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“Midwives to Creativity:”

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements........................................1

Introduction..............................................4

Chapter 1: Multiple authorship, collaboration and the literary coterie..............13


Chapter 3: Salmon Publishing 1985-2007.................................................78

Chapter 4: “With courteous and careful eyes”: Eva Bourke’s ekphrases.........119

Chapter 5: “Our phlegm talk/ must be convincing”: Language and the body in pain in the work of Rita Ann Higgins...........................................151

Chapter 6: “Feeling that the room had no walls”: Ecopoiesis and Moya Cannon’s dwelling spaces.................................................................188

Conclusion.................................................213

Appendices..................................................217

Bibliography..................................................250
For William C. Buckley, who started me on the journey

and John Carrigy, who walks with me on it.
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All errors remain my own.

M.B.
Introduction

24 October 1981. Chill, persistent autumn rain patters down on the roof of the Ladies’ Club, a small, grey two-storey building on the edge of University College Galway’s grounds. Snails cling to its wet garden wall. Passersby, heads bent against the weather, hurry past it towards the city centre, crossing the Salmon Weir Bridge that spans the river Corrib as they make for the outdoor Saturday market next to St. Nicholas’s church. Across University Road, between the canal and the Corrib, Galway’s “new” cathedral, the Cathedral of Our Lady Assumed Into Heaven, dominates the landscape, as it has for just over sixteen years. Forty years earlier, the high, imposing walls of the old Galway jail would have been visible from the Club’s windows.

Just before eleven o’clock, people begin to trickle into the Ladies’ Club in ones and twos. For the past few weeks, a writing workshop has been held here. Some participants saw the open invitation to the workshop in the weekly Galway Advertiser; others heard about it through word of mouth, perhaps over pints at the writerly Quays Bar in Quay Street. Some already consider themselves to be poets or fiction writers, and seek a friendly, critical atmosphere in which to air early drafts of their creative work. Others are unemployed, victims of the dismal economy of the early 1980s, and are trying to stay busy; they crave the structure of a weekly meeting. Rita Ann Higgins, a young woman in her late twenties, has finally decided to attend the writing workshop instead of the Saturday morning flower-arranging course that had first caught her eye.¹

The men and women of the newly-formed Galway Writers Workshop are eager to share their work with a wider audience: using the UCG English Department’s mimeograph, they are compiling a broadsheet magazine. Since they have no funding for the magazine outside of their own pockets, they know their magazine will lack the polish that comes with professional typesetting and design, but they are undaunted; the members of the Galway Writers Workshop are used to making do with very little.

¹ Among the early participants of the Galway Writers Workshop were Jessie Lendennie, Michael Allen, Mary Dempsey, Rita Ann Higgins, Eva Bourke, Luke Geoghegan, and Jackie O’Dwyer.
The first issue of *poetry:galway* would have a simple stapled binding and a hand-designed cover. It would be launched the following month, featuring the creative work of twelve Workshop members as well as a preface by Dr. Patrick Sheerin of the English Department, and the two hundred and fifty copies that were produced would sell quickly. Two issues later, the Galway Writers Workshop would choose a new name for the magazine, inspired by the legend of the Salmon of Knowledge from the Fenian cycle of Irish mythology. For the remainder of its lifetime, the magazine would be known as *The Salmon*.

§

The American poet Jessie Lendennie and her British husband, poet and political activist Michael Allen, were two of the workshop members closely involved in the production of *poetry:galway*, soon to become *The Salmon*. When Lendennie and Allen arrived in Galway in 1981, the German-Irish poet Eva Bourke notes: “there were hardly any outlets for publishing poetry in the west and…many talented women writers mainly wrote for their desk drawers.”\(^2\) This lack of publication opportunities for creative writers in the west of Ireland, particularly women, had begun to be addressed by the inception of the literary supplement “Writing In The West,” published monthly in the *Connacht Tribune*, the main regional newspaper for County Galway, between 1979 and 1996. Established by the poet and scholar Gerald Dawe in 1979, and edited by Dawe and, in later years, by Bourke and poet Michael Gorman, whose work was also published by Salmon, the supplement provided an outlet for new creative work and book reviews by writers in the west of Ireland, and offered support to emerging writers in other ways, such as organising writing competitions and providing information on local arts-related events. Significantly, the supplement’s placement within a popular regional newspaper suggested that the possibility of publishing new creative work should be extended to all its readers, and that engagement with contemporary literature need not be separated from the day-to-day life of those readers. “In these days of spiralling inflation, unemployment, and all the other social problems we regularly read of and experience,” wrote Dawe in the supplement’s inaugural editorial, “it might seem rather extravagant to devote one full monthly page to the ambiguous complications of literature… [but] I daresay the main

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motivating force has been a simple one; that the outlets to literary publication are few and far between in contemporary Ireland, mostly based in Dublin and, with a few notable exceptions, rely totally upon established authors.” In its openness to new and aspirant writers, the new literary supplement, Dawe hoped, would “open the often stuffy doors of literature and let a bit of light in.”

The idea that both the production and consumption of creative writing should be widely available to aspiring writers regardless of factors such as the region in which they are located or their gender was strongly supported by the members of the Galway Writers Workshop. The broadsheet it produced soon after its convocation, with the assistance of the English Department at University College Galway (now the National University of Ireland, Galway), became known as The Salmon by its fourth issue. Edited at first by a panel of four or five editors and, in later years, by Lendennie alone, The Salmon’s print run spanned ten years (1981-1991), during which time it increased in page count, number of contributions, and production standards, and published a number of writers who subsequently established themselves as significant participants within Irish literary culture. Many of these writers have since been elected to membership of Aosdána, the selective affiliation of creative artists in Ireland, including Sebastian Barry, Dermot Bolger, Pat Boran, Eva Bourke, Moya Cannon, John F. Deane, Theo Dorgan, Pádraic Fiacc, Rita Ann Higgins, James Liddy, Thomas MacCarthy, Medbh McGuckian, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Mary O’Donnell, Ciarán O’Driscoll, Mary O’Malley, Miceál Ó Conghaile, Cathal Ó Searcaigh, Gabriel Rosenstock, Maurice Scully, Sydney Bernard Smith, Gerard Smyth, Eithne Strong, and Matthew Sweeney.

During its lifetime, The Salmon also developed into a book publisher which became almost entirely devoted to the production of single-title volumes of poetry. This was an unusual transition for little magazines, which most often develop into publishers – if they do so at all – only after their “parent” periodical has folded. Salmon Publishing, Ltd., published its first title in 1985, and continues to publish individual poetry titles and poetry anthologies, as well as a small amount of literary

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4 Dawe, 24.
criticism, short fiction and drama, into the present day, under the leadership of co-founder and managing director Lendennie.

Eva Bourke’s February 2008 article describes the contribution Lendennie has made to poetry publishing in Ireland from the perspective of more than two decades. Comparing the independent poetry publisher to a supple, intrepid “sailing vessel” engaged in “tacking against the wind and waves and rescuing refugees and wanderers from all ends of the earth,” Bourke’s essay focuses on the way in which Lendennie has “nurtured, encouraged and safely put [writers] ashore again to make room for newcomers.”

Over the past three decades, Bourke writes, Lendennie has not only embraced the role of editor and publisher, but has also acted as facilitator, organizer, midwife, and “parent” to Salmon’s authors and their work, and her “openness towards diversity and an animating spirit of discovery and risk-taking” has opened the possibility of both periodical and book publication to new and emerging authors who might have found it difficult to obtain publication space for their work.

The year 2007 has been selected as the end date for this study, for it is the publication date of the press’s 467-page anthology *Salmon: A Journey in Poetry: 1981-2007*. The breadth of the anthology, which features two poems from each poet’s Salmon collection as well as one uncollected poem, is a testament to the press’s contribution to Irish poetry publishing over the last decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

The fourth and fifth volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, subtitled *Irish Women’s Writing and Traditions* (2002), bear concrete evidence of the contribution Salmon has made to Irish poetry, not least to the women writers who began their careers in the Ireland of the early- to mid-1980s. The poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, editor of the anthology’s section dedicated to contemporary poetry, selected fifty-nine poets for inclusion within its pages: out of these, twenty-three (39%) of the poets selected had books published by Salmon, while twenty-four (41%) had published creative work in the magazine *The Salmon*. Here, then, is a further record of the “inclusiveness” Bourke attributes to Salmon. In comparison, many Irish literary periodicals published writing by women only infrequently: twenty years earlier, the magazine *Arena* (1963-1965), for example, featured work by five women

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5 Bourke, 54.
6 Bourke, 54.
and sixty-one men during its lifetime. “For most of the women poets writing in the 1980s,” remembers Salmon poet Mary O’Donnell (2009), “writing was one thing, but getting into book form was quite another.”

However, neither Salmon Publishing nor the magazine from which it developed, The Salmon, published women poets exclusively. Throughout The Salmon’s print run, the number of female contributors comprised fifty percent of total contributors in only a single instance, the magazine’s nineteenth issue, in which nineteen of thirty-eight contributors were female. Every other issue of the magazine published work by a higher proportion of male writers. Similarly, between 1985 and 2007, Salmon Publishing released 197 books by 122 authors: fifty-six percent of these authors were male while forty-four percent were female. The 2007 anthology, Salmon: A Journey in Poetry, displays similar figures: fifty-five percent of its contributors are male, while forty-five percent are female. As these figures suggest, male poets made valuable contributions to this dynamic, including Lendennie’s co-editor Michael Allen, poet Pat Boran, poet and politician Michael D. Higgins, and Gerald Dawe, founder and editor of the literary magazine Krino: The Review (1986-1996), a contemporary of The Salmon. However, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, the four main publishers of poetry in late twentieth-century Ireland – Dolmen Press, New Writers’ Press, Gallery Press, and Dedalus – published only a small number of collections by women writers. Comparatively, then, Salmon published a striking number of titles by women writers. In this way, The Salmon strove for, and achieved, a nearly equal gender balance, resisting the label of a “women’s,” or specifically “feminist,” magazine.

The first half of this dissertation demonstrates that individual voices rarely, if ever, develop in isolation, and takes as its premise that behind every individual poetic voice lies a history of community, coterie, or multiple authorship, which may be obscured by too close a focus on an individual author’s achievement. It presents a

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9 See Appendix 3.
study of the coterie dynamics from which *The Salmon* magazine, and subsequently Salmon Publishing, developed. Although single creative voices or individual textual contributions nearly always assume priority over group or collaborative efforts, the history of mutual influence that underlies such voices is crucial to their development, particularly if the writers do not fit the criteria for authorship established by a nation’s literary “elite.” Such writers in particular may benefit from collaborative efforts and involvement with literary networks. Since, as Lorraine York (2007) acknowledges, authorship involves the appropriation of cultural space, such networks can assist emerging writers in assuming the necessary “permission” to create cultural products which must precede the condition of authorship.\(^{11}\)

Utilizing the research of Jack Stillinger and Pierre Bourdieu, among others, Chapter One suggests that, contrary to the Romantic concept of the individual “genius” writing in solitude, collaboration and mutual influence are natural, even inevitable, parts of the textual – and personal – lives of most writers. Collaborative endeavours such as formal or informal “coteries,” writers’ circles or writing workshops can be particularly useful to writers who may be “outside” of traditional paradigms of authorship. In a cultural system that privileges the individual male creator with access to, or active participation in, the literary metropolis of that system, a number of factors might act as barriers to an aspirant writer. For example, deeply-ingrained notions of gender could prevent emerging women writers from participating in the creation of cultural products, while writers outside of a nation’s cultural centres may be unable to participate in pre-existing literary networks.

Chapter Two applies coterie theory to the group of writers involved with the Galway Writers Workshop, and with the inception of *The Salmon* magazine. It establishes the periodical as a typical twentieth-century “little magazine,” and demonstrates the value of collaborative endeavours such as writing workshops, little magazines and other instances of group writing to emerging Irish authors who, due to factors such as gender or location of residence, were unlikely to be welcomed into “traditional” literary networks. (Significantly, members of such group endeavours often deny “official” membership within them, indicating that such alliances may

have been flexible, even loose or informal, but were vital to the writers’ careers nonetheless. Finally, it presents an overview of The Salmon in terms of literary content and production data, which demonstrate that the magazine became the centre of an efflorescence of creativity in the west of Ireland, and offers an account of the archive of Salmon Publishing, Ltd., one of the primary sources for this dissertation.

Chapter Three investigates the way in which The Salmon magazine effected the transition from little magazine to book publisher, particularly through the use of branding techniques. In this way, the publishing initiative that had begun in a group-oriented, communal way as The Salmon magazine was evolving, for the transition from magazine to book publisher necessitated a move away from the community-focused enterprise that embraced multiple authorship and group publishing, towards a focus on single poetic voices via a single-copy, for-profit book publisher. A précis of active poetry publishers in mid- to late twentieth-century Ireland places Salmon’s activities into context.

As Lucy Collins (2012) writes, “the creative lives of individual poets offer important insights into the cultural production of [a] period as a whole.” In order to demonstrate that the developments within the life-cycle of Salmon, as analyzed in chapters one to three, resulted in the development of individual creative voices that would make significant and varied contributions to Irish literature, chapters four to six present critical studies of the work of individual poets. Rita Ann Higgins, Eva Bourke and Moya Cannon began their careers in association with the Galway Writers Workshop, and Salmon Publishing was responsible for bringing their first single-title poetry collections – and in the cases of Bourke and Higgins, subsequent collections – into print.

Although Salmon’s list reflects a comparatively even gender balance, the publication of a relatively equal proportion of male and female writers was so unusual among twentieth-century Irish poetry publishers that Salmon has earned a reputation as a “feminist” press as a result, despite the fact that it published the work of more men than women. Such a reputation, misleading though it may be, highlights one of Salmon’s most visible contributions to Irish poetry publishing: fostering the work of

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Irish women writers. Higgins, Bourke, and Cannon have been chosen as representative of Salmon’s achievements: since their first publications by Salmon, all three writers have received increasing critical acclaim as well as literary awards and appointments, including membership of Aosdána, and editorships of prestigious publications such as *Poetry Ireland*. This dissertation addresses their work from three different critical perspectives in order to highlight their individual contributions.

Chapter Four explores Irish poet Rita Ann Higgins’s negotiations of the body in pain. The experience of physical suffering, critics such as Elaine Scarry (1985) argue, performs a veritable “assault on language,” often completely removing the sufferer’s linguistic capacity. Therefore, few texts deal explicitly with the experience of physical suffering: however, in some instances, representations of physical anguish slip indirectly into literary texts, situating physical pain as a mute but constant companion to narrators of novels or to poetic speakers. The poems of Rita Ann Higgins bear such a relationship to physical pain, and attempt to mitigate the “assault” Scarry identifies. The bodies of the men and women in Higgins’s work are frequently compromised in some way: they are disabled or injured, ill, intoxicated, or even deceased. However, her poetic speakers rarely, if ever, articulate the experience of pain directly; in fact, they rarely acknowledge or comment upon their own bodily anguish. Instead, the experience of physical suffering creeps into these poems obliquely, often at the very point at which speakers’ verbal ability and their relationship to language is also undergoing a breakdown. Chapter Four suggests, therefore, that Higgins’s speakers, poised as they are at the edge of both physical and linguistic rupture, can provide readers with insights into the nature of the imaginative expression of pain, as well as the complicated relationship of pain to speech and language, in which poetry plays a pivotal role.

Chapter Five considers ekphrasis in the work of Eva Bourke. The visual arts have featured prominently across much of Bourke’s work, particularly in her first two collections, both published by Salmon. Bourke’s ekphrases, which eschew the traditionally gendered interpretations of ekphrasis that privileges “male” narrative over “female” image, as well as a desire to possess or conquer a silent, still artwork, 

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suggest that the ekphrastic act develops differently when performed by a woman writer. They celebrate the presence of the minute and detailed: a practice of looking that is born of disciplined, precise observation, and they often reflect upon painterly representations of domestic interiors and household items, valuing them for their usefulness and simplicity as well as their beauty. Additionally, the way in which Bourke approaches visual art embraces disorder and the “disjointed,” and takes into account the location of the artwork within a cityscape, suggests that the ekphrastic encounter is not limited to a single gaze between poet and art object. Bourke’s poems recognise multiple ways of seeing and multiple gazes, offering readers a multidimensional version of the ekphrastic experience.

Chapter Six discusses the intersection of nonhuman nature and human dwellings within the ecopoetry of Moya Cannon. Focusing on representations of the construction and breakdown of human dwelling-spaces, this chapter investigates the relationship of this act to the articulation of poetic creativity, for it is through attention to dwelling – the way in which humans participate most fully in the non-human landscape – that humans can be most aware of the delicate, fluctuating connections that sustain the ecosphere. When Cannon’s poetic speakers encounter and engage with man-made dwellings, which are also necessarily located within the natural landscape while remaining apart from it, they often experience disharmony and uncertainty. Man-made structures in her work are frequently drawn as sites of discomfort and instability, situated uncomfortably within the landscape, but such instability is a necessary part of the process of creation: for Cannon, erection and demolition are a vital part of the evolution of poetic (especially ecopoetic) creativity as a renewable resource. This unsettledness, defamiliarization and eventual demolition stems from the “unsayability” or inherent “otherness” of the natural world, which Martin Heidegger discusses in *Building Dwelling Thinking* (1971).

The individual poetic achievements of Bourke, Cannon and Higgins demonstrate that coterie dynamics inevitably influence a writer’s individual poetic voice. The coterie dynamics that developed in association with *The Salmon* magazine and Salmon Publishing would help to grant these, and other, writers the necessary permission to appropriate cultural space, resulting in original, diverse, ongoing contributions to Irish literature.
The concept of the single author writing at the centre of a self-created literary universe has been the critical paradigm for authorship since the beginning of the nineteenth century. “Most theories of interpretation and editing are based on the idea of a single author… as sole controlling intelligence in a work,” writes Jack Stillinger in *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of the Solitary Genius* (1991). “We routinely refer to a single authorial mind, or personality, or consciousness to validate ‘meaning’ or ‘authority’; where others besides the nominal author have a share in the creation of a text, we usually ignore that share or else call it corruption and try to get rid of it.”¹ In spite of readers’ and critics’ insistence upon the existence of the single author, Stillinger continues, the possibility of “pure” authorship has always been more mythical than actual: in fact, to successfully isolate an author’s intended meaning from the complex network of “authors, editors, publishers, booksellers, readers,” and the other unseen collaborators involved in creating a printed text, would be an unachievable task.²

The paradigm of the author as the single originator of meaning has been problematised and redeveloped during the course of the twentieth century by scholars in a number of fields, including literary critics Stillinger and Jerome McGann, philosophers Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. This chapter explores a number of concepts of socialized creativity that evolved during the second half of the twentieth century, all of which challenge the concept of the single author as the sole originator of a text’s meaning, and many of which position authorial intent as only one of a number of factors which comprise that meaning. It emphasizes the reality of “multiple authorship,” to borrow Stillinger’s phrase, by suggesting that behind authorial intent or creative “voice” lies a history of mutual influence and collaboration that is often either “invisible” to readers, or that tends to be viewed as subordinate to the individual creative voice. This history, far

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2. Stillinger, 183.
from being peripheral or tangential to literary texts, is vital to their creation; for, contrary to popularized notions of the often eccentric, sometimes impoverished painter or writer who works feverishly at a masterpiece alone in her attic, art is necessarily a social process, and cannot help but be subject to factors external to authorial intent. These factors, as Stillinger writes, can include predecessors, friends, competitors, as well as the more practical “exigencies of genre,” which can be defined as “a range of externally exerted requests, demands and pressures” that may vary depending on genre. Such external pressures can, and often do, affect the length of a creative work, its subject matter, the amount of time an author is able to devote to it, and other characteristics. For example, an author may find herself obliged to keep a poem to a certain number of lines in order to adhere to the submission guidelines of a literary magazine; she may need to finish a poem particularly quickly in order to meet a deadline for a competition; or she may add a few lines to a poem for financial reasons if a publication has agreed to pay her per line for her creative work.

Outside of the demands exerted by the publication process, perhaps the poet regularly attends a writers’ group, or chooses to share her work with one or two like-minded writers who read and suggest edits to the pieces. More privately – and often, harder for literary historians to document – she may share her work with a spouse, partner, sibling, or child: these individuals can also exert influence over the work. Stillinger details the way in which such relationships can affect a text that is nominally by a single author, such as John Stuart Mill’s Autobiography (1873), which, he argues, “is a collaboration between two authors,” and which bears the influences of no less than seven individuals, including Mill’s sister, his niece, a copyist, and an editor. Bette London, in Writing Double: Women’s Literary Partnerships (1999), argues that critics and readers have been particularly resistant to recognize instances of female literary collaboration, such as the creative (and sexual) relationship between aunt and niece Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who

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3 Stillinger, 182.
4 Stillinger, 53, 52. However, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford anticipated Stillinger’s insistence upon multiple authorship in Singular Texts/Plural Authors (1990). After administering two sets of questionnaires to 1400 members of seven American professional organizations in order to “determine the frequency, types, and occasions of collaborative writing among members of these organizations,” they concluded that collaborative writing is a “frequent activity;” in fact, is the norm rather than the exception. (Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press: 8, 12.)
published their collaborative work under the pen name “Michael Field.” London believes that this resistance is especially pronounced when the “authorship in question is of the sort we deem literary.” More recently, the essays in Literary Couplings: Writing Couples, Collaborators, and the Construction of Authorship (2007), edited by Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson, examine paradigms of literary partnerships – between writers of both genders – that have hitherto received little critical attention. Stone and Thompson argue that most studies of literary collaboration have focused on canonical (white, heterosexual) males, such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, or Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, whereas “detailed studies of the textual relations and joint writing practices of other types of couples – cross-gender couples, female couples, or writing couples in intimate relationships other than erotic (eg., parent-child or sibling relationships) – were much less common.” Therefore, their collection includes an examination of Sara Coleridge’s posthumous relationship with her father’s works, as she edited them for publication, as well as the collaboration between Anglo-Irish writers Edith Somerville and Violet Martin. Stone and Thompson propose a useful alternative to the paradigm of the single author, suggesting that it should be replaced “by a conception of authors as ‘heterotexts,’ woven of varying strands of influence and agency, absorbing or incorporating different subjectivities, and speaking in multiple voices,” positioning authorship as a network that exists between individuals.

If the idea of authorship has been redeveloped by critics such as Stillinger, London, and Stone and Thompson, and extended to include the myriad influences that shape a text outside of the nominal author’s intent, it remains difficult to define the term “collaboration” nonetheless, since it can adopt such a variety of forms. Ede and Lunsford (1990) suggest that collaboration or so-called “group writing” comprises “any of the activities that lead to a completed written document. These activities,” they claim, “include written and spoken brainstorming, outlining, note-taking,

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7 Stone and Thompson, 19. The authors emphasize that they use the prefix “hetero” here in order to highlight diversity, not to imply sexual connotations of any kind.
organizational planning, drafting, revising and editing.” Therefore, “group writing” can take place on many levels, and may not leave a written record. Collaborative endeavours might involve conscious efforts at co-writing, in which two or more writers work together on the production of a text; they might refer to the way in which an assiduous editor heavily reshapes a writer’s manuscript prior to publication; or they might involve the collective input of a number of individuals, in small-group or coterie situations such as writing groups or writers’ workshops. The term “coterie” has retained some associations of exclusivity and elitism: the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “[a]n organized association of persons for political, social, or other purposes; a club; a circle of persons associated together and distinguished from ‘outsiders’, a ‘set,’” or “a ‘set’ associated by certain exclusive interests, pursuits, or aims; a clique.” However, if the term “coterie” is released from its connotations of organized cliquishness, it can be useful to the analysis of the social structures which permit literature to come into being. A literary coterie, then, may be defined as a (more or less flexible) group of persons who regularly share either in the production of writing and/or in its reception, and who often act as first audiences for one another’s work. Collaborative input into a text might also occur unconsciously or by accident, through unintentional errors in “revision, transcription, or publication” which can change the meaning of a text. “Collaborations exist in a range of ‘authorial’ activities not necessarily named authorship,” insists London, “[including] acts of assistance and inspiration; acts of mentoring or mutual influence; acts of revision or editorial input.”

Mutual influence can occur less directly; since the writer is also necessarily a reader, she will be influenced to a greater or lesser degree by what she has read. Harold Bloom’s Anxiety of Influence (1973) prioritises the inevitability of intertextuality, and the way in which the young poet must enter into dialogue (and contest) with textual predecessors. Predicting Stillinger, London, and Stone and Thompson, Bloom asserts, “We need to stop thinking of any poet as an autonomous ego, however solipsistic the strongest of poets may be. Every poet is a being caught up in a dialectical relationship (transference, repetition, error, communication) with

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8 Ede and Lunsford, 12.
10 London, 19.
another poet or poets.”  

Far from being something to be shunned, poetic influence, Bloom argues, is both inevitable and necessary, and is based upon the poet’s “mispriision,” or misreading, of her precursors, where “mispriision” is not an interpretive error, but rather is synonymous with “rewriting” or “revision.” For Bloom, the act of misreading is an essential part of poetic development. “True poetic history is the story of how poets as poets have suffered other poets,” Bloom maintains, “just as any true biography is the story of how anyone suffered his own family – or his own displacement of family into lovers and friends.”

Bloom’s theory has been severely critiqued by numerous feminist scholars who object to its highly-gendered paradigm, one that is heavily influenced by the male-centred Oedipal aspect of Freudian theory. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979), for example, point out that in Bloom’s pattern of influence, “the sequential historical relationship between literary artists is the relationship of father and son… Bloom’s model of literary history is intensely (even exclusively) male, and necessarily patriarchal.” However, Gilbert and Gubar argue, Bloom’s model remains useful, since it is not a recommendation for, but is rather an analysis of, “the patriarchal poetics (and attendant anxieties) which underlie [Western] culture’s chief literary movements.” Gilbert and Gubar argue that, within Bloom’s paradigm, the

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12 Bloom, 30.
13 Bloom, 94.
15 Gilbert and Gubar, 47-48.
woman writer must evade the patriarchal structures that have no room for her, since her would-be “forefathers” are symbols of patriarchal authority who rely on inscriptions of women as either angel or monster, typified by the idea of the creative woman as “diseased” or witchlike.\textsuperscript{16} In \textit{The Anatomy of Influence} (2011), Bloom’s most recent book and, he states, his “virtual swan song” on the subject of literary influence, he has reworded his approach to influence, using language that is less gendered, and emphasizing that the “anxiety of influence” exists between texts, not individuals.\textsuperscript{17} “A potentially strong poet is hardly helpless,” he avows, “and she may never receive a signal of anxiety in regard to the literary past; but her poems will tally them.”\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, he has changed the terminology of the model from that of a contest or battle to one that is more dialogic: influence, he writes, “is “literary love, tempered by defense. The defenses vary from poet to poet. But the overwhelming presence of love is vital to understanding how great literature works.”\textsuperscript{19} Although Bloom’s selection of authors in \textit{The Anatomy of Influence} is overwhelmingly male – Elizabeth Bishop and Amy Clampitt are the only two women poets who receive more than a cursory reference – his emphasis on the way in which “[t]he structure of literary influence is labyrinthine, not linear” is a significant principle of any discussion of literary influence, particularly in relation to poetry.

According to Stone and Thompson, poetry is “a genre that, since the Romantic period, has been identified with the individual lyric voice.”\textsuperscript{20} Poetry, then, has been the last bastion of the myth of the single author. However, as the work of Ede and Lunsford, Stillinger, and Stone and Thompson has established, the condition of multiple authorship is the rule of textual production, not the exception. Therefore, it is particularly important to emphasize the way in which the writing of poetry is a

\textsuperscript{16} Meg Jensen uses Bloom’s model to illuminate literary “father-daughter” relationships in “The Anxiety of Daughterhood: Or, Using Bloom to Read Women Writers: The Cases of Louisa May Alcott and Virginia Woolf” (\textit{Literature Compass} 4:4 (2007): 1208-1226). Both Alcott and Woolf, Jensen writes, overcame the “anxiety of daughterhood” to the benefit of their own literary careers. Both writers wrestled with the literary legacies of their fathers in their writing, and did so in ways that were “informed rather than delimited by their debts to the past. Bronson Alcott and Leslie Stephen have largely become footnotes in their daughters’ biographies.” (1224) Jensen, unlike Bloom, believes that the private anxieties suffered by the daughters toward their fathers and the public, textual way in which they negotiated them in their own work, are entwined.


\textsuperscript{18} Harold Bloom, \textit{The Anatomy of Influence}, 10.

\textsuperscript{19} Bloom, 8.

\textsuperscript{20} Stone and Thompson, 17.
socialized process, since doing so challenges traditional, Romantic notions of the author, replacing them with more nuanced explorations of the actual processes that comprise poetic influence and authorship. These processes are far more complicated, involving many layers of communication and exchange, than the simple, and inaccurate, paradigm of the single author – that is, the model in which one author produces a text which is subsequently brought into print precisely according to that author’s original intentions – permits. Moreover, by refusing to “privilege” the status of the single (and singularly inspired) author, the creation of cultural products such as poems becomes less restricted and more “democratic,” and therefore participation in such acts becomes available to a larger number of individuals, who can and should be permitted to take part in producing, and not merely consuming, cultural artefacts.

As Stone and Thompson argue, the concept of the author as the solitary, organising genius in complete control of a text is rooted in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries. “What happened in the Romantic period,” writes Lorraine York, “was the crossing of communitarian and individualist discourses, a crossing that complicated notions of authorship and texts not only for the Romantics but for those who inherited a now ubiquitous range of aesthetic assumptions which can loosely be termed Romantic,” and which are embodied in Coleridge’s poem “Kubla Khan,” a poem that lionizes the lone, male, visionary poet, identifiable by his “flashing eyes, his floating hair.” Nonetheless, Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was aware of the impossibility of separating the author from influences external to his own vision or imagination. In the preface to Prometheus Unbound (1820), he describes the effects of these influences on the poet. “…[P]oetry is a mimetic art,” Shelley insists. “It creates, but it creates by combination and representation… A poet,” he continues,

is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others; and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both. Every man’s mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of nature and art; by every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they

compose one form. Poets, not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors, and
musicians, are, in one sense, the creators, and in another, the creations of their age.
From this subjection the loftiest do not escape.²³

Far from corrupting or compromising a text’s (or an author’s) integrity and
originality, for Shelley, “external influences” are vital to both poet and poem: they
“excite and sustain” the poet’s “internal powers,” and also impact the text the poet
produces. Anticipating Bloom, he acknowledges that these influences include – even
more importantly than “the objects of nature” – art created by all who have come
before him, as well as conversations and interactions with other living persons.
Whatever the writer has read, seen, or heard will “act upon his consciousness,” writes
Shelley, and these forms will combine within the writer’s consciousness, where they
will be “reflected,” synthesized, and responded to within the later writer’s
contribution to literature. Bearing echoes of Bloom’s notion of “misprision” – a poet’s
necessary “misreading” of her predecessors – Shelley’s concept of these “external
influences” not only anticipates Bloom, whose model of authorship emphasizes the
way texts rather than individuals influence one another, but also reads as an admission
of the importance of dialogue or interplay between living persons to any single poetic
achievement. Ultimately, for Shelley, the fact that the writer addresses and responds
to the work of her predecessors can only enhance her own contribution to literature,
for this act connects her work to a larger network of texts as well as individuals. The
body of work “produced by their combination,” he continues, “has some intelligible
and beautiful analogy with those sources of emotion and thought, and with the
contemporary condition of them: one great poet is a masterpiece of nature which
another not only ought to study but must study.”²⁴

According to York, it is logical that two of the strongest advocates for
expanded concepts of authorship, Byron editor Jerome McGann, and Keats and
Shelley scholar Jack Stillinger, are scholars of Romantic poetry. McGann and
Stillinger, both intent on revealing the collaborations that underlie well-known
nineteenth-century texts, agree that the position of the author is only one among many
factors that influence the production of a text. Far from springing fully-formed from

²³ Percy Bysshe Shelley, “Preface: Prometheus Unbound, A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts.” Complete
²⁴ Shelley, 206.
an author’s mind, “[t]he generation of the text is,” for McGann, “...a perpetually renewed historical process of specific and concrete events.” Resembling Shelley’s emphasis on the network of relationships between other poets and their poems with which every poet engages, McGann argues that mutual influence among poets – as well as the exigencies of the institution of publishing – form the very basis for literature. “This discourse of literature, then,” he writes,

is... a continuing set of finite relationships that develop... between an author, printers, publishers, readers of various sorts, reviewers, academicians, and – ultimately – society at all its levels, and perhaps even international society. Every time a work of literature is encountered the reader places himself in a position where he is able to experience, and join with, that complex human endeavour.

Like McGann, Jack Stillinger investigates hidden layers of collaborative authorships in *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*. Using examples from the works of Keats, Mill, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Pound, and analysing the changes made to different manuscript versions of each work, Stillinger demonstrates that the presence of “multiple authorship” within a work is the norm, not the exception, even for the Romantic poets themselves. “[I]nstances [of multiple authorship],” he writes, “...can be found virtually anywhere we care to look in English and American literature of the last two centuries...[which] is rather strikingly at odds with the interpretive and editorial theorists’ almost universal concern with author and authorship as single entities.”

Even centuries after the first publication of a text, “reviewers and academicians” remain a part of that “continuing set of finite relationships” which comprises literature, and they too, whether consciously or unconsciously, influence textual meaning. One example of this is the way in which Stillinger challenges McGann’s readings of the multiple extant versions of Keats’s poems “La Belle Dame Sans Merci” and “As Hermes once took to his feathers light.” McGann, Stillinger claims, wishes to absolve Keats of association with the “unacceptable attitudes towards women” held by two silent collaborators who contributed to certain versions

26 McGann, 96-7.
27 Stillinger, 22.
of these poems: Keats’ friend Charles Brown, who regularly took down copies of Keats’s poems during his lifetime, and his first biographer, R. M. Milnes, who used Brown’s copy in his 1848 Life of Keats. Stillinger cites McGann’s argument as an example of the return of the “repressed mythic author” – the very mythic author that McGann claims not to privilege in his theory of a literature that is collaborative by nature. However, despite differences in scholarship and interpretation such as these, Stillinger and McGann do agree that it would be useful if the concept of single authorship could be replaced by a more complicated and less stable “‘socialized concept of authorship and textual authority,’ a concept that involves complex relationships among authors, publishers, editors, readers, reviewers, and other ‘institutional affiliations’ as well.”

Acknowledgement and analysis of these “external” factors, they believe, can only enhance the reception of a text – and, paradoxically, do not necessarily threaten the “sovereignty” of the single author. As Stillinger insists, “‘the work of art is... always tending toward a collaborative status,’” but nonetheless, the myth of the single author is a vital component of the way in which a reader encounters a text, and of the way the text operates within the superstructures of publishing, bookselling, and textual dissemination. Some declaration of authorship seems to be necessary to a reader’s reception of a text, Stillinger believes. “For practical purposes,” he writes, “perhaps the single most important aspect of authorship is simply the vaguely apprehended presence of human creativity, personality, and (sometimes) voice that nominal authorship seems to provide.” However, while the myth of the single author seems to be a necessary component of readership, it must not be permitted to obscure the actualities of mutual influence and multiple authorship that lie at the foundation of all literary production.

The concept of multiple authorship, and the study of the influences of authors upon one another – as well as the influence of other individuals who participated within writerly circles without engaging in creative writing themselves – has also received increasing attention in recent works of popular literary history, such as Daisy

28 Stillinger, 49.
29 Stillinger, 48.
30 Stillinger, 48.
31 Stillinger, 186.
Hay’s *Young Romantics: The Shelleys, Byron and Other Tangled Lives* (2010). In it, Hay traces both the literary and personal influences the members of the so-called “Cockney circle” had upon one another, a coterie that included Percy Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Mary Shelley’s half-sister Claire Clairmont, Lord Byron, and the charismatic editor of the *Examiner* newspaper Leigh Hunt, around whom the group of writers and their associates first gathered. In marked contrast to the concept of solitary genius, this group self-consciously embraced the idea of “sociability” as the linchpin of creative productivity, especially for the making of poetry. “[Leigh] Hunt,” writes Hay, “had established ‘sociability’ as an important ideological principle.”

The idea of sociability, for Hunt and his circle, encompassed a group of individuals who entered into literary collaboration and held shared political and philosophical ideals – and who inevitably embarked on relationships with one another that were either personally and professionally constructive, destructive, or, more frequently, a combination of both. These literary and personal relationships were played out in textual space in the pages of Hunt’s *Examiner*, where they took on added public and political significance. “Hunt’s experiment in living,” writes Hay, ...elevated the rituals of friendship – communal dining, music-making, letter writing, shared reading -- so that ... these rituals took on a co-operative, oppositional significance. In *The Examiner*, such activities were given a public outlet, as conversations over dinner were rewritten in the collaborative ‘Table Talk’ columns, letters from friends were published and discussed in editorials, and as different members of Hunt’s circle contributed theatrical and literary reviews which reflected the group’s diversity as well as its coherence.

For a time, this combination of personal friendships, public engagement within the pages of the *Examiner*, and a literary community that embraced diversity as well as coherence, resulted in a fruitful, productive environment in which writers could flourish. However, members of the “Cockney circle” were not exempt from concerns and ambiguities surrounding authorship, and some of them raised questions surrounding authorship within the very texts of their poems. Shelley’s *Alastor*, suggests Hay, is one such work. For Hay, *Alastor* reflects

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33 Hay, 41.
a dilemma of solitude or sociability, about whether the poet needed companionship or isolation in order to produce great work...[C]ould a poet really achieve greatness supported by others? Didn’t the development of powers of intense perception ultimately involve a rejection of society? Wasn’t the search for knowledge in the end a solitary one? *Alastor* asked all these questions, and refused to answer any of them.\(^{34}\)

Far more equivocal than the attitude Shelley presents in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, in “Alastor,” the unnamed Poet, the “child of grace and genius,” meets his demise when he seeks the company of an Other – a visionary woman who is “herself a Poet.”\(^{35}\) Although “Alastor” may seem to articulate a rejection of sociability, in fact, it denounces the poet’s “solipsism,” for the Other he imagines exists only within his own mind. “Those who love not their fellow-beings live unfruitful lives,” the Preface to the poem cautions, “and prepare for their old age a miserable grave.”\(^{36}\)

Other recent popular biographies and literary histories that highlight the social aspect of creativity include Harry Ricketts’s *Strange Meetings: The Poet of the Great War* (2010); Franny Moyle’s *Desperate Romantics: The Private Lives of the Pre-Raphaelites* (2009); and Adam Sisman’s *The Friendship: Wordsworth and Coleridge* (2010). This may signify that popular as well as critical attention is being turned away from the single-author biography that idealises or deifies the life of a particular author and her work, which is yet another articulation of the prevalence of the myth of single authorship. Clearly, a general readership is becoming increasingly interested in the ways in which writers influence and shape one another’s textual and personal lives.\(^{37}\)

One well-documented example of the tenacity of the myth of single authorship into the twentieth century is the way in which critics have been reluctant to acknowledge Ezra Pound’s formative role in the making of T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), an issue documented by Jack Stillinger. “The Waste Land,” he writes,

\(^{34}\) Hay, 67.
\(^{36}\) Shelley, line 15.
\(^{37}\) Part of the appeal of these popular literary histories lies, certainly, in their recounting of the gritty details of authors’ personal lives, for this permits them to be enjoyable, voyeuristic glimpses into the lives of the famous. Yet even this aspect “demystifies” canonized authors, to a degree, reminding readers that the most celebrated authors are not exempt from the exigencies of daily life – including the inevitability of mutual influence, of historical events and of personal dramas.
“stands as a notable instance of multiple authorship or a major poem that is constantly attributed to one author alone.”38 While most critics – and Stillinger lists nine of them – admit that Ezra Pound edited and made revisions to the poem, many have been reluctant to embrace Pound as the poem’s co-author, although Eliot himself certainly recognized “the extent of [his] debt” to Pound.39 “Who, then,” Stillinger asks, “is the author of The Waste Land published in October 1922? Eliot wrote the drafts; Pound is responsible for the principal revisions. But the authorship underlying any particular sequence, or passage, or detail, is still very much up in the air.”40 Despite the existence of manuscripts heavily altered by Pound (and with notes by Vivien Eliot as well), and despite Eliot’s public expressions of gratitude towards him, many twentieth-century critics persisted in viewing Eliot as the sole author of the poem. This, Stillinger believes, is a sign of “…[t]he extent to which the myth of single authorship enters into the critical analysis of this obvious collaboration: The Waste Land, if it were perceived to be a jointly authored poem, would inevitably become a lesser work than it is now taken to be. At present, critical appreciation of a masterwork requires it to be the product of a single organizing mind.”41 Readers seem to insist that the act of writing poetry must be a solitary act only.

Roland Barthes, however, drew attention to the hegemony of the single author with the publication of his essay “The Death of the Author” in the journal Mantéia 5 in 1968. In it, Barthes calls for a shift in emphasis from the author as arbiter of a text’s meaning, suggesting that that meaning is a composite creation. For example, in “The Death of the Author,” Barthes interrogates the identity of the author in a passage from Balzac’s novel Sarrasine. “Who is speaking thus?” he demands:

38 Stillinger, 122.
39 Eliot in Stillinger, 132. Critics who have minimized Pound’s influence on The Waste Land in this way include Denis Donoghue, who claimed that “Pound’s criticism tightened the poem, but did not otherwise alter its movement,” and D. E. S. Maxwell, who stated, “Much of Pound’s advice Eliot himself had in mind anyhow.” (Donoghue and Maxwell in Stillinger, 133.) Stillinger does allow that during the 1980s, critics such as Lewis Turco became more forthright about acknowledging Pound’s contribution: Turco even suggested that “we ought at least to insist that all future editions of the work bear the names of both authors.” (Turco in Stillinger, 135.)
40 Stillinger, 138.
41 Stillinger, 138. Pound, apparently, never desired co-authorship of the poem himself nor attempted to claim it – possibly because, as Wayne Koestenbaum (1989) argues, collaborative efforts between men were often regarded with suspicion, having “a reputation for perversity” or being suggestive of homoeroticism. Nonetheless, the published poem was certainly heavily influenced by his edits, a fact that many twentieth-century critics were unwilling to recognize. (Wayne Koestenbaum, Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration. New York: Routledge, 1989: 139.)
Is it the hero of the story...? Is it Balzac the individual...? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing.\textsuperscript{42}

The loss of identity as the crux of authorship seems at odds with common perceptions of the function of authorship, where it would seem to ensure the construction, not loss or absence, of a voice or identity. The predominance of the individual, and therefore of the individual author, writes Barthes, emerged “from the Middle Ages with English empiricism, French rationalism, and the personal faith of the Reformation,” focusing Western culture around the primacy of the individual or individual speaker.\textsuperscript{43} Within Barthes’s matrix, the author is not an individual – or, as Barthes phrases it, a “human person” – at all: rather, the author is merely the utterance of the word “I” which is necessary to hold the linguistic system together.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, an author cannot be plumbed for the ultimate meaning of a text, nor can the sediments – “society, history, psyché, liberty”\textsuperscript{45} – that lie beneath her. Moreover, Barthes emphasizes the way in which the refusal to search for and locate the Author is a truly revolutionary act: to refuse to assign a final meaning to a work, he maintains, is nothing less than an “anti-theological activity.” This abnegation, then, is equivalent to refusing “God and his hypostases – reason, science, law.”\textsuperscript{46}

All writing, Barthes continues, is fragmented and intertextual by nature: “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author.”\textsuperscript{47} This reversal of textual power dynamics seems to be subversive and Promethean, as the meaning of a text is being “stolen” from an omnipotent Author-God and dispersed instead amongst the text’s readers. However, if Barthes draws textual meaning away from the nominal author, “The Death of the Author”

\textsuperscript{43} Barthes, 142-3.
\textsuperscript{44} Barthes, 142-3.
\textsuperscript{45} Barthes, 147.
\textsuperscript{46} Barthes, 147.
\textsuperscript{47} Barthes, 148.
simultaneously seems to embrace a textual “multiplicity;” if each text is a “multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash,” then each text might also be the product of infinite – that is, multiple – authors. Perhaps only the single author, then, has suffered a death of sorts. Ironically, the concept of “the death of the author” is closely aligned with the nominal author Roland Barthes, an association which re-inscribes the “single author” back into meaning at the same moment that Barthes argues for a shift away from it. Despite this contradiction, his theory is still suggestive due to its focus upon the way in which multiple factors determine the meaning of a text: the historical author may not be “dead” at all, but her role may be indeed be modified, for it is as one of many things that create textual meaning. “The better theories [of authorship],” Stillinger cautions, “may turn out to be those that cover not only more facts but more authors.”

Michel Foucault also interrogates the identity and the whereabouts of the author in his well-known essay, “What Is An Author?”, first published in English in Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism (ed. Josué V. Harari, 1979). Foucault begins his treatise by agreeing with Barthes that “[t]he coming into being of the notion of ‘author’ constitutes the privileged moment of individualization in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences,” which took place at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. Like Barthes, Foucault rejects the concept of the author as God, or the ultimate inscriber, or donor, of meaning to a text. Foucault is more concerned, however, with whether the author, now banished, has simply been replaced with another unassailable notion: that of the work. The very idea of writing – écriture – has, according to Foucault, “subtly preserv[ed] the author’s existence… The word ‘work’ and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author’s individuality.”

To remedy this, Foucault recommends the replacement of the concept of the author with an “author-function” within a discourse. The author-function, he writes, replaces the author with a series of empty spaces that take the place of the subject, of

48 Stillinger, 24.
50 Foucault, 144.
“gaps and breaches” that function within a text and around which “a certain rational being that we call ‘author’ is constructed.” Paradoxically, it is these empty spaces, rather than markers of identity, that construct an “author” or “subject.” How,” Foucault queries, “under what conditions, and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role as originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse.” The author-function, then, is a limiting function, a parenthesis. “[T]he author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works,” he asserts. “[H]e [sic] is a certain functional principle by which ...one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction.” Like Barthes, Foucault conceives of the author – or the subject, or the “I” – as a placeholder, a signifier of an empty space, holding the fabric of a discourse together. It is impossible, however, for that placeholder to be the ultimate originator of a discourse.

While Foucault usefully exposes the way in which readers seek to read “unity” into a text whether in the form of a “unified” author or work, his theory minimizes the significance of the historical individuals who have shaped a text. As Stone and Thompson, Ede and Lunsford, Stillinger, and McGann argue, there is very often more than one hand at work at a text even before the impact of “hidden” mutual influence is considered: the individuals who are associated with a text, whether or not they are its nominal authors, are part of the infinite layers or “fragments” of influence that comprise that text. For Shelley, too, the “author” is the location at which an infinite numbers of meanings coalesce and come together, to be reshaped and refracted into a text. Perhaps, then, Foucault’s paradigm of authorship could be integrated into a schema that problematizes the origin of a text’s meaning while also examining the layers of influence upon it, some of which have been negotiated by historical individuals.

It is for this reason that sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s model of authorship is useful. For Bourdieu, the author of a number of works on cultural production,

51 Foucault, 145, 150.
52 Foucault, 158.
53 Foucault, 159.
including *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *The Rules of Art* (1996: 1992), the creation of cultural products is part of an intricate system of interlocking “fields” or structured systems, that impact one another. In order to analyse cultural production, he believes, the position of the author must also be interrogated. In *The Rules of Art*, which is especially relevant to the structures surrounding the production of literature, music, the visual arts, and other media, Bourdieu analyses the way in which the spectre of the author, or the myth of the solitary artistic genius, as Stillinger might phrase it, obscures the actual processes at work behind the creation of a work of art. “[T]he charismatic ideology of ‘creation’...,” writes Bourdieu, describing the aura of genius surrounding the artist that “sanctifies” her, placing her outside the boundaries of analysis,

is the visible expression of this tacit belief [in the ‘incontestability’ of the author] which undoubtedly constitutes the principal obstacle to a rigorous science of the production of the value of cultural goods. It is this charismatic ideology, in effect, which directs the gaze towards the *apparent producer* – painter, composer, writer – and prevents us asking who has created this ‘creator’ and the magic power of transubstantiation with which the ‘creator’ is endowed. It also steers the gaze towards the most visible aspect of the process of production, that is, the material *fabrication* of the product, transfigured into ‘creation,’ thereby avoiding any enquiry beyond the artist and the artist’s own activity into the conditions of this demiurgic capability.

However, Bourdieu writes this abnegation of the mythical author into the context of a highly sophisticated theory of cultural production, for he desires to uncover the social structures that mask the workings of cultural production, a goal that lies at the very centre of his research. “Interconnectedness” is at the heart of Bourdieu’s work, so that no single field exists autonomously: the field of cultural production, for example, is intertwined with the “fields of power” of politics and economics, and cannot be separated or isolated from them. For Bourdieu, more is at stake than whether or not the “linguistic” author exists or not. The myth of the single author must also be

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54 Bourdieu’s work on the media and journalism and his concentration on “restricted-production” types of cultural production – that is, small-production or “boutique” items as opposed to “the most widely-consumed cultural products – those disseminated by the media” – is useful to studies of literary coteries and to the publications they produce, which are, by their nature, produced on a small scale.  
disassembled if the sociologist is to identify and reveal the hidden factors that shape cultural production: the author must not be exempt from analysis.

It is not surprising, then, that Bourdieu should react strongly to being stymied by the concept of the “holy” or “sanctified” author. David Hesmondhalgh (2006) notices this in his study of Bourdieu’s oeuvre on the media and cultural production, and further investigates his reaction to the myth of the single author. “The Rules of Art provides a relentless and often repetitive critique of the notion of the individual creator, and of the idea of art as transcendent and as therefore impermeable to understanding and interpretation,” he writes. “…Bourdieu is drawing attention to the structured nature of making symbolic goods, and the way that the social making-up of the rules surrounding such activities, is hidden from view, or misrecognized. 57 Bourdieu, Hesmondhalgh notices, repudiates the idea of the “individual creator” nearly ad nauseum, but not without good reason: by conceiving of the author as an entity above interpretation or analysis, the concept of the single author or creator acts as a serious obstacle to analysis of the highly structured system that governs the production and reception of artworks, obscuring the intricacies of that system. While Bourdieu applies the myth of the creator to cultural production in general, it is significant that he chooses an example from literary criticism to elucidate the way in which this “misrecognition” or obscurity manifests itself. “So when, for example,” he suggests,

in their very classic Theory of Literature, René Wellek and Austin Warren extol the very banal ‘explanation in terms of the personality and the life of the writer,’ it is belief in the ‘creative genius’ that they are tacitly admitting that they take for granted (and no doubt most of their readers along with them), thus dedicating themselves, in their own terms, to ‘one of the oldest and best-established methods of literary study,’ one that consists of searching for the explanatory principle of a work inside an author taken in isolation (uniqueness and singularity being central properties of a ‘creator’). 58

57 Hesmondhalgh, 216.
58 Bourdieu, 186.
If “uniqueness and singularity” constitute the very definition of a “creator,” then they must be maintained at all costs: any admission of influence or collaboration would threaten that status, and must therefore be avoided.

Perhaps readers and critics of literature, then, cling even more tenaciously to the concept of the single creator than consumers of other forms of expression. However, a number of recent scholars have explored instances of, and attitudes toward, collaboration and mutual influence between women. Lorraine York attempts to theorize collaborative writing among women within a number of different genres such as drama, poetry, and fiction in Rethinking Women’s Collaborative Writing: power, difference, property (2002). Collaboration, York finds, is often viewed as “suspect,” to be encountered warily; it is dismissed as amateur or inauthentic, and cannot be “real” literature. “Poetic play, it would seem, may be the product of two poets; poetic seriousness, on the other hand, has traditionally been thought to be the domain of the single poet alone.” Similarly, Bette London, in Writing Double: Women’s Literary Partnerships (1999), argues that collaboration between women has been viewed with even more suspicion. “[T]o study collaboration ... was to study the conditions of its erasure,” states London. “And these conditions had gender-specific connotations, reinforcing the idea that women were not ‘real’ authors.” She continues,

Female collaborators were thus regularly dismissed as amateurs… their collaborations were persistently considered adolescent experiments…[and] were also invariably projected by commentators as in some way secret, no matter how public the authors were about what they were doing. And no matter how sustained these partnership ventures, there was a persistent undercurrent that collaborative writing

59 Carey Kaplan and Ellen Cronan Rose address academic collaboration between women and its personal and professional rewards and challenges in their article “Strange Bedfellows: Feminist Collaboration” (Signs 18:3 (1993): 547-561). They describe their acts of collaboration – without drawing generalizations about collaboration between all women – as un-anxious, equal, “lesbian” in a political, but not a sexual, sense. “In talking over the metaphors that came to mind for our collaboration, [in which] [n]either of us leads, neither follows... [t]he jazz metaphor, with its sexual elaboration, is the most accurate model we have found because our ideas and words – like sounds – meet, mingle, harmonize, and emerge conjoined, saying more than either of us would have said alone. Our collaboration presupposes and insists on integrity... The magic of jazz, the harmonious interplay...arises from the total attentiveness and receptivity of each player to the other.” (549-550) Still, “The other [collaborator], carrying a four-course teaching load each semester, worries about losing her separate intellectual identity because she has time only for collaborative projects.” (556)

60 York, 121.
was ultimately apprenticeship for some further apotheosis where the author would be singular.\(^\text{61}\)

London, then, has found that collaboration between women writers is often overlooked or found to be unworthy of a place within the realm of “serious” literature. Not only was women’s collaborative writing regarded as a mere set of writing exercises undertaken by the individual writer as “practice,” the act of collaboration itself was also to be viewed with suspicion. “Indeed, in the case of women,” she writes, “literary collaborators suffered from a double invisibility – the invisibility of collaboration, and the invisibility of women’s writing.”\(^\text{62}\)

While collaborative creative work, especially by women, may have been ignored or belittled by twentieth- (and nineteenth-) century critics, collaboration between writers has not always been an object of suspicion, or a sign that a work was “amateur” or of minor significance only. As Margaret Ezell has noted in *Writing Women’s Literary History* (1993), collaboration was widely practiced, acknowledged, and accepted within pre-eighteenth-century literary circles: it was common for writers, both male and female, to circulate their unfinished work among their peers in manuscript form for the purposes of criticism and discussion. Ezell argues that scholars must remain aware of this reality when approaching texts by seventeenth-century women: writings considered to be “private” from a contemporary perspective, such as unpublished letters or diaries, or unfinished manuscripts that circled among a small group of individuals, were often composed with an audience in mind. Texts such as these that have not been formally published must not be omitted from recognition and analysis, warns Ezell: scholars must refrain from “collap[sing] creativity into publication,” since an absence of the latter does not necessarily reflect an absence of the former.\(^\text{63}\)

Like the unpublished manuscripts that circulated within seventeenth-century literary coteries, the story of the worker-writer movement that developed in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as the working-class writing movement that sprang up in Britain in the 1930s, is also a story of multiple authorship. In *To Exercise Our Talents: The


\(^{62}\) London, 9.

\(^{63}\) Ezell, 32.
Democratization of Writing in Britain (2006), Christopher Hilliard examines the forces that “drew ordinary people into imaginative writing,” including publishers’ efforts to recruit working-class writers in the 1930s, the presence of popular writing in wartime Britain, and, significantly, the amateur writers’ movement that was fuelled in no small part by the writers’ circles that were formed in Britain in the early twentieth century. Both of these movements implicitly rebelled against the notion of the individual “genius” writing in solitude, as both emphasized the role of the communal in the acts of creativity and publication.

While resources such as time, space, and a relatively peaceful writing environment were obviously even more rare and precious for working-class writers than for their upper-class counterparts, the communal space of the writers’ circles provided their members with other vital writerly tools: encouragement, mutual support, a close focus on the “practicalities” of publishing and the marketplace, and regularly held “workshops” in which members could exchange and critique one another’s work. In this sense, they were the predecessors of the writing workshops that became more widely available to middle- and lower-class aspirant writers in the 1970s and 1980s in America, Britain and Ireland. Members of writers’ workshops in the second half of the twentieth century were less concerned with learning the “tricks of the trade” and breaking into the marketplace than they were with editing and critiquing one another’s work in a supportive, creative setting. “The worker-writer movement was novel in bringing the organized workshops that had long been common among middle-class aspirants into the domain of working-class literary activity,” writes Hilliard. “While they shared a format with the older writers’ circles, these groups were not forums for novices eager to fashion themselves into authors and climb the ladder of ‘success.’”

65 Although it is widely accepted that the predominance of the single author came about in the nineteenth century, and although it is clear that the communal nature of writers’ circles and other amateur writing groups implicitly challenges that predominance, Hilliard points out the ways in which the ethos of many writers’ circles well into the twentieth century favoured an approach to both the reading and writing of poetry that relies heavily on British romanticism – the emphasis on the sincerity and authenticity of the piece over its form – or, the favouring the “heart” over the “head.” (10)
66 Hilliard, 282.
While some group members would go on to publish their work with mainstream presses, many were uninterested in tailoring their creative work to fit the publishing industry’s demands. Such writers – and some publishers – were more interested in creating an alternative to the mainstream press, and, as Hilliard points out, such writers came together to form the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers in 1976. Members of the Federation were especially concerned with “the politics of representation” – that is, the unequally-distributed “permission” to create cultural products. “[T]he whole system of producing (and distributing) cultural products is built upon the few producing for the many,” object Paddy Maguire et al. in *The Republic of Letters: Working Class Writing and Local Publishing* (1981). “The great mass of people in this kind of set-up [the traditional dissemination of media] are simply there to be an audience.”

The Federation aimed to redress this imbalance by (re)placing the cultural “permission” to write, or to self-represent, into the hands of the “ordinary” working person. It hoped to reverse this paradigm: the power both to write and to be read, the Federation hoped, would be stolen from the elite few and bestowed upon the many. “Just as there are autocratic and democratic ways of conducting politics or businesses or trade unions, so too are there democratic and autocratic ways of producing, making, and distributing literature,” assert Maguire et al. “What is important to us here is allowing people to represent themselves, of devising ways by which people, ordinary people, can organise and represent themselves.”

Through the workshop format, aspirant writers – such as those involved in the Galway Writers Workshop, including Eva Bourke and Rita Ann Higgins – could avail of the chance to present their work to a sympathetic audience and become accustomed to the act of creating cultural products, not merely consuming them.

Local and community publishing, as well as the format of the writing workshop, would also become instrumental to the many feminist publishing initiatives that were gaining momentum in the 1970s and 1980s. A significant commonality between the writers’ circles of mid-century Britain and the writers’ workshops of the later half of the century is their particular appeal to aspirant women writers.

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68 Maguire et al, 64-5.
the earlier British writers’ circles certainly did not have an explicit feminist agenda, they undoubtedly addressed an unfulfilled need of writing women – to be in the company of other writers, and to have their work encouraged and supported. “The most striking aspect of the composition of writers’ circles was the number of women in them,” remarks Hilliard: female participants often comprised half or more of the total membership of writers’ circles.\(^69\) The advantages writers’ circles could provide, he believes, were especially relevant to the situations of women, who often had husbands and families, or otherwise found themselves in the role of carer. “The obligations and expectations faced by wives and other women who looked after relatives meant that the claims of the literary advice industry were especially pertinent to them,” he notes. Hilliard continues:

The advice industry and circle speakers held out the promise that those who could not relocate to Fleet Street could still become published writers by studying at home or with like-minded local enthusiasts. Less able to make the classic artistic move of packing up and heading to London to try their fortune, women had all the more reason to embrace potential surrogates like writers’ magazines and writers’ circles.\(^70\)

By the 1970s, the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) in Britain had begun to gain momentum, and feminism had begun to expand the possibilities for the woman writer in addition to, and outside of, writers’ circles. In *Rolling Our Own: Women as Printers, Publishers and Distributors* by Eileen Cadman, Gail Chester and Agnes Pivot (1981), the authors explicitly seek to explode the myth of the single author from a feminist perspective. For them, this myth silences aspirant writers of both genders, but legislates against feminism and disempowers the woman writer specifically. “An important difference that the WLM has made to women writers has been the rethinking of ways of working,” they claim. They continue:

The traditional idea of the writer has been of an individual working in virtual isolation and finally producing either a masterpiece or a flop. The terror which this notion of the process can produce – which appears to depend on mystical inspirations and endless energy – has probably led to the sinking into oblivion of many promising writers. In the last few years, women have begun to construct support networks to

\(^{69}\) Hilliard, 42.
\(^{70}\) Hilliard, 45.
help each other write. The writing is still done alone, but the groups of women meet regularly to give each other criticism and advice.⁷¹

Although the authors do not list specific examples here of which promising women writers sank “into oblivion,” they do emphasize the collaborative nature of the writing process. The act of women working together, in writing, publishing, and in other arenas was a manifestation of one of the crucial tenets of the WLM: for them, liberation could be achieved only through collective efforts by women.⁷² “The notion of collective working appears throughout the book [Rolling Our Own] as it is a crucial practice of the Women’s Liberation Movement,” Cadman et al. assert.⁷³ Yet they acknowledge that instances of collaboration are not without their difficulties, obstacles, and resultant frustration. “Although we believe that it is only by dismantling hierarchical relationships and sharing skills that we will achieve change, we are also conscious of the difficulties of working in collectives and its disadvantages,” they state.⁷⁴

Cadman et al. argue that, unchallenged, the myth of the single author can be fatally damaging to the aspirant writer, especially the aspirant woman writer – but the writing workshop, since its rise in popularity in the first half of the twentieth century, has been a tool with which women have been able to counter and overcome these effects. As Christopher Hilliard has indicated, women, on whom the burden of childrearing, housekeeping and caring for others traditionally fell, were historically less able than their male counterparts to relocate or even travel to the metropolis in the hopes of forging a career as a professional writer. Already marginalized by their gender, women living and working outside of a nation’s established literary centres were often in particular need of support networks with which to nourish their writing.

Irish women writers were in a similar situation. In reference to her own personal history, the Irish poet Eavan Boland has written, “A woman’s life was not honoured. At least no one I knew suggested that it was exemplary in the way a poet’s

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⁷³ Cadman et al., 5.
⁷⁴ Cadman et al., 5.
Boland’s comment illustrates two deeply-ingrained notions about the production of poetry. First – using language that is reminiscent of Bourdieu’s – it indicates that the life of a poet is, by its very nature, elevated or “exemplary,” or in some way belongs to a stratum far removed from the ordinariness of daily life. Second, that this sanctified, transcendent life and “normal” womanhood are mutually exclusive. Object Lessons, famously, charts Boland’s efforts at integrating her poetic selfhood with that of her role as wife and mother.

Boland was not alone in the feelings of disconnection that arose from trying to engage in a writing life as a woman. In her essay “In Defence of Writing Workshops” (1991), Boland describes the way in which the isolation endured by many women writers could be alleviated by writing workshops. For Boland, as for Cadman et al., the illusion of single authorship could pose a serious threat to the nascent careers of aspirant writers. A workshop Boland gave in the early 1980s, held on the outskirts of Dublin, attracted several women who had never attended a writing workshop before. One particularly talented, articulate woman, writes Boland, had a husband and children, and came from a town in the west of Ireland. One comment made by this fledgling writer had stayed with Boland ever since: “‘If I said I was a poet in that town,’” [this woman] said, ‘people would think I didn’t wash my windows.’” The implication, then, is that an interest in writing poetry is unfeminine, and cannot co-exist with the “ordinary” activities associated with a woman’s life, particularly activities associated with caring for others.

Although the tone of the workshop participant’s comment is humorous and sardonic, it hints, nevertheless, at the sheer loneliness from which she must have been suffering, as well as the fear of judgement from unsympathetic neighbours (and, perhaps, family). Boland calls this attitude towards the woman writer “bleak, desperate and resonant of all the isolation women especially can suffer in a society where the words poet and woman were – until recently perhaps – almost magnetic opposites.” Along with the prevalence of the myth of the single author, twentieth-

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77 Boland, 20. In 1983, the Irish branch of the organisation Women in Publishing carried out a survey, which found that only 11% of Irish poetry published was by women poets and almost all of it (9%) had
century women writers – as well as writers of colour or from working-class backgrounds – had to contend with prejudices that had been firmly in place since the early nineteenth century. “The truth,” Boland confirms, “is that there is such a thing as a societal permission to be a poet.”

She continues:

Even the notion offends many literary sensibilities. The idea that a society issues subtle, strict and often ungenerously distributed permissions to exercise an innate gift upsets the contrary elite and romantic view that excellence will out. The poet in the garret...The sudden recognition of the irrefutable voice. These are the conventional, nineteenth-century views of poetic development. They are also male, white and middle-class.

For Boland, the paradigm of the single author not only “elevates” the production of literature, it also prevents participation in that production by those who are not members of the dominant class. In the 1970s and 1980s in Ireland, writing workshops were taking place around the country with increasing frequency, and, Boland argues, they presented a useful remedy to the emerging writer – particularly the emerging woman writer – for isolation and discouragement. Accusations of “mediocrity and the lowering of standards and dilution of excellence” levelled at writing workshops by naysayers are unfounded, she argues. “The critique formed by an effective workshop...is a unique dialectic,” Boland insists, “– and [is] uniquely helpful to the emerging writer, who learns how to distinguish and listen to these voices in his or her own sensibility.”

“Whether we like it or not, societal permissions do exist... And of course they are unequally distributed on the basis of gender, class, and colour,” writes Boland. In the late 1970s, 1980, and into the mid-1990s, the many writing workshops and community writing initiatives that arose in Ireland helped to challenge and counter such “societal permissions.” Such initiatives as these could offer support to the

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78 Boland, 20.
79 Boland, 20-21.
80 Boland, 22.
81 Boland, 24.
82 Boland, 21.
women writers who were involved in them throughout three vital stages of creative development: individual encouragement, group facilitation, and, often, publication.  

However, acts of collaboration within Irish literature were not confined to the late twentieth century. “As [the poet Derek] Mahon has said,” writes Heather Clark in The Ulster Renaissance: Poetry in Belfast 1962-1972 (2006), “writing poetry is ‘a private act for friends in the first instance... it’s a coterie activity, really... a coterie business.’”  

Certainly, one of the most famous acts of collaboration in Irish literary history is that of the composition of Kathleen ni Houlihan (1902), attributed to W. B. Yeats, but co-authored by his close friend and patron Lady Augusta Gregory. Until relatively recently, Gregory’s contributions to the work were obscured by Yeats’s name. “…Lady Gregory’s authorship, suppressed by her at the time,” write Lucy McDiarmid and Maureen Waters (1995), “was...suppressed by Yeats and minimized or trivialized by other commentators.” Yeats also engaged in a series of literary exchanges with Dorothy Wellesley, which Lisa Harper examines in her essay “Courting the Muse: Dorothy Wellesley and W. B. Yeats” (2006). Further instances of collaboration between Irish writers – particularly women writers – have been brought to light by scholars, who have investigated the way in which literary partnerships and coteries, as forms of multiple influence or authorship, help to shape individual writers. For example, Julia M. Wright investigates the dynamics between the women writers in the Sheridan-LeFanu circle in her article “All the Fire-Side Circle: Irish Women Writers and the Sheridan-LeFanu Coterie,” while Jill R. Ehnenn devotes a chapter of her book, Women’s Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-

83 For a discussion of publishing as a stage on which feminist acts could be performed and re-performed, see Megan Buckley and Walther, “‘Midwives to Creativity’: Irish women and public(ation), 1975-1996.” Performing Irish Feminisms, ed. Lisa Fitzpatrick. Dublin: Carysfort, 2012: forthcoming.  
84 Clark, 158.  
Victorian Culture (2008) to the creative partnership between Violet Martin and Edith Somerville.\(^{88}\)

However, few projects, if any, have explored the effects of “the social dynamics of creativity” within Irish literary contexts to the extent achieved by Heather Clark’s The Ulster Renaissance (2006). In it, Clark charts the development of poetic friendships between, and individual voices among, the poets who attended Philip Hobsbaum’s workshop in Belfast during the decade in question. Although some of these writers, such as Derek Mahon, attended the workshop only briefly, Clark argues that the “Group,” as the workshop became nicknamed, and its members nevertheless influenced the careers of Mahon, Seamus Heaney, Michael and Longley as well as Paul Muldoon, James Simmons, John Hewitt, Seamus Deane, and Edna Longley, among others.\(^{89}\) Although critics such as Dillon Johnston have dismissed the very existence of a Belfast “school,”\(^{90}\) as have some of the poets themselves,\(^{90}\) in The Ulster Renaissance, Clark demonstrates the ways in which

the friendships [among the Belfast poets], strengthened by the numerous readings, public appearances, and informal gatherings during the late sixties, would lead a growing audience to think of these poets as a group – a categorization which would lead each of them, in time, to define himself against this label. And the construction of a collective identity would inevitably lead to the construction of the self.\(^{91}\)

The construction of the poetic self, Clark argues, is intimately tied to the construction and subsequent and necessary destruction of the literary group or coterie. She, like Stillinger, must labour against the critical tendency to view collaboration or mutual influence as an enemy of both the poet and the poem, as a force that threatens to impinge upon the “purity” or authenticity of the work – and of its author.\(^{92}\)

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\(^{89}\) In a letter to the Irish Times dated 16/7/87, Mahon writes, “…I was never a student of Hobsbaum: I book my degree at Trinity, in a very different climate. I did attend one meeting of the Belfast 2Group,” but found the atmosphere disagreeably combative and never went again. Hobsbaum was, and no doubt remains, a decent man: but he never influenced me in the least.” (9)

\(^{90}\) Poets often vehemently deny coterie membership, perhaps for the reason that acceptance of it could pose a threat to their own images of themselves as “autonomous” writers. For example, “I was not a member of Philip Hobsbaum’s fucking Belfast group,” Mahon asserted in a 1991 interview with James J. Murphy et al, published in Irish Literary Supplement 10:2 (Fall 1991): 28. Clark, 4.

\(^{91}\) Clark, 103.

\(^{92}\) See Stillinger, 185-6.
Ulster Renaissance, however, she proves that investigating the social aspect of creativity can both trace larger mutual influences among writers and enhance critical appreciation of an individual author’s career. “If we regard collaboration as a practice that is artistically enabling rather than disabling,” writes Clark,

> we may interpret the early poetic exchanges between the Belfast poets as beneficial – and indeed necessary – to the development of the poets’ autonomous voices. In other words, the coterie served as a space within which the poets could define themselves against each other. It is no accident that the Belfast poetry scene was most cohesive during the early sixties, when the young poets were just beginning to find their voices, and that it broke apart as their fame grew; they were pushed by conformity to autonomy. 93

Ultimately, Clark concludes, “regardless of nation or generation, members of a tight-knit literary group typically pursue greater artistic autonomy after achieving individual success.” 94

However, that individual success rarely occurs in isolation. Collaboration and mutual influence are natural, even inevitable, parts of the textual – and personal – lives of almost all writers. Collaborative endeavours such as formal or informal “coteries,” writers’ circles or writing workshops can be particularly useful to writers who may find their efforts at literary creativity compromised by being “outside” of traditional paradigms of authorship. In a cultural system that privileges the individual male creator with access to, or active participation in, the literary metropolis of that system, a number of factors might act as such a handicap for an aspirant writer. Deeply-ingrained notions of gender could prevent emerging women writers from participating in the creation of cultural products. If a writer were unable to travel to a cultural centre, the location of pre-existing literary networks, she might find herself at a similar disadvantage. To such writers – including the group of writers that centred around Jessie Lendennie and Michael Allen, co-founders of the Galway Writers’ Workshop and the Salmon magazine – collaborative efforts like writers’ workshops and their affiliated publications could act as valuable, and welcome, opportunities to write and read poetry.

93 Clark, 9-10.
94 Clark, 5.

The bookshelves lining the wall of the sitting-room bear up cheerfully under the weight of dozens of books. Old cloth hardbacks, red and green and blue, have found their place of honour on the top shelf. Beneath them, slimmer books are pressed together, side by side: paperback and hardcover, one or two stand askew on the shelves’ edges. Most of them are volumes of poetry. A few are deep burgundy or canary-yellow, but most have simple white card covers with black text and black, carefully hand-drawn cover illustrations. They belong to the sitting-room’s owner, who has been buying collections of poetry – whenever she can afford them – since she left the United States with her young son in 1970 for London and then, in 1981, for the west coast of Ireland. Now, several years after her arrival in Galway, Jessie Lendennie feels relatively settled into this low-ceilinged house called “Auburn” on Upper Fairhill Road in the Claddagh, formerly a small fishing village outside the city walls of Galway. If she looks out the back bedroom window and cranes her neck, she can glimpse the mouth of the bright River Corrib, the crumbling Spanish Arch and the row of crooked jewel-coloured houses that line the Spanish Parade.

This afternoon, though, she is not concerned with the swans bobbing in the Corrib or the rain spattering the Wolfe Tone Bridge. Her attention is focused on the four women in her sitting-room who are laughing, clutching mugs of tea and sheaves of papers, and throwing coats over the backs of wicker chairs. This is how these informal writing workshops usually begin – all full of chat. Soon, after the mugs have been emptied and refilled, they will get down to business. Someone will read out a poem-in-progress, and then it will be discussed at length. Someone else will suggest a different image for that line. Another thinks the poem would be stronger without stanzas four, five, six, seven and eight. The poem’s author swallows and begins to look nervous as the criticism sinks in, but intuits that the stanza-cutter is probably right. She throws up her typescript-laden hands in amused frustration, and everybody grins and hoots. They are all learning to shape poems and wrestle with their making. Two of them suspect they have nearly enough material for a debut collection, but they have not yet spoken to anyone – even one another – about these suspicions.
The five women in Auburn House’s sitting-room have gathered around its wooden table many times before, and will gather around it on many afternoons to come. They see each other weekly at the Galway Writers’ Workshop, where a larger group gathers to share their work and to contribute to the production of the Workshop’s magazine, *The Salmon*, but they find this informal setting both relaxing and stimulating. Late at night or early in the morning – at home, leaning over the kitchen counter or at their office desks, surreptitiously jotting down a line or two – they perform the solitary business of putting poems on paper. (After all, a pen can fit only a single hand, not two or three or four.) But both at the Workshop, and here in a small sitting room, each writer places her work before an audience of other writers, and poems are revised and re-written again and again. Even when a poem is finally “finished” and subsequently published, the writers can detect in it traces of countless conversations, layers and layers of revisions suggested, dissected, rejected and accepted over months or even years. *There* is where the poet refused to find another word for “cardigan;” *there* is where she finally cut out stanzas six, seven and eight, but not four and five; and *there* is where she changed the “a” in the title to “the.” The “final” version of the poem contains all of these strata: it is thick with echoes of earlier drafts, with the voices, interpretations, readings and re-readings of not one poet, but five.

Who, then, is the true author of any poem given such a thorough airing? A book may be published under a single name, but many other names creep into the poems themselves: snippets of conversation-turned-verse, private jokes and, more explicitly, in the poets’ frequent use of dedications to one another, which complicate the claim to authorship made by the name that appears on a poetry collection’s cover. Names are scattered everywhere: *For Rita. For Jessie. For Anne. For Eva.*

§

This chapter examines the way in which the “coterie” associated with the Galway Writers’ Workshop led to the establishment of *The Salmon* (1981-1991). It identifies *The Salmon* as a typical twentieth-century “little magazine” situated in a “regional” location – outside of the literary networks existing in Dublin, the nation’s literary capital – and applies coterie theory to the group of writers who were responsible for the inception of the magazine. This chapter demonstrates that
involvement within literary coteries and securing publication within their affiliated little magazines are strategies whereby unknown writers, who may be excluded from traditional literary networks due to factors such as gender or location of residence, can begin to build their careers. Involvement with literary coteries and little magazines offers a number of advantages to such writers. Through them, new and unknown writers may hone their writing skills, gain the necessary confidence to continue writing, avail of publication opportunities, and begin the process of establishing a readership and, subsequently, literary acclaim. In order to illustrate the way in which these processes developed among the coterie of writers that were associated with The Salmon, this chapter concludes with an account of the Salmon archive and of magazine production.

2.1. The literary coterie and the “little” magazine

“Authorship involves the appropriation of cultural space,” insist Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson.¹ As the poet Eavan Boland (1991) has argued, “each society issues subtle, strict and often ungenerously distributed permissions” to its members regarding creative writing: therefore, this appropriation of cultural space may have been considerably more difficult for twentieth-century aspirant writers on whom that permission had not been bestowed.² Such writers were often located in regions far removed from the literary networks that exist in a metropolis or cultural centre; if they were bound by family or caretaking responsibilities, as many women were, their engagement with such a literary centre may have been restricted.

Aspirant writers have circumvented these obstacles by engaging in small-group writing activities such as writing groups or writers’ workshops, which not only offer their participants a welcoming environment for their work, but can also present them with their first audiences, and grant them textual space for publication in the form of their affiliated little magazines. A study of the print run of the Galway-based The Salmon magazine, as well as the archive of Salmon Publishing, Ltd., which is located at the University of Delaware’s Morris Library in Newark, Delaware, USA,

indicates that the writers who were involved with the Galway Writers Workshop and The Salmon magazine successfully created this affirmative space for one another.

The coterie of writers that produced The Salmon challenged prejudices toward their non-metropolitan situation and insisted upon their right to partake in cultural production, regardless of their location outside of Dublin, their nation’s literary capital. The Salmon demonstrated a particular commitment to the inclusion of both text and image within its pages; while it never published critical work such as essays or reviews, it consistently devoted space to visual creative work, such as photographs, line drawings, and reprints of linocuts. It also valued the relationship between text and magazine design, which resulted in the magazine’s appealing visual presentation: this quality of presentation became a key aspect of the magazine’s identity, and part of an ardent expression of autonomy from what its editors perceived to be a Dublin-based cultural monopoly. For The Salmon’s editors, a strong visual presentation was an indication of/ assertion of Most importantly, this focus on high production standards assisted The Salmon in its transition into publication of single-title volumes of poetry, a process it began in 1985.

The Salmon, a softcover periodical published in A5 quarto format with a lifetime average of 53 pages per issue, and laid within 180-gram matte- or glossy-card covers, falls into the genre of the “little magazine,” a term which may have originated with the Chicago-based Little Review, edited by Margaret Anderson from 1914-1929. According to Tom Clyde (2003), the little magazine was “an important new form which would dominate the twentieth century.” Although they have predecessors in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, little magazines are, as Clyde argues, “by-products of that vast phenomenon known as Modernism.” In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, emerging writers seeking to fulfil the Modernist exhortation “make it new” often found themselves without a “sympathetic

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3 See Appendix 1 for further details on The Salmon’s production information.
5 Clyde, 34. Such predecessors include the Pre-Raphaelite publication The Germ (London: 1850).
audience [or] a market among the generally conservative publishers of the day.”

They took advantage of developments in printing technology such as “cheap paper, the rotary press, [and] the Linotype machine,” and as a result, numerous “little” journals sprang up, founded more on enthusiasm and ideology than on business sense or knowledge of the intricacies of the publishing industry. “Designed to [appeal] to ‘a limited group of intelligent readers,’” and to create “‘a spirit of conscientious revolt against the guardians of public taste,’” these small magazines succeeded in fostering dialogue between writers who valued experimentation and innovation.

Additionally, Clyde writes, little magazines generally exhibit three specifically modernist traits: first, an emphasis on “the avant-garde in art;” second, engagement with “political radicalism, particularly of a left-wing or libertarian hue;” and third, a strong sense of “regionalism, the urge of areas like the American Midwest to free themselves from cosmopolitan domination.” Irish examples of these, he continues, include the Irish Revival, the aim of which was “to create a respected culture away from London and Paris,” as well as the Ulster magazine Uladh’s “abortive gesture of Ulster regionalism.” Experimentalist art, political radicalism, and – particularly applicable to the case of The Salmon – the creation of a strong literary network away from established centres, all require interpersonal, collaborative networks in order to flourish, so it is no wonder that one of the little magazine’s most significant contributions to twentieth-century literature was its ability to act as a focal point for such relationships. “The little magazine stands out among periodical genres,” writes Malcolm Ballin (2008), “because of its unique contribution to the nurturing of creative potential and its role in facilitating dialogue between writers.”

Ian Hamilton established definitive criteria for what constitutes a little magazine in his key text on the subject, The Little Magazines: A Study of Six Editors (1976). Hamilton allows that “it is not easy to define what credentials a magazine

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9 Marek, 2-3.
10 Clyde, 34.
11 Clyde, 34.
requires in order to fit into the genre,” but maintains that a few criteria can be established nonetheless.  

Little magazines often merit the adjective “little” in a number of ways: they tend to have small circulations and minimal financial resources at their disposal; they appeal to a minority or “coterie” audience; and often “have small respect for the supposed mysteries of how to run a business.” Their lifespans are naturally varied, but, according to Hamilton, the “ideal” lifespan of a little magazine is ten years. At first, he writes,

there are the opening years of jaunty, assertive indecision, then a middle period of genuine identity, and after that a kind of level stage in which that identity becomes more and more wan and mechanical.... The editor at this point has to make a choice: to stop altogether, or to allow his journal to slip into a faceless survival. Most stop... It is in the nature of the little magazine that it should believe that no one else could do what it is doing.

Here, Hamilton identifies the most significant quality of the little magazine as its certainty that it has a specific mission to fulfil, or cultural situation to redress, or that it is engaged with “nurturing literary growth at a level subtler and more crucial than could ever be imagined by the commercial or ‘established’ press.” In order to achieve this, little magazines often expressed “a spirit of conscientious revolt against the guardians of public taste.” As was the case with The Salmon, such revolts were largely led by the strong, often charismatic, flamboyant or eccentric personalities of a single editor upon whose esprit the entire endeavour either succeeded or perished.

While established writers value little magazines as venues for experimentation, and often fondly remember them as sites of publication of their own early work, most contributors to little magazines tend to be little-known. Little-magazine historian Wolfgang Görschacher’s (1993) interviews with eighteen individuals involved in the publication of such magazines – editors, critics, poets, and a librarian – determined that “[t]he altruistic ideal of providing a crèche and a

13 Hamilton, 7.
14 Hamilton, 7.
15 Hamilton, 9.
16 Hamilton, 7.
kindergarten for young artists and, simultaneously, a platform on which young poets are published alongside their mature colleagues, was...the most important function of a little magazine."18 Although Görtschacher acknowledges that poets can be drawn to little magazines throughout their careers, T. S. Eliot’s famous assertion that “the first function of a literary magazine, surely, is to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent” was still applicable to little magazines of the later twentieth century.19 By its nature, a little magazine takes risks in publishing experimental work or the work of unknown or lesser-known writers: this may produce the felicitous result of facilitating the work of emerging writers who go on to build long literary careers, but it can also result in the publication of work by writers who contribute one or two pieces of creative work only to sink quickly into obscurity.

As their name suggests, the physical dimensions of little magazines are usually small, and they are often experimental in form and design as well as in content. In contrast to its predecessor (the ponderous, expensively printed-and-bound nineteenth-century review), the little magazine, writes Malcolm Ballin (2008), is necessarily youthful; it is

slim, physically lightweight, with a colourful cover, rather poorly printed. The text presents a mixture of poetry and fiction. The title has a jocular ring to it, the contributors are not all immediately familiar. The price is low and clearly marked. Could this be a little magazine of the twentieth century? If so, it is likely to contain controversial opinions and perhaps experimental art forms. Buying it will mark the purchaser as a member of a minority group.20

A typical little magazine can even involve multiple media, such as “paper of different colours and textures, surreal and drug-influenced graphics, song-sheets, plastic bags, and more.”21 It is also marked by its frequency of publication; the little magazine’s ephemeral form, its experimental content, and its appearance at regular intervals all emphasize immediacy. To succeed, it must position itself as “on the pulse” of a literary community, offering its buyers a direct connection to that pulse. When a little magazine degenerates into a “sporadical” – that is, a periodical which appears

20 Ballin, 15.
21 Clyde, 49.
infrequently and without a fixed publication schedule – it loses its immediacy, and this signals that the end of its life is near.\textsuperscript{22} It is crucial that a little magazine be published at least twice a year; in Peter Denman’s words, annual publication is “too infrequent to generate the continuity of thought necessary to establish the identity of a magazine.”\textsuperscript{23} The Salmon, too, would dwindle into this type of sporadic publication schedule near the end of its life.

Irish literary magazines, including little magazines, received relatively little critical attention until the twenty-first century, with the only twentieth-century study of note being Barbara Hayley and Enda McKay’s \textit{300 Years of Irish Periodicals} (1987). However, Irish literary magazines have been considered in several recent studies, notably Frank Shovlin’s \textit{Irish Literary Periodicals 1923-1958} (2003), Tom Clyde’s \textit{Irish Literary Magazines: An Outline History and Descriptive Bibliography} (2003), and Malcolm Ballin’s \textit{Irish Periodical Culture, 1937-1972: Genre in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland} (2008). Clyde describes the genre’s significance to Irish literature and culture, highlighting “the crucial importance of the successive flurries of short-lived little magazines, their \textit{collective} relevance and impact, their roles as test-beds and breeding-grounds [author’s emphasis].”\textsuperscript{24} Irish literary periodicals, like literary periodicals elsewhere in the world, can act as cultural thermometers and as tools for the researcher, and may offer the researcher unique insights due to their immediacy. “An essential quality of the journals,” Clyde maintains,

is their \textit{currency}, [for] they are simultaneously the training ground for new writers, a forum in which established writers have licence to experiment, a sounding-board for whatever issues – political, ethical, artistic – agitated sensibilities at the time, and of course a vital source of data in their poems, sketches, advertisements, letters, reviews, obituaries, and satires.\textsuperscript{25}

Taken singly instead of collectively, little magazines can also provide insight into the ways in which a group of writers developed both group and individual identities, for, as Clyde writes, they “position their readers in a particular way which allows them to

\textsuperscript{22} Hayden Murphy uses the term “sporadical” in his article, “Broadsides from the Margins” in the \textit{Times Scottish Education Supplement}, n.d., but likely from 1989: 26. Box 11, F234, ASP.
\textsuperscript{24} Clyde, x.
\textsuperscript{25} Clyde, xi.
label themselves as ‘Tories’ or ‘women’ or ‘interested in literature and culture.’”

Like other coterie periodicals, such as Leigh Hunt’s Examiner newspaper, little magazines can provide coterie members with the valuable opportunity to continue their interactions on a public, textual level.

Literary and artistic collaboration in its different forms, as Chapter 1 demonstrated, is so common as to be nearly unavoidable. Yet such collaboration is often silent or invisible, obscured by the myth of single authorship: that is, the concept that an author is a solitary genius presiding over a unique literary universe of his sole creation. However, writers rarely develop in isolation: they often surround themselves with a coterie, or small group, of individuals who act as early audiences for one another’s works and often help, either directly or indirectly, to shape them. Literary coteries evolve in different ways, depending on factors such as milieu, geographical location, and the personalities and circumstances of its members. However, although they are protean in nature and therefore challenge any generalizations made about them, little magazines such as The Salmon often share a number of common traits in their development and lifecycles. Literary coteries often gain cohesion and focus by imagining themselves against a “cultural hegemony” which, they believe, needs to be challenged or even dismantled, and the coterie imagines itself as comprised of “the voices of opposition and reform,” often both in literature and in politics. Similarly, they sometimes claim allegiance to – or unify around a shared sense of – a particular region from which they draw a sense of identity or “authenticity” as unique from the rest of the country: or, as Ballin phrases it in his study of Welsh periodicals, “the voice of Pembrokeshire speaking to Wales.” By using their non-metropolitan location as a source of strength, they attempt to subvert their own marginalisation as “regional.”

On a textual level, little magazines are often public sites of engagement for a literary coterie: they can act as textual representations of, or public stages for, acts of “sociability” or creativity between a number of individuals. Prior to publication of a creative work, the coterie or small group often acts as a fledgling writer’s first

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26 Clyde, xii.
28 Ballin, 34.
audience. Contrary to the belief that a bigger audience is a better audience, the approval of small groups is often vital to a writer throughout her career in a variety of ways that may change in priority over a writer’s lifetime, including financial gain, an increase in status, writerly critique or peer review, and the desire to establish “creative friendships,” so to speak, as well as other tangible and intangible forms of support.

Both literary coteries and little magazines often develop around a single charismatic individual who acts as a central figure around which the group coalesces. This individual often adopts a leadership role, and is willing to take on much of the work involved with the group and its publications, such as organizing and holding meetings, editing, and paperwork. She is often a writer herself, but is likely to be willing to put the sustenance of the group above the demands of her own creative work. She may be a newcomer to the group that forms around her; in her status as an “outsider,” she is less likely to be impeded by cultural prejudices that may hamper other group members. Members of literary coteries, including these central figures, are often financially unstable, and they may look to wealthier members of coteries for support. For example, as Lawrence Rainey (1998) indicates, Ezra Pound’s “Bel Esprit” project proposed “that thirty individuals each guarantee ten pounds… per year to [T. S.] Eliot, providing him with an income of three hundred pounds... In effect, the Bel Esprit project would create a practical organizational structure that would institutionalize the community forged by the deluxe edition of Ulysses.” However, even if these fiscal difficulties remain unsolved for long periods of time, the group may continue to meet, work and socialize together, for the finances of coterie projects such as little magazines are nearly always subordinate to the coterie’s morals, ideals, or goals – until a certain critical juncture in group dynamics, when they may become a cause for disagreement and discord within the group.

29 Examples of these individuals include Leigh Hunt, around whom the “Cockney Circle” formed, as well as Philip Hobsbaum, who was at the centre of the Belfast “Group” that included Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon.
30 Lawrence Rainey, Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998: 65. Although the financial structure Rainey describes is akin to soliciting subscriptions from readers, and is not explicit evidence of writers providing financial support directly to one another, it is an example of writers seeking capital on behalf of one another, and reflects efforts to cement relationships between a community of readers and writers through a form of patronage or financial commitment.
It is not uncommon for literary coteries to develop so organically, or to develop so many offshoots of, or sub-relationships within, the group that its members do not always formally characterise themselves as members of a group of any sort. In *The Ulster Renaissance* (2006), Heather Clark lists several instances of Northern Irish writers denying membership within a group, even as her archival research has verified their involvement. “‘It seems to me that any decent writer eschews labels. I don’t want to belong to any group,’” Paul Muldoon declared in a 1994 interview.  

Similarly, Seamus Heaney told an interviewer, “‘We certainly don’t see ourselves as a school.’”  

Members of a coterie, then, either may not necessarily label themselves as such, or may not believe themselves to have been members of a group or coterie at any point.

Finally, literary coteries are rarely permanent configurations. Like little magazines, they are bound by “temporality;” the former will dissolve when their currency dwindles, while the latter can be riven or altered by the life circumstances of their members, such as death, professional obligations, or financial obstacles; or they may collapse as a result of fractured personal relationships amongst group members. Ultimately, for one reason or another, they eventually disband, even if friendships between individual group members survive the demise of the coterie, for the development of individual poetic voices will take priority over the group and its dynamics, often obscuring the vivid history of mutual influence that helped to facilitate the emergence of those voices.

Critical reception of sites of “small-group” literary activity has been complicated and conflicted. Not infrequently, as the previous chapter has demonstrated, group literary activity is often an object of distrust for scholars, who can dismiss it as “amateur,” irrelevant, or able to facilitate only second-rate creative work. Critics may also deny the very existence of a coterie or community of writers.  

Twentieth-century activist groups, such as the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP), various subgroups of the Women’s Liberation Network (WLM), and feminist publishers, actively tried to discourage this tendency.

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31 Clark, 4-5.  
32 Clark, 4.  
33 For example, in *The Ulster Renaissance*, Heather Clark points to Dillon Johnston’s declaration that “[s]erious critics make no claim for the superiority, or even existence, of a Northern Irish school.” (3)
and dismantle its causes, only to meet substantial resistance from “establishment” funding bodies such as the Arts Councils. This reluctance to validate writing projects that are comprised of “group efforts” indicates that the myth of the single author still exists.

However, coterie or group literary activity must not be dismissed as amateur or irrelevant simply because all of its members are not what a literary establishment considers to be “serious” writers – or even writers at all. Through the example of the Salmon coterie, it becomes evident that coterie or group influence can help to foster a climate in which emerging authors, particularly women, can find space – both within the parameters of the writing workshop and within the textual space of coterie publications such as little magazines – to create strong poetic voices and to allow their careers to develop, often well before they publish a debut single-volume collection. Indeed, Salmon’s shift from magazine to book publishing eventually assisted its authors’ career development, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

As Raymond Williams defines the term in Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society (1976: 1988), “regional” carries implications “of dominance and subordination,” suggesting that the area specified as a “region” exists in terms “of relative inferiority to an assumed centre...” Under this polarity, the region, by its very nature, is politically and culturally submissive to an implied metropolitan centre. However, Williams notes, “there has been some counter-movement, attempting to make the distinctive virtues of regions the basis for new forms of identity...’ It is interesting that this counter-movement has usually accepted the subordinating term.” In The Country and the City (1973), Williams explores the way in which the “country,” or a rural way of life, is often imagined as a site of “pastoral innocence,”

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35 As Daisy Hay writes, the Cockney Circle group, for example, included artists, musicians, and other individuals who surrounded Byron and the Shelleys, and who contributed to coterie dynamics without necessarily doing so via the written word, including Mary Shelley’s half-sister, Claire Clairmont. Here, interestingly, the figure of the (male) “solitary genius” – a figure considered antithetical to concepts of multiple authorship – has created space for women to participate in literary group dynamics. I am grateful to Patrick Lonergan for his discussions of this subject. Hay explores these relationships in detail in Young Romantics: Byron, The Shelleys, and Other Tangled Lives (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).
36 Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. London: Fontana Press, 1988: 265, 266.
37 Williams, 265.
while the city is drawn as its opposite, a “civilising agency,” and the seat of economic and cultural power.\(^\text{38}\)

This opposition between city as the centre of culture and region as necessarily backwards and culturally deficient was challenged by twentieth-century British writers who were located outside London, the nation’s literary capital. As Christopher Hilliard describes, writers’ circles – which were far more common outside of London than inside of it – acted as valuable networks to aspirant writers: in them, participants could share their work, listen to lectures by successful writers and members of the publishing industry, and enjoy the structure of regular meetings, effectively removing London’s monopoly on the production of cultural goods. Hilliard describes the way in which one participant articulated this “democratization.” At the opening “of the Festival of Britain proceedings in Haworth in 1951,” he writes,

Phyllis Bentley – a single woman who had looked after her widowed mother – pointedly commented, ‘All of us cannot live in great cities, nor do we want to do so; but all of us should have a chance to exercise our talents... All ages, both sexes (very important, this!) many kinds of talent, many types of spiritual aspiration, seem to be catered for [in contemporary Haworth], give[n] a chance.”

Not only did writers’ circles provide “regional” writers with the opportunity to engage in literary production, these non-traditional literary networks “also shared with literary societies the goal of safeguarding a locale’s literary tradition,” Hilliard argues. “Like literary societies, writers’ groups listened to many talks by local antiquarians and students of dialect and discussed ways of writing about local life. Circles thus often talked about regional identity as they talked about writing.”\(^\text{40}\) In this way, members of writers’ circles bestowed upon one another the “permission” to engage in literary production, while also safeguarding traditional forms of preserving a region’s way of life.

Similar tensions surrounding the hegemony of the literary metropolis existed within twentieth-century Ireland, during which time, Patrick Kavanagh (1967) lamented, “one accepted as the final word in painting and letters the stuff that was

\(^{38}\) Williams, 290.
\(^{39}\) Hilliard, 45.
\(^{40}\) Hilliard, 51.
being produced in Dublin.”

According to Kavanagh’s infamous definition of the parochial and the provincial, allowing a nation’s literature to be legislated by the elite figures within a so-called cultural centre constitutes an insidious type of provincialism, an attitude Kavanagh attacked with vigour. “Parochialism and provincialism are direct opposites. The provincial has no mind of his own; he does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the metropolis – to which his eyes are turned – has to say on any subject,” he claims. “The parochial mentality on the other hand is never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish. All great civilisations are based on parochialism – Greek, Israeliite, English…” For Kavanagh, Irish culture did not belong to this group of “great civilisations.” It was provincial, not parochial, and would remain so until it ceased to look to Dublin and Britain for cultural approval – and until its authors ceased to turn to Britain for expanded publication opportunities and for a larger, more “desirable” audience.

A sense of this regional identity as the staging of a contest with members of a dominant group, Heather Clark writes, was central to the formation of “The Group” in 1960s Belfast, which included Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon. “Just as the Irish Literary Revival had succeeded in creating and promoting a distinctly Irish literature in English,” she argues, “the Ulster Renaissance was fuelled by a similar desire to validate a regional identity in opposition to the marginalising forces of both Britain and Ireland.” This desire was expressed in the form of “hostile jabs” which the members of the Belfast “Group” levelled at the Dublin literari who, they believed, expressed “condescension” towards Northerners and Northern poetry.

According to Clark, “[a] sense of opposition and even outright hostility towards the Dublin literary establishment also bound the coterie together… [T]here was always the intimation that literary life in Dublin was phony.” The implication, of course, is that literature created outside of the literary metropolis is more “authentic,” and that those who create it are “purer,” or at least less tainted with the air of the poseur than

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43 Clark, 156.
44 Clark, 156.
45 Clark, 153.
their metropolitan rivals. This implication is reflected in the very title of the Ulster-based *Honest Ulsterman* magazine, which published many Group members, and where, as Clark writes, “many of the anti-Dublin attacks were launched.”

The concept that “authenticity” is most readily found away from metropolitan centres has also been applied to the west of Ireland, a location that had been idealised as a site of “true” Irishness since the Irish Literary Revival, considered to be “…the true repository of an ancient, unique and valuable Irish heritage.” While the west of Ireland was the seat of (anti-English) values such as “cohesion, simplicity, instinctiveness and an organic relationship between lifestyle and environment,” its inhabitants were often viewed as primitive or uncivilized, a prejudice which endured far into the twentieth century. In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Ireland, Tom Clyde notes, the production of literary magazines was largely an activity of the towns of the eastern seaboard. “Even as literacy rates throughout the country gradually began to rise as the nineteenth century progressed, the imbalance between east and west coasts was maintained,” writes Clyde, who, as recently as 2003, argues that the unequal distribution of “literacy, population, education, money and communications” that has created these patterns has not yet been resolved.

Reacting against the inequalities Clyde describes, *The Salmon* enacted a resistance against the cultural forces that allowed the West of Ireland objectivity, but not subjectivity: its members bestowed upon each other the right to “appropriate cultural space.” They achieved this through a staunch insistence on *The Salmon*’s status as an “international” magazine, even while paratextual elements such as advertisements within the magazine, all of which were for local businesses, firmly placed the publication and its imagined readership within the West of Ireland. Documents retained in the archive of Salmon Publishing, Ltd. regarding prospective advertisers, as well as advertisements placed in the magazine, consistently refer to local businesses only, a fact that contradicts its editors’ claim to an international stance. This dissonance between aspiration and reality is, in fact, a mark of its search

46 Clark, 153.
49 Clyde, 54.
50 Stone and Thompson, 34.
for identity and autonomy, since a publication’s claim to an international cultural scope is a form of regional assertiveness: that is, a refusal to subordinate itself to, or permit itself to be mediated by, the literary metropolis. A regional publication’s staunch avowal of its international reach, then, can be a sign of independence and of increasing self-definition rather than a sign of insecurity and insularity, which is part of the process of appropriation of cultural space.

One certain indication of this search for autonomy is the impulse to scorn the members of a cultural capital’s “literati.” Like their Ulster counterparts during the 1960s, The Salmon’s editors imagined themselves in opposition to the cultural hegemony represented by Dublin. They articulated this stance in a number of editorials published in the magazine as well as in an undated grant application, in which they state:

Our primary aim is to provide an alternative outlet based in the west of Ireland with a voice distinct from that of Dublin. This does not imply provinciality or amateurism; our contributors are not solely from the west and are selected on quality (D. L. Hansen is a widely anthologised American, Bob Mairs is from Derry, the Irish language content comes from Dublin and Cork), nor are our sales directed mainly to the West. The point is that too much of Irish cultural life defers to Dublin (and that in turn to London); active, alternative centres of culture are the only way to avoid the sequential provincialisms that are stifling all art. John Silking’s [sic] “Stand” in Newcastle and Anne Smith’s lamented “Literary Review” in Edinburgh are examples of what can be achieved away from the acknowledged centres.51

In a 2008 interview, Lendennie remarked on the way in which “the Dublin poets” were in fact supportive of Salmon’s early endeavours, suggesting that such statements evince a need for autonomy, and may reflect real or imagined funding-body prejudice rather than actual hostility towards individuals: in Patrick Kavanagh’s words, “If you stand outside any position however dreadful it seems you are not at its mercy; this is true of all tyrannies.”52 Such attacks on Dublin, then, are articulations of a desire to challenge or “stand outside” the “positions” that Dublin represented.

51 Box 10, F228, ASP.
52 Kavanagh, “The Parish and the Universe”: 205.
The Salmon’s lifespan, editorship, form, and content position it, as Clyde suggests, typical of a twentieth-century little magazine. However, some of its characteristics were less typical, and The Salmon was dissimilar to its contemporaries in at least three significant ways. First, The Salmon’s emphasis was placed securely upon showcasing the work of new or emerging writers, often unpublished writers based in the west of Ireland, partly as a result of its community-centred origin as the publication of a writers’ workshop. This emphasis on the work of fledgling writers led detractors to claim – both during its lifetime and years after its demise – that the magazine’s editorial policy was too lax. A glance at the magazine’s table of contents, however, indicates that The Salmon gave publication space to writers who would later make sustained contributions to Irish poetry, including Aosdána members Eva Bourke, Moya Cannon, Michael Coady, John F. Deane, Rita Ann Higgins, James Liddy, Ciaran O’Driscoll, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Gabriel Rosenstock and Eithne Strong. 53 The Salmon provided new, unknown writers with a forum for their work: although some of these writers did not build subsequent literary careers, other “emerging” writers whose work The Salmon published rose to prominence thereafter, such as Eva Bourke, Moya Cannon and Rita Ann Higgins.

Second, The Salmon also deviated from its peers in terms of their styles of editorship. While Cyphers and Honest Ulsterman, its longer-lived contemporaries, either had a committed board of editors “with a clear idea of what, for them, comprises quality poetry,” as in the case of Cyphers, or underwent a number of changes in editorship to revitalize the magazine, as in the case of Honest Ulsterman, The Salmon’s fate, as the fate of many twentieth-century little magazines, depended on a single editor, whose time and resources were compromised by the demands of book publishing. 54

Finally, unlike both Cyphers and Honest Ulsterman, The Salmon developed into a book publisher, and did so during its lifetime. While this transition was relatively uncommon for Irish little magazines, it had already occurred in two

53 Aosdána is an Irish affiliation of artists engaged in literature, music and performing arts, and the visual arts. Membership is obtained through election by current members. The Salmon also published a number of other authors whose work has received serious critical acclaim, including Gerald Dawe, Knute Skinner, Chris Agee, Sara Berkeley, Eavan Boland, Sam Burnside, Michael Egan, Conleth Ellis, Maurice Harmon, Gavin Ewart, Joan McBreen, and Carol Rumens.

54 Clyde, 50.
instances: Gallery Press developed from Tara Telephone’s Beat-style broadsheets, *Capella* and *The Book of Invasions* (1969-70), and Dedalus Press emerged from the little magazine *Tracks* (1982-1991). The transition from little magazine to single-title book publisher was less unusual in British little magazines of the era, according to David Miller and Richard Price (2006), who identify this phenomenon of little-magazine-turned-publisher as symptomatic of the changing needs of little magazines at the end of the twentieth century. “[T]he creation of lasting small presses, usually originally associated with a particular magazine,” they write,

began to answer the need for a sense of permanence within the little magazine world with the physical realisation of an alternative canon. While such a practice has been pursued at various times over the century, it’s likely that no period has matched the last quarter of the century in the number of magazine-linked individual presses and books.

*The Salmon*, however, was unique in that it continued to survive after the inception of its affiliated imprint. Only one other twentieth-century Irish poetry publisher – Dedalus Press – succeeded in publishing single-title books and a little magazine simultaneously. However, although the final issue of *Tracks* was published nine years after the foundation of Dedalus Press, the fact that only eleven issues of the magazine appeared over thirteen years suggests that its survival was tenuous at best after its editors took on the roles of book publishers. Unusually, *The Salmon* was able to maintain a relatively frequent publication schedule alongside book publication until its penultimate and final issues.

2.2. *The Salmon, 1981-1991: Overview and archival research*

Having considered the relationship between the coterie context of the Galway Writers Workshop and the initiation of *The Salmon* magazine, this chapter will now present an overview of *The Salmon*’s ten years of publication, based on materials held


56 Miller and Price, 217-218. In their assessment of Irish periodicals during the period 1976-2000, Miller and Price recommend that “*The Salmon*’s imprint, Salmon Publishing, should also be noted: it survived the magazine itself to go on to publish many new Irish authors.” (225)
in the archive of Salmon Publishing, Ltd., located at the University of Delaware; items held in the James Hardiman Library at the National University of Ireland, Galway and at Trinity College, Dublin; and an interview with Salmon’s managing director, Jessie Lendennie.

One of the common obstacles to performing thorough research on little magazines is obtaining access to the entire print run of a magazine. The result of the little magazine’s temporal nature is that readers may not retain copies after they have been read: indeed, a little magazine’s staff members may be so engrossed in the work of compiling a subsequent issue that they, too, may not retain or archive back issues of the magazine. The Salmon’s print run comprised twenty-seven issues in total, of which issues 5 through 23 are available at the James Hardiman Library at the National University of Ireland, Galway, while Trinity College Dublin contains issues 3 through 21. Contrary to the information given in these libraries’ catalogues, twenty-seven issues of the magazine were, in fact, published; issues 24/25 and 26/27 were obtained by purchasing them from private sellers. In order to conduct a study of The Salmon, two primary sources were used: full-text issues of the magazine, and the only extant archive of Salmon Publishing, which is held at the Special Collections Department of the Morris Library at the University of Delaware (Newark, Delaware, USA). The archive was deposited at the University of Delaware by Jessie Lendennie, co-founder and editorial director of The Salmon, and managing director of Salmon Publishing, Ltd. from 1985. Lendennie sold the Salmon archive to the University of Delaware in June 1998, in a transaction arranged by Kenny’s Bookshop in Galway, who notified the University of Delaware that the lot was for sale. The archive had already been fully assembled and described – most likely by Lendennie – before it arrived at the university: the scope of its contents, therefore, had been determined without input from the university library’s Special Collections department.

57 The Salmon’s first four issues as poetry:galway were unavailable at libraries or archives in Ireland, but exist at Emory University’s library as part of the Raymond Danowski Poetry Library. Copyright restrictions prevented photocopying more than half of each issue; therefore, information about Issues 1-4 is limited.
58 See MS 438, “Archive of Salmon Publishing, Ltd., 1982-1997.” Research was conducted at this archive in December 2009.
Lendennie had retained full control of *The Salmon* and Salmon Publishing, and had been the custodian of all archival material relating to both endeavours, since her relationship with her husband, *The Salmon* co-editor Michael Allen, ended in 1987. Because control of the archive belonged solely to Lendennie, documents relating to Salmon that she considered unimportant or redundant may not have survived. Before moving out of Galway to County Clare, she sold her house in the Claddagh area of Galway city, and dismantled Salmon Publishing’s office in the renovated Bridge Mills, a refurbished nineteenth-century mill structure on Bridge Street in the city centre. She also closed the “Salmon bookshop,” as it was casually known, which had also been located in the Bridge Mills in its earlier incarnation as the Brown Penny Bookshop: Lendennie had assumed responsibility for the Brown Penny’s lease after its former owners relinquished it. 60 In 1995, she relocated both herself and Salmon Publishing to a restored farmhouse in Knockeven, Co. Clare, near the Cliffs of Moher, partly to distance herself from what she perceived to be destructive politics within the arts community in Galway, and partly due to financial difficulties. Salmon’s finances, as well as Lendennie’s personal finances, had been under particular stress in the early 1990s. In a 2008 interview, she recalled the turmoil of the period: “And then all of a sudden the phone was going to be cut off, and the mortgage…and you know, the debts were just crazy.” 61

Three years later, in 1998, the sale of the archive was completed. It is unclear whether some archival material relating to *The Salmon* and Salmon Publishing was lost or destroyed in the move, or whether Lendennie might have discarded material she felt was irrelevant, uninteresting, or sensitive. This may explain the scarcity of financial records for *The Salmon* and Salmon Publishing that exist in the archive, apart from a limited number of grant applications and correspondence with the Arts Council of Ireland. As a result, it is not possible to ascertain whether accurate accounts were ever kept, or whether financial records were mislaid or discarded during the move. Lendennie may have destroyed certain financial information in order to mask errors in record-keeping or for tax purposes, or in order to bury negative

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60 Lendennie, Jessie. Personal interview. 4 March 2008.
memories of a particularly stressful period in her personal and professional life.\textsuperscript{62} It is likely that the storage space available to her in her Claddagh home was limited, causing her to be selective about keeping documentation. Finally, when deciding which items would be included in the material to be sold to the University of Delaware, she may simply have chosen to keep the financial details to herself, believing them to be matters of only private significance. It is certain, however, that Lendennie had full and complete control over the contents of the archive before it was offered for sale.

The archive of Salmon Publishing consists of two parts or “series.” The Publishing Series consists of files related to the publication of individual books, of which, at that point, Salmon had published over one hundred and fifty. As the archive’s finding aid describes their scope, “These files vary greatly in completeness.”\textsuperscript{63} Some of the files include only a clean copy of a draft manuscript of the book and first and/or second proofs, while others include draft manuscript, first and second proofs, comprehensive publicity material, book reviews, and correspondence. Typical contents include correspondence between author and publisher, publicity materials related to the promotion of the book, author photos, and reviews from Irish and other newspapers and journals, as well as manuscripts and copies of corrected proofs. The most complete author files in the Publishing Series include those for Rita Ann Higgins, Joan McBreen, Patricia Burke Brogan, and Adrienne Rich.

The Administrative Series of the archive includes general correspondence and correspondence with Irish funding agencies, including the Arts Council and the Galway Corporation, as well as Poolbeg Press and trade and professional organizations such as CLÉ and Poetry Ireland. Other files in the Administrative Series relate to Auburn House, a small imprint of Salmon Publishing specializing in “new age” books on health and spirituality, and, finally, to \textit{The Salmon}.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{62} Johnson, L. Rebecca Melvin, Special Collections Librarian and Manuscript Coordinator. “Message to the author.” 20 September 2010. Email.
The archive of Salmon Publishing revealed material particularly relevant to the inception and publication of *The Salmon*. This material, however, contains a limited amount of information on the magazine’s finances, including estimated sales figures for early issues of *The Salmon*, and incomplete records of the funding available to the magazine. Most often, this took the form of grant applications to local funding authorities and the Arts Council of Ireland, and in the form of correspondence between *The Salmon* editors and the Arts Council. The archive also includes detailed information on the editorial vision behind *The Salmon*, mainly in the form of grant applications and letters to booksellers or prospective advertisers. This information is particularly useful to researchers since editorial commentary rarely appeared in the magazine itself; its editors preferred to devote page space to the creative work of contributors. These grant applications and letters are also significant since in them, *The Salmon*’s editors described their editorial agenda for the magazine in relation to two UK literary journals which *The Salmon* hoped to emulate, the Leeds-based *Stand* and the Edinburgh-based *Quarto*.

The archive also presents information about prospective advertisers in the magazine that is useful in drawing conclusions about *The Salmon*’s readership. For example, the fact that all prospective advertisers were Galway-based complicates its claim to be an “international” literary journal. The archive includes reviews of *The Salmon* in local, national and international newspapers, which provide a contemporaneous perspective on the reception the magazine received, and critics’ perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses. Finally, there is correspondence from contributors and prospective contributors to the magazine, some of whom provide helpful, if informal and secondhand, circulation information by stating where or how they first encountered a copy of *The Salmon*. As far as can be determined, researchers have not considered these factors before in any scholarly assessments of the magazine.

However, there are notable lacunae in the archive of Salmon Publishing, which provides only limited information on several aspects of *The Salmon*; specifically, reliable financial data and circulation and distribution information. Comprehensive financial accounts for the magazine were not available from the archive: no bank statements, annual reports, or other formal reports of income and expenditures exist, apart from two Arts Council receipts for grant aid. After its tenth
issue, the magazine states on its masthead that contributors would be paid £5 per piece, but no confirmation of this exists in the form of receipts or in other correspondence. Moreover, the archive does not include any concrete information in either documents or correspondence detailing its distribution and circulation, such as number of copies returned to the publisher by booksellers.  

Correspondence preserved in The Salmon’s archive from contributors to the magazine’s editor, Lendennie, indicates, however, that The Salmon’s readership was mainly an Irish one, and that its international readership seemed to consist of potential or actual contributors to the magazine, or of personal contacts of Lendennie’s. As Malcolm Ballin observes, “[h]ard evidence about the circulation of Irish journals is difficult to find and much of what exists is either speculative or anecdotal,” but as far as can be ascertained from archive of Salmon Publishing, Ltd., The Salmon’s audience never became truly international, despite of the continuous presence of international contributors to the magazine. Nonetheless, the archive does include correspondence from British and American readers and contributors who frequently mention how or where they first encountered the magazine – tantalizing evidence of a “secondhand,” and therefore largely undocumented, readership. Brian Merriken Hill, editor of the British magazine Pennine Platform (1973-1980: 1981-c. 2003), has expressed a similar puzzlement at his circulation figures. “There is a hidden circulation I don’t fully understand,” he told Wolfgang Gortschacher. “I get letters from people who aren’t subscribers and haven’t bought copies. The magazine is in numerous libraries in Britain and USA, including the Arts Council Library and the Scottish Poetry Library. Thus the circulation is far greater than the subscription list and sales indicate.” Although The Salmon’s circulation is similarly mystifying, this anecdotal, first-hand information provided by potential contributors to the magazine is instructive, since it affords a glimpse into the facets of circulation that are more difficult to trace, including the ones Hill identifies: borrowing and lending from friends, or copies belonging to libraries, poetry centres, writers’ retreats, or other public places.

65 Salmon’s archive was updated with new material in 2011; however, as of 2012, this material is not yet available for viewing by researchers.
66 Ballin, 9.
67 Hill in Gortschacher, 592.
In addition to a consultation of the archive of Salmon Publishing, Ltd., full-text issues of *The Salmon* magazine were examined in order to assess the following criteria: price; page count; cover artist; publication schedule; editor or editors; contributor nationality by birth; contributor gender; and advertisements in the magazine. This analysis demonstrated that the number of female contributors published by the magazine never exceeded the number of males; in fact, in each issue, less than fifty percent of the creative work was contributed by women. While submissions by non-Irish authors were published in each issue, *The Salmon* retained its strong Irish focus: the number of international contributors published in each issue was typically at about one-quarter to one-third of the total.  

*The Salmon*, in its early incarnation as *poetry:galway*, published creative work, mainly poetry, by the members of the Galway Writers Workshop. Although some of the work represented in these issues is not of particularly high quality, some significant trends were established within these early issues which would continue to be important to the magazine’s identity during its lifetime. By its third issue, the magazine had begun to include texts in the Irish language, beginning with “Creimeadh” (“Erosion”), a poem by Michéal Ó Conghaile, who would become the founder of Irish-language publisher Cló Iar Chonnachta in 1985. During this time, the magazine’s editors frequently published their own work within it, including Lendennie and her husband, Michael “M. G.” Allen. The three haikus Lendennie published in the first and second issues of *poetry:galway* are an early indicator of her interest in Eastern literature and traditions, which would later find expression in the small Salmon Publishing imprint Auburn House, which published a small number of nonfiction titles on subjects such as spirituality, new age and meditation. They are also representative of some of the best work published by members of the Galway Writers Workshop in the magazine’s early issues:

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68 See Appendix 1. Many international contributors may have been contacts of Lendennie’s and Allen’s.
69 Facsimile reproductions of these issues have been obtained from Emory University’s Robert W. Woodruff Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library. Copyright restrictions in place at this library prevented the reproduction of more than half of each issue; therefore, information regarding the content of these issues is limited. See Appendix 4 for cover images of the full print run of *The Salmon*. 

65
So comes September;
a slow walk under dark trees,
an early evening.
*
I have often watched,
while Autumn tells a story
of yesterday’s rain.
*
First snow of winter,
Thin trees clasp soft flakes tightly;
Settle, now, to sleep.70

However, early issues of the magazine already published contributions by more established local writers who were not workshop members. Poems such as “Rout of the Symbols” by Aosdána member Sydney Bernard Smith, and “Letter of the Law” by Mary O’Malley suggest that the editors of poetry:galway, which was subtitled The Salmon by the time of publication of its third and fourth issues and was known simply as The Salmon thereafter, quickly began to solicit work by writers further afield than the immediate circle of the writers’ workshop group.71

Although “The Letter and the Law” is uncollected, it, like a number of other poems in O’Malley’s first volume, A Consideration of Silk (Salmon, 1990), comments on the differences between masculine and feminine expressions of desire, and, according to O’Malley’s poetic speaker, the tendency of masculine desire towards objectification. While males indulge in “the well-bred leer/ At the glossy girls in the motor show/ Slim and sleek at a fee,” the female speaker declares, “I give what I choose, bondless/ Without count of cost in coppers or love[.]/What I hold in my bosom is not/ Flesh for the arrogant kiss and caress/ Of you or your like to chew and spew/ Out again into the soiled dark. No.”72 In this way, the inaugural issues of the

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71 “Rout of the Symbols” subsequently appeared in Smith’s New and Selected Poems (Dufour, 1985) with minimal emendation.
magazine granted writers outside of those associated with the workshop the necessary space to develop their early work.

After being published quarterly for the first year of its existence, poetry:galway, now subsumed into its new identity as The Salmon, began to appear thrice yearly. In its second and third years, the magazine began to publish some of its best-known, and most regular, contributors, including Rita Ann Higgins and Eva Bourke. Higgins’s debut in the magazine is also her first published poem, entitled “Dog is Dog is Dog,” which would be collected in Witch in the Bushes (Salmon, 1988). In it, her trademark sharp wit and black humour are already audible: the titular “Dog,” incongruously named “Xadore” (possibly from the French for “I love”), is unashamed by the calls of nature, and has no patience with his owner, whom he has nicknamed “Failure-face.” “If that heap of failure/,” the dog snaps, “with the varicose face thinks/ that us canines have/ the same urinary tract/ as those two leggers/ she’s got another thing coming./ on her ankle.” Varicose veins and other physical infirmities and the demands of the corporeal body recur frequently in Higgins’s later work, as do her challenges to organs of authority: typically, then, the poem ends with a reversal of the positions of authority of owner and pet, and Xadore simply abandons his owner, “exit[ing] to greener lamp-poles.” Higgins would contribute work to a further ten issues of The Salmon.

Eva Bourke’s first publication in The Salmon appears in its ninth issue, with her poems “Gonella” and “Dead Swan,” both of which would be included in her first collection. Also entitled Gonella (Salmon, 1985), the volume republished these pieces with only minor alterations to punctuation and other stylistic details. “Gonella,” which takes a fifteenth-century portrait of a court jester as its inspiration, marks the

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73 See Appendix 1. Due to the lack of circulation figures available, it is unclear why the magazine began to be published three times yearly instead of quarterly.
75 Higgins, 7. See Chapter 4 for an analysis of poems by Higgins on the body in pain.
76 See Appendix 2. For a full list of Higgins’s publications in The Salmon, see Appendix 1.
beginning of Bourke’s poetic engagement with visual art. Bourke published poetry in four further issues of *The Salmon*.77

As the magazine developed, it continued to include poetry and short fiction written in Irish in each issue, often by experienced writers such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Gabriel Rosenstock, Michael Davitt, and Louis de Paor, all of whom had been, or would become, editors of the Irish-language literary magazine *Innti* (1971-c.1980).78 In addition to this emphasis on high-quality Irish-language work, the second and third years of The Salmon’s lifetime reflect a period of experimentation. During this time, it also published texts across a wider range of genres than it had in its early issues, including a larger amount of short fiction; some literary criticism, such as a brief piece on haiku by Lendennie and a short essay in Irish on the poetry of William Blake by Gabriel Rosenstock, entitled “William Blake Agus An Pápa;” an interview with poet Fred Johnston based on a poem of his within the same issue; and a book review. Although the magazine would eventually cease to publish work in any genres apart from poetry and short fiction, at this exploratory stage in its development, *The Salmon*’s experimental attitude – or “assertive indecision,” in Ian Hamilton’s words – in terms of genre added to its contemporaneity.79

Now with several years of publication to its credit, *The Salmon* began to secure submissions from an increasing number of well-known Irish writers in English as well as Irish. Some of these would contribute to multiple issues of the magazine, particularly Gerard Smyth and Gerald Dawe, whose poem “Lundies Letter,” which would appear as the title poem in his collection *Lundys Letter* (Gallery, 1985) in an edited version, appeared in the magazine’s ninth issue. Others, such as John F. Deane, Conleth Ellis, Dermot Bolger, and Greg Delanty would contribute only a single poem, or at most two. During the same time, *The Salmon* also began to publish poetry in translation, usually from German, Italian, or Chinese, translations which were often undertaken by previous contributors to the magazine or those close to them. Bourke’s husband,

77 For a full list of Bourke’s publications in *The Salmon*, see Appendix 1.
78 Miller and Price call *Innti* “a key magazine for modern Irish-language poets.” (162)
79 Hamilton, 6.
professor of German language and literature Eoin Bourke, translated a number of poems by German writers for the magazine, such as Ingeborg Bachmann and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, while Michael Egan, whose original work appears frequently in *The Salmon*, translated two poems by Salvatore Quasimodo from the Italian. A further issue featured the work of four Chinese women poets.

As *The Salmon* reached its middle age, Bourke, Higgins, and O’Malley, the women writers whose first publications occurred within the pages of *The Salmon*, were contributing work to the magazine for which they would later become well-known. These poems would be published in their forthcoming collections, anthologised, addressed in critical articles, or would appear on university curricula:

Higgins’ “Ode to Rahoon Flats” and “Work On,” and “Lizzie Kavanagh” and “Sunny Side Plucked” appeared in consecutive issues, and Moya Cannon’s first *Salmon* publication occurred shortly thereafter, with her poem “Hills.” This is especially true of the magazine’s sixteenth issue, which marked its fifth year of publication. Subtitled “5th Anniversary Issue,” it includes poems by Bourke, Cannon, and Higgins alongside Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill’s “Mo Dhá Luch,” which would be included in her collection *The Astrakhan Cloak* (Gallery, 1992) and Eavan Boland’s “The Women,” which would appear in *The Journey* (Carcanet, 1987), both with minimal emendations. It also featured the work of a number of established male poets, including Dawe, Sebastian Barry, James Simmons, Padraic Fiacc, and Sydney Bernard Smith. This issue is the best representation of *The Salmon*’s achievement. Its continual publication of creative work by emerging writers balanced with established ones, combined with the fact that many of the poems in it, by both emerging and established authors, are retained as they stand in *The Salmon* in subsequent collections and anthologies, is a testament not only to the quality of contributions, but also to the network of writers it was creating.

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By its late middle age, the magazine was rapidly expanding in size: perhaps in order to justify this increase and to emphasize its longevity, a number of its later issues were designated as milestone or “anniversary” issues. The page count of its 124-page nineteenth issue, subtitled “7th anniversary issue,” had nearly doubled that of its previous issue, which published three poems by Medbh McGuckian – one of which would appear in her subsequent collection *On Ballycastle Beach* (Oxford 1988: Gallery 1995) – as well as Katie Donovan’s poem “Watermelon Man,” which would become the title poem in her collection *Watermelon Man* (Bloodaxe, 1993), and a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky in translation. This “anniversary” issue also published new work by Bourke, Cannon and Higgins which would later be collected in single-title volumes, as well as new poems by Sara Berkeley, whose “Home Movie Nights” would become the title poem of her 1989 New Island collection; Pat Boran, whose “Have You Left Mountmellick For Ever?” and “Master” would appear in his collection *The Unwound Clock* (Dedalus, 1990); Leland Bardwell, whose “Dawn Guest” and “History Stopped That Night” were published in her collection *Dostoevsky’s Grave* (Dedalus, 1991); and Eithne Strong whose “Achill” and “Peanut Queenie” appear in her collection *Spatial Nosing: New and Selected Poems* (Salmon, 1993). This issue, then, attempts to reflect the variety of writers who had published work in, and supported, the magazine over the years.

The last issues of the magazine include Mary O’Malley’s poems “Fable” and “Aftermath,” which would appear in her first collection *A Consideration of Silk* (Salmon, 1990), and uncollected poems by Eilis Ní Dhuibhne, but otherwise contains a large number of contributors who were new to the magazine and would only contribute to it in a single instance, a trend that continued into The Salmon’s final issue. Published a full year after its penultimate issue, in its last instalment, *The Salmon* did increase its already substantial page count, partly through a higher number of short fiction submissions, and it included poetry by Bourke, Higgins, and writers such as Clairr O’Connor and Catherine Phil MacCarthy, whose work would appear in the fifth volume of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* (2002). However, this issue, its “Tenth Anniversary
Issue,” was its last. Since its regular contributors had dwindled, and since ten of its fifty-nine contributors either had, or would soon have, books of poetry published by Salmon Publishing, it is likely that at this stage, the six-year-old book publisher Salmon had assumed the magazine’s role of bringing new work by Irish and international authors into print.

The Salmon’s editors placed a high value on the magazine’s visual presentation as well as its textual content, and it received praise both during and after its lifetime for its careful attention to production and design. In 1984, while the magazine was only in its third year of existence, Eavan Boland described it as “a singularly heartening and attractive little magazine... The Salmon is beautifully produced and printed.” Six years later, in 1990, the magazine’s quality of production had not faltered: Hayden Murphy praised it for keeping its standards high in spite of its shoestring budget, in contrast to some of its Scottish and Irish contemporaries: “Many of the publications [in Scotland and Ireland] shamefully ignore design and layout. They plead cost. Rubbish, as the beautifully-presented Galway magazine The Salmon (£1.75) has been proving for 24 issues. With minimal Arts Council support it survives.” Finally, even twelve years after it ceased publication, in 2003, Tom Clyde identified “a steady improvement, issue on issue, in the physical quality of the Salmon, with more illustrations and better paper being used; it also expanded in size every few issues...” High production standards were one of The Salmon’s greatest assets. The magazine’s editors constantly experimented with its physical appearance, which was part of the magazine’s strong assertion of its own identity.

The first two issues of The Salmon, in its first incarnation as Poetry Galway, were produced as mimeographed broadsheets with hand-lettered covers. By Issue 3, when it became known as The Salmon: poetry galway, the magazine was being

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81 This final issue includes no editorial designating it as such, possibly because Lendennie hoped to re-launch it in the future. An email from Lendennie to Salmon author Marvin Bell dated 4 April 1996 suggests that five years after the final issue of The Salmon was published, she still hoped to resuscitate the magazine, perhaps in the form of an online magazine. Box 1, F10, ASP.
84 Clyde, 285.
published in A5 quarto format, with dimensions of about 210mm x 151mm (8 ¼ x 6 ¼), and a 180-gram matte card cover. It retained this format throughout its lifetime, with frequent variations in cover stock, cover design, cover art, paper, typeface, page count, and binding. The Salmon also published graphics within the body of the magazine as well as on its cover throughout much of its print run, from issues 5 through 18 (1982-1987). Line drawings, photographs, cartoons and linocuts, among other media, were presented, all of which were rendered either by Galway artists, or by artists living abroad with connections to Galway or Ireland. When Lendennie assumed sole editorial control of the magazine in 1988, according to the masthead of Issue 19, The Salmon’s page count doubled, but graphics were no longer published within the body of the magazine. By that point, Lendennie seemed to be determined to devote the magazine to poetry and fiction only.

Occasionally, a graphic was included as an “illustration” of a poem or as the result of a collaboration between an artist and a poet, as in the case of Jay Murphy’s “Two Times Two In Domestic Interior” in Issue 10 (Summer 1984), which carries the same name as the Eva Bourke poem it augments. More often, however, the image-text dialogue is less explicit: images are high-quality and are interspersed throughout the texts, but the relationship between them is often unclear. Although including artwork in a literary magazine can create opportunities for multidisciplinary collaboration, and while this was an especially valuable and laudable effort in the pre-digital era, there is little to suggest that The Salmon editors had an explicit policy on publishing graphics, or that its editors made conscious attempts to elicit any intertextual dialogue between images and texts.

However, several other elements contributed directly to The Salmon’s high production standards. One of these was the magazine’s use of professional printing early in its lifetime. By its fourth issue, it was no longer photocopied by hand, but was already printed professionally, and by its thirteenth issue, was being professionally typeset and designed.

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86 See Appendix 2.
The Salmon also quickly established a strong cover design format with which to market itself, from which it deviated only twice throughout its lifetime. Through its ninth issue, The Salmon used a 180-gram matte card cover, usually in cream or tan. Cover designs were one-colour; illustrations took up the bulk of the cover space, and consisted of hand-drawn pen illustrations by local artists including Brian Bourke, Padraig Reaney, and Joe Boske. These drawings were reproduced in strong colours such as deep blue or red, and were surrounded with a border of the same colour. The magazine’s title appeared in the top quarter of the page in capital letters, sometimes in block letters, of varying size, most often approximately 40-point. Price and issue number appeared in smaller font at the bottom quarter of the page. Confining text to the top and bottom quarters of the cover with the illustration at its centre, this “text-image-text” format ensures that the cover design is well-balanced and pleasing to the eye. Names of contributors were listed on The Salmon’s front cover only once, in its sixth issue, in a vertical column to the right of the cover art, which lends the cover a lopsided appearance. Salmon editors may have agreed, since neither a list of contributors nor any other text outside of the magazine’s name appeared on The Salmon’s cover throughout the rest of its lifetime.

With two notable exceptions, by its tenth issue, the lighter-weight matte cover stock was replaced with a 260-gram glossy card cover. From this point onwards, The Salmon always used two-colour covers in conjunction with the heavier, glossier card stock. As before, illustrations took up the bulk of the cover space, but were often rendered in black and white, while a narrow border in vibrant colours such as bright red, deep yellow, royal purple or sky-blue surrounded the illustration and, beneath it, the issue number and sale price. The magazine’s title appeared in the top quarter of the page in capital letters, sometimes in block letters, in approximately 40-point font, and this text was often highlighted by a box of colour shading in the same hue as the border.
The Salmon returned to its 180-gram matte card cover only twice, in issues 12 and 15. In both instances, the cover design deviated from the formula it had set of an image “sandwiched” between text, and the results were striking: one, at least, would have a lasting impact on the magazine’s identity. The card stock used for the cover of Issue 12 was cream-coloured, and the front cover’s graphic, as well as the advertisements on the back cover, appeared in navy blue. A thin line border edges the cover; inside, the single word “SALMON” appears in large capital letters, curved just above a graphic designed by Joe Boske, which is centred on the page. Within a circular border, a powerful-looking fish – clearly a salmon – leaps from the waves. Its mouth is open, its eye glares, its tail splashes the waves: and in capturing the fish in the act of leaping, the graphic is kinetic and powerful. The magazine’s price and issue number appear unobtrusively at the bottom of the page. The minimalist cover design, and the strong, kinetic, virile image – and the fact that the article “the” is not used here to preface “Salmon” – declare that this is a magazine that has developed a recognizable identity. A miniature of this graphic would become Salmon Publishing’s colophon, appearing on the contents page of The Salmon from issues 13-16, and would also appear in its original size on the flyleaves of issues 22, 23, 24/25 and 26/27. It would also appear on the back covers of Salmon books until the late 1990s; thereafter, a variation of it – a more abstract leaping fish – became the publisher’s colophon and continues to appear on some, although not all, books published by Salmon Poetry through 2008.

Issue 15’s departure from the norm would not have as lasting an effect. Printed on lemon-yellow card stock, the front cover was almost entirely covered in turquoise, except for a lemon-yellow border and the title of the magazine, which was printed in four lines of capital letters arranged in an arc that ran from the top centre of the magazine to its lower left-hand corner. The issue number appeared in the upper left-hand corner, while the price was printed in the lower right-hand corner. The colours and unusual text-formatting were arresting to the eye, and would have been likely to attract attention on a bookshop or newsstand display, but
The Salmon editors never returned to this design format. Perhaps they abandoned it for the sake of continuity, thinking it too much of a departure from the established text-image-text format with which readers would have been familiar by that point in the magazine’s lifetime. The following issue returned to this basic design.

The Salmon editors’ use of cover art by talented local artists also contributed to the magazine’s strong, eye-catching cover design. Graphics by Aosdána members Brian Bourke and John Behan, and other well-known artists, including Padraig Reaney, Joe Boske, Philip Blythe, and Anne Kennedy, were featured on the magazine’s cover. Cover artists are usually identified on a small masthead along with the names of the editors, typesetters, and acknowledgments of funding; this masthead appeared either on the inside front cover, or on the flyleaf beneath the magazine’s table of contents. The Salmon increased its emphasis on using art by talented Galway artists through a graphics competition, sponsored by a local business, in which the winner’s illustration appeared on the cover. In a small way this may have contributed to the magazine’s readership as well by appealing to those who would be more drawn to art than the written word.

After its appearance on the cover of issue 12, the leaping salmon logo designed by Joe Boske played a significant part in The Salmon’s identity. In his analysis of the history of the publisher Penguin’s cover designs, Phil Baines has commented on the importance of a stable signifier to a publisher’s identity, especially among the uncertainties of the publishing world: “...[R]eorganization, relocation and the unpredictable nature of the publishing business constantly test a company’s ability to present a coherent image to the outside world.... The Penguin logo itself, however, is a prized asset, being recognized as a publisher’s mark all over the world.” Like the internationally-recognised Penguin logo – although, of course, not

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87 The fact that The Salmon’s editors list the cover artist separately from other contributors of artwork could be interpreted as a “devaluing” of the artist and artwork; however, there is no available evidence to suggest that artists complained to the editors about this decision.
to the same degree of renown – the Salmon logo is a coherent, striking, easily recognizable image which would become memorable to readers, inspire confidence in them, and encourage them to return and purchase the next copy. A strong logo helps to provide the periodical with the stability that keeps its readers returning to it issue after issue, since the contradictory nature of the periodical, according to Margaret Beetham, is “both to ensure rapid turnover and to create a regular demand,” for “the consumer of the periodical is not so much satisfied as stimulated to return at regular intervals to buy the next number of the product.”

Although it never reappeared on the front cover, the logo did reappear on the newly-introduced title page of the magazine, where its visual impact was equally strong: in fact, publishing the logo in the front matter of the magazine while using a different cover design for each issue may imply that the magazine’s identity is stable while its content is flexible and current. Moreover, a well-executed association of word and image makes a strong impact on the spectator: a reader, presented with the Salmon name on the front cover, title page and table of contents in conjunction with the leaping-salmon logo rendered on the title page, as in issue 23, would be unlikely to leave the journal after even a brief perusal without remembering the magazine’s name. The ability to achieve this association of name and logo is crucial to the successful branding of a publication or publisher. According to Baines, “Penguin perfected [this] balance, combining design and sound writing to such good effect that after only ten years the name Penguin and the word ‘paperback’ were ... virtually synonymous. With the resonance that the Penguin name rapidly acquired, it is possible to believe that the word itself was a significant element in the success.”

Even when the Salmon logo did not appear on the title page, it often appeared in a smaller version on the table of contents, or in advertisements for Salmon publishing within the magazine. The logo helped the Salmon name achieve similar resonance and its adoption helped the formation of the publisher’s identity as well during the

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90 Curiously, the leaping-salmon logo never reappeared on the magazine’s cover after issue 12: although this could only have helped to cement the magazine’s identity in the reader’s mind, it is possible that *The Salmon’s* editors were simply more concerned with showcasing new visual art, and hoped that printing the logo on the flyleaf would perform the task of asserting the magazine’s identity.

91 Baines, 13.
transition from magazine to publisher. The design of the Salmon logo will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 3.

Rapid use of professional printing, consistently strong cover design, the development and regular use of a recognizable logo, and the use of the work of talented local artists for its cover art ensured that *The Salmon*’s production standards remained high. While the magazine’s physical appearance remained strong throughout its lifetime, its use of heavier paper, heavier binding, its frequent changes in typeface, and an increasingly erratic publication schedule over its last few issues – typical symptoms of a little magazine’s decline – heralded its demise. Nonetheless, the magazine’s focus on design helped to keep it relevant and engaging to its readers during its lifetime, and also earned it respect from both contemporaneous and later commentators. A compelling sense of design that is constantly being experimented with or recreated is important to the success of little magazines: it contributes a sense of strong editorial engagement, immediacy, currency, and novelty, and, for *The Salmon*, was an important part of its search for autonomy and self-definition. This emphasis on design carried over to the book publisher: strong design and production values would also become an essential part of Salmon Poetry’s publishing programme.

This analysis of *The Salmon* magazine confirms that it can be considered as a little magazine, according to the definitions supplied by critics Ian Hamilton, Malcolm Ballin, and Tom Clyde. Although it is not possible to readily identify a “Salmon school” of poets as such, coterie theory enables the observation of a flourishing of poetic creativity, concentrated mainly in the west of Ireland, which, it is likely, would not have occurred without the group of writers that assembled around *The Salmon* magazine. Whether the dynamics of this group proved to be especially salubrious to the careers of its women writers will be considered in the following chapter.
Chapter 3: Salmon Publishing Ltd, 1985-2007

Jessie Lendennie and her husband Mike Allen look at each other. It is ten minutes before five o’clock on a Saturday afternoon in summer 1985, and, thankfully, nearly everything is ready. They have arranged two long tables side by side in the lobby of the new art gallery near Courthouse Square, on the north side of Galway city, and Jessie has draped them with white paper tablecloths. One table already displays neat stacks of a paperback book with an indigo cover. Now she occupies herself with the other table, laying out wine glasses and bottles of red and white, and, as an afterthought, a lone bottle of Ballygowan.

Guests will begin to arrive for the book launch in less than a quarter of an hour, but Jessie is still ticking things off the massive to-do list in her head. Michael D. Higgins, the former TD and a staunch supporter of the arts in Ireland, will launch the book; he should arrive at any moment, but for now, he is nowhere to be seen. The guest of honour, poet Eva Bourke, arrived early, with her husband Eoin and her sister-in-law – and the book’s illustrator – Jay Murphy. They are sitting on the gallery’s single long sofa, legs crossed, chatting easily. Jessie knows that Eva is terribly nervous, but she hides it well. Jessie herself, on the other hand, is flustered and she is certain the guests will notice. But that, perhaps, is to be expected: after all, she, Mike and their co-editor Michéal O Ríada are the publishers, and this is their inaugural book of poetry. “Chairs!” exclaims Jessie. The gallery staff has only provided a few seats, and Jessie knows most of the launchgoers will want to sit down. She rushes off in search of more.

By five o’clock sharp, the charismatic Higgins has arrived, and has joined the trio of Eva, Eoin, and Jay. Jessie has drafted every available chair into service, and Mike is uncorking the wine. The first few guests drift through the door, mostly writers who have contributed to The Salmon, the literary magazine founded by Jessie, Mike, Michéal and a few others almost exactly four years ago. Its thirteenth issue is due out next week, and Jessie knows there is still a power of work to be done on it. But for now, she greets Mary Dempsey, Rita Ann Higgins, Mickey Gorman, and Fred
Johnston with handshakes and hugs – Jessie is not afraid of hugs – and while her back is turned for a moment, the gallery begins to fill up. By the time Mike calls everyone to attention and introduces Higgins, seventy-five people are crowded into the room.

Jessie glances around the gallery and smiles as the launchgoers tuck into the complimentary wine. She hopes everyone will buy a copy of the book – perhaps even two copies? As she has learned the hard way, publishing a book of poetry is by no means inexpensive – especially one like *Gonella*, which combines images and text. She, Mike and the others have secured some funding from the Galway Corporation for the venture, but they have still had to reach into their own pockets to cover the printing bills. Thinking about Salmon Publishing’s financial situation makes Jessie wince already, even though Salmon has only published one title so far. She shakes off the thought: around Ireland, businesses are closing daily and everyone is on the dole. Salmon may not have any money, but then again, neither has anyone else. Besides, she has met too many talented writers whose manuscripts were rejected by the Dublin publishers – probably, she thinks scornfully, out of disdain for any kind of cultural activity that takes place in the West. Jessie knows from experience that women writers have an especially difficult time of it when it comes to publishing their work. Things have to change, she tells herself.

The launch goes off smoothly, and *Gonella* begins to sell relatively well in local bookshops. “A book launched in Galway is an event: a book written, printed and published in Galway is almost a miracle,” a local journalist comments enthusiastically, if wryly, in her review of *Gonella* a few months later.¹ But Jessie and Mike have already decided to publish another first collection: *Goddess on the Mervue Bus* by Rita Ann Higgins will be released early in 1986. Salmon Publishing, it seems, is about to perform its second miracle.

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Drawing on the work of Jack Stillinger, among others, Chapter 1 demonstrated that texts are rarely, if ever, the product of a single, “uncorrupted” mind or consciousness; the presence of multiple authorship, in the form of collaboration, direct influence or indirect influence, is so frequent as to be nearly unavoidable.

Multiple authorship and mutual influence can be especially prevalent within literary coteries, in which writers share and often edit or revise one another’s work, and this influence is often demonstrated on a textual level in the publications they may produce. Subsequently, Chapter 2 described the history of the twentieth-century “little magazine” and its relationship to the literary coterie, particularly the literary coterie that published *The Salmon* magazine. By 1985, *The Salmon*, calling itself Salmon Publishing, had begun to publish single-title collections of poetry. Although *The Salmon* magazine ceased publication in 1991, Salmon Publishing continues to publish new collections of poetry, as well as poetry anthologies and a small amount of practical nonfiction. In this way, the publishing initiative that had begun in a group-oriented, communal way with *The Salmon* magazine was changing: the transition from magazine to book publisher necessitated a move away from the community-focused enterprise that embraced multiple authorship and group publishing, towards a focus on single poetic voices via a single-copy, for-profit book publisher.

The ways in which Salmon Publishing negotiated this transition would ultimately shape the development of the company’s identity. Salmon’s editor had to grapple with the publishing realities that would not have been a problem had Salmon lived out its existence as a quarterly magazine. Book publishing requires more capital than small-magazine publishing, and this increased need for funding would cause Salmon to suffer chronically from severe financial difficulties, including growing debt and funding grants that remained tenuous at best: the Arts Council of Ireland was reluctant to fund the fledgling poetry publisher at first, and then provided the publisher with book-by-book grants only, effectively usurping the publisher’s editorial authority. Moreover, Salmon’s transition into single-title book publishing meant that its editor became responsible for the constant, close management of a larger number of authors. However, the publisher overcame all of these obstacles, assisted by the fact that Salmon had already established a recognisable brand in readers’ and booksellers’ minds during the four years in which it had published *The Salmon*, and this almost certainly contributed to its survival.

The story of Salmon Publishing’s development from a coterie-based, quarterly, literary “little” magazine to a full-time book publisher of single-author books demonstrates that performances of “socialized creativity” rarely take priority over an individual writer’s pursuit of a distinctive poetic voice, articulated in single-
author works. The author of such works, indeed, may expect to be rewarded by status, money, and a growing readership. To borrow Stillinger’s phrase once more, the “myth of the single author” tends to take precedence over the ideal of multiple or communal authorship. As discussed at length in Chapter One, there are dynamics at play that privilege the concept of the single author over the interactions of groups and collaborative projects.

However, in the case of Salmon, the triumph of the single author is not an unqualified one. Although the goals of little-magazine publishing and single-title book publishing are, in some ways, at cross purposes with one another, they need not be mutually exclusive, as Miller and Price (2003) indicate: indeed, Salmon Publishing was able to use aspects of its coterie- or community-based origins as a magazine to change the established perceptions of both the writer and reader of poetry in Ireland. Vitally, although Salmon has never espoused an explicitly feminist agenda, it successfully created space for emerging women writers in two ways. First, while the Galway Writers Workshop (the workshop that developed into the magazine and publisher) included writers of both genders, the encouragement and community such a writing group offered may have resonated with women writers in particular, who may have felt more isolated as writers due to their responsibilities within the home, the paucity of resources such as free time and a dedicated workspace, and the scarcity of visible publishing outlets for their work. It offered these emerging writers both the physical and psychic space in which to develop. Second, as a publisher, it was ready and willing to provide publication space for new women writers. Atypically for Irish publishers in the 1980s and 1990s, titles by female authors made up forty-four percent—nearly half—of the writers on Salmon’s publishing list.

A brief précis of active poetry publishers in Ireland in the second half of the twentieth century will help to place the activities of Salmon Publishing in context. As Dillon Johnston (2001) notes, “No real Irish publisher of full volumes [of poetry], certainly after the closing of Maunsel, had existed during the first half” of the

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2 Challenges such as these have long acted as obstacles to women’s creative output. One single mother described these problems succinctly in a 1929 letter to the British magazine Writer: “Men may be married, but while they are working work comes first and the family also ran’, however devoted a husband and father the man may be. A woman with a family has to choose either to run the family or write; she can’t do both.” (Christopher Hilliard, To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratization of Writing in Britain. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006: 44.)
twentieth century.\textsuperscript{3} By the time Salmon published its first collection of poetry in 1985, four other dedicated poetry presses existed in Ireland: Dolmen Press, New Writers’ Press, Dedalus, and Gallery Press. Although each of these initiatives espoused different priorities and publishing programmes, they shared some clear similarities: most of them were based (at least initially) in Dublin, and all of them were directed by male publishers. The most venerable of these, perhaps, was the Dolmen Press. Founded by Liam Miller in 1951 in Drumcondra, Dublin, Dolmen published high-quality books of poetry, drama and literary criticism until just before Miller’s death in 1987: its authors included Samuel Beckett, Austin Clarke, and Thomas Kinsella. “Liam Miller and the Dolmen Press staged a spectacular coup aimed at establishing a cluster of major new poets,” wrote poet and critic James Liddy.\textsuperscript{4} “The Dolmen, in effect, replenished the literary energy of the first quarter of the century.”\textsuperscript{5}

According to Liddy, during the first ten years of Dolmen’s life, Miller focused his resources on publishing poets from Dublin, and subsequently turned his attention to establishing links with American writers and scholars. Significantly, Miller also secured Oxford University Press as its distributor in the United Kingdom, creating a strong link with the larger, more prestigious British market.\textsuperscript{6} In terms of the physical production of Dolmen books, “Miller served both the new and elder Irish literature with an extraordinary range of skills and taste culled from the designs and typography of William Morris, Harry Clarke, Eric Gill, and Lilly and Lolly Yeats.”\textsuperscript{7} A Dublin press with a strong stable of authors, Dolmen positioned itself within an august Irish literary history, while emphasising the art and craft of printing books in the tradition of the Dun Emer and Cuala Presses, and was praised for its ability to “avoid the forms of ‘Irishisms’... so profitably exploited in the past” while reviving the energy of the Celtic Revival of the early twentieth century.\textsuperscript{8} However, Dolmen’s single-issue periodical, \textit{The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing} (1962), takes a decidedly

\textsuperscript{4} Liddy’s collection of poetry, \textit{Gold Set Dancing} was published by Salmon in 2000, and his memoirs, \textit{The Doctor’s House} and \textit{The Full Shilling} were published by Salmon in 2004 and 2009 respectively.
\textsuperscript{6} Johnston, 128.
\textsuperscript{7} Liddy, 9.
conservative stance on what it considers to be representative of Irish writing. “The contributors are apostolically twelve in number,” as Liddy describes it irreverently, “all male, six Dubliners, a native of Belfast, four of rural origins – and not a Kerryman in sight.”

For decades, Dolmen seemed to be the self-appointed custodian of Irish literature – a literature that made Miller its centre, and Dublin its capital – a literature that remained heavily male-dominated. “[B]etween 1955 and 1975,” asserts Liddy, “Miller ran Irish poetry almost unchallenged.”

That challenge to Dolmen’s authority would arrive in the form of New Writers Press founded by poets Trevor Joyce and Michael Smith in 1967. “Dolmen was reliant on the small stable of writers it had helped establish,” claims Joyce: “it still leaned heavily on the legacy of Yeats, and it favoured the book as art-object rather than as a cheap, fast and effective means of getting new poetry before its prospective public. We aimed to change that.” The two writers founded the press in 1967 “simply as a means of getting into print new Irish poetry,” and quickly made clear its commitment to experimental poetry. “It soon became an outlet for young poets turned away by Dolmen or British publishers,” notes critic John Goodby (2000), “such as [Pearse] Hutchinson, [Desmond] O’Grady, [Paul] Durcan and [Michael] Hartnett, as well as non-Irish poets.” By the 1970s, its aim was to provide a home for poets “whose concern with language is decidedly Modernist,” and sought to revive the critical importance of Irish poets of the 1930s, such as Brian Coffey and Denis Devlin. Although it became inactive in the late 1970s, since 1979 it has continued to publish titles sporadically; the press published an additional twelve titles between 1979 and 2011. The younger generation of poets it published included Paul Durcan, Gerard Smyth, and Michael Hartnett.


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9 Liddy, 11.
10 Liddy, 12.
12 Joyce, 276.
the editorship of nineteen-year-old Peter Fallon.\textsuperscript{15} Fallon had been a member of the Tara Telephone poetry and music collective, a group of writers and musicians who were involved “in the Dublin beat poetry scene.”\textsuperscript{16} He and Eamonn Carr co-edited two Tara Telephone broadsheets, \textit{Capella} (1969-1971) and \textit{The Book of Invasions} (1969-1970). “At the time the publishers were Dolmen Press and New Writers Press which started about the same time as us, with values that were clearly defined at the outset,” said Peter Fallon of Gallery’s inception. “Although Dolmen commanded a position of excellence and elegance, there was something lofty and removed about it.”\textsuperscript{17} Fallon founded Gallery while studying at Trinity College, Dublin, and the press benefited from the connections he developed while at Trinity, most significantly with two of his lecturers, Brendan Kennelly and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin: Gallery published Ní Chuilleanáin’s first collection as well as some of Kennelly’s early work.

By the 1980s, however, Gallery, despite its beat-poetry or “alternative” beginnings, had, in Peter Denman’s words, “assumed the lofty position” that Dolmen once occupied – evidenced, in part, by its tendency to avoid first collections by new poets. “I don’t expect brave new collections to come sailing down the river every two months,” Fallon told Denman. “I believe it’s a wonderful bonus if a poet does appear, but of all the first collections that have come out in the past eighteen months ...if not from Gallery then from other houses, I wonder how many of them are really good, and should the poet have waited until there was a better book.”\textsuperscript{18} Unlike both New Writers Press and Salmon, Fallon’s policy regarding first collections favours a small, select batch of poets, resulting in Gallery Press’s position as Dolmen’s successor – a dignified, even exclusive publisher that does not prioritise new or experimental work. Such a policy has serious consequences for new writers: a lack of publishing outlets available to emerging writers will hamper their growth and prevent them from improving.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{15} Gallery’s offices moved to Oldcastle, Co. Meath in 1989. \\
\textsuperscript{17} Peter Denman, “Peter Fallon and the Gallery Press.” \textit{Poetry Ireland Review} No. 34 (Spring 1992): 32-37, 32. \\
\textsuperscript{18} Denman, 35.
\end{flushright}
Poet John F. Deane was responsible for the inception of Dedalus Press in Dublin in spring 1985, just a few months before Salmon would publish its first title. Dedalus developed from *Tracks* (1982-1996), the little magazine that Deane co-founded with Jack Harte, the magazine’s fiction editor. Then as now, Dedalus specialised in work by Irish poets as well as poetry in translation. Like Salmon, from its inception Dedalus was eager to publish non-Irish poets: according to its website’s mission statement, Dedalus aimed to bring “Irish writing to the world and writing from around the world to Irish readers.” New Writers Press would have enthusiastically agreed with Deane’s choice of writers in the anthology, *The Dedalus Irish Poets* (1992), which Deane views as representative of Dedalus’s range. “The ‘daddies’ in the anthology are Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey, and also Charles Donnelly. I like their European dimension... Most of the poets that we have are experimental in form,” Deane told Peter Denman.

Dedalus’s focus on experimental poetry stands in sharp contrast to Dolmen and Gallery Press, but like them, it had published comparatively few women by the early 1990s: Dublin poet Leland Bardwell is the only woman whose work appears in the seminal 1992 anthology. (Deane’s use of the word “daddies,” it seems, was not accidental.) “There is no policy to exclude women from Dedalus by any means,” Deane assured Denman. The reason Dedalus had published such a limited number of collections by women, he claimed, was because “Salmon Publishing has specialised in women poets during the period Dedalus has been building up its lists. No other woman poet, other than Leland [Bardwell and another unnamed woman poet] has actually submitted a collection to me...I know that a perception has arisen that I don’t publish women, but it’s an unfortunate accident, not a policy.” Nonetheless, if Dedalus could hardly boast a balanced publishing list in terms of gender in the early 1990s, it had already made substantial contributions to Irish poetry by taking over Thomas Kinsella’s Peppercanister series after Dolmen closed its doors, and by

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19 Deane was also the founder of Poetry Ireland, the national organisation for poetry in Ireland.
22 Denman, “An Interview with John F. Deane,” 35.
23 Denman, “An Interview with John F. Deane,” 38.
supporting writers such as Dennis O’Driscoll, Robert Greacen, Conleth Ellis, and others.

Twentieth-century little magazines, such as those that produced poetry publishers Dolmen, New Writers Press, Gallery, Dedalus and Salmon, deviated from the publishing pattern set by their Victorian predecessors. In nineteenth-century Britain, large-circulation magazines were most often created by firmly-established book publishers, who usually added magazines to their lists in order to support and attract authors for their book publishing endeavours. William Blackwood’s Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine, for example, “was used both as a showcase for new talent, and as a method of attracting potential contributors to the firm’s book lists.”

However, this was not the case with little magazines, which can be traced back to the pre-Raphaelite publication Germ (1850) through The Yellow Book (1894-1897), and which did not fall into this category, being small, coterie-based magazines that targeted a niche readership. Nonetheless, even little magazines usually began and ended their lives as periodicals: rarely did editors of either little magazines or larger-circulation periodicals attempt to make the transition to single-title book publishing. Historically, then, magazines in general – regardless of readership size – rarely developed into book publishers. This would change in the second half of the twentieth century in both Britain and Ireland.

By the 1950s, publishing in Britain and Ireland was beginning to recover from the delays caused by the paper and ink rationing of the second World War. The number of new little magazines established in Britain in the period 1950-1959, according to the research of Miller and Price (2006), fell by eighteen percent from the previous decade. “This statistic is deceptive, however,” caution Miller and Price, “and its interpretation as a measure of the austerity of the decade, against which the undeniable production and aesthetic fecundity of the 1960s is then seen as a revolutionary release, is simplistic.” A number of the magazines that closed during this period were based in London, whereas publications located outside of London were less likely to fold, challenging London’s status as the centre of British little-

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25 Miller and Price, ix.
26 Miller and Price, 86.
27 Miller and Price, 86.
magazine publication. Also, Miller and Price note, many of the little magazines begun in this decade proved to be especially tenacious, lasting for ten, twenty, or even thirty or more years: similarly, in Ireland, magazines begun in the 1940s and 1950s often lasted a decade or two. Such magazines included *Stand* in the UK; *Threshold* in Belfast; and student reviews such as the Dublin-based *Icarus* (1950-present) and the Galway-based *Criterion* (1953-c. 1984) in the Republic of Ireland. Nonetheless, Miller and Price do acknowledge the very real restrictions brought about by post-war austerity upon publishing and upon those who would participate in it: “[t]hose living in a country still using ration books long after the war, it can be argued, simply didn’t have the cash to spend on literary magazines; would-be editors themselves may have been too involved in the ordinary work of reconstruction to dwell on the world of literature.”

By the late twentieth century, the publishing landscape had changed dramatically in both Britain and Ireland, to the particular benefit of magazines and smaller publishers, partially as a result of changes in print technology which led to lower start-up costs for such endeavours. Thus, Salmon’s move into single-title book publishing was not without precedent. Miller and Price (2006) discuss the frequency with which British little magazines developed into publishers, especially in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The print technology that was so instrumental to the small-publishing industry was a result of the so-called “mimeograph revolution” of the 1960s. “The increase in numbers [of little magazines] was partly enabled by the availability of inexpensive print technology, especially mimeograph (a form of printing that used a typed stencil as its master),” they assert. The tendency for magazines to morph into book publishers became more frequent in the period 1960-1975, when “[m]any of the little magazines... were directly linked to small presses. In many cases magazines and books were publishing concurrently, or alternatively a magazine might prefigure the setting-up of a poetry press.”

In Britain, according to Miller and Price, the magazine-linked small press was “key to the early reception of experimental American poetry in the United

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28 Miller and Price, 87.
29 Miller and Price, 87.
30 Miller and Price, 87.
31 Miller and Price, 121.
32 Miller and Price, 120-121.
Kingdom.” Little magazines such as Reality Studios (1978-1988) and Spectacular Diseases (1976-1999) published experimental American poets alongside their British counterparts, “creating a sense of dialogue between experimental poets on either side of the Atlantic,” and continued that dialogue by forming their own imprints – a decision that Miller and Price consider to be “a major step” in fulfilling that mission. In a more lasting legacy, the little magazine Carcanet (1962-1970), edited by Michael Schmidt from 1967, was the precursor to the major British poetry publisher of the same name, which continues to publish new work by authors such as John Ashbery, Donald Allen, Eavan Boland, Donald Hall and Elaine Feinstein as well as reprints of work by earlier twentieth-century authors including Elizabeth Bishop, H.D., Mina Loy, and William Carlos Williams. (Bloodaxe, the independent UK poetry publisher to which Salmon has claimed a close similarity, and which began publishing single-title collections of poetry in 1978, is unusual in that it did not begin as a periodical.)

In Ireland in the period 1960-75, it was possible for a little magazine to be the product of established literary publishers, such as with Dolmen Press’s The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing (1962). Although it ceased publication after only one issue, it was intended to have a longer lifespan, and to present Dolmen writers to an American readership. Little magazines and their related imprints might also be created nearly simultaneously, as with The Lace Curtain (1969-1978), edited by Trevor Joyce and Michael Smith. Joyce and Smith had created New Writers Press in 1967, two years before the first issue of the magazine was published, as a “key small press for Irish modernist poetry,” and The Lace Curtain would act as a mouthpiece for the press by publishing poets who were influenced by Irish modernism such as Joyce, Thomas Kinsella, and Denis Devlin. Little magazines created by established publishers, Tom Clyde (2003) believes, tended to be less experimental, and acted mainly as “shop windows for established publishing houses...showcase productions

33 Miller and Price, 218.
34 Miller and Price, 218.
35 Lendennie stated in a 2008 interview with the author: “I have more of a kind of affinity with Bloodaxe than any other press. They’re...the same kind of people, same kind of ethos, same kind of thing: except that he’s got... a lot more money, and he does a lot more books. And he’s a he.” (Jessie Lendennie, Personal Interview. 4 March 2008.)
36 Miller and Price, 147.
37 Miller and Price, 120.
38 Miller and Price, 165.
on which no money was spared in an attempt to present both the writers – and the companies’ abilities to produce quality product – in the best possible light.”

Alternatively, little magazine editors, having gained experience and platform while publishing their periodicals, could use them to segue from magazine into book publishing, and it is to this group that The Salmon and its editors belong. Like The Salmon, broadsheet magazines Capella and The Book of Invasions, both co-edited by Peter Fallon and the Tara Telephone poetry and music group, were the predecessors of a book publishing venture: under Fallon, Gallery Press published its first single-author collection of poetry in 1970, a year after both magazines ceased publication. Dedalus Press also originated as a little magazine: edited by its founder John F. Deane and co-editor Jack Harte, Tracks (1982-1996) ran for eleven issues, publishing approximately one issue per year. Regardless of the way in which they developed, the vast majority of Irish little magazines of this period were published from Dublin, most notably The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing, The Lace Curtain, Tracks, Capella, and The Book of Invasions, as well as Broadsheet (1968-1983), The Holy Door, and Cyphers (1975-present).

Similarly, in Belfast during the period 1960-1975, magazines such as The Northern Review (1965-1967), The Honest Ulsterman (1968-2003), and Caret (1972-1975) provided valuable publication space for new and emerging writers. Also vital to the careers of many young poets from Ulster was the Festival Publications series of single-title poetry pamphlets, which arose from the Festival at Queen’s University Belfast, an arts festival created and directed by young entrepreneur Michael Emmerson. These slim pamphlets acted as a sort of hybrid, since they combined the content of a single-title poetry book with a magazine-style size and presentation. Following the festival’s expansion in 1965 to include poetry readings, seminars and a number of other forms of performance, Emmerson began to publish short, single-author pamphlets of between ten and fifteen poems each. “The greatest boost to local poetry,” writes Heather Clark (2006) of the Belfast “renaissance” that took place in the 1960s, “...came in the form of individual poetry pamphlets published by

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40 Miller and Price, 333.
Emmerson as part of the new Festival Publications series: pamphlets by [Seamus] Heaney, [Derek] Mahon, [James] Simmons, [Michael] Longley, [Philip] Hobsbaum, Joan Newmann, Stewart Parker, Arthur Terry and Seamus Deane were distributed and sold in Belfast, Dublin, London, and university towns in Britain. These small pamphlets were, in almost every case, the poets’ first collection (only Hobsbaum had previously published a book).” A number of the young writers who achieved their first publication with the Festival pamphlets later established themselves as influential figures within Irish poetry and letters; clearly, these pamphlets must have been instrumental in launching the poets’ careers.

Unlike many of its counterparts in the Republic of Ireland, the Festival Publications series was not produced in conjunction with a periodical. Since many of the Festival poets had already had work published in literary magazines, perhaps the presence of a magazine would have been less necessary to the writers’ careers than the chance to publish a single title under their own names. Valuably for emerging writers whose careers could benefit from the “weight” that a single-author volume could bestow, the Festival pamphlets “provid[ed] the next step towards full publication for newer poets,” while also acting as “a space for work in progress for the more established.” In their ability to be either substantial or experimental, or even both simultaneously, these pamphlets fulfilled the functions of literary magazine and book publisher at once.

Closely related to the story of The Salmon, the example of the Festival Publications demonstrates that the transition from magazine to single-title publications is a crucial one both for poets and the companies that publish them. Traditionally, the individual author who produces individual titles receives more acclaim than the author who remains within the “multiple authorship” of a more collaborative publication like the little magazine: thus, publishing a debut collection even in pamphlet form can act as a publicly visible indication that a writer’s career is progressing, and that her status is increasing. Periodical publishers, too, could gain status from publishing single collections of poetry, and, according to Clark, the

42 Clark, 74.
43 Note the importance of distribution here, too, to poets’ careers: Emmerson must have had the time and energy to build a functional distribution network for the pamphlets— even if, according to Clark, some have criticised his efforts at promotion and distribution. (Clark, 74.)
44 Clyde, 51.
success of the Festival Pamphlets stood as an example to other Irish periodicals that would expand their reach and solidify their reputations. “What began, then, as a grassroots attempt to publish local poetry quickly,” Clark observes, “became an important vehicle for national recognition: soon literary magazines such as Phoenix and the Honest Ulsterman began producing pamphlets on their own.”

In each of these instances, a little magazine publisher’s decision to turn its attention to single-title volumes signifies the development of selectivity, or the identification of a specific mission or agenda. Such an agenda often lies beyond the reach of the collective, collaborative nature of the little magazine or coterie: at this stage, the publisher must have identified enough strong single voices that, it believes, deserve its attention and would appeal to its readership. As the examples of several Irish poetry presses have illustrated, the relationship between a periodical and its affiliated book publisher develops differently in different circumstances. Regardless of individual circumstances, however, for a magazine-cum-publisher like The Salmon to undergo a transition from quarterly literary magazine to a dedicated single-title publisher of poetry collections, it must be in possession of certain resources, which include a competent leader; sufficient money and time to devote to the enterprise; and tools and technology adequate for speedy, effective, cost-efficient printing. The ways in which Salmon negotiated these vital resources would shape its identity as a press, enabling it to create space for new writers, particularly women.

Little magazines and independent publishers – and indeed, most small businesses – cannot succeed without a strong leader at the helm, whose commitment to the initiative is unlimited and unwavering. For Salmon, this role was filled by the American poet Jessie Lendennie. Born in a small town in the southwestern state of Arkansas, she emigrated with her infant son to London as a young woman. She spent eleven years there, obtaining both a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy and a master’s degree in education from Kings College. While in London, she published her poetry in magazines such as Jon Silkin’s Stand (1952-1999), and developed an interest in publishing as a result of her subsequent work with the London-based Poetry Society. Lendennie, her son, and her British husband Michael Allen moved to Galway in 1981, the same year that they, as part of the newly-formed Galway Writers

45 Clark, 74.
Workshop, began to publish poetry:galway, soon to become The Salmon and, subsequently, Salmon Publishing.

By the time Salmon published its first title in 1985, the collective that had begun poetry:galway in 1981 had been pared down to a core group of three: Lendennie, Allen, and an Irish-language editor, Michéal Ó Riada. In 1987, before Salmon had published its fifth book (Song at the End of the World by Fred Johnston), Lendennie and Allen had parted ways. 46 The separation was most likely a difficult one for Lendennie professionally as well as personally, since she had every intention of running the new publisher and six-year-old magazine singlehandedly, with the help of specialists, such as Irish-language editor Ó Riada, when necessary.

As trying as this situation must have been for Lendennie, it is likely that, far from threatening the fledgling publisher’s success, it actually contributed to Salmon’s survival. Irreconcilable differences and personal politics can be fatal to a new publishing enterprise, particularly if co-editors or business partners disagree over their visions for a press. Instead, a single editor or “Managing Director,” as Lendennie has described her role at Salmon, can give a magazine and its new publishing list the continuity of vision it needs to survive. 47 Collective editorship of little magazines “has never been entirely successfully handled,” insists Wolfgang Gortschacher in Little Magazine Profiles: The Little Magazines in Great Britain, 1939-1993 (1993), a view that is shared by many small-press proprietors and literary magazine editors. 48 “It’s not difficult, it’s impossible!” agreed Peter Dale, editor of British little magazine Agenda, in an interview with Gortschacher. “It’s impossible to run a magazine with two editors unless they have a long, long understanding – and a tolerably equable

46 “...That is, I published [Johnston’s book]. Because Michael said... ‘[C]ount me out of this whole thing.’” (Jessie Lendennie, Personal Interview. 4 March 2008.)

47 For example – although it did not technically fit the criteria of a little magazine – the founding editors of the British feminist periodical Spare Rib (1972-1989) espoused different political values and held conflicting concepts of how a magazine could or should articulate a feminist agenda. The result was a permanent rift between the two editors. “There was a blurring of the personal and professional,” explains co-editor Marsha Rowe in a 2008 interview. (Claire Daly, “Breaking Out of the Mold,” The F-Word: Contemporary UK Feminism. Web. Accessed 1 June 2011.) Atypically, Spare Rib was subsequently run by a collective. See Rosie Boycott, A Nice Girl Like Me. 1985. London: Pocket, 2009).

temperament.” If co-editorship of a little magazine is nearly untenable, then co-managing a small press must be more taxing yet, since publishing single titles constitutes a more serious commitment in terms of time, energy and capital. Under single editorship, an independent publisher or magazine is far more likely to remain active.

To borrow William Carlos Williams’s famous phrase, “so much depends on” the individual who finds herself at the helm of a small press. As with little magazines, a small-press publisher’s personal commitment, ambition and individual vision for the press are vital to its survival. “A magazine depends on the energy and enthusiasm of its editors,” J. C.R. Green, editor of the British magazine Prospice (1973-1988), told Gortschacher in an interview. “Most cease publication because the editor runs out of steam.” The personality of a little magazine or small press is wholly dependent upon its editor, whose commitment to the venture must be so profound as to verge upon “manic-obsession,” in Gortschacher’s words. Often, its editor must demonstrate Green’s “energy and enthusiasm” both editorially and financially, a tendency from which Lendennie is no exception. As head of Salmon and its sole full-time employee, she was responsible for all aspects of book production, from manuscript acquisition, contract negotiation with authors, and editing and proofreading manuscripts to handling publicity, marketing, distribution, and accounting. Simultaneously, until late in 1991, she was publishing three issues of The Salmon per year, at about sixty pages per issue. This extraordinary workload could only have been exacerbated by Lendennie’s determination to publish as many new titles as possible. By the end of 1987, around the time that she and Allen parted ways, Salmon had published only four titles over two years: in 1988, however, with Lendennie running Salmon singlehandedly, the company published five new titles, and in 1989 and 1990 it published eight and eleven new titles respectively. For Lendennie, as for other small-press publishers, “manic-obsession” was a necessary part of the task of getting new authors into print.

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49 Gortschacher, 335.  
50 Gortschacher, 422.  
51 For single-editor endeavours such as little magazines and their affiliated pressers, their leaders’ energy must truly verge on the supernatural. Gortschacher lists a few of the many roles a single editor must play, including “secretary, clerk, chief packer, subscription agent, promotion manager, and editor-in-chief.” (16)  
52 See Appendix 4.
Equally as important as her skill as an editor and publisher was Lendennie’s facility for encouraging collaboration and fostering relationships between individuals. Mary Dempsey, co-editor of The Salmon during its first nine issues, describes Lendennie’s manner of leadership at the magazine as a potent mixture of creativity, charisma and practicality that established and cemented personal connections and intimacy among those around her. For example, Lendennie, a competent, self-taught dressmaker, sewed bespoke dresses for Dempsey and perhaps for other members of the Galway Writers Workshop, often in bright colours and bold prints. Also, Lendennie and Allen often opened their home to workshop members; informal meetings were held in their sitting room or back garden of their home in Annaghdown, just outside the city centre of Galway. “I think Jessie brought a wonderful kind of flamboyance, of passion, and quite an acumen in terms of organisation and wanting it to work,” remembers Dempsey.53

An editor must be prepared to invest not only her time, energy and unwavering commitment into her new enterprise, but also, often, her own capital. In the Republic of Ireland, the bulk of funding for arts-related activities is granted by the Arts Council of Ireland. Funding to book publishers can be distributed in two ways: through an annual grant which is intended to assist with all aspects of publishing, including administration as well as the cost of book production; or, through title-specific, “book-by-book” grants, in which the Arts Council allocates a number of smaller grants to a publisher in order to cover the cost of producing individual titles, but which is not intended to assist other expenses associated with publishing, such as administration or payment of staff. The latter form of grant-aid is usually offered to newly-created small presses until they have demonstrated serious intent and published a number of titles of quality – a form of aid that can be difficult for a new publisher to navigate, since it means that the Arts Council assumes final control over which titles the press may publish. Dedalus’s publisher, John F. Deane, addressed the difficulties arising from title-by-title grants in an interview with Peter Denman. “I did find it difficult when I had to deal with [the Arts Council] collection by collection because it stymied my hand,” he told Denman. “I wasn’t actually the publisher, in effect.”54

53 Mary Dempsey. Personal Interview. 1 September 2009.
54 Denman, 38.
While the Arts Council appears to have removed this restriction from Dedalus within a few years – by 1992, Deane was already able to speak of a long and “supportive” relationship with the Council\textsuperscript{55} – Salmon remained tethered to title-by-title grants until 1995.\textsuperscript{56} Subsequently, in 1999, a number of years after it first began to receive its annual administration grant, the press was suddenly returned to publishing on a title-by-title basis – a severe blow to a publisher that had been releasing between eight and eighteen new titles per year. Lendennie called this a “major setback” in an email to several Salmon authors in which she described the newly-restricted funding situation. “...[T]hey have put Salmon right back where I started in 1984,” she lamented, “on a ‘title by title’ grant; which means that we will receive funds for each title (we’ve lost our overall Administration grant which covers remaining costs as well) and I will have to discuss each poet with the literature officer for approval. This is a truly backwards step.”\textsuperscript{57} Indeed, such a limitation amounts to more than financial hardship and bureaucratic inconvenience for the publisher: more damaging is the fact that it “puts an enormous strain on the publisher/author relationship,” since the publisher cannot guarantee if or when it will be able to publish its authors’ books until it receives “permission” – that is, funding – from the Arts Council.\textsuperscript{58} Understandably, this approach leads to frustration and tension between a publisher and its authors, potentially leading to unhealthy business relationships and negative publicity regarding the press and its business practices. However, most small publishers cannot survive without Arts Council support, and so have little choice in the matter, since receiving funding for individual titles is far preferable to receiving no funding at all.

Thus, even editors who are assiduous and meticulous in applying for and securing funding may find their company’s finances in severe danger. Like many other small-press proprietors, Lendennie was at times obliged to “hazard [her] private property and be financially responsible for” the newly-formed Salmon Publishing.\textsuperscript{59} At times, Lendennie’s commitment went so far as to prioritise funding Salmon over

\textsuperscript{55} Interview with Denman, 38.
\textsuperscript{56} Salmon was probably the only Irish publisher to receive title-by-title grants at this time, since Dedalus and Gallery each received annual grants.
\textsuperscript{57} Lendennie, Jessie. “Message to Salmon poets Jean [Valentine], Gwyn [Parry], Janice [Fitzpatrick-Simmons], Jimmy [James Simmons] and David.” 25 February 1999. Email. MS 438, Box 3, F62.
\textsuperscript{58} Box 10, F227, ASP.
\textsuperscript{59} Gortschacher, 22.
paying the mortgage on her house, and she accrued a great deal of personal debt as a result.\textsuperscript{60} Although a publisher’s willingness to invest personal funds into her business could easily be seen as incontrovertible evidence of her dedication to the enterprise, funding bodies may instead view the editor’s investment of her own capital as either a sign that the business is a failure and unworthy of assistance, or as a reason for withholding much-needed grants due to a perception that its proprietor is able to supplement it with her own income. Lendennie described one such response in an interview: “[The Arts Council officer said], ‘Oh God. So things are so bad that you’d have to use your own money?’...Instead of seeing a belief and dedication to literature: that… there are bad times with literature, [and] it’s not all about money, she saw...‘You’re failing.’”\textsuperscript{61} Ironically, Lendennie’s display of a personal financial commitment to the company very nearly resulted in a refusal of funding from the Arts Council, which would almost certainly have caused Salmon to collapse. Yet, in spite of obstacles like these that threatened Salmon’s existence, Lendennie managed to keep it in business year after year – even if on a highly-restricted budget.\textsuperscript{62} One of the most important personal qualities of a small-press publisher, then, is sheer stubbornness.

Individuals at the helm of an independent publisher or little magazine must be deeply committed to literature, but must also be willing to prioritise the creative work of others above their own. Although she had written poetry at least since her undergraduate days at King’s College, London, Salmon’s demands must have taken precedence over Lendennie’s own creative work. While she regularly published poems in \textit{The Salmon}, she produced only a single collection under her own name: in 1988, Salmon published her prose poem \textit{Daughter}, which complicates, restructures, and reverses the myth of Demeter and Persephone in twentieth-century rural and

\textsuperscript{60} Jessie Lendennie, Personal Interview. 4 March 2008.
\textsuperscript{61} Jessie Lendennie, Personal Interview. 4 March 2008.
\textsuperscript{62} In 1995, Lendennie and Salmon’s operations moved from Galway City to Knockeven, near the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare. Although Salmon was becoming more and more visible and established, Lendennie hoped that leaving Galway city would provide distance from some of these obstacles, including financial issues that had plagued her since Salmon’s inception; the end of a relationship with Dublin-based Poolbeg Press that had been unsatisfactory for both Salmon and Poolbeg; and what Lendennie perceived to be destructive politics within the arts community in Galway.
suburban settings. In spite of her commitment to Salmon, however, she continued to write poetry: in 2001, the poem was reprinted along with several new poems as *Daughter and Other Poems*, which received positive reviews from Eavan Boland and others.

In addition to charisma, a facility for multitasking, a passion for self-education, and a wide capacity for “manic-obsession,” being at the helm of a small press requires a kind of unswerving devotion akin to parenthood: it demands constant focus and attention, and even requires that its publisher be willing to place the welfare and security of the press above her own. Salmon poet Eva Bourke articulated some of these qualities in her 2008 *Irish Times* article “A parent to poetry,” which pays tribute to Salmon’s achievements and to Lendennie’s commitment to Irish poetry over the previous twenty-six years. Bourke describes Salmon’s managing director as the ideal parent – selfless, practical, and accommodating. “One of Jessie Lendennie's most attractive and disarming traits is her maternal manner towards her poets,” she writes:

Like a good parent, she is a facilitator, not a dictator. She has no interest in forming anything or anyone after her own image but gets on with the task of getting the books out. I remember well how invariably obliging she was despite her chronic money shortage, how she always did her utmost to keep her poets contented - a difficult enough undertaking - and how unhappy she was if she failed. Over the years she particularly encouraged women, who in the beginnings of the press were so disheartened by Ireland’s male-dominated literary establishment that they had stopped sending work out. Rita Ann Higgins said recently that we were very lucky to have her at the time of starting out as poets, and so we were. Our lives and those of many other poets might have turned out quite differently had Salmon Poetry never happened.

In a 2008 interview, twenty-three years after Salmon had published its first book, Lendennie’s priorities had not changed. Perhaps she had become more aware of the

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toll exacted by Salmon upon her personal and emotional life, but she remained as constant in her commitment: “Everything I do has to do with Salmon. [It’s] probably not a good thing. I don’t know. I mean, it’s a choice, that’s for sure.”

Leaders of little magazines that would become single-title publishers must be not only strong, charismatic leaders, but also must remain tireless in their pursuit of funding for their initiative: if a small publisher is to succeed, it must be in possession of sufficient capital as well as a director who has time to devote herself completely to management of the press. “Poetry publishing and the little mags [sic] are bedevilled by lack of money and time,” asserts Michael Horovitz, editor of the UK magazine *New Departures* (1959-present). Obtaining both of these resources can be a constant struggle, as well as a source of frustration and resentment, for new presses that are repeatedly refused valuable funding, and it is not surprising that they may demonstrate antagonism towards those who have received support: “[t]here are publishers and magazines who have both [money and time], but very few of these are committed to the real work, more often only to their little power cliques,” Horovitz goes on to claim.

Publishers for whom Arts Council funding is not forthcoming might choose to seek support from private patrons or larger companies, an option Salmon was obliged to pursue in 1993. After hearing a radio interview during which Lendennie made mention of Salmon’s financial constraints, Philip McDermott, publisher of Dublin-based Poolbeg Press, offered to bring Salmon under the Poolbeg aegis using part of his own Arts Council grant. Lendennie agreed, and from 1993 until mid-1996, Salmon duly became an imprint of Poolbeg. While the arrangement brought some temporary improvement both to Salmon’s financial situation and Lendennie’s own, it did not constitute a long-term solution for the publisher, partially due to conflicts between McDermott and Lendennie. “It didn’t suit, it didn’t work,” she remembered of the business relationship. “[A]nother thing I learned about entrepreneurs – I would’ve fitted that category I suppose, because I was starting something on my own

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67 Gortschacher, 358.
– when they’re taken over it never works, because it worked as the one-person thing.”

In 1996, Salmon Publishing Ltd. was formally returned to Lendennie’s sole ownership, and Poolbeg and Salmon severed their connection. Shortly afterwards, with a change in Arts Council personnel, Salmon began to receive an administrative grant that covered more expenses than simply the printing expenses for each title. However, as illustrated by the 1999 removal of administrative funding, the amount of grant support was rarely stable, and often had to be stretched to fund a number of titles, since Lendennie was intent on publishing as much new work as possible, and was highly reluctant to turn authors away for lack of funds.

Even when funding was nearly unobtainable, editors have managed to keep their publishing initiatives in business through a more informal means of support: assistance from other industry professionals. Not infrequently, the only barrier between a small press or magazine and its imminent demise could be the temporary – if sometimes tenuous – “goodwill” or credit generously offered by others within the publishing industry. Although records of such transactions rarely exist on paper, according to floundering magazine editors and publishers, sympathetic industry professionals may extend credit to a small press, or offer their services, such as typesetting or printing, at a reduced cost. They may do so because they admire the ideals behind a new press or simply wish to support a new, often local, business – even if they are in financial jeopardy themselves. One Dublin-based book printer, for example, told Lendennie not to worry about the large printing bill Salmon Publishing was amassing with his company. “[T]he printer... I think he kind of liked me; we were getting this big bill with him, and he’d say ‘Oh, don’t worry about it’, and it caused them a lot of problems actually…” Peter Dale, editor of British magazine Agenda (1959–present), described a similar situation, in which his long-running little magazine was saved from demise by its accommodating printers. “Before we had an Arts Council grant we survived because we had doting printers. We still have doting printers. They do an awful lot of work for us for a pittance. Without those printers, I

69 Jessie Lendennie, Personal Interview. 4 March 2008.
think perhaps... *Agenda* would collapse.”  

For literary magazines or independent publishers, then, securing sufficient funding is a challenge that must be met through many different means, including personal contributions from their editors or publishers; public grants; patronage from private businesses; or more informally – but no less significantly – friendly assistance from members of the publishing industry.

Leadership, funding, appropriate tools and technology, and access to a pool of authors with manuscripts ready for publication are vital resources for any new publisher. A final resource that was the most significant – and perhaps unique – to Salmon’s successful transition to book publisher was its use of branding techniques. Branding in particular assisted Salmon in creating both a literary network to which emerging writers, especially women, could contribute, and a readership that would be receptive to their work. Brand identity, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is “a set of attributes designed to distinguish a particular firm, product or line, with the intention of promoting awareness and loyalty on the part of consumers.”  

Developing a strong brand ensures that a company’s products – such as books produced by a publisher – will be recognisable, familiar, and attractive to its consumers. But, as Douglas B. Holt (2004) observes, all the trappings necessary to create a brand, such as “a name, a logo, trademarked packaging, and perhaps other unique design features” are not the true “authors” of a brand’s identity: a brand is only formed when it has become the centre of its own mythology, which is formed from a series of (sometimes conflicting) beliefs about that company and its product. “A brand emerges as various ‘authors’ tell stories about the brand,” Holt claims; such authors can include “companies [themselves]; the culture industries; intermediaries (such as critics and retail salespeople); and customers (particularly when they form communities.)” It is this “storytelling” that imbues a brand with meaning.

Although the concept of branding has traditionally been unsettling to publishers, some of whom who have believed the world of letters should not be

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70 Gortschacher, 339.
73 Holt, 3.
tainted by such mercenary concerns,\textsuperscript{74} branding is a key component in the way readers and prospective authors connect with a publisher. Moreover, deployment of certain branding strategies can help the publisher to author its own “brand mythology,” sometimes, as in the case of Salmon Publishing, even placing it at the centre of a network of writers and readers. Through brand development, then, publishers, particularly independent, niche publishers such as Salmon, can contribute to the creation and sustenance of a strong, visible space for the production and reception of creative work by their authors – a climate that is especially salubrious to lesser-known new writers and writers who, traditionally, have not been allocated much publishing space, such as emerging women writers.

The goal of brand creation and management, naturally, is to increase a product’s visibility – but within a literary environment, increased visibility has the power to disrupt and displace. The work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, previously considered in Chapter 1, is useful in illuminating the way in which a newly visible organization or coterie can cause a seismic shift in the status of all the participants in the “field” in which it is situated. For Bourdieu, who addresses the subject at length in his essay “The Field of Cultural Production: Or, the Economic World Reversed” (1993), the realm of the literary is necessarily defined by tension and struggle. “When a new literary or artistic group makes its presence felt in the field of literary or artistic production,” writes Bourdieu, the whole problem is transformed, since its coming into being … modifies and displaces the universe of possible options: the previously dominant productions may, for example, be pushed into the status of outmoded (déclassé) or classic works.”\textsuperscript{75} What is at stake, he argues, is not only the relative status of literary works, but also a modification of the number of individuals who are permitted to bestow the status of “writer” onto others. Another result is a shift in the “established definition” of the term writer itself.\textsuperscript{76} For these reasons, Bourdieu’s research is useful in theorizing the power dynamics at play within the literary field.

Branding has the potential to change the way in which a society approaches the concept of the poet. As discussed in Chapter 2, Eavan Boland has considered the

\textsuperscript{74} For a discussion of this, see Chapter 1 of Alison Baverstock, \textit{Are Books Different? Marketing in the Book Trade}. London: Kogan Page, 1993:13-29.
\textsuperscript{76} Bourdieu, 314.
way in which subtle societal restrictions dictate who may participate in the world of poetry production and publication in her article “In Defence of Writing Workshops” (Poetry Ireland Review, 1991) within the context of Irish literature. Often, Boland insists, emerging writers of talent whose backgrounds lie outside the parameters of an elite – often, a “male, white and middle-class” elite—can be obstructed, thwarted or silenced – particularly if there are neither infrastructures in place within the literary environment to support and nourish it, nor visible publishing outlets willing to present the fruits of that talent to a readership. However, the presence of a poetry publisher that welcomes and encourages creative work by emerging authors who are not members of a cultural elite can permanently alter a nation’s literary environment. In this way, Salmon Publishing helped to increase the number of participants in the production of cultural activity in Ireland. Partially through its strong use of branding techniques, it helped to make possible a literary environment in which the work of emerging poets, especially emerging women poets, were valued, ultimately transforming the idea of the societal permission to be a poet.

A brief analysis of the way branding and marketing functions in publishing will be helpful in order to place Salmon’s branding initiatives in context. In Marketing Literature (2009), Claire Squires defines the term “brand” as “a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller’s good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. A brand many identify one item, a family of items, or all items of that seller.”77 Once a product has achieved brand identity, that identity can be expanded, so that it promotes not only the practical, tangible assets of a product, but also the way in which the purchase of that product can signify the purchase of a share in a certain kind of lifestyle or community. The power of branding reached its summit in the last decades of the twentieth century: by the 1980s, Adam Arvidsson (2006) believes, “brands now became something of an omnipresent tool by means of which identity, social relations and shared experiences...could be constructed. They were spun into the social fabric as a ubiquitous medium for the construction of a common social world.”78

As pervasive as branding had become by the end of the twentieth century, and while most manufacturers of goods for sale do rely on branding and the development of brand identity to make their products more appealing than those of their rivals, it has long been thought that the relationship of book publishers to branding is more problematic because of the unusual nature of the book as a product. Unlike other commodities – such as, for example, a tin of baked beans – a satisfied customer will not return to purchase the same item again and again. Each title is unique. “One of the problems traditionally experienced by publishers was that they felt the book could not be valued in commercial and marketable terms because of this unique nature,” claim Royle et al. (1999). Brand-name loyalty, many mainstream publishers believed, was little more than a myth.

However, at least since Penguin’s development of the paperback book market in the 1930s and 1940s – which was accomplished with such success that its name and logo became almost interchangeable with the term “paperback” itself – branding strategies were indeed deployed by book publishers. Penguin, for example, was able to create a brand which readers associated with quality by “combining design and sound writing to such good effect that after only ten years the name Penguin and the word ‘paperback’ were ... virtually synonymous,” writes Phil Baines (2005). “With the resonance that the Penguin name rapidly acquired, it is possible to believe that the word itself was a significant element in the success.” While Penguin was able to brand its imprint by creating a correlation in the consumer’s mind with the format of the books it published, in the later part of the century other publishers became adept at associating imprint with genre. In Reading The Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature (1984:1987), Janice Radway also attests to the successful branding of mass-market paperback romances by large North American publishers such as Avon, Harlequin, and Silhouette, all of which deployed different marketing strategies in order to target the suburban – and therefore middle-class – American housewife. “In fact, [romance publisher] Harlequin operates on the assumption that a book can be

81 Royle et al, 4.
marketed like a can of beans or a box of soap powder,” Radway asserts. “Its extraordinary profit figures convincingly demonstrate that books do not necessarily have to be thought of and marketed as unique objects but can be sold regularly and repetitively to a permanent audience on the basis of brand-name identification alone.”

Indeed, by the 1990s, more publishers’ attitudes towards branding were clearly changing, as they became aware that marketing strategies could be applied in new and different ways to a creative product. “Does the publisher brand the imprint, the author, the individual book, the series, or a combination of these?” ask Royle et al. “[B]rand image and values are as important to the book as any other product,” responded one publisher in 1998. “Whether we’re talking Collins Dictionaries, Jeffrey Archer, or Tolkien, we always exploit the brand.” Other publishing professionals staunchly retained a more traditional stance, continuing to believe that publishers focus their branding efforts on individual titles and authors, not imprints. “Where ‘branding’ is successful in company or imprint terms – Penguin, Mills & Boon, and Virago come to mind – then these are seen as exceptions,” claimed the author of Marketing in Publishing, a 1997 title on the subject.

From these testimonies, then, it is clear that the idea of traditional “branding” does not often sit easily with mainstream book publishers. For Claire Squires, as for the two respondents who contributed to the research of Royle et al., the question for publishers is not whether to deploy branding strategies, but how to select them. “Branding is a marketing concept which does not always fit snugly into the institutional and cultural structures of the publishing industry and its products,” cautions Squires. Which aspect of an individual title should be promoted through branding: author, series, imprint, publisher – or, as Royle et al. also suggest, some combination of these? The answer is, of course, different for each publisher – and for each title.

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84 Geoff Duffield in Royle et al., 6.
85 Royle et al., 4.
86 Squires, 89.
However, some research suggests that smaller publishers who target niche markets may be able to adopt traditional branding strategies more easily. “There is evidence to suggest that branding strategies are more successful in niche areas of publishing and not across the board,” Royle et al. propose.87 Like imprints or brand segmentation within larger trade publishers, small, independent or “boutique” publishers often cater to a single market or target audience, not diverse audiences with different needs.88 This could make it easier for small publishers to quickly identify and repeat successful branding strategies. The power of the imprint within the larger matrix of the trade publisher can be effective because it targets a specific audience and can become more identifiable or memorable to that audience than the larger publisher of which it is a component. Customers may come to expect the same thing each time they purchase a title published under a certain imprint, whereas they might not be able to identify so strongly with a larger, more “general” publisher.89 “[A] growing (and positive) reputation as a particular type of publisher constitutes an ascendant brand,” Baverstock agrees.90

For the “ascendant brand” that was Salmon, brand development occurred through the publisher’s choice of name and its local and national connotations, the creation of an easily recognizable logo, and the consistent use of that name and logo on all Salmon titles. At its inception, The Salmon’s five editors were virtually unknown within Irish literary circles; they could not rely on their own reputations as poets alone to make their publication attractive to readers and contributors.91 Thus, it was important that they choose a name of substance for the magazine – one that readers could relate to, but that was less parochial than the name “poetry: galway,” under which they had published the first two issues of their broadsheet. Before selecting the name “Salmon” early in 1982, before the publication of its third issue,

87 Royle et al., 12.
88 The researcher’s professional experience in book publishing bears up this assertion. For example, in the United States, independent publisher City & Company, which, until it sold its fifty-one titles to Rizzoli International Publications in 2002, published “guidebooks about New York for New Yorkers:” or Downtown Press, an imprint of Pocket Books which publishes trade paperback women’s fiction, colloquially known as “chick lit.”
89 John F. Deane, founder of Dedalus Press, is also in agreement. “I think that at this stage there is a poetry clientele, and once they know a book is there, they’ll buy it.” (Peter Denman, “An Interview with John F. Deane: 39.)
90 Baverstock, 61.
91 The editors of The Salmon, according to the first masthead which appeared in Issue 2, were Jessie Lendennie, Michael Allen, Luke Geoghegan, and Mike Watts.
the magazine’s editors had raised other suggestions for titles, including “Other Voices” and “Trails”\[^{92}\] – suggestions that may have been discarded on the basis that they seem unspecific, clichéd, only vaguely “alternative” in tone, and, importantly, too generic to locate the publication within a particular physical space. Finally, “the Salmon name was formed in committee,” according to Salmon’s managing director, Jessie Lendennie. “It was an inspired decision: someone mentioned… the copper salmon, and then everyone agreed, ‘The name is Salmon.”\[^{93}\] By comparison, “The Salmon” is by far a stronger title than either of the first two possibilities, “Other Voices” or “Trails,” in both its specificity and connotations.

Invoking the name of an animal with which the reader is familiar allows her to imagine, and therefore create a relationship to, a particular image. Selecting a relatable, recognizable image or character to which the reader is likely to respond positively has been part of establishing brand identity for magazines since the nineteenth century. “Magazines aim to develop their own distinctive personality; editors, designers, writers and artists all direct their efforts toward that end,” claims Robert L. Patten (2006), and it is this aim that is responsible for the creation of characters attached to magazines, such as Mr. Punch of *Punch* magazine, or Eustace Tilley of the *New Yorker*, “who at the end of February every year examines a butterfly through his monocle, and whose portrait, presumably as proprietor, appears on the journal’s paychecks.”\[^{94}\]

A salmon is an animal rather than a human presence, of course, but, like the character Eustace Tilley, it also evokes a series of powerful associations within the mind of the reader: in a general sense, it conjures up images of nature proud and unrestrained, of an creature with a homing instinct so pronounced that it returns to its place of birth to spawn, and, not least, of a valuable resource in terms of nourishment for human beings. However, it also simultaneously invokes two co-existing

\[^{92}\] Undated, handwritten notes in an unknown hand preparing for Issue No. 3 of *Poetry Galway*. MS 438, Box 10, F228, ASP.

\[^{93}\] Jessie Lendennie, from speech at Celebration of Thirty Years of Salmon Publishing. Public event held at Charlie Byrne’s Bookshop, Galway, Ireland, 28 October 2011, 6:30pm. The reference to a “copper salmon” is unclear; it may be a reference to the Copper River, which is located in south-central Alaska in the United States, and famed for its salmon runs. The name “Salmon,” then, may have originated with Lendennie herself, who has spoken of her lifelong affinity for Alaska and the American Pacific Northwest, and who owns a cabin and land in Alaska’s Spruce Island.

Salmon fisheries had been a lucrative part of Galway’s economy from the fourteenth through at least the early part of the nineteenth century, when the Corrib River was a rich source of salmon, and the rights to fish the Corrib for it were held at various times by the Crown, the nearby Franciscan friary, and by some of Galway’s most powerful families, such as the de Burgoes or, later, the Lynches and the Eyres.\textsuperscript{95} The Salmon Weir Bridge was constructed in 1818 to link the courthouse with the city jail that was situated on the opposite side of the river; although colloquially known as Gaol Bridge or Beggar’s Bridge\textsuperscript{96} in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, today its name acts as a monument to the fish’s place in the city’s history.

The salmon also occupies a significant place within Irish mythology as a well-known symbol of wisdom and poetic excellence. As a boy, Fionn mac Cumhaill, the hero of the Fenian cycle of Irish mythology, studied with the druid Finnéces, who had been waiting for seven years beside a pool in the Boyne River to find the Salmon of Knowledge. At last he catches the fish, and roasts it over a spit on an open fire – and instructs young Fionn not to eat it. Fionn touches the flesh of the roasting fish, and burns his thumb, which he thrusts into his mouth without thinking. The prophecy that a fair-haired man would eat of the Salmon of Knowledge is thus fulfilled, and eternal wisdom – of a type that seems to encompass second sight, divination, and poetic ability – belongs to Fionn.\textsuperscript{97} The name Salmon, then, acts as a fluid interface between local history and a tradition of national mythology: in both, it is a potent symbol of vitality and creativity.\textsuperscript{98} Indeed, some of Salmon Publishing’s promotional material

\textsuperscript{95} James Hardiman, \textit{The history of the town and country of Galway, from the earliest period to the present time}. Dublin: W. Folds & Sons, 1820: 291. Web.
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Beggar’s Bridge} was also the title of a periodical (c. 1977-1978) edited by Michael Gorman, who later became editor of “Writing in the West” and whose collection, \textit{Up She Flew}, was published by Salmon in 1991.
\textsuperscript{98} The salmon also featured strongly in Celtic Revival poetry, including W. B. Yeats’s, probably most famously in “The Song of Wandering Aengus,” which features a “silver trout,” but invokes the myth of the Salmon of Knowledge through its reference to a “hazel wood.” according to some versions of the myth, the salmon received “inspiration, knowledge, and wisdom,” in MacKillop’s words, when it consumed a hazel nut that had fallen from a branch hanging above the pool in the Boyne. According to A. Norman Jeffares (1946), Yeats himself was passionate about fishing as a pastime and visited Galway’s salmon weir on more than one occasion. “[B]lended with Yeats’s knowledge of the salmon’s symbolic meaning in Celtic poetry was a subjective interest,” writes Jeffares. “His delight in watching salmon was perhaps increased by his keenness as a fisherman. He particularly wanted to show Mrs. Yeats, when she first visited Ireland after their marriage, the salmon under Galway Bridge. This vigour of salmon was suggested in an early work \textit{The Secret Rose}, 1897, where Hanrahan, one of Yeats’s
makes this association explicit: an undated brochure on “The Salmon: An International Literary Journal from the West of Ireland,” most likely created in 1990, recounts the myth at length on its back page, and also references the Song of Amergin, in which Amergin, Ireland’s first poet, is transformed into a salmon:  

I am a spear: that roars for blood  
I am a salmon: in a pool  
I am a lure: from paradise  
I am a hill: where poets walk  

Renaming their fledgling magazine secured its identity in the minds of its editors, who quickly became ever more committed to the project and to marketing it under the Salmon name. By the end of 1982, they had already begun to plan a series of readings, a “Salmon Poets’ Tour of the West,” in which poets who were publishing their work in the magazine would organize poetry readings in towns such as Sligo and Castlebar, County Mayo on the west coast of Ireland. Whether these readings actually took place as planned is unclear from available archival information, but what is certain is that the first public mention of the group as a cohesive entity and the name “Salmon poets” as a self-branding tool occurred within the first year of the magazine’s life. The term caught on quickly: the phrase “Salmon poets” continued to be used in local and national media over the decades into the twenty-first century, adding to its “growing (and positive) reputation as a particular type of publisher,” to reiterate Alison Baverstock’s claim, which signals that a brand is healthy, visible, and expanding. Moreover, by marketing itself as a cohesive group of poets, Salmon invented characters, sketches an ideal life of love thus: ‘We will listen to the cuckoos, we will see the salmon leap in the rivers, we will sleep under the green oak leaves.’” A. N. Jeffares, “The Byzantine Poems of W. B. Yeats.” The Review of English Studies 22:85 (January 1946): 44-52, 47.  

99 MacKillop, 24.  
100 From undated brochure referencing Robert Graves’s translation of the Song of Amergin. Box 11, F233, ASP.  
101 For example, the phrase “Salmon poets” was used in an article on Salmon in the Connacht Sentinel, dated 29 August 1989, 7; in a review entitled “The Salmon Poets” by Roz Cowman in Poetry Ireland Review 47 (1995), ed. Moya Cannon; and headlined on a poster for the popular Galway-based Over The Edge poetry reading series in 2007. The term has also been used in private correspondence between the Salmon poets themselves, as in an email from poet and novelist Gerard Donovan to Jessie Lendennie dated 8/10/98: “Dear Jessie, I’ve just heard … the news of [poets] Ted and Anne’s deaths, and I’m deeply saddened. … If anything good comes out of this, it may be that we achieve a sense of who Salmon poets are. Write when you feel like it. All the best, Jessie, GERARD.” 438, Box 2, F41, ASP.
created for itself the history – or mythology – needed to create a functional brand. As Holt observes, “Names, logos, and designs are the material markers of a brand. Because the product does not have a history, however, these markers are empty… Over time, ideas about the product accumulate and fill the markers with meaning. A brand is formed.” The “myth” of “the Salmon poets” helped to accelerate the branding process for both the magazine and the fledgling publisher.

A successful brand creates a lasting association between name and logo in the buyer’s mind. Chapter 2 described the graphic by Galway artist Joe Boske that would become The Salmon’s, and then Salmon Publishing’s, logo from its creation for The Salmon’s twelfth issue in 1985, and the way in which the magazine was able to create and maintain that crucial association. Boske’s leaping-salmon logo appeared in each issue of the magazine in various forms after its introduction in the twelfth issue, and has featured on all books issued by the publisher since it released its inaugural title, Eva Bourke’s Gonella, in 1985. Most often, the logo appears either on back covers, or as the publisher’s colophon on the books’ spines, as well as promotional material produced by the company, such as leaflets and brochures. The first Salmon title was published shortly after the leaping-salmon graphic first appeared in The Salmon, and the fact that the graphic quickly became integrated into all public documents issued by the company could only have reinforced the association between name and logo in the reader’s mind, since a highly visible logo is a key part of any branding strategy.

The leaping-salmon logo appeared in three forms between 1985 and 2007, becoming more abstract and minimalist with each shift. From 1985 until 1992, it appeared on the back covers of Salmon titles as an exact replica in miniature of the original graphic that was published in Issue 12 of The Salmon: neither colophon nor publisher’s name appeared on the books’ spines, as is the case with Gonella by Eva Bourke (1985). During 1992, the name “Salmon Publishing” began to appear on the spine while the leaping-salmon logo continued to appear on the back covers of titles, such as
Philomena’s Revenge (1992) by Rita Ann Higgins. Between 1993 and 1995, during Salmon’s short-lived partnership with Dublin-based Poolbeg Press, the logo took the form of the body of a fish, stretched into the curve of an S-shape with flourishes on each end reminiscent of Celtic knotwork, as seen on Nuala Archer’s From a Mobile Home (1995). This logo was rendered in either dark blue or light yellow, depending on the cover design of the individual book.

After the dissolution of the Poolbeg partnership in 1996 and Salmon Publishing’s subsequent relocation to managing director Lendennie’s home in County Clare, the original graphic in miniature reappeared on the back cover of Salmon titles, and in a few instances, such as Adrienne Rich’s Selected Poems 1950-1995 (1996) and Mary O’Malley’s The Knife in the Wave (1997), in an even smaller version as a colophon on the spine. By 1998, the logo had been redesigned a final time, into a more abstract image of a fish rendered in a single line, usually in black or white, as with Leland Bardwell’s The White Beach (1998). Since 1998, this version of the logo has appeared as publisher’s colophon on all Salmon titles; on the spines of books, title and author’s name are “bookended” by the colophon to the left, and the name “salmonpublishing” (until 2005) or “salmonpoetry” (2006 and afterward) to the right, as with the anthology Salmon: A Journey in Poetry (2007). The logo currently appears in a prominent position on the top navigational bar of Salmon’s website, salmonpoetry.com, and acts as its favicon: into the twenty-first century, Salmon has extended its emphasis on well-executed book design to include a visible, distinctive web presence, with a website that is professionally designed, attractive, and easy to navigate.

While the publisher’s logo shifted slightly over the years in accordance with developments in the life of the publishing house, the place it occupied in Salmon’s history is central to the development of the brand. The combination of Salmon’s

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103 According to Salmon book designer Siobhán Hutson, the S-shaped salmon graphic is based on an illustration from the Book of Kells. (Siobhán Hutson, “Message to the author.” 10 November 2011. Email.)

104 Both the S-shaped salmon and the minimalist, line-drawn salmon graphic were designed by Poolbeg designer Brenda Dermody, who continued to work with Salmon on a freelance basis after the dissolution of its ties with Poolbeg. Dermody also designed covers for Salmon titles through the year 2000. (Siobhán Hutson, “Message to the author.” 10 November 2011. Email.)

105 A favicon is the small, square icon that appears in Internet browsers to the left of a website’s URL.
evocative name and striking logo, and the “mythology” quickly created around the idea of “the Salmon poets” helped to facilitate the little magazine’s transition into the more complex, and financially tenuous, world of poetry book publishing.

Salmon Publishing had created a readership associated with the Salmon name during its incarnation as a magazine. As the example of Penguin paperbacks demonstrates, brand name and product can quickly become synonymous, a process that can be accelerated when the publisher is able to build upon a platform it has already created. Penguin’s situation was no anomaly: in the past, Janice Radway notes, American publishers intent on building strong lists within specific genres such as detective fiction have built on pre-existing magazine distribution networks to sell their books. “[American Mercury Books] hoped... to sell their paperbacks in large quantities to readers who already know their mystery magazines,” she claims. “Those magazines enabled the editors to take note of reader opinion and to gauge preferences that they then sought to match in their manuscript selection.”

While Salmon did not tailor its poetry manuscripts to the demands of a real, or perceived, readership in the same way that mass-market publishers could and did, the fact that it had established a presence as a magazine must have acted as a springboard for the fledgling publisher. No information on Salmon’s distribution networks survives in published material or in the company’s archives, but it is likely that, as the company made its first foray into book publishing, the Salmon name would have already been familiar to at least some Irish booksellers, and to some of their poetry-buying patrons.

The physical attributes of Salmon books also acted in its favour. Salmon’s consistent use of the distinctive use of the leaping-salmon logo would have become familiar to (prospective) book buyers over the years as it appeared in each issue of the magazine and on the back cover of Salmon titles. Although the design of the logo shifted along with changes over the company’s lifespan, such as its brief alliance with Poolbeg Press between 1993 and 1996, in all instances it used the leaping salmon as its central image, an image that would remain recognizable to the customer, and which has provided continuity to its customers by using the same logo over the last fourteen years. As with Penguin paperbacks, with their vivid trademark design and the

106 Radway, 26.
eye-catching logo of a simply-drawn white penguin superimposed over an orange oval, the Salmon logo facilitated the process of matching product with package.

Salmon’s long-term emphasis on strong book design helped to make its titles memorable to buyers. The company began its tradition of marrying graphics with texts during its years as a magazine, when the cover featured work by local artists, as well as photographs, line drawings, and other artwork within the body of each issue. Since it became a book publisher, Salmon has produced only a single title that incorporates both text and graphics: Gonella by Eva Bourke, Salmon’s first book, was illustrated by Bourke’s sister-in-law, artist Jay Murphy, but the experiment was not repeated – possibly because of the high production costs that would have been associated with combining image and text at that time. However, Salmon maintained its commitment to the peritextual elements of its titles by ensuring that each book was professionally typeset and matched with a strong and unique cover design. Until 1996, Salmon titles were typeset out of office and covers were designed by local graphic-design companies. By 1996, after Lendennie had regained control of Salmon from Poolbeg, all Salmon titles were typeset by self-taught book designer Siobhán Hutson, who also assumed responsibility for cover design in 2001. Hutson, who had worked with Salmon since 1991 when she began as an office assistant, developed her design skills as Salmon developed. A single, on-site designer working closely with the managing director on a daily basis is an invaluable resource to a small publisher, since design work can then be placed under the control of an individual who is intimately connected with the company.

As in the case of Penguin paperbacks, the production of books with vivid, creative design became part of Salmon’s trademark. “As successful branding has

107 In fact, both Bourke’s and Murphy’s names appear as co-authors on Gonella’s title page and spine, and a single author photo on the back of the book shows the two women sitting side by side, looking relaxed and smiling. The implication is that author and illustrator deserve equal credit for the book: in Gonella, the artwork is not, as is so often the case, subordinate to or merely supportive of the texts.

108 Literary theorist Gérard Genette defines “publisher’s peritext” as “the whole zone of the peritext that is the direct and principal (but not exclusive) responsibility of the publisher…We are dealing here with…the cover, the title page, and their appendages…and with the book’s material construction (selection of format, of paper, of typeface, and so forth...)” (Gérard Genette, Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 16.)

109 Penguin is, of course, an example of this, as is illustrated reference publisher Dorling Kindersley, often known simply as DK. DK, according to its website, boasts “worldwide reputation for its innovative non-fiction books in which the unrivalled clarity of the words and pictures come together to
become vital to a company’s growth, more emphasis has been placed on the role of innovative design with the designer becoming the ‘liaison between the product and the consumer, with the goal of having the consumer equate product with package,’” assert Royle et al, who also believe that an emphasis on innovative design must be a consistent part of a publisher’s identity from its inception, in order to provide continuity for the consumer. “Books do not differ [from other products] in the need for appropriate use of design as a fundamental means of attracting consumer loyalty to the imprint or author,” they state. Over the years, as the production value of Salmon books increased, the publisher kept its production quality consistently high, but prevented its design from becoming formulaic by creating an individual cover for each title so that each would enhance the other, something that other literary publishers, such as Gallery Press and Dedalus Press, did not do, opting instead for more plain, even standardized cover designs.

In its incarnation as a book publisher, Salmon was able to offer its consumer base something new on a regular basis; it benefited from the structures inherent in book publishing, in which the publication of a book is a lengthier and often more complicated process, but in which contemporaneity and the demand for brand-new material do not necessarily take centre stage. Instead, single-title publishing focuses on collating, editing, and producing individual volumes by individual authors – a structure that enabled Salmon to maintain its focus in a way it could not as a magazine. Towards the end of its life as a periodical, The Salmon found it increasingly difficult to either offer its readers new, relevant material, or to reinvent its identity, and the result was a larger magazine “stuffed with new poems” that was published ever less frequently. As Ian Hamilton (1976) notes, contemporaneity is the currency in which little magazines trade, and if a magazine reaches a stage at which its identity becomes “wan and mechanical,” it will not survive for long. As a book publisher, however, Salmon was able to maintain its currency with more success, as a result of the necessary structure of publishing new titles by new authors on a regular basis.


Royle et al., 4.

Clyde, 285.

basis. “The need to maintain a brand image, update it in line with changing market
trends, and continue to offer something new to the customer is essential in order to
retain a market share,” Royle et al. state. With its editor’s resources occupied by
book publishing, The Salmon was unable to reinvent itself towards the end of its life,
but its long print run is a testament to The Salmon editors’ ability – at certain points,
at least – to print fresh, contemporary work that its readers would welcome.

During its lifetime, Salmon published individual collections of poetry by
single authors and anthologies of poetry, as well as a small amount of drama. It also
published some nonfiction, including titles on creative writing and book publishing,
and, to a lesser degree, spirituality, and health. In spite of its willingness to branch
out into different genres, however, Salmon’s nonfiction titles that are unrelated to
book publishing go unremembered: its most successful books have been its poetry
titles and anthologies, which offer the reader new work from the stable point of a
familiar, reliable source. This is a common result of successful branding techniques
for, as Douglas B. Holt writes, a company cannot retain absolute control of its own
brand’s reputation: the “stories” created by the various “authors” of meaning that give
shape to a brand are not always based upon fact. As previously discussed, The Salmon
published a large number of female writers, but a greater proportion of its contributors
were male: throughout its lifetime, the number of female contributors to The Salmon
never exceeded that of males, and the number of female and male authors were
equally split on only two occasions. Similarly, in its publication of new titles,
Salmon Publishing issued more titles by men than women: between 1985 and 2007,
fifty-six percent of its authors were male, while forty-four percent were female.
However, these statistics were radically different from other poetry publishers at the
time. As mentioned in Chapter 2, according to Dennis Hannon and Nancy Means

113 Royle et al., 5.
114 Salmon’s few drama titles include Patricia Burke Brogan’s award-winning Eclipsed (1994), which
has been translated into several languages, and has been produced over sixty times. Lendennie and
Burke Brogan parted ways: Eclipsed was subsequently republished by Galway publisher
115 As mentioned in Chapter 2, Salmon published its few alternative health and spirituality titles under a
separate imprint from its poetry titles. Auburn House was a reflection of Lendennie’s longtime interest
in spirituality and Eastern philosophy: Harvey Wasserman’s At The Centre of Time (1995), a book of
“healing poems” that resemble short meditations; and Jill Teck’s Becoming The Tree (1997), which
combines Teck’s paintings and commentary as she struggles with and overcomes cancer. Altogether,
only five Auburn House titles were published, which represents .025% of the total number of Salmon
titles published through 2007.
116 See Appendix 1.
Wright (1990), a survey carried out in 1983 demonstrated that only 11% of Irish poetry published was by women poets, and almost all of it (9%) was published by Arlen House.\textsuperscript{117} Compared with these figures, the simple fact that Salmon published work by relatively equal numbers of men and women was sufficient to earn it a reputation as a “feminist” press, and, quite quickly, the Salmon brand became synonymous with the concept of “women poets,” not dissimilar to the way in which the brand Penguin became synonymous with the term “paperback.”\textsuperscript{118} Salmon’s colleagues within the publishing industry also registered this association, as indicated by John F. Deane’s claim that Salmon’s presence accounted for the dearth of women on his own publishing list.

It is difficult to verify Deane’s claim, but what is certain is that, unlike dedicated feminist publishers in Ireland, such as Attic Press, or its UK counterparts such as Virago and The Women’s Press, Salmon did not market itself as an explicitly feminist press. However, simply by publishing a representative number of women poets in a climate in which so few women poets had been able to thrive, Salmon’s audience received it as a press “for” women poets. “For ages Salmon was known as a feminist press, even though we always published men,” said Jessie Lendennie in a 2008 interview. “It was just so startling; it was such an innovation at the time.”\textsuperscript{119} Although it is a fiction, the myth of Salmon’s status as a “women’s press” contributed to the creation of a demand for books of poetry by women writers: by 1992, for example, Deane was being criticised for publishing too few women poets. Through its emphasis upon publishing a relatively equal number of male and female writers, then, Salmon directly fulfilled a feminist agenda. Moreover, Salmon successfully created a market for itself: like American trade publisher Avon (albeit on a much smaller scale), Salmon “had smartly created a demand through heavy advertising and promotion....It invented its own trend, which is clever paperback publishing.”\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{117} Dennis Hannon and Nancy Means Wright, “Irish Women Poets: Breaking the Silence.” The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies 16:2 (December 1990): 57-65, 57. Hannon and Wright wrongly credit Attic Press with publishing this percentage of poetry by women: Attic Press could not have done so, since it was founded after the survey was carried out, in 1984.
\textsuperscript{118} Penguin’s situation was different, of course, in that it made a conscious, calculated effort to do this.
\textsuperscript{119} Jessie Lendennie, Personal Interview. 4 March 2008.
\textsuperscript{120} Yvonne McManus of Major Books quoted in Radway, 34.
An important consequence of the development of the Salmon brand, and a mark of its success, was the international recognition it began to attract, as demonstrated by the interest it garnered from well-known poets outside of Ireland, such as Adrienne Rich and Carol Ann Duffy. As a literary magazine, the international reach of The Salmon was limited, but as a book publisher, Salmon was able to create and maintain links between the west of Ireland and a more global reader- and writership, establishing its presence not only locally and nationally, but also internationally. Significantly, the American poet and activist Rich and the Scottish poet Duffy each agreed to publish a selected volume of their work with Salmon. Through special permission with her American publisher, W. W. Norton, Rich’s Selected Poems: 1950-1995 was published by Salmon in 1996.  

Within a week after Rich went back to the States she contacted Salmon, and discussions on publishing a Selected Poems began. A few years later, in 2000, Salmon also published The Salmon Carol Ann Duffy: poems selected and new 1985-1999. Duffy’s work was receiving increasing acclaim; nine years later, in 2009, she was appointed Britain’s poet laureate, the first woman to receive the appointment.

Salmon also received critical attention from American academics in the 1990s, as its branding efforts increased its visibility, and as Ireland became known as a fertile environment for new work by women writers. In 1991, an article on Salmon Publishing by Victor Luftig, professor of English at the University of Virginia, appeared in Eire/Ireland: “A Migrant Mind in a Mobile Home: Salmon Publishing in the Ireland of the 1990s” praises Salmon for its particular sort of internationalism, which “is matched by comparable diversity in gender, generation, style, and

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121 W. W. Norton granted Lendennie the right to publish a selected edition of Rich’s poems, in a limited edition with a print run of up to 5000 copies, for sale within Ireland and the UK only. In December 2010, Rich was invited to comment on her experience with Salmon for this dissertation, but her lack of response indicates that she declined to do so. Correspondence between Rich and Salmon is available in MS 438, Box 8, F175, F176, and F177, ASP.

Luftig was attracted by the press’s inclusiveness: where some explicitly feminist presses such as Attic published only work by women living and working in Ireland, Salmon’s list included Irish emigrants, writers from both North and South, and writers from a larger Europe – an unusual scope for a poetry publisher at the time. “Nor is Salmon’s internationalism of a kind that will point Ireland exclusively towards Europe. That Salmon’s founder and head is an expatriate American pulls it naturally in this direction, as does its Galway location,” writes Luftig, for whom Salmon’s significant achievement is its embodiment of the “migrant mind;” Salmon, he argues, deserves praise for embracing and cultivating creative work rising out of “imaginations grounded in an Ireland bolstered by its diverse contacts.”

In his study of aspirant writers and what he calls the “democratization of writing” in pre-wartime and wartime Britain, Christopher Hilliard (2006) “suggest[s] that if anything makes the place of literature and the arts in a society “democratic,” it is a shared sense of entitlement to participate in cultural activities” – which includes both the production and consumption, the writing and reading, of literature. “Democratization of culture,” for Hilliard, occurs when “the strata actively participating in cultural life, either as creators or as recipients,” become broader and more inclusive. This was a direct consequence of the activity of Salmon Publishing, which resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of Irish women and men who were able to engage in not just the reading but also the writing of poetry, and to “realiz[e] that the expression of their lives as poets had real worth.” The development of Salmon Publishing as a brand was crucial to its survival and its success – and to its development of an alternative to the publishing options available in Ireland in the last decades of the twentieth century. The growth of the Salmon brand helped to create a literary environment in which the work of emerging poets, especially women poets, was valued.

124 Luftig, 109.
125 Hilliard, 5.
126 Hilliard, 5.
Located outside of Dublin-based publishing circles, Salmon did not have to compete directly with more “established” presses. All other Irish publishers were managed by Irish men, while Salmon’s director is an American woman: like Philip Hobsbaum’s role within the group of writers in the Belfast “renaissance” of the 1960s, Lendennie’s status as an “outsider” may have permitted her to remain at a remove from certain limiting discourses and prejudices that, had she been Irish, might have influenced her criteria for what an Irish publisher could, or should, publish.\(^\text{128}\) Also, as an individual, Lendennie was familiar to many of her early authors, knowing many of them from publishing their work in The Salmon: this must have made the experience of seeking publication less daunting than sending a manuscript to a faceless, often Dublin-based, address. Being a woman, the publisher could be thought of as more “approachable,” especially by women writers, who may have perceived male, Dublin-based publishers as an unwelcoming and intimidating “old boys’ club.” Salmon published more books per year than its contemporaries, so that a larger number of fledgling writers could have the opportunity to produce a first collection, a boon to new Irish writing that cannot be overstated: in order for new writers to develop and mature, publishing opportunities must be present and available.

As Salmon’s focus became increasingly specific, concentrating solely on the publication of single-title volumes of poetry, a number of the poets who published their early work in The Salmon also concentrated on producing individual collections, which would be crucial to building their careers. The following three chapters explore the individual work of three prominent poets published by Salmon who have been selected as representations of the publisher’s contribution to Irish literature.

\(^{128}\) Clark, 60.
Poetry has enjoyed a long-standing, if complicated, relationship with visual art. At least since Homer’s lengthy description of the shield of Achilles in *The Iliad*, poets have looked to the visual arts for inspiration.¹ According to critic Elizabeth Bergmann Loizeaux (2011), “[n]early every poet has turned, at least once, many again and again, to painting and sculpture, and to that genre that stages their interaction.”² The term for that genre is *ekphrasis*, which is translated from the Greek as “to speak out.”³ The name of the genre itself gestures toward the urgency of the poet’s need to respond to visual art; being faced with a work of art, particularly a painting, creates an impulse in the poet to speak of, for, or about it. This tension or impulse, for Loizeaux, is due to the envy that poetry harbours for its “sister art,” painting.⁴ “No amount of talk about the illusion of the natural sign in painting,” she writes, “about images as semiotic systems too, or about writing as itself visual and material, can do away with the suspicion that the image participates in the physical world and/or can give access to it in a more direct, less mediated way than language.”⁵ Ekphrasis, then, is an attempt to interrogate that suspicion: in works of ekphrasis, poets respond verbally to the call that visual art issues to them.

Engagement with visual art figures strongly in the work of the poet Eva Bourke. An early member of the Galway Writers’ Workshop, Bourke’s work appears in five issues of *The Salmon* between 1984 and 1990; accordingly, she was the eighth most frequent contributor to the magazine.⁶ Her poems “Gonella” and “Dead Swan” appear in its ninth issue; “Two Times Two in Domestic Interior” in the tenth issue;

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⁴ Articulated in the *Ars Poetica*, Horace’s famous dictum “*ut pictura poeisis*”(line 361) – “as painting is, so poetry should be” – suggested that poetry should aspire to be a speaking picture, a comparison which led to the designation of the two forms of expression as the “sister arts.” According to C.O. Brink, Simonides, in fact, “called a picture silent poetry and poetry a speaking picture,” and argues that Horace’s intended meaning was not to praise one over the other, but to suggest that both poetry and painting should be able to “stand up to inspection” and reward repeated readings. (C. O. Brink, *Horace on Poetry: The ‘Ars Poetica.’* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971: 369.
⁵ Loizeaux, 5.
⁶ See Appendix 2.
“Day Return” and “The Alder” in the sixteenth issue; “The Book” and “Young Bat” in the nineteenth issue; and “For Davoren Hanna” is featured in the double issue that combines *The Salmon*’s twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth issue.

Bourke’s debut collection, *Gonella* (1985), was Salmon Publishing’s inaugural title, and it also published her subsequent collection, *Litany for the Pig* (1988). She is also the author of four other collections of poetry, all of which were published by Dedalus: *Spring in Henry Street* (1996); *Travels with Gandolpho* (2000); *The Latitude of Naples* (2005); and *Piano* (2011). Although Bourke has been a staunch supporter of Salmon throughout her career, as evidenced by her 2008 article “A parent to poetry,” which praises Salmon’s contribution to poetry in Ireland – her connection to Salmon fell victim to the publisher’s precarious financial situation. Salmon publisher Jessie Lendennie described Bourke’s relationship to the press in a 2008 interview: “Eva probably would still be with us, but at the time that her third book was ready, we just couldn’t do it,” she said. “Luckily then, she had a connection with Dedalus because of her translations, and [with] John [F.] Deane… so she stayed with them.”

Although much of Bourke’s ekphrastic poetry appears in collections published by Dedalus, it is part of a continuum begun by the collections published by Salmon: the title poem of her first collection, “Gonella,” for example, is a work of ekphrasis which takes its inspiration from a fifteenth-century portrait of a court jester in Vienna’s Kunsthistorische Museum. Throughout her two volumes published by Salmon as well as in her subsequent work, Bourke has demonstrated a visible and continual engagement with the visual arts.

Poets have turned to the visual arts as subjects for their poems with increasing frequency from the twentieth century onwards, and while critical studies of ekphrasis have certainly enjoyed something of a renaissance over the past two decades as scholars examine the ways in which writers negotiate the ekphrastic engagement, the act of writing or speaking about works of art is far older. According to classicist Simon Goldhill (2007), in Hellenistic culture, “ekphrasis” was a rhetorical device, “a descriptive speech that brings the thing shown vividly before the eyes.”

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7 Eva Bourke, “A parent to poetry.” *The Irish Times*, Saturday, 23 February 2008: 54.
8 Lendennie, Jessie. Personal interview. 4 March 2008.
of “enargeia,” which translates as “the ability to make visible.” Similar to a theatrical performance, the goal of enargeia was to make the listener become “almost” a viewer. Through the skilled use of such vivid language, the orator becomes able to “get around the censor of the intellect” by securing entrance to the listener’s emotions via astonishment or excitement, and can thus gain access to her or his “innermost mind.” More is at stake for the listener/viewer than the mere pleasure or distraction: enargeia, as deployed through ekphrasis, “sets out to make a slave of,” or trick, the listener by slipping past the guard-dog of rational thought and holding the listener in thrall. This is not to say that ekphrasis’s goal is achieved by spectacle or astonishment; in fact, it intends to alter the listener/viewer’s very act of looking.

In order to illustrate this, Goldhill discusses the Hellenistic use of ekphrastic epigrams that were often written to praise a work of art, taking as an example a collection of thirty-six poems on Myron’s Cow. The authors of these epigrams, he explains, did not intend to put forth a description of the actual work of art, but to offer articulations of “discrete, pointed, witty surprise,” such as “When you see this heifer of Myron, you will perhaps shout:/ ‘Either Nature is lifeless, or Art is alive.’” These epigrams vividly demonstrate that ekphrasis does more than respond to a work of art or astonish its audience: it instructs its listeners in how to look, and how to verbalize the act of looking. As Loizeaux notes, this type of ekphrasis “[f]ocused on a particular kind of description rather than specific subject matter”; the emphasis lay not on the relationship, or the boundaries, between the poem and the artwork, but on the skilled description itself.

This perspective, in its attention to the rhetoric of description and its privileging of spectacle and surprise, became diminished in later discussions of ekphrasis. Leonardo da Vinci presented the interaction between forms of expression – specifically, painting and sculpture – as a contest or paragone in his Treatise On

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10 Goldhill, 3.
11 Goldhill, 7.
12 Goldhill, 4.
13 Myron’s Cow, a renowned statue of a cow, first stood in the Agora, or assembly-space, in Athens, and was later moved to Rome. See Niall Livingstone and Gideon Nisbet, Epigram. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010: 7.
14 Goldhill, 18.
15 Loizeaux, 12.
Painting (first published in 1651), in which he argued for the superiority of painting.\(^{16}\) The concept of a contest or battle as a metaphor for the relationship between the forms of expression was continued by the eighteenth-century German philosopher and art critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781). In his seminal treatise *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), Lessing contends that “painting employs wholly different signs or means of imitation from poetry, – the one using forms and colours in space, the other articulate sounds in time;” or, in Loizeaux’s words, the former is a spatial art, while the latter is a temporal one.\(^{17}\) This construction of poetry and painting as adversaries or opposites assigns gendered attributes to each form of expression: the former is “abstract, rational, active, logical, and male, and the latter is “bodily… still, silent, and feminine.”\(^{18}\)

This gendered paradigm continued through the nineteenth century – William Blake (1757-1827), for example, wrote, “…Time & Space are Real Beings, a Male & a Female. Time is a Man, Space is a Woman” – and well into the twentieth, but it is not the only legacy that nineteenth-century ekphrastic thought bequeathed to writers of the following century. Elizabeth Loizeaux and James Heffernan, among others, have demonstrated that ekphrastic poetry by twentieth-century authors owes much to the founding of public art museums, beginning in the late eighteenth century and continuing through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These institutions allowed works of art to become accessible to large audiences for the first time.\(^{19}\) “Aside from a few poems on portraits in the seventeenth century,” Heffernan claims, “the first truly distinguished specimens of self-sufficient ekphrastic poetry emerge in the romantic period when… the establishment of the museum began to make individual works available for detailed scrutiny.”\(^{20}\) It is no surprise, then, that many of the best-known poems of the nineteenth century engage (real or imaginary) works of art, including “Ozymandias” and “On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery”


\(^{17}\) Lessing, 91; Loizeaux, 14. The Dresden Gallery was opened in 1768, and the National Gallery of London in 1824.

\(^{18}\) Loizeaux, 14.

\(^{19}\) Loizeaux, 4.

by Percy Bysshe Shelley; “My Last Duchess” by Robert Browning; the sonnets of Dante Gabriel Rossetti; and, most famously, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats.

By the twentieth century, the staging of the ekphrastic encounter within the space of the art museum and gallery was commonplace. W.H. Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts,” for example, as James Heffernan notes, takes the museum setting for granted – in it, Heffernan identifies a kind of numbness or “aesthetic detachment” in the poetic speaker, possibly induced by the overwhelming number of artworks on display in such a museum. Other well-known British writers of the twentieth century have crossed the boundary between art and poetry: in “The Thermal Stair,” W. S. Graham begs his deceased friend, the painter Peter Lanyon, to “Give me your hand, Peter/ To steady me on the word,” while Ted Hughes and Leonard Baskin collaborated in Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama (1978). In the United States, engagement with visual art was particularly significant to the group of poets known as the New York School. Frank O’Hara, John Ashbery, Ted Berrigan, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler, and Barbara Guest were intimately involved with visual artists, both personally and professionally; O’Hara and Ashbery were art critics as well as poets, and O’Hara became curator of the Museum of Modern Art before he reached the age of forty. Ekphrastic engagement was a significant part of New York school aesthetics, and this may be due to the fact that the ekphrastic act, as W. J. T. Mitchell suggests, is ultimately a conversation with an otherness that cannot be conquered or assimilated, an otherness that insists on remaining at a remove from the poet. Loizeaux agrees, “[t]he ekphrastic poem is all about that otherness, and about how one engages with it.” Frank O’Hara articulates this otherness directly in his poem “To Larry Rivers;” in it, he consoles his artist friend who is “worried” that he “do[esn’t] write.” O’Hara exhorts his friend, “Don’t complain, my dear,/ You do what I can only name.” As the title of O’Hara’s poem suggests, ekphrasis is inherently dialogic, and so it is also inherently social, implying a complex network connecting

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21 See Heffernan’s chapter “Modern and Postmodern Ekphrasis: Entering the Museum of Art” in Museum of Words (139-190) for an investigation of the functions of the “glance” and the “gaze” in “My Last Duchess.”
22 See Loizeaux’s chapter, “Hughes and Baskin’s Cave Birds” in Twentieth Century Poetry and the Visual Arts, 135-162.
23 Loizeaux, 9.
poet, painter, and, significantly, “the reader-spectator, who shares the writer’s contemplation of an external artifact.” The ekphrastic encounter, then, is inherently inclusive, not exclusive, of its audience, a perspective that would become “increasingly important in the twentieth century as poetry further lost popular readership and its significant social role.”

Twentieth and twenty-first century ekphrastic theory has continued the metaphor of contest articulated by Da Vinci and Lessing. For Murray Krieger (1967), ekphrasis is not a specific literary genre based around an interaction between textual and visual art, but is instead a principle of literature, a “general principle of poetics, asserted by every poem in the assertion of its integrity.” Every poem performs an ekphrasis of sorts, Krieger argues, since the artwork is a symbol for the “frozen, stilled world of plastic relationships which must be superimposed upon literature’s turning world to ‘still’ it;” that is, the artwork represents the “formal arrangement” that must be superimposed upon language’s inherent ephemerality in order to deliver it into spatial existence.

W. J. T. Mitchell, in his influential essay “Ekphrasis and the Other” (1980), disagrees with Krieger’s argument, but continues to utilize the language of conflict or battle to describe the relationship between poetry and the visual arts: for Mitchell, ekphrasis takes the form of a contest between two worthy opponents. “Ekphrastic poetry is the genre in which texts encounter their own semiotic ‘others,’” he asserts, “those rival, alien modes of representation called the visual, graphic, plastic or ‘spatial’ arts.” For Mitchell, ekphrasis is far from a minor, obscure genre limited to poems “about” paintings: the difference between text and image represents nothing less than the difference between self and other, one that is grounded in our “ambivalence about other people, regarded as subjects and objects in the field of verbal and visual representation.” However, he has little to say on the gendered paradigm of the ekphrastic encounter: he admits that the texts he discusses are “canonical in their staging of ekphrasis as a suturing of dominant gender
stereotypes into the semiotic structure of the imagetext, the image identified as feminine, the speaking/seeing subject of the text identified as masculine.”

Although he claims that “[a]l this would look quite different, of course, if my emphasis had been on ekphrastic poetry by women,” he does not offer any suggestions as to how that difference might make itself manifest.

Where Mitchell focuses his argument specifically on poems that interrogate works of visual art, more recently, the jurisdiction of ekphrasis has been extended to include “visual-textual relations” in a more general sense. For Susan Harrow (2010), “[c]ontemporary ekphrastic poetics is revitalizing our understanding of the vivid, volatile relations between words and pictures. A ground-shifting, dialogic discipline, ekphrastic poetics, in its audacious interdisciplinary reach,” she claims, “stretches beyond the territory of the visual” and indeed beyond the territory of the written word. In recent years, ekphrasis has come to refer not only to texts “about” artworks but also to the “verbal representation of a real or fictitious text composed in a nonverbal sign system.” Accordingly, critics such as Siglind Bruhn (2000, 2008) have begun to examine instances of musical ekphrasis, in which composers respond in musical language to works of art, while others, such as Julian Hanich (2011), consider the implications of cinematic ekphrasis, which consists of “verbal descriptions of something not visually or aurally present in the shot.”

Clearly, the concept of ekphrasis has become a useful paradigm for considering the relationships between myriad forms of representation. However, James Heffernan’s (1991) definition of the term is most useful to the discussion of ekphrastic poetry in this chapter, for it privileges the relationship between the written word and the work of visual art. Heffernan’s definition is deceptively simple – “ekphrasis,” he writes, “is the verbal representation of graphic representation” – but its merit lies in the fact that it is flexible enough to encompass many kinds of texts while retaining distinct parameters. Unlike Krieger’s extrapolation, in which every

31 Mitchell, 181.
32 Mitchell, 181.
36 Heffernan, 299.
poem performs an ekphrasis, it is not so wide that it “no longer serves to contain any particular kind of literature,” yet it is not so rigid as to limit ekphrasis to a minor subgenre. Following Heffernan’s interpretation, then, in this chapter, “ekphrasis” is used to refer specifically to poems that respond in some way to works of visual art.

Although twentieth century female poets such as Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, and Adrienne Rich, among others, have been drawn to ekphrasis, the traditionally gendered ekphrastic exchange continued to present challenges to women poets who would engage in ekphrasis. Lessing’s gender-based distinctions between poetry and painting have served, unsurprisingly, to attempt to write the feminine subject out of the genre entirely; she may be spoken about, but can have no voice herself. W. J. T. Mitchell agrees that the “genre…tends to describe an object of visual pleasure and fascination from a masculine perspective, often to an audience understood to be masculine as well.”

Probably the most famous example of an ekphrastic encounter, Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” is one example of this gendered gaze, writes Mitchell, in which the “still unravish’d bride of quietness” is a “potential object of violence and erotic fantasy.”

Taking his cue from Mitchell, James Heffernan (2004) concurs that “[t]he contest [ekphrasis] stages is often powerfully gendered: the expression of a duel between male and female gazes, the voice of male speech striving to overcome the fixating impact of beauty poised in space.” However, it is not a duel in which the opponents are on equal footing, for the female gaze – that is, the image itself – cannot be envoiced: it is necessarily silent. Couched in terms of eroticism or warfare, or both simultaneously, such a conception of the word-image relationship disturbingly constructs the feminine as an object that “wants” to be possessed, even if it “resists” such possession. Moreover, it situates the feminine at both ends of a misogynist spectrum in which the “feminine” image is either sexually desirable on the one hand, or vile and threatening on the other. As Elizabeth Loizeaux points out, for example, “in Shelley’s ‘On the Medusa of

37 Heffernan, 298.
39 Mitchell, 170.
Leonardo da Vinci, in the Florentine Gallery’ (1819)... the Gorgon’s severed head stills the viewer: she ‘turns the gazer’s spirit into stone.’”

By the late twentieth century, female literary critics, art historians, and poets offered critiques of, and alternatives to, such a masculinist way of encountering the image. In *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, (1988), art historian Griselda Pollock denounces ekphrases such as these as evidence of the way in which “woman is fashioned to be the sign and object of man’s desire in patriarchal discourse.” For Pollock, the feminized image, interpreted as the silent and still object of contemplation by a (male) poet, is evidence of the “relentless inscription of masculine desire.” Indeed, in *Vision and Difference*, as well as other of her texts, Pollock raises a number of questions that are relevant to the ways in which women respond to works of art. How, if at all, Pollock demands, can women “speak/represent within a culture which defines the feminine as silenced other?”

Moreover, would images be “read” differently depending on the viewer’s gender—and how would ekphrastic texts that sprang from such readings look? Pollock’s goal is the staging of “a feminist intervention in the histories of art,” as she phrases it, and is less concerned with poetic responses to works of art than she is with writing women back into the history of art as subjects, not objects.

In *Twentieth Century Poetry and the Visual Arts* (2008), Elizabeth Loizeaux answers Pollock’s question in the affirmative. Given the deeply gendered lines along which ekphrasis has been produced, it is easy to imagine that the genre would be uncongenial to women writers. Loizeaux argues that this is not so. “When one reconsiders the history of ekphrasis, it’s clear women have practiced it all along from

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41 Loizeaux, 20.
42 Pollock, 188.
44 Pollock, 15.
the Greeks through Joanna Baillie to Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Michael Field,” she writes,

and especially in the twentieth century: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, Elizabeth Bishop, Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Roseanna Warren, Jorie Graham, Rita Dove, Eavan Boland, Maya Angelou, among others. Have these women simply assented to the options Laura Mulvey famously set out for female spectators: to ‘take the place of the male or to accept the position of male-created seductive passivity’?  

For Loizeaux, one way for women writers to refuse either of the options that Mulvey puts forward is to engage in what Loizeaux herself calls “feminist ekphrasis,” a term that can be defined as “that strain of modern ekphrasis by women that recognizes the power of a sexually charged, male tradition of looking, takes it on, and challenges its gendered dynamics.” Strengthening her argument with her explorations of the ekphrases of Marianne Moore and Adrienne Rich, Loizeaux insists that women poets have indeed found strategies for encountering and representing images in ways that do not subscribe to traditional notions of gender, and that complicate and expand settled ideas of what it means to respond verbally to images. Among these is the notion that the conversation between text and image no longer need be “a struggle for mastery,” so to speak, but rather a collaboration: or, in Susan Harrow’s words, “a desire to develop the ekphrastic beyond the traditional assumptions of linear influence, mimetic translation, and textual incorporation” so that we may “conceive not of rival arts but of reciprocal visual and textual cultures.”

Irish poets, too, have long been attuned to the visual arts. “Twentieth-century ekphrasis is an international phenomenon that invigorated American poetry…as well as English poetry… and, especially, Irish poetry in works from Yeats through Heaney, Mahon, Boland and Muldoon,” Elizabeth Loizeaux notes. To this list Loizeaux adds Paul Durcan, whose book of ekphrastic encounters with works of art housed in the National Gallery of Ireland, Crazy About Women (1991), allegedly sold

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46 Loizeaux, 80-1.
47 Loizeaux, 81. As Loizeaux points out, feminist ekphrasis has also been written by men, and cites Irving Feldman’s “Portrait de Femme” (1965) as an example.
48 Harrow, 257.
20,000 copies in its first two months. Louis MacNeice, Michael Longley, and Tom French, among others, have also practiced ekphrasis, as have many contemporary Irish women poets. Several of the poems in Eithne Strong’s *Spatial Nosing* (1993) respond to works by Magritte and Munch. Mary O’Donoghue’s “Harmony in Blue,” published in her collection *Tullie* (2001), responds to the painting by Symbolist artist Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer. Jo Slade, *City of Bridges* (2005). Moya Cannon takes inspiration from cave paintings in poems such as “Vogelherd Horse, 30,000 B.C.” and “Chauvet” in *Carrying the Songs* (2008). Eavan Boland continues to engage with visual art in her poetry as well as in her most recent work of prose, *A Journey With Two Maps* (2011). In it, she uses an unexpected encounter in a gallery with a painting by her mother, the painter Frances Kelly (1908-2002), as a springboard for a meditation – an ekphrasis in prose, perhaps – on the impossibility of single authorship; the young Boland recognises the painting as her mother’s, but sees that it has been signed by her mother’s mentor instead, effectively erasing her as the painting’s “true” author. At first saddened and betrayed, she recollects the experience as an older woman, commenting:

…[T]he painting itself was made by one person, signed by another and seen by a third; who was herself authored by the first. It existed in a nation which added another element, so that history was woven into the image and my reaction to it. In the end, the laying down of these different authorial layers infinitely complicated the idea of single authorship. So much so, that the idea on its own seemed no longer tenable…It was not a moment to confuse authorship with ownership. And yet that was exactly what I had done….I chose to see only what offended my early belief – that the single artist was the source of art. I allowed the definition of the author to overwhelm the existence of the art.”

Here, for Boland, an encounter with visual art allows her to draw parallels with authorship in the context of the written word, highlighting the way in which both painting and poetry can hardly make unqualified claims to single authorship.

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49 Loizeaux, 61. *Crazy About Women* is not the only collection of Durcan’s that engages visual art. In the introduction to *Crazy About Women*, Durcan claims that visual images are crucial to his practice as a poet. “Picture-making is the air I breathe,” he asserts. (Durcan quoted in Loizeaux, 61.)

Literary critics have begun to devote attention to ekphrases by Irish poets such as these. In “Canvas and Camera Translated: Paul Durcan and the Visual Arts” (1989), Kathleen McCracken does not use the term “ekphrasis” explicitly, but suggests nonetheless that “much of the richness of Durcan’s poetry resides in…a kind of mystery: a transference, both in form and content, of impressions received from a visual into a verbal medium.” Nearly twenty years later, Loiseaux too considers Durcan’s work in her book chapter, “Private lives in public places: Yeats and Durcan in Dublin’s galleries,” which investigates the way the poets’ engagement with the public art museum and the images it houses has helped to articulate, and indeed to construct, Irish national identity in the twentieth century. “Yeats’s and Durcan’s poems speak out of art museums whose roles as preservers of the community’s values were still being written, and by these poems,” she writes. More recently, Karen E. Brown explores the way in which inter-art collaborations among members of the Yeats family contributed to the shift from Irish Revival to Irish Modernist aesthetics in The Yeats Circle: Verbal and Visual Relations in Ireland, 1880-1939 (2011). Other contemporary critics are attuned to the way in which Northern Irish poets practice ekphrasis, notably Rui Carvalho Homem. Homem addresses ekphrasis in Michael Longley’s work, approaching it as a form of translation or translatio, from the Latin: the latter term emphasises the dis-location and subsequent re-location inherent in the act of (to paraphrase James Heffernan) using one medium of representation to represent another. Homem also explores Derek Mahon’s ekphrastic poetry from the perspective of revision or translation, focusing on the intertextual aspect of the practice.

The visual arts appear with frequency throughout the oeuvre of the poet Eva Bourke, who emigrated to Ireland from Germany as a young woman, having studied German literature and art history at the University of Munich. As discussed in Chapter 3, Bourke’s first publisher, Salmon, has displayed a continual commitment to

52 Loizeaux, 35.
the relationship between image and text, from its beginnings as a little magazine throughout its lifetime as a publisher of single-title volumes of poetry. It is not unusual, then, that Bourke’s first collection – the first title to be published by Salmon – was a work of collaboration between the poet and her sister-in-law, artist Jay Murphy. One review of her first collection, *Gonella*, commented on this unusually close collaboration, noting that “…poet and artist worked together throughout, so these drawings really are illustrations, or what could better be described as parallels in a different medium, to the poems.” A reviewer of her third collection pointed to the “ripe textures of oils and landscapes” it laid out, while a critic of her 2005 collection, *The Latitude of Naples*, remarked that “[T]he visual arts make up part of the package in this collection – quite a few poems are about artists, their studios and such exigencies. While these are diverting,” the reviewer allows, he is displeased by the “Narcissus-factor of the depiction of creative endeavour.”

Other reviewers praise Bourke’s range of subjects and poetic subjects, as well as her cosmopolitan perspective. “She sees the world…through the eyes of adults, children, animals,” writes one, “[from] medieval Italy, Mandarin China, modern Germany, from Connemara to Manila and El Salvador; from a Chinese woodcut to an Irish postcard.” Another, writing on *Latitude of Naples*, comments on “some rhythms and cadences [which are] refreshingly and demandingly new to the Irish ear – which says something about [Irish readers], really: they wouldn’t be new to a truly European ear.” Much critical work is yet to be done on Bourke’s work, and, despite reviewers’ attunement to the place of visual art in her poetry, she has not been thought of before as an ekphrastic poet.

56 Born in 1952, Jay Murphy studied at the Dun Laoghaire School of Art and the Central School in London. She is a founder member of independent artists’ organisations Fioruisce, Western Artists, and AKIN. Her work has been exhibited in galleries throughout Ireland, including The Kenny Gallery in Galway. The Irish artist Brian Bourke is her husband. (“The Kenny Gallery: Jay Murphy.” The Kenny Gallery. Web. Accessed 24 July 2012.)
57 Avril Forrest, “Eva Bourke: Gonella.” *The Connacht Tribune*, Friday, 8 November 1985: 19. Significantly, Forrest is careful not to subordinate image to text here; reluctant to refer to Murphy’s images as mere “illustrations,” s/he emphasizes the joint production of texts and images.
59 Kevin Kiely, “Vernacular Energies.” *Poetry Ireland Review* No. 86 (May 2006): 83-86, 83. Kiely goes on to praise “those poems [of Bourke’s] that are womanly and deal directly with the feminine.” (83) Kiely not only ignores the possibility of any fruitful poetic dialogue between image and text or between artist and poet: he also suggests, disturbingly, that Bourke would have done well to avoid the subject altogether and focus on subjects more “feminine” and “womanly.”
60 Forrest, 19.
Eva Bourke’s ekphrases engage with the question posed by Pollock and Loizeaux in their critical work: is the ekphrastic act different when practiced by women? Bourke’s poems about visual art suggest an answer in the affirmative. Eschewing traditionally gendered interpretations of ekphrasis, which privileges “male” narrative over “female” image, as well as a desire to possess or conquer a silent, still artwork, Bourke’s poems respond to visual art without antagonism. They celebrate the presence of the minute and detailed: a practice of looking that is born of disciplined, precise observation, as Loizeaux points out.62 Although she does not write ekphrases of household objects themselves,63 Bourke does turn her gaze on painterly representations of domestic interiors and household items, valuing them for their usefulness and simplicity as well as their beauty. Additionally, the way in which Bourke approaches visual art embraces disorder and the disjointed, and takes into account the location of the artwork within a cityscape, suggesting that the ekphrastic encounter is not limited to a single gaze between poet and art object, but that the encounter is intimately connected to the poet’s, and the artwork’s, surroundings. Bourke’s poems recognise multiple ways of seeing and multiple gazes – to borrow from Loizeaux, she “does not stand and stare at one thing too long” – offering readers a multidimensionalised version of the ekphrastic experience.64

In Elaine Scarry’s words, “Beauty always takes place in the particular, and if there are no particulars, the chances of seeing it go down.”65 Bourke focuses on the particular, to the minute and detailed within a work of art, in poems such as “Museum of Conquest” (Litany for the Pig, 1989), “Backyards, Interiors” (Spring in Henry Street, 1996), and “Artist in his Studio” (The Latitude of Naples, 2005). In the first section of “The Museum of Conquest,” Bourke, like Auden, Durcan, and so many others, steps into the territory of the museum. Her poetic speaker is a visitor to a museum of ancient history, and she finds herself dissatisfied with, and unsettled by, her surroundings: here, in the tradition of Shelley’s Ozymandias, artefacts of war act as memento mori for male conquerors. Yet they are devoid of true meaning for the

62 Loizeaux, 84.
63 As Loizeaux notes, the tradition of women writing ekphrases on household objects that are also works of art is strong: “Lines on a Teapot” by nineteenth-century British poet Joanna Baillie, “Things” by Gertrude Stein, and poems by Eavan Boland including “The Black Lace Fan My Mother Gave Me” and “The Shadow Doll,” both from Outside History (1990), are just a few examples. (88-89)
64 Loizeaux, 88.
65 Elaine Scarry, On Beauty and Being Just, 18.
poetic speaker, who finds little beauty in them: they are the trappings of a civilization, but, removed from the actual communities they were to signify, they lose significance. “Towers, battlements,/ Sphinx-guarded gates/,” the speaker muses, “but no cities.”\textsuperscript{66} Dwarfed by the sheer size of the giant artefacts that stand around her, acting as empty signifiers only, she moves around the museum’s wing, from “frieze after frieze/ of great wars,/ soldiers, chariots” cast in “the hard froth/ of marble” to “rows of giant kings,/ their eyes/ turned in/ towards black stone.”\textsuperscript{67} Here is male dominance set, quite literally, in stone. In Shelley’s “Medusa,” the male narrator fears the image that would have its revenge by rising up and silencing him, “turn[ing] the gazer’s spirit into stone;”\textsuperscript{68} here, the masculine images have already been rendered stony and silent before the female narrative gaze encounters them. However, the implication is that, while traditional articulations of the ekphrastic encounter suggest that the masculine narrator strives to “conquer” the feminine image, here those dynamics are powerfully reversed: the female narrator and her gaze now apprehend the male image, confident that it has been permanently silenced. “Everything’s petrified,” the speaker declares,

- permanently cast
- in the posture of attack
- or rigor mortis.

Rooms of conquests.

Rooms of death.\textsuperscript{69}

The grandiose has become an empty shell, gesturing only to what is no more. There is “[n]o sign of life/ on such heroic scale,” the speaker states, then addresses the reader directly with the command, “Let’s leave.”\textsuperscript{70} For her – although the speaker is

\textsuperscript{67} Bourke, 29: lines 3-5, 11-14.
\textsuperscript{69} Bourke, 29-30, lines 21-27.
\textsuperscript{70} Bourke, 30: lines 28-30. This is an example of deixis, an ekphrastic strategy that engages the reader by emphasizing the immediacy of the encounter, or the “here-and-now-ness” of it, by poetically
not explicitly gendered, the female pronoun is appropriate here, as Bourke privileges the female gaze over the male – the lofty and ostentatious can only end in dust. Viewing tombstone-like monuments to the “heroic” does not stimulate poetic inspiration, but brings it to an end. For Bourke’s speaker, the old maxim “God is in the details” rings true.

In the second part of the poem, the poetic speaker leads her reader away from the museum’s main exhibit of male dominance and battles fought and won, to a space in which she is far more comfortable: “a side room,” where

three earth mother figures
each no taller
than an index finger
hold their bellies/
as though – with a laugh –
they could split into twin fruit
like chestnuts.71

Here, at last, are the “sign[s] of life” she sought, in a collection of tiny female figurines that, unlike the monuments in the neighbouring room, refuse to take themselves too seriously. After all, both expectant motherhood and humour bear fruit: the former in a child, and the latter in the infectious act of laughing. These women are pregnant not only with human offspring, but also with joyful self-expression.

Next, the museum-goer turns her attention to a nearby “small clay bath” that stands alongside “a child-size sarcophagus.”72 Bourke steps back from the poignancy of the miniature sarcophagus to focus on the perfectly-preserved bath, a familiar domestic object, created to be useful, and to be used frequently. Therein, for Bourke’s speaker, lies its art, unchanged over time:

“pointing” to a particular aspect of an artwork. It is often articulated in exclamatory comments or commands to the reader such as “Look,” “There!” or “This.” See an example of this in Adrienne Rich’s “Mathilde in Normandy,” as indicated by Loizeaux (97). Here, unusually, Bourke does not merely “point” to a single artwork; instead, her speaker expects that the reader will join her not only in poetically “noticing” one aspect of the image, but by joining her on a “virtual tour” of the entire museum.

71 Bourke, 30, lines 31-38.
72 Bourke, 30, lines 41, 40.
2000 years left no mark
on its form.
Its highest function
lying on the scale
of intimacy and touch,
it is compact
and serviceable.\textsuperscript{73}

Form mirrors content in “Museum of Conquest:” its short, cleanly descriptive lines convince with minimal pomp and ornamentation. Perhaps these earth-mother figurines are representative, then, of what Bourke hopes to achieve in her work: a definitively feminine form of verse that, like her foremothers Baillie, Stein, Boland, and others, takes practical objects as the symbols with which to transmit meaning, and that recognises that the deepest meaning is rarely found in the large and overblown.

The last lines of this poem are some of the collection’s strongest:

Let’s rest
in this room for awhile
where the objects are small
and enduring.
Time shrinks all conquests
to nothing, but everything here
is large as life:

a Boetian woman
in a finely patterned garment,
a bronze cow that can fit
onto a palm,
a tiny child
holding an even tinier goose.\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{73} Bourke, 31, lines 51-57.
\textsuperscript{74} Bourke, 31, lines 58-71.
These artefacts in miniature are evocative of the wooden Russian “layered” dolls which contain smaller dolls within smaller dolls; they remind the reader that true meaning is created by the small and precise, and that the act of reading and understanding poetry is an internal act, one that forces the reader to turn into herself, not away from herself, and to contemplate the majestic via the meek.

Other of Bourke’s poems in Litany for the Pig engage with visual art in other forms than the ekphrastic exchange. “The Aquarium” is a concrete poem, or an example of what Heffernan would call “visual iconicity:” that is, “a visible resemblance between the arrangement of words or letters on a page and what they signify.”75 “Diptych of a Wedding” envoices a fictional female artist: the daughter of a labourer, she is commissioned to paint portraits of the nobility, but is not permitted to sign her name to her own work. Instead, she slips in a marker of her identity where it will go nearly unnoticed: she paints an unobtrusive portrait of herself into the diptych itself, as the face of a maidservant. In her third collection, Spring in Henry Street (Dedalus, 1996), published by Dedalus, Bourke returns to ekphrasis in her poem “Backyards, Interiors,” which begins with an intertextual reference: a line from Derek Mahon’s “Courtyards in Delft” (1981), in which he considers the same painting, “Courtyards in Delft” by Pieter de Hooch, 1659 (above). The first line of Mahon’s poem reads, “Oblique light on the trite, on brick and tile…”, and continues on to lament the painting’s primness – “Nothing is random, nothing goes to waste./ We miss the dirty dog, the fiery gin” – as well as its stasis: “That girl with her back to us who waits/ For her man to come home for his tea/ Will wait till the paint disintegrates…”76 It is not difficult to imagine that Bourke might have felt the need to respond to such an interpretation, especially in light of her praise of the miniature, the

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75 Heffernan, 300.
functional and the understated in “The Museum of Conquest,” and her respect for art objects that are “small and enduring.”

If Mahon mourns what he views as the necessary stasis of the feminine image – literally so, since it is a painting of three women in a domestic scene – Bourke grants the image a modicum of revenge by meditating on the way in which the useful can also be beautiful, not necessarily “trite,” and by narrating a number of possible futures for the women in the painting. First, Bourke leads us into a seventeenth-century “symphonie domestique,” meticulously describing each of its details: “the bucket beside the birch broom,” “ochre yard tiles”, a sky that “recall[s] wet blue sheets pegged up to dry,” all illuminated by watery, freshly-washed sunlight. If Mahon has looked past the bucket “rimmed with glistening drops,” Bourke notices the way in which it “takes up the motif of light again,” reflecting and augmenting the fragment of sky that is only just visible in the top centre of the canvas. It also draws the speaker’s eye to “the startling indigo of the woman’s skirt/ (the one standing on the outhouse steps/ holding her daughter’s hand):” on the woman’s clothing, the shared colour of sky, domestic object and dress is no longer simply pleasing, but “startling.” Suddenly, the reader is jolted into a deeper engagement with the poem: if Mahon writes silence and stillness into his ekphrasis, Bourke writes the potential for shock, movement, sound, and joy – “a sudden change from minor to major” – into hers.

Indeed, “Backyards, Interiors” is hardly a simple paean to domestic bliss. If, for Mahon, the most enigmatic female image in the painting – a faceless woman who turns her back on the viewer and shares the direction of the viewer’s gaze – can only be waiting for her husband, Bourke utilizes the ekphrastic mode to envoice, and suggest alternate possibilities for, the three females in the scene. Perhaps, she suggests, the faceless woman is “preparing for departure./ taking a last look,” and

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77 Bourke, Litany for the Pig, 31, lines 60-61. Bourke has commented on her reaction to Mahon’s poem in a 1999 interview with Danielle Sered: “Well, I did get a bit annoyed about his dismissing the whole thing as trite,” she told Sered, “and the only people I could see in the paintings were women, so being trivial and being a woman ... So here’s my woman poet’s reaction to that. What does he mean by that? Is it really trite? Are these women just house-proud and dour housewives? You know? So that was my response to that.” (Danielle Sered, “Interview with Eva Bourke.” Galway: 12 July 1999. Emory University Woodruff Library Special Collections, MS 853, Box 1, Folder 1: 1 tape, digitized.)


79 Bourke, 30, lines 11-12.

80 Bourke, 30, line 20.
urges her readers to look beyond “the sense of confined space” in the painting to what must lie beyond it, to where “there are doors flung open, windows/ letting in the sun, vistas of canals/ where eventually ships, tugs, trawlers must pass by.”

Bourke’s ekphrasis refuses to confine the women in “Courtyard in Delft” within the painting’s frame. As Loizeaux acknowledges, the notion “[t]hat the work of art may prove not still is one of the excitements of ekphrasis… When combined, as it often is, with the female gendering of the work of art in ekphrasis, the moving image can exert her power over the typically male viewer, sometimes rising up and speaking.”

It may be that Mahon “freezes” the women in the painting into immobility due to just such a fear: that the image will remain stubbornly kinetic, despite his efforts to conquer it through narration. Bourke, however, embraces the possibility of such motion, and suggests histories for the painting’s women – not by insisting upon a single ekphrastic reading of them, but by raising a number of questions:

Where, if they’re going, will these women go?
How far? The carved gilt frame?
Or will they – one mild autumn day – break out
of the confines of portraiture, crack through layers of paint,
disrupt the composition?

“To look and to record one’s looking is inevitably to set the scene in relation to oneself,” asserts Loizeaux: by declining the egocentricity of single authority, and by suggesting a number of perspectives on the action in “Courtyard in Delft,” Bourke is able to “read” the painting without compromising its integrity. Having done so, she is able to propose a future for one of the women in it, writing her out of de Hooch’s painting and into another; there, she will have her turn to “speak”:

One woman rises from having searched for lice
in her daughter’s hair,
tucks up her pinafore and starts
to pack a wicker basket.

81 Bourke, 31, lines 25-30.
82 Loizeaux, 20.
83 Bourke, 31, lines 31-35.
84 Loizeaux, 88.
She places a pistol beneath her linen shirts
...
her story will be told on a different panel,
already the colours have been rubbed and mixed
with linseed oil, the canvas is prepared.\textsuperscript{85}

In some of Bourke’s earlier poems, such as “Two Times Two in Domestic Interior” in \textit{Gonella}, or “Pygmalion” and “Diptych of a Wedding” in \textit{Litany for the Pig}, she paints her poetic speakers \textit{into} the paintings to which she responds, whether they are traditionally ekphrastic or not: they close themselves into rooms, hide themselves in paintings, and weave and unweave histories not their own. Here, however, the women are painted \textit{out} of the poems and set loose. Having broken free from the gilded prison of the painting’s frame, armed and dangerous, the woman with the pistol will soon demand her own ekphrasis, for “her story will be told on a different panel”: she “rises” up to claim her own narrative future, an audacious move that leaves the reader with a sense of tense possibility.\textsuperscript{86}

Precisely because of its domestic detail, and not in spite of it, “Backyards, Interiors,” like the artefacts with which Bourke engages in “The Museum of Conquest,” infers a world much larger than itself and a wide context for its inhabitants. Moreover, the poem is explicitly feminist in its engagement with de Hooch’s “Courtyard in Delft,” and also in response to Mahon’s overwhelmingly masculinist interpretation of the image. “Backyards, Interiors” is an articulation of feminist ekphrasis which, according to Loizeaux, “works specifically in self-conscious conversation with the idea of a mastering male gazer and a feminized art object.”\textsuperscript{87} In her poem, Bourke unsettles traditional ideas of the image as still and silent; she writes it out of its own frame, and does not attempt to possess it by giving a single reading, but rather, through her use of questions, suggests myriad meanings for

\textsuperscript{85} Bourke, 31, lines 36-40, 43-45.
\textsuperscript{86} Bourke herself commented on this sense of tension in the poem in a 1999 interview with Danielle Sered: “…[Salmon author John] Hildebidle, of MIT, he heard this poem at a reading once and came up to me after and said [assumes gravelly voice]: ‘I’m worried about that pistol!’” (Danielle Sered, “Interview with Eva Bourke.” Galway: 12 July 1999. Emory University Woodruff Library Special Collections, MS 853, Box 1, Folder 1: 1 tape, digitized.)
\textsuperscript{87} Loizeaux, 81.
it – and for the images of women in the painting. In this way, Bourke allows the image to take its revenge.

Elaine Scarry argues that beauty is associated “with error, for it brings one face-to-face with one’s own errors: momentarily stunned by beauty, the mind before long begins to create or to recall and, in doing so, soon discovers the limits of its own starting place, … or may instead… uncover the limitlessness of the beautiful thing it beholds.”88 “Letter to Sujata: On the occasion of a visit to Paula Modersohn-Becker’s exhibition in Bremen 1996,” published in Bourke’s fourth collection, Travels with Gandolphi (2000), embraces a sort of artistic wandering that is experiential, intellectual, and organic, and conducive to chance and wonder. Parallels for such an encounter exist in Barbara K. Fischer’s investigation of “site-specific” practices in the work of three contemporary female American poets (Cole Swensen, Kathleen Fraser and Anne Carson).89 These poets, Fischer argues, “compose ekphrastic poems through strenuous engagement with the place of the encounter.”90 For all three of these poets, she writes, “site specificity is also gender specificity.”91 Instead of viewing the ekphrastic exchange as if within a vacuum, in which text and artwork exist independently of their surroundings or other outside influences; for these poets, the interaction must inevitably take place somewhere, in a specific location. In acknowledging that poems are not site-specific in the same way that certain works of art are, Fischer expands the term to apply it to poems that feature “participation in a physical location,”92 while also stressing the materiality of painting, poem and setting; after all, she points out, painting, poem and setting all exist as objects. For Fischer, then, site-specificity is materiality, and – crucially – is enabled by deixis, or the “here-and-now” element of a text, that locates it within a particular time and place.93 It is the presence of this particularity which is crucial to the alteration the traditionally

88 Elaine Scarry, On Beauty and Being Just, 48.
90 Fischer, 143.
91 Fischer, 143.
92 Fischer, 144.
93 Fischer offers a more precise definition of the term than Loizeaux: for her, “Deixis is the equivalent, in a verbal medium, of the materials and tools that tether a site-specific visual or sculptural work to its landscape, street, or room… [Émile] Benveniste distinguishes deixis from what he calls the “historical” tense, the mode of objective description and exposition that arises from the impersonality of third-person narration.” (146)
gendered “he-she” gaze, for several reasons; first, that the particular resists
generalization; second, that the particular defies “masculine” rationality or logic and
welcomes error and chance; and third, that it possesses the power to disrupt, to
interject ‘interruptive, extraneous, and often disorienting reminders of the “here and
now,” and to reveal an infinite number of gazes within the ekphrastic exchange.⁹⁴

Bourke, too, engages site-specificity in her work: she retains a focus on the
particular as a way to “correct the reductive terms of gender difference and gendered
dominance in ekphrastic studies,”⁹⁵ but also includes an element of the enthralling or
enslaving “spectacle” as well as a variation of the idea of ekphrasis as a public, not
private, exchange, which Goldhill discusses in “What Is Ekphrasis For?” This concept
might be termed “experiential ekphrasis:” that is, an encounter with an artwork in
which the poet does not respond to a single artwork via a singular gaze, but instead
considers multiple factors, including, but not limited to: artwork, site of encounter
(gallery/museum/private home/studio, among others); geographical surroundings of
the site of encounter (city, village, meadow); companions or secondary viewers;
personal histories; and deictic “markers,” or indicators of the here-and-now that lend
the ekphrastic exchange particularity and specificity. Experiential ekphrasis allows for
an “holistic” poetic response to a work of art as well as the circumstances that allow it
to exist, one that is not necessarily based on a narration of the artwork or a description
of what it is “about,” which tends towards the traditionally-gendered “he-she”
polarity. Also, because it is irreproducible, and grounded in a particular experience of
which the artwork is a part, we must rely on the text to, in Goldhill’s words, “enthrall”
us into seeing the artwork/experience in our mind’s eye, which is not dissimilar to the
idea of the ekphrastic poem as “spectacle.”

A number of these factors are illustrated by Bourke’s poem “Letter to Sujata:
On the occasion of a visit to Paula Modersohn-Becker’s exhibition in Bremen 1996,”
published in Travels With Gandolpho (Dedalus, 2000). In it, the ekphrastic response
takes the form of a reminiscence of a circuitous journey in which Bourke meshes
artwork with exhibition space with viewer with the city that surrounds them all. Here,
already, the poem’s subtitle performs, in a way, the deixis that Fischer identifies; it

⁹⁴ Fischer, 147.
⁹⁵ Fischer, 147.
locates the reader firmly within a specific journey (“the occasion of a visit”), location (Bremen, Germany), and date (1996), even though the action in the poem occurs in retrospect, and not on “that November day/ ’96 in Bremen” itself. Though it is so firmly and quickly grounded in the “here and now,” this poem, paradoxically, also concerns the opposite condition; the instability and rootlessness of being an exile – even if that exile is self-imposed. This rootlessness is reflected in the poem’s conversational, rambling tone – not unlike Browning’s “My Last Duchess” – which nearly masks the poem’s surprisingly formal structure. “Letter to Sujata” consists of twelve stanzas of four couplets each and a final stanza of two couplets plus a fifth line, but the structure is scarcely noticeable on first reading, which is appropriate, given the wandering nature of the poem’s tone, its loose end rhyme, and the poem’s substantial length of over one hundred lines.

Although “Letter to Sujata” is focused around the titular exhibition of Paula Modersohn-Becker’s paintings, nearly half the poem elapses before the speaker addresses the artwork itself. First, she considers her surroundings, which consist of

…sullen drizzle that soft-pedals
the pavement turning to ice as it falls,
and same as here the sea’s just down the road,
like a relation bitter with life in the spare
room…

and then turns her gaze toward her companion on this outing, who, like Bourke, is an exile, who does not

fit in, in uneasy exile, self-chosen but real
nevertheless, both at times painfully made feel
other, outlandish. You, born in India,
graceful poet, who dreamt up in freezing Iowa

tropical gardens for picnics, now live in this
boreal town; (the poet’s the one who always

97 Bourke, 34, lines 3-8.
must leave, “saris flapping in the wind”, who carries
home “inside her darkness” wherever she goes)…  

The artwork with which they will engage cannot be viewed in any other way than as
themselves, as humans, as exiles; in fact, later in the poem, they will rejoice in the
celebration of human idiosyncracy and human error that Modersohn-Becker’s artwork
embraces, as does their own meandering journey through Bremen towards that
exhibition. It is the ‘humanness’ of this disorder that lifts both the speaker and her
companion – even if only temporarily – above the condition of exile: “here’s a
language that transcends the otherness,” the poetic speaker exclaims towards the end
of the poem.99

But for now, the journey is only beginning for these two exiles; Sujata,
“homesick for bougainvilleas/ the size of elephants” in her native India, and Bourke
– if it is the poet herself who speaks in this poem – homesick for something
intangible, unidentifiable, but very real.100 Being German by birth does not help her
now; the “self-chosen” exile of living abroad has been all too effective, and it is no
longer home.101 En route to the gallery that houses Becker’s exhibition, they move
from the regularity of the “tall patrician flat-chested houses in their grandeur” into a
fairy-tale-esque cityscape that delights the two women as well as Sujata’s young
daughter; it is not built of streets laid out in regular grids, nor is it lined with sedate,
identical rowhouses, but is made of

an unexpected alley

with madcap buildings gone cracked as Gaudi,
every-which-way the bricks, tiles and glass
stained bluer than the flames of city gas,

fat toads spout water, pixies hold flambeaux,

98 Bourke, 34, lines 13-20.
99 Bourke, 37, line 87.
100 Bourke, 35, lines 32-33.
101 Bourke, 34, line 13.
Several forms of art are speedily invoked in the language here; the ‘madcap’ architecture of Gaudi; the mosaics and the stained-glasswork; griffin-like toads are miniature fountains, while sculptures of pixies act as torchbearers. This is a litany of the contents of a veritable street-museum, but one that seems to be as alive as the women that observe it, and we are just as astonished and enchanted as they are. Here is Goldhill’s ekphrastic “spectacle” at work; a city street turned work of art turned fairyland. We, the readers, are also “enthralled,” and nearly feel that

…we, too, have found our feet
at last here in that topsy-turvy street
full of irreverent architectural pranks
in the universal language of high jinks –
imaginary gardens with live toads –
or high art, the real thing not some ersatz.¹⁰³

When she and her companion arrive at the gallery, the speaker is dazzled again; this time not by a fairy-land, but by the portraits on exhibition. There is nothing of the grandiose or august here, just plain, unrefined, vivid humanity, “bog-farmers’ faces/or their mothers’,” who bear “poverty’s stamp, thick noses, pale, thin hair.”¹⁰⁴ Their subjects may be plain, but these portraits are in no way dull, and here their evocation is all the more vivid for the spectacle of cityscape that preceded them. Now, the limelight of spectacle has shifted to the paintings; they are rich with colour: “rusts, duns and blues, the young mother, her breasts luminous/in a flame-red bodice as she feeds her baby, the most sensual Madonna you’ll ever see…lit up from within the layered paint, as though the canvas had been soaked in it.”¹⁰⁵

Finally, towards the poem’s conclusion, our narrator turns toward her inner landscape for a moment to meditate on ekphrasis herself:

…the painter’s true gift is her love, her genius,
how she with courteous and careful eyes
has put her drab and heavy subjects at their ease
and in the centre of their world, that’s what
it’s all about, speaks to us straight.
We know that poets often make up lies
so they can catch the tail-end of a truth,
but no matter how well and skilfully they do it,
it’s as nothing if that ingredient’s not in it.  

If this appears to be a simple alignment – “painting speaks truth while poetry lies” – it is only so upon first glance. Here, the artist’s impulse, a painting’s existence, the viewer’s response, and the poet’s role are considered simultaneously in a single element:” the call to “speak to us straight.” This is neither an exhortation to represent things “as they are” nor a call for a singular, or reductive, way of gazing; it is a recognition of an artist’s holistic approach to her subject, one that is built of a “courteous and careful” painterly gaze, one that is based on a fundamental openness to the infinite number of responses that might be evoked by any subject. A poet’s trade is “mak[ing] up lies,” and the poetic speaker, with her tongue rather in her cheek, indicts herself here, for, paradoxically she too must “makes up lies” in order to convey the ‘speaks-to-us-straight’ nature of Modersohn-Becker’s paintings.

Here, then, is a poem in which ekphrasis is not an attempt to control a work of visual art, but strives to convey the experience of viewing in its entirety, by focusing on the particular or the deictic via specific locators of time, place and circumstance; by embracing the necessarily fragmented or disorderly nature of the human gaze; and by practicing the element of spectacle that brings the artwork and the experience so vividly before our eyes. It is also significant that the three “viewers” in the poem – the speaker, Sujata, and daughter Jenny – are female. The act of looking has traditionally been gendered male, as has the act of looking in public: as Griselda Pollock comments, “Women…were never positioned as the normal occupants of the public

106 Bourke, 37, lines 88-96.
realm. They did not have the right to look, to stare, scrutinize or watch…They are positioned as the object of the flâneur’s gaze.” In “Letter to Sujata,” however, the three female viewers (or participants) saunter from street to gallery, completely and unselfconsciously engaged in the act of gazing.

Bourke also interrogates the implications of the “gaze” in “The Art Judges” in Travels with Gandolpho (2000). Here, Bourke returns to an explicitly feminist ekphrasis, as defined by Loizeaux, as she considers the painting by Austrian artist Gabriel Cornelius von Max (1840-1915) entitled “Affen als Kunstkritiker” or “Monkeys as Art Judges” (1889). The painting depicts thirteen leering monkeys perched in various positions atop a wooden crate that was most likely used for shipping artwork, judging from the word “Vorsicht,” or “Fragile,” scrawled across it. Several of them gaze at a painting in a thick, luscious gilt frame; only the frame is visible to the viewer. Others gaze into the distance, while yet others peer behind a gap in the drapes that is just visible at the far left of the canvas. The monkeys are snobbish and insouciant; only one makes direct eye contact with the viewer, and he is sticking out his tongue.

While von Max’s painting clearly lampoons high-brow art critics, suggesting, quite literally, that their jobs could be performed equally as well by monkeys, Bourke’s ekphrastic poem performs a different kind of critique in two ways. First, she rewrites a depiction of the gendered gaze: the thirteen monkey-judges are certainly male, and the painting they scrutinize is invisible to the viewer, a move that effectively “silences” it. Her poem helps to paint the invisible image back into the artwork, so to speak, in order that it might challenge the voracious, supercilious gaze of its male critics. Second, Bourke refuses the reader the complacency of a single point of view: the poem can be read either as a narrative spoken by the painting’s creator, or as an envoicing of the painting itself. “Multiplying points of view” in this way removes the focus from the uni-directional perspective of the judgemental...

107 Pollock, 71.
monkeys, and destabilizes their authority, declining the egocentricity of the single viewpoint and poking fun at the “arrogance of the civilized eye” by challenging the reader’s assumptions about point of view.  

Bourke does not doubt that the ape-viewers the painting depicts are gendered male. “They breeze in from tops of trees,” she writes, emphasizing their easy arrogance, “headed by a patriarch with sagging belly/ and grizzled side-whiskers.” The aged “patriarch” leads a pack of his self-obsessed, often inattentive comrades:

Some pick nits
from each other’s pelts,
two regard me with raised eyebrows,
their ancient ironic faces frown,

five have given up on me
and turned towards the gap in the drags
where the next competitor is unwrapping
a burlesque carving covered in gold leaf.

Immediately, their gazes “consume” the image: two frown in disapproval, while five have already made their judgement on the artwork and dismissed it as unworthy. They “have given up on me,” the speaker laments, the pronoun suggesting that the speaker is the painting itself. Outside the confines of the judging tent – the arena that frames and confines this act of looking – the scene is more cheerful: the painting longs to break away from the static gaze imposed upon her, and to interact with the wider world. “Two mothers are nursing their babies./ I am waiting for the verdict/ while outside the revellers are milling/ past the tent in the sunshine.” The speaker looks on longingly: for now, she must remain inside and await the judges’ decision.

At this point in the poem, the tone changes in a way that unsettles the reader’s assumptions regarding the identity of the poetic speaker. In the frustrated voice of a beleaguered artist whose work has been rejected in the past, the speaker predicts the

108 Loizeaux, 88, 87.
110 Bourke, 50, lines 5-12.
111 Bourke, 50, lines 13-16.
judges’ criticism: she insists, “I know my failings,” and significantly, those failings are bound intimately with the written word:

…I let myself be seduced
by words, “blue” for instance or “tree”
instead of making a case,
and there’s an overabundance of rivers and seas.

Where are the marital problems,
the primatial condition,
not to mention metaphysics
or the proud origins of the species?\footnote{Bourke, 50, lines 17-24.}

If the painter is the poetic speaker, she is stymied by her critics’ insistence upon logic, or “making a case,” preferring to luxuriate in the beauty of the signifier, not the “logic” that connects it to what it signifies. Rich with the shades of blue that depict “an overabundance of rivers and seas,” her work refuses to argue, comment, criticize, or propound: although it is no way as “silent” or “still” as Keats’s Grecian urn (especially since the reader suspects, nervously, that the painting may indeed be in the act of speaking for itself), it is self-contained in its integrity and its mystery. If Bourke fears that the monkey-judges’ hungry gazes are picking – have picked – the artwork apart in the same way that they have “pick[ed] nits/ from each other’s pelts,” in suggesting its appearance to her reader, she goes some way towards restoring the invisible image’s integrity to it while permitting it to remain a mystery. Even if the judges will not be pleased, they will be thrown off-guard:

I’ll never come up to scratch
in the face of my judges’ critical rigour.
At every step they’ll stumble
over an owl or a sphinx.\footnote{Bourke, 51, lines 25-28.}
The judges, the speaker is certain, will be nonplussed by both owl and sphinx – or, perhaps more precisely, with the wisdom and mystery that they represent; after all, they are only monkeys who judge by rote and mimicry, without creativity, insight or intuition. The poem ends in tense near-silence; the reader will never know what the judges’ verdict is to be. “…I sit expecting their pronouncement/ any minute now,” whispers the speaker. “I hear nothing/ except an occasional cough/ and the sound of cracking lice.” Bourke insists on leaving the reader with silence, dodging the masulinist notion that to be silent in front of a painting is to admit defeat. As Loizeaux writes of the ekphrases of Marianne Moore, “Silence… could be a telling option in response to the image. The gendered dynamics of ekphrasis that depend on a conventionally male word responding to a female image, language filling silence with speech, need not be played out to the end.”

Given the fact that such a number of Bourke’s poems feature female artists and writers and explore the constraints surrounding female creativity, it is not unlikely that the poem’s narrator is the author of the work and not the work itself. “I know my failings,” the poetic speaker of “The Art Judges” sighs, in the voice of an artist who has been reminded of them time and again. (That the speaker is also gendered female is suggested by the opposition created between the “I” of the poem and the predatory ape-judges whose all-consuming critique she fears.) Yet the reader cannot be certain whether the speaker is indeed the artist, peering through the “gap in the drapes” to watch the expressions on the faces of the critics as they survey her work, or if it is the painting itself, envoiced prosopopoeically, finally able to re-assert herself by “speaking back” to her critics. Or it is possible that the speaker is yet another artist whose work is still to be assessed by the critics, who is hidden behind that tantalizing “gap in the drapes,” keeping one eye fixed on the events that transpire in front of the gilded frame. Such a reading of “The Art Judges” would illustrate the liminal element of ekphrasis, for this “gap in the drapes” gestures toward that grey space that exists

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114 Bourke, 51, lines 29-32.
115 Loizeaux, 92. Bourke has spoken of the way in which poetry is necessarily bounded by silence in a 1999 interview. Silence, for Bourke is “[w]here language goes beyond the sayable, to a certain extent. That this is where it should begin, and end, here, in the silence. This is what I think poetry is: it's on the margins of silence, isn't it, even though we make a lot of words and create a lot of noise.” (Danielle Sered, “Interview with Eva Bourke.” Galway: 12 July 1999. Emory University Woodruff Library Special Collections, MS 853, Box 1, Folder 1: 1 tape, digitized.)
116 “Prosopopoeia [is] the envoicing of the silent image, the most radical means ekphrasis has at its disposal to animate the still, silent image into speech.” (Loizeaux, 23.)
between “representation and mis-representation,” between artwork and the poem that alters or criticizes it, between creation and reception. After all, it is that tension between “representation and mis-representation” that renders the ekphrastic exchange so fruitful.

Finally, it is possible that all three voices – and indeed, many more – all act simultaneously as poetic speaker in “The Art Judges.” This conflation of artist and image is not accidental: in so doing, Bourke allows myriad versions of painter and painting to “speak out” together, playing havoc with the reader’s complacent assumptions regarding who – or what – is looking at whom. Thus, she explicitly reworks the idea of the traditional single male gaze, fragmenting that gaze into an endless number of identities, and opening it to more than a single notion of gender.

Eva Bourke’s ekphrastic poems actively rewrite traditionally gendered ideas of the relationship between image and text. In “Museum of Conquest,” her speaker values the minute and detailed over the grand, lofty and ostentatious monuments to masculine heroism. Her careful attention to the miniature and the marginal helps to facilitate dialogue between image and text, for it refuses to insist that one must “silence” or dominate the other. Bourke’s speakers also celebrate disorder and privilege the experience of looking over an ordered, direct speaker-image relationship. Moreover, the multiple gazes inherent in poems such as “The Art Judges” destabilize the certainty of a single, dominant gaze, and “respect” the image’s integrity by presenting the reader with multiple points of view regarding it.

As the poets of the New York School understood, ekphrasis can act as a fruitful site for working through the anxieties surrounding conditions of “otherness.” While she writes in English and has spent most of her adult life in Ireland, it is notable that Bourke’s ekphrastic poems address non-Irish artworks, and are set within continental European or other non-Irish locations. In this instance, as a German woman living in Ireland and writing in English, Bourke herself – the creator of the text – may be considered to be, like the image she interrogates, in the position of an “other.” Her poems demonstrate that ekphrasis continues to be a way for women poets in particular to examine anxieties that arise from questions of nationality and gender.

117 Heffernan, 307.
The experience of physical pain – a universal human experience – is, ironically, a singularly isolating one. While victims of emotional and collective trauma may gather together and gain strength from their common experience, bodily pain effectively silences its sufferers. “Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unsharability, and it ensures this unsharability through its resistance to language,” writes philosopher and literary critic Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985)\(^1\). “Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.”\(^2\) When Scarry speaks of pain in its position as the ultimate “unshareable,” it is as the segment of the human condition that isolates individuals, fragments and disrupts language, and renders successful “communicability” between individuals impossible. The result, then, is a deep chasm between sufferer and observer: for Scarry, the pain of others can, even with the application of intense effort, only vaguely be apprehended by those who do not have pain. Conversely, for the sufferer, nothing is more certain or true than the reality of his or her own bodily pain. “Thus,” continues Scarry, “pain comes unshareably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed.”\(^3\)

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2 Scarry, 4.
3 Scarry, 4. Since the publication of *The Body in Pain*, other texts have helped to give a voice to those in pain and/or to provide a theoretical structure for the articulation and communication of the experience of pain, including *The illness narratives: suffering, healing and the human condition* by Arthur Kleinman (1988); *The Culture of Pain* by David B. Morris (1991); *The history of pain* by Roselyne Rey (1993); *Illness and culture in the postmodern age* by David B. Morris (1998); and *Enduring creation: Art, pain and fortitude* by Nigel Spivey (2001). In “Narrative, Ethics and Pain: Thinking With Stories” (2001), Morris challenges the concept that pain is ultimately incommunicable. “Although pain is always subjective and never fully communicable, it also belongs, however, to social and interpersonal codes as intelligible as SOS. We may not be able to answer every SOS, but it is self-deception to pretend that we have no idea what it means or what response it asks. Pain, like narrative, exerts an implicit call or obligation. Stories, in addition, can reveal much about the social meanings, public beliefs and shared codes often inseparable from the individual’s experience of pain.” (65)
Physical pain, it seems, stifles language while emotional suffering produces torrents of words. Virginia Woolf also comments on this disparity in her essay “On Being Ill” (1926). “English…which can express the thoughts of Hamlet and the tragedy of Lear has no words for the shiver or the headache… The merest schoolgirl when she falls in love has Shakespeare or Keats to speak her mind for her, but let a sufferer try to describe a pain in his head to a doctor and language at once runs dry.” For both Scarry and Woolf, there is no equivalent of Shakespeare or Keats when it comes to conveying the reality of physical pain. Pain’s rupture with language occurs because pain has no external object; its source is the self, and its referent is also the self, enclosing the sufferer within a universe of one.

Even writers, whose vocation is articulation and communication, are subject to the silencing effects of physical pain, since, as Scarry, Woolf, and others observe, literary representations of the body in pain are relatively infrequent. Nonetheless, they exist: in spite of bodily pain’s status as citizen of a linguistic no-man’s-land, it refuses to be silenced completely. “Verbal strategies” for at least attempting to redress the “assault on language” that pain performs do exist, even if for Scarry, they are few and far between. Since so few texts are explicitly about the experience of physical suffering, it may be useful to look closely at the instances in which representations of physical anguish slip indirectly into literary texts – when physical pain seems to be a taciturn but constant companion to narrators of novels or to poetic or dramatic speakers. The poems of the Irish poet Rita Ann Higgins bear such a relationship to physical pain, and attempt to mitigate the “assault” Scarry identifies.

4 Woolf in Scarry, 4.
5 Other notable, and useful, examinations of illness include French novelist and humorist Alphonse Daudet’s *La Doulou*, a collection of notes first published in 1930 on the experience of being ill with and gradually dying of syphilis. The British novelist Julian Barnes translated *La Doulou* (*doulou* being the Provençal word for “pain,” *douleur*) as *Alphonse Daudet in the Land of Pain* (2002). In it, Daudet anticipates Scarry’s theory of the inexpressibility of suffering: “Are words actually any use to describe what pain (or passion, for that matter) really feels like? Words only come when everything is over, when things have calmed down. They refer only to memory, and are either powerless or untruthful.”

15 Over the last decade and a half, notable memoirs of the experience of the body in pain have been published, including *The Diving-Bell and the Butterfly* by Jean-Dominique Bauby (1997); *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* by Marya Hornbacher (1999); *It’s Not About the Bike: My Journey Back to Life* by Lance Armstrong (2001). Memoirs of illness by Irish writers include *In Your Face: One Woman’s Encounter with Cancer, Doctors, Nurses, Machines, Family, Friends and a Few Enemies* by Lia Mills (2008); *Talk To The Headscarf* by Emma Hannigan (2011); and *My Secret Life: A Memoir of Bulimia* by Leanne Waters (2011). It is notable, however, that all of these are works of autobiography, not works of imagination such as poetry, drama or fiction, suggesting that the actuality of pain muffles creative response.

6 Scarry, 13.
Rita Ann Higgins was an early attendee of the Galway Writers’ Workshop, and one of the two most frequent contributors to its little magazine *The Salmon*: her work was published in ten of its twenty-five issues between 1982 and 1991.7 “Dog is Dog is Dog” appears in its fifth issue; “Power Cut” appears in its seventh; “Ode to Rahoon Flats” and “Work On” in its eleventh; “Lizzie Kavanagh” and Sunny Side Plucked” in its twelfth; “Oracle Readers” and “Men with Tired Hair” in its sixteenth; “I Went To School With You” and “Some People Know What It Is Like” in its nineteenth; “Rat-Like Dogs and Tattooed Men” in its twenty-second; “The Deserter” in its twenty-third; “Every Second Sunday” in the double issue that combined issues twenty-four and twenty-five; and “They Believe in Clint Eastwood” in the magazine’s final double issue.

Higgins’s first collection, *Goddess on the Mervue Bus* (1986) was one of the first titles released by Salmon Publishing, which also published three of her subsequent collections, *Witch in the Bushes* (1988); *Philomena’s Revenge* (1992); and *Higher Purchase* (1996), as well as *Goddess and Witch* (1990), which incorporates her first two volumes, and a play, “Face Licker Come Home” (1991). Thereafter, her collections *Sunny Side Plucked: New and Selected Poems* (1996); *An Awful Racket* (2001); *Throw In The Vowels* (2005), and *Ireland Is Changing Mother* (2011) were published by Bloodaxe. However, Higgins re-established her relationship with Salmon with the 2010 publication of *Hurting God: Part Essay, Part Rhyme*, which intersperses creative nonfiction with poetry, featuring a number of poems first published in volumes issued by Salmon as well as previously unpublished poems that would appear in her most recent Bloodaxe collection, *Ireland Is Changing Mother*. Although several poems in Higgins’s Bloodaxe collections have a subtext of physical suffering8, this chapter concentrates on poems published in Higgins’s Salmon collections, for it is in the Salmon collections that Higgins’s preoccupation with bodily suffering is strongest.

The bodies of the men and women in Higgins’s work are frequently compromised in some way: they are disabled or injured, ill, intoxicated, or even

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7 See Appendices 1 and 2.
8 See, for example, “Why I Refuse to be Gracious” in *An Awful Racket*, which deals with the experience of coeliac disease, and “Nearly Falling” in *Ireland Is Changing Mother*, which, like a number of poems in Higgins’s earlier volumes, is set in a hospital’s TB ward.
deceased. However, her poetic speakers rarely, if ever, articulate the experience of pain directly; in fact, they rarely acknowledge or comment upon their own bodily anguish or incapacitation. Instead, the experience of physical suffering creeps into these poems obliquely, often at the very point at which speakers’ verbal ability and their relationship to language is also undergoing a breakdown. This chapter, therefore, suggests that Higgins’s speakers, poised as they are at the edge of both physical and linguistic rupture, can provide readers with insights into the nature of the imaginative expression of pain, and of the complicated relationship of pain to speech and language, in which poetry plays a pivotal role.

Born into a working-class family of eleven in Galway City in 1955, Rita Ann Higgins is the author of nine collections of poetry, and critical reception of Higgins’s work often places her firmly in the position of “working-class poet.” One reviewer claims that “[s]ocial commentary is her apotheosis,” while another remarks on the way in which she “fac[es] down the shibboleths of poverty and shame.” Others note that her work focuses on “unemployed people and the multiple deprivation[s] and pathos of human situations,” a subject apprehended through “unsentimental social observation, humour, and controlled anger.” While these observations are not inaccurate, and are often combined with a genuine admiration for Higgins’s work, to focus solely on her role as social commentator or satirist per se, is to neglect the ways in which her work informs discourses of gender, sexuality, class, and language. Lacunae such as these in the study of Higgins’s work have begun to be filled by critics such as Lucy Collins (2003), who places Higgins’s work within the context of performance and the intersection of the private and public spheres; Michaela Schräge-Früh (2006), who explores the way in which Higgins and other Irish women poets revise traditional representations of the Virgin Mary in their work; and, yet more

recently, Moynagh Sullivan, whose article “Looking at Being Someone: Class and Poetry in the Gender of Rita Ann Higgins” (2011) offers suggestions as to how the idea of looking or watching informs questions of class or gender in the poet’s work.¹⁵

Higgins, who is now a member of Aosdána, has publicly described the way in which her own relationship to the written word took root through an experience of illness and confinement as a young adult: she first began to read in earnest at the age of twenty-two while in a sanatorium recovering from tuberculosis. “I had TB and I didn't know,” stated Higgins in a 2007 interview:

We had a really nice doctor, who came to the flats where we lived at the time. He said 'You have tuberculosis and you should go into hospital immediately'. I didn't know anything about TB at the time. I didn't know anything about anything. I went into Merlin Park Sanatorium and that changed everything. In the sanatorium people wanted to live - they were desperate to live, and I couldn't understand why. What do you want to live for if you're sick and tired? Everyone watched soap operas on the tele and took Holy Communion. I suppose I had a bit of despair, a fair bit of despair. I thought, there must be something else.¹⁶

For Higgins, “something else” took the form of her first encounters with literature. While in the sanatorium, she read novels for the first time: Brontë’s Wuthering Heights was followed by Orwell’s Animal Farm and many others. Soon afterward she began to read voraciously, she also tried her hand at writing creatively, and the subject of her first piece was intimately connected to the experience of sickness. “When I came out of the sanatorium, I went to a workshop,” Higgins remembers of her early days in the Galway Writers’ Workshop:

There were two things I could do: flower arranging, or go to a writing workshop. Physically I wasn't able for much, so I started to attend the workshop and I had a prose piece. It was called 'Spot on the Lung' and the group that were there were saying to me, 'You know that's the past tense and that's the future tense. You can't do

that. You mustn’t do that, you have to stay in the one spot’. How could I, for God’s sake? So I thought, it must be easier to write poetry.\footnote{Nordin, 134. Higgins’ frank admission of her puzzlement over (and perhaps impatience with) the rules of grammar as a fledgling writer has been used, by some critics, as a way to detract from, and even to attempt to invalidate, her work. See, for example, Fred Johnston’s review of Higher Purchase, entitled “Quod erat legendum” (\textit{Books Ireland}, No. 201: February 1997, 17-19), in which he states, “I have written before that I do not believe the writing of Rita Ann Higgins approaches the nature of poetry. Witty aphorisms on occasion, perhaps; certainly not poetry.” (18) In this interview, however, through the revealing phrase “the group that was there” and the “group”’s pedantic expressions of negativity such as “You can’t” and “You mustn’t,” Higgins indicates that her first forays into writing creatively may have been met with destructive, not constructive, criticism by some members of the Galway Writers’ Workshop. Higgins’ longtime participation in the Workshop and her early and regular publication in \textit{The Salmon}, however, suggests that the issue may have had less to do with her ability as a writer and more to do with the preconceptions of “the group that was there” regarding what, or who, a poet is permitted to be. It is likely that Higgins, who was raised in a working-class family and who left school at fourteen years of age, would not have received much formal training in the rules of grammar by the time she joined the Workshop. Clearly, with the encouragement (rather than discouragement) that she received from other workshop members she was able to overcome or at least circumvent these obstacles, since her first collection was published only four years after she first attended the Galway Writers’ Workshop. As Moynagh Sullivan points out, “It appears that one of the most troubling aspects of Higgins’s poetry is not so much that it highlights class as a component of social and political life…but that her work more disturbingly insists on class as a structuring factor of aesthetics. The implication that it ‘isn’t exactly poetry’ but ‘prose with short lines’ demonstrates that her work can fall foul of discriminations that are fundamentally about class, but are shrouded in a language of formal art.” (117)\footnote{Irene Gilsenan Nordin, “Re-Mapping the Landscape: The Body as Agent of Political, Social and Spiritual Empowerment in Contemporary Irish Poetry.” \textit{The Body and Desire in Contemporary Irish Poetry}, ed. Irene Gilsenan Nordin. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006: 1-18, 2.}

As illness led Higgins to poetry, so it is unsurprising that her first forays into creative writing would lead her to reckon with the emotional and psychological consequences of her illness and her recovery from it. Perhaps her encounter with disease and suffering as a young woman, coinciding, as it did, with her newly-formed awareness of the power of the written word, is responsible for the physical infirmities that plague so many of the speakers and characters in her poems.

Particularly since the late twentieth century, Irish poets and critics have attempted to redefine the place of the body – and the nature of that body – in Irish poetic discourses. “…[I]n an Irish context…the body has a long tradition as a powerful trope,” observes Irene Gilsenan Nordin (2006), “reaching back to early Celtic Christianity, when the body was celebrated as a source of wisdom and beauty, to the fear of the body as a site of temptation and its strong negation in the Catholic tradition, to its exploitation as a force in the construction of Irish national identity, where the body was depicted as a landscape on which the nationalist drama was inscribed.”\footnote{Irene Gilsenan Nordin, “Re-Mapping the Landscape: The Body as Agent of Political, Social and Spiritual Empowerment in Contemporary Irish Poetry.” \textit{The Body and Desire in Contemporary Irish Poetry}, ed. Irene Gilsenan Nordin. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006: 1-18, 2.} This is particularly true for representations of the female body in Irish
literature; the female form has been used as a powerful metaphor for the Irish nation by male authors and political figures (as well as a number of female ones). As a result, women and their bodies have been mythologised and simplified rather than represented as complicated physical entities that grow, change, age, and suffer. Cultural representations of the female body such as these rarely take into account the actualities of dwelling in a female body; natural and anatomical processes such as aging, menstruation and the realities of childbirth are often elided so that women may be publicly constructed or depicted as pure, virginal, aloof, immaculate, or untouchable. The realities of Irish life in the twentieth century can only have reinforced such representations of the female body: the Constitution of 1937 firmly situated women’s experiences within the home, and the Catholic Church prevented their access to contraception, abortion and divorce. This minimised women’s agency over their own bodies and sexuality, allowing the female body to remain an instrument in a nationalist and religious agenda.

“‘Woman,’” observes Kim McMullen (1996), “has been conscripted endlessly to serve as symbolic repository of Irish identity, only to be deconstructed relentlessly by feminist poets, critics and scholars.” Indeed, until relatively late in the twentieth century, the realities of dwelling in a female body, particularly a suffering female body, were articulated only rarely in texts by Irish poets. By the end of the century, however, women poets were writing more explicitly about the physical condition of being female. Perhaps the best-known poet to do so is Eavan Boland, whose representations of “ordinary” physical female experience such as childbirth and childcare, anorexia, and mastectomy in In Her Own Image (1980), Night Feed (1982), and subsequent collections are now well-known. In “The Statue of the Virgin at Granard Speaks” in The Man Who Was Marked by Winter (1991), Paula Meehan takes as her subject the well-known case of fifteen-year-old Ann Lovett, who died alone in childbirth at the feet of a statue of the Virgin Mary in a grotto in Granard.

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County Longford. Meehan’s Virgin, made of stone though she may be, enjoys the sensory pleasures the changing seasons offer, and expresses fleshly desires for sexual fulfilment – but despite these human qualities, she does not intercede as the as young girl at her feet suffers in the throes of childbirth. More recently, younger poets have described the experiences of emaciation and starvation associated with anorexia nervosa, a topic that concerns the majority of the poems in Leanne O’Sullivan’s collection *Waiting For My Clothes* (2004), as well as poems such as “Thin” in Caitriona O’Reilly’s *The Nowhere Birds* (2001). Many of the poems in the late Dorothy Molloy’s posthumously published collections *Hare Soup* (2004) and *Gethsemane Day* (2006) chronicle the poet’s struggle with cancer, hospitalization, and dwelling within an ill body. It seems, then, that a growing number of Irish women poets are able to articulate physical suffering in their work. Women and suffering – “milk and tears” – are both metaphors, Kristeva argues, for non-language or the semiotic: yet poetry has become a successful site for the articulation of suffering by many Irish women.

The relationship between language and “lived embodied experience” – that is, the difficulties of successfully articulating the fact of dwelling in a particular body – is often a problematic one, as Claire Bracken notes in her 2007 review of Rita Ann Higgins’s collection *Throw In The Vowels* (Bloodaxe, 2005). Bracken describes the body, in relation to Higgins’s work, in terms similar to Kristeva’s conception of the semiotic: the body can act “as a liminal space between self and world, ‘the place where consciousness is no longer master,’” where things parenthetical to consciousness may make themselves manifest. Higgins, unlike some of her contemporaries including O’Sullivan, Molloy and O’Reilly, rarely articulates the experience of suffering or the fact of physical pain directly or consciously within her work. Instead pain – or the potential for pain or physical harm – is a constant companion to many of her poetic speakers, living alongside them silently but intimately. Higgins’s many poems that concern physical suffering are rarely, if ever, about pain: for her speakers, pain may be something to be endured, tolerated, or even

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25 Nordin, 6.
conquered – but never confronted directly. As Bracken remarks, the paradox of the “embodied speaker” – and here she refers not only to the speaker in pain, but also of the non-suffering speaker who attempts to articulate the state of inhabiting a specific body – is that “the drive to communicate [is] always being marked by incommunicability.”

Yet Higgins returns again and again to the image of the compromised body: within her work, the “embodied speakers” – or the characters whose stories the speakers tell – are often being injured, falling ill, tripping or stumbling, becoming intoxicated, being confined or imprisoned, or are physically compromised in some other way. These speakers are often betrayed both by their flawed, confined, or suffering bodies and by “ordinary” language’s inability to offer a functional means of articulating these injuries, needs, and desires. Keeping Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic in mind, it is not entirely surprising that bodily suffering, for Higgins, is one of the sites at which disruption creeps into the ordered realms of language, even poetic language, in which an “unsettled” quality is implicitly present. Higgins, then, employs three tactics in particular in her negotiation of the disruptive, “unspeakable” experience of the suffering or disempowered body. First, she chooses indirect speech over direct speech in order to speak of pain obliquely; second, her poems that involve bodily pain are often set within liminal spaces, which allow her speakers to mock institutions that would dictate the parameters of an individual’s suffering. Finally, Higgins nearly always writes from the perspective of a female poetic speaker, specifically envoicing the female body in pain.

Higgins’s approach to the presence of pain is rarely a direct articulation of the experience of suffering: more often, her poems address the experience of physical pain obliquely, indirectly, or with evasion. Avoiding the use of overt or blunt statements and opting instead for hints, insinuations, silences, or other forms of indirect speech in order to communicate crucial truths, needs or desires can be a useful rhetorical strategy in certain situations. Linguists Lee and Pinker (2010) claim that an individual may assume the pose of “strategic speaker” by deploying forms of indirect speech if she is unsure whether the hearer will be cooperative or antagonistic; indirect speech offers the safety net of “plausible deniability,” by which the speaker

26 Bracken, 167.
may protect him or herself in the case of the latter.\(^\text{27}\) Forms of indirect communication such as those described by Lee and Pinker are used regularly in contemporary conversation in English, such as in making sexual advances towards a potential partner, or in asking a colleague for assistance with a task in a professional situation. However, indirect speech may also have been a vital linguistic tool for those living in subaltern cultures, including Ireland, in which exposing meaning or intent to the “wrong” listener, according to Jacqueline Fulmer (2007), could result in “grave consequences ranging from censorship and shunning to death.”\(^\text{28}\) Centuries of colonial rule in Ireland can only have contributed to the creation of a culture of indirect speech, which must have been exacerbated by the presence of undercover informers to the British. According to Spurgeon Thompson (2008), “all previous attempts [prior to the 1867 Fenian rising] to rise in arms against British rule had failed because British intelligence had a reliable network of informers and spies to undermine them.”\(^\text{29}\) The fear that an informer might be watching and listening carefully to the interactions between individuals caused distrust and unease, even among members of small social groups such as families. Indirect speech, the result of “the need to express oneself under censorship, duress or cultural erasure,” then, could be a way to circumvent censorship while avoiding the potentially fatal consequences of explicitly resisting it.\(^\text{30}\) A culture that discourages open discussion of taboo topics as a strategy for survival, combined with the Catholic Church’s perception of the body – especially the female body – as shameful, unclean, or as a dangerous site of temptation, necessarily leads to a distaste for, and a reluctance to speak of, the exigencies of the body.\(^\text{31}\)

Many of the poems in Higgins’s *oeuvre* reveal this distrustful attitude towards the body: to name a few examples, children are instructed to “wear summer dresses in

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\(^{30}\) Fulmer, 29.

bed” and to keep their hands away from their own bodies lest they attract negative attention: “Did you see her up at the altar making a holy show of herself scratching?” a gossipy woman asks a female friend after Mass in Higgins’s “poetic memoir,” Hurting God (2010). In “Be Someone,” an older woman chides a younger woman possibly her daughter, “don’t be caught dead/ in them shameful tight slacks.” This culture of “shame” surrounding the body and its exigencies can extend to a reluctance to engage in frank discussions of illness or pain. “Don’t tell anyone what you have,” Higgins’s father instructs his daughter, when she is diagnosed with tuberculosis as a young woman. “Tell them you have a bad cold. A bad cold can be anything. TB is always TB.” Her father’s admonition not to “tell anyone what you have” is likely reflective, at least in part, of the socioeconomic stigma attached to tuberculosis due to its reputation as a disease affecting the urban poor rather than a specific repudiation of the body, but the outcome for the sufferer is the same: her experience of illness and suffering is stifled.

Like Higgins herself, the majority of her poetic speakers are adult women from the west of Ireland who have been immersed in this culture of indirect speech, and have been discouraged from speaking of the physical realities of the body. Yet Higgins’ speakers do find alternate methods of addressing these taboo subjects: one such method is tacit submission to such a code of silence. If pain is, as Scarry posits, ultimately unspeakable, Higgins circumvents pain’s unspeakability – or censorship – in a unique way. Many of her poetic speakers simply acquiesce to the silence pain seems to demand: they do not attempt to appropriate it by speaking of it explicitly, or by creating a narrative to explain or envoice it. Pain is simply present: it is permitted to coexist alongside them without being mitigated, combated, or even grumbled at. Illness and physical pain are simply tolerated, and often surface as the subtexts of poems that seem to be “about” another subject entirely. In this way, Higgins successfully speaks of pain by speaking around pain.

32 Higgins, “A Future Pickled with Funerals.” Hurting God, 55
36 Humour, as a form of “indirect speech,” can certainly be used as a covert way to discuss taboo subjects sub rosa. Higgins’s work, indeed, utilizes black humour and satire; however, the topic of Higgins’ humor or “wit” has been referred to so often in discussions of her work that, for the purposes of this chapter, I choose to focus on other of her methods for indirectly envoicing physical pain.
“Consumptive in the Library,” the first poem in *Goddess on the Mervue Bus*, Higgins’s first volume, features a silent encounter between the speaker, a “would-be poet with illusions,” and a homeless man with an “unsociable cough” as they sit near one another in the Galway County Library:

About you:
you carry a kidney donor card,
not yet filled in,
a St. Christopher’s round your neck
on a brown shoe lace,
(to warn off demons and politicians),
Memories of Sweet Afton,
the racing page from the Daily Express,
and an unsociable cough.

About me:
I carry illusions
of becoming a famous poet,
guilt about that one time in Baltinglass,
fear that the lift will stop at limbo,
a slight touch of sciatica,
plus an anthology of the Ulster poets.\(^\text{37}\)

Here, Moynagh Sullivan has noted, Higgins “challenges the terms of poetic authority itself, recognis[ing] that she too,” like the homeless man, “is the ‘space invader,’ invading the space of public poetic discourse” by her very presence in the library, and, more importantly, by her determination to “consume” the works of well-known voices in Irish poetry – voices that are specifically male and Northern, significantly different to her own status as female, working-class, and from the west

Sullivan notes the way Higgins takes the “body as social and political space” as her subject – the way in which the insistent coughing of the ill man continually distracts the speaker from the work of (male) luminaries of Irish poetry, drawing her back towards the reality of his suffering body.

As his persistent cough draws attention to the compromised state of his own body, however, it increases the visibility of the speaker’s corporeality as well. The suffering man’s body silently mirrors hers, with its own weaknesses and flaws, including “a touch of sciatica” (as well as psychological forms of suffering, comprised of “guilt” and “fear” that a long-ago, one-night sexual encounter – a serious misuse of the female body, according to Catholic teaching – will condemn the speaker to an eternity of spiritual penance in “Limbo”). Sciatica is not the only illness implied here: the title of the poem unsettles the reader’s assumptions about whether the “consumptive” body in the library belongs to the homeless man, or to the young, sexually active (and perhaps attractive), ambitious female speaker, for Higgins is not explicit about which of the two characters is tubercular. The poem’s “About you” and “About me” headers that precede the descriptive “lists” defining each of the poem’s characters, made even more decisive by the use of colons that follow each pronoun, attempt to establish boundaries between the two bodies in the poem, but its title transgresses those boundaries. Like the frequent cough that intrudes upon the silence of the reference room, it destabilizes the reader’s certainty of the individuality and unique identity of the body.39

Significantly, this effect is reinforced by the lack of proper names in the poem. Set in the highly specific location of a room within a building within a city – “the reference room of the Galway County Library” – Higgins nevertheless allows the

38 Sullivan, 131.
39 As Tony Farmar (2006) points out, since early in the twentieth century, the library in Ireland was seen as a threat to public health. “Even had they been crammed with new books, middle-class people would have continued to shun public libraries as potential sources of disease,” he writes. “This was a fear…during the great pre-war campaign against TB. It was reinforced by the well-known habit of licking the finger to turn a page. Since sick people read a lot, it was feared that every licked page in the library was a noxious reservoir of germs.” Farmar, “‘We Are Not, I Think, A Book-Reading People: Book-Reading and Publishing in Ireland 1890-1960.” The Book in Ireland, ed. Jacqueline Genet, Sylvie Mikowski, and Fabienne Garcier. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006: 123-134, 133.
characters within that space to remain anonymous.40 Eliding the deictic, specifying function of naming minimizes the space between the bodies of “you” and “me,” where the use of proper names would only perpetuate the illusion of individuality and uniqueness. Both the poem’s language and its structure suggest, then, that the realities of bodily existence cannot be so easily compartmentalized: their boundaries blur and resist containment.

By the end of the poem, the speaker and her nemesis part ways, but do so without a sense of finality. Searching for peace and quiet, she moves away from the homeless man, leaving him “the Ulster poets/ to consume or cough at.”41 She takes refuge in the library’s medical section where, as Sullivan observes, “the body is the object of enquiry and the subject of learning,” and the poet-speaker’s very presence there blurs the boundaries between text and body.42 Proceeding towards the medical section, she has moved even further towards the insistent presence of the suffering body, not away from it; and the poem’s open-ended conclusion allows the reader to suspect that the speaker will not truly escape from the persistent cough that reasserts the existence of illness each time it is emitted.

Without direct communication between the speaker of “Consumptive in the Library” and the coughing man with whom she must share the reference room, the two share a common “language” of physical suffering with such a degree of intimacy that the reader cannot be certain to whom the ill body in the library really belongs. Higgins’ use of indirect speech allows her to destabilize the security of the reader’s assumptions regarding who has pain and illness, which goes some way towards closing the space described by Scarry between those who have pain and those who do not. Here, bodies seem to have a reciprocal relationship: the presence of one suffering body seems to implicate or make visible another body, whose pain may not be apparent or visible, and is therefore unable to be appropriated or acknowledged by others.

The territory of the unspoken and that of the suffering body are silently juxtaposed in “Secrets,” also published in Goddess on the Mervue Bus. In it, the

\[40\] Higgins, line 22.
\[41\] Higgins, lines 27-28.
\[42\] Sullivan, 131.
body’s inability to “speak for” itself – or to be spoken of by others – is presented as a certainty. Sites of illness or pain, such as troublesome hip joints, stomach ulcers, weak hearts, or rolls of excess body fat, are hardly worth mentioning for their own sake by the poem’s sardonic, embittered speaker, who has no interest in discussing the experience of pain that accompanies a brittle hip or an untreated ulcer. She does, however, acknowledge their presence and even their value: for her, they are the most reliable allies against the treachery that lurks around every corner, even beneath the ordinary, everyday façades presented by so-called friends, neighbours and family. (After all, informers can appear in many guises.) For the speaker of “Secrets,” keeping one’s private affairs carefully concealed is no guarantee that they will remain undiscovered. Instead, they must be pressed into the very flesh of their bearer who, the speaker tacitly assumes, must be secretly suffering:

Secrets are for keeping,
not for hiding,
the spines of wardrobes
will talk, sooner or later.

Keep your secrets in your heart,
in hip joints,
between folds of flesh,
or under rotting ulcers.43

Central to the speaker’s viewpoint is the conviction that, since pain is the ultimate inexpressible, only sites of the body in pain can be trusted to keep silent, resulting in an uneasy relationship between the speaker and her body in which the old motto, “Keep your friends close but your enemies closer” echoes. Secrets must not be allowed to stray outside one’s own “flesh;” they cannot be safely concealed in commonplace hiding-spaces around the house, for “the spines of wardrobes/ will talk, sooner or later.” Nor is it enough for the speaker to keep them close to the body, by simply tucking them into a metaphorical pocket, or to simply fence them into one’s own thoughts, for minds are far less trustworthy than bodies: they can “leak/ from old

age or too much whiskey.” Even keeping silent intentionally, then, is not enough: the mind will inevitably be compromised or weakened by the dominant body. Secrets must be buried deep within the body, in its most tender, vulnerable areas: if they are to be safe, they must be pressed deep into the body itself, beyond speech, into the world of the semiotic, where Kristeva situates the realm of physical suffering and the pre-verbal. These sites of bodily weakness or suffering are the most secure receptacles for items of great psychological or social value, things that must not leave the private sphere of the body, and must not even be known among intimates such as close family, for pain is the ultimate inarticulate. Such secrets, the speaker implores, must not be confessed under any circumstances to individuals who act on behalf of (male) authority:

Don’t ever tell priests.

Keep well clear of burning bushes,
investigative mothers-in-law
with egg-shell slippers
and Dundee cake.

Never tell the living dead.

Be on the look-out
for lean neighbours
who slither between hedges
and pose as ant-eaters.

They’re really secret stealers in disguise.\(^{45}\)

Individuals with their own agendas such as best friends, priests, mothers-in-law and neighbours are not to be trusted with secrets on any account, and one must exercise

\(^{44}\) Higgins, lines 10-11.
\(^{45}\) Higgins, lines 15-25.
the utmost caution around them. “Keep well clear of burning bushes,” the speaker exhorts: miracles may not be what they seem.

Even releasing such secrets into texts – such as the pages of a diary – is forbidden, since texts, once written down, can no longer be controlled by their authors. The speaker is in no doubt that if such a text is to be found, it will be found after its author’s death, when it can and will be read, judged and made sport of by her family who has – inevitably, it seems – outlived the deceased author. She will be betrayed, it is certain, by the very persons closest to her:

As for keeping a diary,
when you’re gone
for entertainment on wet days
and after funerals,
your nearest and dearest
will read it aloud with relish.

Try blushing with clay between your teeth. 46

For all of its admonitions to the reader, the poem reveals nearly nothing about its speaker until its final line, when she utters her last words with the sardonic assurance of someone whose insight is born of experience: if the speaker knows what it is to blush with clay between her teeth, she must be speaking from the grave. In spite of the fact that she is dead and buried, and her clenched teeth guard a mouth stopped up with clay, she is able to speak – but, paradoxically, only to order her listeners to be silent and to ensure that their secrets, too, will literally die with them. The speaker’s physical pain may cause her to suffer, and may even bring about her death, but these sites of suffering also offer her failsafe protection: her ill body acts simultaneously as saviour and Judas. In life, it prevented her from succumbing to the lure of language, either in speech or text: even after death, her secrets remain closely guarded by the body she once owned, for she has no intention of communicating to the reader outside of carefully controlled words of advice.

46 Higgins, 24-25, lines 26-32.
In order to create space for the articulation of pain, Higgins often sets poems in which the suffering body is a subtext within liminal, transient spaces, sites that are defined by their impermanence and non-presence or “placelessness.” For Higgins, locations that successfully “contain” verbalizations of pain are public, or semi-public, places through which individuals pass rather than take up permanent residence. Such locations include public institutions such as libraries, courtrooms, and most often – and perhaps most logically – hospitals. Significantly, poems by Higgins that take such spaces as their setting emphasize the ways in which these institutions confine, control, and change their inhabitants even when they are intended to be of assistance to them, ostensibly to heal, solve, or instruct. For Julia Kristeva, poetry, poised as it is between the symbolic and the semiotic, has the ability to unsettle and challenge social institutions; it is able to threaten the security and complacency of such institutions, and even to expose their power to control as illusory. Following Kristeva, I suggest that Higgins’s placement of articulations of physical pain within “liminal” spaces calls attention to poetry’s powerful potential for unsettling or challenging the hegemony or usefulness of social institutions. Moreover, Higgins’s use of these locations designates physical pain as a transformative experience, akin to the liminal stage in cultural rites of passage.

Set inside the Galway County Library, then, “Consumptive in the Library” destabilizes the certainty of the reader’s assumptions regarding who has pain and illness and who is healthy, and simultaneously comments on the limits of the library – particularly the local library – as an institution. The two individuals who temporarily share the reference room are hardly typical scholarly or “bookish” sorts: one is a homeless man who is far more interested in “the racing page from the Daily Express” than literature or research, while the other carries “illusions/ of becoming a famous poet” as well as the ordinary worries of a young woman, including a niggling “touch of sciatica” and sexual and religious guilt. Nonetheless, these “space invaders” are still permitted to remain inside the library – even if at least one of them might be more at home in “cold churches or soup kitchens” than among the works of the dignitaries of Irish poetry such as Heaney, Mahon and Ormsby. For both the homeless man and the speaker, the library is a place to suffer as much as it is to read or study; while it is

47 Higgins, 3, lines 8, 10-11, 15.
48 Higgins, line 19.
clear that neither one of them are using the library “properly,” there is no one to prevent them from doing so. Also, while in theory the library is meant to be reserved for those engaged in quiet study, in practice, complete stillness is unattainable: the man’s congested coughing breaks this code of enforced silence with regularity. If there are librarians present, they do not dare to shush him; ironically, the speaker must move to the medical section for relief from the ill man’s “exasperate[ing]” cough. The ill body triumphs over the institution that attempts to contain it, making it an object of fun. Even the poem’s title suggests that the juxtaposition of the two nouns is subversive: the reader intuitively knows that a “Consumptive in the Library” would be out of place and is therefore humorous and even shocking, where “Scholar in the Library” or “Poet in the Library,” for example, would elicit no great surprise.

Like libraries, courtrooms are semi-public spaces; there, processes of law and order are carried out in a highly ritualized fashion beneath national flags or other official insignia. Judges, often clad in wigs and priestly black robes, oversee the judicial process from the bench; raised and set at a distance from the rest of the court, it is imposing and altar-like. Courts specify their own rites of communication and propriety, demonstrated by the use of ceremonial titles and the swearing-in of witnesses. Higgins’s “Whiplashed,” published in Higher Purchase (1996), is set in a courtroom, in which the poetic speaker is an attorney seeking compensation for a male victim of whiplash, who has suffered a number of physical impairments as a result. She – for the reader senses that the speaker, although not specifically gendered, is female – deftly sabotages the solemnity of courtroom ritual, as well as the severity of her client’s injuries. Higgins’s speaker achieves this via three particular techniques: through the frequent use of wordplay; by describing the results of her client’s physical injury as surreal and even absurd; and by making playful sexual and scatological innuendoes.

Claiming that her client has suffered a variety of physical repercussions as a result of the incident, the attorney-speaker begins to address the judge relatively respectfully, but she quickly tumbles into the absurd:

My client, your honour,
is experiencing great difficulty
sitting from a standing position
and standing from a sitting position.\textsuperscript{49}

The impossibility of “standing from a sitting position,” however, is the least of her client’s worries: far worse is the fact that his sexual prowess has diminished. In a description that is nearly Joycean in its wordplay, the speaker informs the courtroom that her client has suffered a lack of spring in his pelvic step, so to speak:

His pelvic spring
is not what it used to be,
in fact on the night in question
his pelvic spring sprung [sic].

His left trapezius muscle is trapped
and is starting to make encores
half two degrees south of his right hippus,
this carry on is involuntary.\textsuperscript{50}

Not only is the injured man’s “pelvic spring” compromised or “sprung” – expressed in a whimsical syntax that echoes the popular twentieth-century rhyme, “spring has sprung, the grass is riz” – but he also seems to be suffering from a male version of the mythical wandering uterus: his “trap” has become trapped (just as his spring was sprung), and is migrating from his shoulder down to his groin, “half two degrees south of his right hippus.” Placing the site of injury firmly below the belt and poking fun at the cumbersome Latin used in medical terminology by appending an “-us” onto “hip,” Higgins subverts the gravity of the legal process as well as the ridiculous complexity of medical language. In doing so, she also carefully elides direct references to pain; the injured client is not permitted to address the judge himself, since, for Higgins’s characters, pain can only be spoken of indirectly; here, a cloak of wordplay and sexual allusions combined with indirect speech allows Higgins to speak of physical pain while speaking around it. When the attorney does quote her client to the courtroom, it is to highlight the way in which his injuries affect his speech; although they are mainly injuries to the groin, examinations or palpitations of them cause him to


\textsuperscript{50} Higgins, lines 5-12.
exclaim (or perhaps ejaculate), “Your numskull killed a swan/ with my new numberella.”

For once, pain has not eradicated speech, as Elaine Scarry suggests; instead, it has “numbed” speech, or altered it into a form of semi-nonsense.

As the attorney-speaker continues with her litany of her client’s ailments, the reader becomes progressively less certain that the injured man is suffering from the neck- and spine-related symptoms of whiplash, and begins to suspect that he has been “whipped” by another form of “lash:”

Another thing, your honour,

since the lash

my client is unable to –

how shall we put it – flatuate [sic].

This unfortunate condition

is causing a false fullness

which my client erogenously believes

will only be relieved

by forty lumber [sic] punctures.

Puffed up with a “false fullness,” the afflicted man “erogenously” – and erroneously – believes that a session of hard “puncturing” of his woody “lumber” region would offer him relief. But such things are not without their cost: “Have you any idea, your honour/,” the speaker demands, “the cost of a lumber [sic] puncture nowadays?”

The obvious sexual, even sadomasochistic connotations are conditioned by the speaker’s nod to propriety with her delicate interjection of “how shall we put it [?]” and her steadfast use of the judicial terms “your honour” and “my client.” The trickster-like attorney simultaneously abides by the regulations of courtroom language and subverts them.

At the end of her argument – or tongue-lashing – the speaker leaves the judge with a parting shot:

My client reminds me, your honour,

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51 Higgins, lines 17-18.
52 Higgins, 37, lines 24-32.
53 Higgins, lines 33-34.
that before this pelvic punishment,
he was cock of the walk. 54

She and her client desire compensation not for the injuries suffered, but for the loss of
sexual possibility, and the reference to the “cost of a lumber puncture” leads the
reader to suspect that any funds the speaker’s “client” might receive would be put
towards purchasing sex. The poem’s surreal, mythical quality, enhanced by wordplay,
the absurdity of the injured man’s complaints and their intimations of illicit sex,
challenge the validity of courtroom ritual, which attempts the impossible: that is, to
categorize an individual’s physical pain as either “true” or “false.”

Like courtrooms, hospitals are highly ritualized institutional spaces in which
pain is legislated or controlled. Within them, pain can be sanitized, medicated,
acknowledged or ignored, and their emphasis on cleanliness and sterility allows traces
of pain and suffering to quickly disappear. As with libraries and courts of law, those
who avail of their services are expected to abide by a number of written and unwritten
rules that attempt to limit or regulate the terms of appropriate use. Moreover, whether
hospital stays are brief or protracted, they are always instances of confinement: often,
patients may not enter or leave them at will, and must be formally admitted and
discharged instead.

According to Dr. Debbi Long et al., the hospital can act as a transitional space
in which shifting identities are negotiated. “Hospitals are ultimately liminal spaces,”
they write,

where people are removed from their day to day lives, taken into a betwixt and
between space of being diagnosed, treated, operated upon, [and] medicated... For
many people, hospitals are places in which their previous identities as a healthy
person, as a mobile person, as an immobile person, are stripped bare. New identities,
such as a cancer survivor, a more mobile person with a new hip, a rehabilitated
person with one less limb are forged. 55

54 Higgins, lines 43-45.
55 Debbi Long, Cynthia Hunter and Sjaak van der Geest, “When the field is a ward or clinic: Hospital
ethnography.” Anthropology & Medicine 15:2: 71-78, 73.
Hospital experiences, then, may force individuals to reckon not only with questions of personal identity, but also with experiences that form the basis of much literature: they can bring sufferers face to face with “life-and-death drama… moments of truth, self-discovery… In being removed from ‘normal’ life, a patient is frequently given the opportunity – or confronted with the necessity – of taking stock of kinship, friendship, meaning, finitude, mortality and other core issues of life.” From this perspective, it is not unusual that such a quantity of Higgins’s poems should take the hospital as their settings. The image of the hospital appears throughout her work with regularity, in poems such as “The Long Ward” and “The Test” in Goddess on the Mervue Bus (1986), while in Higher Purchase (1996) – her last book to be published with Salmon until 2010 – “One for the Bus,” “The Nebulizer Gang,” “When It Comes to the Crutch,” and “The Priest Is Coming We Can Feel It In Our Bones” take hospitals as their settings. However, it is noteworthy that the apprehensions of pain expressed by Higgins’s speakers in these poems are still indirect and understated – even though the hospital setting itself, of course, signifies the presence of physical distress.

Bookended by self-sacrifice and self-abnegation, “The Long Ward” begins and ends with allusions to the ubiquitous bowls of fresh fruit hospitals give to their patients; the women of the Long Ward, however, are suspicious of them. Eating the fruit will confirm their illnesses to them, for it is a sign of the special treatment that illness requires – and moreover, they are well used to going without for the sake of others. “I have never seen/ an old woman/ eating an orange,” the speaker declares at the poem’s commencement. By the last stanza, the hospital-oranges have been safely disposed of; they are given instead to visiting grandchildren who are healthy and hungry, who “embrace good-looking oranges/ and ancient smiles” without fear of being marked by illness or old age.

Inhabited by a well-established cast of characters, the hospital’s large all-female ward is a familiar institution to the speaker of “The Long Ward.” Devoid of teenagers, young women or new mothers, it is a receptacle for women of a certain age who suffer, the poem suggests, mostly from specifically female illnesses as well as a

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56 Long et al., 72.
58 Higgins, 43, lines 45-46.
handful of other afflictions, such as “the odd appendix.” Significantly, “The Long Ward” includes Higgins’s first and only use of the word “pain” throughout her oeuvre, and it appears as the last item in a litany of the Long Ward’s “uses”:

The long ward
for crack,
for prayer,
a joke, a song
and sometimes pain.\(^6^0\)

A wry echo of the Guinness Brewery’s twentieth-century slogan “Guinness for strength,” the repetition of the ward’s name inverts the glass-raising cheer of such a catchphrase: the ward can offer its inhabitants a few fragments to cling to, but nothing so lofty as “strength.” The speaker’s reference to pain, the final item on the list, is quickly qualified: the speaker will not admit that pain is often, mostly, or always present – but concedes only that there is “sometimes pain.”

As in other poems by Higgins that are set in institutions, including “Consumptive in the Library,” neither the poem’s speaker nor the characters she describes are referred to by their proper names. They are “somebody”s, “smiling mothers,” or “old women,” whose identity is based solidly around their grown children: in fact, peppermints and tales of their children are the currency in which they trade:

In the long ward
Silvermints are
shared and returned
with photographs of
“My second eldest”
or “This one is in Canada.”\(^6^1\)

Minimal personal information is exchanged. Such anonymity not only accents the way in which the women conceive of themselves primarily as mothers, even long

\(^5^9\) Higgins, 42, line 7.
\(^6^0\) Higgins, lines 8-12.
\(^6^1\) Higgins, lines 13-18.
after their childbearing years are over; it also allows readers to apprehend the vast numbers of women, too many to name or to count, who have passed through the Long Ward. Instead, their individuality is gestured at through synecdoche: thin legs, searching eyes, and the gifts–commercial trappings of sickness–that bring comfort, such as “…new Dunnes dressing gowns,/ new slippers,/ boxes of tissues/ they would never use at home.” Unlike their attitudes towards the treacherous oranges, the women are content to wear and use the new robes, slippers and tissues in the Ward; they are “safe” markers for self-identification, since they come into the ward from the outside world and are untainted by institution and illness. Like photographs or Silvermints, in “The Long Ward,” the terms “institution” and “illness” may be freely exchanged for one another.

The women in the Long Ward may not be known by their proper names, but the characters whose parts they act are instantly recognizable to the speaker: they are the jester and the curmudgeon. Swiftly, however, Higgins negates the reader’s complacency in encountering such well-established roles by returning to the body, where eyes and hands cling to material objects as if they were life rafts:

Always one to joke
about the black doctor,
always one to complain
about the cold tea, no ham.

An eye on the clock,
a hand on the rosary beads,
pain well out of sight.

Here, the second and last mention of “pain” in the poem is also its last use throughout Higgins’s body of poems that address physical pain. Again, it is well-hidden: earlier in the poem it was concealed beneath “crack/ [a] prayer,/ a joke, a song,” and is now

62 As Moynagh Sullivan has observed, “Higgins refuses to be someone – the individual one – in order to emphasize the body, in order to be a ‘somebody,’ a carrier of the palpable patterns of policies and ideologies that privilege the illusory autonomous self-minding individual (who must be young, able-bodied, have access, be non-dependent or have dependents) over the good of communities and the realities of relatedness and connection, age and infirmity.” (116)

63 Higgins, lines 33-36.

64 Higgins, lines 37-43.
tucked beneath eyes and hands that reach toward religion and timekeeping as illusions of control. The hospital as institution cannot contain pain, and instead provides a structure for a system of exchange that muffles and distracts from pain, an economy that allows oranges to be traded for smiles, sweets for photos, old identities for new ones.

Unusually, Higgins does make use of a proper name in “The Test,” in which the poem’s speaker encounters a grotesquely cruel female doctor. She finds herself face to face with Dr. “Iquanidae Londis” in the “Regional” hospital, where she undergoes a procedure to determine whether or not she is a coeliac.⁶⁵ As a representative of the hospital’s regime, the reptilian Dr. Londis is soulless, cruel and tyrannical, and a proper name is permitted her because she is not an individual body, but rather a caricature, an emblem, possibly named after the chain convenience shop that so often appears within the vicinity of hospitals and which is nearly as placeless as the hospital itself:

Dr. Iquanidae Londis,  
a witch doctor with the Regional,  
she loves her job.  
Her credentials she keeps  
where her heart used to be,  
it reads, Gut Snipper.  
A vocation for it you might say  
if you had the guts left.⁶⁶

Although the poem is not an exploration of hospital life, its setting is still a placeless, clinical location in which the speaker has minimal power over her own body: the doctor’s authority is never challenged, and the fact that she is also a woman does not increase her sympathy for her patient. On the contrary: “witch doctor” Dr. Londis

⁶⁵ The term “iquanidae” or “iguanidae” refers to a genus of collared lizards, *Crotaphytus Holbrook*. See Brian I. Crother et al., “Scientific and Standard English Names of Amphibians and Reptiles of North America North of Mexico, With Comments Regarding Our Confidence In Our Understanding.” (Hammond, Louisiana, USA: Southeastern Louisiana University, 2001, 1-82, 40.)

represents “woman’s inhumanity to woman,” as Higgins titled one of her better-known poems in her second collection, *Witch in the Bushes.*

Similar to the close-mouthed narrator of “Secrets,” the speaker of “The Test” presses painful events such as invasive medical examinations deep into her own body, in the hopes that they will remain safely hidden. “I sampled the test once,” she confesses, “the event I hid deep in the layers of my liver.” But it is no use: two years later she “collide[s] with the witch doctor” once more; “one look into her mad scarlet eyes,” and suddenly the speaker – against her will, it seems – has agreed to undergo the painful test a second time:

“It’s nothing to it,
I just ram this little off-white tube
forcibly down your stingy little oesophagus,

wriggle it around awhile,

…as soon as it attaches itself to your shapely

virginal gut and I see that it’s got a piece

of you between its teeth,

I’ll just give a little tug with all my sincerity....

By refusing them proper names, Higgins frequently disembodies her speakers as she speaks of their bodies “in order,” as Moynagh Sullivan writes, “to emphasize the body, in order to be a ‘somebody,’: in “The Test,” the speaker is literally being disembodied as well, for the formidable Dr. Londis is determined to snip off a piece of her large intestine.

Although she is forced into an invasive medical procedure against her will, the speaker emerges victorious at the end of the poem, as it turns out, she is “no coeliac,” and even the serpentine Dr. Londis proclaims she has the “loveliest-looking large

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67 See Higgins, “Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman (Galway Labour Exchange),” *Witch in the Bushes*, 1988, 48-9. Written as an incantatory list of “the powers that be,” it ticks off some of the countless ways in which women who are in power over other women abuse them: “Powder power,/ lipstick power/ pencil power/ paper power/...big tits power/ piercing eyes power/...I own this building power/ I own you power...Your father drank too much power,/ your sister had a baby when she was fifteen power/ where were you last night power...” (Higgins, 48, lines 3-6, 9-10, 12-13, 16-18.)
69 Higgins, 26, lines 12, 15-18, 22-25.
70 Sullivan, 116.
After being thrust into a liminal placelessness of pain, a transition or rite of passage has occurred: the speaker emerges triumphant in her new identity as a non-coeliac. More importantly, Dr. Londis’s power has been vanquished: now she is complimentary instead of controlling. As the speaker emerges from the liminal stage of transition, changed, it is clear that “The Test” is a testament to the hospital’s status as a liminal zone. However, in its surreally-named, bloodthirsty female doctor and triumphant female speaker, it also hints at Victor Turner’s concept of the liminoid: that is, the poem’s power to disrupt, via wordplay and mockery. Again, Higgins contests the medical establishment’s authority – and its ability – to control individual suffering.

In “The Priest is Coming, We Can Feel It In Our Bones,” published in Higher Purchase (1996), Higgins returns to the scene of the hospital ward. Here, the formidable Dr. Iquanidae Londis has been replaced by equally forbidding nuns and priests, who preside over a ward full of ill, weary women recovering from tuberculosis. Under their gaze, the women’s suffering, mortal human bodies, wasted by disease, are less likely to be healed than they are to be replaced by the body of Christ. Its chilling opening lines echo the force-feeding of anorexics, for the body of Christ is about to be given to them, not taken by them:

In the T. B. ward
we queue for the bath,
our bodies
are knackered
we are all skin and bone,
but the priest will give us
the body of Christ.

(This isn’t just hearsay
Sister Mary Mammary swears)72

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71 Higgins, 27, lines 32-34.
Like Dr. Londis in “The Test,” Sister Mary Mammary receives a proper name only that she may be ridiculed; to paraphrase Moynagh Sullivan, she is permitted to be a someone only in order to be an empty sign, a no-one. “Mammary” is a particularly clinical, asexual term, with its connotations of medical examinations and breast milk production. Yet she has an unmistakeable physical presence: unlike her patients on the ward, Sister Mary of the Breasts is large and fleshily repressive, and her body has a distinctly female shape. Higgins emphasises her “mammaries” in order to place her as the anti-mother, a representation of femininity that suffocates while it claims to nurture.73

Sister Mary is eager to for the women to receive the bodiless body of Christ, but she is clearly less attentive to their physical needs. As the second youngest on the ward, the poem’s speaker has no sympathy for the youngest girl, an epileptic, who is her closest competitor for special treatment by the hospital sisters. In fact, she is shamelessly jealous of the epileptic girl who “throws a fit/ at the drop of a hat,” for her illness is valuable capital in the hospital’s economy, and she can exchange it for anything she likes, including a “spot of tea/ a spot of toast/ brown bread with/ obscene amounts of butter” or “sputum mugs full of glucose.”74 The rest of the women get nothing but “a spot on the lung.”75 Matter-of-factly, the speaker describes the economic system of the TB ward, which is far removed from the nervous barter system that sustains the women in “The Long Ward, and which trades in unfulfilled desire:” “You name it/ we desire it/ she gets it,” she states, envious of the bargain the epileptic girl has snagged; “all for a fit a fortnight.”76

Verbal requests for sufficient nourishment seem to be useless; in order to survive, the women must speak with their ill bodies. A well-established hierarchy of diseases exists within the hospital’s culture, and when it comes to jockeying for position among them, epileptic seizures offer the clear advantages of requiring immediate attention and much fuss. Epileptic or not, however, ordered language has become useless to all of the women, and those who cannot produce seizures must make do with the second-class language of phlegm:

73 For a theoretical discussion of the maternal’s potential to be stifling and repressive, see Luce Irigaray, “And The One Doesn’t Stir Without The Other.” Signs 7:1 (Autumn, 1981): 60-67.
74 Higgins, lines 12-13, 18-22.
75 Higgins, 45, line 29.
76 Higgins, lines 25-28.
Failing a fit,
our phlegm talk
must be convincing
otherwise we’re out on our ear
with our bones in a bag. 77

They resort to the use of coughs and grunts: that is, the linguistic world of the pre-verbal or semiotic. Like “Consumptive in the Library,” in which one ill, possibly tubercular, body draws attention to another, “The Priest Is Coming…” disturbs the institutional complacency that it is desirable – or possible – to make judgements regarding who is more or less ill than whom. However, unlike “Consumptive,” in which the ill bodies gesture to and therefore connect with one another, in this poem, the ways in which the women suffer separate and distance them from one another.

Towards the conclusion of the poem, the time for the Eucharist draws near: as per a “pep talk/ from Sister Mary Mammary,” the women are urged to conceal their suffering as tidily as possible before the priest. 78 There must be no sign that these ill bodies are indeed possessors of bodies. “[And] remember,” she snaps,

no shuffling
no profuse sweating
no farting
no fainting
no fits
and absolutely
no spitting.

The priest is coming
we can feel it in our bones. 79

Sister Mary Mammary muffles the women’s bodies, dis-embodying them for the priest’s arrival: if possible, they are not to be seen, heard, or smelled at all. As in other

77 Higgins, 34-38.
78 Higgins, lines 43-44.
79 Higgins, 46, lines 52-60.
of Higgins’s poems that deal with the ill body, poetic speakers have no possibility of addressing their experiences of pain directly. When the women in the TB ward do attempt to articulate their needs, they are silenced; since language has been denied them, the female body, alone, is left to speak on its own behalf. Perhaps, for Higgins, poetry can offer an alternative to this dead-lock, for the poetic speaker is able to circumvent giving a direct account of the experience of pain, slyly gesturing to it instead.

It is not insignificant that the individuals who speak from the liminal spaces in Higgins’s poetry are nearly always female. Until the 1960s, the Catholic Church and the Irish State drastically limited the political and economic rights of women and, by extension, their rights to public expression. While Higgins’s speakers, most often, must speak of pain by speaking around pain, Higgins re-envoices women in her poems that explicitly address death and dying: she privileges the female poetic speaker by allowing her to act as an articulate witness to death, permitting her to have the “last word” over it. In this there is, of course, a long-standing precedent within Irish culture; for hundreds of years, keening – the formal, public expression of grief over the deceased, usually a male – has been the provenance of women at least since the reign of Elizabeth I.

When it comes to speaking of the body’s demise, then, the triumph of the last word belongs to women, although it is hardly a victory that is celebrated overtly. A number of Higgins’s poems that narrate an incidence of death or address the act of dying appear in Philomena’s Revenge and Higher Purchase, the last two volumes of hers to be published by Salmon. Such poems are often ferociously sarcastic anti-laments: instead of praising the dead, Higgins’s speakers are more likely to criticise, lampoon or, at best, praise the dead through backhanded compliments. According to Angela Bourke (1988), there is a precedence for such criticism in the tradition of the

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80 Women are nearly always the poetic speakers in Higgins’ poems, especially those involving physical pain, but they are not the only sufferers: males who appear in her poems, too, develop lung cancer, varicose veins, are afflicted with hangovers, break hips, contract asthma, and are run over by public buses. See, for example, “His Mother Was the Problem With His Veins” in Witch in the Bushes; “Space Invader” in Philomena’s Revenge, and “He Is Not Thinking About Last Night,” “One for the Bus,” “Burnt Offering,” “A Neck Ahead,” and “Easy Rider,” all published in Higher Purchase.
caoineadh or lament. “In one whole area of the tradition it is the dead man himself who is subjected to abuse,” even “withering dispraise,” she argues.\textsuperscript{83} This assists mourners in moving into the anger stage of grief, but it also demonstrates the way in which, through the lament tradition, women could “protest at violence, injustice and indignity in their lives.”\textsuperscript{84}

In “The Deserter,” first published in the twenty-third issue of \textit{The Salmon}, a dissatisfied, twentieth-century Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill comments on the swift passing of her husband. Unlike her eighteenth-century counterpart, however, whose “Lament for Art O’Leary” is filled with passion and desire, “The Deserter”’s widow charges her husband with being as thoughtless and inconsiderate in death as he was in life. “He couldn’t wait,” the speaker gripes, “just up and died/ on me.”\textsuperscript{85} As usual, her husband has simply “deserted” her without sparing a thought for the trouble she has gone to in looking after him:

Two hours,  
two hours  
I spent ironing  
them shirts  
and he didn’t even  
give me the pleasure  
of dirtying them,

that’s the type  
of person he was,  
would rather die  
than please you.\textsuperscript{86}

Here, the speaker lists her grievances in a way that relates them to those of her listeners: that her listeners will commiserate with her is implicit, for she expects them to know exactly “the type” of man she means. Not only passively spiteful, he is also

\textsuperscript{83} Bourke, 289.  
\textsuperscript{84} Bourke, 289.  
\textsuperscript{85} Higgins, “The Deserter.” \textit{Philomena’s Revenge}, 17, lines 1-3.  
\textsuperscript{86} Higgins, lines 4-14.
actively disrespectful, particularly in his speech: he must have a pint when he craves one, “or he’d have the gawks, he said./ That’s the type he was,/ talk dirty in front of any woman.” The implicit contradiction is, of course, that the speaker resents her husband for “deserting” her, which she carefully masks in her indignation over his lack of appreciation for the carefully-ironed shirts, while she is also grimly satisfied that in death he is finally, and permanently, silent. He does make “a lovely corpse,” the speaker admits, particularly because as such, he cannot criticise or complain:

He’s not giving
out to me now
for using Jeyes Fluid
on the kitchen floor…

He’s tight-lipped now
about my toe separators,
before this
he would threaten them
on the hot ash.  

In life, her husband could tyrannize her through language, by creating a narrative for and around her through complaint and belittlement, particularly of items associated with “women’s work,” such as cleaning products, couch cushions, or the “toe separators” that soothe overworked feet. Now, the speaker’s time is now her own, and, moreover, she alone is left to narrate the story of her life: “The next time/ I spent two hours/ ironing shirts for him/,” she snaps, “he’ll wear them.”

Traditional laments usually mourn the passing of men, according to Angela Bourke, but in Higgins’s poetry, women also mourn the deaths of one another. The omniscient female narrator in “A Time for Praise,” also published in *Philomena’s Revenge*, describes the death of an old woman suffering from a broken hip. At first
the hip keeps its owner awake all night, but it eventually puts her to sleep with finality:

She said
she never slept
with that hip
and she knew everything
that went on
on the street…

When she died,
with that hip,
the men made a tent
with white sheets
at her doorstep.\textsuperscript{91}

In death, her body is kept from prying eyes by this “tent/ [of] white sheets,” which conceals her from the same street she observed with such alacrity in life. When she is placed in her coffin, “the women keen.”\textsuperscript{92} Her witchlike sisters do the mourning, but in an informal way; they ask the speaker for a lift to Penney’s department store, where they purchase cheap black clothes for the funeral in “noisy bags/ oozing with black magic.”\textsuperscript{93} Their cigarettes “dance” as they begin their mourning chant while stuck in traffic in the back seat of the car. “She was never any trouble,/ God rest her,” one declares,

not the worst of them,

no way the worst
not by a long shot,

she always had the last word,

\textsuperscript{91} Higgins, “A Time for Praise,” 47, lines 1-6, 17-21.
\textsuperscript{92} Higgins, line 26.
\textsuperscript{93} Higgins, lines 35-36.
She did, she did,

She looked so peaceful there laid out

She did, she did

Like a bone in the bed,

Like a bone in the bed.94

The presence of death indicates that the reality of suffering has not been controlled; “The Deserter”’s ulcer has left him “wax-faced above/ in the morgue,” and pain has conquered the deceased’s ability to remain articulate, as in “A Time for Praise.” Death’s inevitability ensures that language will always lose the struggle with pain. Nonetheless, in poems by Higgins involving death, female speakers manage to have the proverbial last word on the subject, for the female speaker is still present, often alone, to comment upon it or to construct a narrative around it. This privileging of women’s words could be interpreted as a way to reweave the symbolic with the semiotic to produce a discourse that can include articulations of the semiotic, including expressions of the body in pain.

Physical suffering has been described by writers such as Elaine Scarry and Virginia Woolf as the antithesis of language, in its ability to reduce or remove the sufferer’s capacity for coherent articulation. Individuals in pain may find themselves bereft of the ability to communicate, able only for pre-verbal utterances such as grunts or cries, similar to those described by Julia Kristeva as the “semiotic.” However, it is precisely this element of the pre-verbal that, according to Kristeva, places poetic language as a “privileged site” of analysis.95 Poetic language minimises the distance between the symbolic and semiotic by, uniquely, permitting the semiotic or “unspeakable” to break through the symbolic, repressive order of language. Poetry and pain – or, in Scarry’s words, “pain and imagining” – seem, then, to be closely

94 Higgins, 48-49, lines 43-53.
95 Selden et al., 141.
aligned as “the ‘framing events’ within whose boundaries all other perceptual, somatic and emotional events occur.”

Higgins’s poems involving the experience of pain not only envoice the semiotic through the use of poetic language, they also carefully circumvent the inexpressibility of physical suffering. Through poetic articulations of pain such as these, then, the separate strands of the symbolic and semiotic begin to be reintegrated with one another, reintegrating the lost, “fragmented” body into language. Moreover, Higgins’s poems that deal with pain demonstrate that the exigencies of the suffering body cannot be suppressed by language: as Claire Bracken points out, the “‘lived body’ consists not just of human consciousness, but also the total embodied situation of the individual.”

Poems that represent the “unspeakability” of illness, incapacitation and pain also possess social implications: they are potentially useful to the destabilization of complacency and rigidity of thought within a society. “Poetic language, in particular, introduces the subversive openness of the semiotic ‘across’ society’s ‘closed’ symbolic order,” writes Kristeva. When Higgins, whose work has been described as subversive or “anarchic,” turns her poetic gaze on physical distress, she disrupts any complacent assumptions her readers may hold regarding how, and by whom, the nature of suffering may be articulated.

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96 Scarry, 165.
97 Bracken, 3.
98 Selden et al, 162.
99 Eilean Ni Chuilleanain, for example, in her blurb for Goddess and Witch (Salmon, 1988), points to the way in which Higgins’s work “make[s] anarchic fun,” while Irene Gilsenan Nordin’s 2007 interview with the poet is entitled “‘True to the Subversive’: Rita Ann Higgins in Conversation.”
Chapter 6: “Feeling that the room had no walls:” Ecopoiesis and Moya Cannon’s dwelling spaces

In 1962, Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring exposed and denounced the effects of the pervasive use of pesticides and insecticides in American farms, orchards, and gardens. These chemicals, Carson argued, when used with impunity and without regard for their long-term consequences on the environment (including human health), would have serious repercussions. Famously, Silent Spring opens with a fictional description of an American town situated within a rich ecosystem that supports a healthy variety of animal and vegetable life, where “all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings.” Suddenly and without warning, the harmony is disrupted by a mysterious force: “a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community…Everywhere there was a shadow of death.” Livestock, vegetation, fish, birds – for it is the absence of birdsong that makes for a “silent spring” – and even human children perish quickly and without apparent cause, except for the presence of “white granular powder” that had fallen “like snow upon the roofs and the lawns, the fields and streams.” Although such a situation seems possible only in the realm of science fiction, or as a result of “witchcraft or enemy action,” the reality of its origin is far worse: Carson concludes the fable with the direct, sobering indictment that “[t]he people had done it themselves.”

Considered to have inaugurated the modern environmental movement, Silent Spring was the first of many texts in the second half of the twentieth century to

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1 A version of this chapter was published in The European English Messenger 17:2 (Autumn 2008).
3 Carson, 21.
4 Carson, 21.
5 Carson, 21. Carson particularly objects to the mass use – and abuse – of the pesticide DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane). However, as James Lovelock (2007) notes, DDT was originally used against airborne diseases such as malaria and typhus, and, Lovelock argues, was responsible for saving millions of lives. He calls the banning of DDT and similar insecticides “a selfish, ill-informed act driven by affluent radicals in the first world. The inhabitants of tropical countries have paid a high price in death and illness as a result of their inability to use DDT as an effective controller of malaria.” (James Lovelock, The Revenge of Gaia. London: Penguin, 2007: 138.)
6 Greg Garrard, Ecocriticism. London: Routledge, 2004: 1. Garrard comments on the way in which environmental texts such as Silent Spring not only sound a call for concrete action and change, but are also of rhetorical value. For example, Garrard argues, following on from Ralph Lutts (2000), in order to convince an audience unfamiliar with the signs and consequences of environmental pollution but all too familiar with radioactive fallout after the horrors of the second World War, Carson draws a parallel
interrogate the relationship of human beings to non-human nature. It is this relationship between human- and non-human nature that the Irish poet Moya Cannon explores in poems throughout her oeuvre. Cannon was a regular contributor to *The Salmon*, little magazine affiliated with the group of writers who founded and participated in the Galway Writers’ Workshop. Her work was published in four of its issues between 1985 and 1989: “Hills” appeared in its thirteenth issue; “Eagle’s Rock,” “Blossom Viewing,” and “Taom” were published in its sixteenth issue; “Thirst on Ceann Boirne” featured in its nineteenth issue, and “Afterlove” and “Ultramontane” appeared in its in twenty-second. Cannon’s first collection, *Oar*, was published by Salmon in 1990, and was reissued by Gallery Press in 2000 in a “revised” edition. Gallery also published her second collection; *The Parchment Boat*, in 1997; subsequent collections, *Carrying the Songs* (2007) and *Hands* (2011) were published by Carcanet. While existing archival and print sources yield no information regarding the circumstances under which Cannon’s relationship with Salmon came to an end, her work does not appear in the publisher’s 2007 anthology, *Salmon: A Journey in Poetry*, suggesting that the relationship may have ended in conflict. It is certain, however, that the poems first published in *The Salmon* and in the Salmon edition of *Oar* launched Cannon’s reputation as a poet finely attuned to the environment and to the processes of interacting and dwelling within it. This chapter considers the way in which her ecopoetry explores the relationship between nonhuman nature and human dwelling across all four of her collections, since it is a topic that recurs with frequency within each of them.

Poetry that attempts to repair the chasm between humans and the earth has been called “ecopoetry,” and, in his recent books *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (2002) and *The West Side of Any Mountain: Place, Space and Ecopoetry* (2005), J. Scott Bryson has suggested a useful definition of the term. For Bryson, ecopoetry has three main characteristics: first, an ecopoeem displays an “ecological and biocentric perspective recognizing the interdependent nature of the world;” second, it exhibits “a deep humility with regard to our relationships with human and nonhuman nature;” finally, it often maintains “an intense scepticism toward hyperrationality, a scepticism...
that usually leads to condemnation of an overtechnologized modern world and a warning concerning the very real potential for ecological catastrophe."\(^8\) In this way, as Neil Astley writes in his introduction to the anthology *Earth Shattering* (2008), ecopoetry “goes beyond traditional nature poetry to take on distinctly contemporary issues, recognising the interdependence of all life on earth, the wildness and otherness of nature, and the irresponsibility of our attempts to tame and plunder [it].”\(^9\) However, although it is vital to address this “irresponsibility,” it is equally important to draw a distinction between ecopoetry and articulations of political viewpoints or polemics, as Jonathan Bate insists. In the former, the language itself must perform ecological work, not simply act as a vehicle for a political doctrine. “Ecopoetry is not synonymous with writing that is pragmatically green,” Bate cautions: for example, “a manifesto for ecological correctness will not be poetic because its language is bound to be instrumental, to address questions of doing rather than to ‘present’ the experience of dwelling.”\(^10\) Ecopoetry, then, goes beyond polemic in order to express “an attentiveness, an attunement to both words and the world, and so to acknowledge that, although we make sense of things by way of words, we do not live apart from the world. For culture and environment are held together in a complex and delicate web.”\(^11\)

Poets from around the world have articulated their engagement with this “complex and delicate web,” and American literature boasts a strong tradition of nature writing from at least the nineteenth century. “Nature has been reckoned a crucial ingredient of the American national ego,” maintains Lawrence Buell. “Ever since an American literary canon began to crystallize, American literature has been considered preoccupied with country and wilderness as setting, theme and value in contradistinction to society and the urban, notwithstanding the sociological facts of urbanization and industrialization,” and especially significant is Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden* (1854).\(^12\) Twentieth- and twenty-first century American poets who

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\(^{10}\) Bate, 42.

\(^{11}\) Bate, 23.

write “ecopoems,” according to the definition suggested by Bryson, Bate and Astley, include Elizabeth Bishop, Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry,13 Denise Levertov, Marianne Moore, Mary Oliver, Robert Hass, William Stafford, Paula Gunn Allen, and Joy Harjo, among many others.14

Within modern British literature, too, there exists a long tradition of literary engagement with the natural world. Modern British nature- and eco-poetry has its roots in the work of poets such as Thomas Gray, George Crabbe and the Anglo-Irish writer Oliver Goldsmith, whose anti-pastoral poetry protested against both “the conventional simplicities of neo-pastoral” and the “description and… idealisation of English country life and its social and economic relations,” according to Raymond Williams (1973).15 With the introduction of enclosures, “English country life” had undergone a sea change; common land, on which small farmers relied for subsistence in order to farm small plots or graze livestock, was purchased and controlled by the aristocracy, who often engaged in “rackrenting,” or charging their tenants exorbitant rents. Although the initial aim of the system of enclosures was to increase the production of food, thereby “improving” the quality of life for English labourers, in reality, it meant that large numbers of tenants were robbed of their means of existence, and were driven off the land, as Williams observes, either to seek work in the cities, or to succumb to starvation.16 Therefore, instead of praising rural retreats for their conduciveness to meditation and deep thought, or for their productive, fruitful harvests, poems by Gray, Crabbe, and Goldsmith on the English countryside are characterised by tones “of loss, change, regret: that structure of feeling, at once moved and meditating, appalled and withdrawn, which is caught so exactly in Goldsmith’s couplet, “E’en now, methinks, as pondering here I stand/ I see the rural virtues leave the land.”17

14 A number of these poems can be found in two recent and noteworthy anthologies of eco-poetry: The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet, ed. Alice Oswald (2005), and Earth Shattering: Eco-poems, ed. Neil Astley (2008).
16 Williams, 66.
17 Williams, 68.
In the nineteenth century, William Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” countered the eighteenth-century “quest for mastery over a landscape” that had been validated by the Cartesian “ambition of developing an ‘infinity of devices by which [human beings] might enjoy, without any effort, the fruits of the earth and all its commodities.” Instead – in a fashion that predicts James Lovelock’s Gaia theory – Wordsworth’s poetic speaker submits “to an inner vision which enables one to ‘see into the life of things,’” writes Jonathan Bate. “The memory of the Wye valley teaches the poet that all ‘things’, even apparently dead matter such as earth and rock, have a life, an animating spirit.” This awareness of an “animating spirit” that is intrinsic to all earthly things is truly ecological, for it leads to an acknowledgment that the delicate connections between these entities need to be carefully tended. “Romantic poetry can enable us to think fragility,” Bate contends. “Byron’s ‘Darkness’ proposes that when ecosystems collapse, human bonds do so too. Keats’s ‘To Autumn’ and Coleridge’s ‘Frost at Midnight’ are thinkings [sic] of our bonds with each other and the earth, thinkings of fragile, beautiful, necessary ecological wholeness.”

Twentieth- and twenty-first century British, Scottish and Welsh poets have continued this legacy of “thinking about fragility.” They include Ted Hughes (who, as Jonathan Bate explains, was a passionate environmentalist), Alice Oswald, Kathleen Jamie, Fleur Adcock, William Barnes, Don Paterson, Colin Simms, and Philip Larkin, whose poem “Going, Going” was commissioned by the Department of the Environment in 1972. With a Goldsmithian sense of exile, Larkin grieves for the nuances of both natural and man-made environments, which are slowly being sacrificed at the altar of human avarice. With their destruction, an entire nation disappears:

And that will be England gone,
The shadows, the meadows, the lanes,
The guildhalls, the carved choirs.

18 Bate, 146.
19 Bate, 146.
20 Bate, 112.
21 Bate describes the way in which Hughes, in his later years, “became increasingly angry about the violence wrought by man upon nature.” In a review of The Environmental Revolution by Max Nicholson, Hughes made this explicit: “While the mice in the field are listening to the Universe, and moving in the body of nature, where every living cell is sacred to every other, and all are interdependent, the Developer is peering at the field through a visor, and behind him stands the whole army of madmen’s ideas, and shareholders, impatient to cash in the world.” (Hughes in Bate, 27.)
22 Astley, 89.
There’ll be books; it will linger on
In galleries; but all that remains
For us will be concrete and tyres.

Most things are never meant.
This won’t be, most likely: but greeds
And garbage are too thick-strewn
To be swept up now, or invent
Excuses that make them all needs.
I just think it will happen, soon.23

For Larkin, as for Goldsmith, moral and environmental corruption go arm in arm, and any redemptive power that art might possess is not enough to save it. “Books” and “galleries” may still represent that disappeared England to elite audiences, but they will be poor substitutes, particularly for “us” – a less-privileged class to whom they will not be available, who will be relegated to a world of “concrete and tyres.”

Within an Irish context, ecocriticism has, according to Greg Garrard (2012), “made, as yet, little headway…examples of environmental criticism of Irish literature are few and scattered.”24 Contrary to Garrard’s assertion, however, a body of criticism addressing the intersection of Irish literature and the environment has indeed developed over the past several years, including Oona Frawley’s *Irish Pastoral: Nostalgia and Twentieth-Century Irish Literature* (2005); Tim Wenzell’s *Emerald Green: An ecocritical study of Irish literature* (2009); Christine Cusick’s *Out of the Earth: Ecocritical Readings of Irish Texts* (2010); James J. McElroy’s article “Ecocriticism and Irish Poetry: A Preliminary Outline” (2011); and Donna Potts’s *Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition* (2011). Incontrovertibly, within Irish poetry there exists a long tradition of engagement with nonhuman nature. As Tim Wenzell points out, the forest grove was the spiritual centre and place of

23 Philip Larkin, “Going, Going” in Astley, 88-89.
reverence for both early and Christian Celts.\textsuperscript{25} One early Irish hermit poet put it thus, Wenzell writes: “‘The clear cuckoo sings to me,/ lovely discourse;/ in its grey cloak from the crest of the bushes;/ truly – may the Lord protect me:/ well do I write under the forest wood.’”\textsuperscript{26} As the hermit’s poem attests, early Irish poets had a special connection with birds as inhabitants of the forest, a connection that has echoes in Irish poetry centuries later, as the late seventeenth-century poems in An Duanaire: Poems of the Dispossessed ed. Séan Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella (1981), suggest. These include “Fáilte Don Óan” (“Welcome, Sweetest Bird”) by Séamus Dall Mac Cuarta and “An Bonnán Buí” (“The Yellow Bittern”) by Cathal Bui Mac Ghiolla Ghanuna: in the latter, the speaker mourns for the dead bittern, addressing it as his “brother,” (and suggesting, humourously, that the bittern died for want of a drop to drink, just as the speaker believes he may himself).\textsuperscript{27} The anonymously written folk poem “Cill Chais” is also a lament, mourning the loss of the forest and the ecosystem of which it was part. “Now what will we do for timber,” it begins, “with the last of the woods laid low?” In a manner strangely prescient of Silent Spring, the speaker continues, “Ducks’ voices nor geese do I hear there,/ nor the eagle’s cry over the bay,/ …No birdsong there, sweet and delightful…nor cuckoo on top of the branches/ settling the world to rest.”\textsuperscript{28}

As the Irish-speaking author of “Cill Chais” grieves over the loss of the forest and the ecosystem that supported human as well as nonhuman life, his Anglo-Irish counterpart Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) also engages one of the main characteristics of contemporary ecopoetry as he critiques the “irresponsibility” of “plundering” nature, one of the main characteristics of contemporary ecopoetry, in his poem “The Deserted Village” (1770). Goldsmith, Donna Potts argues, can be regarded as the first Irish writer in English to “use pastoral as a critique of [modernization and industrialization].”\textsuperscript{29} Indeed, “The Deserted Village” depicts the fictional, bucolic village of “Sweet Auburn, loveliest village of the plain,/ Where

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{25} Wenzell 9, 11.
\bibitem{26} Wenzell, 5.
\bibitem{28} Anonymous, “Cill Chais.” Ó Tuama and Kinsella, 329.
\end{thebibliography}
health and plenty cheer the labouring swain,” and its ruin due to the forces of industrialization – specifically the greed of the rich, whose desire for luxury goods or “the freaks of wanton wealth” knows no bounds. Where Auburn’s inhabitants were once poor but self-sufficient, avaricious “princes and lords” have destroyed the nation’s greatest treasure – its lively peasant community – through rural clearances or enclosures in which land was seized from local peasants to reward British soldiers, often to be converted into parks and grounds for big houses. Goldsmith – as well as his contemporaries Gray, Crabbe, and Clare – was deeply critical of the obsession with wealth and the trappings of luxury that corrupts both metropolis and countryside: the exploitation of human and non-human nature required to sustain such lifestyles has disastrous consequences morally, environmentally, and even poetically. For the rural dispossession Goldsmith details is also the dispossession of poetry, as Raymond Williams argues. “The memory of ‘sweet Auburn,’” he writes, “is of a kind of community, a kind of feeling, and a kind of verse, which are no longer able to survive, under the pressure of ‘trade’s unfeeling train’, but which equally cannot be gone beyond, into new relationship and imagination; which can only go into exile and a desperate protest,” and it is this “exiled poetry” – for Larkin as well as Goldsmith – which must prevent the exploitation of nature, and reconnect humans with nature’s “animating spirit.”

Twentieth- and twenty-first century Irish poets who have turned their gaze toward the connections between human and non-human nature include Mayo-born Richard Murphy, who, as Eamonn Wall observes, “lived and wrote among the flora, fauna, birds and seals” in solitude at Ardilaun Island, or High Island, off the coast of

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30 Oliver Goldsmith, “The Deserted Village.” *Oliver Goldsmith: Selected Writings*, ed. John Lucas. Manchester: Carcanet, 1988: 260, lines 1-2. As Raymond Williams indicates, it is difficult to ascertain whether Goldsmith based “Auburn” upon a specific village. (75) It is thought to be based upon either the townlands Lissoy or Glasson, Co. Westmeath, but it is likely that it was also influenced by Goldsmith’s knowledge of the English countryside, for the dire results of the enclosures were certainly not limited to an Irish context. “Improvement of land,” the seemingly noble aim of the enclosure system, “created…a greater number of the landless and disinherited, who could not survive or compete in the new conditions….Thus the economic progress…had social results which at times contradicted it, and at other times led to the disaster of families and communities,” writes Raymond Williams. (66) Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century agricultural writer Arthur Young had been one of the most ardent advocates of enclosure, but, as Williams notes, when he “saw the full social results of the changes he fought for, he was not alone in second thoughts and in new kinds of questioning: ‘I had rather that all the commons of England were sunk into the sea, than that the poor should in future be treated on enclosing as they have been hitherto.’” (67) I am grateful to Charlie Byrne for his discussion of “Goldsmith country” in Co. Westmeath.
Connemara. Although Wall acknowledges that Murphy did not set out to write consciously “environmental” poetry, he points to “a palpable tone of passionate, ecological discovery” in Murphy’s collection *High Island* (1974) in particular, and suggests that for Murphy, as well as non-Irish ecopoets Gary Snyder, Wendell Berry and others, “actions of repair and renewal must begin in the western part of their nations, those regions that would appear, on first sight, to be less tainted by industrialization and profit.”31 John Montague, too, describes the effects of industrialization, but within the context of farming practices. In “Driving South” from *The Rough Field* (1972), the poetic speaker notes the “changing rural pattern” as he drives south; mechanized modes of farming take over from traditional ones, and while they spare the labourer hibernating / in his cottage for half the year” the “indignity of the hiring fair,” a loss has still been suffered. “Yet something mourns,” muses the Larkinesque speaker, for the “lost dream of man at home/ in a rural setting!” now only memorialized in art and poetry. As close as the dream seems to the speaker, it is elusive: he, too, has failed “to return/ to what is already going/ going/ GONE.”32 In Montague’s “The Last Monster,” the speaker not only lists, memorializes and mourns extinct wildlife such as the “golden-pawed snowman of Everest,/ wildcat of the Grampians, /” or the Bower-bird of Peru,33 but also meditates on the implications for the human psyche when the wild, undiscovered and unknown in the nonhuman landscape has been vanquished. Michael Longley pays close attention to the world of nonhuman nature in “Echoes,” in which he continues the early Irish affinity for birds by turning his gaze towards stonechats, and then a bumblebee in a strange state of limbo, “suspended, neither feeding nor dying.”34 In Seamus Heaney’s early work, as Tim Wenzell writes, nature appears “as an alien other,” particularly in poems such as “Death of a Naturalist” in the volume of the same name, in which frogs become, for the child speaker “obscene threats,” sitting “poised like mud grenades;” or in “Blackberry Picking,” in which an evil “rat-grey fungus” renders the morning’s


32 Montague in Astley, 49.

33 As Potts points out, Goldsmith’s “The Deserted Village” resonated particularly with John Montague, who wrote on the poem during his graduate studies; part of this work was later published in *The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing*. See her chapter “A Lost Pastoral Rhythm: The Poetry of John Montague,” 19-44.

34 As Neil Astley acknowledges in *Earth Shattering*, Longley has asserted in an interview, “‘The most urgent political problems are ecological: how we share the planet with the plants and other animals. My nature writing is my most political.’” (Longley in Astley, 60)
blackberry-picking redundant, poisoning the entire batch, while in his later work, nature appears more regularly as “a place wired into human consciousness,” in poems such as “Squarings” from Seeing Things (1991).

Irish women poets have also contributed to Irish ecopoetry in diverse ways. Eavan Boland’s “The New Pastoral” from Night Feed (1982), for example, rewrites the traditional pastoral, locating her female poetic speaker not in an Arcadian bower but, firmly in the suburbs: “All day/ I listen to/ the loud distress – the switch, the tick/ of new herds—/” she laments, “but I’m no shepherdess.” Now, in a twentieth-century kitchen, the speaker struggles to make the craft of poetry compatible with “traditional” role woman as subject, not object, of a poem, and must wrestle with the “amnesias/ of a rite/ I danced once on a frieze.” Much recent critical attention has also been paid to the ecopoetry of Paula Meehan: her “Death of a Field” from Painting Rain (2009) and “Elder” from Dharmakaya (2000) are but two examples. Of the younger generation of poets, Catriona O’Reilly demonstrates attentiveness to the natural world in poems such as “The River” from The Sea Cabinet (2006), in which the speaker meditates on the unfathomable power of the river in all its otherness. For O’Reilly, the river has the power to change and disrupt human complacency, not vice versa: “We wonder how will the river change, escape/ development, or work its careless necromancy/ on the next ones/ to come here.”

Moya Cannon has made significant contributions to ecopoetry in Ireland. Born in Dunfanaghy in Co. Donegal, Cannon, now a member of Aosdána, has lived and worked in Galway for over two decades. Critics reading Cannon’s work, including Donna Potts, Christine Cusick, and Eamonn Wall, have commented upon its intense engagement with nonhuman nature. As Cusick notes, “in both Oar (1990; 2000) and The Parchment Boat (1997), Cannon’s poetry extends a liberating commitment to the

35 For a more nuanced consideration of Heaney’s and Longley’s poetic interactions with the natural world, see Tim Wenzell’s chapter, “Poets of the North, Nature of the West: Kavanagh, MacNeice, Heaney, and Longley” in Emerald Green: An Ecocritical Study of Irish Literature,109-133.
36 Wenzell, 124.
38 Boland, 48-50.
39 See the Spring/Fall 2009 issue of An Sionnach, which is a special edition dedicated to Meehan’s work, particularly “‘A Murmuration of Starlings in a Rowan Tree’; Finding Gary Snyder in Paula Meehan’s Ecopoetics” by Kathryn Kirkpatrick and “The Wolf Tree: Culture and Nature in Paula Meehan’s Dharmakaya and Painting Rain” by Jefferson Holdridge.
40 O’Reilly in Astley,144.
materiality of Ireland’s landscape as a presence that both contains and enables the stories of personal, political, and natural pasts. Her verse,” Cusick continues, represents nonhuman nature as subject and participant in the stories of a landscape and in the landscape of stories."41 Likewise, Wall points to Cannon’s “singular ecological vision,” and describes her as a “committed bioregionalist who pays close attention to her immediate surroundings and records what she observes.”42 Cannon herself makes a similar observation in her essay “The Poetry of What Happens”:

Almost from the start the metaphors available to me related to landscape, language, and place-names, that most tangible of etymologies, the interface between language and landscape. I have always wondered how, among all the possible names, one adheres to a place; how such a tacit consensus is arrived at. Some criterion of oppositeness applies which is very similar to that which applies in the writing of poetry – it is the salient description which sticks, as if somehow the land has colluded in writing the poem of itself and the people who lived on it.43

Here, word and landscape are inseparable. How, Cannon asks, both in this “The Poetry of What Happens” and in her poetry, is it possible to “speak the earth?” Or, in critic Kate Rigby’s words, “…[H]ow then can the poet speak of things in a way that allows them their own being?”44

It is this question, applied to Cannon’s work, that this chapter seeks to address. While Potts, Cusick and Wall all engage with Cannon’s poetic interactions with non-human nature, the site at which the human and non-human intersect in Cannon’s work has yet to receive significant critical attention. Specifically, then, this chapter will focus on representations of the construction and breakdown of human dwelling-spaces, and the relationship of this act to the articulation of poetic creativity, for it is through attention to dwelling – the way in which humans participate most fully in the non-human landscape – that we can be most aware of the delicate, fluctuating connections that sustain the ecosphere.

42 Wall, 158, 175.
Cannon does not attempt to address the concept of landscape tidily, or to frame it within with any form of personal or political agenda – which, as she puts it herself, would be “the violence of trying to deconstruct the core of beauty.”

Christine Cusick agrees: “In Cannon’s poetry,” she writes, “national and political expression are secondary, if at all present, to the unruly pervasiveness of the natural terrain.” Landscape, in fulfilment of one of Bryson’s principles of ecopoetry, exists “organically” in her work, so to speak, as the result of an awareness born out of humility. Sean Mac Reamoinn addresses this awareness in a review of Oar, Cannon’s first collection, in which he notes “a remarkable symbiosis of humanity and the ‘natural world.’” One of the principal locations of this intersection between “humanity and the natural world” is found within dwelling-spaces or structures, and other ‘artefacts’, an intersection that is seldom addressed in previous critical assessments of Cannon’s work. Naturalist Robert Lloyd Praeger describes this intersection, or symbiosis, thus:

It is… the Ireland of the man who goes with reverent feet through the hills and valleys, accompanied by neither noise nor dust to scare away wild creatures, stopping often, watching closely, listening carefully. Only thus can he, if he is fortunate, make friends by degrees with the birds and flowers and rocks, learn all the signs and sounds of the country-side, and at length feel at one with what is, after all, his natural environment. And I hold that in this mood he will also be better fitted for due appraisement of the many monuments of man’s industry and faith that he will meet in this Ireland of ours, be it a cairn of the Bronze Age, a medieval church, or some marvel of modern science.

Cannon’s literary footprints on Ireland’s landscape are equally reverent; nowhere more so than in “First Poetry”, from Carrying the Songs, in which the shapes made by the wings of flying birds form the letters of a language:

These were, perhaps, the original poetry

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46 Cusick, 74.
48 Robert Lloyd Praeger, The Way That I Went. Cork, The Collins Press, 2001: 2-3. As James McElroy (2011) argues, however, Praeger’s approach is not immune to criticism. Elroy comments on his Anglocentric approach to the Irish landscape: “While Praeger’s field studies are laudable, and there can be no doubt about the sheer range of his botanic research,” he writes, “his work serves as another reminder that Anglo-Irish ecologism often assumes as much as it explains: for one thing it assumes…England as [the] centrific point of botanical definition.” (56-7)
swallows, terns, or grey-lag geese,
returning, unnoticed at first,
over the sea’s rim,
or through the same dip in the hills,
in tune with the lift and fall of the seasons… 49

or in “Oysters” from The Parchment Boat (1997), which is a meditation on, to borrow a phrase of Rigby’s, the “unsayability” or otherness of non-human nature. The speaker’s use of questions gently inquires rather than demands, and Cannon refuses the anthropocentric conception of the oyster as “the rare, tormented pearl-maker,” a manufacturer of goods for human consumption:

for no one knows what joy the stone holds
in its stone heart,
or whether the lark is full of sorrow
as it springs against the sky.
What do we know, for instance,
of the ruminations of the oyster
which lies on the estuary bed –
not the rare, tormented pearl-maker,
just the ordinary oyster?
Does it dream away its years?

Or is it hard,
This existence where salt and river water mix? 50

The poetic speakers in some of Cannon’s ecopoems, such “First Poetry,” and “Oysters,” are comfortable within and among non-human nature and are able to express their reverence for it. However, when her speakers encounter and engage with man-made dwellings – which are also necessarily situated within the natural landscape, yet remain apart from it – they often experience disharmony and uncertainty. Man-made structures in Cannon’s work are frequently drawn as sites of discomfort and instability, situated uncomfortably within the landscape, in poems

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such as “After the Burial,” “Foundations,” and “Demolition.” The way in which Cannon negotiates the intersection between landscape and manmade dwelling reveals something about the way in which the poem, or artwork, and the natural world interact.

While Cannon’s poetic subjects are “at home” enough within the non-human landscape to attempt a reverent articulation or envoicing of that landscape and to seek within it that “awareness of community” of Bryson’s, man-made structures are sites of discomfort; the act of dwelling within four walls provides no security, but instead is a cause of anxiety and uncertainty. Perhaps it is this sense of instability that causes Jonathan Bate to pose the question: “[W]hat is the place of creative imagining and writing in the complex set of relationships between humankind and environment, between mind and world, between thinking, being and dwelling?”51

To understand the way in which Cannon responds to this very question, and why, for her, this destabilization of the man-made structure is poetically necessary, it may be helpful to consider Martin Heidegger’s concepts regarding the way in which the act of dwelling – that is, living in a way that is attuned and attentive to nonhuman nature – and the making of poetry inform one another. Both Bate and Rigby ask “whether there could ever be a creative practice and a critical methodology that do not fall short of giving voice of the natural world,” and both suggest that poetry might provide the answer, for, in Heidegger’s words, “poetry is the original admission of dwelling.”52 For Heidegger, and indeed for Bate and Rigby, art in general, and poetry in particular, frees the natural world from an assessment of worth based on the resources it provides to humans, which Heidegger calls a Gestell or “enframing.”53 As Rigby argues, this matrix must be relinquished in favour of another; a matrix of conscious dwelling, which involves “attuning oneself in that which one thinks, does, and makes to that which is given with earth and sky; that is, a particular natural environment.”54 This, according to Heidegger (and Rigby) is itself an art:

For although, in Heidegger, dwelling involves an attunement to the given, it itself is not given, either by place of birth or ancestral belonging, even if your dwelling place

51 Bate, 72-3.
54 Rigby, 430-431.
does in fact happen to be that of your forefathers... [D]welling is an achievement, something which we have to learn again and again, something which involves conscious commitment, not something that is in any sense 'in the blood'... [I]t becomes apparent that some form of exile or at least defamiliarization is intrinsic to dwelling. We must first encounter the absence or obscurity of a place before we can begin to attune ourselves to it in dwelling. The poet admits us into dwelling precisely to the extent that she allows even the most familiar things to appear in all their strangeness, as if encountered for the first time. Only thus might things cease to be mere equipment; only thus might they be revealed as ... the matrix of our dwelling.  

However, as Rigby points out, the way in which Heidegger privileges language is problematic; if, “it is only within the logos of the word that the otherwise undisclosed being of things is revealed,” then humans are necessarily segregated from the non-human world – and thus, the non-human world is still forced into the confines of a frame or Gestell, where the Gestell is language. Nonetheless, Heidegger himself may provide a solution to this problem in “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in which he suggests that “[e]arth juts through the world and world grounds itself on the earth.” This takes place in several ways, including what Heidegger calls das Verschlossene, “that which withdraws and remains hidden,” implying an absence, or process of defamiliarization.

In Cannon’s poetry, man-made structures such as houses act as the sites of this defamiliarization. There, Cannon’s poetic subjects encounter that “absence or obscurity” that, according to Heidegger, is essential to discovering the Heimat, to coming home, in a sort of home-making through home-breaking. The earth – the non-human landscape – creeps or seeps into both the work of art and the human dwelling-space; it thrusts itself up into it, both “ground”-ing and unsettling it with its presence. The broken or unfinished house – the house beneath which the ground shifts, the

55 Rigby, 432.
56 Rigby, 433.
57 Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 55. Rigby explains, “This interrelationship between world and earth is the nexus from which the work of art originates, in Heidegger’s account. Moreover, it is in the work of art that this interrelationship is made manifest. For the work of art itself “sets up” (aufstellt) a work, while at the same time it “sets forth” (herstellt) the earth, disclosing it, that is, as a ground. Thus, “[t]he work of art moves the earth itself into the open region of a world and keeps it there.”” (436)
58 Heidegger, 55.
unsettled house, the house that is in the process of becoming no more – is, for Cannon, the only kind of dwelling-space that exists; for her poetic subjects, the breaking down of the house is the means to discovering the art of dwelling within a landscape. The erection and subsequent collapse of the human dwelling-space is necessary for Cannon’s successful enunciation of creativity or poetic inspiration, for the speaker must first encounter that absence in order to attune herself fully to the art of dwelling – and therefore, to poiesis.

When Cannon’s poems consider both the interiors and exteriors of domestic or manmade structures, those structures are rarely intact, complete, or fully-formed; rather, they almost always describe a structure that is being torn down, has been razed to the ground, or that is only partially built. This tendency, in the words of William Howarth, is analogous to the very discipline of ecocriticism, which “…stresses the relations of nature and literature as shifting, moving shapes – a house in progress, perhaps, unfinished and standing in a field.”

In Oar (1990), Cannon’s first collection, this is visible in poems such as “After the Burial”, in which a grieving Traveller family turns its caravan into a funeral pyre for a matriarch after her death. The mourners stand by and watch while the vehicle and the mementoes it contains burns down to bare bones:

They straightened the blankets, 
piled her clothes onto the bed,  
soaked them with petrol,  
then emptied the gallon can  
over the video and tape recorder,  
stepped outside their trailer,  
lit it, watched until only the burnt chassis was left,  
gathered themselves  
and pulled out of Galway.

Similarly, in “Foundations,” builders digging the foundations for a kitchen in a new house discover a heap of seashells under the concrete, “taciturn clams” that “break

their silence” to warn their evictors that human lives are no less precarious than the molluscs. “‘Dig us out if you need to,” they say,

‘position the steel,
raise the concrete walls,
but, when your shell is complete,
remember that your life,
no less than ours,
is measured by the tides of the sea
and is unspeakably fragile.’

In Cannon’s most recent collection, *Hands* (Carcanet, 2011), the poet continues her concern with the interaction between the human and nonhuman worlds as it manifests itself within man-made dwelling-places, a concern of hers since her first collection, *Oar*, was published by Salmon. In the eleven-line “Orchids,” the elegant flowers invade the sterile enclosures of a hospital’s cancer ward. “Today the ward is filling up with orchids,” the speaker observes, as if the flowers were entering the building of their own volition. They take on an otherworldly quality when compared with the grey and changeable West of Ireland weather: “Beyond the pink terraced houses and the January trees/ the clouds break apart/ to illuminate curtain after curtain of grey hail/ which batter in fast across the bay.” The harsh wintertime weather and its “curtains” of hail seems to conspire with the smug “pink terraced houses” to stifle and confine the speaker, drawing a drape of darkness between her own existence, marked as ill, and that of the world of the healthy.

By the second stanza, however, the orchids, powerful and mysterious as triffids, have dispelled the January gloom: “And tall orchids,/have arrived/ in the cancer wards,” the speaker repeats. Now, however, the flowers have chosen sides: they have aligned themselves with the ill speaker, prepared to use the subtle power of their charms and their nonhuman – indeed, superhuman – strength to support her: they are “magnificent as crinolined beauties,/ at the ball/ before a battle.” Cannon’s depiction of nonhuman nature rejects the traditional pairing of woman with nature as either nurturing, generous mothers or fickle bringers of chaos: here, woman and

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nature align themselves with one another inside the uncertain enclosure of a cancer ward, but they do so in order to invade and conquer the masculine realm of medicine: the speaker and the orchids are prepared to fight a battle to the death, on their own terms. In “Orchids,” unlike “Foundations” and “After the Burial,” the speaker does not enter or erect a dwelling-place within nonhuman nature; rather, nonhuman nature itself enters that most artificial and unnatural of places, the hospital room, “thrusting” itself, in Heidegger’s words, into that territory, and reaffirming the bond between human and nonhuman nature.

“Demolition,” from *Carrying the Songs*, Cannon’s third volume of poetry, is set against the backdrop of an abandoned city house, where several of the poetic subject’s fundamental human needs – shelter, food, and love – go unfulfilled. Here, the narrator regards the house with the distance of a stranger, yet with the lonely intimacy of being the last witness to a vanishing world. “On the gable of the adjoining house/ at first-floor level, high above the people running to work,” she stands among the debris of what was another woman’s kitchen: “a black smudge where the range used to be,” “a recess with six shelves,” “a bag of self-raising flour,” “a tin of Royal Baking Powder/ and a glass salt cellar.”65 Once these were accoutrements of nourishment, but are now useless and inanimate without the heat of a stove. In the white space between stanzas, the reader is given room to process this inventory before she is asked to take stock of the profound groundlessness – or otherworldly “thingliness,” to use Rigby’s phrase, that underlies these once-homely objects:

> And something about this hurts badly
> but I don’t know what
> or why I now remember waking at four in the morning,
> long ago, the day after a love ended abruptly,
> feeling that the room had no walls…66

In “Demolition,” small domestic objects “appear in all their strangeness, as if encountered for the first time,” and the house is defamiliarized, destabilized: “the winds of the world blew across my bed,” the narrator confesses; “I had no shelter or hope of shelter.”67 Rigby, following Michael Haar, observes that the idea of the earth

65 Moya Cannon, “Demolition.” *Carrying the Songs*, 20, lines 1-3, 5-6, 8.
as unsayable “is perhaps more thoroughly Rilkean than Heideggerian” in its “‘assent… to the inexpressibility of Earthly presence itself.’”68 Indeed, the last stanza of Rilke’s poem “Herbsttag” might be read as just such an assent, in it, the poetic subject, like the narrator of “Demolition,” is homeless, exposed:

He who has no house will never build one now.
He who is alone will remain so for many days,
he will be wakeful, watchful, read, write long letters
and will wander peacelessly through the alleys
as the leaves play down.69

But for the speaker of “Demolition,” encountering this “exposed, vanished house,” the dishevelled nineteenth-century bedrooms are not the source of betrayal, but rather the stomach or “gut” of the house, the “sliced-off kitchen,/ the abandonment/ of leaven and savour.”70 The internal landscapes of both humans and houses are capable of betrayal, of erosion, and of decay.

Even shelters created by animals are not exempt from instability in Cannon’s poetry. Birds’ nests survive only precariously – at least when in close proximity to a human house, as in “Crow’s Nest,” from Cannon’s first book, Oar, or are built “out of habit” by an primitive, animal-like God, only to be uninhabitable, to be abandoned and tangled with human refuse, as in “Nest,” also from Oar:

Two Coke cans and a fast-foot carton
are wound into the heart of it.

Out of habit,
god goes on making nests.71

68 Michael Haar in Rigby, 437.
69 Author’s translation from the German of the last stanza of ‘Herbsttag’:
Wer jetzt kein Haus hat, baut sich keines mehr.
Wer jetzt allein ist, wird es lange bleiben,
wird wachen, lesen, lange Briefe schreiben,
und wird in den Alleen hin und her
unruhig wandern, wenn die Blätter treiben.
70 Cannon, “Demolition,” lines 18, 21-23.
In “Sea Urchins,” the poetic speaker meditates on a different sort of nest as she turns her gaze upon the spiny animal, the ugly duckling of the echinoderm class. “Distant cousins of starfish,” they may be far from charming, but the speaker has not failed to notice that they are tenacious nest-builders themselves.72 Plugged into the porous “honeycomb” of rocks “above the tideline,” the sharp-eyed naturalist notes, “[s]ilently, they eat limestone/ and the drifted shells of dead limpets.”73 Unobtrusive yet powerful, they chew through impediments such as rock and the discarded shells of other sea creatures that they might create their own spine-studded dwellings. Not surprisingly, the speaker’s observation here acknowledges that one dwelling must be abandoned and destroyed in order for another to be created: the sea urchin translates the discarded shells of “dead limpets” into its own shelter. This shelter, in turn, is constructed only to be torn down – or, at least, wrenched away from its builder – for it is at the mercy of the ocean, which now conveys the urchin’s handiwork into the hands of the speaker:

They digest the rock in their soft innards
to build coats of brown spines
and splendid, symmetrical carapaces
which the sea will occasionally
deliver to us intact –
sunbleached, rosy sea-lanterns.74

As their nickname, “sea-lanterns,” suggests, the urchin’s empty shell acts as a signal for the speaker: a fragment of proof that both above and below the water, shelter must only be temporary. As in “Nests,” the creation and destruction of dwelling-spaces go hand in hand.

There is one exception to this in Cannon’s work, however; the only instance in which a man-made structure is not the site of defamiliarization or unease, when the earth seems to “thrust itself up” into the world of the house in a more positive, symbiotic way, is when it is built from the start to be incomplete, as in “Easter Houses” from The Parchment Boat. The “Easter house” in question is a low roofless

73 Cannon, lines 3-4.
74 Cannon, lines 5-10.
structure children build with blocks of turf they dig themselves. In the last weeks of repentance and self-sacrifice before Easter, as death prepares to renew itself into life, they “hack sods out of the grass/ and stack them among trees/ into four low walls” that they might have a place to “boil eggs outside.”75 Here, the very impermanence and rough functionality of the Easter house – both of which have been recognised by its young builders – is what allows it to act as a vessel for renewal: after a winter of enclosure, “life had come out again to nest in the open;/ again, the shell was chipped from within.”76 The humility inherent in this awareness of impermanence is suggestive of a deep if elusive spiritual truth: that the need for enclosure reflects the longing for perceptible security – an impossibility in an ever-fluctuating world. Real spirituality, real enlightened creativity, is not born in hiding, but begins with an appreciation, if not full comprehension, of a fundamental groundlessness and instability. In “Easter Houses”, unlike “Demolition,” the structure’s purpose does not go unfulfilled because it was built without attachments, with an acceptance of the primacy of the landscape around it. Even so, it too must be torn down in the end.

Like “Easter Houses,” Cannon’s poem “October,” published in Hands, is also an articulation of that humility; in it, however, the poetic speaker is considerably more at ease within the position of her home – and others’ homes – upon the nonhuman landscape. Late one morning, she considers the rooftops of a village “in the high Pyrenees” from her kitchen window, and observes the way in which the sun meets the human dwelling-space: quickly, “each roof in the village/ is a slab of light.”77 Then she considers the positioning of “each roof,” noticing that they are terraced houses, each clinging onto the mountainside above or below one another. The effect of this, she notes, is a sort of nesting:

folded schist,
slate and marble insist
into the homes of humans upstairs
and into the homes of animals downstairs
and after heavy rain
little springs trickle in through the houses’

76 Cannon, lines 11-12.
Cannon emphasizes this “nesting” or symbiosis through the sudden intrusion of end rhyme, which juts into the poem just at the point at which stones, animals’ dens and human dwellings all co-exist, connected by the vein-like “little springs” that “trickle” into home and den, reminding the speaker that water is lifeblood to all living creatures. Unlike the wet, wild weather of an Irish January, as in “Orchids,” here in the Spanish Pyrenees, sun and rain seem to be held in a perfect balance; the “heavy rain” of the first stanza evaporates in the second, as the risen sun warms “each of those stone and slate houses” just as it warms “the small black cats” that dart across the village’s lanes. Homes, animal life, sun, and rainwater seem to coexist with one another in a state of happy disorder, while the speaker has the pleasure of remaining both inside and outside that chaos. “I sit at the east-facing kitchen window,” the speaker states, as she looks in the direction of sunrise, “slicing fruit, drinking coffee, and light/ and sadness falls away from my shoulders.”

Gently attentive to the act of dwelling, the poetic speaker acknowledges nonhuman nature and her place within and beside it, without trying to appropriate it. The speaker’s sense of her own place illustrates Heidegger’s assertion that poetry can “gather” or bring together things which seem to be disparate: “…[P]oetic images are imaginings in a distinctive sense: not mere fancies and illusions,” he insists, “but imaginings that are visible inclusions of the alien in the sight of the familiar. The poetic saying of images gathers the brightness and sound of the heavenly appearances into one with the darkness and silence of what is alien.”

Cannon explores this symbiosis of brightness and darkness, of absence and presence, is sentence in her poem “Nausts.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a “naust” is a boatshed, or “a place where a boat can be hauled up and kept ashore; a scooped-out trench at the edge of a beach surrounded by a shallow wall of stones:” in Middle English, the term means “to owe,” or to acknowledge a lack or debt. In “Naust,” which contemplates the boat nausts on Island Eddy, an island in Galway Bay near the village of Kinvara, both senses of the word apply:

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78 Cannon, lines 9-15.
79 Cannon, lines 21-23.
80 Heidegger, “Poetically Man Dwells…,” 226.
There are emptinesses which hold

the leveret’s form in spring grass;
the tern’s hasty nest in the shore pebbles;
nausts in a silvery island inlet.

Boat-shaped absences,
they slope to seaward….  

Here, the absence of a living thing implies its presence, and the empty spaces they leave behind seem to be as full as they are empty. Although both boats and nausts are manmade, they, like the leveret’s “form in the spring grass” and the leveret itself, beckon to one another: the nausts exert a call upon the boats that will fill them, helping mariners “to guide the tarred bow/ of a hooker, púcan or punt/ when the high tide lifted it/ up and in, then ebbed,/ leaving it tilted to one side/ in its shingly nest.”

When manmade objects such as boats and nausts – objects that are made from natural things whose purpose is to help humans dwell more fully – are integrated gently into the nonhuman landscape, they enact the same kind of symbiosis as their “natural” counterparts. As in “October,” the boundaries between the “natural” and “artificial” are blurred so that the unity of human and non-human nature may be emphasized.

For Cannon’s poetic speakers, then, profound creativity can only be plumbed when both the presence and absence of structure has been experienced, after these perceptive barriers have been torn down, making both erection and demolition a vital part of the evolution of poetic – especially ecopoetic – creativity as a renewable resource. This unsettledness, defamiliarization and eventual demolition stems from the “unsayability” of the natural world, what Heidegger, via Rigby, refers to as “the unfathomable givenness of a self-disclosing (and thereby also self-concealing) earth and sky that calls us to respond with word and song…” The ability of the nonhuman world to both conceal and reveal itself in the work of art is also described by William

83 Cannon, lines 11-16.
84 Rigby, 433.
Rueckert, with reference to the ecopoetry of Gary Snyder and Adrienne Rich, thus: “What the poets do,” he writes, “is ‘hold it close’ and then ‘give it all away.’” The necessity of defamiliarization, of being unsettled by our surroundings, is precisely what brings us closer to the homeland we seek, closer to apprehending dwelling as an art, not as a conquest. And the tension that arises from these symbioses – building/unbuilding, concealing/revealing, holding close/giving away – makes, in William Rueckert’s words, a poem “a verbal equivalent of fossil-fuel (stored energy)…ever-living, inexhaustible sources of stored energy…”

When Cannon engages with dwelling-spaces in her poetry, she taps into this energy; and in her awareness of the impermanence of the man-made structure in its place within the non-human world, she also illustrates the first tenet of Bryson’s definition of ecopoetry; that “ecocentric perspective that recognises the interdependent nature of the world,” which, writes Rigby, Heidegger defines as “harmony:”

…earth is implicit in the work as that matrix or ‘harmony’ (Einklang) which supports the relation of all natural beings, including, I would add (although Heidegger does not), human beings in their corporal interconnectedness with other beings.

It also serves as a metaphor for the creation of ecopoetry itself, while acting as a reminder that no manmade structure can protect us from the tides and cycles of our inner or outer landscapes.

“How can a work of art, a thing of human making,” writes Rigby, “or, as the Greeks put it, poiesis, speak, and in speaking ‘save’ the earth?” Moya Cannon’s poetry works toward an answer to this question by challenging the stability of human dwelling-spaces, a challenge that is necessary for both the “unconcealment” of poetic creativity and for the art of conscious dwelling, in Ireland and beyond. For Cannon, as well as Heidegger, poetry and dwelling seem to call one another into being: the tension inherent in this call is articulated in poems by Cannon in which dwelling-spaces are aware of their own impermanence, of their tenuous yet profound

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86 Rueckert, 108.
87 Rigby, 436.
88 Rigby, 428.
connection to the environment that sustains them.\textsuperscript{89} Cannon herself touches on this fertile tension at the conclusion of her essay “The Poetry Of What Happens,” in which she muses, “…[L]anguage and stones have been very kind to me and have led me to many rich encounters. I can only ask that they continue to do so.”\textsuperscript{90} Perhaps, for Cannon – as well as other writers engaging in ecopoetry – the space in which the earth is saved dwells somewhere in the tense, creative energy that hovers between “language and stones.”

\textsuperscript{89} Heidegger, 227.
Conclusion

Taking the group of writers who assembled around the Galway-based little magazine *The Salmon* as a case study, this thesis, drawing on information available in the Archive of Salmon Publishing held at the University of Delaware, as well as other sources, has demonstrated that mutual influence and “multiple authorship” in the production of texts is nearly inevitable. Literary production does not occur in isolation; the nominal author of a text is subject to the conscious or unconscious influence of, among other factors, collaborators, competitors, and the exigencies of the publishing industry, all of which may affect the various versions of a text, including its “final,” or published, version. In his preface to the inaugural issue of *The Salmon*, Dr. Pat Sheerin of the English Department commented on the way in which readers of literature are so often encouraged to view texts as finite, finished “products” in which the author’s original intentions are clearly visible, unclouded by outside influence. “We are always confronted with products rather than processes, ‘monuments of unaging intellect,’ rather than the messy, troubled ways of their making,” Sheerin wrote. “… [A]s Raymond Williams has recently reminded us, ‘It is very difficult to think of literature in terms of a man sitting down with pen and paper and making something.’”¹

It is this shift in focus from product to process – the “messy, troubled ways” of textual production – that the study of literary coteries and “group writing” encourages. Literary coteries and the little magazines that are the textual representations of the dynamics at play within them can act as powerful tools in the processes of both literary production and publication, particularly for emerging writers. Such aspirant writers, especially those who are located outside of “traditional” literary networks due to factors such as their gender or location of residence, can benefit from the encouragement and mutual support available to them in such “group” settings. Equally importantly, within coterie situations, members often act as one another’s first audiences or readerships, and the periodicals that are often affiliated with these

coteries can facilitate members’ first forays into publication by providing a periodical – often a “little magazine” – that will welcome their work.

Little magazines, critics such as Ian Hamilton (1976), Tom Clyde (2003), and Malcolm Ballin (2008) have argued, must retain contemporaneity, demonstrating to their audiences that they are “on the pulse” of the literary community they represent. However, being ephemeral by their nature, their lifespans rarely exceed a decade, and they cannot offer writers the sense of permanence that a single-title book publisher can. With the increase of available tools and technology, the last quarter of the twentieth century saw an increase in magazine-affiliated small presses, which could go some way towards fulfilling this need. In the case of The Salmon and Salmon Publishing, branding techniques in particular assisted the publisher’s transition from its origins as a little magazine to a publisher of single-title volumes of poetry. Branding creates a “mythology” surrounding the company or concept it seeks to promote, and the Salmon “brand” soon became associated with new poetry by women writers in particular.

Due to these factors, women writers such as Eva Bourke, Rita Ann Higgins, and Moya Cannon, who have benefited from the “network” created around the little magazine The Salmon, and subsequently Salmon Publishing, have expanded their careers and have established themselves as important voices in Irish literature. These three writers, now members of Aosdána, have made individual, diverse, and lasting contributions to that literature, and this dissertation considers aspects of those contributions. The poetry of Rita Ann Higgins, comprehending the way in which physical suffering challenges and even silences the verbal impulse, addresses that challenge by speaking of the experience of physical pain by speaking “around” it. In her poems that take works of visual art as their inspiration, Eva Bourke engages in what is arguably a feminist ekphrasis; her poems respect the integrity of the visual image by refusing to “conquer” it with a single gaze. Moya Cannon’s ecopoetry often performs the delicate work of writing human dwelling-spaces into the natural world in a way that permits human and non-human nature to co-exist. As diverse as these concerns are, however, the work of Bourke, Higgins and Cannon shares a common concern: the insistence, poetically, upon permitting the unfamiliar, or “other” within it to remain inherently other. This tendency – a natural part of poetic response, writes critic Kate Rigby (2004) – as well as the recognition of the impossibility of a full,
perfect or “complete” poetic response, is intimately connected to the importance of the study of literary networks. According to both Martin Heidegger and French philosopher Jean-Louis Chrétien, writes Rigby, “there is a dimension of our encounters with things, other, world, and God that will always exceed our capacity to respond, whether verbally or corporeally…[W]e are called to respond to the call of the other; and yet… it is only in the noncorrespondence of response to the call that we remain open to that which addresses us in an other, who or which is as such irreducible to the self.” Human responses – including creative responses – to “things, other, world, God,” writes Rigby, will remain imperfect by their very nature, but this “imperfection” is to be welcomed, for “[i]t is the very event of a wound by which our existence is altered and opened, and becomes itself the site of the manifestation of what it responds to.” In both its incarnations as a little magazine and a book publisher, Salmon enabled Bourke, Higgins, and Cannon to answer this call through their creative work, now published across multiple collections since the occasion of their first publications by the press. However, these three writers are not the only ones whose creativity was nourished by Salmon; many other writers have benefited similarly from the publisher’s insistence upon, and facilitation of, a plurality of voices in Irish literature.


Rigby, 438.
## Appendix 1


Source: *The Salmon* magazine

### Key to abbreviations:
- **MGA**: Michael Allen
- **MD**: Mary Dempsey
- **LG**: Luke Geoghegan
- **JL**: Jessie Lendennie
- **ER**: Eoin Rabbitt
- **MW**: Mike Watts
- **Eva Bourke**
- **Moya Cannon**
- **Rita Ann Higgins**

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Appendix 2

Contributors to *The Salmon*


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The Salmon, No. 9  The Salmon, No. 10  The Salmon, No. 11  The Salmon, No. 12

The Salmon, No. 13  The Salmon, No. 14  The Salmon, No. 15  The Salmon, No. 16
The Salmon, No. 17

The Salmon, No. 18

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