

# INTRODUCTION

## Re-Mapping Exile

Michael Böss and Irene Gilsenan Nordin

Political exile and economic emigration once formed a nexus that played a significant role for the construction of Irish patriotism and nationalism. But it was not until 1985, when Kerby Miller published his book *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* that the mental, cultural, and ideological connectives were empirically demonstrated. Miller challenged nationalist orthodoxy in so far as he showed how 'exile', far from simply denoting political banishment, was a social construct with multiple cultural meanings and connotations. Miller concluded that ordinary 'exiled' 18<sup>th</sup>-century emigrants to North America were victimized more by pre-modern cultural determinants, nationalist propaganda and a modernising economy than by British rule and alien, evicting landlords.

Miller's conclusions fed into the resuscitated debate on 'Irishness' in the 1980s and 1990s. However, it took relatively long for this debate to affect Irish literary criticism. As Patrick Ward correctly points out, most literary critics and editors up to then had either wholly disregarded the subject of exile or dealt with it in a rather incidental and vague way (3). The only systematic monograph so far on this topic from a literary point of view is Ward's own *Exile, Emigration and Irish Writing*, which is an investigation of thematic configurations of exile in the work of Irish writers since the Middle Ages. Ward examines the history of notions of exile in medieval, Gaelic tradition and demonstrates how they contribute to the formation of new meanings in the context of Irish nationalism, modernisation, and nation building in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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Some of the essays in the present collection are broadly inspired by Miller and Ward's critical inquiries in that they combine historical, cultural, and literary analyses in their treatment of aspects of exile in Irish writing. The theoretical perspective of exile in these essays is 'structuralist', understood in the political and/or individual context, where exile is seen from a structuralist predominance of negativity, in the sense that exile is understood as a physical state of being, often associated with absence, into which an individual willingly or unwillingly enters. Other essays in the volume are inspired by a 'poststructuralist' perspective, where exile is considered in the light of postmodernist and psychoanalytic concerns. In this respect the narration of exile is understood as a celebration of playful transgressiveness, of hybridity, diversity and otherness, of simulacra and simulation, as a prototype of a split, fluid subjectivity that leaves behind a linear mode of thinking, in favour of 'a sense of identity that rests not on fixity but contingency' (Braidotti 31). This type of exile moves away from a political, cultural, economic idea of exile to an understanding of exile in a wider existential sense.

The volume is the product of a group of Irish Studies scholars in the Nordic countries. It presents readings of Irish literature, history and culture that reflect some of the historical, sociological, psychological and philosophical dimensions of exile in the 1800s and 1900s. We have been particularly interested in discussing 'exile' in a wide range of texts including literature, political writings and song-writing, either in works of Irish writers not normally associated with exile, or in which new aspects of 'exile' can be discerned. Works by the following authors have been examined in order of arrangement in the collection: Hubert Butler, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, Rosa Mulholland, James Joyce, John Hewitt, Van Morrison, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, as well as a number of other Irish women poets, Roddy Doyle, and John Banville. The book is a collaborative joint venture in so far as it emerges from a series of interdisciplinary workshops and seminars held in the period 2001-2004. During these work-in-process sessions, the participants, although each responsible for his or her own contribution, have been subject to collegial

scrutiny and encouragement, as well as the occasional ignorant question, which may be seen as both the burden and blessing of interdisciplinary collaboration. The latter was our experience, however. We fully enjoyed producing scholarship in a way which we consider is far too rare within the humanities. We regard the plurality of approaches represented here not as a flaw, but rather as a source of strength, because it reflects our general view that the historically changing meanings of 'exile' evade rigid and narrow definitions.

The individual authors of the essays have not been asked to strive towards any theoretical unity, but instead to apply the methods and theories that were found most relevant for their approach and the texts chosen for study. The first essay by Michael Böss, 'Theorizing Exile', outlines some general observations on theoretical and historical approaches to exile and suggests areas and topics for future research. This essay offers a systematic and critical discussion of a number of definitions and major theories of exile within contemporary sociological and literary studies. Böss draws on new insights from a variety of academic disciplines and demonstrates how they may contribute to developing a new, general understanding of exile as a multidimensional and 'bilateral' phenomenon. With reference, for example, to recent biblical scholarship, contemporary sociological theory and, especially, Hispanicist Paul Ilie's theory of 'inner exile', Böss suggests that a new 'sociology of exile' may open up for a fresh approach to the study of the role of exile in Irish history and literature. Finally, he discusses how new notions and meanings of exile developed in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy and literature, as a result of the experience of economic modernization, mass migration, extended warfare, and the breakdown of traditional notions of individual belonging and social order.

Billy Gray, in his essay "'The lukewarm conviction of temporary lodgers": The Anglo-Irish and Dimensions of Exile in the Work of Hubert Butler', examines how differing concepts of exile can be applied to Hubert Butler's perception of the Anglo-Irish experience after the Act of Union. As this essay demonstrates, Butler argues that within the confines of a

comparatively short historical period, the Protestant Aristocracy, who had been the original progenitors of Irish nationalism, came to view themselves as exiles within their own country. Gray's contention is that by applying the ideas of exile theorists such as Joseph Wittlin and Jan Vladeslav - particularly those concepts which elucidate exilic experiences pertaining to 'communal trauma' and 'powerlessness' - it is possible to illuminate Butler's views on what he refers to as 'the withdrawal of a whole historic class'.

In 'Exiles no More: Ethnic Leadership and the Construction of the Myth of Thomas D'Arcy McGee', Michael Böss argues that these two leading Irish writers and publishers in 19<sup>th</sup>-century North America (McGee and Sadlier) contributed significantly to the acculturation of Irish Catholic immigrants in Canada and the United States from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By virtue of their shared sense of mission as leaders of the Irish Catholic communities of North America, they helped especially famine immigrants adjust to life in North America. In particular, it is demonstrated how McGee - a former Irish revolutionary nationalist who later became a socially conservative prophet of Canadian nationalism - served Catholic Irish immigrants in Canada, by divesting them of reasons for maintaining a separatist and exilic identity. He taught them, instead, to see themselves as Catholic Canadians of 'Celtic' ethnicity. The argument rests on the assumption that McGee's own 'conversion' to Canadianness occurred at a time of his life when he had learned to accept and respect the role of the Catholic Church in the New World.

The concepts of the stranger and the returning exile, quite common motifs in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Irish literature, are addressed by Heidi Hansson, in her essay, 'From Reformer to Sufferer: The Returning Exile in Rosa Mulholland's Fiction'. According to Hansson, the difference between these two concepts is that the stranger's function is mainly to be the vehicle through which an author can educate readers about the positive aspects of Irish life, whereas the returning exile is more often used to convey social critique. The returning exile sees the need for reform and change, while the stranger is usually shown to finally embrace the initially foreign Irish society as it is. Because the

returning exile belongs to both Ireland and the place of exile – usually America or Australia – the return ‘home’ is often shown to result in a sense of hybridity. This becomes particularly clear when it is a woman who returns. A man who comes back is often shown to return in triumph, but when the protagonist is a woman, the return is often described as problematic.

Ida Klitgård’s essay, ‘(Dis)Location and Its (Dis)Contents: Translation as Exile in James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Finnegans Wake*’, argues that James Joyce makes use of a poetics of translation as a metaphorical means of expressing states of exile in two of his major works: *A Portrait of the Artist* and *Finnegans Wake*. A voluntary exile himself, James Joyce was deeply influenced by travel and multiple languages. This experience became the impetus of his life-long literary revolt against British reign in Ireland. This essay situates itself within a poststructuralist framework by questioning topics of philosophical, translation theoretical, and literary interest in a reading of Joyce. In a demonstration of how Joyce relies on a poetics of translation in his works, the essay questions conventional boundaries of what is perceived as the essence of original language – exemplified in the Tower of Babel myth, boundaries of conventional ideas of translation as mere ethnocentric transformation of languages, and boundaries of conventional literary style in usually one language.

In ‘John Hewitt at Home and in Exile’, Britta Olinder discusses the complications of roots and rootlessness in the works of the Northern Irish poet and autobiographer, John Hewitt. Not only does Hewitt deal with the discomfort felt by the early colonizers in exile from England, and the stories of family members who emigrated to America, but also with his own alienation, even from his friendly Catholic neighbours in the Glens of Antrim, or his inner exile among conservative Protestants in power in his province. This last turns into dissent as exile, felt most keenly during the war when he is, however, also acquainting himself with so far unknown parts of his home ground. In his fifteen-year actual exile in Coventry, Hewitt finds ample opportunities to ponder the advantages and drawbacks of his situation and

occasions for feeling at home and simultaneously as a stranger in other foreign countries.

Representations of Celtic roots and Irish diaspora identities in three 1980s albums by the Belfast born singer/songwriter, Van Morrison, are examined by Bent Sørensen in 'The Celtic Ray: Representations of Diaspora Identities in Van Morrison Lyrics'. Morrison's music, it is argued, is based on a mixture of North American forms (rhythm and blues/jazz and folk/country) and traditional Irish folk inspiration. The 1980s saw Morrison return more explicitly to Irish roots, and a trilogy of albums from that period express Celtic longings, culminating in a full-length album collaboration with The Chieftains (*Irish Heartbeat*, 1988). The essay shows how the songs *Celtic Ray* and *Irish Heartbeat* thematize tensions between longing and belonging in a conflict that, according to Sørensen, is typical of diaspora texts. As the songs reappear in full Celtic-style arrangements on the 1988 album, they form a seamless part of a whole suite of songs on migration (usually figured as 'roving') and exile, describing an arch in the singer's personal development of identity. The essay concludes with a discussion of Morrison's notions of Celtic brotherhood as a hybrid between American New Age philosophies (individualist) and Irish identity positions (collectivist), a duality which is further mirrored in Morrison's internal and external exile positions.

From a poststructuralist, philosophical point of view, Irene Gilsenan Nordin examines exile as an existential state of being, and an expression of the essential human condition, in her essay entitled "'Between the Dark Shore and the Light": The Exilic Subject in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's *The Second Voyage*'. The essay traces the related metaphors of homelessness and home in Ní Chuilleanáin's *The Second Voyage*, and shows how images of fixity, such as those of the house and land, are contrasted with those of fluidity, seen especially in Ní Chuilleanáin's use of water and the sea. Gilsenan Nordin argues that images of home can be seen in terms of the restricting linear mode of intellectual thinking, versus those of homelessness, the contrasting semiotic images of unconscious desire, which are liberating and empowering forces. These juxtapositions are explored in light of the idea of the speaking subject as exilic, one that is constantly moving between

contrasting states of being. Gilsenan Nordin compares this with what the philosopher Rosi Braidotti calls the nomadic subject, one that continually moves across 'established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning bridges'.

By way of comparison and complement, Britta Olinder in her essay 'Washed up on Somebody Else's Tide: The Exile Motif in Contemporary Poetry by Women' shows, indeed, that exile has many faces, as many as those in exile. It is 'bitter, sharp-tongued, mournful and/or delicious', sometimes at one and the same time. If one cannot or will not regard the new country as one's own, the distance, the accepted alienation in the new situation, becomes a fact. Exile then becomes a life-style. The exiled person turns into a continually fugitive soul who can never find peace. These and other attitudes to exile can be found in poetry written by Irish women. Most aspects such as homelessness, the bitterness over conditions that left exile the only option, the feeling of being dispossessed, and comparisons with biblical exile, are also dealt with by male poets, while the daughter's obligation to follow her father into exile or marriage experienced as an exiled state, are experiences specific to women. The essay also examines the role and importance of language and dialect to the person in exile.

Åke Persson's essay, "'The culchies have fuckin' everythin'": Internal Exile in Roddy Doyle's *The Barrytown Trilogy*', argues that Doyle's Barrytown Trilogy is most fruitfully understood if placed against and within the dominant socio-political and economic realities of post-Independence Ireland. Persson sees the Trilogy as being in dialogue with traditional Ireland governed by a rigid system of exclusion. In other words, the Trilogy must be read in a historical context. This essay draws on a range of insights from history and sociology as well as socioeconomic and physical geography to open up the texts, and the author's reading of Doyle can best be described as materialist, although not necessarily Marxist. It might be argued that it comes close to New Historicism/Cultural Materialism. The essay argues that Doyle's works are a product of and a response to the cultural and political webs of a particular society and must be understood in relation to those webs.



Filtering John Banville's novel *Shroud* through a raster of certain postmodern ideas, Hedda Friberg, in her essay, 'John Banville's *Shroud*: Exile in Simulation', examines what she sees as an exilic condition present in the novel. Reading *Shroud* through Jean Baudrillard's early writings on contemporary culture, through his vision of an age of simulation, an 'implosive era of models' - especially as expressed in his *Simulacra and Simulation* - Friberg sees Banville's novel as engaged in a dialogue with Baudrillard's text. Friberg suggests that the novel's protagonist, Axel Vander, can be seen as moving in a state of exile in simulation. Exile is here used both in its original sense of banishment, and in the sense of alienation, or estrangement. Vander's exile is triple-levelled: he is exiled from his people and, through a process of falsification, from their history; he is exiled from the (fake) likeness of a divinity; finally, he is exiled from his own self, which has become a copy without an original. A consideration of such a metaphoric exile in simulation raises questions of shape-changing, reduplication and imitation, authenticity and the disappearance of the real, and of the ultimate fluidity of identity.

## References

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