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# Culture and Exile: The Global Irish

James Joyce had his Stephen Dedalus write that the shortest way to Tara, the epicenter of ancient Gaelic Ireland, was through Holyhead, the port of disembarkation for Irish immigrants to Britain.[1] This was more than just a characteristic witticism about the difficulty of reviving cultural traditions; it was a recognition that Irish people discover themselves to be such only on the streets of some foreign country. Before emigrating, a person might be known as a Kerry woman or a Wicklow man. In the precincts of London or Boston, however, such persons learn what it means to be Irish, for nobody ever knows what his country is like until he has been out of it, experiencing the life of another for the purpose of contrast and comparison. Given that no people can ever fully define itself from within, exile is indeed the cradle of nationality. It was, after all, Germanic tribes who named and thus helped to invent the notion of "France." Likewise, the people of England, and later the people of America—as well as those Irish exiles who moved among them—contributed massively to the invention and refinement of the idea of "Ireland."

This has interesting implications. "Irishness" is often like "Jewishness"—it is whatever other people say it is. To be Irish in such a context is simply to be called Irish, and to know what that means you generally have to ask the English or, failing them, the Americans. But, last of all, you ask the stay-at-home Irish who tend to love the "little platoon" from which they came and to give primary affection to townland or county—so much so that the novelist John McGahern wryly observed that Ireland is an island composed of thirty-two separate, self-governing republics. Jamaicans often report the same sentiments: that in their earlier years their loyalty and self-image is wholly bound up with Jamaica, and that it is only on the streets of Camden Town or in the grandstands of The Oval cricket ground in south London that they learn what it is to be "West Indian."

1. This article is the text of a lecture delivered by Michael D. Higgins, then minister for arts, culture and the Gaeltacht, at the University of St. Thomas on February 10, 1997 at the launch of *New Hibernia Review.* The Rev. Dennis Dease, president of the University of St. Thomas, presented Mr. Higgins with the first issue of the new journal on that occasion. Mr. Higgins acknowledged his continuing collaboration with Professor Declan Kiberd of University College, Dublin.

The making of the Irish, like the making of C. L. R. James's West Indians, seems to presuppose the sort of dialogue which happens among exiles. Only through contact with the art of other countries would a modern Irish culture be reshaped. So wrote Oscar Wilde in the belief that, only when large numbers of Irish people spoke and wrote in English, and perhaps French and German as well as Irish, could this happen. The truly great periods of literary expression, he held, have manifested themselves at those points where cultures converge and cross-fertilize. Wilde made these arguments in his capacity as an emigrant. Though often berated by recent historians for their fanaticism and simple-mindedness, the Irish exiles of the nineteenth century were well aware of the hybrid sources of their own nationalism.

Irish nationalism has often been charged with stifling individuality, and the claim has much justice when applied to the introverted decades of mid-twentieth-century Ireland; but, more generally, the earlier nationalism declared itself part of a project dedicated to expanding the expressive freedom of Irish individuals, to the birth, indeed, of what W. B. Yeats once called "a new species of man." Exile was always implicated in the search for individual freedom. Some writers went overseas in order to achieve that necessary distance which allowed them to recast earlier experiences with the sort of detachment required by art. A whole tradition of Irish writing from Joyce to Edna O' Brien falls into that category. In earlier, as well as more recent periods, many artists felt themselves repressed and even suffocated by local conditions: whether the culprit was British rule, censorship by puritanical nationalists or by a philistine clergy, or the common bourgeois distrust of a bohemian life-style, they felt freer to become themselves in foreign places. For spirits such as these Frank O' Connor spoke in joking that "an Irish person's private life begins in Holyhead." The shortest way to Tara might also be the shortest way to modern art. No wonder that in the autumn of 1939 Samuel Beckett shocked his family by saying that he would prefer to live in France at war than in an Ireland at peace.

What these men said, in effect, was that Bohemia is the artist's only homeland, and Bohemia by very definition is filled with nomads and exiles. From Dante's *Divine Comedy* to Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*, some of the greatest works of literature have been written by exiles who wished by an act of imagination to define the components of that place from which they had been estranged. It was this "note of banishment" which Joyce detected in the least likely of artists, that very William Shakespeare who had been celebrated by Victorian critics for his rootedness in the commonsensical world of rural England. Shakespeare's move from Stratford to London was, for Joyce, an action as momentous in its day as his own migration from Dublin to Paris, and so he read the whole canon, and not solely *The Tempest*, as an ongoing

narrative of exile and loss: "The note of banishment, banishment from the heart, banishment from home, sounds uninterruptedly from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* onward till Prospero breaks his staff, buries it certain fathoms in the earth and drowns his book." Art will always undertake to restore a world lost under the brute evictions of history; music, dance, dreams, literature are what fill the vacuum when an eviction has occurred. Those American jazz musicians, cabaret dancers, and writers who sought to redefine the values of their own republic while living in another, the France of the 1920s, were also attempting to recreate the conscience of a race.

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The Irish experience is not unique, therefore. What is remarkable is the sheer longevity and intensity of the exilic tradition. For this people, writing has always been a writing *down*, a fall from the world of energized orality, and so perhaps a form of exile from a happier world. The book-as-physical-object has been a bringer of trouble as well as illumination. It was waved by Christian missionaries announcing the end of the pagan days of wine, ale, and fireside feasts; and brandished later by the occupying forces from the neighboring island, hell-bent on replacing one form of Christianity with another far more calibrated to the literalist demands of a single book. Even the earliest saints had trouble with books. As far back as the sixth century, Colmcille was condemned never to set foot again on native soil after a controversy which began, simply enough, when he transcribed without permission the contents of a sacred text. The story of the saint's exile, and of his eventual surreptitious return, became one of the master-narratives of Irish tradition, to be repeated in some mode in virtually every generation. Thirteen centuries later, the *Jail Journal* written by the patriot John Mitchel during his transportation to Tasmania in the 1850s, became a defining document of modern Irish nationhood.

What of those who stayed at home? They also were massively transformed by all these experiences. The comfort which they enjoyed might call itself a culture without always recognizing that it too was an after-effect of migration. Those emigrants who left solved two pressing problems: their own and their people's. By moving out, they very often secured the chances of greater material comfort not just for themselves but for those who remained. Had they stayed, some would doubtless have been creative contributors, but many for want of employment would have been a drain on the public kitty. Ireland today would look a lot more like an underdeveloped country if the one in two who left since 1841 had remained. And places like North America and Australia might not be quite so interesting or so prosperous.

The same logic can be applied against a wider backdrop. What would have happened if all who left Italy, rural France, Poland, and Scandinavia for the Americas and Australia had stayed put? Without these migrations, argues the economic historian Saamir Amin, Europe would have been compelled to launch its industrial and agricultural revolutions against just the kind of demographic background which has retarded such developments in the Third World this century. It is often forgotten that "the number of people of European ancestry living outside of Europe is currently twice the size of the population of the migrants' country of origin." Had they never left, Europe might look very different, and so might many other places. Europe, in short, might look a little more like the Third World, and it might look a little more like Europe.

Wherever European migrants went, they took with them something which those who remained on native grounds seldom bothered to shoulder: *an idea of Europe.* If Ireland itself was invented in great part by the English and France by Germanic borderers, Europe itself is in many ways a cultural construction of outsiders and *émigrés.* The "mind of Europe" has been described by Americans like T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound far more convincingly and more confidently than by many internal authors, and described so that they could lay claim to it. Today, in the midst of a radical critique of Eurocentrism on many campuses of the world, it is ironic that while the European Union has difficulty in shaping a clear cultural policy, much less a cultural self-definition, the Americans, Africans, and Asians have far less difficulty in describing the concept.

How true a picture of the home countries did exiles and their descendants carry in their minds and hearts? They are usually accused of being arrant sentimentalists, and in truth the exile's world often does seem overdetermined. Consider the English in Africa or India. To the natives they invariably gave the impression of a people at play, wearing white suits and taking tea in the jungle at four o' clock, not noticing the midday sun, impersonating just the sort of English people they felt they ought to be. And could never be. For it was usually the case that they were in India or Africa precisely because they were either more creative and enterprising, or less moral and reliable, than their cousins back home. Their exile was a mark of their refusal or inability to conform to those normative modes, yet out in the equatorial landscape they were desperately trying to imitate those types they could never hope to be. The personality, thus illustrated, became a vast simplification of the English national character; but, because it was relatively simple, it could be imitated by the colonizers and later contested by the natives.

If this was true of the predicament of the English in India or Africa, it may also have been true in a somewhat similar fashion of the behavior of the Irish

in England. Aware of the image of the stage Paddy, they played up to the role in order the better to know themselves, assuming an identity in order to prove it on their pulses. As early as 1818 the poet John Keats observed that the Irish "are sensible of the character they hold in England and act accordingly to Englishmen." The immigrants conformed to the stereotype, if only because it made an initial relationship possible. Coming from a near-neolithic life in remote fastenesses of the West of Ireland, many new arrivals found it easier to don the mask of the Paddy than to shape a complex urban identity all at once. The modifications to the image could come later: at the outset, the policy of the immigrant was "Mask, and it shall be given to you." The stereotype permitted some contact with the English, but only a rudimentary form of relationship which could be controlled and regulated at will.

In such ways modern Irish personality and culture was reshaped, in the words of Benedict Anderson "like a white-on-black photographic negative," capturing the mixed, hybrid experience of the Irish in England, North America, and Australia. The longing for a sod of Sligo earth felt in a London street by the young Yeats was one manifestation of this phenomenon; the American novels of John Boyle O' Reilly were another, and Australian ballads about Ned Kelly the Outlaw another still. All fed the forces of an emergent nationalism. By the close of the nineteenth century, a group of activists decided to return and print a photograph from the negative exposure "in the dark-room of political struggle." Concomitantly, the center of gravity in Irish cultural activity was to be shifted back to Dublin from London and New York. Henceforth, writers would look for publication at home first: in the words of Yeats, "All day I'd looked in the face / What I had hoped 'twould be / To write for my own race. . . ." Yeats believed that the creation of an Irish national literature necessarily involved the gathering of a national audience, for "does not the greatest poetry always require a people to listen to it?" This writing process would be fraught with frustrations and disappointments. For one thing, people did not always welcome the art thus offered. If writers in the nineteenth century had sometimes misrepresented Ireland for the amusement of a "superior" overseas audience, Yeats found that the honest attempt to express rather than exploit his country could cause problems at home. He soon came to conclude that the artist is usually an internal exile. Thinking of the rejection by riot of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* in 1907, Yeats bleakly observed that whenever a country produced a man of genius, he was never like the country's idea of itself. The signs of that strain may be discerned even in the biography of Yeats: though acclaimed as the national poet, he managed to spend more years of his life outside of Ireland than in.

For many artists the act of writing was not only a measure of their estrangement from official versions of Ireland, but also a measure of that

Ireland's estrangement from its past. Unlike other emigrant groups bound for the New World, the Irish did not learn English on arrival in North America or Australia. Uniquely, they chose to abandon their native tongue and to learn English in the homeland. Within little more than a generation, most changed languages, with the result predicted by Friedrich Engels in a letter to Karl Marx: they had begun to feel like strangers in their own country, whose very maps and placenames, now couched in a foreign language, estranged them from their inheritance. In our own time, John Montague has compared a landscape marked by vestigial Gaelic placenames to a manuscript in a lost language:

> All around us shards of a lost tradition,
> The whole countryside a manuscript,
> We had lost the skill to read,
> A part of our past disinherited,
> But fumbled like a blind man,
> Along the fingertips of instinct.

Why did the Irish in Ireland choose to learn English? Many explanations have been given: to prepare their children for possible emigration; to master the language of modern commerce; to do well in school studies conducted through English. The famines of the mid-nineteenth century, and subsequent migrations, hit the Irish-speaking districts hardest, but over and above these explanations were others still. Perhaps the greatest paradox is that English became the language of Irish separatism, the one in which the nationalist case was put. If Benedict Anderson is right in saying that print-language creates a nationalism, and not a particular language *per se*, then English was the ideal medium through which the abstract bonding of people into a unified movement could be achieved. Newspapers, ballad-sheets, handbills, pamphlets—print, the very technology which underpinned nationalism—was available in the English rather than the Irish language. Moreover, if you were a rebel who wished to write a threatening letter to a landlord or to defend yourself in court, a knowledge of English was essential. When they addressed large, mainly Irish-speaking crowds, even those fluent in Irish like Daniel O' Connell chose to speak in the language of London for much the same reasons that Arab protesters in Baghdad today hold up placards in English rather than Arabic—in hopes that their sentiments would be received, understood and even acted upon by hesitant well-wishers of the imperial power. Also, given the fact that colonialism has always worked off a demarcation between colonizer and colonized, and that in Ireland the people looked just like the Planters, it may well have secretly suited the English over the centuries to leave most of the natives Irish-speaking. In that context, the sudden desire of tens of thousands to learn

English might reasonably be seen as, at least in some cases, motivated by a desire to thwart a cultural version of the "color bar." Yet, acceptance of English as the major medium of Irish nationalism seemed to undermine the very basis of the separatist claim, for if the distinctive Gaelic culture was rapidly evaporating, then the Irish Question could be treated as one more economic than political in nature.

It was as if the Irish had moved too far too fast in cultural terms. To give up a language and learn another would perforce become one of the defining experiences of modernity for many persons in the twentieth century, but for hundreds of thousands of Irish this happened in the nineteenth. Far from being a backward race, the Irish have been for almost one hundred and fifty years one of the most future-oriented peoples of the world. To have begun life in a windswept valley of West Mayo and to have ended it in Hammersmith or Hell's Kitchen was to have experienced the deracination and reorientation that would be for so many millions the central "progress" of the twentieth century. Not necessarily modern by nature, the Irish were among the first to be caught in a modern predicament. If at times they evinced a nostalgia for a lost Gaelic past, they did so as the natural human response to being hurtled into the future at such breakneck speed. Those who suffer from giddiness or motion sickness may take some comfort in the rearview mirror, but to infer that they are fixated on the past would be untrue. Yet this, of course, is a widely held belief, and one best exemplified perhaps by that British Airways pilot who told his passengers in the early 1970s "We are now approaching Belfast Airport—please put your watches back three hundred years." Far closer to the truth is the novelist William Trevor's observation that, whenever he arrives in Britain, he is impressed by thoughts of its glorious past, whereas on setting foot again in Ireland he is struck by the thought that "This place will be really interesting in fifty years' time."

For such a people, modernization has been not so much an option as a *donné*. The sense of being denied a familiar context and being asked instead to improvise a set of values in a terrifyingly open space is the deeper subject of John Montague's lines, but it also characterizes the world occupied by Beckett's tramps. On the stage they must invent a set of instant traditions: "Yesterday. . . . In my opinion. . . . I was here. . . . yesterday. . . ." And they must also imagine a detailed landscape, filled with subtle hints as to how they might behave, when what actually confronts them is a blasted, nearly empty setting. Their condition is rather like that of those ancient Gaelic bards whose self-image and training led them to expect far better things than they encountered: "You should have been a poet," and then, "I was, once. Isn't it obvious?" Within the world of the arts, that also is one of the defining elements of modernity:

the plight of the dandy, the courtier now deprived of his court who must attempt to retain poise amidst a world of disintegrations, when all that sustains him is the memory of a style. Yet, two centuries before Baudelaire and three before Beckett and Benjamin, this was the heroic task of that "Hercules without work," the ruined Gaelic bard, who might appear in his own eyes as an exquisite aristocrat entitled to the ancient rights of a poet, but would be read by the new arbiters of elegance as a simple and silly beggar.

This typology of Irish culture has one strange quality: it is both modern and antimodern at one and the same time; or, to put it another way, it is never more modernizing in practical purpose than when it appears most nostalgic in its official self-description. The Easter Rising of 1916 might be cited as a characteristic example: it is now lamented by fashionable revisionist historians as a foolish military misadventure, an attempt by men in revolt against modern life to return to a Gaelic Ireland. In one sense, nothing could have been more romantic than the symbolic choice of Easter and springtime for an attempt by poets and playwrights to bring back the Celtic world. Yet, the date made pragmatic even more than poetic sense, since it was a public holiday, leaving the colonial administration off-guard and vulnerable, as the police and military spent their day at the races.

That same mixture of the poetic and pragmatic, the past and the future, may be found in the Proclamation of the Irish Republic by the rebels. It began with the phrase "Irishmen and Irishwomen," thereby including women in the body politic as a time when they still lacked the vote, but when suffragism was at its height. Over fifty women fought as soldiers in the Rising—on the Irish side, of course—and one woman, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, was appointed to the inner cabinet of five ministers should the provisional government come into administrative being. She would have been the first female government minister in the world. Yet, the opening sentence of the Proclamation, in which Ireland was imaged as a woman summoning her children to her flag, was as old as the oldest Gaelic poetry. So, the ambivalences persisted: the Rising was home-grown, but unthinkable without the help of "gallant allies overseas," not to mention the example of other republics like France and the United States, nor indeed the *dulce et decorum* rhetoric of The Great War. Like so much else in modern Ireland, it too was an effect of the emigrant experience.

The rebel leader Patrick Pearse might summon the Celtic hero Cúchulainn to his side, but he did so to validate his futuristic, social-democratic dream of a welfare state promised by the Proclamation, one which would "cherish all the children of the nation equally." As a vision, that had as much in common with Rosa Luxemburg as with Cathleen Ni Houlihan. The Irish modernist who shaped it knew how to have thing both ways. After all, he was the man who had

studied the educational methods of Maria Montessori in continental Europe, and who then imported them to Ireland with the blithe assurance that they amounted to little more than a return to the sort of fosterage systems practiced in ancient Ireland. Pearse realized that, if he had something new and intimidating to offer, it was wisest to present it as a reassuring restoration. History could in this way take on the contours of science fiction and the past become the future, projected back into it.

Small wonder that, in the same period surrounding the Easter Rising, Joyce was learning how to wrap *Ulysses,* arguably the most subversive narrative of his age, in the structure of one of Europe's oldest stories, Homer's *Odyssey.* Although Irish modernism was both modern and countermodern in the same gesture, it was the modernity which ultimately set the agenda and the terms: far from being fixated on the past, people like Pearse and Joyce relished their power over it, their capacity to make it answer current and future needs. This was one way of coping with the wrenching dislocations of modern life: the "both/and" philosophy refused all "either/or" options favored by the analytic philosophers of England and North America and, instead, chose to see past and future as complementary rather than opposed categories. This philosophy was really an effect of translation, of a culture being "carried over" from one code to another, while refusing to surrender whatever was good in either, however discrepant those elements might seem to the analytic mind. Its wisdom was close to that of the old Connemara folktale teller who, when asked by an American anthropologist if she really believed in the fairies of whom she told so many stories, thought long and hard before answering: "I do not, sir, but they're there anyway."

This attempt by the Irish mind to live in both the old and the new worlds at the same time explains the awesome formal complexity of much of its twentieth-century culture. It accounts for the willingness of artists to take extreme liberties with the forms of English literature, to improvise, as Jorge Luis Borges observed, "without superstition" and without undue deference to that imported tradition. Borges likened the freedoms taken by Latin American artists with Spanish literature to Irish experiments with English form: if freedom could not be won *in* them, it would have to be won *from* them. The same forces underlay Joyce's unprecedented blend of the magical and the realist narrative modes in *Ulysses* which allowed the mythical and mundane to coexist as the same order of event. Joyce's modernism was as much an anticipation of Marquez and Rushdie as of Mann and Eliot. He used myth as a means of criticizing the limits of European realism as a chronicle of bourgeois life; and he simultaneously used realism to expose the limits of ancient myth-making. Central to Joyce's project was the conviction that more was gained than lost in the act of translating Homer into the terms of contemporary life.

A central tenet of postcolonial writing—that the more translated a person or a text may be, the richer do they become—is implicit in much literature of the Irish renaissance. That new species of man dreamed up by Yeats was intent on a perpetual *becoming*, his art a process rather than a product, his identity less a secure possession than a way of moving through the world. The image of the migrant, tramp, or traveller recurs through the works of Yeats, Synge, Joyce, and Beckett, not only because displacement is the condition of the uprooted intellectual but more especially because such a figure is adaptive. Of such characters one might say what Rushdie observes of postcolonial exiles in *Imaginary Homelands*:

> They are people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as immaterial things; people who have been obliged to define themselves because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they are and where they find themselves.

The migrant is not simply transformed into a hybrid by such travels: she or he thereby creates a wholly new art by virtue of multiple location. If Connemara comes to Chicago under such conditions, then Chicago may also be found in Connemara.

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Being a small, vulnerable island, Ireland is largely an aftereffect of outside forces. If it had never existed, the English would have invented it, as a site of dreams, fears, and fantasies. For centuries Ireland functioned as a sort of English Unconscious, a zone in which visiting English could encounter whatever, either noble or base, they had denied in themselves. What was true of economic and political forces, however, may also have been true of images: those suppressed at the imperial center may have erupted on the peripheries. Thus, it came to pass that the project for renovating the Irish consciousness, led by Yeats and Joyce, had the ancillary aim of "saving England," unfreezing the imperial mind and art from its self-induced rigidity. The radical readings of the plays of Shakespeare by Yeats and Joyce were just one instance of this process at work: the belief, shared by Marx and James Connolly, that a blow against empire in Dublin might put into question the deference of the English working-class towards its lords and masters, was another.

Writers of such sterling quality are always helpful in the birth of a nation. All too often, alas, they themselves become the first victims of the new nation-state. Just as the Puritan reaction followed hard upon Shakespeare's epic invention of England in his dramas, so in Ireland censorship of the artist was instituted within a decade of independence. This was, indubitably less lethal in

its effect than the Puritan ban on theater in the London of the 1640s, and far less damaging than the policies pursued by many newly freed African states in the 1960s, but the censorship was debilitating all the same, as it denied many artists not alone an audience but a livelihood in Ireland. Even more sapping, perhaps, was the change in the use which large sections of the public now had for literature: from being an element of the visionary, it was degraded to a mere tool for the passing of state examinations. Those African students who wrote to Chinua Achebe complaining that his novel *Things Fall Apart* lacked only a decent set of model questions-and-answers at the end might have had one or two counterparts in Ireland.

Yet, the paradox underlying all this remained clear: literature in the eyes of politicians and church leaders was still a force sufficiently powerful and subversive to deserve control and even outright banning. By censoring so much of the best modern writing, the authorities between the 1930s and the later 1960s maintained it at the level of an heroic opposition, endowing it with a conspiratorial glamour long after it had begun to lose that status in other countries. The exiled writers liked to joke that they returned every few years simply in order to remind themselves what a terrible place the country was. Beckett may have spoken for more than himself when he wrote in *All That Fall* that, while it was suicide to be abroad, to stay at home was to court a lingering dissolution. Yet, the agenda of the Irish renaissance was still upheld, and upheld most notably by Beckett, who saw literature as an act of perpetual translation, of necessary translation, as he sought to escape the "wit and wordplay" excesses routinely expected of an Irish author in English. Instead, he burrowed down into his learner's French, seeking not just *le mot juste* but a true point of underdevelopment: Beckett's aim was to use its works with all the literal-minded carefulness of a newly arrived immigrant or "guest worker."

Beckett was just one of many who discovered that they could be truer to themselves in an acquired language: if Wilde had discovered the meaning of being Irish in England, Beckett found a similar freedom in French, on the understanding that whenever a man dons a mask his face relaxes sufficiently to reveal some truth. Yet, the freedom which Beckett found in French—escape from the pressure of an Anglo-American audience wanting traditional "blarney"—was found by other artists, such as Brendan Behan and Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, in the Irish language. In it they could express what might otherwise have been exploited in English. Such writers could, indeed, forget the whole question of Irishness and Englishness, for writing in Irish meant that they no longer needed to worry whether what they composed was Irish or not. Hence, the remarkable pursuit of the "international theme" in texts as different as

Ó Tuairisc's "Aifreann na Marbh" ("The Mass of the Dead") or Caitlín Maude's "Dán Grá Vietnam" ("Vietnam Love-Song").

To emphasize the analogies between Irish arts and those of Borges, Rushdie, and Marquez, is not to suggest that analogies with the Euromodernism of Proust, Mann, and T. S. Eliot are less secure. What makes the Irish case interesting is that it is at once postimperial and postcolonial, a land which contributed to the making of empires as well as to their undoing. If the Willy Brandt Commission was correct to suggest that the key relationship of the coming century will be that between North and South, there is a sense in which that confrontation is enacted in many Irish texts of the past decade, from *Dancing at Lughnasa* to *The Commitments*, or in those songs which married the technique of the Blues to the modes of Gaelic music. This was an overdue reversal of the tendency which, back in the 1920s, had led Langston Hughes and certain artists of the Harlem Renaissance to incorporate the example of Sean O'Casey and J. M. Synge. In some respects, the use made of the inherited art forms of Europe by Irish artists has been reminiscent of that made by those Black men and women who picked up the musical instruments of their masters and by sheer audacity of improvisation invented jazz.

Some of this recent "hybridization" of Irish culture arises from a somewhat unlikely source: the religious consciousness of the people. Colmcille was one of the first Irish missionaries to a wider world, those holy preachers who radiated out across the continent of Europe founding monasteries from Lindisfarne to Bobbio. Ever since, young people have travelled vast distances to preach the Christian gospel. Although Ireland, unlike its west European counterparts, never attempted to found political colonies, many persons tried to found a "spiritual empire," which reached a sort a missionary peak in the mid-twentieth century in the emerging countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Returning from these places, priests, nuns and development workers, continue to make their own comparisons between their postcolonial culture and those of the "Third World," and many have brought back a liberation theology and democratic notions of parish reform with them.

If Ireland at the outset of this century was a model for the decolonizing world, then, at the end of it, its people have a great deal to learn from Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Out of the entire experience has evolved a rich literature. Roddy Doyle's international best-seller *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* contains a hilarious description of what Irish children were once taught about Father Damien and his leper colony, but a more tender treatment of the missionary theme may be found in Brian Friels' *Dancing at Lughnasa*. This shows how an elderly priest, having returned from central Africa to his native Donegal, finds the harvest rituals of both places hopelessly confused in his own mind. A num-

ber of Irish writers would probably now endorse the claim made by a character in Doyle's novel *The Commitments* that "the Irish are the niggers of Europe." Indeed, President Mary Robinson reversed the formula, and complicated it with memories of the Great Hunger, when she visited a famine-stricken Somalia and told her hosts they were "the Irish of Africa." Nobody wishes to overstate these points of contact—except perhaps the *Daily Telegraph* editorialist who wrote in February, 1987, that "the only thing keeping Ireland out of the Third World is the weather"—for clearly the analogies have more to do with the Irish past than present. Today, Ireland is an unambiguously First World nation—a model observer of the Maastricht guidelines, and the like—but it is one with a Third World memory. So, it is not surprising that Black artists have taken up the challenge of Langston Hughes to study Irish models: the West Indian poet Derek Walcott has explored points of contact between Ireland and his native Caribbean in the epic *Omeros*, having been introduced to the work of James Joyce by a Presentation Brother from County Cork who taught at his secondary school in St. Lucia. If *Ulysses* demonstrated how the life of one seafaring people of the Mediterraean could be mapped onto Ireland, *Omeros* successfully Caribbeanizes both Joyce and Homer.

The writing produced by persons of Irish background in other countries is now a vast repository of the national experience. In its widest definition, it might be taken to include Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, of which O'Neill himself said that it simply transplanted an Irish family saga to North America. Many, at home as well as abroad, have followed Eugene O'Neill in treating the family unit as a metaphor for the Irish condition: even de Valéra's Constitution of 1937 did that. A surprising number of noted American writers have Irish roots. That their number is surprising owes much to a certain reservation among some in being identified as Irish at all. In part, this reticence recalls the bad old days of the nineteenth century, when signs were hung in Boston shops saying "No Irish need apply," with the result that immigrants preferred to enter Middle America as silently and smoothly as possible. In even greater part, it arises from a disinclination within families to wash dirty linen in public. When Mary Gordon tried to describe the cultural life of her community in some detail, she found herself attacked at weddings and funerals by relations who accused her of betraying the tribe to its enemies. Hence, someone like Scott Fitzgerald occluded the Catholic and Irish sources of many of his stories, even as O'Neill proclaimed his conflicting feelings about his father from the rooftops.

Each major English-speaking country bears traces of Irish migrations. In Australia, the ballads about Ned Kelly became a rallying point for the celebration of the frontier ethic with its cheerful improvisations and skepticism of established legal procedure. A contemporary novelist like Tom Keneally has

explored the links between the Australian Republican Movement, of which he has been chairman, and the contribution of earlier generations of Irish immigrants to the identity of the rugged new land. His autobiographical writings, from the early *Three Cheers for the Paraclete* to the recent *Homebush Boy*, could be transposed with little strain to the Ireland of the same period. His latest project is a screenplay on the Famine, which of course unleashed the largest waves of emigration to all corners of the world.

Those who left Ireland in the wake of the Famine could seldom hope to return, but one of the most fascinating developments in recent cultural life is the contrasting phenomenon of "part-time exile." The speed of travel means that artists can now live each year in two very different countries, as if for the price of living in one. Such poets as Paul Muldoon, Seamus Heaney, and Eavan Boland divide their time between life on an American campus and life back in Ireland. Equally, novelists like Joseph O'Connor and William Trevor have developed the kind of narrative which is spliced between Ireland and another country. O'Connor's *Desperadoes* describes the search by two separated Irish parents for a son missing in Nicaragua; and Trevor's *Felicia's Journey* cuts between rural Ireland and urban England. Even in drama, that sort of hybridity is not only reported but practised at the level of form: Janet Noble's wonderful play *Away Alone*—written, incredibly, before she had set foot in Ireland—marries the techniques of Sean O'Casey to those of Sam Shepard in exploring the lives of immigrant youths in the New York of the 1980s.

All of these developments reflect a more open, ecumenical redefinition of the Irish. They are no longer seen as the people of the twenty-six counties of the Republic nor even of the thirty-two republics of the island, but rather as encompassing all those anywhere who feel that they may belong. In her inaugural address on becoming president in 1990, Mary Robinson reached out to that community, which she has since often visited, and quoted a poem by her friend Eavan Boland on "The Emigrant Irish":

> Like oil lamps, we put them out the back—
>
> of our houses, of our minds. We had lights
> better than, newer than and then
>
> a time came, this time and now
> we need them. Their dread, makeshift example . . .

Successful tours by writers among emigrant communities, not least the recent showcasing at the Frankfurt Book Fair, have sharpened President Robinson's concept of "the global Irish," leading some to talk of votes for emigrants in senatorial elections. The lesson of Irish writing, however, is that such groups are culturally enfranchised already.