"EVERY MOVE IS PUNCTUATED": WRITING IDENTITY AND SPACE IN IRISH POETRY 1963-2016

A dissertation presented

by

Lauren Rebecca Thacker

to

The Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of English

Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
April, 2016
"EVERY MOVE IS PUNCTUATED": WRITING IDENTITY AND SPACE IN IRISH POETRY 1963-PRESENT

by

Lauren Rebecca Thacker

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities of Northeastern University
April, 2016
ABSTRACT

Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland underwent political, social, and economic changes in the late twentieth century that resulted in changing relationships between self, place, and space. I read poets from across Ireland and analyze how representations of space relate to cultural and individual identity. I argue that poetry can define space without establishing boundaries and while allowing for, and even depending upon, the experience of simultaneous and contradictory meaning. My project purposefully looks at poets from the North and the Republic—Ciaran Carson, Eavan Boland, Tom French, and Leontia Flynn—to suggest that the socio-political and socio-economic events, such as the Troubles and the Celtic Tiger, influence poetry across the island. Reading poetry with close attention to national, cultural, and spatial boundaries can obscure rather than reveal meaning, however, attention to such boundaries is common in studies of Irish literature and indeed, studies of Irish politics and social life in the twentieth century. In my analysis of the relationship between place and self in Irish poetry, I note the diminishing importance of borders and boundaries and trace a shift from a place-based identities to identities based in mobility.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I’d like to begin by thanking my dissertation committee: Laura Green, Lucy Maulsby, and Patrick Mullen. I’ve learned and benefitted from their advice, guidance, and example. At other points in my time at Northeastern, Kimberly Juanita Brown, Elizabeth Dillon, Guy Rotella, and Rachel Trousdale have been enormously helpful. Special thanks goes to Professor Brown for going above and beyond in her support of my interests and to Professor Rotella, whose early support made it possible for me to imagine completing this project. It is no exaggeration to say that I would not have survived graduate school without Linda Collins, Melissa Daigle, and Jean Duddy. Many thanks to them for all they do for our department.

I was lucky enough to have many wonderful teachers and professors who showed me the value of writing and the excitement of scholarly work. I’d especially like to thank Paige Reynolds, Susan Sweeney, Helen Whall, and Joanna Zeigler, from the College of the Holy Cross, and Ralph Daniels (magister) from East Providence High School.

The support and friendship I’ve found in my fellow graduate students is more than I could have imagined. Emily Artiano, Frank Capogna, Ben Doyle, Erin Frymire, Elizabeth Hopwood, Nicole Keller Day and Duyen Nguyen have received many frantic emails, phone calls, texts, and knocks over the years. They always graciously answered and I am grateful for them.

Outside of Northeastern, I have to thank my Charlie’s Kitchen friends, especially Laura Hayner and Finn McConvey, for making Boston feel like home for the first time. I thank Margaret O’Connor, Caitlin Quinn, and Jasmine Robledo, whose friendship has always reminded
me that there is life outside of graduate school. I thank Lauren Gouveia, Natalia Jensen, Jen McMillan, and Kristen Wroblewski, for being tried and true.

To my family: Jay, Pam, and Kyle Thacker, Jill Harrington, and Matt Jacobs, I simply say thank you, and trust they know how deeply I mean it.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather, James Francis Thacker Sr., with gratitude for his sacrifices and his love.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 3

Acknowledgments 4

Table of Contents 6

Introduction 7

Chapter One: Ciaran Carson's Multitextual Poetic Maps 45

Chapter Two: Eavan Boland’s Suburban Poetics 92

Chapter Three: Tom French and Leontia Flynn: Toward a Multimobile Poetics 130

Afterword: Fiona Benson’s Embodied Multimobility 171

Works Cited 193
Introduction

In 1987, Ciaran Carson published *The Irish for No*. The collection opens with “Dresden,” a poem that continually locates, relocates, and dislocates its speaker and the speaker’s companions. The poem begins with the speaker describing visiting a friend called Horse Boyle who lives in a “decrepit caravan, not two miles out of Carrick,” but by third line, he has already interrupted himself to tell the reader “But that's another story.” Not until the eighth of ten stanzas does the speaker get to the story he means to tell, another self-correction that changes the course of the poem and dramatically relocates Horse from his caravan. The speaker, upon seeing Horse’s brother enter, writes,

I forgot to mention they were twins. They were as like as two –

No, not peas in a pod, for this is not the time nor the place to go into Comparisons, and this is really Horse's story, Horse who – now I'm getting

Round to it – flew over Dresden in the war. (64-67)

It is in this moment that the impetus for this project begins. Carson’s method of controlling, limiting, and adding information, such that the reader’s understanding is altered throughout, encourages me to view the poem as a space simultaneously navigated by reader and writer. In another poem, “Ambition,” Carson refers to movements made by “one step forward, two steps back,” an apt metaphor for Carson’s accumulation of poetic detail that causes his speakers, as well as his readers, to continually falter, make tentative progress, and adjust their courses.

The stanza of “Dresden” in which the speaker finally gets “round to it” is a moment when identity is at stake. The speaker has thus far defined Horse’s identity through the people around
him, particularly his brother, noting in the poem’s opening line that “Horse Boyle was called Horse Boyle because of his brother Mule” (1). Horse tells the speaker, and thus the reader, details of other people’s lives: his friend Flynn, jailed for seven years after a thwarted paramilitary mission, and his former teacher, Master McGinty, who came from a particularly impoverished part of Ireland. Horse’s only identity is as the teller of these stories. In the lines cited above, the speaker, thus far imagined as a passive listener, becomes the storyteller and the particulars of Horse’s life, independent of his brother and local community, emerge. In the remaining two-and-a-half stanzas, the reader learns that Horse emigrated to Manchester to find work and eventually, “on impulse,” joins the Royal Air Force. We learn that “Of all the missions, Dresden broke his heart. It reminded him of china” and that he keeps a piece of a china figurine from his childhood in a tin with his war medals. In another example of Carson giving information and then taking it back or complicating it, we learn that Horse “could hear, or almost hear” china breaking “all across the map of Dresden” (75). In these stanzas, Carson demonstrates the temporo-spatial dimensions of Horse’s identity. Horse moves from Carrick to Manchester and then flies over Dresden, which he can only imagine as a map, unlike the specific, first-person knowledge he demonstrates in descriptions of his neighborhood. Dresden breaks his heart, largely due to his knowledge of the city’s porcelain industry and his childhood memories of a porcelain figure, and, back in Carrick years after the war, he keeps his medals with the fragments of that figure. In this poem, Horse’s identity is influenced by local and global experiences, twentieth-century developments that demand or encourage increased mobility, and his ability to construct space and place in his imagination.

***
This project investigates identity as it relates to space, place, and movement in twentieth and twenty-first century Irish poetry, using the language of critical geography and mobility studies as a framework. Literary geography and cultural geography have been part of the critical landscape since the 1970s, while mobility studies became prominent more recently, in the 1990s. ¹ Neal Alexander and David Cooper argue that “one conspicuous feature of the spatial turn in literary studies is a tendency to privilege prose fiction and non-fiction over other kinds of writings” and suggest that there is a “need to develop equally sophisticated evaluations of how poetic language and forms are mobilised in contemporary representations of space” (2). Alexander and Cooper are particularly interested in contemporary poetic representations of space, because “the far-reaching effects of economic globalisation, neo-imperialism, new transport and communications technologies, mass migrations, political devolution and impending environmental crisis have substantially reshaped existing social and spatial relations” and thereby have motivated poetic response (2). Evaluating that response requires an understanding of the ways in which spatial organization reflects and creates social interactions and the ways “exclusivist claims to space” are “attempts to fix the meaning of particular spaces...and to claim them for one’s own” (Massey 3). Classed, gendered, and racialized social interactions necessarily occur in spaces that are “experienced differently and variously interpreted by those holding different positions” (Massey 3). Massey argues that all attempts to fix meaning or establish boundaries are in fact demonstrations of one’s power to “stabilize the meaning of

¹ For overviews of literary geography, see Noble and Dhussa; and Massey. Noble and Dhussa chart literary geography through its beginnings in early twentieth century Britain and and development in the in the United States in the 1970s and 80s. They stress literature and traditional geography as complementary disciplines. Massey covers cultural geography in the 80s and 90s with a focus on scholarship that considers economic and and feminist theory and works within a tradition of scholarship that considers space as social: see Harvey, Lefebvre, and Soja.
particular envelopes of space-time,” stabilizations which deny or overpower other possible meanings (Massey 5). Though claims to space are certainly demonstrative of power, Massey’s understanding does not allow for the complexities present poetic representations of spaces in which definition or ownership is contentious.

Exploration of space, movement and identity in Irish poetry is particularly fruitful because, Ireland is a place in which:

cultural identity has often been interpreted as bound up with place, whether through notions of local culture (the parish of region, for examples) or through the more abstract constructions of national identity, which often involve a supporting image drawn from a particular landscape (the West of Ireland as the source of ‘true Irishness’). (Kennedy-Andrews 1)

This place-based cultural identity has political components, as various forces in twentieth century Ireland have sought, at times violently, to define borders and legitimate identity categories. In 1916, Irish republicans in Dublin proclaimed independence and led a violent uprising known as the Easter Rising. The fighting left parts of Dublin in ruin, the first of many times in the twentieth century that clashes between republicans and unionists or the British army dramatically changed the physical landscape of the land each tried to claim. Though the rebellion failed and most of its leaders, including poets Patrick Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, and Joseph Plunkett, were executed, it galvanized support for republicanism and set it motion years of conflict and contest over borders and national definitions. The Irish War of Independence was fought from 1919 to 1921 and resulted in the Anglo-Irish Treaty and creation of the Irish Free State, which divided Ireland into the six counties of the North and twenty-six counties of the
South. Republicans unhappy with this divided Ireland fought with republicans who supported the treaty; this conflict, the Irish Civil War, lasted from 1922 to 1923. Though those who supported the Free State won, a new constitution was ultimately drafted in 1937 and created the state of Ireland that we know today. In Northern Ireland, the Troubles, discussed in greater detail below, was a clash between republicans and unionists that dominated political and cultural conversations for much of the late twentieth century.

I discuss nationalism and sectarian conflict in greater detail in each chapter of this dissertation and contend that as technology, as well as Irish political and cultural events in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, made travel increasingly accessible, identity becomes less closely tied to individual places and more related to one’s relative mobility. Mobility studies, becomes relevant to poets who began publishing in the twenty-first century. Peter Merriman and Tim Cresswell write that “attention to the practice and performance of mobilities forms an important component of recent work on the geographies of mobilities” and indicate that different modes of mobile practice (such as walking, rowing, running, driving, and flying) “have also come to be associated with different ways of being and thinking, and different ethics, aesthetics and ecologies” (6, 7). Mobility and transnationalism were important cultural influencers before the technology that allowed faster and easier travel and movement—indeed, as Stephen Greenblatt makes clear in *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (2009), the idea that “once upon a time there were settled, coherent, and perfectly integrated national or ethnic communities” is a “fantasy” (2). However, Greenblatt admits that “mobility often is perceived as a threat - a force by which traditions, rituals, expressions, and beliefs are decentered, thinned out, decontextualized, lost” (250). Similarly, Ian Davidson writes that “if identity is pragmatically
linked to our place of origin...then in recent years identities have become more fluid and impermanent as the world's population becomes more mobile” (89). Critics whose work concentrates on Irish literature, such as Kennedy-Andrews and Eamonn Hughes, suggest increasing urbanization and diasporization chips away at essentialist or provincial views of Ireland. These may be considered to be a thinning out of tradition, to use Greenblatt’s language, but framed more positively, allows for complex and contemporary views of Ireland.

This dissertation takes up Alexander and Cooper’s call to evaluate contemporary poetic representations of space, and further explores how representations of space relate to cultural and individual identity. I argue that poetic language has the ability to define the “meaning of particular envelopes of space-time” without establishing boundaries and while allowing for, and even depending upon, the experience of simultaneous and contradictory meaning. Over the course of three chapters and a brief afterword, I analyze Ciaran Carson, Eavan Boland, Tom French, Leontia Flynn, and Fiona Benson as poets who make particularly strong statements about space and temporo-spatial identity. I begin with poets writing in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland before addressing Benson, a British poet, in the afterward. This organization demonstrates the diminishing emphasis on place, in favor of mobility, that I trace in poetic representations of identity. Carson and Boland, poets who began publishing in the 1960s and 1970s, write about identity as strongly influenced by place, and more particularly, by national and cultural constructions of place. In the poetry of French and Flynn, poets who began publishing in the early 2000s, their speakers’ relative abilities to move and travel in real and imagined spaces is more important than place of origin in shaping identity. As place of origin
becomes less integral in establishing identity, it is fruitful to observe poetic trends across nations and to recognize the reciprocity of national traditions.

This dissertation purposely looks at male and female poets from the North and the Republic in order to suggest that though the North and Republic have differing political concerns and interests, evolving attitudes towards place, space, identity, and mobility necessarily involve Ireland as a whole—North, Republic, man, and woman. As Kennedy-Andrew suggests, the mythology surrounding the West of Ireland can be part of identity construction in the North; additionally, poets such as Boland and Longley are associated with the North and the Republic, as well as the United States. Mobility within Ireland and beyond is important for the possibility of the poetic creation of bounded but non-exclusive spaces. In addition to examining poets from the North and the Republic, this dissertation intentionally includes poets writing in different political and cultural environments, chiefly, poets writing during and after the Troubles. I have made this choice in order to demonstrate poetry’s ability to create spaces that shift, overlap, and contradict in the face of political and cultural moments that attempt to define and bind space.

Though the Troubles officially come to an end in 1996, I suggest that the Troubles-era and the post-Troubles-era share a need to stabilize space in the way that Massey describes: to ascribe meaning and deny other possible meanings in a demonstration of power. Carson, Boland, French, Flynn, and Benson illustrate resistance to that need in their poetry of contradictory yet co-occurring temporo-spatial experience.

\(^2\) For example, while the Troubles dominated the political landscape in the North, the Republic, affected but less plagued by violence, was also concerned with matters such as reproductive rights, immigration and emigration, and the waning influence of the Catholic Church.
The choices I made about which poets to study are influenced by ongoing debates in Irish literary criticism regarding bias toward the so-called Northern Renaissance and women’s writing. Though Kennedy-Andrews suggests that poetry can (and does, to varying degrees) “move away from concepts of rootedness towards a poetics or politics of displacement, mobility, openness, and pluralism,” his interest in pluralism remains largely focused on Northern Ireland alone. *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, edited by Paul Muldoon and published in 1986, included ten poets, seven of whom were from the North. In 1990, Derek Mahon, himself a Northerner, edited the *Penguin Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry* and wrote in its introduction that its express purpose was "to dispel the illusion that Irish poetry has been written exclusively by persons of Northern provenance" (3). At this same time, notions that Irish poetry was written exclusively by male persons was both asserting its presence and being challenged. *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, edited by Seamus Deane and an all-male editorial board, and published in 1991, reflects this male bias. Field Day began as a Derry-based group interested in a recovery project that would publish Irish poems, ballads, histories, speeches, and other texts as objects worthy of study and inquiry; the anthology initially appeared as a three-volume set that attempted to cover 1500 years of Irish writing. Haberstroh and St. Peter contend that though the anthology is a great achievement, it is one marked by “the virtual absence of female writers and the consequent spotlight on the all-male editorial board that had produced the work” (1). Though critics argued that the three-volume anthology demonstrated nationalist and English-language biases as well, the clear male bias and subsequent reaction was such that Angela Bourke edited

---

3 For more on debates about the importance of the Belfast Group and the existence of a Northern Renaissance, see Clark. For an in-depth discussion on the politics and stakes of Irish anthologies in the 1970s and 1980s, see: Frazier.
two additional volumes focused on women’s writing. Bourke’s two-volume addition to the *The Field Day Anthology* covers 1,400 years of literary production, letter and journal writing, and journalism. Haberstroh and St. Peter detail figures in women’s writing in Ireland: female publishing houses Arlen Press and Attic Press, the *Irish Journal of Feminist Studies*, *the Irish Feminist Review*, and several anthologies of women’s writing. However, Haberstroh and St. Peter, writing as recently as 2007, say that “a survey of the most publicized, frequently reviewed and popular anthologies of Irish literature...still continued to under-represent significantly the achievements of women, just as *The Field Day Anthology* did” (2-4).

This dissertation analyzes contemporary English-language poetry written by Irish poets in the context of English and Irish literary traditions, Irish cultural history, and critical geography and mobility studies. Though Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, the most prominent contemporary Irish language poet, protested *Field Day*’s lack of Irish-language writing more than its lack of women, English-language poetry makes up the majority of poetry published in twentieth and twenty-first century Ireland. The Irish language influences English-language literature in Ireland, something I discuss in greater detail in my analysis of Carson, whose first language was Irish and whose early collections include English translations of Irish work. In this dissertation, I sometimes invoke a poet’s statements about his or her work in order to provide context or when that poet is well-known for particular points-of-view, such as Boland’s autobiographical essays about women’s writing or Benson’s statements on writing about the body. Largely, though, I focus on critical debates and close readings of poetry in order to read these poets in the context of their treatment of space, place, and identity

***
When studying Irish poetry in the twentieth century, certain people and events begin to stand out as ways to mark time and trends. The Belfast Group, a writing group that began in Belfast in 1963, stands out as a place to begin. Many of the poets and critics who participated in it went on to become major figures and drive trends. Over its nine-year span, the Group included Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Paul Muldoon, Carson, Eavan Boland, and Edna Longley. Heaney’s first book *Death of a Naturalist* (1966) contained poems shared and workshopped at Group meetings, as did Longley’s *No Continuing City* (1969) and Muldoon’s *New Weather* (1973). The Belfast Group was informal, often meeting in pubs or private homes, but its members were largely associated with Queen’s University Belfast (QUB). The Group continues to have academic influence in Ireland and abroad; Boland directs the Creative Writing Program at Stanford University and Muldoon serves as a professor of Creative Writing at Princeton University. Currently, the faculty of QUB’s Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry includes Carson and Edna Longley, as well as prominent younger poets and critics Flynn, Sinéad Morrissey, Fran Brearton, and one-time Heaney student Medbh McGuckian. In particular, Heaney’s influence cannot be overstated. Heaney, born in County Derry and educated at QUB, went on to teach at Harvard University (1985-2006) and serve as the Oxford Professor of Poetry (1989-1994). He won the Nobel Prize in 1995 for “for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth, which exalt everyday miracles and the living past” (Swedish Academy). Heaney and other Belfast Group members, as well as their students, participate in the trends that emerged in mid-to-late twentieth century poetry, including a disenchantment with the pastoral, engagement with the sectarian violence of The Troubles, growing demands for women’s rights, continuing emigration and new
immigration, the Catholic Church’s diminishing impact, and the economic changes Ireland witnesses in the 1990s and early 2000s, can be traced through the members and their students.

Historically, Ireland has been conservative and slow regarding women’s rights, particularly, reproductive rights.4 Though the influence of the Catholic Church has been diminishing over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, its political and cultural sway has resulted in particularly conservative laws regarding women’s reproductive rights. Other groups organized to work against this influence, including the National Women’s Council of Ireland in 1973 and the Irish Family Planning Association, which formed in 1969 and became a member of the International Planned Parenthood Association in 1975. In 1979, contraceptives, including condoms and hormonal birth control, became legal in the Republic of Ireland, but only by prescription and for the exclusive purpose of family planning (i.e. for use within marriage). Contraceptives are now available outside of marriage and, in some cases, without a prescription; abortion remains illegal in the Republic. Until 1992, it was illegal to provide information about abortion outside of Ireland and for an Irish woman to receive an abortion outside of the country.

In 2010, the Human Rights Watch published a report saying that the Republic not only limits legally available abortion in Ireland to a degree which violates human rights, it continues to limit access to legal abortion in other countries through informational control and legal injunctions. In 2014, the United Nations Human Rights Committee expressed much of the same concerns and advised the State to revise its abortion policy at the Constitutional level and ensure that health

4 Despite the Republic’s subpar record with women’s rights, the national elected two female presidents in the 1990s. Mary Robinson served as president from 1990-1997 and Mary MacAleese was president for two terms, from 1997 - 2011. Ireland also has a prime minister or Taoiseach, who is appointed by the Dáil Éireann (a house in Irish legislature) and holds executive power. Ireland has never had a female Taoiseach.
care providers can provide women with information about abortion services without fear of prosecution.

As a result of this slow progress, some women’s poetry reflects a “cultural embarrassment about the Republic’s body politics” and results in a “complicated relationship with physicality” (Guinness 21). This relationship results in lighthearted poems about women enjoying their bodies, such as Flynn’s “The Vibrator,” about mistakenly leaving a vibrator behind in a move, or Katie Donovan’s “Watermelon Man,” about imagining herself “a seed, a fruit, a luscious thing” (“WM” 7). More often, this “complicated relationship” is a violent one. Dorothy Molloy, in “First Blood,” narrates a dinner date that ends in a sexual assault, writing the out-of-body experience that shock and trauma create, while Boland, Caitriona O’Reilly, and Colette Bryce write poems about experiences with anorexia and its accompanying anxiety. Flynn’s “Inside the Catedral Nueva” describes her “granny who for twenty years or so / was stretched on the rack of her re-product-ions,” suggesting that the regressive culture regarding reproductions amounts to a kind of torture (9-10).

Poetic treatment of emerging urban and suburban spaces is key for the poets studied in this dissertation. Mary Corcoran, et al. write that the development of suburban space is an inevitable outcome of urbanization; thus, as twentieth century Ireland became more urban, it necessarily became more suburban (25). The influence of urban poetry, particularly in Northern Ireland, begins with poetry that rejects pastoral tradition. In 1942, Patrick Kavanagh, rejecting his characterization as a “peasant poet,” published the socially critical poem, “The Great Hunger,” which would become his most acclaimed work. “The Great Hunger,” though undoubtedly rural, offers no redemption in physical labor, filial loyalty, communion with nature,
or religion. Guinness characterizes the poem as an “antipastoral vision,” noting that decades later, poets such as French, Mary O’Donoghue, Kerry Hardie, and Martin Mooney would renew that vision (15). The rejection of an idealized pastoral allows the recognition of the country as an increasingly industrialized urban space.

Carson and Flynn complicate what Eamon Hughes calls Belfast’s “dominant representation” as violent and tribalist (142). Though Hughes is primarily interested in novelistic representations of the city, he argues that novels, poetry, and films primarily use Belfast as shorthand for violence, seediness, and corruption. The city is an incidental backdrop and the people in it play stock roles. According to Hughes, reasons for increasing complexity in late twentieth century representations of the city include the expansion of Belfast as an industrial center, growing educational opportunities, the continuing diaspora in which emigrants settled in urban places, and the experiences of The Troubles (143). Though Carson’s poetry undoubtedly portrays scenes of violence, his specific accounts and careful attention to the city’s landscapes and neighborhoods results in the complex representations that differ from the pulp fiction genre known as “Troubles Trash” or “Troubles Thrillers.”

Carson’s focus on city space is particularly illuminating, as understanding the city’s spatial organization is integral to understanding the overall conflict. Catherine Switzer and Sarah McDowell; and Neil Jarman discuss how Belfast’s infrastructure reflected in and reinforced by the city’s political and cultural divides; cultural affiliations dictated decisions about where to live, work, and socialize and peace walls divided neighborhoods, creating a situation in which “the journeys individuals make and therefore their

---

5 For background on and analysis of this genre, see Kelly, Reimer.
understanding of place and sense of space are always marked by their ethnic background” (Jarman).

Two twentieth-century events influenced both the physical and psychic landscapes of the North and the Republic, as well as these poets’ senses of place, space, ethnicity, and culture: the Troubles and the Celtic Tiger boom and crash.

The Troubles is the name for the period of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, lasting roughly from 1968 through 1996. The catalyst for these events was discrimination against Catholics, namely in the form of limited housing options and representation in Parliament. In 1967, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association formed to advocate for voting rights and increased employment opportunities for Catholics. This advocacy led to a series of civil rights marches in Derry. A march held on October 5 1968 was broken up by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and devolved into two days of riots; this march is widely considered the official start to the Troubles. The clash can generally be thought of as between Catholics and Protestants, but more specifically, it is a series of violent actions, including shootings and bombings, by paramilitary groups ostensibly representing Catholic and Protestant interests. Catholic groups might identify as Nationalist, or supporters of the idea of a united Ireland consisting of the twenty-six counties of the Republic and the six counties of the North; or as Republican, which implies support for that same idea as well as for the use of paramilitary force to achieve that goal. Protestant groups might identify as Unionist, or supporters of Northern Ireland’s union with Great Britain, or Loyalist, which implies both loyalty to the British crown and a tacit support for paramilitary activities. Republican paramilitary groups include the Irish Republican Army and its splinter group the Provisional Irish Republican Army, as well as
dissident groups formed in the 1990s, including the Real Irish Republican Army and Continuity Irish Republican Army. Loyalist Groups include the Ulster Volunteer Force, the Ulster Defence Association, the Ulster Freedom Fighters, and the Red Hand Commando. Other groups involved include the British Army, who shot and killed fourteen parade-goers on what is now known a Bloody Sunday, and the RUC, Northern Ireland’s police force which through the 1990s was over ninety percent Protestant.  

Key events during this period include the internment of suspected IRA members (1971-1975), Bloody Sunday (1972), Bloody Friday (1972), the dissolution of the Northern Irish parliament in favor of direct rule from Westminster (1972-1999) and hunger strikes (1981).

The ongoing end to the Troubles is known as the peace process, which includes the IRA ceasefire (1994) and the Belfast Agreement, commonly known as the Good Friday Agreement (1998). Though the Good Friday Agreement brought the Troubles to an official end, the single most violent incident of the conflict occurred months after the agreement was signed: a bombing, carried out by the Real Irish Republican Army, which killed twenty-nine people in Omagh. Though intermittent violence continues, the Good Friday Agreement brought a measure of stability to Northern Ireland that coincided with a period of economic development in the Republic and a growing tourist economy in the North. The Good Friday Agreement created several cross-border organizations, including the British-Irish Council, formed to “promote positive, practical relationships among the people of the islands; and to provide a forum for consultation and co-operation” and the North South Ministerial Council, which coordinates operations and legislation on matters from food safety to Irish and Ulster-Scots language use.

6 The RUC was disbanded in 2001 and a new police force, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, was formed.
The success of the Agreement hinges on ease of movement between the Republic and the North; no passports are required and no checkpoints exist. Recent discussion about the United Kingdom leaving the European Union has reignited conversations about the border between the Republic and the North, with politicians and journalists speculating about the political effects of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic and if that border would violate the Good Friday Agreement (Devenport, McCall, McGowan).

Use of the term Celtic Tiger to describe the Republic’s economy began in 1994, after economist Kevin Gardiner used the term in a report for Morgan Stanley (Maher and O’Brien 1). In 1993, the Republic had begun to experience rapid development that would last until 1997. In that time,

GDP growth rates soared year on year, with double-digit growth recorded in a number of years. The unemployment rate fell to the lowest in Europe, with the number of people at work almost doubling between 1992 and 2007, increasing from 1.165 million to 2.139 million (Kitchin et al. 1070).

This rapid growth was in stark contrast to the economy of the 1980s, during which “the twenty-six counties were mired in an economic depression from which there appeared no possibility of escape” (Coulter and Coleman 3). The quick and unexpected turnaround brought with it record high immigration and job creation, a building boom, and a general sense of confidence in economic stability and prosperity. That growth was abruptly halted and reversed in 2007 when there was a run on Irish banks, which led to bank and national debt, mass unemployment, high emigration levels, a landscape dotted with abandoned construction projects, and bailouts from
the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. The sense of confidence was replaced with a sense of panic and anger at being misled. Maher and O’Brien ask, for example, “why it was that our writers and artists, along with politicians, economists, academics and the media in general, failed to alert the public in an adequate manner to the dangers associated with the Celtic Tiger?” (6). This notion of artistic responsibility is one that the poets I study reject, even as they engage with the political and cultural matters that shape their communities and experiences. Michael Longley, a member of the Northern Renaissance and Belfast Group, has written candidly about his engagement with public concerns, particularly military and paramilitary violence, and his simultaneous resistance to his poems circulating or being understood as political documents. Looking closely at Longley’s treatment of time and space as they relate to identity provides context for the literary and social world in which Carson, Boland, French, and Flynn live and write.

***

In 1968, Longley, Heaney, and Belfast poet-musician David Hammond went on a poetry and music tour called *Room to Rhyme*. The event, sponsored by the Arts Council and including Catholic and Protestant participants, “marked a brief period of potential in the intellectual, political, and social life of the North,” as well as a particularly public poetry (Russell 56). Longley became the Council’s assistant director of literature in 1970 and eventually, its Traditional Arts Officer, a position he held until 1991. Art, for Longley, has thus always had a

---

7 As of 2011, there were 2,876 documented unfinished estates in Ireland, 777 of which can be considered a “ghost estates.” An unfinished estate is a housing estate of two or more housing units where development and services have not been completed and estates completed from 2007 onwards where 10% or more of units are vacant (National Building Agency, 2010; 2011). A “ghost estate,” a term coined by David McWilliams in 2006, is an estate of ten or more units in which 50% are vacant.
somewhat public face, yet he maintains that is it is not his responsibility to write about political or sectarian issues to answer a public demand or desire for such writing. He does, however, address his readership and such desires in letters to newspapers and journals, as well as in Arts Council publications. His poetry is less direct and resists narrativizing conflict. Poems about local acts of violence, such as “Wreaths” (1979) or “The Ice Cream Man,” (1991) focus on the moment an act occurs, without attempting to frame that moment in a larger historical or cultural context. Poems that do provide context can be disorienting rather than orienting; “Wounds,” for example gives readers details about World War I soldiers and paramilitary members, but those details do not provide easy connections or make sense of experience. Longley’s poems are full of quiet observations and accumulated details that create a sense of unease, reflecting the experience of unanticipated violence.

In a letter to the editor published in The Irish Times just a few weeks after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, Longley writes, “Sometimes I feel British. Sometimes I feel Irish. Often I feel neither. The Agreement allows me to feel more Irish, more British and, just as importantly, more ‘neither.’” A sense of uneasy simultaneity is present in Longley’s poetry and prose, but “neither” becomes a viable category, legitimized by an event in time. Many critics have written about Longley’s treatment of space and place, including Richard Rankin Russell and Adam Hanna, both of whom address the uneasy simultaneity I mention. Russell uses the term “two mindedness,” from Yeats’ observation that poetry is made from quarrels with oneself, to refer to things from bicultural identity, wavering between optimism and pessimism, and the “oscillating between an inward notion of lyric poetry as disinterested, even insouciant, and an outward desire to speak to and create community” (4-5). Hanna, also writing about Heaney and
Longley, observes a “double feeling” in Longley’s frequent invocation of a holiday cottage at Carrigskeewaun in County Mayo. The scene—a seaside cottage in the West—is emblematic of the mystic and mythical Irish Revival imagery, yet Longley uses it as a base to explore his own Irish and British identity and to draw connections across the island. Fran Brearton has written extensively about Longley (and is, along with Edna Longley, Flynn, and Carson, a member of the faculty at QUB) and in particular, his use of the term and concept No Man’s Land:

No Man's Land is a landscape which does not simply inform Longley's own poetic locale, rather it becomes that poetic locale: it is adapted and adopted as a kind of schizophrenic hinterland which, in acknowledging the contradictory nature of its origins, challenges as it enables the poetry. It offers a 'solid' ground whose solidity depends, paradoxically, on its fluidity, on its 'betwixt-and-between' quality. (62)

No Man’s Land, for Longley, is a space that emblematizes a “double feeling” or “two-mindedness:” it is defined by what it is not and creates an alternative. While these critics provide insightful readings of place in Longley’s poetry, they neglect the temporal aspects of space, which Longley’s embrace of “neither” demands and which he explicitly addresses in prose writings.

In 1971, the Arts Council published a set of essays called “Causeway: The Arts in Ulster.” In the title essay, Longley writes:

the artist needs time in which to allow the raw material of experience to settle to an imaginative depth where he can transform it and possibly even suggest solutions to current and very urgent problems by reframing them according to the dictates of his particular discipline. He is not some sort of super-journalist commenting with unaltering
spontaneity on events immediately after they have happened. (quoted in Poetry and Peace 18)

Longley wrote this essay not long after Room to Rhyme and not long after The Troubles began. From 1968 to 1971, Northern Ireland, particularly Derry and Belfast, witnessed intermittent rioting, numerous civil rights marches, the dissolution and re-election of the Stormont parliament, bombings orchestrated by the Ulster Volunteer Force and Ulster Protestant Volunteers, the Battle of the Bogside, shootings and other violence perpetrated by the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the formation of the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Ulster Defence League, and internment of suspected IRA members, among many other local acts of disturbance and governmental response (see CAIN for a detailed timeline). Problems, as Longley states, were urgent. Longley distinguishes between the responsibilities of journalist and an artist in light of such urgency, a distinction he maintains in another piece of prose, written three years later.

Longley maintains distinctions between poetry and journalism in a response to Padraic Fiacc’s anthology, The Wearing of the Black, a collection of poems about violence in Northern Ireland published in 1974. Between the publication of “Causeway: The Arts in Ulster” in 1971 and 1974, Northern Ireland witnessed increasing violence, including the continuation of internment, Bloody Sunday, the dissolution of the Stormont parliament in favor of direct rule from Westminster, Bloody Friday, and many shootings and bombings carried out by military and paramilitary forces. Fiacc seems to have anticipated negative reaction to his anthology, writing in the introduction that “I might be accused of a cynical exploitation of what is, hopefully, a transient situation...but there is a time to keep silence and a time to speak; at the very least there
is nothing in this anthology that did not cry out to be said, and this is surely more than enough to justify its existence” (vii). Fiacc includes Longley, as well as Heaney, Boland, John Hewitt, Seamus Deane, Paul Muldoon, Derek Mahon, Frank Ormsby and Carson, two years before Carson would publish his first collection.

Fiacc organizes *The Wearing of the Black* in four movements: a prologue that begins with the “Bog People” and continues through the twentieth century, which is “darkened with fear that gripped the province during the Second World War;” a second movement about Derry and the “smouldering fears which ultimately exploded into hatred and killing;” a third, “climactic” movement about “the terror and horror of Belfast;” and finally, an epilogue on the “bitterness stemming from the results of violence” (vii). Though Fiacc writes that the anthology does not offer a “final statement,” this organization forces the events into a novelistic or cinematic structure and suggests an ending is in sight. Though Fiacc hopes the situation is “transient,” the Troubles were in fact far from over at the time of publication. Longley’s reaction to the volume does accuse Fiacc of “cynical exploitation,” but it goes into detail and, in his response, I find further evidence that time is particularly important to Longley’s poetic identity and imagination of the role of a poet.

Shortly after the publication of *The Wearing of the Black*, Fiacc, whom Longley reportedly referred to as “the patron saint of the insane,” wrote an essay for *Hibernia* in which he declares that Longley did not allow a particular poem to be included (BBC). Longley’s response, published as a letter to the editor in December 1974 is vociferous in its disdain:

Fiacc claims that I fought him about including a poem of mine on the assassination of my "grocer and friend." This is a personal matter which Fiacc has no right to report. The
grocer was not my friend: I rather liked him, that's all. The poem seemed to me to be bad, or at least inadequate, and I asked that it should not be included in Fiacc's Encyclopedia of Tormented Ulster Poets. ...Fiacc ends in grand style by referring to "the Ulster poet's tragic anguish." Self regarding nonsense like this makes me feel ashamed of the journalistic tag "Ulster poet." (I am normally just embarrassed or irritated). I wish to dissociate myself and my poetry from Fiacc's pathetic meanderings. He buzzes around the Ulster tragedy like a dazed bluebottle around an open wound.

(qtd in Russell “Inscribing Cultural Corridors” 221)

Longley, in contrast to Fiacc, expresses a disdain for the journalistic, which might be classified as a more public form of writing than poetry. Russell suggests that Longley’s poetry “[oscillates] between an inward notion of lyric poetry as disinterested, even insouciant, and an outward desire to speak to and create community”; however, there is very little oscillation between public and private in Longley’s writing: he is always public, and always aware of that fact. His concern is not of the public and private, imagined spaces which his poetry can occupy, but of time. Fiacc argues for an immediate need: there is no time for silence or sustained reflection when things “cry out” to be said. Longley’s critique of journalism is not one that takes issue with journalism’s public nature, but rather one that critiques its rapid output and resulting need for simplifying complex situations and identities, e.g. “Ulster Poets8” as a “tag” that is meant to signify a general experience. Poetry has a public role, but it must be thoughtful and, above all, precise: in a 1995

---

8 Ulster is a term that historically refers to nine counties, including the six that make up the North, as well as Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan. The term has been used by unionists, rather than Northern Ireland or the North, to emphasize historical distinctions between the North and the Republic, and for this reason, some republicans resist this term (CAIN).
interview, Longley states “in the context of political violence the deployment of words at their most precise and suggestive remains one of the few antidotes to death-dealing dishonesty” (quoted in McNair).

Longley’s various feeling of annoyance, irritation, and shame at being identified as an Ulster poet did not prevent him from participating in another anthology project with Ulster roots: James Simmons’ literary magazine, *The Honest Ulsterman*. Like Fiacc’s collection, *The Honest Ulsterman* aims to publish poets of varied backgrounds. The journal's manifesto was “We expect to print writers of varied beliefs and backgrounds. Not only protestants and catholics, unionists and liberals, but humanists, anarchists, atheists, mystics, communists, etc” and for this reason, was subtitled “a handbook for revolution” (humag.co). The difference in these projects can be best explained by *The Honest Ulsterman*’s list of backgrounds, which suggest the possibility that someone may identify with any combination of them. Printing Catholic and Protestant in lowercase is another move that purposefully downplays their significance and therefore, their opposition. Compare this with *The Wearing of the Black*’s four-part structure, with strict delineations between each movement, and original cover, which pictured a heart, split down the middle with one side orange and one side green, held together by a black band. This image simplifies and romanticizes sectarian division and does not allow for the complexities that *The Honest Ulsterman* explores by including writers of diverse backgrounds and by not explicitly or exclusively addressing The Troubles. Longley’s contributions to *The Honest Ulsterman* and his poems that address past and current violence demonstrate that he is not averse to writing poetry about conflict, but that, in that poetry, he values precision, complexity, and reflection.
“In Memoriam,” published in 1969, is a poem that demonstrates Longley’s values about reflection and evolving meaning. The poem is one of many in the course of Longley’s career that uses his father’s World War I experience as a touchstone and occasion for reflection. In this poem, the relationship of the speaker’s father to his war experience changes over the course of his life. Immediately after the war, his father was “stranded in France,” and in an attempt to prove to himself that the war was truly over, he remained there and took several lovers, something he tells his son only years later, as he is dying. The immediate aftermath of the war meant seeking new or thrilling experiences, but years later, it means that “old wounds woke / As cancer” (36-37). These wounds may be literal, as the speaker talks of “pills and bandages” that fill the house at that time (39). They may too be metaphoric or spiritual, as the father tells his son about memories of his past. The speaker imagines these memories as once again taking up the weight of dead or wounded fellow soldiers: “Re-enlisting with all the broken soldiers / you bent beneath your rucksack, near collapse” (6-7). These memories have not left his father, and, as he nears death, they are at the fore of this mind. His focus on this period of his life is described as “re-enlisting,” suggesting that he may have been able to leave, but that he cannot stay away. By re-enlisting, he joins his fellow soldiers in his rightful place. He is not able to forget, and now, his son take on the duty of memory, writing, at different points in the poem, “the slow sands / Of your history delay till through your eyes / I read you like a book,” “These words I write in memory. Let yours / And other heartbreaks play into my hands,” and “your voice now is locked inside my head” (3-5, 9-10, 29). The speaker in this poem takes on his father’s memories in an attempt to make sense of them, suggesting that his father, in his own lifetime, could not fully do the job. This is not to say the son will be entirely and ultimately successful. For father and son,
the significance of these experiences change over time. Longley returns to his father’s war experience again and again, trying to understand it and his own experiences with violence.

Only a few years later, Longley writes a poem about his father’s war experiences and, specifically, his presence during the Somme campaign. The Somme campaign, a months-long 1916 British offensive, resulted in 57,470 British casualties on the first day alone. Graham and Shirlow provide a summary of Somme’s importance in Ulster and relationship to local political concerns:

On the morning of 1st July 1916, as the Allied troops awaited the start signal that would follow a massive artillery bombardment of the German lines, the 36th (Ulster) Division held the trenches in front of Thiepval Wood. Raised from the ranks of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), formally instituted in January 1913 to, if necessary, fight to save Ulster from Home Rule, the 36th Division was created in late 1914 as part of Kitchener’s New Army in return for a commitment that Home Rule would not be made operative during the duration of the War (Orr, 1987). When two years later on that July morning, the Allied bombardment failed to dislodge the Germans, the 36th Division was one of many British units that advanced into, and was cut down by, swathes of machine-gun fire. In the first three days of the Somme offensive, it suffered around 5500 casualties, almost 3000 of whom were fatalities; perhaps 2000 Ulstermen were killed on 1st July alone (Middlebrook, 1971). (882)

Because of losses suffered by the Ulster Division, as well as its relationship to unionist politics, this event and these men have often been used as touchstones for the unionist agenda. For example, the Ulster Volunteer Force formed in the 1966, on the fiftieth anniversary of the
Somme, and still listed as a proscribed terrorist organization by the United Kingdom, claims direct descent from the 1913 group. The Somme began on July 1, the same day of the Battle of Boyne according to the Julian calendar, though the Boyne is more commonly commemorated on July 12. The Battle of the Boyne, the 1690 victory the Dutch Prince William of Orange over the English King James II, set into motion Britain’s full transition to Protestantism and British rule over Ireland. Both the Boyne and the Somme resonate particularly strongly in working-class communities, where they are celebrated with parades, bonfires, banners, and murals. Parades, held in both Catholic and Protestant neighborhoods, were such prominent sectarian displays that in 1972, Northern Irish Prime Minister Brian Faulkner banned all marches and parades, though this decree was largely ineffectual (CAIN). Bill Rolston has pointed out that Protestant communities don’t have access to the mythic imagery and rebellious past that Catholic groups use as icons in their celebrations; similarly, Graham and Shirlow note that “unionism...failed to create an identity myth and sense of place which might compete with the cultural coherence of republican nationalism” (884). Thomas Hennessy suggests that the mythology of the Somme attempts to address this lack, and that its occurrence so soon after the Easter Rising of 1916 made it particularly appealing for that purpose. The centrality of the Somme to Northern Irish Protestant identity has been widely discussed by critics in fields including history, sociology, psychology, and geography.

---

9 Under the Terrorism Act 2000, the Home Secretary may proscribe an organisation if she believes it is concerned in terrorism, and it is proportionate to do. For the purposes of the Act, this means that the organisation: commits or participates in acts of terrorism; prepares for terrorism; promotes or encourages terrorism (including the unlawful glorification of terrorism); or is otherwise concerned in terrorism. (gov.uk)

10 See Mcauley, Hunt and McHale, Switzer and Graham, Jarman.
“Wounds” treats the Somme without heroizing or mythologizing. The poem begins with the speaker imagining that he has inherited his father’s memories: “Here are two pictures from my father’s head — / I have kept them like secrets until now” (1-2). Both are war memories that take on new meaning in light of growing violence on the speaker’s present-day. The first stanza uses images and phrases traditionally associated with British or Scottish nationalism and undermines them through associations with the violence of war and colonialism:

Here are two pictures from my father’s head —
I have kept them like secrets until now:
First, the Ulster Division at the Somme
Going over the top with ‘Fuck the Pope!’
‘No Surrender!’: a boy about to die,
Screaming ‘Give ’em one for the Shankill!’
‘Wilder than Gurkhas’ were my father’s words
Of admiration and bewilderment.
Next comes the London-Scottish padre
Resettling kilts with his swagger-stick,
With a stylish backhand and a prayer.
Over a landscape of dead buttocks
My father followed him for fifty years.
At last, a belated casualty,
He said — lead traces flaring till they hurt —
‘I am dying for King and Country, slowly.’
I touched his hand, his thin head I touched. (1-17)

In this stanza, the speaker’s father witnesses the Ulster Division at the Somme as an outsider; in “In Memoriam,” readers learn that the speaker’s father is not part of the Ulster Division, and in fact not part of a Northern Irish regiment at all. In that poem, the speaker says his father is one “Who, following the wrong queue at The Palace, / Have joined the London Scottish by mistake” (“In Memoriam” 17-18). National affiliation and expressions cultural pride can come done to standing in the wrong line, undermining the significance of the Ulster Division in cultural memory. Scottish regiments were present at Somme and the speaker’s father depicts the members of the Ulster division as violently anti-Catholic, even as their present enemy is German forces. Their identity was forged in the Belfast Protestant neighborhood of the Shankill (similar and adjacent to the Falls neighborhood frequently mentioned by Carson). Though they live in Ireland, a British colony, their identification is staunchly British even as the speaker’s father invokes Nepal, another British colony, with his mention of the Nepalese warriors, the Ghurkas. Though members of the British army assert their Britishness—or, at least, their Protestant-ness—in their rejection of the Pope and identification with a Protestant loyalist community, the speaker’s father aligns them with the Ghurkas, thereby associating them with colonized peoples. To the reader, they are distinctly not British here. Yet, one of the shouts is “no surrender!” famously shouted during the Battle of the Boyne. There is a push and pull of Britishness here, one that means something different when Longley is writing in 1973 than when his father served in World War I.

Longley continues to refuse straightforward notions of national or cultural affiliation with the memory of the “London-Scottish padre,” or chaplain, who walks through fields of dead
soldiers. That he is “London-Scottish,” against underscores Britain’s colonialism. Similarly, the
dead bodies wear kilts, aligning the soldiers with Celtic-ness and the ceremonial tradition of men
wearing kilts with nothing underneath. This symbol of masculine, cultural pride is annulled by
the bodies’ vulnerable, exposed positions as they lie dead in the field. Covering their prone
bodies returns them to a sort of dignity; using a “swagger-stick,” a common military instrument
carried by officers, to do so is yet another instance of an instrument of war controlling their
bodies. Again, this image means something different fifty years after it occurs, as soon, the
speaker’s father will be another dead body, a “belated causality” of the war. His dying, slowly
over the course of years, will finally complete his service. Longley underscores this closed circle
with the mention of “head” in the first and last lines of the stanza. In addition to closing the
circle, the double mention of his father’s head signifies a transfer of knowledge or memory. The
pictures are from the father’s head, but the son, touching his father’s dying head and listening to
these memories, has “kept” them and now shares them, interpreting them in his own context.

The second stanza transitions to his father’s burial and present-day violence, suggesting
that acts of war, no matter the context or perceived righteousness of a cause, have equally
devastating consequences. The speaker highlights the youth of perpetrators and victims of
violence during the Troubles, describing “three teenage soldiers,” “heavy guns” that “put out the
night-light in a nursery forever,” and a “shivering boy” who enters a home and murders a bus
conductor in front of that man’s “bewildered” wife and children (21, 25, 30, 33). In “In
Memoriam,” the speaker tells the reader that his father joined the military as a teenager,
uncertain of the politics and national maneuverings that resulted in the war. The “shivering boy”
in “Wounds” may be similarly uncertain about the forces that brought him into that home. His
hurried statement to the “bewildered wife”—“‘Sorry Missus’”—suggests at least a certain childish politeness that remains in spite of the act he has just committed, and perhaps an ambivalence about what he has done or why he has done it (34). Though no one is named in the second stanza, the events closely match the 1972 murder of Sydney Agnew, a bus driver who was shot in his Belfast home by teenage gunman the night before he was to testify about the hijacking of a bus by the IRA. This poem begins with violence and death on a battlefield and ends with it in a private home. The home is blandly, universally domestic—the family watches television as the supper dishes wait to be washed. Longley will repeat this tactic several years later, in “Wreaths,” in which “The Civil Servant” dies just as abruptly: “He was preparing an Ulster fry for breakfast / When someone walked into the kitchen and shot him” (1-2). In both instances, the mundane domestic details contrast with the disruptive political act, making it all the more shocking.

By juxtaposing his father’s experience as a teenage soldier and the acts of a teenager likely associated with the IRA within one poem, Longley disrupts popular narratives both World War I and loyalist paramilitary groups, in which there is a coherent genealogy beginning with the soldiers at the Battle of the Boyne through members of the 36th Ulster Division at the Somme and the contemporary incarnation of the Ulster Volunteer Force. In 1997, Longley published a Belfast Telegraph article criticizing the Ulster Tower, a memorial to the 36th Ulster Division in Thiepval, France. Longley criticized the memorial on both aesthetic and political grounds, writing that its association with the Orange Order is an example of “tribal assertion” that has justified violence (qtd in Brearton “Cenotaphs” 175). Shortly after, a response in the form of a letter to the editor to the Irish Times called Longley’s essay a “mean-spirited, and oddly vitriolic,
attack on the Orange Order.” The author of the letter, listed as Ted McConnell of County Antrim, pulls from the same story as “Wounds”:

Longley's article brought to mind the heroism of Major George Gaffikan who, when the West Belfast Company wavered during an assault, took off his Orange sash and waved it, shouting: “Come on, boys. No surrender!” The robust Major Gaffikan and his sash ... Michael Longley and his whimsical poesy. I know to whom I would erect a memorial. McConnell’s statement participates in the mythmaking, and perhaps, to quote Longley, “death-dealing” that “Wounds” attempts to dismantle. According to McConnell and the “picture” in the speaker’s father’s head in “Wounds,” the waving of the sash and the the shout of “no surrender” are true, and Graham and Shirlow acknowledge that this is widely believed. However, they also cite a veteran named Martin McKee, writing in the Belfast Telegraph years later:

What nonsense is stuck onto the story....Certainly Major Gaffikin waved an orange handkerchief, but orange was the colour of our battalion....If he had said (and if anybody could have heard him) “Come on boys, this is the First of July!”—how many would have known that the Boyne was fought on the first of July? I don’t know why they plaster such incidents on our battle. Nothing was further from my mind than the Boyne on the Somme (qtd in Graham and Shirlow 890).

Hunt and McHale cite the social and individual need to narrativize memory in order to understand a past and imagine a future, and specifically name the Somme as an example of a cultural narrative that has developed over time. The need to make sense of the past, justify the present, and imagine a future are likely the answer to McKee’s question about “why they plaster
such incidents on our battle.” It is also, I argue, the reason for the dismissive Irish Times letter to the editor. Longley’s poetry and prose about the Somme de-narrativize the event, making it complex, confusing, and contradictory. The men assert their Britishness by re-enacting the Boyne, while at the same time highlight their other-ness by locating themselves in the working-class, not-English-but-not-Irish Shankill. At the same time, they are observed by the speaker’s father, who further underscores the unspoken colonialism through his mention of the Ghurkas and his own enlistment in the London-Scottish division. Similarly, the “shivering boy” who “wanders” into the bus driver’s home, presumably associated with the IRA, may be as uncertain as the speaker’s teenage father when he enlists in “In Memoriam.” Whatever these men and boys were to themselves in these moments, to Longey they are, as he writes about himself, “neither.” Longley’s poems stress the importance of memory, particularly memory as it is passed through generations, but his poems resist narrativization and embrace the “neither” that has always existed, even before The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 took steps toward legitimizing that category.

Longley’s poem “Ceasefire” is hybrid: it addresses historical violence that takes on new meaning in the present day and first appears, in the pages of a newspaper rather than a journal or poetry collection. “Ceasefire” appeared in the September 3, 1994 edition of the Irish Times, one day before the IRA officially declared the ceasefire that began the peace process. “Ceasefire” does not explicitly address the Troubles, but instead imagines a scene of peace between Achilles and Priam, after Achilles has killed Priam’s son
Hector in the Trojan War. Though the poem addresses ancient rather than contemporary violence, it is a more straightforward commentary on the Troubles than Longley has previously written. The poem’s publication in the Irish Times underscores the directness of the address.

I

Put in mind of his own father and moved to tears
Achilles took him by the hand and pushed the old king
Gently away, but Priam curled up at his feet and
Wept with him until their sadness filled the building.

II

Taking Hector’s corpse into his own hands Achilles
Made sure it was washed and, for the old king’s sake,
Laid out in uniform, ready for Priam to carry
Wrapped like a present home to Troy at daybreak.

III

When they had eaten together, it pleased them both
To stare at each other’s beauty as lovers might,
Achilles built like a god, Priam good-looking still
And full of conversation, who earlier had sighed:

IV

11 Longley is not the only poet to apply themes of the Trojan War to conflict in Ireland. Yeats’ poems “No Second Troy” (1916) and “Leda and the Swan” (1928) use parts of the myth in meditations on rebellion and colonialism, respectively. Heaney’s 1990 verse play The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles’ Philoctetes has often been quoted during the peace process, particularly the line “hope and history rhyme.”
‘I get down on my knees and do what must be done
And kiss Achilles’ hand, the killer of my son.’

Though the poem’s subject is different from the earlier Longley poems I discuss, they share an intergenerational experience of violence, attention to bodily experiences of pain and grief, and sense of futility. Achilles touches Priam’s hand and Hector’s corpse; Priam supplicates at Achilles’ feet and kisses his hand. These moments are similar to the speaker’s comforting and almost ritual touching of his father’s head and hands in “Wounds.” The focus on Hector’s uniform calls to mind the kilts mentioned in both “In Memoriam” and “Wounds”—Achilles may carefully lay Hector out in uniform and the chaplain may cover soldiers’ exposed buttocks with their kilts, but these are acts of respect paid to bodies already dead. “In Memoriam” and “Wounds” exist in the speaker’s present and his father’s memories of World War I, while “Ceasefire” exists outside of the speaker’s experiences or memories.

Though the figures in “Ceasefire” are ancient Greeks, this is the only poem that gestures towards a future. This forward-looking movement occurs in a small way in the second stanza, when Achilles anticipates Priam leaving with Hector’s body the next morning. In the final stanza, Priam says that he does “what must be done” (13). “Must” implies an inevitability, or, at least, a need. This need, as well as the poem’s particularly public presentation, might call to mind Fiacc’s statement that things were crying out to be said and his narrativized structure with a forward-looking epilogue. However, bear in mind Longley’s 1971 statement about the relationship between time and poetry: “the artist needs time in which to allow the raw material of experience to settle to an imaginative depth where he can transform it and possibly even suggest solutions to current and very urgent problems by reframing them according to the dictates of his
particular discipline.” Longley’s poem of a moment of peace between warring parties, and in particular, acts of respect and forgiveness, and his suggestion that such things “must be done” is the transformation of material that he imagined twenty-three years prior. In “Ceasefire,” the speaker and reader might be Achilles or Priam, they might be both, or neither. In this poem there is a move away from the uneasy simultaneity of earlier poems and towards the embrace of British, Irish, and neither that Longley writes about in 1998. Longley’s resistance to narrativization and embrace of complex or unresolved identity and relationship to place is a precursor to the more direct treatment of space and place I argue is present in the poetry I analyze in this dissertation.

***

I begin my analysis with Carson. Though Carson began publishing several years after Boland (1974 and 1967, respectively), his focus on space sets the tone for my analysis of the other poets in this dissertation. His use of space has been widely studied; however, in Chapter One, I contend that critical attention to his use of maps can too easily conflate poem and map. Further, the understanding of critical geography elaborated by critics such as Doreen Massey, which provides an insightful and important vocabulary about the politicization and contestation of space, does not account for the poetry’s negative capability; that is, that poetry, and in particular, Carson’s poetry, attempts to stabilize meaning while knowing that meaning, for a particular speaker or in a particular poem, is dialectically shaped by contradictory and equally valid meanings. In addition, I argue that Carson, within a poem and across his collections, mingle or layers perspectives and experiences of city space that maps or individual experience cannot. Though maps and poetry share textual qualities, not least of which are authorship and the
claim of authority, Carson’s poetry, read as a set of documents rather than single, static text, depends on intertextuality—between his own poems and others—and intersubjectivity—between the speaker of the poem and other subjects who would surely navigate the city space differently.

Like Carson, Boland has been widely studied. In Chapter Two, my attention to the spaces in which she writes her poems and the places and spaces that appear in her poem generates an analysis which privileges the suburban. Suburban poetry, as I define it, involves twentieth century domesticity; attention to suburbia’s spatial, social, and economic relationships with the urban and the rural; and engagement with intellectual and creative production. Considering suburbia as a spatial and intellectual category disrupts the organizational binaries that usually present themselves in Boland criticism, such as rural and urban, nationalist and feminist, and Irish and American. Like Longley’s embrace of “neither,” Boland’s status as a suburban poet allows her to be alternatively and simultaneously urban and rural, domestic and public, nationalist and feminist.

In Chapter Three, my analysis of Flynn and French, both of whom began publishing in the early 2000s, requires less response and more invention. Though Flynn’s poetry has received some critical attention, the short time she has been publishing, relative to Carson and Boland, means that her place in the poetic and critical landscape is still being established. Her poetry is most often discussed in concert with other poets from Northern Ireland, as part of a new, post-Troubles Northern Irish Renaissance. Purposefully, I have written about her alongside French, a poet from the Republic who has received little critical attention. I have done this because Flynn has been categorized as a post-national poet, even within criticism that exclusively discusses poets from one nation. I argue that terms such as post- and transnational continue to emphasize
the nation even as they gesture towards its diminishing importance, and as such, they do not adequately represent the poetry of French and Flynn. The term I propose, “multimobile,” takes into account Jahan Ramazani’s study of globalized, transnational, and translocal poetry and the burgeoning field of mobility studies. A multimobile poetics emphasizes movement through both time and space and links physical and spiritual or metaphorical mobilities.

Finally, in a brief afterward, I turn to Fiona Benson, a British poet who began publishing in 2014. Ending with Benson allow me to expand the scope of this project and explore different expressions of multimobility. In Benson’s case, I argue that she practices a particularly embodied form of multimobility, using the body as a vehicle for connection across time and space.

***

At the end of Carson’s “Dresden,” the speaker briefly returns to the story with which he begins the poem—how he “nearly stayed” with Horse Boyle. The poem ends with “I might have stayed the night, but there's no time / To go back to that now; I could hardly, at any rate, pick up the thread. / I wandered out through the steeples of rust, the gate that was a broken bed” (88-90). In this poem, the speaker tries and often fails to tell a linear story, interrupted by Horse’s own musings, comings and goings of family and friends, and even the overwhelming physicality of Horse’s caravan—in addition the the gate made of a broken bed, the space features “baroque pyramids of empty baked bean tins” that fall in a “minor avalanche” whenever someone approaches (5, 9). The interruptions and distractions become the story, much like in another Carson poem, “Belfast Confetti.” In “Belfast Confetti,” the speaker is unable to communicate his experience of a bomb and Carson literalizes the illegibility of such an experience: the bomb is “a fount of broken type,” a gunshot is “a hyphenated line,” a military roadblock is a “colon” (2, 3,
5). The speaker is repeatedly asked who he is and where he is going, questions that are likened to a “fusillade” (9). As in many of the poems discussed in this dissertation, articulating one’s identity requires expert navigation of space.
Maps are on Ciaran Carson’s mind in his early poetry. Born in Belfast in 1948, he attended Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) and continues to live and work in the city. He was a member of the Belfast Group in its later years and published his first poetry collection, The New Estate, in 1976. This was followed by ten collections of original poetry, translations, two novels, and Last Night’s Fun, a nonfiction text about traditional Irish music. While the Belfast Group’s founding members began publishing in the early to mid-1960s, Carson’s debut appeared in the midst of the Troubles. From the start, then, his poems take place in a Belfast shaped by sectarian division and conflict. Like Michael Longley, Carson worked for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, where he served as a Traditional Arts Officer from 1975 to 1998. He made the transition to academia in 1998, when he began teaching at QUB. In 2003, he was appointed the director of the university’s Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry. Carson, though, has been critical of Heaney; his Honest Ulsterman review of Heaney’s 1975 North famously called Heaney “a laureate of violence—a mythmaker, an anthropologist of ritual killing, and apologist for ‘the situation’” (quoted in Corcoran 177). This review acknowledges Heaney’s evocative power and critiques his use of those powers; it also reveals how Carson perceived his own poetic role at the start of his career. Heaney’s North, with its Viking imagery and bog poems, places Northern Ireland and its conflict in a historical context, while Carson would dedicate poetry to present-day concerns and immediate, lived experiences of Belfast.

Carson’s experiences inform those of his speakers. Though his poetry is not strictly autobiographical, various facts of Carson’s life appear as part of his speakers’ lives, including
living in Belfast, specifically, near the Falls Road, a predominantly Catholic neighborhood; his father’s career as a postman; his position as a speaker of Irish; and his musical interests. In the modern lyric poetry of Cason’s early work, particularly, *The New Estate* (1976), *Irish for No* (1987), and *Belfast Confetti* (1989), the poet and speaker are difficult to separate. Carson and his speakers attempt to navigate city spaces and are nearly always unsuccessful: they run into dead ends or barricades, they are stopped by paramilitary associates, they knowingly and unknowingly wander into unsafe spaces as street names change and buildings and landmarks disappear quickly. Though Carson’s Belfast may be, by his own account, non-navigable, he continues to liken the city to a map and write poems that recount street names, structures, and movement through city space. In this chapter, I examine poems from Carson’s first three collections, *The New Estate*, *Irish for No*, and *Belfast Confetti*, and argue that his poetry uses concepts of city, map, and poem in order to probe the representative, perspectival, spatial, and temporal limitations of each.

The turn to spatial literary studies, and the vocabulary of literary geography, illuminate a sustained project of mapping and organizing urban space across Carson’s poetic project. Though Neal Alexander and David Cooper argue that the spatial turn in literary studies has a “tendency to privilege prose fiction and non-fiction over other kinds of writings,” Carson’s work demonstrates that poetic language also responds to the social organization of space (2). In light

12 Overviews of literary geography can be found in Noble and Dhussa’s 1990 “Image and Substance: A Review of Literary Geography” and Doreen Massey’s 1994 *Space, Place and Gender*. Noble and Dhussa chart literary geography through its beginnings in early twentieth century Britain and development in the in the United States in the 1970s and 80s. They stress literature and traditional geography as complementary disciplines, while Massey overs cultural geography in the 80s and 90s with a focus on scholarship that considers economic and feminist theory.
of the critical focus on prose, this dissertation takes up Alexander and Cooper’s call to consider how poetic language organizes space. Doreen Massey writes of how spatial organization reflects and creates social interactions and the ways “exclusivist claims to space” are “attempts to fix the meaning of particular spaces...and to claim them for one’s own” (3). Using Massey’s construction, I read Carson’s poetry as attempts to “stabilize the meaning of particular envelopes of space-time” that do not deny other possible meanings but in fact depend on them. In “Turn Again,” (*The Irish for No*) for example, the title may be a command for the reader to continue turning the pages of the book, but it also functions as an imperative for the poem’s speaker, walking through Belfast. Carson’s speakers repeatedly disavow maps as useful guides. If a map can only show yesterday’s plans, as Carson writes in “Turn Again,” and even purposefully “avoid the moment,” as he writes in “Question Time” (*Belfast Confetti*), is poetry similarly limited? Considering the “confused” circles of war in “Insular Celts” and the “through-other” home of “To a Married Sister,” part of my argument in this chapter is that poetry has the ability to mingle or layer perspectives and experiences of city space that maps or individual experience cannot. Though maps and poetry share textual qualities, not least of which are authorship and the claim of authority, Carson’s poetry, read as a set of documents rather than single, static text, depends on intertextuality—between his own poems and others—and intersubjectivity—between the speaker of the poem and other subjects who would surely navigate the city space differently.

Critics frequently discuss Carson’s use of maps and the unstable spaces his speakers experience. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews describes Carson as “presenting the city space as...always susceptible to reconstruction and renewal” and, similarly, Neal Alexander writes that Carson’s poetry gives “a sense of place as it is constructed and deconstructed” and “probes the logic and
limits of maps” (Kennedy-Andrews 2; Alexander 59). Kennedy-Andrews also addresses the limits of maps as records in Carson’s poetry, writing of his “centerlessness” and claiming that Carson’s poetic wandering denies the authority of the official maps and resists the systemization of the world. Like Benjamin, Carson surrenders to the spell of the labyrinthine city, attempting to read and decode the meaning of urban spaces from clues, traces, and fragments that present themselves in what often threatens to become an unbearable sensory overload.¹³ (465, 464)

Kennedy-Andrews goes on to suggest that Carson, “idling in the spaces of the city,” creates speakers who “find [themselves] petrified, disoriented, divested of agency, placed under surveillance” (465). This construction, in which Carson’s poems are attempts to “decode” the city space, suggests that a core or singular understanding of Belfast is available for the correct reader or navigator. I argue for a reading of Carson’s poems in which the speaker may be disoriented and surveilled, but nonetheless maintains agency and resists idleness in his careful navigation of the city and his refusal of maps, guided instead by social affiliations, personal history, and a real-time knowledge of city space that maps cannot reflect.

Carson’s first collection, The New Estate, opens with a decidedly rural poem that nonetheless highlights the intertextuality and intersubjectivity that also typify his treatment of urban space. “Scribe in the Woods” places the writer “behind hedged lines” and accompanied by

¹³ Critics such as Kennedy-Andrews have considered the possibility of casting Carson as a Baudelarian or Benjaminian flaneur, ultimately arguing that Carson’s disinvestment in leisure activity precludes him from being a flaneur. For my purposes, it is important to note that the flaneur gains insight about social groups, while I argue that Carson’s poetry privileges individual over shared experience. The possibility of the flaneur in Belfast poetry will be revisited in the chapter on Leontia Flynn.
a blackbird and a cuckoo (1). The speaker privileges the natural over the manmade, with the
cuckoo’s trill “clearer than a hollow bell” and the blackbird able to successfully “sing a dawn,”
something the human writer may not be able to accomplish with his pen (4, 2). This poem, which
the text notes is adapted from the Early Irish, demonstrates Carson’s bilingualism—though he
did not grow up in the Gaeltacht, Irish was in fact his first language. Carson’s adeptness as an
English language writer are on display too, with his playful punning that places the speaker
behind a literal line of hedges as well as the figurative lines of his poem, collapsing the poetic
project and natural world. In addition, the poem establishes Carson as a member of a lineage of
writers and acknowledges that the tradition he inherits is predominantly rural. Aligning the
poet’s goals with the bird’s song echoes Shelley’s “To a Skylark,” again keeping the poetic and
the natural close to one another and creating reciprocal relationships between Carson, Early Irish
bards, and English Romantic poets. Peter Barry suggests that
the reason for this rural focus...is that the ‘Nationalist’ which Carson registers and
consolidates in these early poems had long been embodied in rural imagery and
symbolism...the Belfast-born Carson draws from this myth pool, as it was the only
vocabulary available.15 (226-7)

14 Carson estimates that his family was one of four in Belfast who spoke Irish at home (“A Life”).
15 Barry goes on to point out that recently successful or predominant poetry, as well as early Irish poetry, had been
rural. Carson was familiar with Heaney as a reviewer, as established, but also as a colleague in the Belfast Group.
Barry suggests that Heaney’s use of rural imagery, though certainly up for critique for its participation in and
perpetuation of Nationalist tropes, makes a certain kind of sense given that Heaney grew up on a farm some 30 miles
outside of Belfast, making it “worth remarking, if not remarkable” that Carson’s earliest poetry reaches for an
experience that is so outside of his own.
Hughes notes that while urban poetry abounds in late twentieth century Northern Ireland, there remains a sense of a “natural antipathy between the poetic and the urban.” Though Carson indeed dips into the “myth pool” of pastoral imagery, his rural poems work to complicate linguistic or creative production as acts through which contemporary identity and belonging are constituted, highlighting the fact that there are multiple ways of belonging and unbelonging in a contested spaces.

Irish nationalist literature relies on particular ways of belonging and models ideal male and female behaviors; in particular, writers tend to feminize Irish land by coding it as a maternal figure or a rose in need of tending. In “The Insular Celts,” Carson imbues that act with both generative and destructive power. When “The Insular Celts” reach the “warm earth” of their island destination, they

```
call it by possessive names -

Thorned rose, love, woman and mother;

To hard hills of stone they will give

the words for breast” (10-14)
```

In naming, creating, and feminizing the island, they participate in destructive acts that leave “the confused circles of their wars” and “cattle-raids” that “have worked themselves / To a laced
pattern of old scars” (31-33). Like the early Irish poem that opens the collection, the mention of “cattle-raids” places Carson in a tradition of Irish, and specifically Northern Irish, storytellers, with its invocation of the Ulster Cycle epic “The Cattle Raid of Cooley” or “Táin bó Cuailnge.” The Ulster Cycle’s most well-known hero, Cú Chulainn, has been used as a rallying figure by both Nationalist and Loyalist communities, with the former invoking Cú Chulainn as an armed hero defending Celtic lands and the latter simultaneously claiming him as a Cruthin protector of Ulster against Celtic invasion.

Carson’s title “Insular Celts” suggests that he aligns Cú Chulainn with Celtic-ness, but it also reminds the reader that contested claims over Northern Irish space are not new and are more often “confused” than straightforward—to use Avery Gordon’s term, whichever narrative is employed is always “haunted” by the other. Gordon investigates what is culturally, historically, or socially visible and un-visible, a dialectical relationship that requires as much attention to absence as presence. Haunting describes how “that which is not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities,” and also “draw[s] our attention to the multiple determinations and sites of power in which narratives of and about our culture and its power are produced and disseminated” (11). The Ulster Cycle, the early Irish “Scribe in the Woods,” and Carson’s translations and poetry are culture-producing narratives that

---

19 From Encyclopedia Britannica, The Ulster Cycle is “a group of legends and tales dealing with the heroic age of the Ulaids, a people of northeast Ireland from whom the modern name Ulster derives. The stories, set in the 1st century BC, were recorded from oral tradition between the 8th and 11th century and are preserved in the 12th-century manuscripts The Book of the Dun Cow (c. 1100) and The Book of Leinster (c. 1160) and also in later compilations, such as The Yellow Book of Lecan (14th century).”

20 Cruthin people, associated with Picts, are thought by some to have lived in Britain and Ireland before Celtic people.
make their intertextuality and interorality visible and remain haunted by intersubjectivity.\textsuperscript{21} Maps and poems are similarly limited when viewed as discrete units; they depend on other texts, other myths, or other understandings in order to communicate.

The space that the Insular Celts, as a people, inhabit is rural and they appear to venerate tradition and heritage, but the poems subverts traditional poetic relationships between self, land, and war and speaks the construction and deconstruction present in Carson’s poems about Belfast. Irish poets from Yeats to Heaney have imagined war’s deleterious effects on land as a positive force that physically rejuvenates land and in turn confirms true ownership of or belonging in a particular place. Yeats’ “The Rose Tree,” for example, imagines the blood of revolutionaries will restore the beauty of a rose tree withered by “wind that blows / Across the bitter sea” and Heaney’s “Requiem for the Croppies,” imagines barley growing from the pockets of dead rebels after the failed 1798 rebellion (“The Rose Tree” 5-6).\textsuperscript{22} In this poem, however, the Celts who create the land in their naming of it leave that land scarred rather than restored or flourishing. Thus, Carson complicates the relationship between self and land in a place in which cultural identity has often been interpreted as bound up with place, whether through notions of local culture (the parish or region, for examples) or through the more abstract constructions of national identity, which often involve a supporting image drawn from a particular landscape (the West of Ireland as the source of ‘true Irishness’) (Kennedy-Andrews, 1).

\textsuperscript{21} Interorality is a term primarily used by Vété-Congolo Hanétha to describe Caribbean oral culture and its relationship to African and European folktales. In this case, I use the term to describe Carson’s invocation of Irish Nationalist figures that in turn rely on pagan/pre-Christian oral culture.

\textsuperscript{22} Heaney has said the poem, written just before the Troubles was meant to be “silence-breaking rather than rabble-rousing” and should not be taken as support for the IRA. (BBC, \textit{Requiem for Seamus Heaney})
The Yeats and Heaney examples cited above demonstrate the relationship between self and place Kennedy-Andrews discusses; in Yeats, the revolutionaries have the power to restore the land and in Heaney, the land reaffirms the presence and righteousness of the revolutionaries.

Like Heaney’s croppy boys, the Insular Celts, seem to go gladly to their death, welcomed by the earth: “They entered their cold beds of soil / Not as graves, for this was the land / That they had fought for, loved, and killed // Each other for” (19-22). The land, however, does not heal nor does it justify their violence. In addition to the “laced pattern of old scars,” man-made instruments interrupt the land in the present of the poem, becoming almost a natural facet of the landscape: “bronze swords” in “the shape of leaves,” “gold spears” in cornfields and “arrows...found in trees” (33, 43-45). These things are illegible to the space’s current inhabitants, as the speaker admits “We cannot yet say why or how / They could not take things as they were” and hopes that “Some day we will learn” how to understand what has been left behind (31-32). The poem aligns the construction of Celtic identity with the destruction of land, hints at intersubjectivity with its invocation of the contested Cú Chulainn figure, and refuses a traceable, legible lineage between early and contemporary inhabitants of national space; therefore, I consider the poem anti-pastoral. Not quite urban, anti-pastoral poetry is influenced by Patrick Kavanagh, who, rejecting his characterization as a peasant poet, published the socially critical poem, “The Great Hunger” in 1942. “The Great Hunger,” though undoubtedly rural, offers no redemption in physical labor, filial loyalty, communion with nature, or religion. Reading Carson’s early rural poetry as influenced by Kavanagh’s anti-pastoralism demonstrates the connection between those early poems and the later poems of urban space for which he is best known.
The early poems in *The New Estate* continue to address Ireland’s foundational and creator myths, use pastoral imagery to anti-pastoral ends, and deny a straightforward relationship between identity and place. They begin to transition from poems of tribal Celticness to those of contemporary Irishness. “St Ciaran’s Island” and “O’Carolan’s Complaint” feature the titular figures lamenting the loneliness in positions as writer and musician, respectively, both roles that Carson occupies. In “St Ciaran’s Island,” the speaker writes that “Since I have come to this island, / The big world has receded” and “Since I will forever be alone / With the green things of this world, / I must learn to grow in silence” (1-2, 21-23). Immediately following, the speaker in “O’Carolan’s Complaint” muses on “the great tunes / I never played,” “all the girls I might have loved / instead of music ” and “the lives I never lived,” and suggests his compositions and performances exist as “mere competence” (1-2, 7-8, 15). Like the Insular Celts in the earlier poem, St Ciaran and O’Carolan appear more “confused” than uncomplicated and certain; acts of creation do not fulfill them. Carson depicts St. Ciaran, in particular, as a man stifled by his solitude, whether that is the general solitude of island living or the monastic solitude of Clonmacnoise. The “green things of this world” do not provide authentic or revelatory experience but instead necessitate St. Ciaran to remind himself that he will “acclimatize” to solitude and his “head will shrink in size” (22, 37-38). Unlike the Insular Celts, St. Ciaran knows he must learn to “take things as they are” (“Insular Celts” 24). This knowledge does not translate

---

23 Carson, an accomplished flute player, was primarily responsible for music programs in his position as Traditional Arts Officer. He published the nonfiction *Last Night’s Fun: About Music, Food and Time* in 1997.

24 St. Ciaran (516-549) spent a period of time on the island of Aranmore, off the coast of Western Ireland, before founding a monastery called Clonmacnoise on the River Shannon. A center of learning, the site was also known for its asceticism.

25 Turlough O’Carolan (1670-1638) was a composer and harpist. His plaque at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin calls him “the last of the Irish bards” and many of his compositions are still played today.
to fulfillment and does not leave him any better equipped to communicate with later generations; instead he “talked to the trees / of God’s silence” (10-11).

O’Carolan, living more than 1000 years after St. Ciaran, exists in a space that addresses an urban economy, one with “monied patronage” and “lit rooms / In grey facades” (3-5). Though surrounded by people, O’Carolan does not find community any more than St. Ciaran. Carson provides his reader with three models of nationalist belonging—warrior, monastic, and creator—and demonstrates the difficulty each faces in connecting with their spaces and those who share them. In these poems, Carson separates identity and geographic belonging, creating figures who are at odds with their surroundings. As the collection moves from rural origin stories to contemporary urban happenings, figures move through the space of the city, at times belonging at others rejecting or being rejected by particular places.

Moving from Ireland’s origin myths to its present-day reality, “The Holiday” is a poem not so much about the experience of a holiday, but about a series of disquieting sights on the return home to Belfast. The remainder of the poems in The New Estate contain movement within the city, an exception to what Hughes describes as the tendency for even Belfast-born poets to consider Belfast as a transitory space—a place to travel through or visit. While other poems in the collection address ancient violence, the speaker in “The Holiday” witnesses contemporary violence first hand:

At breakfast, I remembered
the mutilated sheep we found yesterday.
The pus had thickened to a sour cream
in the pink-lipped wounds.” (1-4)
This recent memory seems to infect other things: “The clouds beyond the window / curdled suddenly” and “a whey-coloured skin” forms on coffee (9-10). Later, “Going home to Belfast,” the speaker finds that “the milk turned sour on our doorstep” (12, 16). Signifiers of innocence or nurturing—sheep, pink lips, milk—are perversely altered here. The sheep, so symbolic of rural Ireland, are not just dead but mutilated. Witness to this violence occurs away from the space of the city, collapsing distinctions between the peaceful, idyllic countryside and the violent or decaying city. The sheep’s “fixed stare” remind the speaker of the bloodshot, tired eyes of his waitress, eliminating any maternal associations that he could make with this female figure providing nourishment (5). The repeated references to spoiled dairy, particularly when taken with the unpleasant vaginal imagery of “pink-lipped wounds,” work to disrupt positive associations with and between the maternal and the earthly (4). Though the Insular Celts may have considered the earth maternal and nurturing, after a visit to the country, even the clouds are sour and repellent.

“The Holiday” introduces ideas of attempting to control interior, private spaces, though those spaces may sometimes resist those attempts, ideas that the following poem, “Bomb Disposal,” continues. In addition to the sour milk, for example, the speaker in “The Holiday” returns to “a house denied our presence, / the door handle cobwebbed - / The papers lying, unread, in the hall” (13-15). “Bomb Disposal” introduces a structure that Carson will repeat in later poems, such as *The Irish For No’s “Belfast Confetti”* and “Travellers,” with a shift in perspective or setting between the first and second stanzas. In the first stanza of “Bomb Disposal,” the speaker wonders if disposing of a bomb is just like the picking of a lock
with the slow deliberation of a funeral,
hesitating through the darkened nave
until you find the answer?
Listening to the malevolent tick
of its heart, can you read
the message of the threaded veins
like print, its body’s chart?” (1-8).

The repetition of the “k” and “t” sounds function as a slowly-building tick as the stanza ponders
the nature of a bomb. Imagining it as the interior of a building or body imagines it as contained,
denying the explosion, which would fulfill the bomb’s purpose and thereby destroy its
objecthood. Wondering if the bomb might be understood in this way also, somewhat hopefully,
portrays it as something able to be understood or navigated through careful study, similar to the
way in which the speaker says in the next stanza, “the city is a map of the city” (9).

   The tension between interior and exterior spaces (between the bomb as an enclosed
object and an exploded non-object) established in the first stanza continues in the second, as the
speaker stops musing on the ontology and knowability of the bomb and begins recounting a
journey: “I found myself in a crowded taxi / making deviations from the known route” (11-12).
Though the passengers are in the enclosed space of the taxi, the environment outside of the taxi
becomes threatening when it is unfamiliar. 

26 Geographers Catherine Switzer and Sarah McDowell and anthropologist Neil Jarman discuss how Belfast’s
infrastructure reflected and reinforced the city’s political/cultural divides: cultural affiliations dictated decisions
about where to live, work, and socialize and peace walls divided neighborhoods, creating a situation in which “the
journeys individuals make and therefore their understanding of place and sense of space are always marked by their
ethnic background” (Jarman).
determined, the deviation in “Bomb Disposal” causes people to “[break] out suddenly in whispers,” noting the buildings’ “boarded windows” and “drawn blinds” (14-16). In this moment, there are two interiors: the taxi and the homes. Though Carson’s speaker is in the taxi, looking out at the boarded windows, it is possible, even likely, that figures exist in the homes, peering out of the blinds at the interloping taxi. No people occupy the space between. The taxi and the homes are contained spaces, like the bomb, but figures inside of them may take actions that rupture the boundaries of the interior spaces (such as throwing a bomb or rock, shooting a gun, or physically approaching the taxi or home). In the moment of the poem, only gazes, each from behind a window, extend outward. Though the spaces remain contained, the presence of windows and the exchange of gazes hint at the tenuousness of that containment. Even if the poem does not give the reader the view from inside the windows, it is haunted by it; that is, the possibility of people behind the drawn blinds makes itself known in the nervous whispers of the speaker and his companions. Carson’s geography may be the whole city, or it may be a single road that means different things to different people at different times.

Subsequent poems in The New Estate feature various attempts to control or remake interior domestic spaces. The collection moves across space-time, beginning with the translated “Scribe in the Woods” and its admiration for the blackbird and cuckoo. The last poem, the titular “The New Estate,” is named for the newly built housing development to which Carson’s family moves, leaving the nearby Falls Road neighborhood behind, and begins with the directive to “Forget the corncrake’s elegy”(1). 27 Though the poem warns that nature “does not grieve for

---

27 The corncrake is a small bird once prevalent in Ireland. Due to agricultural changes (such as the mechanization of farming and crop changes), the corncrake population has declined. From the time of Carson’s childhood to the publication of The New Estate the corncrake population reduced dramatically. The Republic of Ireland’s National
“you, nor for itself,” there is a sense of trepidation about the new-ness of “Marble / toilet fixtures” and the “life of loving / Money” that they might indicate (4, 13-14, 12-13). “Moving In,” “To a Married Sister,” and “House Painting” are poems of beginnings in which spaces’ past lives make themselves known. In these poems Carson resists romanticizing domestic spaces and demonstrates the porous boundaries between new and old, interior and exterior, and domestic and natural.

In “Moving In,” the speaker paints the home, enjoying “the off-white smell” and touching “the eggshell finish of the walls” (6, 20). Carson’s speakers seem to be particularly alert and sensitive to sensory details; recall the speaker in “The Holiday” fixating on the color of the sheep’s wound and the unpleasantness of spoiled milk, both in coffee and on the doorstep. Painting the interior in “Moving In” creates a fully new sensory experience, but the visual is all that has truly changed. Later, in “House Painting,” the speaker says “The soft rot of the glazing bars / Appalled me,” yet he paints them, repeating “Dove-grey and white,” the paint’s names, over to himself as he covers up the rotting wood on the window panes (1-3). Like the spoiled whiteness in “The Holiday,” these colors most often used to signify purity in Western Catholic tradition are instead part of something rotten. In “Moving In” the author uses a window to betray the paint’s false sense of renewal: “The double glazing, there to keep out / Wind and ice, has kept cold in” (26-27). These borders of interior and exterior spaces are, once again, reminders that the control the speakers exert over their spaces is tenuous at best, and can be undone by the space itself, perhaps due to age or choices made by previous inhabitants, or by exterior forces. In

Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht now has conservation efforts in place (ahg.gov.ie).
Carson’s next two collections poems frequently feature doors, and more specifically, a person entering through a door. “Last Orders,” in Belfast Confetti, for example, its title suggesting both a bar’s last call and a religious rite, has its speaker “squeeze the buzzer on the steel mesh gate like a trigger,” the door opening “like electronic / Russian roulette, since you never know for sure who’s who, or what / you’re walking into” (1-4). There is a similar scene in “Night Out,” featuring the same mesh gate, a button to push, and an evaluation before being allowed to enter.

Part of the repetition of doorways can be attributed to Carson’s focus on movement—his speakers are always coming and going. More tellingly, though, they indicate that Carson’s speakers are always defining space and creating and patrolling its borders. The doorways in the later poems offer a measure of control—who or what is inside versus who or what is outside—but that control can easily be violated. As the speaker notes in “Last Orders, “how simple it would be for someone / Like ourselves to walk in and blow the whole place, and ourselves, to Kingdom Come” (8-9). The doors and windows of the poems are attempts to control and patrol space that various forces—people, nature, time—can easily disrupt by ignoring the divisions and borders that such structures are meant to indicate.

In “To a Married Sister,” Carson creates a figure who enjoys, or least does not resist, the forces of the past that make themselves known in her present space. Carson’s interior spaces are usually feminized, both by the unnamed “she” who helps the speaker unpack and makes decisions about the kitchen in “Moving In” and by the repetition of shades of white. The sister of “To a Married Sister” practices perhaps the most radical reinvention of space-time and is able to do so in a private, domestic space, complicating the tradition of the contained feminine domestic. She is not interested in the purity of her home. Carson writes that their “mother would have said
‘A new bride / And a through-other house make a bad match’” (5-6). “Through-other” means messy or disorderly, but it also suggests something that is indiscriminately blended or co-mingled, in this case, the lives of the speaker’s newlywed sister and the lives of people who occupied the space previously. But his sister likes “dilapidation, the touch / Of somewhere that’s been lived in” and “the hairline net / Of cracks on worn enamel” (7-8, 11-12). In this poem, Carson creates tension between the positives and negatives of a lived-in space. Though claiming, with a sense of admiration, that his sister enjoys her space, the speaker frames it negatively. He is “proudly shown the bedroom,” but notes that “patches / Of damp stained the walls a tea color,” notably not the off-white or eggshell of the other poems; the “empty hallways” she likes have “a gloom;” a room is “tree-darkened” rather than shaded; he leaves his sister not surrounded by but “cluttered with gifts” in the space that “bore the accidents of others’ lives” (2-3, 9, 8, 12, 13, 21). The speaker does not share his sister’s acceptance or embrace of comingled past and present.

In the poem’s last lines “A gold resin / Leaked from the slackened joints,” to complement the husband’s “new saw” which “glittered like your wedding-silver” (22-24). The promise of the glittering saw can perhaps remake the space in a more substantial way than paint in “Moving In” and “House Painting” and the gold resin and the silver saw indicate a potential good match, unlike the bad match the speaker’s mother might imagine the house and the bride to be. The gold, however, leaks from the joints, forcing itself into sight. This may be the type of dilapidation his sister likes, but it also suggests a damage they will need to address. The glitter, too, can be slightly menacing, particularly when describing a saw. The complementary gold resin and silver, glittering saw may suggest that a space can be most successfully or happily occupied
in the present when it works with and takes into account the lives “that were there before you” but alternately can indicate an unresolved tension between surfaces or exteriors, and what lies beneath or within. The speaker’s focus on painted surfaces in “Moving In” and “House Painting,” paired with the distaste with which he notes the tea-colored walls, cracked enamel, and visible gold resin indicate a desire for containment and solid, unbroachable borders shared by the occupants of the taxi in “Bomb Disposal.” The co-mingling of past and present, enjoyed by the speaker’s sisters, might be unsettling in other contexts or to other people.

Carson’s next collection features figures who attempt to co-mingle definitions or understandings of public, exterior spaces. The challenges in doing so demonstrate the mutually constitutive way in which culture and personal history defines how one understands and moves through private and public spaces. After publishing The New Estate in 1976, Carson did not publish again until The Irish for No (1988), quickly followed by Belfast Confetti (1989). In many ways, these collections are a pair. Both collections have covers featuring maps of Belfast; both divide the poems into three sections; the second is named for a poem in the first; and both contain poems featuring movement in and around Belfast. In particular, both feature walking in the city and walking as a way of knowing—”I think, I’m starting, now / to know the street map with my feet, just like my father,” Carson writes in “Ambition,” a poem at the start of Belfast Confetti28 (60-61). Both feature instances of violence, and the poems in the collection Belfast Confetti use the images of confetti, language, and punctuation to describe scenes of violence,

---

28 In response to a question about the collections’ structural similarities, Carson said that “In many ways, any structure for a book is arbitrary. But at the same time, I like to structure the thing is some way. It gives you a template, a constraint” (from In the Chair: Interviews with Poets from the North of Ireland p. 148).
similar to the imagery in the poem of the same name. \[29\] *Belfast Confetti* uses a wider range of forms, including translations of Japanese haiku, prose pieces, quotes from Walter Benjamin on Berlin and Kevin Lynch on Florence, and an excerpt from the seventeenth century Ordinance of the Corporation of Belfast. Poems in *The Irish for No* feature speakers that resemble Carson and references to streets and landmarks are drawn from the area and time. \[30\] *Belfast Confetti* continues to reference Carson’s life: details borrowed from father’s career as a postman appear in “Ambition” and his family’s move to Andersontown is referenced in *Brick*. It also includes poems, such as “The Mouth” and “The Knee,” which introduce the point of view of an IRA member. In others, such as “Last Orders,” the narrator could be any Belfast resident, though such anonymity can be dangerous: “...you never know for sure who’s who, or what / You’re walking into. I, for instance, could be anybody” (3-4). The inclusion of prose, quotations, and multiple perspectives allow Carson to take a metaphorical step back (“a bird’s eye view,” as he says in “Box”), while still maintaining the first-person specificity of *The Irish for No* (7).

*Belfast Confetti* begins with “Turn Again,” a poem that appears before Part I, functioning as a prelude or guide for the poems that follow. “Turn Again,” as an imperative, employs a double meaning, similar to the “lines” of hedges or poetry in “Scribe in the Woods.” Turn again is a command or direction for the speaker of the poem who is walking through Belfast and an

---

\[29\] Poems from *Belfast Confetti* that use confetti in this way include “Queen’s Gambit,” “Jump Leads,” and “Jawbox.” Belfast confetti is a slang term for weapons made from street scraps, and, more specifically, implies the use of scraps from shipyards. Because shipyards primarily employed Protestants, the term and the title suggest a Protestant-made weapon (*Belfast Confetti*, David Remnick; “Titanic relaunched as pride of Belfast,” Martin Fletcher).

\[30\] “Obsession,” for example must be set in the 1980s and the speaker remembers his childhood in the 1960s; while “Dresden” suggests a 1970s or 1980s setting with its references to the “latest / Situation in the Middle East” (Irish troops were stationed in Lebanon starting in 1978) and implies that the speaker is younger than WWII veteran Horse, as Horse talks of “how in his young day things were different” and tells the speaker about a time “back before the Troubles.”
implicit command to the reader who is turning the pages of the book. The text is thus a map of the city, or the city itself. And those things are quite different, as “Turn Again” makes clear. The speaker remembers maps that show bridges that were never built or that have collapsed. Part of the distinction between the mapped city and the city itself is that maps are static and reflect a single moment in time, a point that Carson will make again and again: “Today’s plans are already yesterday’s—the streets that were there are gone” (4). Other limitations of maps are tactical or political, such as the bridge that was planned for but never built, or the fact that “the shape of the jails cannot be shown for security reasons” (5). Then there are the limitations of a map’s physicality, which might be the thing it has most in common with the city itself: “The linen backing is falling apart—the Falls Road hangs on by a thread” (6). The violence that makes Falls barely hanging on—to stability, the safety—is perhaps why the speaker “turn[s] into / A side-street to throw off my shadow” (8-9). Like the occupants of the taxi who stray into unfamiliar territory in “Bomb Disposal,” the speaker here is likely being watched. As Carson will demonstrate again, the relatively innocuous question the speaker encounters—“someone asks me where I live”—is loaded in the context of destroyed streets, jails, and the decaying Falls Road (Question Time”). The Irish for No and Belfast Confetti function as a space through which the reader travels as the poem’s speakers travel within and between poems. The poems I examine

---

31 In keeping with discussions of Belfast space by Switzer, McDowell, and Jarman, several neighborhoods in Belfast are shorthand for cultural affiliations. The Falls Road and Ardoyne are known as Catholic, Republican neighborhoods, while the Shankill Road, bordering the Falls, is known as a Protestant, Loyalist space. During the height of the Troubles and to some extent today, the borders of these communities are physically demarcated by peace walls or sectarian visual displays and murals and controlled by paramilitaries such as the Provisional IRA in the Falls and Ulster Volunteer Force in the Shankill.
demonstrate Carson’s treatment of urban space and his ability to define meaning for his speakers while at the same time demonstrating the instability and non-universality of that meaning.

In “Dresden,” the first poem of The Irish for No, the author reveals details before undermining his authority or reliability:

Horse Boyle was called Horse Boyle because of his brother Mule;

Though why Mule was called Mule is anybody’s guess. I stayed there once,

Or rather, I nearly stayed there. But that’s another story. (1-3)

The repetition of names and phrases echoes Irish language structures that “The Irish for No,” as the title of a poem and of the collection, highlights. The titular poem features a discussion of translations from English to Irish, given that Irish does not have words for “yes” or “no”: “‘yes’ is the verb repeated / not exactly yes, but phatic nod and whispers” (13-14). Carson’s repetition in “Dresden” not only imitates language structures but also suggests a sort of hesitant travel, one with half-steps and second guesses, one that advances, but only slowly. This is the “one step forward, two steps back” model that he practices frequently and addresses directly in later poems. Using a conversational tone and frequent enjambment, Carson’s speaker appears as a good-natured storyteller, telling the reader a series of anecdotes about his amusing friend Horse. The poem goes off on tangents and figures interrupt themselves and each other. Horse Boyle, telling his neighbors about current events because he is the only one with a television, abruptly

---

32 In order to answer a question that English might answer with “yes” or “no,” Irish will repeat with the verb with a positive or negative. For example, the answer to “Are you there?” (An bhfuil tú ann?) could be “I am not there” (Níl mé ann).
transitions to “How in his young day it was very different”; a friend called Flynn interrupts stories to tell Irish translations of place names; and even the speaker gets off track (26).

It is not until the eighth out of ten stanzas that the speaker interrupts his own tangent and the speaker realizes the seemingly random anecdotes laid the foundation for a particular story:

Of course who should come tottering up the lane that instant but his Brother Mule. I forgot to mention they were twins. They were as like as two - No, not peas in a pod, for this is not the time nor the place to go into Comparisons, and this is really Horse’s story, Horse who - now I’m getting Round it it -flew over Dresden in the war. (63-67)

There is another repetition here, with the twins Horse and Mule functioning like the “verb repeated”: that is, not functioning in the same way, not existing as peas in a pod, but informing one another. Mule is the question—what is the reason for this story?—and Horse is the answer. Even when telling Horse’s story, the speaker does not get right to Dresden. First, the reader learns that Horse “emigrated...to / Manchester. Something to do with scrap - redundant mill machinery” (67-68). Precarious economics are a theme in “Dresden,” from the Boyle brothers’ “decrepit caravan” to a neighbor from a place where “men were known to eat their dinner from a drawer. / Which they’d slide shut the minute you’d walk in” lest someone in need of food were to enter (4, 58-59). When the speaker gets to Horse’s particular story, the reader learns that such economic instability is what ultimately leads Horse to Dresden, after moving to England for a job made possible only through the loss of others’ jobs—after all, the mill machinery is no longer needed. Horse helps England transition to a new, wartime economy, turning “giant flywheels”
and “broken looms” into scrap destined to be “ships or areoplanes” when, “on impulse” he joins the RAF (69, 71). More repetition here, with a difference: previously, Horse mentioned the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) and the RIC (Royal Irish Constabulary). When he names them, he does so to demonstrate his and his friend’s positions outside power structures. Now, joining the RAF (Royal Air Force) Boyle enters a British power structure, but only after he has been financially disempowered and “wore his fingers to the bone” (70).

Once the speaker gets “round to it,” we learn that “Of all the missions, Dresden broke his heart. It reminded him of china” (67, 72). Horse could “hear, or almost hear” china breaking all across, not Dresden a city known for its porcelain production, but “the map of Dresden” (73, 75). In the previous poem, Carson has generated distrust of maps as documents that reflect the reality of a place. Figuring Dresden as a map speaks to Horse’s vantage point above the city, seeing it as whole in a way that it could not be again. Then, as someone who has never been in Dresden, Horse cannot know it in any way but according to the maps that he has a guide. Horse and the poem’s reader are thus both interpreting texts rather than physical space. Carson does, in a later poem in the collection, posit that such a view can offer knowledge that walking around the city cannot. In “Box,” he describes a man he sees in different parts of Belfast, always with a cardboard box “perched / on his head- no hands” (1-2). Though he sees this man frequently, the speaker’s knowledge is incomplete: “In all these years, don’t ask me what was in there: that would take / A bird’s-eye view” (6-7). Though maps’ authority is suspect or incomplete, the bird’s-eye view of Dresden can offer a perspective that is not absolute but nonetheless valuable.

RIC was the police force for all of Ireland until 1922, when the Irish Free State was formed. The RUC replaced it in the North and was disbanded in 2001 due to its reputation for collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries. The police force in Northern Ireland is now known as the PSNI.
Finally, Horse views Dresden as a map in order to distance himself from the reality of the experience that “broke his heart” and as a way to figuratively map his own experience onto the “avalanche of porcelain” he imagines across the city (72, 76). Horse, living “not two miles out of Carrick,” identifies with the greater Belfast area and is witness to the violence of the Troubles (4). Indeed, loyalist paramilitaries had a presence in Carrick (Carrickfergus, as it is formally known) and CAIN cites an 8.7% decline in the minority Catholic population from 1971 to 1991 (from 16.2% to 7.5%). Carson makes clear that Horse is part of that minority population, by noting that he “was nearly going on to be a priest” and by the constant presence of Horse’s friend Flynn, who was part of a thwarted republican paramilitary mission and learned Irish in jail (53). Horse’s identity is complicated as a member of the British military who participated in the destruction of a city as well as a member of the Catholic minority in a place damaged by the British military and loyalist paramilitaries. The poem’s tangents and half-steps reveal some of these intricacies and hint at others that may “haunt” Horse in the sense that they shape his being though they are not articulated in the poem.

After the speaker reveals Horse’s role at Dresden, Horse remembers a “particular figure from his childhood. A milkmaid / Standing on the mantelpiece” (78-79). During his family’s evening prayers, Horse would look at the porcelain figure, quite possibly Dresden porcelain, and think that “she seemed to beckon to him, smiling, / Offering him, eternally, her pitcher of milk, her mouth of rose and cream” (80-81). As in “The Holiday,” Carson combines images of maternal, sexual, and spiritual nourishment. Here, the cream doesn’t quite spoil, but Horse does break the milkmaid figure, revealing to the speaker that he keeps a tin of mementos such as “His war medals. A broken rosary. And there the milkmaid’s creamy hand, the outstretched / Pitcher
of milk, all that survived” (85-86). This collection of items, like the collection of tangential figures in the poem, provides an alternative map to understanding Horse’s life, one that gives incomplete or perhaps contradictory information but that is no less legitimate. The poem ends with Mule’s approach, his “careful drunken weaving” perhaps an apt metaphor for the rhythm of the poem that takes half-steps and detours but manages to get “round” to its story of Horse’s broken heart and dual positions within and without British military structures (87).

The almost-but-not-quite structure in which Horse “hears, or nearly hears” china breaking is repeated in “Calvin Klein’s Obsession” when a scent brings the speaker back to 1968: “So it all comes back, or nearly all. / A long forgotten kiss. // Never quite” (10-12). The repetition of this sentence structure suggests that imaginations or desires can create (or almost create) experiences when reality is insufficient. Horse, with his knowledge of Dresden’s porcelain production and the memory of the broken figurine from his childhood understands the destruction of Dresden as shattering china, though he may not hear the sounds. Similarly, the speaker in “Obsession” wishes to revisit his youth, though he cannot recall things exactly as they were. Later, imagining a future kiss, the speaker cannot decide on the exact setting, imagining that there will be “musak - no, a live / Piano - tinkling in its endless loop” (70-71). The incomplete nature of his memories encourages him to fill in the blanks of the past and similarly, create a future narrative to complement it, but he struggles with the details of both.

In trying to sort through the partial memories that the scent has stirred, the speaker admits that “I’m taking / One step forward, two steps back” (41-42). This is a construction that Carson will use again, notably in Belfast Confetti’s “Ambition” which features literal movement up a mountain path and the reflection on figurative movement through life. In “Ambition,” the
speaker reflects that on any journey “often you take one step forward, two steps back. For if time is a road, / It’s fraught with ramps and dog-legs, switchbacks and spaghetti” and realizes that “bits of landscape / Keep reoccurring” (13-14, 15-16). What is interesting in Carson’s use of the phrase in “Obsession” is that the speaker wishes for the ability to take steps back, for things to recur. He does not pine for the past nor is he unhappy with his present—he admits that “He has prospered since / He last saw her”—but rather the smell makes him realize that it may not be possible for his memory to account for all of this experiences (73-74). He thinks, “The merest touch of sunshine, a sudden breeze, might summon up / A corner of your life you’d thought, till then, you’d never occupied” and remembers that smelling his mother’s makeup as a child “was just a way of feeling her presence” (57-58, 68). The speaker’s memory of scents, from Kathleen Mary Quinlan’s Rhythm to Boots’ Buttermilk and Clover soap, is only a way of feeling a presence, not reoccupying a particular corner of life.

The poem’s title “Calvin Klein’s Obsession,” suggests that though the speaker’s memory figuratively bring him back, he remains firmly in the present—Obsession was not released until 1985 (Calvin Klein). The speaker may be taking one step forward and two steps back in attempts to reconstruct his memories, but, if time is a road, the city around him has marched on. Gone are the cobblestones and brewers’ drays, the banter between his father and grandmother, and the girl he hasn’t seen in years. Instead, the speaker occupies a globalized world connected by commercial products. Though the speaker has a hint of condescension in describing “Warhol’s high-pitched New York whine,” the poem appropriates Warhol’s take on perfumes of the thirties and forties: “I go crazy because I want to smell them all so much” (23, 22). The poem’s rumination on various scents and the memories they evoke is evidence of sympathy for that
sentiment, though the speaker recognizes that smelling a perfume, or even buying it, cannot fully satisfy the urge: “or maybe it's the name you buy, and not the thing itself” (77). Carson’s speaker is realizing that Belfast’s commercial products allow him to make connections to moments from his past, but they fail to cohere into a comprehensive record of it.

This poem is like Horse Boyle’s tin of mementos in that it collects and connects disparate items. The poem’s references are only possible within an urban and even, at times, cosmopolitan setting. The speaker’s memories of 1968 place him in the “smoggy early dusk / Of West Belfast: coal-smoke, hops, fur, the smell of stout and whiskey” (8-9). Once again, the speaker defines his space with sensory details. The coal-smoke and hops speak to the industrial nature of the city and the furs and smell of alcohol speak to the consumers of that production. The poem, as much as it ruminates on memories, is also a list of items available for purchase, from the Blue Grass perfume that reminds him of a girl from his past to the Gold Label whiskey his grandmother drank or the jacket he buys at a second hand shop, though it is “a thing that until then / I’d never wanted” (51-52). The brand names that the speaker lists are British, American, and French (Brylcreem, Calvin Klein, Yves St Laurent, etc) and portray a Belfast that is part of the Western economy; they are “talk of money, phrased as talk of / Something else” (75). Considering Hughes’ statement that many Belfast poets set their poems outside of the city, the brand names and commercial exchange in this poem serve not only to stir memories for the speaker, but also to allow Carson to keep his speaker physically in Belfast while creating a sense of both the city and the speaker as part of systems of global transit and exchange.

The city appears both internationally connected and intensely claustrophobic in “Belfast Confetti.” The poem begins as an interruption— “Suddenly as the riot squad moved in”—though
the reader does not see the moment just before the sudden movement (1). The action of the poem occurs in exterior, public space, but the use of the preposition “in” creates a space that is somehow bounded. The streets that the speaker names later indicate the poem takes place in and around the Falls, while the riot squad is an RUC force. The space of the poem is bound by cultural background, with the predominantly Protestant RUC moving into the space of a predominantly Catholic neighborhood. The space of the city can be considered a collection of bound spaces whose borders can be forcefully crossed. The entrance of the riot squad brings chaos, in this poem presented as disrupting punctuation. Shrapnel is “raining exclamation marks, / nuts, bolts, nails, and car-keys. A fount of broken type;” the explosion is “an asterisk on the map” experienced as “a hyphenated line, a burst of rapid fire” (1-3). Using Switzer and McDowell’s understanding of space in which “cognitive understandings of the city are dictated by memories of violence,” the bomb serves as an asterisk in Carson’s mental map of the city, a place to be remembered, pointed out, and perhaps avoided as needed. The speaker’s struggle to make sense of the experience and to act is a halted speech act: “I was trying to complete a sentence in my head, but it kept stuttering” (4). The moment remains as illegible—just “a fount of broken type” and a “hyphenated line” revealing nothing—as it is forceful—”raining exclamation marks” (2, 3, 1). He tries to move away from the asterisk of the explosion, listing street names and claiming “I know this labyrinth so well,” though he finds that “every move is punctuated” and the side streets are “stopped with blocks and colons” (6-7, 9). He faces questions about his identity and whereabouts similar to those asked in “Question Time,” here echoing the quick repetition and violence implied by the “hyphenated line”: “a fusillade of
question marks” (3, 9). He creates sense of claustrophobic space through the punctuation that halts his movement through the city.

The street names that make up the “labyrinth” connect Belfast to the larger world. The streets that the speaker knows so well are Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman, Odessa, and Crimea Streets. These streets, in and around the Falls, were named for battles and figures in the Crimean War, fought in Crimea from 1853 to 1856. The Battle of Balaclava, in particular, is well-known and the subject of Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade.” “Charge of the Light Brigade” highlights the obedience war demands: “Theirs not to reason why, / Theirs but to do and die”; it imagines the soldiers marching “Into the jaws of Death, / Into the mouth of hell,” reaffirms their “glory,” calls for “honour,” and terms the dead the “noble six hundred.” Carson is careful to never heroicize violence; his invocation of the Battle of Balaclava and the memorial nature of the street names suggests that this is a purposeful resistance. These references also point to Britain’s history of militarized force. The “Sacaren” (an armoured tank manufactured by Alvis), “kremlin-2 mesh” (anti-bomb attachment to an armoured vehicle), and “Makrolon face-shields” appear not in the context of the Crimean War, but in the streets of Belfast (8). In this way, Belfast is connected to other parts of the world and other parts of history through the experience of violence and military presence, as well as through the business of war highlighted by the brand name tanks and shields.

These connections are at play in “The Barfly,” in which the speaker observes that “the odds change. The borders move,” in a place where “a nod’s as good as a wink” (2, 3). In this

34 Carson lived on Raglan Street until he was ten years old.
35 This description alludes to Heaney’s “land of password, handgrip, wink and nod” from 1975’s “Whatever You Say, Say Nothing. In keeping with Carson’s critique of Heaney, “Whatever You Say, Say Nothing,” is a general
poem, places, or “particular envelopes of space-time,” to use Massey’s phrase, are only “particular” for so long; that is, events, such as acts of violence committed by military or paramilitary groups, political happenings, and Belfast’s evolving industrial nature, can change the physical and psychic organization of a place. In previous pieces, Carson has demonstrated that knowledge of past organizations can indicate one’s belonging to a particular group, either as an exercise in nostalgia (“The Exile’s Club”) or an interrogation technique (Question Time). It is also necessary, in the world of Carson’s poems, to interpret odds and borders, as well as gestures, identities, and one’s relative position in a particular place. Nods and winks may be attempts at covert communication and they must be interpreted, weighed, accepted or rejected. Poems feature speakers making gestures that they know will be interpreted, including ordering Harp at a bar because it “seems safe enough, everybody drinks it” (“Last Orders” 7) and pondering the pronunciation of Belfast as Belfast or Belfast (“Jawbox”), while others feature speakers interpreting actions, such as the speaker in “The Knee” observing that his target “keeps on doing what / He’s not supposed to” and “it seems he was a hood, whatever, or the lads were just being careful” (1-2, 4).36

meditation on experiences of violence, sensationalism, and sectarianism in Northern Ireland, while “The Barfly” is about the individual experience of the speaker.

36 Language and pronunciation as indicators of belonging during the Troubles have frequently been the subject of poetry. Paula Cunningham’s “Hats,” written just after the Ceasefire, features her father manipulating his pronunciation. “We lived in Omagh O-M-A-G-Haitch or -Aitch /as tribally decreed,” she writes, and notes that her father, a traveling salesman, altered his pronunciation depending on to whom he was selling. This strategy of interpreting his audience and adjusting accordingly works for him and allows him mobility until “one day in Derry/Londonderry” her father’s car was hijacked and masked men “asked my father where we lived / and ordered him to spell it.” Carson writes of the same pronunciation issue in “H,” which references the broadcast ban on Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adam’s voice. Actors would read statements prepared by Adams in what Carson calls an “almost perfect lip-synch” (5). Musing on the actor’s accent (“Is the H in H-Block aitch or haitch?” the speaker acknowledges “everything is in the ways / you say them” (7, 9). Though the speaker in this poem is hyperbolic in his statement that “everything” is in pronunciation or word choice, it is true that those things were considered reliable markers of belonging or unbelonging during the Troubles.
In “Barfly,” the speaker is at the Arkle Inn, getting information “from the horse’s mouth,” the slang term indicating the supposed authenticity of the information and its potentially specious nature (4). In the first stanza of “Barfly,” Carson highlights the exchange of information through different types of language, both verbal (from the horse’s mouth) and nonverbal (nods and winks). Carson figures the explosion that ends the first stanza as another type of language; two men enter “and punctuate the lunchtime menu: there’s confetti everywhere,” referencing the confetti of “nuts, bolts, nails, and car-keys” in “Belfast Confetti” (5, 2). The explosion is a “message” or “audio-visual aid” that the speaker can read or interpret because he is familiar with its language. He leaves the Arkle Inn for other locations— he “buzzed off,” like a barfly— because he understands that “for, like the menu, everything’s chalked up, and every now and then, wiped clean” (5-6). In “Belfast Confetti,” Carson imagines the city being written on by violence, the bomb as an asterisk, shrapnel as exclamation points, a hyphenated line, and a “fount of broken type” (2). The city is unreadable. Here, the space of the poem goes beyond the moment of illegibility to reach a new state. Violence writes on the Arkle Inn, it punctuates the menu and “chalks up” the space, creating markers that are visible but do not communicate anything but chaos. Then, after the moment of violence, the space is “wiped clean,” as in the preceding prose passage which observes that “every inch of Belfast has been written-on, erased, and written on again” (52). In Schoolboys and Idlers of Pompeii, that writing is literal; Carson discusses the graffiti and murals that cover “every brick of a gable wall.” Because the literal writing that covers the city encourages viewers to “Remember 1690. Remember 1916,”

37 Several poems in this collection use the image of confetti to stand in for violence, including “Queen’s Gambit,” “Jump Leads,” and “Jawbox.”
themselves violent events, it is easy to make to connection between literal writing on the city’s walls, which by its presence politicizes space and may be painted over or altered depending on the political moment, with violence that “writes” on the city, changing its appearance and meaning. The “confetti” in “Barfly” settles and leaves the space blank or empty, a kind of non-space to be filled in.

The speaker becomes a similar non-presence; he is like “a hyphen, flitting here and there” (8). “Belfast Confetti’s” “hyphenated line” stood in for an explosion, and here, for the speaker’s quick movements between Belfast’s pubs:

So now, I am a hyphen, flitting here and there: between The

First and Last —

The Gamble — The Rendezvous — The Cellars — The Crow’s Nest — The Elephant — The Fly. (9-10)

The destruction that the violence causes is likened to a slate being wiped clean, and on that blank page the speaker marks his movements with hyphens. In “Belfast Confetti,” the speaker lists the “labyrinth” of streets names, separated by commas, but he cannot easily navigate them because he is blocked by various punctuation (6). Here, the speaker embodies the punctuation and is thus able to chart his route through the space of the city, left temporarily blank by a destructive act. In his movement, he exists between places, not in them, a strategy later employed by the speaker of “Punctuation,” who walks “in the black space between the stars” and “in the gap between the streetlights” and imagines the moment after a gunshot as “a blank not yet filled in” (6-7, 5).

Though that moment is blank, the night is written-on here, too, with speaker’s planned
movement through the city, imagined as “lines and angles,” and “chalky diagrams” that are “rubbed out the minute they’re sketched” (1-2).

The speaker does not embody a hyphen, though he may try to achieve a non-presence through his carefully planned, quick movements from place to place. Instead, another figure embodies punctuation, this time a “shadow” which “steps out from behind the hedge, going, dot, dot, dot, dot, dot...” (10). The prolonged ellipses that the shadowy figure embodies creates suspense that is never satisfied, or a “blank space not yet filled in” (5). A reader imagining what might fill blank space is provided with grim possibilities, as the next poems in the collection are “Yes,” featuring a train that is bombed while crossing the border, and “The Mouth,” and “The Knee,” both written from the point of view of a paramilitary member planning an attack. The continued use of punctuation as an organizing mechanism or a stand-in for people within the space of the poem suggests that a poem may be a better representative of Belfast than a map.

In addition to the use of punctuation as a metaphor for violence, there are repeated words, phrases, and images that Carson uses to connect these collections and indicate that the actions of the poems occur in the same space. In “Linear B,” for example, the speaker observes a figure moving through the city like the speaker in “Bomb Disposal” imagines moving through a bomb’s interior: “threading rapidly through the crowds on Royal Avenue” (1). Here, the figure’s movement is quick, where the movement in the earlier poem had been slow and hesitant, but it evokes the same sense of narrowness, creating an exterior space that is nonetheless claustrophobic. The man the speaker observes is on Royal Avenue, a street evoking politics in its name and use. Royal Avenue was the site of the Grand Central Hotel, which closed to guests in 1972 and became a station for British Army regiments during the Troubles. “Linear B” is the
second of three successive poems set on Royal Avenue—the next, “Night Patrol,” features a British soldier having nightmares in the Grand Central Hotel. Setting “Linear B” here creates a charged environment for the man that the speaker observes as somewhat oblivious and disconnected from other members of the public.\footnote{Linear B is syllabic script that was used for writing Mycenaean Greek. It was not fully deciphered until 1953. Carson’s use of this as his title suggests that the figure’s notebook may contain confusing but ultimately meaningful information.} The man, “threading” through the crowds reads and writes in notebook, “peering through / A cracked lens fixed with Sellotape, his rendez-vous is not quite vous” (2-3). His incomplete rendezvous creates him as something of a failed spy, but his presence in the crowd and simultaneous detachment from it, as well as his insistent recording creating him as more of a flaneur than the speaker, whose observation is limited to the man rather than the city or crowd as a whole. The man does not get far, walking in a “zig zags circle” reminiscent of the “confused circles” of the “Insular Celts” and the zig zags of “Ambition” (4). He fills his black notebook with “Squiggles, dashes, question-marks dense as the Rosetta Stone,” similar to the illegible explosion of punctuation the speaker describes in “Belfast Confetti” (7).

While the punctuation in “Belfast Confetti” is violent in its interruption and interrogation, here it seems merely confused, or, as the speaker says, it is perhaps “nonsense.” It may be something else, though, as the speaker imagines the notebook as containing “a formula - for / Perpetual motion, the scaffolding of shopping lists, or the collapsing city” (8-9). If it it is a formula for perpetual motion, that motion is oddly static, for though the man is “never standing still, he “has been the same place many times” (5). As motion and stagnation are paired, so are construction and destruction. As the city collapses, like the “Royal Avenue Hotel collapses under
the breaker’s pendulum” in “Clearance,” the previous poem, it is also scaffolded and built up again (1). Indeed, the Royal Avenue Hotel and the Grand Central Hotel were torn down in 1984 to make room for retail space. The economic components of Belfast’s resurgence, which are discussed at length in chapter three, have origins in Carson’s late 80s Belfast.

“Travellers” is a poem of spaces that have been many places at many times. The first stanza’s subject is a small “trouserless” traveller boy wandering in the “waste ground that was Market Street and Vermeer Street,” through what the speaker calls the boy’s “personal map - junked refrigerators, cars and cookers, anchored / Caravans” (1-3). The speaker suggests that the boy’s “personal map” of the area is different from his own, as well as different from that of Murdock, the subject of the second stanza. Indeed, the fact that the location “was” Market Street and Vermeer Street indicates that in the present of the poem that the boy occupies (he trips, he giggles, all in the present tense) the streets are something else (1). Unlike many streets that Carson names in other poems (such as Balaclava Street in “Belfast Confetti”), these streets have not been destroyed or renamed. They exist in the past tense for the speaker because they no longer match his “personal map” (2). Though the Catholic population is a minority in Northern Ireland and cultural tension between Catholics and Protestants is extremely visible, the Travellers are an even smaller minority population who are largely disenfranchised.39 In this poem, the Traveller boy exists in a “waste ground” that might simply refer to damaged or dilapidated buildings; an earlier poem refers to the titular “Two Winos” “reclining on the waste

39 The 2011 Census lists only 1,300 Travellers in Northern Ireland, making up .1% of the population. Travellers are considered an indigenous ethnic group in Northern Ireland and are protected by law, but they continue to face poor health, limited educational opportunities, and general discrimination (Belfast City Council; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency).
between Electric Street and Hemp Street” (1, 1-2). It can also refer to literal waste, as the boy “pisses on a smouldering mound of Pampers” (4). This boy moves through pace that is both anti-modern—his state of being “trouserless” suggesting either extreme poverty or participation in pre-Catholic superstition that dressed boys as girls as protection from supernatural forces (or both)—and also participates in the world of exchange that entrances the speaker in “Calvin Klein’s Obsession.” Instead of portraying Belfast as a cosmopolitan space, here the Pampers and other items that speak to modernity (refrigerators and cars) are already decaying (a particularly urban decay).

The fact of the decay surrounding the boy is remarkable in that it has to be new. Nomadism is a defining characteristic of Traveller life; additionally, when changing the economics and industry of the 20th century brought them into cities or tempted them to settle, they frequently met resistance and faced violence from “settled” residents. The phrase that follows the derelict scene of the “smouldering mound of Pampers” is “Sic transit gloria mundi” (4). Though “mound” and “mundi” echo one another, the high and low references indicate the gulf of experience between the speaker and the observed boy. As the speaker thinks about passing glory, the first stanza ends with his realization that “This is the exact site, now that I recall it, of Murdock’s stables, past tense” (5). How far past is unclear; the next stanza begins with the fact that “Murdock himself moved out to the Flying Horse estate some years ago” (6).

Like the “moved in” of “Belfast Confetti,” the preposition here indicates something about the way the speaker organizes spaces. Though his personal map no longer corresponds to what he sees, the speaker still considers Belfast his central point around which other places are organized. The “umbilicus of dung” that connects Murdock’s backyard to the rest of
Downpatrick (the town in which Flying Horse is located) highlights the notion of organizing space around a central point (8). Considered with “sic transit gloria mundi,” the use of “umbilicus” suggests the umbilicus urbis Romae, the symbolic center of ancient Rome. For Carson, an umbilicus functions as an almost tangible connecting force, which can positive or negative. The “umbilicus of dung” from Murdock’s yard to Downpatrick is like the “dark umbilicus of smoke...rising from a heap of burning tyres” in yet another waste ground in “Campaign,” another poem in the same collection (6). If Belfast is the speaker’s symbolic center, then for Murdock, it is Downpatrick. He moves “out” there because “He wanted / To end his days among friends; there were Murdocks in the local graveyard” (6-7). His desire to live in this area highlights the connection between self and place, here literally between the body and the earth. The Traveller boy from the first stanza has no such connection to a particular place and instead, his identity is forged through mobility, a relationship between self and space that I discuss in greater detail in chapter three.

Though the speaker distances himself from the young boy through verb tense and possessive pronouns, he also generates a sense of distrust for Murdock’s (and perhaps his own) relationship to space and place. In addition to the “umbilicus of dung” that connects Murdock to his surroundings, there is something ominous about the fact that he has gone to Flying Horse, essentially, to die. Murdock wants to be “among friends,” an apolitical motivation on the surface. Underneath that, however, is the fact that Northern Ireland’s housing estates were (and remain) notoriously segregated communities. Downpatrick is a majority Catholic town and Flying Horse
was itself the site of riots in 1981, on the anniversary of internment.\textsuperscript{40} Scenes from that riot show destroyed cars, burning piles of trash, and children wandering the area, a tableau strikingly similar to the Traveller boy’s space.\textsuperscript{41} The way each space is interrupted and integrated into one’s personal map is culturally determined.

![Flying Horse Riots, Downpatrick, 1981 (Boston College Burns Library)](image)

Both the young traveller boy and Murdock understand and organize space according to their cultural backgrounds; the former occupies a particular place only temporarily (\textit{sic transit}) and the latter has personal and familial connections to place that he seeks to make permanent through burial in that place (\textit{gloria mundi}). These figures can have relationships to the same place, i.e. the site of Murdock’s stables, but, in this poem, only in different tenses.

The figures in “The Exile’s Club” live in Australia but spend their time reminiscing about the Belfast of the past. Though the speaker in “Calvin Klein’s \textit{Obsession}” begins to come to terms with the ephemeral nature of the objects he can purchase, the figures in this poem appear more confident in the ability of material, commercial products to conjure a particular time or place. They are in a public space, “the upstairs lounge of the Wollongong Bar,” but they “make /

\textsuperscript{40} Internment began in 1971 and lasted until 1975. During that time, 1,981 people were held and questioned at camps, 1, 874 of them Catholic. Interment was intended to control the violence of the Troubles but is largely thought to have incited more violence over the years.

\textsuperscript{41} Images accessed via Boston College’s Burns Library archive.
themselves at home with Red Heart Stout, Park Drive Cigarettes and Dunville’s whiskey” (1-2). All of these products have origins not just in Northern Ireland, but in Belfast in particular: Red Heart Stout was Guinness bottled by a bar called Morton’s on Townsend Street; Park Drive Cigarettes was manufactured by Gallaher Group in a Belfast factory; Dunville’s was a Belfast distillery that closed in 1936. These goods function almost as props that help set the scene for their nostalgic evenings. They “make / themselves at home” in the Australian bar, creating a faux-Irish, faux-private space in which they can “get down to business” (1-3). They remember and reconstruct major landmarks: “the whole of the Falls Road” and “the back streets, Lemon, Peel and Omar, Balaclava, Alma” (4-5). These are part of the tangle of Crimean-war named streets in which the speaker of “Belfast Confetti” gets lost. Though the figures in this poem are removed from the violence those streets witness in “Belfast Confetti,” they are aware of it as they “just about keep up with the news of bombings and demolition” (6). Like the figures’ ability to purchase Belfast-made goods, their knowledge of this news implies a system of international exchange. In “Obsession,” Carson uses commercial exchange to portray Belfast as a modern and globally connected city. Here, the exchange requires Belfast to be globally connectected but the focus is on Belfast a center for these “exiles.” The products and the news connect them to Belfast, another “umbilicus” keeping them tethered to their center. Though physically located in the Wollongong of the present, they remain psychically located in the Belfast of the past. Indeed, their knowledge of the “bombings and demolitions” gets only one line before the poem returns to the past, as the figures remember details as diverse as cafe menus, classroom graffiti, “the effects of the 1941 Blitz, the entire contents of Paddy Lavery’s pawnshop” (9).
These final “finer details” that the figures recollect underline the topics that the poems continually circle: commerce and war. First, the invocation of World War II highlights Northern Ireland’s status as part of the United Kingdom and the global connections generated by war. The streets are named for Crimean War battles, connecting Belfast to another part of the world and serving as a reminder of that war and the inextricable forces of politics and religion behind it. Though the Crimean War would have been long over by the time these men walked the streets of Belfast, its presence was felt in the street names and the values about British military that they conveyed. The “effects of the 1941 Blitz,” more recent and more strongly felt, connect the Belfast of the past to the Belfast of the present, with its “bombings and demolition,” as well as to the Dresden that broke Horse Boyle’s heart. Belfast was bombed by German forces four times in April and May of 1941, resulting in over 1,000 deaths and many more injuries. Though Belfast was home to industries important to the war effort, such as shipbuilders Harland and Wolff and aircraft manufacturer Short & Harland, the city was poorly defended; the prevailing belief among UK military officials and the Northern Irish government was that Belfast was simply too distant and too unimportant to be a German target. The economics of war can create industry in a city, such as when Horse moves to Manchester and works with “redundant mill machinery, / Giant flywheels, broken looms that would, eventually, be ships, or aeroplanes” (68-69). It can also damage or destroy industry and disenfranchise surviving populations, as was the case in Dresden and in Belfast, where thousands of people became homeless after the Blitz.

The economic powerlessness suggested by the vague “effects of the 1941 Blitz” is reinforced by the figures’ desire to remember “the entire contents of Paddy Lavery’s pawn
The struggle to remember not just the “contents” but the “entire contents” of the pawn shop suggest that the shop had a robust business. While the exchange of goods in “Obsession” and the wartime industry in “Dresden”—both alluded to in “The Exiles’ Club”—portrays Belfast as connected to the larger world, the use of the pawnshop as the final memory points to an insular Belfast, or, at least insular Falls Road. The customers at Paddy Lavery’s have created their own economy in which money and goods circulate within the community and ownership is temporary or cyclical. The need to do this speaks to the political and economic disenfranchisement experienced by Northern Ireland’s Catholic population. Harland and Wolff, for example, had a nearly exclusively Protestant work force. Belfast’s global connections were slow to benefit the Catholic community. The insular nature of the pawn shop economy contrasts with the fact that the neighborhood is named for the Crimean War and felt the effects of the Blitz, suggesting that it is simultaneously segregated and integrated, a dichotomy present in the poem’s title. The figures in the poem are “exiles,” suggesting a forced removal or isolation, but maintain the ability to self-organize and create community as part of “club.”

_Belfast Confetti_, like _The Irish for No_ before it, contains three sections, with the second section being the longest. That section begins with an excerpt from the Ordinance of the Corporation of Belfast and follows an alternating pattern of two loosely associated poems and a

---

42 Gerry Adams’ 1993 memoir _Falls Road: A Belfast Life_ puts Paddy Lavery’s on Panton Street in the Falls Road neighborhood. Panton Street intersected with Raglan Street, where the Carson family lived until moving to a housing estate when Carson was 10 years old.
43 Indeed, Belfast Forum, an online, community generated archive of the city’s changing landscape, contains many references to the popularity of this particular shop. One user, bhelela, writes that “I remember the Pawnshop I think every kid in Belfast remembers them my Dads suit went in on a Monday and was then taken out on the Friday morning” and another, cobra, writes that “The lady who did my mum's ironing pawned the iron every week for a wee dram.” User arthurmcreegamy sums it up by saying “The pawn offices were the poor persons' bank ...many a dinner would not have appeared on the table only for them!” Belfastforum.co.uk
prose piece. “Gate” and “Last Orders” allude to death, with the former’s numerous references to death or endings (“Terminus boutique”; “MONSTER / CLOSING DOWN SALE”; “Burton’s, where I bought my wedding suit. / Which I only wear for funerals now”; and “The stopped clock of the Belfast Telegraph” and wreaths marking the time and place of a recent explosion) and the latter’s references to guns, bombs, and knives (1, 3, 4-56). “Hairline Crack” and “Bloody Hand” both use bodily images to invoke violence (though in the case of “Hairline Crack” the figure’s body allows her to avoid violence, for “a bullet neatly parted her permanent weave”); “Barfly” and “Jump Leads” are about movement in the city; “Punctuation” and “Yes” use language structures to talk about the structure of the city; “The Mouth” and “The Knee” use body parts as if to isolate acts of violence from the whole, whether than whole is a person or community (8). “Apparition” and Night Out” end the section’s poems on another note of death, though their figures experience it as a distance, through battered military uniforms in the former and by hearing the “broke rhythm / of machine-gun fire” while safely ensconced in a bar protected by a “galvanized wire mesh gate” in the latter (7-8, 1).

The prose pieces provide a setting for the actions of the poems, providing not just a physical space for them to occur, but a history of those spaces, both general (possible Irish language roots for “Belfast”) and personal (the reasons for the route Carson took home from school as a child). Though Question Time warns “don’t trust maps, for they avoid the moment,” it concedes that “if there is an ideal map, which shows the city as it is, it may exist in the eye of that helicopter ratcheting overhead” or perhaps in a photograph of a particular moment, what Carson calls “a fragment of a map” (58-9). Such an aerial map exists as a sight that the helicopter and its occupants can see, but it does not translate to a tangible document, because documents
leave out “ramps barricades, diversions, Peace lines” (58). In Carson’s poetry, maps are less documents that show the city as it is as they are documents that show the city as people want it to be. In *Revised Version*, Carson mentions maps of Belfast from 1788, 1808, and 1811, which include landmarks such as “streets and blocks of buildings which have never existed” and “a grand never-to-be canal...echoing the second Venice dreamed by George Macartney, Sovereign of Belfast in the late 1600s” (67). The city certainly revises itself— “In waking life I expect streets which are not there,” Carson writes—but not in the same manner as maps, which document an ideal or idealized version of the city (68).

Carson’s prose passages in this collection are interested in maps and continue to name streets and landmarks, but attempt to create a palimpsestic sense of the city that accounts for his experience of space and place across time. In *Question Time*, Carson refers to himself as a map, but “a map which no longer refers to the present world; measures his movement by “vanished public houses”; and thinks “I was *there*, in my mind’s eye, one foot in the grave of that Falls Road of thirty years ago” (63). These pieces, in addition to providing information about Carson’s personal experience of Belfast, contain information on the city’s founding, the force of the Farset River, potential Irish-language origins of the name “Belfast,” the geographic and social relationship of the Falls and the Shankill, and neighborhood myths. They name places referred to in poems in *The Irish for No* and *Belfast Confetti*: Gallaher’s tobacco factory, the Grand Central Hotel, Australia's Woolongong Bar, Clock Bar, and Raglan Street among others. These references reveal, not a map of Belfast as it is or was, but rather Belfast as a psychic space. The prose passages in *Belfast Confetti* create a psychic stage set for the actions and speakers of the poems. The speaker nervously walking into a bar knowing “Taig’s written on my face”; the
speaker witnessing “another shadow step[ping] out from behind the hedge”; and another
bemoaning the “clever dick from the ‘Forensic Lab’” who identifies a victim from “the
toothmarks of the first and last bite he’d taken of / The sour apple” do so in the environment that
Carson has created through his selection of anecdotes about Belfast from various points in time44
(“Last Orders” 5; “Punctuation” 9; “The Mouth” 6, 8-9). These accumulated details, stories, and
changing place names create a palimpsestic city, a sense that “every inch of Belfast has been
written-on, erased, and written-on again” (52). Carson’s poems unfold on the stage he has set and
simultaneously add layers to the palimpsest of the city’s story.

“Ambition,” featuring a speaker who shares Carson’s history, deals explicitly with time
and its relationship to place. Immediately preceding “Ambition,” a haiku from Yasui introduces
the poem’s concerns:

I know the wild geese
ate my barley - yesterday?

Today? Where did they go? (1-3)

The haiku’s uncertainty about when actions took place and the location of the geese takes place
in a presumably non-urban setting; the geese are “wild” and the speaker grows barley. Carson’s
speaker reflects on urban matters, but does so from a vantage point on Black Mountain in west
Belfast. Though the speaker is beside a spring and has reached the summit, his view of Belfast is
obscured by smoke, presumably from the city’s many industrial buildings. His “father’s
wandered off somewhere” and the cold spring water is “a winter taste / In summer” (3-4). Like
the speaker of the haiku, Carson’s speaker is not having a straightforward experience of time and

44 A derogatory term for a Catholic, Taig derives from the Irish surname Tadgh.
place, and thus begins to reflect. This poem contains Carson's recurring image of taking one step forward, two steps back and features the speaker thinking "For if time is a road, / It’s fraught with ramps and dog-legs, switchbacks and spaghetti” and realizing that “bits of landscape / Keep reoccurring” (13-16).

Indeed, in this poem things recur almost as doubles, like Horse and his brother Mule, or like the “verb repeated” of “The Irish for No.” On the road that is time, “you are checked again and again” by a pair of soldiers because “The one they're looking for is not you, but it might be you. Looks like you. / Or smells like you” (34, 27-28). In the case of the speaker’s father, this likeness has dangerous consequences. The speaker makes a vague reference to his father’s “time inside” at the poem’s start and in the final stanza the poem returns to it, revealing the extent of and reason for it, as well as the seeming ability to move through time as one moves through space: “he’s back into his time / As internee, the humiliation of the weekly bath. It was seven weeks before / He was released: it was his younger brother they were after all the time” (63-65).\(^4^5\) The near doubles continue, with the speaker’s uncle spending seven years in jail for his father’s seven weeks; the speaker’s resemblance to his uncle; the “summer blue” of the sky on the soldiers’ television looking more like “winter blue”; confusion about His Majesty and Her Majesty; and his parents’ competing “versions” of the same story (48, 50). In this poem, seeming or almost doubles have more to do with perception and desire than reality, like the maps in “Revised Version.” The speaker’s father is mistaken for his brother because that is convenient for the soldiers, and later, the speaker is told he resembles his now-dead uncle as a way to imagine another version of that man’s life. While Carson often uses the “one step forward, two

\(^{4^5}\) Carson’s father was indeed mistakenly interned.
steps back” model to indicate little or no progress, in the poem’s final line, the speaker says that his father “made two steps back towards me, and I took one step forward” (73). Here, one step forward, two steps back allows for progress towards a goal (in this case, locating his father), demonstrating things like “forward” and “back” are dependent on perspective and progress is defined differently for different people and purposes. Identity and one’s position in time and place are subjective, but often have objective consequences.

Carson’s first three collections demonstrate his sustained interest in the poetic exploration of Belfast as a lived-in space. Critics such as Kennedy-Andrews, Corcoran, and Alexander argue that Carson’s use of maps when constructing city space indicate the city’s instability and maps’ inability to properly capture such a rapidly changing space. I use this reading of Carson as the foundation for my own. I argue that Carson’s poetry uses maps like it uses other texts, ranging from original poetry and prose, to translations of Early Irish and Japanese poetry and excerpts and quotes from other authors. That is, Carson’s poetry extracts value from these texts—a “bird’s eye view” from a map, a historical perspective from the Ordinance of Belfast, detail from his prose passages, multiple points of view from his poetry—while at the same time demonstrating that each of these texts is incapable of representing Belfast on their own. The difficulty of representing Belfast is due in part to the physical changes it undergoes (due to violence or simply the passage of time), but also because of the innumerable perspectives and experiences of its residents.

Carson alludes to multiple points of view (such as when the taxi occupants peer through the vehicle’s window, looking nervously at another set of windows) and at other times is explicit (such as his paramilitary speakers in “The Mouth” and “The Knee”). These points of view, as
well as his repeated inclusion of sensory details (the smell of smoke or perfume, the precise color of a wound or wall) indicate that any attempt to represent Belfast will fall far short. Maps may “avoid the moment,” as Carson cautions in *Question Time*, but they are a way of representing a place, not much different than a poem or essay or scent. The young boy’s “personal map” in “Travellers” differs from the speaker’s not only because of the physical layout of the space, but also due to their cultural affiliations. Carson makes clear that Belfast is made up of overlapping and contradicting “personal maps,” each with a particular understanding of a particular “envelope of space-time.” Using multiple genres and perspectives, as Carson does in *Belfast Confetti*, is like Horse Boyle’s box of mementos or the collection of memories in “Calvin Klein’s Obsession.” They cannot add up to “the thing itself”—a life, a memory, a place—but together, they create a fuller representation than a single text or genre could, while at the same time demonstrating the impossibility of a universal representation.
Chapter Two: Eavan Boland's Suburban Poetics

Eavan Boland has always been a poet on the move; one acutely aware of where she is, where she is going, and, not least of all, where she has been. Boland was born in Dublin in 1944; her family moved to London in 1950 and New York in 1956 because of her father’s career as a diplomat. In 1959, at fourteen, Boland returned to Ireland, where she attended Holy Child School and later Trinity College Dublin (TCD). She lived in and around Dublin for several years; her relative closeness to or distance from what she calls “literary and confirming center of Dublin” was integral to her post-collegiate development as a poet (*A Journey with Two Maps* 18). In the 1980s and early 90s, she held a series of academic positions in Ireland and the US before being appointed a full professor at Stanford University in 1995. She now divides her time between California and the Dublin-area. In this chapter I argue that Boland is a distinctly suburban poet and that suburban is a category that disrupts organizational binaries, such as rural and urban, nationalist and feminist, and Irish and American. Literature of the suburbs, and, in particular Boland’s trio of “Suburban Woman” poems (1975, 1987, 2001), are defined by twentieth century domesticity; attention to suburbia’s spatial, social, and economic relationships with the urban and the rural; and engagement with intellectual and creative production.

Boland has long been associated with university space and academic work. Suburban space, in Boland’s writing, is quite different from university space, particularly regarding the type of work performed in each and the value assigned to that work. In a collection of essays on her career, Boland notes that simply being in Dublin and writing in TCD’s library authorized her ambition and allowed her to feel intimately connected to Ireland’s poetic tradition. Later, living
in a Dublin suburb with her husband and two young children, she felt “at a distance from [the poets]” and her ambition, though she still read and wrote poetry (19). The “distance” that Boland feels so acutely is more than physical—Dundrum, the suburb in which Boland lived, is just over five miles from Dublin. Rather, there is an intellectual distance which Boland must bridge in order to write in or about the suburbs. At the start of her career, Boland associates university space with intellectual output, produced and consumed in public, while suburban space relates to private, non-productive labor.

Once Boland begins publishing, she rejoins the university, now as a teacher of writing. Her poetry continues, though, to focus on the domestic and the suburban. Her position in the university allows her the emotional and intellectual distance, not to mention the financial support and the visibility, to effectively write poetry of the suburban experience. In the context of Irish literature, it is not uncommon for writers to spend their careers imagining spaces from which they are absent: think Yeats writing poetry of the West of Ireland from Dublin and London, Joyce chronicling Dublin from Paris, and Heaney returning to the Derry of his childhood while living and working in Dublin, Belfast, and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Boland’s university affiliation does not make her less a suburban poet, and, indeed, part of my argument is that considering suburban as a spatial and thematic space addresses her participation in various traditions—urban and rural, nationalist and feminist—thought to be mutually exclusive. In order to demonstrate the disruptive potential of the suburban, I first provide an overview of Boland criticism and the development of suburban literature, as well as background suburbia as a gendered space related to economic development.
The suburbs are defined by their spatial relationship to both the urban and the rural; they are spaces that demonstrate post-war economic realities, the spread of technology, and the decrease of agrarian labor in Ireland. Because suburban growth gained momentum after World War II, suburban residents in the 1960s and 1970s would likely have been former residents of more rural or urban spaces, urban spaces themselves a fairly modern development in Ireland. Writing specifically about suburbs in the Republic of Ireland, Mary Corcoran, Jane Gray and Michel Peillon, in *Suburban Affiliations: Social Relations in The Greater Dublin Area*, provide a comprehensive overview of scholarship on suburbia and lay out the stereotypical vision of the place and its relationship to gendered experiences of space:

Domesticity is seen as a crucial feature...the suburbs were declared a female world and a feminine space, one in which women and children were confined and isolated within their home environment...Whether passive or active, suburban women were perceived to be condemned to domestic servitude. (9-10)

---

Mark Baldassare, writing specifically about suburbs in the United States, notes the “almost utopian” terms which which planners and politicians discussed suburban development as the answer to the increasing taxes, overcrowdedness, crime, and racial tension associated with urban spaces, resulting in suburban communities of homogeneous racial and social backgrounds (480). Lynn Spigel’s *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* details the ways in which this supposed utopia is a space designed to reinforce social norms, particularly those related to gender. Dolores Hayden’s 1984 *Redesigning the American Dream* details how suburban detachment from the resources and community of urban centers and stark divide between public and private, in which domestic labor is completed solely in the privacy of the home, presents hardships for women. Spigel probes this divide as well, writing that “the division of spheres is socially and politically motivated way of organizing social space, rather than a response to universal human needs” (9). Similarly, Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963) points out the notion that technological advancements, such as vacuum cleaners and washing machines, were meant to free women from the burden of domestic labor, but resulted in higher standards and expectations for cleanliness and productivity, thus further confining them to private, domestic space.
Though Corcoran, et al. point out that such stereotypes can be reductive and ultimately dismissive of women's experiences, they acknowledge that women may well have felt isolated in suburban spaces because suburbia supports the nuclear family over extended kinship networks and men often leave their neighborhoods for work while women largely perform domestic labor within and near the home. Though suburbia, in its idealized form, was meant to conjure a sort of closeness, with neighbors just beyond a driveway and the home acting as a hub and haven for the nuclear family, such closeness, combined with heightened standards for domesticity and confinement to private space, can easily cause feelings of suffocation, isolation and loneliness.

As a female poet in the 1960s and 1970s, Boland was a lonely figure; she explains “I began to write in an Ireland where the word ‘woman’ and the word ‘poet’ seemed to be in some sort of magnetic opposition to each other” (A Smartish Pace). Boland makes clear that for women to write poetry in 1960s Ireland, as she did, the poet must grapple with the looming role nationalism plays in Irish poetry, and how women had long been excluded from nationalist and poetic traditions. Nationalist poetic values are well-summarized by Terrence Des Pres, who argues that the lineage from ancient to contemporary poet remains: “While Ireland’s misery—its failed rebellions, its poverty and cultural deprivations enforced by the English—all but annihilated the earlier bardic order, there remained a distinct spirit of ‘bardic ambition’...ready to serve the nation’s need” (40). Des Pres’ understanding of what it means to be an Irish poet privileges a male, nationalist perspective, and imagines that the experience of colonization, while a “misery,” actually motivates cultural production. Boland addresses women’s roles in nationalist poetry:
Within the poetry inflected by its national tradition, women were often double-exposed, like a flawed photograph, over the image and identity of the nation. The nationalisation of the feminine, the feminisation of the national, was a powerful and customary inscription in the poetry of nineteenth-century Ireland. "Cathleen Ni Houlihan!" exclaimed MacNeice, "Why / must a country like a ship or a car, be always / female?" The woman poet in Ireland, in moving from being the object of the Irish poem to being its author, has caused real disruption. A poetic landscape that was once politicised through women is now politicised by them. Hence, there is a new political poem. ("Contemporary Irish Poetry and Criticism")

Boland thus considers her poetry to be disruptive; this view is much debated among critics. Scholarly work on Boland’s poetry tends to focus on nationalism and feminism and position them as a pair of binaries. Depending on the critic, Boland’s poetry is lauded as groundbreaking or critiqued for reinforcing the patriarchal values she claims to subvert. Edna Longley, for example, writes that Boland’s work claims feminist credentials without enacting them, a charge related to Longley’s claim that Boland’s does not investigate or critique nationalist understandings of Ireland, poetry, tradition, and womanhood, as well as non-Irish (particularly American) readers’ and critics’ willingness to accept romantic notions of Boland as a voice for silenced or oppressed women. Taking an alternative view, Melissa Dinsman, in analyzing Boland’s Anna Liffey as a revision of Joyce’s “Finnegan’s Wake,” writes that Boland “straddles the line between feminist and nationalist in her poetry” by writing in the tradition of

47 A claim made in 1990’s From Cathleen to Anorexia: The Breakdown of Irelands and 1995’s “Irish Bards and American Audiences”
her male predecessors (179). Clair Wills argues that Boland seeks a representative and inclusive poetic understanding of Irish womanhood that utilizes present-day realities rather than mythic figures of the *shan van vocht* or *aisling*, while Geraldine Meaney contends that Boland creates a sort of counter-myth that equates biology and maternity with womanhood, thereby reinforcing the essentialist version of femininity that she supposedly subverts. Andrew J. Auge, taking these critiques into account, suggests that “Boland answers Julia Kristeva’s call for women to shatter the iconic figures of motherhood by attending carefully to the actual experience of maternity” (122).

It is the “actual,” individual experience of suburban living, and in particular, attention to themes of isolation and conformity, that makes the literature of suburbia a disruptive force. Friedan defines this isolation as part of the “strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States”: “each suburban wife struggled with it alone.” (15). Edna O’Brien, whose novels were banned in Ireland upon publication, writes in her memoir that when she first met and married her husband, “I was lonelier than I should be, for a woman in love, or half in love” (*Country Girl: A Memoir* 127). Her trilogy, *The Country Girls* (1960-1964), features protagonists Baba and Caithleen becoming increasingly isolated even as they move out of their rural homes, finding that marriage does not offer the power and freedom they’d imagined when they were young. In a subsequent interview, O’Brien locates her loneliness firmly in the suburbs: “It was so lonely. We lived in SW20. Suburb-ia. When I came 'up London' as I called it, I thought it was heaven” (Cook). O’Brien’s

---

48 O’Brien’s memoir reveals the stakes involved for women who dared participate in labor, particularly intellectual labor; her writing increasingly brings her to London and allows her to interact with publishers and other authors and she earns enough money to leave her husband. At the same time, her husband’s refusal to support her work brings
memoir situates her writing, along with the intellectual, social, and financial connections it fostered, as her way out of this loneliness. Isolation, then, is closely tied to the limited ability to pursue non-domestic labor, which may include writing or pursuit of work outside the home. Adrienne Rich’s “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” picks up on this theme, with the titular figure excelling at the creative practice and domestic duty of embroidery, imagining a “world of green” outside of her own while living in fear of her husband, while Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* features would-be poet Esther Greenwood living in a Boston suburb (2). Esther’s refusal of traditional female roles leads to depression and institutionalization.49

A contemporary Irish example of suburban literature, Anne Enright’s *The Gathering* (2007), makes clear that the face of the suburbs may change but their attendant social and cultural gender values do not. Written as a journal kept by Veronica, the narrator, after her brother’s suicide, *The Gathering* imagines three generations of women: Veronica’s grandmother, the financially vulnerable Ada; her mother, called Mammy, who lived in the housing estate suburbs of the 1970s and had twelve children whose names she could not keep straight; and Veronica, who lives the new Irish suburbs of the Celtic Tiger economy with her husband and two daughters in a new five-bedroom brick house that they own. Certain things have made suburban living more bearable for women of Veronica’s generation—Ireland’s growing economy means that she doesn’t struggle for money like her grandmother, the legalization of birth control offers

“the death-knell” to her “already ailing marriage,” it took several years to win custody of her two sons, and her novels’ depictions of female sexuality and agency were banned in Ireland (*A Memoir* 154).

49 Boland has written of the kinship she feels with Rich, though the women write from different cultural positions. “When I first read the poems of Adrienne Rich I was in my early thirties. I was married with small children…[The poems] describe a struggle and record a moment which was not my struggle and which would never be my moment….And yet these poems came to the very edge of the rooms I worked in, dreamed in, listened for a child’s cry in. They passed through the frost of the suburban dark” (“Reading Adrienne Rich” 17).
her control over her body that her mother didn’t have—but she feels deeply disconnected and unhappy. Veronica wrote for a newspaper but left her job in order to “ferry them [her daughters] to their ballet or Irish dancing or horse riding” (37). “I used to be a journalist,” she writes, “...now I look after the kids—what’s that called?” (39). In the literature of the suburbs, characters and speakers are deeply aware of the suburbs as spaces shaped by lack. For O’Brien, and, to some extent, Boland, it is the lack of connection to the literary social and intellectual world. For Esther and Veronica, it is the lack of purpose. They are limited by expectations assigned to the suburbs as a social and spatial category.

From O’Brien’s Caithleen and Baba to Enright’s Veronica, the literary suburbs remain a limiting and isolating space. However, the physical layouts and experiences of Irish cities, suburbs, and rural areas changed drastically during that time. Boland began writing in the wake of the mass unemployment and emigration of the ‘50s, something that was repeated in the ‘80s when “the twenty-six counties were mired in an economic depression from which there appeared no possibility of escape,” complete with a “haemorrhage of young people emigrating in pursuit of a better lives elsewhere” (Coulter and Coleman 3). All of this changed—rapidly—in the ‘90s before crashing down again:

For the decade and a half between 1993 and 2007 the Irish economic model — the so-called ‘Celtic Tiger’ — roared. GDP growth rates soared year on year, with double-digit growth recorded in a number of years. The unemployment rate fell to the lowest in Europe, with the number of people at work almost doubling between 1992 and 2007, increasing from 1.165 million to 2.139 million (Kitchin et al. 1070).
This economic growth had direct effects on the physical layout of cities, suburbs, and rural areas, and subsequently, on the ways that people live in and move through those spaces. The particulars of urban mobility in the pre- and post- Celtic Tiger economies are discussed in greater detail in my chapter on Flynn and French.

During the Celtic Tiger boom years, “the country embarked on a frenzy of building private housing units, commercial property and public infrastructure such as roads and light rail” (Kitchin et al. 1070). In fact, the rail that connected Boland’s suburb, Dundrum, and Dublin for 100 years closed in 1959; a new line was opened along the same route in 2004 and in 2005, Ireland’s largest shopping mall, called Dundrum Town Centre, opened only minutes from the newly opened stop. These private housing units and the infrastructure that connects them to urban centers demonstrate a shift to marketized home ownership rather than ownership in social housing estates that Corcoran et al. note have long been a part of the Irish suburban landscape and that feature in Ciaran Carson’s poetry (Kitchin et al. 1071; Gray and Peillon 8).50 The global financial crisis of 2007 marked the end of the Celtic Tiger and again changed Ireland’s physical landscape: as of 2011, there were 2,876 documented unfinished estates in Ireland, 777 of which can be considered a “ghost estates.”51 Thus, in the time between the first Boland poem this chapter examines—1975’s “Suburban Woman”—and the last—poems from 2014’s A Woman

---

50 Michelle Norris traces the evolution from socialized home ownership to marketized ownership. Since the formation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the government provided subsidies and grants that supported home and land ownership. This support continued until the Celtic Tiger boom made private ownership more appealing. This switch is one of the factors that contributed to inflation and, ultimately, the economic collapse.

51 An unfinished estate is a housing estate of two or more housing units where development and services have not been completed and estates completed from 2007 onwards where 10% or more of units are vacant (National Building Agency, 2010; 2011). A “ghost estate,” a term coined by David McWilliams in 2006, is an estate of ten or more units in which 50% are vacant.
Without a Country—the economic, cultural and physical realities of suburbia change dramatically.

In addition to changing physical landscape, the Celtic Tiger years changed the face of the Irish workforce. During the boom, women entered the workforce in record numbers, an increase in a trend that began in the late ‘70s because of increased urbanization and economic instability. Sinéad Kennedy makes clear, however, that Irish women in the workforce remained at a disadvantage compared to the rest of the E.U. Writing in 2003, as the economy still grew, she points out that “Ireland has the lowest level of labor market participation in Europe among women with children under five years of age” and suggests that this discrepancy has to do with the fact that childcare in Ireland is more expensive than elsewhere in the E.U. and few state-sponsored childcare options exist, leading many Irish mothers, particularly working-class mothers, to work part-time or opt out of the workforce entirely (Kennedy 97). Though women increasingly work outside the home, a lack of support for working mothers remains, related to cultural attitudes and anxiety towards women’s labor.

In the twentieth century, decreasing agricultural labor resulted in men working in urban centers rather than on family farms. At the same time, government documents reinforced the public/private divide that places women within the private, domestic sphere. In 1937, the Republic of Ireland’s Constitution, or Bunreacht na hÉireann, addressed women’s labor in its stipulation that a woman’s place is in the home:

52 “Between 1971 and 1983, the number of women in the workforce grew by 34%...between 1991 and 1996, female employment grew by 102,000, equally the growth of the previous twenty years” (Kennedy 96).
53 Kennedy writes that the average cost of a full-time créche place in Dublin was €500 per month in December 2002; it had risen to €1,200 per month by June 2002 (97). This cost has remained high. A 2015 study by the Irish Independent found that in Dublin the average cost per month was €1,053 for one child and €1,884 for two children (Sheehan).
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 labor to the neglect of their duties in the home. (Article 41.1-41.2)

In the rhetoric of Bunreacht na hÉireann, a woman’s place “within the home”—the private sphere—benefits the family and, in turn, the nation. The un-remarked on transition from “woman” to “mothers” suggests that, in the language of this document, woman are assumed to be maternal figures. Maternal figures, whether they are literal mother to children or figurative mothers to the nation have “duties in the home,” presumably the private domestic labor of childrearing, cooking, and cleaning. Act 41 frames these acts as a moral responsibility: not performing them would be neglectful and against the “common good” for which the nation thrives.

Domestic work may be integral to the moral character of the nation, but it is not visible or valued in the labor economy, even as it supports the paid labor of men. Consider Yeats’ “Adam’s Curse,” which features and male and female speaker discussing their work, the woman saying “To be born woman is to know— / Although they do not talk of it at school— / That we must labor to be beautiful” (“AC” 19-21). The female speaker stresses the unspoken nature of such work; its invisibility is a crucial part of its success. Consider too, Veronica’s inability to name her work in The Gathering. She is not obliged “by economic necessity to engage in labor” but feels frustrated that her “duties in the home” amount to a sort of nameless, ill-defined work. This

---

54 As recently as 2014, the United Nations Human Rights Committee expressed concern about “the slow pace of progress in modifying the language of article 41.2 of the Constitution on the role of women in the home” (UN).
uncompensated, private labor keeps women dependent and therefore vulnerable, even as they are championed for their support of familial and national stability, demonstrating Spigel’s point that the public/private division is socially and politically motivated.

The speakers in Boland’s poems struggle to define themselves within the confines of suburbia, but they create strategies for personal and professional fulfillment. In these strategies, Boland disrupts traditional binaries, drawing from rural and urban experiences, alluding to nationalist tropes while defying them, and navigating her positions as a post-colonial subject, emigrant, women, poet, and professor.

***

“Suburban Woman,” from *War Horse* (1975), “Suburban Woman: A Detail” from *The Journey* (1987) and “Suburban Woman: Another Detail” from *Against Love Poetry* (2001) feature female speakers attempting to reconcile competing desires and facets of themselves. All three of the “Suburban Woman” poems begin physically locating the speaker in her home. In “Suburban Woman,” the space is defined by its border; it is a space where “Town and country are at each other’s throat” (1). In “A Detail,” the space is defined by the labor performed there: chimneys swept, gardens, shrubs, and hedges trimmed—labor that indicates an outdoor space that is not quite town, but possessing a manicured and controlled nature not quite country. “A Detail” continues with the speaker “setting out for a neighbour’s house” at “the last light,” a setting echoed in “Another Detail,” which begins at “Dusk” when “…the neighborhood / is the colour of shadow” (“A Detail” 19, 22; “’Another Detail” 1-3). These poems represent liminal spaces, but their in-between nature does not allow the speakers and subjects respite from either side and instead makes them vulnerable. Not only is suburbia “town and country at each other’s
throat” in “Suburban Woman,” it is a place where one of the poem’s subjects is “caught in cross-fire” (13). This cross-fire can also be framed as a sort of double-consciousness or hybridized, chaotic identity. Boland’s idea of following two maps and her repeated image of a woman poet envisioning another woman, or another facet of herself with its own form and motivations (for example, taking care of her home and child) certainly do not fuse these maps or facets. However, neither do they create a perpetual other, plagued by inconsistency and chaos. Boland’s suburban women look to the past, to nature, to cultural myth, to social convention, and to literary inheritance, all shaping their motivations to write, garden, clean, or parent. These influences may motivate different actions at different times, and these women do not have static relationships to their physical surroundings and the labor those surroundings encourage. They are doubly conscious, they are hybrid—In “Another Detail,” the speaker is a woman at a desk and a woman drawing a curtain, but both images exist in the mind of the speaker, in her consciousness of herself in that space and her awareness of herself in other spaces at other times.

These poems make use of the passage of a single day and the dawning and setting of the sun. In “A Detail,” the darkness impinges on the separation between the speaker and her surroundings, threatening take away the speaker’s individual identity and make her one with the land, like a woman in a nationalist poem, here a tree that warns “I was a woman like you, / full-skirted, human” and later, pleading “remember us” (“A Detail” 29-30, 42). The speaker does not

55 Claire Nally’s Envisioning Ireland: W.B. Yeats’s Occult Nationalism explores the notion of double-consciousness in the Irish context, exploring the position of the Anglo-Irish (as opposed to the Ascendancy) as neither colonizer nor colonized, as not at home in either nation, his Anglican-ness highlighted in Ireland and his Irish-ness highlighted in England. Nally invokes Bakhtin's notions of hybridisation and cultural consciousnesses. In Bakhtin’s understanding of hybridisation and Nally’s application of it to the Anglo-Irish Yeats, a person with a hybrid identity is “always an outsider” and beset by contradictions, resulting in the chaos of Yeats’ occultism and “widening gyres” (Nally 36; Yeats “The Second Coming).
fear disappearing into the land, rather, darkness might make her body and the land mutually
disappear into one another. As “the light is lessening, / the hedge is losing its detail, / the path its
edge” and, at the same time,

something

which may be nothing

more than darkness has begun

softening the definitions

of my body, leaving

the fears and all the terrors

of the flesh shifting the airs

and forms of the autumn quiet (25-41)

The speaker’s fear of and resistance to imagining the land as woman speaks to her awareness of
nationalist tropes that imagine a woman as nation and a deliberate push against that tradition.
Though the poem has natural elements, it is decidedly not rural, with the image of headlights in
Dublin, manicured hedges, and the speaker, in “a denim skirt” setting out to socialize with
neighbors (20). The thing that “has begun softening” her body “may be nothing more than
darkness,” but that “may be” leaves open possibilities. In other poems, Boland indicts poets who
have come before her, writing of “the songs / that bandage up the history, / the words / that make
a rhythm of the crime” in 1987’s “Mise Eire” and of “the toxic lyric” in 2007’s “The Nineteenth
Century Irish Poets.” In addition to the impending darkness, it may be a literary tradition that
Boland inherits and works within, that has a history of disappearing land and woman into one
another. The speaker’s fears may be the poet’s reservations about writing in that tradition and an attempt to remain visible within it.

In “A Detail” the speaker fears women of the past, disappearing into the land, losing her individualism, and being used and forgotten; such competing senses of connection or disconnection of the self, the past, and to the larger world are central to all three poems. In “Suburban Woman,” a day passes, with sections of the poem set in morning, late morning, afternoon, and evening. Unlike in “A Detail,” the time passes indoors or in solely domestic spaces: a kitchen, a bedroom, a private garden, and a kitchen again. These spaces, though, are likened to the outside world, from repeated war references (falling flowers are “like a military tribute or the tears / of shell-shocked men into arrears”; drawing a blind is a “white flag” at the end of the “day’s assault”) to feminine spaces unlike those in suburbia (references to the myth of Persephone and Demeter, noting that “the kitchen lights like a brothel”) (49-52, 26). In “Suburban Woman,” though a subject’s past is “bleeding” and she is “the sole survivor,” the speaker is connected to the subject and that past, writing

defeated we survive, we two, housed

together in my compromise, my craft

who are of one another the first draft. (13, 20, 66-68).

The speaker is both object and author here, recognizing how historical and cultural happenings help to shape her present experience, even as she is actively constructing it. In “A Detail” the past and present are separate but the speaker fears that only losing her sense of an individual self will make her one with the past; in this construction, the speaker does not recognize and
acknowledge the influence of the past on her present, but instead views the past as something to run from on a darkened path, lest it gain on her.

In “Another Detail” the idea of separate parts of one individual is given its fullest expression, as the speaker sits at her desk, imagining “...an uncurtained / front room where // another woman is living my life” (7-9). The speaker sees this woman performing the domestic duties of carrying a child and preparing food, eventually pulling the curtain shut, cutting off the speaker’s view. The speaker imagines herself outside the home, in the “wintry air” and “featureless November twilight” (6, 22). Though the speaker is outside of the warmth of the home, like the speaker in “A Detail,” she continues to claim ownership of it: “the kitchen / the child she lifts again and holds / are all mine” (16-18). Because the speaker sits at her desk while imagining this scene, this can be read as Boland’s imagining herself as both a suburban woman—wife, mother, domestic—and poet. Her collection of essays, “A Journey With Two Maps,” does not imagine living as a suburban woman and a poet as collapsing the two supposedly different realities into one another, but instead as simultaneously following two paths. Imagining her career in such a way demands a separation of the self, or at perhaps more accurately, a dual self. In “Another Detail,” the speaker, when occupying her role as a writer, does not forget her other roles. Her suburban life remains visible to her from her desk. She remains ensconced in suburbia. The spaces’ physical attributes define the work that needs to be done, and when, the speaker performs work not typically associated with the space, i.e. writing, she can envision the more typical labor which she performs as well. When the speaker-poet is, to an outsider’s view, performing as a typical suburban woman, her alternative form of labor, writing, does not leave her either.
Though the Suburban Woman poems span twenty-six years and each contains within it formal variations and multiple points of view, Boland writes them in such a way that each functions as a cohesive whole and that the three form a connected trio. As stanzas progress in “Suburban Woman,” a day passes, each part of the day with its associated labor: a kitchen routine in the morning, followed by various housekeeping and her cultivated garden in the afternoon and evening, ending at night in the kitchen once again. As the stanzas of the poem progress and the speaker moves from room to room, it is worth pointing to the Italian stanza, or room. The poem’s form echoes its content, and we can consider the poem as an interior, private space through which the speaker moves. Boland writes of the passing of seasons as well as of the day, with references to the Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone, which explains the changing seasons through a tale of a mother’s love for her daughter. The passing of the day and the year require particular types of labor for the speaker, but this is a particularly feminine labor.

It is no surprise that the main figure in “Suburban Woman” performs her duties alone. Because suburban men generally commuted to away from the home to work, suburban homes became the province of women. The work done in that space such as caregiving, cooking, and cleaning, was viewed as naturally feminine and tasks performed in order to support the family and male labor, performed outside the home and for a wage. Boland highlights the particularly feminized nature of daily and seasonal domestic labor when she writes that the “Suburban Woman” is a “mistress of talcums” and a “courtesan to the lethal / rapine of routine” (21, 23-24). “Suburban Woman: A Detail,” echoes that routine and the hints of violence in words like “rapine” and “coutestan, which a summary of a day’s and a season’s work: “the chimneys have been swept. / The gardens have their winter cut. / The shrubs are prinked, the hedges gelded” (1-
3). The opening line of “Another Detail” is the single word “Dusk,” followed by the speaker imagining “wintery air and the smart of peat” (1, 6). Because the speaker in “Another Detail” has removed herself from domestic labor to engage in intellectual labor for her own satisfaction, she imagines those more feminine duties being performed by another person, and in doing so her imagination physically removes her from the space of the home, such that she views the scene from the outside, looking in at domesticity while the figure inside gazes out. This imagined division of the self calls back to the ending of “Suburban Woman,” twenty-six years earlier, in which the poet-speaker and the main figure are “housed // together” (68).

The enjambment of “housed // together” is indicative of the way the speakers imagine separate parts of their cohesive selves, as well as the way that Boland stylistically connects the trio and creates a hybrid yet singular identity within each poem. The first poem begins with a series of couplets, often enjambed and with caesuras, before switching to a section of short lines with no stanza breaks, and then back again. The five sections of this poem all contain, not always rhyme, but the repetition of sounds to bind lines together, such as the succession of -ing verbs that end couplets in the first stanza—“withdrawing,” “dying,” “bleeding,” “needing”—and the “p” sounds in a couplet in the fifth stanza—“prevent,” “print.” “A Detail” has three sections, the first with lines of unenjambed complete sentences and the next two of comparatively shorter lines with longer sentences that unfold over and across stanzas. This structure, as well as another reference to Demeter and Persephone, tie “A Detail” to “Suburban Woman.” The third section refers back to the labor of the first; in the first the “hedges [are] gelded” but by the third, encroaching darkness means that “the hedge [is] losing its detail” (26). Each section temporally locates the speaker with references to season and the relative darkness and lightness through
which the speaker moves. “Another Detail” begins the same way, placing the poet-speaker at “dusk” when “the neighbourhood / is the color of shadow” and she can feel “the wintry air” (1-6). This poem, with a single section, has stanzas of two, three, and four lines. Boland connects the unrhymed lines by starting lines in the same stanza with the same or similar words and phrases, from the repetition of “another” in the third stanza and “is setting”, “is cutting,” and “is crushing” in the fourth. The end of the poem reminds the reader that of the speakers temporal and seasonal location: a “November twilight” (22). Though Boland does not directly reference Persephone in this poem, she does write about a female child and the sensory experience of cutting fruit, features of the myth and of her poem “Pomegranate” (In a Time of Violence 1004), her most direct treatment of Persephone and Demeter. The repetition of sounds and continual reminder of temporal locations tie together the poems featuring multiple points of view and a varying internal structure, while the focus on domestic labor, mythic references, and multivalent speakers demonstrates the hybrid yet coherent nature of Boland’s suburban women.

In a Time of Violence was published in 1994, in an interval between the second and third Suburban Woman poems. The collection is divided into three sections: Writing in a Time of Violence: A Sequence; Legends; and Anna Liffey. Though Boland lived in the Republic and, by the time of this collection's publication, in California, one interpretation of the collection’s title might be the violence of the Troubles, still two years from coming to an official end in the North. Boland’s long historical view might also indicate other periods of violence: the violence of the Irish Civil War, of the Famine, and inflicted on women in myths, Celtic and otherwise. The first poem in the collection, preceding the first sequence, is called “The Singers” and dedicated “for M.R.” Boland’s next collection, The Lost Land, will be dedicated “For Mary Robinson—who
found it.” Robinson was four years into her term as Ireland’s first female president when *In a Time of Violence* was published. The opening dedication to “M.R.” and the poem’s focus on “The women who were singers in the West” suggests that there are many types of violences that can and have been visited on women, but at the same time, women have defied traditions that keep them vulnerable by acting as creators, even when not given proper credit (1). This poem demonstrates the burdens placed on women by Irish Nationalism, whose rhetoric not only painted them as passive, sacrificial muses, but, in the name of respectability and appealing to the Catholic establishment, denied women power they had held under other systems.

The poem’s invocation of the “unforgiving coast,” “rain and ocean,” “Atlantic storms” and an ever-present danger, recalls J.M. Synge’s *Riders to the Sea* (1904), in which the protagonist Maurya has lost her husband and six sons to the sea (“The Singers” 2, 5, 11). The play, which takes place in the Aran Islands, features a Catholic family who maintain elements of pre-Catholic belief, such as a combined fear of and reverence for the sea and keening as a mourning practice. The “women who were singers on the coast,” living as they were at the mercy of the weather, also found a “true measure of rejoicing in // finding a voice where they found a vision” (1, 15-16). In pre-Catholic funeral practices, women took the lead, and keening was considered both a personal expression and a professional practice. The keen (Irish: *caoin* or *caoine*) generally involved a group of women surrounding the body of the deceased. In their

---

56 *Riders to the Sea* was performed three years prior to Synge’s riot-inducing *Playboy of the Western World*. Both were performed at Dublin’s Abbey Theatre. The theater, founded by Lady Gregory and Yeats in 1904, is also known as the National Theatre of Ireland. The warm reception of this play, compared to *Playboy*, and the theater’s association with nationalism, suggests that Western Irish identity and practices informed nationalist ideals.

57 Maurya’s speech at the end of the play can be considered a type of extemporaneous keen: the stage directions indicate that she begins “raising her head and speaking as if she did not see the people around her.” Her speech alludes to both the power of the sea and the mourning rituals associated with it: “They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me...I won’t care what way the sea is when the other women will be keening.”
1840 book, *Ireland: Its Scenery and Character*, Samuel C. and Anna Maria Hall describe the occasion of the keen:

The women of the household range themselves on either side, and the keen (caoine) at once commences. They rise with one accord, and, moving their bodies with a slow motion to and fro, their arms apart, they continue to keep up a heart-rending cry. The cry is interrupted for a while to give the ban caointhe (the leading keener) an opportunity of commencing. At the close of every stanza of the dirge, the cry is repeated, to fill up, as it were, the pause, and then dropped; the woman then again proceeds with the dirge, and so on to the close.

The “women who were singers in the West” may have been keening for a family member, but likely, the *ban caointhe* would have been a woman who travelled, offering her services for a price. In this pre-Catholic practice, women presided over funeral rites.

The role of *ban caointhe* has pagan origins; descriptions and images of the keening women and a banshee are largely identical: the banshee's "cry is plaintive and very much like that of a keening woman of this world" (ÓhÓgáin 31). The Halls, in their description of Irish mourning rituals, note that the keen relates to both political matters and the “supernatural, as it is said to have been first sung by a chorus of invisible spirits in the air over the grave of one of the early kings of Ireland” (226). The folkloric transition of a banshee from that of a goddess protecting the interests of Irish families to an otherworldly being mourning losses is one related directly to British rule, specifically related to the loss landed Irish families experienced in the 16th and 17th centuries when land was confiscated by the British government. The keen then can be seen not only as rooted in pagan traditions, but also related specifically to anti-British
sentiments, thereby doubling its subversive nature. Though Irish Catholics would likely not be concerned about offending British sensibilities, the pagan origins were troubling to those who wanted a more modern Ireland, leading Catholic priests to ban keening and even crying women from funeral practices in the 19th century (O’Coileáin). Indeed, even those claiming the cultural import of keening viewed it with equal parts interest and disgust, particularly directed at the women at the fore of the ritual; the Halls note that if the ban caointhe is not old, “the habits of her life make her look old” (226). Thomas Crofton Croker, after assuring his readers that “Irish, with certain superstitions...have feelings much like those of other persons,” describes the keen as “not a song, I suppose, but a dismal inarticulate yell, set up at the grave, by four shrill-voiced women, who (we understood), were hired for that purpose” (xliv, lii). Opening her collection with “The Singers,” Boland signals to her reader that the rest of the poems will feature women acting as creators in spaces and times that may not acknowledge their contributions.

The first poem in the *Writing in a Time of Violence* sequence echoes a treatment of maps that I examine in my chapter on Carson, namely, a repeated distrust of maps and interrogation of maps as an authoritative organizing mechanism that represents a version of space for political purposes. This poem, “That the Science of Cartography is Limited,” is Boland’s most explicit poem about maps and spatial organization, one that demonstrates how her poetic project differs from Carson’s. Rather than Carson’s poems of single moments, Boland’s poems unfold across time: a day, a season, or “a whole history” (“Quarantine” 10). The poem’s title, “That The Science of Cartography is Limited,” is the start of a sentence the poem’s first stanza completes:

- and not simply by the fact that this shading of forest cannot show the fragrance of balsam,
the gloom of cypresses

is what I wish to prove. (1-4)

This structure is not one that Boland repeats elsewhere in the collection. The title functions like a title of a map—on the page, the title is the largest and names what the rest of the page describes (here, in words rather than the image of a map). It cannot be separated from the rest of the poem without disorienting the reader. By calling mapmaking a science and using its proper name, cartography, Boland lends it a sense of objectivism that the rest of her poem promptly undermines. Determined to “prove” her hypothesis, Boland demonstrates that both scientific and poetic inquiry are shaped by personal histories and biases and that for her, poetic truth and personal experience trumps the map’s authority. There is much to admire in maps—“the masterful, the apt rendering of / the spherical as flat” and “an ingenious design which persuades a curve / into a plane”—but there are limitations, too (20-24). Like Carson, she laments that maps cannot adequately convey sensory experience, but it is not simply that.

Boland, ever combining the personal and the historical, addresses this poem to an unnamed “you,” presumably the speaker’s romantic partner. There are three “pockets of space time” in this poem, to once again borrow Massey’s phrase: the present, in which the speaker views the map and writes the poem; the recent past, when the speaker and her partner “were first in love” and “drove / to the borders of Connacht / and entered a wood there”; and “1847, when the crop had failed twice,” a time that the speaker and her partner discuss on their walk through the woods (5-7, 13). In the recent past, the speaker sees a road of “rough-cast stone” barely
visible under grass and realizes they are famine roads (10). Men, women, and children died of starvation while building these roads and “where they died, the road ended // and ends still” (16-17). In the present of the poem the speaker tells her partner and her reader the sight of a map does not cause her to note the genius and skill of the design, but to realize anew that the line which says woodland and cries hunger and gives out among sweet pine and cypress, and finds no horizon will not be there. (25-28)

These roads are part of the physical reality, cultural memory, and recorded history of the place, but are not visible in the scientific account the map provides. In another poem about the Famine and the winter of 1847, “Quarantine,” Boland writes of two figures dead not just “of cold. of hunger” but “of the toxins of a whole history” (from Against Love Poetry 2001). It is this “whole history” that mapmakers do not or cannot convey in a map, for all their mastery of the scientific form. Boland is careful about all attempts at representation, writing in “Quarantine” that a poem about the Famine has time only for a “merciless inventory” of death and much earlier, in 1987’s “Mise Éire,” a response to Patrick Pearse’s 1912 Irish language poem of the same name, warning that a certain type of poetry might be

Songs

---

58 Famine roads were part of a plan devised by Charles Trevelyan, Assistant Secretary to the British Treasury. Rather than providing aid in the form of food, the British government required the Irish to build roads and receive food for their work. This plan, unsurprisingly, failed because the locations for the roads were chosen at random and did not connect to other roadways, and the people required to participate in physical labor were already suffering from malnutrition. When a person died, the road he or she had been working on simply stopped.
that bandage up the history,
the words
that make a rhythm of the crime. (9-12)

Boland’s poetry indicates that she is invested in writing a particularly Irish poetry but that at the same time, she refuses to “go back to it,” “it” being Pearse’s poetic tradition which imagines Ireland as an old woman and mythic mother (Boland “Mise Éire” 1). It is this simultaneous investment and refusal that makes it difficult and reductive to assign Boland to binary categories of nationalist or feminist, and instead the non-binary space of the suburban female poet.

“The Pomegranate,” undeniably suburban and maternal while remaining connected to the speaker’s urban past and Classical knowledge, employs some of the themes and imagery from the “Suburban Woman” trio.59 The poem is partially set in the “suburbs” with its “cars and cable television” and cultivated outdoor spaces, this time featuring “whitebeams / and wasps and honey-scented buddleias” (44, 17-18). It features temporal and seasonal transitions moving from the “summer twilight” to the “winter” in which “the stars are hidden” (13, 24-25). Most notably, it showcases multiple figures that can be considered facets of the speaker: Ceres, Persephone, and the speaker’s daughter. Boland begins the poem with a succinct summary of the Persephone myth:

The only legend I have ever loved is
the story of a daughter lost in hell.

---

59 The myth of Persephone and Demeter has a popular poetic reference for twentieth and twenty first century female poets. See Edna St. Vincent Millay’s “Prayer to Persephone” (1921), Sylvia Plath’s “Two Sisters of Persephone” (1957), Rita Dove’s “Demeter’s Prayer to Hades” (1992) and “Persephone, Falling” (1996), Louise Glück’s “Myth of Devotion” (2006), and Fiona Benson’s “Demeter” (2014).
And found and rescued there.

Love and blackmail are the gist of it.

Ceres and Persephone the names. (1-5)

The myth, originally Greek, is a fitting one for Boland’s interest in making poetry out of distances, real and perceived, and how distance affects one's identity and actions. In the myth, Hades, god of the underworld, kidnaps Persephone and brings her to the underworld as his bride. Her mother, Ceres, goddess of the harvest and fertility, grieves for her daughter and neglects the harvest, creating the barren winter months. Zeus, becoming alarmed, intervenes and persuades Hades to release Persephone. Hades agrees, but because Persephone has eaten while in the underworld—several pomegranate seeds—she is bound to return for several months of the year. Each year, Persephone returns to the underworld and Ceres grieves; Persephone is then released and Ceres rejoices, creating the yearly cycle of winter and spring.

The speaker imagines her own life in terms of the myth but also images the myth itself as a physical space: “and the best thing about the legend is / I can enter it anywhere. And have” (6-7). She is Persephone as “an exiled child in / a city of fog and strange consonants,” calling back to “An Irish Childhood in England” which describes a “strange city” of “exile” and “bickering vowels” (“The Pomegranate” 8-9, “An Irish Childhood” 21, 1). This construction imagines England as the underworld and Ireland as the home from which she was taken, but later, as an adult back in Ireland and with a child of her own, she is Ceres and “knew / winter was in store for every leaf” (19-20). The anticipation of the seasonal shift and later, the sight of her daughter asleep beside “her plate of uncut fruit / The pomegranate!” indicates that the underworld and the
earth, exile and home, daughter and mother, can exist in the same physical space even if they are
separated by metaphorical distance (28-29).

The speaker is a Ceres figure who, seeing her daughter as a child and admits “I was ready
/ to make any bargain to keep her” (15-16). Later, the daughter’s growth is evident by “her teen
magazines” and “can of Coke”; the speaker realizes that her daughter’s growing independence
will separate them further (27-28). Boland alludes the story of Adam and Eve and suggests a
parallel to the Persephone myth, calling the pomegranate “the French sound for apple” plucked
from a tree (35). The pomegranate, which keeps Persephone from her mother but allows her to
reign as queen of the underworld, might be similar to the apple which expels Eve from the
Garden but grants her knowledge. Though the speaker wants to warn and protect her daughter,
she recognizes that “If I defer the grief I will diminish the gift” and the myth is a space that
belongs to her daughter as much as it does to her (49). In “Pomegranate,” the speaker is realizing
that, unlike the doubled subjects in the “Suburban Woman” trio, her daughter cannot be
collapsed back into her, instead growing more independent, more metaphorically and, likely,
physically distant as time passes.60

Boland’s identification with Ceres allows continuing exploration of exile and identity; it
allows Boland to draw parallels between ancient myth and her present-day experiences, a
technique that demonstrates her Classical knowledge and poetic lineage while claiming
suburbia’s relevance. However, the myth is more commonly known as the myth of Demeter and

---

60 The idea of the myth as a physical space and of the speaker and her daughter as both Persephone and Ceres at
different times leads me to the idea of Kristeva’s split subject. In “Women’s Time” (1981, translated by Jardine and
Blake), Kristeva writes that “Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject:
redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and of another, of nature and consciousness, of
physiology and speech” (31) Birth does not result in another self, but in an individual, independent other: “creation
in the strongest sense of the term” (31).
Persephone; Ceres is the Roman name for Demeter. Popular accounts of the myth, from the *Homericy Hymn to Demeter* to Hesiod’s *Theogony* (700 BC) use the Greek names Demeter and Persephone rather than the Roman Ceres and Proserpina. So then, in addition to using the less common name, Boland also mixes Greek and Roman nomenclature. There are several reasons for doing so, the first of which I contend is in service of the poem’s incantatory nature. The start of the poem contains a repetition of “s” and “l” sounds:

The only *legend* I have ever *loved* is

the story of a daughter lost in hell.

And found and rescued there.

*Love* and *blackmail* are the *gist* of it.

*Ceres* and *Persephone* the names. (1-5)

As the poem zooms out, so to speak, and covers the speaker’s life rather than myth, from a childhood “in exile” and later as the suburban mother of a young daughter, the sounds become more varied. When, at the end, of the poem, the speaker returns to the myth, so too return the repeated “s” and “l” sounds:

The *legend* will be hers as well as mine.

She will enter it. As I have.

She will wake up. She will hold

the papery flushed skin in her hand.

And to her lips. I will say nothing. (50-54)

The repetition of these soft consonants creates a dream-like rhythm fitting the mythic nature of the story and calling back to the oral tradition of the Homeric hymns. Boland chooses “Ceres,”
with its double “s” sound, to enhance the poem’s incantatory qualities, which “Demeter” would interrupt. In particular, the repetition of “will” enhances the poem’s aural appeal and is something of a prophecy, suggesting that such happenings are inevitable or fated. In addition to aligning the speaker with Ceres, mother of Persephone and all the earth, Boland casts herself as a Homeric oral poet.

Ceres, rather than Demeter, allows Boland to connect her speaker notions of liminality of the “Suburban Woman” trio, with its focus on changing seasons and moments of dawn and dusk. Ceres, more than Demeter, is associated with liminal spaces due to the Roman mundus Cereris, or Mundus of Ceres:

The mundus was a monument in Rome whose opening was a state ritual, conducted on special occasions on which all public business was forbidden...literary evidence shows that the mundus represented a threshold between the world of the living and that of the dead, and that Ceres is the divinity associated with this liminal structure (Spaeth 63).

Though scholarship around the mundus remains controversial, Filippo Coarelli, leading scholar of Roman topography contends that the mundus was dug by Romulus, founder of Rome: “Not all scholars have accepted [Coarelli’s] solution, but this much should be clear: that the mundus of Ceres is the mundus of Romulus the Founder, and that it lay in the Comitium” (Champlin 193).

The mundus is the same structure as the umbilicus urbis romae, the center of the city, discussed in my chapter on Carson (Gorski and Packer). Thus, Boland identifies her speaker with Ceres in

61 For more on the importance of transitions in the “Suburban Woman” trio, see “Women in the Twilight and Identity in the Making: The Concept of Transition in Eavan Boland’s Poetry” by Marta Miquel-Baldellou (Estudios Irlandeses, Number 2, 2007, pp. 128-134).
62 The Comitium was a place of public assembly in early Rome, and until the second century BC, the place where Roman tribes gathered to pass laws (University of California Los Angeles, Roman Digital Forum).
order to signify both liminality and centrality. The speaker embraces liminality, “entering” the
myth and becoming Persephone or Ceres while remaining bodily in her own environment,
whether that is a child in London, the “city of fog and strange consonants,” or a suburban woman
knows that “winter is in store for every leaf” (9, 20). The speaker’s daughter, once a part
of her own body and becoming more distinct as years pass, can also enter the myth independent
of her mother. Just as my discussion of Carson’s “Travellers” argues that his invocation of the
mundus suggests that a person’s geographic center is dependent on their cultural affiliation and
tradition, the speaker in “Pomegranate,” invoking Ceres, reimagines the mundus, creating a
center that is not static, urban, male, and public, but one that is dynamic, suburban, female, and
private.

In Boland’s 2007 collection, Domestic Violence, suburban experience is influenced by
the view of Celtic Tiger economy on the brink of collapse and of the poet who has lived outside
of Ireland for over ten years. This distance from the Ireland of her student and newly-married
days results in poetry that still strongly identifies with Ireland—indeed, references to Irish
people, places, and myths abound. This poetry is something like the split, hybridized subject in
“Suburban Woman: Another Detail.” The speakers in these poems are shaped by Irish culture
and literary history, but at the same time attempt to view those things—and themselves—from
outside of them.

A brief poem near the start of the collection demonstrates this tendency to view people
and spaces as hybrid and multivalent. The title “Histories,” from the start denies the reader a
sense of unity, Like the poem “That the Science of Cartography is Limited,” the title implies that
there can be no singular, all-encompassing account of history, that one’s view of history is
shaped by one’s experience in it. The two stanza, eight line poem tells the two truths of a historical moment:

That was the year the news was always bad
(statistics on the radio)
the sad
truth no less so for being constantly repeated.

That was the year my mother was outside
in the shed
in her apron with the strings tied
twice behind her back and the door left wide.

The bad news is “the sad / truth,” happenings from outside of the home brought into it by radio, backed by the science of statistics (3-4). Equally true is the experience of the speaker’s mother, whose private, domestic routine does not appear to change despite the news on the radio. She wears her apron and leaves the door open, seemingly unworried and unaffected by what happens outside. This does not imply that the speaker’s mother is uninformed or ignorant of the outside world, rather, it demonstrates her ability to live with multiple truths at once.

“In Our Own Country” addresses the ways in which Ireland has changed since Boland first began writing poetry. The poem features an unnamed “We”—perhaps the same we in “That the Science of Cartography is Limited”—and “They.” “They are making a new Ireland” and

They have been working here in all weathers
tearing away the road to our village—
bridge, path, river, all

lost under the onslaught of steel. (1, 9-12)

Unlike the work performed in “That the Science,” this work seems to have the weight of economic and political power behind it. The speaker of the poem cannot imagine that this construction, like the construction of the famine roads, will end. This new Ireland wants to willfully forget, or at least alter, the old. The construction the speaker witnesses in the poem may well be that of Dundrum Town Centre, a quaint name for an entirely modern shopping experience—it is Ireland’s largest mall, complete with parking for 3,400 cars (Dundrum Town Centre). The speaker hesitates to embrace change that engages in such revision: “Remember the emigrant boat? / Remember the lost faces burned in the last glances?” she asks her companion and her reader (20-21). The speaker is sure that she and her companion are “exiles in our own country” and admits that “for all I know we have always been” (30, 29). Present-day readers will know that that Celtic Tiger economy will soon come to an end, meaning that much of the construction in the Republic will halt as abruptly and as devastatingly as the famine roads.

The speaker’s reluctance to embrace a changing Ireland does not mean she longs for the past, described as “the rag-taggle of our history” in the collection's last poem, “In Coming Days” (8). It is lost to her, but ultimately not something she wants to recover or connect with. In “Coming Days,” the speaker addresses the allegorical figure of the Shan Van Vocht, knowing she is a being who “can only speak with words made by others” (12). The figure and the word put in her mouth by mostly male writer can be powerful; in 1938, Yeats, reflecting on his 1902 Shan Van Vocht play Cathleen ni Houlihan (co-written with Lady Gregory), wonders “did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?” (“The Man and his Echo” 11-12).
Boland’s speaker admits that the Shan van Vocht has had power over, imagining telling the figure “Once in fact, long ago,” “I almost loved you” (23, 26). The Shan van Vocht can be a persuasive figure, but loving her, and, in the case of a writer, using her as an allegorical device, can result in an adherence to Nationalism that has always been more invested in idealism and nostalgia than in representing Ireland as a lived reality. For the speaker, the imagined Ireland of the future is as murky as the past, as the speaker looks “into distances where we once lived, / into vistas we will never recognize” (“In Our Own Country 5-6). Some of this distance is a result of growing older—“Soon / I will be as old as the Shan Van Vocht—// (although no one knows how old she is)”, the speaker playfully laments (“Coming Days” 1-3). But another factor is the rapid economic development that Ireland experiences in the 1990s. The Celtic Tiger meant that Ireland was connected to the rest of Europe in ways it hadn’t been before, particularly with the introduction of the Euro in 1999. The rest of Europe is also changed during that time; it is like a “stranger” who “has forgotten its own music, wars, and treaties” and who comes to the Dublin suburbs in the form of “a machine from the Netherlands or Belgium // dragging tossing, breaking apart the clay / in which our timid spring used to arrive” (1-19).

This poem seems to revere the past and Ireland’s landscape more than earlier poems, not with a longing to maintain a rural Ireland, but rather in a mourning period for suburban Ireland. The Irish suburbs, a relatively new national space when Boland first moved there in the late 1960s, is losing its distinction as neither rural nor urban. The “onslaught of steel,” part of “frenzy of building private housing units, commercial property and public infrastructure such as roads and light rail” means that the suburbs of Boland’s earlier poetry are in danger of becoming obsolete (“In Our Own Country” 12; Kitchin et al. 1070). In another poem in the collection, the
speaker finds a florin, leading her to reflect that “I am holding / two whole shillings of nothing, / observing its heaviness, its uselessness” (“House of Shadows. Home of Simile” 15-17). This notion that matters can be heavy, physically present, and real, yet useless or unimportant is one that Boland’s suburbia poetry writes against from the start. She knew that there was “no ready-made importance” assigned to suburban matters and that her poetry would need to insist on its own poetic and cultural relevance.

Boland’s latest collection, A Women Without a Country (2014) continues to address a changing Ireland. These poems contain references to her personal life and relationship with both Ireland and the United States, with brief prose passages about her grandmother’s life preceding poems in the titular section, a poem written on the occasion of her daughter’s marriage, and poems that name people and places from Dundrum. In the “Suburban Woman” poems as well as others I’ve analyzed here, speakers contend with creation and representation, from the poet-speaker of “Another Detail” who must imagine her writerly self and her domestic self as two distinct beings and the speaker of “That the Science,” who refuses to acceptance maps as a representative device. Literature of the suburbs is concerned with matters of creative production, and Boland’s latest poems address these concerns at the level of words—how words are spelled, used as a method of control, serve as commonplaces, and betray identity. These poems have a subtle connection to suburbia and are Boland’s most direct exploration of her position as an established writer living, at least in part, in the United States.

In “As,” the speaker experiences a day in Dublin, from the morning when the most lists from the ocean and “In an hour or so // someone will say crystal clear” and “Someone else says

63 The florin was an Irish coin minted between 1928 and 1968.
dry as dust” to the evening when the speaker returns home knowing that “In a little while I will say safe as” (5-6, 11, 32). The speaker may be able to predict this language but she views the similes as a creative speech act: “language / crossing the impossible / with the proverbial” (18-20). In another poem in the collection, “Advice to an Imagist,” the speaker urges attention to the way language is used and imbued with meaning beyond the factual or logical, telling the Imagist poet “Follow / the line you wrote / as if it were salt” (1-3). She describes all of the things she doesn’t mean by salt: its history, its chemistry, its existence in pantries and kitchens. Instead she considers salt as

the word that comes

to the edge of meaning

and enters it:

What a man is worth.

What is rubbed into the wound.

What is of the earth. (24-29)

Words at “the edge of meaning” combine literal meaning with cultural memory and result in language as a living, expressive, mutable thing. The speaker’s advice to the Imagist is in part to acknowledge creative language use in everyday, non-poetic speech. Boland’s resistance to the sublime and embrace of the ordinary is a fact of her position as an Irish suburban woman—in a collection of essays on her career, she writes that “no ready-made importance” was assigned to the spaces and experiences of suburbia, and thus, she “would have to do more than write this subject; [she] would have to authorize it” (A Journey 62-63). As Imagism might focus attention
on a single natural element—a wave, a flower—in order to see it in new ways, Boland’s speaker encourages the same concentrated attention to words, in order to reveal the richness of language in its written and spoken, everyday forms.

“The Port of New York: 1956” and “Becoming Anne Bradstreet,” the collection’s final poem, continue Boland’s exploration of language, particularly as it relates to culture. In earlier poems, such as “An Irish Childhood in England 1951” and and “Mise Eire,” Boland addresses speech and language as a challenging part of the emigrant experience. “The Port of New York: 1956” is her most direct treatment of this topic in an American context. She writes about what she didn’t know as a child but now recognizes:

> It is not the physical
> or literal differences between
> the ground we stand on
> that marks loss. (9-12)

Instead, the speaker marks her loss through language, “by the sound / of endings falling into / their lesser selves forever” (14-16). She lists several words with both their Irish and American spellings: splendour to splendor, for example, and catalogue to catalog. These shortened endings represent a cultural shift for the speaker and again are evidence of language's richness, for there are different types of Englishes. For the speaker who has grown up with one type, however, these different spellings do not seem to add depth to her language but instead indicate loss of meaning. The last example to speaker gives connects this poem to the earlier “Advice to an Imagist” and is indicative of the speaker’s frequent travel.

> and harbour changed to harbor
which robbed us of the *our*
by which we knew
no other city but our own

slipped out to sea in the night,
among foghorns and cormorants,
and came back at dawn
tasting of salt (25-32)

Boland frequently invokes images of leaving Ireland by boat ("Mise Eire") and positions bodies of water as shaping Irish experience ("Anna Liffey"; "Cityscape"). The poem here imagines entering New York Harbor as an experience so total that it changes the very language the speaker can use to describe it and throws past experiences of similar landscapes in sharp relief. The city that loses itself to the sea at night, similar to the mist that covers ocean and land in "As," comes back with the familiar taste of salt, which "Advice to an Imagist" demonstrates is many things: a historic and cultural artifact while at the same time a common household item, a supporter of life, and an expressive, culturally determined metaphor.

"Becoming Anne Bradstreet" follows "Port of New York," contains images of traveling to the U.S. by boat and considers writing as it relates it national identity.64 Anne Bradstreet, born in England in 1612, became a prominent poet in Massachusetts. In this poem, Anne Bradstreet could be Eavan Boland; just as the "Woman without a Country" may be Boland, her grandmother, or Bradstreet; just as the "Suburban Woman" poems contain speakers and figures

64 This poem was commissioned by the Folger Shakespeare Library
that are “housed // together” (“Suburban Woman”). In “Becoming Anne Bradstreet,” the speaker is “An Irish poet watching an English woman / Become an American poet.” Boland, living between Ireland and the U.S. for nearly twenty years may wonder if she is undergoing a similar transition. The *A Woman Without a Country* sequence is dedicated “to those who lost a country, not by history or inheritance, but through a series of questions to which they could find no answer” (25). Boland’s speakers and suburban women ask questions that interrogate their places and their possibilities. If they lose a country in doing so, it is only the idea of a country defined by organizational binaries and strict boundaries. In crossing between city and country and suburb, between Ireland and America, between writer and teacher and mother, draws from all of these supposed oppositions, creating the potential for all to be “housed // together” in a poetic space.
Chapter Three: Tom French and Leontia Flynn: Toward a Multimobile Poetics

The speakers in the poetry of Tom French and Leontia Flynn are relentlessly, ceaselessly mobile. They slip between past and present, reality and imagination, and life and death as easily and frequently as between homes, cities, and nations. This frequent movement, particularly between nations, could be considered participation in what Jahan Ramazani calls a transnational poetics. Ramazani contends that cross-cultural exchange is the chief development of twentieth-century poetry and, in the Irish context, cites Seamus Heaney as an early example of a transnational poet, given Heaney’s “intercultural and interlingual” bog poems, use of American imagery, Greek and Roman myth, Old English language structures, and the ancient Irish genre of dinnseanchas (mythology of place names) (40). Ramazani cautions that the “provincialization of Heaney” participates in essentializing myths of Ireland as insular or uniquely “authentic” (39). Critics have also used the term “post-national” to describe twenty-first century Northern Irish poets whose poetry reflects diverse interests and experiences: they are “less pre-occupied with binary opposition between England and Ireland than their predecessors, as evidenced by their lack of interest in the old colonial theme — even to deconstruct it — as Muldoon and Carson have done” (Kennedy-Andrews 249). Flynn, along with Alan Gillis, Sinéad Morrissey, and Caitríona O’Reilly have been described as post-national poets.65

This chapter contends that the categories of post-national and transnational do not adequately represent the poetry of French and Flynn and introduces a new category, “multimobile,” as a useful way to understand the poetry of French and Flynn. Both categories

65 For an in depth discussion of the term post-national and Northern Ireland, see Delanty; Cauvet; Hayward; and O’Neill.
continue to emphasize the nation even as they gesture towards its diminishing importance. In this sense, the nation remains like the dark umbilicus of Carson’s “Travellers” and “Campaign,” a center around which identity organizes, regardless of physical distance or passage of time. Multimobile takes into account Ramazani’s study of globalized, transnational, and translocal poetry and his contention that national paradigms can elide more than they can reveal; in fact, he argues that national and regional paradigms are a particular danger in the Irish context (39). Because colonialism and sectarianism placed such an emphasis on boundaries and borders in Irish poetry and criticism, we must look for new ways to read Irish poetry as that emphasis diminishes in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. 66 The idea of a multimobile poetics combines Ramazani’s work on transnationalism with the burgeoning field of mobility studies, which his text does not address. 67 A multimobile poetics is one that privileges movement through space over place; it is one that features speakers practicing and linking physical mobility (i.e. travel, commuting) and temporal, spiritual mobility (i.e. slipping between the worlds of the living and dead).

66 For more on the role of physical and psychic boundaries in the Troubles, see Switzer, Jarman, and Rolston. For a discussion specific to borders and poetry, see Hanna; Gamble; and Kennedy-Andrews.

67 Mobility studies has been understood as a development in or an extension of the spatial turn I discuss in chapters one and two. In 1996, Augué induced the concept of a non-place as central to “supermodernity.” Some of these non-places are indeed places—the grocery store, the ATM—but Augue focuses on the inherently ephemeral nature of time spent in such places. They are places we visit and pass through in order to spend our time in destinations that we consider proper places. Augue focuses on the infrastructure that allows people to move between destinations and considers that infrastructure, such as highways and airports, as examples of non-places. In 2000, Urry contended that mobility and networks were key to the relevance and growth of sociology in the twenty-first century, and in 2006, the journal Mobilities was founded and opened with an editorial form Urry, Sheller, and Hannam. They argue for the journal's necessity: the mobility turn was “transforming the social sciences, not only placing new issues on the table, but also transcending disciplinary boundaries and putting into question the fundamental ‘territorial’ and ‘sedentary’ precepts of twentieth-century social science” (1-2). In 2006, Cresswell and Merriman edit an anthology of mobility theorists. Cresswell writes that “studies of transnationalism and translocalism have necessarily involved serious consideration of the role of mobility in the constitution of identities that transcend a particular place of nation” and notes that “mobilities research thinks about a variety of things that move including humans, ideas and objects [and is] particularly interested in how these things move in interconnected ways and how one may enable or hinder another” (553-554, 552).
Ireland’s history of emigration demonstrates a different type of movement within and through the country. Between 4 and 5 million people left Ireland between 1851 and 1921 (Sweeney 6, Miller 569) and from the Republic alone, approximately 1.5 million emigrated over the course the twentieth century (Delaney). Carson’s poetry addresses emigration out of economic necessity, most notably when Horse Boyle moves to Manchester for work in “Dresden.” Another of his poems, “Exile’s Club,” uses “exile” as it has been popularly used to describe absence from Ireland, whether that absence is by choice or by force. Boland frequently uses the term to describe her childhood in England and the United States and James Joyce famously declares, in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man that Stephen Dedalus will use “silence, exile, and cunning” to become an artist (247). Recently, Finest Music, a collection of translated poems edited by Maurice Riordan, includes Paul Muldoon’s version of “Colmcille on Exile,” a poem that imagines the sixth century saint lamenting about being “forced off my home turf” and claiming “I so loved being in Ireland / and still rail against being displaced” (18, 37-38). Economic displacement is at the heart of the various forces motivating emigration across time, from the Famine of the 1840s to the limited employment opportunities for agricultural workers in the 1950s and college educated in the 1980s (Glynn).

Due to the Celtic Tiger economy of the 1990s and early 2000s, the rapid pace of emigration briefly slowly and tourism increased. In 2006, Ireland had the highest net immigration rate across Europe; by 2012, it had the highest net emigration rate (Kenny). French and Flynn began publishing during the Celtic Tiger boom, which co-occurred with the Good Friday Agreement of 1996, an event that brought a measure of stability to Northern Ireland. The
speakers in the poems by French and Flynn are affected by Ireland’s previous economic and political landscape (French’s frequently invoked brother is part of the mass emigrations of the 1980s, while Flynn describes the old Belfast as a “blot and blight” on people’s lives) and benefit from newfound economic stability (Flynn’s speakers travel frequently while French’s are apparently middle class). The position of exile places individuals at a painful remove from their country of origin and limited economic and social mobility allows few options for return. Economic stability allows the speakers in Flynn and French to travel outside of Ireland and within it without adopting the posture of an exile.68 Travel in and to Ireland, particularly the Republic, became increasingly popular: “during the 1990s, Ireland became the fastest growing tourism destination in Europe, with arrivals growing by almost 130 percent over the decade” (Clancy 42). Though this rate slowed in the early 2000s, it is steadily growing again. Tourism Ireland, an organization promoting tourism in the North and the Republic, reported that overseas tourism grew by 11% in 2015 (Grace). As tourism plays an increasingly important role in the economies of both the North and the Republic, research on the subject has increased accordingly.69

The development of Northern Ireland in general and Belfast in particular as tourist centers is perhaps the most dramatic change in the region’s tourist economy in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In order to become attractive to tourists, Belfast participated and continues to

68 Travel abroad by citizens of the Republic grew in the 1990s and 2000s, reaching its height of 8 million trips per year in 2008 (Central Statistics Office).
69 O’Connor and Cronin analyzed Irish tourism in the first years of the Celtic Tiger economy and Clancy argues that tourism was a driving force behind rather than result of the Celtic Tiger. Rynne, Buttmer, and Guerin explore heritage tourism as it is marketed to members of the Irish diaspora; McDowell studies the opportunities and pitfalls of Northern Ireland’s post-Troubles tourist economy, notably conflict tourism in Belfast.
participate in what Catherine Switzer and McDowell refer to as “cognizing peace through normalization” (341). Normalization in this context was first used in 1994 by British Prime Minister John Major and has come to refer to introducing “degrees of normality to Northern Ireland” through the removal of military structures, including the checkpoints and roadblocks frequently seen in Carson’s poetry, and the re-organization of public spaces so that former spaces of violence become neutral or positive (341). In addition to the removal of security apparatuses, normalization includes the increased use of glass as an architectural feature (glass windows caused more damage in a bombing) and the absence of memorials. Switzer and McDowell argue that that such absences are a “sustained attempt to recondition cognitive maps of the conflict, influencing how people approach and negotiate space once associated with violence and suffering” (341-4, 338).

Tourists are interested in Belfast’s recent history, however, and Switzer and McDowell note this that the past is accessible to them even if it is at odds with the city’s new spatial organization: “there is something almost schizophrenic about a city that wipes virtually all evidence of the Troubles from its newly polished centre, even as it finds that tours of the murals, monuments and painted kerbstones of some of its residential suburbs are among its most popular and distinctive tourist attractions” (350). Murals painted on the sides of business and homes have been popular expressions of Loyalist support since the early twentieth century. Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries painted increasingly violent murals in the 1980s and 90s, often featuring masked gunmen or indicating, with an insignia or phase, what paramilitary group controlled an area. Debra Lisle writes that "the tourist's desire to visit the murals is only reluctantly supported by the NITB (Northern Ireland Tourism Board), Tourism Ireland, government officials, and the
majority of tourism workers" and that "traditional forms of tourism (like golf, farm shows, Giant’s Causeway, theme parks)" are encouraged over "new niche markets such as political tourism" (45). Indeed, the 2014-2015 NITB Annual Report notes that domestic travel rose by 11% and that European visits have reached “pre-recession levels.” Part of this increase can be attributed to pop culture events such as Game of Thrones and The Fall, both filmed in Northern Ireland (Tourism NI). Murals and conflict tourism do not appear in the report, even as companies such as Belfast Mural Tours, Paddy Campbell's Famous Black Cab Tours, and Touring Around Belfast continue to promote murals and peace walls as popular tourist attractions. Belfast’s popularity as a tourist destination may be due in part to its recent past; however, tourism depends on an economically and politically stable space, which in turn motivates the city to distance itself from previous turbulence.

Poetry scholars are taking matters of immigration, emigration, and tourism into account, but the fact that Irish poets have been influenced by other national poetic traditions is not itself a revelation. Ireland and England’s poetic traditions are linked through shared language and a colonial past, as well as through the work of prominent Anglo-Irish writers from Maria Edgeworth and Jonathan Swift to Oscar Wilde and W.B. Yeats; more recently, poets Heaney, Boland, and Paul Muldoon have spent significant portions of their careers in the United States. Harry Clifton, who served as The Ireland Chair of Poetry from 2010 to 2013, recently published a collection of lectures called Ireland and its Elsewheres, that explores his own involvement in and relationship to various national poetic traditions. Clifton’s concept of “Ireland and its

70 The Ireland Chair of Poetry is supported by Queen's University Belfast, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaion.
“Elsewheres” demonstrates longstanding connections between national poetic traditions, but the focus remains on the national. Justin Quinn, a Dublin-born poet and scholar living and teaching in The Czech Republic, addresses the changing importance of the national in the *Cambridge Introduction to Modern Irish Poetry* with concluding chapters that examine emigration, immigration, and Celtic Tiger economic policies, arguing that multinational influences “render Irish poetry no less authentic” (176). Influences including collaboration between Irish and American scholars, Irish Studies programs in the United States, Irish emigration to non-Anglophone countries, “inner émigrés” (i.e. poets who were born in one part of Ireland but live and work in another), scholarly distance from New Criticism, and increasing scrutiny of nationalism and gender roles lead Quinn to conclude that local and national concerns can be understood in new and complex ways and that poetry can “bear witness to the multitudes the island contains” (210).

In the poetry of French and Flynn, speakers’ experiences are molded by their relative mobility; Cresswell and Merriman write that “mobile, embodied practices are central to how we experience the world, from practices of writing and sensing, to walking and driving. Our mobilities create spaces and stories” (5). In my analysis of French and Flynn, I focus on mobility through real and imagined spaces and arguing for the relevance of multimobile poetics in critical discussions of Ireland’s global economy and multinational influences.

***

Tom French grew up in County Kilkenny and County Tipperary and has published three collections with The Gallery Press: *Touching the Bones* (2001), *The Fire Step* (2009), and *Midnightstown* (2014). *Touching the Bones* won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection in
2002 and French’s poetry was featured in Selina Guinness’ 2004 anthology *The New Irish Poets.* French earned a BA in European Studies from University of Limerick and went on to receive an H.Dip in Education from NUI Galway and diplomas in Library and Information Studies and Archive Management from University College Dublin; he works for the County Meath library as an executive librarian. His work, however, demonstrates the importance of a multimobile poetics because speakers’ experiences of space-time is explicitly defined by their mobility—their ability to walk, run, drive, or row—and depends on their ability to cross or exist on real and imagined boundaries. French’s speakers have stable, cohesive identities defined through mobility rather than place of origin or sense of rootedness. Again and again French links mobility through real spaces to mobility through time or imagined spaces and recasts static activities such as reading and writing as mobile activities. The technology and economic stability that allows French’s speakers to travel through Ireland in turn allows them to easily move between reality and imagination, life and death, past and present.

My analysis begins with the first-person, present-focused poems across the three collection before returning to *Touching the Bones* to analyze “Pity the Bastards,” an exception to French’s established norm. French’s poems are, with few exceptions, fairly brief, with several three to four line stanzas—one, “While You Wait,” is just two lines. They tend to use pronouns such as “I” and “we” and refer to experiences and interactions with people named by their relationship to the speaker: mother, father, brother. The actions that the speaker describes take place in a present-day world or feature the present-day speaker explicitly remembering past occurrences. “Pity the Bastards,” in *Touching the Bones,* stands out not only for its length—twenty-four stanzas of seven lines each—but for its tone, subject, and time. French structures the
poem like Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl,” with line after line describing the work, beliefs, regrets, violations, and affiliations of the men for whom his speaker invokes pity. These men do live in the present of the rest of the collection. The men in “Pity the Bastards” do not enjoy the same mobility as the speakers in French’s other poems, demonstrating that multimobility is a late-twentieth/early twenty-first century construct.

In *Touching the Bones*, “Ghost Ship,” “Night Drive,” and “Iron” highlight three forms for mobility: rowing, driving, and running, respectively. Speakers perform these mobilities to move to place to place as well as to cross imagined boundaries; all three poems feature figures that cross or imagine crossing between life and death, with reactions ranging from awe to horror. Regardless of emotional reaction, French’s speakers imagine this metaphysical crossing as propelled by literal movement—rowing, driving, running—and is done and undone with ease.

“Ghost Ship: after Dorothy Cross” takes its name from a 1999 art installation anchored in Scotsman’s Bay off Dun Laoghaire in County Dublin. Cross, a sculptor from Cork, completed the project after receiving funding from the won the Nissan Art Project, a yearly art prize sponsored by Nissan Ireland and organized by the Irish Museum of Modern Art. *Ghost Ship* was made from a decommissioned lightship, a once common type of anchored vessel that acted as lighthouses in waters where permanent structures could not be built. Most have been replaced with powerful, light-emitting buoys. This replacement represents, for Cross, the idea that “the role of the sea has diminished for the Irish people and the view is inwards towards the cities” (IMMA). In order to encourage a seaward view, Cross covered the decommissioned ship with “luminous paint” and at night, it was “illuminated to glow and fade” (IMMA).
For Cross, the ship harkens to the past and represents the loss of the sea as a gateway to the outside world, while French’s view of the ship represents the remaining possibilities offered by the sea as a passage. After viewing the installation from the shore for three nights, the speaker begins to imagines the ship truly contains the dead and wants a different, more intimate experience: “Tonight I wanted to be ferried out to it, / to press my palms against its water lines / and touch its sides before I go aboard” (4-6). He imagines that the lands of the living and the land of the dead exist like night and day—barely and nearly imperceptibly delineated—and the speaker can exist in both at the appropriate times. That he wants to “be ferried” to the land of the dead recalls Greek mythology, in which several rivers separate the Earth and Underworld. Charon, who navigates the rivers, is known as the ferryman of the dead, transporting them to the underworld on the river Acheron. With few exceptions, such as Persephone and Orpheus, none who entered the underworld could exit, but French’s speaker imagines that at the end of his night he will “be rowed back home” (13). French’s land of the dead can be easily reached and just as easily left, the first example of French adapting religious or spiritual imagery and language to describe his own spiritual mobility.

French creates the speaker as a voyeur who craves first-hand knowledge. Once at the ship, he needs to touch its sides to affirm its presence as a solid, real structure, for from the shore he can only see it “disappearing into the dark, and reappearing” (3). He boards the ship and again is a voyeur wanting physical interaction as he bears witness; he wants “to touch the tucked neat berths of the dead, / their metal lockers filled with personal effects, / their snapshots of the living, our locks of hair” (10-12). Back in the land of the living, the speaker imagines his only proof would be “the tips of my fingers / glowing in the darkness when I hold them up, / where I
touched it, where it won’t wash off” (16-18). This poem values individual experience and the importance of bearing witness. The speaker is something of a Doubting Thomas, needing to touch his palms to the sides of the ship to affirm its presence.

Because this poem is in response to a work of art, it is appropriate to note that the image of Thomas the Apostle touching the wounds of Christ with his fingertips was a popular subject for paintings since mediaeval times. Though the Biblical account of St. Thomas has Christ saying “reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side,” most artistic accounts, including Caravaggio’s painting “The Incredulity of Saint Thomas” and Verrocchio’s sculpture “Christ and St. Thomas,” arguably the best-known Saint Thomas representations, show Thomas touching the wound on Christ’s side only with his fingertips. The speaker in “Ghost Ship,” touching the ship’s side with his palm and bearing proof on his fingers, like Thomas, witnesses and touches a permeable boundary between living and hand. Unlike the story of Thomas, however, the poem does not condemn the speaker for desiring physical touch as a method of making sense of the world or for wishing for first-hand experience.

“Ghost Ship” is an example of French’s use of spiritual imagery—in this case, ancient Greece’s rivers to the underworld and Christianity’s Thomas the Apostle—to describe his wish for the boundary between living and dead to be permeable. Religion is a frequent reference in his poems—the next is about the Irish St. Moling, while the speaker “Burning the Greatcoat” imagines talking to his dead brother and takes comfort in the “good sign” that a woman called Lazar found his brother’s body (8). In these poems, religion is a cultural inheritance and a way to make sense of and ritualize the experience of death. “Singing in the Underground” uses Greek myths of the underworld to imagine a loved one existing on another plane; the preceding poem,
“The Botanic Gardens,” is about a new grave freshly marked with a cross as flowers in gardens are marked by nameplates even when they are out of bloom; “Ash” features a mother and daughter scattering ashes in the sea; and several, including “The Post-Hole,” “Hip,” “Pity The Bastards,” “The Scar,” and “Burning the Greatcoat” include images of people succumbing to literal or metaphoric death in the ground, from foxholes to graves. In all of these, it is the ritual of religion that provides comfort or guidance, not the doctrine. “Ghost Ship” features images of actual travel and movement that make comforting spiritual travel possible and the importance of touch, both themes to which French returns.  

“Night Drive” addresses both travel and touch: the poem is about a near-accident the speaker and his mother experience when a sheep steps in front of their car on an icy night. French structures the poem as if the speaker is relaying his memory of the event to his mother after some time has passed, with the first and last lines directly addressed to “Mother.” The speaker’s formal address of “Mother” evokes the Virgin Mary, as does the description of her hand as a “white bird” (8). Her hand as something white in the “darkness” of the night positions her as someone pure, reinforced by her restraint, when, “preparing [her] soul for the moment of death” she only whispers, “Jesus” (11, 10). In his memory of this moment, the speaker imagines life and death as two worlds. The speaker is driving in the world of the living, but it is his mother who would navigate if they were to be in the land of the dead: “You would’ve led me to the next

71 Though not integral to my discussion of mobility, French also introduces here the idea of art and literature as an organizing mechanism similar to religious ritual. “Ghost Ship” is directly inspired by Cross’ work and imagines the speaker making gestures—touching the palms and fingertips to test one’s belief—common in medieval and Renaissance art. “The Botanic Gardens” is a poem that dwells only briefly on death before listing names of flowers, a poetic organization seen in Michael Longley’s “The Ice-Cream Man” (1991).

72 Eric Laurier’s “Driving: Pre-Cognition and Driving,” suggests that driving has effects both cognitive and precognitive (“action that pre-figures and in some way anticipates thinking”), creating a sort of “technological unconscious” that indicates technology can create new ways of thinking, reacting, remembering, and knowing (71).
world, Mother, like a child” 16). As in “Ghost Ship,” physical touch is important to the speaker’s understanding of life and death and imagined travel between them. Her hand, the “white bird,” reaches out to him, and looking back on the moment, he recalls “For days I felt the pressure of your hand on mine” (15). Like the paint that won’t wash from his fingertips, the weight of his mother’s hand has left a mark. That mark is proof of an almost-crossing, and he needs that proof because it is not discussed or otherwise acknowledged. Though the poem is structured as an address to the speaker’s mother, there is no response from her and in the poem, their only interaction is that moment of touch.

In the car, the speaker and his mother are quite separate from one another: there is no conversation, the only sound is of tires “squealing” on the ice, her lap is a “fastness” which the event forces her to vacate (4, 6). “Night Drive” suggests that it is not simply technology that opens up these possibilities, but more specifically the interaction between technology and non-technological subjects. In “Night Drive” the moments of interaction are swift and bring subjects to the edge of their experience. The crucial moment in the drive is the interaction between the occupants of the car, the car, and the sheep that steps in front of it. In this moment, there is a heightened awareness of the vehicle and the driver’s ability or inability to manipulate it. This interaction allows for the crucial moment of the poem and the speaker’s memory: when his mother’s hand touches his. It is, he says, “The closest, Mother, we have been in years” (1). In this poem, driving facilitates a way of reacting and interacting that fosters a connection between the speaker and his mother. In addition, the speaker’s mobility shapes the way he conceives death. At the poem’s start, the speaker notes that he is on “a night drive back from Achill” (2). The poem’s final line constructs death as place in the same way Achill is a place” “you would
have led me to the next world.” The speaker’s access to technology allows him to imagine death as a place that can be reached via movement through space.

“Iron,” is another poem of imagined or anticipated death, this time involving the practice of running. In the poem, the speaker’s partner has gone out for a run but returns suddenly, imperceptibly, because of a nagging fear she has left the iron on. The speaker, surprised to see her suddenly next to him, imagines that “this is your ghost, // come, in the instant after your body’s death, / while there was still time, to say goodbye” (8-10). Though running may seem a practice unlike rowing or driving, recent mobility studies have focused on both running and walking as culturally determined mobility practices and on running as a particularly middle-class leisure activity. Running is considered a middle class activity because it requires leisure time and disposable income; the runner in this poem, for example, wears “a red windcheater and fleece-lined gloves,” clothing likely purchased for the express purchase of running in the cold (6). French’ inclusion of these details makes clear that running is a practice that like drives or flying to holiday destinations, is dependent on relative economic security. Though the reader does not see the figure engage in running, her running practice allows the speaker to imagine her swiftly moving through space. The start of this poem, the part about the runner, is all about swiftness. The sentences describing her return are declarative and short, ranging from one to three lines. French fills the start of the poem with references to time—the runner is “suddenly” there; the speaker fears it is “too late”; the moment of sight is an “instant”; he hopes there is “still time” to say goodbye. Later, he remembers it as a “split-second” (18).

73 See Abbas; Bale; Shortwell and Brown; Moores.
Running is the mobile practice that allows him to imagine her ghost quickly moving through space to say goodbye.

When alone, the speaker slows considerably and physical relation to stimuli are important to his processing. The poem opens by noting “I never heard you let yourself in” (1). He understands his world through sensory experience; when silence and the sight of his partner are incongruous, he creates an alternate understanding. He physically reacts to the sight as a “surge of blood in [his] chest” (7). Though the idea that this is a ghost dissipates as soon as the woman speaks, the speaker cannot shake the thought or his physical reaction. When the runner leaves “a second time,” the he takes stock of what happened in a meditative, comma-filled sentence stretching across the poem’s last eight lines. Going to the iron, he “stood there touching the iron // for a long time, like someone granted a pardon” (24-25). Once again physical touch is the way the speaker organizes his experience. Like the speaker in “Ghost Ship,” he touches his palm to the object in question, feeling the iron’s heat until it is cool. The feel of the iron on his skin is not something he needs to trust or take on faith—he feels it firsthand. In this poem, touch the iron is proof of the speaker’s continued existence in the word of the living.

French’s next two collections, The Fire Step and Midnightstown, continue to explore themes of death and its attendant rituals. In these poems, written material is a vehicle for remembering and even entering the past, as well as a portal through which the past lives in the present. The poems in these collections focus in particular on the deaths of French’s brother, father, and mother. In The Fire Step, French writes more than one poem on the same general theme, one poem building on the last. I look closely at two pairs of poems: “The Blood Line”
and “Namesake,” followed by “A Lift” and “Two Pints.” The Blood Line” and “Namesake” are about inheritance, particularly of names, but also of a shared history or background.

“Namesake” is about what the speaker has been told, but may not believe, about his uncle. He does not have direct experience of this person or even a written record, relying instead on family lore, about which the speaker has reservations. The poem begins: “My father’s brother, for whom I am named, / was named — if what his people claim / is to be believed — The Brain of Ireland” (1-3). The family may be claiming, rather than remembering or telling, because of pain or perhaps uncertainty associated with the death of the speaker’s namesake. Though the family relishes telling of his achievements— “He has the Presidents of the United States / like a song, the names of the Great Lakes, / the genealogy of Niall of the nine hostages”— are reluctant to talk of his passing (4-6). The speaker will only learn of his uncle’s death if he “ventured again to ask” (7). This venture may not find a truthful response, as the speaker reports that “they would say / that he succumbed to a brain haemorrhage” (7-8). French breaks the line at “say,” putting pressure on the word, and suggesting that, like tales of his uncle’s mental prowess, he has doubts about their account of his uncle’s death. The “Brain of Ireland” may in fact have suffered from a mental illness or disability, or, at the very least, did not receive appropriate education or support. The brain haemorrhage that reportedly killed his uncle happened in a garden, such that his uncle was found “keeled over” “one ear pressed to the earth, still on his knees, // like the man who knew too much / keeping an ear to the music of the spheres” (12-13; 14-16).

The image of a man who knows something about the natural world that others don’t recalls another poem from Touching the Bones, “Asperger Child,” in which the speaker’s brother intently watches fire, risking the burn to see it more closely because he knows “that his not being
able to see it will hurt him more” (20). The speaker’s uncle in one poem and brother in another share this desire to seek sensory experience of the elements. The uncle shares traits with men in “Pity the Bastards” as well; the list of his mental feats is quite similar to those men,” “who loved the epic / feat of memory and recollected all the Presidents of the United States in order of incumbency, // the dates of the battles of Clontarf and Hastings” (104-106). In “Pity the Bastards,” the “feat” does not indicate intelligence or mental ability. Here too, the uncle’s ability to memorize names and dates may be more indicative of mental struggles than of the smarts, and his family’s focus on his mind—he was the “Brain of Ireland,” he “succumbed to a brain haemorrhage”—may be compensatory. The speaker’s concern about this seems to be that he cannot get close to the truth of his uncle’s life and death because it is mediated through sources he cannot verify. Though he and his uncle share the same name, the past and present remain entirely separate in a way that unsettles the speaker.

French opens “The Blood Line” with the speaker opening a family book to its most recent pages and turning the pages to the older entry. It is not simply flipping through pages, but is a “step back” in time (2). The names recorded in the pages, names of “a cemetery, a birthplace, a townland” are ways of accessing the past through language, an access that is one directional in this poem (3). The “line” in “The Blood Line” allows those at its terminus to access any part of it. The “great-great-great progenitor” cannot, in his present, know what will fill the blank pages of his family's book and what the line will hold (8). The speaker in the present can go back, but, more interestingly, his knowledge of his family’s past and his own experience allow him to have moments that collapse the present into multiple pasts.
The next poem, “Namesake,” continues to use the book as an organizing image and there are moments when it is not clear what page the speaker is on. The second section is a moment of such a collapse:

When I call my younger brother

by my first son’s name

with my father’s voice

he answers me with mine. (9-12)

These four lines are all about connection and relation; not brother but “younger brother,” not son but “first son.” These adjectives complicate the web of connections that the book organizes, as each person has multiple sets of relationships that are called by different names and are experienced differently. The speaker of this poem is father, son, and brother, while his brother is brother, son, uncle, and namesake. Some of these positions are relative and temporal. The speaker, for example, may not have been a brother until his sibling was born, he was a son and brother before he was a father, and remains those things once his son is born. The moment the speaker calls out a name is one in which his awareness of all these roles is heightened. That awareness can only happen with knowledge of the past, but is not a moment of stepping back. It is a moment when his past and present exists in the same space.

In “A Lift” and “Two Stout” the speaker experiences past and present as two states with only a thin, passable line between them. Past and present, dream and reality, and life and death are like two languages: fluent speakers find that they have “slipped between them without noticing” (“A Lift” 14). Both these poems are about the speaker’s dead brother. If the speaker is cohesive across poems and collections, this is the same dead brother whose body was “found” in
“Burning the Greatcoat.” In “A Lift” the speaker reveals that his brother had moved to the Netherlands; in Midnightstown, that his brother commits suicide while there. His brother’s death is a theme in these poems, particularly as the speaker imagines various ways of maintaining a connection or continuing to know his brother. In “A Lift” it is a car ride with a stranger that allows the speaker to enact one way of memorializing his brother: pretending to be him. The speaker gives his brother’s name and “instead of correcting myself, I just kept going, / switching to the first person about a life in the Netherlands, the loneliness of the first few weeks” (3-4). The speaker invents details about what his brother’s life might have been, “fleshing out his life” with a wife, bilingual children who spend vacations in Ireland, and “a love of the Dutch and no desire to return” (5,8, 9). As the speaker travels through space in the stranger's car, he creates a version of his brother that remains absent, but who continues to exist in another place that can be easily reached.

In “Two Stout,” the only way the speaker can reach his brother is in a dream. Aspects of the dream are close to reality: it takes place in The Anner Hotel, a hotel in Tipperary where brothers last shared a drink. In it, the speaker knows his brother shouldn't be there, and they don’t actually speak. Instead, the speaker “hopes he knows I’m grateful that he came” and drinks his own and his brother’s pints (9). In “Lift,” the imagined bilingual children dream in English and Dutch and slip between the languages in their waking life without knowing; similarly, in “Two Stout” the speaker slips between dream and reality with ease. This easy movement does not create an idyllic scenario. Instead, even in dreams, the reality of his brother’s life and death is present. The brother grimaces in pain. He is silent. In “A Lift,” the speaker’s waking life, he can
have a more dream-like experience with his brother, trying on his life, giving him a voice, and imagining that he exists in the present. In dreams, the reality of death creeps in.

Several times in Touching the Bones and The Fire Step, French imagines written records as vehicles for movement through time and space. In Touching the Bones, there is “Common Ground,” which has the speaker finding “a sheet of vellum crunched and creased,” on which his father had written, over and over, the names of his and his wife’s parishes; and two memorial poems, “Singing in the Underground i.m. Jack Mitchell 1932-1997” and “The Botanic Gardens i.m. Anne Kennedy 1935-1998” (“Common Ground” 2). In “The Fire Step,” he continues this practice, including dates at even times in the titles of some poems. “Midnightstown” is French’s most literal take on poem as record, with titles of twenty-one of the collection’s fifty-seven poems containing a name, date, quotation, or combination of the three. Those without a name or date in the title often memorialize or measure time in other ways, such as “My Father Flying,” which features the speaker, now with a young son of his own, remembering spying on his father shaving in the bathroom mirror. Two poems in particular, “Page 9, Irish Independent, 17 February 1987” and “02.07.2012,” combine French’s growing tendency to imagine the poem as record with his ability to imagine death as a space from and to a person can travel.

“Page 9, Irish Independent, 17 February 1987” is another of French’s poem about his late brother, but it does not imagine meeting the brother in a dream, or becoming his brother by giving his name or wearing his coat. It is a bit more clinical, using the page that contains his brother’s obituary as a way to connect to his brother’s death. Only years later can the speaker “zoom out to read the names / of all the other people who died that day,” noting in quotations and italics the “codes for grief” that people use again and again (1-2, 9). The poem first suggests
to the reader that these codes may be trite or insufficient, sharing space on the page as they do with “pairs / of antique beds, ham slicers, kitchen scales” and a weather report (9-10). Such things seem mundane and perhaps even vulgar next to words such as “beloved,” “inexpressible,” and “heartbroken” (3, 8). Yet, the speaker keeps this page as a record own his own grief, and, noting the “meteorological situation” at the bottom of the page, can imagine what he might have said to his brother has he returned from Amsterdam alive. The reader learns that his brother’s body was shipped from Amsterdam, where it was cloudy, to Dublin, where it was not. In “Two Pint,” the speaker and his brother are silent in a dream because “Neither of us could think of anything to say” (14). Here, the speaker can imagine things to say, but they might seem as much of a code as anything in the obituary page:

...had he passed

through the Arrival Hall’s glass doors

and launched, without pausing for breath,

into all that had befallen since we’d met

we might’ve remarked the rain he’d left behind.

We might’ve told him to his face he’d brought the sun. (19-24). The speaker imagines his brother in motion; walking through the glass door is the final step of a journey that has taken him across the North and Irish Seas. Even speaking is described as a movement: the brother does not say or tell, but launches. For the speaker, picturing his brother in perpetual movement is a way to keep him alive in memory, and, given, poems from previous collections, a way to imagine him, however wistfully, moving from the space of the dead to that
of the living. If that were the case, if his brother appeared alive before him, the speaker imagines their conversation would have been about the most mundane of all things: the weather. But in the common joke that a traveler has brought the weather with him lays a love and longing for his brother, suggesting that the codes we use are not shallow but attempts to express death, and that records are powerful conjurers of memory and emotion.

“02.07.2012” functions almost literally as an obituary or memorial for French’s mother. Though the poem’s title is a single date, the poem itself takes place over three days, and, after the last line, is dated “Saturday 31 June-Monday 2 July 2012.” French’s record keeping is ever-present, with references to newspapers and engraving and careful attention to the details of the time and place: “Italy were playing Spain at sunset” and the last time his mother used the words “I am” (17, 24). Though the speaker admits that some things “are slipping my mind” he has a desire to remember, and for others to remember, certain things his mother says. Unsurprisingly, the moment of death occurs after a scene of transit and is itself figured as a movement. The speaker playfully wonders who he will “ring to say / that the roads were quiet, / that we got there safe?” (27-29). Immediately following is the moment of passing:

On a morphine pump nestled
between pillows, nearing beads
of moisture on its breath —
this is how kindness leaves the earth. (30-33).

In the moment of his mother’s death, her kindness does not die or end, but it “leaves the earth,” presumably entering somewhere else. French’s poems imagine life and death as only barely separated and acts of reading and writing as mechanisms that allow one to travel between the
two. French’s speakers drive, row, run, walk, and fly, linking these mobilities with the ability to traverse imagined boundaries. The speakers may be disoriented or unsettled by these moments of metaphysical mobility, but ultimately, French portrays these moments as opportunities for reflection and appreciation.

The speakers in the poems discussed above stand in marked contrast to the figures in “Pity the Bastards.” In addition to the previously mentioned differences in tone and point of view, the figures in this poem stand out among French’s poems because their identities are closely tied to a particular place and their physical mobility is limited by economic and cultural realities. In the context of the other poems in French’s three collections, this long, omniscient narration of claustrophobic existence makes clear that mobility can and does disrupt tradition, and that disruption can be a positive force.

French establishes the limits of the poem’s world and its pastoral nature by telling the reader that the men “spent their lifetimes travelling sixteen acres extensively” and “remembered the headland of the field / they were working in precisely when Kennedy / got that high velocity bullet in the head” (126, 133-115). Other macabre events, such as the 1958 plane crash that killed eleven members of the Manchester United soccer team and Elvis’s 1977 death, make clear that this poem does not take place in the present of rest of the collection and establishes the men’s awareness of global events even as they remain firmly local. Kennedy’ assassination while the men work in fields is one of several instances of combining images of agrarian labor with images of violence: later, an interaction between man and animal that ends with “the full weight of the bull / on their chests” (13-14, 145-146). They witness or learn about acts of violence while in the fields; their presence in the fields is itself an act of violence because they cannot leave
despite the constant wear on their physical and mental health. “Pity the Bastards” is an update of Patrick Kavanagh's anti-pastoral “The Great Hunger” (1942); both feature men who find no redemption through labor, filial or religious obedience, or a sense of rootedness. While Kavanagh’s poem follows one man in particular—"Poor Paddy Maguire, a fourteen-hour day / He worked for years”—French’s poem follows an ambiguous, unnamed group of men who are kept vulnerable through adherence to tradition and limited mobility and whose ultimate suicides link them to the earth with unsettling finality.

These men are indeed vulnerable; at the same time they violate others with seemingly no consequence. They “…meant / no harm when they grabbed the hand of a married / brother’s girl and rammed it down inside the waist- // band of a working pants” (55-57). Victims learn that there are no consequence for such violations from a young age; the “youngster” “whose nipples pinched by an uncle stung for days / under a blue school blouse, who knew know to say / nothing” (59, 61-63). These “bastards” learned the lesson too: they “lived in dread of County Homes” and went to schools “where masters hammered / ‘seventeen different colours of shit’ out of them / on a regular basis and in the process, educated them” (102, 89-91). French repeatedly references the vulnerability inherent in living within the confines of this world and its hierarchal system of institutional power. The state has the power to remove them from their homes. Schools prioritize discipline over education, or, perhaps, that discipline is their education. If beating is the process through which they are educated, the lesson learned and reinforced is their limited

---

74 County homes were a government institution that housed a varied population, ranging from unmarried mothers to people with long-term illnesses and disabilities. County homes also served as a foster service for children removed from their homes, but, in the first half of the twentieth century, there was a general fear that children were taken to such homes in order to serve as labor (Lucey).
autonomy. While such power structures are not unique to rural or small areas, the figures in this poem are repressed by the totality of such a structure because of their limited mobility and precarious economic position.

French finally and irrevocably links the men to the earth with lines that pair their labor with sleep and ultimately, with death. He writes that these men “dreamed / of dying in their own beds, and later, that they “slept in extra rooms / they helped build, in beds that smelled of fields / and sheds” (102-103, 137-138). In the poem’s final stanza, the men “went into the lakes, the earth, the sea, / holding stones inside their clothes like infants / to their chests, whistling into sheds with homemade ropes” (170-173). This set of lines and the pairing of death and beds, beds and sheds, and finally, sheds and death, closes a circle and illustrates with finality the men’s circumstance. The connection between bed and shed blurs the distinction between the indoor, somewhat private space of a bed (“their own beds,” emphasis mine), representing relief from labor, and the shed, representing a transitional space that is not outdoors, but nor is it part of the home—like the “extra rooms” they sleep in. The extra rooms and the shed are indicative of the men’s limited opportunities and economic status; their sleep does not represent a relief from labor because their semi private space is the site of their labor and the smell of the fields follows them to their beds.

The two methods by which the men meet their final sleep are further evidence of their severely limited world. Some men have ended their lives by going “into the lakes, the earth, the sea, / holding stones inside their clothes like infants / to their chests” (170-173). French uses language that masks the horror of such a scene, evoking Catholic Rites of Committal that accompany the burial of a body in the ground or at sea. That the men work the land and hold
stones “like infants” suggests a paternal and loving relationship between man and earth, making it seem fitting or natural that the men “went into the lakes, the earth, the sea.” The land is indeed the only connection the men have—that “they left behind them / nothing and took their names” indicates that they have no infants or close relatives. The land is their closest connection.

There are sweet moments in the relationship between the men and the land, mainly regarding the connection between nature and music. The men “dandled concertinas on their knees like babies / and loved the only note to wind could play” (148-149). Later, at the requiem mass, the speaker urges pity for the men because “if they played // [they] could imitate a hurt plover or a baby wailing”; this talent is ultimately returned to the earth, for they “took more jigs and reels and slow airs with them // than a human could play in their lifetime to their graves” (166-167, 174-175). Indeed, some men meet their deaths by “whistling into sheds with homemade ropes.” Their whistling is another moment of music making; that they whistle as they walk to their death, with ropes they made themselves just like the rooms in which they sleep, demonstrates that all scenes of singing or playing do not necessarily indicate happiness or contentedness, or, at least, cannot compensate for the isolation the men face.

These men “believed in land” but the land took much from them and held them in place. They “were “stuck to the ground / by a hard frost once like Gulliver's” and “spent their lifetimes travelling sixteen acres extensively” (124-126). The moments of joy or peace experienced in these acres are outmatched by scenes of violence or allusions to their limitations. They love Elvis but their “shit-caked boots / were as close as they ever came to blue suede shoes”; they memorize poems, historical facts, and “all the Presidents / of the United States in order or incumbency” but their only audience for such knowledge is the cows they milk; they “loved to
sing *Put another nickel in / the nickelodeon* and did not know what / the words they were singing meant” (86-87, 104-105, 132-133)). For these men, the connection to the earth is the primary connection in their lives, and for those who end it “going “into the lakes, the earth, the sea” it is their final connection. The poem makes clear, though, that this is not symbiotic relationship nor is going into the earth a sort of homecoming. It is a succumbing and a final act of rooting the men in place. “Pity the Bastards” is unlike the rest of the collection in form and tone. The speakers and figures in the rest of the poems do not live in the world of these men. In this way, the poem is a sort of detour, a reminder and indictment of a time in the recent past marked by limited means and mobility that resists idealization.

***

Leontia Flynn, born in 1974, was raised in County Down and attended Queen’s University Belfast for her BA and PhD, where she is now a professor of English. She is the editor of the poetry journal *The Yellow Nib* and published her first collection, *These Days*, in 2004, for which she was awarded the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. She published two more poetry collections, *Drives* (2008) and *Profit and Loss* (2011), and a critical text, *Reading Medbh McGuckian* (2014). She is currently a writer-in-residence at London’s Bloomsbury Hotel (2014-2016). Critical treatment of her poetry has suggested readings that emphasize “irrelevance of place” and the “detrimentalised self,” poems as museums and speakers as curators attempting to order and make sense of unintelligible content; and poems as post-modern elegies for the city (Kennedy-Andrews 280, 283; Mitchell; Marklew). This dissertation, however, focuses on her speakers’ positions as tourists and argues that Flynn’s position as a tourist engages in a multimobile poetics that makes visible the economic, political, and cultural happenings that
support mobility. Further, I argue that her tourism poetry creates an understanding of urban space that ultimately results in a critique of Belfast’s spatial organization and the social encounters that such organization reflects and manufactures.

French’s interest in tourism is clear; in Drives, speakers move quickly and easily between poems named for the speakers’ destinations: “Barcelona,” “Rome,” “Paris,” “Berlin,” “LA,” Washington.” These poems are brief descriptions of single moments in different cities, unlike Carson’s detailed poetic maps of one city, because she is a tourist, a “skilled voyeur,” rather than a citizen (“Paris” 2). The ease with which speakers move from location to location appears again in the first section of Profit and Loss, a series of poems loosely structured around rooms or homes in which speakers have lived. Flynn may move decisively from a childhood home in “The Notorious Case of Robin the Painter,” to a series of young-adult apartments “The Flats,” and then back to the house her father lived in during World War II in “The Yanks.” As in Drive’s travel poems, the speaker is in one home and then the next, or in childhood and then adulthood and back again. Multimoble poetics, as I’ve defined it, values movement through space over place and links physical and metaphysical mobility; Flynn’s speakers are always aware of their transient status, always boarding a train or plane, packing a bag, or reflecting on a long-gone person or moment, noting about life, in one poem, “the flame is lit, then extinguished” (“Olive Schreiner” 15). Her speakers move from poem to poem, from location to location, as a tourist of their own memories. These poems and generates knowledge that is not, as critics of tourism have alleged, cursory or shallow (Crang).

***
These Days includes poems about Flynn’s parents, a theme that continues, alongside poems of urban travel, in Drives and Profit and Loss. These poems, beginning with an account of her parent’s courtship in “26,” through the poems about her father’s Alzheimer's in Profit and Loss, demonstrate Flynn’s treatment of people and relationships as places to which she can travel and feel close to or distant from, as well as individual persons as interior spaces. In Drives’ titular poem, the speaker’s mother tells her grown children that “she’s nearing the end of the road” (37) and in Profit and Loss, memory is “the near shore of my father’s life;” his mind a “bone-dry wasteland” (“My Father’s Language” 8, 17). In the first, the speaker’s mother imagines her life as moving through space as well as time; in the second, she imagines her father’s interiority as a landscape. Both of these treatments indicate that as Flynn uses mobility and tourism to understand and critique Belfast, she also uses it to understand personal relationships. These two threads, beginning in These Days, come together in “Letter to Friends” in Profit and Loss. In particular, two poems from These Days, “Holland” and “The Furthest Distances I’ve Travelled,” illustrate my argument that mobility and tourism allow for deep understanding of people and places and begins to generate a critique of twenty-first century Belfast that becomes more visible in Drives and Profit and Loss.

“Holland” contains references typical to Flynn: to international travel, mundane realities, literary musings, medicating or self-medicating, Belfast, and self-deprecation. The location, according to the title, the “daffodil shed” and the “Dutch doctor,” is Holland, and the mundane reality the speaker contends with is the “rattling noise from the heater” in the shed (1, 8, 1). The constant noise becomes like a “production line” where, the speaker says, “you continually pack and unpack yourself” (2-3). It is this packing and unpacking that calls Philip Larkin to the
speaker’s mind and motivates her to seek a doctor’s help. The speaker, unable to sleep, thinks of Larkin’s “If, My Darling,” a poem that imagines his “darling” entering his head like Alice entering Wonderland, only to find a mind dogged by delusions, worry, and compulsive thoughts. “Was this what he meant,” the speaker in “Holland” wonders (6). The speaker thinks it is “insane” that she tries to understand her mental duress through poetry; in fact, Flynn often wonders about poetry’s use or value, and how those are determined. In These Days, for example, the mentor of “My Dream Mentor” advises a protégé “If you can fashion something with a file on it for the academics / to hone their nails on - you’re minted” and “Perl Poem,” about the speaker’s friend writing code, compares poetry unfavorably to programming language, writing that such language “doesn’t hover of the country - like poetry does - like a special effect” (“Mentor” 8-9; “Perl” 14). If Larkin’s poem hovers over the speaker in “Holland,” it distracts her from her issue or perhaps allows her to imagine that her distress is somehow literary. The speaker, recognizing that this is “insane” seeks medical treatment and is given a prescription (“are these cow tranquillisers,” she wonders as an aside) that she accepts with “grime-stained urchin’s hands” (10, 12). It is not clear that the doctor, who gives her the prescription while “smiling sadly,” will help her any more than Larkin could have. He does not ask questions about her condition but instead tells her, “If I live in Belfast, I also perhaps feel bad” (13). And then, the self-deprecation so common in Flynn’s poetry: “Now even your neuroses are unoriginal” (14). The doctor’s statement that the speaker lives in Belfast imagines her presence in Holland as temporary and transitory and that Belfast is the source of her problem, suggesting both why she may have left and that she remains intimately, clinically connected to the city from a distance.
Flynn’s speakers participate in daily life outside of Northern Ireland can begin to understand Belfast from a distance as they create their own understandings of various cities in which they are tourists. Her speakers can combine native and non-native understandings of Belfast, each of which, on their own, may simply things due to misinformation or lack of information and biases. For the Dutch doctor, the narrative of Belfast is one of danger or malaise. Fynn’s dual position of resident and tourist of Belfast takes that narrative into account while acknowledging her own experiences and the economic, political, and social changes Belfast has witnessed in the 1990s and 2000s. Tourism allows Flynn’s speakers to understand cities constructed narratives and to investigate the values those narratives communicate.

“The Furthest Distances I’ve Travelled” posits that the experiences of a tourist, however brief, can generate deeply-felt and long-lasting relationships. The poem begins as the speaker remembers her early days as a traveler and her certainty that she would remain mobile: “I thought: Yes. This is how / to live” (5-6). In this poem, the speaker highlights moments of transit, recalls tracks, passes, and airports before acknowledging that without really knowing how or why, her days of travel are over. The speaker contrasts her days of travel with her current, more rooted life through images of transaction. She goes

not to a Western Union

wiring money with six words of Lithuanian,

but to this post office with a handful of bills

or a giro (15-18)
In both instances, the speaker goes to an institution that allows her to transfer money to someone else—the scenery and the speaker’s relationship to it is all that has changed. In Lithuania, the speaker can imagine the act to be thrilling, part of “some kind of destiny” that will soon take her to another destination. Once settled, presumably in Belfast, the same act implies routine or obligation. Flynn uses images of financial transactions to mean different things at different times, even, as is the case here, different things to the speaker in a single poem.

The speaker, during a moment of transit she refers to as one of many “routine evictions,” finds objects that recall her days spent traveling. These objects are a mix of purchased and non-purchased items, but the speaker refers to them all as her “souvenirs”:

alien pants, cinema stubs, the throwaway
comment – on a post–it – or a tiny stowaway
pressed flower amid bottom drawers,
I know these are my souvenirs (25-28)

Flynn could have described these as mementos, keepsakes, or tokens, but calling them “souvenirs” highlights their connection travel as well as their connection to commerce. A souvenir is most often a small, purchased item. Some of these are inherently disposable items—the ticket sub, the post-it note, and even the words written on it, per the speaker’s description. And yet they have lasted through the speaker’s travels and evictions in Belfast, causing the realization that “the furthest distances I’ve travelled / have been between people. And what survives / of holidaying briefly in their lives” (24, 30-32). Flynn’s language of tourism applies to people and places and suggests that relationships or experiences that might be considered trivial or even disposable can have long-lasting effects. In this poem, the speaker looks through her
“souvenirs” and reflects on the places and relationships she spent time in; later, in “Profit and Loss,” a speaker will sift through similar items and engage in a similar reflection, but will add to that reflection a sharp critique of Belfast.

The breadth of Flynn’s experience and influences as well as the ease with which she moves from one place (or influence) to another is apparent in Drives, in which the majority of the poems are named for cities or authors. Such ease is absent in Carson’s Belfast of roadblock and interrogations. Each place she moves to and through becomes part of the way the speaker understands self and place.

In the poems “Rome” and “Berlin,” Flynn’s speakers explore the relationship between self, city, and history. In “Rome” the speaker begins with trite saying “Rome wasn’t built in a day” before quoting an unnamed companion saying “‘Rome? / We will take the lot in one short afternoon’” (1-2). The speaker’s quick tour of the city amounts to buying a postcard of the Pantheon and a magnet of the Colosseum before she admits “...I cannot find Rome. There is too much Rome in Rome” (5). There are things she wants to see but cannot locate: “Where’s Catullus busting balls inside the forum?” (6). The speaker does not have the Roman experience she desires, perhaps because the speed of her trip does not allow her to explore, but also because people associate with her imagined Roman experience, like Catullus and the forum, are long dead or ruined. The speaker in “Berlin” has a better experience, wandering through neighborhoods and imagining events that happened there in the “recent and awful past.” (8). She

75 Lines from Catullus’ “Message to My Love” have been translated as “Let her live, and fare well, with her perverts, / whom she claps three hundred at a time, / loving none of them truly, but grinding the groins of all of them, / again and again” and as “Let her live with her boy toys and enjoy / breaking their balls again and again, / loving none” (Skinner; Uzzi and Thomson). Flynn maintains an interest in colloquial translations of Catullus and her next volume, Profit and Loss, contains a sequence titled “Five Obvious Catullus Versions.”
begins to understand Berlin in terms of Belfast, and vice-versa, noting, as she observes bullet-holes in buildings, “here, the Berlin Wall reminds you, you say, of peace walls in Belfast” (9-10). Flynn’s poems about Belfast suggest that the city’s approach to tourism is something of a cross between Rome and Berlin. The past is surely “recent and awful,” but attempts are made to repackage that as tourist attraction. Even the name “peace walls” suggests a cognitive disconnect. These walls do not ensure or celebrate peace, but instead physically divide communities in an attempt to prevent violence. When Flynn’s poetry turns from her tourist destination to Belfast, it suggests that Belfast creates a narrative that violence is firmly in the past, a relic that can be viewed like the ruins of Rome.

Flynn turns her attention to Belfast in several poems in Drives. One, titled “Belfast,” declares that “Belfast is finished and Belfast is under construction,” wondering what to do with information in tourist handbooks: “are these harsh attempts at buyable beauty?” (5, 10). Pages later, in “Leaving Belfast,” Flynn writes of:

leaving Belfast
to its own devices: it will rise or fall
it will bury its past, it will paper over the cracks
with car parks and luxury flats, it will make itself new. (10-13).

She is not nostalgic for the old Belfast— like herself, the city “like[s] to drive / if they can love us, men off one by one / with broken promises”— but it is the new Belfast that motivates her to

---

76 A 2012 Belfast Telegraph article reveals that though 38% of Northern Ireland’s general population believe peace walls should come down, “69% of those that live closest to peace walls believe that they are still necessary, due to the continuing potential for violence,” while a 2015 Atlantic article notes that seven new walls have been built since 2000 (Young, DeGhett).
leave the city “to its own devices” (“Poem for Christmas” 11-13). The new Belfast may not be as new as its facade suggests. The crackers are not repaired, only papered over; in Profit and Loss’ “The Helpline,” Flynn draws attention to the disconnect between the city’s appearance the experiences of its citizens:

> At the telephone help-line in our revamped city centre
> we are talking about the suicide report:
> young men are opening veins, they are dropping from branches,
> their girlfriends are swallowing tablets. (1-4)

In this “revamped” space, death still occurs at an alarming rate, causing Flynn to wonder “What can be done, / ...to make life less awful here – and brief?” (4-5). The reorganization of public space—the “arcades, mock colonnades, church spires, and tapas bars” of “Belfast” and the “luxury flats” of “Leaving Belfast”—were precisely “to make life less awful” (“Belfast” 9; “Leaving Belfast” 13). Things were indeed supposed to change: Flynn writes in “Letters to Friends” that “Belfast, long the blight / and blot on lives has now brought to an end / or several ends, its grim traumatic fight,” yet structures built in the newly peaceful city are “thrown up like flotsam” (191-192, 197). Any type of promised stability is suspect. The state’s attempt to “cognize peace through normalization” and while life, for some, continues to be “awful,” demonstrates Massey’s claim that “stabilization of meaning is always the site of social contest” (6).

“Letter to Friends,” with thirty-two stanzas of ten lines each, is the longest poem in Flynn’s three collections and it considers various social contests, from the meaning and purpose of literature to the relationship between spending and citizenship. While French’s long poem
“Pity the Bastards,” stands out for its tone and point of view as well as its length, “Letter to Friends” maintains Flynn’s light tone, focus on urban mobility, and interest in using mundane or trivial objects as an occasion for reflection. At the same time, it adopts a more public and prophetic voice in the rhyme scheme and iambic pentameter of a Keatsian ode. “Letter to Friends” highlights the economic and cultural developments that make mobility and multimobility possible, demonstrating that Flynn’s position as a tourist generates an intimate understanding of Belfast, as well as, to borrow a term from Carson’s “Box,” a bird’s-eye view.

“Letter to Friends” opens with the speaker commenting on a literal inability to travel:

It’s summer. So of course the torrential rain
has fallen now for days; It’s tuned the roads
to rivers, burst the river banks, swamped drains
and drowned in a cataclysm of soupy floods
a traffic tunnel opened weeks ago.
The cars are stranded on the motorway
turned waterway - the pass is an impasse. (1-7)

From the start, the poem has an air of resignation, a sense that disappointments or failures are unsurprising. “It’s summer,” so “of course” rain has been steadily falling, stranding motorists in their cars and the speaker in her home. Roads and rivers are both avenues of transport, but here that is halted, even at the new traffic tunnel. The traffic tunnel is the first of several newly-built structures, all meant to signal progress, that fail to meet their intended purposes and instead convey stagnation and false optimism. The poem is a moment of pass and impasse.
The speaker remains homebound and writes a letter that remembers the past and imagines a future. It references places from New York to Edinburgh to Amsterdam, and discusses media from *Ulysses* to graphic novels to Facebook ads. Through these memories and items, particularly those that indicate mobility, she can trace “history’s incessant forward schlep” (35). It is this moment of physical *impasse* that she goes back and traces the “forward schelp” that is, for now, paused in her present. She finds receipts for flights “not booked online / but in an actual travel agent;” “boarding passes, rail-cards, ticket stubs” and a list of “diminutive / phone numbers,” shorter than she is used to now because “there are no mobile phones / just ancient landlines pegged along the roads” (42-43, 61, 58-59). These objects are evidence of her past physical mobility and ability to communicate, but now, used up or out of use, they remain static but allow her to travel back in her memories, forward to a future, and out to friends in the form of a letter.

Interspersed among these items, Flynn’s speaker mentions objects that introduce the centrality of economic instability and literature in this poem. Along with old tickets, the speaker finds “some notes from countries long since using the Euro,” and then, later, a “note / which warns my college loan is in arrears” a “dole book and P45s” (40, 83-84, 96). Finding, among these items, a cassette tape that she can no longer play, the speaker recalls the art and literature she and friends once debated. The speaker now considers the passion with which she and friends discussed literature “quaint,” because they would eventually realize that while “reading stuff was like, yeah, well and good,” it didn’t pay their bills (131, 134). When the speaker felt this passion for reading and discussing literature she was financially vulnerable, demonstrated by the bills

77 A P45 is form one is required to fill out when leaving work. In slang, it is similar to “pink slip” in an American context.
and dole-book. Now, she is “enjoying unexpected solvency” but sees herself as a “sardonic-looking idiot” with no backbone and at a painful distance from her former self (94, 105). Neither state is ideal; the debate the speaker has with herself recalls Carson’s poem “The New Estate,” in which the speaker appreciates his new home but feels uneasy about the “life of loving / Money” that may necessarily accompany it (12-13).

In the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth stanzas, Flynn pulls together the threads of literature and economy. Poetry, or “the language at its highest power, / has got its marks back from the public: fail / and fail again” because “we’re not sure what it's for…” and “It's out of step with our capacities / for being literal — and lucrative” (162-4, 168, 169-170). Flynn stops herself and speaks back to a potential argument from the recipients of this letter: “…but hold on, now you’ll argue that it's crass / to gauge a thing’s success in earning bucks / or wish that poems be consumed en masse” (172-4). Flynn’s speaker does not necessarily think that poetry’s impact or success should be judged by its commercial success, but seems certain that is evaluated by those factors. Indeed, poetry’s diminishing impact or visibility, she suggests, is precisely because of competing and overshadowing economic interest. It is difficult for poetry to stand out among the “stream of books, texts, films, and tunes” promoted by powerful entities such as tabloid tycoons or Apple (179). The only people who would truly argue that “in terms of literature we’re doing fine” are “certain good ambassadors” with a vested interest in promoting a “keen” and “literate” population (181-184). Disagree with these “ambassadors,” the word chosen specifically to imply an official state function, and you’ll be be considered “out of line” (181). In these three stanzas,
Flynn illustrates the various ways a population consumes media and enacts or refuses narratives that serve state rather than individual interest.  

Flynn segues from discussing poetry to explicitly discussing Belfast: “What else is new then? Belfast, long the blight / and blot on lives, has now brought to an end / or several ends, its grim dramatic fight” (191-193). Flynn discusses the end of Belfast’s fight, The Troubles, as brought about through specifically economic means and resulting in a spatially reorganized city space. The peace appears purchased with “the pay-off packet and the dividends / among the double-dealing / halts and heists” and results in “a building boom and shopping malls thrown up / like flotsam by our new security” (191-8). Though “boom” is a common way to describe a period of economic prosperity, combined with the image of a building being “thrown up,” the phrase evokes Carson’s Belfast, where his speaker witness bombings and buildings may be there one day and gone the next. Then too, if the structures created in the building boom of the late 90’s are “flotsam,” they are not stable — and neither is the security they are supposed to evidence.  

A parallel conversation regarding state promotion of narratives that differ from individual experience relates to the previously mentioned mural culture in working class Belfast communities. For example, in the 1980’s local city councils, universities, and the Arts Council sent university students into communities to paint murals with input from community members. Though the program was ostensibly “an effort to produce consensus around social-welfare issues that affected both loyalist and republican communities...[it] was designed to avoid ‘hot topics’ and find neutral themes that would neither ignite sectarian divisions nor promote demands for increased social services” (Lisle 36). Unsurprisingly, little input from community members made its way into the murals, which were largely ignored or defaced. The effort did not grow out of community concerns and in fact was seen as the opposite: the attempt to distract working class residents from the true problems faced in their communities. Lisle sums up the reaction to the sponsored mural project with the words of one young resident: “Is this supposed to brighten the place up? Who are you kidding—sure we live in shit” (37). The version of community promoted in the state-sponsored murals did not resonate and working class citizens from both cultures felt their concerns were being further invalidated by a system that had already left them disenfranchised. The Arts Council launched a similar project, called Re-Imaging Communities, in 2012. This project has meant with some resistance but ultimately has been more successful due to greater collaboration with community members.  

Catherine Switzer and Sara McDowell’s “Redrawing cognitive maps of conflict: Lost spaces and forgetting in the centre of Belfast” points out that the city’s building practices have changed since the declaration of peace, notably with the use of glass, a material that would have been too dangerous when bombings were a consistent threat. The
result in economic prosperity, so that “Belfast aspires to be then, every place / where shopping is done less for recreations / (this might apply to all the western race) / than from a kind of civic obligation” (201-4). This civic obligation points to why even suggesting that poetry’s importance is diminishing is to be out of line.

This obligation, as Flynn makes clear, is not unique to Belfast, but “might apply to all the Western race” (203). Flynn’s discussion of the housing crisis demonstrates both how the city is economically connected to the larger world and how the economics of Belfast’s narrative of peace dismiss working class populations or non-prosperous communities even as these populations bore and continue to bear the brunt of violence and sectarianism—recall that new peace walls continue to be built in working class communities. Flynn does not let her readers forget that lower class populations tend, globally, to feel the strongest effects of conflict or disparity, when, a few stanzas later, she describes the housing crisis as “men in suits [who] decided future prices / were capital enough to sell to those / who hadn’t, which when things went wrong spelled trouble” (263-5). Flynn understands Belfast in the context of a globalized economy, which is why critics such as Kennedy-Andrews and Ramazani might use the terms post-national and transnational. My categorization of Flynn as a multimobile poet contends that her position as a tourist, though space and through time and memory, offers a more nuanced understanding of her critique of Belfast. Mutimobile poetics takes into account the economic and cultural factors that determine one’s mobility and gives equal importance to mobility through space and time. In Flynn’s case, her mobility allows her to simultaneously view Belfast as a structural vulnerability of these buildings is perhaps another way that they are “like flotsam.”
tourist and resident and suggests that each positions generates in-depth and complementary knowledge.
Afterword: Fiona Benson’s Embodied Multimobility

This dissertation has focused exclusively on poets from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in order to analyze their treatment of identity as it relates to space and place. Ultimately, I argue that poetry has the ability to establish particular, personal meaning without creating or relying on boundaries and while allowing for, and even depending upon, the experience of simultaneous and contradictory meaning. Attention to boundaries is common in studies of Irish literature and indeed, studies of Irish politics and social life in the twentieth century, however, reading poetry with attention to national, cultural, and spatial boundaries can obscure rather than reveal meaning. As my discussion of Michael Longley, Ciaran Carson, and Eavan Boland has demonstrated, political and social structures were such that one’s identity as a Protestant, Catholic, man, or woman often dictated the spaces through which one could comfortably move. Further, a person’s knowledge of a particular place could serve as proof of cultural affiliation or background when the right to be somewhere or do something was in question—recall presumed paramilitary members demanding an interloper name all the streets in a neighborhood in Carson’s Question Time or Boland’s essays about Trinity College’s library as a space that allowed her to identify as a poet in a male-dominated tradition. Economic developments in the 1990s and 2000s resulted in an increased number of women in the workforce and travel in and out of Ireland, while political developments resulted in the softening of the border between the North and the Republic and the removal of checkpoints and security apparatus in Northern cities. French and Flynn’s poetry reflects the diminishing relevance of bounded categories of place or identity.
As the relevance of a place-based identity diminishes, I contend that a new framework in which to analyze Irish poetry is needed. The term I propose, “multimobile,” takes into account Ramazani’s work on transglobal poetics and the work of Urrie et al. on mobility studies; it prioritizes movement over location and accounts for the ways French and Flynn use physical mobility as an occasion for temporal and spiritual mobility. I purposefully discuss French, a poet from the Republic, with Flynn, a poet from the North, to demonstrate that unlike the term post-national, often used to describe Northern poets and Northern identity more generally, multimobile is a term than can be applied across Ireland.

Now, I further propose that multimobile is a term that can be applied to English-language poets living and working outside of Ireland. English-language poetry in Ireland has always influenced and been influenced by English-language poetry elsewhere, particularly and unsurprisingly, British poetry. Longley and Seamus Heaney have been identified as British poets, and major anthologies continue to discuss British and Irish poetry in tandem, including The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century British and Irish Women's Poetry (2011), The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry (2013), and Reading Postwar British and Irish Poetry (2014). Poetry prizes, including those offered by the Forward Foundation and Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry, are open to poets publishing in Ireland and the U.K. Given the reciprocity of British and Irish poetic traditions and my own arguments that meaning-making is not confined by national borders, I turn my attention to British-born,

---

80 Heaney was included in the 1982 edition of The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry, an inclusion to which he objected though he had been included in similar anthologies before and would participate in British state events after. In an open letter written in response, Heaney declared, “Be advised! My passport’s green. / No glass of ours was ever raised! To toast The Queen.” In an interview 2013 interview, Heaney maintained that his objection was valid because “the violence had been going on for 14 years – and it was about nomenclature to some extent” (Carruthers).
Scottish-educated poet Fiona Benson in order to demonstrate that multimobility can be a productive lens through which to view contemporary poets, regardless of nationality or cultural affiliation. Concluding with Benson allows me to expand the scope of this project, temporally and spatially, and consider how my arguments, particularly about the emergence of multimobile poetics, apply to and find varied expressions in contemporary poetry written outside of Ireland.

Benson’s background, professional affiliations, and choice of subject matter demonstrate both that national paradigms are becoming less important and that they are a relatively modern concern. Benson was born in 1978 in Wroughton, a village in southwest England. She received her Master of Letters and PhD in English from Saint Andrew’s University, Scotland and lives in Exeter, England. Her poetry was included in Faber New Poets in 2009 and her debut collection, Bright Travellers, was published in 2014. Bright Travellers was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection (won by French in 2002 and Flynn in 2004) and awarded the Seamus Heaney Centre Prize for Poetry; the chair of the Seamus Heaney Centre Prize was Carson. In this brief biography, we see that Benson’s poetry has roots and influences across the British Isles.

The first section of Bright Travellers, titled Dumnonia after the Latin name for the post-Roman kingdom that occupied what is now southwest England, demonstrates that the Isles have long been part of a changing political landscape. The Dumnonii were a Celtic tribe who spoke an Insular Celtic language before falling to the Anglo-Saxons in the eighth century (Ellis; Harvey et al.). They would have spoken a Brythonic Celtic language while Carson’s “Insular Celts” spoke a Goidelic Celtic language; the branches of the language family demonstrate a shared heritage.
that remains despite ongoing political conquest and implementation of national borders. \(^81\)

Reading poetic tradition as bound by national borders does not account for cross-border community or connection that has always existed.

In his review of *Bright Travellers* for the Seamus Heaney Centre Prize, Carson said “The language shines through in its maturity and finesse, always particular in its renditions of bodily process or spiritual possibility, shimmering alternately with promise and threat. This is a book of quiet, feisty conviction” (Hellawell). Carson observes that Benson is particularly adept at writing about bodily *or* spiritual experience, suggesting that these are separate matters; my reading, however, suggests that in Benson’s poetry, spiritual experience and spiritual connection are contained within and experienced through the body. \(^82\) It is through sustained, sometimes painful attention to bodily experience that her speakers practice multimobility even as they remain still or do not explicitly frame their connections as a form of travel or movement. \(^83\)

*Bright Travellers* is loosely structured into three sequences: the previously mentioned Dumnonia describes scenes from the area ranging from the dark ages to Benson’s childhood; *Love-Letter to Vincent*, written from the perspective of Vincent Van Gogh’s imagined prostitute-lover; and an untitled third sequence about pregnancy, miscarriage, and motherhood. \(^84\) My analysis focuses on the second and third sequences. In these sequences, Benson’s focus on the

\(^{81}\) Brythonic languages include Breton, Welsh, and Cornish. Goidelic Celtic languages are Irish, Scottish Gaelic, and Manx.
\(^{82}\) Longley, reviewing *Bright Travellers*, introduces a term that helps express the way in which Benson’s embodied spiritual experiences indicate a form of metaphysical travel or connection across space time and creates room for the possibility of a singular bodily and spiritual experience. He writes that Benson “has created her own soul-space.”
\(^{83}\) *Bright Travellers* takes its title from a line in “Visitations,” a poem that imagines the speaker’s infant daughter seeing beings, or “bright travellers” that are not visible to the speaker. These imagined beings may come from another world, time, or place, but Benson’s speakers generally remain grounded in their environments.
\(^{84}\) The Dumnonia sequence was commissioned by Wordquest/Aune Head Arts.
body, while remaining deeply personal, imagines connections to other bodies across space and
time.\textsuperscript{85} Her poems, nearly always in the present tense, describe her speakers in moments of
stillness or reflection. Her speakers remain in disquieting, uncomfortable moments: the speaker in “Portrait with a Bandaged Ear” says to her visitor, again and again, “You show up at my door,” with each stanza describing the visitor's appearance at the moment of crossing the
threshold (1, 10, 19). The speaker in “Sheep” unflinchingly describes the bodies of dead sheep
and lambs, lying still and saying “I can’t not watch” (10). In “Demeter,” the speaker experiences
a moment of not knowing where her child is, and remains in that moment, stretching it across
years and imagined horrors, before her daughter is once again in her sight and in her arms. In
these contained, sustained moments that Benson’s speakers are hyper aware of their own bodies
and the bodies of those around her, and, I argue, use the body as a vehicle for multimobility and
imagined connection across space-time.\textsuperscript{86}

\textsuperscript{85} When \textit{Bright Travellers} debuted in 2014, reviewers were quick to note similarities between Benson and Sylvia
Plath. Ben Wilkinson, writing in \textit{The Guardian}, calls Plath a “guiding hand in the dark,” and points to a shared
“obsession with animals, the wild and corporeal, with ghosts and with history's chasms; the handling of painful
human emotion through naturalistic conceit; the searing imagery and singularly heightened register.” Other reviews
in publication both major (\textit{The Economist}) and minor, (blogs including Quadrapheme and Granta) make connections
between Benson and Plath, mostly commenting on their shared affinity for images of nature or animals and a serious
tone. Benson has commented on her inheritance and use of a dark, foreboding aesthetic, noting “there are plenty of
precedents for threatening natural or maternal spaces in poetry, but I’m most immediately led to think of Sylvia
Plath” (Allen and Benson). Scholarly work on Plath’s use of the body has suggested that “Plath situates the female
subject in a refigured body...creative primacy in these poems is asserted a pleasurable repossession of a body
endowed with incandescent energy, unconstrained liberty, and inviolable self-sufficiency;” relatedly, that the
“female body is a vehicle for imaginative transformation and release” similar to birth as “women’s special
prerogative” and that writing may be considered a physical and sexual act (Van Dyne 6; Bundtzen 41-42; Rose 30-35). These readings of Plath suggest that her attention to the body is a project of self-reclamation, a practice that,
even when another being is present, such in acts of sex or birth, trains its focus to the self.

\textsuperscript{86} In analyzing Benson’s poetry and demonstrating that she practices an embodied, multimobile poetics, Boland
emerges as a poetic model that provides different insight than Plath. While my analysis of Boland focuses on her
poetry of suburban experience, in her poetry, she too attends to bodily experience. Recall that in “Suburban
Woman” the speaker explicitly worries about her body’s ability to remain visible as she leaves the home; recall too,
heightened attention to eating and drinking in “The Pomegranate.” In poems that I did not discuss, such as
“Anorexic” and “Anna Liffey,” female speakers discuss their bodies’ presence in space and cultural and personal
pressures to diminish that presence Though Benson is certainly more explicit in her portrayal of embodied
The second poem in the twelve-poem *Love-Letter to Vincent* sequence, “Still Life With Red Herring,” imagines a Van Gogh who is both obsessed and repulsed by physical bodies. The speaker tells him “In Paris you spend too much time / with the whores, tailing them in bars” given that he is “able to afford only the briefest touch” (1-3). Vincent knows, or rather, *hears* that these women, for their own pleasure, “finger each other in the dark, / use their tongues, raise sounds that are low and rough, / and utterly ungovernable” (5-8). Benson does not write that Vincent knows this, or is told this, or learns this. Writing that he hears this information suggests communication between the men who, like Vincent, are spending their times in bars, and continues to highlight sensory experience. Vincent may only be able to afford a “touch” from the women, but he can “hear” about their activities, however specious that may be.

In the next stanza, the speaker continues to highlight Vincent’s experience of his own body and imagined experiences of the prostitutes’ bodies. She writes:

One day you wake - phlegm in your throat,

The shakes - and paint these parched and stinking fish;

here’s all you think you know of whores, -

the labial gleam of scales,

their gills’ slashed silk, their lice.

I’m bored with your disgust. (8-13)

Readers can assume that this day comes after a night spent tailing prostitutes in a bar; the phlegm and shakes are physical responses to his overindulgent drinking the previous night. Thus, the experience, particularly the physical experiences of birth, nursing, and motherhood, she and Boland share an attention to writing through everyday or personal bodily experiences.
sight of the prostitutes is as fresh for Vincent as it is for the reader, who has just read of them in the previous stanza. Vincent has touched and been touched by them; he has heard of their private activities but not heard them himself, and here, he imagines the smell and sight of the part of themselves they have kept from him. In his painting of the fish, the speaker registers his disgust and attempts to retrain his focus on her, reaching up to kiss him even as she incites him to think of women touching each other in private: “wouldn't you rather be a woman / raising herself to another woman's lips / like this, like this?” (15-17). The speaker is “bored” with Vincent’s fixation and disgust, and in fact, the whole poem chastises him. In the speaker’s estimation, Vincent spends “too much time” chasing these woman, and yet still only thinks he knows them. The competing feelings of disgust and desire that Vincent feels for these women could also describes the speaker’s feelings toward Vincent. In several poems in this sequence, she oscillates between them. In “Pear Tree in Blossom,” for example, he keeps his distance from her in an attempt at asceticism; she writes “Nothing to do but paint, / then sleep, cold as a saint in your hostel bed” (7-8). Though the speaker mocks him in calling him a saint immediately after a poem detailing his lust for prostitutes, she also cannot get him out of her mind, imagining his “sweet mouth to kiss” and thinking “Christ. I never thought I’d beg” (15).

Benson communicates simultaneous feelings of desire and disgust or despair through her speaker’s experiences of warmth or fire and cold or water. When the speaker or Vincent are physically and mentally healthy, Benson uses words that convey warmth, but when Vincent begins to experience mental collapse and the physical relationship between him and the speaker ends, Benson’s language conveys feelings of coldness, wetness, or darkness. In two successive poems named “Sunflowers,” Benson writes of the sunflower as if it were a person; in the first
poem, she describes the flower’s “throat,” its stem is “supple” and covered with “small hairs,” and its petals are the flower’s “chaffy head” (1-7). In the second “Sunflowers” poem, the flowers cause joy and are joy, their bright yellow color indicating that they possess candor and bravery. In both of these poems, Benson uses words that indicate brightness or heat: flames, flame, blaze, burn, blazing, light, brightest, and light. The poem that follows the two “Sunflowers” poems, “Starry Night,” serves to douse this passion, quite literally. The poem begins with a lowercase “you’re” and is the first poem in the sequence that is not written in complete sentences. In a stanza, the speaker abruptly and definitely abandons the brightness of the “Sunflowers” poems:

the stars’ ecstatic fires -

to the flood

a vertiginous dark which is never
done with you, old pal,

oh it would love you in its weir pond

its drowning well (8-13)

Benson personifies the flood like she does the sunflowers, but its desire is life-ending rather than life-affirming. This breakdown of grammar and switch from fire to water precedes the longest, darkest poem in the sequence, “Portrait With a Bandaged Ear.”

In “Portrait with a Bandaged Ear,” the speaker’s desire and disgust are given their fullest expression and results in a resignation to the self-inflicted violence that will ultimately end Vincent’s life. The address of Vincent as “old pal” could be read as a comment on the longstanding relationship between Vincent and this darkness, but it also suggests the end of the
sexual relationship between Vincent and the speaker. Though they continue to have a relationship, Vincent’s primary relationship is now with the darkness and the speaker transitions to the role of an old friend and sometimes-caregiver. “Portrait With a Bandaged Ear” opens with a brief return to the language of the “Sunflowers” poems before once again dousing it. Vincent arrives at the speaker’s door “weeping, exhausted, / a rag tied under your chin like a corpse” and she attempts to revive him through heat: a warm bath, hot soup, and a fire (1-2). These attempts seem to work at first: Vincent falls asleep by the fire. By the sixth line of the first stanza, however, the speaker learns that Vincent is too far gone. Once again, Benson uses images of fire and water to indicate competing and ultimately mutually exclusive desires. He wakes, and she describes him as having “turned” (6). He throws “water all over the bed as if our old love / burned” and leaves her home (8-9). Though he comes to the speaker for the comfort she readily offers, he ultimately and violently refuses it.

Vincent returns to the speaker twice more; each time she welcomes him but notes that his mental decline manifests itself on his physical body. Though he has begun to heal from his self-inflicted wound—Van Gogh cut off part of his ear in December 1888—his body displays evidence of it: “your right ear healed to pearly pink buds, / the naked hole in your head flecked with wax” (11-12). The injury is visible even though he is, in this stanza, mentally stable, or “drunk but lucid,” as the speaker describes (10). The third and final time Vincent arrives, the speaker notes “The veins stand out / on your temples, your nose is pinched and thin” (19-20). In this stanza, Benson describes crimson flowers, which in previous poems might have been signs of life or passion. Here, they are signs that incite Vincent to further mortify his physical state, a “counsel for bloodletting, leeches” that lead him to appear to the speaker with frostbitten toes
and “a crust of blood” across his lips (24, 27). Seeing him in this degraded state causes the speaker to remember their youth and “how fierce you were and clear, back then” (31). The difference between how the speaker remembers Vincent and how he appears to her now is apparent in his physical state as well as their vanished sexual relationship. In the sequence’s first poem, the speaker arrives at Vincent’s door, spends the night “teepeed in your scarlet blanket” where they she says “we’ll talk or fuck / or sit and flip cards, whatever you want” and in this poem, she remembers their youth “spent wrapped in covers” (“Yellow Room at Arles 12-13; “Portrait” 30). Now, Vincent appears at her door, three times across three stanzas; she says “and I let you in and I let you in and I let you in –” (28). Because the past and present tenses of “let” are the same, this line communicates the tensions between their past and present relationships. In the present of the poem, the speaker lets Vincent in her door, but in the past of memory, “I let you in” refers to their sexual relationship.

In the Love-Letter to Vincent sequence, Benson focuses on the speaker’s observations of Vincent’s body. At the start, his body is the site of sexual desire; over the course of twelve poems, his body deteriorates, matching his mental state and preventing the sexual connection that has formed the basis for their longstanding relationship. By the sequence’s final poem, “Wheatfields, Wild Horses,” bodies, and even presence of the speaker or Vincent, have disappeared entirely:

wind whitens the grass
like wild herds riding the Camargue
and in a far field
the shadow of a cloud (1-4)
What remains, now, is not even a cloud, but “the shadow of a cloud.” Without a body to observe and with which to interact, the speaker does not participate in or seem to have any connection to the action of the poem. Benson’s speakers need another body—a lover, a child, even an imagined body—in order to fully occupy their own bodies and use those bodies as vehicles for connection. In the next sequence, speakers are hyper aware of their bodies and the bodies they observe. They use their bodies as sites for multimobility, imagining connections across time and space.

In the collection's next section, the poems are largely about physical experiences of childbearing, including miscarriage and breastfeeding. In these poems, Benson largely continues to use the present tense she used in the “Love-Letters to Vincent” sequence, creating a sense the speaker is perpetually in the moment she describes, seeing, hearing, and feeling as the reader reads the words on the page. This choice creates a sense of immediacy and unease in the reader; as Benson describes disturbing sights or feelings of physical or emotional pain, her speakers are not safely away from these sights or recovered from pain. There is not a sense of perspective, of a future self organizing sights, sounds, and sensations in order to express knowledge or experience. Instead, the reader is unsure when or if each moment will end. Like Vincent in “Starry Night,” each poem seems to be a moment that “is never / done with you” (10-11). That combination of words—“is never / done”—captures the unease that Benson creates in her reader and demonstrates her speakers’ multimobile stillness. The present tense verb “is” is strictly present tense, while “never” looks to the future and “done” implies something in the past. This combination of past, present, and future, implies that the moment (and in Vincent’s case, the darkness) is perpetually, repeatedly, never done. Benson’s speakers exist is a Sisyphean present,
in which “never done” is not a negative or absence but a force that the speaker enacts and reenacts on her body by dwelling in painful moments.

“Sheep” begins with the speaker, who has just experienced a miscarriage, and the bodies that she observes, a dead sheep and her dead lambs, practicing the same present-tense stillness for five stanzas before switching to the past tense for the final stanza. Benson organizes the poem such that the reader is disoriented by the tense switch; the actions that the speaker performs in the last stanza predate what happens in the earlier ones. In the past tense, the speaker was active, she “got up, / gathered my bedding / and walked” (20-21). Benson resists forward action or recovery; the speaker is active immediately following the traumatic event but then succumbs to an almost paralyzed stillness. The poem begins:

She’s lying under a low wind
bedded in mud and afterbirth,
her three bed lambs

Knotted in a plastic bag.
Crows have pecked out her arse
And now the hen

That’s been circling all morning
Tugs at a string of birth-meat
Like she’s pulling a worm in the yard.
I can’t not watch.
I too lay stunned
In my own dirt,

The miscarried child
Guttering out,
Soaking the mattress in blood. (1-15)

Benson uses words that bind the sheep and the speaker together: lying/lay, mud/dirt, dead lambs/miscarried child, bedded/mattress, afterbirth/blood. Though the speaker is still, she creates a connection to the sheep through her gaze, and in doing so, mentally reenacts her own miscarriage. The last two stanzas, which switch to the past tense, make clear that the miscarriage is not happening as the speaker watches the sheep. Though it is physically over and the speaker is not in her soiled bed, she is “stunned,” laying in the “dirt” of her memory, focusing on the sheep’s mangled body—recall the mutilated sheep of Carson’s “Holiday.” The sheep’s body, like the sheep in “Holiday” signifying both nature and maternity but does not provide comfort. Instead, the sheep reminds the speaker of unforgiving, even ruthless, actions. The wind and mud may provide some cover, like a blanket the sheep is “lying under,” but crows and hens are not halted by that meager protection. Before the crows and hens get to her, the sheep is undone by her own body, as the speaker imagines herself undone by her own. As the speaker imagines the connections between herself and the sheep, both betrayed by their bodies and now occupying those bodies like a shell, her miscarriage “is never / done.”
Subsequent poems feature the speaker with a child and continue to focus on the speaker’s hyperawareness of her embodiment. Though, in these poems, the speaker has given birth to a healthy baby, her body continues to act in a way that she cannot anticipate or explain. Benson’s speakers are at times amazed, mystified, and resentful of their bodies and imagine relationships to other bodies; in the poems I discuss, these relationships are to other mothers and to her speakers’ children. Benson’s attention to embodied experience does not imply that her speakers’ experiences of womanhood, pregnancy, or motherhood are universal, nor does she suggest that motherhood and womanhood are synonymous. Instead, Benson’s speakers imagine that embodied experiences of these things allow or create connection, but as readers, we can see that these connections may be false, imagined, or inadequate. In “Sheep,” for example, the connection the speaker imagines to the animal is quite clearly not reciprocal, as the sheep lies dead in the yard. If the speaker imagines their shared loss constitutes a connection fostered through her sustained looking, the fact that the sheep cannot return her gaze suggests that the connection is not sufficient or restorative. In the poems that follow, the speakers continue to imagine that embodied experiences, positive or negative, pleasurable or painful, are ways of recognizing multimobile connection—connection across space and time—though those connections offer varying degrees of comfort.

“Milk Fever” and “Breastfeeding” appear one after the other in the collection. The first, “Milk Fever,” is about a single moment; the two sections of “Breastfeeding” are about breastfeeding generally, though the final stanzas meditate on a single physical act. The five stanzas of “Milk Fever” occur across the moment of the first line: “When she screams” (1). The remaining nineteen lines are about the speaker’s physical, unwilled reaction to her daughter’s
scream: “I can’t help it, / I sweat and the skin / of my nipples becomes // like water’s skin” (2-5). This metaphor of skin as water implies something barely contained by surface tension, and the baby’s cry is a force that threatens to rupture that containment. The water in this poem is not the “drowning well” of “Starry Night.” Instead, it is a symbol of powerlessness and fragility: “think of the way water / begins to tremble / in its glass / as the earthquake begins –” (9-12). Benson ends the poem with “she calls to my body / and my body leaps,” allowing the baby to be a cohesive “she” but imagining that the speaker’s body and the speaker’s self are not quite the same. Her body leaps, but she “can’t help it.” It is not a choice made by the speaker’s conscious self. Though likening her daughter's cries to an earthquake implies a potential threat, the speaker seems a bit in awe of her body’s response. The body’s leaping occurs in a moment of ostensible stillness—the speaker does not go to her daughter in this moment. The leaping is the moment before conscious movement, when, the speaker says “my breasts pulse / and the fine membrane / of each nipple / tightens” (13-16). In this moment, the speaker imagines a connection, occurring across space and felt in her body. This connection is embodied but does not require physical touch, the poem implies future touch and literal bodily connection; in the moment after her body leaps, the reader assumes, the speaker will make the conscious choice to go to her daughter and feed her. Whatever comfort or awe the speaker feels at the connection between her body and her daughter, it is quickly undone, or at least complicated, by the next poem.

“Breastfeeding” begins with a line that interrupts the connection “Milk Fever” imagines: “But really it's like this -” (1). “But really” suggests that speaker is about to contradict something said previously and in this poem, the speaker feels the damage from the “earthquake” of a cry described in “Milk Fever.” In the first of the poem’s two sections, the speaker describes the
physical pain of breastfeeding, as well as confusion and small, unanticipated frustrations or stumbling blocks. She describes “weeping as your milk comes in” and “counting through the pain / as you bring her on / to the hardened breast” as well as the “whole new grammar / of tongue-tie and latch” that she must learn and the frustration of “the nursing bra / like a complex lock /as you fumble” (2, 4-6, 7-8, 15-17). If breastfeeding is still a way of imagining connection to another being, it becomes increasingly clear that this connection, like the connection to the sheep, is not easily maintained, reciprocal, or mutually beneficial. “You are lost,” the speaker says, “the breast siphoned off // then filling” (23, 26-27). The speaker transitions from talking about feeding her baby to cleaning her baby and switches into past tense to imagine connection to mothers across space-time:

    you get down on your knees

    at the foot of the change-mat

    to clean,

    holding your breath.

    It was always like this;

    A long line of women

    sitting and kneeling,

    out of their skins

    with love and exhaustion. (30-38)
In these lines it is the physical act of kneeling and holding one’s breath that allows the speaker to imagine other mothers performing the same actions in other places and at other times. This action allows her to imaginatively travel through space time, similar to the way in which French uses forms of literal travel such as driving or rowing, as well as artefacts like books and newspapers, to remember and create imagined interactions with his long-dead brother.

As I’ve argued, Benson’s multimobility is particularly embodied, and thus, for her, it is a physical act that allows her to imagine she and others being “out of their skins” (37). These women, herself among them, are part of a “long line” and “out of their skins,” suggesting a connection generated by individual embodied experience but existing outside of or across that experience. Benson’s switch from the present tense “But really it's like this –” to the past continuous tense “It was always like this” demonstrates something similar to the “is never / done” of “Starry Night.” Combining “it is” and “it always was” suggests an inevitability and, though there is no future tense in this poem, that “it” will continue in the future as surely as it occurred in the past and occurs in the present. Surely, the speaker knows, logically, that her daughter will grow and she will no longer need to breastfeed or change diapers, but Benson does not show the speaker engaging that knowledge or considering a future beyond that moment of kneeling. Though, in that still, single moment, the speaker can imagine herself in a line of women, connected through physical action, the reader cannot tell for certain what, if any, comfort that connection offers her.

“Demeter” is Benson’s take on the Greek myth that also inspires Boland’s “The Pomegranate.” In Boland’s poem, the speaker reflects on her positions as mother and daughter, saying “and the best part about the myth is / I can enter it anywhere. And have” (6-7). The
speaker, looking into her teenage daughter’s room, remembering her daughter’s childhood and imagining her adulthood, decides, decisively, not to be Demeter, not to protest her daughter’s leaving, learning or growing. The speaker recognizes that this growing will necessarily involve pain, but not necessarily catastrophe, and will ultimately have a positive outcome: “If I defer the grief I will diminish the gift” (“Pomegranate 49). Benson’s speaker does not share this optimistic view and imagines a more literal and modern version of the myth, for, in it, Persephone does not leaving willingly. Though she is often referred to as Queen of the Underworld, Persephone is abducted by Hades and tricked into her yearly return. Benson’s imagines herself as a version of Demeter who will injure her own physical body, as well as destroy the the earth’s bounty, if her daughter is missing or physically harmed. Benson has discussed this poem as a reaction against personal experiences of what she describes as a culture of restraint within British poetry and the idea that women writing about the body is a trap (Allen and Benson). My reading of this poem investigates what Benson accomplishes by embracing and exploring an over-the-top, embodied experience and suggests that the speaker imagines connections but ultimately finds no comfort or redemption in them.

In “Demeter,” the speaker’s daughter plays in a field of harvested hay and experiences it through physical sensations of touch and taste that remind the reader of the Greek myth. The speaker says “My daughter is compelled - / she must fit her arms round each bale” and “her mouth is bruised with blackberry juice” (4-5, 14). While the daughter is visible, the speaker describes the sight of shining hay bales. In the myth, this bountiful harvest is only possible through the goodwill of Demeter, the goddess of the harvest. This goodwill will vanish when her daughter does, and continue to vanish each year when Persephone returns to the underworld for
the winter, bound to return because of the pomegranate seeds she ate there. When the speaker sees her daughter’s mouth stained with blackberries, she follows that sight with the line “and she keeps disappearing,” like Persephone’s yearly disappearance to the underworld. The speaker’s daughter is “disappearing, as if into hell through the shadow / of a hay bale” and once the speaker makes this explicit reference to the myth, her imagined physical reaction and connection to Demeter begins. The speaker says,

- Demeter will be screaming soon,

Cutting her wrists with broken glass,

Rubbing in dirt, turning the world to water and ice

She misses her daughter so much (pathological) - (18-21)

In this anticipated moment, emotion is a “pathological” or physical experience shared by the speaker and Demeter, similar to the way in which the speaker and the “long line of women” in “Breastfeeding” participate in the same painful action of sitting and kneeling. Benson creates connection not only between this speaker and Demeter, but between this speaker and speakers of other poems. Demeter and the speaker are like Vincent in the “Love-Letters to Vincent” sequence, identifying with water and ice and like the mourning speaker in “Sheep,” lying in the dirt to express grief.

The speaker in this poem also imagines a connection to her daughter in her daughter’s absence, one forged through the physical pain they would both endure in such an absence. The speaker imagines accidents or disease mangling her daughter’s physical form, fearing a “small smashed body on the road” or a “small botched body in my arms” (24, 26). The daughter experiences pain that brought on by outside forces, but the speaker, as Demeter, will inflict pain
on herself, through cutting her wrists or “digging up the pavement with her nails” acts that may be attempts to share experience or to bargain for a safe return (30). The repeated references to the daughter’s small body reinforce her vulnerability, thought the disasters the speaker imagines—a car accident, illness—could happen to anyone. Benson creates a disturbing update to Hades’ abduction of Persephone, imagining “men preparing underground rooms” but it is ultimately the speaker who practices a type of abduction (27). The speaker says “I go and pick / my daughter up and carry her protesting home” (33-34). Speaker and daughter are physically reunited; her daughter’s body is in her arms and it is not “botched” or otherwise injured. Yet, this is not a moment of peace of relief, for the daughter resists being held. Though the speaker imagines the moment as an act that “keep[s] her safe from harm,” the daughter’s protest suggests the speaker is acting in her own self-interest rather than her daughter’s protection. Though the speaker imagines herself as the loving, protective Demeter, Benson ends the poem with a physical act suggests a connection between the speaker and the selfish Hades. Benson’s speakers’ careful, painful attention to their bodies demonstrates the possibility of the body as a site of multimobility and a way to imagine connections to other bodies across time and space. The differences between the speakers’ and readers’ perceptions of those connections demonstrates the highly personal, singular nature of embodied experience, and, like Carson, Boland, French, and Flynn, Benson allows her speaker to create meaning that does not deny other experiences or interpretations.

***

This dissertation has focused on poets living and working in twentieth and twenty-first Ireland, a place and time very visibly, and at times violently, interested in self-definition. The
declaration of independence made by rebels during Dublin’s Easter Rising of 1916 led to the War of Independence, the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the creation of the Irish Free State in 1921. This treaty divided Ireland into the six counties of the North and twenty-six counties of the South; because some were not happy with the now-divided island, a new war began. The Irish Civil War lasted until 1923 and though supporters of the Free State won, a new constitution was drafted in 1937 and the Ireland that we know today officially became a nation. The Northern counties remained part of Great Britain and the minority Catholic population often faced discrimination in the form of limited housing, employment, and educational opportunities. In the 1960s, this discrimination led to a civil rights movement that became the Troubles, a decades-long clash between those who supported union with Great Britain and those who wanted to join the Republic of Ireland. Violent contestation of borders and titles—Great Britain or Ireland, unionist or republican—suggests that each group seek to define the true Irish experience. However, whatever is meant by “Ireland” or “Irish” is not static, and economic and social developments saw daily life change, across borders. These changes have not been straightforward or linear progress. The Republic experienced mass emigration in the 1950s and 1980s before an economic boom halted and even reversed emigration. Jobs and housing developments were created at a rapid rate until, in 2007, the bubble burst. During the Troubles, the North was economically vulnerable, but in the late 1990s and early 2000s, it experienced some of the Republic’s stability as tourism increased and jobs were created. Though tourism in the North continues to increase, it, like the Republic, experienced an economic downturn that left residents once again feeling vulnerable. Across the island, rural life and labor has largely given way to urban and suburban living where women have increasingly entered the workforce.
I have analyzed the poems of Carson, Boland, French, and Flynn to find how their poetry reflects changing relationships between self, place, and space. This is a dynamic project that has changed over the course of my research. The Republic’s economy is on the upswing; talk of Great Britain leaving the European Union has once again turned attention to the border between the North and the Republic, and in 2014, Carson awarded the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry Prize to Benson, a British poet. My project pays attention to borders, boundaries and definitions because often, the poets do. Ultimately, however, my reading suggests that there is much to be found in boundaries they manipulate, shift, or ignore. Carson collapses poem, map, song, and sense memory in an attempt to represent experiences of Belfast; Boland writes of suburbia as a space that disregards firm distinctions between rural and urban, nationalist and feminist; French, Flynn, and Benson express identity as shaped by movement through spaces at times real, but more often, imagined. Attention to the way their speakers move through spaces as small as a single street or as contained as a body, as well as through cities and across nations, for these movements gives us insight about the ever changing personal and political significance of boundaries and the risks one takes in crossing them.
WORKS CITED


Bunreacht na hÉireann. Constitution.ie.


Carruthers, Mark. “Seamus Heaney: ‘If I described myself as an Ulsterman I’d have thought I was selling a bit of my birthright.’” *Irish Times.* 15 January 2015. Web. 10 April 2016.


Dinsman, Melissa. “‘A river is not a woman’: Re-visioning in Eavan Boland’s ‘Anna Liffey.’” *Contemporary Women’s Writing* 7.2 (2013): 172-189. Print.


Dundrum Town Centre. dundrum.ie.


Meaney, Geraldine. "Myth, History, and the Politics of Subjectivity: Eavan Boland and Irish


February 2016.


