

**Abstracts from the  
British and Irish Contemporary Poetry Conference  
Hosted by the  
Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry  
at Queen's University Belfast**

**PANEL 1A**

**The Ethnic Basis of Irish Poetry**

*Chris Agee*

This contribution will revisit several definitions in light of the new multicultural Ireland that has taken full hold over the past decade. *What is Irish poetry? What is an Irish poet? And how do such definitions, both old and new, relate to underlying cultural and sociological markers and assumptions, especially unreflective, essentialist markers and assumptions?* Thus, the paper will not deal at all with poetry *qua* poetry, any purely artistic or technical issue, but rather the way the critical definitions involved in the art (such as in the title of this conference) interface with “the sociology of culture”, specifically the sociology of literature, subset poetry. The paper concludes by exploring how a final (and inevitable) switch to “the civic basis of Irish literature” not only has significant literary and cultural ramifications, but opens the way to an important political implication.

**THE METAPHYSICS OF MODERN IRISH POETRY**

*Bruce Stewart*

In this paper I want to compare characteristic approaches to metaphysical ideas and intuitions in the poetry of Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon and, more specifically, to revisit the dialogue between them as regards the spirituality of Ireland—Irish souls no less than Irish acres. After Seamus Heaney identified the central theme of Irish poetry with a ‘sense of place’ in his Belfast Museum lecture of 1977, that phrase was taken up and used very widely as defining the particularity of Irish poetry, Irish literature and even, more broadly still, Irish culture. Apart from its supposed veracity considered as an account of Irish sensibility, the practical merit of the phrase was that it enabled an identification with the matter of Ireland while at the same time avoiding what Heaney later called the ‘inflations of nationalism’. It was, indeed, latently nationalist insofar as it sacralised Irish land and, by implication, territory; at the same time, however, it avoided any explicit truck with irredentism or separatism. In other words, it was at least nominally apolitical.

Early on the aptness of the coinage in its predictative relation to Irish poetry was hotly disputed by Derek Mahon, most notably in a series of poetical responses to Heaney culminating with the poem “Lives” in which he more or less explicitly invited Heaney to ‘revise his ontology’. A little earlier, in fact, Heaney has identified Mahon’s work with a sense of ‘visionary desolation’ – that is, with a sense of remoteness from the informing

quality of belief that comes with an affinity to idea of Ireland as an object of imaginative attachment. While the regionalism, nationalism and cosmopolitanism each had much to do with the shape of this debate and have often been invoked in commentaries on their development, the underlying question of their respective attitudes to spirituality or, properly speaking, metaphysics has not attracted so much attention. Yet both poets have engaged directly with the question that Heaney, once again, epitomised with the question, 'Where does the spirit live', in his most overly philosophical collection *Seeing Things*.

Metaphysics might have been taken, at an earlier day in Ireland, as a virtual synonym for religion. Latterly, of course, the dogmatic element has been dissipated while, proportionately perhaps, an interest in the problematic of spirit have come more to the fore. In the poets in question, that interest is never far from central—so much so that, for instance, Derek Mahon's characteristic procedure has been identified as a form of 'secular mysticism'. I have interrogated the relation between metaphysics and poetry in regard to each of these poets on separate printed occasions in the past. On this occasion I want to bring them together and to explore more fully the element of dialogue in their ostensibly very different, yet intrinsically quite comparable approaches to the matter.

### **Away from the "Savage Nostalgias": Irish Poetry and the Post-Pastoral**

*Jeffrey Thomson*

The pastoral has been a fundamental trope in poetry since its inception with Theocritus. The idyllic hillside, blending simplicity and sophistication, where the artifice of the city blends with the untamed wilderness, such is the imaginative landscape of much traditional poetry from Virgil's *Eclogues* through Milton's "Lycidas." In the American west, this sensibility combined with an ideology of political emancipation to place additional weight on the tradition. The garden, with its blending of personal freedom and political responsibility, was where one became a citizen rather than a servant. In the US, contemporary pastoralists like Donald Hall and Mary Oliver still work in a mode that owes very much to this traditional ideology. The dependence of these poets on the pastoral mood gives their poems a nostalgic and backward-looking wistfulness. The American post-pastoral, however, plays fast and loose with these conventions, inverting some, reimagining others in odd, new ways. (By post-pastoral I mean a conscious sense of play within the domain of the pastoral tradition rather than an anti-pastoral attack on the salvific quality of nature and rural life.) Poets like Maurice Manning and Brigit Pegeen Kelly manipulate language, story, science, myth, history, elegy, and more to create landscapes that are at once visceral and real, yet at the same time invented and fantastic. The political/social identity that the pastoral once represented can no longer be counted on; the ground has shifted underfoot and thus the narrative stance mutates, the multiplicity of voices suggests multiple identities, and the nostalgia in these poems, while still present, is offered with a knowing wink. Traditionally, the pastoral and the natural often represent a retreat from a complicated and violent history into an imagined landscape. And even as far as the late 20th century, in the poems of Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland, the Irish pastoral remains primarily the landscape of either redemption or tragedy. When the western wind blows the doors of the heart wide open at the end of Seamus Heaney's *The Spirit Level* or when Eavan Boland traces the faint, failing trail of a famine road, each is playing out the pastoral model in his/her own way. Heaney's pastoral is a reclamation and celebration of Irish space, landscape and history (even, fully aware, as he is of the hardship and violence of this post-colonial locus) from within the pastoral tradition. Boland's pastoral is

focused on the hidden Ireland, what is missing from the literary map, particularly women's experience and the suburban lifestyle.

These poets, however, work within the tradition of the pastoral; they may be attempting to add to the tradition but they are not attempting to subvert it or to call the fundamental terms of the pastoral into question. Are there Irish poets whose work redefines the pastoral and reimagines the Irish landscape in ways similar to those American poets? What would the Irish post-pastoral's function be and how is it imagined? This paper will explore these questions and point to new voices, directions and influences in the Irish pastoral.

## **PANEL 1B**

### **Geoffrey Hill's Epigraphs**

*Richie Hofmann*

In addition to the dedication to Hugh Wood, the frontmatter of *Scenes from Comus* (2005) includes a series of epigraphs, which serve to layer Geoffrey Hill's poetic debts while also subtly anticipating some of the work's central concerns. The first of these epigraphs is from Milton, from whom Hill borrows the structure of the masque and its title character Comus: "Who knows not Circe / The daughter of the Sun?" The line comes, of course, from Milton's *Comus*, the masque presented at Ludlow Castle in 1634. The fact that it references Circe, the sorceress from Homer, presents the epigraph as an allusion within an allusion; this complicated layering is a central theme of Hill. The emphasis, too, in the epigraph is on "knowing" Circe—knowledge, both in academic-historical terms as well as in biblical/sexual terms is another motif of Hill's masque. The emphasis on Circe's lineage—she is the "daughter of the Sun"—points to the idea of inheritance (which Hill is then doubling by quoting the epigraph) while also offering a dazzlingly bizarre pun in English, with "daughter" and "son" joined together on a single line, an example of language's complicated, multifaceted power.

In this presentation on "Geoffrey Hill's Epigraphs," I will explore the richness of the poet's late work—focusing primarily on *The Orchards of Syon*, *Speech, Speech!*, and *Scenes from Comus*—and the many functions, both formally and thematically, of the epigraphs. How does Hill's rich network of epigraphs both evoke and challenge his place in the tradition? In what ways do the epigraphs anticipate the concerns of the collections and how do they, in their own right, form a certain kind of intellectual geography that is distinct from the poems? How do Geoffrey Hill's epigraphs provide clues to understanding his late poetry, while contributing to its complexity, its uneasiness with language, and its richly allusive and densely packed verses?

### **'Sound as Politics: Geoffrey Hill as a blind mouthed, blind understanding poet'**

*Steven Matthews*

This paper will consider the acoustic possibilities released by the hold which John Milton has exerted upon Hill's poetic sequences of the past decade or so. Hill's decision to move even further away from the lyric's narrative impetus in these late sequences has led to an intensification and further disruption of the rugged sound-patterning which had characterised the work down to the end of *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Peguy* (1983). Formally, in these recent collections, each sequence is tightly constructed, built up from same-sized

and -shaped units. Yet that formal consistency masks a great deal of rhythmic and assonantal play, in which Latinate sounds and lexical groupings derived from Milton clash against a staged colloquialism of idiom. What emerges is a strange mixture of vocal anarchy and constraint, a sounding energy which marks the eccentric and rebarbative nature of Hill's recent politics and persona. The paper will read closely passages from these late Hill sequences against their musical origins in Milton's 'contentious sonnets', and in select passages from *Paradise Lost* specifically. It will also link these to relevant passages from Milton's prose.

**“simple, sensuous and passionate”: Milton and Eliot in the work of Geoffrey Hill’**  
*Michael Molan*

Since the publication of *Canaan* (1996), Milton has been increasingly foregrounded in Geoffrey Hill's work, culminating in *A Treatise of Civil Power* (2005), which takes its title from Milton's *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* (1659). This paper will show that Milton's influence has been crucial throughout Hill's later poetry and prose, and it will argue that Hill has drawn key critical distinctions from this engagement which have informed his understanding of the relationship between poetry and politics. These distinctions will be seen to direct Hill's later critical work on T. S. Eliot, whose theory of the seventeenth-century 'dissociation of sensibility' established the terms of the later 'Milton controversy' in which he played such an important role. The paper will begin by locating an earlier point than *Canaan* from which to chart Milton's influence. Hill has often quoted Milton's description of poetry as 'simple, sensuous and passionate' (*Of Education* (1644)), particularly when defining or defending his poetics. This phrase first appears in his poetry in the sonnet sequence 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture' (*Tenebrae* (1978)), in which it is brought to bear on nineteenth-century poetry and politics. Throughout Hill's later poetry and prose, 'sensual' and 'sensuous' are tested against each other and this establishes a phenomenological description of poetic creation that addresses territory similar to Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility'. The political resonance of this terminology will be examined in *Scenes from Comus* (2005), in which the phrase 'simple, sensuous and passionate' reappears transformed. The paper will then consider this terminology in Hill's critical prose, particularly the essay 'Dividing Legacies' (*Style and Faith* (2003)), in which he attacks Eliot's use of the term 'sensuous' in his readings of Donne and goes on to criticize his later writing, particularly *Four Quartets*. These criticisms are renewed and made explicitly political issues in the lecture 'A Postscript on Modernist Poetics', and the paper will conclude with a discussion of what Hill means when he accuses Eliot and other major Modernist writers of aestheticizing politics by examining his approach in this and the other recent lectures collected as *Alienated Majesty* (*Collected Critical Writings* (2008)). Milton will be seen to be a key influence in the development of Hill's critical thought and in his reassessment of Eliot.

**PANEL 1C**

**Narcissus and Echo: Self Reflection and Repetition  
in *Writing* and *Catacoustics* by Tom Raworth.**  
*James Cummins*

Tom Raworth has been writing and publishing poetry for over 40 years and although his work has received scant critical attention, he is considered by scholars such as

John Barrell, T.J. Clarke, Marjorie Perloff, and Keith Tuma as one of the most important British/Irish poets of his generation. His poetry evades traditional analysis because he creates work that moves swiftly through a range of perceptions, never allowing the reader enough time to “process the information sequentially” (Edwards). A multitude of syntactic, aural and thematic connections may be drawn upon and highlighted within Raworth’s poetry; each string of connections leads the reader in vastly different directions. Therefore both reader and critic alike must create and learn new techniques in order to successfully interpret or analyse one of Raworth’s texts. The role of the reader is no longer one of passive consumption but instead asked to take an active role in the construction of meaning.

In this paper I will concentrate on two, albeit long, poems *Writing* and *Catacoustics* and follow a number of threads pertaining to self-reflection and the use of repetition. I will anchor this paper to the Greek myth of Narcissus and Echo, steering away from the interpretation that foregrounds vanity I will concentrate instead on how self-reflection is integral to the lyric form. I will continue to explore how Raworth’s unique fragmented lyric is concerned with the split between the actual and the perceived and is tied to the uncanny reflected self, which is both self and other. Narcissus and Echo suffer a similar fate, in that both are trapped in endless repetition. Within *Writing* and *Catacoustics*, Raworth explores and draws together myriad of forms of repetition, reflection and echo, highlighting the fact that every reflection of perception, aural and visual, is not a figment “to one side or not real” (Raworth); instead his “poems will show... that is it real, that it does exist” (Raworth). This paper will focus much needed critical attention on two of Raworth’s seminal works and suggest a way of engaging with his complex practice, highlighting a single thread in order to “see the words try / to explain what / is going in there” (Raworth)

### **Only More So,** *Tony Lopez*

I would like to report on an Arts Council England funded creative project, a book-length collaged poem entitled ‘Only More So’. This work-in-progress uses my own development of the ‘New Sentence’ method of composition described in Silliman (1987), which is derived from Gertrude Stein’s writings, especially the non-narrative processes she used in *Tender Buttons* (1914) and *How to Write* (1931).

Unlike other recent examples of ‘New Sentence’ books (such as Hejinian’s *My Life*, 1980 and Silliman’s *Tjanting*, 1981), my project is information rich, eschewing the autobiographical focus of American ‘Language’ writers but learning from them the ‘New Sentence’ texture of non-narrative generative composition and aimed at producing a work which allows the reader to engage on many different levels. My project is composed by collecting and editing sentences from a wide range of non-literary sources and assembling them into prose sections. The book is built up as a modular sequence and will be 100 sections when complete.

I have been working for some time with a variety of source materials to make collaged works in various verse forms, where the sentence is the unit of composition, and the combination of registers within sentences and beyond provides for the possibility of a whole variety of emotional responses. The sentences are combined in non-consecutive arrays from which the reader will always construct a kind of continuity of theme and purpose with a developing sense of resonance and self-reference within the work. The writing is experimental in its processes but the aim is not to display a crude, unfinished or difficult

surface, on the contrary, I am aiming at a prose with the kind of finish, compression and ease of reading achieved in the verse writing in my book *False Memory* (1996, 2003). If sufficient care is taken in composition, the reader naturalises the collaged text and incorporates its particular aesthetic qualities, making connections and developing their own priorities of significance and thematic coherence.

‘Only More So’ employs a wide range of source materials such as the popular science journals *Nature*, *New Scientist* and *Scientific American*, and specialist non-fiction literature in for example history, ecology, medicine, archaeology, psychology, pharmacology, art, literary theory, architectural history, music, teacher education, sociology, environmental science, evolution and genetics, management, holocaust studies, marketing, meteorology and linguistics. There is a build up across sections of materials from the same and similar sources and the reader will recognise non-identical repetition and variations of language at some remove. The effect is a level compositional field of language in which specialised elements are presented seemingly without hierarchical organisation or imposed control.

My aim in this paper is to provide a report on a work-in-progress, presenting original work and identifying questions and methods relevant to many creative projects.

### **Reading Prynne Aloud: Constraint, Orientation, Form**

*Lacy Rumsey*

If J.H. Prynne is now a much-discussed poet, most analysis of his work focuses on the highly difficult conditions it creates for interpretation; much less consideration is given to its rhythm, or to other aspects of its prosody. This is despite the fact that there are many reasons to consider Prynne’s poems as texts for reading aloud as well as in silence. The proposed paper will constitute the second of two linked studies considering Prynne’s work from the point of view of its prosody. The first, whose journal publication is forthcoming, focuses on the way in which the shape and movement of Prynne’s poetry may be analysed in terms of stanza-by-stanza changes (at a very general level) in its probable intonational characteristics when read aloud, overlaid by local rhythmic effects. This proposed paper forms the interpretative counterpoint to the predominantly aesthetic focus of that first study, and inquires into how the prosodic choices which face any reader of Prynne’s work are experienced, and what particular pressures Prynne’s text may bring to bear on its readers.

Simon Jarvis has argued that Prynne’s deletion of syntactic orientation points constitutes an attempt to deprive the work of what the poet himself calls “vantage”, and thereby push it towards a “standpoint of universality” - albeit in the knowledge that “no single individual can ever stand there”. The paper will investigate the possible *prosodic* consequences for readers of the categories of vantagelessness, or universality, and of the difficulty of constructing a pragmatically coherent or comfortable situation from within which to read Prynne’s poetry aloud.

In order to address this issue adequately, the paper will draw (briefly) on phonology and discourse linguistics, using in particular the concepts of *oblique and direct orientation* (terms introduced by David Brazil, the latter of which corresponds to an attempt to perform a text from within the discourse situation that may be inferred from it). It will argue that, unless we want to read Prynne as if his poetry were what one linguist calls ‘lists of boring sentences’, we are likely to find ourselves obliged to take a position on the discourse situations implied by his poems, however opaque or inaccessible these may seem. It will then seek to describe the particular pragmatic pressures that the reader of Prynne may be under, using the example of texts from the volume *Her Weasels Wild Returning* (1994). These poems, with incomplete syntax and mysterious neologisms, induce an awkward identification of reader and implied speaker; the reader must enter the pragmatics of a

situation he or she does not understand, and make rhythmic and intonational performance decisions on the basis of incomplete and conflicting evidence. The reader's relationship to the text is one that, in prosodic terms, may be characterised less by universality than by constrained and partly-understood individualities; the discomforts, as well as enrichments, that this relationship may bring are what most characterises the experience of reading Prynne aloud.

## **PANEL 2A**

### **Criticism or Credulity? The Later Poetry of Geoffrey Hill**

*Thomas Day*

Orthodox arcane

interpreters of repute,  
this is understood.  
Why should I hear  
further what you propose?

Exegetes may come  
to speak the silence  
that has arisen. It is  
not unheard of.  
(‘Scenes from Harlequins’, *Canaan*)

At a time when Geoffrey Hill's reputation increasingly precedes him, criticism of his work seems in acute danger of being suffocated by ‘the strong whiff of orthodoxy’ and ‘consensus of praise’ which David Gervais diagnosed in a collection of essays on his earlier work; and while Hill likes to tauntingly turn the tables on such a passive assimilation of his poetry, the alternate petulant egotism and mock modesty with which he contemplates critical reception suggests the whiff ultimately emits from him. Hill's poetry is especially resistant to the kind of Empsonian-Ricksian silence-speaking close-reading to which it might seem most friendly (Ricks even reads the line ‘Hyphens are not-necessary for things I say’ from *Scenes from Comus* as a playful rebuke to his seminal essay on ‘At-one-ment’ in Hill). When in *The Triumph of Love* (1998) Hill asks ‘Who can now tell what was taken, or where, / or how, or whether it was received: / how ditched, divested, clamped, sifted, over- / laid, raken over, grassed over, spread around’ is he also thinking of how his poem will be received, the act of criticism an implicit desecration of the poem's memory? Perhaps, but he is asking (or is he telling?), and there is also space in the poem for a collaborative understanding of the relationship between poet and critic whereby the former may follow the latter's lead, valuing what others can teach him about his own mind: ‘I came late / to seeing that. Actually, I had to be / shown it’. In *Speech! Speech!* (2000), whose jacket image is a Daumier lithograph depicting an easily pleased audience who might stand for the uncritical critical approval Hill expects his book to come up against (though its Günter Grass epigraph alludes to unexpected applause), Hill speaks as a serpentine devil's advocate egging on his reader, with a fine line between encouragement and taunting, to ‘UN- / HINGE YOUR JAW, DO IT LIKE A PYTHON’, presumably by swallowing it whole. But far from credulous consumption, swallowing it whole might be the most difficult thing for a reader to do with a Hill poem,

scrupulous attention to detail sometimes a convenient way of disguising an inability to tease out the larger inference.

Hill's work poses particular problems for the arcane interpreters of the academy, problems which can both ratify their *raison d'être* and throw it into question. In interviews he has expressed irritation at being pigeonholed as an intellectual poet, and, perhaps with a silent slight to scholars busy carving out shelf space for him in university libraries, has singled out Andy Fogle's review of *Speech! Speech!* on the *Popmatters* website as the best he had ever received, celebrating the atmosphere of critical diversity and freedom the internet has enabled. Such statements are awkward to reconcile with moments in the poetry, not entirely attributable to personae, which scorn 'the world-surfing quote research / unquote of your average junk-maestro' (*Speech! Speech!*); or which – less welcoming of critical divergence when it goes against him – rage against the 'desolation of learning' (*The Triumph of Love*) characterizing the criticism of his work, doing little to change the prevailing view that Hill's erudition aims to intimidate the non-academic reader (as well as the academic one, who serves his purpose out of fear of similar treatment, or so we are asked to believe.)

This paper means to address to some of the seeming contradictions in Hill's approach to the criticism of his work; to consider the parts played by 'predicate acclaim' (*Without Title*) and, on the other hand, by 'the antiphonal voice of the heckler' ('Redeeming the Time') which Hill sees as essential to good writing – the heckler nevertheless someone who must have paid his admission fee by buying in to the poetry; and to reflect on the future directions Hill criticism might take. 'My guess is that', Gervais surmised in 1984, 'we are on course for a celebratory *Festschrift* on Hill's sixtieth birthday that will be just as bland as the one offered to Philip Larkin on his, full of that sort of cosy deference which so easily neutralises what it means to honour. That process has already begun for Hill though I still hope this forecast will be proved wrong'. It hasn't been, *Agenda* duly hosting the *Festschrift*, with many more cosily honorific occasions since. Yet Hill's puzzling complicity in this process is accompanied by a distance from and distaste for it, and when in *Scenes from Comus*, his *Festschrift* (for a friend the same age as him), he looks forward 'thirty years until H. M. commands / a small obstruction for mantelpiece', seeing himself 'around the grinning cake', you sense his relish in throwing spanners in the works of the critical machinery that surrounds him and his poetry. Though I do not find the celebratory note wholly hollow here, since I think we need to value Hill for what he teaches others about their own minds by affirming the untouchable uniqueness of his own.

### **"Ton Kairon Exagorazomeno": Redeeming Time in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill**

*Niamh Downing*

Spatiality operates as a scholarly lens through which to read late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century poetry. As Eric Falci points out in *The Concise Companion to Postwar British and Irish Poetry* one indication of the "importance" of the spatial turn in "current critical theory is that it does not need to be emphasised any more, it has submerged itself within various intellectual discourses and fields, and at present is as much a framework for thinking as a topic of it" (202). However, the "importance" of this "critical tool" might also indicate the conceptual and discursive *dominance* of spatial thinking, which I argue, has "submerged" or occluded discussions of time and temporality in contemporary poetry, unless under the auspices of history. I draw on recent work by philosopher Giorgio Agamben in *The Time That Remains*, which reasserts the importance of thinking 'time' for contemporary politics and poetics, through a philological exegesis of Paul's Letter to the Romans and Walter Benjamin's philosophy of history, both of which exhort us to "redeem the time". The possibility that language might "redeem the time" has

similarly occupied the physical and “*moral landscape[s]*” of the poetry and prose of Geoffrey Hill, from the early essay entitled “Redeeming the Time”, to the poet’s concern with temporality and history in *The Triumph of Love* (LI). As Christopher Ricks suggests in *True Friendship*, “what it might mean to ‘redeem the time’” is as important for Hill as it was for Eliot, “even if they disagree about just what it would be to fully comprehend” (25) such a redemption in poetic form. While many critics have noted this concern with “redeeming the time” in Hill’s work, like Ricks, none pursue in any depth “what it might mean”, or where it is the object of discussion, time is subsumed under the concept of history. In “Redeeming the Time”, Hill suggests that the “vocation” of the nineteenth-century poet “was to redeem the time” (108), and C.D. Blanton detects a similar poetic vocation in *Mercian Hymns* where “the substance of history itself” is offered up to poetry, thus “constituting the possibility of a writing that redeems the time [and] imposing on the poet a responsibility toward a past which lingers as the immanent raw material of present forms” (“Nominal Devolutions: Poetic Substance and the Critique of Political Economy” 144). Yet, as Agamben reminds us, history is not synonymous with time and “modern political thought” must “elaborate a concept of time that compares with its concept of history” (*Infancy and History*, 91) if it is to redeem time. This paper will attend to the concept of time in two long poem sequences by Hill in order to ascertain whether poetry similarly, can offer any possibility of “redeeming the time” or if the effect of language is always and already “not to redeem the time/but to get even with it.” (*Orchards of Syon* XVIII).

### **Suspensions: Seeking the “I” in Geoffrey Hill’s ‘Speech! Speech!’**

*Samira Nadkarni*

Geoffrey Hill’s ‘Speech! Speech!’ is a characteristic blend of cerebral poetry with what can only be described as rather cheeky satire, using performance as a theme and a technique by which to constitute a moral satire. This then raises important questions with regard to the voice of the performer, the self constituted within the poet’s search for authenticity. However, Hill’s use of the figure of the performer puts the “I” in question within the space of the poem. The “I” here is constituted neither by the poet, nor by the poetic persona; the poem, for all its pretence at spontaneity is a pre-written and edited piece of work, a fact acknowledged numerous times over the course of the poem. The performer’s role, as a performer – an actor – makes this “I” one that is uninhabited for all intents and purposes; a free-floating “I” that is non-subjective and thus cannot be seen as a single self. In this manner, the effacement within the poem is not merely Hill’s but also the effacement of his own poetic persona; a fact constantly underlined by the fragmentation of the poem, its repetition or recitation a constant re-marking of this subjective threshold, a tracing undergone even as it fails to be constituted.

As numerous critics have noted, Hill’s alignment with T. S. Eliot’s famous assertion that “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (T. S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’) assured the reader that the personal was evicted from his work whenever possible, resulting in “the fullest possible objectification of individual subjectivity” (Carl Phillips, ‘The Art of Poetry LXXX: Geoffrey Hill’), although recent studies claim that this position has softened, with the personal element mediated and inflected rather than absolutely effaced. Thus, this paper aims to consider whether Hill’s use of the performer in ‘Speech! Speech!’ is actually a softening of Hill’s own previous views, or whether the use of this figure results in

the potential for an effacement that would merely underline his previous stance. In doing so, this paper will make reference to notions of historicity, the prophetic and the subjective, and will draw on the works of Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida.

## **The Example of Geoffrey Hill**

*Bridget Vincent*

In 1981, Geoffrey Hill proposed that poetry “is an exemplary exercise”. In the intervening three decades, the figure of the exemplary poet and poem has become central to his conception of the ethical status of writing. That is, Hill has consistently sought to negotiate between a need for aesthetic autonomy and a desire to effect some (however indirect) kind of extraliterary influence, and the concept of the “exemplary” poem offers a means of articulating this tension. By definition, that which is “exemplary” is characterised at once by a Platonically-inflected element of ideality and self-sufficiency, and, at the same time, by an assumption of outward influence – to be an example is, ultimately, to be followed.

Exemplarity, this paper proposes, becomes an increasingly significant conceptual and procedural nexus in what might be called Hill’s “late style”. In his work at and after the turn of the century, ideas of exemplarity become especially important: his intensifying rehearsals of despair at the degradation of public language render the models offered by resistant figures from the past (and the exemplary influence of his own work in the present) increasingly necessary, and this sense of urgency is borne out in the increasing attention (both poetic and critical) he devotes to his exemplars.

His engagement with ideas of exemplarity constitutes, I will suggest, an historical development rather than a conceptual or heuristic constant: it provides a way of understanding the *evolution* of his career, and its most recent developments (and their attendant controversies) in particular. Accordingly, the paper combines close readings of later collections (with a particular emphasis on *A Treatise of Civil Power*) with analyses of contemporary prose writings. Further, as exemplarity forms part of a larger interest in poetic authority and the vexed status of the public poet, the study draws on changes in the extrapoetic exercises through which his civic profile has been shaped. Specifically, the discussion explores unpublished material from recently-released notebooks in the Geoffrey Hill Archive (Leeds University) in order to examine his contemporaneous activities as a public and pedagogical figure.

### **PANEL 2B**

#### **'Give your ears to this gabble-clinkered music': The contemporary Northern Irish sestina**

*Naomi Banks*

In the 1960s and 70s, the sestina was largely rejected by poets as an enemy of poetic freedom. Mark Evan Chimsky called such established verse forms 'secret agents of some odd form of New Math'. Paul Fusell's book on poetic form devotes just half a page to them, stating dismissively that, 'like many imported forms, the sestina, regardless of the way it is tailored, would seem to be one that gives more structural pleasure to the contriver than to the apprehender'. Margaret Spanos, beginning her exploration of the form in a 1978 article, concedes that it 'has often been objected that this highly intellectualized structure is an obstacle to clarity, strength of metaphor, and lyric inspiration.'

Forty years later, the situation has changed. In 2007, Stephen Burt was able to write that '[t]here seem to be a lot of sestinas lately'. However, the kind of sestina that Burt is talking about seems to be evidence for an almost overwhelmingly pessimistic account of modern poetry:

The sestina is a favored form now as it has not been since the 1950s, I contend, because it allows poets to emphasize technique and to disavow at once tradition, organicism, and social or spiritual efficacy. [...] This sense of artificiality, even arbitrary constraint, has fueled the sestina's appeal and suited it to describe poets' sense that their art as a whole corresponds to nothing much.

Burt's analysis of the sestina is wholly confined to American poetry. My paper turns its attention onto writing from contemporary Northern Ireland. Of the poets to have published their first collections since 2000, a number have written sestinas. Leontia Flynn has one in each of her two collections; Alan Gillis has two in his most recent volume; and Colette Bryce and Sinéad Morrissey both have a sestina in their latest books.

This paper will argue, through close analysis of the poems, that the use of the sestina in recent Northern Irish poetry is not an attempt to 'disavow tradition'; neither is it evidence of the sense of 'futility' that Burt finds in American poetry. Instead, the presence of the sestina within the work of these increasingly prominent writers suggests that a positive engagement with form is now essential to the way in which poetry might comment on, process, and commemorate contemporary experience: be it family relationships, personal loss, memories of the Troubles, abuse, or loss of innocence.

In further opposition to Burt's contention, I will seek to trace links with a distinctive Northern Irish tradition which has been rooted in a lively engagement with form, from the 'tight-assed trio' of Heaney, Longley and Mahon to the formal intricacies and subversions of Muldoon and Carson. The sestinas of this third generation of Northern Irish poets respond in a number of ways to the 'exploded sestinas' of Muldoon's 'Yarrow', as well as to the heritage of politically charged, critically aware poetry produced by preceding generations.

### **‘Sense in Sound’: The Musics of Don Paterson**

*Adrian Paterson*

Until recently the Scottish poet Don Paterson downplayed the connections between his musical and poetic activities. His second career as a jazz guitarist seemed to have little to do with the meticulous plotting of poetic lines. Yet in his recent collections *Landing Light* (2003), *Rain* (2009), and most especially in *Orpheus* (2006) (versions of Rilke sonnets), the intimacy of music and poetry in his thinking and practice is increasingly laid bare. This paper examines the origins of this intimacy and the consequences for his poetry, explaining how music and ideas about music directly affect the making and shaping of his verse, and teasing out the divergent ways in which music functions as a persistent theme. Paterson acknowledges but, in the light of his instrumental practice, deftly adjusts Rilke's orphic conceptions of poetry as song, and plays with music as a material and comic as well as mystic and revelatory force. Setting poems like traps he finds local connections between musical and poetic forms from refrains to fugues, but, crucially, exposes without sentiment the stark differences between their working mechanisms. Less concerned than many poets about an authentic 'voice' we can observe how his poetic variations connect with his jazz-influenced free variations on folk themes, even how the shape of his guitar makes it into concrete poems, but also how his recent rhythmic simplicity and tauter lines are affected by the example of Burns's transparent song-lyrics, not just his poems (which Paterson in his edition of Burns had kept scrupulously apart). All these operations of music thus help explain recent shifts in his poetic priorities. Paterson's handling of sound has always been acute but by consciously mapping aurality onto print and playing text against tessitura as he

increasingly does, Paterson meditates on the experience of art caught by the eye and ear and enriches our understanding of both. As well then as informing his own verse, Paterson's particular musical attention illuminates the work of a small coterie of poets like Ciaran Carson adept in both fields, and that larger swathe of poetic observers who perhaps only aspire to the condition of music. This attention tells us much about the position of a poem in a rapidly evolving media context; Paterson's matchless knowledge of musical and poetic performance underlines the contradictions of a contemporary milieu where readings, performances, and recordings function in an ambassadorial role for books, to reveal finally a great deal about the experiences and changing expectations of the audiences for music and poetry.

## **Lines long behind them: Ciaran Carson, Sinéad Morrissey and the Irish Poetic Line**

*John Raimo*

I propose to trace the evolution of the poetic long-line through Irish poetry until reaching Ciarán Carson and Sinéad Morrissey today. Both poets directly derive their technical practices and respective style from another Irish poet, namely Louis MacNeice (1907-1963). Yet all three poets draw upon the larger resources of British and American poetry dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and none of the three consistently deploys the long-line without a great deal of experimentation with various older and newer traditions. Indeed, any characteristically Irish long-line falls between these historical schools. From the Elizabethan „poulter“s measure“ and the traditional English ballad through Robert Lowth's lectures on Hebrew poetry (1787) and Christopher Smart's *Jubilate Agno* (1763) on to William Blake's *The Book of Thel* (1789) and Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855), the poetic line stretching past iambic pentameter provokes spirited debates about just what constitutes poetic rhythm and what distinguishes poetry from prose. Thereafter literary modernism indelibly frames any question of line length. T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) and Ezra Pound (1885-1972) together identified rhythm with a chosen, systematic practice: either the former's deliberate undercutting of conventional prosody with metrical feet or the latter's individual lines taken as whole units through musical cadence. MacNeice's career uniquely charts the possibilities between these two impulses. Precisely as a modernist then, he arrives at the flexible practices recognizably present in contemporary Irish verse. MacNeice's influence spreads before reaching Carson and Morrissey, however; Seamus Heaney and the American poet C.K. Williams are only two among many whose prose poetry and long lines explicitly build upon his earlier technical achievements. Carson's and Morrissey's long lines respectively begin with MacNeice before admitting such other influences and ranging further afield. Neither writer pauses at the same stage nor shows any sign of stopping. Carson continues to push syntax and traditional rhythms to the breaking points of narrative, dialogue, and near-reportage. In each new book of hers, Morrissey discovers new large-scale musical structures afforded by long-lines yet echoing the oldest poems of the English tradition. How either poet arrives at their most recent work has yet to be fully discussed.

For this paper, I will compare several theoretical approaches to the long line and conduct several close readings of rhythm in individual poems by MacNeice, Carson, and Morrissey. My readings of these two poets will draw upon both traditional prosody and the widely-accepted alternatives offered by the critic Derek Attridge (*The Rhythms of English Poetry*, 1982). I will seek to contextualize MacNeice within modernism as I sketch a distinctly Irish sense of the long-line. Primary attention will be paid to Carson's and Morrissey's debts to MacNeice; other contemporary poets such as Heaney and Williams will be discussed as time allows. Discussion will range over examples drawn from entire careers. Hopefully, the long-line will come to

suggest not only tradition's role throughout Irish poetry but also the possibilities open to younger poets today.

## **PANEL 2C**

### **“This is the underworld of the deliberately lost”: Jane Draycott’s modernist evasions.**

*Jack Baker*

This paper will argue that Jane Draycott’s oeuvre reveals an increasingly impersonal and latently modernist sensibility. From the narrow and intimate scope of her early work, the voices in her poems have become progressively distanced, physically, temporally or emotionally, from the experiences they relate; so that even private and individual themes are euphemised, or transferred onto an anonymous ‘he’. Though Draycott is no belated catechumen of modernist ideals – her work eschews the ‘continual extinction of personality’ advocated by T.S. Eliot – the elusive and impersonal voices of her later collections, set in ethereal landscapes and abstracted from the quotidian, manifest a clear debt to the modernist aesthetic.

*Prince Rupert’s Drop* (1999), the first and most personal of Draycott’s collections, is chiefly concerned with loss. In “Braving the Dark”, an elegy for her brother, the deceased, not those left to mourn him, is the object of consolation, and the reader becomes an intruder into private grief: ‘At last / we’re on our own’. But grief also obliterates the self: ‘I walk the dry hand of the earth and in that oven / burn away my name and the place that I was born’. Identity is further explored in *Tideway* (2002), a commissioned series of poems about the Thames, whose characters are uncertainly rooted in a river-world which is constantly shifting. These figures are transitory, glimpsed at the edges of landscapes, and they dramatise an insight previously explored by Wallace Stevens and William Carlos Williams, that watermen, and poets, shape their surroundings and are simultaneously shaped by them. A preoccupation with the individual’s response to place lingers on in *The Night Tree* (2004), facilitating a recognition, at times playful, of the strangeness of self-knowledge: ‘images of himself repeated in the candelabras / of his erections’.

As in Ezra Pound’s *Cathay*, the emotional forces of *Tideway* and *The Night Tree* are not invested in individual subjects; rather they inhere in delicate modulations of rhythm, in the mastery of rhyme and pararhyme, and in the capacity of the impersonal voice to universalise experience without trivialising it: ‘you have gone with the men who rode down / in the rain, into the past which is one place’. In *Over* (2009), these techniques are married to an increasing emphasis on light imagery both as a metaphorical pattern and as a source of lyric energy: ‘The pre-dawn galleries are darkened fields / where objects yield their store of buried heat’. Light, elusive and fragmented, reflects the fragmentary nature of experience, and like Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Draycott’s poems reveal mere shards of a persona. Her evasiveness is identifiably modernist in spirit, and reinforces a vision of the artist as singular, disconnected from the throng.

### **“The ex-poet’s beside herself”: Reading the End of Poetry**

*Neil Pattison*

This paper considers the work of two poets: Andrew Lawson, a little-known writer who last published original work in 1998; and the widely-known and esteemed Denise Riley, who ceased publishing new poems in 1993. It explores the ways in which these poets came up against an insuperable limit in their sense of poetic vocation, considering the end of their

poetry in relation to the dynamics between the coterie formations in which they worked and the broader social communities they addressed. The paper contextualises this relation in the history of lyric's address to power, arguing that their dilemmas and commitments, finally realised in their abjuration of lyric itself, profoundly express the external and internal pressures through which the British modernism of the late twentieth century worked.

**“Being an(d) Object: Ontology and Ethics in Tom Leonard’s *nora’s place* and Keston Sutherland’s *Stress Position*”**

*Robin Purves*

For more than forty years the poetry and critical prose of the Glasgow poet Tom Leonard has insisted upon the ethico-political necessity of preserving a sense of immediacy in and to presence and existence, a position with a number of impressive philosophical precursors, including Duns Scotus and Gabriel Marcel. This paper will offer a reading of Leonard's sequence *nora's place*, focussing mainly on the use of tense, syntax and prosody, in order to demonstrate the inextricability of these factors with the ontological concerns of the text and the result will be examined with two separate but related contexts in mind: Leonard's reception of the work of William Carlos Williams, and the influence of Heidegger's philosophy on the American poet George Oppen. The paper aims to examine the ethical impulse in Leonard to 'let what is present be what it is' and the technical means with which he tries to accomplish this feat; the paper will end with an examination of the baroque and violent metamorphoses orchestrated in Keston Sutherland's recent *Stress Position*, to outline the thinking behind an utterly contrary ethics and poetics which nonetheless emerges from a political outlook broadly compatible with that of Leonard.

**Overturing the laws of appearance: Barry MacSweeney's political poetry.'**

*William Rowe*

MacSweeney's directly political poetry comprises several books, especially *Black Torch*, *Jury Vet*, *Colonel B*, *Wild Knitting*. These are currently being removed from the MacSweeney canon by those who want to turn him into a pastoral poet. I claim, on the contrary, that these are among his best books, because they take poetic form to new limits which are the limits of what can be seen and comprehended: i.e. to a point where what is hidden by the air we breathe (system of appearances under late capitalism) might appear – a Shelleyan metaphor. I will show how Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, in its struggle with the limits of appearance and audibility in language, can be read as a critical entry to the politico-aesthetic territory of MacSweeney. The reluctance to include the political poems in the public image of one of the most talented British poets of the past 50 years has to do, among other things, with a gap in current discussions of poetry: specifically its relation with politics and social thought. In order to tackle that gap, I will draw on the work of Ernesto Laclau and Alain Badiou, but also on the debates about the political in poetry that occurred in the 1960s, particularly in the writings of Eric Mottram, to whom MacSweeney was close at the time of writing *Black Torch*.

## **PANEL 2D**

### **The ordinary otherness - the poetry of Fergus Allen**

*Joanna Blachnio*

The paper will consider the poetry of Fergus Allen, one of the most extraordinary and original voices in contemporary Irish poetry. Born in 1921 to an Irish father and an English mother, Allen brought out his first collection of verse, *The Brown Parrots of Providencia*, in his seventies. His fifth book, *Before Troy*, will be published in late 2010.

While the notion of the poet as 'other' lies at the core of the practices of numerous authors, it seems particularly relevant in Allen's case – both because of his background and the characteristics of his diction. The paper will first briefly discuss the linguistic peculiarities of the poet who has consistently shown himself as fond of 'difficult' vocabulary: specialist jargon or words falling into disuse. It will then move on the discussion of various strategies for conveying the sense of 'otherness' in Allen's poetry. Some of these are deliberately conventional: the *topos* of the theatre and the practice of putting on masks, for instance, is systematically present from *The Brown Parrots of Providencia* onwards. Likewise, the poet frequently chooses exotic settings for his work. Rather than these conspicuous practices, however, one of the most original features of Allen's verse is the way he uses images of nature to communicate his own separateness. While he is most innovative when focusing on ordinary scenery, his version of the 'commonplace made strange' has little of the exuberance which has become a trademark of the Martian school in England. Allen looks at nature in a cool, detached fashion, showing an obsessive interest in its clandestine aspect, barely perceptible to the human eye. Recurrent in his work are images of fungi, insects, wild plants – forms of life which, existing in a seemingly barren, post-industrial environment, actually have the power of surreptitiously transforming it.

The paper will go on to consider the impact of the thus envisaged nature on human beings, and the position of humans against this 'clandestine nature'. Allen's poetry dismantles the Baconian idea of nature eventually becoming subordinate to man – while the boundary between landscape and human beings is often blurred, harmonious existence of the two does not follow. On the contrary, it is nature's quiet persistence that often proves most threatening to humans, who find they have to defend their position against the landscape's dynamic qualities. Eventually, Allen envisages a future where human beings may become eradicated by nature.

### **For the Birds: Flights of Fancy in Irish Women's Poetry**

*Maria Johnston*

'Poets have written about birds from the very beginning', writes Simon Armitage, himself a bird-watching enthusiast, in his newly-published anthology *The Poetry of Birds*. Since their dawn chorus first filled the air, birds have inspired human artistic life, and the landscape of Irish poetry has always been a bird-haunted one. Indeed, the emblem of the Seamus Heaney Centre itself is a blackbird that has flown from its ninth-century perch in 'The Lagan Blackbird' across the centuries – and across linguistic borders – into the poetry of contemporary writers such as Ciaran Carson and Heaney himself, by way of almost every Irish poet between. With his finely-tuned ornithological ear, Michael Longley is the pre-eminent avian poet but younger poets such as David Wheatley may also be read as keeping the bird-watching tradition in Irish poetry alive. A look at recent poetry collections by

Irish women poets – bearing titles such as *The Nowhere Birds* (2001) and *Wren Cantata* (2009) – indicates that these poets too are no strangers to the bird-world. The relationship between women poets and birds has always been an intimate one. As has been well-documented, beleaguered women writers the world over have long identified themselves with the image of the caged bird in addressing themselves to a male-dominated literary tradition. In her 1982 study *The Nightingale's Burden*, Cheryl Walker identifies the 'free-bird poem' as a distinct archetype in women's poetry in the United States before 1900. How Irish women poets continue to work with this trope into the present century is the concern of this paper. Whereas the bird-gazing Irish male poet concentrates on his feathered subjects with a keen eye and a sensitive listening ear, birds tend to flit in and out of poems by Irish women poets, never quite coming into close focus. Too often these are vague avian presences. Merely decorative, they are invoked as easy tropes and employed for romantic effect in a poetry that tends to idealise nature. Such poetry would surely fail to earn the end-credit disclaimer 'no animals were harmed'. Only a few Irish women poets, rarer aves, succeed in earning their bird-watching credentials. The ornithologist Tim Dee once likened the identifying of a bird with the making of a poem, and it is my contention that the lack of studied attention to the details of the birds themselves in this poetry is matched by a similar lack of attention to poetic technique, to the sound and movement of words and to the world beyond the poet's self in these poems. This paper will concern itself with how Irish women's poetry is becoming increasingly bird-ridden, even bird-witted, and, moreover, will consider how what might be termed a poetics of bird-watching may helpfully inform a critique of contemporary Irish women's poetry.

**'AS COLD AND AS HARD AND AS TEMPORARY AS FLIGHT': BIRDS IN SOME RECENT POETS OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND**

*David Wheatley*

Recent work by Kathleen Jamie, Alice Oswald, Andrew McNeillie, Peter Reading, Helen Macdonald, Jacob Polley, Jen Hadfield and others all lends weight to claims that nature writing is currently enjoying a revival. This paper proposes to identify and evaluate some of the strands in this revival, with particular reference to the treatment of birds.

'A bird of the air shall carry the voice, and those that have wings shall tell the truth', we read in Ecclesiastes, and in contemporary poetry too birds are frequently signs that are taken for wonders. But while the return to nature is a central component of much contemporary poetry, *whose* nature, and with what voice it speaks, are less transparent affairs. One line of demarcation among poets is between naturalists and shamans, those who stalk their quarry with binoculars and field-guides and those who unashamedly cross the species barrier, speaking for and from the non-human perspective. While Peter Reading writes from a self-consciously ecological position, e.g. in *-273.15*, for instance, he does so only by eschewing the more radical postures of identification with his subject we find in Helen Macdonald's *Shayler's Fish*.

How directly do these writers descend from Romantic traditions? Simon Armitage and Tim Dee's *The Poetry of Birds* (2009) places contemporary nature writing squarely in that line. Alice Oswald's most obvious debt is to Ted Hughes, and behind Hughes, Lawrence and John Clare, placing her slightly askew of the more orthodox Wordsworthian line, while Macdonald (a trainer falconer and avian researcher) writes in the tradition of Cambridge avant-gardism. John Kinsella fuses nature writing, avant-gardism and activism, rejecting the commodification of animal life in our meat-eating culture as strenuously as he rejects the commodification of language, showing affinities with the radical theories of Peter Singer (*Animal Liberation*) and J.M. Coetzee's musings on the same themes in 'The Lives of Animals.' How collectively compatible are the carnivorous animism of Ted Hughes's work, the Catholic agrarianism of Les Murray, and the aforementioned radical postures of John

Kinsella? Which do we choose? What relative weighting do we give to questions of animal ethics and questions of aesthetics as we do so?

In his study *Poetic Animals and Poetic Souls*, Randy Malamud takes a harsh line with poets whose interest in the natural world he interprets as an unconscious reinscription of human dominionism, subjecting the animal kingdom to our needs and demands, however well-intentioned. More sensitive nature writing therefore, ironically or not, may find itself keeping its distance from the very animals it describes, since, in John Berger's words, 'The more we know [of animals], the further away they are'. The truest nature poetry, I will suggest in conclusion, and the poetry that gets closest to the animal world, is not that which blithely collapses this distance, but that which best inhabits it, best makes of the poem and in-between space, between the human and animal, and most honestly testifies to the essential strangeness of non-human life on earth.

### **PANEL 3A**

#### **Sound Reading: Don Paterson's Lyric Principle**

*Derek Attridge*

Don Paterson's two part-essay 'The Lyric Principle' articulates an uncompromising theory of the centrality of sound-patterning to the working of the lyric. While Paterson's argument emerges from the practice of the lyric poet, this paper will examine the claims it makes from the point of view of the reader. How do sound and sense relate to one another in the reading process? Are the poet's and the reader's interaction with the sounds of the language importantly different? How does Paterson's account connect with the long tradition of stylistic analysis, drawing on the insights of linguistic studies of phonetics and phonology, that has dealt with these issues? Does Paterson's own poetry exemplify his arguments, from the point of view of the reader? (His frequent use of half-rhyme will provide one example for discussion.) Could a computer – as Paterson claims – be programmed to write successful lyric verse?

#### **Contemporary Poetry and Stupidity**

*Natalie Pollard*

Using examples by Douglas Dunn and Geoffrey Hill, among others, this paper will consider poetry's capacity to stupefy, to strike dumb and/or physically immobile:

- 1) through the shock of well-designed rudeness/provocation;
- 2) through offering up striking moments of lyric beauty, in which one feels 'unable to grasp it' and powerless. A gesture at the otherness of beauty, that turns us aside, that is like Hill's 'brush with an alien being'.
- 3) through being 'difficult', working at the limits of the articulable and thinkable, playing on ignorance, complexity, the poverty of understanding, etc.

#### **The Lyric as Testimony**

*Antony Rowland*

The genre of testimony is still widely regarded as an unaesthetic form of written or oral attestation to historical suffering opposed to more self-consciously literary forms such as

poetry. Yet in their groundbreaking book on testimony, Felman and Laub focus on the work of Celan and Mallarmé: their invitation to further examine the poetics of testimony has not yet been fully explored. Susan Gubar contends that the lyric form cannot constitute testimony due to its truncated form, whereas I argue that late modernist and postmodernist lyrics – as opposed to realist prose (and verse) – appear more adept at engaging with the confusion and ineffable experiences arising from events of suffering. Reading the lyric (and lyrical) as testimony also entails an adjustment in the ways in which we traditionally respond to poems, due to the pressure of the metatext, the demanded hyper-attentiveness of the reader, and a paradox of identification that often draws the reader towards identifying with the poet's experience, but then reminds them of its sublimity. I shall refer to the work of the UK soldier-poet Jack Bevan, who – in the 1960s – reflects on his traumatic war experiences in the poem 'Ubique'.

### **PANEL 3B**

#### **A few ancient faces /detach and begin to circle': Thomas Kinsella and feminine archetypes.**

*Andrew Browne*

This paper will explore Thomas Kinsella's usage of feminine archetypes in *Notes from the Land of the Dead* (1972). This collection, in particular the section of six poems beginning with 'Hen Woman', introduce a variety of characters from Kinsella's past as reflected through his own psyche; or, in other words, representations from his psyche of the impact of these people on his early childhood. Kinsella's explorations connect thematically and structurally to modern psychology and in particular the work of C. G. Jung but also relate to certain theories of Jacques Lacan and Paul Ricoeur. The representations of Kinsella's great aunts, father and grandmother structure the majority of this poetry, but it is a development of female archetypal imagery through the representations of certain old women from his youth, in particular his grandmother, that gives these poems their strength. These images are first encountered in 'Nightwalker' and 'Phoenix Park'. The poems in *Notes from the Land of the Dead* develop the archetypal significance of the grandmother figure within the poet's psyche while also exploring the impact of immediate experience and drawing wonderful connections between the two.

#### **'Before Elegy: In love with Carson (Kinsella) and Muldoon'.**

*Matt Campbell*

It'll be about sickness and elegy - Carson's recent volumes, Kinsella's 'Phoenix Park' and Muldoon's cancer poetry - maybe even Grey Gowrie's transplant sequence 'Domino Hymn'. By 'before elegy', I make a sort of reference to Carson's recent book (Until Before After) but I also mean sequences which can't quite come to elegiac form because they follow an incomplete pattern of illness from its midst (or even in recovery); but also there is a sense of the love poem persisting against the refusal of elegiac form in these sequences - and indeed the retrospective imposition of other types of form, rhyming but also mathematical. There is something going on about tearing, tissue and cellular structure in all of these poems as well.

## **Making Vision Possible: The Body in Brendan Kennelly's *The Man Made of Rain*** *Katelyn Ferguson*

Brendan Kennelly wrote his poem sequence *The Man Made of Rain* after receiving quadruple bypass heart surgery in 1996. In his preface, Kennelly describes a number of visions that he had following the operation:

I saw a man made of rain. He was actually raining, all his parts were raining slantwise and firmly in a decisive, contained way. His raineyes were candid and kind, glowing down, into, and through themselves. He spoke to me and took me on journeys. His talk was genial, light and authoritative, a language of irresistible invitation to follow him wherever he decided to go, or was compelled by his own inner forces to go.

Later Kennelly frames the problem at the heart of his poem sequence as, chiefly, one of language: how can he use language, that system of human interaction by which our thoughts and feelings are actualized for the purposes of communication, to represent the surreal experience of his sickbed visions? He continues in the preface, reflecting on his motivation for writing the poem, "I wanted to see the dream absorb and transfigure its own violation by the real."

In this paper I will use a number of close readings to explore how Kennelly's post-operative body functions as a site of meaning in *The Man Made of Rain* in ways that have significant implications for his use of language. Rather than framing his visions as moments of escape from his "Hacked, bruised, foul" body, Kennelly presents them as experiences of heightened embodiment. I will give examples how Kennelly plays with traditional representations of the body in space in order to conceptualize various physical and emotional traumas. I will then describe how Kennelly uses shifts in metre and the sequential structure of the poem to mimic the physical changes and dislocations that coincide with his recovery. As his bruises change from red to blue to yellow, as his wounds throb and swell and ooze, and as the sounds of his heartbeat and hospital room resonate in his skull, Kennelly's healing body helps him to understand the spectacular, unbounded, flowing presence of the man made of rain.

Language operates in *The Man Made of Rain* in much the same way as the body does, as an imperfect medium through which Kennelly registers and shares his visions with difficulty. Ultimately, I will suggest that *The Man Made of Rain* is a celebration of how language is complicated, recovered, and vitalized through its continued use in spite of its shortcomings. I will point to the implications that this *homage* to language, captured beautifully in *The Man Made of Rain* through the metaphor of the healing body, has for our understanding of Kennelly as an Irish poet with an interest in history and social change.

## **'Remembering the Poets': Michael Longley and Greek Lyric Poetry** *Florence Impens*

Many poets writing in English, in Ireland and in the UK, have been looking towards Greece and Rome as a source of inspiration for their work, leading recently to a classical revival after the disinterest in the classics in the first half of the twentieth century. In Ireland, writers

as diverse as Brendan Kennelly, Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon, who started to publish in the 1960s, have all since drawn from classical literature in their work.

Michael Longley, who received a strong classical education at the Royal Academical Institution in Belfast and then in Trinity College, Dublin is probably one of the best known Irish poets to be influenced by the classics. Since the publication of *Gorse Fires* in 1991, Longley has repeatedly engaged with Greek and Latin writers in his work. His Homeric and Ovidian poems have been widely studied and continue to attract critical attention, but little has been said about Longley's unique engagement with lesser known texts. His fascination for what is often called minor poetry –a label he would certainly reject- is still being neglected.

The proposed paper focuses on a sequence of three poems in *Snow Water* (2004), 'Praxilla', 'Corinna' and 'The Group', based on Longley's reading of the fourth volume of *Greek Lyric*, an anthology edited by David A. Campbell in the Loeb series (1992). Here, Longley appropriates the work of poets long forgotten, whose existence is known only to specialists and through fragments. How does he face up to the challenge of reviving those poets for a lay readership living in the third millennium? How does he argue for their inclusion in the canon of western literature, along with Homer and Virgil? A reader turned poet, Longley writes from a very personal sense of connection with the classics, with an eye on the original texts rather than on the tradition. He informally converses with dead authors as he would with living companions, and this feeling of immediacy is both articulated in images and in the process of rewriting. The classical fragments are brought back to imaginative life and brought home as they focus on domesticity and are taken into Longley's poetic world. Minute textual analyses reveal how Longley closely translates fragments taken from the anthology to re-organize them within the context of his own poems, making up for their incompleteness as he weaves them with his own lines. A restorer of textual mosaics, Longley in this sequence recreates a colourful image of the classical world, whose vividness recalls Louis MacNeice's 'crooks, (...) adventurers, (...) opportunists, (...) careless athletes' and 'fancy boys' whom he opposed to the 'paragons of Hellas' in *Autumn Journal*. Both classicists, the two poets move away from canons and textbooks to offer an original vision of antiquity and redress the simplified representation of Greece and Rome as stilted *exempla* of reason and order. My paper will conclude on this comparison.

### **PANEL 3C**

#### **'Women Poets and the Irish History Wars'.**

*Dr Catriona Clutterbuck*

This paper explores the engagement by Irish women poets with the impacted opposition between revisionist and counter-revisionist (or, post-colonial) approaches to Irish history, a conflict that has dominated Irish Studies in the past half century. Using the work of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Eavan Boland, the paper argues that women's poetry conceptualises a newly generative model of relations between the antagonists in this debate, whereby their respective approaches can be brought to bear on the project of understanding the past, together rather than separately. Given that poems concerned with history particularly focus the necessity for self-reflexive awareness by the writer of his or her processes in the acts of representation and witness, poetry becomes a key arena where the value of such methodological sharing can be proven. The poetry of Boland and Ní Chuilleanáin suggests a way

through the Irish history wars by refocusing the debate on Irish historiography through the question of gender.

### **'Towards A New Confessionalism'**

*Jane Dowson*

So-called 'confessional' poetry has a tricky history of critical responses that are muddled by psychology, religion and a conflicted Anglo/American divide. In 'Getting Poetry to Confess' (2001), the contemporary lyric poet Claire Pollard examines the enduring appeal of public exposure of private suffering and calls for a 'New Confessionalism' that will reclaim poetry's potential readership. The paper offers a critical grammar that rehabilitates the work of Plath or British postwar poets such as Elizabeth Jennings and that can apply to contemporary poets, such as Gwyneth Lewis or Pascale Petit.

### **'The visual aesthetic in Lynette Roberts, Stevie Smith, and Liz Lochhead'**

*Will May*

This paper will apply W.J.T. Mitchell's theories of ecphrasis and iconology to three poets who all, at various points in their careers, considered themselves painters or artists, examining how the failure of language to represent experience is mitigated by their emphasis on the visual. Lynette Roberts' Primitivist paintings illuminate useful modernist contexts for reading poems such as 'Brazilian Blue'; the sources for Stevie Smith's own sketches or "higher doodling" offer revealing new contexts for her poetry; Liz Lochhead trained as a painter at the Glasgow School of Art and her work preoccupies itself with visual tropes. Through close attention to Roberts, Smith, and Lochhead, the paper will also shed light on the ecphrastic poetry of Elizabeth Jennings, U.A. Fanthorpe, and Carol Ann Duffy.

## **PANEL 3D**

### **SIMON ARMITAGE'S CHANGES OF PLACE**

*Ian Gregson*

In *Gig*, describing a reading tour of the USA in November 2005, Armitage explains an anxiety he feels when performing outside Britain, about how the poems will 'translate'. The problem is not linguistic when the audience is American, but geographical:

many of the poems are based in one particular village, looking out of one particular window, and at the time they were written had no ambitions beyond the visible horizon. Will the Yorkshire Moors and the motorway between Leeds and Manchester hold much meaning or interest for an audience in the American South? (p. 104)

His reading starts with 'The Shout' which he says has become a sort of 'signature tune' because it encapsulates so much of his own personal style. Armitage's account of the poem's

background is therefore especially telling because he regards it as having a representative significance, emphasising the links between the poem and Armitage's native origins:

There's one small geographical reference in the poem that will be meaningless to all but a few and is worth a quick mention. Most of the houses in the village of Marsden are down in the bottom of a natural geographical bowl, with one notable exception. Fretwell's Farm sits on top of Binn Moor, way above every other dwelling. The apex of the roof and the chimney pot are just about visible from the picture window of my mum and dad's front room. And at night, so is the light in the farmyard. The Fretwells don't live there any more - in fact the true name of the farmstead is Acre Head. But when I was a boy, and it got dark, and the black of the night sky and the black of the moor merged into one unbroken backcloth of darkness, that light used to shine like a star, and people talked about Fretwell's farm as if it were a constellation - something you could steer a course by if you were lost and heading for home. (p. 106)

I have quoted that passage at length because it evokes so vividly a key aspect of Armitage's sensibility, his very concrete and particular sense of place, which is felt by readers of his poems as a constant presence, the sense that a high proportion of his writing has a very specific setting with its own parameters. It is an abiding specificity and by his own account here it has its source in his native origins, and it reveals as mistaken one major part of his personal image, especially his early image, as a 'whizzkid', because it reveals that a crucial part of his sensibility is retro in its adherence to the place where he was born and grew up. A major component of the postmodern is a geographical restlessness involving the idea, for example, that economies have changed so that they require mobile workforces, no-one has a job for life, and everyone must be prepared to shift regularly to seek work. The idea of stable, small communities, in which everyone knows everyone else and where most people spend their whole lives, is supposed to be a thing of the past. Yet Armitage is a thoroughly contemporary writer whose adherence to a single, native place plays a key role in his work.....

### **Beyond Explanation: The Radical Challenge of the Everyday in the Poetry of Michael Donaghy .**

*Ahren Warner*

In the opening soliloquy of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, the protagonist scorns academia: "Is, to dispute well, logic's chiefest end?/Affords this art no greater miracle?/Then read no more...". In this paper I will suggest that the poetry of Michael Donaghy begs similar questions of the contemporary academic. For, if logic as the process of reasoning is the academic's stock in trade, Donaghy's work seems representative of much of the best contemporary poetry in offering the reader something that does not require the all-too-familiar academic process of deductive explanation. Indeed, the critic Hugh Kenner bemoaned the tendency of post-war British poetry towards the "easy book"; the book which, unlike his preferred poets such as Pound or Bunting, did not require the critic's explicative powers to facilitate the reader's comprehension and thus - the logic goes - enjoyment. Rather than accept this view, one still popular among the Academy, I want to suggest that the poetry of Michael Donaghy offers up a radical challenge to the critical reader. This challenge is the presentation of poetry which, in its use of what MacNeice would call 'ordinary life', produces affect

in the reader which is not reducible to, or definable by, logical or semantic explanation. Rather, I will argue that the affect of poetry such as Donaghy's is produced via work which escapes or subverts the bounds of logical explication. Martin Heidegger locates an abyss at the heart of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Showing the Kantian system of reason to be underpinned by the faculty of imagination, he writes: "How can sensibility as a lower faculty be said to determine the essence of reason?... Can the primacy of logic disappear?". Similarly, I will argue that the "Blarney Stone" bar at the beginning of Donaghy's 'A Repertoire' or the action of "Intoning the Christian names of the Andrews Sisters" in 'Shibboleth' subvert the "primacy of logic" by invoking affective experiences that the reader shares. Quite literally, by producing poems whose affect depends on the reader's own memory of the poems' subject-matter, the work of Donaghy can be seen to erase the boundary between subject (reader) and object (poem); the boundary that Julia Kristeva describes as the "precondition... of propositionality". Such erasures of the subject-object boundary, the beautifully affective shift between the everyday phrase "something in his blood" and the everyday fear of "cancer" towards the end of 'A Repertoire' or the sublime metaphor of the "racer's twelve-speed bike" in 'Machines' are all examples of a kind of affect which stumps the academic's normal process of reasoning. By arguing that the problem lying at the heart of the relationship between academia and contemporary poetry such as Donaghy's is not that the poetry is too 'easy' but that the affect of such poetry is radically difficult for the critic to approach, I hope to place the emphasis on contemporary poetry as offering a new and formidable challenge; a challenge which it should be the critic's duty to attempt.

### **'For whom should I build?': Place and Self in Basil Bunting**

*Alex Wylie*

Basil Bunting occupies a peculiar place in the history of twentieth-century poetry. Learning his craft from Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky, he is a product of that Poundian-Objectivist strand of modernism which has had such an influence on American poetry; as a Northumbrian Quaker, he places great aesthetic and moral importance both in the individuality of voice and the celebration of locality. The balance of influence is between high modernist deracination and internationalism, and a stubborn regionalism which Bunting equates with autobiography: for Bunting, the individual voice is a rooted voice. In crucial ways, he reacts against Pound's *Cantos* while feeling their gravitational pull (as 'ON THE FLY-LEAF OF POUND'S CANTOS' suggests), seeing *Homage to Sextus Propertius* as a more fruitful model for poetic voice, cultural rootedness, and historical collage. The paper will also examine what is meant by Bunting's 'neo-modernism' in the context of the Poundian influence and the drive toward the celebration of the regional rather than the catholic.

Further to this, Bunting repeatedly resituates modernist poetry from cosmopolitan to rural settings, testing the possibility of the pastoral within the modernist aesthetic; in this way, Pound's *Homage to Sextus Propertius* (1919) is 'translated' into Bunting's 'Chomei at Toyama' (1932). This is in part symptomatic of Bunting's political and religious opposition to urban capitalism, and in part an extension of his project to subvert high modernist uses of voice and setting. Focusing mainly on *Briggflatts* and 'Chomei at Toyama', the paper explores Bunting's position in Anglo-American poetry of the twentieth century, his reassessment of Poundian modernism, his equation of landscape and autobiography, and his project to snatch pastoral from the jaws of modernist irony and apocalypse, whilst exploring the possibilities of that very movement.

## **PANEL 4A**

### **'The voices of my education': the origins of Seamus Heaney's poetics**

*John Dennison*

It has been recognised that Seamus Heaney's poetics are most consistently and centrally concerned with poetry's adequacy in the face of history's violence — what he has insisted on as poetry's responsible, autonomous answer. Reasonably enough, some have assumed that this long-standing theme originates in Heaney's experience of poetic response to the Northern Ireland conflict. While the Troubles is unquestionably a crucible for Heaney's emerging poetics, his ideal of adequacy, and the conceptual structures and humanist commitments of his poetics, properly originate prior to 1969 in Heaney's education at Queen's University. In this paper I detail the significant extent to which his later poetics are indebted to the largely humanist literary criticism read by Heaney as an undergraduate, including work by Eliot, Sidney, Lawrence, Daiches, Leavis, and Arnold. Heaney's preoccupation with poetry's oppositional relation to quotidian existence, his expectation that poetry offer some ameliorative response to that reality, and the language of adequacy all have strong sources in this reading. As well as material drawn from interviews and retrospectives, I consider Heaney's manuscript notes for his Honours English course, drawing attention to particular conceptual and idiomatic antecedents to the later poetics. In light of such evidence, I argue that thorough comprehension of the structure, ideals and character of Heaney's later poetics, including the high poetics of his Oxford period, requires that we recognise the foundational significance of his undergraduate education in literary criticism.

### **In 'the stillness of long evenings' : Seamus Heaney's Poetry since 2006.**

*Michael Parker*

Five months after the launch of his last major collection, *District and Circle*, in August 2006, Seamus Heaney suffered a stroke while on a visit to Donegal. This talk will introduce and explore the poems written in the aftermath of this episode, including the work published in the *Irish Times* in April 2009 to mark the poet's 70th birthday. The principal focus of this paper will be on *The Riverbank Field*, a short sequence that appeared in 2007 in a limited edition from the Gallery Press. In this Heaney exhibits once more his undiminished powers of lyric inventiveness. Conjuring memories of family members, neighbours, bus journeys, book-buying expeditions, its speaker shuttles back in time to a past 'long since vacated/ Yet returnable to'.

Amongst its recurring literary points of reference are Virgil's *Aeneid* Book VI, in which the hero Aeneas descends into the Underworld in search of his lost father, and his *Eclogues*, which, like Heaney's closing poem, speaks of 'an age of births'. The paper will conclude discussing how Heaney's poetry continues to be energised by acts of translation - cultural, temporal, spatial, linguistic, above all, imaginative.

## **“You Hardly Notice As You Move: Sound Patterns in Recent Sonnets”**

*Meg Tyler*

Sonnet writers in the twenty-first century, like their predecessors, must face the challenge of being both novel and natural. What strategies do contemporary poets like Alice Oswald and Seamus Heaney use in recent poems to carry on a conversation with the tradition and in which ways do they depart from it? In “Wood Not Yet Out” (*Woods etc.*, 2005), the British poet Alice Oswald, with a nod to John Clare, uses seven rhyming couplets where there is “closure between each pair, so it’s not all entangled together.” What prevents the rhyming couplets from feeling stagnant or too rote are the enjambed lines, the syntax that shifts its weight over eight lines and then six, forming two sentences (the second of which has no closing punctuation) strung across the architectural frame. In sonnets such as “A Shiver” (*District and Circle*, 2006), Seamus Heaney upsets our rhyming expectations by placing some rhyming pairs at the beginning rather than at the end of the line. A Petrarchan rhyme scheme haunts “A Shiver,” and in a traditional Petrarchan sonnet the octave and sestet often conduct actions that are analogous to the actions of contraction and release in the muscular system. The one builds up pressure, the other releases it. The physical release narrated in “A Shiver,” however, is not necessarily liberating; has the promise of the sonnet, to offer resolution, been compromised? In my paper I will discuss these turns in sonnet-making and consider the direction the sonnet is moving in today.

### **PANEL 4B**

#### **‘The god tracks converge’: Peter Riley and the poetics of place**

*Neal Alexander*

Peter Riley is often associated with the Cambridge School of avant-gardist poetry and has long been active in the small press scene, yet his work also engages with and adapts the traditional genres of lyric and pastoral. Riley’s poetry occupies a sort of ‘middle ground’ between the mainstream and neo-modernist experiment, but is perhaps most notable for its treatments of place and space, sifting the landscapes it encounters for their layers of social and imaginative significance. This paper will focus upon his depictions of the North Staffordshire Peak District in the long poem *Alstonefield* (2003), which develops a peripatetic aesthetic for exploring the complex relationships between self and place, their mutual implication and co-construction. Riley’s poetry illustrates Jeff Malpas’s contention that place is ‘that within and respect to which subjectivity is itself established’. His personae call the unity and coherence of lyric subjectivity into question by self-consciously foregrounding the performativity of identity, demonstrating its essential provisionality. And there is an important parallel here with his representations of place, which is typically understood not as a bounded, stable locus but as an open field of convergences and inter-

relations. As Edward Casey has it, ‘place is not entitative – as a foundation has to be – but eventmental, something in process’. I argue that this conception of place in terms of processes and convergences is exemplified in *Alstonefield* via the trope of the night walk, as Riley’s narrator wanders half-purposefully through a landscape defamiliarised by darkness and moonlight. As he does so the poem’s meandering meditations on topography, history, memory, and loss braid together elements of autobiography and surreal fantasy, travelogue and philosophical speculation. The result is, in Riley’s words, ‘something better than pastoral’.

### **‘Dreaming of the Islands’: The Poetry of the Shipping Forecast**

*John Brannigan*

This paper examines poems which make reference to the Shipping Forecast, as broadcast by BBC Radio Four, including poems by Seamus Heaney, Carol Ann Duffy, Sean Street, Andrew McNeillie, and Andrew Waterman. The aim of the paper is to consider how both the radio broadcast and the poems it inspired conceptualise the cultural geography of the British Isles. If culture is, as Wendy James has argued, ‘adverbial’ rather than ‘nominal’, what kind of cultural geography of the Isles is practised in the poems which draw upon the forecast’s daily and nightly ritual of naming the sea areas around Britain and Ireland? How might this maritime and archipelagic imagination of the Isles be related to current post-devolutionary attempts to reconceive the British Isles, both politically and intellectually? All of the poems revel in the forecast’s litany of names such as Dogger, Fastnet, Lundy, Heligoland and Finisterre, for example, which do not evoke places so much as they imply ideas of untapped spatial and cultural possibility within the British Isles. Might there be a utopian dimension to some of these poetic visions of the archipelago? On the other hand, some of the poems juxtapose domestic and maritime settings, and dramatise a tension between the safe and comfortable houses or beds in which listeners enjoy the broadcasts, and the exoticised coastal margins of the Isles in which the forecasts may be merely the ‘cold poetry of information’.

### **Write off the map: Poetry of the British Isles and Topographical Notation**

*Amy Cutler*

This paper explores the links between cartography and British poetry, looking at the work of specific companies and cartographic producers alongside poetic writers. The writer James Clarence Mangan’s employment in the ‘Topographical Department’ of Ireland’s Ordnance Survey map will be a starting point for a consideration of poets’ responses to the handling of geographic information, followed by responses to the same Irish OS (by Ciaran Carson, Seamus Heaney and Eavan Boland). This is a topic with a long history: chorography is a particularly strong focus in literary studies of early modern writers, which is a period in which poets were often trained as surveyors. This paper is intended to give the same close attention to these relationships in the modern period, focussing on responses to the OS, including Douglas Oliver’s poem ‘Ordnance Survey Map 178’ (1969), Allen Fisher’s portrayal of the flummoxed Brixton surveyors in *Brixton Fractals* (1985), and Sean Borodale’s *Walking to Paradise* (1999), a set of 12 folding ‘maps’ of the Lake District modelled on the OS, but in the form of poetic text instead.

The first part of the paper will contextualise this by giving a brief history of the influence of the Americans Charles Olson and Ed Dorn on British poets, including an illustration of the cartographic documents they were using. The second part of the paper will consider the use of alternative (non-

OS) maps by British writers, such as Peter Riley's use of defunct lead mining maps of Derbyshire in *Tracks and Mineshafts* (1983) and Colin Simms' imagining of the false survey of the North West Passage imposed onto the Yorkshire landscape in *No North Western Passage* (1976). Through a survey of the use of diagrams, text and paratext, and different mapping traditions by these writers, I will show the usefulness of comparisons, not just in linguistic presentation of 'difficult topographies' which challenge the map in new ways, but also in the use of maps as an incentive to challenge textual writing in new ways and lead to new forms of experimentation with space, syntax and other poetic devices. My argument is that cartography and poetry are disciplines which continually can be shown to challenge and expand each other's parameters. This will necessitate close readings, and the paper will end with a reading of Peter Riley's *Sea Watches* (1991), illustrating its approach to the mapping of the movement of tides across a fractal Welsh coastline – including the final prose note 'Topographical Notation'.

#### **PANEL 4C**

##### **Sorley MacLean and the Modernist Long Poem**

*Peter Mackay*

Sorley MacLean's poem cycle 'Dàin do Eimhir' and his long poem *An Cuilithionn* are both – in quite different ways – fragmented and unfinished attempts to write an extended poetic work, in the manner of Eliot, Pound, Yeats and MacDiarmid. However, they are deliberately fragmented. Both reached a level of completion and coherence which MacLean subsequently wrote out of them: by removing individual poems from the 'Dàin do Eimhir' sequence, and by withholding most of *An Cuilithionn* from publication for almost fifty years. This paper will discuss the Modernist long poem as an inherently problematic form; it will also detail the context to MacLean's work, focusing in particular on the influence of MacDiarmid's poetry – and his friendship – and on that of Herbert Grierson, who taught MacLean at Edinburgh University. It will argue that the fragmentation of MacLean's long poems is in fact part of their achievement and is a tactic that helps MacLean position himself firmly within the Modernist canon.

##### **Bards and Radicals in Contemporary Scottish Poetry: Liz Lochhead, Jackie Kay, and an Evolving Tradition**

*Margery Palmer McCulloch*

In the early years of the twentieth century, literary scholars and critics felt able to define and/or argue over what they called *the* Scottish tradition in poetry. Today, and after the literary revolution begun by MacDiarmid in the post-WWI period, we are more aware that there are, and historically have been, several 'traditions' or 'tendencies' in Scottish poetry, even if they mostly share attributes that bring them together as recognisably 'Scottish'.

This paper will propose that one such developmental line within modern Scottish poetry is what one might identify as the bardic and radical tradition as seen in the work of Burns, MacDiarmid, and in our own time Morgan. It will argue, on the other hand, that in the poetry of the generation of writers who came after Morgan, this radical (both ideologically and aesthetically), bardic, and historically male approach to the poet's role has been taken over by female poets such as Liz Lochhead and Jackie Kay.

After an initial brief discussion of what is meant by the idea of a radical and bardic tradition, the paper will focus specifically on the poetry and drama of Lochhead and Kay,

showing how in the work of these two women writers this historical line of development in the national poetry of Scotland has evolved to meet the demands of a contemporary context of gender and global relationships.

#### **PANEL 4D**

##### **POETRY & TRANSLATION DURING THE COLD WAR:**

The Example of Miroslav Holub/

*Justin Quinn*

This paper will investigate the cultural transactions surrounding the poetry of Miroslav Holub, as it migrated from Czech to English in the 1970s and '80s, profoundly affecting the work of many major anglophone poets, above all Ted Hughes. First, I will outline the particular dynamic in the translation of his work (Holub declared that often English translations took precedence over the Czech originals). Second, I will trace the contours of his influence in English, exploring the presumptions and expectations that shaped his reception in anglophone poetry. Third, I will attempt to make general conclusions about the nexes of poetry, translation and politics, on the basis of the preceding research. Thus I will address not only technical issues of translation, but try to comment more generally on British, and Irish, poetry of the period.

##### **An Ulsterman Abroad: James Simmons and Nigeria**

*Nathan Subr-Sytsma*

Once thought of as a leading figure in the Northern Ireland poetry scene, today James Simmons is usually mentioned by critics only in connection with *The Honest Ulsterman*, which he founded in 1968 as a platform for poetry and other writing from the province. What's seldom remembered is that before his career as little magazine editor and literary provocateur, Simmons spent significant years outside Northern Ireland, first as an undergraduate at the University of Leeds in the 1950s, where he befriended Wole Soyinka and Tony Harrison, then as a university teacher in Soyinka's native Nigeria, along with Harrison, in the mid-1960s. My paper argues that Simmons's period in Nigeria is worth revisiting, not only as a formative episode in a controversial poet's development, but also as an important example of growing literary exchange within the Commonwealth at that time.

The poems that Simmons wrote in and about Nigeria display his trademark, if at times off-color, bravado: "After Rupert Brooke," which appeared in a Belfast Festival Publications pamphlet in 1966, parodies Brooke's "If I should die," hijacking this well-known sonnet in order to confront readers with the speaker's sexual exploits in Africa. At the same time, some poems from the period are among the strongest Simmons ever wrote. In "Nigeria 1967" and "The Bonfire," for instance, Simmons attempts to come to poetic terms with the 1966 mass killings of Igbo people in northern Nigeria. These poems evince flashes of striking language and a rare seriousness. Might we also read these poems, published in *The Honest Ulsterman* in December 1969, as Simmons's response to the outbreak of the Troubles? When Simmons's provocatively titled poem, "I hated Africans," appeared in *The Listener* the next month, John Hewitt wrote to Simmons to remark that his piece "achiev[ed] a compassion I'd never remarked in your work before." Rarely reprinted, let alone discussed, such poems bear rereading and perhaps even a place in the Irish poetry canon.

Similarly, Simmons's role in a developing Commonwealth network that connected African, British, and (Northern) Irish writers has yet to be taken seriously. While teaching in Nigeria, Simmons and Tony Harrison worked together on an Africanized version of *Lysistrata*

called *Akin Mata*, which was staged for appreciative audiences before being published by Oxford University Press. Along with Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo and Laurence Lerner, a South African emigré who had taught in Belfast, Simmons contributed a poem to a volume published in Nigeria to mark the centenary of W. B. Yeats's birth. Simmons also continued to cultivate a friendship with Geoffrey Hill, whom he had known at Leeds, during Hill's 1967 stint in Nigeria. The traces of such cross-Commonwealth collaboration can be seen in Simmons's inclusion in *The Honest Ulsterman* of a review, by Derek Mahon, of Wole Soyinka's *Poems from Prison*.

While acknowledging that Simmons will remain a contentious figure, my paper nonetheless suggests that taking into account his years in Nigeria may alter our assessment of his poetry and his place in Ireland's literary landscape.

## **Philip Larkin and Americans**

*Rory Waterman*

Philip Larkin (1922-1985), perhaps England's most prominent poet since the Second World War, never visited America and never wanted to. Indeed, the rise of American power and influence during his lifetime was met with equal resistance by the poet, who campaigned to stop the manuscripts of British writers from finding their way into the hands of American curators and archivists, and who once said that Kingsley Amis's novel *One Fat Englishman* 'takes its place among all the other books that don't make me want to visit America'.

Larkin's perceived racism and xenophobia have been debated at length by critics and general readers since the publication of the poet's *Selected Letters* in 1992 and Andrew Motion's candid biography *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life* a year later. Many of his private attitudes can thankfully be described as 'not of our time', but Larkin's resistance to American hegemony can – for better or for worse – be said to reflect common English and European attitudes, in Larkin's time and in ours.

This paper will discuss the possibly uncomfortable relevance of Philip Larkin's anti-Americanism. First, it will outline Larkin's self-confessed 'xenophobia' in relation to his reactions to America and Americans at various points of his life. It and will then address Larkin's treatment of Americans in his poetry, with a specific focus on the short poem 'Posterity' (copies of which will be supplied), one of the poet's later works, which deals with an eager young Jewish-American academic and which risked provoking a furore of condemnation upon its publication in America in 1974.

## **SONGS FOR A DROWSY EMPEROR: ON READING JOHN ASH**

*Stephen Wilson*

The reference in my title to "Yeats's Sailing to Byzantium" identifies, as it is intended to, John Ash as a Byzantine poet but it is important to recognize at the outset that Ash's Byzantium and Yeats's are very different places. For Yeats Byzantium was a place of high art and artifice but perhaps above all it was somewhere else, somewhere that was not here. Ash has sailed, or at any rate travelled, to Byzantium and for the time being at least lives there. I would not deny the high art or insistently foregrounded artifice of Ash's work (indeed those qualities are to be celebrated) but Ash should not be seen as a latter-day aesthetic émigré or set down as simply an exotic (much less dismissed as an eccentric or a sport). In "The Other Great Composers" (DISBELIEF, 1987), Ash writes of those who "lived in places tourists don't care to visit" whose works grew "longer [and] 'unperformable'" as they embraced "new forms of learning and excess" and who end "dead-centred in a continent of

neglect.” “The Other Great Composers” is, no doubt, in some measure self-referential but it is not autobiographical. What I will argue in my paper is that John Ash’s journey from Didsbury to Istanbul (vis New York) has taken him not away from but towards the centre of contemporary poetry in English and that he is an important public poet who urgently demands our attention.

## **PANEL 5A**

### **“A prolonged course// Of lobotomy and vivisection”: Calvinism, Rupture and Revision in the Poetry of Derek Mahon**

*Gail McConnell*

This paper considers how theology shapes the status and constitution of subjectivity, language and poetic form in the work of Derek Mahon. After making comparisons in brief with the iconography of Seamus Heaney’s poetry and the iconoclasm of Michael Longley’s, this paper considers how Mahon’s view of poetry diverges from that of the iconographer and the iconoclast. In theological terms, Mahon’s poetry represents and incorporates a Calvinist perspective on the fundamental problem of language. Mahon perceives iconography and iconoclasm as two sides of the same coin, insisting instead on an unbridgeable divide between language and truth which poetry can only attest to and lament. Poetic adequacy is not something in which Mahon can believe, nor poetic priesthood. *Pace* Heaney, he refutes the lyric’s capacity to incarnate or transcend; *pace* Longley, to ritualize or elegize. Instead, Mahon’s poetry is conditioned by rupture: of humanity from God and of Word from Flesh. God is absent and poetry – failing – fills the void. The lyric poem is part profanity, part prayer, and always subject to erasure, rupture or revision. This paper explores the metaphysical disjunction between subject and object Mahon describes with reference to the separation of subject from object, word and thing, and human from divine in Calvinist theology. It disentangles Calvinism from its more negative critical and historical treatments and examines how Calvinist dynamics radically shape Mahon’s view of the self, the word and poetry, and considers his practice of revision as a response.

### **“Even as we speak”: Time in Form from MacNeice to Mahon”**

*Kelly Sullivan*

“MacNeice's poetry is obsessed with time, both the time poetry keeps and the time it cannot,” writes Conor O’Callaghan in a review of the 2007 Faber and Faber *Collected Poems of Louis MacNeice*. He suggests that MacNeice manages not only to describe the tedium of life in England just before the second world war, but that he also creates a sense of that life through the form of the poem itself. With its shifting metre and rhyme, but constant sense of rhythmical procession, MacNeice creates a sense of shifting perspectives of time and of constant, implacable advance. Eliot wrote to MacNeice praising *Autumn Journal* because he “found that [he] read it through without [his] interest flagging,” and he attributed this to “the dexterity with which you vary the versification [and...]the fact that the imagery is all imagery of things lived through, and not merely chosen for poetic suggestiveness.” Eliot’s comments attest to *Autumn Journal*’s success, on some level, in representing the life of the poet as ordinary man, a goal MacNeice outlines in *Modern Poetry* (1938).

In one of his own essays on MacNeice's work, Derek Mahon praised a number of qualities including MacNeice's "existentialism of the passing minute" a quality we might just as easily attribute to Mahon himself. Of the many poetic characteristics Mahon adopts and adapts from MacNeice (and from Auden), the verse-epistle serves, for both poets, as a way both of marking and of making time. This genre – a letter poem, or perhaps a journal in form – allows both "the public and private worlds to interpenetrate." Such interpenetration allows these poets to manipulate the divide between publicly marked events, timescapes and actions with the anguish, boredom, and "existentialism" of the privately passing minute. The presentation of ordinary time, and enduring time, simultaneously allows for the presentation of "things lived through" as opposed to mere poetic images.

This paper will trace some of the formal and aesthetic moves Mahon adapts from MacNeice's poetry, looking particularly at the influence of *Autumn Journal* and *Letters from Iceland* on Mahon's *The Hudson Letter*. I aim to show how rhythm, metre, and stanza contribute to the creation of public and private conceptions of time in these poems, and, more broadly, to show how such conceptions of time illustrate these poet's social and artistic concerns and help place the poet in the ordinary world.

### **Staging the present – the real as visible : the heritage of Greek historiography and philosophy in the poetry of Derek Mahon**

Melanie White

Most studies on the influence of the Classics on the poetry of Ulster poets who started writing in the 1960s focus on Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley, as well as on the various translations and adaptations of Greek drama that have been published from the 1980s until today, by poets both from Ulster and the Republic. Similarly, the notions analysed often concern the translation or rewriting of canonical texts from Greek or Latin poetry. What has attracted less attention is the way classical concepts of historiography and time are explored by contemporary poets with no classical background, in more indirect patterns of renewal.

This paper proposes to explore the implications of such a form of influence in the poetry of Derek Mahon, where some distinctive elements of Greek historiography and philosophy appear within the temporal scheme of certain poems, in some stylistic choices, and in Mahon's overall concern with sight. Mahon's interest in the Classics appears at first glance to be restricted to his translations of Euripides' *Bacchae*, his adaptation of Sophocles' two Oedipian plays into one under the title *Oedipus*, or his poems inspired by and translated from Ovid, and his more recent Homeric rewritings, such as "Calypso" or "Circe and Sirens". But delving deeper into the structure of some of Mahon's poems, where *personae* rely on visual perceptions of reality amidst the poet's emphasis on a constant redefinition of the real according to conditions of visibility, one discovers similarities between Mahon's rendering of the present and Herodotus' first stylistic steps towards what became the foundations of Greek historiography. Some of the characteristics of the writing of Herodotus, such as the historian's relying solely on what he has seen and witnessed with his own eyes, as well as his first attempt to speak in his own name, with the use of the first person narrative, are to be found in some of Mahon's poems.

Mahon's perpetual visual re-adjustments, a concern he shares with MacNeice, also influences his conception of time. His famous refusal of a historical time has meant that in many poems, a poetic temporality based on the real as visible, is staged in a sort of suspended time. The time-space thus created, out of duration and chronology, is a reminder of Aristotle's concept of "the possible" as distinct from the actual defined in the *Metaphysics*. The possible exists in the suspension of its very actualisation, which can take

place through the act of seeing. Aristotle's concept of the "possible" allows Mahon to stand on an poetic promontory which encompasses both what actually happened and what might have been, thus creating an independent poetic time-scale where thoughts and images take shape, from smudges to fine outlines, as in the "cloud-thoughts" of "Harbour Lights". Herodotus and Aristotle thus reappear in Mahon's poetry, not through wilful references, but through more indirect structures. This paper wishes to analyse the mechanisms of such a heritage within the creation of a poetry of the present.

## **PANEL 5B**

### **Of Bodies, Brides and Ballerinas: Women and Intermediality in McGuckian and Morrissey**

*Rui Carvalho Homem*

This paper will consider moments in the work of Medbh McGuckian and Sinéad Morrissey in which poetic writing seeks the benefit of indirection and addresses paintings, deriving additional imaginative impulse from representations found in another artistic medium. It will focus especially on cases in which the word-and-image design yields images of women glimpsed in revealing moments of their experience, i.e., scenes that help delineate their personal and social identities. Both McGuckian and Morrissey have taken an active writerly interest in ostensibly placid familial scenarios that appear pervaded by an indefinite, sometimes ominous sense of trouble – and this perception is arguably compounded by the relational dynamics that are proper to ekphrasis ('the verbal representation of visual representation' – Heffernan 2003). This affords a privileged vantage from which to inquire into whether the relation between verbal and visual can extend and inflect the traditional generic description of the lyric as a representation of the 'speaking' self, a space for subjective revelation. Further, this paper will argue that poems by McGuckian and Morrissey allow for a critically productive analogy: that which equates the relations that define 'a woman's place' with the intermedial nexus itself, the mutually challenging rapport of verbal and visual.

Although poems from different collections by McGuckian and Morrissey will be approached in the course of this paper, particular attention will be given to some of their recent work – especially McGuckian's *The Currach Requires No Harbours* (2006) and *My Love Has Fared Inland* (2008), and Morrissey's *Through the Square Window* (2009).

### **'anti-home ... counter-home': Place in Medbh McGuckian's Poetry**

*Eamonn Hughes*

Much criticism of Medbh McGuckian's poetry has rightly concentrated on its concern with "logocentrism, patriarchy, relationships, and parturition" as one critic has put it. Insofar as a consideration of space enters into the criticism it does so on the basis that McGuckian's poetry radicalizes private spaces. While this is an important aspect of her work - which after all speaks of 'forfeit[ing] the world outside/For the sake of my own inwardness' – it has overlooked the fact that in such private spaces there seems nearly always to be 'An already open window...'

These windows are, of course, just one of the 'edge' spaces which recur in McGuckian's poetry, but the poetry frequently goes beyond such limits. There is then a more capacious and outward aspect to McGuckian's poetry in which 'sight is ... overladen with the seen

world...’ and ‘the eye consists/ of a million worlds’. This paper will examine this aspect of the poetry - the ways in which it ransacks the world - with the aim of articulating some, at least, of the principles by which it enfolds space.

### **Observations of Rain: Medbh McGuckian and the Troubles**

*Ashley Tellis*

In this paper, I will explore the ways in which Medbh McGuckian’s poetry, from her first collection, offers responses to the Troubles. Dismissed as apolitical by most critics, not included in any political anthology of poetry in response to the Troubles, I argue that her poetry is equally misread by masculinist plumbings of her intertextuality by critics like Shame Murphy and feminist recuperations by critics like Leontia Flynn who make untenable distinctions between linguistic and political identities. Following Flynn’s lead to simply read the poems for what they are, rather than “interpreting everything *but* the poem” I will read a cross-section of McGuckian’s early poetry, before her more obviously political later collections, to ask questions about gendered responses to political violence.

### **PANEL 5C**

#### **Munster Poetry**

*John Goodby*

*Cliona Ni Riordain*

*Val Nolan*

The last forty years has witnessed the assertion of regional and non-English autonomy within a once metropolitan-dominated British and Irish poetry: we can speak, for example, of poetry of Northern England, with its own presses, and distinctive ethos (in both ‘mainstream’ and ‘alternative’ modes) in a way which would have been impossible before the 1980s. The Regionalist movement of the 1940s and the decentralising trends of the 1960s are predecessors to this development, just as Northern Irish poetry is the most successful example, and often the model, for such developments. Since the 1990s, the establishment of regional / national literature centres (eg: Wales’ Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea [1995]), poetry reading series, festivals, prizes and workshops (eg: the Galway City-based Connaught poetry scene of the 2000s) have served a decentralising agenda. In many cases, new forms of poetic autonomy build on older identities and poetic reputations. Speakers on this panel will be taking the work of three such figures from the Munster region by way of exploring the validity of the concept of ‘Munster poetry’: Michael Hartnett, Thomas McCarthy and Gerry Murphy. Issues which might be raised in discussion might include: the mechanisms of marginalisation; canon-making; the legitimacy of regional identity; conflicts between metropolitan forms and languages and those of the ‘periphery’; mechanisms by which subaltern and subversive poetic discourses are incorporated by the centre.

## PANEL 5D

### **“Smaller than the nation, larger than the family”: Exploring Longley’s work as an editor** *Elizabeth Chase*

This paper explores Longley’s work as an editor, those moments in which he acts as a literary interlocutor shaping and presenting the work of other poets and to define twentieth-century Irish poetry. In his introduction to John Hewitt’s *Selected Poems*, readers find Longley’s belief in the Irish poet as an “elegiac celebrant” (xvii). In his introduction to *Causeway: The Arts in Ulster*, Longley notes that the poet requires “time in which to allow the raw material of experience to settle to an imaginative depth where he can transform it according to the dictates of his particular discipline. He is not some sort of superjournalist commenting with spontaneity” (8). Rather, it is the poet’s duty to fulfill “his painful role as Cassandra,” but also to “celebrate life in all its aspects, to commemorate normal human activities” (9).

In these introductions, Longley expresses a belief in delicate balance between the everyday and the need to address Ulster’s “cultural apartheid” (9). What Longley says of John Hewitt is equally true of his own work: “he is always trying to understand. Diffidence follows certainty, withdrawal follows assertion. His most generous embraces carry with them a hint of *noli me tangere*” (xvii). Thus Longley celebrates those poets whose involvement in the arts extends beyond the published page: John Hewitt spent much of his life working for art galleries, MacNeice worked with the BBC, and Longley himself has shaped the arts in Ireland through his work for the Arts Council. These choices—the poets Longley celebrates and the poems he highlights—reveal his philosophy that the artist must be involved in his or her community; not just a poetic community, but one deeply connected to the society of which he or she is a part.

This paper examines Longley’s drafts for his edited volumes housed in the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University in order to better understand the choices he makes as an editor and intermediary between Ireland’s poets and their international audience. Longley’s work as an editor is then used to return to and explore his own poetry, particularly the Homeric translations of *Gorse Fires*. In these poems, as examination of Longley’s manuscripts reveals, he subtly employs Homer’s work to obliquely engage with contemporary Irish politics. Thus a poem originally called “The Shankill Butchers” has its tenor muted by a shift to simply “The Butchers.” Throughout his work as a poet and an editor, Longley reveals an investment in the oblique, the carefully honed exploration of dangerous territory. For Longley, the poet is a vital but often unnoticed member of the community: “I find relevant here,” he writes in his introduction to *Causeway*, “an analogy of Cyril Connolly’s. He compares art’s relationship with the community to the influence on the body of certain glands. Small and seemingly unimportant they may be, but when they are removed the body dies” (8). Art may not be “a midwife to Society,” but as Longley makes clear in his poems and in his work as an editor for the poems of others, Art bears witness and in doing so, becomes a “potent force.”

**Trade Publishers and Small Presses**  
*Matthew Sperling*

This paper will build on recent work in the history of the book and the sociology of literary culture, to consider what can be gained by reading contemporary British poetry in the light of its publishing contexts. I'd like to use the paper as a stalking-horse for the article on the publishing contexts of recent poetry I've been invited to write for Peter Robinson's forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*. There are three aims here. One, to offer a short history of the changes in poetry publishing within the period, touching on issues such as the closure of the Oxford University Press poetry list in 1999 and the emergence of the Picador list and of Salt; the formation of Arts Council England in 1994 and the importance of subsidy for presses such as Bloodaxe and Carcanet; the proliferation of small press and pamphleteering ventures, with barriers to entry increasingly low in financial terms; and the impact of electronic information technology in the form of print on demand publication and e-books. Two, to offer a description and analysis of the shape of the current publishing situation. And three, to consider the relation between these things and the aesthetic and interpretative aspects of reading poems (and indeed writing them).

It is commonplace within book history that the book is an expressive form, and that the nature of the artefact in which and through which we encounter a work are at least part-determinative of its total meaning. The unwisdom of judging a book by its cover is well-attested, but nonetheless what we call its 'bibliographic codes' have their own significance, which can be read off against an established 'language' of the book. Book history then is not just a positivistic study of books as physical objects, but a branch of the larger study of culture and society. In the case of poetry the issue becomes especially acute since poetry, as a Bordieuvian analysis would have it, is an extreme case in several ways: laughably low in economic profitability but perhaps inordinately high in cultural capital and prestige. And since poetry is perhaps the art form most minutely and distinctively sensitive to the significance of small linguistic facts (syllables, phonemes, individual letter-forms even), we might expect it to be similarly sensitive to the signifying power of bibliographic facts: this at any rate is the claim my paper will begin to test out.

The broader conceptual significance of this work is that I'd like to offer a better basis for thinking about the structure of 'contemporary British and Irish poetry' as a cultural field than we currently have, and then to think about what this might enable in terms of how we read actual poems. This is to say, I want to offer a challenge to what Roy Fisher has called the 'idiot bipartite map' of contemporary poetry, often structured around the opposition *mainstream—avant garde*, which seem to me defunct as both sociological and aesthetic descriptors; and I want to think about what a more sophisticated model might be, perhaps drawing on network theory in recent sociology to reconstitute our understanding of the contemporary poetry 'world'. The works I will discuss will be drawn from as broad as possible a range of 'nodes' within this putative network, in order to give the fullest picture of the field that I can. If accepted, I hope that this paper will also interact fruitfully with the scheduled panel of poet-publishers.

## **PANEL 6A**

**'If you have ever thought of writing a novel, I would very much like to hear about it':  
Ciaran Carson and the Poetry of Prose**  
*Nicholas Allen (NUI Galway)*

Writing to Ciaran Carson in the early 1990s, the literary editor Neil Belton encouraged the poet to write prose. *Last Night's Fun* and *The Star Factory* soon followed. In this paper I want to trace the lines between Carson's poetry and prose of this period, considering the ways in which both forms changed in relation to Carson's ongoing formal, historical and

biographical experimentation. Included in this formation is Carson's relationship with Belton. Their correspondence initiated a sustained conversation on literature that reveals the broad aesthetic and material contexts for late century publishing. The rag pickings of reading, memory and travel thread through Carson's books as filaments of an emerging art that is somewhere between poetry and prose. Co-ordinates might be found as far apart as Baudelaire and Tim Robinson. Reading *Last Night's Fun* and *The Star Factory* as hybrid art, I want to investigate the space opened up by Carson in his writing as indicative of a momentary mutability that continues to unsettle criticism's territorial categories.

***Remembering Being: A reading of Ciaran Carson's poetry in the light of Martin Heidegger and Paul Celan***  
*Grzegorz Czemiel*

This essay attempts to read the two latest poetry books by Ciaran Carson – *On the Night Watch* [2009] and *Until Before After* [2010] – in the light of Paul Celan's poetry and the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Ciaran Carson's stripped and bare poetics which he develops in these books are considered from a poetic point of view, taking Celan as an important point of reference, as well as from a philosophical stance of Martin Heidegger's both early and late work. The two books by the Belfast-based poet are thus argued to be a fine combination of poetic and philosophic explorations. The analysis of these collections focuses on the handling of such problems as poetic restraint and condensation, as well as the dialectic of possibilities which language opens and those it closes off. Carson is also argued to be a poet who problematizes the questions of time, death and language both in the form and content of his poems. Moreover, the essay argues that in this light Carson emerges as a poet who can be placed somewhere within the line of thought that originates in Heidegger's considerations of language and Celan's poetry, and which was carried on in the critical works of Maurice Blanchot (*The Space of Literature*), Jacques Derrida (*Shibboleth for Paul Celan*) and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (*Poetry as Experience*). It is the last of these three books that brings into question the crucial issue tackled in this essay – the status of poetry and its relationship with experience – as these considerations lie, as I wish to argue, at the heart of Carson's later books. What is more, it might be suggested that such a reading of Carson's late poems throws an interesting light on one particular strand of (Northern) Irish poetry (Seamus Heaney, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon) which developed after the Second World War. It opens up a possibility to interpret this poetic tradition in the light of its attempt at „remembering being”, understood in a Heideggerian sense. I argue that underneath the question of identity tackled by these poets lies a deep concern for a certain mode of „being-in-the-world” which is obscured by a diversely understood modern nihilism. A new critical perspective might emerge from such an understanding of their work, at the same time reassuring Ciaran Carson's vital position among contemporary poets writing in English.

**“In and Out of Time”: Ciaran Carson's Poetry**  
*Ciaran O'Neill*

“A Frank / Ifield song / From 1963, I think, kept coming back to me: *I remember you – / you're the one / Who made my dreams come true – just a few – kisses ago.* I'm taking / One step forward, two steps back, trying to establish what it / was about her / That made me fall in love with her, if that's what it was; / *infatuation* / Was a vogue word then – ”

(Carson, “*Calvin Klein’s Obsession*”). Appearing in *The Irish for No* (1987), “*Calvin Klein’s Obsession*” exhibits what Neil Corcoran describes as a “movement by digression” (Corcoran, *Poets of Modern Ireland* 191); a technique that enacts the poet’s fragmented colloquy with the past. In the poem, one sensory stimulus evokes the next, precipitating a bout of nostalgic allusion that is locked to the present by the peripatetic rhythm, “One step forward, two steps back”. Reveling in a Proustian sea of mnemonics, Carson has only to wait for each to swim up:

I raised my glass, and – solid, pungent, like the soot-encrusted  
brickwork  
Of the Ulster Brewery – a smell of yeast and hops and malt  
swam up:  
*I sniff and sniff again, and try to think of what it is that I am remembering:*  
I think that’s how it goes, like Andy Warhol’s calendar of  
perfumes,  
Drips and drabs left over to remind him of that season’s smell.  
Very personal, of course, as *Blue Grass* is for me the texture of a  
fur  
Worn by this certain girl I haven’t seen in years. Every time  
that *Blue Grass*  
Hits me, it is 1968. I’m walking with her through the smoggy  
early dusk  
Of West Belfast: coal smoke, hops, fur, the smell of stout and  
whiskey  
Breathing out from somewhere. So it all comes back, or nearly  
all,  
A long-forgotten kiss.

(Carson, “*Calvin Klein’s Obsession*”)

Today, twenty-three years after its publication, “*Calvin Klein’s Obsession*” more than ever evokes a potent poetic fragrance. Its Proustian preamble, conjuring a memory narrative that wields an array of histories with consummate ease, shows correspondences with many such yarns that the poet has written since. Indeed, with Carson, the effect is often that of re-reading lines one has heard or seen somewhere before. “Perfume breathed from somewhere, opening avenues of love, or something déjà vu”, Carson writes in “The Queen’s Gambit”; a poem in *Belfast Confetti* that resembles a spaghetti junction of surveillance videotape and memory, topped with a wink and a nod. Here again, as with “the smell of stout and / whiskey / Breathing out from somewhere” in “*Calvin Klein’s Obsession*”, “it all comes back, or nearly / all”, but somehow not quite. If “everything is... provisional” is elsewhere offered to be the poet’s rationale (Carson, “Revised Version”), his modus operandi also suggests an enjoyment in putting readers off the scent. At times however, Carson proves less taciturn, opening up to the sound of music:

Maybe around 1985 or so it occurred to me that maybe poetry could  
borrow something from the whole musical experience, which involves  
talk and chat and stories as well as the actual music... everything  
constantly digressing.

(Brandes, “Ciaran Carson” 82)

To elaborate on Corcoran’s reading of *The Irish for No*, it is perhaps the *musical* “movement”, or equally as Carson puts it, the “musical experience” of his compositions, that

are deserving of critical attention. In “*Calvin Klein’s Obsession*” for instance, a “Frank Ifield song” serves to energize the poem’s romantic flourishes as the poet sways wistfully around this tentative love story. However, it is arguable that the love poem comprises an uncomfortable genre for Carson, and one could point out that his dalliances in this region have been few. Where instances of experimentation do occur – glimpsed in the mystery romance of “*Calvin Klein’s Obsession*” – they tend to incorporate some musical aspect or imagined accompaniment. Having conceded his avoidance of “what the ‘I’ feels”, commenting, “I don’t particularly want to write about how I feel” (Brandes, “Ciaran Carson” 83), Carson’s subsequent use of musical motifs and improvisatory forms in his forays into love appear to offer an alternative focus besides a purely personal one. Re-opening such “avenues of love, or something déjà vu” with the collection, *For All We Know* (2008), this musician-poet appears to have learnt from the “one step forward, two steps back” movement of “*Calvin Klein’s Obsession*” and masterminded another way to conduct a love story – to the style of fugue.

## **PANEL 6B**

### **Bad Language: Political (de)Constructions in Sinéad Morrissey and Leontia Flynn** *Miriam Gamble*

This paper looks at the use of language in the poems of Sinéad Morrissey and Leontia Flynn, and argues that, although superficially dissimilar, their poems rise from the same impulse to challenge mainstream discourse in the contemporary public realm.

With Morrissey, the paper examines her emphasis on freedom of speech, her use of opulent diction, and her valorisation of the prophetic voice, and sets these trends against the backdrop of her grounding in the literature and ideas of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

With Flynn, the paper argues that what might seem cheap indulgence in the language and mannerisms of popular culture is in fact a profound engagement with and challenge to the ubiquitous and blanket nature of that (US) culture. Flynn’s approach is related here to the concept of ‘mimicry’ as defined by Colin Graham; it is argued that, rather than revealing her ‘personality’, the poems’ surfaces shield it, and that she masks behind the language of cool a serious and dissonant subjectivity.

Both poets, the paper argues, view poetic language as simultaneously endangered by and subversive of contemporary media discourse; they also locate poetry’s ethical life in the probing and upheaval of that discourse, which extends beyond the media realm to the ‘shadowy’ institutions of political and economic power. The paper relates their praxis to socio-cultural readings of the post-Troubles space by Colin Graham and Aaron Kelly, and to theories of poetic diction and the politics of poetry by, for example, Jay Parini. In *Why Poetry Matters*, Parini suggests that ‘poetry provides a moral standard for expression’; he also states that poets create ‘the bedrock language of each time and place, a form of meditated speech against which all other language must measure itself’. These are the premises by which this paper is governed, and from which its examination of the differing linguistic approaches of the poetry of Flynn and Morrissey takes off.

**"Carolina Hat": Transnational Translation and Vona Groarke's  
*Lament for Art O'Leary*  
Meg Harper**

At one point in Vona Groarke's 2008 version of Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonail's famous keen for her husband, *Tórramh-Chaoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, Eileen remembers, "My golden lad, / you were gorgeous always / in your hand-woven stockings / and knee-high boots, / your Carolina hat, / a whip in your hand / to put manners on a gelding" (33). This "Carolina hat" (a sly alteration from the English term for a popular hat in the 17th and 18th centuries, mentioned in the original poem [*Field Day Anthology* IV:1376]) is my starting point to examine a poem that significantly resituates itself in a welter of previous translations and academic revisionings. The Irish lament, whose rich history of scholarly and writerly attention includes recent work by Angela Bourke, including her translation in Vol. IV of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, is taken up by Groarke in a bold version with a lengthy explanatory and historical introduction. Groarke's version is new in a number of respects, including a poetic voice inflected by Irish, English, and American diction and usage. Groarke's *Lament*, as she describes in her introduction, "turns the here and now around to face another time and place" (18), emphasizing that the poem exists as a textual event in more than one time frame as well as another spatial setting. The other time is in fact multiple, including the many translations and discussions of the lament from its eighteenth-century composition until now. The place is also multiple: it might be Dublin or Manchester, Boston, or London, or Wake Forest, North Carolina, where Groarke spends part of every year. This new poem stresses the mobility of Eileen's passionate lament: in Groarke's hands, it becomes a poem of the particular place that manages also, intriguingly, to highlight transnational cultural and linguistic implications. The versioning is another chapter in the history of a work that begins in the fluidity of oral composition and is repeatedly reworked in translations (as Groarke's introduction stresses). This new version leads to questions of situatedness that reimagine the local and global in non-oppositional relation to each other.

**Feminist linguistic utopianism and the *aisling* genre**  
Laura O'Connor

My paper explores the intersection between the second-wave feminist attempt to dismantle patriarchal symbolic domination, epitomized by *écriture féminine*, which has contributed to the efflorescence of Irish women's poetry since the sixties, and women poets' revisions of the *aisling* genre. In a series of Lip pamphlets from Attic Press in the 1980s, several feminist theorists, including Edna Longley, Geraldine Meaney, and poet Eavan Boland, critique the homosocial logic of the *aisling* and how men's rehearsed fealty to the conflation of the feminine and the national in the Mother-Ireland icon serves to obfuscate the material oppression and near-invisibility of actual women. Boland's pamphlet "The woman poet and the national tradition" and poem "Mise Eire" critique the figuring of Ireland's history of victimization as an emblematic archaic Mother Ireland whose "honor" has been traduced by colonization as "an underlying fault, almost a geological weakness, in Irish poetry." As well as a patriarchal and heteronormative coding of national honor, the Gaelic genre of the Jacobite *aisling* is an exemplary instance of the widespread international tendency, noted by

Mary Louise Pratt, to predicate a homogeneous, feminized “linguistic utopia” at the core of a given imagined speech-community.

Boland believes that it is essential for the woman poet to leave the *aisling*’s “palsy of regrets” behind--“I won’t go back to it,” declares “Mise Eire[‘s]” poet-speaker--but Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Medbh McGuckian return to an “it” that encompasses both the *aisling* topos and a feminized linguistic utopianism they associate with the Irish language. Ní Dhomhnaill is drawn back by her deep engagement with her Jacobite precursors, her fascination with the hold of the negative *cailleach* imago on the collective Irish psyche, and her conviction that the *cailleach-spéirbhean* transformation in the underlying Flaitheas myth is amenable to psychic integration. She declares allegiance to the gendered Flaitheas myth that structures *Feis*, while conceding that many feminists find such allegiance suspect. Her polemical interventions in English on the subject basically accord with Julia Kristeva’s argument that the apotheosis of Stabat Mater and mother-goddess archetypes are less an idealization of the archaic mother than the idealization of the primary narcissism that binds us to her. In marked contrast to Ní Dhomhnaill’s deep and ambivalent immersion, “it” exercises an uncanny strangeness, even exoticism, for McGuckian, who in the course of explaining how she never identified as “Irish” but rather as “Catholic” when growing up, recalls a single exception: “The first Irish tune that actually stirred me to tears was Sean O’Riada’s soundtrack of ‘Roisin Dubh’ for the film *Mise Éire* (1966), which we were somehow taken to. This experience haunted me with a cavernous sense of loss and agony. I could put no name to my longing”(191). Some thirty years later, at another red-letter commemorative moment, McGuckian was engrossed in research for her book about the 1798 rebellion, *Shelmalier* (1998), whose theme, according to the Author’s Note, is “less the experienced despair of a noble struggle brutally quenched than the dawn of my own enlightenment after a medieval ignorance, my being suddenly able to welcome into consciousness figures of an integrity I had never learned to be proud of.” During the same period McGuckian was translating several revisionist *aislingí* by Ní Dhomhnaill, including “An Banríon Sneachta” and “Primavera” from *Feis* (1991) and indictments of inter-ethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia and in Northern Ireland, “An Slad” and “Eithne Uathach,” from *Cead Aighnis* (1998). McGuckian has been forthright in interviews about the strong affinity she feels towards Ní Dhomhnaill because of “her use of Irish as if it is alive and because it is alive in her” and because, while “her [McGuckian’s] womb is almost [her] *brain*, for the other women in Ireland, their wombs are not their brains, but I think with Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill it is” (her emphasis). As well as examining these translations (in part by comparing them with earlier drafts from the Emory archive), I’d like to explore the entanglement between the nationalist Utopianism of the *aisling* and the feminist Utopianism of *écriture féminine* evident in Ní Dhomhnaill’s characterization of Irish as “the language of the mother par excellence” and McGuckian declaration that she’d like “to reach an English that would be so purified of English that it would be Irish.”

## PANEL 6C

### **‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at RS Thomas’**

*Philip McGowan*

“I turn now  
not to the Bible  
but to Wallace Stevens”

(RS Thomas, from ‘Homage to Wallace Stevens’, in *No Truce with the Furies*, 1995)

This paper will explore RS Thomas’ acknowledged debt to Wallace Stevens in his poetry, particularly in his later collections. It will focus primarily on Thomas’ ‘Thirteen Blackbirds Look at a Man’ from *Later Poems* (1983) as a central point of reference in this poetic relationship, Thomas translating Stevens’s thirteen “sensations” (as he refers to them in his letters) from ‘Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird’ (*Harmonium*, 1923) into thirteen occasions for philosophical queries about man’s role in the natural world. Thomas’s concern with man’s destruction of landscape in collections such as *Laboratories of the Spirit* (1975) and *Frequencies* (1978) is matched by his ongoing and interwoven investigations into the possibility of God and the possibility of our expression of God’s existence. It is in this latter area that his alignment with Stevens is most readily seen. Where Stevens argues for the structures of poetry and reality to be one, despite immediately acknowledging the impossibility of this concordance in language due to its inability to encapsulate the world, Thomas I argue calls for the structures of faith and of language to be one, although acknowledging that faith is based in uncountable things. In both his poetry and his prose writings, the echoes of Stevens sound clearly in Thomas’ interrogations of the possibility of belief and the expression of that belief in language: “[t]he mystic fails to mediate God adequately in so far as he is not a poet. The poet, with possibly less immediacy of apprehension, shows his spiritual concern and his spiritual nature through the medium of language, the supreme symbol” (from Thomas’ ‘Introduction’ to *The Penguin Book of Religious Verse*, 1963). The main focus of my paper will be Thomas’ writings, showing how he establishes a connection with Stevens and then adapts this to his own particular position as a Welsh poet writing poetry in English as well as a minister of the Church in Wales. Although obviously falling short of offering thirteen ways of looking at Thomas, this paper aims to open discussion of Thomas’ poetry again to concerns beyond the more narrow focus of Welsh nationalism and ruralism for instance which has tended to dominate critical discussion of his work.

### ***‘While the bird sang, like a shower of rain /they forgot about Bush and Saddam Hussein’***

**Robert Minhinnick’s representation of War from Wales**

*Dr Nerys Williams*

In this paper I examine Robert Minhinnick’s recent poetry as an anti-war poetic. Minhinnick’s contribution to Todd Swift’s original e book anthology *100 Poets Against the War* (2003) would evidently appear to secure his status as an anti-war

poet. Moreover Minhinnick's recent volume of prose *From Babel and Back* (2005) includes essays that document time spent in Iraq following the Gulf War. He has also investigated the use of depleted uranium for arms manufacture against Iraq in the Gulf War, as well as researching Gulf war Veterans' experiences of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

At stake here is not necessarily Minhinnick's status as an anti war poet- this is undisputed. My interest is how representations of Wales intersect with Minhinnick's depiction of Iraq. Often read disproportionately as a travel writer, Minhinnick's poetry does not solely seek to examine the relationship of the local to global. A sense of a dizzying simultaneity of concerns becomes apparent in Minhinnick's latest volume *King Driftwood* (2008). Recent poems such as 'Return of the Natives' and 'An Isotope Dreaming' examine how information can be navigated to create a form of poetic knowledge that offers political reflection upon the communal. In 'Return of the Natives' the speaker suggests wryly that 'could be I'm/ back could be supplementary information/ exists could be I never / left.' Moreover the citational density of borrowed languages and phrases in *King Driftwood* challenge a restrictive interpretation of Minhinnick's poetry as only navigating the hyphenated Anglo-Welsh identifier.

The linguistic texture of Minhinnick's later work, illustrates also an intense pressure to transform information to create a site for poetic knowledge. I will suggest that in this volume ecological concerns convene with anti-war sentiment as well as regional affiliation to create a poetic of considerable complexity. Minhinnick's poetry re-energises an anti-war poetic from a dormant state of mere polemic or protest. Ultimately I will argue that his meditation from Wales not only secures a safe passage as commentator but a problematising of representing a distant war and how that knowledge may be communicated to his audience.

## **PANEL 6D**

### **Poetry in 1960s Leeds: a peculiar cultural economy.**

*Jon Glover*

If one looks closely enough most cities in the UK have a number of poets living and working there. I suppose that to be inevitable assuming that there is some law of cultural averages. On the other hand, some cities attract attention from time to time as being places of particular energy, innovation and publication. Further, it seems that some cities attract or apparently spontaneously generate a significant group of new writers. London, Oxford and Cambridge are on the list of obvious reasons. However, Leeds in the 1960s seems to have been special for poetry and poets. Why? Was it just happenstance that brought Geoffrey Hill, Jon Silkin, Tony Harrison, Peter Redgrove, Ken Smith, David Wright and Martin Bell together? Did they merely 'pass through' as others might have done and in other cities? Or is there evidence that something odd was happening? Or is it that precisely because it was 'odd' it has left significant records which now offer unique evidence of how poetry works?

It is probably hard for younger poets and academics to recall how alien it was until very recently for writers to be able to find regular and permanent employment in the academy. It is also hard to think of a time when writing poetry and fiction, of all the art forms, had no place in the formal educational system – no Degrees in Creative Writing, no recognised equivalence between 'hard' research and creative work. I want to examine what happened in

Leeds and to suggest that an odd, indeed unique, series of negotiations and exchanges took place there. The role played by Eric Gregory and Bonamy Dobrée in joining with their friends T S Eliot, Henry Moore and Herbert Read to advise and energise the UK's first Creative Arts Fellowships in a University – the Gregory Fellowships – is probably increasingly well known. But I want to look at how the processes of contact, influence and leadership (if those are reasonable terms) actually worked in handing over key elements of poetic capital from one generation to the next.

After a brief outline of the Gregory Fellowships system I will look at new evidence of how culture of print and publishing, the culture of University education and the culture of the urban and rural North came together in 1960s Leeds poetry. It is so easy to assume that if a significant figure is present at a University then she or he must have influenced students and emerging writers. How did three key people, Hill, Silkin and Redgrove, interact with students and what effects did they actually have? I will also ask whether the image of 'capital' is relevant to poetry at that time and whether perceived movements of creative wealth in Leeds provide a model for the scrutiny of poetry in other cities and whether it could ever be replicated.

### **Seriousness and Value in the Work of Peter Porter**

*William Wootten*

Peter Porter can be one of the most intellectually ambitious and demanding of post-war poets. At the same time his is a poetry which takes care to circumscribe poetic ambition. Indeed, he once courted controversy by declaring that poetry is 'a modest art'. In this paper I shall look at some of the ways in which Porter's work negotiates the differences and conjunctions between poetic worth and ultimate seriousness and value.

Porter's work has adapted and explores an ethical vocabulary inherited from his acknowledged master, W.H. Auden, as well as from Philip Larkin and Wallace Stevens.

After showing ways in which this is the case, I shall explore tensions within Porter's language and ideas. In particular, I shall tease out how, in the verse, Porter will seek to accord other arts, particularly music, a transcendence and value he is wary of according to poetry. I shall maintain that, in so doing, Porter will often seek to capture the very qualities he would deny his art. I shall also point to a further apparent paradox: that it is when Porter's verse is under most emotional and ethical pressure, when the 'pointlessness of poetry' seems most evident, that its worth can be most conspicuous. In seeking to demonstrate this, I shall concentrate upon the elegies in which Porter seeks to come to terms with the suicide of his first wife that are contained in books from his greatest volume *The Cost of Seriousness* (1978) up to and including the recent *Better Than God* (2009).

## PANEL 7A

### BOOKS OF NUMBER

*John McAuliffe*

‘that stanza I use in “Incantata” comes, as you know, through Yeats with the same rhymes, and through I think Abraham Cowley’

‘Paul Muldoon in conversation with Neil Corcoran,’ in Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, ed. *Paul Muldoon: Poetry Prose Drama* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 2006) 165-187. 186.

Paul Muldoon’s use of the same set of rhymes across his long poems ‘Yarrow’ and ‘Incantata’ and in subsequent long poems has been the subject of critical work by Clair Wills, Tim Kendall, Iain Twiddy and others over the past decade or so. This presentation will look at how Muldoon’s example may also be found in recent work by Ciaran Carson and Don Paterson and will examine how they, like Muldoon, have set about writing book-poems which have a numbered formal design that shapes the construction of individual poems.

I will examine the particular structures of *For All We Know*, *Moy Sand and Gravel* and *Rain* and how they each consider, ironise and develop their individual lyrics, Muldoon through the exploded sestina which regathers the material of the collection’s short poems, Carson through the doubling of his book’s structure and Paterson through *Rain*’s central haiku sequence, which re-titles and re-reads the individual poems which precede and succeed it.

WB Yeats is a prominent point of reference for all three collections, and I will compare their procedures with Yeats’s shaping of his books and, more broadly, with numerological strategies in Henryson, Milton, Blake and Joyce. Whereas some critics locate occult significance in Yeats’s book structures and others argue that Muldoon’s numerological structures are thematically related to his elegiac subjects, I will argue that the ‘secret’ structures of these recent collections express an anxiety about the contemporary lyric poem.

### ‘Quoof’, ‘Quaquaqu’ and ‘Chiraqui’: The Language of Muldoon’s Poetry

*Ruben Moi*

‘Quaat?’ asks Derek Mahon appositely in his review of *Quoof*, Paul Muldoon’s outlandish fourth volume of poetry from 1983, and captures the eccentric side of Muldoon’s linguistic universe. Mahon’s questioning of Muldoon’s classic coinage illustrates the critical controversy of Muldoon’s poetic language, and indicates the frequent bewildering quality of Muldoon’s poetry itself. Add to Muldoon’s idiosyncratic vocabulary his range of registers, his avidity for alphabetic atomism, his sensitivity to sounds and syntax and his twists and turns of grammar, and Muldoon proves to be, according to critics, a poetic paragon or perennial prankster. While pointing out some of the fascinating features of Muldoon’s poetic language, and referencing some its critical reception, this paper intends to discuss some of the existential, philosophical and political dimensions of Muldoon’s peculiar use of language.

## **“The Shape of the Table”: Uses of the Dinner-Party in the Poetry of Paul Muldoon**

*John Redmond*

Paul Muldoon has organised two of his major long poems, ‘7, Middagh Street’ and ‘The Bangle (Slight Return)’, around the motif of the dinner-party. Numerous significant shorter poems, including ‘Paris’, ‘Lunch with Pancho Villa’ and ‘Holy Thursday’, make use of the same motif. This paper connects Muldoon’s poetic interest in dinner-parties with his preference for static set-pieces and meandering conversational forms, as well as with his habitual placing of images of consumption next to images of production (“the boudoir in the abattoir”). Concentrating on ‘7, Middagh Street’, this paper argues for the influence of W. H. Auden on this aspect of Muldoon’s writing, particularly with respect to the dinner-party as a small-scale image of a possible polyphonic utopia.

The dinner-party poem in Muldoon’s canon is typically a member of a subset which belongs in turn to a larger set of what we might call ‘agrarian poems’. Both types of poem confirm those historicising and contextualising impulses in Muldoon which incline him to see all processes as chronically interwoven, always forming part of one or other continuum. For example, the dinner-party in a French restaurant, featured in ‘A Bangle: Slight Return’, takes its place at the end of a complex set of processes which originates on the kind of farm where the poet grew up. At the same time, we, as readers, are encouraged by the poem to see farming as part of a continuum which extends from Virgil’s *Georgics* to the poems of Robert Frost.

The long poem, ‘7, Middagh Street’, is dominated by images of consumption and there several impromptu feasts are recalled or imagined in the various dramatic monologues. Muldoon’s whole canon may be read as a bizarre menu and, in ‘7, Middagh Street’, a wide range of food and drink is paraded before the reader — from a wedding-cake to bathtub gin, from a raw beef-steak to smoked quail, from grits and greens to a crumpled baguette. This paper argues that the almost inexhaustible menu of Muldoon’s canon is both a metaphor for, and a demonstration of, poetry’s excessive function, and serves to leave us, as readers, with the feeling that there are more things in the world than we had remembered.

### **PANEL 7B**

#### **‘The Chances Are This Won’t Work’:**

#### **Peter McDonald and some versions of *Pastorals***

*Adam Crothers*

Peter McDonald has written that, upon reading Alan Gillis’s ostensibly anti-pastoral poem ‘The Ulster Way’, he felt ‘properly chastised’ for having published a poetry collection entitled *Pastorals* (2004). This comic modesty cannot be left as the last word on McDonald’s engagement with pastoral, an engagement far more nuanced than, for instance, the writing of ‘nature poetry’ as a way into, or out of, discussing personal troubles or the Troubles. McDonald, deservedly praised as a critic, is admired but insufficiently discussed as a poet; my paper will address this, in four stages, by considering the (often uncomfortable) overlap between the two

occupations, and the self-consciousness about this overlap that the pastoral tradition invites into McDonald's poems.

First I will consider the influence – both upon my thinking and, I suspect, upon McDonald's book – of William Empson's *Some Versions of Pastoral* (1935). Empson's simultaneously broad and deep (if not always lucidly expressed) understanding of the pastoral tradition, his sense of what pastoral says about the complicated social role of the artist, is of much importance. The second part of the paper will focus upon some of McDonald's borrowings from the tradition, his versions of pastoral writers. He references Spenser, translates Theocritus, and imitates Virgil; 'Damon the Mower' takes its title from Marvell, while, more subtly, 'The Resurrection of the Soldiers' echoes the passage of Gray's 'Elegy' discussed by Empson. Does this shared authorship equal shared authority?

In his critical work, indeed, McDonald has written extensively about the complexities of poetic and critical 'authority'. He has reservations about the value of 'popular' poetry; one is reminded of Empson's fuzzy distinction between proletarian art – by and for, but not necessarily about, 'the people' – and pastoral, which 'though "about" is not "by" or "for"'. McDonald's poems 'Work: 1958' and 'Work: 1998' are 'about' different kinds of working life. I will compare the second poem's withdrawal into a detached, introspective, self-critical world ('I watch my steps leading me everywhere') to the second-person address of the first poem, with its democratic rhyming quatrains and its suggestion of sympathy rather than ironical self-pity.

The paper will conclude with some comment on risk. My title comes from 'The Risk', and the word also appears in the final line of 'At Castlereagh Church': 'weeks before | the clematis will risk a flower.' That the latter is immediately followed by the poem 'Pastoral' (with its mention of flowers, and springtime's risk in 'fighting where it could not win') is hard to ignore. Christopher Ricks has suggested that all great art must be accusable of, must risk, specific kinds of failure (great religious art risks blasphemy, and so on). What failure does McDonald risk when he risks a flower, risks writing *Pastorals*? What does that title risk, and what risks does it demand? And should McDonald be 'chastised' for these risks? 'The chances are this won't work' is an expression of ambition as much as of humility, and I will argue the case for McDonald's risks within the pastoral and the lyric.

### **Thomas Kinsella: From Centre City**

*Lucy Collins*

In Thomas Kinsella's poetry the intellect is always in dialogue with the physical world, not only reflecting the immediacy of subjective experiences, but the personal importance of the material conditions of community and culture. Throughout a long career, Kinsella has integrated private and public perspectives, so that his poems accumulate a network of meanings, much as the civic space of Dublin is formed by layers of the personal and political past. Kinsella employs a variety of strategies to explore the relationship between the private citizen and the city. The figure of the walker is a persistent one, enacting the dynamics of observation and suggesting new creative spaces within which the poet may move. The circularity of this act is also important—Kinsella seeks to maintain a dynamic body of work, always open to change and revision, and more significantly to the act of re-thinking itself.

This paper will consider Kinsella's engagement with the city of Dublin as a means of negotiating the relationship between public and private histories, and between spatial and temporal understanding in poetry. Kinsella's search for meaning is a complex and contingent

process: in his investigation of the layered nature of human experience and understanding, he combines spatial and temporal representation but in ways that redraw the borders between the national and the personal, between the philosophical and the experiential. The dismantling of the city space that takes place in his work is a radical investigation not only of the social forces that neglect cultural development but also of the pressures exerted by the act of representation itself.

## **PANEL 7C**

### **Ghostly Currents: Alice Oswald and the Return of the Repressed**

*Dr Sarah Jackson*

Jan Coo! Jan Coo!  
have you any idea what goes into water?

Alice Oswald *Dart* (London: Faber, 2002), 25

The apparition of Jan Coo haunts the River Dart in Alice Oswald's book-length poem, re-appearing as 'a tremor in the woods' or 'a salmon under a stone'. Thinking about the ways that 'ghosts disturb our sense of the separation of the living from the dead', this paper argues that Jan Coo's inevitable return in the poem disrupts not only the nature of being, but also the limits of reading. Beginning and ending with the same question, 'Who's this...?', Oswald gestures towards the problematics of closure addressed in Freud's 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable', returning us, as readers, to the source of the river – and to the beginning of reading again. Such repetition and return, for Peter Brooks, is 'basic to our experience of literary texts'. 'Rhyme, alliteration, assonance, meter, refrain', he writes, 'are in some manner repetitions that take us back in the text, that allow the ear, the eye, the mind to make connections, conscious or unconscious, between different textual moments'. This paper explores the ways in which repetition and refrain haunt Oswald's work, so that her writing hovers between forward and backward movement, beginning and end, tradition and change.

*Dart*, then, is both haunting and haunted. Indeed, Derek Attridge argues that 'not only is it possible to talk about the ghost *in* literature; we can say that the ghost *is* literature (as long as we're cautious about that word "is")'. Drawing on Derrida's account in *Spectres of Marx* that 'a masterpiece always moves, by definition, in the manner of a ghost', this paper will open up the multiple ways in which contemporary British and Irish poetry is always haunted by repetition, return, and other ghostly currents.

### **'All who take pleasure in the learning of that time': Cavafian resonances in Christopher Middleton and John Ash**

*Evan Jones*

This talk will examine ways in which works by both Christopher Middleton and John Ash – contemporary British poets of the diaspora who have lived in the US and Turkey – have been affected by place and historical elements in the poetry of C.P. Cavafy (1863-1933).

Critics over the years have taken to separating Cavafy into various visions, so that as Edgar Allan Poe is known differently and distinctly between the Americans and the French, so the reputation and importance of Cavafy as a poet has developed in different ways between the Americans and the Greeks. In America, he is an arbiter for the homoerotic in

poetry – admired by Auden, and influential to the generation after, importantly James Merrill and Mark Doty. In Greece, however, he is the poet of the diaspora: born in the cosmopolitan Alexandria of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and living for brief spells or longer in Marseilles, Paris, London, Liverpool and Constantinople. He was a poet whom the Athenian cultural intelligentsia of the 1930s, including future Nobel Laureate George Seferis, were distrustful of: a distrust linked to Cavafy's infamous sexuality.

In Britain, despite his popularity and the abundance of translations in print, Cavafy's influence and position are less discussed. Yes, contemporary figures continue to find inspiration in his work and life: David Hockney has illustrated fourteen of his poems; Derek Mahon has translated his poetry; and Seamus Heaney has written an introduction to a recent translation of the poems. But he resonates in these cases, as in many, for *being* Cavafy, not because of his influence on poetic or artistic modes.

In examining specific poems by Middleton and Ash, poets who, like Cavafy, 'live on the outskirts of empire', I argue that the very different methods in which they carry Cavafian elements forward suggest a shared reading that distills Cavafy's poetics into yet another variation – the poet of the diaspora turning to Byzantine history for pleasure, learning and content – but one that is entirely their own.

## Harry Clifton's Paradise: Dante and the Contemporary Irish Poet

*Maren Kratz*

Contemporary Irish poets as diverse as Thomas Kinsella, Seamus Heaney, Ciaran Carson and Harry Clifton have turned to Dante to convey their own political or personal experiences. In his essay on Dante and the modern poet, Heaney ascribes a "generating power", a "long reach into the first and deepest levels of the shaping spirit" to the *Commedia*. Reasons for the poets' use of Dante are intricately linked with religious, cultural and political motivations. Catholicism as a repressive as well as a protective force is inherent to this generation of Irish writers, and most of them have felt compelled to respond artistically to the Troubles.

Critical studies of Harry Clifton, although he has been increasingly acknowledged since *Secular Eden* (2007), are regrettably rare. Exploring the concept and imagery of (Earthly) Paradise, this paper will go into detail on Clifton's poems 'The Crystalline Heaven', 'Secular Eden', 'Cacciaguida', and 'The Poet in Exile' (Clifton's translation of Canto XVII from Dante's *Paradiso*). Taking into account theories of intertextuality and influence, including Bloom, Genette and Jaus, I will investigate Clifton's methods of borrowing and its impact, to show how he uses *La Divina Commedia* to express his own subject.

In 'The Crystalline Heaven', Clifton quotes from *Inferno* XVI, underlining the oppressive work atmosphere at Dáil Éireann, and sets it against the Dantesque heavenly vision that the glass dome of the building evokes in him. 'The Poet in Exile' renders Dante's conversation with his ancestor Cacciaguida, who divines Dante's exile, since Dante sets the *Comedy* before the time he writes it in, i.e. before his exile. His ancestor's (imagined) words serve him as a justification for telling the story of his otherworldly journey. 'Cacciaguida' parallels Dante's ancestor with Clifton's own ancestor, whose steps he is trying to retrace. 'Secular Eden' reflects on French everyday life, which is seemingly free from moral and sectarian pressure, "no one will ever fall from grace", there is "no guilt now". Ironically, the "pure, organic apple" from a "health food shop" promises "apokatastasis". The tension between an internalized religious upbringing and a longing for the greener grass on the other side represents a common feature of much of contemporary Irish poetry.

In the light of a general secularization of Western culture, it will also be considered how secular

(or, indeed, how religious) Clifton's poetry is. He contrasts France, his "secular Eden", with Italy and his Irish homeland. The clash of his Catholic background and the modern world, in which everything is global and migration is fashionable or even obligatory, reverberates in his poems. Furthermore, I will discuss the answer to the question of whether happiness and poetic freedom can only be achieved in exile.