.<sup>109</sup> The Miscellany poets also accounted for a sizable proportion of Poetry Ireland's material, and the sense of continuity between the two ventures was further enhanced by Montague's stewardship of the final double issue of 1968.<sup>110</sup> While the format was to change with the demise of Poetry Ireland, what began with Montague's "quiet manifesto" for a new generation of writers was carried on with Dolmen Press's establishment of Poetry Ireland Editions, a somewhat uneven series of what were eventually to be fifteen chapbooks devoted to individual works mostly by promising young poets.<sup>111</sup>

So despite the Miscellany's disappointing sales figures, its contribution "towards the recreation of Dublin as a centre of letters"--towards the repatriation of Irish writing, if not Irish writers, after decades of allegiance to London--and its influence upon developing voices made its impact both far-reaching and indisputable.<sup>112</sup> Seamus Heaney credited the Miscellany, among other publications of the early 1960s, for the measure of confidence it invested in the vitality of Ireland's poetic community at the time of his own literary apprenticeship:

I got my hands on Robin Skelton's anthology, Six Irish Poets; on the first edition of John Montague's Poisoned Lands with its irrigating and confirming poem, "The Water Carrier"; on Alvarez' anthology, The New Poetry, where I encountered the work of Ted Hughes and R.S. Thomas. All of these things were animating, as were the occasional trips to Dublin where I managed to pick up that emblem of Ireland's quickening poetic life, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing and to read in it the strong lines of Richard Murphy's 'The Cleggan Disaster' ...Everything at that time, was needy and hopeful and inchoate.<sup>113</sup>

The Dolmen Miscellany, with its defiant questioning of a national identity's infringement on a literature, begs comparison with Robin Skelton's Six Irish Poets, an anthology published by Oxford University Press in 1962, which counterpoises and challenges its sensibility in almost every regard. Skelton's collection takes as its informing principle the idea that, despite a variance of approach, the six authors represented embrace to varying degrees "what might be described as purely national themes."<sup>114</sup> It offers a peremptorily English view of Irish poetry that stresses "Irishness of themes" without ever describing or elaborating upon them. Skelton explains his understanding of Irish poetry in the following way:

I have harped on the way in which these poets use, to a greater or lesser extent, specifically Irish themes, because it seems to me that this is both healthy and interesting. It is healthy, for it shows that Irish poetry can still base itself firmly upon what might be described as 'natural resources'. It is interesting because in England at the present time there appear to

be very few poets indeed with this kind of awareness of their nationality, this sense of belonging, however rebelliously, to a social or ethnic group. Such an awareness, can of course, lead to regionalism of the bad, or parochial kind. It can, however, also lead to real vitality.... This sense of belonging is, I believe, important to poetry. It gives a firm foundation upon which to build. It gives roots. And however far poets here represented have ranged, either in their words or in their lives, it is clear that they find in national concerns, and in Irish scenes, something which perpetually fascinates and disturbs.<sup>115</sup>

Here, Skelton's rather patronizing perspective on Irish poetry proceeds from his misreading of contemporary English poetry, inasmuch as figures such as Philip Larkin, as representative of The Movement and "Little Englandism," were redefining English experience and the English character according to their perceptions of post-war austerity Britain. Where the Miscellany sought to diagnose and eliminate both prescriptives of Irish identity and the idea that the artist's chief function was to articulate them, Skelton, with his view from the outside, saw those same factors as not only laudatory but enabling. Of Skelton's six poets, all but Kell and Clarke were also represented in the Miscellany: Weber, Murphy, Kinsella, and Montague. If only for this coincidence of contributors, the two collections are complementary.

Skelton's effort is made partially in compensation for the deficiencies of periodicals, especially of young writers' issues, which tended to provide a less than

comprehensive indication of a poet's work. About Six Irish Poets he comments:

Its object is simply to give enough space to six good poets to enable them to introduce themselves to new readers more completely than it is possible in the cramped confines of the usual sort of compilation. It is difficult for any poetry reader, however dedicated, to get to know the work of all the poets who have aroused his interest by single poems in periodicals. Young poets, in particular, are hard to get to know for their publications are often hard to find, and are sometimes discreetly ephemeral. This, then, is an attempt to group together a selection of poems by six Irish poets, some of whom are still little known....<sup>116</sup>

Montague himself has no fewer than thirteen poems represented and is cited for his "impulse towards observation of society, and towards the analysis of whatever is most 'Irish'":

here, perhaps, is an example of an internationalist outlook, which I have mentioned, yet Mr. Montague finds himself frequently harking back to the Ulster of his childhood...he is representative of much Irish poetry of our century; the same impulse has been shared by Patrick Kavanagh, F.R. Higgins, John Hewitt, and many more.<sup>117</sup>

Of the poets in general, Skelton predicted in what amounts to a self-fulfilling prophecy that "in future years, the fifties and sixties may very well be seen as a period of seminal importance in the development of Irish art and literature."<sup>118</sup> Alike in the measure of confidence they expressed in the talents of a rising generation, both Six Irish Poets and The Dolmen Miscellany were able in

different ways to "indicate something of the vitality and significance of the Irish poetry written over the last few years."<sup>119</sup>

For later anthologists and editors, The Dolmen Miscellany became a landmark, a standard, and an example against which all other unveilings of Irish poetic generations could be measured. Twenty-three years after the Miscellany was published, the Dolmen Press embarked upon a similar project, The Inherited Boundaries, an anthology devoted to the work of seven poets "all born in the Republic of Ireland in the nineteen fifties, when the contributors to The Dolmen were just beginning to make their reputations."<sup>120</sup> Much as Montague had done a generation earlier, editor Sebastian Barry issued a challenge to the presumption of "a unified poetic sensibility," and saw the anthology as an effective means of "clearing up that misunderstanding."<sup>121</sup> Barry summed up the legacy of that earlier effort in this way:

The Dolmen...still managed, under the editorships of John Montague and Thomas Kinsella, to be a remarkable gauge to that generation. As well as prose writers, it presented seven poets: Pearse Hutchinson, Valentin Iremonger, Thomas Kinsella, James Liddy, John Montague, Richard Murphy, and Richard Weber, and claimed them as a proper group, bar the second poet, who was older. Apart from the exclusion of, say, Desmond O'Grady, it stands as a percipient choice. All of the poets were connected one way or another with the Dolmen Press, which was single-mindedly and single-handedly creating the means to a literature of the Republic, at least in poetry.<sup>122</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

<sup>1</sup>Liam Miller, talk given to the Dept. of English, University of Victoria (1972?), tape recording, Special Collections, McPherson Library, University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Miller, talk given to the Dept. of English, University of Victoria.

<sup>4</sup>Liam Miller, The Dun Emer and the Cuala Press (Dublin: The Cuala Press, 1973), p. 97.

<sup>5</sup>Liam Miller, Dolmen XXV: An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1976), p. 7.

<sup>6</sup>Reflecting on the private press movement, Miller said, "my own firm is also devoted to that tradition as I believe that we must in our small way serve first the needs of our country's emerging writers and in so doing open channels of communication abroad. I have found in my own experience that publication from Dublin doesn't prevent recognition abroad." Talk given to the Dept. of English, University of Victoria.

<sup>7</sup>Miller, Dolmen XXV: An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press, p. 7; Richard Murphy, interview by author, 4 April 1990, Toronto, Ontario, tape recording.

<sup>8</sup>Miller, Dolmen XXV: An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press, pp. 7, 83. Louis le Brocquy supplied two drawings--a headpiece and a talepiece--for Donagh MacDonagh's Love Duet (December 1951).

<sup>9</sup>Liam Miller, "A Prospect of Dolmens," Ireland's Press and Printing (Dundalk: Dundalgon Press, 1953), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup>Liam Miller assumed responsibility for the typography and design of Marcus' Irish Writing with issue no. 19 (June 1952).

<sup>11</sup>Miller, The Dun Emer Press and the Cuala Press, pp. 20, 99.

<sup>12</sup>Miller said, "in the first decades of the century the hot flush of our renaissance tended to look internally and they were very happy if they sold one hundred copies of the first edition The Playboy of the Western World; W.B. Yeats assumed much of the editorial responsibility for the Cuala (Dun Emer) Press, operated by his sister, Elizabeth Corbet Yeats. James Joyce, who was among the few prominent Irish writers not to be published by the press, parodied the colophon of In the Seven Woods in Ulysses; "Five lines of text and ten pages of notes about the folk and fish gods of Dundrum. Printed by the weird sisters in the year of the big wind." Miller, The Dun Emer and the Cuala Press, p. 32; Miller would revive the Cuala Press in 1968 and adopt its trademark red ink colophon for the editions he produced.

<sup>13</sup>Liam Miller, "The Heirs of St. Columba: Publishing in Ireland," The Times Literary Supplement, 3655, 17 March 1972, p. 316.

<sup>14</sup>Miller, talk given to the Dept. of English, University of Victoria.

<sup>15</sup>Richard Murphy, interview by author, 4 April 1990, Toronto, Ontario, tape recording.

<sup>16</sup>Miller, talk given to the Dept. of English, University of Victoria.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>John Montague, "Isolation and Cunning: Recent Irish Verse," Poetry 94, no. 1 (April 1959), p. 264; John Montague, "Letter from Dublin," Poetry 90, no. 5 (August 1957), p. 312.

<sup>19</sup>In "The Young Writer," Montague complained that "in a recent review of literature of 1951 the TLS could afford to ignore Ireland altogether." The Bell 18, no. 7, p. 8; John Montague, "Letter from Dublin," p. 312.

<sup>20</sup>Montague, "Isolation and Cunning," p. 264.

<sup>21</sup>Montague, "Isolation and Cunning," p. 270.

<sup>22</sup>Montague, "Contemporary Verse: A Short Chronicle," Studies no. 47 (Spring 1958), p. 449; John Montague, "American Pegasus," Studies no. 98 (1959), p. 183.

<sup>23</sup>Montague, "American Pegasus," pp. 183-184.

<sup>24</sup>Montague, "American Pegasus," pp. 191, 183.

<sup>25</sup>Montague, "American Pegasus," p. 191.

<sup>26</sup>Montague wrote, "The full range of Anglo-American activity can no longer be interpreted in terms of one tradition, like a vast historical umbrella: the individual poet chooses, creates his tradition from the living elements in his background, whether Californian or Bostonian or Admass American. The integrity of his achievement lies in his ability, like a diviner, to find where, in darkness and noise, the living water flows." "American Pegasus," p. 191.

<sup>27</sup>Montague, "Contemporary Verse: A Short Chronicle," p. 449.

<sup>28</sup>John Montague, "Outward Bound," Threshold 4, no. 2 (Autumn - Winter 1960), p. 74.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Montague had published Forms of Exile (1958) and had won the May Morton Memorial Award in 1959; Kinsella's Another September (1958) had been recommended by the Poetry Book Society and in the same year he had won the Guinness Award; Richard Murphy had several works to his credit, including The Archaeology of Love (1955), and took the AE Memorial award in 1961. Quidnunc noted that "although they are nearly of the same age, and share the same publisher and platform, the poets are very dissimilar both in work and background." Quidnunc [Patrick Campbell], "An Irishman's Diary," The Irish Times (Dublin), 24 January 1961.

<sup>31</sup>John Montague, "In the Irish Grain," introduction to The Faber Book of Irish Verse (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 36.

<sup>32</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "The Irish Writer" in Davis, Mangan, Ferguson? Tradition and the Irish Writer (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1970) p. 57; Murphy, interview by author; Quidnunc, "An Irishman's Diary."

<sup>33</sup>"Happy is the Poet," The Daily Herald (?), n.d., in The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection, Special Collections, McPherson Library, University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C.

<sup>34</sup>Murphy, interview by author; "Happy is the Poet."

<sup>35</sup>That activity was more than literary. Terence Brown has observed, "the years 1958, when the government White Paper Economic Development appeared...until 1963 when the First Programme was succeeded by the Second, have already become almost legendary years in Irish self-understanding." Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History p. 241.

<sup>36</sup>John Montague to Special Collections, University of Victoria, TLS, 6 May 1972, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>37</sup>John Montague, "Reviews: Three Prose Writers," in The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, ed. John Montague and Thomas Kinsella (Dublin: The Dolmen Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1962) p. 103; Montague to Special Collections, 6 May 1972.

<sup>38</sup>Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, p. 241.

<sup>39</sup>Liam Miller, Dublin, to John Montague, Paris, LS, 30 April 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>40</sup>John Montague, Paris, to Thomas Kinsella, Sandycove, Ireland, LS, 18 December 1961, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>41</sup>Henri Cartier-Bresson, Photography of the Miscellany being planned, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>42</sup>John Montague, Promotion Letter, 1 June 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>43</sup>Catalogue of Correspondence and Manuscripts relating to The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>Murphy, interview by author.

<sup>45</sup>Thomas Kinsella to John Montague, LS, 31 March 1961, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>46</sup>Peadar O'Donnell to John Montague, LS, 4 April 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>47</sup>Montague to Special Collections, TLS, 6 May 1972, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

\*The twelve contributors to the Miscellany included: Brian Moore, Thomas Kinsella, Aidan Higgins, Pearse Hutchinson, James Liddy, Richard Weber, John Jordan, Richard Murphy, John Montague, Valentin Iremonger, John McGahern, and James Plunkett.

\*Robert F. Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, p. 169.

\*John Montague, addressed "Dear Sir," TL, 1 June 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

\*Ibid.

\*Garratt, p. 169; Montague, Paris, to Thomas Kinsella, L, 18 December 1961, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

\*John Montague, "Preface" to The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, iv.

\*Montague would later ask, with reference to that poem, "is that what Yeats meant by bequeathing us a catalogue of subjects that could only be legitimately treated in parody?" John Montague, "Under Ben Bulbin," Shenandoah 16, no. 4 (Summer 1965), p. 23.

\*Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles: the Tradition of an Idea," in Ireland's Field Day (London: Hutchinson, 1985), pp. 57-58.

\*Ibid.

\*Montague, "Preface" to The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, iv; Deane, "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea," p. 58.

\*Sean O'Faolain, "This Is Your Magazine," pp. 5-6.

\*Catalogue of Correspondence Relating to The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, p. 1; "The TOWER has at last begun to rise!" Montague wrote to Liam Miller, LS, 1 February 1962. The Tower had particular resonance within an Irish context as the title of one of W.B. Yeats's later collections (1928) and as one of his most vital symbols.

\*Thomas Kinsella to John Montague, LS, n.d., The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

\*John Montague to Liam Miller, LS, 23 March 1962; Liam Miller to John Montague, LS, 26 March 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>62</sup>John Montague to Liam Miller, LS, 23 March 1962; Valentin Iremonger to John Montague, LS, 19 May 1961; John Jordan to John Montague, LS, 29 April 1961, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>63</sup>Montague, "Under Ben Bulben," pp. 22-23.

<sup>64</sup>John Montague, "Global Regionalism: Interview with John Montague," interview by Adrian Frazier, The Literary Review 22, no. 2 (Winter 1979), p. 159.

<sup>65</sup>Montague, "Isolation and Cunning," p. 270.

<sup>66</sup>Mary O'Malley, Belfast, to John Montague, LS, 14 March 1961, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection. Mary O'Malley, founder of Threshold (est. 1957), was a driving force behind the resurgence of literary activity in the North. The first three sonnets of The Rough Field were published in her magazine in 1962.

<sup>67</sup>Thomas Kinsella to John Montague, LS, 31 March 1961, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>68</sup>Thomas Kinsella to John Montague, LS, 26 March 1962; Liam Miller to John Montague, LS, 26 March 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection; Liam Miller concluded "the final title agreed with Tom and Peadar is The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing which I hope resolves the difficulties." Liam Miller to John Montague, LS, 4 April 1962. Montague and Kinsella had been at first reluctant to accept this title because of its similarity to S.J. White's magazine, Irish Writing.

<sup>69</sup>John Montague to Special Collections, 6 May 1972; Thomas Kinsella to John Montague, LS, 31 March 1961.

<sup>70</sup>John McGahern to John Montague, LS, n.d., The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>71</sup>See Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea," pp. 45-58.

<sup>72</sup>Montague claimed, "what was lacking in Irish verse until recently was proper ambition, professional preoccupation with the job." John Montague to Thomas Kinsella, LS, 18 December 1961, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>73</sup>John Montague, "The Impact of International Modern Poetry on Irish Writing," in Irish Poets in English, ed. Sean Lucy (Cork: The Mercier Press, 1973), pp. 148-149.

<sup>74</sup>"The Trout" was to rank, with "Tom's poem" and Montague's study of The Deserted Village, as one of the most important pieces in the collection. John Montague to Liam Miller, LS, n.d., The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>75</sup>John Montague to Liam Miller, LS, (dated December); Liam Miller to John Montague, LS, 4 April 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>76</sup>John Jordan, "Off the Barricade: A Note on Three Irish Poets," in The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, pp. 107-116. The "three Irish poets" to whom Jordan refers are Kinsella, Montague, and Desmond O'Grady. By an inexplicable error of logic, the poems which O'Grady sent to Montague were not used in the gathering. Desmond O'Grady to John Montague, LS, 7 April 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>77</sup>John Jordan, "Off the Barricade: A Note On Four Irish Poets," galley proofs, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection. The title of Jordan's article was meant to reflect a change in Ireland's literary climate since 1944, when Valentin Iremonger, Robert Greacen and Bruce Williamson published a book of their own poems as an act of protest against the enduring shadows of Yeats and AE.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid. Though they met only once, Jordan's personal dislike of Murphy and his Ascendancy background perhaps accounted for his unfair critical bias. Murphy, interview by author.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>With reference to the Jordan piece, Liam Miller wrote to John Montague on 16 May 1962 and gave him and "Tom" the right "to exercise the editorial scissors where necessary. Jordan has sent back the review much amended with the Murphy section removed. Privately, I must say I am very glad about this." Montague wrote in a covering letter dated 6 May 1972, "I think that episode (the deletion of all references to Murphy) proves that I was not opposed to Murphy, and even prepared to protect him, though I was aware of the incongruity of having such a prejudicial view of one of our contributors in the same issue, especially when it was supposed to present the united front of a generation...I don't know if I would suppress the Jordan review again."

<sup>81</sup>Murphy, interview by author.

<sup>82</sup>Jordan, "Off the Barricade: A Note on Three Irish Poets," p. 116.

<sup>83</sup>John Montague to Richard Murphy, draft of a letter, n.d., The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>84</sup>Thomas Kinsella to John Montague, LS, n.d., The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>85</sup>Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, p. 241; E.F. O'Doherty quoted by Brown, p. 267.

<sup>86</sup>Brown, p. 241.

<sup>87</sup>John Montague to Special Collections, TLS, 6 May 1972.

<sup>88</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "A Country Walk," in The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup>Aidan Higgins, "Helen Langrishe Goes Home," in The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, p. 18.

<sup>90</sup>'Gombeensism,' by no means new to Ireland of the 1960s, was decried by Yeats in "September 1913."

<sup>91</sup>Kinsella, "A Country Walk," p. 10. Kinsella alludes, by way of parody, to Yeats's "Easter 1916."

<sup>92</sup>"Castration and blindness might be a symbol for the plight of a subject people," Montague proposed in "In the Irish Grain," The Faber Book of Irish Verse, p. 21; Higgins, "Helen Langrishe Goes Home," p. 21.

<sup>93</sup>Patrick Kavanagh, "The Parish and the Universe," Collected Prose (London: Martin Brian & O'Keefe, 1973), p. 283.

<sup>94</sup>Montague argued "The Deserted Village is one of the first statements of a great modern theme, the erosion of traditional values and natural rhythms in a commercial society." John Montague, "The Sentimental Prophecy: A Study of The Deserted Village," in The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, p. 75; and John Montague, "Three Poems," Threshold, no. 17.

<sup>95</sup>James Liddy, "By the Western Seaboard," in The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, p. 31.

<sup>96</sup>John Jordan, "First Draft," in The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, pp. 36-45; Pearse Hutchinson, "A True Story of the Class War," pp. 27-28; Brian Moore, "Preliminary Pages for a Work of Revenge," pp. 1-7.

<sup>97</sup>Among the seven pieces exploring the artist's relationship to society are Brian Moore's "Preliminary Pages for a Work of Revenge," Kinsella's "A Country Walk," Hutchinson's "A True Story of the Class War," James Liddy's "By the Western Seaboard," John Jordan's "First Draft," Montague's "The Sentimental Prophecy," and James Plunkett's "Ferris Moore and the Earwig."

<sup>98</sup>Jordan, "Off the Barricade: A Note on Three Irish Poets," pp. 107, 111, 112, 113.

<sup>99</sup>According to Terence Brown, Daniel Corkery at his most influential in the 1920s and 1930s, "felt able to identify with even greater precision the forces which preoccupy a properly Irish mind. They are, as he defines them in Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature, (1) religion, (2) nationalism, (3) the land. Unless his exclusive creed asserts, a writer is imaginatively absorbed by at least one of these preoccupations, he is, Corkery assures us, not to be considered an Irish writer; he does not express the reality of Irish life." Brown, Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, p. 66.

<sup>100</sup>Montague to Special Collections, TLS, 6 May 1972.

<sup>101</sup>Terence de Vere White, "The Road to Parnassus," The Irish Times, 15 September 1962.

<sup>102</sup>p.c., "The New Writers," Hibernia (October 1962).

<sup>103</sup>Sean O'Faolain, "To Hell With Ireland," The Manchester Guardian, 5 October 1962; Keith Harrison, "Avoiding the Leprechauns," The Listener, n.d.

<sup>104</sup>Samuel Beckett to John Montague, LS, 29 September 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>105</sup>Miller, talk given to the Dept. of English, University of Victoria.

<sup>106</sup>Miller, Dolmen XXV: An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press, p. 35.

<sup>107</sup>Peter Lennon, "Dolmen Dublin," The Guardian, n.d.

<sup>108</sup>Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 79.

<sup>109</sup>Jordan, "Editorial," Poetry Ireland, no. 1 (Autumn 1962), p. 3.

<sup>110</sup>John Montague, ed., Poetry Ireland, nos. 7-8 (Spring 1968).

<sup>111</sup>By Miller's description, "Poetry Ireland Editions were issued to substitute for the appearance of the magazine Poetry Ireland. Fifteen volumes appeared, each presenting new work by a poet." Miller, Dolmen XXV: An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press, p. 51.

<sup>112</sup>Montague, interview by author, 23 May 1987, Buffalo, N.Y., tape recording.

<sup>113</sup>Seamus Heaney, "The Placeless Heaven: Another Look at Kavanagh," in Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry, ed. Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 185.

<sup>114</sup>Robin Skelton, "Introduction" to Six Irish Poets (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), ix.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid, xiv.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid, xi.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid, xii.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid, xi.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid.

<sup>120</sup>Sebastian Barry, "The History and Topography of Nowhere," Introduction to The Inherited Boundaries: Younger Poets of the Republic (Mountrath: The Dolmen Press, 1986), p. 13.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### MONTAGUE AND THE RE-MAKING OF TRADITION

While the "hungry Fifties" had impeded and inhibited the emergence of what might be called the Dolmen Generation, the decade had been especially unkind and disabling for the generation which immediately preceded it.<sup>2</sup> Elder contemporaries like Patrick Kavanagh, Padraic Fallon, Brian Coffey, Louis MacNeice, John Hewitt, and Denis Devlin, whose creative perseverance in the face of public disfavour and deliberate obscurity became for poets like Montague a "salutary revelation" and insight into the way in which "talent will survive against the grain of a hostile climate."<sup>2</sup> Inasmuch as Montague alleged his own generation had been the casualty of "the middle class revolution," those who had attempted to forge their careers in the decades before him were equally "casualties of the war"--both generations were victimized by their social contexts.<sup>3</sup> Those chiefly responsible for the Miscellany were also instrumental in rehabilitating the denigrated or diminished reputations of Ireland's two most senior and arguably most influential writers, Austin Clarke and Patrick Kavanagh, and in broadening, if not dismantling, the boundaries of the literary kulturkampf which had once excluded them.

Austin Clarke's association with the Dolmen Press, which by and large fuelled his poetic rebirth, commenced with the privately printed Ancient Lights in 1955, and was all but solidified by 1961 when Later Poems was published to the ecstatic acclaim of a substantially wider audience than Clarke had known in any previous time in his career.<sup>4</sup> Thomas Kinsella, who would eventually consolidate these and earlier achievements in his 1976 edition of Clarke's Selected Poems, was originally both reserved and sceptical in his estimation of Clarke's contribution to contemporary poetry:

In general he wasn't good enough for his technique when it was good, and lost control over his technique when he started speaking like a major man. In toto, I think his output reduces down to (perhaps) less than Kavanagh's....I cd not produce a stately welcome for Austin's "Collected", in which his placing in Irish literature, etc., is attempted.<sup>5</sup>

Yet despite Clarke's critical assaults on Modernism, which subsided only with the belated recognition of his poetic successors in the second edition of Poetry in Modern Ireland (1961), his fame in later years proceeded, somewhat ironically, both from his conversion to the social realism he had once condemned and from efforts by Kinsella, Montague, and Liam Miller, in regrafting his work to the tradition from which it had been severed and displaced for more than two decades, beginning with his exclusion from Yeats' Oxford Book of Modern Verse in 1935.<sup>6</sup> As Robert F.

Garratt has noted, "these younger writers recognized in Austin Clarke a transitional figure," whose career spanned both the romantic preoccupations of the Revival and the critical realism of contemporary literature and whose "poetic history served as a barometer of Irish poetry after Yeats."<sup>7</sup> As Montague himself confessed in 1982, "a climate had been created in which the rediscovery of Austin Clarke had almost become inevitable."<sup>8</sup>

What the 'reborn' Clarke accomplished through the "distanced ironic stance of his later years" to some degree fulfilled what Montague saw as Ireland's need for "one fearless critical writer and satirist, another Swift, though preferably a Catholic, to clear this apathy from the air."<sup>9</sup> Clarke's very changeability and diversity--given his formulation of "the Celtic Romanesque," his experiments in prosody aimed at achieving a sense of continuity with Gaelic medieval Ireland, and his engagement with a democratizing Joycean sensibility concerning religion and urban culture--made him a "liberating force" within Irish poetry.<sup>10</sup> With its emphasis on the "private and satiric Clarke" and virtual neglect of his earliest work, the Selected Poems of 1976 upheld Clarke as an example at the same time as it remade him in the image of his poetic successors.<sup>11</sup> In reviewing the book, Montague offered these remarks:

this late drafting of a recruit [Clarke] who had spent a good deal of his reviewing time in assaulting contemporary poetry had its comic aspects, but I was glad to have played my own small part in it; the belated recognition of the mature Clarke, the existence of an Irish poetic tradition in English, to follow or despise, became an accomplished fact...his brave and lonely spirit emerges as the conscience of our cramped and crippled southern state during its early years.<sup>12</sup>

In issuing a landmark six-hundred-page edition of Clarke's Collected Poems in 1974, the Dolmen Press not only made the strongest statement possible for Clarke's significance, but also restored the same sense of continuity to twentieth-century Irish poetry that Clarke himself sought to establish in relation to his Anglo-Irish and Gaelic legacies. Ev Montague's reckoning, "Austin Clarke's lifework can be seen as a deliberate attempt to reconcile the two traditions; he is our first completely Irish poet."<sup>13</sup>

Kinsella and Montague, along with others who began to write in the 1950s, undertook a program of "personal repossession in the form of commentary and translation," and became not only the inheritors but the trustees of "that part of the past which refuses to go away...and remains to enrich and complexify the present."<sup>14</sup>

For Robert F. Garratt, "the difficulty, then, for Irish poets at mid-century came in the search for continuity, finding something that would suffice to provide cultural identity and also to admit the modern world."<sup>15</sup> Inasmuch as

Montague and Kinsella were willing to immerse themselves in "the filthy modern tide" of an Irish reality and, in acknowledging a Modernist sensibility of cultural fragmentation, to take issue with the efficacy of tradition, that search for continuity came to express itself in an acceptance of the inalterable discontinuity and loss that underscored the relation between Irish writing of the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Kinsella explained in "The Irish Writer":

Every writer in the modern world--since he can't be in all the literary traditions at once--is the inheritor of a gapped, discontinuous polyglot tradition. Nevertheless, if the function of tradition is to link the living with the past, this is done as well by a broken tradition as by a whole one--however painful it may be humanly speaking. I am certain that a great part of the significance of my own past, as I try to write my poetry, is that that past is mutilated.<sup>16</sup>

For both Montague and Kinsella, the unwritten agenda for the retrieval and "reactivation" of what the latter called "the significant past" was understood essentially as a "healing" process intent on making the loss of culture and community as much as the inheritance of these things intelligible and relevant within a modern context.<sup>17</sup> In his discussion of tradition, Seamus Deane has suggested:

The consideration of style is a thorny problem. In Irish writing, it is particularly so. When the language is in English, Irish writing is

dominated by the notion of vitality restored, of the centre energized by the periphery, the urban by the rural, the cosmopolitan by the provincial, the decadent by the natural. This is one of the liberating effects of nationalism, a means of restoring dignity and power to what had been humiliated and suppressed. This is the idea which underlines all our formulations of tradition.<sup>18</sup>

Given the choice between "the great twins of the Revival," each with his own aesthetic blueprint for revitalization, Kinsella designated Joyce, rather than Yeats, as the "true father" because, as he said, his achievement, in its "simultaneous revival of the Irish tradition and admittance of the modern world" stood for "the Irish tradition as continuous, or healed--or healing--from its mutilation."<sup>19</sup> Though predicated on the idea of separation, Joyce's work was, nevertheless, founded on what Deane has called

the belief in the capacity of art to restore a lost vitality. So the figures we remember are embodiments of this 'vitalism'; particularly Molly Bloom and Anna Livia Plurabelle. The fact that they were women is important too, since it indicates some sort of resolution, out of the level of femaleness, of what had remained implacably unresolvable on the male level.<sup>20</sup>

Montague has made explicit his own identification with the Joycean approach to tradition, beyond the heterogeneity and pluralism encoded to that interpretation, in his foremost creative investigations and critical pronouncements.<sup>21</sup> Chiefest among these is what Antoinette Quinn has called his "obsession with the eternal feminine"

which, like one of his key texts, Graves' The White Goddess, has expressed itself in the creation of "his imaginative cult of the female."<sup>22</sup> Women, in what Montague sees as their three principal incarnations as lover, mother, and hag, are pleasing and harassing presences, sources and mockers of primal vitality.<sup>23</sup> Even when they are not fully realized, they function as objects or projections of man's need to recover from 'a loss of strength'. The painful displacement from and compensatory pursuit of that source of vitality, especially as it is embodied in the maternal principle, operates on interactive autobiographical, political, and mythological levels throughout his canon. His early and disabling estrangement from his own mother becomes a metaphor not only for the experience of colonial deracination and dispossession but for the alienation of modern man, in his drive for progress, efficiency, and modernization, from "the first home" ("Sheela na Gig" in Mount Eagle)--from the great earth mother or Ur-mother--and from the atavistic power of tribal ritual, the fertile matrix of landscape, and the informing but not-quite-understood racial subconsciousness that the feminine principle encapsulates.

Montague's work is, by and large, about the search for personal and communal vitality, and about the capacity of the poet's mnemonic and creative imagination to restore life and continuity, and to 'recompose the wholeness of

feeling' despite the destructive, divisive, and antithetical forces which continually threaten and often succeed in undermining that task. However indebted Montague may be to the circular aesthetic of Joyce or of early Irish art, his work in its own right is intent upon the idea of return to the place, person, or imaginative construct from which that vitality originates and emanates:

Harsh landscape that haunts me,  
well and stone, in the bleak moors of dream  
with all my circling a failure to return  
to what is already going

going

GONE

("Driving South," The Rough Field, p. 83)

Even in the early stages of his career, Montague argued that the integrity of any poet's achievement resided "in his ability, like a diviner, to find, where, in darkness and noise, the living water flows."<sup>24</sup> The 'sources' of Montague's poetry are his own beginnings as well as beginnings in general, its medium a backward quest or backward glance intent upon an ultimate healing or reconciliation through the confrontation of "the primal hurt," however painful or insupportable its attendant sense of loss.<sup>25</sup> At their most affirmative, the primary tropes and symbols operating within Montague's cautionary and recuperative vision are metaphors for the creative process and, more specifically, for the process by which art,

especially poetry, arises, sustains, and in turn must be sustained.

For Montague, the Muse or inspiring principle, far from being exclusively feminine, "is anything that excites you--to awe first and to poetry second--and that, for me, also includes wells, stones, old women, and babies."<sup>26</sup> Of these, the images of the well, with its connotation of Hippocrene and its distinctly feminine associations as well as associations with Yeats' Hawk's Well, and the stone, not only isolate and maintain what Antoinette Quinn has called "the creative tension between flow and fixity," which animates much of Montague's work, but together provide an analogue to the paradoxical brevity and endurance of the poetic act, and, by extension, Montague's own efforts in reviving and keeping alive both the Irish tradition and the Irish tradition in English.<sup>27</sup> Quinn has argued,

'Well' or 'source', his most obsessive trope, symbolizes his autobiographical fascination with his own origins and with the hiding places of his poetic power and also his abiding concern with creativity and the life-principle, with pulse and process, fluidity and fertility, tidal throb and threnody. 'Stone' is expressive of his contrary attraction to stasis and permanence, to monumental art, ancient cultural artifacts and ancestral inscriptions, to Sheela-na-gigs, dolmens, passage-graves, 'shards of a lost tradition,' to poetry as a means of self-perpetuation and an enduring communication, to whatever survives and defies Mutability.<sup>28</sup>

The polarities of kinesis and stasis not only preside within Montague's poems, but often dictate and

describe the way in which those texts achieve resonance or 'multivalence' through the intertextual interplay of a constantly re-made canon.<sup>29</sup> By changing a poem's context, Montague enshrines and perpetuates a particular work at the same time as he defies the notion that its meaning can in any way be fixed or ratified. Hence, paradoxically, and by Montague's own admission, "no word is final except the always renewed text, which the critic should serve as enthusiastic mediator."<sup>30</sup> This insistence or dependence upon critical currency and continued assessment is only part of what is, by degrees, "a self-congratulatory tendency" or "penchant for eager self-regard," an abiding concern for his own reputation and that of his predecessors, and a more profound sensitivity to the dynamics of tradition.<sup>31</sup> Those dynamics entail the precariousness of cultural memory and the coherence it affords; also the alignments and affinities which speak for the essential unity or what Montague calls "the cross-fertilization" of disparate cultures--a kind of cultural intertextuality.<sup>32</sup> Beyond Montague's nostalgic retrospective and elegiac vision which underscores his acceptance of mutability--his conviction that "the only unchanging thing in life is change"--and the breakdown and loss of tradition, there remains the impulse to redress that impermanence by reaffirming personal, local, and international traditions, and by recreating communities

which embody them both within an imaginative context and within his critical domain.<sup>33</sup> Montague's search for a context for the entities of home, community, and their attendant traditions, assumes vital importance throughout his nine verse collections, but are especially salient in his most recent Mount Eagle, where the poet locates and defines himself in relation to "earth's house hold" (see Gary Snyder's book by that title), his Ulster origins, his young family, his racial and, in many ways mystical inheritance, and not least of all an international literary pantheon to which he has always aspired and now belongs.<sup>34</sup> Here, Montague finally realizes "the French idea of a fertile literary community" that was denied him earlier in his career.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, he announces, through dedications, allusions, and translations, his active, if not equal, participation in a multitude of foreign and native traditions: from the French amour courtois of the thirteenth century to the Symboliste movement of the nineteenth century; from a first-hand familiarity with the great "American poetic adventure of this century" advanced by writers from William Carlos Williams to Gary Snyder, and Robert Duncan; from the Irish language lyrics of the Middle Ages to more recent practitioners like Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill; from internationalists like Samuel Beckett and Denis Devlin to "the four masters concerned with the matter of these

islands"--Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Graves, David Jones, and Austin Clarke.<sup>36</sup>

The literary fathers and contemporaries to whom he pays greatest tribute, among them MacDiarmid and John Berryman, are, like himself, self-styled literary "outsiders" seeking "to reconcile defiant adoption of a local or special tradition with the international claims of modern poetry."<sup>37</sup> The cross-cultural context and dual allegiance suggested by John Berryman's appellation for Montague--"le poète Irlandais"--underlies one of the vital concepts of Montague's aesthetic, that of the "global regionalist":

My amphibian position between North and South, my natural complicity in three cultures, American, Irish and French, with darts aside to Mexico, India, Italy or Canada, should seem natural enough in the late twentieth century as man strives to reconcile local allegiances with the absolute necessity of developing a world consciousness to save us from the abyss. Earthed in Ireland, at ease in the world, weave the strands you're given.<sup>38</sup>

Writers to whom Montague has directed both a mosaic of praise and a plethora of critical attention either endorse or are seen to endorse this sensibility. Hence, Oliver Goldsmith, whose achievement has proven "both an example and an albatross," is cited for "his continuing interest in French literature," for the cosmopolitanism that marked him as a 'Citizen of the World', and for his endorsement of "rural virtues."<sup>39</sup> George Moore, the subject

of Montague's 1951 study, "The Tyranny of Memory," is acknowledged as "our only civilized writer," whose appropriation of "the French analytical approach" enabled him to address "subjects nearer home." Moore's impulse toward nostalgia, "commitment to a perpetual stock-taking," and obsession with memory are regarded not as regressive tendencies but as confirmations of his status as a modern writer:

The heavy latent shadows of nostalgia lies across much of the best writing of the last fifty years, whether the indefatigable burrowings of Proust, Graham Greene describing intimations of mortality in a Lost Childhood, or even Evelyn Waugh, relaxing the astringency of his satire to flounder in luxuriant memories of his salad days.<sup>40</sup>

The nineteenth-century northern "exile," William Carleton, is credited with the "literary discovery of the Irish people," and with acquiring his fame in the cities by remaining "a country man at heart." Carleton's decision to write anti-Catholic propaganda in order to advance his career is interpreted by Montague as a curious inversion of the pressures incumbent upon Southern writers at mid-century.<sup>41</sup>

Each commentary Montague has undertaken on the achievement of an influential elder in turn substantiates his contention "that the wider an Irishman's experience, the more likely he is to understand his own country." In a recent introduction to a selection of these and other prose

studies, Montague revealed the primary purpose of his critical agenda when he noted "so many of my earlier essays were strategic attempts to get respected elders back into print, to recreate a fertile context."<sup>42</sup> Yet, as Seamus Heaney has observed in "Envy and Identifications," "when poets turn to the great masters of the past, they turn to an image of their own creation, one which is likely to be a reflection of their own imaginative needs, their own artistic inclinations and procedures."<sup>43</sup> Given the reciprocity implied in any writer's creative and critical engagement with his predecessors, Montague's strategy and motivation in rewriting Irish literary history is in fact double-edged: he is at once affirming the primacy and relevance of his literary masters and, in invoking and reincarnating them in his own image or in effecting a personalization of these figures, solidifying, if not justifying, his own place among them within the context he creates. To whatever extent Montague is influenced by his exemplary elders, any reading of those older texts is in turn influenced and redefined by Montague's assimilation of them in his poetry and fiction. That "each writer," as Jorge Luis Borges has suggested, "creates his precursors" remains especially relevant to Montague's case.<sup>44</sup>

As much as he functions as an interpreter of tradition--as the self-appointed mediator of past and present--Montague cautions that tradition itself "should

not be an anachronistic defence against experience."<sup>45</sup> In this regard, he follows the example of his American friends, William Carlos Williams and Robert Duncan, who, by Robert Creeley's estimation "attempted to be rid of the overlay of a speciously 'historical' appreciation, a 'tradition' which is finally nothing more than a congealed 'taste' or 'style'--which is distinctly different from art."<sup>46</sup> As Robert F. Garratt has argued, when Montague "evokes the past he does so in order to explain and understand the present."<sup>47</sup> Far from being an issue of adherence or conformity--a subjugation of the self--Montague's use of the past, as it is implied in his considerations, preoccupations, and confrontations with history or tradition, is vital to "the search for the self" and the achievement, however painful, of self-actualization.<sup>48</sup> From Montague's perspective, tradition is both something that is given and something that is made, insomuch as "the individual poet chooses, creates his tradition from the living elements in his background."<sup>49</sup> Either to neglect or renounce certain aspects of one's inheritance, as even the myriad-minded Joyce, "our all-seeing ear and great democrat of literature," did in regard to "Protestantism and the dispossessed world of Corkery's Irish-speaking peasant" is to promote a sensibility or condition of racial exclusion that Montague has diagnosed as "the partitioned intellect."<sup>50</sup> The point of tradition,

within Montague's expansive and synthesizing vision, is not to make a fetish of evasion but to find through it a means towards liberation. "One explores an inheritance," Montague has said, "to free oneself and others."<sup>51</sup>

Eamon Grennan has made the important distinction between Montague and Joyce, that while Montague confronts, exorcises and transmutes his fear of "the old people" who trespass on his childhood, and enters into a benign understanding and communion with these "figures of fear and friendliness," Joyce's Stephen Dedalus and, by turns, Joyce himself are emotionally and psychically displaced from the world of the Irish peasantry: "I fear him. I fear his redrimmed horny eyes. It is with him I must struggle all through this night till day come, till he or I lie dead...No. I mean him no harm."<sup>52</sup> Tradition, especially when it operates in accord with others, becomes an ameliorating force, a medium of cohesion as well as of continuity.

The sensibility of the unpartitioned intellect, symbolized for Montague by the harp, the seal of the United Irishmen and its motto, "It is new strung and shall be heard," negotiates and accommodates

richness and narrowness, the world and our province: we must have both. Or rather, we must have them all, remembering what Seamus Deane has brilliantly diagnosed as 'the central fact of the Irish tradition -- that it is always an attempt to describe what we have yet to build'... [It] might also be of use as a touchstone, at

the very least a description of a certain kind of mind, an ideal inclusiveness towards which we might all aspire, a passionate welcoming; a fertile balance....The unpartitioned intellect is a sensibility which is prepared to entertain, to be sympathetic to, all the traditions of which our country can be said to be composed. I am thinking in terms of archaeology, history and religion....The unpartitioned sensibility should be able to accept, listen to, at least, the many voices, agreeable and disturbing, which haunt our land. 'The isle is full of noises' but they should be made to blend, as a symphony contains its dissonances, a symphony in the modern post-Beethoven sense, from Mahler to Shostakovitch, structures of healing."<sup>53</sup>

Like the symphonic structure of The Dead Kingdom, which, in its expansiveness and its containment both of division and its consequences, aspires towards an ultimate healing or achievement of wholeness and understanding, the polyphonous unpartitioned sensibility Montague proposed shortly after completing that work subscribes to a healing of the social and cultural divisions that separate the Irish from the Irish and Ireland from the rest of the world.<sup>54</sup> Montague's attachment and absolute need for "love, friendship, and the healing harmonies of music, painting, and poetry" afford him this: "when the veil lifts, of pain, or misunderstanding or whatever, I catch glimpses of unity, a rich harmony that manages to accommodate disturbance, discord."<sup>55</sup>

Montague's ongoing engagement with the political exigencies of his native province, not to mention his very aggressive, though often criticized, attempt to reunite

Ireland's increasingly divergent political and literary traditions, has necessarily cast him in the role credited to W.H. Auden in the 1930s--that of "cultural diagnostician, analyst, and therapist."<sup>56</sup> Notwithstanding the elegiac, even tragic tenor to much of Montague's poetry, his acute sense of social responsibility and commitment makes him, in Edna Longley's estimation, as much a surgeon as a coroner.<sup>57</sup> When asked if it were possible for a poet so "immured by his political context to extricate himself from it," Montague responded:

It would be dishonest if he did--not only to his past, but to his family's past as well. What's in his blood must speak through him. He must bear witness, as Ritsos and Amichai and Neruda have done. But in a context of understanding, compassion, diagnosis, hope... [The Rough Field] firstly should have the function of introducing people to that world and give people a glimpse of why what is happening is happening, why the bombs are going off, etc. And secondly, if the people more directly involved in the situation read it, it should have the effect of curing them of their violence and healing them in their long historical disease.<sup>58</sup>

The need to cure "the disease called violence," to heal divisions and enmity, to assuage primal wounds of a broken home, of broken traditions, or of tribal pain, and above all to "turn psychic defeats into victories," these things lie at the heart of Montague's poetic consciousness and prevail equally in all its dimensions, whether his preoccupations are personal, ecological, political, mytho-

racial, archaeological, or linguistic.<sup>59</sup> Like the Celtic poets or filidh who credited their recitations with the power to assure "health, wealth, and progeny," Montague evinces himself as well as his readers of the ameliorating capacity of his art, where the achievement of "self-knowledge" effects change or gives way to understanding on a larger scale.<sup>60</sup> For Montague, "poetry is a partly redemptive process. It tries to explain and to extract something of beauty from horror, and it tries to absorb some of the distress and to transform it into something of beauty."<sup>61</sup>

Montague's self-appointed role as poet, if he can be said to have one, is that of intermediary, avatar, guardian, medium or shaman whose task it is to exact from time a timelessness, to make one culture intelligible to another, as he does through translation or "cross-fertilization," to render the invisible world visible, and to retrieve and remake what had been lost. When Montague speaks of Ireland, he very often speaks for "a tribal consciousness," however remote or dissociated from any contemporary reality or understanding of community.<sup>62</sup> In outlining his imperatives as the unofficial custodian and "voice of a community," Montague has claimed:

I think a poet should speak for his people, out of his people's pain...it is they who are being taken away from what they had, and it is I who am the possessor, and with the older people, the guardian of what had been there....The racial

aspect of a poet's inheritance should be unconscious as breathing....One important aspect of my work...is that it is mediumistic, insofar as it is letting older generations speak through me.<sup>53</sup>

From among an arsenal of postures and guises, of which his most recent is the proprietary and anagrammatic eagle in "Mount Eagle," Montague assumes an almost paternalistic responsibility for the secret, instinctive and other-worldly intelligence that unites man with his fellow man and connects him with the rest of the natural world.<sup>54</sup> Montague's avian perspectives ("Mount Eagle" in Mount Eagle and "What a View" in Tides and The Dead Kingdom), together with what Michael Allen has referred to as "the image of old Mount Eagle imprisoned in his Captain Birdseye outfit," aligns him with the ancient Irish poets and the shamans of Siberia and North America, all of whom were known to have worn "cloaks of bird feathers for their excursions to the world beyond."<sup>55</sup> Like the old woman in the Dingle peninsula who, when asked for directions to Gallarus oratory, "proffers ritual greetings" ("The Answer," A Chosen Light, p. 37), Montague is an invoker "of power to cleanse the mind," an emissary of the guardian and presiding spirits. This is a function to which Montague readily admits, especially for the conception of The Rough Field and The Dead Kingdom:

I sleep walked through The Rough Field like a medium transcribing a familial, and by extension, tribal message, keeping faith with the burden of that vision for a decade. Where did it come from, why should I be the chronicler of what happened to the lost intentions of the O'Neills? ...I had assembled this terrifying material. I said, 'who could solve the north of Ireland? Who could possibly heal this?' And so, for 'The Invocation to the Guardian,' I went into a kind of trance and I invoked all the great solvers of problems and I gave it to them: Napoleon, Solomon, all of them.<sup>66</sup>

Although Montague's stature as a contemporary Irish poet is assured, he is also an Irish poet in the most traditional sense of that designation, first of all as shaman, a diviner and prophet, an initiate into "the mysteries of antiquity," whose province it was to conduct his audiences, through ritual and trance, on journeys to another world, and, secondly as file, an arbiter in disputes, a bestower and confirmer of kingship, an official custodian of history and royal genealogy.<sup>67</sup> As far as the visionary dimension to Montague's work is concerned, even the facial scars which both he and his father, a journeyman in the subterranean world of the New York subway system, bear are in some way reminiscent of the "initiation scar" sported by those who have undergone and emerged from a rite of passage in the underworld.<sup>68</sup> Each time Montague makes a journey to "the shadowy territory" of the North the structural or narrative focus of the collection, as he does in The Rough Field and The Dead Kingdom, he encounters and confronts the shades from his own past, the mother who

abandoned him, the aunts who fostered him--and the spectres which continue to haunt the politicized and polarized northern milieu.<sup>69</sup> Figures of the poet proliferate throughout Montague's work, but increasingly the gifts of prophecy and divination which promote their authority also enforce their solitude and loneliness. Yet it is precisely this solitude--embodied in the title of the book Mount Eagle by Cassandra, by Fintan, by the "no longer privileged poet trying to crash the sound barrier," by the eagle in his aloofness--which is, as Seamus Deane has observed, the source of the aristocratic in Montague's work.<sup>70</sup> Unlike Heaney, who is an unwilling and uncertain witness to victimization, Montague, because of his mediumistic role, takes that victimization onto himself. As much as Montague is engaged with his context and with its creations he remains somehow above, isolated, or removed from it. Despite his otherwise Joycean affinities, the romantic, mystic, and aristocratic in Montague aligns him with Yeats, and it is Yeats, perhaps more than Joyce, who established both the precedent and the need for Montague's own editorial agenda. Citing the absence of any appreciable literary comradeship at mid-century, Montague has explained his initiative:

The unselfish generosity of our great father figure, Yeats, seems to be an ideal that has been temporarily lost but would Irish writing have worldwide respect but for him, serving as focus for both activity and reaction? From

The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing (1961) through my Faber anthology to Bitter Harvest, the forthcoming Scribners anthology, I have tried to present the best of my contemporaries. It is in this context that I find the element of self-seeking in the Northern thing depressingly close to Ulsterkampf, when our giant forebears, Yeats and Joyce, have given us the freedom of the world.<sup>71</sup>

Granted the different demands and parameters of Montague's three major anthologies, in each decade he has sought to revise his understanding of the Irish tradition and to keep pace with the changing face of Ireland as it is reflected in its literature: from the progressive Ireland of Sean Lemass and his own "Clohessy" ("A Change of Management," Death of a Chieftain), to the strife-torn, economically besieged Ireland of the Troubles and the European market economy, to the disaffected and socially inimical Ireland of the post-Anglo-Irish Agreement.<sup>72</sup> As all anthologists have been in recent years, Montague is necessarily a participant in the "anthological wars" cited by Edna Longley for the way in which they "exemplify the relation between cultural and political exclusion."<sup>73</sup> Unlike Thomas Kinsella's Oxford Book of Irish Verse (1986), which stops short of acknowledging poets born since 1940, or Paul Muldoon's Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Verse (1986), which concentrates on the work of ten poets but features only three from the Republic, the two anthologies Montague has published since the Miscellany "lead up to the present" and show "the Irish tradition as

it has been glimpsed by English-speaking writers" without compromising or precluding what Ewart Milne saw as "the possibility that the Irish poet's gaze should now be turned outward."<sup>74</sup> What distinguishes both The Faber Book of Irish Verse (1974) and Bitter Harvest (1989) from all but the most specialized anthologies, like Sebastian Barry's The Inherited Boundaries (published by the Dolmen Press in 1986), or Gerald Dawe's Younger Irish Poets (1982), is the measure of confidence they invest in Ireland's younger writers, even in instances where their publishing records are limited at best, or where their reputations have yet to be tested.

In providing a perspective, "an over-all picture," of the many-stranded Irish tradition through an investigation of "whether there has been any connection between what had gone before and what is happening now," Montague's intention in editing The Faber Book of Irish Verse was not only to help the young writers, but to help them understand their position and their inheritance.<sup>75</sup> In its unsubtle evocation of William Carlos Williams' In the American Grain--which has been described as a Bible for younger American poets--Montague's introduction, "In the Irish Grain," is as much a handbook or manual as an analysis or survey.<sup>76</sup> In recognizing the achievements of marginalized or largely forgotten figures, like the political poet Charles Donnelly or the experimentalist

Brian Coffey, Montague is indirectly issuing a licence or creating a mandate for the creative freedom which eluded him in the earliest stages of his own career. About the 1974 anthology, Montague has said:

During the late nineteen-sixties I had two major tasks: one was to complete The Rough Field and the other was to do the Faber book which had been passed on to me by Valentin Iremonger, who had undertaken to do it when he was the Irish Consul at our London Embassy. I had set myself the challenge of trying to give a skeleton of the Irish literary tradition in its several languages. But really to do the book I would have to have been hydra-headed, a scholar and translator of early Irish poetry, of Irish medieval poetry, of medieval Latin, and an expert in eighteenth century, both in English, Irish, and Ulster Scots. There is no chance that any one person could join up all these disciplines. However, I did my best, and I think the result at least represents the backbone of the Irish tradition as I could find it. I also set myself the extra criterion that the translations should be by poets, which was often misunderstood.<sup>77</sup>

At a time when Montague was surveying "early Irish sagas and Irish medieval masterpieces like the Vision of MacConglinne and the Frenzy of Sweeney," he was also exploiting and assimilating their techniques of interplay between prose and poetry in his own long "visionary" poem, The Rough Field.<sup>78</sup> With the search for continuity and the task of reconstructing tradition uppermost in both undertakings, Montague distinguishes himself, in Terence Brown's view, as "a poet coming to terms with his own artistic past, discerning pattern and significance within it."<sup>79</sup> The chapter headings for the Faber Book of Irish

Verse in themselves serve as an analogue to Montague's foremost themes and preoccupations: old mythologies; a way of life; a Monastic Church; Women and Love; courtly love; the Bards Mourn; a Wandering voice: songs from the Irish. Montague also strives for a definition of the 'Irish writer' expansive enough to justify his selection and succinct enough to substantiate his own position:

The question has often been raised by crusading nationalists, and as often dismissed, whether Swift and Goldsmith can be regarded as Irish writers. It seems to me that the claim has validity whenever a writer shows the pressure of local experience, and is regarded as a seminal influence by later writers....An Irish poet seems to me in a richly ambiguous position, with the pressure of an incompletely discovered past behind him, and the whole modern world around.<sup>80</sup>

Montague's insistence that the translations, which comprised roughly one quarter of the collection, should be executed by poets themselves, was founded not only on the assumption that greater sensitivity would be brought to bear upon the works, but in the belief that "exchange between the two languages" and between poets of the past and those of the present is "crucial for the future of Irish literature."<sup>81</sup> Among the translators are no less than James Clarence Mangan, Flann O'Brien, Padraic Colum, Brendan Behan, James Stephens, Frank O'Connor, Thomas Kinsella, Austin Clarke, Maire Cruise O'Brien, Valentin Iremonger, James Simmons, Michael Hartnett, Eilean Ni Chuilleanain, and Sean O'Riada. The perceptive choice of

James Clarence Mangan's rendering of O'Rahilly's "The Brightest of the Bright," intensifies rather than diminishes the sense of connection between the nationalist poets of the mid-nineteenth century and the last great wave of writing in Irish, and lends support to Montague's claim that the Irish tradition, with its accompanying racial sensibility, is not so much "gapped, silent, and discontinuous," as it is mutilated.<sup>82</sup> Where the anthology fell short, as Montague admitted readily, was in the area of modern poetry in Irish:

To have included [it] would have been unfair, as well as burdening an already contemporary section: I could only hope to include a few names with translations, which, however good, would place them at a disadvantage among their English contemporaries. When I come to revise the anthology, I hope to find many new poems and more fresh translations.<sup>83</sup>

To make amends for the inevitable shortcomings and deficiencies of the Faber anthology, Montague's Bitter Harvest, in its editorial outlook, if not by its inclusions, accepts the unassailable nature of the recent resurgence in Irish language poetry. By Montague's reckoning, it is the "exfoliating achievement in two languages, at least two traditions, which works to redeem the systematic degradation of the whole island."<sup>84</sup> Yet, in what amounts to perhaps no more than a token representation of Irish works in translation by Michael Hartnett, Michael Davitt, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, and the more senior Mairtin

O'Direain, Montague is concerned primarily with the way in which their talents, especially those of O'Direain, have "survived against the grain of a hostile climate."<sup>55</sup>

As the title of Montague's introductory essay, "Against the Grain," suggests, Bitter Harvest's selection of verse by Irish poets born in this century provides salutary postscript of addendum to the Faber anthology, but differs from its antecedent in its outright polemicism.

This anthology is both a supplement to my previous, a survey of Irish verse from the earliest times; and a statement, amounting to a proud claim. As the earlier anthology showed, Irish poetry has a long tradition....The relationship between literature and the immediate form of history we call politics is both subtle and brutal. It seems no accident that the earlier burst of great writing coincided with a redefinition of Ireland, leading to the creation of binary political entities, contrary allegiances....Now that uneasy stalemate [between the North and South] is being challenged by bomb, bullet, and some hopeful argument. Whatever the outcome, and there may well be none for sometime, our withers are being wrung. For it is against this hectic backdrop that these poets strive; they are neighbours of nastiness, contemplatives of chaos....Because of such pressures, some of the best poetry in the English-speaking world has been written in Ireland since the Sixties.<sup>56</sup>

The paradoxical manner in which a writer is at once served and disserved by "a field of irreconcilable social, political, and religious forces," becomes the main criterion for Montague's selection, though it leaves unanswered, except for Montague's proposal of yet another anthology, the omission of many of the more notable writers

who were victims of those circumstances.<sup>87</sup> Such was the case with Patrick Kavanagh, Louis MacNeice, Denis Devlin, and Valentin Iremonger. That the chronology should begin with Francis Stuart, a writer, known for his novels, whose abiding concern is for the artist's relationship to society, sets the tone for the following selections, many of which betray a growing, if not incisive, social and political consciousness. Stuart's poem, "Remembering Yeats," reflects the attitude of reverence and ambivalence harboured towards Ireland's literary father, but, at the same time, Montague is electing, at least implicitly, other senior poets and mentors who could just as easily assume his place: Stuart, Coffey, Hewitt, to name only a few.<sup>88</sup> In instances where Miscellany and Faber alumni make yet another appearance, Montague's business is to make his contemporaries more contemporary, to update rather than memorialize their achievements.<sup>89</sup> His own offerings, while perhaps not his most well-known or representative pieces, are taken from his two collections of the eighties, The Dead Kingdom and Mount Eagle. What poems like "Mount Eagle," "Cassandra's Answer," and "She Cries" (all from Mount Eagle) attest to is the almost insupportable responsibility inculcated on the writer by his social position.

In spirit, if not in scope, the Scribner's anthology has more appreciable points of contact, not with

the Faber Book of Irish Verse but with the special Northern issue Montague edited for the Belfast journal, Threshold, in 1970, a time when Ulster's savage political crisis was reaching its apex.<sup>90</sup> Bitter Harvest, with its countenance of the "religious racism of the North" and the "diseased body politic" which sustains it, brings full circle what was first diagnosed and ratified in Montague's introduction to the Northern Crisis issue:

It is a strange fact that the religious-political tension in the North, which is the distinguishing mark of life in the province, has produced very little literature....One encounters either impotence or rage; or a certain weariness; they wish that the local problem would go away and leave them to more central concerns. And yet it is something that we may be stuck with, and only through absorbing its bitterness, it seems to me, can Ulster hope to grow. I think that this process is now beginning to happen and that the flurry of literary activity in recent years was no accident, but psychically linked to political change (it even preceded it by a few years)....The important thing is not to ignore it, as previous generations (with a few honourable exceptions) have tended to do. For the time being to be an Ulster writer is, in a sense, to be a revolutionary writer; old moulds are broken in the North.<sup>91</sup>

Montague's "intimate picture of the crisis," because of its contentiousness, also brought charges of misconduct and "whoops of disapproval" from southern reviewers, especially from Hibernia which had produced a rival symposium on the North.<sup>92</sup> From eye-witness accounts of Derry marchers, personal statements, reports, poems, translations (notably, Kinsella's rendering of the Pangs of Ulster), open letters,

and excerpts from plays and novels, the tone that is established and maintained throughout is one of outrage tempered only by pleas for clemency and mutual understanding. The essentially non-partisan but often incendiary criticisms levelled by Protestant and Catholic contributors alike--among them Thomas Kinsella, Seamus Heaney, Seamus Deane, Derek Mahon, Frank Ormsby, John Hewitt, and the Canadian novelist Brian Moore -- admit the longstanding nature of the conflict, but attack the entrenched attitudes of acquiescence and bigotry which perpetuate it. The issue concludes, almost apocalyptically, with Montague's "A New Siege," a poem which universalizes Ulster's backyard conflict by apprehending it in relation to student protests and civil liberties movements of the late 1960s or in terms of what Terence Brown has called "a larger contemporary process of the breaking down and remoulding of the human estate":

Lines of protest  
 lines of change  
 a drum beating  
 across Berkeley  
 all that Spring  
 invoking the new  
 Christ avatar  
 of the Americas  
 running voices  
 streets of Berlin  
 Paris, Chicago  
 seismic waves  
 zigzagging through  
 a faulty world<sup>3</sup>

Montague's "experience of agitations in Paris and Berkeley taught him that the violence of disputing factions is more than a local phenomenon."<sup>94</sup> Though Montague's obsession here and throughout his work is with the "most immediate form of history we call politics," the coinciding or analogous experience of parish and universe, which not only informs "A New Siege" but pervades The Rough Field as a whole, finds its unlikely authorization and precedent in the decidedly "ahistorical genius" of Patrick Kavanagh.<sup>95</sup>

In the ten years (1962-1972) during which Montague's vision for The Rough Field assumed its full dimensions, his energies were also absorbed in a variety of projects, among them The Faber Book of Irish Verse, the Northern Crisis Issue of Threshold, and his edition of Kavanagh's Collected Poems, all of which left indelible marks on his maturing poetic consciousness and the agencies of its expression.<sup>96</sup> In explaining his agenda for the sixties, Montague has remarked in a recent memoir:

The irony of the situation is that I was editing the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh in the background, and clearing the way for a vision of the rooted poet, to replace that of Yeats. Meanwhile, The Rough Field was also being ploughed or excavated, from The Deserted Village to The Great Hunger, and my fascination with modern experimental poetry, from Pound to the 'field theory' propounded by poets as diverse as Duncan, Snyder and Olson.<sup>97</sup>

What Montague neglects to mention here, but what was especially salient for him shortly after he completed his

edition of Kavanagh, was the fundamental localism espoused by all these writers which helped to blur the distinction and establish a common ground for these otherwise antithetical schools and understandings of poetry. Hence, Kavanagh by no means stands alone, as Montague claimed in 1965, since "it often seems to me that American poetry since the great generation of Pound and Stevens has become just as intensely local an affair, requiring us to be familiar, for example, with Mr. Robert Lowell's family background or the Northwest Indian lore so beautifully used in Gary Snyder's Myths and Texts."<sup>98</sup> Kavanagh's The Great Hunger, his masterly testament to the deprivations inherent in rural Monaghan society and, by way of extension, implicit in his own personal and career frustrations, provides background to The Rough Field's psychic and historical exploration of the displacements, dispossessions, and discontinuities of neighbouring rural Tyrone, and becomes, as Robert F. Garratt has argued, "its single most important source."<sup>99</sup> Following Kavanagh's injunction to make "the Iliad from such a local row" ("Epic"), Montague created a work of epic scope by documenting, both figuratively and literally, the quarrels and conflicts imbedded in his own Ulster roots.<sup>100</sup> Through Kavanagh, who, in the absence of any "sustaining tradition" created his own, Montague, with no Northern poets to look to beyond Art MacCooley or William Carleton, found the

assurance to speak with immediacy on behalf of the Hidden Ulster, until then its voiceless anonymous Catholic population.<sup>101</sup>

To whatever extent Kavanagh's pioneering effort awakened Montague to the efficacy of his own context--and "provided proof that out of inartistic settings poetry could arise"--Montague's adherence to his example is none the less qualified:

I would appear to have been the first poet to have come from the Hidden Ulster....At the time my colleagues in U.C.D. and my poetic contemporaries in the South refused to believe such a special context existed. It was not welcome. I didn't understand it (the Teague or Ulster Catholic part of myself) until it began to move in speech. The only person who was close to it was, of course, Patrick Kavanagh. The frustration in Kavanagh is not historic. One would find the same frustration in a small farmer in the north.<sup>102</sup>

Though Montague has since censured what he calls "Kavanagh's narrowing notion of parochialism," a crucial element in his prescribed "ideal method for poetry" reiterates Kavanagh's contention that the writer, if he is to be parochial and not provincial, must write with assurance about the particular life he knew and must extract from that ordinary experience, as Joyce did, whatever is most universal.<sup>103</sup> The preponderance of the given life--the physical realities of a place and the look and voices of the people--is an inalienable feature of Montague's "poetic method," if not its full import. For

Montague, this involves "on the one hand, continually to dig deeper in your own garden patch, in whatever garden patches you have been given or you have claimed, and on the other hand, to try to discover anything across the world which can become accessible to you."<sup>104</sup>

In dismantling the pastoral myth of the Irish peasant and in erasing all traces of the Revival's "local colour," Kavanagh inured himself in the exigencies of a pastless present replete in exacting, realistic and often grim detail.<sup>105</sup>

Not mere memory but the Real  
 Poised in the poet's commonweal.  
 And you must take yourself in hand  
 And dig and ditch your authentic land.<sup>106</sup>  
 ("Auditors In")

Whether he is addressing rural or urban experience, Kavanagh's regionalism stands in stark contrast to what M. L. Rosenthal has called the "neo-regionalism" of poets like William Carlos Williams, Hugh MacDiarmid, T. S. Eliot, and Montague, which, he says,

involves powerful recovery of the deepest memories of a region or nation that is radically out of touch with them, and therefore out of touch with the richer experiences and values underlying its own history. Neo-regionalism may employ local colour and realistic character portrayal as Masters does, but it is something more embattled and demanding. Its heroism resides in its refusal to yield up cultural memory to oblivion. More positively, the imaginative effort has to do with reaching a state of awareness that re-affirms a transcendent identity--the sense of continuity between the significant past and the freshest

involvement in the present moment, and of one's place in this continuity. [Works like] David Jones's The Anathemata (1952), Basil Bunting's Briggflatts (1965), Geoffrey Hill's Mercian Hymns (1971), John Montague's The Rough Field (1972), and Thomas Kinsella's Notes from the Land of the Dead (1973) have a special political dimension. Their nostalgia for older, indigenous ways can be militantly reminiscent of separatist rhetoric.<sup>107</sup>

Needless to say, Montague learned from Kavanagh--learned to address his own experience in terms of any number of 'parishes', learned to speak with immediacy "for the small farmer and his province"--but discriminated in what he chose to absorb and develop, and ultimately in what he made accessible to his own poetic successors.<sup>108</sup>

In proposing a Kavanagh-Montague-Heaney axis or sequence of influence in recent Irish poetry, Seamus Deane has made this important distinction:

Montague has brought the regionalism of Kavanagh one step further and deeper. The border between his Tyrone and Kavanagh's Monaghan has a certain appropriateness now. It encloses Montague in history as much as it releases Kavanagh from it. Montague has a religious sense of the local and the past, Kavanagh of the local and the present.<sup>109</sup>

For Montague, the distinction between Kavanagh's mentality and his own resides not only in the relative absence or importance of a historical sense, but in the degree of objectivity and detachment with which rural experience is addressed and by which it is rendered and ultimately transformed. In this regard, R. S. Thomas or, for that matter, Montague himself, is to Kavanagh as William

Wordsworth was to John Clare--a nature poet as opposed to a country poet.<sup>110</sup> In appraising Kavanagh's procedures and inclinations, Montague has made a forceful argument for the advantages of his own approach:

Deprivation (both spiritual and physical) became one of his [Kavanagh's] major themes: he was a great admirer of Knut Hamsun's Hunger. Sometimes he sees a light on his hills, sometimes he attacks them, and here arises the critical distinction between a country poet and a nature poet. Kavanagh's mysticism is still tinged with a vague Catholic spirituality. He has not the moralizing confidence of a Wordsworth. To put it another way: Wordsworth might write a poem on the plight of Clare, but the latter was too much a victim of his world to see nature as a reservoir of spiritual experiences, and could never return the compliment. It would take more detachment to organize his experience, and here I'd like to introduce a comparison between Kavanagh and a successful contemporary...R. S. Thomas.<sup>111</sup>

Montague's response to Kavanagh, as it emerges over the years in his commentary and criticism, is, to say the least, contradictory, an uneasy combination of qualified admiration and justifiable mistrust. In his more recent critical pronouncements, such as "Patrick Kavanagh: A Speech from the Dock" (1980), Montague notes the somewhat unwilling sense of identification proceeding from the similarity of their backgrounds as well as from the artistic strategies born out of those conditions. Montague confessed, "I admired Patrick Kavanagh but was wary of him, all the more because, coming from an Ulster farming community myself, I could recognise many of his protective

--and destructive--ploys."<sup>112</sup> As far back as 1957, when he was writing "Letter from Dublin" for Poetry (Chicago), Montague hailed Kavanagh as "unquestionably our finest poet," the uncompromising voice of "conscience of his society," but also conceded, "he has no understanding of the motives of the more literary writers and sees shame and barrenness where, perhaps, there is only justifiable love of an endangered tradition."<sup>113</sup> By 1977, when Montague came to revise his 1961 collection, Poisoned Lands, and was well disposed to reflect on its informing influence, his attitude remained essentially unchanged: "I admired Patrick Kavanagh but his baffled fury was that of a man flailing between two faded worlds, the country he had left, and the literary Dublin he never found."<sup>114</sup>

What Montague has had to say about Kavanagh has, however, often been misinterpreted as malice, when, in fact, it aims at nothing more than an honesty or candor which Kavanagh himself would have undoubtedly condoned. Such is the case with Montague's frequently misconstrued but "deliberately provocative statement made in a Yeats Centenary number of an American magazine," that "Mr. Patrick Kavanagh's honesty of vision has been liberating; but he has liberated us into ignorance: he has literally nothing to say."<sup>115</sup> This alleged "ignorance," by Eamon Grennan's reckoning, has less to do with a flagrant disregard for tradition than "a capacity for pure,

uncontaminated awareness of the actual, the quotidian."<sup>116</sup>  
 The disputatious and injudicious nature of Kavanagh's career, from the days of outraged editorializing in Envoy and Kavanagh's Weekly to the period of public humiliation and ostracism following the infamous Law Case, made him, as it were, a "liberating" figure for later writers who, with respect to their professional conduct, "were forced to estimate the scene more harshly."<sup>117</sup> Learning from Kavanagh was necessarily a matter of learning from his mistakes, especially as far as his personality and posturing as what Montague has called "a stage Irishman attacking the stage Irishmen's literature" were concerned.<sup>118</sup>

Montague's editing of Kavanagh's Collected Poems (1965) represented a concerted effort on his part to reverse or redress the circumstances of Kavanagh's diminished presence within Ireland as well as on the international scene:

Kavanagh's only certain claim to fame is within the context of Irish poetry. He did not reach the outside world like a Yeats or a MacNeice....It was to offset such injustices that I collaborated in collecting his work, that I am sure he could have done more for himself....Whatever about Kavanagh's acceptance with the English language tradition, his work can reach far beyond it....My publisher in the sixties was Timothy O'Keefe, then with MacGibbon and Kee, and he accepted my case for a collected Hewitt, as well as for a fraught attempt to assist the ageing Kavanagh.<sup>119</sup>

In publishing the Collected Poems with a London publishing house--Montague's own--MacGibbon and Kee, Montague made a

case, at least implicitly, for the merits and more than limited appeal of an author doggedly "Indifferent to the props of a reputation," whether those that came to him at home or abroad.<sup>120</sup> As such, Montague helped to bring a writer of regional focus into international standing. That the collection itself garnered acclaim from Alvarez in The Observer, and in The Spectator, New Statesman, and New York Times while receiving considerably less attention in Ireland--in fact, being "misunderstood" at home--made Montague's argument for the pervasiveness of Kavanagh's influence--an influence that was to be felt among the "Kids" of Dublin, like James Liddy and Brian Lynch, and as far afield as American poets, like Galway Kinnell, for example--all the more compelling.<sup>121</sup> For Montague's part, his anonymity as editor--a measure taken against incurring Kavanagh's disfavour--showed how little the divisive and acrimonious nature of Irish literary society had changed since the early 1950s. As Martin Green, Montague's collaborator in the project cautioned, "I think it is fairly important at this stage to keep the selector's name out of sight."<sup>122</sup> In protecting himself, Montague also severely restricted his access to the unpublished materials which eventually found their way into the exhaustive, and perhaps more definitive, Kavanagh Collected published by the Goldsmith Press eight years later.<sup>123</sup>

More than most Irish writers of his generation, John Montague has been entrusted, by choice or by default, with the responsibility to uphold and renovate the multiple traditions that have been passed down to him by a variety of 'strict masters' from Ireland and elsewhere. From that sense of responsibility towards his poetic elders, Montague has cultivated an equal and complementary commitment to his own contemporaries--the co-beneficiaries of those legacies--and to younger writers whose challenges are faint reminders of the unenviable controversies and dilemmas which embroiled his early career. Coming of age, both as a poet and a critic, at a time when Ireland found itself at a cultural, post-revolutionary crossroads, with too few real critics and too many detractors, Montague took it upon himself to find what was still vital and enabling among the voices and traditions, some lapsed, others merely depleted, that made up Ireland's thousand-year-old, heterogeneous literary history. Making the past intelligible to the present and the present accessible to future generations, Montague has entered into his stocktaking with an eye to the paradoxical permanence and renewal the critic and editor can bring to an author's work. As it became increasingly clear towards mid-century that the falsifying myths and over-worked prescriptives of the Irish Literary Revival would no longer suffice, new artistic strategies were proposed and pursued, but none proved so effective as

the actual "taking in hand" and re-inventing of what had been mislaid and discarded.<sup>124</sup> For writers like Montague, tradition became not a "congealed," deadening, or "anachronistic defense against experience," but an expedient means of accessing and ordering the phenomenal world.<sup>125</sup> Not merely participating within these traditions but re-making them according to his myriad-minded, pluralistic sensibility, Montague moved, as he continues to move, beyond what the Irish Revival upheld as its 'product' of ideal rural content, beyond the repudiative dialectic of the Thirties' writers, towards a more holistic and expansive sensibility willing to entertain and, in turn, sustain whatever proves necessary to the process of artistic individuation and refinement of craft. As an interpreter and custodian of the literary past as well as of the literary present, his is a gesture of "taking in hand in hopes of a handing on."<sup>126</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup>John Montague, "Against the Grain," introduction to Bitter Harvest: An Anthology of Contemporary Irish Verse (New York: Scribners, 1989), xvi.

<sup>2</sup>Montague, "Against the Grain," xv.

<sup>3</sup>John Montague, referring to Patrick Kavanagh, said he was "also in a way, a casualty of the War, which interrupted whatever literary career he might have had." John Montague, "Patrick Kavanagh: A Speech from the Dock," in The Figure in the Cave and other essays, p. 137.

<sup>4</sup>Robert F. Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, p. 125; in his bibliography of the Dolmen Press, Liam Miller remarked, "in 1960 we made an arrangement with Oxford University Press whereby they became our general distributors for the next fifteen years. The first book to be published under this arrangement was Later Poems which collected all the poetry of Austin Clarke's middle period. As well as doing much to establish the Press in a wider field, this book restored Austin Clarke's position in modern poetry, was a Poetry Society Recommendation, and was hailed by Poetry (Chicago) as 'the poetic event of 1961'." Liam Miller, Dolmen XXV: An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas Kinsella, Sandycove, to John Montague, Paris, LS, 3 January 1962, The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing Collection.

<sup>6</sup>Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, p. 114.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, pp. 136, 103.

<sup>8</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague: Deaths in the Summer," interview by Stephen Arkin, New England Review 10, no. 3 (1982-83), p. 226.

<sup>9</sup>John Montague, "The Young Writer," The Bell 18, no. 7 (October 1951), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>Montague, "Patrick Kavanagh: A Speech from the Dock," p. 143.

<sup>11</sup>John Montague, "Kinsella's Clarke," in The Figure

in the Cave and other essays, p. 134.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Montague, "In the Irish Grain," introduction to The Faber Book of Irish Verse, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "Introduction," The New Oxford Book of Irish Verse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), xxix; Thomas Kinsella, "A View of Irish Literature," in A Needle's Eye (Belfast: Lyric Players Theatre, 1979), p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, p. 168.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "The Irish Writer," in Davis, Mangan, Ferguson? Tradition and the Irish Writer, pp. 63, 66.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "A View of Irish Literature," in A Needle's Eye, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup>Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea," in Ireland's Field Day, p. 47.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "The Irish Writer," p. 65.

<sup>20</sup>Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea," p. 51.

<sup>21</sup>Montague's appropriation of Joycean models is most evident in Death of a Chieftain (1964), his collection of short stories. Montague has written, "when I assembled Death of a Chieftain, I tried for a similar pattern [as Dubliners], from childhood to manhood, though I was dealing with the Ulster countryside, and a much later Dublin. No one noticed this oblique homage but I may still restore my original epigraph from A Portrait, where Joyce grapples with the spectre of the Irish countryman." John Montague, "James Joyce: Work Your Progress," in The Figure in the Cave, p. 99.

<sup>22</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup>John Montague, "The Hag, the Hill, and the Heart: An Interview with John Montague," interview by Carolyn Meyer, Poetry Canada Review 10, no. 3 (Fall 1989), p. 16.

<sup>24</sup>John Montague, "American Pegasus," Studies, no. 98 (1959), p. 191.

<sup>25</sup>John Montague, "A Flowering Absence," The Dead Kingdom (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1984), p. 90.

<sup>26</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 63.

<sup>27</sup>Brian John, "The Healing Art of John Montague," Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 12, no. 1 (June 1986), p. 43; Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 30.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 33.

<sup>30</sup>John Montague, "Preface," The Figure in the Cave, ix.

<sup>31</sup>Michael Allen, "Celebrations," rev. of Mount Eagle by John Montague, The Irish Review, no. 7 (Autumn 1989), p. 99.

<sup>32</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 81.

<sup>33</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, Irish University Review, 19, no. 1, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup>Among the critics and poets who are inducted into Montague's honorary literary community are Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney, John Berryman, Hugh MacDiarmid, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Edna Longley, and Norman (Derry) Jeffares. John Montague, Mount Eagle (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Wake Forest University Press, 1989).

<sup>35</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 85.

<sup>36</sup>John Montague, "Preface" to The Figure in the Cave and other essays, ix; John Montague, "Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 70. The allusion to 'The Four Masters' recalls the Annals of the Four Masters (the Annals of Ireland by the Four Masters) and its description of the "Flight of the Earls."

<sup>37</sup>John Montague, "The Seamless Garment of the Muse," Agenda 5, no. 4 (Autumn-Winter, 1967-68), p. 34.

<sup>38</sup>John Montague, "Ballad for Berryman," Mount Eagle, p. 62; John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 88.

<sup>39</sup>John Montague, "Preface" to The Figure in the Cave and other essays, ix; John Montague, "Tragic Picaresque: Oliver Goldsmith, the Biographical Aspect," Studies, no. 99 (1960), p. 52; and John Montague, "The Sentimental Prophecy: A Study of The Deserted Village," in The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, p. 75.

<sup>40</sup>John Montague, "The Tyranny of Memory: A Study of George Moore," The Bell 17, no 5 (August 1951), pp. 13, 20, 23.

<sup>41</sup>John Montague, "Tribute to William Carleton," The Bell 28, no. 1 (April 1952), pp. 19, 13, 18. Montague observed, "Carleton was prepared to begin his career by writing something like anti-Catholic propaganda as another writer in present-day Ireland might be prepared, for a time, to write Catholic propaganda" (p. 19).

<sup>42</sup>John Montague, "Preface" to The Figure in the Cave and other essays, ix.

<sup>43</sup>Seamus Heaney, "Envy and Identification: Dante and the Modern Poet," Irish University Review 15, no. 1 (Spring 1985), p. 5.

<sup>44</sup>Jorge Luis Borges, "Kafka and his Precursors," Other Inquisitions, 1937-1952, trans. Ruth L. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), p. 108, quoted by Robert F. Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, p. 89.

<sup>45</sup>John Montague, "In the Irish Grain," p. 38.

<sup>46</sup>Robert Creeley, "On the Road: Notes on Artists and Poets," in Claims for Poetry, ed. Donald Hall (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1982), p. 66.

<sup>47</sup>Robert F. Garratt, "John Montague and the Poetry of History," Irish University Review 19, no. 1 (Spring 1989), p. 101.

<sup>48</sup>Robert F. Garratt, "John Montague and the Poetry of History," p. 102.

<sup>49</sup>John Montague, "American Pegasus," p. 191.

<sup>50</sup>John Montague, "James Joyce: Work Your Progress," p. 102; John Montague, "The Unpartitioned Intellect: Dante, Savonarola, and an Old Sign," Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 12, no. 1 (June 1986), p. 7.

<sup>52</sup>Eamon Grennan, "'Of So, and So, and So': Re-Reading Some Details in Montague," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 117.

<sup>53</sup>John Montague, "The Unpartitioned Intellect," pp. 8, 9.

<sup>54</sup>That The Dead Kingdom is "constructed like a Mahler symphony," containing its dissonances, necessarily makes it a "structure of healing." John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, p. 67.

<sup>55</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 84.

<sup>56</sup>Edna Longley, "Searching the Darkness," in Two Decades of Irish Writing, p. 139.

<sup>57</sup>Edna Longley, "Searching the Darkness," p. 137.

<sup>58</sup>John Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael: Interview with John Hewitt and John Montague on Northern Poetry and the Troubles," interview by Timothy Kearney, The Crane Bag: The Northern Issue 4, no. 2 (1980), p. 88.

<sup>59</sup>John Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," p. 87; John Montague, "In the Irish Grain," p. 38.

<sup>60</sup>John Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," pp. 91-92.

<sup>61</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague: Deaths in the Summer," interview by Stephen Arkin, p. 241.

<sup>62</sup>John Montague, "Global Regionalism: Interview with John Montague," interview by Adrian Frazier, p. 164.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid, pp. 163, 165; John Montague, "A Primal Gaeltacht," in The Figure in the Cave and other essays, p. 44; and John Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," p. 91.

<sup>64</sup>According to Dillon Johnston, the title of Mount Eagle "is a near anagram of the poet's name." Dillon Johnston, "Eros is Eire," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 56.

<sup>65</sup>Michael Allen, "Celebrations," p. 102; Alwyn and Brinley Rees, Celtic Heritage: Ancient Tradition in Ireland and Wales (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961), p. 17.

<sup>66</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 81; John Montague, interview by author, 23 May 1987, Buffalo, N.Y., tape recording.

<sup>67</sup>Alwyn and Brinley Rees, Celtic Heritage, pp. 17, 95.

<sup>68</sup>The Irish hero Cuchulainn "journeys to the Land of the 'Shadows', noviciates in ceremonies and returns to Ireland with an initiation scar upon his arm." Alwyn and Brinley Rees, Celtic Heritage, p. 256.

<sup>69</sup>John Montague, interview by author, 23 May 1987, Buffalo, N.Y.

<sup>70</sup>John Montague, "Cassandra's Answer," "Survivor," "She Cries," and "Mount Eagle," Mount Eagle (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Wake Forest University Press, 1989), pp. 22-23, 75, 48, 68-69; Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880-1980 (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 153.

<sup>71</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 85.

<sup>72</sup>Montague's story "A Change of Management" (Death of a Chieftain, pp. 89-110) focusses on the collision of values of an old, leisurely, if less productive Ireland that was left 'without a future' after the War and the patriotic fervor for financial reform and modernization; Montague's anthologies--one for each decade--include The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing (1962), The Faber Book Of Irish Verse (1974), and Bitter Harvest (1989).

<sup>73</sup>Edna Longley, "Poetic Forms and Social Malformations," in Tradition and Influence in Anglo-Irish Poetry, ed. Terence Brown and Nicholas Grene (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 158.

<sup>74</sup>Ewart Milne, "The Travail of Irish Poetry," rev. The Faber Book of Irish Verse, Agenda 11, no. 2 (Summer 1974), p. 90.

<sup>75</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague: Deaths in the Summer," interview by Stephen Arkin, pp. 227, 229.

<sup>76</sup>In 1959 Montague wrote, "William Carlos Williams' brilliant book, In the American Grain, has become almost a bible for young American poets." John Montague, "American Pegasus," p. 191.

<sup>77</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague: Deaths in the Summer," p. 227.

<sup>78</sup>John Montague, "In the Irish Grain," p. 24; like The Rough Field, "the meat of these books is in prose and then suddenly they break out into poetry when they get into the proper mood." John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague: Deaths in the Summer," p. 228.

<sup>79</sup>Terence Brown, "The Dead Kingdom," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 104.

<sup>80</sup>John Montague, "In the Irish Grain," pp. 28, 37.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>83</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague: Deaths in the Summer," p. 227.

<sup>84</sup>John Montague, "Against the Grain," introduction to Bitter Harvest, xvii.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid, xv.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid, xv, xvi.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid, xvi.

<sup>88</sup>Francis Stuart, "Remembering Yeats," Bitter Harvest, p. 1.

<sup>89</sup>According to Richard Murphy, when Montague edited The Faber Book of Irish Verse he consulted each poet to determine which poems were most representative of his or her body of work. Richard Murphy, interview by author, 4 April 1990.

<sup>90</sup>John Montague, ed., Threshold: Ulster Crisis Issue, no. 23 (Summer 1970).

<sup>91</sup>John Montague, "Against the Grain," xvi; John Montague, "Foreword," Threshold: Ulster Crisis Issue, p. 1.

<sup>92</sup>John Montague, "Threshold," in A Needle's Eye, p. 63.

<sup>93</sup>John Montague, "A New Siege," The Rough Field, fourth edition, p. 74.

<sup>94</sup>John Montague, "Preface," The Rough Field, fourth edition, p. 7.

<sup>95</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 79.

<sup>96</sup>Patrick Kavanagh, Collected Poems (London: Martin Brian and O'Keefe, 1964).

<sup>97</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 81.

<sup>98</sup>Robert F. Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, p. 208.

<sup>99</sup>Patrick Kavanagh, "Epic," Collected Poems, p. 136.

<sup>101</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 79.

<sup>102</sup>Robert F. Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, p. 208; John Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," p. 88.

<sup>103</sup>John Montague, "Global Regionalism," p. 156.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall, The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 273.

<sup>106</sup>Patrick Kavanagh "Auditors In," Collected Poems, p. 124.

<sup>107</sup>M. L. Rosenthal, The Modern Poetic Sequence, p. 273.

<sup>108</sup>Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce, p. 182.

<sup>109</sup>Seamus Deane quoted by Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce, p. 182.

<sup>110</sup>John Montague, "Patrick Kavanagh: A Speech from the Dock," p. 144.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>113</sup>John Montague, "Letter From Dublin," Poetry 90, no. 5 (August 1957), p. 311.

<sup>114</sup>John Montague, "Introduction," Poisoned Lands, second edition (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1977), p. 9.

<sup>115</sup>John Montague, "Patrick Kavanagh: A Speech from the Dock," p. 142.

<sup>116</sup>Eamon Grennan, "'Of So, and So, and So': Re-Reading Some Details of Montague," p. 122.

<sup>117</sup>John Montague, "Patrick Kavanagh: A Speech from the Dock," p. 143.

<sup>118</sup>Ibid.

<sup>119</sup>John Montague, "Patrick Kavanagh: A Speech from the Dock," pp. 143, 145; John Montague, "Preface" to The Figure in the Cave and other essays, ix.

<sup>120</sup>Patrick Kavanagh, "Auditors In," p. 125.

<sup>121</sup>John Montague, "Patrick Kavanagh: A Speech from the Dock," p. 141.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>123</sup>Patrick Kavanagh, The Complete Poems, ed. Peter Kavanagh (New York: The Peter Kavanagh Hand Press, 1972).

<sup>124</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "Brothers in the Craft," Quarry 39, no. 1 (Winter 1990), p. 83.

<sup>125</sup>Robert Creeley, "On the Road: Notes on the Artists and Poets," p. 66.

<sup>126</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "Brothers in the Craft," p. 83.

PART II

"THE ALWAYS RENEWED TEXT": READINGS OF THREE POEMS

## CHAPTER FOUR

### "THE WILD DOG ROSE"

In what amounts to an incisive commentary on the structure of his own substantial poetic oeuvre, John Montague has asserted that "a man's life work can be seen as part of a pattern, with individual works existing not so much in themselves but as part of a total elaboration and investigation of themes."<sup>1</sup> Far from constituting a betrayal of the principles upheld by Irish poets of the 1930s and by all others rejecting the overworked shibboleths of the new Republic, Montague's implementation of themes underpins not only a "flight towards self-awareness," but a complex and expansive understanding of the correspondence between all levels of experience.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, an explicit or implied alignment of the personal and the national, the private and the public, the past and the present, the mythical and the contemporary, the local or particular and the universal, the living and the dead, ultimately speaks for an abiding unity, coherence, and constancy as well as for the mediating authority of the poetic consciousness. Like the great modern jazz musicians Montague has cited for their accessibility (and also like the symphonies of Bruckner and Mahler for which he has expressed admiration), his own art is predicated on the infinite variation and

improvisation of established figures and themes.<sup>3</sup> Such variation and improvisation impart stability, cohesiveness and a seamless continuity to a body of work otherwise in constant flux, and which, as a result of diverse contexts, tropes, and symbols through which they are enacted, acquire an accumulated richness and resonance of meaning. By changing as much as by remaining changeless, by proving "always different/always the same," his foremost themes exemplify and also help to facilitate the creative tension between fixity and flux which operates throughout Montague's work.<sup>4</sup>

With the possible exception of A Chosen Light (1967), Tides (1971), and A Slow Dance (1975), which themselves provide grist for his revisionary mill, Montague's practice has been to raid, "recombine and resituate" poems from previous collections, often as many as three times, in a way which not only enforces new readings of individual poems, but underscores how appreciably meaning arises from and, in turn, is determined by context.<sup>5</sup> Like his mentor, William Carlos Williams, Montague seems to be saying "the poet isn't a fixed phenomenon, no more is his work."<sup>6</sup> By submitting his canon to an on-going process of revision, Montague challenges and defies the notion that the meaning or reading of the individual poem or, for that matter, of entire collections can be fixed. At the same time what he asserts and makes

pre-eminent is the universality of his chosen themes and the versatility of his key images, as they are deployed and made to adapt to the more particularized concerns and demands of each collection, or what Montague has called "the temporary exhaustion of an obsession."<sup>7</sup> Not only are individual texts perpetuated and preserved by virtue of their potential fluidity of meaning, but the themes they encapsulate are proven capable of cutting across the personal, national, historical, and linguistic domains or jurisdictions to which they are assigned by their canonical placements.<sup>8</sup>

The "redeeming patterns of experience" Montague formulates are comparable to, if not as fully realized as, W.B. Yeats's Swedenborgian theory of correspondences espousing what Kathleen Raine refers to as a "symbolic relation of inner and outer," where discord or concord between lovers and between family members is expressive of more appreciable and profound occurrences in the world at large.<sup>9</sup> Among other writers exerting an appreciable influence on Montague, Robert Duncan has likewise argued that "our consciousness, and the poem as a supreme effort of consciousness, comes in a dancing organization between personal and cosmic identity."<sup>10</sup> Known equally as a love poet and a political poet, Montague blurs the distinction between these traditions by claiming "love poetry," because of its dialectic progression, as "a form of political

poetry."<sup>11</sup> The relationship between love and politics is made most salient in the short apologetic poem prefacing his most ambitious sequence of love poems to date, The Great Cloak (1978):

As my Province burns  
I sing of love,  
Hoping to give that fiery  
Wheel a shove.<sup>12</sup>

The seeming irrelevance of love within a context of political upheaval and impending chaos, as the allusion to Nero's fiddling intimates, is subsequently dismissed and disqualified through the poet's affirmation of love's power to govern and to alter destiny, to turn not only "the golden wheel of love" which figures in Montague's earlier poem "Sentence for Konarak" (ACL, p. 17), but more significantly, Boethius's "fiery wheel" of fortune and, beyond that, even Yeats's great wheel of history. By what Adrian Frazier has referred to as "sympathetic magic," the attainment of order in love and marriage ordains and facilitates similar accord in the wider social and political spheres.<sup>13</sup> The Rough Field (1972) and The Dead Kingdom (1984), Montague's two 'Northern' collections, enact a more blatant correspondence by superimposing the poet's troubled divisive family history on, and ultimately making it speak for, the fractured and turbulent history of his region, his province, and what would be his 'nation'.

The universality for which Montague strives expresses itself in a dance of themes, not exclusively Irish so much as embracing the matter of Ireland.<sup>14</sup> Their conjunction, proximity, or outright opposition to one another suggest and support a larger scheme of interdependence. Inasmuch as Montague's art is informed by the idea of "integration" and by an acute awareness of the rhythms imbedded in nature itself--ebb and flow, turn and return, waxing and waning, "the systole and diastole of the heart"--all of which Heraclitus "imagined as phases of a dynamic unity," each of Montague's primary themes is necessarily answered by its antithesis, to which it exists in a relationship of continual, if ironic, exchange.<sup>15</sup>

Among Montague's most recurrent themes or, what might be termed dialectics, division is counterpoised, though not necessarily overcome, by the impulse towards reconciliation and healing. Love is set in relief by the pain of its failure, by violence, bitterness, and the indiscriminate destructiveness of time which all but extinguish it. Loss which, beyond death or disappearance, can also mean dispossession, depopulation, deracination, and a resulting discontinuity, is countered, though not always reversed, by physical, imaginative, and mnemonic attempts at recovery, by the re-assertion of succession, inheritance, and community, and by the re-acquisition and revival of tradition. Montague's engagement with the vicissitudes of

exile, estrangement, alienation and displacement, with the spatial and emotional gaps between people and between places, acquits itself equally with the initiative for return, with a propensity for repatriation, in every sense of the word, with the quest for home and origins, with the affinity for land as landscape and cultural repository, and with the cultivation or re-discovery of sense of place. As much as language and its loss become crucial issues in Montague's work, whether through his meditations upon his own speech impediment or upon the more pervasive aphasia or 'speechlessness' of post-Gaelic society, its insufficiencies and misappropriations are underscored by a silence, attesting to what remains inexpressible, which resides within the poems themselves and which surrounds them by way of a "Giacometti tension."<sup>16</sup> Violation, dereliction, defilement and corruption, however irremediable they prove to be, necessarily imply and establish a precedent for Montague's countervailing preoccupation with cleansing and purification.

Such as it is, the expansiveness of Montague's poetic vision proceeds not only from its mediation of these polarities but from an innate sensitivity to paradox and inherent dichotomies. For as much as women--or the eternal feminine--are richly creative and inspiring presences (and, on occasion, absences) throughout Montague's work, they are also principles, emissaries and agencies of death

and destruction. Time, as it is understood as process, transience, and mutability, is likewise both a creative and destructive force. Against Montague's fascination with flux there prevails an equal attraction to what is stable and what survives, to permanence and stasis, to the deceptive and paradoxical atemporality of memory and art by which change is defied and arrested and by whose precision and disciplines living moments of brief and epiphanal intensity are precariously preserved--'a moment's monument'.

Montague writes in full recognition of the impermanence and vulnerability of everything but change itself, yet he also writes in spite of this and as an act of defiance against it. Beyond his insistence upon the "absorbing disciplines" of love and friendship, and the "healing harmonies" of the arts which afford a tenuous stability by recording what is lost, by recreating, retrieving, and ritualizing experience, his poems uphold and embody the possibility, however remote or illusory, for fixity within flux.<sup>17</sup> Increasingly in Montague's work, the poet stands alone against the onslaught of process, offering not merely salutations for survival and endurance, like the exclamatory "what solace but endurance" of "A Courtyard in Winter" (A Slow Dance, p. 19), but mitigating loss by committing it to the unsteady permanence of his poetic forms. "The poet," as Montague has claimed, is one who turns "psychic defeats into victories."<sup>18</sup>

From loss, failure, division, and pain, Montague finds fertile sources from which to fashion a healing vision that, without necessarily resolving conflicts and antitheses, defies, absorbs and contains them by its expansiveness. The progress of Montague's opus is towards an ameliorating 'patience', towards recognition and integration.<sup>19</sup> As with any dialectic, its growth proceeds from a marriage of opposites but, in Montague's case, this is accompanied by a complex interweaving, irradiation, and networking of themes which point toward an ultimate interdependence and accretion. To consider one of his major themes, then, is necessarily to touch upon or have reference to several others.

To return to Montague's deft manipulation and augmentation of themes through canonical reordering, each reprinting of individual poems--and there are countless examples--varies poetic effect according to intertextual alignments and juxtapositions.<sup>20</sup> Each recapitulation in turn brings to bear all previous readings of a poem. This undertaking has the effect of enhancing the thematic elements, yet it also raises the important issue of the degree to which a poem's meaning is determined by its context.

"The Wild Dog Rose" appears in two of Montague's collections, first in Tides (1971), then in The Rough Field (1972).<sup>21</sup> Recounting the attempted rape of an old

woman known to the poet, it is a poem about violation and pain eased by religious consolation, and about endurance in the face of suffering, loneliness and brutality. Taken autonomously, without respect to its context, it constitutes yet another of Montague's many encounters with the hag or cailleach-figure for whom he has expressed a remarkable affinity.<sup>22</sup> Here, she is not only a 'genius loci', a guardian of place, but by virtue of the physical characteristics stressed in Montague's description of her--her "great hooked nose," her dirt-dewlapped cheeks, and her "staring blue" sunken eyes--she is also reminiscent of Robert Graves' threefold White Goddess, the bestower of kingship and poetic inspiration, in her final and most malign incarnation.<sup>23</sup> Her identification here is with the waning of the natural cycle, but when Graves describes her, as the lover or bride,

the Goddess is a lovely, slender woman with a hooked nose, deathly pale face, lips red as rowan-berries, startlingly blue eyes, and long fair hair: she will suddenly transform herself into sow, mare, bitch, vixen, she-ass, weasel, serpent, owl, she-wolf, tigress, mermaid or loathsome hag. The test of a poet's vision, one might say, is the accuracy of his portrayal of the White Goddess, and of the island over which she rules. The reason why the hairs stand on end, the eyes water, the throat is constricted, the skin crawls and shiver runs down the spine when one writes or reads a true poem is that a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, the Mother of All Living, the ancient power of fright and lust--the female spider or the queen-bee whose embrace is death.<sup>24</sup>

"Terrible" as she is, the poet's encounter with her --in what promises to be his last visit, his "goodbye" to that "final outcrop"--constitutes a coming to terms, a laying to rest and termination of those superstitious fears which haunted and daunted him in his childhood and of which Antoinette Quinn has said the hag as Muse always inspires at the outset:

I go to say goodbye to the Cailleach  
that terrible figure who haunted my childhood  
but no longer harsh, a human being  
merely, hurt by event....

And I feel again  
that ancient awe, the terror of a child...

but now hold  
and return her gaze, to greet her,  
as she greets me, in friendliness.  
Memories have wrought reconciliation  
between us, we talk in ease at last,  
like old friends, lovers almost,  
sharing secrets.<sup>25</sup>

("The Wild Dog Rose," Tides, p. 16)

Unlike renderings of the hag figure as early as "The Sean Bhean Vocht" (1957), which nevertheless establishes Montague's iconography of suffering Mother Ireland as a woman "wrapped in rags and shawls," the persona's relationship to that once repellent "nest of shawls and rags" is reciprocal, even intimate.<sup>26</sup> No longer distanced, in terms of either time or space, by her fearful "otherness," the poet-persona finds recourse to his fears in the memories he shares with the woman, and the sense of

dislocation and alienation he once felt towards her is further reduced by the immediacy of the poem's rendering in the present tense.<sup>27</sup> That the pair become "like old friends, lovers almost," apart from describing the traditional relationship of the poet to his Muse, also recalls the story involving Niall Noigiallach (of the Nine Hostages), the most pervasive of Irish sovereignty myths, where the bestowing of a kiss and an embrace upon an objectionably weather-beaten old crone not only restores her youth and beauty, but also secures the title and prerogatives of kingship for the one of three brothers willing to accept her challenge.<sup>28</sup>

While this allusion to ritual kingship becomes more salient in the context of The Rough Field's contemplation of a united Ireland, the hag's mythological status is none the less assured by her designation as 'Cailleach', the supernatural force presiding over the season of Samhain and its traditional pagan festival (November 1).<sup>29</sup> Beyond an exclusively Irish context, her "retinue" of less-than-faithful dogs equates her, in her hard-won celibacy, with the virgin huntress, Diana. Montague establishes her mythic identity only to undercut her "admonitory" and awe-inspiring unassailability, to de-mythologize her, and ultimately lay bare her vulnerable, yet, by far, more remarkable humanity. Once "that terrible figure who haunted [the poet's] childhood," an irrational presence looming

larger than life, she is, by degrees, subdued and diminished by the poet, who rationalizes her as "a human being merely, hurt by event," and later regards her with a condescension intimated in the "obscure honour" he feels at being privy to her confidences. His urbane self-possession is, in this regard, reminiscent of Peter Douglas's reaction to his once unredoubtable and red-rimmed-eyed father in "The Cry":

His own limp ease, the horn-rimmed glasses,  
the scarf tucked in neatly at the throat of  
his sports-shirt, the pointed black Italian  
shoes--everything represented a reaction  
against this old fire eater who had dominated  
his childhood like a thundercloud. But now he  
felt no fear of him, only a calm certainty of  
his own position.

("The Cry," Death of a Chieftain, p. 66)

Inasmuch as Peter Douglas finds he cannot assert the continental outlook dismissed by his father, much less cure Ulster's "political disease" by rational journalistic exposure, the poet-persona of "The Wild Dog Rose" (Tides, p. 17), at the point of conquering his old childhood fear of the Cailleach and of reversing the process by which she has grown into myth, finds that, while no longer a "terrible figure", she still retains the power to disturb, repulse and frighten, to impinge upon the imagination and violate the senses with her "terrible" story:

And there  
where the dog rose shines in the hedge  
she tells me a story so terrible

that I try to push it away,  
my bones melting.

Where the Cailleach's account of her attempted rape comes to bear, the poet's response is as justifiable as his earlier fears were unfounded. Where he finds the burden of her trauma, unstinting in its detail, almost insupportable, the heroine and victim-narrator succeeds in containing and controlling the violence perpetrated upon her and in managing her pain.<sup>30</sup>

The second and third sections of the poem, presided over by the therapeutic and talismanic image of the wild dog rose, witness a transformation of the Cailleach from a rambling seventy-year-old madwoman to what Antoinette Quinn has described as a "consolatory Muse."<sup>31</sup> As much as she functions as both muse and foster-mother (as almost all old women tend to do throughout Montague's poems), she herself is dependent upon the intercession of her own female muse, the "Blessed Virgin" Mary, when canine and human defences fail her and when her own well-guarded virginity is jeopardized.<sup>32</sup> Robert Graves recalls that in "medieval poetry the Virgin Mary was plainly identified with the Muse and functioned as a cauldron or source of inspiration."<sup>33</sup>

The Cailleach, then, becomes a figure of the artist, replicating or doubling the role of the poet, "turning psychic defeats into victories," transmuting suffering and brutality into an image of beauty.<sup>34</sup> Her

compulsive storytelling, hardly of the customary folk-tale variety, is comparable with what Montague has described as the raison d'être of the poetic act: it is "a partly redemptive process," "it tries to explain and to extract something of beauty from horror, and it tries to absorb some of the distress and to transform it into some kind of beauty."<sup>35</sup> Where the Cailleach's invocation of the Virgin Mary affords her protection, or, at the very least, consolation, a similar invocation of protective signs, of the Christian "Mary of the sky veil" and of the pagan "triple tined Poseidon," at the beginning of "Boats" (Tides, Section V) serves only to stress that "there is no security on the sea" and that "the rhythms of nature can be both friend and enemy." Once delivered from her ordeal, the Cailleach, as Antoinette Quinn has observed, makes

Mary, as the Holy Mother of God, her customary foster-mother. In her capacity Mary is represented as Mater Dolorosa, a mother who suffered the loss of her son. By associating this absent mother figure with the shining dog-rose the old woman transforms her into 'a flowering presence,' a 'chosen light.'<sup>36</sup>

Contrary to the old woman's belief, the wild dog rose does in fact have thorns.<sup>37</sup> The quality and strength of her faith, as much as her ignorance, mitigate its power to wound so that it becomes, with its "bleeding lips," its "beaten," "bruised and heart-shaped" petals, an emblem, as the hyacinth is in classical mythology, of sacrifice, grief

and suffering, but even more so, of the endurance, immunity and healing acceptance the Cailleach's religious convictions afford her. The flower operates, as Quinn has noted, as "a symbolic antidote to her near-defloration"; and by a similar turn of phrase, the dog rose provides protection when her retinue of dogs has forsaken her.<sup>38</sup> The poem itself is predicated on the paradox of strength proceeding from weakness: like the "weak flower" which emits a "strong" fragrance, the Cailleach derives strength, courage and fortitude from the illusion of the flower's defenselessness. From what he once perceives as a crumbling old woman, deranged by loneliness and debilitated by suffering, the poet-persona acquires not only wisdom, but poetic inspiration.

In Tides, "The Wild Dog Rose" appears as the penultimate poem in the opening section by the same name, the subject of which, by Montague's own reckoning, is "the inferior, human sea, with its inextricable rhythms of life and death."<sup>39</sup> By no coincidence, the first poem in the volume, "Premonition," presents woman as victim, undergoing an emergency operation that seems as life-threatening as it is life-saving. Here, the fine line between surgery and butchery is blurred (as the reference to "the butcher's block / Of the operating theatre" suggests), with both the act of cutting and the woman's nakedness becoming metaphors for an exfoliating revelation

of essential human emotions. Despite the intuition which links the speaker with his subject, there is no way by which he can ease her pain or come to her aid, just as she is powerless to reverse or transcend her own victimization:

That is not hair, but blood  
 Flowing. Somebody is cutting  
 Your naked body up:  
 Strapped in dream helplessness  
 I hear each thrust of the knife  
 Till that rising, descending blade  
 Seems the final meaning of life.

Mutely, you writhe and turn  
 In tremors of ghostly pain,  
 But I am lost to intervene,  
 Blood, like a scarlet curtain,  
 Swinging across the brain.

(Tides, p. 11)

Equally at a loss to control violence or avert impending destruction is the Perseus-like speaker of "North Sea" (Tides, p. 25) who stands by not only as a turbulent storm reduces a civilized and genteel seaside resort to a state of uncertainty and precariousness ("the shelf of Europe") and its casino's dome to the pathos of "a tethered balloon," but as the more foreboding "almost forgotten monster / of unhappiness" clanks ashore, like a spectre from a B-grade horror film, to wreak havoc and, by narrative deflection, "claim you."

"Coming Events" elaborates upon this theme of violence and victimization in its spare and curiously detached description of Gerard David's painting "The Judgement of Cambyses." David's representation of the

flaying alive of a man called Sisamnes is in itself "a naive interpretation of a cruel subject."<sup>40</sup> Montague's rendering of the scene as anatomical lesson, as a procedure requiring painstaking discipline and "craftsmanship on the part of its practitioners," draws attention away from any recognition or identification with the pain and suffering experienced by the victim.<sup>41</sup> The narrator of the prose poem comments dispassionately,

The only expression in the faces of those looking on is a mild admiration....It is difficult even to say that there is any expression on the face of the victim, although his teeth are gritted and the cords attaching his wrists to the legs of the table are stretched tight.

("Coming Events," Tides, p. 26)

Inasmuch as the craftsmen are identified as "executioners" only at the very end of the poem, the narrator aligns himself unequivocally with the victimizers in their refusal to relate cause and effect, to accept or recognize the act of torture as the cause of human suffering.<sup>42</sup> This phenomenon, which constitutes an indefensible failure of human compassion, is in itself well-documented in reports on torture by organizations like Amnesty International. The narrator speculates that "the whole scene may be intended as an allegory of human suffering," but beyond this conjecture the poem itself becomes an allegory of the way in which art misleads, distorts, and ultimately subsumes issues of morality. The

medium is, in every way, capable of overriding the message. Like the "line of perspective" which leads the viewer away from the centrality of suffering to admire, for the sake of its craftsmanship, the "brown calfskin of the principal executioner's boots," the painting exhibited in the Stadsmuzeum, and all art for that matter, is meant to be admired for the skill of its execution which is often altogether exclusive of its subject. For Montague, at least, therein lies its most inexorable danger.

Peter Denman has noted that "Coming Events" constitutes a stripping bare of the narrative and historical elements of David's painting to reveal what underlies it as a moment of violence and primal human suffering.<sup>43</sup> While critics such as Terence Brown have accused Montague of excessive romanticism, there remains the countervailing and decidedly 'unromantic' impulse in his writing to excavate, exfoliate and lay bare, to strip away "Layer after layer of the darkness," as his self-styled "mental explorer" Theseus does in "The Quest" (Poisoned Lands, p. 39), and find what is authentic, truthful, and revelatory. Set alongside, if not precisely adjacent to, both "Premonition" and "Coming Events", "The Wild Dog Rose" proves remarkable insofar as its heroine refuses the role of victim to which she seemed destined and triumphs over the violence to which she is subjected.<sup>44</sup> The poet-persona, far from ignoring the affronting brutality of

her recollected pain and suffering, gains insight into her character and responds with a mixture of fear (at her resignation) and sympathy (towards her acceptance).<sup>45</sup>

By Montague's own accounting of Tides, the Cailleach of "The Wild Dog Rose" is "placed with the Hag of Beare and she's placed with the sea and she's placed with the whole movement of life down to the deaths, being taken away and flowing on."<sup>46</sup> In this regard, even the rhythms of her monologue, "faltering and continuing," suggest the natural and inevitable ebb and flow which inform her mythical counterpart's vision of life's depletion and termination. As a personification of process, she assumes each of the forms Robert Graves associates with the "capricious and all-powerful Threefold Goddess": first acting as foster-mother to the poet (whose other substitute mother lies dying, "broken down by process" in "Omagh Hospital"); then assuming or suggesting the role of bride, both in her rejection of the suitor who "came asking in her youth" and in her flirtation with the poet-persona; and finally acting as layer-out (in her invocation of the Mater Dolorosa, mother of the dead and risen Christ).<sup>47</sup>

Herself an image of depletion and dereliction, the ravages of time have exacted their toll on the place over which she presides:

The cottage,  
circled by trees, weathered to admonitory  
shapes of desolation by the mountain winds,

struggles into view. The rank thistles  
and leathery bracken of untilled fields  
stretch behind with - a final outcrop -  
the hooped figure by the roadside....

Juxtaposed against the anthropomorphized "deities of place" which reign over the "terminal, / peewit haunted, / croplless bogland" of "King & Queen" (Tides, p. 15), as well as against the legendary hag of the Beare peninsula in West Cork (whose return heralded the arrival of winter), the Cailleach's steadfast guardianship of her native parish, her lonely sixty-year vigil over her chosen place, acquires near-mythological resonance. The footnote appended to "The Wild Dog Rose" which defines "Cailleach", among other possible meanings, as "nun" reinforces a correspondence between Montague's present-day parochial crone and the ninth-century royal concubine-turned-recalcitrant-nun that has already been intimated in the collection's folk-tale epigraph:

...Mariners know  
the glitter of the sea-hag.  
long-regarded, turns to a rose.

The two cailleachs are at once contrasting and complementary figures; their differences serve to expose their inherent similarities. Beyond the distinction made by Antoinette Quinn, that one is a "local near-contemporary land hag" and the other "a legendary ninth-century Southern Irish sea hag," there are striking dissimilarities in the

complexion of their faith and in the objects of their religious devotion.<sup>49</sup> The virgin cailleach's supplications, both in her time of need and in thanksgiving for her deliverance, are directed toward Mary, whereas those of her far more wanton and licentious counterpart are made, sometimes in the form of solicitations, to "the Son of Mary." Her relationship to her new-found God is not only apprehended in fiscal or remunerative terms, as "deposit," "misspent," and "downpayment" tend to suggest, but also expressed in a curious conjunction of eros and agape, of profane and sacred love:

Well might the Son of Mary  
 Take their place under my roof tree  
 For if I lack other hospitality  
 I never say 'No' to anybody.  
 ("The Hag of Beare," Tides, p. 22)

In taking few liberties with his translation and in fact showing a marked sensitivity and fidelity to the fulsome earthiness of the original Gaelic (and comparison with authoritative renderings by scholars like Kuno Meyer bears this out), Montague makes explicit the contrast between the woman who never says 'No' and the woman who never says 'Yes'. At the same time, he locates within the Hag of Beare a surprising resilience and irrepressibility that remain somehow unscathed by her more pronounced resignation to denial and loss. Her process of acquiring faith, "of learning that God knows best," sets in relief the more

profound and resolute belief of her modern counterpart. By his juxtaposition of these poems, Montague ties his neighbourhood hag to a thousand-year-old tradition and makes her not only a figure embodying endurance but an enduring figure, an archetype who has survived the centuries.

Dillon Johnston describes Tides as a volume having to do with "erotic love, the woman, and the loose myth of the feminine principle in history expressed through images of the moon, the tides, and the ancient woman, the cailleach."<sup>49</sup> As an expression of Montague's fascination with both the eternal feminine and the amour courtois, Tides is equally concerned with the way in which women, because of their binary power to create and destroy, are predisposed to idealization and distortion by the men and artists who regard them and rely upon them.<sup>50</sup> Within Tides, the polarities of the feminine principle are exemplified by "A Dream of July" (p. 36), where the loved woman is idealized, against her own wishes ("dissatisfied with her mythic burden") as the fecund and abundant harvest goddess, Ceres, and by "The Pale Light"(p. 27) where the distorted "putrid fleshed woman" who excites desire is also a Death-Goddess whose "mawlike womb" reverberates eerily with "the whimper of death being born." Not altogether unlike the legendary Hag of Beare, whose veiled face, according to Robert Graves, "made her [a death-goddess] easy to

Christianize," she is a figure encountered many times throughout Montague's canon: the "Sheela Na Gig" of Mount Eagle, "Coatlicue" of A Chosen Light and "Death of a Chieftain," the "black widow goddess" and "Miss Death" of A Slow Dance, and the "beggar woman by the name of Meanans...a ragged show Queen" who, by her imprecations, brings about the collapse of the MacNeil's house in "The Road Ahead" (Death of a Chieftain).<sup>51</sup> Neither distorting nor idealizing, Montague deconstructs the conventions of courtly love in "Down" where the beloved is demythologized, brought down in one epiphanal moment from her exalted position to a level of common humanity:

Seen,  
as in a pallid  
lightning flash

a grieving woman  
& not a goddess.

We begin  
the slow  
climb  
down.<sup>52</sup>

(Tides, p. 28)

In its presentation of multiple perspectives further enhanced by Montague's roving use of the page and liberal use of parentheses, "Life Class" oscillates between a grotesque distortion and repression of the female form, arising from a fear and tormented denial of female sexuality, and a "gentle celebratory acceptance of the body's offerings."<sup>53</sup> From the two parenthetical passages

which witness a harsh and puritanical asceticism on the part of both Old Testament "desert fathers" (who equate the female form with temptation, sin and damnation) and contemporary fashion designers (who distort and mould the female form to the point of uniform and ubiquitous androgyny), the poem's mediating voice moves towards a more realistic contemplation and portrayal of the studio model's ordinariness as wife and mother and of the imperfections which confirm her mortality.<sup>54</sup> The title of the poem in itself suggests not only the variety of perspectives from which the model in her studio and women throughout the long course of history can be viewed, but what ranks among the first imperatives of art education and its curriculum: that "the students should be taught to work strictly from life without any attempt at idealization."<sup>55</sup> "No ideas but in things," William Carlos Williams would say.<sup>56</sup> The poem is therefore an exercise in resisting the temptation to idealize, vilify, stereotype, and distort. Inasmuch as the study of the female form, at least for the visual artist, constitutes "a means to mastery of his art, a refinement of his discipline," Montague's consideration of all facets and surfaces of the female form in "Life Class," together with his more profound fidelity to the imaginative cult of the female, represents a crucial avenue leading towards the development of his poetic craft.<sup>57</sup>

"The Wild Dog Rose" is one small part of this agenda, yet it demonstrates Montague's struggle to work from life, to de-mystify a woman long held in formidable misapprehension and to bring her down to a level of common, if suffering, humanity. Her qualified success in eluding the role of victim has its parallels with the artist's model whose enduring but "tired smile," inscrutable as that of the Mona Lisa, is her only defense against an assault by an army of artists' pencils which threatens to fix her, entrap her, and ultimately subdue her complexities.

On cartridge paper

an army of pencils  
deploy silently to  
lure her into their

net of lines while  
from & above her  
chilled, cramped

body blossoms  
a late flower:  
her tired smile.

(Tides, p. 42)

Like the Cailleach, the model asserts a 'flowering presence' where there is otherwise only pain and discomfort.

Reintroduced as "the last full section, the swan song, the evening lesson" of The Rough Field (1972), "The Wild Dog Rose" acquires a new depth of historical and social meaning as its thematic underpinnings take on a public, as opposed to private, significance.<sup>50</sup> By its

interrogation and assimilation of The Rough Field's foremost concerns, it constitutes the volume's apotheosis and, at the same time, brings the collection full-circle, back from the wide-ranging historical and international frame of reference of "A New Siege," the section which immediately precedes it, to the immediacy and intimacy of the poet-persona's relationship with his county and parish. Montague has considered the re-situation of the poem and its heroine in this way:

inside The Rough Field she's very, very near to being a kind of suffering Mother-Earth, and this is beautifully underlined in the second performance of The Rough Field. There was a young woman playing the fiddle who said, 'John, can I play "Roisin Dubh" ("The Little Black Rose", the eighteenth-century ballad and secret name for Ireland) at the end just as they describe the rape?' And I said, 'well, you can, but please play it softly.' And so, as she's describing her rape or her attempted rape, you get this lovely song of Ireland's betrayal and Ireland's loss and Ireland's wrong. And it's very, very moving. Terribly moving. That's one aspect it placed there. It's also an attempt to show that the Roman Catholic experience can give depth if it's really used by somebody, even somebody very ignorant, somebody ignorant that they don't know that the wild dog rose also has thorns. It's the power of her belief which transforms the moment and saves her. And so, even those who have been hurt so much in the North, perhaps if they believe enough, if they believe that God may help them to endure that it may help them. It would be very hard for me, but perhaps there's some meaning to that.<sup>59</sup>

Thomas Dillon Redshaw has described "The Wild Dog Rose" as "a distant sequel" to "Like Dolmens Round My Childhood, the Old People" (the final poem of the opening canto, "Home Again") since "the two narratives not only

share variations on the return motif, they also make no plain use of the bird-call motif."<sup>60</sup> "Like Dolmens Round My Childhood" appears in no less than three of Montague's major collections, Poisoned Lands (1961), The Rough Field (1972), and the revised Poisoned Lands (1977). Its situation at the end of "Home Again" establishes it as the terminus and destination of the poet's journey west from Belfast to the 'rough' but familiar lands beyond the Northern Pale; of his journey home to Garvaghey; and of his journey back in time, from the contemporary disaffected realm of "rexine seats," through a Civil War-era Belfast divided among the "Ancient Order" and "Ulster's Volunteers" and the "despoiled" Victorian "inheritance" of its "huckster streets", through the territory claimed for centuries by the O'Neills, and back through his own genealogical history to an Ireland and an Ulster of prehistory, embodied in the "old people" and their megalithic reminders.<sup>61</sup>

As the name "MacCrystal" suggests ("strange," says the narrator of Montague's short story "The Road Ahead," "that a spring should flow opposite a house called MacCrystals") and as the designation of Maggie Owens as "a well of gossip defiled" insinuates, the old people function as sources, as the ultimate place of origin, to which the poet returns for inspiration and for an enabling vision of cultural unity and permanence.<sup>62</sup> Inasmuch as they are

custodians of a diminished tradition, "silent keepers of smokeless hearth," they are also guardians and inheritors of place, genii loci, whose close affiliation with Tyrone and Ulster is connoted by the surnames "Owen" (since County Tyrone is, in fact, Tír Eoghain, the Land of Owen) and "Niall" (or Ui Neill, the sacral chieftains of Ulster and all Ireland, whose lineage is traced to Niall of the Nine Hostages and whose defeat at Kinsale in 1604 saw the beginning of Ireland's colonial domination).<sup>63</sup>

Not only evocative of tradition, continuity and sovereignty, the names of the old people, when recited together as they are in this poem, enact a symbolic reconciliation of religious differences dividing Catholics (Niall and Moore) and Protestants (Eagleson). A similar recitation of names or, more precisely, of placenames in the sixth movement of "A Severed Head" suggests, by way of the Irish tradition of the dinnseanchas, the Norse, Irish-Scots and English periods of domination, all of which have been assimilated into the landscape, but also enacts, in its Scots-Irish hybrids like "Fall Brae" a figurative, if also retaliatory, intertwining of those otherwise incompatible groups.<sup>64</sup> The religious differences arising from Ireland's racial heterogeneity are in themselves absorbed and obscured by the overriding paganism and 'wildness' of their residual community. Far removed, both physically and psychically, from the narrow life of Belfast

where "constraint is all" (p. 12), the old people display not only a "Fomorian fierceness," a primeval 'otherness' that aligns them atavistically with a lost, half-real, half-imagined tribal consciousness, but also an inherent 'wildness' that links them closely with the natural world which is, as Montague later demonstrates in "Hymn to the Omagh Road," itself on the verge of extinction.<sup>65</sup> Living on what might be called the margins of civilization, Jamie MacCrystal feeds "kindly crusts to winter birds"; Maggie Owens is "surrounded by animals"; the Nialls' cottage is surrounded by heather and foxglove and harbours crickets beneath its hearth stone; Mary Moore drives "lean cattle from a miry stable"; the local recalcitrant Orangeman achieves notoriety as "Wild" Billy Eagleson.<sup>66</sup> Their "wilderness" constitutes an altogether different reality from Belfast's "wilderness of cinemas and shops" and from the demi-urban landscape with its "wild flap of laundry" which Montague finds so reprehensible in "Enterprise."<sup>67</sup> The note of violation which the Cailleach strikes both through her appearance and her narrative is sounded equally by the Old People who "trespass" on the poet's childhood dreams.

Like the old people, "a figure of fear and friendliness," an unlikely relic and repository of wisdom towards whom the poet exorcises and conquers his longstanding sense of anxiety and displacement, the

Cailleach of "The Wild Dog Rose" recalls but, by her exemplary fortitude, manages to move beyond her textual antecedents. Like Jamie MacCrystal whose cottage is robbed shortly after his death, the Cailleach experiences a similar violation and disturbance of her closely-guarded property.<sup>68</sup> By the enabling power of her own belief, however, she avoids the utter indignity and humiliation of sexual violation. Like Maggie Owens, "the fanged chronicler of a whole countryside," whose menagerie of "shivering pups" and "mongrel bitch" follows her everywhere, the Cailleach, with her retinue of dogs in tow, "rehearses the small events of her life" together with those

of neighbours  
she quarrelled with, who now lie  
in Garvaghey graveyard, beyond all hatred....

As a local historian and transmitter of the dinnseanchas, the Cailleach does within her own small parish what Montague undertakes throughout the course of The Rough Field. Thus, more than merely "a well of gossip defiled," more than a woman violated but also capable of violating the poet-persona's more refined sensibility, the Cailleach in her re-appearance at the end of The Rough Field becomes a multi-faceted and richly humane figure whose own affronting narrative cannot be circumscribed, as Maggie Owen's was, by the stereotypical and reductive confines of a vignette. Since "The Wild Dog Rose" completes the circle

begun with "Like Dolmens Round My Childhood," the Cailleach, apart from her display of fortitude, necessarily passes into that "dark permanence of ancient forms." Like the doctors and curates who trudge "a broken path" to attend the old people, the poet attempts to heal the psychic wounds and alienating fears that have prevented him from establishing a sense of continuity with the past and from being initiated into its secrets.

The transfiguring power of the old woman's unquestioning belief acquires even greater significance within the context of The Rough Field where the survival of Roman Catholicism and the sense of community it affords is set against an historical subtext of religious persecution. "The Wild Dog Rose" operates and is contained within the same structure as "The Bread God," with its ironic juxtaposition of the hysteria, paranoia, and bigotry of Orange Order propaganda ("ROME MEANS ABSORPTION", "APISTS = PAPISTS") and more subtle and lyric affirmations of faith under siege and faith in apathetic decline ("Christmas Morning").<sup>69</sup> Among the instances of doubling throughout The Rough Field ("my former step doubles mine"), the old woman's proffering of the living dog rose is foregrounded in the poet's earlier attempt in "Penal Rock: Altamuskin" to revive, in a gesture recalling a figurative baptism, anointment, and resurrection, the few withered flowers remaining on the snow-covered massrock that has been the

seat and symbol of his family's faith since the enactment of the Penal Laws in the early eighteenth century.<sup>70</sup> "To learn the massrock's lesson," the poet, according to Thomas Dillon Redshaw, becomes his own "ministering priest," performing a "propitiatory and commemorative rite" by transforming the snow, and the "forces of negation" it represents, into the affirmative and potentially transfiguring waters of life.<sup>71</sup> Redshaw observes:

the massrock's "few flowers" represent the positive élan vital: enduring simplicities of patient parochial faith. So, by cross-association, the persona makes a gesture of bloodless sacrifice in his private Mass....<sup>72</sup>

The Cailleach's transfiguration of the violent attack upon her through her sense of religious consolation echoes not only the person's "figurative performance of the commixtio" and its implications for a revitalization of faith, but Montague's own intent and determination in writing "The Bread God."<sup>73</sup> In much the same way that the Cailleach contains, absorbs, and transforms the violence inflicted upon her through her narrative and its informing emblem, Montague offers an "antidote" to the invective of Protestant extremism (to which he was exposed when he was placed mistakenly on a Protestant mailing list) by transcribing it verbatim, incorporating it into his text, adapting it to his own poetic needs, and otherwise

controlling and dissipating the import and effect of its hatred.<sup>74</sup>

The flower, then, as it is found in "The Wild Dog Rose," "Penal Rock: Altamuskin," and elsewhere in The Rough Field, functions as a symbol of simple piety and faith, a "surviving sign of grace."<sup>75</sup> In a collection where religion, both historically and contemporaneously, prevails as a source of irremediable division, as the cause of cataclysmic upheaval and disturbance, as the mainstay of the propagandist's bitterness and bigotry, as empty excuse for a social excursion, and as the pejorative, ironic, and meaningless catchphrase of the urban graffiti artist ("God is Love"), the flower image, wherever it is invoked, proves that religion can also be a redemptive and consolatory force, and that it is, as the poet's missionary uncle maintains, not the cause of present-day conflicts and misfortune.<sup>76</sup>

The preponderance of floral symbolism also aligns these poems, and in particular "The Wild Dog Rose," with "The Little Flower's Disciple," the second movement of "The Leaping Fire," whose pious, "workworn" spinster heroine is none other than the poet's paternal great-aunt and foster-mother, Brigid.<sup>77</sup> Throughout "The Leaping Fire" the rose, as facilitated by its semantic richness, undergoes a striking series of transformations, first appearing as the roses from heaven which shower upon the uncorrupted body of

the future sainte Thérèse of Lisieux, then evoked through the image of the aunt's "worn rosary" (in "The Living & the Dead"), upon which is superimposed the "metal [typewriter] keys" the poet "tells" with a prayer-like creative intensity. By deployment and manipulation of this symbol, Montague thus equates a religious consciousness with a developing poetic consciousness. "People draw strength from whatever they manage to believe in," Montague has said, and in this particular case, the poet-persona draws strength from his art.<sup>78</sup> At the outset, however, "The Little Flower's Disciple" refers to the "sobriquet" of Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux who "had shown innumerable people that sainthood is attainable by anybody, however obscure, lowly, untalented, 'ordinary', by the doing of small things and the discharge of daily duties in a perfect spirit of love for God."<sup>79</sup>

In following, even surpassing, the example of her favourite saint, Aunt Brigid accepts, with the utmost self-sacrifice and selflessness, the "harness of humiliation" entailed not only by her daily farming tasks, but by her responsibility for maintaining, by "legal fiction," the "family name" in the diminished, "helpless" and "hopeless" circumstances already disclosed and explained in "Home Again." That she is capable of assuaging, with her paradoxical "scaly tenderness," the wounds and divisions within her family is reinforced by her very name. Of her

two namesakes, the pagan Irish Brigid was both the female sage and goddess of poets who presided over the coming of spring (Beltaine). Her Christianized counterpart, St. Brigit, whose symbol was fire, was also associated with fertility and artistic skill, but most of all was known and invoked for her healing powers.<sup>80</sup> Combining characteristics of both, Brigid Montague is likewise a "patronness of the hearth, the fire, the forge," whose miraculous skill of smooching the ashes rekindles the household fires from which the poet draws inspiration.<sup>81</sup> The fire, as it is rekindled with an artisan's skill, is both an emblem (as it also is in "O'Riada's Farewell") of the creative imagination and, in the more commonplace terms discussed by E. Estyn Evans, "a shrine to which spirits return, a link with the living past."<sup>82</sup>

Aunt Brigid's efforts, by "legal fiction," in maintaining the family name also make her, along with the Cailleach, what Antoinette Quinn sees as "exemplary of the artist as healer, gathering into her hands and taking responsibility for the pain of her family."<sup>83</sup> Even in her "meekness," which finds its parallel in the Cailleach's "weak flower," she becomes a source and embodiment of inner strength. By Montague's own admission, the two cantos, "The Leaping Fire" and "The Wild Dog Rose," point to the possibility of religious consolation, to its redemptive and affirmative agency, without ratifying and endorsing it:

["The Wild Dog Rose"] doesn't say that it accepts that comfort, just that she has been able to draw strength from it....[In "Omagh Hospital"] Aunt Brigid is dying without very much consolation although she has been a very holy woman. She seems to be sinking into something which she never bargained for: nothingness. While ["The Leaping Fire"] begins with religion, it does not rely on any religious consolation.<sup>84</sup>

Yet belief in The Rough Field is not merely a religious matter, but a crucial element in the realization of political freedom and self-determination through the espousal and implementation of revolutionary precepts, as Che Guevara's gloss on "A Good Night" makes explicit: "The inhabitants of the region are as impenetrable as rocks...You talk to them, and in the depth of their eyes it can be seen that they don't believe."<sup>85</sup>

The image of the rose, by which the Cailleach is linked to other figures and contexts, and thereby grows in significance, also recalls the "Roisin Dubh," the eighteenth-century patriotic song and secret name for Ireland, which has special relevance to The Rough Field's political, historical, ideological and nationalist concerns.<sup>86</sup> The Cailleach becomes, as it were, not only a poor old woman, but the poor old woman who is Ireland, the Sean Bhean Vocht, the yet-to-be-redeemed Sovereignty of Irish myth, aisling and patriotic balladry.<sup>87</sup> As Mother Ireland, her suffering, loss, sterility and violation serve as metaphors for the all-too-inexorable and adverse

economic, political and cultural repercussions-- desolation, dispossession, anglicization and depopulation --of Ireland's Plantation and colonial subjugation. Not only a personification of Ireland, this lonely and embattled surveyor of rough "untilled fields" is also an embodiment of Garvaghey and its bitter history, since the name of Montague's parish can signify "violence" and "harshness" as much as an uncultivated "roughness" or "coarseness." As the barren "final outcrop," the sole remaining inhabitant of her native district, she recalls the old woman who is the last living link with Auburn's history and community in Oliver Goldsmith's The Deserted Village, a text which ranks, along with Kavanagh's The Great Hunger, Hart Crane's The Bridge, and William Carlos Williams' Paterson, among the foremost influences upon The Rough Field. Auburn's prodigal son addresses the woman:

All but you widowed, solitary thing  
That feebly bends beside the plashy spring;  
She, wretched matron, forced in age, for bread,  
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,  
To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,  
To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn;  
She only left of all the harmless train;  
The sad historian of the pensive plain.<sup>68</sup>

The desecrated pastoral idyllicism and much lamented depopulation at issue in Goldsmith's poem find expression in the Cailleach and in her surveyance and embodiment of the place in which she lives:

The cottage,  
 circled by trees, weathered to admonitory  
 shapes of desolation by mountain winds,  
 struggles into view. The rank thistles  
 and leathery bracken of untilled fields  
 stretch behind...  
 we talk in ease at last...

of neighbours  
 she quarrelled with, who now lie  
 in Garvaghey graveyard, beyond all hatred;  
 of my family and hers, how she never married....

Her own celibacy, sterility and barrenness not only serve as metaphors for the malign and debilitating effects of colonial rule upon Irish landscape and culture, but also reinforce the theme of discontinuity and failed succession which informs the volume as a whole. Where mere bloodlines and lineage do not suffice to provide connection between past and present, figures of the artist, the Cailleach perhaps chiefest amongst them, appear to memorialize what is lost, to heal what is broken, and revive what lies near extinction.

In endeavouring to reduce this woman, who once loomed larger than life over his childhood, to the most rudimentary of human terms--loneliness, madness, and fear --the poet-persona of "The Wild Dog Rose" participates equally in a process of de-bunking, de-mythologizing and de-mystification, that is, throughout The Rough Field, the inevitable and necessary response to both 'progress', with its pursuit of a "sanitized," "hygienic," efficient homogeneity, and an outmoded nationalism whose

insurrectionary aims, in what Engels (The Rough Field, p. 64) would regard as a measure of their failure, were never properly realized after the revolution.<sup>89</sup> In deconstructing those cultural myths and orthodoxies and in assessing their value and validity, Montague takes what might be called an inventory of what is authentic and enabling, repudiates and dispenses with what is disabling, and shapes his own mythology by formulating new 'myths' more amenable to his imaginative demands and creative identity. This Montague accomplishes in part through a 'ritualized' recreation of experience, through a strategy which locates what, in the words of Mircea Eliade, is "exemplary and consequently repeatable" and thus serves "as a model and justification for all human actions."<sup>90</sup> Apart from creating myths and tradition afresh, Montague is equally concerned with what contemporary society has done to myth, with the way in which history has been undermined and impinged upon the ahistorical. In what Montague sees as the diminished reality of post-revolutionary, post-Emergency, post-rural Ireland, "Dagda's cauldron" has shrunk to "a coal-fired stove," the "mythic lyre" has "shrunk to country size," the fiddle whose music once united the community and the guns which once aided in its "parochial struggle" have been reduced to "playthings," and, not least of all, the farmer's field has shrunk to a "tiny landscaped lawn."<sup>91</sup> The world of The Rough Field is a remarkably unstable one

in which things are subject continually to either expansion or contraction. "In this strange age of shrinking space," only the old people and the accumulated wisdom they safeguard prove irreducible: the poet-persona tries to catch Finn's "monster trout" of wisdom which has retained its mythic proportions ("The Source"); his aunt's frail body casts a "monstrous" shadow on the wall ("The Living & The Dead"); his elderly neighbours assume the monumental stature of standing stones or of what Montague later calls "five thousand year resisting stones"; the old woman who likewise 'resists' assault and endures the pain of its memory emerges in the end as an indomitable presence.<sup>92</sup>

The identification of the old woman with not only Ireland or Garvaghey but the more inalienable concept of 'home' is enhanced through the recurrence of what Thomas Dillon Redshaw has indicated as The Rough Field's predominant "return" and "bird-call" motifs.<sup>93</sup> The Cailleach is the figure to which the persona goes "to say goodbye"; for the prodigal poet, she lies at the end of one exile and at the beginning of another. With its countless instances of displacement and dissociation, The Rough Field is a book not only about going home, but about being "at home," about coming to terms with the physical and emotional realities and ramifications of one's place. Being "at home" is the ultimate reclamation of place, the ultimate assertion of one's identity, the necessary

conjunction of self and place. Yet throughout The Rough Field, where deprivation, denial, and loss are the keynotes, attempts at being "at home" are continually frustrated: the poet's pathologically "unhappy" father feels "at home" only in the whiskey-induced medium of "brute oblivion"; the poet upholds the pastoral ideals envisaged by Samuel Palmer, Marc Chagall, and Oliver Goldsmith only to lament the "lost dream of man at home/in a rural setting."<sup>94</sup> Forced to learn English at school, the poet's grandfather finds his "parent's hearth growing slowly alien." The poet's return to his native parish brings him only to a recognition of his "failure to return"; Peter Douglas of Montague's short story "The Cry" returns to his hometown only to find himself an unwelcome intruder and to be told "Nosy Parker Go Home."<sup>95</sup>

With the Cailleach, however, the poet finds himself "at ease, at last." In her rootedness and attachment to place, she counterbalances the exiles and dispersals that have engendered the breakdown of a civilization and a family. That the hag is described as a "moving nest of shawls and rags" all but equates her, even in her barrenness, with a nurturing, sheltering maternal principle and the concept of place as origin.<sup>96</sup> While other nests and 'homes' throughout The Rough Field are destroyed and decimated (as in "The Fight," "Balance Sheet" and "Take Your Stand"), hers remains more or less intact. Not so

benign or reassuring, perhaps, are her "mottled claws," by which she resembles what Redshaw has called "some antediluvian bird" and by which she is linked, through a common 'ancestry' and also through a common articulation of loss and denial, with The Rough Field's exhaustive catalogue and chorus of birds.<sup>97</sup> "The Wild Dog Rose" exists in relation to everything that has preceded it. By his assessment of The Rough Field, Montague sees,

a kind of dialogue between the various sections so that, let's say, after the raucous politics of "A New Siege" and its Anglo-Saxon metre and the broken sections of "Patriotic Suite" (a kind of musical term), you get a return to the private. The private is "The Wild Dog Rose" and the suffering individual who is behind all these things.<sup>98</sup>

By its placement near the end of The Rough Field, "The Wild Dog Rose" grows by accretion, by an enriching accumulation of symbolism and detail, at the same time as it retains what Antoinette Quinn regards as "its own angular and wayward integrity."<sup>99</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

<sup>1</sup>John Montague quoted by Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup>Samuel Beckett, "Recent Irish Poetry," Lace Curtain, no. 4 (Summer 1971), p. 58.

<sup>3</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 83.

<sup>4</sup>John Montague, "A New Siege," The Rough Field, fourth edition, p. 75; Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 30.

<sup>5</sup>Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals, p. 151.

<sup>6</sup>William Carlos Williams, "Introduction," The Wedge, in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, ed. Donald Hall and Warren Tallman (New York: Grove Press, 1973), p. 138.

<sup>7</sup>John Montague, "Preface to Tides," in The Figure in the Cave and other essays, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup>Brian John, "The Healing Art of John Montague," Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 12, no. 1, p. 36.

<sup>9</sup>John Montague, "Pastorals," Poisoned Lands, second edition (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1977), p. 49; Kathleen Raine, The Inner Journey of the Poet (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), p. 88; Adrian Frazier, "John Montague's Language of the Tribe," Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 9, no. 2 (November 1975), p. 74.

<sup>10</sup>Robert Duncan, "Towards an Open Universe," in The Poetics of the New American Poetry, p. 214.

<sup>11</sup>John Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," p. 91.

<sup>12</sup>John Montague, The Great Cloak (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 7.

<sup>13</sup>Dillon Johnston, "Eros in Eire," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 54; Adrian Frazier, "John Montague's Language of the Tribe," p. 74.

<sup>14</sup>Brian John, "The Healing Art of John Montague," p. 35.

<sup>15</sup>Peter Denman, "The Executioner's Boots: The Fiction of John Montague," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 132; Robert Duncan, "Towards an Open Universe," p. 217.

<sup>16</sup>John Montague, "A Note on Rhythym," Agenda 10, no. 4 (Autumn 1972), p. 41.

<sup>17</sup>John Montague, "Process," The Dead Kingdom, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup>John Montague, "In the Irish Grain," p. 38.

<sup>19</sup>Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals, p. 155; Peter Denman, "The Executioner's Boots: The Fiction of John Montague," p. 132; Terence Brown, "The Dead Kingdom: A Reading," in Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 102.

<sup>20</sup>"Tracks" appears in Tides and, to an entirely different effect, in The Great Cloak; "What A View" appears in Tides and The Dead Kingdom, where it assumes a heightened political relevance; "The Cage" appears in A Chosen Light and The Rough Field. There are other examples, too numerous to mention.

<sup>21</sup>Unless otherwise specified, all references to The Rough Field will be from its fourth edition.

<sup>22</sup>John Montague, interview by author, 23 May 1987, Buffalo, N.Y., tape recording.

<sup>23</sup>Antoinette Quinn writes "the Cailleach is portrayed as genius loci, the "final outcrop" of a bleak, barren landscape." Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 32.

<sup>24</sup>Robert Graves, The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth, amended and enlarged edition (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 24.

<sup>25</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 32.

<sup>26</sup>John Montague, "The Sean Bhean Vocht," Poisoned Lands, second edition, p. 12.

<sup>27</sup>Eamon Grennan refers to the primeaval otherness of "the old people" in "'Of So, and So, and So': Re-Reading Some Details in Montague," p. 117.

<sup>28</sup>Daragh Smyth, A Guide to Irish Mythology (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1988), pp. 112-113.

<sup>29</sup>John and Caitlin Matthews, The Aquarian Guide to British and Irish Mythology (Wellingborough, England: The Aquarian Press, 1988), p. 145.

<sup>30</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 32.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 32.

<sup>33</sup>Robert Graves, The White Goddess, p. 393.

<sup>34</sup>John Montague, "In the Irish Grain," p. 38.

<sup>35</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague: Deaths in the Summer," p. 241.

<sup>36</sup>Douglas Sealy, "The Sound of a Wound: An Introduction to the Poetry of John Montague from 1958 to 1988," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 14; Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," pp. 32-33.

<sup>37</sup>John Montague, "The Hag, the Hill, and the Heart: An Interview with John Montague," p. 17.

<sup>38</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 32.

<sup>39</sup>John Montague, "Preface to Tides," p. 49.

<sup>40</sup>Oxford Companion to Art, ed. Harold Osborne, s.v. "Gerard David."

<sup>41</sup>Peter Denman, "The Executioner's Boots: The Fiction of John Montague," p. 131.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Peter Denman, "The Executioner's Boots: The Fiction of John Montague," p. 131.

<sup>44</sup>Terence Brown, Northern Voices (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975), pp. 167-168, quoted by Robert F. Garratt, "John Montague and the Poetry of History," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 93; Douglas Sealy, "The Sound of a Wound," p. 12.

<sup>45</sup>Thomas Dillon Redshaw, "Longing for Home: Two Motifs in The Rough Field," Etudes Irlandaises, no. 6 (December 1981), p. 82.

<sup>46</sup>John Montague, "The Hag, the Hill, and the Heart: An Interview with John Montague," p. 17.

<sup>47</sup>Robert Graves, The White Goddess, p. 24.

<sup>48</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 32.

<sup>49</sup>Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce, p. 197.

<sup>50</sup>John Montague, "Preface," The Figure in the Cave, x; John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 85.

<sup>51</sup>Robert Graves, The White Goddess, p. 370; John Montague, Mount Eagle, p. 31; John Montague, A Chosen Light, p. 62; John Montague, Death of a Chieftain, p. 140; John Montague, A Slow Dance, pp. 49, 50; Death of a Chieftain, p. 87.

<sup>52</sup>Dillon Johnston, "Eros in Eire: Montague's Romantic Poetry," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup>Peter Denman, "The Executioner's Boots: The Fiction of John Montague," p. 131.

<sup>54</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 47.

<sup>55</sup>Oxford Companion to Art, s.v. "Art Education."

<sup>56</sup>William Carlos Williams, Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 9.

<sup>57</sup>Oxford Companion to Art, s.v. "Model."

<sup>58</sup>John Montague, "The Hag, the Hill, and the Heart: An Interview with John Montague," p. 17.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Thomas Dillon Redshaw, "Longing for Home: Two Motifs in The Rough Field," p. 62.

<sup>61</sup>John Wilson Foster, "The Landscape of the Planter and the Gael in the Poetry of John Hewitt and John Montague," Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 1, no. 2 (November 1975), p. 18.

<sup>62</sup>John Montague, "The Road Ahead," Death of a Chieftain, p. 88; John Montague, "Like Dolmens Round My Childhood, the Old People," The Rough Field, fourth edition, p. 16; the sense of the dolmen as a source of place of origin is substantiated by Robert Graves's observation in The White Goddess (p. 213) that "a dolmen is a burial chamber, a womb of Earth, consisting of a capstone supported on two or more uprights, in which a dead hero is buried in a crouched position like a foetus in the womb, awaiting rebirth."

<sup>63</sup>Thomas Dillon Redshaw, "Notes on the Text," The Rough Field, fifth edition (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 1990), p. 87; Edward MacLysaght, The Surnames of Ireland, sixth edition (Blackrock, Co. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1985), p. 234.

<sup>64</sup>Thomas Dillon Redshaw, "Notes on the Text," The Rough Field, p. 91.

<sup>65</sup>Eamon Grennan, "'Of So, and So, and So': Re-Reading Some Details in Montague," p. 121.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>67</sup>John Montague, The Rough Field, pp. 12, 67.

<sup>68</sup>Grennan, p. 111.

<sup>69</sup>John Montague, "The Bread God," The Rough Field, fourth edition, pp. 25-30; Thomas Dillon Redshaw, "That Surviving Sign: John Montague's The Bread God (1968)," Eire-Ireland 17, no. 2, p. 81.

<sup>70</sup>Redshaw, "That Surviving Sign," p. 78. The poet is twinned with his father (by the scars they both bear on their foreheads), with his uncle (through their crafts),

and with his grandfather (through the struggle with language).

<sup>71</sup>Redshaw, "That Surviving Sign," p. 81.

<sup>72</sup>Redshaw, "That Surviving Sign," p. 78.

<sup>73</sup>Redshaw, "That Surviving Sign," p. 81.

<sup>74</sup>John Montague wrote in the "Preface" to The Rough Field (p. 7), "an extreme Protestant organisation put me on its mailing list, for instance, and the only antidote I could find against such hatred was to absorb it into 'The Bread God'.

<sup>75</sup>Redshaw, "That Surviving Sign," p. 78.

<sup>76</sup>In present-day Ireland, Massgoing (p. 29), is secondary to football matches between Pearsons and Hibernians (suggestive of political struggles) and "a monster carnival"; the slogan "God is Love" appears on p. 12; writing from Melbourne, the poet's Jesuit uncle claims that the family's loss of position in the neighbourhood "had nothing to do with religion" (p. 30).

<sup>77</sup>John Montague, "The Little Flower's Disciple," The Rough Field, p. 20.

<sup>78</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, p. 68.

<sup>79</sup>Redshaw, "Notes on the Text," The Rough Field, fifth edition, p. 89; Donald Attwater, The Avenel Dictionary of Saints (New York: Avenel Books, 1965), p. 319.

<sup>80</sup>Graves, The White Goddess, pp. 390, 394; Daragh Smyth, A Guide to Irish Mythology, pp. 25-26; Alwyn and Brinley Rees, Celtic Heritage, p. 92.

<sup>81</sup>John Montague, "Jaweyes," The Crane Bag, no. 2 (1978), p. 159.

<sup>82</sup>E. Estyn Evans, Irish Folk Ways (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 71.

<sup>83</sup>Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 33.

<sup>84</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview with Dennis O'Driscoll, p. 68.

<sup>85</sup>Che Guevera quoted by John Montague, The Rough Field, p. 48.

<sup>86</sup>See "Roisin Dubh," An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed, ed. Thomas Kinsella and Sean O Tuama (Mountrath: The Dolmen Press, 1981), pp. 309-311.

<sup>87</sup>John Montague, "The Sean Bhean Vocht," Poisoned Lands (1961), p. 16.

<sup>88</sup>Oliver Goldsmith, The Deserted Village, in Eighteenth-Century Literature, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, Paul Fussell, Jr., and Marshall Waingrow (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, p. 1969), p. 1254.

<sup>89</sup>A grinding uniformity of experience (the result of decades of nationalist hegemony) is what Montague decries in "Patriotic Suite" (pp. 63-70) where laundry flaps in a thousand backyards (p. 67) and where "Christ bleeds" on the walls of "a thousand school rooms" (p. 69).

<sup>90</sup>Mircea Eliade, Dreams and Mysteries quoted by Richard Kearney in "Myth and Motherland," in Ireland's Field Day, p. 62.

<sup>91</sup>John Montague, The Rough Field, fourth edition, pp. 15, 64, 16, 43, 61.

<sup>92</sup>John Montague, The Rough Field, pp. 52, 21.

<sup>93</sup>Redshaw, "Longing for Home: Two Motifs in The Rough Field, pp. 74, 76.

<sup>94</sup>John Montague, The Rough Field, pp. 46, 82.

<sup>95</sup>John Montague, The Rough Field, pp. 39, 13, 83; John Montague, "The Cry," Death of a Chieftain, p. 83.

<sup>96</sup>Montague, "The Wild Dog Rose," The Rough Field, p. 78.

<sup>97</sup>Redshaw, "Longing for Home: Two Motifs in The Rough Field," p. 82; underscoring the paradoxes of freedom and exile, Montague's catalogue of birds includes bitterns, swallows, curlews, roosters, and swans. Montague's use of the swan motif encapsulates a multi-dimensional and multi-layered Irish reality, from the legendary white daughter of Lir (p. 73) to the demotic and cheaply ornamental "concrete swan" (p. 61). That the lake at Coole Park is "bereft of swans" suggests its demise as an artistic centre, a place where "passion and precision" once met (p. 67). The Literary Revival with its roots in an Ireland of the

Ascendancy has been replaced by a new openness and wanton liberalism embodied in the image "a cob and his pen, / Most nobly linked" (p. 69).

<sup>98</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, p. 65.

<sup>99</sup>Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 34.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### "THE COUNTRY FIDDLER"

What can be said for "The Wild Dog Rose" also applies to virtually all of Montague's reprinted poems, since his ongoing strategy of revision is aimed at proving the autonomy of each work as well as the "multivalence" and complicity of texts--what Montague has referred to as the way in which his poems "chat amongst each other."<sup>1</sup> This dialogue between poems becomes especially significant in "The Country Fiddler," the second section of Montague's second and, by his own admission, least successful book, A Chosen Light (1967).<sup>2</sup> While claiming to have no comprehensive aesthetic, Montague has made his most unequivocal statement about the nature of his art and, accordingly, has put that credo into practice in the four loosely interrelated sections of A Chosen Light and, in particular, in the outrightly and implicitly doctrinaire poems of the book's fourth and second sections.<sup>3</sup> Writing in exile in Paris, Montague takes the slow hammering out of his aesthetic--of what he wants for himself as an artist--and makes it, among other considerations, his subject. In its often manifesto-like statement of principles and in its discernment of a 'chosen' artistic course, A Chosen Light roots out the

origins of his creative identity and impulse, touches upon the initiation into craft, works out parables of precision and discipline, sets forth strategies, and creates, in its dedications and references to a veritable pantheon of twentieth-century writers--John MacGahern, Christopher Ricks, William Carlos Williams, Theodore Roethke, Robert Duncan, John Hewitt, André Malraux, Samuel Beckett ("Salute, in passing"), and Flann O'Brien--a fertile and peaceably co-existent Irish and international literary community.

Edna Longley has said that A Chosen Light is a book about "closing gaps"--those between what is 'chosen' and what is inherited, between an Irish identity and an emigre one, between the North and South of Ireland ("Vigil"), between authorities and insurrectionists (as the "frail portent" of a rainbow implies at the end of "Paris, April 1961"), between one generation and another, between the lover and the beloved, between the North and South of Ireland ("Vigil").<sup>4</sup> "The Country Fiddler" and "A Bright Day," both from the second section, reflect two very different yet complementary dimensions of the artist's process of individuation, one a statement of artistic precedent, the other of poetic method. Together they help to close the gap between what is dictated to the poet by heredity and heritage and what his own more liberated and cosmopolitan sensibility demands. Prior to A Chosen Light,

the balancing of these contrary demands had already been the subject of Montague's "The Water Carrier," where the poet is poised precariously between tradition, with its inherent restrictiveness and dangers, and the vitality of the world around him, between "iconographic stylization" and "realism."<sup>5</sup> In "The Country Fiddler" what the speaker asserts is the idea of artistic continuity--of craft surviving against all odds--within a temporal frame of reference. Against this is balanced the atemporal ideal--the detail of the momentary particular and the intensity of the particular moment--to which Montague admits he aspires in "A Bright Day."<sup>6</sup> Here he declares his determination to say "something/Luminously as possible," to formulate and effect a "slow exactness,"

Which recreates experience  
 By ritualizing its details--  
 Pale web of curtain, width  
 Of deal table, till all

Takes on a witch-bright glow  
 And even the clock on the mantel  
 Moves its hands in a fierce delight  
 Of so, and so, and so.

(A Chosen Light, p. 36)

Clearly, Montague is following the imagist-objectivist directives of William Carlos Williams, among other American colleagues, who brought to his work an intense and radical emphasis on the sensational and perceptual, upon "the way things look."<sup>7</sup> Citing the revelatory dimension to Williams' work, his preoccupation

with "truthfulness, exactness, and concrete presentation," Randall Jarrell has argued "it isn't what he says that counts as a work of art, it's what he makes, with such an intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity."<sup>8</sup>

Montague's assimilation of Williams' technique and strategies, confirmed by the innumerable points of contact between The Rough Field and Williams' masterwork Paterson, is understandable, since it was Williams, after all, who conferred upon him the title and obligations of 'poet' ("William Carlos Williams, 1955," A Chosen Light, p. 64).

All indebtedness to Williams aside, Montague's unqualified pursuit of clarity owes just as much to contemporary French, traditional Irish, and even Japanese models.<sup>9</sup> Poisoned Lands witnessed Montague's early affinity with lapsed French surrealists like René Char, whom David Gascoyne has cited for his "concern with clarity and careful detail," and Paul Éluard, the exponent of a "pure" poetry for whom authenticity and clarity depended upon "direct contact with the source."<sup>10</sup> A translator of Éluard ("Charnel Houses"), Montague has, as he says, "been identified with [him] now and again" and also confesses an admiration for the "fluidity of [Éluard's] work."<sup>11</sup> As much as French models have informed Montague's developing aesthetic, the title of "A Bright Day" in itself recalls Egan O'Rahilly's epiphanal and politically provocative poem

"Brightness of Brightness," its parent verse form, the aisling (the connection with which is further enhanced by the seventeenth-century Gaelic epigraph to the fourth section of A Chosen Light which translates, "I saw a vision in the bright day's dawning"), and the whole tradition of luminously detailed Gaelic nature poetry which precedes it.<sup>12</sup> For Kuno Meyer, translator of the seminal Ancient Irish Poetry, that impulse "to seek out and watch and love Nature, in its tiniest phenomena as in its grandest, was given to no people so early and so fully as the Celt."<sup>13</sup> In embracing this aspect of his literary inheritance, Montague, at his lyric best, likewise works by an intimation, by a deployment of "light and skilful touches," and by an evocation of "a succession of pictures and images" which, together, Meyer had likened to the delicate impressionistic techniques of the Japanese.<sup>14</sup>

In a poem like "11 rue Daguerre," which Eamon Grennan identifies as the "lyric centrepiece of Montague's art," all these forces and influences come into play, as if to demonstrate and substantiate the theory of existential radiance and exactitude espoused early in "A Bright Day."<sup>15</sup> Montague's description of something so mundane as his own backyard achieves a luminous intensity, not unlike the effect of the haiku, through its "ritual precision" and laudable restraint in naming, without commenting upon, the phenomenal and objective world:

In that stillness--soft but luminously exact,  
 A chosen light--I notice that  
 The tips of the lately grafted cherry-tree  
 Are a firm and lacquered black.<sup>16</sup>

("11 rue Daguerre," A Chosen Light, p. 46)

While Montague's epic framework, that makes The Rough Field a work of "total recall," has the effect of collapsing time, his lyric poems aspiring towards a 'total awareness' of the particular have the effect of suspending time.<sup>17</sup> In espousing an optimum stillness, Montague concedes,

I know that my own best life  
 Is the hypnotised field-mouse

Housed beneath its [the predatory head's] claws.  
 ("Division," A Chosen Light, p. 63)

"Time Out," in its nostalgic celebration of rural commonplace, reflects Montague's marked antipathy to 'progress' and his corresponding desire for a reprieve or respite from modernization. Through its almost obsessive attention to minute, microscopic detail, it takes its 'chosen moment' out of time and effects an exemplary 'stillness':

The donkey sat down on the roadside  
 Suddenly, as though tired of carrying  
 His cross. There was a varnish  
 Of sweat on his coat, and a fly  
 On his left ear.

("Time Out," A Chosen Light, p. 39)

As Eamon Grennan has suggested, Montague answers Patrick Kavanagh's demand to "snatch out of time the passionate transitory," to fix the momentary and the mutable by making them "luminously exact," yet if his sonnet, "Company," written in memory of Theodore Roethke, is any indication, Montague's poetic masters in this regard are many:

Is it news  
That the beetle's back is abstract,  
A jewel box; the ash-pod has glider wings?  
Cruelty is not their way of life,  
Nor indifference; they ride the currents  
To grasp the invisible. The service  
They do shapes also what they are....<sup>18</sup>  
("Company," A Chosen Light, p. 43)

This almost existential equation of action with "being" figures largely in Montague's poems, both celebrating the observance of ritual and "recreating experience by ritualizing its details." Not surprisingly, "how" becomes the operative word and syntactic cornerstone for both "The Answer" (Montague's tribute to not only the "ritual greetings" of the Dingle Gaeltacht and their enduring power to "cleanse the mind," but to the appreciative cognition of detail by which even the most mundane of objects, the "tinny, two-legged, horned alarm clock," is "isolated into meaning") and "The Centenarian," where the old French matriarch's narrative emphasizes not 'what' she has done but

how she knew the young Hussard captain  
 loved her, as passing her window  
 every morning, he lifted his kepi:

how she drove through French and enemy lines  
 to recover her handsome cavalier son  
 buried in No Man's Land...

She does not raise her failing eyes  
 to heaven, to attest what she has undergone,  
 but treats Him like a gentleman  
 who will know how things are done....

("The Centenarian," A Chosen Light, pp. 44-45)

Where the etiquette, "light ritual," yet largely artificial inured customs of the French aristocracy are no more than reminders of their former enterprise, assiduity and illustriousness ("Enclosure"), Montague's presentations of "how things are done" within the rural Irish farming community extol a near-perfect conjunction of life and art as it arises from a total absorption in the tasks at hand. While the modern factory farming methods which Montague brings in for indictment in "Henhouse" are directed towards nothing more than the efficient and soul-less 'manufacture' of a product, the "GOLDEN CHICKEN," what is emphasized through the empiricism of Montague's accounts of the time-honoured rural crafts of ploughing ("Hill Field") and forging ("Forge") and of the more dubious practice of catching a fish or, as some would have it, of masturbation ("The Trout") is the notion of an inspiring, if violent, vitality and of richly creative, and to some extent, procreative, process.<sup>19</sup> As such, these otherwise commonplace orderings of experience attain a quality of

ritual, their practitioners the authority of artists. A parable for Montague's own exfoliating, ordering and epiphanal imperatives, the farmer in "Hill Field" undertakes his task with a concentration and sweeping conception not unlike that of a visual artist:

All that bone bright winter's day  
 He completed my angle of sight  
 Patterning the hill field  
 With snaky furrows,  
 The tractor chimney smoking  
 Like his pipe, under the felt hat.  
 ("Hill Field," A Chosen Light, p. 30)

Through a consummate absorption in stage after stage of his appointed task, the blacksmith at his forge, more than being exemplary of the artist--a maker who makes his bellows sing--also has ascribed to him the miraculous power to give life, to revive and awaken the "dead" or "sleeping metal." Montague's rendering of this ancient craft is in keeping with what E. Estyn Evans has observed to be the blacksmith's proverbial strength and skill and the magical properties imbued in his forge water:

Then the bellows sang in the tall chimney  
 waking the sleeping metal, to leap  
 on the anvil. As it was slowly  
  
 beaten to a matching curve  
 the walls echoed the stress  
 of the verb to forge.<sup>20</sup>  
 ("Forge," A Chosen Light, p. 38)

Like the blacksmith whose now obscure and obsolete "singing bellows" were once the crossroads rallying point

of the community, the uncle's adeptness with the fiddle, now emblematic of rural craft mislaid, was also once "a favourite at barn and cross-roads" dances, a focal point of communal activity. Long after his rural art has been "silenced in the discord of Brooklyn," the uncle remains at the centre of his newly-adopted community, even if it is only as the dissipated proprietor of a "wild speakeasy," the cellar where "many dossed" "during the depression."<sup>21</sup> As the renegade artist mangué, as the officer of an unexpected legacy, and as the unlikely upholder of the community, the poet's fiddler-uncle serves to introduce and focus the issues of succession, attribution, exile and artistic commitment at variance throughout the remainder of A Chosen Light.

That the "country fiddler" is identified, towards the end of the poem, as the poet's godfather (and, as "A Graveyard in Queens," A Slow Dance, p. 48 later reveals, his namesake) intensifies the degree of kinship between them and makes the indirect passage of that creative legacy all the more plausible. While making the unequivocal distinction between his own verse craft and his uncle's neglected talents, the speaker and chief beneficiary of this windfall, by his own peregrinations, from America to Ireland and back to America again, and by his own discovery of 'voice', reverses the process of dislocation and the cultural loss which necessarily accompanies it:

I attended his funeral in the Church of the  
 Redemption,  
 Then, unexpected successor, reversed time  
 To return where he had been born....

The country people asked if I also had music  
 (All the family had had) but the fiddle was in  
 pieces  
 And the rafters remade, before I discovered my  
 craft.  
 ("The Country Fiddler," A Chosen Light, p. 29)

The "unexpected" or "strange" bequest of this 'gift' from  
 the 'gifted' is echoed towards the end of the chapter in  
 "The Answer" (A Chosen Light, p. 37); insomuch as her face  
 resembles a "wrinkled windfall," the old woman who bestows  
 "ritual greetings" on her unsuspecting visitor is not only  
 a figure of decay but of generous good fortune. Far  
 from these welcome surprises, the circumspect husband and  
 wife of "Witness" (A Chosen Light, p. 33) anxiously, and  
 perhaps covetously, await confirmation of their inheritance  
 as the family patriarch, a scion of tradition with his  
 "rosary beads" and "hawthorn stick," drafts and signs his  
 final will and testament,

Suddenly important again, as long before.  
 Cannily aware of his final scene too,  
 With bald head swinging like a stone  
 In irresistible statement: 'It's rightly theirs'  
 Or: 'They'll never see stick of mine.'

Down in the kitchen, husband and wife  
 Watched white ash form on the hearth,  
 Nervously sharing my cigarettes,  
 While the child wailed in the pram  
 And a slow dark overcame fields and farm.

Succession here, while it too passes "through strangest hands," provides no assurance that tradition will not be extinguished. Rather, the steadily encroaching darkness, where, from the beginning of the poem to its end, the hearth-light dwindles from a "crumbling fire" to the ash from a cigarette, becomes a metaphor not only for the troublesome old patriarch's declining vitality, but for the imminent annihilation of the religious, cultural, and family traditions both he and his household fire represent.<sup>22</sup>

Not so lucky as even these would-be beneficiaries are members of the comically hapless Drummond family ("Clear the Way") for whom succession and inheritance necessarily amount to a powerlessness to alter or avert their destined dispensability:

Some of whom made soldiers for foreign wars  
 Some supplied factories in England.  
 Jimmy Drummond was the eldest but died younger than  
 any  
 When he fell from a scaffolding in Coventry  
 Condemned, like all his family, to Clear the Way!  
 ("Clear the Way," A Chosen Light, p. 34)

Heredity is likewise a liability in "Family Conference" (A Chosen Light, p. 56) where an elderly woman's reluctance to reveal the secret of her own mother's madness results in her suppression of the family history. Closer to the laying on of hands in "The Country Fiddler" is the gesture "of manumission" by which William Carlos Williams liberates a

young, neophyte Montague into his craft ("William Carlos Williams, 1955"). That art and its succession through tradition can be a liberating force is likewise illustrated by the French dowager whose age liberates her into the artful disclosure of her life story in "The Centenarian." Elsewhere, in the cautionary fairytale, "Beyond the Liss" (A Chosen Light, pp. 66-67), the strange but beautiful music which liberates Sean the hunchback (an embryonic version of Montague himself?) not only into a world of his own physical perfection, but

Into the world of ideal  
Movement where (stripped  
Of stale selfishness,  
Curdled envy) all

Act not as they are  
But might wish to be--

constitutes a "pure gift" whose privileges, as the Muse-like "lustrous princess" makes abundantly clear, are not to be abused. Among other poems, the emancipation achieved and expressed through art and sought through exile is offset by images and instances of constraint, limitation and enclosure: the scenes and figures framed by windows in "Family Conference," "Paris, April 1961" (p. 50), and "Return" (p. 25); the cloistered artifice of the French ch<sup>^</sup>ateau ("Enclosure") where life is reduced to "aesthetic views"; the "enclosed" POW camp at Dungannon and its outward approximation, the concentration camp at Rudshofen.

The latter instills an empathetic sense of enclosure and incarceration in the speaker who seeks to render its "exactness":

This low-pitched style seeks exactness,  
 Daring only to name the event.  
 But as I write, the grid of barbed  
 Wire rises abruptly around me  
 The smell of woodshavings plugs  
 My nostrils, a carrion stench.  
 ("Back to school," A Chosen Light, p. 51)

The poet's father, like the country fiddler, also seeks freedom through exile, yet finds only constraint through adherence to tradition. The title of "The Cage" refers not only to the confinement of his father's job behind the "grille / in the Clark St. I.R.T.," or even to his lengthy sojourn in America which separates him, out of political necessity, from his family, but, in more general terms, to the circumscribing and proscriptive prejudices, habits, and customs which identify him as "a traditional Irishman" who

drank neat whiskey until  
 he reached the only element  
 he felt at home in  
 any longer: brute oblivion.

And yet picked himself  
 up, most mornings,  
 to march down the street  
 extending his smile  
 to all sides of the good  
 (non-negro) neighbourhood  
 belled by St. Teresa's church.  
 ("The Cage," A Chosen Light, p. 54)

With the allusion to "the mystic wound" which beats on his forehead like the initiation scar of ancient shamans, his father's lost years in the New York underground take on the resonance of an underworld quest. Yet despite whatever knowledge he has derived from his subterranean quest, he is a figure not to be followed, "for when / weary Odysseus returns / Telemachus must leave."

As Montague makes explicit, his art proceeds not only from 'what is given' but from 'what is pursued.' In the process of finding his own poetic voice, Montague deliberates over the question of adherence and attribution, and discriminates as to what and who he should follow. Among the "strict masters" considered, venerated, but ultimately passed over is Samuel Beckett ("Salute, in passing," A Chosen Light, pp. 46-47), the "rigorous" practitioner of "an icy human mathematics," of whom it is said (as could be said equally of the poet's father):

The voyagers we cannot follow  
Are the most haunting.

A figure of sacrifice, like Orpheus of "The Split Lyre," he is, contrary to Montague's imagist-objectivist inclinations, more intent upon "proving" than "noticing" "how man now is." In another sonnet, "Paris, April 1961" (A Chosen Light, p. 50), the same detachment and aloofness are realized in the figure of André Malraux, the former revolutionary activist and prototype of the 'committed

writer' turned right-wing Gaullist minister at the time of the Fifth Republic and the "Algerian Putsch," who now bears witness on the side of the governmental authority he once abjured. Disproving his theory that "there was no continuity to human history," the Algerian crisis amounts to a "period revived," an unlikely affirmation and approximation of the continuity Montague discovers within his own family.<sup>23</sup> A paradigm of commitment to art compromised, Malraux's political conversion and creative lassitude comment implicitly on the country fiddler's abandonment of rural craft in favour of more dissolute and cosmopolitan preoccupations.

The relationship between life and art and art and politics is made most salient in "The Lure," part of Montague's Patriotic Suite (1966), a work composed to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising, but "disavowing," redressing and deflating the idealizing, yet ultimately misleading "lure" of political and cultural nationalism which originally inspired the insurrection.<sup>24</sup> If art is to have any validity whatsoever, Montague argues, the complex process of "Living for Ireland" must take precedence over an obsessive and inescapable glorification of Ireland's heroic dead. Montague explains:

I disavowed 1916 in 1966 with Patriotic Suite. Sean O'Riada's 'Mise Eire' arrangement I found overwhelming. But I was also suspicious of its effect, and drafted as an answer, an antidote to the aisling of nationalism, which I defined

as 'The Lure,' leading the artist astray like  
a marshlight. My contrast between the ideal  
Ireland and the reality was dedicated to the  
composer.<sup>25</sup>

The resulting sonnet, offering fragmentary glimpses of the  
memorabilia displayed in the 1916 Room of the Kilmainham  
Jail museum,

the pathos  
of last letters in the 1916 Room  
'Mother, I thank...'

a podgy landmine,  
Pearse's swordstick leading to a care-  
fully profiled picture

demonstrates not only the artifice (as suggested by the  
enjambment "care-fully") by which nationalism is sustained  
and sanctified, but the lifelessness, artificiality and  
irrelevance of these idealizations beyond the embalming  
confines of a museum or the purely academic speculations of  
"Herr Doktor" (A Chosen Light, p. 68).

Montague's aesthetic determination not to succumb  
to the "the lure" nor to be led astray either by  
ideological priorities or flagrant self-regard is set  
forth, with manifesto-like rhetoric, in the tenets of "The  
True Song," the final poem and culmination of A Chosen  
Light:

The first temptation is to descend  
Into beauty, those lonely waters  
Where the swan weeps, and the lady  
Waits, a nacreous skeleton.

The second is to watch over  
 Oneself, a detached god  
 Whose artifice reflects  
 The gentle smile in the mirror.

The third, and the hardest,  
 Is to see the body brought in  
 From the street, and know  
 The hand surge towards blessing.

For somewhere in all this  
 Stands the true self, seeking  
 To speak, who is at once  
 Swan

lady

stricken one.

("True Song," A Chosen Light, p. 69)

This pseudo-heroic testing episode in the pursuit of artistic integrity finds the poet determining not how to write (as he has done already in "A Bright Day") but what to write about. In negotiating a path between beauty and its superficiality, between artistic individuation and mere egotism, between bearing witness and proselytizing, Montague argues most vehemently for the establishment of total identification with one's chosen subject, with the source which feeds the poem. "Poetry" is, as Robert Duncan would have it, "...A Natural Thing":

...a moose painted by Stubbs...  
 his only beauty to be  
 all moose...

the poem  
 feeds upon thought, feeling, impulse,  
 to breed itself,  
 a spiritual urgency at the dark ladders leaping.

This beauty is an inner persistence  
 toward the source  
 striving against (within) down-rusket of the  
 river.<sup>26</sup>

As William Carlos Williams said: "When I spoke of flowers,  
 I was a flower, with all the prerogatives of flowers,  
 especially the right to come alive in spring."<sup>27</sup>

When it comes to Montague's actual cognizance of  
 Williams, the senior poet emerges as a far less aloof and  
 far more fallible, vulnerable but, in the end, humanely  
 nurturing figure than the "milkless Olympian / bull" which  
 functions as an epithet for Williams in his own poem:

the bull in godlike

Unlike the cows  
 he lives alone, nozzles  
 the sweet grass gingerly  
 to pass the time away

He kneels, lies down  
 and stretching out  
 a foreleg lick himself  
 about the hoof

then stays  
 with half-closed eyes,  
 Olympian commentary on  
 the bright passage of days.

(William Carlos Williams, SP, pp. 52-53)

Given Montague's description of his uncle as "heavily-  
 built, tranquil-eyed as an ox," there is some degree of  
 implicit resemblance between Montague's hereditary and  
 appointed creative mentors, though his uncle's physical  
 attributes, especially his 'burliness', suggests that rural

ways die hard, even within the exigent and distracting discord of Brooklyn. In his synthesis of urban and rural contexts, of American and Irish experience, he pioneers the dual allegiance and sensibility brought to greater fruition by his namesake and godson. In his incorrigibility as well as in his access to traditional culture, he predates and foreshadows the marriage enacted in "The Siege of Mullingar" (p. 60) between traditional Irish music (the *Fleadh Cheoil*) and a more permissive and liberal mentality and morality, freed at last from the puritanical and sanctimonious rural Irish simplicities and orthodoxies extolled by "O'Connor and O'Faolain" throughout the thirties and forties.

That the uncle's funeral is conducted in "the Church of the Redemption" is not merely ironic, however. Above all, "The Country Fiddler" is a poem about redemption. Its speaker redeems a cultural and family tradition that had been mislaid through negligence and displacement, yet in his return to America and to the Church of the Redemption "twenty years afterwards" he also reclaims and reconstitutes that part of his experience long given up for lost. The commemorative act by which the uncle and his handing down of craft are celebrated itself constitutes one of the major cornerstones of Montague's aesthetic. Memory is for Montague "the restive sally-switch" (p. 31), the unmoved mover, the imaginative means

by which the transient is fixed, by which the present closes the gap with the past.

"The Country Fiddler" reappears, in a slightly altered form, five years later in The Rough Field.<sup>20</sup> Inasmuch as the operative words of A Chosen Light are 'bright', 'frail', 'aloof', 'ritual', 'exact', and 'still', those of The Rough Field are 'dark', 'narrow', and 'pale'. In that they are contrasting collections, where A Chosen Light seeks exactness and precision, The Rough Field, as its title more than attests, sketches out a broad expanse of history and experience and tranverses it through a collage or multitude of unrefined, though not undisciplined, forms.<sup>21</sup> In its multiplicity of themes, however, "The Country Fiddler" makes the transition and adapts, or rather, is made to adapt, to the more political, polemical and diagnostic imperatives informing the sequence as a whole. Situated as the fourth movement of "Home Again," the book's opening canto, "The Country Fiddler" is set against the narrator-persona's less successful and rewarding return to his other 'parish', Garvaghey, as well as against his grandfather's long-past but once routine Sunday side-car pilgrimages to the family seat among "the dark glens of Altamuskin," against the political, as opposed to rakish, exile of the poet's father, against the broken tradition of clandestine hedgeschool mastery once upheld by the poet's grandfather. The rusting and rotting

of the uncle's cast-off fiddle are symptomatic of a more pervasive commercial, social and cultural decay and of the decline in the Montague family's fortunes since the turn of the century and, more so, since the end of the war:

The rotting side-car propped a hole  
 In the hedge, box lanterns askew.  
 All the sadness of a house in decay  
 Showed in the weed-grown cobbles,  
 The gaping stables. But the stacks  
 Still rode the stone circled haggard  
 And the tall shed was walled high  
 And dry with turf, for the war years.  
 Then the wide tent of a hearth  
 Where Dagda's cauldron swung  
 Shrank to a coal-fired stove  
 And tiled stone.

(The Rough Field, p. 15)

Given what amount to the contrary movements operating within "Home Again," "passing on" can be understood in terms of succession, as it is in "The Country Fiddler" and "Like Dolmens Round My Childhood, the Old People." Yet it can also mean the demise of a way of life and its traditions, as it does in the section's first movement which laments "a mode of life that passes on" and which alludes to an inheritance that has been incontrovertibly "despoiled."<sup>30</sup> Succession in this regard is facilitated by the least likely of benefactors. Shirking his responsibility to future generations is the half "wild Irish," half "Ulster Puritan" "rustic gentleman," grandfather John Montague, who not only keeps his eight surviving children "out of sight," but through a

commitment to Redmondism that is intractably at odds with his offspring's Republican inclinations, also keeps them out of mind:

Sixty years  
 Later, his succession was broken,  
 Sons scattered to Australia, Brooklyn.<sup>31</sup>

Far from the mythic Dagda, the "father of all" and "chief of the Gaelic pantheon of gods," his all-too-assured patrimony witnesses the downfall of the family dynasty, the depletion of the cauldron legendary for its abundance.<sup>32</sup>

It falls to far less distinguished members of the community, the Old People, who themselves pass into the permanence of myth, to uphold a sense of continuity and craft. Of these, Jamie MacCrystal is not only a bestower of gifts, tipping the young poet "every pension day," but a questionably gifted artist teaching, as the fiddler uncle could not do, by example, singing "to himself / A broken song, without tune, without words."<sup>33</sup> The poet's resuscitation and rehabilitation of craft in "The Country Fiddler" approximates and comments upon the physical and imaginative effort, in the section's second movement, to smoor the dead ashes on the family's broken hearthstone and rekindle them into a "leaping fire" that is at once emblematic of continuity, power, tradition, knowledge, fertility, and hospitality.<sup>34</sup> The poet-persona's pilgrimage to his Brooklyn birthplace, which brings him to a

recognition of continuity, militates against his journey "Home Again" to Garvaghey, which brings him only to an awareness of the resentment his prodigality has earned him--"So you're home again!" (p. 11)--and to a knowledge that, whatever his compunctions, 'he can't go home again':

Harsh landscape that haunts me,  
Well and stone, in the bleak moors of dream.  
With all my circling a failure to return.  
(The Rough Field, p. 13)

Moving full circle from America to Ireland and back to America again, the persona's peregrinations in "The Country Fiddler" suggest the large cyclic conception of The Rough Field, its broadly drawn "Lines of leaving / lines of returning."<sup>35</sup> The uncle's flight from Ireland, "in an old disgrace," is only one of innumerable flights, exiles and dispersals throughout the sequence: the poet's father (who was "right to choose a Brooklyn slum / rather than a half-life in this / by-passed and dying place"); his Jesuit uncle stationed to Australia; Saint Colm Cille ("He who set his / back on Ireland"); the children of Lir ("Lir's white daughter"); the "comrades scattered wide" who once walked by Glencull waterside; the Flight of Earls, including Hugh O'Neill and the O'Hagans; and, not least of all, the poet-persona himself, who, by his American birth, is doubly displaced.<sup>36</sup>

From A Chosen Light, the implication of the uncle's flight shifts from bankruptcy to mute patriotism. That he

provides accompaniment to barn and cross-roads dances with "O'Neill's Lament," Thomas Davis' "Lament for the Death of Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill," and not, as he did in A Chosen Light's version, with less controversial and politically conscionable ballads ("The Sailor's Bonnet" and "A Fowling Piece"), makes him a politically astute, even politically committed, figure whose own exile carries away a modicum of the tradition also lost through the seventeenth-century Flight of Earls. In articulating Ireland's loss, he becomes the prototype of all of The Rough Field's other bards, fiddlers and singers, who elegize and, in the act of elegizing, set about healing the breach of tradition. Among these is Aindrais Mac Marcuis's song "Is uaigneach Eire" (p. 39), ("This Night Sees Ireland Desolate")--

Her chiefs are cast out of their state  
 Her men, her maidens weep to see  
 Her desolate that should peopled be  
     ...now scattered over seas  
 A land dispeopled of her best...

--played by the fiddler of "A Severed Head."<sup>37</sup> Jamie MacCrystal offers up his "broken song" (p. 16). Emblematic of deep and perhaps unassuageable social wounds, "the torso of [a] fiddle groans to / carry the tune, to carry / the pain of / a lost... / pastoral rhythm" (p. 44). Experimental French composer Pierre Boulez, whose works effect a synthesis of European composition and Eastern serial music, is upheld (p. 69) as a model of precisely

the sort of innovation of which the Irish have lost sight.<sup>36</sup> Packy Farrel obliges his drinking companions' request to "say a song" with his rendition of the eighteenth-century "An Bunnan Buide" ("The Yellow Bittern") and, in the process, effects a temporary revival of community "to a near- / ly perfect round" (p. 49). In "Patriotic Suite," patriotic balladry of all kinds, but most notably "An Bunnan Buide" ("Again that note!...the lost cry / of the yellow bittern") and the poems of W. B. Yeats inspired by the fiercely nationalistic Maud Gonne, Cathleen Ni Houlihan herself, constitute the "symbolic depth-charge of music" which "releases a national dream" (p. 65).

With no more than "shards of a lost tradition" to serve as reminders of what once existed, with the added encumbrance of a "grafted tongue" to frustrate the repossession of the Gaelic language, and with the inconsolable awareness of the innumerable wrongs, atrocities, and indignities that have been committed, "the important thing," as the volume's epigraph from George Seferis maintains, is to find someone "who will redeem it" (p. 1). Having lost the ability to comprehend the dinnseanchas, to decipher the historical and mythological associations of placenames--"The whole landscape of manuscript / We had lost the skill to read" (p. 35)-- Montague works, against the forces of process and history,

toward a redemption and re-acquisition of lost skills, lost language, lost forms and tradition.

Adherents to tradition, who do not find themselves asking, "Now we own the cow, why keep the cream?" (p. 67), have to contend not only with the homogenizing and levelling influence of British domination but, more immediately, with the overwhelming tide of popular culture that is the inevitable consequence of the upturn in the Irish national economy or the GNP, as well as the dubious benefit of "a trade expansion of 5 percent" (p. 68). Montague reasserts the craft that has long run in the family, only to discover that the traditional function of cheering, easing and assuaging (as John Derricke recognized over four centuries ago: "Both Barde and Harper is preperde, which by their cunning art, / Doe strike and cheare up all the gestes with comfort at the hart," p.55), has been usurped and supplanted by a statistically impressive entertainment industry.

While all Europe seeks  
 new versions of old ways,  
 the hammer of Boulez swing-  
 ing to Eastern harmonies,  
 (The Rough Field, p. 69)

Ireland witnesses and condones ("THAT'S THE STUFF," p. 74) a proliferation of dancehalls and showbands. By July 29, 1967, at least--the date of the article excerpted from The Evening Press which glosses Montague's "Dancehall" (the

fifth and final movement of "A Good Night")--music is no longer an art form or even a craft, but a source of employment:

In five years, showbands have become the most important part of the Irish entertainment industry. About 10,000 ball-rooms, small halls, clubs giving full or part-time employment to about 100,000 people, while between six and seven thousand musicians play with 700 professional and semi-professional bands.<sup>39</sup>

Music, once a "deeply racial art," has now become a deeply commercial art.<sup>40</sup> As "Balance Sheet" further evinces, modern Ireland affirms the quantitative at the expense of the qualitative.<sup>41</sup>

The dancehall comes at the end of the persona's night-long ruminative and physical journey in "A Good Night," through the local environs of the countryside and through the vicissitudes of personal, family and local history. The journey begins at the Last Sheaf, a traditional watering-hole and gathering-place that nevertheless provides what Montague calls only a very faulty sense of community.<sup>42</sup> Not only "the raw inheritor of his place" but the obvious successor to the Last Sheaf, the unfinished, concrete dancehall, as a symbol of an era comparable to "Sir John's" "gutted" Ascendancy castle, represents the harsh and sobering reality of Ireland's

future where music becomes the mere pretext for "an industry built / on loneliness." Where even the bullocks of "The Source" are capable of responding to the poet with "slow surprise," the nacreous dancehall "stares blankly back" with "its blank eyes."<sup>43</sup> Yet, for all its apparent harshness, the poet must concede:

Seemsh no escape. Poet and object  
must conshumate.

No lyric memory softens the fact--  
this stone idol  
could house more hopes than any  
verse of mine.

I eye its girdered skeleton  
with brute respect.

("Dancehall," The Rough Field, p. 54)

A ship with its cargo of vague dreams, the dancehall is a monument to the mentality and the now-pejorative aspirations of the community it serves, in this case providing prefabricated entertainment for a mass culture. Its pounding and shaking music, a far cry from "The Morning Star" and "O'Neill's Lament," is not only a sign of change, but, in the context of the "faulty" seismic-shocked world of The Rough Field, also an agency of "energy & change."<sup>44</sup> Where even emblems of autonomy and authority like the uncle's fiddle and the senior Montague's rifle are reduced to "rustiness," the real adversary or nemesis of everything Montague has come to value in and about The Rough Field-- family, tradition and the land itself--is not British political and commercial domination, with its protracted

program of victimization, or even the poverty that is the inevitable consequence of that subjugation, but an overwhelming desire, in Ireland and around the world, for 'progress.'

No aficionado of misery, Montague states unequivocally,

Only a sentimentalist would wish  
to see such degradation again:  
heavy tasks from spring to harvest;  
the sack-cloth pilgrimages under rain

to repair the slabbery gaps of winter  
with the labourer hibernating  
in his cottage for half the year  
to greet the indignity of the Hiring Fair.

Fewer hands, bigger markets, larger farms.  
Yet something mourns.

("Driving South," The Rough Field, p. 82)

Although a self-confessed political poet, Montague is also, in the broadest sense of the term, a pastoral poet whose sense of loss is exacerbated through the backward glance to childhood and, past a fall into division, to a Goldsmithian and arcadian society "of local culture based upon ritual and frugal content" that is hinted at but never adequately realized.<sup>45</sup> Like the narrator of Goldsmith's The Deserted Village whose excursion through Auburn skillfully accommodates "an alternation between images of original innocence and malignant destruction," and leads him toward "a final statement," "a culminating vision of decay in his own time," the persona of "A Good Night" strays upon the

modern monolith of the dancehall which stands as a statement of "the erosion of traditional values and natural rhythms in a commercial society," and to the overtaking of the musician's traditional function by purely economic and commercial interests.<sup>46</sup> Relegated to the status of mere employees, musicians are denied the sense of belonging to society, unlike the musicians and poets of the Gaelic tradition whose role was, in Montague's words, "socially secure."<sup>47</sup> The persona's resignation to the dancehall's supremacy, which in its plaintiveness can also be taken as an expression of his concern for "the spiritual health of his country," is likewise a resignation to the diminution of his own function, and to the gradual drowning out of the traditional songs and tunes that have not only linked one generation to another for century upon century, but have provided the subtext linking the various sections of The Rough Field to create a single, cohesive poetic structure.<sup>48</sup> In a curious reversal of events in the course of the poet's lifetime, "The Country Fiddler" finds the musician evading and deserting his audience, "Dancehall," the audience turning its collective back on that music.

Of The Rough Field Montague has remarked, "I sometimes saw the poem as taking over where the last bard of the O'Neills left off."<sup>49</sup> Against the "auctioneer's patter" of "going, going, GONE," as well as against the more implicit momentum of process, Montague stands not only

as arbiter and diagnostician of his own era, but as custodian and medium of previous generations, responsible for making appreciable the presence of the past.<sup>50</sup> In much the same way that he reverses the cultural loss brought about through his uncle's abandonment of craft, Montague, in seeing the "Irish landscape" as a kind of "primal Gaeltacht," enacts a figurative reversal of centuries of territorial expropriation through a mastery of the dinnseanchas.<sup>51</sup> In the second movement of "A Severed Head," the regional names of Garvaghey, Glencull, Clogher, and Knockmany are systematically decoded, given meaning in another language, and thus repossessed:

From the Rough Field I went to school  
 In the Glens of the Hazels. Close by  
 Was the bishopric of the Golden Stone;  
 The cairn of Carleton's homesick poem.

Scattered over the hills, tribal  
 And placenames, uncultivated pearls.  
 No rock or ruin, dun or dolmen  
 But showed memory defying cruelty  
 Through an image-encrusted name.  
 (The Rough Field, pp. 34-35)

With the gloss "We have the Irish again" on the textual "Ta an Ghaedilg againn aris" (p. 35), English is marginalized by a renewed, if legislated and regulatory, emphasis on the Irish language. Musical, apart from its allusions, in its juxtaposition of blocks of "dissonance and harmony," and encyclopedic in its containment of documentary detail and stylistic multiplicity, The Rough Field is a work of epic

intent and proportions, mediating extremes of experience, the probities of the known world and the secrets of a "Hidden Ulster."<sup>52</sup> What cannot be recovered in terms of cultural, political, and linguistic loss is, in part, redressed by Montague's appropriation of a veritable spectrum of old Irish genres for the articulation of these privations. Of these genres, Thomas Dillon Redshaw has identified "dinnseanchas, aisling, amhran, lanaer, and the topical genres: Aites (Deaths), Fessa (Feasts), Forbasa (Sieges) and Fisí (Visions)."<sup>53</sup> More than its cataloguing of traditional Irish modes and genres, The Rough Field constitutes "a concerted and disciplined re-shaping, re-ordering, re-vision of Montague's oeuvre dating from 1958."<sup>54</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

<sup>1</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, p. 71.

<sup>2</sup>John Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 80.

<sup>3</sup>John Montague, Seminar given at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 28 February 1990.

<sup>4</sup>Edna Longley, "Searching the Darkness," pp. 143-144.

<sup>5</sup>See Robert F. Garratt, Modern Irish Poetry, pp. 205-206.

<sup>6</sup>Eamon Grennan, "'Of So, and So, and So': Re-Reading Some Details in Montague," p. 121.

<sup>7</sup>Randall Jarrell, "Introduction," Selected Poems of William Carlos Williams (New York: New Directions, 1969), x.

<sup>8</sup>Randall Jarrell, "Introduction," xiv, xvi.

<sup>9</sup>Grennan, p. 123.

<sup>10</sup>David Gascoyne, A Short Survey of Surrealism (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1935), p. 124.

<sup>11</sup>John Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, p. 58.

<sup>12</sup>John Montague, A Chosen Light (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1967), p. 57.

<sup>13</sup>Kuno Meyer, "Introduction," Ancient Irish Poetry, quoted by James Carney, "Introduction," Medieval Irish Lyrics, second edition (Mountrath: The Dolmen Press, 1985), xx.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Grennan, p. 121.

<sup>16</sup>Grennan, p. 123.

<sup>17</sup>Hugh MacDiarmid, "John Montague's Ulster," Agenda 11, nos. 2-3 (Spring-Summer 1973), p. 109.

<sup>18</sup>Patrick Kavanagh, "The Hospital," quoted by Eamon Grennan, p. 122.

<sup>19</sup>Frank Kersnowski discusses "The Trout" in John Montague (Lewisburg, P.A.: Bucknell University Press, 1975), p. 70.

<sup>20</sup>E. Estyn Evans, Irish Folk Ways, p. 199.

<sup>21</sup>John Montague, "The Country Fiddler," A Chosen Light, p. 29.

<sup>22</sup>E. Estyn Evans has said "the open hearth with all its associations is truly the heart of and centre of the household and home....I have sat at fires which, it is claimed, had not been allowed to go out for over a century, or for as far back as memory could go....Above all it is a shrine to which ancestral spirits return, a link with the living past." E. Estyn Evans, Irish Folk Ways, p. 71.

<sup>23</sup>Anthony Thorlby, ed., The Penguin Companion to European Literature (New York: McGraw Hill, 1969), s.v. "André Malraux," by C. Jenkins.

<sup>24</sup>John Montague, "Living for Ireland," in 16 On 16: Irish Writers on the Easter Rising, ed. Dermot Bolger (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1988), p. 17.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Robert Duncan, "Poetry, A Natural Thing," The Opening of the Field (New York: New Directions, 1960), p. 50.

<sup>27</sup>William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Works of a Poet, ed. Edith Heal (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 21.

<sup>28</sup>In the interim, Montague had also used the poem in the short 24-page anthology, The Planter and the Gael (1970) on which he collaborated with the Protestant (though hardly in a strictly religious sense) writer, John Hewitt. Their joint aim in producing the book and in embarking upon a series of poetry readings throughout Northern Ireland was to bring about a mutual and complementary understanding that would override present-day sectarianism; John Montague, The Rough Field, fourth edition, pp. 15-16.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Dillon Redshaw contends, "The Rough Field's spectrum of genres is as broad or broader than Paterson's. In Montague's stunning epic of "humanity articulated"...[there are] lyrics (traditional and modern), laments and elegies, prose and 'found' poems, epistles and epigrams, narrative balladry, odes, monologues, contemplations--even a sonnet." Redshaw, "Ri, as in Regional: Three Ulster Poets," Eire 9, no. 2 (1974), pp. 54-55.

<sup>30</sup>Montague, "Home Again," The Rough Field, fourth edition, pp. 13, 12.

<sup>31</sup>Montague, The Rough Field, pp. 14-15; according to Thomas Dillon Redshaw, "John Redmond, a leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party after Parnell, won the passage of the Third Home Rule Bill (1912). His acceptance of the exclusion of the 'Six Counties' from the Bill and his support for Irish conscription during World War I led to his electoral defeat by Sinn Fein in 1918." Redshaw, "Notes on the Text," The Rough Field, fifth edition, p. 88.

<sup>32</sup>Daragh Smyth, A Guide to Irish Mythology, pp. 42-43.

<sup>33</sup>Grennan, pp. 111-112.

<sup>34</sup>E. Estyn Evans, Irish Folk Ways, pp. 71, 274-275.

<sup>35</sup>Montague, "A New Siege," The Rough Field, p. 73.

<sup>36</sup>Montague, The Rough Field, pp. 44, 27, 73, 61, 39.

<sup>37</sup>Aidrais MacMarcuis, "This Night Sees Ireland Desolate," The Faber Book of Irish Verse, p. 122.

<sup>38</sup>Kenneth MacLeish, ed., The Penguin Companion to the Arts in the Twentieth Century (New York: Viking, 1985), s.v. "Pierre Boulez."

<sup>39</sup>Redshaw, "Notes on the Text," The Rough Field, p. 92.

<sup>40</sup>John Montague, "I Also Had Music," in The Figure in the Cave, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup>At the cost of environmental desecration, what is gained through road construction is employment for "10 men," groceries and clothes for "ten wives" and "30 children," and a cruising speed of "50 miles p.h." on the

new Omagh Road. Montague, "Balance Sheet," The Rough Field, pp. 58-59.

<sup>42</sup>Montague, "Global Regionalism," p. 164.

<sup>43</sup>Montague, "The Source," The Rough Field, p. 53.

<sup>44</sup>Montague, "A New Siege," The Rough Field, p. 74.

<sup>45</sup>Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," p. 88; Montague, "An Interview with John Montague: Deaths in the Summer," p. 230; Montague, "The Sentimental Prophecy: A Study of The Deserted Village," p. 69.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid, pp. 65, 75.

<sup>47</sup>Montague, "The Planter and the Gael," p. 91.

<sup>48</sup>Montague, "Global Regionalism," p. 163.

<sup>49</sup>Montague, "Preface," The Rough Field, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup>Brian John, "The Healing Art of John Montague," p. 36.

<sup>51</sup>Montague, "A Primal Gaeltacht," The Figure in the Cave, p. 42.

<sup>52</sup>Montague, "I Also Had Music," p. 47; Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," p. 89.

<sup>53</sup>Redshaw, "Ri, as in Regional: Three Ulster Poets," p. 55.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid, p. 56.

## CHAPTER SIX

### "A MEETING"

Montague's concern with tradition "not as an anachronistic defense against experience" but as an enabling means of augmenting his own experience has necessarily engendered the need to access otherwise unintelligible and remote traditions by means of translation. While acknowledging, as Ezra Pound had done before him, the untranslatable components of poetry that make all translations mere approximations, Montague has, from the beginning of his career, made translations from the French and Gaelic a significant part of his cross-cultural agenda.<sup>1</sup> In becoming what he terms "a global regionalist" and proponent of "the unpartitioned intellect," he aims to espouse "a sensibility which is prepared to entertain, to be sympathetic to all the traditions of which our country can be said to be composed."<sup>2</sup> In breaking down the barriers between cultures and in demonstrating how one context can speak to and for another, Montague makes his case for the "unpartitioned intellect" all the more compelling. An outgrowth of Montague's integrating vision, his translations are intent upon making the past intelligible to the present and other cultures intelligible to his own. Himself not only a

product but a mediator of a cross-fertilization of cultures, Montague has claimed,

My amphibian position between North and South, my natural complicity in three cultures, American, Irish and French, with darts aside to Mexico, India, Italy, or Canada, should seem natural enough in the late twentieth century as man strives to reconcile local allegiances with the absolute necessity of developing a world consciousness to save us from the abyss. Earthed in Ireland, at ease in the world, weave the strands you're given.<sup>3</sup>

Montague's pluralism is reflected in the writers to whom he feels the greatest affinity: Francis Ponge, Octavio Paz, Robert Duncan, and Gary Snyder.<sup>4</sup>

From accounts of Montague's literary apprenticeship, including the thinly-veiled roman-à-clef, The Lost Notebook, which chronicles his aesthetic, intellectual and sexual coming of age in Europe in the summer of 1950, his attraction to French literature was largely an expression of his distrust of Irish orthodoxies coupled with a corresponding desire to cast himself, as he does towards the end of that novella, in the role of a latter-day Stephen Dedalus. Emerging as points of contention and controversy in both the "Square One" chapter in The Lost Notebook and "An Occasion of Sin," a short story detailing Ireland's puritanical xenophobia, the novels of François Mauriac help to demonstrate the divergence of Catholic consciousness into, on the one hand, "the flood of human passion" espoused by the French, and,

on the other, the Irish "superstition and stubbornness" which seem a throwback to a primitive and much less permissive society.<sup>5</sup> Through translations of poets like Paul Éluard, whose "Charnel Houses" ("Les Charniers") not only features an urban setting but tackles the somewhat unsavoury topic of putrefaction, the young Montague sought to affirm his divergence from the chauvinism of pre-ordained Irish subjects.<sup>6</sup> In "Walking the Dog," a poem which, in the first edition of Poisoned Lands, immediately follows Montague's indictment of provincialism and provincial art in the more accomplished "Regionalism, of Portrait of the Artist as a Model Farmer," French culture and the errant Irish imagination which follows its lead are given leave, even under the watchful eye of the authorities, to pursue their own course. The speaker, for whom Paris is a place of convalescent exile, displays an initial Irish reticence and resistance to the challenge of French ease and permissiveness: "I suppose I should restrain / But, vive la liberté!"<sup>7</sup> By 1977, when Montague came to revise Poisoned Lands, his aim was not so much to use French texts and subjects as a means of counterpointing Irish insularity and prejudice as to show, in previously suppressed poems like "Cathedral Town," after François Monod's "Reims," how French models could be enabling vehicles for his own and otherwise antithetical experience.<sup>8</sup> The provincial and the cosmopolitan are at

once brought to a point of convergence and surprising accord.

Among others whom Montague has translated from the French are André Frénaud (a selection of whose verse he published as the chapbook, November), Paul Éluard, René Char, Apollinaire, Henri Michaux, Eugène Guillevic, and Robert Marteau, most of whom were born since the turn of the century.<sup>9</sup> Despite his exorbitant claim that he is "the only person alive who is also a poet in the English language who profoundly understands and cares for contemporary French poetry," Montague projects himself into the role of an Arthur Symonds who made an earlier and profoundly influential generation of French poets, including Baudelaire, Corbière, Laforgue and Rimbaud, accessible to an English readership.<sup>10</sup> In entertaining plans for a collection of his French translations, Montague foresees the possibility of "breaking or at least impinging on" what he calls "the desperate provincialism of modern British poetry, which only Hughes and Tomlinson have escaped."<sup>11</sup> Such an undertaking would, to Montague's mind, make "the English realize that French poetry never faltered."<sup>12</sup> As much as Montague's admiration for French literature and sense of responsibility for its transmission aligns him with pioneering Irish writers who were also "Citizens of the World," Oliver Goldsmith foremost among

them, his aim in translating is to refine his own craft by learning "effects from another language."<sup>13</sup>

Apart from translations anthologized by Random House and privately printed by his own Golden Stone Press, Montague makes most explicit use of French texts in the "libertine" first chapter of his "plotted" love sequence, The Great Cloak, where their cultural displacement of the book's prevailing themes help to impart and sustain a degree of distance, civility, and what Antoinette Quinn calls "respectful courtesy," to the philandering and grossly dissatisfied male-speaker's tale of marital infidelity and his slow conversion from dalliance to permanence in love.<sup>14</sup> Montague's appropriation of Frénaud ("The Hunt," p. 10) and re-working of Stendhal's observations on the transitoriness of erotic love in his own four-line poem (p. 9) not only attest to the universality of his subject, its anonymous placelessness apart from the topos of the urban hotel-room, but also voice the clichés of love while affording Montague the opportunity to reverse them and remake the conventions of love poetry. Dillon Johnston observes,

In The Great Cloak, Montague assigns to various speakers the awkward and clichéd statements inherent in love poetry. For the book's subject of failed love and remarriage, painfully private and increasingly universal, no new language exists. Rather than attempting to be more coy or radiant than countless other love poets, Montague confronts the problem

directly by declaring the cliché and then by attempting in his short, clean lines to renew this worn language of love. The initial cliché he often places in the mouth of another speaker: the wife, the lover, or one of several French or Gaelic poets whose translations are included in the text.<sup>15</sup>

Montague's use of Gaelic texts is particularly noteworthy, if only for the fact that one of these, "A Meeting," an imagistically sharp five-line lyric from the ninth-century Irish, has already been featured in The Faber Book of Irish Verse as well as in two of Montague's previous collections, Tides, and his 1972 Cuala Press book of Irish translations, A Fair House: Versions of Irish Poetry.<sup>16</sup> Situated among other 'Short Ones' in A Fair House, "A Meeting" is remarkable not so much for itself as for its representativeness of its parent tradition and, with a "shining burden of natural detail," of a style reminiscent of the Japanese haiku.<sup>17</sup> The collection is an exercise in reclaiming that part of the past that lies in another language and in redressing the incongruity whereby poets are "more familiar with the culture of the Pueblo Indians and the poetry of Basho and Li-Po than with that which most resembles them in their own countries."<sup>18</sup> Through this re-appropriation of ancient Gaelic texts-- fragments "still alive" from an older tradition which all Irish poets, whether they write in Irish or English, hold in common--Montague provides a purview not only on pre-

Christian and medieval aesthetics, but on the tenor of Gaelic life and 'the Matter of Ireland' as it was addressed by its earliest poets.<sup>19</sup> In tracing the origins of Irish poetry back as far as "The First Invasion," a narrative conceived almost two thousand years ago as creation myth (as suggested by the division of the women), flood myth, and biblical precedent for Irish genealogy all in one, Montague is, at the same time, going back to the origins of his own craft.<sup>20</sup> It was a grammar-school exercise in translating placenames which brought him not only to an awareness of "the stream" of the Irish language "driven underground," but, more significantly, to his "discovery of poetry."<sup>21</sup> Published in the same year as The Rough Field, A Fair House is equally concerned with tradition and "the pressure of an incompletely discovered past," the anomaly which Montague cites in his Introduction to The Faber Book of Irish Verse: "Irish literature in English is in the uneasy position that the larger part of it lies in another language" (pp. 21-22). By framing his versions of Irish poetry with rubricated texts of his own poems detailing cultural and linguistic loss ("Penal Rock: Altamuskin," "A Lost Tradition," and "A Grafted Tongue"), Montague makes explicit the more than ironic "predicament of the English-speaking Irishman" yet he also makes the re-acquisition of those historically-misplaced and linguistically-displaced

texts something of a Pyrrhic victory.<sup>22</sup> The act of reclamation necessarily underscores what has been lost.

"A Meeting," an anonymous five-line epigram, relates the celebration of an unofficiated "mad-merry marriage" between "a girl" and "the son of the King of Moy" during the pagan festivities of Mid-Summer's Day (Beltaine, later St. John's Day):

The son of the King of the Moy  
met a girl in green woods on mid-summer's day:  
she gave him black fruit from thorns  
& the full of his arms  
of strawberries, where they lay.  
(A Fair House, p. 25)

According to Robert Graves, the culminating point of these festivities came with the "mad-merry marriages 'under the greenwood tree', when dancers from the green went off, hand in hand, into the greenwood and built themselves little love-bowers and listened hopefully for the merry nightingale." Mid-Summer's Day was not only a time favourable and auspicious for lovers, but for the promotion of healing and the fertility of crops throughout the coming season.<sup>23</sup> Laden in its short span with precise and sensuous natural detail, "A Meeting" not only reflects the abundance and fertility of the season, but, through its incorporated allusion to the thorn or hawthorn, also carries the strong connotation of female sexuality.<sup>24</sup> That the girl, in her generous plenitude, is no mere maiden but an incarnation of the earth-goddess makes her simple tryst with the son of

the King of the Moy take on the significance of a Sovereignty ritual.

The re-situation of this poem at the beginning of the third section of Tides, "Life Class," not only effects a radical shift in tone from the previous section, but contributes to the book's chiaroscuro effect that in turn emulates and reinforces its exploration and appropriation of the rhythms inured in nature.<sup>25</sup> "A Meeting," which itself records a ritual celebrating and acting in sympathy with the rhythms of the seasons, marks a point of transition from the second section's articulation of the "Muse as death, naked death," to the third section, as ruled by "a different kind of nakedness: the muse as energy, love, the full moon."<sup>26</sup> After the unrelenting interrogation of all aspects and configurations of victimization, discomfiture, severance (both physical and emotional), destruction and betrayal in Section Two, "A Meeting," with its affirmation of renewal, exchange and abundance, stands not only as a reprieve, but, by its survival as a text, a rebuttal to the forces of destruction and entropy which dominate the first two sections as well as the final one. Apart from their shared origins in nineteenth-century Ireland, the girl in the green woods represents a renewal of the cycle which the Hag of Beare concludes. Standing in stark contrast to both the consequences and forfeitures of sexual appetite in "The Pale Light" (p. 27)

and the intimations of miscarriage leading to the finalization of divorce proceedings in "Special Delivery" (pp. 29-30), the girl in the green wood and the son of the King of the Moy together exist in a relationship of ease and exchange that is entertained idyllicism in "Love, A Greeting" and finally realized within a contemporary setting of comparable healing seclusion in "The Same Gesture":

There is a secret room  
of golden light where  
everything--love, violence,  
hatred is possible;  
and, again love.

Such intimacy of hand  
and mind is achieved  
under its healing light  
that the shifting of  
hands is a rite

like court music.

(Tides, p. 37)

That "A Meeting" operates as a touchstone for the remaining poems in the section becomes clear, especially where what Dillon Johnston has called "the paradox of memory's, and of poetry's atemporal preservation" is at issue.<sup>27</sup> Against "A Meeting" where the transience of love is fixed, if only by the thousand-year-old tradition to which the poem belongs, Montague places "Tracks" and its "tauntingly valedictory mirror [that] promises only an ephemeral mimesis":

I shall miss you  
 creaks the mirror  
 into which the scene  
 shortly disappears:  
 the vast bedroom  
 a hall of air, the  
 tracks of our bodies  
 fading there, while  
 giggling maids push  
 a trolley of fresh  
 linen down the corridor.<sup>28</sup>  
 (Tides, p. 43)

Love's permanence at the beginning of the section serves to offset what Antoinette Quinn has called "an enduring impermanence."<sup>29</sup>

Montague uses "A Meeting" yet again in The Great Cloak where it fulfils an altogether different purpose-- contributing in no small measure to the anthology of portraits which elevate Montague's new and pregnant wife, as opposed to the childless Madeleine (whose infertility takes on horrific and surreal connotations in "She Dreams" and "Childless"), to the level of pristine and inviolable myth.<sup>30</sup> Once again situated at the beginning of a chapter, in this case "Anchor," "A Meeting" confers and comments upon the new-found yet tenuous stability Montague finds with Evelyn. 'Anchoring' in this case refers not only to the domiciled, settled and idyllic life he finds through remarriage, but to his return, after years of peripatetic existence (as the multiple settings of Portugal, Northern Ireland, Paris and Dublin in "Separation" suggest) and short-lived love affairs on the continent, to Ireland and

to the anchoring surety of its native traditions. In contrast to the first chapter which offers, by way of French writers, clichéd statements on the transient nature of erotic love, the third chapter puts its stock in the proverbial wisdom of an old Irish saying: "the hearth is a good anchor."<sup>31</sup> Where the mad-merry marriage of "A Meeting" is condoned as a form of socially accepted behavior, attracting no moral judgement whatsoever, the succession of illicit trysts or "slight affairs," conducted throughout "Search" in a series of anonymous city hotel-rooms, are not only met, as "Do Not Disturb" exemplifies, with disapprobation--"the porter's conspiracy, distaste of the outraged"--but with considerable interference from the outside world:

That always strange moment  
 when the clothes peel away  
 (bark from an unknown tree)  
 with, not a blessing moon  
 but a city's panelled skyline;  
 an early warning system

Before, disentangling,  
 through rain's soft swish,  
 the muted horns of taxis,  
 whirl of police or fire engine,  
 habitual sounds of loneliness  
 resume the mind again.

("Do Not Disturb," The Great Cloak, p. 11)

The clichéd imperative of the title underscores, with considerable irony, the conspiracy of forces which not only intrude upon and foreshorten the couple's lovemaking, as exemplified by "the early warning system" of the city's

lights switched on toward nightfall, but also disrupt, undermine and frustrate both the lingering effects and the reconstructive recollection of that intimacy. Apart from its emphasis upon the transience of love's experience and the futility and paradox of all efforts to record that experience, "Tracks" presents the shared world of the lovers in terms of enclosure rather than mere seclusion. Antoinette Quinn has remarked,

The metaphysical expanse of "Snowfield" contracts into the mockingly "vast" and humanly dwarfing enclosure of an hotel bedroom, and then into a pyrotechnically exciting, orgasmic landscape bounded by 'the walls of the skull'.<sup>32</sup>

An oblique element of voyeurism, of intimacy betrayed by outsiders and onlookers, is suggested by the mirror which overlooks and briefly contains the lovers and by the giggling maids who "hover in the corridors."<sup>33</sup> The same concept is articulated more explicitly in "Closed Circuit," where the poet, his imagination triggered by a spate of paranoid jealousy, projects his absent lover into the clichéd role of a pornographic starlet:

my sweet one  
my darling, my love  
 until they fall apart  
 (Oh, the merciless creak  
 of jealousy's film)  
 in a wet calm  
 like flowers after rain.

("Closed Circuit," The Great Cloak, p. 17)

"Closed Circuit" in this case refers not only to the purely gratuitous and melodramatically clichéd bad art (that, when piped via television transmission into the privacy of hotel rooms, passes for entertainment), but to the obsessive thought patterns and imaginative constraint jealousy incites.

In "Wedge," the title of which recalls William Carlos Williams' book on the subject of marriage (The Wedge, 1944), the private, self-contained world of the "cobbled courtyard" which the poet and his first wife Madeleine share in Paris with the Japanese framer (and expert gardener), a florist, an old woman, two blind accordion players, and a gelded cat (a latent symbol of the sterility of their marriage), proves to be no refuge from the forces of process and death. Rather, this silent and secluded hortis conclusis, which was originally "a symbol of the good life" shaped by habit, ritual and routine, is impinged upon, violated and ultimately destroyed by the outside world:

Or, la vie en rose,  
 setting for a shared  
 life, slowly broken,  
 wrenched, torn apart,  
 change driving its  
 blunt wedge through  
 what seemed permanent:

the cobbles uprooted,  
 the framer beheaded  
 in a multiple accident....

("Wedge," The Great Cloak, p. 32)

This despoiled Eden, deprived of the gardener by whose painstaking artifice the "grafted cherry tree" "foamed to brief / and splendid blossom / each European spring," is the failed prototype for what has been called the "condition of blessedness" or "star equilibrium,"<sup>34</sup> the "Eden-like" "sea's edge garden" domicile the poet establishes with Evelyn in the book's final poems, "The Point" and "Edge." Happiness, because it is "a balance, precariously maintained," as Montague had come to realize in "Death of a Chieftain" (p. 167), is necessarily contingent upon seclusion:

Avoid too much notice;  
 learn from the hare,  
 crouch low, and quiet,  
 until the hunt passes.

("Gossip," The Great Cloak, p. 57)

"A Meeting," with its legendary bower of ease and abundance, sets a precedent and serves as a guiding example for the poet's ultimate realization of a precarious refuge and outpost of happiness at Roche's Point, "a sheltering home" sheltered between the "harbour's arms."<sup>35</sup> As opposed to the tragedy which mars his Parisian-Eden, the poet, in speaking of the foghorn which mediates the mists of uncertainty (which shroud the opening of "The Point") insists,

Listen carefully. This is different.  
 It sounds to guide, not lament.  
 When the defining light is powerless,  
 Ships hesitating down the strait  
 Hear its harsh voice as friendliness.

("The Point," The Great Cloak, p. 61)

Earlier in the collection, "Gone" presents a parodic inversion of the subtle and restrained Gaelic sensuousness ascribing the interactive delight in nature and the edenic contendedness of "A Meeting." Described in turn as 'strange,' 'defiant,' 'flagrant,' 'ornate,' 'outlandish,' and 'gaudy,' the garden from which the speaker is separated by a window and which becomes the focal point for his sense of separation and displacement, contains a veritable catalogue of riotous floral species, transplanted from their natural habitats in parts of the world so various as the southern United States, Portugal, and Australia. Yet, for the speaker, the excess of the floral display, if not its suggestion of displacement, serves only to underscore the lover's absence:

...ornate magnolia, Belle of Portugal  
 rose with its outlandish whiteness,  
 the grey-blue musk of eucalyptus,  
 seem only to stress, in a need  
 born of their resolute gaudiness,  
 one overriding fact: your absence.

("Gone," The Great Cloak, p. 16)

As far as natural imagery is concerned, The Great Cloak in its novelistic progression aspires towards and accomplishes a return to Eden, moving from an alienating urban landscape

of "chill towers," through aberrant mutations of nature and lifeless imitations of the organic world (as signified by the memoried "circle of hobbyhorses" of "The Blue Room" and the "hobbyhorses" of "Herbert Street Revisited" as opposed to the vibrant "team of horses" of "After a Quarrel") to a rich and effulgent demi-arcadia that becomes "the point" of the poet's existence.<sup>36</sup> Where, in conjunction with the sundering of a marital relationship, the natural imagery of Section Two is apprehended in terms of tearing or rending--the fish of "Separation" engorged by "the golden / marriage hook" (p. 30), the deracination of old love and the "butterfly with a torn wing" in "No Music" (p. 34)--the natural imagery, as it is first fully revised in "A Meeting," is directed toward the idea of intermediation and reconciliation (as the "linked swans" of "Song" suggest) as well as toward the conferral of blessing upon the couple's union ("A six pointed star, the sign of union" in "Signs," p. 49).<sup>37</sup> The "restorative" and palliative virtues of love and lovemaking, fully realized in "Anchor," are intimated in "Talisman," where ease as opposed to raw desire makes the recollected moment of lovemaking a talisman to be "invoked against harm."

Inasmuch as "A Meeting" is the first full expression of renewal and fertility, it is also the first among a series of idealized, iconographic renderings of Evelyn which, in the best tradition of the amour courtois,

portray her not as a multi-dimensional, fully individuated human being, since she is never given the chance to speak for herself, as even Madeleine does, but as a goddess come to life out of myth.<sup>38</sup> She is, by turns, the "girl in the green wood," the harvest goddess Ceres ("A Dream of July"), the earth-goddess to whom the poet, "solemn as a knight," swears "Allegiance" (p. 46), Diana, Luna, Eve, a "sleek" "mermaid," "a bowsprit Venus," Mary ("The Great Cloak"), and a paradigm of harmonious domesticity ("Content"). The idealization of Evelyn, for all its reductiveness and evasion of complexity, nevertheless represents a progression of the 'plot' in terms of how women are perceived. By comparison, women in Section One, in their indistinctness and anonymity, are no more than "blank sheets" awaiting or bearing the poet's inscription ("Snowfield").<sup>39</sup> Madeleine, whose 'truth is betrayed' even in the conciliatory and reconstructive gesture of Section Two's closing poem, "Herbert Street Revisited," fares even worse than her nameless rivals by becoming, through her inability to produce a child, an object not only of derision but of self-derision.<sup>40</sup> What mitigates, to some degree, the insupportability of her loneliness, guilt, and anguish is the means by which Montague lends dignity to marital breakdown through recourse to the conventions and forms of courtly love. First popularized in thirteenth-century Provençal, the pastourelle ("Tearing" II)

reinforces the sense of comfortable distance with which the poet and Madeleine have come to regard their tumultuous breakup; but, far from being an innocent tale of a knight and a shepherdess, Montague's "Pastourelle," revealed in the end as a mere conceit, cannot altogether suppress or reverse the violence and primal hurt that has passed between them:

a hawk circled the wood,  
 & a victim cried, the sound  
 of hooves rising & falling  
 upon bramble & fern, while  
 a thin growth of rain gather-  
 ed about us, like a cowl.<sup>41</sup>

("Pastourelle," The Great Cloak, p. 25)

The third and final chapter enacts not an imitation but an assimilation of medieval Celtic conventions, constructs, and aesthetics. "Working Dream" demonstrates the last of these, with the poet's manuscript featuring

A star, a honeycomb, a seashell,  
 The stately glory of a peacock's tail  
 Spiralled colour across the page  
 To end with a space between a lean I  
 And a warm and open-armed You.<sup>42</sup>

("Working Dream," The Great Cloak, p. 51)

The "branching of zoomorphic interlacing" fundamental to what Dillon Johnston has called the Celtic abhorrence of empty spaces here becomes a clever metaphor for the poet's own desire to close the gap which separates him from the loved woman.<sup>43</sup> The filling in of the blank spaces, of the sense of "something missing in" the "separate self," is not

only suggested by the recurrence of words like 'shared,' 'twinned,' and 'linked' throughout the third chapter, but fully accomplished through the birth of the poet's first child:

Now you hide beneath  
everything I write;  
love's invisible ink,  
heart's watermark.<sup>44</sup>

("Child," The Great Cloak, p. 60)

Altogether unlike the tabula rasa women of the first chapter, Una, whose birth represents the termination of his attenuated search for permanence, herself provides an indelible subtext to everything the poet undertakes.

Montague is well aware of the fact that any reprinting of a poem necessarily draws attention to its textual changes or revisions. Poems like "A Muddy Cup" (A Slow Dance and The Dead Kingdom), become vehicles of self-revelation and the growth of the poetic imagination as well as gauges of the intimacy and confidence to which Montague will admit his readers. At first a disclosure of the poet's origins and melodramatic early childhood in America as well as of his mother's strong distaste for even the faintest recollection of those years, "A Muddy Cup," with the addition of a final parenthetical stanza in The Dead Kingdom, becomes a story not of failed exile or retreat from exile but of much more painful and remorselessly cruel exile from the maternal:

(all but the runt,  
 the littlest one whom  
 she gave to be fostered  
 in Garvaghey, seven miles away;  
 her husband's old home).<sup>45</sup>  
 ("A Muddy Cup," The Dead Kingdom, p. 68)

Close to twenty years elapsed in Montague's career before he was able to write about his immediate family and it took almost as long for the details of his fosterage finally to surface. To this extent, old poems come to the rescue of new disclosures, unmaking accustomed readings of a text at the same time as intensifying the effect of its revelations.

Montague is a poet acutely aware not only of history, but of the publishing history of his own poems. To him, they are components within a complex structure, infinitely adaptable pieces to an unfinished puzzle, each in itself carrying its old nuances and intertextual complexities to a new context.<sup>46</sup> Readings of individual poems are not to be made complacently (as Montague claims "on the edge is best") any more than the poems in entire collections, even beyond Montague's injunction at the beginning of The Great Cloak, should be read separately.<sup>47</sup> The raison d'être of Montague's poetic oeuvre, if it can be said to have one, is to promote the idea of creative process over and above that of product. Where nothing is fixed, each time Montague sets about his unfinished business of writing poems he lends support to the idea that

the "continuously remade by text" is by no means the preserve of the critic alone.<sup>48</sup>

## NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

<sup>1</sup>Montague has said "I think all translations are approximations." "An Interview with John Montague: Deaths in the Summer," p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Montague, "The Unpartitioned Intellect: Dante, Savonarola, and an Old Sign," p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 88.

<sup>4</sup>Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, p. 70.

<sup>5</sup>In The Lost Notebook, the novels of Mauriac are entirely out of place--even objects of scorn--in rural Ulster: "[my mother] turned to Francois Mauriac...one of his blackest, Le Desert de l'Amour, the desolation of carnal love. She was so upset by this exposure to normal French culture that she hightailed it to confession, and told the priest she had been reading dirty books." Montague, The Lost Notebook, p. 91; Montague, "An Occasion of Sin," Death of a Chieftain, pp. 128, 133.

<sup>6</sup>Montague, "Charnel Houses," Poisoned Lands (1961), pp. 38-39.

<sup>7</sup>Montague, "Walking the Dog," Poisoned Lands (1961), pp. 57-58.

<sup>8</sup>Montague, "Cathedral Town," Poisoned Lands, second edition (1977), p. 29.

<sup>9</sup>See The Random House Book of Twentieth Century French Poetry, ed. Paul Auster (New York: Random House, 1982).

<sup>10</sup>Montague, interview by author, 23 May 1987.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, p. 70.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 38.

<sup>15</sup>Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce, p. 70.

<sup>16</sup>Like "The Country Fiddler," "A Meeting" had also appeared in Montague's co-venture with John Hewitt, The Planter and the Gael (1970). What its inclusion perhaps allows for is a validation and reinforcement of Montague's Gaelic heritage.

<sup>17</sup>John Montague, "The Seamless Garment of the Muse," Agenda 5, no. 4, pp. 30, 29.

<sup>18</sup>Montague writes in "In the Irish Grain," "the anomaly remains: Irish literature in English is in the uneasy position that the larger part of it lies in another language" (p. 22); Montague, "The Seamless Garment of the Muse," p. 30.

<sup>19</sup>Montague, "A Primal Gaeltacht," p. 45.

<sup>20</sup>Montague, "The First Invasion of Ireland," A Fair House (Dublin: The Cuala Press, 1972), pp. 3-4.

<sup>21</sup>Montague, "A Primal Gaeltacht," p. 43.

<sup>22</sup>Montague, "In the Irish Grain," p. 21.

<sup>23</sup>Graves, The White Goddess, p. 398.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, p. 176.

<sup>25</sup>Montague, "A Meeting," Tides (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1971), p. 35.

<sup>26</sup>Montague, "Introduction to Tides," in The Figure in the Cave, pp. 49-50.

<sup>27</sup>Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce, p. 184.

<sup>28</sup>Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 37.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Quinn, p. 39.

<sup>31</sup>Montague, The Great Cloak (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1978), p. 43.

<sup>33</sup>Quinn, p. 37.

<sup>34</sup>Montague's best-known love poem, "All Legendary Obstacles" (A Chosen Light, p. 16), makes the reunion of long-separated lovers the focus of attention for curious onlookers.

<sup>35</sup>D. H. Lawrence, Look! We Have Come Through! quoted by Dillon Johnston, "Eros in Eire," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 55.

<sup>36</sup>Montague, "Edge," The Great Cloak, p. 62.

<sup>37</sup>Montague, The Great Cloak, pp. 18, 36, 42, 54.

<sup>38</sup>Quinn, p. 38; Johnston, "Eros in Eire," p. 53.

<sup>39</sup>Quinn, p. 39.

<sup>40</sup>Quinn, p. 36; Johnston, "Eros in Eire," pp. 52-53.

<sup>41</sup>See Montague, "She Dreams," The Great Cloak, p. 38.

<sup>42</sup>Alex Preminger, ed., Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, enlarged and amended edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), s.v. "Pastourelle," by Frank M. Chambers.

<sup>43</sup>The manuscript which the poet reads in fact bears a striking resemblance to A Slow Dance and recalls its abundant natural imagery.

<sup>44</sup>Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce, p. 185.

<sup>45</sup>Johnston, "Eros in Eire," p. 54.

<sup>46</sup>See Brian John, "The Healing Art of John Montague," p. 48.

<sup>47</sup>Hugh Kenner's assessment of Yeats's body of work also applies to Montague's oeuvre: "instead of looking for an explication of a particular poem by Yeats, look at the poem on the next page." Montague, "An Interview with John Montague," interview by Dennis O'Driscoll, p. 66.

<sup>48</sup>Montague, The Great Cloak, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup>Montague, "Preface," The Figure in the Cave, ix.

**PART III**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### "BY MEMORY INSPIRED": REMEMBERING AND RE-MEMBERING THE COMMUNITY

Far from the argumentative neophyte writer whose chief caveat could well have been "non serviam" and whose overriding determination was to express only his "own problems" in his writing, "not those of his sickening community," John Montague has become, with each successive volume of poetry, a more forceful advocate of the idea of community, a more faithful devotee to the dynamics by which what is broken or wounded can be healed, what is dispersed can be re-integrated, and what is lost can be re-constructed.<sup>1</sup> Fascinated by the patternings of "energy, growth, and fertility," "passionate" in his "identification with the process of change," but, at the same time, wary of the decay and destruction which is their inevitable outcome, Montague works against, and often dramatizes himself as toiling against (as in "She Cries," Mount Eagle, p. 48), the overwhelming tide of forces which push life, love and happiness slowly and inevitably towards the brink of the "abyss."<sup>2</sup> As the "lucky the dancer on thin ice, / rope walker on his precipice" ("O'Riada's Farewell," A Slow Dance, p. 58), forever poised on "the edge" between fixity and mutability, Montague, like his friend the visual artist

Barrie Cooke, attempts to find "how closely the artist can expose himself to flux and still transpose his feelings into that other form of life called art."<sup>3</sup> At his disposal in this undertaking are the "talismans" of memory and what he describes as the "swaying ropeladders / across fuming oblivion"-- "the healing harmony / of music, painting, poem" ("Process," The Dead Kingdom, p. 18)--which, if not altogether forestalling the "goddess of Mutability, / dark Lady of Process, / our devouring Queen" ("Gone," The Dead Kingdom, p. 19), manage, by sometimes apprehending the loss she implies, to absorb that effacement and assert a salutary, if temporary, control over it:

So sing a song for  
 things that are gone,  
 minute and great,  
 celebrated, unknown.  
 ("Gone," The Dead Kingdom, p. 19)

Sing a song for the broken  
 towns of old Tyrone:  
 Omagh, Dungannon, Strabane,  
 jagged walls and windows,  
 slowly falling down.  
 ("Red Branch (A Blessing)," The Dead Kingdom, 50)

Given Montague's reliance on the healing harmony of the arts, there is a preponderance in his canon of painterly technique and of painters in general (among them, Morris Graves, S. W. Hayter, and his own Michael Gorman from the short story "A Ball of Fire"). Further to this, composers and musicians of all kinds populate his work: Pierre Boulez and his "Masterless Hammer"; Sean O'Riada and

the masters with whom he can never be ranked--Mozart, Mahler, Stravinsky; John McCormack; the harpist Carolan; the poet's uncle and even his father.<sup>4</sup> Snatches and titles of songs are interspersed throughout his verse: Edith Piaf's "La Vie En Rose"; Percy French's "Come Back Paddy Reilly"; "Kathleen Mavourneen"; "Molly Bawn, why leave me pining"; and Richard Strauss's 1895 symphonic poem, Till Eulenspiegels Lustige Streiche.<sup>5</sup> Even the word "song" figures in the titles of many of his poems: "Song for Synge" (A Slow Dance, p. 21); "Song" (The Great Cloak, p. 50); "Almost a Song" (A Slow Dance, p. 25); "Song of a Lonely Bachelor" (Poisoned Lands, p. 47); and "The True Song" (A Chosen Light, p. 69). What Montague recognizes in poems like "The Silver Flask," "Almost a Song," and "Up for Sale," is the functional use of song not only to heal but to effect communion as they figure in, and thus bring into accord, "the activities of the group"--whether that group is the broken "family circle" of the Montagues, the turf-cutting neighbours split by religion, or friends grown distant from years apart.<sup>6</sup>

If poetry is, for Montague, "a partly redemptive process," it is also a largely reconstructive task aimed at a movement towards "recognition and integration."<sup>7</sup> Memory, or the mnemonic dimension to his work, even with its uncertain and subjective atemporality, points to the possibility of re-remembering, of reconstituting a shared

world, the basis for which may be filial, familial, marital, tribal, cultural/literary, religious, political, fraternal, and even ecological. All of these, however, present a challenge to Montague's reconstructive or projective art because they are what Seamus Deane describes as "communities under pressure."<sup>8</sup> As the self-appointed guardian and possessor, along with the old people, "of what had been there," Montague is empowered, within the imaginative compass of his poems, to summon up lost worlds, to heal or have the patience to await their healing, and, at the very least, to understand the rifts and primal wounds by which they have fallen into division.<sup>9</sup> The act of speaking for and about a collective consciousness, and of becoming the "voice of a community," is a role to which Montague is destined, as he makes explicit throughout The Rough Field and the anagrammatically-titled Mount Eagle, by the derivation of his name from Tadgh or Taque, meaning "poet," "philosopher," or "fool," but also recalling the derogatory Orange epithet for Catholics, the designation for an entire class, "hatred's synonym" ("A New Siege," The Rough Field, p. 74).<sup>10</sup>

Although Montague is, as he confides with assurance in "The Source," in full "possession" of the past of his locality and, as the representative of a "tribal consciousness," of his province at large, the engagement necessitated by that sense of responsibility towards the

community is sometimes far from personal.<sup>11</sup> In fact, in poems like "Mount Eagle," the proprietary genius loci who is a projection of Montague himself remains aloof and altruistically detached from the very community for whose sake and welfare he sacrifices his liberty:

The whole world was changing, with one  
language dying; and another encroaching...

and the region needed a guardian--  
so the mountain had told him. And

a different destiny lay before him:  
to be the spirit of that mountain.

Everyone would stand in awe of him.  
When he was wrapped in the mist's caul

they would withdraw because of him,  
peer from behind blind or curtain.

("Mount Eagle," Mount Eagle, p. 69)

"The secret shell of loneliness" (A Slow Dance, p. 22) and remoteness to which the poet, by Montague's reckoning, commits himself as he tries "to crash, without faltering, / the sound barrier, the dying word" (Mount Eagle, p. 48) overflows even into Montague's diction which Dillon Johnston claims is "pitched slightly above, but consistent with, current usage and actual speech."<sup>12</sup> Like the ancient Celtic filid whose officiation of "health, wealth, and progeny" promoted him to a position of unassailable authority and respect, Montague, by affecting a similar aristocratic or magisterial artistic posture that enforces solitude and isolation, finds himself at once

inside and, as medium, messenger or avatar, poised slightly above or outside the community. While remaining a poet for the secular world--intent upon political exigencies, environmental mishaps, personal loss and domestic life--Montague often upholds or embraces a sacral, oracular, vatic or priestly function, as he does as the invoker and petitioner of what he calls "deep, dark, not-quite-understood powers" in "For the Hillmother" (A Slow Dance, p. 12), "a litany for the Blessed Virgin...transposed into the pagan Hillmother," "the maternal earth, fertility goddess and poetic Muse, apostrophized as fons et origo of all creativity":

Hidden cleft  
                   speak to us  
 Portal of delight  
                   inflame us  
 Hill of motherhood  
                   wait for us  
 Gate of birth  
                   open for us.<sup>13</sup>  
 ("For the Hillmother," A Slow Dance, p. 12)

Effecting a conflation of pagan and Christian outlooks, Montague is at the same time putting the community or the communal voice back in touch with the organic, creative, and procreative source of its being, back in touch with a sense of the sacredness of the earth. A comparable use of an incantatory choral line is found in "Courtyard in Winter," where the refrain "Snow curls in on the cold wind" (A Slow Dance, pp. 16-18), expressive of what Dillon

Johnston calls "a tribal viewpoint," has the effect, in alternating with the poet's gradual disclosure of the private story of his friend's suicide, of "converting a personal poetic voice [of loss] to a communal voice."<sup>14</sup>

The shamanistic or mediumistic dimension to Montague's art reaches its apotheosis in poems like "Invocation to the Guardian" (The Dead Kingdom, pp. 20-21), where the poet, as the 'entranced' intermediary between the turmoil of Ulster's present-day sectarianism and the accumulated wisdom of the past, calls upon history's great problem-solvers to effect an end to the crisis:

Master of royal decorum  
Great Lord of Babylon...

All powers in the realm,  
Both physical and mental,  
Swift resolver of problems  
With no apparent solution;  
Who could read the tablets  
In abstruse Sumerian. Sir,

Legendary as Nimrod of Nineveh  
Swift as Macedon's Alexander,  
At twenty, the 'hegemon', benevolent  
As the Buddha struck Ashoka,  
Scholarly as Cormac of Cashel,  
Wise as Justinian, brisk  
As that codifying Corsican...

Stand by us now, magister,  
Staunch our deep wounds  
Light our dark island,  
Heal our sad land.

Montague administers his "cure for the recurrent disease called violence" not only by entreaty but by the extensiveness of his catalogue since, as the narrator of

The Lost Notebook claims, "being systematic, making an inventory has always been my remedy for dodging sorrow."<sup>15</sup>

Even with the incalculable pressures towards commitment and politicization inculcated on the writer by the Northern Crisis, to be a political poet, as Montague describes himself, is not to be concerned exclusively with governing and non-governing bodies and their informing ideologies, but to be, in much more general terms, "the conscience of one's race," the one who "bears witness" with "compassion, diagnosis, hope," who tries to warn and tries to heal.<sup>16</sup> With a more pronounced emphasis since the publication of The Rough Field, Montague's undertaking has been directed toward the filling in of gaps and divisions between individuals, peoples, sensibilities and cultures, between man and the natural rhythms of earth, wind, and water from which he has become increasingly alienated in his drive towards industrialization and pursuit of factory farming schemes. The violence, hatred, division, and almost surreal terror which are so much a part of the first, second, and fifth sections of Tides, of Section III of A Slow Dance, of the second chapter of The Great Cloak, the greater part of The Rough Field (but especially "The Bread God," "The Fault," and "A New Siege"), and of "The Black Pig" section of The Dead Kingdom, are absorbed into Montague's vision, as he forays into the "hinterland of pain."<sup>17</sup> By containing them, Montague hopes to come to

terms with and "to understand the waves of violence" "inside man," to allay or exorcise them by way of a cathartic release.<sup>18</sup> Montague's intent is therapeutic and consolatory. The cyclic structure he borrows from Celtic and Indian art,

with its instinctive feel for the whole  
burgeoning vegetative, totally-assimilating,  
never-stopping, glory-giving, death-giving,  
life-giving, smiling and crying process of  
nature,

he applies to The Rough Field, The Dead Kingdom, Mount Eagle, and even to individual poems like "Caledon Castle" and "Like Dolmens Round My Childhood," making pre-eminent the possibility for renewal, even where attempts at return and restoration have failed.<sup>19</sup>

Montague's guiding sensibility is poised between a recognition of the "impossibility of resurrecting the life of the lost moment" and the need to bring the past to the surface, to reconstruct imaginatively and with an anthropologist's or detective's skill the life of the community that was there, in order to understand the present and attend to the wounds that remain.<sup>20</sup> Memory, whether it apprehends a personal or collective past, is not only the agency which 'defies cruelty' but the consolation of uncertain efficacy and permanence which grows from absence, loss, and even "bitter failure" ("Courtyard in Winter," A Slow Dance, p. 19). From recollected fragments

and rehearsed deficits, Montague fashions his 'healing art' and re-members, if only within an imaginative context, the communities and shared worlds which are the source of his pain.

The quest for harmony, ease, integration and sense of belonging which acquires increasing significance with each book Montague has published since 1975 is an extension of what both he and Gary Snyder have assimilated from primitive cultures and their understanding of the poet's function. On the issue of the poet's relationship to his community, Snyder has argued in his essay "Poetry and the Primitive: Notes on Poetry as an Ecological Survival Technique":

what [primitive cultures] do have is this knowledge of connection and responsibility which amounts to a spiritual ascesis for the whole community. Monks of Christianity or Buddhism, 'leaving the world' (which means the games of society) are trying, in a decadent way, to achieve what primitive communities--men, women and children--live by daily, and with more wholeness. The shaman-poet is simply the man whose mind reaches easily out into all manners of shapes and other lives, and gives song to dreams. Poets have carried this function forward all through civilized times: poets don't sing about society, they sing about nature.<sup>21</sup>

Among Montague's poems bearing the most indelible stamp of Snyder's influence are the stridently environmental poems of his most recent collection, Mount Eagle. "Reaching out into all manners of shapes and other lives," Montague establishes an absolute identification--a sense of being at

home--with the natural world through alternating underwater and avian perspectives of the utmost serenity and tranquillity:

I open underwater eyes  
and the great lost world  
of the primordial drifts  
a living thicket of coral  
a darting swarm of fish...

(how still it is up here  
where I dance quietly to myself,  
stilt across a plain, hardly  
disturbing the dust on the moon's shelf)

I had forgotten that we live between  
gasps of, glimpses of miracle;  
once sailed through the air like birds,  
walked in the waters like fish.  
("Up So Down," Mount Eagle, p. 12)

Only two of many 'lost worlds' Montague recalls or retrieves in Mount Eagle (the others include Atlantis, nineteenth-century Cork, his childhood home, the womb from which man is banished at birth), the forsaken but remembered domains of sea and sky, with their transposition of terrestrial "thickets" and "swarms," point to the fundamental kinship of all living things as well as to man's equal, but not superior, place within the largest community of all, earth's household. A much earlier poem, "Kenmare Bay" (Poisoned Lands, p. 54), which disputes man's place in the natural world by making his intrusion into the landscape cause for retaliation, nevertheless argues implicitly for the interconnectedness of all living things through the multiple yet interdependent clauses forming the

single sentence of the poem's final three stanzas:

.A frieze of pines  
Provides green peace for a black crow  
To holler at the sea  
And at the motor-boat

Which noses between  
Seaweeded islands, rhinestone inlets,  
Scattering the sea-pies  
Whose red beaks flash

Above visitors' hats  
Like scalping knives.

("Kenmare Bay," Poisoned Lands, p. 54)

From the acquisitive and predatory survival-of-the-fittest ethos which, though decried, governs man's relationship to nature in "The Last Monster" (Poisoned Lands, p. 58), in "Hymn to the New Omagh Road" (The Rough Field, pp. 57-61), and in the curiously dispassionate "Net" (Tides, p. 60) with its questioning "are we ourselves or / the air we breathe," Montague's maturing consciousness or, more precisely, conscience accepts and demands a more complete responsibility for the life of this planet, all of which 'springs' from a common source. The Nootlec salmon-spawning legend behind "Pacific Legend" (Mount Eagle, p. 11) not only speaks for the universality and cross-cultural significance of Montague's familiar themes of return and renewal but, in foreseeing the possibility of "redgold" salmon assuming "human form," breaks down the barrier civilized man has erected between human and animal kingdoms.<sup>22</sup> The salmon, the initiating and encapsulating

image for Montague's journey back to the sources of his own identity in The Dead Kingdom ("Upstream," pp. 11-12), once again makes his magisterial and life-asserting journey up-river in "Springs" (Mount Eagle, pp. 13-14). This time, however, the salmon becomes an unfortunate environmental casualty, his homing instinct undermined and betrayed by the toxicity of the source to which he is drawn and by man's negligence in "forgetting," as the speaker had "forgotten" in "Up So Down," their shared affinities and kinship:

Prince of ocean, from  
 what shared springs  
 we pay you homage  
 we have long forgotten  
 but I mourn your passing  
 and would erase  
 from this cluttered earth  
 our foul disgrace:

Drain the poison  
 from the streams,  
 cleanse the enormous  
 belly of ocean, tear  
 those invisible miles  
 of mesh so that your  
 kin may course again  
 through clear waters.

("Springs," Mount Eagle, pp. 13-14)

Speaking, somewhat grandiloquently, with the first personal pronoun "we" on behalf of the entire human race, Montague transforms what might otherwise be a Greenpeace-inspired tirade on the dangers of environmental mismanagement into a sacramental plea and benediction.

Not confined to poems of public domain or global

significance, Montague's 'we' is the most common voice of his love poems and reinforces the sense that the shared, but private and sometimes even secret, world of the lovers is also a community. For all its brevity, the lovers' tryst conducted in recuperative exile from the outside world in "The Same Gesture" (Tides, p. 37) not only heals for the moment but, when 'recollected in tranquillity' ("we...remembered"), eases and provides relief long after the moment has passed. Like so many of Montague's other poems which articulate his healing vision, "Springs" (in its invocation) and "The Same Gesture" (in its grateful paeon) are examples of the genre Gary Snyder has identified as the "healing song":

Poetry is a healing act....Song is healing magic. There are all kinds of song. The genres are: work-song, a personal power-vision song, war song, death song, courting song, hunting song--all of these are used by people for their own needs and uses. But the special genre is the healing song. The shaman was the specialist in that. He returned to his power-vision song experience many times and deepened it over and over again, whereas other people had one power vision and that was enough. The power of this type of song--the power that the shaman connects with--enables him to hear and to see a certain classic song which has the capacity to heal. And I think that we could say that for self-conscious, quote, 'literary' poetry of the sort that has been transmuted for the last two millenium in the West--the best of it belongs to that genre: healing song....[There have been] massive attempts in Western history to re-speak the primary and most archaic-ness of our tradition in a form that would integrate, harmonize and heal people's minds.<sup>23</sup>

Summoning forth the past, conjuring up and reconstructing lost worlds is, for Montague, one means of acting upon his healing intent. Undertakings like The Rough Field and The Dead Kingdom, which aspire towards an inclusiveness that Hugh MacDiarmid has described as "total recall," collapse time, interweave mythic, historical and personal levels of experience, and make of absence a richly creative presence, to assuage and lay to rest the past's harmful effects upon the present.<sup>24</sup> In "Herbert Street Revisited," the final or valedictory movement of the anguished middle chapter of The Great Cloak, Montague makes amends in extremis for going against Madeleine's wishes and betraying "the truth" about their marital breakdown (precisely as he has done in the preceding twenty pages). Edmund Spenser's epigraph to The Great Cloak, with its explanation of the cloak's derivation from the Greek pallia, insinuates the palliative treatment and aim of the book: its attempt to 'mitigate,' without curing, the pain of separation and divorce; its concealment of the real enormity of marital transgressions through recourse to the distancing conventions of courtly love; and, finally, its presentation of the male protagonist's quest for the "shelter," home, and "ease" he ultimately finds with Evelyn.

"Herbert Street Revisited," with its reconstitution of a lost and former happiness, is recompense, however

small, for the breakdown not only of a marriage, but of the tiny Parisian courtyard community ("Wedge," The Great Cloak, pp. 31-32) whose dissolution sounds the death knell for that relationship. Where "Wedge" summons up the past only to lament its disintegration, "Herbert Street Revisited," in many ways its companion poem, reaches back to an even earlier time in Montague's marriage to reconstruct, re-member and offer up a benediction for "the pattern of one time and place" which both "watches and endures succession." In its "triumphant evocation," "recreating past contentment" through what Antoinette Quinn calls "precisely realized images," and, in its Evelyn Waugh-inspired title, "Herbert Street Revisited" responds to Montague's early contention that, beyond "The Tyranny of Memory,"

the heavy latent shadows of nostalgia lie across much of the best writing of the last fifty years, whether the indefatigable burrowings of Proust, Graham Greene describing intimations of mortality in a lost childhood, or even Evelyn Waugh.... [George] Moore is...like so many modern writers, obsessed by memory....<sup>25</sup>

More than a mere "stocktaking" but, all the same, nostalgic, "Herbert Street Revisited" offers salutary hope that old happiness, despite the bitterness of the intervening years summed up in the twenty previous pages, cannot be erased or eradicated altogether.<sup>26</sup> "Someone is," after all, "leading our old lives" (The Great Cloak, p.

40). Making his peace with Madeleine in this, the gracenote of the chapter, Montague rehearses but neutralizes the images that had operated as symbols of marital discord and collapse. The grim and encircling "hobbyhorses" of memory which grind "up and down" in the insomniac's mind as he tries to sleep in "The Blue Room" (The Great Cloak, p. 36) are rendered harmless as the innocent "hobbyhorses"--"the pony and donkey"--which, "linked in / the slow motion of a dream," parade "side by side, down / the length of Herbert Street." Their pairing alone stands in stark contrast to the twinned fish which float, to one's peril, in opposite directions in "Separation" (The Great Cloak, p. 30). The rhythmic "rising and falling" motion of the hobbyhorses' hooves in "Herbert Street Revisited" is as life-affirming as the suggestion of a funeral cortege in "Wedge" is finite. Where the healing images set forth in the first section of the poem do not suffice, Montague assumes the posture and oracular pitch of an all-powerful shaman or avatar:

...like a ghost dancer,  
 invoking a lost tribal strength  
 I halt in tree-fed darkness

to summon back our past,  
 and celebrate a love that eased  
 so kindly, the dying bone,  
 enabling the spirit to sing  
 of old happiness, when alone.

("Herbert Street Revisited," The Great Cloak, 41)

By what Eamon Grennan has called "an unsentimental

conjuring trick," but what approaches a benediction, Montague re-members and recreates the lost world of his early marriage through a succession of highly specified fiats:

So put the leaves back on the tree,  
 put the tree back in the ground,  
 let Brendan trundle his corpse down  
 the street singing, like Molly Malone.

Let the black cat, tiny emissary  
 of our happiness, streak again...

Let Nurse Mullen take the last  
 train to Westport, and die upright...

And let the pony and donkey come.<sup>27</sup>  
 ("Herbert Street Revisited," pp. 41-42)

Montague relies on a similar method of conjuring, as he says "I call up that empty farmhouse / its blind, ghostly audience," to recover and repopulate a scene of childhood happiness and domiciled stability in "Hearth Song" (Mount Eagle, pp. 16-17). Singing "for no one," but gaining the rapt attention of a cottage-full of listeners, the cricket under the hearthstone is both a figure of the shaman-poet, "scraping the shape of itself," and a vital source of inspiration, "welling up out of the earth," for Montague's own singing. That the cottage belongs to the Nialls, the debilitated and disinherited descendants of Ireland's chief sept, necessarily makes that scene, together with the remembrance of it, a plaintive reminder of the kinship of a once-united Ireland. The imaginative

summoning forth and reconstruction of happiness, home and community in "Herbert Street Revisited" establishes a bridge to the third and final chapter of The Great Cloak, the basis for which are the "shared sounds," "shared" life and healing happiness of the poet and his second wife Evelyn as they search out and find a "nestling place" ("Song," The Great Cloak, p. 50), a "small house" that serves as a "paradigm of the universe" ("After a Quarrel," The Great Cloak, p. 54).<sup>28</sup> From this refuge to which he will once again return, Montague departs for the North at the beginning of his next collection, The Dead Kingdom, to examine the remnants of a "marginal civilization" ("Bog Royal," The Dead Kingdom, p. 26) that suffered "a grief that will never heal" (p. 49) and the revenants of his own shattered family, "the fertile source of guilt and pain" (p. 92).

By far the most explicit use by Montague of his shaman or conjurer guise is found in "The Hill of Silence," the penultimate poem of his most recent collection, Mount Eagle. Following upon "Knockmany," with its talismanic and promissory image of a rainbow over the hill of "the Danaan mother goddess" from which transpires "a healing dream / in savage Chicago" (Mount Eagle, p. 71), "The Hill of Silence" speaks with a tribal and sometimes incantatory voice. It recommends and conducts a communal ascent towards an ancient healing place, the megalithic equivalent of a

modern field hospital, whose significance as "Our world's polestar / A stony patience" reaches far beyond the minutiae of the countryside it dominates.<sup>29</sup> Once again, Montague issues his fiats:

Let us climb further.  
As one thought leads  
to another, so one lich-

ened snout of stone  
still leads one on,  
beckons to a final one...

Let us also lay ourselves  
down in this silence

let us also be healed  
wounds closed, sense cleansed

as over our bowed heads  
the mad larks multiply

needles stabbing the sky  
in an ecstasy of stitching fury

against the blue void  
while from clump and tuft

cranny and cleft, soft footed  
curious, the animals gather around.

("The Hill of Silence," Mount Eagle, pp. 73-74)

By reaching back into Ireland's collective consciousness, into the dark, not-quite-understood aspects of his race, Montague locates an appropriate model by which Ireland, together with the rest of humanity, can rise above the ebb and flow of violence, as the warriors had done more than a millenium ago, and find, or at least await with "patience," a balm for its wounds.

Singular journeys or ascents of comparable therapeutic intent are undertaken in Montague's short story "The Road Ahead," where, much to the narrator's disappointment, the source, like the life in his old community, is dried up. In "The Road's End" (A Chosen Light, pp. 31-32 and The Rough Field, pp. 33-34), the well-spring of memory, the "restive sally switch"--the unmoved mover--militates against the desertion and decay of the speaker's native parish as well as against the neglectful blocking-up and stagnation of the well which is its spiritual and creative centre. Despite the anonymity ("someone has / Propped a yellow cartwheel / Against the door") and sense of sacrifice ("fuschia / Bleeds by the wall") which prevail at the end of the poem, the vestiges of the neighbourhood's past--"the shards of a lost culture"--are not only life-promoting, as the sheltering of calves in the MacCrystal's old shed suggests, but enough to stimulate recollections both from the speaker, who remembers the parish with a recitation of the names of its former inhabitants, and from another custodian of local history:

'I like to look across,' said  
Barney Horisk, leaning on his slean,  
'and think of all the people  
Who have bin.'

("The Road's End," The Rough Field, p. 34)

Further to this excursion is the recollected journey to "The Source" (what William Carlos Williams has called "the symbol of all beginnings") in "A Good Night," a sequence which examines the dynamics and foundations of community, especially the personal, family, and local histories which help to form a common bond.<sup>30</sup> In Garvaghey Montague finds, as Williams found in Paterson, "an image large enough to embody the whole knowable world," a place of which he can write with the same particularity that "a physician works upon a patient."<sup>31</sup> That "A Good Night" begins at the Last Sheaf, which is, by coincidence, another name for that emblem of depletion and winter--the cailleach or hag--lends substance to Montague's claim that the sense of community which abides there is a very faulty one, somehow nearing its end. Only after a series of songs culminating in Paddy Farrel's rendition of An Bunnan Buidhe, are the anonymous drinkers, their "community revived" for one brief moment, named as close friends and childhood confreres:

'I said to him': 'He swore to me.'  
 With smart alec roughness, Henry  
 Rakes up our family history:  
 'Was it patriotism, or bankruptcy?'  
 Austin Donnelly remembers our fight  
 Over a swallow's nest....  
 ("Up for Sale, " The Rough Field, p. 49)

The next two poems in the sequence, "The Fight"--an account of single combat which has the resonance of saga--and the sonnet "Salutation," focus on these vividly recollected

childhood incidents which the speaker shares with both Austin Donnelly and Henry.

In much the same way that the camaraderie within this "rump parliament of old friends" (p. 51) revives memories of a seemingly lost or long forgotten world of childhood, the speaker's recollection of a previous journey to "The Source" incites a flood of memories associated with that place, the outpouring of which constitutes a kind of personal *dinnseanchas*:

As I plod  
Through the paling darkness  
Details emerge, and memory  
Warms. Old Danaghy raging  
With his stick, to keep our  
Cows from a well, that now  
Is boarded up, like himself.  
Here his son and I robbed a  
Bee's nest, kicking the combs  
Free; our boots smelt sweetly  
For days afterwards. Snowdrop  
In March, primrose in April,  
Whitethorn in May, cardinal's  
Fingers of foxglove dangling  
All summer: every crevice held  
A secret sweetness. Remembering,  
I seem to smell wild honey  
On my face.

("The Source," The Rough Field, p. 52-53)

Robert F. Garratt has observed that "the Wordsworthian element is crucial here, in allusions, in echoes, and in poetic strategy. The natural world becomes internalized and, transformed by the imagination, releases a moment from the past, powerfully felt."<sup>32</sup> In knowing his place intimately down to the intricacies of its seasons and its

minutest natural details, and, as such, re-possessing the landscape, Montague necessarily re-possesses the past. He proclaims:

All around, my  
Neighbours sleep, but I am  
In possession of their past  
(The pattern history weaves  
From one small backward place)  
Marching through memory magnified....  
! "The Source," The Rough Field, p. 53)

Crashing through space, like a figure fresh from legend, with his magical and magnificent "seven league boots," Montague presents himself elsewhere as entirely capable of collapsing time, of retrieving, with a diviner's skill, a past far beyond his living memory and raising it to the surface:

The world we see only shadows  
what was there. So a dead man  
fables in your chair, or stands  
in the space your table now holds....  
Before your eyes the red sandstone  
of the wall crumbles, weed run wild  
where three generations ago  
a meadow climbed, above a city  
which now slowly multiplies,  
its gaunt silos, fuming mills  
strange to the first inhabitants  
as Atlantis to a fish's eyes.  
("Moving In," Mount Eagle, p. 15)

Even his own home, Grattan Hill, its present reality defamiliarized through a perspective from the past, is as subject to process and mutability as the lost worlds it has replaced. Against Montague's exfoliating imperatives, his

drive to strip away all that seems unnecessary and superfluous, there is an equal determination to delve into and divulge the complex layers of history, the pressure of which de-stabilizes and exposes the present as but a fragment of a total reality. The evanescence of past and present is not only what sets much of Montague's work "on the edge," but what endows it with an often overpowering sense of pathos. Terence Brown has remarked with regard to "The Silver Flask" (IV The Dead Kingdom):

What makes this section of the work so haunting is its powerful suggestion of the timelessness of memory. The family's history composes a permanent present tense in the mind of the poet, memories fixed as images in poetic recollection....The poet seems able to summon the dead back to momentary life, to allow them a posthumous presence in his art.<sup>33</sup>

The intersection of time-consciousness--the pastness of the past--and timelessness--its mnemonic atemporality--is illustrated and made most salient in "All Souls" (A Slow Dance, pp. 52-53). A full-stop caesura in the middle of the first section--"Three smiling nuns. That polite, parlour"--punctuates an abrupt shift from present tense to past tense, from a sense of the past as part of an eternal present to a sobering awareness of what has been lost. While the shift in tense to some extent militates against Montague's attempt to re-member his relatives and preside over his family reunion ("All the family are together," p. 52), the poem's title, in its allusion to All



Two poems from the second section of A Slow Dance explore the issue of sharing and its influence upon the achievement of community. "Almost a Song" (1964) is a poem that might well have been included in A Chosen Light since it is not only concerned with the ritual skills of turf cutting and stacking that require the utmost discipline and dedication, but mindful of the way in which those seasonal rural activities are presided over by a pagan site of ritual and astronomical significance:

Early summer, the upper bog,  
slicing the thick, black turf,  
spreading, footing, castling  
and clamping, ritual skills  
ruled by the sun's slow wheel  
towards Knockmany....

("Almost a Song," A Slow Dance, p. 25)

Yet quite unlike anything in A Chosen Light, the craft here, like the voice used to describe it, is communal, an almost tribal task bringing Protestants (old Eagleson from "Like Dolmens Round My Childhood") and Catholics together through a common purpose. So accommodating is their work in creating the turf bank, that it even affords them shelter from the elements. While the turf-cutting brings members of the community together, it functions as a rite of passage, affording the speaker an expedient means of becoming, by stages, an acknowledged and fully-entitled member of the community:

a messenger first, then helper,  
 I earned my right to sit among  
 the men for a stretch & smoke  
 while we put our heads together  
 in idle talk of neighbours  
 and weather.

("Almost a Song," A Slow Dance, p. 25)

The imperfect sense of community resides in the incompleteness suggested in the title. What transpires from their activity is "Almost a song," a gesture of hope, though not quite sufficient to heal the differences and divisions which exist between the local inhabitants.

An incomplete sharing and a foreseeable negation of all that can be shared are the forces at work in Montague's treatment of Protestant-Catholic relations in "The Errigal Road" (A Slow Dance, pp. 26-27). The poem constitutes an elaboration of Montague's contention that among Ulster Protestants, there is a refusal "to share, to recognize his neighbour as his equal, to accept that we are all here on one island, Ireland not England."<sup>34</sup> With his Protestant neighbour, Old Eagleson, Montague embarks upon an excursion round the environs of his family's native parish, "Errigal Keerogue" (p. 26). At the outset, they are presented as equals, as the speaker says, "We match paces along the Hill Head Road." As equals, they journey back in time, past an old Christian site with its "early cross," to pagan Knockmany and the liberating effect of "its brooding tumulus / opening perspectives beyond our Christian myth." The prospect to which they climb has the effect of

dismantling the religious differences which separate them. Along the way, the two neighbours participate equally in a local dinnseanchas, unravelling the lore of landmarks, reclaiming them from the alienating obscurity and decay into which they have fallen, and raising a long forgotten past to the surface:

As we climb, my old Protestant neighbour  
signals landmarks along his well trodden path,  
some hill or valley celebrated in local myth.

'Yonder's Whiskey Hollow', he declares,  
indicating a line of lunar birches.  
We halt to imagine men plotting

against the wind, feeding the fire or  
smothering the fumes of an old fashioned worm  
while the secret liquid bubbles & clears.  
("The Errigal Road," A Slow Dance, p. 26)

For whatever bond the presence of the past in their shared landscape affords them, the sight of the border and of County Monaghan beyond introduces a note of irremediable division and brings the neighbours to a painful awareness of present-day political exigencies which are the foremost manifestation of their inherent differences: "'On a clear day you can see far into Monaghan,' / old Eagleson says, and we exchange sad notes / about the violence plaguing these parts." Montague is once again asked to function, as he functions in "Courtyard in Winter" and "Almost a Song," as a messenger, a mediator and a spokesman:

At his lane's end, he turns to face me.  
'Tell them down South that old neighbours

can still speak to each other around here'

& gives me his hand, but does not ask me in.  
 ("The Errigal Road," A Slow Dance, P. 27)

What, to all appearances, is a gesture of forthright concern, reconciliation, and neighbourly goodwill on the part of old Eagleson, in fact falls far short of the mutual understanding and generous exchange essential not only to friendship but to the settlement of conflict between the North and South. While Protestant and Catholic residents of Garvaghey and its environs can certainly "speak to each other," they are not on terms of sufficient intimacy to enter into each other's homes.

Section II of A Slow Dance is, in fact, devoted to a consideration of homes, shelter and containment as well as to an examination of the way in which those places afford or deny warmth, nurturing, friendship, and kinship. Binary perspectives, like those implemented in "Sawmill, Limekiln" (A Slow Dance, p. 15), "Homes" (A Slow Dance, pp. 22-23), and "Views" (A Slow Dance, p. 24), enhance the contrast between unaccommodating places--sterile, alienating and resistant even to change--and sites which, even in decay and disuse, continue to promote and sustain life. While the sawmill offers to its unwelcomed visitors only "pine chips / pricklier than straw; / a plank harder than / stone," the "collapsing stone / of the lime-kiln," long outlasting the utilitarian function for which it was

built, harbours a polly cow as she gives birth.

"Homes" offers a comparable diptych. Its abandoned yet picturesque "Famine Cottage," seen from a personal perspective, is expressive of an openness and receptivity-- "a shape easily / Rising from the ground, / As easily settling back" (p. 22). No longer a home but still associated, by the name "MacCrystal," with the lives of the people of the district, it stands in stark contrast to the "Tennysonian" "hunting lodge" (p. 23), an edifice as alienating as the most sublime landscape, which is not a home at all, but a seasonal residence where the rich can indulge in a violent, if fashionable, form of recreation. The two "Homes" of Montague's poem encapsulate the two solitudes of Victorian Ireland: the displacement of Catholic farmers to parts unknown by the exigencies of famine and the internal displacement of the aloof and patrician Ascendancy class. The sterility and resistance implicated in "Victorian Ireland" are also symptoms and consequences of the artistic ferment and community to which it gave rise--the Irish Literary Revival and its spiritual centre, Coole Park. In "Take Your Stand" (VII "Patriotic Suite"), the title for which Montague borrows a line from W. B. Yeats's "Coole Park, 1929," the "visitor to Coole Park / in search of a tradition" (The Rough Field, p. 67) is prohibited from 'taking a stand' and from adding or contributing to that legacy insofar as he is barred from

carving "raw initials" on its "famous beech-tree."

The imperfect sharing which deprives the present of the past in "Take Your Stand" is also the cause, as it emerges in "The Errigal Road," of Ulster's violent impasse. Old Eagleson's refusal to share him home with his Catholic acquaintance is but a prelude to the effacement and disappearance of the "shared landscape" (p. 27) whose landmarks and history brought them into temporary accord. The failure to share and to detect a "secret pain" is the informing regret of "Courtyard in Winter." While the poet survives by his "disciplines" (A Slow Dance, p. 16) and by his ability to break the "deep crust" of despair beneath which "the living water" flows, he cannot, given the sobering and inalterable reality of his friend's suicide, assume his usual role of healer:

In all our hours together, I never  
 Managed to ease the single hurt  
 That edged her towards her death;  
 Never reached through her loneliness  
 To save a trust....

("Courtyard in Winter," A Slow Dance, p. 17)

No matter how desperately he tries to "comfort" (p. 18) himself through the distancing and diversionary recollection of his childhood cognizance of death and the impact of its news, the only consolation he can find is "endurance" ("What solace but endurance, kindness?" p. 19), or what Seamus Deane has called the prevailing note of "patience" in Montague's later poems.<sup>35</sup> Fintan, the last

figure to appear in Mount Eagle, is a consummate "Survivor" (p. 75) upon whose many-centuried patience, in riding out the flood, the survival of human history and the renewal of life depend.

Even with his recent emphasis on patience and the acceptance (rather than resignation) it implies, the primary impulse behind Montague's work is towards reconstruction. This undertaking is one which Montague passes on to the central characters, most of them outsiders, of his short stories. Peter Douglas, chief protagonist of "The Cry," commits himself to "a moral protest" (Death of a Chieftain, p. 65) by reconstructing, with a journalist's eye to fact and "detail" (p. 67), one specific manifestation of Ulster's "political disease" (p. 71). Yet, given the intractability and narrowness of the hometown where he witnesses a police beating of a suspected I.R.A. member, his efforts, interpreted as interference by the townspeople, are to little avail:

He could not even decide, staring blankly at the paragraph he had just written, whether to give it up or not: he could get a beginning and an end, but the whole thing did not cohere into the cry, logical but passionate, for which he had been hoping.

(Death of a Chieftain, p. 82)

Bernard Corunna Coote's life ("Death of a Chieftain") is not only dedicated to the archeological reconstruction of a lost pan-American-Celtic civilization that would speak for

the underlying unity of East and West (and also of the North and South of Ireland), but is itself the subject of reconstructive speculation among the fellow inmates of the Hotel Darien:

he knew [the fragments of his life] were being picked up, one by one, gestures towards a portrait. Assembled, they made what Tarrou once smilingly called LE PETIT TESTAMENT DE BERNARD CORUNNA COOTE.  
(Death of a Chieftain, p. 149)

Himself the embodiment of "cultural reversion" (p. 150), his search, in all its folly, is for integration, cohesion, and reconciliation. Coote explains his theory:

'Saint Brendan...discovered America. But what about even earlier? We know that the Celts were a widely dispersed people: traces of them have been found in Sardinia, Gallicia, the valley of the Dordogne. We are the secret mother race of Europe. But if...[we] could prove that the Celts not merely discovered but founded America! Think of it....Then, for the first time, the two halves of the world would fit together, into one, great, universal Celtic civilization....All I need is proof.'  
(Death of a Chieftain, p. 161)

Retrieving lost worlds is also Montague's undertaking in "A Flowering Absence" (The Dead Kingdom, pp. 89-91), where, with detective's skill and determination, he attempts to unearth the details of his birth and infancy in Brooklyn, New York. Aided by his cousin Brendan (earlier in The Dead Kingdom in "A Murmuring Stream," pp. 13-14)--a

figure of Saint Brendan, voyager to the New World--but not abetted by "Sister Virgilius" (p. 90) (whose guiding memory could have charted his course through the 'underworld' of his early years), his search acquires the resonance of Dantean quest and pilgrimage.<sup>36</sup> Yet the failure to reconstruct fully the events of those years itself becomes a vital source of Montague's pained but easing poetic consciousness.

In deploying the revisionary language of the Planter and the Gael to apprehend and bring into accord the otherwise irremediable religious factions, political entities, and cultural identities that make up the present reality of Ulster, Montague, along with his Protestant colleague, John Hewitt, have found one means by which to negotiate a path through the exigencies of the Northern crisis. Alluding to the collaboration of Montague and Hewitt, Seamus Heaney has written,

For a moment, the discovery and deployment of this language allowed us to talk of Planters and Gaels rather than Protestants and Catholics, to speak of different heritages rather than launch accusations and suspicions at one another, to speak of history rather than the skullduggery of the local governments. It was a palliative, true in its way, salutary in that it shifted the discourse into a more self-diagnosing frame of reference.<sup>37</sup>

The same tenacity Montague has displayed in diagnosing and administering to Ulster's chronic political disease, he has applied to the pursuit and intermediation of the various

and sometimes inharmonious strands of the Irish literary tradition and its two bifurcated languages. Montague's sense of responsibility toward the past and toward the exposition of its presence has made his translations, editorial undertakings, and critical investigations more than the products of a "mere antiquarianism." Rather, they constitute attempts to bridge a psycholocial and "linguistic chasm," to bring a "significant literature back into relevance," and to find some degree of fixity and permanence where process prevails.<sup>38</sup> Montague has not so much made, or, more precisely, re-made his canon and literary context as he has "called them into being." As custodian of cultural memory and intermediary of fixity and flux, his search has always been for "redeeming patterns of experience."

## NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

<sup>1</sup>John Montague, "The Young Writer," The Bell 18, no. 7, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>John Montague, "The Painting of Barrie Cooke," The Dubliner 3, no. 1 (Spring 1964), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Montague, The Rough Field, fourth edition, p. 69; "O' Riada's Farewell," A Slow Dance, pp. 57-63; Brian John, "The Healing Art of John Montague," p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>Montague, "Wedge," The Great Cloak, p. 32; "Bog Royal," The Dead Kingdom, p. 25; "Abbeylara," The Dead Kingdom, pp. 16-17; "Intimacy," The Dead Kingdom, p. 62; "O' Riada's Farewell," A Slow Dance, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup>Maria Leach, ed., Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1972), s.v. "Song."

<sup>7</sup>Peter Denman, "The Executioner's Boots: The Fiction of John Montague," Irish University Review, 19, no. 1, p. 132.

<sup>8</sup>Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals, p. 153.

<sup>9</sup>John Montague, "Global Regionalism: An Interview with John Montague," interview by Adrian Frazier, p. 165.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, p. 163; Thomas Dillon Redshaw, "Notes on the Text," The Rough Field, fifth edition, p. 88.

<sup>11</sup>Montague, "Global Regionalism," p. 164.

<sup>12</sup>Dillon Johnston, Irish Poetry After Joyce, p. 189.

<sup>13</sup>John Montague, interview by author, 23 May 1987.

<sup>14</sup>Johnston, p. 189; Douglas Sealy, "The Sound of a Wound," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>Montague, "Beyond the Planter and the Gael," p. 86.

- <sup>16</sup>Ibid, p. 88.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup>Montague, "Global Regionalism," p. 169.
- <sup>19</sup>Montague, interview by author, 23 May 1987.
- <sup>20</sup>Eamon Grennan, "'Of So, and So, and So': Re-Reading Some Details in Montague," Irish University Review 19, no. 1, p. 127.
- <sup>21</sup>Gary Snyder, "Poetry and the Primitive: Notes on Poetry as an Ecological Survival Technique," in Claims for Poetry, p. 438.
- <sup>22</sup>John Montague to author, LS, September 1988.
- <sup>23</sup>Gary Snyder, "Interview with Gary Snyder," in The Poet's Craft: Interviews from the New York Quarterly, ed. William Packar (New York: Paragon House, 1987), pp. 274-275.
- <sup>24</sup>Brian John, "The Healing Art of John Montague," p. 36.
- <sup>25</sup>Antoinette Quinn, "'The Well-Beloved': Montague and the Muse," p. 37; Montague, "The Tyranny of Memory: A Study of George Moore," p. 23.
- <sup>26</sup>Montague, "The Tyranny of Memory: A Study of George Moore," p. 23.
- <sup>27</sup>Grennan, p. 127.
- <sup>28</sup>Montague, The Great Cloak, pp. 50, 47.
- <sup>29</sup>Montague, "A Primal Gaeltacht," in The Figure in the Cave, p. 43.
- <sup>30</sup>William Carlos Williams, I Wanted to Write a Poem: The Autobiography of the Work of a Poet, ed. Edith Heal (New York: New Directions, 1958), p. 21.
- <sup>31</sup>William Carlos Williams, "The Poem Paterson," Paterson (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 1.
- <sup>32</sup>Robert F. Garratt, "John Montague and the Poetry of History," Irish University Review, 19, no. 1, p. 96.
- <sup>33</sup>Terence Brown, "The Dead Kingdom: A Reading," p. 107.

<sup>34</sup>Montague, "The Figure in the Cave: A Chapter of Autobiography," p. 82.

<sup>35</sup>Seamus Deane, Celtic Revivals, p. 155.

<sup>36</sup>Montague, interview by author.

<sup>37</sup>Seamus Heaney, "Place and Displacement: Recent Poetry of Northern Ireland," Pete Laver Memorial Lecture (Grasmere: Trustees of Dove Cottage, 1985), p. 5.

<sup>38</sup>Thomas Kinsella, "A View of Irish Literature," in A Needle's Eye, p. 32.

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