



Provided by the author(s) and University of Galway in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Title | Irish Travellers: An Exploration in Criticism and Fiction |
| Author(s) | Holmes, Mary Patricia |
| Publication Date | 2012-09-28 |
| Item record | http://hdl.handle.net/10379/3557 |

Downloaded 2024-04-26T21:47:10Z

Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.



Irish Travellers:
An Exploration in Criticism and Fiction

Mary Patricia Holmes

This dissertation is submitted in fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy

Supervisor:
Dr John Kenny
School of Humanities
Department of English
National University of Ireland, Galway

September 2012

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------|----|
| Acknowledgements..... | i |
| Abstract..... | ii |
| Introduction..... | 1 |

SECTION I

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter 1 Socio-Cultural History..... | 7 |
| Chapter 2 Ideologies of Representation..... | 22 |
| A. Photography..... | 23 |
| B. Television and Film..... | 28 |
| C. Literature and Drama..... | 43 |
| Chapter 3 Shelta, Orality and the Representation of Ideology..... | 54 |
| A. Third-Person Omniscience: <i>The Honey Spike</i> | 63 |
| B. First-Person: <i>Paveewhack</i> | 70 |
| C. Dramatic Dialogue: <i>A Whistle in the Dark</i> | 77 |

SECTION II

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Run Over: A Draft of a Novel</i> | 93 |
|---|----|

SECTION III

| | |
|---|-----|
| Reflections on Research and Practice..... | 233 |
| Bibliography..... | 252 |

Acknowledgements

During the course of this work my mother was diagnosed with a serious illness and had to be placed in a care institution in Toronto. She has been a consistent support throughout my life and this work would not have been possible without her love and selflessness. On top of her many wonderful maternal qualities, she encouraged me and my brothers and sisters to make stories, to dream and always to dance. I am forever grateful to her for her dreams and her love.

Thank you to my uncle, Dr James Walsh, and my brother Andrew and his family who have all generously encouraged me. Thank you to my wonderful friends for their advice, support and faith, in particular: Celine Horner and Colin Kelleher, who believed in me even when I'd lost hope; Paul Gleeson, who through his own example has helped me to be courageous; Kate O'Boyle without whose support and gentle guidance I would not have finished; Ciara Griffin and Rebecca Downes for their continual and reliable friendship and last minute help; Leo Keohane, whose immense generosity, kindness and intellectual engagement have enabled me to become more kind, critical and focused in my anger; and to Fathers Diarmuid Hogan and Patrick O'Donohue, Alice-Mary and all the Higgins family for their kindness, advice and assistance. Professionally, thank you to James Ryan, Harry Clifton, Mark Haugaard, Adrian Frazier, John McAuliffe, the James Hardiman Library staff and to the BA CONNECT programme who funded this work for four years with a generous fellowship.

To John Kenny, who may have got more than he bargained for in supervising me, thank you for your patience, kindness and solidity. Your creative, intellectual and professional guidance has been most appreciated.

And a final thank you to my young nieces, Felicia and Helena Holmes, who at the time of this writing are on the cusp of adolescence and whose confidence, intelligence, curiosity, compassion and exuberance inspire me and fill me with great love and hope. It is to them, and to my mother, that this work is dedicated.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the construction of the Irish Traveller character in fiction. Traveller marginalisation has been perpetuated in literature through stereotypical representation and subjugation of their world-view. This thesis aims to investigate the predominant Irish Traveller stereotypes in art and fiction, and the strategies for innovative representations.

This study is tripartite: discursive, creative and reflective. The discursive section provides an overview of Traveller culture and a history of relations between the group and the settled community in order to explore how representations have evolved for better or worse. Representations within photography, film and literature present an overview of the dominant depictions of Travellers in popular culture; these include the victim, the fool and the criminal. Depictions that engage the Traveller perspective or world-view are rare. Using a stylistics approach, three innovative representations, Bryan MacMahon's *The Honey Spike*, Peter Brady's *Paveewhack* and Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* are analysed to reveal the choices these respective writers have made. A particular focus is placed on the Travellers' specific argot, Shelta, and the oral nature of their community.

Section II of this thesis is the creative application of the best of these ideas in a draft of a novel entitled *Run Over*. The intention is to create a polyphonic chorus of voices, in which the Traveller voice is equal among many. Section III is a reflective essay, which chronicles the interaction of the critical and creative work throughout this Ph.D. The praxis orientation of this work fosters the interaction of critical and creative work, cultivating inquiry, awareness and innovation.

Introduction

Praxis, the interaction of theory and practice, is the fundamental motivation of a practice-based Ph.D. dissertation. The structure of a practice-based Ph.D. takes its shape from a question (or a problem) emerging from a creative work, which becomes the basis for an academic research project, whose findings then feed back into the creative construction. How these processes relate is important, and in the third section of this thesis a reflective essay details these interactions. Together the discursive, creative and reflective sections of this thesis explore the construction of a three-dimensional Irish Traveller character in long fiction.

Irish Travellers are a semi-nomadic oral community who choose to remain separate from the settled (non-Traveller) community. Currently the accepted term by which to denote the group is Traveller, but many people still refer to ‘tinkers’ or ‘itinerants’. As of 2010, the Traveller population was estimated at 40,000 in the Republic and Northern Ireland. For many, inadequate housing, poor living conditions and poverty contribute to low life expectancy. Infant mortality and suicide rates are also high. Beyond these physical concerns and perhaps because of them the group is marginalised within Irish society. Their lifestyle choices, which are often the antithesis of contemporary settled society’s objectives, have separated them from the wider community. How exactly the group came to be a separate community is unknown, but there is evidence that this separation has been intact for at least two hundred years. All the while, the relationship between the Traveller and the settled community has been coloured with animosity and suspicion.

Common depictions of Travellers in the media and art include that they are dirty, diseased, illiterate, violent and misogynistic.¹ This has been the framework for relations between the Traveller and settled communities and has besieged Traveller representations. The majority of Traveller characters in literature have been minor and typecast on the wrong side of typical oppositions such as good and evil, victim and perpetrator, love and hate. These depictions rely on structural conventions that

¹ Kevin Myers, ‘I’m Irish, I Know About the Gypsy Problem,’ *The Telegraph* 3 Oct. 2004, Web, 14 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3611584/Im-Irish-I-know-about-the-gypsy-problem.html>>.

invoke social and cultural stereotypes from the world outside the text and reinforce the audience's expectations.

Audience expectations were at the heart of the Abbey Theatre's decision to reject JM Synge's 1907 drama *The Tinker's Wedding*. The directors of the Abbey thought that the play was too dangerous and that Irish audiences were not ready for the controversial plot in which the despised 'tinkers' outwit a Catholic priest. Although the play was first produced on 11 November 1909 in London, it was not until the 1960s that *The Tinker's Wedding* was performed in Ireland by an amateur theatre company and only in April of 1971 did it debut at the Abbey Theatre, sixty-four years after initial publication.

Synge's representations found meaning and purpose in new and unsettling ways to re-present, and in doing so challenged both literary and social expectations and conventions. As in Synge's time, Traveller representations today are essentially a struggle between archetype and innovation on one side and stereotype and repetition on another.

Many depictions of Travellers in the popular media rehash similar ideas, which include the thug, the scapegoat, the victim and the fool: essentially highly stereotyped characters who lack agency, subjectivity or integrity. There is a growing canon of criticism of Traveller literature, from single-author analyses to cultural study surveys that examine representations in fiction, film and the media. These critical works are predominantly concerned with stereotypical representations within overall narrative structures. This thesis aims to delve deeper into works of literature that portray the Traveller beyond the stereotypical offerings by deconstructing how the texts communicate elements of agency, subjectivity and integrity and larger ideas such as ideology. Because this is a practice-based thesis, the guiding principle here is composition. Understanding the community and evaluating the representations that have been produced facilitates this composition-focus by reflecting on why and how representation can be best achieved.

Because Travellers operate as a separate culture within Irish society, little is known of their lives or their ideas. The first chapter in Section I, the discursive component of this thesis, presents an overview of Traveller cultural history. To understand how representations fail or succeed it is imperative to understand the

community's culture and their defining ideology. The socio-cultural history of the group and their long acrimonious relationship with the settled community is also examined as many representations have been constructed with political motives to critique or acquiesce with political ideas.

Chapter Two of the discursive section presents an overview of the main artistic depictions of Travellers in photography, film and literature. These art forms have been chosen because of their popularity and influence in modern popular culture. Documentary photography is saddled with the task of finding innovative ways to present a static image. By concentrating on the individual experience and the frustration and pain of marginalisation, many photographers succeed at countering stereotype. A truly individual depiction can still surprise and shock. The best of television and film portrayals also concentrate on humanising the Traveller. Dramatic and comedic fictional treatments are common but several documentary productions have proven to be just as effective, if not more so in presenting the hard reality of Traveller life without moralising or falling into sentimentality.

The final part of Chapter Two is a broad overview of Traveller representations in fiction and drama since the beginning of the twentieth century. In early depictions Travellers were regularly represented in the romantic image of mythological Ireland, predominately in order to critique the social changes occurring within the country at the time. During the next century, images of Travellers changed dramatically. Popular representations included loveable rogues or harmless eccentrics maligned by a highly conformist society. As urbanisation increased, Travellers were portrayed as scapegoats, savages, brutal villains, or the embodiment of urban desolation. Most importantly, Traveller portrayals were usually one-dimensional, stereotypical with a predictable symbolic function. Most representations depicted Travellers as a group and few offered any insight into their personal life. Even more rare were, and indeed are, depictions that engage the Traveller perspective. Those that do offer something more innovative have been met with condemnation, from Synge's play to Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in Dark*, the first artistic representation of the brutality now commonly associated with the group, which was also rejected by the Abbey Theatre in 1961.

Until recently, the majority of Traveller representations in fiction were minor roles. The innovation needed to construct a fully realized character demands space on the page and the attention and time usually afforded to central protagonists. Thus Travellers' marginalisation is perpetuated on the page. In the few innovative representations, there is an understanding of the Traveller culture, and at the same time these works do not subjugate Traveller characters or their worldview as inferior or second-class; their ideological perspective is given equal billing.

In the final chapter of this discursive section the representation of Traveller ideology in language is studied in detail in order to understand techniques of the Traveller character composition. One drama, Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* (1961), and two novels, Bryan MacMahon's *The Honey Spike* (1967) and Peter Brady's *Paveewhack* (2000), all depict Travellers as the main protagonist. A stylistics analysis reveals the choices the respective writers have made within Traveller dialogue specifically to convey the Traveller worldview. Two unique features of Traveller dialogue are examined: their specific argot, Shelta, and the oral nature of their community. Within the Travelling community the lexical transformations that Shelta uses to obfuscate understanding parallels the group's antagonistic relationship with the settled community. At the same time the practical, aggregative and repetitive nature of orality has influenced the community's culture, traditions and use of language.

The underlying ideologies directing and informing the writer and visual artist are just as important as those of the character they are portraying. A non-Traveller representing the Travelling community will be subject to different constraints and freedoms than a Traveller will. To maintain consistency within the discursive backgrounds, I have chosen to address works only by non-Travellers. Space limitations preclude an engagement with the work of Traveller self-narratives and autobiography because of the narrative and philosophical differences that exist between these genres and fiction or drama. Examining how previous works have utilised and encoded elements of Traveller culture and how these can be reproduced to construct a strong Traveller character is the reason for this discursive section in the hope that the ideas and strategies collected here can be utilised in Section 2, the creative section of this thesis.

The novel, entitled *Run Over*, is a collection of different voices, starting with the first-person perspective of the twelve-year-old protagonist, Finn. Other first-person perspectives include Finn's mother Ruth, his uncle Denis and the Traveller Sid Connors. The intention is to create a polyphonic chorus of voices, in which the Traveller voice is equal among many. Sid Connors, the main Traveller character, is struggling with the death of his wife and daughter and attempting to regain custody of his three sons. The other significant Travellers in the story include Sid's brother-in-law Johnny Stokes, who runs a successful scrap metal business, and his wife Catherine; The Cowboy, who, by way of intimidation and manipulation, wrestles for dominance within the Traveller group with Johnny and Peter Mac; Peter Mac's straightforward opinionated tendencies often put him at odds with other members of the group, in particular The Cowboy; JP, a newlywed and father, is a small-time thief; and finally there is a group of children including BigAl, Johnnyrocket and MickyD. I use other Traveller characters beyond these and have tried to create an aura of a busy community where events happen quickly. These characterisations attempt to straddle a quasi-realistic narrative situation with representations that humanise Travellers and avoid stereotype.

Currently the novel is approximately 54,000 words, which places it on the lean side of the novel definition. Around the same time as I started to write the novel I read William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, which clocks in at just over 56,000 words. Perhaps I unconsciously absorbed the structure and the polyphonic nature from him. Regardless, I'm unsure of what this means market-wise. I can imagine if a reader is going to part with ten or twenty euro for a novel they will want at least a weekend read of three to four hundred pages. But then Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 415* (1953) was under 50,000 words, as was Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* (1969). More recently Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours* (1998) comes in under 55,000 words, and Julian Barnes novel *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) is around the 40,000 word mark. So length-wise, there is precedent. But would readers buy a small debut novel from an unknown author? I hope so—and in any case the evolving eBooks market, with its divergent pricing, can make a difference in such cases.

The construction of *Run Over* and the many challenges I encountered along the way are detailed in Section III, the reflective component of this thesis. As well as chronicling the development of my creative work, I include accounts of the

challenges that arose within my discursive explorations and throughout my Ph.D. studies as a whole, including the interaction of the creative and critical spheres of this thesis.

This practice-based Ph.D. thesis concerns the separation and the interplay of creative and critical processes. The balance between the synthesis and exploration of the creative work on one hand and the analysis and discovery of critical positions on the other has engendered a fruitful dialectic that has consistently reinvigorated my creative work, even though there have also been many times during which the critical work has overwhelmed the creative. The creative-critical relationship—which occurs on many levels, from the page to the larger process of genre and style of writing—is a fine balance between separation and integration. Within each sphere, creative work needs an unfettered space to develop and to resist the battering ram of criticism in order to lay a foundation free of judgement and self-censorship. The need for clear separation early on pertains to each level of the creative-critical relationship, from the germination of idea fragments to the space offered by the practice-based Ph.D. itself, which allows the writer the time and space needed to accomplish an extended piece of writing. By understanding the referent, narrative structure and then stylistic choices of the finer Traveller representations, this thesis attempts to both discern and learn from the best strategies to construct an original fictional composition. This is the interaction of theory and practice: Praxis.

SECTION I

Representations of Travellers

A Contextual Survey and Analysis

Chapter 1

Socio-Cultural History

Lady Gregory, in her 1903 essay ‘The Wandering Tribe’, recorded a description of Irish Travellers by a farmer in the West of Ireland: ‘A bad class they are, indeed . . . Wild beasts they are, stealing turf from the banks.’¹ Another respondent said, ‘they are under a curse, like the Jews, to be wandering always; and they have some religion of their own, but it’s a bad one.’² Irish Travellers have a long history of acrimony with the settled community in Ireland. Much of what is known about Travellers within the settled community is based on media accounts and hearsay that are often sensationalised or otherwise distorted.

Another of Gregory’s interviewees said: ‘I think the tinkers are not the same as the rest of us; I think they originated in themselves.’³ This is testament to the degree of division between the two groups, but also to the uncertain origins of Travellers. They are an oral culture and have no record of their history. Many accounts maintain the group are descendents of pre-Celtic nomadic craftsmen who maintained an intentional distance and never settled.⁴ The more common view is that they are settled people who ‘dropped out’ of society during the Cromwellian conquest in the seventeenth century or later in the Famine.⁵ Irish references to ‘tinkers’ and wanderers exist in some annals prior to the nineteenth century, but are vague and undefined. One of the first recognised references is from the *Irish Poor Law Report* in 1835 in which interviewees described ‘strolling tinkers’ who formed a distinct class, dispensed with the services of clergymen, had illegitimate children and

¹ Lady Augusta Gregory, ‘The Wandering Tribe,’ *Poets and Dreamers, Studies and Translations from the Irish* (Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1903) 125. Gregory’s essay was inspired by the Travellers in WB Yeats’ play *Where There is Nothing* and consists of a collection of quotes. She attributes these quotes to vague personages including ‘a farmer living by the roadside’, ‘another neighbour’ and an ‘old man from Slieve Echtge’. Presumably the quotes are from people she knew in and around Gort and County Galway.

² Gregory 127.

³ Gregory 123.

⁴ These include Jane Helleiner, ‘Gypsies, Celts and Tinkers: Colonial Antecedents of Anti-Traveller Racism,’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18.3 (1995): 532-554; and Aoife Bhreatnach, ‘Confusing Origins and Histories: The Case of Irish Travellers,’ *Irish Journal of Anthropology* 10.1 (2007): 30-35.

⁵ Proponents of this drop-out origin theory include Ireland, Commission on Itinerancy, *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1963) and Sharon Bohn Gmelch and George Gmelch, ‘The Emergence of an Ethnic Group: The Irish Tinkers,’ *Anthropological Quarterly* 49.4 (1976): 225-38.

sometimes two wives, intermarried with the intention of continuing to beg and who met in the evening to drink and smoke.⁶

Travellers have often been treated in the media as a necessary evil. The resistance to treat them as equals stems predominantly from their reluctance to adhere to the laws and customs of a society that does not allow for their specific cultural practice. Generally, the settled community has little knowledge of Travellers, including their history and the history of the interaction between the two communities. Within the media and art, Travellers are often represented as a static community in both space and time. This lack of understanding objectifies and alienates the Travelling community. An overview of settled-Traveller relations and of Traveller culture is intended to highlight the interaction of the communities but also to provide a temporal history and the changes that have occurred within the Travelling community.

In the early twentieth century, newspaper coverage of the group was generally split between positive feature articles and negative news and court reports that detailed anti-social behaviour. In the 1913 *Irish Independent* article, 'Irish Tinkers. Dwellers by the Wayside', Thomas Kelly described the community and addressed settled people's misconceptions about them. He explained the occupation-based hierarchy within the community. At the top were horse and donkey dealers, and next were the working men, who made tin products and repaired what needed fixing around the house. The lowest level of Traveller did not aspire to any kind of work and had 'bad tongues and begrudin' minds, with seedy-looking donkeys and a poor class of tent.'⁷ The first record of Travellers with a corresponding photograph is from a 1932 issue of the *Sunday Independent*. The article begins, 'Our Irish Tinkers are remarkable people' and went on to describe the life of the typical Traveller (including his love for cheese!). The story ended with a quote from a Traveller: 'The country people would be robbed outright if there were no tinkers.'⁸ This is an ironic statement considering what was to come. Many newspaper reports at this time detailed court cases and violence, and a week and a half after the 1932 *Sunday*

⁶ Great Britain, Royal Commission into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland, *Condition of the poorer classes in Ireland: first report, appendix A and supplement* (Bathurst: HMSO, 1835) Digitised by EPPI: University of Southampton, 21 July 2012 <<http://pdf.library.soton.ac.uk/EPPI/297-6.pdf>> 485.

⁷ Thomas Kelly, 'Irish Tinkers. Dwellers by the Wayside,' *The Irish Independent* 1 Oct. 1913: 4.

⁸ Shirley MacEgill, 'Our Aristocrats of the Open Road,' *The Sunday Independent* 2 Oct. 1932: 10.

Independent article, the *Kildare Observer* reported that a Traveller man had been convicted of assault on a housewife and sentenced to six months' imprisonment with hard labour.

In a 1931 essay in *Béaloides*, Pádraig Mac Gréine described how Travellers journeyed by foot or by cart, sheltered in barns, old buildings or various canvas tent structures.⁹ An article in the *Irish Press* in 1935 heralded the new horse-drawn caravans and listed the advantages of all-in-one living and travelling.¹⁰ This piece also noted the rivalry amongst Travellers in decorating the exterior of their caravans. These kind of horse-drawn caravans were increasingly popular from the 1930s until later in the 1950s and 60s when motorised caravans became available. In 1959 Patrick Kavanagh noted that the boom in horses and scrap had been kind to Travellers and many were living in motor-drawn caravans with radios installed. 'With that kind of prosperity', Kavanagh wrote, 'comes mental awakening and that means the end of the tinker's trail'.¹¹

Traditionally a Traveller nomadic group included up to two or three families travelling in caravans together with animals in tow, camping on the roadside or in a field. Mac Gréine noted: 'They wander about from place to place, begging, selling their wares, visiting fairs with an eye to a good bargain and occasionally stealing when the chances are in their favour.'¹² Groups travelled on traditional routes encompassing two or three counties. Where the group stopped depended on time of year, festivals, the presence of other Travellers and if work was available. Traditional employment was predominantly rural-based and included dealing, tin-smithing and household and agricultural labour.

As land ownership increased, the presence of Travellers and their animals became more troublesome. During the first thirty years after Independence, complaints about the Traveller nuisance grew as did altercations between Travellers and farmers. Horses ate crops, theft and begging were common and farm families felt unsafe and feared reprisal if they did not comply with the Travellers' demands. Across the country, groups of farmers forced Travellers out of rural areas and into

⁹ Pádraig Mac Gréine, 'Some Notes on Tinkers and Their 'Cant'', *Béaloides* 4 (1934): 260.

¹⁰ 'Seen, Heard and Noted, "Poor Old Horse!"' *Irish Press* 12 Mar. 1935: 6.

¹¹ Patrick Kavanagh, 'God's Ginty,' *Irish Farmer's Journal* 10 Oct. 1959: 24.

¹² Mac Gréine, 260.

the urban fringes. In one incident in June 1956 in Bushypark, outside Galway City, a Travellers' camp was destroyed, a caravan damaged, a Traveller woman was assaulted and all of the camp residents, including many young children, were terrorised by fifteen to twenty men wielding guns and other weapons. Two brothers were eventually acquitted of the attack.¹³ In 1955 the *Connacht Tribune* reported that in the town of Boyle, County Roscommon camps blocked footpaths, caravans obstructed the roads and horses wandered freely.¹⁴

Articles in newspapers throughout the country detailed these kinds of tensions and the confrontations between Travellers and the settled community. Letters to editors and editorial columns demanded government action to deal with 'the itinerant problem' and in 1963 the Irish government published its *Commission for Itinerancy* report in response. The report concluded that nomadism was a symptom of poverty and 'Travellers were once settled people who were not able to cope with economic or social pressures and had taken to the road.'¹⁵ The main goal of the report was to rehabilitate the group by resettlement strategies, which included demanding fixed addresses for social welfare payments and offering Travellers houses or areas specially reserved for their caravans.

The Irish government was more focused on assuaging the voting public's anger and fear than on the long-term ideological ramifications. From the 1930s, as Ireland moved beyond the War of Independence and the Civil War, the country struggled with a new political system and government administration, economic difficulties that lasted almost sixty years, a tuberculosis epidemic, the Troubles in Northern Ireland and mass emigration. Social change was encouraged and anticipated by the shift from agriculture to manufacturing. Amid this turmoil, the Catholic Church maintained a tight hold on the nation's morality, bolstering censorship and deterring ideas contrary to the church's teaching, including feminism. The twentieth century (at least until the mid-1990s) was among the most dynamic and challenging times in Ireland's history. There was little tolerance for entertaining a group of 'drop-outs' who refused to engage on the settled community's terms. Newspaper coverage concerning Travellers from the mid-1960s was predominately

¹³ 'Brothers acquitted of assault on road camp,' *Connacht Tribune* 6 Oct. 1956: 21.

¹⁴ 'Curb Tinkers motion lost,' *Connacht Tribune* 17 Dec. 1955: 25.

¹⁵ Ireland, Commission on Itinerancy, *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1963) 12.

negative, covering matters such as evictions, court cases, gun or drug crime, and few articles contained positive or constructive viewpoints.

In the 1970s, alongside attention from anthropologists (George and Sharon Gmelch and later Jane Hellenier) and photographers (Alen MacWeeney and Josef Kouldeka), a political awareness began to grow within the Travelling community itself. By the end of the 1980s Pavee Point had established itself as the main Traveller lobby group and soon other community advocacy groups, including the Irish Traveller Movement were started.¹⁶ These gradual changes motivated some non-Travellers to reassess how the Travelling community was represented within the media. In 1996 the National Union of Journalists advised against using terms such as itinerant, knacker, pikey and tinker in print. In addition, Travellers were only to be identified when it was relevant to the story concerned.¹⁷ Faced with these parameters the news media embraced more implicit means of reportage. Juxtaposing articles beside suggestive images of violence, including those with slash hooks, shovels and hammers, dishevelled appearances or reprehensible non-violent behaviour such as leaving garbage behind in camping sites or in and around their houses have become common techniques in newspapers and magazines. Travellers are usually portrayed in groups and sexualised images of females predominate in newspapers, on the internet or in tabloids, and especially in reference to weddings or horse fairs.

The attitude towards Travellers in the UK is generally more exploitative and intolerant than in Ireland, although this may be due to the greater number of media franchises. For example, in October 2008 several UK media outlets, including the *Daily Mail*, published a series of photographs of a 'typical' Traveller wedding in Cheshire featuring a scantily clad bride, a buxom mother of the bride and provocatively dressed young girls.¹⁸

How the settled society perceives Travellers is an important component in understanding how representations emerge. In turn, how these representations affect perception is also valuable. The recent Channel 4 documentary *Big Fat Gypsy*

¹⁶ For more detail on both twentieth-century Traveller history and their political development see Micheál Ó hAodha, *Irish Travellers: Representations and Realities* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2006) 35-46.

¹⁷ Aoife Bhreatnach, 'Travellers and the Print Media: Words and Irish Identity,' *Irish Studies Review* 6.3 (1998): 289.

¹⁸ David Wilkes, 'The £100,000 white wedding for the 16-year-old girl who lives in a caravan,' *The Daily Mail* 29 Oct. 2008, Web, 12 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1081355/The-100-000-white-wedding-16-year-old-girl-lives-caravan.html#ixzz23eh3DOfl>>.

Weddings focuses on extravagant Traveller weddings where transportation is regularly in domed carriages and bridal dresses weigh over ten stone and include unusual features such as fairy lights. The show also documents first communions and so the age of the females in focus ranges from eight to twenty-two years. Despite the Gypsy in the title, only Travellers have been portrayed on the series. The show piloted in the UK in 2010 and ran for two seasons. I was unable to find viewing figures for Ireland alone, but the February 8 2011 episode had viewing figures of almost ten million, making it the fifth most watched individual show in Channel 4's history.¹⁹ The programme was discussed in Irish papers, on radio and television talk shows and prompted the production of a similar programme by Dublin-based TV3.

The production company for *Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* claims that each episode offers insights into the Traveller culture including gender roles, education and relations between the two communities. Travellers disagree. They describe the documentary series and its advertising as sensationalist, exaggerated and fuelling hatred and suspicion of Traveller groups.²⁰ Keeping in mind that the meaning of one representation may have ramifications for future representations, especially at the ideological level, social media can be used to gauge the extent of influence. On Twitter, a user has 140 characters to make a statement. Using a hash tag at the front of a word or a phrase, usually set by a main user or provider (in this case, Channel 4 used #gypsyweddings and the unofficial tag was #BFGW), both Irish and UK Twitter users can watch the program and simultaneously share comments within a filtered stream.

On February 15, 2011 during the show's broadcast, Twitter was saturated with comments. Many contributors thought the program was ironic; some felt it was funny, others saw it as humiliating. But the overall consensus was one of hate. The comments fired directly at Travellers included: trash, tramps, train wrecks, sluts, cunts, whores, fat fuckers, hypocrites, stupid, racist, cheap, tacky, a different species, dogs, vermin, sexist pigs, repulsive and disgusting. Some contributors asked if this was a pantomime; others suggested Travellers have no self-respect and should be

¹⁹ Baliyar Khalsa, 'Gypsy Weddings tops C4's best of 2011,' *Broadcast* 12 Jan. 2012, Web, 19 July 2012 <<http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/gypsy-weddings-tops-c4s-best-of-2011/5036438.article>>.

²⁰ Henry McDonald, 'Travellers Attack Channel 4 over My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding Series,' *Guardian* 14 Feb. 2012, Web, 19 July 2012 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/feb/14/travellers-attack-channel4-gypsy-wedding>>.

ashamed of themselves, and that they must have venereal diseases. Some said it was embarrassing to normal Catholics or that Travellers do not deserve to be speaking with Irish accents, that nothing (the way they dress) says ‘fuck me’ more, and that they should be stoned, locked in a basement and left to starve, burned to death and tossed off the planet. Much of the contribution consisted of heavy sarcasm and didactic judgement regarding the wedding in particular, but also towards child rearing, domestic hygiene, the Travellers’ morals and the female’s body weight. The Twitter stream was engulfed with negative comments referring to the female body, in particular the breasts. Many contributors wondered and speculated where the group found the money to pay for the wedding and even vilified them for how they spent it. Expectations of thievery and violence were common and many said they could not take them seriously. Some comments on Twitter are done in the spirit of fun; people are watching ‘trash TV’ and are engaging in the discourse of playful banter that the programme inspires. However many are unaware of this boundary. Certainly, advocating violence is disproportionate and potentially devastating, but more subtle dehumanising insults can cause great damage as well.

There are obviously methodological problems involved in introducing comments from thousands of Twitter users, the most important of which concerns the representative nature of these tweets. A thorough investigation of each Twitter user is not a practical option for this thesis, but these ideas are presented here as an indication that the statement from the 1963 report which described the attitude of the settled population to Travellers at the time: ‘Itinerants are despised as inferior beings and are regarded as the dregs of society’ is still prominent.²¹

TV3’s programme, *The Truth about Travellers*, was a three-part series aired in 2011 to large viewing figures and explored Traveller life within Ireland specifically. Similar television documentaries that aim to present representations that are more balanced include *Blood Of The Travellers* produced for RTÉ in 2011, which examined the genetic makeup of Travellers. Both these documentaries were more even-handed than *Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and far less sensationalist.

Many newspaper journalists tend to report on Travellers with sweeping, often negative generalisations, for example Kevin Myers’ diatribe in the *Telegraph* in

²¹ Ireland, Commission on Itinerancy, 102.

2004 in which he described all Travellers as being patriarchal, dirty, diseased, alcoholic, illiterate, violent, misogynistic, and low achieving.²² An editorial in the *Down Recorder* (25 June 1986) called for public services and private businesses to refuse service to all members of a Traveller group that had occupied a car park outside the Down District Council Chambers. The newspaper described Travellers as ‘social misfits who suck the blood dry before moving on to another easy prey’, ‘a cancer’ and ‘a plague of parasites’.²³ All of this makes one nostalgic for Thomas Kelly’s 1913 article.

Some journalists take a more reflective approach when writing about Travellers. In an opinion piece in the *Irish Times* in June 1995, Fintan O’Toole suggested that the hostility directed towards Travellers was the result of the settled community’s self-contempt and inability to reconcile the impoverished conditions of the country before the reforms of the 1960s.²⁴ O’Toole commented that the pace and rate of change within the settled community since the 1960s has left the Travellers increasingly marginalised and often living in conditions similar to those of settled people in the 1940s.

Paul Delaney has speculated that the media, and indeed the initial assumptions on which the 1963 report was based, frame the relationship between the two groups by placing the rights of the settled community on one side and the obligations of Travellers on the other. Delaney examined an editorial from the *Sunday Business Post* that focused on an infamous incident in 2001 when damage at an illegal halting site on the banks of the Dodder River was left for the local council to repair, provoking public outrage and a media storm. Breaking the argument apart, Delaney noted the absence of any reflection as to what was motivating the Travellers. Instead, the editorial focused on the privileges of the majority, the duties of the minority and entirely ignored the needs of the group.²⁵ Consideration for Travellers’ tradition and motivation still faces substantial resistance. Most of this opposition castigates rather than understands the culture, if the concept of culture is introduced at all. Examining the Traveller culture and traditions is essential to

²² Kevin Myers, ‘I’m Irish, I Know About the Gipsy Problem,’ *The Telegraph* 3 Oct. 2004, Web, 14 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/personal-view/3611584/Im-Irish-I-know-about-the-gipsy-problem.html>>.

²³ Paul Noonan, ‘Pathologisation and Resistance: Travellers, Nomadism and the State,’ *Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland*, ed. Paul Hainsworth (London: Pluto, 1998) 163.

²⁴ Fintan O’Toole, ‘Hostility to Travellers challenges migratory Irish,’ *The Irish Times* 16 June 1995: 16.

²⁵ Paul Delaney, ‘A Sense of Place: Travellers, Representation, and Irish Culture,’ *The Republic* 3 (2003): 83.

appreciate their motivation and understand how representations reflect or obscure the Traveller reality. Most important to this work is an understanding of the Travellers' use of Shelta, a canting slang used traditionally as a cryptolect. Chapter Three will focus on Shelta, but for now other cultural elements of the contemporary Travelling community including accommodation, employment, marriage, religion and horses are examined.

Travellers still define themselves as peripatetic nomads, but nomadism was severely limited in 2002 with the introduction of *The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act*. Living in a house may be an indicator of less mobility for some Travellers, but it provides a crucial base for others. Travellers with permanent housing have the luxury of travel since their home is secure, whereas Travellers who live in halting sites might fear that by leaving they will lose their space and end up left to camp on the side of the road and at the mercy of the Gardaí. The 2011 census found 12% of Irish Travellers lived in caravans and mobile homes, down considerably from four years earlier when the figure was 25%.²⁶

Halting sites are often controlled by specific family groups or those with common values. Families who do not fit in usually move on. The local council provides Traveller families with a parking bay, which is essentially a concrete plot equipped with toilet facilities, water and electric connections. But Traveller families are often large and subsequent generations may want to stay in close proximity to the family unit leading to two or three generations of extended family living in one or two bays, resulting in severe overcrowding. This intergenerational domicile is not new: the *Poor Law Report* in 1835 mentioned it as did Mac Gréine in his 1931 essay.

Despite common beliefs in the settled community that Travellers live in filth and chaos, most Travellers are diligent and obsessive about maintaining and ensuring the inside of their caravan is clean. The same holds true for physical appearance and personal hygiene. Ciara Griffin has described the rigour associated with laundry day where clothes for the upper body and those for the lower body are washed separately, as are male and female clothes and adult and children's clothes.²⁷

²⁶ Ireland, Central Statistics Office, *Census 2011 This is Ireland (Part 1)* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2012) 39.

²⁷ C.C.M. Griffin, 'The Religion and Social Organisation of Irish Travellers on a London Caravan Site (Part 1),' *Nomadic Peoples* 6.1 (2002): 58.

Some families still travel, predominantly in the summer, to socialise, to make important business and matchmaking contacts, to attend traditional fairs and markets and for skilled work in which Travellers specialise—the same reasons they have always travelled. However, traditional employment has been severely curtailed by the mechanisation of agriculture, plastic production and increasing mobility of the settled population, so now many Travellers deal in commodities or services such as scrap metals, caravans, horses or tarmac. Most are self-employed and for many the emphasis is on income generation rather than waged employment. Occupational flexibility is a priority in order to cater to social obligations based on family and nomadism. Attaining self-employment is increasingly difficult as areas traditionally associated with Travellers (e.g. recycling, waste disposal, horse-trading) are subject to increasing regulation and enforcement. For many, social security benefits are the main and regular source of income. Until recently Traveller participation in formal education or the labour market was rare. Only about half of Traveller adults in 2008 had completed at least primary school education and the 2006 census revealed that 63% of Traveller children under the age of fifteen had left school compared to 13% nationally.²⁸

Marriage is the basis of the political hierarchy within the community and is often a strategic alliance. Virtually all Travellers marry, mostly to other Travellers. Certain groups are more likely to marry each other; 85% of Traveller marriages are consanguineous and a third of these are first cousins.²⁹ Marriage occurs early in a person's life, usually during the teenage years or in the early twenties. Courtship is swift, if it happens at all. Divorce is almost unheard of, although separation does occur. A woman's primary responsibility is to support her husband, children and extended family. The amount of authority and power women yield within the family changes during their lives; young brides are subordinate to other adults, but by rearing children, women acquire power within the family and community.

²⁸ Ireland, Department of Health and Children, *All Ireland Traveller Health Study, Executive Summary* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2010) 13.

²⁹ Sinéad Ní Shúinéar, *Irish Travellers: A Culture of Anti-Hierarchy* (Limerick: University of Limerick, 2007) 6.

In the 2006 census almost all Travellers (95%) reported to be Roman Catholic.³⁰ Devotions, religious pictures and paraphernalia such as holy medals and holy water are all given special prominence in many Traveller homes. Rituals and rites of passage are important opportunities to display the family's status to the rest of the community and reinforce group bonds. Traveller weddings have always drawn large crowds, often three hundred people or more, who arrive at considerable expense and travel long distances to pay respect to the families. These large gatherings allow for matchmaking and political alliances, which reinforce the collective identity and delineate the cultural boundary from the settled community.

The manner in which Traveller girls dress themselves, in particular at weddings, is often portrayed as scandalous. Provocative clothing is worn in order to draw attention to themselves and attract potential husbands. In 1890 and 1931 both Leland and Mac Gréine wrote about the revealing clothing young females wore, and examined the settled community's prejudices in their respective times. Despite fashion choices, purity has remained a crucial component for female identity. Marrying well depends on it and those who compromise themselves physically, risk placing their own and their families' reputations in jeopardy within the community.

Honour and strength are among the most important virtues in the Traveller community and are the basis of hierarchy and respect.³¹ Confrontations can occur spontaneously at large gatherings or as a planned event. The infamous bare-knuckle fight has become synonymous with Travellers' dispute resolution, despite its illegality. Regulated and monitored by the community, attendance is limited and strictly vetted, although occasionally videos of these fights are posted on the internet. Even numbers from each side attend and only males are allowed.

Stepping up to violence is encouraged and while fights and violence resolve some disputes, most are settled through a variety of indirect strategies ranging from property damage to ridicule and gossip to all-out avoidance.³² But without a structured hierarchy, physical aggression is a means of maintaining order and is the

³⁰ The remainder are: Church of Ireland (including Protestant), 2.4%; Other stated religions, 0.3%; No religion, 0.3%; and Not stated, 1.9%. Ireland, Central Statistics Office, *Census 2006 Volume 5: Ethnic or Cultural Background (including the Irish Traveller Community)* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2007), 40.

³¹ Several Travellers have represented Ireland in boxing at the Olympics, and in 2012 John Joe Nevin from Mullingar won a silver medal in the men's light flyweight.

³² Griffin, 58.

basis of social organisation, with titles such as the King of the Travellers inflating the status of specific individuals and their families. Fighting among close relatives is common but families will also defend each other in a major quarrel to express and reinforce family solidarity. Solidarity is also important when dealing with the settled community during unscheduled life-crises such as hospitalisation or imprisonment because group members have been placed in the midst of and at the mercy of outsiders.³³

Horses have long held an important economic and symbolic role within the community. Travellers keep horses for reasons of tradition and investment. Beyond buying and selling, horses are still used to race, trot, showjump and facilitate business by hauling materials. Horses are pivotal to Traveller culture and self-perception, so much so the Irish Travellers Movement logo is a horseshoe. Men and boys dominate horse keeping and trading, and for many it is their full-time occupation. Both settled Travellers and those who live on halting sites will often keep their horses in the immediate vicinity. In 1997 the *Control of Horses Act*, which became law in response to stray horses in urban areas, was met with condemnation from the community who suddenly needed special and expensive licenses to keep or use their horses within urban areas.

Despite the associations with horses there is also a history of mistreating horses, and an even longer history in using them to gain advantage. Mac Gréine in 1934 detailed the ways Travellers resorted to trickery in the sale and dealing of animals, particularly lying about age and ability in order to maximize financial return. He also detailed the theft that occurred on farms and in houses when a group camped nearby. Newspaper archives from the late nineteenth century detail countless cases of animal cruelty, thefts, drunkenness, fighting, murder and other violence.

Many accounts suggest that begging was only successful because the Travellers were persistent and the settled people wanted away from them. Media outlets and people from all stages and walks of life who I've spoken to valorise older Travellers as more honest and decent than their contemporaries, but earlier newspaper articles, as well as sociological and anthropological reports, show that the

³³ Sharon Gmelch, 'Groups That Don't Want In: Gypsies and Other Artisan, Trader and Entertainer Minorities,' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15 (1986): 319.

older generation was just as demonised when they were younger and the older generation at that time were valorised.

Welfare fraud, violent crime and drug dealing are all associated with a more modern type of Traveller. In a 2006 study by The National Advisory Committee on Drugs about the nature and extent of the illicit drug trade amongst the Traveller community, a social worker commented that Travellers who traded in drugs did so 'like they used to trade in other things'.³⁴ The study found that the main reason for drug-dealing by Travellers was economic and many of the study participants linked drug-dealing to the lack of job opportunities for Travellers. In 2010 the *All-Ireland Traveller Health Survey* reported that Travellers are over-represented in Irish prisons compared to the non-Traveller population. Travellers comprised 4.6% of the prison population as compared to 0.9% of the Irish population.³⁵

This review of Traveller culture and the settled community's interaction with the group is meant to provide an appreciation of that from which creative works draw their representations and where stereotypes may originate. Understanding the community is another element all together. Mark Haugaard, the editor of the *Journal of Political Power*, argues the structuring of Traveller social order has many elements of a medieval society. His evidence is the strict social order, an absence of a strong central authority, segregation of the sexes, the tendency towards collectivism (as opposed to individualism) and the highly valued qualities of bravery, honour and physical strength. In addition to these points, Travellers have maintained an oral culture and do not participate in the schooling system (until very recently at least) and so are socialised in a different manner. This medieval nature of the community contrasts with the forces influencing settled society, namely individualism and the deference to a hierarchical social structure, and it is these issues that create much of the animosity between the groups. Haugaard also suggested that the way some Travellers pollute—leaving trash or damaged property behind when they leave camping site—is intentional and are small rebellions against settled people and the state.³⁶ These ideas go beyond the tit-for-tat squabbles that

³⁴ Jane Fountain, *An Overview of the Nature and Extent of Illicit Drug Use Amongst the Traveller Community: An Exploratory Study* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2006) 40.

³⁵ Ireland, Department of Health and Children, *All Ireland Traveller Health Study*, 110.

³⁶ Mark Haugaard, personal interview, NUI, Galway, 17 July 2009.

focus on finger pointing and blame to provide a deeper and nuanced understanding of the situation.

This type of reflection is missing in media depictions, which seem more intent on fuelling animosity than quelling it. Within art, many, if not most, artists have approached their representations from the outlook of the settled community and with a shallow understanding of Traveller history and culture. Literature is not immune to these sorts of misrepresentations, but it is the visual art mediums of photography and film that are particularly powerful in disseminating ideas, predominately because of the potency of the visual medium itself but also because of the relative ease and speed with which these mediums are consumed. And so it is to photography and film that we will now go to determine what the dominant stereotypes are.

Chapter 2

Ideologies of Representation

For better or worse, popular culture provides a perceptual frame for envisioning and understanding the world around us. Predominant images and ideas propagated by both the media and art can easily gain ground as defining images and ideas. The negative stereotype of the Traveller commonly seen in the media is both disseminated and challenged by visual art and literature. Semiotic methods can be used to understand the ideologies through which representations are constructed and the motivation by which meanings are fabricated. The fundamental concept of semiotics is the sign, as described by Saussure, which consists of the relationship between a ‘signifier’, the form which a sign takes, and the ‘signified’, the meaning it represents. When signs are interpreted in certain ways, especially in great numbers and over time, they become the privileged view (recall the twitter response: whores, stupid, cheap, repulsive and disgusting). The representation becomes its own truth and is reinforced as some sort of natural law. E.H. Gombrich stated that representation is like a useful map, ‘not the faithful recording of a visual experience, but the faithful construction of a relational model.’¹ So strong is the belief that what we see actually exists, we are prone to infer other properties of an object from its image alone, even when the other senses provide contradictory information. But understanding is based on how something functions, not merely how it looks. In visual art forms this is both a great advantage and detriment. Repeating and rehashing images in standard ways feeds into relational models or signification structures with which the viewer is familiar and can easily associate with an implied narrative. However if the signification process isn’t varied or defamiliarized, for example by offering an alternative narrator or viewpoint, the representation runs the risk of objectifying its content and contributing to stereotype.

Visual art forms, specifically photography and film, are ubiquitous in modern culture. An inventory of the main images and productions distributed by these forms with regard to our present topic is helpful to examine the representational strategies

¹ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000) 90.

and techniques with which artistic works are able to push the limits of convention and yield ideas that may help dismantle stereotypes and increase the probability of innovation.

A. Photography

Below is a selection from the collections of eight photographers that reflect the general mood and style of Traveller representations in documentary photography overall. Descriptions and analysis of the photography are presented initially and the images are displayed at the end of this section (pages 29-36). Two to three images per photographer have been selected to convey an overall sense of portrayal within each collection. Most documentary photography does not have the same pressures as news photography (the lack of time and commercial purpose) and succeeds as an artistic form not just in its purpose to represent, but to depict a narrative as well.² In Ireland, Travellers have been a subject for photographers since the 1950s and increasingly so in the last ten years, with mixed results.

The first Irish Traveller photographic collection to appear was Elinor Wiltshire's. Wiltshire, who owned Green Studio in Dublin during the 1950s and 60s, is best known for photographing Dublin City before the architectural teardown and her images of Travellers were taken with the same spirit of documentation and preservation. Wiltshire's collection was shot in the 1950s when public furore against Travellers was growing but before government reforms were implemented or publically considered. The Travellers pictured here were located in Loughrea and Claregalway in County Galway.

Figures 1 to 3 (page 29) convey how Wiltshire represents Travellers as a close-knit, hard-working community. The subjects are all from the same campsite and are comfortable in front of the camera, clearly posing and performing for her, having dressed up for the occasion. Many of her photographs are intimate: the subjects are smiling, relaxed and happy with their arms around one another or

² The critical theory concerning documentary photography is vast. Recent publications that have informed my thinking here include Manuel Alvarado et al, eds., *Representation and Photography: A Screen Education Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); and Ian Heywood and Barry Sandywell, eds., *Interpreting Visual Culture: Explorations in the Hermeneutics of the Visual* (London: Routledge, 1999).

touching each other in some way. The children pose for the camera with adults within close watch. Family, protection and work are overriding ideas here. Wiltshire depicts the Travellers in a rural setting and near their caravans, but she also photographs them individually and close up in unconventional poses. By changing the content of her photos and moving in for close-ups, Wiltshire offers a different representation that considers alternative realities and allows her subjects to be individualised.

Figures 4 to 6 (page 30) are a sample of Alen MacWeeney's photographs of a group of Travellers encamped in Ballyfermot in Dublin in 1965. MacWeeney's photographs were taken at a time when government rehabilitation policies had not been fully implemented but, especially with the availability of the dole, were beginning to assert influence. MacWeeney's timing was excellent. His work straddles two eras of recent Traveller history; there is a similarity to the happy natives of the Wiltshire set, but this collection also conveys the grim realism that lies in the future. Ramshackle houses stand beside caravans and grinding poverty has set in, but despite these hardships MacWeeney captures the community's resilience with photographs of men and/or children playing, men drinking and playing music or families posing together. The photographs are rich with impact and, with the benefit of knowing what was to come for these people, they take on an air of anthropological and historical importance.

Josef Koudelka is a member of the Magnum Group of Photographers, and his photographs included here, figures 7 and 8 (page 31), were taken at Puck Fair in 1971. Figure 7 is a unique portrayal of dismay. There are many connotations of inebriation: the bottles on the road, the man with his arm wrapped around a post and the other holding his head. The man with the guitar is one of the few representations (outside of the professional well-known musicians) of Travellers as entertainers. At the other end of the spectrum is figure 8, where a young child's head pokes out upside down from under a tarp covering a portion of a traditional caravan. The light-hearted nature of the picture conjures up idealised images of childhood but also the unpredictable and sometimes absurd stereotype of Travellers themselves. Koudelka's two images present stark and disturbing contrasts of childhood and adult reality.

Paula Allen is a war photographer and during her time in Belfast in the 1980s and early 1990s, and later in 2002, she photographed a family of Travellers, the Gavins. Figures 9, 10 and 11 (page 32) are a small sample of this collection. Allen depicts the personal hardship that violence and instability, including domestic violence, arson and murder, have on individuals. In the thirty years since Wiltshire's collection, representations have changed from her subject in figure 1 working over an anvil to Allen's depiction of the man in figure 11 displaying his gunshot wounds. Marginalisation, dismissal and the role of women feature prominently in Allen's photos. In figure 9, a Traveller woman leans on her kitchen counter beside the dish rack but her attention is directed elsewhere. In figure 10 the young boy is lying down beside a window shirtless, looking confused or upset and outside various discarded items are piled on top of one another, including a kitchen sink. One of the greatest sources of irritation between settled people and Travellers is the way Travellers deal with waste and the lack of attention they pay to the home exterior. This is not a topic regularly dealt with in any art form and Allen's representation—juxtaposing it with a child in a vulnerable position—is a unique composition.

Francesco Alesi is an Italian photographer who documented the Travelling community's reverence towards Roman Catholicism. His collection '*God Bless Ya*', from which figures 12, 13 and 14 (page 33) are taken, has been published in *The Irish Times* and in various exhibitions and publications across the world. Alesi taps into a strong underlying current by focusing on the role of religion in Travellers' lives, demonstrating Travellers' interaction with the Catholic Church from weddings to funerals, to pilgrimages and regular mass attendance. The photograph of the family wearing necklaces (figure 12) is taken outside Knock church; the placement of their hands and the relaxed nature of the photograph convey intimacy and protection alongside curiosity and apprehension. The photograph is not unlike Wiltshire and MacWeeney's photographs from almost half a century earlier. Alesi's photographs capture a palpable energy. In figure 13 the boys are seemingly talking over one another, asking questions, laughing and showing each other up. Figure 14 showcases the floral tributes at a Traveller's funeral in Tuam, County Galway. The sporting associations here—Roy Keane, Manchester United—and the mobile phone convey the texture of the deceased man's interests and his life. The energy within this collection is evident in these examples in the bright coloured clothing of family,

the boisterous children and grandeur of the floral tributes and is a characteristic of Traveller life that eludes most other representations.

Originally from Dublin and now living in Australia, James Horan's photographs are featured in figures 15, 16 and 17 (page 34). Figure 15 depicts a group of women in provocative dress dancing at a pub. The dresses are tight and enhance the body shape. In figure 16 a father holds the foot of the young boy (presumably his son) who is sitting on top of a horse. The content of this Traveller photograph is rare enough for documentary collections. The man is dressed respectably in jeans, a jumper and a collared shirt and his son is wearing the same. The photograph contains nothing outrageous, scandalous or morally reprehensible. There are caravans, horse trailers and an expensive-looking vehicle in the background and the horse looks healthy. This type of photograph humanises Travellers. Figure 17 is a fortune teller with crystal balls and tarot cards inside her caravan at the Ballinasloe Pony Show. Outside there are young men leaning against a windowsill and one is pointing a handgun in the same direction the fortune teller is gazing (it remains uncertain if the gun is real or fake, though presumably it is fake). Horan's photographs engage and entertain. They tell a story of a very modern Traveller that does not fall into the expected stereotypical characterisations. Here are people who love their children, have to work at making a living, spend time with their friends and are part of a community in which personal security and the suggestion of gun crime are major concerns. Horan's pictures are inclusive: they present Travellers as normal everyday people who are similar to the settled community.

Kenneth O'Halloran's photographs, figures 18, 19 and 20 (page 35), are part of a larger collection taken at various locations throughout Ireland. These photographs are from the project entitled 'Fair Trade', which won third place in the portraits category in the 54th World Press Photo Contest (2010). Travellers have become an en vogue photographic subject within the last five years, perhaps because Travellers' issues are becoming more prevalent and, in turn, their cultural visibility has increased. Sensationalist content such as the sexualised females in figure 18 are increasingly common. O'Halloran's photos suggest three different types of Travellers. In addition to figure 18, figure 19 represents an urban,

fashionable and self-aware Traveller while figure 20 resembles more the traditional conservative perception of Travellers.

Figure 21 (page 36) is from the *Irish Independent* of October 2008, printed alongside an article about Travellers. This unusual representation includes common Traveller associations—the Hiace van, the trader persona and, perhaps by her position at the back of the van, an illegal trader. The gate referred to in the message on her shirt invokes ideas of landscaping, a common occupation within the community. The woman herself is attractive, wearing a tight t-shirt and large hoop earrings and she is smoking; all common representations of the Traveller female. In addition within the message on her shirt, the ‘wanna’ is a graphological variation that alludes to a lack of articulacy and a low-prestige dialect. All of this might fall into stereotype except for the fact that she is sizing up the camera as if she might be assessing a potential buyer. Her confidence is unsettling, intimidating and unique within Traveller representations. This portrayal parodies elements of Traveller culture, but by placing the onus of power onto the Traveller that parody takes an ironic turn.

Such ironic images are appearing more frequently presently and this may be due to the proliferation of working-class comedies and dramas (*The Hardy Bucks*, or the RTE miniseries *Love/Hate* for example), or the increase might also be an effect of settlement. Many Travellers have been settled for at least a generation and that cohort of children has been educated with settled children and raised in an environment where the focus has not been exclusively on surviving. For all the current problems and strife, Travellers are more integrated in Irish settled society than ever before. This is not to say they have conformed, but these are significant changes all the same within and to the community and may affect both groups’ perception of each other. Representations like figure 21 are less concerned with marginalisation or objectification and focus instead on what distinguishes the community, but not in a humiliating or downgraded fashion.

The discussion of photography is unique in this thesis because the representations are beyond linguistic language. These images are, to refer to Gombrich again, a relational model. They are a base form of representation, on which additional layers of language or movement can be applied. In understanding the

dominant representations offered by photography, such as family-oriented, protective, insular, a group caught between two worlds, poverty, innocence, alcohol use, marginalisation, violence and the role of religion, we can begin to comprehend how these depictions leave the group prone to stereotype within a structured narrative.

B. Television and Film

There are surprisingly few Traveller representations on Irish television.³ There were minor Traveller characters pre-1983 in *The Riordans* and *Bracken*, but the first major Traveller character on Irish television was Blackie Connors in RTÉ's drama *Glenroe*. In describing the Traveller on the show, one of the *Glenroe* producers noted 'It was generally felt that the representation of Travellers was biased, but biased in providing an unrealistically rosy picture of Traveller life'.⁴ In an early episode of *Glenroe*, Blackie Connors sues the main character Dinny Byrne for selling him crates of rotten duck eggs. Another character remarks his surprise that the Traveller chose not to threaten Dinny's person or property, but instead followed the rule of society.

More recent television depictions include Pa Connors, a minor character in RTÉ's comedy *Killinaskully* written by Pat Shortt. *Killinaskully* lampoons all of its characters in a light-hearted observational comedy. Pa is characterised as mindless, emotionally immature but business-minded. He is good-natured, often outwitted by others, and is used predominately for slapstick comedic effect. Two other RTÉ comedies, Katherine Lynch's *Wonderwoman* and her later *Working Girls*, featured

³ Several of the larger television and film productions discussed here were produced in the US or the UK. They are included because they were distributed, aired and successful in Ireland. While these representations are different from purely Irish ones, they are related, and their popularity and influence surely affect Irish ideas. Some television programs, such as the US-produced *The Riches*, are not included here for the purpose of keeping discussion limited to media distributed in Ireland. *The Riches*, which aired on the FX station for two seasons from 2007-2008, depicted a family of American-Irish Travellers, but was never shown on Irish television. For in-depth analysis and discussion of *The Riches* see: Mary M. Burke, *Tinkers: Synge and the Cultural History of the Irish Traveller* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009); Peter Kabachnik, 'The Culture of Crime Examining Representations of Irish Travelers in *Traveller* and *The Riches*,' *Romani Studies* 19.1 (2009): 49-63; or José Lanter, *The 'Tinkers' in Irish Literature: Unsettled Subjects and the Construction of Difference* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008).

⁴ Edward Brennan, 'Cultural and Structural Irish Television Drama,' *Irish Communications Review* 8 (2000): 6.

< Figure 1 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 1. Elinor Wiltshire, *Blacksmith at Sheridan O'Brien campsite, Loughrea, Co. Galway*, 1954, *The Wiltshire Collection*, National Photographic Archive, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Web. 10 Aug. 2009 <[http://kildarest.nli.ie/npa/wil/will4\[54\].htm](http://kildarest.nli.ie/npa/wil/will4[54].htm)>.

< Figure 2 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 2. Wiltshire, *Two little boys and a caravan*,
<[http://kildarest.nli.ie/npa/wil/will3\[54\].htm](http://kildarest.nli.ie/npa/wil/will3[54].htm)>.

< Figure 3 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 3. Wiltshire, *The Sheridan O'Brien campsite, Loughrea, Co. Galway*,
<[http://kildarest.nli.ie/npa/wil/will6\[54\].htm](http://kildarest.nli.ie/npa/wil/will6[54].htm)>.

< Figure 4 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 4. Alen MacWeeney, *Johnny Cassidy and Big Dan Flynn, Goresbridge*, 2007, *Irish Travellers: Tinkers No More*, (New Hampshire: UP of New England, 2007) 56.

< Figure 5 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 5. MacWeeney, *Big Mickey Flynn, Labre Park*, 41.

< Figure 6 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 6. MacWeeney, *The Ward Family, Cherry Orchard*, 94.

< Figure 7 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 7. Josef Koudelka, *PAR67518*, 1971, Magnum Photos, Web, 7 Feb. 2010

<http://www.magnumphotos.com/Archive/C.aspx?VP3=ViewBox_VPage&VBID=2K1HZOMLPBQ7K&IT=ZoomImage01_VForm&IID=2S5RYDWY03_A&PN=3&CT=Search>.

< Figure 8 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 8. Koudelka, *PAR197398*,

<<http://magnum.orangetest.com/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult&ALID=2K7O3R92QD2Q>>.

< Figure 9 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 9. Paula Allen, *Mag (Gavin) Joyce*, October 1994, *Gavins*, Web, 10 Aug. 2009 <http://paula-allen.com/gavins/2/122_mag-gavin-joyce-1994.html>.

< Figure 10 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 10. Allen, *Martin Gavin*, August 1988 <http://paula-allen.com/gavins/1/114_martin-gavin-1988.html>.

< Figure 11 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 11. Allen, *John Gavin Jr (showing gunshot wounds)*, September 2002 <http://paula-allen.com/gavins/3/128_john-gavin-jr-2002.html>.

< Figure 12 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 12. Francesco Alesi, *A family from Dublin in pilgrimage to Knock Shrine*, 15 Aug. 2008, *God Bless Ya'*, Web, 10 Aug. 2009
<<http://www.anraphotos.com/stories/god-bless-ya-2>>.

< Figure 13 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 13. Alesi, *Untitled*, <<http://www.anraphotos.com/stories/god-bless-ya-2>>.

< Figure 14 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 14. Alesi, *Traveller's funeral in Tuam*, 2009
<<http://www.anraphotos.com/stories/god-bless-ya-2>>.

< Figure 15 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 15. James Horan, *Traveller girls are pictured in the bar at Haydon's Hotel*, 3 Oct. 2010, *The Irish*, Web, 16 Oct. 2011

<<http://www.jameshoranshootspeople.com/#/PROJECTS/the%20irish/24/>>.

< Figure 16 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 16. Horan, *Travellers Jimi O Donoghue and his son Connie from Cork*,

<<http://www.jameshoranshootspeople.com/#/PROJECTS/irish%20horse%20culture/27/>>.

< Figure 17 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 17. Horan, *Fortune teller Margaret Lee from Lucan, County Dublin*,

<<http://www.jameshoranshootspeople.com/#/PROJECTS/the%20irish/16/>>.

< Figure 18 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 18. Kenneth O'Halloran, *Cahirnee Fair*, 2009, *Fair Trade*, Web, 10 Oct. 2011

<<http://www.kennethohalloran.com/#/PROJECTS/Fair%20Trade/9/caption>>.

< Figure 19 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 19. O'Halloran, *Ballinasloe Fair*,

<<http://www.kennethohalloran.com/#/PROJECTS/Fair%20Trade/21/>>.

< Figure 20 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 20. O'Halloran, *Mohill Fair*,

<<http://www.kennethohalloran.com/#/PROJECTS/Fair%20Trade/26/caption>>.

< Figure 21 has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.>

Fig. 21. *Wanna buy a Gate?* 26 Oct. 2008, *Irish Independent* 15 August 2009, Web, <<http://www.independent.ie/lifestyle/the-traveller-testimony-1510428.html>>.

the character Singin' Bernie Walsh. This character draws on stereotypes and generalisations of Traveller women, including heavy makeup, flamboyant clothing and an over-assertive personality. She is ostentatious in the vein of *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, although Lynch's character precedes the show.

Within film, Travellers have been main characters for several large productions in wide release. The 1992 film *Into the West*, directed by Mike Newell and written by Jim Sheridan, uses a magic realist mode in representing contemporary Traveller life. From its initial sequences, the film juxtaposes open natural spaces with urbanisation, poverty and the discrimination that defines the modern Traveller reality. John (Papa) Reilly is a former King of the Travellers, who since the death of his spouse has lost control of his life due to grief, poverty and drink. He lives in the Ballymun flats in Dublin with his two young sons. The Traveller traditions and history are kept alive by the boys' Traveller grandfather. The movie begins when the grandfather is followed from the sea into Dublin by a white horse, named Tír na nÓg. The boys are obsessed with American western movies and are excited at the new arrival. The horse lives with the family in their flat until the authorities are alerted and who then confiscate the horse. The boys steal Tír na nÓg back, but are caught by surveillance cameras. They escape to the west of Ireland on back of the horse while Papa Riley and the authorities pursue them. *Into the West* represents Travellers as the epitome of a materially and spiritually impoverished modern Ireland and who can redeem themselves by returning to their traditions.

Critics associated with the Traveller community generally attack the movie for promoting the idea that Travellers are pre-industrial relics and do not belong in the modern world. This misses the point of the magic realist mode, especially one constructed as family entertainment with the predictable platitudinous ending. Despite the over-sentimentality that the plot as a whole suffers from, the Travellers here are portrayed as both perpetrators and victims of prejudice. The film also highlights the lack of self-esteem in victims of exclusion.

Using children within a narrative has advantages because they engage in their interests (e.g. the boys' fascination with American cowboy culture) with an abandon that adults cannot sustain without seeming somehow developmentally challenged. While adults represent responsibility, child characters can more easily embody

naivety and innocence. The language spoken by the Travellers is predominately a low-prestige inner-city Dublin vocabulary. Overall, the Traveller associations with mythological figures are a bit forced, but the film depicts a lively community that is struggling with very real social problems. *Into the West* is light feel-good entertainment and is not constructed as a serious drama in the way Sheridan's later works are.⁵

Trojan Eddie was written by Irish playwright Billy Roche and directed by Gilles MacKinnon in 1996. The film is told from Eddie's point of view and is based on the myth of Diarmud and Gráinne. Eddie is a down-on-his-luck market stall worker who dreams of having his own business but is stuck under the control of his employer, John Power. His personal life is similarly disordered. He is separated from his spiteful wife and maintains a quiet affair on the side while raising his two young daughters. Eddie reluctantly becomes involved in helping his co-worker Dermot and his lover Kathleen escape together with an £11,000 dowry collected from her wedding to Power only hours before. Eddie is harassed and threatened by Power's henchman as they search for the couple. By accident, Eddie finds the lost dowry money himself which enables him to escape from Power's grip, set up his own business and finalise his divorce.

Despite the happy ending, *Trojan Eddie* is an unsentimental portrayal of a group of Travellers in a small unnamed Irish town. Much of the action takes place in a desolate mud-soaked halting site where the Travellers regularly break into fistfights between themselves and non-Travellers. The heavily-accented and rapid-fire dialogue is engaging and carries much of the action with its intensity and acuity, but the narrative is weighted down by the number of subplots. Overall, *Trojan Eddie* portrays the Traveller world as dirty, bleak and morally bankrupt, where women are manipulative and sexually available, and relationships (both business and personal) are marred by theft, violence and betrayal.

Writer and director Guy Ritchie's *Snatch* (2000) may be the most well-known representation of Travellers, not least because Brad Pitt played the main Traveller character, Micky O'Neill. The complicated plot is set within the larger

⁵ However, audiences have not seen the last of this story. In November 2011, Sheridan received €50,000 from the Irish Film Board to write an updated version of *Into the West*.

context of the illicit jewel trade and the illegal boxing underworld. The non-Traveller characters are highly suspicious of the group and regularly repeat 'I hate fucking pikeys'. Micky agrees to throw a fight for thugs Tommy and Turkish on the condition that their London gangster boss Brick Top buys a new caravan for his mother. When Micky wins the fight and demands the caravan, Brick Top's team of gangsters set fire to Micky's mother's caravan with his mother inside. Micky agrees to throw another fight but he wins this one as well and when Brick Top's gang move in to seek revenge, Micky and his fellow Travellers (called gypsies in the film) are already prepared for the ambush. They take brutal revenge for Micky's mother's death and then disappear, abandoning their camp.

Superficially, the Travellers are represented as a tight-knit group, small-time crooks, crude, unsophisticated and stupid. Micky's dialogue is hard to decipher; his accent is strong and he mumbles quickly. The London underworld take this as evidence of his stupidity. The Traveller group is well aware of the extent to which they have been underestimated and, as the narrative unfolds, it becomes apparent they have manipulated these presumptions. Travellers are not usually associated with an ironic self-awareness and this type of portrayal conveys the street-wise intelligence which goes beyond the tired tropes of the bare-knuckle boxer. While the narrative strategy of the cunning Irishman who finds success by exploiting the thick-Paddy stereotype is well established, using this strategy with Travellers is unsettling. This defamiliarization of sorts occurs because the prejudices of the gangsters are reflected by the viewer and because the Travellers are aware of what those prejudices are and use them for their own gain. Overall Travellers are presented as tough, clever, self-aware and determined. Ritchie's representations have depth and are humorous in a way that is not humiliating. As with Figure 21, ironic self-awareness may constitute a vital ingredient in constructing a three-dimensional realistic Traveller character.

Recently there have been a number of small budget fictional films focussing on the masculine and violent nature of the Traveller community.⁶ Most of the narratives are set within the context of feuding Traveller families, but others focus on

⁶ These include *Strength and Honour*, dir. Mark Mahon, perf. Michael Madsen, Richard Chamberlain, Vinnie Jones and Patrick Bergin, Maron Pictures, 2007; and *King of the Travellers*, dir. Mark O'Connor, perf. Michael Collins, Thomas Collins and John Connors, Vico Films, 2012.

a jacked-up conflict between Travellers and settled society, often depicting the male Travellers as savage throwbacks and the women (if they're included at all in the narrative) as sexualised objects.

Traveller representations have not avoided the documentary turn in contemporary art. Documentary film can be a vigorous and innovative approach in depicting Travellers through which the viewer is permitted access into an otherwise closed community. However, the distinction between fiction and documentary film can be a muddled one. While fiction may be a straightforward invention, the documentary is not straightforward fact. People do not act as they normally would when under observation, and so documentaries must contend with this illusion of reality. In light of the restricted and separate nature of the Travelling community, the approach to how this illusion is conveyed to the audience is crucial. The documentaries I will touch on here examine social, political and personal realities and offer contradictory information that allows the viewer to question the reliability of the narrator or main character.

Pavee Lackeen, the Traveller Girl (2005) is a docu-drama written and directed by Perry Ogden and follows the life of ten-year-old Winnie Maughan for several weeks. With her mother and several of her brothers and sisters, Winnie lives in a trailer on the side of a road in Ringsend in Dublin, from which the Council authorities want them evicted. The film portrays a bleak life where social relations are guarded and apathetic. Poverty, boredom and Winnie's trouble at school are major problems. The film is successful at presenting Travellers as a vulnerable and disadvantaged group, and the lack of action and scenes of urban desolation help to convey the incessant boredom and hopelessness that contribute to the family's figurative paralysis.

The documentary *Knuckle*, directed and produced by Ian Palmer, was released in cinemas in 2011 to positive reviews. The documentary chronicles the history of the hatred and violent feuding between rival Traveller families, the Quinn-McDonaghs, the Nevins and the Joyces. The feud stems from a fatal accident in 1992, although all the families use the fights as a way to raise money (the purse for one fight is £120,000). The fight scenes are many and difficult to watch, but overall the film is an effective character study of the reluctant and engaging James Quinn-

McDonagh. The narrative is bolstered by the frustrated protestations of Spike Nevin and the vicious and unintentionally comedic Big Joe Joyce (the infamous King of the Travellers, who reveals his secret of soaking his fists in petrol days before a fight). The majority of the film follows a linear structure and is told from Palmer's point of view (as a settled man who becomes involved with Travellers by filming wedding receptions). He narrates the film using his own footage shot over twelve years at the request—or at least with the permission—of the Travellers themselves. Occasionally he makes use of the home videos that the families use to goad each other. Besides Palmer and his crew, the settled community exists on the margins of this film predominately in the guise of the Gardaí. The film is unpretentious, uncompromising, often brutal and always compelling. At no time does Palmer moralise or attempt to thwart the viewer by sentimental portrayals. The film did not have a widespread release but was featured in the Sundance Film Festival and garnered sufficient attention for HBO to buy the rights to the film and hire *Trainspotting* author Irvine Welsh to write a dramatic series.⁷

The raw nature of the Travelling community is an attractive context for narrative. Drama and conflict are easily unearthed and many representations within the visual medium take advantage of this. Several of our examples examine the masculine nature of the community to varying degrees. The depiction of hostility, violence and control, especially in film, is almost endemic; many narratives include a King of the Travellers (either as a personality or the competition itself), presumably in an attempt to raise the stakes of what is at risk within the plot. Arguments are solved through violence, in particular bare-knuckle fighting. The ideas that Travellers are tight knit, protective of both the family and the community and are guarded against the outside world, are well established in these art forms. Strict rules of conduct are often portrayed and any deviation from the course, usually set by an older generation, is not tolerated, creating a natural narrative conflict. Several portrayals highlight the marginalisation within the community especially concerning women. Other depictions err on the side of misogyny, portraying Traveller women as manipulative, overly-sexualised and untrustworthy. These narratives reinforce the

⁷ Nellie Andreeva, 'HBO's Series Adaptation of Sundance Docu 'Knuckle' Locks Writer And Director,' *Deadline.com* 10 June 2011, Web, 17 Feb. 2012 <<http://www.deadline.com/2011/06/hbos-series-adaptation-of-sundance-docu-knuckle-locks-writer-and-director/>>.

degree of control the individual Traveller is under and suggest the most effective way to bring about change is to either run away or take advantage of the situation.

Many representations utilise Travellers' style of dress to convey a negative stereotype. In these portrayals, Traveller women wear short skirts and midriff-exposing tops. They often wear a great amount of jewellery (gold rings, necklaces, large hoop earrings), heavy make-up, fake tan and use expletives and coarse language as a matter of rule. The men often appear as gangsters in long leather coats or singlet vests. The propensity to represent their dress in flamboyant and (to some) deviant ways are meant to provoke aesthetic judgement that associates their style of dress with deviant ideology and a lower class. The constant images of eroticised childhood, of sexualised females and hard men suggest that Travellers are not just a different culture (if indeed they're seen as a specific culture at all), rather they are a subordinate culture, similar (if not one and the same) to the lower-prestige working class and uninhibited 'chav' culture. Other predominant ideas associated with these representations include vulnerability, low self-esteem, dismay and apathy.

Representation is most innovative when the character is portrayed in their day to day life engaged in their hobbies, personal or leisure activities. This domesticity and routine shed light on how the Travellers within the narratives perceive themselves, the elements of their culture they identify with, and the social rules that govern the group. *Into The West* portrays the two boys obsessed with cowboy movies. The Traveller children in *Snatch* ride BMX bikes and spend their time in the fields coursing. *Knuckle* concentrates on boxing. Francesco Alesi's photographs portray people immersed in religious belief and participating in their church, and James Horan's photographs highlight Traveller horse culture. In many of the photograph collections, Travellers are positioned within their homes and their community, and the artists allow them to represent themselves in specific idiosyncratic ways and within a context. In addition, changing the *angle* of a photograph (as per Wiltshire's close-ups) or of a story (the young Traveller girl's point of view in *Pavee Lackeen*) is an innovative approach that sidesteps stereotype by presenting an alternative viewpoint, avoiding clichés of typification and presenting, or implying, a compelling narrative.

A broader meaning can be found in general narratological terms. Happy endings are not common and when they do exist they are either the result of fantasy or betrayal. Drama is the dominant mode, probably in an attempt to capture the pathos of the Travellers' situation and to provoke sentiments of pity and fear. Comedic representations face substantial challenges in refraining from basing their comedy in humiliation. *Snatch* works because the representation parodies itself, and the depiction of the Travellers' self-awareness is innovative. Ritchie's plot does not try for cheap laughs, instead it strives to make the viewer take the community seriously on its own terms.

The representations that subvert dominant power structures are also those that succeed in terms of narrative development and engagement. The characters are surprising because they are unpredictable. Micky O'Neill in *Snatch* and the ironic female gate-seller in figure 21 offer an alternative Traveller representation. These depictions capture the subversive and removed nature of Traveller society and do not slide into an overmoralised narrative. The self-awareness exhibited allows the Traveller characters dominion over their own identity, kicking up the representational dust and leaving the viewer usefully unsettled.

C. Literature and Drama

Narrative prose and drama are not privy to the easy reliance on visuality as are photography and film. Instead, through descriptive language, or even simply dialogue, the writer must provide enough material to allow the character to form in the reader's imagination. In most literature and dramatic works the Traveller is afforded little range of representation. Travellers in subordinate or minor roles are usually typified within narratives as negative contrast for a major character or as fodder for a plot that relies on the Traveller being a victim, a fool or scapegoat in some way.⁸ We move on now to an examination of a sample of representations in which Travellers are afforded major roles.

⁸ For a thorough survey of all minor and major Traveller representations in literature see Lanthers, *The 'Tinkers' in Irish Literature*. The representations selected here are based on the dominant or particularly unique types of depictions.

Traveller characters have appeared in literature since George Brittain's 1830 novel *Irishmen and Irishwomen*. Other than William Carleton's *The Emigrants of Ahadarra* (1848), there were few subsequent representations until the publication of several academic articles towards the end of the century ignited interest in the Traveller lifestyle.

In 1882 Charles Leland described a unique dialect spoken by the Irish 'Tinkers'. Later, in *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*, John Sampson and Kuno Meyer each published further linguistic details of the group's particular Cant, referred to presently (in academic terms at least) as Shelta. Of particular interest to writers and artists was Sampson and Meyer's work that linked Shelta to an ancient Celtic origin.⁹ Travellers were perceived as a refreshing alternative to the austere mores of Victorian life. Typified as passionate, rebellious and sexually liberated, they came to signify an authentic Irishness, embodying the antithesis of the materialism and repressed sexuality that dominated Ireland at the time.

In 1902 George Moore wrote to Douglas Hyde commending him for his play *Tinceir agus an tSidheog* (translated as *The Tinker and the Sheeog* or *The Tinker and the Fairy*), but suggested an alternative ending where the Traveller is enlightened with philosophical insights that 'could transcend the individual limitations of expression'.¹⁰ Hyde ignored Moore's advice. Using strong Irish mythology associations and metaphors highlighting the political situation of the day, Hyde's character is the King of the Tinkers who saves a dying hag with a kiss that transforms her into a beautiful fairy. In return, she proposes marriage. The language used throughout is poetic and romantic and the Tinker quotes poetry and references Cuchulain. By the time he agrees to marry the fairy, she has changed her mind, decided he is an unworthy mate and returns to the fairy otherworld. The Tinker bemoans his fate, refers to the fairy as a deceiver and a slut and hopes never to see her again.¹¹ Hyde's comedic Travellers and their veiled associations with Irish

⁹ John Sampson, 'Tinkers and Their Talk,' *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 2.4 (1890): 204-21; and Kuno Meyer, 'On the Irish Origin and Age of Shelta,' *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 2.5 (1891): 257-66.

¹⁰ Paul Delaney, 'Representations of the Travellers in the 1880s and 1900s,' *Irish Studies Review* 9.1 (2001): 58.

¹¹ The play was first performed in Irish in the garden of Moore's Dublin home. It starred the future Sinéad O'Flanagan (the future wife of Eamonn de Valera) and was attended by the three hundred people including Jack B Yeats and Lady Gregory. The play was also heckled by the Unionist neighbours watching from the upper windows next door, see Declan Kiberd, *The Irish Writer and the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005) 98.

independence were soon superseded by more overt religious and political standpoints.

Moore's growing interest in Travellers caused concern for W.B. Yeats. The men had discussed an idea for a play featuring Travellers, but after reading Moore's letters to Hyde, and anxious that Moore would steal his idea, Yeats wrote his 1902 five-act play *Where There is Nothing* in haste. In later years Yeats was embarrassed by his play, going so far as to prevent its inclusion in his collected works. In *Where There is Nothing*, the main character, the wealthy Paul Ruttledge, believes modern society has become artificial and useless. He joins a group of Travellers and soon marries one of the women. At the wedding reception the Travellers create havoc in the nearby town, drawing out the police with whom Ruttledge debates theories of justice and law. Ruttledge is injured during the celebrations and the Travellers drop him off at a monastery to recover while they flee from the authorities. During his time with the monks, Ruttledge becomes increasingly philosophical about the excesses of the modern world and soon his ideas develop a following. Irritated by his uncompromised quest for the truth, the monks force him out. Later, looking ever more like a Christ figure, Ruttledge is overrun and killed by a mob incensed by the teachings of one of his followers. The Travellers return in time to pull his body out of the river and wait with him as he dies. The Travellers' language is a lower-prestige Hiberno-English with few alterations to the graphological form. A utopian critique on Irish society at the time, the strong idealistic nature may account for Yeats' denial of the play in later years. The Travellers are portrayed not necessarily idealistically—they are prone to fighting, drunkenness, and betrayal—but as an uncorrupted community, marginalised, hard-working, polite and relatively open to outsiders. Overall the impact is sentimental, predictable and naive.

J.M. Synge used Traveller characters in *The Well of Saints*, *The Shadow of the Glen* and *The Playboy of the Western World* in minor roles or as influential off-stage threats, but his 1907 two-act play *The Tinker's Wedding* placed Travellers in central dramatic roles for the first time. *The Tinker's Wedding* was controversial for Synge's challenges towards the clergy and the church and because Travellers obtain the upper hand. The play, which is often overlooked by critics and theatre companies in favour of Synge's other dramas, has been characterised as difficult and as 'Synge's ugly duckling', with analysis focused on the crude farce and 'little or no

deftness of characterisation'.¹² Mary Burke suggests that the paucity of criticism surrounding Synge's most unsuccessful play tells more about the critics' prejudices than Synge's ability. *The Tinker's Wedding* starts with Sarah Casey's desire to marry Michael Byrne so that 'no one can call her a dirty name'. She convinces the local priest to wed them for a small fee and a tin can, but Michael's mother Mary steals the can to trade for drink. The next morning Sarah and Michael go to the priest to be wed, but he refuses to perform the ceremony because the can is missing. A fight breaks out and the Travellers bundle the priest into a sack. They free him after he swears not to involve the police and he curses them as they flee in mock terror.

The Abbey thought the play too dangerous for the Irish theatre. The problem, in 1907 at least, was twofold: Synge's portrayal of the priest, uncharitable and prone to drink, was considered disrespectful, and the Travellers' contempt for religion in the play, such as when Mary Byrne refers to praying as 'queer noise'. Both of which were considered scandalous. Although Sarah wants to marry to gain respectability, she is derailed by the priest's expectations and prejudices. In *The Tinker's Wedding*, Travellers are portrayed as reactionary, boisterous, contemptuous, solipsistic and independently minded. They provide humour and opposition to the priest's stranglehold on appropriate conduct and ideology.

Fantasy was first used by Douglas Hyde as a mode of representing Travellers and later by James Stephens. Fantasy still remains a popular mode for featuring Travellers (e.g. Mary Ryan's 1982 novel *Into the West*, the source of the eponymous film). In this mode, Travellers are often depicted interacting with mythological and folkloric characters, a feature that critics have argued alienates the group by emphasising an otherworldly representation, encouraging marginalisation. Despite these criticisms about fantasy as a narrative mode, Stephens used Traveller characters in his novels *The Crock of Gold* (1912) and most extensively in *The Demi-Gods* (1914). The latter portrays the hardships of the Traveller life in which hunger, cold and infant mortality are all examined. The story is told in third-person past tense, and begins when three angels descend from heaven and meet Patsy McCann and his daughter Mary. In a bid to understand life on earth, the angels temporarily put aside their wings and halos and join the Travellers on the road. They

¹² Burke, *Tinkers*, 88.

travel along the west coast of Ireland and meet a series of characters including a Kerry man who has been kicked out of hell. The Travellers are presented as an alternative to industrialisation and materialism, but at the same time Stephens portrays them as aggressive, shameless, passionate and uncompromising. The story is based in fantasy but is also humorous, emphasising Stephens' societal criticisms. He represents settled people in a negative light as untrustworthy misers and bullies who regularly use expletives. The language is formal and of its time, but the Hiberno-English dialogue is strong and realistic.

In post-Independence Ireland, relationships between the settled community and Travellers were marked by growing tensions. By not cooperating with the new order that encouraged material acquisition and property ownership, Travellers sealed their marginality and derided status. This was reflected in fiction as Travellers were represented as untrustworthy and absurd. Liam O'Flaherty featured Travellers in two of his short stories, 'The Tent' (1926) and 'The Stolen Ass' (1926). In 'The Tent', three Travellers (one man and two women) offer shelter to Carney, a settled man, who is lost during a storm. The story is told in limited third person, and delves in and out of Carney's point of view. The narrative draws on assumptions of sexual deviancy. The Traveller man, Joe Byrne, is represented as abusive and controlling, while the women are portrayed as temptresses and savages. At the same time, the women are rarely given a chance to speak and the reader is provided with just one of their names. Carney describes the women as having a 'proud, arrogant contemptuous look in their beautiful brown faces'.¹³ The Travellers' accent is conveyed by the apocope structure, in which the last consonant in a word is replaced with an apostrophe (travellin', goin': colloquially known as dropping one's g's). Otherwise, there is little of note in the language used here. Once Byrne finds Carney responding to the advances of one of the women, he unexpectedly punches him and throws him back into the storm.

'The Stolen Ass' depicts a Traveller's day in court for stealing a donkey. This comedic story is told in the third person and is predominately dialogue with little exposition. Most of the constructions exaggerate accent and use several types of elision, in particular apocope, as in 'mesel'', 'an'' and 'o'', all of which suggest a

¹³ Liam O'Flaherty, 'The Tent,' *The Short Stories of Liam O'Flaherty* (London: Cape, 1949) 154.

lack of formal education. The dialect is Hiberno-English with features such as clefting ('It was at Ballymorguttery I met him, your honour'), the habitual be ('... that weren't the story at all, only be way of comparison') and comparisons ('But sure I might as well be lashin' a tin-can as that old ass for all the walkin' I could get out of him').¹⁴ O'Flaherty's Traveller constructs an argument so absurd and confusing that it is obvious he is trying to subvert the court. When the judge realises this, he sentences the man to fourteen days of hard labour. Overall, O'Flaherty's Travellers are suspicious, mysterious and not to be trusted.

Seán O'Faoláin experimented with the mysterious-Traveller stereotype before deflating it and exposing the prejudices of the settled community. He included a group of Travellers in 'Lilliput' from *Midsummer Night Madness and Other Stories* (1932), which tells the story of a Traveller woman living in Black-and-Tan-besieged Cork with three small children in a broken-down wagon. She has defied an order to vacate the streets, and although the people in the neighbourhood offer her food and assistance, they encourage her to move for fear she will alert the Tans and cause additional trouble for them. When the soldiers do show up in the middle of the night they are appalled at her living conditions, but leave her alone and are careful not to disturb her sleep. The story is a third-person narrative with most of the Travellers' speech recorded indirectly. The woman invents stories about her life and in her only direct quote she says 'It was a tree fell on the donkey-ass'. Her children throw stones and apples at people who bother them and give ribald answers. The Traveller woman refers to her husband in 'Moore's hotel' (the jail) and it is noted that she is concerned about what will happen when the 'polis' turn up. 'Lilliput' is unfortunately and unfairly often given short shrift by critics who label it as trivial.¹⁵

On the other hand, Maurice Walsh's bestselling novel, *The Road to Nowhere* (1934) was widely praised at the time. In Walsh's novel, the Traveller community is represented as a safe haven from the law. When Rogan Stuart is implicated in the murder of the former British proconsul's son, he takes refuge within a group of Travellers and becomes Rogue McCoy. The Travellers are led by patriarch Jamsey Coffey, the 'would be king of the tinkers if the tinkers needed a king', and his third wife, who is the descendent of royalty and is described as 'black-haired, black-eyed,

¹⁴ O'Flaherty, 'The Stolen Ass,' *The Short Stories of Liam O'Flaherty*, 267.

¹⁵ George Brandon Saul, 'The Brief Fiction of Seán O'Faoláin,' *Colby Library Quarterly* 7.2 (1965): 71.

aquiline, dusky with heavy set ear-rings almost touching her shoulder'.¹⁶ Rogue is accepted into the family and befriends Coffey's unpredictable son Shamus Og. The Travellers' language is exaggerated Hiberno-English, with regular use of both apocope and comparative features such as similes. "Blood-an'-turf!" Screeched the baited Jamesy. "Didn't I crawl like a snail for the last fortnight an' you walkin' *Copaleen Rua* on the soft edges of the road?"¹⁷ A common novel convention is to signify foreign words by the use of italics. For Walsh's readers (the book was aimed towards the American market) this italicisation magnifies the otherworldly nature of the words and the community who speak them. Rival groups of Travellers are poor, antagonistic and small-time criminals, but the Coffey Travellers are represented here in a vein similar to the romantic characters that were popular in the Revival. Walsh presents these Travellers as loveable rogues, unstable and prone to violence. They live in a sort of genteel poverty with none of the associated realities of nomadic life. Their culture and lifestyle is gentrified and objectified to serve the settled community within the novel and in the reading audience. Overall, Walsh's representations of Travellers and their language is tired and clichéd. Both O'Flaherty (particularly in 'The Stolen Ass') and O'Faoláin's earlier representations are more restrained in their portrayals and so are fresher and less stereotypical.

In children's and young adult fiction, Travellers have been depicted as a spectacle or danger. Representations are usually of the group as a whole with little emphasis placed on individuals other than the king or chief. These characters are defined by their physical characteristics or their clothing, such as the Yellow Handkerchief character in Patricia Lynch's *The Turf Cutter's Donkey* and *The King of the Tinkers*. (Lanters, *The Tinkers*, 74).

Lynch presents the Travellers' way of life as a threat to the stability of the family. Many of her stories were serialised in the *Irish Press* starting in 1931 and later published in short story and novel formats. In many of her works, Travellers are used to emphasise the 'Irishness' of the countryside or embody the threat to the stability of the social and familial order. There are generally two types of Travellers in Lynch's work: the work-shy homeless thieves prone to violence and who spoil the countryside, and the passive romantics eager to prove their worth. The narrative

¹⁶ Maurice Walsh, *The Road to Nowhere* (London: W&R Chambers, 1953) 99.

¹⁷ Walsh, 321.

structures in many of Lynch's stories are similar: settled children encounter Travellers when they run away from home or by a chance encounter; then they are exposed to trouble directly from the Traveller or via an associate of the Traveller; next they narrowly avoid danger; and finally the child solves a problem for the Travellers or the child reports them to the Guards. The child realises, though perhaps not always explicitly, that the power structures within their families are preferable to the chaotic alternative of the Traveller community (Lanters, *The Tinkers*, 77).

A very different sort of Traveller was introduced in Tom Murphy's play *A Whistle in the Dark*, first performed at the Theatre Royal in Stratford East in 1961. Michael Carney and his new English wife live in a slum in Coventry and are inundated by his four brothers and father, Dada, who travel from Mayo to stay with the young couple. The brothers are small-time criminals and a well known violent gang. Much of the play centres on an impending fight and the airing of grievances from previous fights including one in which the brothers came to Michael's defence and from which Michael promptly ran away. After the brothers win the fight both Michael and Dada's allegiances are questioned. In an attempt to retrieve his position of paternal power, Dada incites a fight between Des, the youngest brother and Michael in which Michael kills Des. *A Whistle in the Dark* focuses exclusively on the Carneys and how tribal politics is compounded by the effects of marginalisation and dismissal. This is a violent play and often difficult to watch and/or read but it is also humorous and thoughtful. Murphy does not present Travellers as a homogenous entity who think in exclusive terms and without consideration. Rather Murphy's play by exploring the experience of pain and fear, transcends this Traveller-settled dichotomy.

Bryan MacMahon's *The Honey Spike* also featured Travellers with multiple elements to their personality. He first staged his drama *The Honey Spike* in 1966 at the Abbey Theatre and later the play was adapted to novel format in 1967. MacMahon depicts the journey of a newly married Traveller couple from the Antrim Coast to Kerry to ensure their first child is born at a lucky honey spike. MacMahon's characters are victims of a brutal racism that has been internalised and left the group disempowered. The story focuses on the uneasy relationship between Travellers and the settled community, but also considers the misogyny, internal feuds and alcoholism within the community. The characters are relatively complex: naive,

minor thieves, feckless and at times cruel, and usually victims to their desires and emotions. They are poor, still travel in a cart, use tents for accommodation and rely on begging and trickery for food and money. The characters are not emotionally stable and often react to situations quickly and without much forethought. While the characterisation is strong, MacMahon presents these characters in a highly romanticised way—it is not quite of the Maurice Walsh variety, but is sentimentalised nonetheless.

Living under a cloud of suspicion and outside the rule of the law, Travellers are a perfect trope for crime fiction.¹⁸ In 1999, John F. McDonald published his novel *Tribe*, which focuses on Owen McBride, an Irish Traveller who has become alienated from his own community. *Tribe* stands out from other crime fiction because the main characters here are Travellers and use Shelta regularly in their conversations. Owen works at breaking and selling horses and he has a non-Traveller girlfriend who wants him to settle down. He struggles with his commitment to her, as he struggles committing to the settled or Traveller worlds. The novel starts with a graphic bare-knuckle fight in the wasteland of industrial Manchester. The setting is indicative of Owen's lot in life. He becomes involved in a botched robbery that puts him in the line of fire of a local underworld gang. Out of options, Owen escapes the gangsters by integrating into a Roma Gypsy group, and here he reaffirms his Traveller ethnicity and decides to return to his girlfriend to settle down. The novel is a first-person narrative by Owen who speaks non-standard English heavily interlaced with Shelta words and phrases. There is a great deal of Shelta within the novel and significantly there is no glossary, leaving the reader to determine meaning from context alone. While there are ambiguities, they are not so extensive as to distract from the narrative. The prose is peppered with expletives and McDonald relies too heavily on their use and effect. On some pages the words 'fuck' and 'cunt' appear in almost every sentence. But other elements of his idiolect jar with these expletives—for example, Owen describes the 'anaesthetic light of Manchester' and the 'gauche wasteland'. The characterisation is inconsistent, superficial and the character is intensely unlikeable. The stereotypes seem to have been picked from the bargain bin:

¹⁸ For an extensive discussion of Traveller crime novels see Lanters, *The Tinkers*, Chapter 6 'Getting away with Murder: Crime and Detective Fiction,' 164-188.

violent, sexually promiscuous, misunderstood, and with criminal tendencies, without any significant innovation of the character form.

McDonald's novel and Tom Murphy's play *A Whistle in the Dark* are similar in that they both depict violent situations. However, particular narrative strategies are invoked in each piece. McDonald chooses to show the violence in graphic prolonged scenes at all stages in the novel, whereas Murphy's violence is kept off-stage until the end when the characters strike out at one another on stage. Murphy's narrative approach draws on the anticipation of violence and the resulting fear, keeping the audience engaged. In addition, McDonald's book incorporates a range of concerns and subplots that bog the narrative down, whereas Murphy's story is streamlined with subplots that bolster the main narrative. At the end of McDonald's novel we are left with a crude unlikeable character, who finds his happy ending, whereas with Murphy we are left with complex and ambiguous characters who have been confronted with the reality of their deep-seated familial trauma. Because of these and other structural problems, McDonald's narrative does not leave the reader satiated. Murphy's approach, instead, accentuates fear and highlights the tragedy of chronic violence. *A Whistle in the Dark* may not be a happy ending but it is a thoughtful one.

Shelta was used again in *Paveewhack* (2000), the debut novel by Peter Brady. The narrator and main character is Jack Joyce, otherwise known as Whack who is on his deathbed recalling a series of fateful events when he was fourteen-years-old and living in an unnamed town in the midlands. The Joyce family are settled Travellers and the story revolves around Whack's misadventures with his father, his friend Goat, and girlfriend Sally. His father, Blocker, is a small-time conman who begrudges having to settle and resists the authoritative institutions of both the Catholic Church and the Gardaí. The latter proves fatal for Blocker. Whack's attempt at revenge by poisoning the local Sergeant fall flat and he is imprisoned for life. Travellers are represented as small-time tricksters, prone to drink but ultimately good people. Brady portrays the family as victims of a grossly unfair and abusive police force. The characters are corralled into education, religion and housing, resulting in deep unhappiness and frustration. The story is told using a heavy dose of Shelta, which is aided by a glossary at the end, but the need for regular referral disrupts the narrative. Brady's novel, by no means an easy read, is further complicated by complex graphological variation.

As we can see from these examples, Traveller representations in fiction have closely paralleled the Traveller experience in the past century, though few settled writers have written about Travellers on Travellers' terms. Writers regularly utilise Traveller characters to express frustration with settled society. At the turn of the twentieth century, Travellers were seen as an alternative to the march of the industrial age and their representations were essentially criticisms of capitalism. Synge was the first to attempt to portray multiple ideologies without subjugation and *The Tinker's Wedding* was met with neglect and dismissal. James Stephens and later Seán Ó Faoláin also utilised Travellers to critique the current culture and to disrupt perceptions about property, labour and equality, but their work also paid attention to the reality, the hardship and the pain of Travelling life. In the 1960s representations of Travellers began to emerge that still recalled O'Flaherty's trickster, O'Faoláin's aloof family and Synge's dissidents, but that now reflected the *new* reality of Traveller life which included the settled community's resistance to nomadism, the move to urban centres, inappropriate accommodation, poverty, frustration, lack of legal rights and pervasive marginalisation. Traveller characters were either disempowered and tragic, or empowered and dangerous.

Travellers, although still insisting on separation, are more visible in early twenty-first century Ireland. More is known of their culture, of Shelta specifically, their particular vocabulary. Representations still wheel out the Traveller stereotypes to serve a general narrative structural purpose but an increased number of fictional works are attempting to represent the Traveller perspective. Since 2000, two novels featuring Shelta (*Tribe* and *Paveewhack*) have been published. *Tribe* suffers from various narrative and characterisation problems including overwrought dialogue; *Paveewhack* does a better job, but there many other representations which offer stronger dialogue with less or no Shelta. As we will move on to see now, exploring the ways in which fiction can approach Traveller dialogue is a step towards understanding how ideology and culture are encoded in language.

Chapter 3

Shelta, Orality and the Representation of Ideology

Representing marginal communities in literature brings with it questions of moral obligation and social responsibility. There is pressure to represent the groups' political and sociological situation with exactitude and precision. The specifications of scene and place contribute to the illusion of reality and help to provide a sense of knowing a person, place and experience. This verisimilitude attempts to ensure that the world of the story is authentic and credible. Nevertheless, the novel is an act of creation and depicting reality within an imagined space is a challenge and concern.

An adherence to verisimilitude may encourage the text to be *drawn from* real-life experience, but works of art must be thought of as being *brought to* experience. The difference between the two can be seen in the former's stereotypical (and easily objectified) characterisations versus the latter's more archetypal approach. Both types of characterisation draw on preconceived types but where the stereotype is focused on the end point, the archetypal approach is a starting point. Stuck at the end point, the stereotype resists expansion where the archetype encourages it.

In the world outside the novel, we experience ourselves in relation to our past and our future, a continuity that allows the individual to understand one's own ethical development. But how we see others is very different. Our outsideness, at its worst, may lead to objectification and alienation of the other, and at its best, may allow us to see the other in a much more complete way that they cannot, and indeed the inverse is true as well. Mikhail Bakhtin refers to it as transgression or a surplus of seeing, which allows us to aestheticize the other. The dynamic between self and other is the dynamic between the ethical and aesthetic.¹

The relationship between self and other converge in literature, where the entire existence of a character, the patterns of their relationships, how they become fulfilled or destroyed can be seen in its fictional entirety. Characters are experienced in a way that is impossible in our own lives outside the self. In literature we see the

¹ M.M. Bakhtin, 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,' *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, trans. Vadim Liapunov (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990) 204.

ethical strivings of the character in an aestheticized way. For a successful characterisation, the author must understand any differences in ideological viewpoint from their own. Considering Travellers use a highly variant vocabulary, are grouped into categories considered repugnant to society such as ‘pikeys’ or ‘knackers’ and have a long history of stereotypical representation, avoiding objectification is a difficult task. Understanding ideological viewpoint is essential for achieving an ethical and aesthetic balance in characterisation and an overall sense of verisimilitude within a story.

Three works we have already touched on, Bryan MacMahon’s novel *The Honey Spike*, Peter Brady’s novel *Paveewhack* and Tom Murphy’s drama *A Whistle in the Dark*, have all contributed to the Traveller literary canon. In each of these works, Travellers comprise the major roles. These three works also stand out either because the authors, all members of the settled community, represent the Travellers’ ideological viewpoint without interference or objectification from their own ideology or because they obtain a balance between ideologies within their novels. Bakhtin referred to the presence of multiple ideological worldviews as polyphony.²

Mindful of these challenges and at the same time maintaining the idea that the novel is a form of experience, we can approach these three works now in more detail with the question of how the Traveller character can be constructed to constitute an experience of the other as subject. To quote Roger Fowler: ‘the language of the novel must construct the complete dialectic between the ideologies at issue without totally subjugating one to the categories of the other.’³

The Traveller vocabulary encodes their ideology in fundamental ways that reflect their interaction with the settled community and their own culture. Shelta, the academic term for the Traveller vocabulary and also known as Gammon within the Traveller community or Travellers’ Cant generally, is used predominately for in-group communication especially in the presence of the settled community or at times of danger. The extent of current Shelta use is debated; some Travellers insist the vocabulary has died out while others reject this¹²³ idea. The linguistic definition of

² M.M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 5.

³ Roger Fowler, ‘Anti-language in fiction,’ *Literature as Social Discourse: The Practice of Linguistic Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981) 146.

Shelta is also an on-going debate but a discussion regarding Shelta's language status is beyond the remit of this thesis. Shelta shall be referred to as a vocabulary here if for no other reason than how it is approached within the creative work. As we have already seen, Shelta was first described in the 1890s by Charles Leland and further detailed linguistic surveys by John Sampson and Kuno Meyer soon appeared in *The Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society*. In his series of essays in *Béaloides* in the 1930s, Pádraig Mac Gréine found that many of the lexical features these early researchers noted had already disappeared. Around the same time, R.A. Macalister listed over nine hundred Shelta words in his 1937 book *The Secret Languages of Ireland*. By 1994, Alice Binchy's analysis of Traveller vocabulary showed a complete loss of Shelta prepositions and a significant loss of adjectives, adverbs and verbs.⁴ In 2002, Binchy estimated there were roughly three hundred words remaining in the Traveller vocabulary.⁵ In her Ph.D. thesis, Binchy consolidated all the earlier findings and collections to map Shelta's lexical and syntactical evolution. Although much of the lexicon was shown to have derived from Irish or English, Binchy found many words had an indeterminate origin, which she organised into semantic categories. Among the largest of Binchy's categories were words for survival; next was drink and food preparation, followed by body parts and then crime and law enforcement: all important aspects of the traditional Traveller lifestyle. Binchy suggests that these words, including *beoir* (woman) and *feen* (man), have been diachronically stable, forming the important core lexicon of Shelta and that the derived words are gap-fillers and have been used for centuries to protect the integrity of this core lexicon.

The secretive and separate nature of Shelta reflects the relationship between the two communities generally. The British-Australian linguist M.A.K. Halliday has described how alternative ideologies can be manifested in language.⁶ An anti-language is spoken by members of anti-societies which exist in an ideologically antagonistic relationship to the dominant culture and are categorized as deviant or criminal. Their use of language retains the standard grammatical system but intentionally inverts lexical structures and their meaning to make clear that a shift of values has occurred. In Shelta, besides the words of indeterminate origin that Binchy

⁴ Alice Binchy, 'The Status and Functions of Shelta,' diss., U of Oxford, 1994, 75.

⁵ Alice Binchy 'Travellers' use of Shelta,' in John Kirk and Donall O'Baoill, eds, *Travellers and Their Language. Belfast Studies in Language, Culture and Politics* (Belfast: Queen's University of Belfast, 2002) 16.

⁶ M.A.K. Halliday, 'Antilanguages,' *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979) 164-182.

noted, word transformations occur via relexicalization, suffixation and metathesis and are used on specific words (derived from English or Irish), typically ones central to the activities of the subculture and that set it off most sharply from the settled community, such as tobar (road; from the Irish bother), Corraí (horse; from the Irish cappall), Céna (house; from the Irish teach) and Garead (money; from the Irish airgead)

Thus, Shelta consists of words of an indeterminate origin that are central to the lifestyle in addition to loan words manipulated for relations with the settled community. The anti-language foregrounds the idea that the language people use is a reflection of their ideology and their experience in the world. Because Travellers are an oral culture, orality serves a much deeper process and may be an important component for Traveller representations.

Although literacy is increasing in the community, many Travellers are still functionally illiterate and rely solely on oral means to communicate. The general features of orality, as laid out by Walter J Ong, can be used to understand and illuminate the representations of Traveller speech. Ong suggested oral societies must invest great energy in repeating what they wish to preserve. Repetition is achieved by structural (e.g. phonetic, grammatical) parallelism, by organising speech through temporal and relational links and by additive constructions. All of these elements simulate the rapidity by which thoughts translate into words. Formulaic language and mnemonics provide a shorthand of meanings which are easily remembered by the speaker and are familiar to the audience. While repetition is common in stories, intellectual experimentation is not. Stories are used as knowledge repositories and intelligence is based in situational contexts. Self-analysis breaks down totalised knowledge and discourages situational thinking, which is too risky for the collectivist ideology underpinning oral communities. Highly polarised, agonistically-toned and enthusiastic descriptions of physical violence often mark oral speech and narrative.

Generally then, Ong's principles of orality are:

1. based on mnemonics and formulas
2. additive rather than subordinate structure
3. aggregative rather than analytical
4. redundant
5. agonistically toned
6. empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced
7. homeostatic (focusing on relevance)
8. situational rather than abstract.⁷

Anti-language and orality highlight the Traveller ideological worldview. Depicting speech equates to depicting a cognitive conception of experience, encoding for ideology and at the same time maintaining credibility in areas of verisimilitude and aesthetics. The way in which language organises and presents the cognitive conception of experience is called *Mind Style*. To quote Fowler again: 'Cumulatively, consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world to one pattern or another, give rise to an impression of a world-view, what I shall call a "mind style"'.⁸

In the mid-twentieth century Fowler was a major contributor to the emerging discipline of Stylistics, which offered a methodological approach to examine these cumulative, consistent structural options. Stylistics, the study of style in literature, has one foot in linguistics and another in literary criticism. The study emerged within Russian Formalism in the early twentieth century, expanding on the earlier discipline known as *rhetoric*. Roman Jakobson, a key figure in modern stylistics, was a member of the Russian Formalists and later The Prague School, which developed the idea of *foregrounding*. Jakobson's address to a stylistics conference in 1958 was later published as 'Closing statement: Linguistics and Poetics' in Thomas Sebeok's *Style in Language* and so began the study of stylistics in earnest. Around the same time in the UK, the linguist J.R. Firth insisted the study of language must occur in the 'context of situation' and prioritized meaning.⁹ Halliday was one of Firth's students and he developed on the idea that meaning is embodied at every level of linguistic organisation in his *Systemic Functional Grammar*. Halliday remains an

⁷ Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 69.

⁸ Roger Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* (London: Methuen, 1977) 76.

⁹ Margaret Thomas, 'John Rupert Firth,' *Fifty Key Thinkers of Language and Linguistics* (London: Routledge, 2001) 180.

influential figure in stylistics and his 1971 essay ‘Linguistic Function and Literary Style: An Inquiry into the Language of William Golding’s “The Inheritors”’ is still an important resource.¹⁰ Modern stylistics deals with the texts on all language levels from the functional point of view. These functions refer to the roles occupied by words and phrases and the functions of language as a whole to understand how a character’s conceptual structure, social roles and themes all feature in a work. Meaning is found within the clause at three different functional levels: the ideational (the linguistic embodiment of our experience of the world via transitivity), the interpersonal (the communicative exchange between people via syntactic relations), and the textual (the overall organised message via larger thematic and cohesive strategies).¹¹

For our purposes, the ideational or representational level is of most interest. Here the focus is on clausal processes (typically realised by the verbal group) and include actions and events encoded within the transitivity structures of the clause. Processes are the result of categorizing thousands of fundamentally different verbs into several functional categories that include processes of doing (physical activity or more formally material processes), mental activity (sensing, thinking or other mental processes), communicating (saying, telling, reporting or verbal processes) and characterizing (relating or relational processes). In addition, the participants (typically realised by the nominal group) and the circumstances (typically realised by the adverbial group or prepositional phrase) are important. The participants are defined by their different roles in regards to the type of process (for example, an actor or recipient in material processes or a sensor and phenomenon in mental processes). Generally, the transitivity structures or how the processes relate to the participants (are the processes transitive, intransitive, ditransitive?) over the whole of a text-space highlight different ways of thinking. This is a simplified overview of Halliday’s theory, which in his introductory textbook is detailed over three hundred pages. While our present space precludes a deep stylistics analysis here, these ideas

¹⁰ M.A.K. Halliday, ‘Linguistic Function and Literary Style: An Inquiry into the Language of William Golding’s ‘The Inheritors,’ *Literary Style: A Symposium* ed. Seymour Chatman (London: Oxford UP, 1971). Rpt in *Linguistic Studies of Text and Discourse. The Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday* ed. Jonathan Webster (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002) 88-125.

¹¹ For more detail on Functional Grammar see Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (London: Edward Arnold, 1994); or Halliday, ‘Golding’.

may help us to understand how or if orality, marginalisation and power differentials are conveyed on the page.

If we can relate the linguistic patterns to underlying functions of language we have a criterion for eliminating what is trivial and for distinguishing true foregrounding. In his essay on William Golding's *The Inheritors*, Halliday defines foregrounding as 'prominence that is motivated' (104). Because orality and marginalization are important elements of the Traveller lifestyle there is reason to believe they may be prominent features in fictional representation and so foregrounded. Foregrounding is achieved by repetition (the repeated use of a word or word pattern), parallelism (the repeated use of words, phrases or sentences with the same grammatical structure or which convey a similar idea) or deviation. There are several categories of deviation including phonological, graphological, lexical, grammatical and semantic that are of importance. Given that orality is unusual in modern society, orality itself is a deviation within these works. Most of Ong's eight principles of orality serve as semantic deviations, although several fit into other deviation categories.

Ong's principles of (1) *mnemonics and formulaic language*, (3) *aggregative rather than analytical language* and (4) *redundancy* are types of lexical deviation. Ong's redundancy—which I interpret as types of lexical collocation and repetition—serve as cohesive properties in both reference and form. The use of Shelta is also a lexical deviation.

Foregrounding using grammatical deviation has a vast range of possibilities. Alterations within word order, ellipsis and sentence structure are all potential ways to foreground. Ong's principle of orality (2) *sentences with an additive rather than subordinate structure* is pertinent here. Essentially this is a type of conjunction and may also be semantically deviant as it is a cohesive property that (in Ong's perspective) links ideas through relational or temporal connections.

Semantic deviation, then, is defined as 'meaning relations which are logically inconsistent or paradoxical in some way'.¹² I would argue that Ong's principles (6)

¹² Geoffrey Leech and Michael H. Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (London: Longman, 1981) 43.

empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced, (5) *agonistic tendencies*, (7) *homeostatic (focusing on relevance) outlook* and (8) *situational rather than abstract nature* all fall under this type of deviance. Ong's (6) suggests the collectivist ideology; (5) and (7) echo the single-mindedness of a marginalized minority to maintain boundaries, social roles and customs; and (8) reflects the group's preference for tangibility over analysis.

Finally, not related to Ong's principles but an important type of deviation nonetheless is phonological and graphological deviation. Within prose these are essentially the same, in which the latter attempts to capture the former via accent, volume and tempo, among other things. Graphology at best is only suggestive of a particular pronunciation, which may be widespread in society anyway. These variations, regardless of phonological veracity, have become a convention which encode for many features including class and/or ethnicity. For example, in many works, characters who pronounce 'and' as 'an' or 'n' or do not pronounce the final 'g' in 'ing' are by association and the non-standardness of their spelling, speaking a low prestige dialect, which implies a lack of formal education and a position lower down on the socio-economic scale.

Travellers' speech is represented in MacMahon's *The Honey Spike*, Brady's *Paveewhack* and Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* in similar ways. A general problem is that Traveller speech generally deviates from the norm—there is an abundance of non-standard morphological features that knit together a non-standard background and which may be deviant overall but whose use within the text does not represent deviation as such. Many of these are consistent across our three principal texts and include the distinctive form for the second person plural ('ye', 'yis', 'youse'), the use of reflexive pronouns ('himself', 'herself'), a present tense with generalised -s ('For you I says . . .'), negative concord ('don't think you must'nt have . . .') and subject-verb non-concord ('I seen him').

Accent can be represented by the loss or addition of sound with the conventional apostrophe as elision mark. Wide variation occurs in this regard between our three works: *A Whistle in the Dark* and *Paveewhack* use very little of

this technique, while *The Honey Spike* is extreme in application. Too little of this variation and the dynamic nature of Traveller speech delivery might be lost; too much and the representation might turn caricatural. Including these marks seems unnecessarily conventional when the omission of the sound in the first place is to signal unconventionality, though there are places where they provide clarity (the elided ‘and’ form as ‘an’ versus the indefinite determiner ‘an’). *The Honey Spike* uses elision marks liberally and on pages that are dialogue heavy, the visual effect including direct speech quotation marks can be cluttered and confusing to the reader.

Accent variation in the three works is accomplished in part by a mixture of different forms of elision. Methods of loss of sound at the beginning of a word (aphaeresis) include ‘‘way’ for ‘away’ (*The Honey Spike*), ‘bout’ for ‘about’ (*Paveewhack*) and ‘‘prentince’ for ‘apprentice’ (*A Whistle in the Dark*). Loss of sound within a word (syncope) is essentially a process of lenition and includes ‘any’hin’ for ‘anything’ (*Paveewhack*). Loss of sound at the end of a word (apocope) includes ‘agian’ for ‘against’ (*A Whistle in the Dark*). Assimilation is the merging of words, for example ‘ushed’ or ‘ushta’ for ‘use to’, ‘gonta’ for ‘going to’ and ‘‘twas’ are common throughout all three works. Epenthesis (sound additions to the beginning or ending of words) is common in the two novels: for example, ‘hus’ for ‘us’ and ‘tiv’ for ‘to’.

Besides replicating the sound losses or additions, lexical changes to simulate accent are widespread. These include metathesis in both *The Honey Spike* and *Paveewhack* such as ‘aks’ for ‘ask’, and derivations such as ‘grade’ (derived from the Irish airgead) for money. In *Paveewhack* the sound change of vowels is intense throughout: ‘furst’ for ‘first’, ‘thrun’ for ‘thrown’, and rarer consonant changes such as ‘marriet’ for ‘married’ and ‘war’ for ‘was’. The intent is to replicate the rapid-fire delivery with which Travellers often speak. To move beyond these initial points, I will examine extracts from our three works to identify how the language conveys ideology and contributes to character construction. Only those elements which foreground the Traveller mind style are noted.

The three works are examined together here because they are all contemporary depictions featuring Travellers in main roles with strong characterisation. Within each, the Traveller mind style is shown to be a major

component of the narrative arcs. The main objective here is to examine if there are unique features or patterns within the writers' stylistic (or formal aesthetic) choices that conveys this mind style and how, if at all, they succeed and in particular present an agency, subjectivity and integrity to the characters. The two novels examined here have different points of view. In *The Honey Spike* the point of view is presented in third person omniscient in which the reader is provided access to the thoughts of many characters. In *Paveewhack* the first-person narrator is Whack Joyce, the main character in the story. Generally, the advantage here is that because the reader has access to the characters' thoughts and words that character is more sympathetic. The disadvantage is the restriction placed upon the narrative constraining all action to what the character knows or experiences. The third work examined is a drama, *A Whistle in the Dark*. Compared to long fiction the language within drama is of a heightened and accelerated nature because the narrative is reduced to voices and gestures. To maintain a degree of comparability between our three works my analysis will focus on direct speech.

A. Third-Person Omniscience: *The Honey Spike*

Bryan MacMahon's *The Honey Spike* is set in the late 1950s in both the North and South of Ireland. The novel is told in past-tense and third-person unrestricted omniscient narration, and it follows a linear time sequence with numerous flashbacks. The story centres on Martin and Breda Claffey, a young recently married Traveller couple who are expecting the arrival of their first child. At the opening of the story, the couple are in the North of Ireland accompanied by Martin's mother Poll-Poll and her third husband Mickle when Breda suddenly decides she wants to give birth at a lucky hospital (the honey spike of the title) in Kerry.¹³

The older Travellers, Poll-Poll and Mickle, are solipsistically-sentimental, foolhardy, unsympathetic and at times cruel. Both are hardened by experience and eager to engage in violence to defend themselves. Poll-Poll's son Martin is apathetic except for when he is drinking, at which point he becomes aggressive. Breda, the main character, is tormented by uncertainty and although she regularly acknowledges

¹³ Bryan MacMahon, *The Honey Spike* (Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1972).

unfairness and inequality, she does nothing about it. She is shy and confused, conflicted by her own needs and her husband's. Breda receives little warmth or affection from people with the occasional exception of her godfather, Martin and Poll-Poll.

MacMahon uses an even mixture of verbs in past and present tense. The excerpts examined here contain mostly finite verbs with little subject-verb non-concord. The clause structures tend to be complete, especially when compared to the other two works examined here, but this may be a function of the omniscient narrative style.

The novel begins with a description of the Antrim coast. MacMahon then describes Breda with the characteristic signs of a gypsy: a basket on her arm, a shawl thrown back from her head, a tanned face, weather-bleached hair and wearing jewellery. Martin is standing in a cart and commanding the piebald in front. He is described as having red-brown stubble of beard, a yellow scarf tied at his throat, a hat and old-fashioned breeches. After a page and a half of descriptive narration, the characters speak, first Martin and then Breda and continuing in that sequence:

You sold nothin' at all?' he said. [1]¹⁴
'I told you I done bad!' [2]
'I done bad too. [3] Twelve cans goin' out, [4a] a dozen comin' back. [4b] The North's a hungry country.' [5]
The girl continued to glare at the scene below her. [6]
'If this is the part of Ireland that has been stolen from us,' [7a] the man went on, 'As far as Martin Claffey is concerned [7b] the country can stay divided till the crack o'hell. [7c] (MacMahon 12-13)

The adjective 'hungry' in [5] is not used in the conventional manner of need but is rather a negative description that conveys barrenness, lacking elements that are desirable or not being satisfied.¹⁵ This resentfulness Martin feels is reinforced by the girl's glare. Both figurative [4] and emotive [7a] language contribute to the sense of ill-feeling and bitterness, as does the use of words such as 'hungry', 'stolen', 'glare', 'divided' and 'crack o'hell'. In the latter half of the excerpt Martin

¹⁴ For ease of analysis, sentences are numbered in sequence and the clauses therein are alphabetized sequentially.

¹⁵ 'hungry, adj.'. OED Online. August 2012. Oxford University Press. 18 Aug. 2012
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/89498?redirectedFrom=hungry>>.

takes advantage of the political situation through which he funnels his frustration, although later he claims to have no political allegiance.

[5] is a generic statement that reinforces Martin's indignant attitude and which go unchallenged by Breda. In [7] Martin foregrounds himself in the third person; this precedes the only mental process (is concerned) in the passage. This type of self-reference may allow Martin the distance to be more emotional and forthright.

A few paragraphs later Martin's anxiety is obvious in his description of overcoming his fear of heights as he crosses a bridge:

At first it cowarded me. [1] Then: 'blast you for a bridge,' says I. [2] I seen the fishermen outside at the rock's foot, [3a] laughin' up at me. [3b] As I was standin' there, [4a] down the Cliffside comes a lad of ten or so [4b] with a fisherman's dinner under his arm. [4c] An' without settin' a finger on either rope, [5a] he skips across the swingin' plank. [5b] 'You be damned!' says I, [6a] an' I talkin' to the bridge. [6b] Out I goes! [7] Midways I stopped. [8] When I looked down [9a] I almost sweated my blood. [9b] Then I said that no Antrim bridge'd coward a Southern Travellin' man. [10] An' begod, I crossed. [11] I threw myself sweatin' on the rocks at the other side. [12] (MacMahon 13-14)

Here, Martin's speech is lexically creative ('cowarded me') in which the noun is concerted to the verb and discoursally deviant ('blast you for a bridge', 'You be damned!') as people don't normally talk to bridges, let alone insult them. The colon in [2] is slightly deviant. As Martin tells his story, MacMahon utilises the colon to indicate simultaneous action. [3] starts with 'I seen' and is followed by the adverbial 'as I was' in [4a] and then a series of present participle verbs ([3b], 'laughin''; [4a], 'standin''; [5a], 'settin'') emphasises the act of the boy coming down the cliff and across the bridge. All this action ends with Martin's voice in [6]. This kind of higher-level punctuation usage is common in this novel.

In [1] the verb 'cowarded' is emotionally loaded with greater consequences for the character than if he was only 'intimidated'. There is a great deal of lexical cohesion here reinforcing the ideas of anatomy, movement and location. A high

proportion of words are anatomical terms ('foot', 'arm', 'finger', 'blood', 'man', 'lad'), verbs of movement ('skips', 'goes', 'comes', 'stopped', 'looked', 'crossed', 'threw') and prepositions ('up', 'down', 'under', 'across', 'on', 'out'). The preoccupation with anatomy and movement throughout this excerpt, alongside the emotional anguish Martin experiences, foregrounds the intensity of Martin's feelings of paralysis. His fear is reinforced by the high proportion of intransitive clauses.

This next small excerpt is an example of a rhetorical change in dialogue. With the rest of the family gathered around, Mickle explains where he spent his afternoon:

'A fella shook hands with me, [1a] an' I comin' out of a pub,' Mickle went on. [1b] 'You're a loyal servant of the Queen,' [2a] says he. [2b] Me, that turned Republican [3a] after I sold me British Army pension! [3b] 'A true blue' says he, [4a] 'so me a' you will scarify the Pope [4b] an' then we'll drink the health of King William victor of the Boyne.' [4c] (MacMahon 40)

Compared to the two previous passages, this piece is easier to read and has a high degree of cohesiveness which adds to the fluid nature. Mickle uses pronouns effectively to increase the level of cohesion throughout the passage and invokes additive ('and') and temporal ('after', 'then') conjunctions several times to reinforce this tightness. The effect of the additive conjunction 'an'' in [1] instead of the usual temporal 'when' is unsettling. This defamiliarization is then conveyed onto Mickle who is both a conman and ideologically flexible.

This passage is a good example of the exaggeration used throughout Mickle's dialogue. The participants in Mickle's descriptions are all human and he includes himself among a notable group including 'the Queen', 'the Pope' and 'King William'. Mickle's tendency throughout the novel to associate himself with larger-than-life people (dead or alive) contributes to an overall sense of hyperbole, reinforced by a network of continual overstated words that borders on farce. By keeping his listener (or reader) in the dark and being sly in his indirect associations, he appears dim-witted and humble, though neither of these is the case.

Another example in which a character seems to be saying one thing but in fact means another is the advice Poll-Poll gives to Breda on the morning of her wedding:

‘A man needs his woman as he needs his right hand,’
Poll-Poll went on. [1] ‘Without us, the best of men are
childer. [2] As I mention childer, [3a] never forget that
they are all ours: [3b] we want only the loan of a man
to put us goin’. [3c] At times even the most balanced
of men go crazy,’ She said. [4] ‘When that happens to
your man, [5a] don’t screech like a chicken; lie low
until the trouble’s over [5b] an’ then pretend that
nothin’ was ever wrong. [5c] Never let a man see the
end of your mystery: [6a] hold the bone an’ the dog’ll
follow you. [6b] Let crawlers say what they like, [7a]
but life is fair. [7b] At times it runs like a runaway
horse. [8] But if you hold the reins of life till they burn
to the bone, [9a] the whore of a runaway is sure to
stop. [9b] Things will turn as lucky for you then as
they were unlucky before. [10] (MacMahon 117)

This is a series of instructions that at first appear to be lessons in subservience, but upon closer inspection Poll-Poll is saying the exact opposite. Poll-Poll’s instructions include ideas that men are infantile and mentally imbalanced, that a woman must never let her husband know her completely and to be steady and consistent regardless of how she is treated by her husband (because he is imbalanced). This is all very ironic as Poll-Poll is volatile, moody and on her third husband.

The instructional tone here is foregrounded by the material processes (which convey an attitude of ‘do as I say and don’t ask questions’) and by the high proportion of transitive clauses. The speech is organised through strong relational and referential links, but between [6] and [7] there is a leap of cohesion (from ‘never let a man see the end of your mystery’ to ‘life is fair’). The word ‘crawlers’ is lexically deviant and while it may be a Shelta word, presumably refers to a lazy person.

Nine generic sentences, asserting universal truths according to Poll-Poll, are stated throughout the passage in [1], [2], [3b], [4], [6b], [7b], [8], [9] and [10]. These set the instructional tone and highlight the power differential between the women. Despite the many subordinate structures, Poll-Poll’s language has an oral nature, in

particular the use of practical situations to explain her ideas: ‘don’t screech like a chicken’; ‘hold the bone an’ the dog’ll follow’; ‘a runaway horse’.

On the journey back to Kerry, Martin and Breda encounter the IRA, the RUC, superstitious midland farmers, Jesuits, Guards, good people and bad and other Travellers. Much of the narrative occurs in flashbacks to events before the journey. Shelta is used sporadically throughout the novel, however when Martin and Breda encounter a poor Traveller family in the Burren the incidence of Shelta increases dramatically. This is the most Shelta used at any point in the novel. Here the young boy (she refers to him as ‘tome soobla’) reminds Breda of the cold winter when she and Martin found a caravan of children living in deprivation and their parents gone:

Breda’s eyes followed him. [1] ‘*Tome soobla!*’ she said to herself. [2] ‘Lovely boy!’ she added. [3] (MacMahon 126)

A few paragraphs later:

‘*Gammy thálosc!*’ Breda said in gammon. [4] ‘Aye! It’s a bad day,’ the woman said. [5] [. . .] ‘Their *maderum*’s in the *keengup*,’ [6a] she heard the other woman say, ‘*Gather misslied!*’ [6b] Mother in the hospital, the father gone: [7a] the words sunk home in Breda. [7b] [. . .] ‘Your *jeels* is *loshte* to the *feen?*’ the eldest girl wanted to know. [8] ‘Aye!’ Breda said. [9] ‘I’m married to the man.’ [10] (MacMahon 126-127)

While italicising foreign words is often standard in English literature, Shelta is considered particular to Travellers so MacMahon’s effect here seems to setting apart the words and the ideas behind them, with the effect of highlighting their difference. Presumably he is italicising the words for the reader’s benefit. All of the Shelta in this excerpt are nouns except ‘misslied’ and ‘loshte’. Other uses of Shelta throughout the story include ‘lackeens’ or ‘lack’ for females, ‘shams’ for men, and ‘shades’ for the Gardaí.

Breda's use and knowledge of Shelta in concert with her compassion allows her to connect with a more ethereal and saintly idea. Throughout the novel Breda indicates she wishes to settle, but Martin never replies to these ideas. When the couple arrive at Puck Fair, Martin begins to drink and soon a fight breaks out. Breda sustains a head injury, goes into labour and after Martin ignores her, she convinces her godfather to take her to the honey spike where, upon arrival, she gives birth and dies.

The third-person omniscient is an effective approach especially in conveying many different viewpoints within the group. The distinction between the Traveller and settled voices is convincing, but the constant barrage of different points of view and subplots is overwhelming and at times confusing. MacMahon's aesthetic techniques are impressive and he manages to convey both power differentials and the Traveller mind style. Generally, within *The Honey Spike*, foregrounding techniques that place importance on the characters' lack of emotion and paralysis, the tendency towards deception and the power differentials proved far more valuable than transitivity for conveying the Traveller mind style. Transitivity was effective as a narrative technique generally, but the use was not necessarily deviant as per our purposes here. As noted earlier MacMahon uses graphological variation to introduce phonological deviance but he also, more importantly and impressively, uses variations of cohesion, lexical deviance and at times discursal deviance to reinforce the characters' lack of agency and marginalisation. The characters' subjectivity is enhanced by hyperbole and generic sentences that add farce and humour and play on the stereotype of the Traveller as fool. The characters within the novel, despite tendencies for deceit, are naive and deficient in judgment and understanding. There are times when the reader feels MacMahon is suggesting this foolish tendency reveals a spiritual or moral truth, but he never quite convinces and instead the character falls back into stereotype.

Aesthetically there is much to admire in this work, but the work fails to transgress stereotype and lacks a sense of verisimilitude. One is willing to excuse the inconsistent and complicated relations between Breda and Martin and by extension his family, but otherwise Breda's character in particular is too inconsistent, from standing up to the RUC to submitting to her rival for her husband's affections. The narrative is also generally too one-sided, showing and defining Travellers as

innocent victims. One of the more interesting scenes in *The Honey Spike* is when a tennis ball inadvertently bounces into the couple's cart and Breda hides it inside her blouse. The tennis player approaches the cart and pleads for the ball, explaining her father is a medical doctor who sympathises with the Traveller situation. Breda is undeterred and she insists she does not know where the ball is. More of this complicated and interesting interaction would have benefited the story. The novel seems to be making the Travellers' case, depicting the hard world they inhabit but absolving them of any culpability. While MacMahon steers away from a sociological tone, there is most definitely a pro-Traveller ethical agenda about the novel, which compromises the work.

B. First-Person: *Paveewhack*

Peter Brady's *Paveewhack* is a picaresque story set in an unnamed town in County Offaly in the 1960s. The story is structured as the elderly Whack Joyce's recollection of a summer in his early adolescence. The narrative mode is first-person and present tense. First-person narratives foreground the speakers' mind style and, because Whack is recounting his actions, this narrative approach works well. The dialogue is not marked throughout the story. There are no quotation marks, and dialogue as reported by Whack is often buried within paragraphs (because of this, I number the excerpts here to distinguish speech tags from direct speech). The incidence of subject-verb non-concord is high in *Paveewhack*, and complex clauses are a regular occurrence as are fragments. At times the fragment units bleed into one another and can be seen as a larger clause structure.¹⁶

Whack Joyce is for the most part a well-adjusted and typical fourteen-year-old looking for adventure and mischief. His family are heavily discriminated against by most of the authoritarian organisations but in particular the Gardaí. Whack's father, Blocker, is an alcoholic and prone to relatively inoffensive levels of deceit. He yearns to return to a nomadic existence and rejects what he believes to be the unjust laws of settled society. Consequently, he is the main scapegoat for the local Guards. Early on in the story, Whack recollects how Blocker prepared him for

¹⁶ Peter Brady, *Paveewhack: A Novel* (Dublin: New Island, 2001).

questioning from the local Gardaí about a recent crime that Whack refuses to admit to:

Now you play yer cards rale close. [1] Remember how I show ya how to bluff in poker? [2] He'll be tryin his best to bamboozle you, [3a] but you stick tiv yer story. [3b] Look how the badger defend himself? [4] Pretend the auld sarghint's a fox hound. [5] He'll be circling ya, snappin growlin, barkin. [6] What does the badger do? [7]

He get the best grip he can on a leg or the neck [8a] an squeeze wuth his jaws [8b]—tighter an tighter til he hear a bone crack. [8c]

You keep a strong grip on to your side of the story, son. [9] You know how they often tries to cod the badger by snappin a stick, [10a] makin him think he just after crackin the hound's bone wuth his teeth [10b] so he'll let go his grip? [10c]

Sure. [11]

Well Gillick he try an bluff you into confessin tiv it. [12] He's a evil bastard. [13] He'll try any trick to catch ya, so be rale careful. [14] (Brady 31)

This set of instructions differs to those seen in MacMahon's work. Among the main differences are the lack of generic sentences and the presence of continuative conjunctions ('now', 'remember', 'look', 'well') that direct the cohesive nature of the piece and reinforce the urgency of the situation. The similarities, on the other hand, are the reliance on transitivity and material processes.

Graphological variation is rife here, but the elision marks do not busy the page as they did in *The Honey Spike*. In addition, there is a great deal of non-standard spelling such as 'tiv', 'wuth', 'rale'. Most of the clauses are simple and the more complicated subordinate structures ([8] and [10]) highlight the fox hound attack and the strategy to divert the Sergeant. Blocker questions Whack several times to reinforce his points and prepare Whack for what he is about to experience. The syntactical subject in sentences [2], [4] and [5] is implied and the verb in the initial position in each sentence underpins the important actions (remember, look, pretend) and, as stated earlier, creates a sense of urgency.

Lexical collocations and parallelism help to focus on the Sergeant's malicious intent. Lexical repetitions include evaluative verbs such as 'bamboozle',

‘crack’, ‘play’, ‘squeeze’, ‘cod’, ‘bluff’, ‘trick’, ‘snapping’, ‘cracking’, ‘catch’ and ‘confessing’. ‘Grip’ is repeated three times, twice in reference to the badger’s grip on the hound’s bone (‘best grip’, ‘strong grip’). The Sergeant is the subject to the verb ‘try’ (in various forms) three times.

After Blocker and Whack outmanoeuvre the local Sergeant, they celebrate with a large dinner. This small excerpt begins with Blocker using a metaphor to describe the amount of food on his plate and quickly turns into an exchange of challenge and wits:

Father sayin, [1] I’ll need creels on this plate [2a] ta
hauld the chuck. [2b] Jesus you swear I’d worms. [3] I
so hungry I could ate a scabby babby—scabs furst. [4]
Go aisy aan thee grunter there Whack! [5]
How bout a pig trough? [6] I say, cause I can be as
thick as the best. [7]
Shut up ya stoomer [8a] or I’ll give ya a belt of the
back a me hand. [8b]
He’s a savage a the table but a chicken at the work, [9]
me granny say. [10]
That don’t go down too well. [11]
Bring me a bull, [12] me da say then. [13] Cut his
horns off an wipe his arse [14a] an I’ll ate him no
bother. [14b] Mevvy I leave ya the tail, [15] he say tiv
me gran, [16] for to make ya some soup. [17]
I taste a bit a heaven [18a] an a mighty lock a hell in
me life, [18b] says me gran, [19] but I’ll take hell
anitime. [20]
I’d prefer a bull in me oven, [21] says me ma, which
make me father splurt his peck all over the table wuth
a blast a laughter. [22] (Brady 43)

Sentences [1], [7], [10], [11], [13], [16], [19] and [22] are all reporting clauses and the rest is free direct speech. In both types of speech, five examples of Shelta are seen (‘creels’, ‘chuck’, ‘grunter’, ‘stoomer’ and ‘peck’). All but ‘stoomer’ (‘stoomer’ is defined as a fool in Brady’s glossary) are nouns referring to food. There are many deviant spellings and most of them change the vowel sound from a monophthong to a diphthong with the intent of elongating the sound. In sentence [4] Blocker neglects to use the verb ‘am’.

Lexically the collocations concentrate on the gruesome nature of the piece: ‘worms’, ‘scabby-babby’, ‘grunter’ (Shelta for pig), ‘back of me hand’, ‘savage’,

‘bull’, ‘horns’, ‘arse’ and ‘hell’. As the friendly banter increases within the family, Blocker’s descriptions tend towards a scatological nature. Blocker and Whack’s victory of sorts has bolstered Blocker’s confidence and his cavalier attitude. When Blocker is challenged by the grandmother his dialogue becomes clipped and blunt. Sentences [12] and [14a] have an implied syntactic subject (you) and the actions, ‘bring’, ‘cut’, ‘wipe’ and ‘ate’ are focused and direct. Blocker and the grandmother’s exchange is hyperbolic and competitive, each challenging the other as to who is more durable in the most dramatic terms. In their exchange, especially in [9], [12] and [14], a parallelism exists within each of their statements (using nouns and noun phrases in a cyclical rhythm).

This excerpt is an example of the over-confidence and self-congratulatory tendencies that both Blocker and Whack illustrate. These conceits eventually cause them to doubt the intent and ferocity of others. Blocker tends towards this type of hyperbole throughout the book and without any sort of substantial action behind his words, he emerges as a fool.

Whack spends most of his time avoiding school, conspiring with his best friend, playing practical jokes on people or punishing misbehaviour as he sees fit. He is governed by his instinctive sense of right and wrong and his mistrust of authority groups. He questions much of what he is expected to do and the societal roles he is expected to play. In this third excerpt, he struggles with the idea of a settled Traveller in discussion with his friend Goat:

This thing about settlin, Goat, [1a] we argue on the way home from school, [1b] what will the likes of hus get out of this in the end? [1c] Draw the dole. [2] Live in the wrong end of town, [3a] get treated like shit. [3b] Jesus, Goat, me lingo’s changin even. [4] Yer beginnin ta suffer from settlement pains, Whack, [5a] but you’ll get over that. [5b] Settlin into what? [6] That’s what I’m aksin ya. [7] That’s up to you. [8] What you mane? [9] Two choices. [10] Turn intiv a cakesham or stay a cream cracker. [11] If you don’t like it, [12a] you can travel the road, biy. [12b] Jesus but you’s getting fierce stuck up, Goat. [13] (Brady 126)

[1b] is a reporting clause but the rest is direct speech. Whack's awareness of the changes in his vernacular is mostly resonant in the use of the simile 'like shit'. The use of the expletive is deviant here and unusual within the novel, reinforcing the boys' opinion of settling. 'Cakesham' (course-mannered townie) is the one Shelta word in this passage and 'cream-cracker' is rhyming slang for knacker. Both are used as syntactic objects here, as are many pejorative words ('dole', 'wrong end of town', 'shit', 'suffer'). Compared to the other excerpts there is very little subject-verb non-concord. Ironically, many of the verbs express movement ('get out', 'get treated', 'get over', 'is getting', 'turn', 'stay', 'live', 'travel', 'draw', 'changing', 'suffer') and the three verbs in the initial positions, in [2], [3a] and [3b], reinforce the options of settling. In addition, the numerous intransitive processes encode for and contribute to the foregrounding of Whack's frustration. Not only are they subject to forces beyond their control but there is no participant encoded when they discuss the future ([2], [3], [6], [11]). This passage is constructed on short sentences and relies less on conjunctive cohesion. The short, structured and tense sentence structures seem to foreground the consequences and effects of living in a house.

This excerpt is an example of Whack's tendency to over-analyse elements of his life he is unhappy with: similar to many other adolescents, Whack questions and concentrates on the unfairness of life, but he also has a high degree of self-efficacy. Both his actions and his language reflect the empathetic and participatory nature of orality. He questions inequalities and attempts to make them right, but usually without regard of the consequences for other people or for himself. He exposes an extortion plan, rescues a young girl from her abusive father and then later accidentally murders him. Throughout the story, the settled community commits a series of offences, including unlawful confinement, racial abuse, incest, extortion and domestic abuse. The misuse of power culminates in Blocker's murder by the local Gardaí. Later, Whack tries to avenge his father's murder by poisoning the Sergeant, but his attempt fails and he is imprisoned.

The Shelta within the story occurs predominately in Whack's narration. This next excerpt is not direct speech within the story but is included here to demonstrate the use of Shelta and how narration is presented and works throughout the story:

This evenin there's money took out of a house in the town. [1] Me da's wobblin home later that night. [2] He carrying a load a garaid [3a] he get outa doing a dayle, [3b] selling a lock a mountain goat he pass off as deer tiv a cakesham in the gat cean. [3c] Next thing the squad car pull up beside him. [4] Grunter lower the windie. [5] He want to know where he coming from. [6] Me da get stubborn [7a] cause he have a good streagale a skyhope in him. [7b] Grunter an this other shadog [8a]— they jump out an pin him tiv the wall. [8b] Grunter search his jacket pockets [9a] an come upon the pile a deener. [9b] He then try an blame the robbery on him. [10] Sure we all know he carry a chip on his shaulder, Pecker. [11] They take him in tiv the barracks. [12] Course he don't want to tell the shadogs where he get the money [13a] cause he after doin a swingle. [13b] (Brady 178-179)

In this passage there are over ten deviant spellings and ten Shelta words. The use of Shelta isn't so much disruptive in itself as in the way it is distributed. Four of the eleven Shelta terms are in [3]. Overall, 'garaid', 'lock', 'streagle' and 'skyhope' are easily understood via the surrounding context, but 'cakesham' and 'gat cean' are more obscure.¹⁷ Grunter, in accordance with the familiar slang use of 'Pig', is Whack's name for the local Sergeant and the metaphors he directs towards the Sergeant are all negative ('carry a chip' and 'keen to pin it on someone').

Paveewhack's characters are believable and sympathetic. They are subject to unjust brutality and racism and while they react to this mistreatment they also perpetuate crime and disorder regardless of the unfair practice. Brady's narrative utilises this reactive tendency with a self-congratulatory nature to convey a group of people who survive day-by-day teetering on the precipice of disaster. This three-dimensionality of the characters contributes to their sympathetic and likeable nature. And when disaster does strike the reactive self-defeating behaviours are believable. Transitivity, which is utilised here to suggest frustration and hopelessness through the lack of agency and stalled movement within the clauses, is notable but the most obvious style device in Brady's novel is the language. Graphological deviation is

¹⁷ Despite 'cakesham' featuring in an earlier extract, the word is only used twice in the novel.

pervasive as is the use of Shelta. Sentences here are often complex and sprawling and Brady varies clause structure to foreground changes in emotion, such as during the Sergeant's vicious maltreatment of Blocker. Semantically the oral viewpoint is well established, from the situationist and relevance-focused mind style to the additive nature of the dialogue, the highly polarised outlooks and Whack's participatory personality.

As with the previous novel, lexical deviation is an important element in foregrounding the Traveller ideology. Words and descriptions featuring manipulation, deceit (both done to and done by the Travellers), coercion, constraint and violence predominate in repetitive patterns and in figurative language. A scatological nature in many of these threads is common. The most important element of this lexical deviation is the use of Shelta and graphological variation. Shelta is predominant in the first half of the book and then tails off, relying on the graphological variation to convey linguistic and semantic deviation. Due to the amount of Shelta, there is difficulty in identifying specific words and this regularly interferes with the pace of the narrative. The presence of an inordinate amount of Shelta and graphological variation in *Paveewhack* would dissuade all but the most obstinate reader. The glossary contains 125 words to assist in finding a way through the vernacular high grass. Eventually, about half way through, the reader will have been acclimatized, but half way through is too late. *Paveewhack* does succeed in portraying the Travellers' political situation (although at times, veering towards over-sentiment) and their mind style. Transitivity plays a larger role in representation here than in the previous work, in particular the lack of transitive clauses within Whack's language when referring to the future. The characters and the world Brady has constructed are sympathetic and believable and he employs excellent techniques in doing so. However, it is the aesthetic stylistic choices, specifically the lack of balance in regards to vocabulary choice and variation, which are ultimately the novel's downfall. The result is a novel that mistakenly appears to be sociologically-heavy, attempting to convey the Traveller experience through vocabulary alone. The attempt at realistic representation has backfired, negating the strong verisimilitude by heavy handed aesthetic choices.

C. Dramatic Dialogue: *A Whistle in the Dark*

Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* uses graphological variation and Shelta sparingly. Murphy's use of language is less obvious at the superficial level and more directed in the deep structure. He draws on various aspects of orality, including the situationist mindset, additive nature of the dialogue, highly polarised and agonistic outlooks, enthusiastic description of physical violence and the empathetic and participatory nature within the Travelling community. Subject-verb non-concord is limited and most of the verbs are present tense. Clauses are predominately simple, with many fragments and verbless clauses.¹⁸

There is an issue about whether Murphy's characters are Travellers, as it is not made explicit. The characters are poor Irish immigrants from County Mayo who are ridiculed by the Coventry locals as tinkers. Michael recalls when the local postman yells abuse at him: 'Go home you tinker! Go back to your tent, Carney!' (Murphy 2, 42). In Act III Mush roars: 'Tinkers! Carneys! Tinkers! Tinkers!' (Murphy 3, 70) and in Act II, Harry recalls a story when 'Dada was then sort of selling things round the countryside' (Murphy 2, 43). The faction fighting in which the characters engage within the play is indicative of the Traveller lifestyle and is in general a major reason the settled population find the group objectionable. The characters continually espouse collectivist attitudes, which is also indicative of the Travelling community. Previous analyses also assume the characters to be Travellers.¹⁹ That Murphy does not focus on the characters' Traveller status is a strength of the play. Many Traveller treatments fall into the sociological trap where the characters' and author's political aims quickly overtake the narrative, resulting in the writing becoming the equivalent of a political lobby group. Murphy avoids this completely and retains evidence of the scars of marginalization and ridicule in his work.

The play centres on Michael Carney. Three of his brothers (Harry, Iggy and Hugo) have been staying with him and his wife Betty in their house in Coventry for several weeks. As the play opens, their father, Dada, and youngest brother, Des, are about to arrive from Ireland. The violent nature of the brothers and their disregard

¹⁸ Tom Murphy, 'A Whistle in the Dark,' *Plays: 4* (London: Methuen Drama, 1989) 1-87.

¹⁹ Mary M. Burke, *Tinkers: Synge and the Cultural History of the Irish Traveller* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009) 187-190.

for domesticity have wreaked havoc on the young couple and their house. Betty wants them to leave, but the brothers ignore her objections and Michael insists it is his duty to put them up. In moving to England, Michael was hoping to leave behind his violent family and their brutal nature, but in practice that is harder than he anticipated. The Carneys are both misogynistic and misanthropic, small-time thugs with an inferiority complex but simultaneously ambitious and vicious, intent on getting revenge on people they think slight or disrespect them, including, in Act III, each other.

This volatility and unpredictability is evident from the first few lines of the play. While Harry is looking for his sock, Iggy is trying to hurry the brothers so they can meet the incoming train. Murphy's description of Iggy brings to mind an image of a dapper gangster: he wears a suit and is revered as the iron man in the family and the community. In Act 3, Iggy warns Des to stop fooling around: 'No more now. You shut up when I say to, or you'll have no mouth. Do you understand that?' (Murphy 3, 72) The straightforward cause and effect with which the threats are delivered leave no doubt as to Iggy's ability. But Iggy stutters, frequently repeating and prolonging sound and syllables ('r-r-ready', 'sh-sh-shirt, sh-shi-shirt', 't-t-t-train'), thus destabilizing the iron man image, and increasing the sense of uncertainty in the discourse.

Michael, on the other hand, is attempting to break free from the brutal nature of the family. He is the most articulate and reflective of the family but his desire to live a different kind of life is rendered impossible in the parameters of the collectivistic Traveller family. The pressure to conform to the family's demands impairs Michael's ability to create a new life for himself. His inability to escape is apparent in Act II when he tells Betty:

But I can't get out of all this. [1] I could have had a good job. [2] I could have been well fixed. [3] I could have *run* years ago. [4] Away from them. [5] I could have been a teacher. [6] I had the ability [7] . . . What's wrong with me? . . . [8] (Murphy 2, 57)

Self doubt and paralysis haunt Michael throughout the play. In this passage, within [2], [3], [4], [6] and [7] Michael is the syntactic subject, while a collection of

positive ideas (good job, well fixed, teacher, ability) sit in the object position and in between are the modal and/or perfect constructions. In each of these sentences Michael had the ability in the past to ‘be’ or to ‘have’ but did not act on that ability. The modal-perfect construction encapsulates Michael’s struggle with passivity and lost opportunities and sets his trajectory throughout the play as he attempts to understand the nature of his inaction.

The irony of Michael wishing he’d run years ago is that at the end of Act II he describes to Betty the night he was attacked by the Muslim gang and his brothers came to his rescue. On seeing his opportunity, Michael ran away while Harry ended up badly injured and spent two nights in hospital. By abandoning the fight, Michael exposed his cowardice, but also, and perhaps more importantly, his disloyalty to the family. Harry, at first verbally and later physically, attacks Michael for running away. His attacks are based on the importance he affords familial loyalty and his sense of right and wrong. As Harry’s character unfolds it becomes obvious he is violent, clever and capricious:

You know how I fight. [1] We’re all iron men. [2] Not just Iggy. [3] Ask Dada. [4] Fight all night, Michael. [5] Anyone. (*Holds up his fist.*) Iron, look. [6] Aw, but look, more iron. [7] (*Withdraws from his pocket an ass-shoe which he wears as a knuckle duster. He gives Michael a tap on the shoulder with it.*) A souvenir from Ireland. [8] Iron, man. [9] Let no one say there was ever a jibber in our family! [10] Or was there? [11] Hah? [12] Not even one? [13] Was there a jibber in our family, Michael? [14] Go on, tell the missus. [15] (Murphy 1, 18)

This passage displays strong connective links between the sentences focussing on the collective (I-we-Iggy-Dada-Michael-Ireland-man-family), while [2] is meant to exclude Michael, who is definitely not an iron man. This distinction is drawn out again in the repetition of ‘jibber’ in [10] and [14].

Grammatical deviation foregrounds Harry’s intimidating nature and the power struggle between the two brothers. The passage is a mixture of fragmented and simple clauses consisting of commands and questions (‘Let no one’, ‘Ask’, ‘Go on’, ‘Was there ever’). The exclamatory ([10]) and the interrogative ([14]) are both

specifically directed towards Michael. The fragments and these directed sentences highlight Harry's compulsion to remind Michael of his disloyalty. Overall, Michael is repeatedly ostracised and marginalised. Harry's language uses both rhyme and chiasmus ('Fight all night'; 'Iron, look'; 'Aw, but look, more iron'). His use of 'Hah' plays a major role in his own idiolect and he uses it in an interrogative, intimidating and dispassionate manner.

In Act II when Hugo and Harry discuss Hopalong Cassidy, Harry's dialogue is dramatically different, illustrating another side to his character:

Hugo: Did ye ever notice he used never bother with
the women? [1] I never seen him kiss a jane
once. [2]

Harry: I did. [3] Just once though. [4] Yeh see, in this
picture [5a], this one was after getting shot,
[5b] and she was dying, [5c] out on the prairie,
[5d] and Hoppy come along, singing or
laughing at something, or admiring the view
for himself. [5e] On his horse. [6] And she was
dying. [7] So he seen her, [8a] and he jumped
down. [8b] And she said 'Hoppy, kiss me, I'm
dyin' or something. [9]

Hugo: Hah? [10]

Harry: 'Hoppy, kiss me, [11a] I'm dyin'' or
something—something. [11b]

Hugo: And did he? [12]

Harry: He did. [13]

Hugo: Well I suppose he couldn't help it. [14]

(Murphy 2, 45)

Harry is a different man in this extract. [5] is one of Harry's longest sentences in the play and the length highlights the brevity of the surrounding sentences. Compared to Harry's previous excerpt, there are far more past and present participles and much less use of the present tense, suggesting a more relaxed attitude. Each time a character changes tone into a more cooperative or relaxed mood, the sentence structures change into longer coordinated constructions with adverbial and prepositional phrases. His repetition of the word 'something' in [5e], [9] and twice in [11] downplays the needs of the woman and the kiss, as does the verb 'suppose' in [14]. The use of the article 'the' before the plural 'women' in [1] is indicative of how the gender is objectified throughout.

In the early part of the play, Dada is the spiritual leader, but as Harry's power in the family grows, Dada's disintegrates. Dada consistently uses grandiose and empty speeches to avoid responsibility. The veneer has well and truly cracked when Dada finds out in Act III that Michael does not talk about him to Betty. Michael's (apparent) rejection of him has unearthed an earlier rejection by a group of respectable businessmen back in Mayo. Here he registers Michael's rejection of him and his lifestyle:

N-a-a-a-w! [1] . . . He thinks he knows it all. [2] But he doesn't know much about life. [3] Very smart. [4] Very—very—very smart. [5] (*Drinks, pauses, sings*) . . . 'Do you remember me [6a] standing there? [6b] For one last kiss, [7a] beneath the kind stars' light.' [7b] (*Drinks, pause, Suddenly*) . . . I hate! [8] I hate world! [9] It all! [10] But I'll get them! [11] I'll get them! [12] By the sweet, living, and holy Virgin Mary, I'll shatter them! [13] They accepted me. [14] They drank with me. [15] I made good conversation. [16] Then, at their whim, [17a] a little pip-squeak of an architect can come along and offer me the job as caretaker. [17b] To clean up after him! [18] But I'll—I'll—Do you hear me? [19] I hate! [20] . . . (*grows softer*) Oh, I wish to God I was out of it all. [21] I wish I had something, anything. [22] Away, away, some place . . . No. [23] No! [24] I'm proud. [25] I did all right by my family. [26] Didn't I? [27] . . . Yaas! [28] (*passionately to himself*) On my solemn oath I did my best . . . my best, my best, my best. [29] I'm proud of them. [30] Yah—yah—yah! I hate! [31] (Murphy 3, 60)

The misanthropic nature of the commentary and the instability of subject matter confirm Dada is an unstable man. Again, as the intensity of the content increases and decreases so too the sentences shorten or are elongated. The piece begins considering Michael's intelligence, then diverts off to a sentimental song and then Dada explodes with fury, lashing out at 'them', 'they' and 'their'. He begins to soften in the later sentences and then almost rallies himself to prevent despondence from creeping in.

Dada's use of 'I'll' in [11], [12], [13] is arguably a modal construction conveying probability, which given the nature of the content and the instability

conveyed already at this point leaves us doubting the likelihood of Dada's threats coming to fruition. Later in [19] this same construction is most definitely a modal verb for which the probability is cut short by the em-dash. The ellipses are common throughout Dada's speech in the play and together with the lack of cohesiveness especially in [8] foreground the jumps in his narrative and his thought, revealing his agitated state.

[8], [20] and [31] all contain the non-transitive 'I hate' construction. The lack of specificity as to who he hates is indicative of Dada's lack of focus throughout the play. [9] also contains the 'I hate' construction but has the broad focus 'world' as its object. [14] and [15] are transitive constructions in which Dada is the affected recipient, implying he is the one being acted upon, mistreated or victimised.

The lexical deviations in this passage are surprising. Despite the misanthropic nature of the excerpt, many of the words convey images of beauty and innocence: 'kiss', 'whim', 'wish', 'sweet', 'living', 'holy', 'kind', 'stars', 'light', 'Virgin Mary', 'oath', 'best' and 'God'. This deviation of use—between the original meaning of the words and the manner in which they are used here—suggests Dada's disconnect with reality and his lack of self-efficacy. This in turn is highlighted by his attempts to summon religious imagery: 'I wish to God', 'Virgin Mary', 'solemn oath'. In addition to the repetition of 'hate', there are other reoccurring words or phrases that illustrate these conflicting patterns including: 'I'm proud' (2), 'best' (4), 'I wish' (2), 'I'll' (5), 'it all' (3), 'very' (3), and various negative ('no' or 'N-a-a-a-w' (3)) or affirmative ('yaas' or 'yah' (4)) interjections. Finally sentences [21] and [22] are lexically very similar to Michael's 'But I can't get out of all this'.

Whereas Dada's dislike of Michael is pure projection, Harry's problem with Michael is predominately due to Michael's attempts at distancing himself from the family, both in the fight and at a larger level as well. Any attempts at rising above or breaking away are met with hostility. Family loyalty is so important to Harry that he even respects his enemies for their dedication to each other. Towards the end of Act III not only does he inveigh against Michael but also Dada and Des. If his disregard for language early on in the play was disconcerting, his command of it here is terrifying:

Things are clear enough to me. [1] There's been so many intelligent blokes for so long [2a] explaining things to thick lads. [2] So many. [3] So worried. [4] All them clever blokes, cat smart, so worried about it all. [5] [*Points at MICHAEL.*] He's so big and bright, [6a] he talks about families and home and all, [6b] and he's ashamed of us. [6c] See him apologising to Betty when he invited us here. [7] Little jokes for all, [8a] so she could take us. [8b] And all the time he doesn't know me outside. [9] The preacher. [10] Family. [11] Home. [12] (*HARRY is suppressing tears.*) But I'm thick. [13] Thick lads don't feel, [14a] they can't be offended. [14b] . . . You worry about me, don't you? [14c] And then you apologise to them with the lovely white collars for me, don't you? [15] And to them with the lovely white collars you say, 'Yes sir, I'm a pig, sir, if you say so, sir!' [16] And be pleased, 'cause they're surprised, smile to you, your manners, a pat on the head to a dog. [17] And then you're better'n me? [18] (Murphy 3, 79)

Grammatical deviation is once again used effectively as clause structure is varied with fragments, subordination and coordination. The interplay of clause length contributes to the emotional nature of this passage in which mental processes predominate. Initially Harry focuses on the conflict between himself and Michael, fluctuating between ironic constructions such as 'thick lads' and 'clever blokes' and then, with the use of the adversative conjunction 'but' in [13] (the first and only use of 'but' in this passage), Harry proceeds to triangulate this relationship between himself, Michael and 'them'. This suggests that Harry's anger may have less to do with Michael's reluctance to fight and more about the embarrassment and shame Michael feels towards his family. In [14] Harry topicalises himself as a thick lad and here he contends directly with his emotion.

The lexical repetition and parallelism are striking. The emphatic 'so' is used six times in as many sentences, creating the rhythmical effect of 'so many', 'so long', 'so many', 'so worried', 'so worried', 'so big and bright'. 'Thick' is repeated three times, and 'blokes', 'family' or 'families' and 'home' are all repeated twice. The repetition continues in the next excerpt with 'to them with white collars' repeated twice. [14] and [15] offer a lovely connecting balance between, 'you worry, don't you; you apologise don't you; white collars don't you; white collars you say

sir; you say sir'. The effect of this repetition is to highlight and reinforce Harry's perception of how Michael feels about his family, to expose Michael's hypocrisy and foreground Harry's anger and pain.

As Dada's prized role as patriarch fades, he becomes increasingly irrational, erratic and cruel, encouraging his sons to harm Michael during a re-enactment of a childhood game. Dada urges Des to kill Michael, but his plan backfires: Michael kills Des in self-defence. Dada shirks any responsibility, making excuses for himself until he becomes incoherent. He delivers the play's final words standing on a chair while his sons surround Des' body on the floor. Here Dada's language is indicative of his mental state and his future within the family:

. . . Boys . . . ye're not blaming me . . . no control
over it. [1] No one has anymore. [2] Did my best. [3]
Ye don't know how hard it is .[4] Life. [5] Made men
of ye. [6] What else could I have done. [7] Tell me.
[8] Proud. [9] Wha'? [10] A man must have—And
times were hard. [11] Never got the chances. [12] Not
there for us. [13] Had the ability. [14] Yas. [15] And
lost the job in the guards, police. [16] Brought up
family proper. [17] Properly. [18] No man can do
more than best. [19] I tried. [20] Must have some kind
of pride. [21] Wha'? [22] I tried, [23a] I did my best
[23b] . . . I tried, [23c] I did my best [23d] . . . Tried
[23e] . . . Did my best [23f] . . . I tried . . . [23g]
(Murphy 3, 87)

This passage is increasingly incoherent, to the point where it descends into lexical dribble. There are no compound sentences in this extract, only simple clauses, incomplete clauses and fragments, foregrounding Dada's mental state. The syntactic subject is frequently implied when Dada talks about himself in [1], [3], [6], [12], [14], [16], [17] reinforcing his inability to take direct responsibility. Between [20] and [23] there are ten clauses and five instances of the word 'tried', none of which have a syntactic object. In [11] the verb has been cut short of any object altogether, and in [21] the direct modification of the object 'pride' is obscured by 'some kind'. There are several generic sentences, one of which [11] is a reference to a previous conversation in which Dada stated 'A man must have pride' but here the idea is cut short. Modality conveying obligation occurs in [7], [11], [19] and [21], but Dada does not, or perhaps cannot, fulfil these responsibilities.

In *A Whistle in the Dark* Tom Murphy avoids the kind of gratuitous vocabulary that besieges *Paveewhack*. In *A Whistle in the Dark* the victim-persecutor or good-evil relationships are present but are also inverted, wherein the persecutor becomes the victim and vice-versa, and every shade of ambiguity in-between such polarised outlooks is invoked. *A Whistle in the Dark*'s ethical charge stems from the anticipatory tension within the work—where the effect of marginalisation is a deep shame that does not manifest itself in predictable routes. The physical violence is kept off stage as long as possible, until shame and violence explode in a reaction that neither cleanses nor relieves. The power of the verisimilitude within Murphy's play lies in the exploration of the effects of marginalisation, rather than just the marginalisation itself. The audience may consider the story as Murphy tells it, but there is a larger inferential effect here. The violence of the play is the same violence reported in news programmes and papers. Murphy touches a chord with such subtlety that a non-Traveller can relate to the Traveller situation, and in a way MacMahon and Brady's descriptions of brutal and savage discrimination cannot. That is not to say that there is not a place for MacMahon and Brady's type of discrimination, and nor is it to say that Murphy does not offer just as brutal and savage scenes. The point here is that the ethical charge is directly related to verisimilitude because not only is the discrimination obvious and believable, it is attributable in the larger world. Murphy's play presents the world repackaged and defamiliarised but it is a world that holds true. The reader is brought to the experience.

More so than the other works, *A Whistle in the Dark* illustrates how mind style is conveyed not just by content of the dialogue but also by structure. Murphy's narrative strategy is enhanced by his aesthetic choices. The language encodes the unpredictability, the shame, and the marginalisation in features such as stuttering, the use of couplets, rhyme and chiasmus, pronouns, modality; at levels of grammatical, lexical and syntactic deviation. The language is engaging and humorous. Ideas of self-righteous indignation are introduced through infringements upon the characters' ethical beliefs, Michael's desire to support his family and examining alternatives to the tradition of warfare and Harry's notion of familial loyalty, which serves as his moral compass.

Although graphological and morphological deviation are used sparingly, grammatical deviation is used effectively here to convey a spectrum of emotion.

Longer sentences convey ease as do non-finite verbs, present participles and a reduced use of the present tense, while short sentences and present tense reflect the intensity appropriate to much of this play. Accent is conveyed through sentence structure and word order. The tension and unpredicability of the language is such that the arrival of a single adversative conjunction can change the trajectory and tone of conversation. The transitive patterns in this play are predominately the effect of the grammatical deviations. Murphy takes full advantage of this opportunity and uses intransitivity to convey, in particular, agency and personal responsibility (or the lack of). In addition, the transitivity patterns suggest and help to convey shortcomings or deterioration in thought or as a means of intimidation.

Each of the major characters have their own relationship with language that reflects their cognitive machinery: Michael is laden with uncertainty, Harry wields words like a showboat cowboy in the Wild West uses a gun, Iggy, the iron man stutters and Dada misappropriates words regularly. Modality is used effectively here to foreground Michael's self-doubt and Dada's unwillingness, insincerity and his inability to contend with his obligations. Finally, the work is not overrun by Shelta or graphological variation. The aesthetic stylistic choices Murphy makes throughout his play are dictated by the characters' experiences. Much in the way that *Paveewhack* failed because of its language, *A Whistle in the Dark* succeeds because of it.

*

Before offering my own fictional treatment in the next section, I set out in the above discussions to understand the dominant artistic representations of Irish Travellers, and, more specifically in fiction, the role of language in representing the experience of a three-dimensional non-stereotypical Traveller character. I was interested in the role of reality in representing language and a marginalised people generally. Of particular interest was how the unique and characteristic elements of speech, such as speed and accent, are conveyed and is there a point where an adherence to reality obscures meaning and enjoyment.

The Honey Spike, *Paveewhack* and *A Whistle in the Dark* represent Travellers as, respectively, the fool, the scapegoat and the criminal: all modern and common characterizations. Throughout these works, the Traveller mind style is foregrounded

by aesthetic techniques chosen by the author that highlight unique constructions within speech and contribute to the representation of experience. Overall, these choices present language in ways that foreground time, movement and control, reflecting the oral, nomadic and antagonistic mind style of Traveller culture.

Time is represented within subject-verb non-concord, punctuation and graphological variation. The effect is generally to contract time, either by taking emphasis off the larger continuum or by increasing the speed by which the individual and present-time message is conveyed. This contraction and acceleration results in a circular manifestation of time.

Present tense dominates in the two novels, and in all three works the writers titrate between tenses to produce different effects, such as despair for what has passed, concern for the future or when explicit information is needed. Generally, finite verbs, which encode tense and number, can be regarded as anchored to a more definite time and related in more concrete ways to their subjects. In *The Honey Spike* and *A Whistle in the Dark* the finite form of the verb is regularly used and there is little subject-verb non-concord. On the other hand in *Paveewhack*, the incidence of subject-verb non-concord is high and the use of non-finite verbs instead of finite forms is a regular occurrence. The use of non-finite verbs does sit well with general ideas of time in oral and Traveller traditions of present-time orientation.

The purpose of graphological variation and phonetic change is to approximate a realistic accent and to suggest rapid speech, as already noted in detail. Similar to the effect of subject-verb non-concord, the result of graphological variation is not only one of altered time but altered perception. Illusions of a lack of education and sophistication haunt these lower-prestige dialects and characterisations. Depicting non-standard speech by using non-standard spelling is a tricky balance and can result in unintelligibility if taken too far. Non-standard forms of language, including deviant spellings, run the risk of distancing the reader, and it is not all together necessary, as *A Whistle in the Dark* illustrates.

Transcribing an oral community's speech onto the page is similar to a translation. There are elements of oral speech that do not fit with the rules of written text, several of which Ong mentioned and which were discussed previously. Other elements include timing, specifically pauses, that oral speech designates by the

breath. Breath, intrinsically associated with time and rhythm, is particularly hard to replicate in written text. The solution generally is to represent these pauses with punctuation marks such as commas, ellipses, em-dashes and colons. However, these rules of written grammar and their use in stories of an oral community remain somewhat of an imposition. In *A Whistle in the Dark*, punctuation is utilized in a more character-specific way illustrating, for example, hesitancy or madness. *The Honey Spike* uses more elaborate punctuation (such as semi-colons or colons) in a meta-functional way which is perhaps a result of the third-person narration. The use of high level punctuation, in particular within *The Honey Spike*, highlights the contradiction: these punctuation marks emphasise actions or fragmented thought effectively, but considering the texts represent an oral community the presence of the more elaborate forms is curious, especially in light of the attempts at realistic dialogue through intense graphological variation and lexical deviation that occur within the same text.

Movement occurs within each story, via the use of prepositions, adjuncts and word variations that emphasise both perceptual and physical movement. Kinetic verbs expressing movement are common and even ellipped syntactic elements can encourage a forward or backward movement. In each story, movement plays a dominant role. Martin and Breda's journey to Kerry forms the spine of *The Honey Spike*; *Paveewhack* is structured as a series of small adventure stories that begin to build on one another and end with Whack imprisoned; in *A Whistle in the Dark* Michael dreams of escaping from his family's grip and when he runs away from a fight that familial grip tightens. The words 'run' and 'escape' repeat and permeate throughout Murphy's play. All of this is interesting in three works about nomads. The reality is that Travelling tradition has been cut short and this is encoded within each text in the syntactical imagery. The focus on movement, prepositions and deixis has a claustrophobic specificity and orchestration that reflects what the Traveller must feel when moving from a nomadic existence to one in which mobility is curtailed.

Grammatical deviations facilitate and constrain movement. Coordinated clauses, one of Ong's main principles of orality, contribute to a linguistic sprawl across the visual landscape of the text containing different actions, decisions and descriptions, while dependent clauses elaborate on or revisit information the reader

already knows. Fragments stop and start movement. The use of fragments, especially in *A Whistle in the Dark* reinforces at different intervals, intimidation and (perhaps) mental illness. While not especially unusual, when the characters react with hostility, simple sentences and fragments are common, but in *A Whistle in the Dark* Murphy parallels extremes in behaviour or thought with a corresponding grammatical breakdown, and in doing so avoids the use of overly elaborate punctuation that the other works occasionally use during moments of drama.

In all three works this sense of movement and control are represented within the clause via intransitive processes and a lack of agency. This can be aggravated by an inverted word order which affects the continuous, sequential and linear flow of experience. When this flow is interrupted, as it commonly is in both regional dialects and informal use of language, a semantic inversion occurs that can affect a power differential between characters. This power relationship manifests itself in these works in both control and hostility within the Travelling community and from the settled community. Depiction of hostility within the community is not prevalent in *The Honey Spike* or *Paveewhack*, but is central within *A Whistle in the Dark*. On the other hand, coercion from the settled community is most explicit in *The Honey Spike* and *Paveewhack*. The violence in *Paveewhack* and *A Whistle in the Dark* is important for each novel's theme and narrative structure.

Language exchange is often emotive, hyperbolic and competitive and is rarely direct or explicit. Rhythmic patterns are invoked at different times with different effects. Parallelism is common and is used frequently in playful situations with hyperbole and chiasmus. These types of figurative language take a different turn when accompanied by interrogative structures and threatening metaphorical images. Repetition of words or parallel structures is common in all three works and the excessive use often implies sarcasm. The level of aggression varies, but confrontational, intimidating language is seen throughout all the pieces. Lexical deviation is crucial in representing the Traveller mind style, from repetition of thematic elements, including time, movement and control, to manifesting oral culture and reinforcing the semantic deviations especially those that concern Shelta.

Shelta is used less than expected in the three works we have covered here. Shelta commonly assumes the noun position and is associated with food, money and

pejorative terms for other people. *The Honey Spike* italicises Shelta, giving it an irregular and atypical feel. Such strategies foreground the cryptolect so it stands out as unusual. *Paveewhack* uses Shelta liberally and the glossary at the back is meant to aid comprehension. With measured uses of Shelta, relevant sentences are understandable regardless of word choice and graphological variation. However, Brady, as we have seen, overindulges. The many Shelta nouns obscure the action and the narrative in *Paveewhack*, so the novel collapses under its own cryptolect weight. Murphy, on the other hand, is conservative with both graphological variation and Shelta. He uses only four Shelta words throughout the play ('sham' and the variant 'flysham', 'gam', 'gammy' and 'shades') and instead draws to great effect on elements of orality, allowing the characters' mindsets to dictate their lexical choices. In *The Honey Spike* and *A Whistle in the Dark* the lack of Shelta may reflect diminishing language practice or suggest that Shelta is not the most significant force in constructing Traveller speech. The oral mind style, as described by Ong, is foregrounded in these works and is overall more important than Shelta in representing Traveller character speech in fiction.

In these works, the characters struggle with the fear of cowardice. In *The Honey Spike*, Martin has to motivate himself to cross the bridge and later during Puck Fair, at the risk of looking like a coward, reluctantly stands up to his ex-girlfriend's jealous boyfriend (who instigates the fight that leads to Breda's death). In *Paveewhack*, Whack and Goat consistently push each other into action for fear of appearing cowardly. In *A Whistle in the Dark*, Betty pleads with Michael to join his brothers at a faction fight in order to prove he is not a coward, but Betty cannot say the word 'coward' and Michael has to finish the sentence for her. These are examples of characters attempting to face their fear; but the most interesting are the characters who are not aware enough to do so, namely Mickle, Blocker and Dada. Solipsism and an inflated sense of self, demonstrated in extravagant and grandiose but empty speeches, works for the most part as inadequate protection against this fear. Their speeches refer back to themselves and often contain bombastic sentiment, ridiculous tall tales or fabricated stories meant to evoke sympathy. These are essentially public relations speeches in an attempt to manipulate the listener for either monetary rewards or favour. The characters' aim is to be respected and important, but there is no attempt at genuine engagement with others, for connection

would expose them as the cowards they are. The main characters (respectively, Martin, Whack and Harry and Michael) all demonstrate elements of this grandiosity but possibly because of their younger age (and fewer disappointments) or because they know better, they can pull back. Finally, in all three works a character dies at the end (Breda, Blocker and Des). As demonstrated in the earlier sections of this essay, this narrative approach is not uncommon and presumably signifies a hopelessness in regards to the community's future.

The narrative trajectory in *The Honey Spike* is the Claffeys' frantic journey to get to Kerry before their child is born and in *A Whistle in the Dark* the narrative is guided by Michael's uncertainty and the brothers' looming showdown with the rival gang. Both these stories occur over several days and the action is tight and focused. *Paveewhack*, on the other hand, takes place over several months and the narrative often meanders without intent. This narrative looseness may be indicative of the mind style of a 14-year-old boy, but alongside issues of lexical deviation, the lack of consistent engagement quickly tires.

One of the main suggestions I made earlier was that representation is most innovative when characters are portrayed engaged in hobbies, personal or leisure activities. Although this is not a point specific to Travellers it remains a crucial point here in the bid to prevent objectification within the depictions.

Overall, *The Honey Spike* is weighed down by both a loyalty to reality and stereotype. *Paveewhack*'s desire for authenticity obscures engagement and comprehension, which is unfortunate because the experience and characterisation are unique. *A Whistle in the Dark* begins with familiar figures, the doting but neglected wife, the self-obsessed violent brothers, but Murphy's characters are not confined to stereotype. Each character is innovative and expansive. Harry, in particular, is the character who stands out among all the others examined within this thesis.

Harry is the one figure in these works who is ironic and subversive. The effects of marginalisation are deeply imprinted upon him but so is his older brother's shame. Harry is able to subvert the dominant power structures, his businesses are illegal, he removes himself from the general squabbles of family life, but is quick to attack when he is threatened or in some way compromised. He is interesting and

engaging because he is unpredictable and does not lose himself in morality as does Breda in *The Honey Spike* or Whack in *Paveewhack*.

Most importantly, Harry's language is unique. He is angry and violent but unexpectedly understands the importance of rhythm and rhyme, as if only certain sorts of characters are allowed to speak certain ways. His actions and his language refuse to be subjugated into the category of the other. He is three-dimensional, not because he is sympathetic or because we trust him, but because he transgresses expectations. We begin with an archetype but end with an individual—he isn't just involved with illegal activity, he runs them; he won't dogmatically follow rules, he wants to win; he isn't just angry, he is deeply hurt and struggling to maintain restraint—all of which comprise an innovative Traveller representation. The outcome is an uncertain and unsettling feeling, a type of defamiliarization perhaps, which recalls the Micky O'Neill character in the movie *Snatch* and the 'Wanna buy a gate?' woman (Figure 21, p36).

The absurdity of the majority of Traveller literature is that the most affective narrative is not in the mute representations of Traveller as victim, criminal or fool. The real story is in the pain and the anger and the frustration of marginalisation that breeds the antagonistic relationship between the Traveller and settled communities. The real story is in the anti-language which seeks to obfuscate, to shut-out, and it is in orality which perceives the world in a concrete and unmitigated fashion. There is a resistance and a fullness. In time perhaps a great polyphonic novel with a well-developed and fully realised Traveller character will be published. Until then, we can approach a better understanding of representing minority, marginalised cultures in fiction by offering Traveller characters their own unique voice.

SECTION II

Run Over

A draft of a novel

Run Over
Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Hitchhiking (Finn) | 95 |
| The Judge (Denis) | 103 |
| Tom feens in the kitchen (Sid) | 109 |
| Oliver Cromwell: scapegoat (Ruth) | 115 |
| BryanAdams (Finn) | 125 |
| Rumbles stumbles dickory dog (Sid) | 130 |
| A fine balance (Denis) | 138 |
| Oliver Plunkett: martyr | 146 |
| A trip to Drogheda (Ruth) | 154 |
| A feen with a long tober to misli (Sid) | 160 |
| (Self) Sabotage (Finn) | 165 |
| A surprise day off (Ruth) | 174 |
| A gammy morning (Sid) | 179 |
| Black out (Finn) | 183 |
| Bad to worse (Sid) | 188 |
| A newer new plan (Sid) | 200 |
| Search party (Ruth) | 205 |
| The empire strikes back (Denis) | 210 |
| The hidin spot (Sid) | 216 |
| Not a conversation (Ruth) | 225 |
| Fatty Mulroney gets it in the chest (Sid) | 228 |

Hitchhiking

I've hitchhiked before, loads of times. Once Dad and I hitchhiked on the road to Whistler cos our station wagon broke down. We walked for ages before a car passed, and when it did all Dad had to do was stretch his arm out and put his thumb up. That was a while ago though, different country too, but if they stop for you in Canada, they'll totally stop for you in Ireland.

A loud roar above me in the sky. A plane landing at Dublin airport. Aer Lingus, I think. Once the plane was gone, I walked backwards, practicing with my hand out, imagining a car stopping. Maybe I'd be picked up by someone I knew, like Granddad's friend Dr Wallace or Mr Quinn on his way to see his daughter in Slane. They use this road all the time. I saw a van over the hill, but I didn't stick my arm out.

This was harder to do by myself. Maybe this was the wrong idea.

The blue van pulled in to the side of the road and stopped in front of me. Even before the door opened I heard 'Buffalo Soldier' blaring from inside. When Uncle John came back from travelling a few years ago, he played Bob Marley all the time and smoked pot in our garden in Vancouver until Dad warned Mom if he heard Bob Marley ever again he was going to choke Uncle John with his dreadlocks so then he had to move home to my grandparents but that was a good thing he told me later cos he kicked the weed once and for all there.

The passenger door sprang open, 'Where ya gonta?'

'Drogheda.'

'Come on.' The driver waved me in. His head was shaved and he was wearing a leather jacket and jeans. He threw a bunch of bags and food wrappers from off the seat with more of the same in the back. 'Push it outta the way.'

'Thanks.' First time anything is scary, I reminded myself. It was something Dad always told me. Inside, the van reeked like cigarettes. I set my rucksack on the floor and grabbed the seatbelt, but couldn't find the slot.

'No female there, she's gone.'

I let the belt spring behind me. He had dark stubble on his face kind of like Dad sometimes when he was working too much.

‘Alright?’ He drove the van back onto the road and leaned over the steering wheel to check the sky. ‘Bout to lash. Made it just in time.’

‘Yeah, thanks.’ The sky was dark blue. I didn’t even think of rain. Rookie mistake. ‘I missed the last bus.’ I said. If I brought the subject up maybe he wouldn’t ask too many questions.

‘Whereya stallin in Drogheda?’

‘Pardon me?’

‘Drogheda, where in Drogheda?’

‘Oh, Blackbush Lane, near the train station so that would be best, but you can drop me anywhere.’ The dashboard was covered in dust and the green lights on the stereo were going up and down still to ‘Buffalo Soldier’. The ashtray was propped open and almost full with cigarette butts.

‘Whaya at in Drogheda?’

It was a question with Drogheda in it. I took a chance. ‘I’m from Dublin, but I’m actually from Canada. That’s where I was born, but now we live here, or I do. Live here.’

The man said something but no way I could understand this time, he didn’t want an answer anyway, I think. Maybe he asked something else and I just gave him a totally weird answer. He kept his eyes on the road, so I didn’t say anything. We passed a huge construction site. A red sign said to watch this space. A new garden centre and hardware superstore was opening soon.

‘Where’re yer aul pair?’

‘Pardon me?’

‘Ahh.’ The man rolled his eyes. ‘Yer mother an father, yer parents like.’

‘Oh.’ I’d practiced this all morning. ‘They’re dead.’

‘Wha?’ The man snapped his head towards me real quick and he looked all horrified. He glanced at the road and then at me a few times. ‘For the love—thas shockin. Both a them? Tagather? Jaysis. How?’

‘Car accident.’ Maybe I shouldn’t have said that.

He mumbled something I didn’t understand again. Then he opened his window half way and flicked his cigarette out. He pulled another from a small blue pack and then tossed it onto the dashboard where it stuck between the dark blue plastic and the windshield. I didn’t know anyone who smoked. Sometimes Toby’s mom did when she was nervous about selling a house or something. Granddad used to smoke and Dad did too but they both quit before I was born.

We drove on a minute in silence except for Bob Marley singing. ‘Whas yer age?’

I’d practiced this all morning too. ‘Sixteen.’

‘Sixteen? Go away out of tha. Yer naw sixteen.’

I was thinking of saying fourteen, but Tom said I could pass for sixteen. Only now I thought maybe he was joking. I scratched my leg.

‘I’d int a put you a sixteen.’ He glanced over at me again. ‘Sixteen?’

Should have gone for fourteen.

‘Yis are gettin younger-lookin evry year. It’s these chemicals they got in food, int it? Food chemicals. I’m only after spendin the afternoon arguin this. They say sugar’s the worst. You eat sugar?’

‘Coke?’

‘Coke? Coke is pure sugar, syrup like. Who drinks Coke anymore? Ya might as well be smokin. Put a five cent, even one cent, inta a glass a Coke an it erodes. I tried it. Very bad for yer liver an yer teeth. Thas wha I tell me biys anyway but fat lot a good it do. They guzzle the stuff as well.’

The rain was pouring down outside now. I moved my knees in front of the vent blasting out hot air. In the fields, sheep and cows huddled under trees to stay out

of the rain. In one of the nearby fields large electrical masts were connected to one another by bunches of wires.

‘I just come from me visit with them in Dublin. Thas where they live. So they do.’ The foldy bit on the front of my school trousers was sticking up weird so I smoothed it down and moved a bit in my seat. ‘Why ya goin ta Drogheda agin?’ The man asked.

‘My grandparents live there.’

‘Ah well then, yer a Drogheda man, can’t be all bad, so. Sid’s me name by the way, Sid Connors.’ He put out his hand for me to shake.

‘I’m Finn.’ This was the first time I met a stranger by myself. My leg was beginning to ache again, but I didn’t feel like pulling everything out to find my pills. I’d be at Gran’s in a half hour, tops. She’d fix it.

The ‘Get Up, Stand Up’ song was next. He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel. ‘Whas yer family name Finn?’

‘Mallin.’

He turned his head to me real quick again. ‘Mallin?’ He watched the road then me. At the road. At me. Road. me. Then he laughed. ‘Unusual nough for these parts.’ Side window, me. ‘Yer granny lives in Drogheda?’

‘Grandparents, Yah.’

He’s barely even watching the road now. ‘Gabriel Mallin? With the corraí—the horses?’

What. Ever. I nodded. Running away was useless in this country. Everybody knows everybody else.

He drove the van onto the side of the road and stopped.

‘What are you doing?’ If he takes me back to Dublin, I’m so out of here.

Sid leaned one arm over the steering wheel and turned to me. ‘Agin. Sos we clear. Gabriel Mallin, the horse doctor, with the two biys, the scientist an the judge,

he's yer grandfather?'

I nodded.

He rubbed his cheek and stared out the front window, 'Fuck.'

'Is something wrong?'

He turned to me. 'No. No. Not at all biy just—I know, I know yer grandfather, Gabo. He's seen me corraí, me horses, like.' He waited for some cars to pass and then drove onto the road again. 'I dint know the wife died too, thas all. Awful stuff.'

We were only on the road for like a minute when he drove in and parked outside a pub.

'Need to get fags, only be a sec.' As soon as he was out of the van, he was talking on his mobile. I needed to pee anyway, so I found the toilets through the pub. The place was dark with a few booths and a pool table, but nothing special. Sid's reaction to Granddad was a bit weird, especially when he stopped. I should just call Granddad from here. I'd left my bag and my money in Sid's van but maybe Sid might loan me his phone. I went back into the pub and he was at the bar shouting.

'Cos it's illegal. Me money's as good as anyone's.'

'Find a Guard who'll arrest me,' the guy behind the counter was wiping the counter not even looking at Sid.

'Licensin act subsections 4-5 an 4-7, I've the legislation.'

'Two months ago and again last week your kind came in here Connors and ye made a fool a me and disgraced yourselves. I told ye then none a ye would ever so much as buy a sweetie off me in the future, so now take your legislation and get out, before I call the Guards.' The man flipped a part of the counter up and moved around to Sid. 'Out of me shop.' Then he pointed to me, 'This one's with you as well is he?' He grabbed my arm and flung me through the door. I fell and my face hit the gravel.

All I remember next is them screaming at each other and I think the guy came outside. Sid picked me up and hauled me into the van. There was blood on my

face and gravel there too. They were still screaming but next thing I know the tyres are squealing and we were driving again. Sid patted me on the back, 'You alright?'

'What just happened?' I was using my sleeve to soak up the blood on my face. It was almost all gone now.

'The fuckin prick.' Sid hit the dashboard and dust flew into the air. He wiped his mouth with his sleeve. 'A group a lads havin a few pints tend towards breakin things up, thas just a fact. Dint matter if is Travellers or not, only scuses.' He searched around and then found a pack of cigarettes in the glove box. 'Wouldn't know simple respect if it fell on him.' He was speeding now and his voice kept going up and down but always he was yelling. 'There int a hairider workin man anywhere in Ireland with as much love an pride as I've for me family. Dint even have the decincy to look me in the eye. He's the worst man of his trade, he is. I can take my legislation he says, an yes I can take me legislation, the fucker. I know more bout the fucking legal system than any a them, probly the fuckin Chief Justice even.'

I doubt it. The Chief Justice was at Denis' house for dinner a few months ago. Toby's mom helped him plan it, it was to say thank you to the people who helped him through the investigation. The Chief Justice has a grandson my age so he liked me. His grandson is also named Paul Henry but he got real sick a couple years ago and now he doesn't get to do things like I do. Mr Henry was always asking me about my GAA team and stuff. He was also at my Dad's funeral. Denis didn't agree with him on everything but he said he respected him, and that was rare enough. I didn't say any of this to Sid though, there was no getting a word in.

'I got the law earwickin I dint gev me childers their basic needs. An whas a basic needs I aks him. An ya know wha he says? Ya know wha he says?' Sid tapped me on the arm, 'Health care an education. Health care an education. Well my god. Funny tha, I think the exack same, health care an education. If I love me children, I'd do whas best for them. The fuckin nerve. Gev up on me children, as if I int been through enough. They driven a man to desperation, an thas the truth so help me god.' He pounded the steering wheel now and I must have jumped or something cos he noticed me again. 'Ah sorry, I'm sorry, I jump ahead of meself sometimes.' He glanced back and forth from me to the road.

The bleeding on my cheek had officially stopped. I was checking it out in the mirror under the visor. It was just a brush burn, not the greatest location though. A dangly thing was hanging from the mirror. Through the peep hole was a picture of Jesus with his heart on fire. We were passing a new suburb outside now, all brown and yellow houses organised in crescents, all exactly the same. Their lawns and the roads were still dirt though. We were almost in Drogheda.

‘Yer Da’ were the scientist eh?’

‘Yeah.’

‘Wernt quainted with him personally, no, but haird he were sound. He was an astrologist was he?’

‘AstroNOMist. Astrologists are horoscopes, he was an astronomer.’ Dad used to say the l in astrologist stood for liars and the g stood for garbage.

Sid cranked his window half way down and threw his cigarette out. Then he plonked his head out the window and let the rain wet his face. ‘Of all the stars whas the best?’

‘The best star? I guess Betelgeuse. It’s my favourite anyway. It’s huge and really bright, it’s part of Orion, the constellation.’ He didn’t say anything so I just kept talking. ‘It’s like from the sun to Jupiter in size, it’s massive. It’s in Orion’s shoulder, do you know where that is? I have a sky guide with me if you’re interested.’ Between the guy throwing us out of the shop and the astrology thing, I was thinking he was a Traveller. I’d only ever seen Travellers in movies. Granddad knew them, so did Denis and he hated them, but Sid was okay.

‘Ah, the kinds of things in me head arnt layrned from bukes, at least not bukes like tha.’ He rolled the window back up.

‘I can help you.’ I opened my bag, but of course it was right at the bottom.

‘Good man.’ Sid snatched the blue cigarette pack from where it was wedged on the dash. ‘What bout the Justice Mallin, he’s yer uncle, right?’

‘Yeah.’ I’d brought two jumpers, three shirts, and only one pair of jeans and had to feel around them till I found my book near the bottom.

‘He know yer thumbin, yer Uncle?’

‘Maybe.’ I hauled my book out and shoved everything back in. ‘Here’s my sky guide. We can talk through anything you don’t understand.’

‘Gev here.’

Sid balanced the book on the steering wheel and thumbed through the pages. ‘No photies eh?’ He handed the book back to me. ‘Take care of tha now so ya dint lose it.’ He lit his cigarette with a red lighter. ‘Yer alrigh Finn. Not yer average sixteen year old, sure yer not now. Canada’s nothin like this gratch I hope. These ones make Charlie Haughey look like a fuckin charity worker.’

On the inside cover of the sky guide was my Dad’s signature. Mallin, it read, and slanted to the right. The M separate from the rest. I traced along the curve of ink. The final leg of n kicked out towards the book’s spine. ‘Where are you going in Drogheda? Do you live there?’ I asked.

‘Through town to Donore in Louth. Thas where we’re settled for now. I stall with me wife’s family. I’m a Galway man, a blow-in like yerself really. We got a lot in common you and me Finn, we understand aych other, I can tell. People like us, we gotta stand up for ourselves. We gotta stick together. Like aul Bob says here, we’re fightin for survival.’ Sid pushed the button on the stereo and ‘Buffalo Soldier’ played again.

I looked out at the houses. Sid understood me, he listened to me. And anyway she slapped me in front of him of all people. Denis didn’t know the meaning of listen, all he does is order me around and what does she do anymore other than sleep, she doesn’t even stand up for me. If they think I’m giving up football. No, I’m not thinking about it or them anymore. Ever. We came up to the two roundabouts right after one another. We passed the big trees and brick wall at the entrance to the Boyne Valley Hotel.

‘Why int ya stall with me for some tay. You can tell me then why yer laving Dublin. Ya might like it.’

Why was I going to my grandparents anyway? They loved me, but still, maybe showing up at their house wasn’t the best decision after all. Grandma would

be all upset, and then Mom and Denis would drive up and force me back to Dublin and everyone would fight again.

We drove past the railway station and then under the bridge, right past the road to my grandparents' house. I had options now. I could get away or I could run away. I'd forgotten the last time I didn't wish I were somewhere else. Sid knew Granddad, he knew about Dad. These were good signs. And Denis didn't like Travellers. No better reason. I'd call Granddad later and tell him I was okay.

The Judge

Tom and I had just finished lunch at the Merrion when we saw him. He was kneeling over the clamp, preparing to attach it to my tyre.

'No, no, no.' I ran across the street yelling at him.

'Sorry bud, already done.' He continued working.

'It's not done, the clamp isn't on.'

'Good as.' He hadn't even looked up at me yet.

'Will you stop, I don't think you realise who I am.'

He stood up then and with a dumb stare gaped at me. His head was shaved so the middle part stood up more than the rest. He had three studs at the end of his eyebrow. 'No, no idea.'

'I'm a high court judge. And if—' I had to stretch to see the name. '—APOC parking knows what's good for them you'll take this leg trap and piss off.'

'Listen bud, don't shoot the messenger eh. A few extra bob, is all I'm here for. I'm savin for Australia.'

'Do not clamp my car.'

‘Outta me hands once it’s opened. Otherwise I get charged and, bud, I don’t give a fuck who ya are, that’s not happenin.’

I glanced back at Tom who shrugged. My meter had expired fifteen minutes ago.

I felt for my wallet in my jacket. ‘Fifty Euro,’ I handed him the bill. ‘Take it for yourself and piss off.’

‘I get charged twenty.’ He put a pair of sporty wrap-around sunglasses on and crossed his arms over his chest. I could still see the top stud on his eyebrow. I pulled a twenty out and gave it to him.

‘Right. Nice doing business with ye.’ He hauled the clamp back into van and drove off.

‘Pity if you got lost in the Outback.’ Normally I wouldn’t drive but I had to be in Kilkenny this morning. Tom could walk the five minutes to his office but that’s on my way so I gave him a lift.

He started talking about Andrea Reilly the economist, who’d been back from Washington for seven months already. He wanted me to ask her for dinner. In fairness that wasn’t a bad idea. He said he could arrange it so she’s at a dinner party or a lunch or my talk the next week on the constitution.

I stopped at the light. ‘The problem is the getting to know one another, the time, the energy, the taking on of someone.’

‘It’s a fucking introduction.’

I didn’t respond and we sat there idling in silence listening to the radio which right then announced two hundred new jobs slated for Wexford.

‘Someone’s bought land.’ I said.

‘Yeah, Tinedale. Thirty acres. Got it for a steal. Reckon there’s no more development in Dublin right now so he’s branching out. Had a two prong offensive; one with the party in Wexford and he’s a good mate of your one in Industry, so they

went back to a licence application from some American pharmaceutical offering a lower tax rate and an offer in Wexford. Sorted.’

‘So what’s Tinedale building?’

‘Ack, you know, the standard two up, two down, boxes of shite they’ll sell off plans.’

‘Any facilities, schools like?’

‘Don’t know, that’s a whole extra level of complexity, I’d say probably not.’ We arrived outside his office. ‘I’ll have Laura invite Andrea on Wednesday alright. You don’t have to move past talking about the weather if you don’t want to.’

At the Four Courts, Dessie was on the door and inquired about the state of justice beyond the Pale as I passed. A few young barristers were around but otherwise it was a quiet afternoon in this part of the building. Courts were in session downstairs and in about forty five minutes to an hour, people would return to their offices. My staff was in the office working on any number of cases. One of my assistants informed me he left important correspondence about the Connors case on my desk and I told Emma, my PA, that my door was closed.

The case that would never die. I’d been cleared almost a year previous but because the two other judges were forced to resign, there was a never ending stream of bureaucracy. I had been involved in the tail end of court appearances by an Irish Traveller whose case was mutilated by two sloppy judges. The Minister of Justice had come down hard so the Courts service was forced to account for all interactions with Connors, including mine. I was told not to worry, that things would be taken care of and the report did exonerate me. I was a footnote in the papers who concentrated more on the other judges and Connors’ himself. The letter was mostly an update about the moves to examine the possibility of a Judicial Council, which meant meetings to decide if there should be more meetings to have meetings. There was a meeting coming up to talk about who should be at these meetings and I’d been asked to attend. They’d probably ask me to chair the fucking thing.

I'd started out in administrative law and as Senior Counsel was involved in the Lindsay tribunal and then the Mahon tribunal. Since I joined the judiciary, I'd been holed up in Family court for three years until my promotion. Family court taught me that the majority of people have little control whatsoever on their emotional health. Be it lorrie drivers, architects, waitresses, surgeons; occupation didn't matter. Most discount their feelings completely until they detonate (usually in my courtroom) at which point logic succumbs magnificently to emotion. Most people are seconds away from detonation. This isn't my treatise against emotion, quite the opposite. Emotion and feeling are imperative in life, but deal with it on your own time, hire someone if you must, do not wait until you end up in my courtroom. Take some fucking responsibility and sort yourselves out.

I sent an email confirming I'd attend the meeting and then checked my phone. Nothing. Tom rang shortly after, there were drinks at an exclusive bar in town. I knew what he was doing and he said there may indeed be an economist or two in the crowd. I told him I'd think about it. Tom was never one to let grass grow and he's reluctant to let his friends either. When he joined Goldman Sachs in New York City, he pushed for me to move over, said he knew of a job in the Irish delegation at the UN. He discouraged me from joining the judiciary, saying it was prestige nonsense but then I wasn't the one with an apartment in the Upper West Side. He came back to Dublin to head up derivatives with the Bank of Ireland only a few months before the World Trade Towers collapsed. He lost three friends in the attacks. Tom's mother rang him that afternoon to see if he was okay, which was the second strangest thing that happened to Tom that day, and if you only knew his mother and nothing of the World Trade Towers, you would understand the gravity of the situation.

I was reading about the 1952 exclusion in the land law, when Ruth texted and asked if I want dinner and also if I'd look after Finn the next day while she had lunch with Bridget. I texted Tom that something had come up. He didn't say anything what I knew he was thinking but the next time we're drinking he'll wrap his arm around my neck and tell me I'm trying to replace Mark with them, or maybe I'm relying too much on Ruth. And maybe that was all true.

After meeting with one of my assistants about the land dispute case, I placed the statute book in my bag for later and left for Clontarf. I parked outside the house, where Toby Gleeson was on the path with his new dog. As soon as he saw me, he lurched for the dog and held him down.

About a year and a half ago, I accidentally hit the Gleeson's dog. I never told them but I did tell Mark and Ruth. Mark was fine, the dog barked too much anyhow, but Ruth felt otherwise. I said I didn't realise what had happened until the next morning when I saw fur on my bumper. I told them I'd heard a thud but it was late and I was tired, it just didn't register. LIE. I got out of the car and stared at the dog, an Airedale terrier or something. It wasn't dead. I'd stayed late watching the Chelsea match with Mark, and had an early morning meeting. If I went traipsing over to the Gleeson's, they'd need to hold hands and talk about how they felt and probably cry because their fucking shit-for-brains dog was outside at eleven at night and I'd be absolutely wrecked in the morning. The dog was whimpering, in pain. So I got in the car and then reversed and ran over it again. It would have to be put down regardless. I lessened the dog's suffering. Poodles was the dog's name. Poodles. They were surely responsible for at least harmful intent inflicting the dog with that poxy name. Ruth later told me that the vet who examined the dog said he'd been run over not once, not twice, three times. It was only a fucking dog, I spent half my sad sack of a life listening to self-destructive humans treat each other worse on a daily basis.

'Howya Toby?'

'This is my new puppy. His name is Salvador.'

'Salvador?'

'You know the poster on our bathroom wall? Mom said it's by Salvador . . . um.'

'Dali, Salvador Dali.'

'Yeah, him.' The puppy was struggling to be free of his grip. 'I'm calling him Sal, it'll be like we're selling hotdogs in New York.' He lifted his hands slightly and the dog walked towards me smelling my shoes.

'What?'

‘Finn said everyone in New York is named Sal. And Dad thought it was a good name for a beagle.’

The dog jumped on me and I backed up.

‘Come here Sal.’ Finn had come outside, the puppy ran to him and he picked it up. He brought him back to Toby, but shielded the dog’s eyes when he passed me. ‘Don’t look at him Sal. He’s more of a cat person.’ He gave him back to Toby and they exchanged a glance as if they had a secret.

‘What was that subversive glance for?’ I asked Finn as he opened the front door.

‘I didn’t think you liked dogs.’ He shrugged and returned to the telly and couch in the front room.

Ruth was marking assignments in the dining room. ‘1916?’

‘No, but not far off. The 1798 revolutions over here and World War Ones here.’ She stood up. ‘End of term essays.’

‘Are they any good?’

‘Nope. Well a few are, but most of them would rather do anything but history.’

I followed her into the kitchen. I told her about my meeting and the clamper. She had a fine day, but was looking forward to the summer break. She was almost sure now the school was going to offer her a contract for next year, which I assumed she’d take but I wasn’t certain it would really be enough for her. I think she should return to school, change profession, she’s still young enough to practice law or medicine, or go into academia. I didn’t talk about any of that though. We had spinach cannelloni and salad for dinner. Soon it was Finn’s bedtime and she didn’t need any help with the dishes, and so there was nothing left to do but go home.

Tom Feens in the Kitchen

None a them so much as crack a smile at the subla before they push me inta Johnny's kitchen. I int a clue it were him. He said he were sixteen, sure he'd as much chance bein sixteen as I do but he's alrigh. Fair play, he's on his own an thas rare enough ya know so fair play. Is only when he says his family name, is not tha reglar a name, ya know. So I watch him rale close an then I seen the family semblance. I akst him where he wanted ta go, he chose for himself so he did. He dropped in my fuckin lap. Merry Christmas ta me.

An I only had an idea a Dr Mallin in me head not two hours before, after Peter Mac, yer mare needed work an yer wan from Donore came out. Three hundred fuckin euro for comin inta shootin distance of the horse, an you had ta pop the fuckin pill up its arse yerself. Highway robbery. Sure, member when Gabe Mallin came out a while back, only him an yer wan in Swords, Michael Byrne, them the only two dacent vits, I can think a. No matter what went on between me an the son I respect the man ya know. He's sound.

So anyway I'm mindin meself, drivin, got the Bob—Bob—who was it? Dylan, yeah Bob Dylan, he's the one. I got the Bob Dylan on, an yer wan's on the side a the road. Member that couple in from Australia. Mad yokes hitchin cross the world. Bit a craic, I says, so I stop.

Shy to start but he pipes up when I akst bout his auld fella. He says his name an only then does I cop it. I member hairin Mallin's brother died but he said his ma died too, I dint raleise tha. I thought it were only the brother. The biy carries on with some story when I akst why he's hitchin. No criminal mastermind him but I'm naw gonta stick me nose in. When I cop he's Mallin's kin, I just kayp goin. Okay I stalled to ring Johnny, ta clear me head, like. The biy wanted to come. He fuckin akst.

'Sid, I got a team a reindeer outside an a big red an white outfe I get out once a year,' Peter Mac wastes no time.

'Now that explains a lot.'

'Whas large, white an sits in the clouds?' The Cowboy says.

‘The moon,’ Martin crows the answer The Cowboy’s lookin for.

He points a me. ‘Yer fuckin head.’

I cross me arms. ‘He’s goin nowhere. He’s gonta get me my biys. If yees dint like it, yees can kiss me hole. Thas the end a it.’

‘Here we go agin.’

‘Wha so he’s yer hostage is he?’ Peter Mac aks.

‘Member when Mick bringed tha German yoke in for Paddy Toomey’s funeral?’ JP is over the side with the other just-marriets, Martin an Joe, leanin ginst the sinks like one big fuckin groom.

‘He wis a fully grown man,’ Steamer’s sittin beside The Cowboy with both a his hands shoved into his pockets.

‘Fully grown? Good to see yer kaypin watch.’ JP an the grooms are laughin at the aul wan in the corner.

‘Ate for Germany, he did,’ Paddy Collins says. ‘A fierce cravin for the sausage rowls from the Centra in Navan, he had. Member tha? An only tha one Centra no other, an the day he come out with a dozen a them an all the time aytes them in the rog offerin naw even a crumb to no one.’

‘Where’s tha biy now?’ Francie aks.

‘Somewhere in Germany,’ Paddy shrugged

‘Sid’s wan, you fuckin eejit.’

‘He’s out with mine, he’s grand,’ says Johnny.

‘You gonta proteck him then?’ Peter Mac aks.

Johnny turns in his chair, now he’s facin him. ‘Would ye rather he waits on the fuckin road?’

‘Bonny Johnny sat on a wall,’ The Cowboy’s laynin back in his chair an Johnny won’t like tha but he’ll say nothin.

‘Ya gonta be hodin him for ransom is tha it? Take him ta the Spike in Dublin with a glock ginst his head?’ Peter Mac is botherin me now.

‘Bonny Johnny had a great fall.’

‘He’s gonta make a dale,’ Martin says.

The Cowboy sits up an snaps his fingers. ‘I get it, yer a jolly swagman with yer jumbuck.’ An now he’s singin the Waltzin Matilda.

‘He’s a fuckin judge, Sid,’ Francie sets in on me.

‘What dya think I be workin at for the past two fuckin year Francie? Gonta Dublin ta stick me finger up me hole?’

‘Thas what he’s doin innit?’ JP an Martin are talkin mongst themselves.

They’re all at it now an The Cowboy’s off on the chorus a the fuckin Waltzin Matilda loud over evryone. In all a this whas in me head is when I were ten an me an me brothers went down the river. There was these frogs, rale ugly ones ya know, an with no rayson I slam a rock down on top a one of them. I hare its bone popped an this grey leaks outta its head. The other frogs fucked off quick enough an the three a us cleared out as soon as but the whole time I int settled a what I done. I went back later ta bury it but it were gone by then. Layter on me ma smacked me when me brothers towd her what I done but I was sorry enough I no need ta be sorry ta her as well.

‘How much will ya aks for?’ Steamer says an Francie hits him cross the head like as if I dint cop what they mayne an Steamer just let the cat outta the bag. The talkins more like yellin an the singins louder now an it’s like a fuckin henhouse. I stand up, ‘Would yees all just shut up ta fuck. An the fuckin canary in the corner int helpin.’

The Cowboy stops his singin. ‘Well Sidney Kidney, puddin an pie.’

I sit down agin.

‘Dohwn we get enough trouble, between the comedians, hairidheaded fellas an the sociopaths round here,’ Peter Mac opens his gob at the first chance. ‘We dint

need no one harbourin delusions of grandeur.’ He’s leanin cross the table at me an tha nose a his is too long an narra ta stay in one piece. Aim for the end of the cheek bone for a clayne break. ‘We want quiet an honest lives.’

‘Honest lives?’ JP says, ‘Like what you sowed tha mare for Monday last? She might a been filly once upon a time.’

‘This int to do wit tha.’ Peter Mac straightens rale slow. ‘I get tha yer thinkin a yer biys but this a thick way ta go about it Sid. This is the end a the line. They’ll have it in for you big time now, yer life is over. But the rest a us, we’ll be accomplices.’

‘The Guards dint do nothin with the German,’ Steamer says.

‘This wans a kid, he’s different,’ Paddy’s turnin inta fuckin Bernardos on me. ‘They won’t like tha he’s a kid. The law’ll be landin any minute now.’

Peter Mac goes back an leans ginst the rodas, like he’s doin us a favour by stayin.

And then The Cowboy starts on, ‘Will yees all just kayp yer knickers on. I, for one, welcome the law. Bring them on. Good ta see if me aim is still as good as it wis.’ He poses with his arms up as if he’s hodin a rifle an shoots at me.

‘Be some craic,’ Steamer, the lickarse, says.

‘Wheest, all a ye.’ The Cowboy says it louder this time an now evryone shuts up. ‘What’re yes like, when dye all turn inta fuckin skule biys.’ The Cowboy is no relation a mine. He’s me wife’s cousin. ‘Sidney Kidney’s grown a shiny spiney, this calls fer recognition. Bring them on, bring the fuckin law in. Cos lads, the Pavees got cunnin an cunnins better than strength. David bate Goliath, an it’s a mouse who bringed down the elephant dint he biys? Maybay he’s walkin on eggs, yer wan in Dublin, but how’d he get there eh? Only fer pore unfortnate Sidney Connors. Easy target yer wan thinks dint he. He’s a robe-wearin-thief, lads, an he thinks he’s better than us. He stole Sid’s biys from him an all a ye watched him.’

‘It’s not like tha, we dint do nothin to stop them. We never did.’

I never saw any letter posted from Wheatfield, but I int sayin it an no one else does neither.

Peter Mac can't stand The Cowboy takin the spotlight an he's starts clappin. 'Arnt ye great. Thas a grand performance. Yer great so yer are. An what happens when they're here? Whas yer plan, shoot them all like yer fuckin Billy the Kid or somhin? You'd have us all in Mountjoy an what then? Think a someone like Francie here, if he gets buked agin he'd be in for months or years.' An Peter Mac'd be fuckin delighted if Francie went down agin.

'Ay,' Francie stands an moves towards him. 'Dint spake for me ya baldy bastard. I'll do what I like an I'm scared a no one. Prison's a fuckin holiday, compared ta livin beside baldy cunts like you.' Francie talks a big game, rale hairid. It's not like tha tho, he got connections, he got money, he's good at liftin, an can move things in an out a places. He's no hairidman, really more wha we call a grayser.

The Cowboy kayps on, 'Lads, stop yer arguin, kayp somhin fer the womin. Sidney done somhin here fer the first time in his fuckin life. Let's not it ruin fer him eh.'

By the door Peter Mac an Francie are talkin rale intense. All we can hair are a lot a 'is tha so's an 'youd like tha's an now even though we're all hairin what The Cowboy is sayin, our eyes is on the two a them.

The Cowboy stands straight an folds both hands up a the top a his chest an says in one of them put-on voices, 'Tha I wis where I would bay, then would I bay where I am not, but where I am, there I must bay, an where I would bay I cannot.'

Francie grabs Peter Mac by his coat an Peter Mac kayps willin Francie ta hit him, 'Stalein a kid is a stupid thing.'

I stand up agin, it's like I'm in fuckin mass, 'I never stole him. He cayme with me an I mayne him no hairim.'

'They int gonta see it tha way,' Martin says from groom corner.

‘Does ya want ta live ta see tomorra ya snotty pricks?’ I says it so they all gets it. ‘None a us maynes him any hairim.’ But no one’s mindin me. Johnny is in between Francie an Peter Mac, tellin them ta fuck off outside if it’s a fight they’re after. It’s his kitchen so.

The Cowboy yanks Francie off Peter Mac an now goes straight inta Mac’s face, ‘Member when you wis fucked out from the Laurence Inn an you wis fit ta bay tied? You tried to take the publican. Poxy fuckin pub you kept sayin an you wis walkin roun like you wis Nelson Mandela so hairid done by. You wouldn’t shut up ta fuck bout all the graveances done ta ya.’ Peter Mac an The Cowboy their das are brothers an Winnie, Annie’s ma, is their aunt. Both a them are McDonagh but we never use McDonagh for The Cowboy. ‘An here, Sidney Kidney puddin an pie, hits it rich, finds the bullseye, when all the biys come out to play, Peter the bleater, he runs away.’

‘Ye’ve all lost all yer fuckin marbles. Wha are ye gonta prove pickin a fight with a judge?’

The Cowboy laughs. ‘Yer voice is gettin rale old rale quick. Prove? Wes provin nothin, thas fer them. Whas it called Sid—burden a proof?’ Cowboy’s laughing more now. ‘I member tha cos we said proof of the bourbon were more important.’ He’s lookin for laughs but nobody does. ‘Member tha Sidney?’ I membered. He’s still waitin on his laughs, ‘Lads, ye’s all gone fucking primetime on me.’ He turns back to Peter Mac. ‘See we done nothin wrong. The biy chose to be with Sidney. You haird him. We not fightin but sure ta fuck wes not fer pushin round. An you bay a very sorry man if you walk when family needs you Macky Biy.’ The Cowboy turns ta face the rumeful of men. ‘And tha goes fer all a ye, wes family here, we ta stick to aytch other, understood?’ He points at me. ‘We’re gonta get yer biys back Sidney kidney.’ Then he begins ta howl. ‘Are ye ready biys cos there’s gonta bay trouble biy oh biy there’s gonta bay trouble. Go on ya boyo.’ He laughs like a crazed dog an walks out, him an Francie an Steamer an a few a the newlyweds all head off together.

Oliver Cromwell: scapegoat

After Mark was killed I'd have boarded up the house and shut everyone and everything out, except for Finn. I said I had a new friend. She was Zimbabwean, a widow as well, with two small children and had just been given refugee status. I invented stories how her husband was killed. Set upon, set alight, savage. I enjoyed making them up, I even found myself crying for him. She was struggling I said and needed a friend. But of course I underestimate Ireland and Denis had links with some African organisation. And after he mentioned my friend to somebody there they became concerned for her welfare and I had to tell them she left for the UK very suddenly. Her cousin lived there I said, she wanted to be close to her family.

I was thinking of this because I was at Saturday brunch with Bridget and two of her friends, Deirdre and Helen, when Zwanela (not that it needs reiterating but I made her name up) came up in conversation. We were eating at SixtySix, the place with all the plates on the walls on South Great Georges Street. Bridget was friendly with the chef despite the fact her sister had dated him for ages in the early nineties before dropping him for a Connemara fisherman by whom she'd become pregnant. The women asked about Finn and I gave them an update. The conversation moved on to other similar sadnesses and as I feared, my friend surfaced in conversation.

'Strange she left so quickly,' Deirdre said.

'It was.'

'I wouldn't have thought it'd be easy for a refugee to move around.'

'I've no idea.'

'She must have mentioned something. Didn't you ask?'

'No.'

'That's very strange.'

'Denis is taking care of it,' Bridget said.

This kind of thing with these sorts of women is basically self-flagellation. Before Mark died, I went on a weekend spa trip to a posh hotel in Waterford with

these three. The hotel was new and the overnight spa stay was discounted and it was still five hundred euro each, which was out of our budget, but Mark had settled into Dublin life again no bother with all his friends and his brother and his cousins, Finn had school and I sort of had Bridget, she was a woman so she qualified, but really she was Mark's friend. Mark persuaded me to go, we'd sort the money out somehow. If I'd burned five hundred euro I would have had more fun. It wasn't that the women were horrible or terrible, I just didn't fit in. They talked about property deals and social events, who's getting married, divorced, that sort of thing. They wheeled out the same questions—about Canada, do I miss home, but nothing substantial. They didn't make any great strides to befriend me, but they'd no problems moaning to me about their lives. I asked Helen about her recent wedding and my body massage was accompanied by the financial details of matrimony and the difficulties she and her new husband were having. They were probably going to have to sell their second home in Kerry. Deirdre made a bitchy comment that I needed a haircut and when I replied money was tight, she suggested I shouldn't be spending money on extravagant weekends away then. In fairness she was right and I never went away with them again although I was also never again invited.

Back under the plates. 'You must miss Vancouver?' Helen asked and I wasn't sure if she realised the situation I was in. What do I say: 'Well of course I miss it, my husband was alive then and if we hadn't moved he'd still be alive' or, 'of course I miss it, my whole family is there you bitch.'

'A little. I like it here. I ring my family a lot anyway'

Helen just had her first baby at thirty-eight and she doesn't know her ass from her elbow. Helen's daughter's name was Blathnaid and I asked if that was insurance against emigrating but they either didn't get it or considered it rude. I was only thinking of a North American attempting to spell that name. Anyway polite laughs from Helen nothing from Deirdre or Bridget.

Deirdre was in the midst of a decision whether to move to Milan with her boyfriend. I'd never been so I nodded politely and offered appropriate encouragement at the right moments. A small part of me wished she'd leave. I wished she'd fuck off and stop annoying me. But then I tell myself to behave.

‘Where’s the subbing got you these days?’ Deirdre asked.

‘I’m still in St Aidan’s, up on Collins Avenue.’

‘Remember that one, the ride from New Zealand?’ Bridget said. ‘That’s who she’s replacing. His father died so he went home and stayed on there longer than intended.’

‘Fabulous, for you.’

‘I don’t think he’s coming back.’ Bridget said.

‘That’s a terrible loss.’ Helen says.

‘I bet he goes home and feels indebted to the family,’ Deirdre starts. ‘Man of the house sort of thing. I bet he’s not coming back. They’ll offer you a contract.’ She was so sure of herself. I almost wanted not to receive an offer just to prove her wrong.

‘I keep telling her she’s wasting her talent teaching history,’ Bridget said to the women about me. ‘If she retrained in computers or financial management, she’d make better money and not have to deal with adolescents all day.’

I’d sooner slit my wrists. And anyway I like adolescents.

‘I’m sure Trinity would cover any fees. Get Denis to sort it out.’ Deirdre says.

‘Did you see Louise Toolan’s back studying? For nursing of all courses,’ Helen has had a carrot on her fork for five minutes.

‘Has she ever left school? Last I heard she was doing law.’

Bridget waved her hand in the air. ‘She’s a professional student: can’t do, teach; can’t teach, study.’

I said I had an appointment, left cash on the table and legged it out of there. I was delighted when it was over, those women kind of scared me. They probably saw me as a nerd, which is what I am I suppose. I hope its nerd and not complete loser. Anyway afterwards I meandered around the city. I love the area on the far side of

Grafton Street, south of Dame Street. Mark said it's not Temple Bar but he didn't know the name. At the posh grocery store I bought a few groceries, only because convenience was more valued than cost right then. I walked through Temple Bar and at the Liffey I saw the cap of the Four Courts. I walked over to O'Connell Street Bridge and on to Marlborough Street, which reminded me of Denis' law lecturer friend who was beat up further down this street a few years ago. I passed the Abbey who were running a JM Synge play that might be interesting and the Peacock had a young playwright series that, by the warning on the poster, may or may not involve nudity and excessive expletives.

On Lower Abbey Street, a 31B was waiting so I scurried along faster because it would be just my luck if it pulled away right then and I'd already stretched the definition of a few hours in town. I needn't have hurried as the driver was stepping off for a stretch and a smoke, but I was on automatic pilot and got on anyway. I preferred to sit on the first seat of the elevated section near the back. The heater is right there and it feels better to be high rather than low. I made myself comfortable, and then realised it'd be a few more minutes before we left and wished I'd continued up to Connolly.

I was still working through the trauma of Finn's fall. My doctor suggested I go back on the anti-depressants but I hadn't found the right one and wasn't willing to try a new one so soon after the last disaster. On the night Finn fell, I was in the living room looking for something when I heard the clattering outside and then Toby's whistle. That was the night of the meteor shower. Mark was involved in a study in Scotland once and the impact on him was so great that he had to drag all of us through a ritual of celebration, otherwise known as a party, every fucking May. It was a tradition in Vancouver and the first year we were here we continued on with it, but after he was gone and despite Finn's insistence I couldn't do it. In the end Denis, Gabe, Colin and Toby sat with Finn. It wasn't much fun apparently. And I wanted to avoid it again this year. I should have listened to my instinct, but it was out of my control. Before I knew it Finn had strung fairy lights across in the attic and set up the telescopes, Denis brought alcohol, Maura and Gabe sorted out dinner, even guests turned up. I called for the boys from the bottom of the stairs. Through the kitchen window I saw Denis and Colin in the back headed towards the side of the house.

I went out the front door. Finn was yelling from the side of the house. Toby was on the balcony blowing that fucking whistle. Finn had fallen off the balcony into the cedar bush.

‘It’s in my leg.’ It was the equivalent of the phone call to tell me Mark had been in the accident, times a bazillion. Or maybe by now I was hypersensitive.

‘For fucks’ sake Ruth, what are doing?’ Colin and Denis tore at the bush from their side but I opted to climb. I kept falling through and was treated later for the cuts and bruises at the hospital. I reached him before the others, but given the amount of blood he’d lost that wasn’t a good thing. Apparently the ambulance arrived quickly but I remember it taking ages.

In the ambulance, Finn lost consciousness. Up until that point I thought I was doing okay. Most of the self-help books on bereavement I’d read had rubber-stamped me through all five stages of grief. There was a point there in the ambulance when I asked the medic where Mark was. He said he was probably still at the house. Finn lacerated his femoral vein, went into hemorrhagic shock and lost consciousness but he was stabilised quick enough. I asked the hospital for a sedative and a couple hours later, Denis was rubbing my shoulder, waking me at Finn’s bedside where I’d been sitting forward in a chair and slumped over on his bed.

‘What about Mark?’ I couldn’t remember if I’d decided Mark was at the house or dead. The accident and Finn falling off the roof had merged into one event, the intervening year evaporated.

Denis was all blurry, ‘He’s dead, Ruth.’

His car was t-boned on Tara Street at George’s Quay and Mark was put on life support. Apparently the doctor told me straight away the initial tests indicated he was brain dead. When Denis explained it to me I remember thinking medical science was wrong. We’d been married for fourteen years, this doesn’t happen, He was going to regain consciousness. This was Mark, fallible yes, frequently, but always good in the end. What if brain activity restored itself I said, but they said that wasn’t possible, but anything is possible I said and what did they know. What if I turned off the support and he was almost back? I held his hand, I kissed him, I touched him, I lay down beside him, all to provoke him back. But nothing. Finn talked to him, but

nothing. The monitors showed no brain activity and they did the diagnostic tests twice. Denis and his parents all believed he was dead. Mark was only forty-two, we had another forty years together probably, easy. I think I accept he's dead, I'm not prone to absolutes in this department, but I'm still learning to cope. I barely made it on my own before him and now I'm so accustomed to him, how am I suppose to do this? Mark's family drive me mental but they're here and they mean well. For all my bitching, Denis has been amazing. He's helped with everything, He thought the antidepressants necessary. I never really wanted them, but I thought taking them would help getting back to work, but in the end they made things worse.

Across the street from where I was sitting on the bus was the Scot's Church, named accordingly for those who used it. Nice church, from the eighteen-thirties if I remembered correctly. It was rumoured to have impressive naves, but I'd never been inside. There were some junkies talking slow and without much intention about the timetables at the front of the bus. I remembered there was a methadone clinic somewhere nearby. The bus finally left and the junkies sat down and annoyed the bus driver, who did his best to ignore them. To get to our closeted middle-class neighbourhood you have to pass through a relatively rough area of Northside Dublin. Last March when I went to the Teacher's Club beside the Rotunda to hear a history professor from Cork talk about eighteenth century faction fighting in Dublin City, I lost my bearings driving home. I ended up on Buckingham Street, which has all these massive concrete apartment buildings, like something out of communist Eastern Europe and half the street was boarded up. Later Colin told me that was the street he learned to stay on his motorcycle while kids threw bricks at him.

I've always been guarded in this area but I haven't ever felt in danger, although I'm not one for taking risks with my personal safety. A group of loud screechy teenage girls clambered on and bolted to the upper level of the bus. They're attractive and were made up to the nines so they might have passed for twenty-five at first glance. I noticed them only because of their noise level but otherwise I was staring out the window. A few minutes later I saw the Fairview off-licence out my window. Next stop was mine. The junkies all said goodbye to me, as did the bus driver. I walked the bit down the Howth Road to Charlemont Road, which is my street. The name comes from the man you are probably thinking of, Lord Charlemont, James Caulfeild. Maybe you weren't thinking that. Spot the history

teacher. Caulfeild spelled with the E before the I, one of the few examples I've seen of that without a preceding C, either it's an antiquated spelling or a misspelling never corrected. The ambiguity is probably why I don't live on Caulfeild Road. No one else around me considers history to the same degree I do, but I think it gives a place context. He was the first president of the Royal Irish Academy and quite a few places in Dublin are named after him (most noteworthy: Charlemont House, now an art gallery, up near Parnell Square or Charlemont station on the new Luas system). He helped Henry Gratton's election campaign in seventeen-seventy-five (or thereabouts) and despite his English title supported Irish Independence. So it's nice to live on his road.

We live at number twenty-three at the end of a row of four. This house is smaller than our one in Vancouver. That took some getting used to but I love it now. Bridget and Colin live in the next quartet up at number seventeen. She found the house for us, before it was listed, and organised the sale. The Sextons, at twenty-one right next door, are a lovely couple with two nice teenagers. The Kellys (across the street at thirty-eight) have several kids, the boy, Oisín, is Finn's age, and the Booths (fourteen) have a daughter, Méabh, also in Finn's class. There is a rental at twenty, with mostly Australians and Kiwis, but they're pretty quiet even though one of the women has dreadlocks.

I've always lived in Vancouver, except for a year when I was 21 and lived in Montreal with a girlfriend. Since the accident I've thought about moving back but it feels like going in reverse. Where would we live—with my parents in Deep Cove or with my brother in North Vancouver? Our house in Mount Pleasant would be always there, like a blinking homing beacon reminding me of what was, what could have been, if we just hadn't moved. I can't begin to cope with returning to Vancouver and all that would entail. I don't think Mark would have wanted us to leave, not right away anyway, we've only been here two years. The only way Denis is going to have children is if it's an accident and with one son down, Finn is a massive part of Maura and Gabe's lives. I may move back when Finn is older but for now I'm rebuilding. Even my mother says I should stay, make a go of it, for Mark's sake.

Since my parents left after the funeral the neighbours have been good to me. I'm closest to Bridget and Colin. She's cooked dinners, laundry, cleaning, school

runs, listened. She's currently pushing a therapist on me but I'm not ready yet so instead she's bought me more books on bereavement than I realised were published: *Tear Soup*, *Grief Relief*, *Someone you love has died*, *Death: the final frontier* and the last straw was *Death: the final stage of growth*, before I asked her to stop.

I don't know how to handle Mark's grief. He would be devastated to have died, to have left Finn, to not experience him growing up. How do I deal with the disappointment of all he's missing and going to miss? Denis says we must keep focused on the positives, he was happy before he died, he loved his life, his family, his job, but we were part of that and now it's all gone and then you remember why and then there's a tsunami of anger and resentment of being cheated out of a life, out of a man. I'm angry for me and I'm angry for him, but the anger doesn't have legs, it doesn't go anywhere, I can't mobilise it somehow, I can't mobilise and then the sadness comes. There's crying yes, fists into the pillow, but it's worse than that. At the grocery store, he's still there trying to find the right avocado or determining the differences between brands of milk or pasta or olive oil or whatever, sometimes that's a good thing and other times I drive to the Dunnes near the airport. All of this happens in waves, there are times of normality but something, anything, triggers the switch and the cycle is on again. I realise we can die at any moment but that's hypothetical. We'd talked about what would happen if either of us died but I didn't expect it to happen, not yet.

I opened the front door. Denis had made dinner. Finn was watching TV with his leg up on the couch. Both of them greet me but Finn mouthed, 'He's driving me mental.'

I sat on the arm of the couch and placed my arm around his neck. 'What's he done now?' I whispered.

'He keeps telling me to do things. Okay, I've done my homework, I cleaned up my room and I even tidied the coffee table.' He pointed to the table and to the telly where he'd organised his games. 'Now he wants me to set the table, do my stretches, take the garbage out. I'm an injured party here.'

I went to the kitchen. He was listening to a news show on the radio as he was cleaning up. Dinner was in the oven.

‘I’ve only just had lunch.’

‘Well you can have the salad now and the main later.’

‘I was just talking to Finn, he’s pretty tired. What was he doing today?’

‘Not much.’

‘Did he help you with dinner?’

‘Not a finger.’

‘But he cleaned his room and did his homework.’

Denis looked up from the dishes. ‘That’s not helping out, that’s life.’

‘Well he’s injured.’

‘He was moaning to you obviously. I’m not asking him to cut down trees, it’s setting the table for god’s sake. If he sits around he’s just going to become increasingly ill.’

‘I know, but he can chill out for a few more days. This isn’t the army.’

‘This is what we’ve been talking about Ruth. You need structure, discipline. This is about rebuilding your life. You can’t do it watching telly, going for lunch everyday.’

‘You wanted me to go to the fucking lunch.’

‘If you’re serious about rebuilding then you need to be serious about the decisions you make on a day to day basis.’

I shuffled around the kitchen for a few minutes until it grew awkward with him in the dinner-cooking-role and me as the one-chef-too-many. I set the table and afterwards joined Finn in front of the TV where he was watching *Doctor Who*. He extended his hand out, which meant ‘don’t speak, show at crucial juncture.’ Mark and I did it as well. It’s a family thing.

In a couple months he will officially be a teenager, which is hard to believe. He has long stretches of confidence, where I swear he thinks he’s twenty-five not

twelve. He doesn't realise how sensitive he is, how vulnerable. It's a difficult age, twelve. He's desperate to grow up. He's sure he knows everything, but then he's confused and scared. When he thinks too much about Mark's death or he gets scared of me dying or of himself dying or being hurt, he comes to me like he did when he was younger. And I tell him everything is okay and wonder how this is the same kid who shouts at me that I don't know anything about anything and most of all I totally don't know anything about him. Since Mark's death he's grown several inches which has been a pain in the ass for clothes and shoes. His confirmation is later this year and he's chosen Mark as his name, no contest. So his name will then be Finn Benjamin Mark Mallin.

I can hear Denis bringing food to the table, surprised to find the table set.

Mark:

- * was a better cook than me;
- * made a great steak marinade and stuffed mushrooms and Sunday morning brunches;
- * hated cleaning up;
- * liked things to be tidy (consolidated, he'd say);
- * driving in the car on a hot afternoon with the windows down. The week before I'd quit the all-time worst teaching job known to humanity, stuck myself out of the car window and screamed something about quitting, woo hoo, and I'm sure a fuck-you or two. He was laughing, howling, when I clambered back in;
- * never cried (in front of me anyway) although he was close to it when Finn was born, when we almost broke up and when we left Vancouver;
- * had trouble admitting when he was wrong.

I was at the Capers on Fourth Ave having a coffee and reading the book on Oliver Cromwell I'd just bought from Duthies. Reading and drinking coffee on a Saturday afternoon in Kitsilano is about as up your Vancouver ass as a person can be. That was me, and it was Mark who asked if he could sit at the free chair at my table. I'd seen him around Kits and there he was across the table staring at me with a disgusted look on his face, and that's how it started. He was from Drogheda, and that, he said, allowed him a special propensity against Cromwell. He called him a cunt which startled me, but I was attracted to him and ran with it. Antonia Fraser, inadvertent matchmaker.

The episode finished and Finn, who was still figuring out the story himself, retold it to me at the same time. His story synopsis hit the skids when he didn't

understand how the dalek got to somewhere, or something. Denis called us for dinner and I helped him up from the couch and walked behind him to the table. He was still limping a bit but he was getting better everyday.

BryanAdams

I didn't think about it when we were driving but when we first arrived I was a little scared. Sid introduced me to Catherine and then he left with a bunch of men. Catherine was really angry and she told me to follow her. Loads of kids stared at me and she said something to them which sounded mean but I didn't understand.

Two other women were in her kitchen. Once I walked in they stopped talking. One of them was shoving flowers into a clear vase already jammers with a big bouquet of flowers in the middle of the table. There was a picture of the Pope on the wall.

Catherine sat down at the table beside the other women and lit a cigarette. I was still standing holding my bag. Maybe I should have just stayed at home and locked myself in my room again. 'However way you came by Sid, he shouldn't a been bringing you here. You'll be back at yer home by tonight alrigh but if anhin happens while yer here, you find me, ya get me? We're different than yer kind, but whaever the differences, yer safe alrigh. I'll make sure of it.'

'And so will I,' the flower arranger said.

'We'll all be kaypin watch,' The third woman pointed two of her fingers up to both her eyes and then at me.

'Wha age are you?'

'Twelve,' I didn't feel so brave anymore.

'Johnny,' She yelled out the door from her chair at the table. 'Johnnyrocket.' I heard the 'wha' in the distance. 'Come here.'

He walked in the door, glanced at me then at her.

‘You kayp watch after him, ya hair me?’ She said to him. ‘And If I see a scratch on him, you be next, ya get me?’

‘Yah.’

She turned to me. ‘You lave yer bag here an be gone with ya.’ I couldn’t get out fast enough.

He’s waiting for me outside. ‘Sid’s got her in a bad way today.’ He tells me his name is Johnnyrocket. A group of kids gather around. There is BigAl (one word and big cos his older brother is Little Joe), Danny is called MickyD cos his name’s McDonagh and his sister Winnie is called WickyD, Robbie and Christy and Kenny and Maggie and Molly are all standing around me. Johnnyrocket and BigAl are brothers, Maggie and Molly are sisters and Micky and Wicky are brother and sister and then everyone is each other’s cousin or thereabouts. I lost track. Maggie and Molly have seven kids in their family. None of the kids here are only children.

‘You was hitching,’ Says BigAl. ‘You do tha much?’

‘A few times.’

‘Why dint we ever think a tha?’

They ask me where I’m from, where I was born, why did I move, where did I like better, why was I hitching, what’s Canada like, what are the people like there, did I like Ireland, did I have brothers and sisters, how old are my parents, how did my Dad die, what do I do without brothers, who is my best friend, did I bmx, did I know how to course, did I miss him, what are my parents’ names, was I ever in Finglas, did I know Annie and Maggie died in a car accident too, is that why I was here, who are my grandparents, is that vit really my Grandda, do I work with him, did I know Sid before, did I go to America ever, did I speak French, do I have pets, what’s my favourite colour, did I know Paddy, Jack and Mick, can I name all thirty-two counties, is it quiet in my house without other kids, what’s the best thing I’d ever seen, was I ever in Spain, how tall am I, how old am I, did I think they were born yesterday, did I ever see a moose, what about a bear, how old are my parents, did I say I had a sister, what’s my middle name, am I Catholic, what is my favourite dog, did I like dogs or cats more, did I live in a house, did I like not having brothers

and sisters, did I speak Spanish, why was my leg injured, did I hate needles, did I have to get needles in the hospital, did I ever want to get married, does my leg hurt, did I want a sister, would I take Wicky, does it rain in Canada, did I ever go to South America, do I like horses, bear or lion—who'd win in a fight?

BigAl lets me borrow one of his bikes. It's red with *Thunderbolt* in white on the frame. They show me around the estate. At the very end is a small field with a shed on it. Inside the shed is a boxing bag and weight sets. JP and Martin have caravans on either side of the green and they pitched in together and bought a few things. Johnnyrocket tells me soon enough Tommy and Micko wanted in. They're all older, not as old as Sid say, but older than us. JP has a baby and Martin's wife is about to pop. Tommy is engaged to a Traveller girl from Waterford and Micko is still looking although Molly says he asked for WinnieJ, but Steamer Joyce (WinnieJ's da) isn't sold on the idea but Winnie Joyce (WinnieJ's ma) loves the idea cos then WinnieJ would be close. Anyway the story is the shed is for everyone but stay away from the weights, although Little Joe and Conor started using them recently and they're only fourteen.

They showed me who lives where. Sid's house is at the side in between Johnnyrocket and BigAl's house and Maggie and Molly's house. Maggie and Molly's da is Peter Mac and he's cousins with The Cowboy and even though The Cowboy's kids use the name McDonagh, The Cowboy doesn't. So, when someone says the McDonagh's they mean Maggie and Molly's da or MickyD and WickyD's da not The Cowboy. When they mean The Cowboy they say The Cowboy's family.

In front of Sid's house there is another small field with horses in it. The horses wander anywhere they want on the estate but most of them hang out here, although there are a few lying down near JP's caravan at the back. There's a pile of harnesses outside Micky D's house but they aren't all his. I found a whistle in the pile and tell BigAl and MickyD about Toby's whistle and BigAl thinks that's a good idea and snatches the whistle from my hand cos he's going to do that too now. MickyD says the horses are resting but we'll race them later. So we bike down to the shed to see what's happening, past the older boys who are arguing about something inside the bonnet of a car and some girls who are sitting on the wall talking and laughing.

MickyD warns me about Gerry Joyce who is there practicing on the bag. Gerry is fifteen and thinks he's a better boxer than anyone fifteen and under and he sort of is, but Kenny's older brother Martin (who they call The Indian cos he's always quarrelling with his Da) is thirteen and getting better all the time. The Indian can't wait for the day he beats him. 'He already sorted his victory song,' says Kenny.

Maggie and Molly stand around the older girls Jacinta and Rachele (Maggie and Molly's older sisters), Isabella and Missy (Christy's older sisters) and WinnieJ. They all have straight long hair. WinneJ is wearing ripped jeans and a short top that shows her middle part and lots of the boys stare at her but she only smiles at Micko, who is supposed to be watching Tommy lift three hundred pounds. Isabella has some kind of jewellery thing on her head that hangs down where earrings should be and she's loads of rings on. She's talking to Little Joe and looking around but Little Joe is only staring straight at her.

'This is my new best bud,' says BigAl about me.

'Mine too,' MickyD says.

'I'm the wan in charge a him,' Says Johnnyrocket.

'What's yer name?' asks Gerry.

'Finn.'

'Wes gonta need to gev you a better name,' Says Robbie.

'How bout faggot,' Gerry says.

'Shut up,' Says The Indian to Gerry.

'Takes one to know one,' Says BigAl.

'Wha about Canada?' Says Jacinta.

'Or the Eskimo?' Says WinnieJ.

'I like tha one,' Says Micko from the side and Tommy hits him in the side of the head cos he's still not spotting him.

Someone says ice and then someone else sings 'Ice Ice Baby' and then 'Under Pressure' and suggestions go from Hammertime to Freddie Mercury to Bryan Adams and they say I kind of look like him cos I have blond hair and he's Canadian too so that's how I got to be called BryanAdams.

'All one word though,' says BigAl. 'Cos it sounds better.'

Maggie, Molly and Wicky are dancing over at the side, they don't stop even when Micko says to get away. Wicky and Molly have long feathery things around their necks and Wicky is talking French.

'Ah bonjour BryanAdams.' She tickles the feathery thing into my face. 'C'est une tres bonne.'

'What dya think Spanish music or French music, which is better?' Molly is dancing in front of me and BigAl, who is watching to see if anything kicks off between The Indian and Gerry. She isn't as good with the feathery thing as Wicky is.

'Is there a difference?'

'Es dere a diffarance?' Wicky screeches. 'Mais oui, c'est une tres bonne diffarance. Music de la Spain is like yesyesyesyesyesyesyesyesyesOLE!' She is wiggling the feathery thing the whole time, but you probably already figured that. 'Le music de la Francais est like da, da. Da, da. BOOM-BOOM. Da, da. Da, da.' For the boom boom part, she leans down and shakes her chest not in my face but in my direction and kayps on wiggling the feathery thing slower for the da da parts. 'Tres bonne, oui?'

'Not really.'

'You speak French?' Wicky drops the feathery thing and I'm amazed I'm even listening to her still.

Gerry offers to show me a few moves so I put the gloves on. They felt weird, like my fists were cartoons. I hit the bag but it barely moved. Everybody is sitting around now and some of the girls are singing a song I've heard on the radio recently. Even Tommy and Micko stop to watch, they're mostly laughing though. Stevo grabs a pair of gloves and he boxes the other side of the bag real good. I can't do anything

with him hammering away so I sit down beside BigAl who tells me I did good for my first go. Later I asked BigAl about Sid's kids and the car accident. He told me the story and I kind of thought it sounded familiar but I thought it was only cos I knew what it was like sort of. I didn't make the connection until the next day when BigAl told me about the ransom note.

Rumble stumbles dickory dog

Martin tells his mother's people in Wexford, Steamer is in touch with ones down in Limerick, Johnny calls his cousins in Dundalk, an Francie rings Jimmy Doherty in Ballyfermot. Francie, in fairness, he's The Cowboy's brother-in-law but I believe him now it wernt his idea. Him an Steamer, neither a them ever had an idea between them. The Cowboy though, he's no pertender. He has it in him an ye dint need ta be hangin round him long ta cop tha. He usta fight bare-knuckle. He was alright. We made ten grand off a one a his fights, but he got done for bitin in one an then they had ta pull him off Tom Ward from Tuam, an Tom was a while ta see straight agin so Cowboy wernt allowt no more in the ring, but he still did an when he were found out what could they do? Well finally he stalled. Johnny an Steamer wernt bad neither. Johnny never foughted him, but Steamer did an Steamer bate him. But then Steamer bate Jack Joyce so tha were fine.

Afterwards Johnny an me we walk outside an over ta the front a Paddy's gaffe where we can see the shed where all the biys are. Johnny gevs me a fag an, fuck it, I take it. I'd a hairt attack last year, just a small one like. An the doctor sits beside me aksin how much I drink, how much I smoke, do I take any exercise, an like he dint need the fuckin degree in the end. 'There comes a time,' he says an gevs me the speech on takin care a meself. 'What's more important,' says I ta him 'taking some drink or smoke ta gev me mind some lightness or end up toppin meself cos I can't bear these things no longer?' He towd me ta just take it aysy. Right, take it aysy.

'I'd love a pint now,' I says after a few drags.

‘I’d love about ten pints right now,’ says Johnny.

The young fellas are yellin at Gerry Joyce on the bag. I find me hat from inside me coat cos it’s May but is sharp enough ta be October. Catherine knocks on the windie from inside a Paddy’s house where the women are roun the table with the young girls who couldn’t care less bout watchin Gerry. She hodes her hands out ta say whas the story, but we only wave an carry on.

I known Johnny longer than any a them, even Annie. He nods twards the biys, ‘Dint mind the other fellas talkin but you done it this time Sidney. A judge int no ordinary man, they got laws specially for them.’

‘I’m aware of a tha, thanks very much,’ I point ta me eyes. ‘I got eyes.’

‘I wonder if it’s such a good idea, thas all.’

‘Dint worry bout it.’

‘I dint think so. You fuck off. I do worry about it, cos you int thinkin straight Sid an wha happens when you int thinkin straight eh? The choices ya make Sid. How many times do we have ta go through this shite? It’s this that lost you the biys in the first place.’

‘The lad was given to me. A present like’

‘He’s the divil in disguise.’

‘Johnny I seen the divil, she’s bout forty five an twenty stone cos she sits on the fuckin computer all day shovin hobnobs inta her fat fuckin mouth, wearin them stupid red glasses an grey suits, I never seen her wearin nothin else but grey. An she sits there with her files an her red fuckin fingernails pawin at people’s lives an I seen me file an it got fuckin choclate stains on it. Dacent money she’s paid ta spend all day on the computer. I seen it once—how ta make herself younger—thas wha she were reading, at work like, no word a lie, I seen it with me own eyes. I wouldn’t a thought it true if I didn’t see it. This kid is so far from the divil he’s growin wings on his back. I seen a bit a his halo there when he turns left like tha, dya see it there. No, no the divil is a useless cunt is what she is, an she’s a fat fuckin stain on humanty. Hate is too kind a word.’

Johnny knows all bout Cathy Mulroney an her HSE badge. Johnny Stokes came all the way from Drogheda for a job in the Galway quarry an it were there I met him when I were seventeen. Johnny an Annie are brother an sister, two a seven they are, Tommy is a brother as well an when their aul wan Joe had his first stroke Annie made me, an Mary made Peter Mac, an Winnie made Steamer all settle here, an Bridy an Joe, more kin, live in Drogheda now, close by. When I met Johnny he was workin extra ta pull together money ta buy Old Ned's scrappin business off him. He an Catherine were just after being married an all the Stokes came out ta misli roun the West when he were workin at the quarry an I met Annie then. Six months layter we was married.

Johnny runs an alrigh business, usta be mostly steel, now he's got more, anyhin he can get. He got a few arrangements in Drogheda, car dalers an construction places, like. He cooks it so when the tax office sniffs round he can play pore. He earns more than any a them, an none a us had a clue how good it were for him til it got ya couldn't gev away scrap steel, wernt worth the effort. Johnny managed to sell his ta some lads in Blanch but he's not just inta the steel, he got suppliers an buyers lookin for the nickel an the copper too, he's got diversification so he has. But the steel stopped The Cowboy in his tracks. Not just him though, others too, Micko an Paddy they lost about fifty grand, an it int been aysy on Johnny neither but where others need the dole honestly now he's alrigh. Johnny just got a head for the business. He read an writes even but one time I saw him take the post, one of them from the government about recyclin you get, ta young Alan aksin what a few words meant. So he's not as fuckin smart as he makes out.

Johnny's still laughin at Fatty Mulroney, but still can't stop himself, 'Ya seen me with the tax office Sid, you dint dale with these kind direct. Thas what they want. Thas how they catch ya an thas when the shades are there drawin in on ya. Take Tommy there, six months in Mountjoy for stalein a few fuckin cars, if he'd just kept his fuckin mouth shut an not laid the whole story out for them they'd never had enough for trial. Jaysis, you're a fuckin Pavee man aren't ya?' He flicked his hand off me head. 'We dint fit an if we kayp it tha way, they'll not be able for us.'

Gerry is gevin the biy lessons now how ta go on the bag. Finn's scared a it. If a bag say anhin it'd say Gerry is good, not afeard ta fight hairid, but bags dint say much. If he pult tha off with one a them Joyce biys from Anvil Park or the Wards in Mullingar, then I'd be impressed. Is near enough fifteen young ones sittin roun watchin Gerry showin evryhin he layrnt from Ray. The Cowboy's cam, Stevo, he's the second pair a gloves on, he's dacent but it's The Indian, The Cowboy's older biy, who got the rale head for fightin. Me two oldest, Micko an Paddy, been in trouble at skule for their fightin. They got suspended but the Social an Fatty Mulroney forced the skule ta kayp them an now they ta stay longer evry day, an thas too much. Punishment dint fit the crime I say but the skule refused talkin ta me an towd me it wernt me place. Their own father were a bad example for them parently an ventually I were forced ta gev in cos they'd stop me from seein me biys the once a week I do now. So wha could I do?

Finn sits down an Stevo's hammerin the bag. Johnny dint care bout the fight, I can tell he's watchin his biys Little Joe an Johnnyrocket. Joe is beside Francie's Isabella an the two a them only got eyes for aytch other. Johnnyrocket's on the other side a Isabella leanin down with his elbows on his knees. Little Joe is little Joe cos he's not big Joe, although Little Joe is only fourteen an he's almost taller than any a us. Johnnyrocket's calt so cos when he were young you'd never seen him without his toy rocket, just yer chaype Russian sort with an Irish flag on the side, it dint go nowhere, but the kid wouldn't lave it ta save himself so the name stuck.

'The Cowboy, Sid, he's bad news so he is. He's no good for no one. Even the fuckin horses are spooked.'

'He's helpin kayp Peter Mac in place.'

'Thas the problem. See on edge Peter Mac is, an he's not without his points Sid. Now I preciate things is heavy, but is no good how The Cowboy's mate hooks are inta evryhin. People been chewin at the bit since he moved back.' Now Johnny nods towards the biys. 'Fuckin Joe here hornin in. He can fuckin think again, no way I'm not allowin tha.'

Finn is sittin cross from them beside BigAl, another a Johnny's biys.

‘Good man Al, I towd him ta kayp his eye on Finn,’ I says.

JP arrives beside us, ‘Lads you want ta mind yerselves.’

‘Wha?’ Says I, an before he can splain, The Cowboy, Francie an Steamer are beside us too. We nod but we say nothing. They’re already into the cans.

The Cowboy starts in with his fairy rhymes, ‘Once upon a time when pigs spoke rhyme, an monkeys chewed tobacco, hens took snuff to make them tough, an ducks went quack, quack, quack, O!’

‘It’s Oscar fuckin Wilde.’

‘Higgledy-piggledy.’

‘Yer just as big a faggot as him.’ Johnny an The Cowboy they mostly are alrigh with aytch other, but Cowboy’s been hodin a grudge since the steel went bust but he’d not say it like tha to any a us.

The Cowboy cups his balls. ‘There once wis a man from Nantucket, his dick wis so long he could suck it, he said with a grin while scratchin his chin, if my ear wis a cunt I could fuck it.’ He’s laughin like a fuckin eejit. Johnny kayps watch on the biys over there an I take another fag off him. I hate The Cowboy’s fuckin rhymes, he got good at it when his girl Bridget fell bad sick with the hurlers three year ago.

‘Fuck, lighten up would ye. Did someone piss in all ye cornflakes?’ He’s drinkin from a can, they’re all drinkin from cans an I’m dyin with the taste a one but I started on the smokin an it’s one or the other an even though I’m tempted I’m naw aksin none a them for any favours.

‘Go on ya boyo.’ Cowboy scrams cross to the biys. ‘Come on son.’ Now he’s movin roun, shadow boxin an throwin his fists along with Stevo.

‘You should layrn him a few moves,’ Johnny says.

‘I could layrn you a few moves,’ The Cowboy’s dancin an shadow boxin roun Johnny now. ‘Dance like a butterfly, sting like a bee.’

‘Riginalty’s not yer strong point then,’ Johnny says it rale bored like, an JP’s laughin.

‘Cos I’m The Cowboy for eternity,’ He throws his arms in air an yells the ‘nity’ last bit rale loud an the biys stop a second but turn back ta the bag soon nough. The Cowboy looks Johnny up an down, ‘Wanna have a go, dya?’ He throws a few punches at Johnny’s face, not so close though. ‘Well then, wha are ya waitin for, show me if ye anyhin left.’

‘Not worth me energy.’

‘Ah, you got nothin left anyway,’ The Cowboy stops boxin an takes a final swat at nothin. Them business men an them bankers they tapped you like a Chinese dam. Gev in you did. In yer eyes so it is. I can see it.’ He’s pointin right at Johnny’s eyes. ‘It’s in yer woman’s eyes too, the way she looks at ya, disgusted she is.’

‘Like a Chinese dam? Wha? How many cans is tha now?’

The Cowboy nods him off, he’s back boxin, movin his feet like he’s fuckin Michael Flatley. ‘Down there for dancing.’ He says ta JP.

‘Up here in yer arse,’ Says Francie hittin his head.

‘Cowboy, dya ever fight any a the Donaghues?’ JP says it an The Cowboy stops dancin. Francie is watchin me watchin The Cowboy.

‘Who’s aksin?’ Cowboy gets serious quick.

‘I am,’ JP says it like maybe The Cowboy dint cop the question came from him, rale fuckin dumb like, an we never been sure if he thick like tha or he just pertends sometimes. ‘I haird it were legend.’

‘I did,’ says The Cowboy straight into his face. ‘An it wis.’ He eases. ‘There wis thray a them, an only one a me. I’m comin outta the Trap in Ardee there, ya know the place, dya, off Market Street? Rale dark it wis tha night, full moon an all. They surrount me there, up ginst the wall they have me, an theys in with the digs an they thinkin I’m done fer, three of them Louth pricks ginst me, an they stop fer a second so yer wan can get a runnin start an the others are watchin him sos they dint see me stand an they dint spect me to have me chain. Jimmy still have the scar

where I nearly took his eye out, but I'm not sure if tha wis the chain or me foot. Thray a them, one a me.' He points ta himself. 'I won.'

Never haired tha one. The Cowboy did usta carry a chain an Jimmy does have a scar on his eye. The Donaghues are them who been doin all them tiger kidnappings, where they break into some post office workers' house an threaten ta kill them less the post office coughs up. They done four a them I haired a. They tried reglar staling, but Anto Donaghue got done tha way, so now they gone back ta the kidnappings.

Evryone's gone quiet now. 'But yer friendly with them agin?' I says.

The Cowboy shrugs, 'I were prevoked. I stood me ground. Maybe you hode grudges Sidney, but I'm the forgivin type.'

'Sounds like you been at the Bible agin Cowboy,' Johnny says.

'But I'm feelin rale nostalgic for tha chain,' The Cowboy walks twards Johnny an maybe Johnny's right tha somhins wrong with the choices I'm makin cos suddnly I'm the fuckin lunatic standin in front a The Cowboy.

'This int a public attraction Cowboy.' I says an Steamer's beside me now, more like refereein than takin sides. 'There'd better be no Donaghues around this camp in the next few days.'

'Well there's the gift horse's mouth now.'

'This is me own problem.'

'You aksed us for help, dint he lads?'

'I did not.'

'You brung him here an now wes all involved like it or not. Theys the experts, they done this sorta thing six times, an int been caught once. They dint fuck up Sidney Flipney. They know what ta do an they get wha they akst for.'

'Nothing happens to the biy.'

‘The biy? It’s naw his health we got to worry bout Sidney Flipney.’ He steps away from me. ‘Anyway, I’m a persnal friend of the biy’s grandfather.’

‘He thinks yer a mentaller.’ The Cowboy called out Gabe Mallin bout a year ago. It were the colic agin. The Doctor wernt happy with us feedin horses from the ground, but The Cowboy acted the eejit askin if he wanted us ta feed them at the kitchen table and get the dogs ta be waiters. The Doc said he’d already been on us bout needin a trough but The Cowboy, he said, ‘Ya dint, I did, ya dint, I did, I dint, ya did, I dint, ya dint, dint, did, did, dint’ and shook his head from side ta side with each did an didn’t. The Doc walked off like he were gonta leave but we stopped him a course. He charged 150 a horse, 300 for any with the colic. It might a been chayper ta shoot em but we brought him down an he left with a thousand and two in his pocket.

‘Money, is tha it?’ I moved twards him.

‘Money? Well thas wha the Donaghues aks for. We can aks for what we want.’ The Cowboy says. ‘Fine tune it ya know, custom fit. If ya want yer biys we gonta need help an they done it before, simple as tha. No foolin this time Sidney. Professional help is wha they are, consultants like. Never know, we might get our names in the paper. I bay sorry if we dint make the front page meself. ‘ He’s laughin an thas wha this is ta him, a fuckin joke.

‘Naw one fuckin cent Cowboy. If there’s a copper on the ground lave it. I’m warnin ya.’

‘You? Warning? Me?’ He moves in ta me close an I’m tirin a him but I also dint need to have me face smashed in.

A roar from the biys, Finn is down on the ground. Gerry Joyce is standin over him laughin an then The Indian an Little Joe are on him straight away, pushin him at the shoulders. BigAl, Johnnyrocket an Stevo drag Finn up onta the chair. The girls are all scramin an hiss in like cats. The Cowboy is yellin now too, encouragin his cam.

‘Fuck sake,’ I start ta walk down but Francie grabs me shoulder. I push off Francie’s hand.

‘We mighten need ta worry if young Gerry has anhin ta do with it,’ The Cowboy laughs.

Francie’s starin at me an I coulda done with larynin him, ‘Wha dya want?’

‘It’s gona happen quick Sid. It’s already late. Tomorra or the next day.’

‘Whas yer point?’

‘Yer stallin here no more. Once ya got the biys yer gone. To Tuam or Tralee or Anvil Park or to tha place in Valencia you an Annie went last year, an for a while like til they forgotten you. The lad’s alrigh, so they won’t be on you forever, but you need ta plan cos yer gone.’

Johnny an JP are beside us him listenin, I look at them but they dint do nothin. Cowboy is grinnin like a prick.

‘Ah Sidney, we’ll miss ya,’ He hits the top of me back as he walked past, pushing me forward an I lost me footin. Me choices are ta get banged up agin or ta disappear. Annie an me neither a us wanted ta move into the house. But her family needed her an they were delighted she were home, she dint mind the house or so she said. We were only after movin when Magdalena were born an then Jack come along. She’d laugh at me now gettin tender about a fuckin house. Imagine a Traveller man not wantin ta lave his caen. Fuckin ridiclus, but there it is so.

A fine balance

The day the report was released my father and Mark secured the first tee time at Portmarnock. I was still angry with my father but I knew somewhere in his perverted logic he was on my side. He’d responded himself to a call out from the Travellers’ estate that Sid Connors lived on. He told me later Connors was there but most of his dealings were with John Stokes and Joe McDonagh, the one they call The Cowboy. Six horses had colic to varying degrees and he made almost 1200 euro out of it. His defence was that it was an animal welfare situation and the only other vet who would deal with Travellers was away. He told me I wasn’t going to dictate who he could or

could not service. I asked him if he'd ever heard of the concept of family loyalty. We hadn't talked for three months and Mark's idea to end the standoff was golf. I wasn't in great form that morning. My drives were pathetic and I couldn't hit more fly balls if I'd tried. By the third hole, the birds have pretty much fecked off and Mark, knowing what my mind was preoccupied with, asked what was the worst possible outcome of the report. I considered it a moment: being kicked off the bench, losing my reputation, my livelihood. Mark looked at me as though I'd lost the plot and I had to concede that wouldn't happen, even O'Neill had found a job in Europe.

The Chief Justice maintained including the *Attorney General vs Connors* in his report was a necessary technicality. He was sticking to his story despite my attempts to call him out, which were many and plentiful. You might say I had a touch of neurosis. The case was included in the report because Henry intended his review to be exhaustive. He wanted to put the criticism to bed before something destroyed the fine balance. Things were tentatively holding. He told me to trust him, but I don't think I do. I was shocked when they first made me the offer. Mark was the only person I could trust. He said to do it and that was the right decision. They kept their end of the deal and I was fucking delighted to be out of Family Court. I would have done a lot more for a lot less. I'm not sure why they made the arrangement, insurance maybe, feeling the need to own someone perhaps, but the ruling in and of itself was obvious.

A reading of Article 40.3 would have sufficed, but in the end my verdict was comprised of two major arguments: the psychiatry report and the statement from the HSE. Most novels didn't read as well as this psych report. The main concern was that there was little evidence of a reduction of the trauma and shock within any member of the Connors' family. Flashback memories, an inability to recollect major parts of the trauma, sleeping difficulties, including recurring distressing dreams and insomnia and actively avoiding stimuli such as evading conversations associated with the accident were all prevalent within the survivors. In addition, problems with anger control, sustaining concentration and hypervigilance, which was extreme at times, were significant issues as well. The three psychiatrists diagnosed nervous shock and post traumatic stress disorder. Each doctor explicitly noted that given the involvement of children, the nature of the accident and the severity of the symptoms—all of which were noted in several medical reports in the days following

the accident—the health authorities had failed in their responsibility to care for the family. The report recommended immediate and significant action to ensure the children did not suffer long-term damage and an inquiry into the HSE’s actions.

The second argument of the verdict was the HSE’s statement, which detailed the attempts of social workers and community nurses to contact and visit the Connors’ family at several different listed addresses. In each encounter, Connors was uncooperative, verbally abusive and threatened two HSE staff with physical harm. Because the children, ages eight, seven and five, had been left unsupervised at home for extended periods lasting days and up to one week, both the report and the statement concluded that Connors was unable to assume full parental responsibility or provide a stable and secure home for his dependents.

How else could I respond? The other Travellers were ludicrous in their promises to care for the children, certainly the testimony of those with criminal records were absurd. Joe McDonagh was released barely two weeks from a six-month sentence in Wheatfield for locking another Traveller in a six by six cattle box as a means of extortion, and he stood in front of me as if he were serious. The Stokes family may have been a possible foster placement, Catherine Stokes was impressive and she made a good point about the importance of keeping the children within the familial structure, but redressing the fundamental problem of trauma and its effects was crucial and followed recent precedent. Connors was allowed contact with his children in regular weekly visits. Assessments were scheduled to occur at six month intervals with hopes of returning the children as soon as possible. The idea was to assist the children and afford Connors an opportunity to address his health and return to full obligations slowly.

The media labelled the case the Alexander Affair, after Kevin Alexander, the medical doctor from Greystones, who crashed into the Connors’ family car on a Saturday night three years ago at the Kilmoon Cross Junction on the N2 in Meath. The mother and daughter were killed instantly. Alexander pleaded guilty to causing death by dangerous driving and to driving with excess alcohol before Judge Cormac O’Neill in Dublin Circuit Criminal Court. When it came to the sentencing stage, O’Neill asked Judge Murphy to stand in for him. This wasn’t unusual but unfortunate in light of what was to come. Murphy sentenced Alexander to four-years

with leave to apply for review after two, and banned him from driving for twelve years.

Initially Alexander was incarcerated in Wheatfield Prison, but after six months was transferred to Shelton Abbey, an open prison with pleasant surroundings, good amenities and relaxed security. One of Alexander's regular visitors was Paul Martin, a former Fianna Fáil councillor and friend to the Taoiseach at the time. A month into Alexander's stay at Shelton, the Minister for Justice received an inquiry from the Taoiseach's office as to the possibility for day release for Alexander.

Around the same time, Stephen Coyne, a Supreme Court Justice was walking his dog in Herbert Park. He met his neighbour's son and his girlfriend, who was Alexander's sister, having a picnic dinner on the far side of Herbert Park Lake. Within a week, the Dublin County Registrar had re-listed Alexander's case. Correct procedure dictated Murphy conduct the review, but instead O'Neill reviewed the case. The hearing lasted seven minutes, at the end of which the remainder of Alexander's sentence was remitted. Neither the Gardaí nor the DPP were notified of the review or of Alexander's release. The only state representative was a clerk from the Chief State Solicitor's office who spotted the listing in the court diary that morning. The DPP brought a High Court challenge to O'Neill's decision to release Alexander, but prior to this case being heard Alexander voluntarily returned to prison. Around the time of the second hearing, a local farmer in Knock Kilua in Westmeath alerted the Gardaí to the three Connors children living alone in a caravan nearby his property. The children were immediately placed in State care and Connors was charged with wilful neglect.

Connors came into the court room all meek and mild, with the hat-in-the-hand trick and defending himself initially. He broke into tears, he said he didn't know what he was like anymore, he said he was lost, he had isolated himself from his family. When none of that worked, every first, second and third cousin east of the Dingle peninsula all muckraked in: it was their fault, they should have tried harder, won't happen again, promise. Then he tried moral indignation and insulted me to the degree a contempt charge was a foregone conclusion from the most lenient of judges. The Guards were beginning to hate the case for I had them removing overly emotive

spectators on a daily basis. The supervisor told me removing the occasional problem case from a court room was fine, enjoyable even, despite the paperwork but this case was in the top ten for removals and once out of the court the people turned from sentimental wrecks into vipers.

During the case I kept remembering a plot from somewhere, *Blackadder* maybe, where the murderer is caught pulling the knife from the victim's body. The lawyer not alone gets him off but successfully sues the victim's family for laundry for his bloody clothes. But this was not *Blackadder* and the three children were placed in care that afternoon. Afterwards, on a bench outside the Four Courts, Connors lectured the media about the corrupt judiciary. Two months later when I was appointed to the High Court, Connors was outside the Four Courts again screaming conspiracy.

My father is still the best golfer in our family, although I can challenge him, Mark was never very good. He only golfed for the conversation. At the twelfth hole he changed tact and asked this time what I thought the best possible outcome would entail. What happened in the end wasn't too far from my answer. The Chief Justice's report cleared me of any misconduct. O'Neill's handling of the matter and Coyne's intervention were both condemned as acts that compromised the administration of justice. Coyne was the first to resign, expressing deep regret for his inappropriate behaviour. O'Neill resigned his position shortly after, reminiscent of a reluctant schoolboy.

Later that evening we celebrated at Mark and Ruth's house. They were all there to congratulate me, even Bridget who was convinced it was me who killed her dog. After dinner, after the cake, forks tinked off of wine glasses and I stood up to speak. I don't remember exactly what I said: something about being exhausted, the help of friends, support, I may have said a joke, but standing there in the door way Ruth had placed her jaw on Mark's shoulder and he bent his head back towards hers. They were holding hands.

To say I've never wanted a relationship would be untrue. I've only ever wanted a career more. I'm in my mid-forties and I'm a High Court judge. Something has to go. My last relationship was with a philosophy lecturer at Oxford almost a decade ago, it was long distance and went on for three years. Things were great until

she started wanting to know where the relationship was heading. She was willing to move to Dublin and teach at Trinity or UCD. She had it sorted. Children and a wife would be nice, but maybe not with her. Before I decided, I visited Mark who had all of that in Vancouver.

My arrival coincided with a particularly rough patch in Mark and Ruth's marriage. I may not have chosen my time well, but Mark was grateful and later in remembering the visit he asked how I knew his marriage was in trouble. He thought I'd come to support him. He'd been sleeping in Finn's bed for almost a month, while Finn slept with Ruth. Other than me, no one else was aware of what was happening. Outside the house, they played it up as if all was fine. Mark had been in Canada almost a decade but had yet to apply for citizenship (papers organised and application in before I left) and Ruth had no overriding parental shortcomings, I was still Senior Counsel then but I'd have wagered on a Canadian court granting her full custody.

I knew they were holding back for my sake but occasionally the fighting would bubble up. I rarely saw Ruth or Finn, and Mark wasn't at his best during that visit. He was quick to argue and slow to let things drop. Late on the Saturday afternoon we'd just returned from a puck-around in the park when Ruth walked downstairs in a green halter dress.

'Going somewhere?' Mark asked.

'I thought I'd invite Denis to dinner with me. A nice quiet affair, you won't mind Mark?' She was a certifiable lunatic. This confirmed it. Mark was somewhere between laughing and ready to punch her.

'We'll all eat together, shall we, the three of us,' Denis responded.

'Three's a crowd,' She motioned towards Mark and walked into the kitchen.

Mark tried to laugh it off. 'Do you see what she's like?'

I changed the conversation, but Mark wasn't listening. My analysis of Kilkenny's chances this season mid-sentence was interrupted with a 'fuck her', and with his hurl followed her into the back of the house. I remember dropping into the green recliner, thinking about my options as their threatening whispers grew in

volume. I still had four days on my ticket. I was thinking about San Diego, Bronagh Steeves lived there then. Later after I'd showered and dressed and then steeled myself before entering the kitchen, I found her hunched over the table with her head down. Mark was nowhere to be seen.

'He's outside,' She said from the nest of her arms. Her face was red and she was drying her eyes.

Mark was leaning over on the swing, facing the green bushes in the corner.

'Will you leave him?'

She shrugged. 'We can't afford to split up. So this is how we live. And now he has this idea to move to Ireland, not because he misses home, but because he'd have more legal rights there or something.'

'Well that's not necessarily true.'

'He said you told him that.'

'I've been misquoted.'

Mark slammed the door behind him when he came in.

'So what will we do for dinner then?' Not only did I not want to eat dinner with these two, I didn't want to be in this kitchen, in this city, in this country, on this continent.

Mark laughed to himself, as if he thought we were conspiring against him. 'Do what you want. I'm going to get Finn.' He grabbed the keys from the top of the fridge and by the anxiety on Ruth's face, I knew Mark had won in the what-to-do-now stakes. But before he left, Mark returned into the kitchen and asked if she was coming. She nodded, grateful, I understood, and she said for me to come along, we'd have dinner somewhere all together on the way home. She touched my shoulder and spoke it lightly into my ear. When I turned to stand up Mark was staring at me as if I'd been the one who crossed a line. And this is what marriage did to people. Was it the constant compromise or the lack of self-efficacy? The answer for Pamela was a resounding no.

Somewhere between wanting to kill each other and having her jaw on his shoulder, him tilting his head back and she standing up to kiss him on his cheek, they managed to make their marriage work. And then he was in the hospital room. Ruth was so sure he was getting better and it was obvious to everyone except her he was only alive because of the machines. At one point she said that he'd worked so hard for everything in his life, how could it end like this. As if working hard was insurance against premature death. She thinks about it too much. Still. As if she'll think her way out of grief. I suppose it's harder for women to control their emotions. Initially she was alright, which thinking back now is a terrible sign. With everything happening at work, Henry's report and the media scrutiny, I had become accustomed to conversations with Mark and it wasn't long before she assumed the role of confidante. Tom warned said I was becoming too close, but I actually thought she needed me. Then Bridget described the night she'd knocked on her door and when there was no answer she peeked in through the window and saw Ruth sitting on the couch staring into space, and I realised how little she talked of herself. She invented ridiculous stories about how and whom she spent her time with, she cancelled plans at the last minute if she even bothered to show up and then her bank manager rang him to enquire about the mortgage payments she'd missed.

She was using anti-depressants intermittently as her doctor tried to find the right fit. One caused her blood pressure to hit the roof, another made her drowsy to the point of incapacitation, on another she developed a rash across her face. The substitute teaching keeps her mind pre-occupied. I'll be grateful when she gets a more stable contract. But Finn's manoeuvre on the balcony tipped the apple cart. Both of them need stability, they need routines and maybe some help. My mother suggested that either she and/or my father stay with them for a while until Finn's leg improved. My parents were as bad at grieving as Ruth was and the whole lot of them together would eat each other. So I've decided to stay with Ruth and Finn myself. I haven't told her this though, I'll ease her into it. This was about getting her out of a destructive pattern of thinking, providing Finn with support, and me with some company.

Considering Finn had ruptured his femoral vein he was getting on mighty. He needed crutches for the two weeks before he returned to school and he was still walking slow but undeterred otherwise. I brought work back with me and used

Mark's desk, which was strange at first but then reassuring. I prepared Finn's breakfast and lunches, cooked dinner, helped Finn with his homework. Tom came over the night of the Barcelona match. My parents came down on Tuesday. The next night the three of us watched *Total Recall* together. Finn talked about his school, friends, his ambitions which were mostly in astronomy but he did ask about the law and what it was like being a judge. This was about going forward.

Oliver Plunkett: martyr

The story is my Dad was killed in a car accident. Three other people were killed too. The guy driving the first car said he was certain he saw the green light and turned around to hand his kid something and by the time he looked up he'd crashed into the car in front of him who crashed into my Dad who was on his own green light. My Dad died, the kid in the first car died, the lady in the second car died and another lady crossing the street did as well. Other people were really badly injured. The guy in the first car is a mess.

My Mom says we have to try to forgive him but she's only saying that cos she thinks that's what she's supposed to say. She doesn't forgive him, not in a million years. I don't. I won't ever. I can't. How could I? My Grandma, who can barely speak about it, says we have to forgive too and that guy has a lot on his conscience. She says God works in mysterious ways. My other grandmother, Granny Joan in Vancouver, doesn't believe in God. She's Buddhist now. She and my Grandpa Ben and loads of others from Vancouver were here for my Dad's funeral, all my aunts and uncles and my cousins came. It would have been awesome if Dad was here. Granny stayed with us for two months but eventually my Mom said she couldn't keep on forever. The original plan was Vancouver for Christmas but after the accident Grandma would have freaked out if we went. So we left on January tenth instead and I got out of school until February. I had homework to do though. My Mom and Uncle John and Grandpa tried, but they weren't much help. It was the first time me and my Mom were in Vancouver again since we moved. Dad had been there twice for work since we moved here. We were supposed to go all together at

Christmas, but then, you know that already. We drove past our old house. They painted the front door red. The house is a salmon colour so the red doesn't really match. When we owned it the door was wood. My Mom was upset so Grandpa drove away. All our flowers are still there though.

My Grandpa has a boat and three kayaks so we used to paddle and sail a lot and I miss that. Dublin is cool too, in different ways though. I haven't decided where is best. Toby Gleeson is my best friend in Dublin. Does that sound gay? Hope not, but he is. We're in the same class at school and he lives on the same road as me. His Dad and my Dad met each other when they were at university. His Dad, his name is Colin and he's in the Guards. He's a real guard, he used to carry a gun even, but he's high up now so he doesn't need it anymore. He was in the war in Bosnia even and they all lived in Holland for a while when he was an investigator in the trial of the guy who started the war there. So Toby knows what it's like to live somewhere different too. That's not why we're friends but it helps.

I'm on a football team and a soccer team. My Dad played GAA in Vancouver. Everyone else in my family here played too, not my Grandma or Mom though. My teams are Dublin or Meath, those were my Dad's teams too. I've been to Croker loads of times. We take the Dart there. It's like a five minute walk from our house and then five minutes to Croke Park. We don't drive and get stuck in miserable traffic.

The last game I played was against Artane three weeks ago. I've been to other games since but I can't play till my leg is totally healed. My mom freaked out on me about balancing on the balcony railing, she said she was considering banning me playing ever again. I was ready to argue but Granddad kicked my foot under the table and lowered his hand which meant to relax. My Granddad comes to every single game I play, he did even when my Dad was here and even the matches on weekdays. At my last game I was scared he was going to freak out on me but he did the exact opposite.

It was all cos of Sean Brady who's centre back on Artane and as soon as I saw he was marking me I knew there'd be trouble. He's always calling kids names and taking cheap shots when the referee isn't watching. He kept on at me saying I was a yank and then he was all like your father's dead, what did he do, see you and

have a heart attack? I was so close to losing it but Oisín on my team walked away with me and later arsed him out of it for me. Even a guy on his team told him to stop. I could barely play, no one passed me the ball and Granddad was on the side, yelling at me and walking back and forth. When the halftime whistle blew I was dreading the lecture I was about to get. Toby said he was a knacker, a pure pikey and Oisín stood up for me in front of Granddad, but load a good that did. Granddad hauled me away from the rest of the team as soon as he could reach me.

‘Don’t let him undermine you.’ He wrapped his arm around my shoulders and pulled me real close to him. ‘The next thing you say to him, if his mother fucks anyone else in this town they’re going to make her cunt a heritage stop on the bus tour.’

I couldn’t. No way.

‘He’s a bully, stand up for yourself. Let him know who he’s dealing with.’

‘He’ll kill me.’

‘He won’t. He’ll pretend he will, but he won’t, they’re empty threats Finn. He’s the sort of brat who talks big but doesn’t act.’ He wanted me to goad him into throwing a punch. ‘Make it look as accidental as you can so he’s kicked out and you get a penalty shot. Think strategically, how can you wheedle him to do what you want, it’s up to you to control these fuckers. When you’ve sorted that, do whatever you need to, avoid the ref and no messing.’ I dragged myself back on the field convinced I was a total wimp, but I said it to him anyway.

‘What did you say?’ He asked. So I tried it again.

‘You’ll regret that.’ He said but actually I didn’t think I would. The stupid face on him was hilarious. At another point in the match, I told him to smell his mother’s fingers. And then I made sex noises. I saw that on a TV show.

Finally, I bolted away from him into an opening. Cormac passed to me and then yelled to watch out above. And there he was diving down on top of me. Maybe I should’ve run or maybe I should have curled up and protected my head, but I jumped for some reason. His face cracked against my shoulder, it hurt a lot but Brady’s nose was bleeding so he looked way worse than me. His team bench were

freaking, my team bench were freaking and we were both sent off. Granddad winked and nodded at me, 'Atta boy' as I came off. We won the match and later on at the park Sean Brady threw his hand towards me, he couldn't be bothered.

In Vancouver, I have three uncles and almost three aunts. My uncles are Peter, John and Ray who is married to my Mom's sister, Sarah. Peter is married to Laura and their kids are Colby (my age), Madison and Abby. Abby was only born a two years before we left. Aunt Sarah and Uncle Ray have two kids, Hannah and Ben (Ben is a year older than Colby and me). Uncle John is getting married to Soledad next year. She's from Chile so that's why she has a weird name but hopefully I'll have more cousins soon. Denis is my only uncle here, he's not married though and doesn't have any kids. I have lots of second cousins but no first cousins. Denis was so happy when we moved here. He was pretty lonely I think without my Dad. And my Dad was happy they lived near each other again too. I wish I had a brother, that would be cool. Toby has a sister, Aisling. They fight a lot. I'd like to have a sister too. I'd like to have a brother and a sister. We have another room upstairs someone could go in and if the third kid was my brother, he and I would share a room or if it was a girl then it would share in the girls' room. My Mom was pregnant twice, apart from me. The first baby died at twenty four weeks. The second baby was born at thirty weeks and she lived for four days. My Mom stayed with her and my Dad brought me in three times to see her in the incubator. She had loads of tubes and wires on her and if you stuck your finger in she'd hold it. She had a tiny knitted hat and little knitted mittens to keep her warm even though her incubator was heated. We named her Grace and she's buried in Vancouver beside my Mom's grandparents.

I like my school. Its name is Mount Temple. U2 went there. But nobody talks about that. My Dad said worse things would happen to me. My favourite subject is Science. Biochemistry sounds like a cool job or maybe it's just the word that's cool. I can't really tell you about that. When somebody asks what job I want I say biochemist, or better biochemical engineer. Aeronautical engineer sounds good too but the b is better to start with. I've no idea what those jobs do but that's what I say when people ask and it's so obvious they don't know either but they laugh at my answer cos most kids say a guard or a doctor. Toby wants to be a journalist. I think he should say photojournalist cos it's a bigger word and sounds better.

Worst subject is Social Studies or Irish. I'm in a special class for Irish cos I'm so far behind and I get grinds for it from my second cousin Pádraig who is twenty-two or something and needs the cash my Grandma says. Denis talks to me in Irish and that helps too. Figuring out the different sounds in different places is the hardest part. Social Suckies, though is the worst. I really don't care about history or politics, which totally winds my Mom and Denis up and sometimes they'll even give me a lecture. Last year my teacher asked if Denis could talk to the class but he was too busy so another judge came in and I was so happy it wasn't Denis.

Before Dad's accident we did loads of stuff with Denis, so I'm used to him but since I fell off the balcony he's *always* here. There was one night earlier this week, one night in almost two weeks that he wasn't here.

'He's kind of irritating,' I said to my Mom. We ordered a vegetarian pizza, without sweetcorn, on the Denis-free night and ate it in front of *Coronation Street*. She lifted her eyebrows in a way that means you're totally right.

'He was worried Finn.'

'He was worried about you.'

'He is worried about both of us.' She's forever defending him. It bugs me. 'He has a lot of pressure on him and he's also worried about your grandparents remember. He feels responsible for us and neither one of us help matters.'

'Why's he worried about Grandma and Granddad?' There was a courtroom scene on *Coronation Street* where the judge was wearing a white wig. Once when Dad and I visited Denis at the Courts he caught me with his wig on my head. I've never been in his chambers again.

'Nothing really, they're just . . .' It was the usual. It's what's always wrong with everyone. And not only I can't forgive that guy for killing my Dad, I also hate whatever is wrong is always just this or just that and it's only just about Dad. This is how everybody is now. Everybody is just changed, nothing is ever right and usually they're really sad. It's always the same. No one gets better. But I couldn't say anything cos she'd had the big freak out just last week.

'Why does he spend all his time with you then?'

‘He doesn’t.’

‘He does, you’re always talking.’

‘He needs someone to talk to. We’re friends.’

‘He was massaging your shoulders the other night.’

‘I needed it, trust me.’

‘Doesn’t he have anywhere else to go? What about Tom?’

‘Give over Finn. Maybe he feels needy, I feel needy. I’m scared you’ll do something stupid again and hurt yourself for real. Maybe if you stop fooling around people won’t be so in your face.’

I wasn’t fooling around. I was only trying to balance on the balcony railing. Toby dared me. I almost walked the whole railing as well.

We drove to Drogheda on Saturday and of course Denis had to come, in our car even. Our car is bigger than Denis’ so Mom drove. I don’t know why we go on Saturday cos she always complains about having to go to church the next morning. Why doesn’t she go another day, I asked her, but she only shook her head. I think she secretly loves it. It’s the opposite of Granny. My Mom is all happy she’s Buddhist but when we had a chance to go to their retreat or whatever my Mom made the lamest excuse. My Granny was kind of sad about that but she didn’t say anything.

So we had to go to mass on Sunday with my Granddad and Grandma at St Peter’s. It’s this huge old church splonk in the middle of Drogheda. It totally doesn’t fit. The rest of the street is all these really old small buildings, like two hundred years old, all close together, and a big brown town centre thing in the middle of them all, which doesn’t have any good shops in it, although there was a comic shop there for a while. And then there are a hundred steps up to three massive archways. There’s a big round stained glass window above the arches and keep looking up cos the spire is really high. But be careful where you look up from cos once I did it on the steps and I fell backwards. Mr Gleeson caught me and Dad told me not to be such a dope.

Inside it's like a thousand-foot ceiling and there are all these columns everywhere. Grandma says it reminds her of Chartres Cathedral outside Paris but I don't know cos I've never been there. My parents went to Paris after we moved here and they stuck me for the weekend with Denis and Rose. She was his girlfriend then, they broke up about a month before Dad died. She was at the funeral home and the funeral and later I overheard Grandma complaining to Mom that was overkill. Anyway there are these gold chandeliers hanging down every so often and at first you think they aren't all that much but you get used to them and it's because they aren't all that much that they kind of fit. The floor is diamonds and squares and flowers and then there are four altars. It's crazy. The altars are white stone, I checked once when it wasn't church. The biggest altar has the Last Supper carved into it. It's really good. This is the church my grandparents come to every week, they do stuff with it and have loads of friends here. My Dad's funeral mass was said here. That's why I know the floor so well.

So this day Mom was sitting beside an older woman who looked like a dwarf compared to my Mom when we stood up, Grandma was at the other end near the aisle. They had a fight the night before so Denis and Granddad were keeping them apart. The first reading was from Paul to the Corinthians. My Granddad leaned over to tell the joke like he always does. 'Paddy goes to heaven and walks up to St Paul, "tell me Paul," says Paddy, "Did you ever hear back from the Corinthians?"' He's told me this joke like a million times and I always laugh. Everybody laughs cos it's so dumb. I think it's the way he says it. I remember hoping Paul and the Corinthians wouldn't be at the funeral. I forgot about it until I was in the church and then I was like please no Corinthians cos I didn't want that joke then. I don't know if he would have, but I didn't want it. We were in the first row on the right. We never sat there before and never since. We sit sort of in the middle section on the left. But at the funeral we were on the right and my Dad's casket was on our left. There were three readings at the funeral and none of them were Paul to the Corinthians. My Uncle Peter read, then Denis and then Mr Gleeson read the last one.

In church it was always time to stand again. Standing in the communion line was the best part, there's a good view of all the people and it meant mass was almost over. But it wasn't communion yet. I was a bit lost. They hadn't said the Creed thing yet but the priest hadn't spoken yet either. My Mom was staring at a red bag on the

pew in front of her. Denis was beside her looking at the ceiling. Granddad had crossed his arms listening to the priest and Grandma was working the blue glass rosary through her fingers, so I watched her do that for a while. The music book was always interesting, but she'd probably slap my hand if I picked that up. Time to stand again. The Priest read the gospel and it was short so we sat down while he talked.

On the left side of the church was the shrine to Oliver Plunkett. Best. Thing. In. Any. Church. Anywhere. Ever. There is this huge window box with a big golden spiral at the top, and inside is Oliver Plunkett's actual head from three hundred years ago or something. I'm not kidding. It's not like a plastic head or something it's the guy's real-life head. The head is totally brown, with no hair, his eyes are closed and a few teeth stick out from under the brown lip. If you walk around to the side you can see where his neck was cut. It's awesome cos it's in a church. I've heard the story a million times but I still can't remember if he had anything to do with Oliver Cromwell, but maybe the name is confusing me. Mom knows the history. Anyway, everyone wanted him to turn Protestant, but he wouldn't so they killed him and then the Catholics made him a saint. He was hung, drawn and quartered. I used to think that meant they'd tie you up in between four horses and make them run four different directions, which would be cool, but once when I was talking with Dad about what would happen to the guy's body and when would he die and what would he die of first, Mom said we were sick and disgusting and we never went back to it. There's a big picture of him lying down on a stretcher and being dragged through the streets. I guess that's drawn. Maybe with the four horses thing the head wouldn't survive. They disembowelled him, is that quartered? Did that happen before or after they hung him?

'Finn.'

My Grandma had reached over and slapped my good leg, hard like. I was slumped over with my elbows on my knees staring at the shrine.

'Sorry,' I sat up again.

It was time to stand and then kneel and then everyone queued for communion. I let Denis go before me cos I wanted to sit beside Mom afterwards.

While we were standing, I was thinking about what I'd say if I were in confession but then I saw the red-haired girl from the last time I was here, she was sitting beside her dad and her sister, it was obvious they were related cos they all looked totally the same and then I bumped into Denis. The girl didn't see me so I could stare without feeling bad. She had nice red hair and loads of freckles, she was pretty, one of the first girls I ever noticed like that. My mother snapped her finger in front of my face. Then I cupped my hands and the priest laid the Host in the middle. Some people take it straight into their mouth but my family doesn't do that. Mom said it's unhygienic. I put the Host into my mouth, crossed myself and followed Denis to the pew. I kneeled down and leaned in to Mom but she pushed me off. I said an Our Father and a Hail Mary and there was nothing else to do except watch the people return to their pews. The Host tasted like glue and a little bit was stuck to the roof of my mouth. I used my tongue to move it, when suddenly everyone sat back in their seats.

A trip to Drogheda

Dr Gabe and Maura Mallin,
6 Blackbush Lane,
Drogheda,
County Louth,
Republic of Ireland,
Ireland,
Europe,
Western Hemisphere,
Northern Hemisphere,
Earth,
Solar System,
Milky Way,
Universe
?
53.709839N, 6.341887W

Finn addressed a letter like this but ran out of space and continued it on the back. Mark said postmen in Canada knew where Ireland was and didn't need the rest but I let him send it regardless and Maura thought it was funny. When I first met Mark I was slightly in awe of his foreignness and somehow over the years I forgot about it, I rarely noticed his accent. But every so often this other world of his jutted

into our life. Thank god for caller ID. Visits back were always very intense with loads of booze. Having Finn helped, especially when he was a baby and required sober attention from me. I wasn't deep down crazy about moving but Mark wanted it and I became excited with time.

About two months after Mark died, Maura decided she needed to redecorate the house, which since the day Mark was born had been a shrine to her sons and later grandson. Photographs crammed in on tables and the walls. She even had extra copies of their degrees and honours printed up. Gabe was out somewhere and she was drinking her morning coffee. An old picture on the wall caught her attention. The early eighties, Mark's Inter Cert results celebration. His were the highest in the country that year. The photo had aged probably due to the sun exposure so close to the window. Concentrate on what you have, not what you don't, her doctor and her friends advised her. When she asked me about it I told her I wasn't there yet and didn't know if I ever would be.

By the time Gabe was home for lunch she had removed all but her favourite photos. Sixteen in total: their wedding photo, eight official family photos including two with Finn and me, Finn as a baby, the photo from their last visit almost three years ago in Vancouver (the one I took), Mark's welcome home party, Denis' official High Court photo, Mark's staff photo from Trinity, Finn's recent school photo. She had even hung up the photo of Finn, Mark and I on top of Whistler mountain. Everything else in photo albums. She painted the whole downstairs of the house and then she and Gabe stayed with us for the week while it dried and aired out. The change helped for a while but overall it wasn't any better. How does it happen that this baby who needs everything from you and only you, can only see you and hear you and smell you, how does this baby become a toddler falling down and hurting himself and running to you for care and resenting his younger brother and turning to his father as some sort of punishment against you, but always coming back and needing you even when he's fifteen and been rejected by his first girl or home from college and wanting to spend time with you, or crying at the departure gate promising he'll be home soon and when he does he brings someone he's fallen in love with and later brings his own child home and then one afternoon you pick up the phone and find out he's on life support and probably brain dead?

Nothing goes right then. Maura rarely has good days, she's either irritated or listless. They fight a lot now, she and Gabe. 'He's dead', he keeps saying. 'He's dead.'

'Don't say it,' she screams.

He keeps saying it as if he's punishing himself, as if he did it.

'Why does he do it?' She'll ask Denis, who for the first time in his life, can't give her an answer. She doesn't concentrate on it, doesn't need to. She has a grandson who is the spit of his father and is sounding more Irish every day. Of course focusing on Finn makes her focus on me. She doesn't like mine and Denis' friendship. This much I know. She thinks Denis is wasting time, delaying marriage and having his own children, as if she thinks this is actually going to happen. Gabe says only that she's too sensitive about everything.

We went up on the Saturday afternoon and stayed overnight. Finn and Denis were outside with the football and Maura and Gabe were whispering in strained tones when I walked into the kitchen. I cleared my throat to announce my presence. There was no need, they'd noticed me already. Gabe went to join the boys and Maura cleared a place at the table and set down a cutting board and knife. Garlic and onions needed to be chopped. Potatoes had to be peeled and cut in half.

Maura turned the radio on, 'For some company.' There was a chicken in the oven, the parsnips and carrots were ready and she was icing dessert. The potatoes were holding up the process.

I'd made my way through two pounds when Maura walked over, 'Who taught you how to peel potatoes?'

'Pardon me?'

'You're throwing half the potato away,' The anxiety was growing in her voice. 'That's not how you do it.'

'Show me how you want me to do it,' I handed her the knife.

Maura began to flick small shavings off the potato, 'Small peels, like this. It's quicker and wastes less.' She returned the potato and knife. 'Now you do it.'

I stared at her a second, 'I'm not a child.' Hard to pull off when your mother-in-law is standing above you, hands on hips. I sighed loudly and began peeling in the manner she'd been shown.

'Good girl,' Maura said and returned to the cake. She turned her back to me but I'm sure with the eyes in the back of her head saw the dirty look I was giving her. I know she thinks I'm a good mother and wife but she's disappointed in me somehow. She wants to be friends with me, to be able to talk, like how her friend Elsie does with her daughter-in-law. But that just not me, we don't click. I respect her, but we're two different types of people. It doesn't help that she's never liked my family, Mark told me so. We're too nice apparently, and bubbly and laughing, laughing, never stopping with the laughing and never shutting up about how wonderful it was that Mark was part of our family, apparently. And Mark *was* part of my family. We accepted him for who he was, we didn't try to force him into a specific role. She doesn't like my mother. She thinks she's ridiculous, now that she's a Buddhist, and she doesn't eat meat and chains herself to trees. She was arrested a few months ago for civil disobedience, which didn't fare well in the public relations department. I overheard her tell Denis that she'd need good *luck* getting into Ireland again, to which Denis replied it was a good thing she was related to a high court judge. Denis tells her loads of shit about me but then so did Mark. Mark told her about the miscarriages and about when I went into labour at six months. I'm sure she knew about our problems in our marriage, the ones that were my fault anyway. Let's face it, Maura was shocked we lasted fourteen years. She thinks I don't like her, maybe I don't. But certainly I don't like what she wants me to be.

'Ow.' I dropped the knife onto the table. Blood streamed. I sucked on my thumb.

'What in God's name have you done now?' Drops of blood speckled the cutting board. 'Ah Ruth, it's as if you've never been inside a kitchen before.' Maura turned on the tap. 'Come here and put your thumb under the water.'

Denis appeared on the other side of the screen door. Maura stepped away from me, 'She's managed to maim herself.' She rolled her eyes, 'Will you find a plaster for her? Before she bleeds all over my kitchen. There should be some in the press.'

Denis returned with the small box. I dried my thumb with a paper towel and he unravelled the plaster onto the cut and told me to rest outside, he'd finish helping and then he rubbed his hand over my plaster, petting me. Maura was watching the whole time with sort of a morbid fascination. When she met my glance, she quickly turned back to her bowl of icing.

Dinner was fine. One less rubber chicken in the wild. Both Maura and Gabe were delighted to hear about my job possibility. Gabe said we'd give the house a good maintenance once over to make sure all is settled before September. Maura offered her services if balancing everything becomes too much. She said it might be beneficial if Finn came and stayed with them for a while in the summer so he could be taught some basic skills, learn how to peel potatoes, for instance. My knife had a serrated edge and pointy bit at the end. I glanced over to Finn, who looked like Christmas had been cancelled.

'It's all well and good to know the names of comets and meteorites or history dates, but he needs some basic skills.'

'It'd be good if we could get him ironing,' Finn looks at me as if I was a traitor.

'So you don't know how to iron either?'

'That was a joke actually.'

'Do you know what you're getting yourself into?' She asked Denis.

'Pardon?'

'Please don't make the same mistake Mark made.'

'What—'

Denis interrupted and kicked me under the table, 'If I could find a woman that put up with all my shit like Mark did I'd have everything sorted.'

'Ah for God's sake,' Maura was disgusted.

'What are you saying?' I decided to try again with her.

‘I’m saying it would be good for Finn to come stay with us for a while.’

‘Because I’m not a good mother.’

‘He needs to learn some basic skills, that’s all.’

Finn laid down his utensils and stared at his plate in silence.

‘What was the mistake Mark made?’

‘Oh god Ruth, why must everything be overanalysed with you, only just that you can’t peel a potato.’

‘I only scraped my finger.’

‘Yes, straight into the potatoes and in caring for you I nearly burnt the chicken.’

Finn looked up at me and I wanted to say it might have added some flavour but I kept my mouth shut. The awkward silence was soon broken when Denis changed the conversation to the local politician’s latest scandal with a seventeen-year-old from Clones.

After church the next day Gabe, Maura, Denis, Finn and I talked to other parishioners on the steps. Maura introduced Finn to an old man he’d met a thousand times before, but still the man didn’t remember Finn.

Mary O’Neill and Joanne Berger were thrilled to see Finn and I. Mary remarked that we hadn’t been up in a couple weeks, and then twigged why and said ‘oh yes’ and paused again.

‘It’s great you’re up and healthy Finn,’ Jo covered for her. ‘You’re a grand boy altogether.’

‘I can’t play sports for at least another month.’

‘And you’re looking well,’ said Jo to me. ‘After the other son are we?’ She laughed.

‘Maura’s always talking about how she misses you,’ Mary was making up for lost ground. ‘You’re the daughter she never had.’

Gabe called out to an acquaintance and left. Denis followed. I clenched Finn’s shoulders, holding him close. He was going nowhere. Maura grabbed Jo’s arm and walked down the rest of the steps with both her friends. Finn wrangled out of my grip and stared back at me. I was scratching my eyebrow. He said I didn’t look so good.

A Feen with a Long Tober to Misli

They all folla me inta me caen, the seventeen thousand kids tha live on this estate. Reglar thing this is at night, but usually it were ta see me off ta sleep. They take care a me, these wans. Sometimes they talk about how is gonta be like when me biys come home, but tonight it were different.

‘Gerry Joyce just calt BryanAdams over.’

‘He fired in on him an he knew BryanAdams never fighted in his life before.’

‘He barely had gloves on.’

When it happened Maggie ran ta Ellie next door ta the shed an akst for a cloth for his face, an once we got inta me caen Molly goes straight inta me kitchen an gets another one. Johnnyrocket’s moanin on how he’s in big trouble now thanks ta Gerry Joyce an I tell him to go find his ma.

Finn was hodin his tears. ‘I didn’t do anything.’

‘Yer not gonta cry are ya?’ BigAl says. ‘He’s only an old bollix.’ A few a them start laughin at Finn.

‘You dint mind Gerry Joyce BryanAdams. He’s a gobshite,’ Says Molly who’s in charge a nursin him.

‘Dya see the hidin The Indian gave him?’

‘Dya see the hidin his Ma gave him?’ They’re all laughin now even Finn.

Finn’s tryin hairid not ta cry. I push Kenny an Christy out from beside him an sit but they pour in over me. BigAl has his arm over Finn’s shoulder an MickyD is restin his elbows on the couch behind, Molly is still nursin him.

‘Maybe you should stick ta the science eh—’ an as I launch into a speech about Travellers’ good nature, Catherine’s in the door.

‘Oh for—’ She puts her hand on her head. ‘Winnie an Steamer’s Gerry is it?’

‘Catherine, dint start somhin,’ Says I.

‘Dint start somhin, whas this biy’s muther gonta say Sid?’

Well thas a point. An then I think it’s half ten, she probly has a few fuckin choice things ta say right now. By the time Catherine’s back, we got Finn laughin agin. BigAl aks if Finn can sleep in their rume. He say’s he’ll sleep in the blow up bed even. I wernt sure, cos Catherine dint need more hassle but she towed them ta use the pump ta blow up the mattress this time cos she’s not takin any kid ta A&E for losin consciousness tonight. The other biys want ta stay over too, but she only ignored them.

Catherine’s shakin her head, ‘What a ya like Sid?’ She’s always takin care a evryone else, an always no bother on herself. After Annie died she were the wan who cared for us, she were the only rayson I ayte, an me house were clayne an I dint notice any a it, an still she’s the only rayson I ayte an have clayne clothes. Even after when Johnny an I fell out an I left like I did she still stood up for me in court. When he gave out his judgement she was yellin an shoutin so they hadta take her out but she were scramin off the top a her lungs the whole time.

‘I need me biys home,’ Says I ta her.

‘The Social agreed—’

‘They agreed on six month Catherine. Tha were a year ago, evryone’s gone ta them. The two a you, Mary an Peter Mac, Winnie an Steamer, Paddy an Mary in Dublin, evryone in me own family. They dint want ta know. The thing is—an this is all I can figure out—theys stalling cos they dint like Travellers.’

‘Go on outta tha.’

‘It’s true.’

‘It has to go through the courts.’

‘There’s no danger forgettin wha the courts think a me.’

‘Sid you do this an you’ll never get those childers home, ya get me? Christ sake theys not all wrong, it’ll take time, the Court backlog they said it were. You’ll still see the biys evry week an once evryones together agin you won’t have to run.’

I cover me face, ‘It were suppost ta be six month, it’s almost double tha now. One afternoon once a week Catherine, three hours if Social feels genrous.’

She stares a me. She reminds me a little a Annie but with blond hair. She dyes her hair though now an it’s cut short. Annie’s were brown an long. They both have the brown eyes. When I met them at Spencil Hill I sang tha song ta Annie even before she were me girl an thas how I won her over.

‘This needs to be ended Sid. Stop an think whats goin to happen here, what yer doin to us all, what about the biy’s family, ya get me?’

‘I can’t do anyhin anymore, evryhin I touch—’

‘Ah no you need to forget tha. No, I’m toleratin this no more. Cop onta yerself. This int provin nothin an it’s only goin to end with a lot a people getting hurted. Yer wreckin our heads so you are, Johnny’s an mine. This needs to be ended.’

I’d tell her thanks but she dint want ta hear it, in fact she dint want ta hear nothin from me. She says ta sleep, tomorra is goin ta be an unusual day. I walk with her ta her house cos I want ta make sure Finn’s alright ya know but he’s out cowl’d,

though the other biys are playin with his computer game thing. I say goodnight ta Catherine, Johnny's already sleepin so I go back ta mine.

I shoulda helped the biy, Finn I mayne. But Johnny an his biys were there an then a few a the women scramin murder an Winnie smacked Gerry cross the head for batin Finn an it were bad for Gerry cos he'd been hassled by some of the biys an then evryone seen his ma smack him an there wernt nothin he could do cos too many men were round. He walked away after she started how Ray'd never do somhin like tha an Gerry only yelled at her then 'Well maybe you'd prefer fuckin Ray here.' An he were hurted by her, but Winnie Joyce dales the final blow when she yells, 'I would.' But I know if the day ever comes when Gerry laves, Winnie'll be fuckin baluba.

I'd a liked ta talk ta Finn more but he was wrecked so I let him off with BigAl an Johnnyrocket. Now I'm in me kitchen. The counter an floor near the sink is all wet an I member Maggie got the towel for Finn. I make some tay an then sit down at the table. Back before, I'd arrive in more than once ta find the lot a them here in me kitchen talkin with her. This is where they usta all meet cos Annie had the two babbies.

There's a few breakfast rolls in the fridge still. I only a fridge these days for take-away an craym. I clear the pictures on the table outta the way ta ayte me roll. I were workin for Johnny when Annie died. Just labourin or movin things when he akst me ta. Landscapin. He gev me loads a time off ta make it ta Court, but still I got me weeks wages evry Friday. I wernt thinkin straight then. With Catherine fixin me life here an Johnny fixin me there, I got sick a them. He akst me ta work on a Saturday so I says I'd sons to raise an he says I'd ta get over meself an work an I says I dint need him an his mot to be lickin me hole evry second a evry day an back an forth an ventually I hit him. Not once not twice, I dint know how many times. Anyway dint feel sorry for him, he knows how ta throw a punch an I came out the wrong end a tha fight. Micko McDonagh an Tommy had ta seprate us. I left with me biys tha night. I went ta over by Knock Kilua ta a spot we usta stall at before when wes were younger. Away from fuckin evryone. I signed on there, got a few handy jobs haulin things an we was alrigh, till the second court date came up anyway. I were drivin back an forth but it were no good. I were only gone two

days, the biys were fine. They'd a phone, food, a telly an their bikes, they was in fuckin heaven. Only then do I get the call about the Guards pickin them up an tha I was wanted in Mullingar town to face charges of abandonin me childers. In fairness to Johnny an Catherine they wasted no time findin me an helpin me. They bringed me back here.

There's post on the table tha came durin the week. Junk mostly. Most a it about sellin property or insurance. Me hole. It's all a fuckin scam. Control is wha this is. No drinkin, no smokin, can't say this, can't do tha, do be this weight an this age an even if you pay us if you do any a these things wrong you'd be as well off ta burn the fuckin money. Even both times I were paid out the only way they'd gev me money were through a bank an then they dint want me ta take it out. They insure a drink driver an let him off after six month of four-years for killin me wife an me daughter an then they try ta force me ta lave money in their bank. I dint fuckin think so. They tell me I can't manage an I can't be no father an I've ta folla instructions, take their poxy courses an folla their skedule.

I fuck the chair cross the room with me foot, drop me breakfast roll ont a the table an go outside cos I slammed holes in nearly evry fuckin wall in this house an it's beginnin ta look strange. I've me own bag an I'm punchin now.

Francie's words are in me head. It's gonta happen tomorra which is today or the next day which is tomorra an time is tickin. I ought ta pack. Mainly I'd only take the pictures. Now we'll be four, the biys only. An now I can't hode me fuckin head up but I kayp punchin an is it Magdalena or Annie who I'm like this for right now? But if I just get the biys it'll be a start. Not ta tha day in Valencia agin when Jack stole Maggie's bear an Mick an Paddy were scrappin an Maggie were cryin an then Jack were cryin an Mick towd me his head hurted an you an Paddy went off ta see if distance could bring pace, but it'll be somhin. I love tha scramin an fuss. It's better than quiet.

(Self) Sabotage

On the drive home, Mom was still angry. I sat in the back and Denis drove cos basically she was busy complaining about Grandma. He looked at me in the mirror and tried to change the conversation. He even asked me a question but I was playing a game on her phone. I listened for a while, it was all about how rude Grandma was to her and how she never liked her and she talked about that for ages. I don't think Grandma doesn't like my Mom, but maybe it's cos they're both girls.

Denis said for her to stop insulting Grandma. She's a great mother and she'd done more for him and my Dad than anyone else. She was struggling he said and my Mom should lay off. That didn't go down so well. Denis tried to calm her down, but she was angry. As if she wasn't struggling, she said, don't talk to me. So he asked me what music I wanted to listen to and I said The Beastie Boys, and he said perfect, which was unusual cos they were my Dad's favourite band but Denis never listened to them before.

When we got home, I searched around for Dad's book on physiology. Seeing Oliver Plunkett made me wonder how his face survived four hundred years. I searched everywhere downstairs and the attic but no joy. Into Mom's room, maybe Dad read it. Mom never moved anything so technically it could still be there. Papers on the bed, nothing interesting. A bag from Brown Thomas on her dresser. I picked up bits and then realised it was some sort of bra and flung it back in the bag. She had twenty quid and exactly four euro eighty-five of change on her dresser. There was a cufflink on the shelf under the mirror. She must have been through Dad's stuff again.

I searched through the bedside lockers and there it was. Dad's physiology book. I sat on the bed and looked at the pictures for a bit. When I got up to go downstairs and read it on the couch, I saw the shirt and tie hanging in the closet. All of Dad's clothes were organised by Denis and both my grandfathers after the accident. She saved his better and favourite clothes for me and they split the rest between themselves. Granddad didn't want any, he said it wasn't right. Some of Dad's clothes were given to charity or that was her story. I happen to be informed

those bags are at the back of Mom's closet and in the spare room. This was Denis' shirt and tie.

A couple hours later, he was sitting on her bed. She was napping and he was waking her up but—hello—you can knock and say wake up from the hallway. Why is he even in their bedroom? That's off limits. I heard him planning dinner. This was like six nights in a row including the Drogheda trip. The only time I spend alone with my own mother is in the morning or immediately after school. So I went to the kitchen when she was making dinner. She was banging pots and pans and slamming the presses and when I asked if I could help she said she was fine.

'You don't seem fine.'

'I'm not in a great mood, what do you want?'

'I want to help.'

'No, no, thanks anyway I appreciate it but it's best for me to work on my own today.'

'Can I sit?'

She nodded and so I did. She asked how my leg was and I said it was hurting and so she handed me painkillers with a glass of water.

'I really like Sal, Toby's new dog. Can he stay here sometimes, like when they go on vacation.'

'Just what we need.'

She didn't take the bait, so I continued. 'Maybe we could get a dog too so they could be friends.'

'Finn, I wouldn't be able to cope with a dog.'

'I'll look after it.'

'Not today okay. We'll talk about it some other time maybe, but I can't do this now.'

'You're always too busy or too upset, you're always something.'

‘Finn—’

‘You’re never too busy to talk to Denis.’

‘I can’t do this. Go watch television or to your bedroom or to Toby’s okay, just please leave me alone for a bit.’

I stood up and kicked the chair behind me. My water glass tipped over, but I only realised that when she yelled at me to get back there and clean it up. I pretended I didn’t hear her. I went out the front door and slammed it hard. Denis was getting out of his car, back from the shops. I opened the gate and slammed it behind me as well.

‘Hello,’ He closed the car door with his foot cos he had two bags in his hands.

‘I didn’t realise you’d left.’

‘What’s wrong?’

I flipped it, ‘You’re what’s wrong. You’re always here, don’t you have a house to live in? Why can’t you just leave us alone?’

He stood there thinking hard, like always. He never reacts or gets angry and he drives me nuts. I was on my way to Toby’s but halfway there I turned around. He was at the door still watching me. He said to come in and talk about it and then he just sauntered inside, like he owned the place. He was in my house. I was outside. He was probably walking down to my mother right this second. And how was it that I was outside of my own house.

I decided to go round the back. If they wanted me inside, fine, I’d sneak up on them. I opened the gate as little as possible and squeezed through. I could hear her yelling. They were in the kitchen. My Mom was at the sink and Denis was leaning on the table with his arms crossed over his chest. I did my best to hide behind the rose bushes that were taller than me. The thorns were really thick and impossible to pull off. She was yelling about dinner, how Ciara Kelly had borrowed her big pot three months ago and hadn’t returned it and the nerve of her. Every fucking pot and

pan was stolen or scratched or ruined. Everything is ruined she said and then she looked out and saw me standing there.

‘Get in here.’

Not exactly a great invitation. I could still go to Toby’s. I might be able to stay the night except I wanted to find out what was happening.

‘Why can’t you tell me those things? About the pots,’ I said when I came in.

She said she didn’t know what I was talking about.

‘You talk to him about that kind of stuff and not me.’

‘Finn, she’s only venting,’ Denis said. ‘Be grateful you don’t have to listen to it.’

‘What’s that supposed to mean?’ She said.

‘It’s a joke.’

‘I didn’t realise you’d turned into Tommy fucking Tiernan.’

‘What were you doing in her bedroom earlier?’

‘I was waking her up.’

‘You were stroking her hair. I saw you and I saw your clothes in Dad’s closet.’

‘Was I stroking your hair?’ He asked her. ‘Your mother ironed those clothes for me as a favour.’

He has an answer for everything.

‘You need to talk to him,’ Denis said it to Mom, who was leaning her head against the fridge.

‘You know what I think,’ I came up close to him with my finger out. ‘You need to shut up, and leave us—’

‘Stop it,’ She turned to me.

‘You want him around more than me, you always say you’ll tell him to go but you never do.’ I screamed it loud. She yelled for me to stop it but I didn’t and I said Grandma was right, there was something going on and maybe I might have said something about fucking. And when I did she slapped me. Across the face. She’d never hit me before. Denis covered his face in his hands.

‘Go to your room.’

‘I’ll be at Toby’s,’ I walked out of the kitchen but she grabbed my arm before I could get away.

‘I said, go to your room,’ She marched me to the stairs and forced me up them. ‘Upstairs.’ She shouted it at me, ordering me. So I did. Jumping on every stair and slamming every door on the way. ‘Now you can do whatever you want together in the kitchen.’ I jumped up and down on my floor hoping she was underneath. I kept shouting about how she was a lousy mother and I was sick of Denis and when I fell on my bed I realised I’d forgot the stupid physiology book downstairs. I screamed again.

About an hour later, Denis brought me a plate of dinner and set it on my desk. I was watching a DVD.

‘Can we talk about what happened?’ He asked.

‘I don’t want to talk to you.’

‘Nothing is happening between your mother and I. Your Grandmother is paranoid, I promise you, your mother and I are friends and that’s all.’

‘Then why are you always here?’

‘Well for one I’m family and two your mother isn’t doing so well.’

‘Oh, she’s never doing well. Nobody ever is. The only person who ever seems to be okay is you.’

‘The doctors have been trying her on different drugs and different dosages. Remember when she was sleeping so much last year, or a couple months ago when you couldn’t talk to her without her breaking into tears, remember? They’re all

different side-effects. She's decided to stop them, but I'm not so sure, after your fall she hasn't been great.'

'So it's my fault.'

'Not at all, and I'm not making excuses for her but we need to take care of each other.'

'How am I supposed to care for anyone when no one tells me anything?'

'She didn't want to worry you.'

'She was fine before you started always being here.'

He didn't say anything then and I turned on my side away from him, bit awkward with the computer but it was a good effect.

'Finn, I understand you may not want me here, but when you need me I'll be here for you.'

'Don't want you, don't need you.'

He sighed, told me to eat my dinner before it turned cold and left. I pulled my desk in front of my door in case anyone tried to get in. Sometimes Mom comes in the middle of the night and sleeps with me for a while. But not tonight lady. I asked Dad to buy a lock for my room but he said no, again thanks to Mom. She locked herself in the bathroom in our house in Vancouver and Dad had to knock the door down to get her out. We didn't have a door on our bathroom for three weeks so Mom hung up a curtain.

Thank god I slid my desk there. About ten she knocked on my door. She apologised for hitting me. She said the only reason she did it is cos she was so shocked at my words. She was so in love with my Dad, she said, and she thinks of him, she talks to him all the time, sometimes she forgets he's dead and when she remembers it's so hard to cope and she was stunned that I could imagine anything different. She was sitting on the ground and crying. I was going to let her in but I didn't. Don't know why, just didn't feel like forgiving her or maybe I did and I didn't want her to know I'd forgiven her. Big difference. Eventually Denis came and said I was probably asleep.

Anyway the next morning, guess who was downstairs. Starts with d and rhymes with menace. He was in his suit and his laptop case was in the hall.

‘You’re still here?’

‘Finn you’ve had your time to be angry. Your mother apologised.’

‘Where is she?’ I opened the cupboard and grabbed a new pack of tablets from the box.

‘Getting ready for work.’

I poured a glass of orange juice, swallowed my pills and sat at the table waiting for my breakfast.

‘Have anything to say about your actions last night.’

‘It’s too bad she didn’t kick you out.’

‘Your attitude is wearing thin Finn. Keep this up and you won’t be playing football anytime soon.’

‘What?’ I sat forward. ‘You can’t—you aren’t—that’s not your job. You might be able to tell everyone else what to do, but you can’t touch me. I’m not your kid. You can’t tell me to do anything or not to do anything.’ I stood up, close to the door in case I needed to bolt.

‘Stop while you’re ahead alright.’

‘I’ll stop when I want to. You don’t order me around. You don’t control me. I don’t have to do anything you say.’

‘That’s fine Finn, whatever.’

‘No, not whatever. Not whatever.’ I needed something quick. ‘I heard Granddad talking.’ I was on shaky ground. ‘He said you were a crap judge and you only got promoted cos you’d been there for so long they didn’t know what else to do with you.’ He didn’t really say that. Later I regretted making that up, but it was the one sure way to wind him up.

‘You want to talk Finn?’ He slammed his cup on the counter. ‘You want to talk about walking disasters. Have you looked in the mirror recently? Have you considered your mother lately? You’re the single reason she’s still vertical and then you decide to pull your little gymnastic routine on the balcony, like a reckless little shite, prancing around the place. Why can’t you understand that your actions have consequences? Do you ever stop to consider your mother, your grandparents, or even me?’ He walked in front of the door now, cutting off my escape route. ‘If you insist on making things worse for this family why don’t you go bang your head a few times off the pavement for good measure, maybe you’ll knock some sense in yourself at the same time.’ He stopped for a few seconds and stared at me, but then he started again. ‘This family needs to stabilise. You need routines, you need structure. Between your mother’s depressive episodes and your disappointing dance career, I’m beginning to seriously wonder if you shouldn’t go live with your grandparents. How would you like that? Or maybe I should move in here hah?’ He was really close to me now, ‘Keep your hysterics for the playground. Check any problems you have with me at the door because I am not dealing with your shit. You leave me alone and I leave you alone.’ He turned to the counter, grabbed a bowl of porridge and threw it on the table nowhere near me.

‘Maybe it would be better if I wasn’t here at all.’

‘Shut. Up.’

He said it real mean, like he didn’t care, like just shut up kid.

‘Get ready for school.’

I kicked my chair and stomped upstairs. Enough was enough. Whatever about Mom, I wasn’t spending the rest of my life being told what to do by Denis. No football. Forget it. If he wasn’t leaving, then I was. They can have each other. I dumped everything out of my rucksack onto my bed. I shoved in warm clothes, my Liverpool jersey and some painkillers for my leg too. On the bulletin board over my desk was the picture of the three of us at the top of the Chief a week before we left Vancouver. My scissors were in the drawer. SNIP. Straight down the picture. My mother fell into the wastebasket and I tucked the rest of the picture into the safe pocket deep in my rucksack. Screw them.

I had thirty-seven Canadian dollars and only six euro in change. Stupid. I should have separated the money. I walked out into the hall. Her door was closed. I tiptoed past, avoiding the squeaky floorboards. I crept into the spare room and searched the chest of drawers and the bedside locker. Nothing. I needed her permission to access my bank account. Phoning Granddad and asking straight up was out of the question. Time for Plan B. I stomped down the stairs real loud again and kicked the wall. Then I opened the door and grabbed the handle on the outside.

‘Finn,’ It was her.

‘What?’ I waited.

‘Listen, I’m sorry about last night. I was hoping after school we could—’

I slammed it hard, ‘I don’t want anything to do with any of you.’

Toby was waiting for me on the street, blowing his whistle to the national anthem. It was his sign that he was ready to go.

‘You could slam the door again, Albania didn’t hear it.’

‘You are so lucky to be in a normal house.’

‘Normal? You don’t have a younger sister. I’ll trade you Aisling for Denis any day.’ Toby told me how Aisling slept in and he got in trouble cos he was watching telly eating breakfast instead of getting her up but it had nothing to do with him and no one told him to get her up. I felt better with Toby. But Denis would be there tonight and tomorrow and all the time now. He didn’t answer when I said I should leave and remembering that, I made my mind up. Halfway to school I pretended I’d forgotten something at home and I’d see him in class. He wanted to come with me but I told him no, which was kind of weird, but he’d understand later. I’ll run I said, and I was a faster runner than he was so that made it better.

I walked back down the Malahide Road to the bus stop and thought through the plan again. The train and bus went to Drogheda, but all I had was six euro. The 35B, the one in front of me right then, would take me to Swords. The driver said it was two euro ten. I could do anything in Swords, maybe Granddad could pick me up there. I dropped the coins in the box then sat in the middle, away from the older

women at the front. I crouched down when we drove past my school. Only when we were well past Artane did I think about hitchhiking.

The bus dropped me outside Swords, almost halfway to Drogheda. It wasn't the M1, but it was a direct route. Good enough. I'd be in Drogheda by lunch. A steel fence with pointy bits on top lined the side of the road, and an old stonewall covered with vines and bushes lined the other. Green fields with small pockets of trees stretched off in their own directions.

Granddad will be impressed. Grandma will hug me, call me 'love' and say stuff like 'aren't you the brave boy.' Denis won't be able to order me around anymore. I'd be sure to get a ride. I stayed at the side of the road where the bus dropped me. A bird sang out and across the road, another responded.

I've hitchhiked before, loads of times. Once Dad and I hitchhiked on the road to Whistler cos our station wagon broke down. We walked for ages before a car passed, and when it did all Dad had to do was stretch his arm out and put his thumb up. That was a while ago though, different country too, but if they stop for you in Canada, they'll totally stop for you in Ireland.

A surprise day off

St Aidan's has about eight hundred boys between the ages of seven and eighteen. Most of my classes are a few years older than Finn. The majority have been well-raised and are polite. Today I have my American history lesson at ten. We focus on the US since European settlement up to modern day. We don't do details. This afternoon I have two lessons of the British Empire.

I have thirty boys in my hall. They shuffle in, somewhat rowdy. I usually let them blow off steam before the day begins but today I'm strict and tell them to listen to the morning announcements. Then they stand to say the Our Father and sing the national anthem. Despite my mood, the conscientious observers are safe today. All the students are supposed to stand, orders from the principal. He does random checks and has caught me twice but despite stern lectures he's never told me to stop. I'm

leaning on the desk with my arms folded during the prayer when the door opens. I'm busted again. The students who were sitting all stand immediately but John has already seen it. He leaves and gives me a look. American history doesn't start till ten; I'm expected to go see him. As they leave the room off to their first class, a couple of the students apologise and say they hope I don't get into trouble.

The principal's name is John Maguire. He's a good man despite the fact he's a strict catholic. He refuses to let the teachers talk to students about abortion or clerical abuse. He says he wants students to question the church, but he doesn't want a school of them. My defence for letting students sit during the prayer begins with the explanation that there's a certain wisdom one acquires from dissenting and ends with the statement that refusing to participate in a prayer isn't exactly a military coup. Anywhere from four to fifteen kids sit down regularly. That's twenty six to fifteen still standing, at least half the class. At the end of June I'd like to talk to them about it, the reasons why they sat down or remained standing. The only reply he ever has is that there are the rules at this school for a reason. Nowhere in there is there a stop. So until I'm threatened with losing my job or if he just says it outright, I'll keep doing it. As I'm leaving the office he asks me if I'm okay.

'It's just, and please don't take this the wrong way, you seem somewhat under the weather today. Maybe you're coming down with something?' He's a gentleman because I know he's thinking I've had another bad spell of grief. 'Are you,' he's talking really slow now. 'Having much fun? In life, you know.'

I don't say anything because I'm wondering if he's about to throw himself at me.

'I mean, for example do you ever go for walks without an endpoint in mind?'

I'm confused. 'I don't really know what you're asking.'

He nods and steps back into his office. 'Take care of yourself Ruth, you're going to need to be healthy next September.'

He closes his door and I'm left in the hall now wondering if that means they're going to offer me the contract. I walk back through the halls to my classroom. The guy in New Zealand must not be coming back. I sit down in the chair

in front of my empty classroom. That means I'll be teaching history, english and geography next year. Good god. The room is full of desks and chairs, a vertical band with the timelines of world events displayed chronologically starts at the door and wraps around to the end of the wall opposite me. Otherwise the walls are covered in political and historical maps, bar the blackboard behind me and the windows to the side with a view of the trees and a green area. I have to prepare for my slide show. Today I'm teaching the Civil War and I want to put faces to names so to speak. The slides include various slaves, art works of famous battles, various soldiers, most of whom had some body part or other amputated, General Lee, Grant and Lincoln; the usual.

I rub my hand on my forehead, a little shocked at the news. A little shocked still at what happened in Drogheda. What the hell has happened in my life? Suddenly my son hates me, my mother-in-law hates me, my brother-in-law is mad at me and I've done nothing. I'm so sick of it all, I'm sick of fighting, being told it's my fault for the planet coming off its axis. My head is killing me and I wonder is this a side effect of coming off the drugs or am I really this fucking psychotic. I rustle through my bag and find a Nurofen Plus.

I start to set up the slide projector. The job is only a year contract. In a year I'll be better able to make decisions, I'll think clearer, things will be better. Anyway Mark would be delighted with this news. He wanted both of us to have jobs, routines, regularity, normality, resuming what we had in Vancouver. We'd go out for dinner, the three of us, to celebrate and then the next Sunday we'd drive to Wicklow or to the seaside. Clogherhead beach in Louth is beautiful.

A knock at the door disrupts my self-pity. John comes in and closes the door. He's taken the liberty of alerting the head of history to the fact I wasn't feeling well. He's already called a retired teacher to come in and take my classes today.

'John, I'm fine. I just had a tough weekend.' I had taken three days after Finn's fall. I didn't want to take any more days.

He stares at me and I wonder actually how bad do I look.

'Take the day.'

‘My first class is at ten. I’ve planned it, I’ve got slides and everything.’

‘Then leave when it’s done. Come see me before you go.’

He leaves and I find my compact mirror. I’d tied my hair back but it’s kind of a mess. My eyes are red and there are dark circles under my eyes, although I think they’re normally there. In the end, the class went fine. The slides went down well, especially the one of an Irishman with shamrocks and a harp stitched into a Union flag. Several of the boys asked for a copy of it. I decide to take John up on his offer and pick Finn up from school. We can both have a day off, just the two of us. Or I could pick him up after school and we could spend the evening together. I stop by John’s office and he’s happy with my decision, so I leave the British Empire to the retirees.

I arrive home and put my lunch in the fridge. In the kitchen, the heaviness returns. Finn was so angry. He said we were fucking like monkeys. What the hell does that mean? Where did he pick that up? Certainly not Maura unless there’s a side to her I don’t know about. When I’d calmed down, I tried to apologise but he was having none of it, he moved his furniture in front of the door again. Denis thinks Finn’s jealous of him, that he’s trying to protect me from outside influences and doesn’t want me to change. And I think about it now what does he mean ‘to change’? I don’t know what’s changing.

Denis is alright, very noble. We’re certainly not monkey fucking. Denis isn’t my type. The companionship is nice but sex wouldn’t be. I’m attracted to him sometimes but there are also moments when a deep disgust shudders through my body thinking about him. It’s just not happening for me. Sometimes it feels like he thinks he’s responsible for us now. That he’s Finn’s father and I’m his wife. Like a levirate marriage or a widow inheritance. Now don’t get me wrong, the security is brilliant and always having someone to watch Finn while I go off by myself is wonderful. But it’s like we both showed up separately to hang out with Mark at a bar, and suddenly Mark’s off to the toilet or somewhere and Denis and I are left standing beside each other trying to think of something to talk about.

I have to leave this kitchen, it’s all still here, looming in the air. I go into the living room, but Finn’s shit is everywhere so I try the dining room, but I’m not

comfortable here either. On the bureau I discover a brown envelope which came in the post a few days ago. I meant to open it but forgot that it was here. It's the Journal of the Royal Society of Astronomy with one of Mark's last papers published inside. Kevin Aiken from Trinity sent it and has included a note that says there are still three more papers they're finalising. It also says 'let's get in touch, have lunch or something.' I haven't seen Kevin in almost four months. He was responsible for bringing Mark to Trinity. UBC called him the poacher. Now that the country had money, the government was determined to bring home Irish expat scientists who left when there were no jobs and Mark was one of their targets. The process carried on for almost two years in total from when Kevin first introduced the idea to Mark over an afternoon drink at a conference in Boston to the evening when, with Finn sitting on one arm of his chair and me on the other, Mark pressed the purchase button buying three one-way tickets on the British Airways website.

We agree to meet at the Epicurean Food Hall at twelve-thirty. I decide against my better instinct and drive. I find a park at the Jervis Centre and walk up. Kevin is a lovely guy, he has three children and a nice wife, but he's a fucking bully when he wants to be. His strategies to recruit Mark were to make a good offer and aim for the heart. But I can't blame Kevin, all of this is a spectacular combination of many decisions. If anyone is to blame it's Ireland for not just fucking shrivelling up and dying. In Vancouver, Mark was more aware of what was happening here than in Canada. He had Irish friends and they'd do their Irish things, like wake up early on weekend mornings to watch the GAA. He was a Dublin supporter and regularly wore his two-tone blue shirt or the blue t-shirt with the word DUB written across the front, or his official jersey; he had loads of Dublin shirts. In essence, he never really left.

We opt for burritos at the Mexican place. Kevin updates me with news from Trinity. Niall, the Ph.D. student who Mark adopted and nursed back to academic health from a retiring professor who was sick of Ph.D. students, was doing well in his post-doc in Edinburgh. Kevin details what the other lecturers and Mark's other Ph.D. students are doing. All is well but it's obvious in his voice and the manner in which he rubs his hands together when we talk about Mark that Kevin misses him too. We have coffee and I keep avoiding his questions of how we're getting on.

'St Aidan's is offering me a year contract.'

He nearly spits out his coffee. ‘You wait till now to tell me? Congratulations, I’m so happy for you.’ The doubt in my face must be obvious because he immediately reaches across the table and grabs my hand. ‘You’re doing the right thing. Mark would be so happy.’

I saw myself there. Swollen from tears and too much salt accepting praise for doing what was expected of me. For keeping with the plan. For keeping with his plan. For keeping with his plan for my husband. I don’t factor in to this at all. But I know he’s not like that, at least not really so I keep my neurosis to myself. We leave each other and agree to do this again soon. I buy some groceries from Tesco in the Jervis Centre and drive home. I’ll have dinner on by the time Finn comes back from school. The whole time I keep thinking about what he meant by ‘Mark would be so happy’.

I mean it’s what I wanted, for someone to take the place of Mark to be happy for me. That’s why I called Kevin, I needed someone who wouldn’t end the sentence, ‘but we really have to talk about Finn’ or bring it back to why Denis is always here. I needed someone who knew a bit, but not too much. Sympathy maybe. I wanted Mark to be pleased but I didn’t want someone else to say it. I didn’t want to acknowledge what I’d become.

A gammy morning

Morning, bout half seven. You’d think children need to sleep but if this pack have anyhin ta say bout it, they dint. BigAl an Molly, they were there cos I haired them fightin. Now they’re all outside racin an Finn’s lookin uncomfortable on top a Beauty. I swear this kid’s never stepped outside in his life before. The Cowboy’s after textin me sayin I gotta help him move some cars in front a his house cos I’m the rayson his cousins are comin from Kildare. They’ll be bout twenty a them he says an ventually they’ll have ta be forced ta go, though The Cowboy have somhin ta say bout tha I suspeck.

It's sunny out now an blue skies but they're callin for rain layter. So far it's been a dacent spring. It were hot even some days. Tommy's over workin on his seventy-nine Capri. I towd him it needs a new steerin column but he dint listen to no one. He'll call me over layter an I'll say ta him for the six millionth time an he'll say no thas not it, not cos it's not it, but cos he never admit when he's wrong.

The kids are scramin like it's the wild west. BigAl's on Beauty with Finn an he's batein her ta race faster. Stevo's on Sunshine an Molly's on Peach but neither a them are a match for Beauty an BigAl even with Finn on her as well. Johnnyrocket an MickyD are arguin at the side bout how ta fix the harnesses.

The Cowboy's already moved some a the cars ta his back. I'd a mechanics course at the college in Galway, I almost done it but once the babbies arrived tha was me. I didn't get all me certs but I'm better than most, an evryone here knows it.

'Mornin.'

He's under the bonnet an even before he sets eyes on me he's all smiles, 'Mornin horse.' Now he stands up, 'Jaysis the head on ya.'

I'm in no mood for The Cowboy this mornin an if he starts with the fuckin rhymes I'm likely ta kill the prick. 'Whas the problem?' I'm gonta stretch this, him needin me help, an he goes along with it bein rale helpful like, an sayin nothing.

I start me work but The Cowboy sees JP an Ellie an calls them over. The Cowboy wants ta see the new babby. A girl it is, not even a month old. Rosarita for long an Rosie for short. They only moved here two months ago an they're still in the caravan. They was in a nice little haltin site down in Wicklow for three weeks. JP got work an Ellie has family there so they thought it'd be alrigh but yer wans in the haltin site they wanted their bay. JP an Ellie, they were kept awake all hours an towd the jacks were broke, but JP saw later they were in no way broke, an all the while Ellie's seven months pregnant. Disgraceful tha is. They were bout four dozen Joyces, so no use arguin. JP an Francie are brothers so Francie an Mary towd them ta move here.

JP's rale smart with his clothes, he's wearin proper trousers an his blue shirt is tucked in an pressed. Sometimes he'll wear a tie, but he int today. An he needs ta

look smart cos Ellie is a stunner. She's straight blonde hair an blue eyes, an she's always tanned. Today she's wearin them rale big pink heels an a pink an white dress an she's matchin with the babby. Adds a touch a class ta the place so she does.

'Mornin boss,' The Cowboy says it rale loud an saggerated an he bends down sayin it ta Rosie who's in her car seat almost asleep but now she's awake an ya can tell she's no fuckin clue whata make a him.

Ellie's hodin the seat. 'We're off to Ikea,' She says. 'To get stuff for Rosie.' She's smilin but she dint seem too happy.

'Bit early for tha.'

'Ah Sid you never been to Ikea,' JP rowls his eye like it's an ordale. He's a bag with him. 'It's been open since seven. We wanted to lave an hour ago, but we's ready only now. Rosie is a demandin lady.'

'You'll want to come to terms with tha sharply. Wait till she layrns to talk.'

I'm sure Ellie dint want ta be here. The Cowboy's all coochy cooin an she's drawin the babby away slow so he dint notice.

'Bye, O me babby, When I wis a lady, O then me babby dint cry, but me babby is weepin, fer want a good kaypin, O I fear me pore babby will die.' The Cowboy touches her cheek with his graysy monkey hand. I can't believe the fuckin eejit.

Ellie pulls the babby away now fast. 'We'll not get a park, if we dint lave now.'

'Ah take care a her,' He turns ta JP. 'She's got her looks, here's hopin she got her brayns too.'

JP laves an I wipe me hands on a rag, 'Whas wrong with you?'

'Wha?'

'Wha happened ta rock a bye babby on the tree top?'

‘When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall,’ Cowboy says it like he’s maynein somhin.

‘At least it dint say me babby’s dyin.’

‘It might as well, it says ‘down will come babby, cradle an all.’ An mine dint say the babby’s dyin. The babby in tha song int kept as well as Rosie is, It’s a complment. Fucks sake. Can’t say fuckin nothin round this kip without some toerag up me arse. When’d we all get so fuckin sensitive?’

‘How many sprogs dya have? Dya cop Ellie couldn’t get away quick enough, ya scared her, ya did. She’s probly thinkin right now ya cursed her. They’ll probly detour to find a fecking priest.’

The Cowboy fixes the top a his trousers as he watches them drive out.

‘Sometimes you’re a right fuckin thick,’ Thas all I’m gonta say now and I go back under the bonnet. Cos I know he’s thinkin bout his who had the crib death, but he needs for ta consider Ellie for fucks sake. We all had sick kids. My Jack’s asthma had him in at Temple Street in Dublin an Peter Mac’s second girdle died in Drogheda hospital from measles. Strange fuckin thing to be dyin from int it? Since then I wouldn’t trust them with me dog. Member tha wan sick—who cut those womens’ parts out—you can never be too sure. He did it for the fuckin laugh. If he touched my Annie or any a mine I’d a cut his tongue out an fed it back to him.

‘Jaysis Sidney, you maybay righ,’ He says finally rale quiet. ‘I dint mayne no hairim. I thaw it wis cos I touched the kid with me hand.’

‘Well tha dint help neither. Dya member wha it were like after yer first were born?’

He’s silent bout a minute, ‘No.’

‘Well I do an you was fuckin banjaxed. You dint know nothin an yer scared yer gonta kill it. So think a tha next time yer roun her.’

I towd him the car was ready an he got in an it turned over right away, purrin like a kitten. Cowboy yahoed an slapped me hand. ‘The Ford’s next.’

Between The Cowboy an the roarin over in the field you'd think we had something to celebrate. The biys had fucked the harnesses ta the side cos the connections were broke. They'd a calt me over but they saw The Cowboy an I scrapin already an they're smart enough ta kayp distance.

All four a Cowboy's cars he were havin trouble with had faults in their fuel pumps. It's the green diesel The Cowboy's got his hands on, so after two I've the problem sorted quick enough. When I'm on the last one Paddy Collins comes ta me an ta The Cowboy rale slow, aksin thick questions an wastin time. Anyone else we'd a bate them away but Paddy's not so well an when he finished with recitin evry fuckin snuffle an shiver he ever had, I'm a bit sorry for him. Paddy's had the sarcoidosis for as long as anyone members. It's fucked him up, an anytime anyone coughs it's always the sarcoidosis. Three months after they towd Paddy he had it, Father Mike came in an by the end a the day he sits us down ta say nobody else had the sarcoidosis only Paddy an tha it were serious but he'd be alrigh. So we thought tha were the end a it, but Paddy just there, he says it'd spread ta his kidneys an his veins, but sure the Father said it were goin nowhere Cowboy says but Paddy said it had. Now there was no one who could say wha it would do next. Sure he wernt able no more for what we were bout ta do. He'd stall with Birdy's family in Finglas an said if we need somhin to ring.

Black out

I woke up by the yelling. BigAl and Mary. I was a little scared at first but it went away. I knew where I was. My leg had started bleeding again, not bad though. It mostly just hurt. I went to the bathroom and cleaned it the way Mom had showed me. Slowly around the edges and then into the middle and douse it with water and soap. I dry it and put the bandage and plaster back on, which is kinda gross but I don't have any new ones. This would be way easier if Mom was doing this for me at home. She would know what to do and she'd calm me down. A bruise was forming around my right eye. I sort of wanted to cry but I put my Man U hat on to cover it, the bruise and the tears. Denis gave me the hat for my birthday last year. I know

walking on the railing was dumb, I wasn't thinking, but I can't do anything anymore. I don't really want to go back but I miss her and I wish she was here.

Catherine opens the door.

'Alright?'

'Yeah,' I nod and pull up my pants.

She comes in beside me and grabs my chin to look at my eye. She says the bruising is a good sign and reaches into the press behind me for some ointment that she spreads onto the skin around my eye. She didn't ask if she could though. When she is finished she says, 'Let's see the leg.'

I don't know what to do. I have to take my pants off to show her.

'I four sons and raised half this estate, unless you got nothin, I int gonta be surprised. I want ta see, make sure you int gonta die on me.'

I drop my pants. The bandage is covered in blood and she scratches her head when she sees it. 'You need a new bandage.' Then she peels off the bandage and the plaster, cleans it with soap again, spreads a cream over it and rebandages it with new plasters and bandage. While she is doing it she tells me a story about the day Sid kissed a pig. I'm trying hard not to cry and fake laugh too much at the end.

'Better?' She says when she's done.

'Yeah,' I pull up my pants. It is better though it still hurts a bit.

'Away with you ta the table for somhing ta eat.'

I wash my hands first and cart my stuff back to my bag in the bedroom before following her into the kitchen a few minutes later. When I walk in, Catherine is talking to an older woman leaning against the counter smoking. They are talking about my leg. When the woman sees me, she nods and they stop. Catherine motions to the table and calls for the other kids.

Big Al had plans. They'd divvied up teams, he's captain of one team and Micky D is captain of the other. They flipped a coin to see who got me. Big Al says I could be midfielder or striker whichever I want. Midfielder, I say.

Winnie Joyce comes in with Gerry. He comes to the table and helps himself to a handful of cereal.

‘Still alive then?’ He’s standing over me, and a few pieces of cereal drop onto my head.

Before I have a chance to answer, Mickey D says, ‘Ya barely scratched him.’

‘Ya came from behind.’ BigAl says.

‘I was standin right in front a him, like a number one,’ He puts his finger to his chest, ‘ta number two.’ He points at first to me but then to everyone else.

‘Ya got a problem with yer head.’ BigAl says. ‘Ya got it mixed up, we’re number one and yer number two.’

‘I knocked BryanAdams out.’

‘This int our guy. He’s not even a Traveller, he’s not even Irish for god’s sake.’

‘Don’t matter, he’s with you. I knocked him out.’

‘Giz a couple years Gerry and we’ll see whose knocking who out.’

‘You don’t got a prayer, none a ya. Micko he even aksed me ta Dublin earlier, for help like. None a ye would ever get aksed to help. Never.’

‘Oh yeah why int ya go then?’

‘Why int ya go to Dublin and not come back.’

‘His ma said no.’

‘Me ma had nuttin to do with it.’ But he checks behind him before he says it.

‘Somebody went to Dublin this morning?’ I ask.

‘Micko McDonagh went ta Pearse Street, Gardai station.’

‘He dint ask for help, he wis gonta dob ya in.’

‘Giz ye up to the Guards.’

They keep on for a while till Gerry's mother calls him away and by then we're done our food.

'Come on BryanAdams.' BigAl grabs my shoulder. 'Yer my prize midfielder.'

This isn't good news. I don't feel so steady. Dad always said not to exercise after you eat. I couldn't really walk straight, it hurt too much. I say it to BigAl who replies, 'I think running helps.'

Once we're outside Peaches the horse storms past us with Mary on top screaming to go faster. BigAl runs toward a brown horse, jumps on top and brings it over to me, 'Come on get on.'

I'd only been on a horse a few times and never without a saddle and an adult nearby. 'How do I get on?'

'Jump you thick.'

WickyD cups her hands for me to step on. 'Your majesty.'

I thank her and climb aboard behind BigAl. Before I can get comfortable, BigAl whips the reins and we're off. He's screaming and what starts as a trot is now a full gallop.

'Can we slow down?'

'You mean can we go faster.' He whips the reins again. At the end of the field the horse turns quickly. I fall to the side and BigAl has to turn to push me back up but he doesn't slow down.

'Seriously, slower.'

'Ack BryanAdams.' Finally he slows down and lets me off in front of the group of kids. 'He's no rider either.' Once I'm down, he whips the reins again and he and Beauty bolt across the field.

'Fun int it?' MickyD says to me and after thinking about it for a second, I agree, it was. I just didn't have a good grip. The football game is starting to form together so the kids set off into the field to see what the plan is and I stay here on the

sidelines gathering my breath. I see Sid over in the distance working on a car so I go up and ask about getting a lift to Dublin. He doesn't even know about Mick McDonagh and then totally blows me off.

I go back to the field and watch them setting up. I'm going to be a sitting duck out there. Everyone is going to target me. Do I take them on or do I drop at the first guy who comes after me and guarantee my chances of survival. I should take them on but I feel like dropping. I don't really want to play football right now. I really don't feel so good.

'BryanAdams, come on.' Big Al yells it in my face. I'm going to have to do this but the way I feel I'll probably have to drop at the first challenge. They throw the ball down and we start. Mary is the first person to try and trip me up, but I outsmart her and turn towards her quickly and stop her in her tracks. BigAl passes me the ball and I get past MickyD. I've got a clear shot on goal so I take the shot and score.

'I thought you was sick,' MickyD yells at me through BigAl and Christy's cheers.

I shrugged, 'I am. Don't blame me if you can't handle it.'

'BryanAdams gets his jab in.' BigAl yells out and pats me on the back of the head. If it's going to be this easy I might be able to do this. My Dad always said 'there's no such word as can't'. Mom agreed with it but she always made a joke out of the phrase, like it was a slogan in a yogurt ad or something. Next, there's a scare on our goal but Christy passes me the ball and I get it to BigAl who scores. I have to stop to catch my breath and then again not too long later. The pain is pretty bad but the game is fun. And that's when I figure it out. There's no fun anymore. We don't laugh, she doesn't make jokes. I make jokes, all the time, Granddad makes jokes but none of it does any good. Denis has no sense of humour. My Dad was fun, even when he was busy we'd go out and kick a ball around without it being some kind of major competition. Denis is like anti-fun and he's bringing my Mom down.

I can tell I'm not as fast as before, even Mary outruns me. It's kind of hard to breathe or think really. And when MickyD pushes me, I stumble and fall on the ground. Mom's not taking Denis' side, she doesn't know what she's doing, like

when the King of Rohan was under Saruman's spell. I should have stayed and fought him. BigAl comes up to me slowly,

'I think somhin's wrong with BryanAdams. Go get ma.'

'Oh my god,' Mary kneels beside me and covers her mouth. 'Is tha blood?'

She is kind of disappearing but her head is expanding and then there is another head and another. A lot of loud voices. Someone picks me up and I'm gone.

Bad to worse

Just when I'm beginnin ta warim ta The Cowboy agin Finn walks over. He's wearin a cap down over his eyes like Gerry wears his.

'Heya Killer, Whas the story?' Says The Cowboy.

'I hurt my leg,' The apron string roun this kid is industrial size cable.

'Sure ya look like a rale fighter now,' The Cowboy flips his hat up with a flick ta the peak. 'Jaysis.' The eye is bad.

'Lemme see,' says I. It's well swollen an bruisin blue an bits a red.

'Catherine said it looks worse than it is.'

'She's right, good sign it's colourin.'

'Couldn't a hit ya tha hairid,' The Cowboy elbows Finn in the arm. 'We'll call ya bruiser now, how's tha? BryanAdams is a little long to say anyway.'

'Sid I'm not feeling very well. I think my Mom will probably be really worried now so could you take me into Dublin or even Drogheda?'

The Cowboy gets interested in a spot a grayse on the grass.

'Ya Ma? I thought she were dead.'

‘No,’ He looks like he dint know what I’m saying. ‘My Dad died not my Mom.’

I coulda sworn, but I’m not gettin in ta it. ‘Lad look at the state a me.’ I says pointin ta me clothes. ‘Me van’s after dyin an I’m helpin Cowboy now. Some a them are gonta be racin horses today. I’ll see if I can sort somhin.’

‘Could you drive me Cowboy?’

‘Me? Sorry lad, dint drive.’ Course he just got outta a car an he has more cars roun his house than all a us together.

I’m thinkin I know wha he’s thinking, but then he says, ‘Well Gerry Joyce said Micko McDonagh went to Dublin this morning. Maybe he could take me when he’s back? It’s just I really miss my Mom and I’m kind of worried for her.’

‘Micko McDonagh? In Dublin?’

The Cowboy’s gone now, he’s walkin towards Francie’s house. I see Steamer in the distance and when he sees me, I never seen a worse actor decidin ta kayp walkin the way he is or go back the way he came. He shuffles inta Francie’s too. Somhins wrong.

‘He went to the Pearse Street Gardaí Station. That’s not a million miles from my house. I could have just jumped on the Dart, or depending on how he came into the city he could have left me off really close to my house.’

‘Pearse Street?’ Pearse. Street. ‘I’ll aks him now.’ He’s bout ta say somhin else so I continue, ‘—ta see if he can take you, go back ta the horses Finn. Sure I won’t be long.’ I start but turn round ta him. He’s still there, watchin me confused or angry or somhin. ‘Listen, would you mind aksin Johnny ta call over ta Francie’s?’

Now I see it. Francie peers roun the curtain an he pulls back once he sees me. I knock on the door. No one answers. I turn the door knob an it’s locked for the first time in fuckin history so I knock agin an I says rale slow, ‘I know ye went ta Pearse Station you pack a cowardly cunts. Open this door before I rip it down.’

No reply, ‘Open the fucken rodas.’ I says rale loud poundin on the door an just as I’m bout ta kick it ta fuck, Francie opens it. I see The Cowboy an Steamer in the kitchen an as soon as I’m in the house they move outta sight. I grab Francie by his coat an pin him ginst the wall. Steamer could thrash me but I dint fuckin care, but he does drag me aisy off a Francie.

‘Pearse Station?’ I scam it.

‘No clue what yer talkin bout.’ Francie says. Steamer’s gone pale an sits down now on the chair. They done somhin.

Crash Francie into the frame a the door. Me fist ginst his face. ‘Tell me.’ Francie’s bigger than me, but I’m quicker an smarter. He still dint say nothin so I grab a few a Mary’s china dolls an get ready ta fuck them cross the rume.

‘Alrigh, dint. Enough,’ Francie yells. ‘Mick’s gone to Pearse Station alrigh, put them down.’ He’s still in the corner tryin ta rub his own back. ‘Fuck Sid, next time not into the fuckin door frame. Me ma died a kidney problems.’

Inta the kitchen but The Cowboy’s gone. ‘Where’s The Cowboy?’ I says.

‘Relax the cacks,’ He yells from the bog. I kick the door an tell him ta hurry ta fuck or I’ll kick the whole fuckin door in. Francie’s scramin at me bout respectin his caen an then Johnny bursts through the door an into the house.

‘Lads? The whole fuckin estate can hair ya.’

‘Where’s the biy?’ I peek roun the curtains like Francie just done.

‘He’s with the rest of them.’ Johnny’s watchin Francie sulkin in the corner still. Steamer goes into the kitchen.

‘Mick McDonagh took his morning constitutional ta Pearse Street Station.’

‘Huh? The shades? In Dublin like? Wha?’

‘Listen,’ Francie says kinda quiet, ‘All we done is gev them the note to say we got Finn an we want ye biys back.’

‘A note? Wha?’ I dint cop what he’s on about. ‘I dint see no note.’

Steamer comes in with The Cowboy follain him, fixin his belt agin.

‘We made it up last night, The Cowboy an Steamer an me,’ Francie sits down.

The Cowboy wastes no time. ‘How else dya expect to get them? ESP? Carrier pigeons? We gotta make our demands known. Say what ya mayne, mayne wha ya say an all tha.’

Steamer’s rale uncomfortable touchin the top a the table an now shovin his hands in his trouser pockets an takin them out agin an crossin them over his chest. I rub me hands up an down me face. Me fingers are cowed, me face is hot. I’m not feelin so good meself now. But this int bout Mick McDonagh or Steamer, an Francie’s not fuckin smart enough. This is The Cowboy. He’s leanin up ginst the wall, rale casual, like he’s not involved at all.

‘Slipt yer mind this mornin did it?’ I says ta him.

‘There was no talkin to ya. Ya wis eating the head of me from the minute I laid eyes on ya. Ya were arguin with yerself bout a fuckin hystrectimy.’

I’ve him by the neck on the wall. He smashes at me head an kicks at me. The others are draggin me off but I’m able ta throw him hairid ginst the wall an he smashes his head. He comes at me.

‘Dint try it on with me Connors.’

Steamer an Johnny are between us now.

‘Dint try it on with you?’ He’s losin his fuckin mind. ‘Wha’d it say Cowboy. The note, wha’d it say?’

‘Ah you fucked off to yer gaffe with yer dumb fuckin mopey head in the sand. Always fuckin mopin. This gotta be done quick. We towd ya last nigh. If you done tha in the first place, they wouldn’t a taken yer biys. Anyway we all agree. All a us. Even mister fuckin rich bucks himself here.’

‘Dint.’ Johnny warns him.

‘Fuck off.’ The Cowboy pushes Johnny’s finger outta his face, an he’s at me agin. ‘Go on Connors, explain it to me, I’m just a thick int I? So worried bout the new mothers an babbies, like a fuckin hospital charity, like the fuckin Social you are. It’s clear you been larynin from them cos all you got is fuckin excuses. Always with the big fucking plans, but do ya ever do anything? Yer a little pig Sid, desperate to be man but yer only a little pig an yer house has been huffed an puffed an blown in. So we did it. Big fuckin dale. We wried the fuckin note cos we want this done. Fuckin done. Wha ya gonta do? Cry at us?’

‘Wha’d it say?’

‘How’s it agin? Hush-a-bye, babby, on the tree top.’

‘Wha’d it say?’ I push frword but the biys still hode me tight.

‘Okay, okay how’d it go let’s see . . . knittin away with me bobble an thread, I went for me wife to find tha she’s dead. I’m a fuckin disaster an you took me three bastards. I’ve got one a yers now an he’s quite a trifle, but he’ll be alrigh as a target for me rifle.’

I’d a breaked his fuckin neck if Johnny an Steamer dint drag me out a the house. He’s laughin an yellin at me ta lighten up. We’re outside now an they still hodin me arms down. There’s less kids now but they’re still racin horses an there’s bikes out now too. A few a them sittin on the green are watchin us cos I’m yellin. Tommy’s still workin on his Capri an now Peter Mac, Martin an a few a the others are sittin on the wall an talkin ta him an they all see us as well.

Steamer tells me ta relax, ‘It’s only bout the switch for the biys. Bout our conditions.’

‘Conditions?’

The Cowboy comes after us, ‘What’re ya like Sid? Ah I wis only havin a laugh.’ He puts his hand on his hip an pushes his coat ta the side, rale dramatic like, an stickin out from his belt is the magazine of his SIG tha he usually reserves for kaypin the Wards handy. ‘A thick lad like me, wider than fuckin Tarzan, what dya spect? I forget meself sometimes.’

‘Akst for money dint ya?’ says I. If he’s gonta kill me he’ll do it no matter what I say.

They all gone silent. In the distance Peter Mac jumps off the wall.

‘Come back inta Francie’s,’ The Cowboy says. ‘Int righ to bay talkin in front a the childers.’ The Cowboy walks back ta the house an leans on the doorframe watchin us with his hand on his SIG.

‘Would ya look at him? He thinks he’s fuckin John Wayne,’ Johnny says ta me.

Peter Mac arrives up ta us now, ‘Well now, how’s Shergar?’

‘Steamer, got somhin fer ya here,’ The Cowboy yells from the door.

Steamer finely lets me arm go, ‘He towd us you’d have the final word on it all. I dint know you dint know. He akst for money Sid. It’s a ransom note.’ He goes back ta The Cowboy. I only hair what he says, but it dint sink in like. Why’s he goin back ta The Cowboy? He int dumb an it’s not like he can’t bate him, he’d take any a us, all a us together at the same time.

‘You still have them shotguns?’ I says ta Johnny.

‘Two a them, but they won’t fit neat in yer trousers like tha.’

‘Johnny, wrap them in blankets alrigh? Drop them in me van.’

‘I dint think so Sid, no. Fuck sake yer naw—’

‘I promise I’ll come back ta ya, just do this for me.’

‘So help me god Sid, if I dint hair from you an you go off again it won’t be The Cowboy you’ll be worryin bout.’

Steamer’s inta Francie’s house now but The Cowboy’s still standin there an we’re watching aytch other the whole time. Peter Mac is facin towards the childers racing. ‘They akst for five hundred grand.’

‘Wha?’ I says it too loud.

‘Aysy,’ Peter Mac says rale slow. The Cowboy’s still standin there.

‘How dya know tha?’

‘Francie showed me this morning.’

‘So evryone seen the note cept me?’ Fuckin typical. Tommy an the others over at the Capri are watchin us now too. All I want is me biys home. Me head’s killing me now.

‘The money’s gonta be on the biys when they’re switched.’

‘Sidney,’ The Cowboy yells from Francie’s house.

‘Joe Ward from Tuam calt me bout findin a motor for him this mornin an I towd him we’s a dispute brewin with the shades forthwith. Comin over straight away they are. The Cowboy dint want you at the switch, says he’s tryin to proteck you from them, from the shades. The way we figure it, his plan is ta get the money off the biys, send yees away an then tell us ye legged it with the money.’

‘Nothin like fuckin warnin people.’

‘Ya been with tha prick all morning. An why dya think tha is? Ya dint think he can’t fix a fuel pump?’

The Cowboy’s gettin bored, he kayps lookin inside but he’s not shiftin from the door.

‘But Sid—’

Maybe The Cowboy has a point. Maybe I dint move quick enough but I’d make tha mistake no more.

‘Listen, he’s me cousin an may me granny forgive me, but he’s a fuckin sociopath so he is Sid. Yer name’s on the ransom note.’

‘Me name—wha?’ The ground starts swirlin an maybe it’s comin ta meet me so I lean on a post ta stall me from fallin.

‘You dint know tha neither.’

‘Sid,’ Johnny’s in front a me now. ‘Bossman, you alright?’

‘Sidney,’ The Cowboy yells agin.

Am I hearin voices? Peter Mac says somhin to Johnny an goes off somewhere. Johnny says The Cowboy’s finely gone. ‘He only dint want you talkin to Mac, it’s alright Sid.’ He tells me ta folla him, we got business in his house ta dale with.

I pull at me shirt for room ta breathe an sit down at his table, coverin me face with me hands. I’m gonta prison. Thas just it. Prison. All thas left is to get usta the idea. I smell the muck from the kids’ shoes over by the door an it’s mixed up with some sort a clayner Catherine must a ust. Then I raleise there int no noise. Bad news when a house full a kids gone quiet. Johnny’s standin there rubbin his forehead.

‘The biy passed out Sid.’

I dint believe this now.

‘He were with the biys in the field an he fell down, out cowl.’

I got nothin left. ‘Jays ta fuck.’ What kinda fuckin day is this. ‘Is he alive? Where is he?’

‘In the biys’ room.’

Catherine is pettin his head with a cloth an all the childer are there watchin over him, all six a Johnny’s an MickyD, WickyD, Kenny, Christy, Robbie, Molly, Maggie, Stevo. Me sister-in-laws Winnie an Nellie are there too. Finn’s lyin in BigAl’s bed under a Transformer poster.

‘They’re outside just here,’ Catherine says.

‘Micky D hit him.’ Says Mary.

‘I didn’t, it wasn’t anything I didn’t do before. It was just the game.’

‘I turned roun Sid an I saw him fallin.’ BigAl says. ‘Little Joe calt for Ma.’

‘He dint look so good this mornin,’ Molly says. She’s up by his head on the other side a the bed with Maggie. ‘Rale pale he wis.’

‘Is he breathin? Is he okay?’

‘The girdles are just watchin his breathin there, it’s okay, but dint know anyhin else.’

I rub me hands on top a me head, ‘I need ta sit.’ Johnnyrocket bringed over a small red chair with a happy face caboose painted on it.

Catherine waves her hand a them, ‘Go see what’s on the telly, the lot a yees. Dint none a ya lave this house though, an say nothin to anyone who comes near. Little Joe, BigAl, yer both in charge a makin sure nobody laves an says nothin.’

‘What bout Johnny or Martin?’ says BigAl.

‘Do as yer ma says an if anyone laves it’s yer problem,’ Johnny slaps him on the back a the head but still BigAl nods him off an Winnie an Nellie take the kids to watch the telly.

‘Whose gonta watch his breathin?’ Molly aks.

‘I will,’ I says.

‘Use this then,’ She hands me the small mirror on her way out. ‘Put it under his nose an it’ll steam up when he breathes.’ The mirror has stars at the top an a Cinderella on the side. I know it’s Cinderella cos it says so.

They shut the door an Catherine, Johnny an me are left in the room with Finn.

‘What in the name a God is happening?’ Catherine says.

‘The Cowboy akst for money.’

‘For the biy?’

Johnny’s hands fall ta his side, ‘That’s what all his snakeing round is about so.’

‘Peter Mac says now they used me own name on the ransom note.’

Catherine looks at me an at the biy an covers her face, she stopped pettin his forehead even. I tell them evryhin from start ta finish an throughout it all she’s not pettin him, an playse kayp on I’m thinkin even though I’m saying ta her the story, an when I’m done only then she starts agin an now ta be sure I stick the mirror under his nose.

She hits me arm. ‘Away with ye, he’s breathin for Christ’s sake.’ I set the mirror on the locker beside me. There’s a knock at the door, Molly brings a cowl cloth for his eye, an Nellie’s behind her with some holy water an medals. She maykes the sign a the cross on the biy’s forehead with the water an strings the medals roun his neck on a chain.

‘St John a God for the sick an St Jude for a miracle,’ She sprinkles the water up an down the length a the biy an says a prayer. They lave agin, but not before Nellie touches me shoulder. She never liked me much after she haird bout the dalein but since Annie’s death she’s always sayin prayers or givin me medals or tellin me things like it’s not for us ta understand God’s ways, an even though she has a fierce faith I know she misses Annie an I seen her cryin for Annie, an when she says them things bout God an mystery it’s not for me she’s sayin it. When she touches me somhin bends inside me an now I’m bitin me nails, tryin me best ta kayp together.

Johnny starts textin on this phone. ‘Wha does Peter Mac know bout this ransom note.’ Peter Mac an Tommy been havin the same discussion all mornin. The two a them come over an we sit in the biys room talkin. Peter Mac walked in on them when they was finishin the note this mornin. They said I’d seen it. The biy’s family was already in touch on the email. Me biys will be at the top a the toll bridge at eight am tomorra. Finn is handed over first. The Cowboy’s plan is ta have bout a hundred caravans an two hundred men all in balaclavas. The Cowboy will walk the biys inta the middle a the caravans an aytch a the biys go inta different ones an then they’d all drive away at the same time an somewhere along the line they join up. Flood the roads with vans is his idea. I can hair Catherine cluckin an getting ready to fuck me outta it. But come her time all she says is, ‘This needs to

be ended Sid, only one man can do tha an you got to take control here.’ Catherine says. ‘Dint say nothing ta The Cowboy, just go, just take the biy an go.’

‘Where? Wherm I suppost ta go?’

‘Ye all go with him Johnny, Peter, Tommy. I am sick ta death a this. Stay here an you’ll either be dead or in prison, neither way you won’t never see them biys again. Sort it out. This needs to be finished now. No more messin.’

‘He’s not going alone. Tommy can go with him.’ Peter Mac says.

‘Me? I’m not the one with a fucking deathwish. Let Johnny go, he’s the fighter.’

‘I got a family, so does Peter Mac.’

‘I’m righ fuckin here.’

‘Ye all go.’ Catherine said. ‘Go until yer far away.’

‘I’m not laving you here to dale with fucking Ronnie Kray.’

‘Ach, he’s more Ronnie Corbett than Ronnie Kray.’

An thas how we made the plan. Peter Mac, Tommy, Johnny, Catherine an me. The only argument were who were comin with me. Johnny wrote the whole thing out in four steps on four papers. Tommy tells Martin, Peter Mac tells Mary Mac, Catherine gets Nellie, WinnieJ an Francie’s Mary. It wernt half nine in the mornin an we had a plan like we was the fuckin navy seals or somhin.

First Martin drives down inta Francie’s yard like he did last month. Far down ta need thray men bout half hour ta move it. Then Mary’s cryin, louder an louder, she’s not feelin so good in the babby area and she needs the car like an not any car, this car, she goes on bout her mammy tellin her never to take a strange car to the hospital givin birth. Francie’s helpin straight off but the Cowboy an Steamer need work so Nellie goes over an on bout the love a God an tha moves both them quick ta help. All the while Tommy sorted me with extra petrol an Peter Mac an Johnny carry Finn ta me van. Catherine, Mary Mac an the other womin are organsin the childers for a trip ta town an thas code for Finglas to stall with Catherine’s kin.

I finely thank Catherine for evryhin an she only pats me on the arm an says she'll see me in Tuam next week or next month or maybe it'll be Spain an I can tell her all the details. We'll laugh then she says. I take the backway ta me caen ta collect me things. A few clothes for the biys, for me, the pictures an me money from the payout. I only look around one last time. It's not the same without Annie, never was. I walk quick cross the yard, kaypin me eyes on Francie's house all the time an now Nellie yells out for me from her caravan. I'd a just kept walkin but she's runnin cross the fuckin estate yellin so I motion ta her to shut up.

'Whatever yer doin, take this.' She whisper all a sudden an slips a chain with three medals inta me hand.

I rowl me eyes, me fuckin hairt. 'Alrigh, thanks Nellie.'

'St Christopher so you travel safe, St Dymphna for sound judgement an St Jude in case you need a miracle.' I'm already movin away from her, no sign a nothin from Francie's house still. Catherine's waving tellin me to move it. The lads are in the vans watchin too. Before I move away she grabs up me other hand, 'An this.'

It's a paper bag an I can feel a gun inside. 'Jaysis Nellie.'

'It's Jimmy's glock but he's no need for it in the Joy, not this one anyway. It's loaded. There's more bullets in this bag if you need them. Playse God you dint use it.' She stops me before I can say anyhin. 'Wheest.' She squeezes me hand, 'Good luck. God bless.'

I might be the only one without a fuckin gun here. I shove it under me seat. Breathe out. I gev the signal an we're off. We need a clear way without being stopped an sure enough we make it aysy over the M1 an then cross the N1.

A newer new plan

Once I see a dacent pull out, I stall ta check on the biy. Peter Mac, Johnny an Tommy drive in roun me. We're not five minutes stalled when a car drives by an slams on its brakes. Johnny goes roun ta see who it is. I whisper ta Peter tha Jimmy's Glock is under me seat. He winks an lifts his hand outta the pocket a his coat. I only see the handle as he wraps his hand around it.

It's JP. Fuck. Ya can almost hear us all let go our breath at the same time.

Peter Mac hits JP on the side a the head. 'Where you been eh? Lavin when yer family needs ya most.'

'I dint lave, I wis drivin back.'

'You went ta Ikea?' I says.

'Yeah,' He nods, but he dint sound right.

'Where's Ellie?' Now he looks rale uncomfortable, like he's gonta cry the guilty fucker an he's tryin ta spit it out. He's gone ta the shades. I know it, I grab him an shake him. 'Where's Ellie?'

'Okay,' He pushes me back. 'Ellie an Rosie are with her aunty in Walshestown.' He's fidgetin, like he's scared. 'We wernt at Ikea, tha wis an excuse. I'd no clue youse wis lavin, I was thinkin youse wis stayin at the estate, an The Cowboy an Francie ya ought ta see their guns, this wild west thing is too far gone now, an Rosie, she's not a month old an I dint want this for her. I mayne between us bein moved off the haltin site in Arklow an now this, it int the best a starts. So me an Ellie we got to talkin bout what might go on an I'm scared for the two a them I wis. I am. So we decide they'd lave till this blows over. I drove them down but I wis comin back. I'm here like arnt I? I towd Ellie's family. They said they'd help if we needed any.'

We've all been proprly shut up now. This is what I done ta peple.

'Thas noble a you JP,' says Johnny and then his phone rings. He stares at the number for a second and answers .

‘It’s all over the news,’ JP says.

‘Is it? Our names like?’ Tommy’s all fuckin smiles.

‘No. Just his picture,’ JP says an Tommy kicks a rock. ‘But the shades are evrywhere. I been stopped twice already. There’s loads a Travellers roun the place, on the roads like, it’s class. Spike Collins wis picked up in Navan. They held him for a few hours but there were nothin on him sos they had to let him go. But lads they’re crackin down.

‘JP you took first aid,’ Tommy says.

‘Only at the chemical plant, like two years since. I mayne if someone’s burned okay.’

‘Go see the biy,’ It’s more of an order from Peter Mac than a question.

We’re not takin no for an answer an JP jumps up into the hode of me van. ‘Jaysis Sid, he’s losin blood.’

‘How dya know?’

‘The pool a blood right here.’

JP takes the biys’ pants off an by our ractions you’d think we found a dead body in the woods. I dint want ta see his fucked up leg but I’m starin an I’m squintin like as if I’ll see less tha way an me shoulders are up roun me ears. Is mostly all the blood but when JP gets rid a the bandage, the leg’s all bruised an gapin open. Peter Mac’s more direct an just turns away.

‘Are yees takin him to the hospital?’ JP aks.

‘Tha wernt the plan, no,’ Says I.

‘We’re switchin in the mornin. Just gotta kayp him good till then.’ Tommy says.

‘Are yees fuckin mad?’ JP says. ‘His stitches burst.’

‘Is tha bad like?’ I aks.

‘Well he’s not gonta be dancin tonight.’

‘Is he gonta live?’ says Tommy.

‘I’m no doctor.’

We need someone to help. Someone who knows what to do. ‘What about the grandfather—Doctor Mallin?’ says I.

‘Lads,’ Johnny interrupts. ‘Tha’s Tinedale, the construction one member him? The wan who fired The Cowboy after he threatened him with the nail gun. They want to make a private deal. They’ll give us twenty grand.’

‘Who?’

‘The family.’

‘Twenty fucking grand?’ Peter Mac says. ‘That’s it?’

‘What else do we get?’

‘He int know. He’s gettin back to me.’

‘Twenty grand is a long way from five hundred grand’

‘Twenty grand is alright between the few us. Weekend away somewhere nice, sure end this now and it’s a bit of a lark, well worth it.’ Tommy says.

‘They gotta promise they’ll be no charges.’

‘None of you got to worry about charges. This is all me. We take the five hundred grand. I’ll go til they catch me.’

‘We’re accomplices Sid.’

Peter Mac looks over at Johnny whose noddin his head till he sees Finn’s leg an turns away agin. ‘Fuck he’s bad. Whatever we do, we have to make it quick. No choice, can’t take the risk. We dint want anyhin to happen to the lad when he’s on our bukes, nothin, ya get me?’

‘Tell Tinedale we want two hundred and fifty grand. Half our rignal price. We still carry on with the guards but if he comes back with a reasonable offer, we consider it.’ I says and then turn to JP. ‘How long we got?’

‘I’m no doctor.’

I’m gonta to level this shitehawk if he says tha one more time.

JP jacks the leg up on his own knee an takes them thick pads an hodes them in place, ‘Cowboy’s plan bit much int it. No fuckin wonder Anto Donaghue got banged up. If the family thing dint work out and the guards is the only option, I wis thinkin all ye need to do is with all these vans on the road, one a ya collect Sid’s biys an once yer safe, away from the shades like, someone else go in, drop him at Lady a Lourdes an then as yer leggin it, call them an tell them where he is.’

The way we turn inta one another we all know tha this is it, an we all know we all know it.

‘Yer van JP, it’s still registered in Wickla int it?’ says Johnny.

Johnny tells JP he’s comin with me an JP protests but he’s got nothin on Johnny or Peter Mac so JP thinks he’s agreein but Peter Mac’s already in the back a JP’s van.

‘It’s like fuckin Shangri-la in here.’ He’s got a purple candle with some Indian god an a hundred arms on it. ‘This’d be the god of ridin now would it?’ Next he hodes up a bag a grass. ‘An a little grayse to kayp things nice an aysy eh, there ya are Sid, JP has sactly wha ya need.’

‘I wish.’ Says I. Five months workin with Richie Keane an I wouldn’t piss on the stuff.

Peter Mac shrugs an pops the weed into his own pocket. JP’s wrappin the biy’s leg now an the rest a us are movin me tools an all me papers from court ta Johnny an Peter Mac’s vans. Peter Mac wernt kiddin bout JP’s van. There’s a bed an pillows, a poster a two blondies an one has a strip a bush an the other has it cleared away completely. There’s even a fuckin stereo. When JP’s ready we move

Finn an the food an the blankets an the guns. I lave me own van unlocked so whoever finds it dint need ta smash me windies. Playse god, let nothin happen ta it.

JP has a bunch a phones he's lifted over the last few months. We agree on the plan agin an I want ta be the one ta talk ta the shades but the rest a them won't have it. Johnny tells me ta stick with the biy an I want Johnny ta negotiate with the shades then, but he says Peter Mac's as good as any, an Johnny's a better man ta spake ta the Guards at the estate. Johnny's worried now for his own, he wants ta get back. Between JP movin Ellie an Rosie out an the shook he got when he saw Finn's leg the dish is runnin away with the spoon in his mind, an I wonder now if all a them are right an I am hangin roun The Cowboy too much.

'Aytch a us has a job,' Johnny says. He an Tommy are headed ta the estate ta clear out. They'll tell the lads what the story is, JP's admant we tell Francie, they're brothers like, we can't agree on Steamer but he's alrigh an we do. Me an JP are hidin an we all agree on where. JP gevs Peter Mac a pink sparkly phone ta call the shades an it got a purple unicorn danglin from the end. He rips the unicorn an throws it at JP an I get a Motorola flip phone, blue. Peter Mac deals with the shades, Johnny deals with the family. We're no takin no chances the shades won't be tracin calls so Peter Mac's off ta Navan. Mick Joyce's biy Christy were kilt in Navan there by a motor car. Maybe he's been dead ten year, but tha dint matter. The plan is set Johnny tells me, stick ta it. Wait for Peter Mac's call. No messin an if anyhin happens tha goes square I'm ta ring him sharply. He's not jokin he says ta me like I'm BigAl or somhin. We shake hands when we're ready ta go. They're starin at me, Johnny, Tommy an Peter Mac an then Johnny grabs both sides a me face an tells me I'm doin the right thing, an I says thanks an see ya. When I climb inta JP's van I wonder if I ever will. But I say nothin.

Search party

I waited for Finn after school. I went up in the car to meet him, but he wasn't there. But neither was Toby so I went to the Gleasons. Bridget opened her door and smiled, 'Come on in.'

'I'm looking for Finn.'

'He's not here.'

'He didn't come back to school.' Toby yelled from the front room where he was holding down the new puppy from rushing the door. I asked Toby what he meant. I rang Finn's Headmaster who suggested I contact the missing child hotline. To register, he said, call as soon as possible. He scared me a little even though he also advised me that in situations such as this the child is often at the cinema or an arcade. They can't classify a child as missing for twenty-four hours, but after ten hours, they will notify Gardaí.

At six-thirty Colin stopped by to see if Finn had showed up yet and we drove together around Clontarf and Fairview searching for him. Fairview Park was the worst of the local places. A teenager was stabbed there a while ago and last month someone knocked the head off the Sean Russell statue. We drove down the Strand until Sutton then back into St Anne's Park. Later, Colin and Toby biked down to the Park for a closer inspection. I photocopied pictures of Finn, and Bridget helped distribute them to the local shops. Most people recognised him, including the off-license guy, but no one had seen him today.

The rain had stopped anyway and it was warm now too, this was all good news. Before the funeral, my mother had me draw up to-do lists. They helped keep me calm and organised so I came home to make a list. Where could he be? Where are his favourite places? What is his favourite activity? Why did I slap him? Why does he have his father's temper? What am I going to do if something happens to him? What am I going to do if something happens to him? What if someone has hurt him? Why did he run away? WHERE. IS. HE? I'm writing too quickly, I'm making lists of lists to make lists about and I'm writing too quickly I can barely read it now.

Where the fuck was he? Why is he doing this?

I dropped my head on the table. I can't manage myself anymore. I can barely stand the idea of working. I can't stand up for myself. My son hates me. I'm not sure how much money I have in the bank. The List. Control YOURSELF. List.

Where would he be:

Cinema

Theatres (unlikely)

Croke Park (would he get in?)

Sporty place

Sciencey place (is there a planetarium here? I don't think so)

Trinity

Malls—Dundrum, Jervis Centre (more likely if it was raining but maybe)

Shops open late

I rang Denis and then Gabe rang, they were all coming over. The day was overcast so the light wasn't going to last very late. Anne's Park was massive, but at least they closed it after dark. Bridget dealt with Childline, and Colin registered an alert in the Gardaí system. He contacted Trinity security and then asked a few younger officers just off-duty to check the arcades and cinemas.

This was how the night played out. Me making lists and gradually my house filling up with more people who thought making lists was a good idea and there we all were with our colons and asterisks and our good ideas getting absolutely fucking nowhere. I was sure he was in a cinema up until about ten o'clock. Since then I've been sitting on this couch. There are two detectives behind me with laptops and GPS equipment. Stephen and Liam. I've met Stephen before at one of Bridget's dinners. I watched them for a while from the chair. But moved to the sofa and sat with my back to them. They tell me there is nothing I can do, not yet. I don't know what that means. I make a list, bulleting out the possibilities. It's seven-thirty in the morning and Finn is officially missing. Detectives are assigned to the case. Colin is in charge of the investigation, which required some pleading to the Commander but Colin convinced him and I'm happy for that.

Gabe goes from sitting beside me (saying nothing) to sitting beside Maura (praying with her) to the kitchen (no idea). Denis is in the kitchen and I don't know why he's there and not here. Tom is beside me detailing how he's lived through all these horrific situations and he's here to tell the tale thanks to luck and know-how, two elements, he assures me, Finn has in spades. He was in a hurricane somewhere

or was it an avalanche and everyone was screaming, ‘Socorro, socorro, por favor’. Is that Argentina—do they have snow in Argentina? Why am I even thinking this and in between the natural disasters and terrorist attacks he keeps repeating some fucking elephant rampage story and in every iteration the elephant gets bigger and the death toll rises and against all odds Tom keeps surviving and this is supposed to calm me down, and at this point I’m beginning to cheer for the fucking elephant.

‘You don’t have to be here. Feel free to go in and talk to Denis.’

‘I want to be here. Am I bothering you?’

‘No.’ Awkwardness grows as the silence continues. ‘It feels strange. We’re not really friends. I mean isn’t it more natural for Bridget to be here and you to be there?’

He’s on the edge of the couch looking at me, ‘Why do you think we’re not friends?’

I shake my head and click the pen in my hand. ‘What if he’s gone?’

‘It’s early days Ruth.’

I want to tear his eyes out. I want to punch him and the guards, take their headsets and do it myself. ‘Why is he doing this?’ Suddenly tears and sobs descend down on me.

‘Ruth, you need to pull yourself together now. This is not the time for panic. You need to be on form.’

I nod, wipe my cheek and sigh. He’s right. ‘Anyway it’s not me, it’s Denis. He’s doing this to him. We’re not lovers,’ I turn to him quickly. ‘I swear.’ He’s tried it on very discreetly, but any move he’s been made has always been about him not me. I don’t need to be there, anyone would do. ‘I need him to help me with administrative things like the house, money and legal stuff. I like having him around and I do like him. But there’s nothing physical, not even a kiss, well not a lengthy one anyway. I thought it would be good to have Denis around, a male figure and all that.’

Tom sits back and sighs.

‘That’s the truth.’

‘I know.’

Maura has been praying all night. Father Diarmuid drove down from Drogheda to sit with them. He comes over every once in a while to talk to me too. He places his hand on my shoulder and starts to pray. Stop I say. I don’t do this. What do you do? He says which is sort of unexpected. Nothing. I’m doing nothing, I’m making lists. He nods and asks if he can pray in front of me and I say no, I prefer silence. Diarmuid doesn’t say some inane thing to try and make things better. He doesn’t make the face that others do, the pity face. And after all that I wish he would pray for Finn, just in case. And then I think maybe I should, just in case. He says he’ll make us a hot drop in the kitchen.

Tom was out earlier with a search party in the park but they’ve stopped until morning. He’ll go again later. There were others searching too. Everyone from the street, even the renters with the dreadlocks. Finn’s headmaster was by earlier. Gabe talked to him. He’s organised a group for this morning. The Chief Justice checked in before he went to bed and again this morning. The detectives keep repeating his name. Paul Henry, Paul Henry, Paul Henry. He rang Colin too. I was sitting in the chair when he called. Colin’s tone didn’t change with him.

My parents and my brother ring. Gabe had emailed them. What could they do? My mother is going to meditate. This family prays, my family meditates. It’s all the same. Someone said they are praying for help from Mark. Father Diarmuid and Gabe come in with tea. Maura says no and Diarmuid sits down beside her. I wonder if the xanax I had last night are still affecting me.

‘What’s Denis doing?’ Tom asks.

‘He’s uh—’ Gabe has the look on his face like when the horse has to be put down. ‘Struggling. He thinks it’s his fault.’

I hear Colin’s phone ring and he walks out of the room to answer it. I can hear the tone of his voice from the hallway change. After a few minutes he taps Steve’s shoulder. ‘Is it here? Bring it up on the email.’

Tom and Gabe are talking and my attention jumps from their conversation to what Colin is up to and then back. He and Stephen are reading on the computer but I can't see it. Then I hear him say. 'Contact Henry, I'll talk to the Commissioner and deal with Denis.'

He leaves the room and for a few seconds I stay on the sofa but then I hear the kitchen door shut and I'm up and following him. In the kitchen Colin had sat down at the table with Denis and Bridget. I ask what is happening.

A ransom note. Finn is fine, and in exchange for his return they're asking for five hundred thousand euro and Sid Connors' children.

I look around to see if I misunderstood. Denis is holding the edges of the table as if he'll fall if he doesn't. Bridget has her hand over her mouth. Tom and Gabe walk into the kitchen. Colin explains the situation again and that's a good thing because I don't think anyone believed it the first time through. Then there's a time of silence, where space morphs into gel-like blobs, like being inside a lava lamp, panic slowly rises and a rash of goosebumps culminate in a chill shuddering up my spine and before panic sets in Gabe wraps his arms around me but then Denis breaks into a strange fit of quiet laughter. He stands up and makes a phone call over the sink, his back to us.

They've a search warrant already. Local Guards are being dispatched and the Security Branch are on their way to the Traveller estate. But the Minister of Justice is reluctant to activate the Crisis Response Plan. Denis yells into his phone, swearing at the person on the other end and then hangs up.

'It's a publicity stunt Denis. That's why they do this sort of thing. He's a gobshite not a terrorist.'

Denis closes his phone. He keeps staring at the ceiling every once in a while, taking deep breaths, nodding and saying something to himself that I can't hear. I can't bear the sight of him. I go to leave but before I can he says,

'This is not my fault.'

'Then whose fault is it?'

‘I’ll fix it.’

‘I don’t want you to fix it.’ I scream. ‘Your fixing is what got us here in the first place. You’re always fixing. Your life is one large fix. Leave it to the police.’

I go back into the front room and tell Maura who at first looked like she was going to faint, but fair play she went straight to her beads to pray. She didn’t lose it like I thought she would. Maybe we’re all getting used to trauma. Gabe comes in, whispers something to Maura as he hugs her and then he leaves. Bridget comes in and over to Maura and me.

‘He’s a smart kid, he’ll be okay.’ She places her hand on my shoulder. The hugs and support are helping. I appreciate them, I need them and I want to tell her so but all I can do now is cover my face in my hands.

The empire strikes back

When they leave the kitchen, I call Henry first and then the Minister. Colin’s gone all fucking bleeding heart weirdo, meeting the Travellers at the top of the toll bridge at eight am tomorrow. Finn is to be exchanged first then the boys. When does Bruce Willis arrive? This is how An Garda Síochána deal with a tiger kidnapping. A child—Finn—could do better than this. We know who they are. Anthony Donaghue is already in questioning at the Joy, in fact if they sort out the Donaghues and Connors here they’d kill two birds with one stone. The head of the Gardaí has already been on to them, I made sure of it. Colin already had to jump through a few loops to be assigned this, and the threat of being pulled better make him see sense. I’m pacing in the kitchen waiting for Henry to ring me back when Colin returns.

‘It’s hard to run an operation on two fronts Denis.’

‘Well maybe it’s time to stop acting like this is some sort of opportunity for personal redemption.’

‘I’m a fucking Chief Superintendent in Special Branch Denis. I know what I’m doing.’

‘Do you? From what I’ve seen you need to be sectioned under the mental health act.’

‘We are responding to events as they occur, and it’s pretty fucking difficult to do so when I’ve got the Minister of Justice on the line.’

‘They’re criminals, we don’t do things their way. We call the shots here.’

‘It’s a negotiation tactic.’

‘Negotiation? Is that what they call reckless risk-taking these days?’

‘I can play your game Denis, I can sweet talk everyone you throw at me. You’re not the only one with an official line. But we’re doing things my way. If you want to use your phone again, I suggest you shove it up your arse.’ He slams the kitchen door as he leaves.

Henry said he’d be in touch with the Commissioner and ring me back, but still I’m waiting. I look out the window, the backyard is full of pink roses. Tinedale knows Travellers in that area. He had hired them on as labourers in some of his developments. He still owes me for expediting the Wexford property deal. Once he answers his phone and understands the situation, he’s happy to help. He worked with Johnny Stokes, the one with the scrap metal firm, Sid Connors’ brother-in-law. I instruct him on what to do and what to say. Twenty thousand is my initial offer. He says he’ll call straight away and be back to me.

Below me in the sink there are about a dozen teaspoons. Spoons from stirring the tea. A dozen fucking teaspoons. How many more does she have? How many more does she need? I wash the spoons, and drop them in the holder on the drying rack. The door opens, but I don’t turn to see who it is.

‘Denis?’ It’s my father. ‘You all right?’ He places his hand on my back and I stretch out over the sink. He doesn’t say anything and we just stand there, me over the sink with his hand on my back. ‘They’re making arrangements in the front room, you should come see for yourself.’ Neither of us move for a minute but then he pats my back, ‘Come on.’

I follow him in. They're talking to someone on speakerphone. I can see Liam's computer searching GPS coordinates.

'Youse're misinformed.' The voice on speakerphone says. 'That note wernt writed by us. It wis . . . it were somebody else alrigh. We want no trouble. And youse dint neither. You gevs the biys an once their away safe, ye'll be towd where he is, the biy. So the three Connor biys are to be on the Dundalk road, outside Tesco as soon as possible, early afternoon? In the pullout in the road there, alrigh?'

'It's the bus stop.' Says my mother who is still sitting with Father Diarmuid at the table. Colin holds his hand up. She mouths sorry and covers her mouth with her hand.

'Is it a bus stop?' the voice sounds further away now, 'isi?' He returns to the phone. 'So it is, but listen we dint no Gardaí, not you, not Sergeant Roche, nobody. Any signs a shades means no Finn.'

'You're asking me to trust you?'

'We got no rayson to kayp Finn. We only want the biys back.'

'Let me talk to Finn. I need to speak with him, make sure he's okay.' Colin says.

'No can do. He's not here.'

'Then your arrangement isn't going to work I'm afraid.'

'Colin.' Ruth blurts out loud and again he has his hand up telling her to stop.

'Listen, I'm honest. We'll not cross ya.'

'Listen, I'm honest. Not a chance in hell. You could keep Finn and continue to make demands.'

8 Abbey Crescent, Navan. Liam writes it on a piece of paper for Colin and then I step out of the door to let him pass with his laptop and headphones. He's contacting the Navan Gardaí in the hall.

‘Ah Christ, listen kayping the lad is the last thing we want. Fucks sake. Alrigh. What then? What if we exchange—there at the bus stop. Biys for Finn, maybe ya want one a his parents there or a nurse maybe.’ Someone in the background says something. ‘Sorry, his grandparents I mayne or a nurse. But how do we know ya won’t come after us, the second we switch.’

‘Your strategic analysis committee hasn’t thought this through?’ Colin laughs at the idea.

‘Colin what are you doing? This is my son, give them your word.’

Colin is drawing his hand across his throat.

‘Who’s tha?’

‘I’m his mother. I’ll do it. I’ll be there. Tell me the time, they’ll be no police.’

‘Ruth. Shut. Up.’

‘His muther? I though you was dead.’

‘What? I’m not—’ She sees me standing in the doorway and then turns back talking to the phone. ‘Is he okay?’ Her voice starts to wobble.

‘Oh yeah, no, listen love, I dint mayne to upset ya. I musta got tha wrong. He’s grand, he’s roarin round the place, so he is. They was racin horses earlier. He were boxin last night too, sure he’s a great cam.’

Colin looks like he’s going to kill her.

‘This is grand, it’s grand int it Gleeson, I’m sure there’ll be no cops hangin round like. Aren’t you? What sure with yer Aisling gettin so big, you got plenty of other things to be doin. An Toby, he’s a handful, int he? Saw him the other day with that feckin whistle. It drives the old wan nuts dohwn it?’

Bridget is only half understanding this, but she realises those are her children the voice is talking about.

‘I have to contact the HSE to find out how soon we can organise the Connors’ boys. Ring me back in twenty minutes.’

‘Twenty minutes.’ The voice hangs up and for a second or two the din of the dial tone fills the space before Stephen ends the call.

‘Ruth you’re a fucking liability,’ Colin immediately yells at her.

‘Calm down.’ I say.

He threw his hand up at me, ‘It’s done now. Are you happy?’ He turns to Stephen who is biting his nails watching, ‘Are you calling the HSE or are you just going to sit there all day and waste my time.’

Stephen nods and turns slowly back to his phone.

‘Does this mean he’s been watching us?’ Bridget asks.

Colin rubs his eyes, ‘Do you remember that profile you had up on your website last year?’ He’s still yelling. ‘This is what happens when you put too much information on the fucking internet.’

‘It was only there a week before you took it down.’

‘Long enough Bridget.’

‘That was ages ago Colin,’ I interrupt. ‘They aren’t computer geniuses.’

‘He’s been watching us,’ She’s starting to cry.

‘It doesn’t mean they’ve been watching us.’

‘What about Toby’s whistle?’

Colin didn’t have any explanation for the whistle, ‘I’m not scared.’

‘I am,’ Bridget stands up. ‘They have Finn, what’s to stop them from taking Toby or Aisling?’ She apologises for crying and then he yells at her to go home and she apologises again to all of us and runs out the door.

Stephen is busy contacting the HSE while Colin and Liam are listening back to the recorded conversation. He shakes his head at the point when Ruth interrupts. ‘All they need is a fucking inch, a fucking millisecond to get on top of you.’

‘Colin can you not have a female officer with a gun who’s trained for this kind of thing? They won’t know the difference,’ Tom asks. ‘She can’t be the one to do this.’ He turns to her, ‘I won’t let you. Denis won’t allow it. It’s too dangerous.’

‘It’s not Denis’ decision.’ She says as if I’m not even here. ‘When did I start needing Denis’ consent?’

‘And if Finn blows her cover?’ Colin says.

‘Or if Finn is injured or worse?’ She says.

I’ve had it with this shite. I can’t take it anymore. ‘Ruth you are essentially living in fantasy land. I know it and Colin knows it. There are rules, conventions, about this sort of thing and you are not strolling into the middle of a Travellers camp waving a fucking olive branch.’

She just stands there staring at me. ‘It’s not a Traveller camp and—’

‘They asked for her,’ Colin interrupts her.

‘I don’t care if they asked for fucking Mary McAleese. She’s not doing it. If they asked for Aisling would you send her too?’

‘Why is everyone speaking for me?’ She shouts for attention. ‘I’m doing this and you can stop with your veiled insults Denis. You don’t tell me what to do.’

‘For fucks sake. Colin, there’s rules against this. She’ll only do this over my dead body.’

‘I’m standing right here.’ She’s screaming and waving her arms up and down, ‘I’m a human being.’

Colin stares at me and I can see he’s thinking through the Mallin family psychoses at this point which may necessitate professional help yes, but he’s not one to talk, they base plots for *Fair City* on his family dramas.

‘I think you’ll find it’s not your decision Denis.’ Then he turns to Ruth, ‘Sorry to have to agree with Denis, but he’s right, there are rules against this sort of thing. The incident has already been labelled a high security risk. You can be in a car

nearby, you will be given priority to see him once we have him back, but I can't put you in this position.'

She sits down on the couch beside Tom, staring at the ground and with her mouth all screwed up and fists clenched. She's mad at me now, but I'm right and I'll be proven right. I'm sure of it. My mother sits down and wraps her arms around her. She'll hate that but won't fob her off.

My phone rings. It's Tinedale and I return to the kitchen. They want two hundred and fifty grand and prosecution protection, as if I have any control over such things. Two hundred and fifty grand not to make this a police matter, the alternative is to leave it and go through the press haranguing all over again. I can see Fintan O'Toole's article now: Victim or Persecutor? If it gets out that I tried to hide this, I'll look like an eejit. The fucking press. Leave it, I tell Tinedale. Let it be a police matter and let the fucker eat himself.

The hidin spot

We take the back roads an cross over ta Blackhall Cross an then just north a Glaspistol an up a short grass path into a solid group a trees. The good thing here it's the end a the road an it's a hill so we see anyone comin our way. No one seen us get here anyway an as soon as we find our spot in the trees, we stall an even chill a bit. JP goes ta take a piss an I light a fag an stare out the window.

I never been a fan a Louth. Never felt much welcome here. Winnie an Joe, Annie's parents, their caravan were sprayed with pig shit near Dundalk bout ten years ago. Anywhere else tha Annie begged, if they dint want her they'd shut the door an say no thanks, end a story, but in Louth they stand on their steps scramin at her an won't lave til she were off the street. Not just their caens even. She were only beggin.

JP got back in. 'He's alrigh now, bleedin's stopped, breathin okay, sleepin I think.'

'You're a fuckin miracle worker JP.'

‘More desprate than anyhin, I dint want ta know what’s gonta happen ta us if anyhin happens ta him.’

‘Well nothin’s gonta happen now tha yer here.’ He’s nervous but he’s not the only one. ‘Listen, I’ll only say this once, but I’m sorry you an Ellie an Rosie been caught up in all a this.’

‘Truth be towd Sid, I wernt lookin forward ta goin back. I’m sorry for the others but I rather be anywhere than with tha fuckin mentaller.’

‘He’s had his share. Member, Danny, the crib death, an he lost a lot a money in the steel.’

‘Thas why he wants the money so bad.’ JP says it like he’s cluein in.

The Cowboy’s more like me than I care ta admit. Evryhins great, top a the world an then bam it’s all gone. One or the other. He buyed all tha steel when he saw Johnny doin well an at tha time he’d just got done on the horse dales an he were needin somhin else. He stayed away from the drugs, fair play, an thas more than I can say for meself but he sees Johnny doin well an he decides he’s movin inta the scrappin business for himself. Johnny took some hit on tha steel but he had nough other things ta kayp him floatin, he’s in business comin fifteen year now. But The Cowboy, this were his first dale. Johnny tried ta warn him off it, it were too risky, but The Cowboy listens ta no one.

‘Are you ragin he’s banjaxed you?’

‘Cowboy’s only in a spot a trouble only now.’ I’m sick a talkin so I light another fag an go check on the biy. He’s still out. ‘You sure he’s sleepin? Maybe he’s in a coma or somhin?’

JP turns roun, ‘Whas the diffrence? Maybe both.’

‘He were runnin an then he fell down, bit fuckin strange int? Ya think he’d pass out when he’s sleepin.’ The hode of JP’s van here is nicer than some gaffes I stalled at. I sit beside the biy’s head. JP’s set it up nice, he’s even got a cartoon buke. *Watchmen.*

JP's busy thinkin out loud in the front. 'Maybe he dint have ta when he were sleepin, like yer body's restin an it dint need ta stop, but when yer runnin roun an there's somhin wrong with ya anyway.' Annie's da always say JP's a thinker but I int saw it before now. He goes off debatin fuckin medical science ta himself an I see the biy's rucksack is here an I open it.

Dublin jersey, fair enough, he lives there. Socks, trousers, pjs, just like his fuckin ma packed it. I unzip the side pouch an there's photies. Himself an his Da, must be. The biy's younger an blonder, happier. Hair's shorter, looks better. He an the Da are the fuckin spit a one another, cept the Da has grey hair. He looks like his own Da, the horse doctor, in fact like Mallin too. The two a them are sittin at a table, somewhere warim cos theys only in t-shirts an a palm tree's in the back. Int Spain. The Da's arm is roun the back a the biy's chair. Good head a hair on him, small round glasses, good set a teeth. There's a second photie a the biy an the father agin on top a mountain. I can tell they're up high cos a the view. The Da's standin behind with his hands on the biy's shoulders, no glasses this time. His hair's a mess. Both a them are happy. The photie'd been cut but I can see a hand roun the Da's waist. A ladies' arm maybe. I drop the photie a the mountain in the pocket but kayp the other an stare a it for a while fore I slip it in me own wallet. Winnie's medals are still roun his neck an I feel for me own. They're still there. I grab hode of them an bate them ginst me chest. Playse God.

Drop another blanket over him an feel his forehead, he's not as hot as before. I open the phone JP gev me, but nothin. It says three megapixels on the side a it, like thas somhin, so I take a picture a Finn ta see. It's alrigh, nothin much. I take me own phone from out a me coat. Four point two megapixels an thas not even advertised. They're tryin ta get us thinkin the wrong way. Fuckin bullshit these ads are, the more somhin is shite the more ads it's got. Johnny's phone is five pixel an his photos are class an not a fuckin ad anywhere.

JP's gone ta the other side a the trees ta see the view now maybe. On one side it's green fields an then a band a white sand an blue straight ta England or maybe Wales. It's nice although I never been one ta camp near water an it still gev me the creeps. The other side is green hills an roads criss-crossin an the odd car bootin along. There's an illegal tip on the far side a Gormanstown over there.

JP's sittin on a rock, 'I wis thinkin bout the biy missin his Da an it'd be great if his Da wis here when he wakes up wouldn't it. He'd like tha. He's sort a the sensitive type, tha kid.'

'It's his Ma he's missin.'

'I thaw it was his Da?'

'No, his Ma, his Da's dead.'

'But he still misses him.'

I'm wonderin if JP had a smoke in the last fifteen minutes. I'd a smelt it. 'Anyway it's my biys who are missin their Da.'

'No word a lie.' He's a bit silent an before he goes on I've a notion what he's goin ta say. 'I miss me Da too.' JP's Da took his own life when JP was just a babby, so he dint know him, but he thinks he did. No rayson for why his Da did it an no one talks bout it. Annie thought it was the depression an five kids was too much for him. He hung himself outside his own father's caravan an he meaned for his father ta find him but it were his wife tha did an she was never right agin.

'Dya think a her? Annie?'

'What kind of question is tha? I dint never not think a her. I think about what she'd have ta say about things, everyday. I like ta think she's not sittin there beside her Ma, cryin into her arm ashamed a the sight a me.'

'Not a chance. She'd never be ashamed a you. You had a few hairid breaks Sid, yer only doin the best you can. No one is shamed a ya, specially not Annie.'

'I just want me family home.'

'And by the end a the day Sid, in a few fuckin hours it's gonta happen. The plan's foolproof an I know these roads better than any Guard. If we're not takin the money, whas it matter? Finn, he's a bit banged up but sure thas not our fault.'

I thought like tha yesterday but not so much anymore. Then the Motorola rings, thank fuck. It's Peter Mac. 'Whas the story?'

‘Are you sittin down?’

They agreed on switchin times but there’s a new rangement. The switch is between me an the mother an someone from the Social at two o’clock, so thas two hours from now, at the bus stop outside Tesco. They won’t release the biy unless Social is there.

‘What are they gonta do, the fifteen point assessment scale?’ What am I suppost ta say ta the Ma. What am I suppost ta do, lay him at her feet? He’s fuckin comatose boss.’

‘Wake him up.’

‘Can we wake him up?’ I says ta JP.

‘The kid? No.’ JP shakes his head an then stops. ‘I mayne I’ve no clue.’

‘Fuck sake. Any word from Johnny an Tom?’

‘They’re alrigh. No Guards yet. The Cowboy is plannin on lavin with Finn sharply. But no clue where he’s thinkin a takin him. Catherine’s gone with the childers ta Finglas, but The Cowboy thinks they all gone down to Brigid’s Well an he thinks Finn’s with them. Martin an Mary they gone ta the hospital, parently all tha pertend pushin got the babby the wrong idea.’

‘And Steamer an Francie?’

‘Francie’s alrigh, he’s okay. He told Johnny he dint like all the guns parently. I dint know bout Steamer. I’m almost sorry I’ll miss when The Cowboy goes bullaba.’

‘The fuckin Social an his ma—how we suppost ta get out once we drop him.’

‘It’s sorted Sid. Tell JP he needs ta be on his game. Back roads, tell him tha. I say head twards Finglas but I’ll talk agin ta Johnny an we’ll sort it. It’s grand. I been on this phone too long already. I’ll meet you behind Tesco, at the bins, in an hour forty five alrigh, we’ll be ready for them.’

He hung up an JP's standin there with his arms crossed, eye's big, gaggin ta hear the news.

'Two hours?' Is all he says after I tell him.

'Yeah. Well hour an forty-five.'

'Finglas is too aisy. North Meath. There's a few nice camps near Emlagh, Stokes cousins are in a haltin site near there, ya know the ones.'

I did an he were right, Finglas were too aisy. 'He said there'd be no cops.'

'Bet they'll be waitin for us on the edge a town.' We's quiet for a few seconds. 'Goin in's gonta be as much a risk as comin out, like climbin a mountain so.'

'Maybe they'll just shoot us on our way in.'

JP's quiet now an I probly shouldnta joked bout the shootin part.

'Member the part a the plan bout gettin vans? We need them specially in Drogheda too.' JP says. He calls Ellie an her lot help no bother. An then I thought a me cousins in Finglas an Paddy Collins who were wantin ta help somehow. Between the two a us we've enough vans leavin Walshestown an the north side a Dublin in an hour Drogheda looks like the factory exploded so.

'It's all we can do Sid. Best way ta dale with the shades I reckon.'

'David an Goliath.'

'The fuckin mouse an the elephant.' JP pertends he's The Cowboy an folds his hands over his chest. 'The fuckin wren we is.'

'Fuck off, you're scarin me now.'

It's almost one. We's meetin for two. There'll be enough vans out we can get lost in traffic. It's perfeck, so why is me hairt batein like fuckin rave music. I'm rubbin me eyes an then scratchin me scalp, kaypin me head down an tryin ta get a fuckin grip. I'd moments like this before sure, like when I'd ta face up ta Richie Keane ta

quit the dalein. I thought I'd be one a them tha has ta dig their own grave. I was runnin between Limerick an Dublin dalein with me cousin but I lasted five months only, I wernt cut for it. Annie were havin trouble sleepin, so scared she were. I only did it cos we was hairid up with the babbies. I were fuckin brickin it from when I made me decision til I tow'd him. Though in fairness you dint tell Richie Keane nothin, you aks politely an pray he dint blow yer head off as ya walk out the door. The Cowboy's chickenfeed compared ta these ones. I said one a me childers were sick an me wife had a bad hairt. I got off lucky. I wernt deep nough in it for them ta care much bout me, or maybe Richie Keane was feelin generous tha day. I'd done me job, I dint owe no one no money an I kept away from the stuff. An they knew I'd kayp me mouth shut, well in fairness tha were a condition an I always did.

When Annie died a few a them came to her funeral, not Richie himself but others tha I been in contact with. When I saw them walk outta the church the world shrunk in all roun me at once. The whole world started at me an ended at them an evryhin got smaller as they got closer an for all I member Roy Keane could a shook me hand. I'm standin there waitin for them ta pull a gun an all they say is they're sorry for me loss. Tha bad hairt a hers. They thought she were the one drivin an had a hairt attack. They made a donation ta the Irish Hairt Foundation in Annie's name an bout two months layter a thank you letter off a the Foundation shows up in me post.

JP's happy lookin at the view an he's aksin bout why certain roads are in some places an not others. He thinks it's bout bedrock and the easiest cut. I let him talk but after a while I'm a fuckin expert on roads construction an I'm goin fuckin lula.

'You got a radio on yer phone?' I says.

'Naw only in the van.'

'I want ta hair if we're on the news.'

'I'm stayin here. Call me if we's on.'

He throws me his keys an I go ta the van. Weather report first an then the news music da da duh ta start. Some fucker in Pakistan or Palestine were it? Blew

himself up an kilt twenty-four people. Another wan kilt walkin down the road in Offaly an then the traffic report an now Joe Duffy is on. Nothin. Fuck all. Bit disappointin. I turn the keys an when I shut the door behind me I see it. The back door is open. I stand still for a second, I musta left it open I tell meself but I walk over cos I'm sure I'm playin tricks on meself, but there it is. Blood is on the floor and his rucksack int here. He's gone.

'Finn?' I turn roun an agin runnin evrywhere. Suddnly I'm like a fuckin cat with the distemper. 'Finn.' I'm scramin.

JP runs lumberin through the trees.

'He's gone, the biy's gone.'

He just stands there.

'JP, the biy is fuckin gone. JP.' I'm scramin. I'm runnin fuckin evry direction. 'JP.'

'Calm down Sid.' JP goes to check the back. His old bloody jeans are on the ground. 'He wis just here. He couldn't a gone far. There's only one way out and he can't be movin at a fast pace. We'll find him.' says JP. 'We'll drive.'

'JP, if he dies—'

'He won't die, dint think like that. He won't die.' We drive slow in case he's in a ditch. 'I saw this show on the telly bout this English yoke, in the military somewhere in Africa an all the aborigines are shootin him but he's still alive an he runs away but he thaw they was gonta ayte him so he walks through the jungle for six days losin blood all the time an he'd no water an still he survived. So six days in the jungle Sid, bleedin and no water, this int tha bad. We just gotta find him Sid, thas all.' Soon enough we's at the cross roads an there he is. Back from the dead with a new pair a pants on. An he's gettin inta a car.

'I dint fuckin believe it.' I slam me fists inta me face. 'If we're two minutes quicker.'

'Steady on,' Says JP. We wait until the car goes ont the road agin an we folla it.

The shades are all over the place, down evry fuckin road, evry parkin spot. Satellites are buzzin an squeakin an sendin the word ta the Army waitin over the hill probly or behind that hedge. We folla the car through Termonfeckin. Part a me wants ta crawl in the hode, smoke a huge joint an talk bout nothin an watch tha Indian centipede thing. But this int bout me, this is bout me biys, JP says agin ta kayp focus. They're dependin on me he says, otherwise they're gonta grow up in a fuckin court room, he says. An fair play ta him cos tha does it.

'Maybe I can get him outta the car.' I says.

'What are you gonta do, drag him out?'

'If I've to.'

'There's three a them in the car you eejit.'

We're drivin inta Drogheda now, Scarlet Street. Past the Tesco. I member the plan when I see Tesco and reach for me phone but I only got the one JP give me so I press in the numbers but the fuckin keys are too small and I can't get them out fast enough.

'They're takin him ta the hospital,' I says.

'No they int. If they were they'd a turned at Bredin Str—. ' JP dint finish what he's sayin cos if they're not turnin at Bredin Street they're probly goin ta fuckin Mill Street, where there's more pork than a slaughterhouse. He looks at me.

'Kayp yer eyes on the fuckin road.'

'We're gonta be fine.' He's talkin for his own benefit. 'We int seen no shades yet. Just kayp it aysy.' JP's drivin with his wrists cos his hands are balled up inta fists.

'Calm down fucks sake.' I yell at him an now it's me talkin for me own benefit. We pass the Magdalena tower. We named Maggie after it cos Annie loved it for some rayson. The car turns at Magdalena Street. We ease a little but still Mill Street int far.

‘They’s headed for the bridge.’ JP says but then they turn agin on Laurence Street an now stop. The kid gets out. The car drives on.

‘He’s fuckin wrecked,’ Says JP.

‘What time is it?’

‘Ten after.’

JP drives the van up on the path. ‘Call Peter Mac an Johnny.’ I says before I shut the door.

Not a conversation

Father Diarmuid might have imagined he had a fully blown conversion on his hands, but my reasons for wanting to be in the church aren’t religious. I’m here because it’s a quiet space, the funeral was here and once Finn had this fascination with Oliver Plunkett, and I was so excited for that because I thought he was interested in history, but Mark assured me his interest was more about the gruesome artefact than the story. I’m sitting near the back of the nave, staring up past the arcade of arches to the sanctuary where long stained glass windows add drama to the already spectacular altar. Services aren’t really my thing but the actual church structures are. St Peter’s is particularly grand, surprisingly so, not because of the exterior but because I wouldn’t have expected a church like this in a town like Drogheda, but that’s Europe for you. The solitude is too good to last. Denis sits down beside me.

‘Hard to believe this church isn’t even a hundred and twenty five years old isn’t it?’

He looks up towards the roof, ‘I think it’s older.’

‘There’s been a church here for a long time but this church is from the eighteen-eighties.’ I know he wants to talk, but I don’t want to talk to him. I say nothing hoping he’ll go away, but he starts.

‘I’m sorry. I’m sorry this has happened. But in whatever manner it did, be assured the full weight of the law will be thrown at Sid Connors. And when Finn’s home we’ll do something, go away. We’ll talk about things,’ He touches my shoulder. ‘We’ll sort through things. We just need time as a family to find some stability.’

‘As a family?’

‘In a broad sense.’ He takes his hand off my shoulder, slightly irritated. ‘This family needs to be stable and to do that we have to work together. The past eighteen months have been too chaotic, two years in fact. And each disaster leads to another. We have to stop this. I miss Mark too but at some point the floodgates of grief have to be pulled up. We have to do this, if not for you then for me.’

‘Do you think Finn knew Connors before this?’

‘I wouldn’t doubt it. They’ve probably been following us for months. Ruth, you don’t understand the situation. Connors is not—I can’t think of what the comparison would be in Canada—Connors, Travellers, for the most part, they’re vicious. He had visitation, he was scheduled to have custody returned. All he had to do was comply with the courts requirements. But this is how he chooses to act.’

‘I don’t think Finn knew. He’s not one to keep something like that to himself. Especially recently after the accident and his fall. He’s been annoyed but I thought he was annoyed at you. I should have taken him more seriously. It’s strange I feel like I’ve been taking you seriously but not him, not even me really.’

‘We’ve done nothing wrong Ruth, I’ve done nothing wrong. My verdict followed precedent. I followed experts’ advice, the psychiatry report. These people are dangerous. I want Finn returned as much as anyone and that will happen I’ve no doubt, but Connors is a racketeer, and I’m restraining myself because we’re in a church.’

‘God help me if anyone ever does a psychiatry report on me.’ It’s as if the report is some sort of truth, some standard that measures distance from normal, like latitude and longitude lines. ‘You know since Mark’s death I see myself in his description of those reports.’

‘No one is condemning him for his grief, quite the opposite. He was offered help, but he didn’t take it. And now he wants everything his own way. Classic blackmail. What would happen if everyone refused to comply with the law?’

‘The antidepressants keep me this standard of normal but screwed up so many other things. I’m not clinically depressed, I don’t have a chemical imbalance, I miss my husband and I’m scared. That’s not a disease. I don’t have to be a certain measure of happiness. I’m not waiting to be stamped as acceptable.’

‘The thought of returning Connors’ children to him, it’s not only a legal issue, it’s a moral issue. It’s inciting everyone who doesn’t like a court ruling to take matters into their own hands. Anyway how much time do you think he’ll be able to spend with his children now?’

‘You know maybe happiness isn’t a right, maybe there’s not an infinite amount of happiness in the world. Maybe not being happy is important too. Maybe not being scared is more important.’

‘He’ll be in police custody by the end of the day. He’ll be twenty years in prison or more if I have any say in it. You cannot defend him Ruth. He’s a fucking fool.’

Stephen interrupts, it’s time to go. Denis starts saying something about safety, but I’m done not-talking to him. I point over to the columns of the arches, and tell him the tops are called the capital and apparently that’s how you work out the different architectural style but that’s all I know. Before I leave the church, I look back and he’s leaning against the pew, checking his phone.

Three armed Guards and two unmarked cars are waiting at the bottom of the steps. A woman with three boys are standing in front of the blue car. She introduces herself as Cathy Mulroney, the social worker associated with the case.

‘This is so terrible, I’m so sorry this is happening.’ She touches my arm and then introduces me to the boys, Jack, Paddy and Michael.

‘Mick,’ He corrects her.

We stare at each other and then I remember they were in the same car accident that killed their mother and sister. Cathy Mulroney is still talking to me. The oldest boy might be ten, he has dark hair and is standing there arms crossed across his chest. He searches my face and looks away quickly when we make eye contact. After that he settles his gaze on the top of my skirt. The next brother, about seven, has no problem keeping eye contact. He has freckles and lighter brown hair than his older brother. He intimidates me slightly by his refusal to look away. The youngest boy, maybe five, is sitting on the ground with his head in his hand, complaining he's hot and hungry. Mulroney's voice is only matched by his and I wish I had something to give him.

'It won't be long now, you'll have a big dinner after this,' I say, leaning down, my hands on my knees.

'With Da?' The oldest boy asks.

I want to say yes, but that might not be appropriate considering the situation. I shrug and say 'That's the plan' quietly but they have good hearing and the youngest boy says, 'It better be,' more out of exasperation than anything else, I think. Mulroney is barking orders at Colin, insisting on obtaining a signature from somebody who isn't here. Protocol is important she says. Colin agrees but there are more pressing issues at this juncture but that isn't good enough and Colin is quickly approaching his last nerve.

Fatty Mulroney gets it in the chest

He's standin there, lookin at the ground, outta it. He crosses the road an stumbles down West Street. There's loads a people roun, Mass must be lettin out or somhin. 'Finn.' I've ta say it twice. He's almost at the church an when I get closer ta him I see he's swayin an not walkin straight. I call his name a third time an he raises his head up at me rale slow.

'What happened? Where'd you go?' He yells it loud. The people goin by walk wide round us.

‘Shh, Finn, we was only in the trees. We seen you get into the car an folloed you, we’re worried bout you son. Yer leg, you lost a lot a blood.’

‘I don’t feel very good.’

‘I can help, you just need ta come with me.’

He walks towards me an now I hair it.

‘Daddy.’

Jack. My Jack. An now Paddy an Mick. Theys there. Standin right there, beside a car together. Two women are with them an both a them turn towards me. Fatty Mulroney. I dint fuckin believe it. She stops Jack from runnin ta me an orders the other biys ta stay, hangs on ta aytch a them with her sausage arms. No, I knew she’d be here, couldn’t fuckin resist it, she couldn’t.

I can see a few shades round the place, least five. None a them in uniform but they got guns. I know the one, the Super, he’s the one Peter Mac’s been talkin to. He’s tellin them ta back off, orderin others ta clear the path an the road. A couple of them run up the steps an into the church. JP drives up behind me in the van. He’s standin out the window sittin on the door perched up high. I look back at him an he nods, he’s on his phone. He’s got Jimmy’s glock handy.

The other woman calls for Finn an he turns roun an rale quiet he says ‘Mom’ an then the floodgates open. She starts ta run. I grab him an now the Super yells at her an so she stops an stares at me. She looks bout ta throw up or somhin. She goes agin walkin slow, even though the Super is yellin at her not to. Someone comes outta the church. It’s fuckin Mallin himself. I dint believe it. Is there a hidden camra here somewhere? Mallin’s scramin like a lunatic an runnin down the steps, but he’s stopped by a couple a others. She’s not stoppin though, she dint turn round or nothin, only kayps her eyes on the biy an me an even over at JP. Beyond the shades there’s a loads a vans after turnin up an I can hair them behind me now too.

Finn int standin right, he’s too much weight for me anyway. ‘Take him ta them steps.’ I says ta her. An when she walks frward he crumbles into her an now

she's hodin him in the way mothers do. She backs him up ta the steps an sits him down.

'Oh my god.' Finn says rale loud, 'that's so much better.'

Mulroney leans in an fixin her clown glasses ta see him better with. 'What have you done to him?' Nothin tha'd compare ta what I'd like ta do ta you. All me biys are squirmin tryin ta get her off them. She rounds them up behind her an orders a Guard ta help her.

The mother sits Finn down on the steps an when she pulls his hat off an sees his face, she's all panicky. She's cradlin his head an beggin for help from the Super but he dint move. He's watchin me. The ones behind him are all Special Branch but they're caged in now an half a them are facin one way an the other half my way.

'We said no cops,' JP yells out.

'This isn't where we agreed to meet,' the Super says, an anyway we got more power than them now.

The mother is talkin ta the biy an he's cryin, he's havin a fit.

'I'm walkin to the boy,' Says the Super. 'I'm unarmed.' His hands are up in the air an he's turnin in all directions. Someone else comes outta the church but theys stopped by the shades.

So now I walk closer too with me arms out ta show I got no gun neither. Aysy ta do though when yer covered. I'm walkin twards Fatty. The Super reaches Finn who's still sayin somhin more ta his ma an he's strugglin ta stand up an he pushes at her, an he's lookin at me an he's cryin an tryin ta get up but neither she nor the Super now will let him. An maybe he wants ta come back with me.

'Connors.' The voice is from the top of the steps behind Mallin. It's the old wan Doctor Mallin. 'You know me, Gabe Mallin.' He's got his fuckin hands in the air now too. 'I'm not here to cause trouble, but that's my grandson an I think he's injured.'

'Ack, it's his fucken leg doc, he says he injured it last week.'

‘He did. I know. I can help him. Please, is it alright if I go to him?’

‘He’s no horse.’

I turn roun ta JP an fuck me there must be a dozen vans. He nods. ‘Alrigh.’ I wave him down an Mallin’s all bent outta shape as the old man passes. Once he gets down the steps he touches her shouder an goes ta Finn. He checks out the strip tha JP put there but he dint move it or nothin.

‘He’s alrigh.’ I says. The Doctor dint say nothin so I say it agin. ‘He got into a bit a scrap boxin.’ The Doctor an herself look up at me an say nothin. ‘I want me biys.’

Fatty sets off on me, I shoul da considered me biys before I kidnapped an assaulted a minor, she yells. In one day I survived The Cowboy losin the plot, the biy collapsin, the biy disappearin, an meetin evry fuckin shade in the north east but I’m not sure I won’t crack by the site an sounds of Fatty here, she’s even wearin the grey suit. ‘What have you done to him?’

If they shoot me I hope JP or someone has the good sense ta aim for her. ‘I dint do it.’

‘Daddy.’ Jack wriggles away finely from her an runs ta me. Fatty kayps the other biys close ta the car an is orderin more Guards round.

‘Mom.’ Finn yells an kicks at her. The Doctor has ta avoid gettin kicked. He says somhin ta her, the Doc does, that she’s the one ta do it, or somehin. She nods an gets up. She stares at me agin, she’s not far from me now an I can see how much I hurted her, it’s in her face, an she’s just lookin at me an at Jack an I dint even think ta get him ta run ta the van. I just hode him an stare at her. Finn kicks her in the leg an she turns back ta him.

‘Please,’ Finn says.

She turns ta Fatty, ‘Let them go.’

‘Ruth,’ back on the stairs it’s Mallin scramin an tryin evryhin ta get down but there’s two men hodin him back. ‘Ruth, do not interfere.’

‘Denis. Stop.’ The Super stands an hodes his hand up. ‘Stop. I’m serious.’ He goes ta her now an says rale quiet, ‘What are you doing?’ I can hair all this an can see the way she’s wrecked an she’s nothin else now.

‘What are they goin to do.’ She puts one a her shouders up an down, ‘Deport me?’

I ought be thinkin bout the shades over there, or the Travellin men on all sides who’ve come from evrywhere ta help me. I should be thinkin bout the mother as she walks over ta me biys an touches me Paddy’s head an I’m proud he dint do nothin but stand there, but I’m not thinkin a any a tha. I should be thinkin bout Jack an his arms too tight roun me neck. No instead I’m thinkin why is Mallin always above me, even now. Even now he’s lookin down on me, an I’m thinkin when it was tha he got inside a me an all this time he’s been livin there, rent free, pullin strings. But now he’s strugglin ginst the shade. I see the Doc hode Finn rale close an the two a them on tha step reminds me a tha photo I stole an I’m sorry for tha. Finn’s watchin me an I know now he got what he wanted from her an I understand tha.

Someone says me name behind me an it’s Peter Mac tellin me ta send Jack over an so I do an when I turn roun the mother has gone up ta Fatty who’s now scramin at her if she sets one finger on her she’ll charge her for assault an for obstructin justice an the mother takes her first finger an puts it in the middle of Fatty’s chest an pushes Fatty back an off the curb. Paddy bolts forward an Mick’s close behind him an as they’re comin runnin at me I start runnin too an we’re all laughin. They’re laughin cos it’s all fuckin nuts an I’m laughin cos I’m not sorry for Mallin an his laws or for The Cowboy who’s goin ta go fuckin buillia but we’ll proteck him from the shades, I’m not sorry for any a it. We dint stop runnin until we’re into the back a the van an I int look behind at Finn, or the Super or the mother or specially Mallin or Fatty, no one. JP’s ready an as soon as we’re in someone shuts the door an we’re gone. By the time I look up we’ve gone out by the river an headin twards Slane.

SECTION III

Reflections on Research and Practice

On a rainy Saturday night in Dublin in 1996 a crowd crammed into a Camden Street pub and it was there I met a group of people whose lack of pretension, sense of humour and eagerness to enter into animated argument made me thankful for the downpour. At the time I had no idea who Travellers were or the story of their long acrimonious relationship with the settled community. As I got to know them I was struck by how difficult life can be for a minority group with traditions that intersect with the dominant society's system. I began to wonder if there was a reason beyond inconvenience why different ways of living can't abide by one another. Years later Travellers materialized in my writing, although their appearance was less about political statements and more about the potential for good narrative conflict.

Prior to commencing work on this thesis I was developing my fiction through an MA in Writing where I was encouraged by the mentors to change the Traveller characters to non-Travellers. I rejected this idea, although I had no explanation other than it *didn't feel right*. This was less of a conscious decision and more of an intuitive one. My MA supervisor suggested I might find fuller scope for developing my fiction within a practice-based Ph.D. programme. Here I would have access to research tools and strategies and the time to understand Travellers, the stereotypes that apply and their representations in art and literature, and then I could go off armed with this information to work on my own Traveller characters, free of the demands of a nine-to-five job.

The Canadian poet Betsy Warland once told me that writing a story is like casting a net into the air. *Story hunting*, she called it, and likened it to butterfly hunting. I interpreted this to mean that the writer is a medium. When I began writing *Run Over* I believed that free writing was an avenue to creativity and organic ideas. At the time, I was free-writing first drafts; I didn't know where I was going or who my characters were. This kind of writing is fine when an unexpected phrase or a scene that I would never have consciously imagined is produced. But this process also takes time and for many years I was getting nowhere. I believe now that I was too quick to approach the page and wasn't hanging on to the character in my head long enough before he or she fully formed. Regardless of the difficulties, *Run Over* has emerged through this kind of fog.

The first glimpse of the story began with the emotion of a young boy angry with an older male relative. That's all I knew. The story has always begun after Mark's death and in the early drafts I struggled with location. My instinct was to set the story in Ireland. I was living in Vancouver, Canada at the time, and felt writing about another country was inviting stereotypical characterisations into the narrative. Writing about Ireland in North America in particular can be problematic. North American culture perceives Ireland in strong sentimental tones that have originated from the emigrations of the nineteenth century and cherishes the romantic narrative of the underdog poet warrior who fought off the dominant empire. It is a perception that has been mutated by time and bears little relation to present reality. My story was going nowhere so I shelved the idea. But threads of the story kept coming back to me and eventually I gave in and changed the setting, and the story began to inch forward.

From the start Finn, Denis, Ruth, Sid and Colin have all been part of the story. Everyone else has grown up around them. Initially my Traveller characters were highly stereotypical and one-dimensional. The main problem was in the language they were using, which was somewhere between exaggerated Hiberno-English and Irish-New York mob-speak. But the more time I spent with my characters, the more I believed in them and the more I thought I owed them something. Early research to see how authors used Traveller characters in fiction yielded only J.M. Synge's play *The Tinker's Wedding* and Maurice Walsh's *The Road to Nowhere*. These early struggles with dialogue were the reason I began to investigate direct speech as a means to convey ideology. I read about Shelta and my Traveller friends gave me disparate answers as to the use and meaning of the words. Most of them told me Shelta was obsolete, but others insisted the vocabulary was still a major component of Traveller life.

Finding the appropriate voice has been a major problem. I had planned to emulate Mark Twain's style in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (first-person in the action) and then later Harper Lee's in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (first-person reflecting). In both cases I used Finn as the narrator, but Sid and the Travellers always came out wrong. Then I used Mark as the omniscient narrator (speaking from beyond the grave) and later an unknown omniscient narrator (me?), but the Travellers were still not right. I understand now that the problem with the disembodied omniscient narrator is that he or she doesn't interact with the

characters and that is precisely what I'm trying to avoid. I want to achieve a social novel, with many voices, regardless if they listen to one another. I returned to the first-person narrator, using Finn and Sid at first, and then I chose to use Ruth as well to show that Finn may not be the most reliable of narrators and also to balance Sid's character.

At the beginning of this Ph.D. I set out to understand Traveller culture as explicitly as possible, to discern what the main stereotypes refer to and if and how they misrepresent their referent. The idea was that an awareness of the forces affecting my own characterisation might enable me to counter them, to learn from people's mistakes or, more optimistically, to build on earlier successes. To begin a proper understanding of Traveller life and culture, I talked to various people with opinions from different angles and read the Irish census reports, the legislation, anthropological studies, education studies, sociological studies, political studies, health studies. If there was a relevant study, I read it.

I was surprised to find there is a substantial body of literature containing Traveller characters, especially from the early half of the twentieth century. Accordingly there is also an accompanying group of critics.¹ Many of these critics focus on a range of representations across different art forms and others concentrate exclusively on literary representations. These critics expound a wide range of thought that incorporate ideas of control, marginalisation, ideas of otherness and hegemony in works of both philosophers and critics from Levinas to Spivak. Here I encountered one of the main stumbling blocks of my whole thesis: theory. Theoretical work is of fundamental importance in understanding Travellers and their socio-political history, but how much theory should I read and how much should I include in the thesis were questions that I often forgot to ask myself. For most of my Ph.D. I have been the only practice-based student in the University study room and I'm surrounded by other students who focus predominately on theory, and so it was a struggle to remind myself that my Ph.D. did not have the space nor the theoretical orientation to provide the kind of background that another Ph.D. might. And given the broad nature of my topic, at one point I was drowning in theory.

¹ Including Paul Delaney, Mary Burke, Mícheál Ó hAodha, José Lanters and Aoife Bhreatnach.

One of my primary critical texts is José Lanter's *The 'Tinkers' in Irish Literature: Unsettled Subjects and the Construction of Difference*, which is a comprehensive survey of Travellers in literature.² Because of the extensive nature of this work I feel somewhat timid criticising it, but there are instances when Lanter's argument seems unreasonable, finding problems in every Traveller representation without taking into consideration narrative or situational context. For example, if a Traveller was a criminal in a story then the author was accused of perpetuating the criminal stereotype. At no point does Lanter advocate censorship, but that was the effect on me. Other critics, such as Mary M Burke and Micheál Ó hAodha navigate this tricky territory better, mostly by examining the intent and genre of the work and the discursive background of the author.³

So after reading the political ideas and the critics I drafted my first academic chapter and then sat back down to return to my fiction with these big contextual ideas in my head. Suddenly I found myself shut out and blocked from writing. I'd lost all confidence in myself and in what I was trying to achieve because, mindful of the potential responses of critics in the area and, worse, Travellers themselves, I was deeply uncertain of my views and treatments. Suddenly I felt a chronic pressure to represent Travellers exactly right—fundamentally *realistically*—for fear I'd fall into perpetuating an existing array of misrepresentations.

I stopped and decided to change tracks. I realised from the outset that specific uses of language were going to be an important component of my work, and so in my first year I started with Old English, read *Beowulf* and began working my way through the history of the language. The reading reinforced ideas of the flexibility and absorbability of the English language and the realisation that change has been a constant dynamic. Despite my enthusiasm, I lost my way in the fifteenth century during the switch from Middle English to Early Modern English. Not to be deterred, I switched to Irish, which was a 'Tá mé go maith agus tú féin?' short of a complete disaster. This kind of ongoing search for an intellectual space away from the critics has characterised my project, and these small forays have all been beneficial; even

² José Lanter, *The 'Tinkers' in Irish Literature: Unsettled Subjects and the Construction of Difference* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008).

³ Mary M. Burke, *Tinkers: Synge and the Cultural History of the Irish Traveller* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009).

the miniscule amount of Irish I've learned has helped with my understanding of Shelta and Hiberno-English construction.

But my writing was still blocked so I stopped reading everything related to my project. Because creative and innovative thinking can be triggered by the joining of seemingly dissimilar phenomena I picked up a novel from the other side of the world that I'd always wanted to read, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967). As the pages on the right side of the open book became fewer and fewer I could sense the despair of knowing that the end was nigh. On the other hand I was itching to finish quickly so I could start writing my Travellers into a magical-realism narrative structure that would draw on the Traveller propensity for superstition. I read several more of Marquez's works (I have learned more about plot from him than any other writer) and appreciate how he uses his political and journalistic experience and ideas so subtly in his fiction. I realise that this is not uncommon, but the beauty and skill Marquez brings to this work makes all the difference. Despite being from North America, I'd never read South Americans. I knew little about the continent, despite the fact it has a history not unlike Canada's and which also has been strongly influenced by Irish history.

Engaged by parallels and coincidences, I gravitated from Columbia down to Argentina to Jorge Luis Borges. Borges' writing is challenging, imaginative and courageous. His non-fiction surprised me, in particular 'I, a Jew' (1934) in which he defends the Jewish faith, and his balanced and rational essays from 1937 to 1945 that condemn the Nazis and remind the reader of the substance and quality of German culture. His writing style remains engaging, informative and modern. Borges also wrote articles against the Argentine Perónist government and against Perón himself. When Perón was ousted, Borges' turned from non-fiction to fiction and received international acclaim. So when the military junta seized power in March 1976, I'd have thought Borges would have reacted similarly as before. But Borges did nothing of the sort. His view that the new government was not fascist was perhaps an unfortunate concession in his relief that the Perónists were no longer in power. He later claimed he was unaware of what was happening ('*No leo los diarios*'—'I don't read newspapers'),

although a torture centre was in walking distance of his house.⁴ His contemporaries were harsh in their criticism of him, verging on, but never quite calling him a coward. Others seemed to come to terms with his silence as an artistic proclivity. In fairness, standing up the Junta was a death sentence. In early 1977, on the first anniversary of the coup, political journalist Rodolfo Walsh published the *Open Letter from a Writer to the Military Junta*, where he broke the censorship and reported on the abuses that occurred at the time. He was murdered the next day.⁵

For several months I read Argentine literature and non-fiction exclusively with no purpose other than *it felt right*. I read about the country and the continent's history, including about Che Guevara and Salvador Allende and Pinochet in Chile. At the same time other Ph.D. students were studying major figures of Irish nationalism, in particular James Connolly and Jack White. The difference between what I was reading and discussing versus what I was seeing in the newspapers or on the nightly news seemed to be growing everyday; the euro was crashing, Ireland was in meltdown and the entire planet seemed to have been subducted by domination and aggrandisement. You might think I was marching on the streets or watching news reports of distant cities being burned (well that did happen but only once, the London riots in 2011), but you'd be wrong. Much like my surprise in Borges' actions I found not engagement, but disengagement. There's a whole world of infinite distractions to keep people disengaged: sports, celebrity culture, video games, fashion, television, even the day-to-day noise of politics. I've always been aware that these distractions exist, I engage in them myself frequently, but at this time the milieu I found myself in afforded me a critical outlook towards the very serious chicken-little scenario that was happening and didn't so much as judge, as try to understand what all of it was. And why weren't people toting guns or kicking in bank windows? Surely we wouldn't meet the same fate as Walsh if we did? But is there too much to lose otherwise? What would happen? When a group of us in the Feminist Society on campus organised a protest in support of the Pussy Riot punk band on trial in Russia, we were all careful to consider what the University administration's point of view on our activism would be, god forbid we were kicked out of our Ph.D.s towards the end.

⁴ Clive James, 'Jorge Luis Borges; Can a great writer be blind to the world around him?' *Slate Magazine* 7 Feb. 2007, Web, 28 Feb. 2012

<http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/clives_lives/2007/02/jorge_luis_borges.html>.

⁵ James.

I'm not advocating violence by any means but has protest has become ineffective and why? Or is there a groundswell and I've had my head in books for too long to notice?

I'm sure the people who participate in the economies of distraction, and the media who help to create the fervour around them, will argue that they are meeting a demand in society, as if they're handing out free pharmaceuticals to desperate cancer patients. And I realise that people's individual lives have so much stress placed upon them already, between wondering if they'll be able to pay the mortgage, demanding families, stressful jobs, the incontinent dog and missing car keys, that there's no time to worry about Africa, or political corruption or any of the other million things that need attention. And people say they *need* the distractions, they're harmless. But still consider the fact that the conservative, moralistic, isolationist, misogynistic, celebrity-obsessed, intrusive tabloid *The Daily Mail* is the most popular online newspaper in the world (45.3 million visits in December 2011 alone).⁶

The paranoid conspiracy chipmunk in my head wonders if all these distractions alongside the constant fear-mongering that the sky is falling in are a manipulative means of keeping people entertained, distracted, isolated and away from the real business of the world, and if it's engineered by the Bilderberg Group or the government or something along those lines. Orwell's ideas of surveillance from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are certainly still pertinent, but this seems to be the realisation of Aldous Huxley's vision in *Brave New World* in which pleasure and distraction result in egotism and passivity and are used as the means to obfuscate and coerce. Where a hundred or even fifty years ago, governments put a gun in peoples' faces, now they confuse, distract, entertain. I wonder as people are watching reality television or arguing over the superiority of Manchester United or Liverpool are their rights and freedoms, couched in legislative acts and bills, being chiselled away? But then the logical chipmunk in my head suggests I take a pill and lie down.

⁶ Will Oremus, 'The World's Most Popular Online Newspaper,' *Slate Magazine* 3 Feb. 2012, Web, 10 Sep. 2012 <http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2012/02/daily_mail_new_york_times_how_the_british_tabloid_became_the_world_s_most_popular_online_newspaper_.html>.

We may seem to have veered suddenly into left field here but, for reasons I am still discovering, all of this is what I am writing about. This inequality, corruption, rigidity and complacency, which would demotivate the most spritely of starry-eyed enthusiasts, makes me angry. Maybe, quite possibly, it's *my* rigidity and complacency I'm angry at and I realise now this is a deep factor motivating me.

The process that this thesis has afforded me—reading widely and allowing myself the mental space to explore—has reinforced the basic job description for a writer: stopping, observing, listening, reflecting, speaking or (writing) out. Orwell's requirements for a writer in 'Politics and the English Language' are: sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose. I read this as relating to both art and politics: wanting to be renowned, to be respected for the style and content of your work and having something to say, something that makes people think.

Anger is an important emotion. Acknowledging, reflecting on and understanding it are crucial to both the creative and writing processes. This comes down to one word: *awareness*. Awareness is the big-picture element of the entire Ph.D. thesis process and has changed my writing more than anything else. As I become more aware, more able to acknowledge my own fears, I'm less paralyzed and more able to mobilise. Whatever happens when the revolution comes, I don't want to be wasting time wondering if I should mouth off at some wingnut at the sandwich counter or be messing around with modal auxiliaries. I want to be able to act (and write—with any luck) quickly and with integrity. And I realise all of this study and reading, from diversions offered by a novel in the jungles of Columbia to a writer who paid with his life when he dared to stand up to his government, is about me summoning courage to have a voice and in turn offering my characters a voice. Some days the process works the other way round. But one way or the other it turns out that writing mindful fiction is hard work. My own need to develop this courage and willingness to defend opinions is the reason my intuition was against turning my characters into non-Travellers during my MA and why writing is not at all about turning oneself into a passive medium. I have discovered that writing fiction is active engagement, often painful and uncomfortable, but ultimately grounded, inclusive and aware.

My South American sojourn was research in defiance. I'd read myself into a hole that I didn't know how to get out of. Engaging with the past and recent struggles

of a completely foreign place allowed me a sense of freedom. A week became several months of reading. And in this time I learned again to trust my own writing processes because the more deep into the continent I read the more I found myself back in Ireland, either via Borges, Llosa or Guevara, a little braver this time to take on projected critics, the demands of realism and myself.

I lay the blame for my writer's block firmly on the shoulders of realism—lousy, good-for-nothing *realism*. I understand limitation and constraints can evoke their own creative response, but in committing to realism I might as well have been tying myself to a train track. I became so concerned about accuracy and fidelity in representation that I forgot all about the free creative spark that attracted me to write about Travellers in the first place.

Between 2008 and 2010, I attended three plays that in particular convinced me my concern about realism wasn't worth the heartache. The play *It's A Cultural Thing or Is It?* was written by Michael Collins, himself a Traveller and was staged in Dublin's Projects Arts Centre in 2008. The first act focused on his childhood wherein he experienced harsh racism. The second act started in this same vein, but then the actors elephant-marched across the stage with placards that read 'Traveller Rights are Human Rights' and the play veered off into a morality driven political platform which ruined an otherwise strong story. Two years later in 2010 I attended the *The Trailer of Bridget Dinnigan* based on Federico García Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*. The play was reworked by writer Dylan Tighe in collaboration with Traveller activist Catherine Joyce and eleven women from the Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group. This is itself its own genre: community-based art, also known as 'new genre public art' or 'connective aesthetics', and which focuses on marginalized groups who cooperate in the adaptation and production processes with the aim of empowerment. The practical value of the play, outside ideas of interpretation and translation, was in the depiction of the female Traveller experience, an area not regularly represented in art. My attempts to reach Tighe were unsuccessful but I assume his motivation for the project was particular to the development of community art. Forgive me if I sound opportunistic, but this is an excellent way to access and learn about a marginalised group. I encountered this play late in my second year, too late into my study to undertake such a venture. The final play, also in 2010, was *The Tinker's Curse* by Michael Harding, which was also

developed in conjunction with Travellers. Harding, who I did make contact with but who did not answer any of my questions regarding his representation, presented an interesting one-man act play in which the Traveller character tells his story intercepted every twenty minutes or so by short musical interludes.⁷

Despite any criticisms, I enjoyed these plays and was able to derive information about representing Travellers from each of them. I was also struck by a sense of panic about what I had chosen to undertake. To different degrees each play focussed on self-expression and empowerment, and served a community purpose as much as a narrative one. These writers relied on Travellers themselves to structure and mould their representations. There was, at least in Harding's case, seemingly an intent to get the representations exactly right. I decided I didn't want to have other people rework my characters, regardless. If there are structural problems with my Traveller characters then that's bad news, but it's my problem alone and this work is as much about me, and some form of creative intuition, as it is about my characters. Even if this work never sees the light of publication-day, it must have an integrity that not so much adheres to Traveller culture but rather to my own development as an artist and writer. Perhaps it's a short cut, but in a decade of Sundays (which, all told, is almost accurate in the length of time I've been working on this) I could never approximate the Traveller reality for reasons of being a non-Traveller, being non-Irish, and naturally inclined to credit the postmodern idea that reality is always subjective.

The best advice may be Hemingway's iceberg principle: write the minimum of what you know. Additionally (and apropos) my attention was drawn to the observation that 'there are no camels in the Qur'an'. In a nice coincidence this is a Borgesism. Borges suggested that the absence of camels in the Qur'an was proof enough that it was an Arabian work. Only a determined realist, self-consciously trying to write an 'Arab' work, would purposefully include such an everyday phenomenon as a camel.⁸ Maybe this is where Collin's play became problematic, in that he brought too much of the context into the work, over-politicising it in the process. A piece of writing

⁷ None of these plays are included in my main academic work because they were developed solely by, or in association with, Travellers. Because of space restrictions, Traveller representations by Travellers is beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Argentine Writer and Tradition,' *The Total Library Non-fiction 1922-1986, Jorge Luis Borges* trans. Eliot Weinberger, (London: Penguin, 1999) 423.

motivated by artistic process should not have to submit to sociology. This may seem an elementary finding, but I've found that controlling the sociological impulse is a struggle when fictionalising a marginalised group in any way extensively or seriously. The three existing creative works on Travellers that I concentrate on in Section I are all, for the most part, on the good side of narrative politicising. Tom Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* maintains the balance best. Whenever Murphy's text takes a sociological turn, there is a purposeful and strategic reason connected to the characters' development.

In the end I had to make a decision to either continue to write, despite all the blocks and frustrations, or quit. Almost simultaneously I encountered Mikhail Bakhtin and read Jennifer Egan's novel *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010) which gave me new creative ideas and consequently determination. Before I went back to writing, I made sure I wrote all the sociological and critical information I'd gathered down in drafts of my academic sections. And then I put it all out of my mind.

Mikhail Bakhtin has influenced what I want to achieve from an overarching point of view. His emphasis on social life resonates with the collectivist oriented Traveller. His theories of polyphony and the carnival have been particularly influential. In this work I'm interested in the idea of polyphony because it resonates with the idea that Travellers have essentially been muzzled. Contentious issues between the settled and Traveller communities are consistently defined through the settled community ideology and there is little tolerance (because of what is perceived as anti-social behaviour by Travellers) to understand Traveller motivations. The contradictory and self-defeating course of action on both sides would make Joseph Heller blush. But then I didn't want this story to be Traveller versus settled exclusively, and somehow Ruth and Finn were there to reject Denis' smothering affection.

When Finn runs away and The Cowboy sends the ransom note, life unravels within the Mallin family and the Travellers group. The rules that govern relationships are decimated. Here, I considered Bakhtin's carnival idea wherein people can act with impunity. I like the idea that Ruth's moment of truth is when, despite both Denis and Colin (law and order, if you like) asking her not to push Fatty Mulroney (the government, if you like too) off the curb, she does it anyway. Ruth's

action is not about her close relationships, or even what is morally right; instead it is about people at the margins, understanding and helping one another (although specifically for her it is about proving herself to Finn). At the end it's only because of this disregard of the rules that things are resolved, and possibly with corruption and collusion exposed.

After reading *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, I realised I was taking all of this too seriously. I wasn't enjoying writing the fiction because I was being too serious about everything (Tóibínitis?). I needed to return to PG Wodehouse, Flann O'Brien and Mark Twain, to have fun in the reading and the writing act itself and so I returned to the engaged and unwieldy nature that attracted me to Travellers originally. I decided to try the story from alternative voices and with a slight sarcastic tone reminiscent of Egan's novel. The first chapter I attempted in this manner was 'I'm Top of the List, King of the Hill' when Maura goes to New York City (p157) with her friends and then continued on next with the chapter entitled 'Poodles gets Justice' (p101). The tone of these chapters opened some figurative chute by which I was able to rewrite the story, including the chapters in first-person point of view. The sarcastic tone allowed me distance from the characters. Instead of feeling their emotions, I was now enjoying them as a removed meta-narrator of sorts in that way whereby temporal distance can bring humour to the worst of situations. Coupled with my ideas from Section I that irony and self-parody are effective in portraying innovative and surprising characters, I gave myself permission to take a risk and rewrite in a very new style and voice. Much of this has been re-written in subsequent drafts, but utilising different approaches and voices to positively impact story and writing progression has been an important realisation.

From the time I began to understand Bakhtin my thesis work started making sense, and once I'd found my way through his work to literary stylistics I could finally envision a finishing line. Stylistics was what I'd been searching for, although I had been skirting around the edges of it for some time. I began to grasp the difference between a practice-based Ph.D. and a more traditional theoretical one and in doing so I was able to turn completely and without hesitation to the creative work to guide me. In fact I think a practice-based thesis, whatever its divisions, is in its entirety *composition* and *praxis*, and had I realised that sooner I might have picked up on stylistics earlier. Stylistics has guided the interaction of an academic and creative approach, reinforcing

the fact that meaning is found on every level from the superstructure to the smaller issues such as sound elision and graphological replacement. The deeper analysis of the three works motivated me to approach my own work in new ways and cleared a creative space to experiment with voices and character traits.

The first of these was in the overriding narrative strategy. Because I'm trying to understand and illustrate a different viewpoint, I think the first-person point of view is the only way to get under the skin of the Traveller character—like literary method acting. So now that I knew why I want a first-person narrator, the focus was on making them likeable but at the same time avoiding the self-indulgence of stream-of-consciousness. Currently Sid is the only Traveller narrator, which I don't mind and hope it reflects their closed off nature and the tendency to have one man speak for them.

In an early draft, I had Sid and or Finn die. But reading the other works, in which Travellers usually die at the end, I realised the effect wasn't what I wanted or intended. I was caught up in the excitement of the narrative and didn't realise the symbolic interpretations. In addition, I didn't (and don't) want my work to be some sort of moral billboard advertising the group's health challenges including low life expectancy, high suicide rate, high infant mortality—although I do think I'm straddling that fence when Sid talks about everyone's kids dying, JP's father's suicide, the various characters who have spent time in prison, The Cowboy's use of green diesel, or Sid's drug-dealing days. I want to provide texture; I want them to have a past but I don't want to overdo it. I didn't want the characters to be camping on the side of the road or in caravans. I didn't want them to be poor or completely removed from popular culture. I wanted at least one (Johnny) to be successful in business. I wanted some (but not all) to have experience with the law, with the courts. I wanted some to be feeble, some to be strong, some to be bullies, and all of them get on each other's nerves. I want them to be diverse and varied, like any other group. There are Travellers who live on the side of the road, but these aren't them.

The question of how my characters speak is a project that I will probably be working on until either I die or the piece gets published (whichever comes first). The focus in stylistics on processes and transitivity has helped me understand my characters' interaction with others, their thinking processes and ideology. Ideally in

Run Over, Denis' speech is Hiberno-English and he regularly uses legal jargon. He is rational and calm, even though he is under constant threat of ruin. His language is articulate, with a serious tone much of the time. *Thinking* and *doing* verbs pepper his dialogue. Sid's speech is basically the exact contrast to Denis'. His words are short, mostly for speed of articulation. Many of the syllables are lost at the end of words and he speaks quickly. His speech is concrete and situational, with little self-analysis or abstraction. Ruth gains more awareness through the story, at the end she comes out of herself and sees how self-absorbed she has been. She uses Canadian English with many related colloquial terms. Her language is filled with more *relational* and *feeling* verbs and is almost hyper-analytical (and critical). Her speech resonates with pop psychology terms. Finn's speech is a combination of Canadian and Hiberno-English. It is casual and sometimes he won't finish sentences, or if he does he trails off, ending with 'whatever' or 'I don't know'. I hope Finn is that strange combination of curiosity, boredom, vulnerability and courage that all kids are. Besides Sid and the other Travellers, Finn is the only one with his words misspelled. In rewriting, I have noticed that Finn's word choice and sentence structure is often too advanced. For example, (on p99) I originally had him observe: 'Hanging from the rear view mirror was an eyepiece.' The phrases 'rear view mirror' and 'the eyepiece' are too formal for a pre-adolescent, so I changed it to: 'a dangly thing was hanging from the mirror' which is a much stronger and a tighter construction for Finn's age and outlook. Much of my rewriting has involved revising the language in this way for each character.

In Murphy's *A Whistle in the Dark* I found Harry's use of 'hah' particularly intimidating. The way he deploys it is unpredictable and unsettling and I think it is a great effect. I've attempted to stay away from linguistic ticks such as 'actually' or 'genuinely'. Sid says 'ya know' in a way that is searching for advice or approval. Catherine says 'ya get me' in an assertive way. Harry was also the impetus for The Cowboy's nursery rhymes. Seeing how effective Harry's use of language is (especially at the very beginning of the play) convinced me that perhaps The Cowboy's language could be so varied and unpredictable as to include nursery rhymes, and potentially the uncertainty and unusual combination will reflect onto him. The hyperbole seen in *Paveewhack* I've used mostly for younger characters, like Finn and JP, where I think it works best as a sign of overconfidence.

Originally I thought the secret to cracking the Traveller character on the page was to present them speaking Shelta—that that was the onus of this thesis. But after reading many of the novels that feature Shelta and comparing excessive use in *Paveewhack* with limited use in *A Whistle in the Dark*, I believe now it is less important. I do think it is an anti-language as per Halliday's theory, and that it is important within Traveller culture, but its use in fiction is less important than the principles of orality as discussed in Section I.

Most of the characters' names have arrived easily enough but The Cowboy emerged after reading Mark O'Rowe's play *Howie the Rookie* (which doesn't concern Travellers but is a great play regardless) in which many names have a directive (The Rookie, The Howie, The Chopper). It reminded me of Dublin gangland culture (The Monk, The Viper) and I think it provides the character with an exclusivity and individuality while borrowing on that gangland idea. That said, the name The Cowboy is also purposefully a bit silly and I have considered changing it to something more threatening—but for now it stays.

Every character's actions and motivations have gone through substantial revision, but in a character-driven piece where does plot come in? At some point there must be a level of contrivance. I'm always thinking of plots or situations—like *what if the guy in the milk aisle pulled out a gun, I wonder if the woman in front of the wine would think to throw bottles at him so the guy in front of the cat food could take him down?*—and inevitably the person behind me in the queue has to tell me the cashier is free. Characters keep me grounded and plot sends me crazy with wild ideas. But through writing many melodramatic narratives I've learned the best way to present drama is to underplay the action. Car chases become terse arguments where everyone is one synapse away from busting somebody else's chops, or *Scarface*-style shootouts become stilted standoffs in front of churches and children: the process is one of constantly pulling back. I'm not great at this though. There is a point in this work which is a stone's throw from Bruce Willis scaling a building clenching a gun between his teeth, which is when Denis finds out about the ransom note and proceeds to blow a fuse and calls the Minister of Justice (p214). That scene feels slightly unhinged and underdeveloped right now and may well end up with a tink-tink of a tea cup hitting the saucer as Denis tries to keep it together, or maybe it's okay to give a little wink to ridiculousness. It is, after all, fun to be fun. But

understanding the limits of ridiculousness is important. And absurdity can work if it comes slowly and the rest of the piece is believable, I think.

The third area in which stylistics has impacted my work is at the sentence level. Subject-verb non-concord and graphological variation feels something of a short-cut to me in that there must be a less obvious way to convey accent or class. But maybe there isn't. In examining the effects of graphological variation overkill in *Paveewhack* and *The Honey Spike* I tried to pull away from these strategies. I carried through with it because I was *advised* to, and the representation is certainly better for it. I've taken a great deal of editorial advice from my supervisor and the result is a richer product and more thorough understanding of what I am attempting to achieve. This editorial relationship has enabled me to become a better writer and less sentimental. Perhaps I've relied on my supervisor too much for advice and guidance and it is time for the baby bird to beat it out of the nest, but when the Ph.D. finishes, it is the end of this editorial relationship that will be missed the most.

The speed of speech has been another aspect of Traveller dialogue that is difficult to convey. I combined many of the words (assimilation) with varying degrees of success (some of these 'dint', 'int', 'gonta' still remain). I also tried to condense the font so that the actual spaces between letters and words were closer, but in the end that looked too gimmicky. Currently, I now think that run-on sentences, assimilation and ease of articulation (via rhythm mainly) is the only approach that works.

Regardless of my difficulty in applying graphological and lexical deviations, I appreciate their ability to provide meaning. From foregrounding to the complex ideas such as transitivity, working with language in both functional and syntactic ways has reinforced the social nature of my writing. Stylistics has made me focus on the communication—what am I trying to say and how I am saying it. And the consequence is I've become much more aware of language and its use, joy and drudgery.

At some point along every avenue of inquiry I've stopped and asked myself if the reading was pertinent and examined how it felt *intuitively*, a dimension which is always important in creative work. Sometimes the work didn't seem pertinent but *felt* right; at other points the work was contextually *pertinent* but didn't feel right. As

long as either a cognitive or visceral charge was registered I continued, and if neither occurred I ditched what I was doing for something else. I don't necessarily understand my creative process all the time, but I do trust it and more so now at the completion of this Ph.D. Creative instinct and intuition are often neither logical nor develop in linear fashion, regardless of one's need for clarity and control. because of the nature of this particular type of thesis, my creative evolution needed to be given as much space as the academic work, and both need to be taken seriously. Feigning off acedia and drumming up will and motivation to work involved more time and energy than I realised. And even when work *was* flowing, understanding the difference between being languid or unmotivated and being jammed in a cerebral position where I didn't belong (a period reading Julia Kristeva) or where I felt I might be in over my head (attempts to engage with Wittgenstein) was tough.

So with attaining a balance in mind, I gradually navigated a path towards academic explorations that would help root my fiction writing. I wasn't sure that venturing into South American literature was *pertinent*, but it *felt right*. Reading Bakhtin was challenging at first, but he led me into literary stylistics and much of what he has to say in *The Dialogic Imagination* became important to both the critical and creative areas (if indeed that distinction can at all be easily made) within this work. As time has gone on, I've become braver at relying on creative work as a deeper intuitive type of knowledge. But it hasn't been a one-way street: the research has forced my fiction to stand up straight and take itself seriously. In essence, this thesis has been a balancing act of literary principles, academic rigour and artistic resonance.

My undergraduate degree was in science. This initial training stressed the importance of asking questions, of observation, of systematic planning and methodology. Much of this training has served me well but I have had to learn to back off from ideas of systematic and rigorous methodology and planning in favour of allowing thought to be *processed* and to *unfold*. In both science and the arts the *preconceived* result is the death of real knowledge. Chaos and uncertainty drive the need for order and clarity and therein lies a path to understanding. So I have learned to cater for a new approach, establishing new ways of recognition and behaviour, I have learned that while the final product is important it is the process of discovery, the practice, that matters.

The practice-based Ph.D. is a unique and rare privilege. Throughout the academy, research without the possibility of future profit is endangered and indeed there are few obvious and guaranteed commercial benefits to practice-based Ph.D. research. This narrow focus inhibits the kind of discovery that emerges from uncertainty and it is to both the academy and society's detriment that this kind of commercial hegemony be allowed to continue. There is an immediate and imperative responsibility on the humanities and the practice-based doctorates to demonstrate that creativity needs space and time and often includes uncertainty and a great deal of chaos. We must protect the academic privilege to discover and reflect in a non-determined way. The best art and science materialises out of a difficult process in which the artist and the scientist endures a realignment of perception that pushes at the boundaries of knowledge, creates new understanding and above all questions the world around us.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alesi, Francesco. *God Bless Ya* 15 Aug. 2008. Web. 10 Aug. 2009. <<http://www.anrphotos.com/stories/god-bless-ya-2>>.
- Allen, Paula. *Gavins*. 2002. Web. 10 Aug. 2009. <<http://paula-allen.com/gavins>>.
- Alvarado, Manuel, Edward Buscombe, and Richard Collins. *Representation and Photography: A Screen Education Reader*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Andreeva, Nellie. 'HBO's Series Adaptation of Sundance Docu 'Knuckle' Locks Writer And Director.' *Deadline.com*. 10 June 2011. Web. 17 Feb. 2012 <<http://www.deadline.com/2011/06/hbos-series-adaptation-of-sundance-docu-knuckle-locks-writer-and-director/>>.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.
- 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity.' Trans. Vadim Liapunov. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. 4-256.
- Barnes, Julian. *The Sense of an Ending*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2011.
- Barth, F. 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries.' *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference*. Ed. F. Barth. Boston: Waveland Press, 1969.
- Barthes, Roland. *Writing Degree Zero*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1967.
- *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. London: Cape, 1982.
- *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical Essays on Music, Art and Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. London: Penguin, 2008.
- Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC, Penguin, 1972.
- Bernstein, Basil B. *Class, Codes and Control*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974.

- Bhreatnach, Aoife. *Becoming Conspicuous: Irish Travellers, Society and the State, 1922-70*. Dublin: UCD Press, 2006.
- ‘Travellers and the Print Media: Words and Irish Identity.’ *Irish Studies Review* 6.3 (1998): 285-290.
- ‘Confusing Origins and Histories: The Case of the Irish Travellers.’ *Irish Journal of Anthropology* 10.1 (2007): 30-35.
- Binchy, Alice. ‘The Status and Functions of Shelta.’ Diss. University of Oxford, 1994.
- Blood of the Travellers*. Dir. Liam McGrath. Perf. Francie Barret. RTÉ. Scratch Films, 22 and 29 May 2011. Television Production.
- Borges, Jorges Luis. ‘The Argentine Writer and Tradition.’ Trans. Eliot Weinberger. *The Total Library Non-fiction 1922-1986, Jorges Luis Borges*. London: Penguin, 1999. 420-427.
- Brady, Peter. *Paveewhack: A Novel*. Dublin: New Island, 2001.
- Bradbury, Ray. *Fahrenheit 415*. London: Flamingo, 1993.
- Brennan, Edward. ‘Cultural and Structural Irish Television Drama.’ *Irish Communications Review* 8 (2000): 1-13.
- ‘Brothers acquitted of assault on road camp.’ *Connacht Tribune* 6 Oct. 1956: 21.
- Browne, Marian. ‘A Sociolinguistic Study of Irish Traveller Cant.’ Diss. UCD, 2004.
- Burke, Mary M. *Tinkers: Synge and the Cultural History of the Irish Traveller*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009.
- Carter, Ronald. *Investigating English Discourse: Language, Literacy and Literature*. London: Routledge, 1997.
- Chandler, E. *Photography in Ireland: The Nineteenth Century*. Dublin: Edmund Burke, 2001.
- Chapman, Raymond. *Linguistics and Literature: An Introduction to Literary Stylistics*. London: Edward Arnold, 1973.
- *The Language of English Literature*. London: Edward Arnold, 1982.
- Clark, C. ‘Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture.’ *Ethnos* 68.3 (2003): 427-29.
- ‘Concern at Intinerant Invasion. Only Blot on the Holiday.’ *Connacht Tribune* 6 Aug. 1955: 21.
- Coolahan, John. *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1981.

- Coulthard, Malcolm. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman, 1985.
- Court, Artelia, Alen MacWeeney and Thomas Munelly. *Puck of the Droms: The Lives and Literature of the Irish Tinkers*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Cunningham, Michael. *The Hours*. New York: Picador, 2002.
- ‘Curb Tinkers Motion Lost.’ *Connacht Tribune* 17 Dec. 1955: 25.
- Delaney, Paul. ‘Representations of the Travellers in the 1880s and 1900s.’ *Irish Studies Review* 9.1 (2001): 53-68.
- ‘A Sense of Place: Travellers, Representation, and Irish Culture.’ *The Republic* 3 July (2003): 79-89.
- ‘A Discourse on Nomadism: Travellers and Irish Writing.’ *Facing the Other: Interdisciplinary Studies in Race, Gender and Social Justice in Ireland*. Ed. Borbala Farago and Moynagh Sullivan. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008: 232-43.
- Dukore, Bernard F. ‘‘Violent Families’’: *A Whistle in the Dark and The Homecoming*.’ *Twentieth Century Literature* 36.1 (1990): 23-34.
- Dunleavy, Gareth W. ‘Editor Moore to Playwright Hyde: On the Making of ‘the Tinker and the Fairy’.’ *Irish University Review* 3. Spring (1973): 17-30.
- Ellwood, Wayne. ‘Nomads at the Crossroads.’ *New Internationalist* Apr. 1995: 7-10.
- Evans, Jessica. *Visual Culture: The Reader*. London: Sage, 1999.
- Fanning, Bryan. *Racism and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002.
- Faulkner, William. *As I Lay Dying*. London: Vintage, 1990.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Thing: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Fountain, Jane. *An Overview of the Nature and Extent of Illicit Drug Use Amongst the Traveller Community: An Exploratory Study*. National Advisory Committee on Drugs. Dublin: Stationary Office, 2006.
- Fowler, Roger. *Essays on Style and Language: Linguistic and Critical Approaches to Literary Style*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.
- *Understanding Language: An Introduction to Linguistics*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974.
- *Linguistics and the Novel*. London: Methuen, 1977.

- *Literature as Social Discourse: The Practice of Linguistic Criticism*.
Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981.
- *Linguistic Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986.
- ‘Funding Programmes/ Funding Decisions/ Development/ Fiction
Development Loans.’ *Irish Film Board*. 25 Nov. 2011. 01 May 2012
<<http://www.irishfilmboard.ie/decisions.php?type=1&year=2011&date=2011-11-25>>.
- Gmelch, Sharon, Pat Langan, and George Gmelch. *Tinkers and Travellers*.
Dublin: O’Brien Press, 1975.
- Gmelch, Sharon. ‘Groups That Don’t Want In: Gypsies and Other Artisan,
Trader and Entertainer Minorities.’ *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15
(1986): 307-30.
- Gmelch, George. *The Irish Tinkers: The Urbanization of an Itinerant People*.
Menlo Park: Cummings, 1977.
- Gombrich, E. H. *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial
Representation*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000.
- Great Britain. Royal Commission into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in
Ireland. *Condition of the poorer classes in Ireland: first report, appendix A
and supplement*. Bathurst: HMSO, 1835. Digitised by EPPI: University of
Southampton. 21 July 2012. <http://pdf.library.soton.ac.uk/EPPI/297-6.pdf>
- Greenfields, Margaret. ‘Gypsies, Travellers, and British Land Conflicts.’
Peace Review 20.3 (2008): 300-309.
- Gregoriou, Christiana. *English Literary Stylistics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave
Macmillan, 2009.
- Gregory, Lady Augusta. *Poets and Dreamers, Studies and Translations from
the Irish*. Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1903.
- Griffin, C. C. M. ‘The Religion and Social Organisation of Irish Travellers on
a London Caravan Site (Part I).’ *Nomadic Peoples* 6.1 (2002): 45-68.
- ‘The Religion and Social Organisation of Irish Travellers (Part II):
Cleanliness and Dirt, Bodies, and Borders.’ *Nomadic Peoples* 6.2 (2002):
110-29.
- Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying
Practices*. London: Sage, 1997.
- Halliday, M. A. K. *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of
Language and Meaning*. London: Edward Arnold, 1979.
- *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward Arnold, 1994.

- *Linguistic Studies of Text and Discourse. The Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday*. Comp. Ed. Jonathan Webster. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002.
- Haugaard, Mark, and Kevin Ryan. 'Power and Powerlessness.' *Contemporary Ireland: A Sociological Map*. Ed. Sara O'Sullivan. Dublin: UCD Press, 2007. 193-209.
- Haugaard Mark. Personal Interview. 17 July 2009. NUI, Galway.
- Hedican, E. J. 'Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture.' *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology-Revue Canadienne De Sociologie Et D Anthropologie* 42.1 (2005): 117-18.
- Helleiner, J. 'Gypsies, Celts and Tinkers—Colonial Antecedents of Anti-Traveller Racism in Ireland.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 18.3 (1995): 532-554.
- Helleiner, Jane. *Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.
- Heywood, Ian and Barry Sandywell. *Interpreting Visual Culture: Explorations in the Hermeneutics of the Visual*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Horan, James. *The Irish*. Web. 16 Oct. 2011.
<<http://www.jameshoranshootspeople.com/#/PROJECTS/the%20irish/>>.
- Hyde, Douglas. *Selected Plays of Douglas Hyde, 'an Craoibhin Aoibhinn*.' Ed. Gareth W. Dunleavy and Lady Janet Egleson Dunleavy Gregory. Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe, 1991.
- Hyland, John, and Parish of the Travelling People. *Do You Know Us at All?* Dublin: Parish of the Travelling People, 1993.
- 'hungry, adj.' Def. 2a. *OED Online*. September 2012. Web. 18 Sep. 2012
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/89498?redirectedFrom=hungry>>.
- Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1969.
- Into the West*. Dir. Mike Newell. Perf. Gabriel Byrne, David Kelly, Ellen Barkin and Ruaidhri Conroy. Channel Four Films, 1992.
- Ireland. Commission on Itinerancy. *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 1963.
- Equality Authority. *Traveller Ethnicity*. Dublin: Equality Authority, 2006.
- Central Statistics Office. *Census 2006 Volume 5: Ethnic or Cultural Background (Including the Irish Traveller Community)*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 2007.
- Citizen's Information. *Control of Horses. Vol. 2008*. Dublin: Citizen's Information, 2008.

- Central Statistics Office, *Census 2011 This is Ireland (Part 1)*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 2012.
- Department of Health and Children. *All Ireland Traveller Health Study*. Dublin: Stationery Office, 2010.
- ‘Irish Tinkers Have No Relation to Gypsies, Some Interesting Facts.’ *Leitrim Observer* 25 Apr. 1931: 3.
- Irish Traveller Movement. *End of the Road? Report on the Socio-Economic Consequences of the Control of Horses Act 1996 on the Traveller Community*. Dublin: Irish Traveller Movement, 2002.
- ‘The Citizen Traveller Campaign.’ Dublin: Irish Traveller Movement, 2006.
- Irish Traveller Movement and Traveller Movement (Northern Ireland). *Misli, Crush, Misli: Irish Travellers and Nomadism*. Ed. Mark Donahue, Robbie McVeigh, and Maureen Ward. Dublin: Irish Traveller Movement and Traveller Movement (Northern Ireland), 2005. Web.
<http://www.itmtrav.com/pdf/MISLI-CRUSH-MISLI.pdf>
- It's A Cultural Thing or Is It?* By Michael Collins. Dir. Michael Rafferty. Perf. Michael Collins and Patricia McCarthy. Traveller Wagon Wheel Theatre Company. Project Arts Centre, Dublin. 27 May 2008. Performance.
- James, Clive. ‘Jorge Luis Borges; Can a great writer be blind to the world around him?’ *Slate Magazine* 7 Feb. 2007. Web. 28 Feb. 2012
<http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/clives_lives/2007/02/jorge_luis_borges.html>.
- Kabachnik, Peter. ‘The Culture of Crime Examining Representations of Irish Travelers in *Traveller* and *The Riches*.’ *Romani Studies* 19.1 (2009): 49-63.
- Katherine Lynch's Wonderwomen*. Writ. Katherine Lynch and Warren Meyler. Dir. Maeion Cullen. Perf. Katherine Lynch. RTÉ, 2010. Television Series.
- Kavanagh, Patrick. ‘God’s Ginty.’ *Irish Farmer’s Journal* 10 Oct. 1959: 24.
- Kelly, Thomas. ‘Irish Tinkers. Dwellers by the Wayside.’ *The Irish Independent* 1 Oct. 1913: 4.
- Kiberd, Declan. *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation: Literature of the Modern Nation*. London: Vintage, 1996.
- *The Irish Writer and the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.
- Khalsa, Baliar. ‘Gypsy Weddings tops C4’s best of 2011,’ *Broadcast* 12 Jan. 2012. Web. 19 July 2012 <<http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/gypsy-weddings-tops-c4s-best-of-2011/5036438.article>>.
- Killinaskully*. Writ. Pat Shortt. Dir. James Finlan. Perf. Pat Shortt. Short Comedy Theatre Company. RTÉ, 2003. Television Series.

- King of the Travellers*. Dir. Mark O'Connor. Perf. Michael Collins, Thomas Collins and John Connors. Vico Films, 2012.
- Kirk, John, and Donall Ó Baoill. *Travellers and Their Language*. Belfast: Queen's University of Belfast, 2002.
- Knuckle*. Dir. Ian Palmer. Perf. James Quinn McDonagh, Joe Joyce. Revolver Entertainment, 2011.
- Koudelka, Josef. *PAR67518*. 1971. Magnum Photos. Web. 7 Feb. 2010. <<http://www.magnumphotos.com>>.
- Kravitz, B. 'Reinventing the World and Reinventing the Self in 'Huck Finn'.' *Papers on Language and Literature* 40.1 (2004): 3-27.
- Lambrou, Marina, and Peter Stockwell. *Contemporary Stylistics*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010.
- Lanters, José. *The 'Tinkers' in Irish Literature: Unsettled Subjects and the Construction of Difference*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008.
- 'The 'Tinker' Figure in the Children's Fiction of Patricia Lynch.' *ABEI Journal: The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies* 7 (2005): 151-62.
- Leech, Geoffrey N., and Michael H. Short. *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. London: Longman, 1981.
- Leerssen, Joep. 'Mimesis and Stereotype.' *Yearbook of European Studies* 4 (1991): 165-75.
- Leland, Charles G. 'Shelta. The Tinkers' Talk.' *The Gypsies*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1882. 354-72.
- Lynch, Patricia, and Mildred R. Lamb. *The Cobbler's Apprentice*. Dublin: Talbot Press, 1930.
- Lynch, Patricia. *The Turf-Cutter's Donkey Goes Visiting: The Story of an Island Holiday*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1935.
- *King of the Tinkers*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1938.
- *Tinker Boy*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1955.
- Mac Gréine, Pádraig. 'Irish Tinkers or 'Travellers'. Some Notes on Their Manners and Customs, and Their Secret Language or 'Cant'.' *Béaloideas* 3.2 (1931): 170-186.
- 'Further Notes on Tinkers' 'Cant': Together with Some 'Travellers' Tales, Customs, Beliefs and Prayers.' *Béaloideas* 3.3 (1932): 290-303.
- 'Some Notes on Tinkers and Their 'Cant'.' *Béaloideas* 4.3 (1934): 259-63.
- MacWeeney, Alen. *Irish Travellers: Tinkers No More*. New Hampshire: UP of New England. 2007.

- Macalister, R.A.S. and John Sampson. *The Secret Languages of Ireland: [with Special Reference to the Origin and Nature of the Shelta Language Partly Based Upon Collections and Manuscripts of the Late John Sampson]*. New York: AMS Press, 1985.
- MacEgill, Shirley. 'Our Aristocrats of the Open Road.' *The Sunday Independent* 2 Oct. 1932: 10.
- MacMahon, Bryan. *The Honey Spike*. Dublin: The Talbot Press, 1972.
- Marin, Louis. *On Representation*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001.
- McCann, May, Séamas Ó Síocháin, and Joseph Ruane. *Irish Travellers: Culture and Ethnicity*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University of Belfast, 1994.
- McDonald, Henry. 'Travellers Attack Channel 4 over My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding Series.' *Guardian* 14 Feb. 2012. Web. 19 July 2012
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2011/feb/14/travellers-attack-channel4-gypsy-wedding>>.
- Meyer, Kuno. 'On the Irish Origin and Age of Shelta.' *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 2.5 (1891): 257-66.
- Morris, Pam. *Realism*. New York: Routledge, 2003.
- Murphy, Claire. 'Irish Snappers Capture World Awards.' *Clare Champion* 12 Feb. 2011. Web. 14 Jan. 2012
<http://www.clarechampion.ie/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5270:world-honour-for-corofin-snapper&catid=73:feature&Itemid=55>.
- Murphy, Frank, Cathleen McDonagh, and Erica Sheehan. *Travellers: Citizens of Ireland: Our Challenge to an Intercultural Irish Society in the 21st Century*. Dublin: Parish of the Travelling People, 2000.
- Murphy, Tom. 'A Whistle in the Dark.' *Plays: 4*. London: Methuen Drama, 1989. 1-87.
- Murray, Christopher, ed. *Irish University Review Spec. issue on Tom Murphy* 17.1 (1987).
- My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*. Dir. Morag Tinto. Firecracker Films. Channel 4. 2011.
- Myers, Kevin. 'I'm Irish, I Know About the Gipsy Problem.' *The Telegraph* 3 Oct. 2004. Web. 14 Nov. 2008
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2004/10/03/do0305.xml>>.
- Ní Shúinéar, Sinéad. 'Apocrypha to Canon: Inventing Irish Traveller History.' *History Ireland* 12.4 (2004): 15-19.

- ‘Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture.’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28.2 (2005): 414-15.
- *Irish Travellers: A Culture of Anti-Hierarchy*. (Limerick: University of Limerick, 2007).
- Nash, Mark. ‘Reality in the Age of Aesthetics.’ *Frieze Magazine* 114 (2008).
Web. 29 June 2012
<https://www.frieze.com/issue/article/reality_in_the_age_of_aesthetics/>.
- Noonan, Paul. ‘Pathologisation and Resistance: Travellers, Nomadism and the State.’ *Divided Society: Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland*. Ed. Paul Hainsworth. London: Pluto, 1998.
- O’Faoláin, Seán. ‘Lilliput.’ *Midsummer Night Madness: And Other Stories*. London: Cape, 1932. 79-85.
- O’Flaherty, Liam. *The Short Stories of Liam O’Flaherty*. London: Cape, 1949.
- O’Halloran, Kenneth. *Fair Trade*. Web. 10 Oct. 2011
<<http://www.kennethohalloran.com/#/PROJECTS/Fair%20Trade>>.
- Ó hAodha, Micheál. *Irish Travellers: Representations and Realities*. Dublin: Liffey Press, 2006.
- Ó hAodha, Micheál, and Ian Hancock. *Migrant and Nomad: European Visual Culture and the Representation of ‘Otherness’*. Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2007.
- O’Reilly, Michael, and Tomas O’Briain. *Traveller People: A Bibliography*. Dublin: Blackrock Teachers’ Centre, 1994.
- Ó Riain, Gearóid, and Dublin Travellers Education and Development Group. *Traveller Ways Traveller Words*. Dublin: Pavee Point Publications, 1992.
- O’Sullivan, Joan. ‘Talkin’ Different’: *Linguistic Diversity and the Irish Traveller Minority*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.
- O’Toole, Fintan. *Tom Murphy, the Politics of Magic*. Dublin: New Island Books, 1994.
- ‘Hostility to Travellers challenges migratory Irish.’ *The Irish Times* 16 June 1995: 16.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- *An Ong Reader: Challenges for Further Inquiry*. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, 2002.

- Oremus, Will. 'The World's Most Popular Online Newspaper.' *Slate Magazine* 3 Feb. 2012. Web. 10 Sep. 2012
<http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2012/02/daily_mail_new_york_times_how_the_british_tabloid_became_the_world_s_most_popular_online_newspaper_.html>.
- Orwell, George. 'Politics and the English Language.' *Horizon* 13.76 (1946): 252-65.
- Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989.
- Papineau, David. *Reality and Representation*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1987.
- Pavee Lackeen: The Traveller Girl*. Dir. Perry Ogden. Perf. Winne McDonagh, Rose Maughan and Michael Collins. Verve Pictures, 2006.
- Pavee Point. 'Travellers: Nomads of Ireland.' Dublin: Pavee Point Publications, 1997.
- Pickering, Michael. *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Popoviciu, L. 'Irish Travellers: Racism and the Politics of Culture.' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25.4 (2002): 694-95.
- 'Rival Tinkers Meet.' *Leitrim Observer* 23 Feb. 1907: 3.
- Ryan, Mary. *Into the West*. London: Headline, 1992.
- Saltzman, A. 'On Not Being Nice: Sentimentality and the Creative Writing Class.' *Midwest Quarterly-a Journal of Contemporary Thought* 44.3 (2003): 323-35.
- Sampson, John. 'Tinkers and Their Talk.' *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* 2.4 (1890): 204-21.
- Saul, George Brandon. 'The Brief Fiction of Seán O'Faoláin.' *Colby Library Quarterly* 7.2 (1965): 69-74.
- 'Seen, Heard and Noted. "Poor Old Horse!"' *Irish Press* 12 Mar. 1935: 6.
- 'Sequel to Bushypark Incident: Intinerants Describe Alleged Attack on Camp.' *Connacht Tribune* 21 Jul. 1956: 10.
- Shklovsky, Viktor. *Theory of Prose*. Elmwood Park, IL, USA: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009.
- Short, M. 'Graphological deviation, style variation and point of view in Marabou stork nightmares by Irvine Welsh.' *Journal of Literary Studies* 14.3-4 (1999): 305-23.
- Snatch*. Dir. Guy Ritchie. Perf. Jason Statham, Brad Pitt and Benicio Del Toro. Columbia Pictures, 2001.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. London: Allen Lane, 1978.

- Stephens, James. *The Demi-Gods*. London: Macmillan, 1914.
- Strength and Honour*. Dir. Mark Mahon. Perf. Michael Madsen, Richard Chamberlain, Vinnie Jones and Patrick Bergin. Maron Pictures, 2007.
- Synge, J.M. *The Tinker's Wedding: A Comedy in Two Acts*. Dublin: Maunsel and Co, 1907.
- The Trailer of Bridget Dinnigan*. By Catherine Joyce and Dylan Tighe (in collaboration with the cast). Dir. Dylan Tighe. Perf. Bridget Collins, Bridgid Collins and Christine Collins. Dylan Tighe in association with Blanchardstown Traveller Development Group and Irish Traveller Movement. Project Arts Centre, Dublin. 17 June 2010. Performance.
- The Tinker's Curse*. By Michael Harding. Dir. Michael Harding. Perf. Michal Harding. Focus Theatre. Town Hall Theatre, Galway. 29 Apr. 2010. Performance.
- The Truth About Travellers*. Dir. Owen Mc Ardle. Perf. Henry McKean. Scannan Productions. TV3. 2011.
- Thomas, Margaret. 'John Rupert Firth.' *Fifty Key Thinkers of Language and Linguistics*. London: Routledge, 2001. 178-83.
- Toibin, Colm. 'Thomas Murphy's Volcanic Ireland.' *Irish University Review* 17.1 (1987): 24-30.
- Trojan Eddie*. Dir. Gillies MacKinnon. Perf. Stephen Rea, Richard Harris and Stuart Townsend. Channel Four Films, 1997.
- Vonnegut, Kurt. *Slaughterhouse Five: or, The children's crusade: a duty-dance with death*. London: Vintage, 1991.
- Walsh, Christine. *Postcolonial Borderlands: Orality and Irish Traveller Writing*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.
- Walsh, Maurice. *The Road to Nowhere*. London: W&R Chambers, 1953.
- Walsh, Michael. 'Ireland's Artistic Debt to the Tinkers.' *Sunday Independent* 25 Sep. 1938: 5.
- Wanna buy a Gate?* 26 Oct. 2008. *Irish Independent*. 15 August 2009. Web. <<http://www.independent.ie/lifestyle/the-traveller-testimony-1510428.html>>.
- Weber, Jean Jacques. *Critical Analysis of Fiction: Essays in Discourse Stylistics*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992.
- Wilkes, David. 'The £100,000 white wedding for the 16-year-old girl who lives in a caravan.' *The Daily Mail* 29 Oct. 2008. Web. 12 Jan. 2009 <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1081355/The-100-000-white-wedding-16-year-old-girl-lives-caravan.html#ixzz23eh3DOfl>>.

Wiltshire, Elinor. *The Wiltshire Collection*. 1954. National Photographic Archive. National Library of Ireland. Dublin. Web. 10 Aug. 2009.
<<http://kildarest.nli.ie/npa/wil/>>.

Yeats, W. B. *Where There Is Nothing*. Stratford-on-Avon: A.H. Bullen, 1903.

'You better watch out.' *Glenroe*. Dir. Alan Robinson. Perf. Mick Lally and Liam Heffernan. RTÉ. 26 Dec. 1999.