Border States in the Work of Tom Mac Intyre
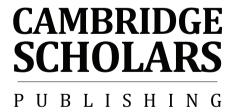
Border States in the Work of Tom Mac Intyre:
A Paleo-Postmodern Perspective

By

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P U B L I S H I N G

This book is dedicated to my partner Emily Franks.

It is also dedicated to my family Mary, Michael, Anne, John, Valerie, Mel and my parents Catherine and Jack Ryan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

In the history of Irish literature Tom Mac Intyre is very much a marginalized figure. There has been limited scholarly interest in his work to date. This study aims to show the uniqueness of Mac Intyre's paleo-postmodern aesthetic of conjoining an experimental approach to form with an Irish cultural thematic base, and how this can be situated in a literary and theoretical context. The interdisciplinary analysis in this study is informed by generic forms such as theatre and prose through a combined theoretical model of a Yeatsian paleo-modernist interest in the occult, Jungian archetypes and Lacan's post-structural conception of language and its relationship to the unconscious. This study will undertake an analysis of Mac Intyre's collection of short stories *Find the Lady*, and two of his plays, *The Great Hunger* and *Rise up Lovely Sweeney*, which focuses on the construction of Irish identity in a paleo-postmodern context. Paleo-postmodernism is a term I have created to describe the unique aesthetics of Tom Mac Intyre. It includes the influence of Yeats's revivalist interest in Irish mythology, which has been termed paleo-modernist, and Mac Intyre's experimental style which ruptures the English language through the presence of Irish language and mythology. This study is centred on the fact that Mac Intyre's paleo-postmodernism is unique in Irish literary history.

Mac Intyre's work has not received the attention it deserves due to its complexity. He approaches his fiction and drama in similar ways. Both genres, in Mac Intyre's work, are subject to an experimental style where content is steeped in ambiguity. Every word, sentence, and image have different layers of meaning; and such an intricacy of allusion points to an ancient and elusive, ephemeral voice rooted in identity. In his analysis of Mac Intyre's short stories Seamus Heaney states, "I have not grasped the full import and the inner logic of all the stories," and his view is typical of the critical reception Mac Intyre has received for his drama and fiction.[1]

This study will demonstrate how Mac Intyre's work is important in twentieth century Irish literature. The history of Irish literature can be divided into two general aspects: 1. An experimental tradition mentored by

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1. Seamus Heaney, "Introduction," in *The Harper's Turn*, by Tom Mac Intyre (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1982), 8.

Joyce and Beckett which rejects a positive cultural perspective on Irish identity. 2. The mainstream Irish literary canon of writers who valorize Irish cultural values and identity. The main influences in this group would be W.B. Yeats, Patrick Kavanagh and Brian Friel. Mac Intyre is unique in that he crosses these boundaries. In his fiction and drama, he adapts a postmodern experimental style to a Yeatsian revivalist interest in Irish myth and language. In the Irish literary world Mac Intyre's experimentation in his drama and fiction has placed him among the writers who, according to Heaney, "set out to make it new".[2] Mac Intyre's disruption in his work is concerned with dismantling through the English language the historical resonance of what he perceives as the negative influences in Irish culture of patriarchal constructs such as Catholicism, nationalism and colonialism. As Heaney notes on Mac Intyre's work, "There is a far thing, pierced and lonely, some crystal of hurt transmitting a pure signal."[3] This statement is the essence of Tom Mac Intyre's art. Mac Intyre's experimental revivalist approach is used to grasp a purist sense of Irish identity in mythology and the Irish language to heal the ancient pain of the "hurt mind."

    The focus of this study will take a multi-generic approach involving a literary analysis of Mac Intyre's theatre in the 1980s and his short fiction.[4] Beginning with a study of mythology in his short stories there will be an analysis of Mac Intyre's distrust of the English language and how his experimental style is informed by his Protestant heritage. It will then consider the tragic nature of such a language conflict and its reflection on Irish identity in the familiar literary discourses of rural Ireland and the minefield of political sectarianism in contemporary Ulster.   By approaching Mac Intyre's work in this manner, I hope to demonstrate the idiosyncratic nature of his aesthetic of assimilating a postmodern form with revival-type content. Mac Intyre's construction of a spiritualized Irish identity from the fallout of language experimentation is unique in Irish literature and the term paleo-postmodernism, as developed in this study, marks that uniqueness, and shows that Mac Intyre's work is not as inaccessible as is generally believed.[5]

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2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. As opposed to a purely performance approach, I take a literary approach to Mac Intyre's theatre.
5. A detailed description of paleo-postmodernism is set out later in this Introduction.

Tom Mac Intyre

Tom Mac Intyre (1931…) was born in Bailieborough, county Cavan. He comes from a Presbyterian background. He has often described his childhood upbringing as very strict:

> I was brought up in a fiercely puritan, sectarian atmosphere. I was subjected to a De Valera, Gestapo-style education. I was told again and again –in this Hitler's Ireland […]-'you don't have permission to breathe unless I say so,' and it's quite a job to shrug off those strictures. [6]

He undertook a BA in English literature at University College Dublin and subsequently between the 60s and late 70s spent some of his time in the United States as a lecturer in creative writing at the University of Michigan and at Williams College, Massachusetts. He started his writing career in his thirties in 1965 and in 1979 he moved to Paris to work with the Surrealist dance group the Calck Hook Theatre Company. From the 1970s he became a playwright for the distinguished Abbey Theatre in Dublin.[7] As well as his published work in fiction and poetry, Mac Intyre took an unusual turn towards politics and published a diary entitled *Through the Bridewell Gate* (1971), which covered the arms trial in 1970 which involved Irish Republican politicians such as Charles Haughey and Neil Blaney.[8]

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6. Sarah Keating, "Born With Storytelling In His Blood," *The Irish Times* 25 April 2005.
http://www.Irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2009/0425/1224245347246.html
7. The Abbey Theatre is based in Dublin and is an historic landmark in the history of Irish Theatre. The Abbey, which is also known as The National Theatre of Ireland, was founded by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory in the late nineteenth century. See Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up To Nation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 37-38; Robert Welch, *The Abbey Theatre, 1899-1999: Form and Pressure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1-8; Tim Pat Coogan, *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal, 1966-1996, and the Search for Peace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 120-121.
8. The famous arms trial in Dublin in 1970 included the involvement of two cabinet ministers, Charles Haughey and Neil Blaney, who were accused of importing guns for the IRA. The official IRA had reestablished themselves in 1969 when nationalist families in Northern Ireland were under attack by sectarian loyalist groups. Charles Haughey and Neil Blaney were accused of providing one hundred thousand pounds of public money to arm the IRA. The cabinet ministers were subsequently sacked and the incident created a rift in the Fianna Fail party, who were debating to what extent the Irish government should be involved in the

Mac Intyre has had a prolific career as a bilingual writer of verse, prose and drama. He has written two novels *The Charollais* (1969) and *Story of a Girl* (2003). He has published five collections of short stories: *Dance the Dance* (1970), *The Harper's Turn* (1982), *The Word for Yes: New and Selected Stories* (1991), *Find the Lady* (2008). He has published seven collections of poetry*: Blood Relations: Versions of Gaelic Poems of The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1972)*, I Bailed Out at Ardee* (1987), *Fleurs du Lit* (1990), *A Glance Will Tell You and a Dream Confirm* (1994), *Stories of the Wandering Moon* (2000), *Abc* (2006), *Encountering Zoe: New and Selected Poetry* (2010). He has also published three collections of poetry in Irish: *Ag Caint Leis an mBanríon* (1997), *Silenus na gCat* (1999), *Tamall Suirí* (2004).

Though Mac Intyre has been a prolific playwright, very few of his plays have been published. His published plays include *The Great Hunger* (2000), *The Gallant John Joe (2000), Sheep's Milk on the Boil* (1997), *Good Evening Mr. Collins* (1996), *What Happened Brigid Cleary* (2005), and *Only an Apple* (2009). Other plays, not published, include his first play, *Eye Winker Tom Tinker* (1972), *The Old Firm* (1972), *Jack Be Nimble* (1976), *Find the Lady* (1977), *The Bearded Lady* (1984), *Rise up Lovely Sweeney* 1985), *Dance For Your Daddy* (1987)*, Snowhite* (1988)*, Kitty O'Shea* (1990), *Chickadee* (1993), *The Chirpaun* (1997). His unpublished plays in Irish include *Cúirt an Mheán Oíche (The Midnight Court)* (1999) and *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire (The Cry of Art O'Leary)* (1988).

Identity

Self-identity in Mac Intyre's work is one that transcends history. His protagonists tend to be tragic figures who distrust the empirical world of Irish modernity, the rural Irish landscape or political idealism. Instead they have an essentialised liminal existence on the border between the alienating space of post colonial Irish modernity and the desired esoteric space of Irish myth and language. Their tragedy lies in the fact that their desire for self-fulfillment through that ephemeral Celtic space is always elusive. They always end up as fragmented subjects or lost in a silent space. The alienating aspect of the existence of these characters is rooted in the English language. In Jacques Lacan's terms, which are discussed later in this Introduction, a subject is defined by language, and in the

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problems in the North. See W. J. Mc Cormack, *The Blackwell Companion to Modern Irish Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 30.

context of Mac Intyre's protagonists that definition is through the English language.[9] Historically the English language in Ireland was imposed by colonial force, and in Mac Intyre's work the protagonist's desire for a beatific vision of the primal Irish, pre-colonial self is sought out through the deconstruction of the English language.

According to Seamus Deane Irish culture essentialised itself to its own detriment as it ultimately reinforces the divisive political divisions in the north of Ireland:

> Although the Irish political crisis is, in many respects, a monotonous one, it has always been deeply engaged in the fortunes of Irish writing at every level, from the production of work to its publication and reception. The oppressiveness of the tradition we inherit has its source in our own readiness to accept the mystique of Irishness as an inalienable feature of our writing and, indeed, of much else in our culture. That mystique is itself an alienating force. To accept it is to become involved in the spiritual heroics of a Yeats or a Pearse, to believe in the incarnation of the nation in the individual. To reject it is to make a fetish of exile, alienation and dislocation in the manner of Joyce and Beckett. Between these hot and cold rhetorics there is little room for choice. Yet the polarization they identify is an inescapable and understandable feature of the social and political realities we inhabit.[10]

This point is central to understanding Mac Intyre's unique position in Irish literature. Mac Intyre maintains the "mystique." His disruption of meaning in his work gives the impression of a fragmented political identity, but his themes have inflections of Yeats's early revivalist valorization of ancient Irish mythology. Unlike Yeats, Mac Intyre claims he is not political. In a personal interview he quotes a variation of Yeats's famous division between the creative and political world. According to Yeats, "We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry."[11] Mac Intyre states, "Out of the argument with ourselves we make poetry. But out of the argument with others we make politics."[12] Fragmentation in Mac Intyre's work represents an attempt to reach an unreachable language, a spiritual apotheosis rooted in mythology

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9. Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology* ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 447.
10. Seamus Deane, "Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea," in *Theorizing Ireland* ed. by Claire Connolly (Hampshire/New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 25.
11. W. B. Yeats, *Mythologies* (NY: Macmillan, 1959), 331.
12. See interview in Appendix 1, 227.

and the Irish language. It is an essentialised desire and the tragedy for his characters lies in the existence of the English language, which becomes a barrier to accessing that primal ur-Irish nature.

Mac Intyre's anti-empiricist prioritization of the unconscious is reminiscent of the ideas of the Irish eighteenth-century philosopher George Berkeley who believed that immateriality was the nature of the world and knowledge was only accessible via the mind.[13] This Cartesian attitude influenced Yeats and "constituted a mythologising of the historical past which suited not only Yeats's *nationalist revivalism* […] but also his *Ascendancy Conservatism*."[14] Like Berkeley and Yeats, Mac Intyre has an Anglo-Irish inheritance, but his vision is ultimately a personal journey which is outside a collective structure of politics or religion. [15]

Contemporary Short Fiction

In Irish literary history the short story has always been regarded as a "pre-eminent Irish prose form."[16] This is due to the influence of the Irish oral story telling tradition from which the literary short story established itself.[17] In the nineteenth century the short story was the domain of the Anglo-Irish, with writers such as Edith Somerville and Violet Florence Martin, who wrote under the pseudonym "Martin Ross." Their themes centred on the lives of the Irish ascendancy, and the Catholic masses were stereotyped as largely ignorant and void of any subjectivity. In twentieth-century Irish literature the form was dominated by Catholic writers such as Frank O'Connor, Seán Ó'Faoláin and James Joyce, where realism was the main characteristic.

In his work *The New Short Story Theories* (2004) Charles May sees the short story genre as having transcendent and mythical features: "the tradition of the short story as descended from myth, folk tale, fable and romance forms, drives it towards focusing on eternal values rather than

13. His anti-empiricism was regarded as an attack on British empiricists such as John Locke who believed that external reality was made up of primary and secondary qualities.
14. Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland* (London and NY: Routledge, 1997), 151.
15. Berkeley was an ascendant conservative. See Edmund Curtis, *A History of Ireland: From Earliest Times to 1922* (NY: Routledge, 2002), 259.
16. Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Short Story* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.
17. Deborah Averill, *The Irish Short Story From George Moore to Frank O'Connor* (MD: University Press of America, 1981), 20-21.

temporal ones and sacred or unconscious reality rather than profane or everyday reality."[18]   Aspects of this definition applies to Yeats's revivalist interest in mythology and the spirit world, but as Heather Ingman notes the definition "does not suit the mimetic fictional worlds of mid-twentieth writers like Frank O'Connor, Sean Ó'Faoláin and Michael McLaverty."[19] The "unconscious" aspect of May's definition in terms of dreams and symbolism rejects chronology in favour of artistic patterning suggests the modernism of Joyce's *Dubliners* or Beckett's short fiction.[20]   Mac Intyre's prose is very much concerned with the unconscious world and its relation to Irish mythology.   His style is non-linear in the manner of the experimental prose of Beckett and the American fiction of William Carlos Williams.[21]   Mac Intyre's work cannot be pigeonholed into a particular school of Irish short story writing.   But Heaney notes the influence of the revivalist tradition on Mac Intyre's short prose:

> When Irish mythology began to become a literary currency at the end of the nineteenth century, it was used to vindicate a claim to national identity, historic culture, spiritual resource.   A hundred years later the writer approaches it with less propagandist intent, with a primary hunger for form, in order to find structure for the unstructured potential within himself.[22]

This applies to Mac Intyre's latest collection *Find the Lady* (2008) where the unconscious and postmodern fragmentation meet at the point of a Yeatsian-type Celtic mysticism.   Mac Intyre's experimental style involves a disruption of a linear plot.   Out of all of Mac Intyre's short story collections I chose to analyse *Find the Lady* as it is the best prose representation of Mac Intyre's valorization of the feminine which will be discussed later in this Introduction.   I also examine *The Harper's Turn* (1982) which contains a story on the Sweeney myth which is useful for analysing Mac Intyre's dramatic interpretation of the myth which is explored in Chapter Three.

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18. Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Short Story*, 8.   From Charles May, "Introduction", *The New Short Story Theories* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1994), xxiii.
19. These writers were masters of the Irish short story in mid to late twentieth century Ireland.   Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Short Story*, 8.
20. Heather Ingman, *A History of the Irish Short Story*, 8.
21. Mac Intyre admires Williams's experimental style in the short story form.   He describes his meeting with Williams in 1962 in "An Hour with WCW", *Krino* No 18 (1995), 16-19.
22. Seamus Heaney, "Introduction" in *The Harper's Turn*, 9.

There is very little scholarly criticism available on Mac Intyre's short prose. Peter Denman undertook a review of Mac Intyre's first collection of short stories published in 1970 called *Dance the Dance* (1970) which was an uncharacteristically conventional work lacking any experimental style.[23] In Mac Intyre's second collection *The Harper's Turn* Seamus Heaney follows a trajectory of Mac Intyre's publishing career to the period when *The Harper's Turn* and notes the "elliptical" experimental pieces in the collection prioritized form over content. Critical analyses of the history of the short story, such as Heather Ingman's *A History of the Irish Short Story* (2009) or Deborah Averill's *The Irish Short Story from George Moore to Frank O'Connor* (1981) or Patrick Rafroidi's *The Irish Short Story* (1980), have ignored the contribution Tom Mac Intyre has made to the genre. [24] In *The Irish Novel in Our Time* (1975), Patrick Rafroidi discusses the importance of Mac Intyre's first novel, *The Charollais* (1969), as representing a rare example in the Irish novel of Joycean-styled innovation.[25] With notable mentions in *Representing the Troubles in Irish Short Fiction* (2004),[26] Mac Intyre is briefly cited in introductions of short story anthologies which have included his work: *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction* (1999) edited by Colm Tóibín, David Marcus's Introduction to *The Faber Book of Best New Irish Short Stories: 2004-5* (2005) and *The Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction* (1994) edited by Dermot Bolger. [27] There are also notable book reviews of Mac Intyre's short fiction style by Brendan Duffin, Aidan Higgins and John Dunne. Maurice Harmon has reviewed Mac Intyre's novel, *Story of a Girl,* and many of his comments are relevant to Mac Intyre's short story style.[28]

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23. Peter Denman, "Form and Fiction in the Stories of Tom Mac Intyre", *Etudes Irlandais IV*, (1995), 87-93.
24. Patrick Rafroidi and Terence Brown, *The Irish Short Story* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1980).
25. Patrick Rafroidi and Maurice Harmon eds., "A Question of Inheritance: The Anglo-Irish Tradition," in *The Irish Novel in Our Time* (Lille: Publications De L'universite De Lille III, 1975), 23.
26. Michael L. Storey, *Representing the Troubles in Irish Short Fiction* (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 89.
27. Colm Tóibín ed., *The Penguin Book of Irish Fiction* (NY: Viking, 1999), 789; David Marcus, "Introduction", in *The Faber Book of Best New Irish Short Stories: 2004-5* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005); Dermot Bolger, *The Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction* (London: Picador, 1994), 9-13.
28. Brendan Duffin, "A Plurality of Village Voices," *Fortnight* 424 (2004), 24; John Dunne, "Distillers Art" in *Books Ireland* 157 (1992), 45-46; Aidan Higgins, "Review: Glancing Bows," *Books Ireland* 67 (1982), 174.

Irish Theatre in the 80s

Up until the 1980s the history of Irish theatre in the twentieth century had two phases: the first phase led by Synge, Yeats, Lady Gregory and Seán O'Casey had ended by the late 1920s. Up until the 1950s Irish theatre was in serious decline and from the late 50s till the late 80s it entered a second phase with playwrights like Brian Friel, Tom Murphy and Hugh Leonard.[29] In the 1970s theatre was dominated by themes of political violence due to the escalation of the war in Northern Ireland and at that time the political plays of Sean O'Casey were the most popular.[30] But in the 1980s the focus had changed and the situation "moved beyond a increasingly tired set of conflicts, which it was now able to look back upon with irony, anger, sometimes even compassion and forgiveness".[31] As Mary Trotter notes, the 1980s was a period in which "playwrights and companies stretched Irish theatre's artistic boundaries, re-evaluating, commenting on, or breaking free of the peasant kitchen realist style that continued to inform much Irish drama."[32] Mac Intyre's experimental drama helped to "define a new situation" in 1980s drama.[33] As Daniel Shea states,

> In contrast to the conventional characters of theatre who speak their idiolects about their pasts, presents, and futures, who reason in their own peculiar ways about their circumstances, and who respond in comprehensible

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29. See Fintan O'Toole, "The State of the Art," in *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000), 48.
30. Chris Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre*, *1601-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 245. A good example of the political tension is when the artistic director of the National Theatre Society Peacock Theatre, an aspect of the Abbey Theatre, stated the focus of the theatre would be "political satire, historical comment and documentary experiment." In 1970 this mandate was tested when a play entitled *A State in Chassis*, written by Eugene Watters, Tomas MacAnna and John D. Stewart, gave an equally negative portrayal of loyalist paramilitaries and nationalist civil rights activists. One performance was interrupted by civil rights protesters who condemned the absurd portrayal of the nationalist movement in the North. See Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth Century Ireland: Cultivating the People* (London: Routledge, 2001), 193.
31. Chris Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre*, 1601-2000, 259; Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), 118.
32. Mary Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre*, 159.
33. Chris Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000*, 259.

language to others' conversation, Mac Intyre's characters are less what we hear them say and more what we see them do.[34]

Along with director Patrick Mason and actor Tom Hickey, Tom Mac Intyre pioneered a new approach to theatre production in Ireland where the old fashioned primacy of the playwright's text was replaced by an open script which was transformed by the collaborative efforts of the director and actor.[35] Physical theatre is a form of theatre that regards the physical as being as significant as dialogue. The term "Theatre of the Image" applies to the experimental plays of Tom Mac Intyre: "These plays heralded the development of a new idiom in Irish theatre, with an equally weighted verbal, gestural and visual score, even if the language was mostly incantatory as opposed to anecdotal or narrative in the traditional sense."[36]

This method was pioneered by Jerzy Grotowski who, in the 70s, by adopting the theatrical aesthetics of Antonin Artaud, articulated a physical aesthetic which revolutionized modern theatre in the twentieth century. Tom Hickey notes Grotowski's influence on Mac Intyre's adaptation of Kavanagh's poem, "The Great Hunger:"

Mac Intyre had spent time in Manhattan and had seen Merce Cunningham and Kantor from Poland. [...] So there was a whole American/European influence floating around in the rehearsal room. And there was Grotowski whom I didn't know much about. But I was aware he defined theatre as

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34. Daniel Shea, "Theatre of the Image,"in *The Theatre of Tom Mac Intyre: "Strays From the Ether"* ed. by Bernadette Sweeney and Marie Kelly (Dublin: Carysfort Press), 207.

35. Mac Intyre's physical theatre was informed by the experimental dance theatre of the surrealist Paris-based Calck Hook dance group and Meredith Monk's experimental ideas of performance. Chris Morash, *History of Irish Theatre, 1601-2000*, 257; Daniel Shea, "Theatre of the Image," 198-209. According to Tom Hickey, the main actor involved in Mac Intyre's plays of the mid-80s, "Mac Intyre is a story teller. One way of telling stories is through the image. Language pushed to the incantatory takes on the force of the imagistic. What is that force? It's the force of the image jumping the cerebral and going direct to the visceral. There is a gain in immediacy that can be terrifying." Tom Hickey, "Tom Mac Intyre: Border Country Bandit," in *The Theatre of Tom Mac Intyre: "Strays From the Ether"* ed. by Bernadette Sweeney and Marie Kelly, 62.

36. Deirdre Mulrooney, *Irish Moves: An Illustrated History of Dance and Physical Theatre in Ireland* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2006), 175.

sacred and holy, which I believed it is. It's a ritual containing elements of "play." [37]

Grotowski along with Bertolt Brecht became one of the most influential theatrical theoreticians of the twentieth century. In his famous work *Towards a Poor Theatre* (1969) Grotowski discusses the basic tenets of his philosophy:

> In the evolution of the theatrical art the text was one of the last elements to be added. If we place some people on a stage with a scenario they themselves have put together and let them improvise their parts as in the Commedia dell'arte, the   performance will be equally good even if the words are not articulated.[38]
>
> The actor who undertakes an act of self-penetration, who reveals himself and sacrifices the innermost part of himself [...] must be able to manifest the least impulse. He must be able to express, through sound and movement, those impulses which waver on the borderline between dream and reality. In short, he must be able to construct his own psycho-analytic language of sounds and gestures in the same way that a great poet creates his own language of words.[39]

Grotowski has termed the actor's vocation as a "holy" process where every aspect of the actor's self, especially the visceral, can represent the action authentically on a physical and metaphysical level.[40] Grotowski's idea of theatre is rooted in the desire to deconstruct "layers of convention, to penetrate the myths that link past, present, and future, and to uncover the symbols that are the heritage of all."[41] Mac Intyre's use of physical language has a similar aim; to strip away repressive Irish cultural constructs such as religious, patriarchal and colonial identifications in order to access the primal self. Mac Intyre describes his first meeting with Grotowski in the 1970s:

> I was in the middle of the USA. It was winter, it was always winter in the 1970s in the middle of the USA. Vietnam was in full swing, and there was considerable unease. Word came up the turn pike : Grotowski is speaking

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37. Deirdre Mulrooney, *Irish Moves: An Illustrated History of Dance and Physical Theatre in Ireland*, 186.
38. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards A Poor Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1969), 32.
39. Jerzy Grotowski, *Towards A Poor Theatre*, 35.
40. Grotowski, *Towards A Poor Theatre*, 34-36.
41. Stanley Hochman and Sybil P. Parker eds., *McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of World Drama: An International Reference Work in Five Volumes.*, 2nd edn, 5 vols (Berkshire: McGraw Hill, 1983), 421.

in room 207 of Kent State campus tonight. We all piled into a car and set out. We arrived there to find Grotowski looking exactly as one would expect a Polish prophet would look, dressed entirely in black, chain-smoking and speaking only in French. This is a great start, this is a mighty start, so he has an interpreter alongside him. And I'll always remember the key sentence from that expedition that Grotowski gave us, and we come back here to what is already a motif in our conversation, he said, "we speak of going to a play, never lose sight of a *play,* never lose sight of the noun to play, to play, to play".[42]

"Play" refers to the improvisational rehearsal process Mac Intyre was involved in his experimental period of the mid-80s where the triadic partnership of Mason, Hickey and Mac Intyre resulted in the production of five experimental plays, all of which took place in the Abbey (more specifically the Peacock theatre, which is the Abbey's space for more alternative drama).[43] They included *The Great Hunger*, *Rise up Lovely Sweeney*, *Snowhite*, *Dance for Your Daddy*, and *The Bearded Lady*. The reason for the lack of interest in the body in Irish theatre as Kiberd notes is historical:

> The roots of the problem may lie further back in the sufferings of an impoverished people. But further back still in the writings of Gaelic Ireland may be found the authentic voices of a medieval and late medieval people who lived most fully in their bodies and never for one moment wished to be out of them. The attempt by the current generation of artists to reconnect our theatre of the word with those experiences buried deep in our bodies is one of the glories of our culture.[44]

Kiberd equates ancient Gaelic Ireland with a valorization of the body and a post-famine nineteenth century Ireland which had lost its language, the result being a damaged Irish psyche that was disconnected from its language and body. As Fintan O'Toole states,

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42. Fiach Mac Conghail, "An Interview with Tom Mac Intyre," in *Theatre Talk: Voices of Irish Theatre Practitioners* ed. by Ger Fitzgibbon, Lillian Chambers and Eamon Jordan (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2001), 311.
43. Mac Intyre also uses the term "play" to describe his experimentation with language in his prose and drama. The term is also relevant to Beckett who uses the term to describe the dubious nature of reality, "Beckett's plays are just play for precise performance. They are play as opposed to unmediated reality, but play is its own mode of reality." Ruby Cohn, *Just Play: Beckett's Theatre* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3
44. Declan Kiberd, "Introduction," in *Irish Moves: An Illustrated History of Dance and Physical Theatre in Ireland* ed. by Deirdre Mulrooney, xiv.

The fear of the flesh which infected Ireland for so long affected our theatre just as much as it affected social life. A mistrust of the physical has given us a theatre that has always sought safety in words alone, ignoring the other senses and maintaining an anchor in things that can be understood verbally, abstractly. Tom Mac Intyre's version of Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger* heralds a theatre that can express what words can only suggest.[45]

Like other writers such as Friel, Mac Intyre attempts to reconnect with that ancient identity which was rooted in the power of its own Gaelic identity, language and body. But Mac Intyre's experimentation with the body in the mid 80s was different from the verbal theatre of his counterparts. Mac Intyre's experimentation through language deconstruction and mime represents an attempt to capture that lost Gaelic self in terms of myth and language. The emphasis on the body is reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's minimalist theatre and Mac Intyre has been compared to Beckett.[46] Mac Intyre is also influenced by Yeats's drama. He states how Yeats's imagistic theatre has influenced his own imagistic style.[47] Like Yeats, Mac Intyre is interested in exploring the poetic side of theatre and their imagistic styles are reflected in their interest in bringing the unconscious space of the imagination on stage.[48] I chose *The Great Hunger* and *Rise up Lovely Sweeney* as the focus of study as they best exemplify Mac Intyre's experimental strategy in the mid-80s. Frank Mac Guinness noted that his experiences of those particular plays changed his approach to theatre.[49] *The Great Hunger* is an adaptation of a classic poem and Mac Intyre's approach subverts the iconic Irish theme of rural Irish repression. *Rise up Lovely Sweeney* is a myth which has had many interesting interpretations in twentieth-century Irish literature, with Mac Intyre's being the most experimental.

In relation to published collections and book chapters any scholarly interest in Mac Intyre's work is limited to a chapter in *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, analysing Mac Intyre's play *The Great Hunger,* in Bernadette Sweeney's work *Performing the*

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45. *Critical Moments*, ed. by Fintan O'Toole *et al* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2003), 20.
46. Sanford V. Sternlicht, *A Reader's Guide to Modern Irish Drama* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998), 130.
47. See interview in Appendix 3, 231.
48. Fiach Mac Conghail, "An Interview with Tom Mac Intyre," 308-318; Christopher Murray, *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror Up To a Nation*, 231-232.
49. Deirdre Mulrooney, "Tom Mac Intyre's Text-ure," in *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre* (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2000), 192.

Body in Irish Theatre, and the first complete collection of essays on Mac Intyre's theatre, *The Theatre of Tom Mac Intyre: Strays From The Ether* which was published by Carysfort press in September 2010 (in which a portion of this study is published).[50] In terms of his theatre Mac Intyre has had notable mention in a number of prominent academic works on contemporary Irish theatre. They include Christopher Murray's *Twentieth Century Irish Drama: Mirror up to a Nation,* which comprises one of the most detailed studies available on Mac Intyre's work. Bernadette Sweeney's *Performing the Body in Irish Theatre* also contains a detailed analysis of Mac Intyre's theatre.

Other examples of scholarship which notes Mac Intyre's contribution to Irish theatre include Christopher Morash, *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-*2000; Masaru Sekine, *Irish Writers And The Theatre*; Christopher Fitzsimon's *The Abbey Theatre: Ireland's National Theatre*; Nicholas Grene's *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context From Boucicault to Friel*; and Margaret Llewellyn Jones, *Contemporary Irish Theatre an Cultural Identity*. In *A History of Irish Theatre 1601-2000* Christopher Morash summarises the influences on Mac Intyre's work including the great choreographer Meredith Monk. In *Critical Moments* Fintan O'Toole has a series of published articles from his time as a theatre critic for *The Irish Times.* His review of Mac Intyre's play *Rise up Lovely Sweeney* is generally positive about the production, but he is also critical of some of the visual images which he felt were unconvincing. In her work *Irish Moves: An Illustrated History of Dance and Physical Theatre in Ireland* Deirdre Mulrooney interviews Tom Mac Intyre about physical theatre in Ireland. This is one of the first comprehensive studies on Irish physical theatre. In *Contemporary Irish Dramatists* Michael Etherton notes Mac Intyre's contribution to the development of the "Theatre of the Image" in Ireland.

Nicholas Grene's essay "Tom Murphy: Famine And Dearth" which is published in *Hungry Words: Images of Famine in the Irish Canon* is curious in terms of its omission of any reference to Mac Intyre's adaptation of Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger*. Even though in his essay concerning the plays of Murphy, including the latter's *A Crucial Week* which is "a smalltown version of Kavanagh's "The Great Hunger,"' Grene still excludes Mac Intyre's classic adaptation of Kavanagh's poem as a

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50. A portion of my second chapter covering Mac Intyre's *The Great Hunger* is included. Catriona Ryan, "Oedipal Desire in Mac Intyre's *The Great Hunger*: A Paleo-Postmodern Perspective," in *The Theatre of Tom Mac Intyre: "Strays from the Ether"* ed. by Bernadette Sweeney and Marie Kelly (Dublin: Carysfort Press, 2010), 111-125.

point of comparison : Grene's essay is included in a collection of essays entitled *Hungry Words: Images of Famine in the Irish Canon* where the same problem arises in that Mac Intyre's adaptation of Kavanagh's poem, which has an important place in the Irish literary canon, is excluded.[51] I feel the exclusion of such an important writer as Mac Intyre is reflective of the literary establishment's confusion about where to pigeon-hole Mac Intyre's style of conjoining the experimental with the traditional. My use of the term paleo-postmodernism marks Mac Intyre's uniqueness in the Irish literary canon.

Subversion: Irish Language and Myth

There is a strong tradition of literary subversion in Irish literature. In the face of the cultural loss of the Irish language, the burden of Irish history weighs heavily on many Irish writers in terms of their relationship to the colonial language of English. The response of some Irish writers to this predicament is to "subvert that language at every chance.".[52] A writer such as Brian Friel makes this theme the subject of much of his work. Friel believed the Irish have not "comfortably assimilated 'the language of English and the job of the Irish writer is to make the English language uniquely Irish.'" [53] Stephen Dedalus in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* highlights the Irish writer's sense of alienation using the language of English:

> The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words home, Christ, ale, master on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language,

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51. Nicholas Grene, "Tom Murphy: Famine and Dearth," in *Hungry Words: Images of Famine in the Irish Canon* ed. by George Cusack and Sarah Goss, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2006), 245-262.

52. See Michael Gregory Stephens, *Green Dreams: Essays Under the Influence of the Irish* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1994), 77-78, qtd in Eamon Wall, *From the Sin-é Café to the Black Hills: Notes on the New Irish* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin press, 1999), 19.

53. In plays such as *Translations,* Friel highlights the political turbulence between Ireland and England and how that was reflected in the languages of English and Irish. Friel created a new Irish-English as opposed to an English-English vocabulary where the private and public aspects of Irish cultural life could be properly represented. Friel was very influenced by Synge. See Richard Pine, *Brian Friel and Ireland's Drama* (London: Routledge, 1990), 8; Francis Charles McGrath, *Brian Friel's Postcolonial Drama: Language, Illusion, and Politics* (NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 205.

so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.[54]

The root of Dedalus's alienation is historical. The Flight of the Earls in 1601 marked the end of an Irish rebellion against the English colonizing force and subsequently in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Gaelic poets used subversion to attack the dominant colonial regime as they grieved for their lost culture: "coded into every one of their lyrics, was the memory of a Gaelic order which they hoped to see restored."[55] In the twentieth century Irish writers were the "most politically subversive when they deal with the matter of literature itself, that is, form, genre and language."[56] Seamus Deane describes the language conflict experienced by Irish writers:

We've got essentially a colonial heritage that's had some very deep effects on the language. We write English, but we write it haunted by the ghost of a lost language. When you write in English or in Irish, you are, in fact, involving yourself in some kind of political statement. The linkage between language and politics is more incestuously close in such a situation than it is in a more settled society.[57]

Mac Intyre often refers to the "haunted" nature of his writing which represents the autochthonous unfolding of his ancient Celtic heritage. The "ghost of a lost language" refers to the Irish language and in Mac Intyre's work its presence has a subversive effect. As Mac Intyre states, "Irish has given me a bed to play in, it's a wilder bed, it's a more essential bed, it is an infinitely more haunted bed."[58] The subversion of the English language through the use of the Irish language has its historical precedents in writers such as Thomas Mc Donagh who claimed that "the distinctive note of Irish poetry is struck when the rhythms and assonances of Gaelic poetry insinuate themselves into the texture of English verse." [59] The disruption

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54. James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1992), 189.
55. Declan Kiberd, "Foreword," in *Sub-Versions: Trans-National Readings of Modern Irish Literature* ed. by Ciaran Ross (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V, 2010), x.
56. Ciaran Ross, *Sub-Versions: Trans-National Readings of Modern Irish Literature*, 6.
57. Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern literature, 1880-1980* (NC: Wake Forest University press, 1987), 29-30.
58. See interview in Appendix 1, 225.
59. Seamus Heaney admires McDonagh's ideals, but questions the practicality of it. Heaney states he "prefers to write in the living speech of the landscape I was

of the English language is through the Irish language which Mac Intyre calls a "spirit language," and, in Mac Intyre's view it is a metaphysical language that's "roaring from the unconscious." [60] The poetic nature of Mac Intyre's language which incorporates a defamiliarised English form is rooted in what he sees as the unconscious nature of the Irish language. The symbolic aspect of this unconscious Irish resource, in Mac Intyre's view, is manifested in mythology itself. In his prose and theatre Mac Intyre's written and physical images are manifested in Irish subjects whose conscious post-colonial identities suffer the loss of the pre-colonial self. Therefore they are confused and alienated in the colonially imposed language of English; and their confusion is reinforced by their awareness of their unconscious identities which represents the space of their authentic selves. This confusion is the space Mac Intyre focuses on. It is also, in Mac Intyre's view, a subversive space:

> In Irish writing of any ambition in the English language there's a battle going on with the English language. […] The English took away our tribal language and we gave them a literature. The sense that they took away […] and that's terrifically sound in the Irish unconscious among the artist, and we're here talking of writers. I think it engenders a saboteur element. [...] to be a writer to be playing with language […] we're forced to write in English, but we'll turn English inside out and upside down.'[61]

In that interview I asked the subsequent question as to whether Mac Intyre felt alienated using the English language and this was his response: "undoubtedly that's there, there's no doubt in the world about that."[62] It is because of this sense of alienation as an Irish writer using the English language that Mac Intyre valorizes the powers of the Irish language in his subversive writing.

Beckett and Joyce share an ambivalence towards language through their disdain for "the authority of language to be the master of the literal sense of reality. By subverting meaning, they produce […] texts that no longer searched for meaning or identity but delight in interrupting, inverting and reverting these."[63] Yeats and Joyce share common ground in that both wanted to "unmask Irish culture and demonstrate its otherness in

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born into."   Maria Cristina Fumagailli, *The Flight of the Vernacular: Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and the Impress of Dante* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V, 2001), xx.
60. See interview in Appendix 1, 224.
61. See interview in Appendix 2, 229.
62. Ibid.
63. Ciaran Ross, *Subversions*, 6.

relation to England."[64]   Yeats's was rooted in a unitary ideal of Irish identity and Joyce's was concerned with its fragmentation. Mac Intyre's subversive methodology crosses these boundaries. Like Yeats and Joyce he creates an otherness within the language of English; what Mac Intyre refers to as a "revenge campaign:"

> Well, the world around me was alive with performers, with the extravagances of language, especially in east Cavan, with our strange version of English which was riddled with Gaeilge. I mean the Irish just have to be writing plays. I would argue that one strange result of the English taking our language from us was to set up a fiercely competitive revenge campaign, directed towards achieving more eloquence than Standard English will ever achieve.[65]

That "revenge campaign" in Mac Intyre's prose and drama involves the defamiliarisation of the English language. Mac Intyre's revolt is also an attack on colonial authority; an authority whose patriarchal colonial nature is represented by the English language. The other patriarchal trope which Mac Intyre subverts is Christianity. In his search for an ur-Irish identity rooted in the unconscious, Mac Intyre reinforces a traditional conflict in the history of Irish writing between the Celtic pagan tradition and Christianity.[66] Mac Intyre refers to these patriarchal influences as part of the "daddy society:" "the desperate need [...] is for the grip of the patriarchal goosestep if you like, to be marvelously mitigated."[67] In Mac Intyre's work the English language becomes a focus of patriarchal power which the author "unmasks" in his short stories; English is disrupted through the presence of Celtic myth. In his drama the emphasis is on the subversive presence of Irish language and its physical representation of the body. Mac Intyre's aesthetics of the body are also informed by his interest in dance. He is influenced by the experimental dance aesthetics of the American choreographer Meredith Monk and Pina Bausch.   In Mac Intyre's theatre the body is the trope of the Irish language. It ruptures English through its body memory of what Kiberd terms as pre-colonial "Gaelic […] people who lived most fully in their bodies and never for one

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64. Ibid. 7.
65. Sarah Keating, "Born With Storytelling in His Blood." Online.
http://www.Irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2009/0425/1224245347246.html.
66. "Variations and versions or subversions of this battle between profane and sacred values, culture and conscience, individual imagination and social conformity have since punctuated Irish literary history." Ciaran Ross, *Subversions*, 4.
67. Fiach Mac Conghail, "An Interview with Tom Mac Intyre," 309.

moment wished to be out of them."[68] Mulrooney describes that Celtic space in Mac Intyre's work as the "pre-semiotic,"

> In that bog-hole there is no grammar that stands on ceremony, no symmetrical sentences, no consumer object beginning middle and end. From inside the bog-hole Tom Mac Intyre has learned to speak theatrically in the pre-semiotic. As Roland Barthes asserted, narration only begins once trauma has subsided, and Mac Intyre's idiom at its best is characterized by this anarchic, traumatic feel of raw experience, yet un-told.[69]

The English language in Mac Intyre's work is the language of colonial trauma and the real "narration" in his work is the voice of the primal Irish identity which is a spiritualized Irish cultural space.

Border States

As already noted Mac Intyre is from Co. Cavan which is a county in the Republic of Ireland. It is also in the province of Ulster. In the twentieth century Ulster has been a politically contentious issue. After Ireland became a free state in 1921, most of the province of Ulster remained British, bar three counties including Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan.[70] This alienated the Protestant community in the three counties which were largely Catholic.[71] The border counties in Ireland have a history of conflict, both religious and colonial. The cause of religious and political conflict in the north is from the fallout of colonialism. Since the twelfth century Ireland endured invasions by the Normans and then the English. In the seventeenth century the English consolidated their control in Ireland through its policy of plantation. In that period thousands of English and Scottish Protestant settlers were dispatched to Ireland and the Catholic majority became displaced. After a number of attempted

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68. Declan Kiberd, "Introduction", *Irish Moves: An Illustrated History of Dance And Physical Theatre In Ireland*, xiv.
69. Deirdre Mulrooney, "Tom Mac Intyre's Text-ure," in *Theatre Stuff: Critical Essays on Contemporary Irish Theatre*, 187.
70. Malcolm Anderson and Eberhard Bort, *The Irish Border: History, Politics, Culture* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 84.
71. During the negotiation of the partition of Ireland in 1921 the Protestant community in the North opted to retain six instead of nine counties under British rule, as Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal were largely Catholic. See Ruth Dudley Edwards and Bridget Hourican, *An Atlas of Irish History* 3rd edn (Oxford: Methuen, 1981), 247.

revolutions in 1798 and 1916 against the British control of Ireland, the country finally became independent in 1921. In the Republic of Ireland the Protestant communities were a minority, and after the declaration of the Irish Free State the Protestant population was rapidly reduced to five percent.[72] As discussed in Chapter One Mac Intyre is from a Presbyterian background in Co. Cavan; therefore the issue of border states informs his work. In his introduction to the published edition of Mac Intyre's play *The Great Hunger,* Vincent Hurley states,

> For the Elizabethans it was the frontier between Gaelic Ulster and the lands controlled by government forces. Later still it became the dividing line between plantation Ulster and the areas still occupied by the native Irish. Today it is a "border country" with all that implies of tension, uncertainty and division […] this land is in Mac Intyre's blood. He's enough of a Cavanman to be adept at the side step.[73]

The presence of physical borders is a common image in Mac Intyre's work and represents the alienated border counties of his childhood. As Hurley states, the historical "tension, uncertainty and division" is in Mac Intyre's "blood," and such tensions are political and religious. The war in Ulster in the late twentieth century had a major impact on the three border counties as their borders were manned by British soldiers for thirty years. As well as the religious and political themes, the "tension" in the border counties is also a linguistic one. From the Act of Union in 1801 Ireland was officially under the jurisdiction of the British crown and, as noted in Chapter One, the British undertook a policy of erasing the Irish language and enforced the English language on the Irish population. Such a loss inevitably affected Irish cultural identity; as Robert Welsh states, "if a community of people does not have a system of representation, a code which will reflect its life and show that life to be of value and of significance, then its people will get the sense that real life is being lived elsewhere, so they lose touch."[74]

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72. Maurice Irvine, *Northern Ireland: Faith and Faction* (London: Routledge, 1991), 137.
73. Vincent Hurley, "The Great Hunger: A Reading," in *The Great Hunger: Poem Into Play* by Patrick Kavanagh and Tom Mac Intyre (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1999), 79.
74. Robert Welch, *Changing States: Transformations in Modern Irish Writing*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 17.