Lynne Victoria Crook

MA, BA Hons

BORDERING ON LAUGHTER: THE USES AND ABUSES OF COMEDY IN NOVELS FROM NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND (1988PRESENT)

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

I declare that this thesis is my own work, and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

September 2007

ProQuest Number: 11003626

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 11003626

Published by ProQuest LLC (2018). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC. 789 East Eisenhower Parkway P.O. Box 1346 Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346 Lynne Victoria Crook: MA, BA Hons. Submission for Ph.D. September 2007. Bordering on Laughter: the uses and abuses of comedy in novels from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (1988-present)

This study will argue that the distinct social and political changes which have occurred in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland during the last twenty years have altered the choice and treatment of the targets of comedy in different ways for writers from either side of the border.

Though this work builds upon classic studies of Irish literary comedy such as Vivian Mercier's *The Irish Comic Tradition* (1962), there is little current criticism on the use of comedy in the contemporary novel from either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. Past work, such as that by Mercier and also David Krause's *The Profane Book of Irish Comedy* (1982), has tended to concentrate solely on literature from the Republic of Ireland, linking it to ancient Gaelic traditions. Though the importance of such traditions should be acknowledged, this study endeavours to push beyond them, considering the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in relation to each other and also as part of an increasingly globalised economic and cultural milieu.

This thesis begins with a consideration of carnivalesque comedy demonstrating how the use of carnival imagery reflects changing attitudes to social and political structures. It continues with an examination of the appearance in literature of the often unheard comic voices of 'everyday' groups in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Finally, it will consider how increasingly globalised economic and cultural dynamics have affected both areas, and how comedy sets up an interrogation of the status of the individual in this new environment.

This thesis moves towards an evaluation of comedy as a way for writers to examine issues which are inherently unstable in a rapidly changing political and social world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Lynne Pearce for her expert supervision, as well as her encouragement and patience. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Jayne Steel for setting me on the right path, as well as her expert knowledge of Irish literature.

I would also like to thank Dr. Sally Bushell for her support as Postgraduate Tutor. Dr. Rose Jack, Dr. Kamilla Elliot and Dr. Mike Greaney have all provided invaluable advice and comments in various panels and upgrades.

There are several people who have provided help and support during my time as a Teaching Assistant. I would like to thank Dr. Catherine Spooner, Dr. Rose Jack and all of my fellow TAs over the past four years. I would also like to thank Ms. Leila Moore, both in her role as Postgraduate Secretary and Part One Secretary.

The British Association for Irish Studies have provided much support in the form of information and the opportunity to disseminate my research.

I would like to thank my friends in the Graduate College and my housemates. I would also like to mention Emma Vickers and Shaun Scally for allowing me to pick their brains over bizarre points and not looking at me strangely.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their unfailing love, support and encouragement over my university career.

ABBREVIATIONS

CHAPTER ONE

Commitments Roddy Doyle, The Commitments, in The Barrytown Trilogy

(London: Vintage, 1998 [1988]), pp.1-140

Eureka Robert McLiam Wilson, Eureka Street (London: Vintage, 1997)

[1996])

Ripley Robert McLiam Wilson, Ripley Bogle (London: Vintage, 1998)

[1989])

Snapper Roddy Doyle, The Snapper, in The Barrytown Trilogy (London:

Vintage, 1998 [1990]), pp. 141-340

Star Roddy Doyle, A Star Called Henry (London: Vintage, 2000)

Van Roddy Doyle, The Van, in The Barrytown Trilogy (London:

Vintage, 1998 [1991]), pp. 341-633

CHAPTER TWO

International Glenn Patterson, The International (London: Anchor,

1999)

Jack Colin Bateman, Divorcing Jack (London: Harper Collins, 2001

[1995])

Mammy Brendan O'Carroll, The Mammy (Dublin: O'Brien Press,

2005 [1994])

Priests Colin Bateman, Turbulent Priests (London: Harper Collins, 2000

[1999])

Rachel Marian Keyes, Rachel's Holiday (London: Penguin, 1997)

Right Pauline McLynn, Right on Time (London: Headline, 2003)

[2002])

Side Marian Keyes, The Other Side of the Story (London: Penguin,

2005 [2004])

Titanic Mary Costello, Titanic Town: A Novel (London: Methuen, 1998

[1993])

Wan Brendan O'Carroll, The Young Wan (London: Plume,

2004)

Water Marian Keyes, Watermelon (London: Arrow Books, 2001 [1996])

Weekend Pauline McLynn, Something for the Weekend (London: Headline,

2000)

Wee Sweetie Colin Bateman, Of Wee Sweetie Mice and Men (London: Harper

Collins, 1996)

CHAPTER THREE

Breakfast Patrick McCabe, Breakfast On Pluto (London: Picador,

1999 [1998])

Breeze Patrick McCabe, Call Me the Breeze (London: Faber and

Faber, 2003)

Cartoon Ferdia Mac Anna, Cartoon City (London: Review, 2000)

Cat Damien Owens, Dead Cat Bounce (London: Hodder and

Stoughton, 2001)

Homecoming Robert Cremins, A Sort of Homecoming (London: Hodder

and Stoughton, 1998)

Jessie Zane Radcliffe, Big Jessie (London: Black Swan, 2003)

This thesis follows the style conventions contained in the MHRA Style Guide (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2002). I have, however, adopted the publishing convention of stating original publication dates for texts in square brackets.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	p. 1
CHAPTER ONE	
CARNIVAL COMEDY: CELEBRATORY GROTESQUE, OR A G	ROTESQUE
Introduction	p. 25
Ripley Bogle: Robert McLiam Wilson	p. 36
The Barrytown Trilogy: Roddy Doyle	p. 46
Eureka Street: Robert McLiam Wilson	p. 60
A Star Called Henry: Roddy Doyle	p. 72
Conclusion	p. 84
CHAPTER TWO	
MUNDANE MIRTH: THE EVERYDAY IN COMEDY	
Introduction	p. 91
Gender Roles	p. 98
The Family and Comedy	p. 115
Comedy and the Community	p. 128
Conclusion	p. 153
CHAPTER THREE	
INTERNATIONAL AMUSEMENT: THE COMEDIC VIEW OF THE 'HYPERREAL,' THE 'AUTHENTIC' AND THE 'REAL'	IE .
Introduction	p. 157
Globalization and the 'New Ireland'	p. 168
Place, Violence and the Borders of Comedy	p. 182
Comedy and the Subjective Self	p. 206
Conclusion	p. 220
CONCLUSION	p. 225
BIBLIOGRAPHY	p. 234

INTRODUCTION

'I was supposed to do James Joyce's shopping once but I couldn't make head or tail of the shopping list'

The above quotation illustrates the strength of the tradition of comedy in both society and literature in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and also some of the potential pitfalls of studying it. Stephen Dixon and Deirdre Falvey note in their study of contemporary Irish stand-up comedy that the attention to Irish comedy has concentrated upon the literary tradition: 'Ireland's popular humour in some ways has a more literary tradition. There is a respect for words, the use of words, and all that storytelling guff.' This thesis does engage directly with the literary tradition of comedy, but I would also like to stress that the comedy which emerges from within the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland belongs to distinct socio-political trajectories, while also relating to the sphere of wider literary and cultural influences.

The time period covered by this study is determined both by literary and social landmarks. The earliest novels dealt with in this study, *The Commitments* (1988) and *Ripley Bogle* (1989), mark a time in which both Northern Ireland and the Republic were on the cusp of change. In the Republic, *The Commitments* was published just two years after an attempt to legalise divorce was defeated and one year before an

¹ Kevin Gildea, cited by Stephen Dixon and Deirdre Falvey, in *The Gift of the Gag: The Explosion in Irish Comedy* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999), p. 104. Within this study I have been forced to use the generalised term 'Irish' with reference to many critical works. However, in my own argument I have tried to distinguish between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland due to the different (though interlinked) social and political changes which have occurred within the two areas in the last twenty years.

Stephen Dixon and Deirdre Falvey, p. 7.

injunction prevented students of Trinity College distributing information on abortion.³ However, in contrast to these persistent conservative values in public life, the novel was also published one year before Mary Robinson was elected President and four years before homosexuality was legalised (232-233). Within Northern Ireland, *Ripley Bogle* was published during a time of continuing and intractable violence. It was five years since the Anglo-Irish Agreement had been signed (agreeing that both the Republic of Ireland and Britain should be included in any settlements in Northern Ireland) and two years before the Major government took over from Margaret Thatcher, but, tellingly, also four years before the Warrington bombing (232-234). It is clear that there are forces for wide social and political change in both areas, but also equally strong forces wishing to preserve the status quo. This study intends to examine how these conflicting tendencies can use comedy to further their cause, and also how change has been depicted and examined through comedy in the last twenty years.

In this thesis, I intend to argue that, though there are important literary influences at work in contemporary writing, the wider social and cultural experience of writers in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland has led to very different, and yet linked, uses of comedy. This reflects the title of the thesis, in that many of the works studied here show a fascination with border areas, both geographically and metaphorically. Such borders have been noted in many ways by different critics. Edna Longley, for example, notes Northern Ireland's position as a geographical and political border area: 'a frontier-region, a cultural corridor, a zone where Ireland and

_

³ Linden Peach, *The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 232-233. Further references to this edition are given after quotations or information in the text.

Britain permeate one another.' Linden Peach links this to postcolonial theory by Bhabha, noting a metaphorical border existing in novels from both the Republic and Northern Ireland, which allows previously silenced groups a new voice: 'a space which is not only new to them, but marked with uncertainty- an "in-between" space indeed' (1).⁵ Other critics note the conjunction and interplay of cultural and social binaries. Theresa O'Connor sees the tradition of Irish comic writing as part of: 'a culture trying to devise strategies to mediate between self and other, male and female, the world of being and non-being.' What is clear is that new writers within both the Republic and Northern Ireland feel a need to patrol (and test) the boundaries between their respective homes, between themselves and other countries, and moral boundaries within their own works.

What is often not mentioned in these critical studies are the ways in which these writers also explore the boundaries between the writer, text and reader. Comedy seems to be a perfect medium for this investigation, as it questions our relationship to the issues in the novels by investigating our complicity or resistance to the issues contained within it. Comedy is frequently talked about in terms of its possibilities for resistance to unsatisfactory dominant orders, but also vis-à-vis its tendency towards conservatism. Andrew Stott, for example, notes that comedy is produced from: 'the

_

⁴ Edna Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994), p. 195. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Another postcolonial term used within Irish Studies which indicates the permeability of borders is 'hybridity'. This is a more problematic term, and there is not enough space in this Introduction to deal with it fully. Some of the difficulties in the appropriation of the term are dealt with in: Ellen-Raïssa Jackson, 'Gender, Violence and Hybridity: Reading the Postcolonial in Three Irish Novels', *Irish Studies Review*, 7 (1999), 221-231; and also: Gerry Smyth, 'The Politics of Hybridity: Some Problems with Crossing the Border', in *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations*, ed. by Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 43-55.

⁶ Theresa O'Connor, 'Introduction: Tradition and the Signifying Monkey', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 1-7 (p. 3).

matter of dominant cultural assumptions and commonplaces.' Even if these 'commonplaces' are mocked, the fact that they are worthy of attention invests them with some level of power. Edna Longley notes that comedy has been used as a form of comfort in Northern Irish literature, linking it with the form of reminiscence: 'Comedy and reminiscence could, I suppose, be described as "modes of reassurance" in that they emphasise shared or interchangeable experience' (95). Longley notes how this is used by Protestant writers in particular: 'practised by Protestant writers, they [comedy and reminiscence] carry a non-political implication of identity and roots' (95). These modes could be a way into finding an identity *not* bounded by political implications, or could lead to a denial of the particularities of identity altogether. What is clear in Longley's brief mention of comedy is its ability to test borders: 'I would like to consider an approach and a genre which are licensed to cross boundaries. The approach is comedy or humour, the genre reminiscence, and they cross each others' boundaries as well' (95).

I will not be linking comedy specifically to reminiscence in this study; however, I do think that the 'licence' which comedy and humour have is extremely important to their use, not only in the Northern Ireland as in Longley's work, but also in the Republic. As well as potentially being a 'reassurance', I will be arguing that comedy also has the power to destabilise, by making the audience question their appraisal of borders and boundaries. I would also like to contend that comic literature is frequently self-reflexive, drawing the reader into a game of 'sides', in which they are made to feel superior to those they laugh at, yet also make them aware of the unpleasant connotations that such superiority may have. Many of the writers in this study

⁷ Andrew Stott, *Comedy* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 8.

question and explore this border space in their works, often asking us why we are laughing, and whether this is acceptable.

The quotation at the beginning of this chapter also shows that literature and comedy, perhaps particularly in the Republic, are often associated with a few major figures in modern literature, such as James Joyce. However, previous work on Irish comedy has shown that these figures also come from a long tradition of comedic literature and social and cultural traditions. Rather than being an end product from which contemporary writers must take their lead, such figures are milestones in an everevolving relationship with comedy which contemporary Irish writers are necessarily a part of. As such, it is important to not only bear in mind such pre-eminent figures, but a longer and perhaps less defined tradition.

These traditions have been traced in a small, core collection of critical studies, the earliest of which was Vivian Mercier's Irish Comic Tradition (1962). This work emerged at a significant moment, as Declan Kiberd has asserted: 'without ever quite announcing it as such, Mercier had launched the movement that now goes by the name of "Irish Studies". '8 This work is also important to this study with respect to the link it provides between the oldest, Gaelic traditions and later satire. This is especially useful to me as a non-Irish subject, and most especially as a non-Gaelic speaker. It is, however, worth noting for this study that the modern works which Mercier deals with are from the Republic of Ireland, leaving out any mention of Northern Ireland. Mercier most helpfully points out that many writers have been incorporated into the Gaelic tradition of comic writing, despite their decidedly Anglo-Irish status. Writers

⁸ Cited in James M. Cahalan, A Backward Glance: Radharc ar gCúl', New Hibernia Review, 8.4 (Winter 2004), 139-145 (p. 139).

such as Swift, according to Mercier, incorporate aspects of archaic satire and 'flyting' despite their apparent hostility to this heritage; he notes such aspects as: 'a sense of power and prestige' and 'the immoderate fury of his [Swift's] personal satire, the utter disproportion of cause and effect.'

Certainly, satire is still an important part of contemporary comedy in both Northern Ireland and the Republic: novels such as *Ripley Bogle* (1989) and *The Last of the High Kings* (1991) use extreme language and fantastic situations in order to deconstruct national myths (as well as parodying prominent political figures) in a similar manner to the Gaelic texts that Mercier uses. It is, however, extremely difficult to prove how this tradition may have happened, especially as many of the writers (both in this study and in Mercier's) did not speak Gaelic and much of this tradition is originally oral, not literary. Mercier's answer to this seems obvious, but can perhaps only remain as conjecture based on his observations of the outcome:

The oral culture of any area is far richer and more complex than its literary culture, especially where two languages and cultures interact, as they do in Ireland; many unrecognized elements remain in suspension in such an oral culture, waiting for the right temperament to act as a reagent and cause them to precipitate; when these elements are precipitated in literature, we are amazed, yet they were present in the culture all along. (238)

What these 'right temperaments' are, however, seems difficult to define. It is also notable that, while Mercier admits that the 'Anglo' part of 'Anglo-Irish' has to have an effect on these works, he does not really deal with this aspect of the comic tradition as he does not view it as specifically Irish: 'a great deal of so-called Irish humour is indistinguishable from its British counterpart' (11).

⁹ Vivian Mercier, *Irish Comic Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 191-192. Further references to this edition will be given after quotations in the text.

In some ways, Mercier's reluctance to deal with major comic Anglo-Irish figures is understandable, as comic writers such as Swift or Wilde had been extensively studied with reference to their use of classical, 'Anglo' and educated forms. Clearly, Mercier wishes to avoid these comparisons in order to concentrate on his hugely original overarching study of the Gaelic roots of Irish comedy. However, I would argue that as 'Irish' comedy has come to prominence on the world stage even more in recent years, both in a literary and popular culture sense, it is perhaps time to look at the permeability of culture between Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and other countries, including Britain. 10 The impact of American culture and the increasing integration of the Republic of Ireland into Europe, both economically and culturally (continued since the Republic joined the EEC in 1973), can also be seen as reasons why comedy in Ireland, albeit with its roots quite possibly in Gaelic culture, has also taken on board (for economic as well as artistic reasons) traits which are more widespread than Mercier indicates. The increasingly global publishing industry, and the sudden saleability of Irish (or 'Oirish') culture, literature and identity in a worldwide market, mean that comedy from both Northern Ireland and the Republic has more opportunity to be heard, but also must contend with the often stereotyped works that readers may expect, and publishers may demand.

This said, it is striking how transnational some of Mercier's observations are, when we look back on his work from the position of hindsight. Others have also noted the strong connection that many of Mercier's points have with the work of Mikhail

-

¹⁰ For information on the success of several Irish stand-up comedians on the international stage see Dixon and Falvey, *The Gift of the Gag* (as above). For an interview with Graham Linehan and Arthur Mathews on the success of their *Father Ted* series on British television, and their decision not to offer it to RTÉ, see: Ben Thompson, *Sunshine on Putty* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004).

Bakhtin, although Mercier's book (published in 1962) was in fact earlier than Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (first published in Russian in 1965).¹¹ Apparently the later book: 'delighted him. It confirmed the rightness of his approach.'¹² Mercier draws attention to the use of the grotesque and the macabre in the work of both archaic and twentieth-century authors. As in much of Bakhtin's work, which we will be coming back to in the next chapter, for Mercier such impulses are: 'concerned with forces which in the long run are uncontrollable: reproduction and death' (4). In this regard, we are offered an explanation of humour as a defence mechanism against those forces which humans cannot control:

Whereas macabre humour in the last analysis is inseparable from terror and serves as a defence mechanism against the fear of death, grotesque humour is equally inseparable from awe and serves as a defence mechanism against the holy dread with which we face the mysteries of reproduction. [Italics in original] (48-49)

This seems very close to the way in which Bakhtin understands 'the grotesque' in his work in *Rabelais and his World*, in which both 'carnival' and 'the grotesque' are seen as a defence against the forces of death and feudalism.

What this demonstrates is that the study of comedy from both Northern Ireland and the Republic belongs to European as well as regional literary and cultural traditions. It is clear that there is a great deal of difficulty in defining specifically 'Irish' comedy, as there seems to be a tendency to pick and choose the authors which one uses in order to create a suitable tradition, rather than finding a tradition from a wide selection. For example, David Krause, in *The Profane Book of Irish Comedy* (1982),

_

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965]).

¹² Declan Kiberd, cited by Cahalan, pp. 139-145 (p. 144).

notes that Mercier did not deal with Irish drama, as it did not fit into his idea of tradition: 'partly because he believed it was a genre that had no direct link to the Gaelic tradition.' However, Krause himself limits his texts via notions not only of audience and reception, but also the geographical position that the writers find themselves in: 'that body of work written by the Irish in Ireland for Irish audiences' (22). Like Mercier, Krause also concentrates purely on texts from the Republic of Ireland. Indeed, as he is writing about drama, there is a heavy concentration on dramatists writing for the Abbey Theatre and, as such, for mainly Dublin audiences.

It is understandable that Krause and Mercier both wish to put a limit on the texts that they are working with. This is clearly also a concern in this study, as I have found it necessary to limit this research to comedy within novels written by authors who were largely born in either Northern Ireland or the Republic. However, there does seem to be a danger of this becoming a distinctly parochial exercise in the preceding critics, and there are times when both Mercier and Krause come dangerously close to promoting a stereotyped, if positive, view of Irish comedy; for example, Mercier claims that there is an 'ancient belief in magic, which notoriously has never died out in Ireland' (12). There may be arguments for the appearance of magic in literature, but the assertion that the 'belief' in magic has never died out is not entirely the same thing.

Finding a coherent argument, while also trying to avoid a stereotyped image of comedy or the areas from which this comedy comes, has been one of the main concerns of this thesis. There are many difficulties in dealing with a wide selection of

¹³ David Krause, *The Profane Book of Irish Comedy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 10. Further references to this edition will be given in parenthesis after quotations in the text.

texts, which may be largely comic, but also have formal roots in other genres. There is a distinct argument that, indeed, there are very few solely comic novels written. As such, we have novels which come from genres as diverse as romance (although 'chick-lit' seems a more appropriate contemporary label), thrillers and more experimental novels. Dealing with this diverse range of distinct genres, as well as many novels which do not fit happily under discrete labels, and teasing out the comedy (and more importantly, the target of the comedy) has been a difficult one.

This said, there are themes which seem common to the genre in which they are written. For example, many of the 'chick-lit' novels are concerned with domesticity (and the role of the modern woman in relation to this) and the world of work. As most of these novels are written for younger, pre-marriage, employed women, these concerns are hardly surprising and fit in with the genre itself. Violence is an integral part of the traditional thriller, and as Northern Ireland is a known site of violence, it is not surprising that many of the thrillers are either set there, or mention politics associated with the area. However, this does not preclude these same concerns, and the comedy aimed at issues associated with them, appearing in novels of other genres, or no set genre at all. In order to compare how the targets of comedy are therefore dealt with, it seems sensible to deal with these works thematically, rather than in terms of genre.

This also extends to the models and theories of comedy which have been used here. There are many different modes and theories of comedy, ranging from the classical dramatic model which ends in marriage (and acts as a counter-point to tragedy), through the theories of comedy as a superiority complex to Freud's theory of the

conservation of psychic energy.¹⁴ This is not to mention the difficulty of choosing between theories that concentrate on literary form which is associated with comedy, to those which concentrate on jokes and humour, which have come to be associated with comedy in the contemporary age. As such, and following the decision to let emerging themes guide the chapter organisation, the theories used here are those which seem to provide a 'best fit' with the texts themselves. I will be drawing upon theories which seem to illustrate the emergent comedy, rather than selecting the texts which most illustrate the chosen theories. These will be outlined in more detail at the beginning of each chapter, but I think that this approach is important in making the most of the texts themselves, allowing trends to appear, rather than imposing a structure upon them from outside.

This commonality between Krause and Mercier extends to their use of Gaelic literature, with Krause specifically using the myth of Oisín and Saint Patrick. Once again, we see the idea of testing borders between modes of being within Ireland, which Krause regards as extended into the work of twentieth-century Irish comic drama. The tension lies between Oisín as a figure of a freer, more generous but pagan world, and Saint Patrick as a representation of a strict, pious but Godly new Ireland. In the actual myth, Oisín visits Tír na Nog, the eternal land in Irish myth, but (overcome by homesickness) returns to Ireland. Inevitably, disaster befalls, and he is forced to remain in Ireland, suddenly aged beyond normal human years in an unfamiliar Christian milieu. Krause asserts that the comic quarrel between Oisín and Patrick represents the argument in Irish society between impulsive freedom and the strictures of the church:

-

¹⁴ Two comprehensive studies which outline these varying theories of comedy are: Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002) and Andrew Stott, *Comedy* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Is it possible, then, that the folk bards who wrote these poems might have been dramatizing the split in a single character, the two voices in the quarrel representing two contradictory attitudes of one wavering sensibility? [...] the quarrel between Oisín and Patrick could be called Ireland's quarrel with herself. (80)

It is quite clear which of these stances Krause foregrounds in his work, and which he links to comedy. He sees this free pagan spirit as an impulse within Irish literature that is able to reassess increasingly hegemonic and rigid orders, which constrict the progress of the Irish people:

The comic profanations in Irish literature are a liberating impulse that mocks whatever is too sacred, any authority, whether British or Irish, political or religious, which has become too holy or hypocritical, too stagnant or repressive, in relation to the complex realities and hopes of Irish life. (247-248)

Krause clearly wishes to see comedy as a radical statement against the prevailing orthodoxies, which, in the time period in which he concentrates his work, means the dominant pieties of early- to mid-twentieth century Nationalism in the Republic. Many of the playwrights who he most concentrates upon (O'Casey, Synge and Behan) deliberately mock the hypocritical, or staid, aspects of the new Republic, often with the result of open criticism or attempted censorship (or rioting in the notable case of Synge after his play *The Playboy of the Western World* was shown at the Abbey Theatre in 1907).

In this thesis I argue that comedy frequently *is* on the side of the 'people' in contemporary novels. However, whether or not the 'people' are on *its* side, or which 'people' the author presumes, is open to debate. The rioting at Synge's *The Playboy of*

the Western World, certainly shows that the theatre-going 'people' were not yet ready for such impropriety. Krause, echoing similar critiques made of Bakhtin's work on the carnivalesque which we will deal with in Chapter One, also points out that although comedy can provide a release from the strictures of a prevailing order, it is often only fleeting and symbolic:

This is at best an a temporary and vicarious process of comic insurrection because it is of necessity more a state of mind than an overt act of violence, specifically a psychic victory of the imagination through which the artist of knockabout comedy and those who share his creative vision find the courage to endure yet another day of repressive order. (271)

How much Krause sees comedy as a force of change is therefore debatable, and this is also an aspect of comedy which we will deal in with in more detail in Chapter One.

Although Krause endeavours to keep very tightly to the idea of Irish comic drama as Irish, he (like Mercier) has to admit that some of his comments are likely to be as applicable in other countries and circumstances:

Since it is likely that those barbarous sympathies strike a universal impulse, a common cause for men and women to mock repressive conformity and authority, what I said about Irish comedy can probably be extended to include the comic literature of many nations. To the degree that most of us regularly need the catharsis of a comically inspired *non serviam*, a declaration of individual independence, whether we find it in the comic mythology of the creative arts or in compensatory dreams, we are all potentially Irish. (12)

This seems like a rather flimsy way of excusing his own reading of the comedy as exclusively Irish, and yet having to admit that there may be elements within it that are not necessarily specific to the Irish milieu. In order to accommodate Krause's reading, we are therefore 'all Irish'!

It would, perhaps, be more sensible to say that all *comedy* is potentially Irish, in so much as it has the 'licence' as Longley termed it, or the malleability, to cross boundaries and be appropriated both within Northern Ireland and the Republic (as well as comedy from these areas having the opportunity to cross into other societies). It would be far too easy to pretend that Irish comedy had no specificity, which clearly it does; however, it would also be untenable to expect global tendencies in comedy not to impact upon regional literatures, especially in a contemporary setting. The existence of international publishing companies based in Britain and America, the relocation of Irish workers and writers across the globe, the increasingly international media and the effect of multinational corporations on both the Republic and Northern Ireland have all had an effect on the content and focus of literature and comedy. I would argue that the endeavour to acknowledge this influence, while also drawing out the specific ways in which comedic forms are used and adapted within these texts, is a theme which sets this study apart from the preceding criticism.

What is also clear in Krause's work is the strong strand of Irish writers and 'antic comedians' that seek to question the hierarchies of power that exist within their society:

His [the antic comedian's] defiant laughter is aimed at the household gods, those fallible and worldly hierarchies of power, the state and the church, which more for worse than for better organize and control society, and are therefore destined to frustrate us. (25)

This is certainly evident in the plays of Sean O'Casey and others, whom Krause deals with here. I would also argue that the same impulse can be found within

contemporary comic novels as well. Authors such as Brendan O'Carroll, Patrick McCabe and Roddy Doyle all question the social hierarchy and the role of the church within society in a similar way to the older generation of comic writers dealt with by Krause. What should be mentioned here, however, is that Krause openly spends less time on writers who do not follow in this tradition. It is therefore hard to say whether this is because these writers are simply not as complex, or if Krause allows the tradition he favours to skew the use of the material at his disposal.

I also think, however, that there is an added historical slant to this investigation by some of the newer writers. They not only question issues contemporary to their own novels, but look back at historical moments which have helped to determine the current social hierarchy and political situation. All of the above mentioned authors, as well as others such as Mary Costello and Glenn Patterson, use the past as the inspiration for at least some of their novels, and question the hierarchies of power that existed (and still exist) through their use of comedy. As we shall see, by questioning these hierarchies in the past, the authors may also cause questions to be asked about how these historical moments are portrayed in the present, and their effect upon the national psyche.

As already noted, both Krause and Mercier take their examples exclusively from the Republic (though some of the myths they use as their archaic models come from the Ulster cycle), and it could be tempting to follow in their footsteps from the point of view of establishing, or revising, a comic tradition. However, as much of this thesis is concerned with the use of borders, and the very porosity of these borders within comedic texts, it seems crucial to confront the political, and potentially cultural,

border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Moreover, many of the comments which both Krause and Mercier make on the grotesque and the antic nature of Irish comedy may equally apply to work taken from Northern Ireland.

It does seem, however, that the engagement of these conventions in Northern Ireland may have evolved in a very different way to their deployment in the Republic. As we shall see in the next chapter, their closer proximity to violence seems to have caused writers from Northern Ireland to use comedy rather differently, and pick their targets carefully. The comedy here is aimed much more clearly, indeed often overwhelmingly, at specific political figures and groups, rather than at wider cultural shifts. This also undermines the positive view that Mercier has of the grotesque, as we are often made aware in comedy from Northern Ireland that blood spilt and people killed cannot be recovered.

Another area left uncovered by Mercier, and Krause, is that of women within the Irish comic milieu. This is dealt with in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers* (1996), a collection of essays edited by Theresa O'Connor. Once again, many of the contributors work with the notion of boundaries, although in O'Connor's introduction to the edition it seems that these are to be definitively transgressed or transcended, not just tested: 'a focus on boundaries and a hybridizing vision that engages in witty negotiation with established patriarchal, colonial, and nationalist orthodoxies.' Much of the work concentrated on here is Anglo-Irish (with the very clear exception of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill who often writes in Gaelic) and as such seems less concerned with tracing a heritage directly back to specific myths. However, there are many more

¹⁵ O'Connor, pp. 1-7 (p. 4).

comments on the position of women in the Republic, particularly in the double bind of women as symbols of the land itself, while being at the mercy of the prevailing hegemonic church order:

There is a psychotic splitting involved where, the more the image of woman comes to stand for abstract concepts like justice, liberty, or national sovereignty, the more real women are denigrated and consigned barefoot and pregnant to the kitchen.¹⁶

We will look at how women writers deal with this psychotic splitting in everyday life in Chapter Two. I would also advise readers, however, that much of the women's comedy dealt with here is not always transgressive simply on account of its female/feminist consciousness; a good deal of it labours under the same difficulties of complicity or resistance as male-authored comedy.

Studying this area of culture is also highly problematic due to the recurring temptation to collude with the stereotyped notion of the joking, cheeky Irish (as already hinted at in some of the comments from previous critics such as Mercier). This is not aided by the way in which this image of Ireland (especially of the Republic) has been promoted through the popular cultural media in the recent past, especially in Britain and America. Television programmes such as *Ballykissangel* (1996- 2001) have projected the image of 'Ireland' as a nation of easy-going locals, with purely personal, often easily resolved, issues: 'The sense of "pastness" which the series exudes is an ahistorical, apolitical past; it relates to an Ireland that never was and which does not exist now.'¹⁷ Other moments in popular culture, such as *Father Ted* (1995- 1998), for

Ruth Barton, 'The Ballykissangelization of Ireland', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 20.3 (2000), 413-426 (p. 422).

_

¹⁶ Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, 'What Foremothers?', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers* (see O'Connor, above), pp. 8-20 (p. 16).

example, offer a far more positive view of Irish culture, precisely by poking fun at those stereotyped images of Ireland (through figures such as Father Dougal) as well as established authority figures in the priests themselves.

What is equally important is the way in which contemporary comedy situates itself both in the flow of the past, and in the vagaries of the present. It is clear that the changes within both Northern Ireland (through the recent Peace Process) and the Republic (through the now almost clichéd 'Celtic Tiger' economy) have led to a host of new issues, not all of them positive, and a rapid evaluation of self-image in both areas. The secularisation of the Republic has been augmented by the new issues of immigration, changes in the family unit and the painful process of the secularisation itself, in which many givens of this society have been broken down. This has led to the twin processes of reassessing and deconstructing past hegemonies, but also questioning the present one. This can lead to a radical reviewing of identity, but also a conservative nostalgia for a more certain past. As O'Connell points out in his sociological study of the recent changes in the Republic:

The belief, widely felt if less often explicitly stated, that the cost of modernisation and economic success and a hegemonic bland liberal consensus is the loss of identity and character, and a sense of who we are. And if our traditional morality looks a little less lustrous in the light of what we know today about the past, nonetheless some people would argue that even a dodgy traditional Catholic morality is better than no morality at all.¹⁸

Many writers are also caught between writing for their immediate country, and the fact that to make many of their novels viable, they must publish with the larger, often London-based publishers. Patrick Magee has noted in his work that such publishers

¹⁸ Michael O'Connell, *Changed Utterly: Ireland and the New Irish Psyche* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2001), p. 7.

have, at times, been unwilling to publish novels about Northern Ireland, and certainly have often avoided those with a complex outlook on a situation which they perceive as unfamiliar or unattractive to the buying public. Magee notes the upturn of novels published by Irish authors as the inter-party talks began in earnest during the 1990s: 'During the 1990s as a whole, eighty titles by Irish authors appeared out of a total of 210 to date. The rise in this output therefore is measurable in real terms and as a percentage of the overall output.' Although Magee is noting an increase in publications from Irish authors here, it is still noticeable how much fiction about Northern Ireland is still written by writers from outside either the North or the Republic.

Some of the difficulties for authors who are writing for a wider geographic audience can also be seen in Chapter Two of this study. The fiction dealt with here is phenomenally successful, especially in the cases of Marian Keyes and Colin Bateman. It is interesting due to the fact that the observations contained within it, about contemporary Northern Ireland and the Republic, are embedded within genres that are distinctly populist, that of romantic fiction (or perhaps 'chick-lit'), the thriller and detective fiction. It is not unfair to say that such novels are often chosen for their saleability due to the adeptness with which the writers deal with genre as much as their treatment of images of the Republic or Northern Ireland. In particular, Marian Keyes seems to be riding on the crest of a wave of contemporary women's writing, and could be mentioned in the same publishing breath as Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones' Diary* (1996). Indeed, Keyes first novel, *Watermelon* (1996), was published in the same year.

10

¹⁹ Patrick Magee, Gangsters or Guerillas?: Representations of Irish Republicans in 'Troubles Fiction' (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001), p. 151.

The constraints of the genres used here (as well as the way in which the authors must negotiate between these constraints and promoting a new image of the area which the novels are written from) means that the status of the novels as 'progressive' or 'non-'progressive' is often difficult to define. This also relates to a wider issue of comedy itself, as its status as a radical or conservative form is uncertain. Comedy assumes a certain audience, and as such asks the reader to join in with the laughter. As such, it presumes a pre-existing set of values which the reader must share in order to find the joke funny, or at least understand it. The question here is how far the author is able to draw the audience into their own values (thereby possibly challenging the values of society) and how much the author must agree with the existing values of the audience in order to make comedy a viable prospect.

This tendency has been discussed by several critics with regards to different forms of comedy and humour. The central premise is often that humour depends on the social circumstances that surround it, and therefore that, in many cases, it is hard to translate. As Jerry Palmer says, this socially based view does not always allow for an easy comedic interchange between societies: 'the sociological argument that humour is not a property of actions or statements, but a property of the social circumstances in question.' This argument, however, which relies on anthropological view of humour stretching back to ancient times, does not really consider the increasing exportation of humour through syndicated television and literature. Northern Ireland obviously shares many popular cultural media with the rest of Britain, such as television programming. The Republic of Ireland has also received many British programmes

_

²⁰ Jerry Palmer, *Taking Humour Seriously* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 30.

for some time. Added to this is the global media phenomenon which particularly extends the awareness of American culture, adding to a consciousness already built up by the sizeable Irish diaspora within the United States.

A more subtle approach to the issues of complicity or radicalism in comedy is offered by theorists dealing with particular modes of comedy. Despite the variations in the specific aspects of comedy-related modes dealt with, many of them have similar issues with regards to their intent. Linda Hutcheon has dealt with both parody and irony as forms of humour, and she notes the difficulty that we find ourselves in when we deal with parody, which relies on both the transgression of a law (the 'rules' of a literary genre, for example), but also upon the invocation of that law: 'The presupposition of both a law and its transgression bifurcates the impulse of parody: it can be normative and conservative, or it can be provocative and revolutionary.'²¹ We meet this problem once again in Bakhtin's carnivalesque, in that any transgression, if temporary and allowed (as comedy most often is), also in many ways emphasises the importance of that which it parodies. As Umberto Eco says: 'One must know to what degree certain behaviors [sic] are forbidden, and must feel the majesty of the forbidding norm, to appreciate their transgression.'²²

Linking this to satire, especially in the realm of literature from Northern Ireland and the Republic, brings in further knotty problems. As Hutcheon notes, satire (though often directed at powers that hold the reins of the prevailing hegemonic discourse) can be used to defend norms rather than destroy them: 'it ridicules in order to bring

²¹ Linda Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms (New York: Methuen, 1985), p. 76. Hutcheon also makes similar points about irony in: Linda Hutcheon, Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony (London: Routledge, 1994).

²² Umberto Eco, The Frames of Comic Freedom' in *Carnival!*, ed. by Thomas A. Sebeok (Berlin: Mouton, 1984), pp. 1-9 (p. 6).

deviation into line- or it used to.'23 She also notes, however, that 'black humour' is a form of satire which seems to point out a lack, or a loss, of norms. I would argue that there are complex issues surrounding satire in both the Republic and Northern Ireland, but most especially in the North. Within this region, there is more than one discourse fighting for recognition, and all of these have the potential to subsume the individual in some way. As such, there is a welter of targets for satire, and also a complex question about which 'norms,' exactly, are being defended. This will lead into a central issue in this thesis, about the relationship between the radical and the conservative, and also the potential for the middle-ground as a radical position.

We have already touched on some of the issues which will be contained in the following chapters. However, it would be useful at this point to outline the trajectory of the rest of the chapters within the thesis. In order to give an overview of the time period dealt with here, Chapter One includes novels by Roddy Doyle and Robert McLiam Wilson, and builds upon the traditions of Irish comedy already outlined by critics such as Vivian Mercier and David Krause. Drawing upon their view of Irish comedy as coming from a tradition of irreverence and potential satire, we will be using the theories of carnival proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and his World* (1965) in order to highlight how this tradition has been used and altered differently over time in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Significant social and political changes have taken place in these two areas, both within the economy and through the Peace Process, and we will examine how history and the present have been treated differently by these two authors, and with different emphasis. The potential for a 'liberating carnival' or a 'terrifying grotesque' will be examined, and

22

²³ Hutcheon, A Theory of Parody, p. 79.

through the critique of Umberto Eco we will see how the limitations of Bakhtin's positive view of this mode are dealt with in Northern Ireland and the Republic. I intend also to show that there is a third reading of this position, which can allow for aspects of both Bakhtin's positive carnivalesque, and Eco's critique.

Chapter Two of this thesis will concentrate on the 'mundane,' or perhaps day-to-day, aspects of culture and society as expressed in populist fiction. It will concentrate on the changes in everyday society in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, and also how they are embedded within popular genres, such as romantic comedy and the thriller. These genres are interesting as they have a high commercial turnover, and presuppose a wide, or at least sizeable, audience. However, these novels often concentrate on depicting everyday life from within small communities. These may be based around geographic areas within Northern Ireland or the Republic (such as within work by Mary Costello or Brendan O'Carroll) or around a specific familial community (as within novels by Marian Keyes and Pauline McLynn). The comedy contained within them often has to mediate between writing for an audience who may not be totally familiar with the situations described, but also having to find ground in which the reader can understand the text, and simply 'get the joke'. This also means that the comedy within these works often walks a line between delivering an easily recognisable humour (which may be based upon conservative values) and humour which endeavours to more radically challenge existing mores (but which is potentially difficult for an uninformed audience to understand).

While Chapters One and Two largely concentrate upon the effect of social and political changes within the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, Chapter Three

endeavours to locate these tendencies within wider global trends. Changes in the relationship between time and space, as theorised by critics such as Kevin Robins, have led to an evolution in the relationship between the 'local' and the 'global'.²⁴ This has also led to an increasing concentration on the 'local' as a way for individuals to find a sense of community and 'meaning' within the contemporary world.²⁵ However, claims to 'meaning' within the postmodern world must be scrutinized, as noted by theorists such as Baudrillard and Lyotard.²⁶ The comedy dealt with in this chapter often engages with potentially loaded terms such as the 'real' (drawing upon postmodern theorists rather than Lacan), the 'hyperreal' and the 'authentic' through the choice of targets for humour. This chapter will examine how the postmodern world is depicted, and evaluated, within these texts. Importantly, it will also look at the ways in which both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are viewed in relation to these global trends.

This study moves towards an evaluation of how comedy, often the lingua franca of everyday exchange, can be used to assess how both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland view, and are reviewing, their identities in the contemporary milieu.

_

²⁴ Kevin Robins, 'Traditions and translation: national culture in its global context', in *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, ed. by John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 21-44 (pp. 24-25).

²⁵ Hebdige, Dick, 'Fax to the Future', Marxism Today (January 1990), 18-23 (p. 20).

²⁶ Texts by Baudrillard drawn upon here are: Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983); Baudrillard, Jean, *The Illusion of the End*, trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994). The main text from Lyotard used is: Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).

CHAPTER ONE

CARNIVAL COMEDY: CELEBRATORY GROTESQUE, OR A GROTESQUE CELEBRATION?

Introduction

Carnival, anti-carnival and comedy

The carnivalesque tendency of some comedy seems a sensible starting point for this study, not least because of the commonality with the work of Mercier and Krause who both hint at a carnivalesque resistance to the hegemonic status quo. As such, this traces a tradition in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, in which we may see the diverging and converging uses of comedy in both areas over a long period. While both Mercier and Krause mention the uses of the carnivalesque and grotesque in 'Irish comedy' (their term), it is worth allying this to the more thorough theorization of this area by Mikhail Bakhtin in his work in *Rabelais and His Work* (1984 [1965]), as well as noting the critiques of this approach by theorists such as Umberto Eco in 'The Frames of Comic Freedom' (1984).

Mercier asserts that the grotesque tradition of Irish comedy is: 'concerned with forces which in the long run are uncontrollable: reproduction and death.' This is also reminiscent of Bakhtin's concentration on the carnival use of the bodily lower stratum which has similar connotations as the site of defecation (waste) and birth. Krause

¹ Vivian Mercier, *Irish Comic Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 4. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

notes the universal aspects of Irish drama, which centre around a resistance to a repressive status quo (especially religious), which is once more reminiscent of the religious and feudal system which Medieval, and Rabelaisian, carnival disrupts in Bakhtin's work: 'those barbarous sympathies strike a universal impulse, a common cause for men and women to mock repressive conformity and authority.'²

Bakhtin embraces the potential within Medieval carnival (especially in the works of Rabelais) for a dialectical relationship between the self and the people, the upper and lower classes, social constraints and bodily desires. He champions the carnival tradition which Rabelais' work draws upon as: 'opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook.' Again, this is highly reminiscent of Krause's assertion that Irish drama: 'mocks whatever is too sacred, any authority, whether British or Irish, political or religious, which has become too holy or hypocritical, too stagnant or repressive, in relation to the complex realities and hopes of Irish life' (247-248).

The link between the comic and the carnivalesque grotesque has also been noted on a wider scale by such critics as Umberto Eco, who says that: 'The idea of the carnival has something to do with the comic. So, to clarify the definition of carnival it would suffice to provide a clear-cut definition of the comic.' However, the definitions of 'comedy' and the 'comic' are often intangible, interconnecting and temporally based. Again, this is a difficulty which Eco notes: 'every attempt to define the comic seems

² David Krause, *The Profane Book of Irish Comedy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 12. Further reference to this edition are given in after quotations in the text.

³ M. M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 3. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

⁴ Umberto Eco, 'The Frames of Comic Freedom', in Thomas A. Sebeok, *Carnival!* (Berlin: Mouton,

^{1984),} pp. 1-9 (p. 1). Further references to this essay are given after quotations in the text.

to be jeopardized by the fact that this is an umbrella term' (1). Eco prefers to rely on a definition drawn from classical, Aristotelian literature, which somewhat concentrates on theories of notional superiority. Eco sees carnival as a time in which people can indulge in behaviour which they would normally find reprehensible: 'By assuming a mask, everyone can behave like the animal-like characters of comedy' (3). It is clear, however, that the underlying idea that these actions are reprehensible is still extant, unlike in Bakhtin's theories, where such moral judgements are wholly done away with.

Eco states that such carnival is only ever a temporary respite from social and political restraints. It is tolerated, or even promoted, by those in power, and, as such, is in fact only another form of social control. Rather than critiquing Bakhtin himself, Eco questions the extension of Bakhtin's theories to other arenas by later critics: 'Bachtin [sic] was right in seeing the manifestation of a profound drive towards liberation and subversion in Medieval carnival. The hyper-Bachtinian ideology of carnival as *actual* liberation may, however, be wrong' (3). Krause appears to agree with Eco to some degree, talking specifically about Irish dramatic comedy:

This is at best a temporary and vicarious process of comic insurrection because it is of necessity more a state of mind than an overt act of violence, specifically a psychic victory of the imagination through which the artist of knockabout comedy and those who share his creative vision find the courage to endure yet another day of repressive order. (271)

I do not wish to argue here that the idea of carnival, or comedy, within literature is a form of liberation by itself *per se*. However, I would argue that its use may be indicative of a wider felt need, or possibility, of some kind of liberation outside of the text, as well as within it.

This treatment of comedy as a manifestation of carnival in modern literature is important in this study not only because of the parallels between Mercier, Krause and Bakhtin, but also because of the specific historical context in which some of these critical texts, as well as contemporary texts from Northern Ireland and the Republic, were written. Rabelais, and Bakhtin, were both writing during times of great social, religious and political censorship and threat (the Medieval feudal system and Stalinist Russia respectively). With censorship and repression, however, come resistance and the inherently felt threat of revolution. Michael Holquist's summation of both Rabelais and Bakhtin highlights the similarities in the circumstances of their writing, both with each other, and with the works I intend to deal with here: 'Both Rabelais and Bakhtin knew that they were living in an unusual period, a time when virtually everything taken for granted in less troubled ages lost its certainty, was plunged into contest and flux.'5

I wish to argue here that writers from both Northern Ireland and the Republic use comedy to create resistance in an environment where the discourses of power and status are uncertain. However, despite these similarities between Bakhtin's theories and comedy from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, there are also more problematic aspects in drawing such parallels with reference to the power relations within the novels dealt with here. Holquist states that Bakhtin: 'explores throughout his book the interface between a stasis imposed from above and a desire for change from below, between old and new, official and unofficial.' I would like to argue here that these binary oppositions of power are rendered in a far more complex

-

⁶ Holquist, pp. xii-xxiii (p. xvi).

⁵ Michael Holquist, 'Prologue', (see Bakhtin, above), pp. xiii-xxiii (p. xv).

manner within these novels, as the desire for change (and what change is desired) and what counts as repressively 'official' may come from more than one direction, rather than simply 'above' and 'below'.

An example of an ostensibly clear moment of revolution in history which many writers, from both the Republic and Northern Ireland, deal with is that of the Easter 1916 Rising. However, even this apparently fixed point in Irish history is the subject of constant debate, and new spaces may be opened up in the discourse surrounding it. One of Eco's main objections to Bakhtin's constant highlighting of the positives of carnival as revolutionary is that revolutions inevitably return to social constraints, even if they may be under another order:

When an unexpected and nonauthorized carnivalization suddenly occurs in 'real' everyday life, it is interpreted as revolution (campus confrontations, ghetto riots, blackouts, sometimes true 'historical' revolutions). But even revolutions produce a restoration of their own (revolutionary rules, another *contradictio in adjecto*) in order to install their new social model. Otherwise they are not effective revolutions, but only uprisings, revolts, transitory social disturbances. (7)

Doyle returns to the Easter 1916 Rising in *A Star Called Henry* (2000), one of his more recent works. Here he questions the relationship between the seeming 'carnival' of the revolution, and its effects. He explores the treatment of the ordinary 'people' that Bakhtin considered so important in the generous and inclusive nature of carnival, which sought not to overthrow and destroy, but to engulf and renew. Doyle contrasts this to the revolution of 1916 that the protagonist, Henry Smart, is involved in, which

⁷ The term 'people' is a problematic one, but also one which necessarily occurs while using the work of Bakhtin. He seems to use the term for the classes who were outside the feudal or ecclesiastical elite, although this does not seem to be an entirely solid definition, and these boundaries do move. Following Bakhtin, the term 'people' in this chapter refers to those in the individual novels who appear to be endeavouring to resist totalising ideologies.

promises to de-marginalize those 'people' in the lowest classes such as himself, but which eventually threatens to outcast him from his homeland entirely.

The relationship in the Republic of Ireland between social and political circumstances, again with an emphasis upon the working classes, and the possibilities of carnival is also explored in Doyle's earlier works which form *The Barrytown Trilogy* (1998). These three novels, *The Commitments* (1998 [1988]), *The Snapper* (1998 [1990]) and *The Van* (1998 [1991]), contain the irrepressible, carnivalesque characters of the Rabbite family. They are displaced from the core of the traditional social model in the Republic during the economically depressed 1980s, through their status as working-class, Dubliners and non-Gaelic speaking. They are far from the view of Ireland as wholesome and rural espoused by traditional Republicanism. However, even with the advent of the economically revolutionary carnival of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy, they find themselves still dispossessed and at the mercy of an older order which is not overturned, despite their comic resistance.

The relationship between the 'people', carnival, revolution and resistance is further complicated in Northern Ireland. The province is, obviously, under still more direct British political control, although there have been various attempts to introduce self-rule under various guises. However, the status quo under which the 'people' have to live is not confined to governmental hegemonic influence. Rather, there are multiple ideologies which vie for the status of hegemony, and which combine to form a status

⁸ A power-sharing executive was first mooted in the 1970s, but collapsed after Unionist ministers resigned, see 'Northern Ireland: The Troubles', BBC: History,

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/recent/troubles/the_troubles_article_06.shtml [accessed 3 September 2007]. The recent Assembly was first proposed in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, but successive deadlines intended to decide on power-sharing were not met. It was finally suspended in 2000 after a failure to make any agreement on decommissioning. The latest incarnation began in March 2007, and is historic in its multi-party nature, see 'Timeline: Northern Ireland Assembly', BBC News: Northern Ireland, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/2952997.stm [accessed 28 August 2007].

quo of conflict in many of these works. The idea of two 'communities' within Northern Ireland, with their own traditions and elements within them which purport to be pro-'revolutionary,' or acting as a 'resistance,' brings its own methods of confining people's behaviour. As such, the location of carnival, whether it can be entirely inclusive and rejuvenating, is a complicated question. Bakhtin states the symbols of carnival are: 'filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities' (11). There is certainly a sense in which these novels strive to highlight the relativity of several potentially repressive ideological 'truths'; however, a sense of 'change' and 'renewal' seems a far more precarious proposition at times. Robert McLiam Wilson, both in Ripley Bogle (1998) [1989]) and Eureka Street (1997 [1996]), questions the location of carnivalesque resistance, and also who exactly the 'people' are, in comparison to an 'us' and 'them' view of those within power, and those without power. In this way, the basis of both Bakhtin's and Eco's arguments about carnival are rendered debateable in the Northern Irish context. Various upsurges (be they on a small or large scale) from varying parts of the 'people' means that carnival is, indeed, a constant 'dialogue' between these factions, at least in literature.

Parody, 'double-voicing' and carnival

Within Bakhtin's model, parody can take many forms. It may be a parody of literature, speech or action. As Gary Saul Morson says: 'it appears that any symbolic act, whether artistic or non-artistic, verbal or non-verbal, can become the object of parody.'9 We may also extend this within comedy from Northern Ireland and the

⁹ Gary Saul Morson, 'Parody, History and Metaparody', in *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*, ed. by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp. 63-86 (p. 63). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

Republic, without being untrue to Bakhtin's original work, to people themselves and, most especially, public figures (their symbolic acts making them open to parody). What is clear is that those figures who are parodied are in some way integral to the people or society that parodies them. This also leads to the question of whether, as Morson says, this actually attributes 'symbolic significance' (63) to the parodied act (a similar point to that which Eco makes on 'allowed carnival'), or if it attempts to degrade and alter this significance.

Another feature of parody, according to Morson's critique of Bakhtin's work, is that of 'double-voicing'. A parodic representation of someone or something contains not only one utterance, but two. This is easily seen when the thing parodied is an actual text, which is mainly what Morson deals with. The surface of the parody will appear similar to the original parodied text. However, embedded within it is another utterance, intended to have in Morson's words: 'higher semantic authority' than the original utterance (67). This can also be applied to parodies of public figures; however, the parody hinges upon the typical utterances or actions of a particular person or type of person.

It is the tension between the original utterance and the parodic utterance, and the status of those who make these utterances, which is most interesting within comedy from both Northern Ireland and the Republic. The boundary between the parodied and the parodying utterance is often blurred, particularly in the matter of which has the most authority. Morson also touches upon this in his essay. It is just this situation he describes when talking about 'meta-parody': 'when readers do not know with which utterance they are expected to agree or suspect that the second utterance may be no

more authoritative than the first- then we do not have parody, but another dialogical relation, metaparody' (68).

This potential 'dialogical' aspect to parody (or meta-parody) seems to be what lends the carnival aspects of the comedy studied here its tension. In a society that is in flux, that is not entirely sure what utterances it wishes to give 'semantic authority' to, or which it wishes to destroy, the parodies often appear to be at once carnivalesque and 'awful' (both in the sense of terrible and awe inspiring). There is not only a satirical bent to the parodies, but a genuine confusion about what to satirise and destroy, or what to carnivalise and allow to be re-born.

The Grotesque

This confusion between the carnivalesque and the awe-inspiringly terrible often manifests itself within these works in the appearance of the grotesque. Again, the grotesque represents a site of a dialogue, in this case between the individual and the outside world. It is the areas of the body that are open to outside, material influences that are concentrated upon and exaggerated in a parody of the individual that highlights the link with the wider 'body' of the people. As Bakhtin observes: 'the bodily element is deeply positive. It is presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people' (19). Indeed, it is the 'lower bodily stratum' that is concentrated upon, those parts of the body concerned with both excretion (destruction), eating (rejuvenation) and reproduction (rebirth). As such, Bakhtinian parodies concentrate on fatness, huge mouths, buttocks and genitalia. It is within the bodily grotesque that these apparently dichotomous elements are brought together in a kind of 'circle of life'. In medieval

carnival, a parody that destroys its object also has a promise of impending rebirth in a potentially better form.

Bakhtin contrasts this with other forms of the grotesque that have lost this connection between the individual body and the body of the people. In particular he notes the influence of the classical body, which cuts off the body from the outside world. The individual here becomes subjective and self-contained. Bakhtin argues that this stance is adopted within the grotesque of the Romantic period. Images which ally the body with the lower stratum in medieval carnival can, indeed, represent death, but it is always followed by a complimentary movement upwards, signifying rebirth. The Romantic grotesque, and later instances in the Modernist movement, shows the subjective body at the mercy of repressive elements, debased but not rejuvenated. Bakhtin uses Victor Hugo's view of Rabelais to illustrate the difference between the open interpretation of the body in Medieval carnival, to the more constricted view by the Romantics: 'In Hugo's variations the ambivalent lower stratum falls apart to form these moral-philosophical images and antithesis' (126) and 'He failed to understand the regenerating and renewing power of the lower stratum' (126). As such, the Romantic grotesque is dark, focussing on the inevitable degeneration of the individual, while the Medieval grotesque sees this as only part of a wider circle of existence before re-birth. Bakhtin asserts that: 'Darkness, not light, is typical of this genre. On the contrary, light characterises folk grotesque. It is a festival of spring, of sunrise, of morning' (41).

These two opposing uses of the grotesque are both in evidence within contemporary novels from both Northern Ireland and the Republic. Both are noted by Mercier,

though he does not make the distinction in quite the same way as Bakhtin. Mercier terms them 'grotesque' and 'macabre':

Whereas macabre humour in the last analysis is inseparable from terror and serves as a defence mechanism against the fear of death, grotesque humour is equally inseparable from awe and serves as a defence mechanism against the holy dread with which we face the mysteries of reproduction. [Italics in original] (48-49)

However, though Mercier makes a distinction between these two modes, he also notes that: 'The macabre appears even more frequently than the grotesque, though sometimes they are indistinguishable' (63). I would argue that these two modes are more often indistinguishable than not, although I would also suggest that what Mercier terms 'macabre' is an attempt to laugh more radically in the face of death, rather than accept it. Bakhtin's theoretical model, in which birth and death are part of a grotesque temporal cycle of carnival, thus seems more helpful with regards to the texts dealt with here. Equally, the points at which this cycle is broken by the use of a subjective, Romantic grotesque more fully explains the re-appearance of terror in these texts.

However, it is most interesting to observe where authors deploy these two ways of viewing the subjective or inclusive bodily grotesque (whether consciously or not). The use of medieval, inclusive bodily parodies seems to signify the possibility of hope. In both the works of Roddy Doyle and Robert McLiam Wilson it coincides with the redemptive qualities of the 'people' through their parodies of 'everyman' characters. However, both authors also use subjective images of the bodily grotesque which have more in common with Romantic grotesque in their deployment of dark, genuinely frightening images. These seem to be used by both authors in order to signify points at

which they see their characters at the mercy of repressive, often violent, forces that are not easily overcome by a short period of carnival. At this point, it seems, the reality of a repressive status quo within the outside society impinges upon the fragile resistance of a fictive carnival. One of the main lines of enquiry within this chapter, as we shall see, is how Doyle and McLiam Wilson undergo this process at different times in the production of their works. It is this that I shall try and link to the particular political and social circumstances that surround the moment of the production of their texts.

Ripley Bogle: Robert McLiam Wilson

Out of the four books I shall be dealing with here, *Ripley Bogle* (1998 [1989]), is the one that most obviously features the dark and frightening Romantic grotesque of individual degeneration, rather than Bakhtin's 'positive' medieval carnival grotesque. As Bakhtin says of the former: 'The images of the Romantic grotesque usually express fear of the world and seek to inspire their reader with this fear' (39). I would argue that this tone underlines the moment of the novel's production. First published in 1989, it deals with a time of acute and apparently endless political violence in McLiam Wilson's locality of Northern Ireland. The most repressive British government within the period of this study was still in power (led by Margaret Thatcher) with its attendant no-talking, no-compromise policy. This situation seems to preclude the hope that exists in Bakhtinian carnival, which comes partly from the idea that there is a possibility of something better in the future, as Bakhtin says: 'The accent is placed on the future; utopian traits are always present in the rituals and images of the people's festive gaiety' (82). Under the circumstances in which it was written, *Ripley Bogle* therefore seems to abandon the hopeful forward thrust of

positive carnival, instead adopting the Romantic grotesque which concentrates on the horror of the here-and-now, or the fear of a future which means inevitable degradation.

As there seems to be 'no future' in Northern Ireland, the only option for Ripley (the eponymous protagonist) is to endeavour to escape, rather than face and resist, the violent status quo of his background. As such, his characterization is indicative of the Romantic grotesque. He is an individual doomed to degradation, as the chance of escaping his experience of violence and marginalization seems impossible in the political climate of the time, where his background constantly follows him. For Ripley, life is not the upward spiral of carnival (where one is degraded to be brought back as something better), but the opposite (Ripley rises briefly only to be further degraded). He starts his life in a deeply deprived West Belfast estate, is identified as a child genius, but becomes homeless in Belfast as his family life fragments. He later escapes this situation by going to Cambridge University. However, he drops out of his degree there, and becomes homeless in London, from whence he tells his tale.

There are respites for Ripley, during which we see the possibility of a carnivalesque freedom. At times, his stay at Cambridge University is made to seem like a carnival. There seems at first a possibility of the movement between classes within the intellectual meritocracy, rather like the destabilisation of class boundaries within Bakhtinian carnival. This is not only the case for Ripley moving up into the middle-classes, as he also finds some of the apparent dinosaurs of the University far nearer to his streetwise intelligence than he expects, such as when he is called into a disciplinary interview: 'He stitched me up, he ran me ragged. I was most surprised to

be left standing by an old codger like him.' However, this apparent breakdown between classes which the University provides proves to be sophisticated 'playacting', reminiscent of Eco's critique of carnival as a superficial sop to freedom and equality. There are many characters with pretensions towards working-class politics, but often on their own terms, which do not cohere with Ripley's actual experience.

Joshua Swinnington-Booth is one such example. He is very clearly upper class, but is attracted to the 'gritty reality' of disaffected 1980s inner-city youth, so much so that he changes his name to Bazza Wilkins. Moreover, he is attracted to the violent consequences of politics, despite never having experienced them himself: 'This young man spoke with relish of hatred, blood and death. He was also breathtakingly confident and well informed on the subject of the IRA' (*Ripley*: 206). However, rather than value Ripley's first hand experience, Joshua accuses him of betraying his past: 'the Honourable Bazza informed me that I was a "dirty turncoat bastard" who was betraying his countrymen in his pathetic efforts at social climbing' (*Ripley*: 206).

It seems that the carnival masquerade is only acceptable in one direction. The upper classes can masquerade as the lower in a façade of 'political awareness' while retaining the privilege of their background, but the lower class must choose to abandon their past experience (especially if this upsets the spuriously leftist political leanings of the educated elite in the novel) if they wish to access some of the middle-class advantages in the future. This is underlined for Ripley by the lecturer who takes his disciplinary interview. Ripley can continue to be 'true' to his background (this has led to him insulting a lecturer who derides Ripley's political views) and so be thrown

¹⁰ Robert McLiam Wilson, *Ripley Bogle* (London: Vintage, 1998 [1989]), p. 252. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

out, or he can fit in, and so give up his past. The lecturer gives the impression that this is Ripley's black-and-white choice, and one which he has implicitly made by being at Cambridge to begin with:

Whether you like it or not, when you came to Cambridge you signed yourself up as a member of an elite. An elite, mind you-meritocracy, aristocracy- it matters little. Still an elite. Egalitarians don't come to Cambridge. Not real ones. (*Ripley*: 251)

However, even when Ripley is attempting to fit in to Cambridge in order not to return to the violence of his past, he is not allowed to participate fully. For example the end-of-year party exemplifies many of the ideas of a 'period of licence' that is a key ingredient in Bakhtin's carnival. The rules are relaxed, consumption is a major part of the festivities and students dress up as the upper-class that they may, or may not, be. Nevertheless, it is also clearly a period of *allowed* carnival, as Eco points out. Ripley, as the genuine working-class figure, and the uncomfortable reminder of the falsity (and exclusive nature) of this consumption, is not made welcome. At best, he appears more as an observer than a participant; at worst he is openly rejected. The carnival becomes not an excuse for Ripley to join one of the higher ranks, but for a group of youths from the higher ranks to step outside the rules and threaten him openly: 'You should have stayed in bog country, Paddy. Nobody wants you here' (*Ripley*: 260).

After Ripley drops out of Cambridge and becomes homeless in London, the fearful connotations that surround the idea of the bodily grotesque become more apparent as Ripley's body begins to degenerate. All the positive connotations that the bodily grotesque has in Bakhtin's carnival are twisted and inverted within Wilson's novel, or, alternatively, the negative connotations exist on their own, without the concomitant

positive connotations. Everything Ripley can ingest (principally cigarettes and alcohol) help to destroy his body. The consumption of nourishment, in the form of food, which represents regeneration in Bakhtinian carnival, becomes difficult for Ripley as his body has been denied it for so long. When he has the chance to eat, he has to approach food with caution: 'Eagerness might be hazardous- that way dysentery lies. My digestion needs a gentle course of revision before I can move onto anything as ambitious as solids' (*Ripley*: 107).

Communal eating is a way of underlining the cohesiveness of the 'people' in Medieval carnival. Bakhtin overtly links body, communal festivity and food: 'The material bodily principle is a triumphant festive principle, it is a "banquet for all the world" (19). For Ripley, however, this is traumatic. He goes to a soup kitchen, where he finds himself physically repulsed by his fellow tramps. He reflects once more the Romantic and classical idea of the individual, unable to open himself up to outside influences in a communal manner, either literally- in the form of real communication-or metaphorically by eating in the presence of others.

The view within Northern Irish fiction of the body as an individual and fragile unit is also clear within this novel. In Rabelais' work the destroyed body can be an object of comedy (a point that Bakhtin discusses in detail). Rather like a Loony Tunes cartoon, the body is not really destroyed: it can be brought back to life. It is very clear in McLiam Wilson's work, however, that harm caused to the physical body is not part of a system of degradation followed by renewal: it is a teleological system of total degradation. Ripley describes his father's death by a 'revenge' shooting in graphic detail: 'Thick, oozing pools of scarlet gore formed on the cracked linoleum, streaked

and muddied by boot and shoe' (*Ripley*: 115). The result of death, the total cessation of life, is made clear: 'The ambulance didn't come for three hours and by that time his flesh was yellow and cold. He was well dead' (*Ripley*: 115). All those who come into contact with this violence are made in some way complicit with the horrifying consequences. It seems that any kind of hope or re-birth, either individually or collectively, is considered beyond the bounds of possibility at this time within Northern Ireland.

This carnival image of death and re-birth is further denied, and the Romantic fear of individual bodily destruction reinforced, by the death of Maurice, Ripley's school friend. Maurice is a two-fold character. He is clearly idealistic, and very noble. It is he who helps Ripley out of homelessness in Belfast and back into school, in order that Ripley can pass his exams (and later go to Cambridge). However, similar to some figures at Cambridge, he is a middle-class radical and, as such, often derided within the novel. Maurice is shown to be naïve in his involvement with the IRA. While Ripley wishes to escape what he sees as a repressive, totalitarian, and harmful view of possible social change in Nationalist political violence, Maurice succeeds in falling in deeper. Ripley is aware of this apparent dichotomy:

It was ironic really. There was me, Ripley Bogle, from out of the less-than-working classes, child of the Falls and son of a gun, breaking my supraspermbound balls to get out of all that and there was Maurice, child of ease, silvergobbed and pretty posh, trying to be Che Guevara. (*Ripley*: 102)

Maurice does, indeed, become involved in what is depicted as a twisted 'carnival' of violence. On the one hand, Maurice's IRA compatriots offer a resistance to British rule; however, on the other, they also repress members of their own community

through violence, and their consumption (in the form of organised crime) is clearly selfish, not part of a wider consumption. Indeed, Maurice is killed by members of the IRA who object to his denunciation of their 'money with menaces' scheme. His mode of death makes his downward 'fall' or degradation most explicit. In Medieval carnival imagery, the bowels and what Bakhtin terms the 'lower bodily stratum' indicate degradation, but the proximity to the organs of fertility also indicate re-birth. In Maurice's death, however, the exposing of the bowels where he is shot indicates death solely, with no return to life: 'I smelt the unmistakeable odour of liquid shite, squeezed from his ripped guts' (*Ripley*: 311).

It is clearly important in Northern Irish comedy that a sense of horror is reserved for the destruction of the individual body in the manner of the Romantic grotesque and there seems to be a complex relationship between this and a Medieval carnivalesque. Certainly the subjective individual is prized, and it is therefore an abomination when any character is destroyed. However, on further inspection, we may find a more subtle relationship between the people of the carnival, the individual grotesque body and the politics of the time. During a time of extreme violence, it seems inappropriate in Northern Irish writing to treat the death of any individual with anything less than horror. However, the individual within fiction is also clearly linked to the 'people' as a wider whole. As such their destruction marks not only the wilful destruction of individuals, but the wilful destruction of those individuals who actually make up the crowd of the 'people'.

There are other instances in which images associated with the Medieval carnivalesque are twisted in Ripley's narrative. Another frequent image within medieval carnival is

•

that of procreation, hence Bakhtin notes images of pregnant hags, bringing together both the possibility of death, and the possibility of re-birth. In *Ripley Bogle* we have a similar focus on pregnancy in the figure of Deirdre, Ripley's Protestant girlfriend. However, rather than the pregnancy featuring as a new beginning and a symbol of hope, Deirdre undergoes a botched abortion and her pregnancy terminates in a horrible fashion: 'It had been the usual bog job- the miscarriage, that is. In other words, the rejected, mangled foetus had been voided and deposited in the family toilet bowl' (*Ripley*: 146).

The attitude toward sex and reproduction undercuts an idea of carnivalesque freedom. Sex is shown as a corrupting, not liberating, force within Ripley's narrative. Ripley's status as the poetic Catholic Gael, and Deirdre's bourgeois, Planter Protestant status, as well as the 'love-across-the-barricades' trope of Northern Irish fiction, is parodied within the text to underline this. She is only interested in surface features, and the shallow aspects of a relationship: 'My ace beauty being the only trait to which Deirdre could really apply her rudimentary perceptive faculties' (*Ripley*: 79). Deirdre's consumption is made to sound selfish, and reinforces the class structure which carnival purports to supersede: 'Deirdre's daily lunch box averaged more calories than one of my better nutritional weeks but she betrayed bugger all awareness of this knotty little inequality' (*Ripley*: 144). Ripley, on the other hand, is apparently incapable of sleeping with Deirdre due to his sensitive nature and finer feeling: 'It was her clothes that did it [...] They told the tale – of her. Little Deirdre. That girl, that child' (*Ripley*: 81).

Ripley attempts to make us believe that he stays with Deirdre after her miscarriage in spite of her increasingly erratic and dangerous behaviour (and despite the baby having an unknown father), through a sense of love and self-sacrifice. However, Ripley's narrative is turned back upon him, and it seems that he becomes the object of parody as the novel progresses. Indeed, small hints along the way have suggested that his narration is not altogether 'reliable' and this is confirmed in his final, explosive revelations. In fact, not only has Ripley exaggerated his 'pure' character (he *has* slept with Deirdre and is the father of the miscarried child), but it is also he who carries out the botched abortion. Ripley once again turns to religious stereotyping in order to absolve some of the impact of his own actions: 'It must have been a lot easier for her since she wasn't even a Catholic; Protestants had abortions all the time, practically every day. It was no sweat for them. No, it was definitely me who was doing the suffering' (*Ripley*: 313).

Ripley is gradually revealed as a butt of the text's parody himself. His use of stereotyping, and also the excuses for his actions, are called into question. Wilson himself sums up Ripley's weaknesses in terms of a moral cowardice:

[Ripley] almost constantly uses his bad childhood, his terrible poverty as an excuse. And I think there should be a dent made in that; but only a dent. And I don't think it's entirely wrong but I think those who excuse certain acts by 'abuse as a child' or stuff like this... A lot of us are abused, a lot of us have bad childhoods, it doesn't drop moral requirements of people. 12

¹¹ Abortion is still illegal in Northern Ireland, except in circumstances where the pregnancy threatens the mother's physical or mental health, see 'Q&A: Abortion in NI', *BBC News: Northern Ireland*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/1386450.stm [accessed 3 September 2007] (para. 5 of 17)

¹² Robert McLiam Wilson, in Niall McGrath 'Prophet of the Pleochroic: Interview with Robert McLiam Wilson', *The Black Mountain Review*, 3 (2000), 13-23 (p. 15).

For all Ripley's denunciation of violence within the country, when he himself is faced with violence, he is incapable of resistance. Maurice is killed after Ripley is threatened by the IRA and gives his friend's hiding place away. Ripley has shown his family to be massively inadequate; however, his father is killed after standing up to a group of paramilitaries and rescues a girl from them who has been tarred and feathered, and it is Ripley who is shown as a possible coward. The fact that early on in the text the reader is positioned in such as way as to encourage sympathy with some of Ripley's statements about the evils of hurting others makes their relationship with the lead character complex and deeply disturbing.

This controversial presentation of Ripley's character means that, in many ways, the central narrative of the book turns in upon itself. Despite Ripley's attempts at breaking out of his prescribed social role, at the end of the novel he is still in the position that he was at the beginning, and he seems to have few options for changing his situation-or character- for the better. His only ideas revolve around the same routes to stability that he has tried and failed with before: 'The world could still let me in. Perhaps I should go to Oxford this time. Who knows?' (*Ripley*: 326). It is clear within this novel that Ripley represents a social order which is both forcibly repressed, but also turns in on itself, and is unable to find a way forward from violence. As in Eco's model of the role of carnival, a set of social rules always assert themselves, and there is always a section of society either repressed or marginalized. This seemingly endless cycle of degradation and Ripley's role within it is, however, revisited in Wilson's later novel *Eureka Street* (1997 [1996]) which, as we shall see, engages carnival and parody in a more optimistic way.

The Barrytown Trilogy: Roddy Doyle

The Barrytown Trilogy (1988-1991), a collection of three books about the Rabbite family, was written slightly earlier in the 1980s than Ripley Bogle. The Republic of Ireland did not suffer the same level of violence as Northern Ireland in the 1980s, but it did suffer from a very high level of unemployment. In examining economic data from 1986-1987 (the year before first novel in the trilogy was published), MacSharry states that Ireland was a 'basket case' economy with the 'statistics of a third world country.'13 During the mid- to late- 1980s, the Republic of Ireland was still heavily influenced by the conception of Ireland set up after independence by such figures as Eamon De Valera. In this model of nationhood, an emphasis was placed upon a rural economy, Catholicism and indigenous aspects of culture such as the Gaelic language. The Rabbite family seem to be everything that this ideal is not, as English speaking Dublinites. The indirect influence of the Catholic Church is felt in these novels, as we shall see, but the Church itself is rarely taken very seriously by the characters. While Ripley Bogle captures one moment in time, however, this series of books shows the continuing marginalisation of these working-class figures over a longer period, but also their attempts at resistance and an attempt to negotiate their social position in a society in economic and social flux.

It is the moral monopoly of the church, and also the rural as a fundamental ideal of the Republic, that is most attacked in *The Commitments* (1988), the first of the three books in the trilogy. The book centres on the inception of a Dublin soul band, thought up by Jimmy Rabbitte (Jr). It comprises only one (possibly) professional musician. For all of the others, it acts as a carnivalesque resistance through movement, sex and

¹³ Cited by Michael O'Connell, *Changed Utterly: Ireland and the New Irish Psyche* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2001), p. 31.

song to the confined nature of their lives within a deprived area of Dublin. Roddy Doyle explains his intentions in the novel in a way that is reminiscent of much of the thrust of Bakhtinian carnival: 'What I tried to do with *The Commitments* was to show people who are economically and culturally trapped, but rather than lie down and wallow in it, they celebrate, they scream and roar and create music about it and turn the experience into a positive thing.' 14

This is made clear at the beginning of the novel by Jimmy. He draws a direct comparison between the fate of the Dublin working class and another historically repressed people:

—The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads.

They nearly gasped: it was so true.

—An' Dubliners are the niggers of Ireland. The culchies have fuckin' everythin'. An' the Northside Dubliners are the niggers o' Dublin.—Say it loud, I'm black an' I'm proud.¹⁵

The statement is ironically amusing in that Jimmy's use of derogative terminology is part of a heartfelt expression of empathy with the historical repression of the black people. It underlines the un-multicultural nature of the Republic at the time, but at the same time it also illustrates the multi-layered way in which the section of society which the band represent feel themselves marginalised.

It is clear that the band members themselves do not feel their use of black soul music to be incongruous. They agree that this music provides a language to expresses their inner lives, which is frequently at odds with the public life prescribed by society. Jimmy Jr is more explicit in this, as he explains the link between the music and his

¹⁴ Roddy Doyle, in Sharon Montieth, Jenny Newman and Pat Wheeler, *Contemporary British and Irish Fiction: An Introduction Through Interviews* (London: Arnold, 2004), p. 56.

¹⁵ Roddy Doyle, *The Commitments*, in *The Barrytown Trilogy* (London: Vintage, 1998 [1988]), pp. 1-140 (p. 13). Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

-

idea of politics: 'Not songs abou' Fianna fuckin' Fail or annythin' like tha'. Real politics [...] Your music should be abou' where you're from an' the sort o' people yeh come from' (*Commitments*: 13). This rejection of party politics in favour of the irrepressible energy of the 'people', and actions true to themselves rather than straitened social mores, reflects more directly than *Ripley Bogle* the kind of resistance that Bakhtin links to carnival. Not only does the band reject the powers actually in charge, but they feel that they have no real direct link to them.

This kind of politics exposes the repressed and therefore 'unsaid' aspects of the life of a section of what Doyle represents as the 'people'. It changes the body (that symbol of the carnival) into an alternative site of politics. In singing explicitly bodily and sexual songs, the group are transgressing the boundaries of what is sayable in a society still (at least partially) constrained by the morals of the Catholic Church. The themes of these songs are reminiscent of those which Bakhtin identified as a staple of many Medieval carnivals: '[songs] which combine universalism (problems of life and death) with the material bodily element (wine, food, carnal love) with awareness of the time element (youth, old age, the ephemeral nature of life, the changes of fortune)' (90).

However, it is fair to say that there seems to be a dichotomy between the social expectations and moral upbringing of the group, and the music they play, as well as the lives they actually lead. Jimmy explains the link between sex and soul music, which causes no little embarrassment to the rest of the group:

[—]The rhythm o' soul is the rhythm o' ridin', said Jimmy.

[—]The rhythm o' ridin' is the rhythm o' soul.

[—]You're a dirty-minded bastard, said Natalie. (Commitments: 35)

However, despite the outward protestations from members of the group, they have to acknowledge that this description of the music means more to them than other uses for music that they have encountered. In particular, the female members of the group have only sung in choirs before, and they inwardly admit that this did not really mean very much:

They'd been in the folk mass choir when they were in school but that, they knew now, hadn't really been singing. Jimmy said that real music was sex. They called him a dirty bastard but they were starting to agree with him. And there wasn't much sex in Morning Has Broken or The Lord Is My Shepherd. (Commitments: 34)

This dichotomy between the body as a site of eroticism or of shame, and what is said and unsaid, is interesting with reference to the two different views of carnival we see in Bakhtin and Eco. The characters are increasingly leading a more secular and physical life, but are often frightened of admitting this in public. It seems that while there is a Bakhtinian carnivalesque change within the life of characters, this still cannot be expressed fully publicly except in the allowed form of music itself, as in Eco's model. Indeed, some critics, such as M. Keith Booker, consequently see this appropriation of sexualized, American culture as ineffectual in 'real' political terms:

Even the most seemingly transgressive political gestures made by Doyle's Dubliners have no real charge and involve little more than an acting out of motifs derived from multinational popular culture, a fact which assures that their "transgressions" can be safely and easily be contained within the status quo. ¹⁶

The 'popular music' of *The Commitments* does, however, employ Bakhtin's strategies of parody and 'double-voicing', both for comic effect and to give expression to many unspoken aspects of daily lived experience. The original soul songs are altered by

¹⁶ M. Keith Booker, 'Late Capitalism Comes to Dublin: "American" Popular Culture in the Novels of Roddy Doyle', *ARIEL* 28 (1997), 27-45 (p. 32).

Deco, the lead singer, to become more Dublin-centric in their lyrics. This is not done to denigrate the originals, but does highlight the problematic nature of Jimmy's apparently easy appropriation of music from another culture. The new lyrics are highly amusing in their highlighting of the parochial nature of the band's life in comparison with the textual original:

—WHEN A MA—HAN LOVES A WO—

MAN——

HE'LL BUY HER LOADS O' SWE—EE—EETS

———

HE'LL EVEN BRING HER TO STUPID PLACES LIKE
THE ZOO— OO——

HE'LL SPEND ALL HIS WAGES ON——

HER——

BUT DON'T LET HIM SEE YOU LOOKIN' AT HER——

COS HE'LL GET A HAMMER AN' HE'LL FUCKIN'
CREASE YOU——

No one laughed. It wasn't funny. It was true. (Commitments: 103)

The serious reaction of the audience seems to be part of the joke, but while it is amusing in its unlikelihood, it also lends the parody itself some veracity. Deco demonstrates the way in which his community speaks within another medium of communication (song), one which can express a way of living not easily expressed in conversation.

What is also notable about the parodies of these songs is that they are a form of expression which is more clearly of the 'people' than more traditional forms of music within the Republic. As Brian Donnelly notes, the culture of Barrytown owes more to international commercial culture than the prescribed culture of the Republic, and is only nominally part of the capital city:

Barrytown in the early books is an anonymous suburb where consciousness is largely shaped by imported television programmes, American popular music and English soccer which has supplanted the GAA much in the way that the name of a local pub has been changed from The Dark Rosaleen to The Miami Vice. 17

The Commitments is a clear instance of carnival in many ways, as the communal experience of the band's shows represent many of the ideas that carnival presents: the sudden cessation of rules, the saying of the unsayable in a public environment and the break from everyday ways of life. While it foregrounds the body in the music, however, the bodily grotesque is not directly in evidence. This is something that appears more clearly in the next two books of the trilogy, *The Snapper* and *The Van*.

The next book chronologically, *The Snapper* (1990), deals with the body at its most reproductive as it chronicles the months of (Jimmy Jr's sister) Sharon Rabbitte's pregnancy. Partially, it is the confusion over who the father of the baby is and the issues around having an illegitimate child that are the focus of the book. However, there is a very large amount of description given over to the physical side of pregnancy, and both Sharon's, and her father Jimmy Sr's, struggle to come to terms with this. Sharon's pregnancy challenges the norms of the society around her in a carnivalesque way, as Linden Peach notes: 'Sharon's illegitimate pregnancy turns the Rabbitte household into a site of carnival that challenges other members of the community.' The moral, Church-approved, way of viewing the body (especially the female body) is as a closed unit. Ideally, it admits nothing and birth is 'miraculous' (thus dissociated from sex), and not the earthy, painful process that it actually is.

¹⁷ Brian Donnelly, 'Roddy Doyle: From Barrytown to the GPO', *Irish University Review*, 30.1 (Spring 2000), 17-31 (p. 19).

¹⁸ Linden Peach, *The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 154.

This way of viewing the body also problematizes the carnivalesque treatment of Sharon's pregnancy within the novel. The father of Sharon's child is also the father of her friend, who forces himself on Sharon while she is drunk. Due to the taboos surrounding the open conversation about such actions, Sharon is not sure herself how to view this: 'She'd wondered a few times if what had happened could be called rape. She didn't know.' Though Sharon's pregnancy, and her attitude, acts as a carnivalesque resistance to many taboos, this one appears to remain. Sharon herself represses the thought, as she is too embarrassed to make public the identity of the father and her attacker.

While Sharon passes over the issue of rape, her attitude to other bodily taboos is clearly a form of carnivalesque resistance. Sharon illustrates the proximity of birth and reproduction to defectaion and the lower bodily stratum as she attempts to explain to Jimmy Sr some of the symptoms of her pregnancy, such as constant trips to the toilet:

She whispered to Jimmy Sr.

—Me uterus is beginnin' to press into me bladder. It's getting' bigger.

Jimmy Sr turned to her.

—I don't want to hear those sorts o' things, Sharon, he said.

—It's not righ'.

He was blushing. (Snapper: 208)

What is important here, however, is to mention that this is not put forward as a parody of a pregnancy. While these images of pregnancy are clearly 'renewing,' as in the Bakhtinian grotesque, they are not exaggerated to make them funny as we may expect. Rather, it is the characters reaction to them which actually causes amusement. Graham

16

¹⁹ Roddy Doyle, *The Snapper*, in *The Barrytown Trilogy* (London: Vintage, 1998 [1990]), pp. 141- 340 (p. 185). Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

Norton, a well-known stand-up comedian from the Republic, notes the taboo surrounding bodily matters, including pregnancy, even when this is within an allowable social order:

It seems like there's an emotional illiteracy [...] there is an embarrassment about going home to your mother and saying I'm pregnant even if you're married and everything is fine. It's still disgusting and-I'm so sorry and, yes, we did, we did.²⁰

Here, the comedy derives from a bodily reality which breaks into this socially induced paranoia about the body, and makes a mockery of all such attitudes. Simon Critchley notes this dichotomy between how the body is viewed, and how it actually is, as a building block of humour: 'What makes us laugh, I would wager, is the return of the physical into the metaphysical, where the pretended tragic sublimity of the human collapses into a comic ridiculousness which is perhaps even more tragic.' He disagrees with Bakhtin's more hopeful model of the bodily grotesque, as: 'In my view, the body that is the object and subject of humour is an abject body- estranged, alien, weak, failing.' However, the comedy in *The Snapper* seems drawn from a difficult, but positive, journey towards making the body *less* estranged. Though Sharon frequently feels frightened and ill, at the end of the novel (after she has given birth), she is able to make a positive link between labour and laughter:

—Are yeh alrigh', love?
It was the woman in the bed beside Sharon.
—Yeah, said Sharon. —Thanks; I'm grand.
She lifted her hand —it weighed a ton —and wiped her eyes.
—Ah, said the woman. —Were yeh cryin'?

—No. said Sharon. I was laughin'. (*Snapper*: 340)

²² Critchley, p. 51.

20

²⁰ Cited by Stephen Dixon and Deirdre Falvey, *Gift of the Gag: The Explosion in Irish Comedy* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999) p. 215.

²¹ Simon Critchley, On Humour (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 43.

This journey towards a more open public treatment of bodily taboos extends to other members of the family. Jimmy Sr (the father) is depicted as the archetypal unreconstructed male in some ways. He is clearly a caring parent, and though confused by the situation is largely supportive of Sharon. Nevertheless he finds the reality of having a 'modern' pregnant woman in the house rather daunting. The whole process is a mystery to him, despite having five children. However, his initial embarrassment about the physical side of pregnancy is amusingly turned around in a virtual surfeit of knowledge after he has read all of Sharon's childcare and pregnancy literature:

> —You're getting' snotty now cos o' your hormones, Jimmy Sr told her. —I'll talk to yeh later.

Sharon laughed at this.

—There's nothin' wrong with my hormones.

—I didn't say there was annything wrong with them, said Jimmy Sr. -No, there's nothin' wrong. As such. Wrong's the wrong word. Imbalance is the term I'd use.

—Thanks very much, Doctor Rabbitte. (Snapper: 327)

While Jimmy Sr. largely ignores the moral and social implications of Sharon's illegitimate pregnancy, his wife Veronica finds this more problematic. It is clear that she is uncomfortable with dealing with a more fluid and less prescribed set of moral rules. Despite the largely secular life of the family, Veronica still occupies a traditional maternal role as moral arbiter. As O'Connell notes this was a socially and church-prescribed role: 'The emotional management of the family was left to a mother who did not consider using her talents outside the home.²³

This is made explicit as she and Jimmy try to decide how they are going to explain Sharon's pregnancy to the two younger girls in the family. It is clear that Veronica is the more resistant of the two to the idea of change:

²³ Michael O'Connell, Changed Utterly: Ireland and the New Irish Psyche (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2001), p. 22-23.

—Times've changed, Veronica, he said.

—I suppose so, said Veronica. —But do we have to keep up

with them? (Snapper: 189)

It is equally true, however, that as Veronica attempts to divert Jimmy from his role as family jester, she is also capable of shocking him with her more intimate knowledge and acceptance of the physicality of pregnancy. It seems that Sharon's pregnancy gives her the chance to voice this, as she presumably never did during her own pregnancies. Though Jimmy Sr learns the science of pregnancy, he also rarefies it to the status of

—We don't want you bursting your waters all over the furniture, isn't that right, Jimmy dear? They're new covers.

'miracle'. Veronica, on the other hand, is capable of making jokes about labour itself:

She went out, into the kitchen.

Jimmy Sr sat there, appalled. That was the dirtiest, foulest thing he'd heard in his life. And his wife had said it!

Sharon was laughing. (Snapper: 326)

Though Veronica makes a mockery of Jimmy's 'new' knowledge, she also distrusts it. This new awareness involves Jimmy Sr stepping out of his prescribed masculine role as head of the family and breadwinner (his love for his children is more often expressed through little presents than advice or open displays of empathy), and tests social boundaries in a way that is not totally comfortable for Veronica. His new familiarity with the female body has apparently led to some other potential effects for their sex life, so much so that Veronica seems convinced that he has been committing adultery:

—There. D'yeh like tha', Veronica?

—It's alright.

She grabbed his hair.

—Where did you learn it? (*Snapper*: 303-4)

Between them, Veronica and Jimmy Sr. seem to represent an Ireland on the cusp between an older way of life and new one. However, like the country at the time, while certain sections of them move on, other parts of their psyche are harder to change. *The Snapper* is the only one of the three books in which the family as a whole changes in a concrete way, in that Sharon's new baby is an incontrovertible new fact. Family life, however, soon goes back to normal, even with an additional member. In the other two books it is even clearer that the revolution, change or carnival they begin with has been repealed in some way by the end of the novel. This adheres both to the comedic tendency towards the reassertion of a status quo, and also nods towards Eco's assertion that much carnival is only temporary.

While *The Commitments* and *The Snapper* deal with the changing social and moral conditions of the Republic, *The Van* (1991) deals more specifically with the changing economic status of the country, and its effects on the lives of working-class people. This novel seems to have been published just at the start of the economic upturn which continued in spectacular fashion as the 1990s progressed (the later effects of which will be dealt with in subsequent chapters), and it posits the idea that the economic revolution is not an all-inclusive carnival.

The book begins as Jimmy Sr is made redundant from his job in the building trade. Until now, especially in the preceding book, he has been the most carnivalesque figure. He eats and drinks, swears and jokes and generally takes on the figure of the 'Spirit of the Carnival.' However, as well as a consuming presence he is also a figure of generosity. It quite literally gives him a purpose according to his daughter: 'He often

did things like that, gave away pounds or fivers or said nice things; little things that made him like himself' (*Snapper*: 154).

Taking away the means of this generosity and consumption (his own money) robs

Jimmy Sr of this power. It also affects his traditional masculine position as the main
breadwinner, both within the family and in his circle of friends. He begins to feel
threatened by his own maturing family, most particularly by his second eldest son,

Darren. Jimmy Sr is torn between natural pride and an awareness that he has missed
out on the opportunities available to his son:

There was something about the way Darren spoke since his voice broke that left Jimmy Sr confused. He admired him, more and more; he was a great young fella; he was really proud of him, but he thought he felt a bit jealous of him as well sometimes; he didn't know.²⁴

This is also shown by his relationship with his eldest son, Jimmy Jr. In the previous books, Jimmy Jr has been a source of concern, never really settling down. Now, however, Jimmy Jr has his own job and is the dispenser of largesse, deposing Jimmy Sr as leader of the carnival. The father finds himself in the position of having to accept his son's generosity. It is not a role that Jimmy Sr feels comfortable with:

It was funny; he'd been really grateful when young Jimmy had given him the fiver, delighted, and at the same time, or just after, he'd wanted to go after him and thump the living shite out of him and throw the poxy fiver back in his face, the nerve of him; who did he think he was, dishing out fivers like Bob fuckin' Geldof. (*Van*: 375)

The opportunity for Jimmy Sr to regain both his position as head of his family, and the leader of their carnival, is provided by the van of the title. This is, in fact, a fast food

²⁴ Roddy Doyle, *The Van*, in *The Barrytown Trilogy* (London: Vintage, 1998 [1991]), pp. 340-633 (p. 390). Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

van that Jimmy begins to run with his friend, Bimbo. The money makes Jimmy once more into a distributor of largesse, and the fact that much of their trade is centred around Friday night revelry makes the work itself almost into a carnival.

However, Jimmy's position is more precarious than it first appears. The van is bought with Bimbo's redundancy money, and although Jimmy Sr is treated, at first, like a partner in the business, eventually he finds himself demoted to another employee: 'The second Thursday his pay was in one of the little brown envelopes wages always came in. He looked at it. His name was written on it' (*Van*: 603). This act of pedantry (Jimmy Sr is basically the only employee) is particularly galling for Jimmy, as he has always had the upper hand over Bimbo, significantly in his use of joking. Jimmy Sr finds himself at the mercy of both Bimbo and Bimbo's wife. He is deposed as the leader of this carnival and a new regime is in place. These successive revolutions (the van as a resistance to a marginalizing economic status quo, then as a way for the weak Bimbo to gain power) point towards a cyclical movement which hints both at Bakhtin's model of social change, and Eco's model of the re-establishment of a ruling power, even if it may be the new, previously revolutionary, one.

Jimmy Sr and Bimbo attempt to rectify the cracks in their friendship in a night out where they break away from their circumscribed geographical and social area and try to visit the newly 'yuppified' carnival of central Dublin. At first this suits Jimmy Sr, as he is more aware of this new world than the rather naïve Bimbo. This is especially evident when they attempt to free themselves from their domestic responsibilities and begin to chat to two young women. It becomes clear through this conversation, however, that their new found wealth is not of the kind that fits into the new 'Celtic

Tiger' economy. Despite Jimmy Sr's best efforts to disguise the greasy truth of their business by calling it 'catering', the clueless Bimbo is completely honest about their business. It is perverse that while Bimbo scuppers Jimmy Sr's chances with the woman he is chatting to, he himself has no problems. It is clear that Jimmy Sr is still at odds with this changing economic milieu. He is no longer the holder of more knowledge than those around him, and his life experience cannot count for anything in a country that does not require the specific knowledge that he possesses.

This could, perhaps, be linked back again to Eco's arguments about revolution. In the Bakhtinian version of the Republic of Ireland's economic revolution, the benefits would be there for all. However, it is clear that in *The Van* that this is not so. Jimmy Sr can only look on in wonder during the early stages of the book at the newly moneyrich youth of his home city:

Young ones must have been earning real money these days as well; you could tell by the way they dressed. He'd sat on that stone bench with the two bronze oul' ones chin-wagging on it, beside the Halfpenny Bridge; he'd sat on the side of that one day and he'd counted fifty-four great-looking young ones going by in only a quarter of an hour. (*Van*: 409)

For those that attempt to break into this carnival, away from their centre of knowledge, the end can only be failure. The van itself proves to be a disaster due to Bimbo and Jimmy's lack of knowledge, as they are closed down by a Health and Safety inspector. Eventually, driven into a rage by their lack of control, Bimbo and Jimmy Sr drive the van into the sea. They are both caught between the rejection of an older status quo, and marginalization by a new one. The new status quo is worrying, especially since it does not seem to have a set of fixed hegemonic codes to concretely react against. As Eco says: 'Without a valid law to break, carnival is impossible' (6). However, the older

status quo may sometimes appear to be becoming equally fragmentary and hard to fully react against, and Jimmy Sr finds himself in limbo without any real carnival drive. It seems, at this precise moment of social evolution, no carnival-act is fully satisfactory.

Eureka Street: Robert McLiam Wilson

While the economy of the Republic changed through the 1990s, the political (and also economic) situation within Northern Ireland was also evolving. The next stage in the development of the political situation that Robert McLiam Wilson addresses is the period surrounding the 1994 ceasefire. This date is significant as the IRA's announcement of a 'complete cessation of military operations' was also followed by similar announcements from Loyalist groups. Although in hindsight this time represented only one event in a much longer process (and, indeed, the ceasefire would itself be broken later), this still represented a pivotal historical moment within the text. The change in tone between the two political time-periods in Northern Irish history that correspond with the production of Wilson's two novels is reflected in the stories they tell. There is a distinct move away from the dark, Romantic grotesque of *Ripley Bogle* to a more hopeful use of the grotesque, of parody and of other components of carnival, which point towards a Bakhtinian positive drive for change.

Robert McLiam Wilson himself points towards a change in the way that he decides to use comedy in *Eureka Street* (1997 [1996]). Instead of the often acerbic and derogatory jokes of *Ripley Bogle*, parody and comedy are used here as a means to degrade those who place themselves above the 'people', but not to utterly destroy

²⁵ Mark Devenport, 'IRA ceasefire: Ten years on', BBC News: Northern Ireland,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/3942053.stm [accessed 28 August 2007] (para. 3 of 23).

them. Wilson makes clear in an interview that he sees comedy as a positive, rather than purely destructive, force: 'if you make something laughable you rob it of its grandeur and its power to appeal and its power to seduce. And I think humour is basically a generous and democratic device of which I am very fond.' His terming of comedy as 'democratic' also links it to a wider conception of the 'people,' rather than the lone satirist. The point of *Eureka Street* is not to excise parts of Northern Irish society but to remove their mystique and so include them as human parts of the 'people' as a whole.

This objective involves some very explicit parodies of well-know public figures. The most obvious political parody is that of Jimmy Eve (a thinly disguised Gerry Adams) and his Just Us party (Sinn Fein translates as 'Ourselves Alone'). Wilson holds both Jimmy Eve and Just Us up to ridicule, but not with the disgust he reserves for those with such strong Republican interests in *Ripley Bogle*. Their version of history is viewed as an absolutist grand narrative which elides the complications and ambivalent details within which Wilson's text resides. Wilson sees such constrained views of history as an unhelpful fallacy: 'It wasn't so much that real history was rewritten. Real history was deleted [...] They told the world a simple story. They edited or failed to mention all the complicated, pluralistic, true details.'²⁷

Though these parodies are less heated than those in *Ripley Bogle*, they still retain the trait of duplicitous, self-serving Nationalist figures who publicly claim one aim, while privately retaining another agenda: 'When he said that he only wanted dialogue he meant that he only wanted total victory. When he told reporters that he respected the

²⁶ Robert McLiam Wilson, in Niall McGrath, 'Prophet of the Pleochroic: Interview with Robert McLiam Wilson', *Black Mountain Review*, 3 (2000) 13-23 (p. 17).

²⁷ Robert McLiam Wilson, *Eureka Street* (London: Vintage, 1997[1996]), p. 326. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

rights of the Protestant community he meant that soon they wouldn't have any' (Eureka: 383). However, Jimmy Eve is rendered almost harmless by this parody, unlike those dangerous Republican figures of Ripley Bogle. It seems that his political story has become boring and is now an anachronism to a new generation: 'The situation had not been improved by his six-year-old daughter who, having asked him what a unitedireland [sic] was, had walked away only half-way through his explanation' (Eureka: 383).

As Jimmy Eve is a clear symbol of a particular ideology, his characterisation links well with Bakhtin's idea of carnivalesque parody as a way of targeting those who claim to hold moral authority. Eve is denigrated to the point where he is laughable, and holds no moral or social power. However, Bakhtinian carnivalesque parody is also used in a more complex way with characters who could be termed 'everyday,' but who also clearly hold some power over those around them, most often through violence. Crab and Hally work with Jake (the main narrator of the novel) for a short time. They are Loyalist bigots, and possibly involved in some paramilitary activity. Wilson exploits the frequently used parody of Protestant paramilitaries as idiotic, and he also makes Crab and Hally's actual paramilitary credentials questionable. However, unlike the parody of Jimmy Eve (intended to wholly divest him of fear, and therefore power) this tendency is reversed to some extent. It seems that the parody of stupid Loyalist thugs is so pervasive that there needs to be a reminder that such figures are still threatening. They discover that Jake is Catholic and endeavour to threaten him by sending him what should be bullets and a picture of his foster parents. Their actions are simultaneously frightening and ridiculous: 'I finally worked out why they'd sent the

ball-bearings. The dumb shits mustn't have been able to get their hands on any actual bullets so they'd sent the BBs as a kind of air rifle substitute' (*Eureka*: 184).

Other parodies of Loyalist bigots are more clearly carnivalesque, as demonstrated by Ronnie Clay, another workmate of Jake. Ronnie is a parody of a hard-line bigot; apparently he has not been able to sleep since the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Instead of imagining calming scenes before sleep (as recommended by his doctor) he counteracts his problem by imagining violent images of racial and religious cleansing: 'He dreamt of ways of ridding the planet of all its dark-skinned humans. He dreamt of starting an underground militia to kill blacks- I didn't want to know what had happened to all the Catholics' (*Eureka*: 280). This is unpleasant, but also amusing in its impossibility. Despite his fantasies, Ronnie is completely impotent in their actual enactment, and thus is rendered harmless within the novel.

As well as having this effect of at least partially removing the power of such bigots and thugs as Crab, Hally and Ronnie, parody also has a reconciling effect in *Eureka Street*. This is far more akin to Bakhtin's carnival, which, he says, includes as it denigrates: 'Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is alien to folk culture' (11). This is most in evidence in the relationship between Jake and Aoirghe. Aoirghe represents the kind of middle-class hard-line Republican that Wilson deconstructed in *Ripley Bogle* through Maurice. Unlike Maurice, Aoirghe has no direct involvement with the violent side of any paramilitary organisation, but she admits to supporting their actions. Her view of history is depicted as very similar to Jimmy Eve's: 'The old stuff: the island of Ireland had been a free stronghold where human culture flourished at its finest. Then the English came!' (*Eureka*: 99). She clashes with

Jake, who makes no differentiation between the different religions or people who live in either the Republic or Northern Ireland. As far as he is concerned, all of the people who live there have had their part to play, and are therefore to blame in the pointlessness of the conflict: 'Eight hundred years, four hundred years, whatever way you wanted it, it was just lots of Irish killing lots of other Irish' (*Eureka*: 99).

Added to this total deadlock over the ethics of political violence, there is also a class difference in the background between Aoirghe and Jake which exacerbates the lack of respect between the two. Jake comes from a broken home in a deprived Catholic area in West Belfast. This would seem the perfect credentials for Aoirghe to respect his views. However, as Jake's views do not coincide with hers, she begins to question his credentials: 'I don't know. You just don't seem very Catholic. You don't seem very West Belfast' (*Eureka*: 95). Aoirghe prefers a stereotyped version of 'Catholic West Belfast' which is almost a parody itself in its extreme. However, as this viewpoint is discrete, and admits no plurality, it contrasts with the carnivalesque parodies in the novel which are there to deliberately destabilise such entrenched viewpoints.

This lack of respect is mutual, however. As Aoirghe is middle-class, Jake dismisses her strength of feeling as sheer bigotry: the product of a bored, spoilt character who has no real problems, and as such needs to spuriously espouse some other cause. Compounding this, for Jake, is the fact that she can expound her views without having to live in an area where she is exposed to violence: 'I envied educated people who got off on revolutionaries. Islington was full of them. It must have been fun if you didn't have to do any of the dying' (*Eureka*: 99).

However, much of the vehemence of their disagreements is moderated by the pure comic moments that happen between the two, and the clear romantic undertones. Much of this comedy, it must be said, is at Aoirghe's expense rather than Jake's. It also has the theme of calling into question her pride in her 'Irishness', and as such any notions of a homogenised Gaelic identity at all, recalling the Bakhtinian drive away from fixity and towards ambivalent relativity. Jake, for example, has trouble with her name when he first meets her:

'I'm...' She made a noise like someone choking.

'Would you like some water?' I asked politely.

 $[\ldots]$

It took ten minutes and they ended up borrowing a pen from a waiter and writing it down on a napkin but in the end I determined that the girl was called Aoirghe. (*Eureka*: 92-93)

This theme of naming continues when Jake finds out that her surname is in fact Jenkins: 'It must have broken her republican heart that she wasn't called something Irish like Ghoarghthgbk or Na Goomhnhale. I laughed. Like a drain' (*Eureka*: 292).

It should be noted, however, that most of the comic moments involving Aoirghe are told solely from Jake's point of view. The aspects, such as her name, which he uses to mock her are just as arbitrary as those that she uses to dismiss him. The parody is a reflection both on Aoirghe's one-sided view of history and politics, but also on Jake's equally shallow treatment of those who have a particular political affiliation. To some extent, Wilson has made clear in interview that Jake is also intended as a literary parody: 'Jake Jackson was supposed to be a satire of the reformed hardman, a stock character in crime fiction.' Many of the parodies of characters who engender fear directly are intended to make them wholly laughable, and reduce them to parodic

²⁸ Robert McLiam Wilson, in Richard Mills, "All Stories Are Love Stories" Robert McLiam Wilson Interviewed by Richard Mills', *Irish Studies Review* 7 (1999), 73-77 (p. 76).

'types.' However, the interaction between Aoirghe and Jake demonstrates that in order for the plurality which underpins the novel (and the carnival contained therein) to flourish, some of the characters have to be re-invested with a layered personality which is necessarily at odds with the parodic stereotypes that could be associated with them.

This humanization is demonstrated towards the end of the novel, through an incident that reveals Aoirghe's deeper personality. This incident involves Roche, a young boy from a rough neighbourhood that Jake has taken under his wing. During a riot Roche urinates on a car, and gets badly beaten as a result. At the hospital, where Jake finds him, there is a delegation of Sinn Fein members and Amnesty International representatives, including Aoirghe. One of the Sinn Fein councillors has gained a small head wound while being arrested at the riot. Apparently his car has been urinated upon by the police. It is not difficult to draw the conclusion that the Sinn Fein member owned the car, and the vandalism is due to Roche. Presumably he has also been involved in Roche's injuries, although this is not proved at any time. This is clearly a turning point for both Aoirghe and Jake. The fact that Jake takes out all of his frustration with the situation on her alone does not help matters: 'After a few minutes, she ran out into the corridor, sobbing. I followed her all the way to the exit, abusing her viciously. She fled the building' (Eureka: 364).

However, as the ceasefire comes into effect, Jake feels that he owes her an apology for these actions, having blamed her for the whole situation: 'She deserved a little and I'd given her more than a lot. Her politics were poisonous but she hadn't beaten up any twelve-year olds' (*Eureka*: 367). In reconciling himself with her, Jake seems also to reconcile himself with his own background. However, it is notable that the person who

is expected to change the most is Aoirghe. At the end of the novel, as Jake muses on the uncertainty of Belfast's future in what is, after all, an uneasy ceasefire, his hope comes from the fact that Aoirghe, more than he, seems to have changed and now 'sees' more clearly: 'She smiles and she looks at me with clear eyes' (*Eureka*: 396).

However, the character which changes most in the novel (at least outwardly), and who is the most carnivalesque character is Jake's friend, Chuckie. Chuckie is a flagrant parody of the working-class Protestant, in which the traits associated with such stereotypes are eventually inverted and made into a mockery. At the beginning of the novel, Chuckie is depicted as money hungry (as well as uneducated, fat and unattractive) and he still lives with his mother in the house that he was born in. This is in contrast to his better educated, well travelled, and apparently more interesting, Catholic friends. In short, he is: 'just a fat shite with no da' (Eureka: 57). However, this begins to change on his thirtieth birthday. A chance meeting with an American woman, Max, and a successful money making scheme begin to alter his role. He transforms the political situation of Northern Ireland into a money-making carnival that he is the head of. He exploits every stereotype about any aspect of Northern Ireland in order to raise funds for his spurious businesses. Terrorism and 'Oirishism' are subjected to the same treatment, and both are dismissed as laughable: 'To my horror, I discovered the rejected proposal for the chain of ready-to-wear balaclava shops. I was told how much money they had made from the leprechaun walking-stick scam' (Eureka: 307).

Chuckie has no solid political knowledge or education, but he beats down Jimmy Eve in a debate on American television. This is a hilarious display of bravura, as his speech is mainly induced by sheer nervousness and cocaine. He terrifies Jimmy Eve and the rest of the Just Us party with his popularity: 'the Just Us people considered him the charismatic Protestant of ancient republican demonology and that he was the kind of imponderable in Ulster politics that they wanted to avoid' (Eureka: 386-7). There are two things that are laughable about their reaction. Firstly, it seems highly amusing that Jimmy Eve can be out-done by a mixture of rugby tactics (Chuckie stuns him by whispering abuse in his ear while shaking hands) and sheer drug-induced eloquence. What is also amusing is that the Just Us party are so worried about Chuckie as a credible Protestant threat when Chuckie is, in fact, indifferent to whether Ireland is united or not. He states quite clearly that he would be happy to give up any nationality in return for prosperity: 'There are no nationalities, only rich and poor. Who gives a shit about nationhood if there's no jobs and no money?' (Eureka: 331). Like the figures in Bakhtinian carnival, Chuckie is determined to take control away from those politicians who function at a remote, ideological level, and return some power to those who wish to make a material difference to the life of the 'people.' Bakhtin states that in carnival this principle is often undertaken by grotesque figures: 'The essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity' (19-20). The lack of connection with the 'people' that the Just Us party suffers from is underlined by their comparison with Chuckie.

Though Chuckie is a conduit for the political satire aimed at the 'Just Us' party in the novel, as a character he does not appear to be consciously satirical in his actions. For example, Bakhtin's definition of the modern satirist seems to describe the opposite of Chuckie's characterisation: 'The satirist whose laughter is negative places himself

above the object of his mockery, he is opposed to it' (12). However, it becomes clear that Chuckie's role in the novel as a whole is positive. He is rarely directly derided himself, nor does he deride anyone else. Rather, he demonstrates the ambivalence towards political matters which Bakhtin notes as an important feature of the carnivalesque. His sudden success would seem due simply to greed and opportunism, except that he gains a new self-knowledge as he moves through the novel. What was, at first, purely self-interest becomes a way of looking after others. After his mother is involved in a bombing in the centre of Belfast, Chuckie buys her a whole catalogue's worth of goods (literally) in his distress at her shock. Most tellingly, the knowledge that he is about to become a father forces him to go out and consolidate his business position, not for his own benefit, but for his whole family: 'It was time to provide for his international family. It was time to make some more money' (Eureka: 319).

This intention to provide for his family is tested when he returns home from his business pursuits in America and finds that his mother has discovered that she is in love with her female childhood friend. However, while initially horrified, Chuckie's ambivalence and acceptance wins out:

He had realized that he and his mother were both so small, so breakable, that each merited more love than they knew. He didn't want to spend too much time thinking about it, but he knew that Peggy and Caroline could do whatever they liked to each other and there was simply no room for him to mind. (*Eureka*: 377)

This sense of generosity begins to suffuse Chuckie's character as the novel carries on. His large girth changes from being the sign of consumption and laziness and becomes a sign of his generous largesse. Chuckie and his optimism expand out and include the world around them, which is reflected physically, in a distinctly Bakhtinian parody:

'Chuckie's chest swelled with unfashionable grandeur, and he headed for the fridge' (*Eureka*: 390). This continues into his business interests. Chuckie decides that his real aim is to provide jobs for the region, replacing the nationality-centred politics with his economic aims and representing the true people of Belfast:

The majority politics in Northern Ireland were not political. The citizens were too shy to give the grand name of principle to any of the things that they believed, but there were still things that they believed. And that peaceful majority spent its life keeping down jobs, or failing to keep down jobs [...] he, Chuckie Lurgan, would bring back work to the city single-handed. He would be a hero. (*Eureka*: 381)

In the end, Chuckie is forced (again, by pure TV induced panic) to actually announce he will be setting up a full political party, which will be entirely non-sectarian, and will challenge the existing political parties. Additionally, this party will be linked to the OTG, a nonsensical piece of graffiti that has been popping up over the city. The man who is behind this evades capture, and his motives are never discovered, except that he clearly enjoys the confusion that the letters cause. Taken into Chuckie's hands, however, it becomes a symbol for hope in the future. The contradictions and unlikelihoods which are part of the Northern Irish political situation, and which McLiam Wilson's work is centred in, are bound together in Chuckie's actions and are made into a possible way forward for the region.

It is apparent that the period between McLiam Wilson's first and last novel is indicative of a significant change in the carnivalesque qualities of life in Northern Ireland and their potential for change. In this second book, the change takes the form of a bloodless revolution, and therefore, for Wilson, it is far more deserving of the full carnival treatment. The romantic grotesque and its incipient darkness are abandoned

for an inclusive and regenerating set of parodies that attempt to bring the community together and render those threatening parts of it harmless.

This is not to say that McLiam Wilson blindly believes the future to be rosy for Northern Ireland at this point. There are many issues that threatened the ceasefire at the time mentioned in the text, including the facts that punishment beatings went on, that neither the IRA nor Loyalist groups actually gave their arms up, and the general public's concern with the early release of terrorist prisoners. Indeed, the ceasefire was not successful (the Canary Wharf bomb followed in 1996, and there was still intergroup Loyalist violence), and it was not until the 1997 ceasefire and subsequent 1998 Good Friday Agreement that the possibility of a lasting peace seemed more likely, though this was still hampered by main-party wrangling and hard-line splinter groups. This on-going threat is encapsulated by Chapter Eleven of the novel, in which a bomb is set off in a busy shopping area, just before the ceasefire is called. Unlike the novel's other carnivalesque images, the treatment of the body here is far more reminiscent of Ripley Bogle, and contrasts with Bakhtin's description of violence in Rabelais' work in which the assaults on the characters known as the Catchpoles are described in gleeful detail: 'We see once more the anatomizing dismemberment and the culinary and medical terms which accompany it: mouth, eyes, head, neck, back, chest, arms are listed' (202). In Eureka Street the body parts of the victims are also listed, but in a way that maximises their ultimate destruction with no possibility of 'rebirth'. In contrast to Bakhtin's description, the characters are not there to represent a higher order being beaten, but are vulnerable individuals, prone to destruction:

> Her left arm was torn off by sheeted glass and most of her head and face destroyed by the twisted mass of a metal tray. The rim of the display case, which was in three large sections, sliced

through or embedded in her recently praised hips and some heavy glass jars impacted on her chest and stomach, pulverizing her major organs. Indeed, one substantial chunk of glass whipped through her midriff, taking her inner stuff halfway through the large hole in her back. (Eureka: 222)

However, an intertextual engagement with McLiam Wilson's previous text does indicate the extent to which a nascent hope can be taken. Jake meets Ripley Bogle towards the end of *Eureka Street*. It is clear that Ripley has done little to change his circumstances, except to move back to Belfast. Jake is now able, however, to offer him a new lifeline. He gives Ripley the number of his own foster parents, who are desperate for someone to help, just as Ripley is in need of aid. The ending of this part of the story is unknown, just as the ending of the story of the ceasefire was unknown at the time of the novel's publication. The act of Jake's generosity and the act of the ceasefire are both made in the same spirit of a defiant optimism, and both show the determination to rectify the horrors of the past:

I had no idea whether he would get in touch with Matt and Mamie. I thought it was more unlikely than likely. I didn't imagine I'd done anything to patch up that spectacularly damaged life. But the trees were bright in the sun and the women were pretty and half dressed and I was stubbornly jubilant. (*Eureka*: 348)

A Star Called Henry: Roddy Doyle

Unlike Doyle's previous work, A Star Called Henry (2000) is not rooted in contemporary Dublin, but moves backwards in time to the early-twentieth century. The novel takes in the earliest stages of the setting up of the Irish Republic, including the abortive 1916 Easter Rising. In dealing with these early stages of the Republic, Doyle investigates the values that the ensuing society was, or is, based upon. As he says in interview: 'In a way he [the protagonist Henry Smart] has been instrumental in

finding what being Irish means because he is located in a particular time and place.²⁹ In the new days of secular economic success following the transition documented in *The Barrytown Trilogy*, it seems that it is just as needful to examine the basis upon which the society, government and history of the Republic is based. This is also part of a wider trend, in which critics and writers began revising this iconic historical moment and subsequent effects, such as the increasing influence of the IRA and partition. As Patrick Magee notes, there have been various views of these events: 'From a certain perspective in the South, a distinction was made between the old and contemporary IRA. A more recent revision had them equally culpable, for now Irish nationalism, the grand narrative of 1920, which viewed partition as unfinished business, was held to be the problem.'³⁰

A Star Called Henry deals with similarly problematic identities and liminal characters to those found in McLiam Wilson's work. Issues of marginalization, which are sketched out in Doyle's Barrytown Trilogy, are extended here to include different classes, religions and political affiliations. He depicts a foundation of freedom that is twisted from freedom for all, to a freedom for the few that pass the tests of those who are likely to take power. This darkness of the past is mirrored in the change of tone between The Barrytown Trilogy and this later novel, and in the way Doyle treats the 'carnival' of revolution.

29

²⁹ Roddy Doyle in interview with Sharon Monteith (see above), p. 57. Doyle is not the only novelist from the Republic who uses the past to investigate the present. Claire Boylan investigates women's roles in the Republic from an historical perspective in *Home Rule* (London: Abacus, 1997 [1992]) and Michael Curtin investigates the more recent past of the 1950s in *The Plastic Tomato Cutter* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997 [1989]).

³⁰ Patrick Magee, Gangsters or Guerillas?: Representations of Irish Republicans in 'Troubles Fiction' (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001), p. 188.

There are some ways, especially early in the novel, in which the images of the carnival grotesque used in A Star Called Henry appear to show it as a hopeful mode of change, one in which the disenfranchised lower classes may come to gain recognition. Henry acts as the leader of the carnival for those like him, and he is a figure of hope, change and renewal in the book. He is depicted as a grotesque figure, in the sense that his physical and mental prowess are exaggerated until they become ridiculous. Henry apparently leaves home aged five, partially to escape the squalid conditions. More ridiculous and carnivalesque is his growth rate and sexual maturity. He even boasts that even as a small child women are attracted to him in a way not connected with maternal instincts: 'I was never a child. I could read their eyes. I could smell their longing and their pain. I'd stand right up against them, confuse them, harass them.'31 By fourteen, and his inclusion in the occupation of the Post Office during the 1916 Rising, he is six foot two inches tall. When he escapes from jail after being imprisoned for his involvement in the Irish Republican Army, he falls into the arms of an equally overblown character, Piano Annie. Their physical relationship seems an attempt to enhance the mythology that Henry has built up around himself: 'She climbed down from where I'd ridden her, up on to my shoulders. In the last seconds, before I came- she'd got there a good minute before me- her fingers couldn't reach my back' (Star: 174).

What is most striking about the images of the carnivalesque in this novel, however, is that they always have a truly dark side. No part of the carnival that Henry is involved in is ever simply positive. Even the apparently great and guiltless sexual relationships Henry has seem to stem from his horrific, and neglected, childhood. He breaks away

-

³¹ Roddy Doyle, A Star Called Henry (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 65. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

from the women who gaze upon him as a child to go back to his broken mother, who is now incapable of looking after her children with the maternal affection they require:

I sometimes crept by the house to see that my mother was still alive. I left food when I had any, even a bottle of gin [...] She'd open her arms and I'd crawl in, with Victor, over the other children, just for a minute. She'd cry, and sometimes I would too. (*Star*: 65)

This search for affection seems to carry on later in Henry's life. The only other woman who really takes care of him is Miss O'Shea, a school teacher who allows him into her class. Henry decides that: 'By the end of the first day [...] Miss O'Shea had fallen in love with me' (*Star*: 72). It is true that he later begins a relationship with her during the Post Office occupation and eventually marries her. However, even then he still clings to the idea of her as the teacher of his youth, refusing to listen to her name when they are married, so he only ever knows her as 'Miss O'Shea'.

As such, Henry's own projection of himself as the leader of the carnival within the novel is compelling in a similar way to the characterisations of the Rabbittes, but it is also highly questionable. Early in the novel, Henry seems able to use his own degradation to his advantage. He seems to show the movement from the bodily lower stratum in Bakhtinian carnival, to the upward motion of renewal and rebirth. After his father all but deserts his family, they move quite literally lower, as they move from a top floor room, to the dankest of cellars: 'There were four children, countless ghosts and my growing, dying mother packed into the only corner of the room that wasn't flooded, all fighting for space on the poor old mattress' (*Star*: 48). It is Henry who is

the first of the family to try and escape, and drags his younger brother, Victor, with him.

He uses his knowledge of the seediest parts of Dublin to his advantage. He even uses the unimpeded breeding of the rats (seemingly a signifier also of the lower stratum combining breeding, death and detritus) to make his living. He and his brother Victor find the rats' nests and boil their babies in order to attract the parents, which they catch and sell as the bait for dog-fighting. Though a deeply unpleasant image for the reader, Henry is clearly proud of his inventiveness, and the disgust in the novel is reserved for the audience at the dog fighting rings who pay Henry to risk his fingers pulling enraged rats from his bag: 'I'd stare at them as I sank my hand into the sack and felt the fury in the rats' backs and the men would look away. I'd let them see the little boy being asked to maim himself for their entertainment' (*Star*: 66).

There are periods, such as when he joins the Irish Republican Army, when Henry is able to escape these jobs. However, it is notable, that it seems to be *only* Henry who manages to get out of this life. His family stay there, and are swallowed by the lower stratum, and all of the filth that goes with it. Perhaps because they are at the mercy of the lower stratum of an uncaring city, rather than their own or a real community's bodily lower stratum, they are destroyed, rather than rejuvenated. They become alcoholic, like his mother, or die young, like his brother Victor. This lower stratum, represented in the book by the cellars and sewers of Dublin, is a dangerous place for many, but for some it is an escape. For Henry's father, it is part of his livelihood. As a brothel bouncer and part-time assassin, he disposes of bodies in the streams and sewers that run around and under Dublin.

His relationship with Henry, and the relationship with the underground world that he shows his son, is complex. To Henry, he is a stranger but also a kind of hero. When the very youthful Henry shouts at Edward VII to: 'Fuck off with your hat!' (Star: 51) it is his father that saves him from the crowd who attack Henry and his younger brother, taking them into the sewers which criss-cross Dublin. This underground world that Henry's father inhabits seems, on one level, to equate to the regenerating and life-giving earth of Bakhtinian and Rabelasian carnival as it saves Henry and his brother from the mob, despite the proximity to human waste and filth. Bakhtin notes the image of the earth, and the 'earthy', as 'swallowing' but also life-giving: 'Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time' (21). However, this also hides, rather than swallows and renews, Henry's father's victims. It also takes away Henry's father, who disappears back into the metaphorical and literal underground, leaving Henry once more: 'The memory of his voice was still down there; it drifted just under my face, and then I could hear splashing as he marched away from us' (Star: 59).

Henry embroiders his father's personality into a figure as gargantuan and carnivalesque as himself. His father works for a brothel madam known as Dolly Oblong, whom he becomes infatuated with, and indeed his loyalty to her induces Henry's father to leave his family. To Henry Sr, she seems overwhelming, exotic and cunning calling herself 'Alfie Gandon' in her business dealings; to Henry Junior, she is still part of the legend that is his father. His father is a paid murderer, but his actions are made almost excusable in the corrupt Dublin of the day, and when the police catch up with him, he disappears into the night, never to be found again. Henry takes the

filth and degradation that his father and Dolly Oblong deal in, and transforms them into a grotesque that celebrates the possibility of outwitting those authority figures that keep the poor where they are.

There is, however, another side to this. Henry is also capable of stating that: 'My father was a gobshite' (*Star*: 60). Henry Sr's infatuation with Dolly Oblong is never returned; indeed he only speaks to her a handful of times, and this is strictly to be given the names of those he is meant to kill. Her apparent cunning in giving herself the alter ego 'Alfie Gandon' is a mistake on Henry's father's part. Gandon is in fact a successful businessman, who controls the seemingly unassailable figure of Dolly Oblong. Gandon is responsible for the likely death of Henry's father, though Doyle leaves the possibility of his survival open. By the time that Henry is part of the troops that take over the Post Office during the Easter Rising, Alfie Gandon has become part of the political wing of the fight for a Republic. This is only one of the many problems with the foundations that this Republic is built upon that Henry finds.

Henry joins the Irish Citizen Army, not through any romantic ideas of his own, but through his genuine regard for James Connolly (who appears as an important Socialist figure) and also because it seems another way out of the slums. The revolutionists themselves are already divided along class and geographic lines even before they achieve a Republic. Henry states that he is in the revolution only for pecuniary gain, or personal fame. As an aspiring leader of a Bakhtinian-style carnival, he enjoys the regard of his peers, not his leaders. He despises those who are there for advancement in what he already sees as a flawed society, or even worse, for flawed ideals:

I could tell from the back of his head, he was one of the Christian Brothers' boys, here to die for Ireland, dying to please his betters [...] I was ready to die myself- I was banking on itbut I'd been hoping to get a few quid into my pocket in case the worst came to the worst and I lived. (Star: 89)

Henry's position as the representative of the 'people' versus those who are in the Post Office due to ideology becomes more apparent with the arrival of a group of women who wish to pick up their husbands' wages from the regular British army. Henry's opinion of these women is very different from the way they are viewed by some of his comrades (including the historical figure of Michael Collins), and this puts the idea of an equal and democratic Republic on an unsure footing. Henry has to persuade Collins to allow these women the money that they need to live on. It is quite clear that some of the members of the Republican contingent are repelled by the low-class women: 'Jesus, I hated the Volunteers. The poets and the farm boys, the fuckin' shopkeepers. They detested the slummers- the accents and the dirt, the Dublinness of them' (*Star*: 103). This class and rural/urban divide is something which Doyle identifies at the very heart of what is meant to be a carnivalesque revolution, which should bring equality to all.

It is clear that, for Henry, the revolution is a class-based one. This is illustrated when the Post Office is attacked by British forces. Instead of wasting his bullets on the cavalry, Henry starts shooting at shops which he sees as the symbols of class subjection:

I shot and killed all that I had been denied, all the commerce and snobbery that had been mocking me and other hundreds of thousands behind glass and locks, all the injustice, unfairness and shoes- while the lads took chunks out of the military. (*Star*: 105)

It is clear that Henry hopes to lead a revolution that involves all the people, and he, indeed, witnesses the lower classes rising up to claim what they have been denied as they use the confusion in order to loot the shops: 'Now that it was night and safe and the rozzers had hidden themselves away, the citizens of Dublin were lifting everything the could get their hands on' (Star: 113). However, this riotous amusement of the people is under threat not from the British, but from the Volunteers, some of whom wish to shoot the looters as an example. Henry has to argue that they be allowed to carry on in safety. It is, at moments like this, that the carnivalesque grotesque and the romantic grotesque intersect. The free people provide images of amusing incongruity as they procure the items of consumption denied to them: 'Another kid, dressed in the threads of a golfer five times his size, dashed by with his back parallel to the street, held down by the weight of a full golf bag' (Star: 113). At the same time, however, the actual violence of the situation gives rise to images of a darkly grotesque nature, a reminder of death rather than re-birth. Several of the looters carry obvious signs of paupers' diseases (such as ringworm) and there are images of disturbing, rather than amusing, incongruity: 'a woman made an armchair for herself out of one of the dead horses; she wrapped herself from the wind and rain in a velvet curtain and cuddled up between the horses legs' (Star: 117). The threat of the Volunteers' highly moralistic tone turns a joyful reversal of fortune into a situation in which they consider using force against their own 'people,' and Eco's theory that revolution only results in another set of repressive social rules comes to the fore again here.

The possibility of the carnivalesque grotesque, the efficacy of the lower stratum and Henry's status as the leader of a 'people's' carnival becomes more questionable still after the Rising is over. Henry is one of many taken to Dublin's prison as a traitor. Unlike the rest, however, he uses his inherited knowledge to make his escape through the underground sewers and rivers of Dublin. There even seems to be a mystical link between him and his missing father, which helps to keep him safe and on the right track: 'I was in a sewer again and I felt fingers under my chin- safe safe safe—holding my mouth over the goo' (*Star*: 140). However, this only seems to keep Henry safe when he is being true to himself. After his arrest, Henry appears to be swayed from his resolutely pro-lower class stance by the lure of legendary status. He is later signed up to become a member of the IRA, partly seduced by the new songs that have apparently built up around his name and also by the fact that he has been deliberately sought out: 'Before I went back to my bed that night I'd been sworn into the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the secret society at the centre of the centre of all things. I was a Fenian. I was special, one of the few' (*Star*: 184).

It is at this point that the complex relationship between Henry and the lower stratum of death (previously signified by his father) comes to the fore. Henry becomes a right hand man of Michael Collins, and deeply involved in the IRA. He finds himself called upon to execute various people, mirroring his father's employment, except now this is in the name of freeing Ireland. In some ways this seems to Henry worse than the crimes of Henry Sr, as the actual targets rarely seem to be real threats to the IRA, and he despises the hypocrisy of the ideologically suspect reasons given for their deaths. He begins to realise that he is just as much of a fool as his father in his own way: 'They knew what they were doing when they chose me; I was quick and I was ruthless, outspoken and loyal- and such an eejit it took me years to realise what was going on' (*Star*: 240).

The fact that the apparent disloyalty of his victims is often due to their economic or social circumstances, and rarely due to a deliberate political stance on their part, eventually makes Henry question his role. He murders Piano Annie's husband (distrusted by the IRA as he joined the British Army during the First World War, desperately needing the pay). Later in the novel, however, he is called upon to murder a friend of his, David Climanis. Again, Climanis' political views do not seem to be the real question. Rather it seems to be his Latvian nationality (with its connotations of Communism) and his Jewish upbringing that are at fault. The tragedy is that he himself states very clearly that he does not adhere particularly strongly to either of these things: 'The Jews are a people. So I am one of the Jews. Jewish is a religion. I am *not* one of them' (*Star*: 283). Just as Eco's model of carnival rebellion predicts, the marginalization before the revolution is shifted to another set of the 'people' rather than removed.

This purification of the movement and of the city from unwanted elements, begins to coalesce in Henry's life even more directly. When Henry meets Miss O'Shea again she is a member of the women's force in the Post Office, Cumann na mBan. Miss O'Shea resents her constricted role as a woman, but realises that those she is fighting with will never let her break away from it: 'I knew it the minute they started shouting for their tea' (*Star*: 123). After their marriage, Henry and Miss O'Shea are both involved with the IRA. However, Miss O'Shea begins to attract too much attention. It appears that the war has turned into a kind of money-making exercise for some of the IRA (a theme taken up by many contemporary writers, especially from Northern Ireland), that her highly moral stance threatens. Henry suddenly comes face to face

with one of his own protégés, Ivan, who has twisted Henry's minor profiteering into something much uglier. He has already had Miss O'Shea's mother's cottage burnt down, and he goes on to threaten both her and Henry. Henry is happy to pilfer from anyone who can afford it, in a carnivalesque manner, but Ivan's scheme is much more far-reaching, and involves repressing those who he ostensibly claims to fight for: 'And when it's over and the guns are rusty, they'll love me and remember who freed them. But they'll also remember that they were once terrified of me, although they'll never say anything about it' (*Star*: 316).

Henry finally realises after this, and his second stint in jail, that he has ceased to think for himself, following orders because: 'cleverer men than me had told me to' (*Star*: 318). Henry realises that he can no longer aspire to the role of leader-of-the-carnival that he has tried to envisage. Both he and his wife are in danger from the British and the IRA due to their refusal to toe the party line. The leaders are now people like Alfie Gandon and Ivan, who run the country and repress the people for their own gain. Eco's analysis may thus be seen to be borne out, as the revolution only leads to another social hierarchy and set of rules.

Henry's only remaining option is escape. He returns to Dublin, and, in a parting shot, finds Alfie Gandon, and kills him. Gandon seems to be a symbol of the rot that Henry wishes to rid his carnival of, even if he can no longer be leader of it. Henry returns, for the last time, to the underground rivers and sewers of Dublin. This time, however, it seems to be a genuine re-birth. With his exit from the country, he will no longer be swallowed again by the lower stratum and underground life of Dublin or Ireland: 'I came out of the water behind Kilmainham. Washed, cleaned. A beautiful morning'

(Star: 339). This exit, however, demands a sacrifice. He leaves his wife and new daughter behind in Kilmainham women's prison. In order to be reborn, to gain his freedom and not to be dragged back into the hellish underground that Republic now represents to him, Henry has to leave some of his family behind. Nevertheless, this final assertion is one of escape- and victory: 'Every breath of its [Ireland's] stale air, every square inch of the place mocked me, grabbed at my ankles. It needed blood to survive and it wasn't getting mine' (Star: 342).

Conclusion

The tension between the positive connotations associated with the Bakhtinian grotesque and the negative ones associated with Romantic grotesque imagery, as well as Eco's related assertion that the carnivalesque is inherently cyclical in nature, are clear within the work of these two writers. What I would like to take forward in this thesis are the different ways in which these two writers have repositioned themselves within this model over time, and how this can be contextualised in terms of social and political change, within both the Republic and Northern Ireland.

The Bakhtinian grotesque is normally linked to the idea of a positive carnivalesque revolution, in which the possibility of society being re-born in a 'better' guise is opened up. The Romantic grotesque, as Bakhtin notes, is associated with threatening images, and connotations of the individual being at the mercy of larger movements in the world (be they cosmic or man-made). In the work of both McLiam Wilson and Doyle, the Romantic grotesque appears to represent the darker aspects of society, which may be associated either with change or the complete impossibility of change

but, most importantly, with the violence or repression which forms part of certain moments of time captured within the novels.

The link between Eco's theory of the constant reassertion of repressive social structures and the darker tone of the Romantic grotesque is illustrated by McLiam Wilson's first novel, Ripley Bogle. This can be linked to the seemingly interminable political model that Northern Ireland was caught in at the time. The situation appears strongly linked to Eco's cyclical model in his critique of Bakhtin. There are smallscale revolutionary acts; however, these are rarely depicted as 'carnivalesque' as they do not lead to any real change in the status quo. Whether Loyalist or Nationalist, political and paramilitary groups are depicted as wishing for a change in the social structure and government of the province which are absolute, and involve the destruction of one another. This, coupled with the public refusal of the British government to have any dealings with terrorists (or parties associated with terrorism) leads to a symbolically farcical dead-lock. The impossibility of change in this situation is reflected in the use of the dark and inverted Romantic grotesque. Ripley himself can never escape his background and the violence associated with it. The entire narrative of his life is also cyclical. The homelessness that he escapes in Belfast, he returns to in London. The violence that he presents himself apart from in Belfast, he enters into in England, as he loses his temper and injures a tramp.

Ripley depicts himself as at the mercy of outside forces which are out of his control, and is keen to distance himself from any blame or responsibility (hence perhaps the appropriateness of the Romantic grotesque mode where the individual is powerless against outside forces). However, the text's positioning of Ripley in relation to its

readership questions whether this hopeless way of looking at both Northern Ireland and the individual is a helpful one. The very fact that Ripley tells us at the end of the novel that he has been lying, questions whether this decline is really inevitable. It is true that his childhood is dreadful, but it could be argued that it is his adult actions that have led to his downfall. The same could be said of Northern Ireland in the context we are given here. Such a hard-line view renders the novel a biting satire, but leaves open the possibility for change in the future. Even Ripley's fate is not entirely decided: 'Smoking with steady, slow compassion, I begin to make some plans' (*Ripley*: 326).

This more optimistic view of the world is given its full rein in *Eureka Street*. Correspondingly, we see Wilson turning to the more positive side of the grotesque, that associated with Bakhtinian carnival, and the prospect of rejuvenation. As I have already observed, Chuckie is the archetypal Bakhtinian carnival leader, and the repository of optimism in the novel. The political change surrounding the 1994 ceasefire appears to encourage the tentative hope of real change. However, it is also important to note that the spirit of optimism that suffuses the pages of the text is not shared by all of the characters. Jake, in particular, draws attention to the continuing shootings and punishment beatings, and even Chuckie concedes at one point that the possible release of terrorist prisoners worries him. Indeed, the optimism of the novel relies on a blind cheerfulness, which is perhaps at odds with the narrative conclusion of the novel, where a new clear sightedness is highlighted.

The relationship between optimism and pessimism, carnival and social repression, and the Romantic grotesque versus the Bakhtinian grotesque, is blended more complexly in the work of Roddy Doyle. His first set of books, *The Barrytown Trilogy*, appear to offer us an almost overtly Bakhtinian image of the carnival, centred around various members of the Rabbite family. *The Commitments* shows sexual freedom and a new voice for the disenfranchised through music; in *The Snapper* the rejuvenating aspects of the lower bodily stratum make an appearance in the form of Sharon's physical reproduction; and in *The Van* the act of conspicuous consumption shows itself as a possible act of freedom in allowing Jimmy Sr and Bimbo a way of a life which is not ruled by other employers or the welfare state.

However, throughout these novels, the cyclical nature of revolution (as espoused by Eco) makes itself clearly felt. Each novel is, in itself, figured as a minor revolution for the characters concerned, offering a possible new way of life, or thinking. But equally, by the end or start of the next novel we find the characters back in much the same position as they were when they began. Barrytown remains the symbolic heart of the texts, and in some way the characters are always drawn back there. The political climate of the time appears to preclude the characters moving out of their normal sphere. The new influx of wealth appears to be just out of reach of those like the Rabbite family. Moreover, within this carnivalesque setting, which sets social hegemony against the repressed 'people,' the characters themselves are frequently reduced to carnivalesque parodies. Yet at no point through the novel do we lose sympathy with the characters, or question their motives.

Doyle's novel *A Star Called Henry* is, however, much more complex in its questioning of one of the founding moments of the Republic of Ireland's history: that of the Easter Rising of 1916. It is particularly notable here that Doyle switches from

exclusively using images connotative of the Bakhtinian grotesque, also employing ones associated with the Romantic grotesque. Doyle highlights the emancipation of the poor, of children, of minorities and of women, as well as the freedom of the country itself. However, the fact that few of these groups experienced any great changes after the Easter 1916 Rising (indeed many of them seem to have suffered more in the text), figures the Rising as a lost opportunity for real change. The fact that, by the end of the novel, the up and coming political figures are frequently shown to be as self-serving and inclined to their own bigotries (which replace those of the previous regime), clearly backs up Eco's statement that revolutions only ever lead to the imposition of a new set of rules, which always have to repress someone.

We find, however, in *A Star Called Henry*, that the images are not wholly negative. In this second novel, Doyle appears to be calling for a reappraisal, not just of an historical moment, but of something far more fundamental. By making his characters and the situations more complex, he appears to be calling the society to question itself as a whole. He shows society to be based not only on historical and political precedent, but often on the assumptions of people themselves. The history in Doyle's novel relies not on the major groups involved within it, but on the individuals who make up those groups. By making Henry allied to few of those groups, a random atom in the apparently regular structure of the story of the 1916 Rising, Doyle highlights the individual positions and alliances that, in fact, all go towards making history.

It is via broadly 'humanist' narratives like this that the novels appear to test the boundaries of both Bakhtin's and Eco's models of carnival/revolution. By concentrating on the group as made up of individuals, rather than on the individual as

subservient to the group, both Doyle and Wilson offer a different model of revolution. I would suggest that the porosity of the boundary between the carnivalesque grotesque and the Romantic grotesque comes from the uncertainty within society, both in the Republic and Northern Ireland, about the efficacy of categorising people according to class, religion or political affiliation. Groups are a sign of strength, and a large enough group can engender change. However, grouping individuals also leads to the abuse of power in forms of sectarianism and bigotry, particularly when one of those individuals refuses to fall in with the group.

Both Doyle's and Wilson's most positive characters are those who are able to mould their own identities to some extent. That is not to say they are 'outside' society. Rather they may be used to depict alternative models for change. Through these individuals, Doyle and Wilson demonstrate that in some ways Eco is correct: society never does evolve in leaps (or even a straight line) from bad to good. However, my own feeling is that they adapt Bakhtin's model of sudden revolution into something resembling an upward spiral. The shibboleths of history, of sectarianism, sexism or racism (both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic) always draw the individual back to them. However, the individual can return with a heightened knowledge and self-awareness that means the experience is never the same again.

It is in this mode of discourse, which I think vacillates between the 'freedom' celebrated by Bakhtin and the 'repression' figured by Eco, that we see the most positive moves forward, if by a tortuous route. These novels point towards a way of living and change which is not easily effected in everyday life, in which socioeconomic factors work, habitually, to keep 'the people' down. It is this 'mundane

life', in which comedy is as much a component part as a deliberate political statement, which we move on to in the next chapter, here we will see how comedy may test boundaries on a smaller scale and often in a more domestic setting.

CHAPTER TWO

MUNDANE MIRTH: THE EVERYDAY IN COMEDY

Introduction

The emergence of marginalized or silenced groups within society is an issue touched upon in the previous chapter in terms of political affiliation and class. However, I am also aware that this argument has been couched using Bakhtin's term of 'people', which, as previously noted, is a rather nebulous and potentially homogenising term. It assumes a stratified society consisting of the 'everyday people' and those in power. I would like to argue within this chapter that society both in Northern Ireland and the Republic holds more than one marginalized group, and that comedy is often used to convey their 'everyday', 'mundane' and 'quotidian' experiences to political effect.

Comedy from and about the everyday may be used to describe this site, or it may be used to push beyond it. Stott notes that poststructuralism, in particular: 'has configured laughter as a trope that expresses a sense of the beyond, of something outside language and cognition as it is organised in the quotidian.' Comedy from and about the everyday often throws illuminating glances both towards what could be and what actually is. The question of whether comedy always pushes beyond the boundaries of the 'ordinary' or merely reiterates the status quo is particularly relevant to much of the literature I shall be studying in this chapter.

¹ Andrew Stott, Comedy (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 141.

The works I shall be dealing with here focus on characters in terms of relationships and community: the roles which they are expected to play in the 'everyday' and also the difficulties that the characters face when they break out, or are forced out, of these roles. However, what marks these novels out is the emphasis that they place on the 'empty' spaces of time within everyday life, often emphasising the 'ordinary' nature of the protagonists. Joe Moran defines this notion of routine emptiness as the 'quotidian': 'empty, purposeless moments of daily life, filled with activities such as commuting and office routines, that we generally take for granted but that take up so much of our lives.' Some of the texts here even view this 'quotidian' as a way of life to be aimed at and prized, often demonstrating a need to regain some kind of normality in an extraordinary situation.

This chapter questions whether the main role of comedy is as a force for change beyond everyday values, or is simply a way of reinforcing them. At this point, the idea of the 'ordinary,' linked to the mundane, becomes a politically loaded term. Highlighting the mundane may be a way of exposing the lives of previously marginalized or repressed people, rendering them 'ordinary' instead of 'Other'. It is often the comedy within these works which raises the 'ordinary' and the 'mundane' into a subject worthy of investigation. However, the idea of the 'ordinary' may also carry with it connotations of the status quo, and can involve keeping marginalized groups in their place. Equally, due to this concern with the mundane, comedy is frequently treated as 'low' culture (culture with a small 'c'), and the study of it is often restricted to a select band of comedians or comic writers: 'Comedy, a genre known for its low cultural status, is reduced to the works of a small number of

² Joe Moran, 'The Value of Trivial Pursuits', *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 2 March 2007, p.17.

exceptional "comic minds". This low-culture is often accused of escapism, or wish-fulfilment, which may be viewed as the exact opposite of the 'mundane'. However, I would like to argue that writers such as Colin Bateman, Marian Keyes, Pauline McLynn and Brendan O'Carroll are only able to successfully write in these modes (such as the thriller, nostalgia and romantic comedy) by embedding the everyday within their works. It is only by reference to this, and knowledge of how their chosen form and comedy alleviates the mundane everyday, that their novels appeal to the reader.

These escapist tendencies are most apparent in the form and narrative thrust of the works. The similarity between the narratives seen in Shakespearean and classical comedy is quite striking. As Northrop Frye has observed, the traditional trajectory for comedy begins when the hero is made to overcome a series of problems and misunderstandings which prevents his relationship with a 'true love', with the hero often gaining new self-knowledge along the way. These obstacles frequently take the form of other characters:

What normally happens is that a young man wants a young woman, that his desire is resisted by some opposition, usually paternal, and that near the end of the play some twist in the plot enables the hero to have his will.⁴

The contemporary novels in this chapter are also informed partially by a bildungsroman narrative, in which the lead character is required to make a journey of discovery in order to achieve his/her happy ending. This ending often centres around

³ Henry Jenkins and Kristine Brunovska Karnick, 'Introduction: Comedy and the Social World', in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. by Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (Routledge: London: 1995), pp. 265-281 (p.266).

⁴ Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 163.

the discovery or reclamation of a (usually heterosexual) romantic relationship.⁵ This chapter will investigate the appropriation and alteration of this trajectory by contemporary authors, most especially female writers, which points towards a rethinking of such traditional roles but also the persistence of some social mores.

Co-existent with this formal drive to a traditional comedic 'happy ending', however, is the direct treatment of the everyday and the mundane. In many of these novels the comedy is often closely grounded in the characters and their everyday language, rather than in the deliberately overblown parodies of texts such as *Eureka Street* (1997 [1996]) or *A Star Called Henry* (2000). Indeed, the novels which tend to test the status quo most actively resist the drive towards a neat 'happy ending.' Rather, they highlight the various agents or 'state apparatus' that restrict, and potentially repress, marginalized groups in the 'everyday.' Furthermore, they highlight the fact that this mundane life carries on, not only for the characters dealt with in the text, but also for an implied mass of humanity who share their everyday existence.

This focus on the quotidian, especially within the form of the novel, also elicits connections with most definitions of literary realism, especially in its naturalistic depiction of events. As Armes explains, the link between comedy and realism goes back to a time when 'real life' or the 'ordinary' was deemed suitable only for comedy. He notes this, in fact, while implicitly prioritising writers who treat the ordinary with a sense of gravitas: 'Writers such as Defoe, Richardson and Fielding in England broke with ancient doctrine of levels of representation (whereby realism was deemed

_

⁵ One exception to this treatment of purely heterosexual relationships in work by women is: Emma Donoghue, *Stir-fry* (London: Penguin, 1995 [1994]), which centres on a lesbian relationship.

suitable only for comedy) and dealt seriously with the lives of ordinary individuals.'6

His own definition of realism seems, indeed, to absorb the idea that the merely 'funny'
does not reveal any deeper truths beyond its immediate impact of laughter. However,
Armes also notes the social aspect of realism, which it seems to share with the
communal act of comedy: 'In its broadest sense realism is an attitude of mind, a desire
to adhere strictly to the truth, a recognition that man is a social animal and a
conviction that he is inseparable from his position in society.'7

Comedy, while it may not always adhere strictly to 'the truth' (though many texts dealt with in this particular chapter strive to do this), is frequently considered a 'communal' act, and certainly the novels featured in this chapter depict their protagonists as part of a wider social domain. Society here is a tapestry of groups, which may be held together by the comedy within the text, as any joke must uncover some common ground between the teller and the listener (otherwise the listener will not understand the joke). As Critchley asserts:

The thesis that I would like to pursue is that humour is a form of *sensus communis*, common sense. That is, jokes are the expression of sociality and possess an implicit reasonableness. I will give the grounds for this claim presently, but the essential point here is that humour is shared.⁸

The idea that comedy is 'shared,' however, and also that it has an inherent 'reasonableness' once more leads us back to the politically charged notion of the 'ordinary.' 'Reasonable' carries with it overtones of both the rational (reason) and that which seems 'reasonable' to others. What can seem rational and reasonable to one

⁸ Simon Critchley, On Humour (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 79.

⁶ Roy Armes. Patterns of Realism (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986 [1971]), p. 17.

⁷ Armes, p. 17.

person can, of course, seem the opposite to another, especially if they are the butt of this 'reasonable' humour. As we shall see, comedy from within a community can endeavour to look beyond the boundaries of that community, or may merely reassert them, and it may do both for radical or conservative purposes.

This balance between the radical and conservative, or the impulse between exposing or simply reasserting, social boundaries may be seen in the use of nostalgia. As noted in the introduction to this thesis, Edna Longley mentions a close relationship between the impulses of nostalgia and humour. Many authors use comedy and nostalgia as a way of recovering the everyday voices of apparently mundane people who have been ignored in the past, and using the comedy to link these voices to the present as part of a shared sensis communis. Linda Hutcheon's view of historiography (which may include nostalgia) sheds some light upon this connection. She notes that postmodern historiography is often an attempt to recover voices which would otherwise be lost:

We now get the histories (in the plural) of the losers as well as the winners, of the regional (and colonial) as well as the centrist, of the unsung many as well as the much sung few, and I might add, of women as well as men.

Certainly, all of the novels considered here contain voices which may exist outside the mainstream, and belong to the 'unsung many'. Hutcheon's assertion, however, relies upon a stable sense of the dominating hegemony. In her theory, proper, radical postmodern literature must structurally question this:

It foregrounds and thus contests the conventionality and unacknowledged ideology of that assumption of seamlessness and asks its readers to question the processes by which we represent our selves and our world to

⁹ Linda Hutcheon. The Politics of Postmoderism (London: Routledge, 1993 [1989]), p. 66.

ourselves and to become aware of the means by which we make sense of and construct order out of experience in our particular culture. 10

The texts dealt with in this chapter, however, rarely enter into overt structural experimentation. Yet by placing the comedy in the mouths of the unsung many they are often able to question not only the dominant hegemony, but also the very idea of its existence, and the rhetoric in which it is habitually couched.

Many of these works also resist an easy categorization with regards to their representation of dominant and suppressed groups. We have already seen, particularly in Wilson's work, that the position of losers and winners, victims and aggressors, has been much confused in the violence of the Troubles. It is clear that the violent expression of the conflicting ideologies within Northern Ireland is questioned through comedy. This means that it is often not a particular political 'side' which is lampooned as repressive, but the way in which characters choose to express their standpoint. The Republic of Ireland has recently found itself in the midst of social and economic change, which has considerably altered traditional social roles. In particular, the influence of the Catholic Church is under threat, a factor which leads to questions over what moral boundaries and modes of social organisation are now being adopted. It is this confusion which both marks out historiographical literature in the Republic and Northern Ireland, and also provides the space for much of the humour.

This tendency can, however, render these novels complicated- if not confused- in political terms. Even Longley's association between humour and nostalgia (as outlined in the main introduction) throws up the possibility of this indulgence being a

¹⁰ Hutcheon, p. 53-54.

non-progressive return to the past, drawing the reader into a comfortable place which elides, rather than questions, current issues. The very realism of novels set in the contemporary time also means that humour here may reinforce the status quo by placing the reader in a common ground with these everyday characters, essentially stating that this is the 'way things are'. In this chapter I wish to show the way in which many of these novels engage the 'everyday' in both a conservative (and ideologically reassuring) and a radical (and ideologically challenging) way. More importantly, I wish to show how comedy may confuse the line between these two tendencies, questioning the clear binary opposition which critics posit.

Gender Roles

The novels dealt with here, with their emphasis on everyday, mundane, and therefore domestic issues, means that changes in the area of gender constitute a major preoccupation for both male and female writers. In the Republic, especially, women have been the group most affected by increased secularisation and their traditional domestic roles have been affected by the access to new rights such as divorce (introduced in 1996), contraception, and a relaxation of laws surrounding the distribution of information on abortion. State involvement in policing people's sexual behaviour (clearly linked to the Republic of Ireland's absorption of Catholic Church doctrine into the state apparatus) means that women have long been at the mercy of oppressive ideology. In the words of Edna Longley: 'Church-state politics also bring feminism into the foreground, since control over women's minds and bodies is central to the argument.'¹¹

¹¹ Edna Longley, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland*, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994), p. 34.

Indeed, during the past 30 years there has been a much vaunted move in the Republic of Ireland from a country in which self-repression was an intrinsic part of social behaviour towards a freer, more individualised, post-modern society. The united society that the government and Catholic Church sought to maintain has been passed over in favour of late-capitalist consumerism:

Social order was maintained as long as individuals did not seek to satisfy their pleasures and desires- as long as they practiced self-denial. Over the last fifty years we have moved in Ireland from a Catholic culture of self-abnegation in which sexual pleasure and desire were repressed, to a culture of consumption and self-indulgence in which the fulfilment of pleasure and desires is emphasized.¹²

As another illustration of this change in attitudes and public behaviour, O'Connell wryly comments on the increased availability of condoms: 'In 1991, Richard Branson's Virgin Megastore in the centre of Dublin was pursued by the Gardaí for making condoms available for sale. Now we would happily wear condoms on our head in public if we felt it was the fashionable thing to do.'13

The implementation of laws on divorce, contraception and abortion marks out very real differences between Northern Ireland and the Republic. Abortion, for example, is completely illegal in the Republic, compared to Northern Ireland's laws which (though very strict) make more provision for cases which pose a threat to the mother's health. Michael O'Connell notes, however, that there seems to be an unwritten rule in the Republic that some cases are expected to be sent to Britain for the procedure, and that public opinion is slowly changing: 'The public attitude overall remains opposed to

¹² Tom Inglis, 'Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland', *Eire Ireland*, 40.3&4 (Fall 2005), 9-37 (p. 11).

¹³ Michael O'Connell, Changed Utterly: Ireland and the New Irish Psyche (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2001), p. 3.

"abortion on demand", but the numbers prepared to accept a grey area of crisis pregnancies where it could be allowed as well as those favouring outright availability are undoubtedly growing.' Although the Republic has become increasingly secularised, this change has been recent (divorce has only been legally possible since 1996, for example), and almost dizzying in its rapidity, meaning that these changes remain controversial and certainly are still an issue for writers.

With regards to fiction, comedy is clearly one way in which it was possible to deconstruct these restrictive gender roles, and it has also become a space for a new generation to explore the newly fluid roles open to them. Many critics, such as Rowe, project comedy as a suitable place for the female voice to be heard: 'whereas melodrama allows the transgressive woman to triumph only in her suffering, romantic comedy takes her story to a different end, providing a sympathetic place for female resistance to masculine authority'. Such a form is often associated with the feminine, due to its very preoccupation with the mundane, and the 'everyday' as Rowe outlines: 'Like melodrama, comedy is more often confined to the realm of amusement than art because of its popular accessibility and its connections with gossip, intrigue and the everyday, areas of culture tied to the feminine' (43).

The form of comedy has necessarily had to be adapted to reflect the changing parameters of sexual relationships in the modern world, and Frye's view of relationships as the route to narrative closure is now somewhat mediated by a concentration on two-way relationships as an end in themselves. What may still be true

¹⁴ O'Connell, p. 88.

¹⁵ Kathleen Rowe, 'Comedy, Melodrama and Gender: Theorizing the Genres of Laughter', *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, (see Karnick and Jenkins, above), pp. 39-59 (p. 41). Further references to this article are given after quotations in the text.

to some extent, however, is the utopian ambition for such relationships. As Rowe says of film romantic comedy:

It speaks to powerful needs to believe in the utopian possibilities condensed on the image of the couple; it addresses the wish for friendship between men and women, and for moments of joy in relationships constrained by unequal social power. (56)

These romantic relationships are often brought most to the fore in writing by (and aimed towards) women.

Another of the major themes that writing by and about gender roles (especially those of women) foregrounds is the generational clash between the purportedly new, outward looking Ireland and the older regime. In this sense, the stand-up comedian Brendan O'Carroll's series of Agnes Browne novels (published between 1994 and 2004) give us a glimpse of an older generation from the point of view of their female protagonist. O'Carroll's series of novels centre on a tenement community in Dublin, called The Jarro, and are mainly set from the 1950s through to the present day. While the books are clearly intended to be a celebration of the strong women of the area, they also mention many pressing social issues such as domestic violence, women's medical ignorance of their own bodies, large families and criminal activity. These are clearly issues which form the 'mundane' aspects of the women's lives, and they fill quotidian moments of emptiness with gossip and jokes on such matters.

However, the very 'ordinariness' of these issues (in the view of the characters within the novels themselves) means that though these issues are introduced many are treated quickly. For example, in the first novel of the series *The Mammy* (1994), Agnes has

just been widowed by her abusive husband Redser. The impact of this abuse is lessened in the text due to Agnes' own strength of character, as she mutely accepts this on the condition that Redser never hurts the children: 'she also established an unspoken but well-understood law with Redser. She did this with a look, the way only a woman can, and the look said: "I can take it... but don't ever touch my children." Redser never did.' 16

This seems an inadequate response, however, even within a comic novel and it is noticeable that no other characters mention this issue (not even Agnes' children). It may in some ways reflect the stigma attached to speaking out about domestic violence, and an acceptance that this was simply 'how things are'. The characters, Agnes included, seem to accept this as a part of her new, married 'everyday' reality. Agnes' own mother is unsympathetic to her daughter's plight, and indicates it is simply Agnes' fault for choosing the wrong man: 'Well, love, you've made your bednow lie in it!' (*Mammy*: 38). There is also, however, the distinct feeling that little humour can be found in such a situation, perhaps explaining why we only meet Agnes after she has been widowed, and this issue can therefore be dispatched. It is not until later in the series that such political issues are more fully and carefully dealt with.

A major theme throughout the series which is both more fully and also more comically treated, is the level of sexual and bodily ignorance within the female population. In *The Mammy*, set in the late 1960s, it is clear that the new sexual revolution is filtering through into the everyday speech of the women through popular culture, but that it is an alien language to Agnes and her friend, Marion. It is clear that

¹⁶ Brendan O'Carroll, *The Mammy* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2005 [1994]), p. 38. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

in her unhappy marriage, Agnes has treated sexual matters as a chore, and can barely believe that Marion may have enjoyed this side of marriage. The fact that the two women have no idea of the correct words to use is amusing, in the use of puns, but it also highlights a very real lack of knowledge:

'Love, me arse! Makin' babies, makin' more worries, makin' shitty nappies... makin' him happy!'

'And you, makin' you happy too. You can't say you never enjoyed it?'

'Marion, will you get a grip! Enjoy what?'

'You know... the organism!'

There was a moment's silence in deference to the magical, modern day word. Agnes sipped her bovril, and Marion glanced around sheepishly as if she had just spoken a national secret!' (*Mammy*: 41)

A more serious side to this is highlighted in the later written prequel to *The Mammy*, *The Young Wan* (2004). The attempts at sex education that Agnes and Marion receive in a convent school are clearly inadequate, and are couched in a language that alienates the girls. Marion provides a moment of comedy by asking totally truthful and naïve questions that clearly embarrass the teacher: 'When the sister had said "breasts," Marion asked if this was the same as "diddies," and then did "vulva" mean her "wiggie." These two were followed by her ejection question, which was, "Is 'penis' the same as 'cock'?" The girls' everyday language is used as a highly potent comedic resistance to the nuns' attitude, but this scene also serves to highlight that it is the only resistance that the girls have.

It is quite clear in this episode that the social control sketched out by Inglis makes an appearance. The girls are told in no uncertain terms that any sex outside marriage is a sin, and moreover that the consequences will be borne solely by the transgressive girl:

¹⁷ Brendan O'Carroll, *The Young Wan* (London: Plume, 2004), p. 71. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

The warnings were there, of course, and the sister made the girls write them down:

- (1) Never wear black patent shoes with a skirt, as boys could see the reflection of your knickers in them.
- (2) Makeup is only used by harlots and prostitutes.
- (3) Dancing closely so that your body touches against a boy's body would bring trouble. For, the sister explained, once boys were aroused they had no control of their actions, and anything that followed would be the girls' own fault.
- (4) And, of course, all of the above were a one-way ticket to eternal damnation in hell. (*Wan*: 72)

The warnings given by the nuns are both terrifying in their absoluteness, and worrying in their inadequacy to equip the girls with the knowledge which would mean they could make a reasonable choice in their 'everyday' lives, where such rules are clearly not so clean cut. This is underlined by Agnes' later encounter with Redser, as she loses her virginity barely understanding what is happening and her total confusion over how she should view this unsolicited act is clear: 'She was so confused, she felt dreadful about doing "it," but at the same time she loved it. Somebody wanted her and it felt good... or bad. Five minutes later, Redser was gone. Agnes bathed herself until the water went cold' (*Wan*: 171).

However, there are several elements in the novels that are somewhat fantastic, far removed from the 'mundane' or 'everyday' which make up much of Marion and Agnes' interactions. These point towards an inexorable drive towards the comedic happy ending, as mentioned by Frye. In the first novel, *The Mammy*, the novel ends with Agnes being visited by Cliff Richard, thus fulfilling a lifelong dream. She also

attracts the attention of a French restaurant owner, who is a ludicrous parody of an obvious French stereotype: 'Pierre [...] stood at the doorway, transfixed. "Sacre bleu! Agnes Browne, you are a veesion [sic] of heaven!" (Mammy: 143). Agnes also finally ends her life in hospital, in The Granny (1996) via a spiritual experience in which her friend Marion (already dead) is there to lead her to heaven with characteristic humour:

'Marion, why can't I see you?'

"Cause you haven't crossed over. It's a rule they have here, you have to cross over. It's a load of shite if you ask me, but there you are, rules is rules! Agnes, if you just put your hand out into the dark I'll take it and I'll bring you over." [Italics in original] 18

Such episodes are entirely within the wish-fulfilment nature of much traditional comedy. In his foreword, it is clear that O'Carroll is basing these novels on a sector of society familiar to him, and may also be aiming the novels at the same readership: 'I was lucky to have been born in Finglas, Dublin, a place where strong women are in abundance [...] In the pages of this book, my first offering, is the tale of such a woman, Agnes Browne' (*Mammy*: 5). The novels, however, walk a line between revealing the lost, or unheard, lives of the women, and also hiding or subsuming aspects of these lives in order to provide an escape or temporary space of relief from the 'everyday' or 'mundane'. The question remains if this is entertainment for a sector who know what is unwritten anyway or if, by providing such an escape valve, such difficult portions of history can be negated.

Younger writers such as Marian Keyes and Pauline McLynn deal more directly with the change in attitudes between the generation that Agnes Browne represents, and the younger, more widely travelled and liberally educated set of young women that their

_

¹⁸ O'Carroll, *The Granny* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2004 [1996]), p.191.

protagonists represent. Even with the clear changes between these two generations, however, there is remains a continuing preoccupation with heterosexual relationships and the possibility of marriage. Unlike the life partnership that marriage represents for Agnes, however, these relationships are often complicated and always up for reappraisal.¹⁹

This is also exemplified by the way in which the content of these novels alters the traditional form of a romantic comedy. Female writers in the Republic living within an already much-changed society both use and abuse the trajectory of the narrative, which usually ends with the hero winning the heroine. Marian Keyes inverts these conventions in order to give her heroines the active role. It is notable, however, that it is often not the social world that must change in order for a successful relationship to be achieved, but the heroine herself. This is often linked to wider issues of the discovery of her 'self', as well as a preoccupation with a fashionable, consumer lifestyle. This is a tendency in recent romantic fiction which Lynne Pearce investigates in relation to *Bridget Jones' Diary*: 'personal relationships have become but *one* in a list of lifestyle challenges. The form and presentation of Bridget's diary totally endorses this view via such comic effects as the heroine putting her weight and estimated calorie intake at the head of every diary entry.'²⁰

While these themes of consumption (or the restriction of consumption), glamorous lifestyles and popular culture all form an important part of the protagonists'

Lynne Pearce, Romance Writing (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), p. 183.

There are frequent examples of relationships which are unsatisfactory or re-appraised in women's writing. There are characters in relationships with married men, for example in Martine Devlin, *Three Wise Men* (London: Harper Collins, 2000); married to men who have affairs, for example in Sharon Owens, *The Tea House on Mulberry Street* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 2003); or even engaged to men who are gay, as in Annie McCartney, *Your Cheatin' Heart* (London: Time Warner, 2005).

'everyday' lives in Keyes' work, it is notable that it is often the partial rejection of these aspects which is most rewarded by the culmination of a romantic relationship, rather than subsuming the relationship in a 'project of the self,'²¹ as Pearce has observed happening in British and American fiction. Comedy here is used to gently mock these shallow choices, rather than make them acceptable. This is most notable in the case of *Rachel's Holiday* (1997). In Keyes' novel the narrative is told from the perspective of the heroine, who is clearly (to the reader) addicted to recreational drugs and alcohol. Rachel depicts her family and friends as the 'blocking' characters of Frye's conception of comedy, who restrict her freedom by sending her to the rehabilitation clinic.²² She sees their help as a betrayal, especially by her boyfriend who provides the clinic with information about her addictions: 'I was baffled by Luke's cruelty. It stung like a slap on sunburnt skin. First he ditched me, then he got me into tons of trouble. Why?'²³

Much of the humour associated with Rachel is predicated upon her snobbish espousal of the values of consumer culture (despite the fact that Rachel really has none of the fiscal attributes necessary for such a lifestyle). Rachel is attracted to this life, but also feels inferior to it. She retreats into a semi-fantasy world, which drink and drugs help her to indulge. At first, as she uses her shallow values to hide the fact that she is in some ways genuinely unhappy, and mocks her boyfriend for his disregard of her ideal fashionable lifestyle: 'Tommy Hilfiger suits, Stussy hats, Phatpharm jackets, Diesel satchels, Adidas skateboard shoes or Timberlands- I don't think these boys even knew such things *existed*. Anyone worth their sartorial salt would.' (*Rachel*: 34) The reader

2

²¹ Pearce, p. 183.

²² Frye, p. 165.

²³ Marian Keyes, *Rachel's Holiday* (London: Penguin, 1997), p 196. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

gains a sense of superiority over Rachel for much of the novel, as we are aware of how much she is deluding herself. We laugh at her assumption that the Cloisters rehabilitation clinic will be a celebrity-spotting 'holiday'. Clearly, sartorial knowledge is not really the most important thing for a relationship, and it is not until the end of the novel, when she has in fact accepted the morals of her parents and relinquished much of her past life, that she is able to once again meet up with her boyfriend, and begin an 'adult' relationship. The point of the novel appears to be an adjustment in the heroine's view of herself in relation to society, with the hero as her prize. The goal is reminiscent of traditional comedy, though it is more usually society which should change to accommodate the protagonist.

However, in more recent novels, Keyes clearly endeavours to give her heroines more than one kind of goal. In line with a good deal of popular romance fiction and film, many of her characters must negotiate professional and personal commitments, which seems to be an attempt to mirror the 'everyday' experience of more (presumably female) readers: 'Both partners must make some sacrifice to reach the correct balance between professional and personal concerns.' In *The Other Side of the Story* (2005) Keyes focuses on three main characters whose stories have very different endings. It is, however, interesting to see how these are differently weighted. Gemma, who is fully Irish, appears to be the main protagonist (as she begins the novel), and she begins a new relationship at the end of the story. Lily (Gemma's English ex-friend) learns a valuable lesson about taking responsibility for her own life, and re-affirms her existing relationship. Jojo (who is an American career woman) actually finishes by ending what seems like a potentially perfect relationship, as the man in question interferes with her

_

²⁴ Kristine Brunovska Karnick, 'Commitment and Reaffirmation in Hollywood Romantic Comedy', in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, (see Karnick and Jenkins, above), pp. 123-146 (p.133).

job. It is noticeable that the characters most associated with the Irish milieu are the most prominent and have the 'happiest' endings. The comedy of the novel largely resides in the narratives which head towards the archetypal 'romantic' ending, and characters such as Jojo who are not located within this may be seen as a sop to the text's 'realism' whilst never really destabilising its comfort zone.

Keyes's novels resist the temptation, however, to play the Irish character in terms of an English audience. Peillon notes that the recent popularity of Irish culture has been appropriated into the world of 'commodity,' one example of which is popular fiction. In this model, the Irish character should be geared towards pleasing an English audience, and should do so in a certain way, as Peillon notes:

This commodification takes place in a context of proximity to the English market; the task of writing becomes in this way that of seducing mainly English readers. And this is done by picturing Ireland and its people in a way which flatters stereotypes and prejudices widely held in England, by portraying an Irish quaintness.²⁵

However, this does not appear to happen with the character of Gemma, or indeed any of Keyes' other Irish protagonists. They are distinctly un-'quaint', and throw themselves into the world of commodity in a way which seems to say that they are equal to it, rather than subsumed by its mores. Despite this, Ireland is still frequently depicted as the site for personal discovery, or re-discovery. While Keyes posits a global economy and culture, in which Ireland relies as much as any British or American culture on the status of celebrity and commodity, it is still often the place to which characters return in order to bring some sense of meaning to their lives. Indeed,

²⁵ Michel Peillon, 'Agency, Flows and Post-colonial Structure in Ireland', *Irish Review* 30 (2003), 71-81 (p. 77).

the work-life balance often has to 'cross borders' in order for it to be successfully readjusted and the novels often end with a return to family and origins.

Writers such as Pauline McLynn, meanwhile, deal with the separation between personal, family and work life rather differently. Her Leo Street novels centre around a female protagonist in the male-orientated world of private investigating, and there is often a tension between Street's close-knit 'community' of family and friends, and her career as a 'private' investigator. Though this could be written as a potentially glamorous and exciting job, it is made clear by Street at the beginning of the first novel that it is, in fact, emphatically mundane and often centred on domestic disputes: 'Most of my work is mundane- insurance claims, infidelities, fraud and sometimes a missing person. Jealousy, spite, greed and despair, that's my currency.'26 During the long and boring stake-outs this involves, Leo is often marking time in the manner of the quotidian. In this sense, Street is very much an Everywoman, though her work gives McLynn more scope to put her into situations which can range from low-life (she works in a seedy nightclub as a barmaid to discover a scam in Better Than a Rest (2001)), to the very glamorous (she also attends a television celebrity chef's classes to track an adulterous wife in Something for the Weekend (2000)) to extremely dangerous (Street also deals with a major drug dealer in order to find a missing girl in Right on Time (2003)).

Despite the presence of several romantic possibilities in the novels, McLynn's novels differ from Keyes's in their resolution. McLynn's choice to place her examination of these relationships within the crime genre means that it is Leo's professional life and

²⁶ Pauline McLynn, *Something for the Weekend* (London: Headline, 2000), p. 7. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

her cases which provide the resolutions to the novels.²⁷ The personal relationships are on-going and are not sealed into the narrative. As they cannot therefore constitute a 'goal', this ending is substituted by the completion of a professional goal- the resolution of the case. In effect, this allows for a naturalistic progression of Street's personal relationships, rather than the assumption of a happy future that the reader must deduce from Keyes's novel.

This also leaves scope for McLynn to consider some other issues due to Leo's complicated love-life which culminates in her pregnancy in the third novel. The father of the baby could be either one of the two main romantic leads with whom she has been struggling throughout the series, and Leo seems aware of a lingering expectation in the society around her that she should be in a stable, and legal, relationship:

'Okay,' I admitted. 'I need a husband.'

Again with the glare.

'Really need a husband,' I amended.

He continued to be rude on the staring front, so I retorted with, 'No need to be so traditional, mutt.' 28

The very way she approaches this debate, however, by talking it through with her amusingly humanised dog, reinforces the optimistic way in which this issue is dealt with, rather than it being a cause for high drama. It is also clear that Leo is herself an independent, educated woman, and she is determined that she will be able to cope as a single parent if necessary: 'I began to plan how to deal with my life without relying on the crutch of an Andy or a Barry; they could not be depended on, even if they seemed to be around from time to time' (*Right*: 79). Nevertheless, it is interesting that

²⁷ McLynn is not the only writer who brings together the crime and romance genre. This also appears, for example, in: Maggie Gibson, *Blah, Blah Blacksheep* (London: Orion, 2001).

Pauline McLynn, *Right on Time* (London: Headline, 2003 [2002]), pp. 98-99. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

a more definite romantic ending does actually appear to end the series of novels (at least as I write), as Andy saves Leo from an attack by a group of drug dealers, perhaps reasserting this as a final goal.

This new balance in relationships, both between men and women and between the professional and the personal, also shows itself in the work of male writers, who concentrate on male protagonists. This re-appraisal of gender roles is clear in the work of Colin Bateman. His main character in a series of novels, Dan Starkey, is always under the threat of becoming separated from his wife Patricia, and she is often the party to review their relationship. However, the way in which gender issues are treated is quite different than in the female-authored novels I have dealt with so far. Clearly, changes in social issues such as divorce are different in the British-administered Northern Ireland, where Colin Bateman's novels are largely set. Nevertheless, the authors are interesting to compare from a genre and gender point of view as the texts are roughly contemporary with one another.

In particular, the depiction of Patricia, Dan's wife, needs to be politically considered. Patricia is a 'modern woman' in so much as she is independent and capable of making her own decisions (both in her personal life and her career). In many ways she is also a very 'reasonable' in her relationship with Dan; for example, when she is deciding upon their future on the occasion she believes him to have had an affair, she is upset but is able to contextualise the situation:

It's not just her. Look- I just need a bit of time away from you, and this is as good a time as any when I have a bit of an excuse. I just... feel like I should be doing something

else. We need to change. We're getting older, Dan, and we're still running around like kids.²⁹

In many of the novels, Patricia represents the 'ordinary' and 'everyday' life which Dan must fight to save as it is ripped away from him, frequently by paramilitary characters and violence. She is, indeed, literally taken from him (and kidnapped) on two occasions, in both *Divorcing Jack* (2001 [1995]) and *Shooting Sean* (2001), and on other occasions she leaves him, providing him with a reason to get out of whatever scrape he is in simply so he has the chance to win her back.

Although the novels reflect in some ways the changing role of women (Patricia is not one-dimensional), it may also be interpreted as a hidden sleight. She can also be depicted as 'unfathomable', and is more often the butt of the joke than the source of humour, serving as a foil for Dan's sharp one-liners. As well as her sudden turns from reasonable behaviour to physical attacks, she seems to change her moral compass. For example, in *Divorcing Jack*, she is very clear that for Dan to kill someone, even a murderer, is wrong: 'It makes you as bad as him, Dan. And you're not.' (*Jack*: 177) However, by the time of a more recent novel, *Driving Big Davie*, she is actively encouraging an act of murderous vengeance against the man who killed her son: 'That man has ruined our lives. [...] This isn't about revenge, it's about justice.'

Such equivocal positioning of female characters serves to illustrate a difference in the 'truth value' given to male and female characters, a trait which Neale and Krutnik have noted in much earlier film comedies: 'The imbalance between male and female 'perspectives'- between the 'truth-value' ascribed to each- is especially marked in the

-

²⁹ Colin Bateman, *Divorcing Jack* (London: HarperCollins, 2001 [1995]), p. 40. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

³⁰ Colin Bateman, *Driving Big Davie* (London: Headline, 2004), p. 159.

expository articulation of their oppositional desires.'³¹ These discussions about what the female protagonist does want, or should want, crop up more regularly in female orientated works, especially in those centring on romantic relationships. Here, the perspective is controlled more tightly by the female protagonist, as she is the one with the stronger voice. A closing discussion, with her 'perfect partner', is typically one in which the woman realises that there are no obstacles to the thing she both should, and already does, want (though this is still generally the hero). For example in *Watermelon* (2001):

I said nothing.
I was thinking.
He was right, I decided.

When happiness makes a guest appearance in one's life, it's important to make the most of it. It may not stay around for long and when it *has* gone wouldn't it be terrible to think that all the time one could have been happy was wasted worrying about when that happiness would be taken away?³²

This points to a mediation for both genders about the 'truth' ascribed to any gendered perspective within 'everyday' settings, as well as those of romantic comedy. The male characters in some female-authored novels are made one-dimensional (or fantasy figures) to suit the wishes of the female protagonist, in a similar way to the role of the heroine in traditional models. The male character in the above quote, for example, is ideal as he tells the protagonist exactly what she wants to hear. This re-appraisal occurs not only between the two genders of the current generation, but there is also a mediation between the gender roles of the present and the gender roles of the past, which have changed so rapidly in the new environment, especially within the Republic of Ireland.

³¹ Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 144.

-

³² Marian Keyes, *Watermelon* (London: Arrow, 2001 [1996]) p. 610. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

The Family and Comedy

As well as the question of the heterosexual relationships between the hero or heroine of the story, comedy in the everyday also frequently deals with the question of the family in both Northern Ireland and the Republic. It is noticeable that though there are clearly many different kinds of family, there is still a lingering sense of an 'ideal' which was once a social requirement: 'the nuclear heterosexual family is usually the key economic unit of the poorer society.' It is also clear, however, that this very static idea of the family is now becoming more fluid with recent economic changes, especially in the Republic.

What is clear is that the idea of the traditional family unit, and also the image of the mother, are tenacious in fiction both from the Republic and the North. The position of the mother as head of the family was used particularly by the Catholic Church in consolidating its position within society, O'Connell notes: 'The church recognised and used the power of mothers over the domestic sphere to maintain their wider social hegemony.' Mothers had control over the traditional futures of their children, deciding which would be sent away to work or the church or married off. O'Connell also notes that: 'Fathers, on the other hand, were socialised to believe that expression of much interest in their children was a sign at least of immaturity, if not femininity.' While these works often use these stereotypes, however, they also question such broad definitions about how roles within families were, and are, fulfilled.

³³ O'Connell, p. 50

³⁴ O'Connell, p. 22

The effect of the contemporary world on an older generation, with the perceived fluidity in relationships and the erosion of marriage is illustrated in Keyes's *The Other Side if the Story*. Here, it is Gemma's (the protagonist) mother who is abandoned by her husband, stereotypically for his younger secretary. The way in which this event is described, however, is very different to the break-ups involving younger, active heroines. In this story, Gemma's mother is rendered completely incapable of any action. Equally, Gemma's father is unable to communicate directly with his wife. Instead, the whole incident is played out through Gemma:

And the yellow-bellied cowardice of the man. He fesses up to me, on the phone, then leaves me to break the news to Mam. He-llo? I'm his daughter. She's his wife. But when I reminded him of this he sez, 'Ah no, you tell her, women are better at that sort of thing.' 35

Gemma's mother essentially goes into a self-imposed social exile, unable to cope with either the scorn or pity of her social circle. Near the end of the novel, Gemma's father returns, and her mother accepts him back with no complaint: "He's my husband. I took my marriage vows in a *church*." She said it in such a non-negotiable way, my hand itched for a stray hammer to beat some sense into her' (*Side*: 528). It is quite clear that this is not a true resolution, but relies on Gemma's mother simply ignoring her husband's behaviour. Gemma constantly comments on her mother and father's conservative and 'mundane' natures, and her mother's need to stay within this respectable family status quo precludes her seeking any recompense.

The generational difference is very clear here: perhaps even stereotypical. Gemma makes it clear that as a member of a younger, more independent generation of women,

³⁵ Marian Keyes, *The Other Side of the Story*, (London: Penguin Books, 2005 [2004]), p. 16. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

a betrayal such as this in her relationship is not something which she could overcome. She does not see this as 'mundane' in the sense of normal, but simply as outmoded:

If something like this happened to me, I didn't think the relationship could recover and I doubted I'd ever be able to forgive [...] Thinking of herself as the dutiful wife, instead of a woman with feelings and rights, meant that Dad was able to slot right back into the life that she'd kept warm for him. It infuriated me beyond belief. (Side: 528)

This image of parental (and most particularly maternal) views on the new possibilities in marriage, which now include divorce in the Republic of Ireland, contrasts with Keyes' earlier novel, *Watermelon*. Here, the character of the mother is much more complex, if still very traditional. Although very much worried about her daughter (Claire), the mother here almost encourages her daughter to pursue another relationship while she is separated from her husband: 'maybe a little fling is exactly what you need. To get your self-confidence back. And to get your feelings for James in perspective' (*Water*: 182). Claire's shock at her mother's suggestion is amusing in highlighting the clear disparity for Claire between her mother's suggestion, and the expected behaviour of the older generation.

This seemingly quite radical advice is, however, later tempered by the mother's efforts to persuade Claire that she should perhaps give the marriage another try, despite the fact that it is clear (at least to the reader) that this is utterly wrong. The reasons she gives are not quite as ultra-traditional of those given by Gemma's mother (the church is never mentioned), but they still have overtones of marriage as an unbreakable bond. The implication is that Claire is being selfish by refusing to put her pride aside: 'But talk it over with him. Maybe you could both go for marriage guidance counselling. But don't let the anger blind you to everything else. After all

this is the father of your child we're talking about' (*Water*: 479). The perceived ideal of the nuclear family as 'ordinary' means that the 'extraordinary' (with Claire as a single mother or divorced) has to be resisted, and is clearly a conservative reaction.

However, this is tempered by the fact that when Claire does finally leave her husband and begins a new, more satisfactory, relationship she is supported by both of her parents. The implication here seems to be that her parents are not perfect, and that the older generation are likely to hold onto some of the morals of the more conservative past that the younger generation may find unpalatable. However, while this older generation still clearly have ideas of a status quo which is potentially constricting rather than simply 'mundane', they are beginning to come to terms with alternative social paths for the younger generation.

This willingness to embrace change is demonstrated in a rather different manner by Pauline McLynn in her 'Leo Street' novels. Leo's mother's involvement in her daughter's love life is a lot more direct. She positively encourages her daughter away from a long standing (if unsatisfactory and unmarried) relationship and back towards Leo's first boyfriend: 'I was always sorry that yourself and himself never made a proper go of it. And he's doing very well now, you know' (*Weekend*: 79). However, the latter sentence here clearly shows that her mother is adhering to a more mundane wish for her daughter to be in a stable, and also financially secure, relationship, rather than this simply being for Leo's emotional well-being.

The family in McLynn's novels is often the focus of much of the comedy, outside Leo's occasionally harrowing work. The dichotomy between her two 'worlds' is most noticeable in *Right on Time* (2003 [2002]). Her family is lovably eccentric, peopled with characters such as her Grandmother, who is going through a 'phase' of believing in the occult, and dressing accordingly, much like a teenager: 'Gran could have taken the eye out of a hypnotist with her gear. Her dress was long and purple, with a design of stars and half-moons, reminding anyone who knew her that she had power to cast spells and raise demons, including herself' (*Right*: 267). However, in many other ways, her family could be considered 'everyday' or 'ordinary.' There appears to be no divorced children, all of the family members are still in touch and there is only Leo who becomes pregnant without being in a stable relationship.

Though Leo caricatures her own family, their very 'ordinariness' also provides a safe environment in which Leo is often the butt of the joke. However, it is clear that this is her role within the family (rather than a way of excluding her), adhering to Simon Critchley's idea of comedy as a *sensus communis*. Her physical ineptness is a recurring trope throughout the series but when she is in the company of family this is an acceptable embarrassment. This is illustrated by the way in which this trope is treated in two separate incidents, one in the company of Leo's family, and one as she tries to tackle a local drug dealer. In the first incident her mother gleefully informs Leo's old flame that Leo is now single:

I am especially prone to arse-over-heel activity when under family pressure. It was therefore inevitable that I would get up from the table, bang my thigh hard against it, recoil into the kitchen chair I had just vacated and keel over on to the floor. I was wearing a floral print skirt which reached to my mid-shin when left to its job, but now shrouded my waist revealing plenty of knickered buttock. (*Right*: 229)

This event encapsulates Leo's resigned acceptance of the comedic role: "I'm the clown act round here." I gave a self-deprecating shrug of the shoulders' (*Right*: 230).

This contrasts greatly with a similar physically embarrassing situation which takes place in Mayville, a run-down area of Dublin. Leo visits a local pub to question a local criminal gang leader (Doc Phelan) about a missing teenage girl, and is subsequently threatened. She is chased out of the pub by a dog, falling into the street. The physical ineptness is very similar to the above comedic episode, but here laughter is replaced by fear:

He made a last dart at me, ripping away some trophy cotton to present to his master, then returned inside to applause. Terror and relief flooded through me, and I allowed myself to lie on the ground a moment and convince my bowels to stay put. (*Right*: 176)

The potential for comedy is, here, swallowed up by violence. Life in Mayville is depicted as 'beyond the mundane' (though clearly for some violence is all too clearly an everyday occurrence), and certainly not 'ordinary' as Leo's family essentially is. It seems that such districts must be shown in all their horror, and the only laughter is the twisted laughter of Doc Phelan as he ridicules Leo's discomfort.

It could also be said that the extent of the violence in the final novel, *Right On Time*, undermines the comedy. Leo is attacked after trying to break a drugs ring, and loses her unborn child. The concern shown by her family for Leo, and which is more often shown through comedy, is replaced here by obvious anxiety, highlighting the 'ordinary' nature of family feeling underlying their joking: 'I don't know what we'd have done if we'd lost you' (*Right*: 342). The comedy which exists in the personal

part of her life, ceases as these two worlds collide, and her eccentric family are also shown to be a source of non-comedic strength: 'I heard my mother whisper, "There will be other babies, Leo." Startled, I looked at her, and saw that she needed no explanation, and didn't expect one. I was overwhelmed by her love and understanding' (*Right*: 338-339).

What is interesting in both Keyes' and McLynn's work, is that the approval of the family, and most especially the mother, is extremely important to the 'happy ending.'

This is in contrast to the tendency within cinematic romantic comedy to remove the mother figure from romantic story lines. Rowe gives us a Freudian explanation for this:

The mother's absence from romantic comedy occurs because of the genre's attention to the heroine's Oedipal passage to femininity, her acceptance of the terms of heterosexuality, the subjugation of female by male. To do so, she must reject the most important feminine identification of her life, her mother. (50)

Neale and Krutnik provide an even simpler explanation by quoting Cavell: 'it "continues the idea that the creation of the woman is the business of men." ³⁶

However, as we have seen this 'neutralizing' of the mother clearly does not apply to Irish literary comedy, especially that written by women. The traditional role of the mother as the head of the domestic world still applies to a large extent in these works. Although the novels depict independent protagonists, they still rely on the approval of their families, centred on the matriarch, especially in personal matters. Mothers here appear as arbiters for the 'ordinary', even if their home-spun wisdom is often depicted

_

³⁶ Cited by Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 159.

as out-of-date and 'mundane'. Even at the end of *The Other Side of the Story*, Gemma (who has by now demonstrated her far greater independence than her mother) still has to take her new boyfriend home to meet with her mother's approval:

When Mam met Johnny the Scrip for the first time, she took in his broad shoulders, his air of kindness and the twinkle in his eye that is a permanent feature now that he's no longer working around the clock, and she leant over to me and murmured, 'Looks like the professionals have arrived.' (Side: 648)

The importance of the figure of the mother as the locus of the family is made even more explicit when this mother figure is also politicised. Mary Costello's *Titanic Town* (1998 [1992]), set at the beginning of the Troubles in the strongly Catholic area of Andersonstown, focuses on the political involvement of Bernie McPhelimy, an 'ordinary' housewife in the area. Much of the humour in the novel revolves around Bernie McPhelimy's involvement in a pressure group who wish to prevent sniper fire from the IRA in public spaces during the daytime. However, the ideas of the 'ordinariness' of this mother figure are much changed from those already noted in the Republic.

Bernie seems an unlikely political mover and shaker, but it is clear that the community which she comes from is already highly politically aware. As such, politics which may seem removed from everyday life become part of their quotidian reality, as they are literally in the firing line. Bernie's involvement in the 'Peace Women' is an attempt to recuperate the 'ordinary' (in terms of the 'mundane') for those like her who do not wish to be involved in violence. The apathy that she receives from some, and the threats from others, only makes Bernie more determined, and far reaching, in her aims. She wants: 'Peace to lead normal bloody lives for once, in this cursed country.

That's what's wrong with this place: too many people think like you. You're defeated before you even get started, or you're pro-violence. It's time the rest of us spoke out.'37

Women involved in political activity in real life Northern Ireland have often been depicted as concentrating on the local and parochial activity. As Ward notes with regards to talks after the Good Friday Agreement: 'The reality is that a peace process is a "top-down process," whereby local communities- especially women- are typically excluded and women, despite their activity in informal peace processes, remain largely absent from the formal negotiations.'³⁸ It is over such issues that Bernie begins her campaign at the start of the novel. She is highly aware of the apparent stupidity of sniper fire which is harming the people which the IRA are purporting to fight on the behalf of: 'I just said straight out to Tony, this is ridiculous, all this shooting in broad daylight […] Especially when the children are coming home from school and women out doing their shopping' (*Titanic*: 162).

Bernie begins by concentrating on garnering support from within a familiar community, and she frequently uses her family ties to contact figures in the local IRA branch. However, this does not provide the changes that Bernie is pushing for, as it is made clear to her by the local IRA that such matters will only be considered as part of wide-scale constitutional change. Community work is seen as laudable, and to be praised as important, but rarely forms part of the nitty-gritty of all-party talks. As such, the quotidian everyday is by-passed for constitutional aims and so is much work

³⁷ Mary Costello, *Titanic Town: A Novel*, (London: Methuen, 1998 [1993]), p. 199. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

³⁸ Christine Chinkin cited in Margaret Ward, 'Gender, Citizenship and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process', *Eire-Ireland*, 41.1&2 (Spring 2006), 262-282 (pp. 263-4).

done by women like Bernie. This is born out as Bernie begins to deal with the British government representatives, who relegate her from a go-between for the IRA and British government, to collecting a petition in her local area, thereby removing her leverage with the local IRA leaders.

It is clear that Bernie's aims are informed by her everyday personal experience, and her status as a mother. Through much of the novel she is fondly mocked by her family, who make some of her statements seem hopelessly naïve. Bernie is referred to throughout with the diminutive title of the 'wee woman' and seems to rely on black market sedatives to get her through the day much of the time. This said, it is also clear that Bernie is the ideological centre of the novel. The mockery that her family throw at Bernie only comes back to haunt them, as they do not allow their personal experience to inform their views, and seem unaware of the basic human emotions that Bernie concentrates upon: 'Some woman, somewhere, as the wee woman would say, will be breaking her heart for him tonight' (*Titanic*: 339).

This apparently 'mundane' personal experience, however, also includes some moments of amusing insight and savvy which serves to undercut the apparent supremacy of those dealing with both violence and constitutional aims. The IRA move Bernie and her friend and compatriot from the 'Peace Women', Deirdre, from house to house before a meeting in order to disorientate them. These attempts at security and secrecy do not hold up much to Bernie's scrutiny, though, as her housewife's eye spots they have returned to the original house:

'Ah you've got to be joking,' said Bernie as she looked round the room. 'Now we're back where we started!'

The men laughed.

'How did you know?' asked Finbarr, who had come up to greet them.

'Well it's a different room, but the same curtains. I was admiring them earlier.' (*Titanic*: 202)

Adherence to a blinkered political outlook is also deconstructed within the novel by contrasting Bernie with another mother-figure, that of Patsy French. Bernie's family adhere to respectable working class values and roles within the family, in comparison to Patsy French, who seems to prefer living in a fantasy land which inflates her own importance. The cause of Nationalism provides her with an outlet for stories in which she re-invents herself with a self-worth far removed from her everyday and rather sordid appearance:

To all appearances Mrs French was a dirty, throughother [sic] sloven, yet she had a remarkably positive self-image. She saw herself as Roisin Dubh, sloe-eyed symbol of young Mother Ireland, an inspiration to gallant patriots, a stalwart soldier in the fight for national freedom. She believed she had pioneered urban guerilla warfare in Ireland. (*Titanic*: 54)

This family are treated at the beginning of the novel as a source of amusement for the McPhelimy family, particularly for Annie's father, who teases Mrs French about her far-fetched stories, to her total incomprehension: 'She was very fond of Father and certainly provided him with hours of entertainment' (*Titanic*: 54).

The French family is a caricature of neglect, and Mrs French is figured as the total opposite to Bernie. They are both the heads of a matriarchal clan, but Mrs French is as gargantuan as Bernie is tiny, and as gross as Bernie is neat. Whereas Bernie protects (perhaps even overly) her own children, Mrs French sends her young sons out to the barricades, and there is a clear indictment of a mother who prefers political activism to

caring for her own children. Bernie, although the main focus of the family, also bends to her husband's requests when necessary; Mrs French, in contrast, is depicted as usurping her husband's role as the ultimate head of the family:

Every evening about five o'clock Bernadette would go down the street to Brogan's new shop, still partially under construction, for a giant box of cornflakes and a bottle of milk. This was the evening meal, the staple diet of the French establishment, the woman of the house having scant interest in the lesser, domestic matters. Mrs French liked to talk politics, to sing along with the ranting rebel ballads, to watch the comings and goings of the neighbourhood. But mostly she liked to drink. She also battered her husband. (*Titanic*: 55)

It is clear that her caricatured persona serves to question the veracity of her political convictions, as they have more to do with her self-image and cachet in the neighbourhood than any deep seated ideological concerns. However, the depiction of Patsy also exposes a set of conservative, rather than radical, values. The caricature is based upon Patsy's flouting of the conventional, restricted matriarchal role, and her rejection of this in favour of the 'male' world of constitutional politics. In comparison, Bernie is depicted as conventional in her unquestioning acceptance of her role as mother and wife. Nevertheless, it could also be argued that it is Bernie who most breaks out of the idea of an 'ordinary' housewife within this community by making her campaign so public and openly questioning the political efficacy of the violence around her. The comedy here, which clearly wishes to defend the usually unheard (and therefore potentially radical) opinions of local political workers such as Bernie, nevertheless draws upon some traditional social roles for its punchlines.

The comic creation of Patsy takes a more sinister turn when the French family become a major part of the hate campaign which aims to oust the McPhelimys from the area, after Bernie's political involvement. However, unlike her previous outbursts, in which she is very much to the fore of any campaign, in reality Mrs French prefers to be one of a mob, breaking the family's windows in the night so as not to be identified. Much of her local reputation is ruined, however, by Bernie's older sister, who undermines Mrs French's Nationalist credentials by exposing her past in a public row:

'I know Pasty White these years back,' she proclaimed, 'long before she was the great Republican. Oh the bold Patsy wasn't always a nationalist. She wasn't during the war anyway. Then she was a soldier's hoor.' Mrs French gasped, her face contorted with horror. She looked badly shaken. 'Oh, did you not think I remembered that, Patsy? When you were the talk of the Falls? Brits, Americans, RUC men, it didn't matter to Patsy White. She wasn't a bit fussy.' (*Titanic*: 183)

Just as Bernie's political views are purely, even naïvely, informed by her personal world, Patsy French's political views are ruined by her personal behaviour, much to the amusement of both the street and the reader. Once again, however, it is Patsy's personal and sexual proclivities that provide the humour, rather than her actions towards the McPhelimy family.

With Bernie's later removal from direct political involvement (as she is eventually defeated by the constant threats to her family), much of the comedy leaves the novel. Her naivety, which in many ways made her hopelessly comic, was also the note of hope in the narrative. Indeed, the last pages acknowledge that her comic ramblings have considerably more truth in them than many other political discourses: "Somebody loves him," she would say, for Provo, or Stickie, or soldier, or RUC man, "the mother that bore him. Nothing's worth a life. When I think of the trouble and suffering that goes into bearing them and rearing them" (*Titanic*: 339). The last words

are one of collective guilt, not just of the Catholic community, but of all those who in some way supported violence: 'Her rambling, and the rest of us egging them on. For the cause, for queen and country, for peace, with justice or at any price. For there will be no surrender, fuck pope and queen both the same' (*Titanic*: 340).

Comedy and the Community

Much of the debate on the radical or conservative potential of comedy surrounds its status as a communal act. Comedy can serve to reinforce discrete community boundaries in confirming a set of shared values. This may be seen as a positive resistance to a more powerful threat by highlighting the opinions of 'mundane' characters who are often voiceless within the public sphere. However, it may also serve to exclude individuals who are different from the 'norm' of the community by employing conservative values. Comedy may also rely on some shared reference point between the writer and reader (or comedian and audience) from which to draw humour. As Stott notes, comedy can be seen to depend on this community for its laughter, as it is: 'conceived of always with some kind of audience in mind, and everywhere produced from the matter of dominant cultural assumptions and commonplaces.'39 Tuck and Medhurst go even further, stating that certain forms of comedy not only draw upon community, but also perpetuate the idea (or as they see it, the myth) of community: 'To perpetuate this myth of a unified population [...] sitcom must ignore the fragmentary nature of modern society and instead posit an idealised organic nation.'40

³⁹ Stott, p. 8

⁴⁰ Andy Medhurst and Lucy Tuck, 'The Gender Game', in *Television Sitcom*, ed by. Jim Cook, BFI Dossier Number 17 (London: BFI publishing, 1982) pp. 43-55 (p. 45).

In contrast to this, however, and particularly importantly for Northern Ireland, comedy can provide a way of integrating individual desires into the wider community. As Rowe asserts: 'comedy insists that community does not repress individual desire, but in fact represents its very fulfilment' (47). This is an important aim of much of the comedy in this chapter, especially within Northern Irish literature where the phrase 'community' is often treated as a journalistic cliché, and an over-simplification of the individual's experience. The insistence on the existence of two distinct 'communities' often leads to stereotyped views of members of both of these groups, which can mask the traits of the individual.

'Community' in Northern Ireland carries with it a wide range of ready-made labels, and while many works of comedy serve to deconstruct these stereotypes, the relationship is often problematic. Such stereotyping can be made to work in a positive way, as Barry Curtis notes of its use in sitcom:

In sitcom, stereotyping is a device for fixing characters in roles- it enables viewers to 'know' the characters better than they 'know' themselves so that their narrative is loaded with irony. Stereotyping as an activity by comic actors generates the comic effect of accurate, simplified observation.⁴¹

The immediate impact of stereotyping is to give a recognisable basis to characters and, in a rapidly changing social environment, such stereotyping may mean that many identities can be included in a work, although potentially at the cost of a fully formed depiction.

⁴¹ Barry Curtis, 'Aspects of Sitcom', in *Television Sitcom* (see Medhurst, above), pp. 4-12 (p. 8).

For example, we find authors exploiting entrenched stereotypes and public opinion (without any attempt at a critique of those), or authors using comedy merely to poke fun at just these difficulties. As Neale and Krutnik point out:

The position of the stereotype in comedy is so often highly ambiguous, depending upon the extent to which it is used either as a norm to be transgressed or as the ready-made embodiment of the unusual, the eccentric and the deviant.⁴²

More confusingly, much popular comedy takes an ambivalent stance, and frequently contains both conservative (figuring characters as deviant in order to preserve an exclusive status quo) and radical (mocking a norm which threatens to exclude a portion of society) actions in the same text.

These opposing modes can often be seen in the work of Colin Bateman, especially in his Dan Starkey series of novels. In *Divorcing Jack* (2001 [1995]), his first novel, Bateman is precise about how he describes Dan Starkey's newspaper column:

I have my views. I don't let them get in the way of my work- apart from my column, which is supposed to have a particular viewpoint. Unionist with a sense of humour, if you like. It's balanced by the fascist on the opposite page and the loony Republican at the back. (*Jack*: 9)

Dan is somewhat vacillating in most of his views, apart from the fact that nothing is worth the life of another human being. In this sense, he seems an acceptably moderate character, though still retaining some political affiliation (a rare one to be expressed in Northern Irish literature). The intention seems not so much an attempt not to offend

⁴² Neale and Krutnik, p. 4.

anyone, but to equally offend everyone: 'Political bias is dispensed with in favour of a demolition job at everyone's expense.'43

However, the balance between deconstructing stereotypes and simply reinforcing them is a complex issue in Bateman's work. In his novel *Of Wee Sweetie Mice and Men* (1996), Dan Starkey's comments about the other main character, Fat Boy McMaster, show an ironic view of the way in which Protestants can be stereotyped (as uncultured and with a lack of erudition):

Then he opened his mouth and guldered: 'Away ya go, ya fuckin' wee fuckin' fucker!'

Three hundred years of Protestant culture distilled in one man. 44

There is a strange dialectic between the surface of the joke and what it implies. As we are aware that Starkey is also a Protestant character, we may assume that the tone is intended to be ironic in some way. Though Starkey says this, he does not (and the reader is also not meant to) take it as the whole truth. The difficulty here is that the joke relies on the knowledge of the reader: first, that they know the conventions of such jokes, and can therefore decipher the 'double bluff' aspect of it, and second, that they are aware of the stereotype that Bateman is both using and mocking.

At other times, the deconstruction of the stereotype is much more clearly being tested by the comedy. For example, Bateman deals with stereotypes of paramilitaries very frequently. He actively exposes a popular view of paramilitary organisations as money with menaces schemes operating under spurious political impetus. Bateman does this

⁴³ Deirdre Molloy, 'Pump-action Fiction', Fortnight, March 1996, p. 33.

⁴⁴ Colin Bateman, *Of Wee Sweetie Mice and Men* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), p. 51. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

with both Loyalist and Republican groups of paramilitaries; however, his most sustained example of it is in the character of Cow Pat Coogan in *Divorcing Jack*. Starkey says of this character: 'He was branded a Republican, but he always seemed more interested in money than freeing Ireland.' (*Jack*: 31) This is also conflated with a mockery of a literary (and filmic) stereotype of the Republican terrorist as the sensitive hard-man. Bateman shows the possibility that Coogan is a potentially pitiable character as he learns of his ex-girlfriend's death. Dan says: 'There was an odd touch of emotion on his voice for a moment, but it soon disappeared, like a match on ice' (*Jack*: 176). However, Coogan's indiscriminate killing shows that, however troubled the character may be, there is no reasonable justification for his actions.

Despite the fact that Bateman obviously has a political purpose to his use of stereotypes, their deployment in successive novels means that there is a risk of entrenching them through sheer repetition. In *Of Wee Sweetie Mice and Men*, Bateman deals with a Loyalist ex-terrorist Stanley Matchitt, who fulfils an image of Loyalist figures as bloodthirsty and bigoted. The stereotyping, however, also leads to many opportunities for comedy, especially through the mocking of the public stance of the terrorist groups. Matchitt revels in his notoriety, which seems to involve particularly bloody murders, reminiscent of the Shankill Butchers. The 'public image' of Matchitt as a hardened terrorist is removed in a drunken incident caught on camera:

One memorable night he got plastered, recruited a crew of equally inebriated locals and stole the *Golden Hind* [...]

A police photographer captured Stanley being sick over the side seconds before he was arrested, and released it to the papers. From that day on the fearsome monster that was Matchitt the Hatchet was dead and Snatchit Matchitt was born. (*Wee Sweetie*: 33-34) There is a double-edged use of comedy going on here, which is not without political implications. Clearly, laughing at such a fearful figure is, in itself, a method of resistance to fear; yet the attendant humanization of a murderer will be seen by some as counter-productive, written at a time in Northern Ireland's history when those imprisoned for terrorist activity were regularly being released as part of the on-going Peace Process.

It is certainly clear that Starkey does not believe that the newly pacifist Matchitt is any different to his past persona, despite assertions to the contrary. He raises the question about whether any ex-terrorists can be included as part of a larger community:

'This is New York. Everyone has guns.'

Sweetie: 102)

The comedy here is clearly drawing new, and very clear, boundaries rather than testing them, yet (as these boundaries are intended to shut violence out) they are also a kind of radical resistance. Within these boundaries lie 'everyone', the 'ordinary' people who resist violence, and those like Matchitt are pushed out. That said, the comedy can also be used in a non-progressive way, in order to deliver a sharp punchline. Later in the novel, Matchitt returns to his old ways and indulges in quite surreal violence on a whale watching trip, leading Starkey to quip: 'They're not even Fenian whales!' (Wee Sweetie: 251).

^{&#}x27;You're not everyone. You're a nut.'

^{&#}x27;Ex-nut, if you please.'

^{&#}x27;Aye, sure.'

^{&#}x27;Wait and see, Starkey. Don't prejudge.'

^{&#}x27;Aye, they prejudged Hitler too. Lovely man.' (Wee

Beyond this engagement with more stereotyped sections of 'communities', Bateman's novels also illustrate the more difficult problem of how individuals not involved with violence are to be depicted. Most sympathetic characters seem to have major signifiers removed from them, and are secularised and de-politicised. What images there are of a wider community also continue this tendency. The most obvious of these images is that of the islanders (on the fictionalised island of Rathlin) in *Turbulent Priests* (2000). As the islanders become aware that murders have been committed in order to preserve a fundamentalist proto-religion that has grown up on the island, and that the violence is likely to escalate, they band together to protest: 'Behind the trailer came the ladies of the parish, half of them in aerobic tracksuits. And behind them, stretched out way back down the hill, others, dozens upon dozens of ordinary people, the fishermen, the shopkeepers, the housewives, the kids.'⁴⁵

Put into the context of the time that this novel was produced (not too long after the Good Friday 1998 agreement), it is clear that this community reflects the 'everyday' individuals within the wider population who are against violence. The people of the island are a community brought together by familial ties, not by the denominators of 'community' used in the press of the mainland. They are also angered not just by murder on general principles, but on very specific ones:

'Duncan was a good boy.'

^{&#}x27;Duncan was my cousin.'

^{&#}x27;My nephew.'

^{&#}x27;My cousin.'

^{&#}x27;My uncle, and you killed him!' (Priests: 253)

⁴⁵ Colin Bateman, *Turbulent Priests* (London: Harper Collins, 2000 [1999]), p. 251. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

This clearly indicates a wish to remember the victims of violence not just as a mass, but as individuals who have links to those who survive them. It is also not hard to see the influence of the overwhelming 'yes' vote in the Good Friday Agreement here, which was widely seen as a triumph for the 'ordinary' person in the street.⁴⁶

However, what is also noticeable is that very little of the *comedy* in the novels actually relies on any sense of community. Bateman's books rely almost solely on Dan Starkey and his one line quips. We are used to the idea of a serious 'unreliable narrator', and it seems relatively easy to distance oneself from aspects which one is aware are a distortion. However, comedy implies that the reader and narrator share a common ground, which makes the reader's position while negotiating this humour more complex. The reader must be aware that, although we understand the joke, we are not necessarily expected to agree with it, such as Starkey's mockery of McMaster. This is also shown by the fact that comedy is open to all within the novel: even characters such as Matchitt are capable of a good (at least 'well-crafted' in a technical sense) joke. However, though this makes characters such as Matchitt 'everyday', and to some extent realistic, it is clearly not the intention to make them 'ordinary'. A major challenge for the politically aware reader is therefore the need to square the indulgence of the comedy (which may be non-progressive) with the moral positions contained within the novels.

Bateman's focus on a highly individualistic main character, who positions himself marginally within a community, but who is also as an outside observer, differs hugely

⁴⁶ 71.2% of people in Northern Ireland voted 'yes' to the Agreement, with 94.39% voting 'yes' in the Republic of Ireland. 'The Search for Peace: Good Friday Agreement', *BBC News: Northern Ireland*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/northern_ireland/understanding/events/good_friday.stm [accessed 28 August 2007] (para. 5 of 11).

from Mary Costello's *Titanic Town*. This novel, in contrast, is written almost solely from within *one* community. Much of the humour in this novel, and also many of the serious points, come from the ideals that the main characters hold, but also the lack of input that they have in how these ideals are to be politically carried out. Costello explores boundaries not only between communities, but *within* the community depicted. The novel both deconstructs the myths of Nationalism that many of the characters (particularly the older children in the main family) subscribe to, but also examines carefully how the community is manipulated not only by the British forces and politicians, but by the IRA and their political representatives.

It is clear from the start of the novel that the polarising of political opinion and communities has led to an increasing awareness of the tight geographical boundaries that this Catholic community live within. The children in the family are kept within these boundaries as their parents fear for their safety. The young Annie McPhelimy (the narrator of the story) views members of the Protestant community as 'other', an attitude which can only be exacerbated by the fact that it is returned in kind, as demonstrated in her meeting of another small girl: 'She marched up to me and took my medal in her dirty little Protestant paw. "You're a Roman Catholic, aren't you?" she demanded' (*Titanic*: 10). She is part of a deeply divided Belfast, amply demonstrated by the fact that she lives very near the 'Peace line', a physical boundary put up to, as she says: 'prevent impoverished Protestants and oppressed and impoverished Catholics from knocking the shite out of each other' (*Titanic*: 9). The wry comedy both highlights perceived similarities and differences between the two sides of the line.

As this viewpoint shows, the involvement and perspective of the narrator in the novel somewhat alters the depiction of the 'mundane' or 'ordinary'. Costello is much more detailed than many writers about the discrimination that working-class Catholics faced in terms of employment and housing. This is exacerbated as the Troubles get into full swing, and the reaction against Catholic workers in largely Protestant workplaces is shown. The few, such as Annie's mother, are blamed by Protestant workers for the actions of the IRA: 'they're angry about the bombings this week. They're demanding we get the sack or something' (Titanic: 87). However, Costello also deconstructs the way in which Bernie's community views outsiders. It is notable, for example, that Bernie refers to her hostile Protestant fellow workers as a mass, just as they see the Catholic minority: 'Remarks would be passed by the Protestant majority, allegations would be whispered in the lift and the canteen' (Titanic: 86). There is no doubt that this could, and did, happen, but there seems no leeway that allows for at least some of the Protestant majority not to pass remarks. They are a mass to the Catholic workers, just as the Catholic workers are a mass to them.

This sense of being branded as outsiders by another community, as well as physically threatened, means that the sense of community within Bernie's geographical area becomes increasingly important. The beginning of the novel (coinciding with the start of the Troubles) sees this community as pulling together and, as such, many of the internal differences are subsumed under the necessity of protecting their own areas from attacks from Loyalist gangs and snipers: 'Dozens of them crowded around roaring braziers sipping tea and Guinness. Others scanned the Black Mountain opposite with inadequate binoculars' (*Titanic*, p. 75).

Most of the children in the family, especially the boys, seem to find the occurrences more glamorous than scary. They, in a very adolescent way, simply want to join in and be 'one of the crowd', as much as one of the community. As far as they are concerned, this is a temporary and welcome distraction from the 'mundanity' of school and homework. However, Costello also deconstructs this glamour, showing it to be very out of the 'ordinary'. For example, the various boys that Annie develops normal teenage crushes upon are generally out of her reach by their very involvement in paramilitary organisations, but they are also forcibly taken out of her reach. One becomes an informer, and is moved to England after being pursued by the IRA, the other is imprisoned and loses his potential degree and career. They never re-enter Annie's life, and the waste of their lives is implied, if not directly noted, by the narrator.

The representation of this geographically tight community's view of itself is highly intimate, and, as such, both fond and very critical. The IRA are treated in a way which makes them seem far more 'ordinary' and 'mundane' than in many other works, as the family know, and are related to, many members of the political and active wings of the IRA. This is especially true in the way that comedy is applied to these figures, as the humour makes them seem familiar and often unthreatening. Most of Provisional IRA are very young, and, for example, when they are sent to protect the McPhelimy's before the family move from the area after being threatened, they fall asleep: "They could have all been raped in the night and they'd have been none the wiser," he [Annie's father] commented with a nod at the dormant' (*Titanic*: 267).

However, in comparison to this intimate knowledge, Bernie is an innocent in the wider world, and her main problems seem to come when issues which she wishes to tackle within the community are hijacked by outsiders. The Assembly of Women, made up mainly of women from affluent Protestant areas, are at a meeting which Bernie and others attend, believing it to be purely for local people: 'It seemed a harmless enough initiative—a group of local women getting together to improve living conditions' (Titanic, p.162). The women from outside the area are not welcome in Andersonstown, either from an economic or religious point of view. This ill-feeling is exacerbated by the irresponsible attitude of the press, who engineer the presence of a crowd of local protestors in order to get a better story: 'At that point a journalist from a reputable newspaper gave the nod to his photographer and slipped the bolt on the assembly hall doors. The crowd burst in' (Titanic: 166). The sight of the rather haughty women being pelted with eggs is, in some ways, amusing, but it does serve to underline that they are thrown out without any real attention to what they are saying. Their presence is angering enough even without any speech on their part. The fact that Bernie agrees to appear on the local news bulletin, but is captioned as a member of the Assembly, is the first occurrence to damage her position within her community. It is clear that the political lines of this 'ordinary' community are tightly policed, and Bernie's questioning of them marks her out as 'extra-ordinary' in more than one way.

Bernie endeavours to distinguish both herself, and her friend Deirdre, from the Assembly of Women as a new group labelled the 'Peace Women'. They organise a petition against violence in their area, but as this is suggested and supported by Brandywell (a fictional British minister), it is viewed as an attack on the IRA, and potentially the Nationalist cause, rather than the plea for normality which they intend

it to be. This is an issue which seems to mirror actual events, as Patrick Magee says of the reaction to the real 'Peace People':

Their discourse of 'peace now' was translated by the republican grass-roots, who had suffered and witnessed years of repression, to mean 'peace at any price', and was answered by the republican demand for 'peace with justice.'

Bernie understands as well as any character the position of the Catholic community, and there is no hint in the novel that she ever ignores injustices like internment (in fact, she is instrumental in having several neighbours released), but her media naivety means that she is not aware, until it is too late, how the petition will look to those within her community:

The image of the smiling politician, looking very, very pleased filled half the screen, and beside him Deirdre smiled up the smile of the winsome colleen [...] Bernie's heart stopped with a thump, her legs weakened, bowels churned. She suddenly understood what they had done, how it would be seen, how useless it all was. (*Titanic*: 241)

Brandywell's assertion that: 'It is a difficult and delicate situation you find yourselves in, and I am most concerned that you should come to no harm [...] Equally, I am concerned that you should not be used by any group or individual' (*Titanic*, p.214) rings hollow under the circumstances, as he has clearly used the women himself.

The British politicians' duplicity is enhanced by their lack of a grasp of the 'mundane' ground-level realities within Catholic areas, and, in fact, within all working-class areas. The comedy within the novel is often used to highlight how arbitrary the boundaries between 'everyday' working-class people can be. However, the line

⁴⁷ Patrick Magee, Gangsters or Guerillas?: Representations of Irish Republicans in 'Troubles Fiction', (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001), p. 88.

between the women and the British representatives seems far more definitely drawn. The various aides seem polished and suave, completely alien to Bernie and Deirdre. This is underlined when Mr Irnmonger's (one of the aides) composure is ruined by the very earthy reality of Deirdre haemorrhaging on his settee. She is looked after by his wife, while he disappears: 'Mrs Irnmonger saw them out the door and into the car. She stood in the driveway looking worried and unhappy as they drove away. Her husband, discretion itself, did not reappear' (*Titanic*: 208).

This occurrence is treated as 'mundane' by Deirdre, but such an earthy comic treatment of the female body is something which horrifies the dapper Mr Irnmonger. As Stott notes: 'Laughter shatters the illusion of women as quiet and poised and reveals them as fearfully bodily and biological creatures.' This suaveness which leads Mr. Irnmonger to be ironically termed 'discretion itself' is, in itself, something to distrust. While the IRA are occasionally inefficient in an understandable way, the British aides are both remote and unmanly; indeed, they are made most clearly 'other'. Deirdre casts judgement on Irnmonger's sexuality due to his fastidiousness, and his apparent closeness to his male secretary, which marks him out even further: 'in his job he has to be married. He'd need somebody to act as hostess, and I don't suppose Callum would do.' (*Titanic*: 209)

It is through this kind of comedy that we see both the resistance contained within Costello's writing, and also the more problematic aspects of endeavouring to write about a community which is held in some ways to be typically 'ordinary'. The judgement cast on Irnmonger's possible sexuality serves to band the two women

⁴⁸ Stott, p. 100.

together in the face of much more powerful and experienced political movers. However, it is very clear that it also reinforces some of the more conservative views of that potentially beleaguered community, showing their views of homosexuality as 'abnormal' and worthy of mockery. As in the treatment of Patsy French, however, it is not the actual political behaviour that is satirized, but the target's personal behaviour. Whilst this is not a convention confined to satire from Northern Ireland (one only has to think of the popular nickname for Peter Mandelson: 'Mandy'), it does highlight the difficulty of mediating the border between the individual, their political position and the community.

Glenn Patterson endeavours to tackle the problem of boundaries within and between communities in his novel *The International* (1999) by using a setting in which he can introduce many characters from various communities, including some sections of society in Northern Ireland who are given a voice rather less often. He voices his concern about this lack of attention to various minority groups in his definition of the phrase 'community': 'There are apparently only two, though were this leaves the Chinese community, the Indian community, the Gay community, etc. is anybody's guess.' He also makes this explicit in his discussion of the effect of the Good Friday Agreement, which he argues led many to stop interrogating the veracity of these binaries: 'it seemed to me there were- just as there had been while we were in conflict, so when we were at peace- two versions of the past and I just couldn't accept either of these versions was the complete one. ⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Glenn Patterson, Lapsed Protestant (Dublin: New Island, 2006), p. 2.

⁵⁰ Glenn Patterson, 'Passing an Artist's Eye over the Troubles', Sunday Herald

http://sundayherald.com/7347 [accessed 30 July 2002] (para. 2 of 23)

Patterson's characters often seem very detached from the easy stereotypes of Northern Ireland's two communities, and they can occasionally seem like the deliberate exception rather than the rule. Danny's background (the narrator of The International), as the child of a mixed marriage between two now atheists (he even claims that he doesn't know which of his parents is Catholic and which Protestant), is so evenly balanced that it seems a very deliberate ploy. He is also homosexual, and one of the few characters from a minority group who is allowed to become one of the main voices in a novel from Northern Ireland. The novel is set in 1967, and while legislation decriminalising homosexuality was about to be passed in England and Wales, similar laws were not passed in Northern Ireland until 1982.⁵¹ As such, Danny is something of an observer, an outsider to both communities and always having to keep watch for the practical reason that his sexuality could lead to his arrest, not to mention its status as a social taboo. However, the question of religion and communities in Northern Ireland means that it is hard for any individual to escape their influence totally, even if is only in the *attempt* to escape them.

Similar to Costello, Patterson chooses to set the novel at a crucial moment in recent Northern Irish history.⁵² The point at which the novel's action is set, and the moment it is written, respectively mark both the beginning and the end of at least part of the Troubles. The International Hotel was the setting of the first Civil Rights Movement meeting; it was also, however, the employer of one of the first victims of the violence-Catholic barman Peter Ward. This marks a moment at which previously hidden, or

⁵¹ Robert Verkaik, 'Northern Ireland divided over new rights for gays', *The Independent Online* http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/ulster/article2116916.ece [accessed 15 August 2007] (para. 14 of 24)

⁵² Patterson chooses to investigate the past in order to throw light on the present in several of his novels. These include: *Burning Your Own* (London: Minerva, 1993 [1988]) and *Number 5* (London: Penguin, 2004 [2003]).

ignored, fractures in the society of Northern Ireland began to turn themselves more into fully ideological and political positions. The moment at which *The International* is published, moreover, is just post-The Good Friday Agreement, and poised on the threshold of a possible new dawn.

The human cost of the intervening period is remembered in the novel, and is always treated with the utmost seriousness. However, the act of writing history is another matter, and the first line of the novel makes clear that the idea of a clear history is laughable: 'If I had known history was to be written that Sunday in The International Hotel I might have made an effort to get out of bed before teatime.' The point is, of course, that history is only ever written with hindsight, the important events selected and dissected after the event. In actual time, most people are unaware of their import, and generally are more concerned with the apparently 'mundane' personal events of their lives: 'if history was so easy to predict it might never have a chance to happen at all for the crowds of people wanting to have their photographs taken to say, "I was there" (*International*: 9). Danny states that he 'turned my back on the bigger story' (*International*: 10), which is ironic as the rest of the novel is clearly set to prove that the 'mundane' moments of such 'ordinary' lives are more important (and 'bigger') than the binary political discourses being set up at the time.

This 'big picture' includes images and statements from many sides of the conflict, which have almost clichéd ideas of 'winners and losers' in the Troubles. The novel complicates the assertions made by Hutcheon, noted in the introduction of this chapter, by making the reader question who the losers (or winners) are, exactly.

⁵³ Glenn Patterson, *The International* (London: Anchor, 1999), p. 9. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

Generally speaking, this would be decided in terms of political power. However, Patterson points out here that people's lives are decided not only in terms of their social grouping, but also in terms of their personal achievements. Stanley, a new customer at the bar, certainly seems to be one of life's losers. He is not 'ordinary' due to his Socialist (rather than Nationalist or Loyalist) political beliefs, and also in his eccentric pursuit of a career in children's entertainment. He hopes to interest the producer of *Crackerjack* in his socialist influenced puppet show Rab and Jem.

One may expect such deviation from the norm to mark Stanley out as a clear 'loser' of history, and we could expect him to be the victim of comedy. Indeed, his obsessions almost seem to seal Stanley's fate, as does his naïve belief in his project and his failure to read the signs of a cosmopolitan blasé treatment of him by a potential television producer. When he finally gets to show the producer his ideas the almost inevitable happens:

A friend of his was probably waiting to have a word.

'Tall man, wee beard?' the master asked.

'That's him.'

'He left.' (International: 201)

In the novel, however, Stanley is not a loser at the mercy of comedy, but is a creative comedian himself. In many ways he has a deeper insight into some of the clichés and stereotypes of his time than the producer who rejects his ideas. When the producer suggests that perhaps a better image of the two Irish puppets would be as leprechauns, Stanley decides to play him at his own game:

Walking home, however, Stanley had a better thought. Rab and Jem would *disguise themselves* as leprechauns to try and get work in England. They would be useless of course, terrible accents, beards coming unstuck. The worse they

were the funnier it would be, a complete send-up of all the stereotypes. (*International*: 206)

In contrast to Stanley, Clive (Danny's cousin) seems to be one of the winners of Belfast. A self-made man, he uses both business acumen, and sheer street-wise guile to further himself. He has learned from past experience that there are always borders, literal or metaphorical, geographical or moral, but in common with much comedy, he exploits rather than feels oppressed by these boundaries:

He developed a special fondness for border towns and border people. He admired the pragmatism that could wish the boundary away at the same time as profiting from its existence; he loved the way a cow, say, became less and more than itself when translated across the invisible line and concluded that the only worth a thing had was the amount you could persuade a body to part with for it. (*International*: 122-123)

Clive appears in the novel to be on the top of his game. He is in the middle of a deal to help Fitz, a businessman from the Republic, to earn a stake in the new Belfast Urban Motorway, by becoming a front for his company in order to cover up the involvement of a company from the Republic in an essentially Unionist endeavour. It is clear that this will involve a certain amount of bribery for Noades, a local councillor. Clive believes that he has both men firmly under his thumb, knowing as he does of Fitz's liaison with a girl which Clive has arranged for him, and Councillor Noades' bribe:

He thought it, frankly, a sign of weakness or inadequacy to allow yourself to be enticed into the sort of set-up he had contrived for Fitz last night.

Noades was just as bad. That carry-on at dinner with the new waitress: a schoolgirl, practically. If only Clive had known, he could have saved Fitz five hundred pounds and just steered a couple of lassies in gymslips the councillor's way. (*International*, pp. 233-234)

However, as Clive's exploitation of these boundaries is purely for his own gain, his potentially comic inversions seem to turn back onto him. The final irony, and also the most comic moment involving Clive, is when his smugness is removed through his own actions. It is a moment of richly deserved justice when Fitz turns out to be the better con man, and absconds with the bribe intended for Councillor Noades. It is made worse by Clive's own lies, as he clearly cannot report Fitz to the police while telling the truth, but his lie gives Fitz the time to get away: 'Clive had lent Fitz a sum of cash until the banks opened on Monday. The Master pointed out that it was only Saturday night. Fitz had not yet broken the terms of the loan' (*International*: 277).

Patterson unobtrusively passes comment upon these events through the voice of Danny who occupies a position on the boundaries of what would publicly be admitted as 'ordinary'. He, as a clearly intelligent character, is destined for a future in an office job until he is found kissing a fellow male schoolmate: 'I was taken to the headmaster's office to where in due course the police were summoned. By midnight when I was deposited on my parents' doorstep I was cautioned, expelled, and headachingly sober' (*International*: 48). The hotel itself provides an 'extra-ordinary' space in which Danny can escape to some extent, and also indulge both his and the guests' fantasies: 'I worked in a hotel and I looked as if, were you to ask me, I wouldn't say no' (*International*: 101). This said, Danny is still careful not to let his colleagues find out about his liaisons. It is a clear reminder of the fear which homosexual men have had to live under, not just in Northern Ireland, but it does also provide some of the humour. Danny lets the reader in on his secret, and there is a kind of light irony when we know Danny's thoughts, whilst other characters clearly do not (for example when

Danny is contemplating making a pass at Stanley, rather than the woman Stanley is sitting with, as she believes):

'Have you a problem?'
Yes, I have a problem, I wanted to say, but it's not what you think it is. (*International*: 245)

It is clear that much of the humour in the novel stems from the speech and word-play of the characters as opposed to the ironic view of a single narrator. Much of this humour points towards the cracks in the polarised view of Northern Ireland through 'official' histories which seek to explain the violence in terms of tribal loyalties. The wit of the bar room concentrates on puncturing these essentialist views with an amalgam of different viewpoints.

Danny's boss, Hugh, and customer Liam, are examples of players in this polyphony. Liam has open Nationalist affiliations, and it is a mark of the hotel that he can sit in the bar, along with any other customer, and read a nationalist newspaper. Liam has previously been interned for an IRA membership (which he had allowed to lapse), but his thoughts on his political actions are clearly the subject of change and reconsideration: "I thought I was a soldier," I overheard him say once, "but I wasn't, I was a complete balloon" (*International*: 30). When we meet Liam, his son is working for British Oxygen and it is the mundane necessity of a job which has caused a reform to these political beliefs: 'he blessed the company again for saving his son's working life' (*International*: 31). The irony is not lost on Hugh, but more to the point this irony is also accepted by Liam:

'I never thought I'd see the day when you were thankful for British anything,' Hugh muttered, forgetting himself, and Liam winked- Ah, now- and I wondered what memories were locked away by that brief shutter. (International: 31)

Much of the novel indulges in this wry humour, which centres on the oddities of the customers and staff at the hotel. However, the ending of the novel invokes a much darker irony, in which it intersects with violence in the fates of many of the characters. Hugh, who never takes time off, is killed on holiday driving past an army checkpoint due to 'accidental discharge'. Liam Strong is killed on one of the rare occasions he is not in The International on a Saturday night: 'He and Rita both, killed breaking the habit of a lifetime when a satchel full of gelignite was thrown into the restaurant they had gone to for dinner' (*International*: 309). The most heavily ironic death is that of an incidental character, Oscar, who is both deaf and mute: 'That same year, Oscar had a bag put over his head in an entry behind a drinking club and was shot for informing' (*International*: 310).

These are ironies which clearly go beyond comic irony, and which are used to highlight the tragedy of the ignominious ends of 'everyday' people (who could be met in any bar), but who have been made to seem 'extra-ordinary' within the narrative in a very positive sense. This is contrasted with the portrait of Gusty Spence (a major Loyalist figure), a powerful individual who is made incongruously 'ordinary': 'It was difficult, watching these proceedings on television, to comprehend how much of an influence this dapper, gentle-sounding man's actions had had on my life, on all our lives' (*International*: 317). The endings question exactly what constitutes 'ordinary' and 'extra-ordinary,' making the destruction of the characters of The International (and those like them in reality) all the more sordid as the architects of such destruction are, after all, only everyday people like them.

While many of the texts from Northern Ireland are concerned with examining the conception of community as geographically or politically based, community in works from the Republic of Ireland seems to be naturally founded on a looser agglomeration of family and friends. This is demonstrated in Pauline McLynn's Leo Street series. Throughout this series there is a tension between Street's close-knit 'community' of family and friends, and her individual career. Tellingly, this career is of a 'private' investigator, and the early cases that Leo takes are her own concern, and other characters (unless under investigation themselves) are kept very much out of the picture. However, the impact of her career, and the necessity of her community in supporting her after she loses her child becomes more apparent in later novels.

In her first novel, *Something for the Weekend*, there are few other characters that Leo interacts with comedically, especially during her periods of work, simply because nobody else involved in the main storyline can know of her real role. This leads to some curiously visual comedy for a novel, which is also strangely reminiscent of McLynn's own previous incarnation as Mrs. Doyle in *Father Ted*:

The better part of valour was to give up and walk away with an attempt at dignity. I had got a few hundred yards from him, with my head held very high, when I stepped in a rut and landed on my arse in a ditch at the side of the road. (Weekend: 211)

It is notable even in this first novel, however, just how much of the comedy does rely on having more than one character there to share in the joke. When Leo is in the company of other characters, it is comedic banter which is used to cement and highlight the forming bond between them. Many of these characters from the first novel are also brought further into the main detective plot of the subsequent novels. This culminates in *Right on Time*, in which Ciara and Con (both participants in the cookery course which acts as Leo's cover in the first novel) appear as part of the finale of the series. It is the comedic moments that these characters share which leads them to become part of the supportive community that Leo also shares with her family, as previously outlined.

It is this 'ordinary' comfortable and supportive community which is contrasted with the failure of community in the deprived area of Mayville. It is described very clearly as an area of exceptional urban decay, with issues such as drug addiction, prostitution and human trafficking (even in children) brought to the fore very quickly. Peillon notes the increasing existence of such concentrations of poverty in cities, as the deprived who may once have migrated now stay within Ireland, presumably without the skills to find jobs elsewhere: 'the growth of a significant underclass in the major cities indicated that the impoverished Irish typically had to a large extent ceased to migrate.' Leo describes the area in some disbelief, as something almost inconceivable even though it exists in her own city: 'The scene was what I imagined the days leading up to Armageddon would be like' (*Right*: 118). It is clear that though the scenes which Leo sees may be 'everyday', she also considers them to be 'extraordinary' in comparison to her own community.

It seems also that such urban degradation has to be treated as the forefront of any endeavour, as the novel keeps returning to it. Leo is particularly scathing about the use of Mayville area as the backdrop to a highly romanticised, and crass, film: 'A

⁵⁴ Michel Peillon, 'Agency, Flows and Post-colonial Structure in Ireland', *Irish Review* 30 (Spring/Summer 2003), 71-81 (p. 75).

bleak, urban drama, I thought wryly, minus the grit of real life here in the ghetto: Hollywood as Hollowood, again' (*Right*: 142). This statement, however, perhaps only highlights the uncomfortable mix that is in the novel itself. The juxtaposition of the breakdown of community in the world of Mayville, against the light, comedic community of the rest of Leo's life, questions which of these cases is the most 'real' and 'everyday' in the novel. Leo admits that she has been unaware of the levels of crime and poverty here, despite her geographical proximity in the same city: 'What kind of bubble have I been living in all these years?' (*Right*: 111). However, there are also moments when Leo's relatively comfortable life seems the true 'ordinary' reality, and Mayville and its inhabitants an unfortunate nightmare. Leo compares the social problems with her personal problem of an unplanned pregnancy. They both seem like mundane difficulties played out by ordinary people on a regular basis, but clearly Leo's problem is one which can be remedied and mitigated by the comedy within the novel, while the other cannot:

I turned dispiritedly for home and my familiar comforts, ashamed of what I saw as my own cowardice in the face of 'real life'. All of the same questions were there for the asking, all of the same problems needed to be solved. (*Right*: 118)

It is not entirely clear which problems (her own or those she turns away from in Mayville) are meant as 'real life.' However, it is clear that there is a comedic gap between the two communities, as there also seems no way for comedy to bring any hope from one to the other. Comedy is used as an inclusive bonding exercise for those who wish, and who have the opportunity, to participate. Extending this towards the less fortunate is only for the lucky few, such as the teenage girl who Leo does finally find.

I would thus argue that it is within the representations of community that we see the biggest differences in the engagement of the 'everyday' in the comic literature of the Republic and Northern Ireland. The overt politicization of people's quotidian reality in Northern Ireland means that it is difficult to avoid for many writers. The idea of 'community' is such an overdetermined concept (both in literature and more notably in news and political speak) that it necessarily carries with it dominant ideas of what it means to belong to one 'party' or the other. It is this idea of 'two' communities that therefore is foregrounded in the literature from Northern Ireland, and comedy is most often used to deconstruct the essentialisms associated with them. Characters from another kind of 'community' (such as Danny in *The International*) are rare, and provide an alternative repressed voice, beginning to make itself heard in literature from Northern Ireland.

In comparison, the literature from the Republic seems much more concerned with investigating old ideas, and ideals, of 'community' in an increasingly urbanised and fluid setting. Community here is constituted as family and friends more than the geographically and politically defined social groupings. Such texts throw up far more issues of urban deprivation, where a loss of community leads to crime and poverty (or vice versa). The challenge for comedy in this location is that, in many cases, the characters are outsiders to the deprivation, and thus is not in a position to mobilize comedy to iconoclastic ends. Consequently, such comedy loses much of its power to resist.

Conclusion

The texts considered in this chapter highlight the liminal spaces of the 'everyday' within comedy in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. It seems that in a society in such flux, the 'ordinary' or 'mundane' moments and structures of everyday existence cannot be taken for granted. The comedy here is often used to both highlight and investigate this notion of the everyday and the 'ordinary' in order to discover the importance of voices which have been hidden, as well as to discover fractures in those aspects which may have been too easily accepted as 'ordinary' or the norm, in the past.

It is quite clear that works from the Republic concentrate overwhelmingly on increasing secularisation and fragmentation in the area, reflected in gender roles and familial ties, as well as the failure of community in some areas. These works highlight the difficulty of using comedy in a way that reflects the quotidian everyday. Works by O'Carroll, Keyes and McLynn seem radical in many ways in their open treatment of issues such as sexual matters, domestic violence, generation gaps and gender roles. However, though they deal frankly with such issues, it questionable how much they test the boundaries of such matters. As such, though the comedy contained within these novels still contains the idea of an 'ordinary' social structure (often centred around the nuclear family), it treats this structure as an ideal which is there to be modified, rather than fully reappraised. For example, though Leo is pregnant out of wedlock, she is aware that a more stable relationship would be the ideal. Also, though Agnes Browne loses an unsatisfactory husband, her new partner (Pierre) essentially becomes a more positive replacement.

This re-establishment of a traditional status quo links to the often relatively conservative mode of the texts' resolution. In common with their mediation of the 'ordinary' and 'everyday', these endings may be adapted, but are rarely wholly jettisoned for an alternative. Keyes, in particular, reverses the traditional model of romantic comedy to give the heroine the active role, but this means that the ending of the novel still demands at least the prospect of a lasting heterosexual relationship. Though McLynn is able to change her resolution to that of a professional goal through her choice of the crime genre, the cementing of a relationship still appears to end the actual series of novels. O'Carroll follows his protagonist through to the final resolution of death, but not without several romantic fantasy fulfilling moments along the way.

In comparison, works from Northern Ireland concentrate far more on questioning the political and social stereotypes which have potentially become accepted as 'everyday' and 'ordinary', certainly within public political-speak. The resistance that the comedy offers is far more clearly centred upon deconstructing the binary oppositions that individuals may live within, as well as resisting violence, than mediating the more fluid vacillations of the economic and social change which characterises literature from the Republic. Indeed, the point of much of the comedy in works from Northern Ireland appears to be endeavouring to actively make ideas of community and individuals' social roles more fluid, rather than simply mediating or representing such change.

However, though works such as Glenn Patterson's *The International* endeavour to represent groups other than the mainstream Nationalist and Loyalist groupings, this is

not to say that the representation of the 'everyday' heterogeneity follows a uniformly 'progressive' line in Northern Irish literature. This is clear in novels such as those by Colin Bateman in which the comedy associated with stereotypes still prevails even if it is with the purpose of parody and deconstruction. The danger here is that it also runs the risk of re-establishing the stereotypes through constant reference and reinforcement. Comedy can be used as a way for the sense of the 'ordinary' to be both represented and challenged, as in work such as *Titanic Town*. However, as we saw in this novel, though the comedy works as a form of resistance to the political powers which threaten the protagonists' everyday lives, it can also be used to re-establish the 'ordinary' in a way that asserts values which could potentially repress others in certain circumstances (such as Deirdre and Bernie's treatment of Irnmonger).

Though many of the novels dealt with in this chapter tend to a conservative representation of the existing status quo, their overall project certainly has a strong point to make. By endeavouring to reflect life 'as it is', they frequently play with well-known stereotypes in order to disappoint the expectation of the reader. Indeed, this often seems to be the objective of many of the novels. The use of comedic tropes such as the happy ending, heterosexual relationships and stereotyping means that there is a difficult relationship between giving a radical view of the everyday and working within generic boundaries. This said, I would argue that by using popular and well-known tropes, these writers are directly tackling the most conservative modes by inverting and abusing their traditional *modus operandi*. Although the structure of such novels may be seen as conservative, the familiarity of this manner of representation may allow some radical content to be presented in a way designed to provoke a sympathetic response from the reader.

CHAPTER THREE

INTERNATIONAL AMUSEMENT: THE COMEDIC VIEW OF THE 'HYPERREAL,' THE 'AUTHENTIC,' AND THE 'REAL'*

Introduction

While it is clear in the preceding chapters that borders of societal groupings in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, as well as 'accepted' history, have been tested by comedy, there also remains the factor of an impending testing of geographical borders by the increasingly globalized world that both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland have found themselves in. According to Kevin Robins, the primacy of history as a factor in identity may be being superseded by geography: 'Geography has always mattered. For many, it matters now more than ever.' He quotes Edward Soja, revealing that it is the 'space' aspect of the collapsing 'space-time' continuum in the postmodern age that most obfuscates an attempt at making sense of the world: 'it may

^{*}Throughout this chapter these terms have a background in post-modern criticism, rather than other possible interpretations (such as Lacan's conception of the 'real' as a threatening space beyond expression). The 'hyperreal' finds its origins in critics such as Baudrillard (and Eco) in which a representation of an actual object/person becomes more real than the original. In this chapter many instances are drawn from other film, media or literary representations in these texts. The 'real' is partially based on Dick Hebdige's assertion of the 'real' as a 'lived' experience (as outlined in this introduction), in contrast to the 'hyperreal's' concentration on representation rather than actuality. This concentration of the 'lived' has a link to the day-to-day life, either externally (in terms of actual events) or in terms of the internal life of the characters. However, the 'real' in many of these texts is also confused with experiences which give 'meaning' to the characters' lives. I am aware that this is problematic, and have therefore employed the third category of the 'authentic'. This term denotes an attempt to discover a 'real' experience which is, in fact, often spurious, relying on a memory of the 'real' rather than an actual lived experience.

¹ Kevin Robins, 'Tradition and Translation: National Culture in its Global Context', in *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, ed. by John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 21-44 (p. 23). Further references to this chapter will be given after quotations in the text

be space more than time that hides consequences from us, the "making of geography" more than the "making of history" that provides the most tactical and theoretical world' (23).

As we have seen in the introduction to this study, critics such as Mercier and Krause have been inclined to deal with an homogenous 'Ireland', eliding the complex social and political borders that exist both at the moment of their own writing, and in the past. The works that we shall be dealing with here are very clearly rooted in a world which is highly aware of geographical and social borders, but also conscious of the fragmentation and porosity of those borders in an increasingly globalized age. This is a particularly important factor in the evolving use of comedy in both Northern Ireland and the Republic, which builds upon the traditions of Irish comedy identified by Mercier and Krause in texts stretching from ancient Gaelic texts to the early- and midtwentieth century, but in which the increasing influence of British and, especially, American comedy plays a part.

An evolution in the targets of comedy is also an important factor here. We have already seen in previous chapters a continuation of satires upon political, national and religious figures and practices which Mercier and Krause identified as an intrinsic part of the tradition within the Republic, and which has made up the bulk of satire within Northern Ireland. However, the new economic growth and an increasing awareness of Northern Ireland and the Republic as part of a globalized sphere has led to a whole new set of targets for comedy. The impact of the new 'Celtic Tiger' economy and the Peace Process are certainly still matters of contention among commentators, writers and academics alike, and indeed some critics question the idea that the Republic of

Ireland has undergone a total transformation. This, in itself, is linked to the difficulty of treating the Republic of Ireland as an easily labelled 'postmodern' country, as O'Connell's summation of Luke Gibbons's opinion shows: 'mythical notions of Old Ireland, exaggerations of the distinctiveness of the present and a refusal to recognise continuities with the past must undermine any attempt to assess modernity and postmodernity in this society.'²

However, I would argue that there is no doubt that the *idea* of the Celtic Tiger, and also postmodernity, has certainly entered the public consciousness. The *perception* of a 'New Ireland' can be assessed, and it is within this assessment that much of the comedy in this chapter makes its voice heard. As already hinted at in the previous chapters, the incursions of a global commodified culture have made their way into the everyday life of many people. As Dick Hebidge points out: 'while postmodern descriptions of space-time "compression" or "implosion" may seem overdrawn, it's clear that we're living in a world where "mundane" cosmopolitanism is part of "ordinary" experience.' However, this mundane cosmopolitanism has potentially more catastrophic effects on both individuals and the wider national identity in terms of people's place both within their community, and on a global scale. There has been a new concentration on what Kevin Robins terms the 'global-local nexus' (33). This concept highlights the increasing globalization (especially of the commercial) world in tandem with a concentration on the idea of the 'local'.

² Michael O'Connell, *Changed Utterly: Ireland and the New Irish Psyche* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2001), p.25.

Dick Hebdige, 'Fax to the Future', *Marxism Today* (January 1990), 18-23 (p. 20). Further references to this article will be given after quotations in the text.

Within the new global-local nexus that both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland find themselves, there are the competing pulls of a hyperreal commercialism and the pull of the 'real' existence of the local. As Hebdige says, the 'real' local is often seen as the alternative to the 'hyperreal' international commercial world: 'Cosmopolitanism- the register in which the "globalisation" of culture is today represented- is regarded as the inauthentic Other to all that is "local", "lived" hence "real" (20). This idea of the 'lived' experience being the 'real' experience certainly holds some weight in the texts we will be dealing with in this chapter. The 'lived' real often acts as a touchstone against which the targets of comedy can be measured, and against which they are frequently made to look shallow and ridiculous. However, it is necessary to separate out the idea of 'authenticity' and the 'real'. As Baudrillard says, the 'hyperreal' international world has caused a search for the 'authentic', though this seems impossible to Baudrillard in its drive for a stable identity: 'When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity.'4 In other words, the authentic is held simply as a hidden, and equally laughable, 'hyperreal', the substitution of a comforting memory of the 'real' for the real itself, much as the hyperreal is the substitution of the 'signs' of the real for the real itself.

It is this global-local nexus which the comedy in these texts explores. Comedy finds its feet here both as an intrinsic part of the postmodern arsenal of border-testing, but also as a way of resisting many of the experiences of living in a postmodern world, possibly re-inscribing conservative borders. As we have already seen, comedy is never

⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983), p. 12.

an entirely innocent act in these works, and certainly comedy is most potentially subversive, but also most potentially repressive, at border points. It creates a liminal space in which a community may inscribe, or resinscribe, its own identity: 'Public liminality can never be tranquilly regarded as a safety valve, mere catharsis, "letting off steam," rather it is communitas [sic] weighing structure, sometimes finding it wanting, and proposing in however extravagant a form, new paradigms and models which invert or subvert the old.'5

I intend to argue in this chapter that it is this ambiguous liminal space between the 'real', the 'authentic' and the 'hyperreal' that the comedy in these texts exploits and questions. It appears in much of the literature here that the 'real' is indeed the 'lived' experience of Hebdige's definition of the local, whereas the 'authentic' is seen as a disguised version of the 'hyperreal' itself. What is most clear is the conception of the 'hyperreal' as something which is to be questioned, if not, indeed, something to be wholly resisted.

As Hebdige says, community identity (and, as such, a certain sense of individual identity) is based upon a sense of place: 'It's usually through the metaphor of roots that this connection to "home" as point of origin is imagined' (20). However, the sense of place within both Northern Ireland and the Republic is often inextricably linked to a sense of 'history'; for example, the diasporic sense of 'home' or De Valera's vision of a rural Republic. Hyperreality, the increasingly interchangeable and globalized versions of culture, seem to confuse this sense of place-history, and as such place-identity or community-identity, as Malpas states: 'Humanity has become lost in

⁵ Victor Turner, cited by Lawrence E. Mintz, 'Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation, *American Quarterly*, 37 (1985), 71-80 (p. 73).

a realm of hyperreality that refuses us the distance to stand back from our experiences and question them; refuses us, in other words, a sense of historical perspective.' This may be presented as both a way of questioning clichéd versions of place-history, or may be a further confusion of the postmodern milieu.

The complicity/resistance dichotomy that informs much comedy is doubly in evidence here. Just as comedy necessarily has to draw on a certain set of shared assumptions in order to work, postmodern comedy may attempt to question the hyperreal, commodified world, yet it is also inextricably part of that world. This is particularly clear when treating it within the arena of postcolonial discourse, as Gerry Smyth notes:

For if postmodernism relies on critical/theoretical strategies which have emerged from the 'First World', and specifically from the particular phase of late capitalism into which the West appears to have moved, then this radically qualifies its claim to be the agent of resistance to Western politico-cultural practices.⁷

This factor is also complicated by the position of both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland themselves. They are clearly part of this Western, commercial world (to whatever degree social commentators will attest to), but they may also be seen as postcolonial territories. There have been calls for a new way of reading fiction without necessarily reflecting on the Irish 'thing': 'This tendency for Irish writing to be swallowed by Irish Studies and fed into a narrative of Irishness and Irish history

⁶ Simon Malpas, *The Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 94.

⁷ Gerry Smyth, 'The Politics of Hybridity: Some Problems with Crossing the Border', *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations*, ed. Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 43-55 (p. 44).

effectively imprisons it.'8 Despite this, there is clearly still a compunction to link the postmodern present to the colonial past, complicating the temporal shift. Linden Peach asserts that Ireland is an 'in-between' space, which turns its attention to tradition as much as it does experimentation: 'it [the in-between space] also involves reclamation of tradition in ways that make it peculiarly unhelpful to talk of contemporary Irish fiction, as one might more easily of British fiction in terms of "experimental" and "traditional" writing.'9

There is a danger here that the critic may see the postcolonial past in the novel more than the writer, and certainly I would argue that the reclamation of the past and tradition could also be linked to a wider postmodern tendency to try and discover both a level of 'authenticity' and the 'real' perceived as lacking in the present. Certainly, however, both the postmodern social world, and also postmodern literary experimentation, is approached with a degree of suspicion in some writing from Northern Ireland and the Republic. As Peach asserts: 'a number of Irish novels confront the unreliability of narratives, symbols and definitions and challenge the seduction of postmodernity.' 10

This is especially true with reference to the seduction of the postmodern commercial world within society. There is a feeling in many of these texts that social policy in both the Republic and Northern Ireland has been prey to the seductions of the

⁸ Peter Sirr, cited by Desmond Taynor, 'Fictionalising Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, 10 (2002), 125-132 (p. 127)

⁹ Linden Peach, *The Contemporary Irish Novel: Critical Readings* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 20. Notable exceptions to this are *Yeats is Dead!*, ed. by Joseph O'Connor (London: Vintage, 2002 [2001]), *Finbar's Hotel*, ed. by Dermot Bolger (London: Picador, 1999 [1997]) and *Ladies' Night at Finbar's Hotel* (London: Picador, 2000 [1999]), in which every chapter is written by a separate writer. In the case of Bolger's collections of short stories, the writers of each story are not specified. In the case of *Yeats is Dead!*, each writer continues the plot for a chapter before handing it on to the next, with no master plan for the story.

¹⁰ Peach, p. 21.

international global economy. The new 'decentred or polycentric corporation' (26), to use Robins' term, has had a direct impact on the role of the individual within society as part of the economic boom. A change in work ethic from being part of smaller, localised companies, to being a possibly expendable member of a workforce at the mercy of multi-nationals, has led to a questioning of the identity of the individual worker. The increasing emphasis on the insignificance of individuals with reference to the 'big picture' has led to writers examining the (im)possibility of new ways of making this working identity 'significant' in other ways.

The influence of the world-wide commodification of culture has also had an impact within both the Republic and Northern Ireland. There is clearly a repudiation in many texts of a simplistic commercial 'Irishness' which seems to be the view of outsiders. These representations may range between the kitsch, commodified 'Oirishness' of recent years, and an equally extreme media (and therefore saleable) image of the 1970s and 1980s IRA activity. These commodified versions of Irish identity are clearly not a reflection of reality, but are a hyperreal entity in themselves. As Baudrillard says of the wider postmodern environment: 'It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself. 12 However, this is also problematized by the repudiation within the texts of some insider views, and the search for an 'authentic' Irish identity through what is often depicted as an outdated Nationalist discourse, most especially within the Republic. As Aidan Arrowsmith notes, the idea of true Irish 'roots' has come to represent a comforting image in the apparently empty postmodern world: 'amidst the flux and homogenisation of globalisation, Irishness as

Baudrillard, Simulations, p. 4.

As well as the novels closely dealt with in this chapter, this theme can be found in: Jason Mordaunt, *Welcome to Coolsville* (London: Vintage, 2004) and *Yeats is Dead!*, ed. by Joseph O'Connor.

a cultural signifier appears to denote a comfortable and nostalgic sense of "home" and "family".'13

This need for the idea of an authentic Irish identity seems to be engendered by the perception that the new postmodern and commercialised Republic no longer has a distinct 'real' or 'lived' identity. As Fintan O'Toole states:

To write honestly of where most of us live now is to describe everywhere and nowhere: system-built estates, clogged-up motorways, a vastly expanded suburbia, multinational factories, shopping centres such as Liffey Valley where the food court is called South Beach and is decked out with stray bits of Florida like an Irish pub in Germany is decorated with newly-minted old authentic Irish street signs.¹⁴

This almost-parody of Lyotard's potentially more positive statement, in which one: 'listens to reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonald's food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and "retro" clothes in Hong Kong,' highlights an increasing sense of dislocation. The possibility of finding a distinct 'real' identity rather than a false 'authenticity' within this milieu is an issue which troubles many of these writers. The comedy itself sets up an attack in all camps, but can also create a dialogue between the 'real', the 'authentic' and the 'hyperreal', very rarely coming to an easy conclusion about which is the most positive, or possible.

As already noted, this perception of the 'hyperreal' as the instant when the representation of some reality (its 'simulation') becomes in fact *more* real than the

¹³ Aidan Arrowsmith, 'Introduction: The Significance of Irishness', *Irish Studies Review*, 14 (2006), 163-168 (p. 164).

¹⁴ Fintan O'Toole, cited in Desmond Taynor, 'Fictionalising Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, 10 (2002), 125-132 (p. 125).

¹⁵ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 76.

reality itself also has an impact upon the world of the news media. It seems to be the reporting of an event that is more important than the event itself. This aspect of the hyperreal is not too difficult to link to Northern Ireland, in particular, as well as wider concerns with the presentation of violence within the Republic of Ireland. Terrorism is, by definition, only terrorism if it 'terrifies' the maximum number of people. The image of the events is just as important to the terrorists as it is to the media itself, and one may even say more important to the viewers who may have no other access to these occurrences. According to Baudrillard, this is so much so that every terrorist act is already a simulation, and potentially hyperreal:

Thus all hold-ups, hijacks and the like are now as it were simulation hold-ups, in the sense that they are inscribed in advance in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media, anticipated in their mode of presentation and possible consequences.¹⁶

However, the issue is that the media itself does not (and indeed cannot) represent events in all their reality. Selection of information, and the various agendas that differing parts of the media has, can lead to representations that owe more to the demands of reporting itself than notional 'lived experience.' We have already seen instances of this in literature from Northern Ireland in previous chapters, such as in *Titanic Town* (1998 [1993]), and McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street* (1997 [1996]) in which the character Jake notes:

I'd seen riots on this road where these guys had openly passed out cash to the stone-throwing youngsters. I'd seen riots where five kids chucked a few bricks surrounded by twenty or thirty photographers who had broadcast pictures of mayhem to the world.¹⁷

¹⁶ Baudrillard, Simulations, p. 41.

¹⁷ Robert McLiam Wilson, Eureka Street (London: Vintage, 1997 [1996]), p. 361.

Such media images may present violence as the only 'real', or lived, experience in Northern Ireland. However, it is clear that writers both from Northern Ireland and the Republic question these images as 'authentic', both with reference to political violence, and also criminal violence in more recent years, as they are influenced by the commercial media sphere and the hyperreal images of Hollywood.

Many of these texts also deal with what the variable status of the 'real' actually means in terms of identity, and indeed whether a 'real' identity is possible. There is a tension between the idea of a national identity and an individual identity, which can often ignore emerging groups in the rush to form a mass identity. As already noted, there is a direct conflict between the postmodern aspects of identity, and wider concerns of the postcolonial discourse. However, it is also seen by many critics as a necessary stage in the further development of both identity and writing:

The writings of the contemporary generation offer articulations of a newly emerging movement of Irish postmodernism that reflects a cosmopolitanism that is in the process of disentangling itself from the historical dialectic of post-colonialism. ¹⁸

Whether this new 'cosmopolitanism' is a way forward to a fundamental re-thinking and discovery of identity within Northern Ireland and the Republic, or if it is simply the 'mundane', and essentially non-progressive, cosmopolitanism of Hebdige's observations seems to be the issue at stake in these texts.

¹⁸ Luke Strongman, 'Toward an Irish Literary Postmodernism: Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha'*, Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 23.1 (1997), 31-40 (p. 33).

Globalization and the 'New Ireland'

This section of the chapter deals with the globalising influence of the world economy, particularly on the Republic of Ireland. The potentially overwhelming influence of the 'global' in the local-global nexus threatens the chance to develop a specific local identity in a postcolonial interpretation of this exchange. As Peillon notes:

The post-colonial interpretation of globalization views the local as a mere extension of the global; it reduces the former to the latter and allows very little room for an analysis of the interaction which takes place between them.¹⁹

It appears that the increasing emphasis, especially in the Republic, upon an emergence into the global economy has caused a crisis in finding a 'real' and distinctive identity for many individuals.

There are many in Ireland that have benefited hugely from the much fabled and fêted 'Celtic tiger' economy. However, it has also become a target for much satirical comedy. There are clearly economic disadvantages that go along with the advantages. As Doyle demonstrates in his *Barrytown Trilogy* (1988-1991), those previously engaged in traditional working-class manual labour have found themselves pushed to the sidelines. Also, for many relatively middle-class and educated workers, it can mean that they are at the whim of global companies who have little or no loyalty to the place in which they site their bases. As economic markets change, the job security within such companies is extremely precarious, as they compete not with local areas and companies, but globally. As Simon Malpas points out: 'the ability of states to regulate their economies and distribute welfare to their citizens is eroded by the

¹⁹ Michel Peillon, 'Agency, Flows and Post-Colonial Structure in Ireland', *Irish Review* 30 (2003), 71-81 (p. 80).

increasingly interconnected world markets in which finance and employment move quickly away from any society that seems likely to prove expensive. '20

Joe Flood in *Dead Cat Bounce* (2001) finds himself dealing with just this kind of situation, but from the perspective of a worker expected to manipulate the image of a multinational to protect their business interests. The way in which Owens uses humour to highlight the vicissitudes of modern life in Dublin is complex. Joe has a job as a junior PR executive, and initially projects himself as just another very small cog in the large corporate world. From the outside, his job could seem glamorous, but Joe's lack of enthusiasm and the ridiculousness of time and motion control is made obvious. His life is curbed to an absurd extent by his immediate boss:

Pie-charts were a Geraldine speciality. Every month or so, a copy of one would land on every employee's desk, accompanied by a stern memo from Stuart, the *capo di tutti capi*. One such memo contained the following line: 'It shouldn't take more than four minutes to perform even the most complicated toilet function.'

Quite a life I'd carved out for myself.²¹

However, Joe is also complicit in some ways in the culture of consumption and commercialism that he derides. Joe is scathing about the necessities of his own job, which he sees as a dishonest abuse of image, converting everyday life to a more palatable 'hyperreal': 'As far as I could tell, it was all about exaggerating the good your clients had done while covering up the bad. It wasn't quite lying, I suppose, but you could certainly see it from there' (*Cat*: 61). Nevertheless, Joe's constant complaints of the soullessness of his existence become the butt of the comedy in the novel. Joe's view of the commercial world is depicted as out of proportion by his

²⁰ Malpas, p. 108.

²¹ Damien Owens, *Dead Cat Bounce* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2001), p. 59. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

colleague, Go-go, who sees it as inescapable: 'You think, somehow, that wanting to make a profit or wanting to have a career is morally wrong. Face facts. You're a fucking hippie. Without the charm' (*Cat*: 209).

Much of the humour in the novel, however, is centred upon parodic descriptions of those within the commodified milieu. Joe's boss, Stuart, is a case in point. Stuart seems the epitome of the 'new' Irish worker, chasing after the new capital flowing into the country. He is a master of the trans-national manipulation of image, deliberately selling the hyperreal and manipulating it to his clients' advantage. He consistently thinks in terms of the global 'big picture' of business, rather than the effect upon individuals. Joe describes him as a man totally absorbed into economic success and all its trappings:

It [Stuart's house] once featured in a weekend supplement piece entitled something like 'Rich People and the Fuck-off Houses they live in.' In the week following that publication seventeen of Stuart's twenty-two employees, including Go-go and me, requested a salary review. We were all refused because, and again I quote, 'Times are hard.' (*Cat*: 61)

Stuart is a parody of his own image, seemingly adopted from the hyperreal manifestations of the *nouveau riche* in the media. The parodic effect is heightened with his overblown mid-Atlantic speech. Owens uses the idea of an increasingly globalized American culture, but renders it ridiculous in its local, 'real' and lived surroundings: 'I started to imagine the scene ahead of me at work. Stuart running around, clapping backs, spouting about "getting to the end zone" or "going the distance" (*Cat*: 295).

This humour, however, has a more pointed economic satire to it. Stuart is ecstatic when he learns that one of their clients will possibly be closing down an electronics manufacturing plant near Dublin, thus putting out of work many of the highly skilled labour force. For Stuart, however, this is simply a possibility to show what his company is capable of on a wider scale, dealing with the public image of the parent company. He gives no thought to the people in the actual plant itself, and the indication is that on the global scale all that matters is the manipulation of a hyperreal image, rather than individuals:

I want you all to realise that this is not bad news for us. If Edinburgh closes, all well and good. If Dublin closes, then we lose a client, sure, but in the best possible way. We get to handle a closure. We get experience. We get a big fat fee. And maybe some new clients. In the long run, we'll be better off. (*Cat*: 73)

Stuart has everything the role of 'noveau-yuppie' requires; however, his apparently 'perfect' image is undercut by the lived 'real' in which nothing is perfect: 'And then there was his wife [...] She showed up at the office every so often and drove the male staff beserk with lust. And mirth- sadly, she had a voice like Barry White with a heavy cold' (*Cat*: 61). The simulation of the 'entrepreneur' seems to demand the trappings that Joe lists here, but the lived 'reality' is unlikely to ever match up to the hyperreal which Stuart seems to be chasing after.

Stuart clearly embodies the 'winners' of the Celtic Tiger economy in the Republic, and although Owens ridicules their status, he does not seem to question their existence. Similarly, Zane Radcliffe in *Big Jessie* (2003), points out the economic winners of the Northern Ireland Peace Process, focusing on the subsequent inward investment. His main character, Jessie (or Jay) Black, is a music journalist, who has

previously made his living through tabloid exposés. Several of these have involved uncovering scurrilous information on his bullying ex-classmates, who have helpfully risen to be high-profile public figures. Jay's integrity as a reporter is questioned by these revenge attacks, as Jay is just as prone to the abuse of the 'hyperreal' media image as any of his victims.

However, the main thrust of the attack on the 'New' Northern Ireland seems to target the economic inequalities that political wrangling has failed to solve. To begin with, there are many side swipes at the new 'Celtic Tiger' economy that is seeping into Northern Ireland, riding on the global cachet of the success in the Republic of Ireland, and also the relative success of the Peace Process. The concentration on new workers in high-profile jobs coming into the area, rather than investment in new employment opportunities for existing residents is noted, as the apartment that Jay lives in has been built on land that could have been used for new companies. The view of those likely to buy the apartments is clear: 'His market researchers had identified this group of Celtic Tigers, young professionals who were apparently prepared to part with one million plus for the privilege of bestriding the city like colossal wankers.'²²

Radcliffe also makes clear that many of the 'small' people still seem to feel pushed out of the politics of the area, and are disenfranchised by the concentration on jobs based on the global economy which focus on commercial potential as an indicator of worth, rather than less easily calculated factors. Jay compares himself as a well-paid music journalist to Carmel, his flat-mate, who has to deal with huge amounts of trauma as a nurse:

²² Zane Radcliffe, *Big Jessie* (London: Black Swan, 2003), p.76. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

There was I, getting paid three times as much as her for doing sod-all squared. I'd be writing three paras on some precious sub-Velvets wannabes, while she'd have to summon the words to tell a single parent their one and only had died. (*Jessie*: 31)

The helplessness of many of the characters, in the face of these global trends, is frequently vented as humour of one kind or another. Jay makes this explicit in Carmel (or Karma's) case: 'From bedpan to deadpan without breaking stride' (*Jessie*: 31).

However, compared with *Dead Cat Bounce*, this state of affairs is laid firmly at the door of corrupt politicians. In *Big Jessie*, Jay is only able to live in his flat because of his discovery of a homosexual affair between the developer and a high-profile politician. The fact that Jay is paid-off with the flat (for never publishing this story) questions his integrity, though it is excused within the novel by his wish to help Carmel and his other flat-mate, Diggsy. It is clear that much of the corruption in the novel is still linked with the lingering effects of political violence and a closed political system within Northern Ireland, which Jay stands outside as the journalist-observer.

The material consequences of this are something which we will move onto in the next section; however, it does set up an illuminating similarity between Northern Ireland and the Republic with reference to the global-local nexus in that it is the individual, and their sense a of a secure value in the global world of the hyperreal, which is most at risk in both areas. One may argue, however, that there is an enlightening difference in the comedy. There is a long tradition in Northern Ireland of ridiculing individual politicians as corrupt, while satire within the Republic seems to have concentrated on such hegemonic apparatus as the church. As such, possible corruption in the Republic

seems to be sidelined, despite high profile cases involving former Taoiseach Charles Haughey and the publication of the Flood report into widespread political corruption in 2002.²³

While the protagonists in *Big Jessie* and *Dead Cat Bounce* both subscribe to, and resist, the idea of the international world of commodity, the protagonist of Robert Cremins' *A Sort of Homecoming* (1998) throws himself into the international space of the 'hyperreal'. Tom (or Tomás) Iremonger seems to have wilfully embraced all that the postmodern world has to offer. He endeavours to literally enact the collapse of space-time in the global-local nexus, by losing himself in a global 'lost weekend'. In embracing the hyperreal he re-invents himself as the image of 'Iremonger' (as he prefers to be called), endeavouring to subsume his 'real' lived experience, which we find to be quite different. The first indication we have of this is Iremonger confronting himself as a poster model in the airport (during an enforced return for Christmas). There is some confusion as to which 'Iremonger' he 'is': the image or the man:

I see myself, Iremonger illuminated, as soon as I turn the corner. A red paisley tie (Oscar's, £29) offsets the dark-blue tailored suit (Louis Copeland, £499). I carry a cell phone in one hand, a copy of *The Irish Times* in the other. The other me walks faster, weaving around other passengers.²⁴

Iremonger is obsessed with the surface minutiae of his hyperreal image, but he increasingly gets this confused with his lived, and 'real', identity. Cremins seems to indicate that by denying his past, Iremonger necessarily denies his 'real' self. The

²³ See: 'Haughey vague at bribes enquiry', BBC News,

<www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern ireland/845446.stm> [accessed 11 June 2007] and: James Helm,

^{&#}x27;Tribunal exposes Irish political corruption', BBC News

<www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2284586.stm> [accessed 11 June 2007]

²⁴ Robert Cremins, *A Sort of Homecoming* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998), p. 5. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

irony of the poster is that it is there to advertise the importance of the new educated, skilled class in the economy of Ireland: 'Our Greatest Resource, reads the slogan at my feet' (Homecoming: 5). Not only has Iremonger spent most of his time out of the country since his graduation; the money that is funding his lifestyle has been inherited from the 'old' generation of his grandfather. Iremonger himself has, in fact, contributed little to the Irish economy except his image.

Though Tom subscribes wholly to his idea of the 'hyperreal', Cremins, along with many writers from both Northern Ireland and the Republic, seems determined to discover a lived 'real'. Tom projects himself as a simulation- an essentially empty sign- while Ireland, most specifically Dublin, acts as a repository of the 'real'. Rather than the real and the hyperreal collapsing into one another, Cremins endeavours to play the one off against the other, showing that Tom's adoption of the pose of the hyperreal only prevents him from engaging with the real world contained in Dublin. The only nod towards the 'real' that Tom makes is the purchase of his 'genuine' American policeman's jacket (nicknamed Nico). However, its association with the consumer world, and the fact that Tom appropriates its history rather than 'lives' it, marks it out as a symbol of the false 'authenticity' that seemingly needs to be resisted.

One episode which underlines Tom's misappropriation of both the hyperreal and the 'authentic' is an altercation with a former university friend, Ardal. At the beginning of the novel, Tom has a casual relationship with him, which involves Ardal (otherwise known as 'Bish') supplying him with cocaine. Tom's naïve insistence that he can deal with Ardal, as he suspects he has been dealt some bad drugs, shows that his worldly-wise façade is painfully inadequate. Ardal represents the darker side of an image built

upon consumption. Like Tom abandoning his given name of Tomás, Ardal also leaves his old name behind, to become 'Bish'.

Bish robs Tom of his prized jacket, in order to cause him the maximum embarrassment rather than for pecuniary gain. Tom cannot even bring himself to tell his parents that he has been robbed by 'one of his own.' Tom's embarrassment attests to the fact that, at heart, he is aware that he is still part of this comfortable, middle-class milieu. Ardal, on the other hand, only uses this background as a cover to retain his Trinity University rooms. Unlike Tom, who merely adopts the surface image of the hyperreal, Ardal internalizes the Hollywoodized images of criminality and becomes a high class drug dealer inclusive of hard-men sidekicks and a gun: 'A Christmas present. From Ardal to the Bish. Like it? A Steurenagel 17. German precision engineering – the Porsche of pistols' (*Homecoming*: 212). Within the novel, this fits with the comic parodies of the 'New' Ireland, in which consumption (even of drugs) is the new prize. However, the more serious indication is that the lived 'reality' of Ardal is, in fact, as a simple, but ruthless, criminal and bully.

This seems to be a repeat of the bullying that has haunted Tom since his childhood as his image, as he perceives it, never quite lives up to what is expected. To add insult to injury, the figure the teenage Tom most compares himself to, Strongbow, is now Tom's ex-girlfriend's new fiancé. Even in the episode where Tom describes his first impressions of Strongbow, however, it is clear that it is his over-sensitive sense of image which lets Tom down. At first, he avoids Strongbow because he is so English, seemingly a disadvantage in a school with a sense of Irish nationalism: 'I thought that befriending him might lower my already modest social standing in the class'

(*Homecoming*: 94). The irony is that Strongbow becomes more 'authentically' Irish than Tom: 'Strongbow could have gotten a pass from Irish class but didn't, and learnt more of the language in two months than I had done in seven years' (*Homecoming*: 95).

In many ways, this 'authentic' image that Strongbow cultivates is laughably precarious (after he moves back to England as an adult he regains his Home Counties accent); however, it contrasts markedly with Tom's family background. Strongbow's heritage (which is Irish) fits in more easily with a simplistic Nationalism which is projected as 'authentic' in the media. This is amusingly juxtaposed with Tom's forefather:

A picture of the funeral [of Strongbow's grandfather] made the inside pages of *The Irish Times* – Strongbow and his family and all these big shots from Fíanna Fáil. Old man Strongbow had been in the GPO in 1916. (So had my grandfather, as a junior clerk; he got marched out of the building about ten minutes after Pearse read the Proclamation from the front steps). (*Homecoming*: 95)

Tom's grandfather's background seems to prevent Tom being able to reach for the same level of 'authenticity' as Strongbow, despite the fact that this is an equally 'constructed' hyperreal image. The message here is clearly that the public image of Ireland, supported by the newspaper coverage, is searching for a solid past to counteract the uneasy present. Baudrillard notes this tendency in the wider postmodern world: 'what we seek now is not glory but identity, not an illusion but, on the contrary, an accumulation of proofs- anything that can serve as evidence of a historical existence.' 25

²⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, trans. by Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. 21

The myth of Tom's family origin does not fit the 'authentic' origins that the media wishes the Republic to be built upon and, as such, is discounted. Tom's grandfather was a self-made-man in the new Republic, but he was also part of governmental policy that prevented Jewish refugees access to the country during the Second World War. The lived 'reality' is somewhat more subtle, but is clearly too complex for a media image. As Tom's uncle says: 'I think it's true to say that sometimes Daddy identified too closely with his job, that he was too much the civil servant' (Homecoming: 183). This also implicates the past governmental structure of the Republic (acting in the public interest), for which Tom's grandfather acts as a media scapegoat. Though Tom tries to defeat this sense of the 'authentic' through his use of the 'hyperreal', there is an indication that by his denial of his background (and therefore his lived 'reality'), he is doomed to failure. Cremins' novel is quite clearly a comment upon the 'New' Ireland itself, and the role of the globalizing commodity within this. It would seem, to some extent, that it is the wholesale acceptance of the global 'hyperreal' that is held up for interrogation by the humour in the novel.

However, while novels such as A Sort of Homecoming and Dead Cat Bounce posit the existence of a 'New' Celtic Tiger Ireland, there are novels which identify the adoption of potentially 'hyperreal' images long before the recent economic upturn. Once again, this argues against the idea of the Republic of Ireland as an isolated Western country, and reveals it to have been part of this trend long before a 'new' Ireland is meant to have emerged. Patrick McCabe's novels, in particular, deal with ideas of scapegoats, the 'real' and a global influence in small-town Ireland's past. In his novel Breakfast on Pluto (1998), Pussy Braden's obsession with consumer goods and labels begins in

the 1970s and throughout the novel he models himself on Hollywood idealisations of female sensuality, both in order to make sense of his sexuality and escape his small-town surroundings. Consumerism is here linked to a 'hyperreal' image of femininity (or hyper-femininity):

My arms I filled with Max Factor, Johnson's Baby Oil, Blinkers eyeshadow, Oil of Ulay, Silvikrin Alpine Herb shampoo, Eau de toilette, body mosturizers, body washes, cleansing milks, St Laurent Eye and Lip make-up, Noxene Skin Cream and Cover Girl Professional Mascara. Not to mention clothes!²⁶

While Pussy appears to revel in the surface at least as much as Tom Iremonger, this also relates to an aspect of Pussy's personality (his femininity) which gives his life 'real' meaning. Unlike Tom, it is not simply an escape from his past, though the glamorous film stars which Pussy chooses as his role models do provide some kind of imaginative escape from his home town of Tyreelin. This also contrasts to his female friend, Charlie, who seeks the 'authenticity' of a hippy lifestyle, but again through commodified objects: 'A cloth Indian belt and nature shoes — I simply gave up in despair' (*Breakfast*: 35).

This comparison with Charlie does highlight the humorous aspects of Pussy's persona, as he often adopts these 'hyperreal' aspects of femininity to the point of parody. However, it also reveals the opposing trajectory- in which Charlie rejects feminine 'glamour' in favour of an alternative 'authenticity'- to be equally laughable. Both Charlie and Pussy adopt a different image in opposition to the small-town that they live in, but it is clear that in some ways *both* the 'hyperreal' or the 'authentic' are essentially hollow when compared to their 'real' lived experience, as they fail to

²⁶Patrick McCabe, *Breakfast On Pluto* (London: Picador, 1999 [1998]), pp. 35-36. Further references to this text are given after quotations in the text.

entirely make up for the lack therein. Both Pussy and Charlie have breakdowns after experiencing political violence, and it is only after they accept a more stable 'lived' experience that they can recover (notably for Pussy, however, this still involves the adoption of a feminine role, a factor that I will return to later). This, in fact, involves them moving to England, though this is also equally problematic, a difficulty which I will return to.

McCabe interrogates the nature of the apparent switch from the 'Old' Ireland to the 'New' more thoroughly in his later novel, *Call Me the Breeze* (2003). In the early part of the novel the protagonist, Joey, lives in Scotsfield: another small-town in the grip of economic stagnation and political violence during the 1970s. After Joey spends some time in prison (roughly from the early-1980s to the mid-1990s), however, he is released into what seems like a different country. In his early years of incarceration, Joey notes links his own depression to the general depression of the country: 'You almost go into a foetal crouch as you turn each weighted and weary page [of his prison diary], with talk of nothing- only strikes and abortion referenda, rain and misery in a country that seemed ruined.'²⁷ By the time he is released, it seems that the country itself is ready for a new era: 'Because now, in the town of Scotsfield and everywhere else, absolutely anything was up for grabs. *Boomtown*, they were calling it in the papers now. I couldn't wait' (*Breeze*: 120).

However, though Joey feels that he is coming back to a new era in the town's history, the continuing existence of dishonest political dealings, small-town hypocrisy and overtones of violence (which Joey was at the mercy of before his jail sentence) are

²⁷ Patrick McCabe, *Call Me the Breeze* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), p.103. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

still in evidence. The cross-border political violence and corruption that exist in the portion of the novel set in the 1970s have simply put on another 'image', summed up in the form of the local politician Boyle Henry. The link between the 'hyperreal' and what could be termed political media 'spin' is made clear, as Boyle changes his public persona from IRA collaborator to peace worker in order to keep his position: 'He's done Trojan work behind the scenes for a settlement in Northern Ireland, Joseph. Works night and day' (*Breeze*: 121). It is clear to the reader that attitudes within the town have not changed: only the cosmetic appearance of such landmarks as the local bar, which first gains a disco, and then becomes a wine bar. The whole outward appearance of the town appears to be a 'hyperreal' construction, which conceals the lived 'real' experience of violence and hypocrisy. Indeed, much of the novel's humour comes with the constant threat of Joey revealing Boyle's past crimes.

This aspect of humour within the novel is complex, however, as it relies on Joey's own unreliable narration. He sees, or certainly senses, the hypocrisy and stagnation in the town that seem to constitute the lived 'real,' despite the attempts to hide them with a hyperreal façade. However, we also have to question the extent of Joey's grasp of 'reality' in his attempts to find an emotional 'authenticity' which seem to be based upon cult films, literature and popular music, with no attempt to link them to the 'real', or even likely. For example, his attempts to run a local talent festival are amusingly out of touch with the contemporary world as he hopes that U2 and Madonna might play the next year. The priest has to point out to Joey that the 'jokes' that some local people make in front of Joey himself are truly derisory. Many in the town really are laughing at him, rather than with him: 'I won't let you make a cod of yourself! Do you think I don't hear what they're saying? Even in front of you they say

it!' (Breeze: 134. Italics in original). The fact that the reader may laugh at the same aspects of Joey's character certainly problematizes the comedy; however, our sympathy is largely still with Joey as a figure of some morals (however twisted). This is in contrast to the town itself which is clearly happy with its 'hyperreal' makeover, and remains indifferent to more fundamental changes in its corrupt political life.

It is clear from these novels that both the commodified 'hyperreal' and 'authentic' are seen as suitable targets for comedy. However, it is also clear that it is the individual characters' relationship to the 'authentic' and the 'hyperreal' that is the most laughable element within this. A failure to connect to a lived 'real', as in the case of *Dead Cat Bounce* and *A Sort of Homecoming*, renders the characters ridiculous, and it is their blind ignorance which is most highlighted by the humour. This is more problematic in McCabe's novels, and also Radcliffe's, as the violence enacted upon, or experienced by, the main characters (as well as ostracism due to his sexuality in Pussy's case), means that their actions are constrained by their surroundings as much as their own shortcomings. Clearly the lived 'reality' of violence and repression is one that most would wish to escape. The main problematic aspect is that the comedy can only offer alternatives to the 'hyperreal' or the 'authentic' in small instances, or on an individual scale. It seems that escape from the post-modern state can only be achieved through the individual conscience, while a wider comedic attack on the global is left at the wayside.

Place, violence and the borders of comedy

The differences between Northern Ireland and the Republic with regards to the representation of the hyperreal are more marked when dealing with the nexus of

comedy and violence. Economic changes in both the Republic and Northern Ireland are clearly up for debate in both areas; however, violence has a very specific political and emotional resonance which seems to alter the way in which comedy is deployed in specific contexts. This is also dependent on the (hyperreal) presentations of such violence within both the fictional and factual media.

As various television companies and news channels vie for the attention of the public, the images of violence become more 'real' to the viewer and more distanced from the material experience of the events, entering the realm of the 'hyperreal'. As Marc O'Day states: 'there are increasingly numerous examples where the "reality" of television problematizes or even replaces everyday reality.'²⁸ O'Day mentions Baudrillard's famous claim that the Gulf War 'didn't happen', and though this is clearly an overstatement, for those not directly involved it may well seem true: 'for the vast majority of people the war, like much of the wall-to-wall breaking news and current affairs coverage of CNN and its rivals, was only experienced as a media event.'²⁹ I would argue, however, that this assertion is especially problematic for those living in Northern Ireland. Such events here, due to the compact geography of the region, are often very close to home. It is also true that these same citizens are aware (through international media and the Irish diaspora) how those outside Northern Ireland may (mis)represent the situation.

This may be linked to the globalizing economic influence. Media images, both factual and fictional, are at the mercy of market decisions about what will 'sell', not just their adherence to the 'real'. Perversely, perhaps, violence has been commodified in

²⁸ Marc O'Day, 'Postmodernism and Television', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 103-110 (p. 103).
²⁹ O'Day, pp. 103-110 (p. 104).

Northern Ireland itself. The 'Troubles Tours' now run by a local bus company (which take in such sights as Loyalist and Republican wall murals) are a good example of an economic outcome which attempts to explain Northern Ireland to the outside world, but in a selective fashion. This may treat the tourists as passive (rather than active) agents, thus preventing a more thoroughgoing investigation by such outsiders. As Spurgeon Thompson notes:

Consumerism, then, is the tourist board's answer to curiosity. If curiosity is managed within the strict orderings of consumer capitalism, where subjects are understood as consumers not critical agents, for example, then the tourist board can deflate the potential threat represented by curious visitors.³⁰

Both literature and the media (which are both, after all, commercial arenas with their own consumers) have to deal with a similar balance between giving the reader/viewer information which they may actively evaluate, or endeavouring to make them into a passive recipient of an enforced view. The frequent use of reportage and parody in novels and film can blur the boundary between the fictional (the potentially 'hyperreal') and the factual (the 'lived real'). This often gives the novels or films themselves a gloss of the factual, but also perhaps gives the real events the gloss of the fictional. Added to the communal act of comedy, this may draw the reader into a world which could bear questioning.

It is clear that there is a strong feeling amongst authors from Northern Ireland, however, that such fiction treads a very fine line, and particularly that events potentially linked to violence are to be treated with care. The imposition of 'Troubles Trash' literature, especially that written by those outside Northern Ireland, is often

³⁰ Spurgeon Thompson, 'The Commodification of Culture and Decolonisation in Northern Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, 7 (1999), 53-63 (p. 54).

derided for its excess and flimsy hold on the facts. As well as the appropriation of classical realism as a method of exposing the 'everyday' reality (as discussed in the previous chapter), another way in which such sensational literature has been deconstructed is through the use of humour to puncture the gloss of media manipulation. Public figures held to be complicit with violence are, for example, often satirized for their exploitation of the media. What is very clear is that the *victims* of violence are not generally allowed to be the targets of comedy.

Big Jessie, by Zane Radcliffe (much like Colin Bateman's texts discussed in the previous chapter) deals with the role of the journalist in the media, and also deconstructs the idea of 'spin' or media manipulation through the author's parody of public figures. The fact that most of the characters are reporting upon, or involved in, violent deeds, clearly makes this a politically charged act. What is clear in this novel is that the journalist in question, Jessie (or Jay) Black, has his own, very personal, agenda for the work that he does. We are told of an episode at the start of the novel in which he is bullied by several members of his school class. He swears that he will have some kind of revenge upon them: 'McClaren, Meeks and Huggins were going to suffer. Even, as it turned out, if it took me twenty-four years' (Jessie: 19). It seems to be in the tradition of comedic unlikely coincidences that all of his old classmates end up being very public figures, and he also ends up being a journalist.

In common with Colin Bateman, Radcliffe's comedy takes in more than one target, which includes, at times, the protagonist. It is clear that Jay's motives are not necessarily high-minded, and he has been responsible for a lot of tabloid journalism, finding 'dirt' on public figures other than his old tormentors. As noted earlier, at the

beginning of the novel Jay has threatened to expose McClaren (now a successful property developer) as a closet homosexual. Jay's elastic morals are illustrated by the fact that he agrees to be paid off by McClaren, who gives Jay a large apartment on the newly gentrified riverside. Jay justifies this by pointing out that it is also to the benefit of his two best friends: 'if Diggsy hadn't just been kicked out of his parental home and Carmel hadn't so recently been attacked on the steps of the nurses' quarters at the RVH, I might have laughed in McClaren's face' (*Jessie*, pp. 78-79). Jay seems to have a foot both in the lived 'real' through his friends, but is part of a hyperreal manipulation of public image, in which he is aware that exposing the 'real' can be detrimental.

While the figures of the school bullies are all clearly fictional parodies of 'types', there is a large amount of humour which relates to known groups and figures within Northern Irish politics. The comedy directed at them is both very visceral and angry. The book is written in the years after the Good Friday Agreement, after which the plans for devolution began to grind to a halt. The frustration at the inability of some politicians, especially Unionist, to compromise, is illustrated by the rationale behind Diggsy's art 'instalment':

While construction was taking place all over Belfast, the Unionists were ensuring that nothing constructive happened at Stormont. They met the irresistible force of progress with immovable objection. *Never, never, never. No, no, no.* Their politicians had become dinosaurs and their institutions, particularly the Orange Order, had become increasingly outmoded and irrelevant. (*Jessie*: 23)

The artwork itself sounds like a parody of some contemporary art instalments, which somewhat suggests that such endeavours are 'out-of-touch' with an everyday 'reality' in their overt use of simulation. However it is clear that the target of the art is also the main target of the comedy. The Unionist politicians are shown to be out-of-touch with the 'real' desires of the people through the instalment, which is a bowl of oranges slowly rotting with the backdrop of Belfast itself.

This use of potentially hyperreal parodies seems to be more dangerous with reference to individual public figures, confusing the 'hyperreal' and the lived 'real' to a much larger degree than any other authors from Northern Ireland that we have dealt with so far. Radcliffe seems to deviate in many ways from the parodies of public figures invoked by Bateman or McLiam Wilson. While these authors clearly mould the truth into a caricature, stretching it in places, they rarely 'make up' facts or give their characters extraneous personality defects. However, Radcliffe seems to go much further, although his parodies are not, perhaps, as direct. This begins with the minister that McClaren is having an affair with: the Reverend Ian Crawford. Not only is he a closet homosexual, but he is also a hypocrite, publicly declaring: "The only solution to homosexuality in Ulster," he famously proclaimed, his voice rising to a crescendo, "is a good LYNCHING!" (Jessie: 78).

The idea of a religious figure also being a political figure in Northern Ireland is not rare, and could be seen as a general parody of 'type', rather than of a specific person. However, the fact that Crawford is also a best selling balladeer automatically draws one's mind to figures in Northern Irish political life, such as the Unionist Reverend William McCrea (who has released several gospel albums). The fact that these figures do not seem to have had any sexual scandals in their lives suggests that this parody, though funny, is pushing into dangerous territory in which the 'hyperreal'

representation may supersede the lived 'real' in a way that is detrimental to the individual. The fact that such figures have often highly questionable political histories also raises the question of whether political misdemeanours are no longer enough to raise the requisite distaste within the reader. Again, Reverend William McCrea is a case in point. Though he appears to have had no personal scandals, he took the controversial step of sharing the platform at a rally with the hard-line Loyalist paramilitary Billy Wright in 1996 (and was later to officiate at his funeral after Wright was assassinated). However, these kinds of actions are passed over in favour of very personal hypocrisies.

This tendency is exacerbated by figure of Martin O'Hanlon, who is also the father of the main love interest, Scarlet/Edel. He is the leader of a major Nationalist party, and has known links with the IRA. It is difficult not to think of either Gerry Adams or Martin McGuinness (although Radcliffe does seem to make the physical description quite different from the two of them). Scarlet becomes a very unwitting *femme fatale*, as every man who comes into contact with her is hurt or warned off, via the violent links that O'Hanlon has. Jay threatens O'Hanlon's ruin not through his political links, however, but by taping an interview from Edel detailing years of physical abuse: 'My dad was a bully. A violent bully. He hit me' (*Jessie*: 319). Much as with Bateman's stock caricatures of paramilitary figures, violence is shown to be an intrinsic part of this character, but here it is explained in terms of intensely personal reasons. It is also clearly designed to provoke an emotional response in any reader, not just one familiar with the Northern Irish political situation.

^{31 &#}x27;The Gospel Singing MP', BBC News: Northern Ireland,

 [accessed 28 August 2007] (para. 15 of 21).

We are shown that O'Hanlon also kills to cover up the fact that he had an early affair with a woman who later becomes a British political figure, and who delivered their still-born child. It is this personal history that the novel uses to explain his violent actions, and the supposed political justifications are subsumed by this:

As far as he was concerned, Kate Rogers had killed his wee boy. This woman, this *English* woman, had murdered his child. It's all very sad. Marty used to place such great value on the sanctity of human life, but from that day on, and for decades after that, he exhibited such a wilful disregard for it. (*Jessie*, pp. 226-227)

Again, as these 'hyperreal' parodies are based upon extraneous fictional details, this tactic may actually detract from the very real political reasons for satire: the control that these people have over the public at large. It may well seem that this parody leaves comedy behind, and indeed, it could be seen as the most dangerous aspect of the novel in strategic terms. It is very usual for stock characters, stereotypes and parodies to turn up in comic novels. However, I would suggest that in this instance the parody does not seem either funny nor directly satiric, and thus it is even harder to justify its inclusion.

The very deep political basis for these potentially hyperreal images marks a difference in the treatment of violence and its reporting by the media in texts from Northern Ireland and the Republic. Within the Republic, especially in those comedic novels set in Dublin, there seems to be very little direct party political involvement in the violence; instead it is centred around purely criminal violence. Ferdia Mac Anna's Cartoon City (2000) is notable, as it uses a very similar approach, plot line and central character as Radcliffe's novel, but it does seem to have a different relationship to the 'hyperreal' and the lived 'real'. Gerry Smyth notes the importance of Dublin in the

literary imagination of fiction from the Republic of Ireland, but also notes the changing face of the city from the 1980s and beyond: 'new "Dublins" were emerging-post-industrial sprawl, misplanned conurbation, heroin capital of Europe- a spatial organization incorporating a wide range of diverse and amorphous microcommunities: self-conscious bourgeousie, increasingly internationalized working class, criminal cadre schooled on Hollywood.' Certainly, this latter group of the 'criminal cadre' is much in evidence in *Cartoon City*, and it is the adoption of hyperreal images of Hollywood by the criminal fraternity in the novel which provides the site for much of the humour. The very title indicates that the setting of the novel, and the events therein, are in the arena of simulation and the hyperreal.

The underlying violence and criminality in the city is clear from the start, as it begins with the protagonist, Myles (another journalist), reporting on a gang who is about to hijack a van full of illegal cigarettes. The fact that the hijacking is foiled by the gang finding the driver in the truck with his mistress sets the tone of ineptitude that follows Myles, as well as Pat and Dez (the actual criminals). The sales-driven media that Myles represents is evidenced by the way that he alters his planning of the article. At first, he intends a gritty exposé of Dublin's underworld: 'The ease with which the crime had been accomplished gave Myles an angle for his article: "Crime Pays – and that's why people do it" However, when the plan fails, this angle is easily changed to accommodate the problem: 'Myles concluded that tonight's cock-up would make a good gang-who-couldn't-shoot-straight type of colour piece' (*Cartoon*: 12). The experience that Myles himself has 'lived' does not really matter, only how he can

³² Gerry Smyth, 'The Right to the City: Re-presentations of Dublin in Contemporary Irish Fiction', in *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*, ed. by Liam Harte and Michael Parker (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 13-34 (p. 14).

³³ Ferdia Mac Anna Cartoon City (London: Parker 1997).

³³ Ferdia Mac Anna, *Cartoon City* (London: Review, 2000), p. 8. Further references to this novel are given after quotations in the text.

convert this into a commodified, saleable and ultimately 'hyperreal' image. This conjures up the illusion of 'authenticity', appealing to a memory of the 'real' already affected by media images.

Pat is an old friend of Myles, and he clearly has his own agenda for being in the media, as he craves the notoriety. What is clear is that this criminality and violence is being used for a 'hyperreal' voyeuristic entertainment. There is no question that the bottom line is to sell more newspapers using a gritty 'authentic' image, and not to expose a lived and therefore 'real' problem within society. Pat has offered his services for his own ends, and there is no danger that he himself will ever be exposed to the structures of justice through the newspaper. This is further underlined when Myles goes to meet Pat again for what he is promised will be another 'really sweet story' (*Cartoon*: 14).

This time, the story centres on an illegal dog fight, which is in fact run by Pat's own mother. It seems to be something of a family affair, as Pat brings his own son to the fight as well, warning him to lie about where he is:

Alongside Myles, Pat lifted his small son onto his shoulders for a better view.

- 'Darren, where are we at this minute?' Pat said.
- 'At the movies, Da,' Darren said.
- 'What are we seeing?'
- 'A Bug's Life.'
- 'Very good. Be sure you remember that.' (Cartoon, pp.71-72)

There is an instance of black comedy here as we see both the contrast and the similarity between what Pat says he is taking his son to see, and where they actually are. Clearly, a dog fight is not a suitable place for a child, and contrasts with the anti-

violent morals of a cartoon like *A Bugs Life*. However, as already noted, the way in which violence is treated in the novel is almost cartoonish, as it is rarely seen as 'real' by the main characters; rather it belongs in the world of the film and fictional narrative. The concern that the humour seems to target is the confusion between hyperreal and real violence which seems to take place in all of the characters' minds.

As Myles' aim is to make himself an 'ace' reporter through the exposé (rather than write the exposé because he is a good reporter), the violence seems secondary to how it is going to be written up and presented. It becomes more about the showmanship, the 'hyperreal' gloss, of the newspaper article than the 'real' lived (or potentially dying) nature of the spectacle itself. This is reinforced by the appearance of the star attraction 'Buster'. This turns out not to be another dog, but a man, and his appearance is described rather like the entrance of boxers into a ring:

As the entourage approached, the minders walked either side of the figure, shining flashlights. The crowd parted to let them pass. The man in the cape was a small, brawny black man with a pockmarked face wearing a leopard-skin headband. (*Cartoon*, p.76)

The spectacle of the man seems to detract to some extent from the fact that he has, essentially, been demoted to the status of an animal, in being required to fight them. The fact that it is a black man, with the addition of a leopard skin headband, conjures up images of the 'savage' which would seem more nineteenth-century than twenty-first-century Dublin. Simon Critchley points out the inverse relationship that this action has to comedy, producing fascinated revulsion, rather than laughter: 'There is

something charming about an animal become human, but when the human becomes animal, then the effect is disgusting.'34

The de-sensitising of the crowd to violence is very clear; however, this also reflects back onto the reader. We know that the novel is fiction, and therefore we may suspend a moral judgement, and even gain a vicarious enjoyment. The narrative, however, also calls into question other aspects of the media, through Myles' role as a journalist indulging in particularly sensational stories (which, unlike a novel, do purport to be 'real'). The novel is, however, based upon some level of reality, and the line between the vicarious enjoyment of the novel, and the vicarious enjoyment of such journalism, becomes blurred, complicating the ethical relationship between the novel and the reader. In many ways, this implicates the reader as we marvel at the spectacle of the dogfight and 'Buster', even if not in quite the same way as the characters.

In this case, the black humour of the novel does, in fact, serve to police the boundary between the ethically 'right' and 'wrong', which seems to equate to a misappropriation of the hyperreal glamour of violence versus an awareness of the lived 'real' consequences. The comment in the novel is implicit, as we see the dark irony of Pat's son's innocent comments, and the overblown, but also vacant and exploited nature of Buster. Myles also endeavours to make a comment in his portrayal of the dogfight: 'As an epilogue he tacked on a short made-up section in which "Black Pat" advises his son against a life of crime' (*Cartoon*: 79). Myles' attempt at a moral tag-line is, however, undercut by his very admission that it is made up, and also by the fact that Pat almost encourages his son into a life in the violent criminal periphery:

³⁴ Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 34.

'Can I have a fighting dog?'

'Who's gonna feed it? Who's gonna scoop out its shit?'

'I will.'

'Maybe when you're nine, and then only if you're good.'

(Cartoon: 74)

It is also quite clear how Myles pushes the criminal characters into the arena of the media, and also how they become (potentially) part of the hyperreal realm of violence. Myles portrays Pat, and his sidekick Dez, as following in a line of outlaws against the restrictive mores of conservative society: 'whose lawless acts were assertions of individuality against a bland, conformist and unfair society' (*Cartoon*: 79). The images of Hollywood seem to be more appropriate than a contemporary equivalent, and Myles has to dip into the fictionalised cinematic world of the Wild West to complete his report: 'Myles portrayed the pair as the modern equivalent of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid' (*Cartoon*: 79). Pat buys into the hyperreal image that Myles has provided for him, and even describes himself in the same terms: 'People like to read about outlaws. It brings a bit of colour into the life of ordinary folk' (*Cartoon*: 90). It is clear that Pat is hungry for fame as much as he is money, and it seems that he almost forgets the 'real' lived experience of being a criminal (with the potential of arrest) as he throws himself into his own idea of a Hollywoodized, hyperreal criminal role.

This adoption of filmic notions of the 'anti-hero' leads to both Pat's and Myles' downfall. When Myles meets Mia, who becomes the *femme fatale* in the novel, he is drawn into her confidence, and the image that he has projected of being part of a gang of outlaws (as he believes it to be glamorously dangerous) leads her to ask him to kill her own father. Pat and Dez agree to help, as there is the possibility of also walking

away with a pile of untraceable bank notes. Despite the fact that Pat exudes an air of worldly criminal confidence, it is debatable how familiar he is with assassinating anyone. However, he has so far subsumed himself in his own hyperreal image as an underworld gang leader that he begins to believe his own hype: 'I have a pain in my arse sitting around this dump taking minor scores. A big score sets a person up. Who knows, maybe afterwards I can even write *my* book' (*Cartoon*: 151).

What becomes increasingly clear is that Myles, Pat and Dez are not as professional as any of them think. Myles is aware to some extent that he is inept, and in many ways shares these traits with his Northern counterparts of Dan Starkey and Jay Black. However, unlike these two other journalists, he is drawn into violence because he actively seeks it out, and is trapped into 'hyperreal' notions of violent glamour. There is a clear difference between Northern Ireland and the Republic in how far writers are prepared to allow violence and comedy to intersect. This also seems to affect how far violence is allowed to enter the 'hyperreal' in Northern Irish fiction. While this relationship is obviously complex, Northern writers seem highly aware that readers may not be able to accept violence as 'hyperreal' and may be acutely aware that it is 'lived'. The comedy is confined to targeting the perpetrators of violence who use the 'hyperreal' medium of the media, rather than violent incidents themselves.

Pat and Dez also clearly have little idea of how completely ruthless criminal masterminds are in the 'real' world. This is highlighted by Mia's father, as Myles discovers: 'He seemed relaxed, as though it was perfectly routine to hold a gun pointed at a naked man's heart' (*Cartoon*: 99). When Myles thinks he has shot Mia's father, Dez notes that they should have gone to find a body, and yet none of them do.

Almost inevitably, Mia's father reappears, and kills Dez. However, Mia's father also appears to become a parody of a 'hyperreal' image, especially when he re-appears with his female Nazi fetishist sidekick, opening the way for Pat to kill him. The irony of the novel, however, is that Pat is killed and Myles wounded not by Mia's father, but by a gang of 'scumbags' from Dez's neighbourhood who blame them for Dez's death: 'Earl and the scumbags with the ghettoblaster were running at them. Myles caught a glimpse of something steel and shiny in their hands' (*Cartoon*: 266). Throughout the novel these 'scumbags' are dismissed as amateurish 'eejits.' Pat and Myles's failure to take the gang seriously due to their lack of 'image,' and Pat's need to be seen as an outlaw hero, seals his fate:

Slowly, he turned to face Myles. Frothy blood dribbled from his mouth. His eyes seemed glazed. When he saw Myles he gave a crinkly grin.

'Vamoose,' Pat said. (Cartoon: 270)

It is quite clear that in the lived 'real', criminals do not need style, or parodic affectations (such as Mia's father), to be dangerous, they simply need a knife and some intent.

The only character who finishes the novel still unscathed is Mia, who emerges as the most expert manipulator of a 'hyperreal' image. She flatters the self-image of both Myles and Pat, and persuades them into killing her father, while carefully manipulating her own as a bohemian artist. Mia taps into a brand of hypermasculinity, which both Myles and Pat are seduced into holding as an ideal, by asking them to model for her highly unusual art:

Myles's penis hung between the giant stone phallus and a tiny pink appendage that looked like a biro stub. He went across to look at it. The painting looked imposing, playful and colourful. Myles felt a gleam of delight as he read the title, 'Mr Tall'. The brochure listed the Mr Tall painting as retailing at £500. (*Cartoon*: 184)

It is her own father who warns Myles that he has been taken for a fool by Mia to do her dirty work, and that she may have inherited her father's psychotic tendencies: 'Did she tell you that she was driving when her mother was killed? Did she tell you she was driving when her boyfriend Barry was killed? Of course not. My little girl was born crazy' (*Cartoon*: 234).

This episode highlights important differences in the way the lead female characters in Cartoon City and Big Jessie are treated, and also to a difference in the way that the 'real' and 'hyperreal' image is viewed in the two novels. Mia's image appears to be just that: a hyperreal image which she projects to mask an emptiness behind her character, drawing on clichés of the Irish colleen (with her red hair and green eyes) as well as the femme fatale. Indeed she has no emotional reaction as she watches Myles and Pat being attacked at the end of the novel: 'Mia had walked away, he remembered. She had watched Pat and himself fighting for their lives and then turned her back on them as though she had grown bored with the entertainment' (Cartoon: 272).

Scarlet, in *Big Jessie*, on the other hand, struggles with two different hyperreal images of herself, neither of which are her lived 'real' character. The image of 'Scarlet' is a deliberate ploy to hide herself so she can have some freedom from her father, Martin O'Hanlon. It is a way of overcoming her shyness, but also an image which she uses to promote her band: 'I wear red because it puts me in control. People notice red. They respect it. They yield to it' (*Jessie*: 42). While she plays the harp under her real name

of Edel O'Hanlon (thus promoting the family name in a suitably Nationalist manner), she also feels that this image is in many ways a hyperreal illusion: 'I'm sick of being paraded as some delightful and inoffensive Catholic role model. Jesus, my albums get played on religious radio programmes' (*Jessie*: 320). Her lived 'reality' lies somewhere in between these two, underneath the deliberately hyperreal image that she adopts, and the other that is forced upon her.

This complex relationship between the 'hyperreal,' the 'real', violence and the effect upon individual identity, is also a strong theme in Patrick McCabe's novels. As these novels are set in areas of the Republic near the border with Northern Ireland, they highlight the possible porosity between these geographical areas. They show a melding of the comic attitudes of both the Republic and Northern Ireland in a way that questions more thoroughly the relationship of the reader both to the hyperreal images contained within the novels, and, more importantly for this study, the aim of the comedy.

In *Breakfast On Pluto*, the violence in the novel is enacted upon the protagonist, Pussy, or on other innocents within the novel. Many of those in the small town of Tyreelin are not directly involved in either violence, or in Pussy's ostracism, but are made complicit by their failure to stand up to this status quo. Pussy is the only character who seems to fully feel for the victims of violence, but as he keeps the same comedic tone throughout, the reader has to question their relationship to both the narrator, and also those moments which contain violence. The comedy contained within the novel does tread a very fine line between acerbic irony and laughing at

misfortune. One of the first seemingly random killings mentioned in the novels is that of a mentally impaired boy:

When they started asking him the questions, most likely he thought it was his own sort of private *Celebrity Squares*. And why, probably, he raced up the stairs so enthusiastically to get his rosary beads when they leaned in close and asked him, smiling: 'What religion are you?'[...]

I think it was the first Down's syndrome boy shot in the Northern Ireland war. The first in Tyreelin, anyway. (*Breakfast*, pp. 46-47)

This use of a Down's Syndrome boy, given the never wholly serious commentary of Patrick and the almost-humour of this last statement, is problematic for the sympathetic reader. Clearly in some ways this is McCabe's intention, in that it does shock the reader into acknowledging the victim's innocence. McCabe thus walks a fine line between using this character as a weapon and making him the butt of the joke. This is underlined by the similarity of the killers' sick humour, as they ask him to: 'Clap your hands for *Celebrity Squares*!' (*Breakfast*: 46) before shooting him. Pussy's humour, such as his nickname for the boy (Laurence Lebrity), could be seen as fond mockery, but it still chooses to target a similar innocent obsession as the killers.

As well as encouraging the reader to find humour in desperate circumstances, McCabe forces him or her to question where this humour is derived from, and our reaction to this information. The two reactions of humour and disgust seem closely intertwined in McCabe's, often deliberately grotesque, comedy and in some instances form a dialogue, asking us where one begins and the other ends. As Andrew Stott notes, an uneasy and antagonistic relationship between binaries exists in much comedy:

This central contradiction, the inversion of the good and the bad, the wise and the foolish, and the mad with the sane, lies at the heart of the 'eccentric' vision of comedy, where thoughts and experiences can coexist alongside ironic reflection on those same thoughts.³⁵

This mad/sane, wise/foolish nexus clearly exists with reference to Pussy, and Joey in the later *Call Me the Breeze*, as they comment upon, and make us laugh at their surroundings, but also are figures for us to laugh at. We feel both superiority to and sympathy for their views.

This questioning of what constitutes reasonable humour, and the testing of the boundaries of comedy is explored in more of Pussy's experiences. In his home town, Pussy is clearly ostracized by his adoption of ostentatious, hyperreal versions of femininity. In England, however, he is treated as an Outsider because of his status as Irish, more than as a transvestite. McCabe notes the anti-Irish sentiment exacerbated by the IRA campaign of the 1970s, voiced by a local Londoner: 'Oh nao! Look at that little old lady! Where's 'er legs then? Gao on- tell me! Where's the old gel's legs?... Send 'em all back, that's wot I say. Back to the bleedin' bog wot shat 'em aht in the first place!' (*Breakfast*: 86). This seems to be a potentially laughable character, as he does seem like a hyperreal version of a Cockney straight from a film or television programme, and certainly his generalisations about Irish immigrants seem laughable to a reader sympathetic to the protagonist. However, he also highlights the very 'real' effects of lived violence on those innocents at its mercy, and also those who are (spuriously) rendered guilty by association, such as Pussy.

³⁵ Andrew Stott, Comedy, (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 51.

This conflation of bigotry and violence is demonstrated in the episode in which Pussy is involved in an IRA bomb attack as a bystander. His subsequent hysterics attract attention, and he is arrested on suspicion of being an IRA man in disguise who has planted the bomb. His adoption of a hyperreal image of femininity is discounted, and replaced by his image to the police as a hyperreal version of 'Irish' (much exacerbated by tabloid media images). Though Pussy's outward appearance is of a hyperreal glamour (and hyper-femininity), it is clear that it does have a link with his internally lived 'real' experience. The difference between Pussy's internal 'real' life which is a constant search for stability and love (linked to his outwardly 'hyperreal' appearance) and that of an IRA bomber are amusingly pointed out: 'No! You don't quite get it! You see, what I am is an ordinary transvestite prostitute, not the slightest bit interested in politics at all!' (Breakfast: 142). The fact that in the scene of devastation that he is surrounded by Pussy is simply 'ordinary' subsumes his own fragmented self-image (caught between a 'real' internal femininity and an outwardly 'hyperreal' one) which is identified as false by the police. It is clear that in the 1980s, it is the politics which is most threatening in the Irish character, rather than the body.

As the police pick on Pussy as the nearest Irish person in order to secure a quick conviction, we also see the re-emergence of his comedic voice as a response to their brutality. Under their violent questioning, Pussy's loosely held together poise breaks down completely, though he describes it in Hollywoodized and feminized terms:

Not quite so hilarious when Detective Inspector Routledge and his good pal PC Wallis started shoving me round the shop! All I can say is, if you weren't whistling Dixie backwards on the far side of Pluto by the time they were finished with you, dearies, then you were made of strong stuff and no mistake – which, sorry to say, Miss Pussy wasn't! (*Breakfast*: 143)

Not only does this point out the desperation of the police in England (with covert references to cases such as the Guildford Four), it also leads to a final breakdown in Pussy's mental state.

The next few chapters of the novel are, in fact, fantasises of revenge upon those political and personal circumstances which circumscribe Pussy's existence, except that here Pussy is in control of the violence. He clearly confuses this with 'hyperreal' images of power, appearing almost as a super-hero. Yet because the novel is non-sequential, for a short time we, as readers, are not entirely sure for a short time whether these episodes are true or false. We discover eventually that they are an empty simulation of revenge, in which Pussy comforts himself with the thought that he can solve all the woes he has experienced, though he is also aware that this is impossible. He first imagines himself as an actual bomber, in a pure piece of comedy which manages to parody the IRA cell structure as a coterie of transvestite adoring flunkies: "No! No, please!" the other members of the unit pleaded with their adored leader. "We beg you to do it, Puss! After all, you are the most feared terrorist in London!" (Breakfast: 146). As in much comedy, this is amusing and simulates resistance, but in fact offers no lived 'real' alternative to the violence which Pussy wishes to resist.

Most of these sequences take place in the town of Tyreelin. Pussy revenges himself upon the local Loyalist cell, who have carried out various atrocities throughout the novel, including torturing an old classmate of Pussy's. He also machine guns the pub haunt of the IRA men who killed his friend Irwin for turning police informant. Like writers from Northern Ireland (such as Radcliffe, Bateman, McLiam Wilson and

Patterson), both McCabe (and Pussy) call down a plague on all camps of political violence. However, as the last act in this sequence is the burning down of the church which contains Patrick's erstwhile priest-father, these episodes also confuse the personal and the political. As they become more personal, they also become increasingly disturbing. Though our sympathy is with Pussy with regards to his father, it is difficult to put the priest (however hypocritical and degenerate) into quite the same group as those characters we know have perpetrated torture and murders. We only discover that these actions are fantasy later in the novel and it seems to be the relief that the episodes are not intended to be a lived 'real' that renders them comedic. This highlights the fact that it is only 'hyperreal' violence that is wholly allowable for comedy. Those violent acts which we know are not represented as a 'hyperreal' fiction of Pussy, or another character, are emphatically *not* comedic.

This intertwining of the personal and the political with violence is also highlighted in Call Me the Breeze. Joey, the main protagonist, is aware that Boyle Henry (a local politician) and other figures in the town, such as Hoss Watson and Sandy McGloin, are deeply involved in the IRA and have been perpetrators of most of the violence in the area. These figures hound Joey, playing on his image as the town idiot, and mocking his familial past (his father has an affair and abandons Joey and his mother), which they use as a means to suppress his voice and credibility. The fact that Boyle is linked throughout the novel with the hyperreal 'spun' images of politics means that the violence is closely associated with the 'hyperreal,' and despite the fact that Joey seems to have a slim grasp of everyday logic, he is the only way that the reader sees the 'lived' reality of the power relations in the town.

In some ways, this link between Boyle Henry and the 'hyperreal' make it more threatening for the politician when Joey gains access to the very media that gives Henry his power. Joey is, at one point, given a job teaching film and media, and uses this to make a film about the history of Scotsfield. The fact that this will involve exposing the previous crimes of Boyle Henry seems not to occur to him, playing as he often does a kind of 'innocent fool'. Despite the fact that Joey seems to have a slim grasp on reasonable behaviour, he does have an insight into the lived 'real', beyond the hyperreal that the rest of the town seems to accept as the norm. As Andrew Stott explains, this link between ostensible 'foolishness' and wisdom is one which goes back far beyond modern times:

> Foolishness is not the same as idiocy, but rather an expression of the ambiguous, doubled, and inverted ideas of wisdom and folly that existed in the medieval period.³⁶

Linden Peach links the use of unstable characters in McCabe's work to a Foucauldian sense of madness giving characters licence to expose aspects of their surroundings, even as they are forced out: 'They are perceived as posing a threat to the existing order, and are thus subject to denunciation, while simultaneously, benefiting from a Foucauldian view of madness, may be seen as holding a mirror up to social order, expressing fundamental, often uncomfortable truths, about it.'37

Joey's innocence in trying to explain that the film is really some kind of 'metaphorical' truth to some clearly dangerous men is amusing, but also seems to involve Joey trying to convince himself that he is not a whistle-blower: 'what I'm saying, Hoss, is that your character - the character Hoss as he appears in the film -

³⁶ Stott, p. 47.

³⁷ Peach, p. 177.

could effectively be almost anyone! Anyone who happens to get caught up in a conflict! It's got nothing to do with you *per se*!' (*Breeze*: 265). He does, in many ways, seem to be arguing for the film to be seen as 'authentic' (as ostensibly 'real', but in fact 'hyperreal'); however, it draws far too near to lived events for this to be true. Joey, in his role as the 'wise fool' seems incapable from twisting the most important aspects of the 'real.' We are never totally sure how much Joey unable to see the effect his actions have, which is especially true at the end of the novel, when he admits that he is aware that many of his fantasies are delusions.

Joey's attempted use of a potentially hyperreal medium contrasts with another character, Johnston Farrell, who runs a local writer's group. He bases a novel in the area, but rather than concentrate on genuinely dangerous characters, he turns Joey's life into *The Cyclops Enigma*: a clear swipe at authors who use the Troubles as the basis for ill-informed 'boys own' thrillers: 'The first in a series of "Jake Carradine" thrillers set in border bandit country in the feral, explosive mid-1970s, this book will blow your mind!' (*Breeze*: 312). However, it is Joey (as the least threatening figure) who most feels the brunt of this novel. Farrell uses Joey's memoirs of his misguided (and non-violent) criminal past as the basis for *The Cyclops Enigma*, sensationalising as well as fictionalising them, but not enough to make sure Joey will remain anonymous. Farrell makes Joey into a hyperreal, marketable commodity in these novels, and Joey's accusation that Farrell misses the 'emotional' truth holds some weight. Though we know Joey's narrative to be deeply suspect, his sense of the emotional 'real' generally turns out to have a basis in fact.

It is clear that, in these works, it is not only the borders between the 'hyperreal', the 'real' and the 'authentic' which are being questioned in the use of comedy. The exploitation of major characters, such as we see with Joey, and the presence of violence so close to the comedy, questions the very ethics involved in the comedy itself. The deployment of much of the negative comedy also relates to the protagonists' positioning of themselves in relation to the potentially dangerous 'hyperreal' and the seductions of postmodernity. However, this comedy is always at risk of turning into the 'hyperreal' itself. Moreover, the liminal nature of comedy may be seen as both a site of possible birth and possible destruction for the individual self, as we shall now see.

Comedy and the subjective self

The position of the subjective self is a complex issue within both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The status of both areas within the local-global nexus as globalized entities, but also ones with a localised history of colonisation, place them at the intersection of the debates on the individual self between postmodernism and postcolonialism:

The 'decentring' of identity and the rejection of stable subjectivity are perceived to be a Western luxury contrasted to a need to adopt, what Spivak calls 'strategic essentialism' on the part of those struggling against colonial and neo-colonial forces.³⁸

It is quite clear that the economic boom within the Republic has precipitated a crisis in national identity from some quarters: 'It is as though we're enjoying the pithivier of pigeon with fondant of kumquat but wonder... maybe the bacon and cabbage tasted

³⁸ Eleanor Byrne, 'Postmodernism and the Postcolonial World', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism* (see O'Day, above), pp. 51-57 (pp. 55-56).

better? Or indeed, could we still make bacon and cabbage if we needed to?'³⁹ With the perceived disruption of a discernable 'we' within both the Republic and Northern Ireland, there seems to be an increased emphasis on the 'I' within these novels. It is often clear in the novels that we have already investigated that the self of the protagonist seems to be the most major thing at stake. However, it is also clear that many of the protagonists' searches for a 'real' self are the butt of the comedy in the novels, most especially when this 'real' self is confused with a hyperreal or 'authentic' self.

In trying to find a sustainable self within the commercial milieu, Joe, in *Dead Cat Bounce*, seems to be buying into the reaction against the idea of hyperreality. The fact that Joe, paradoxically, looks for a degree of the 'real' in the creative arts and the fact that he endeavours to find this by writing a film script-full of Hollywoodized hyperreal images- seems somewhat ironic. Joe fails to appreciate that his idea of the 'real,' is, in fact, a version of the 'authentic' and simply a disguised version of a hyperreal story narrative.

He leaves his job as soon as he finishes his script, without sending it to any studios. He seems to trust in a narrative certainty, garnered from such simulations of happy endings that exist in Hollywood films. This is comically undercut, as his writer neighbour tells him that he has little chance of getting anywhere with his script:

'Ok. In my opinion... In my opinion, which is probably worth nothing... you had no chance anyway.'

I could only nod. I had always known that. Since day one. Unsolicited scripts don't get read, no matter how good they are.

³⁹ O'Connell, p. 7.

'Yeah. You're right.'

Julie looked emboldened and went on. 'I mean, it's not very

good, is it?'

My heart stuttered. (*Cat*: 310)

The irony lies in the fact that Joe has assumed that he is being realistic about his

chances about having his script read, and does not stop to think that it is unlikely that

his first attempt will be good enough. While endeavouring to reject one aspect of the

commercial world, he is seduced by another simulation, which advertises the fact that,

to quote an adage, everyone has at least one book (or film) within them. The narrative

of the happy ending has taken over his sense of perspective. As Malpas notes, the

postmodern world is: 'a culture in which the fantastical creations of media, film and

computer technologies have come to be more real for us, and to interact more

fundamentally with our experiences and desires, than the hitherto predominant

realities of nature or spiritual life.'40 Joe rejects his everyday 'lived' reality and

escapes into this fantasy, both of his actual script, and also the narrative certainties of

other scripts.

To add to this irony, the character least interested in chasing after any kind of either

'hyperreal' or 'authentic' dream is Go-go, Joe's long-suffering sympathetic ear, who

is resigned to a dull, but 'lived' reality. If anything, he underestimates his own

potential, but finally is the one closest to reaching his ultimate goal. He complains

about his job along with Joe, but unlike his counterpart, he also accepts that it is a

necessary part of life:

If I really couldn't stand it, I'd walk. I mean, it's just a job,

Joe. Sooner or later, everyone has to get one. Right, OK, it is

⁴⁰ Malpas, p. 125.

kind of cheesy sometimes, but fuck it, we don't make biological weapons for use on orphanages. (Cat: 178)

Rather than searching for an 'authentic' purpose to life, Go-go concentrates on other fulfilling areas which may be easily 'lived', such as friends and relationships. He finds himself obsessed with a girl who apparently only wants him as a friend. Even Joe cannot imagine that Sheila could be interested in Go-go: 'I couldn't shake the feeling that her only interest in Go-go was the periodic self-validation he provided' (Cat: 57). Joe's own self-absorption means that he does not find out until the end of the novel that he is actually wrong. Sheila finds out about Go-go's feelings for her from a friend and invites him to go to Australia with her. It is notable that the one character in the novel that does not attempt to escape from the apparently 'shallow' hyperreal world around him is actually the character least prone to a belief in such images, and also the one who is offered the possibility of a new life. This seems to point to a position which is opposed to the absolute domination of the postmodern simulacra of the contemporary world, but which also seems to indicate that this can only be reached by accepting one's lot and not endeavouring to reach beyond it to a 'real' which may not exist, both of which may be seen as inherently conservative positions (not to mention doubly-binding).

This hyperreal world, which seems linked by the authors to the 'global' component of the global-local nexus, is examined in relation to the 'local' in several of the novels, and also the 'local' identity of the protagonists. There is certainly a sense in many of these novels that at least part of the Republic offers one sense of identity in the form of a lived set of roots. As I have already noted in Aidan Arrowsmith's work, the Republic has come to represent the idea of a grounded set of 'roots' and 'belonging'

which may be interpreted as 'real' in comparison to the global economic space. However, in *Dead Cat Bounce*, Dublin is seen as a place in which 'roots' are unidentifiable, and a stable subjective self is impossible. Joe must accept his rural roots in order to find any stability, and Go-go leaves for Australia to find a satisfying life.

In contrast, in *A Sort of Homecoming*, Dublin is treated as a repository of 'roots' and the basis of a stable subjectivity, in contrast to the vacuous existence of international airspace most prized by the protagonist. It is clear that Tom initially views these 'roots' not as grounding, but as ties which hold him back. He clearly considers Dublin to be lacking in the necessary cachet of other global cities. For him, it still retains too much of the parochialism of its previous past, and unlike many of his friends, he comes back purely because he is forced to by his parents and circumstance. What is painfully clear is that Iremonger's hyperreal image, and his 'trancontinental lost weekend' amount to little more than an attempt to run away from the 'real' self connected to his lived past, and also from 'real' life. Particularly for Tom, Ireland is both the reality that he needs, and what he tries to escape from; as Mainie tries to tell him, it is the only place that he can feel 'rooted' or grounded: 'Everyone has their own Dublin. Everyone deserves their Dublin. Parisians, no matter what they say day-to-day, would never dream of leaving Paris' (*Homecoming*: 248).

Iremonger's determination to put his past entirely behind him- to erase it if possible- is clear even in the first few pages, as he denies a fundamental part of himself: his given name: 'You can call me Tom – don't even *think* of calling me Tomás – but mostly the world calls me by my surname, my essential name, my true title: Iremonger'

(*Homecoming*: 2). Tom associates his first name with adolescent discomfort and weakness, such as when he begins to let his true feelings for his ex-girlfriend, Mainie, show: 'Iremonger doesn't ask those kind of questions. That's more like a question... Tomás Michael would ask. I send an executive order to my body not to blush' (*Homecoming*: 57). It is clear that the comedy here is aimed at Tom himself, as he denies his 'real' (lived) feelings, exchanging them for a super-cool hyperreal image, which is impossible to maintain.

What is also increasingly clear, however, is that this façade is, in many ways, a diversion from having to deal with the proper way of escaping adolescence, and entering into a fully formed 'self'. As he returns to Dublin, it becomes clear that Tom's friends have, in the main, moved on, while he remains stuck in his undergraduate persona. He sees his travels as a 'project', rather like Joe's attempt at screenwriting; and- just as in Joe's case- this seems like a spurious attempt at the 'authentic' despite the vaguely theoretical phrasing he gives it:

The philosophy runs something like this: make the present moment a work of art. Fuck sitting in dark recording studios or in a poky room writing a book (I have been, since graduating from Trinity, a post-literary individual, and even there I tried to stick to criticism as much as possible). (Homecoming: 4)

Tom wishes to live in a kind of 'no-man's-land', perpetually between, and never moving, either back or forwards: 'Dive deeper into the present than you've dared to do before [...] And don't let the past and the future, the bully boys of existence, push you around' (*Homecoming*: 4). However, in taking this lack of identity as an absolute itself- even selling his identity for a poster- Tom seems to miss some of the more positive aspects of the postmodern which mitigate the family past which he is

endeavouring to run away from. Since the media images to which his family past is subjected serve to reinforce Strongbow's superiority and bring back painful teenage memories for him, Tom is unable to deconstruct the potentially spurious Nationalism that they are built upon, and misses a chance to find a space for a 'real-life' home in the Republic.

The problem with living with no reference to either the past or the future, in a perpetual state of recycling one's own present, is that it necessarily precludes any progression towards a more stable subjective self. Tom, as a character, cannot move on until he faces his past, and also until he accepts that he has to think about a future. The 'lived' reality of Ireland and Dublin begin to deconstruct his postmodern philosophy, rather than these localities being the site of empty 'hyperreality' as in *Dead Cat Bounce*. The first indication we have of this is when Tom's cash card is eaten by am ATM machine: leaving him without money, his means to sustaining his 'hyperreal' self-image. He regains some cash by creaming off donations from a school friend's charity collecting tin, but the fact that he then frets about this shows that Tom is conscious that he cannot live just in the present but must become aware of future consequences: 'Waiting for him to come back to the phone, this wimpy little voice inside me answered the question: the money, he wants the Roomkeepers' money, the Roomkeepers want their money' (*Homecoming*: 137).

After this incident Tom's image becomes increasingly fractured. First, it becomes clear that his father is potentially very ill, which delays Tom's departure. It also becomes obvious that the ex-girlfriend, Mainie, who Tom is convinced he can win back (without doing anything so crass as making an effort) is not interested in him.

With Mainie goes Tom's position as a hyperreal icon in the gossip pages, and it is clear that he is to be replaced by Strongbow: 'Mainie introduces her new man to Carmel [the gossip columnist], who begins to paw him and question him closely' (Homecoming: 101). His friends who have remained in, or are coming back to, Dublin are more in touch with some kind of everyday existence than he is. When Tom finds out that one of his best friends is gay, he has to question his own behaviour. As a result of his consummately superficial lifestyle, Tom realises that he never really makes a connection with any of them: 'So one of my best friends was gay. Why hadn't I picked up on that? Had I picked up on it, and let it go again? Could I really say he was one of my best friends? Weren't friends people you really knew?' (Homecoming: 273-274).

The butt of the humour in the novel is thus as much Tom himself as the milieu in which he circulates. The hyperreal, and also the 'authentic', are closely linked with adolescent preoccupations and clearly need to be jettisoned by Tom at the end of the novel. As he prepares to leave Ireland once again, he meets Strongbow. In Strongbow's open acceptance that he has caused Tom real pain, we see an acceptance of maturity: 'I tell you what, next time you're in London, give me a call. Phone my office. Look, here's my card. We really must have a proper chat over a pint. Straighten things out' (*Homecoming*: 290). This almost seems to have a disproportionate effect on Tom, as he suddenly realises that he is not going to leave Ireland, and that he really has to face his previous life. The final scene in the novel supports this new frame of mind, as instead of running away from the situation, Tom decides to do the responsible thing, and go and get his luggage properly sorted out (rather than simply walk from the airport). The final words of the novel show Tom

accepting his 'real' self, rather than the image he has built up, in all its defects, by admitting his true name: 'Yes, I'm Tomàs Iremonger' (*Homecoming*: 295). Once again, as in *Dead Cat Bounce*, there is an essentially conservative stance here, which wishes to find a way out of the post-modern world. In this case, however, the answer for the protagonist is to return to Dublin, rather than to endeavour to leave it.

The interplay between discovering a 'real' self, and a construction of a 'hyperreal' self, is also particularly apparent in the work of Patrick McCabe. His novels concentrate on characters whose sense of self is particularly fractured, sometimes for clear personal reasons and often through equally clear mental health issues. Pussy's internal conflicts in *Breakfast On Pluto*, however, are exacerbated by the way in which others view him. In Ireland, he is viewed as a stereotyped gay man: most of the (un)humorous insults that are hurled his way come from the world of the media, and such iconic figures such as Larry Grayson (mixed up here with Bruce Forsyth): 'Look! There she is! Nice to see you to see you nice! Ooh! Shut that door!' (Homecoming: 192). Pussy is viewed according to the surface sheen he adopts, and through images of media figures which seem deliberately 'hyperreal' and stereotype-appealing, rather than as someone who has grown up in the village.

The ostentatious nature of Pussy's surface image, and its clear link to the hyperreal images of Hollywood femininity, makes it difficult at times to decipher whether it is a tendency towards his 'real' emotional self, or if it is a spurious 'authentic' persona which masks his deeper fragmentation. It is also difficult at times to know whether this tendency of Pussy's is being played purely for laughs. Certainly, when Pussy is first caught wearing his foster sister's clothes and goes on to steal a hugely

unattractive pair of knickers from their middle-aged neighbour, the disparity between these and Pussy's idols is amusing. However, despite the reaction these actions cause (and later threats of violence) this episode also highlights that Pussy really cannot help himself:

A situation which wasn't helped, I admit it, and it's not something I'm proud of, by my promising that I would never do it again because they were Caroline's private things and I had no business taking them, and then sneaking off a few days later and stealing Mrs O'Hare's smalls off the washing line. (Breakfast: 14)

At other times, however, Patrick's cross-dressing seems to be a protection against the world, as he can become anything from a glamorous caricature, a middle-aged housewife, and at one point the son of his landlady. Pussy's adoption of feminine and masculine roles often seem 'performed' in the sense that they are a mask which he may adopt or reject. However, it is also notable that these 'performances' often revolve around hyperreal images of perfection culled from films and magazines. This means that in many ways he comes close to a comedic parody of these, whilst exposing his own fragile sense of self. This is particularly true in his incarnation as his landlady's son, which reflects her fantasies rather than Pussy's, and removes the vestiges of Pussy's control over his own identity. It is this role that ultimately uncovers Pussy's principle source of anxiety, that he lacks the security of his mother's love, and feels guilt at pretending to be someone else's child:

I kept thinking: 'You shouldn't be doing this, as well you know. She's not your mammy. If she wants you to be her son, that's fine. But she's not your mammy. Your mammy was special. Even if she did dump you on Whiskers Braden's step and leave you for ever. Even if she did that, no one, *no one!*, could ever take her place. So why are you sitting on a strange woman's knee, Patrick Braden? (*Breakfast*: 92)

At the end of the novel, it is clear that his ideal- as he never finds his mother- is almost to become her: gaining the loving family that he never had, though even this seems based upon a hyperreal image gleaned from a 'family drama' film:

To wake up in the hospital with my family all around me, exhausted after my ordeal maybe, but with a bloom like roses in my cheeks, as I stroke his soft and tender head, my little baby, watching them as they beam with pride, in their eye perhaps a tear or two – who cares! – hardly able to speak as they wipe it away and say: 'He's ours!' (*Breakfast*: 199)

However, in contrast to this hyperreal domestic fantasy, it seems that all of the characters in the novel have to hit rock bottom, and fracture entirely, before they can begin to re-build themselves. Charlie, Pussy's best friend, who breaks down when her boyfriend is shot by the IRA for informing, finally begins to recover only after her dog is killed by vindictive neighbours: 'If you were to pinpoint the moment of Charlie's gradual recovery, I think it would have to be then – as if by now she'd suffered it all and there was no other way she could go' (*Breakfast*: 195). Pussy's own breakdown and incarceration in hospital is not fully outlined (he seems to move back to England at some point), but his doctor's departure seems to be his final breaking point. As we leave Pussy, he appears to be living the life of a middle aged spinster, with Charlie's new family vicariously providing him with the stability he has long craved and frequently lost. This is a stability all the more important since they are, at least, a lived and 'real' family: 'nothing gives me greater pleasure than to hear the bell going and the sound of all their voices outside' (*Breakfast*: 198).

This notionally 'happy ending' seems to follow the traditional path of a comic novel: redeeming the characters just in time for the end, making our laughter at them palatable. However, this contrasts with McCabe's later novel, *Call Me the Breeze*. The

wrong-doers who fall to the wayside in *Breakfast On Pluto*, win an absolute victory here. The personal reasons for Joey's breakdown are quite clear, and derive from a family history of mental instability and his parent's unstable marriage. Joey's sense of self veers between extreme self regard for his creative abilities, and self-loathing. At the beginning of the novel, this takes the form of drug taking, throwing himself into mind altering literature and carrying on a fantasy relationship with 'Mona'. It takes some time for us to realise that Mona is in fact an 'adult' doll, and that she is also named after his father's mistress.

However, the appearance of Jacy in the village begins to replace this original obsession of Joey's. We witness not only the fantasy that Joey builds up around Jacy, but also his dawning realisation that she is not the 'Californian', hyperreal, hippy icon he envisages her as at the beginning of the novel, especially once she begins to age into a middle-aged disillusioned mistress. The fact that Joey is not bothered by this does reinforce the fact that perhaps he is a disturbed, but essentially good and deepfeeling character who values more than the superficial image: 'She was as beautiful as ever, all right, even though she had put on a lot of weight and was dressed in a hooded jersey shirt and sweatpants. Her lovely blonde hair was black at the roots now and looked like it hadn't been washed' (*Breeze*: 315).

Joey's own fantasies blind him to many aspects of his life (for example his comfort eating and his clearly damaged ego from abandonment by his parents). He continues to be seduced by hyperreal images; for example when he kidnaps Jacy, imagining himself as a Robert De Niro character, at total odds with his rather slovenly appearance. However, (almost as a consequence of this) he sometimes exhibits special

Henry. As Joey says: 'He'd sell Jacy too. I knew that. Once he was finished with her, he'd pawn her off, and not give it a second thought' (*Breeze*: 53). His prediction is proved right only after Joey has been imprisoned for Jacy's kidnapping and Boyle plots Joey's downfall. It is, in fact, the blue movie that Boyle humiliatingly makes Joey take part in that forces Jacy to finally leave. Joey ironically saves her through his own final defeat in the town.

Joey's only outlet for both his sublimated knowledge of the violence in the town, and also his main way of exploring his fragmented sense of self, is through writing. Ironically, this begins to take shape when he is in prison due to the intervention of a new governor: 'What I have to thank Mervin for, more than anything, is keeping at me until I admitted to him that, yes, I did scribble a bit, but not leaving it at that, insisting that I write down some of my experiences' (*Breeze*: 101). Perversely, with the secure environment of the prison, and the support of Mervin, Joey actually seems to blossom in confidence, organising poetry groups and theatre productions, which carries him through to his release:

It was both the hardest thing and the easiest thing I ever had to do, leaving Mountjoy on that summer's day, three years after Bone. Hard because I'd never again meet people like the governor, and easy because I knew that was nonsense, that was the old way of thinking. (*Breeze*: 120)

However, the reception of the novel that Joey does eventually have published highlights both his fractured subjective self, and also the danger of misinterpretation through comedy. Joey writes much of it in a fit of self-loathing after he is forced out of Scotsfield by Boyle Henry, and the story contains nothing at all of the desperate

crimes that have been committed. Rather, it centres upon a grotesque caricature of his own life, informed purely by his sense of revulsion at his failure, physical ugliness and his parent's reputations: 'Oh man, dear but the father would be proud! He'd be proud of what we seen there dumped in that cradle! A steaming pile of soggy old pastry going around masquerading as a baby!' (*Breeze*: 328). Success comes when it is received by the English publishers as a comedic book and critically lauded as such. Joey sarcastically remarks on his reviews: 'Hilarious indeed. Your mother on the floor with her mouth covered in spit, crawling around in nightmare. Rib-tickling "puckishness" that will "have you in stitches" as the *Sunday Telegraph* attested' (*Breeze*: 330).

In this novel McCabe thus taps into a sense of grotesque humour (in a more general sense, rather than the specific senses of Romantic and Bakhtinian which were discussed in Chapter One), which both repels and fascinates the reader. As Andrew Stott observes: '[it is] a humorous mode that aims to produce an ambiguous feeling pitched somewhere between pleasure and disgust.'42 As we have already mentioned, comedy may contain conflicting and self-reflexive reactions, and here this is exacerbated by the ambiguous feeling that the reader has to their acknowledgement of the humour at all. There is an uncomfortable irony for the reader, as it is a reminder that we are laughing at what is essentially a deeply mentally and emotionally disturbed character, putting us, perhaps, in the same category as the insensitive reviewers, and possibly others who exploit Joey.

⁴² Stott, p. 87.

The explosive truth that Joey could tell with reference to actual events is permanently silenced by his final public humiliation by Boyle Henry, and by the reception of the one novel he gets published. Joey is unable to follow this up with any other work that can compete with it on the terms that he is given, only being allowed to exist as a comedy figure and writer. Like Pussy Braden, Joey finds that his fantasies can no longer stand up to the real world. However, unlike Pussy, who simply retreats into an alternative image, Joey finds a moment of clarity in which he admits the foolishness of his fantasies absolutely:

Maybe that's the way it happens for someone else, but not Joey Tallon, the small-town innocent who happened to get lucky, waking up to find himself famous! Me, a writer? New there's a fucking joke! Another illusion, just like Jacy! Surprised to hear that, are you, Bone? You thought I didn't know she'd never lived in California? Sure I did. All along. I just happened to think that if you believed — enough! — that somehow that would make it happen. (Breeze: 333)

Ironically, this moment of self-enlightenment serves to convince the reader of Joey's 'real', if misguided, talent, especially in comparison with the hyperreal images that characters such as Boyle and Johnston Farrell are lauded for. Indeed, his ultimate act of agency is to dramatise his own suicide, leaving a note for his companion (a cell-mate from prison). It is clear from this final note that Joey, and the text, puts the blame squarely at the feet of the environment which Joey has found himself in, and in which any attempt to effect 'real' change is deemed risible: 'I'm in the wrong place, can't you see that? Why? Why can't you see it?' (*Breeze*: 336).

Conclusion

The ending of Call Me The Breeze raises the question of the reader's complicity in the texts we have been looking at in this chapter, and indeed throughout this thesis. As

with the notion of postmodernism itself, comedy is always in a grey area between radical deconstruction and also a conservative relativism that serves to let the status quo re-enter through the back door. Adrienne Janus identifies this as a liminal space, and comedy which makes us laugh may be both a liberating, and a detrimental experience, for those within its remit:

Laughter can also serve as a regulatory function in the process of socialization, disempowering actual social beings or constructs by moving them past the boundary which incorporates them into a subject position, over into a framework where they become a laughable object. This excluding movement corresponds to a movement that enables the inclusion of otherwise marginalised elements or figures of social life.⁴³

Both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, seem to provide a space in which these grey areas may be explored, and indeed, where such explorations are most necessary. It is in this 'space' within the local-global network that the competing influences of the 'real', the 'hyperreal' and the 'authentic' are explored and mocked. However, just as postmodernism may be seen to 'eat itself,' so comedy fails to find an alternative to the inexorable slide into the 'hyperreal' and the 'authentic' (as the 'hyperreal' in disguise) even as it reflects them. Equally, these texts also show many authors' reluctance to take postmodern relativism on its own terms.

What is noticeable in these novels is their search for a locus of stable and fulfilling identity. A Sort of Homecoming and Dead Cat Bounce, in particular, seem to come to conservative conclusion, as they force their protagonists to face up to the bourgeois ideals of family and 'real' work. There is a very clear adoption of the idea of the

⁴³ Adrienne Janus, 'Song, Murmurs and Laughter in Irish Writing: Sound and Socialization as Liminal Occasions in Language, Literature and the Self', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Alan A. Gillis and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 115-123 (p. 123).

Republic as a grounding version of the 'local' in the local-global nexus, being used in opposition to the confusing and rootless global. This is particularly notable in *Dead Cat Bounce*, which adopts the very traditional model of the Republic in using the 'rural' as the site of true 'roots'. There is a tension between the relativism of postmodernism, and the 'strategic essentialism' of Spivak, which can inform the emerging identity of postcolonial countries.⁴⁴ It seems that the Republic, certainly, is negotiating a way between this essentialism and the postmodern commercial world which it clearly exists within.

However, it is not only the external world which the novels portray that is held up for scrutiny. A common link between the fiction of Northern Ireland and the Republic is the treatment of the media and readers' complicity with this 'everyday' hyperreality. Here, once more, we witness a peculiarly grey area between the forces of deconstruction and conservatism: between a search for the 'real' and the nagging suspicion that the best any of the characters can hope for is a false 'authenticity'. Clearly, the media is held up to scrutiny here, but we also cannot forget that what we are reading is also a work of fiction that will direct, and manipulate, responses in a similar way. Within novels such as *Cartoon City* we witness a level of excitement and violence which we are supposedly not meant to think of as 'real', especially as it is linked to much of the comedy within the novels. We view this as fiction, which excuses our enjoyment, and yet we are expected to agree with the critique of a media which presents violence and salacious detail to us through similar channels.

⁴⁴ Gayatri Spivak, cited by Byrne pp. 52-57 (p. 56).

Within these grey areas, however, it is also possible to register differences between Northern Ireland and the Republic. It is quite clear that in both areas, the 'hyperreal' and the 'authentic' are acceptable targets for comedic approbation. However, what can be made acceptably 'hyperreal' is a more complex question. In the case of novels from Northern Ireland, it would seem that violence is too much part of everyday reality to be converted into a globalized 'hyperreal' image of itself. Rather, it is 'hyperreal' versions of Northern Ireland imposed from outside the area, and the 'hyperreal' image of various public figures associated with the Troubles, that are acceptable fodder for the comedic spray-gun of many Northern Irish novelists. However, it is worth comparing younger writers such as Radcliffe with slightly older writers such as Bateman, Patterson and McLiam Wilson on this point. Whereas the latter generation have parodied a good many public figures, they have achieved this largely by exaggerating what they believe to be the most ridiculous features of said figures. However, there is a hint in Radcliffe's work that, as the public consciousness endeavours to consign these violent episodes to the past, satiric comedy may not be an adequate form of protest. At an earlier moment in history, such comedy may have been seen as a release of repressed emotions (such as fear). Radcliffe, however, supplements the evocation of these fears with new feelings of disgust (most notably the physical abuse of Scarlet/Edel by her father and the hypocrisy of the Reverend Crawford), seemingly in order to make more explicit the target of the comedy. This could, however, be seen to run dangerously close to a new mode of hyperreality, rather than the parodied version of the 'real' that the older generation of writers were targeting.

In the Republic, it also seems that the relationship between the hyperreal and violence is one that exists in complex relationship to comedy. Both McCabe and Mac Anna cause the reader to question their own relationship to the idea of the 'hyperreal' and the 'authentic,' asking us (through the satirical impulse of comedy, or by the juxtaposition of comedy with violence), what our relationship to the hyperreal world of fictional violence and comedy is? This not only has implications in terms of the Republic's relationship to the 'global', but also with regard to an internal debate about the victims of both violence and comedy. In all of these novels, it is the fragmenting of identity in modern life which becomes the issue most at stake.

The comedy contained within these novels has the potential to undermine the pervasiveness of the 'hyperreal' and its associated mock 'authenticity' in modern life. This can, however, go along with a tendency to excuse fictional violence through comedy in ways which may appear to deaden the impact of literal violence, an action which some may find disturbing. Comedy may thus be seen to both challenge, and reinscribe, conservative boundaries. While some novels employ comedy in a straightforward satire of the postmodern ethos, others use it to keep open for debate the liminal space between the 'hyperreal' and the 'real', whilst patrolling the boundary between these and a nostalgically seductive, but ultimately empty, 'authenticity' which offers neither freedom, nor stability. For authors such as Cremins, Owens, Mac Anna, Radcliffe and McCabe the search for the 'real' often runs precariously close to the adoption of a spurious 'authenticity' which they may mock in their protagonists; however, this is still seen as preferable to a blasé acceptance of the new world order, hyper-real or otherwise.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, I have endeavoured to investigate the nature of the borders within novels from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. This has involved considerations of the moral boundaries and structural borders of comedy itself. However, as the last chapter shows, the ways in which the targets of this comedy are chosen and treated also signal borders in the social and political environment outside the texts. It is this concentration on the changing conditions from which these texts are produced which sets this study apart from work done by previous critics, especially with reference to comedic works.

The relative benefits of both the economic and social changes in the Republic and as a result of the Peace Process in Northern Ireland are a still a matter of debate among commentators and critics. However, it is quite clear through all of these chapters that the diverse perception of these shifts provides most of the targets for the comedy. What is equally as clear is that these changes have altered the ways in which these writers wish to represent the places they write about. First, there seems to be an increasing awareness in all writers of the wider global milieu into which their texts emerge. Further, in Northern Ireland there appears to be a need to reflect political and social events from an 'insider's perspective', correcting some of the images imposed on the area from the outside. In contrast, the main concerns of comedic texts from the Republic appear to centre upon economic change, and the new roles opened up by an increasingly secularised society.

The uncertain nature of these changes, however, has most certainly led to ambivalence- indeed anxiety- with regards their representation. This is most keenly felt in the use of comedy and comedic structure. There are also clear issues surrounding the moral implications of the choice of comedic targets and which subjects are considered legitimate for laughter. Comedy which takes place in close proximity to violence is a particularly contentious area. The strictest borders of comedy in this sense, and those least likely to be tested, appear in literature from Northern Ireland. Through all three chapters in this study, there seems to be an unwritten rule that those who perpetrate violence are fair game for ridicule while the victims of violence are always treated with the utmost respect.

Writers such as Robert McLiam Wilson, Colin Bateman, Glenn Patterson and Mary Costello frequently satirise those in power, and, although their political standpoints may vary, it is quite clear that they all put a high price on the sanctity of the individual human life. Nevertheless, it is possible to see changes in the way the nexus of comedy and violence has been treated as time has passed. Robert McLiam Wilson's work, as outlined in Chapter One, shows a tentative move towards hope in the adoption of a more inclusive mode of comedy following the 1994 ceasefire. However, it is evident in many texts that, as the Peace Process has progressed, comedy has not been used simply as a way of 'moving on.' This is certainly the case with writers such as Glenn Patterson and Mary Costello, who use comedy to highlight the untold stories of previously silenced communities and also individuals. They actively mine the past in order to provide 'border' spaces between the apparently monolithic histories associated with Northern Ireland. Laughter, associated as it is with 'low' culture and

those who usually have no voice, appears to be a way for these characters to be heard in a sympathetic light.

However, this most recent period has also seen some developments in comedy from Northern Ireland which suggest a confusion in how to depict both political figures and violence through humour. In the work of writers such as Colin Bateman and Zane Radcliffe it is clear that comedy is testing the previously concrete boundaries of truth-telling and violence. I have already noted in Chapter Three that Radcliffe's novels push the caricatures of public figures further than any other author dealt with in this study, perhaps moving into territory beyond satire. It is also clear in Bateman's work that the comedy has moved successively nearer to violence. Moreover, as the stereotypes of violent characters in the novels are deconstructed, so are they humanised and seen to deploy comedy in a similar way to the central protagonist, Dan Starkey. It is also notable that Starkey moves nearer to the violence himself, actually shooting one of the 'bad guys' in *Turbulent Priests* (2000 [1999]), albeit to rescue his infant son.

Although such politically-charged renditions of violence are more common in Northern Ireland, there are also writers from the Republic who deal with these issues. Furthermore, this uncomfortable relationship between violence and comedy is also exemplified by the work of Patrick McCabe, which centres on the border-lands between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. McCabe seems to push the moral boundary between comedy and violence even further, often putting the reader into an uncomfortable position from which they have to question their own complicity in both the comedy and the violence in the novels. The reader is forced to ask if, by

laughing at the protagonists, they are also involved in the repression and exclusion that these characters often face. The sympathy felt for these figures surely has to be balanced with their opinions and actions, which may be seen as equally non-progressive in some instances. This said, it is clear that in novels such as *Breakfast On Pluto* (1999 [1998]) and *Call Me the Breeze* (2003) that politically motivated violence against innocents is viewed as unacceptable. The comic narration of the protagonist is often figured as a moral resistance to this, even if the individual protagonist cannot win out in real terms.

The setting of McCabe's novels in close geographical proximity to politically motivated violence seems to set his work apart from other novels written from the Republic of Ireland. Here, violence is more usually dealt with in the context of a notorious criminal fraternity. Also, in common with many other texts from the Republic of Ireland, a consideration of criminal violence as the seedy underbelly of a globalized and media-centric world is never far away. Robert Cremins and Ferdia Mac Anna both depict the criminal characters in their novels as image-obsessed as well as money-hungry. The potential glamorisation of violence by such subjects seems to be a worthy (and legitimate) subject for comedy. In particular, it is the perceived falsity of these media images which is the central butt of the humour rather than the criminality.

Humourlessness is often a way of highlighting the targets of comedy in these works. As comedy and humour are often seen as communal acts, humourless characters (representing the target of the comedy) are frequently incapable of joining in the joke, excluding them from both the community within the novels, and the 'community' of reader and text. Alternatively, the occasional humour which these characters exercise

is designed to repulse the reader, as it seems misplaced (and never inclusive). Stuart in Damien Owens' *Dead Cat Bounce* (2001), for example, is funny for the reader as he sees no humour or irony in his extensive misappropriation of Americanisms, not to mention the disparity between his penny-pinching attitude towards his staff and his own lavish lifestyle. The violent figure of Doc Phelan in Pauline McLynn's *Right On Time* (2003 [2002]) is also shown to have a sadistic sense of humour, as he only seems to find laughter in others' discomfort or pain.

This tactic is also used in texts from Northern Ireland: for example, Patsy White in Costello's *Titanic Town* (1998 [1992]) is oblivious to the way in which Bernie McPhelimy's husband makes fun of her. However, such characterisations are more common in the Republic. The drive towards deconstructing simplistic stereotypes and caricatures within Northern Irish fiction seems to mean that such figures must more often be accepted as part of the community, and questioned as such. Characters such as Stanley Matchitt in *Of Wee Sweetie Mice and Men* (1996), who are associated with violence, are also capable of joking, for instance. Indeed, it is most often figures who are already emphatically outsiders who are further ostracised in through their complete inability to join in with communal laughter (such as the British politicians in Costello's *Titanic Town*).

While much of the comedy from the Republic concentrates upon the perceived incursion of the contemporary obsession with image, there are other writers who investigate this society as a product of its past. Roddy Doyle investigates the current economic change within the Republic, and notes the importation of American culture, within *The Barrytown Trilogy* (1988- 1991). However, the sectors of society dealt

with here (represented by the Rabbitte family) are also disenfranchised by the social structures in the Republic of Ireland, as much as global factors. This is further highlighted in *A Star Called Henry* (2000) in which Doyle investigates a founding moment of the Republic. It is clear in these works by Doyle that comedy and laughter are a way of uniting groups disregarded by the 'powers that be,' especially with reference to issues of class. Though the comedy often centres upon strong main protagonists, such as Jimmy Sr or Henry Smart, they seem to be representatives of a wider community. Humour is used to link the leaders of each 'carnival' in the novels (Jimmy Jr, Jimmy Sr or Henry) with the people they hope to lead.

However, as already noted in Chapter One, this carnivalesque humour rarely means an immediate change in the social milieu. In both his early trilogy and *A Star Called Henry*, Doyle highlights the inequalities within the social hierarchy at a level which seems to preclude an ending which involves lasting change. All of the novels end very much where they began, pointing out the continuing presence of a restrictive social and moral hierarchy. The changes to this social structure are presented in other works from the Republic, although, in many of them this appears as a process, rather than the revolutionary changes promised by the carnivalesque.

This evolutionary progress is particularly true for works by women which tend to depict these social trends within a close family community. Again, it is often humour in works by authors such as Marian Keyes and Pauline McLynn which binds this community. In contrast to the work of Costello or O'Carroll, this humour is the only thing that marks this 'community' out, as it frequently lacks the geographical and class distinctions upon which the definitions of community are based in texts set at an

earlier time. Nevertheless, it is clear that the traditional social mores which are closely examined in Costello and O'Carroll's work still make their influence felt in novels by younger women writers. It is also evident that these texts, and the comedy within them, act as an evaluation of both new and old roles rather than a complete jettisoning of previous ones. The mediation between the generations within these familial communities in solving moral and social problems (which often arise in the younger generation's lives) points towards an awareness of the possibilities of change, but also a reluctance to simply reject the values of the past.

The traditional comic narrative used in female-authored texts, though inverted, highlights this trend. The female protagonist often adopts some of the values of the older generation, rather than forcing the representatives of this previous society to change their views in order to claim the reward of a relationship with the hero. As such, both the form and content of some of these novels may be seen as potentially conservative, despite their depiction of apparently major shifts in the society outside the text. There are, however, novels which have rather more progressive ways of reaching a conclusion. Pauline McLynn's crime fiction novels, for example, concentrate upon professional rather than romantic goals in order to provide an ending for the narrative. However, it is clear that they still put an emphasis upon heterosexual relationships and it is also notable that it is the prospect of a resolution to the protagonist's romantic difficulties that seems to end the series.

Such questions over the radical or conservative status of these novels is also applicable to the status of comedy as a whole, and one which is important to all of the texts. What is clear within this study is that the status of the form and content of the

comedy, as either radical or conservative, is not mutually exclusive. There are texts which seem to be formally radical, which also contain messages which could also be interpreted as radical in terms of uncovering hidden issues within society. The tendency within Patrick McCabe's novels, for example, towards positioning the reader in a way that forces them to question both their relationship to the protagonist and also the comedy may be seen as an interesting formal innovation. Moreover, I would argue that it also radically questions the status of such socially excluded figures outside the texts.

However, although I have indicated the existence of both 'conservative novels' (with relatively conservative content) and clearly 'radical novels' (experimental in form and challenging in content), this distinction is frequently difficult to make. Indeed, it is especially true of novels from Northern Ireland. Writers such as Mary Costello, Colin Bateman and Glenn Patterson do not necessarily experiment hugely with the forms of their novels. Their stance of 'truth-telling', the vignettes of everyday life they often draw, as well as the attention they pay to stereotypes may not seem radical. Certainly, the comedy in the novels can fall into a non-progressive restatement of well-known themes for comedy within Northern Ireland. What is also clear, however, is that the aim of these novels is to give a voice to a middle-ground within Northern Ireland which is often not heard. It may seem a strange concept for such a space to seem radical, and yet there is a clear intention in these novels for this to be the case.

It would seem that within the literature from Northern Ireland there is a special interest in the unheard, unnumbered many who are not involved in political violence, and are yet at its mercy. Comedy here clearly acts as a way to show that potentially

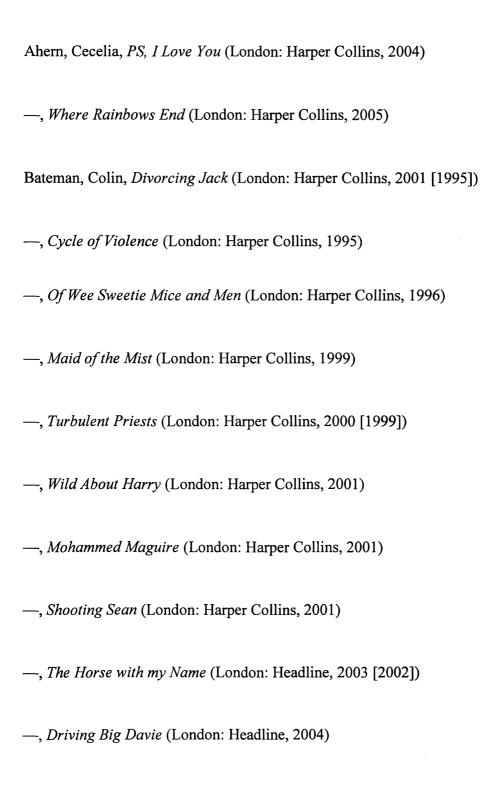
homogenous ideas of 'communities' are agglomerations of significant individuals. In the words of Glenn Patterson: 'Numbers can numb, which is why literature will sometimes succeed where simple documentary fails in conveying the horror of war. Literature particularises, its mathematics is unitary: one plus one plus one...'. This humanist drive towards the importance of the individual can also be seen in novels from the Republic. However, the comedy within novels from the Republic seems to link the individual and the community in a wider range of ways. Here, comedy and humour may be a way of forming a community in an increasingly impersonal and fragmenting (often urban) setting. Indeed, it may be the individual's *only* defence against the impossibility of finding a true community, either through the effect of the globalized postmodern world, or because of the ostracism of the protagonist.

The range of ways in which comedy is deployed in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland precludes an easy categorisation of this mode as either inherently conservative or radical. Rather, comedy appears as a form of communication in which those issues most difficult to voice may be dealt with, for better or worse. What is clear is that it is those who take themselves, and their world-view, a little too seriously who are treated to the full force of the laughter.

¹ Glenn Patterson, Lapsed Protestant (Dublin: New Island, 2006), p. 170.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY READING



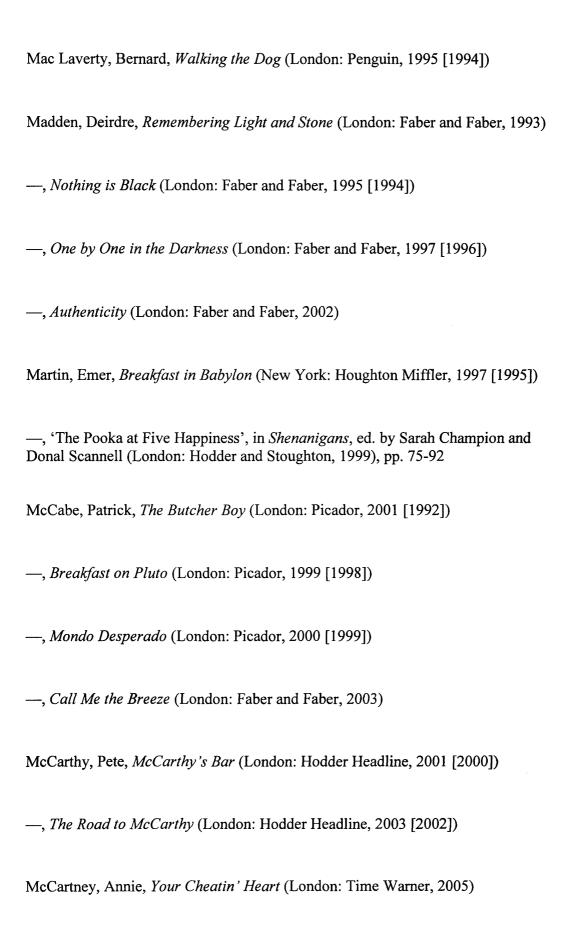
Behan, Brendan, Borstal Boy (London: Black Swan, 1983 [1958]) —, Confessions of an Irish Rebel (London: Arrow, 1991 [1965]) Binchy, Maeve, and others, Irish Girls About Town (Dublin: Town House, 2002) Bolger, Dermot, ed., Finbar's Hotel (London: Picador, 1999 [1997]) —, ed., Ladies' Night at Finbar's Hotel (London: Picador, 2000 [1999]) Boylan, Claire, *That Bad Woman* (London: Little, Brown, 1995) —, *Home Rule* (London: Abacus, 1997 [1992]) —, Black Baby (London: Abacus, 1998) Burns, Anna, No Bones (London: Flamingo, 2002 [2001]) Champion, Sarah and Donal Scannell, eds., Shenanigans (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999) Collins, Michael, Emerald Underground (London: Phoenix, 1999 [1998]) Costello, Mary, *Titanic Town: A Novel* (London: Methuen, 1998 [1993]) Cremins, Robert, A Sort of Homecoming (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998)

—, 'The Mile High Club', in Shenanigans, ed. by Sarah Champion and Donal

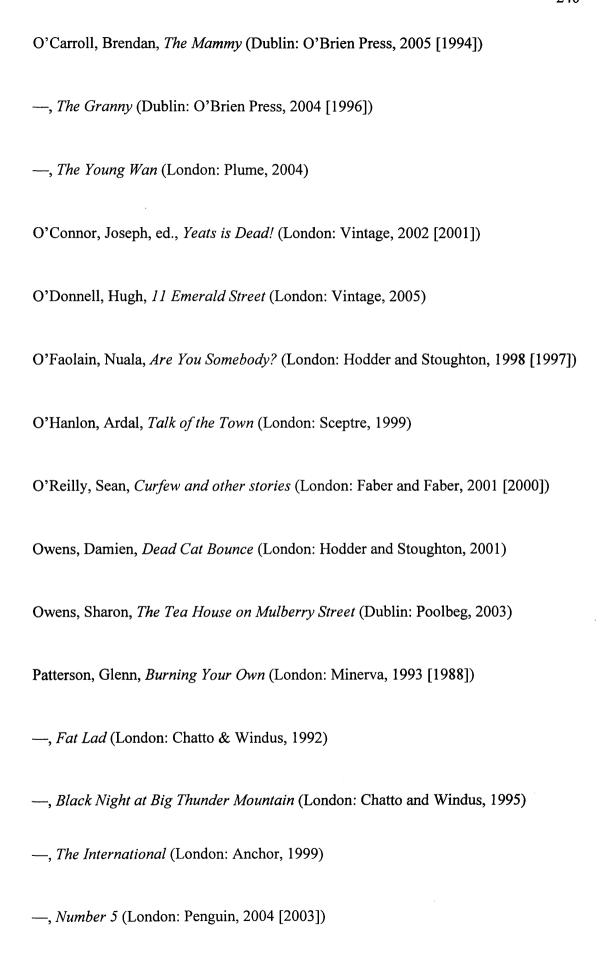
Scannell (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), pp. 231-244

Cullimore, Claudine, Lola Comes Home (London: Penguin, 2001) Curtin, Michael, *The Plastic Tomato Cutter* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996 [1991]) —, The League Against Christmas (London: Fourth Estate, 1997 [1989]) —, Sing! (London: Fourth Estate, 2001) Devlin, Anne, Ourselves Alone (London: Faber and Faber, 1990 [1986]) Devlin, Martina, *Three Wise Men* (London: Harper Collins, 2000) Donoghue, Emma, Stir-fry (London: Penguin, 1995 [1994]) Doyle, Roddy, Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha! (London: Minerva, 1994 [1993]) —, The Barrytown Trilogy (London: Vintage, 1998) -, The Commitments, in The Barrytown Trilogy (London: Vintage, 1998 [1988]), pp.1-140 —, The Snapper, in The Barrytown Trilogy (London: Vintage, 1998 [1990]), pp. 141-340 —, The Van, in The Barrytown Trilogy (London: Vintage, 1998 [1991]), pp. 341-633 —, A Star Called Henry (London: Vintage, 2000) —, Oh, Play That Thing! (London: Vintage, 2005)

Fielding, Helen, Bridget Jones's Diary (London: Picador, 1996) Gibson, Maggie, Blah, Blah Blacksheep (London: Orion, 2001) Gough, Julian, 'The Best Tipperary has to Offer', in Shenanigans, ed. by Sarah Champion and Donal Scannell (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), pp. 33-60 —, Juno and Juliet (New York: Anchor Books, 2002) Greeley, Andrew M., Irish Lace (New York: Tom Doherty, 1996) Kelly, John, Grace Notes and Bad Thoughts (Dublin: Martello, 1994) —, The Little Hammer (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000) Kerr, Simon, *The Rainbow Singer* (London: Phoenix, 2002 [2001]) Keyes, Marian, Watermelon (London: Arrow Books, 2001 [1996]) —, Rachel's Holiday (London: Penguin, 1997) —, Sushi for Beginners (London: Penguin, 2001 [2000]) —, Under the Duvet (London: Penguin, 2002 [2001]) —, The Other Side of the Story (London: Penguin, 2005 [2004]) Mac Anna, Ferdia, The Last of the High Kings (London: Penguin, 1992 [1991]) —, Cartoon City (London: Review, 2000)







—, Lapsed Protestant (Dublin: New Island, 2006)

Radcliffe, Zane, London Irish (London: Black Swan, 2002)

—, Big Jessie (London: Black Swan, 2003)

Rooney, John P, Bottling it Up (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2003)

Ryan, Liz, *The Year of Her Life* (London: Coronet, 2002 [2001])

Scannell, Donal. 'Introduction', in *Shenanigans*, ed. by Sarah Champion and Donal Scannell (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999), pp. ix-x

West, Tara, Fodder (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2002)

TELEVISION, FILM AND DVD

Byrne, Ed. *Pedantic and Whimsical*. Eggbox Brontosaurus Productions. 2006.

Kielty, Patrick. Patrick Kielty Live. Phil McIntyre Television. 2006.

Moran, Dylan. Monster: Live. Universal. 2004.

—. Like, totally... Dylan Moran Live. Universal. 2006.

O'Briain, Dara. Dara O'Briain: Live at the Theatre Royal. Universal. 2006.

Tiernan, Tommy. Tommy Tiernan Live. Universal. 2002.

Father Ted: The Complete 1st Series. Dir. Declan Lowney. Channel 4. 2001.

SECONDARY READING

Alexander, Flora, 'Iris Murdoch's Moral Comedy', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), pp. 99-107

Appignanesi, Richard, and others, *Introducing Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Icon, 1999)

Armes, Roy, *Patterns of Realism* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1986 [1971])

Arrowsmith, Aidan, 'Introduction: The Significance of Irishness', *Irish Studies Review*, 14 (2006), 163-168

Bachorz, Stephanie, 'Postcolonial Theory and Ireland: Revising Postcolonialism', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Alan A. Gillis and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 6-13

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965])

Baldick, Chris, Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1990])

Bal, Mieke, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997)

Barreca, Regina, New Perspectives on Women and Comedy (Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach, 1992)

—, 'Making Trouble: An Introduction', in *New Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, ed. by Regina Barreca (Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach, 1992), pp. 1-11

Barry, Peter, Beginning Theory (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)

Barta, Peter I., Paul Allen Miller and David Shepherd, eds., *Carnivalizing Difference: Bakhtin and the Other* (London: Routledge, 2001)

—, 'Beginning the Dialogue: Bakhtin and Others', *Carnivalizing Difference: Bakhtin and the Other*, ed. by Peter I. Barta, Paul Allen Miller and David Shepherd (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1-21

Barton, Ruth, 'The Ballykissangelization of Ireland', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 20 (2000), 413-426

Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulations*, trans. by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983)

- —, Selected Writings, ed. Mark Poster (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996 [1988])
- —, The Illusion of the End, trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994)
- —, The Uncollected Baudrillard, ed. by Gary Genesko, trans. by Peter Flaherty and others (London: Sage, 2001)

Begley, Jon, 'Satirizing the Carnival of Postmodern Capitalism: The Transatlantic and Dialogic Structure of Martin Amis's *Money*', *Contemporary Literature*, 45 (2004), 79-105

Bery, Ashok and Patricia Murray, eds., *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations* (Hampshire: Macmillan Press, 2000)

Booker, Keith, 'Late Capitalism Comes to Dublin: "American" Popular Culture in the Novels of Roddy Doyle', ARIEL, 28 (1997), 27-45

Byrne, Eleanor, 'Postmodernism and the Postcolonial World', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 51-57

Cahalan, James M., "'Humor with a Gender": Somerville and Ross and *The Irish R. M.*', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 58-72

—, 'A Backward Glance: Radharc ar gCúl', New Hibernia Review, 8.4 (Winter 2004), 139-145

Cairns, Ed and Tara Cairns, 'Children and Conflict: A Psychological Perspective', in *Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, ed. by Seamus Dunn (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), pp. 97-113

Carr, Jimmy and Lucy Greeves, *The Naked Jape* (London: Michael Joseph, 2006)

Charlton, H.B. Shakespearian Comedy (London: Methuen, 1961 [1938])

Colebrook, Claire, *Irony* (London: Routledge, 2004)

Connery, Brian A and Kirk Combe, *Theorizing Satire: Essays in Literary Criticism* (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1995)

—, 'Theorizing Satire: A Retrospective and Introduction', in *Theorizing Satire*, ed. by Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 1-13

Connolly, Claire, 'Theorising Ireland', Irish Studies Review, 9 (2001), 301-315

Connor, Steven, *Postmodernist Culture*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999 [1997])

Cook, Jim, ed., *Television Sitcom*, BFI Dossier Number 17 (London: BFI Publishing, 1982)

—, 'Narrative, Comedy, Character and Performance', in *Television Sitcom*, ed. by Jim Cook, BFI Dossier Number 17 (London: BFI Publishing, 1982), pp. 13-18

Corner, John and Sylvia Harvey, eds., *Enterprise and Culture: Crosscurrents of National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991)

—, 'Introduction: Great Britain Limited', in *Enterpise and Culture: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, ed. by John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1-20

Cotter, David, 'Notes from the Rathmines Underground, or, The Spiders and the Bees', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, ed. By Alan A. Gillis and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 37-40

Critchley, Simon, On Humour (London: Routledge, 2002)

Curtis, Barry, 'Aspects of Sitcom', in *Television Sitcom*, ed. by Jim Cook, BFI Dossier 17 (London: BFI Publishing, 1982), pp. 4-12

Davies, Ioan, 'Lenny Bruce: Hyperrealism and the Death of Jewish Tragic Humor', *Social Text*, no. 22 (Spring 1989), 92-114

Dentith, Simon, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000)

Dixon, Stephen and Deirdre Falvey, *The Gift of the Gag: The Explosion in Irish Comedy* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999)

Donaldson, Ian, *The World Upside-down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970)

Donnelly, Brian, 'Roddy Doyle: From Barrytown to the GPO', *Irish University Review*, 30.1 (Spring 2000) 17-31

Dotterer, Ronald L, 'Flann O'Brien, James Joyce and *The Dalkey Archive*', *New Hibernia Review*, 8.2 (Summer 2004), 54-63

Dunn, Seamus, ed., Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995)

Easthope, Antony, Englishness and National Culture (London: Routledge, 1999)

Eldred, Laura G, 'Francie Pig vs. the Fat Green Blob from Outer Space: Horror Films and *The Butcher Boy*', *New Hibernia Review*, 10.3 (Autumn 2006), 53-67

Eco, Umberto, 'The Frames of Comic Freedom' in *Carnival!*, ed. by Thomas A. Sebeok (Berlin: Mouton, 1984) pp. 1-9

—, Travels in Hyperreality, trans. by William Weaver (London: Picador, 1987 [1986])

Farquharson, Danine, 'The Language of Violence in Robert McLiam Wilson's *Eureka Street*', New Hibernia Review, 9.4 (2005), 65-78

Free, Marcus, 'From the 'Other' Island to the One with 'No West Side': The Irish in British Soap and Sitcom', *Irish Studies Review*, 9 (2001), 215-227

Frye, Northrop, Anatomy of Criticism (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957)

Gillespie, Michael Patrick, '(S)he was too Scrupulous Always: Edna O'Brien and the Comic Tradition', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), pp. 108-123

Gillis, Alan A. and Aaron Kelly, eds., Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001)

Goodby, John, 'Bhabha, the Post/Colonial and Glenn Patterson's *Burning Your Own*', *Irish Studies Review*, 7 (1999), 65-71

Gray, Breda, 'Longings and Belongings: Gendered Spatialities of Irishness', *Irish Studies Review*, 7 (1999), 193-210

Guelke, Adrian, 'Paramilitaries, Republicans and Loyalists', in *Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, ed. by Seamus Dunn (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), pp. 114-130

Gutleben, Christian, 'English Academic Satire from the Middle Ages to Postmodernism: Distinguishing the Comic from the Satiric', in *Theorizing Satire:* Essays in Literary Criticism, ed. by Brian A. Connery and Kirk Combe (New York: St. Martins Press, 1995), pp. 133-147

Hall, Julian, The Rough Guide to British Comedy (London: Rough Guides, 2006).

Halperin, John, ed., The Theory of the Novel (New York: OUP, 1974)

Hamilton Grant, Ian, 'Postmodernism and Politics', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 13-23

Harkness, David, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century: Divided Island* (New York: St Martins Press, 1996)

Harte, Liam and Michael Parker, eds., Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000)

Harte, Liam, 'Migrancy, Performativity and Autobiographical Identity', *Irish Studies Review*, 14 (2006), 225-238

Hebdige, Dick, 'Fax to the Future', Marxism Today (January 1990), 18-23

Hill, Val, 'Postmodernism and Cinema', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 93-102

Hodgart, Matthew, Satire (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1969)

Holquist, Michael, 'Prologue', in *Rabelais and his World* (Bloomington USA: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965]), pp. xiii-xxiii

Hughes, Eamonn, 'Town of Shadows: Representation of Belfast in Recent Fiction', *Religion and Literature*, 28 (1996) 141-160

Hutcheon, Linda, A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms (New York: Methuen, 1985)

- —, The Politics of Postmodernism (London: Routledge, 1993 [1989])
- —, Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony (London: Routledge, 1994)

Inglis, Tom, 'Origins and Legacies of Irish Prudery: Sexuality and Social Control in Modern Ireland', *Eire Ireland*, 40.3&4 (Fall 2005), 9-37

Innes, C. L., 'Postcolonial Studies and Ireland', in *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations*, ed. by Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 21-30

Jackson, Ellen-Raïssa, 'Gender, Violence and Hybridity: Reading the Postcolonial in Three Irish Novels', *Irish Studies Review*, 7 (1999), 221-231

Jameson, Frederic, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', New Left Review, 146 (1984), 53-92

Janus, Adrienne, 'Song, Murmurs and Laughter in Irish Writing: Sound and Socialization as Liminal Occasions in Language, Literature and the Self', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Alan A. Gillis and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 115-123

Jeffery, Keith, ed., An Irish Empire?: Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996)

Jenkins, Henry and Kristine Brunovska Karnick, 'Introduction: Comedy and the Social World', in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. by Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (Routledge: London: 1995), pp. 265-281

Karnick, Kristine Brunovska and Henry Jenkins, eds., *Classical Hollywood Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1995)

Karnick, Kristine Brunovska, 'Commitment and Reaffirmation in Hollywood Romantic Comedy', *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. by Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 123-146

Kelly, Aaron, 'Reproblematizing the Irish Text', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Alan A. Gillis and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 124-131

Kenny, John, 'The Critic in Pieces: The Theory and Practice of Literary Reviewing', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Aaron Kelly and Alan A. Gillis (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 132-140

Kern, Edith, The Absolute Comic (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

Kiberd, Declan, Anglo-Irish Attitudes (Derry: Field Day Theatre, 1984)

—, Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995)

—, 'The City in Irish Culture', City, 6 (2002), 219-228

Kirkland, Richard, 'Bourgeois Redemptions: the Fictions of Glenn Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson', in *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*, ed. by Liam Harte and Michael Parker (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 213-231

Knox, Colin and Padraic Quirk, *Peace Building in Northern Ireland, Israel and South Africa: Transition, Transformation and Reconciliation* (London: Macmillan, 2000)

Krause, David, *The Profane Book of Irish Comedy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1982)

Lanters, José, 'Carnivalizing Irish Catholicism: Austin Clarke's *The Sun Dances at Easter*', in *Carnivalizing Difference: Bakhtin and the Other*, ed. by Peter I. Barta, Paul Allen Miller and David Shepherd (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 191-207

Leacock, Bernie, 'Irish Ireland: Recreating the Gael', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Alan A. Gillis and Aaron Kelly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 154-159

Lefcourt, Herbert M, *Humor: The Psychology of Living Buoyantly* (New York: Kluwer Academic, 2001)

Lewis, Barry, 'Postmodernism and Fiction', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 111-121

Longley, Edna, *The Living Stream: Literature and Revisionism in Ireland* (Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1994)

—, 'Foreword', in Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture, ed. by Aaron Kelly and Alan A. Gillis (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. v-vii

—, 'Irish Poetry and "Internationalism": Variations on a Critical Theme', *Irish Review*, 30 (2003), 48-61

Lovell, Terry, 'A Genre of Social Disruption?', in *Television Sitcom*, ed. by Jim Cook, BFI Dossier 17 (London: BFI Publishing, 1982), pp. 19-31

Lowe-Evans, Mary, 'Hyacinth and the Wise Man: Lady Gregory's Comic Enterprise', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 40-57

Lynch, Rachael Jane, 'The Crumbling Fortress: Molly Keane's Comedies of Anglo-Irish Manners', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 73-98

Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984)

—, *The Postmodern Explained*, ed. by Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas, trans. by Don Barry and others (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1992 [1988])

Macey, David, *The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory* (London: Penguin, 2001 [2000])

Magee, Patrick, Gangsters or Guerillas?: Representations of Irish Republicans in 'Troubles Fiction', (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2001)

Maguire, Mark, 'The Space of the Nation: History, Culture and a Conflict in Modern Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, 6 (1998), 109-120

Maguire, Mark and Paul Hollywood, 'Introduction: The City in the Era of Globalisation', City, 6 (2002), 167-72

Maley, Willy, 'Crossing the Hyphen of History: the Scottish Borders of Anglo-Irishness', in *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations*, ed. by Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), pp. 31-42

Malpas, Simon, *The Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 2005)

Martin, Robert Bernard, 'Notes toward a Comic Fiction', in *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays*, ed. by John Halperin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 71-90

McGlynn, Mary, 'Pregnancy, Privacy and Domesticity in *The Snapper'*, *New Hibernia Review*, 9.1 (Spring 2005), 141-156

McGrath, Niall, 'Prophet of the Pleochroic: Interview with Robert McLiam Wilson', *The Black Mountain Review*, 3 (2000), 13-23

Medhurst, Andy and Lucy Tuck, 'The Gender Game', in *Television Sitcom*, ed. by Jim Cook, BFI Dossier 17 (London: BFI Publishing, 1982), pp. 43-55

Meredith, Robbie, 'The Shan Van Vocht: Notes from the North', in *Critical Ireland: New Essays in Literature and Culture*, ed. by Aaron Kelly and Alan A. Gillis (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2001), pp. 173-179

Merchant, W. Moelwyn, Comedy, The Critical Idiom 21 (London: Methuen, 1972)

Mercier, Vivian, Irish Comic Tradition (London: Oxford University Press, 1962)

Miall, Hugh, Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000 [1999])

Mills, Richard, "All Stories Are Love Stories": Robert McLiam Wilson Interviewed by Richard Mills', *Irish Studies Review*, 7 (1999), 73-77

Mintz, Lawrence E., 'Standup Comedy as Social and Cultural Mediation', *American Quarterly*, 37 (1985), 71-80

Molloy, Deirdre, 'Pump-action Fiction', Fortnight, March 1996, pp. 33-34.

Monteith, Sharon, Jenny Newman and Pat Wheeler, Contemporary British and Irish Fiction: An Introduction Through Interviews (London: Arnold, 2004)

Moran, Joe, Reading the Everyday (London: Routledge, 2005)

—, 'The Value of Trivial Pursuits', *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 2 March 2007, pp.16-17.

Morris, Pam, ed., The Bakhtin Reader (London: Arnold, 1994)

—, Realism (London: Routledge, 2003)

Morson, Gary Saul and Caryl Emerson, eds., *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989)

Morson, Gary Saul, 'Parody, History and Metaparody', in *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*, ed. by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989), pp. 63-86

Muecke, D C, Irony, Critical Idiom 13 (London: Methuen, 1970)

Murphy, Andrew, 'Ireland and Ante/anti-colonial Theory', *Irish Studies Review*, 7 (1999), 155-161

Murphy, Neil, 'Flann O'Brien', Review of Contemporary Fiction, 25:3 (Fall 2005) 7-41

Murray, Dominic, 'Culture, Religion and Violence in Northern Ireland', in *Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, ed. by Seamus Dunn (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995), pp. 215-229

Neale, Steve and Frank Krutnik, *Popular Film and Television Comedy* (London: Routledge, 1990)

Newsinger, John, 'Divorcing Jack: Review', Irish Studies Review, 7 (1999), 286-288

Ní Chuilleanáin, Eiléan, 'The Voices of Maria Edgeworth's Comedy', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 21-39

-, 'Vivian Mercier', New Hibernia Review, 8.4 (Winter 2004), 146-147

Ní Dhomhnaill, Nuala, 'What Foremothers?', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 8-20

Noonan, Gerald, 'Canadian Duality and the Colonization of Humour', *College English*, 50 (1988), 912-919

O'Brien, George, 'Introduction: Tradition and Transition in Contemporary Irish Fiction', Colby Quarterly 31.1 (March 1995) 5-22

—, 'Worlds of Their Own: Autonomy and Anxiety in Contemporary Irish Fiction', *Colby Quarterly* 35.3 (September 1999), 133-153

Ó Broin, Leon, Dublin Castle and the 1916 Rising (New York: New York University Press, 1971)

O'Connell, Michael, Changed Utterly: Ireland and the New Irish Psyche (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2001)

O' Connor, Theresa, ed., *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996)

—, 'Introduction: Tradition and the Signifying Monkey', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), pp. 1-7

—, 'History, Gender and the Postcolonial Condition: Julia O'Faolain's Comic Rewriting of *Finnegans Wake*', in *The Comic Tradition in Irish Women Writers*, ed. by Theresa O'Connor (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1996), pp. 124-148

O'Day, Marc, 'Postmodernism and Television', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 103-110

O'Halpin, Eunan, *The Decline of the Union: British Government in Ireland 1892-1920* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987)

O'Sullivan, Patrick, 'On First Looking into Mercier's *The Irish Comic Tradition*', *New Hibernia Review*, 8.4 (Winter 2004), 152-157

Olsin Lent, Tina, 'Romantic Love and Friendship: The Redefinition of Gender Relations in Screwball Comedy', in *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. by Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 314-331

Palmer, D J, ed., Comedy: Developments in Criticism (London: Macmillan, 1984)

Palmer, Jerry, Taking Humour Seriously (London: Routledge, 1994)

Peach, Linden, *The Contemporary Irish Novel: critical readings* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004)

Pearce, Lynne, *Romance Writing* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007)

Pelaschiar, Laura, 'Transforming Belfast: The Evolving Role of the City in Northern Irish Fiction', *Irish University Review* 3.1 (Summer 2000), 117-131

Peillon, Michel, 'Agency, Flows and Post-colonial Structure in Ireland', *Irish Review* 30 (2003), 71-81

Pettitt, Lance, 'Introduction', Irish Studies Review, 9 (2001), 149-153

Piroux, Lorraine, "I'm black an' I'm proud": Re-inventing Irishness in Roddy Doyle's *The Commitments'*, College Literature, 25.2 (1998), 45-58

Pollard, Arthur, Satire, Critical Idiom 7, (London: Methuen, 1970)

Powell, Chris and George. E. C. Paton, eds., *Humour in Society: Resistance and Control* (London: Macmillan, 1988)

Quinn, Peter, 'The Catholic Novel: Fact or Fiction?', *Commonweal*, 129:19 (November 2002), 16-21

Robins, Kevin, 'Traditions and Translation: National Culture in its Global Context', in *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture*, ed. by John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 21-44

Roche, Anthony, 'Vivian Mercier's *Irish Comic Tradition*: The Man and the Book', *New Hibernia Review*, 8.4 (Winter 2004), 148-152

Rose, Margaret A, *Parody: Ancient, Modern and Post-modern*, Literature, Culture, Theory 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

Rowe, Kathleen, 'Comedy, Melodrama and Gender: Theorizing the Genres of Laughter', *Classical Hollywood Comedy*, ed. by Kristine Brunovska Karnick and Henry Jenkins (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 39-59

Russell, Richard Rankin, 'Brendan Behan's Lament for Gaelic Ireland: *The Quare Fellow*', *New Hibernia Review*, 6.1 (2002), 73-93

Ryan, Louise, 'Constructing 'Irishwoman': Modern Girls and Comely Maidens', *Irish Studies Review*, 6 (1998), 263-272

Salingar, Leo, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974

Salisbury, Laura, 'Beside Oneself: Beckett, Comic Tremor and Solicitude', *Parallax*, 11.4 (2005), 81-92

Schneider, Klaus-Gunnar, 'Irishness and Postcoloniality in Glenn Patterson's Burning Your Own', Irish Studies Review, 6 (1998), 55-62

Sebeok, Thomas A., Carnival! (Berlin: Mouton, 1984)

Selden, Raman, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker, A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory, 4th edn (London: Prentice Hall, 1997 [1985])

Sim, Stuart, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005)

Smyth, Gerry, 'The Politics of Hybridity: Some Problems with Crossing the Border', in *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations*, ed. by Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 43-55

—, 'The Right to the City: Re-presentations of Dublin in Contemporary Irish Fiction', in *Contemporary Irish Fiction: Themes, Tropes, Theories*, ed. by Liam Harte and Michael Parker (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 13-34

Spencer, Lloyd, 'Postmodernism, Modernity and the Tradition of Dissent', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 143-152

Steel, Jayne, 'Vampira: Representations of the Irish Female Terrorist', *Irish Studies Review*, 6 (1998), 273-284

Stewart, Bruce, 'Inside Nationalism: A Meditation upon *Inventing Ireland*', *Irish Studies Review*, 6 (1998), 5-16

Storey, John, 'Postmodernism and Popular Culture', in *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. by Stuart Sim, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 133-142

Stott, Andrew, *Comedy* (London: Routledge, 2005)

Strongman, Luke, 'Toward an Irish Literary Postmodernism: Roddy Doyle's *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*', *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 23.1 (1997), 31-40

Swanson, Gillian, 'Law and Disorder', in *Television Sitcom*, ed. by Jim Cook, BFI Dossier 17 (London: BFI Publishing, 1982), pp. 32-42

Taylor, Timothy D., 'Living in a Postcolonial World: Class and Soul in *The Commitments*', *Irish Studies Review*, 6 (1998), 291-302

Taynor, Desmond, 'Fictionalising Ireland', Irish Studies Review, 10 (2002), 125-132

Thompson, Ben, Sunshine on Putty (London: Harper Perennial, 2004)

Thompson, Spurgeon, 'The Commodification of Culture and Decolonisation in Northern Ireland', *Irish Studies Review*, 7 (1999), 53-63

Tillinghast, Richard, 'The Curse of the Irish', New Criterion, 17.1 (September 1998), 71-73

Tracy, Thomas, 'The Mild Irish Girl: Domesticating the National Tale', *Eire-Ireland*, 39.1&2 (Spring 2004), 81-109

Ward, Margaret, 'Gender, Citizenship and the Future of the Northern Ireland Peace Process', *Eire-Ireland*, 41.1&2 (Spring 2006), 262-282

Warner, Geoffrey, 'The Falls Road curfew revisited', Irish Studies Review, 14 (2006), 325-342

Watt, Ian, The Rise of the Novel (London: Hogarth, 1987 [1957])

White, Hayden, Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe (London: John Hopkins Press, 1973)

Wilson, Robert McLiam, 'Cities at War', Irish Review, 10 (1991), 95-98

—, 'Rhythm Method', Fortnight, September 1994, pp. 45-46

Wiseman, Richard, 'The Truth About Lying and Laughing', *The Guardian Weekend Supplement*, April 21st 2007, pp. 42-53

INTERNET SOURCES

Carbonneaux, Laurence, 'Interview de Robert McLiam Wilson', http://perso.infonie.fr/lca/mcliam05.html [11 May 2002]

Chrisafis, Angelique, 'Overlong, Overrated and Unmoving: Roddy Doyle's Verdict on James Joyce's Ulysses', *Guardian Unlimited*http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,1144561,00.html [accessed 12 November 2003]

Devenport, Mark, 'IRA Ceasefire: Ten Years On', *BBC News: Northern Ireland*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/3942053.stm [accessed 28 August 2007]

Helm, James, 'Tribunal Exposes Irish Political Corruption', *BBC News* www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2284586.stm [accessed 11 June 2007]

McLiam Wilson, Robert, 'Sticks and Stones: The Irish Identity', *Grandstreet*, http://www.grandstreet.com/gs/gs62/wilson2.html [accessed 5 February 2001]

—, 'Belfast Surrenders to Drama', *Guardian Unlimited: The Observer* http://observer.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,869105,00.html [accessed 16 May 2006]

Patterson, Glenn, 'Passing an Artist's Eye Over the Troubles', *Sunday Herald* http://sundayherald.com/7347 [accessed 30 July 2002]

Pelaschiar, Laura, 'Place and Self in Northern Ireland', *CAIN Web Service*, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/bibdbs/pelaschiar2.htm#place [accessed 16 August 2002]

—, 'Urban Narratives', *CAIN Web Service*, http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/bibdbs/pelaschiar3.htm#urban [accessed 16 August 2002]

Stella, Laura, 'Interview with Roddy Doyle', *Università degli studi di Bergamo*, http://www.esterni.unibg.it/fa/fa_stel.html [accessed 29 August 2007]

Taylor, Charles, 'The Salon Interview: Roddy Doyle', *Salon*. http://www.salon.com/books/feature/1999/10/28/doyle/print.html [accessed 12 November 2003]

Verkaik, Robert, 'Northern Ireland Divided Over New rights for Gays', *The Independent Online* http://news.independent.co.uk/uk/ulster/article2116916.ece [accessed 15 August 2007]

Weich, Dave, 'Roddy Doyle, Unleashed', *Powells.com Interviews*. http://www.powells.com/authors/doyle.html [accessed 12 November 2003]

'A Conversation with Robert McLiam Wilson', *Ballantine Reader's Circle*, www.randomhouse.com/BRC/wilson.html [accessed 30 April 2001]

'Celebrity Chat: Colin Bateman', *Virgin.net*, http://www.virgin.net/chat/celebrity/archive 14.html> [accessed 23 April 2001]

'Haughey Vague at Bribes Enquiry', *BBC News*, www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern ireland/845446.stm> [accessed 11 June 2007]

'Interviews: Colin Bateman', *Virtual Ireland*, <www.virtualireland.com/story/interview/default.asp?page=comp&sstory=IViews> [accessed 1 May 2002]

'Natural Born Killer?: An Interview with Colin Bateman', *HarperCollins.com.au*, <www.harpercollins.com.au/authors/author_interview.cfm?Author=BATEMAN_CO LIN.html> [accessed 7 August 2002]

'Northern Ireland: The Troubles', *BBC: History*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/recent/troubles/the_troubles_article_06.shtml [accessed 3 September 2007]

'Patrick McCabe', *British Council*, <www.contemporarywriters.com/authors/?p=auth69> [accessed 2 March 2006]

'Q&A: Abortion in NI', *BBC News: Northern Ireland*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/1386450.stm [accessed 3 September 2007]

'The Gospel Singing MP', BBC News: Northern Ireland, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/936685.stm [accessed 28 August 2007]

'The Search for Peace: Good Friday Agreement', *BBC News: Northern Ireland*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/northern_ireland/understanding/events/good_friday.stm [accessed 28 August 2007]

'Timeline: Northern Ireland Assembly', *BBC News: Northern Ireland*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/2952997.stm [accessed 28 August 2007]

'Titanic Town', *Political Film Society*, <www.geocities.com/polfilms/titanictown.html> [accessed 2 March 2006]

'What is the Northern Ireland Assembly?', *BBC Action Network*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/actionnetwork/A4289358> [accessed 28 August 2007]