

The *Unheimlich* Self in Modernity:

Recreating meaning through poetry

By

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Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not currently submitted in consideration for any degree.

Signed..... (candidate)

Date.....

Statement 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explore the sociological aspects of poetry – in terms of both reading and writing it. Research into the impact of contemporary postcolonial poetry on society has remained a topic which, to date, has been under-examined within sociology proper. As a result, poetry continues to be a topic which has, for the most part, been restricted to studies within the discipline of English literature, or in some cases the interdisciplinary arena of cultural studies. This thesis intends to offer an argument which will show poetry worthy of study in sociological terms. Poetry, as language, has a formative effect on communities. This is illustrated within this thesis by a close analysis of postcolonial poetry from Irish and native American cultures. Postcolonial poetry was chosen as the subject for this project because of the particular experiences of the communities this poetry is derived from. How communities and people experience their social worlds is considered to be essential for the creation of any social order. Poetry, it is argued, comes to life in this experiential struggle.

This struggle is explored in relation to a broad survey of sociological, anthropological and postcolonial literature through a series of interconnected themes. These themes – permanent liminality, court society, *sacra*, *unheimlich*, alibi-for-being, the surplus, and abyss – arise from the debates presented in the theoretical chapters of this thesis, and demonstrate the ways in which poetry, society and the subject interact.

This thesis is dedicated to my beautiful sister Jane, my darling son
Teddy and all the difficulties of in-between.

CHAPTER ONE:

Introduction

Introduction

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
doth glance from heaven to Earth, from Earth to heaven;
and as imagination bodies forth
the forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
a local habitation and a name;
such tricks hath strong imagination.

William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5.1.13-19.

More often than not, the act of reading poetry is considered to be one which affects the senses aesthetically or, on a less profound level, serves to entertain. Its role throughout history as a means of political commentary or activism is fading into the past as popular culture becomes saturated with forms of media that are significantly easier to access and far more explicit in relation to intended meaning. In a world such as this, what can the role of poet and/or poetry amount to? In the above quote, Shakespeare alludes to the poet's role as they who bridge the gap between the abstract and the concrete. Within this excerpt however, is also the undeniable suggestion that an ability to give "airy nothing" a name is something of a trick. But if the "imagination bodies forth the forms of things unknown", this can hardly be a mere trick. The poet does not simply give 'nothing' a name, which certainly *would* constitute a trick of sorts; rather the poet calls forth that which is unknown and strives to make it known through the poetic form. Here we are confronted with abstract consciousness, or what Shakespeare calls the imagination. Is poetry a solitary pursuit, dependant on the actor's imagination and irrelevant outside of that? To this end the thesis at hand sets out an investigation into

whether poetry is a relevant cultural phenomenon within modern society. It is absolutely necessary however, for this study to go beyond a discussion of poetry's relevance within society and explore the potential of poetry to affect society more generally. The aim of this dissertation then, is to ask: if modern society is within the grip of a crisis of authenticity, how can poetry be a force to help subjects work themselves towards a more meaningful social life?

Theory

The study of poetry as an art form in contemporary Western society has been a generally neglected area of sociological consideration. It is true that various theorists have considered the place of literature more generally, however their analyses have proven restrictive in so far as they reduce literature to nothing more than a mirror through which we can observe the reflection of society. This type of attitude to literature is evident in many sociological approaches from Georgy Lukács in *The Theory of the Novel* (1971) to Lucien Goldman's *Toward a Sociology of the Novel* (1975) and Alan Swingewood's *The Sociology of Literature* (1972) and more recently Eastwood (2007) and Griswold (1993; 2000; 2008). None of this work has generated a widely accepted programme of sociological study however, nor has it included the poetic form for consideration in its own right. Instead of using literature as a reflective tool with which to observe society and examine its apparent ills, this thesis will offer poetry as a dynamic tool which has the potential to introduce forms of authentic meaning in society.

Given that this topic is philosophical in many of its core concerns and questions, a more philosophical paradigm was deemed necessary if the main research question was to be engaged with effectively. The thesis is built upon the hermeneutical foundations of philosophers like Friedrich Schleiermacher, Martin Heidegger and Wilhelm Dilthey. More specifically this thesis uses a philosophical hermeneutics focusing on the text as the site of interaction and the data which is to be analysed. Dilthey's work on experience (1995) sets the

pace for the investigation and provides the study with the foundation onto which the researcher can build an understanding of the ways in which experience is lived and understood in modern society. Chapter Two engages in a discussion of the various aspects of society which provide evidence to show modern society dealing with a particular form of experience which lacks in meaning. This discussion is heavily based on the theory of permanent liminality propounded by sociologist Arpad Szokolczai (2009) which is based on anthropologist Victor Turner's research on the Ndembu Tribe of Zambia (1967). Turner's work describes a rite of passage which he eventually sees as a phenomenon which is indicative of human society and its development more generally. In this case, anthropological concepts are used. This is not indicative of a turn to anthropology, rather it is suggestive of the highly philosophical nature of Turner's work and how it is interpreted by Szokolczai. For the purpose of this thesis, a concept with the ability to aid the researcher in a more developed analysis of the intricacies of modern society is one which will help shed light on how the subject experiences that society. In Chapter Three and Six social experience is shown as something which can be related to poetry in so far as it how it is created and read by the subject - but more than this, because it affects the subject it also affects how they act within their social arena. Within this social order the specific ways in which subjects act in, and experience their social world is evident. In *The Court Society* (1983) Norbert Elias uses France's court society as a reflexive tool to consider the many nuances within social interaction in society that are a result of a particular civilising process inherent in that particular social order. In *Reflexive Historical Sociology* (2000) Szokolczai uses this work in order to draw greater light on the specific structure at work within permanent liminality.

Chapter Three introduces the reader to the Heideggerian concept of *Unheimlich*. This term is used to describe a state of angst, a feeling of unease that the subject feels in modern society. Translated directly it means 'not at

home'. This interpretation which implies that the subject must be uneasy if they are not at home is key to the tone of this study and opens up an interesting avenue for debate which is taken up in the poetry chapters which follow. How does *unheimlich* affect the subject's experiences within society and what does it mean for society at large? Moreover, what can/does poetry have to do with this state of angst?

Chapter six is devoted entirely to this question and draws on Bakhtinian theory in order to show the way in which social subjects become cognisant of *unheimlich* and move away from what Mikhail Bakhtin calls an 'alibi-for-being' (1979). When they do so, and notice a 'surplus of meaning' they become answerable for themselves socially. It is at this point that they can move towards the philosophical concept of the Khôra which the same chapter argues is the way through which subjects restore meaning in society. This theoretical process is set forth in Chapter Eleven and is shown through an in-depth analysis of the work of the poets and the poetry explored in Chapter Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten.

Poetry

Four poets were chosen for this research project - Joy Harjo, Rex Lee Jim, Patrick Kavanagh and Eavan Boland. Two of the poets are of Irish descent and two of native American descent - Navajo and Muscogee. Through a theoretical consideration of the term 'postcolonial' in Chapter Three, drawing on the work of notable theorists like Homi Bhaba, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Franz Fanon it is argued that whether or not a social group can be said to be postcolonial is inherently tied to their experiential context. To this end it is out forward within this chapter that these poets are indeed postcolonial. Furthermore, it is argued that because of this postcoloniality that these subjects are *unheimlich* in how they experience their social worlds. A

distinction is drawn here between the *unheimlich* felt by the subjects within the court society illustrated in Chapter Two and the postcolonial subjects depicted in chapter three. The postcolonial subjects form of *unheimlich* is far more explicit and as a result significantly more obvious and thus keenly felt. These poets, it is maintained are already on the way to acknowledging their *unheimlich* and noticing a surplus of meaning within the social act. Within these particular communities issues of land, cultural authenticity and identity are all too apparent. In this space, poetry becomes the experiential playing ground upon which no subject is refused due consideration and these poetic subjects have free reign. It becomes the ritual site upon which society can mould and remould its particular order. As such, experience itself becomes just as important, if not more important than the ritual site of the poem and this becomes particularly apparent as the thesis progresses. For this reason Harjo, Jim, Kavanagh and Boland were chosen as subjects for this project. It is contended within this thesis that these poets exemplify the postcolonial subject, but more than this - that within their poetry, this struggle with *unheimlich* and a raw experiential battle with social life is depicted with palpable honesty. Here, poetry is offered as a way of restoring meaning within an inauthentic social space and searching out what Socrates called ‘the good’ in society.

Method

Chapter Five sets out how this return to meaning is possible methodologically while Chapter Eleven describes exactly what it means for us as subjects within ‘Liquid Modernity’ as exemplified through poetry (Bauman, 2000). As described earlier in this chapter, this research is built upon the hermeneutical tradition using the text as site of interaction and thus key to understanding social life. This project focuses on poetry in specific but the methodology constructed within Chapter Five could be used in an analysis of any art form. Given that the poetry chosen for this study was done so as a result of the

quality of the texts in relation to how they deal with *unheimlich* and experience a close analysis of the poetry was obviously necessary. The poems were examined in a traditional way according to the tenets of literary analysis - by their rhythm and structure first and then by their metaphorical and allegorical content (of course, always allowing for a connection between these elements). The semantic function of specific words, grammar and line structures were utilised in order to create certain effects. In this way, as is argued in Chapter Six, metaphors perform a role akin to *sacra* in a rite of passage. The poem is, as highlighted earlier, the site of interaction and as such is a rite of passage itself; drawing the reader and the poet through the rite and towards reaggregation where they have restored a sense of meaning to their social worlds. Methodologically then, a literary analysis is undertaken in order to reveal the inherently social elements of the text. That social element always returns, at each and every moment, to the experience of the poet and the reader.

Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue.

HENRY JAMES, *The Art of Fiction*

Ultimately, it is how we experience the world that affects us and thus the social reality around us. If we can manipulate and encourage our consciousness into a more profound way of thinking then our experiences are in turn influenced by that change in awareness. It is the unlimited potential of art, and in this case poetry to which this thesis aspires to touch on and so catch a few air-born particles in its tissue.

Poetry in the Social Arena

The specific poets were chosen also because of the proven (and some unproven) effect their poetry has had on society. Rex Lee Jim started out

writing stories from a young age - almost as soon as he was able to write, he experimented with prose. This ability led to his winning a scholarship to attend Princeton University where he developed his writing skills further. An advanced education and an interest in literature led Jim to a point where his writing took on a more political air. His poetry dealt with clashing cultures, displacement of land and loss of identity. Keen to remain a part of tribal life, Jim became a member of the Judiciary Committee and the Public Safety Committee within the Navajo Nation before becoming their Vice-President in 2011. Throughout his political career, it has become clear that Jim does not see literature and politics as two separate and distinct things - rather they are part of the same whole. In fact, his campaign to become Vice-President drew on his background as poet, and this seemed to be an attribute that the Navajo people respected. This is exemplified by the following statement written as part of a biography of Jim on the website of The President of the Navajo Nation - "The Navajo people elected Vice President Jim for his vision to foster our language, traditional songs and prayers, and to ensure the prosperity of the Navajo Nation" (Navajo Nation Government, 2011)

This suggests that, for the Navajo people, language is absolutely central to keeping the traditional culture alive within the community. At political rallies Jim quoted his poetry - this was evidence of his loyalty to the Navajo people, but more than that; it showed that the Navajo people understood his words on a more profound level, his poetry helped them reengage with their culture. In fact, poet Sherwin Bitsui notes that upon hearing one of Jim's poems *Nahookos* (Big Dipper), he was rendered awestruck by its cultural significance. The land he grew up in came to life as he listened to Jim read this poem to an auditorium of people (Poetry Society of America, 2009). In this case the metaphorical content of the poem brought Bitsui to a place of abstract consciousness. He was so moved by the potential of poetry that he was moved to write his own in the hope that he too could engender this type of awareness in others. The Navajo culture seems particularly open to the

transformative potential of art and its ability to effect the community for the better - so much so that it has an explicit place in politics.

Joy Harjo's work has become so celebrated in the last four decades that she is noted as being one of the forces behind the 'Native American Renaissance' (Lincoln, 1985). This renaissance involved an attempt made, for the most part, by educated native American people to reclaim their histories and thus their voices. They did this through politically saturated literature and almost as soon as they began, there was a reaction within the general American population. One of the more positive reactions was in the education sector. Courses in Native American studies began to spring up all over the United States - the first of which started in the University of California, Los Angeles. Poets like Joy Harjo, Leslie Marmon Silko and N. Scott Momaday (who, in 1969, won the Pulitzer prize for *House Made of Dawn* [1968]) wrote themselves back into American History and made a statement which would mark them out as voices not to be ignored. More importantly, they were actors on a world stage legitimately commenting on native American issues, provoking debate and changing the way their own communities as well as the general American public saw the native American community through poetry and prose. In addition to this 'renaissance' Joy Harjo herself has become a role model in the cross tribal native American community for female members searching for way to make sense of their complex histories and place in the North American 'New World Order'. This is exemplified by her non-fiction writing enterprises which revealed how she overcame a difficult past marred with many of the problems associated with growing up as a member of a native American community. She had her children at a young age and suffered physical abuse in the family home, but because she fought for her education and her right to a voice in contemporary society, she emerged a strong figure of success for the generations of native American women to follow.

Patrick Kavanagh is the unlikely hero and focus of Chapter Seven. Throughout his career, Kavanagh seems to be the figure most lured by the spectacle of the court society. His early poetry shows a character grappling for some sort of recognition or notoriety. He suffers for this desire, as his poetry is never considered 'traditional' or 'authentic' enough, but this suffering is what pushes him to an awareness of the superficiality of the literature scene in Dublin at the time. His astute observations and keen, critical eye enable him to write some of the best (and scathing) poetry of his career. At this point in his life he becomes more aware than ever of his *unheimlich* self and also of the *unheimlich* nature of those around him who, unfortunately, fail to recognise it as such. It is important to note that Kavanagh never really achieved any recognition from the elite of Dublin literary society while he was alive. He wrote sporadically for *The Irish Times* newspaper and published some of his poetry within the pages of that broadsheet but as far as publishing books of poetry, he fell far behind Joy Harjo on the other side of the Atlantic. The English literary scene was far more open to Kavanagh's talent however, and in 1956 a meeting with Patrick Swift, the editor of the Literary Journal *Nimbus*, subsequently led to 19 of Kavanagh's poems to be published in that same journal. Kavanagh's presence was felt keenly by one group of people in Ireland however; the students. This led to many guest lecturing posts in UCD and even abroad in the United States (Quinn, 2005) The student population, full to the brim of nationalistic Irish poetry found something far more honest and full of the failures of life in the words of Patrick Kavanagh. This allowed for a space in Irish literature extolling a different type of voice, one which questioned the mythological Ireland full of fairies or fighters - one for modern Ireland where it was ok to question what it meant to be Irish in the first place. For this reason Patrick Kavanagh is included in this study; he struggles with himself and the image of his country and community and while acknowledging that he will always be homeless to some extent, finds solace in that realisation. Kavanagh's earthy words made a difference in the 1960's, 70's and 80's where a different voice urged people to

reengage with more solid foundations of Irishness and move away from the spectacle of affected mythologizing. This gave way to the pretensions and superficiality of the 'Celtic Tiger' in the late 1990's and 2000's. For this reason, poets like Kavanagh are more necessary now more than ever. At a time where the Irish people are struggling for a sense of order to a chaotic social and economic system, it is essential for the Irish community to reassess what it means to be Irish.

Eavan Boland's poetry, which is examined in detail in Chapter Eight of this project takes on an entirely different tone. Boland's work deals with the intimacy of home on one hand, and the myth of history on the other. Her work is emotionally raw and asks for an intense engagement from the reader. When Boland first entered the Irish writing scene she attempted to subvert traditional notions of femininity and the home. She introduced the Irish public to the intimate moments of family life in an unapologetic way and in so doing made domesticity and femininity a valid subject for poetry and thus it was eventually acknowledged as such within the Irish public. Boland's work gained national recognition in 2005 when she became a poet for study on the Irish Leaving Certificate syllabus as part of the English course (Haberstroh, 1996). Until Eavan Boland started writing and publishing poetry, Irish poetry circles were dominated by men and the social issues that concerned them. Boland brought the private family life out into the public and more than this, she addressed the elephant in the room - she asked the question 'where were women in Irish history?' From this she progressed on to a discussion as to the nature of Irish history in general and finally came to see it as a constructed myth. Her poetry became a project in diagnosing the myth of fixed history and the problematic aspects of modern social life that arose as a result. This is examined in further detail in Chapter's Eight and Eleven as poems like 'Naoise at Four' are examined. When Boland's poetry entered the general education syllabus, this changed how thousands of students saw canonical Irish poetry and what was acceptable as poetical content. This translated to an

understanding among the Irish youth that the society around us, including our history, is subject to social construction and is no more fixed than the literary syllabus itself.

The important aspect of the poetry written by any of these poets is the effect that their poetry can have. The argument that will be made in this dissertation is that the poem is a site of ritual that can bring the writer or the reader through liminality itself and through abstract contemplation and metaphorical *sacra* will bring the reader and writer both, ideally, to a place of renewed understanding through a confrontation with the abyss. Without this confrontation, native American societies would find it harder to reconceive of themselves on their own terms, and Irish communities would fail to be able to think outside of the weight of oppressive and (apparently) fixed history. These concepts in particular will be discussed in further detail in Chapters Five, Six and Eleven.

Chapter Structure

The theoretical foundations of this chapter are laid out in Chapters Two, Three and Four. Chapter Two restricts itself to a discussion of the current debates as to the structures of and issues apparent within modern western society. The thesis restricts itself to modern western society as those areas of the western hemisphere engaging in an open market economy and share the similar philosophies that have arisen from a shared history and economic formation. In particular, this chapter focuses on the theory of 'permanent liminality' as put forward by Arpad Szakolczai in *Reflexive Historical Sociology* (2000). This chapter examines the connection Szakolczai makes between liminality, as theorised by Victor Turner (1967), and Norbert Elias' conceptualisation of the court society and how these theories can be used to understand the order of contemporary society. This chapter brings these theories further to include a new analysis of the role of *sacra* in this situation

of liminality. This hypothesis becomes even more important as the thesis moves on to chapters examining poetry and its formative potential more theoretically.

Chapter Three follows the formation of postcoloniality historically within the Irish, Navajo and Muscogee communities. It begins with a discussion of what it means to be postcolonial and engages with contemporary theory on that subject. One of the most important achievements of this chapter is its description of postcoloniality on its own terms in relation to experience. When speaking of experience, the work of Wilhelm Dilthey is incorporated with illuminating results. This unique interpretation of postcoloniality is connected to the experience of *unheimlich* and is understood to be a central force at work within modern society and indeed one which deserves further elaboration and discussion. With this in mind, Chapter Four carries on with a proposal as to where poetry can offer some answers to the questions outlined in Chapter Two and Three.

Chapter Four focuses primarily on poetry. It examines the various elements of poetry which make it a useful artefact for research into society, experience and the condition of modern life. Within this chapter traditional aspects literary analysis are considered and related to the study at hand. Deep literary analysis according to rhythm, tone and syntax is discussed as one way of elucidating the (perhaps) implicit content of poetry. This is followed by a discussion on the merits of allegorical and metaphorical readings and the significance of noting any surplus in meaning when it comes to the social act which was reviewed in Chapter Three in relation to experience. Chapter Four concludes with a review of the process of reader responses when it comes to poetry and how that connects to the ritual of poetry and thus the main aim of this thesis - a travelling through liminality to a point of reaggregation and renewed meaning.

Methodology is the focus of Chapter Five. It explains the philosophical rationale for such a study and expands on the epistemological background for and the method in which the research has been conducted. It details the method of close literary analysis and how it is conducted, while it also sets forth the rationale for the choice of poets in relation to their social context and how this has an effect on the research at hand. A comparative analysis of the four poets is made as to the effect of their poetry on the specific communities and a comment is made on the result of this effect.

Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine are the analysis chapters. Chapters Six and Seven focus on the Irish poets, Eavan Boland and Patrick Kavanagh. Issues such as *unheimlich*, social responsibility, land, embodiment and femininity come to the fore within these chapters. These chapters focus on a close analysis of various poems considered to be of relevance in relation to the overall objectives of the thesis. Chapters Eight and Nine turn to the native American poets - Navajo poet Rex Lee Jim and Muscogee poet Joy Harjo. Some similar issues are observable through analysis of the poetry in these chapters - for example, social responsibility and land are of particular importance to these poets. However, additional issues such as cultural alienation, ancestry and belonging come through with particular intensity within the lines of this Navajo and Muscogee poetry.

Chapter Eleven is the main discussion chapter which brings together the poetry with the theory presented in Chapters Two, Three and Four. Here, experience is shown to be the foundational element for social action. The dangers apparent in adopting a Bakhtinian 'alibi-for-being' (1993) are illustrated here in so far as it fails to allow the subject to become aware of the surplus of meaning within any social situation. This is the acknowledgment which can set the reader or the writer on a journey to abstract consciousness and a meeting with the abyss of meaning. At this point examples from Boland, Kavanagh, Harjo and Jim's poetry are offered to show how the

theoretical aim of the project is possible and through the ritual site of poetry. Finally the thesis concludes with a treatise on the potential of poetry to turn the subject towards the platonic light of the more being-ful while encouraging an awareness in the reader that there will always be a more 'being-ful'.

CHAPTER TWO:

Experiencing Modern Identities

Introduction

In order to make an argument for the potential of the poetic form within contemporary society, this social order itself must be situated within current sociological thought. To this end the following chapter contends that modern 'western' society is in a state of 'permanent liminality'. Within this state "liminality becomes a permanent liminal condition [in which modernity] becomes frozen, as if a film stopped at a particular frame" (Szakolczai, 2000: 220). While there are many alternative analyses of modernity, the theory and argument offered here is one which is separate and distinct in how it theorises the human subject. The primary aim of this chapter then, is to situate modern society within a framework of analysis that will strive to highlight some of the main barriers to a restoration of authentic meaning in society. Ultimately, it means to carry on from Arpad Szakolczai and his theory of permanent liminality and offer new insights into this current state at work in modernity.

Throughout this chapter, an attempt will be made to avoid any monolithic view of modernity that purports to encompass its characteristic problems within an overarching narrative system. It will endeavour to highlight the specific features of modernity that would allow the *unheimlich* self (or the condition of homelessness) to become one of the most difficult issues to resolve in terms of authentic meaning. The specific elements of this type of social structure will be approached, all the while acknowledging the implicitly dialectical and reflexive process at work in the creation of any social reality. The aim here is to offer an analysis of modernity that is nuanced and comprehensive at the same time as it allows for human agency. In essence then, this chapter offers the most convincing classification of modernity as a state of permanent liminality before going on to a discussion of the various elements of that particular social order - namely, the court society, *sacra* and masks, and finally identity. The main concern for this

chapter is how subjects within this particular situation experience their social world and engage in social action. This is particularly necessary if an argument is to be put forward in later chapters contending that *how* subjects experience their world is essential for the type of reality they live in and negotiate.

Classifications of Modernity

There have been countless different analyses of modern society from a wide variety of disciplines, concerning the apparent changes noticeable over the last century and a half. Within this concern is the (problematic) implicit assumption that changes have taken place in this western society – changes that are far more dramatic and intensive than were apparent from any documented change within previous eras. These changes have been considered by many theorists as a development that went hand in hand with the rise of capitalism. Karl Marx, being one of the most prolific critics of capitalism as it was at the time of his writing, wrote extensively on the connection between the economy, capital and social order. It was Marx's contention that capitalism, through its focus on the accumulation of wealth, led to problems in society that were unique to a system which privileged economics over human welfare. Capitalism in the late 19th C was characterised by an increase in the privatised ownership of large scale factories and businesses. The growing number of workers migrating to urban areas in order to secure work in these factories meant that class division became intensified and problematic. Labourers worked long hours for meagre pay in poor working conditions within crowded cities. As Marx saw it, this invariably led to the workers' alienation from themselves, their work and their workmates. As he felt that human beings needed to work to fulfil their human potential, Marx maintained that this sense of alienation would eventually lead the workers to revolt and demand better, more fulfilling conditions societally (Bryant, 2006). While Marxist theory is a grand

narrative of epic proportions, there is nonetheless an acknowledgement within it that society is fundamentally subject to changes in its structure and as a result, is intrinsically malleable. For this thesis, that propensity towards change is of paramount importance.

Max Weber (1991) also observed these changing conditions as they related to capitalistic endeavour. His analysis however, was concerned with the causal affect of religious fervour within the protestant faction of society in developing a 'spirit of capitalism'. Weber claimed that the inclination towards asceticism and the belief in predestination within Calvinistic Protestantism had significant implications for capitalism as it developed in Europe in the 19th C. By a belief in the virtue of hard work and its visible manifestation in accumulated capital, a culture emerged which promoted a work ethic based on religious ideology. However, as time passed and mass production intensified, the attitude towards wealth accumulation changed from being a sign of virtue (interpreted as an indication of one's secure place in the afterlife) to being a sign of status (interpreted as an indication of one's superiority as a person within society). This essentially individualistic attitude to life would complement the principles of capitalism perfectly, and did so according to Weber. This developing relationship would lead to an overtly rationalised approach to structure within society (Weber, 1991; Ritzer, 2004) where state policies and procedures are particularly sympathetic to open market trade focusing on economic progress, built on a belief in the virtue of capital accumulation. While Marx's theory, resting on the importance of the economy and the means of production is most certainly a valid one in many ways, it nonetheless essentialises these problems said to be associated with capitalism and as a result misses many of the nuances in society that exist, not as a direct result of capitalist systems, but rather in a symbiotic relationship *with* them. Weber's concept of rationalisation, however, refers to a mode of experience and tendency towards agency within modern society rather than a structure. At the heart of this rationalisation is the disenchantment of the

world which the subject feels. Because society is overtly rationalised, subjects feel the weight of a philosophy that holds teleological efficiency and rational calculation in favour over autonomy, individuality and creative control. Weber's methods incorporate both structure and agency and as a result have more to offer the reflexive researcher.

More recent arguments draw on these early sociological theories and develop them by using current issues as a focus point. Most theorists express concerns over (or in some cases appreciation of) a political and economic (increasingly these concepts have become interchangeable) agenda known as 'neo-liberalism'. In addition to this, there has also been significant debate over the (perhaps) connected process of globalisation (Beck, Adam and Van Loon, 2000, 1992; Beck and Camiller 2000; Giddens, 1999; Rapley, 2004; Scholte, 2000; Robertson, 1992; Huntington, 2011; Ritzer, 2007, 2008, 2009; Bauman, 1998, 2000). Drawing on Marxist theory, Douglas Kellner sees globalisation as a reformation and intensification of the structure of capitalism. Ulrich Beck (2000) sees this period in history as defined by a growth in the illusory nature of closed spaces. As a result culture, societies and politics are transnational to the extent that these nations are coming together under an ideology distinct from the 'international community spirit' of the past, where countries remain very much independent and would interact with one another on the basis of a benefit to their own nationhood (politically or militarily perhaps) and national identity (Ritzer and Goodman, 2004). Beck defines modern society as characterised by the idea of 'globality' which means that "from now on nothing which happens on our planet is only a limited local event; all inventions, victories and catastrophes affect the whole world" (Beck, 2000:11). Globalisation refers, in part, to the process whereby the 'global village' is becoming more and more pronounced. A term introduced by Marshall McLuhan in 1962, the global village is a metaphor used to describe the increased influence of and capabilities of the internet. Beyond and in addition to this, the term can be more generally applied to the

general shrinking of the world conceptually or what is known as ‘phenomenological contraction’ (Waters, 2002). Malcolm Waters further expands on the qualities of globalisation in his book on the topic and notes what he terms as an annihilation of time and space distances and a conscious orientation of national governments towards the international stage. This can be seen as particularly relevant to the western world at least, and in its current form globalisation is said to be upheld and reinforced by the strength of a neoliberal economically driven politics. This type of politics compliments globalisation perfectly due to its policies that favour deregulation of the market, privatisation in the control of economic factors and a focus on the ‘freedom’ (liberation) of the actor within society (Held and McGrew, 2003).

Anthony Giddens, in a similar vein to the theorists above albeit in a more sensationalised fashion, equates globalisation to a ‘juggernaut of modernity’ which is fundamentally uncontrollable and reified (2000). Even movements which attempt to exist outside this overpowering state of reality are subsumed within it; the example he gives in this regard is the concept of tradition. It becomes something absorbed by and into the capitalist ideology and therefore gets obliterated by the might of the juggernaut. A book written in an indigenous language for example is published, bought and thus loses its authenticity by virtue of the fact that it is now part of the system – the ‘culture industry’. Theodore Adorno (2001 [1972]), along with Max Horkheimer, coined the term ‘culture industry’ in 1944 in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The term was used to describe the co-opting of culture by the capitalist machine. Essentially the culture industry serves to construct false needs for the masses which invariably lead them to consume these constructed needs all the while ignoring any ‘true’ needs. The ease with which they consume these constructed needs or reality produces a passive society incapable of autonomy or independent action. This notion of the passive subject incapable of social agency has invaded modern discourse to a significant extent. Adorno and Horkheimer trace this discourse and the connecting dangers of rationality

back to the ‘myth of enlightenment’ wherein the subject is deemed authoritative because they have the ability to reason. This is fundamentally problematic because the subject is placed in a position of superiority and rationalises their control over, and dominance of, the natural world. This theme will be deliberated upon in more depth in Chapter Six. As can be seen from Giddens’, Waters’ and Beck’s analyses of modernity, modern society is offered up as an uncontrollable, reified phenomenon removed from mere mortals and as a result, untouchable. Fredrick Jameson’s late capitalism has a comparable focus (1991) also, Guy DeBord’s society of the spectacle (2009 [1967]) and Jean Baudrillard’s hyper-reality (1998) are of a similar epistemological intention – all underlined by a Neo-Marxist ideology.

Undoubtedly, these theories have added much to our understanding of the modern world in which we live but while they outline the changes apparent they fail to really elucidate the ideological problematic at the centre. Neo-Marxist theories of the kind propounded by Waters, Kellner, and Jameson and postmodern theories (also, sometimes Neo-Marxist) put forward by a myriad of different scholars fail to adequately account for the human dimension of these problems with regard agency in modernity. This is something which Karl Marx himself failed to give adequate consideration to a century and a half ago. The particularly protean nature of reality seems to be an unacknowledged force in much of this type of theory. In addition, it would seem as though these analyses of modernity which hold this phase of history up as a false reality, lack a reflexive contemplation of the subject at hand. By focusing on the structural to the detriment of agency or the cultural forces at work in society they reify society to the extent that meaning is actually rendered irrelevant in the face of the hyper-structured social order. Various academics who claim reflexivity of theoretical construct refer to ‘multiple modernities’ that avoid simplifying modernity as a rationalising force akin to Giddens’ ‘unstoppable juggernaut’. Appadurai, in *Modernity at Large* (1996) speaks of ethnoscaples where new forms of community are developing across

different time and space constructions. Featherstone and Lash (1995) draw a picture of modernities developing differently but always returning back to the global of which, they attest, everything is now a part. While these conceptualisations of the many different faces of modernity somewhat avoid a totalising view of modern society by accounting for and recognising cultural disparity, the effect these analyses have eventually brings the multifaceted and multi-nuanced experiential condition of modernity together and ties them up neatly within the confines of an overarching paradigm.

Bjorn Thomassen in an article entitled ‘Anthropology and its many modernities: when concepts matter’ (2012) highlights the inherently problematic nature of such concepts of modernity. Thomassen suggests moving towards analyses that do not consistently attempt to go beyond, overcome, and move outside traditional structures and boundaries associated with modernity. He argues that we should resist what Bernhart Giesen calls the “lure to transgression” (2009). Perhaps the problem is in the word ‘transgression’. Rather than moving beyond or past something, subjects or societies must undergo a change in the structure built on cultural differences which are motivated by changing patterns of meaning. This is what Arpad Szakolczai makes a project of in much of his work – a search for the roots of processes that we take for granted as definite and stable constructs and exposing them as elements within the course of modernity which need to be marked and explored further. This project aims to explore these components further and offer some potential in modernity through culture. Perhaps then, rather than solely viewing modernity as a state consumed by the myth of the enlightened world, or as the death knell of meaningless pastiche, it can signal a space wherein poets can note the “trauma that has to be coped with” (Giesen, 2009). In this way subjects might move towards isolating the various aspects of society which they deem problematic in an attempt to re-create them in a way that promotes a resurgence of meaning.

In consequence of this kind of hypothesis then – rather than an overly simplistic, essentialist critique of modernity expounding the qualitative differences between order and disorder, it is essential to employ a reflexive model if society is to be understood in all its fragmentary complexity. Perhaps, as a processual phenomenon, modernity has schismogenetically engendered a social situation characterised by a chaotic fluidity of social norms and values that were considered definite. Thus change becomes the fundamental focus point for social actors. Zygmunt Bauman makes just this argument in his seminal work on the topic entitled *Liquid Modernity* (2000). Bauman argues that in modern society subjects are entrenched in a societal order that privileges the new, the advancing, and the becoming. As a result, the ‘solid’ social values and traditions of the previous societal states become redundant (2000: 16). The old solids are considered deficient in some way and need to be overcome in order for a new and improved, almost perfect example of society to come into being (1992: 174). The new societal form is considered definite while, paradoxically, subject to the constant malleability of liquid modernity and is therefore undermined by it at every turn. It is liquid, as Bauman argues, and therefore the natural antithesis to solidity.

If this Liquid Modernity is an accurate description of modern society, how can we understand it in a more comprehensive way rather than through the lens of the old stalwarts of order and disorder? Along with order and disorder, Arpad Szakolczai argues, it is imperative to consider the state in which order is suspended (Szakolczai, 2001). Anthropologist Victor Turner noted that this suspended state or ‘liminality’ is an essential element of all societies. He argued that it was (and is) an under-appreciated concept in anthropology and if it were to be used more often in social analysis, it would provide a framework through which to understand social situations on a more profound and less dichotomous level (Turner, 1967). If overarching paradigmatic explanations of overtly structural problems were enough to eradicate the inconsistencies, paradoxes and crises in the western world, those

crises would either not exist, or we would be on our way to resolving them. As we have neither resolved, nor it seems, are on our way to resolving these pervasive issues, it is painfully evident that another mode of theorising is necessary. By introducing a new term which accounts for the dissolution of order within an ordered system, rather than rehashing the old reliable of order and disorder to explore modernity (all the while expecting a different outcome) it is expected that a fresh perspective on the issues facing modern society would be advantageous. Szakolczai's contention that modern society is entrenched in a period of 'permanent liminality' does just that (2001). Bauman theorises about liquid modernity, where the traditions of the past are rendered meaningless in the face of discourses of progress and advancement. The combined powers of capitalism, industrialism and surveillance overwhelm the individual and as a result they fail to keep traditions or the 'solid' in place. The discourse of modernity which focuses on neo-liberal development simply leads to liquefaction and subjects fail to hold on to definite ideas of individuality in relation to themselves, their country or their principles (Lee, 2011). The discourse creates a reality for subjects wherein they must subscribe to the offered order if they are to succeed in the modernity they are surrounded by. Whereas in Bauman's work this is offered as a type of disorder, constant change and fluid reality which can never hold a shape; liminality allows for this malleability as a type of order evident within a particular social process. Meaning is not lost or completely fluid, rather it is enmeshed in a complex interrelation of court society, performance and masking which involves a certain type of reflexivity, and – as will be argued in the next chapter – is part of what Martin Heidegger would term 'inauthentic Dasein'.

In his text on Nietzsche's philosophy – Volume Three, entitled *The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics* (1991), Heidegger argues that –

The essence of modernity is fulfilled in the age of consummate meaninglessness. No matter how our histories may tabulate the concept and course of modernity, no matter which phenomena in the fields of politics, poetry, the natural sciences, and the social order they may appeal to in order to explain modernity, no historical mediation can afford to bypass two mutually related essential determinations within the history of modernity: first, that man installs and secures himself as subiectum, as the nodal point for beings as a whole; and secondly, that the beingness of beings as a whole is grasped as the representedness of whatever can be produced and explained.

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Heidegger is essential to this conversation from a sociological perspective and, it may be argued, to any debate on the benefit of literature for society. He boldly deals with issues like truth, art and the nature of being and these issues are imperative for any piece of work that attempts to deal with human interaction in society. Moreover, because Heidegger specifically considers the formative potential of poetry in society, his work is of particular interest to a thesis focusing on poetry as its primary source. In his later works – *Poetry, Language, Thought* (2001), he speaks of the ‘thingly’ nature of all works, that which is “always, already there”. The work of art, however, is not solely a ‘thingly’ phenomenon. Van Gogh’s painting of the peasant shoes, for example, have an additional element beyond the thingly aspect, which requires a more developed understanding of the nature of the work of art, and consequently the nature of truth, or more appropriately for this thesis authentic meaning, in art. Throughout this study various Heideggerian terms will be incorporated in order to give further illumination to particular phenomena. The concept of ‘authentic Dasein’ will be introduced in Chapter Two to describe the difference between being authentic and inauthentic in society, and this is connected to being homeless in modernity or *unheimlich*. The ‘they-world’, as in the world of the ‘they’ or the inauthentic Dasein will

also be employed and connected to the court society which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Toward the end of the thesis, two concepts become particularly important – the feeling of unease in modernity known to Heidegger as ‘Angst’ and the phenomenon of the abyss which authentic Dasein, in a state of angst, is moved towards. For now, it suffices to move on to the theory of permanent liminality and how it manifests itself within modern society.

Liminality, Permanent Liminality and *Sacra*

Arpad Szakolczai bases his theory of permanent liminality on Arnold Van Gennep (1960 [1909]) and Victor Turner’s (1967) research on rites of passage. By returning to a concept associated with ‘traditional’ societies Szakolczai views modernity through a different lens and interprets modern notions of rationalisation, progression and advancement left over from the enlightenment, in a new way. From here on when speaking of liminality, ‘the subject’ can refer to an individual, a social group, or both. Turner points out that ritual in a rite of passage and indeed this concept of liminality, is essentially transformative rather than confirmatory, which he maintains is the outcome of a ceremonial affair. The actor is transformed socially in a rite of passage and for this reason it is particularly important. In the court society, which will be expanded upon in the next section of this chapter, this transformation is difficult as the emphasis on rationalisation and performance in society is intensified to the extent that change appears unnecessary (Elias, 1978). In a traditionally liminal situation of the kind Turner wrote about in *The Forest of Symbols* (1967), subjects perform many different roles without the restriction of a believed definite individual identity that exists beyond the performance. When studying the Ndembu tribe Turner observed that performance itself is a reality for the subjects, where any identity is possible. This can be brought forward to bear on the argument at hand because similarly, in a court society, a great amount of importance is laid at the feet of the subject performers in *how* they perform and to what standard. The

performance itself is reality and as a result the visage is an all-important reflection of a subject's worth.

These particular nuances within society are signals indicative of a modernity that is far more complex than a Marxist ideology of powerful and powerless, oppressor and oppressed, or even one pointing to the ever increasing power of technology can account for. This is evident in, and is an aspect of, postcolonial studies which has been attempting to deal with tendencies in modern academics to essentialise specific problems in society and relate them, in many cases, to taken for granted grand narratives or political ideologies (Bhabha, 1990). Utilising a model of reflexive historical sociology, based on Foucault's genealogy of knowledge, Szakolczai opens up a system of understanding that is more systematic and reflexive, and therefore capable of a more comprehensive analysis of human interaction in society and how it has developed to create a modern situation. This genealogical analysis "concerns the exact nature of the conditions under which a new phenomenon emerges – a new social practice, political institution or world religion" (Szakolczai, 2009). The following section then, proposes to reassess key elements within the phenomenon of permanent liminality within modernity.

While this thesis is concerned with the middle phase of liminality, it is important to note that generally, there are three phases observable in a rite of passage: separation, the liminal period proper and reaggregation (or separation, margin and aggregation – [Van Gennep, 1960 {1909}]). The first stage of separation is accompanied by symbolic behaviour detaching the person or group from a fixed state; they distance themselves from the definite structures of the previous social order and question their authority. A fixed state may refer to a defined social role, status or condition of mental, physical or emotional health for the individual, or a social situation or cultural condition for the group. In the liminal period proper the norms and structure

of what characterised the previous state have broken down and subjects are concerned with playing the part of the non-subject, (alternately referred to as the initiate or the neophyte) in an attempt to work out a new societal structure. This is the moment of performance and poetry, but of course non-transformative for the court society. The final period then, is marked by reaggregation where this shape has been outlined and a new phase begins. This happens when the individual or group is in a stable state again and where a new structure is mapped out for them to adhere to. Within this new structure, norms and codes are clearly defined and there is a distinct lack of confusion and/or fragmentation. A monastery where there is a focus on asceticism, a constant breaking from what went before, is an example of the first stage of liminality. The public sphere of celebrity performance is an example of the second stage of liminality – the middle phase, while the third stage might be characterised by a communist society where there is constant reaggregation based on the cultivation of a society in waiting, or fearing the ‘other’ or the enemy. Permanent liminality is also evident at other points of historical development, as an example one could look to France after the Revolution in 1789. Szokolczai feels that within modern society there is evidence of these stages of liminality having been stalled or extended.

The pre-liminal state of breaking away from the old norms and values is characterised by Zygmunt Bauman’s argument that the disintegration of former structures becomes a reality due to the discourses and social processes of modernity. This means that modern society is reduced to a liquid existence where nothing is certain, structured or solid. The very state of liquid modernity is evident by the liminal period proper, and Bauman even goes on to argue that the problem of modernity remains in the fact that due to this discourse of modernity, it is almost impossible to create solid structures (Szokolczai, 2000). When change and fluidity is revered in society and that becomes a reigning order, reality and society become stalled in the liminal period. This is marked by, and results in, a lack of reintegration in society

after the liminal period – thus, the post-liminal period or reaggregation is not achieved. This shows that precedence for this type of theorisation is already within popular academic discourse but some of the issues inherent might be resolved through incorporating the concept of liminality. This theory could help account for some of the more complex elements within modernity such as performance and interdependence and this is why it forms part of the theoretical framework of this study.

As noted above, historically this process of liminality is not unusual; it is in fact rather a common process that is an implicit part of developing societies, groups and individuals as maintained by Szakolczai, Turner and van Gennep before them. Take the civil war in England and the following period of uncertainty as Cromwell worked to make England a republic instead of a monarchy (Sharp, 2003), or sacrament of Marriage for an individual. As outlined earlier liminality as a theoretical concept was first introduced as an important sociocultural event by anthropologist Arnold van Gennep in 1909 and later expanded upon by Victor Turner in his research on the Ndembu tribe of Zambia in Central Africa (1967; 1969). Van Gennep felt that, through research expounded in his book *Rites de Passage* (1960 [1909]), he had come across a particularly important realisation – the significance of the transition period in social situations. He singled out three stages of this transition period – rites of separation, transition rites and post-liminal rites as elaborated above. He called the middle phase characterised by transition rites *liminal* and it is with this phase of liminality that we are concerned here. This tripartite structure for van Gennep was a universal one used to understand an aspect of human understanding but importantly – it is a living concept. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (2001 [1912]) Emile Durkheim looks at rites and rituals as markers of the cultural situation in which they are created but van Gennep and later Turner understand them as living entities vigorous with potential. They differ from Durkheim in so far as they argue that these rites are not simply reflections of the culture but are an example of how, in a

specific social space, culture itself can be created. Turner takes this dynamic conceptualisation of liminality and weaves it into his work revealing yet another level of social insight.

Liminality for Turner can apply to a temporal or spatial construct and can include both groups and individuals. A way in which the liminal moment highlights possibility (positive or negative) is in relation to temporality. In an historical sense, liminality shows history to be a construct wherein at times the structure is fixed and at others loose (Thomassen, 2009). This is reflective of van Gennep's view of 'periodicity'. The liminal period, with its fundamentally contradictory nature, is at the same time both intensely structuring and unstructured. Basic modes of understanding and rules of conduct in society were previously questioned and the subjects are encouraged to embrace the world around them without having replaced these structures. Traditionally speaking, in order for something, i.e. a rite of passage, to be liminal, the actors must move through the three phases explicated earlier. The foundation of this thesis rests on Arpad Szakolczai's contention that modern society has broken with a previous social order but has failed to return itself to a meaningful social order. As a result, this thesis argues that modern society has stalled in the *limen* – or the middle stage of liminality. This non-eventful static space (as opposed to active) which modern secular society seems to be engulfed in at the moment has been described by Szakolczai as "a constant state of liminality" or permanent liminality (2000: 220). Turner, in *The Forest of Symbols* (1967) speaks of the lack of hierarchy in liminality proper (the middle phase) and the general confusion, fluidity and uncertainty which defines it. How can this be compared to a society that Weber argues is highly structured, bureaucratized and essentially rationalised? There are two things to note here – in a liminal period, while the structure of the previous state has broken down and technically the subject is without definite form, they nonetheless adhere to strict rules regarding the authority of the liminal situation itself – abiding by

the force of tradition set out within that state. The subject is completely obedient to the liminal situation as its authority is fully believed to be for the common good. The subject's individuality comes into play here and should not be underestimated – this concept of what the individual expects to get from the situation becomes powerful and thus the liminal state itself is reified

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Authority in question is really quintessential, tradition emerges clearly in societies where initiations are not collective but individual and where there are no instructors or gurus.

Turner, 1967: 100

There is an unavoidable problem with modernity in that individuals do not exercise their power of agency in a way that would lead to a resurgence of meaning within society. Instead, their agency and reflexivity is concerned with the structure at work in the liminal space rather than the possibility of a structure outside that space. In traditional liminal situations there is always a master of ceremonies to direct the proceedings and make sure that subjects progress through the rite of passage in the appropriate way. The master of ceremonies is outside the liminal moment but is also a definitive part of it. They ensure that the initiates do not lose all connection to the solid meaning structure of society and so direct them in a way which helps them to make the most out of the limen. The problem with modern society then, is perhaps a lack of instruction. Possibly we lack a credible master of ceremonies and, as Agnes Horvath and Bjorn Thomassen (2008) argue, we are instead subjected to the will of a trickster – the subject who has no civic or ethical responsibility but who, nonetheless enjoys the performative aspect of the liminal period and performs identities. As they are essentially irresponsible and lack any kind of moral outlook, the trickster becomes a dangerous figure who can wield large amounts of control and power because they can imitate

any given reality. With this ability they can draw on and take advantage of desires at the heart of society. In a modern liminal society the master of ceremony is absent in many cases, and in others the position is infiltrated by this trickster who pretends towards the qualities of the master of ceremony. The trickster does not actually possess the necessary qualities to fulfil the role of the master of qualities and as a result simply performs it. This can be dangerous as there is no 'ethic of responsibility' behind the trickster's actions and so s/he cannot direct the subjects towards reaggregation. Subjects within this court society become overly concerned with the presumed charismatic character of the trickster and as a result fail to concern themselves with the search for authentic meaning.

In modern society, without an authentic master of ceremonies to direct them, the initiates reinforce the performance of the middle period of liminality more generally through a performance of their own roles as part of the group. Within the performance they critique everything and yet question nothing, so that reality is fundamentally unstructured as it cannot have a definitive or solid base without a similarly solid structure of meaning (Boland, 2007). The performance thus becomes a structure in itself. In the liminal period proper then, the subject is compelled to dwell on the reality associated with the middle period and to treat the previous structure with distrust. The benefit of this in traditional and positive (as in structure generating) liminal situations is that the subject works out the issues of the old system and devises (presumably) transformed meaning to place in its stead. In a situation of permanent liminality there is no redemptive offering and so the subjects are reduced to constant performance and confusion. Within this ambiguous structural situation it is possible for "novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise" (1967: 97) Turner refers back to Plato and his debt to the Greek mysteries when he says that within liminality there "is a certain freedom to juggle with the factors of existence" (1967: 106) This is particularly reflective of the potential in liminality to

restore meaning which is an important element of the theory as a general sociocultural concept; and of particular importance to the thesis at hand. The question then looms quite large – why has modern society failed to pass through the middle phase of liminality and move towards reaggregation? In connection to this, why/how do subjects continue to remain within the middle phase of modernity?

A crucial aspect of liminality for Turner is that the subject of the rite of passage is socially invisible – this is important to note in relation to the court society where the subject must be particularly visible at all times. The subject must lose the structure (or ‘become invisible’ in that their former identity is lost and they have not taken on a new one) of what went before in order to allow transformation. The initiate is invisible as a subject, but takes on a mask of sorts – they are the neophyte and must perform that part. The mask worn within the performance is supremely visible in order for the initiate to reinforce their position as a non-subject. The performance itself becomes their identity within this space, but it is acknowledged that the performance is not their essential identity; which is something that cannot be formed until reaggregation. Because they are essentially invisible as their former selves they must perform an overt and explicit identity and masks help them in this task. These masks are called *sacra* and in function, can take on many forms. *Sacra* can be relics, instruments or masks and while simple in form, are inherently complex in how they are interpreted within the liminal social situation.

Turner describes the role of *sacra* which are utilised in the liminal period proper by drawing attention to the fact that they are created for a particular purpose within the liminal moment proper: *sacra* follow liminality in its structure, in so far as the instruction of *sacra* also involves three processes. The first is connected to the first stage in the liminal period and involves the reduction of society into recognised components and factors. The

second is when these components are recombined in ways that promote a mode of abstraction for the initiates. The third function of *sacra* then, is to recombine them in ways that make sense in regard the new reaggregated society. In a rite of passage where subjects progress through the three stages of liminality there is a deconstruction of the social order – this is related to the first process of *sacra*. Familiar cultural configurations are then recombined in the second stage of liminality and the second process of *sacra* in order to promote de-familiarization so the subject can accurately reflect on the given norms of the previous social situation. All of these elements should promote ‘*communitas*’ (Turner, 1969: 96) where there is a level of equality and homogeneity among the subjects as they move towards reaggregation. *Sacra* then allow the initiates to dwell on the masks – what is left over from the first phase as solid meaning – and approach them without previously held notions of reality and so have the ability to use them to re-create society using tradition creatively.

Because the Ndembu tribe used the masks as *sacra* as a way of separating the subject from their ties to the previous order, this encouraged objective and profound consideration of particular elements within that system in order for them to be able to think in more abstract terms about social order more generally. The idea is that, in doing so, initiates might have the ability to use them to re-create social order. The mask then, paradoxically, is both true and untrue – it both effaces and marks subjective identity. In order for the mask to be shown as a mode of concealment, it must be worn in the public arena. The initiate must *perform* this loss of identity. In the court society evident within modern society, the mask – or performance – is not acknowledged as such, and this is where the problem arises. As the mask is not seen for what it actually is, no reflection on its properties is really possible, thus reaggregation cannot be attained and the performance gains more authority and becomes more intensified. While conceding that they are both acknowledged as a form of truth – *sacra* in the Ndembu tribe is noted as

truth in its malleable nature which is full of pulsating potential, truth in the court society is related to the representation and performance of social codes.

Essentially then, *sacra* can provide initiates with something solid to hold onto within the liminal moment proper; they can allow the initiate to think in more abstract ways and finally they can aid them in restructuring the social order. In the Ndembu ritual, the neophytes utilise *sacra* which are sacred items used to guide them through the middle phase of liminality towards the reorganised structure awaiting them. They are akin to the material manifestation of the master of ceremonies – a subject outside of the liminal moment providing security and a guiding force for the initiates. *Sacra* are a vital facet of liminality as they go towards explaining the authority of tradition and meaningful structures in the rite of passage. When speaking of the role of *sacra* within liminality, Turner notes that one of the most important characteristics of them is that they either intensify one particular subject or create a subversive effect when they are associated with something seemingly inappropriate. For example, on a mask a nose might be exaggerated in its size or there might be a case where a figurine head of a person is attached to the body of an animal. Turner argues that “to enlarge or diminish in this way is a primordial mode of abstraction. The outstandingly exaggerated feature is made into an object of reflection” (Turner, 1967: 105). Even if *sacra* are represented as monsters or half human, half animals, there is a perfectly logical reason within the liminal moment. To explain this phenomenon, Turner quotes William James in arguing that “what is associated with one thing and now with another, tends to become dissociated from either, and to grow into an object of abstract contemplation by the mind.” The purpose of *sacra* then, is to encourage the initiates into a state of abstract contemplation which would allow them to reconceive of their social reality in order to be able to restore meaning to the de-structured space of liminality.

The Court Society

Norbert Elias' *Court Society* involves a historically reflexive sociology comparable with the type of research undertaken by Foucault (1975) or Voegelin (1999 [1952]). This courtly ethic of the importance of rationality is conceived of in a similar way in Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (hereafter *PE*). Actions are influenced by a rationalised collective consciousness. In *PE*, Weber notes the particularly irrational element within the rationalisation of society. If an argument is to be made suggesting that modern society is immersed in the middle phase of liminality, and that phase has become permanent, this belief in the certainty and authority of rationality is key. Within these theoretical parameters, society would have all the appearance of a formed structurally sound space and the actors themselves would be convinced that the structure is definite and correct if it coincides with rationality. This belief, if given too much primacy as a mode of reflexivity however, would therefore be restrictive and contrary to a process of change. Society would not be able to create itself anew – as per the traditional progression of the phases of liminality which lead finally to reaggregation – as the illusion that the structure already exists and is meaningful is so intense that its absence is not recognized or acknowledged. This rationalised structure becomes static and is misrecognised as a definitive order based on the 'good life'. As a result they cannot create a new order based on more solid foundations. In permanent liminality the deconstruction of the previous order fails to lead to reorganisation. Interdependence and visibility become warped in the social drama that never ends. Interdependence becomes embedded in the myth of the individual and this leads to strategic game playing (Szokolczai, 2000: 136). Those subjects who are 'being themselves' take on the appearances of the court society and the masks of the liminal state and mistake them for reality and a 'true self'. This becomes schismogenetic in that the more subjects perform the roles, the more importance is placed on the visibility of the performed identity and prestige placed upon them as a result. As each subject attempts to out-do the other, be

more visible, perform a specific identity more authentically the act becomes truth for them.

Norbert Elias' main concern when writing *The Court Society* was how the particular course of development within certain societies could stamp certain characteristics on both that social group, and societies to come in a specific way. Elias focused on the court of France's Louis XIV in the 17th century and studied the defining markers of this social order. In *Reflexive Historical Sociology* (2000), Szokolczai connects key elements of Elias' court society to features evident within social life in permanent liminality. Social interaction is rationalized for subjects to the utmost extent within permanent liminality, just as it is in the court society. Subjects engage in strategic games related to levels of visibility and appropriate performance by virtue of their interdependence. In modern society space has been contracted and human beings are visible the majority of the time. As a result the stage on which their social lives are played out is for all intents and purposes quite claustrophobic. This leads to a situation where individuals are moved to "continuous reflection, foresight and calculation, self-control [and] precise and articulate regulation of one's own affects" (1994: 398). Within the Ndembu tribe, the initiates of the rite of passage are separated from the group and live in close proximity with one another – in the court society the members live in a comparable situation. As a result of this, in many ways stifling social situation, visibility plays a significant part of the subject's actions. On fundamental level, routine aspects of one's day i.e. toileting becomes an obvious issue or 'reality' that the group must contend with (Szokolczai, 2000). This can be compared with a traditional liminal situation where invisibility is the key – but conversely visibility of *sacra*, or masks. The group rationalises these processes and aspects of human 'nature' and creates a system where those, previously private, actions are no longer taboo when explicitly performed, if of course, they are done so in a specific socially acceptable way. If the performance is visible, it is reality and indeed it must

be visible in order to be reality. One must conduct oneself in a particular manner in order to be accepted; and since each subject in the liminal state or courtly society is aware of the other's movements, even down to the most private, they must exert control over their own actions.

This level of homogenisation of behaviour leads to a situation where subjects are acutely aware of how to perform an appropriate identity. When this identity is recognised, respect follows as “membership of this recognised ‘good society’ becomes foundation of personal identity as of social existence” (Elias cited in Szokolczai, 2000: 129). This court rationality works in a similar way to Foucault's Panopticon in that the subject internalises social control as a result of constant visibility and inspection (1977: 200). Appearances then, become of utmost importance and subjects engage in a meticulous maintenance of those appearances and retain a level of homogeneity with the group. As this preoccupation with appearance becomes more intense, truth is absorbed in representation and the two are believed to be coextensive. The visual is given pride of place in the court society and from this perspective those who are particularly adept at performance succeed with more ease. In the court society embodied in a state of permanent liminality seeing therefore, is indeed, believing.

The danger of associating truth with representation is nowhere more apparent than in modern Ireland. In the so-called ‘boom years’ it was almost a foregone conclusion that a person was of high status if they were visibly wealthy as a result of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1965 [1899]) and their large house was indicative of wealth and prestige. The following years of economic downturn highlighted the fundamental flaw in this logic and drew light on the irrationality inherent in the rationalisation of appearance within the ‘social drama’. Because the majority of the Irish population enjoyed financial stability, they had the luxury of being able to immerse themselves in the pursuit for social prestige. Elias references this aspect of the

court society when he outlines that “a compulsive desire for social prestige is to be found among members of classes whose income under normal circumstances is substantial... and at any rate is appreciably over the hunger threshold” (1994: 396). They could perform the part of the individual, importantly – an acceptable one, that would add to their prestige in society.

The body became the site for the pattern of internalisation of shame in the middle ages but within the court society of modernity it is hyper rationalised into a structure of understanding, dictating exactly how the body should look if it is to be accepted. Increasingly, subjects are socialised to feel ashamed about a lack of living up a specific image. This shame can be prevented against by incorporating certain fashions into a performed image as the particular clothes a subject wears, as the items they consume are believed to say a substantial amount about who they are and what place they occupy in society. Subjects are dependent on one another for acknowledgment that they are performing in the correct manner, and those who maintain a better control of how they appear have more power, social standing and are more in keeping with the terms of the good life. Foresight in this sense then becomes particularly important. The subjects of court society must anticipate what particular clothes or products will reinforce their level of social prestige and what will instigate their social demise. This becomes more of an issue in modern society due to the forces of globalisation and modernisation. The world is becoming increasingly smaller as outlined earlier in this chapter, so much so that terms like ‘global village’ are now commonly used in every day conversation in the western world. Advances in technology have led to a situation where subjects are under constant surveillance and are aware of their actions at each and every moment. In a society where ‘Facebook’ is generating more power through knowledge of people’s actions, those people are themselves becoming more disposed to internalising social control in the way that Foucault outlines in his conceptualisation of the Panopticon. This control becomes more intense, however, in a society already predisposed to a

civilising process whereby it is rationalised as part of a ‘good’ and healthy life. It is particularly difficult to resolve this problem as the structure of interdependence it is based on becomes more and more advanced at the same time as it becomes more and more complex. The structure of interdependence is rationalised within the anti-structure of the liminal situation and becomes rooted to systems of understanding reality.

In order to succeed in a court society then, the individual must at all times be aware of their surroundings; their terrain both “human and non-human”. If they are to thrive within this society the ability to work with the knowledge they have of one another and the structural principles of the space is imperative and they must use it to their advantage. They must engage in strategic game playing with regard their knowledge of the system and their knowledge of other people’s actions. Social control becomes an overwhelming part of the society as subjects are acutely aware of one another’s movements and actions at any given time and without a master of ceremonies to direct them the society is dissolved into a game of identities. With knowledge of one another’s movements and performances comes power and the ability to further define one’s place in the complex hierarchy of the court society. This power is connected to status and privilege in the social order and the image of one living the ‘good life’ as according to the principles of that particular social figuration. What makes this type of court rationality prevalent in modern society unusual is that it transforms human relationships previously based on interlocking links of family, friendship and neighbourhood among others to ones based on relationships of strategy and mobile relations of power (Szokolczai, 2000: 133). Subjects are primarily concerned then, with a reflexive awareness of their appearance, performance and their comparison with others in order to push themselves further into the image of a successful player in the social order and one living the ‘good life’.

***Sacra* and Masks**

In a liminal situation of the type Turner observed, masks were used as *sacra* promoting abstraction that would enable initiates to envisage a new social structure. If modern society is in a state of permanent liminality, it should follow that *sacra* or masks should be an aspect of this structure. Where are *sacra* then and why are they not providing subjects with a material version of the master of ceremonies to guide them through to reaggregation? *Sacra*, as a concept and an artefact promoting performance but also abstraction, seem to be of much more consequence than Turner realised. This section will argue that in modernity, with the pervasive force of courtly rationality and interdependence *sacra* themselves have become rationalised. *Sacra* have taken the form of masks and are co-opted by subjects into the performance. With the performance being drawn into the court rationality to the extent that it is considered true if visible, the masks that subjects wear to aid their performance are also considered true. The function of the masks in the traditional rite of passage is lost amid this rationalised structure and *sacra* cannot be used as a means for abstraction – they instead become a vital part of the performance.

In the Ndembu rite of passage, the masks allow the subject to play with forms of identity in order to have the space to recreate themselves without the restriction of the prevailing discourse. In modern society the subject takes the masks of identity as reality and therefore does not question or recreate selves or social orders anew; this is where the danger of a permanent liminality comes in. Subjects perform their identity with the help of masks offered by the structure which promotes fashion, progression, and the new. Liminality in modernity is thus given an enduring structure which it is not meant to have. Performance and use of *sacra*, or masks becomes part of the structure within the structureless space. Because *sacra* and the discourse of which they are a part are considered definitive truth in representation, subjects feel no need to rework the social structure. Because the

characteristics of *sacra*, in this case the forms of the masks, are not approached in a way that acknowledges their objectivity and thus objects for contemplation they cannot lead to abstraction of thought. For example, in the Ndembu rite of passage a mask might be a part of the performance depicting an unusually large nose. The initiates of the Ndembu tribe would dwell on this exaggerated image of the nose and consider its import. It would play the part of a material version the master of ceremonies and in this way allow the initiates to think in ways outside the constraints of the previous structure and consider what that image might mean. This is how *sacra* aid initiates in the process of reaggregation. In permanent liminality, the court rationality and focus on visibility means that the nose itself is considered truth. Initiates accept it for what it appears to be rather than its function in providing abstraction of thought. Because *sacra* cannot provide subjects with a mode of abstraction, they sink further and further into the game of identities and thus into the rationality of permanent liminality.

Masks and Identity

In an article on the mask and identity formation, Arpad Szakolczai (2010) also highlights this interesting construction of the mask and brings attention to modern society's distrust of its use and form as an actual object. In pursuit of the challenges at the heart of this topic he draws on the writings of Italian sociologist Alessandro Pizzorno in general and one article in particular 'The Mask: An Essay' (2010). Szakolczai indicates that this suspicion of the mask in modern society is symptomatic of a widespread difficulty with the 'public' space that subjects inhabit. In modern society, we forget that we are wearing masks, according to Szakolczai and this is problematic because it is important to realise that when we interact or engage in society in any way, we must wear masks and this realisation is imperative to our reflexivity as subjects. These masks are not fixed however, they change and are changed by interaction in the social world (they should be *sacra* by which we can test and

challenge dominant models in society). By ignoring the masks in their role as *sacra* and taking them for truth, or as a true representation of subjectivity we lose ourselves in the performance, taking it also for reality. The focus is on attempting to don a mask that is as true a representation of your subjectivity as possible, as if that subjectivity were a definite and unchanging entity.

Szakolczai traces this search for performing truthfulness with the help of Foucault's lecture in 1983 on the Greek 'Cynicism' movement of 4 BC to 4AD (2011). The Cynic movement was based on the principle that one could achieve ultimate happiness, or *Arete*, by living in complete harmony with nature and by acting as naturally as possible in that regard i.e. toileting and conducting all forms of base human actions in the public sphere. There is an implicit acknowledgement here that when 'the self' performs in the public sphere it becomes reality and is indicative of reality. This focus by the cynics of ancient Greece on the transparency of identity and human nature as opposed to a false portrayal of identity marks the first stage in a long history of the search for an authentic self. Foucault's practices of self are swept into a performance whereby power relations decide whether those selves are authentic – true or false. The redemptive value of a 'genuine' identity or self is placed in such high esteem that the mask itself, which is believed to separate the subject from their identity, is treated with unadulterated suspicion. The formative and transformative properties of the mask are thus ignored. This has led to significant problems in today's society as through the focus on truth in representation subjects have lost sight of the fact that identity is a continual process of creation and recreation rather than being a tangible objective and reified object. The masks worn in permanent liminality are believed to be the truthful self and therefore the subject confuses themselves with the role they perform in society. Because they are not aware that they are playing a role, they cannot reconstruct the social world more authentically. Rather than a working out of identity through reflexive thought and examination of society proper, the subject is reduced to searching for a

fixed identity which is more and more revealed as a nebulous and ultimately fallacious concept.

In traditional societies the mask's identity is performed in the public sphere. In modern society the masks are also displayed or performed in the public arena and through surveillance and visibility; subjects act out versions of identity which are acceptable and those which are not (Elias, 1994). This leads to constant playing of strategic interpersonal games – individuals are continuously playing power games in a bid to reflect the ideal of identity as much as possible thus intensely internalising social control. Competition is par for the course in this court society of the permanently liminal. This is where permanent liminality settles into itself. If *sacra* fail to do their job of promoting deconstruction and reconstruction of society then the subjects cannot possibly reorganise their society. If *sacra* are the masks of individuality and interdependence becomes more defined in order to decipher the 'truth' or authenticity of these masks within that interdependent structure then social control makes reorganisation unlikely if not impossible. The reason for this being that homogeneity reigns supreme through a belief in the static, unchanging truth of heterogeneity i.e. a teenager wears Adidas rather than Nike as it is more reflective of 'who they are'. The 'masks' of identity are considered to be imbued with an objective authority which the initiates are required to respect, but by failing to recognise them as masks, as practices of self, as performances, there is no way for the initiates to work themselves out of the liminal situation. Subjects are thus linked in interstructural liminality and are tied by this logic of identity as appearance in truth within court society and the permanently liminal situation.

Conclusion

The modern condition then to reiterate, is a confused one marked by normlessness, restlessness and irrational rationality. Arpad Szokolczai draws

a picture of modernity as a permanent liminality where the previous social order has broken down. It was argued that modern society, in an attempt to move through a liminal situation, has become stalled in the middle phase of liminality. This phase is characterised by normlessness, confusion, performance and constant change based on fluid foundations. Norbert Elias's theory of the court society provided valuable insight into how subjects are compelled to act in a constant performance as part of the social drama with the help of masks unable to perform their duties as *sacra*. The more meaning is attributed to appearance, the more meaningless the social reality becomes. The problem remains that subjects cling on to a liquid universe, see it as solid and so feel no angst, no unease with reality that cannot be washed away in the bright light of a mall where they find representations that offer a type of truth. This is without doubt problematic however. When subjects fail to subscribe to solid principles and social ties in order to strengthen social cohesion and instead turn to a world of fluidity and change, principles are themselves changeable representations. Reaggregation then – a move away from constant flux, it would seem, is impossible without a definitive master of ceremonies and the possibility for abstraction through *sacra*-like phenomenon. Perhaps the answer to this question lies in possessing a morally defined ethic of responsibility that moves away from the strategic games of the court society. In order to do this, subjects must first feel uncomfortable with this reality within permanent liminality. If society at large is either comfortable in or ambivalent of the protean world of modernity, then where or to whom do we look to find those who are uncomfortable at home, recognise that and make a move to work themselves and society out of it? The next chapter will deal with this question, offering a solution to this problem in terms of who, while later chapters will deal with the question in terms of how.

CHAPTER THREE:

A Postcolonial Acknowledgement of *Unheimlich*

Introduction

In the previous chapter the concept of permanent liminality was put forward as a way of understanding modernity and the discourses surrounding or incorporating it. It was suggested that such is the pervasiveness of the court society ethos within this liminal situation that most subjects continue to engage in stifling social situations of constant performance and visibility while failing to realise the importance of reconstructing the social order based on more solid foundations. The many facets of liminality were shown to be present within modern society along with their problematic manifestations. Subjects within liminality, it will be maintained, are not 'at home' because the liminal space is structureless and lacking in solid forms of meaning. It lacks solid forms of meaning in so far as the structure of the social order was broken down in the first stage of the process. However, as noted in the previous chapter, certain forms of authentic meaning still reside in the liminal period proper – the master of ceremonies for one but also the material manifestation of this role in the form of *sacra*. While the main aim of this thesis is to offer a way of restoring meaning in social life, if subjects within liminality are 'not at home' in society then it follows that they suffer from diminished meaning in their social lives. Subjects within permanent liminality lack that security and structure associated with a definite concept of home also – this was mentioned in Chapter One and Two as something which Heidegger termed *unheimlich*. This state of homelessness and its consequences for both the subject and the social group will be described in detail later in this chapter.

The intention here is to argue that some subjects within modern society are aware of their condition of homelessness and are uncomfortable with it. In addition to this they strive to salvage something from the wreck of their former social orders in order to be able to restore some solid foundation for a reaggregated social structure based on authentic meaning. The following

chapter claims the postcolonial subject for this role as by virtue of their experiences of colonialism they are more likely to be uncomfortable with modernity in its current guise. A comprehensive overview of the postcolonial subject in general will be undertaken, but essentially this thesis will focus on Irish, Navajo and Muscogee/Creek communities. To that end it is vital to consider the historical dimensions of coloniality, postcoloniality and the unique position of the postcolonial subject experientially. The chief interest of this chapter is to offer the reader a coherent outline of the postcolonial experience and propose the ways in which this experience affects these subjects in how they may orient themselves within social action. It is maintained that this experience is particular to the postcolonial subject and thus is an important aspect of how they comport themselves within society and negotiate social action. The explicit sense of *unheimlich* which this experience engenders compels the poets discussed in later chapters to search for different forms of meaning in society.

Postcoloniality and the Postcolonial Subject

In many cases the postcolonial self is caught between ‘traditional’ ways of life and the alleged ‘modern’ way of life that the newcomers or the colonial force offer. The postcolonial subject is in essence trapped in a liminal situation. Often, they are in the difficult position of either accepting or disputing their postcolonial status and all that that implies (Spivak, 1999). Regardless of how they view their own socio-cultural positioning, they must nonetheless engage with the canonical Anglo literary tradition, something Caribbean poet and playwright Derek Walcott often dealt with in his work, starting from his first collection of poetry *In a Green Night* published in 1969 and continuing in many later collections over the years. For some postcolonial writers, their work is trapped in this false dichotomy of colonised and coloniser; self and other. That they must deal with their own traditions, modernity and the power struggle which this entails is considered proof of

this entrapment. The attempt, for many postcolonial writers, including Walcott and also Joy Harjo and Rex Lee Jim, has been to liberate the narrative voice from this colonial discourse (Widget, 1983). The problem here is that even in trying to locate themselves within a cultural tradition of perhaps pre-colonial reality, they necessarily need to engage with the Anglo tradition as the canonical force – if only to dismiss it. The challenge, for some poets then, is in “reinventing the enemy’s language” (Harjo, 2011). Even then the (larger) Anglo audience must accept the created discourse in order for it to be accepted by the literary community at large. If it remains within the ‘traditional’ culture, then arguably it can effect no significant change for the culture on a wider platform. But the notion of ‘tradition’ is itself questionable as a reference point or as any solid symbol of culture for people to cling on to.

Some theorists argue that if anything ‘traditional’ associated with an ‘original’ culture is incorporated into modern society then it loses its claim of pure authenticity and therefore cannot be traditional (Spivak, 1999). For example – when a traditional item or phenomenon is used to maintain or reinforce culture, it is necessarily considered and encountered within a ‘new’ context; one where the subject uses the item for a purpose other than was intended within the original context. The tradition is thus interpreted within that context and the result is a creation of something that is new and apart from the traditional item; the meaning behind the practice, ritual or custom is fundamentally transformed. It is not the item itself which has changed but rather how it is interpreted, its use value or function; the very context in which it is perceived necessarily makes the item or practice very different from what it originally was (Widget, 1983). The tradition is lost because the focus now becomes acknowledging ‘the tradition’ as an objective and removed construct. As a result the subject’s intention moves further and further away from a tradition which is incorporated into the social order, and which would enable it to exist within the new context in a culturally

subjective and/or reformative way. By reifying tradition it becomes static and therefore cannot be a 'true' tradition – one that was seamlessly part of the culture. Tradition, in essence then, is the moving of a cultural phenomenon into new contexts and giving them dynamic life within those contexts. Our interpretations of and belief in traditions are what make them exist as useful signifiers of cultural identity – they are not a part of some objective reality (Handler and Linnekin, 1984). The intention here is not to suggest that tradition is in any way spurious, but rather that much of what we believe to be definite and unchanging traditions are reconceptualisations of older or pre-existing phenomenon. This 'original phenomenon' referred to here is not the original *object* but rather the cultural interaction which created the tradition. If the postcolonial artist is aware of the nature of tradition in this way, then they are saved a futile dialogue between self and other in a competition for authenticity.

When the term 'postcolonial' is used then it is not without difficulty, as can be observed from this issue of tradition and authority. 'Postcolonial' itself implies within it a fixed cultural state that preceded the colonisation. This fixed state comes from the same place as 'tradition' does – a cultural definitive. It can be argued however, that virtually every country in the world was colonised at one time or another. One of the most powerful colonising forces, England, was itself colonized at various points throughout history by the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans (Bartlett, 2003). This suggests that very few cultures enjoy or have experienced a stable, homogenous or static ethno-cultural reality. If this is so, then how can be it argued that a postcolonial situation refers to one where a relatively stable and homogenous culture or society was colonised by a powerful 'other' or force. The only solution to this problem is that this thesis must analyse how a concept or issue has emerged throughout history in order to see the common themes in the experiential reality associated with it and how that, in turn, may have affected society today. Comparatively, it is the domain of historians to

reflect on an earlier point in history when colonisation may have taken place (i.e. Norman invasion of England) without the necessity of bringing the theme forward in time to consider how those events impact modern society. It is an irrefutable fact that some countries played the part of the dominant at specific times – militarily, culturally or socially – while others have played the part of the dominated throughout recent history. This generates what some theorists call a dialogue of “self and other” (Said, 1994). In order for there to be a self and other there needs to be a clear definition of what it means to belong within either of those categories. Should it actually mean that a subject belongs to an authentic ‘native’ culture or an inauthentic ‘foreign’ culture? If this is the case, then many additional issues arise around the concept of authenticity, as whether any given ‘postcolonial’ writer can be legitimately called ‘postcolonial’ in every instance is at times questionable given that some will be in possession of authentic culture and others not.

In addition to the above, different subjects, theorists and writers will have a different concept of what postcoloniality actually is. Is there a difference, for example, between the settler countries (Canada, Australia) and non-settler countries (India, Jamaica) wherein both settled and native peoples are subjected to colonisation? Do those peoples who settled into a country but are not necessarily ‘native’ have a right to claim union with the colonised country above the colonisers because ‘they were there first’ or perhaps because they were subjected to domination and control? Is there a certain amount of time you must live somewhere before colonisation takes place in order for you to be able to claim status as the colonised? What about those ‘indigenous people’? Some theorists argue that if a writer is not of ‘indigenous’ ancestry, they are necessarily precluded from being considered a postcolonial writer by virtue of their (real and/or perceived) superior social position. The Irish writer W.B. Yeats for example, a political writer in support of Irish nationalism at times, was most definitely an Anglo-Irish man of landed ancestry (Foster, 1989). Does this mean that his writing is disqualified from being considered

postcolonial literature? Perhaps of course, he would have dismissed the term anyway due to its overly simplistic nature, on behalf of himself and his peers, had he been confronted with it in literary circles. This raises the question of what it actually means to be indigenous. Were all human beings not nomadic at one point or another? What does this historical fact mean for spacio-cultural authenticity? Beyond this, if a writer is labelled postcolonial does this confine their work to the constant dialogue with the colonial 'other' and therefore make discourse outside of that difficult, if not impossible? Gayatri Spivak makes the argument that, if a postcolonial writer becomes part of the established literary canon, they effectively enter into the power dialectic in contradiction to the position they inhabited, and perhaps wrote about before colonisation. This, she purports, negates their value for the colonised subjects they claim to represent (Spivak, 1999). Is this conceptualisation of the postcolonial subject overly deterministic, however? Why even attempt to use such a word to define and classify an area of study which is obviously, given the above understandings of it, inherently nebulous and ambiguous? What does this term 'postcolonial' actually mean then within this study and how is it useful as a theoretical construct? Is there any redemptive value in it and/or the claiming of 'selfhood' in opposition to the 'other'? In order to answer these questions it is essential to understand postcoloniality itself.

What exactly does it mean to *be* 'post'-colonial? If this term is to be understood in all its complexity and beyond the confines of the arguments above, it stands to reason that it would be of particular benefit to revisit the root of the word 'colonial' from which the former term is derived. In doing so it is hoped that the postcolonial, as a concept, can be held up to a definition which avoids reducing the efficacy of the term. The difficulties in attempting to classify the postcolonial 'condition' may be revealed in such a genealogical study of the word itself. The word 'colonial' comes from the Latin 'colonia' which means "settled land, farm or landed estate"; colonia has its origin in the Latin word 'colonus' which refers to a "husbandman, tenant

farmer, or settler in a new land”. Both of these words owe their development to the root word ‘colere’ which means to inhabit, cultivate, frequent, practice, tend, guard, respect” (Onions, 2012). It would seem that colere, the word which the latter day word colonial is derived, referred to an active process of ‘caring for’ a place or state of being. Colonus then, the later development of the word, is distinctly related to the land and the act of caring for it specifically. The modern English word colonial and its most recent etymological predecessor colonia are closely connected as colonia is the fixed state of the settled land or newcomer in that land and this resonates substantially with the modern understanding of the term colonial. In the earlier foundations of the word there is a distinct focus on the experiential aspect of the act. The process of doing, of caring is where the word derived its meaning. In the 14th Century, the word changed in its meaning and began to refer to a fixed spatial state rather than an experiential happening. This change of meaning reflected a change in attitude to the land and the act of caring for it. Primacy of meaning was now attributed to the land itself as a tangible entity and the spatial was privileged over the experiential. This thesis proposes to redress this imbalance of meaning. Inaccurate intention was ‘stamped’ on the concept of coloniality – and thus postcoloniality – and as a result, has had a formative impact on what is considered to be postcolonial in modern society. This thesis then, proposes to treat the postcolonial as a site of experience rather than a fixed state dependant on a perceived spatial and geographical legitimacy. The issue of land and the role it plays in people’s concept of home and security is essential to the argument at hand and fundamentally affects the postcolonial subject’s experience of reality. The postcolonial writer emerges within and as a result of this experiential space.

Within the term ‘postcolonial’ lies the suggestion, as elaborated above, that there is an inherently experiential worth to the historical and socio-cultural reality which people share who are or have been subjected to a discourse of self and other, dominator and dominated, powerful and powerless. ‘Othering’ is the justification of this domination in order to be able to adequately

subjugate a group of people – the ‘other’ as a group are weak and in need direction economically, socially and ultimately intellectually. This is an undoubtedly experiential state. This thesis intends to look at the postcolonial poet then, as an artist creating literature and in this case writing poetry, within this dialogue of power – experiencing a particular dynamic within their reality. Whatever the theorist’s conceptualisation of the term postcolonial is, the tension between two or more cultures is always acknowledged as a key characteristic of it and it is experienced as part of the subject. It does not necessarily follow that a society needs to be postcolonial in order for there to be a conflict between two or more cultures within it, but this tension is no less an aspect of the postcolonial as a result, and understanding this struggle can help reveal some of the issues inherent in postcolonial literature and the resultant experiences of those cultures. More than this – it is precisely the experiences of the postcolonial subject between cultures and as a result, not at home within any one particularly, that lends them a specific vantage point which subjects within an Eliasian ‘court society’ might lack. The postcolonial subject is in many cases subsumed in a dialogue of clashing cultural authorities and the identities associated with that. Attempting to cling on to tradition or the authority of the ‘native’ self has its own difficulties – as described above – and so reverting back to this pre-colonial self or subscribing to the identity of the dominant culture is not a valid or indeed ‘authentic’ option.

In a similar vein and one that Bhabha draws on in *The Location of Culture*, (2004) Franz Fanon outlines the difficulties inherent in the discourse reinforcing a belief in the ‘belatedness’ of the black man. This belatedness is connected to a temporal position of black to the past; to tradition. Black is associated with everything that is primitive and therefore uncivilised and connected to an earlier point in human evolution and the past. This tradition and space in the past implies that there is a future, a modern space that the civilised white man inhabits. Both of these constructs are symbols of

categorisation and the signifiers, in this case ‘black’ and ‘white’ are used to reinforce this schema that serves to perpetuate the power struggle between two concepts which are believed to represent two groups of people – and indeed the authority associated with them i.e.; tradition with the past and modernity with the future. Fanon does not mean to suggest that the black man does not exist; rather he asserts that in relying on the concept of black (or indeed any other term used to signify the marginalised) to provide a transcendence of set socio-cultural concepts, subjects simply fall back into the already determined categories of understanding and therefore cannot escape them or create anything truly ‘new’ because they are still using the language of the dominant discourse (Fanon, 1986). The most destructive form of colonisation then is linguistic colonisation from Fanon’s perspective, because the subject is forced into a specifically cultural collective consciousness from which they cannot escape. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon stresses the power and influence of language when he declares that “...to speak . . . means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization” (1994). The black man is essentially fragmented as a subject then, because within the French collective consciousness (in this case) iterated through language, to be black is to be the ‘other’. To assume an ‘other’ that deviates and refutes the legitimacy of the ‘self’ one inadvertently proves its legitimacy. Thus the black man thinks through the veil of French consciousness and necessarily thinks of himself as the ‘other’ and so is alienated from himself, by the very act of engaging with this dichotomous ideology. Fanon argues that this argument is true of many situations where a group of people have been subjected to linguistic colonialism. However, due to the increasing force of globalisation and the political agenda that accompanies it in modern society, languages are becoming homogenous ideologically. The same rhetoric propounding the benefits of austerity measures, making decisions that are of benefit to the economy, and the inherent importance of the market are uttered in Italian, German, French, and Spanish just as much as in English. One overarching cultural ideology is

articulated through the grammatical constructions of numerous different languages which impacts on the people in a specific way producing homogeneity of thought within those cultures.

With a society becoming ever more technologically advanced however, additional issues raise their heads. As Edward Said notes in *Orientalism* (1978) –

“One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the orient is viewed... If the world has become immediately accessible to a western citizen living in the electronic age, the orient too has drawn nearer to him, and is now less a myth perhaps than a place criss-crossed by Western, especially American interests.”

– p 26

This quote accurately portrays the complexity of the postcolonial condition, state and the subject therein. Added to these complexities is Arjun Appadurai’s conceptualisation of ethnoscapas which refers to the phenomenon whereby ethnic groups no longer retain their “tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous” identity. Identity as experienced, for the postcolonial writer, is not a taken for granted or ‘given’ category. Because of this increase in global mobility and advances in technology, ethnicities and identities themselves are changing. Cultural identity and the postcolonial subject are changing which leaves us with the question – what are the alternatives? Carrying on from this – why within this world, does the postcolonial subject have the potential to disclose aspects of society and how is it considered to be from a unique vantage point? The answer to this question is in the fact that to be postcolonial is not a simple spacio-cultural relation; they are not outside of modernity – rather they inhabit a unique place within it. That place is experiential and related to the fact that many feel as though they are living between two cultures and at home nowhere.

Hybridisation, Homelessness & Heteroglossia

The Freudian concept of being *unheimlich* (translated from the German to mean ‘not being at home’), similar to Heidegger’s state of *angst* illustrates a feeling of being ‘not quite at home’ with one’s reality. For Lukács this is connected to *heimweh* (homesickness) and is fundamentally problematic in that it is intrinsically connected to the concept of alienation. Reminiscent of Goethe’s Iphigenie who longed for the Greek homeland, this homesickness is a characteristic of modern society and is reflected for Lukács in the modern novel which illustrates the fragmentation of the authority of the individual within modern society. Bhabha differs from this view of homelessness by following on from the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin in asserting that it is *because* of that very feeling of being ‘not at home’ within defined given realities, that the postcolonial subject does not feel the need to engage with binary oppositions, power dialectics and definite categories of understanding in the same way as those who are ‘at home’ in modernity do (Bakhtin, 1984). Homelessness for Bakhtin represents an understanding on the subject’s part that language is fundamentally socio-culturally creative and is by no means absolute in its ability to signal reality. They are ‘not at home’ with any one definite social order

In *Rabelais and his World* Bakhtin declares that “time is, to some extent, always open” (1984 p. 171). This can be taken to mean that when the generalized laws and formulas have been applied to a situation or event, there will always be an element which is “untranscribable” for the individual; that which cannot be worked out by the application of a given mode of understanding based on their experiences. This element Bakhtin calls ‘the surplus’ is deemed the truly human element of a situation or event and it acknowledges the “eventfulness” of a social performance (action within a social context). This means that the individual, if they acknowledge this

surplus of meaning in relation to themselves and their society, can recreate both themselves and the social order they exist within. Homi Bhabha follows on from Bakhtin's *unheimlich* and the notion of this surplus of meaning. He calls the rational alternative to power dialogues of assumed and reified cultural imperatives as 'hybridisation' or 'cultural hybridity' (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridisation for Bhabha acknowledges or opens up this interstitial space between two binary opposites – this space entertains difference without imposing a hierarchy or power division. In breaking down these perceived definite forms by offering a gap in which the subject can escape assumed or fixed categories of understandings that same subject can reassess the validity of those conceptions. To be an *unheimlich* self for Bhabha means inhabiting 'the beyond' or being on the periphery. When speaking of Serbian Nationalism, Bhabha says that only in both literal and figurative death of the culturally contingent borderlines of modern nationhood and complex interweaving history can the Serbians achieve an ethnically homogenous society. Claiming cultural authority necessarily negates the space in-between – it must be obliterated ideologically. This creates a highly objectified culture with no room for manoeuvre or change. It involves both a simplification of historical reality to the extent that it is unrecognisable from experiential reality and a renunciation of changing traditions (of which the problems are described above). The postcolonial subject (if they embrace this position) is within an interstitial space because they are between cultures, living on the periphery of one or more and so between many. This view from a particular experiential position within modern society allows this subject to view modernity from a less restrictive viewpoint. The argument here intends on departing from Bhabha in that it maintains that are not outside of, or beyond any one perceived homogenous culture, rather they are engaging and open to the possibilities of the medial position. This medial position is not a definitive answer to the problems of modern discourses; rather, it signals a space where there is a surplus of meaning within social construction and therefore houses certain potential and possibility.

In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin introduces the term *heteroglossia* which allowed Bhabha to develop his theory of hybridisation. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, heteroglossia is revealed as an unavoidable result of different languages colliding. Bakhtin felt that when the Greek language first acknowledged the ‘other’ in the Latin language, the language went from one of *monoglossia* to *polyglossia*. This meant that the Greek culture would never be the same – it could not cling onto a uniform system of beliefs assured of their objective veracity. The monoglossic structure would need a homogenous cultural construction in order to remain monoglossic. Simply in accepting Latin as an alternative or ‘other’ linguistic construct, their own linguistic construct would be transformed. Because each language allows for a conceptualisation of reality that is particularly unique to the culture it is created from or creates, in being confronted with the other language, in this case Latin, those constructs of reality come into the Greek cultural consciousness. The language thus moves towards a speech which showcases a polyglossia of understanding. When there is an admittance of many different languages (as in modern society perhaps) Bakhtin attests that the culture and language moves towards heteroglossia. Heteroglossia, because it recognises the many different cultural, linguistic and conceptual frameworks in existence, is also a reflection of the effect which that recognition has on a given language. The language itself must change to accommodate these alternative indexical approaches. It is argued here however, that in this modern world, culture is becoming more homogenous in its illusory cultural heterogeneity which is actually subjected to the continuing forces of globalisation. Technological advances and the push of neo-liberal politics east signals a new change in language structures and systems of understanding associated with it. Bakhtin argues that –

This verbal-ideological decentering will occur only when a national culture loses its sealed-off and self-sufficient character, when it becomes conscious of itself as only one among other cultures and languages. It is this knowledge that will sap the roots of a mythological feeling for language, based as it is on an absolute fusion of ideological meaning with language; there will arise an acute feeling for language boundaries (social, nation and semantic), and only then will language reveal its essentially human character; from behind its words, forms, styles, nationally characteristic and socially typical faces begin to emerge, the images of speaking human beings

– 1981: 370

The problem remains that, in modern western society while national culture has indeed become decentred ideologically, an international culture has taken its place by force of globalisation and international capitalist political structures. This means that a new ideological structure is *becoming* sealed-off and self-sufficient in its authority while the old ones of nationhood, to some extent are being revealed for their “essentially human character”. So while boundaries of styles, language and forms are acknowledged in their difference they are nonetheless subsumed into the dominant ideology of the burgeoning and increasingly deterministic international culture. These traditional cultural phenomena are drawn in to what Theodore Adorno might call ‘The Culture Industry’. Culture is commodified and difference is rendered a kitsch connection to a supposedly objectively defined specific culture. Essentially, this heteroglossia Bakhtin speaks of cannot be achieved by the method he offers as a solution to the totalising narrative of nation and the creation of self and other. The court society spoken of in Chapter Two counteracts this by recognising other creeds, cultures, religions and languages, and draws these disparate entities together under the one ideology.

Simply because the heteroglossia is not possible within a society that celebrates merging cultures as they come to partake in the court society, the

positive version of *unheimlich* in the way that Bakhtin conceives of it is also impossible. This is one of the reasons Szakolczai maintains that subjects in modern society have not yet worked themselves out of the liminal phase. They are *unheimlich* and unaware that they are so, thus they are fixed to a reality based on fluid concepts of meaning and are tied to a constant, static performance within the court society. Heidegger calls this 'inauthentic' world the 'they-world' – a world which is constructed for us and there prior to our being. The 'they-world' is the permanent liminality subjects have taken as definitive. It is constituted by the will of people who, rather than choosing to direct themselves towards the possibilities of Dasein, do things because 'that is what they are expected to do' or because 'that is what one does'. This, for Heidegger, leads to inauthentic Dasein. Heidegger asserts that in this case, *Dasein*; the being-in-the-world or human being has become inauthentic because they have become too familiar with the perceived world that is believed to be truthful itself. For the purposes of the study at hand, this means that subjects do not realise that they are *unheimlich*. The things of the they-world; visibility, conspicuous consumption and prestige among others, are mistaken for being truth – appearance is (again) misconstrued as reality. Dasein is thus reduced to playing a role in society, is a member of the court and performs to the tune of and wears a mask of appropriate identity. What one is expected to do is, of course, familiar as a cultural imperative – familiarity is offered as truth while authentic truth (of possibility or possibilities for Dasein) is concealed because subjects fail to look for it. It is Heidegger's contention that the subject – individual or societal – must defamiliarise themselves with the 'they-world'.

The permanent liminality Szakolczai speaks of and the court society Elias illustrates can add to an understanding of this they-world and the method of working oneself out of it. In a traditional rite of passage, within the liminal situation if the subject is to work themselves out of the limen, they must engage in a deconstruction of the norms that went before in order to

recreate the structure or order anew. As shown earlier, *sacra* as masks that ordinarily aid in this reconstruction process have become subsumed within the logic of irrationality and visibility in the court society within the anti-structure of liminality. They, in their appearance, have become truth within court society or Heidegger's they-world. Heidegger offers us an alternative route to reaggregation then – embracing anxiety. It is Heidegger's contention that if subjects embrace the angst associated with their position in modern society they are moved towards 'the abyss' which for Heidegger is a space of potential within social life. The anxiety Heidegger refers to, can be understood within this thesis in terms of the subject becoming aware of the fact that they are *unheimlich* and making a move to rectify that situation – it is a recognition of the surplus in social interactions. Because subjects within the court society confuse the constant performances within permanent liminality for reality itself complete with authentic meaning, they are unable to work themselves out of it. The postcolonial subject however, by acknowledging the violence and destruction within the colonial imperative are more aware of the inadequacies of the social system and thus have the courage to face the abyss, embrace the anxiety that accompanies such awareness. They have the courage to move towards a search for meaning because they are aware that there is a surplus of seeing at the heart of every individual and every social situation. As a result they know that alternative social structures are both possible and inherent in every social reality.

Experience and Postcoloniality

Within permanent liminality, as discussed in Chapter Two, solid notions of identity and home have been rejected while nothing but malleable representation has been put in their place. The subject who acknowledges his/her homelessness and has the courage to face the reality of the loss of culture and tradition is in a better place to restore authentic meaning in modernity. This is not necessarily true of all postcolonial subjects/artists/poets however; some continue to refute any arguments

attesting their homelessness and engage in dialogues claiming authenticity, tradition and reclaiming 'lost' culture to which they have access. Many postcolonial artists concern themselves with this conversation which relies on a constant vying for the truth of a particular given reality or realities. This argument can never reach resolution as it is based on the premise of a definitive objective reality and does not focus on the experiential import of human interaction. The problematic within this type of approach takes on a new level of difficulty when one cultural imperative or the other is propounded as the essential truth – the qualities of either argument are in many cases lost amid a schismogenetic escalation of the issues at hand. This results in a more intensified self and other and bears no resemblance to the cultures as they were originally constructed. In addition to these issues, the subject becomes distracted and therefore cannot really be aware of their *unheimlich* state. Because this project focuses on both Irish and native American poets – artists living with the consequences of two intensely different forms of colonial domination – and before delving into the philosophy behind the experiential basis of postcoloniality, any genealogical study that intends to get to the crux of this particular experience must assess the conditions of these groups separately and historically.

Colonialism

Why did the postcolonial countries or people actually become postcolonial in the first instance? What motivated countries like England, France, Spain and Portugal in the 18th and 19th Century, those countries most involved in colonial 'advancement', into embracing this particular ethos? Was it purely for the expected wealth of resources they were sure to accumulate? If so, then what allowed them to feel that they had the right to such resources, when they themselves would surely have been aggrieved if a foreign people invaded their own country and attempted to colonise it and commandeer their own resources? Lynn T. White Jr argues that Christianity has a particular burden of guilt when it comes to human being's attitudes towards their natural

environment. He maintains that the underlying assumptions of this religious doctrine incorporates a power hierarchy, on top of which sits the human being. The Judaeo-Christian creation myth sets forth a rationale which gives 'man' mastery over the earth. This logic of domination, of man's separateness from the natural world became stamped on the human being's perception of reality. White maintains that this notion led to the western subject's attitude towards the environment and has a direct connection to humanity's approach to and reverence of science and technology. White draws on the example of the middle ages and the change in how the land is depicted. No more are the land and human being working together in order to survive; now the human being uses the land without any sense of mutual respect. Images in calendars of the time depict human beings killing pigs, controlling crop production and essentially mastering the land in the same way their Christian creation story told them they would (White, 1979 [1967]). Thus humanity moved away from animism and towards civilisation – the more civilised a society became the more they were able to dominate and exploit the world around them. Even though it might be argued that modern western society moves towards a type of secularisation, for White it none the less retains the mark that Christian philosophy left on it. Eric Voegelin's study of political ideology in the early 20th Century explains this dominating impulse by the theory of Gnosticism (1999 [1952]). Voegelin connects this desire directly to western ideology and the connotations it held at the time and in many cases still does today. Voegelin argues that there was a move away from a complete faith in religion as the answer to all of humanity's questions as a result of the intellectual 'enlightenment' of the 18th century. Academics, intellectuals, artists and indeed the 'ordinary' people in some cases began question the world, reality and its apparently preordained state of existence. This disruption of the status quo led to a sense of alienation in 'western' societies. Alienation here does not draw on the Marxist understanding of the term; rather it refers to a feeling of disconnection from society coupled with a belief that this lack of meaning is a result of inherent disorder within the world as it is. Of course, alienation

in the way Voegelin conceives of it can occur as a result of many different types of societal discontent. In the case of the colonisation of North America there was a belief abound in Europe that there was a way to transcend this disorder – through what Weber might term *formal rationality* and what Voegelin calls Gnosticism. This instinct can be connected to Weber again in terms of the protestant ethic. Even though the religion associated with that dominating impulse may have been on the decline in modern societies the rationalised structure of action stamped on it still remains and was left in terms of a Gnostic compulsion.

Gnosticism is a “type of thinking that claims absolute cognitive mastery of reality. Relying as it does on a claim to gnosis, Gnosticism considers its knowledge not subject to criticism” (Voegelin, 1999 [1952]). Gnostics are so sure of their vision of truth that they reject any thought of critical reflection and think of themselves as the *Übermensch*, or the elite who alone can transform the world into a heaven on earth. They are the ones to rectify humanity’s ills and instil a utopia in place of a flawed society. Voegelin gives Marxist ideology as an example of this type of discourse and the communist manifesto as an example of Gnosticism at its best. Marx believed that once the proletariat managed to overthrow the bourgeoisie and reclaim the means of production, society would become the epitome of equality and a promised land would be created. This was exercised through a Weberian type of formal rationality which considers social action a type of means ends calculation (Cockerham, Abel and Luschen, 1993). This ‘means ends’ calculation is put into effect on a large scale through generally applied rules, laws and regulations. Formal rationality was the action at the heart of the ideology which propelled Gnosticism forward in colonial America. Oswald Spengler, in his influential work *The Decline of the West*, (2010 [1922]) argued that puritanism in fact bore very little resemblance to the Christianity of which it was supposed to belong. Voegelin took up Spengler’s argument here and maintained that it certainly was inspired by some other attitude or inclination

that was beyond Christianity. For Voegelin, it seemed to have a distinct connection to the Gnostic impulse. This puritan drive became a dominating force in the 'new world' of America and was rationalised with a formalistic force. The native Americans were considered profane creatures and were debased in a multitude of ways by way of the coloniser's intention to remake the 'new world' in the image of a 'perfect world' which, ironically was completely unlike that which they left behind. The coloniser's mission was simple; to purge the new world of ills or evil, which amounted to anything of which they did not approve; to transform the new world in a perfect image of reality and to maintain that perfection. Voegelin noted that because this goal was (and is) impossible, the colonisers in this case would eventually become aware of their own ineffectiveness and would therefore need to suppress it in some way. Voegelin looked to Nazism as an example of this and noted how this realisation of ineffectiveness would lead to difficulties including totalitarian rigidity and a confusion between reality and the dream-world. The American consequences of this, a failed attempt at implementing a utopia, resulted in thousands of indigenous people being removed from their homes amid varying degrees of violence, degradation and inhumanity. As an analytical tool Gnosticism, and formal rationality as the active element within it, are particularly useful for an understanding of the precepts of coloniality and the resulting postcolonial condition. The impulse to dominate instigated by the Christian religion as it spread throughout the western world merged with the Gnostic impulse of righteousness to create a powerful colonialist philosophy.

Colonial Histories

Because each postcolonial subject will have a unique experiential legacy which they must contend with, the different forms of postcoloniality must be historically situated as a result. Each society dealing with the effects of colonialism will have different experiences of levels of violence, intensity of cultural destruction, displacement of home and land and differing degrees of

integration and power dynamics. It is essential in research of this kind to avoid any tendency to define postcolonial experiences by virtue of what qualities a group must possess in order for them to have a legitimate claim to that concept – rather all postcolonial experiences have their own particular configuration and should be judged on those terms. As Ashcroft et al argue, “putting barriers between those who may be called post-colonial and the rest, contradicts the capacity of the postcolonial theories to demonstrate the complexity of the operation of imperial discourse” (2002: 200). By drawing a picture of developing historical postcolonial situations reflexivity is introduced to the research which would otherwise be absent and thus risk reinforcing preconceived notions of colonial and postcolonial situations. The experiences of these communities is of paramount importance to the research here.

Ireland

One of the marked differences between the historical experiences of the Irish as distinct from the indigenous Americans is found in the extent to which both peoples were exposed to settlers (violent or not) from over the seas. Ireland, being so close to mainland Europe had seen many travellers from distant lands arrive on its shores from as early as 300 BC when the Celts arrived and onwards through the arrival of the Norse and then on to the Anglo-Normans. Each with different intentions ranging from plundering and pillaging to procreating, (and eventually) living and assimilating. This colonisation of Ireland can be called colonisation on the basis that people were living on the Island (most probably of Scottish origin) and foreign groups invade Ireland with the intention of dominating the ‘native’ population culturally or economically and in some cases militarily (Bardon, 2009). It was not until 1169 AD that England attempted to exert a more forceful influence on Ireland and its inhabitants. Even then, English rule was not particularly repressive for the general population of Ireland – it more resembled a change of land ownership because the majority of the Irish people were peasants who did not own, but worked the land. From 1172 AD until 1541 Ireland had a

‘feudal lord’ who did not retain full control of the Ireland. Gradually Ireland began to change as a result of these Norman invaders; in Southern Ireland the English language took root, not by force, but seemingly by choice and with the extra motivation on the peasants behalf, of developing lines of easy trade. Up until this point then, it is arguable that the Irish were not particularly subjugated by the newcomers; rather they seemed to learn from them and vice versa. In Dublin particularly, it was evident that those immigrating to Ireland were not solely from the aristocracy – rather English, Welsh and French peasants, artisans and gavillers were arriving at Irish ports weekly, ready to make new lives and trade with the Irish (Foster, 1989). This period in Irish history then, cannot reasonably be defined in the dualistic terms of powerful and powerless. It was Henry the VIII’s break from the authority of the Catholic Church in 1536 which saw Irish history begin its journey down the long road of a struggle for land, power and an ever elusive ‘freedom’ from domination.

From this point on, English rule in Ireland became more absolute and more imposing. Henry the VIII proclaimed himself King of Ireland in 1541 and with the accession of his daughter Elizabeth I to the throne in 1558 a policy of plantation in Ireland was instigated. English law was enforced in 1603 and with a scramble for power and land in England the Monarchy used Ireland and its land as a way to pay the British aristocracy for various favours and general loyalty. With the Catholic rebellion in 1641 control of the island was returned to a confederacy of Catholics. In an attempt to draw Ireland under English control once more, Oliver Cromwell invaded Ireland in 1649 and massacred a reported 2,000 people in the town of Drogheda (by Cromwell’s own estimation). This campaign of slaughter continued for many years, in its most violent form until 1653. Men, women, children and animals were killed and stores of crops were burned. Of the dwindling population, those who were not killed directly by ‘the sword’ died from starvation or disease. Between 1641 and 1652 it is estimated that 504,000 native Irish and

112,000 colonists had perished (Bardon, 2009). The initial Cromwellian invasion propelled Ireland into a dark, violent and oppressive phase of history which was broken in 1660 by the succession of Charles the II to the throne.

This period of stability under Charles II lasted until 1685, but in 1689 with William the III on the throne and the subsequent introduction of a penal law system in Ireland in 1695, the fate of the Irish Catholics was set to deteriorate. Penal laws were characterised by a multitude of different elements all succeeding to relegate the Irish Catholic to a second class citizen in the best case and little more than a slave or a beast of burden in the worst. The penal laws ensured that Catholics (among other factions of Irish society e.g. Presbyterians) could not vote, inherit land, practice their faith, be educated to a fair standard or even own a good horse (Bardon, 2009). An outright and marked attempt to separate the Catholic Irish from the Protestant Irish (and English) bred hostility, anger and resentment among the Irish peasant population. Catholic landowners were increasingly losing rights to their property and a feeling of injustice spread across the island. Rebellions were plotted and quashed in this period of history and Irish politicians attempted to restore justice to the people of Ireland. The Catholic emancipation act of 1829 overturned the penal laws, but by that time the feeling of bitterness towards the English was so ingrained in the Irish consciousness that it was in many ways too little too late – the Irish wanted their land back. The land war of 1879 -1882 continued not militarily but politically until 1909 when the British government introduced a Land Purchase Act. The general population of Ireland were content enough with this offering while a faction of the educated Irish Catholics felt that it was not enough; they wanted an independent Ireland. The Easter Rising in 1916 was generally ignored by all but a die-hard group of Irish Revolutionaries. But when the rising failed to go to plan and the British army arrived to violently suppress any revolution, the revolutionaries became martyrs. By virtue of their over-eager brutality, the British gave the Irish population a narrative of victim and villain which

reopened the old wounds connected to an earlier feeling of injustice gifted by Cromwell and later the penal law system. With the majority of the Irish population behind them, surviving revolutionaries would fight for national freedom and that general feeling of resentment towards the British for the events of 1916 would eventually be catalyst that would give rise to an Irish free state.

This historical contextualisation should show that the colonial experience need not be entirely negative; indeed it need not be even predominantly negative. In cases where it *is* however, specific features and sentiments emerge in the national discourse. The more violent those experiences and intense the sentiments, the more the separation of self and other becomes apparent, as in order for the oppressor to justify the domination the ‘other’, that other must be utterly dissimilar from themselves. The intensity of domination experienced by Ireland was by no means constant throughout the eight hundred years of English presence in Ireland. In actual fact, based on the fact that the general catholic populous had no issues with the English settlers until laws made their position as Irish Catholics inferior to their protestant counterparts, and even further than that – it can be argued that it was not until the specific periods of violent unrest mentioned above, that the Irish Catholics really felt their oppression. The significance of the experiential value of colonial can be seen here – when the Irish Catholics did not feel or experience the colonial force negatively, as a constraining and imposing control, the majority declined to support the revolutionary cause. They had been used to foreign settlers on the island and changes to their ‘traditional’ culture as a result – essentially the English were no different to the Norse. The Irish relationship with their English counterparts was by no means a simple one of domination and submission. Ashcroft, Griffiths et al describe this conflicted Irish colonial experience when they note that –

What makes the Irish example so interesting and difficult for the postcolonial theorist is the fact that Ireland was victim, accomplice and beneficiary to the British and European Imperialism. The sense of hybridity in postcolonial culture, that 'cultures are never unitary in themselves, nor simply dualistic in relation of self to other' [Bhabha, 2007] is essential to an understanding of Irish identity. Eight centuries of fluid movement between Ireland and Britain has produced some of the most complex cultural identities possible, and can be seen to manifest themselves in the North as enigmatically as they ever have in Irish-British relations.

– 2002: 143

However – domination, injustice and inequality would make them the archetype of the colonial subject. Postcoloniality is thus attributable to the *experiences* of a particular group of people rather than a spacio-cultural definitive. The Irish people were removed from the land which was the centre of their social and cultural universe and with this came the experience of alienation. The Irish were disconnected from their land through the Gnostic impulse of British colonialism and Cromwellian rule in particular. They were no longer responsible for their own natural environment and so suffered a sense of isolation and detachment from the land which was inherently tied to their sense of home. In so far as the Irish, for much of their relationship with England were treated with relative respect, the same could not be said of many of their colonial subjects further afield however. The next section will consider the effect of colonialism on two communities within North America – the Muscogee and the Navajo.

North America

The colonial history of North America is far more difficult to illustrate in a comprehensive way than that of Ireland. When Columbus first landed in America in 1492 the native tribes were completely unused to sea faring travellers and certainly unused to ones of white skin dressed in ostentatious finery and donning impressive looking weapons. These tribes were isolated

for the most part, apart from interactions and/or wars with, neighbouring tribes. Intertribal quarrels most certainly existed before and after Columbus' arrival, however their severity can be considered on a par with the British force in Ireland prior to Cromwell's time. While there were small factions who disagreed with British interference in Ireland, the situation was not critical enough to warrant any large scale revolt. With the intertribal warfare of North America, the various tribes were on more or less the same footing militarily speaking, and so the consequences of any of these wars would have been of similar severity for the respective tribes involved. Neither culture would have suffered in any significant way. From approximately 1790 to 1920, however there was a push to 'Americanize' the native Americans. This involved a series of acts designed to assimilate the native American tribes into the larger American culture. At times this agenda was pursued more violently and with more vehemence than at others.

Before 1790, the 'problem' of the native American population, in the opinion of many settled populations, was considered one to be quashed – for example, in 1756 Governor Robert Morris issued a 'Scalp Act' offering a reward for all Indian scalps procured (Fritz, 1963). After that date legislation was put into place in attempting to deal with the 'Indian problem' more effectively and with less force (with exception to the American Revolutionary War where it was necessary to (forcefully in some cases) employ the military might of the native Americans to help fight for 'freedom'). The Dawes Act of 1887 signalled the first move by the American Government in its endeavour to break the hold of various tribal nations over their members and their geographical location. If members of specific tribes gave up certain forms of self-government, establishments and customs, they would be awarded land in recompense. Of An estimated 93 million acres of land awarded to native Americans, most was to individual members of tribes rather than communities or groups (Hoxie, 2001 [1984]). This succeeded in breaking long held traditions of community among many tribes and resulted in a

situation where many tribal members would eventually become assimilated into the larger American culture. Members of traditional tribes decreased in numbers and were eventually pushed to barren lands west of the Mississippi, starting with the so-called ‘five civilised tribes’, where they would not come in contact with the American population ‘proper’. This was the policy of removal, favoured by the American government from 1827 to 1840 approximately. Indigenous American nations were, in essence, put out of sight until a time when they could socialise with the American people east of the Mississippi in a way beneficial to the settlers. To this end, industrial schools were set up on reservations, from the latter half of the 19th Century into the 20th Century, propounding the ideals of a European way of life (increasingly becoming a new American way of life) and the Christian belief system. This move made it difficult for the native people to retain a sense of their traditional way of life and beliefs, which in the majority of cases was connected to the land or particular geographical markers, and reinforced the attitude of the new world settlers. While many indigenous nations have had similar experiences to contend with, each individual American tribe will have had its own particular colonial experience which is unique in itself. This difference, in many cases, boils down to the intensity of oppression faced and the level at which each tribe experienced a loss of cultural and geographical heritage. As a result, an investigation into the states and consequences of all those individual experiences is far beyond the remit of this thesis. To that end, as this study intends to use the work of poets from two separate indigenous American nations, it is proposed that the research focus on the colonial – and thus postcolonial – experiences of those two particular nations – the Muscogee and the Navajo.

Muscogee (Creek)

Poet Joy Harjo is a member of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, one of the five previously mentioned ‘civilised tribes’. As soon as the Spanish, British and French settlers arrived in the United States, they used existing disputes

between tribes to augment and further their campaign to gain more control over American land and the resources it produced. The Creek people were offered goods from Europe in trade for the support of the tribe against enemies – in some cases the British against the French or Spanish or any one of them against the Comanches or another warring tribe. In the 19th Century, the main concern was to assimilate and acculturate the Muscogee into mainstream American society. George Washington's superintendant of Indian Affairs, Benjamin Hawkins, spent much time and resources teaching the Muscogee to use European agricultural practices and to speak English in order to trade with the 'white men'. This was a successful enterprise to some extent and as time went on the Muscogee incorporated more and more of the European way of life into their own. However, the Creek War broke out in 1812 and a band of Creek warriors joined forces with the Tenskwatawa and Tecumseh tribes in a war with the United States government against the cession of lands and rights and rejecting the settler's attempts to push a foreign culture on them. During the time that settlers needed the support of the Muscogee nation they treated them with relative respect (Braund, 1993). As soon as the European's felt that the Indians were not needed however, that perhaps they were causing more trouble than they were worth, the focus turned towards removing them. This would serve many purposes for the settlers or the 'New Americans'; they would eliminate the 'Indian problem' and take control of land that the Indians now inhabited which would enable them to utilise various geographical resources. With the inauguration of Andrew Jackson to the presidency in 1829, the governmental stance towards the Indian problem became more severe. The Indians, the government decided, should be removed to west of the Mississippi river. The treaty of Cusseta in 1832 forced the removal of the Muscogee Nation itself to land west of the Mississippi and away from their ancestral home. In 1834 the Muscogee were forced to move in what would later be known as 'The Trail of Tears'. Over 23,000 Muscogee people were removed from their homes in South Carolina and Alabama and were forced to 'Indian Territory', a

(relatively) small expanse of land in modern day Oklahoma. 3,500 died from starvation or disease as a result of the arduous journey (Swanton, 1922). French philosopher, political thinker and historian, Alexis de Tocqueville witnessed the removal of a tribe similar to the Muscogee Creek, the Choctaw Indians (another one of the five civilised tribes). He would later make these observations –

In the whole scene there was an air of ruin and destruction, something which betrayed a final and irrevocable adieu; one couldn't watch without feeling one's heart wrung. The Indians were tranquil, but sombre and taciturn. There was one who could speak English and of whom I asked why the Chactas were leaving their country. "To be free," he answered, (I)...could never get any other reason out of him. We ... watch the expulsion ... of one of the most celebrated and ancient American peoples.

—Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

De Tocqueville's words here illustrate the level to which many Indian peoples felt the weight of their subjugation. They felt they had no other option but to leave their homes if they wanted to be free of the 'white man's' influence. There were indeed many problems which the native American people and the Muscogee people in particular had to deal with from the moment of the settler's arrival. These problems however, were treated with relative tolerance and resignation – similar to the attitude of the Irish prior to Cromwell's arrival, until the forced removal of the 1830's. At this point, the Muscogee people are told by implication of the removal act that their culture which was historically associated to their location, their traditions, their language and their community are of little consequence. Beyond that, forced removal makes it abundantly clear that the American government saw the Indian nations, not as allies in wars or trade partners, but as inconvenient subordinates who lived unworthy lives and indulged themselves in a puerile faith. In this way the Removal acts can be compared with the introduction of the penal laws in Ireland – both cases display legislative incentives aimed at

demeaning, humiliating and rendering insignificant the traditional ways of life incorporated by a particular culture.

Navajo

During the time of Spanish-Mexican administration of Southwest North America, from the mid sixteenth century to the mid nineteenth century, the Navajo population alternated between fighting ‘the intruders’, agreeing peace with them and fighting with neighbouring Indian communities. The attempts by the Spanish at colonising the Navajos lacked an intensity that the Americans would later make up for in the mid nineteenth century. Although the Spanish and the Mexicans intended on using the Navajos for their resources in order to optimise trade of those resources with Europe, they had neither the military resources nor the necessary commitment in the end to enforce lasting subjugation of the Indian community (Iverson, 2002). The Navajos showed, during this time, that being exposed to the cultures of different groups need not necessarily be a bad thing. In interactions that might have had either conflict or peace at their core, they showed time and again that one group can learn positive and constructive elements of another culture which can ultimately aid those groups in thriving and prospering. The figure of ‘Changing Woman’ is a central concept in the Navajo culture and one that adds to this tendency of the Navajos to incorporate elements of other cultures and make them their own. She is the mythological figure said to be the mother of the Navajo people. In terms of both mythology and cultural ideology Changing Woman affects Navajo culture even to this day. She is maternal, capable of giving life, she cultivates, nourishes and protects. She is constantly changing because she is woman and never a fixed or static phenomenon – this change is positive and sustains life, but more than that – the story of Changing Woman is a message which teaches the Navajo people that without change human beings cannot survive. She is not only an example of positive change leading to sustaining life however; she also motivates the Navajo Nation to endure by incorporating innovative measures which

ultimately means avoiding cultural insularity. The Navajo nation has survived by putting this ideology into practice; by learning agricultural techniques from the Pueblos and military and trading techniques from the Spanish. The Navajo people became more powerful and well equipped to deal with the changes in North American society in comparison to some of their contemporary tribes because they became gradually more visible, in some cases formidable, but certainly always unavoidable.

In 1846 a significant part of the North American West became part of the United States. The Navajo were one group of people whose lands the U.S. would claim (Iverson, 2002). New Mexico Territory after 1846 became a veritable war ground between the settlers declaring U.S. authority over the lands and the Navajos who asserted their cultural authority over the land. It became clear, very quickly, that the intention of the U.S. was to lay claim to any land they felt would be economically advantageous. U.S. citizens had rights to whatever land they so chose under the auspices of the U.S. government which meant that there was almost constant violence between the settlers and the Navajos. In 1862 anger towards the Navajo nation reached boiling point. They were vilified for reacting to the attacks on their land, crops, herds and people. The Governor and Commander of New Mexico territory, James Carleton wrote to the U.S. government and army requesting their intervention in the ‘Navajo Indian problem’ and requesting their removal from New Mexico. The overt rationale behind any of the removals until that date in North America was based on the premise that the land was laying waste and the native Indians did not use it in its most productive capacity. The Americans in contrast, would be able to use and cultivate the land to a greater degree simply by virtue of the fact that they were, of course, more civilised. In a letter to Lorenzo Thomas on the 6th March 1864, Carleton wrote –

...by the subjugation and colonization of the Navajo tribe we gain for civilisation their whole country, which is much larger in extent than the state of Ohio, and, besides being the best pastoral region between the two oceans, is said to abound in the precious as well as the useful metals.

–1979: 63

Essentially, the Navajos were in the way of economic progress for the Americans. This was enough to justify the removal of an ancient tribe and the subsequent oppression of its people. In 1854 Carleton set out a site to which the Navajos would relocate. Named Fort Sumner, the site was woefully inadequate for the purpose of housing a bustling Navajo community. It was far removed from neighbouring towns making it difficult for the people to build houses, the water was polluted and the valley itself was prone to spring floods. Carleton ignored these issues and decided to continue with his plan to remove the Navajos and to this end he employed the assistance of Kit Carson. Carson was a well known military man of the time, familiar with Indian cultures and its associated Indian problem. The American attack on the Navajo was ruthless, short and effective. They hit the heart of Navajo life in Canyon de Chelly destroying homes, crops, livestock and killing any Navajo that obstructed their goal. Some Dine chose suicide rather than being shot by the enemy. Old, very young or infirm people were shot on the spot to send a message. The Dine were left with no option but to concede defeat (Iverson, 2002).

In the January of 1864 the Navajo were forced on the brutal journey to Fort Sumner which would be called ‘The Long Walk’. The journey was so harsh that at least 200 of the 8,000 who took part in the forced removal died over the eighteen days it took to relocate (Iverson, 2002). The land on the way to Fort Sumner was barren and water was anything but plentiful as a

result, those who were old, pregnant or in ill health had a particularly difficult time on the journey. Luci Tapahonso recalls –

two women were near the time of the births of their babies and they had a hard time keeping up with the rest... Some army men pulled them behind a huge rock, and we creamed out loud when we hear the gunshots. The women didn't make a sound but we cried out loud for them and their babies.

–1993: 97

When they arrived in Fort Sumner, the Dine found the land barren with very little vegetation to signal hope for farming. Every crop they planted failed to mature and the water they drank was too full of alkaline to be palatable. Largely unarmed and weak due to lack of proper nutrition, they were vulnerable to raids from the Comanches and the Utes not to mention the threat of animal attacks as wolves and coyotes were native to the land surrounding the area. The Navajos experienced something very much like concentration camp conditions. Subjugated to the last, food was insufficient in quantity at best and sparse or spoiled at worst. Subjected to a liminal situation where their traditions, customs and language suffered a breakdown they tried to incorporate the American ways of life in so far as it might help keep them alive. These conditions succeeded in creating an oppressive situation wherein the majority of the Navajos were downtrodden, mentally distressed, and malnourished as a result of being torn away from their former land, farms and livestock. As the problems in Fort Sumner escalated and relations broke down between the Navajos and the American soldiers it became apparent to the government that where the Navajos were situated was inadequate for a community of their kind and their living conditions were intolerable. Barboncito, one of the leaders of the Navajo people made it clear

to the commanding officers at Fort Sumner that if it continued, a rebellion was inevitable (Iverson, 2002).

General William T. Sherman along with his aide Lewis Tappan came to Fort Sumner early 1868 in order to discuss the future of the Navajo people. In negotiations, the Navajo leaders raised the case for their return to Navajo Country. Sherman agreed to the Navajos' return to their former lands with the proviso that they would not leave the designated area but to trade. On the 1st June 1868, the Navajo people signed a treaty with the U.S. government and were free to return to the land of their ancestors. The Navajo colonial experience has much in common with the Irish and Muscogee experience recounted earlier on in this chapter. All three suffered brutal oppression and subjugation of their culture and traditions. Something different stands out in the Navajo situation, however. While the Irish clung onto the nebulous concept of what it meant to be Irish with vehemence – religion, culture and tradition (regardless of how authentic any of them could be argued to be); the Navajo kept hold of their traditions at the same time as they shrewdly incorporated elements of the American culture they deemed to be of use. For a culture with such contrasting views and principles from those they would eventually negotiate with, the Navajos were amazingly able to put themselves forward in a civilised, intelligent way that would eventually lend the American government to accept their right to rule themselves to an extent far beyond that which any other Indian community has managed. They were a society struggling against the injustice of pre-conceived notions of Darwinian evolution and the binary opposition of civilisation and barbarism – in which they always came out the poorer of the two and yet they still negotiated a treaty to give them back their land. They were a society who, because they adopted changes and made them a part of their own culture in the true spirit of Changing Woman, would not only survive but prosper in the years to follow. The Dine did suffer a degradation of their ways of life, traditions and culture. However, where the Navajos differed from the Irish or the Creek was

in the capacity they seemed to have to make the US government see them as something other than a people to be disregarded and removed. The experience of The Long Walk and the time at Fort Sumner was an experience that many Navajo people still speak of to this day and is an unavoidable part of their national consciousness. These experiences of oppression, humiliation and subjugation are crucial to the colonial experience and the development of the postcolonial subject.

Where the Irish became Christian, and along with that came the problems of Christian philosophy as outlined by White, the native Americans were completely unfamiliar with the type of hierarchical system of domination and ownership displayed by the colonists. Their attitude to the land and the natural environment in which they lived was one of mutual respect and recognition. Their 'removal' from the land which they called home was aggressive and certainly led to anger, but that anger was also combined with an element of confusion. The native American philosophy connected to their religion incorporated the land as an equal. Land here does not mean simply 'earth' but rather the land, the world, the environment all means the same thing; that area which gives life. Humans live with the land, not in domination of it. As argued earlier, with civilisation comes the separation of human beings from the land and the result is an alienated, removed subject unaware of their place or home in the world.

Conclusion

This chapter has claimed that the postcolonial subject has a particular vantage point derived from their experiential foundations, from which they can observe modernity. As theorised in Chapter Two, modern society has become stalled in the middle phase of liminality which gives rise to many different issues unique to that situation – identity performance and role reliance, malleability, constant flux and interdependence. At the same time however, it also offers possibility. If the subject is aware of their state of homelessness

then they are in a better position to approach and deal with that state. The postcolonial situations explicated above illustrate the experiential quality of a particular type of *unheimlich*. The type of homelessness observable in postcolonial experiences creates a situation where it may be easier for the postcolonial subject to connect that condition to problems at the heart of modernity – the attitude towards land and the rationalisation of our attitude towards it. As evidenced by the research in historical contextualisation conducted within this chapter - in addition to this the experience of being dominated, disrespected and removed from that sense of home which accompanies land - the postcolonial subject is left inherently uncomfortable with ‘progressive’ modernity. This uneasiness leads subjects to search for more solid foundations to build their understanding of reality upon. This search is taken up in the next chapter where poetry will be put forward as a valid site for negotiating meaning within reality and the social act.

CHAPTER FOUR:

Formative Poetic Discourses

Introduction

The word ‘poetry’ is derived from the ancient Greek word ‘poesis’ which means to create, make or compose (Onions, 2012). Poetry, if we follow this definition, incorporates more than the form in which it is most commonly recognized in modern society – one with a very particular structure, style and intention within creative writing. Coupled with techné, poesis is that which is brought forth by being (artistically) created (Heidegger, 2001). Poesis then, is at the heart of all artistic endeavours which of course includes literature in general. What separates poetry then, from the broader category of literature? Poetry is not one simple construct that is easily defined and unproblematically classified. It can be defined as a particular genre, using a particular set of linguistic features – symbolism, allegory, metaphor as standard – or can be considered a construct separate from novels or drama on the basis of how it is arranged on the page; its particular form (Furniss and Bath, 1996). Essentially, poetry is not one of these things, but rather all of them, and perhaps much more. For the purpose of clarity, poetry in this study is treated as a specific form of literature that uses textual strategies like tone, allegory, metaphor and figurative language to make a point. It is structurally divergent from the novel or drama due to its use of particular forms of metre, rhythm and syntax. Due to these differences, it promotes and indeed creates a space for a particular type of creativity to flourish. Poetry, it should be clarified, is not offered here as the sole means of reflexive reconstruction of socio-cultural and possibly political life. Such an argument would be counterproductive in its implication that it is possible to reduce alternative literatures in general to pointless exercises in imitation and/or entertainment, in addition to creating a claim for poetry that it cannot possibly meet. Instead, poetry is offered as one form of linguistic construct within society which, it will be argued, has the capacity to create, confirm and negotiate social life and as such is inherently influential at the same time as it has significant potential. This chapter intends, firstly to set out what poetry is, and what

possibilities it may have as a linguistic structure. Secondly, the chapter will outline the *ways* in which the poetic form can be useful in so far as it can be formative with regard social reality and a restoration of authentic meaning therein through experiencing the poem as a rite of passage in itself. To this end, structural elements of the poem as cultural artefact will be considered like allegory and metaphor before the poem can be discussed according to its deconstructive and constructive properties, for example; disavowing the alibi-for-being and noting the surplus of meaning within the social act. Finally then, the poetic structure will be revealed as a site of ritual through reader response theory.

Beyond Form: What is Poetry?

Poetry, it might be said, uses the elements of language discussed above in a unique way, and this is what distinguishes it from other forms of literature. Poetry has been, for many years, considered a form of representation – either of the self, or the socio-cultural condition (Schweitzer, 1991; Richardson [in Ellis and Flaherty, 1992]). If poetry is but a representation of reality whether individual or social, then it is in fact nothing more than a form of mimesis (the Greek term for representation or imitation) which suggests an objective reality that the poetry simply alludes to. Both Plato and Aristotle spoke of art in these terms; that it was a form which attempted to represent nature. In many cases, this definition of art as a type of mimesis has proven to be reductive in that all art, and thus poetry, can hope to achieve is an accurate representation of reality. Attempts to either discredit poetry within academic circles and popular discourse has mostly drawn upon this argument; that it is an imitation of reality or mimesis and as a result is always at a remove from ‘truth’. Alternative attitudes to poetry and/or art commonly argue that this mimetic aspect of the art form can, in fact, be dangerous as human beings are influenced by various images of humanity and are likely to imitate the imitation (Verdenius, 1972; Zeitlin, 1971). As a result, it is believed that what the art represents is of huge

importance – this attitude has formed the rationale of many governments introducing censorship laws.

Most of these claims usually refer us back to arguments in book III or X Plato's *The Republic* and use their interpretation of Plato's attitude towards poetry as a way to justify their hypothesis (Murdoch, 1977; Belfiore, 1983). In calling attention to Plato's famous work, Belfiore (who is certainly not on her own in this opinion) suggests that the great philosopher builds a case against poetry and ultimately asserts that "poets corrupt even the best people by creating special circumstances in which ethical rules appear not to apply" (1983: 212). Much of our understanding today about the place of art in society, and its mimetic intentions is due to this analysis of Plato's approach to poetry in particular but art in general. This argument fails to acknowledge that *The Republic* is a work full of literary mechanisms however. In fact, Plato uses allegory in book nine of *The Republic* in order to bring truth out of concealment in the story of the cave. Allegory is an essential aspect of the poetic structure and as such will be dealt with in more detail further on in this chapter. This tendency towards incorporating narrative structures and components of the poetic form in Plato's *The Republic* is at the heart of what poesis itself does. In using allegory Plato creates, makes and brings 'truth' to the surface, as Heidegger would argue. Heidegger would also point out that this is the epitome of a poetic undertaking because, in using allegory to make his point, Plato is without doubt using a form of poetic communication. If this is so, then how can any reader of Plato analyse his work and come to the conclusion that he has an obvious disdain for poetry? Would this not make the great man an outright hypocrite? Furthermore, while Plato certainly notes the dangers apparent in poetry, he nonetheless treats poets as allies in promoting a good life for young people through early education, and creating unity in civil life for all subjects in society. This suggests that a particularly careful reading of Plato is *essential* to understanding the complexity of the matter as

he approaches it. Poetry is full of potential – both positive and negative. This is clear from Plato’s consideration of the artistic form in Book III and X.

When Plato, in Book III of *The Republic*, notes the dangerous affect drama can have on the guardian classes, he focuses on the negative simply to make a point. Poetry can be dangerous precisely because of its potential to make, create or negotiate reality. But similarly, it can have positive potential for those very same reasons. It can encourage characteristics worthy of heroes in the youth if it is approached with caution and respect. Given that he uses the forms and structures of literature to write *The Republic*, his warnings against the form must belong to a larger and more tempered argument. The points he makes in Book III and X must therefore be seen as an acknowledgment of the potential of art and as such it is worth posing the question – what would our populist attitude towards poetry or art be now? The common belief in art being but mere imitation and the negative effect of it on society as a result is combined in an unholy union with a disregard for the import of the artistic form in general. This contradiction in terms is indicative of the inconsistency and confusion abound in modern society and can be hypothesised as a result of centuries of mistaken analysis. Poetry is not an imitation of reality – it is, like poesis, that which makes and creates. It is language, combined in a particular and distinct way which allows for creativity. Language is itself inherently social at the same time as it actually facilitates social interaction; it is not an imitation of reality. Because poetry is a form of language, it cannot be mere imitation of reality. It allows reality to come into being. In a similar vein, at the time of the enlightenment and onward in modernity, there was an alternative argument propounded by the Romantic poets as to the virtue of poetry. Samuel Taylor Coleridge best describes this philosophy when he argues in ‘On Poesy or Art’ that poetry is “the mediatrix between, and reconciler of nature and man” (Burwick, 2009: 198). More recently, W.B. Yeats vehemently argued that poetry was a rite of passage that allowed one access to esoteric knowledge that was, by necessity,

hidden from the view of common man. These attitudes are more in line with the thesis at hand while they admittedly (in Yeats' case particularly) approach the topic in a different way than the one offered here.

Reality is negotiated, and poetry, just like the novel or any other form of literature, allows "the world to world" as Heidegger would assert. In other words, it brings reality into view so that people can be confronted with it and negotiate it themselves. Heidegger uses the construction of a temple as an example of this world worlding. When a temple is 'set up' or erected "the holy is opened up as holy and the god is invoked into the openness of his presence" (2001, p42). Dedication in this context is akin to consecration. The god comes into existence through the setting up. The worldly element of the temple is the world it opens up – one of praise, glory and the sacred. The world, referred to here, represents the existence of being. The *world worlds* (sic) when existence exists. Being then reflects back on the world that makes accessible modes of birth, death, sacred and profane. To be a work of art then, a poem means to open up a world. Joy Harjo's 'Eagle Poem' opens up a world because the reader can understand her existence at the time and the eagle's essence of being through the poem. When a world opens up the existence of elements within it are unconcealed – even in the absence of a god at the temple the 'world worlds' because in their absence they become present in the function of the temple.

Allegory

Poetry is usually divided into verses which are separated from one another by a space. 'Verse', from the Latin 'versus', means return, turn around or speech which returns upon itself (Onions, 2012). In this way, verses in poetry are indicative of poetry's tendency to showcase patterns. Verse as an aspect of, and used in connection with, poetry also highlights the inclination of poetry to portray ideas which the author has 'turned over' in his/her mind promoting

reflexivity. Poetry, just like the sociology discussed in Chapter Two, must incorporate reflexivity if it is to be analytical in a productive way. Kieran Bonner makes this very point about reflexivity in his article ‘Reflexivity and Interpretive Sociology’ (2001) –

The analytic element of all social inquiry includes an examination of the ethical and political implications built into assumptions while simultaneously raising for reflection the ethical and political implications built into its own assumptions.

p.176

Poetry then, when reflexive, is as politically important as it is socially or culturally important. It challenges political and ethical assumptions and has the power to reconstruct hegemonic structures. The poet is, within their own experiential framework, answerable to themselves and has the capacity to act with responsibility in relation to their being. In being ‘answerable’ for their utterances, as Mikhail Bakhtin might argue, they are being authentically reflexive (1993). They incorporate Bonner’s idea of reflexivity and as such are aware of the effects they have on the social situation and the inherently constructive force of the socially interactive situation. They are thus accomplishing exactly what Bakhtin speaks of when he proposes the concept of answerability. Through allegory the poet can employ answerability and engage with reflexive thought.

Many great works of poesis and/or poetry use allegory in an attempt to be reflexive and make the world meaningful again. Ambiguity and allegory are particularly important when the author is conscious of being economical with language. The poet is forced by the very structure of the poem to choose words and concepts carefully; if they are particularly adept at their art they

choose those words conveying a reflexive awareness of their formative and perhaps transformative potential. With the help of allegory, abstract concepts are made more concrete and this paradoxically allows the reader to move towards abstract conceptualisation on their own terms. This means that concepts or ideas that are difficult to portray in direct speech are made possible within the form of allegory. In addition to this, if a writer is trying to convey a point with force, that direct speech fails to encapsulate to the intended extent, allegory can be used to capture that point quite effectively. In direct speech, someone might draw on Lord Acton and say ‘absolute power corrupts absolutely’. Outside of a narrative context, the meaning of these words fail to be really experienced by the subject. However, by writing in the narrative form and using allegory as George Orwell does in *Animal Farm*, the meaning of Lord Acton’s words are made a part of the subject’s network of experience by virtue of that allegory. Distinguishing between latent and manifest meaning and the underlying semantic function is essential to an allegorical understanding of a text.

Giovanni Boccaccio was one of the first people to discuss Dante and the use of allegory in his work. As an author/philosopher/poet, Boccaccio believed that there were three elements of allegory which make it specifically useful in poetry. Firstly, allegory is a veil which keeps truth away from the multitude. Secondly, by virtue of its linguistic and formal structure, poetry already has a veil in place – a reader must behold the work and interpret it. The final and most remarkable aspect of allegory from Boccaccio’s perspective is that the poet veils truth in order for the reader to work at an interpretation of it and thus discover it for themselves anew (Tambling, 2010). This, in essence is how the reader makes the poetic form an experience in itself; when the underlying message of the allegory reveals a truth of reality which has been negotiated by the poet – it is re-negotiated by the reader and thus is experienced again and in a new situation and context. Without this small element of difficulty the reality brought to light by the

poet would fail to be really *experienced* by the reader. This is connected to the difference in how direct speech is approached and the narrative allegorical construct is approached. In the latter, the reality brought to light is made part of the subject's world and allows them to exist in the world in a specific and changed way. They the society of which they are a part can only change as a result of the experiential quality of existence. This, of course, can happen as a result of many different forms of experience but there is a difference between existence and experience and using the latter in a reflexive manner. In the they-world of the court society, it is easy for the subject to exist without engaging in experience proper – they remain content with the world as it is created for them.

In engaging in an art form that requires an engagement on the subject's behalf, the subject or Dasein, engage in experience and thus have the potential to create reality as a result. The poet must undergo a rite of passage themselves in that their previous social order is broken down, they are tempted by the court society within modernity, and they attempt to work themselves out of the liminal moment through the ritualistic form of poetry. Allegory can help them towards a type of abstract contemplation missing in modernity as a result of the lost form of *sacra*. This potential within allegory in poetry will be returned to in the next chapter. Allegory itself implies fluidity, as it is a veil for abstract concepts in many cases. In order to prevent a postmodern interpretation of allegory, it should be said that while allegory can highlight the abstract and thus intimate the fluid nature of reality, by giving those abstract concepts meaning they are thus rendered more concrete or tangible. Poetry through allegory incorporates and takes on features of the they-world or the court society in order to exaggerate or intensify specific elements of that reality. By doing this it questions these features of the old social structure in a similar way to which *sacra* as masks within the Ndembu ritual would. *Sacra* of the masks in modernity has become redundant as they are mistaken for truth, while allegory in art becomes *sacra* of the traditional

rite of passage in regard its efficacy and intention. As a result it has the potential to portray the changeable nature of reality and question taken for granted aspects of it. True allegory, used in its most effective and profound way, always veils an intended experiential truth which has come to pass through the interaction and negotiation of reality.

Drawing on the writing of Paul de Man (1996 [1969]) allegory can be considered a construct which recognises that it is impossible for writing and speech to portray exactly what is intended. He goes on further to suggest that allegory has no referent at all. This however, is reductive in the sense that if there is no referent then what is the point? We run the risk here of assuming that all language is arbitrary. Language gains meaning from interaction and context and is thus, in this way, quite meaningful. De Man, influenced heavily by Walter Benjamin argues that allegory is a void “that signifies precisely the non-being of what it represents” (1983: 35). In being a representation of something, that something is rendered a ‘non-being’ according to de Man when it is subjected to allegory. De Man maintains that it is the temporal aspect of allegory which makes it a ‘void’ – it is removed from experience to the extent that it is nothing more than referential. However, it is precisely this which allows allegory to engage in the surplus which was explicated in Chapter Three. As discussed above, direct speech or writing fails to induce the subject into an experience with the meaning intended within that speech. By experience gained through an interaction with allegory, the reader must strive to make sense of the text and understand the meaning of the piece. In this way the reader becomes part of the text in that they *experience* meaning when they have successfully analysed and understood the allegorical intention. Allegory here is shown to be much more than a ‘void’ which reveals that the intended subject is reduced to a non-being. Instead it creates a space for experience and, as Heidegger would have it, for authentic Dasein to flourish.

The Alibi-for-Being and The Surplus

In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* Bakhtin contends that ‘answerability’ is key to authentic existence. This authentic existence is similar to Bonner’s reflexivity in sociological research. One must be answerable for one’s work, art and existence. Answerability in this context is the ability of the subject to recognise their position in society as a creative force and to be able to act accordingly and with responsibility in that role and this is at the heart of dialogism. By acknowledging the multifarious and polysemous nature of reality, the individual is answerable. Bakhtin takes this argument further when he asserts that there is “no-alibi in being” (1993: 79). To maintain that subjects in society should have ‘no alibi in being’ is to claim that they must be authentic in their approach to existence. Bakhtin regularly used Marxism as the case in point for individuals using an alibi for being. A grand narrative is used to demarcate reality for the individual and as a result the individual is restricted by this system of understanding. The vibrant energy of existence is rendered static in the face of the overarching paradigm. The ‘alibi for being’ is essentially an already made reality to which the individual acquiesces and has no creative or formative effect on.

In Heideggerian terms this alibi for being can be compared with the ‘they-world’ mentioned in the previous chapter which again, resonates with some of the themes apparent in the court society. Subjects use the court society rationale or the they-world as an alibi for being. The belief in the inherent truth associated with appearance and the masks that delineate a subject’s position in that society is used as this alibi in that subjects do not recognise the need to engage in dialogism. Beyond this is the implicit understanding that language and interaction is fundamental to social, cultural and political development. The poet answers to this criterion when symbolising experience through metaphor based on their own experiential framework. They are answerable to themselves and have the capacity to act with autonomous responsibility in relation to their being. In being answerable for their

utterances and the effects they have on the social situation and in providing a platform for the constructive force of a socially interactive situation, they are accomplishing exactly what Bakhtin speaks of when he proposes this concept of answerability. To take this notion further, the most effective postcolonial poet recognises and engages in their hybridised position in society. As a result, they are suspicious of grand narratives and are cognisant of their oppressive tendencies. This means that the postcolonial poet, in this situation, rejects the ‘alibi’ for being. How are they moved towards this answerability however?

In *The Dialogic Imagination* Mikhail Bakhtin introduces the concept of dialogism. Dialogism refers to the effects of differing viewpoints, attitudes and their effect on one another, the text, the author and the reader. It is Bakhtin’s contention that truth does not simply emerge from one mouth, one individual or one author. Rather, truth emerges from a dynamic interaction arising from utterances proposing alternate, sometimes contradictory systems. For this reason, it can be easy for subjects to mistake truth for one view of a particular object. In Chapter Two, by turning to Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and his World* and the concept of the surplus, it became apparent that reality cannot be completely accounted for and that “time is, to some extent, always open” (1984: 171). This means that, at the heart of dialogism is the acknowledgement that reality always has another layer to it, and one rarely understands it in its entirety or even in any large part. The surplus acknowledges that –

“An individual cannot be completely incarnated into the flesh of existing socio-historical categories. There is no mere form that would be able to incarnate once and forever all of his human possibilities and needs, no form in which he could exhaust himself down to the last word, like the tragic or epic hero; no form that he could fill to the brim and yet at the same time not splash over the brim. There always remains an unrealised surplus of humanness; there always remains a need for the future, and a place for this future must be found”

- 1981: 37

No social situation is fully constructed then; there is always an element left open. In an earlier part of this thesis, the surplus was connected to the potential apparent within the liminal situation of society but also the liminal situation that the postcolonial subject finds themselves in. This open space emphasises the possibilities inherent in the surplus (and perhaps the dangers). In re-engaging with the eventfulness of an event (and thus, the surplus) and moving away from the static nature of an overly classified social space (which they are predisposed to doing any way by virtue of their hybridised selves) the postcolonial poet can introduce reflexivity into language and discourse and thus begin the process of social reconstruction. The poet becomes active in this space by being the “good listener”. They use their “outsideness” and experience to ask the right sort of questions. In incorporating reflexive experience into the poem the poet becomes a medium for the ritual which the reader is about to undertake. They recognise that the human is not everything that they can be by virtue of the “surplus of seeing”; namely that the individual is never fully cognisant of everything in relation to their own being, thus the individual cannot be aware of everything there is to know about their social reality (1984: 140). This acknowledgement creates a space for potential which, as we will see in the next chapter, is offered in the form of the abyss.

As Morson and Emerson (1990) argue, by “recognising the other’s capacity for change, one provokes or invites him to reveal and outgrow himself”. By using allegory, poetry is offered as an eventful and metapragmatically performative space available for this ritualistic reconstruction of identity, cultural norms and meaning – be that socially, politically or individually. The danger in the surplus is just as imminent as the danger in the abyss or liminality in so far as negative consequences are just as likely as positive consequences and this is reminiscent of Plato’s reservations concerning the potential apparent in poetry. In centuries of thought, we necessarily come back to the same human issues and are required to meet them and deal with them anew and at every turn. Through allegory then, not simply symbolism, the poet can employ answerability and engage with reflexive thought. By acknowledging the surplus of seeing, subjects move towards answerability and have the ability to interact with and understand the potential of allegory and metaphor. Heuristically speaking, Bakhtin’s own argument is that which proves that poetry, in the right circumstances just like any other form of literature, can be a legitimate force for socio-cultural and/or socio-political reconstruction (Eskin, 2000). By being answerable for their own utterances based on experiential understanding the poet is truly engaging in dialogism.

Experience and Temporality

It is not enough then, to consider the importance of potential in the surplus. What remains to be considered, is how the poetic subject can use this surplus in pursuing meaning in modernity. In fragments of the remains from notes that were to be used for a revised edition of his earlier work on poetics, Wilhelm Dilthey gives further explication to the lived experience of the subject – a topic he first introduced in that earlier essay (1996). While initially theorising the connection of psychology to historical development, in his later work Dilthey starts to give the socially interactive, structural element

of human experience more credence. He maintains that even something considered inherently personal, such as grief, has a sociological element to it – it requires a constructed socio-cultural system in order to be able to represent, understand and relate to the lived experience – “...this structural relation of grief to a perception or a representation, referring to an object about which I feel grief, is a lived experience. This structural nexus appears in me as a reality, and everything that it contains of reality is lived experience” (1996: 224). In order to understand the world and comprehend lived experience in any way, the subject must necessarily have other lived experiences to relate it to. This is the historical, to some extent, element of Dilthey’s work but is probably more accurately considered the sociological aspect of it.

Historicising the experience implies that there is a structurally objective indelible reference point to which the subject can refer and interact with on the basis of. Rather, the subject separates experiences teleologically as a result of this ‘structural nexus’, as Dilthey puts it and reflects, interacts with and creates new meaning in interaction on the basis of the signs and signifieds within a specific social context. This does not mean, however, that they are confined to a particular ideological order – they are simply social and thus have the ability to create and engage in lived experience as a result of the structural order of social life and language. Dilthey goes on further to characterise the nature of lived experience and he illustrates its value and potential in lines that are reminiscent of Bakhtin’s concept of event-ness “...lived experience is not merely something present, but already contains past and future within its consciousness of the present”; the lived experience is influenced by past lived experiences and even anticipation of future lived experiences but what is essential is the action enacted in the present (always and already a part of both the past and the future).

This intimation of the importance and formative element of the future is a revealing element of Dilthey's work. In the present or lived experience the event-ness becomes the imagining of the future. The imagination for Dilthey is hugely significant because it is his contention that it is the imagination which allows the subject to create and recreate their world. This itself is not an unusual argument but becomes more intricate when he applies it to the creative process and poetry in particular. He determines that part of the lived experience itself is constituted by the anticipation or imagining of the future. Consciously or subconsciously, the subject creates and recreates their own experiences by virtue of their imagination. Poetry is not an objective entity separate from lived experience; instead, at the same time as it relives the experience in the first instance, it prompts further experience in the reader and then activates a series of lived experiential changes as a result. The poet's experience itself should not be considered separate from lived experience in general or socio-cultural interaction as they are indivisible – one constitutes the other and vice versa. Dilthey expands on this argument when moves on to a discussion on Goethe and his poetic imagination. He declares that it is Goethe's particular penchant for reflecting on the nature of lived experience which elevates his poetry to another level of comprehension. Goethe did not just simply view modernity from afar, rather, he engaged with it and as such he was an active member of the court society proper. In 1782 as a result of his active duties in court and his particular loyalty to Carl August (the Grand Duke), Goethe even became a nobleman – thus the 'von' before the Goethe in his name (Gray, 2010). This reflection is turned into an active engagement with lived experience through the form of the poem but is done so reflexively.

Goethe manages, from Dilthey's perspective, to turn the lived experience of the characters of Faust or Prometheus into the lived experience of the reader by employing an intelligent and reflexive command of the various aspects of the lived experience of those characters. This reflexivity is separate from the social constructs of religion or metaphysics and this interpretation of

existence is itself a lived experience. Goethe, it might be said, uses this awareness of the dangers of the liminal moment in his poetry. The poet projects their lived experiences in a way that is reflective of the fact that they identify with the character's own lived experience (1996: 276). Later in the same essay on Goethe, Dilthey remarks "...what completely distinguished Goethe's personal poetry from that of his contemporaries...and elevated it above theirs was a striving toward the fulfilment of his own existence, toward the realization of everything human in his person and his life." (1996: 243) It is the poet reflexively working towards the experiential nature of experience that separates Goethe from fellow poets Lenz or Klinger.

If the above extract is understood through Heideggerian logic, an interesting possibility comes to light in two ways. Firstly, the poet appears as a subject striving towards the fulfilment of their own existence and humanity. This is comparable with Heidegger's Dasein struggling for authenticity in a move away from the they-world and a move towards a consciously designed reality for him/herself. Secondly, there is a resounding familiarity here between Dilthey's theory of a striving towards the experiential nature of experience and Heidegger's contention that it is in revealing the equipmentality of equipment that the work of art brings truth out of concealment. Both reflect and reflexively imagine or present the potential and vitality of lived experience. The postcolonial subject, it cannot be disputed, has a particular bank of lived experiences thematically with which they can observe and interact in society. These experiences have exposed them to a particularly fragmented view of the world with the potential to be unrestricted by dominant ideologies, by nature of their lived experience.

According to Victor Turner, who drew substantially from theoretical elements of Dilthey's work on experience and poetry to develop his own conceptualisation of the Anthropology of Experience, art is the *social field* where the subject brings elements of the past together with the present in the

space utilised by the imagination. Lived experience is always a matter of becoming rather than a reaction to what already is. This lived experience develops patterns and coherences which contribute to how we understand the world. It can also be worked out and instigate further experiences by virtue of the poetic form. The poem works out reality, and in every subject encountering it reality is again worked out through social dramas which are at the heart of experience (Turner and Bruner, 1986). As Turner would have it, cultural artefacts (or indeed performances) are the units of experience that bring out what is normally sealed up and inaccessible in the mundane act of everyday living. In this lies the difference between what Dilthey and Heidegger before him would term the distinction between *erlebnis* and *erfahrung*. *Erlebnis* is the type of experience discussed here wherein authentic Dasein searches for meaning and works out reality anew. *Erfahrung* in contrast, is the type of everyday lived experience that inauthentic Dasein finds in the they-world where s/he lives the life that is already there for him/her and do not work out or negotiate their existence beyond that.

Turner identifies five moments of experience that can be applied to a cultural event or artefact. The first moment involves the subject invoking more intense emotions than in normal activity; the second moment involves an evoking of past experiences; the third moment is when feelings associated with past events of symbolic or emotional importance are revived; the fourth stage is when meaning is generated by linking the past and present events; and this fifth and final stage is when experience is completed when expressed and communicated in such a way as the audience can develop an understanding of the meaning behind the act or performance and translate it into experience themselves in which they partake in the moments which are described here. Experience is thus an act of “living through, thinking back, and willing or wishing forward” (Turner, 2001). This theoretical underpinning of Turner’s anthropology of experience is reminiscent of Heidegger’s ‘existence, thrownness and fallenness’ – future, past and present.

Experience in both instances involves a dialectical and reflexive understanding of reality in which the past (thrownness) is always part of the present (fallenness) and these both come together in a projection of the future (existence) which is substantiated by the imagination which is itself a fundamental element of art and poetry. Within the interstitial space, according to Turner, there is heightened emotion and feeling of experience of past events. Experience reveals symbolic patterns of reality which we use to interpret the world around us. These patterns can be worked with, negotiated and can lead to the development of alternative social patterns, arrangements and values in the form of the poem.

As highlighted from the beginning, this study does not intend to suggest that poetry is an *exclusive* force for changing or reconstructing socio-political reality. It is however, by nature of its engagement with the principles of existence, revealed as a space for reimagining reality and offering viable structural alternatives. The postcolonial poet can offer an interesting analysis of society through acknowledging the liminality of modernity and metapragmatically offering truthful utterances unrestrained by dominant socio-cultural and political models. The reflexive reader recognises this in the poetry and reflects on lived experience. This prompts a chain of interactive, interpretive, performative, formative and leading to *transformative* understanding on the part of the poet and the reader who has drawn on the surplus and thus has the potential to affect larger socio-cultural and political structures.

Reader Response and the Ritual of Poetry

In considering the place of the reader within the realm of literature, it becomes necessary to draw on the concept of reflexivity which has revealed itself at the heart of this thesis. It has become apparent that there is no final truth at the heart of a poem, play or novel; no complete and definitive

reading. Instead, reality is negotiated between various different subjects who are involved in a given discourse, whether it belongs to a poem, a book, or a specific social group. All subjects are important to the development of that discourse and the understanding of the truth within it. This is no less true of the reader who approaches the poem with a view to understanding and perhaps learning from it. When a reader sits down to read a poem they engage in the first moment of Turner's classification of experience. They invoke intense feelings in order to be answerable to the meaning within the poem. There is a conscious effort to be open, aware, receptive and reflexive and this instigates the meaning behind the reader's experience of the poem and thus affects their awareness and thus their reality. The poem is, in essence, a ritualistic site. The reader, as an entity, was deemed insignificant for the most part when it came to poetry except in how they were affected by the poem in a Platonic or Aristotelian sense. In the twentieth century, scholars began to think about the reader in other ways; how they might affect the text or even what being affected by a text could mean from a positive perspective.

In 1950, Walker Gibson penned an essay which introduced us to the 'mock reader' who, he argued, was at the heart of any piece of literature. In writing this essay Gibson moves away from discussions focusing on the psychological effects of literature on the reader and develops a more nuanced argument which continues to this day about how the reader affects the text and vice versa. Gibson proposes that there is always a 'mock reader' within any piece of literature. The mock reader is s/he whom the author expects the reader to be and who the reader must become by virtue of the text. The reader, as Gibson argues, must "assume, for the sake of experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume" (Gibson, cited in Tompkins, 1980). The language used, the grammar and even the context gives the reader's experience a particular shape and form. Take, as an example, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1996). Through the form of an idiomatic dialect spoken by those local to the Scottish city of Edinburgh, the

reader is required to take on the vernacular of the Scottish working class and use that to understand the lived reality of the characters. In this way then, both the mock reader and the text itself will have a bearing on the experience which is at the centre of the reader's approach to that text. Of course however, while Gibson does not mention a surplus of understanding, it must be noted that a surplus of understanding nonetheless exists whenever a reader approaches a piece of literature. There will always be a gap between the mock reader and the reader; what Bakhtin would term the untranscribable element of the text. Wolfgang Iser (1974) might see this as proof of the inexhaustibility of the text. It is also a reflection of how, through experience, reality is always being re-negotiated and does not necessarily need to rely on already laid out categories of understanding which are a part of the world already there for us – the they-world.

While this untranscribable element of literature is certainly important for the development of this thesis, it should in no way imply that the reader does not need a bank of understanding tied to a discourse in order for him/her to understand the text in the first instance. In fact, as Jonathan Culler argues, the “poem must be thought of as an utterance that has meaning only with respect to a system of conventions which the reader has assimilated” (1975: 12). This can be related back to an earlier discussion in this chapter which considered the elements of temporality at work both within a text and in social interactions more generally. Experience is based on previous experience which as Heidegger asserts, “are still there for me”; they do not belong to some lost epoch in a temporally remote sphere, rather they are a part of the now. Discourse must also involve an element of futurity because in every moment we are preparing, imagining the next thing, becoming. Structurally, there are certain features and conventions of a language we relate to a given work. Through the veil of language, discourse and its structural implications, we comprehend the work and this in turn helps us to decide whether and in what ways that piece of literature is appropriate for its form. This social truth

is negotiated by the writer before the reader approaches the work of art and influences them in their interpretation of it; however, this does not take away from the untranscribable element of the text, but should be noted as an important element of social analysis through literature or indeed any analysis which uses as its subject a particular form of discourse.

Stanley Fish, in an article entitled 'Interpreting the Variorum' (1976) argued that meaning must be defined in experiential terms. What happens to the reader as s/he reads the text, what they gauge from it, is not within the text before the reader experiences it. This experience, from Fish's perspective, constitutes the world rather than simply reflects it. This hypothesis is evident of an important step in reader response theory. The text needs to be born of a specific discourse contextually, produced by an author, and interpreted and re-experienced by a reader within their specific context. Authority no longer resides solely with the text, the context, the author, or the reader – it is a negotiation, an interaction between all of the above and in this way reality is created, truth is generated and experience gained.

Conclusion

While the meaning derived from poetry is subject to change according to specific socio-cultural and political situations, the system of forms, approaches, expectations and behaviours in relation to that meaning are common to particular communities within those discourses. These systems allow subjects to work with and redefine the effect which that meaning can have. Around those systems, the social reality itself is subject to constant processual force and this is poetry's saving grace. By using discourses and forms within a society and the discourses surrounding and forms of poetry like allegory, subjects have the potential to challenge the status quo. Through the experiential event that is an essential trait of poetry subjects can negotiate reality for themselves by interaction with the text and by nature of its unique

style and form. The poem becomes a ritualistic site in which the poet incorporates active understanding of the surplus of meaning inherent in society. This is then used as a tool which, when included with linguistic structures, becomes a space for the reader to work through a liminal experience and on towards understanding. They emerge on the other side of the poem, if it true to the liminal ritual, “changed, changed utterly” (Yeats, 2001 [1921]). In effect, the poem thus allows both the writer and the reader to enter a ritual situation where they can reconceive of social meaning anew. The exact process by which this is achieved is more complicated than reader response theory allows however. Consequently, the chapter which follows sets out the method by which meaning can be recreated through the act of reading and writing poetry.

CHAPTER FIVE:

A Methodological Search for Meaning

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a methodological framework which will be followed throughout this thesis in its aim to reveal how art, and specifically poetry, can be used as medium for the restoration of authentic meaning within society. The research methodology is based on Weber's method of interpretive sociology and contends that essentially, the social world must be interpreted in order to be understood and beyond this – interpretation is necessary for social action to exist, form and reform. This type of sociology is based on the philosophy of hermeneutics which was heavily influenced by Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Wilhelm Dilthey and Hans Georg Gadamer – the latter of whom became particularly important for theorists within sociological circles (Habermas, 1972). Moreover, while this thesis moves between many disciplines including philosophy, anthropology and English literature, it is nonetheless anchored within sociology proper and interpretive sociology in particular in its journey to understand how poetry can be a meaningful resource within the modern world. The thesis is, of course, qualitative in technique and will take 'poetry as text' as the model of analysis. The aim is to demonstrate the centrality of this type of discourse in society's reconstruction of itself through an ability to reformulate experience in the textual narrative form. The previous chapter outlined why poetry, and postcolonial poetry in particular, is suitable for a study of this type. There are two main objectives within this chapter, firstly; the aim is to provide a theoretical rationale for the methodological approach adopted in this research and therefore to discuss interpretive sociology, social constructivism and narrative analysis in more detail. Secondly, this chapter outlines the specific methodological approach undertaken and provides a justification for its particular focus - on both poetry in general and the chosen poets in specific.

There is an implicit argument within this thesis which contends that by avoiding the restrictive practice of confining a piece of research to any one discipline, this project is able to take advantage of the particularly relevant elements of alternate disciplines. Perhaps even, as Szokolczai argues, that –

we actually live in a moment when mainstream disciplinary research has reached – and even went considerably beyond – its useful or legitimate limits. There is strong evidence that it has become overspecialised, bogged down in minuscule, often terribly trivial problems.

2008: 276

Ultimately then, this project methodologically concerns itself with the question of what it means to be human in society and delves into other disciplinary fields in its attempt to reach resolution. Again, Szokolczai (2008) argues that “...such a question cannot even be approached within the narrow limits of a ‘positivistic’ or ‘critical’, ‘objective’ and ‘rational’, and most of all ‘value free’ science.” Rather, to understand the constructed world around us, we need to engage with the fundamentals of human consciousness. The implication within this is that it is impossible to separate the individual from the whole, and to understand the social and political arena we need to investigate those elemental conditions of humanity. We need to explore and approach reality as a dialectical, dynamic entity in constant flux and by subscribing to the philosophy of international political anthropology this research intends to do just that. As an interdisciplinary structure this type of research situates itself within the realm of, and finds itself in, interpretive sociology.

Epistemological Background and Structure

The epistemological foundations of interpretive sociology are distinct from those of the more positivistic social sciences put forward by Auguste Comte.

Interpretive sociology –

...assume(s) that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them

Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991: 5

If the line of reasoning above is taken as a base understanding for this type of methodological approach, then interpretive sociology has its foundations in the philosophical school of thought called hermeneutics. The word hermeneutics refers back to the messenger-god Hermes who in myth was capable of interpreting the words of the Gods for humanity (Palmer, 1969). Hermeneutics within philosophy is the art of understanding and theory of interpretation. Hermeneutic theorists argue that the experience and interaction of the subject in a particular socio-cultural context is of paramount importance in how they view and interpret the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gadamer, 2006 [1975]; Dilthey, 1976; Heidegger, 1988; Schutz, 1973, 1953). The world in this view is never an objective entity – it is an experienced phenomenon. If this is taken to be an accurate description of the human condition, then any methodological analysis attempting to uncover facts and truths about an objective reality is fundamentally flawed. Reality on these terms needs to be experienced and interpreted in order to exist for the subject.

To social (or otherwise) scientists of the objectivist or empirical persuasion social acts are a reflection of and reaction to the objective reality

that they are exposed to. Language then, for theorists of this persuasion, is a reflection of this reality – a mirror (Wittgenstein, 1901; Rorty, 1979). Wittgenstein can be read to support this view of language as a mirror but can also be interpreted to argue that language creates social reality. For many social constructionists however, the language as mirror contention is a poor attempt to understand the multifaceted nuances of both language and the social world. Friedrich Schleiermacher, for example, argued the linguisticity hypothesis which maintained that interaction and social life was understood *through* language rather than it simply being a reflection of reality. Wilhelm Dilthey carried on in this vein of thought but differed slightly from Schleiermacher in that he argued that we do not live as linguistic creatures *before* the social action or interaction but rather we live as understanding, interpreting creatures *within* the social act (Palmer, 1969). The written word is a specific example of the social act, existence and understanding in social life. In his essays on poetry and experience Dilthey gives consideration to this process of interacting in the social world. He breaks the social act into three parts – experience, expression and understanding. Experience is life as we meet it and is pre-reflexive, in that it is of itself and in itself. The experience is only understood through expression which is based on experiences of the past and anticipations of the future. Experience exists before the subject/object separation –

The consciousness of the experience and its constitution are the same: there is no separation between what is there for me and what in experience is there for me. In other words, the experience does not stand like an object over against its experience, but rather its very existence for me is undifferentiated from the whatness which is present for me within it.

1996: 346

Essentially then, it is impossible to separate the subject from the object because the actor only understands the object through their own subjectivity.

This subjectivity is not itself a reality and this is where hermeneutics moves distinctly away from Descartes' "I think, therefore I am". Instead, in order to understand and experience the social moment, the subject must recall other moments of experience. Temporality, for Dilthey, is imperative to interaction in so far as that when experience "is there for me" I must recall other experiences if I am to adequately make sense of this present experience. Not only this, but I must envisage the future if I am to understand the possibilities inherent in the experience. This temporality is never something imposed reflexively; however, it is within experience and is a necessary part of the interpretive process (1996: 349). It is *within* experience. As Heidegger attests, experience is equiprimordial with existence itself (1988). Dasein, or the being who is aware of his/her own being, is essentially interpretive – this subject always sees something *as* something. Dasein, or the subject/actor, moves through life based on a forestructure of understanding or experience and this is projected into the future possibilities. This dialogic interaction is an essential aspect of reality and this reality exists in the 'life-world' – so called because it is not an objective reality but one that comes into view through the subject's interaction, or life in the world. But as Bengtsson argued,

Even if the life-world is objective both in the sense that it is a shared world and in the sense that it transcends (exceeds) the subject, that is, its qualities are not qualities within the subject, it is likewise inseparable from a subject, namely, the subject who experiences it, lives and acts in it. The world is always there in the first person from the perspective of my space and time here and now.

1989: 72

The subject and the object are indivisible and to understand one we must understand the other. Our experiences are intersubjective and this is necessary for a discourse to be coherent in order to facilitate social interaction. This intersubjectivity is comparable to Heidegger's notion of 'care' and is, for

him, another part of Dasein's being which is inseparable from experience. Care is the fundamental basis for interaction; it is representative of our concern for the world or existence and motivates our action towards it. It is always connected to temporality and experience as it manifests itself most notably in our anticipation of the future – our 'futura'. This tripartite construction of experience, reality and interaction is imperative to understanding social processes and is revealed as an important part of being an authentic Dasein – a creative subject with the ability to recreate social reality. By giving too much attention to the objective present, as the positivistic sciences have tendencies to do, the researcher and thus the research can never truly progress beyond that present. This results in, returning to a previous chapter, 'fallenness' and a sense of the never-ending present which is revealed as a permanent state of liminality.

Even though this type of hermeneutics argues that there is no definitive and truly objective reality, it does not mean to suggest, in a nihilistic way, that there is no truth at all. Rather, in social life from a Weberian perspective, while there may not be irreducible objective social facts, it is certainly possible to decipher the current trends in interaction and discourse in the social world. There are social facts which subjects become aware of by a process of noting and remarking them – essentially bringing them into the social world. This does not mean to suggest that they were not there in the first instance. If subjects create the awareness, by which the world they engage in becomes known, by analysing how they attribute meaning to and how they create and recreate the social world around them, the researcher can isolate those dominant discourses and interactive processes in the world.

Interpretive studies assume that people create and associate their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. Interpretive researchers thus attempt to understand phenomena through accessing the meanings participants assign to them.

Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991: 5

It is a central aim of this thesis then, to show how poets can access those meanings and social facts and offer possible ways of restoring meaning within the particular situation of modernity. If experience is the important element of existence and poetry is an artefact through which we can understand this reality – “...what is expressed in this universal content of the literary work is not knowledge of reality, but the most vivid experience of the interconnectedness of our existential relations in the meaning of life” (Dilthey, 1996: 238), then studying this form of discourse is particularly useful. For Gadamer, the hermeneutic circle is of utmost importance to any analysis of social reality – an interpretation and understanding of social events are possible by analysing their meanings to the human participants and their culture (2000 [1975]). The researcher must relate the parts to the whole and the whole to the parts. The main contention here is that a “Social process is not captured in hypothetical deductions, covariances and degrees of freedom. Instead, understanding social process involves getting inside the world of those generating it” (Orlikowski and Baroudi, 1991: 6). By getting inside the world then, through their poetry, of postcolonial poets familiar with liminal situations, it is intended that an understanding of the social processes required to move past that liminality will become clear. If “there is no direct access to reality unmediated by language and preconception” (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991: 6), it is left to the researcher to analyse the meanings and cultural constructions created by and negotiated with specific semiotic structures – poetry in the case of this thesis. To reiterate, interpretation and understanding is imperative to how we direct ourselves within the social

situation and text can provide a useful tool in revealing how human beings engage in that process. By critically evaluating a particular type of discourse, it is intended that this research will offer a way to uncover meaning within the social reality under investigation. As Dilthey argued, interpreting poetry is a microcosmic example of what we do to live. It is “the role of the researcher...to bring to consciousness the restrictive conditions of the status quo” (Orlikowski and Baroudi 1991: 8). The status quo here refers to a reality that comes into being facilitated by subjects – one that is constantly constructed and reconstructed through interaction rooted in particular belief in reality.

In a similar way to Dilthey, Max Weber argued that the social act was central to social life and structure. In defending interpretive sociology, Weber argued that all science justifies itself on the basis that it is attempting to uncover that which is worth being known (1998). The problem arises, however, when we try to rationalise and pin down exactly what those things *are* which can be universally and objectively defined and considered worth being known. Science presumes that what it studies is worth being known, as it must do in order to legitimise its aim and by extension its place within society. Social phenomena for Weber can only be interpreted with reference “to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position towards life” (1998:145). Whether or not we accept a given proposition in the social realm is based on our nexus of interactional experiences to date. What stands out in Weber’s book *Economy and Society* (1978 [1922]) is the argument that the social act is key to an understanding of the social world around us. Meaning in life is derived through the social act itself and is then modified through interpretation, but that interpretation is affected by previous experiences of social interaction. Understanding the meaning of social action then, is imperative within sociological study and this thesis in particular. We as human beings can only understand the world, others and ourselves through the social act and our experience which is

essentially an awareness of the world as based on previous experiences action and interaction. This philosophy is crucial to understanding the meaning of texts.

Social Constructionism

Within modern social theory, interpretive sociology has developed in many different ways – leading to social constructionism proper (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1984, 1993), critical theory (Habermas, 1972; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000;), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984; Atkinson, 1988; Silverman, 1998), interpretive ethnography (Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 1995; Denzin, 1997) symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Prasad, 1993), discourse analysis (Foucault, 1972; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000), and deconstructionism (Derrida, 1972/1981; Kilduff, 1993) to name a few. This particular study will use a symbolic analysis of poetry in order to illustrate how society develops on an interactive level with cultural artefacts.

This methodology will not systematically describe a scheme whereby the ultimate truth will be revealed about reality in the social world, as a more positivistic methodology might. What it does claim however, is that while there are no fixed social or cultural laws to describe and categorise reality indefinitely and there is likewise no set reality to which the human being reacts like a puppet, there are nonetheless particular forces which move them and influence the construction of social reality. Realities are created by the subject and for the subject through language and discourse which only exists through social action and interaction. Poetry is a voice in this discourse and is as such is a valid site of interaction – by studying poetry the researcher is studying interaction, albeit in a particular and unique form. If the researcher can isolate the characteristics rather than the rules and norms of the

interactive and experiential process, then the formative potential of the poetic structure will reveal itself at the same time.

Poetry will be studied as an expression of lived experience; drawing on elements of Saussure's theory of linguistic structures. Saussure contends that language is an inherently social phenomenon which allows interaction to take place – it constructs rather than reflects. Without the terms 'left' and 'right' to designate those directions we would not be able to conceptualise them and therefore they would not exist. The sign and the signifier only work in conjunction with, and have meaning in, relation to one another. To consider this in another light – Derrida conceives of language as necessitating difference. In order for the colour white to be white and for people to understand it as that, we need to differentiate it from all those colours which are not white, thus we need to assign words to other colours. This does not suggest that every colour in existence has been given a word, but rather that white has been and we understand that. The Sami people, an Arctic indigenous people inhabiting parts of the far north of Sweden and Norway, have many different words to describe types of snow (Grimes, 2000). In the English language there are a mere handful – this does not mean to suggest that in certain areas of Northern Europe that snow is constructed differently – rather that it became necessary in that particular culture for different types of snow to be noted in order to communicate to others in the community that a particular type of snow is falling. This would allow the tribe to prepare for the consequences of the snow fall – be the fall light or heavy. In Ireland, for example, these distinctions are not necessary – but this does not mean that the different types of snowflakes do not exist. Some forms of social constructionism would argue that because of this the snowflakes exist in the arctic but do not in Ireland. This is known as strong social constructivism and is perhaps taking the argument too far. If their particular form was described to an Irish person, no doubt they would agree that there is a distinction, what

must be surmised then is that the potential for that which we do not yet know to come into existence is great.

Methodologically then, the text will be considered the site of interaction. It is a ritual space which draws the writer and the reader into a liminal situation where they have the potential to recreate or reconceive of social reality. Language allows for interaction and as such is essentially formative. It describes things which have been brought into social consciousness and described as elements of reality. This very naming is meaningful as it is reflective of the kind of society in which those subjects live and the reality they have constructed. According to Wittgenstein, we all engage in language games that allow us to interact with one another according to our experiences (1953). “Meaning is use” Wittgenstein contends, and this reflects the importance placed on the interactive processes in society. Different language games are enacted within, and are particularly appropriate for, different groups of people. A study of these language games and this discourse that is performed and created through the interaction of subjects within the language game can be studied and analysed. By treating the text as representative of a particular language game the discourse can be understood by what Clifford Geertz might call interpretive tacking (1973). Geertzian theory attests to the essentially semiotic nature of culture – culture consists of signs that point to meaning. This form of cultural and social analysis is closely aligned to techniques used in literary criticism (Stern, 1998) and naturalistic enquiry (Belk, 1991). For this research project, it is argued that the text is not simply a reflection of social or cultural reality but rather that it is and has the potential to negotiate and become reality. Poetry is an expression of lived experience, and as such becomes experience again for those reading it. When the subject reads the poem, in order to understand it they must engage in Dilthey’s tripartite system of experience, expression and understanding. They must *experience* reality in recalling past experiences, anticipating futural possibilities and using them to make sense of the present.

Narrative Reality

The use of particular language, narrative structures and forms is fundamental to how the subject experiences a particular reality but importantly – is the basis of how the subject reconstructs social reality. A narrative structure or construction involves four main elements: firstly it will have an objective, in that it must have an experience or situation to be explained; secondly it must have events connected to that situation that aid an understanding of the context; thirdly there must be an order to the arrangement of events, in modern society this is usually a linear temporal arrangement; the final element of narrative construction involves causal linkages – the events must connect to one another and have an effect on the objective of the narrative (Gergen, 2009).

In a seminal text devoted to the subject of narrative construction *The Model of the Text* (1976), theorist Paul Ricoeur speaks of ‘the will’, which involves a project or aim similar to Dilthey’s experience and Heidegger’s being-in-the-world. The will refers to the subject’s need to see events as always connected to experience or other events in the world. Action, for Ricoeur, brings and projects worldly events together in a similar way to Heidegger’s ‘care’. This feeling of connection to the world is related to the individual’s action and interaction within it – where for Heidegger it is manifest in the subject showing concern for the world, for Ricoeur this care or will is only made intelligible through the construction of narratives relating to experience. Through action then, these narratives are made a part of reality. Again, temporality comes into the frame in so much as to experience an interaction in the social world, as argued earlier, it is necessary to be able to re-experience past interactions and anticipate future ones. In creating narratives of experience we are devising the structures by which we interpret the world and which will therefore affect the burgeoning world. Action is –

...saying in as much as it is in doing, ordinary action as much as it is an intervention into the course of things, narration in as much as it is the narrative reassembling of a life stretched out in time and finally the capacity to impute to oneself or others the responsibility for acting

Ricoeur, 1973: 152

In creating these narratives of social reality then, we create a discourse of understanding which our interpretation of existence is based on. By analysing the nature of these narratives, we can come closer to identifying the types and nature of those discourses which construct social, cultural and political reality. By studying narrative constructions the researcher can theorise how subjects make sense of experience, and how imagining (anticipating the futural possibilities), hiding, performing and critiquing those experiences helps them to experience reality in a specific way and develop more reflexive discourses. Imagining in this context is not a static phenomenon removed from social reality; rather it is a happening in so far as it is within the sphere of the imagination that experience can draw together the tripartite structure of temporality that is so essential to interaction.

Specific social constructs like cultural themes, views, roles and norms can be understood through an analysis of the narrative text. In addition, patterns of writing style can be isolated; how the language itself is employed and whether it adds to the discourse portrayed in the poem in question and also how the discourse itself might maintain or construct identities within social, cultural or political reality. In a hermeneutics of the kind Gadamer, Heidegger and Ricoeur might propound, the text is not simply considered something that can reflect or maintain reality – rather, by understanding the constituent parts of the text, a picture of the whole can come into view and this whole is considered dependent on the parts. It is understood by how those parts fit into the wider context and are finally interpreted by the subject with relation to all

of these elements. To understand exactly how the text can construct reality or society, it is imperative to understand and interpret the text as part of that reality – not a reflection of it. The intention for this research project is to study poetry as a discourse within the social world that is involved in creating and recreating social life. The discourse in this context is that set of descriptive and referential terms which portray the beliefs within those language games and social situations. A given discourse is “constituted through a limited range of terms used in particular stylistic and grammatical constructions and often a repertoire (discourse) will be organised around specific metaphors and figures of speech” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 149).

Poetry, it is maintained, is not arbitrary in meaning by virtue of its linguistic properties. Rather, in constructing narratives by employing specific language games and reflexively considering the construction process, poetry – like any text – can be transformative. It is with this in mind then, that interpretive sociology is considered particularly relevant for this study. For Michel Foucault, language produces the social reality in so far as it creates a myriad of different power structures and recreates them through discourse but essentially – nothing has any meaning outside it. We incorporate narratives in order to enable and promote interaction. Social interaction built on narratives of experience create meaning and the creation of meaning is essential to the intentions of interpretive sociology and fundamentally, this thesis. By studying the narrative structures of postcolonial poetry, systems of meaning tied to interaction and experience should come to the fore. By creating unique narrative structures which lead to the construction of alternative discourses which exist outside and/or questions the veracity of dominant power structures, postcolonial poetry can be revealed as transformative with the potential to restore meaning structures.

Data and Textual Choices

Poetry is the type of text chosen for analysis in this study. In particular the poetry of four poets, Patrick Kavanagh, Eavan Boland, Rex Lee Jim and Joy Harjo. First of all, poetry was chosen above other types of cultural artefact due to my interdisciplinary educational background as researcher. Studies into the impact of poetry on society are few and far between and particularly so within the discipline of sociology. When the arts are considered, they are often shown in an unforgiving light or within the confines of art as representation (see Longley, 1986; Constantine, 2010). Alternative approaches to this considers the piece of art as objective in its truth and separate from the actors involved. (Adorno, 2004 [1970]; Adorno, Bloch, Benjamin, Brecht, Lukács, in Jameson, 2007). This is contrary to the argument put forward in this thesis - the contention here is that social experience through rites of passage enable art to be more socially active. Art is truth in experience and action. It is for this reason poetry was chosen as text for analysis. It is the contention of this thesis that poetry has more to offer society than accurate representation. Furthermore, specifically postcolonial poetry was chosen. The rationale for this selection lies in the experiential nature of poetry derived from communities with this cultural foundation. Poets from the Irish community were chosen due to my familiarity with the society of which they are a part and my own preference for the content of this particular poetry. The two Native American poets were chosen due to previous research undertaken by myself in relation to the comparisons between Native American and Irish poetry. The Navajo poet Rex Lee Jim was specifically chosen due to the powerful content of his poetry in relation to issues of land and cultural convergence. Also, and importantly, Jim was chosen because of the political effect his poetry has had on his community - as discussed in Chapter One. Muscogee poet Joy Harjo was chosen similarly for the remarkable content of her poetry and in specific her work in relation to modern forms and manifestations of violence. Harjo also is also incredibly significant in the Native American community generally as a female poet and

a voice for the creative arts. She argues that if we downgrade the imagination and the power of metaphor then we are left with an over-rationalised and disenchanting world which leads to that propensity towards violence which she speaks of in her poetry. Ultimately, however, these particular poets were chosen because their poetry is illustrative of prose as it uses experience in the most profound way and turns it into an allegorical and metaphorical construct particularly appropriate for the objectives of the study at hand.

The community of which Boland and Kavanagh are/were a part is significantly different on many levels to the communities of which Harjo and Jim are a part. First of all, it should be noted that Boland and Kavanagh are/were members of a culture at a time where Ireland had gained its independence from England economically and socially and was becoming a more prosperous country. Even before this, when Ireland was in the grips of the most aggressive period of colonialism, the Irish people were familiar with colonial agendas and even the hierarchies to which they would be subject. This meant that much of Irish culture had changed in the 17th Century in order to allow for trade with neighbouring cultures and indeed from interaction with those cultures. As a result, the Irish culture, while certainly changed due to the forced language change - from traditional Irish to English, and the displacement of land - many elements of Irish culture would stay the same. For example, Christianity was the dominant religion prior to the 17th Century and remained so afterwards. The hierarchy which the Catholic Church was dominated by was a hierarchy the Irish people understood and so essentially colonialism was something the Irish understood structurally. This was true also due to the various colonial escapades in Europe for centuries to which the Irish were exposed. This matter was discussed in detail in Chapter Three. The Native American communities examined in this thesis however, both Navajo and Muscogee, dealt with a much more violent and oppressive history due to the fact that they were completely unfamiliar with the type of hierarchy enforced by the colonial influence in America. They were treated

like animals through The Removal Act of 1830 (Library of Congress, 2010) - which was easier to do so because they were so different culturally from the colonisers - this is also described in more detail in Chapter Three. While the Irish still remained on their land, the Native Americans were forced to move thousands of miles away to barren and unfamiliar land.

This difference in the experience of colonialism is illustrated in the poetry in one main way - the Native American poetry deals with loss of land and social responsibility in a more intense and perhaps more aggressive way. In addition to this, language is also more of a raw topic in the Native American poetry - this is exemplified in Rex Lee Jim's poetry as he writes all his poetry in Navajo first, and then re-writes the poetry in English. Navajo is the language which gives his imagination its first flight and English is only, and almost, a necessary evil. Due to Ireland's close proximity to England, English culture and indeed its proximity to Europe more generally, there is a distinct impression that much of the culture evident in the pre-catholic Ireland was lost a long time before Cromwell's aggressive campaign to colonise in the 1600's (Bardon, 2009). Because of this Ireland modernised, if not in tandem with England, certainly not too far behind due to the fact that it clung on to the coattails of its neighbour's modernising intentions. Modernising became the important agenda to an extent in Ireland, and this was certainly true of the Ireland which Boland and Kavanagh experienced. Ancestry and history thus became less important to the Irish than the Native Americans who were refused the benefits of modernity in the United States. They remained underprivileged and lacking in basic resources in many cases (Oberg, 2012). This is demonstrated in the poetry of Boland through her discussion of myth and history and conversely in Jim's when he speaks of the wisdom inherent in tales told by the elder members of the tribe. When North America was colonised, for many of the tribes this equated to cultural genocide, a phenomenon which Jim deals with when he raises issues of identity. Because Irish culture remained the same to a large extent, and modernised by choice

later, this question of identity failed to provoke such raw emotion in the Irish poets discussed in this study. Even at times of revolution and struggle, the Irish clung on to what they felt were the stalwarts of Irish identity and much nationalistic poetry is indicative of this.

Boland's work specifically deals with femininity and the private domestic space. Her experiential understanding allows her to acknowledge undocumented meaning in the social order in relation to this specific issue. She not only raises issues of femininity in modern society but she questions the structure of a society which could drown out an entire class of people from its history. This she brings to the public eye and raises for debate and discussion. Kavanagh's considerations are more concerned with the alienation that accompanies the modernising society and what this means for society more generally. His work is thus related to the Dublin of the time of his writing. The particular elements of that society are investigated in order to understand what specifically engendered that sense of alienation Kavanagh observes and brings to life in his work. Rex Lee Jim's poetry deals primarily with the Navajo community and its difficulties in negotiating the clashing cultures of Modern America and Navajo. Through his poetry there is a sincere and honest attempt to ask the difficult questions, for example - how have the Navajo people assisted in the cultural destruction they have experienced over the last two centuries? In Chapter Nine an analysis is made of Jim's poetry in relation to the Navajo community and the difficulties they have and are experiencing still. While Jim's poetry focuses on Navajo issues predominantly, Joy Harjo's work brings to the fore issues that native American communities are dealing with more generally. Harjo approaches areas of concern for native people and relates them to American society at large in a way that highlights how a problem for one, is a problem for the other. Given that the native American communities live as part of the larger community that is the United States of America, social problems that affect the native communities are a reflection of issues at the heart of the

community as a whole. This is particularly apparent through her theory on the changing nature of violence in modernity as explicated in Chapters Ten and Eleven. The changing nature of violence in society is apparent both within native communities and the American culture at large. When cultures are intertwined in such a way as is evident in North America, social problems exist transculturally although their effect may be different within the various communities.

A striking similarity between these poets, however, is described in Chapter Three in relation to the type of experiential foundation of their respective cultures. From Boland to Kavanagh and on through to Jim and Harjo, each poet deals with alienation. This feeling is argued in Chapter Three to have its roots in the experience of being dominated, disrespected and being removed from a secure home. This disconnection with the home as manifestation of a connection to land is absolutely imperative to the sense of alienation and *unheimlich* (this is expanded upon fully in Chapter Six). There is a distinct acknowledgment within the poetry examined of a surplus of meaning within social situations and this moves them to write poetry in order to work themselves out of the situation they find themselves. This poetry is evidence of that fact that the poets keenly feel a sense of *unheimlich* and their experience is given vitality through the careful use of language and metaphor in a way that clearly brings the reader through the rite of passage marked by *sacra* and on to a space of abstract consciousness. Poetry again becomes the site of ritual which they use to approach the abyss to recreate a meaning more 'being-ful'.

Literary Criticism and Analysis

Because social experience can be documented and investigated in many ways within accepted forms of sociological investigation, initial consideration was given to the possibility of conducting interview style research. However, due

to a preliminary review of literature on the topic it became clear that the existence of *sacra* within the rite of passage was particularly significant. As a result, interview based research became less appropriate for the study at hand.. *Sacra* in the liminal situation, as depicted in Turner's description of the Ndembu tribe ritual, were implicit within the rite and not something the initiates had any explicit control over. For this reason, any interviews with postcolonial subjects would have lacked an awareness of the role of *sacra* in rites of passage as they inform and encourage the restoration of social meaning. In this case, it is the view of the researcher that interviews here would add less to this kind of project than poetry. *Sacra* within poetry, once revealed as existing in the form of metaphor, allegory and specific word placing within rhythmic structures is most certainly an acknowledged tool of the poet. The *sacra* thus can be traced more closely and to a more productive end in relation to a surplus of meaning and the abyss of meaning. In addition, the poem is always an experiential offering; that is its aim - to draw the reader into an experience which they can re-experience for themselves due to the nature of emotive language content and imagery. For the philosophically and theoretically complex focus of this particular piece of research then, poetry was considered as particularly suitable data for analysis.

Structural literary analysis is imperative to any study focusing on the nature, or potential of poetry. This type of analysis is combined with literary criticism in order to provide a comprehensive discussion on the meaning within the poetry as text. Literary criticism involves an examination of the poetry as it relates to the society within which and through which the poets are writing. For example, each of Patrick Kavanagh's poems are related to the social order at work in the Ireland he writes about and issues illustrated in his prose are considered within that context. Structural literary analysis involves a more detailed analysis of the words themselves - how they are organised in the poem, how they connect rhythmically, and what this might mean in relation to the overall critique of the poem contextually. Because of this, an

element of this chapter will be devoted to an outline of how to approach the form and structure of poetry methodologically. The poetry is approached first of all as a poetic structure and in the first reading, note is taken of the metaphorical and allegorical content. Specific words are most relevant and these are marked. Analysis is then conducted as to the relationship between the specific words and the cultural and social context be that Ireland of the 1950's in Patrick Kavanagh's case, Ireland of the 1970's in Eavan Boland's or contemporary North America as it exists for Navajo poet Rex Lee Jim and Muscogee poet Joy Harjo. A theoretical examination is undertaken at this point in order to unearth the most likely meanings of specific metaphors. This is conducted according to the general rules of traditional literary analysis. From here the findings are compared to the rhythmical structure of the poetry as outlined below in order to come to a more rounded understanding of the meaning behind the text, both implicit and explicit. For example, in Patrick Kavanagh's poem 'In Memory of my Mother' the poet uses the word 'Oriental' to describe his thoughts as he walked through the streets of Monaghan town. Initially, this word seems out of place and perhaps even confusing in the context of a rural Irish town. On a closer analysis of the poem, it becomes clear that he is declaring that his experience of walking with his mother through these streets has freed his mind, imagination and thoughts to such an extent he was transported as far away from a restrictive Irish society as possible - to the Orient even. The 'Orient' is contrasted with the Ireland depicted in much of his poetry thus far - an Ireland of pretension and stifled imagination as portrayed in poems like 'The Paddiad'. This experiential understanding and social action is related in the poem and brought to life by connecting words like 'earth', 'heaven', 'angels' and 'land' which serve as *sacra* leading him on to his abstract awareness which becomes more concrete through the ritual of poetry. Further examples of this function of poetry lies in Eavan Boland's poem 'Night Feed'. In the first three stanzas the stress beat lies on specific words, namely and among others; 'dawn', 'believe', 'season', 'rainwater', 'mirror', 'tiptoe', 'wriggling', 'rosy', 'this' 'early bird', 'finder', 'best',

'house' and 'life'. This poem is a homage to her life as mother. Each word is saturated with a realisation of the privilege in experiencing the quiet potential, the budding, innocent, pure and perfect life she lives in the moment she goes into her baby's room to feed her. In this poem she is a discoverer of new land - 'finder', 'early bird'; she is new and connected to nature - 'dawn', 'season', 'rainwater' and finally, she encounters both domesticity and meaning as they collide; 'house', 'believe' and 'life'. Specific word emphasis and rhythm provoke in the researcher and the observant reader a keen awareness of experience in a unique way. No more is the home the site of repression; in this poem common conceptualisations of domesticity are subverted and so it becomes the site which sets her (and consequently the reader) free.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's assertion that the formal features of language, as displayed in poetry, embodies meaning rather than reflects it, is in keeping with the ethos of those theoretical imperatives underpinning this study (*Biographia Literaria*, 1817). As Cleneth Brooks argues in his book *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947) –

The truth is that the apparent irrelevances which metrical pattern and metaphor introduce... become relevant when we realize that they function in a good poem to modify, qualify, and develop the total attitude (209)

How something is said then – when it comes to poetry – is vital if we want to truly appreciate *what* is said. The rhythm of a poem is one of the most observable aspects of a poem's form; it can draw the reader into a familiarity with particular words while encouraging a lack of familiarity with others due to the placing of them in the sentence structure. For example, in this line from Joy Harjo's poem 'Strange Fruit' from her book *In Mad Love and War* (1990)

–

My feet betray me, dance away from this killing tree

o b o b o b b o oo b o

The stress or beat in this line is on the second word 'feet', fifth word 'dance' and ninth word 'killing'. In the rhythmical structure of the English language the beat needed to fall on the eighth or ninth word to maintain the metrical structure of the line. The words 'from this' are said within the same off-beat to make them almost inseparable from one another and as there are two words remaining in the line, the stress falls on the verb 'killing' rather than the noun 'tree' as the line started with an off-beat. According to natural speech rhythms then the line will end on an off-beat. This leaves both stress and beat on the word 'killing' which requires us to question why a tree would be referred to as something involved in something both active and requiring engagement with morals and the social world. Thus, in this case rhythm can be shown to aid a rethinking of familiar and unquestioned patterns of thought. The subject's experience of the tree is negative, it brings death to her. At the same time however, it seems to have agency. By anthropomorphizing the tree, the natural rhythm of life is subverted. With this, a sense of unease and perverted reality is revealed through the beats in the line of the poem. Stress on these particular words draw the reader into a unique situation where previously familiar elements of existence are deconstructed and subverted. Rhythm and words thus perform the role of *sacra* as they guide the reader through the rite of passage and, as will be discussed further in chapters to follow, on to a place of restored meaning. Rhythm is the carrier of speech and is what makes a piece of writing easy and enjoyable to read but is also what can make it difficult and laborious to read. It is the effort involved in reading a piece of poetry that necessitates an intense engagement from the reader and which makes it all the more likely for them to be guided through the rite of passage by *sacra* in the form of words, rhythm and metaphor. The English language is stress timed and poetry shapes lines into metre, playing with rhythm and uses this aspect of language to its advantage in working out the content – or in other words – uses it to construct the narrative of experience.

In the poem discussed earlier – Kavanagh's 'In Memory of my Mother' the stress beat falls on specific words – 'earth', 'world', 'angel', 'land'. This rhythmical connection of specific words draws attention to the way in which Kavanagh has experienced them as related phenomenon. By stressing specific words, importance is attached to them and they perform the function of *sacra* guiding the reader to a form of abstract linguistic cognisance and from there the reader is moved to an awareness of the surplus of meaning within the social act. In this case for instance the land and Heaven are brought together as equal entities.

Poetry, simply by organising words into lines, draws attention to the material nature of those signifiers. The interpreter is aware of this materiality at the same time as they are attempting to decipher meaning – they are put in a situation where the taken for granted structure of language is presented as unfamiliar as they must use their powers of perception to interpret meaning that is usually explicit in most forms of language. Thus our ability to gauge meaning quickly, easily and without much thought is arrested by the necessity of having to analyse an unfamiliar linguistic structure. As a result, the poem becomes a liminal test of our capacity to construct meaning from experience and thus suspends ordinary structures. By spending time thinking, using past experiences to interpret, we are stepping into the experiential moment Dilthey and Heidegger speak of. We can experience reality using poetry as a catalyst that encourages – no – necessitates an interpretation of reality that is fundamentally *unheimlich* and aware of it. Poetry deconstructs and creates the conditions for experiences that can reconstruct reality. By incorporating new methods and styles of writing, certain novelists have succeeded in making the familiar unfamiliar – for example Salman Rushdie deconstructs our concept of reality and time in *Midnight's Children* (1981) and gives us a space to contemplate a fragmented perception of reality. Likewise, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) problematises our notion of temporality and through the unfamiliar incites a questioning on the readers

part of all that is familiar. The reader or interpreter thus experiences reality in a new way apart from the dominant mode of discourse. Other novels (and of course, this is true of any art) maintain the status quo by engaging with dominant discourses and power structures and hence reinforcing their influence through strengthening the opposing forces of self and other. In this way, books might account for the 'foreign' presence and purport to be heteroglossic all the while actually maintaining the ideological monoglossia of modernity. For example – Chris Cleave's novel *Little Bee* (2002) could be considered a perfect exemplar of heteroglossic intention. In the book he speaks through the persona of an English woman and a Nigerian woman – they are both narrators. Yet, while Bakhtin might argue this to be heteroglossia in action, the book only succeeds in reinforcing the dominant discourse of the day – how do we deal with the actual effects of globalisation, what is a 'good' attitude and what is a 'bad' attitude. It reinforces the discourse but does not subvert or instigate transformation in consciousness or experience, therefore fails in its heteroglossic impulse. To be truly heteroglossic the artist and the reader both need to move beyond the dominant ideological discourse – the form of language can be an ally in this regard. Cleave enters an argument in relation to what is considered foreign or the other, but even though he proposes that the reader must question what is good and bad, he fails to subvert the issue and ask the reader why they must engage in a discourse of good and bad in the first place. Harjo complicates our relationship with familiar phenomenon like trees and dancing in order to elevate our thinking beyond the taken for granted, this moves us to acknowledge the surplus of meaning within social situations. In questioning the given, we realise that what was given was by no means definitive in the first place. This is key to the rite of passage within which initiates must grapple with the undefined in order to redefine. Likewise in 'In Memory of My Mother' Patrick Kavanagh does exactly the same - he challenges the reader's sense of comfortable familiarity in order to render them uncomfortable with what is no longer familiar - and thus draw from them an

acknowledgement of their own state of *unheimlich*. Chapter Eleven will deal with this process from the initial state of *unheimlich* and noticing the surplus of seeing, which is arguably what Cleave does, and on to the method of approaching the abyss and finally towards reaggregation which is what Rushdie achieves in his work.

Conclusion

Additional elements of the poetic construction which will be included in the structural element of the literary analysis are techniques of metaphor, irony, tone and ambiguity. In *The Language Poets Use* (1962) Winifred Nowotny argues that metaphor can liberate the mind from given reality and allow it to think beyond the boundaries of a socio-cultural structure. She claims that poetic metaphors draw on the store of signifiers from the language in question, but uses them in a unique way. Meaning, when it comes to metaphors (unless they are ‘dead metaphors’ – ones we have become so familiar with we forget they are metaphors) is far from explicit and so require the interpreter to think about them – which automatically leads to heightened levels of intellectual awareness in which the interpreter is disposed to a more advanced and less restrictive view of reality. The poetry analysed in the following chapters will offer examples of the constructive potential of allegory and metaphor – although they are based on the same principle of employing imaginative techniques allegory is a more extended metaphor with a definite intended meaning at its core. In this way, an argument can be made showing allegory or metaphor as a promising companion to the imagination within the interactive experiential space as it negotiates reality. Irony defamiliarises the reader to the reality they are confronted with while tone can induce the reader to a comfortableness, or lack thereof, with the poetic content. Ambiguity in poetry can point to a content implicit in the ambiguous nature of the poem and suggest content beyond the obvious.

In this way, the structure of the poem itself is conducive to reimagining the social order. In addition to this, the specific poets chosen for this research are fitting for this study due to the proven effectiveness of their poetry as it has had an effect on social situations. Also however, as will be revealed in later chapters, their poetry engages with the surplus of meaning and in specific cases approaches the abyss of meaning which allows them to recreate meaning anew. This meeting of the abyss will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter and is uncovered as an indispensable element of social reaggregation and restoration of meaning.

CHAPTER SIX:

Resolving *Unheimlich*

Introduction

I long, as does every human being, to be at home

Wherever I find myself.

Maya Angelou

Home is a place where the subject, in an ideal situation, should feel safe and secure. If this is what 'being at home' means then modern society is anything but homely, as outlined in Chapter Two and Three. Modernity is characterised by fluid, changeable structures of identity and meaning and as such could not be further away from a place of security. In the above quote, Maya Angelou describes home as a state of mind. A state of mind is created in the subject by a negotiation between place, identity and experience; thus home should be a negotiation of these variables also. So far this thesis has argued that it is by a disruption of solid notions of place and identity that subjects become *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich*, it has been maintained, is a key condition of the subject in modern society but is a condition that many postcolonial poets are confronting and attempting to work out through *poesis*. The search for meaning in modernity has become more difficult as structures of understanding become more fluid. The following section in this chapter will put forward an argument to show that, firstly; there is a difference between authentic and inauthentic meaning, and secondly; authentic meaning can be recovered by confronting the untranscribable space; the abyss within permanent liminality. In order to do this a discussion of the *khôra* or the abyss is necessary as it has been considered within relevant literature to date. Authentic meaning will be linked to responsibility, land and subjective rationalisation. Authentic meaning as it emerges through the analysis chapters will be given preliminary consideration in order to situate those chapters

more thoroughly later. The abyss and its potential is absolutely vital to the potential of poetry and indeed any cultural artefact and is thus crucial to the poets focused on in this thesis and the way in which they can restore social meaning.

The Khôra and/or The Abyss

The abyss has an important connection with Bakhtin's surplus in so far as the abyss needs the surplus in order to direct people towards the potential of the nothingness. The surplus is an acknowledgment that there are elements of social reality that have not been drawn into social consciousness and as such have not been named. The unheimlich self must acknowledge the surplus of meaning in relation to themselves and their social reality if they are to access the potential of the abyss. The concept of the abyss has attracted a significant amount of attention in scholarly circles, with many academics pointing to the dangers inherent in such a thing. Plato gives initial consideration to the abyss in the dialogue 'Timaeus' – he refers to it as *Khôra*. He goes on to describe the Khôra as “a receptacle of all becoming” (Timaeus, 49a) and also a “space which exists always and cannot be destroyed. It provides a state for all things that come to be. It is apprehended by a kind of bastard reasoning that does not involve sense perception”. This understanding of the Khôra is particularly worrisome and certainly sheds light on why so many modern theorists have expounded the threat involved in this placeless space. It exists always and is the form which gives life to everything regardless of meaning and “sense perception”. As Thomassen (2012) argues, this empty vessel is exactly that space which has enabled the Sophist to thrive without any responsibility to meaning. On a more sinister note, Richard Kearney (2002) compares Khôra to evil in contrast to the good which is characterised by God, while Agnes Horvath (2010) equates the Khôra with the 'nulla'. The nulla was, for the Greeks, a dangerous symbol of both nothing and infinity which is indicative of its utter disregard for meaning and truth. Critiques of, and warnings

against, the Khôra are numerous, with Friedrich Nietzsche adding to the existential panic by stating in *Beyond Good and Evil* that “if you stare long and into the abyss, the abyss also stares into you” (2001 [1886]).

Jacques Derrida returned back to the initial discussion of this space, abyss or *Khôra* when he reconsidered the argument in Plato’s *Timaeus* in *On the Name* (1995). In this piece of work Derrida argued that the *Khôra* was never meant to exist in itself, it “does not have the characteristics of an existent, by which we mean an existent that would be receivable in the ontologic, that is, those of an intelligible or sensible existent. There is *Khôra*, but the *Khôra* does not exist.” (1995: 97). The *Khôra*, to reiterate, provides a state for all things which come to be; it allows the earth to form and become beings. Within this, it is undeniable that bastardized, flattened out or fluid meaning can form and multiply because the *Khôra* allows things to come into being indiscriminately. However, the *Khôra* or the abyss itself has no intention, either good or evil. It is the nothingness that allows something to come into social consciousness. While it is necessary then, to consider the negative implications of such a space, it is also necessary to consider the positive implication of that same force. If the *Khôra* is infinite and cannot be destroyed, then it can create solid meaning as well as fluid meaning and so it is imperative that humanity learn to access its positive potential.

When speaking of the abyss or of this nothingness, Heidegger is at pains to point out that he, by no means, suggests that nothingness is dangerous, a negation, or a nihilistic lack of meaning. Nothingness for Heidegger is the state where anything is possible and nothing is definite. In these terms, nothingness is very much like the *Khôra* which Plato theorizes but viewed from a different perspective. In contrast to Plato, Heidegger focuses on the potential within the nothingness. In order to access the potential within the abyss, Heidegger states that *Dasein* must feel something called *angst*. *Angst* in Heideggerian terms is a general state of unease with the reality of

nothingness. It is not a fear of anything specific, but rather a mood minus the object of fear. Angst and nothingness are dialectical in their being, in so far as one constitutes the other and vice versa. In a state of angst the world is removed to being something strange and unfamiliar. Heidegger calls this strangeness or angst towards the world as ‘uncanny’ or *unheimlich*. Earlier, this term was introduced as a type of alienation in a discussion on the formation of the postcolonial self. The argument was made that the postcolonial subject in particular has the potential to experience this phenomenon and importantly – recognise it, as they are betwixt and between worlds – they are in a liminal position subjectively. In feeling removed from the world, things and phenomena reveal themselves to *unheimlich* Dasein as those things which are indefinite, full of possibility and have the potential to be directed towards existence. They avoid the ‘taken for grantedness of the they-world and have much more opportunity to create meaning within structure – which is what society in the grips of a permanent liminality lacks. Encountering nothingness is angst, angst is *unheimlich* and *unheimlich* is the basis for the subject working themselves out of liminality. It is not enough to feel *unheimlich* however – this thesis maintains that the subject must acknowledge the surplus of meaning and move reflexively towards the potential within the abyss.

While Heidegger takes the concept of the abyss in a more productive direction then, he does not account for the negative potential of the abyss in order to be able to work with it. He does not connect the abyss to the they-world which is, admittedly, bizarre – simply because if the nothingness helps all things come into being, then it stands to reason that it must also have given ‘beingness’ to the they-world and the subjects therein. The result of this is that when Heidegger speaks of inauthentic Dasein as the being which is engulfed in the they-world, he fails to really explain why the subject has suffered this fallenness and how it actively affects them in society. In summary, there are four ways in which theorists fail to fully utilise the

concept of the abyss: The first is by dismissing it as a veritable pit of meaninglessness; the second by ignoring its existence – the attitude nourished within permanent liminality; the third is indulging a fear of it and the overwhelming amount of negative possibility inherent within it while the final is the opposite – focusing entirely on positive potential. None of these approaches to the Khôra/Abyss/Nothing actually face the abyss in order to adequately understand it. The purpose of this section in the chapter is to offer an explanation of how the abyss can offer a potential resolution to the perceived problems within permanent liminality. For this thesis, the abyss is that which has been untranscribed or unnamed, it is the not yet known. It is the world which has not been worlded, or brought into the open. It is essentially neither positive nor negative in itself – its efficacy rests on the subjects whom acknowledge it, face it and access its potential.

At one point, in order for modernity to dwell within a space of liminality, the worrisome elements of society must have taken root in the abyss. Because the abyss is the root of all becoming, all social order is essentially created from its potential nothingness. This is, of course, one of the dangers of an untranscribable space. However, the problems of modernity have intensified, not because of the potential of the abyss, but from a hyper-rationalisation of the structure of society which is built on a liquid foundation. Rationalisation came from the abyss but its perpetuation is the result of an unchanging social structure within a liminal situation. This type of foundation for any structure (social or otherwise) will invariably lead to instability and flux, which is an aspect of western society as already outlined. The abyss is not a feature of society in so far as it has no character, it does not exist in the way a being exists; it is not active but it is rather a reservoir of potential which always *is*. In this way then, the abyss is the only thing which can be used for attempts at reaggregation, and more importantly – must be used for that end. Society simply cannot change – a subject or society cannot move through a liminal space, become reaggregated and take on a different structural form – without

utilising the space of the abyss. If the abyss was not a part of reality, it would not be possible to generate anything ‘new’ because everything ‘new’ derives from it. This is, of course, not meant to suggest that the abyss *creates* anything. The abyss facilitates the world worlding or coming into social consciousness. The problem with modernity is that, as Frederick Jameson might put it, social reality is a ‘pastiche’ – a mix of the already worlded dressed up as something novel. It performs well and is visible to all interdependent subjects in its ‘newness’, but offers nothing beyond the stale ideologies of old (neo-Marxism for example). In a world where the pastiche is paramount, where and how do we search for and restore authentic meaning?

Authentic Meaning and Responsibility

First of all, it must be stated here that the they-world or modernity within the throes of permanent liminality is not meaningless. As clarified in Chapter Two with the help of Elias’ concept of the court society, it became clear that modernity certainly has meaning for the subjects who live in it. In fact, these subjects are highly reflexive in how they interact in their social groups and act according to a rationalised and structured system of understanding relating to visibility and interdependence. The distinction is within the type of meaning that can be found in permanent liminality and the type of meaning that poetry restores. For the sake of clarity these types of meaning will be called authentic and inauthentic meaning. The reason for using these words in specific lies in their particular appropriateness for the argument at hand. The word ‘authentic’ has its roots in the Latin word *authentēs* which means ‘one acting on one’s own authority,’ from *autos* ‘self’ and *hentes* ‘doer, being,’ (Onions, 2011). Authentic meaning then, is the meaning which the subject accesses according to their own sense of reality. The subject is essentially *unheimlich* and as a result completely relies on a performance of identities for their orientation in the world. Their experience is based on and surrounds

these performances and as they reflect only on how accurate these performances are, they negotiate themselves further and further into an existence nurtured by inauthentic meaning.

Inauthentic meaning is epitomized by a lack of experiential humanistic responsibility. Subjects in a court society, within the modern western world characterised by permanent liminality, are failing to retain responsibility for themselves, their experiences or their social worlds. Max Weber spoke of an ethic of responsibility in *Politics as Vocation* (1995) which referred to the policy of making decisions as a politician based on weighing up the social benefits of a particular action compared to the costs. Within this conception of responsibility the politician certainly acts on their own authority but also considers the effect of specific actions on the community. This thesis maintains that responsibility should go further than politics or ‘existential responsibility’ (Sartre, 1942) – it should involve the subject accepting responsibility for one’s authority, towards the society of which they are a part, and the world in which they live. They must answer for their choices in these three ways, as a failure to do so will lead to a distancing of the subject from these elements of social reality and they will suffer alienation as a result. For example, without taking responsibility for one’s children, a subject will suffer a distanced relationship with them. Similarly, without taking responsibility for one’s country, control is taken out of one’s hands and the country becomes something reified and distanced from one’s scope of influence. This concept becomes even clearer when it is revealed that responsibility originates from the Latin *respondere*, ‘to respond’. Within this definition there is a distinct sense of obligation to the other – in this case the other is the society they are a part of, the world they live in and themselves as actors. The subject is required to answer for themselves – they act on their own authority but must be accountable for their actions. Rather than this level of responsibility being an inconvenience, it gives the human subject the sense

of connection with the world around them that it needs in order to give meaning to their lives.

This idea is reminiscent of the Socratic Paradox and the definition between knowledge and ignorance. Human beings should always vie for knowledge, and in this case responsibility is akin to knowledge. This knowledge brings them into tune with themselves, their existence and their world – although it might involve sacrifice and effort it is essential to ‘the good life’. The argument being made here is that subjects, if they are to avoid alienation and a state of *unheimlich*, need to be and feel responsible for themselves and the world around them – it creates a purpose for which to live. It is difficult for the modern subject to be responsible for their own reality however, because human beings have become more complacent as permanent liminality has become more entrenched. On an individual level subjects constantly defer their identity to the will of the group within the court society. They perform for themselves and others, and in so doing accept the identity given to them or the mask which they don, as their subjective truth. Advertisements in the media depict the ideal subjective reality and most subjects absorb the offered masks, negotiate them as part of their being and reflexively maintain their identity as a result, all the while believing that it is always and only truthful if visible. In this way the subject refuses responsibility for themselves and thus reject authentic meaning.

Subjective Rationalisation

In 1904 Max Weber wrote one of his most famous books comprised of a series of essays entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Gerth and Mills, 1998). In this text Weber outlined what he felt were the foundational values which led to the spirit of Capitalism which is still dominant today. He traced this spirit to an ethic of asceticism within Calvinistic protestant life that was essentially rationalistic. For Weber, this

rationality changed as people lost sight of their initial goal – proof of salvation – and began to focus on the end result of monetary accumulation. The solid foundation was abandoned in favour of a more formalistic rationality which reified the wealth, and the structure of amassing it, above all else. This gave birth to a more formalised type of rationality which privileged calculability, efficiency, predictability, and control over uncertainties rather than traditional societal structures which focused on social solidarity and common understanding. It was no longer necessary to have meaningful common understanding as long as one was engaging in acceptable forms of rationalistic endeavour with an end goal of economic success. This spirit invaded business, society, health, education and general social interaction. Rationalisation in modern society has become the common mode of interaction. The belief is that as long as the rationalised structure is in place society should be relatively harmonious. For example, when the American government declared that there were weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and for that reason invasion was necessary, the American people accepted the rationale with the majority supporting the war. Six years later when overwhelming proof was released that there were actually no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, the American people were irate, but in general quite complacent (Albright and Hibbs, 1991). When the structural rationality of an action still remains, it would appear that in modern society the meaning behind the action is *meaningless*. This shows the phenomenal level of trust in the structure and authority of rationality as a system upon which meaning, understanding and interaction is based. The benefit of the court society is in its highly rationalised system based on visibility. It is for this reason that it fits so well into the social landscape of modernity. Subjects experience Turner's ideological *communitas* (1967) that is the cultivation of a perpetual and ossified liminality with constant performance akin to the court rationale.

Capitalism thrives in modern society for this reason, it is, as Weber pointed out, fundamentally rationalised – it is structure put in place which is

easy to understand and follow, but it also makes responsibility less necessary. Rationality has pervaded all levels of society to the extent that subjects abdicate their accountability to the system and in doing so render themselves more distanced from the world around them. The irony of this phenomenon is that formal rationality is essentially irrational and it leads to inauthenticity in the subject as they disregard the need for accountability in their lives. In the cases outlined above, as long as the social system allows for people to take advantage of it then it is fine to do so – this is not conducive to a healthy attitude towards social reality and responsibility in existence. This type of rationality is also observable in the Gnostic impulse described in Chapter Three. They treat the land itself as an instrument in the construction of this world and the carrying out of their ideology to its rationalistic ends. The land is simply a means to an end and is certainly not considered an entity on an equal par with the civilised force of western (and in many cases Judaeo-Christian) humanity. For this reason human beings become more alienated in a hyper-rationalised social structure founded on fluid meaning structures.

Land, Community and Responsibility

As described in Chapter Two, the important feature of the postcolonial condition is the experiential element. ‘Colonial’, as a word, was etymologically traced to the active duty of tending to and the husbandry of land. This was revealed as an inherently dynamic process connected to experience and existence. Eventually postcolonialism was reduced to a fixed state which did not equate with the origin of the term. The argument was finally made in this study that the actual meaning of the term relates to the experiential aspect of colonialism which remains a part of postcolonial societies and cannot be ignored. The change of meaning ascribed to the term colonial is a telling additional feature of colonialism; it suggests that the colonial system is one whereby responsibility for land is taken out of the hands of the people who originally tended to it. ‘Land’ in this thesis means

more than a simple reference to the earth or soil which we walk upon; it refers to the world in all its active, environmental reality. Land is a symbol for the soil, the plants, the animals, the air, the water and human beings; all interacting, all interconnected. To tend to land involves a high level of concern for and duty towards the land which is worked. This shows a definitive connection between poetry and the land. Both bring the human being into a state of existence with the world around them. They move into the experiential space of their experience when living authentically in conjunction with cultivating the land or poetry in order to create authentic meaning, or home. Poetry then can restore a sense of responsibility in the subject for their natural environment. The poet, but also the reader, move away from formal rationality in reconnecting with the land and the security it necessarily implies.

This level of responsibility towards land in general pervaded the native American societies to the extent that communities felt an obligation to all elements of the natural world that enabled them to survive and progress. This theme is particularly revealed through the poetry of Joy Harjo as many of her poems incorporate images of the land and the natural environment. Her aim in drawing the earth into her poetry to such a degree is to show how the land in general held a central role in the traditions and group identities of many native American tribes. This connection to and concern for the land was considered a privilege and was the foundational culture upon which many of these tribes interacted and built their societies. Rex Lee Jim speaks of the connection between the corn, which is a symbol of the land and the continuation of his people while Joy Harjo refers to the natural world in the most metaphoric language full of imagery designed to illustrate how all elements of the earth interact.

Nostalgia for a connection between the land and the people is also apparent in the poetry of Kavanagh and Boland, which takes the form of a

recognition of something lost in many cases. This translates, through the poetry, to an intense feeling that something is missing in modernity and it is connected to the land or what the land represents – a sense of security and home. Beyond this is an implicit respect for and responsibility towards the earth which each of these poets emphasise in their own way. The problem is that, first of all, this responsibility towards the earth or the land is not guaranteed in modernity. In fact, the land is at every turn subordinated to the will of the economy and the force of international trade. Rationality is individualistic while at the same time the individual relies on subjective interdependence; an interdependent network of individualistic rationalities which is perpetuated in modernity by the structure of free trade and market driven economies.

As a result of this individualistic outlook, communities become more distanced from one another. Groups of people rarely come together through authentic meaning structures and instead, interact on a superficial level of performance which is subject to change at any given time. This has the potential to throw the subject into confusion over their identity once more and at any moment. In addition, subjects fail to feel responsibility towards one another whether in smaller or larger units. With broken families on the rise across the Western world it is becoming clear that the stability of communities in general is coming into question (Newman and Grauerholz, 2002). This is a recent problem in native and Irish communities however but nonetheless a growing one. With the destruction of traditional societal structures in native American communities, tribes have found themselves in a position where they are encouraged to emulate the settler's ways of life. The burden of maintaining their traditional tribal culture was lifted and so was the responsibility they had to their formative social structures. This led the way to cultural fragmentation where postcolonial subjects did not need to feel responsible to their traditional heritage and were confused about what they should feel responsible to, if anything. This decline in the perceived need for

responsibility is connected to the state of *unheimlich* – the subject is distanced from themselves, one another and society through their own rejection of responsibility or by the effect of colonial force, and becomes alienated.

Meaning in Modernity

In a world where this rationalistic impulse is so strong, how can any subject work to restore alternative or more solid forms of meaning? What might this meaning look like? To answer this question it is necessary to return to the theme of land and how it connects with a sense of security and home. Within many languages today there is a connotational overlap between the word ‘land’ and the word ‘home’. Within the Irish language, the word ‘baile’ could refer to a village, a town or a home – it either represents a given area of land, on which people always live, or the home dwelling in which they live. Baile then, refers to the spatial area, the land where one or more people live – its meaning is interchangeable to some degree while always having a spatial element to it. In the Navajo language the word for ‘land or terrain’ is simply – *kéyah*, however *kéehwiit’ínígíí*, *bikáá* means ‘the land on which we live’. The language gets more specific when the word *kéyahgóó* is considered which means ‘directing oneself toward homeland’ (Wall and Morgan, 1994). The letters that all of these words begin with ‘*ké*’ themselves form a word – foot. The foot is the part of the human body which is most in contact with the earth or land. This signifies an underlying implication within the Navajo language, and by association the Navajo way of life – that the human being is inherently connected to the land and the land is thus a form of home. Every word which follows and uses *ké* as a root word relates to something which provides protection, security, home or life in some way – for example *kéedahat’i* means ‘homestead’ while *kéedahwiit’i* means ‘we live’. Even within the English language this connection exists – Gothic texts suggest to scholars of etymology that the word ‘land’ was originally meant as ‘that area of earth which is owned by an individual or is the home of a nation’ (Onions, 2012).

The English usage of the term implied ownership while the Navajo and the Irish suggested relations between them but the important element of all of these etymological identifications is the fact that within each one there is an unavoidable connection between the land and the home. While this might be true it is still worth noting that the Navajo understanding of the term denotes more respect to the interconnectedness of home, land and human being while the modern English usage of the term signifies dominance and control.

As discussed in previous chapters, the postcolonial condition is one of *unheimlich*; reflexive (in its most effective form) homelessness or a situation where the subject is aware of their state of *unheimlich* and is trying to negotiate meaning within their given reality to restore solid forms of value systems. If this is so, then as the above section argues, the question of land is essential to the problem of *unheimlich*. As soon as human beings gave up their nomadic ways for the more sedentary life of farming, they connected land with home – a place of constancy and security, somewhere around which to build a social and individual identity (Bell-Fialkoff, 2000). Where they settled was important, as this represented the place that they would live and be responsible for in terms of crop production and animal herding for the duration of their lives. Space and home would come together in this way for the first time, and would then be ripped apart with the force of imperial and colonial might, time and again, throughout the centuries that would follow. Understandably then, the postcolonial subject's relationship to the land is a difficult one, fraught with power struggles and injustice. Responsibility for the land was taken from them and with that a secure concept of home – in Ireland this took the form of plantation and was crystallised with the Penal Laws of the 1600's, and in the United States it took the form of Removal Acts. Interestingly then, all the poets which have been considered in this study incorporate land as a central theme in their work which goes to highlight that they themselves are aware of this issue of homelessness in modern society. Is being aware of something enough however? If one is

attempting to restore meaning of any kind, it is imperative that one offers something meaningful as a starting point. Kavanagh, Boland, Jim and Harjo all point to one thing in common – security in the natural world, the land, the home. This meaning is generated through an awareness of the interconnectedness of these elements of reality and a responsibility towards them – and with this comes subjective authenticity. The meaning associated with the land is restored through poetry.

As The Poets Meet The Abyss

Chapter Three illustrated how the postcolonial subject deals with a state of *unheimlich*. The argument showed that the postcolonial self has great potential to perceive that they are *unheimlich* and work with the state in order to negotiate alternative meaning structures in their lives and the world around them. It was also claimed that the postcolonial subjects discussed in this thesis feel the weight of their experiences of postcoloniality keenly. They were, as described earlier, removed from their previous structures of meaning without anything of substance taking their place. They suffered the death of, or flattening out of, the meaning structures surrounding their languages, cultures, traditions and general systems of understanding. Earlier in this chapter some of those cultures were shown to have a particular view of the world that incorporated an element of holistic understanding. There was a concerted effort in many of the poems written by these poets to consider the place of the natural environment in an overly rationalised modernity. At the heart of this contention was the sense of responsibility directed towards the animal, plant and importantly; the land. The land was revealed as particularly significant in that it had and has so much of an association with the space, physically and figuratively, of the home. When, from the very beginning of this thesis, it was argued that the essential condition of modernity was a sense of homelessness it quickly became apparent that the place the land held in people's lives was more than an arbitrary connection. From the Navajo perspective, the land is the mother of all creation – without the land, human

existence is impossible. This reality becomes problematized in modernity when the importance of the land, and by extension the entire natural universe, takes a back seat and in its place sits the rationalised structure of modern society in all its peculiar irrationality. When a subject has acknowledged their *unheimlich* condition they are in a better position to be able to negotiate their sense of reality in order to be able to work themselves out of it to some extent – this project argues that specific postcolonial poets have done just this. When they confront their own homelessness in modernity they recognise their discomfort with it at the same time. Rather than taking to reductive forms of critique (Boland, 2013; Felski, 2011) which simply serve to perpetuate the *unheimlich* condition, they attempt to restore meaning structures.

These poets have one particular thing in common – their sense of responsibility. Whether this be to themselves as authentic subjects, the community around them or the natural environment, they all stress the importance of concern for and respect towards existence and all the elements of reality that create and maintain existence. This sense of responsibility moves them to write poetry that deals with meaning in modernity and methods of restoring it to a more solid construction that incorporates a feeling of home at the centre. It is for this reason that these poets do not feel afraid of the abyss; rather they are aware of it and engage in it consciously in order to negotiate alternative meaning structures that promote authenticity. They move towards the abyss drawing on its potential to restore meaning and given that have previously lost the meaning attached to their traditional cultures, they have less to lose. Even if they were aware of the negative potential of the abyss of meaning (and in many cases they certainly are), their sense of responsibility to themselves as authentic subjects would no doubt override any sense of misgiving. They themselves use the poem as a ritualistic form to guide themselves through liminality to a place where they are confronted with the abyss, from which they eventually generate authentic meaning and then move past into a re-aggregated phase. Wilhelm Dilthey argued that a social

act can only be a true social act if it has a tripartite system of experience, expression and understanding, moving from one through to the second and then on to the third. The subject must experience and express if they are to understand the social world. Thus *how* human beings think about, approach and act towards their world is essential in how social acts and society is created. Therefore responsibility or a lack of responsibility towards the land, the world humans live in, is imperative to understanding why in the modern world so many subjects are suffering under the weight of alienation and/or *unheimlich*.

Restoring Meaning

As demonstrated in Chapter Four, poetry has a unique ability to convey meaning. By using particular language in a consciously economical way the poet can direct themselves towards the future, which as Dilthey argues, is an essential aspect of existence. The postcolonial poet uses a particular bank of knowledge in order to be able to write the poem in a meaningful way. Kavanagh, Boland, Jim and Harjo use their experiences of homelessness in modernity and the beauty in the natural world that is connected to us but which we give little attention, to write their poetry and direct themselves towards a restoration of meaning. What does this mean for the reader however? And what are they offering besides a reconnection with the world? First of all, these poets engage in experience in a way that is more reminiscent of the German word *erlebnis*. This is the type of experience where authentic Dasein searches for authentic meaning and negotiates and works out reality in a way that encompasses responsibility and its home restoring principle. With this attitude towards reality they employ a method of ‘abstract linguistic cognisance’ which involves a method of approaching language, thought and experience in a way that encourages *erlebnis* in those who read the poetry. In order to move on further with this concept it is

important to understand what its conflicting force – ‘rationalistic linguistic cognisance’ – might be.

Rationalistic linguistic cognisance is a type of language which nurtures in the subject the kind of thinking patterns which promote the kind of existence which subjects in the court society, or they-world would engage in. It underlines the behaviour exemplified in the section on ‘Subjective Rationalisation’ and is rooted in the language which surrounds and pervades permanent liminality. It is perfectly epitomised by social media outlets like ‘Twitter’, ‘Facebook’ or even the mobile phone which all promote the use of text-speak or ‘txtspk’ but is also found in academic discourses for example – human capital, aesthetic capital and social capital. These terms reduce the subject to certain variables that they are then defined by. Text-speak however, is a form of language that omits all language that it deemed unnecessary to the conversation. In this way verbs, vowels and all forms of descriptive language are sacrificed for the efficiency of contracted forms of language, and intention is made so explicit that meaning is actually lost. Such a contraction of language creates and reinforces distances referred to at the beginning of this chapter. Rather than speaking to friends face to face, now it is not even necessary to hear their voices to remain friends – the physical space between people thus expands, and this becomes a normal part of modern life. The simultaneous contraction and expansion of space in modernity causes even more confusion about solid structures of reality and lead to further *unheimlich* and alienation. The language we use has become hyper-rationalised and, if Heidegger (1977) was right when he argued that “language alone brings beings as beings into the open for the first time”, then what kind of being does this form of language create? The kind of being created by this overly rationalised system of language is the overly rationalised subject that shirks authenticity and responsibility. With language forms like this becoming more and more common, what future can we hope for? The goal must be to change how people think and, again, if Heidegger

was correct in his faith in language, then this responsibility falls at its feet. Language is the form through which we reflect on the forces which move us and so is decisive for the subject we become and the existence we experience.

Joy Harjo's style of abstract linguistic cognisance is formed when she uses non-explicit modes of language in the form of metaphor and allegory to make her argument about reality and existence. By using more abstract forms of language Harjo invites the potential of the abyss into her poems. She encourages an open space in her poetry that the reader can use to formulate abstract thought patterns of their own. Abstract linguistic cognisance encourages the reader to think in ways that are contrary to explicit rationalistic cognisance – the subject, by nature of the language used, is persuaded to think in a more authentic manner i.e. one removed from the hyper-rationalisation of permanent liminality and more connected to their particular bank of experiential understanding. They can base their thoughts on their own authority rather than acting at the behest of subjects with whom they are in an interdependent situation, within the court society. Metaphors propounding the connection of human beings to the land or animals suggest a way of thinking of the world that is more abstract, but more authentic as it incorporates modes and recognitions of responsibility in existence. Metaphors encourage the reader into a particular state of mind where they are removed from the rationalistic cognisance and are open to the potential of the abyss which is inherent in language, that is, it makes connections but is not explicit. The subject connects the abstract meaning from the metaphors or allegory and uses past experiences to interpret them – this relies solely on the subject's awareness and taps into their sense of *unheimlich*. Importantly, they can only access the abyss if they are aware of their *unheimlich*; otherwise they simply reinforce the rationalisation of the they-world. When they feel the problems associated with that condition feelings of connectedness are awakened and they start to truly experience *erlebnis*. They begin to make sense of this new experience and generate meaning from it – when the implied meaning at the

heart of the poem is interconnection, responsibility or authority the subject starts to reinterpret those themes in meaningful ways and apply them to their own understanding of reality. This experience reveals symbolic patterns of reality which the subject uses to interpret the world around them. In this way they can themselves become authentic and move away from the inauthenticity associated with meaning in the court society. As Fanon, Bhabha, Bakhtin, Dilthey, Szakolczai and Heidegger argue, language is essential in any situation where the subject conceives of the world in a different way in order to generate authentic meaning.

Conclusion

If the subject within modern society wants to work themselves out of a static and rationalistic mode of thought, language must be utilised to facilitate this change. Language is paramount to the way we conceive of the world and is the mode by which we name beings and bring them into social consciousness. Language is the method by which we restore meaning from the space of the abyss. In a world where our linguistic structures are becoming rationalised and condensed to the utmost degree, generating authentic meaning is an even more difficult task. By using abstract forms of imagery which encourages a particular type of cognisance in the subject, poets who are attempting to work themselves out of their state of *unheimlich* turn to the potential the abyss has to offer. They see it as a space in which subjects can be prompted to take more responsibility for their land, their existence (*erlebnis*), their world and their home. Thus they can experience reality in less overly structured, hyper-rationalised forms. The abyss can be something more than an unknowable looming presence of negative potential – it can be harnessed, *must* be harnessed if solid meaning structures are ever to be woven into social life again. This is the main issue at the heart of this chapter. The poem becomes the site wherein the poet and the reader can

reconceive of the meaning structures at the heart of society and recreate them through the use of *sacra* and acknowledging a surplus of meaning. Fundamentally however, they must approach the abyss if they are to restore meaning and responsibility to their social action and thus social action more generally. This is the way to restored meaning. The ritual process of writing poetry is illustrated in Chapters Seven, Eight, Nine and Ten through a detailed examination of the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh, Eavan Boland, Rex Lee Jim and Joy Harjo. This journey through the difficult liminal space is illuminated through their poetry and shows the ways in which the poets do, and must, suffer as a result of their collisions with the inauthentic elements of modernity.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

Patrick Kavanagh and *Unheimlich* Postcolonial Experience

Introduction

Patrick Kavanagh's experience of *unheimlich* comes through in his poetry in a particularly vivid, forceful and image rich way. His interaction with the Dublin of his day was marred by disappointment, failure and disillusionment. For this reason, his poetry depicts a subject fighting with the dominant social order, both in an attempt to understand it and in an attempt to resolve what he saw as superficiality and pretention. Accordingly, the main focus of this chapter lies in this experiential struggle. It deals with how Kavanagh approached the social order and grappled with its apparent failures in order to be able to negotiate, according to the theoretical foundations of this thesis, a more meaningful and authentic system of understanding and thus action. To this end matters of experience, imagination, liminality and responsibility will be discussed in so far as they impact upon a journey towards the abyss of meaning and on to a restoration of meaning.

Patrick Kavanagh was born on the 21st October 1904 in Inniskeen, County Monaghan to parents Bridget Quinn and James Kavanagh. James Kavanagh was a cobbler by trade but was also a farmer, tilling the land and tending to animals on their nine acre family farm. It was expected that Patrick would work side by side with his father on the land when he came of age and at the same time become his father's apprentice cobbler. At the age of thirteen, the young Kavanagh left school and initially followed the path laid out for him. Life became harder for the Kavanaghs however, as shoe shops opened in nearby towns and shoes became cheaper to buy and were made of more disposable material. This, in turn, meant that the cobbler's trade was required less and less as time went by and the income they received from this profession decreased as a result. The Kavanaghs turned to the land at this point and spent time and money developing it in order to build up the income they could receive from it. Within a few years they expanded the farm to encompass twenty-five acres. For all intents and purposes the young Kavanagh was a particularly 'normal' rural farmer of his age – he was an

active member of the Inniskeen community and held the position of goalkeeper for the Inniskeen Gaelic football team (Quinn, 2005). What was less 'normal' for a young farmer of his time perhaps was the instinct that led Kavanagh to huddle himself up in the corner of an upstairs room, lit only by candlelight, and read and write poetry. As he mentions himself in his manuscripts, such was the busy farm life he lived and such was the demand on his time and energy that even as he wrote he could be sure that, at some point, his mother's voice would break him out of his poetic reverie with requests to feed this or that animal, put bedding down for another or lift something into or out of the house.

Certainly, this was a difficult start for someone who had intentions of writing and publishing poetry. Rather than reap the benefits of a University education and a generous benefactor, Kavanagh first had to challenge the status quo of what was expected of him, an elder son from a farming background, before he could dedicate himself to poetry even part-time. The expectations and responsibilities heaped upon him from family and community alike were extensive, but add to that his lack of education and it became apparent that developing his poetic skill would be no mean feat. To develop his chosen trade he studied poetry and ballads from humble sources like *Old Moore's Almanac* and *Ireland's Own* and with their help garnered an understanding of the basic poetic form. For the more formal aspect of the art of writing poetry he looked to school books and *Palgrave's Golden Treasury*. This focus on canonical English poetry convinced the young poet that his own language was not the language of great poetry – he felt that he needed to change his rural vernacular if he was to write great poetry (Quinn, 2005).

At a grass seed market in Dundalk in 1925 Kavanagh came across the weekly journal edited by George Russel, *AE – Irish Statesman*. With this publication he learned of the literary revival taking place in Dublin and he heard of Joyce, Yeats and Gertrude Stein. For the next six years Kavanagh

would educate himself from the pages of this literary publication which was a little closer to the poetry being written at the time than *Palgrave's* would have been (Quinn, 2005). He learned that his own experiences were, perhaps, worthy of poetic expression after all. In 1930, AE approved publication of one of Kavanagh's poems, *Ploughman*, which was published in an anthology of the year's best poems. *Ploughman* would be the poem that signalled his birth as a poet and thus gave him access to the Dublin literary circles of which he would have much to say throughout his long career. In 1931 Kavanagh made his famous sixty mile journey to Dublin on foot to meet AE who encouraged him in his poetic enterprise as he had many poets starting out. He gave him books of poetry to study and introduced him to other writers of the time both distinguished and undistinguished in their profession. Kavanagh was welcomed into the Dublin world of the literary revival as a peasant poet. Through Lady Gregory, Yeats and Synge the Irish peasant was romanticised and as a result when an actual peasant farmer came along who was also a poet, he was bound to interest those within the literary circles. Kavanagh initially found himself performing the part of the peasant poet in order to fit in with the perception of what the Irish poet should be. He played his part well to begin with and even dressed in the appropriate attire – worn old work clothes.

In 1936 Macmillan published Kavanagh's collection of poetry entitled *Ploughman and Other Poems*, an image of him developed, as a result of this collection, as the unique and quintessential rural poet. However, as Antoinette Quinn (2005) observes, his poetry lacked carnal method – it could, she suggests, have been written by someone holidaying in the country. There was a lack of experiential understanding because, around this time, he was writing the poetry almost as a part of that peasant performance and so it lacks the experiential quality that his later poetry is remarkable for. Kavanagh erases the actual interaction of the plough, the horse, the land and himself in favour of abstract symbolisms that refer to some metaphysical truth. What we are

left with is an overly symbolic poem which lacks any concrete referent and as a result fails to draw on the recipient's own experiential understanding and imagination in the way that his later work does.

With 'Inniskeen Road: July Evening' however, Kavanagh begins to write with some of the techniques and themes that he eventually becomes known for. This poem is the first intimation that Kavanagh is aware of the differences between the canon, the Dublin 'literati' as he would later call them and his own unique brand of poetry. From this point on he no longer feels the need to adopt a method of writing more common in Europe at the time – he is now confident enough to write according to his own understanding of what great poetry is and should be. The perfection of his art would take quite a few years to complete but the result would be poetry quite distinct from the esoteric meanderings of Yeats and the controversial modernism of Joyce. Wishing to leave farming behind and make a name for himself in the world of literature, he moved to London in 1937. However, he failed to secure any substantial literary work and returned to Ireland in 1939. He decided that, instead of returning to Monaghan, that he would live in Dublin and work as a freelance writer. This was a particularly difficult time for the young writer who spent most of his days looking for any kind of job that might advance his literary aspirations. In the evenings he would frequent The Palace bar on Pembroke Road in Dublin, which was where the Dublin 'literati' gathered to talk of literature, politics and romantic Ireland. He soon grew weary of the pretention and lack of action that was characteristic of many of the literati and his contempt for them would be immortalised in the poem 'The Paddiad'. Kavanagh would come to "view the The Palace as 'the dregs of the old literary revival', where 'fusty, safe and dim' writers were still preoccupied with producing a distinctively ethnic Irish long after political independence had been achieved" (Quinn, 2005).

In contrast to this romantic view of Ireland, Kavanagh along with Sean O’Faolain and Frank O’Connor were of the opinion that a more realistic approach to literature should be adopted. When O’Faolain took over the literary journal *The Bell* in 1940, it was a perfect opportunity for Kavanagh to voice his opinions, through poetry, of Ireland as he saw it. Romantic Ireland truly was dead and gone, but it was now with Yeats in the grave. Experience, what it meant and what it could mean was now the focus of Irish literature. Not without struggle did Kavanagh succeed at balancing the symbolic allusions of his earliest poetry like ‘Ploughman’ with the overly realist poetry of ‘Stony Grey Soil’. Eventually he produced a work which did just that – ‘The Great Hunger’. This long poem was Kavanagh’s most successful one that made a commentary on some of the socio-political issues within Ireland at the time. Rural Ireland was suffering from increased depopulation at the time due to low marriage rates. Fewer people were getting married because of the expense of making a match (dowry etc) coupled with the traditional Irish attitude which gave primacy to the land as an economic resource above all else – this meant that fathers kept control of their land until they physically could not work it anymore, at which stage their sons would inherit it but would be relatively old themselves and thus less likely to marry. This social problem, which Kavanagh was familiar with from his own experience of living in rural Ireland, was used as a vehicle to discuss widespread concerns over the intensification of materialism and disintegration of the influence of spirituality.

Following the publication of elegiac poems ‘On Raglan Road’ and ‘In Memory of My Mother’ from 1945 until 1955, Kavanagh concerned himself with writing satirical pieces both in poetic and journalistic form. Many poems from this era were notable for their undercurrents of anger, irritation and Kavanagh’s indignation with his place in (or out of) the Irish literary canon. In March 1955 he was diagnosed with lung cancer and although it was traumatic and required a long convalescence period, Kavanagh developed a

new love for life and a positive attitude to the world surrounding him. While ‘The Great Hunger’ in the style of a social commentary, dealt with the conflict between sexuality and agriculture on the one hand and materialism and spirituality on the other and how these two conflicts inter-relate, his later poems dealt with poetry itself and what it can accomplish. Throughout his life his disdain for pretence and affectation is significant and brought to life through his analysis of the Dublin literati. He himself is almost always the outcast, the anti-hero and in this way, he avoids being dragged into “the pools of blackest porter” alongside the anguished beasts of the ‘Jungle’. Patrick Kavanagh’s personal and professional journey took him through the experience of the peasant farmer illustrated in ‘Ploughman’ to a more socio-aware type of poetic programme exemplified in ‘The Great Hunger’ or ‘Lough Derg’. His later work represented a move away from the ‘twee-Irish’ of the Nationalist agenda and towards a poetry wherein he focused on experience, imagination and the world around him.

The following chapter argues that poetry can be a useful arena in which to offer a sociological commentary on reality. Through a close analysis of a selection of poetry from Kavanagh’s extensive collection built up over a fifty year career, themes explored in chapter two, three, four and five come to light as key concepts within Kavanagh’s poetry and go to confirm him as a poet who has acknowledged his post-colonial position and has stared into the abyss in order to attempt to reclaim or restore authentic meaning. In his treatment of the Dublin literati, Kavanagh brings Elias’ court society and the hyper-rationalised performative element within it to life alongside an implicit, and sometimes explicit, description of liminality. Through his poetry, Kavanagh offers himself as a poet intent on using the potential within the abyss to restore solid concepts of meaning in order to develop more authentic strains of action and interaction in modern society. Through his astute analysis of the Ireland he saw taking shape in the forties, fifties and sixties he

sees the decline and liquefaction of meaning structures and attempt to overcome them through poetry.

Dublin's Literati: Inauthentic Dasein and Court Society in the Irish Free State

As described in chapter six, the Irish people had a difficult relationship to the land on which they worked. The country was primarily agricultural until the mid-20th century. With the penal laws, Irish people were forced to work on and pay rent for the land they once owned. They were reduced to workers on the land that they previously had full responsibility for. When this responsibility was taken away from them, they were left with a feeling of *unheimlich* as illustrated in the previous chapter. The Irish Free State was formalised in 1922, along with this came a wave of Nationalist fervour which translated into the world of literature. The nostalgia for a traditional Ireland that was somehow lost pervaded discourse within the arts circles, and this paved the way for a sentimentalist type of literature lamenting the good old country and the days of fairies, poteen and the happy authentic peasant. Kavanagh, having grown up in this 'traditional' country world, realised the problems with harking back to a point in history and proclaiming its authenticity, especially when the people doing that proclaiming are themselves unfamiliar with this ideal world experientially. He understood the beauty in and potential of the land to provide cultural foundation, but felt that romanticising it in a sensational way simply served to reinforce the logic of the court society – it was essentially about performance rather than a search for meaning in experience.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger differentiates between the authentic and the inauthentic self or Dasein accurately describes an *unheimlich* subject unaware of their own state of existence. The authentic self is the self who is aware of their choices or the possibilities inherent in the world which is, as Heidegger states, always there for them, and acts according to their own wishes.

Inauthentic Dasein however, is that self which accepts the world already there for them and fails to recognise (wilfully or no) the possibilities inherent, Heidegger terms this world that Dasein falls into and does not question the ‘they-world’. In ‘Jungle’, a poem where Kavanagh very obviously criticises the Dublin literary circles, the theme of inauthentic Dasein comes through very clearly. People whom Kavanagh meets in Dublin are part of what he calls the ‘literati’. They are portrayed as players within the court society who congregate in The Palace bar on Pembroke Road in Dublin – the bar is described as a jungle and the people as beastly animals. They are so immersed in the performance that the court society requires that they fail to take accountability for their own authenticity. As previously discussed in Chapter Five, this nourishing of the inauthentic meaning and rationalisation associated with the court society leads to a situation where the subject is *unheimlich* but unaware of their condition and so cannot work themselves out of it by negotiating a reality based on more authentic meaning. The lions of Frustration, referring to the literati frequenting the pub, are described as fed but not satiated –

The anguished beasts have had their dinner

And found there was something inside

Gnawing away unsatisfied.

The beasts in this stanza are inauthentic Dasein and “have had their dinner” i.e. they have conversations about poetry, art and Ireland but still something is notably absent as Kavanagh argues – they fail to derive any real meaning from the conversations save that it reinforces their image as knowledgeable literati. He describes them (inauthentic and *unheimlich* Dasein) as beasts, natives, barbarians who screech as they dive into the River Liffey. Screeching animals are usually considered the wildest of animals where, in many cases there is an air of the supernatural about them – for example the aye-aye (or little devil), the coyote or in Irish Mythology the Banshee screeches to warn

of a coming death. In concerning themselves with the supra-natural, the literati themselves become beast like, they lose their human connection. The supernatural cannot exist without the they-world and the belief in it and various myths gain power by people simply accepting it without question – it is taken for granted tradition; it is convention. This is the rationality of modernity and the site in which Kavanagh experiences the tragedy of his own *unheimlich* and postcolonial condition. The literati use “Convention”, or rationality, to cover their nakedness and in this case nudity is used to reference their ignorance and the fact that they have no authentic self behind the convention – they are Dasein, but they are inauthentic, they fail to engage in *erlebnis* whereby they might search for authentic meaning. The word convention here is capitalised suggesting that convention has been personified, given a character that the literati can adhere to.

Heidegger makes a distinction between the experiential element of beings and the categorical element of things. Here, convention which is typically a thing has been mistaken for experience and so the literati, while thinking that they are experiencing life, are actually being pushed into a more inauthentic existence where they fail to make the most out of experience. This is of course, *erfahrung* and not the *erlebnis* necessary if one want to restore meaning. Convention is already there for them and as a mistaken form of existence they sink further and further into inauthentic Dasein. ‘Reason’, as opposed to rationality, is also capitalised and in this way Kavanagh offers it to the reader as the force which “lit up the road” and shows the tail-stumps of the beasts as they try to run away. Reason is what illuminates the inauthenticity of convention and the they-world. Here, reason performs the same role angst does in Heidegger’s understanding of the role of the poet. Reason, like angst, is the mood Heidegger refers to in *Being and Time*; it is an attitude, a reflexive awareness that compels authentic Dasein to see the possibilities within the world. This state of mind cannot come to pass when Dasein is wholly immersed in the they-world; instead a different type of state-

of-mind comes to pass, one less conducive to reflexive awareness. A state of mind is part of Dasein in that it allows Dasein to exist in the world; to interact. As Heidegger (2008) argues –

A state-of-mind not only discloses Dasein in its thrownness and its submission to that world which is already disclosed with its own being it is itself the existential kind of being in which Dasein constantly surrenders itself to the ‘world’ and lets the ‘world’ matter to it in such a way that somehow Dasein evades its very self.

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Reason is a useful state of mind and one which compels the poet, in this case Kavanagh, to reject convention and the daily food offered in the Palace and to search for something else. Reason is attitude which brings the subject to an awareness of their *unheimlich* – it shows the narrator the tail stumps on the beast’s behinds and in this way illuminates the inauthentic for the reader. At the end of the poem, the word ‘frustration’ is capitalised as the “holy well” where the beasts drink from. Frustration is contrasted with Heidegger’s angst in that frustration is derived from a feeling of upset that you have no ability to change. The beasts lack an ability to change anything simply because they do not know what they need to change because they are so deeply ensconced in the ‘they-world’ of conventionality, their state-of-mind has not changed and they have not become aware of their homelessness. Kavanagh makes these abstract connections in order to subvert the common conception of the Irish Literary tradition and so invites the abyss into his poetry. Through abstract linguistic cognisance the reader forms connections which are removed from the hyper-rationality of the they-world and comes to an experiential awareness of their own reality and the potential within the abyss.

In *The Civilizing Process* (2000 [1978]) Norbert Elias notes that “every individual belongs to a ‘clique’, a social circle which supports him when necessary; but the groupings change. He enters alliances, if possible with

people ranking high at court.” (2000 [1978]: 398) In ‘Paddiad’, a poem written during Kavanagh’s period of particular contempt for his Dublin peers, Elias’ court society is painted in vibrant colour. The sub-heading for the poem is ‘The Devil as a Patron of Irish Letters’ suggesting that there is sickness at the heart of Irish literature, and all the way from the top – the patrons as the Irish government. Again the poem is set in “the corner of a Dublin pub” but the implicit understanding is that the pub is The Palace which is satirised in ‘Jungle’. The actors in the poem are different varieties of ‘Paddies’ – “Paddy Whiskey, Rum and Gin” – all capitalised, all humanised. “Chestertonian Paddy Frog” croaks nightly, signifying a character used to the sound of his own voice. This particular ‘Paddy’ represents the poet G.K. Chesterton – a poet who converted to Catholicism and whose writing was famous for displaying themes of a Christian undertone. This character compares nicely with the main antagonist of the poem – the Devil, mediocrity. In the last two lines of the first stanza Kavanagh purports that “Every man completely blind to the truth about his mind”, the ‘Paddies’ are all happy to follow the ‘Convention’ of the jungle and avoid any reflexive thought. They are happy to follow the rationalised structure in place in the they-world. Every Paddy’s “eye is glazed”, suggesting that they are almost somnambulant in their interaction within the literary social scene; their discussions about poetry and art are passive and lacking in authentic meaning.

The devil is given the air of a monk, quiet at prayer – but his every word is taken as truth and he usually utters nothing but praise, dangerous and sycophantic praise. The paddies cannot develop or change as a result and become authentic Dasein because they are, first of all not reflexive enough or engaging in responsible action outside the confines of the court society themselves to notice the need to for change, and second of all; when issues of authenticity are dismissed by those who surround them they are even less likely to be aware of them and instigate change. Therefore they are more likely to remain in the they-world which means that they exist, not on their

own terms, but on the terms of a reality already set out for them. This is exacerbated by increasing interdependence where specific roles are given so much importance that each subject strives to take on the roles which are most revered and as a result, subjects become inauthentic Dasein because they are moving further and further away from any individual agency.

Kavanagh's treatment of the Devil is interesting in that he argues that the Devil is not some "horned and hoofed" nasty creature, rather this is a clever rouse to allow the devil to go about his business unnoticed. In actual fact, the Devil is none other than the – again capitalised – state of 'Mediocrity'. Mediocrity is propounded by the rationalistic system at work in modernity and characterised by writers like Chesterton who "write many Catholic novels, none of which mention devils". The Devil is a state of being inauthentic Dasein; mediocrity is a mood which allows Dasein to dwell in the they-world rather than an angst which allows them to restructure reality according to their own working out of meaning structures. The Devil is the opposite of a master of ceremonies which would lead the subject through liminality and on to reaggregation. The master of ceremonies is the subject who still has a grasp of the structure of society while not being involved in the ritual as a participant per say and so directs the initiates on to a re-negotiated version of society. The devil then is the personification of this lack of direction which upholds the status quo – a type of trickster figure. He masquerades as a master of ceremonies but in actual fact has very little intention (and perhaps even less ability) to direct the subject towards a change in social structure. 'Mediocrity' has a penchant for the image of what the Irish past was – presumed static rather than vibrant tradition; things which cannot be understood experientially and therefore things which Dasein will find difficult to develop meaning through, or to use as a way to restructure reality. Kavanagh states that the devil's forte is "for what is dead,/ Pegasus Munnings bred." At this point the poem becomes especially interesting and remarkably related to the performative element of subjects within the court society. First

of all, Pegasus obviously refers to the mythological Greek winged horse that is a symbol for divine inspiration in poetry. This might all be well and good had Kavanagh not indicated that this Pegasus, this poetic inspiration comes not in the style of experience, but rather it is “Munnings bred”. Alfred Munnings was a renowned 19th Century painter of horses. This fact that the Devil’s forte is for a Pegasus ‘Munnings bred’ suggests that the inspiration which the literati or the Paddiads derive from this Pegasus is nothing more than a simulacrum. This Pegasus is a Munnings bred painting of the mythological horse, therefore it is a copy of a copy masquerading as true inspirational force. Through his/her own inauthenticity Dasein cannot come to a realisation of the fact there is a difference between authentic and inauthentic meaning. The devil, Mediocrity is responsible for the second-rate verse infiltrating Irish society that harkens back to an ‘auld Ireland’ with no substance. This old Ireland of Connemara, Celtic Mist and the bedraggled genuine peasant Irish man is the twee-Ireland that the Paddiads cling onto with the support of Mediocrity. They perform their role as the ‘Oirish Paddy’ in order to be accepted in the group.

As Elias argues, “the craving for prestige and fear of its loss, the struggle against the obliteration of social distinction, is more to be explained...[as] a key element of the civilizing society” (1994: 398). Social control in this situation, just as in Elias’ court society, becomes key as each of the Paddiad are constantly aware of each other’s actions at every given moment. They must play their part within the society correctly if they are to be accepted and appearances become more and more important to successful interaction within the group. The significance of Pegasus being painted rather than an interactive force is suggestive of the fact that the Paddiad shy away from experience itself and move towards a performance behind a mask. Within the liminal space the mask of traditional identity in this case becomes reality and the representation rather than the experience is given prominence in this constructed world. An image used repeatedly in Kavanagh’s poetry is that of

the Mummers. The Mummers or Wren Boys are a group of travelling performers who usually perform on Stephen's day by singing songs and acting for local communities in the hopes of earning a few pence to spend in a local public house. Paddy Conscience, the 'Paddy' who arrives late and does not interact in the same way as the other Paddies preferring not to pander to Mediocrity and ridiculed for wanting to be counted out "at Mummers' rantings". Mummer is capitalised here again suggesting that it is more than the group of men (usually) 'on the wren', rather it is symbolic of an attitude, an approach to life and way of acting in society. The Mummers would act out traditional folk plays and wear masks in the performance. Kavanagh, characterised by Paddy Conscience is innately wary of the Mummers and what they represent. The Mummers that are embraced by the Paddiad are dangerous to Paddy Conscience and reflect *sacra* worn by initiates of the liminal period. This is itself is not dangerous, but if a society is stalled within permanent liminality, the Mummers masks become sinister – they are no longer a reflection of a rite of passage guiding the Paddiad through liminality to reaggregation, but they are a taunting reminder that the Paddiad have become the Mummers, acting out the folk play where 'Paddy Connemara', the characterless persona, comes to life as the reality of keeping Romantic Ireland alive and well.

Paddy Conscience is later found dead in Paris, so the poem goes on to explain. The choice of Paris is interesting – Oscar Wilde, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett all found artistic refuge in Paris when the streets of Dublin were unwelcoming to their poetic voice. In fact Oscar Wilde died and is buried in Paris. More than likely Paris here was used as a way to draw attention to the fact that Irish writers of literature focusing on *erlebnis* or the search for authentic meaning in life, who could justifiably be considered 'authentic Dasein', found the artistic atmosphere in Dublin stifling due to the emphasis on the rationalistic "convention" and "mediocrity". However, in 'The Paddiad', the Devil commandeers the memory of Paddy Conscience and

draws him into the rationalistic representation of traditional Ireland. He is buried with a green silk shroud “tourist style” – this is similar in a way to how James Joyce and Oscar Wilde have been co-opted as part of the great Irish Literary legacy, when in actual fact Ireland did little more than attempt to suppress their creative drive. The appearance and performance of reality is again shown to be the only thing that the Devil and his minions within the Paddiad care about. Paddy Conscience is buried “tourist style”; the image of Ireland from the outside is offered as the essential reality that the Paddiad adhere to and thus this becomes their reality. For Kavanagh this is inauthentic and is founded on an overly rational approach to existence where subjects are unaware of their *unheimlich* state and fail to live negotiating authentic meaning within reality. They are instructed by the Devil to write “the inside story” of Paddy Conscience which ignores his experiences of hunger and failure and instead builds for him a false world where he could have had fortune “if he chose it” and where women fall at his feet. The government even give money to build a monument in his memory – but paradoxically this is the same government that refused his requests for grants when he was alive. The creation of and importance placed upon appearance and representation bubbles to the surface of this poem through every line. But beyond this; it is the belief that those representations are truth in themselves is what Kavanagh puts forward as problematic. This serves as a commentary on the lack of responsibility in modern society for the subject’s search for authentic meaning, for the community of which the subject is a part and the world in which they live. The literati focus on twee-Ireland and in doing so the Irish relationship with land and the active responsibility for it is rendered a footnote in the national and social consciousness. This attitude serves to reinforce the state of *unheimlich* rather than subverting it.

This emphasis on truth in representation is again notable as a theme in the poem ‘Irish Stew’. The poet is given advice from a mentor or would-be benefactor but the advice is to enhance his image as a peasant poet, as this is

what will help him sell his poetry, and ultimately him to an audience eager for twee-Irish. The person giving the poet advice is restless, irritated and his hatred of the poet (and perhaps poetry) is palpable but yet he smiles as he speaks – here we have a disjunction between appearance and intention or experience. The speaker denies his own self as he smile even though unhappy with the situation. He speaks “in the Name of God” that the poet is “too great a genius to/ Talk of steak and onions or a stew”. The speaker is urging the poet to consider loftier themes and move away from an experientially based poetic style. In, what is now indicative of Kavanagh’s own style, ‘name’ is capitalised, which suggests that the speaker is more concerned with the signifier rather than the signified, the idea of something than how it becomes part of reality through interaction, The poet is being advised to stay away from experience in the guise of domesticity or a home as this might negatively affect his imagination, he is better suited to dreaming the poet’s dream and avoid anything that might detract from that. The irony here being that, for Kavanagh, the experience of life is essential to the imagination and the poetic dream. In the second half of the poem the ‘mentor’ goes one step further and argues that the poet should not even concern himself with the world outside Ireland, he should leave the job of ambassador of the arts to the politicians as the poets mind should remain tied to Ireland lest it become corrupt by the cosmopolitan Europeans. The Irish poet must stay as traditionally ‘oirish’ as they can in order to maintain their appearance. Essentially the message is to keep up the charade of the peasant poet as that is what sells; you must act like a poet if you are to be one, performance at the heart of it all, is key. It is through a conceptualisation of these issues and development of them in the poetic form that Kavanagh’s poetry becomes a commentary on and analysis of Modern Irish Society stalled within a state of permanent liminality but more than that – it deals with the *unheimlich* subject’s attitude to existence and works to restore authentic meaning through poetry.

***Unheimlich* or The (not so) Jolly Beggarman and the Abyss**

Throughout his poetic career, Kavanagh's disdain for the pandering and self-congratulatory members of the Dublin literati necessitated the creation of a kind of anti-hero. This anti-hero took the guise of Paddy Conscience in many poems and was always a kind of reflection of himself and his own experiences within the literary community in Ireland. Kavanagh recognised the *unheimlich* in himself and was intent on finding a way to confront it in order to work through it. Paddy Conscience was the character he created to deal with it within the poetic space. He took the form of Stephen Daedalus in 'The Paddiad' as well as Yeats and O'Casey; he is the authentic Dasein that sings to his own hymn sheet. He is in many poems dirty, dishevelled and in some cases drunk (but never 'intoxicated' like the beasts in 'Jungle') but always takes responsibility for himself. The anti-hero is an outsider in Dublin, on Pembroke Street and in the Palace Bar; he is the quintessential outcast who is aware of his social position and in this way is also *unheimlich*. He is uncomfortable with the complacency of the literary circles, and by contrast, their comfortableness with existing in the they-world and struggles for a way to be authentic in existence. Paddy Conscience's answer to the complacency surrounding him is to articulate his unease with the obsession with appearance and representation and the old traditional Ireland, whatever it was supposed to be. He challenges the status quo and demands a response (responsibility) of some kind, their response is typical, inauthentic and full of disgust for Paddy Conscience whose "drunken talk and dirty clothes" are an appearance which Lucifer sees through. Here, Kavanagh shows the difficulty with an over reliance on representation, for while Paddy Conscience looks the part of the peasant or the beggarman, he is actually no such thing and uses his words, his poetry, to "blast this [they]world with a puff". Kavanagh uses language to confront the abyss and incorporate it into his poetry.

Lucifer catches on to the danger of this situation quickly and distracts the rest of the Paddiad away from the reality of Paddy Conscience's remarks by suggestion of a competition to find the best poet in each county. Lucifer drags the literati of the they-world away from the potential of the abyss and instead offers them a rationalistic take on the creative force of poetry – competition. Paddy Mist and Frog are the most vocal of the Paddiad at this point and the incorporation of the frog as a symbol for the unthinking paddy is particularly poignant at this point. First of all, the 'common frog' is the only frog which is native to Ireland, suggesting that this Paddy is representative of the common Irish person. Beyond this more obvious symbolism however, is the link of the frog with a tripartite system of development. They are first an egg, then a tadpole and then an amphibian. This transformative ability of the frog is what usually leads it to being associated with the catholic idea of the holy trinity, so again the symbol comes back to and is indicative of, the common Irish man/woman. Interestingly however, the state of liminality is also a tripartite system of development and as a symbol of transition, of betwixt and between, it is even more remarkable that Kavanagh uses such a symbol (frog) to reflect the static element of modern society. This image of the frog which Kavanagh uses to demonstrate what he sees as a negative element of Irish society at the time, symbolises the very state of liminality which Arpad Szakolczai observed as a key condition of modernity. Again, this is an example of how Kavanagh brings the abyss into his poetry and implicitly asks those who read his poems to think in more abstract terms about reality and therefore engage *erlebnis* in order to negotiate more authentic meaning.

'Auditors In' is a poem chronicling the difficult path the writer is on; being a poet but failing to conform to the idea of what a poet should be. The speaker in this poem is the same Paddy Conscience figure that is recurrent throughout many of Kavanagh's poems and who is essentially a manifestation of Kavanagh's *unheimlich* himself in verse. At first the poet-speaker reflects on his place and questions the role of poetry within the literary world. He

asks whether poetry is solely for entertainment value and is thus little more than the type of performance engaged in by the literati, or whether it is more than this and has a formative purpose for human beings. The speaker asks whether poetry should deal with man's 'mission' – which implies action and this in turn indicates experientially base performance of authentic Dasein rather than the static performance of inauthentic Dasein which he scorns in 'The Paddiad'. By using the word mission which has an implicit active element in it, Kavanagh alludes to the responsibility the subject has towards himself and the search for authentic meaning. He goes on to lament his own fate and how he is considered to have failed through following an ideal, his search for authentic meaning, rather than performing the part of the poet as laid out by the literati. He argues that really, this does not constitute failure, rather it does the opposite – “Evilest knowledge ever haunted/ Man when he can picture clear/ Just what he was searching for/ A car, a big suburban house”. From these lines in the first stanza it is clear that the speaker considers it dangerous for a man to have a very clear picture of what his desires are. If a person is too clear on where they are going in life, the implication here is that they are more than likely following a rationalised path already laid out and belonging primarily to the they-world.

The model set out for the poet in Irish society is one with the car and the big suburban house, but they keep it as a “Half secret” lest he “lose the attraction of the poor but proud image” which is an impression that always serves to sell the poet and his art. He, the speaker, the poet is left on the margins again. Through fancy, flaw, or a mixture of both he has a disorganised life, with not even the structure of a marriage to keep him in society. This description of himself as structureless works on two levels – first of all, it illustrates his state of *unheimlich* while secondly, describing a life very far removed from the irrationality of rationality in modernity. His unfavourable economic situation has led to sexual castration, indicative of the fact that certain images, performances sell while others do not. The they-

world sells, the self-world does not and this “lonely lecher” lives in the self-world of authentic Dasein. He refuses to live in the they-world even though it would be more financially advantageous simply because he feels uncomfortable in it; he is *unheimlich* and his angst pushes him to be Paddy Conscience, the thinking rather than the following man who sways to the force of whichever way the wind blows. He pulls himself up out of this negative reverie however, and attests that he is “capable of an intense/ love that is experience.” He finds the answer to his *unheimlich* within experience itself. To live authentically, Kavanagh attests you must “dig and ditch your authentic land”. Land as a focus point is returned to again here, it serves as the site of authenticity, home, responsibility and as solid meaning which might aid in the renegotiation of reality. In digging and ditching authentic land the subject must face the abyss and take with them some semblance of a meaning structure based on a foundation of home – secure and stable land which encourages responsibility in the subject.

Experience, Imagination and Liminality

The beauty of the world enraptures him and he intends to experience it all and re-experience it in writing his poetry. The experiences in his poetry are not “mere memory but the Real/ Poised in the poet’s commonweal”. The reader approaches poetry not as a removed object attempting to decipher the hidden meaning. The reader’s very interaction with the poem is an experience of its own, an experience of perhaps beauty, of realisation, of an acknowledgement of the self-world. In this way, poetry becomes a kind of ritual – for both Kavanagh and the reader. Towards the middle and the end of his career, Kavanagh became penniless through his disavowal of the they-world and the search for authenticity in his work. His contempt for the literati, observable in the poems ‘Jungle’ and ‘The Paddiad’, is still apparent in his later work, but it is more of a silent acceptance and pity, as can be seen from the following lines –

The gun of pride can bring them down

At twenty paces in the town -

For what? The tragedy is this:

Pride's gunman hesitates to kiss.

What comes through far more potently in this poem is his positive awareness of the beauty within experience; he has finally reached his own version of the ideal. This lonely poet, through a search for the ideal, has come to reside in a space that is purgatory. There is a suggestion of danger associated with this state but he tells the reader (or himself, or both) –

Yet do not be too much dismayed;

It's on your hand the humble trade

Of versing that can easily

Restore your equanimity

Poetry is his way of bringing his imagination to life and experiencing the world around him and helping the reader to experience the world in a different way, one that is aware of the they-world, but is not subservient to it. In this way Kavanagh acknowledges that he himself, as an *unheimlich* subject, is in a liminal space or as he calls it 'purgatory'. He is betwixt and between two 'constant' states and through his poetry he is attempting to reconstruct his reality. He works himself out of this space through his poetry and it becomes a ritual experience for him. The concept of experience itself and his art becomes the most important element of reality to him and as a result he is "indifferent to the props of a reputation", again harking back to the performative element of the court society engaged in by the literati. By living in the shadow of traditions as laid out by the they-world, the literati are completely removed from experiencing reality on their own terms and thus

they fail to live their lives authentically. He, in contrast lives in modest and humble accommodation and experiences the world around him as much as he can. He has now found a place where the Self reposes –

The placeless Heaven that's under all our noses,
Where we're shut off from all the barren anger,
No time for self-pitying melodrama

He is in a home of sorts now – the placeless heaven perhaps as a vision of the abyss. In realising that he is *unheimlich* he must focus on the experiential aspect of reality is itself a kind of home – the structure within the unstructured; the anti-structure within liminality. Home is not necessarily a place – or that illusive image of the expensive house and car. Home can be a state of mind, Kavanagh is contented now that he is aware of this, for –

Somewhere to stay
doesn't matter. What is distressing
Is waking eagerly to go nowhere in particular.

Home can be found in recognising the beauty in the world, becoming responsible for it and having an awareness of it. To experience (*erlebnis*) or work towards authentic meaning is the way to restore a sense of home for the *unheimlich* subject. The true tragedy of purgatory, of the liminal space, is the tragedy of the inauthentic Dasein who is *unheimlich* and has nowhere to go because they are following a path rather than experiencing their reality – they have no responsibility for themselves and so cannot work themselves out of *unheimlich*. For Kavanagh, God as an entity is not a supernatural and removed creation, intangible and lofty. S/He/It is “under all our noses”; it is simply experience itself – this is what is sacred. And in the case of a life unlived i.e. lived unconsciously within the they-world, experience or “God/Unworshipped withers to the Futile One.” The poems themselves are the

ritualistic exercise incorporating experience in a particular form in order to work himself out of *unheimlich* liminality.

Although a much shorter poem than ‘The Paddiad’ or ‘Auditors In’, ‘Kerr’s Ass’ is certainly not left wanting with its wealth of powerful imagery and symbolism. Most analyses of ‘Kerr’s Ass’ see it as a poem acclaiming the wonderful elements of local village life. And while this is undoubtedly an element of the poem, it is by no means the extent of what the poem conveys. The poem certainly displays the ethic of responsibility which the narrator feels for the Ass and the man who owns him but also touches on meaning which is more abstract. In ‘Kerr’s Ass’ the narrator borrows a donkey from a neighbour as he wants to make a trip to the Irish town of Dundalk to sell some butter at a market. The donkey is described as an exile in Mucker where the speaker lives as he is not on his home soil – the fact that the donkey is described as a being who is out of place draws comparisons to the Paddy Conscience in other poems, who is himself never truly at home. The unusual situation of walking an unfamiliar animal to the market prompts the speaker to be acutely aware of his surroundings and the *experience* of walking the donkey to Dundalk. As a result –

a world comes to life –

Morning, the silent bog,

And the god of imagination waking

In a Mucker fog.

By an awareness and concern for his surroundings the narrator becomes conscious of the beauty in the world around him. The land and the vibrant natural environment forms a structure through which the narrator can re-engage with experience and feel the responsibility that comes with connection. In this way the narrator starts to use the abyss to reconceive of

meaning in reality. Rational structures of modernity are left aside for the responsibility inherent in connecting to the natural world. Kerr's Ass itself becomes the image of this experience, the catalyst for his artistic vision, of coming into himself and being aware of the world around him in all its beauty. He has this experience because the donkey wakes him into the world. Through this journey with his animal companion he sees connections between different elements within the world, and starts to generate meaning from beauty.

The donkey is itself a symbol within many traditions, not least of all in the Christian religion. In this poem however, he is first of all a contrast to the "Pegasus Munnings style" of 'The Paddiad'. This donkey represents the "dig and ditch of authentic land"; he is the ultimate beast of burden and is very much a representative, and/or part of, the trials and tribulations that are an unavoidable aspect of life. He is the ultimate connection to the land in Ireland. He is not the mythologised painted Pegasus; the copy of a copy. The donkey is the everyman, familiar with ridicule and stubborn. His stubbornness is not simply bad temper however; it is the instinct for self preservation which leads us back to the poet here as belonging to the self-world rather than the they-world. The donkey is also associated with the God Dionysus. Dionysus is fundamentally an outsider; having been portrayed as a man-woman in the earliest literature, but also being semi-divine with Zeus as his father and Semele, a mortal, as his mother (Hard, 2008). He is the ultimate emblem of betwixt and between, of liminality in effect and has a nature that can be both lustrous, encouraging ecstasy, at the same time as he can be induced into uncontrollable fits of rage. This character with completely opposing and intense elements is representative of both the positive and negative aspects of liminality and is indicative of the dangers inherent within it. Dionysus is the only God who is considered to be between life and death due to the fact that after the Titans ripped him apart physically, limb from limb, he was reborn. Dionysus represents freedom, but dangerous freedom

full of potentiality, and symbolises everything that is chaotic and unexpected (Hard, 2008). In this way by using the donkey rather than the noble horse, by using Dionysus' loyal companionate creature as the focus of this poem, Kavanagh is alluding to more than the beauty in tradition. He is ascribing to the donkey an air of possibility related to experiential potential derived from the 'natural' world around him – and with Dionysus being the only God to have his followers worship him in the woods rather than an ornate temple, it would seem that the donkey is a perfect conduit for that message. The donkey stirs Kavanagh to an awareness of the land, and the potential in reality associated with the land. This is a poem which holds up the land as a sacred element of reality which we have either neglected or have been forced apart from. The distance generation by postcolonialism is rectified by connecting once again with that which was lost – the responsibility inherent in caring for and recognising the importance of the earth which gives us a home.

The beauty in 'In Memory of My Mother' is the subtlety with which Kavanagh brings his themes to life. As usual, his clever play with the structure of the language on the page sometimes says more than the words if they were read in prose style. Enjambment is a common tool of his to make a point or to make an image all the more vivid. The first line of the poem reads "I do not think of you lying in the wet clay" and if this were not followed by the words in the second line "Of a Monaghan graveyard" the reader would not be quite sure that his mother was dead. The use of enjambment to separate "wet clay" from "Monaghan graveyard" makes it clear that the poet has made a decision not to think of his mother in the past tense. Indeed the whole first paragraph is suggestive of this desire –

I do not think of you lying in the wet clay
Of a Monaghan graveyard; I see
You walking down a lane among the poplars
On your way to the station, or happily

Going to second Mass on a summer Sunday

He separates “I see” from “You walking down a lane among the poplars – obviously keen to separate any connection of “I see” with a memory. He prefers that it is connected with action, with an experience of her walking down a lane. In the second stanza the last line reads “Among your earthiest words the angels stray”. The beats in this line rest on ‘earth’, ‘words’, ‘angels’ and ‘stray’. Here earth connects to heaven through the words he uses in the poem and again allows the earth to hold a place of importance in his verses. By allowing his imagination to stray, his words, his interaction and experience revisited connects to the world around him and creates possibility – constructs of death are as meaningful as we allow them. The past is as real and as much a part of reality as the present and both must come together and have bearing on one another if a future is to be imagined, conceived of and constructed. The second last stanza reads –

And I see us meeting at the end of a town
On a fair day by accident, after
The bargains are all made and we can walk
Together through the shops and stalls and markets
Free in the Oriental streets of thought.

The “I see” is restored to the event in this stanza. The meaning behind their meeting is reclaimed and so is the experiential reality of the event. The implication here is that perhaps in death there is more possibility than in the hyper-rationalised constructed world of modern reality. Very little of County Monaghan would lead one to think of it as a place which would provide a home for an oriental street of thought. County Monaghan, like most of rural Ireland at the time, would have been a place where tradition and sameness were privileged over new or broadminded attitudes. The word Oriental is derived from the Latin ‘Orientum’ meaning ‘determine bearings’ and as the sun rises in the east, the eastern “Orient” thus gained its name. Oriental came to represent the strange or mysterious in the 19th and 20th Century as it was a place where, until relatively recently, few people from the “western world” would have ventured due to difficult travelling conditions and vice versa. The use of the word ‘Oriental’ then would seem to be a peculiar choice – but then again, perhaps not. If oriental is indeed strange and mysterious, then this suggests a level of potential thought which is removed from the mediocrity of the they-world later associated with the literati in ‘The Paddiad’. If the streets of thought are oriental, it follows that they represent a type of freedom from the commonly held catholic system of thought which, whatever about her ‘soul’, buries her body in the cold wet clay. And so instead, Kavanagh chooses to reimagine her enjoying and experiencing life. Rationalistic and linear conceptions of time are disrupted in favour of the active force of experience. The final three lines of this stanza reinforce this concept of possibility within experience and the imagination –

For it is a harvest evening now and we

Are piling up the ricks against the moonlight

And you smile up at us – eternally.

Potential is again brought back to the land and its force as catalyst for potentially restoring authentic meaning structures. Harvest here is suggestive of a new phase of existence, the food is ripe and there are a whole new set of possibilities in store for it. Likewise, moonlight is a time where there is more possibility inherent than at any other time in the day and this is emphasised by the last line where his mother smiles up at the characters in the poem ‘eternally’. Interestingly, she does not ‘look down’ on them as would be a part of the Catholic discourse, but rather up – implying that she is within his reality and part of that natural world rather than part of some supernatural existence at a great remove. The beauty of his mother’s memory is combined with a connectedness to the earth and its resources – it is the basis for a solid meaning structure in modernity.

Answerability, Allegory and Answerable Allegory

Mikhail Bakhtin maintained that the greatest problem with the they-world (Heidegger’s terminology, of course) is that the subjects immersed in it fail to realise that there is “no alibi in being” (1993: 102). Realising the truth of this statement then, is one way of dealing with the problems associated with modernity as they-world. It is a way for the subject to avoid becoming the ‘subjectified subject’ and be answerable to the greatest extent possible for their existence, experience and reality. The poet in general should be aware of their social situation and how others perceive them if they are to be free of an alibi in being and act within that that social situation and with that information strive to subvert the power of perceived absolutes. Patrick Kavanagh does this and makes his writing particularly effective by adopting the linguistic, grammatical and descriptive mechanics of poetry. Through the persona of Paddy Conscience or the *unheimlich* subject, Kavanagh illustrates his desire and need to be socially answerable. He is reflexive when he is aware of how the literati or the Paddiad perceive him. This has an effect on him and in turn affects how he perceives them and he is aware of this. He is

not at home when speaking with them, but also realises that they feel uncomfortable with him as demonstrated by their reaction to Paddy Conscience in 'The Paddiad'. With this knowledge he remarks and notes various elements within society that he considers problematic. He draws a colourful picture of the world he is surrounded by and critiques it in an interesting and valuable way.

In his use of language he is metapragmatic through enjambment and careful word choice and in his use of allegory he is imaginative and uncompromising. By utilising allegory in this way Kavanagh intensifies the negative aspects of a phase the Irish Literary movement, and the Irish state, is going through. His poems function in the same way the masks were used in the Ndembu rite of passage and demarcate elements of a given reality which should be questioned. This is complemented by an awareness that art is a social field where the past is brought together with the present in the space utilised by the imagination to give rise to a future brought to light in the potential of the surplus. This potential is made possible by the experience which the poem generates. First of all the reader is in a position where they are open to the meaning which the poem is believed to have. If the poem is written with effective use of language and appropriate finesse of artistic form with regard metaphor and allegory it will evoke past memories in the reader. This type of language usage is called abstract linguistic cognisance and creates in the reader an ability to think of their existence in more abstract terms. These feelings are revived and considered in light of the meaning put forward by the poem – in Kavanagh's case the land and the natural environment for which the Irish postcolonial subject has lost responsibility. The experience is created when the subject, or the reader, turns this connection in a new meaning for themselves through confront the abyss through the abstract allegory or metaphor in the poem. Ideally then, the reader should themselves develop a sense of home through an understanding of their

position of responsibility in reality. The poem becomes the ritual in which the poet and the reader can confront the abyss and access its potential.

Conclusion

Patrick Kavanagh has been presented as a poet eminently capable of dealing with the human and social “trauma that has to be coped with” (Giesen, 2009). He presents an in-depth and multifaceted analysis of Irish society in the early to mid-20th century along with a description of the postcolonial condition and the desire to build a home in modern society. Examples of the powerful concepts coming through his work should show that, far from being a poet concerned with the ‘inner self’, he was a poet utterly absorbed with understanding society, the world and how human beings interact within reality. By dealing with the postcolonial condition which resulted in the subject becoming *unheimlich* by virtue of the responsibility for land and society being removed, Kavanagh felt forced to meet the abyss. Through postcoloniality and the pervasive effect of permanent liminality, he has more to gain than lose by confronting the abyss. By rejecting the rationality of modernity he suffered social exclusion and a relatively unsuccessful career while he was alive. He felt however, that his responsibility was such that he needed to confront the inauthentic meaning structures in modernity and instead offer people a space where they could work out their conceptions of reality in a way that did not rely on the rationality of the court society. Through the ritualistic poetic form then and the use of metaphor and allegory, abstract thought patterns were encouraged so that the subjects themselves could confront the potential of the abyss. The underlying implication in his poetry however, is that in moving towards a hyper-rationalised society, human subjects have moved further away from the nexus of responsibility which gives human beings authentic meaning. This could be restored, he maintains, by understanding one’s place in the world and observing the beauty in nature which reveals meaning in existence. In this way Kavanagh certainly approaches the poem as a rite of passage and a

ritual aid. Kavanagh's poetry is a declaration of an intense desire to fully comprehend existence in all its complexity and is ultimately indicative of a yearning for, and struggle to find, home within *unheimlich* modernity.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

Eavan Boland: An Experiential Search for Meaning

Introduction

Eavan Aisling Boland, in one way or another, was always a subject in exile. A female poet at a time where such a person was not permitted admittance into the essentially patriarchal hierarchy of Irish literature, she lived for many years at a remove from her past, her present and at times, her future. Concerns which inform her poetry are most certainly related to her experiential foundations as that exiled self, but also as the taken for granted exiled self - the woman, and what's more, the woman poet in society. This social position enables Boland to deal with issues in an interesting way unique to her cultural and experiential context. This chapter thus considers the *unheimlich* self as it becomes aware of myth in history, disembodiment and subversion through acknowledgment of the surplus and the use of experience as a way to direct oneself towards the abyss. Boland's poetry is indicative of the way experience is essential to restoring meaning in society through an awareness of the surplus within the social act. Without such an awareness, a meeting of the abyss as it is discussed in Chapter Six would most certainly be impossible.

Boland was born on the 24th September 1944 in Dublin Ireland to Frederick Boland; an Irish diplomat and Frances Kelly; a well-known Irish painter. When Boland was six her family moved to England when her father secured a job as Irish Ambassador to the United Kingdom. As an Irish child in England she felt ostracised from other children her age, as well as the home she knew well and was longing to return to. This sense of homesickness and the tension involved in constructing an identity would be catalyst for much of her poetry. From a young age she was exposed to the realisation that the definite identity which she believed was tied to Ireland and which was then questioned in England may not have been definite after all. This would lead her to doubt the authority of a stable and complete identity in general and what that meant to and for the subject and for social interaction more broadly.

The underlying conceptual base of Boland's poetry then, is how identity and reality is constructed through experience and how that experience in turn affects identity and reality for the subject and the social group of which they are a part.

As a teenager, Boland returned to Ireland to attend secondary school in a suburb of South County Dublin called Killiney. From there she attended Trinity College Dublin where she studied English and Latin. In 1962, while at Trinity, she published her first collection of poetry entitled *23 Poems* where, for the first time, she tackled issues of femininity, domesticity and nationhood through the poetic form. It became apparent through this and later collections of poetry that Boland's muse was subjective experience. Through the gentle art of questioning the previously unquestioned, the experiential element of life in all its verve would be introduced into poetry regardless of whether it subscribed to the notions of what Irish literature was expected to portray if it were to be considered authentic. To this end then, Boland poeticised the cornerstones of social life – motherhood and domestic life – and brought them into the public consciousness in a new, unapologetic and unafraid manner. In 1969, Boland married the novelist Kevin Casey and had children at a relatively young age. This would undoubtedly have an impact on her poetry but, rather than proving to have a negative effect, it seems to have been a positive one and one which grounded her work in a reality far removed from that which Irish poets had conceived of previously. Boland achieved a level of experiential understanding which was illuminated in the poetry and this resonated with readers. Throughout her career, Boland would focus on how life is experienced and what that means for the subject. In different ways and at different times she would attempt to subvert traditional notions of femininity and history as evidenced through collections of poetry like *Night Feed* (1982), *Outside History* (1990) and *In a Time of Violence* (1994).

Her first experience of teaching was in Trinity College Dublin following her graduation from the same University. This was the start of a career which saw her lecture in institutes on both sides of the Atlantic – University College Dublin, Bowdoin College and The University of Iowa. Boland is currently a faculty member of the Stanford University English Department. Despite her history of being a part of the academic life within some of the most reputable Universities in the US and Ireland, Boland has always endeavoured to avoid the technical side of academics. Believing that academics was overly structured and subject to such technical rigour that the creative instinct was in many cases stifled, Boland moved away from academics in the traditional sense (Clutterbuck, 2005). Instead, she gave herself to the creative ideal and held the position of ‘Writer-in-Residence’ in various Universities which allowed her to pursue her poetic instinct artistically rather than academically. Nonetheless, in 1995 Boland felt it necessary to justify her type of poetry and wrote an academic text entitled *Object Lessons* which critiqued the place of (or lack thereof) women and the domestic life within poetry. The following chapter will analyse a selection of Boland’s poetry throughout the years in an attempt to understand the mechanics and the meaning within it and finally, why it can be used as a useful tool in the subject’s attempt to work themselves out of a they-world of modernity.

Exiled and *Unheimlich*

In ‘An Irish Childhood In England: 1951’ Boland reflects on the state of experience through the narrative of her exiled self as a child in 1951 when she moved to England with her family. Boland constructs this poem in the effective manner of the narrative style – she introduces the objective of the poem which in this case is to illustrate her contradictory childhood experience of Irishness in England, but also the contradictory experience of being a postcolonial subject. The name itself emphasises that the poem is not about *her* as a child but rather these experiences themselves: ‘An Irish Childhood in England’ rather than ‘An Irish Child in England’. Thus, before the reader

even approaches the first stanza they are aware that this poem is about experience rather than a fixed subject. The picture she draws, the narrative she (re)constructs aids the reader in an understanding of the experiential context which she is describing. Boland employs an interesting order to the events in her narrative; she flits from the past to the present and then back to the past again which jars the reader into an understanding of the cyclical, dialectical or dialogical aspect of temporality. The past has an effect on the present and the present likewise affects the past. In order to imagine a futural space, the past has bearing on the present and they both direct the subject in their conception of the future. The particular construction of temporality within the poem is achieved through the destabilising effect the narrative has on ideas of direct causal linkages and raises the experience of a situation, rather than the situation itself, above any deterministic notions of what reality or identity is. The different elements of the narrative affect the overall objective of the poem – the concept of experience – and create the space where interaction and narrative come together to (re)produce experience for the reader. In this way the poem becomes the ritual space for the reader to reconceive of taken for granted structures.

Boland uses the theme of exile to bring the experiential conditions of her childhood to life in ‘An Irish Childhood in England’. The first line illustrates the contention evident in any situation where a child is taken from a country where they feel secure and familiar with their surroundings both physically and culturally, to one where they are the outsider, the other, or as Boland remarks in the first stanza an ‘exile’. The stanza begins with the child noticing the “bickering of vowels on the buses”. Immediately, and through something as taken for granted as language, the child becomes aware of their separation from the others on the bus – they pronounce their vowels different, and simply in uttering them, they are making an argument for the truth in their vowel pronunciation rather than in vowel pronunciation of the Irish exile. This linguistic reality and the “navy-skirted ticket collectors” that the

child notes around her on the bus bring it home to her that she is an exile in this land, she is not at home here. “Ration-book pudding”, “Bowls of dripping” and the school pianist playing celebrated English tunes are the elements of English culture which she uses to demonstrate how she fails to fit in. The three tunes which the pianist plays are ‘Iolanthe’, ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ and ‘John Peel’; all songs which celebrate the English colonial past – a past which the child has learned, ironically, led to the victimisation of her ‘home’ in Ireland. These songs are a symbol of her own of victimisation; she is the outsider and is treated as such. Her reasoning for noting them in the poem are related to what she would have known of, and believed of, England up until the time she moved to that country. ‘Iolanthe’, an opera by Gilbert and Sullivan, is one of the most celebrated of their collaborations and is set in 19th Century England. The opera centres on the story of a love affair between a half-fairy and a mortal. There are undertones of criticism directed at the aristocracy within the opera but for all this, the opera has been incorporated into English culture to the extent that it is less subversive of and more inclined to reinforce English culture. It is with this intention that Boland refers to the play. ‘John Peel’ is a song depicting the life of John Peel a renowned English huntsman, and is a symbol of the English desire to track, hunt and conquer. ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ is an iconic English song extolling the virtue of English civilisation and the integrity behind their scheme of extending that civilisation “wider still and wider”, as the lyrics of the song suggest. This illustrates the gnostic impulse within English history and leads to a situation where Boland becomes patently aware of her postcolonial condition. Their civilisation expands and conquers smaller ones wherein those smaller cultures in many cases are ‘relieved’ of their burden of responsibility for their land and running their society. This removal of responsibility adds to the sense of *unheimlich* in the subject.

This gnostic intention is fundamentally at odds from what the young Boland would have learned in a national school setting in Ireland. Instead she

would have learned about Ireland as victim of the English desire to conquer under the guise of enlightenment. This historical conflict left the Irish child in England in a precarious position. Which version of history was she to believe? She was invariably confused and this feeling is exemplified in the second stanza of the poem when she declares that she “didn’t know what to hold, to keep.” She tried to keep hold of the past of a fixed sense of identity and what she never knew she had until she was separated from it. She makes this observation in the second stanza and then falls asleep and lets the moment pass. This act of falling asleep and the state of the passing moment becomes for her a reality. In this moment where she lets the ‘reality’ of Ireland’s version of the past and England’s version of the past she becomes herself, she gains her identity. The child is a product of the binary opposition of two differing realities and so finds for herself a reality in-between. This in-between space is further indicated by her children being ‘half-asleep’ and she herself living as part of a moment passing, a night, sleep. Within the bounds of sleep the subject is not restricted to any particular idea of what reality is. Sleep here is an untranscribable space akin to the abyss where experiences come to bear on what is produced from it but it is none the less a space free of rationalistic influences. Imagination is given a free space to create in this abyss, and constructs anew with the help of the past moment from which it derives its subject matter.

The exile, which she refers to herself as, is not at home or is *unheimlich*. They are in a new physical situation or reality but they take from the past or from their ‘home’ a different reality. Necessarily then, they must consider the veracity of either construction of reality, and this is exactly what the child here does. The child is in an interstitial space and rather than clinging passionately to one construction or the other she rationalises whether she should be clinging to any of them in the first instance. This leads her to consider what type of identity is true for her and how she is to unearth it in order to cling to it. The final lines of the third stanza reveal that once the

subject is separated from 'home' and placed in a new reality where they are *unheimlich*, there is no going back as she waits for the "sleep that never did restore me as I'd hoped to what I'd lost". The world she came to know, that she has an experiential understanding of and which was her reality was –

the space

between the words I knew by heart

and all the other speech that always was

becoming the language of the country that

I came to in nineteen-fifty-one.

Enjambment in line three of the fourth stanza evokes a deep seated feeling in the child that perhaps the language of the new country is the "speech that always was". She broaches the suggestion that perhaps this 'new' language has primacy over all of the languages which it eventually smothered, or almost smothered, like Irish the language; the language of that country which used to be her home. This is, of course, put in contrast with the knowledge of the words she "had by heart". The previous set of words and discourses and cultural constructions was a reality that the child had by heart. When anything is learned "by heart" the implication is that it is remembered structurally, rationally or "learned off". This can be connected to that rationalistic drive in modernity which reduces everything to inauthentic meaning. Learning something by heart then, is synonymous with passive activity and not necessarily something that is considered, or questioned in order to understand the knowledge behind it. This intention within the education system was further expanded on in Chapter six and comes to bear on Boland's idea of the kinds of reality available. Rationalised and learned by heart or creation which can come from the abyss and open up new possibilities. The last two lines of the poem recall a memory of an occasion in school – the child, rather than an "I am not" uttered "I amn't" which elicited a response in the teacher of

“you’re not in Ireland now”. This contraction of “I am not” into one word combining both positive and negative intention in regard the self as subject, is suggestive of the inherently contradictory element within the postcolonial subject. It also reflects the interstitial space between two perceived constants where the identity of the child, and Boland herself, lies. The child both is and is not her past; she is and she is not Ireland; she is and she is not England; she is a result of the experience of being in between these two definitives and this is the reality for her which is constructed in narrative form in her poetry in general and ‘An Irish Childhood in England’ in particular. The postcolonial situation has created a subject that is inherently *unheimlich* and Boland argues that the only way out of this state is to avoid rationalistic, ‘there for me’ reality and draw in the potential of an untranscribed space; the abyss.

***Unheimlich* and the Myth of Fixed History**

History is a theme apparent in much of Boland’s work as has been explicated through analysis of ‘An Irish Childhood in England’ which demonstrates this theme and reveals the difficulty in creating or retaining an identity when the subject has been removed from the certainty of a particular history. History is offered as a method which is commonly used in modern society to reinforce the rationalisation of the court society. Boland encounters history as a fixed answer to the quest for stable identity. ‘Fond Memory’ written in 1994 continues with this topic as Boland describes how, as a child, she lived her life according to the rules of the English school system and culture. She “dressed in wool as well,/ ate rationed food,/ [and] played English games”. The first three stanzas show Boland, as a child, trying her best to live the life she has been brought to England to live. Even though she “learned how wise the Magna Carta was”, she still suffered a sense of homesickness and isolation which highlights her unease with the social system she was living within. She recalls with fondness the image of her father sitting at the piano in corner playing the “slow lilt of Tom Moore”. The Tom Moore here is the

Thomas Moore who is famed for the writing of many Irish melodies – usually about the brave Irish soldiers and war situations where heroism is rife and being celebrated in death was something to aspire to. The anger with the colonial situation and the resulting loss of land and social responsibility still remained. As the child's father plays these melodies on the piano she thinks to herself "this is my country, was, will be again". The child clings to remembrances of the past in an attempt to hold on to an idea of what her identity is comprised of – the meaning behind the tunes of Thomas Moore's lyrics. The song her father plays is "made to be our safe inventory of pain" and is celebrated as the remainder of that tradition which honours the brave victimised Irish, and makes that constructed memory live on in the minds and discourses of the Irish people and culture. In the last line the adult narrator, Boland, reflects back and realises that the young child had been wrong; this was not her country. If it was at one stage, it was never to be again; once she was *unheimlich* and aware of that condition as a subject, she was to find her own way and work her identity out in the interstices between two worlds through the ritualistic medium of poetry.

Boland explores this theme further in 'Outside History' (2001), a poem published in a compilation of the same name. She incorporates the image of the stars to make a point about the history which creates a subject in exile. In order for the subject to be *unheimlich*, there must be a previously existing solid construction of what home is or should be. Stars, however, are always 'outside history' – they were there before humanity and will be there no doubt after. They are physically removed from humanity and it is generally acknowledged that they will always be somewhat removed from humanity conceptually as it is argued that the universe and the stars within it carry on into infinity (Seeds and Backman 2011). These stars, however are "iron inklings of an Irish January", referencing the fact that even though they are removed from society, they are none-the-less connected to it in that our construction of reality draws them in and connects them to our experiential

understanding of the world around us – a cold Irish January. Under the weight of this realisation human beings nevertheless exist; they construct the world around them and eventually find within this world that they are human. Boland observes the stars and comments that –

Under them remains

A place where you found

you were human –

a landscape in which you know you are mortal.

Being human is connected to the idea of what one should be if one is a human being it is revealed as a fixed concept tied to a particular society – very much like nationality connected to identity. Mortality brings the human being back to an innate connection with the world around them; it is connected to the experiential quality of existence and beholding the beauty in natural phenomenon. Furthermore, when Boland asserts that there is a “time to choose between them” she refers to the fact that the *unheimlich* self must get to a point where they are faced with the choice between the rationalistic world and the potential inherent in the solid elements of reality – the environment. Either way, Boland stresses the importance of being answerable, in Bakhtinian terms and choosing a world, a path and an identity. Boland chooses to be part of “that ordeal whose darkness is only now reaching me from those fields” which are home to the voices and characters of the past. This image of the darkness again brings forth the concept of the abyss. These characters in the past held a solid conception of what constituted a home, that same idea that has been lost as a result of colonialism. When we try to control, rationalise these aspects of the past, when we “we kneel beside them, whisper in their ear”. In attempting to interact with them as though they are controllable entities they simply die. This reflects the inherently

questionable nature of tradition as it is conceived of in many modern societies. To survive, it needs to live as a part of the present and not a removed cultural imperative that is treated with objective reverence that is rationalised to the extent that it is unrecognisable from its original form. Boland chooses to acknowledge the transient nature of these constructs and decides to confront the darkness of this realisation. She does not mean darkness in the conventional sense here, instead she simply means the space which is as yet unknowable, and therefore full of possibilities.. Here, in the space of the poem, Boland brings a concept to light as meaningful and as potent as any theory within Sociology proper – experience within the abyss is where the subject can access the creativity with which to deconstruct and reconstruct society. Boland chooses to use the space of the not yet named in order to introduce abstract cognisance into her poetry in the hopes that it will provide the platform for *unheimlich* subjects to use the poem as a ritualistic force to reconstruct their ideas of reality.

‘Outside History’ also acknowledges the failure of institutionalised accounts of history to reflect the lives of women within those societies. This instinct to rationalise social structure to such an extent often has had the result of creating inequality in order to perpetuate its ideology. Women are in ways very much like the stars in that they are, for the most part, outside given accounts of history. Boland maintains that she chooses not to subscribe to the given construction of history which is inherently androcentric and focus instead on the experiences of life and how the subject interacts with the reality. This aspect of the poem draws attention to the essential disparity between history and experiences of reality. In ‘Mise Éire’, translating into ‘I am Ireland’ Boland asserts that she “won’t go back to it”, the myth and history which constructed Ireland. Her nation, she goes further to say, is “displaced into old dactyls”. A dactyl is an aspect of poetic method where the poet employs a specific rhythm in which the lines showcase a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables. The poetic meaning of this term

however, is not what Boland references here. Dactyls are also figures from Greek mythology. They are a race of male creatures born from Rhea – the mother of the gods. The story tells the tale of Rhea, while in labour, digging her fingers into the earth and giving rise to ten (some versions of the story say thirty-three) figures – all male and given the name of the Dactyls (Hard, 2008). In this Boland refers to the fact that Eire / Ireland is usually considered a female, a victimised woman – the Kathleen Ni Houlihan of Padraig Pearse’s ‘Anna Liffey’; the Goddess Éire. The Irish Republican Brotherhood sometimes referred to themselves as ‘the sons of Éire’ thus this line in the poem refers to the fact that the victimised Irish history constructed by men are about those men – they are the heroes of the Irish story – their responsibility was taken from them and rather than reconstructing their reality they encouraged the image of ‘victim Ireland’. They are similar to the Dactyls in Greek mythology in that they are born of the ‘Great Mother’. In Irish mythology Éire is always connected to the land which is significant here because land is a key component of colonialism and is what the concept of colonialism is based on – dominating land means controlling resources. Following this initial move, the people are subordinated to colonial rule, and in the poem Éire is the first to suffer and then her sons or ‘the Dactyls’.

This heroism in suffering is well documented in the Irish consciousness and is characterised by an oath in the poem – the suffering is reinforced in words. The fact that the oath is a major part of the creation of this mythology of heroes is significant as it is contrasted with the silence which embodies the history of the Irish woman. The second stanza reinforces this connection of wordiness to men and history – “songs that bandage up the history,/ the words that make a rhythm of the crime/ where time is time past”. The past and the traditions associated with it are bandaged up with history through songs and nurtured as though they were a coveted wound; a wound that is relished for the pain it causes. These songs create the history they sing of and give an identity to these Dactyls; these sons of Éire. Boland goes on to say that the

result of this kind of discourse is that subjects come to see time as the past itself. They are so dependent on this past to inform and re-inform their identity that they “make a rhythm of the crime”, they use language to ensure that the past remains part of the general discourse of the country, thus acknowledging the formative nature of language.

Boland herself, as in ‘Outside History’, feels as though she has the choice of which discourse she will subscribe to. She decides that this clinging to a particular historical account of Irish victimisation is contrary to her own understanding of reality and experience – it rejects notions of accountability and relegates the Irish to ‘poor unfortunates’ with no control. She will not go back to a “palsy of regrets”. Instead she turns to the women who are signified by silence in the history books. She (re)imagines their experiences in order to create a new type of discourse, one where these silent women are accounted for. With this in mind then she draws a picture of an Irish prostitute going into the local garrison to sell her wares for the hope of receiving fine cloth in return, cambric. Boland introduces such a character in contrast to the submissive Éire of legend; the conquered. While one could make the argument that the prostitute’s body has been conquered in a similar way, she is ultimately in control. She chooses to walk into the garrison and she demands something in return – something more valuable from her perspective – the cambric. The second figure she introduces to the reader is the image of the mother emigrating to faraway lands. The mother is portrayed in tragic circumstances – she holds her “half-dead baby to her” as she huddles in the cold. The water below is depicted as dirty and the kind of water that mingles appropriately with the guttural vowels uttered by the immigrant as homesickness descends. The unavoidable reality, however, is that while the new language she is exposed to initially is a scar, it heals after a while and eventually becomes a “passable imitation of what went before”. This is the problem with rationalised modernity – nothing is remade, just a passable imitation of the past events. The immigrant woman does not care that the new

language is evidence of previous pain but is co-opted by the immigrant into an imitation of what went before. The immigrant takes the new language but not all that goes with it, but at the same time the scar has marked her, in that she will never be exactly what she was. She exists somewhere in the interstitial space that Boland speaks of in ‘An Irish Childhood in England’ – she is *unheimlich* in liminality. This woman does not seem to lament the loss of language rather she goes with it. This is exactly what Eavan Boland does in her poetry. While there is an acceptance of the suffering of the exile, or the silenced female none of the characters nurture the wounds of suffering – they deal with them, accept them and move on. In this way they are silent, as through language history is formed. This paradox is made all the more apparent because Boland is using language to (re)write the history of Ireland and of these characters. She creates a history, a true myth in that it represents a truth of human nature rather than an objective history that we are confined to accept and acquiesce to. She uses language as a ritual tool to subvert the rationalistic powers of language in order to re-inscribe in them the potential of the abyss.

History and the ‘They-World’

‘The Oral Tradition’, a poem published in the collection *The Journey* (1996), is a quiet treatise on the importance of experience relegated to a shadow in the background by force of the stories of mighty heroes and their strength in the face of adversity. The first two stanzas depict the poet, Boland, following “a reading/ or a workshop or whatever” as she watches the people involved disperse and she “half-wonders” what becomes of their words, “the fragrances we think we sing”. She puts it to the reader (and perhaps herself at the same time) that we presume our words to be “fragrances”; beautiful remembrances of the past or other such ‘worthy’ topics that traditional Irish poets worked with and (re)imagined. As she sits in a room with the fire crackling she becomes aware of two women speaking behind her. Their “talk was a gesture, an outstretched hand”, meaning that their conversation was one

of interaction – physical rather than simply verbal. As they spoke, Boland hear words like “summer”, “birth” and “great-grandmother”, these words urged her to follow – she felt an instant connection to this type of interaction. The women proceed to tell a story of a woman giving birth far from the medical world that was becoming par for the course. The ensuing story is filled with the verve of experience: “She could feel it coming” and she had a skirt that the child she had with her kept pulling – still the mother, her role not lulling for a moment while she gives birth. “She lay down and gave birth to him in an open field” and the child was born blemish free. This is the essential story of how the human race continues to exist, but is also the story that is forgotten in history; pushed to the background.

Like ‘An Irish Childhood in England’, ‘The Oral Tradition’ also flits from the past to the future and then projects itself to an imagining of the future and at the moment the woman in the story gives birth, Boland returns to the present and notices the rain on the window panes. The story does for Boland what the poem ideally should do for the reader – it should initiate a sense of experience in the reader as it does in Boland; she imagines the situation of the story herself and considers what it might mean beyond the obvious. She imagines flowers – lilacs and laburnum and the woman amid the nature giving birth. There is a sense of wonder to the moment exemplified by the laburnum – the golden chain flowers. This beautiful scene is cut short by the mother’s action of lifting “her son to the archive where they would shelter in: the oral song”. The mention of oral song is representative here of the history constructed by the Dactyls in the name of Éire. It is considered “avid as superstition” and is –

layered like an amber in
the wreck of language
and the remnants of a nation

It is full of energy but serves to restrict the mother and son. It is an archive and while the history within might seem full of life, the archive that the son is lifted up to is essentially static, as an archive must be. The old idea or concept of what the nation was, is, or should be still remains and rather than moving forward towards an image of nation based on authentic meaning. Authentic meaning is here shown to be the natural world of the laburnum and the birth of this child. The rationalised world exemplified by the archives are given superiority over this naturalistic view of the world and are superior as a result. Boland contrasts this woman and the experiential value of her reality to the “iron miles in trains” ahead of her. The legacy constructed by man – planes, trains and automobiles – are all used as reasons validating man’s supremacy and this is a presumption which she questions here. She is aware that she “had distances ahead” of her if she was going to adequately introduce a new type of authentic history into general discourse based on a more holistic and interconnected view of the world. This is the reality she becomes aware of in the last line of the poem, “a sense suddenly of truth,/ its resonance”. The static archives of the they-world – a space which is full of the rationalistic interdependence of the court society is essence static. It lacks the capacity to reconstruct the social space as reliance on the archive has become so ingrained in the national discourse that subjects fail to be able to move outside the rationalistic linguistic cognisance described in chapter six.

The Disembodied Self

To grasp modernity as a historical phenomenon means to recover the sense in which the natural attitude is inscribed in the body, and the sense in which the process of embodiment itself constitutes that attitude.

– Harvie Ferguson

A particularly interesting insight comes through Boland's poetry phenomenologically when we consider how she conceives of the woman as a subject within history. Time and again she contrasts the legacies of the male and female subject through the symbols of language and silence. The concept of silence which is always linked to the female is made all the more apparent through her experiences which are portrayed through the site of the body. In much the same way as Weber connected the spirit of modernity to the ascetic principle in Protestantism, as Elias considered the civilising process as a concept working hand in hand with the control and performance of the body in society and Foucault maintained that the body is the site which enables social control and is characteristic of modernity as we know it, Boland connects the they-world of rationalised versions of history as that which produces and maintains the silenced female body. In 'The Oral Tradition' the female narrative is relegated to a whispered discussion in muted tones in a corner and her experiences are hushed and implicitly understood as something rightly subservient to the predominantly male archives of history. Men are analogous with words, language and women with silence.

Throughout her work she acknowledges the socially formative nature of language and this creates and/ or embodies the self throughout history. If woman is silence, then it follows that this history is also the same force which produces a female character disembodied by an androcentric historical account of the Irish past. If, as Ferguson (2006) argues, Elias made the process of embodiment central concern to any general sociology, then

embodiment within poetry is valuable within any attempt to use poetry as a ritualistic device with which to investigate society. Elias (1978) discerned a pattern within modernity comparable to, or following on from, the court society – manners of the court society were adopted and adapted to the new industrialising Western society. As theorised in Chapter Two, the body became the space for truth in representation and subjects were encouraged to control it in particular ways for the advancement of respectability within specific social groups. Constant self-monitoring and self-consciousness reflexivity in the social sphere became a matter of necessity. This led to an intensification of performative action within said social groups which led the individual away from what Heidegger calls authentic Dasein and towards an inauthentic Dasein that fails to incorporate Bakhtin's principle of answerability and the concept of responsibility in relation to land and community. Interestingly, the more the subject reflexively approaches how they appear within their social group and amends their appearance to suit the objectives of that group the more they rely on performative measures to be and remain accepted. This leads to a point where the subject fails to be answerable to themselves on any level and sacrifice any movement towards authentic Dasein to the will of the group. Within the performance, the mask is deemed part of the subject and is taken for truth within the social drama (this concept was elaborated on further in Chapter Two). As the subject relies more on the mask as an essential part of their performance the more they start to reify the elements that create the mask and embody them as objective entities as though they have unique characteristics themselves which can be transposed on the subject to complete their identity.

The fluid nature of modernity is such that the principles of the court society ethos change according to and with the fashions of any particular season and with any particular trend. This means that the subject is constantly trying to complete their identities with various performances or artefacts; these reified elements that can be incorporated into their social mask. This

constant social game playing is characteristic of the court society but creates a situation where the subject becomes disembodied themselves. Because they become overly concerned with strategic game playing in modernity, the mask itself becomes embodied and this leads to a situation where the mask is treated like a being to the detriment of the subject that is only a true and accepted being if associated with or incorporating the mask. Because they are constantly looking outward for 'truth', the being of the mask – the site of performance – becomes 'truth in representation'. They relegate their ethic of responsibility, to the objectives of the group and as a result become disembodied due to their relinquishment of answerability. As described in Chapter Five, this leads to distancing and alienation which reinforces the state of *unheimlich*. This process of disembodiment is the means by which Dasein becomes inauthentic and resides in the they-world. Boland connects the hyper-rationalised they-world to the discourse of Irish History and concentrates, not necessarily on the disembodiment of women, but rather on the non-embodiment of women. In order for the subject to be 'disembodied', they need to be 'embodied' in the first instance and Boland argues that this was never really the case for women in much of world history and most definitely in Irish history.

The intention then, in 'Mise Éire' is to embody women in such a way as to reintroduce them into historical discourses. In proclaiming 'I am Ireland' she connects herself as woman to the land and takes responsibility for it. The first character in the poem is a prostitute who sells her body for fine cloth. While she is presented as a character in control of her choices, she is nonetheless, reduced by the circumstances of the time to giving herself up to men in the garrison in order to clothe herself in the manner she desires. If this woman is to dress her body in beautiful cloth, she must first give it away. The second female character in the poem is an emigrant; she faces the jarring, bitter cold wind on a boat to the new world and gives up her home for the possibilities that lie ahead. This sense of suffering in order to progress, of losing in order

to move forward, is inextricably linked to the site of the body. This premise is reinforced by the meaning reiterated through the poem through the character of the prostitute, the emigrant and Boland herself as the main narrator: a postcolonial emigrant exile. The implication is that if the subject wants to progress in modern society, they must first give something up – the lure of the they-world, the comfortable wound that they cling to their bosom. Boland's focus on embodiment is given life through the narrative form and the reimagining of experiences within that form, and as such is as worthy for its underlying meaning as Elias' civilising process and has the potential, perhaps, to reach a wider audience. The inherent tragedy is that the disembodied self in modernity clings to the they-world convinced it is the only method of attaining identity. The disembodied self is the alienated *unheimlich* self, unaware of their condition. Boland's answer to this problematic is that it can be resolved through the formative force experienced through art. While a significant number of her poems deal with history and its misleading claim to truth, an even larger number of her poems deal with the beauty and benefit in experience for the subject. The poem is the ritualistic form which makes the abyss a space for potential meaning and which leads the subject to a reconstructed view of reality based on the beauty within the natural world.

Experience as a Mode of Subversion

One of Boland's longest poems 'Anna Liffey' deals with the theme of experience in an extensive and profound way. Throughout the over one hundred and seventy lines of this poem she uses the symbol of the River Liffey to consider life's trajectory and its purpose. In fact, James Joyce named one of his characters in *Finnegan's Wake* Anna Livia, who was also a personification of the River Liffey (Joyce, 2012 [1939]). The Liffey is a manifestation of the purpose of the natural environment that makes human existence possible. Initially, the poem tells the story of how the river came to

be called “The Liffey”. *Liphe* or ‘Life’ was the original name of the plain of Kildare through which the river ran and the river acquired its name from that land as a result. Boland mythologises this story by describing how ‘Life’ was a daughter of Cannan and he and he named the plain in her honour as she loved it so much. A woman gave the river its name and in modern times had come to be known as Anna Liffey. She then goes on to describe the source and course of the river and all of the various characteristic elements of the river and the areas through which it flows.

The environment is that which allows humanity to connect to their experiential foundations. The river incorporates many aspects of life and Boland argues that as they are all drawn to it and live with it, they necessarily become a part of it. “One body. One Spirit./ One place. One name.” Land, human, river, animal – they are all part of the same thing. In separating them out according to a rationalistic structure the human becomes alienated and dwells further in their *unheimlich*. She describes these as “Fractions of a life/ It has taken me a lifetime/ To Claim” – the river runs through and creates towns and villages in addition to homes for wildlife and what this brings home to her is that the various elements of Irish life create the whole nation. This is the very nation that she has had difficulty in coming to terms with, that she has been exiled from and which now she is beginning to understand. When she first came to live near the source of the River Liffey she “had no children. No country”, but soon her country “took hold” of her and her children were born. She describes how she “walked out in a summer dusk” to call them in and as she does so she creates her world; she adopts the philosophy that one should –

Make of a nation what you will

Make of the past

What you can

What she is actually intimating here is the tripartite structure of past, present and future – that one must incorporate the past into the present if one is to make the most of it, but always being aware of the futural moment. This is how one experiences life to the utmost of their ability – realising that these temporal constructions are just that – constructions and one must work with them to become an identity. The self-aware *unheimlich* subject finds it difficult to reside in the they-world, the unconsidered present, because the rationalistic constructs jar with them as they are searching for authentic meaning. In the search for this authenticity, the postcolonial subject becomes responsible and answerable for their construction. Boland asserts that a river is not a woman, but is a sign of a woman and vice versa and she uses this sign to make a point. Land, water and humanity are interconnected – they come into existence through their connections with one another. The river has given names to places but these same places do not remember it. Once the land or river gave the modern world a way of rationalising reality; i.e. the generation of names of places, it took on a life of its own and failed to maintain that connection with the river. Boland feels that her life, the life of the postcolonial subject, is like the life of the River Liffey; “The body is a source. Nothing more”. Rivers, life, human beings “are always en route to/ Their own nothingness”; from the moment they are born they are their way to their end point. We cling on to signs as exemplified by the River Liffey and life as a river but in the end it “will be lost in this:/ I was a voice”. The only thing that Boland can hold on to with certainty is the realisation that authentically meaningful human experience is all that really matters in the end. Boland engages with the thought that human beings and the world around them are inherently connected and it is supremely important to be aware of this aspect

of reality. The grand narratives and the hope of an objective meaning to life is all irrelevant in the grand scheme of things. We as human beings can hold on to nothing save being responsible for our own life and in our connection to other beings, having our own experiences and being as authentic as we can possibly be.

‘Energies’ published in *Night Feed* (1982) is a poem that evokes just this feeling of the importance of the small experiences derived from human interaction, gleaned from the quiet moments, if the subject is reflective enough to appreciate it, and progress through the five stages of experience outlined by Victor Turner (2001). She begins the poem with the words “This is my time”, which serves to highlight her conviction that authentic reality lies in being answerable for one’s existence; being responsible for their incorporation of the past into the present while acknowledging the future. In this way the subject can avoid the disembodied and alienated self that emerges with modernity. By saying that this *is* her time she is remarking that she is answerable for her existence and turning it into reflexive experience rather than reflexive existence which is a facet of the court society within modernity. She goes on to describe how hay is comprised of a “banked radiance” that is guilty of “miserer the day” while hers whiles away –

In chores left to do:

the soup, the bath, the fire.

Then bed-time

However, while her hours disappear into the nothingness associated with daily life, she has –

The buttery curls,

the light,

the bran fur of teddy-bear.

Within these words it becomes clear that this interaction, this life and experience she shares with her children is, for her, the epitome of what Heidegger considers authentic Dasein. Boland consciously uses domestic experience to make a political point. For her authentic meaning is gained through the responsible experience of one's life.

Conclusion: The Poet as Master of Ceremonies

In describing Irishness in a way that brings attention to the fluid but overly rationalised nature of historical accounts, Boland highlights her difficulties with subscribing to the structure of permanent liminality. It becomes apparent through her poetry that she feels that the postcolonial condition is inherently homeless. Through poems like 'An Irish Childhood in England: 1951' Boland focuses on the experiential nature of the postcolonial experience – one characterised by exile, *unheimlich* and homesickness – a longing for some tangible identity that she once had. Boland feels that by writing poetry which offers reconceptualisations of the social world and the human's place within it, she can use the form of poetry as a ritual to reconceive of the world around her and one which the reader can use in the same way. Through this state of *unheimlich* then Boland is moved to confront the space of the abyss and attempt to restore structures of authentic meaning which stem from her concept of re-embodiment of the postcolonial self through connections with the

world around them and other human beings in a responsible way rather than in an interdependent manner.

Narrative reality, and how the subject interprets the social world around them, has been described in Chapter Four as something essential to social life. Boland constructs subversive narrative accounts of the subject's experiences that are rarely considered in the poetic form and so brings them into a discourse which traditionally gave precedence to the heroes of history rather than the silent experiences of history characterised by the women in Boland's poetry. Through the narrative form then, subjects experience reality through an understanding of the past, living in the present and a projection towards the future through the imagination. In this way, Boland makes her subject matter political at the same time as she enacts her own sense of authentic Dasein. Such is the form of the narrative structure that it initiates a sense of understanding in the reader also.

If the reader is open to the potential within the abyss of the poem, they themselves can recognise the worth of experience and turn that into their own experience through a system that prompts the subject to identify the message or meaning within the poem to past experiences in themselves. That realisation of the dialogical construct of temporality itself induces an experience in the reader that becomes complete when they direct themselves towards a futural event, principle or concept. Poetry, in this way, becomes a force that encourages responsibility within existence, something that has shown to be lost within the haze of the court society and obscured by the lure of the hyper-rationalised they-world. A world then, in a state of permanent liminality can look to poets who use the poetic structure as a form of ritual inviting the abyss in to reconceive of social reality. This is done in the hopes that the postcolonial homeless selves might find home by confronting the abyss and wading through the murky waters of liminality in the hopes of emerging on the other side reagggregated without having lost anything, but

maybe having regained a type of authentic meaning. Finally, it is how Boland uses metaphors and allegory that enables her to subvert presumed and inauthentic meaning in order to set forth a structure for the reader to use as a rite of passage itself. In these chapters on Boland and Kavanagh, there is certainly a struggle to manage inauthenticity within modernity. Essentially, however, and for the most part, that inauthenticity is considered as an aspect of modernity in itself. In the chapters which follow inauthentic meaning within modernity is considered in comparison to the traditional cultures of the poets in question. While the four poets seem to come to a concluding theory on the importance of responsibility and land as home, they arrive at that theoretical destination in different ways.

CHAPTER NINE:

Rex Lee Jim: Converging Cultures and the Meaning of Land

Introduction

There is a heavy influence of ancestry, language and traditional culture apparent within this chapter. Rex Lee Jim uses the Navajo culture as a way to provide examples of authentic meaning in society and lament the loss of that same meaning. He grapples with issues of identity, cultural conversions, land and responsibility and of course this section of the thesis follows this structure as a result. The main aim here is provide the reader with an understanding of the experiential aspect of the poet as it affects the poetry and thus impacts upon the social context. These are the experiential tools used to provide a framework for the reader and writer to negotiate the ritual of poetry through an acknowledgment of the surplus and on to the abyss and a restoration of authentic meaning.

Rex Lee Jim was born on the Navajo Nation reservation outside Rock Point Arizona in 1962 to a farmer and a weaver; he was the fourth of eight children. The Navajo generally introduce themselves by referencing the clans they are part of by virtue of their grandfather's ancestry. This highlights how important ancestry is to Navajo identity. Rex Lee Jim, according to this method of introduction, is "of the Red House People, born for the Red Streak Running Into Water People. [His] maternal grandfather is of the Towering House People and [his] paternal grandfather is of the Mexican People". Ancestral ties pervade all elements of Navajo society – they dictate many aspects of social reality such as norms, rules and codes. These norms are often connected to how a person views themselves, how they view particular members of the community and what their roles in one another's lives might be (Bernstein, 2010). Until the age of eight, Jim did not attend main-stream school. Instead he was educated by his maternal uncle who taught him ancient ceremonies known as "blessingways", which are according to Jim "designed to address certain illnesses, whether spiritual, mental or physical" (Bernstein, 2010). Before entering the mainstream education system then, Jim

was literally a master of ceremonies – a role which he continues to embrace. These ceremonies require a certain set of knowledge and prayers and require a significant amount of time and dedication to master. Once a member of the Navajo community becomes a medicine man they are called on to perform ceremonies as part of many different rites of passages throughout the lives of people within the community. In this way, Jim ensures that he is an active member of the Navajo community.

At the age of eight Jim attended school at Rock Point which, at the time, was run by two Journalists from Boston – Janet and Sam Bingham. Although he began school with a poor understanding of English (Navajo was his first language) the Bingham's encouraged Jim to learn more of the world beyond the reservation and through studying English he became aware of the potential in language to do just this. One of his first assignments in school was to translate stories told in Navajo by family members into English. This was the first time that Jim would bridge the cultural gap between the Navajo and American world linguistically and he did so with notable poetic flair according to his teacher Janet Bingham (Bernstein, 2010). As a response to Jim's particular academic ability, Sam Bingham organised for him to attend a school in Newfoundland for a year which would challenge him academically, intellectually and culturally. Jim returned home following the school year and finished high school in Carbondale, Colorado and from there he went on to study at Princeton University. Jim majored in English at Princeton and was given the space to flourish academically and creatively. On completion of his primary degree he returned to Rock Point and discovered that the local school was badly in need of teachers. He applied and was accepted for the position of teacher and soon put his goal of achieving a master's degree in English to the side so he could focus on the school he once attended and the education of a younger generation of the Navajo community. In 2001 he earned his master's degree from Middlebury University and in the following years became an instructor in education in the Navajo Community College. Jim

entered politics in 2002 and won a seat on the Navajo Nation council. With this position as a foothold onto the wider political platform, Jim turned his attention towards the United Nations where he hoped he could further the rights of indigenous people of the Americas more generally. Jim furthered his political career on January 11th 2011 when he was elected to the Navajo Nation council as Vice Chairperson.

At Princeton, Jim began writing poetry and has continued to do so throughout a varied career which ranged from teaching and instructing, to acting, directing and in recent times, politics. During his time at Princeton his Professor, Alfred Bush, helped him publish two collections of poetry – *Ahi Ni' Nikisheegiizh* in 1989 and *Saad* in 1995, both published by Princeton. His first two collections were published in Navajo; however, in 1999 he published a trilingual collection of poetry with An Clochan Press entitled *Duchas-T'aa Koo Diné*. This chapter will focus on poetry from this compilation; it is the most appropriate collection for this type of study as the poems are rewritten in English – the same language Boland, Kavanagh and Harjo write in. Given that the poems in this compilation have been rewritten in English, the research will focus on the particular conceptualisation of the subject matter that the English poems convey. There must always be an acknowledgment that these poems have lost something in the journey from the Navajo framework of conceptualisation to the English framework of conceptualisation. This is true simply because each language has its own unique understanding of the world that is implicitly connected to its socio-cultural construction. If one is not part of that culture there will always be an element of any attempted research, investigation or observation that remains somewhat removed from the meaning of cultural artefacts or actions within the community.

To this end, the poetry must be approached in a particular way. First of all, it must be acknowledged that the poetry is a cultural artefact that will

have many meanings which are unique to that specific culture and which cannot be easily accessed or understood by those who are not in direct contact with or are members of that culture. This poetry however, is also an artefact that has meaning on a transcultural level and as such, will be analysed on that basis. Jim's poetry deals with one culture meeting another – in this case the Navajo meeting the American or the 'Western' culture. He is a writer fluent in Navajo, Spanish and English and therefore well acquainted with the dynamics of how cultures meet, diverge, clash, merge and assimilate. This cultural positioning gives Jim a particular insight into the construction of the socio-cultural, economic and political reality of the world around him. Through the form of the poem, Jim deals with issues of postcolonial identity, the clash of cultures and the importance of the natural world. As a postcolonial subject, intrinsically *unheimlich* as a result of colonialism in America, Jim attempts to use poetry to re-negotiate meaning through a confrontation with the potential of the abyss within modernity. In this way, the poem becomes the ritualistic medium through which both the poet and the reader work out authentic meaning structures in their lives and society.

Identity

Many of Jim's poems deal with issues that arise from identity fragmentation. Being *unheimlich* necessarily implies that the subject lacks a solid foundation or identity structure. This is a result of the many varied aspects of permanent liminality which is a society built on a liquid foundation of meaning. For Jim, the court society identity structure is not enough for the individual or the society, and he is intent on constructing an identity based on authentic meaning structures. 'Self Only' illustrates the difficulties at the heart of a postcolonial identity in that it depicts the confused identity that is a consequence of the gnostic colonial situation – it shows the subject aware of their *unheimlich* while not attempting to work out of it just yet. Jim experiences the confusion associated with being neither completely part of one culture or another. In order to show this contention which manifests itself

in the individual and the postcolonial society of which they are a part, Jim compares the Navajo culture to the general ‘western’ culture (which for him goes hand in hand with Christianity). The title of the poem is itself suggestive of this struggle; ‘Self Only’ indicates that the self has somehow been reduced to a less worthy state as a result of his interstitial cultural positioning. By accepting some of the cultural phenomenon of the larger American society, has his identity become confused and as a result rendered less than what a coherent version of the ‘self’ should be? The first stanza and first two lines of the poem draw on traditional Navajo imagery. “You have the dark bow/ You have the feathered arrow”. The dark bow is symbolic of the Slayer of Enemies which is itself a symbol of the overthrowing of evil. The dark or black bow called ‘Altqin dilqil’ were used as the poles upon which the structure of the first Hogan, or Navajo home, was built. The feathered arrows are indicative of the hunting tradition among the community. These lines are reflective of the Navajo desire to protect its culture and customs, but also Jim’s awareness that he has the tools to build himself a home, a structured foundation for his identity. The first five stanzas lack any definitive structure, ranging from three to one line stanzas and including cases of enjambment. The fourth line brings the reader back to the character of the grandfather, one of the most respected members of the community based on his age and experience. The grandfather sings “I am the child of Changing Woman”; this man is sure of his heritage and his belief system and is happy in pronouncing it. As the fifth stanza goes on to note, this is also a man who is knowledgeable when it comes to his traditional folklore and myths. Not only does the grandfather have a belief system tied to his ancestry, but he is immersed in it – it is a distinct part of his identity. Because he is sure the solid foundations to authentic meaning for him, he is not *unheimlich*.

The last stanza moves on from the grandfather to the narrator, who is Jim himself. He asks himself, who is he?

And I? me? myself? mine?

My name is Rex, they say.

Your name has certain associations, they say.

You murdered your father, I am told.

Your married your mother, I am told.

Obviously, here Jim is considering the western connotations of the word “Rex”, which is his first name. Rex is the Latin word for King which for Jim connects him to the play *Oedipus Rex* written by the renowned Greek playwright, Sophocles. *Oedipus Rex* is not only significant in that the play was written by a Greek playwright. Undoubtedly ancient Greece and Greek philosophy or literature is, for Jim, a symbol of the beginning of western civilisation; however German Psychologist Sigmund Freud also incorporated into his theory of sexuality. Oedipus is thus a symbol of more than the beginning of western culture; it is a symbol for the continuation and progression of the culture also. This contradiction between the traditions of the Navajo and the Western world are given even more potency because they are encapsulated within his name; the term people use him to identify him as a distinct character within his society; the symbol of his very identity.

This all happened across the wide waters. I am told.

Where am I coming from?

While Jim is given all of this information concerning the name Rex and its connotations, he is simultaneously informed that this what his name means and that these things “happened across the wide waters”. Their words impress upon him the reality that all of those associations which his name manifests are contrary to his cultural identity. All of which he is told that he is by

linguistic connection; he simply cannot be by virtue of his community. His identity is therefore almost negated.

The last line in this poem depicts this confused sense of identity perfectly – “Where am I coming from?” What perspective must he take on his own identity? With what cultural perspective will he view the world around him? He, as a person, is undoubtedly a combination of both traditional Navajo and modern western society and as a result he is struggling to define his own identity. It is clear that, while this poem uses Jim’s own experiences as a focus point, his story is here used as a tool to make a more universal point. It emphasises the difficulties inherent in any attempt to maintain a clear sense of identity for a subject who has been socialised into two (or perhaps more) different cultural prerogatives as a result of colonialism. As someone who was raised within a more culturally homogenous community, his grandfather was completely confident in his world view and his place in the society around him. Jim uses this poem to point out that the luxury of a definitive world view is more difficult for someone who is, and is not, of two different cultures.. In the last line of ‘Self Only’ Jim reinforces this reality by asking “Where am I coming from?” another way of saying ‘where do I come from?’ In relation to his case particularly, he asks whether he is from Navajoland/Dinéyah, the United States of America or maybe even both of these worlds together. Jim is irreducibly a product of colonisation and the merging of cultures more generally, and the problems involved in constructing an identity within such a reality are brought into view in this poem. As a result of the fact that he has no solid meaning structure to relate to, he becomes *unheimlich*. He cannot have complete responsibility towards the Navajo traditions or the Modern world, and so is homeless in liminality. Fortunately for Jim, he is aware of this homelessness and writes poetry with a view to restoring meaning and thus finding a home in modernity.

Cultural Convergence

This loss of identity for Rex is more than simply a personal issue or challenge; it is reflective of societal issues at large. The solid foundations of the Navajo culture are being replaced by the more fluid inauthentic meaning structures of modernity. ‘Hosteen Grinder’ outlines Jim’s worries regarding the increasing homogenisation of culture in the United States. The backdrop to this poem is set on the Navajo nation where a woman runs out of flour to make bread and asks her husband to go to the local town, Farmington, to buy flour. When he refuses she says that he must grind the corn himself to make flour for her to bake with. The tradition of grinding corn to make flour has become a thing of the past and is only resorted to in an emergency as modern conveniences have rendered it unnecessary. The poem shifts to images of the desert and the faint sound of a cry in the background. “Flaming billboards of Coca-Cola” are said to “stand triumphantly on bodies of sand across Northern Arizona”. The modern western culture is infiltrating the desert and the cultures that resided there previously. In addition, it does so in a triumphant manner implying that it has conquered the bodies of sand, or the body of the culture which it is, in effect, overthrowing by virtue of its sheer force. There is no respect afforded to or responsibility towards the land; it is something to be dominated. On “the other side of the river” the faint cry grows in force until white corn boy and yellow corn girl (the Diné are originally derived from corn; boys from white and girls from yellow) along with many other traditional characters like pollen boy, are crying. Again, towards the end of the poem the figure of the Grandfather is used, a symbol of tradition and the Navajo way of life –

My grandfather stares and says

My corn pollen bag is empty and

They have gone to Farmington to buy bread.

On this side of the river the cornfield is flourishing – the river seems to divide the cultures or ways of life from one another – ‘this side of the river’ with modern western society and ‘the other side of the river’ with the traditional way of life of the Diné represented by the characters of white corn boy and yellow corn girl. The Grandfather observes this division and notes that his corn pollen bag is empty and so are his hopes for the future and the perpetuation of the old Navajo customs and beliefs. In place of his way of life, the newer generations succumb to the power and influence of liquid modernity, characterised here by the powerful symbol of the Coca-Cola billboard. The Grandfather is keenly aware that the old way of maintaining life and culture is slowly being replaced.

The message here is not a simplistic one propounding the benefits of one culture over another, but rather that colonisation is an issue that must be considered in order to properly contemplate the negative consequences of the cultural homogeneity or globalisation that is at its core. The same theme is reiterated in ‘Last Night’ where the narrator, presumably Jim, brings a group of children and elders into the local town. The younger children eat ‘Big Macs’ and ‘Pizza’ while the older members of the group eat “kneel down bread” and thoroughly enjoy it regardless of how difficult it is to eat with their “toothless mouths”. There is a clear distinction here between the two generations; one embraces modernity and all its choices while the other revels in the traditions of the Navajo community. The underlying problem becomes clear when the reader notices that those holding onto the Navajo traditions are the older members of the community. The youth, by comparison, are more concerned with all that western society has to offer, this is shown by their choice of food; that which is created by formally rational structures. The fact that Jim primarily writes in the Navajo language is an attempt to address this issue in a proactive way. Being a member of the younger generation, many of his peers speak exclusively in the English language which makes it more interesting that Jim chooses to write in the Navajo language – one that is

becoming less and less used in everyday speech within that community. The point Jim makes is not that the Navajo language and conception of reality is superior, but rather that each language has its own specific wealth of experiential and conceptual apparatus and that with the demise of each language necessarily follows the demise of that particular view of reality. In a world that is moving towards an increased homogeneity of thought and language, to lose alternative perspectives is counterproductive and perhaps detrimental to the potential for change in society.

Throughout Rex Lee Jim's poetry there is a distinct theme of cultural awareness which emerges from his experiences in attempting to reconcile his knowledge of and interaction with the Navajo culture and the 'mainstream' American culture. In two poems, 'I'm Just Observing' and 'In the Cornfield', Jim sets the stage for the world's creation – both from the mythico-cultural perspective of the Navajo and Christian communities. The title of the first poem, 'I'm Just Observing', is telling – it explicitly states that he, the writer, is simply observing these stories of creation and reworking them or reimagining them in light of the benefit of a particular experiential background which is somewhat removed from either of the creation stories. As a postcolonial self, he is not entirely engulfed in either tradition, although he may have more of a connection with the Navajo rather than the Judaeo-Christian myths. The narrator in the poem directs themselves towards, and addresses, the 'Whiteman'. At first it is suggested that the narrator is offering the Whiteman an apple – in a similar way as the snake offered Eve the apple in the Garden of Eden. There is a line break here and the next stanza makes the situation clearer – the narrator is actually warning the 'Whiteman' not to pick up the apple. The narrator observes the apple, acknowledges its existence but simultaneously realises that it should not be picked up by the Whiteman. This metaphor is two-fold. Firstly it harkens back to the creation story in the Christian bible where the apple is a symbol of all that the Whiteman should avoid if they want to preserve their virtue. Secondly the

metaphor brings this myth into the context of the more recent history of the Whiteman's arrival in 'the new world' of the Americas where the apple is a symbol of the land that they are confronted with and all the potential within it. The Whiteman is again warned to stay away from the apple, or the land, as to pick it up and consume it would constitute a similar disavowal of human virtue as was experienced in The Garden of Eden. In eating the apple Adam and Eve were forced to leave The Garden; to renounce paradise as they were no longer worthy of it. Likewise, in the new world taking the apple amounts to taking the land and in doing so they take possession of something which should not be 'possessed' in that way. The Whiteman, the coloniser, shows himself unworthy of that very same land as he fails to treat it with respect or acknowledge the responsibility which the Navajos feel towards it and to which they should if they want to exist is a way that is meaningful in its connection to the world around them.

At this point in history, where European settlers are confronted with the Navajo Nation (or perhaps vice versa), the maps of meaning that the two cultures have cultivated and embraced themselves collide as the Christian creation myth encounters the Navajo first people myths. The poem illustrates this as the fourth stanza begins with "you fled" which refers to the Whiteman's departure from the Garden of Eden. It suggests that the Whiteman had some choice in their departure from the Garden of Eden – they could have accepted the responsibility that respecting the tree with the forbidden fruit would have required, or alternatively, attempted to possess and therefore reject responsibility for the tree and by extension, the garden. This abdication of their responsibility is here presented as the root of their downfall. The poem then continues on with an image of laughing Coyote running into a "dry arroyo" or creek. In the first people myths, Coyote is not simply an animal – rather, characters like Coyote, Bear and White Crow are the first people to inhabit the earth. They were the prototypes for modern humans and lived at a time before humans existed. When the humans came

into being the first people were transformed into a race of animals who, to this day, still display some of the characteristics associated with those first people (Bright, 1992). Coyote is the ultimate Trickster figure as described by Paul Radin (1956); like the snake in the Garden of Eden who enticed Eve into eating an apple from the forbidden tree, Coyote is a demiurge. The demiurge is a strange, semi-divine creature, more accurately called a craftsman or labourer. The demiurge is the being responsible for the creation of the world as we know it. In the Garden of Eden, the snake takes humanity away from the pure goodness of paradise, and creates an imperfect world full of confusion, chaos and self-conscious ridiculousness. In many Navajo myths, the inconsistencies of the world are a direct result of some action Coyote took as one of the first people. In the next line of the poem “the dust devil dances around the snakeweed”. Snakeweed, from an aesthetic perspective, resembles many snakes coming up from the ground but it also has been used in ceremonial rituals and within some cultures it is used as a cure for snakebite. The dust devils that dance around it are ‘Chiindii’ – spirits which remain on earth after a person dies. They represent the worst aspects of the person who passed away and are considered to be very bad omens or presences. The fact that they are here dancing around the snakeweed is suggestive. These dust devils or bad spirits engage with the snakeweed, which reminds the reader of the snake which caused so much trouble in the Garden of Eden. There seems to be a point here where the myths of the Christian and Navajo traditions come together in a way which highlights the fact that the faith, or belief system underpinning both communities have an unavoidable similarity thematically. The Coyote and the Snake have a distinctive creative purpose as a demiurge while, at every turn, this purpose most certainly shows itself to be a contradictory and confusing one. The image of the dust devil dancing around the snakeweed is indicative of the spirit that is applied to the character of the snake. This line evokes awareness on the part of the reader that, like the dust devil, the snake represents everything bad about the human being. Had human beings not been easily persuaded into doing that which they had

been forbidden, the snake's words of encouragement would have been redundant. Rather than blaming the snake, the poem maintains that the human being should take responsibility for their actions.

In the next line of the same stanza, just like the dust devils danced around the snakeweed the white crow also dances – but on a barbed wire. The white crow was a gluttonous creature in Native American mythology. In order for him to save all the buffalo meat for himself, he warned the buffalo any time the Navajo went on a hunting expedition for food and thus the beasts were able to escape the hunter's bows. The Navajo people were almost reduced to starvation from the lack of food and could not understand why, suddenly, their hunting techniques were inefficient. When the people eventually discovered what had been happening one angry person grabbed White Crow and threw him into a fire and his feet were weighed down with a rock. Before he could get away his feathers were singed – which was to remain as a mark of his actions henceforth and to this day the crow is black (O'Bryan, 1993). Under the weight of his greed White Crow clings on to the barbed wire while “eyeing a dead buck”. His claws bleed with every jump excited by the prospect of satiating his constant hunger, a quality indicative of the trickster. He cringes as he does so and “Each cringe lets a droplet of blood explode/ On hardened earth below”. The image of the blood exploding, blowing up on the earth below which is described as blue is significant. The colour blue is associated with the second world in Navajo mythology. This world was characterised by constant conflict in the form of disagreement, fighting and even killing. The Swallow people were particularly powerful in this world and were the cause of much of the problems associated with this world through their constant vying for power and domination. The fact that Jim decides to conclude the poem with an image of the blue world – one marked by war between the animals or first people – is particularly noteworthy. The modern world has been comparable to the blue world in that it was created as a result of conflict and fighting among cultures in order for one culture to

display its authority over another (and in this case specifically within America and from the perspective of the Navajo). The preceding stanzas highlight the irrationality at the centre of this conflict. The cultures referred to in the poem have similar thematic undertones that are concerned with the concept of good and bad and the ‘something in-between’; the figure of the trickster, fooling the gullible into particularly undesirable situations and the power of the land. In this poem the land is offered as the final powerful force – from both the Christian and the Navajo perspectives.

Without a definite master of ceremonies the trickster has more control over subjects. The apple – as a fruit of the land – is the eventual catalyst leading towards Adam and Eve’s downfall. Jim evokes the symbol of blue earth to illuminate the conflict at the heart of intercultural relations and simultaneously emphasises the importance of land in these myths and their subsequent effect on the respective cultures. Modern society has moved away from these tales based on moral warnings and instead towards Gnostic tales of mastery and control based on Christian ideology (White, 1979). In the Christian creation story, Adam and Eve attempt to possess something which they should instead respect. They had a responsibility to God and for the world they inhabited to treat it in a specific way. Their downfall was their lack of accountability and their inability to live in a respectful way with the land. Similarly, in modern society there is a desire to control and dominate land rather than treat it with respect. This is modernity’s downfall also – lack of accountability and interconnection with the world around them. Instead subjects in the they-world treat the natural environment with formal rationality – it is used in a means end system where the end is inauthentic meaning associated with the court society.

‘Corn Pollen’ also uses creation myths as a basis to build a picture of the important place the natural environment holds in existence. In the opening lines Jim highlights the transient nature of weather and this is a metaphor for

the transient nature of human life and history because for him the natural world and humanity are inextricably linked –

Dark clouds travel

Dark mists travel

All winds play

All plants play

Difficult times, the poem suggests, are as transitory as dark clouds traveling overhead. The image of winds playing suggests the vitality of experiencing life at it full or living with it and in the thick of it rather than distancing oneself from it. At the same time as the poet is acknowledging this reality of nature, two men talk about their contradictory understandings of creation. The Christian character tells the Navajo man –

You didn't crawl out of the earth

You didn't crawl out of the darkness

God from above placed you here

From heaven your Father placed you here

This rejection of native people's religion and tradition is particularly common in the context of colonialism. In many cases the indigenous communities adopted the settler's religion or incorporated elements of it into their understanding of reality. The Navajo community to this day still retains a large amount of the culture that is tied to religious traditional foundations. The above stanza is indicative of this traditional religious understanding of the world. The Navajo people believe that they were created out of darkness and from the potential of land. The Navajo man replies in what seems to be quite a calm and self-assured manner that –

I know I crawled out of the earth

I know I crawled out of the darkness

Yes, I know that from above

My father spit me into my mother's womb

The first thing of note here is the fact that the 'f' in 'father' is not capitalised. This means that the father referred to here is a common noun rather than 'Father' as proper noun that the Christian man refers to. This is significant because it tells you that there is a marked difference between the subject of the Christian and the Navajo man's conception of creation. The Christian man's Father is an omnipotent being that as 'the one' created life and all that accompanies it on earth. The Navajo man, by contrast has an utterly different idea of the role his father plays in the creation story. The fourth stanza captures the Navajo's belief that the Diné originally manifested from the earth through the form of corn. Before this there was nothing – the darkness referred to above. The earth gave the Diné life in the beginning and then in a more modern sense his father (common noun), spit him into his mother's womb. This father is the only father that he acknowledges. The connection between the earth, the land and human creation is imperative to understanding one's place in the world within the Navajo tradition. Responsibility for the land therefore, and the nurturing and growing of crops is an elemental part of their lives and experiences; or rather it was until the colonisers took that responsibility away from them in their gnostic perception of the world.

The repetition of the 'I' in the fourth stanza suggests that the Navajo man does not wish to impress his views upon the Christian man and he is speaking personally and uttering a truth that is reality for him. The last stanza returns back to the focus on the natural environment depicted in the opening lines. The first line in this verse reads "All around the fog met the earth, but

now it is time for planting”. The use of the past tense here before moving on to the present tense in the next line is suggestive in that the poet is implying a change of circumstances. In modern society, the earth was covered in fog – a metaphor for inauthentic meaning – but now something must change and subjects must work towards the restoration of authentic meaning. The “now” suggests that action is necessary and should be based on the experiential quality of human connection with the land or the world around them. This change of intention expresses an awareness of potential and possibility – for if there is space for promise in relation to the land then equally there is space for promise in society – there is an abyss where meaning can be created anew. The last three lines of this last stanza are vital in that they draw both cultures into a compromise. The fog that is apparent need not hamper the potential of the future because as the poem maintains, it is time for that fog to settle and for the earth to welcome the sunshine. The fog of hyper-rationalisation and performance focused society must give way so that a clearer and more authentic meaning can take root.

The last line “seeds of all kinds have made everything beautiful again” implies that the different cultural influences can grow or turn into something positive if we allow the fog to settle. The land, however, is central to this possibility. While this quite humanistic outlook is certainly conveyed in the imagery and the metaphors used in the poem, there is an undeniable sentiment running as an undercurrent which contrasts the Navajo way of life with Christianity in a more favourable way. Christianity’s essential structure is here offered a belief that the one true Father created everything separately to one another but at the same time and always in some kind of connection with one another. This removes the holistic element of the natural world as everything is distinctly separate from one another to which they are subject to a further degree of separation from that of their creator. Christianity then, intrinsically separates the human from the land. From the beginning of Christianity, those who consider themselves Christians have had a

contentious relationship with the land. This was argued to have a connection with the Voegelin's gnostic impulse described in Chapter Three. In "I'm Just Observing" this attitude is depicted by illustrating the creation scene in the Garden of Eden. The story which describes the beginnings of human life is indicative of the essentially problematic link between human beings and the land they inhabit, a disavowal of responsibility and the removal of responsibility, both leading to *unheimlich*. The aim then, is to find a way to restore the idea of home. For Jim, this sense of home was connected to the land and responsibility for it; when this was taken away, so was the idea of home. In restoring notions of home then, it is important to understand the necessity of land and the natural environment to our social world and work our way forward to more authentic meaning structures based on solid foundations.

The Navajo culture is contrasted with this belief which situates humanity at a far remove from the natural environment. It is held up as an active community which acknowledges the privileged place the land has in sustaining human life and authentic meaning. The Christian settlers had a particular understanding of the world that was based on power relations and domination and as a result they become more removed from a respectful and interconnected view of the world and social reality. The final line of the poem sends a message that is essentially inclusive and hopeful for the future. "Seeds of all kinds have made everything beautiful again" a phrase that argues for a fertile land where each group has the same chance of being nurtured and fulfilling its potential. Land provides foundation, security and solid constructions of meaning for modern society rather than more rationalistic, distanced and alienated ones.

Land

Jim offers land and a connection to it as one of the ways to restore a solid sense of our reality and social world. The poem 'The White Hill' deals with

this theme of land and its cultural influence. It initially describes a scene where the narrator walks on top of the hills which are reminiscent of the mountains which serve as the markers signifying the boundaries of Dinétah in the Navajo monument valley. The mountains themselves are said to form a Hogan – a traditional Navajo home – suggesting that the land itself is a type of home which shelters and protects the Diné. This poem is particularly interesting as it invokes an image of Changing Woman which is a guiding force of the Navajo people and inspires them to incorporate elements of other cultures into their own so that the energy and life of the Navajo community might continue. Jim describes how, as he walks on the hills, regardless of which way he looks “there is no way down”. By choosing to walk on top of the hills, he is stranded implying that if he chooses to devote himself entirely to the traditions and myths as depicted in Navajo folklore, he is just as stranded as if he were walking on top of the mountains in monument valley with no way down.

The next stanza tells a different story – it is directly relatable to the reality of being part of a minority group or culture within America. In this stanza Jim recalls how “another one in Dinnehotso/ Died, this time from exposure/ On this cold night.” The significance of this second line lies in the fact that Jim is sure to point out that *this* time the death was caused by exposure to the cold, implying that there is another form of exposure which is resulting in death among the people of Dinnehotso. In 2004, 2009 and 2012 the National Centre for Environmental Health found unusually high levels of natural arsenic and uranium in the local water supply in Dinnehotso which is home to approximately 1,800 Navajo people. These water nitrates have been linked to lung, skin and bladder cancer and are said to have caused an incalculable number of deaths over the past fifty years (NCEH, 2012). As high a number as 40% of the Dinnehotso chapter’s members are said to live below the poverty line – which makes the third line in the stanza – “from exposure/ On this cold night” particularly poignant. The lack of responsibility for the land

and towards the people living in the Navajo community is apparent as in mistreating natural resources people have died. This lack of connection and responsibility for the environment has led to disastrous consequences and is a perfect example of how the further we move away from the land, the less authentic meaning we have. Jim then goes on to incorporate an ideology far removed from the Navajo religious foundations when he says that “tears will flow from heaven all night long”. The use of the concept of heaven here is interesting. Is Jim suggesting that the people who are responsible for the high level of water nitrates in the community’s supply are being un-Christian as they ignore the obvious problems within America’s indigenous societies? That even their own God and angels are crying for them and will continue to do so until the inhumane treatment of an entire social group ceases. November is coming, he points out at the end of the poem and so are the bitterly cold nights where already suffering Navajo people will have very little refuge from the unforgiving weather. This poem is indicative of Jim’s desire to deal with local and global issues in a holistic manner. He rejects an insular view of the world or local issues in favour of a wider and more analytical understanding of particular problems and in so doing, offers a more critical appraisal which moves the debate forward.

‘Questioning, Questioning’ draws on themes of tradition, land and the importance of ancestry. In this poem, what appears to be a young boy asks many questions of his grandfather which are mostly related to Navajo tradition. In the initial three lines the grandfather encourages the boy to ask questions implying that the more questions he asks the better chance he will have of knowing the world around him and his Navajo culture in particular. The first question asked relates to the infamous Coyote and where he started trotting. Coyote as trickster is often referred to as ‘Trotting Coyote’, ‘trotting’ because of his particular, almost good humoured gait. What the boy actually wants to know is – when did the Navajo people become aware of Coyote and his mischievous ways? The grandfather’s response is that “Coyote has cold

feet and only travels in the winter”, meaning that Coyote only really needs to travel for food in the winter as resources become more scarce in his surrounding vicinity and so has to hunt further afield. The Navajo people on the other hand, are less likely to be wandering far in the winter due to the weather constraints. The exact beginning then, of Coyote’s existence, is not something that the Navajo can know with any great certainty beyond the traditional myths relating to the figure. The grandson then asks of his grandfather “where did the people emerge, they, say, only grandfather?” The grandfather replies that the story will emerge when the corn whistles on the stove. Corn is an important crop to the Navajos for many reasons – the corn husks have been traditionally used to make bags and moccasins, in prayers and rituals but most importantly corn has been used as a food source which has sustained the Navajo people culturally and physically for thousands of years (O’Bryan, 1993). Corn is a symbol of land, fertility and new life for the Navajo people and when the grandfather in the poem says that he can only tell the story of creation when the corn is ready, this is indicative of the respect afforded to the plant as a life source and sustainer. The implication here is that without the influence of corn the Navajo people would not be able to continue their traditions in order to be able to pass down the creation stories to the next generation or indeed, any of the other myths associated with the culture. This belief is founded on the importance of land to the Navajo community – corn is a symbol of the potential of land and the power it has to give life to individual people, communities and societies at large.

Following an acknowledgment of his place in the natural world, in ‘Questioning, Questioning’ the grandfather reveals another truth based in mythological foundation – “The horned toad and lightning and wrestling once more, my grandson”. This line in the poem refers to a particular story centring on a dispute between horned toad and lightning. Horned Toad was living on the land that lightning felt was his property and warned the toad that if he did not remove himself he would exert the full force of his might on the

toad and invariably annihilate him. The toad felt that the land was his also and so was still there when lightning returned and eventually lightning attacked him. Toad was saved by his tough over layer of shell however and the lightning was powerless to move him. By describing the two creatures as characters who are ‘wrestling once more’ the grandfather is alluding to more than the myth – he is using the myth to make a point about modern society and the various social groups’ dispute over land and grappling for possession of it. The message at the heart of the allegorical story of lightning and the toad is the question over who is the true owner of the land. The underlying suggestion is that perhaps the land cannot be possessed and that even though different people will have a particular claim to it, that claim can never be truly and definitively authoritative. This brings the reader back to the colonial forces which took possession of the land which the native tribes previously had responsibility for and deprived them of the responsibility for the land to which they afforded great respect. Without their land, their roots, their solid conception of the world around them they were thrust into a state of *unheimlich*. The boy ignores his grandfather’s words of wisdom on this front however and instead asks his grandparents to bring out the bags of corn – meaning that he wishes his grandparents to bring out the life lessons, the life sources that the corn holds. His grandparents reply that they “enjoyed corn mush this morning while/ you were/ still asleep”. This is suggestive of the experiential wealth of information the grandparents are in possession of while also indicating that the boy needs to be more patient and listen and absorb the wisdom of his elders – something which he has not shown particular skill at so far within the narrative that the poem offers.

The respect afforded to land and its elevated status within Navajo society is repeated in a number of Jim’s poems and particularly so in ‘Food’. ‘Food’, unsurprisingly, is essentially about sustenance and the part that earth and more widely, the natural environment plays in maintaining life. The first line is clear in its contention that the light of the sun nourishes the plants and the

earth in order for crops to flourish. “The dawn brings back the/ Food that allowed the elders to ripen” – it becomes clear very quickly that Jim is speaking about more than crops – the daylight and the earth come together to create the condition for agriculture and this in turn is the source of sustenance for the human race, and in this case the Navajo community specifically. There is an implicit awareness in the first few lines of this poem that that the earth is essential in preserving humanity, and as such it should be respected and revered for its fundamental role in life. Responsibility for it then, in nurturing the connection is equally as important for human existence. The stanza goes on to declare that “each morning/ Young hearts breathe in the dawn” – they too are aware of the natural world’s role in their life and the part it plays in their growth. The second stanza goes on to describe how –

Stories are danced and

Prayers are sung.

For the people,

It is the way of the dawn.

The fact that Jim uses the word ‘danced’ rather than ‘told’ suggests that these stories are active in their role in Navajo life rather than static myths removed from the day to day lives of the members of the community. The choice of the word ‘dancing’ also adds an element of joy to the telling of the stories. The prayers are sung rather than chanted and they are sung for “the people” which is a direct translation of ‘Diné’ – the Navajo word that the community use to describe themselves. The last line in the stanza looks to the future and the possibility for future sustenance by the land, the natural environment more generally and signals a bright beginning full of promise and hope. Through the telling of stories and singing of prayers which are indicative of maintaining traditional culture and recognising the influence of the earth and all it offers the “earth gives birth to all”, the future generations of Navajo

people included. The concluding lines read “and sacred places are reserved/ For those yet to come”. All the while ensuring that they respect tradition and the world around them it is essential to keep an eye to the future, to the continuation of the Diné. It is only in maintaining this interconnectedness that humanity can continue in a meaningful way.

Conclusion

Rex Lee Jim’s poems constitute a concerted effort to engage his traditional culture and compare it in ways with the dominant western culture showcasing Coca-Cola billboards and Big Macs. In acknowledging the *unheimlich* aspect of his identity in ‘Self Only’, he simultaneously acknowledges the *unheimlich* nature of postcoloniality. This sense of homelessness becomes all the more apparent when he observes what he considers to be inauthentic meaning in modern society – and this for him is connected to the particular religious viewpoint held by the colonists. He confronts this meaninglessness and uses allegory and metaphor in his poetry to draw the reader into a ritualistic experience whereby they can start to restore meaning themselves by confronting the potential of the untranscribed space – the abyss. By consciously incorporating images and metaphors connected to the natural world, the reader is offered some solid foundation on which to balance as they attempt to negotiate structures of authentic meaning. While metaphor and allegory remain an implicit force within the poetry of Rex Lee Jim, Joy Harjo is explicit in her use and avowal of the potential in metaphor. Thus she uses metaphor as a conscientious way which adds a further depth of understanding to her poetry. This will be discussed in the next chapter as well as Chapter Eleven as one particular element of her writing is vital to an exemplification of the potential of the abyss - that of the rationalisation of violence.

CHAPTER TEN:

Joy Harjo: Alienation and the loss of Metaphor

Introduction

For Joy Harjo, language is most definitely a political tool and she has used it for decades in an attempt to subvert notions of what a tribal person and/or woman should be. In doing this, she reiterates time and again the importance of metaphor and the ability to see things outside of an explicit rationalistic structure of communication. For this reason, she feels that poetry has an ability to encourage subjects to a state of abstract consciousness where other linguistic structures cannot. To this end, the following chapter considers the potential in metaphor through Harjo's poetry, but also the violent undercurrents of the postcolonial experience in modernity. This is compared to the traditional values and meaning structures of native communities in order to highlight the lack of authentic meaning in western society. Finally, an argument is offered as to the potential of language as a political tool.

Joy Harjo was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma on the 9th May 1951. Despite having not been raised on the Muscogee Creek reservation, she nonetheless continued to feel and exercise a strong connection to her native roots. Because Harjo's grandmother Naomi Harjo Foster and her aunt Lois Harjo Ball were artists – Joy was, from a young age, surrounded by their paintings and the message that this was a way in which women could have a voice. Harjo spent much of her childhood drawing and painting and as a result, she nurtured an artistic ability that would be of paramount importance to her developing identity. This pastime also gave her the ability to escape into a world of her own making and away from the violence witnessed at home. Her father was an abusive alcoholic and left the family home when she was young, but unfortunately this experience of violence continued as her mother married a man equally as abusive. At this time, Harjo's main concern was to escape her life in Oklahoma and follow her dream of becoming an artist. At sixteen, and with her mother's encouragement, Harjo moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico and enrolled in the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA).

She studied painting and theatre and within a year was chosen as lead member of an American Indian arts ensemble which travelled throughout the US to perform shows (Harjo, 2012).

When she returned from her travels, Harjo discovered she was pregnant and subsequently married the father of her child. Her first child was soon followed by her second and her life became more difficult. It transpired that history was to repeat itself, as Harjo had to cope with many of the problems that her mother before her had to, and to which she was a witness. Her husband was, she would later recollect, prone to violent rages if his temper were tested but essentially, he was a victim to the lure of what forgetfulness alcohol could offer (Harjo, 2002). Although this was a stressful time full of personal struggle with two young children and a difficult relationship, Harjo resolved to continue on to University. With determination and resolve she began her bachelor's degree at the University of New Mexico and graduated in 1976. At University, Harjo developed an interest in poetry and describes it as a process that "started from the inside out, then turned back in to complete a movement" (2002). Poetry, she wrote later, approached her in the chaos and offered her a way to make sense of the world. Poetry was more than a way to achieve a sense of personal enlightenment; for Harjo it was essentially a political tool. Her desire to push herself academically and artistically eventually drove her to the University of Iowa where she graduated with a master's degree in Fine Arts in 1978.

Over the next few years, Harjo taught in various institutes including the IAIA from 1978-1979; Arizona State University from 1980-1981; Santa Fe Community College from 1983-1984; The University of Colorado from 1985-1988; The University of Arizona from 1988-1990 and finally the University of New Mexico from 1991-1995. Throughout this time, Harjo devoted herself artistically to the improvement of her poetic craft and published numerous collections of poetry including *The Last Song* (1975);

What Drove Me to This? (1979); *She Had Some Horses* (1983); *Secrets from the Centre of the World* (1989); *In Mad Love and War* (1990) and *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky* (1994). From 1995 to 2000, Harjo began experimenting with music as an accompaniment to her poetry and learned how to play the saxophone as a view to combining the two. To this end she started a group called 'Poetic Justice' and began touring and performing with them. *A Map to the Next World* was published in 2000 followed by *How We Became Human* in 2002. Since then, Harjo has toured, performed and published her memoirs entitled *Crazy, Brave* (2012).

Certain themes come through strongly in Harjo's work; themes which are usually connected to the earth, the land or the environment. A holistic attitude towards the world underpins her philosophy and usually manifests itself through symbolic references to the natural world. She conceives of herself as a subject who is fundamentally *unheimlich* and uncomfortable with modern society. When incorporating her traditional Cree culture into her work she attempts to salvage some elements of it which she believes would help restore meaning in a world so concerned with fluid conceptions of meaning that privilege performance and representation as truth. Human connection with the natural world is offered as a solid meaning structure which would help society bridge distances created by individualisation within permanent liminality and create a sense of home. In using language as a type of political tool, Harjo notes this rationalisation of society at the same time as she incorporates the untranscribable space of the abyss. Clever use of language, metaphors and imagery provide a platform for subjects to use experience and abstract conceptualisations of reality to be able to think in a more holistic and connected way which would immediately limit the sense of alienation in modernity. Poetry gives readers a ritualistic form with which to restore authentic meaning which they can then apply to society.

The Potential in Poetic Metaphor

In much of her poetry Harjo uses metaphors based on animals and the natural environment to make wider arguments about reality and highlights this element of her poetry when she pronounces “you can manipulate words to turn departure into aperture”. Words can be used to create something new, and poetry is a perfect place to do that because of its ability to incorporate allegory and metaphor so seamlessly. As argued in Chapter Four, allegory is a particularly useful phenomenon in that firstly, it is a veil which keeps its meaning away from those who will not be affected by it. Secondly, by virtue of its linguistic and formal structure, the reader must work in order to interpret it. The most important element of allegory or metaphor is that, while interpreting it, the reader experiences it themselves and thus discovers it anew (Tambling, 2010). For Harjo, this ability to interpret or understand metaphor and allegory has become lost in the wider society and has been subordinated in favour of a more explicit form of learning and understanding. This explicit form of learning is offered as truth and with the argument formed in Chapter Two which maintains that as the court society ethos has pervaded modernity, it has become clear that truth has been confused with representation. Harjo suggests that a way to avoid this is to increase exposure to metaphor in popular culture and engage people in a discussion about the intimate connections in the world that are brought to life through metaphor – “to engage in metaphor is to be inside these innate connections between human, sky, earth. Then, we are earth or as earth. We are not standing at a distance looking at earth and then selling earth.” Harjo’s contention is that, in becoming distanced from the earth, we are also more distanced from one another and ourselves and so we rely on interdependent individualism. This leads us into a situation where we have no solid foundation of culture to orientate ourselves in the social universe and are more likely to end up joining in the game of identities. Metaphor and allegory nurture our narrative understanding and facilitates a perception of the world that is more open and creative. It opens up a space for subjects to ritually experience the

connectedness of the world – they can use this space, this abyss to restore authentic meaning by virtue of the fact that they free their mind of the rationalistic thought patterns of the they-world.

‘And If I Awaken in Los Angeles’ is a poem that documents this struggle between hyper-rationalisation and metaphorical thinking. The poem is premised on the condition that the narrator might ‘awaken in Los Angeles’. In this context, Los Angeles is not simply the place as an entity – it is a metaphor for life in the modern world. When she refers to the possibility of awakening in this modern world she is not referring to the simple act of awaking from a physical slumber – rather she is speaking of a more existential awakening. In the first stanza Harjo observes that if she awakens in Los Angeles she –

Will find a crazy boy teetering there

On the sidewalk against morning traffic,

Too far gone to even ask for a quarter.

In this scenario Harjo does not see a crazy boy and dismiss him immediately. She sees him in connection with the world around him. She sees him as part of the intimate connections in life and the world in which he lives. She awakens to her human-ness and notes that if she exists in all her authenticity in relation to reality she –

Will hear his mother call for him,

Her spirit confused by the taste

Of sadness.

Here Harjo becomes authentic, something which she calls ‘awakening’, as she begins to see the connections in the world around her as a subject. She continues this theme on throughout the rest of the poem and in the second

stanza she comes across a woman singing Billie Holiday songs and who “is kind to rats and does not harm anyone”. The poem starts with a recognition of the humanity of the boy in his connection to his family, moves on to a woman who is kind to an animal usually abhorred by the general society – she recognises their place in the world, and then on further to Harjo’s acknowledgment of the fact that if she were to awaken in this ‘City of Angels’ she would know that she is –

Not the only dreamer.

I will appear in the vision of dove

Who perches on the balcony of the apartment.

She puts herself in the place of the dove and imagines how she connects to him and what her relevance is to him. From his perspective –

I am the human with a store

of birdseed. He is the sun.

I am a fruitful planet.

To the dove, Harjo is part of the world but certainly holds no place above him. He shines on her like the sun and she is moved to giving him food in a similar way to how the earth is nourished by the sun and so gives life to crops. The bird does not place himself in a position of mastery; he is a part of the system in much the same way as Harjo is. The second last stanza is particularly interesting in that she brings the awakening back to herself. Finally, she remarks, if she awakens in Los Angeles she –

Will not have to get up and say my prayers
To the east, and look out over the city of millions,
Past the heads of palm trees, through foggy breezes –
Because I will be a prayer as I perform the rituals

Of being human.

There will

Be no difference

Between near and far.

First of all, if she awakens unto herself she will not have to say prayers to the east – a religion which travelled over the seas to take America into the 19th, 20th and 21st century. She will not have to look to an ideology reinforced by a culture from far out beyond Los Angeles and again further. She will be a prayer herself; she will perform her own ritual which involves Dilthey's experience, expression and understanding. She will draw in the far and the near together in one understanding of the intimate connection surrounding all that exists.

The last stanza illustrates the problem with living an authentic existence in modernity however. "This morning" she attests "I have too much to do to awaken". As a result of the fast paced world of modernity complete with its hyper-rationalisation, she is moved to an almost somnambulant existence – she lives, she is awake, but she does not awaken to the authentic meaning in existence. She carries out her day to day duties, she prays and feeds the birds but fails to see how they connect to her or the world in which she lives. She then heads "to the refrigerator and forget(s)". She forgets to live out her

existence in an authentic manner and instead opts for the easy solution of performing identity rather than claiming it. In this poem metaphors are used to bring life to the seemingly insignificant elements observable in one's day. The contrast between being awake and awakening to one's reality is an interesting point and is very much connected to the idea of approaching experience and reality in an authentic way as outlined in Chapter Five. This poem provides the reader with a space to engage with the potential of the abyss if they have the nerve to do so. Harjo essentially alludes to the connection between animals, the earth, the sun, trees, the air and finally, the human being. In dismissing the interconnectedness of all of these aspects of reality, Harjo argues that the human being becomes alienated from themselves and thus does not and cannot awaken to their reality.

In 'Letter to the Breathmaker', Harjo laments the loss of meaning in modern society. She personifies this loss of meaning in the guise of the 'Maker of Breath', that entity which causes human beings to exist in all their humanness. Breathing is the quintessential life blood of the living being in the natural world, and so Harjo's claim that this Breathmaker has abandoned humanity is indicative of the struggle to retain this essential element of life. Breathing here of course does not simply refer to the process of taking in air and letting it out; rather it is a metaphor for authentic living for the human being. As a result of the Maker of Breath absconding and leaving humanity to their own devices they are thrown at the mercy of lesser gods (note the lowercase 'g' in god meaning that she does not intend to refer to any one particular deity).

For it appears that you have abandoned us to the lower gods

Who trick us with the gleam of casinos,

While two fat butler birds swing on the plumeria.

First of all, it is quite clear from the above quote that Harjo is comparing the lost meaning directly with the glitz and spectacle of the modern world. Authentic meaning has been almost extinguished by the bright force of the garish and imposing formal rationality at work in the casinos. The last line of this stanza refers to two “butler birds”, a type of bird most common to England and Ireland interestingly. Harjo’s intention here is to highlight how even though a part of the world she inhabits, the casino is nonetheless based on the ideological foundations of colonialism. The casinos on reservation land in the US are the result of the benevolent attitude of the American government towards the native peoples – showing them that they do not mean to take away their freedom to engage in their economic rationalised system – only that they mean for them to act according to that ideology on their own terms. This is, of course, a contradiction in essence and is illustrated as such by Harjo. In the second stanza she does go on to note that she continues to see glimpses of the Breathmaker, but she prefaces this by saying that “We want to see you, Breathmaker, not just the evidence/ of you”. This authentic attitude to existence must be the dominating aspect of reality if fluid foundations of reality are not to take over in their entirety.

In the third stanza Harjo goes on to describe her disgust at the rationalistic system taking over modern social life. Violence, colonialism, the destruction of cultures and more are rationalised by the dominating force as though they are the only logical way forward given that they uphold the ideology of the colonisers.

We are sick with the stories of those political parties

Who would destroy our tribal nations.

They have a reason, they say, and there is reason

Behind any massacre, whether it be on our lands

Or on paper. These lands have been turned

into gunneries, these papers into roads for war.

Harjo expresses her deep abhorrence for a system which can make anything reasonable if lucrative and advantageous to the ideology behind this Gnostic impulse to dominate. The land itself has been dragged into the rationalised system – it is industrialised and treated as an entity to exploit for the same end as described above. The paper, which should enable humanity to flourish through the written word, through knowledge as it reaches quarters far away from where it was first conceived. Instead, paper is itself co-opted into playing a part of the colonial agenda – it is used to take away people's land, their home and with that their rights as human beings and eventually the solid structures on which they built their societies. This is the ultimate insult, the land which they understood as their home now dominated, misused and manipulated into submission and playing a part in their cultural downfall. The last two lines of the poem read –

A butterfly with wings like lungs carries pollen in the
direction of the sun.

We will search for you urgently everywhere.

With these words Harjo sets out her intention to seek out meaning in modernity. She is aware of her state of *unheimlich* and is not willing to accept the status quo but rather she will challenge it and search for alternative to the structure maintaining a society which she sees as fundamentally problematic.

'Emergence' is again, a poem depicting the sleeping existence of much of humanity within the modern world of which she writes. The poem begins on a midsummer's night and describes the scene as it appears to Harjo. The light is faded as it "skims the earth" and dogs bark at the "musk of other dogs". Harjo is herself despondent, suffering a broken heart which is both in relation to herself and the world around her. She is "striking relentlessly against the flint of hard will" in order to try and rouse herself to engage in a world she describes as "coming apart". The land itself is aware of this worrying reality –

It's coming apart and everyone knows it.

So do the squash erupting in flowers

The colour of the sun.

So does the momentum of grace

Gathering allies

In the partying mob.

The heart knows everything.

I remember when there was no urge

To cut the land or each other into pieces,

When we knew how to think

In beautiful.

Harjo equates the cutting and violence exacted on the land with the violence exacted on the people living on that land. By cutting the land the colonisers also cut the people – away from themselves and the land. The inevitable result of this was an alienated subject unaware and unfamiliar with "how to think in beautiful". Thinking in beautiful here is again brought back to the

ability to see the intimate connections in the natural world and how all of these elements interact and live in with mutual respect of one another. In order to think in beautiful there must be no dominating power surviving on the exploitation of the land or the home which societies live on. There must be responsibility and respect engendered towards one another and the world in which people live, and while permanent liminality is a static phase modernity is steeped in using rationalistic structures of ideology as a crutch, thinking beautifully is inherently difficult.

Harjo then moves on to describe how she is shocked by, and yet unaccountably drawn to, the world which is emerging –

There is no world like the one surfacing.

I can smell it as I pace in my square room,

The neighbour's television

Entering my house by waves of sound

Makes me think about buying

A new car, another kind of cigarette

when I don't need another car

and I don't smoke cigarettes.

Harjo acknowledges the lure of the spectacle in this stanza and reveals her amazement that even though she is horrified by the new world as it develops, she cannot help be taken in to some extent, such is its underhanded form of allure. Harjo follows this up with an acknowledgement that the “human mind is small when thinking of small things” and undoubtedly she is referring to her thoughts on hearing the advertisements on the television. She contrasts this in the next line however when she asserts that that same mind “is large

when embracing the maker of walking, thinking and flying”. To engage with the experiential element of experience is to move towards authentic meaning. She continues on to proclaim that if she can “locate the sense beyond desire”, beyond the bright lights and imagery of consumption and modernity, she –

Will locate the point of dawning

And awaken

With the longest day in the world.

If she can do this, remove herself experientially from this rationalistic structure devoid of responsibility, she can awaken in a similar way to how she describes awakening in “And If I Awaken in Los Angeles”. She will awake to the authentic meaning in the holistic connectedness of reality and move into “the longest day in the world” because she will be confronted with and see the world in its all its vibrant and animated existence for the first time.

‘Perhaps the World Ends Here’ is a perfect example of how Harjo takes a simple image – the kitchen table – and uses it in a metaphorical sense. By doing this she creates a platform from which she can connect the seemingly insignificant in the micro-world of the subject to a macro level commentary on issues relevant to modernity, the postcolonial subject, or both. She begins the poem with the line “The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live”. In this short line Harjo drags us towards the realisation that we are nothing without the sustenance afforded to us by the land. Food is a symbol of our ever present connection to the land and one which we try to ignore through the rationalised techniques of companies which convert food into mere fuel, an economic output for personal input as energy for more rational behaviour. Harjo goes on to describe how the “gifts of the earth are brought and prepared, set on the table”. Initially then there is this connection between the earth and the table. The next stanza describes people chasing chickens or dogs away from it, bringing the land into connection with the

animals that also thrive as a result of its fertility and on to humanity – the babies that “teeth at its corners”. This table is the cornerstone of the family home – it is where socialisation is conducted and is an intricate part of the lives of individuals. “It has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun”; it is the ultimate image of security and structure which human beings can always find solace in. In this way the home, the land and the human being are connected in a tripartite system of existence – all centring on the image of the table. Beyond this, the table is place where “wars have begun and ended” in victory or horror, in many cases both. The table has seen birth and death, joy and sorrow, prayers and thanks. This table, so significant in the life of the human being and the security associated with the home might be an image of more. It might even be the image of the end of the end of the world.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

In these last lines Harjo allows the possibility of the end of the world as connected with the kitchen table but there is nonetheless a feeling of hope in the last image. She ends the poem as if to say yes the world might end here, but if it lived with meaning embracing the connectedness of life, it will be a sweet last bite.

Postcoloniality and Violence

One of the most powerful themes running through Harjo’s poetry is the theme of violence. Violence is considered in many different guises; as a result of colonialism, racism, discrimination and modernisation. Particularly for Harjo, violence as a result of colonialism is the ever present weight on the shoulders of the Native peoples and is most definitely still evident in modern America. In a poem ‘For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash’, Harjo outlines the acts of war that continue within American society as a result of hundreds of years of contention. Anna Mae Pictou, a young Micmac woman, was a member of the American Indian movement, an organisation which lobbied and made cases

for increased rights for members of American Indian communities. In February 1976, her body was found on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The FBI initially attributed her death to exposure and ordered her hands to be cut off to send to Washington for fingerprinting. Upon the results of a second autopsy it was discovered that the woman had been shot to the head and so the fact that her body had been mutilated by the FBI was considered to be indicative of the lack of respect afforded to the native American community and essentially, was an act of war (Brand, 1993). The poem begins with an image of the “sky blurred with mist and wind”, Harjo professes her amazement as she watches the “violet heads of crocuses erupt from the stiff earth after dying for a season”. This image of the flowers’ resiliency, the earth resiliency is compared to the tragic death of Anna Mae. Anna Mae spoke out for her community and was met with opposition so vehement that she was “warned to be silent” or have her “body cut away from [her] like an elegant weed”. Anna is compared to the weed in order to draw our attention to the fact that in the beginning of the poem the flowers survived whereas she did not. There is a further comparison to be made here when we think of the contrast between the crocus and the weed – both come from the earth but because the crocus is accepted as desirable it is given nourishment to survive. The weed, on the other hand is considered out of place in the ordered system of what flowers are desired and are ripped away without any second thought. The Muscogee community felt “a righteous anger” in relation to this unnecessary death and “understood wordlessly the ripe meaning of [her] murder”. This violence is depicted here as connected to the postcolonial struggle for rights to land, cultural autonomy and education.

In ‘Strange Fruit’ Harjo delves into the alternative manifestations of violence born from the colonial impulse. She writes this subtle yet effective poem describing thoughts as they passed through the mind of a woman activist, Jacqueline Peters, just before her lynching in June, 1986. Peters had been working to start up her own chapter of the *National Association for the*

Advancement of Coloured People when her death occurred. The poem follows Peters as she walks to the shop one evening. Very quickly she “smelled evil, then saw the hooded sheets ride up in the not yet darkness”. The night previously the narrator describes how she felt uneasy, as though ghosts were following her and her husband urged her to –

Shush, we have too many stories to carry on our backs like
houses, we have struggled too long to let the monsters steal
our sleep. Sleep, go to sleep.

She goes on to declare that she never woke up – indicating that this reality is a nightmare. She recalls how she lived her life and maintains that she was kind and responsible to her fellow creatures. In the fifth stanza the narrator draws our attention to her feet –

And my long, lean feet like my mothers have known where
to take me, to where the sweet things grow. Some grow on
trees, some grow in other places.

But not this tree.

Her mind then goes to her family and her husband “fixing the supper, the baby fussing for her milk”. These are the images in her mind as her feet betray her and “dance anyway from this killing tree”. She is lifted from the ground and becomes the rotten fruit that rationality and modernisation has grown. These poems show Harjo’s concern for the explicit violence apparent in American society perpetrated in the name of order and rationality at the close of the late twentieth century.

Tradition and Community

As a form of structure for people in society to adhere to, Harjo espouses the benefits of cultural traditions. She uses her own Muscogee culture as a framework with which to make this argument. She then compares this type of

structure to the structure advocated in modernity, which privileges economic progress above all else. As a philosophy without a philosophical basis, this is a fundamentally flawed attitude which nurtures a fluidity of identities and the malleable cultural prerogative which is indicative of permanent liminality. Tradition, Harjo argues, provides subjects with a way for living as a human being in society. Certain traditions, she goes on further to assert, have exceptionally useful ideas and ideologies which have been forgotten in modern society. It is worth returning to these customs and beliefs in order to reclaim some of the more beneficial notions which have been lost as a result of colonialism.

The essential element of most, if not all, native American belief systems is the idea that the earth and everything which lives on and from it are connected together (Martin, 2001). This holistic conception of reality presupposes a sense of respect for the natural environment, which the Indigenous American people felt was paramount to healthy living and a good life. The culture which the Europeans brought with them was utterly incomprehensible to these ‘first people’. This attempt to dominate – the physical environment, the culture and ultimately the people was very much contrary to the native way of life in America. Harjo claims that one of the main problems with modern society is a lack of unconditional respect for one another and the natural world. This lack of respect is bolstered by the push towards individualism and away from community. Subjects are concerned with how they are perceived and their performed identity while lacking the reflexivity to question the logic of their actions in the first place – their reflexive abilities are concerned primarily with the game of identities. Harjo claims that a return to community – holistically incorporating the natural environment could help modern society in becoming less liquid. By offering a solid philosophical base subjects can create identities outside of the court society. In ‘Promise of Blue Horses’ from a collection of poetry entitled *The*

Woman Who Fell From the Sky (1994), Harjo questions the modern notion of the superiority of human beings –

We are a small earth. It's no

simple thing. Eventually

We will be dust together; can be used to make a house, to
stop

a flood or grow food

for those who will never remember who we were.

Here she compares human beings to a microcosmic version of the earth. This goes further than simply saying that human beings can give life in the same way as the earth does. She is essentially arguing that we cannot possibly be worth any more than the earth. When we die, we become dust, earth and so take on its many forms – wood, mud to make a house, earth for a dam or soil for growing food. As physical matter, we are earth for longer than we are anything else. When this happens, we become irrelevant as individuals and are important only in how we add to the earth and give it the potential to continue carrying out the functions it has always performed. Everything, for Harjo, begins and ends with the earth we live on. In order to justify colonisation, the colonised subjects were argued to be less than human – animalistic barbarians. In an effort to turn this colonising tool on its head, Harjo endows inanimate objects and animals with human characteristics or abilities. This connects her to the traditional myths of her tribe where the first humans had characteristics which were later transposed to the animals which had similar characteristics, to show that the link between animals and humans existed since the beginning of time. In 'The Place that the Musician became a Bear' Harjo describes how "the moon has stomp-danced with us from one horizon to the next". In depicting the moon in this way she also makes the more political point that in modernity we distance ourselves from the beauty

of the world around us and in doing so we immerse ourselves more in liminality. By having trees laugh or crows warn us about imminent death she implores the reader to start to interact with the world around them rather than to try to control it.

In 'Promise' Harjo writes about the birth of her granddaughter. This poem illustrates the way Harjo considers everything in existence, from the traditions of her tribe to the natural environment and humanity, to be intrinsically connected. At dusk Harjo notices the red sky creep up and she interprets this according to her ancestral myths which suggest that the sky is a sign of animals blessing her and offering her their protection throughout her life. Birth is not something reduced to the individual experiences of those directly involved but rather connected to the wider environment and reflective of the universe in its capacity to continue, create and provide a foundation for life. Again Harjo anthropomorphises an element of the natural environment when she claims that she "knew the monsoon clouds were talking about it as they softened the speed of light".

In 'Eagle Poem', Harjo reflects on the circle of life. In the opening line of the poem she notes that "To pray you open your whole self". These words indicate Harjo's desire to bring the reader into an awareness of what "to pray" might mean for them, but also she sets the poem out like a prayer offering it almost as an alternative. The second line goes on to offer up the prayer "to sky, to earth, to sun, to moon/ To one whole voice that is you". Essentially then, this poem returns back to traditional concepts of holistic and intertwining reality and the respect that Harjo maintains, should be afforded to each element of it as they are all connected to one another. She rejects the arbitrary separation of the earth and humanity while acknowledging that they hold different places in existence and have different functions at different times. Further on in the poem she utilises the image of the eagle and incorporates it in the poem as a metaphor reinforcing her original point. "Like

eagle that Sunday morning/ Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky”, she observes the eagle flying and is struck by how powerful, free and yet fragile it is. In the eagle she sees humanity and realises that “we must take the utmost care/ And kindness in all things”. In these lines is the awareness of the beauty in the world but also the transient and delicate nature of it. A later line reads “we are truly blessed because we/ Were born, and die soon within a/ circle of motion.” Here Harjo touches on the theme she introduced in the first line – the importance of prayer. A prayer should open you up to the world and help you notice the connections all around you at the same time as it should fill you with an appreciation of how lucky it is to be alive and experiencing existence. The last lines express her final wish “we pray that it will be done/ In beauty. In beauty.” The suggestion here is that while we are consumed with visibility and appropriate performance in what she describes as the ‘over culture’ we cannot possibly observe the beauty around us. This prayer is a way for the reader to re-experience reality and breach the distances being created in modernity.

Language as Political Tool

One of the most pervasive influences colonialism can have on a people is the extent to which their language has been affected. The Muscogee language in particular has suffered hugely as a result of colonialism to the extent that many members of the tribe cannot speak the language and many others choose to converse in English for the sake of convenience. Although there are projects put into place to promote the Creek language, the younger generations of the Muscogee are continuing to speak English more frequently and as their first language (Comrie, 2009). As discussed in chapter two, philosopher and post-colonial theorist Frantz Fanon (1994) stresses the power and influence that a language can have when he declares that “...to speak . . . means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization”. When the civilisation a culture is supporting is not their own, the social problems as a result are complex. The Muscogee people are faced with the

might of colonial culture in every word understood, read and spoken in the English language. Language is not simply a form of communication but it a way to conceive of the world, it is a map of reality. Throughout her poetry Harjo questions the map of reality offered in modern society, but she also questions the use of words and writing in general. Harjo argues “in my tribe and with many indigenous people, words on paper are suspect because they’ve been used to sign away land and take away children” (Harjo and Winder, 2011). The written word has been used as a way to maintain control and dominate indigenous cultures since the Americas were first colonised. For Harjo, this goes further than an attempt to be able to manipulate the people through use of a common mode of communication. It is indicative of a move to change the way the colonised people think and perceive the world that is more in line with the colonial world view. As Fanon argues, linguistic colonisation is one of the more insidious elements of colonialism. It affects how the native people approach existence and restricts them to a world view only conceivable through the colonial language. The more words and languages that belong to particular cultures become extinct, the less varied our notions and visions of reality can be. The more one, two or three languages start to dominate particular cultures, the harder it will be for people to think outside modes of thought which are promoted as definitive and are taken for granted as truth.

In ‘This Land is a Poem’ Harjo addresses the ability of a poem or language to capture the essence of, or beauty of, the earth. She describes the land itself as a poem – it is a thing of lyrical beauty. She acknowledges this at the same time as she admits that she herself could never do it justice in a poem –

This land is a poem of ochre and burnt sand I could never write, unless paper were sacrament of sky, and ink the broken line of wild horses staggering the horizon several miles away.

In writing this poem, Harjo does not capture the entire breath or potential of the earth – but she does capture something more specific and more meaningful than direct speech could hope to. Rather than observing that “there is a herd of horses walking by the horizon”. Instead of this explicit language Harjo uses the horses as a metaphor for writing, for life and for the beauty which it is capable of. With the use of such vibrant imagery, the reader experiences the poem, its intention and gives the reader a tool with which to reflect upon the forces that move them in their lives and in society more generally. Harjo concludes the poem with the line “Even then, does anything written ever matter to the earth, wind, sky?” Here she touches on the enduring force of the world – it has primary place for her above humanity because humanity can only survive because of it. Harjo’s intention in her poetry is to “reinvent the enemy’s language”, the anger implicit in this phrase will be discussed in a subsequent section; for now, how she does this must be addressed. First of all, and this is true of much contemporary native American poetry from Allison Adelle Hedgecook to Sherwin Bitsui, Harjo disrupts the structure of the poetic form usually propounded within the literary canon. Instead of working within those accepted structural parameters Harjo prefers to write in ways that she considers appropriate to the content of the poem. Many of her poems are written in prose style while others play with and disturb standard grammatical structures. The purpose of this is to attempt to reinvent the colonial language and inscribe within it insights more in line with her native heritage.

‘A Map to the Next World’ uses the image of map as a metaphor for a map of meaning inherent in language. Harjo moves between the worlds of imagination and accepted reality seamlessly and successfully makes this connection with physical and cognitive maps which resonates with the reader. In the first lines she lays out her past intentions of creating a map showing those the way out of the fourth world and into the fifth world. In many native traditions the world moved through four stages of being – the first, second,

third, fourth and finally the fifth world. These worlds mythically depict the native American journey of animals and humans from creation to the present day. The first world was full of mist and had little life save black and white clouds which represented the female and male forms. From these beings like animals, trees and humans were derived. Once beings were created there was trouble in the first world and so some animals found their way out to the second which was the second or blue world. There was a great amount of fighting in this world and so those who had made their way up from the first world made their way into the third, yellow world. When this world started to sink those in the third world made their way through an opening in the sky to the fourth world. However, because this land was found to be small and barren and First Man found his way to the fifth world. In this world all beings are separated and have space to grow and procreate. The fifth world is said to be the world we reside in today – four dark worlds preceded by one light world; ours (Martin, 2001).

Harjo expresses her wish to provide her own map of the modern world – this map, drawn from elements of her traditional culture would have at its core a holistic approach to reality. In native American myth there is supposed to be another world above the fifth – the sixth world which houses the spirit of living things. Harjo wishes to engage with a world that treats all living things with respect and responsibility. This map would explain how “we forgot to acknowledge the gift, as if we were not in it or of it”. In this Harjo is drawing attention to the fact that the over culture distracts us as subjects to the extent that we live without gratitude for life or the earth which sustains us. She goes on to persuade us to “take note of the proliferation of supermarkets and malls, the altars of money” because “They best describe the detour from grace.” Our priorities have become warped as a result of this culture and have distanced us from ourselves, the world around us and its beauty. In the line that follows Harjo warns us to “keep track of the errors of our forgetfulness; the fog steals our children while we sleep” – here she is describing the danger

associated with forgetting one's culture and traditions. If communities lose them to the nebulous force of permanent liminality they lose a solid foundation and map with which they can be directed through life. In this poem Harjo is speaking to a daughter or granddaughter and so her words constitute advice being passed on throughout the generations. When traversing this world of supermarkets and malls, the native person must "travel through the membrane of death, smell cooking from the encampment where our relatives make a feast of fresh deer meat and corn soup, in the Milky Way". Harjo is making a point here about what the native cultures have given up as a result of this forgetfulness and all in favour of the Milky Way, a map of another sort. The Milky Way here is representative of this move away from the connectedness of the whole and the focus on the science as a definite but removed reality. Within her culture, planets and the brightness of the Milky Way "lights the map printed with the blood of history" – in other words, the natural world is a part of a map of understanding which orients their lives. In the lines from these poems Harjo reinforces Fanon's argument pertaining to the dangers inherent in linguistic colonialism and argues that the fall out is cultural confusion which can only be resolved through the search for a solid cultural foundation.

Harjo's main aim in her poetry is to "reinvent the enemy's language" as indicated above. By using the English language while incorporating aspects of her cultural heritage Harjo manages to work with the coloniser's tool and use it for her own advantage – like suggesting the necessity of traditional cultural foundations for social life. Harjo incorporates metaphor to reintroduce the subject to the earth and the natural environment she argues that they have been taken for granted and instead offers community in the place of individualism and fluidity. She opens the poem up to the potential of unwritten social reality by using abstract metaphors and language and thus encourages the reader to engage in a more experiential and abstract way of approaching reality.

Conclusion

The Gnostic colonial impulse which, as a philosophy, has infiltrated modern western discourse today is put forward as a disquieting theme in Harjo's work. It is a discourse which serves to distance the subject, alienating them and reinforcing their state of *unheimlich*. By using particular linguistic structures Harjo invites the potential of the abyss into her poetry – she uses it as a way to restore authentic meaning. She feels that modernity has come into existence as a result of violence and the disavowal of responsibility. As a result there is more to gain than lose by confronting the abyss. She does not put all her faith in the poetic structure and the ability of the subject to restore authentic meaning. Instead the poem becomes the ritual form in which the subject is guided by abstract images of the interconnectedness of the world and uses this belief in the beauty and vital importance of the earth as a way to gently underpin a certain intention towards responsibility which is itself essential to authentic meaning. Chapter Eleven follows the poem as a rite of passage closely and exemplifies the way in which it performs as that structure. In doing this it brings together the crowning moments of poetic endeavour achieved by the four poets focused on in this study.

CHAPTER ELEVEN:

CONCLUSION

Experience, Creating a World and Restoring Authentic Meaning

Introduction

Performing as a ritualistic structure, the poem can be used by subjects to guide themselves through the liminal moment and on to the other side – a reaggregated society which they themselves have created. This chapter proposes to follow this process – from the breakdown of the solid social order, into the uncertainty of the liminal period proper and on to a restoration of meaning in the reconstituted society. This journey is not an easy one – it involves sacrifice, suffering, loss of identity, alienation but also perhaps the freedom (and/or trauma) in knowing that what is to be gained is worth more than what might be lost in the process. This final acknowledgment led the four poets discussed in this study to a point where they were moved to face the striking potential of the abyss. By following this process incorporating the work of all four poets, this chapter finally provides further evidence of the formative potential of poetry.

Experience Creates Our World

In *Poetry and Experience* (1976) Wilhelm Dilthey argues that experience is inseparable from the world. Similarly, and building on Dilthey's observations on poetry and experience, this thesis maintains that if experience is inseparable from the world, then *how* we experience the world is absolutely essential to what form the world and society takes. Heidegger spoke of a tripartite ontological structure in relation to acting within the social arena – existence, thrownness and fallenness or in other words an awareness of the future, past and present. One acts towards the future based on experiences of the past but always within the present. In the present (fallenness) the subject interacts with beings both being and non-being (Dasein and not-Dasein) but also those inauthentic Dasein engaging in the they-world of court society. Basically, how we understand the past affects how we direct ourselves towards the future which has a direct impact on the act as it is, now. Our actions then are undertaken with a view as to their effect. If this is true, and our actions are based on our experiences then understanding the process of

experience is also of particular importance because our actions create the future and happen as a result of our understanding of past experiences. To this end, Dilthey offers his own tripartite structure of understanding when it comes to societal action. Dilthey asserts that the social act consists of three stages – experience, expression and understanding. In a simple social act this is quite straightforward – for example, a subject experiences the emotion of anger, expresses this feeling to another subject at which point both subjects understand the social interaction. One realises perhaps, that they misheard the other’s remark while the second subject understands the first’s reaction to their simple statement. In a situation where the subject is trying to negotiate the problematic manifestation of modernity this structure becomes a little more complicated due to dynamics of interdependence and reflexive self-awareness. Nonetheless the experience in the first place is of paramount importance to how the subject expresses themselves within society and how subjects in general understand one another and thus experience the social act anew.

A Poetic Alibi for Meaning

For many years Patrick Kavanagh tried to live up to the image of the peasant farmer. He was the postcolonial subject who accepted the change in social structure did not question it and performed the role as set out for him by rationale of the court society. Antoinette Quinn (2005) observed that this early poetry lacked carnal method – it could, she suggests, have been written by someone holidaying in the country. This is suggestive of Kavanagh’s distaste for writing poetry according to the misplaced sentimentality of the time for ‘romantic Ireland’. Romantic Ireland was what sold however, and if he was to be a successful poet in that world he must play by the rules of the courtly rationale. Kavanagh continued to interact with the court society of Dublin’s literati for some time until eventually he came to the realisation that within this society there was a lack of authentic meaning; these people performed accepted roles rather than experiencing life in and for itself – they

failed to reach understanding as outlined by Dilthey. He noted that those around him consumed this idea of the 'old Ireland' but, because they failed to understand the subject of their discussions in any experiential terms, they were always left unsatisfied. In 'Temptation in Harvest' Kavanagh describes the difficulty he had in leaving the countryside to return to the pavements of Dublin to continue in his pursuit of literary success. At first, the reader is inclined to view the temptation as that which draws him towards the Monaghan landscape, distracting him from his poetic duties –

I should not have wished, should not have seen how white

The wings of thistle seeds are and how gay Amoral Autumn
gives her soul away.

In fact, Kavanagh even anthropomorphises the land and its ability to have an almost siren-like effect upon him –

I turned to the stubble of the oats,

Knowing that clay could still seduce my heart

After five years of pavements raised to art.

Oh the devilry of the fields!

However, it soon becomes clear that what he refers to as a temptation is not the land, the clay or the wings of thistle seeds. Rather, it is the poetry itself and connected to this is the inevitable distancing from the land. Essentially, poetry has alienated him from the land rather than bring him into a greater bond with it. He loves poetry, he exclaims, but his concern is really for the land, as he attests here "I love one! But ricks are more my care". Ricks are rectangular shaped mounds of hay, straw or turf and although he is deeply tied to them, he is pulled away from them by his love of poetry and the accompanying acknowledgment he receives as an artist. Poetry here is not simply the form or the act of writing in a particular way. For Kavanagh,

poetry in Ireland at this time represents the court society of the literati discussed in Chapter Six. It represents the life he struggles to engage with, understand and reconcile himself to. While he is drawn in by visions of the natural environment in 'Temptation in Harvest' he is nonetheless aware of the alternative mode of existence which he has been living for the past number of years –

An old woman whispered from a bush: 'Stand in

The shadow of the ricks until she passes;

You cannot eat what grows on Parnassus –

And she is going there as sure as sin'.

Again the ricks, the earth, provide Kavanagh with security. Within this is the intimation that there is a lure to poetry symbolised by this woman as she passes him. Parnassus, being the metaphorical home of literature and poetry is what she offers and is where she is going. But, the old woman reminds Kavanagh, "you cannot eat what grows on Parnassus" – it may be a mountain but it is not fertile land. Parnassus, as a metaphor for poetry and the life that poetry can offer him cannot sustain him or nourish him; only the land can provide that physical (and the implication here is that it also provides metaphorical, as in existential) support and sustenance. The use of the word 'sin' is also telling. By drawing to mind the negative image of sin, Kavanagh connects Poetry with something more sinister. At this point it becomes clear that poetry for Kavanagh is inextricably linked, at this point in his life, with the more menacing elements of Dublin society trapped in the middle phase of liminality. While he is aware of the problems associated modernity, he none the less succumbs to the temptation of the show on display in Dublin –

From the spotlight of an old-fashioned lamp

I go follow her who winked at me.

From this poem, and these lines in particular, it is clear that Kavanagh certainly played his part in the court society for some time and his early poetry is a reflection of this. Furthermore, while aware of some of the issues associated with that role, he nonetheless refused to ‘awaken’ as Joy Harjo calls the move to engage in the world in a more authentic manner.

In ‘Last Night’ Rex Lee Jim also describes himself becoming lost in the spectacle of modernity and struggling to free himself of its bright and blinding allure –

Last night

I dreamt myself into a mirror

Where I lost myself in the reflection.

Last Sunday

I genuflected and kissed the feet of Christ

And the calloused stink made me see spots in a starless
night.

Last morn

I looked into the window shield of a Mercedes and

Found myself gasping in ethereal shiftlessness.

In this poem Jim expresses an alienation from himself as a subject by engaging with modernity in its particular guise – “I lost myself in the reflection”. Jim goes on to describe how he genuflected at the feet of Christ – a humbling and deferential movement but interestingly, acted out towards the symbol of a philosophy which it was shown in Chapter Three, encourages the Gnostic impulse. Furthermore, by describing himself as looking into the window shield of a Mercedes, (this in addition to the loss of himself in the reflection, is suggestive) the implication is that he lost himself and has nothing left but amazement at the spectacle inherent in the performance within modern society. In illustrating his experience in this way, Jim acknowledges that he is not outside of modernity by virtue of his postcolonial experiences but rather, *because* of them he is very much within modernity. He endures a constant struggle to find a way towards a sense of solid and authentic meaning. Jim is constantly struggling with himself and the sense of comfortable complacency which for him is common in modern society. This was discussed in Chapter Eight, firstly in ‘Myself Only’ and then in ‘Corn Pollen’ where Jim notes that a simple trip to the local town makes it easier for the native community to prepare lunch, as they can buy bread rather than having to make it. However, while on the one hand this makes life more convenient, at the same time it takes away from the traditional structures of meaning on which cultures like his were built. Jim (and also, other members of his community) must contend with an alienation from his own identity in

addition to an alienation from the culture, the land and the social order of his traditional Navajo way of life.

Muscogee poet Joy Harjo grappled with the force of an alibi for being, due to the fact that her sense of social structure crumbled along with her deteriorating traditional Muscogee culture. For many years she drank excessively in her attempt to avoid ‘awakening’ – what she explains as the process of being aware of her place in the world as part of a system of connectedness. In ‘And if I Awaken in Los Angeles’ she describes the fact that modern society is so rationalised that human beings themselves act in this rationalistic way. They carry out their day to day duties while remaining completely unaware of the authentic meaning behind their actions – and she herself is one such subject. In numerous poems she describes this struggle with modernity; the struggle with herself to move away from the sense of alienation that pervades her reality. She is all too familiar with the magnetic appeal of the court society rationale however –

The neighbour’s television

Entering my house by waves of sound

Makes me think about buying

A new car, another kind of cigarette

when I don’t need another car

and I don’t smoke cigarettes.

Harjo is not immune to the show on display in modernity and is inherently a subject within that show. She is also aware however that there is something reductive about it and that the meaning it offers is inauthentic in that it is built on insecure and malleable foundations. Nonetheless, the alibi for being has manifested itself in a failure to ‘awaken’; she is too busy, there is too much to

do, she must work in order to generate an acceptable amount of money to fund her life and lifestyle. In this way she describes herself as another player acting upon the stage of the modern world.

The Surplus

The search for authenticity in meaning must first start with an awareness that there is, somehow, an inclination towards inauthentic meaning within modernity and in fact, it is the dominant force within it. This inauthenticity of meaning is symbolised by the court society described in Chapter Two, the *unheimlich* self, outlined in Chapter Three and the rationalisation of society, including the instrumentalisation of land, as illustrated in Chapter Five. This, as it stands, is all well and good. However, what leads the postcolonial subject, and in this case the postcolonial poet, to an awareness and unease with this inauthenticity? How do they become aware of the flaw within the modern social act? In engaging in modernity, the postcolonial poet recognises that there is a disparity between expression and understanding within the authentic social act. Within the court society, the subject expresses their understanding of reality based on their previous experiences. These past experiences are based on a court society rationale and so their experiences as expressed in the present create reality anew but always according to the court society rationale. Because experiences as expressions create our world, permanent liminality is in this way reinforced and is perpetuated.

The problem is that subjects within the court society understand their experiences only in relation to this social structure and thus cannot reconceive of it in a transformative way. They understand the reflexive action of the court society and within it, and importantly are unaware of anything beyond that. As such, they fail to acknowledge Bakhtin's 'surplus of seeing'. The surplus of seeing is a relatively simple concept referring to the subject's acknowledgment that each social situation is not fully comprehended by that same subject or, indeed, any other. It necessarily implies that there will

always be an element of any given social situation which has not been named. This does not mean to suggest that the unnamed element of a given social situation has not been named *at all*, but rather that it has not been named within a particular social context. Subjects within the court society understand their own social structure to such an extent and are so engulfed within the system of interdependence that they are not moved to an awareness of the unnamed within a given social situation. In this way they can never approach the abyss. They view the final element of the social act as having been completed – they have reached understanding. However, the postcolonial poet in this case realises that while the social act may be completed, it is never done so entirely or to the utmost of its potential – this they also understand. The final element of Dilthey's tripartite system of the social act, understanding, must work in two ways. Firstly there must be a general understanding of the social reality as it stands to the individual, but secondly there must be an awareness of the untranscribable element within that social act and a move made toward it, if the subject is to awaken from the inauthenticity of the they-world. This dual aspect of understanding, the final stage of the social act, must be met in order for the social act to be authentically completed.

The very fact that this “surplus of seeing” exists in the first place then, points to the potential of that which is, as yet, unknowable within social life in general. This possibility is the very thing which indicates that society is not definitive; that there is always potential for change, and that reality is far more complex and unknowable in its entirety than human beings sometimes care to admit. In modernity, alienation is offered as progression because the further subjects and societies move away from one another the closer they get through communication technology. This is considered proof that society is constantly evolving and improving. The poets which this study has focused on have realised the problems associated with alienation in society and rather than embrace modernity and all its spectacular progress, they search for the

meaning behind the ‘progress’. By observing the irrationality of rationality they become cognisant of the fact that, while the court society rationale is fully convinced of the righteousness in the philosophy of progression, they fail to concede that this is simply one approach to reality – and an inherently flawed one as outlined in Chapter Two particularly.

In ‘Naoise at Four’ Eavan Boland draws the reader into the turbulent and violent Irish history –

The trap baited for them snaps.
like forest pests they fall for it,
like humans writhe, like both submit.
Three brothers die: their three saps
spill until their split kith
heals into an Irish myth

Boland brings to mind the bloody wars that litter Irish history. The deaths she describes in this poem are forgotten in modernity, they are “healed into an Irish myth”. In death, humans and animals are one, caught by traps and writhing in pain. This violence is considered to be gone, past, forgotten in modern society. Then Boland makes the connection between two worlds: one of the past (thrownness) and one of the present (existence). Because we fail to realise the connection, note the surplus of meaning named but not named in the social situation there can be no move to recreate the social act and thus affect the social order. Boland does note this discrepancy however, and expresses it in the last stanza –

Our unease

vanishes with one smile

as each suburban, modern detail

distances us from old lives.

Yet every night on our screens

new ones are lost. Wounds open.

Nothing heals. And what perspective

on this sudden Irish fury

can solve it to a folk memory?

Boland illustrates how uneasiness with modernity is easily absorbed by the rationalised system at work within it. In basing expression and understanding on an experience connected to the court rationale, subjects are unable to reconnect with old experiences or “old lives” in order to learn from them. As a result they cannot express their desire to understand in alternative ways: The reality of the situation is that, tragically, by being distanced from any realisation of our propensity towards violence “every night on our screens new ones are lost”. The fact that Boland speaks of the television screen introduces another layer of alienation and distancing from our social histories and experiences. The surplus of meaning here is the rationalisation and desensitization of human beings to the violence and tragedy existing around us, created by us and experienced by us. Boland recognises this surplus of meaning in the modern social reality. In this way, the poets discussed in this thesis pursue meaning associated with an understanding of the always already unfinished nature of the social world. But an awareness of this is simply not enough; critiques of reality are common within many walks of life, literature

and academia. How can a poet, particularly a postcolonial poet, do something different?

Experientially Staring into the Abyss

In 'Naoise at Four' Boland is aware of the past's connection to the present in relation to levels of violence, but in modernity the distancing and particular rationalisation of it is indicative of permanent liminality. This is what the surplus allows for, but as stated earlier it is accessible by many critical and/or analytical minds. While the ability to be aware of one's state of *unheimlich* and recognise a surplus of meaning in any social event is important, it is certainly not enough to let the poet work themselves out of the liminal situation. With the loss of the master of ceremonies and their replacement with trickster-like figures, how is the subject guided through liminality towards a place of authentic and solid meaning structures? As illustrated in Chapter Two, even *sacra* which were described as the material manifestation of the master of ceremonies has been co-opted by the courtly rationale at work in permanent liminality. The masks, which were in many cases used as items which would encourage the initiate into a state of abstract contemplation, are used as a model of truth in representation within the court society.

Because the way in which subjects think about and understand their own existence is crucial for how they act within it and how they negotiate their reality with others, a change in understanding is pivotal and part of the restorative power of the liminal moment. How is this attitude towards existence moved from an awareness of the surplus, to something more? Abstract consciousness was mentioned as something which might aid this – it was noted before in relation to *sacra* as something traditionally utilised in the Ndembu rite of passage. What does abstract consciousness mean for these poets then, and what does it look like? Returning to 'Naoise at Four' this process can be made more tangible. As described, the poem is based on the

poet's unease with de-sensitized violence in the modern world and so makes connections with it to a past history which has been immortalised in myth. This is the surplus. In order to take this idea further Boland must necessarily approach the abyss with it, guided by *sacra* made of images and metaphor through the rite of passage which is, for her, the process of writing the poem. In the first stanza there is the image of the three men writhing "like forest pests". In the second stanza she draws us a domestic picture of a little girl, aged four, drinking milk from a plastic cup. The third stanza depicts a television set complete with images of violence within the modern world. So far Boland has a social problem. She has also brought to mind images and metaphors which occur to her and are a result of her past experiences. She then goes on to express them and in this moment things change – while she is doing so, expression and understanding come together in a more profound way. She encounters the abyss while being moved to abstract contemplation. Boland has the experiential awareness, she has the metaphorical *sacra* guiding her through the liminal moment, but now she is confronted with a stillness that is a result of a breakdown of the definite acceptance of previous complacency within the social reality. "Suburban, modern details" have fallen away and she is left with the images as they make abstract metaphorical connections in the presence of the abyss of concrete meaning. Boland is turned towards authentic understanding, a reaggregation as she comes through the liminal moment by virtue of the poetic rite of passage. *Sacra*, the experiential foundation, the surplus and now the abyss have brought her to a new level of understanding.

Wounds open.

Nothing heals. And what perspective

on this sudden Irish fury

can solve it to a folk memory?

Boland now realises that by solving violent histories to a “folk memory”, wounds remain open and nothing can heal. In a similar way to the rationalisation of society and its connected desensitization of violence, folk memories simply serve to dress up the horrors of the past. Ultimately this renders them impotent in their ability to aid subjective understanding beyond the courtly rationale in the social act. However, Boland knows that this courtly rationale will offer a perspective on the modern violence that will anaesthetise the public to the tragedy and as a result they cannot be affected experientially – “and what perspective on this sudden Irish fury can solve it to a folk memory?”. Because subjects cannot be affected experientially, they will not express that experience and thus will not be moved to authentic understanding.

To reiterate, this is where images and metaphor, described in Chapter Four come to the fore as they play their part in the ritual and provide a function similar to that which the masks played in Turner’s description of the Ndembu rite of passage. For the reader, the metaphors within poem become *sacra*, and the process of reading it becomes a ritualistic experience – a rite of passage. The metaphors, as described in Chapter Five become a means towards abstract contemplation. In doing this, the poem draws the reader into a space where the structure of the liminal period proper falls to the side for a moment and they are able to distance themselves from its energy. When they are in this space, the abyss itself, they necessarily must engage with the abyss of meaning – the same abyss initiates of a rite of passage must always engage with. Within this abyss and confronted with the potentialities of meaning, the

subject can and must, by virtue of abstract contemplation, affect their perception of reality and change the way they view their social order. Through the process of reading the poem, the reader is drawn into the ritual. They themselves experience the process of reading and abstraction of consciousness by virtue of the particular linguistic structures of the poem and eventually in that abstract state understand the place of human beings within the world as distinct from the ‘already there for us’ construction of it set out by the they-world. Essentially and ironically, in abstracting the subject from a given reality they can move towards a differently constructed reality on a more connected, solid and authentic level. In the case of this thesis, the subject (both poet and reader) is guided by *sacra*; the manifestation of the material master of ceremonies – here given form in image rich metaphors and allegory within the structure of poetry. The poet is thus moved towards the untranscribable potential of the abyss. That particular experience has an effect on the subject and thus the world as they engage with it and negotiate it anew.

Landed Violence

Within the poetry discussed in Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine, there is a wealth of romantic images of land. The land and the natural world are described as a force that brings you in touch with your humanness and thus soothes the dull ache of alienation all too evident in modernity. This beauty, which Harjo more explicitly claims is inherent in the land, might translate into what Stendhal calls “*la promesse de bonheur*” or ‘the promise of happiness’ which he believes to be inherently connected to the beautiful (Onions, 2012). Alas, this was not to be the case within Western modernity. In fact, the land through capitalism and colonisation became associated with something very much removed from beauty. In modern society, as a result of industrialisation and technologicisation the land was violently manipulated into becoming a handmaiden of the court society rationale and the subjects existing within it. ‘Land as beautiful’ was replaced at some point in history with this aggressive and dominant attitude to it which focused on it as a

resource to be used. To understand the changing perception of ‘the land’ as a source and then a resource, an illuminating connection can be made between what ‘land’ actually refers to and the etymological derivations of the word ‘savage’. The word savage originates from the word *salvage* meaning ‘wild, savage, untamed’. *Salvage* is an alteration of the Latin word *silvaticus* meaning ‘wild’, literally ‘of the woods’ again derived from *silva* meaning ‘forest, grove’. The implication here is that to be a savage is the opposite of being a ‘civilized’ person. This would entail being ‘a courteous member of a town/social group (Onions, 2012) and is directly at odds with being wild or savage which denotes an inextricable link to the land. Even the type of land described by the root word of savage – ‘forest, grove’ – is suggestive of the land being untamed, not yet moulded to the will of the ruling race; the human being. The human beings who live on and with this wild and unrationalised form of land are themselves wild and untamed; they are savages. Van Krieken notes this colonialist propensity when he describes the English attitude towards their colonized peoples in ‘In the beginning all the world was Irish’. He describes how the English felt that –

The Irish people... appeared to be resolutely wedded to the life which it has been accustomed to lead in the woods and the countryside and this was a problem that needed to be dealt with

2001: 34

For the Gnostic intention this was the ultimate problem with ‘native’ peoples. They were not civilized which meant that they were not acting in an appropriate way according to the structure of the social group of which they were a part. The land should not be accepted in its form as forest or wild terrain as this type of land would sustain a social group only in so far as their base needs are met. It should be used as an instrument and resource to strengthen the Gnostic ideology, to reassert the authority of the human being and to place them in their correct position as master of nature.

This impulse to control and dominate rather than live in harmony with nature was put forward by Lynn-White in 1967 as a result of the Judaeo-Christian construction of the social world according to their religious ideology. Within this ideology, from the creation story onwards, land was an entity infinitely inferior to the might of the human being who was created in the likeness of God the creator himself. Within this system of belief land became an instrument to carry out the will of the ruling ideology and as such, it was drawn into the hyper-rationality of modernity. This is evident in poems like Joy Harjo's 'And if I awaken in Los Angeles' or Rex Lee Jim's 'Corn Pollen'. For many native American communities this is what being postcolonial means to them – a rationalisation, an instrumentalisation of the land and so a forced alienation from their natural environment. Not only has direct responsibility for the land on which they have lived for centuries been taken from them, but that land is being manipulated and turned against them by the weight of the rationalising world of fluid and permanent liminality. Their postcolonial experience constitutes an alienation from the natural world, from their identities as native people and from their ability to engage with their communities on a level founded upon a solid construction of social order. Within this is the implication that the Gnostic impulse is itself violent in that it distances the subject from the land, from themselves and from their fellow actors in society. Far from being at one with the Christian philosophy of 'love thy neighbour', this attitude is uncaring at its core. As such it separates people from the world around them in a brutal manner. This has led to many of the problems in modernity as Joy Harjo goes on to describe in much of her poetry.

In a comparative reading of Irish and native American texts, there seems to be one glaring difference between the two postcolonial imperatives. While there may be an undercurrent of violence in the Irish poetry analysed in Chapters Six and Seven, in the poetry written by Rex Lee Jim and Joy Harjo

there is an overwhelming theme of violence which bubbles through to the surface with an unmistakable sense of anger and bitterness. Jim illustrates this theme in relation to the world in which he lives – a reminder and result of a violent loss of language and culture. Harjo also conceives of her native position culturally in this way, but she also sees violence far more extensively as a metaphor for the modern world in which we live. Irish nationalistic poetry certainly emphasizes violence; however it is a localised and romantic form of violence which is very much connected to nationalist agendas and therefore fails to reflect on the changing tides of modernity. This type of violence is offered as a form of fire that will purify scars remaining from years of repression and raise men from fallible humanity to heroism. Harjo's poetry does something much more than this; it offers a framework with which to understand the forces at work in modern western society.

Before moving on to Harjo's approach to the poem and modern society as experiential sources, it must be asked: why is the anger associated with the postcolonial condition so much more palpable within native American poetry than within the Irish prose? As discussed in Chapter Three, the experiential basis of the colonial process is imperative in any future perceptions or conceptualisations of reality. With this it needs to be acknowledged that the Irish colonial condition was inherently different to the native American experience. The Irish had been used to the sight of invaders of many different cultures and creeds over the years and had learned, over the thousand year stretch, that accommodation was essentially a necessary element of survival for the small country. The native American communities, however, which had been relatively homogenous and were used to interactions only from their fellow Americans were completely unfamiliar with the attitudes and Gnostic ways of the Europeans. When the Europeans did arrive with intentions to conquer and control, the native Americans were in a supremely vulnerable position.

In Ireland, while colonisation took place for many years perpetrated by a myriad of different power forces, Irish culture and language was essentially maintained and often merged with that of the colonisers with little large scale conflict. This of course, would change in the 1600's, particularly with the arrival of Cromwell. In this way then, the Irish experience of colonialism was not, as argued in Chapter Three, completely negative. The Irish had almost become complacent actors in a European drama where they knew their lines and their place in the story so well, that they failed to be shocked to the core in the same way that the native Americans were. While the Cromwellian assault of the 1600's certainly shocked them, it seems to have left less of a general impression of bitterness and anger and perhaps more of a romanticised and localised version of it (W.B. Yeats in his earlier poetry and Colm Breathnach more recently, although with a distinctly less nationalistic impetus). Poetry from young writers like Navajo poet Venaya Yazzie still confront and attempt to 'work out' the issues left over from the cultural rubble created by colonialism from a native American perspective (O' Mahony, 2011). In 'Reality in Four Parts' Yazzie describes her Grandmother still holding onto a sack full of tears which –

she captured from Diné men,
who lost hope when long black strands of it fell upon
cold, cement floors,
when their sacred hair was cut from their skull.

Poetry from young Irish writers however, more commonly tends to deal with subtle issues of cultural identity. These differences in the poetry seem to be a result of the unique experiential foundations of the particular cultures involved which were outlined in Chapter Three. Joy Harjo is moved towards the abyss in the same way as Boland in that she brings to the rite of passage –

the writing of the poem – an experiential foundation and the images or metaphor which become *sacra* moving her to abstract contemplation.

Violent Modernity

In modernity, violence seems to have taken on a new form distinct from those explicit forms it favoured in the past but also combining them to a degree. Violence has become more subtle, pervasive, manipulative and individualised. Alienation as a result of a loss of land, culture and/or language is not simply something to bemoan or lament. Harjo describes it is an act of violence which is indicative of modern society. To understand this argument it is necessary to return to a concept considered in Chapter Two – the court society. Elias describes this phenomenon as an elemental change in human society and how the human comports oneself and acts in the social arena. Foucault once suggested that all history, in a way, is the history of violence (Foucault, 1975). Humanity has developed in a particular way as a result of centuries of violence and empirical struggle from the Persians to the Romans and on to Great Britain (with a myriad of different contenders in between). This was not illogical, unstructured, chaotic action however – as Foucault argues –

What is most dangerous in violence is its rationality. Of course violence itself is terrible. But the deepest root of violence and its permanence come out of the form of rationality we use. The idea had been that if we live in the world of reason, we can get rid of violence. This is quite wrong. Between violence and rationality there is no incompatibility.

1996 [1980]

There is an awareness in much of Harjo's poetry that the modern world is distancing us as subjects from ourselves, our cultures and the society around us. This is how she engages with the surplus of meaning in her poetry. But then there is another element of her poetry where she engages with the abyss.

Images of violence contrasted with domestic, modern or everyday scene brings Harjo to another level of understanding. Harjo uses these experiences of distancing and alienation in tandem with the images and metaphors in her social environment to move her towards abstract contemplation. In confronting the abyss, Harjo comes to the realisation that indeed, a particular type of rationality is at work in modernity. Within this type of rationality she sees the emergence of a violence unique to modern western society and distinct from the explicit forms of violence prevalent in previous eras. How then, has the change in human interaction, as noted by Elias, affected the rationalisation of society in order to create this modern manifestation of violence? And what does this type of violence look like?

Firstly, Harjo sees modern society as overly rationalised, to the point of irrationality where individualism, the economy and capitalistic endeavours are privileged above all else. In this society subjects are unsure of their identities and so rely on the overt images associated with the neo-liberal ideal set out in Chapter Two in relation to Bauman's 'Liquid Modernity'. In 'The Path to the Milky Way leads through Los Angeles', Harjo describes a modern scenario in which –

We can't easily see that starry road from the perspective of
the crossing of the boulevards, can't hear it in the whine of
civilisation or taste the minerals of planets in hamburgers.

Harjo's traditional culture with a solid foundation, to incorporate Bauman's theory, which encourages the relationship between humanity and the natural environment, has been rendered insignificant in light of the might of modernity and its ever r-evolving liminality. Harjo describes this culture focused on the liquidity of the image and representation as the 'over-culture'

–

Beliefs, social institutions, arts, and traditions construct culture. The United States is made up of many cultures. There is no such thing as a melting pot. There are various cultural streams that are renewed, slowed, cut off, or otherwise changed. The over-culture is a culture of buying and selling.

2011: 56

The rationality at the heart of this buying and selling reinforces individualism as something which separates people from society, but nonetheless exists within it. The court-society's focus on representation, visibility, performance and extensive yet subtle social control is an inextricable element of this rationalised world, as explicated in Chapter Two. The court-society's form of aggression and violence is just as apparent as the violence characterised by the force of empire, but in this case is rationalised in a way that reflects modern society. As a result of the focus on visibility within modernity, violence has been internalised in a more manipulative way degrading the concept of virtue in social life. Visibility means that knowledge is easier to acquire and it is acceptable to use it in whatever way one sees fit because, after all, representation is truth. If one is to think of an American political campaign full of negative strategies to undermine the opposing candidate, one starts to understand this change in violent intentions. In a more thoughtful society based on authentic meaning this would lead people to think the worst of both candidates as they ruthlessly attempt to drag one other down. In liminal modernity however this is considered to be a completely appropriate way of acting. The candidates are representing one another according to their most shameful characteristics and whether these representations are accurate or not is irrelevant as the authority afforded to representation is so strong as to obliterate any need for accuracy. Subjects become violent in how they manipulate the knowledge acquired as a result of visibility. Merriam Webster (2012) describes violence as "injury by or as if by distortion, infringement, or profanation" or "intense, turbulent, or furious and often destructive action".

This manipulation of knowledge becomes aggressive and destructive in modern society and is commonly utilised as a form of news in the press. It is considered acceptable because visibility is equalled to truth in representation and truth is itself considered the property of the public. However, this destructive action is rationalised into a means-end orientated action that privileges representation as truth and therefore explicit violence is internalised and rendered implicit and mannered. Thus it is acceptable action with the general society. This pushes subjects further into a game of identities and reinforces social control within societies. Because this form of violence is so subtle, so controlled in terms of a rationalised court society, it is appropriate behaviour, which means that it has the potential to devolve even further.

Manipulative violence focused on destruction and based on individualism is particularly apparent within politics, as just described, but it is also evident in modern society in many other ways. Modernity nurtures mass culture in its many different forms and pushes to the fringes any alternative forms. Harjo argues this 'over-culture' subsumes other cultures and renders them unimportant through the influence of language – they are now 'minority cultures', secondary to a mass culture of the kind Dwight McDonald theorised in 1957. Cultural phenomena, becoming more common in books, film and television promote the common in society unmarred by any reflection on the meaning of virtue or the good life. Reality as performance is exaggerated, sensationalised and shown as the ultimate irony and symbol of social degradation through the increased rating associated with shows like the appropriately named *Big Brother*. In these shows, the court society rationale is pushed to the nth degree and eventually turns on itself while reinforcing and recreating that impulse anew in those watching. They engage in the acceptable pastime of observance and as subjects become more and more visible through the force of globalisation. Observers thus become more inert and passive as participants in society. As a result of globalisation, culture is

becoming more homogenous and 'minority cultures' are violently pushed back into the pages of history.

Languages have also been the subject of violence. Taking English as an example, the amount of people conversing in text-speak or 'txtspk' has exploded far quicker than the natural changes of language have historically allowed. This has led to a situation where young adults are becoming more confident with this new 'language' than they are with Standard English. Not only this, but in a study based on eighty students and their reactions to the text speak phenomenon, students have described their worries about how text speak was affecting their English academically (Drouin and Davis, 2009). This type of violence is pervasive as global culture is offered as the 'one size fits all' melting pot and anyone who wishes to remain outside this culture is pushed to the fringes of society. The philosophical basis of this kind of social structure is questionable and has at its core an individualist intention that can be related to Simmel's theory of money. Simmel argued that money was an excellent reflection of how humans interact in society and was becoming more and more powerful as a representation of that interaction as time went on (Simmel, 1990). In modern society subjects focus on money as the end result in goal orientated action and formal rationality becomes the dominant mode of action (Weber, 1998 [1922]). This has increased the individualistic intentions at the heart of court society and thus mannered violence becomes more common. Negative, violent and aggressive attitudes are acceptable when directed at those who do not engage in the game of identities appropriately as they are vilified when they do not. If they maintain their position in the minority culture and play their particular role, then they will find performing within modern society easy. If they do not, they will find life increasingly difficult and uncomfortable to negotiate as they fail to live up to the ideal of the interdependent, performative context.

Harjo argues that this internalisation of violence in a restrictive and subtly socially controlled way has led to the phenomenon of young people resorting to explicit and intensified forms of violence –

Maybe what I've seen is what's been underground, what's been bubbling beneath the surface, or boiling beneath the surface of American consciousness all along, it's just been opened. You think about what this society is coming to when the children kill each other.

Harjo, 2011

Here Harjo refers to the Red Lake Massacre, which was perpetrated by Jeffrey Weise on the 21st March 2005. Weise shot and killed his grandfather, his grandfather's girlfriend, two teachers and five students of Red Lake Senior High School (Davey and Wilgoren, 2005). Harjo connects this violence to the overt cultural control mechanisms which remove people from their conception of identity or what Bauman might call a solid cultural base from which the subject can orient themselves within the social universe. Within a liminal modernity the subject is given rules and structure to abide by, but these are void of any underlying cultural foundation. Harjo describes this modernity as a society within a state of war; one for the most part without the open use of arms but which, for all that, is still struggling between opposing forces for a particular end. This end for Harjo always comes down to domination in some form or another.

In this case, the domination is cultural. Harjo says that “violence occurs with distancing” (2011). Traditionally and within colonial situations, that distancing might have taking the form of a creation of self and other – the colonisers created a distancing between themselves and the colonised and labelled them as barbaric in order to feel that their act of war was in some way warranted and legitimate. In modern American society, the distance reveals itself between the “over culture” of capitalistic intention and the many different cultures which it attempts to subsume. Cultural colonialism is just as

violent as physical colonialism as in both cases something is indifferently destroyed and this war for Harjo is inherent in modernity. In 'The Real Revolution is Love' Harjo can see "Columbus land once more, over and over again" but she goes on to iterate that "This is not a foreign country, but the land of our dreams". Meaning that people create the world they live in and the United States is a result of the dreams of humanity. However, although she knows that Columbus and his gunfire are far away from her now she still hears the sounds of war "I listen to the gunfire we cannot hear, and begin the journey". Harjo moves from the image of the first colonial war in the Americas to the cultural war that surrounds her now. The America, comfortable with violence whether it is explicit or implicit, physical or mannered "was given life with the first massacres" (Harjo and Winder, 2011).

Harjo's main argument here is that violence is more than a physical affront. It has many manifestations from the violent obliteration of space and time as a result of technological advances, to the industrialisation of land and the alienation of subjects within the social structure. Harjo, like Fanon before her, points to the forceful destruction of a language, a phenomenon that the Irish, Muscogee and Navajo Nations all had to contend with. Harjo, however connects this agenda of modernity to the rationalisation of violence in society – "forcing language use is violent and disturbs the root of a people, both the afflicted and the perpetrator" (Harjo and Winder, 2011). Without the security of roots, (roots being synonymous with land, one must always root oneself to it) the individual is freewheeling through modernity, clinging on to whatever mask is available and appropriate at the time. As a result of the colonial experience, Harjo believes that a more subtle form of violence has pervaded modern society – it is violence to our humanity and our identity as such. It is also a violence that perpetuates and feeds permanent liminality and creates subjects who are more than willing to sit passively and accept the rationalistic structure of society without ever feeling the need to recreate social meaning in a more interactive and responsible way. Language, culture and social

relationships have all suffered a violent affront which seems to be unstoppable without the security of a solid social order. Harjo remarks this and sees it as the great tragedy of modern society and in this way performs a role which is most accurately described as social theorist.

The Beautiful Home

Within the poems that use the earth or land as a theme, that land (or alternately sky, animal or plant) always rests peacefully within and interacts with many other aspects of the natural environment in a seamless way. The importance of the social act for this thesis, and experience within it has been thoroughly explicated within this chapter. The experiences of subjects within the court society have been shown to create distances within social life and thus perhaps lead to rationalisation of violence. In contrast, the four poets discussed in this thesis suggest that the natural world does the opposite of this. In entering the still of a moment in nature driven by experiential understanding and *sacra* which are images transformed into metaphor, this becomes apparent. The actions of plants, animals, earth, sun and sky all come together to act in a profoundly interconnected way. This type of interconnectedness seems to be the realisation which brings all four poets into a symphony of experience and understanding.

In Harjo's 'Eagle Poem' the narrator observes an eagle flying overhead – she quietly watches the eagle as he swoops and circles in the air above. There is a distinct sense of calm in the poem – it is a scene wherein the natural world takes precedence over the rationalised world. The “sky, earth, sun, moon” come to life in the words on the page and Harjo suggests that this beauty is worthy of a prayer. She associates a recognition of the importance of these elements of the world with beauty itself. The poem maintains that when one becomes aware of one's place within the “true circle of motion”, that awareness is comparable with the sacred and authentic within the good life. This type of awareness is authentic because the subject is responding to

the world around them, recognising and accounting for that interconnection, of which they are a part. In recognising their connectedness to the natural environment in this way they are more connected to their self and this in turn constitutes a move away from the alienation associated with *unheimlich*. They come into consciousness relating to their place in the world in an active way, in that they are an intricate part of the world in all its vitality. This is diametrically opposed to the static rationalistic thinking of the they-world wherein subjects respond to one another self-consciously and according to the logic of the court society.

Likewise, in a poem entitled 'Monaghan Hills' Patrick Kavanagh speaks fondly of the hills which surrounded his home. He expresses his belief that the hills had a foundational effect on his character and had far reaching implications for his developing consciousness. "Monaghan hills/, you have made me the sort of man I am". He goes on to surmise that had he been born in a different county, encircled by different hills he would no doubt be a different sort of person.

If I had been born among the Mournes,

Even Forkhill,

I might have had echo-corners in my soul

Repeating the dawn laughter

These hills have influenced his lifestyle, how he views the land, how he views the world and have produced in him a deep affection for poetry and song.

Because of you I am a half-faithed ploughman,

Shallow furrows at my heels,

Because of you I am a beggar of song

The connection of subject to land becomes more profound in the closing lines of the poem which read –

O Monaghan hills, when is writ your story,

A carbon-copy will unfold my being.

In these lines the true meaning of the poem comes to the fore – he and the hills are one in the same. In fact, as the hills will invariably last longer than the human life, the implication in this poem is that he is a reflection of these hills and that we are all in one way or another connected to the land in which we were reared and that which we strive to call home.

On a similar note, Eavan Boland points to the enduring force of the River Liffey as a symbol of the constructive and formative power of the natural environment while Rex Lee Jim describes the nurturing strength of the earth and its place in the reality and the lives of human beings. All of these images of the land as world entice the reader to see the land, not as some instrumental proponent of modernity, but rather as the manifestation of all that is beautiful. It gives life, it nourishes, it sustains and ultimately it is the house of our existence. The land is our home and in that secure role, it is indeed beautiful. This section of the chapter follows the poetic form as it incorporates a type of authentic meaning into the ritual process by virtue of images and metaphors connected to the land. In ‘April Dusk’ Kavanagh constructs the poetic form in a ritualistic manner guiding the reader through the narrative as they engage with the metaphor which leads them to abstract consciousness all the while

remaining true to the function of *sacra* – in which that abstraction should eventually lead the subject towards the abyss.

‘April Dusk’ is essentially a poem of longing. Kavanagh laments the fact that he is not a lover in the beautiful April evening and instead is a poet musing about life. He feels a little removed from the vitality of life in the beginning of the poem. He then moves on to consider the plight of the horse in his manger. Although the horse’s stable is filled with hay and he has every rational reason to be content, the horse is melancholy as he turns away from the hay and instead takes to “dreaming of grass soft and cool in hollows”. Essentially Kavanagh imagines that the horse is dreaming of a type of freedom from the overly structured and rationalised world which has become his life. Kavanagh proceeds to anthropomorphise the Horse and asks –

O does he neigh

Jealously words for John MacGuigan’s ass

That never was civilised in stall or trace

In empathising with the horse’s plight Kavanagh is also making a comment on the type of life which the horse leads. The horse is a part of the ‘civilised’ they-world through no fault or desire of his own. He is subject to the whims and desires of his master and so leads an inauthentic existence. Kavanagh sits observing this world and then notices a ploughboy as he walks past – the boy is himself subject to someone else’s commands – and the poet, in sympathy with the ploughboy feels “the subtle pain/ That every silenced poet has endured”. He, as poet, observes the tragedies within modernity and yet is restricted in what he can do about it. Here Kavanagh essentially alludes to the sense of *unheimlich* that he imagines most poets have had to contend with. The fact that he uses the word ‘silenced’ is interesting – he is indicating that his words go unheeded by the world, or rather that the world fails to understand the import within lines of poetry – both his and other poets – and

instead view them as pointless exercises in play purely for entertainment's sake. By comparing his own predicament with that of the horse, Kavanagh draws a picture for the reader of a situation where man and beast are one and the same. The horse dreams of green pastures where he is not fenced in by the rational structure keeping him in place. Kavanagh also dreams of these green pastures where he is not fenced in as a poet where he is restricted to poeticising about those things which are deemed safe in modernity. Rather, he wants to subvert the given meaning systems wherein subjects live inauthentic existences and negotiate ones based on more solid foundations. Here the land, the natural world, is offered as somewhere that a beautiful sense of home can be restored. Kavanagh responds to the horse, sees himself in the animal, realises the connections all around him and negotiates his view of reality in light of it.

By focusing on the beautiful potential of the land in all its fertile animation Kavanagh, Harjo, Jim and Boland in similar poetic constructions, disavow the hangover left by the colonialist Gnostic impulse which encourages the instrumentalisation of land and hence the further rationalisation of society – this they understand by virtue of the surplus of seeing. Their response is a restoration of meaning through situating authentic meaning in relation to the land. In approaching the abyss through abstract contemplation, they begin to see that the land and a sense of home are one and the same thing – by restoring meaning to that land we can also restore meaning to ourselves as alienated subjects.

Connectivity and The Platonic Cave

In *The Essence of Truth* Heidegger turns to Plato's allegory of the Cave in Book VII of the Republic in order to understand how truth becomes 'unhidden'. He argues that the freed prisoner does not simply turn towards the light, see the figures which made the shadows on the wall and know that they are truth. Instead he makes this distinction – the shadows were indeed

unhidden for the prisoners, in a similar way to how the freed prisoner comes to view the figures in the light. This implies that there are degrees of unhiddenness. Both the shadows and the figures are beings of a sort but the figures given illumination by the force of the sun are ‘more beingful’ (2002 [1988]: 25). Plato notes this when he maintains that “whoever is turned towards the more beingful beings, sees and talks more correctly” (515d). This brings the argument back to Heidegger’s argument in *Poetry, Language, Thought* (1971) when he attests that truth resides in the ‘equipmentality of equipment’ or how effectively something performs the role it was intended for. This means that the more beingful the being is, the more they are *connected* to the world as a being. Inauthentic Dasein is inauthentic simply because they rely on the interdependence of the court society rather than the structure of understanding which is connected to culture and solid forms of social order. The more beingful the subject is, the more connected they are to the social act, the world surrounding them and the beings which fill it with life. This connectivity is inherently juxtaposed with spatial and temporal distance which is fast becoming a characteristic of modernity. The further subjects are separated from one another spatially the further they are removed from their beingness.

The struggle then for the poets in this thesis is and was at every point, the fight to turn towards the more beingful which translates also as the more authentic. In turning towards the potential of the abyss, they do just this. In ‘The Myth of Blackbirds’, Joy Harjo outlines this desire to move towards being more beingful. She describes how the world interconnects and we become part of this interconnection by virtue of our experience, which is here symbolised by the memory of blackbirds; the memory of experiencing them within the world –

This is the world in which we undressed together. Within it white deer intersect with the wisdom of the hunter of grace. Horses wheel toward the morning star. Memory was always more the paper and cannot be broken by violent history or stolen by thieves of childhood. We cannot be separated in the loop of mystery between blackbirds and the memory of blackbirds.

Plato's allegory of the cave does not describe the figures which reveal themselves in the sun as truth themselves. The truth resides in the prisoner's awareness that what is offered as unhidden is never truly that. There is always bound to be a light which shows those figures as *more beingful* rather than as essential and ultimately *true* beings. Truth is thus philosophical in this context rather than connected to any one true and tangible entity. Turning towards the light then, is turning towards a realisation learned from the still nothingness of the abyss. Here, the realisation finally rests on the connectivity and beingness of beings within their social reality, how they experience, express and understand the world around them. This chapter provides an explicit account of the poet and/or reader as they turn towards the light. This turning is the basis of authentic social action and fundamentally understanding social reality.

Epilogue: Turning, Turning.

The power to learn is present in everyone's soul and that the instrument with which each learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body. This instrument cannot be turned around from that which is coming into being without turning the whole body until it is able to study that which is and the brightest thing that is, namely, the one we call the good.

Plato, *The Republic* Book VII. 518d

Chapter Five saw poetry connected to an image of working, ploughing, turning the land through the etymological roots of the word 'verse'. Initially it was considered something which bonded the human being, in an experiential way, to the world around them. It helped the human being understand their place in reality through a process of abstract contemplation akin to *sacra* in rites of passage. This thesis has shown that poetry can and indeed has, returned to this functional and formative role in society. It can be used as an experiential framework for the subject to engage in, which takes them through the liminal period and on to reaggregation. Poetry can aid the subject in their attempt to turn, in a Platonic periagogical way, towards the 'truth/unhidden' or in this case authentic meaning which is inherently connected to what Plato in the above quote called 'the good'.

For this thesis, the good and home (always already connected to the land) are one and the same. As elucidated in Chapter Three, land is inherently connected to the concept of home and for solid social order, home is simply essential. It provides security, a system of understanding and existence in a system of connections with other human beings. Home allows us to exist in the natural world in an authentic way and feel the experiential weight of the

reality we have created around us. If poetry is connected to the process of working the land, and land in turn is connected to home, it stands to reason that through poetry it is possible to move towards a new social order based on the principle of security, founded on the concept of land and home. This is indeed a valid method of understanding and restoring meaning in society. By turning themselves toward the light, these poets face the brightness which at first seems like nothing because the light is so blinding (and of course fear inspiring). After a few moments of abstract contemplation they start to realise that this light is not an abyss as in nothingness, but rather it is an abyss as in meaning ad infinitum.

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