

Irish Travellers: On Writing Orality, Representation and Belonging

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ABSTRACT

Irish Travellers: On Writing Orality, Representation and Belonging

Christine Walsh

Travellers, a traditionally nomadic people indigenous to Ireland, have suffered marginalization and discrimination within modern Ireland. This thesis, informed by Michel Foucault's musings on struggles for power within the modern nation, explores the history of colonialism as an unresolved trauma that contributes to the persecution of Travellers in Ireland. Due to their traditional oral culture as well as systemic racism that excluded them from educational institutions, many Traveller autobiographies (most published in the last twenty years) have been "spoken" works such as Traveller activist Nan Joyce's *My Life on the Road*, one of two longer autobiographies focused on in this thesis. Joyce's direct style approaches language as primarily a social interaction, characteristic of orality, as she responds to negative representations of Travellers within the dominant culture. Even though Sean Maher's more literary 1972 memoir, *The Road to God Knows Where*, reflects his formal education, his focus remains on storytelling as he writes to preserve Traveller traditions that he sees as imperilled. Both writers present worldviews that challenge not only the more literary expectations of the presumed non-Traveller reader, but also the academic 'othering' that delegitimizes knowledge derived from orality, and ultimately the rational materialism that validates the homogenizing and normalizing impulses that regulate the modern nation. By re-presenting official versions of history in narratives that include Travellers as active participants, Joyce and Maher reveal the role of storytelling in creating national belonging even as they write to construct legitimate places of belonging for Travellers within the nation.

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Dedication

To my four sons who never cease to inspire me

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Irish Travellers: On Writing Orality, Representation and Belonging

“Most of what I know comes from listening to tales around the camp-fire.” (Maher 113)

INTRODUCTION

Travellers are a traditionally nomadic minority group indigenous to Ireland. In former days, they travelled the countryside in horse-drawn caravans; today, those Travellers who are still nomadic, about fifty percent of the roughly twenty-four thousand¹ people in Ireland who identify themselves as Travellers, are more likely to be pulling trailers behind automobiles or driving motor homes. However, after decades of settlement and assimilationist policies, half of all Travellers living in Ireland are now permanently settled, though many of these still travel part of the year.

The reasons that Travellers have been marginalized and persecuted within Ireland are complex. In focusing on two autobiographical works by Traveller writers, this thesis reveals the legacy of colonialism as a contributing factor, as well as a prevailing perception of nomadism as a threat to sedentary values that Robbie McVeigh identifies as “anti-nomadism”. Dominant discourses tended to erase Travellers from the mythologies of nationhood that fortified nationalist aspirations and later, after the formation of an independent state, continued to espouse a definition of Irishness that promoted an ostensible homogeneity. In her autobiography, *My Life on the Road*, community activist Nan Joyce reaches out to an assumed non-Traveller² Irish audience, arguing for a meaningful place for Travellers within the contemporary Irish nation. She portrays Travellers as patriotic Irish citizens, while simultaneously maintaining their difference as a separate people with a unique culture within the nation. Even though Joyce’s dialogic

style differs greatly from the more literary style of Sean Maher's memoir, *The Road to God Knows Where*, and even though the two works represent politically divergent views, both write Traveller culture back into the Irish historical landscape.

Government policies have in the past attempted to contain and control the perceived recalcitrance of Travellers' nomadic lifestyle, but by creatively redefining Irishness and the place of Travellers within the nation, Joyce and Maher's texts represent the kind of responsive discourse that Michel Foucault has referred to as "a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (Foucault *History* 101). It is crucial in reading Traveller texts to be aware of the subtlety and pervasiveness of how privileged discourses have excluded and discredited certain kinds of knowledge. The ways in which oral cultures perceive the world tend to be dismissed within literate cultures as "naïve". This confirms Foucault's finding that certain kinds of knowledge are "subjugated" — delegitimized because they are deemed as "inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated", and are therefore "located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault "Two Lectures" 82). Joyce and Maher's autobiographies challenge the assumptions by which certain kinds of knowledge are discredited. In proposing the legitimacy of oral history for example, they strike at the rationale that constituted the premise that legitimated decades of officially sanctioned settlement policies as 're-settlement'. At the same time, in the act of telling their stories (paradoxically in writing), these writers preserve cultural memory and resist assimilationist pressures. Their texts corroborate Leigh Gilmore's assertion that "writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts the right to speak rather than to be spoken for" (40).

Noting that Homi Bhabha cites “‘literacy’” as among the “‘key’” (citing E. Gellner 142) totalizing impulses of the modern nation, oral forms represent a counterpoint to these homogenizing, unifying trends. While narratives privileged within a nation enjoy official recognition in public ceremonies, school curricula etc., tangential versions retain cultural tenability and even vitality by employing more covert methods of dissemination through oral expressions that Gibbons refers to as “fugitive and endangered cultural forms” (145). These include the traditional Traveller (Cant) songs Maher performs before his astonished classmates and the stories he relates³. Storytelling is flexible, responsive to the past but adaptive to present circumstances in ways that cannot be contained. The recalcitrance of oral cultures to assimilate has been perceived as an obstacle to the ‘unifying’ imperatives of modernity.

There are fundamental differences between literary practices and preoccupations, and the more concrete concerns of orality. Orality, as Walter Ong (still one of the most important theorists of orality) points out, is “always embedded in non-verbal existence” (*Orality* 160). Literacy allows for more abstract, analytical thinking because ideas can be recorded and returned to, re-examined, reflected on and modified. However, the abstracting tendency of literate thinking can become an oppressive instrument when it questions the validity of the experiential vocabularies most apt to be available to more marginalized people. Academic paradigms such as the postmodern discourse that have questioned the validity of “lived experience” as a valid epistemology because it is socially mediated (Cavallaro 40), for example, have the effect of duplicating exclusionary practices, further marginalizing already marginalized people. As Shari Stone-Mediatore explains, “the viewpoints of people who have been the most socially and culturally

marginalized are not presented in ‘theories,’ in the standard sense of the term, but in engaged, creative, community-situated ‘stories’” (163). These modes of expression based on life experience are often the only ones available to people like Travellers who have been “excluded from official knowledge-producing institutions”⁴ (Stone-Mediatore 163). To dismiss Traveller points of view because “experience” is a non-privileged form of knowledge effectively silences marginalized people by denying the legitimacy of less theoretical modes of discourse.

Autobiography tends for the most part to be largely influenced by realism, using representations to signify an individual’s life and even an inner “self” and is closely linked to the construction of self-identity since both rely on a sense of continuity achieved through memory. As Lana F. Rakow and Laura A. Wackwitz point out, the self “is a composite, remembered self” (citing Susannah Radstone 173). The process of remembering “rais[es] questions about what we wish to remember” (Rakow & Wackwitz 173) because this by implication also always involves what we choose to forget. As Michel de Certeau points out in his analysis of history (which aptly applies to autobiography to the degree that the latter represents an individual’s ‘history making’), the process of “selection between what can be *understood* and what must be *forgotten* in order to obtain the representation of a present intelligibility” (de Certeau’s emphasis 4) also creates *absences*. In the autobiographical text, certainly in Joyce’s text, such absences tend to be represented as silences so that what is not spoken at times resonates with meaning. Trauma also may be a major obstacle to remembering, but again, such silences often resonate in a text. Forgetting in order to remember applies to the formation of any cultural or historical text, not just autobiography because such undertones contain

cultural meaning — they represent not only the unspeakable, but also, being a kind of self-regulating collective censorship, the unthinkable.

This thesis aligns with Richard Dyer in presuming that while representations are not without limitations, they are “also what makes saying possible at all” (2). Dyer recognizes that dominant cultures can and do use representations of marginalized groups in ways that justify oppressive practices (1), but subjugated people can and do present and re-present themselves in creative ways that resist such definitions. Joyce’s at times direct disputations of negative beliefs reveal that she understands “conflicts over representations are struggles over meaning” (Rakow and Wackwitz 172), and that received beliefs can be changed (Rakow and Wackwitz 174). Joyce’s belief that ignorance, “a fear of the unknown” (118), is the cause of racism motivates her writing. However, Joyce’s text also reveals some of the challenges of working within and responding to the values and representations of a dominant culture. (These will be examined in Part I.)

Joyce’s text evinces confidence in the ability of language to communicate, a relationship with language tied to the fact that oral interactions naturally imply a speaker and a receiver, or “narrator and addressee” as Sidonie Smith describes the interrelation between autobiographer and reader, a relationship “that is fundamental to autobiographical acts and the kinds of intersubjective truth they construct” (Smith 69). Smith’s observation suggests a parallel between autobiography and speech. The tendency of both Maher and Joyce to view subjectivity as more communal than individualistic reflects the inherent sociality of the spoken word. As Ong remarks, “Oral communication unites people in groups” (Orality 69). Both autobiographies downplay

individualism in favour of more communal conceptions of self, diverging from the Cartesian concept of an interior, isolated Self. Ong attributes the invention of the Cartesian model to literacy because “writing and reading are solitary activities that throw the psyche back on itself” (*Orality* 69). He proposes that almost universal literacy and availability of written materials have changed the way people interact, creating an isolating effect that preceded theories that hypothesized more individualistic paradigms⁵. Descartes privatized thought by stressing the “logic of personal enquiry”, a move that “ousted ... the art of discourse”, a collaborative intellectual activity maintained among institutions of learning until Descartes revolutionized “the art of thinking [as an] isolated intellectual activity” (Ong *Presence* 63). This shift from orality to literacy was not instantaneous. Learning techniques emphasized dialectic and rhetoric “well through the Renaissance” (Ong *Presence* 293). However, Ong postulates that the invention of the printing press and ready access to print culture “intensified the inwardness” of human thought (*Orality* 153).

Although there probably no longer exist cultures that could be identified as “primary oral cultures” (Ong *Orality* 31), that is cultures that think of words as sounds and have never been exposed to the idea of inscribing language, many cultures remain intricately entwined with their oral heritage. In fact, orality has deeply influenced Western literacy, although this is seldom acknowledged. Some of the seminal texts of Western culture such as the *Pentateuch* and Homer’s *Iliad* were oral works before being inscribed. Traces of orality resonate like an aftertouch in stylistic idiosyncrasies within these texts. Similarly, reverberations of Celtic folktales, popular beliefs, legends and myths remain within modern Ireland, to some extent still in the forms adopted and

adapted by the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival. Although Ong refers to orality and literacy as “polarities” (*Orality* 157) at least once, the tenor throughout his oeuvre suggests that orality / literacy are not mutually exclusive. In fact, he proposes, “*l’écriture* and orality are both ‘privileged’” (*Orality* 169-70), in that each mode can inform the other. With the continuing development of electronic media, the spoken word has combined with literary variants in formats such as text messaging, essentially a ‘conversation’ constructed in non-grammatical syntax and truncations⁶. Digital communications are once again creating a revolution, morphing interpersonal and informational exchange to a degree that the contemporary world is evolving into a secondary oral / secondary literate culture (Fowler Abstract). Although there is not place here to explore these shifting hybrids, this thesis maintains the view that the dichotomizing that imagines orality / literacy as opposites is a construct that may in itself have derived from the Western dialectic tradition in which one argued against an opponent (sometimes imaginary, sometimes in attendance) in order to “win” one’s position (Ong *Orality* 111). “[T]he ‘art’ of rhetoric” developed an “agonistic dynamics” (Ong *Orality* 45) that “situate[d] knowledge within a context of struggle” (Ong *Orality* 44), a proclivity evident in Joyce’s text where she addresses an imagined audience / reader in order to convince. Besides the assumption of an imagined listener, Joyce’s emphasis on survival issues such as housing, as well as on human interrelations coincides with the practical preoccupations of orality that remain grounded in lived relations.

Because the spoken word is an action (Ong *Orality* 31-2), a passing instant in time that cannot be retrieved, mnemonic devices characteristically shape oral style, including the use of rhyme, metre and alliteration (Ong *Orality* 34). Formulaic language

such as epithets (Ong *Orality* 38) provides a shorthand of meanings and character ‘types’ often already familiar to the audience⁷. Repetitions serve as memory aids, reminding both speaker and audience of what has gone before. Ong regards the “redundancy” characteristic of oral presentations as more “natural” than the “[s]parsely linear or analytic thought and speech” (*Orality* 40) that developed only when the technology of writing freed up the mind from having to commit all to memory. Whereas orality tends to be less grammatically rigorous since so much of meaning is imparted by non-verbal means, “[w]ritten discourse develops more elaborate and fixed grammar ... because ... meaning ... is more dependent ... upon linguistic structure” (Ong *Orality* 38).

The oral influence evident in Joyce’s autobiography comes from its having been spoken into a tape recorder and then transcribed to text by editor / collaborator, Anna Farmar. Therefore the structure of the text as a whole, as well as insertions from other sources such as newspaper articles, Joyce’s original poems, and one traditional verse must be considered as collaborative choices. In a personal correspondence, Farmar explained their collaborative process: “Nan spoke about her life, sometimes prompted by me, sometimes I would ask her to clarify something, but on the whole she just talked (not always in chronological sequence!)”. Farmar’s exclamation mark suggests that arranging the anecdotes into as close to a chronological narrative as possible was a challenge, not surprising given that less importance is given to linearity in oral compositions. She reworked Joyce’s recorded anecdotes, minimizing the characteristic repetitions and circularity of orality by reshaping the spoken word into a more linear, more literary style. In a work like Joyce’s that proposes to communicate her life story in order to bring to light larger issues affecting not only her individually but Travellers as a group with the

expressed purpose of promoting political and social change, Farmar's decision to reduce redundancy, fashioning a tenuous chronology of sometimes disparate anecdotes, probably best succeeds in conveying Joyce's intentions. At the same time, Farmar worked with the principle that "[the work] should be mediated as little as possible" (personal correspondence). Thus, Farmar retains the unique "voice", though non-text based elements of Joyce's delivery such as laughter, voice inflections or physical gestures are lost. Perhaps in order to preserve the sound of Joyce's words, Farmar keeps some colloquialisms such as "afeard" for "afraid", "usen't to" for "did not used to" etc. Ungrammatical elements, such as the liberal use of commas to connect independent clauses in the written text duplicate the pause for breath of speech. Run-on sentences also simulate the rapidity with which thoughts translate into words and support Ong's observation that speech reflects "additive" thought patterns. Not only do oral forms tend to link ideas through the use of 'and' (Ong *Orality* 37), these "aggregative" groupings tend to organize ideas through temporal or relational, rather than sequential or logical correspondences (Ong *Orality* 38). Aggregation also reflects a worldview that seeks unity (a way of interpreting the world that will be examined at length in Part III).

Nan Joyce was born to nomadic Travellers in 1940, the second of nine surviving children (one child died in infancy). Her autobiography, originally entitled *Traveller*, and first published in 1985, informally divides into two halves. The first half, comprised of often relatively unconnected anecdotes that depict an idyllic childhood, dwells on memories of her family life, and prominently features her father whom she greatly admired. From a life in which all of their needs were met by attentive parents, the family falls into destitution after their father was killed in police custody when Joyce was about

twelve years old. With nine children to care for, including a newborn, and faced with a jail sentence because she was unable to pay fines for illegal camping, her mother in desperation went with another woman to steal scrap and was caught and imprisoned for one year. For the next twelve months, the children survived on their own. The care of six younger siblings fell to twelve-year-old Nan, her older sister Kathleen, fourteen, and younger brother, Willie, ten, who used every means, including begging, stealing food or trading in scrap, in order to meet the family's basic daily needs. Her account intersperses humorous anecdotes in a Dickensian scenario: unsupervised children living in impoverished circumstances within a seemingly indifferent society⁸. After her mother's release, the timeframe skips a few years to when, at the age of sixteen, Joyce married and immediately started her own family.

Even though she experienced periods of severe deprivation in her childhood, her reminiscences from this period are full of buoyant humour. The second half of the book, which concerns Joyce's adult life, represents a marked change in tone. Now, the primary focus is on survival issues such as health, education and housing. The difference between childhood and adulthood seems to be that even though as children they bore adult responsibilities, it was a temporary if difficult situation, whereas as an adult with children of her own, troubles fell squarely on her shoulders.

Joyce's emphasis on the public sphere in the second half, her struggles on behalf of her family that lead to her activism, allows her personal life to remain in the background. Her elision of individual relations may reflect her characteristic personal reticence, though it may also indicate a preference to foreground issues that affect not only her, but also the Traveller community in general. Conflict between her inclination

to speak frankly and her disinclination to divulge personal details that would breach conjugal discretion creates a tone that is both straightforward and reticent. Certain subjects are not broached. She rarely 'names' her feelings, but the intuitive reader may surmise her emotions. Relations with her husband represent a silence in the text. It is evident that often when Joyce is in direst need, she is alone in her difficulty. This emphasis on the public sphere in the second half recalls what Gilmore identifies as a "masculinist" (45) approach because Gilmore asserts that male autobiographers tend to emphasize the public life over the private life. However, to the extent that this may be true, Joyce differs from an individualistic model in that she does not emphasize events as a consequence of individual achievement and because her concern for others, including her family motivates her action, a representation of "the self in relation to others" (Gilmore 77) typically found in women's autobiography. Perhaps because she wants to foreground issues, Joyce focuses on events rather than their psychological or emotional effect on her as an individual. Recurring patterns emerge, an unremitting succession of inadequate shelter and ill health, especially affecting the children, often as a direct result of hazardous surroundings. Their misery is exacerbated by an at times unremitting harassment by authorities carrying out a policy of forced evictions that created more instability for Traveller families. While she resists the bullying of officials early on, the death of her first grandchild as a direct result of unhealthy housing (the toddler probably contracted the meningitis that killed her from rats infesting the camp) brings a clearer focus and outspokenness to her activism as she begins to take on a leadership role within the community.

Her almost total absence of psychological self-reflexivity seems to fall in line with the predisposition of oral thought not to delve into abstract analysis, except that Joyce draws in issues of class struggle that seem to be informed by Marxist paradigms and therefore could be seen as a theoretic framework. Her aversion to self-analysis may represent a tacit rejection of the self-indulgent, 'bourgeois' sensibilities underlying Freudian influenced psychoanalysis. Instead, in Joyce, there is a concern for community that demands an externalizing impetus that addresses a presumed non-Traveller audience / reader. This suggests that writing oneself into the fabric of a nation is not a strictly self-reflexive proposition. For any or all of these reasons, Joyce rarely divulges her private feelings.

Indirectly though, a strong sense of identity emerges, revealing a concept of selfhood firmly attached to familial relations. Joyce defines herself in relation to others, a network that gradually enlarges to embrace wider communities. Mary G. Mason remarked a tendency among women autobiographers to define themselves in terms of "alterity" (41). A self-perception that consciously acknowledges the involvement and influence of close personal relations as an extension of self is contrary to the individualism based on the Cartesian model noted above. Julie Cruikshank, based on her work among those societies⁹ still steeped in oral traditions, argues that in these social structures, knowledge itself is "relational" and should be regarded "more like a verb than a noun" (*Social Life* 70). The inherent relationality of oral societies becomes evident in the transmission of knowledge through storytelling.

In Sean Maher's *The Road to God Knows Where*, the prominence given to storytelling suggests that memory is collective and that an individual's identity develops

through a cultural identity. In Maher, the importance of human relations is often emphasized by their absence. Life on the road means a constantly changing environment where social relations imply eventual separation. This instability creates a profound sense of loneliness in young Sean, intensified by a troubled family life. Maher, called Sean Devine in the text, so intertwines storytelling with life events, the lines blur between the fictional and the factual, the ordinary and the uncanny. José Laners suggests that this name change indicates “a slightly fictionalized account of his life” (26), but there is no clear indication to what extent this is true. He does employ novelistic techniques such as long, detailed conversations that he would most certainly not have been able to remember verbatim and he details dialogues between people such as his parents where he is not present, without indicating how he came by this information. Alternatively, his fictional name may help create the emotional distance between the writing Maher and Sean, the boy with the wretched childhood, which allows the writer to remember painful, suppressed memories.

In spite of Maher’s emphasis on storytelling, there is a less accidental impression to his anecdotes than in the first half of *My Life on the Road*, where at times disconnected memories seem almost randomly strung together. Maher has a purpose in writing, even if that intention is as fluid as a desire to celebrate Traveller storytelling and culture. Unlike Joyce and many collections of shorter Traveller autobiographies that have been mediated through a tape recorder or an interview process, Maher wrote his memoir.

Born in 1932, the eldest offspring of an unhappy Traveller match — a “shot-gun affair” (1) — young Sean expresses the desire to receive a formal education, and cherishes hopes of becoming a priest, aspirations met with suspicion, incomprehension or

hostility by other Travellers, particularly his father. His dream to receive an education proves elusive until at the age of twelve he runs away from his family. Malnutrition and exposure leave him deathly ill with pneumonia. From his hospital bed, caregivers intervene on his behalf so that he is sent to school as he wishes rather than back to his parents. He received four years of formal education at which, by his own accounts, he excelled, at least partly because he was highly motivated. In Maher's estimation, his education was a source of difference that made him a partial outsider to his own community. This in-between status may account for the ambivalence so evident in his memoir, mixed feelings towards traditional Traveller culture that Azade Seyhan, speaking of the immigrant experience, describes as "a conversation between opposing voices or ... conflicting self-perceptions of ethnic groups ... [T]he narrator is caught in an ambiguous ... discourse of ... conflicting loyalties or preferences" (quoted in Lanter 38). Although Travellers are indigenous to Ireland and not immigrants, they also have to negotiate between two cultures. In Maher's case, these "conflicting loyalties" may also be of a personal nature. Although his style is anecdotal and much space is given over to traditional storytelling, as well as personal anecdotes, a clear sense of the family dynamic is revealed, including the psychological and emotional pain caused by the physical and verbal abuse Sean suffered from his father.

The Road to God Knows Where exhibits many of the characteristics of the "split" self that Gilmore typifies as a "masculinist" text. Maher actively interprets his past, a self-reflexivity that requires the writing 'I' to make an object of the past 'I', and then, with the benefit of the experience and understanding gained over the intervening years, offer an 'objective', almost an outsider's view. According to Gilmore, this splitting

technique was one used by Augustine whose *Confessions*, an early template of modern autobiography, functioned as “a dialogue that takes a split self as speaker / knower” (46). In Maher’s text, this psychological ‘splitting’ plays out through his cast of characters. Maher assigns ownership of each story he recounts to specific ‘characters’, usually allowing them to relate their stories as a first-person narrative, though occasionally relating the story on their behalf, but not before crediting them. Similar deference shown in other storytelling societies suggests that some stories belong to certain individuals, not in the legalistic sense in which an author owns a copyright, but in a more reverential sense in which the “story” is part of that person’s life and out of respect can not be borrowed by another without permission. The assignment of story to storyteller also suggests that both become associated with a specific time or place.

Like Joyce, Maher’s characters propose orality as a legitimate form of knowledge, although the multivocality of his text allows for opposing views that simultaneously problematize such assertions. His partial fictionalizing of characters gives the writer the freedom to explore diverse views without having to identify with or be identified by them, without having to take an ‘authoritative’ position. His strategy suggests that these ‘characters’, who often bear nicknames rather than actual names, are as much personas as ‘real’ people with lives apart from the memoirist. Appearing and disappearing in all of these characters, their stories and dialogues, the ‘decentred self’ that Maher creates parallels postmodern notions of subjectivity. In this way, Maher diverges from the Augustinian autobiographical template that validates the memoirist’s self. Maher’s representation of characters within the framework of a memoir creates a forum for

contrasting voices that allows Sean to recede as an individual into a cultural milieu to become an observer, while as master storyteller, the writer manipulates the scene.

Maheer does not write with any obvious political agenda but his emphasis on Traveller cultural representations preserves traditional stories and songs that might otherwise have been lost. Since the era Maheer writes of — his memoir ends sometime in the 1950s — Traveller culture has undergone the kinds of assimilationist pressures that have affected other indigenous minority cultures. Committing oral storytelling to print tends to reify what is essentially a one of a kind, dynamic performance that is always responsive to a particular audience. That Maheer takes pains to establish the storytelling experience in a specific setting and to place the story in the mouth of a particular raconteur offers a partial solution to the difficulty of transcribing an oral performance to writing. Nevertheless, the onus remains on the reader to fill in the gaps between the presentness and performativity of storytelling, and the reification of a written text meant to represent this dynamic recitation. Forecasts made by some of his characters of either the eradication of Travellers as a people, or at least of their traditional nomadic lifestyle, run up against the paradox presented by Maheer's memoir. By the very act of writing with the intention of preserving traditions that he sees as imperilled, his written record tends to disprove dire predictions of cultural annihilation found within his text.

Concepts of Time and (Historical) Narrative

Subtle but fundamental differences in the worldviews of orality and literary thinking account for the impossibility at certain junctures for Anna Farman as editor to fashion Joyce's loosely connected anecdotes into the semblance of a purely realistic,

coherent text. The modern Western mind thinks of time as “linear, sequential, and unidirectional, like an arrow” (Suzuki & Knudtson 177). The evident struggle to achieve narrative cohesion in Joyce is in part due to a view of time in oral cultures where there is much less notion of linearity. Much more in evidence is the circularity of yearly and life cycles. This in part accounts for the absence of a narrative trajectory, another major way in which both Maher and Joyce depart from earlier autobiographical templates. Maher’s chapters tend to be episodic, usually associated with and revolving around specific people involved in his life at that juncture. Joyce’s loosely connected anecdotes tend to be recounted in a direct style that creates a sense of present-time that only rarely portends future developments. Even though Farmar has rearranged Joyce’s spoken anecdotes chronologically, Joyce does not seem to imagine her life in terms of a linear impetus. While Farmar has arranged the text so that the last chapter represents a kind of conclusion in which Joyce hopes for improved conditions for Travellers, Joyce’s anecdotes attest to a predictable regularity in the cycle of forced evictions, poor housing and consequent ill health. This daily struggle for survival may in part account for the “intense present-time orientation” (Ní Shúinéar “Ethnicity” 60) many theorists¹⁰ have identified as intrinsic to nomadic cultures. Ong finds the same propensity in oral cultures; a need to expunge no longer needed information in order to maintain room for that which is still deemed essential. (Of course, memory works this way for all people. On a daily basis, every one tends to remember what they consider to be important and to slough off the rest.) “The Hebrew tribes, for example, as eventually recorded in the Pentateuch, were obsessed with genealogies (see Numbers). This meticulous recording of the past implies a very strong sense of generational continuity evident in other

societies like Travellers' where clans (extended families) form the basis of community. (The sense of generations past and future is not always as detailed as it was in ancient Hebrew culture for example, but the principle remains.)

In fact, Travellers also think about the future. Why otherwise would Maher make great efforts to become educated? Why would Joyce have worked arduously to improve present conditions for Travellers — was she not also thinking of her children and grandchildren? Bridget Gaffey, one of the contributors to a collection of short autobiographical compositions and poems, *Moving Stories: Traveller Women Write*, clearly considers the future when she writes in the Preface, "Some women in the group have written about how things used to be because these days are now completely different for the Travelling people ... those times are gone, never to return. We want to let the next generation know how it used to be" (8).

When making theoretical generalizations, especially about people who have been disadvantaged by marginalization, the scholar must consider if the apparent truth contained in the observation is inherent, or if certain behaviours relate to life conditions. Before one deems a people as intrinsically "present-minded", one would have to enquire as to the external conditions that keep life short and harsh¹¹. While "present-time" inclinations are partly a consequence of orality, a concession to the limited capacity for the human brain to remember (although important memories are preserved and transmitted through storytelling), they can also be a defensive mechanism that allows the human psyche to face an uncertain future.

Even though Maher's memoir refrains from the linearity usually associated with a realist narrative, his apocalypticism reflects the very essence of Western concepts of time

derived from the Biblical model in which world history begins with Creation and ends with Apocalypse. Nonetheless, in view of Maher's otherwise episodic narrative, this concept of the end of time (though the 'end' always contains a beginning) could be indicative of Maher's education, a kind of overlay that affirms that Traveller culture, while strongly influenced by orality, is not what Ong has defined as a primary oral culture. Even so, it remains true of societies where people still depend on seasonal variations such as hunter, fisher, small-scale agrarian and nomadic societies, or in traditionally oral societies, that time tends to be conceived as it is lived, as cyclical. Such a view of time as circular contravenes typical Enlightenment thinking that conceives of human history as a linear progression, always moving forward, a concept of time that underpins "our ... notions of 'progress'" (Suzuki & Knudtson 177), and pervades Western discourse. The modern concept of time allows for a view of history that reduces a complex of social, cultural, technological, economic and environmental interactions to be represented as a narrative of "events" that contain "an underlying, meaningful, and rational structure" (Flax 31). Michel de Certeau posits historiography as "history making" because, as with all realist narratives, historians exercise a process of selection based on their pre-existing paradigms so that "[t]hey seem to tell of facts while, in effect, they express *meanings* [my emphasis] which moreover refer what is *noted* (what historians hold to be relevant) to a conception of whatever is *notable*" (de Certeau's emphasis 42). A concept of time as linear and life as moving forward to a conclusion translates so well to narrative forms that "[Roland] Barthes places it in direct relation with ... the realistic novel" (cited by de Certeau 42). The similar process of meaning making that occurs in writing 'life as narrative' necessitates filling in gaps, false starts,

impasses and inconsistencies, in order to create the illusion of linearity. This process employs memory as forgetting (what is deemed unimportant) and remembering (what is deemed significant) within “interpretive frameworks” (Rakow and Wackwitz 173) that help the individual (or social group/ culture/ nation) construct a sense of identity. Such omissions are usually passed over in silence, in part because they go unrecognized since they are unconscious. While interpretive frameworks are socially and culturally informed and in this sense ‘inherited’ (as social construction proponents have minutely explored), the capacity of human activity and imagination to move beyond received wisdom will be demonstrated in some of Nan Joyce’s insights in Part I. In Joyce and Maher, a selection process occurs but is less motivated by an attempt to preserve an overarching sense of meaning that culminates in a conclusion. Instead, choices in oral texts tend to be based on relations, both in the sense of human relations, as well as relationality as an organizing criterion.

Concepts of time represent only one of the cultural differences that can become problematical when they are not recognized as potential barriers to understanding. The academic carries with her a culture of literacy that has tended to devalue oral expressions. That these modes of thinking are not polarities and that in fact, computer culture (among other technological tools) is in the process of inventing creative amalgams suggests that these cultural variations need not be construed as an impassable chasm. However, sensitivity to differences can help the academic (who occupies a relatively privileged position) to approach knowledge systems that tend to have been discredited by letting go of some of her literary credentials long enough to examine alternative viewpoints with

due consideration, an attitude feminist historians have appropriately labelled “‘epistemic humility’” (cited by Ruth Roach Pierson 94).

Part I: The Problem Of Representations

Because both ‘representations’ and epistemologies of experience have been problematized and sometimes discredited, and given that these are the languages used by less privileged speakers / writers, Part I of this thesis will focus on questions of representation. Dyer advises that representations involve how others see a group, as well as how a group sees itself (1), and that these represent power relations. Joyce and other Travellers are fully aware of the kinds of stereotypes that circulate among the general population about Travellers. Joyce challenges negative stereotypes, sometimes by directly addressing them, a blunt approach that reflects the “deep agonistic roots” (Ong *Orality* 111) of oratory. This agonistic style can be discomfiting for a reader more attuned to the subtlety of erudite argumentation. José Lanter notes that sometimes these refutations can seem “defensive”, but she does not propose alternative strategies.

While Joyce’s tactics may not always succeed, challenging domination remains an essential part of the struggle for Travellers to assert cultural legitimacy because, as Shari Stone-Mediatore notes:

[T]he prejudices that prevail in a society are those that are circulated by dominant social groups and that rationalize dominant social institutions. No one escapes the influence of such ruling beliefs; however, dominant social groups benefit from ruling beliefs while the more marginalized groups endure the contradictions of those beliefs and the institutions they rationalize in resulting practical conditions in their lives. (89)

For Joyce, the difficulty remains of using the vocabularies of a hegemonic culture while trying to legitimize positions that may stand outside the parameters of majority

norms. As Stone-Mediatore explains, drawing in Hans Georg Gadamer's finding that values are embedded in the very language we speak:

When the more socially powerful groups have greater control over the institutions that produce and distribute knowledge, those groups can widely disseminate their views and present their views as if they were universal truths. Such socially produced "common sense" beliefs inform academic and popular discourses and, consequently, affect the whole community's way of thinking. Such beliefs thus tend to remain unnoticed and untested. (78)

In spite of the hurdles, Joyce makes the effort to reconfigure terms of evaluation.

Rather than sidestep Joyce's trust that her life story can act as a catalyst for political change, Part I of this thesis will re-examine those approaches that Lanter deems "defensive", as well as alternative strategies that depart from direct rebuttals. Her appropriation of familiar images, for example, inverts their usual connotations in ways that problematize their underlying assumptions. Alternative points of view Traveller writers bring to light are crucial for balance within a society *because* they destabilize by challenging dominant beliefs and evoke a response, a debate if not dialogue.

Part II: Retelling History: Writing Travellers into the Nation

Having looked at various ways that Joyce challenges prejudicial attitudes, Part II examines Joyce and Maher's creative rewritings of Irish history. Before focusing on more metaphorical expressions of belonging in the nation, Joyce's original poem "Go! Move! Shift!" interspersed in the autobiographical text, represents the quest for inclusion as a physical struggle for actual living space, depicting forced evictions as a form of systemic persecution. The poem's didacticism parallels earlier poetic usage when strong connections between poetry and public life denoted its oral, agonistic origins. Moving on to more metaphorical approaches, history as story making, Traveller versions of apocryphal national narratives offer positive models that depart from the negative scripts

ascribed to them by others and simultaneously write Travellers into the history of the Irish nation from which they have been effaced. In the process of telling history, they make claims for orality as a legitimate form of knowledge and destabilize beliefs within predominantly literate societies that solely valorize the written word. In directly addressing an historical omission by presenting imaginative alternatives, Joyce and Maher reappropriate the mythologies of nationhood so as to include Travellers in a positive, participatory role. Maher's characters offer inspiring stories similar in their heroism to the narratives of the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival, which promoted tales of a glorious legendary past as a counterpoint to English domination and helped shape perceptions of Irish culture and identity at home and abroad. Maher's retelling of these myths from Traveller perspectives confronts assumptions of "who gets to frame and to tell the story — whose voices are prominent and whose are marginalized" (Cruikshank "Oral Tradition" 2 of 8). By underlining Traveller participation within the nation and its historical constructions, Joyce and Maher reinforce their claim to full-citizenship.

Part III: Haunted By History: Discourses Against "Anglo-Saxon Empiricism"

Part III investigates various modes of narration used by Joyce and Maher, all of which reveal worldviews that are contrary to the rational materialism that typifies modernity. The section opens with the first of two of Maher's mother's stories to be examined, the miracle at Colanney Well. Reverence for holy places in Ireland and pilgrimages to these sites were once commonly practiced, especially among the rural population. Luke Gibbons argues that after the trauma and displacement of the Famine (1845-49), Irish expressions of piety that derived from pre-Christian traditions and

popular belief were brought under the centralizing control of the Roman Church. Angela Bourke corroborates this view, but also considers the linguistic and cultural reactions of post-Famine trauma, which included a backlash by the growing Irish middle-class against all that was traditionally Irish, including orality and the Irish language.

Maher's mother's apocalypticism offers a different coping strategy. It is difficult for the *secular* mind to imagine the kind of life circumstances that can envision the annihilation of one's people within religious paradigms of sin and redemption and be comforted, as Maher's mother seems to be in relating St. Kevin's dire predictions for Travellers. Therefore, apocalyptic forecasts as a consequence of trauma must be explored. The dollman's anti-modernism provides a background of struggle that helps to contextualize these dire predictions. The views expressed by Maher's characters highlight the contradictions of 'progress'; perspectives that tend to remain ignored in more official economic analyses which foreground development only in positive terms.

Joyce strongly disputes the kind of fatalism evident in Maher. Her ability to question and to depart from widely held social conventions is expressed through her activism. In spite of Farmar's efforts to fashion a narrative, anecdotes that attribute supernatural significance to events disrupt conventional realist expectations, even though Joyce relates these occurrences as if they were a natural part of life. Her blending of the mystical and mysterious into ordinary life reinstils a sense of oneness with her world that characterizes a worldview that Ong attributes to orality. Because sound is a "unifying sense" (Ong *Orality* 72), oral cultures and those still deeply influenced by oral traditions interpret the world as a cosmos, a universe filled with meaning, a world that mirrors a greater reality. Joyce's 'mystical' experiences suggest the immanence of God (God as

near), an attitude that Noel O'Donoghue identifies as typical of "Celtic" Christianity, but which Mircea Eliade finds more generally throughout European rural cultures (164). In contrast, the characteristic modern "culture of intense inwardness" (Sass 205) that typifies the isolated Cartesian self leads to a sense of separation from the world. The distancing mechanism that Ong ascribes to an emphasis on the visual that language as print encouraged, allowed for the objectivity of scientific enquiry, a view of the world as purely material, mechanistic phenomena to be investigated. The worldviews evident in Traveller writing act as a counterbalance to the rationalist materialism still predominant in Western thinking and its institutions.

Attitudes of reverence for the natural world will be examined in Joyce's poem "The Beauty I Can See". Though not appearing in her autobiography, the poem is of interest because of the ways that Joyce takes a traditional genre, the Irish nature poem and makes the Irish landscape a metonymy¹² for patriotic nationalism. At the same time, she portrays the Traveller presence as integral to this landscape. A comparable synthesis of Travellers and landscape appears early in her autobiography in a childhood memory that incorporates Travellers into the historical landscape through the action of narrating history. Maher's memoir concludes with an exultation of nature that offsets the often grim circumstances and tone evoked in the preceding pages, a strategy that allows for an open-endedness that offers hope while circumventing the narrative obligation of a dénouement.

Mircea Eliade identifies the almost mystical experience of nature evident in Joyce and Maher to be a relation with nature shared by rural people throughout Europe that he ascribes as an amalgam of Christian and pre-Christian beliefs (164). In Ireland, these

pre-Christian practices can be traced to ancient mythologies and druidic practices. Rather than interpret this responsiveness to the natural world as an anachronism, attitudes that allow for such close interaction with nonhuman life reflect contemporary concerns for the environment, especially for those environmentalists who believe that a change in philosophy is instrumental in changing environmentally destructive practices.

Environmentalists argue that the ethical myopia of the scientific paradigm allows for the thinking that leads to environmental destruction. Some, such as David Suzuki, are turning to the traditions of oral cultures in order to find ways to fill these ethical gaps. Beginning to close the conceptual separation between human beings and the natural world, environmentalists argue, may lead to more awareness and respect for the interrelatedness between the human species and its environment, and consequently, more ethical, ecologically sound practices.

This thesis examines the ways in which Travellers write themselves into the nation with the point of view that their rewriting of established paradigms are pertinent and address contemporary issues. They describe the nation and their place within it from perspectives not usually considered, but when heeded, their points of view can illuminate not only the things that are lost, but also what is worth keeping. Because they are writing from the periphery of Irish society, their elliptical perspectives capture angles that not only reveal themselves to themselves (allowing for the self-reflexive writer Laners emphasizes), or themselves to others (in support of their desire for equal citizenship), but also mirror the Irish community as a whole. Stone-Mediatore suggests that heeding the viewpoints of people marginalized within a democracy strengthens the democratic processes that such a society professes to value. Furthermore, within the specific Irish

context, digging deeper into the history of colonialism suggests that anti-Traveller persecution at least in part arises from the buried but unresolved trauma left by the colonial legacy.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM

“... the roads was narrower but the land was wider” (Chrissie Ward)

Considering all that Irish Travellers and non-Travellers seem to share, a theoretical framework will help contextualize what may otherwise seem an inexplicable prejudice and provide a historical and ideological background to the racism described in the texts. Noting however that no one theory can adequately explain the complexities that permit the historical persecution of a people, this thesis emphasizes historical and philosophical contexts over psychological perspectives¹³. Jim Mac Laughlin finds a relation between anti-Traveller racism and the Enlightenment philosophies that gave rise to modern nation states. However, Judith Okely and Jane Helleiner quote historical documents that suggest suspicious attitudes and ensuing persecution towards nomads existed before the modern state. The child’s nursery rhyme that opens Nan Joyce’s *My Life on the Road* points to the pervasiveness of this mind-set. Applying a post-colonial context that supports the cultural trauma thesis, Sinéad Ní Shúinéar argues convincingly that racist rhetoric depicting Travellers as ‘aberrant’ people closely emulates English attitudes towards the Irish under colonial rule. Having internalized these negative opinions, the non-Traveller Irish population projects their “self-loathing” onto Travellers whose nomadic lifestyles, poverty, piety, large families etc. conjure images of defeat from a colonial past the majority Irish have not yet come to terms with. Jim Sheridan’s film version of John B. Keane’s play by the same name, *The Field*, will help to identify some of the colonial residues at the root of ‘anti-nomadism’ in Ireland. The enlarged role that Travellers occupy in Sheridan’s screenplay explores anxieties that perceive

landlessness as antithetical to the traditional, rural, patriarchal values the protagonist, small farmer Bull McCabe clings to. Rendering Ireland as a nation haunted by its past, the movie portrays the trauma of the Potato Famine as an unhealed scar on the national psyche. In this context, the disputed field becomes an arena where the Bull continues to wage colonial struggles.

Sedentarism as a 'Norm'

Robbie McVeigh defines 'sedentarism' as ““that system of ideas and practices which serves to normalize and reproduce sedentary modes of existence and pathologise and repress nomadic modes of existence”” (9). Jim Mac Laughlin traces anti-nomadism to the same Enlightenment philosophies that also gave legitimacy to worldwide European colonisation. Adam Smith (among others) hypothesized a view of history as a progression characterized by predictable stages of development in which nomadism was supplanted by sedentarism (Mac Laughlin *Country* 24). Likewise, John Locke connected the move to private property over communal ownership as “the abandonment of ‘primitive’ lifestyles” (Mac Laughlin *Country* 24). The mind-set that linked ownership rights not to occupancy but to evidence of ‘development’ permitted the ‘legal’ expropriation of ‘unused’¹⁴ land from nomadic peoples. Societies were hierarchized according to resource utilization, a criterion that:

[L]egitimised the domination of nomadic societies in the colonies by white ‘settlers’ and ... justified the marginalization of nomadic groups including Gypsies, Travellers and the rural poor within Europe, on the grounds that, as propertyless people, they had no right to be included within the political or moral structures of European societies. (Mac Laughlin *Country* 23)

Therefore early on, in spite of principles of egalitarianism that modern liberal democracies declared, the philosophies that helped formulate these political systems excluded certain people as undesirable citizens.

According to Mac Laughlin, the devaluing of nomadism is concomitant to the rise of the modern nation state in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the valorization of “bourgeois nationalist ideas about homeland, property, hygiene and respectability” (“Racism” 129). Although he argues convincingly, his hypothesis does not explain evidence of earlier persecutions whereas Okely is more thorough in tracing the various edicts and pogroms enacted from the time Roma can first be traced to Europe in about the 16th century (3). Their presence was first recorded in England in 1505, (around the same time as ‘tinkers’¹⁵ are first referred to). By 1554, they were being imprisoned or deported under British law. There is insufficient evidence to determine if these early references to ‘tinkers’ are referring to Irish Travellers, Roma (often referred to as ‘English Gypsies’), to practitioners of a trade (tinsmiths or ‘tinkers’), or to displaced populations. In England at this time, a major shift in economic and agricultural practices was forcing rural populations off the land and into cities. Such social upheavals were seen as a potential source of instability and foment across Europe of the day and therefore authorities (aristocracies) sought to control nomadism, leading to edicts against ‘vagrants’. Helleiner finds evidence of a similar mistrust of nomadic populations with the Tudor “re-conquest” of Ireland (31), which also shows that nomadism was considered a threat before the development of modern nation states. Pre-conquest Ireland was a pastoral society with “many itinerant occupational groups” but, Helleiner observes, the “mobility of Gaelic society” became associated with “barbarism” (31). Thus,

Helleiner finds that “English colonial discourse and practice from the second half of the sixteenth century often equated the ‘civilizing’ of the Irish with a suppression of mobility” (Helleiner 31)¹⁶.

The traditional child’s rhyme that opens Nan Joyce’s *My Life on the Road* as a chapter heading provides evidence of the longstanding pervasiveness of anti-nomadism. The verse reveals fearful or suspicious attitudes that perceive the Gypsy presence within European sedentary society as a threat. Marlene Kadar used the same poem in her essay on the forgotten Roma Holocaust, “The Devouring: Traces of Roma¹⁷ in the Holocaust: No Tattoo, Sterilized Body, Gypsy Girl,” citing the verses from Eric Kincaid’s recently republished (2001) book of nursery rhymes:

My mother said I never should
Play with the gypsies in the wood.
If I did, she’d surely say
Naughty wan to disobey¹⁸. (Joyce 1: 1-4)¹⁹

This is as much of the poem as appears in *My Life on the Road*, but Kadar continues with the next four lines of the verse that illustrate all the terrible things that will happen to the disobedient child and so represent a cautionary tale:

Your hair shan’t curl
And your shoes shan’t shine
You gypsy girl,
You shan’t be mine. (Kadar 239-40: 5-8)

Lines five and six represent minor inconveniences, but the next two lines underline more serious consequences: rejection (or loss of affection) due to a change in identity. By merely associating with the ‘Gypsy’ threat, the child will become one. The next stanza culminates in a complete loss of the child’s identity with her abduction, the consequence of her participation in an emblematic Romany activity, playing the tambourine, “In came Sally with a tambourine” (Kadar 240: 12), as well as in economic transactions with

Roma, “I paid ten shillings for a blind white horse” (Kadar 240: 14). Money changing hands conjures the well-known association of the Roma with dishonesty, but the verse also contains supernatural connotations. The blindness of the horse not only suggests a defect, but also hints at sorcery, especially given that the horse immediately carries the child away: “I was up on his back and was off in a crack, / Sally tell my mother I shall never come back.” (Kadar 240: 15-16). The rhyme not only recalls the belief that Roma held magical, (usually) malevolent occult powers, but also affirms the popular belief that Roma stole (white) children²⁰. That this poem is a nursery rhyme may suggest its innocence, but more accurately should be seen as revealing the predominance of ‘anti-nomadism’ in the European imagination.

Historically, the response to nomadic populations has ranged from the extremes of extermination to less radical means of eradication by assimilation. When assimilationist policies fail, authorities seek to control movement and thereby contain the perceived threat. Though persecution of nomadic groups within Europe extends back to at least early modernism, methods of controlling the ‘problem’ have been perfected within the apparatus of the modern nation state. Foucault’s observations on modern administrative techniques finds that “one of the primary objects of discipline is to fix; it is an anti-nomadic technique” (*Discipline* 218). He goes on to say, “That is why discipline fixes; it arrests or regulates movements ... it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions” (Foucault *Discipline* 219). The modern state’s need to control aberrant behaviour motivates the widely accepted practice of ‘community-planning’ as a form of economic segregation and encourages such policies as the forced evictions that are a

recurring motif in Joyce's autobiography. David Sibley underscores the moral undertones of this policing of boundaries. He notes that the degree with which differences are construed as violations correlates with the emphasis on "order, conformity and social homogeneity" (Sibley 38-9) in a society. As Mike Davis observes, "'the greater the search for conformity, the greater the search for deviance'" (quoted in Sibley 38-9). Such was the case in Ireland according to historian J.J. Lee who argued that the newly independent Republic "desperately" tried to establish unity "on a basis of homogeneity and mass conformity" (explicated by Dymphna McLoughlin 85).

Since early modern times, ethnic mobility has been perceived as a threat by authorities precisely because it epitomizes a lack of control, an unknown factor. In "Theorising Sedentarism: The Roots of Anti-Nomadism", Robbie McVeigh further develops the suppression of nomadism as a moral imperative when he proposes that having "internalised the dominant ideology of sedentarised identity and individual property rights" (22), the settled population feel threatened because nomadism in their midst "subvert[s] deep-seated beliefs about the normalcy of settlement and wage labour and private property" (22). However, writing five years later, in an introduction to *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*, McVeigh and co-writer Ronit Lentin focus on the systemization of persecution and conclude, "The inequality experienced by Travellers can no longer be dismissed as a consequence of nomadism ... because sedentary Irish society in general — and the state in Ireland in particular — discriminates against Travellers, routinely, structurally and in a racist manner" (23). In the same essay, the authors quote Paul Noonan's analysis that confirms systemic racism: "Being a Traveller²¹ ... involves low life expectancy, high infant mortality and morbidity, low

educational achievement, appalling living conditions and differential access to a range of state services” (McVeigh and Lentin 23).

Colonialism contextualizes the specific circumstances of anti-nomadism in Ireland and therefore will be examined before turning to the principle texts. In “Othering the Irish (Travellers)” Sinéad Ní Shúinéar links racist discourses to the colonial legacy. Just as Irish men were once depicted as apes abusing and exploiting the hapless, downtrodden Irish woman, Traveller men are especially reprehensible, an opinion held even among professionals according to Ní Shúinéar who criticizes portrayals by experts that label Traveller men as increasingly redundant, ““not useful as family builders””,²² unable to economically sustain their families, “in other words ... write-offs” (“Othering” 188). Familiar stereotypes depict Travellers as dirty, uneducated, shiftless tax and welfare cheats; more prone to violence, crime and alcoholism by nature. Ní Shúinéar argues convincingly that the settled Irish, rather than confront the trauma inflicted on the collective psyche by centuries of colonial occupation, have deflected their own internalized self-loathing onto Travellers. Certainly, the stereotypes pinned on Travellers by many in Ireland echo those once directed against the Irish by the English, rhetoric that was used for centuries to justify colonial occupation as a ‘civilizing’ influence. Ní Shúinéar notes the similarity in the denigrations employed by the English when she writes, “From the very beginning ... backwardness, nomadism and beggary are portrayed as general Irish characteristics, compounded by superstition (later Popery), anarchy, and a penchant for violence” (“Othering” 179).

While Mac Laughlin fails to extend the history of persecution far enough back to include pre-modern occurrences, he is correct in noting that in the second half of the

nineteenth century, “Social Darwinism” (“Racism” 129) provided a framework for a more racialized nationalist discourse that alleged to have a scientific basis. To illustrate the increased racialism of British colonial rhetoric fashionable after Charles Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* was published in 1849, Ní Shúinéar cites a now well-known quote by British historian Charles Kingsley. In this quote from a letter Kingsley wrote while visiting Ireland in 1860 (a few years after the Famine devastated rural communities), the Irish are both racialized and animalized: ““I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country,”” he writes. ““To see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours”” (Ní Shúinéar “Othering” 180). Political cartoons published in English, American and Canadian newspapers of the day regularly depicted simian characters, a visual code immediately recognizable to the reader as representing the Irish male (Irish women were most often represented by ‘Hibernia’, a virtuous but harried female (Ní Shúinéar “Othering” 181)). Similar depictions regularly appear in non-Traveller rhetoric about Travellers, whether in more polite bureaucratic language that shapes public policy or vitriolic fulminations in popular media. In the *Sunday Independent* (28 Jan 1996), Mary Ellen Synon employs the kind of animal imagery the English formerly used to describe the Irish when she writes that Traveller culture “is a life of appetite ungoverned by intellect ... a life worse than the life of beasts, for beasts at least are guided by some wholesome instinct” (“Travellers in Ireland” 5 of 13). She insinuates their innate criminality by representing qualities of goodness as exceptional when she writes, “This tinker “culture” ... is a morass. And one of the surprising things about it is that not every individual bred in this swamp turns out

bad. Some individuals among the tinkers find the will not to become evil” (“Travellers in Ireland” 5 of 13). These examples point up Dyer’s observation that mainstream representations of cultural minorities can be used to oppress, control and exclude, and then to justify these practices.

Examining non-Traveller writing about Travellers highlights some of the ways in which nomads are imagined. The Traveller becomes the “outsider” within making them a symbol of the perpetual “Other”, readily recruited as a romantic figure representing freedom from social convention, the personification of the artist as Other; or as the criminal element, a subversive threat, a contaminant within the body of the nation that undermines ‘decent’ values. Jim Sheridan’s film version of John B. Keane’s play, *The Field*, offers an enlarged role to the unsettling ‘tinker’ presence barely mentioned in Keane though in both versions, the ‘tinkers’, as they are referred to, represent a threat to the traditional, land-based patriarchy. The film version of *The Field* serves as a useful illustration of the kinds of prejudices that circulate about Travellers, as well as hinting at some of their origins, which Sheridan’s screenplay suggests is the consequence of the traumatic events of Irish colonial history.

The Legacy of Colonialism: The Field

Discriminatory British policies made land a contentious issue in the history of Ireland. Who owned the land and who controlled it were especially crucial issues in an agrarian society as Ireland was, as it meant the difference between survival and starvation. After the Flight of the Earls in 1604, the year when the remainder of the Irish aristocracy fled overseas, mainly to France, the Plantation of Ulster began, a British

policy that confiscated land from Catholic farmers (“Plantation of Ulster”) and gave it to English and Scottish Protestant “Planters” who could be counted on to be loyal to the British Crown. The Penal Laws, a series of laws, the most punitive of which were passed circa 1697-8, forbade, among other measures, Irish Catholics from owning land. Finally, The Great Famine, 1845-49²³, a catastrophe on a massive scale, changed the demographics of Ireland. About one million people were displaced through mass emigration. As well, an estimated one million died from disease and starvation²⁴. Tenant farmers were evicted from their plantations for being unable to fulfill their fiscal obligations to landlords²⁵, a fact that will impact on post-independence Irish government policies towards Travellers.

Jim Sheridan’s interpretation of John B. Keane’s 1965 play, *The Field*, foregrounds colonialism as a trauma that still resonates in the daily struggle for existence. Protagonist Bull McCabe’s (Richard Harris) obsessive desire for one small field represents a legacy of starvations — for land, but also for sustenance — incurred under colonialism, now ingrained in the national psyche. In the aftermath of the Famine, this psychic wound tied self-preservation to land ownership. Small cottiers disappeared. The remaining farmers had more land than previously and no longer subdivided their land among their children, as had once been the practice. The Bull represents the patriarchal values and patrimony of rural Ireland.

The action begins when the Widow (Frances Tomelty) announces in the local pub (which also serves as public meeting place), that she will put up one of her fields for auction, a field that has been leased and improved by the McCabe’s. The film conveys that this is a man’s world in various ways. Suspicious male eyes follow the Widow’s

progress through the centre of town and into Flanagan's Pub (Flanagan is also the auctioneer), the exclusive haven of men at this hour of the day. Flanagan reminds her that he cannot serve her alcohol at this hour, but she has come to announce the sale by auction of her field. When one of the men asks, "McCabe's field?"²⁶, the widow corrects him, "He rents it", to which another male voice responds, "It was bare rock when he got it". By time-honoured consensus then, the field belongs to McCabe in all but legal title. According to custom, in deference to the McCabes' toil that has improved the productivity of this tract of land, the Widow should first offer to sell the land to the Bull at a negotiated price, taking into account the rent he has already paid her. She bypasses this protocol, asserting, "I need the best price I can get." The Widow affronts an established code of behaviour, an understanding between men, instead choosing, as an outsider to the community, to look out for her own security. (Her position as an outsider is made clear in the auction scene when the townspeople jeer at her, "Go back to where you came from!") When the Bull hears of this imminent sale, he drives into town to defend his customary rights to the land. In the pub, he points out that no one from Carraighthomond would dare to make a bid on 'his' land. When Flanagan mentions the possibility of "outsiders" at the auction, the Bull launches into a passionate invective that calls up the crimes of British imperialism. In one of the most powerful scenes of the film (not included in the play), the Bull recites the hardships endured under British colonialism to a spellbound crowd of locals. The vehemence of his speech underlines the indelible trauma left by the Famine.

The Bull:

Outsiders? Are these the same outsiders who took the corn from our mouths when the potatoes were rotting in the ditches? Are these the same outsiders who took the meat from the tables when we lay in the ditches with the grass juice running green from our mouths? Are these the same outsiders who drove us to the

coffin ships and scattered us to the four corners of the world? Are these the same outsiders who watched as our valley went silent except for the cries of the last starving child?

The publican calmly replies, “The English are gone Bull”. Richard Harris’s delivery lays just the right degree of forcefulness on Bull’s final tirade, “*Gone* because I drove them out. Me and my kind. *Gone* but not forgotten Flanagan. No outsider will bid for my field” (the italics represent Harris’s intonation). Bull’s strong emotional connection to the land derives from a palpable remembrance of the horror of the helplessness of the Famine’s victims against the injustice that valued conservative economic models over human compassion. The way of life that the Bull defends unto death is sufficiently problematized by irresolvable inconsistencies within his character. He is a brutal, ruthless, driven man, but his obsessions seem to be so married to this unyielding land that the malady begins to take on ancestral dimensions — as the consequence of a harsh colonial saga. And yet, for all his violence and coarseness, there is still a certain fierce, if tormented dignity that he expresses in his ceaseless labour, his obstinate self-sufficiency, his at times chivalrous demeanour towards the Widow²⁷ as the ‘weaker’ sex (though this ‘chivalry’ does not extend toward the tinker’s²⁸ daughter). Either because of Sheridan’s direction or Harris’s interpretation²⁹, this nobility elicits a grudging respect for his principled doggedness, even if one rejects the narrow-mindedness of his values.

Whereas the Widow is still considered an outsider after indeterminate years, the Bull holds great influence in the community and conspires with his compatriots to rig the auction so that he can take legal title of the land he feels rightfully belongs to him. His scheme is stymied by the arrival of a rich outsider intent on bidding on the field. In both versions, this outsider is a returning émigré, but in Keane, he comes from England, and in Sheridan, he is the figure of the “returning Yank” (Tom Berenger), bringing with him the

taint of American economic imperialism. The American personifies “success” achieved through emigration (a similar function is filled by the anglicized William Dee in Keane), a privileged position met with varying degrees of resentment or collaboration from the locals. The American also epitomizes modernization, a motif that resonates in Maher. He is not content to admire the view. He brings with him innovation and change. Not only does he come to buy their land with his emigrant money, he plans to make a quarry on the field and harness the waterfall for hydroelectric power to run his cement factory — he literally wants to pave over paradise. Intent on scaring off the American threat, and with an alibi agreed upon by the other pub patrons, the Bull incites his strapping son and heir, Tadgh (Sean Bean), into giving the “Yank” a sound beating. Unfortunately, the American dies. Father and son hide all evidence of their crime, dumping the body into the sea. A conspiracy of silence falls on the town that after three weeks, the law is still powerless to sway.

From a passing mention in Keane, Travellers play a prominent, if negative role in Sheridan. The Travellers, who appear to be camped in the centre of town for most scenes, are ragged, aggressive and say such stereotypical lines as, “Got any milk for the babby?” If Sheridan is using such stereotypes ironically, this is not in evidence. Rather, he seems to be providing a shorthand sketch that by its instant recognizability says, at least to an Irish audience, “Traveller”. The father drinks, is argumentative, and loudly demands “blood money” from the McCabe’s for the donkey that Tadgh killed for trespassing in their field. (The movie opens with father and son dumping the donkey’s carcass in the sea.) In another brief scene, the tinker’s daughter (Jenny Conroy) — the

girl remains nameless — pulls her inebriated, unconscious father on a cart like a beast of burden.

The tinker's daughter, a red-haired temptress, fills the stereotype of the over-sexed siren; her rolling eyes, her lolling head, her long tongue licking her lips as she meets Tadgh's eyes with her bold gaze. Irish film scholar Cheryl Temple Herr calls her "glamorous" (45), apt if by glamorous, Herr means exoticized, a common caricature of Travellers and Roma in non-Traveller artistic representations. Herr's reference to the emigration "wake" dance scene as "gothic primitivism" would more appropriately apply to the tinker girl's demeanour, with emphasis on 'primitive'. At the dance, the Bull is trying to matchmake Tadgh with a suitable dancing partner, a local farmer's daughter who stands to inherit some land, but the tinker's daughter plays a disruptive role, destabilizing his manoeuvrings. Like the American, she is an outsider, and therefore, views traditions in which she has no stake as merely stultifying. Moving from one man to the next around the perimeter of the dance floor, the tinker girl taunts them: "You're all afraid of me, the tinker's daughter. Will you dance with me? Will you dance with me? You're afraid that if you touch me, you'll lose the soil under your feet and end up sleeping under the stars." Her mockery challenges both their most cherished beliefs and prejudices. Just when Tadgh seems about to accept, the Bull takes her as a dance partner.

After the murder of the American, Tadgh overhears his parents speak of his older brother's suicide. Perhaps the circumstances of his brother's death are a revelation since his parents never speak of him. It is night. Tadgh flees his father's home. His flight represents a break from his father's domination, a rite of passage. Tadgh finds the tinker girl sitting by her campfire all alone. Her younger siblings, her father and all the other

members of their entourage seen earlier have expediently disappeared. Here, the Traveller girl serves as a symbol of freedom, a fleshly emissary of sexual liberation to disrupt the restrictive inhibitions imposed by a strict Catholic patriarchy.

In similar fashion, but without the sexual overtones, J.M. Synge's comedy, *The Tinker's Wedding*, first staged in London in 1909, transgresses social strictures by creating "generic" Traveller characters on whom Synge can project the unfulfilled desires of a repressed Catholic society. Synge's 'tinkers' exemplify Michael Hayes's observation that historically, representations of Travellers by non-Traveller Irish writers have tended to mirror the "colonial 'stage Irishman'", a stock character who plays the part of "the happy-go-lucky vagrant, the criminal, the drunk, the storyteller and the outcast" (243-4).

When Sarah Casey decides she and her common-law husband Michael Byrne must be married by the Church, her mother-in-law, Mary Byrne (who disagrees with the idea of an officially sanctioned marriage) inadvertently sabotages their plans when she uses part of the agreed upon payment for the Priest to buy herself alcohol. After the Priest refuses to marry the Traveller couple, an argument ensues and escalates until, fearing the Priest will call the "peelers" (i.e., the police) down on them, Michael Byrne gags the Priest and ties a sack over his head. The three Travellers convince the Priest to take an oath of silence and release him from the sack. The Priest has the last line of the play. As he calls down a malediction on the Travellers, the three malefactors flee off stage, shouting, "Run, run. Run for your lives" (50).

The Travellers break all social proprieties, but like naughty children, their inappropriate behaviour is portrayed as being without malice. The action plays like

slapstick. The transgressive humour points to Synge's sympathy as a Protestant for the Travellers' irreligious attitude summed up by Mary's anticlericalism in her final speech to the Priest, "[I]t's little need we ever had of the like of you to get us our bit to eat, and our bit to drink, and our time of love" (50). Understanding that comedy is a transgressive genre helps mitigate the portrayal of Travellers as puckish, thieving, and unruly, especially given that their ingenuousness contrasts with the Priest's more mercenary fixation on the meagreness of his payment. One of the possible effects of the staging of such a boundary breaking play in a conservative society repressed by religious strictures such as Ireland was at the time could be the audience's identification with the transgressors, a kind of vicarious disobedience³⁰.

The main Traveller character in Sheridan, the 'tinker girl', represents a similar break from the stultifying expectations of a conservative, rural society, but again, the very fact of her namelessness suggests a character type. Sheridan creates an exoticized representation of the "Bohemian Gypsy" girl that offers the fantasy of escape from repression (Sibley 15), as if he assumes that being outside of the strictures of his society equates with having no restrictions at all, of being a libertarian and therefore capable of liberating. Such a representation contravenes the stress Travellers place on chastity for young women, one reason for early marriages, an emphasis on virginity that has prompted the chagrin of outsiders who view this surveillance of women as hopelessly patriarchal.

Taking up with the Traveller girl represents a radical divesture of patriarchy and patrimony for Tadgh. At the fireside, the tinker girl who, in earlier scenes, has mocked his slavishness to his father, notices his bruised face, blows he received during his fight

with the American, and supposes his father has beaten him. Her comment, “All fathers beat their children”, reinforces the ‘naturalness’ of violence amongst Traveller men. Wanting to impress her, Tadgh boasts that he has killed the “Yank”. The next scene shows them sleeping in bed together.

The tinker girl is the catalyst that sets off the chain of events that leads to the final scene of total devastation. Tadgh has decided to go away with her but returns with her the next day to bid his father farewell. The Bull calls her a whore and informs Tadgh that she has betrayed them to the police. Actually, her father, still aggrieved about his dead donkey, went to the police with the disclosure. She does not deny that she told her father but there is no indication of ill intent on her part. Tadgh does not renounce the girl or his decision to go away with her. Instead, he reinforces his autonomy, openly rejecting his father’s values when he tells him, “I never cared about the land”. This defiance suggests that his preference for a Traveller wife is not arbitrary, but coincides with his decision to turn his back on the land and all it represents.

The Bull’s warning to Tadgh in an early scene, “Never trust a woman who has no contact with the land,” goes unheeded. Tadgh and the girl are seen driving away in her horse-drawn caravan. Conspicuously, Tadgh holds the reins, a gesture that indicates that he has found his ‘manhood’ and now plays an active role in his own destiny. Seeing that all he has worked for is lost, the Bull loses his mind just as the script seems to lose its way, unravelling like Bull’s world. The Bull’s struggle takes on epic proportions, which may account for Sheridan’s unfortunate decision to transmogrify the Bull into the mythic figures of Cuchulainn and Canute (Herr 44). In the monumental final scene, the Bull is driving his cattle towards a cliff, intending to send them plummeting into the sea. Tadgh

is alerted of his father's mad purpose. At the girl's bidding, he runs to stop his father, but instead is trampled by the stampeding cattle. Tadgh and the herd fall to their deaths.

In the closing shot, the two women stand at the top of the cliff, viewing the carnage below. Maggie McCabe (Brenda Fricker) stoically comforts the weeping tinker girl but does not shed a tear, as if her long acquaintance with sorrow (the suicide of her son) goes much deeper than spontaneous expressions of grief. The shot of these two women surveying the total destruction of the Bull's patriarchal world suggests that their survival is the beginning of a new world order. On the shore below, the Bull tries to hold back the tides, slashing the surf with his ashplant. The mythic proportions of the tragic finale make allegorical interpretations unavoidable. The Bull, representing a patriarchal tradition not altogether unadmired by Sheridan, cannot hold back the inexorable tide of modernization. The sense of nostalgia underlying Sheridan's own ambivalence about the traditional patriarchy he sees being eroded by foreign economic dominance and pressures to modernize, and his sympathy for a rural life he sees as dying out leaves the conflict between tradition (and patriarchy) and "a forward-looking" (Herr 74) modernity unresolved. Ambivalence toward modernity seems to consider what is lost as also significant. This double-mindedness reflects mistrust in the values represented by the former colonizing power, Britain (also the world's first industrializing nation), as will be examined at length in Part III where Maher's apocryphal stories blame a lack of religious fervour (a symptom of Irish capitulation to the nefarious British influence) for the evils of modernity.

PART I: THE PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATIONS

The hardships that Joyce endures correspond to a real life. Such representations raise ethical issues since they are not merely aesthetic, but contain “a moral dimension” (Eyerman 13). Therefore, literary analysis must take this “cognitive dimension” (Eyerman 13) into account. Looking at an autobiography such as Joyce’s, written with the active political intention of promoting “a better understanding with the settled people” (Joyce 118), believing that not only is this possible but essential in order to communicate Traveller needs, concerns and perspectives, Part I examines not only the limitations of language but also the dialogic possibilities. The problem of representations in Joyce’s text raises the question: how best to respond to negative representations within the majority community that propagate stereotypes about Travellers, the difficulties encountered, and when and why difficulties may arise. Joyce often chooses a direct approach, which Traveller scholar José Laners for one finds problematic. Close analysis discovers that some of these apparent difficulties are related to cultural differences, a kind of culture ‘clash’ between the literary expectations of a reader encountering modes of oral expression translated to print. Finally, this section attempts to identify those moments when representations seem to be more successful, a particularly onerous venture since such an endeavour must involve some degree of subjective criteria. Then again, as shall be demonstrated, even the most diligent literary scholar approaches an oral text with a whole history of reading that does not allow for an unproblematic correspondence.

How others represent a group is not only crucial to that group’s self-image but also affects how they are perceived (Dyer 1). Travellers, of course, are acutely aware of

these negative representations and respond, but their response becomes a challenge for minority writers since the categories and terms of representation are always “codes and conventions of the available cultural forms ... [that] set the wider terms of limitation and possibility” (Dyer 2). Familiar codes tend to be established by the dominant culture. Therefore, while everybody uses representations, minority cultures also sometimes must propose counter discourses that redefine what can be said and yet utilize a shared language. Minority representations counter dominant discourses by appropriating the language and images of the hegemonic culture. Recalling Roland Barthes’ structuralist analysis of “the pure signifier, the empty signifier to which a multitude of meanings can be attached” (Duncan and Duncan 22), the very emptiness of cultural conventions becomes a multiplicity that can be exploited, allowing for creative alternatives to the usual interpretations. For example, as will be examined below, Joyce employs an image familiar to her presumed Irish Catholic audience / reader, the Holy Mother, but subverts the familiarity of the icon in order to question the purported Irish commitment to the ‘dignity’ of motherhood. In redefining the over-determined sign of the Virgin, Joyce reveals that the sign is finally an empty one, a cultural fiction. Thus, while representations can be used as an instrument of power, dominance and repression, counter discourses can unbalance the power dynamic.

Much of this section will be directed towards José Laners’ argument as well as the role that Joyce’s oral style may play in Laners’ misgivings. Joyce’s speaking / writing is directed outwards as a dialogue. A dialogue always assumes a recipient, an imaginary addressee, and implies the possibility of communication. Her use of direct refutations, a popular tool in oratory, underlines the originally oral basis of

argumentation, but can discomfit a reader / audience attuned to the more abstract argumentation that literacy engenders. In her essay, “‘We are a Different People’: Life Writing, Representation, and the Travellers” (a title that borrows the final chapter title of Joyce’s autobiography, one of several Traveller writers she cites), José Lanter notices that in Traveller writing “explicit or implicit denials of negative stereotypes ... often inadvertently perpetuate the stereotype by invoking it” (35). *My Life on the Road* opens by refuting the popular perception that Travellers are descendants of peasants displaced by the Famine who never managed to resettle (Helleiner 30), a narrative of defeat. Joyce’s rejoinder, “we’re not drop-outs like some people think” (1), seems to be directed at an imaginary interlocutor. Lanter’s discomfort with Joyce’s direct style may be partly attributable to a general tendency among literate people to dismiss the direct confrontation of oral argumentation as perhaps unsophisticated or naïve (Lanter’s tendency to undervalue orality as a legitimate form of knowledge will be established in Part II). Even though Lanter may be feeling cultural discomposure, she nevertheless might consider that Joyce’s apparent ‘defensiveness’ indicates the pressures of living in a subordinate status.

Lanter begins her essay by looking at Joyce’s frequent mention of cleanliness, good habits that Joyce attributes to her upbringing. Joyce writes, “Mother and Father had this thing for cleanness. Even though we only had an old wagon or tents in the summer everything had to be shining. The mugs might be washed perfectly clean but still a kettle of water would be boiled and thrown over them before Father would drink the tea” (4). She also mentions personal hygiene, “Mother was always bathing us and washing our hair. ... Our hair used to be glittering” (4). By stressing the attention given to

cleanliness, Joyce refutes the strong association of Travellers with dirt, a belief that overlaps with a general bourgeois abhorrence of poverty³¹.

The detail Joyce pays to habits of cleanliness may seem defensive if it is considered only as a rejoinder to negative appellations, but the above quote is also informational, containing hints of Traveller proscriptions. Ironically, in view of the proliferation of non-Traveller rhetoric that associates Travellers with dirt, Travellers consider their settled neighbours to be unclean. Traveller cleanliness focuses on notions of pollution and purity inferred above in Joyce's description of rinsing already clean teacups. Taboos centre on maintaining strict separation between the outer body and the inner body (Okely 78-87)³². Anything can potentially pollute the inner body if separation practices have not been followed. This includes not only food, but also anything that touches food, such as dishes, utensils and food containers. Several washbasins are kept for different, exclusive purposes (Okely 81). A kitchen sink is never used to wash hands, clothes or hair, for example. Often, in modern Traveller trailers and motor homes, kitchen sinks are boarded up or never installed (Okely 82). Even kitchen linens are washed separately in basins that have never been used for general washing and hung to dry apart from other linens and clothes. Joyce relates that even as young children they were aware of these prohibitions:

When we were growing up we had this thing about cleanness and if we were out in the day we wouldn't ask tea until we came to a real clean house. ... If we saw a woman in a house with dirty nails or teeth we wouldn't ask for tea. ... We'd never drink out of a stranger's cup and when the woman would be making us tea we'd say, 'Now put it in a bottle' – we thought it would be cleaner than cups because nobody ever drank out of the bottle. (24-5)

These taboos serve the purpose of creating barriers that ensure a separation between Traveller and non-Traveller communities, thus preserving the integrity of an endogamous people (Okely 80). Joyce offers perspectives on issues of contention that have often been

ignored, initiating a dialogue that can work towards inter-cultural understanding. In practical terms, knowledge about cultural differences can avoid misunderstandings such as have showed up in the design of 'official' Traveller campsites where the washing facilities were located in the same building as toilets (Okely 79), an arrangement repugnant to Travellers.

Joyce's stated purpose in writing is to increase understanding between communities, but this in no way includes any desire to assimilate or be assimilated into mainstream culture. In fact, her implicit argument throughout is that Travellers should not have to give up their culture in order to find acceptance and equality within Ireland. Laners, on the other hand, seems to consider any calling attention to difference as perpetuating the terms of social exclusion. She writes, "The very strategies that are meant to reduce the marginal status of a minority group often have the opposite effect, merely by the act of drawing attention to the otherness of that group" (Laners 33). Here, Laners conflates an externally imposed segregation that views difference as aberrant and threatening with a strategy such as Joyce's that proposes difference as non-threatening and seeks to build on commonalities between communities. Along with an appeal for more tolerance of difference, Joyce and other Traveller writers confirm their uniqueness as a point of pride even as they write to create a self-image that challenges negative images imposed by others. Her concluding, "we are a different people", encapsulates her pride in her Traveller identity and her sustained position that difference should not be cause to deny Traveller rights to equal citizenship within Ireland.

Laners is astute in questioning the efficacy of direct refutations of negative stereotypes by Travellers and in recognizing how vital such enquiries are to establishing

the reliability of Traveller representations, but even though she opens her essay by introducing the issue, she ultimately evades the question. She hints in her opening paragraph that the failure could be in “representation” when she questions “the very notion of representation itself” (Lanters 25), but eventually circumvents the problem by interiorising Joyce’s project, an interpretation that runs counter to Joyce’s purpose of addressing external conditions and educating a public. Lanters’ analysis places emphasis on the individual by suggesting that Traveller “life writing, while ostensibly aimed at influencing the attitude of a settled audience, may effect greater changes in the writers themselves” (41). Such an analysis hints at failure of the writer’s conscious intention, but allows for Traveller writing as a creative process that helps the writer construct ““a *sustainable self-image*” (Marianne Gullestad, quote and italics in Lanters 41). Lanters’ conclusion displaces the act of writing from the kind of intersubjective reader response such as Elizabeth Laing (7) hopes for in a Preface to *Moving Stories: Traveller Women Write*, to a more self-contained role in which the individual writes in order to define himself / herself. Lanters’ emphasis on writing autobiography as an individual boon rather than a communal activity diminishes this dialogic potential, and reflects the modern Western inclination, based on the isolated, interiorised, Cartesian self (itself a manifestation of writing culture according to Ong), to conceive of selfhood as an individualistic pursuit. In contrast, Joyce’s discomfort with personal disclosures, her preference to remain in the background of her story while foregrounding circumstances common to most Travellers indicates a less individualistic, more communal sense of identity that has been remarked elsewhere in minority and women’s autobiographies (Friedman 34; Gilmore 77). Lanters’ emphasis on the individual’s self-image, while

valid, must be understood within the context of the more communal self-identity evident in Traveller writing. While Laniers is correct in concluding that one of the functions of autobiography is the process of creating “sustainable” self-definitions for the writer, this role is not exclusive.

Although Joyce’s responses to persecution can sometimes sound defensive, other strategies disarm reservations, such as her use of humour and her customary optimism. Perhaps more than any other technique, her characterizations of three key people in her life reverse stereotypes by personalizing the sweeping generalizations of bigotry. The difficulty of finding a shared language that does not reiterate the oppressions of dominant culture is her challenge.

Although Joyce sometimes falls back on generalizations when depicting both Travellers and non-Travellers, those anecdotes that show Travellers and non-Travellers as individuals are more convincing as well as more effective in challenging stereotypes. Fond memories from her childhood illustrate Traveller family life in positive terms. In anecdotes of her early years, she develops three main characters; her father, her older sister Kathleen and her younger brother Willie. Georges Gusdorf’s “assertion that autobiographical selves are constructed through the process of writing and therefore cannot reproduce exactly the selves who lived” (referenced in Friedman 34), also applies to the ‘characters’ populating Joyce and Maher’s autobiographies, even if they represent actual people. In Joyce, character development occurs using literary techniques, occasionally through direct appraisal by the authorial voice, but more often through anecdotes.

Joyce's many stories about her father counter negative portrayals of Traveller men by showing him to be a role model. She underlines his strong sense of pride in his heritage, a sense of self-worth she inherits, as her eventual leadership role in the community epitomizes. Yet, some statements such as, "The way he dressed people never took him for a traveller but he used to make a point of telling them because he never was ashamed of it" (6), also tend to set him apart as exceptional from other Travellers. Countering stereotypes that portray Travellers as lazy, Joyce describes the care and meticulousness with which her father would build and decorate Traveller wagons³³, a specialized skill not widely practiced even then. Besides focusing on the many ways her father earned a living for the family, she describes the useful role Travellers served as skilled craftsmen and traders within the rural Irish economy and the good relations they shared with settled people when she was young:

Ireland was very poor then ... you couldn't get copper or brass or tin or anything like that so the travellers used to smuggle it in their wagons. They'd bring it into the Free State [The Republic] ... and they'd make tins and pots and lovely copper ornaments and buckets. In those days travellers were *different*; they were a very proud people. (my italics 3)

Joyce's example counters popular stereotypes that depict Travellers as idle welfare bums and yet at the same time, by placing economic autonomy in the past, she seems to confirm rather than dispel views such as those found in George Gmelch's 1985 study that "while 'itinerants' had once had a viable rural lifestyle, modernization made their skills redundant" (Ní Shúinéar "Othering" 186). Joyce would certainly not want to propose nomadism, and therefore Travellers, as anachronisms, as she almost seems to suggest. By making this comparison, she does establish that disparities in Traveller self-sufficiency are not due to any innate defects in Traveller character. Since Traveller writers almost unanimously assert that living conditions and relations between

communities have deteriorated between now and then, the unfavourable comparison raises the question as to why this discontinuity exists. Worsening economic conditions for Travellers will be examined in Part III as a factor contributing to the anti-modernism expressed in Maher. Here it will be noted that though publishing in 1985, Joyce's emphasis on class issues as 'dividing practices' in Irish society anticipates the effect of the "Celtic Tiger" economy that began in the 1990s, an economic boom that has brought prosperity but also has allowed greater economic disparities to flourish³⁴. In contemporary Ireland, as elsewhere, definitions of 'class' are now based primarily on income. While Locke equated good citizenship to the ownership of private property, Victor Merriman in "Decolonisation Postponed: The Theatre of Tiger Trash" notes that in a globalizing economy, "[i]nclusion in the social order is ... predicated on economic capital, disposable income and lifestyle" (311), all criteria that exclude the poor.

While Joyce can only on rare occasion be suspected of deliberately choosing words that evoke sympathy, neither is she naïve. Her strong rhetorical skills have given her a confident sense of the emotional impact of words. Generally, her vignettes convey a spontaneous warmth, even as they contradict negative stereotypes. At the same time, being always fully attentive to circulating stereotypes can provoke 'defensive' responses to a silent critic. For example, she details the various ways in which her father made a living, including horse training and breeding purebred dogs, but immediately adds, "He never used to hit a horse or let anyone be cruel to animals" (6), refuting stereotypes that depict Travellers as more apt to mistreat animals. Such counter-discourses demonstrate that as they write, Travellers are always aware of the negative stereotypes they are writing against.

Other anecdotes reveal curious, inquiring minds that contradict stereotypes depicting Travellers as ignorant by nature³⁵. Joyce's father conducted formal lessons in the evening by the light of the gas lamp, teaching by rote, a technique derived from oral traditions long retained as a pedagogical tool in literate societies. Besides learning their alphabet, much attention was focused on their religious education. She mentions the "little sally rod about as thick as a match" that her father used during these lessons, "he'd be waving it. It was springy and if you got it across the legs you'd really feel it" (20). Though typical of the methods used in classrooms of the era and meant to be a humorous comment, Joyce nevertheless feels the need to offset any suspicions among her readers by adding, "My father never battered us, he'd never hit us hard, but while he was teaching us the catechism we'd be looking at this sally rod, going" (20).

While her mother remains for the most part a silence in the text, her father figures in most of her anecdotes about her early life and is strongly associated with the happiest times of her life. The tragedy of his untimely death – he died while in police custody, a death never subjected to official investigation – is felt more strongly by the reader because Joyce has taken care to reveal his character. Admittedly, considering the sudden and violent way in which her father was taken from them, his portrait may be somewhat idealized. However, given the obvious affection with which she remembers her father, it would be too cynical to suggest that her descriptions of his industriousness and resourcefulness are a 'defensive' ploy designed to counter negative stereotypes. Regretting his early death, she often hints that had he survived they would have had a happier life. On several occasions she attributes her lack of education to his early death such as when she says, "my father died when we were very young and he didn't get much

time to teach us” (21). At one point, Joyce reminisces, “when Father was alive we were so happy” (67), poignant because placed so firmly in the past. Patricia Meyer Spacks notices a tendency in women autobiographers to look back on childhood as “often the happiest and freest time”, and suggests that this nostalgia hints at the “loss of self” adulthood can represent for women, certainly for many women of Joyce’s generation living in patriarchal societies (whether Traveller or non-Traveller), for whom freedom of choice was limited by social conventions and, in Joyce’s case, serious financial restrictions (see Hirschmann 20-23). “[T]herefore”, Spacks writes, such women “[look] back fondly to the relative freedom and power of childhood and youth” (quoted in Carolyn G. Heilbrun 72). The occasional glimpses into Nan Joyce’s own marital problems reinforce Spacks’s assessment. This could explain the lighter tone and spirit of adventure that manages to permeate all but the most despondent moments of her childhood accounts. Joyce offers another explanation (that does not invalidate Spacks’s observation) when she confesses that after Kathleen left three months before their mother was released from prison, she became depressed (51). Having so recently lost their father and with their mother in prison, Joyce experienced her sister’s departure as yet another loss made more difficult because of their vulnerable situation. Her admission that while Kathleen was with them “we had a big person to lean on” (51) suggests that, even when times are difficult, the sense of mutual support gained from shared responsibilities provides courage and strength, a reciprocity that seems to be absent from her adult life.

The warm sense of humour in her accounts of the early years helps to offset the harsh life circumstances she exposes. Her humour is disarming, but sometimes feels like an attempt to put forward the most optimistic conclusion possible in the circumstances.

Humour can also serve as a defence. For example, her quip when the police officers tell her that her husband is “sleeping it off” in the cell, ““Oh, great, he might be sobered now”” (94), seems like such an instance. Her use of humour to downplay negative behaviour among Traveller men attempts to deflect criticism by asserting that drinking has little serious or lasting consequence. Joyce uses the example of fairs, a combined social / business activity that once represented an important source of income for Traveller families, as well as a hub of social contacts. Joyce observes that if they drank too much during business transactions, “the men who had the new wagons might end up with the rotten ones ... But they usen’t to worry about it because the next time at the fair they’d be a lot wiser” (14-15). Physical brawls, particularly reprehensible to non-Travellers, are little more than letting off steam with no lasting animosity between warring parties³⁶:

When the men were drunk they might have a boxing match but they’d fall more times than they’d hit each other. Next morning they’d have a black eye each and they’d be ashamed to get out of bed to face each other ... And then the two men that were boxing would shake hands – they never kept in any spite or hate ... Then the women would march them to the priest to take the pledge. (18)

Her depiction is cartoon-like, almost slapstick. In a motif familiar in Irish literature, it is the women who take matters in hand. The men are portrayed as childlike, carrying on a cliché of the strong woman and the physically virile, but morally weak man, now the submissive penitent. Sometimes rendered tragically, here the scene is comical: “the men would be brought to the priest and they’d let on to be real innocent saying, ‘Oh, Father, we didn’t mean to fight.’” (18). Although Joyce refuses to condemn their behaviour, she admits that life was better for everyone when they were not drinking: “When the men had taken the pledge you’d see the change in them in a few days” (18). Her candour, however discreet, such as when she reveals her husband’s alcoholism, is much more

convincing than these kinds of generalizations which, as Lanter notes (34), only replace one stereotype with another.

When Joyce and Maher contextualize the social and economic conditions that frame Traveller social problems, drawing a relation between despair, alcoholism and discriminatory practices, this strategy proves more effective than downplaying the negative effects of drinking. Unlike Joyce who seems to address a reader / listener, Maher's frequent insights into the childhood events he recounts reveal a more self-reflective attempt for the adult now writing to arrive at personal resolutions. Perhaps through the act of writing itself or with the wisdom gained in the intervening years, Maher comes to view his father's abominable behaviour with compassion, an evolution that influences the reader's understanding. Maher's candid account of the problem of alcoholism is much grimmer and provides a counterpoint to Joyce's caricature or alternately, her reticence about how the problem has affected her personal life. His tone is darker with more stress on the negative impact of physical and verbal abuse. He introduces the reality of his troubled childhood from the first page. The second sentence, "My father, when sober ..." (9), immediately involves his father's alcoholism, and in the next paragraph he elaborates, "My father was a character, a real hard case, a man who lived for a drink" (9). He characterizes his mother's not drinking as "a rare thing on the road" (9), which suggests drinking as a norm among Travellers, but also reinforces her exceptional moral character.

When portraying the verbal and physical abuse he suffered at the hands of his father, Maher is unflinching but in those circumstances when he is the detached observer, when the situation involves others and not his mother and him, he occasionally

downplays abuse. His minimizing the harmful effects of conflict as “all soon forgotten” (21), contradicts an earlier assertion that witnessing parental conflict has a very detrimental effect on children: “I always felt distressed when my parents started to fight with each other ... Seeing this when one is young, during the formative ... years of one’s life, does no real good; in fact, more often than not it destroys” (19). “Destroys” is emphatic and Maher continues to describe the destructive effect conflict has on children. His statement that, “In the end the child can only continue as his parents did before him” (19), suggests a certain inevitability in perpetuating the negative cycle. His conflicting positions underline the difficulty of his in-between status and recall Lanter’s reference to ‘conflicting loyalties’. The tension of trying to integrate multiple positions can result in a psychological splitting. In Maher, alternating views are most often articulated through the mouths of his characters, a tactic that allows the writer the freedom to explore contradictory opinions without having to take a definitive stance. In Maher’s case, his ambivalence may not only be due to an intercultural conflict but may also evidence difficulty integrating opposing personal loyalties, the result of his troubled childhood.

On a larger scale, Maher portrays conflict and misunderstandings between Travellers and non-Travellers as a consequence of culture clash. Disagreements arise because the different communities have different needs. This corroborates McVeigh’s assertion that nomadic and sedentary people “stand in a contradictory relationship because they occupy the same social space in a profoundly different way” (22). One example is recycling as an economic activity, an important source of income for Travellers who collect and recycle everything from bottles and rags to scrap metal. In recent times, zoning laws have sought to curtail this practice.

The second time his family tried to settle in a house, Maher describes the attempt as a “great trial for my parents ... We found it almost impossible to adapt to it” (139). Because his father worked in recycling, junk began to accumulate inside the house and out, “old rags, horse-hair, feathers and ... scrap”, which may have been materials collected for salvage, though Maher is not specific on this point (139). Because he stands in a between-place, Maher is able to see the interests of “settled” people as violated by the practice, while at the same time, he understands the Traveller perspective. He describes the house as “a dump”, and considers the neighbours’ complaints as ‘natural’, but he also sees the harm the conflict had for his brothers and sisters who suffered jeers from the settled children in the neighbourhood and at school, an ordeal which resulted in their frequent absences from school. Furthermore, he concludes that his mother “took the full brunt of all this ... worry” because his father could “go out and have a few drinks to ease his mind” (140). Maher describes his mother’s social isolation in an earlier unsuccessful attempt to settle in a house when he was eight years old. Maher attributes their ostracism to a general hostility towards Travellers:

[W]e were not wanted; there was always a great deal of prejudice among the townspeople ... [My mother] was always alone in the house; none of the neighbours would even talk to her, let alone come into our house for a visit or a cup of tea. To the townspeople we were dirty, begging tinkers and no *respectable* person would visit us. (my italics 17)

Again, Maher depicts his mother as the one who bore the heaviest burden because of her social role as a stay at home mother with no income. The moral overtones of social exclusion are contained in Maher’s qualification that it was “respectable” society that shunned them (17).

In these difficult circumstances, he identifies the “arguments and quarrels” that ensued between his parents as “only natural” (19), given that external pressures can put

strains on personal relations. This comprehension, however, is the insight of the adult writer. Elsewhere, Maher states that as children witnessing these battles, they were “puzzl[ed], for we could not understand” (19). When they decided to leave the first house they lived in, Sean cried, and this caused a row between his parents. It is only at the beginning of the next chapter, right after the story of wife beating detailed below, that Maher finally reveals the form of his father’s displeasure: “I remember with deep resentment the punch I got from my father that day we left our little house. I cried because I didn’t want to leave and he punched me, *I feel now*, because he really didn’t want to leave either” (my italics 23). Maher in no way excuses his father’s action, but the adult writer now believes he understands something of his father’s emotional state, although he notes wryly, “A punch didn’t cure my loneliness, nor my parents’ either” (23). Maher pinpoints the cause of his father’s violent behaviour as an unresolved and perhaps irresolvable internal conflict, his father’s inability to face his own sense of vulnerability, his impotence before obstacles he cannot seem to change. Maher’s novelistic technique of detailed and therefore slightly fictionalized conversations between his parents reveals his father’s underlying sense of failure. As they are leaving, his father denies having any regrets, “‘It’s just as well we left that town, I got sick of the place’” (18), and equates living in town with “‘sheer starvation’”. To this, Maher adds his insight, “My father, of course, felt it very deeply, living in a town and not being able to get a day’s work. Living on a few measly shillings’ relief was no joke” (18). Maher also observes that the futility of his efforts to provide for his family left his father “often depressed” (19). These are the first hints of understanding that the adult writer brings forward. His father copes with their marginalized position ineffectually, by lashing out at

his family. His behaviour, set against a background of general antipathy, helps contextualize, without excusing, his verbal and physical abuse.

In spite of the horrific episodes of child abuse, Maher intersperses the bleakness with humorous stories, providing regular tonal shifts. Though he looks for the humour in situations, at the end of chapter one, he tries unconvincingly to make light of an incident that begins as a practical joke, but ends with the wife of another couple being severely beaten. The couple's dispute underlines the demands imposed in a fiercely patriarchal society – the row was precipitated by a ruined supper. When the woman flees her camp, her husband calls after her, ““Come up here you red-headed witch and get me some supper”” (22), an epithet that repeats mainstream stereotypes of Traveller and Gypsy women as imbued with underlying power and sexuality and therefore threatening to the established patriarchy. Although Maher describes a horrific beating, where the husband “caught hold of his wife by the hair with one hand and punched her repeatedly in the face with the other”, he then tries to mitigate the consequences by claiming, “[t]he next morning the row was forgotten” (22). Clearly, the child witnessing the scene and the present writing self are of one mind. Neither has forgotten: “Maggie’s face was battered and scarred and swollen, so much so that she had to remain in bed for about a week after” (22). This indicates the severity of the beating. His comment, “My parents were powerless to help” (22), suggests that they might have wanted to, especially since his mother could have prevented the gaffe that led to the fight but thought the outcome would be amusing. Maher the writer concludes this incident and Chapter One with a generalizing statement, declaring, “There is great cruelty on the road, but then again there is great love and kindredship among travellers that overcomes all hardships” (22), a

problematic avowal because “overcomes all hardships”, with its sense of unqualified victory, oversimplifies the usual complexity of Maher’s text. While love and affection may help alleviate hardships, Maher surmounts the difficulties he faces sporadically and after hard fought personal struggles. Such occasions, none of them presented as triumphs, often intermingle with equally palpable feelings of desperate loneliness, even despair. Similar in tone to Joyce’s conclusion to her autobiography, there is a sense here that when Maher uses such statements, they are meant to convince the writer as much as the reader.

By framing the family’s misery within a larger context, Maher implies collective responsibility but does not pontificate. He explores these enlarged perspectives through his characters. He begins to see his father not only as a victimizer, but also as a casualty; unable to cope with the difficulties of an openly hostile society without the crutch of alcohol. In the penultimate chapter, Maher, now a young man on his own, views his father’s alcoholism in terms that open the way for empathy, an understanding that allows for human frailty. He arrives at this point as he is arguing with two fellow Travellers on the merit of traditional travelling life. Maher takes an opposing position, arguing against nomadism, and pauses in the debate to muse, “I thought of my father trying to drink himself out of his misery and into a better, if imaginary, life” (154). This reflection casts new light on his father’s cruelty, depicting a man caught in his personal anguish, pain that he in turn inflicts on others. Maher’s candour offers a harsh perspective on Traveller life, one that would seem to corroborate with negative stereotypes. However, his ability to weave in external causes resituates the story from a personal tragedy to failure on a larger scale, without disallowing the role of personal responsibility. He does not excuse his

father's behaviour – he clearly sees the futility of turning to alcohol to assuage one's misery. Through Maher's eyes, the reader begins not only to comprehend the tragedy of wasted lives, but also to look beyond individual action and personal responsibility to the social conditions that can limit individual choice (Hirschmann 20-23).

Maher's insight implies that he is on a path where forgiveness opens the way to liberation from a difficult past. Maher expresses this new beginning in his conclusion. His proverbial 'life is a journey' trope that calls upon the Christian tradition of pilgrimage resonates with his Traveller identity, which Maher symbolically shares with his reader when he reminds us that we are all travellers on that road (165). Borrowing such recognizable images and reshaping them to express a distinct perspective, familiar but unique, highlights the flexibility of these easily recognizable cultural images.

Joyce's writing too, makes a powerful impact when she puts forward simple but redolent images, portraits in miniature that resonate because they evoke the familiar but skew it. One such image occurs in an anecdote about her older sister Kathleen who went missing one day and was found by her parents "in the middle of the Corporation dump in Whiterock and every bit was covered in ashes. She was sitting there like a fairy reading Dandys and Beanos — that was how she learned to read, from the comics" (31-2). This single image encompasses a web of interrelations. First, this portrait refutes without ever directly referencing the stereotype that associates Travellers with ignorance. "Like a fairy," suggests that this is a fond picture, not meant to rouse pity, but still the image illustrates the courage and determination that children demonstrate, even when growing up in difficult conditions, including overcoming obstacles to learning due to systemic racism within educational institutions (a fact corroborated almost unanimously by

Traveller testimonies). Kathleen sitting amongst trash reading her Beanos also evokes contemporary images of those majority world³⁷ children and their families who make their living sifting through mountains of garbage at landfill sites, collecting recyclable materials to sell (an activity that continues to supplement Traveller income (Helleiner 145-9)). The snapshot also bears testimony to the practice of relegating more marginalized people to peripheral locations. Because “power is expressed in the monopolization of space and the relegation of weaker groups in society to less desirable environments” (Sibley ix), landfill sites become a potent geographic indicator of ownership claims and out-group apartheid³⁸. As if symbolizing their pariah status, ‘undesirable’ elements of society worldwide live in closer proximity to the mountain of waste created by affluence than those who can afford to live in safer environments. By presenting a familiar image – the happy, inquisitive child – and then displacing it – her classroom is a garbage dump, her reading materials cast-offs – Joyce undercuts the sentimentality that might have been evoked by such a tender picture.

In similar fashion, but more consciously perhaps, Joyce reworks an iconic Catholic symbol. Manipulating familiar images in ways that question the underlying beliefs that empower the motif provides one solution to language constraints. In the final chapter, “A Better Understanding”, she returns to a memory from her childhood. Just as she associated her father with idyllic happiness, Joyce seems to associate her mother, when she is mentioned at all, with hardship and lack. Joyce remembers a cold winter’s day when she and her mother had been begging — she always depicts having to beg as a humiliation. This day, she particularly feels the sting of rejection. As she expresses it, “people kept banging the doors in our faces” (117). She also notices that even those who

gave them something “wouldn’t speak to us” (117). They went into a chapel to warm up. Here, Joyce likens her mother, “praying with the child in her arms”, to a statue in the chapel of “Our Lady with the Child Jesus in a sort of shawl” (117) – the shawl is the traditional covering for Traveller women. By superimposing the image of her mother and the Holy Mother, Joyce leans towards the maudlin, but regains her footing by grounding the moment back in reality when the child Nan, “wonder[s] why people should be treated like this” (117). (The placement of the thought within the young child’s cognizance makes the recognition of maltreatment more poignant.) Either the adult writing or the child in the memory (it is not clear) concludes that it is because they “weren’t real people to them” (117). On the other hand, maybe they were too real, too close, too associated with the past that Ireland has left behind – the endemic poverty, the evictions, the Famine, the history of colonization. Perhaps proximity induces fear and loathing. Sibley argues that when nomadism can be placed in a safely distant past, Roma and Travellers can then be seen in the miasma of a pastoral idyll, but only if the image stays far removed in time and place, not the nomad standing on street corners (or on one’s doorstep), or with their motor homes parked under viaducts in contemporary urban settings. The child’s avowal *not* to grow up to be like her mother — ““I’ll make a better life when I grow up – I won’t have to beg, I won’t have to be pitiful-looking to get charity just to survive”” (117) — shatters the idealism contained in the icon.

Such repudiations are indicative of the mother’s apparent inferior status, a perception that reflects the lack of regard given to her role in society. Kristi Siegel notes that in women’s autobiography, “The mother—typically—does not present a model whose power exceeds the domestic sphere” (21). Siegel’s analysis is corroborated in

Joyce's emphasis on her father descriptions of her childhood. The dissimilar textual treatment allotted to her mother suggests that while she may have loved her mother, she by no means saw her as someone to emulate, an assessment that reflects societal values of the time that generally downgraded the household and care giving responsibilities traditionally performed by women. (Joyce's rejection in the Afterword of these gender-biased ascriptions of value is discussed below.) The contrast is accentuated because Joyce highlights the difference. For example, of her mother's lack of education, she states, "My mother couldn't read or write, she never had any education and I think she felt a bit left out because my father was such a scholar" (6). Likewise, a more perfunctory treatment of her mother's activities contrasts with the rich and varied sensations her father's activities elicit such as when she describes him shoeing horses: "He'd ... redden the horseshoe in the fire. Steam and smoke would come out when he put the shoe on the hoof but it didn't hurt the horse. I used to love the smell of the horse's hooves scorching" (6). Although she mentions her mother's fresh baked bread, there is none of the heightened senses or enthrallment associated with her father's work. While Joyce grew up in a very traditional Irish society where, Traveller or non-Traveller, the public domain was considered a male realm and a woman's place was the home, Joyce's eventual turn as an adult to the public life, working as a Traveller advocate and social activist and even running for public office, intimates the strong connection she felt for her father and his more exciting sphere of action, especially given that he was her apparent role model.

It must be noted that the sharp delineation of gender roles in Joyce's account was a cultural norm in Ireland at the time. In fact, the sanctity of "the Family" written into the

Constitution of Ireland, 1937, assured ““sexual stereotyping”” (quoted in Frances Gardiner 50). Under Article 41, the state promised to "protect the family", and under the same article vowed “to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home” (Gardiner 50). This allusion underpins Joyce’s transposition of the Holy Mother as an icon that represents revered motherhood in contrast with her own downtrodden parent. By using the instantly recognizable image of the Holy Mother, an over-determined symbol that carries with it a surplus of meanings, including the sanctity of motherhood, and then shattering the bliss of that most Irish of Catholic devotions by interjecting their reality as Travellers, Joyce challenges the notion that motherhood is honoured in Ireland. Thus, she exposes the breach between Irish society’s most cherished beliefs and the harsh circumstances that some citizens endured. Because there was little legal recourse at this time, and because women, especially married women, were kept out of the work force (Gardiner 53), women and children bore the heaviest burden of this gap between ideological public professions and the physical and economic security of women and children. Joyce, an avowed believer, here as elsewhere, demonstrates the imagination and courage to move beyond the clichés of inherited religious scripts in order to question moral double standards in the nation at large. However, like many women of her generation, her engagement with the public world comes through a disassociation with the mother, a distancing mechanism evident in the disproportionate anecdotal treatment dedicated to her parents. These fissures arise when a response to subjugation merely inverts the terms of value without examining how the devaluation reflects still functioning societal standards. Consequently, the denigration of (traditional) female activity persists (and

therefore of the women who engage in essential, extra-monetary labour). As Stone-Mediatore notes, this devaluation extends to certain categories of essential labour because “people in socially marginalized positions ... do the work that ruling representations overlook and undervalue” (180). Not only does Joyce as a child disavow her mother’s perceived subjugation, as an adult she wonders, “did I make a better life” (117).

Joyce’s question is not merely self-reflective, for the conditions of evaluation are based on hegemonic consensus in ways that repudiate certain groups and individuals. Joyce challenges these mainstream values when she places emphasis on the moral qualities of a human being over personal achievement. She asserts in the Afterword, “I’m not ashamed of my children, they’re all good; they’re not rich but they have their goodness and pity and charity—that’s the main thing” (xii). In adding, “[T]hey’re not rich,” she calls attention to a tendency in capitalist societies to measure a person’s value monetarily and then seems to reject wealth as an indicator of personal merit. She extends this sense of self-worth to her own abilities, but acknowledges that all may not share her standards: “Settled people would look at you as an uneducated person but I’ve been highly educated in cooking, looking after children and managing” (xii). Her point concurs with one that many feminists have tried to make: work traditionally done by women has also consistently been undervalued.

Joyce’s challenge is to find a language that the majority culture can understand and even connect with as their own, but that does not misrepresent her averred views and values. Such a contradiction occurs when Joyce speaks of her sister Kathleen’s success. Being the oldest, Kathleen, only fourteen when the children were left without parents, took on a great deal of the responsibilities of keeping the family together during that

difficult period. Thinking that her mother had served her time and was about to be released from prison³⁹, Kathleen left the other children and made her way to England, where eventually she did quite well. Naturally wanting to celebrate Kathleen's life and marriage, Joyce adopts language that assumes the majority values that attach importance to social status, a position that contradicts her argument throughout the text against social class as a determinant of human worth. Although Joyce's praise of her sister is without irony she does attempt to contextualize the appearance of success by twice wondering, "What kind of life must she have had?" (51, 63). Without answering the question, Joyce underlines the obstacles Kathleen must have faced when at age fifteen, she went alone to England, for "she had no-one there to go to ... no money, no education" (51). Although Joyce does not presume to analyze interior lives or attempt to speak for others, the first time she reconnects with her sister in Glasgow some four years after Kathleen's departure, Joyce comments on Kathleen's style: "She'd turned into a lovely lady, you'd think she was from a big posh house the way she was dressed and the way she had her hair" (63). Especially important in a society where one's accent can prevent upward mobility, Kathleen had learned to speak "real English" (63). However, Joyce concludes, "the happy person Kathleen had been was there no more" (63). The reader is left to imagine the contradictions or adjustments or concessions Kathleen had to make in order to fit into a lifestyle so foreign to her upbringing. While Joyce does not surmise, she does relate an amusing anecdote from one of their rare visits. Both married with children, Kathleen had "a beautiful house" (67). Joyce recounts that Kathleen would rearrange the furniture in her house and continues, "The way settled men are they have their favourite

armchair and [Kathleen's husband] he'd be looking for it to sit down ... and she'd say 'Well, I've shifted today!' The traveller was still in her after all those years!" (67).

Kathleen's success has been achieved through cultural assimilation, having married a "settled" man of some skill and education (he is an architect). Joyce describes a "success" story that portrays the abandonment of the customs and culture of one's birth to adopt a settled lifestyle, even though her autobiography argues throughout that Travellers should not have to give up their culture in order to fully participate in society. Momentarily slipping into language that adopts majority values after implicitly and sometimes explicitly asserting Traveller values as different, less materialistic, more humane etc., reflects the personal inconsistencies and contradictions common to all language users⁴⁰. Some of Joyce's difficulty arises in having to create a language that responds to hegemonic standards proposed as cultural 'norms' while asserting Traveller cultural differences as not irreconcilable with, but rather complementary to majority Irish values.

Examining the ways in which the conscious intention of a speaker / writer may be destabilized by contradictory subtexts can provide insights into how direct discourses function, not only their ability to communicate specific issues, but also the language lapses that create ambiguity. This latter occurrence, when it appears, underlines the ambivalence produced by the "'conflicting loyalties'" (Seyhan quoted in Lanters 38) of straddling (and sometimes living between) two cultures, and the difficulties for the minority culture of negotiating and creating a meaningful place within the larger society. Ambiguousness need not be regarded as failure since the implications of contradictory interpretations direct the reader outwards, back to the circumstances that inform the

writing / speaking voice and thus, demand the kind of intersubjective readings Travellers wish to encourage through telling their stories. While representations are imperfect in scope in that they are imbued with conventional, uncritically accepted ideologies inherent to the cultural milieu to which they pertain, alternative perspectives such as Traveller writers present enlarge the terms and categories of representations and therefore ought not to be dismissed as having only subjective (i.e., individualistic) implications.

Minority discourses face the difficulty of redefining and retelling dominant discourses. To this end, Part II looks at how Traveller writers and storytellers rewrite foundational Irish mythologies in order to reconfigure the terms of representation that cast Travellers as historic victims. Their versions of well-known apocryphal stories portray Travellers as agents of history in active, participatory roles that support their claims both to a longstanding Traveller presence in Ireland and their rights to full citizenship. In the process, they argue that orality is a valid means of transmitting ancestral knowledge. Their approach to history as story making offers imaginative alternatives to hegemonic discourses that claim to be the only valid representations of history.

PART II: RETELLING HISTORY: WRITING TRAVELLERS INTO THE NATION

except that it is not a story,
more a rumour or a folk memory
...

there is a way of making free with the past,
a pastiche of what is
real and what is
not, which can only be
justified if you think of it

not as sculpture but syntax:

a structure extrinsic to meaning which uncovers
the inner secret of it.

("Lava Cameo", Eavan Boland)

Autobiography demands re-membering. What the writer remembers or forgets usually (but not always, such as in the case of trauma) mirrors the writer's sense of what is meaningful. Therefore, remembering involves a process that also implies forgetting. This selective process is applied not only in creating a life narrative but also extends to larger historical narratives that fashion cultural memory. De Certeau postulates that historians are not immune from this process because they begin with "the pieces that the imagination of their society has organized beforehand" (288), and write from within their cultural framework of values. National identities are formed through historical narrations that suppress "the unthinkable"⁴¹ in order for a new identity to *become* thinkable" (de Certeau's emphasis 4). In spite of the suppression of all that "this new understanding of the past holds to be irrelevant," fragments persist that de Certeau compares to "shards" that represent "remainders left aside by an explication" (4). These suppressed stories represent "'resistances,' 'survivals,' or delays [that] discreetly perturb the pretty order of

a line of 'progress' or a system of interpretation" (de Certeau 4) that more official narratives have sought to impose. Such historical narratives have played a role in oppressions. Traveller historical narratives represent another 'system of interpretation' that contests the univocality of official versions of history.

In the case of Travellers, popular belief held (and academic treatises sometimes concurred) that Travellers were "descendants of peasants forced into landlessness and mobility by the evictions and famines suffered by the Irish during the centuries of British domination" (Helleiner 30). Although these theories are lacking in historical evidence, they have shaped popular imagination as well as government policy. Jane Helleiner observes that this perception of Traveller origins shaped official policies in the 1960s when "a state settlement program ... was promoted as the action of a benevolent state motivated by a national duty to 're-settle' victims of colonialism" (30). Traveller oral histories contest this reading of history.

That Travellers rewrite historical narratives dominated by others asserts their need to address their present circumstances as reverberations of the past. If one accepts Luke Gibbons' argument that Irish history is "an open-ended narrative" (158), no single interpretation can be considered definitive. Gibbons asserts "[t]he impossibility of gaining direct access to the past ... because it is part of an unresolved historical process which engulfs the present. It is lived history" (157). Certainly, pre-history (i.e., pre-literate history) is not inscribed and therefore cannot be a reified text. Moreover, the bias of official histories tends to ignore the 'small' stories of ordinary citizens and valorizes the 'big' events of the public domain, the military and political struggles. Such an emphasis has precluded female activity from the narrative of history, as well as excluding

the stories of lower social classes as insignificant. In this way, dominant narratives reproduce existing inequalities.

Dominant ideologies create the categories of representation while people excluded from public discourse experience these categories in ways that often diverge radically from more official representations (Stone-Mediatore 180). In Maher, an old-time Traveller nicknamed the doll-man⁴² verifies these areas of neglect when he remarks that gaps in representation exclude Traveller experience: “‘The written history is very warped in its composition and truth’” (Maher 105). His distinction, “*written*” history, infers the existence of alternative, oral histories. In the same exchange, Maher argues the merits of formal education for Travellers, even as he recognizes his education as an incomplete perspective because all reference to Travellers within the nation are erased. In response to this omission, Maher moves towards a partial validation of oral representations in his rejoinder, “‘Remembering, too, the many great old storytellers I have known and listened to on the road as a boy, I can easily overlook the truth of the official written history of Ireland’” (157). Although maintaining official history as a version of the ‘truth’, Maher nevertheless suggests that Traveller stories perform an important symbolic function, history as interpretive narrative that will be discussed below.

Maher’s remark suggests that there is a rationale by which truth status is assigned to some versions of history, a process of selection and interpretation that produces “a ‘régime’ of truth” (Foucault “Truth” 133). Such regimes of truth, whether sanctioned through secular or religious institutions, tend to silence alternative versions but these latter narratives continue to propagate among more marginalized groups who in their turn

may dismiss official versions of history. Traveller retellings of apocryphal stories of the pre-historic origins of Ireland challenge the way “historical weight is differently accorded to different accounts, some of which become included in official history, [while] others [are] relegated to memory” (Cruikshank “Oral Tradition” 6 of 8). Oral history represents a knowledge base that until recently, tended to be dismissed as “inadequate” under the literate criteria of Western law and academe⁴³, considered unable to measure up to standards of historicity that ascribed more authority to written documentation as the most reliable authentication of fact⁴⁴. John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* exemplifies this emphasis where “the *written* text enjoys the status of an originating presence, and is the standard against which the inferior claims to truth of speech and tradition may be judged” (italics in Gibbons 153). Facing colonial discourses that justified colonization in the absence of “civilization”, Gibbons asserts that “native Irish historians” advanced an Irish antiquity that was “culturally inscribed” (153) to counter colonialist expansionism. However, their propositions of an ancient, sophisticated civilization in pre-conquest Ireland “depended to a large extent on an oral heritage, and thus had to contend with a prejudice *against* popular memory” (italics in Gibbons 153). Travellers, speaking and writing against neo-colonial scripts, face a similar dismissal vis-à-vis the legitimacy of their oral histories. Similarly, to label Traveller stories as “appropriations”, “rewritings” or “retellings” of mainstream accounts accords even more authenticity to the latter, for such phrasing implies that *their* stories are reworking established conventions and that the migration of ideas can occur in only one direction. (The erroneousness of this assumption will be further explored in Part III.)

Traveller stories rearticulate the univocality of well-known versions of Irish pre-history, but they face the same challenges as earlier Irish historians.

Before proceeding to Traveller accounts, some of the features of various definitions of Irishness will be set down, as these represent the framework of national identity Travellers contend. After centuries of British domination, the rhetoric on both sides of the political and geographical divide utilized supposed fundamental differences between the British and Irish for political purposes. As noted above, the British used inferiorizing rhetoric to justify colonialism as a ‘civilizing’ influence. While the prolonged efforts to achieve self-rule sometimes erupted in armed struggle, Irish independence was more often fought for within intellectual and political arenas, which entailed rhetoric. Popular Irish views characterized Englishness as the antithesis of Irishness, especially on moral issues (moral distinctions paralleled to a certain degree in Traveller writing where non-Travellers are depicted as lax, and vice versa). Perceived differences were based on economic organization, religion, and moral fibre. These widespread stereotypes could be summarized as national caricatures: if the British were licentious Protestant shopkeepers, the Irish were pious Catholic farmers. The doll-man identifies the ills of Ireland as “class-consciousness”, a conclusion that coincides with Joyce’s analysis. He attributes “greed, ambition and pride” to “the influx of foreigners” (106), a reference that, given the time frame, (the first half of the 20th century) alludes to the English and not to more recent immigrants. This attribution of social ills to a former colonial power indicates the as yet unresolved aftereffects of colonialism.

According to Gibbons, another strategy to counter disparaging colonial discourse was to create a “coherent narrative form on the amorphous mass of Irish history” (155).

Gibbons' contention falls in line with de Certeau's conclusions about historical narratives as a text that "has eliminated otherness and its dangers in order to retain only those fragments of the past which are locked into the puzzle of a present time" (287). Accordingly, Gibbons believes the history of Ireland to be much more fragmented than Irish nationalist historians wanted to acknowledge (for fear of propping up British stereotypes). Noting the degree to which such histories racialized the Irish and how succinctly these unifying myths corroborated with "eighteenth-century primitivism and the benevolent colonialism of Matthew Arnold" (156), Gibbons proposes these nationalistic historical inventions of a glorious Celtic past as "an extension of colonialism rather than a repudiation of it" (156).

In Joyce's oral genealogy, references to intermarriage with "travellers from other countries" (1), including Spanish ancestors and a grandmother with a "Norman" name (1) descended from "English travellers" (1), reflects centuries of European influences in Ireland. Her embracing inclusiveness and diversity counters nationalistic discourses that stress cultural isolation and racial purity, narratives that deny or downplay the effect of intercultural exchange in a society's development. At the same time, her insistence on an ancient Irish lineage that places a Traveller presence in Ireland long before colonial times contradicts the unsubstantiated but widely propagated claim that they are descendants of peasants displaced by the Famine who never managed to resettle (Helleiner 30). Joyce highlights the intergenerational transmission of knowledge in oral cultures, and indicates her trust in that process when she says, "there's a lot of history behind [Travellers] though there's not much written down – it's what you get from your grandfather and what he got from his grandfather" (1). Although she begins by acknowledging that some

of her ancestors “went on the road in the Famine” (1), she emphasizes, “more of them have been travelling for hundreds of years”, and traces their presence in Ireland to “St Patrick’s time” (1). Her reference to other ancestors “burned out during the Cromwell evictions” (2) in the seventeenth century embraces another seminal episode of past tribulation that is part of the collective Irish memory. Her orally transmitted genealogy illustrates how family histories often incorporate historical events as milestones. At the same time, she uses these historical events as touchstones that immediately resonate with the presumed listener. Whether non-Traveller or Traveller, the Irish generally ‘remember’ these milestones in certain, specific ways. Republicans have tended to consider⁴⁵ the Cromwell evictions, for example, as a particularly nasty instance of gratuitous colonial cruelty. Joyce uses these collective narratives to foster a sense of shared history, at the same time as she differentiates between cultures. For example, she asserts that the flexibility of nomadism made Travellers “used to coping with cold and hardship and hunger, they could survive anywhere because they had their own way of working and their own culture” (2), and concludes that because of their greater survival skills, some of the evictees “married in with travellers” during the time of the Cromwell evictions.

While homogeneous versions of Irish history were helpful for the nationalist cause precisely because of the unifying power of such mythologies, Gibbons is astute in noting that they were largely fabricated. However, his proposal that the “construction of a continuous, unaltered tradition, stretching back to remote antiquity, can be seen, as precisely a colonial imposition” (157), is problematical because he does not adequately⁴⁶ explain Irish intellectual nationalists’ (including the Celtic Literary Revival’s) adherence

to and promotion of just these forms of “cultural nationalism” (Helleiner 40). Drawing its members from the Protestant Anglo-Irish Ascendancy as the Literary Revival did, it was in the interests of this privileged minority, originally of British extraction but with Irish loyalties and nationalist sentiments, to create a supra-historical, pre-Christian narrative of Irishness inspired by Celtic mythologies that would allow for more inclusive definitions of belonging. At the same time, tales of a glorious past offered an inspirational counterweight to historical inequalities borne under colonialism: the inferior social standing and weakened political power of the Irish within their own country that would seem to verify British assertions of Irish cultural and racial inferiority.

While the Celtic Revival’s emphasis on nationalism as cultural was meant to circumvent the potentially devastating consequences for the Protestant minority of defining belonging within the nation by religious affiliation, this is exactly what happened in post-independence Ireland. Angela Bourke places this tendency to conflate Irishness and Catholicism in the post-famine years of the 19th century and is harsh in her assessment of the consequences of this social conservatism. She traces the growing influence of the Church into just about every aspect of daily life to a spirit of collusion within “the propertied middle class [who] dictated a repressive social morality based on a newly centralized, authoritarian, and misogynist Catholicism” (Bourke “Reading” 4). Bourke notes the intertwining of Church and State in the implementing of this conservative, moral agenda. The social cohesion achieved through pressures to conform to rigid standards of moral behaviour effectively silenced any dissenting voices that may have represented difference. Travellers, who by and large are Catholic, were subsumed into this Irish homogeneity by virtue of being almost completely undifferentiated in the

national discourse – except as the occasional object of study with the goal of ‘re-integrating’ them into society, this latter preoccupation informed by the widely held belief that Travellers were dispossessed by British colonial policies. Even though Travellers experienced the effects of these assimilationist policies as detrimental, the government interpreted their actions as righting old wrongs. While on the one hand “anti-camping” laws prohibited “illegal” camping, Travellers and Traveller advocates note that governments have failed to act on promises to provide “official” sites, an area of neglect they have lobbied to change for decades with some limited success.

Metaphorically, Nan Joyce’s autobiography can be interpreted as an attempt to write Travellers into the nation where belonging is conceived as “imagined” space, but in view of settlement policies, and in response to forced evictions and other harsh practices, much of her autobiography deals with the literal struggle for space within a physical geography. Joyce’s didactic poem “Go! Move! Shift!” epitomizes the major preoccupation in her autobiography where belonging is represented as an actual struggle to find physical space and personal security. The poem highlights the policy of forced evictions as reprehensible, motivated by bigotry and intolerance. Verses are interspersed over a few pages in a section of the text that describes a campaign of police harassment they experienced during one of their many stays in England.⁴⁷ Local police⁴⁸ would continually uproot them throughout the day so that they were constantly moving from one area to another. “The police would say, ‘Move on, move on’”(75); this echoes the penultimate line repeated in each of the six stanzas of the poem⁴⁹. One verse appears in the text immediately following the above quotation. Four more stanzas open the next chapter that bears the poem’s title and a sixth stanza appears two paragraphs further

below. The first two lines of the first stanza remember a more tolerant past when, “Once you could pull in with your caravan / To a sheltered spinney or to open ground” (75: 1-2). The sense of safe haven connoted by “sheltered spinney”, and the more informal use of space suggested by “open ground” contrast with the present rigorous application of “the law” in the next line that hints at a state-sponsored suppression of nomadism:

But the law moved in with the barbed-wire fence
And they said that your camp was a prime offence
And told you to shift and keep on going
And move along, get along, move along, get along,
Go: move: shift. (75: 3-7)

The irony of “prime offence” suggests that repressive tactics far outweigh the ‘crime’ of nomadism. The allusion to “barbed-wire” evokes internment camps or prisons, emphasizing confinement, containment and loss of freedom. The image underlines the prejudice that motivates the faceless, nonindividuated figures who represent authority: the policeman, the farmer, the “local people”, the law and the council. In each of the stanzas where quotation marks indicate speech (generally in the last three lines), these authority figures divest themselves of the Traveller presence in their vicinity without heed to the consequences of their actions on Traveller lives. That economic interests are a factor behind this persecution is underlined in the next stanza where, “The local people said to me / ‘You’ll lower the price of property’” (77: 17-18). Joyce’s perception of class as an important factor in their persecution substantiates David Sibley’s contention that economic interests often buttress modern forms of persecution. Sibley, referring to the “eviction ... of many English⁵⁰ Gypsy sites,” asserts that persecution of minorities has an economic basis and “demonstrate[s] the need of the state to secure the interests of capital through socio-spatial control of ‘deviance’ and cultural difference” (84). Joyce recounts one of many incidents when they were forced to move that echoes the line in the

poem about falling property values. She testifies that after being evicted from a roadside early one morning, they tried to pull in next to some “swanky-looking houses ... with a big high wall round them” (93) to make something to eat but, “The very minute we pulled in a gang of people came out from the houses. They were calling us names and shouting, ‘You’re not camping here!’” (93). Joyce notes the obvious luxury of the houses behind the dividing wall, a concrete manifestation of social barriers. Socio-economic spatial divisions such as the widespread practice of developing suburban neighbourhoods by income segregation typical of modern urban planning have the effect of further isolating segments of society so that there is no chance for dialogue – in the important sense of achieving mutual understanding – since the parties are physically so far removed.

Joyce demonstrates that the control of space is an outward manifestation of power relations. In her poem, Travellers are relegated to figurative and actual borderlands. In the first stanza of the four stanzas that open Chapter Nine, Traveller babies are born on roadsides: “Born in the middle of the afternoon / In a horse-drawn trailer on the old A5 / The big twelve-wheeler shook my bed” (77: 1-3). The first line of the third of these four stanzas, “Born on a common near a building site” (77: 15), also expresses the liminality of their social position in terms of a spatial placement. Their inability to find a figurative space within the nation translates to inhabiting the actual physical peripheries of communities, camped on the edges of town, and in larger urban centres halting in undeveloped or abandoned industrial areas, under overpasses and in other underused locales. While this is partly for practical reasons (this is where they find “unused”

space), the physical segregation also offers a tangible emblem of the peripheral status they occupy in Irish society.

Joyce uses poetry didactically, bringing to light an actual social issue. In doing so, she maintains the rhetorical uses of lyric poetry, and thus maintains the public functions of the poem. Incorporating conventions that indicate poetic form, e.g. versification, rhyme and repetition (the latter two elements retained as memory aids from the time when poetry was an oral performance), Joyce argues a case against forced evictions, and therefore, for space within the nation, almost as directly as she does in her prose. The gradual evolution of poetry away from spoken recitations to emphasis on literary forms was reflected in a shift of focus from outward concerns, the social world of the spoken word, to the more inward self-reflexivity and subjectivity of the lyric poem, a form that became strongly associated with Romanticism, the individuated self and the literary⁵¹. Joyce's use of poetry for political purposes parallels the tendency in her autobiography to downplay a more self-absorbed subjectivity and emphasize more comprehensive, community-oriented concerns.

Because Travellers have been written out of history, Joyce tries to establish Travellers as patriots by asserting their active participation in nation building. Her apocryphal story of gun smuggling by Travellers during the "troubles"⁵² challenges their 'victimhood' status by depicting Travellers as proactive. The humorous anecdote was related to her father as a firsthand account by the Traveller couple involved. The story goes that the Black and Tans, British paramilitary police active during the Civil War (renowned for their thuggery), were about to search the Traveller couple's cart where guns were hidden when the husband, who was walking beside the cart, told his wife, who

was sitting on the cart, “‘Scratch’ ... so she started scratching. He walked over to the two soldiers, scratching away, and he said to them ‘Have you got any cure for lice sir? I’m walking alive.’ When the Black and Tans heard this they backed away, they wouldn’t come near him and they wouldn’t go near the cart” (27). The humour lies in the shrewd manipulation of the soldiers’ predetermined beliefs, making both the soldiers and their prejudgments appear ridiculous. Because the Traveller couple turn negative stereotypes to their favour, the story operates as a ‘trickster’ motif where the wily trickster / underdog / Traveller (anti-hero) outwits the Black and Tans, the byword of foreign authority and domination in the struggle for independence. The trickster character exemplifies that adherence to and exhortation of a strict moral code that emphasizes straightforwardness is reserved for the privileged, a role personified by the ‘hero’, by swordplay and gunslinging. The trickster is a shapeshifter, adaptive to circumstances, a creator god gifted with the ability to rise from the ashes of disaster. Therefore, the role of trickster is usually played by characters of weaker social status who use their intelligence and wit to achieve their goals. As well as proving Travellers to be agents of history, the story points to their loyalty as republicans and patriots, underlining Joyce’s persistent argument: we are Travellers *and* we are Irish.

Julie Cruikshank supports years of field research working in the northern Canada among First Nations elders and storytellers with the findings of anthropologists and historians. In her essay, “Oral Tradition and Oral History – Reviewing Some Issues,” Cruikshank cites a study by David Cohen who, while working among clans in East Africa, noted that those clans with superior resources were able to record their genealogies, and therefore these histories “came to be accorded considerable status and

gradually assumed the character of official history” (“Oral Tradition” 4 of 8). Other clans “whose histories were overlooked in the process ... never accepted that the recorded accounts represented their interests, nor did the written versions assume any particular authority in their eyes” (Cruikshank “Oral Tradition” 4 of 8). Cohen’s findings are of interest not only because they mirror attitudes to official discourse expressed in Maher’s memoir, but also because of the degree to which they could parallel the moment in Irish history when literate Irish monks transcribed pre-Christian myths. In the process, early monks appropriated by Christianizing Celtic customs, myths and beliefs, reifying these Christianized versions through the act of inscription.

Because oral tradition obviously precedes written documentation, the facts of prehistory are much more difficult to ascertain, and archaeological texts permit even more latitude for conjecture than historical texts. Scholar R.P.C. Hanson points out that while very little is known *in fact* about St. Patrick (other than his British origins), almost everything accepted as apocryphal wisdom is in fact not true. Hanson asserts, “He did not banish snakes from Ireland. He did not illustrate the doctrine of the Trinity by the example of the shamrock ...” (24), etc. Whereas all that remains of Patrick’s written communications are the *Letter to Coroticus* and the *Confession* (Hanson 23) (with a third work, *St. Patrick’s Breastplate*, ascribed to him by tradition but, at least in its written form, traced to three centuries after his death (O’Donoghue “Breastplate” 45)), the earliest books about his life were penned about two hundred years after his death and so were based on oral sources. Want of facts however did not lessen the enduring influence of these apocryphal legends in shaping Irish identity, proving that beyond what can be ascertained in ‘fact’, these stories contain a symbolic value.

Gibbons argues convincingly that after the Williamite defeat at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, it became even more crucial for trampled Catholic aspirations to advance positive counter-discourses in order to neutralize the inferiorizing rhetoric of British colonizers. As discussed above, it was “in the interests of native Irish historians” to resist the nature / culture dualism that permitted legitimization of colonial occupations in other British colonies allotting the confiscated lands to empty “nature”. Therefore Irish historians promoted the idea of a Celtic cultural continuity in Ireland “from the dawn of antiquity” (Gibbons 153). Essentially, Traveller narratives propose similar tactics for similar reasons, in order to counteract non-Traveller beliefs that place Traveller origins in a narrative of defeat, as victims of the Famine, which denies them status as an enduring and separate culture.

The possibility that Traveller versions of apocryphal history have any substantive basis, that they may be as true, or as false (in the sense of oversimplified and unsubstantiated) as more official versions also based on very meagre historical ‘evidence’, is one concession that Lanters’ assessment of Traveller self-representations seems unable to make, although she does recognize their positive symbolic value. Such phrasing as, “Travellers sometimes endow themselves with respectable ancestors” (28), and “historical self-explanation often takes the form of poetic self-invention” (28), suggests that Lanters regards any truth substance in Traveller oral histories as implausible. In this attitude, Lanters emulates British empirical philosophers John Locke and David Hume, who both rejected oral representations based on “popular memory” (Gibbons 154) as too far removed from the reliability of the printed text. Stone-Mediatore overturns this reification of the written text over other kinds of evidence when

she proposes that one should read “the historical text as a story” (165). Rather than dismiss oral accounts, the researcher, by heeding popular beliefs as if they could have an origin in archaic history, opens the investigative mind to alternative interpretations of archaeological evidence. Maher’s mother underlines the educative importance of these accounts and stresses the reliability of the speakers when she says, ““We on the road can’t write our deeds, but we do remember them and pass them down faithfully by word of mouth”” (68). Maher appreciates the merit of both kinds of knowledge. Although he received only four years of formal education, this was fairly intensive and thorough, giving him a good basis in Irish literature and history. To this conventional canon, he brought his knowledge of traditional Traveller songs and stories. Nevertheless, he noticed discrepancies and questioned why the stories he heard at school were “different” from those he heard at home. In a conversation with one of his tutors, he brings up St. Patrick. ““You never tell about him being a traveller”” (Maher 127), he says. The Brother casts doubt on this unfamiliar adaptation. ““[Y]ou may have heard a false version””, he answers, but young Sean objects, ““No, it was not false, it’s the one in the schoolbook that’s wrong”” (Maher 127). The Brother is able to concede that there are many versions of history, each of them with different views of events: ““With Irish history, English, Danish and what have you, perhaps yours is not false, after all””(Maher 127).

Although the Brother’s first reaction may have been to dismiss Sean’s version, historians who have studied oral history recognize similarities between written and oral accounts. Cruikshank argues, “All are structured, interpretive, combative, and subjective as well as objective” (“Oral Tradition” 3 of 8). Rather than cast doubt on orality as less

reliable than more 'authentic' historical documents, historian Judith Binney characterizes all history as a form of storytelling, discovering and uncovering 'truths' that are being constructed within the time and context in which the interpretation is being written / rewritten when she states that "[a]ll histories derive from a particular time, a particular place and a particular cultural heritage" (quoted in Cruikshank "Oral Tradition" 3 of 8). Binney also contests the claim that oral histories are less reliable because they may change over time, and notes that "Eurohistory ... has a lifespan of about ten or fifteen years before it gets reinterpreted; in contrast the life of an oral history is considerably longer" (cited in Cruikshank "Oral Tradition" 4 of 8). It is understood that Binney would be referring not to 'facts', but to the interpretation of data that the historiographer uses in an attempt to close the gap between the writing present and an irretrievable past. As Mikhail Bakhtin has remarked, "It is impossible to change the factual, thing-like side of the past, but the meaningful, expressive, speaking side can be changed, for it is unfinalized" (quoted in Luke Gibbons 3). Because the meaning ascribed to the past changes according to the political climate and ideological stance of the writing present, there exists no virgin territory of pristine historical data that can claim exclusive monopoly on truth telling.

Lanters' essay makes assumptions about the inherent inferiority of oral forms of knowledge commonly held within literate cultures and therefore fails to question how mechanisms of power legitimate some stories over others. While St. Patrick, St. Brigid and St. Kevin all are accepted as founding figures within the national discourse, how to interpret these largely mythical figures, how to decipher historical fact based on physical evidence from legend, is by no means without controversy. As Michel de Certeau

concludes, “[h]istorical facts’ ... speak of ‘choices’ which are precedents, and which are therefore not the result of observation — which are not even verifiable but ... only ‘falsifiable’” (citing Karl Popper 59). Paradigms can change. Feminist scholars, for example, have interpreted artifacts such as rock engravings in ways that support their argument that Brigid was first revered as a goddess before she was appropriated as a saint by the newly fledged Catholic faith taking hold on Irish shores⁵³. Because of an absence of historical documentation, Traveller versions of early Irish history are as difficult to prove or discount as varying interpretations of Celtic legends. Traveller reappropriations of foundational myths are driven by motives similar to the Anglo-Irish Literary Revival’s emphasis on traditional stories and legends: first as a positive self-identity, especially important as a response to negative interpellations, and secondly, as a way of writing a place of belonging within the nation. The first impetus is largely interiorised as an affirmative narrative of selfhood and the second objective is turned outward to engage a public forum.

Cruikshank has detailed the symbolic function stories serve as positive self-narrative after having worked with First Nations women elders in the Canadian Yukon. Cruikshank noticed that these women incorporated traditional stories into their lives in ways that helped them in “evaluating contemporary choices”, and concluded that “If one has optimistic stories about the past ... one can draw on internal resources to survive and make sense of arbitrary forces that might otherwise seem overwhelming” (*Social Life* xii). Adaptability is a noteworthy feature of these traditional stories. Traveller stories that recast Traveller characters into positive and pivotal roles in nation building fulfill this same helpful self-constructing function. Lanters recognizes one aspect of this

twofold significance, the symbolic role, when she concludes her essay by referring to “writing one’s life story [as] taking control of one’s own narrative, inventing oneself poetically, and imagining oneself into the future” (41). (Maher’s mother subverts this noble optimism somewhat by imagining the ‘future’ as apocalyptic. The significance of this trope will be discussed in Part III.)

Maher, like Joyce, traces Travellers back to at least St. Patrick’s time, asserting a Traveller presence in Ireland contiguous with the period when this Irish ‘apostle’ was evangelizing and Christianizing the island. His mother depicts an active Traveller participation in Patrick’s ministry. Her version of the traditional St. Patrick’s story contrasts with one gleaned from Gaelic speakers in the West of Ireland, recorded by Lady Gregory in *A Book of Saints and Wonders*, published in 1906. The latter rendition correlates with the Traveller version in that both make a Traveller presence contiguous with St. Patrick’s ministry. In Lady Gregory’s translation, St. Patrick curses the “tinkers” for trying to deceive him for their own personal profit. Patrick’s curse, “[A]s for the tinkers, every man’s face is against them and their face is against every man, and they get no ease or rest, but are ever and always travelling the world” (Gregory 44), essentially justifies the persecution of Travellers as divine judgment originating in their own nefarious nature. Helleiner (50) notes that Traveller versions invert these traditional stories in which nomadism (whether Traveller or Roma or ‘Wandering Jew’) is believed to be punishment for participation in the death of Christ. In Maher’s mother’s story of St. Patrick, not only do Travellers offer the slave boy hospitality and refuge, helping him escape his bondage, but when he returns from mainland Europe years later, “it was to [Travellers] that he first preached the words of Christ” (Maher 70). This claim suggests

that Travellers are a chosen people also implied by her assertion that the Travellers ““became his disciples”” (70), a story that parallels the Biblical scene where Christ chooses ordinary fishermen to be his followers. (This idea of Travellers as chosen people will recur more potently in the story of St. Kevin in Part III.)

Although Maher the writer is recording Traveller stories in his memoir, he almost invariably places the story in the mouth of the character associated with the story, which may be out of respect to a sense of proprietorship (Cruikshank found a similar deference among Yukon First Nations storytellers that attributes ownership of stories to specific individuals) or may correspond with the way Maher’s memory functions (memories tend to have a spatial rather than a temporal context according to Edward S. Casey who notes “this is especially true of childhood memories” (229). The boy Sean remembers his mother recounting the story of St. Patrick at bedtime as they waited for his abusive father to return to their camp, knowing he was out drinking. The dread of his father’s imminent arrival shows in his mother’s fretting, “as soon as you hear him coming, scoot off into bed”” (69), so that for the reader, as most likely for Maher, the story becomes etched in a particular time, place and circumstance. Here, this creates a poignant dissonance between the story’s mythic setting and the actual family situation.

When his mother tells him that it was the Travellers who helped St. Patrick escape from slavery, immediately the boy Sean questions the veracity of the story: ““Mammy, this might have been a made-up story”” (68). Maher’s tactic is typical of the ways in which storytellers anticipate and address opposition before it arises, either by dismantling audience scepticism or admitting their own doubts (Bourke “Virtual Reality” 10). His mother admits the story might not be true but adds, ““I believe it,”” and then argues at

length for the reliability of oral tradition. She reasons, “‘I know that this and other stories are passed down from generation to generation among the travellers, and they are not people who add to tales themselves’” (Maher 68). The last point confirms the dependability of the storyteller. Next the integrity (rather than the literal accuracy) of the account is assured:

‘You must remember that the records of deeds in the past are always passed down by word of mouth. From listening at campfires when stories are told, you will know what great attention is given to detail. I have heard a story at one camp-fire and maybe years later I have heard the same story at another, the important details still unchanged. You must remember that story-telling is our only means of communication with the past.’ (Maher 68)

In this passage, she draws upon the same process that disseminated the *Iliad* and the *Pentateuch*, amongst other influential Western works, before these oral transmissions were ever committed to writing. His mother is correct in saying, “‘the important details [are] still unchanged,’” but in emphasizing the faithfulness of a story over time, she elides the skill of the storyteller. Each performance involves improvisational adaptations with embellishments or omissions responsive to the particular audience so that no two oral performances are alike (Ong *Orality* 59). Emphasis on word for word accuracy are obsessions based on a textual model; these strictures do not apply in the same way to performances that cannot return to a written text to confirm accuracy (Ong *Orality* 57-8). Maher reaffirms his mother’s confidence in the trustworthiness of the storyteller when he later says, “‘Whatever else one can say about the travellers of Ireland it can’t be said that they are inclined towards exaggeration or lying’” (157), to which his travelling companion concedes but with a disclaimer, “‘Yes,’ said Joshua, ‘I’ll grant you that, but, just the same, a lot of the tales are of the superstitious kind’” (157). This concession followed by a counter-proposal is a recurring strategy in Maher’s memoir indicating that while he cherishes the stories he recounts, feeling always the outsider from both

communities, he steps back and views them from the perspective afforded by his years of formal education.

Such “poetic” inventions as the Traveller version of St. Patrick’s ministry at the very least provide creative and constructive alternatives to conventional discourse (as well as to silences and gaps in that discourse), and show that Travellers grasp the significant role symbols play in scripts of national belonging. The underlying lesson of his mother’s teaching rather than its literal historicity moves the boy not only to dream, but also to defend his dreams. Therefore Maher defends the truth of his mother’s stories. As a boy, Sean often would be invited into people’s homes as he did his “rounds”, begging or selling from door to door. In a conversation with a non-Traveller family who had invited him in to eat, Sean was laughed at when he told them he wanted to be a priest: “[I]magine having a tinker priest” (64). Sean remonstrated, “I’m not a tinker, I’m a traveller, and our Blessed Lord himself was a traveller, ma’am ... My mother ... told us, and it’s true too, that Our Lord used to travel around all the time” (65). His ability to defend himself underlines the positive potential of such stories towards self-constructing narratives. The boy’s trust in the authority of his mother’s words demonstrates the important intergenerational component of oral culture. When this communication halts, as has been the tendency worldwide when micro-cultures are exposed to electronic mass media, the chain is broken and the danger arises that the next generation could lose a link with their cultural heritage. This underlines the importance of Traveller writing as a record of cultural history, as the writers themselves are often consciously aware, a means of recording a past so that it will be preserved for future generations.

Maher's mother's view that the spirit rather than the letter is preserved in oral stories corresponds with Marlene Kadar's approach to the difficulties posed vis-à-vis oral cultures and memory, specifically the problem of recovering the almost obliterated stories of Romany victims of the Holocaust. Faced with the quandary that very few Romany survivors have recorded their stories in "more conventional autobiographical genres", Kadar comes to accept that "traces or fragments of autobiographical telling must stand in for" (223) more complete histories. She comes to understand that "[m]emory registers what it felt like, not exactly what it was like and that slippage from "historical fact" to individual feeling and yearning is crucial to remember in our work in Autobiographical Studies" (Kadar 224). In spite of the dearth of written testimony, "traces of story and memory" (Kadar 226), and songs composed in concentration camps connect to a human dimension of the past not contained in facts or numbers or statistics about the Holocaust.

The Canadian legal system has had to move towards acknowledging the significance of legends and oral traditions as having a substantive basis in at least one court case involving First Nations land claims. In a court case that they initially lost, a decision later overturned, hereditary chiefs of the Gitksan⁵⁴ nation argued, "that the case before the Supreme Court [of British Columbia] should not depend on the literal accuracy of [their] histories. ... Oral tradition is more than literal history and should not be reduced to mere historical data, they argued, though it does provide evidence for scholars studying the past" (Cruikshank *Social Life* 64). The first judge dismissed their arguments, but the Supreme Court of Canada overturned his judgement on the grounds that "the trial judge erred by not taking into account oral histories of the natives presented to the court to establish their occupation and use of the land" (Matas et al., 1 of 3). The

latter judgement recognized oral tradition⁵⁵ as not untenable, opening the door for similar judgements. To extrapolate, Traveller claims that their ancestors numbered among the *filidh* of ancient Ireland (ambulatory “scholars and keepers of the flame of tribal wisdom” (Flannery 15)), have not been proven, neither have they been disproved; therefore, in academia, the debate should remain open.

By writing to create new perspectives on shared symbols Joyce and Maher reshape the historical. While the ‘mists of time’ may shroud mysteries, certain contemporary facts are in evidence. First, some stories and historical interpretations are deemed authentic while others are discounted, especially where they challenge dominant discourses and the status quo. Secondly, Travellers demonstrate the ability to put forward responses to historical omissions and errors that whether judged as creative imaginings or as having some basis in oral tradition can provide “optimistic” models that offset present hardships. These kinds of mythmaking are not dissimilar to the Irish Literary Revival’s constructions of nationalism as cultural and pre-colonial, and like the Anglo-Irish compositions attempt to circuit divisive issues that may otherwise jeopardize their claims to legitimate citizenship. However, to complicate the simplicity of the proposal that these stories provide optimistic self-explanations, Maher’s mother’s apocalyptic stories that predict the destruction of Travellers as a “race” could hardly be classified as ‘optimistic’ by the modern secular mind. The origins of such narratives and their function vis-à-vis defining oneself within the nation will be examined next in Part III.

Part III begins by examining the crucial influence of oral thinking in shaping the worldview that informs Maher’s mother’s miracle stories and Joyce’s religious concepts.

The dollman's anti-modern viewpoints background the economic and social conditions that give rise to the apocalyptic perspectives expressed by Maher's characters as a reaction to trauma: the national trauma of colonialism, the collective trauma inflicted on Travellers, and Maher's personal trauma.

PART III: HAUNTED BY HISTORY: DISCOURSES AGAINST “ANGLO-SAXON EMPIRICISM”

I am ready to go home
through an autumn evening.

Suddenly,
without any warning, I can see them.

They form slowly out of the twilight.
Their faces. Arms. Greatcoats. And tears.

They are holding maps.
But the pages are made of fading daylight.
Their tears, made of dusk, fall across the names.

Although they know by heart
every inch and twist of the river
which runs through this town, and their houses—
every aspect of the light their windows found—
they cannot find where they come from:

The river is still there.
But not their town.
The light is there. But not their moment in it.

Then they faded.
And the truth is I never saw them.

(Eavan Boland, “The Colonists”)

Speaking Against “Anglo-Saxon Empiricism”: The World as Cosmos

Simplistic scenarios about cultural domination cannot account for the capacity of the creative imagination to subvert hegemonic scripts⁵⁶. While more elite, erudite culture functions within established institutions, current cultural trends (the proliferation of electronic media sites, for example) indicate the extent to which culture propagates from below, from the grassroots. Traveller writing affirms the inherent intelligence and creativity of thinking, feeling people, even if their social position is not graced with privilege. Because of the ever-present risk that oral accounts will be lost forever

(especially when the performer dies), Maher spends much time / space recounting traditional stories, always attributed to a storyteller, and therefore rendered as a borrowing (as well as a retrieval). In order to preserve these stories (and the way of life they represent), Maher undertakes to create a written record, even though writing orality poses the problem of the lost spontaneity of the storytelling performance. While spoken language is fluid, always in movement, written language becomes a static object separate from the scribe (Ong *Orality* 46). Orality is a language of presence. It is a live performance, an action, not an object. This is the compromise. Maher structures his accounts so that the setting of the retelling, as well as the circumstances of the event, characteristics of the storyteller, reactions of the audience etc., are set forth. By these means, a sense of theatrical 'timing' remains.

Besides stories featuring visitations from departed souls ('ghost' stories), many of these conveyed by visitors to their campfire, his mother's repertoire includes miracle stories, as well as tales of apocalypse. All of these genres share a common characteristic evident in the narrative structure as revealed through the telling of the tale: a kind of religious veneration for the incredible and the inexplicable based on a belief in the supernatural and an afterworld. Unfortunately, there is not space in Part III to investigate the function of ghost stories, but Maher's mother's stories of miraculous wells and her tales of the apocalypse will be examined. The shocking pessimism of Maher's apocalyptic predictions can best be understood as reflecting not only a worldview, but also concrete living conditions, a reaction to the stress of sustained social marginalization. Mircea Eliade notes that in apocalyptic literature "the end of the world is never absolute; it is always followed by the creation of a new, *regenerated* world"

(Eliade's italics 1960). However, in Maher's mother's story, this new world does *not* include Travellers as a people.

In contradistinction to Maher's fatalism, Joyce's mystical experiences inspire a more inclusive perspective that leads her to an expanded role as a community leader. Ong and Eliade see both worldviews, however distinct in their outward manifestations, as typical of the universe of the oral thinker where the natural world is perceived as a manifestation of an all-pervasive "life force". Whether this be interpreted as spirit or god / God, this presence imbues the world with meaning. In fact, the outward world manifests God / god / spirit, much as literate societies consider 'God' to be expressed through a written text. In a sense, the world is a living text to be read and interpreted, animated by spirit. Like the spoken word, this text is an action, always in movement, always changing, and therefore one must always remain open to the divine manifest. Ong identifies the grounds for difference between this and the modern scientific mode of thought as language, the cognitive differences between orality and literacy, and their reliance on the aural and visual respectively.

How we experience language shapes how we experience our world. Because of "the centering action of sound", the world of oral – aural cultures surrounds and envelopes, like sound (Ong *Orality* 73). In this worldview, human beings share kinship with the non-human world, whereas in worldviews that emphasize the visual, the universe becomes distant and removed. The emphasis on the visual in literate societies produces a marked distinction between the human and its environment that allows for objectification or 'thingness', and therefore scientific enquiry. Louis A. Sass summarizes this spatial and psychic alienation as typifying modernity, a "desacralization" of space

“initiated by Galilean and Newtonian science and grounded in Cartesian dualism whereby the external world is stripped of all magical, religious, value-laden, or anthropomorphic characteristics and is grasped by a purely calculative rationality” (205). Basing his summary on Martin Heidegger, Sass argues that “the objectivist vision of modern science and technology” (205) allows for the exploitation of other life forms and the earth’s resources because the natural world is perceived “in terms of an ordering that accords with human categories and needs” (Sass 205)⁵⁷.

Noel Dermot O’Donoghue politicizes philosophical trends when he depicts “empiricism” as a “British” invention. He creates a contradistinction between “Celtic” worldviews and English beliefs when he identifies the philosophical materialism of “empiricism” as a uniquely “Anglo-Saxon” invention (even though the roots of empiricism can be traced to Aristotle). His viewpoint reveals the reverberations of post-colonial grievances persist. He perpetuates a nationalism that tends to define British and Irish national characteristics as comprising general, oppositional features. O’Donoghue is not completely clear on his terminology though his explanation that there are unchanging ideas “closely intertwined” with the world of the “senses” (*Angels* 25-29) brings to mind Plato’s belief in “a more real and perfect realm, populated by entities (called “forms” or “ideas”) that are eternal, [and] changeless, and [that are] in some sense paradigmatic for the structure and character of our world” (“Plato” 1 of 14). He most probably refers to “British” Empiricism and “the great triumvirate” (“David Hume”) of Locke, Hobbes and Hume. At any rate, he sets these unnamed “Anglo-Saxon” philosophers as oppositional to “Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Hegel [and] Heidegger and nearly all the great philosophers outside the Anglo-Saxon tradition [that] accept the

reality of an intelligible or spiritual world distinct from the material world” (O’Donoghue *Angels* 26). O’Donoghue infers the philosophy of empiricism as a failure when he observes, “nearly all the great philosophers outside the Anglo-Saxon tradition accept the reality of an intelligible or spiritual world distinct from the material world” (*Angels* 26)⁵⁸. Rational materialism might be a more accurate term since his argument seems to address purely materialistic notions of reality.

O’Donoghue’s contention that British empiricism represents an intellectual rift with earlier notions of reality is supported by Gibbons who uncovers textual evidence that indicates the grave suspicions held by British intellectuals toward contemporaneous Irish worldviews. Empiricist philosopher David Hume, for one, opposed the preponderance of orality in Ireland that he perceived as antithetical to rationality. Hume, writing about Ireland in 1796, “[argued] that tradition and popular memory were indistinguishable from credulity and superstition” (Gibbons 154). Certainly, Hume’s views connecting popular culture, religion and orality fall in line with Enlightenment philosophy, where “religion ... retains a voice” through a connection to orality and popular culture, but “one which is superstitious, deprived of reason, and foreign to the knowledge already possessed by the enlightened milieus” (de Certeau 184). Furthermore, de Certeau argues, because “the group (or the individual) is legitimized”, or defined, “by what it excludes” (5), by what it is *not*, “the rationality of the Enlightenment maintains a necessary relation with its other” (174). These civilizing, educating compulsions struggle to fill a lack in the unacceptable Other — de Certeau lists the “illiterate populous, the child, the savage” (174). Hume meanwhile attributes the difficulty the English encountered in the “subduing and civilizing of that country”

(quoted in Gibbons 154) to the supposed Irish intellectual deficit signified by the tenacity of popular culture and (Roman Catholic) religious belief. With “‘civilization’ [defined and circumscribed] within what comprises writing” (de Certeau 184), it follows that the rationality of print culture was seen as essential to the ‘civilizing’ influence advanced by the colonialist project, but the tenacious recalcitrance of orality thwarted the eradication of Irish backwardness, as English writer William Thackeray commented almost one hundred years after Hume’s observations. In *The Irish Sketch Book*, Thackeray laments the apparent inability of the burgeoning print culture in Ireland to completely eradicate the “‘lies and tradition’” (quoted by Gibbons 146) perpetuated by “oral tradition and popular religious practice” (Gibbons 146).

Rational materialism has formed the scientific and technological basis of the modern era, a rationality that limits the parameters of intellectually acceptable modern beliefs to the world that can be known factually. Joyce’s interpretations of life events as supernatural and Maher’s fantastic fictions of the surreal broaden notions of reality to encompass the inexplicable. Presenting worldviews that embrace the possibility of mystery and magic opens up the boundaries of the modern imagination that tends to valorize what can be seen and verified, the visible over the hidden. In this sense, Joyce and Maher’s expressions of what O’Donoghue defines as “Celtic” beliefs not only underline the worldviews Ong and Eliade find common to oral cultures, but reintroduce age-old beliefs that might be considered archaic, except that they address contemporary environmental and social issues in ways that offer alternative paradigms for defining (and therefore inventing) Ireland in the modern world. In this way, their writing represents not an anachronism but an active challenge to accepted wisdom.

Oral influences are evident not only in Maher's inclusion of traditional Traveller ghost and wonder stories, but also in the facility with which Joyce incorporates occurrences that she attributes to supernatural causes into the 'realism' of her 'life story', an odd strategy considering that she in particular wants to convince the reader of the reliability of her account. Even though these transitions between the ordinary and the extraordinary are presented as a natural facet of her life, their unusual content disrupts the reader's expectations of a realist text. Maher's miracle stories and Joyce's mysticism integrate rationality and irrationality by dissolving the boundary between the natural and the supernatural in ways that flout the Enlightenment rationalist worldview (Cavallaro 44), as does the continuing practice of Traveller veneration of holy wells and other religious traditions now often regarded even by observant Catholic non-Travellers as superstitious.

What makes one set of beliefs acceptable while other people's practices are judged as superstitions? Within modernity, one factor seems to correlate with how far removed practice is from daily life. De Certeau notes that while "'de-Christianization'" (183) occurred with the Enlightenment, this is more accurately defined as "a deterioration of the religious universe [since] Christian faith is still compatible with this disappearance" (183). The nature of what is 'acceptable' religious practice and belief changed. Examining "official clerical discourse", de Certeau finds that as priests became more learned, religious discourse became more "uniform and without internal contradictions; it was ruled by quotation, impermeable to personal experience" (189). This growing distance between experience and the theoretical was also reflected in the absence "of references to real local life" (de Certeau 189). Religious belief expressed

through a close connection with daily life reflects the immediacy of orality and therefore is deemed regressive, while beliefs based on an abstract distant 'law-giver' / 'law-maker' reflect literate modes of knowing and are therefore deemed enlightened. Irish history provides a fairly recent example of modernist / anti-modernist ruptures that results in dividing knowledge into acceptable and unacceptable forms. In Ireland, this break with the past paralleled the hegemony of colonial powers and was born out of the devastation of the Famine. The loss and dislocation generated as the aftereffects of this national catastrophe were expressed as an extensive rejection of traditional ways.

To be considered respectable and to gain social advancement within a colonized nation requires "appropriating the culture of the colonizer" (Bourke "Reading" 4). Bourke observes that in the post-Famine era, an urban Catholic middle-class distanced itself from the 'benightedness' of the past (that the catastrophic Famine seemed to epitomize) by rejecting traditional "folk" beliefs. Bourke suggests that language issues played a crucial role in that the Irish middle-class embraced "literacy, rather than orality; English rather than the Irish language" ("Reading" 4). (The latter element of each pair was seen as paradigmatic of ignorance.)

While the majority of Travellers are Catholic, popular modes of worship fell out of favour with the established church. Modernization in post-famine Ireland was paralleled in the religious sphere by centralizing within the Roman Catholic Church, an impulsion which sought to "exorcise the baneful influence of traditional cultural practices (such as wakes, 'keening', 'patterns' at holy wells, and other 'pagan' rituals) from religious devotions, bringing Irish Catholicism into line with *Roman Catholic* orthodoxy" (Gibbons' italics 136). This move within the Church to suppress popular belief came out

of the First Vatican Council 1869-70. Besides the claim to papal infallibility, this same council imposed devotional uniformity through an emphasis on education of religious and lay people, and regular church attendance and confession among the faithful (Gibbons 136). Though long eschewed by middle-class urban Catholics (Bourke “Reading” 4), popular traditions that, due to their pagan origins, often exist outside of without contravening official dogma, continued to be practiced among rural populations in Ireland even after Vatican II. They gradually fell out of favour to the point where even Catholic clergy criticize Traveller expressions of faith as ““emotional and impetuous”” (quoted in Ní Shúinéar “Othering” 188). In spite of the suppression of traditional devotions and rituals originating in pre-Christian customs Travellers continue to practice such outward demonstrations of faith as following “patterns”. These devotions involve an “annual pilgrimage ... on the feast day of the patron saint of the parish” (Ní Dhomhnaill 423) to a location associated with the saint, a site established through tradition. Many of these sacred places have pre-Christian, even druidic origins, and are therefore strongly associated with nature, with an emphasis on the hallowedness of the location. Those places that are still visited are numerous. Some are based on ancient traditions, such as Tara, once considered the *omphalos* of the world, and are identifiable by archaeological evidence. Besides these locations, other sites such as tree groves formed natural structures utilized for worship. Knowledge of at least some of these natural sites remains in popular memory. The criteria by which druidic wisdom chose these sites seems to have had to do with telluric lines, the belief that these junctures coincided with portals into the other worlds presumed to parallel the physical / temporal world of human experience.

One of the unique characteristics that O'Donoghue singles out as typical of "Celtic" belief is a sense of unity rather than separateness with the natural world evident by this sacralization of place. (Ong, as noted, considers this a general characteristic of oral cultures.) O'Donoghue identifies four characteristics of ancient Irish perceptions of reality, beliefs that were popularly known through a strong oral tradition of stories and legends that survived centuries of Christianisation. These beliefs share the common premise that there exists more than this physical world, that there are in fact other realities that coexist alongside our familiar world; thus the belief in the legendary little people, the fairy folk, as the original inhabitants of Ireland. The boundaries between these worlds are considered to be permeable. Therefore, some locales are avoided at certain times of the day or year while others are revered and visited en masse. Legends also tell that gods or elemental spirits or "abiding essences" (O'Donoghue citing Kathleen Raine *Angels* 36) inhabit Ireland. O'Donoghue notes that pagan beliefs have been Christianized to integrate a panoply of angels under whose watchful eye the believer is protected from harm. Finally, he identifies a fourth characteristic of Celtic beliefs, credence in spirits, which accepts that the deceased are "in some sense still present with family and friends" (O'Donoghue *Angels* 37). For the pious, reality encompasses not just the world of appearances but embraces the invisible in ways that can at times transform the everyday into the extraordinary.

In Ireland, sacred places have become interconnected with its colonial history, an influence O'Donoghue alludes to when he describes the significance of these sites and suggests the British as the source of historical hardships, "If we recall these places today and this sacredness of ancient and enduring sorrows, it is not in a spirit of triumphalism

or in a spirit of revenge against the gross imperial powers of the past” (*Angels* 4). This statement encompasses both the historicity of Sean’s mother’s tale of the holy well and reinforces the figure of a landscape haunted and sanctified by its history. Poets such as Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland⁵⁹ (see portions of Boland’s poem, “The Colonists” cited above) have utilized this trope that blurs temporal and spatial boundaries in ways attuned with Celtic sensibilities, making the historical palpable and suspending the supposed dichotomy of rationality and the unfathomable.

Landscapes Haunted by History

Maheer weaves extraordinary occurrences into tales of historical and cultural trauma, both personal and collective, explanations of suffering that may in some way offer a means by which he approaches his personal pain, the consequence of his troubled and lonely childhood. At least one prayer he relates indicates he suffered from invariable disappointment as a child. The child Sean prays, ““God, why don’t you make my father like me? Why don’t you stop him from fighting with my mother over me? She always sticks up for me, but when she does my father beats her. This isn’t fair, Lord. Why do you let it happen?”” (73). Maheer concludes, wryly, “But even God, it seemed then, hadn’t the answer to my questions” (73). This child’s view⁶⁰ of God’s direct intervention in human affairs was at least partly instilled by his mother. Speaking with her, Sean says, ““I hope God makes Daddy stop drinking””, to which his mother responds, ““God and his Blessed Mother love all poor travelling people and when we pray *hard enough* he will help us”” (my italics 66). In spite of the child’s prayers, circumstances do not change. Maheer’s mother’s words seem to imply that a want of fervency, lack of faith in the

suppliant, may be the cause of divine inaction. Even if Maher distances himself from his characters' views, apocalyptic language recurs often enough in *The Road to God Knows Where* that, though it is placed in the mouths of various speakers, it seems to reflect a certain tendency in Maher to despair.

Gibbons argues that “‘in conditions of acute stress’ ... [a] blurring of the boundaries between the personal and the political” occurs (quoting Miroslav Hroch 21) such that the individual identifies so strongly with national trauma that it becomes personal. Accordingly, Maher’s response to communal catastrophe integrates not only Ireland’s ordeal under colonial oppression, or Travellers as a persecuted people, but also unresolved childhood trauma that can only be expressed in more depersonalized terms. The difficulty of facing personal trauma makes the martyrdom at Colaney Well an ideal trope to commemorate and to release painful recollections, personal or national. However, the miracle stories recounted by Maher’s mother contravene the Roman Church’s effort to modernize, and instead cleave to the less centralized Catholicism that characterized Ireland before the mid-nineteenth century (i.e., before the Famine). Though her stories contest traditional lore among ‘country’ people that justify Traveller persecution as warranted on moral grounds, they also substantiate this sense of divine will, although inverting negative designations so that Travellers play the virtuous role. Due to Ireland’s troubled and at times bloody history, other sites besides those directly associated with the lives of official saints became sacred because of their historical significance, being the sites of battles etc., as Maher explores in the Colaney Well story. Given that tales of martyrdom predominate in “marginal” communities “confronted with

the threat of extinction” (de Certeau 273), the proliferation of such stories among Maher’s characters suggests a community that feels under siege.

Thematically, the story continues the idea of hardships that would otherwise be inexplicable were they not justified by a sense that sacrifice contributes to a greater good, a renewal of faith in believers. Such a belief is buoyed by faith in a hereafter where martyrdom will be rewarded. His mother’s story recalls a time of religious persecution, probably when Penal Laws made it illegal for Catholics to meet and worship. She explains that because believers “‘could not say Mass in public ... they had to find secret places to say it’” (85). The congregation (there were Travellers among them) is discovered as they worship by the well and, along with the priest, they “‘were murdered in cold blood by a band of soldiers’” (85). Within the conventions of a martyrdom tale, the soldiers, emissaries of the colonial power, represent the “devil” (de Certeau 273). Greg Garrard notes that “extreme moral dualism” (86) typifies apocalyptic language. Accordingly, Maher’s mother uses emotionally charged language to set a clear-cut distinction between good and evil that vilifies the “persecutors” and beatifies the martyred. Indeed, the first section of the narrative concludes with an atrocity that underscores the barbarity of the oppressors, “‘The priest, God bless him, was tortured before his body was cut in pieces’” (85). Although the place, Colaney Well, is identified, she does not give the timeframe of this event though historically it would have been between 1691 and the Rebellion of 1798, the year of the next account when a second priest is martyred. The irony of the second martyrdom is that the faithful were commemorating the earlier massacre at the same well. Their death as they worshipped confirms the sanctity of their spilled blood.

Having complied with the rhetorical necessity of grounding the introduction in historical events that authenticate the sacredness of the well through martyrdom, her story concludes with a “miracle” that employs religious iconography. Two doves appear to a Traveller couple camped under the tree where Colaney Well is located, “shining doves ... shining whiter than snow” (87), an epithetic phrasing typical of orality that recalls Biblical epithets such as, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Is. 1:18), where whiteness signifies a condition of absolute purity. Doves most often symbolize the Holy Spirit in Christian iconography. However, the presence of two doves is less easily translated to such a religious interpretation. They could represent love through their association with Aphrodite / Venus⁶¹. The light “like rays of sunlight” (87) that emanates from the doves, utilizes a tradition of Biblical and Classical dualisms that represent light as all that is morally good, just as darkness represents ignorance, sin and all that is negative. An unearthly voice, “the like of which the travellers had never heard before” (87), explains the origin of the well located in the hollow of the tree as the blood of the sacrificed “men and priests who died for the love of their Redeemer” (87), blood turned to water (another Biblical allusion⁶²) that now feeds the well. Although O’Donoghue uses less dualistic language, his statement that the four locations in Ireland and Scotland that he looks at in *The Angels Keep Their Ancient Places* are “sanctified by prayers and tears” (4), alludes to a similar principle of purity through martyrdom and sacrifice.

When the voice stopped speaking, the doves, emitting a “heavenly glow”, flew upwards, “higher and higher”, an ascension that serves as an instructive metaphor to the listening audience, pointing to the paradisiacal life to come, the reward of the faithful.

For some inexplicable reason inherent to the logic of wonder tales, the entire family, parents and children, dies in their sleep. In absence of a human witness, the events of this miraculous incident are related “by the spirit of the dead man” (88) to other Travellers who come to camp under the tree. The visitation from beyond points to this site as a portal where the distance between worlds can be traversed. Maher’s mother refers to the practice of tying amulets to a tree explaining this gesture “as a sort of offering to the goodness of God and the sacredness of the place” (88). Referred to as “rag trees” (Green 107, 108), this ancient custom, replicated around the world, connects human activity with the natural world, but also with the Spirit or spirits that animate that world. In order to dissociate from the literalness with which non-proponents have regarded such acts of veneration, Maher’s mother is *not* worshipping the tree. Rather, as Eliade observes, among those societies and individuals for whom the cosmos reveals Spirit⁶³, “nature always expresses something that transcends it” (118). The devout pay homage to the divine presence in all things of which this tree is but one manifestation.

In her proleptic conclusion, his mother anticipates and dismisses any logical explanations for the existence of the well, “Of course a lot of people will say that there is a spring going up the trunk of the tree ... and that’s why it stays full, but if this was the case the well would overflow; it never overflows nor goes dry” (88). She will only acknowledge the miraculous. That her story concludes with the formulaic, “there you are children ... that’s the true story of Colaney Well” (88), a reminder that orality is a medium necessarily transmitted between people, re-establishes this as a bedtime story. Concluding the chapter with such a formula undercuts his mother’s claim for a literal veracity, a distancing tactic that attests to Maher’s ambivalence to certain aspects of

Traveller culture, here, piety that many would consider to be superstition. So while Maher may want to create a record of traditional beliefs, he views such beliefs as a partial outsider, with the scepticism afforded by his scholarly education. This in-between status exacerbates his sense of alienation from his roots and the feeling of profound loneliness evident in the memoir's subtext.

The Bane of Modernity and Apocalyptic Consolations

Maher feels an outsider among his fellow Travellers. Likewise, Travellers feel and are treated as outsiders within the nation. Thus, Maher lives in a double solitude. He responds by presenting Traveller perspectives that expose social contradictions within modern capitalist democracies, inconsistencies that profess equality as a value even while disadvantaged groups are systematically excluded. Maher does not promote any obvious political agenda, but after he leaves home, his characters try to educate him in the ways of the world and this leads to heated discussions punctuated by invectives against perceived injustices. His emphasis on storytelling gives the appearance of being apolitical while the fictional style gives his characters the freedom to declare their views with little or no editorial input, a strategy that allows the writer room for exploration without commitment. Maher remains the 'master' storyteller (in the sense of being the creator of the space for these actors to express themselves in) while the characters appear autonomous. In allowing expression to these points of view, Maher gives voice to those people excluded from the benefits of progress for whom modernism represents loss. Their perspectives counterbalance dominant discourses by challenging conceptions the

majority take for granted, thus “offering radically new perspectives on basic historical categories and values, such as ‘work,’ ‘progress,’ and ‘justice’” (Stone-Mediatore 122).

While Joyce is the more overtly political writer, Maher articulates quite radical language through his characters. Both the doll-man and his mother use apocalyptic language to express and to explain their dire situation. Their extremism confirms Damian Thompson’s appraisal of “Apocalypticism ... as a genre born out of crisis” (quoted in Garrard 86). Language is polarized and depicts a moral “struggle between good and evil” (Thompson in Garrard 86). While Greg Garrard notes that Christian millenarianism “stresses radical discontinuity” (88), an ahistoricism that releases the believer from engagement in present temporal governments, such views are by no means apolitical. Even if proponents choose to opt out of present systems (which they see as corrupt and destined for destruction), apocalypticism is a political stance. Examining the doll-man’s anti-modernist diatribe as a product of the social reality that fuels it helps to shed light on the grim prognostications concerning the destiny of Travellers.

Maher met the doll-man when he and his wife befriended the twelve-year-old Sean after he ran away from his parents. The couple were acquainted with Maher’s parents and knew of his father’s drinking. His nickname comes from the unique way in which the doll-man makes a living. The couple travelled from town to town and in each town the doll-man would give a performance using his hand-cart as a stage featuring his hand-made, ‘dancing’ marionette to the accompaniment of a mechanical music box that required winding. In a culture where old people are rare, the doll-man, “nearly seventy-six years of age” (103), is a survivor. His experience and viewpoint are from an earlier generation; he speaks of times from before World War I. In his lifetime, therefore, he has

seen great changes, including the tumultuous transition from colonial rule to the founding of the Irish Republic after the Civil War (1922). Maher distances himself from the doll-man's views by presenting them as the jeremiad of an old man, offering no opinion on them, though reasonably, being part of his memoir, they are formative to his identity in some way. Only in the closing pages when he writes of "the horribleness of modern ethics and thinking" (164), does Maher openly articulate his view regarding modernism, though these could be surmised due to the propagation of similar anti-modern espousals from his characters. At this juncture, Maher admits that the "great influence" the doll-man had over him was as valuable as "whatever learning I got in the years afterwards" (100), an appraisal that would encompass his formal education. In the doll-man's version of literary history, Chaucer, Shakespeare and other "great figures of literature" (100) were either Travellers or gleaned their stories and derived their inspiration from Traveller tales. He goes further in attributing an ancient and honourable lineage, tracing Traveller origins to "the days of the kings of Ireland and their clans" (105).

These are the kinds of claims that Lanthers dismisses outright with the somewhat condescending: "Travellers sometimes endow themselves with respectable ancestors by casting important cultural and historical figures into the role of Travellers" (28). She quotes some of the several instances in Maher's book when his characters make claims such as the dollman's: "St. Patrick was a great pavvy⁶⁴" (106). Lanthers interprets these assertions as pure fiction, but she does acknowledge their symbolic significance, writing that "such stretching of the parameters of what a Traveller is" (29) broadens "the narrower ethnic definition put forward today by Traveller organizations" (29) — but whether she feels this is a positive trend remains open-ended. Though the dollman's

assertion is decidedly overstated — he proposes, for example, that “the *writing* that has survived from early Irish history was written by Travellers” (my emphasis 105) — Lanter’s dismissal suggests that she is unable to entertain any truth value in such assertions, even though historically, more privileged artists, writers and musicians (i.e., those who enjoy the benefits of a broader cultural education that reflect a more mainstream status), appropriate “folk” tales, songs and imagery from minority cultures around the world. Regarding this issue, Canadian writer, Ronald Lee, a Roma, opens his “autobiographical novel”, *Goddam Gypsy*, on the subject of appropriation framed as an accusation: “Our music, our art, our crafts, our fashions have been stolen to be presented in the concert halls and museums of the world ... All that we have created through the centuries has been taken from us, and yet in popular myth we are the ‘thieves’” (no pagination)⁶⁵. Far from dismissing the doll-man, Sean believes in the rich cultural heritage of Travellers, even though this is not confirmed by what he learns at school.

The doll-man’s tales of a vibrant Traveller culture from a glorious, mythical past creates an even sharper contrast in comparison with the poverty of their present-day living conditions. The doll-man exposes the inherent contradictions of modern society when he censures “the so-called progress of the nation” (Maher 105) for bringing harm to Travellers, “I see the great injustice that is being done to all our people on the road ... The only progress for those on the road is misery, suffering and abuse” (105). This negative assessment of modernism, a lifestyle that is usually considered an achievement points up the fact that during times of economic expansion already marginalized groups do not necessarily benefit. Instead they tend to “remain in poverty”, and may even be harmed by being displaced or otherwise “debilitated by ‘development’” with “little legal

or political” recourse (Stone-Mediatore 180). Even though people without formal education such as the doll-man lack a theoretical background in economics, they understand labour relations through experiencing working conditions and supply-and-demand fluctuations first-hand. Therefore their perspectives provide often ignored points of view (Stone-Mediatore 180). By depicting progress as a loss, Traveller perspectives expose the human cost of so-called progress for more marginalized individuals or groups who may be negatively impacted (through dislocations, loss of traditional livelihood etc.). Though Maher is less overtly political, the dollman’s invective against the ‘evils’ of modernism remain firmly grounded in a social context and so reveal the trauma of persecution that causes visions of apocalypse to seem a solace for the subjugated.

Such grassroots analyses bring a human variable into official economic equations. The dollman’s testimony encapsulates Marxist critique of capitalist exploitation. As in Joyce’s poem “Go! Move! Shift!”, the doll-man describes labour conditions in human terms, how his entire family, including the children, toiled in terrible conditions: ““My father and mother, brothers and sisters worked and slaved from dawn to dusk for a few shillings a day. Oh yes, the travellers were sorely used as workers. They could not complain when they were sick and greatly undernourished”, ill-treatment possible because, he concludes, ““There were a lot more people than jobs”” (104). (Farm labour jobs subsequently dried up with mechanization.) Experiencing ‘progress’ as a loss of traditions and economic independence, the doll-man laments the decline in civility concomitant with increased affluence when he observes, ““For all the education and all the so-called prosperity, simplicity, love and human understanding have walked out the door”” (105).

Three times the doll-man blames the present problems of Travellers on “‘this modern age’” (105), for which “plastic” (104) becomes a synecdoche⁶⁶. The doll-man laments not having been able to save his own children from alcoholism, and blames “‘the evil that is in modern society for their ruination’” (108). Thus, he redirects individualistic arguments that attribute all social ills to personal responsibility by returning Traveller problems to a larger social setting, where national values come under scrutiny. With observations that echo the doll-man’s views and Joyce’s poem, David W. Orr bemoans the anti-humanism of modern technological systems: “The purported rationality of each particular component ... added together as a system lacks both rationality and coherence. Nor is there anything inherently human or even rational about words such as ‘efficiency,’ ‘productivity,’ or ‘management,’ that are used to justify technological change” (Orr 19-20).

Attendant with his gloomy assessment of the fundamental immorality of modernism, the doll-man predicts the destruction of the travelling way of life (“‘like everything that is good in life, it’s marked for doom’” (109)), transferring personal loss and a concomitant sense of helplessness to a larger stage. Allegory⁶⁷ (such as apocalypticism represents) is an essential means for colonized people to express otherwise illicit points of view. Gibbons notes, “allegory in a colonized culture is part of the symbolic ordering of life itself and hence, for all its visionary tropes, is in a position to unmask power relations” (21). Edward Hayes, referring to Irish ballads, suggests, “‘[t]he very extravagance of allegory employed ... is an unmistakable index to the intensity of the persecution which produced it in the first place’” (quoted in Gibbons

143). Disenchanted, disenfranchised, demoralized and disqualified from mainstream society, the frustration and alienation of marginalized groups fuels apocalyptic language.

This apocalyptic theme, the imminent destruction of Travellers as a people, is also conveyed in Maher's mother's story of St. Kevin. Her story again attributes deep spiritual qualities to the Traveller people, demonstrating that, with Ireland so long defined by religion, predominantly Catholicism in the Republic, linking one's forebears with such foundational, mythologized figures as St. Kevin establishes legitimacy. At the same time, the strategy counters negative moral assessments made by the majority population. At a loss for how to proceed with Christianizing Ireland, St. Kevin receives guidance through a vision that directs him to ask Traveller families camping nearby to assist him. His mission was very successful because the Travellers were so adept at memorizing the Gospels and transmitting this knowledge as they travelled the countryside. Just before St. Kevin died, he gathered the Travellers together and delivered a final sermon. The sermon begins by echoing Christ's sermon on the Second Coming in which Jesus foretells the destruction of Jerusalem and describes the last days: "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Mt. 24: 7)⁶⁸. Likewise, St. Kevin predicts a gloomy future for humanity: "[I]n my vision, I saw many dark and unholy deeds ... king fighting king, nation fighting nation" (83). His sermon establishes the Travellers as a special, holy people, but the honour means that Travellers will be subject to the worst kinds of ill treatment: "In the vision I see them becoming a race of people apart, no longer the heralds of God, but instead humiliated and outcast beings" (84). This pronouncement mirrors Lady Gregory's folk tale in that it legitimizes Traveller

persecution as predestined, sanctioned by God, but in Maher's version the persecution is due, not to an essentially bad character, but to their adherence to the true faith.

Intertwining patriotism and religion, Maher's mother's apocalyptic stories imply that Traveller piety, far from being backwards, is a beacon for other Irish Catholics. Unlike the rest of Catholic Ireland who have embraced modernity, Travellers, in clinging to their traditions, are in fact cleaving to a truer faith. In order to understand the logic of this argument, one must remember that the English once perceived Ireland's Catholicism as a potential threat against the crown, a threat realized in the deposed Catholic monarch King James II's bid to regain the British throne by forming an allegiance with the French. This alliance ended on Irish soil with James's defeat by the Protestant king, William of Orange (William III) at the Battle of Boyne in 1690. If Catholicism is anti-English, Traveller contentions that they cleave to a truer, older Christianity aligns them as a people with a long history of struggle and resistance against the colonial oppressor, an important distinction, especially given that the more modern, centralized Catholicism that Vatican Council 1870 inaugurated in Ireland promoted a turn away from nationalism as "popular insurgency" in favour of an "accommodation with state power" (Gibbons 136), which meant working with the colonial administration. Maher's storytellers' uncompromising rhetoric rejects accommodation with the former colonial power. Therefore, Traveller resistance to modernism marks them as true patriots.

Maher's memoir is populated with people who espouse intensely political rhetoric, but not of the type that compels someone like Joyce to become directly engaged in a political process. The admixture of religion and politics expressed by Maher's cohorts seems to give preference to spiritual solutions by assigning spiritual significance

to such practical problems as poverty. Though it does little to address poverty as a social condition with root causes and therefore, conceivable solutions, his mother's story of St. Kevin explains their poverty and outsider status in ways that have a positive angle, as a temporary trial that may have unspecified heavenly rewards (though this is not explicit). This explanation recalls Christ's admonition, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth ... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Mat. 6: 19-20). One can see the influence of a traditional view of explaining poverty in Catholic Ireland of the day. In Catholicism generally, poverty was spiritualized. Presented with Christ's lack of worldly success as a model to emulate, monastic initiates took vows of poverty. Among the laity, "God's people"⁶⁹ were those blessed with poverty here on earth for they would be rewarded in heaven. Evidently in Maher, the blessing of poverty is bestowed on Travellers because they are spiritually strong enough to bear physical sufferings and deprivations. St. Kevin foresees that "even through this great degradation, humiliation, hate and persecution, the travelling people keep their great faith" (83). Perhaps, because poverty had for so long been endemic among Catholics in Ireland, rather than thinking in terms of discovering and addressing the underlying causes, a view that looks at poverty as remediable, emphasis was placed on charitable works as an immediate, if temporary solution. However, attributing a divine origin to present difficulties quells any idea of direct political involvement within the nation since, by this rationale, solutions must be otherworldly too. This turning away from practical solutions indicates an utter disenchantment with the powers that be.

Thompson calls apocalypse, "the consolation of the persecuted", and notes that the intent of apocalyptic storytelling is to "stiffen the resolve of an embattled community

by dangling in front of it the vision of a sudden and permanent release from its captivity” (quoted in Garrard 86). Maher’s mother’s story serves this purpose to the extent that it ascribes a spiritual significance to hardships that encourages forbearance, but concludes by foretelling their utter obliteration as a people, surely a very pessimistic conclusion. Nevertheless, in the parable, there remains a divine purpose even to this horror because as a result of this catastrophe, “the hard-hearted people of Ireland”, along with the entire world, “shall mourn the passing of the most unique race of people in the world” (Maher 84). Just as the death of Christ was necessary in order to save the world, this story implies that a new, better world will emerge from the ashes of devastation, apparently though, a world without Travellers. Salvation through annihilation offers a grim inversion of the far-off hope a persecuted people lives vicariously through liberation narratives. Since Travellers are God’s chosen people, in spite of this pessimism, an element of hope resides in the pledge that the destruction of the Travellers will bring about a spiritual revival, for “the world will be renewed in faith and love of Almighty God” (Maher 84). The apocalyptic scenarios propounded by Maher’s characters leave Travellers little in the way of concrete space within the nation. Maher’s stories define the Traveller role in Ireland as sacrificial and spiritually redemptive for the majority, but leave Travellers (or at least their way of life) as doomed for extinction.

Traveller stories do not present the rational and the irrational as mutually exclusive polarities. The juxtaposition of realism and the inexplicable in their narratives corresponds with similar conjunctions of the rational and irrational in every day life, even if such syntheses may be contradictory. Eliade contends that modern secular beings hide logical incongruities even from themselves, creating themselves as ‘self-made’

individuals (203) through “a series of denials and refusals” (204). One typical evasive strategy is to categorize certain behaviours and beliefs as ‘superstition’ since the label is generally applied to the beliefs of others, not one’s own. In addition to these cultural biases, Eliade identifies an essential contradiction within the “modern non-religious” individual. While the emphasis of secular democratic societies⁷⁰ is individual ‘sovereignty’, people continue to practice desacralized myths and rituals (Eliade 203-4), often without acknowledging or even being aware of their sacred origins. Some of these behaviours call upon pre-Christian customs that invoked the magic of potent talismans for protection from harm. Christmas traditions such as kissing under the mistletoe and bringing holly into the house, for example, have druidic origins.

This coalescence of the rational and irrational need not be regarded as inherently negative. Such syntheses can also allow for a creative dynamic between the commonplace and the inexplicable that integrate worldviews generally held to be antithetical. David Suzuki and co-author Peter Knudtson in their book *Wisdom of the Elders*, here drawing on Claude Lévi-Strauss, propose that such a synthesis between the reductive approach of scientific enquiry that tends to fragment the world, and the holistic, “totalizing” view of the “Native Mind”⁷¹ (13) would allow for more creative solutions to problems caused by an over-reliance on technology. Orr attributes the narrow focus of technological and scientific paradigms to “Descartes and Galileo” (20). He argues, “[T]he foundations of the modern worldview were flawed from the beginning. In time, those seemingly small and trivial errors of perception, logic, and heart cascaded into a rising tide of cultural incoherence ... and ecological degradation” (Orr 20). Elsewhere, Suzuki, citing Thomas Berry, expresses the need “to find a new story, a narrative that

includes us in the continuum of Earth's time and space", a story that will "[remind] us of the destiny we share with all the planet's life" (*Sacred Balance* 25). Travellers, of course, are not 'native' in the sense that Strauss investigates, non-white aboriginal cultures still relatively untouched by European influences, though they do claim a long, even indigenous history in Ireland (Traveller activist Grattan Puxon for example, argued in the 60s that they descend from the original inhabitants of Ireland (Lanters 28)). Nevertheless, in the era when Joyce and Maher write (within recent memory), Travellers still maintained the close relationship with the land and its seasonal variations that Eliade remarks in other rural European populations. Traveller writing reveals attitudes and aptitudes⁷² that draw on this familiarity with the natural environment.

A worldview such as Joyce's understands humans and nonhumans as interrelated. Her contribution to ecological perspectives will be examined below as an offshoot of a worldview that rejects hierarchies and therefore hierarchical paradigms of leadership. Horizontal views of leadership offer more inclusive alternatives to governance by hegemonic groups and lie at the heart of democratic change. Another important feature of Joyce's worldview that informs her experience of nature lies in her belief that "the supernatural is indissolubly connected with the natural" (Eliade 118).

Modernity and Mystical Experience

Joyce's path to leadership begins with a tragedy, though she attributes her new confidence to a spiritual awakening that followed in the aftermath. Although never explicitly articulated, the death of her first grandchild from meningitis seemed to be the trigger that pushed Joyce to community activism. She speculates that the toddler

contracted the disease from rats infesting their camp during a garbage strike when she claims that people were dumping garbage, including medical wastes, at their site. The incident represents a 'snapping' point that drove her to try to seek justice. From here, her activism becomes more confident, as well as more sophisticated. Joyce attributes her strength to faith.

Joyce offers various religious experiences that can only be described as 'mystical' to explain her enlarged understanding of community that grows to encompass a more inclusive, expansive sense of humanity. Immanence, her experience of God as near and accessible, carries her beyond the personal to a transpersonal perspective. Because the force of Joyce's argument for equal rights for Travellers as full citizens relies in part on establishing personal credibility, the insertion of occurrences that she attributes to supernatural causes might seem an odd tactic in achieving this goal since such accounts disrupt conventions of narrative 'realism'. Her revelations indicate a worldview that allows for the possibility of supernatural causes to events unfolding in the material world. This belief is so entwined with day-to-day life that when she attributes supernatural significance to an occurrence, these transpire so naturally as to seem almost commonplace.

Joyce takes great care to ground events in physical reality so as to illustrate that these occurrences take place in our spatial / temporal plane. They are therefore extraordinary without being outside of nature. This recalls the Celtic belief that there exists more than our physical reality, that there in fact exist parallel realities that at times coincide with this, our earthly dimension. In recounting an otherworldly visitation the night of her father's death, she seems to be affirming, without proselytizing and without

dogmatism, a credence that alternative dimensions coincide with what we call reality.

This idea challenges the reader in ways that may be unsettling. One way that people deal with discomfort is to ridicule and so dismiss. Alternatively, the reader could remain open to other perspectives. Even if the reader pushes away such stories, rationalizes them as fiction or the product of an over-active imagination, Joyce's proposition counters the rational materialism that pervades the modern worldview.

Joyce relates that because their mother was in hospital and their father had not returned from visiting her, the children had to light the gas lamp themselves, a tricky task as it had a tendency to flare up. With eight frightened children alone in a trailer somewhere on the unlit outskirts of town, "about midnight," the three older children heard "a man scream, like someone dying" (41). They were camped beside a quarry and thought their father had fallen in, but they were too "afraid of the dark" to verify. Next, Joyce says:

A very strange thing happened. After we heard the scream someone came in the door. When you walk in a wagon the springs go down and the wagon shakes; we could feel the pressure on the door and the floor moving but we couldn't see anyone. We heard footsteps, the wagon went down a little bit — and the Tilley lamp was turned off. (41-2)

Though her account is grounded in the physical world, she interprets these phenomena in paranormal ways. As well as detailing the physical characteristics of a caravan that establishes the setting as material reality, Joyce employs three sensory perceptions to establish veracity: the kinesthetic, an awareness of one's body in space (related to touch but not exclusively tactile); hearing – the scream and the footsteps; and sight, a sense accentuated by its ineffectuality in this darkened environment. With the light extinguished, they are left in the total darkness of the void. Though they cannot *see* with their eyes, they 'sense' a presence. This anecdote provides a means of expressing the

inexpressible. When she concludes this account with, “I was always thinking about the scream we heard at the same time Father was in the [police] cell” (42), she circumscribes without delineating the emotional impact of the catastrophe of her father’s death, as well as the horror of his unsolved and uninvestigated death where a more expository approach might only confirm the ineffability of certain of our experiences. The sudden appearance of the inexplicable not only unsettles the usual expectations of a realist text, but also rejects the imperatives of Western materialism that would discount the inference, never actually articulated, that their father’s ghost visited them the night of his death. Although this would be extraordinary, this visitation is by no means represented as a rift in the natural order of things. Joyce does not try to convince the reader to believe that spirits of the deceased can return. She merely relates these events as she experienced them, and lets the reader interpret. However, every experience that she imbues with significance beyond the commonplace has a deep and often lasting effect upon her. This is especially true of the experience that arises in the wake of the stress and emotions that followed her granddaughter’s death.

In examining the implications of Joyce’s spiritual experiences, the difficult material circumstances that seem to induce these moments of religious revelation must be remarked; periods of vulnerability, extreme stress, and depression, all factors leading to or symptoms of what have come to be known as ‘mental illness’. In one such instance, Joyce was alone, having just collected her second baby from a convalescent hospital where the baby was recovering from a hernia operation. Still holding the infant in her arms, Joyce experienced an episode of amnesia. “[M]y mind just went”, she writes, “My memory was gone. It must have been the effects of the birth because I wasn’t really well

for a long time after ... I didn't know what I was standing there for or where the child came from" (68). She sought but did not receive help from a clerk in a nearby pharmacy. Joyce identifies the aversion the average person has when confronted with a stranger in distress when she concludes, "I suppose she thought I was mental" (68). Next she went into a nearby chapel, "lit some candles and started to pray" (68), and her memory returned. "I thanked God when everything came back into my mind — at least I knew the way home" (68), she says.

Her granddaughter's death was another event that led to a great deal of emotional turmoil in the extended family. She coped by taking action. Seeing her daughter's anguish, and feeling that "'too many people got away with too many things in my lifetime'" (90), Joyce began to build a case against the attending physician who had failed to properly diagnose and treat the child when her parents brought her to the hospital. By the time they returned again that evening, it was too late to save her life. When Joyce returned to the hospital to get the name of the doctor, not only would the nun⁷³ not provide his name, Joyce was outraged by her attitude: "[W]hat did she say to me? 'It's all the will of God!'" (90). Joyce strongly refutes this fatalism that attributes human error and preventable disasters to a higher power and thus fails to distinguish between what is beyond human control from that which can be attributed to human action.

When Mary (the bereaved mother) had a nervous breakdown and was admitted "to the nerve hospital" (90), Joyce dropped the legal case. Visiting her daughter at the asylum and seeing the other mental patients, many of them young women, Joyce had an epiphany that left her with a sense of deep compassion for others, an acceptance of

human frailty as part of life expressed in her observation, “Life can turn you if you haven’t got strong will-power,” followed by an outpouring of sympathy: “I know it’s not right to feel sorry for people because I hate pity myself, but I started crying because it broke my heart looking at them” (91). The next moment she describes transpires in the interstice of composing a poem, observing the women around her, and sunlight momentarily blinding her eyes:

I always carry a little diary in my pocket ... I had just started writing a little poem about looking at those women when strong sun came in my eyes and I couldn’t see a ha’porth. Someone who didn’t believe in God would never believe me but I got a funny feeling that God was very close, that he was closer to the asylum than he was to any other place. (91)

The last line echoes a Christian (Catholic) belief that God bestows a special dispensation on the lowly and downtrodden, and also demonstrates her identification with these women — compassion requires being able to see oneself in the other. Although her idiom is her distinct conversational style, she shares this feeling of expansiveness with religious devotees and initiates around the world, and like them, her experience generates a sense of inclusiveness that allows her to transcend more limiting points of view (Greyson and Liester 321). From this point, Joyce begins to think of herself in terms of someone who is able to help, a principle of leadership as service articulated here when she notices that these young women “all gathered round me” (91). Her comment, “I’m that kind of person” (91), expresses an awareness of this aspect of her character not articulated before. Next, she remarks differences between individuals without employing hierarchical judgements that place more value on some individuals over others. Though she is conscious of her own strengths, she understands that this does not give her licence to find fault, but rather to be more tolerant: “I’ve always had this will-power that I can get up and fight on again, but we’re not all as strong as each other and people who give

up can't help it" (91). Her personal hardships have most likely informed this insight. This outlook offers an alternative to forms of leadership that are based on the individualist model. Hierarchical models stress privilege and status whereas Joyce's conception of her leadership as service stresses 'horizontal' relationships based on principles of equality.

The psychiatric hospital provides a setting that resonates with the historical reverberations of 'madness' and mysticism without attempting to address either the past connection between the two modes, nor how we have come to define 'mental illness'. First it should be noted that the action of writing in her journal at this instant bypasses earlier models of psychoanalysis⁷⁴ that worked with the assumption that the patient needed a professional 'guide', the psychoanalyst, in order to begin to understand the hidden workings of subconscious impulses. Writing one's life represents a departure from this past hierarchical patient / professional relationship as Joyce's journal symbolizes. Cognitive psychologists now focus on the 'stories' we tell ourselves, believing that these self-narratives can be rewritten in ways that are positive and helpful. Autobiographical theorist Paul John Eakin applies Jerome Bruner's "'narrative'" (21) psychology in *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* when he emphasizes self-writing as self-knowledge. Rakow and Wackwitz have arrived at a similar understanding when they note, "we must remember ourselves and represent our identity and past experiences to ourselves with interpretive frameworks that connect and make sense of our own biographies (i.e., stories we tell ourselves about ourselves)" (173). While Rakow and Wackwitz explain the process of constructing a self-identity, cognitive therapists recognize that just as these stories can be debilitating, limiting, and even false, the act of

writing also contains the potential to reinterpret and re-write our lives. So while all narratives involve a process of selection that depends on a framework of interpretation, these may change.

The next point returns to the link between what was once called ‘madness’, now ‘mental’ illness and mysticism. In *Madness and Civilization*, analysing Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* and Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, Foucault brought to light a pre-Enlightenment view where ‘madness’ retained “a link with the sacred” (Tom Hayes 2 of 11). Foucault notices in *Madness and Civilization* that from the Middle Ages when aberrant behaviours were ascribed to demonic (or divine) influences, the Enlightenment created the science of ‘mental’ illness. As with the desacralization of nature that will be looked at below, science demystified the human mind. This changed perception disallowed the possibility that the ‘mad’ were in possession of divine knowledge unavailable to ordinary people, “the literary madman [as] ... a disguised philosopher” (Shoshana Felman 207) that early modern writers still heeded. Although Joyce does not explore these connections, the setting of her religious awakening resonates with these historical significations.

Studying the lives of the saints, one might conclude that the difference between religious experience and psychosis⁷⁵ can be difficult to ascertain. One of the defining characteristics may be that for the former, experiences attributed to powers outside of the recipient, tend to have a lasting, positive impact. Though scientific studies of these phenomena are limited, in a survey of participants who experienced “nonpathological auditory hallucinations” (Greyson and Liester 322), medical doctor Bruce Greyson and psychiatrist Mitchell B. Liester found that the “majority” (328-9) felt positively about their experience. They concluded: “Nonpathological auditory hallucinations differ from

psychotic hallucinations in that they tend to be supportive rather than critical; they may offer truths with a validity beyond the limits of the ego; they generally enhance personal, interpersonal, and societal functioning” (Greyson and Liester 322). Though studying auditory experiences, their findings can be applied to Joyce because even though she does not hear voices, she apparently does undergo a permanent and positive change typical of these kinds of experiences (Greyson and Liester 323).

That Joyce represents herself as momentarily blinded by intense light offers a metaphor that recurs in other famous conversion stories such as the biblical account of Paul on the road to Damascus. Is physical blindness meant to dramatize the lack of spiritual discernment or do such stories suggest that temporary physical blindness is a necessary precondition to true spiritual insight? Ong argues that the reliance on sight literacy required made language an object, opening the door for scientific objectivity, which fundamentally changed the way people see themselves in relation to the world.

Sight is a “dissecting sense” because it “situates the observer outside what he views” (Ong *Orality* 72), whereas experiencing language as sound makes the listener the “centre of [his or her] auditory world” (Ong *Orality* 72) with the result that oral cultures retain a sense of a universe in which they are participants. Eliade, on the other hand, attributes a worldview such as Joyce expresses as the “archaic” belief that “*the world exists because it was created by the gods*” (Eliade’s italics 165). Eliade uses the plural, but the same concept, God as creator, applies in the monotheism of “Celtic Christianity”, as so eloquently expressed in early Irish language poetry. This extra-dimension derives from a belief in the world as God’s creation (Eliade 165). When people view “the whole of life [as] sanctified”, life takes on an extra dimension of meanings. As Eliade remarks,

“life is lived on a twofold plane; it takes its course as human existence and, at the same time, shares in a transhuman life, that of the cosmos or the gods” (167). The world becomes a text in which God, the gods or the Spirit is revealed. David Suzuki and Peter Knudtson reveal a similar perception in the “Native Mind” that sees all things as alive and worthy of respect because we as humans share a “kinship” with our fellow creatures. This sense of participating in a world inhabited, where human beings are but one life form among many extends to what Western minds view as ‘insentient’ life forms such as trees, or “tree *people*” as the Haida call them, (Suzuki & Knudtson xxxii), and also what we view as ‘non-living *things*’: rocks, rivers and the earth itself (see Suzuki & Knudtson 34). Cultures with such a worldview relate to other life forms with “a profound sense of empathy and kinship ... rather than a sense of separateness from them or superiority over them” (Suzuki & Knudtson 18). Relationships as a horizontal kinship are mirrored in Joyce’s sense of oneness with others that arises from her hospital visit.

Another encounter that left Joyce deeply moved suggests her awareness of the non-human world as also meaningful. As in other similar episodes, Joyce hints that she was at a low point and that it was a struggle just to get out of bed but she focuses on the physical symptoms rather than her emotions: “I was very sick and all my strength had gone. I was so run-down and tired I had the feeling I was finished” (95). “Finished”, suggests profound discouragement, even depression. She walked into a nearby field to pray and be alone, “crying at the one time” (95). Here, she experiences physical sensations that could have been symptoms of a fever. This association of a weakened physical condition and mystic revelation corresponds with much mystic discourse⁷⁶. “All of a sudden I got this burning on top of my head. I thought it was on fire. I put up my

hand beside my forehead and I could feel the heat going through my fingers” (95). This description echoes a line of a medieval Irish poem: “I am the God who created the fire in the head” (Finan 78). Both images recall the day of Pentecost where the giving of the Holy Spirit is described as “cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of [the faithful assembled]” (Acts 2: 3). In this reading, the bird that Joyce describes would be analogous with the Holy Spirit, usually represented by a dove, a blending of ‘pagan’ and Christian motifs that might disturb orthodoxy.

When she sat down, a large bird flew up from the treetops and startled her. Although she offers a natural explanation, “it must have been nesting and maybe I disturbed it,” the bird so awes her with its “awful noise, flapping its wings,” that she feels afraid: “I got a terrible shock altogether and I didn’t know whether to run out of the field or what” (96). She simultaneously attributes an origin outside of nature: “It wasn’t really a natural bird like a pigeon or a crow or a pheasant, it was a big bluey-grey bird. When it was flapping its wings where I was sitting its feathers were falling down and some of them fell in my lap” (96). This admixture of fear and amazement evokes the sublime, an expression of almost religious fervour associated with European Romantics who, disheartened with the “rationalistic order” of modernity (Salerno 195), used the sublime in nature to emulate a mystical experience more digestible for an increasingly secular population. However, to merely acknowledge European precedents would once again elide the insights that the Romantic Movement gained from knowledge of indigenous European and non-European cultures⁷⁷.

Even though Joyce’s fear suggests that she is not fully able to integrate this interspecies encounter — she “hurried” out of the field feeling “shaky over the

experience”(96) — nonetheless, her according significance to this encounter recalls more ancient, orally based traditions. Though occurring within a natural setting, this exchange between human and the natural world evokes the magic of fairy tales, originally an oral genre, as well as First Nations stories of encounters between animals and holders of “medicine,” people whose special gifts or powers include an ability to communicate with other species. There are often quite literal analogies between human and nonhuman entities in these stories. First Nations stories often concern immediate survival issues and involve codes of right behaviour. Favours or powers are conferred by the totem animal on the human, often symbolized by the proffering of a talisman (such as feathers) along with supernatural abilities that designate the human as shamans (healers) among their people⁷⁸. Recognizing interspecies relationships as not only possible but beneficial conforms with Eliade’s observation that in such worldviews, “life ... is not strictly confined to man’s mode of being” (166); importance is also accorded to non-humans.

The emphasis of oral thinking on life as lived, rather than abstract theories, means that spiritual matters remain intrinsically practical, as evident in Joyce’s response to her encounter with the bird. She applies herself to the household tasks she had been neglecting because of her depressed state with renewed vigour. Although these are ordinary tasks, Joyce describes feeling almost superhuman elation: “I got this strength that I could go through anything and nothing could stop me” (96). She does not represent her experience as singular nor does she claim any special status: “I’ve had loads of experiences like this in my life — I suppose it happens to loads of people” (96).

Her experience effects a transformation as Joyce’s remark indicates, “I felt a different person: I felt brand-new” (96), not a change of heart, but a burst of energy that

suggests a link between her depressed state and her physical symptoms. Joyce next applies herself to daily activities she had been neglecting, maintaining a connection to “the events of everyday life” (8) that Seán Ó Duinn finds typifies “Celtic Christianity”. Furthermore, the steps required bathing her children, heating pots of water (drawn from what source is not specified but running water was often not readily available in camps) on top of a gas burner, underlines a *feminist* theory of time that closely resembles concepts of time commonly found in oral cultures. Both are “relational, continuous ... and cyclical” (Hughes 137). Feminists have noticed that women’s time tends to be care and “needs-oriented” and therefore responds to “the time demands of others [so that] women’s lives are characterized by the overlapping temporalities of simultaneous actions” (Hughes 137). In contrast, linear time is market or production driven time. Christina Hughes adds that women can adjust to “the dominant temporal consciousness, especially when organised as wage labour” (citing B. Davies 137), even though the nature of their responsibilities continues to require “flexibility”. While these observations are “gendered”, they continue to reflect the reality of the majority of women worldwide, and certainly replicate Nan Joyce’s familial responsibilities in the time in which she is writing⁷⁹. Thus the experience of time, not only for women, but also for men in less modernized settings does not conform to the notion of time as a linear progression that underlies autobiographical and historical narratives.

Joyce’s mystical experiences and the meaning she attaches to them take in the possibility that there are kinds of human experience that defy purely physiological, materialist categories. As the Greyson study suggests, faith in a higher power (which in part implies an ability to be able to attribute a meaning to life’s vicissitudes beyond one’s

personal perspective) can help alleviate depression and certain other psychological symptoms such as anxiety. While her faith is presented as fundamental to her identity, she never fully rationalizes her encounter with the bird, probably because she cannot. She does not identify this experience as transformative beyond a momentary euphoria and renewed vigour, but she does conclude the segment by recommending a spirit of thankfulness: “you need to thank [God] for the things you have”, adding, even “if you have problems yourself you still don’t know how lucky you are — you can always be worse off” (96). Learning to ‘count her blessings’ undoubtedly derives from her trying life, but gratitude is also one of the basic attitudes of the Christian faith.

Rather than view religious experience as a lapse in rationality, it would be more constructive to reflect on the ways rationality and the inexplicable coexist. Understanding this synthesis permits points of view that move beyond a materialist rationale. Rather than dismissing more intimate relations with nature as quaint and archaic, situating human existence within a broader life world that envisions interrelationships as horizontal and sees human existence as inextricably interconnected with the environment, creates distinctive mindsets, as do inverse values. Ong attributes this sense of connectedness to the dialogistic dynamic of orality. He notes that dialogue “belongs to a culture which typically experiences problems as interconnected or simultaneous” (Ong 1967: 293), rather than “linear or sequential”, a holistic approach to problem solving that engages “the entire human life-world” (Ong 1967: 294). As noted in the introduction, while virtually no known existing society remains a primary oral culture (that is one that has not even the concept of writing), there remain residual secondary oral cultures. These include aboriginal cultures, although the long tradition of orality as a legitimate medium

for the transmission of knowledge reverberates in the emphasis in Irish Traveller and non-Traveller cultures on storytelling, performance and song. The bardic tradition represented “vast amounts of [memorized] poetry, stories and historical material” (Flannery 18) that allowed an oral dissemination of “tribal memory” that remained as a cultural influence well into the modern era.

The Exultation of Nature: Fashioning a Place in the Irish Landscape

Though not included in her autobiography, Joyce’s poem “The Beauty I Can See” is a modern variation on the Irish nature poem, a recurring genre in Irish literature since the time when *filidh* travelled the countryside. These itinerant, oral scholars played an important role as “public intellectuals and principal advisors to the chieftains” (Flannery 18). *Duchás* translates from the Irish as “nature” (Irish Dictionary Online), but its usage includes the sense of an “intimate attachment fostered through stories associated with a particular place” (Flannery 16). Related to the nature poem, but with a broader emphasis, Irish language poet, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill examines the tradition of *dinnsheanchas*, a compound word that approximately translates as Dinn, “landmark, eminent or notable place” and seanchas, “lore” (Ní Dhomhnaill 408). *Seanchas* encompasses all manner of lore, not only fairy lore (depicting places where the boundaries between this and the Otherworld overlap), but also includes oral customs and historical record keeping ranging from “genealogies”, placing the wanderings of an illustrious ancestor at the site for example, as well as “stories of conquest” (Ní Dhomhnaill 408-9). Joyce’s poem falls more easily into the category of the typical nature poem both in its adulatory tone and because she uses no specific place names.

Nature poems sometimes focused on a particular setting. In his essay, “The God in the Tree”, Seamus Heaney quotes a translation of a fifteenth or sixteenth century Irish poem attributed by tradition to Oisín, “Benn Boilbin” (184), that opens with the mountain made famous by W.B. Yeats’s “Under Ben Bulbin”. However, besides this place specific nature poetry, Heaney’s own translation of *Buile Suibhne, Sweeney Astray*, includes long passages in praise of trees that makes no specific reference to place (Heaney 187-8), and instead emphasises a natural world where human activity is peripheral. The only direct references to a human presence in the quoted passage are “The yew tree in each churchyard” and “life-blood on a spear-shaft” (Heaney 188: 25, 30). Even so, a human presence is implied through the poetic voice that uses metaphorical language to describe forest trees where, “some milk of human kindness / cours[es] in its sap” (Heaney 187: 7-8). Similarly, Joyce’s poem tries to reduce the impact of human activity in shaping the land in order to propose a more pristine setting (see below). Meanwhile, the lack of specificity in her poem helps Joyce create a relatively timeless landscape in which she imagines Traveller cultural activity as integral to that landscape. At the same time, her variation of the nature poem genre takes on political implications as the poem obliquely addresses those non-Traveller attitudes that may want to eradicate all nomads from the landscape.

Her poem returns to treasured images from her childhood, a montage of memories that puts forward that while as a child she may have been “very poor” (Joyce “Beauty” 36: 4), her life was enriched with “a beauty that money could not buy” (Joyce “Beauty” 36: 28), as the last line of the one stanza poem concludes. Joyce rejects material possessions as a barometer of success when she declares, “No toy could give me this

much happiness” (“Beauty” 36: 19). Instead, her observations of community activities that follow this line emphasize human interactions as conducive to bliss and contentment, a theme also found in short autobiographies by other Traveller writers. Their material poverty contrasts with the spiritual riches offered by the natural beauty of Ireland:

Oh, but hadn't I all the beauty,
That mother nature put on earth,
The different kinds of wild flowers,
That no one ever planted. (Joyce “Beauty” 36: 5-8).

The last line disassociates this natural world from human activity, removing human agency from this wild garden. Of course, in reality, Ireland's environment has been deeply shaped by human influence in ways that have been profoundly political. The British policy of denuding the remaining forests to erase the threat of ‘banditry’ by displaced small landholders after the Planters were installed would be just one example.

This shaping of the Irish landscape by human history is explored in her autobiography. Here, Joyce establishes their attachment as Travellers to Ireland as geographic space through narrative participation, the tradition of *dinnsheanchas*. In the early years, her father's informal instruction exemplifies the oral transmission of historical knowledge that confirms history as a form of storytelling (as yet unfinished, constantly being rewritten). Joyce relates that as they travelled the country, prompted by her many questions “about old castles or houses or monuments” (5), her father would tell them “the history of all the places we passed through” (5), recalling again the “fugitive” (Hayes quoted in Gibbons 145) mobility of orality that participates through voice in shared symbols. Young Nan's responsiveness to her surroundings, together with her father's knowledge of the past that elicits a narrative, suggests an active involvement that underlines their historical connection to this landscape and validates their belonging to

these places. Joyce's reminiscence points to Ireland as a place where history is perceptible in the very topography of the landscape, a trope exploited by innumerable Irish writers⁸⁰. The description involves a relation with landscape in the immediate present but calls upon a past to impart meaning beyond mere physical manifestations, beyond thingness. Behind every rock, castle, field, tower, there is a story, stories not always contained within more official representations of the past such as public monuments because these latter tend to favour official aspects of history. Traveller *dinnsheanchas*, the narratives by which historical meaning is imparted to an environment, at times would have veered from more official histories in order to more accurately describe their experience of the land. As Traveller Johnny Collins asserts in *Traveller Ways, Traveller Words* (a collection of shorter autobiographies conducted as interviews), "Travellers always gev [gave] their camps their own names" (32), names derived from their own experiences of the place, such as camp conditions, topography, the surnames or occupations of neighbouring "settled" people etc. The personalization of place names by group consent seems to give some sort of satisfaction (perhaps a sense of security or autonomy) to Collins who notes, "The settled people'd never know the names of, iv the camps we use' ta live in" (32).

Joyce's poem modifies the blending of history and patriotism her father imparts to the landscape by combining patriotism and an exaltation of nature in language that invokes the mythologies of nationhood. The poem moves from the sweeping "beauty of Ireland" (36. l. 9) to smaller scenes: "The silver running streams beside the green fields, / Covered with yellow buttercups" (Joyce "Beauty" 36: 10, 11). In the next line, this landscape transmutes into "our beloved tricolour" (Joyce "Beauty" 36: 12), an allusion to

the yellow, white and green flag of Ireland. The possessive pronoun “our” claims a share in this most immediately recognizable symbol of national identity, the flag, a physical emblem of the idea of nation and nationalism. Being an “empty signifier” (Duncan & Duncan 22), the flag can encompass Traveller patriotism, the Irish landscape and the Traveller way of life in that landscape as an ineffaceable presence, a claim to belonging reinforced by the preoccupations of the second half of the poem. In the final one third of the poem, Joyce recalls an emblematic Traveller pastime, caring for and selling horses:

To look at father shoeing the horses,
Paring the horses’ hooves,
Picking up the little pieces
Then to listen to the Travelling men,
Dealing and swapping horses,
Trotting the horses up and down the old tat road,
To hear the noise of their hooves. (“Beauty” 36: 19-25)

In spite of the indeterminate locale, situating this occupation on a byway establishes Traveller activity firmly on Irish soil and lends solidity to their presence, reinforced by the sound of the rhythm of horses’ hooves pounding the road. Roland Barthes claims that myth “transforms history into nature” (129), by which he means that mythology seeks to naturalize historical contingencies. Joyce’s poem transforms nature to encompass history, at the same time reshaping Irish landscape to accommodate Travellers as an integral presence. Whereas in *My Life on the Road*, her father’s history-telling creates a metaphorical space of belonging through language, Joyce’s poem takes the received circumstance of a kind of internal exile (externally imposed) and, conflating landscape and nation, naturalizes a Traveller presence and Traveller activity in that landscape, thus employing metaphor to insist on national belonging.

Maher too expresses an intimate relation with the natural world when he ends his memoir with an exaltation of nature. He concludes with euphoria, a state of bliss

achieved in nature that assuages and symbolically erases the misery, isolation and despair of the preceding pages. The loneliness of the road having been a recurring theme in his life until now, in this moment, he describes a feeling of kinship with the nonhuman world:

Even now, on this heavenly dawning day, as I tread onwards, my thoughts are beautifully distracted by the sound of God's feathered creatures bursting into morning song. How I envy the birds' joyous song; for them, sweet creatures, song is contentment, joy and happiness ... Listening and drunk with rapture, a tear and a smile come together, for I feel good at this break of a new day, heralded by a million voices of God's feathered creatures. Times like this are heaven to me, taking me into a different and more beautiful world. (163)

The end is a beginning. He leaves his character, himself, on the road, without destination, but moving forward into a new day. Time conceived as a linear progression (the Western concept that shaped narrative style) necessarily smoothes out the false starts and dead ends that can characterize life, especially a life lived on the peripheries where one's labour can just as likely amount to nothing as to any 'improvement' in one's life circumstances. The concept of time as circular in primary and secondary oral cultures, time as a succession of seasons and life cycles, belies the 'life as a narrative' format of the classic autobiographical template. Maher's inconclusive ending conforms to the "road" novel by disrupting the Aristotelian longing for a *dénouement*. Paradoxically, as with apocalyptic thinking, the notion of heaven proposes an end that is both the end of time (the world as we know it) and a new beginning. Maher reaches out to his reader, looking for connections by using the first person plural and extending notions of kinship when he writes, "In reality, each and every one of us is on the road" (165). By this, he suggests that all people are travellers on this same journey of life. Maher's symbol of "this earthly road" (162) points to his belief that this world is but one possible world. The symbol evokes the pilgrimage metaphor of the Christian Church. "[E]arthly road"

(162) points to a heavenly counterpart just as the phrase, “Whether I shall experience [happiness] in this world, I know not” (162), points to the possibility of a life to come. In the final paragraph, the afterlife is a campsite, or “mollying ground”. Maher recognizes the reader as kindred when he proposes, “one day, please God, we shall all meet at the final mollying ground” (165).

The moments of “rapture” Maher experiences in these closing pages intimate that one can experience a foretaste of “heaven” here on earth through an appreciation of nature, not the objective world that science observes and studies, but the world of God’s creation, a world where nature is still a “wonder” (163). The “dawning day” opens up new beginnings, “a new journey and only God knows what lies ahead” (163). In this conclusion, Maher searches for hope, but his attempt is mixed with profound sadness, his grief for what he sees as the cause of the destruction of his people, “the horribleness of modern ethics and thinking, a grave insult to God, the Creator of all” (164). Maher concludes by at last openly declaring modernity as antithetical to Spirit.

Joyce also attempts to conclude her original volume with hope, but she seems to want to convince herself as much as the reader, as if to build up her own courage. This final chapter mirrors Chapter One in that both employ “we” as a collective. In the final paragraph, this usage is even more unequivocal. Joyce speaks on behalf of her people. She delineates the challenges. For Joyce, ignorance remains the greatest obstacle to “A Better Understanding”, the title of this concluding chapter taken from the final line: “what we want most of all is a better understanding with the settled people: that we should understand them and they should understand us” (118). Joyce notes that Travellers are now “able and willing to speak up for themselves” (118), an increase in

political involvement that reflects a growing confidence. Joyce believes that improved access to education for Traveller children is the solution that will allow Travellers a better future. The chapter alternates between optimism (“the last few years have been a great point in the travellers’ history” (118)), hope (“I would like all the travelling children to have self-confidence and to grow up proud of what they are” (117)), and bitterness (“But the way they’ve been treated and discriminated against they grow up ashamed of their own parents” (117)). In the Afterword, appended fifteen years later, though not defeated, her hopes have been nuanced with resignation and a more pragmatic analysis of the challenges faced by Travellers within Ireland.

CONCLUSIONS: EXCLUSIONS

The Afterword provides an important update that puts forward crucial perspectives on the privileged speaker, and on the subtlety and pervasiveness of exclusionary practices. Joyce experiences the pain of invisibility, of being overlooked not by opponents but by “settled people” who sympathized with the Traveller cause. At a time when she was actively campaigning for Traveller rights, travelling the country to attend speaking engagements, appearing in the national media and even running for public office, Joyce was overlooked for paid positions in emerging Traveller organizations. She states, “[T]he ones that got the jobs were all settled people. When the money came for the training centre, it was all settled people working there and they never said to me ‘Nan, you’ve great experience, why don’t you come in?’ It wasn’t for the sake of money, but it was making a person a full person” (xi). Her supposed ineligibility for these jobs in spite of her evident qualifications points to the undervaluing of certain kinds of knowledge that assigns an inferior status to experience. This oversight is probably ‘innocent’ in the sense of not being premeditated, but at the same time is intrinsically linked to hegemonic standards. Her supposed ineligibility underlines the self-perpetuation of privilege such as that afforded by education. Besides this bias, functioning at a more unconscious level, the inculcation of unspoken codes of behaviour constructs a framework for in-group / out-group evaluations by which groups maintain “boundaries”. Just as harmful as overt racism are such exclusionary practices by more privileged groups⁸¹ that are so internalized in their maintenance of group ‘norms’, there need not be any justification in words. Codes of silence prevail that effect the perpetuation of discriminatory practices based not only on race, but also class and

cultural distinctions (identifiable through accent, idiom, decorum and attire), and religious / cultural differences (especially where these are expressed as visible symbols).

Joyce describes situations where she was made to feel dependent. She first contrasts her economic situation with “those” non-Travellers sympathetic to the Traveller cause. She insists that her grievance in no way relates to the disparity between their economic situations, but she cannot accept the humiliation of being made to feel dependent on others. As she travelled around the country to speak, Joyce explains, “[T]hose would be driving around in their big cars and their expenses ... those would be driving me in the car and I’d be in the back and they’d have their cheque books and if you got hungry you’d have to wait for them to go into a café and buy you a coffee or a sandwich” (xii). Joyce juxtaposes emblems of dependency and independence where driving a car is symbolic of being in control of one’s itinerary and the back seat is for passengers; and the one who holds the cheque book represents the one who controls the finances. She feels reduced to a child-like status. There is no suggestion of any malice on the part of these supporters, although there is certainly evidence of insensitivity. Her repetition of “those” divides, underlining income disparities where “those” are people with money. As if in reciprocation for being made to feel as a non-person, Joyce inverts the power relation by placing her words in the mouths of those she felt exploited by, “You go around, doing great work, and people say ‘go ahead and we’ll take the benefit of the work’” (xi). Joyce’s experience demonstrates that when previously silenced people begin to speak on their own behalf, they can meet up with entrenched, authoritative positions that construe their informal knowledge base as “inadequate to the task”. Similarly, when more sophisticated academic discourse promotes theoretical frameworks

that question the viability of non-theoretical knowledge such as languages based on experience, the tendency to dismiss is expressed in sophisticated ways but still represents an exclusionary practice.

CONCLUSION / INCLUSION

What lies in the future for Travellers? Sibley contends that assimilationist policies fail because governments underestimate “the capacity of the minority to resist and to maintain its own cultural values” (84). Travellers writing orality supports Sibley’s assertion. However, Joyce’s bittersweet Afterword highlights the ongoing nature of the struggle. Even as she celebrates the increased confidence “of traveller women coming out and speaking for themselves” (xv) and finds hope in the younger generation, she concludes with uncharacteristic pessimism when she observes, “still there’s a lot of hatred, some people have this hatred and I don’t think they’ll ever get rid of it” (xv). The more resigned voice, perhaps reflecting Joyce’s withdrawal from her more public life as an activist, recalls Homi Bhabha’s evocation of the limited but significant role of the storyteller who offers “no salvation, but a strange cultural survival of the people” (170). For minority voices speaking from the peripheries, every battle is hard-fought, the conclusions never certain, a prelude to the next struggle.

As Joyce has anticipated, access to education remains key to developing Traveller pride and autonomy. Having received an MA in Ethnic and Racial Studies from Trinity College Dublin, Traveller activist and playwright Rosaleen McDonagh’s postsecondary education still makes her a minority among Travellers. Her original “one-woman show depicting the social care system for Travellers in the 1960s and 70s” (“Rosaleen” 4 of 4), *The Baby Doll Project*, first staged in Dublin, January 2003 tackles issues of racism and attitudes towards the physically challenged (McDonagh has cerebral palsy). She has since staged a “reworked reading” of a play in progress, *John and Josie* that, in her explorations of sexual orientation and non-traditional families, opens up new directions in

Traveller self-identities. Because music and theatre integrate the orality of performance, as de Certeau observes, they represent “a space where the organizing power of reason is effaced” (183), where the “recalcitrance” of oral cultural expressions find voice. Writing genres that preserve the power of language as spoken word such as poetry, storytelling and song might be some of the most powerful tools of resistance to assimilationist pressures for Travellers. Poetry, especially through the transformative, regenerative qualities of its plays of meaning, resists⁸² appropriation into dominant discourses. Traveller efforts to reshape hegemonic representations and reinvent categories of discourse are ongoing and respond to changing conditions.

Rather than dismiss Traveller representations as naïve, which only reiterates exclusionary practices, academics and citizens must listen seriously and respectfully to what these representations say or are not saying, how they work and what they are attempting to do, remembering always that in autobiography, these rhetorical strategies represent a life. Searching for common ground between communities, Maher declares that we are all fellow travellers on the same road. His oblique reference to a future life (or afterlife) admonishes us to consider where that road leads, not only for Travellers, but also for the nation. Proponents of saner development policies in Ireland and abroad, ecologists and environmentalists, noticing that certain values are lacking in the modern ethos, have begun to listen to those voices that recount stories based on oral tradition, stories imbued with mystery, stories where human beings understand their vulnerability and the limitations of human ability. This admission of finiteness allows for a humility that concedes that in some sense all life shares the same origins and the same destiny. The dialogic foundation of orality may be better able to offer a holistic approach towards

ecological soundness precisely because problems are seen as interconnected. However, like conflicting demands between indigenous and nomadic peoples, conflicting demands between developers and conservationists are unlikely to be resolved except through intensive democratic debate at a grassroots level, struggle by struggle. This is because, as Travellers are acutely aware, land use is highly politicized and arbitration tends to favour influential interest groups.

What of Traveller traditions? Joyce's sister, Chrissie Ward observes that in the days of her childhood, "the roads was narrower but the land was wider" (46). (She is referring to the unused land on either side of a roadway where Travellers could once pull in to camp.) Today, in contemporary Ireland as elsewhere, the land has grown "narrower" — divided, fenced and set apart for specific uses by property owners — a limited commodity, more crowded and less hospitable to informal usage. Meanwhile, the road has been paved wider; traffic moves faster and increases exponentially. A European Community report optimistically put forward that Travellers will never disappear because "[n]omadism is as much a state of mind as a state of fact" (italics in McDonagh, quoted in McDonagh 96). However, for all the optimistic tone, the tendency of literate thinking to render concrete realities as abstractions begins to be evident in the longer quote. The report seems to argue that nomadism is "subjective" and involves "*feeling oneself to be a Traveller*" (my italics, McDonagh 96). This is true, verified by short Traveller autobiographies, and represents one of the ways Travellers have had to redefine their identity. At the same time, the report's contention could foreshadow a complete abstraction of "the objective reality of travelling (the fact of moving from one place to another)" (96) to a subjective mode in ways that would mitigate the onerous harm of anti-

nomadic policies. In point of fact, the gradual move away from traditions (recorded in an array of Traveller autobiographies) has meant that Travellers have had to redefine themselves to themselves.

Writing orality, performance and social activism all represent discursive strategies of resistance that provide starting points where changing Traveller self-identities can emerge. Writing orality reveals that subjugated knowledge sometimes runs parallel to, sometimes exist outside of, and sometimes traverses more officially sanctioned ways of speaking. Traveller perspectives help to fill in the gaps in our knowledge, challenging our complacency and broadening our awareness of other ways to tell our lives.

¹ According to the 2002 Census ("Traveller Community" 2 of 6).

² Although Joyce refers to non-Travellers as "settled", with approximately half of the Traveller population now settled in permanent housing at least part of the year, this thesis employs the term non-Traveller. Joyce and other Travellers also refer to non-Travellers as "country" people. Maher often uses the term "gentry", which accentuates class differences as well as their status as landowners, conveying a sense of privilege.

³ Residual orality filled a functional role as Joyce asserts in an anecdote that describes an offshoot of Traveller nomadic economic activity as the dissemination of information, not only between Travellers, but between the Traveller and settled communities. In the Ireland of her youth, Joyce describes the isolation of some of their rural clients:

If they were living on the side of a mountain, or in a real lonely place, they mightn't get to the town for six months and they loved to see the travellers coming so that they could get their pots and kettles mended and buy little things. In those days the half-doors would all be open. You'd look in across the door and ask the woman did she want anything and she'd ask you in to have a cup of tea. She'd say, 'Now, tell us all the news. What's happening in Belfast?'

So we were sort of newspapers and radios as well as everything else. (3)

⁴ Lack of access to formal education is a recurring theme in Traveller autobiographies, not only Joyce's but in numerous shorter works. Not only do forced relocations, 'shifting' by authorities mean removing children from school, Traveller accounts also relate the forms of hostility Traveller students have to endure including taunting by fellow students, and insensitivity or outright segregation by teachers etc.

⁵ In the same way as the multiplicity of electronic communications will undoubtedly shape present generations.

⁶ Though writing before the era of personal computers, Ong acknowledges this in *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History*. New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1967. 9.

⁷ As Dyer has made clear, more literate societies also call upon a battery of cultural codes so embedded in the collective consciousness as to be received uncritically. Political rhetoric (as well as other public forums such as advertising) is just one example of language that utilizes mutually understood cultural meanings.

⁸ Although the system was obviously negligent, in all fairness, the children so feared being taken by authorities they used every tactic to avoid detection. Their aversion underlines the suspicion with which they viewed figures of authority, a distrust not altogether unjustified.

⁹ Cruikshank is referring to "hunting societies", but the observation could be extended to include those oral-based societies, including small-scale agrarian societies, where knowledge tends to be steeped primarily in survival issues, the practical aspects of daily life, the fluctuating demands of seasonal cycles etc. This is not to suggest that such societies have no cultural life, but that their cultural activities will in some way reflect this primary relation with the nonhuman world.

¹⁰ Lanters quotes Paul Noonan's similar assertion that "the Traveller community 'is very much present-time oriented'" (27). Ironically, such declarations come at a period of advanced consumerism that, as Terry Eagleton has remarked, encourage the subject "to live provisionally" (*Ideology* 198).

¹¹ At the age of about sixty-five, Nan Joyce represents just three per cent of the Traveller population over sixty-five compared to eleven per cent of the general population ("Traveller Community" 2 of 6). This

figure is partly attributable to the high birthrate ("Traveller Community" 2 of 6), but there remains the fact that "Traveller women live on average 12 years less than women in the general population" (Catherine Joyce 1 of 12, citing a Department of Health and Children Report, *Traveller Health: A National Strategy 2002-2005*).

¹² Even though considered a literate device, this term is more applicable. See Lanham on metaphor (101).

¹³ Due to the complexities of Julia Kristeva's work and because present-day Ireland fits McVeigh and Mac Laughlin's observations; and in lieu of the focus in Joyce on Marxist-influenced economic models over psychological factors as influences in Traveller oppression, this thesis does not foreground psychological models such as Julia Kristeva's musings on the 'abject' or anthropologist Mary Douglas's similar observations about purity and pollution. However, psychological models that examine the dynamics of 'othering' anathemetical groups can be usefully applied. Certainly, rhetoric of "pollution" and "purity" are often utilized, even contemporaneously, to justify persecution.

¹⁴ The quotation marks are used to indicate that these definitions were unilateral on the part of the 'law makers' and interpreters who happened to be the European colonizers. In other words, Western 'international' law was applied worldwide in all cases where European culture encountered non-European cultures.

¹⁵ 'Tinker' was used to designate Travellers by non-Travellers until recent times, but Travellers do not refer to themselves as Tinkers.

¹⁶ While it may seem out of place to mention the possibilities of 'Irish' Travellers living in England, in fact mobility across national borders continues to be one of the characteristics of Traveller nomadism, as Joyce's story exemplifies. Unlike the vast majority of Travellers who live in the Republic, Nan Joyce grew up in Northern Ireland, but as an adult the Joyce family moved between Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England. Most often, as was the common practice with the settled Irish, such moves were motivated by job opportunities and often involved seasonal employment.

¹⁷ Although generally referred to as "Roma", this term comprises three major groups (with major sub-groups): the Roma, predominantly settled in Eastern Europe (Kalderash), the Sinti of Western Europe (Manouches and Romanichels) and the Kalé of Spain and Portugal ("Myths" 2 of 3).

¹⁸ The lines are split in *My Life on the Road* for the sake of spacing and appear in columns as a heading. The wording of the first stanza varies slightly between the two texts.

¹⁹ Poetry, where quoted, will be written as page numbers followed by line numbers.

²⁰ To illustrate the prevalence of the abduction scenario, such an abduction scene is dramatized in Shirley Temple's 1937 *American* produced film, *Heidi*.

²¹ Parallel circumstances affect the First Nations of Canada.

²² Here, Ní Shúinéar quotes from newsletters published by the Association of Teachers of Travelling People.

²³ The first potato crop failed in 1845, and again in 1846. 1847 did not see a catastrophic failure, but yields were low. The last crop failure was in 1848, but the devastating effects in the countryside lasted well beyond this date.

²⁴ Thus, from 1841 to 1851 the population dropped from 8.2 million to 6.5 million ("Irish Famine").

²⁵ Historian Peter Gray writes that "between 1849 and 1854 ... about a quarter of a million people were permanently evicted from their homes" (68).

²⁶ Most quotations are taken directly from the film except where stated otherwise.

²⁷ In the play, the Bull bullies even the women.

²⁸ Neither she nor the Widow has names in the movie.

²⁹ Whereas in the film the Bull is portrayed as alternately instigating and restraining his son's violent acts, in the play he only incites Tadgh to violence and is more unequivocally brutal.

³⁰ Or there could be a backlash, such as the nationalist riots that followed the staging of Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* in Dublin, 1907 (Cusack).

³¹ Dirt is connected with poverty (Sibley 57-8), as well as with a racist association of darker skinned people (Roma, East Indians, Africans, etc.) (Sibley 22-4).

³² Okely studied cleanliness taboos among English 'Traveller-Gypsies', but Ní Shúinéar notes that these beliefs are also observed among Irish Travellers (56).

³³ Ward mentions that some of these wagons were made to order for a wider Traveller clientele (60)). Travellers call them "wagons", but they are referring to what non-Travellers would consider to be traditional 'Gypsy caravans'.

³⁴ In a conversation with Traveller scholar Mary Burke, she noted that with increased prosperity, conditions in Ireland are actually getting worse for Travellers, an observation that Joyce verifies.

³⁵ Such beliefs can manifest as discriminatory practices. Many Traveller autobiographies testify that as students, they were treated differently in the school system, not only that they were subjected to racist comments by teacher and student alike, but that teachers did not bother to try to teach them the regular school curriculum. One writer, Bridget Gaffey says, "when all the girls were learning Maths, English, Irish, and History, I was always given a colouring book to go to the back of the class while all the other girls of the settled community did the work. They never tried to teach me any of the things I would have loved to have done" (92-3).

³⁶ Maria Campbell, in her "life story", *Half-breed*, uses a similar strategy to counter outsider views. Describing her Métis childhood, Campbell writes of their social life, "We never had a dance without a good fight and we enjoyed and looked forward to it as much as the dancing" (57).

³⁷ Often referred to as the third world, this thesis recognizes the arguments made that First World / Third World tends to give more priority to the 'First' as a model to emulate. Similarly, the term 'developing' world also underlines modernizing as an important gauge that elides the fact that global modernizing projects tend to be modelled on and financed by Western capitalist interests, as well as the subsequent degradation of traditions that this type of development engenders. "Majority world" is the preferred term because it acknowledges that the majority of the world's population lives in countries that do not have mature economies or predominantly modern infrastructures.

³⁸ In Eastern Canada, Africville, a century old African-Canadian community established on land beside Halifax harbour was subjected to a municipal garbage dump located in their community and other spatial harassments until their community was bulldozed out of existence in 1967 to eventually be replaced by a harbour front park (Mackenzie). These disputed lands, so called 'squatter' or 'shanty' towns are a growing phenomenon worldwide, creating a legal limbo for residents where sometimes decades long 'occupation' rather than official legal status (deeds) is the only claim to ownership.

³⁹ In fact, Joyce's mother had to serve an additional three months for unpaid camping fines.

⁴⁰ The more far-reaching the project, the more susceptible rhetorical belief systems become to inconsistencies. Nancy Fraser, for one, criticizes Foucault for depending on Enlightenment values “for the force of his arguments” while berating them, but concedes that part of the difficulty of his task lies in the challenge of having to create an entirely new language:

The fact that Foucault continues to speak ... the language of humanism need not be held against him. Every good Derridean will allow that there is not, at least for the time being, any other language he could speak ... Foucault himself acknowledges that he cannot simply and straightaway discard at will the normative notions associated with the metaphysics of subjectivity. (57)

⁴¹ The ‘unthinkable’ would be those narratives that are inconceivable because they contradict established beliefs. For example, Japanese historians elide all evidence that Japan was an expansionist, aggressor nation prior to and during World War II, and reaffirm narratives of victimization. This is an extreme example of the ways that groups such as nations create historical narratives and is only used to illustrate what I believe de Certeau means by the term, ‘unthinkable’: an idea so repugnant to the moral sensibilities of a group (like a nation) that it must be wholly rejected. So the unthinkable is an idea that must be suppressed.

⁴² The doll-man gets his nickname from his métier as an ambulatory performer who presents marionette shows.

⁴³ The Canadian legal precedent described at the end of Part II illustrates how this is changing.

⁴⁴ While written accounts certainly carry authority; pictorial, decorative, ceremonial and functional artifacts, as well as archaeological sites are used to extrapolate information about pre-literate cultures. Of course, these are interpreted in accordance with certain biases and assumptions already held by the scholarly community, paradigms that take time to reorient in the light of new or contradictory evidence.

⁴⁵ In the past three decades or so, revisionist historians have either tried to refute these widely held beliefs or at least to nuance their presumed negativity. See Liam Kennedy’s scathing (though not entirely convincing) attack on historical Irish “folk-traumas” (186) as he typifies those historical views that emphasize British colonialism as particularly harmful, in his book chapter, “Out of History: Ireland, that ‘Most Distressful Country’” (185-223).

⁴⁶ His proposition seems to allow two undesirable conclusions regarding the Irish Literary Revival: 1) Either these well-educated, relatively privileged people (largely drawn from the ranks of the Irish Ascendancy) were too naïve to see how their emphasis on cultural nationalism was ‘playing into’ the British agenda, or 2), as Protestants of British ancestry, they were consciously promoting a kind of British-sanctioned nationalism. I am not suggesting that Gibbons means to propose either of these conclusions, but his argument, as written, seems to lead in those directions. In spite of this reticence, the important aspect of his argument is the suggestion that the effects of colonialism are so far-reaching as to be subliminal. The implications of this proposal are worth reflecting on, as they expand the horizon of colonial studies.

⁴⁷ As has been noted, borders between The Irish Republic, Northern Ireland, Scotland and England were frequently traversed as Traveller families followed employment opportunities, including seasonal labour. (Many ‘settled’ Irish also travelled to England during the same period, sometimes for temporary work, but sometimes settling more permanently.) It is interesting to note that in no way did residency elsewhere diminish Joyce’s claim to Irishness. As she explains, “The travellers are peculiar people, although they were never really wanted in Ireland, they were outcasts in their own country still they had great love for it. When they were away the first place they would sing about was Ireland. No matter where they’d be it was always Irish songs and ‘God bless Ireland’ when they’d great drunk” (24). Elsewhere, in *Moving Stories: Traveller Women Write*, a collection of short autobiographies of “Irish Travelling women who have been in Southwark [England] for the last five years” (Gaffey 8), Kathleen McDonagh clarifies her ethnicity more

succinctly, "I am Irish but I was born in Manchester in June 1965" (McDonagh 49), suggesting that for Travellers living in England, their place of birth has less meaning than their cultural heritage.

⁴⁸ Although this particular incident occurred while they were in England, it represents only one incident in a similar pattern of harassment in both England and Ireland. In fact, the two countries differed little in terms of anti-camping policies and their implementation through constant police harassment. However, Nan Joyce's sister, Chrissie Ward, claims that the police in Northern Ireland were worse in their abuse because Travellers are predominantly Catholic. In her autobiography (conducted as an interview), Ward testifies to the anti-Catholic slurs of the police when she quotes them as saying, "Ye dirty Fenians. Go on ye pack o' Fenians. Ye should be up on your own country. Yiz are not welcome down here" (Ward 48), as they drove the Travellers from their tents. Similarly, religious differences seem to have prompted Joyce to return to Ireland from England on more than one occasion (such as the time a doctor in an English hospital suggested she practice birth control).

⁴⁹ If the seven stanzas appearing in *My Life on the Road* represent the complete poem is not indicated. Because the stanzas are separated in the text, line numeration will be limited to the page where stanzas appear, then begin again at line one, etc., on subsequent pages. The seven stanzas that are interspersed in the text appear below in the order that they appear:

Once you could pull in your caravan
To a sheltered spinney or to open ground
But the law moved in with the barbed-wired fence
And they said that your camp was a prime offence
And told you to shift and keep on going
And move along, get along, move along, get along,
Go: move: shift.'

Born in the middle of the afternoon
In a horse-drawn trailer on the old A5
The big twelve-wheeler shook my bed
'You can't stop here', the policeman said
'You'd better get born in some place else,
So move along, get along, move along, get along,
Go: move: shift.'

Born in the tattie lifting-time
In an old bow tent near a tattie field
The farmer said 'The work's all done,
It's time that you was moving on
You'd better get born in some place else,
So move along, get along, move along, get along,
Go: move: shift.'

Born on a common near a building site
Where the ground was rutted with the trailer's wheels
The local people said to me
'You'll lower the price of property,
You'd better get born in some place else,
So move along, get along, move along, get along,
Go: move: shift.'

Wagon, tent or trailer-born
Last week, last year, or in far-off days
Born here or afar, seven miles away
There's always men nearby who'll say

'You'd better get born in some place else,
So move along, get along, move along, get along,
Go: move: shift.'

The winter sky was hung with stars
And one shone brighter than the rest
The Wise Men came so stern and strict
And brought the order to evict
'You'd better get born in some place else
So move along, get along, move along, get along,
Go: move: shift.'

Once you could settle for a week or two
On a public common or a riverside
But the council chased us off the sites
And they said 'You people have no rights
You'd better get moving some place else
So move along, get along, move along, get along,
Go: move: shift.' (75, 77, 80, 85)

⁵⁰ Citing remarks and studies of "English Gypsies" is not inappropriate for several reasons. First the permeability of borders means that these nomadic groups not only encounter each other, but also sometimes live in close vicinity. Joyce recalls one encounter from her childhood when they camped with "Romany gypsies" (23). That her father learned their language and they learned his again indicates that even endogamous cultures intermingle and even sometimes intermarry, as Joyce again verifies. Secondly, both groups share a traditional nomadic lifestyle and anthropological studies such as Okely's find many of the same customs and taboos. Whether English or Irish Traveller, or English Gypsy (or Roma), all face similar housing and mobility requirements. Finally, all nomadic people living in Europe suffer persecution and discrimination. This is not to say that a mere cultural transference is always applicable, but that it sometimes can be.

⁵¹ Ong identifies the "Romantic Movement" as "the beginning of the end of the ... oral art form" (*Orality* 158). Here, he includes the epic poem.

⁵² "Troubles" was a euphemism for the sectarian violence that erupted in the late 60s and continued until the signing of the Good Friday accord in 1997. Here though, as Joyce's reference to the "old IRA" indicates "troubles" refers to the civil war that ignited shortly after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty which split the country, granting 26 counties dominion status, the "Irish Free State", but partitioning the six predominantly Protestant, Ulster counties in the North (Pašeta 83-4).

⁵³ Mary Condren's argument in *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland*. (48-78).

⁵⁴ Also spelled Gitksan.

⁵⁵ However, almost a decade later, the land claim still has not been settled and according to the Gitksan Chiefs' Office website, "resource extraction and development has continued unabated in the Gitksan territories while the aboriginal title court action and treaty negotiations are under way" ("Who We Are").

⁵⁶ On the other hand, with the proliferation of mass media, the tendency for co-option of minority cultural expressions proves highly profitable. "Authenticity" has a market value. Recent examples of appropriation of "street"-culture include using graffiti, skateboarding, piercing, tattooing etc., to sell products such as soft drinks and running shoes ("The Merchants of Cool").

⁵⁷ Sass notes Heidegger considered “the objectivist vision of modern science and technology [as] essentially subjectivist” (205).

⁵⁸ For the sake of clarity, the ‘empiricism’ O’Donoghue refers to will assumed to be a kind of materialistic positivism that underpins the scientific method: that all phenomena are manifestations of matter and that these manifestations can be tested and verified by predictable laws.

⁵⁹ See also Seamus Heaney’s “The Strand at Lough Beg”, originally from *Field Work*.

⁶⁰ If Maher the writer’s views have changed since childhood, he does not indicate it.

⁶¹ For example, see *The Aeneid* VI: 190-204 where “his mother’s birds”, Venus’s two doves, lead Aeneas to the Golden Bough.

⁶² Blood and water, especially when associated together with Christ, symbolize purity. This association comes from the crucifixion scene. When one of the attending soldiers pierced Christ’s side with a spear to verify that he had expired, “forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19: 34).

⁶³ Spirit or God, or gods, or ‘Life Force’: the challenge of trying to express concepts that may be foreign to modern Western thought presents itself, made doubly difficult because we seem to be able to use such words as “worship”, and yet without necessarily understanding in what sense other people ‘worship’. Is it ‘reverence’, as in profound respect? If so, respect for what? For the life force that animates all? What worldview underlines the gesture?

⁶⁴ Pavée is the name Travellers give themselves.

⁶⁵ First Nations writers in Canada have expressed similar grievances. See *The Globe and Mail*, Jan. 26, 1990, “Stop Stealing Native Stories,” by Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, as one example. Because the issue involves questions of ownership based on power differentials, the practice is ongoing and unlikely to be discontinued anytime soon. In spite of this pessimistic assessment, the worldwide web remains a potential equalizer by allowing less advantaged groups a public forum. (Of course, such access involves benefits and dangers which cannot be expounded here.)

⁶⁶ The development of disposable containers to package represented a real loss of income for Travellers and thus becomes a tangible symbol of economic decline, as seen in Joyce’s two-stanza poem (99).

⁶⁷ Use of allegory in Ireland as a code to represent Irish resistance to English colonial oppression has a long history in Ireland but as Christopher Lockett points out, the Irish Literary Revival shaped this amorphous tradition into forms that served to mobilize nationalist sentiments. Yeats’s play, *Cathleen ní Houlihan*, “a conflation of mythology, folklore, and popular legend” (Lockett 5 of 15), depicts Ireland as an old hag who becomes a young beauty again when young Irish men sacrifice their lives to oust “the strangers in the house”, the British, and regain “the four beautiful green fields”, the four counties of Ireland (Yeats’s text quoted in Lockett 5 of 15).

⁶⁸ All Biblical quotes are from the King James Version.

⁶⁹ The significance of this term, paraphrased in Joyce as “God’s Children” was informed by an *Irish Nationalisms* class lecture given by Dana Hearne, Concordia University, Mar. 22, 2006. Note that the predominance of this paradigm is confined to a bygone era. Official Catholic attitudes towards poverty have changed. In a joint study based on a survey analysis, Niamh Hardiman et al. introduce their findings with the precaution that while a “traditional view grounded in notions of charity is still widely expressed in social practice ... some Catholic organisations advance distinctly radical and structural analyses of poverty. We are therefore unlikely to deduce any single a priori link between Catholicism and attitudes to poverty and wealth” (4).

⁷⁰ While Eliade's observation can be said to be generally true in modern Western democracies, his assessment does not take into account the fundamental difference between highly secularized western European societies and American society, a nation whose puritanical origins still dictate publicly espoused codes of political and social behaviour.

⁷¹ Strauss uses the term 'savage mind'.

⁷² For example, many of the autobiographies in *Traveller Ways, Traveller Words* (works shaped by an interview process) reveal knowledge of 'folk' remedies that utilize locally growing wild herbs.

⁷³ At this time, many of Ireland's institutions, including hospitals, were still administrated by Catholic religious communities.

⁷⁴ Foucault's work in deconstructing the patient / doctor relation as a power relation (see for example *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975* as a partial summary of his life's work to that date) helped to spur an "anti-psychiatry" movement that tried to equalize the relationship of which Jerome Bruner's approach could be considered a part.

⁷⁵ Pierre Jovanovic cites Aimé Michel's study of Catherine de Pazzi that proposed a diagnosis of sadomasochism (242-3). He also cites other authors who contend such diagnoses.

⁷⁶ Julian of Norwich was "mortally ill" (Gilmore 114) at the time of her visions. Often, as with Catherine of Sienna (Jovanovic 238-44), sickness is self-imposed through excessive fasting and other extreme ascetic practice.

⁷⁷ European Romantic writers and composers plundered the stories and songs of European "folk" cultures. As noted by Romany writer Ronald Lee in his autobiographical novel, this included "Gypsy" stories, songs (see Johannes Brahms and Franz Liszt's Hungarian Dances), and visual images etc. Such borrowing was inspired by Rousseau's "noble savage", the notion of prelapsarian Man, a romanticized viewpoint to be sure. However, in spite of this romanticism, there is no doubt that after almost two hundred years of cross-cultural contact with the indigenous peoples of colonized lands, Europeans had some understanding of aboriginal ways. This debt has only recently begun to be investigated by academics and much work remains to be done. One academic, Bruce E. Johansen in his PhD. Dissertation (published as *Forgotten Founders*) explores the influence that the political and social structure of the League of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee or Iroquois Nations had on the American Founding Fathers as they formulated the American Constitution.

⁷⁸ See George Blondin, *When the World Was New: Stories of the Sahtú Dene* (Yellowknife: Outcrop, The Northern Publishers, 1990) for example.

⁷⁹ Granted these gendered roles can change. In Canada, for example, in the 2005 census (for the first time ever since 1986), an increase was noticed in the number of hours men spend doing unpaid in the home (.4 hours/day). (Based on the General Social Survey, the study also found that "Women still do most of the housework and tend to feel more time-stressed than men do" (General 2 of 6).) However, to argue against feminists who base their conclusions on millennia of traditional gender-based divisions of labour still widely practiced on a global scale by citing the anomalies noted in an affluent country such as Canada with established government programs providing various programs to assist its citizens in their daily lives is playing the devil's advocate.

⁸⁰ One could begin by looking at poetry, traces of the "Famine roads" that lead nowhere, built by starving peasants on a "work" program that was part of the British colonial response to famine in Eavan Boland's "That the Science of Cartography is Limited" or, Seamus Heaney's many explorations in *North, Field Work, Station Island*. In prose, Nuala O'Faolain's novel about the Irish Famine in *My Dream of You* explores the ways in which the landscape is still shaped by reminders of the Famine, including traces of abandoned potato fields.

⁸¹ Dividing practices are reciprocal but generally, because more privileged groups wield more influence and power while marginalized groups tend to be more vulnerable, the negative effects of exclusionary practices are more likely to be felt by the latter.

⁸² Resists, but is not entirely immune. The all-engulfing capitalist credo of, "If it sells, use it," always must apply. Andreas Huyssen in "Mapping the Postmodern" cites pop 'counter'-culture's appropriations into the mainstream as a signal of the demise of modernism (he would include postmodernism which he sees as only an extension, not a turn from the oppositional tenets of modernism). The observation holds true only if there is no apparent marketable value in the artistic expression.

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