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O L L S C O I L   L U I M N I G H

Memoirs From Below: Twentieth-Century Narratives of the Irish in Britain.

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Abstract

This thesis examines twentieth-century memoirs and autobiographies from Irish migrants to Britain, focusing particularly on the period 1930–1960. This time period roughly corresponds with the peak of a sustained wave of migration between Ireland and Britain. The thesis seeks to explore the validity of stereotypes that have grown up around the Irish migrant community who settled in Britain at this time. These stereotypes, engrained at cultural and governmental levels, characterise the Irish migrant as male, hard-drinking, navvy-type figures. This thesis looks beyond the metonym and explores the individuality that hides behind a façade of homogeneity. The effectiveness and appeal of the genre of autobiography as a means of expressing the complexities of migrant experience is dealt with in the opening chapter. The thesis then scrutinises several texts drawn from the "navvy" tradition, identifying many common themes and tropes within this sub-genre. Ultimately, however, these texts prove to be highly individual, offering the author the opportunity to express individuality and difference from a position of safety within a distinct community. The experiences of Irish women migrants are also examined with particular attention paid to the possible reasons for a relative paucity of autobiographical texts from this section of the migrant community. This thesis identifies a tendency for women to view Britain as a haven or refuge rather than as a place of exile. It also looks at how Irish women were viewed as being more assimilable into British society. Conversely, it also documents how issues like transnational care served to destabilise precarious identities. The final chapter deals with memoirs from second-generation Irish migrants. These texts are marked by a distinct conflict between competing identities and ethnicities. Many of these second-generation texts document the mental strain of being Irish at home yet British to the wider world. The thesis concludes by noting that, while there are evident commonalities of experience within these migrant memoirs, they serve as an eloquent reminder that stereotypes are ultimately simplistic and reductive and belie the individuality of the migrant subject.

<u>Declaration</u>

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted for any other awards at this or any other academic establishment. Where use has been made of the work of other people it has been fully acknowledged and referenced.

Robert O'Keeffe June 2013

<u>Dedication</u>

This work is dedicated to Anne Marie for her support and encouragement and in recognition of the many sacrifices she made to see it to fruition.

<u>Acknowledgements</u>

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Introduction and Literature Review

Themes

This thesis examines the written life experiences of Irish migrants to Britain in the twentieth-century. Its title "Memoirs from Below" adapts the idea of "history from below", which argues that the histories of so-called ordinary people were worth recording (Lefebrve 14). Working-class memoir offers an invaluable textual repository of first-hand experiences of migration between Ireland and Britain. The twentieth-century period, particularly the years from 1930 to 1960, saw vast numbers of Irish people travel to Britain in search of work and until relatively recent times, their experiences seemed to fall outside the notice of literary scholarship. It could be argued that they have also been ignored in public discourses, consigned to the margins of the social histories of Ireland and Britain. Of late, this has begun to change, as scholars such as Liam Harte, Tony Murray and Eamonn Hughes restore neglected works of memoir and autobiography to public attention.[1] This thesis seeks to foreground works from working-class Irish migrants, examining how authors used them as a means to explore and document the trials and triumphs of migration. These primary texts are personalised vignettes of the complex process of social and personal transformation and while all are loosely arranged under the heading of migrant memoir, they each provide a window on unique physical and psychological journeys. While it would be reductive to lump these texts together as providing a distinct or typical Irish migrant experience, there are commonalities of experience and recurring themes that bear examination. It will prove instructive to examine these memoirs through the prism of relevant cultural theory and examine how the

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[1] See for example: Liam Harte, *The Literature of the Irish in Britain* (2009); Tony Murray, *London-Irish Fictions* (2012); Eamonn Hughes, "The Fact of Me-ness: Autobiograpical Writing in the Revival Period" (2009).

Irish migrant community sought to define themselves and how they had certain constructions thrust upon them.

Traditionally, Irish migrants have been granted a metonymic status in the public consciousness and it is this intersection between metonym, stereotype and reality that concerns this thesis. It seeks to determine how valid the notion of a stereotypical migrant experience was and looks to explore the multiplicity of voices that hide behind the generic term "migrant memoir". This thesis will use the memoirs of several working-class Irish authors to examine how the migrant community dealt with the sense of dislocation and destabilisation inherent in the migrant experience and how it sought to define itself both within the terms offered by the host society and within the strictures it set upon itself.

The thesis will examine how certain types of narrative have been foregrounded as providing a sense of definitive, genuine Irishness, where stereotype is seized, adopted and adapted by the migrant until it becomes a self-perpetuating mask. The Irish community in Britain, and further afield, has been continually characterised in masculine terms with the navvy adopted as epitomising the migrant experience. For most British and indeed Irish people, the Irish migrant is a hard-drinking, socially wild but politically conservative, working-class male figure. Undoubtedly, this stereotype has its roots at least partially in reality, as Irish men flooded into Britain in large numbers to work on building sites, particularly in the years during and just after the Second World War, but it is reductive and ultimately dismissive of the myriad Irish migrants who chose different paths in Britain. It ignores the fact that many of these migrants were women, who find themselves

rendered invisible in public remembrances of the migrant experience, condemned to the ignominy of a double stereotype that includes them while simultaneously excluding them. Even within the masculine stereotype, there are flashes of individuality that resist the narrow parameters of sociological or cultural classification. The brutal nature of life on the building sites of Britain is often nullified by the lyricism of the memoirist, outlining a capacity for individualism that belies the notion of homogeneity. For the children of Irish migrants to Britain, there is an even greater diversity of experience. Subjects are often stranded between competing identities, simultaneously attracted and repelled by their makeup, engaged in a never ending quest for personal identity or ethnicity.

These texts offer a window into the migrant experience, offering opportunities to delve beyond stereotype and see first-hand how migrants dealt with the pitfalls and benefits of emigration. These autobiographies tend not, in the main, to be classic works of literature although there are flashes of linguistic prowess that elevate them from being purely historical texts. What they do provide, however, is a chance to restore a personal voice to an oft-forgotten segment of the Irish population and as E. P. Thompson offered, "To rescue them from the grim condescension of posterity" (Thompson 2). In terms of Irish Studies, they give the researcher access to nuanced and measured contemplations of the experience of migration that have more depth than those offered through historical or sociological interviews. They illustrate the fact that there is no complete uniformity within the Irish migrant experience; instead, it is a series of individual experiences that can often overlap and share commonalities. In their ground-breaking exploration of Irish-language migrant

memoir *Ar an gCoigríoch* (2011), Aisling Ní Dhonnchada and Máirín Nic Eoin observed that,

> Certain motifs are recycled again and again, becoming clichés of Irish emigration: the battered suitcase, the stingy landlady, the greedy contractor, the cruel foreman, the unhealthy food and niggardly rations, the hobnail boots, the park benches, the heavy drinking, the shared beds. (68)

It is true that these motifs occur with some frequency within most of the texts. The familiarity of these tropes allows the author to site himself in the realms of authenticity. These are shared experiences, recognisable to the target audience and it must be borne in mind that all clichés start out with elements of truth. The formulaic nature of the genre and the recurrence of stock situations ultimately belie the personalised nature of these accounts.

D. K. Fitzpatrick writes in the preface to his history of Irish migration to Australia *Oceans of Consolation* (1994) that, "My task has been to make that small chorus of unknown Irish voices audible and distinct, its elements of dissonance unmuffled by imagined harmonies" (36). While he was writing in the context of personal letters from Ireland to Australia, his mission statement provides an admirable model for the research of Irish migrant memoir and a reminder to avoid perpetuating well-meaning stereotypes. It serves as a caution to the researcher to, as John Boyle advised at the end of the introduction to his own memoir, "Let the boy tell his own story", and injuncts the researcher to avoid letting preconceived theories or expectations occlude the author's voice (Boyle x).

<u>Recovery Project</u>

As previously stated, the primary texts studied for this thesis are not by and large, memorable for their literary worth; many of these memoirs tend to be self-consciously plain speaking. Their value lies in their ability to restore a voice to a neglected and often silenced section of the Irish population. These migrants played a vital role both in British and Irish society and were often rewarded with an ignominious invisibilty, viewed as an embarrassingly inconvenient reminder of the interdependence of two nations with a complex and difficult relationship. Many migrants were silenced by official indifference to their existence. In Ireland, it was often sneeringly inferred that the best and brightest stayed while the "surplus" was raised for the export market. This view conveniently overlooks the role that remittance monies sent back by emigrants played in keeping the fledgling Irish state afloat financially. In Britain, Irish migrants were viewed, at best with amused and patronising tolerance and at worst with overt displays of racism and exclusion, and many found it politic to remain silent and avoid drawing attention to themselves. The memoirs studied for this thesis offer a window onto a hidden world, a chance to peer behind the veil of silence and gain insight into lived experiences of migration. They document the process of leaving behind the certainties of home and the concurrent process of change and adaptation to a new set of social mores. Grace Nichol's poem "Epilogue" (1984) gives a good insight into the transformative nature of migration, that sees the subject shed old ideas and tentatively experiment with new modes of thinking, behaviour and expression,

> I have crossed an ocean
>
> I have lost my tongue
>
> from the root of the old one

a new one has sprung. (332)

It is notable that a lot of the memoirs that appear in this thesis are drawn from authors who come from peripheral areas of Ireland. As such, they suggest pockets of migrant creativity, with the west coast particularly well represented. Donegal, Mayo and Kerry have established traditions of producing memoir. This could perhaps be explained by the unforgiving and unproductive nature of the landscape and the lack of employment opportunities offered in those regions but it is fails to explain why regions like Clare, Monagahan and Cavan, where similar economic conditions prevailed, failed to produce a similar volume of literary output. The peripherality of these authors is further underscored when it is taken into account that many of them are written by authors drawn from Gaeltacht areas. Many of them appeared originally in Irish and are only available to a wider audience through the work of translators like Valentin Iremonger, Gabriel Fitzmaurice, and Robin Flowers. Authors such as Domhnall MacAmhlaigh, Maidhc Dainín Ó Sé, Micí MacGabhann and Risteárd de Paor choose to articulate their life stories through their native tongue, eschewing the English language. Arguably, this can be read as constituting a retreat to the safety of origin. It allows them to tell the story of travel and growth while remaining anchored within the familiar surroundings of home. This echoes Seamus Deane's notion of autobiography that "An idea of Ireland has to be fashioned , discovered, recreated over against that which threatens to disallow it"(Deane, "Field Day" 380). Gaeltacht regions were constructed in the public imagination as a form of living museum for Irish culture, and havens from the corrupting influences of modernity. Life in the Gaeltacht can be said to represent a form of *über* Irishness, and by situating themselves within the Gaeltacht tradition,

the authors can inure themselves against accusations of assimilation. It can also be argued that, as a genre, memoir is closely related to the oral storytelling culture that survived best in the Gaeltacht areas. There was a strong tradition of storytelling all along the west coast and the role of *seanchaí* was an honoured one in the Gaeltacht communities. Memoir may be a textual continuation of the oral tradition. This may in part explain the preponderance of memoirs from Ireland's economic and social margins.

Memoirs from Irish urban migrants are usually marked by a more knowing, streetwise tone than those from rural migrants. They tend to be less conservative, politically, socially and sexually. Jim Phelan's *The Name's Phelan* (1948) and Brian Behan's *With Breast Expanded* (1964) are fast-paced, acerbic commentaries on the experience of migration. Neither author suffers from crises of confidence and the accounts of both men are marked by large amounts of bombast and braggadocio. Both authors express their contempt for "culchies" at various times, seeing them as being hopelessly inferior to their urban (Dublin) cousins. There appears to be less of a culture shock for urban migrants arriving to Britain, with the landscape remaining much the same, albeit on a grander scale. Urban memoirs tend to be franker about sexual matters than the memoirs from rural writers. Phelan and Behan delight in innuendo and are, in the context of the time of publication, quite candid about their sexual activities. Elaine Crowley's *Technical Virgins* (1998) deals with her own burgeoning sexuality, seeing Britain as a venue of romantic and sexual possibility, "Surrounded by attractive, adoring men. Aware that I had blossomed. Being in love. Being loved in return" (138). In common with Behan and Phelan, she doesn't view

her migration as being a calamitous exile, seeing it instead as a liberating experience. Harte says of her account that

> In place of the tearful backward look we have here a clear-eyed repudiation of 1940s Ireland from a young woman's perspective, a compelling reminder that the country did not automatically become a landscape of loss in the mind of every post-war migrant. (Harte *The Literature of the Irish* 239)

The physical nature of life on the building sites of Britain, coupled with exploitative work practices would seem to have had a politicising effect on many of the Irish authors. Many of them became involved in union activities. Brian Behan was a union organiser and was blacklisted on many of the London sites for his efforts. Mick McCarthy in *London Years* recalls his own involvement in several strikes on building sites that degenerated into riots with the police. McCarthy later espoused a practical brand of socialism, running the Embankment Pub in Tallaght, which held a small theatre space that he used to give up-and-coming acts like "The Dubliners" and "The Wolfe Tones", a platform to perform. Patrick Devlin, Alice Foley and Seán Ó Ciaráin were all heavily involved in union activities throughout their working lives. Paddy "The Cope" Gallagher's experiences as a seasonal potato picker left him with the drive to improve the lot of his neighbours by setting up a Co-Operative movement in Donegal. John B. Keane's *Self-Portrait* (1964) gives a searingly angry look at the how migrants were treated both at home and abroad. It is a fascinating snapshot of an artist in the process of maturation. He is still subject to the admonitions of the Catholic Church, conflating socialism and communism as an idea that is intrinsically anti-Irish; yet his memoir is a paean to socialist ideals, advocating that the state should learn to care for its citizens, "A country is like a

parent. It must provide for its children to stay at home, and when the urge which is part of the heritage of the Irish race takes hold of you, plant your feet firmly on the ground and don't go" (68). The unfairness of the migrant position that sees the migrant forced from home certainly has a politicising effect. Traditionally, the working-class Irish community in Britain have been seen as Labour voters. Tim Pat Coogan relates an anecdote told to him by a former labour M. P., that, "The Irish in Liverpool grew up trained to do three things: go to Mass on a Sunday, vote Labour and join the Transport and General Workers Union" (192). Life in the margins politicised these authors and the politics of the left gave them an impetus to document their experiences, leaving a record of personal "histories from below".

Historical and Social Context

The Immigrants

I see them coming

Up from the hold smelling of vomit,

Infested, emaciated, their skins grey

With travel; as they step on shore

the old countries recede, become

perfect, thumbnail castles preserved

like gallstones in a glass bottle, the

towns dwindle upon the hillsides

in a light paperweight-clear

They carry their carpetbags and trunks

With clothes, dishes, the family picture. (Margaret Atwood 10-18)

As a nation, Ireland, by the twentieth-century had become accustomed to and arguably, socially conditioned for, emigration. Historically, the drive towards migration became entrenched in the Irish psyche due to the cataclysmic events of the mid-eighteenth century when the Great Famine saw the population of Ireland decline by over two million people in the ten years between 1841 and 1851. Even the sterile cliometrics and bureaucratic language of the 1851 census cannot muffle the scale and horror of the effects of famine on the Irish population. Academics differ on the death toll figures for the time but it generally agreed that close to one million Irish people left the country during this period. What can be stated with a degree of certitude is that the Great Famine marked a sea change in Irish attitudes towards emigration. Studies suggest that before the Famine, emigrants were largely drawn from among the middle-class Protestant and Presbyterian communities (Miller; Coogan; Ó Tuathaigh). The cataclysmic effects of the Famine now forced many poor and middle class Catholics to abandon the country in what Dermot Keogh has termed "conscription by starvation" (122). Atwood's "The Immigrants" (1976) gives a flavour of how the famine experience of migration came to be engrained on the psyche of migrants and on those left behind. The trope of the coffin ship is a powerful image that serves to act as a physical manifestation of the psychological trauma of the process of leaving home. Atwood neatly encapsulates the idea that for the migrant, Ireland ceases to be a real place; becoming instead an idealised site of unrealised possibility, far removed from the often harsh realities of migrant life. For those left at home, migrant life was no less alluring and romanticised and the tantalising prospect of wealth, freedom or adventure that migration seemed to offer proved irresistible to many Irish men and women. Scholars have shown that as Irish

communities became established across the globe, chain migration became a feature with many potential migrants wooed by the success, real or imagined of those that had gone before. As a culture of migration became entrenched, farming practices in Ireland changed as landowners and smallholders moved away from the practice of subdivision of land in favour of the law of primogeniture (Cairns and Richards 43). Families remained big and with room for only one son or daughter on the land there was an attendant labour surplus in rural areas. Attitudes hardened in the aftermath of the cataclysm and it has been observed that, "Few people anywhere have been so prepared to scatter their children around the world in order to preserve their own living standards" (Lee 374). In the period between 1801 and 1921, almost eight million people left Ireland to seek work or a new life abroad (Akenson 6). Fitzpatrick has pointed out that this figure is equal to the entire population of Ireland at its peak (Fitzpatrick, *Irish Emigration* 1*)*. Diarmaid Ferriter uses the astonishing statistic that, "By the last decade of the nineteenth century only three fifths of those born in Ireland were still at home and three million were overseas" (44).

While these migrants were drawn from every class and creed, it is generally agreed by scholars of the period that the large majority were drawn from the working classes. By the early decades of the twentieth-century, North America was, for many migrants the preferred destination, followed by Australia but the expense involved in travelling to these destinations in comparison with the fare to a British port meant that they were out of the financial reach of a large section of the population. By contrast, Britain offered a chance for a new life for a small initial outlay and held out the illusion of impermanence. Patrick O'Mara recounts his parent's motivations for choosing Britain, "Then later, after the arrival of four children, stark poverty, that

driving urge of all Irish people, brought them to Liverpool in search of work—perhaps the most Irish city in the world outside of Ireland" (20). As employment opportunities were, by and large, clustered around the great industrial cities of Britain, the Irish tended to gather together in the poorest areas of urban Britain, creating what Kerby Miller has termed "kinship networks"(432). There were several waves of migration between Ireland and Britain in the twentieth-century. The carnage of the First World War left Britain with an acute labour shortage that the Irish were happy to fill. Indeed, the effects of large numbers of emigrants leaving rural Ireland became so detrimental to the fortunes of the IRA Volunteers during the Irish War of Independence that some areas had to impose travel bans (Ó Ruairc 22; Gavin Foster 96). In spite of these strictures, the flood continued and Ferriter notes, "From the mid-1930s Britain was the chief destination for Irish people" (330). Migration to Britain increased in the 1930s as, with unemployment rates soaring due to the world-wide economic depression, America was no longer seen as a viable alternative (Keogh 89). Dutch historian Joost Augusteijn records how in 1932, one of Easons' bestselling books is listed as being the *Irish Independent Handbook on Emigration to England*, a hand-out that gave practical advice on finding work and housing in Britain (23).

The Second World War offered further opportunities for work for Irish people in Britain and while it was technically a breach of neutrality, the Irish government continued to issue travel permits for Irish citizens for the duration of the war. Conscription into the armed forces at this time meant that women entered the work force in droves. This was to prove a major draw for Irish women as careers in Ireland were in short supply and there was an expectation, backed up by legislation

in Ireland, that saw women give up professional work on marriage. The nature of work available in Ireland was, in any case, limited and the Irish census of 1946 states that, "one third of all girls under age twenty and one quarter of all occupied women were in domestic service" (Ferriter 473). Conscription across Britain meant that factories were in dire need of workers of both genders. For many Irish women it opened up a different world, one that promised and delivered financial and social independence. Donall MacAmhlaigh writes about meeting his sister on the street in London and finding that she had "got a job as a secretary in one of the biggest stores in London and is getting a man's pay; but it isn't it a pity that she couldn't find a job at home with all her experience and learning" (123). Freed from parochialism, many Irish women embraced the chance to build lives outside the home, lives that offered choices unimaginable at home in Ireland. Louise Ryan has published several articles that deal with emergence of the Irish nursing tradition in Britain during this period, and look at how these women did a lot to soften the image of the Irish in Britain, contributing to the engenderment of more positive stereotypes. For many of this wave of emigrants, the temporary nature of their migration proved illusory. Thomas McCarthy's "The Emigration Trains, 1943" gives voice to the creeping permanence of circumstance,

> We were heading for England and the world
>
> At war. Neutrality we couldn't afford.
>
> I thought I would spend two years away
>
> But in the end two became twenty. (qtd. in Keogh 135-6)

In the post-war period, Britain with the aid of Marshall Plan monies underwent a sustained campaign of infrastructural rebuilding and modernising. There

was a boom time in Britain and it coincided with a period of relative economic stagnation in Ireland. Ferriter quotes, "In the period from 1949-1956 Irish incomes rose by 8% while average European increase was 40%" (381). Britain offered Irish men and women the chance to work and the chance to earn large amounts of money. For an initial outlay of the relatively small price of a ticket for the mail boat and a rail ticket at Holyhead, Irish migrants could be housed and at work within a few days of leaving home. Unlike North America, there was no need of documented employment sponsorship before travel documents were granted. Work permits were freely available in Ireland and controls, though they existed, were lax at best. Tellingly, in the 1950s, Ireland's emigration quota for the USA was never filled (Keogh 216). Britain offered constant, well-paid work and at least the illusion of temporariness and the promise of frequent trips home. The boom in Britain saw an increase in housing stock and a gradual move away from the tenement type dwellings that were available to the migrant community in the early half of the twentieth century. Life in Britain, gave many Irish migrants a sense of financial stability and a standard of living that far exceeded that available in Ireland. For many women in particular, the prospect of moving back to rural Ireland was unattractive and ultimately unrealistic.

Ferriter observes that, "Emigration was a safety valve which enabled Ireland to successfully navigate the transition from a traditional rural society to a modern rural one" (381). Emigration and remittance monies funded the growth of the Irish economy while simultaneously ensuring that population levels remained sustainable in Ireland. It was of dual benefit to the Irish State but was an unacknowledged and embarrassing truth. Ferriter quotes from a letter from the Garda Commissioner to the

Taoiseach, John A. Costello in 1956 that stated, "There are only two categories of emigrant: those who did not accept Irish institutions and laws and preferred to live elsewhere, and finally those whose forefathers were driven to the mountains and bogs by Cromwell and who have been living on uneconomic holdings" (481). Many of the memoirs studied in this thesis recount similar disdainful comments made by those at home in Ireland. Ignorant and self-serving statements, like that of the Garda Commissioner, served to deflect attention from the state's failure to provide adequately for all its citizens. John O'Donoghue, writing in his memoir, *In a Quiet Land* (1957)*,* summed up the inexorability of migration,

> At home I am certain of one thing with regard to my future way of living, namely, that farming is not the life for me. I am still on the sunny side of twenty, thank God. I do not want to leave Ireland of the pleasant memories but like thousands of others I will have to go because dark Rosaleen has nothing to offer me but a spade. (207)

The 1950s were to be a high water mark, in terms of emigration to Britain. The 1960s saw the arrival of T. K. Whitaker's economic miracle and the Irish economy entered a period of strong growth that culminated in it joining the EEC in 1973. The numbers of migrants travelling to Britain dropped considerably as job opportunities were created in Ireland. This is not to suggest that they stopped entirely but the numbers were down considerably from the peak in the 1950s.

Of the millions of Irish people who migrated to Britain over the course of the twentieth-century, many stayed, married, had families and gradually put down roots. MacAmhlaigh's *An Irish Navvy* (1964) offers a particularly vivid illustration of the slow drift towards assimilation. His exaggerated, almost *über* Irishness is leavened

over time by an acceptance of the merits of Britain. A desire for work drove him to Britain but he slowly puts down roots and his memoir closes with a glimpse of his growing acceptance of his status as an "exile", "I can sense the old feeling that I get each time I leave Irish soil, but it won't last long. I'm getting used to it now (182). The Irish forged communities within the urban cities of Britain, and names like Cricklewood, Kilburn, Camden Town, and Digbeth became synonymous with Irishness. The fractious nature of the relationship between Britain and Ireland was to complicate the process of integration for the migrant as the shared bonds of language and aspects of culture were rendered moot by the problems posed by a shared history.

Critical Approaches

This project utilises current Migration Studies and Diaspora Theory to address themes of identity, belonging and becoming within life writings of the Irish Diaspora in Britain. It interrogates primary texts through the framework of theories from scholars such as Stuart Hall, Homi Bhabha and Avtar Brah. Hall's ideas on identity have proved extremely important in understanding issues of diasporan identity in this thesis. He stated that,

> Identity in this sociological conception bridges the gap between "inside" and "outside", between the personal and the public worlds. The fact that we project "ourselves" into these cultural identities, at the same time, internalizing their meanings and values, making them "part of us" helps to align subjective feelings with objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world. (Hall, *Modernity and its Futures* 598)

The migrant strives to adopt a mask of belonging, one that will become second nature with the passage of time. Hall goes on to acknowledge that this is never a static process; rather, it is subject to change and outside influences and that the postmodern subject renders

> The very process of identification through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities has become more open-ended, variable and problematic … Identity becomes a "moveable feast", formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us. (599)

The subject's search for identity is a continual process with fluid parameters that are defined from within the subject but also, potentially, from a position whereby the subject's identity is defined and influenced by external forces. In terms of migrant autobiography this is a particularly useful concept. Migrant status brings with it certain prescribed expectations, both from within and outside, the migrant community. Migrants are ascribed certain characteristics by the dominant discourse and are often created as problematic figures that reside on the fringes of refined society. Stereotyped as being dirty or overly fecund or any of the range of negative stereotypes, the Irish migrant often finds it easier to play down their Irishness and to maintain a silent, stoic mask of Britishness. This denial of self can have serious psychological implications for the subject. Equally pernicious are the expectations of behaviour imposed by the Irish migrant community, that sees attempts at assimilation as a form of betrayal and that delights in inhabiting the masculine stereotypes of the building sites.

The theories of Bhabha are also useful for the study of Irish Diaspora memoirs. He builds on the earlier works of theorists like Said and Fanon. His theories offer insight into some of the psychological coping mechanisms adopted by migrants. He posits the idea that, "In mimicry, the repression of identity and meaning is rearticulated along the axis of metonym" (90). He argues that the migrant offers a mask to the members of the dominant community, letting them see what they want to see, projecting their desires and prejudices onto a blank canvas. Mimicry gives the migrant subject a socially acceptable face that masks inner fears and desires. Bhabha also writes extensively about hybridism, the process whereby the subject subtly changes, becoming trapped between two cultures, and belonging wholly to neither discourse. He argues that this is not a fixed or unstable state but that it constitutes an ever changing reactive process. It is a process that affects not only the subject but also subtly changes the dominant discourse, altering the balance of power over time. He posits that,

> Hybridity subverts the narratives of colonial power and dominant cultures. The series of inclusions and exclusions on which a dominant culture is premised are deconstructed by the very entry of the formerly-excluded subjects into the mainstream discourse. (90)

This is reflected in many of the memoirs studied in this thesis, where the Irish see the franchises of power gradually expanded to include them.

Bhabha's work has been hugely influential in the field of Diaspora Studies and his ideas have expounded on and expanded by a growing number of researchers who aim to apply his theories to the everyday study of migration experience. Roger Bromley is one such researcher who has taken the ideas of

Bhabha and used them as a key to understanding cultural representations from the margins. He states that the principal focus of his book, *Narratives of a New Belonging* (2000) is "on cultural fictions which in Barthes phrase speak "outside the sentence" – texts which are written from the affective experience of social marginality, from a disjunctive, fragmented displaced agency and from the perspective of the edge" (4). He builds on Hall's concept of the liminality of migrant life, focusing on the problematic nature of identity in the third space, remarking that,

> The in-between zones are shifting grounds, threshold spaces, and displacement and migration have led to a struggle for space where identity is endlessly constructed and deconstructed across difference and against set inside / outside oppositions. (6)

Identity is a fluid and reactive process in which a totality of selfhood is never achieved and the subject is constantly forced to consciously or unconsciously adapt to social circumstance.

Brah also develops this theme observing that diasporic journeys are "embarked upon, lived and re-lived through multiple modalities … for example of gender, race, religion, language and generation" (*Cartographies* 86). Modalities and outside influences absorbed at a societal level have the potential to destabilise the subject's sense of self and belonging. These flashpoints are frequently referred to in the memoirs studied for this thesis, with authors finding their conceptions of self were subject to the vagaries of time and circumstance. Ultimately the author's personal identity is subordinate to preconceived parameters, ascribed by others. Many discovered that they were members of a

"we" whose boundaries and ideology were ill-defined and they were left to inhabit a metonymic existence. The term Irish could stand for any number of positive or negatives depending on place and circumstance.

Irish Diaspora Theory

Having examined some of the pertinent theories at play in Diaspora Studies more generally, it is useful at this point to explore some of the work that has been done in the more localised field of Irish Diaspora Studies. While work has been progressing in the sociological and historical disciplines for some time, the study of Irish migrant literature is very much a new phenomenon. It is primarily drawn from the interdisciplinary tradition, with scholars choosing to site textual experiences alongside documented "real life" experiences in a bid to read and deconstruct fictive representations of the migrant experience. One of the seminal texts charged with bringing Irish Diaspora Studies to the mainstream has been Bronwen Walter's *Outsiders Inside* (2001) which explores the challenges of being Irish in Britain. She posits the idea that the Irish community, and particularly the Irish women's community suffered from a degree of invisibility in Britain. Their whiteness excluded them from discourses on minority status yet they suffered from overt and subtle forms of discrimination. Walter comments that,

> This universalization of the centre through shared whiteness marks only certain oppressed groups as different. Such an illusion of coherence is a product of modernist and colonialist discourse which focuses on the "other" and categorises itself as a neutral "same". (*Outsiders Inside* 6)

In other words their own means and modes of identification were disregarded and they were lumped together as being Irish. Whiteness meant that the Irish were

"awarded" a type of honorary if unsought Britishness but it was an illusory inclusiveness. The term "Irish" was laden with implications that changed continually and often was used in a pejorative fashion. Walter's interviewees continually draw attention to the casual racism that their Irishness engendered in Britain. She identifies several recurring racist tropes, including associations with dirt and over-fecundity that are used to problematize the Irish, excluding them from "polite" society. Primarily, Walter is concerned with restoring women's voices to studies of the Irish migrant experience. Irish migrant women have traditionally been ignored in academic terms, featuring only as an addendum or afterthought to the masculine experiences,

> The absence of migrant Irish women from public discourse has been matched
> by a resounding silence in academic study. Women's place in Irish society
> has increasingly been recognised since the 1980s but emigrant women have
> been left almost off the agenda. (*Outsiders Inside* 2)

Wryly, she observes her fellow scholars' blindness towards, "The small place occupied [by women] in the records (Censuses apart) or in analyses is never questioned. Yet the titles of all these books claim universality in approaching their subtext" (*Outsiders Inside* 3). This work and her subsequent works, both on her own, and collaboratively with scholars such as Mary Hickman, have gone a long way towards redressing the gender imbalance in Irish Diaspora Studies.

Breda Gray further expounds on gendered representations of Irishness, arguing that, "The Irish woman is a site of contradiction and ambivalence and it is often by rendering the divisions and antagonisms between national and gender categories visible that the Irish woman herself as a subject of history may become

visible (*Women and the Irish Diaspora* 5). By drawing attention to disparities of power and individualising experience, a truer picture of the subject emerges. In her paper "Breaking the Silence" from 2003, she deals with issues of memory and recollection,

> Late modernity … is characterised by increased individualism and a fragmentation of traditional categories of belonging… The individual is seen as gaining primacy over community with the effect that biographical autonomy becomes the central attribute of the modern subject. (19)

This is an important idea and may be used to read a number of memoirs that appeared in the later decades of the twentieth century.

Patrick O'Sullivan has commented that, "The study of migration, emigration, immigration, population movements, flight, scattering, networks, transnational communities – this study demands an interdisciplinary approach" (irishdiaspora.net). It is an approach that he has put into practice to good effect with his six-volume Irish World Wide series that collates work from Irish Diaspora scholars from across the academic spectrum. It provides an important reservoir of knowledge, with each volume dealing with various strands and themes of study. O'Sullivan is also involved with the Irish Diaspora Research Unit which offers an often eclectic, scholarly archive of Irish Diaspora Studies materials, freely available online to the general public. It is one of a number of repositories of sources available to Irish Diaspora scholars and the various materials that it offers were useful for this thesis in terms of providing an overview of current issues of concern for the Irish community in Britain. The Irish Centre for Migration Studies, formerly run by Piaras Mac Éinrí, at University College Cork, has as its mission statement to "Promote the study of

historical and contemporary migration, to and from Ireland within a comparative international framework, using new information and communication technologies" (migration.ucc.ie). It houses research and sources on emigration and has an oral archive with a large collection of interviews. In researching this thesis, these interviews offered a useful yardstick against which to measure migrant memoirs, a chance to compare textual and oral reminiscences and look for commonalities or contradictions.

As mentioned, the study of literary representations of Irish migrant experience is a relatively under-subscribed field and seems at present to be a peculiarly masculinised endeavour. Ellen McWilliams can be counted as a rare exception to this, publishing a number of important texts in the area of migrant Irish fiction.[2] Liam Harte has been to the fore in promoting the study of Irish memoir and autobiography. His *Modern Irish Autobiography* (2007) is a collection of essays from scholars drawn from various disciplines and has as its remit, the provision of, "An inaugural attempt to provide a critical atlas of a sprawling and relatively unexcavated terrain" (4). It seeks to introduce a framework for the critical evaluation of memoir and to look at how, "The lacunae and aporias that cohere around this mutual articulation of subject and nation are recurring points of reference and interrogation for many of the contributors to the book" (6). In his own essay in the collection, "Loss, Return and Restitution", he lays out some sound advice for the study of migrant narratives, pointing out that,

> Issues of subjectivity, authority and agency must be central to any reading of
> the first-person accounts by members of dispossessed or subordinate groups

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[2] *See for example: Women and Exile in Contemporary Irish Fiction* (2013).

as they must be to readings of proletariat autobiography in general, into which category many Irish migrant memoirs must fall. (92)

His 2009 book on *The Literature of the Irish in Britain* focuses on autobiography and memoir, listing extracts from many forgotten or ignored texts linked together with an introduction that gives a flavour of the disparate nature and themes of the texts, describing them "As a written corpus it is fragmentary, eclectic, amorphous, uneven and obscure" (xv). He finds many commonalities within their experiences, identifying a recurring occurrence of anti-Irish feeling but argues that it seems to been accepted as a normal response, observing that, "Far from labouring their experiences of discrimination or wrapping themselves in a cloak of victimhood, several writers barely register their experiences of such, while others record racial and religious slurs in a light ink" (xxxi). Describing the difficulties he faced in compiling a representative sample of texts, he comments that, "I find myself working in an annexe of Irish writing where there is "no canon against whom one might respond, and few rules" (xv). It could be argued that he succeeds in creating a canon, the sheer number of texts listed in his book filling the void in Irish Studies, and offering a creditable base from which to launch further research. He modestly claims that "While every anthological initiative is necessarily selective and representative, this one makes no claim to comprehensiveness" (xvii). However, it is an inescapable text when studying within this field, containing many of the seminal primary works within this fledgling corpus.

Tony Murray's recent article "A Diasporic Vernacular" (2011) is an important addition to the study of Irish migrant autobiography. It deals with an important subsection of migrant memoir, that of the experiences of second-

generation Irish in Britain. Identifying their importance within the discourse, he comments that, "Such texts provide a fertile source for exploring how the descendants of Irish migrants negotiate complex personal and cultural identities and positionings and … demonstrate how their identities are articulated and narrativised in the process" (75). Using Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity which sees the subject attempt to write himself into being using the elements of fact, personal fiction and desires, he looks at how,

> Memoir is a productive site for examining how such processes are refracted and mediated through narrative, not least because, by threading the events of a life together, their authors (often despite their best intentions) reveal surprising and instructive ambivalences and contradictions. (76)

Focusing on John Boyle's *Galloway Street* and John Walsh's *The Falling Angels* he looks at how the process of articulating selfhood sees history used to justify actions retrospectively and how violently polarised views on nationality and ethnicity can be contained within the same subject. He also identifies several other second-generation memoirs to which this theoretical framework can be applied and in doing so provides an invaluable guide for researchers.

Murray's recently published *London Irish Fictions* (2012) develops this research and offers insight into the ways that Irish migrants coped with life in London. He examines literary portrayals of Irish migrant life in London, drawing on both autobiography and fiction, exploring how migrants sought to resolve the tensions of living between two cultures. In a chapter on the experiences of second-generation migrants he further expands on the fragmented nature of second-generation identity where identity is never fixed or stable. Like Murray, Harte also

points up the lability of second-generation identities when he states that "They support a conceptualisation of second-generation Irishness as a continuum of multiple and partial identifications rather than a monolithic cultural category" ("Migrancy" 228). Many of the second-generation memoirs studied in this thesis have moments where the author plays down or is repulsed by his or her Irishness, reacting to cultural imperatives absorbed from within the British social system.

At the same time, many second-generation subjects choose to idealise Ireland, creating it as a site of spiritual possibility, a place where the romantic side of the self can find resolution. Such approaches infantilise Irish culture, framing it as a centre of quaint, antiquated irrationality, a geographical and social binary of logical, modern Britain. Aidan Arrowsmith's article "Plastic Paddy" draws attention to these coping mechanisms, identifying the impulse for second-generation subjects to reject their parent's heritage as a form of youthful protest or as an effort to better blend in with their peers (17). He sees the urge to romanticise Ireland as a form of "second-generation nostalgic essentialism", where subjects indulge "In a classic revivalist sentimentalisation of "ould Ireland" as the rural idyll" (22). Crucially, he scrutinises the recurring trope of authenticity, where subjects feel trapped between cultures, belonging to both but continually forced to choose between two seemingly binary identities. Authenticity offers an illusory chance to resolve or negate the dysfunction of an interstitial life. The second-generation narratives examined in this thesis, provide numerous instances where the subject attempts to absorb themselves completely in one or other culture; only to find that aspects of the other side of their cultural make-up intrude and work to destabilise their identity.

In terms of memory and the formative and curative powers of recollection, there have been few scholars who have embraced the field of memory studies with more gusto than George O'Brien; his three memoirs *Dancehall Days* (1990), *Village of Longing* (1990) and *Out of Our Minds* (1995) bear testament to a concurrent scholarly fascination with the processes of remembering. In his essay "Memoirs of an Auto-Biographer" (2007) he writes about the driving forces behind the impulse towards autobiography, recalling that in his own experience, "What I thought, with the neophyte's naiveté was that I was entitled to my own story. Sufficient to the day was the narrative thereof, I said to myself. I had permission to speak ("Memoirs" 215). O'Brien seeks to shift the centre of power, stepping outside stereotype and metonym and articulating his individuality, seizing and at the same creating, a self from the detritus of personal history. Arguing that this does not constitute a rejection of origin but rather an expansion of origin, he posits,

> The significance of autobiographical form may be found in the idea of movement, of going towards, of an interplay between different, even opposing, realms of experience and perception and idiom. And one implication of this idea is that rather than seeking to dismantle the "we", the autobiographical aims to augment it, making it more pliable, more accommodating, more complicated as though in stating his own case, the autobiographer claims "citizenship" to be a special case of attentiveness or vulnerability or need. (221).

Autobiography offers a means for identity to be created along personal lines, the parameters of belonging changing in response to individual needs and desires.

The emergence of working-class memoirs and autobiographies in the modern era marks a departure from early twentieth-century Irish memoirs and autobiographies, which were usually drawn from the "great man" or "great events" school. Barry Sloan observes that in

> Earlier works of autobiography … the social, political and cultural history of the nation co-exists in intricate proximity to the writer's personal history, which not only complicates and contextualizes the account of the emerging individual but also threatens to subsume it and thereby to compromise the aspiration to achieve a form of universalised self-expression. (221)

The gradual emergence and growing popularity of "memoir from below" over the course of the twentieth century saw a greater importance attached to introspection, personal reflection and identifiable experience. There was a growing tendency to use the formulaic nature of memoir as a vehicle to express individuality from within the embrace of community. Eamonn Hughes recently characterised it thus, "The dilemma involves the contrary urges to stress on the one hand the autobiographer's uniqueness and on the other the autobiographer's representativeness. This is the choice between individuality and community" ("Stories" 126). He identifies that this a precarious and potentially destabilising position, writing,

> The autobiographer's predicament arises from the need for conventional narrative structures within which to tell one's story as against the imperative to tell a new story: autobiographical expression is both enabled by the genre's existence and constrained by the limits of its genre" ("Stories" 126).

Hughes identifies a conflict in migrant discourses between tradition and culture, labelling tradition as a form of "cultural atrophy" that sees a historical form of idealised behaviour used as a "defence against change" ("Art, Exiles" 10). Culture is

conceived as being more of an active and reactive entity where, "Most importantly, culture is subject to historical change; indeed, it may be said to be the product of coping with the consequence of historical change" ("Art, Exiles" 10). Applying this definition, it is clear to see that memoir and autobiography represent a form of culture born from the disjunction between origin and destination.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter One deals with the genre of memoir and autobiography, exploring how useful a medium it is for the expression of migrant experiences. It seeks to identify the various means in which memoir is used as a tool for placing order on past events and establishing a sense of self for the migrant. Texts like Sean Ó Ciaráin's *Farewell to Mayo* (1992)*,* Jim Phelan's *The Name's Phelan* (1948) and Thomas Rice's *Far from the Land* (2010), reveal the constructedness of memory and the importance placed on the development of self. This chapter utilises the work of scholars such as James Olney, Eamonn Hughes, Jakki Spicer and Seamus Deane to examine how memoir is used as a vehicle to tease out the complexities of migrant experiences. George O'Brien has been to the fore in exploring the interlinked nature of identity and memory. His own memoir *Out of Our Minds* offers a knowing and often acerbic, backwards look at the process of an Irish boy's passage to manhood in Britain. His academic works, for example his article "Memoirs of an Autobiographer", offer the idea that identity is a reactive entity and requires personal input and that identity is subject to a subtle form of revisionism as the subject ages. This chapter adapts that idea, and explores how the various memoirists use the process, not as a simple chronological tool to recount the milestones of life but as a textual means of affirming selfhood with the process of writing providing a form of catharsis. Aidan

Arrowsmith characterised it thus, that the past is, "A construction, visible only through the lens of the present" (Arrowsmith, "Plastic Paddy" 301). This chapter also documents the drive for authenticity, the desire to be seen as writing from within the community and charts how authors use colloquial language and dialogue to lend a patina of credibility to their accounts. Memoir is a formulaic medium of expression but within the formula, it offers opportunities to articulate individuality. Memoir also plays an important role in bridging the gap between the orality of traditional rural Irish culture and the textual demands of modernity. The role of nostalgia in memoir in also examined, both as a form of means of reaffirming nationality and as a bulwark against assimilation.

The experiences of male Irish migrants to Britain are dealt with in the second chapter. In terms of available texts, this provides the richest seam of material, reflecting perhaps the relative freedoms and expectations afforded by their gender in the twentieth century. Liam Harte in his collation of Irish memoirs *The Literature of the Irish in Britain*, lists over thirty memoirs by male migrants to Britain. This chapter looks at some of the reasons for migration and also seeks to identify commonalities within these accounts. It draws on cultural theorists including Homi Bhabha, seeking to test the applicability of his idea of a "Third Space" that leaves the migrant existing between two cultures while never belonging fully to either. A careful reading of the primary texts in this chapter, reveal that his ideas of syncretism and mimicry can be proven to be valid in Irish migration memoirs. Works by writers such as Domhnall MacAmhlaigh, Mick McCarthy, Richard Power, Donal Foley and Maidhc Dainín Ó Sé give a flavour of the various coping strategies utilised by migrants in order to blend in and also demonstrate how assimilation can take place

on a wholly involuntary and unconscious basis. The process of ghettoization, whereby the Irish tried to recreate a simulacrum of home is also addressed in this chapter, together with the important role played by the pubs, churches and dancehalls in the lives of migrant Irish. The heteronormative and conservative nature of the Irish community is also looked at, with attitudes towards sexuality and homosexuality in particular, foregrounded. Britain offered many of these Irish men a chance to indulge their sexual desires, aided by the relative anonymity of the city scape. Irish culture in Britain has always had an image of hyper-masculinity with many Irish men choosing to view themselves through the parameters of stereotype, constructing themselves as hardworking, hard drinking, rebel figures at odds with society. This chapter explores how true these portrayals of masculinity were and investigates the idea that this exaggerated stereotypical Irishness was a mask, a defensive façade presented to the host community.

The third chapter deals with Irish women's written experiences of migration to Britain. There is a problematic dearth of published first-hand accounts from Irish women migrants to Britain. Interviews conducted by sociological researchers fill the void to a certain extent but those few first-hand texts that exist are doubly valuable, offering insight into a world that has often been hidden and viewed as a mere addendum to masculine experience. This chapter sets out to explain some of the possible factors that prevented or discouraged women from setting their experiences down in print. It looks at texts by authors like Elaine Crowley whose *Technical Virgins* (1998) details the social and sexual freedoms that migration brought. Nan Joyce's *On the Road* (1999) documents her surprise at the lack of prejudice that her traveller background engenders in Britain. Anna May Mangan's *Me and Mine* (2011)

is not a first person migrant memoir but a memoir of her mother's life and recounts the hardships, privations and good fortunes that her life contained. The aim of this chapter is to restore the female voice to the discourse on migration and to combat the social invisibility that has dogged these women. Irish women's attitudes towards migration are markedly different from men's with most women choosing to see life in Britain as a haven, allowing opportunities for personal growth unimaginable at home. This chapter looks at how the anonymity of city life allowed many women the freedom to work, socialise or engage in sexual relationships, free from parochial censure. It observes that Irish women often found themselves serving as interlocutors between the family and the state, charged with an unspoken duty to inculcate a sense of Irishness within the confines of the home. Negative stereotyping of Irishwomen in Britain is also explored, with insinuations of slovenliness being documented in many texts and used as a device to dehumanise migrant women. The stresses and mental anguish caused by transnational duties of care and the substitution of friendship networks in place of kinship networks are also looked at. This chapter draws on sociological theory from scholars like Breda Gray, Sara Ahmed, Bronwen Walter and Louise Ryan, applying them to the primary texts to gauge their applicability.

The final chapter explores memoirs from second and third-generation Irish people in Britain, focusing on the issues that spring from lives lived between two disparate cultures. It analyses how memoirs in this group tend to focus more on issues of identity and belonging, continually seeking to negotiate the contradictions of being publicly British and privately Irish. Recent memoirs by authors like John Walsh, Blake Morrison, John Boyle and John Healy highlight the psychological stress that can result from trying to reconcile the two competing national identities.

These are viewed in tandem with recent scholarly works on the field such as Tony Murray's, "A Diasporic Vernacular" and Aidan Arrowsmith's "Plastic Paddies" which help to identify certain recurring themes. There is a frequent concern shown by memoirists in this category with authenticity and many display unease or a sense of "transgressing" on a culture that is familiar yet exclusive. Differing attitudes towards religion and authority are also foregrounded with many authors railing against ascribed ethnic badges of signification. The power of religion and particularly Catholicism's power, to disrupt and destabilise precarious identities is also investigated with many of the memoirists seeing the religion of their parents as being somewhat exotic at the same time, faintly repellent. A creeping sense of alienation between the generations is also looked at, as is the notion of one family containing two tribes where, "The natural affinity of the camper is the not the natural affinity of the citizen" (Ní Dhonnchada and Nic Eoin 70). Within the family there can be wildly polarised views on issues of nationality, with loyalties divided between Ireland and Britain. This chapter will also deal with the prevalence of Edenic tropes in second-generation memoir, exploring how authors use it to propagate stereotypes of wild and primitive Irishness or romantic Celticness contrasting it with a perceived sensible, pragmatic Englishness.

Location of project in current research

This thesis attempts to tease out the various strands of Irish migrant experience as represented by the migrants themselves. It identifies three different subsections of interest within the corpus. Firstly it deals with what has become viewed as traditional working-class migrants; it then turns towards memoirs from Irish women migrants, before examining the autobiographical output from second and

third-generation Irish in Britain. This is not to suggest that these categories can serve as a catch-all; within these rough classifications, there is a wealth of individual experience that defies codification. As the study of memoir within Irish Studies is in its infancy there remains considerable scope for further exploration. There is room for further study of this material under headings such as class, sexuality and religion but these topics are outside the remit of this thesis. On approaching this field, Harte's *Literature of the Irish in Britain* provided an invaluable starting point. It is a work of serious scholarship that identifies and collates a wealth of Irish migrant memoirs. On the other hand, it can prove to be dispiritingly all-encompassing text for the MA student. Many eureka moments in the library where new texts were "rediscovered", were subsequently defused as the texts were found to be present in the contents list of his collection. While Harte has written a thoughtful and in-depth introduction to this collation, its principal value lies in its restorative nature, that identifies texts where "A high proportion of its contents belong to the realm of out-of-print and the difficult-to-access , and an unknown number of works remains unpublished" (Harte xv). Within the works he identifies, there remains a lot of scope for academic research, where texts have yet to be examined through the prism of relevant theoretical machinery. This thesis strives to foreground some of these theoretical issues, applying current international and Irish Diaspora theory to the texts and testing how valid ideas on race and belonging prove. In a similar vein, Murray's recent work *London Irish Fictions* published in October 2012, deals with how the urban city scape features in both migrant Irish fiction and autobiography, focusing on the ways in which the Irish community in London used or avoided ghettoization as a means of inculcating a sense of belonging. Murray identifies

many important autobiographical texts and views them in conjunction with similar fictive representations of migrant life, identifying several distinct sub-genres within the field. This work constitutes an invaluable source for those looking to explore written representations of the Irish in London as it identifies many neglected or unrecognised texts, particularly in the section dealing with second-generation memoir. Notwithstanding these examples, further work remains to be done in this field and exciting challenges remain in charting the emergence of Irish communities in the urban centres of Britain. This thesis attempts to find and research new literary expressions of the processes of being, belonging and ultimately becoming. While fiction has much to offer in terms of exploring the migrant experience, it lacks the potent blend of viscerality and reflectivity of memoir and a work that focuses primarily on memoir offers much to the field of Irish Diaspora Studies, combining as it does the disciplines of history, sociology and literature.

Tina O'Toole has written that the study of women's writing is vitally important, "both to stimulate ideological diversity and to redress the structure dividing 'writing' (i.e. mainstream or men's work) from 'women's writing' (received as a kind of supplement)" (O'Toole xxi). Chapter Two of this thesis sets out to examine women's written experiences of migration, not as an addendum to the mainstream but as an important, independent and integral part of the corpus of Irish life writing. It follows on from recent interdisciplinary efforts to highlight and combat the invisibility of women's experience within Irish Diaspora Studies. In the sociological field scholars such as Gray and Ryan have worked to reclaim and revive Irish women's recollections of the process of

moving between cultures, challenging the hegemonic voice that constructs migrants as being male and heterosexual. As mentioned, Bronwen Walter's *Outsiders Inside* points up the invisibility of Irish women in Britain, arguing that they remained hidden from public, and by extension, academic view. Enda Delaney, writing in the historical field has made similar observations. This thesis sets out to investigate the role that literary studies can play in reinstating and making Irish women's thoughts and voices heard.

Working in this field and drawing on interdisciplinary scholarship, expands understanding of the nuances of migrant life. One of the primary aims of this thesis has been to promote and encourage the on-going adoption of interdisciplinary models in Irish Studies in a bid to arrive at a truer and more rounded picture of the Irish migrant experience in Britain. In doing so, this work will stand as a document that contributes to the cumulative knowledge of Irish migrant experiences in Britain.

Chapter One:

To Memory Now I Can't Recall: Memoir And Migrant Expression.

This chapter will examine why memoir and autobiography have been used so effectively as vehicles for the expression of the migrant experience; paying close attention to the paradoxical nature of a genre that is at once communal and inclusive and simultaneously, individual and exclusive. Focusing on the impulses behind the autobiographical mode it will look at some of the factors that complicate the act of remembering and re-cognition. It will also consider the usefulness of the autobiographical form, as a means of self-actualisation that allows the author to consolidate their adult self through the recounting of his or her life journey. Harte in the introduction to his anthology of memoirs, *The Literature of the Irish in Britain: Autobiography and Memoir, 1725-2001*, contends that,

> The best are acts of imagination in their own terms, mediations on how journeys 'across the water' breed strange and unexpected dichotomies, produce new patterns of seeing, living and remembering, prompt different stories about who we are and where we belong … and the role the migrant imagination and its witnesses have played in shaping those fluid contrapunctual concepts-home, place and belonging, that are themselves cognates of that most labile and vexing of abstractions: Irishness. (xix)

He goes on to argue that their value lies in their very diffuseness: the lack of a unified voice or experience rendering them invaluable as a means of understanding the amorphous nature of Irishness. There is no single, indisputable Irish voice;

instead, there is a multiplicity of Irish identities subsumed beneath a banner of communalism. Patrick O'Sullivan identifies the intimacy of the autobiographical milieu when he comments that, "It falls to art and autobiography to shelter, in Marx's phrase, 'man in his sensuous, individual, immediate existence'" (7). Autobiography allows the author the chance to articulate private thoughts and to lead the reader, and often the writer too, towards an excised and acceptable vision of self. In terms of Irish migrant experience, autobiography offers the writer a vehicle to express the alienation, loss and sense of disconnectedness inherent in the process of moving from one culture to another. Many Irish writers found that they had identity thrust upon them in Britain. They became Irish for the first time, a badge that could have positive or negative connotations depending on time and circumstance. This sudden immersion in the anonymity of stereotype forced the migrant to evaluate who they were and to adopt certain modes and expressions of behaviour. Hughes posits that, "people make their own individual identities though not in the circumstances of their own choosing" ("The Fact" 32). Identity is as much a reactive reflex as it is a pro-active one. Autobiography affords the writer the opportunity to create or their own identity, to regain control of their own personality, and to restructure the self in its own terms.

Jim Phelan in the introduction to his bombastic and vainglorious memoir *The Name's Phelan* gives a perceptive insight into the difficulties offered by the medium of autobiography stating,

> For a teller of tales, a fiction spinner, such as I have been for most of my life, even before I was a writer, any attempt at a straightforward factual narrative is very difficult indeed. It is so easy and the temptation is so great, to round

off a passage or tidy up an episode, to make a neat story, instead of the

inconsequentialities which a life story usually is … Wherefore, because I

have had an interesting time and have glimpsed many unusual angles of

existence, I have tried to tell the story as it is known to me and only to me …

(Phelan Preface)

Autobiography is a medium tinged with conscious and unconscious elements of

fiction. Sean Ó Ciaráin in the preface to his memoir *Farewell to Mayo: An*

Emigrants Memoir of Ireland and Scotland (1991) comments that,

This is not a book of fiction or fantasy but a true record of my own

experiences, feelings and thoughts throughout my early life. There are no

figures of the imagination in this book, but real flesh and blood people who

played their parts, however brief, in the saga of my life's story in Ireland and

in Scotland. No superfluous embellishments have been added. It all happened

and has been taken down from memory. (Ó Ciaráin 9)

What is true to the author may not be a verifiable fact but it is still a subjective truth.

The author seeks to present his own truth drawn from the imperfection of memory.

Deane has argued that, "clear demarcation lines cannot be drawn between the factual

and fictive aspects of life-writing any more than they can between its documentary

and aesthetic elements" (*Field Day* 382). O'Brien is conscious of the stresses that

exist between literal and figurative truths within his memoir, "I didn't have much

confidence of being in pursuit of truth. Truce would do, not only as a homonym but

also as an ambition" ("Memoirs" 218). Literal truth is sacrificed for a form of

expedient self-characterisation. He recognises that his is a particular truth, one that

conforms to his needs and aspirations rather than existing as a chronological tool.

Paying homage to the individuality of his own personalised, articulated experience, he writes,

> Home. A prototype of belonging which I've evidently had to invent for myself, where I could open up at love, fear, work, pain, hope and various other fundamental four-letter words about which I was never sure before that I had permission to speak. ("Memoirs" 238)

The truth that is foregrounded through memoir is not meant to be a historically or bureaucratically provable truth; rather it serves as a personal interpretation of the random events, times and meetings that make up individual memory. Spicer states that "Truth is not the same as fact" (388) and quotes Olney's observation that, "autobiographical writing is the site of the consolidation—perhaps even of creation—of the individual in his creative subjectivity" (388). Thus, when memoirists like Mick McCarthy or Sean Ó Ciaráin present pages of recounted conversations in astonishing detail, these should be viewed as documenting feeling and perception and not, to borrow a phrase from Rankean ideology—"history as it was". The actual conversations are unimportant, the value lies in how the author has processed them and used them as backdrop to their own personal narrative. That is not to say that authors are unconcerned with authenticity—believability is immutably entwined with belonging, and autobiographers seek to present recognisable pictures of life, filtered through their own personal experiences, which affirm or confirm their origins. Thomas J. Rice in the acknowledgements for his memoir *Far from the Land* (2009) remarks,

> That same evening I had the good fortune of meeting Niall Fitzduff, a close friend of the Nolans. Niall has since become a good friend and my authenticity barometer for the overall narrative. Growing up in the same rural milieu at about the same time—Niall's insights have been invaluable to me in 'keeping it real,' true to the way of life I've tried to capture in the hindsight of fifty years. ("Acknowledgements" n. pag.)

Rice is motivated by a desire to write from within the culture, seeking approbation through authenticity.

In the introduction to *Far from the Land*, Rice comments that, "It has taken me over twenty-five years to deliver on this vision. This memoir is the product of over fifty years of reflection, which I've tried to render authentically, without hyperbole, nostalgia or cliché" ("Introduction" n. pag.). It is impossible, however, to excise these elements from any account of lived experience. Human nature veers instinctively towards sentimentalism and memoir offers the perfect vehicle for stylised sentiment. This is evident in the following lines that close out the introduction to Rice's memoir,

> I hope the reader comes away with a more nuanced appreciation—as I did — on what it means to be Irish. Not as some romanticised caricature, but as a people of courage, people of compassion, and people of complexity who— wherever time and tide may find us—will never be far from the land. ("Introduction" n. pag.)

Having started out with a firm objectivity, Rice descends into dewy-eyed subjectivity. Cliché and nostalgia prevail, precisely because they have their roots in certain shared experiences. They render the account recognisable to the wider

community and provide a platform from which to establish common ground. Authenticity is sought through the vehicles of hyperbole and cliché, the sheer familiarity of situation or speech pattern invites the reader to participate in the conceit of believability.

For many authors, employing literal truth in their accounts could prove to be divisive and isolating. Truth, whether subjective or objective, is rarely valued in a closely integrated, rural society such as Ireland at mid-century. The anonymity of the city may offer the author certain freedoms from parochialism, but, if the author harbours any desire to retain links with his home community, the process of representation is often precariously difficult. John O'Donoghue, before the start of his memoir *In a Quiet Land*, offers the following, acerbic dedication, "My sister and my brother's wife, whose vigorous opposition to the idea of publication so spurred me on to write" (n. pag.). The author's recollections, while sacred to him, may be viewed with embarrassment or anger by those who find themselves recreated, with all their faults and foibles on show to the world. O'Brien remarked that, "Those who were left, thought for the most part, that what I had done was, in the words of one of them "A dirty lousy thing" ("Memoirs" 218). O'Brien finds himself cut off from his origins; his printed observations transgress against an unwritten code of manners. Community and its attendant affections and affectations, thrive in the private sphere and by publicising it the author becomes alienated, "I was perceived an outsider—an emigrant, a professor, even a Yank" ("Memoirs" 225). In short, by shining a light on Lismore he ceased to be "one of us" and was instead characterised as being intrusive and wilfully cruel. O'Brien ruefully suggests that, "In the context of public

remembering, Autobiography tends to be tainted, an unwarranted rupture of the ostensible prophylaxis of silence" (219-20).

It can also be argued that autobiography bridges the gap between the oral culture of traditional Irish storytelling and modernity as represented by the novel format. The sudden transition from a rural society to an industrialised one meant that Irish writers were able to meld the two formats into a form of personal "fact-ion". Memoir and autobiography, written by members of the Irish migrant community represent the first tentative steps towards modernity, with the migrant community seizing the power to narrate. Up to the early years of the twentieth century, autobiography and memoir were almost the sole preserve of the ruling classes or public personalities, such as for instance William O'Brien the nationalist M.P. or George Moore the writer. Gradually, it was to change and become adapted for use by the working classes. The middle decades of the twentieth-century saw Irish migrants take a staid and ultimately foreign discipline and adapt it to give voice to hidden communities, fusing it with elements of the oral tradition where,

> A new position arises, perhaps to take the place of the storyteller, but under reduced—or at least radically different—circumstances. A story which is utterly dependent on orality and the proximal exchange between teller and listeners, gives way to exchange mediated by technology, including technology of the book. (Spicer 396)

Migrant memoirs contain several of the elements present in story-telling. Both forms rely on a familiarity of situation, a situation that is complicated by adventure and diversity with a strong central character enduring or prevailing over time. Many

of the memoirs studied in this chapter use phonetic representations of colloquial speech patterns, designed to aid recognisability and inculcate a sense of orality. When Thomas Rice recreates a conversation like,

'Mick, I can go this time but only if ya get me home before nightfall'

'Right so. Not a problem. We're going to beat the tar outa Tullow. I'll have one quick wan at Flood's and have ya home in two shakes of a lamb's tail.' ("Chapter 20" n. pag.)

he is trying to create an aural link to his childhood through textual means. The rhythms and cadence of the accents of his childhood are foregrounded in a bid to lend believability to his tale. It is a textual demonstration that he once belonged to the community. The conversational recall shown by the authors has less to do with photographic recall than with the need to round out or add colour to a story. Oral story-telling relies on similar machineries, with exaggeration and linguistic dexterity helping to place the narrator at the centre of the action. A successful story-teller must assume the role of omniscient narrator, retelling the story but in a manner designed to engage or enchant the audience. The oral tradition has however, been adapted for the modern era and memoirists use new textual vehicles to express old emotions and ideas. The story remains the same but the means of telling it have moved on.

Memoir is used not only to reconnect with, and recollect the community of origin, but also to re-imagine that community in textual terms. Authors seek to bridge the gap between a pre-literate, idealised childhood and the regulated life of the literate present,

> The childhood state is constantly affirmed as one that is deeply responsive to the enveloping natural state; it is as if the lyrical passages are the images of a constancy and timelessness that the human community cannot offer, especially at a time of social disintegration through emigration. (Sampson 206)

Autobiography offers the writer a chance to install themselves as a link in the lineage between the naturalness of the oral tradition and the artificiality of modern life. Writing acts as an antidote to the dysfunction of social disintegration. Harte has characterised autobiography as being "a textual supplement to lived experience" ("Loss and Restitution" 109). O'Brien posits that,

> The change in focus from collective experience to individual witnessing and evaluating, with which autobiography is centrally preoccupied, is a symptom of modernisation—of willed modernisation as the trajectory of desire, on the autobiographer's part. No less modernising, however, is the change in emphasis from the spontaneity, informality, transience and intimacy of orality to the studied, constructed, permanent, detached character of print. ("Memoirs" 220)

However, there seems to be an awareness, particularly among writers from rural areas, of their position in the oral tradition. This awareness is often coupled with a desire to emulate the forms of the oeuvre. Patrick Devlin's memoir closes with "Good morra tae ye" (Devlin 256). It is a peculiarly conversational sign-off, the colloquialism serving as a final reminder that what has gone before was intended as entertainment and fosters an illusion of intimacy with the audience. Similarly, Ó Ciaráin finishes with "But that is another story", which is, in its Irish form "Sin scéal

eile", a traditional closing line used by *seanchaí* in the oral story-telling tradition (192). Donal Foley closes with, "There is a sound of footsteps crunching on the road from the pier, then a firm shake hands and a welcoming voice; "Ta failte romhaibh." We're home" (100). His odyssey has ended and he has come full circle, returning to his roots. John B. Keane, too, chooses to end his memoir with the traditional blessing "Good luck and God Bless". Again, this form of farewell, still used or at least recognised in homes across Ireland, serves to build an intimacy with his readers, reminding them that the author is drawn from within the boundaries of the culture of which he writes.

There is didacticism inherent in autobiography that seeks to position the author's life as an exemplar for the audience. Autobiography can be viewed as offering a cautionary tale to generations to come,

> Thousands of others who grew up in Ireland before or during the war and emigrated to Britain in the late nineteen-forties or fifties could write similar memoirs, but with the exception of a very few, they have shown a marked reluctance to put their experiences on paper. I decided that I would do so before it was too late, for ours will soon be a diminishing generation. We are getting old, our way of life is all but gone, and before we ourselves go, I feel it would be right that some of us should set down the inside story of our experiences as a document to those who come afterwards. (Ó Ciaráin 9)

Ó Ciaráin is concerned that countless Irish people who migrated during the middle decades of the twentieth century will be forgotten, their stories unheard and their lives unexamined and unmourned. He is aware that migration will remain as a tradition. Gray quotes Nancy K. Miller's notion that, "Indeed the point of memoir …

is to keep alive the notion that experience can take the form of art and that remembering is a guide to living" ("Breaking the Silence" 2).

Many autobiographers use the medium as a means to try to place an order on life and perhaps use the process as a form of *bildungsroman* to retrospectively imbue the self with more linear and defined direction. Olney has commented that,

> Implicit in the very fact of memory is the consciousness of a self that is continuous from past to present and that also paradoxically, is made different by this present exercise of memory; a self that is the same in its essential nature, yet a self that is renewed, extended and amplified by an act of memory. (48)

Memory is irrevocably fused with and informed by the present day. Maturity brings with it, not only the desire to record, but also the life skills with which to analyse the past. John B. Keane, looking back on his early years in London, remarks that

> As a barman I found little time for writing. There was always time for drinking and reminiscing but this period was the most important in my development as a writer. I lost objectivity and emerged and became involved personally with human beings. To involve oneself is a dangerous game but I was lucky and emerged without loss of inner face or sense of obligation. (65)

Keane can retrospectively accord motive to his youthful actions, as he views them through the prism of knowledge he has acquired in the intervening years. O'Brien has also written of the need for self-articulation coming with the comfort and safety that middle age has brought saying, "So when at last I fell on my feet with a job and a family, the impetus arose to try and bridge the distance between where I started and where I ended up (*Out of Our Minds* 214). He is driven to reconcile his present self

with the distant nervous, bumbling self of his youth by a desire for fulfilment, a sense of needing to order and control what and who he has become. By assuming a retrospective control of his youth, he seeks affirmation of his present position.

Denis Sampson, analysing George O'Brien's work suggests that, "in recovering Lismore and his formative years therein, O'Brien achieves the empowerment which everything in his orphaned, fostered, exiled childhood had denied him" (202). He further states that, "childhood is revealed as a site of elaborate mythology of both personal and cultural significance" with the result that "Adult narrative voice is anchored by the recovery of the emotional knowledge of the child" (212). The author needs to bring the intelligence and reason of adulthood into a symbiosis with the innocence of childhood. Autobiography can restore a sense of "wholeness" to the author, "making sense of life is inseparable from the act of writing it, so that even the subject himself cannot be sure of the sense until the work is complete and he can read it" (Sloan 239). For emigrants this recovery and reconnection with the past, serves an important function; it allows the migrant to site himself in the homeland, drawing on a personal foundational myth, tempered with the experience of another culture that allows them to offer critical insight from a position that straddles both inside and outside the culture. Rice comments,

> As a self-absorbed sixteen year old in 1958, I'd seen only the negatives of our community and had taken my friends and neighbours for granted, dreaming only of adventure and escape from the drudgery of farming. Twenty-five years later, I saw the experience through a different lens. What I saw now and remembered best were the everyday heroics: people facing

down impressive odds to keep home and hearth together, raise families and

fight off hardship and despair with quiet dignity. ("Introduction" n. pag.)

This would seem to tie in with Harte's notion that, "The narrative is more than an

attempt to recreate childhoods past; it is also an attempt to <u>remember</u> a lost self

through reinstating the erased voice of childhood, a voice which continually mocks

'the middle-aged raconteur" ("Loss and Restitution" 108). The suggestion here is

that true insight is achieved by meshing youthful emotion with mature reflection.

The author reconstitutes a sense of community, recognising the debts he owes to his

youthful experiences.

Recollection can provide catharsis, facilitating a form of textual therapy.

Deane remarked that,

You know, it is bound up with the notion that the past will keep revisiting

you in a demonic form if you don't find a way of dealing with it—which is

not a way of dismissing it, but a way of internalising it. But if you don't

internalise it within yourself, then it will externalise around you in some way,

which is not to say that I have any sympathy at all with the contemporary

notion of putting it behind you, moving on from it. (Deane and Fitzpatrick

90)

Arrowsmith argues that the art of writing fulfils the desire to "exorcise the past by

weaving narratives" ("Photographic Memories"301). It can provide a means of

dealing with unresolved issues and psychological traumas. John MacGahern's

Memoir exemplifies this sense of needing to excise a troubled past. It deals primarily

with his tortured relationship with his father, a deeply flawed, cold and unpleasant

man, of whom he writes,

> A life from which the past was so rigorously shut out had to be a life of darkness. Though I have more knowledge and experience of him than I have of any other person, I cannot say I have fully understood him, and leave him now with God, or whatever truth or illusion or longing for meaning or comfort that word may represent. (271)

He has tried to find redemption for him through memory but doesn't succeed. He is also trying to find a resolution for his own feelings of hurt and betrayal but once again, is unsuccessful. It is instructive that MacGahern chooses to leave their relationship at that point and devotes the final paragraphs of the memoir to memories of his mother,

> I did, in the end, answer to a different call than the one she wished for me, and followed it the whole of my life. When I reflect on those rare moments when I stumble without warning into that extraordinary sense of security, that deep peace, I know that consciously and unconsciously she has been with me all my life. (272)

MacGahern chooses at the end, to finish by foregrounding the happier memories in his life, as a marked antidote to the darkness that dogged the book, and by extension, his life. He finds a personal redemption through the act of writing. He ends with a poignant scene of recaptured innocence that sees him reconnect with an imagined, earlier self, "As we retraced our steps, I would pick for her the wild orchid and the windflower" (272). The closing sentence represents, not only the conclusion of the book, but also the end of the influence of MacGahern's father on his life and the conscious seizing of a new life, made real through text.

Many of these writers seek to achieve self-actualisation through an articulation of difference: rationalising that, "I am Irish because I am not English". Deane remarks that, "Autobiography is not just concerned with the self, it is also concerned with the 'other', the person or persons, events or places, that have helped to give the self, definition" (*Strange Country* 380). Autobiographical accounts of moving to England often deal with the fraught relationship between the British and Irish people and this relationship often provided the dynamic for the creation of more nationalistic and particularistic modes of self-identification. Harte has explored the idea that autobiography offers a chance for the subaltern to speak back unimpeded, and challenge the hegemonic discourse stating that,

> Issues of subjectivity, authority and agency must be central to any reading of first person accounts by members of the dispossessed or subordinate groups, as they must be readings of proletarian autobiography in general, into which category many Irish memoirs fall. The process of seizing what Edward Said calls "The power to narrate" is an essentially political act which transforms the subject from an anonymous object of speculation into a known narrator of specific personal histories. ("Loss and Restitution" 92).

Homogenised and stereotyped as 'Paddies' or 'Biddies', autobiography allows the author to become a public individual, and more importantly allows the author to dictate the parameters of his own existence. This identity is often predicated on the notion of being a stranger in a strange land. Autobiography fulfils a role documenting, "the performative negotiation of prejudice and racism, the fragmentation and transformation of identity under the pressures of migration—the crisis of individuation engendered by the clash of cultures, attitudes and ideologies" ("Loss and Restitution" 97).

Donall MacAmhlaigh's account of his early life in England, demonstrates how exiles often chose to define themselves through opposition. MacAmhlaigh's enthusiasm for the Irish language can be seen as a doomed attempt to avoid assimilation,

> But over and above that, I doubt if any Irish speaker can keep his language as pure as might be desirable, seeing that so much of his life has to be spent among English speakers. The terms and the images native to the English language are affecting the Irish language and corrupting it and you always have to be on the lookout to make sure that the real idiom is not escaping you (150).

MacAmhlaigh privileges Irish speakers as representing a "purer" form of Irishness. It is an audible manifestation of both difference and independence. It feeds into the notion that migration is somehow distasteful, regrettable and impermanent. Rosi Braidotti has written that, "The migrant … is caught in an in-between state whereby the narrative of the origin has the effect of destabilising the present" (59). MacAmhlaigh is stranded between cultures and he fears integration because he fears becoming alienated from his origins.

As a medium, autobiography offers a more visceral and less mediated response to the pressures of metonymic existence, than that seen in sociological or historical interviews. Rice gives voice to the impotent rage of the young migrant,

> I would give a full account of what it was like to be an Irish labourer in Sheffield—steel (and pollution) capital of the world in 1959. "Paddy" was the only name we could expect. At sixteen, in the belly of the beast, I had a

baptism by fire—brutal and almost mortal. I would do full justice to that

experience since it captures the fate of entire generations of young men and

women who, unlike me had no choice but to emigrate and join the pick and

shovel brigades of the Wimpy and McAlpine contracting combines.

("Introduction" n. pag.)

 Rice assumes a restorative mantle, giving a voice to the voiceless. His antipathy

towards Britain is strangely at odds with the affection he feels for America. This

seems to stem from the complex relationship between Britain and Ireland; a

relationship dominated by binaries, real and imagined, complicated by colonial

history. Rice's memoir alludes to "the implications of being seen as both different

and inferior in a culture that is at once foreign and intimate" (Harte, "Loss and

Restitution" 294). Ó Ciaráin too was irritated by the casual dismissal of his

individuality, "And he would address me as "Paddy" when he knew well that was

not my name. This I did not like. To my way of thinking, people are entitled to be

called their right names" (116). O'Brien too, was also horrified by the indifference

that his background provoked,

I remember never being asked who or what I was, or if I don't exactly

remember, no twinge of interest presents itself to be embellished, no echo

returns of a laugh shared or a back slapped, there's nothing imagination

might inflate, imitating the roundness and the resonance of the fullness of

time. Life was the dreadfulness of simplicity itself (*Out of Our Minds* 26).

It offers an insight into the loneliness of living in an officially invisible community.

Migrants found themselves living labelled lives in Britain with the term "Irish"

having a fluidity of meaning that could encompass dirt, musicality, violence or

poetry as time, circumstance or prejudice demanded. Adversity and social ostracism

force the migrant to create and inhabit a character drawn from an oppositional stance. Autobiography then is the attempt to reclaim individuality from within the confines of the term Irish and to reshape the boundaries of what is understood by the term Irish. Giddens captured the didactic and aspirational nature of memoir, commenting that, "We are not what we are but what we make ourselves" (Giddens 75).

The seemingly rigid format of autobiography, with its defined narrative of beginning, middle and end, paradoxically offers a chance to articulate uniqueness. It allows the migrant writer to step outside the confines of life offered by the Irish community and seek the "I" within the "We". O'Brien characterised it as a process of finding individualism within a group remarking that "I learned that although there certainly was a 'We', authenticated by origins, place and kindred, this collective identity could be viewed with equal validity as a gaggle of differences" ("Memoirs" 217). There is a duality inherent in autobiographical migrant identity that sees the subject loosely defined through nationality; while simultaneously seeking to refine that identity in more individualistic terms. These Irish migrant memoirs tend to follow a certain formula. The narrative usually begins with scenes culled from childhood, followed by an account of the wrenching move to an industrial centre. The narrative develops as the author charts his progress in the host country, detailing the tribulations or joys of sudden immersion in modernity. They often end with the author, either returning to his native land, or slowly becoming enmeshed in a new life. Personality serves to rescue memoir from the banality of formula with commonality of experience used as a framework to build an interesting version of the self. O'Brien comments that,

> If it does no more than replicate the consensual understanding and acceptance of the "we", autobiography will, however unwittingly, focus on the elective nature of the consensual, thereby highlighting such constitutive elements of the consensual as tradition, change, collective behaviour, representative thought patterns, models of individuation and local 'characters'—in short, a comprehensive repertoire of instances and effects which reveal not only the depth of the settled life but also its limits. ("Memoirs" 220)

O'Brien's own troubled childhood experiences perhaps blind him to the benefits offered by life within a definable community. What he sees as the limitations offered by autobiography, could equally be read as providing the impetus for articulating individuality. It allows the author to site himself emotionally amongst his own people, connecting and reflecting from a position of comfort, garnering strength and insight from shared experience but allowing the author to put forward his own particular view of events. There is also a sense of pleasure derived from the process of self-examination, "Up to this stage of my life, mine is not a very exciting story but, like most people, I have enjoyed talking about myself" (Keane 106). Elizabeth Grubgeld commented that "Autobiographers work within inherited forms of apprehending experience but do so as individuals capable of speaking in singular and unpredictable ways" (qtd. in Sloan 239). The subject matter may be familiar to the audience, but its effectiveness is determined by the author's ability to articulate their own experience in a compelling manner. Keane plays on the sense of centrism that autobiography offers, opening his account with, "I was born on the 21st of July, 1928, in the town of Listowel in Co. Kerry. Apart from my birth, it was an uneventful year, free of plague, war and famine" (1). He demonstrates his awareness

of the innate conceit of autobiography, the presumption of importance that the author must embrace to effectively transmit his ideas and experiences.

Brian Behan offers an insight into how individualism can triumph over communalism, offering an alternative view of the mail boat from Dun Laoighre to Holyhead,

> All round the hills, little pinpricks of light came on, here there and everywhere, like pins in a pin-cushion. I tried to feel sad that I was leaving my haunts behind, but I didn't, and then I felt ashamed because I didn't. Then I got fed up feeling ashamed and wished to Christ that the bloody boat would push off and let me get the hell out of here. (95)

This contrasts sharply with Maidhc Dainín Ó Sé's account,

> When she had cleared the harbour, there was a huge crowd on deck all looking back towards Howth and the other bit of Ireland that was in front of them and slipping away in the darkness. There were people there with handkerchiefs to their eyes and they making great cries. (90)

Behan is aware of the "correct" response and chooses instead to remain true to his own feelings and abandon what he sees as mawkish sentimentalism. Hughes has commented that, "In autobiography we can see the attempt not just to understand what it is to be Irish but also to understand what it is to be an Irish person" ("The Fact" 39). Behan acknowledges and indeed embraces his Irishness but consciously avoids the compulsion to act in a manner expected of him by either his host or home nations. He is Irish on his own terms.

Nostalgia and family are the bedrock on which Irish migrant memoirs are built. The natural state of childhood is positioned in a dyadic relationship with the chaotic modernity of enforced urban life. Authors struggle to convey a sense of a prelapsarian existence; one that manages to be, if not idyllic, then at least heavily idealised. John B. Keane's accounts of his summer holidays with relatives in rural Kerry offer a flavour of the fetishising of childhood in Irish memoirs,

> For the next five years I never missed the summer holidays in the Stacks Mountains. Those were wonderful days and it was there, for the first time, that I met characters who mattered and people who left a real impression. They were lively and vital people composed of infinite merriment and little sadness. (11)

Hunger and poverty are often foregrounded, but with an attendant understanding, that these are negated by communalism and a fraternalism that contrasts sharply with the "coldness" of Britain. In narrative terms, it heightens the sense of anguish and loss that arise with emigration and highlights the divide between home and all that signifies and the "othered"' status of the migrant. Nostalgia can be a destabilising emotion and prevent assimilation into the host culture. Declan Kiberd remarked that, "The worship of the past is often an excuse for an escape from the mediocrity of the present" (191). Nostalgia can feed into a culture of victimhood, with an idealised life in Ireland pitted against a harsher life in Britain,

> Salthill on a summer's day came into my mind then and I felt that I heard all the noises of the children playing in the strand and the mournful noise of the Connemara bus going by full of people. It was as if I had gone wandering in my mind, standing there not taking any notice of anything but remembering

times gone. When Tom called me, saying it was time to pack up, I was as fed up with life as any man could be. (MacAmhlaigh 89)

O'Brien commented on the use of nostalgia as a formula to evoke catharsis,

Nostalgia—and underneath its veneer—that smooth, protective carapace of facility, sentimentality and compensation, detectable in the first instance by its uniform tone—there is nostalgia's overwhelming sense of needing to mark the end of something ("Memoirs" 238).

For many migrants, nostalgia was used to mark the end of their own first-hand experience of living in Ireland. It was used as a device to fix a snapshot of a particular era in the mind—a time and way of life that could not be returned to, and instead is created as an idealised tradition. Sean Ó Ciaráin recalls an encounter with a navvy who had never returned home, a man for whom home had become an abstraction, rather than a place to return to,

Paddy was a Belmullet man the same as myself but much older, very much older. He was over a long time. Fifty years it was, he said, since he came to Scotland, and he had never once been back. The idea of taking a trip home had never occurred to him. I found it hard to understand that it was the people and the things connected with years and years before that he was interested in more than the present, especially where Ireland was concerned. I know better now when I am getting like that myself. (107)

The navvy is interested only in an Ireland that corresponds with his internalised Ireland. Hughes has explored the difference between culture and tradition, pointing out that culture is a living, evolving thing, whereas tradition is imitative and ultimately stagnant. Tradition is a facsimile of a moment's culture—the moment when the migrant leaves Ireland and it remains unchanging and non-evolving.

Nostalgia can be said to be a form of tradition, constituting imagined Irelands, where life was gentler and more rounded. Tradition, in the case of Ó Ciaráin's navvy, is used as a protective mantle, designed to anchor the migrant and afford him a recognisable frame of reference. It has its roots in real life but is ultimately a fiction, a device used to shield the migrant from assimilation. By imagining an unchanged Ireland, the migrant can support the fiction of an unchanged self.

Autobiographers hearken back to more innocent times and use this heightened sense of innocence as a device to point up the trauma of sudden immersion in industrial life. The arrival into urban areas can mark a form of rebirth or, at the very least, mark a definite and rigidly definable move from childhood to adulthood for migrants. Denis Sampson posited that, "Childhood is reimagined out of necessity, since articulation is the source and seat of empowerment and in spite of its loss, yearning and homelessness, the power and pleasure of articulation make up the legacy of the memoirists childhood" (208).The embarkation gates at Dun Laoghaire were for many migrants, the gates out of an imagined Eden. Donal Foley struggles to convey his sense of abjection on leaving,

> For myself, I was totally confused. I did not want to leave Ireland at all. Indeed, I still did not believe I was doing so. This was a nightmare adventure in which I was involved with all these strange people and strange faces. Inside me a resentment was building up against I knew not what. Why should I have to go and leave all these others in comfort? (54)

Deane argues that this Edenic trope is used to represent the moment where family life ended and life as an individual with all its attendant pressures began, "The most exploited alternative is the Edenic one, the imagined time in which the present strife

and rupture did not exist and the question of the self's relationship to the society was not even at issue" (*Field Day* 380). Eavan Boland perceptively identifies the psychological effects of migration, and the loss of belonging that migration entails, "Hardly anything else that happened to me as a child was as important as this: that I left one country and came to another. That an ordinary displacement made an extraordinary distance between the word *place* and the word *mine*" (Boland 3). Rice similarly remarks that, "I would do my best to capture the anguish of uprooting a life and letting go of the people and place that had forged my essential identity" ("Introduction" n. pag.).

Maidhc Dainín Ó Sé, recollecting his initial journey away from home and towards England gives a flavour of the wrench of migration and the anguish of leaving his family,

> While I was cycling up Mám A'Lochaigh, I looked down at the parish of Moore and, looking down, my tears fell in plenty. There before me were Béal A Chuain, Béal Dháith Tower, Baile Reo, the bottom of Mount Brandon and all the places I knew so well. 'Yes,' I said to myself, 'I'll be back to you and my pockets won't be empty.' (86)

There is a definite sense that, for the adult Ó Sé, the physical and emotional boundaries of childhood are inexorably linked. His sense of self was defined in relation to his place within a community governed by rigidly defined and seemingly immutable parameters. It is interesting to note that Ó Sé's translator Gabriel FitzMaurice chose to leave the place names in the original Irish—the emotional investment in place perhaps rendering them untranslatable. Patrick Devlin too, takes great care to precisely recreate his childhood geography,

> Three miles north of Buncrana there is a cross roads. If you take the left fork over Dunian bridge and the next turning right, in no time you will be in a place called 'the Rock', in the townsland of Fofenagh … The three hills overlooking the Rock are Malia, Cnoc Brac and Tructrasna. (9-10)

The place names have an almost lyrical quality and have an incantatory effect on the narrative, conjuring an Ireland of the author's making. There is sense that if the author can only reconnect with these simpler times, they will find a form of resolution. Rice also conjures images of a Hindean Ireland of perpetual sunshine,

> I was reminded of their essential kindness and the good times: The humour, the poetry, the dancing the music, and the extraordinary characters I'd known in those first sixteen years living in the lush splendour of Mount Leinster's foothills. And always, always, the land—its moist woods, quilted fields, hillside springs, and brilliant rivers, rich in brown trout and lush banks where we whiled away the endless summer nights. I was reminded too, of all the gifts bestowed, all I owed it and the people who stayed and still embraced it. ("Introduction" n. pag.)

Geography is used to define the borders of belonging, with childhood haunts serving to illustrate that, "its author is an individual, just like everyone else" (Spicer 398). O'Brien reverses this process as he chooses to finish his memoir with a geographic indication of the happiness, contentment and personal resolution that he has found in Britain,

> We strolled along, going west, restful at last, no longer needing witnesses, smiling shy smiles, under the railway bridge, past Osney Mead and out the road to Hinksey, Swindon, Cumnor, Kingston Bagpuize. (*Out of Our Minds* 200)

The incantatory effect here, illustrates that the author finds comfort and acceptance at last, in a physically and audibly different landscape. He has consciously exchanged his badges of geographical signification and found acceptance on his own terms.

Autobiography then, is a medium with much to offer in terms of documenting Irish migrant lives in Britain. Subjective accounts of the process of migration offer an invaluable addendum to historical accounts, becoming in the process, literary histories "from below". They furnish intimate accounts of a people whose existence was a source of some embarrassment for their nation of origin and go some way towards redressing the silence around these "forgotten" people. As documents, they also chart the destabilising drive to belong to a community. These autobiographies show us that whether migrants chose to integrate with the host community or immerse themselves in the imagined communities, the results were never complete. Individual circumstance triumphs over communalism and ultimately the author is forced to create and define themselves along paths dictated by outside discourses. Psychologically, memoir provides a useful means of dealing with seminal life moments and resolving traumas. Authors reconnect with their younger selves and apply learned knowledge to lived experience, in a bid to achieve totality. They grant an imprimatur to the middle-aged self, providing the author with a sense of linearity, an upward trajectory, leading eventually towards the present self. Cliché and nostalgia are used as tools to effect authenticity, establishing the author's right to speak. The author presents recognisable vistas and recreates accents and local idioms, in a bid to prove his lineage and thereby cement their status as an 'insider'. By utilising and subtly subverting the formulaic nature of autobiography, authors can

establish common ground with the reader while simultaneously articulating their own story. Migrant memoirs ultimately act in a dual capacity, illustrating the commonalities offered by the experience of migration to Britain while concurrently highlighting the multiplicity of voices contained within that experience.

Chapter Two:

They're Building Up and Tearing England Down: Memoirs from Irish Men in Britain.

Important work has been done by many academics on the lives of the Irish in Britain, with historians and sociologists collating many first-hand accounts of the migrant experience drawn from interviews with migrants and their families. There is also a nascent school specialising in the study of migration through literature. Memoir has until now remained an undervalued tool for examining the discourse. As the working class migrant population was, by and large composed of men and women with perfunctory education, they have left little in the way of a written record. Those few that did write of their experiences leave a valuable tool for the student of Irish Studies, a reflective and deeply personalised account of the experience of an oft-times painful transition from one culture to another. Roger Bromley has commented that,

> Migrant writing, a product of flux, moving identities and sometimes
> conditions of near illegibility, works with what might be called archaeology
> of identity, culturally, temporally and spatially multi-layered. (Bromley 120)

It will prove instructive to examine some of these memoirs through the prism of relevant cultural theory and examine how the Irish migrant community sought to define their identities and how they reacted to and adapted some of the stereotypes ascribed to them in Britain. This chapter will use the memoirs of working-class Irish authors to examine how the migrant community dealt with the sense of dislocation and destabilisation inherent in the migrant experience. It will also explore how the Irish community in Britain subtly negotiated the parameters of belonging offered by

the host society and how individual Irish migrants subtly subverted the oft-censorious strictures of the greater migrant community. This chapter concentrates, in the main, on the period from the 1930s to 1950s and looks at first-hand recollections of the experiences of displacement and subsequent resettlement of Irish men in Britain. As these parameters roughly correspond with the peak times of Irish emigration to Britain and many of the navvy stereotypes date from this period; memoirs taken from this time offer valuable insight into the lives of a well-known, if dimly understood section of the community.

Increasingly, after the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 emigration became a safety valve for the Irish economy. A culture of migration became engrained in the Irish psyche and it has been remarked that, "from their early days, Irish children learned of the possibility that their adult years would be spent in some other land and thus an Irish childhood was a preparation for adulthood" (Akenson 191). The reasons for migration varied, with some migrants citing adventure as a motivating factor; some commenting on the loneliness of remaining at home while the majority of young people from a particular area departed; while for the vast majority, economic necessity meant that Britain offered opportunities for employment and advancement denied to them in an economically stagnant Ireland. Donal Foley in his memoir *Three Villages* perceptively expands the franchise to include those migrants who tended to be invisible in received accounts; those who failed to conform to the rigid parameters of Irish respectability,

> There were the misfits, the prostitutes who used to wear the shamrock along
> Piccadilly on St Patrick's Day, the winos waiting outside the pubs on
> Edgware Road, and the young Irishmen who filled the hostels for down and

outs. Hopeless young people of both sexes who just could not cope and had

been driven into exile by desperation or very often an unwanted pregnancy.

The trains arriving in Euston in the immediate post war years were often

filled with Irish people, penniless and with no place to go, who threw

themselves on the welfare services of the great impersonal world of Britain.

Very often they received the warmth and affection which was denied to them

at home. (60)

For many migrants the experience of migration, marked a brutally swift transition

from a rural childhood existence to the harsh anonymity of adulthood lived in the

modern industrial age. The embarkation gates at Irish ports marked a physical

gateway into adulthood for generations of Irish people. Britain, as Ireland's nearest

neighbour, became a "matrix point for the Irish diaspora" acting as a stepping stone

to the wider world and also providing a home to generations of Irish men and women

(Akenson 191).

The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century saw seasonal

agricultural work like "tattie hoking" (potato picking), traditionally undertaken by

migrants from Mayo and Donegal, slowly give way to longer term migration as

migrants moved into the building sector and began to monopolise construction and

labouring jobs. The 1950s alone saw some 400,000 men and women leave Ireland in

search of work (Hickman 13). Britain, was at the time, enjoying a post war boom and

proved an irresistible draw for a sizeable number of these migrants. While there was

no language barrier and the two nations were broadly similar at a cultural level, the

problems of a shared history often served to cultivate a climate of mutual distrust

between Irish migrants and British subjects.

Many migrants, on arrival in Britain found themselves assigned the role of Irishman. For many, this was an alien role as migrants tended to subscribe to more particular, localised identifications. MacGill's Dermod Flynn continually iterates himself as a Glenmornan man seeing his sense of self as indivisible from his sense of place (O'Tuathaigh 84). He remarks that,

> Twas good to be a Glenmornan man. The pride of it pulled me through my toil when my bleeding hands, my aching back and sore feet well-nigh refused to do their labour, and that same pride put the strength of a twenty-one year old into the spine of a twelve year old man. (MacGill 40)

Geographical horizons were limited to the boundaries of childhood. By and large rural life was static and insular and defined by parochial affiliation rather than by nationalistic signifiers. This would seem to tie in with Stuart Hall's definition of a nation as being, "something more ancient and nebulous (than the modern nation state), the nation—a local community, domicile, family or condition of belonging" (Hall, "Question" 296). Donal Foley's *Three Villages* contains an interesting reflection on how the outside world is viewed through local signifiers, he writes that,

> The history lessons were taught by linking every townsland in the parish with a particular period, and we were encouraged to know as much as we could about every area. The parish of Slieverue was particularly rich in evocative place names — Rathculliheen, Kilculliheen, Ballinamona, Killaspy, Kilmurry, Attymore, Ballinacrea, Knockane and Newrath. All were pure Irish names with strong historical association with the pagan and Christian eras … As well as giving us a strong identity with the area it also gave us deep pride that we were born in such a place. (3)

The Irish were to discover that in many cases their own personal signifiers were ignored and that personal background and local identity were suborned under a homogenous umbrella of national identity.

> To alien eyes and ears it often mattered little whether an Irish emigrant was from Dublin or Mayo, a Protestant or a Catholic, a labourer or an artisan, a parent or an on the loose. To their great indignation the Irish population abroad tended to be lumped together as ignorant, dirty and primitive Paddies or Biddies. (Fitzpatrick 33)

Liam Greenslade also develops this point with an anecdote drawn from an interview with an Orangeman, who is horrified to find that in the eyes of the British people he is a "Paddy". Despite having lived his life in a form of fetishized Britishness, he is labelled as Other in the society that he sees as forming the backbone of his identity. The irony is not lost on Greenslade who observes that, "The colonist's objectification of the colonised supersedes any rational notion the colonised may have of themselves" (Greenslade 217).

For the Irish coming to Britain, they arrived to find themselves second class citizens derided as "poor Paddies and Biddies", stereotyped as ignorant and dirty and whose only visual representation in the British media was as the comic foil for cartoonists and comedians. Newspapers were often quite hostile to the Irish community and served to strengthen the public perception that the Irish were an alien and disquieting presence in British society. Eagleton has commented that Britain was haunted by the "savages on the doorstep rather than in the desert" (Eagleton, "Changing the Question" 79).The Irish as foreigners, were viewed with suspicion by

the police and were seen as genetically disposed towards criminality. The police, in most of the memoirs analysed in this chapter, are seen as instruments of oppression and the agents of a hostile state. P. J. Devlin's first encounter with the police leaves him in no doubt as to his status within his host society, recalling that,

> I had the experience of being questioned by the police and I was left with the impression that in their books a man on the tramp is a vagrant and the lowest form of social outcast. If he happens to speak with an Irish accent, he is a potential criminal as well. (Devlin 172)

Mick McCarthy, recounting a strike that degenerated into a melee between workers and police, tells how the newspapers characterised the riot as a dispute between two "Irish gangs" (*London Years* 120). The tense relationship between the migrant community and the police force cemented feelings of exclusion for migrants and hindered assimilation. It made it easier for migrants to sustain the notion, "that Britain was a place to be looted or plundered" (D. Foley 59).

Bhabha posited that, "The construction of the colonial subject on discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual (Bhabha 67). Englishness is created as an ideal and the best that an immigrant, or for that matter a Scots or Welsh man can hope for, is to become Anglicised. Nationality contains an element of pedagogy and the successful migrant who hopes to assimilate is expected to conform to societal norms, as exemplified by the dominant discourse, as these norms represent the apex of civilisation (Bhabha 244). Matthew Arnold put it in these terms, "Provincial nationalism has to be swallowed up at the level of the political and licensed as cultural contributors to English culture" (qtd. in Hall, *Modernity and its Futures*

297). The expectation was there, that the Irish should assimilate into British culture and cultivate a degree of submissive invisibility. By remaining visibly, demonstrably different, the Irish are sentenced to live a metonymic existence with "Irish" epitomising everything that British would prefer not to identify with. The image of the "wild Irishman" allowed the establishment a licence for exclusion.

For those who endeavoured to follow this path, the path to modernity was, "characterised by an unending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself" (Hall, *Modernity and its Futures* 278). To assimilate was to undertake a process of self-denial, assuming a mask of conformity, mimicking the behavioural patterns of the dominant discourse while simultaneously rejecting the traditional organic modes of expression cultivated since childhood. Interestingly, few if any of the memoirs from this time deal in any depth with the process of assimilation. They are centred very much within the Irish migrant community and autobiography is used as vehicle to demonstrate and celebrate the lack of assimilation. Certainly writers like MacAmhlaigh and Foley were scathing in their attitudes towards Irish men who went "native" in Britain. MacAmhlaigh writes that, "There's something demeaning about the Irish person that imitates the English or other people. I don't think that, even if I was here till Doomsday, I'd ever acquire any of the unpleasant idioms that they use around the place (9). Foley comments that, "In my experience Irish doctors and graduates quickly assumed membership of the British middle class, because, in the words of some cynical Irishman of those years, 'they did not want to know'" (D. Foley 60).

For those who did try to disappear quietly into British life, the process of syncretism was often a painful one with huge psychological damage resulting from the fracturing of identity. Assimilation required a surrender of self, and the assumption of a façade of belonging that served to subdue the self in favour of the communal. Outward conformity demands an internalising of individuality that can emotionally destabilise the migrant, leaving them vulnerable and consumed with self-loathing. This is reflected in the research that suggests Irish migrants were statistically more prone to alcoholism and schizophrenia (Greenslade; Miller). Many migrants presented a mask to members of the host community, sheltering behind stereotype. They offered the members of the host community a version of Irishness that they could be comfortably superior to, taking a certain satisfaction for themselves in the control and power offered by deceit. Brian Behan recognised the opportunities offered by inhabiting the stereotypical Irishman mould, "A fat man with a bald head, he didn't look like he would stand for any old buck. So I decided to play the daft Paddy act. To everything he said, I turned big wondering eyes and said, "Is that so sir … Is that a fact sir" (142). Both sides find comfort in the familiar roles offered by the colonised/coloniser relationship. Behan mimics the role expected of him, "answering back, taking on the protective coloration of approved, official forms" (Kiberd 128). It was often easier to avoid contact or interaction with the host community seeking solace among your own community,

> I heard an Englishman call them the 'Silent Paddies' once and it was true. I noticed this kind of silence among most of the Irish when they'd be in English company. It seemed they were unable to take part in the light humorous conversation that the English were so good at. (Power 179)

Often too, the worldliness of the British shocked the young Irish men. Maidhc Ó Sé tells of his dismay at the ribaldry of his workmates, "It was mainly Englishmen who were working with me and the biggest fault I had to find with them was that they couldn't put two words together without using an ugly word" (102). MacAmhlaigh too was uncomfortable when forced to spend too much time in the company of Englishmen,

> I suffered a lot down among a gang of Englishmen today for I had to go down and fill the place of a man that didn't turn up for work. There was no style to their talk and I was fed up to the back teeth by the time the first break came along. They're a queer crowd, I must say: chattering away like a gaggle of children or geese and saying nothing at all. (163)

MacAmhlaigh's dismissive, yet defensive, attitude towards his English co-workers would seem to underscore Richard Power's point about the inability of some Irish to interact easily with members of the host community. There is an inherent fear of being made to look foolish or worse, to be seen as becoming less Irish. There is an awareness that differences must be cherished and brandished at every opportunity or the "Irish" part of the self may become diminished. As a consequence the migrant becomes an outsider relegated to the fringes, "lacking vestments of the local or national territory" and if he chooses to emulate the host culture, risks cutting himself off from his origins" (Bromley 12). Bhabha stated that migration, "is not a smooth passage of transition and transcendence" and that "being in the beyond is to inhabit an intervening space" (Bhabha 6). The migrant ceases to be Irish and is not yet British, becoming instead a complex amalgam of competing identities and inhabiting what Bhabha refers to as the "Third Space". This in-between state is characterised as being an on-going process of integration that never achieves totality. What is

achieved is an assimilated face that the migrant presents to the world. Outwardly Anglified and inwardly Irish, yet wholly neither, the migrant represents a threat to the dominant discourse. Bhabha uses the analogy of a thorn in the paw of a lion. It remains ostensibly a lion but it can no longer act as a lion (32). By extending the franchise of citizenship and widening the bands of assimilation, Britain also becomes subtly changed. It too, is subject to a fluidity of signification, a fracturing of its central components.

Hickman and Walter have commented on the myth of the homogenous nature of British society preceding World War II, observing that, while it is true that British society was predominately white before this time, there were gradations of whiteness (7). Accent, religion and physiognomy were used as badges of signification and labels of difference, designed to construct the migrant community as Other. These badges were also used by the Irish to define themselves. Sean Ó Ciaráin's memoir speaks of being able to recognise his fellow Irish by their physical features,

> No matter how long they had been away from Ireland you could still recognise them from their appearance and the way they walked … I would say a lot more the look of a countryman they had about them, that made them look different in a city. A Dublin man would not stick out near as much on the streets of Glasgow as a Donegal or Mayo man would. I think people whose formative years were spent in stepping over the springy flexible sward will always have … a different gait to those who learned to walk on hard, recalcitrant city pavements. (Ó Ciaráin 97)

MacAmhlaigh too, writes about how the Irish were visually identifiable and physically different from the English,

> One thing I noticed since coming here—that you'd know an Irish person
> easier than anyone else. They usually have curly black hair and high reddish
> cheek-bones but even without these traits you can pick them out easily—
> except for the odd person. (20)

This physical recognisability could also hinder attempts to assimilate and often served to relegate the migrant to the further fringes of society.

An alternative path, taken by many migrants, saw them retreat into their own stylised Irish ghettoes, seeking comfort, meaning and stability in a traditional emotional landscape imposed on an alien physical geography. They sought to create microcosmic Irelands in England. Fitzpatrick wrote that,

> The partial exclusion of Irish immigrants from the societies which they
> served had naturally encouraged cultivation of ethnicity in defensive alliance
> against richer and often hostile host populations. This ethnic defensiveness
> manifested in settlement patterns, marriage choices, political and social
> networks, religious participation, drinking practices and persistent
> involvement in Irish affairs. (Fitzpatrick 35)

Migrants withdrew into insular communities whereby contact with the host nation was severely limited. They drank in Irish pubs, worshipped at Irish Catholic churches, roomed with Irish landladies and worked with Irish crews. England was an alien and potentially hostile landscape and could only be negotiated by interposing a recognisable space on an alien landscape. MacAmhlaigh's memoir *An Irish Navvy* (1964) provides an excellent sense of this disconnectedness from the host community. His diary records his first moments on English soil as,

> I stood on John Bull's territory for the first time in my life on Tuesday
> morning when I got off the Irish Mail at Rugby. I don't count Holyhead for
> that's really Welsh and there was as much Welsh spoken there as there was
> Irish on a fair day in Derrrynea. (MacAmhlaigh 5)

He finds a kinship with Welsh on a level of difference or Otherness, recognition of a shared Celticism that sites them outside the hegemonic discourse. There is an awareness at some level that Englishness is the epitome of civilisation and all who reside outside that epitome are somehow lesser creatures, identified through faults and differences. It is interesting that MacAmhlaigh uses the image of John Bull, the quintessential metonymic image of Englishness. It reveals the dissonance at the heart of the migrant experience. The image of John Bull, that for the English, symbolised national pride personified in the figure of an upstanding pugilistic yeoman is inverted, subverted and reclaimed by MacAmhlaigh, becoming the face of a hostile, unwelcoming, traditional enemy. He is repulsed by the harsh industrial features of this foreign territory,

> My heart sank altogether then as I stood and looked around at the dirty ugly
> station. Everything looked so foreign to me there. Round about six o'clock
> hundreds started pouring into the station, pallid pasty faces with industrial
> lunch boxes slung from their shoulders. (MacAmhlaigh 6)

The physical shock of landing in the industrial age is also articulated by Mick McCarthy, whose first hours in Liverpool were characterised by a confusing jumble of noise and frenetic activity,

> People were rushing in all directions, not even casting a glance at one
> another. Trams, buses, taxis and bikes filled the streets. Policeman stood at

every corner … More walking, more traffic, more noise … Trams lumbered

by in quick succession. (McCarthy, *Early Days* 137)

Donal Foley described his early impressions of Britain in similar terms,

The train stopped at Crewe first, a dark jungle of a junction with only the

hissing of the steam trains and the incomprehensible shouting of the porters

to be heard … Crewe looked even worse in the half-light than in the stygian

darkness. (54-5)

Even savvy Irish urbanites could be overawed by the sheer scale of British

life. Brian Behan notes in *With Breast Expanded* that, "Then we rolled through

Crewe. To me, accustomed to railway stations with two, three lines at the most, to

see a hundred stretch out with lamps lighting them like streets in a town was

staggering" (97). For Sean Ó Ciaráin, the grime of modernity is a visual reminder

that he has left the comfort and safety of home,

My first impressions of Glasgow were not good—long row after row of

dismal-looking, smoke-blackened buildings. By the time we left the boat I

was feeling within me an emptiness and depression which I never had before,

but which I was to come to know well in the months ahead. (O' Ciaráin 76)

Maidhc Dainín Ó Sé also recounts this sense of arriving in a physically and

psychologically hostile environment commenting that,

Never in all my life did I get a smell so horrible and so stale as when the train

was coming into London city. I thought Dublin was bad when I was there the

previous day, but the air was fine and wholesome there in comparison to this

place. (92)

Richard Power also offers an eloquently, poignant vignette of his early impressions of Britain,

> Euston station, a foggy winter morning. Derelicts still sleeping under the pillars in the main hall, like the cold day statues of the poor who built this Victorian temple, graffiti on the walls of the toilet, swearwords, illicit appointments, obscene verses, cris de couer, ranting against some injustice or other or against life, boasts of demeaning sins, every sort of public expression that an overwrought person would make, who desperately needed to broadcast a confession. (160)

Overnight, these young men underwent a form of personalised Industrial Revolution with a sudden and total immersion in a bewildering landscape. Coming from a predominately rural society to a heavily industrialised one was a discomfiting and disorienting experience for some Irish and some chose to seek solace in the comforting familiarity of their own communities. MacAmhlaigh initially feels isolated on arrival in Northampton,

> I reached Northampton by eight o' clock on a slow train that took three quarters of an hour to do that short journey…and I felt my isolation more and more as I saw that I was right in the heart of England where I was unlikely to meet a single Irishman. The black chimney stacks of London would have been preferable just then as I knew that I'd have met some of my own people there anyhow. (MacAmhlaigh 6)

There is a certain comfort in banding together, redefining and recapturing identity through "kinship networks and urban villages" (Miller 500). Foley observes that,

> They settled in the London ghettoes of Kilburn, Dagenham, Willesden, Harlesden, Hammersmith and in the cities such as Coventry, Birmingham,

Manchester and Glasgow … London was then, as now, a series of villages and the Irish made their own of many of them. They had their own public houses, their own bookies' runners and lodging houses. They went to the same churches as much for social reasons as for some vague kind of religious loyalty. (D. Foley 58)

Stuart Hall describes the process of ghettoization as a process of "becoming rather than being" (Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* 4). He argues that,

Identification is constructed on the back of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation. (*Questions of Cultural Identity* 2)

Stylised versions of Irishness serve to disrupt the process of integration and are used to create an artificial world where the migrant can remain at odds with the host nation. They become members of an "imagined community" living lives predicated on "imaginary geographies" (Hall, *Modernity and its Futures* 293). Greenslade makes the point that this illusion of separateness is a nebulous and fragile concept that is torn down when the migrant comes in contact with officialdom,

The migrant can bury him or herself in the migrant community to a certain extent. At certain crucial points in the workplace, in education etc., he will have to emerge to deal with the majority population at which point the cultural or racial inferiority presupposed in the colonial relationship will be made manifest (Greenslade 214).

Those who chose to remain part of a visible, identifiable Irish community were welcomed into an almost parodic world of exaggerated Irishness that veered towards what Gray has described as "cultural excessiveness" (*Women and the Irish Diaspora* 109). It offered an Irish tradition that was often more traditional than that of home. It is a very masculinised Irishness defined by drinking, religion and dancing. Public houses often acted as the focal point for the migrant community. They served as job centres for new arrivals, a place where one could go to find out about work in the area. Donal Foley writes that,

> These Irish pubs served as community centres where the rootless Irish emigrants met and were most likely to meet someone from home. It seemed to be essential for these Irish people to maintain a strong sense of identity with their home places in Ireland. … It was in a sense a reaction against the anonymity of the big city. (620)

They also offered a haven for the migrant community, a place for a marginalised minority to gather as a majority. The pub provided the Irish, freedom to be Irish, in an artificially created enclave, an approximation of home. And for a considerable number of migrants it was a means of coping with the loneliness and alienation of life in the third space. A lot of work has been done in recent years on the issue of alcoholism and mental illness in the migrant communities and it would appear that figures for the Irish community were unnaturally high (Greenslade; Tilki). Liam Greenslade has suggested that, "Alcohol serves an analgesic function; it dulls the pain, of toil, of homesickness, of estrangement, of loss. In company it soothes the pain of interaction" (218). Ralph McTell's song "A Long Way from Clare to Here" frames this sense of anaesthetical drinking in poignant terms.

The only time I feel alright,

> Is when I'm into drinking,
>
> It almost helps to ease the pain,
>
> And levels out my thinking.

Ó Ciaráin noted that "Nearly every man I knew in those days who was half a man at all took a few drinks either on a Friday or a Saturday night, some on both nights" (129). MacAmhlaigh bemoans the lack of imagination in his fellow workers that sees them spend all their time in pubs, observing that "Most of them don't realise that there fun and pleasure to be had in life—apart from being in the pub every evening … Here, there's nothing for them most of the time except drinking and gambling" (MacAmhlaigh 173).

Drinking forms an integral part of the lives of the Irish migrants. English stereotypes about the drunken Irish are inverted, with a perverse delight taken in the capacity for drink. The youthful profile of the average migrant coupled with an engrained drinking culture meant that violence was common place. All the memoirs studied for this chapter recount numerous instances of fighting in pubs, on streets and on building sites. McCarthy and MacGill fill pages with lovingly descriptive accounts of physical rows that they have witnessed or been part of. MacAmhlaigh comments at one stage that, "We saw a great bit of fighting at dinner time today" (169). Tony Murray has written on the impulse, in navvy autobiography and fictive representations of Irish construction workers, to glorify violence and revel in feats of strength and combat. He links it to the brutality of the navvy existence and argues that it caters to a deep unarticulated need for heroic figures in the Irish community (Murray, "Navvy Narratives" 216-7). The Irish men chose to view themselves as embodying the stereotypes but have assumed control of the stereotypes, turning

perceived fault into proud virtue. Fanon's idea of *negritude* that sees the colonised or marginalised person assume, "The will to be a nigger, not a nigger like all the other niggers, but a real nigger, a Negro cur, just the sort of nigger the white man wants you to be" would seem to accord with the behaviour of the young Irish men in Britain (Kiberd 149).

The Irish community classed itself as hard drinking, hard fighting and hardworking, a macho image that possibly springs from the removal of familial influence and parochial censure. McCarthy, hospitalised following a beating from a policeman at a march to stop Moseley's fascists from attacking the Jewish East End, is berated by his nurse (later to be his girlfriend),

> "It depresses me to see how many Irish lads wind up here in casualty. It beats me how many of them get into trouble."
>
> "Maybe it's trying to live up to everybody's image of us," I suggested "The fighting Irish."
>
> "They never seem to carry on like that back home," she said."Too many people know them at home, that's the difference." (*London Years* 60)

This was echoed by Richard Power, who observed,

> I suppose the English are constantly surprised at the fighting instinct of the Irish on social occasions and the number of times they have to employ 'Paddy's Taxi' to transport them home … The Irish troublemakers were not quite the same however. They were not adolescents. They were not contestants in a jousting tournament nor did they get much pleasure of fisticuffs. It was easy to observe the venom in any strife in which they were involved. It was some unspoken pact between the members of each clan, a

tribal loyalty that was responsible for it. That, and the restless, unsettling way of life that they engaged in, without definite goal, without household, without authority, without having to answer to their family, to the state, to anyone at all. (194)

The image of the Irish community in Britain has always been inextricably linked with the construction industry. In the post-war period, when large areas of Britain had to be rebuilt from the ground up, large numbers of young Irish flooded into Britain to exploit labour shortages. It represented a massive population shift and sucked vitality from many of Ireland's more rural and peripheral areas. Richard Power, reflecting on the loneliness and isolation of a rapidly depopulating landscape that forced him to leave home, writes that,

> I had to leave. Every time I went past Cóilín's house, the old door locked up, the stain of dust on the windows, my optimism faltered. Dara Pheig was gone. The girls who once danced by my side, they were gone … In the place where they played handball, pools of water gathered and green moss grew. (151)

The migrants were for the most part, "predominately single and poorly educated, many arriving without pre-arranged work or accommodation" (Leavey 763). The stereotypes of the Irish navvy, hard-working, uneducated and prone to legendary drinking and violence were taken up by both the host and migrant communities. It was often used as a catch-all to denigrate the "dirty" Irish community and as a justification for their exclusion from "polite" society. On the other side, Irish men were prone towards exaggerating the importance of their work, creating an exclusionary mythology. The popular songs that sprang from the culture of the

building sites like Dominic Behan's "MacAlpine's Fusiliers" and "Building Up and Tearing England Down", with their rambunctious and scabrous humour, helped to inculcate the sense that the construction sector is the preserve and natural habitat of a particularly masculinised Irishman. Power remarks that,

> There is a long-standing cult of the noble worker, a cherished, widely held chauvinistic theory that a considerable gratification can be derived from manual work which can't be achieved from any other kind of work, especially that which is intellectual. That theory is nothing but rubbish. There is absolutely no enchantment to be got out of attending to a truck or a machine, whose coming and going you cannot regulate. (187)

Even a hardened cynic like Brian Behan was not immune to the myth of noble worker, "I could have hardly looked for a more filthy job … Still, my work had a certain element of romance. We were the pile drivers" (106). Maidhc Ó Sé left secure factory employment, infected by the migrant community's enthusiasm for building,

> Going on for the end of March, the cold and frost of winter were gone and the days were stretching. You'd hear nothing at the dances and in the pubs but talk about digging and foundations. More people building castles in the air. Yes, by God, building and big money. (139)

Donal Foley perceives the nature of the positive mythology that grew around the Irish men, who worked on the building sites of Britain,

> The Irish in Britain were always the hewers of wood and the drawers of water, and so they have remained to this day. Irish doctors there are, Irish engineers, nurses, teachers, clerks, journalists and the rest but it was to the heavy tasks of building to which the Irish skills were dedicated … The name

of the Irishman was an honoured one in the public houses of the ghetto areas where employers knew what hard work was about … All the rules were broken willingly for them because they could work … They were hard working, well paid slaves, exactly what Britain wanted to rebuild their devastated country. (58)

The temporary and peripatetic nature of the industry made it difficult for the young men to settle for any length of time and form lasting relationships. The construction sites themselves were impermanent and a glut of employment meant that the cast of faces changed on a regular basis as people drifted between jobs. Gerard Leavy comments that, "These were generally temporary jobs demanding continual relocation, often throughout England. Thus there was no constancy in accommodation and in social or personal relationships" (775). A recurring theme in "navvy" memoirs is the poor quality of both food and accommodation that greeted the young male migrants. While female migrants arriving in Britain as nursing trainees were assigned safe, secure communal living areas, no such fail-safes existed for aspirant construction workers. Young Irish men tended to settle in "digs" where a bed, breakfast and evening meal was provided. Standards varied hugely and workers tended to flit between accommodations in a constant search for better conditions. This too hindered assimilation and fed into the idea that emigration was a temporary phenomenon. For many however; the idea of a return became a myth as marriage and children anchored them, often unwillingly, into British society,

> That day in September 1944 when I kissed my Mother goodbye, I did so with a heavy heart. My absence from Ireland, I vowed that day would be of short duration. It was not to be like that. Indeed it was to be fully twenty odd years

before I was enabled to return to Ireland. It really was another lifetime.

(Foley 51)

Religion played a huge part in defining the Irish community, the large majority of whom were Roman Catholic. Hickman has remarked that,

> The Irish Catholic Other was significant because it intertwined, both a discourse of the inferiorised colonial subject, and that of the Other against which English nationalism has pitted itself since the 16th century—Roman Catholics. (Hickman 9)

The migrant found themselves doubly reviled and marginalised, a subversive, rebel figure, practicing a religion to which the British were implacably opposed. This is turn became an important badge of signification, an articulation of Otherness, a means of preserving the purity of self-identity. We are Catholic and Irish, therefore we are not British. Mass offered a weekly opportunity to celebrate their difference and become visible, it was a public, performative demonstration of Irish identity. It is a manifestation of ethnic defensiveness, and a bulwark against total assimilation.

> I put a bit of shamrock in the lapel of my coat and went down to Mass in Camden Town at 9 o' clock. The church was full … I feel as light hearted as a lark every St Patrick's Day and when the congregation started to sing 'Hail glorious St Patrick' my heart swelled out with pride for my race … and in the honour of the country that gave them birth and who can say that the empire that we, the Irish people, have built is not greater and nobler in the four corners of the world than the one that John Bull built with the help of his guns. (MacAmhlaigh 132-3)

Catholicism imbues the Irish with a sense of defiant nationalism, a conscious articulation of racial difference that seeks to choose a model of subjectivity that is "historically framed and culturally bounded" (Bromley 11). Donal Foley is alive to the nationalistic overtones of an almost adversarial, religious devotion,

> They have also held strongly to their religious faith. The huge Corpus Christi processions, with all their colour and pageantry are a feature of Irish Catholic life in East London. In the old days these processions were as much national demonstrations as religious in character. (65)

Grossberg has suggested that identity is created and reinforced through the manufacture of a tradition that, whether real or imagined, is practised in opposition to the hegemonic discourse, saying, "Diaspora emphasises the historically spatial fluidity and intentionality of identity … Diaspora links identity to spatial locations and identifications to histories of alternative cosmopolitanisms and diasporic networks" (92). Dancehalls served as a focal point for the Irish migrant community, constituting a re-imagining of traditional rural dances in a modern urban setting. The dancehalls provide a space for an expression of an aspirational identity,

> Dickie, the bucko with me was astonished for he never dreamed things like this went on outside Ireland; but he's wrong. This town is in many ways, more Irish than a lot of the towns at home. More Irish is spoken here and much more Irish music is played here. (MacAmhlaigh 112)

The dancehalls in Britain differed in one important aspect. While the atmosphere was congenial and served as a simulacrum of home, the anonymity of urban life offered more opportunity for sexual expression. Richard Power's account in *Apple*

on the Treetop of one of his first dances in England offers a flavour of the liberation offered by emigration:

> 'Cast your eyes over there at them now.' I followed his gaze to the men and women whispering to one another. 'Do you honestly think they'd be dating like this at home? Bejasus, the old people would be talking about them, weighing up the pros and cons, and the young folk would be ridiculing and making a mock of the pair of them and Mother of God, to be courting in front of the people in a public house. The whole parish would be gaping and gossiping'. (190)

He later marvels that, "I was amazed to see how young most of them were. Some of them would not be allowed out to the movies where they came from but here they were skitting, laughing and trying to lure shy men" (193).

Music and fellowship become very important as a means of expressing difference and enunciating particularistic forms of identity. Most of the memoirs of this period, reference songs of home and these ballads are used to conjure and convey the loneliness of the migrant lifestyle. Mournful ballads of loss and exile seem to resonate with the men and offer a snapshot of the mental anguish of life in the third space. Donal Foley recognised the power of music to simultaneously repel and create loneliness,

> Involuntarily, almost, a group of young Irish people, myself amongst them, found ourselves in a small singing group in the darkness. There was a strange eerie quality about us as we sang together "The Rocks of Bawn", "They're Cutting the Corn in Creeslough Today", "O Mary this London", "An Carrigdown" and a dozen more songs I cannot remember. It was, of course,

the shared loneliness that threw us together, and the joy of the remembered songs gave us happiness. I never sang like that before, and indeed never since, but the remembrance of that night did bring home the terrible loneliness which many young Irish people were suffering at that time. The songs of exile are a real part of Irish culture which should not be ignored. (58)

Mick McCarthy, convalescing in hospital, recalls a fellow patient entrancing the ward,

Suddenly the sound of the fiddle came from the far end of the ward: "The Derry Air". More beautiful and poignant than ever that beautiful air could have sounded before. Eerie and beautiful. Twice more, within the hour, the same trance-like feeling banished completely the reality of our surroundings. (*London Years* 61)

However; the reality of life in the modern age did impact on the freedom to enjoy the dances. The laid back nature of rural life was sharply at odds with the demands of industry.

The Irish dances in Glasgow … were only poor comparison to the dances at home. For one thing they only lasted about two to three hours—not much compared to the all night till morning dos at home. People had to be up early in the morning for their work so everything ended about eleven o'clock. (Ó Ciaráin 129)

Subtly, the Irish were guided towards a syncretism, a reconciling of the traditional aspirations with the demands of modernity.

The Irish in Britain constructed a patrician society capable of random acts of spectacular and showy benevolence but also one whose borders were curiously impermeable for those who challenged the accepted norms. Parameters were rigidly patrolled in what was a "homogenous, masculine and heteronormative world" (Gray, *Women and the Irish Diaspora* 112). Conformity was expected within Irish society and difference was viewed with suspicion and intolerance. Ó Ciaráin relates how a Welshman took to frequenting the bothy and seemed to care more for the company of the men. One of the women in the bothy pointed out that "He is a Nancy boy, that's what he is … a good thrashing that's what he needs" (88). Ó Ciaráin is nonplussed by the man, "I just did not know what to make of him or how it was that he had his sexual priorities all wrong". The men resolve their discomfort by attacking the man and driving him off with stones (Ó Ciaráin 88). Homosexuality appears to have been very much a taboo among the Irish community. Brian Behan, in a tribute to his brother Brendan, writes that, "When in my ignorance I sneered at homosexuals he turned on me like a tiger and told me to keep my dirty ignorant thoughts to myself" (176). Mick McCarthy is horrified to encounter Ranter, a flamboyant homosexual, nicknamed Lady Galway, from Ireland,

> 'Those people make me sick,' I said emphatically. 'They're just freaks. This country is crawling with them.'
>
> 'This country is not unique in that respect,' Deirdre said.
>
> 'Maybe not. But there's no place else where they're so brazen about it.'
>
> 'You'd be surprised how many of these people wind up in hospital,' Anne interjected. 'Mostly victims of violence. Quite a few come in mentally disturbed, just nervous wrecks.'

'Surely they have nobody to blame only themselves,' I persisted. 'Isn't it easy to see why ordinary people react the way they do.'

'When you get to know these people, it's a different story altogether,' Deirdre went on. 'Usually they are model patients and mostly above average intelligence. Maybe you wouldn't be so prejudiced if you came up against this problem as we do.' (McCarthy, *London Years* 98-9)

Transvestism and homosexuality cannot be reconciled with his vision of Irishness as something noble and manly and must necessarily be constituted as Other. In his eyes, Britain has ruined this young man; as things like this didn't happen in Ireland. Ranter, represents for him a physical exemplar of the perils of a permissive society. Later, he meets the man again as they prepare to travel home to Ireland, "A different Ranter, accompanied by one of his now soberly dressed companions. Gone were the exotic clothes and hairstyles" (*London Years* 171). He is conscious of the weight of expectation enforced by Irish society. Returning home, the man must retrieve the traditional garb of an Irishman and assume a heterosexual mask. This contrasts sharply with the almost homoerotic prose of Patrick MacGill who revels in the physical form of the navvy,

When on the roads, dressed in every curious garment which he could beg, steal, borrow or thieve, Joe looked singularly unprepossessing; but here, naturally garbed, and standing amidst the nakedness of nature, he looked like some magnificent piece of sculpture, gifted with life and fresh from the hands of the genius who fashioned it. (MacGill 199)

It must be noted that bigoted attitudes towards homosexuality were not confined to the Irish community and existed at all levels of British society in this period. Donal Foley, remembering his stint as a court reporter in the 1940s, observes that

The homosexuals, on the other hand, were treated with unconcealed hostility by everyone. Usually they were butlers or gentlemen's gentlemen, timid little men, who were often subjected to harsh abuse from the magistrate. "Do you know what you are?" he would demand of the frail figure in the dock. "No sir" the man would answer. "Well I will tell you. You are a filthy lavatory pest," the magistrate would helpfully prompt him. He would then go on to fine him the maximum amount. (71-2)

The role of women within the migrant community was also heavily prescribed. Women usually gave up work on starting a family (Akenson 203) Traditional values and a visible Catholicity became the hallmark of the Irish family in Britain. Attitudes among Irish men towards women followed traditional roles. MacAmhlaigh's reaction to his landlady's drunkenness is perhaps illustrative of the social mores of the time,

> It's clear, however that the women have the upper hand in this country and that's neither right nor reasonable. I'm not saying that any man should be cruel to his wife, disciplining her at every point, but it's certain that it's very necessary at times! (MacAmhlaigh 83)

MacAmhlaigh seems to have been quite dismissive of women in general and far more comfortable in the society of men. This could possibly be explained as his being a product of a society where a woman's only role was as mother, potential wife or nun; or equally likely, could be explained by an innate misogyny. Public women unnerved MacAmhlaigh, "The women are as plentiful in the pubs here as fleas are on a goat and no man can be at ease wherever they are" (7).

The other memoirs looked at in this chapter offer a more nuanced look at the interplay between the sexes in the migrant community. The privacy afforded by life in the urban areas of Britain saw many Irish embrace the possibilities offered by anonymity. Mick McCarthy and his girlfriend Deirdre develop a sexual relationship, eventually moving in together, a development that would have caused shock and outrage at home. They are careful to conceal their new status from Deirdre's brother who visits while on leave from the army (123). They must pay lip service to tradition in order to avoid alienating themselves from their origins. Maidhc Ó Sé quickly recognises the joys and effectiveness of modern, urban courtship rituals and within a week of arriving in London goes on a double date to a "posh" restaurant with a friend of his. Their enthusiasm is matched only by their bewilderment,

> The waitress came again with four small plates. Two tiny spuds on each plate. No sooner had the plate hit the table in front of Tom, than he had his fork stuck to the handle in one of the spuds. 'Bring them in they're boiled,' he said. The piece of meat Mary had in her mouth, she blew it out with the dint of laughing. Tom thought it was for testing them that the two potatoes were on the small plate. (115)

Brian Behan too, relishes the liberty offered by London, "Celia came from a long, long line of atheists and I doubt she'd even heard of original sin, let alone believed in it" (120). Britain offered freedoms for sexual development, unthinkable in an Ireland dominated by institutionalised sexual repression.

Irish migrants to Britain often had an uneasy, almost schizophrenic attitude towards home. Many felt let down by Irish society and the nascent Irish State's inability to provide for its own citizens (O'Tuathaigh 60). Others idealised Ireland,

creating it as an idealised, if not idyllic, prelapsarian existence that contrasted sharply with the harsh angularity of British society. There seems to have been a taboo around criticising Ireland in front of anyone of another nationality,

> There's a little Jackeen from Dublin here and he'd make you feel rightly ashamed. He started off at dinnertime in front of the English about how little work there was in Ireland and about the poverty … The Paddies over here are very much against that sort of thing—that anyone should pretend in front of the English that things are not too good in Ireland … To be sure everyone knows that it's the lack of a livelihood that's responsible for us being here; but it's not at all praiseworthy that a man shouldn't stand up for his own country even though it has no place for him (MacAmhlaigh 85).

McCarthy too, on his first night in London, is asked by a Welshman, "Things very bad in Ireland then?" Not at all bad" I replied "We all get free beef, spuds are plentiful and there are loads of fish" (*Early Days* 139). Pride in the place of origin, mixed with resentment arising from negative stereotyping fuels a reluctance to denigrate Ireland. Ireland was home for many migrants and they saw their migration not as a voluntary process but as period of involuntary exile. Donal Foley rails against the nation that forces him to leave,

> For myself, I was totally confused I did not want to leave Ireland at all. Indeed, I still did not believe I was doing so. This was a nightmare adventure in which I was involved with all these strange people and strange faces. Inside me a resentment was building against I knew not what. Why should I have to go and leave all those others at home in comfort? I would soon go back, I told myself. (54)

Ó Sé laments that, "Oh I said to myself, didn't the Man Above give us a great cross that we can't earn a living in our own place (90). Economic necessity forces the migrants to leave Ireland but the country retains an emotional hold for those who left. The Ireland they left behind becomes an imaginary haven where life moves to a gentler rhythm,

> Lying on my bed after a long day's work, I thought of the thousands of people who left the coast of Ireland to make their living in foreign countries. People who grew up with the freedom of the glens and the mountains. The song of the birds and the breaking of the waves against the cliffs left behind them. With no sights to see in cities like London but big brick buildings. A black colour on them from the smut of industry. The noise of the machines and the bustle of people; and yet, loneliness in the middle of the crowd. I was thinking of my father and my mother and they sitting beside the fire, the pipe in my father's mouth and the smoke billowing from it. (Ó Sé 111)

MacAmhlaigh suffers a similar experience,

> This afternoon I stood for a while on the top of the water tower looking around at the red sky over westwards. Suddenly I got homesick for the old place. I thought of Galway and Lough Corrib as they would be on a summer afternoon … It was as if I had gone wandering in my mind, standing there not taking notice of anything but remembering times gone. When Tom called me, saying it was time to pack up, I was as fed up with my life as any man could be. (MacAmhlaigh 79)

MacAmhlaigh was particularly prone to romanticising Ireland, fetishizing aspects of Ireland and installing it as his own personal ideal. Arrowsmith has

discussed the idea that this nostalgia is a destructive force, cocooning the migrant from the new realities of life, saying that, "The confusion, in these nationalist fantasy Irelands, of a utopian future with an idealised, unmodernised past begins to look like a habitual mode of distracting from significant absences in the present" ("Photographic Memories" 298). MacAmhlaigh clings to an *über* Irishness to avoid facing the fact that he is becoming something else. For MacAmhlaigh, Connemara represents the very apex of Irishness and all other forms are somehow inferior. This has a destabilising effect on his relationship with his host country and indeed with some of his fellow countrymen. He is more comfortable with Connemara men, native Irish speakers like himself, their separateness and cultivated difference rendering them identifiably Irish. In a society where successful assimilation demands a donning of a mask and a diminution of the self, he revels in the construction of his identity "through difference not outside it" (Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* 4). In his eyes there are distinct gradations of Irishness with Dublin people being the "lowest of the lot. They do hardly any work at all, just sponging around for the most part (MacAmhlaigh 122). This is a recurrent trope in many of the memoirs from this era. Power also touches on the distaste that country people hold for Dubliners,

> We sat down. Coilin was nervous because Aran men didn't like to drink in the pub. Dubliners for the most part patronised it and according to Coilin they were a fierce wild and treacherous crowd. (167)

There is a palpable sense that Dubliners are not truly Irish people, their ways are different to the ways of the rest of the country and they are effete and somehow unmanly, debased by their urban environment. There is also a sense that they are somehow more aligned with Britain.

It is ironic that MacAmhlaigh's mythologizing of the West of Ireland seems to be drawn from the Irish Literary Revival tradition which sought to imbue Irish culture with a veneer of Protestant empiricism, creating a mirror image of the Kipling fantasy of the strong manly type. His ideal Irishness has its origins in an idealised Britishness. Nostalgia for an imagined romanticised past informs and drives his present identity. It "innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The past-present becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of living" (Bhabha 7). He becomes an exile by choice, an Irishman in a foreign country "chained onto the flow of discourse" (Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* 4). P. J. Devlin in his memoir *That Was the Way of It* (2001) sums up the pride taken in maintaining and parading difference when he says,

> We Irish are stubborn in this respect [signing on for social welfare]. We like to be our own men, beholden to no one. Maybe this is why we undersell ourselves and fail to realise our potential. Although for a variety of reasons Britain has never got around to classifying us as aliens, in our heart of hearts we were and will always remain so. (Devlin 164)

Identity then is a fluid rather than a static concept governed by many conflicting determinants. Aspects of identity are forced upon the migrant by the host society who assigns labels and stereotypes drawn from historical prejudice and preconception. The memoirs of McCarthy, Ó Sé, Ó Ciaráin, MacAmhlaigh, Power and Foley catalogue many incidents of exclusion and marginalisation. McCarthy, in particular, is refused service in pubs and taunted with the pigs in the parlour stereotype. All have their individuality disregarded at various times, finding themselves homogenised as "Paddy". All respond by avoiding or withdrawing from

the host society and embracing their own created communities. They live Irish lives in English spaces, lives predicated on the notion of demonstrable difference. Ultimately they find that lines between the two cultures are in a constant state of flux and the authors unconsciously slip in a hyphenated existence. Against their will but in a manner too subtle to resist they become hybridised, incorporating aspects of both cultures in their lives.

Chapter Three:

"I Couldn't Go Back": Irish Women's Experiences of Migration

Migration has, for much of the twentieth century served as a national safety valve, a means of dealing with a surplus population. Economic necessity obliged many Irish women to migrate to Britain in the period 1930-1960 as employment opportunities in Ireland were sparse. Britain offered Irish women the possibility of a job and life outside the precincts of the home. By and large, for working-class women, roles were limited to various forms of domestic service and increasingly from the 1930s, nursing (Delaney 12). Contrary to public perceptions, for most of the twentieth century more women than men left Ireland in search of employment. Bronwen Walter quotes a staggering statistic stating that, "For example, of women living in the Republic in 1946, one third had left the country by 1971" (*Outsiders Inside* 3). Migration has traditionally been characterised as a particularly masculinised experience. Male migrants, due to the public nature of their employment have been adopted as epitomising the Irish migrant experience with women's role relegated to the status as chattel or bystander (Walter, *Outsiders Inside* 103). Important work has been done in the sociological field to address this inequitably gendered approach to migration but in cultural terms, generations of Irish women have been rendered invisible in terms of migration experience, suborned to a masculinised discourse that sought to explain female experience through exclusively male filters. This chapter will seek to examine the different ways in which women responded to the challenges of emigration. It will look some of the possible reasons why such a large swathe of the Irish migrant population has remained almost invisible in terms of life writing. It

is instructive to view some of these memoirs in terms of the move from rural society to the "masculine city scape" and also to look at the role of the city in the Irish psyche as a "corruptive influence" (Ryan, "Irish Female Emigration" 275). Stereotypical images of Irishwomen both from the host country and the point of origin also played an important role in the lives of migrant women and it is interesting to note how these are manifested in life accounts of Irish women, in terms of memoir and sociological interview. Many women embraced these stereotypes, while others sought to construct themselves along non-performative modes of identification. Sexual opportunity and the removal from parochialism created for many women a haven, rather than a burden and allowed lives to develop along more natural lines, allowing for an acknowledgement of sexuality that would have been impossible in Ireland. The inclusion of women in the workforce will also be examined, exploring how Irishwomen's role in the domestic and nursing professions caused a concurrent assimilation into the host country. A recurrent theme in the study of women's narratives is the pressure that can accrue from transnational family spaces, where Irish women's lives were complicated by a conflicting sense of duty to their own nuclear family and also to the extended family at home. This chapter will also track how friendship networks provide an insight into the tools that women used to carve new lives in alien spaces.

In terms of autobiography, Irish women's experiences of emigration are characterised as much by absence as by presence. There is a dearth of written first-hand accounts by women of the process of moving and adaptation. For various reasons these women have left little published written traces of their experiences. Frequently, their stories are told through the eyes of their husbands, sons or

daughters, offering a somewhat reductive and unstable means of communication. Writing was, for many of these women, an activity that took place in private spheres, restricted to the functionality of communication. Anna May Mangan remarked in *Me and Mine: A Warm Hearted Memoir of a London Irish Family* (2011), her account of growing up in the London Irish community that,

> When they [Her parents] were alive I was Mum's letter writer: Letters, bills, Christmas, Easter and St Patrick's Day cards and Mass and sympathy cards. If she was sending money to a niece or nephew for their birthday, I would write the card and she would write her signature on the banknote she was enclosing … Even now Mum is gone, I feel like I am still her writer. (274)

Alternatively, Irish women migrant's stories have been recorded through the collection of oral histories and sociological interviews with scholars like Gray, Walter, Delaney and Ryan. While these interviews provide a valuable insight into the mind-set of migrant women; they lack the reflectiveness of memoir. The snapshot nature of interview limits the effectiveness of communication; furthermore, the interviewer becomes an active participant in the process, guiding, probing and perhaps unconsciously directing recollections. The scarcity of published memoir means that those few that do articulate the stresses and successes of women's migration provide a vital link to a doubly marginalised community. Harte in the introduction to *The Literature of the Irish in Britain* comments that,

> As it is, male autobiographers significantly outnumber their female counterparts, leaving one to regret the fact that so few Irish nurses left accounts of their migrant experiences, and bemoan the paucity of memoirs by domestic servants, despite their ubiquity in Victorian Britain. Such silences are instructive, of course. (xvi)

In trying to determine and evaluate the varied reasons that saw Irish women choose to migrate to England, Gray posited that,

> Women have left in search of life opportunities, self-liberation and career advancement, to give birth and to have abortions, as a means of personal survival and of contributing to the survival of their families in Ireland. They have emigrated to escape difficult family circumstances, heterosexism, Catholicism and the intense familiarities and surveillances that have marked Irish society. (*Women and the Irish Diaspora* 1)

The memoirs examined in this chapter seem to bear out this hypothesis. Anna May Mangan's *Me and Mine* details the life of a family whose kinship networks are, over time, relocated and recreated in England. It charts the prejudices that these rural Irish people faced on a regular basis and looks at how the family hybridised, becoming geographically English but remaining audibly and psychologically Irish. Elaine Crowley's *Technical Virgins* (1998) deals with the author's time serving with the Auxiliary Territorial Service during World War II. Crowley left Dublin and the stifling embrace of a possessive mother in the 1930s and moved to Britain. It provides a gendered narrative that is at odds with traditional perceptions of emigration as exile; documenting instead, the liberation of life in Britain. It articulates the idea that Britain was a site of cosmopolitanism and modernism that women could choose to embrace, a sharp contrast to the lives that they were expected to conform to in Ireland. For many women, Britain offered an escape from the stifling nature of Irish society. Eavan Boland's *Object Lessons (1996)* offers intriguing ideas on the nature both of Irishness, and of femininity and examines how the two terms often seem mutually exclusive. Her status as the child of the Irish

ambassador to the United Kingdom places her in a unique position. She, "was no English Alice. I was an Irish child in England" (45). Living in a position of privilege, she is nonetheless aware that there is a something subtly different about her, there are conflicts of belonging and becoming that must be negotiated. Gray remarks that,

> Fixity and mobility, belonging and longing are negotiated in the tensions between national and global practices and imaginings. The bi-located belonging articulated in migrant women's accounts produce an anxiety that compounds the ambiguities surrounding the migrant in the 'homeland'. (*Women and the Irish Diaspora* 95)

In order to successfully assimilate into new communities and identifications, the migrant is forced to confront old certainties and recognise the dissonance and artificiality inherent in traditional national identities.

As previously stated, in terms of migrant life writing, Irish women have largely been invisible. Certainly, first-hand working class women's memoir is extremely rare. Harte's *The Literature of the Irish in Britain* lists just eight texts by Irish women for the twentieth century. Of these, two are by second-generation Irish women, three drawn from the wealthier classes and just three first-hand accounts are by what could be termed working-class women. While Harte points out that his collection is not exhaustive, it does succinctly demonstrate the dearth of women's life writing from this period. This relative invisibility can be explained by several social factors. For many working-class Irish women, arrival in Britain saw them enter the workforce in various forms of domestic service. Walter has commented that the early part of the century saw women move in to fill gaps in what has been termed the 'care deficit' in Britain (Walter, "Irish Women in the Diaspora" 4). This work

was characterised by long hours of physical toil and this served to limit their free time. It was certainly a lifestyle that offered little opportunity for self-articulation or actualisation. The lack of social status inherent in domestic servitude, coupled with an attendant lack of education may also serve to explain the lack of "downstairs" memoirs. Louise Ryan has written extensively on how these women became an integral if unrecognised part of middle class society, freeing middle class women from the constraints of home life. This role also allowed women to integrate more freely into British society and forge a presence in "Deep England"; often stepping into a maternal role and proving substantially influential in the formative years of many upper class British men and women. For many domestic servants, days were long with free time and privacy existing as a scarce commodity. Certainly they were not conducive to the cultivation of reflective memoir. Harte quotes Maureen Hamish's *Adventures of an Irish Girl at Home and Abroad* (1906) as being indicative of the difficulties faced by working class girls,

> My present employers are kind, and I am happy at last; but my readers will understand the writing of my book is second to my work, and the duties attached to my position. If I could have given my whole attention to my story it might have been better. (Harte xvi)

Hamish's sense of duty takes precedence over the need for actualisation. She has suborned her own needs to that of her employers in an attempt to blend in. Individuality is a luxury that must be seconded to economic and social necessity. Walter has referred to the host community's reliance on migrant labour in terms of,

> The absence of servants from public discourse was not therefore an admission of an indication of their lack of importance, but rather an admission of the inadmissibility of their power. Not only did they represent

the necessity of, and middle class men's dependence on, women's paid work, but their relationship with middle and upper class children placed them in an extraordinarily important position. Servants raised children and played a key role in the early experiences of middle-class men, while mothers were excluded from close contact by the necessity to appear untouched by manual labour. (Walter, *Outsiders Inside* 104)

This led to the cultivation of a double layered silence around the role of Irish women in British society. It was impolitic for British society to recognise the role played by Irishwomen in the preservation of British values. To do so, would be to accord a position of power to an inferior.

At the same time official Ireland was in denial about the need for Irish women to seek employment and this resulted in a certain shame and social stigma around emigration. This was in direct contrast to the stated aims of the Irish constitution for Mná na hÉireann. Article 41.2 of Bunreacht na hÉireann promises that,

In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (Scannell 61)

Emigration of women from Ireland was seen as something of a grubby secret. They were a living embodiment of Ireland's failure in its duties as a nation. Migrant women were therefore constructed in the public eye as being somehow suspect. While the remittance monies from Irish emigrants kept the country afloat for long

periods of the twentieth century, it went unacknowledged and there was a sense that those who emigrated were in some way tainted by their association with Britain, corrupted by travel and modernity (Ryan, "Irish Female Migration in the 1930s" 5). There was an innate hypocrisy in relation to female migration; many women were educated for longer than their male counterparts in the expectation that they could send more money home. Their reward was, in many cases, to become figures of suspicion and reproach.

If British society was marked by an antipathy towards Roman Catholicism, then it found its obverse in the nascent Free State. England was constructed as a dystopia, a site of corruption and godlessness. Louise Ryan has written extensively on the unease that was articulated in the 1930s by the forces of official Ireland, commenting that, "The "emigrant girl" symbolised an Irishness marked by religion, culture and a sense of place. In transgressing physical space by leaving home and travelling to London, she also transgressed cultural space and encountered the dangers of life in an alien, urban environment" ("Irish Female Emigration in the 1930s" 272). At this time there was a pervading sense that the emigrant woman who chose to leave Ireland was inherently lessened by her experience and complicit in her own moral downfall. In a society where England and Ireland were set up as binaries, urban vs. rural, Catholic vs. Protestant, innocent vs. worldly, migrant women found themselves stranded on the wrong side of an immutable binary between virtue and immorality. Gray has observed that,

> Because of the close association between women's role in reproduction and
> in maintaining of the purity of a nation's respectability (Mosse), women's
> migration frequently means a disruption in transgenerational stability and in

the transmission of culture and identity. Despite the fundamentally gendered nature of one's relationship to national identity and of experiences of migration, studies of national identity and "postcolonialism" tend to overlook the intersections between gender, experiences of movement and national identification. (Gray "Irish Women in London" 95)

Migrants were attracted with the promise of plenitude and comforts unimaginable to the average home in Ireland,

> Leaving home was a simple "sail or starve choice", there was no work in rural Ireland, nor any prospect of it for my aunts and uncles ... Letters home from friends and neighbours already working in London told proudly of flushing toilets, electricity, hot running water and dances seven nights a week and in the afternoons too. (Mangan 7)

The lure of comfort and financial stability was instrumental in establishing patterns of chain migration but this was a development that worried the Irish Catholic Church. Ryan explores at length how the Catholic hierarchy were concerned about the effects that England was having on Irish morality and quotes a diatribe from Dr McNamee, Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise, aimed at curbing the drift of breeding stock to Britain. He railed against "the fascination of the garish distractions of the city, and by the hectic life of the great world as displayed before their wondering eyes in the glamorous unrealities of the films ("Irish Female Emigration" 274). It is a revealing quote on many levels, showing the culture of isolationism adopted by Ireland in the pre-war period. There is a sense that the "great world" should be alien to the average Irish woman; worldliness is a vice that should be avoided at all costs. Those men and women who have journeyed to Britain have been

subtly tainted with a modernity that begets godlessness. Ryan postulates that women were cut off from their origins by being perceived to have been susceptible to urban corruption,

> The big city, by its very nature, is a space that is open and in flux. It has often been represented as disorderly, uncontrollably complex and chaotic. Women who form part of this large open space are also likely to be represented as disorderly and uncontrolled: their public mobility stands in sharp contrast to the private enclosure of home. ("Irish Female Emigration" 275)

Irish newspapers were filled with admonitory articles, warning of the perils of perfidious Albion. Horror stories peopled the brothels of London with innocent Irish girls lured from chastity by masculine aggressors. The urban landscape was an inherently hostile atmosphere, fraught with danger for Ireland's comely maidens. There was an unarticulated fear of a loss of control over these young women, the erosion of both familial and societal, paternalistic structures. The fact that young people were seizing and moulding their own independence, voting with their feet and leaving Ireland was seen as an indictment or rejection of Ireland and its values. It meant that emigration became subtly linked with betrayal.

For Irish women who were drawn to the lights of Britain, titillated by the stories filtering back from earlier migrants, their first impressions of the 'bright lights' of the city could be somewhat disappointing. Crowley remarks that,

> All my life I had believed that everywhere in England was beautiful. That unlike Dublin there were no slums and no poor people … So my first sight of an English town was a bitter disappointment. Even the glorious sunset could do little to enhance the grimy buildings, the run down houses. Small houses.

>Little shops. Low-sized people, poorly dressed. And everywhere a smell of smoke. (36)

These seem to tie in with the initial impressions of many of the migrants studied in the earlier chapters. The move from a predominately rural society to the frenetic pace of life in the city came as a physical shock. It could be a disconcerting experience, an abrupt introduction to an industrial setting, a physical manifestation of the emotional journey to an alien landscape. Post-war Britain was coldly modern and physically alien. Far from being the urban idyll, many women were initially repulsed by the industrialised and seemingly faceless conurbations of Britain. Even foodstuffs seemed to be subliminally hostile and removed from the natural world of home,

>One of the first things I noticed about some of the food was how it differed in colour from the food at home. Greens as they were called hadn't a trace of green about them but were a blend of yellow, white and grey. Brown gravy was a shade I could only describe as buff, beige or fawn … And when on rare occasions roast beef, pork or lamb was served, it too was a colour I didn't associate with such meats and was tough, fatty, full of gristle and tasteless. (Crowley 21)

Moving from a culture that was rigidly bound and defined through parochial affiliation and patriarchal kinship networks to the anonymity of urban sprawl required a certain amount of adaptation on behalf of the migrant women,

>I didn't know what to think of London. There were crowds everywhere and I didn't know where all the people were coming from or going to. I'd come now from a rural area where you saw lads once a week, unless they were going to the well or something. And now I'd come over here and everybody was knocking you down. I was bewildered. I remember well the

underground, going on the tube and then the moving stairs. I was awful afraid

until I got used to it. (Delaney 60)

If Britain's streets turned out not to be paved with gold, then at least for a lot of

people they represented a huge improvement in living standards. Housing stock,

while poor by modern standards, was often much better than the housing migrants

had left behind in Ireland. Mangan's parents' first house as a married couple was a

"A dump but nevertheless a step-up of sorts from where they were raised in Ireland"

(19). She also describes that the "Bayswater bedsit was a hovel—and they were quite

delighted with it. They had the thrill of electricity, an indoor toilet—shared with a

dozen others—and one another" (28). This stood in marked contrast with the house

where they were raised where, "Fifteen of them, my grandfather, grandmother, Dad

and his twelve siblings, all called a cottage with one room downstairs and two

bedrooms upstairs home" (32).

On arrival in Britain, many Irish women found that they acquired a new

identity that had little to do with their own conceptions of self. Male migrants were

accorded a role as hard drinking, fighting irrational creatures and women discovered

that they too were to be victims of stereotypes; characterised as dirty and "not quite

white" (Hickman and Walter 10). The sheer volume of Irish migrants arriving in

Britain in the middle decades of the twentieth century led to widespread unease in

British society. This unease was to manifest itself at the level of casual and

institutional racism, engrained and normalised within the dominant discourse. The

Irish were created at the level of a sinister Other and dirt marked them as inferior

beings at a remove from the host community. Bronwen Walter commented that,

"Dirt is literally defined as "matter out of place" and clearly conveys the message of

exclusion" (88). Irish women were viewed as flotsam washing up on Britain shores, posing a threat to perceived purities. This was a particularly galling stereotype as it impacted not just on the public habits of Irish women but also followed them into the home. Dirt was not something that could be washed away but formed an inherent part of stereotypical national identity. Walter commented on how these stereotypes took root in British society and were used to demarcate rigid lines of belonging,

> Dirt was frequently invoked in the nineteenth century as a characteristic consequence of Irish households rather than as a consequence of the conditions in which their low pay confined them. Irish women were despised for lacking domestic skills and being associated with dirt. (Walter, *Outsiders Inside* 188)

To publicly articulate an Irish identity in Britain was to open oneself to being perceived as slovenly and inferior. These stereotypes proved very pervasive and nearly all the women's memoirs studied for this chapter have incidents where Irish people are charged with being dirty and ignorant. Elaine Crowley's *Technical Virgins* tells the story of her grandmother's introduction to her English fiancé's family recounting that, "My high spirited grandmother who, when introduced to her father-in-law and he asked 'How are the pigs in Ireland', replied, 'Ask my sweet Irish arse'" (145). Taunts about cleanliness could have an injurious effect on the psyche of Irish women, forcing them into silence and trying desperately to maintain a stoic invisibility. Anna May Mangan recalling an incident where she is taunted about her home in a school setting writes,

> How could I repeat what Fenella had said about my house being a slum in front of my mum? She was always cleaning and polishing and generally

cherishing the 'slum' and I was scared about how upset she would be, and

worst of all how hard she would try not to show it. (172)

Ironically, Mangan's mother worked as a cleaner where she was continually reminded about her status within her new community, "Mum was a cleaner in any number of private homes. She used to say that the women she worked for could never remember her name, even after she'd been on the staff for months, or years. Most of them just called her 'Irish'" (Mangan 29). It is another of the ironies of stereotype that many British homes were kept clean by these anonymous Irish women, allowing British women the freedom to seek lives outside the home.

Irish women were also perceived as being overly fecund, providing a vehicle for a form of virulent anti-Catholicism that appears to have been endemic within British society. Catholicism was identified with large families and seen as something sinister or outside the norms of polite British society. Irish Catholicism was an alien religion, a malaise eating at the core of British values. This foregrounding of the perceived Irish propensity for reproduction works on many levels to problematize Irish migrants. It fed into British fears about a self-propagating enemy "within",

Our telephone was on a party line with a complete stranger, commonplace at

the time. Shared line rentals were half price and we could overhear all one

another's conversations. The man who shared with us complained to British

Telecom that he didn't want to share with Irish people as there was hundreds

of us and we'd always be on the phone blocking the line. (Mangan 81)

It also carried overtones of animalistic behaviour, imputing a predilection towards excess and a lack of self-control that helped to fix the Irish as being somehow outside the parameters of civilised society. Stereotypes of sexual fecundity also fed

into colonialised views of sexual availability. Irish women were often doubly vulnerable both as immigrants of little standing and members of an un-regarded lower class. Mangan recounts a scene of sexual harassment, in matter of fact tones that suggest this was not uncommon,

> Lunch was silver-served at 1pm on the dot by my mum, Peggy and a merry band of Irish waitresses—one specially reserved for wine pouring and pass-the-port duties. The diners were captains of industry but on the occasions I helped out in university holidays I was amazed at how thick some of these captains of industry could be. One was convinced that the buttered beans referred to on the menu were stored up my skirt. 'Do you have any more beans?' he asked as his hand travelled up the back of my thigh. Another wanted to know, 'Are there any more peas, Miss?' as his sweaty palm made a circular motion on my black-skirted buttock. (180)

In reality many Irish women were hopelessly naïve and innocent of sex and sexuality; products of a society where sex was something vague that happened to married people or at least the very soon to be married. Sex was something that was done to Irish women and not something they were expected to participate in, or show interest in. Contact with the opposite sex as an adolescent or young adult was severely limited, with single sex schools remaining the norm until the latter decades of the twentieth century. Rural romance tended to be carried out publicly, in socially sanctioned forums like the dancehalls, where contact was policed and where room was left between dancing couples to provide room for the Holy Ghost. Arrival in London meant the emergence of sexual possibility but it was a road fraught with half understood perils. Mangan recounts,

> When my mum was fifteen and still living at home in Ireland, her eldest
> sister Theresa returned from London without warning. No explanation for her
> surprise visit was needed. The lump that sat high under her belted coat spoke
> for itself … "But I swear to God, I didn't let him touch my bellybutton!" In a
> house that had welcomed thirteen babies, not one of the young women in it
> understood how a baby was made. (30-31)

Elaine Crowley writing of her time in the WRAF, tells of how she and her fellow
recruits were excited by the prospect of leave time romance,

> There was much speculation amongst us as to whether we might get off with
> Yanks. Would we be safe with them if we did? 'They're only men,' said
> Bubbles reassuringly. But the majority of Irish girls (including me) had never
> been out alone with a man. (Crowley 21)

It is an interesting quotation that shows a mixture of longing and fear, an embracing
of unknown possibilities, an articulation of forbidden desires. Desires, not just for
romance but also for freedom from the infantilised roles expected of women in
Ireland. Margaret McCurtain has written that, "In Ireland, women became virtual
minors before the law, privatised, in their lifestyle, and admonished by the Churches
to be obedient to their husbands" (McCurtain 44). Crowley enthusiastically
immerses herself in Britain, revelling in the freedom and anonymity of war time
British society. She dismisses the idea of return to a cloistered existence in Dublin,

> No I didn't want any of that. Nor the dancehalls. Stand waiting for men who
> had been viewing you like cattle in a market. Their numbers swelling when
> the public houses closed. Nudging each other. And, when their courage was
> up, crossing the divide in your direction, you hoped. (139)

The addition of "you hoped" offers some idea of the lack of social and sexual roles available to Irish women. These roles could be crudely characterised as mother, maiden or crone; women could be married, marriageable or become spinsters. In the eyes of official Ireland, the apex of femininity and certainly the most publicly acceptable role for a woman was as a nun. Life in Britain was remarkably freer for many Irish women. England saw many Irish embrace the possibilities offered by anonymity. As referred to in an earlier chapter, Mick McCarthy and his girlfriend Deirdre enthusiastically embrace the anonymity of London which allows them to explore their sexuality free from negative comment or societal censure.

The emergence of the nursing tradition among Irish women in the 1930s helped to ease the path of assimilation, fixing Irish women in the public gaze as nurturing and professional, in sharp contrast to the image of the "wild Irishman". Many women chose to abandon these narrow, proscriptive models that sought to characterise Ireland and the Irish in negative terms and more fully immerse themselves in the host community, embracing modern life and subordinating and hiding their Irishness. Akenson posits that "For Irish girls the problems were never as acute as for men. Irish girls never had quite the same working class image in Britain as their men had acquired" (201).Walter and Hickman have remarked that Irishwomen were largely exempt from the British stereotypes of drunkenness and violence; being viewed as assimiable members of society (Hickman and Walter 12-13). MacAmhlaigh bemoans the attempts at assimilation from Irish women commenting that,

> I'm afraid, from what I have seen so far, in this place, that the Irish girls
> don't come within an asses' roar of the "foreigners" so far as deportment,

manners and that sort of thing is concerned. They have an ugly fashion of screeching with laughter in the canteen, and they have the most revolting English idioms at the tips of their tongues- such as, "you've had it mate" and "crikey". There's something demeaning about the Irish person that imitates the English or other people. (9)

MacAmhlaigh may well be threatened by the women's willingness to adopt a performative mask as a means of easing themselves into a new culture. He is discomfited by their ability to shed old certainties, and choose new models of being and belonging. Boland was aware of this drive to fit in, to be seen to adopt the manners and mannerisms of the dominant culture, writing in *Object Lessons* that,

> The expatriate is in search of a country; the exile in search of a self. He or she
>
> learns to look for it in a territory between rhetoric and reality, with its own
>
> customs and habits of mind, its preferred speech and rigorous invention. (50)

Selfhood is paradoxically achieved through a certain surrender of self, a restructuring of certainties and attitudes and the adoption of conciliatory compromises with the dominant discourse. Mary Hickman has written on how Irish women as white immigrants have an advantage of invisibility that is compromised by a pronounced audibility (Hickman 13-15). "Women's speech was already branded as less authoritative, and the added assumption of an Irish accent serve literally to silence them" (Walter, *Outsiders Inside* 90). Maude Casey in her semi-autobiographical novel *Over the Water* has her British/Irish heroine declare that, "Mammy knows no one in our road. She is so afraid of scornful glances at her Irish voice that she opens her mouth to no-one" (2). The women who MacAmhlaigh derides for sounding English are undertaking a subtle mimicry in order to reinvent the self in the mould of

the hegemonic discourse. Crowley, writing about the process of assimilation wryly observed that, "In four days I had learned to answer to Paddy, Cock, Chuck, Kid and occasionally Cloth-ears" (Crowley 156). The onus is on the migrant to fit in and to adopt the correct modes of "civilised" deportment. Audibility remains a major flashpoint for Irish migrants. During the bombing campaigns of the Troubles, many Irish women were afraid to be heard. Tensions ran high and Irish accents denoted suspect loyalties (Hickman and Walter 14). Mangan writes of the prejudices encountered by her parents,

> There was nothing militant about them even though they were daily misjudged as terrorists because of their accents by the English. "All we did wrong was be from somewhere else," my mum once said, her eyes bright with tears, after a neighbour had refused to take in a parcel for her. Her reason was that "it might contain bomb-making ingredients." (227)

Eavan Boland recounts an incident where her Irish accent makes her the target of vitriol, leaving her in no doubt as the position that the Irish occupy in British society,

> 'I amn't taking the bus,' I said. I was six or seven then, still within earshot of another way of speaking. But the English do not use that particular construction. It is an older usage. If they contract the verb and the negative, they say, 'I'm not.' Without knowing, I had used that thing for which the English reserve a visceral dislike: their language loaded and aimed by the old enemy. The teacher whirled around. She corrected my grammar, her face set, her tone cold. 'You're not in Ireland now' was what she said. (46)

Audibility can also be used as a mask to hide behind, an adoption of stereotype that allows the migrant to remain unseen. In a powerful passage in *Over*

the Water, the narrator's mother is described as being "wild with nerves" and her Irishness increases as the train pulls out for Holyhead:

> 'But sure, it's good enough for the bloody Irish. The bloody bog Irish don't know any bether sure.' Her voice is freeing itself from being in England. 'Give 'em any owld bit of filt an' let 'em rot in it! The dirty Irish!' I am embarrassed by this Irish voice. 'Mammy for goodness sake, don't carry on' I say. (Casey 8)

Her mother seeks to hide behind an exaggerated Irishness, camouflaging her nerves and uncertainty behind the screen of stereotype. Assimilation was for many women achieved at the expense of accent. Nan Joyce in *My Life on the Road* writing about her sister recounts that,

> My sister Kathleen had been in Glasgow for years, working in a hotel. She used to write back to my mother, so we got in touch with her and she came to see us. I was so glad to see her! She'd turned into a lovely lady, you'd think she was from a big posh house the way she dressed and the way she had her hair. She spoke real English because she'd been in England for years. (63)

Interestingly, as traveller women, life in Britain was far more welcoming and inclusive. She remarks that, "I went to school in Lancaster and I found that children and the teacher were so nice to me! They never once called me a bad name or anything, though they knew I was a traveller" (Joyce 72). By adopting, consciously or unconsciously, the modes of speech of the majority, Joyce finds an acceptance, unthinkable in Ireland. Britain seems to have provided something of a haven for the "outsiders" of Irish culture.

In a wholly different context, Elizabeth Hamilton writing from an Ascendancy perspective, writes perceptively of the sense of exclusion from both the host country and the country of origin,

> To be Anglo-Irish is not conducive to a sense of stability, in that to belong to two countries is to belong that much the less to each. It means in the republic of Eire, to be some degree an outsider—the spectator of a regime in which as a citizen of Britain one has no part; in England, to be at a distance from—not wholly identified with one's fellows; to be conscious—and proud too—of one's Irish origins; quick to take up the challenge for Ireland; resentful perhaps of that faintly patronising tone the English can adopt regarding any people other than themselves. (Hamilton 177)

Having lived life on the fringes of Irish society, characterised by the majority of the Irish population as being English, she finds that on arrival in England she is awarded a form of Irishness that serves to isolate her still further. She is subject to an exclusionary form of hybridity that serves to doubly disconnect her from both societies.

Life was difficult for migrant women in Britain and frequently they ended up in the more down at heel areas of British cities but even the shabby housing available represented a great leap forward in terms of modernity and creature comforts. In spite of these comforts, many migrants found themselves ghettoised, trapped in a rut of poorly paid and unstable employment. This brought its own psychological stresses that manifested themselves through alcoholism and violence. Violence towards women appears to have been extremely prevalent among the Irish migrant community. Pat O'Mara's *Diary of a Liverpool Slummy* documents sickening scenes

of domestic abuse towards himself, his mother and his siblings. The almost Dickensian poverty of immigrant Liverpool forms a backdrop to a story of appalling mental and physical cruelty. Alcohol abuse leading to poverty and physical abuse seems to have been endemic among the Irish working class community in Britain. Figures have indicated that levels of alcoholism and mental illness were proportionately greater in the Irish community than in the host population (Greenslade; Miller; Tilki). Tilki has described the engrained drinking culture among the working classes as "a culturally sanctioned coping strategy" (Tilki 255). All too often this public coping strategy seems to result in private violent expressions of disaffection. In spite of MacAmhlaigh's protestations about the number of women in public houses; heavy drinking remained a particularly masculine endeavour (7). Mangan paints searing and often disturbing portraits of the abuse suffered by her aunts at the hands of their husbands. These husbands are created in her memoir as personified stereotypes, drunken, violent and insipidly cruel men. Culturally inherited prohibitions on divorce and separation meant that marriage became for her aunts, less of a partnership and more of a life sentence,

> Mum's sisters didn't choose their husbands as wisely as she had done. Perhaps being so far from home and needing to belong steered them into the wrong arms. Or the terror of being left untaken, an old maid … marriage, be it good or bad, was a permanent mark, and rotten husbands were better than no husbands. Divorce was a Tammy Wynette song, not a real life option for them. Down the years, 'Stand by your man' became their sad anthem. (55)

The camaraderie of the work place often offered the migrant woman a substitute for home life with friendship networks taking the place of kinship

networks (Ryan "Navigating the Emotional Terrain" 304). Using examples culled from interviews with women who had been student nurses in the 1950s, Ryan identifies the pattern that "'England' can be transformed into knowable, familiar spaces, in a relatively short time, through the companionship of a network of 'Irish girls'" ("Navigating the Emotional Terrain" 303). Several of her interviewees recall a happy and carefree existence in the nurses' homes; these homes served as a half-way house for women, gradually easing them into a strange society and affording them behavioural models to draw from. These women found themselves in a safe and controlled environment that offered, at the same time, freedoms unimaginable at home. While these women were living under supervision in their lodgings, they could socialise, visit pubs, dances and meet who they liked, without fear of familial or parochial censure. They were earning wages that in many cases were far in excess of the average man's wage in Ireland. In this regard they represent an unarticulable threat to Irish masculinity, a challenge to the patriarchal discourse. Crowley, on hearing that she may be demobbed following the end of World War II, is horrified by the prospect of returning to Ireland with, "Prying, preaching, probing. I couldn't go back. Not to a factory. To compulsory mass. Chapels where you paid your entrance …" (139). This seems to be a recurrent idea in Irish women migrant reminiscences; having lived with a modicum of freedom, it became impossible to return to the country of origin.

As noted earlier, Irish women usually gave up work on starting a family and the Irish migrant family tended to conform at least outwardly to the stereotypes of traditional Catholic values (Akenson 203). Attitudes among Irish men towards women's place in the family followed traditional roles. The home for many migrants

became a microcosm of an idealised Ireland. It was a space that could be controlled and created as an approximation of Ireland. Motherhood was seen as the apex of Irish feminine life. The arrival of children often served to cement the family in Britain. Enda Delaney marks this when he says,

> The arrival of children signified a watershed in the life course of individuals living in Britain … Raising a family was widely perceived to be a significant determinant in expediting the inevitable process of 'settling down' and as one migrant aptly described 'Imperceptibly, you put down roots'. (69)

There seems to have been markedly different responses to the creeping permanence of migration. Men seem to have clung more to the idea of return, seeking happiness in geography while women seem to have been able to define home through family. Women adopted the attitude that "England was now their home, but nevertheless this did not diminish their sense of being Irish" (Delaney 207). Women cultivated the ability to conceptualise home as being a fluid and nebulous concept that could transcend generation and geography. Sara Ahmed has written that,

> Home is here, not a particular place that one simply inhabits, but more than one place: there are too many homes to allow place to secure the roots or routes of one's destination. It is not simply that the subject does not belong anywhere. The journey between homes provides the subject with the contours of a space of belonging, but a space which expresses the very logic of an interval, the passing through of the subject between apparently fixed moments of departure and arrival. (333)

Irish migrant women have multiple homes and multiple loci, allowing them to site themselves through fluid concepts like family rather than through immutable geographical parameters.

Louise Ryan in the introduction to her article "Navigating the Emotional Terrain of Families "Here" and "There": Women, Migration and the Management of Emotions" (2008) talks about how motherhood complicates the migrant experience saying that women were "involved in negotiating our transnational ties and obligations to family members "here" and "there" (302). She and her interviewees have also spoken about the loneliness that motherhood brought. It is a flashpoint for women, a moment where the reality of life without a familial support network becomes evident and often problematic. One of her interviewees speaks about resenting the couples that she sees with grandparents in tow. Childbirth brings home the isolation of migrant living and forces the migrant to find alternative means of coping (Ryan, "Migrant Women and Motherhood"). At the same time children provided a vehicle for integration for women that was, by and large, denied to men. Interaction with schools and doctors forced Irish women to confront the reality of living abroad. It showed the fiction of the imagined Irish community; eventually women were forced to interact with official Britain. School presented an opportunity for assimilation and was for many women, an unconscious step towards a new identity, "By providing England with educated, useful children, they felt they had in part redeemed themselves for turning up uninvited" (Mangan 227-8).

At the same time the onus fell on many Irish women to act as interlocutors between the state and the family. Working class women served as the official point of contact between and imagined Ireland and official Britain There is an inherent expectation that it falls to the mother to instil a sense of Irishness in her children, to "undertake the meshing of work and family systems" (Ryan "Migrant Women and

Motherhood" 296). Pat O'Mara spoke about how he gained a sense of Irishness in the home that was very much at odds with his British education,

> Our mothers and fathers, of course were unequivocal in their attitude—destroy England no less! But we children at school, despite the intense religious atmosphere of the Catholic school were rather patriotised and Britishised—until we got back to our shacks, where we were sternly Irishised. (71)

Boland has also written succinctly about the osmotic absorption of particular conceptions of Irishness,

> In one sense I was a captive audience. My childhood was spent in London. My image makers as a child therefore, were refractions of my exile: conversations overheard, memories and visitors. I listened and absorbed. For me, as for many another exile, Ireland was my nation long before it was once again my country. (128)

Transnational obligations also demanded that Irish women should stay in close contact with Ireland, maintaining links and rendering assistance when required and,

> In addition, it is important to acknowledge that transnational networks may not necessarily provide positive sources of support but instead may place heavy demands both financial and emotional, on migrants. (Ryan, "Migrant Women and Motherhood" 297)

There was a duty of care to family left behind, an assumption that there was an obligation to share the bounty, "Posting things home was the solemn emigrant duty. English newspapers, especially *The News of the World*, plus Turkish Delight and

Fry's Chocolate Cream topped with ten-bob notes were dispatched weekly in brown envelopes of various sizes" (Mangan 29). This was an arrangement that could often foster resentment for the migrant, placing them under financial pressure and creating an economic barrier to integration. These obligations required an emotional adjustment and, "as time passes migrants can come to adopt strategies that are 'spatially extensive' incorporating multiple members in diverse places'" (Ryan, Migrant Women and Motherhood" 298). Peggy Levitt has argued that, "many migrants gain more social power, in terms of leverage over people, property and locality, with respect to their homeland than they did before migrating" (1014). Often, Irish women found that as parents got older, responsibility for transnational care devolved to them. Trips to Ireland were an essential part of the migrant experience. Delaney makes reference to the sardonic comment, current among British employers in the 1950s, of "The Irish month—six weeks long" where the Irish would journey home and decide to extend the holiday, delaying the pain of leaving home for as long as possible (68). Maude Casey opens her novel *Over the Water* with the telling phrase "We live in England, but. We live in England, but all year long we are preparing for the journey home" (Casey 1). The duty of care was in some instances dealt with by bringing elderly and infirm parents over to Britain,

> Before they came to London, neither of them had ever travelled more than a few miles outside where they lived … They were both content to make the move to follow their families. "The life went out of me when they were all gone," said my grandma. My Mum once asked her if she missed her little house in Ireland. "I'd rather be anywhere than in those four empty walls," she replied, tears daring to fill her fiercely independent eyes. (Mangan 46)

The memoirs studied for this chapter tend to see return as a negative, with the writers recognising that life is materially better in Britain (Gray, *Women and the Irish Diaspora* 86-7). They seek ways to reconcile the conflict between belonging and becoming; with some using memoir as a vehicle to seek a means to preserve a sense of origin or nationality. There is a sense that existing tropes of Irishness were not applicable to Irish women, that traditional depictions of Irish femininity held little validity in the real world. Boland recognises this sense of disconnectedness, this nationally gendered invisibility, writing,

> In any new dispensation, the idea of a nation must seem an expendable construct. After all, it has never admitted women. Its flags and songs and battle cries, even its poetry, as I've suggested, make use of feminine imagery. But that is all. The true voice and vision of women are routinely excluded. (145)

Distance grants a visibility to Irish women, allowing them to move from the realm of glorified stereotype to more realistic roles. It also serves to foster an individualism, antithetical to exclusionary modes of patriarchal nationalism. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin characterises the study of Irish women's image through history as being the study of the gulf between image and lived experience. She also remarks that,

> Both the image of woman envisaged in the Irish constitution as housebound wife and mother and the revolutionary woman in the mould of Countess Markiewicz owe something to this myth making faculty. Both figures appear in a context in which the separation of a woman from her role, her sexual function, her background and her country itself can be discussed. (Ní Chuilleanáin 2)

By having no concrete recognisable role in the culture, Irish women are forced to adopt new modes of identification. Caught between stereotypes of dirt and purity, Irish migrant women must forge an independent identity commensurate to their surroundings. This was not to say that they cut all ties with home; rather that they redrew their relationship with home and suborned it to the needs of the next generation,

> My Mum and Dad and all their brothers and sisters came to this country with no sense of self importance. They well knew their place as the Invisibles, always grateful for the opportunities to work and for the healthcare and education for their children. (Mangan 227)

Lives were subtly carved in the overlapping boundaries between nations and precariously managed in the interfaces between two similar but disparate cultures.

Chapter Four:

Neither Fish Nor Flesh: Second-Generation Irish Memoir

This chapter will examine memoirs from second and third-generation Irish people in Britain, looking at the various interstices between the first generation migrant experience and those of their children and grandchildren. There are many evident commonalities between the two but migrant life-experiences are arguably more complex for subsequent generations. The stresses of living between two cultures are inescapable and more keenly felt. This is not to suggest, however, that it is a solely negative experience; living between cultures also offers opportunities denied to the native or the immigrant. It allows the subject to foreground different aspects of their ethnicity at different times, literally allowing them to have the best of both worlds. Second-generation memoirs tend to be more introverted and reflective, focusing on issues of identity and belonging. There is a recurrent striving for personal validation, a need to create an indisputably personal identity that allows admittance to and legitimation of, the world of their parents while also retaining links to the world of their peers. They offer a form of therapy for the author who can use the text as an attempt to reconcile the various competing strands of their disparate personalities into a contented whole self. They reflect a status that is at once central and peripheral. Central in that the children of migrants sit on the intersection between two spheres of nationality. Peripheral in that they inhabit a space that is neither here nor there, viewed with a certain amount of distrust by both communities. There are several recurring tropes in these memoirs with certain issues serving to isolate the subject from both origin and environment. Many of the memoirs are concerned with

the duality of the second-generation experience where the subject is privately Irish and publicly British. Lessons learned in the home must be weighed against the strictures of public life with the result that the children of migrants are forced to adapt and conform to differing circumstances. Identity is formed and reformed on the back of often conflicting emotions and there are flashpoints and fracture lines along the borders of belonging that see the children of migrants flip between the two sides of a hyphenated existence. Factors like religion, accent and music all have the power to destabilise precarious identities.

Until recently, there has been little scholarship on second-generation memoir. The publication, in recent years, of intimate and thoughtful texts, like John Walsh's *Falling Angels* and John Healy's *Galloway Street* have sparked an interest in this hitherto neglected field. Harte, Arrowsmith and Murray, among others, have been to the fore in bringing these and other memoirs to the notice of the academic community. Murray in his influential article "A Diasporic Vernacular" has identified many of the seminal texts in this field, offering the researcher a substantial base from which to explore the experiences of the second-generation subject. Memoir is a medium particularly suited to the articulation and indeed, construction, of second-generation identity. Gray, writing about the value of the autobiographical discipline, comments that, "These are liminal artists exploring the contradictions of Britishness, Englishness and Irishness from a perspective of inbetweenness and this highlights a third narrative of the Irish in Britain" ("Breaking the Silence" 26). She identifies the artificiality of life in the third space and the struggle to construct narratives that smooth the path towards belonging. In order to maintain the façade of belonging, "real" life needs to incorporate fictive elements. Harte also explores the

idea that autobiography affords the author the opportunity to create a story that is as much about self-enlightenment as it is about entertainment, "Second-generation identity formation is pre-eminently a matter of narrativity, of stories being told, just as autobiography itself is a rescripting of self" ("Somewhere Beyond" 299). The subject needs to convince themselves and the audience of their "authenticity", of their right to speak on Irish matters. For many of the authors, there is a feeling of transgressiveness, an intrusion on a sphere that influences, but doesn't admit, "The still small voice of conscience told me, this is none of your business. But it was my business. Family business. The legacy I'd come into. The love to which I owed my life" (Morrison 95). In Blake Morrison's case, his mother's Irishness was suborned to his father's Englishness, leaving a romanticised void that aches for resolution through the concreteness of textual explanation, "I didn't know what I was missing, and yet I missed it" (Morrison 311). Walter et al have advanced the idea that second-generation experience can, in the individual, cover a multitude of lived and inherited tropes, noting that some of their interviewees, "felt able to belong to several pasts simultaneously as they lived the experience of dwelling in displacement" (Walter et al, "Family Stories" 22). Memoir gives the author an opportunity to weave these strands and memories together into an approximation of a fulfilled self, achieving equilibrium between the polarities of nationality. It can be a fraught process, dogged by disappointments and disillusion, as they seek to interpose themselves on an emotional landscape that is familiar yet frequently defamiliarised. Harte characterises it as an on-going, reactive process that requires constant vigilance, remarking that, "For its second-generation subject, who can be conceived as being doubly displaced from origins, self-improvisation is a dubious birthright and 'home' an endless re-citing and re-siting of an 'ex-isled self'" ("Somewhere Beyond" 299).

Trapped between two very different cultures, the author must examine the trappings of both, and create an identity salvaged from the detritus of personal and inherited memories.

Sociologists have pinpointed the drive to belong as being one of the primary stimuli for second-generation migrants. They inhabit an invidious position that sees them straddle a fine line between the culture of origin and the host culture. Isolated from both cultures, to a certain degree, they are left, "oscillating between mimicry and subversion" (Harte, "Somewhere Beyond" 299-300). Tony Murray uses a similar image to convey a sense of the oppositional nature of competing national identities that sees the children of migrants, "Condemned forever to oscillate between the attractions and antipathies of both cultures" (Murray, "A Diasporic Vernacular" 82). This sense of being neither fish nor flesh is continually explored through second-generation memoir. The memoirists are, "Genetically Irish but environmentally English", a position that can cause a large degree of psychological tension (McLoone 25). There has been a number of works that deal with the psychological fall-out of performative living and it has been proven that second-generation Irish in Britain are more prone to alcoholism and mental illness than the children of British natives(Greenslade; Hickman; Tilki). Living between two cultures, can leave the subject stranded on the outside, cut off from wholly embracing either culture and never achieving the totality of selfhood that comes so naturally to the indigenous child. There are forced into a position where they adopt, adapt or reject aspects of their personalities to maintain a fiction of indigineity, "If Ireland is Home, I wonder, what about this place? What about Galloway Street and Scotland? Do they not count?" (Boyle 1). Trapped between two binary identities, the

subject constantly flits between the two as circumstance demands. This requires a constant effort to maintain a chameleon-like invisibility and requires vigilance on behalf of the subject, "In Achill I was different because I was Scottish and now I'm back in Scotland I'm different because I sound Irish. It seems to me I'm a foreigner wherever I go" (Boyle 195).There is a constant need to "perform" and to react to external expectations of self. The authors are aware that they are different from their family and at the same time different from their peers and that there is a need to construct a façade of belonging, "I have to talk a bit posh in Ireland or they'd never understand" (Walsh 17). Walsh must inhabit and project their stereotypes of "typical" British behaviour, flattening out his accent, cleaning it of traces of working class London, literally paying lip service to his status as the child of socially and financially successful migrants.

Artificiality is an integral part of the second-generation's psychological make-up. Walter et al have commented that, "Hybridity, in which both placed and displaced identities are held in tension, their expression varying contextually in space and time" ("Family Stories" 212). Identity and the articulation of selfhood are dependent on circumstance and the second-generation subject must be able to don the protective mantle of the company they keep,

> I, who am not Irish, feel I am being sucked into a new Gaelic identity. And yet I've spent forty-odd years growing up with this Irish strain, this Celtic gene that invaded my English soul at a million turns. While this figure who did most to turn me into this curious hybrid lies dying beside me. I begin to remember the years I'd spent being both English and Irish, the constant switchback of my relationship with both countries, the condition of being

between the two cultures my mother straddled like the consummate actress she was; her's, my father's, my sister's and my own endless falling between sense and sensibility, between south London and the west of Ireland. (Walsh 31)

It is interesting to note that he sees the terms Gaelic and Celtic as interchangeable; offering them as signifiers of something alien and invasive yet exciting and exhilarating.

Belonging is a complex negotiation that requires the subject's identity remain in a constant state of flux. Walsh captures the conflicting duality that informs the second-generation experience remarking that, "At home I was the small Englishman, regarding the Irish hordes with curiosity and some alarm. At school, by contrast, I was the class 'Mick'" (93). Identity and ethnicity are, for Walsh, prescribed by his peers and, "His claims to an English soul are invaded by his Irish background" (Gray, "Curious Hybridities" 214). The desire to fit in is strong and requires the individual to supress aspects of personality in order to blend with the herd. Arrowsmith commented that, "Second generation experience necessitates an awareness of the constructedness and hybridity of identities" ("Plastic Paddies" 42). Performativity is a necessary part of belonging for the children of migrants, adopting modes and habits different to those at home, or conversely, attempting to adapt to a private world at variance with the public persona. It was a difficult process that often saw the individual cut off from full acceptance in either community.

So I headed towards my teenage years as a puzzle both to my parents and to myself—confusedly pubertal, easily embarrassed by displays of Celtic waywardness and British superiority, cowed by the ever-present priests but

with a small streak of London defiance growing inside. Familiarity with Irish Catholics was breeding terrible scepticism. I was becoming a fully paid-up member of the tribe, without actually buying any of its beliefs and traditions. It was an uncomfortable place to be. I was like an outsider at a square dance, one who knows all the moves through constant repetition, but dreads being asked to join in. (Walsh 115)

Walsh feels doubly inauthentic, stranded between Irishness and Englishness, yearning to fit in rather than to stand out but psychologically unable to choose which strand of identity to foreground (Arrowsmith, "Plastic Paddies" 35-6). The emergence into the public world causes a sharp delineation between the cultures. What was acceptable and normal within the precincts of the family home, is suddenly challenged by a new set of codes and modes of belonging. Idiom and accent mark children as outsiders and this can lead to bullying and alienation. John Healy recounts in his memoir *The Grass Arena* (1998),

It was a tough area of London. The locals had no time for foreigners and although I was born in London and mixed and played with children my own age group but their elder brothers (sometimes by six or seven years) would verbally and physically attack me. (Healy 4)

For those that did assimilate and become audibly British, there was a risk of alienating themselves from their families, "As my accent got more pronounced in my early twenties, he [his father] would repeat things I'd said; the word "*aaact*ually" drove him into paroxysms of contempt, twirling an invisible curly moustache like a squadron leader (Walsh 218). For parents, buoyed up with the notion their exile from Ireland was a temporary

phenomenon, their visibly British children were a reminder of the
permanence and finality of emigration,

As for myself, I felt uncomfortable when addressed by friends of my
parents—not through shyness, so much as having the wrong voice with
which to speak. All the Irish voices that nagged and neighed and trumpeted
across the table had a conviction about them, a twang of passion, an
explosive certainty that just rolled over my own puny attempts at
conversation. I writhed with Englishness. I sounded adenoidal, stuffy and
slow beside their quicksilver, allusive chat. I knew one had to perform but if I
couldn't do it their way, I wasn't going to do it at all. (Walsh 67)

He is painfully aware that he is different from his parents and withdraws from them,
choosing to embrace difference as a form of protective mantle. Contrarily, making
the choice to imitate parents can also end up an isolating experience. Following a
long sojourn on Achill, John Boyle's mother is delighted to hear his newly acquired
Irish accent, marvelling, "I can't get over it, she keeps saying. He's pure plain
spoken" (192). He has reconnected with her idyll, becoming an Irish child, free from
what she sees as a "fancy" accent. He, however, is then less than impressed to find
that his Irishness is not appreciated in Scotland, with his father and friends finding it
a source of irritation and ridicule, leaving him to opine that, "It's a hard thing to
come back home and feel like a stranger in your own country." (195).

Harte has explored the notion that fitting in needs to be accompanied by a
concordant cutting out, arguing that in order to gain admission to the ranks of the
hegemony, the subject must engage in "self-amputation" and "self-erasure"
("Somewhere Beyond" 297). The subject needs to cut their cloth along socially

acceptable lines if they desire to advance. Walsh recounts how during the IRA's bombing campaign in the 1970s, right wing elements in the British establishment and media suggested forcibly repatriating Irish citizens. His father is horrified to be constructed as an immigrant, seeing the term as a pejorative,

> 'Immigrants' he said, as if the word had been 'criminals'. *Immigrants.* The bloody nerve of it ... He hated it. He was the local Battersea G.P., for Christ's sake. He was a man of stature and learning, held in respect by his patients, by the community of the sick, not some dubious alien who had arrived in the cargo area of a long haul truck. Immigrant indeed. (219-220)

As a white middle-class doctor he is horrified to be constructed as Other, labelled in the same category as immigrants from Jamaica or India. Walsh is uncomfortably aware of the difference between his status and that of his father, "My father was suddenly transformed in front of me, from an exile … into an immigrant" (221). He is forced to confront both his father's alienation from, and his own membership of, the alienating community. It is an insurmountable difference between them; they find that they are members of two different tribes. For children of native Irish speakers the difficulties are exacerbated,

> In fact those Connemara exiles had a problem which faces all emigrant communities. Their children were growing up English speakers, and therefore were not having the communication they needed with their parents who still used Irish among themselves at home. It was a fact which worried the teachers and priests in that Huddersfield. It was a form of alienation that they did not want to see develop—a ghetto situation on the kitchen floor— the final irony of the Irish emigration. (D. Foley 85)

Nationality is fluid and even if the subject chooses to reject it, it can prove surprisingly resilient, "But you can't shake off Ireland quite so easily" (Walsh 15). In "Curious Hybridities", Gray looks at *Falling Angels* and develops the point that the difference between Walsh and his mother is one of agency (214-5). She could choose to hybridise but he is forced by birth and circumstance into life on the fringes. He is at once attracted by Ireland and repulsed by it. Harte has explored the idea that there were "A range of accommodation strategies to negotiate the deeply engrained anti-Irish and anti-Catholic prejudices of the middle classes", including tactics such as self-effacement and self-erasure ("Somewhere Beyond" 297-8). This too, could prove problematic for second-generation children, who confuse these camouflaging tactics with supineness, "Yet the Protestant (and father's son) in me is tempted to link her passivity to a part of a Catholic worship—the (unthinking?) obedience demanded by the Mass" (Morrison 259). He links her behaviour to a set of inherited prejudices that construct the Irish as a lumpen, homologous mass of people, ill-equipped for rationality. Walsh too, seems to have inherited these modes of thinking, when his acquired Englishness rails at the fecklessness of the Irish, "O please, I thought, this is so typical of Ireland—so keen on making do, so hopelessly given up to mediocrity, so terribly not good at things" (243). These attitudes were congenital in British society and were absorbed at the level of public society by the children of migrants. Racial and religious stereotyping was prevalent on television, radio and in the print media of the seventies and eighties and these crude stereotypes have proved enduring and pervasive.

McLoone put forward the idea that, "The Irish … have always been Britain's 'other' and these feelings of being the outsider and the victims of majority distain

were passed on from one generation to another" (26). What McLoone doesn't take into account is that subsequent generations may not recognise their victimhood, but instead, absorb and promulgate the distain of their parent's heritage. This holds particularly true in those times when, "The national stories of Britain and Ireland continue to clash, this decentred knowledge has an on-going political significance for people of Irish descent in Britain" (Walter et al, "Family Stories" 2).The IRA bombing campaigns of the 1930s and 40s and particularly those in the 1970s led to waves of anti-Irish sentiment in Britain, "My father and mother were Irish immigrants … our neighbours on both sides were Londoners and, being immigrants, we were treated like lepers" (Healy 2). Angela Moran remarked that, "Being Irish in Britain from 1975 was often a private celebration, kept secret from those beyond the local community" (160). At such times Irishness was constructed in the British media as being inherently violent, savage and backward. It became politic for the Irish community to cultivate a degree of invisibility and equally it became easier for many second-generation Irish to disavow their heritage. Revolted by civilian bombings and seemingly endless, daily reports of internecine conflict, second-generation Irish often chose to foreground their Britishness as a bulwark against the "backwardness" of their Irish roots. Draconian legislation in the form of the Prevention of Terrorism Act meant that views on Irish affairs were only articulated within the confines of the Irish community. In those circumstances it is easy for invisibility and silence to become habit and for the Irish aspects of identity to be completely subsumed.

Walter et al have commented that ethnicity constructed through nationalism is inherently constructed along emotional lines ("Family Stories" 210). Physical

geography is constantly at odds with the imagined space. Eve Walsh-Stoddard noted, "Defining home and belonging through place, marks discourses of indigeneity, of a close tie between subjectivity and a concrete place" (148). Ireland as "home" should work to exclude the children of migrants but instead offers the ultimate imagined space, a chance to belong to the semi-mythical world that their parents inhabit,

> And when John Fayden told him I was Maggie Sweeney's son from Scotland, the old man said, "By God he's a Sweeney alright by the cut of him". And I didn't know why but it makes me feel proud that I've come back to me mammy's home after all these years and people here think I look like her. (Boyle 158)

He is thrilled to insert himself in an unbroken lineage and to achieve a form of "tribal endorsement" (Murray, "A Diasporic Vernacular" 82). He has embedded himself into an Irish traditional family, despite his outward Englishness. Seán MacStiofáin in his *Memoirs of an Irish Revolutionary* (1975) is amazed and attracted in equal measure by the communalism of Irish life where, "Everybody knew everybody. In England you could live twenty years beside someone and never be asked inside the front door. Here in Ireland I found this contrast astonishing" (45). These feelings of belonging have strict parameters though and a recurring theme in second-generation memoir is of the faint but firm exclusion from "authentic" Irish life, "Everybody seemed to know everybody else; they greeted each other in a most friendly manner. They were friendly towards me too, but I wasn't really a part of the community, so I was more or less treated as a poor visitor" (Healy 56). John Bird in his memoir *Some Luck* (2002) recounts how he is continually reminded of his status as exotic outsider, accepted into the community but held at a certain remove also, "I couldn't understand anyone unless they spoke slowly. My grandmother would laugh because

I didn't understand her. Then she'd call me 'a little Cockney' and laugh even more" (19). He is mostly the same but subtly different, tainted by a foreign strain. Searching for similarities and belonging often only serves to highlight differences, "I had chased my Celtic soul down Dublin's long streets. I had longed to find my Irish self over there. Instead I'd just become more English—fastidiously unable to accept a life whose priorities were different" (Walsh 215). Again, Walsh's use of the word Celtic suggests that he is seeking a romanticised and fantastical Ireland that remains forever out of reach. Gray has explained the distance maintained between the "real" Irish and the second-generation as being created by inherently false impressions of each other's lives. It is built on stylised versions of Irishness that have little to do with everyday life, "The very condition of being 'in-between' is rendered inauthentic, a plastic identity that cannot but undermine cultural identity and cultural transmission" (Gray, "Curious Hybridities" 214). Identity is formed on the past tradition and not on present culture with the second-generation migrant chasing a, "ghost of authentic belonging" (Harte "Migrancy" 235). Inhabiting a position of *über* Irishness based around tropes and stereotypes drawn from the kitschier end of the Irishness spectrum, the children of migrants leave themselves open to the, "Familiar implication that the second generation can never be more than an imperfect copy of the originals from which they derive" (Harte, "Somewhere Beyond" 300).

Arriving into maturity and adult years could often spark a renewal of interest in Ireland, which could, once more, become a site of personal possibilities. For those seeking some form of catharsis of belonging, or a reconciling of the various selves, it offered an opportunity to construct an imagined Ireland that could grant a sense of personal completion. These imagined Irelands were drawn from a tradition acquired

from the previous generation—one that sought to portray a romantic Ireland that was the antithesis of industrial Britain,

> Somewhere Sophie had picked up the notion that being Irish made her more exciting, more interesting, more something-or-other than being a boring old English, Anglo Saxon person, minding her Ps and Qs and being sensible. My vestigially Celtic heart leapt in its bosom. (Walsh 245)

Gray has identified certain elements that open second-generation identity to charges of plasticity or inauthenticity. She looks at the à la carte nature of ethnicity that sees the subject appropriate the positive virtues of inherited culture, "Religion, class and the crack—a self-conscious assemblage of (available) bits and pieces that make up something approximating an Irish identity" (Gray, "Curious Hybridities" 216.) "Self-consciousness" suggests an agency, a choosing of, or striving for, an identity that resists concrete definition. Identity requires performativity and personal input in equal measure, "Irishness can be located variously in the specificity of place, one's grandparent's blood or the ephemeral unity of thousands of people cheering a soccer team of mixed accents and mixed race" (Stoddard 147). It is a process that is built on banks of fiction, aspiration and longing. Inherited nostalgic tropes tended to play on the naturalness of Irish life versus the artificiality of Britishness. John Healy's account of his initial impressions of Ireland, exemplifies the tendency for the second-generation to search for a mythic Ireland where the spiritual side can be given full reign,

> There's a sort of calmness that seems to come out of the grass and the ditches and the mossy banks. Lonely mists that suddenly spread over the fields to give an old feeling, cosy and warm. Always a lot of work to be done everywhere. The bogs are very ancient. The people, especially the women

> with their delicate skin, soft as the misty climate, give the warmest welcome to friend and stranger alike. Each time I returned these feelings became stronger. (6)

Bogs are continually referred to and utilised to lend a patina of authenticity to memory. It is a marker of how pervasive and lasting, stereotypes can be. Declan Kiberd has recorded how Elizabethan moss-troopers first coined the term bog-trotters and it has served as a pejorative term for Irish people since then (21). Morrison's father teases his wife about going home to Christmas with the "peasants in the peat bog" (292). Bogs are used as a symbol of wildness or primitivism, forming a physical bulwark against a psychological Englishness,

> Of all my memories this was the happiest—lying in a sleeping bag, reading *Tristram Shandy* in the dying glow of the turf bricks, as shadows flung themselves about the wall, and spiders abseiled onto the window ledges, and I lay with a martial cloak around me, the smell of turf and hot whiskey in my nostrils, drowning before the Celtic hearth, lost to England, drenched in Irishness at last. (Walsh 160)

Walsh finds authenticity within stereotype—he creates an Ireland that to the casual eye smacks of a Bórd Fáilte advertising campaign but is real to him. He finds his own version of Irishness that he can be comfortable with and creates his own tradition, an immutably personal conflation of what he understands to be Irishness. Harte characterises it as Walsh's "romantic mythopoesis" and argues that it reveals "The power of an archaising impulse over his sense of 'authentic' Irishness, here conceived as an essence that withstands and transcends historical change ("Somewhere Beyond" 299). Walsh needs his Ireland to be immutable and inscrutable, offering an anchor against the uncertainties of life.

Seán MacStiofáin offers insight into the importance that romanticised homelands can offer to those caught between two cultures,

> It was a deeply emotional experience for me from the moment I set out from Paddington Station … When we got off the boat at Rosslare it was just daylight. I was able to get a glimpse of the country I had waited so many years to see. 'At last,' I said to myself. As I stepped ashore, I realised what Irish people born or brought up in England or America had meant when they tried to describe such moments in their lives. But Mary gave me no time to think any more about it. "Come on" she said, "We'll never get a seat on the train. (MacStiofáin 45)

His girlfriend's pragmatism is at odds with MacStiofáin's misty-eyed sense of reconnection. His Irish girlfriend is concentrating on getting home to Cork, while he is intent on finding Home in Ireland. Their versions of Ireland are different, but both equally valid. Her Ireland is a place drawn from direct lived memory while his is drawn from inherited memory. Home is a shifting concept, crafted along idealised lines where peace and belonging are subtly intertwined, "I went into a pub on a bridge overlooking the fairly fast-flowing Boyle River. It felt really cosy and relaxed. Everything seemed to have slowed down" (Healy 48). Arrowsmith commented that, "The materials of second-generation identity are taken to be the narratives which are passed down, but which are inevitably idealised, distorted, shaped by the experiences, desires, repressions of those who tell the tale" (42). John Boyle's Achill Island is also a nostalgic Eden, a mystic place that offers the promise of authentic belonging,

> Squinting up the slope into freak winter sunlight, I saw the hillside striped dark with the silhouettes and shadows of these strangers with familiar faces, my first, second and third cousins, my uncles and aunts by blood and by marriage, by highway and byway, by hook and by crook, for better for worse: all the Sweeneys, Cooneys, Corrigans and Faydens of Achill and it seemed to me at that moment, the ghosts of all the ancestors we shared. (Boyle 298)

It is a particularly stylised description, with more than a touch of Joycean flourish. He seeks refuge in cliché, the dyadics of "highway and byway", "hook and crook", and "for better for worse" are all distinctively, aurally, Irish phrases, designed to soothe the path towards belonging. The litany of names has a soporific or incantatory effect that sites Boyle on an unbroken line with a mythic past, "I was going back to a place (Achill) that had left its mark on me since I was a boy of ten" (9). It is an attempt to align himself with a pre-literate past, a doomed attempt to meld the strands of pre-modernity and modernity. Terry Eagleton neatly encapsulates the notion that the journey from where the emigrant started to where their descendants are is one way and that the gap between the two is wide. He remembers his grandfather, noting that he was illiterate and goes on to recount that, "My mother's mother was only slightly more gifted in the literary realm. She once sent me a note when I was in hospital which ended, 'Terry, you are a better writer nor me', a self-referential utterance worthy of a French symbolist" (*The Gatekeeper* 121). Expectation, situation and education keep second-generation subjects at an unbridgeable remove from their forebears.

Music looms large in many second-generation memoirs and is used at various times to demonstrate either belonging, or the impossibility of belonging, "You had to

sing. Singing was mandatory … Not to sing was to be English" (Walsh 72). It is an exclusionary audibility; the songs that were sung had message and meaning that was lost on Walsh, who ruefully observes that, "In the Irish songs that played in the background of your life—the second chamber of your burgeoning sensibility—the words were important" (77). The "burgeoning sensibility" is the unacknowledged side of his self that is held in abeyance; the quixotic part of his nature that conflicts with what he sees as his English qualities of solidity and logic. Hilary Mantel, writing in her memoir *Giving Up The Ghost* (2003) about the cacophony of competing tunes in her head, mentions two tunes from very different traditions. *The British Grenadiers* vies with *The Croppy Boy,* reflecting through music, her divided loyalties, "My aged father did me deny/ And the song he sang was the croppy boy" (3). National sensibilities are unconsciously implanted through aural means and can remain dormant for long periods. Pat O'Mara acknowledges the power of music to bring out his sense of Irishness, "The sound of a patriotic Irish air will make me want to get out my shillelagh for the old wrongs of Ireland; but the moment the music is over, common sense will warn me to put it back" (O'Mara 71). There is a synaesthesic quality to Irishness that allows it to be conjured through music. Tony Murray, while analysing *Galloway Street,* observes that,

> Accent, music and the sound of names, therefore, all play a role in the audible expression of Boyle's allegiance to Scotland, echoing the way in which, in the early pages of the book, other forms of sensory perception such as touch and smell played a similar role in the comprehension of his immediate family and environment as a small child. (79)

Music can be used as a means of reconnecting with an embryonic sense of belonging. Half remembered lyrics spark remembered or imagined memories of

home. There has been a renewed interest in musical expressions of shared nationality in recent years with scholars such as Martin McLoone and Sean Campbell, exploring the influence second-generation Irish musicians have had on British culture. They have focused on how bands like The Pogues, The Smiths and The Beatles influenced and were in turn influenced by, modern British culture, exemplifying hybridity at work.

Religion has proven a flashpoint for many second-generation migrants to Britain. Hickman and Walter have observed that, "The 'imagined community' of the British was a Protestant community" and this is certainly borne out by second-generation memoir, which continually iterates a sense of otherness engendered by membership of an "alien" religion (Hickman and Walter 9). Irishness and Catholicism have always been seen as linked terms in Britain with religion used to subtly connote undesirability and impute suspect loyalties. Protestantism achieves an epitomic status, inextricably linked to "true" Britishness. Inhabiting a space outside this dominant discourse, means that identity must be formed through mimicry or alternatively, by direct opposition to the hegemony,

> I grew up, then, amidst secrecy and doubleness, absolute refusal, Gothic grotesquerie, gestures of extremity, ginger-tufted virgins, rituals of asceticism and self-immolation, death in life. No doubt all this helped to shape my politics later, if only because it was as far from the world of middle class Protestant England as the mountains of Afghanistan (Eagleton, *The Gatekeeper* 31).

Catholicism is outside the norm and carries a taint of foreignness, isolating the second generation, not only from their peers but also bringing them into conflict with

their families. Eagleton described it that, "To be Catholic was not really to be English, rather as being a Jew was not" (*The Gatekeeper* 33). Second-generation Irish grew up in and were educated in a system that foregrounded Protestantism as the religion of progress and rationalism. Historic prejudices render the migrant somehow suspect and "growing up Catholic still sets children apart from their national Protestant norm" (Walter et al 5). Gray further develops this point stating, "For second-generation Irish in Britain, their Irish identities are read as working class and their parents are judged by English middle-class norms" ("Curious Hybridities" 216). They are doubly excluded from the discourses and centres of power being both poor and foreign. There were however gradations of respectability even within these religious strictures. Terry Eagleton shrewdly identifies the difference between upper-class "respectable" English Catholicism and the more suspect Catholicism of the immigrant community, "The majority of English Catholics, then as now, were of Irish working-class stock rather than cronies of Evelyn Waugh" (*The Gatekeeper* 11).

Religion, for the Irish migrant population and their children, was as much an ascribed badge of signification as it was an ideological choice, an adjectival signifier that bound the terms Irish and Catholic together on the fringes of respectability. Nationality and religion were bound together in stereotypes that were maintained by both host and migrant communities,

> McCormack was an Irish navvy who lived close to the convent, and a notorious lapsed catholic. Even in those pious days, being a lapsed Catholic was almost acceptable … It was a convenient label for ensuring that you

never actually left the Church; it simply shifted you from one ontological

category to another. (Eagleton, *The Gatekeeper* 10-11)

If this sense of otherness engendered a sense of community for first-generation

migrants; it could, in turn, have a destabilising effect on their children. Social

conditions and mores dictated that the practices of religion were more loosely

observed in Britain. John Bird paints an interesting pen portrait of the differences

between his family and the more "traditional" family of a childhood friend, "There

were pictures of Jesus and our Lady everywhere. Her family were Irish, but they

were Holy Irish, as my mother called them: Irish people who took God very

seriously. They were different to us" (106). The ties of religion that were so much a

part of performative living for new migrants, became loosened as they adapted to

lives lived in the crucible of modernity. For the children and grandchildren of

migrants, religion became a badge of belonging that was more symbolic than

theological. It allowed an à la carte Catholicism that saw people identify with the

religion as a mode of origin and not as a way of life. Eagleton proclaimed that "A

Catholic aversion to subjectivism went along with a working-class allergy to

emotional ostentation and both were underpinned by an Irish devotion to tribe rather

than the individual (*The Gatekeeper* 31). It saw the dilution and adaptation of

Catholicism on non-hierarchical terms. Walter identifies how religious dereliction is

a harbinger of modernity, commenting that, "This secularization has accompanied

the increasing maturity of the second generation 'second wave' Irish community, and

represents a new form of social identity" ("Ethnicity and Distribution" 142).

Many second generation Irish in Britain, particularly those from mixed

marriages, found the Catholicity of their parents unnerving and some were violently

repulsed by it. Blake Morrison's *Things My Mother Never Told Me* (2004) is an extraordinarily honest if brutal account of his attempts to come to terms with his mother's underplayed Irishness. She had what he described as, "An Irish Catholic girlhood that was all. Ordinary enough but not to me who found it both enchanting and fairly repellent" (167). Morrison is programmed to see Britishness and in particular Englishness as the apex of human civilisation, writing at one point of the conflict between the two sides of biological inheritance, "I felt torn in half—my father, English humanist, ruling my head; my mother, Irish Catholic ruling my heart" (189). He privileges the English side of his personality as providing rationality; a throwback to the Victorian ideals of Renan that sought to masculinise the coloniser and feminise the colonised. He tells how his father embarked on a Gradgrindean mission to prod his mother towards rationality, "Brashly pragmatic, he plans to banish her Catholic illogic. To deprogramme her. And to batter her with facts, facts, facts" (177). Catholicism and by extension, Irishness, is seen as being irrational, quixotic and ultimately inhabits a position of inferiority. His mother is embarrassed by her origins, seeing her parents' fecundity as being innately damaging to her social position, "Why the silence? Why not say she was one of the twenty or at least thirteen. Perhaps the awkwardness was that such numbers advertised her Irishness" (Morrison 22). There is also a latent fear that he will be socially scarred by his unwitting relationship with Catholicism, "War, films, books, bed, birth control—the curse of her Catholicism tainted everything (180). Morrison struggles to equate his lively, intelligent mother with a religion that he finds repugnant on many levels. He is aware that he has been socially programmed to find difference distasteful, "Where did the sectarianism come from ... in part it was simply the language of bourgeois Britain. Hatred of Catholics was endemic to its modern mercantile class—hatred of

blacks, Jews and homosexuals too" (187). John Walsh is also perplexed by what he sees as his mother's craven deference to the clergy,

> 'Father is speaking. Let's all listen to this carefully,' and I would cringe for her, and my smiling, indulgent real father as well. Such total acceptance of priestly infallibility wasn't just a denial of the spirit of the time, it was a denial of the forceful, determined, tough-bunny, argumentative woman against whom I battled throughout my teenage years. I couldn't understand the subservience with which she greeted the priest's mundane pronouncements. (Walsh 111)

Eagleton describes his grandmother as "a kind clerical groupie, and the idea that a priest would speak well of her to others yielded her a supreme, almost libidinal pleasure" (*The Gatekeeper*118). There was a palpable and unbridgeable gap between the two generation's experiences and expectations of religion,

> Her viewpoint was forged in absolute, unswerving, doctrinaire Irish Catholicism. Mine was a stubborn, rebellious, inchoate English bloody-mindedness, a refusal to be told what to do by a behavioural system that seemed to have nothing to do with me. Somewhere between Rome and Ireland, it seemed, a list of rules had been invented specifically to condemn a lot of things that, to my English eyes, seemed perfectly all right. (Walsh 111)

Irish-born parents were anxious to preserve at least elements of their own culture and so, "When children reached primary school age, proximity to Catholic schools was valued highly" (Walter, "Ethnicity and Distribution" 142). Catholic schooling allowed the children of migrants to gain an approximation of the education that their parents received in Ireland but there were several important differences.

While the personnel teaching in the schools were overwhelmingly Irish, the syllabus they taught was immutably British. It has been remarked that these schools concentrated on turning out Catholics not Irishmen (Harte, "Somewhere Beyond" 295). Eagleton caustically observed that, "The task of these raw-boned, huge-handed Brothers, themselves refugees from small farms in Clare or Kerry, was to wipe the last traces of bog from our souls and pack us off into middle-class England" (*The Gatekeeper* 38). O'Mara reveals how the myth of national homogeneity was promulgated by the British education system,

> The British always won wars—not the English, but the British—giving the impression that we were all more or less brothers under the skin, the Irish, the English, the Welsh and the Scotch. We were the kingpins; and we were always in the right—these are the straight, patriotic impressions that remain. (O' Mara 70).

John Walsh's *Falling Angels* also comments on how emergence from the cocoon of family, forces the second-generation migrant to adopt the trappings of the host culture,

> When I was small, I had a Galway accent as thick as turf. By the time I was eight or nine, it had mostly been flattened. The process that takes small boys from a score of different backgrounds and pestles them together until they emerge as homogenous alumni of the English education system had worked its way with my accent; I now spoke a charming, rather highfalutin' English from which most of the traces of shebeen and shamrock had been eliminated. (Walsh 9)

It is interesting to note the negative stereotypes that Walsh draws on to illustrate his process of assimilation. He infantilises Irish culture, drawing on *Punch* staples, in an

attempt, perhaps, to lessen the psychological blow of rejecting the culture of his parents. Walter et al. posited that the entry into primary education marked, for the second-generation, a seminal divergence from the lives of their parents, "At school age, most markedly, second-generation children are thrust into the public sphere where this (Irish) culture is not represented or may be missing altogether" ("Family Stories" 201). The children of migrants learn different histories and different geographies than their parents learned, with the result that they form radically different outlooks. The focus shifts from Irish to British modes and views and there were often glaring differences between the two. Pat O'Mara spoke about how he managed his multiple, competing identities, "My mental prejudices today as an adult, work something like this; ferocious, sacrificial Irish-Catholic (die for Ireland's freedom) first; ferocious sacrificial, patriotic Britisher second; and patient wondering dreamer third" (71). Schizophrenic attitudes like these, towards nationality and belonging, could have a destabilising effect on the mental health of the second-generation.

An engrained British superiority complex, together with an attendant supposition of the natural inferiority of the Irish, meant that many second-generation Irish grew up with conflicting emotions about their acquired heritage. Irishness could, at one and the same time, foster feelings of attraction and repulsion. Second-generation Irish teenagers were often embarrassed by their audibly different Irish parents. The teenage impulse is, by and large, to blend in and not stand out and so their parents visibility and audibility could cause tension and resentment, "How come our family always has to be different. Why can we never just be ordinary like other people?" (Boyle 129). Boyle illustrates the psychological trauma that can be

triggered by competing or conflicting identities, "I stand there listening but I hardly hear a word he's saying. I'm ashamed; to tell the truth I'm ashamed of my daddy. It's a rotten feeling because I love him as well though" (217). He loves his father as a man, but not as an Irishman. His father's foreignness causes a distance between them as it taints Boyle's own status with his peers. His father is outside the pale of British society, markedly different, and as Boyle desperately wants acceptance to society, he must reject his father. Adoption of one set of values often requires the rejection of another set and for some migrants this caused deep rooted, if unarticulated, antipathy towards Ireland. Occupying a position of inferiority within the binary relationship, the influence of Irishness can be felt as constituting an unwelcome intrusion into the lives of the second-generation. John Walsh describes how his life was dominated and shaped by the Irish community in Britain,

> I had Ireland and the Irish. They were everywhere. Irish things, Irish people, Irish faces, Irish songs, Irish voices, Irish names, Irish drink, Irish newspapers, Irish gossip, Irish tales, Irish woe, Irish exile—it permeated the life I lived in Battersea, it hung around in a great green fug. (Walsh 58)

The word "fug" with its connotations of dirt and slovenliness reveal that he is not immune to the negative cultural stereotyping that was endemic in Britain of the 1970s and 1980s. He draws on, "hegemonic images of Irish laziness and poverty" (Arrowsmith, "Plastic Paddies" 37). He returns again to images of dirt and poverty with, "Irishness got in your hair and under your fingernails" (58). Walsh is conditioned to see Irishness as being the lesser part of his heritage, as something slightly creeping and sinister. John Boyle also learns osmotically that there is something repulsive about being Irish,

Our daddy's manners at the table are terrible. He can't help it, I suppose, he

left school when he was twelve and had to go out working … And his nose is

all beat and bashed from fights in a pub when he was a young man so he

can't breathe right. He's only a labourer and he has to work outside in all

weathers in the muck and the wet, so sometimes you feel a bit sorry for him.

But it can also be a dead scunner when you're trying to eat your dinner.

(Boyle 135)

It is a piece of condescension in which the comedy is overwhelmed by an almost

unbearable air of sadness and tragic distance—distance between the migrant and his

child. Both are trapped between cultures, but Boyle is forced towards the realisation

that his life is different. He sees that he and his father reside on different rungs of the

social ladder. At a young age, he is divorced him from his father's experiences of

migration; they have nothing to do with his own conceptions of himself as a Scot.

The only surety proffered by second generation memoir is the insecurity of

the authorial position. Identity proves to be a labile and fluxive concept, open to

often conflicting external and internal triggers. The authors seek a resolution of the

disparate threads of their lives and hope to achieve a totality of selfhood but it is an

impossible pursuit. There is no one correct path to belonging or authenticity. Instead,

the author needs to react and adapt to time and circumstance. It is a dissonant

existence where identity is never wholly personal and is always subject to

governance or censure by others. Even at a personal level, conscious choices can be

subject to the capricious influences of half remembered songs, stories and snatches

of conversation. Carefully rehearsed and rigidly held beliefs and modes of behaviour

can be quickly undone by seemingly ephemeral inconsequentialities. Ultimately, the

best that second-generation authors can hope to achieve through memoir is a textual explanation for, and partial negation of, the isolating duality that results from living between Ireland and Britain.

__Conclusion__

This thesis has discussed Irish migrant memoirs and examined issues of memory, identity, and ethnicity. It has explored these memoirs through a prism of Diaspora Theory drawn from across the academic disciplines. Applying historical, sociological, cultural and literary theory to the text, certain common themes have been discovered but these commonalities serve to underscore the individuality of these works. Authors respond to the stock situations or stereotypical experiences that are posed by Irish migrancy in different ways, employing different coping mechanisms and constructing their identities in reaction to their individual circumstances. These texts form a lived archive of personal recollections of a process that transcends stereotype and give lie to the notion that there is a single or indeed typical migrant experience. Memoir provides a window onto deeply personal explorations of liminality and marginality, on the process of self-construction and the experience of living on the fringes of society. There are, however, loose categorisations that help to structure the study of memoir. This thesis has grouped together four strands of migrant experience where similarities of experience throw up some valid questions for study. The genre of memoir was examined, with close attention paid to how it facilitates the construction of identity and how it is used to inculcate a sense of social belonging. There was a focus on gendered responses to the migrant experience and the thesis considered how male Irish migrants dealt with the complex process of moving between cultures. Women's experiences of migration were also inspected, in a bid to restore women's written experiences and perspectives on the process of migration to the record. This also serves to counteract the silence around Irish women migrants in the literary discipline. Second-generation

memoirs were also probed, with issues of authenticity, nostalgia and belonging used to illustrate the fluid nature of identity within a subject.

My thesis established that memory plays an important role in the construction of identity. Memory is used as a tool to create and shape the self, write identity into being and cement a place in society through text. Autobiography is concerned as much with present needs as with past deeds and, "the moment of writing is as important as the past being recaptured" (Barrett 23). They form a retrospective look at life, filtered through the needs and desires of the author who uses the process as a means of textually constructing a rational, appealing self. Sloan describes memoir as constituting a conscious and knowing attempt to control and stabilise the self where memoir "not only constructs a story but also observes itself doing so and provides its own commentary on the process of story making" (222).

In the process of transmitting their innermost thoughts, the author uses memoir to re-structure their vision of self and the writing process is used as a form of personal therapy. Authors can attempt to exorcise painful memories by setting them down in print. Nostalgia was identified as providing an important function within migrant memoirs, used as a stamp of authenticity and as a means of siting the author within the community of origin, granting the author a foundational imprimatur. It was also identified as being a potentially destabilising force, often providing a psychological barrier to assimilation and leading to mental anguish and unhappiness.

Memoir is also used to surmount the gap between the traditional Irish oral storytelling forms and modern textual modes of story-telling. Colloquialisms are

used in memoir to bolster a sense of authenticity but also to lend a sense of orality to a textual medium. This gap is also representative of the gap between Irish rural culture and urban British culture. This thesis has identified how authors take what is a formulaic medium and use it to express individuality. By wrapping themselves in the raiment of their community of origin, they can safely find ways to articulate their own personal experiences without jeopardising their membership of that community. It is a complex and precarious position where the author presents familiar situations and settings and strives to express his or her reactions and reflections in a manner that expresses his or her particular vision of truth Harte has written that,

> autobiography is properly conceptualised as an act of language, memory, imagination, even fantasy but not history … We change ourselves by narrating ourselves and we narrate ourselves in dialogue with others, whether in written or in spoken forms, such that every autobiography sustains an intricate interplay of factual and fictive elements" (*Literature of the Irish* xxv).

A precise, verifiable or quantifiable truth was found to be an impossibility; instead memoir revealed itself as a blend of historical truth, subjective memory and fictive aspiration. Many authors chose to couch their experiences in cautionary terms, seeing memoir as a tool of instruction for subsequent migrants, documenting the pitfalls, identifying dangers and outlining the skills necessary to survive in Britain.

This thesis has examined memoirs from working-class male migrants and discovered that, at a superficial level, elements of stereotype have their basis in fact. Huge numbers of Irish men worked in construction jobs in Britain throughout the twentieth-century and the image of the "navvy" Irishman has become enshrined as

representing the typical Irish migrant. Many of the memoirs studied for this thesis are based around this peripatetic and transient lifestyle of men "working on the buildings". They document a rough and tumble existence and offer a window on the harshness and inequity of life on the urban margins. To take only this message from these memoirs would, however, be reductive, lumping these men together under a banner of victimhood. They also document other integral aspects of the process of migration, recounting moments of triumph along despair and inclusion opposite exclusion. The working and living conditions of these men were often grim yet their memoirs are saved from becoming maudlin by their equanimity; with many recounting random acts of kindness and recollections of good times afforded by life in Britain. Certain commonalities appear in most of the working-class migrant memoirs, appearing to confirm many of the deeply engrained stereotypes about the Irish in Britain. Religion, in particular Catholicism, was a major factor in the lives of the migrant Irish and was, by and large, cherished and valued as preserving a sense of distinction or difference from the British, providing a defence against assimilation. Alcohol also emerged as a common trope in all the memoirs studied in this category, with public houses forming a focal point for the male migrant community. Alcohol was used to remedy homesickness and as a means of coping with the pressures of migrant life. Pubs served as meeting place, job centre, bank and social life for many working-class Irish, and this, coupled with high wages and lack of parochial censure, helped to cement the stereotype of the drunken Irishman. Violence was also endemic within this sector of the migrant community and all the memoirs studied list incidents of fights, brawls, riots and domestic abuse. A heady mixture of alcohol, youthful machismo and an unaccustomed degree of anonymity provided an atmosphere where physical violence flourished. Reading many of the

memoirs studied for this thesis, it is striking how pernicious and pervasive a theme domestic violence is. Many of the accounts document instances of wife–beating and domestic cruelty; and its portrayal has a depressing matter-of-factness about it that suggests it was common within the community. Nostalgia has been revealed to have played a large part in the lives of the memoir writers. Home is idealised as a prelapsarian refuge and thoughts of home intrude on life in Britain, locking migrants into a position of in-betweenness. Stability or a sense of belonging can be challenged and laid waste by a memory or a snatch of song. The migrant is subject to a fracturing of identity that can leave the reformed identity weakened and susceptible to re-fracture. Despite the many commonalities, migrant memoirs have revealed that these male migrants, far from being a homologous group are instead, resolutely individual. They may at times inhabit stereotypes, adopting a heightened or grotesque version of Irishness that allows them to offer a mask to the larger world but the impulse towards autobiography documents the survival of a fierce sense of individual self that transcends sociological labels.

The examination of Irish women's memoirs revealed gendered differences in approaches to the experience of migration. Women seem to have viewed the experience in more positive terms, more often seeing it as opportunity rather than as a sentence of exile. Irish women seemed to site home through familial rather than geographical parameters. This thesis sought to uncover the reasons behind the paucity of memoirs from Irish migrant women, arguing that a combination of long working hours and family obligations left little time for the task of writing. It was also argued that Irish women tended to assimilate better than their male counterparts and blended more seamlessly into British society. Their social invisibility was, in

times of intra-national antipathy, a boon of sorts, allowing them to remain apart from a community that was castigated in Britain as being backward and inherently disposed towards terrorism. Under such conditions of silence, it was difficult if not foolhardy to raise the head above the parapet. It has also been pointed out that many migrant memoirs are rooted in the dystopic tradition and that, in the absence of feelings of unhappiness or displacedness, many Irish migrant women hadn't the same impetus or need for textual explorations of selfhood. Those memoirs that do exist offer insight into the issues faced by Irish migrant women and mark an attempt to redress the invisibility of women within diasporic writing. They form a documentary challenge to masculinised perceptions of the Irish community and give a voice to a marginalised sector in a marginalised community. Anti-Irish sentiment levelled at women has been identified in a good number of the memoirs studied in this area, with many women finding themselves branded as dirty or untrustworthy because of their nationality. There are also many instances recounted where the supposed fecundity of Irish women is used as a barb to imply either primitivism or promiscuousness. Conversely, many of the memoirs site Britain as a gateway to sexual exploration, with opportunity converging serendipitously with anonymity to provide opportunities for healthy sexual expression. The urban cityscape was held by the church and by extension, the state in Ireland as a hostile, masculine space, antithetical to the moral well-being of Irish women. In reality it allowed many women to live independent lives, earning money and to escape the constitutionally enshrined status of chattel in Ireland.

Family looms large in Irish migrant women's memoirs and family life serves as an anchor for women and also as a fulcrum. An anchor in that women are able to

visualise home in terms of family and not through the narrow parameters of physical location. Family life acts as a fulcrum in the sense that the greater part of the burden of integration devolves to women in the migrant community. On one hand, they are charged with inculcating a sense of Irishness in the home; on the other they are often the means by which the family becomes more British. Memoirs like Elaine Crowley's revealed that kinship networks were replaced by friendship networks and that these friendships were built around commonalities of work, children and location. Nationality becomes of secondary importance, subordinated to the demands of everyday life. Irish women prove more adept at preserving self, separating identity and geography and adapting psychologically to the demands of interstitial life.

Second-generation memoirs were revealed as being particularly fluid and subject to outside influences. Identity is a recurrent theme that inspires a more introspective turn in this subsection of memoirists. Home becomes the ultimate "imagined space", a semi-mythical place where resolution is found between the polarities of competing nationalities (Anderson 12). Belonging is a key concern of second-generation writers, the sense of finding a place that grants authenticity. Many writers articulate a sense of transgressiveness when writing about Irish culture, influenced by it but not feeling wholly part of it. The second-generation subject is continually caught between Ireland and England, between personal geographical origins and inherited cultural origins. Maturity brings with it a desire for individuality that is present in many of the memoirs studied. It is often an illusory individuality, predicated on the notion that Irishness is somehow different. Irishness is adopted as an Othered status, used to indicate difference from the herd, nationality used as a device to articulate or explain a sense of uniqueness. The Othered nature of

Irishness was also identified as being problematic for second-generation migrants with deep rooted societal prejudices acting to destabilise adopted positions of ethnicity. Subjects were simultaneously attracted and repelled by Irishness, seeing it as antithetical to modernity. Many of the memoirs studied show that authors held the two strands of identity to be binary opposites. Irishness is associated with wildness and primitivism, as against a stolid and rational Englishness. Spirituality or impulsiveness in the author's life is explained away as an outbreak of Irishness. The drive to explore Irish heritage seems to come with the security of adulthood. Irish culture for children of migrants is categorised as being inescapable during early childhood, invidiously uncool during teenage years and something to be selectively embraced as an adult. The teenage years seem to be a particular flashpoint. The teenage impulse is for invisibility and difference is seen as something which potentially alienates the subject from the herd. Many of the memoirs document tension between migrants and their children during the teenage years. For migrant men in particular, the everyday presence of demonstrably, audibly British children was an unwelcome reminder of the creeping permanence of migration. This thesis explored the idea that there are often two tribes within one family, where children are biologically related to but sociologically and culturally alienated from their parents. Second–generation memoirs are often the result of efforts to heal internalised divisions and to restore a self that is acceptable to both sides of the cultural divide.

This thesis has examined memoirs from the various subsections of the Irish migrant community in Britain and discovered that beneath the generic term, "migrant memoir", there is a wealth of voices and experiences. Delving beneath the veneer of

stereotype and the occluding miasma of canard and cliché, this thesis has foregrounded the individual while documenting the societal parameters that shelter, buttress or constrain that individuality. Migrant identity has been proven, through the examination of these memoirs and autobiographies, to be an ever-changing, reactive and fluid entity, dependent on factors such as financial circumstance, geographical location, political climate and most importantly, personal temperament. Donall MacAmhlaigh's memoir closes with a sentence that sums up the ambiguous nature of Irishness in Britain. It is a sentence that, depending on the reader, offers either a proud declaration of, or a tentative pleading for, the recognition of the cumulative potential of Irish migrants, "We're a great people, surely" (182).

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