

Tina O'Toole  
Ce' Leis Tu' ? Queering Irish  
Migrant Literature

Ties between colonizer and colonized have frequently been figured in Irish culture as heteronormative unions; a foundational example of this is the marriage between Horatio and Glorvina in Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806).<sup>1</sup> More than a century later, following the hard-won achievement of political independence in the southern state, the 1937 Free State Constitution's promise to 'cherish all of the children of the nation equally' likewise inscribed a heteronormative family unit at the heart of the democratic Irish republic.<sup>2</sup> The persistent link between gendered heteronormative social institutions and national stability went unchallenged, with what Breda Gray terms the 'mapping of heterosexual desire onto a patriotic desire for national families and, through them, the reproduction of the nation'.<sup>3</sup> Concomitantly, sexuality has often been pathologized in periods of constitutional crisis, and national discourses continued to be imbricated with heteronormative concerns throughout twentiethcentury Ireland.<sup>4</sup> This tendency is evident in the controversies surrounding the Roger Casement diaries, for instance, as Lucy McDiarmid and others have demonstrated; Casement's patriotism could not be reconciled with his homosexuality, to the extent that generations of Irish historians continued to disseminate preposterous explanations for the contents of his private papers, which attest to his sexual identity and desires.<sup>5</sup> These ley lines beneath the nationbuilding projects of Irish culture account for the rigid enforcement of literary and other censorship in the early days of the Free State, which specifically targeted cultural representations of sexual desire. Given these constraints, it is hardly surprising then that migration is central to the Irish 'coming out story', or that same-sex desire in Irish literature is almost always represented as occurring abroad.<sup>6</sup> Such literary migrancies reflect the diasporic displacement of Irish lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people (LGBTs). Queer Irish sexuality, as Ed Madden argues, thus constitutes a diasporic project.<sup>7</sup> Focusing on queer subjects in migrant literature by women writers, this essay sets out to examine the links between LGBT and diasporic identities, and to explore the ways in which queer kinship and migrant affinities unsettle the fixities of family and place in Irish culture.

For Irish LGBTs, the answer to the question 'ce' leis tu'?' [who are you]<sup>8</sup> is complex: in order to work out who(se) we are, we continually negotiate our position with/in heteronormative family structures and forge new kinship structures within which to flourish. To grow up in Ireland, even in recent times, was to be inscribed within familist discourses founded on the centrality of the family of origin. Irish LGBTs circumvented this fixed heteronormative and patriarchal structure by constructing lateral networks of their own: alternative families, or what might be described as queer kin.<sup>9</sup> Queer kinship, which appropriates relationships and values from the bio/genetic sphere but introduces elements of choice and agency to these connections, provides a useful framework within which we might read Irish LGBT literature. The fluid and transnational nature of queer kinship networks differs from the more static aspects of mainstream communities perhaps especially in Ireland where identities and relationships based on, and sharply delimited by, familial and fixed spatial contexts have tended to be paramount.<sup>10</sup> The life of twentiethcentury Irish writer Kate O'Brien provides a good example of this, with a queer kinship group reaching across Ireland, Britain, and Spain described by biographer Eibhear Walshe as 'an extended circle

of professional, university-educated and independent women – academics, painters, writers’.<sup>11</sup> Cognate networks and coteries are evident in a number of other queer Irish biographies, including those of Micheal MacLiammoir and Hilton Edwards, Eva Gore-Booth, and Kathleen Lynn, to mention just a few.<sup>12</sup>

We gain insight into the formation of such relations through Judith Butler’s useful delineation of queer kinship practices, which she defines as those that ‘emerge to address fundamental forms of human dependency, which may include birth, child-rearing, relations of emotional dependency and support, generational ties, illness, dying, and death (to name a few)’.<sup>13</sup> Given the web of affective relationships between LGBT people, Butler argues that ‘a more radical social transformation is precisely at stake when we refuse . . . to allow kinship to become reducible to “family”’.<sup>14</sup> When, during the AIDS crisis in 1980s Ireland, the Irish state disavowed those ‘children’ who refused to assimilate to dominant social paradigms, placing them outside the remit of health and social welfare services, activists and voluntary workers, in tandem with families and friends, established an impressive range of advocacy initiatives and care provision services, enacting radical queer kinship. The slogan ‘silence = death’, created by AIDS activists in the USA a decade earlier and adopted here by Irish activists in the 1980s, best sums up the urgency with which ‘gay’ community organisations (as they were then described) attained visibility, moving into the public domain in their efforts to win recognition and healthcare provision for their dying brothers. The concomitant strengthening of relationships forged between those living with AIDS and their carers and supporters (gay and straight) in that period of crisis, would underpin the increasing strength and visibility of queer kinship structures in Ireland from the late twentieth century on.

While nascent queer kinship structures are visible across the Irish diaspora by the end of the nineteenth century (in the coteries of Wilde, Gore-Booth, and Casement, for instance), a century later these transnational networks were firmly established, and a concomitant alignment of queer and migrant subjectivities along with them. The opening up of a queer diaspora space had a powerful impact on social activism in Ireland.<sup>15</sup> As I have discussed elsewhere, these social movements were invigorated by transnational exchanges between social radicals and their emigrant peers,<sup>16</sup> who sent home what Peggy Levitt terms ‘social remittances’.<sup>17</sup> These ideas, policies, actions, and texts developed by theorists and activists abroad became common currency within activist groups on the island of Ireland during the late 1980s. Within such a (partly textual) framework, then, Irish feminists and members of LGBT communities negotiated a shared understanding of their identity and political activism to challenge the dominant culture. Thus we see the influence of international feminist thought in the language and politics of late twentieth-century Irish lesbian activists. For instance, when contemporary writer and social activist Mary Dorcey was asked in 1995 to define her lesbian identity she couched it in terms of ‘the early 1970s phrase “womenidentified-woman”’ (33).<sup>18</sup> This concept derives from the New York Radicalesbians manifesto ‘The Woman-Identified Woman’ (1970) (and reflects the time in which it was deployed, before the trans conversation queried and problematized such terms). Likewise, Adrienne Rich’s writings, specifically the term ‘compulsory heterosexuality’, were widely used and debated among feminists in Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

While feminist theory, often transmitted along axes of queer kinship, was key to the shaping of the women’s movement in Ireland, literary writing also played a part in the contemporary dissemination of ideas among feminists and members of Irish LGBT communities.

Among this work were publications by the Dublin-born lesbianfeminist activist and author Anna Livia (then based in London, later in California), and by Mary Dorsey, who lived for a time in London before moving back to Dublin. Best known as a poet, Dorsey's first collection, *Kindling* (1982), was published by the UK Onlywomen Press, before her breakthrough, *Moving into the Spaces Cleared by Our Mothers* (1991) was issued by Salmon Press. Her fiction reflects her diasporic experience in the 1980s, particularly evident in the collection, *A Noise from the Woodshed* (1990), which contains stories set in a futuristic British metropolis, as well as in Dublin and small-town Ireland. As with the poetry of another Irish migrant lesbian, Cherry Smyth, Dorsey's early work blends Irish and English cultural sensibilities in the fictional lesbian communities and households she creates. These examples illustrate the overwhelmingly diasporic nature of twentieth-century Irish lesbian literature. As Irish lesbians and bisexual women looked for role models, cognate communities elsewhere, and ways to read themselves into representation, the distinctive logos of UK publishers such as Virago and Women's Press became prevalent on Irish feminist bookshelves. While much of this fiction and poetry came from overseas, this is not to understate the importance of homegrown feminist presses, Arlen House and Attic Press; the former focusing primarily on out-of-print work by Irish women writers, the latter fostering new work in the areas of feminist literature and social research.<sup>20</sup> As a result, the work of Kate O'Brien experienced a particular resurgence and she quickly became something of a role model for a generation of Irish women coming of age in the 1970s and 1980s.

While O'Brien's earlier novels were widely disseminated throughout the 1980s and 1990s, her less well-known *As Music and Splendour* (1958) was only reissued in 2005. Her protagonists are two talented young singers who are sent to study opera in Italy in the latter decades of the nineteenth century; the novel traces their musical training and experiences, and their performances on the Italian stage. Rose Lennane's career (based on that of the Irish diva Margaret Burke Sheridan) is stratospheric; as a prima donna she becomes a household name, and her (heterosexual) love affairs are as intricate as those of the leading ladies she plays. Clare Halvey's talent is of a somewhat different order, but she too finds success following her training as a singer of sacred music. O'Brien carefully delineates Clare's incipient lesbian identity and her relationship with fellow student Luisa Carriaga, which, rather than being exceptional, is framed as comparable to the desires and relationships of other characters.

At the outset of the novel, Rose and Clare suffer from homesickness and find the discipline of their musical training gruelling, but they quickly become part of a transnational group of young musicians or 'lodger-students'<sup>21</sup> who help the girls acclimatize to this new way of life, providing a solid kinship network that supports the rootless existence of their chosen profession. O'Brien thus underlines the nomadism of these performers' lives, drawing on the kind of transnational queer kinship she experienced in her own varied career: 'they had each other to cling to – buoyant pieces of flotsam'.<sup>22</sup> While the network at the centre of this novel ostensibly emerges from the world of opera, the nexus of queer and artistic communities in the period would have been legible to the informed reader; the wellknown gay couple, Mac Liammo'ir and Edwards, for instance, thrived at the centre of just such a queer kinship network in the Irish theatre world at mid-century. As O'Brien's characters explore various roles onstage, they begin a series of performative experiments, adopting interchangeable names and personalities that lead into and out of the identities they will forge as adult women. These fluid identities

contrast with normative socialisation in Ireland at mid-century, in which everyone is expected to be 'so uniform and rule of thumb', as one of the characters says.<sup>23</sup> This evokes the rigid set of ideas about sexuality, gender, and family involved in the hegemonic configuration of Irish national identity in the early period of State formation.<sup>24</sup> O'Brien's characters reject these regulatory structures in much the same way as the author had done in her own life, replacing their families of origin with queer kin. However, the novel's commitment to expanding subjectivities and social horizons does not stop there, as her female characters go on to explore a range of alternative identities both on- and off-stage. While Rose Lennane's career in Ireland, we learn, would have been confined to her family's dressmaker shop and the local parish, instead, she becomes the celebrated diva Rosa d'Irlanda, the wearer of costumes and roles, who transforms herself into Desdemona, Violetta, or Gilda as the opera demands. Moving into and out of these roles enables Rose to be a player of parts and to move through diverse social classes and networks. While Rose is certainly liberated in the novel (with the freedom to travel, have a fulfilling career and choose her relationships without family interference, for instance), the narrator makes clear that Clare's evolution was more remarkable, given the limited scope for same-sex identities and desire in mid-century Ireland. On the Italian stage, she becomes part of a queer diaspora where her lesbian identity will not necessitate rejection and alienation from a supportive community network, as it did for O'Brien's other lesbian and gay characters, Eddie Considine in *Without My Cloak* (1931), Agatha Conlan in *Mary Lavelle* (1936), or Henry Archer in *The Land of Spices* (1941). While the call of Clare's grandmother, 'come in my child, the tea is wet, come on in out of the wind, my love', is a leitmotif calling Clare back to her old life, Clare chooses to leave behind such nostalgia in order to construct a new identity for herself in Rome. While Clare takes with her the capacity for love nurtured by her grandmother, she must learn how to forge new relations with chosen kin. She struggles to free herself from her Irish roots and the socialisation that goes with them, and it is only during a later visit to Ireland in adulthood that she comes fully to understand this. Soon after her arrival 'back home' she realizes that she doesn't belong there any more: she is no longer 'the same Clare' who once lived there with her grandmother. This revelation echoes Anne Marie Fortier's description of 'home as not-home' in the narratives of 'lesbian/gay people' who experience 'estrangement in the original home', and whose migration is thus 'a movement away from being estranged'.<sup>25</sup> Ultimately, Clare finds a supportive queer kinship with her peers (both gay and straight) in the transnational atmosphere of the Italian stage. Thus, while Rose's choices had she remained in Ireland were limited, the absolute taboo pertaining to same-sex relationships in the period made Clare's choice to leave her only option: to stay would have meant suffering the kind of estrangement suggested by Fortier.

Clare's migrant status enables the open expression of lesbian identity in *As Music and Splendour*, while her outsider position enables her to openly challenge Irish familist practices. As something freely chosen, Clare's lesbian identity and desire are clear and modern. Accordingly, she briskly rejects her friend Thomas's Freudian formula of lesbian affect as mere arrested development, a 'schwarm', or crush, consisting of 'two silly girls kissing'.<sup>26</sup> Instead, as in O'Brien's better-known novel *Mary Lavelle*, Clare draws on conventional Catholic repression of the sexual body to contextualize and explain the relationship:

You can argue as you like against my loving Luisa. But I can argue back all your unbridled sins. We all know the Christian

rule – and every indulgence of the flesh which does not conform to it is wrong. All right. We are all sinners. You and I and Rose and Tonio and Rene and Mariana – and all our friends.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, like a range of other transgressive desires and different kinds of relationships, love between women becomes a consistent part of the sexual discourse. This is amplified by the introduction of the case of Charles Stewart Parnell and Kitty O'Shea to the conversation between Clare and Thomas. 'I could never explain to you what that [divorce case] could mean in Ireland', she says, meaning that there is no license to love in Ireland.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, in the queer kinship space of the Italian operatic world, Clare and Luisa's bond emerges as both emotional and sexual in nature. Aintzane Legaretta Mentxaka argues that artistic training is linked to sexual development in *As Music and Splendour*; following this logic, it is evident that Clare's autonomy at the end of the novel relies not only on her ability to earn her living, but also on the depth of her self-awareness and sexual self-definition.<sup>29</sup> By then, she is shown to be able to make her own choices, withstand the criticism of their peer group (and by extension, the public world), and remain wholly self-directed in her artistic and personal life. Clare's self-acceptance with regard to her sexual identity is central to her independence.

Given the reliance on the heterosexual family unit as means of social organisation and control in twentieth-century Irish society, the commitment to same-sex relationships and queer kin throughout O'Brien's work is exceptional. She queers diaspora space in her fiction to give herself the freedom to explore a world for women outside the parameters of the domestic and maternal. She places her characters outside the dominant sexual economy, unbound by the Irish hegemonies of the 1950s. Clare Halvey's resistance to heteronormativity evokes Rosi Braidotti's 'nomadic consciousness', which is 'akin to what Foucault called counter-memory; it is a form of resisting assimilation [. . .] into dominant ways of representing the self'.<sup>30</sup> A rejection of 'home' and family of origin undergirds Claire's refusal to be assimilated to Irish social mores. However, O'Brien's own career demonstrates the drawbacks of working in this territory. By operating outside the approved-of discourses O'Brien's radical work was subject to official censorship by the Irish state, though her popularity was sustained in Ireland during her lifetime.<sup>31</sup>

While O'Brien's mid-twentieth-century novels were banned in Ireland, Emma Donoghue's cognate late twentieth-century work has been openly celebrated here.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to O'Brien's exiled lesbian and gay characters, Donoghue's are almost all Irish-based, as well as being more open and self-confident about their identities and attachments. Her 2007 novel, *Landing*, at first glance, might be compared to her first two lesbian realist novels, *Stir Fry* (1994) and *Hood* (1995); like them, the narrative focus of the 2007 novel is on contemporary Ireland, specifically a queer sorority in Celtic Tiger Dublin. The novel centres on a long-distance relationship between two women who meet on an airline flight, and follows their efforts to sustain the relationship between Ireland and Canada; theirs is a twenty-first century transnational affair, mediated by e-mail, voicemail, and cheap air travel. This device gives Donoghue a bird's eye view of both cultures, and specifically the LGBT communities and identities in each, as her protagonists learn about one another's cultures. The novel's contemporaneity is written into its foregrounding of hybrid ethnicities (one of the protagonists is of Indian-Irish origin) and of displaced national boundaries. The hybrid identity of the globetrotting Si'le is the cause of several misidentifications in the text (although, noticeably, she's never detained by immigration officials at Dublin airport). For instance, while on a visit to Canada, she is

told by a barman that she ‘doesn’t look Irish’, to which she responds ‘the funny thing is, Dave, I’ve been told I don’t look like a lesbian either’.<sup>33</sup> This interaction deftly splices received ideas about Irish identity, sexuality, and ethnicity, constructing S1’le as an avatar of contemporary Irish society. The tensions between this more inclusive culture, recently characterized by a politically expedient call by the Ta’naiste [Irish deputy prime minister] for a referendum on same-sex marriage,<sup>34</sup> and more traditional assumptions about Irish homophobia and social conservatism are clearly seen in the diasporic space of Irish America. There, these tensions are revealed by the Ancient Order of Hibernians’ refusal to allow the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organisation (ILGO) to march in the New York St Patrick’s Day Parade. Anne Maguire suggests that ILGO’s continued efforts to march reveals the dissonance between different waves of Irish migrant communities in North America, which is to some extent a generational conflict.<sup>35</sup> S1’le’s reception in a Canadian bar gestures to these issues, and answers Gish Jen’s question ‘Who’s Irish?’ by laying claim to that identity as her own.<sup>36</sup>

In a series of reversals, *Landing* seems to challenge received ideas about LGBT migration, and perhaps about Irish emigration generally. Displaced queer Irish diasporans have come home to roost, bringing with them recipes for Moroccan stew and a taste for Italian designer kitchenware. The Irish settings in upmarket venues and the shining chrome and glass of the Financial Services Centre underline an Ireland in thrall to the Celtic Tiger, with Dublin as a centre of global capitalist expansion. By implication, there is no longer any need for economic migration; indeed the first migration in the text is that of S1’le’s mother, who migrates to Ireland. Similarly, the reverse migration of a ‘downsizing’ gay couple who move off to a smallholding in Leitrim disrupts the usual link between queer community and urban space.<sup>37</sup> Another *volte face* in the text is the adoption of Irish identity by the English Marcus, who proclaims, ‘I discovered I had an inner Irishman’<sup>38</sup>, thus inverting the usual migration of Irish people to Britain in previous centuries and their assimilation to mainstream white culture there. Finally, in an intertextual reversal, the narrative of *Landing* loops back to Donoghue’s first novel to pick up the butch dyke character Jael, but her performative identity in *Landing* is that of a Dublin 4 career woman with husband and child in tow; her bisexuality queers sexual affinity and identification, not to mention the Irish family itself. These reversals question central assumptions about Irish identity and prompt scrutiny of an Irish migration that has long been read as only out-migration and expulsion by an improvident or intolerant society.

The novel problematizes both points of origin and assumptions about whiteness and Irish identity. In a gesture toward the genesis narratives of several Anglo-Irish writers including Sydney Morgan, who claimed to have been born on a ship in the Irish Sea, S1’le is born on an Air India flight to Ireland. These origins also allude to contemporary debates about Irish-born children of immigrants to Ireland, who were denied citizenship by referendum in 2004.<sup>39</sup> This engages ongoing conversations about immigration control and heteronormative nationalism, which as Luibhe’id points out, ‘has historically been withheld from many people based not only on sexuality but also on intersecting gender, racial, class, and geopolitical factors’.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, despite the shiny twenty-first century veneer of the novel, contemporaneous statistics detailing the upsurge in return migration to Ireland are countered by S1’le’s concluding choice to emigrate to live with Jude in Canada. This removal is emphasized by the displacement of Ireland itself, as she migrates to her lover’s hometown called ‘Ireland’, in provincial Ontario. S1’le’s decision to

migrate derives, in part, from its persistent xenophobia: Síle's nephew is called 'nigger' at school, and one of her work colleagues is told 'go home, Paki bitch'. Cognate homophobia also alienates her. Beneath the surface of brash Celtic Tiger culture, the narrator observes, lurks the very real possibility of being gay-bashed or cauterized by the centuries-old code of Irish silence. By contrast, (a somewhat stereotypical) liberal Canada offers refuge to immigrants of all identities and hues. The novel emerges as an attempt to critique or reshape the homeland. Read in the context of Brian Axel's configuration of the diaspora and the nation state being 'intertwined in a dialectical relationship' whereby 'the diaspora produces the homeland and . . . the homeland is one aspect of the diasporic imaginary',<sup>41</sup> we might see the novel as having something in common with the social remittances sent home by an earlier generation. As such, Donoghue, now a Canadian immigrant residing in Ontario herself, sends back her own social remittances, making this intervention or impetus for change in Irish culture.

To further explore the dialectical relationship between home and diaspora space, situating Donoghue's fiction in the tradition of Canadian immigrant literature brings it into contact with queer subjectivities in cross-national contexts. For instance, read in tandem with fiction by contemporary author, Shani Mootoo, another Dublinborn migrant to Canada, Donoghue's lesbian diasporic space seems less unique. Rather, in the Canadian context, the work of both Donoghue and Mootoo is consistent with an established tradition of diasporic writing, which includes work by well-known writers such as Dionne Brand, who regularly addresses queer migrant identity formation in her work.<sup>42</sup>

Shani Mootoo's parents migrated to Dublin when her father attended the Royal College of Surgeons and the family remained on in Ireland for some years after their daughter was born, before returning to Trinidad. Mootoo emigrated to Canada when she was nineteen and describes herself as a 'multiple migrant'.<sup>43</sup> Despite this, media interviews in Canada seem to fix on Mootoo's 'Irish background'; she sidesteps this question in one interview by replying that, since she left Ireland as a small child, 'the Irish thing is just a bit of a lark'.<sup>44</sup> Notwithstanding her characterization, Mootoo's fiction provides a useful set of signposts for reading the work of LGBT writers just beginning to emerge in Ireland, many of whom are 'multiple migrants' like herself.<sup>45</sup> Unlike Canada, with its long-established tradition of welcoming in-migration, Ireland has yet to see the wide-scale effect of emerging immigrant writers on existing literary and cultural forms. However, in the light of recent social and cultural developments, it is only a matter of time before migrant LGBT writers begin to make their own of Irish culture.<sup>46</sup> Mootoo's fiction, particularly when read in the light of Donoghue's, anticipates such future work, and revisits questions of hetero-nationalism and queer kinship discussed earlier.

Mootoo's poetry and fiction explores a range of queer hybridities and transnational transgenderings. Like several of the characters in her award-winning novel *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996),<sup>47</sup> Mootoo has said that she left Trinidad when she came out as a lesbian, describing negative familial and social reactions to her sexual identity there which resonate strongly with Irish LGBT experiences of homophobia.<sup>48</sup> 'If I can't speak my truth I'm going to die and that's one of the reasons I felt I needed to stay away. My truth for many years was compromised because there wasn't room for it', she says in the same interview. *Cereus Blooms at Night* reflects some of Mootoo's transnational experiences, but is perhaps closer to O'Brien's imagined community of outsiders in Rome than to Donoghue's displacement of Ireland onto

small-town Ontario; like the Italian opera space, Mootoo's fictional Atlantic island provides refuge to her group of cultural misfits. Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* sets out to explore cultural and sexual hybridities, transnational identities and post-colonial hangovers. As in Donoghue's work, there are a number of crossnational and transgressive relationships of various kinds at the centre of the story. These begin with local boy Chandin's unreciprocated passion for the fantastically named Lavinia Thoroughly, the daughter of the English minister on the island; his attempts to acculturate himself will, Chandin hopes, help to win her heart. When she rejects him, he marries her best friend, Sarah, who comes from the same cultural background as himself.<sup>49</sup> However, the apparent love triangle in this narrative then shifts its focus to an emerging lesbian relationship between Lavinia and Sarah. These two eventually run away together but are forced by Chandin's violent reaction to leave Sarah's daughters behind in their flight. The elder of the two daughters, Mala, is from then on subjected to physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her father. The scope of this essay does not allow for a full exploration of the novel, which also incorporates the stories of a later queer generation including the transgender Otoh and his gay lover Tyler, who takes care of Mala in her old age. Suffice it to say that the labyrinthine plot stages a series of temporal and spatial shifts, as well as containing some magical realist elements, which further queer narrative linearity and enable transnational links to be made. Migration is repeatedly used in the novel as a means of escape from familial violence, as Lavinia and Sarah, and later Mala's sister, Asha, flee the family home to migrate abroad. Mala, unable to escape overseas as the others have done, performs a different kind of migrant act: she refuses to sleep within the four walls of the family home in which she was battered and abused, and instead moves out to live in the garden that Sarah made before she left. Arguably, another kind of migrant act is performed linguistically in the novel, in the ways in which characters move between languages and forge new hybrid tongues with which to communicate. In this way, Mootoo unearths a third space within which her characters can make themselves understood, and more importantly, forge a queer kinship network within which they can flourish.

Unlike Donoghue's *Landing*, which despite references to verbal and physical attacks bears all the visible hallmarks of lesbian romance fiction, Mootoo's narrative is anything but soft in focus. A series of disturbing abuses perpetrated by the powerful or those in their ambit – whether colonizers and colonized, religious ministers and those in thrall to them, or adults exploiting children – demonstrates the brutal means by which gender, sexual and national boundaries have been enforced and maintained over time. Her exploration of cultural colonialism and the politics of renaming is particularly incisive, which makes available postcolonial comparisons with Irish literature, such as Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980) for instance, which also focuses on issues of colonial occupation and renaming. Like O'Brien's earlier fiction, particularly *Without My Cloak*, Mootoo's work demonstrates how family-based, gendered and sexual violence has often been the means by which order in this basic social institution has been maintained. Thus, we find in the novel that conjunction of crises of national identity and the pathologising of sexuality identified by Jasbir Puar.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Mootoo's work rejects easy simplifications whether to do with postcolonial contexts or homo/hetero/sexual binaries. The mother of one character in *Cereus* reminds her daughter, Otoh (who is now living as a man): 'You grow up here and you don't realize almost everyone in this place wish they could be somebody or something else?'<sup>51</sup>; thus making Otoh's transgender identity consistent

with fluid and multiple identities of various kinds in their community. Ultimately, the relationships forged by Otoh and Tyler create a space within which the now-elderly Mala and her first love, Ambrose, can be reunited; by the end of the novel these four constitute a queer family, incorporating multigenerational and transgendered heteroand homosexual affinities. While theirs is a tightly-knit group, which provides each of its members a place of solidarity and refuge from a sometimes hostile mainstream community, it is not the closed unit we tend to expect in traditional family situations. The final page of the novel documents an international appeal to Asha, Mala's long-lost sister, asking her to make contact with them. This final invitation suggests a queer kinship structure that is open, reaching out transnationally to other relations.

Under the sign of the Ladies of Llangollen, queer Irish writers from Oscar Wilde on have had first-hand experience of emigration, and have registered the profound effect of those migrant experiences in their literary work. While we anticipate cognate work emerging from immigrant communities here, and herald its re-envisioning of Irish literature, we need to ask how the space of Irish literature has been constituted thus far. As Alice Feldman and Anne Mulhall's recent essay on Irish immigrant writing asks: 'What . . . are the past encounters that have constituted the contours, the skin of "Irish writing", the space at whose borders the migrant woman writer arrives? What "lines" have been accumulated that must be followed or deviated from if she is to be welcomed or expelled from that space?'<sup>52</sup> Central to such reflections is the reminder that identity is a process, sometimes performed as 'a bit of a lark' (as in Mootoo's deflection of the inevitable 'Irish question') but nevertheless a process that takes place within a context of regulatory structures of various kinds, between borders and hegemonic structures of belonging and notbelonging. One set of 'past encounters', to use Feldman and Mulhall's term, is the diasporic literary space carved out by LGBT writers. We might borrow diaspora scholar Sneja Gunew's term 'serial accommodations',<sup>53</sup> which describes the tensions between individual and collective identities in the space between home and diaspora, to frame the literature under discussion here. To take this a step further, we might see such work as an ongoing series of queer interventions by migrant writers, resisting, rejecting and questioning the dominant sexual economy, whether 'at home' or in the diaspora space.

#### NOTES

1. Sydney Owenson, *The Wild Irish Girl* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1806] 2008).
2. The Republic of Ireland was formally established in 1949.
3. Breda Gray, *Women and the Irish Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2003), p.161.
4. This analysis is informed by Jasbir Puar's work on contemporary homonationalisms; see *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
5. See Lucy McDiarmid, *The Irish Art of Controversy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).
6. Examples might include Colm Toibín's *The Story of the Night* (1996), set in Argentina, and Desmond Hogan's *The Lkón Maker* (1976), whose central protagonist first explores his bisexual identity in England.
7. Ed Madden, 'Queering the Irish Diaspora: David Rees and Pa'draig Rooney', *Eire-Ireland Journal of Irish Studies* 47 1&2 (2012), 172–200.
8. The question 'who are you?' in the Irish language, may be directly translated as 'to whom do you belong?' or, in other words, 'what family do you belong to?'
9. The concept of queer kinship offered alternatives to heteronormative family structures and claimed legitimacy for queer families. See for instance: Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Heather Murray, *Not in This Family: Gays and the Meaning of Kinship in Postwar North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).
10. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in twentieth-century diasporic settings where heteronormative family and church norms obtained, queer Irish migrants gravitated instead towards more ethnically and culturally mixed LGBT communities and counter-cultural movements.
11. Eibhear Walshe, 'Invisible Irelands: Kate O'Brien's Lesbian and Gay Social

- Formations in London and Ireland in the Twentieth Century', *SQS: Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* 1 (2006), p.42.
12. See Christopher Fitz-Simon, *The Boys: A Biography of Micheál Mac Lirim and Hilton Edwards* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1994); Sonja Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth: An Image of Such Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012); Marie Mulholland, *The Politics and Relationships of Kathleen Lynn* (Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2002).
  13. Judith Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?', *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13.1 (Spring 2002), p.14.
  14. Butler, p.40.
  15. I' de O'Carroll's ground-breaking study of Irish women migrants to the USA, *Models for Movers* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1990), is one of the few sources of data on the social context of emigration in the period.
  16. Tina O'Toole, 'Adrienne Rich's "On Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence"', in *Mobilising Classics: Reading Radical Writing in Ireland*, ed. by Orla O'Donovan and Fiona Dukelow (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), pp.157-74.
  17. Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
  18. Interview with Mary Dorcey, in *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Toward the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by I'de O'Carroll and Eoin Collins (London: Cassell, 1995), p.33.
  19. O'Toole, 'Adrienne Rich'.
  20. Arlen House was the first feminist publishing house in Ireland. Established in 1975 in Galway by Catherine Rose, it focused on the recovery of out-of-print women writers, re-introducing Irish writers such as Kate O'Brien, Janet McNeill, Nora Hoult and Anna Parnell to a contemporary audience, as well as publishing new poetry collections by Eavan Boland, Rita Ann Higgins and Mary Rose Callaghan, among others. Attic Press emerged from the organization Irish Feminist Information (IFI), set up by Ro'isi'n Conroy and Mary Doran in 1978, as a publishing and distribution service for activist groups in the period. In 1984, IFI set up Attic Press under the directorship of Ro'isi'n Conroy, and throughout the 1980s and early 1990s they published contemporary works by women including Nell McCafferty, Eilís Ní Dhuibhne, Eithne Strong, Evelyn Conlan, and Ronit Lentin, among others. A Women's Studies list was established by Attic, then under the directorship of Ailbhe Smyth, which produced *The Irish Women's Studies Reader* (1993), edited by Smyth, as well as important social histories, and the polemical series of LIP pamphlets in the 1990s. For more on this see 'Feminist Cultural Projects', in Linda Connolly and Tina O'Toole, *Documenting Irish Feminisms: The Second Wave* (Dublin: Woodfield Press, 2005), pp.117-44.
  21. Kate O'Brien, *As Music and Splendour*, p.50.
  22. O'Brien, *Music and Splendour*, p.29.
  23. O'Brien, *Music and Splendour*, p.189.
  24. See Gerardine Meaney, 'Sex and Nation: Women in Irish Culture and Politics', in *Irish Women's Studies: A Reader*, ed. by Ailbhe Smyth (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), pp.230-44.
  25. Anne Marie Fortier, "'Coming Home": Queer Migrations and Multiple Evocations of Home', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 4.4 (2001), pp.129, 118.
  26. O'Brien, *Music and Splendour*, p.207, p.211.
  27. O'Brien, *Music and Splendour*, p.208.
  28. O'Brien, *Music and Splendour*, p.204.
  29. Aintzane Legaretta Mentxaka, *Kate O'Brien and the Fiction of Identity: Sex, Art and Politics in Mary Lavelle* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), p.107.
  30. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.25.
  31. Her first novel, *Without My Cloak* (1931), won the Hawthornden Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. O'Brien was also a well-known media personality and reviewer in Ireland.
  32. *Slammerkin* was nominated for the 2001 Irish Times Irish Fiction Prize, and the Booker Prize nomination of *Room* was celebrated across the Irish media.
  33. Emma Donoghue, *Landing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2001), p.131.
  34. Genevieve Carbery, 'Gilmore Wants Gay Marriage Vote', *Irish Times* Tuesday, 12 November 2012.
  35. For more on this, see Anne Maguire, *Rock the Sham: The Irish Lesbian and Gay Organisation's Battle to March in New York* (New York: Street Level Press, 2006).
  36. Gish Jen, *Who's Irish?* (New York: Vintage, 2000). Jen's fiction about immigrant experiences and identities in North America focus in particular on Asian-American communities.
  37. This was a common feature of Irish LGBT communities at the turn of the twenty-first century, when countercultural activists of various hues deserted the brash capital(ist) city to develop new communities in parts of rural Ireland.
  38. Donoghue, p.183.
  39. The 2004 citizenship referendum, approved by over eighty per cent of those who voted, restricted citizenship to those with Irish ethnic or kinship origins. In other words, a child born in Ireland of immigrant parents no longer has an automatic right

to Irish citizenship.

40. Eithne Luibhne'íd, 'Sexuality, Migration, and the Shifting Line between Legal and Illegal Status', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14.2-3 (2008), p.290.
41. Brian Axel, 'The Diasporic Imaginary', *Public Culture* 14.2 (Spring 2002), p.426.
42. See for instance Dionne Brand's novel, *What We All Long For* (Toronto: Alfred Knopf, 2005) and her prose poem *A Map to the Door of No Return* (Toronto: Vintage, 2001).
43. Interview with Shani Mootoo following the awarding of the K.M. Hunter Foundation Award for Literature 2012. [http://www.kmhunterfoundation.ca/artist\\_videos/2012/shani\\_mootoo\\_2012.html](http://www.kmhunterfoundation.ca/artist_videos/2012/shani_mootoo_2012.html)
44. Mootoo, [http://www.kmhunterfoundation.ca/artist\\_videos/2012/shani\\_mootoo\\_2012.html](http://www.kmhunterfoundation.ca/artist_videos/2012/shani_mootoo_2012.html) Mootoo visited Dublin again when *He Drown She in the Sea* was shortlisted for the 1998 Dublin IMPAC prize.
45. For instance, emerging Belfast-based playwright Shannon Yee has so far had her work staged as part of the aLAF (Lesbian Arts Festival) in Dublin 2003 and the Outburst Queer Arts Festival in Belfast 2008; she has recently been awarded a place in the Royal Court Theatre's playwriting group, see [www.s-yee.co.uk](http://www.s-yee.co.uk)
46. The Women Writers in the New Ireland Network (WWINI) is a case in point, see [wwinc.wordpress.com](http://wwinc.wordpress.com). Publications include include Eva Bourke and Borba'la Farago' (eds), *Landing Places: Immigrant Poets in Ireland* (Dublin: Dedalus Press, 2009), and Theophilus Ejorh (ed.), *Embers of Words: An Irish Anthology of Migrant Poetry* (Dublin: Choice Books, 2012).
47. The novel was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize.
48. Interview 'Shani Mootoo's Contradictory Trinidad', *Trinidad Express Newspaper* 2 Apr 2011 [http://www.trinidadexpress.com/woman-magazine/Sani\\_Mootoo\\_s-119106194.html](http://www.trinidadexpress.com/woman-magazine/Sani_Mootoo_s-119106194.html)
49. We are never told Sarah's original name, which has been Anglicized by the minister's wife when she goes to the local school.
50. See Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).
51. Shani Mootoo, *Cereus Blooms at Night* (London: Granta, 1996), pp.237-8.
52. Anne Mulhall and Alice Feldman, 'Towing the Line: Migrant Women Writers and the Space of Irish Writing', *Eire-Ireland Journal of Irish Studies* 47 1&2 (2012), p.217.
53. Sneja Gunew, 'Serial Accommodations: Diasporic Women's Writing', *Canadian Literature* 196 (Spring 2008), p.6.