Histories of Imagination: Critical and Creative Approaches To Irish Art Writing In the Twentieth Century

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PREFACE

Before setting out the results of this study I should give my personal reasons for undertaking this research. I had a sustained interest in literature before I began studying art and art history and this led me to a visual art practice which explored the interconnections between literature and art. For example, in my final degree show I exhibited a copy of James Joyce's *Ulysses* suspended upside down in a tank of water drawn from the River Liffey in Dublin. I had entitled the piece *Stream* as a visual pun on Joyce's stream of consciousness technique. In the bottom of the tank I had placed an aerator, creating bubbles which rose to the surface of the tank, gently agitating the pages of the book, and causing the print on the pages to dissolve over time in the Liffey water.

The idea of physically returning the words of *Ulysses* to its source of inspiration was intended to be a symbolic manifestation of the close imaginative connections between literature and visual art. So, when I was given the opportunity to research Irish art writing in the twentieth century, it was the imaginative dimensions of all types of writing, art historical, critical, creative and experimental which interested me most and are explored here. It was not my intention, however, to try to arrive at a definitive conclusion about the role of imagination in Irish art writing; it is too fluid a concept and indeed its most important value lies in its malleability to new approaches. The purpose of the thesis, therefore, was to amplify the processes of imagination in all types of art writing and to make a case for considering some creative writing as part of a history of imagination.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my current supervisors Howard Wright and Alaister Herron, and my previous supervisors Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes and Liam Kelly, for their help and support throughout the long gestation of this thesis. I particularly thank them for their patience, endurance, and forbearance during the interruptions caused by my periods of ill health. For this reason too I would also like to thank the administrative staff at the Research Office and the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences for their assistance in obtaining extensions of time to enable me to finish. I also thank my fellow student in the field of Irish art writing, Emma Mai Dwan O'Reilly for her support and for sending me her completed thesis. I am also grateful to the library staff for assisting me in obtaining books and other material I requested.

I would also like to thank Tom Mitchell who gave generously of his time when I brought him to Derry in June 2010 following a lecture he gave at a Word/Image conference in Ulster University. His reading suggestions and encouragement on the value of research into imagination was important to me at a time of doubt. Similarly I would like to thank Ian Buchannan for his help when I discussed my research with him at a seminar in Belfast and for the readings which he sent me later.

Finally I would like to thank my friends and family for their support and encouragement during some difficult times. Most especially I thank my wife, Claire, and my sons, Cormac and Paul, for their faith in me, their love, and their practical help.

Summary of thesis

The main title of this thesis, *Histories of Imagination*, is intended to be a broad imaginative framework within which to consider a range of creative and critical approaches to Irish art writing in the twentieth century. The introduction sets out the purpose and general aims and objectives of the thesis, followed by an explanation of the methodology used, before giving an explanation of the title and subtitle. It then sets out to define modernism and, because the nature of the research is interdisciplinary, this is first defined in an art historical context and then in a literary context. At the end of the introduction, under the heading 'creative writing as a source of art writing', the historical context of how visual art and literature were regarded in Ireland in the twentieth century is sketched out before proceeding to outline the case for considering art writing within a history of imagination.

Chapter one addresses place, imagination and Irish art writing and explores how cultural imagination in Ireland has been suffused with changing notions of place and space over the last century. The chapter begins with a range of definitions of place before examining a range of perspectives on place. The work of Lucy Lippard and her focus on the idea that place is inherent in the idea of the local is considered, followed by a reflection on regionalism elucidated by Declan McGonagle. The tensions that exist between the rural and the cosmopolitan in Ireland are explored through the work of Vincent Cheng and set against current global and cultural theory. The final section discusses imagination, emigration, exile and the diaspora.

Chapter two begins with an attempt to clarify definitions of 'art writing' and then sets out the background to the historiography of Irish art writing in the twentieth century before reviewing how Irish art histories are written. There then follows an examination of the work of several specialists in art history writing, particularly in

relation to how they view the writing process. The chapter ends with a discussion of the intersections of creative writing and art history.

Chapter three addresses the role of philosophy and imagination in Irish art writing and sets out some of the definitions of imagination and their historical background before reviewing some twentieth century philosophical perspectives on art writing. The sublime in the word/image debate is then examined, followed by Richard Kearney's contribution to the study of imagination, particularly his work on the hermeneutic imagination. The chapter ends with the outline of a speculative theory of imagination.

Chapter four is the first part of a review of critical art writing and imagination in Ireland in the twentieth century and begins with a sample of writers (Yeats, Joyce and Russell) from the early part of the century to illustrate their contrasting views on imagination. This is followed by a section on Mainie Jellett and Thomas MacGreevy and an assessment of their attempts to promote modernism in Ireland. The chapter ends with a section on Samuel Beckett and his influence on art writing and criticism,

Chapter five is the second part of a review of critical art writing and imagination in Ireland in the twentieth century and begins with a review of the significance of the *Rosc* exhibitions between 1967 and 1988 and the contribution of the artist and critic Brian O'Doherty to the debate on the Irish imagination. The section following this covers the critical response of Róisín Kennedy to O'Doherty's essay and this is followed by the critical responses of Brian O'Doherty and Richard Kearney to Louis le Brocquy's reconstructed heads of literary figures. The chapter ends with an assessment of Tom Duddy's essay on Irish art criticism followed by a section on

Richard Kearney's *Transitions* (1988b) which addresses the crisis in Irish culture which emerged during the twentieth century.

Chapter six, on creative writing, imagination, and Irish art writing, is derived from a selection of modernist work by James Joyce, Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel. The chapter begins with a section on James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) in relation to imagination and memory. The last three sections are on the imaginative approaches of Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel, with justifications for the particular works chosen.

In the conclusion the four objectives set out in the introduction are evaluated in sequence and an assessment made about how they contribute to the argument of the thesis. The purpose of the thesis is to attempt to place imagination and creative writing within the framework of a history of imagination in twentieth century Ireland and this is also appraised in the conclusion

ABSTRACT

In exploring the dynamic between the dominant literary heritage of Ireland and its art writing in the twentieth century, this study makes a case for the inclusion of a wider range of creative Irish writing under the heading of 'Irish Art Writing'. Imagination is always at play in how art and its histories are constructed, and there is also truth in imaginative fiction; this research puts forward a case for considering them as 'Histories of Imagination'.

The approach is interdisciplinary in that all forms of art writing in Ireland: art historical, critical, creative, and experimental are considered within a more expansive framework. There have been recent attempts to categorise Irish art writing, but this thesis assesses the feasibility of expanding the category of Irish art writing to encompass creative writing, particularly modernist writing, *as* art writing, with common themes such as place, imagination and memory which are explored in turn in the study.

There is an examination of the influence of place in various literary and artistic endeavours before considering the historiography of Irish art writing in the twentieth century. The development of the philosophical concept of imagination in the modern era is then examined, together with the threats to its existence in the postmodern era; the possibility of developing a theory of imagination is also explored. Imagination and its influence on art historical writing and critical writing are then surveyed in the thesis before a selection of examples from the Irish literary canon of the early twentieth century are analysed.

A broad range of art writing throughout the twentieth century is evaluated, combining elements of philosophy, hermeneutics, iconology, art history, and critical

writing in an attempt to make an original contribution to the field of Irish art writing by proposing an enlargement of its definition within a possible history of imagination.

INTRODUCTION

This introduction will first set out the context, motivation, focus and purpose of the research carried out for this thesis. This will be followed by a statement of the general aims and objectives of the research before providing a detailed explanation of the thesis title and definitions of modernism. The chapter will end with a consideration of how Irish creative writing could be considered as a valuable source of art writing in a proposed history of imagination in the twentieth century.

As was indicated in the preface my art practice was often focused on the interconnections between literature, imagination, place, memory and visual art. The piece which I made on Joyce's *Ulysses* entitled *Stream* (2005) has already been referred to in the preface as an example of an iconic work of literature being used physically in an artwork but I had carried out a number of projects related to some of the other themes in this thesis. For example, in relation to place, the site specific artwork *Up the Walls* (2004) on the Derry walls was an attempt to draw attention to the fact that sites such as the walls are only imbued with significance because of our written history and how it is imagined. Without our knowledge of history it would simply be a beautiful location with a spectacular view. The large five feet wide blank strips of paper I used on the site were intended to represent the invisible layering of history and imagination. To reinforce this point I carried out the work on the first of May 2004, the day on which ten more European countries joined the European Union, and the ten suspended strips of paper were intended to symbolise the addition of these histories - imagined or otherwise - to the European narrative.

The last work I will refer to also addressed the theme of memory and imagination. *Rekindle* (2005) was based on the theme of the communal and familial significance of fire. The idea emerged from a story I heard many years ago about an elderly man

in County Donegal who refused to be taken into care because he was “minding the fires” of neighbours who had emigrated many years earlier. When another neighbour heard what he said he took a burning ember of turf from the old man’s fire, telling him that he would “mind the fires” for him and the man went peacefully into care.

Traditionally the home fire never went out and local custom required that before you left your cottage to emigrate you brought a burning ember from your dying hearth to add it to a neighbour’s fire where it would be “minded” until your return when you could take back an ember from the host fire and rekindle the hearth in your old cottage, maintaining the traditional obligation of never letting your home fire go out. The presence of so many abandoned hearths in Donegal and other parts of Ireland and the world prompted the idea of symbolically rekindling some of them. I chose a small cluster of ruins of old cottages in a remote area of Donegal which had been devastated by emigration, took an ember from a nearby cottage fire, and lit small turf fires in their cold hearths. The smoke silently rising from their chimneys was intended as a poignant evocation of the memory of the displaced families who had once lived there.

It is also worth explaining why I chose not to refer too often to actual artworks in the text which follows. When the research was undertaken there was a wide questioning of the nature and value of Irish art writing and its historiography and this was why the focus was placed on the writing dimension as opposed to art making and its criticism. The motivation, therefore, was to examine the dimension of imagination in art writing and how it could be considered as part of a history of imagination, without the accompanying detailed descriptions of artworks which would distract from the purpose of the study. This was not intended either to underplay the importance of imagination and memory in the work of many artists such as Frances

Hegarty, Andrew Stones and Gerard Byrne. Indeed their work and the work of many other artists are central in bringing many of the themes discussed in the text into the visual discourse.

General aims and research objectives

While the general aim of this thesis is to attempt to place imagination and creative writing within the framework of a history of imagination in the twentieth century, it will be necessary first to clarify some of the terms used in the text. Most particularly the many variations of the term 'art writing' will be addressed. These can include art history, art biographies, critical art writing, and 'experimental' art writing. The discipline of art history, for example, formerly implied that the writer was able to create a distance between the 'facts' of art history and artists' biographies and that they could be written about in a scholarly or academic way. Recently, however, research has revealed that there is a significant amount of imagination and creativity involved in the enterprise of art historical writing and this will be addressed in Chapter Two. Similarly, critical art writing can be shown to be intrinsically subjective and imaginative by the variety of opinions expressed about particular art works; there is no universal, 'correct' response to art. Experimental art writing, at the other end of the art writing spectrum, is more overtly creative and exploratory.[1]

All of these forms and functions have writing at their core and deploy imagination in content and structure; the inherent instability of language itself will also be addressed later in relation to art writing. The term 'art writing' is, therefore, very fluid and art historians such as James Elkins (see later in 1.5) argue that there needs to be more

[1] Experimental art writing in Ireland is addressed in more detail in Emma Dwan O'Reilly's thesis (2006) *Becoming text: art writing in Ireland 2009-2013*. Thesis, (PhD). Ulster University.

thought given to the actual writing of art history, an acknowledgement that as much can be revealed about the writer in the writing of art history as can be revealed by an author of fiction. (Elkins, 2000) Conversely it can be argued that fiction is only partially imagined and that it will inevitably contain elements of the writer's concerns, beliefs, and experience of life. History and historiography are suffused with imagination and creativity anyway, and this should be more widely acknowledged if the profession and its research concerns are to progress fruitfully. This thesis also puts forward an argument that there are many classifications of imagination, and some scepticism about the value of it in art writing discourse, but this research will attempt to heighten awareness of its central importance in writing, not just in creative, but in historical and critical enterprises, to facilitate their inclusion in a history of imagination.

The subject matter of the research will not, therefore, be confined to art discourse only, but will tease out connections between creative writing, art history, and art writing. Richard Kearney[2] (born 1954) has made these interconnections very explicit when he quoted Aristotle's contention that the cathartic power of fictional and poetic narratives were important in uncovering the 'universal' structures of existence, "unlike historical accounts, which deal merely with particular facts." (Kearney, 2002, p.13) This has also become an area of interest to art historians in more recent times, and some of this work will be explored later. The purpose of this research is to highlight imagination and its role in creativity and criticism in the twentieth century in Ireland. In other words, whether the term 'fiction' or 'creative writing' is used

[2] Richard Kearney is the Charles Seelig Professor in Philosophy at Boston College and has taught at University College Dublin and at the Sorbonne. He was formerly a member of the Arts Council of Ireland and is currently a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He has presented five series on culture and philosophy on Irish and British television and broadcast on European media. His work is focussed on the philosophy of the narrative imagination, phenomenology, and hermeneutics and is an important element and inspiration of this thesis.

there is a sense in which it has the connotation of ‘fantasy’, as opposed to the solidity of ‘fact’ or ‘theory’. The Latin root of ‘fiction’, ‘fingere’ - meaning to shape or mould - does, however, evoke the idea that fiction is a form of imaginative moulding of actual experience into artistic form, and this perspective is close to the methodology of this study.

It should be noted too that many historians are looking now at sources of history as documents or texts in the method espoused by Hayden White (born 1928) whose work will be considered in more detail in Chapter Two. White’s work has refocused some historians on the idea that history is a form of storytelling in itself and more attention should be paid to the ways in which history is written; history, in other words, White argues, is a narrative and, consciously or unconsciously, historians are adopting narrative constructions and conventions. If this is indeed the case then surely it is only a short step to considering creative writing as source texts for art writing and this is part of the argument in this thesis.

The twentieth century in Ireland has been chosen as the focus of this study because of the unique interaction of art writing and literature which took place within this period. Professional art criticism and art theory had not yet fully emerged in Ireland in the early part of the twentieth century and, consequently, many of the contributions to debates on art were made by well-known writers who felt free to comment on all forms of art expression because they felt an affinity with the creativity process. One could argue that this affinity with others who used imagination as their stock in trade gave them freedom to comment on its origins and value; they were also aware of the fluidity of meaning and were keen not to allow art to be corralled for purposes they were at odds with, and examples of this are discussed it the text.

Research objectives

Having set out the general purpose of the thesis in this introduction the research objectives will be to:

(1) *Review the writing on place in Ireland in the twentieth century with a view to making the case that its strong relation to imagination would make it an essential component of any history of imagination in that period.*

This objective will be addressed in Chapter One which puts a heavy emphasis on the imaginative aspects of place in order to make the case for its inclusion in any history of imagination.

(2) *Define the term 'art writing' and how it will be used in the thesis. Review the historiography of art writing in Ireland in the twentieth century and consider whether there is a case for expanding the historiography to include more experimental and creative approaches.*

To attempt to fulfil this objective Chapter Two will review the historiography of Irish art writing in the twentieth century while Chapter Six will survey some modernist creative writing in the early part of the century which could be considered to be examples of art writing.

(3) *Review the philosophical dimension of imagination and its importance in interpretation and art writing in twentieth century Ireland, with the aim of postulating the notion of a 'history of imagination' within a speculative theory of imagination.*

To try to meet this objective Chapter Three will review the philosophical dimensions of imagination in the twentieth century and speculate on whether it might be possible

to consider the idea of a theory of imagination which could, in turn, contribute to formulating 'histories of imagination' in a more inclusive way.

(4) *Consider integrating a range of modernist writing from the early part of the century with art historical and critical writing and assess how these could be read as part of the history of Irish art writing in the century.*

Critical art writing will be examined in two parts in Chapters Four and Five while relevant creative writing will be considered in Chapter Six in an attempt to address this objective.

Methodology

As this thesis is based on an interdisciplinary approach to Irish art writing involving art historical, art critical, visual, and literary critical disciplines, it would be useful to review the contribution of Mieke Bal [3] (born 1946) to the interdisciplinary debate. For example, she notes that images are often referred to as texts which can produce meaning just as literary texts do and they are often referred to as 'visual texts'. The term 'visual text' reminds analysts that things such as colour, line, and texture, which comprise a painting or any other visual work, contribute to its meaning, but meaning and form cannot be so easily disentangled. (Bal, 2002, p.26) Bal also draws attention to the pitfalls of interdisciplinary practice in general and, as this is an important aspect of this thesis, it will be explored further.

Bal puts more emphasis on the need for concepts such as meaning, narrative, metaphor, and myth which can 'travel' more easily between disciplines, rather than

[3] Maria Gertrudis "Mieke" Bal, Dutch cultural theorist and video artist who describes her work as 'cultural analysis'. She has a wide range of research interests, including classical antiquity, art, feminism, and contemporary literature. She has also written *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1985) where she considers tools for the analysis of stories.

the rigid, established methodologies within each discipline. In her work on inter-disciplinary practices she provides an example of the confusion which can result if a more open, less definitive, concept based methodology is not followed. She cites an occasion when a seminar was taking place among students from a range of disciplines in the humanities around the topic of ‘signs and ideologies’. The word ‘subject’ comes up and is interpreted differently by each participant, causing widespread confusion. The philosopher in the group assumes that ‘subject’ relates to the rise of individualism; the psychoanalyst interprets it as being the unconscious; the narratologist thinks it is the narrator's voice; the architectural historian believes it is about the human in space, while the art historian takes it to mean the subject of a painting. Their disciplinary training had never allowed them to consider ‘subject’ as a concept. To overcome this difficulty Bal refers to her work as ‘cultural analysis’, rather than art history, philosophy, women's studies, or even cultural studies. (Bal, 2002, p. 6)

Bal believes that cultural studies has suffered unforeseen difficulties which any pioneering practice encounters in challenging disciplinary boundaries. In particular, she highlights three problems which jeopardise its intellectual vigour. The first problem concerns its attention to new kinds of objects and fresh fields of study which are averse to traditional approaches. Sometimes there has been a lack of success in creating new methodologies to counter the exclusionary methods of the separate disciplines. Yet it is these, sometimes rigid, methodologies, which, it could be argued, often prevent the analysis from floundering. This is the fundamental dilemma of content and practice which can cause difficulties, especially in teaching. (Bal, 2002, p. 7)

The second problem with cultural studies which Bal articulates concerns the deepening divide between the old ways of doing things and the new ways. She sees this problem mainly as a social one as it can seem to threaten predominant power structures in institutions, but it also has consequences in a changing economic climate where academic jobs are more difficult to get. Hierarchies can return, reinforcing monolithic appointments policies and negating any progress made. Bal believes that more reflection on the problem of method would pave the way for a more nuanced academic environment. (Bal, 2002, p. 7)

The third and final problem which Bal articulates relates to her concern that a combination of inadequate methodology and a reinforced opposition might create a situation where university administrators could use cultural studies to enforce mergers and cancellations of departments, endangering the broad grounding required for it to thrive. (Bal, 2002, p. 7) To counter these threats to cultural studies Bal believes that a 'cultural analysis' approach would fundamentally change the way methodology is regarded within different disciplines and help to overcome the aforementioned drawbacks by using concepts to explore methodological common ground. (Bal, 2002, p. 8)

The use of the concept is, therefore, an important element in the methodology of this thesis. Concepts do not have universally accepted definitions across all disciplines but are dynamic in nature and in striving to define what they *are* more can be learned about what they can *do* rather than what they *mean*. It is this flexibility which makes concepts so useful in interdisciplinary studies of culture; they have great intersubjectivity potential, not because they mean the same thing for all, but because they do not. (Bal, 2002, p.11) While definitions of the various strands of this study, namely, art writing (historical, critical or creative), imagination, memory and place

are attempted, they are not intended to be authoritative, but discursive, and in regarding them more as concepts, disciplinary boundaries can be traversed more easily. This is not to imply, however, that there will be universal acceptance of certain concepts; some will be suspended between absolute certainty and doubt, while others will oscillate between theoretical tool and mundane word; yet it is this fluidity which can enable collective joint ventures to be undertaken in pursuit of new insights.

In a 2003 article in *Circa*, titled *Nauman.. Beckett… Beckett. Nauman: The Necessity of Working in an Interdisciplinary Way*, Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes[4] made some pertinent observations in relation to interdisciplinary practices. She was writing about interconnections in the works of Bruce Nauman[5] (born 1941) and Samuel Beckett (1906-1989), believing that they converged in performance. She noted that, while composers and playwrights have always had performance at their disposal, in the history of art 'theatrical' and 'literary' approaches were shunned in the middle of the 20th century because of the dominant high Modernist ethos of that time. (Lerm Hayes, 2003, 47-50)

This is why Nauman and other artists in the 1960's rebelled against what they believed to be the shackles of Modernist artistic practice. Their interdisciplinary performances generated a new energy for all arts at the time, especially for Beckett. Subsequently, in the 'linguistic turn'[6] in the 1970's the focus became the structure of signifiers in any context; everything became text and was not limited to language. Everything within culture could be 'read' and deconstructed to reveal 'subtexts'.

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[4] Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, together with Liam Kelly, are former supervisors of my thesis and had an important influence on guiding it.
[5] Bruce Nauman is an American artist whose work incorporates a wide range of media including sculpture, printmaking, photography, video, drawing, and performance.
[6] The literary turn is discussed in more detail in Chapter One, 1.6.

Lerm Hayes also stated that she believed that art historians should make themselves more familiar with literary approaches to texts and not leave them to literary scholars alone. (Lerm Hayes, 2003, 47-50) This is the approach which this thesis will seek to explore in more detail.

While noting that in the 1990's that a 'performative turn' had complemented earlier interdisciplinary works and that performative strategies in Nauman's and Beckett's works also opened up an interest in silence and a "forfeiting of the nicely finished product" (Lerm Hayes, 2003, pp.47-50) it also revealed a tension between textuality in literary and visual genres and the performative drive. The idea of play and spectacle as well as 'non-art' phenomena like games, rituals and dances also began to be regarded as interesting in cultural terms and part of the interdisciplinary debate in theatre studies and anthropology. Lerm Hayes believes, however, that it could be argued that this approach was pioneered by art historians like Aby Warburg[7] (1866-1929) who observed that for the non-western world there was always a performative sense of identity. It would seem then that with this performative turn European and North American culture had joined the rest of the world.

In her closing remarks, Lerm Hayes states that interdisciplinary approaches are more central than critics previously acknowledged; the historic distinctions in the arts have not prevented artists from crossing the barriers and their existence as historical givens can even act as a challenging stimulus. "The borders between the arts are thus all-important and simultaneously null and void". (Lerm Hayes, 2003, pp. 47-50) This stance is in line with Mieke Bal's, too, in the acknowledgement of

[7] Aby Warburg was a German art historian and cultural theorist who founded the Warburg Institute, London. His early studies on the sources of paintings led him to apply the methods of natural science to the human sciences and he introduced a new method in the study of art history, namely, iconography, or iconology, later developed further by Erwin Panofsky.

the academic value of each discipline while retaining the right to traverse them; this is the methodological approach of this thesis.

Explanation of title

The main title of this thesis, *Histories of Imagination*, was intended to be ambiguous and reflexive. One reading conveys the notion of the history of art as the history of the tangible product of imagination, while the alternative reading implies that histories can never be wholly scientific or objective, but are comprised of elements of imaginative (re-) construction and (re-) interpretation. These readings of the title are individually valid but the intention was to create a sense of continuous oscillation between them in the way hinted at by Michael Ann Holly[8] (born 1944) when she asks questions about how works of art become intelligible to us, and, more importantly from the point of view of this study, "Where does the process of historiographic invention begin?" (Holly, 1996, p. xiv) There are etymological roots in the word 'history' too which make it natural that the idea of storytelling and the 'facts' of events are connected, even if only subliminally. The word 'history' is an amalgam of the French word 'histoire' and the Italian word 'storia' and it is inscribed with the notion of a 'telling' of events, a narrative, and this inevitably connotes interpretation and imagination.

Aside from the interpretive element there is a growing sense that there was always a critical element in art writing in Ireland below the radar of what might now be considered professional art history. In *Writing Irish Art History: A Report. (2011)* Niamh NicGhabhann refers to Fintan Cullen's *Sources in Irish Art: A Reader* (2000) as, "revealing the tip of a continually critical and self-reflexive iceberg, which has existed as long as art has been made in this country." (NicGhabhann, 2011, p.1)

[8] Michael Ann Holly is an American art historian noted for her work on historiography and theories of art history.

NicGhabhann's report will be considered in more detail in Chapter Two and when her contention is extended to include the self-reflective concerns of literary writers in relation to imagination, it can reveal important historical evidence of common cultural themes across a wide range of creative activity in Ireland during the twentieth century.

In the subtitle of this thesis, *Critical and Creative Approaches to Irish Art Writing in the Twentieth Century*, the time span of the study has been delineated but this is not intended to imply that this will be a comprehensive survey of all of the writing on art in that period. The deliberate distinction between 'critical', which broadly refers to non-fictional art writing, and 'creative' art writing, which alludes to a sampling of fictional work, is not just a device which allows for a more manageable approach to the vast amount of material available, but also serves to denote a sense of solidarity within the creative community.

The research will be conducted on a selective case study basis and, while it is broadly historiographical, in that it is about how histories are written, those histories are not confined to the chronological surveys of art historians. The writings of artists, curators, critics, cultural commentators, reviewers, newspaper journalists, amateurs, novelists, playwrights and poets, have, at various points in the twentieth century, contributed to the pool of Irish art writing that will be drawn on for this research.

Definitions of modernism

As this thesis is interdisciplinary in that it will be considering art historical and critical perspectives in parallel with modernist literature, this section will give definitions of modernism pertaining to art history and then give definitions as they relate to literary theory.

Modernism and art history

Eric Fernie in his book *Art History and its Methods* (1995) has written that the adjective modern has two meanings. In the first, more general, usage it describes what is contemporary or up to date and of the present age. The second meaning, however, is derived from the fact that the period considered the contemporary age for most of the twentieth century still retains the word 'modern' even after it has moved to a subsequent contemporary age as, for example, in the use of the term 'postmodern' in describing the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's. (Fernie, 1995) Fernie believes that this indicates the power and endurance of the ideas contained in the concept of modernism and these have been defined by Charles Harrison in his chapter, 'Modernism' in *Critical Terms for Art History* (Nelson and Shiff, 2003) Harrison writes that there are three definitions of the term 'modernism' in art historical terms, although these can be transferred to other disciplines.

In the first definition the term 'modernism' is used to distinguish the characteristics of Western culture from about the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century when the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation were regarded as the main engines of transformation in society. These forces of change were also seen by some as threatening to the autonomy and agency of the individual. Harrison believes that to describe an artwork as modern indicated "its engagement with preoccupations and spectacle specific to the age." (Harrison, 2003, p.189) This was the basis of the famous call by Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) for "a painting of modern life" and that artists should reflect this by seeking to capture the characteristics of the age, "...the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal, the immutable." (Baudelaire, 1863, cited Harrison, 2003, p.189) Modernism

in a work of art in this sense then is specifically related to how it depicts the concerns and spectacles of the age.

In Harrison's second definition 'modernism' is regarded as a property that is internal to a particular practice or medium which "may have to be confronted in the continuing pursuit of aesthetic standards set by the art of the past." (Harrison, 2003, p.191) In this second sense modernism refers to the modern tradition in high art and the conditions in which a truly modernist work can be distinguished, not just from classical or conservative works, but also from popular or mass culture. (Harrison, 2003, p.191) Harrison is clear that in the second definition modernism is determined not by its "engagement with the representative concerns of the age, but rather that its development is governed by *self*-critical procedures addressed to the medium itself." (Harrison, 2003, p.191) To call a work 'modern*ist*' is "...to stress both its intentional and self-critical preoccupation with the demands of a specific medium, and its originality with regards to the precedents that medium avails." (Harrison, 2003, p.192) In other words, in Harrison's second sense of modernism, aesthetic values and a commitment to them are prioritised over societal concerns and this is what "qualifies modernist art as the high art of the age."(Harrison, 2003, p.193)

In Harrison's terminology his third definition of modernism is differentiated from his second definition by the use of a capital 'M'. He has described that it is "distinguished from the second not so much by a difference in the field of reference as by a distancing from the terms in which that field is represented." (Harrison, 2003, p.193) Modernism in this last sense stands, not for the artistic content as designated by the second definition, "but rather for the usage itself and for a tendency in criticism which this usage is thought to typify." (Harrison, 2003, p.193) A Modernist in this definition is regarded not simply as an artist but as a critic whose

judgements reflect a particular set of ideas about art and its development. (Harrison, 2003, p.193)

This third characteristic of modernism, its reflexivity and questioning of the purpose of creativity, was the one which Clement Greenberg sought to emphasise when he noted that modernism extended to all forms of cultural production. But it was not the first time that civilization had questioned its foundations, although it had never gone so far in doing it. (Greenberg, 1961) For Greenberg, "The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence." (Greenberg, 1961, cited Harrison and Wood, 1992 p.755)

In relation to art history, however, it is worth remembering that Greenberg never sought to disengage with the past completely, stating that, " Modernist art develops out of the past without gap or break, and wherever it ends up it will never stop being intelligible in terms of the continuity of the past." (Greenberg, 1961, cited Harrison and Wood, 1992 p.759) In Ireland, however, this link with the past has been at the root of the debate concerning modernism, particularly as it relates to the revivalist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century and the reaction to it by some writers, and is pertinent to any historiography of Irish art writing.

Definitions of modernism in literature

There is a general acceptance that modernism dominated the arts and culture of the first half of the twentieth century and that postmodernism began from around the 1980's. Peter Barry (2009) gives a useful summary of the major characteristics of these two movements; he describes modernism as the earthquake which brought down the structures of pre-twentieth century practices in music, painting, literature, and architecture. (Barry, 2009) It began in Vienna around 1910 and spread widely in

Europe. In painting, perspective and pictorial representation were cast aside in favour of varying degrees of abstraction, while in literature traditional realism, with chronological plotting and all-seeing narrators was abandoned for experimental forms. Barry identifies 1910 to 1930 as the period of high modernism and among the leading literary writers were T. S. Eliot, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stephens, Gertrude Stein, Marcel Proust, Stéphane Mallarmé, André Gide, Franz Kafka and Rainer Maria Rilke.(Barry, 2009)

All of these modernist writers shared certain characteristics in varying degrees which could be summarised as follows:

1) The emphasis is on subjectivity, on how we see rather than what we see - as in the stream-of-consciousness method.

2) In literature there is a movement away from objectivity; there is no all-seeing narrator and no fixed point of view.

3) Distinctions are blurred between genre boundaries.

4) There is an attraction to fragmentation of form and disjointed narrative.

5) There is more reflexivity and questioning about the nature and purpose of writing (metanarratives). (Barry, 2009, p.79)

These common characteristics created a body of literature which was experimental and innovative but it was to fade in the 1930's after a period of political and economic unrest. There was a resurgence of modernism in the 1960's but not to the heights it had achieved in the 1920's. (Barry, 2009 p.79)

Creative writing as a source of art writing

In the 1970's the artist and critic Brian O'Doherty[9] (born 1928) stated that, "Irish artists occupy the gate lodge to the literary Big House, listening to the heavy traffic up and down the driveway." (O'Doherty, 1971, p.24). This conveys the idea that Irish art and literary writing have had an uneasy relationship at times. Indeed Róisín Kennedy (2006) has pointed out that popular interest in visual art had diminished during the Gaelic revival at the end of the 19th century, with dramatic falls in exhibition attendances, while in the same period the Literary Revival had flourished, due to a successful integration of English literature with Irish mythology and folklore. Kennedy asserts that, "A division in the arts between what was considered populist and part of a native Irish tradition and those more elitist arts associated with the Anglo-Irish developed at the end of the 19th century, and persisted up to the 1970s." (Kennedy, 2006, p.34) This situation created a barrier in the psyche of some in considering visual artists as the heralds of modernism in Ireland and put a greater burden on writers to express these new imaginative approaches.

Kennedy also argues that in the early part of the twentieth century educational policies in Ireland privileged literature over visual arts, which were seen as part of an Anglo-Irish elitist realm. Perhaps this has contributed to a sense of self-consciousness in art writing in Ireland, an almost too eager desire to distance it from the dominant international literary reputation which Ireland enjoyed, especially in the twentieth century. This study will investigate whether it might be more productive to consider the relationship between Irish literary writing and art writing

[9] Brian O'Doherty is an Irish art critic and artist who had been based in the United States since 1957. He is a former art critic of the *New York Times* and, at the time of the *Irish Imagination 1959-1971* exhibition, was editor of *Art in America* and director of the visual arts programme at the National Endowment for the Arts.

within an overarching imaginative framework that could create a synergy which would enrich both strands. Perhaps it is time for the cultural gatekeepers to stop patrolling the perceived boundaries of their disciplines and allow a wider encompassment of what could be considered as art writing.

This tension between the literary and the visual is not just a twentieth century phenomenon. There have been many times in the past when there have been explorations of language and the visual image. Donald Preziosi (born 1941) in his introduction to *The Art of Art History* (1998) entitles a section "Art History: Making the Visible Legible" and its purpose is to draw attention to the widespread idea in art historical circles that art objects are to be regarded as evidence of a specific period and that certain characteristics of that time can be inferred from them. It is, in other words, the purpose of art historical research to make the artwork *legible* to our time by exploring the causes, or sources, of particular art works. (Preziosi, 1998) This study, however, proposes that it is the consideration of wider sources, especially literary sources, which can also reveal the imaginative foundations of specific periods.

By positing imagination as the source of art and art writing, this study will explore the possibility of considering whether their imaginative origins can be discerned and incorporated into a history of imagination. Theories and histories are formed around acts of creativity and innovation but these theories are also manifestations of individual imaginations and are equally worthy of study in the same way that writers such as Aby Warburg (1866-1929), and, later, Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968) considered artwork within the context of the prevailing styles and tastes of the societies that produced it.

In relation to the interplay between literary traditions and art it is worth noting that Warburg and Panofsky were interested in this line of thought too. In Warburg's case he saw the study of classical texts as central to the decoding of some of the art of the Renaissance period and Panofsky continued this approach, but in a slightly different way. Panofsky extended iconography to iconology, a way of considering the wider philosophical questions and cultural attitudes, which can influence works of art. This is nearer to the purpose of this study which seeks to reveal imaginative construction as one of the by-products of this philosophical and cultural mix.

The interdisciplinary approach of these art historians was influential in the development of what would be called the 'scientific' historical method, but even before this period, David Lodge (born 1935) points out that the novel as a literary form developed from journalism, which contained large elements of imagination and invention. He cites the examples of Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) who saw himself more as an historian than a novelist and Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), who wrote more like a novelist than an historian. (Lodge, 1992, p.203) It is widely accepted too that Daniel Defoe's 'historical account' of *The Life and Strange, Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), established the new literary genre of realistic fiction.

There are more examples closer to home which reflect the complexity of the relationship between creative writing and art writing. Although he was involved in an early enterprise to bring cinema to Dublin, it is generally accepted that James Joyce showed little interest in the visual arts, and this could be partly explained by the difficulty he had with his eyesight. The fear of blindness, and the limitations it could place on his ability to express himself, may have influenced his decision to be a writer, but there is a tacit acceptance of the power of art in the borrowing from

Rembrandt of the title for his early work, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). Perhaps Joyce was acknowledging the succession in artistic expression, but his palette would be of words, not paint. Few would challenge the significance of his influence on art writing in the twentieth century and this will be explored in more detail later.

In his book, *The Act of Reading* (1978) Wolfgang Iser (1926-2007) considers the distinction between 'fiction' and 'reality'. They are not, as is usually assumed, complete opposites and in trying to determine the degree of 'reality' in fiction there can be confusion, requiring a consideration of the frame of reference. In his own words Iser states that, "Whatever the frame, the basic, and misleading, assumption is that fiction is an antonym of reality." (Iser, 1978, p.53) The consequence of this assertion for this thesis is that it validates a more open approach to the distinction between 'factual' historical art writing and works of literature. It allows a reflection, not just on what literature does, but on what it means, "...fiction is a means of telling us something about reality." (Iser, 1978, p.53) and there are many instances in Irish literature which attest to this which will be examined later.

One of the most striking examples of the dynamic between fiction and reality is to be found in a work by Elizabeth Bowen (1899-1973) whose novels give a first hand account of the decline and disenchantment of the Anglo-Irish in Ireland in the early years of the twentieth century. In her novel *The Last September* (1929) Bowen writes in her preface to the novel that the burning by the IRA of the fictional Danielstown in the book, based on her real home of Bowen's Court in County Cork[10] was more real to her than anything she had experienced in her life; an extraordinary testament to the power of fiction.

[10] Bowen's Court was not attacked but did go to ruin in later years.

This thesis will explore the possible value of using the concept of imagination, and in particular the 'hermeneutic imagination', as elaborated by Richard Kearney, to evaluate Irish art writing and its deeper roots; it is interesting, too, that literary critical theory was quickly subsumed into visual art criticism, because there was a shared need to question concerns such as authorship and reception. The cross-fertilisation of these, often nebulous, discipline boundaries between text and image has created a synergy in the dynamic of cultural evaluation, and perhaps the addition of an awareness of common cause in considering the role of imagination in art writing and fiction could further enrich that dynamic in possible 'histories of imagination'.

Literary theory itself was not founded on new approaches to literature alone; new theories of literature were derived from writings outside the literary studies discipline. For example, studies in psychology, philosophy, gender studies, sociology, history, and culture, all offered new perspectives for literary theorists and it was the porous nature of these disciplines that facilitated theory transfer. A further bleeding of literary theory into visual studies and art writing was, therefore, inevitable in this interdisciplinary climate.

Yet it is not adequate just to talk about the discipline boundary between literary theory and art history. This research aims to consider, and hopefully erode, the barriers between 'professional' art writing and imaginative writing in such a way that the 'certainties' of 'objective' knowledge are challenged; subjectivity can be embraced through reading creative texts and writing imaginatively to enhance and deepen understanding by making new meanings. While some art writing is regarded as historical narrative it is worth remembering Hayden White's observation that historical narratives are, manifestly, 'verbal fictions' and are, "as much *invented* as

found and the forms have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences." (White, 1978 cited Budd, 2009, p.352) This could be regarded as further evidence in making the case that some literature could be used as a source of art historical writing.

As part of this research the process of how creative writing could be used in the writing of art history will be considered. Recent work by Catherine Grant and Patricia Rubin in their publication, *Creative Writing and Art History* (2012), follows on from the work of Maria Fusco, and will be considered in more detail in section eight of Chapter Two. If it can be established that there is imagination and creativity at work in art writing, then it would seem natural to explore its potential in broadening the project of writing art history in a more overt way – if only as a potentially liberating exercise in the professional development of art historians. James Elkins (2000) has argued that, in the end, art history is a kind of writing and that, however controlled it might appear, it can still reveal the concerns and thoughts of the writer as much as any fiction. It is worth noting, too, that Ernst Gombrich, writing in *The Story of Art* (1950), stated that there was really no history of art, just histories of artists.

Using the term 'imagination' in the art writing and art historical framework, therefore, will attempt to create a space where multiple acts of creativity can be considered, not only within their prevailing contexts, but as intersecting and interacting with others. In discussing Gilles Deleuze's 'plurality of trajectories' in works of art, Simon O'Sullivan stated that he believed that art history was not just a critical project but a creative one that ran parallel to the actual artwork being considered, "In fact, I suspect that a kind of rhizomatics has always been going on in between the various objects and practices of canonical art history; a secret and

nomadic art history of sensation and becoming." (O'Sullivan, 2006, p.36) This, of course, challenges the notion of objectivity in considering any act of creativity in that it suggests that a form of vibration is always triggered, leading to multiple interpretations, and this hermeneutic approach will be examined in more detail later.

It is not the objective of this research to propose that imagination could provide a key to a 'theory of everything' in Irish art writing but it is hoped that it could be considered as a feasibility study of the value of reintroducing imagination to the interdisciplinary debate. Irish art writing, too, could be regarded as a particularly appropriate context in which to conduct this study, as it is suffused with notions of invention and imagination, in both subject matter and process. In his book, *Sources in Irish Art* (2000), Fintan Cullen has a section entitled, "Creating Histories" in which he draws on the writings of contemporary critics and historians in the last third of the twentieth century on the subject of how Ireland was visualized, and he cites these as representative of a growing confidence in the analysis of Irish visual material.

Cullen also argues that these investigations will contribute to the burgeoning area of Irish Studies and will uncover further potentially productive histories. As part of this process the original contribution of this study will be to argue that the widening of art history writing to include elements of narrative imagination and literary output in general could help to draw more attention to the imaginative commonality of all creative endeavours in the Irish context. This is not to suggest, however, that there is only one valid narrative or accepted version, rather, this process will point to many interpretations, and is intended to enrich, not to stifle.

The role of philosophy in relation to art writing and aesthetics has a long tradition. For example, in the eighteenth century Edmund Burke (1729-1797) wrote extensively on rationality and reason in the visual and the literary and for philosophers like Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) there was a conflict over language and aesthetics, as evidenced when he commented on the artist's dilemma, "Thus, in order to detain the fleeting apparition, he must enchain it in the fetters of rule, dissect its fair proportions into abstract notions, and preserve its living spirit in a fleshless skeleton of words." (Schiller, 1794, 2004, p.3) It is to be hoped, however, that by incorporating more imaginative and creative approaches to art writing that the "fleshless skeleton" will take on a more healthy appearance.

The very wide definitions of imagination present a range of problems which will be addressed more fully in Chapter Three but in his essay *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1901, 2008) Henri Bergson had proposed that there was a logic of the imagination which was different from formal logic, and writers and critics should make "...a special kind of effort [...] by which the outer crust of carefully stratified judgments and firmly established ideas will be lifted, and we shall behold in the depths of our mind, like a sheet of subterranean water, the flow of an unbroken stream of images." (Bergson, 1901, 2008, p. 26)

This deliberate strategy of opening the imagination allowed space, Bergson believed, for an acknowledgement of the temporal nature of perception and the ever changing states of the object perceived by the viewer. It is interesting that Bergson refers to a flow of images and this acknowledges imagination's function as partly visual and this will be debated in more detail in Chapter Three. Such a creative enterprise, however, presents many difficulties for conventional art history. Are responses universal and, if they are not, are they just a jumble of individual reactions which

defy categorization? It could be argued that this would be valuable in that it would challenge hierarchies and voices of authority, leading to a more general acceptance of the multifariousness of human responses and a less rigid, definitive, approach to art writing.

The cultural discourse of the first half of the twentieth century in Ireland was, of course, dominated by nationalism, and this aspect is reflected in the discussions on imagination throughout the text. There is little doubt, either, that the Irish revolutionary period of 1913 to 1923, in whatever way that revolution is defined, brought no agreement among the participants about its outcome, although it could be argued that a social revolution predated the political one. One of those participants, Kevin O'Higgins, was in no doubt, however, when he proudly asserted that they "were the most conservative revolutionaries that ever succeeded." (O'Higgins cited Hopkinson, 2002, p.131)

The influence of the rising tide of modernism outside Ireland and its effect on Irish cultural output will also be considered at various points in the text but as political and social attitudes evolved, global economic influences became more evident and when Ireland joined the European Economic Community[11] in 1973 many felt that this marked the end of a period of isolation. There was also a re-emergence of the 'national question' in cultural debates at the end of the century, and these will bookend similar debates at the beginning of the century. Given that the exploration of imagination is a key element of this study, its role in influencing political ideologies is necessarily entangled with discourse in artistic and literary debates.

[11] Now known as the European Union.

As already mentioned, the beginning of the 'linguistic turn' in historiography is particularly relevant as it represents the moment when critics like Hayden White (see Chapter Two section six) articulated the notion that there should be more emphasis placed on the artistic aspect of historical writing rather than its scientific methodology. The relevance of these approaches lie at the heart of this study and are dealt with in Chapter Two on the "Historiography of Irish Art Writing in the Twentieth Century".

It has been argued too that constructed 'realities' should always be subjected to scrutiny and interrogated; independent realities are often just social constructions which are shaped further by the way they are written about. Robert Scholes[12] (1929-2016) has written that, "All writing, all composition is construction. We do not imitate the world we construct versions of it. There is no mimesis, only poiesis, no recording, only construction." (Scholes, 1975, p. 7) This was acknowledged from the earliest times, and in the context of Irish art writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, writers such as W.B. Yeats, who straddled the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the new century, will be shown to be prescient in this respect too.

The close reading of a selection of literary writing from the twentieth century in Ireland is an important aspect of this study, and it will seek to demonstrate that interpretations of meaning are an integral element of attempts to understand shifting cultural values. The richness of some of this literary heritage is a continuing source of value to both readers and authors, who may reveal aspects of their personal experience they were only vaguely aware of. Any act of creativity can become a

[12] Robert Scholes was an American literary critic and Professor at Brown University, Rhode Island. He is well known for his work on fabulation and metafiction.

forum where intentions and interpretations can intersect safely, deepening experience of the world.

This thesis will also attempt to make an argument for the significance of the concept of imagination in constructing a methodology for examining creative writing as an important part of Irish art writing, and there has been a growing literature on this in other disciplines. For instance, contrary to public perception, Einstein's method of working was not purely mathematical; he believed in the Kantian method of setting up 'thought experiments', exercises in imagination which helped him to set up 'what if?' type hypotheses that could be tested by experimentation and research. This was the basis for his famous pronouncement in an interview with George Sylvester Viereck in 1929 that "imagination was more important than knowledge." (Viereck, 1929, p.17) The section on creative writing and art history (Chapter Two, Section eight) will explore the value of experimenting with writing art history in a more overtly imaginative way.

If it can be recognised that there is more creativity in art history writing than would seem to be the case, then "thought experiments" in art writing could become more acceptable, and this thesis will argue that this has already happened in some of the canonical works cited. Blurring the boundaries between historical fiction and academic historical research could produce new speculative hypotheses and stimulate new insights, provided, of course, that the imaginative nature of such an enterprise is clearly understood.

In order to pursue this train of thought, this study will examine key moments in Irish art and literary writing and their surrounding critical contexts. The opening out of previously regional attitudes to 'modernising' trends enabled Irish writing to move

on to the international stage, but it may have had negative consequences, too. Did this willing openness indicate a desire to move away from a stifling regionalism, as it did in James Joyce's case, or did it create a climate that encouraged writing that pandered to a global narrative at the expense of a rich, local, minor language that could have had resonances for our understanding of writing on art inside and outside Ireland? The debate about centres and peripheries in art writing will be explored in more detail later in Section four of the next chapter.

CHAPTER ONE: PLACE, IMAGINATION, AND IRISH ART WRITING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

1.1 Introduction

As the purpose of this study is to consider the connections between imagination, memory, and art writing in the twentieth century in Ireland and set them within a history of imagination, there is a very compelling reason to include writing, critical or creative, in relation to place as part of that history. This chapter will explore how cultural imagination in Ireland has been suffused with changing notions of place and space over the last century.

Place, and its imagination foundations, has had an important influence, not just on cultural memory, but on all artistic output in Ireland in the period under consideration. It has also been argued that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Irish revival attempted to assert new versions of an Irish sense of place in an attempt to establish a cultural basis for independence. These sentiments were clearly informed by nationalist ideologies and were attempts to graft Irish archaeology onto the revivalist cause to help inspire future generations. But the metaphorical use of landscape was to continue in more subtle forms, particularly in relation to fraught historical contexts, dispossession, and abandonment.

At the end of the century too place was still seen as an important element in cultural debates. Ciaran Benson[13] (born 1950) in his book, *The Cultural Psychology of Self,* (2000) addressed one of the contradictions of our age. The importance of self-expression, self-esteem, self- motivation, and self-fulfilment are assumed to be 'self-

[13] Emeritus Professor of Psychology at UCD and former chairman of the Irish Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon.

evident', yet at the same time some involved in contemporary art and philosophy have viewed this 'self' as an illusion.

Benson argues, however, that having a sense of self requires us to hold the idea of being in place, with ourselves as stories to be told with narrative structures and moral agency in and across personal time. This kind of placement also draws on the repertoires of cultural and historical options which are regarded as valuable to people and their communities. "Powers of self-creation and self- responsibility need to be considered, as do linguistic ways of placing ourselves in the conversation that is human life." (Benson 2000) This more general context can be expanded to the political dimension of national identity.

Fintan O'Toole (2001) commented on the role of national identity in locating the self and that this is examined in large part through the prism of Ireland's relationship with England. He believes that Benson's thinking reflects the way the experience of Irish identity is seen as a set of negotiations between the desire for fixed certainties and the realities of dislocation and instability. Benson's notion of the self as a way of placing ourselves in the world, as a "navigational system" for journeys into an unpredictable world seems especially appropriate in a culture that has been created by the displacements of emigration and economic transformation. (Benson, cited O'Toole, 2001 p.71) Many of the issues which have concerned artists and writers in the twentieth century in Ireland have also been related to questions of origin.

These have been of universal concern too, and philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, who will be considered later in Section three of Chapter Three, have regarded them as salient. For him matters of origin are related to time, space, and being, and in his essay, *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*, (1951) he contends that the

word ‘being’ in many languages means to be located in a place, as well as to exist. If we exist, therefore, we must be located somewhere, and this affirms our existence. Dwelling, or being, is a prerequisite for any ‘building’ in space. (Heidegger, 1951) Origins, and knowledge of them, are, therefore, of considerable importance. Gaston Bachelard[14] (1884-1961) in his book, *The Poetics of Reverie* (1960) has suggested that these origins lie mostly in private experience and that “in the child's reverie, the image takes precedence over everything else. Experiences come only later”. (Bachelard, 1964, p.102) This spatial experience may, therefore, be connected with our earliest concept of time, and how we remember the world.

There are interesting approaches to landscape and place in relation to acts of reading and writing. Viewing landscape can be considered as an act of reading and the cultural geographer Brian Stock[15] (born 1939) has, explored the metaphor of ‘reading’, and how it applies to landscape, stating that, “when I say , ‘I read the landscape’ , what I really mean is, ‘I understand the landscape by means of a conceptual instrument I call reading’.” (Stock, 1993, p.318) John Feehan[16] (born 1946) has pointed out that there are very early physical connections between writing and landscape. Arguing that trees were a very important element in the Celtic experience of the world, Feehan has maintained that they became the dominant language of landscape, and this was reflected in the origins of writing, first as

[14] Gaston Bachelard was an influential French philosopher who was mainly concerned with poetics and the philosophy of science, where he developed new approaches to epistemology. In relation to this study it is of interest that Bachelard demonstrated how new theories integrated old theories into new paradigms, changing the sense of concepts. This was the basis of Mieke Bal’s case for interdisciplinary approaches discussed earlier in this study. Bachelard was also interested in psychoanalysis, poetry, dreams, and imagination and *The Poetics of Space* (1958) had an influence on architectural theory.

[15] Brian Stock is a Canadian academic with an interest in modes of perception. He is a graduate of Harvard College and Trinity College, Cambridge and has taught in many universities in Canada, United States, and Europe. His research focuses on the learning of reading and writing, reading practices and the relationship between reading and the inner life of the mind.

[16] John Feehan is an Irish geologist, botanist, author, and broadcaster. He was a Senior Lecturer in the School of Agriculture and Food Science at University College, Dublin to 2012.

Ogham, and then in the Latin alphabet, "the letters were imagined as trees – as though to reflect the idea that trees are the alphabet of landscape as letters are the alphabet of literature." (Feehan, 1997 pp.575-577)

There are echoes of this language metaphor in the poem, *The Rough Field* (1972) by John Montague[17] (1929-2016), where the speaker laments his inability to understand the many Gaelic place names embedded in the landscape around him, disconnecting him from the language and the place:

> The whole landscape a manuscript
> We had lost the skill to read,
> A part of our past disinherited
> But fumbled, like a blind man,
> Along the fingertips of instinct.
> (From 'A Lost Tradition', *The Rough Field*, John Montague 1972, p.35)

Part of this study suggests that these deep connections between linguistic expression and landscape make the consideration of place an important element in art writing, especially in an Irish context, where it is not just the physical reality of landscape as a genre, but its role in defining Ireland itself as a politically and culturally constituted landscape, which has made it such a muscular presence in Irish art history. As Liam Kelly (1996) noted in reference to the art produced before the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland, "landscape still persisted as a dominant theme in Irish art." (Kelly, 1996a, p. 11)

[17] John Montague was an American born poet sent to live in Ireland at the age of four. He lived in Paris and taught at Berkeley and at UCC. His poetry expresses an intensely personal realisation of historical experience while demystifying the romantic myths of the past.

This chapter will deal firstly with definitions of place, and then evaluate how it has been written about in an Irish context throughout the twentieth century, before considering how it was regarded at the end of the century in relation to the challenging realities of globalisation and dislocation. But it is imagination and memory, and their shifting contexts in relation to place, which will be the motivation for this element of the study of Irish art writing as part of a possible history of imagination in the twentieth century.

There have always been uncertainties associated with the idea of place in Ireland, and the more recent instabilities and challenges to what place means in Ireland have really always been there. Benedict Anderson (1991) has observed that nations are, in effect, 'imagined communities' and Brian S Osborne in his study, *Landscapes, Memory, Monuments, and Commemoration: Putting Identity in its Place* (2001) has been emphatic in his belief that national cohesion needs to nurture a communal sense of historical experience and that this requires "the choreographing of the power of imagination by locating it in an invented history, and grounding it in an imagined geography." (Osborne, 2001 p.7)

This sentiment cuts to the heart of this study in that it affirms how much imagination is involved in forming ideas of identity and statehood. Sian Jones and Paul Graves-Brown (1996) have also written that recent emphasis on the subjective and constructed nature of ethnic and national identities also applies to the relationship between history and cultural identity, and that, contrary to nationalist assertions, it has been revealed that ethnic groups and nations do not usually have continuous linear histories, with a common origin, and a putative 'Golden Age'. "Such accounts of group history are constructions in which the past is selectively appropriated, remembered, forgotten and invented, but at the same time reproduced and

naturalised in the popular consciousness." (Graves-Brown, Jones and Gamble, 1996 p.6) This application of imagination to the creation of a national consciousness seems to be a generally accepted strategy in many countries.

Origin myths are, however, often descended from real historical processes, as Andrew P Fitzpatrick points out. He believes it is necessary to be aware of the way in which present politics inform our reconstructions of the past, but we should be careful to avoid the dismissal of all attempts to analyse ethnicity in the past as modernist fantasies. He argues, for example, that, despite valuable critiques of the concept of the Celts, the widespread, if uneven, distribution of La Tène culture, still requires an explanation, and here cultural identity may have been an important dimension. (Fitzpatrick, 1996 p.241) Narratives of Irish history have powerful emotional charges, with attendant political consequences, and these narratives, for many people, give meaning to their lives and form part of their cultural consciousness.

In nationalist ideologies people often assume that their identities are intrinsic qualities of the urban or rural landscapes in which they live, and they are not just imagined at one time either; they are constantly being re-imagined by different people over time for different purposes. Because these narratives of belonging are always changing, both in society and in the individual, it may seem pointless to categorise them but, although the collective dimension will never supersede individual memory, it does allow theories about how imagination functions in forming ideas about belonging in society.

1.2 Definitions of Place

It can be argued that the ways in which imagination is at play in fictional or 'factual' writing is an important element in considering histories of imagination, but it could also be stated that these constructions are only influential in so far as they are studied or read. Place, on the other hand, is everywhere, and the perception of it is constantly at play in the lives of people, whether it is written about or not. There are various ways in which the interconnections between place and identity can be written about. For example, Ashworth and Graham's study, *Senses of Place: Senses of Time* (2005), is primarily geographical in its emphasis, but their approach to meanings of place, identity and multiculturalism is instructive. They are clear about the purpose of their study by stating that, "In defining the discourses of inclusion and exclusion that constitute identity, people call upon an affinity with places or, at least, with representations of places, which, in turn, are used to legitimate their claim to those places." (Ashford and Graham, 2005 p.3) Using case studies from Ireland and abroad they have examined the links between senses of place and senses of time and suggest that, not only do places change over time, but imagined pasts are selected, not just for contemporary purposes, but for imagined futures. They also seek to explain why place images are created.

When people define the discourses of exclusion and inclusion that make up identity they are inclined to do it in relation to actual places or representations of places, and this, of course, makes it relevant to any attempt to consider these imaginative endeavours as part of the imaginative aspect of art writing. The concept of 'collective identity', too, allows the use of generalisations, but it does not supersede individual identity. But place images do not appear from an objective source, they are created by a process of internal identification by the individual, and by external

imprinting from outside. This makes the whole process of sorting out how identities are imagined and constructed, and the images created for those identities, very complex and difficult to unravel.

Ashworth and Graham also address the problem of meanings and function in the creation of heritage in the past. Heritage is usually created for a specific future, but what if the demands of society change and the past has to be reinvented to accommodate new presents? This imposed selectivity means that heritage may have to be about forgetting as well as remembering and the legitimisation of power structures may call for heritage to be accompanied by multiple identifications. Now, however, heritage places are essentially places of consumption, and that consumption, or the demand for it, can also recreate places or change their meaning. This has implications for international tourism and the 'consumption' of heritage in areas with contentious pasts. (Ashford and Graham, 2005)

The past in general, of course, whether as history or heritage, can confer social benefits as well as incur costs, and David Lowenthal has identified four traits of the past, namely: how antiquity conveys respect and continuity, how societies create emblematic landscapes which connect the present to the past, how the past provides a sense of termination and, lastly, how it offers a sequence, allowing lives to be located in a linear narrative, connecting past, present and future. (Lowenthal 1996) First, however, it would be useful to consider the idea of place as a local phenomenon.

1.3 Lucy Lippard and the 'lure of the local'

At the end of the twentieth century there were broader, more interdisciplinary, approaches to definitions of place, and Lucy Lippard[18] (born 1937), in her book, *The Lure of the Local* (1997), makes the point that the idea of place is inherent in the idea of the local. Place is land, cityscape or landscape, as it is seen from the inside, with all the resonance of a particular location, both familiar and personal. This usually applies to what is known as 'local', and it is bound up with personal memories and histories. "Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location, replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth." (Lippard, 1997 p.7) For Lippard, then, space defines landscape, but it is memory which defines place, and this subtle distinction is what makes it an important element in this study where a history of imagination is being considered.

For Lippard, however, land is neither place nor landscape nor property. It can be regarded variously as a measurable physical space, metaphorical land, or ideological land but, for people who are not land based, land is an idea. Whether they are fortunate in being able to maintain their land, or unfortunate in not being able to leave it, land is often the epitome of experienced reality. It is a mixture of history, culture, agriculture, community and religion which Lippard regards as a kind of web, of which human creativity is an integral part. (Lippard, 1997) She acknowledges that artists are now looking beyond what they see in the physical landscape and reading

[18] Lucy Lippard is an American art writer and critic who has published books on feminism, art, place and politics. She visited Ireland in 1984 and made an interesting intervention in the debate on political activism and art in Ireland in her article, 'Activating Activist Art,' *Circa*, no. 17, July/August 1984, pp. 11-17.

more cultural geography and cultural studies as well as sociology, folklore and literature. Some artists, she believes, have gone beyond the reflective function of conventional art and beyond the reactive function of 'activist' art. She believes that there is great potential for an art practice that raises consciousness about land, history, culture, and place to make connections visible, and possibly create alternative relationships to place. (Lippard, 1997)

The main thrust of Lucy Lippard's analysis is that of all the art that purports to be *about* place, very little is truly *of* place. She believes that there should be more focus on existing places, how their topographical details reflect and generate memory, and how they contain certain kinds of knowledge about nature and culture. These memories are often stratified, too, in that they are laid down over periods of time to form a kind of palimpsest, and, in the end, she argues, "Memory is part first-person, part collective." (Lippard, 1997, p.34) In the case of restless multitraditional people, which most will become ultimately with growing global migration patterns, the power of place may ultimately be lost, but it will continue, even as an absence, to define culture and identity. (Lippard, 1997)

It could be argued that this makes the idea of place a very persistent concept in the imagination. Lippard acknowledged in her later book, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art and Place* (1999) that her views were influenced by her own upper middle class background (Lippard, 1999 p.155) This was an honest acknowledgement that, despite her attempts at academic detachment, she accepted the pull of personal experience on her imagination, and this proposition is central to any attempt to formulate a history of imagination. Everyone is shaped by their background whether this is acknowledged openly or not.

Landscapes and their stories come to define groups when they become personified as homeland, motherland or 'land of our fathers'. In nationalist ideologies these images are mobilized to construct a sense of unity from diverse groups. Simon Schama (1995) has observed that inherited landscape myths and memories have had surprising endurance through time, and can still have power to shape institutions. He writes that national identity "would lose much of its ferocious enchantment without the mystique of a particular landscape tradition: its topography mapped, elaborated, and enriched as homeland." (Schama, 1995 p.15)

These unique narratives bond people to places and they produce what Stephen Daniels (1993) has labeled "patriotic topographies". Identity is defined by stories of golden ages, traditions and heroic deeds and destinies – all contributing to the imagined community by the symbolic activation of time and space. (Daniels, 1993 p.5) Yet there were countervailing forces to these strategies of unified identities at the end of the twentieth century.

Globalization had led to a reassessment of the interconnections between identity and the local, and created a situation where there was more consciousness of marginality and a desire for transnational mobility. Some critics had seen this emerging hybridity and fluidity as a possible counterweight to what they would have regarded as the oppressive aspects of a modern identity which sought to eliminate difference and create a unified homogenous national identity, predicated on the simple binary of self and other.

Homi Bhabba[19] (born 1949), has argued that dominant powers seek to obliterate these differences, but that perhaps globalization, by creating fracture and fluidity, could create new spaces in between these national, single identity, formulations. This would, he argues, create a "third space" that "makes it possible to begin envisioning national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'". (Bhabba, 1995 pp.38-39) This, of course, creates a radically different scenario from the homogeneity of modern identities and gives free expression to a culture of celebrating difference.

1.4 Declan McGonagle and Regionalism

In his address, "Looking beyond Regionalism", to the Annual Conference of the Association of Art Historians, held in Trinity College, Dublin in 1990, Declan McGonagle[20] (born 1953) expanded on the concept of regionalism and how it has been defined by centres of power. By being defined as regional there is an acceptance of the idea of a hierarchy where the centre of power is placed at the top and the regional is situated somewhere below this.

Although social structures exist outside geographical areas and politically formulated boundaries, regionalist mind sets override locality and reinforce structures of power which can only be counteracted by privileging locality. This "culture of locality" (McGonagle, 1990 p.101) is, McGonagle believes, more rooted in the idea of process, and connects it with what is happening in contemporary art in

[19] Homi Bhabha is an Indian English scholar and cultural theorist and one of the most significant figures in contemporary post-colonial studies, developing concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence, and difference. He is Professor of English and American Literature and Language, and the Director of the Mahindra Humanities Centre at Harvard University.

[20] Declan McGonagle was Director of the Orchard Gallery, Derry, 1978-1984 and 1986-1990, Exhibitions Director, ICA, London,1983-1986, Director of IMMA, Dublin, 1990-2001, Director of Interface Research Centre, Ulster University, Belfast, 2004-2008 and Director of NCAD, Dublin, 2008-2015.

a wider context. This culture of locality becomes embedded within its audience and develops a sense of the world "without invalidating the local or the vernacular", and "a new vocabulary is possible" (McGonagle, 1990 p.102) which can be read at an international level or a local level. This, McGonagle also believes, "breaks the presumption of metropolitan knowledge and local ignorance" (McGonagle, 1990 p.102) and can be related to Lucy Lippard's call for a recognition of the local in art.

Writing about the increasing loss of faith in history and its implied linear progression, with attendant notions of formal solutions, where the ethical and the aesthetic are separated, McGonagle argues that this leads to a disconnection with the local. The consequent promotion of the abstract and the universal over the figurative tends to devalue, not just the local, but other cultural practices such as feminist art, community art, and ethnic art. This idea of universal art as the 'real thing' could put the local into a subservient position and turn people into anonymous consumers of cultural products with no sense of participation in the process. (McGonagle, 1990)

1.5 The cosmopolitan impulse

In an essay by Vincent Cheng[21], "'Terrible Queer Creatures': Joyce, Cosmopolitanism and the Inauthentic Irishman" (2001) he reviews the concept of Irish identity when set against the cosmopolitan impulse. He explores the tensions that exist between the rural and the cosmopolitan in Ireland and sets them against current global and cultural theory. Rather than the usual binary contrasts Cheng offers a more complex view of the interdependence of nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

[21] Vincent Cheng is Shirley Sutton Thomas Professor of English at The University of Utah. His research interests are in Modern English and American Literature, Colonial and Postcolonial English Literatures, James Joyce, Postcolonial Theory and Irish Studies.

This developed from his earlier work on race and colonialism, *Joyce, Race and Empire* (1995), where he argued that Joyce wrote insistently from the perspective of a colonial subject and created a significant political commentary on British imperialism in Ireland and on colonial discourses and ideologies in general. In his foreword to the book David Attridge writes that Cheng has demonstrated the importance of politics in Joyce's writing where he draws attention, not only to the potency of politics, but to "the miserable legacy of binary thinking in the politics of race and empire and seeks continually for ways of breaching the oppositional logic upon which such thinking relies."(Attridge in Cheng 1995 p.xiii) But there were problems emerging with the appropriation of Joyce's image in other contexts.

In Michael Malouf's article, "Forging the Nation: James Joyce and the Celtic Tiger" (Malouf, 2000) he examines how Ireland's changing conception of itself in a global context is reflected in the changing social value of the contemporary, posthumous reputation of James Joyce. In particular Malouf considers the use of James Joyce's portrait on Irish currency notes and contrasts the popular image of Joyce as an official, tourist-board approved, Irish historical figure with the academic discourses of postcolonialism and postnationalism which emphasize his exiled status and his critical relation to language, tradition and empire. (Malouf, 2000)

As opposed to the popular images of Joyce, Malouf also points out the difficulty of reconciling his European exile with his Irish subject-matter, not to mention the process of reinventing a rebellious, even 'blasphemous' figure as a national icon. But these contradictions do not arise in isolation; rather, they had their counterparts in the social contradictions of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy and its associated processes of imaginative national self-fashioning. (Malouf, 2000)

Malouf also considers how the devaluation of Yeats and the rising ascendancy of Joyce as a national figure suggest how the image of the artist remains a crucial part of an Irish national self-image. If Yeats was the figure of a cultural decolonization and anti-colonial nationalism, then Joyce appears to be a consolidating figure for a contemporary discourse of postnationalism. (Malouf, 2000) Joyce has been reinvented for other purposes too.

Malouf believes that, while academics invent and re-invent Joyce as a modernist, post-modernist, and postcolonial Irish figure, he is also being commodified as a figure in the local Irish imagination through events such as Bloomsday and Joyce walking tours of Dublin. He argues that Joyce and Yeats have become national commodities and are treated as allegories for different types of Irish identity, informing tourists' views on urban and rural Ireland. "Their works take on the form of literary Baedekers - Joyce for the city, Yeats for the country - that lend an available language to express the tourist experience." (Malouf, 2000 p.7)

The works of Yeats and Joyce become part of a commodified Irishness with no emphasis on what the work is really about; rather, it is their social function which is paramount. "In so far as they are used to naturalize a disruptive, unruly past into a consumable continuous present, the allegorical language of Joyce and Yeats are integral to the tourist experience." (Malouf, 2000 p.8) It could be argued, too, that Dublin, as a tourist destination and a European city, derives its very self-conscious identity largely from James Joyce and he is being used, Malouf believes, "to tame and normalize the anomalous urban space of Dublin." (Malouf, 2000 p.9) Yet the shorthand of 'Joyce for the city, Yeats for the country,' is not the only distortion in the branding process.

Writing in *The Irish Times* in 2001 Eamon Delaney listed the pubs in central Dublin which displayed photographs of famous Irish literary figures and he expressed his exasperation at the plethora of images:

> "Meanwhile in O'Reilly's, an anguished George Bernard Shaw wraps his hands around his face as if to say: 'Make it stop, make it stop now!' But there's no stopping, and further along Baggot Street, Joyce appears on a wall mural next to his friend, Patrick Kavanagh, just as if they were contemporaries, which is, indeed, the effect of all this imagery - the suggestion of some kind of contemporaneous 'literary gang' ".(Delaney, 2001, p.66)

Delaney also reflects on the irony of the close identification of Joyce with the Irish pub, regarding it as ironic, "given that pubs in Joyce's work are usually miserable, mean-spirited places full of rancour and wasted elegance. In *Ulysses*, it is what Bloom flees from to avoid the ranting Citizen." (Delaney, 2001 p.66) These examples reveal the powerful role of imaginative interpretation in the canon of Irish literature but questions of cosmopolitanism need to be set against the more intricate architecture of the interplay between imagination, emigration and the diaspora.

1.6 Imagination, emigration, exile and the diaspora

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak stated that "large movements of people – renamed 'diaspora' – are what define our time". (Spivak 2002 p.47) But, of course, given that it is defined as the dispersion or migration of communities, the idea of rootedness and belonging in a particular place no longer applies. Paul Gilroy has also observed that diaspora "… disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location, and consciousness." (Gilroy, cited Prabhu, 2007 p.70)) Yet it is more complex than the breaking of the territorial bond with identity.

Luke Gibbons (2005) has argued that Irish society had suffered many of the adverse effects of modernity and the diasporic effects of globalism, including social disintegration and fragmentation, for generations before the term 'globalisation' had entered the critical lexicon. The tragic history of emigration and the Irish diaspora have in a very real sense made Irishness long since a global identity. (Gibbons, cited Mays, 2005 p.6) Terry Eagleton too has stated that, while on one hand, Ireland signifies "roots, belonging, tradition", it has also spelled at the same time "exile, diffusion, globality, diaspora" (Eagleton 1994).

Since the mid-1990s a number of commentators and academics have located the Irish experience within a new conceptual framework. When the notion of the Irish community is spoken about now it embraces a greater body of people, with approximately seventy million people claiming Irish descent. Richard Kearney (1997) has observed that Irish identity is no longer co-terminus with a geographical place and this challenges inherited definitions of state nationalism. He also believes that as long as Irish people see themselves as isolated on an island they are ignoring their diaspora and failing to realize "the basic cultural truth that cultural creation comes from hybridization not purity… polyphony not monologue". (Kearney, 1997. pp 99-101) Yet the argument of this thesis is that some of these new conceptual frameworks are imaginative, not in the sense that they do not exist, but that they are imaginative restructurings, and the counter narratives to the idea of the diaspora help to demonstrate this.

While the diaspora model has conceptual usefulness not everyone agrees with it. One of these critics is David Llyod (1996) who criticizes the sentimentality

and celebration of the diaspora concept, preferring to see emigration as the key factor. He points out that in the four decades preceding independence in Ireland almost two and a quarter million people had emigrated; they had not emigrated for adventure but for economic survival and their leaving had left a mark on Irish culture. “It can neither be softened into the contours of a cultural diaspora nor ignored for the sake of exaggerating Ireland’s twentieth-century prosperity.” (Lloyd, 1999) Yet this is not the only imaginative reformulation of the idea of the diaspora and emigration.

In his article “Alternate Irelands: Emigration and the Epistemology of Irish Identity.” (2000) Eugene O’Brien focuses on the notion of emigration as a literary and theoretical trope that allows for the creation of an alternative epistemological perspective in terms of defining Irishness. Rather than talk about the historical fact of emigration, he concentrates on the models of emigration in literature, notably in the writings of James Joyce and Seamus Heaney. In their texts, the notion of the emigrant creates a space for an epistemological position from which the essentialist notions of Irish identity can be subjected to transformation. (O’Brien 2000).

The emigrant as historical figure allows for a pluralization of identity, for an ‘other’ to be added to Irishness, be it Irish-American, Irish-Australian or Irish-English; the emigrant model allows for the internalization of this historical pluralism, and for a consequent critique of essentialist notions of Irishness. O’Brien is aware of the notion of centrality in cultures but warns that if that centre is historically and ideologically fixed, then it can limit the future developments of Irishness by exercising some form of veto on the socio-cultural development of the society in question through the reification of myths and narratives of identity. (O’Brien, 2000)

Here again the argument of this thesis about the significance of imagination and how it could constitute its own history comes into focus.

To counteract centripetal tendencies emigration can have a balancing influence, allowing for different perspectives on these ideological recollections and new notions of Irishness to emerge. As an example of this process O'Brien instances how this cognitive or intellectual emigration brought the original notions of republicanism to Ireland, as the United Irishmen applied American and French Enlightenment political theory to an Irish context.

Emigration can be seen then as broadening the scope of cultural discourse, standing as an important symbol of plurality, and experiences of new cultures can have transforming effects on the idea of Irishness. O'Brien argues that it is wrong to see Stephen's emigration in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) as a flight from Ireland and from all things Irish. Joyce's point is that Stephen is not leaving Ireland because he is in some way renouncing Irishness; he is leaving so that he can discover new forms of Irishness. Joyce is also stressing the need to acquire a critical distance that will allow him to perform some form of critique of essentialist formulations of Irishness. (O'Brien, 2000)

O'Brien also notes Seamus Heaney's awareness of the centripetal pull back to tribal, ethnic and essentialist origins, what he terms "the appetites of gravity" (Heaney, 1975 p.43), and his further awareness that such essentialism — "the tight gag of place" (Heaney 1975. p.59) — delimits debate, discussion and the voice of the other. When faced with these atavistic associations of home and home-place, Heaney attempts to achieve a broader perspective through his notion of being an 'inner émigré'. This imaginative notion of inner emigration allows for interactions of different identities and alternative notions of Irishness; alternative Irelands can be

ushered into being. Heaney acknowledges this in *Among Schoolchildren*, (1983) where he stresses the complexity of his own notions of alternative Irishnesses. From learning about Jane Austen, Tennyson and Lawrence and attending sherry parties at the house of an Oxford professor at Queens University, to acting with the Bellaghy Dramatic Society (Heaney 1983, p.7), we see Heaney as someone who is being influenced by both the Irish and English aspects of Ulster culture. (O'Brien, 2000) Heaney too speaks of feelings of strangeness and alienation in connection with place and language.

Writing in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978* (1980) he points out that he has maintained a notion of himself "as Irish in a province that insists it is British" (Heaney 1980. p.35), and goes on to further underscore his sense of difference, "I teach English literature, I publish in London, but the English tradition is not ultimately home. I live off another hump as well." (Heaney 1980) O'Brien argues that Heaney inhabits a liminal space which allows him to see difference, rather than sameness, as a criterion of definition in terms of notions of singular and communal identity. The centre of identity holds, but only through being 'spread' so as to include the voices of alterity. Heaney's notion of Irishness, of '*us*,' has spread in order to include '*them*' (O'Brien, 2000) and this is another example of a positive and useful imaginative reformulation.

Declan Kiberd (1995), however, postulates that Ireland and England needed each other to define themselves and he refers to Oscar Wilde's belief that it would be through contact with the art of other countries that a modern Irish culture might be reshaped. Kiberd notes too that although some recent historians have berated the Irish exiles for their fanaticism and simple-mindedness they were keenly aware of the hybrid sources of their own nationalism. (Kiberd, 1995) Kiberd also notes

Benedict Anderson's assertion that the migration of many rural people to the cities in the latter half of the nineteenth century also represented a type of exile where their children learned English as a kind of standardised vernacular in the growing school systems. For the Irish who stayed at home in the rural areas too life conducted through the medium of English also represented a type of exile.

Kiberd also makes the point that when Yeats followed Wilde and Shaw to London in the 1880s he quickly became unhappy about the way the press sought to turn him into another 'entertaining' Irishman. He returned to Dublin and shifted the centre of gravity of Irish culture back to Ireland, helping to make Ireland interesting again to the Irish. Kiberd believes ultimately that artists, by celebrating the hybridity of the national experience, and by their espousal of a pluralist philosophy, could help to shape a more positive future for the whole island. (Kiberd, 1995)

Fintan O'Toole (1999) has commented that he believes that, "In Ireland everyone has become an emigrant now, even without leaving home" (O'Toole, 1999 p.25) and goes on to surmise that Ireland is not *at* a crossroads; it *is* a crossroads where different ideas and experiences form into patterns, and then dissolve, before forming into new and different patterns. Yet he believes that this is not a new experience for the Irish as their country has always been a contested space, disputed in arms or ideas. "Often the ways of imagining it... have become more important than the place itself. And for most of its history, the presence of opposing imaginations has been a source of conflict and cruelty, as well as of richness and complexity." (O'Toole 1999 p.25) This view supports the argument of this thesis in that in considering art writing about place we are really looking at a history of imagination and a more overt acknowledgement of this could clear away some of the uncertainty and animosity

involved in the discourse surrounding place and identity. It is never fixed and always in flux.

Richard Kearney has also noted that such a process of "ideological recollection of sacred foundational acts often serves to integrate and legitimate a social order" (Kearney 1998, p.166). But Kearney also cites a warning by Paul Ricoeur, who points out that such a process of reaffirmation can be perverted "into a mystificatory discourse which serves to uncritically vindicate or glorify the established political powers." (Ricoeur, cited Kearney 1998, p.166) Ricoeur's point is essentially that in such instances the symbols of a community become fixed and fetishized; they serve as lies. (Regan and Stewart, 1973, p.29). Ricoeur's blunt attack on 'the mystificatory process' as 'lies' is a sobering reminder of the negative consequences of overreaching in imaginative speculation.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter on place and Irish art writing has attempted to make the case that, although there are many formulations of place in creative writing and cultural criticism, they are all imaginative constructions which feed into the proposition of this thesis, namely, that we are really charting 'histories of imagination' which are always provisional and inherently unstable. Only a few aspects relating to place and identity have been considered in Irish art discourse but there is a sense that the real 'place' of Ireland will always be culturally determined in ways we are not able to foresee. Hopefully, however, that sense of place will be open and outward looking – not defensive, self-centred or exclusionary in nature; places do not have an inherent identity, they are constructed by human behaviour. As Stuart Hall has expressed it, "Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned...within the narrative

of the past. Cultural identity is a matter of *becoming* as well as of *being***.** It belongs to the future as much as the past." (Hall 1993 p.394)

Everyone is defined by plural connections and identities which include ethnicity, religion, gender, and class and they are compounded by local, regional, and national identities. In an age of increasing globalisation other things like migration and trans-national identities can be added to the mix. These multiple identities can make a sense of belonging in the world very complex and confusing but there is consolation in the thought that there would be unease too with the idea of one single metanarrative. Perhaps the richness and complexity of so many identities should be embraced; familiar and comforting narratives need to be abandoned for new imaginative formulations.

The purpose of considering aspects of place and imagination first in Irish art writing in the twentieth century was to remind the reader of a more familiar context of imagination at play. It is widely accepted that imagination influences how places are perceived but when considering art writing in its various forms the influence of imagination is often less obvious and this is what the next chapter will explore.

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF IRISH ART WRITING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

2.1 Introduction

Having considered the more familiar use of imagination in terms of place the following chapter will attempt to tease out the significance of imagination in various forms of art writing The chapter will begin with an attempt to define the rather nebulous term 'art writing', and how it will be used in this thesis, before moving to clarify how the term 'historiography' will be applied; it is not, however, intended to be a comprehensive chronological survey of all Irish art writing in the twentieth century. It will deal briefly with issues relating to the historiography of art writing in general, before examining aspects of the historiography of Irish art writing in the twentieth century and the special features of its manifestation in a context where literary writing and art writing were, it could be argued, so uniquely enmeshed. The interrelationship of creative writing and imagination in Irish art writing will be addressed in detail in later chapters but this overview will seek to address the more general points of intersection between creative writing and art writing in an attempt to sketch out the background to an important element of this research, namely, the consideration of a 'history of imagination' by evaluating some modernist writing *as* art writing.

The difference between creative writing and art history will be addressed first to demonstrate how porous the boundaries are between what could be regarded as academic art history writing and creative writing. This then opens a path to establishing the credibility of contemplating creative writing as a form of art writing. In other words if it can be demonstrated that traditional art writing contains strong elements of imagination then it is not inconceivable to regard creative writing,

especially modernist writing by James Joyce, Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett and others, as experimental art writing. In her introductory essay to *Creative Writing and Art History* (2012), "A narrative of what wishes what it wishes to be", the editor, Catherine Grant, sets out her views on writing art history creatively and this will be analysed in section eight of this chapter.

2.2 Definitions of art writing

In order to make the case for literary writing as a form of art writing it would be helpful to clarify some of the changing definitions of art writing. Art writing is more generally taken to be a term which can refer to art history writing or to critical art writing, but in recent years there has been an emerging practice of experimental art writing which, while more fluid, still considers its practice as having historical roots in modernist literature.

Contemporary art writing also positions itself as a 'minor literature' within traditional art writing by citing the writings of Gilles Deleuze[22] (1925-1995) and Felix Guattari[23] (1930-1992) and their deployment of James Joyce's writing as an exemplar of a minor literature. (O'Reilly, 2013 p.13) It is an experimental form of art writing, but unlike the creative writing practices outlined by Catherine Grant (2000) in section eight of this chapter, this form of art writing focuses more on art writing as something completely distinct from traditional art criticism and art writing.

[22] Gilles Deleuze was a French philosopher who wrote on philosophy, literature, fine art, and film. He was influential in a variety of disciplines including literary theory, post-structuralism and postmodernism.

[23] Felix Guattari was a French psychotherapist, philosopher, and semiologist, best known for his intellectual collaborations with Gilles Deleuze, particularly *Anti- Oedipus* (1972) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980).

Writer and artist Simon O'Sullivan[24] addresses the traditional modes of criticism and writing about art and asks, "Why write about an object - or experience - which, in itself, is alien to discourse? What could motivate such a project besides a desire for colonization, or, more specifically, a desire for meaning?" (O'Sullivan, 2001, p.115)

2.3 Overview of the background to the historiography of Irish art writing in the twentieth century

While part of this study will concern a range of texts related to explorations of imagination, and their affinity with the concerns of visual artists, critics and commentators, this must be set within the context of the development of Irish art and art writing in the twentieth century. This section will provide an outline of some of the anxieties and developments in Irish art in the twentieth century as an orientation framework for the research.

There were several attempts to establish an Irish visual art tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century in Ireland, most notably in the launch of the Celtic Arts Revival and the creation of the Hugh Lane Gallery in 1908. The art writing of this period, as exemplified by George Russell (Æ) and Lady Gregory, Hugh Lane's aunt, indicate a desire to establish a gallery that would position Dublin as the capital of modern art in the British Isles. The reality, however, was that Ireland had become isolated in cultural terms, and the gallery, in following a traditional format, failed as a source of inspiration for the modernist artists who had to travel abroad to seek a less stultifying environment. James Joyce, for example, found himself in this position, in that he rejected the possibilities of artistic identification with Ireland and

[24] Simon O'Sullivan is Professor of Art Theory and Practice at Goldsmith's, University of London. In his interdisciplinary work *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattarie: Thought beyond Representation* (2006) O'Sullivan uses the Deleuzian encounter to attempt to bring art and philosophy together in a productive relationship.

England, and realised that to fulfil his artistic aspirations he had to escape the claustrophobic atmosphere at home and connect with the wider European tradition.

Identity, and the complexity involved in its creation was, of course, a common theme in art writing at this time, and commentators like Declan Kiberd[25] (born 1951) have written about the many issues surrounding its formation. From a literary perspective he argues that, after centuries of colonialism, Ireland had to reinvent itself as a complex modern country. In the writings of Synge, Yeats, Shaw, Wilde, Lady Gregory and Somerville and Ross they were trying to work out a utopian Irish identity that could accommodate different traditions – Catholic, Irish, Protestant, and Anglo-Irish. Kiberd asks the question "Who invented Ireland?" and, in analysing various historical, cultural and literary texts, he notes how Irish society had been able to assimilate new elements through all its major phases, challenging the notion of racial purity advocated by some. Identity is, he believes, more usually a matter of exchange and negotiation. (Kiberd, 1995)

The 1920s were a time of great political upheaval in Ireland and there was conflict in cultural areas too. There were cultural debates surrounding modernists like Mainie Jellet (covered in more detail in 4.4) and Evie Hone, and their opposition to state sponsored conservative attempts to promote an academic, representational Irish style of state art, exemplified by artists like Sean Keating. Jellet and Hone were influenced by new European art movements, and official opposition to their attempts to

[25] Declan Kiberd is the Donald and Marilyn Keough Professor of Irish Studies and Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. Prior to this he held the chair of Anglo-Irish Literature and Drama at University College, Dublin.

modernise art in Ireland were further complicated by the prevailing attitude of the Catholic Church to the role of women artists in Ireland.[26]

The White Stag Group, formed in 1939 by a group of London artists, introduced more contemporary international art to the Dublin scene and exacerbated the already fraught tensions between the traditionalists and the modernists. This inspired some of the more progressive local artists who openly criticised the Royal Hibernian Academy (RHA) and the Dublin Municipal Gallery for rejecting work by progressive painters such as Louis le Brocquy[27] (1916-2012).There was, in effect, a clash of imaginations. This led in 1942 to the creation of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art (IELA), which was intended to be a stimulus to living Irish artists from both the academic tradition and those inspired by modernism.

In the late 1940s there was some easing of the tensions between IELA and the RHA, with the RHA becoming less rigid in its exhibiting policies. While the National College of Art, however, remained steadfast in its opposition to modernism, there were signs that the government was starting to respond to the gathering interest in art among the general public and there was a growing awareness of the economic implications of insularity. They set up a committee on Cultural Relations in 1948 to stage some travelling exhibitions and three years later set up the Irish Arts Council. The Northern Ireland Arts Council had been preceded by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), who had begun a collection in 1943

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[26] Róisín Kennedy (2006) has examined the treatment of these Anglo-Irish women artists in her thesis *Politics of vision: critical writing on art in Ireland 1939-1972*. Thesis, (PhD). University College Dublin and there is an edited collection of essays by Éimear O'Connor (2010), *Irish Women Artists, 1800-2009: Familiar but Unknown*, Dublin, Four Courts Press in association with TRIARC.

[27]Louis le Brocquy was an Irish painter who represented Ireland at the Venice Biennale in 1956. His work was also included in the historic exhibition *Fifty Years of Modern Art* at the World Fair in Brussels in 1958.His famous "Portrait Heads" series of literary figures and artists is discussed later in this thesis.

to stimulate public interest in art in Northern Ireland, and some interesting art writing emerged in this period from writers like John Hewitt.

The early 1960s saw a burgeoning of interest in art, and art critical writing, with more awareness of trends in the international art world. In 1967 Rosc began to hold exhibitions in the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) in Dublin. The outbreak of the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland, however, were a significant point of rupture and we could argue that most writers were struck dumb by them; but it was a moment too when artists attempted some form of articulation, albeit without comprehension or direction. It was in effect a kind of 'minor language', a 'stuttering', in terms of Deleuze and Guattari. The 'Troubles' were problematic for artists in many ways but they did stimulate international interest in the art that was produced here during that period, and artists/writers like Brian O'Doherty were pivotal and influential. It is also illustrative of how important debates on art and art writing came mostly from outside Ireland until the arrival of *Circa* in 1981.

The 1970s saw the advent of Postmodernism and this was reflected in Ireland with the introduction of a more modern style of teaching in the new National College of Art and Design in Dublin, and the promotion of more contemporary visual art forms. In an interview with Brian McAvera for the *Irish Arts Review* in 2003, Brian Maguire was recalling the history of the National College of Art (NCA) in Kildare Street, Dublin, and its transition into the National College of Art and Design (NCAD). He pointed out that there was no library at the NCA at the time of the transition in the 1970's, but, subsequently, NCAD had a library on "a par with other Irish universities." (Maguire, cited McAvera, 2003, p.64) This was, of course, a stimulus to Irish art writing too. The Crafts Council of Ireland was also formed in 1971, acknowledging a need for more recognition of the indigenous craft industry.

In the 1980s there was a rapid growth in contemporary art writing and theory and there was a dramatic shift in the balance of power towards the avant-garde. Locally the establishment of *CIRCA* magazine in 1981 was hugely influential in contemporary Irish art writing, as was the Sculptors' Society of Ireland, now known as *Visual Artists Ireland*, in 1980. Internationally, too, *Artforum* magazine was launched in 1962, expanding the quantity and range of art writing from this period.

The 1990s will be remembered for the "Celtic Tiger" economic boom, but it also had effects on the cultural confidence of the country with increases in arts budgets. The Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) was established in 1990 and the government in the Irish Republic set up the Per Cent for Art scheme. New galleries opened in the North, too, and Culture Ireland was established in 2005. The worldwide recession and the subsequent collapse of the economy did, of course, change the situation for the arts, as it did for everything else, at the start of this century but this is beyond the scope of this study.

2.4 Writing Irish art histories

There has been a growing interest in recent times in reassessing and re-evaluating how Irish art histories are written, and Niamh NicGhabhann[28] in her two articles, "Writing Irish Art History: A Report" (2011) and "Introductory essay: writing Irish art histories" (2013) addresses some of the issues and strategies involved in the construction of Irish art history as a discipline. There is a widespread sense that it is a discipline which is at the very early stages of its formation, although NicGhabhann points to earlier instances where it could be seen as operating, and this self-

[28] Niamh NicGhabhann is Assistant Dean of Research, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at University of Limerick.

consciousness induces a desire not to be too prescriptive about the boundaries of the subject.

It is worth noting too that NicGhabhann (2011) points out the importance of new institutional frameworks of art history in Ireland. Apart from developments in Ulster University such as the MA in Irish Visual Studies and their Graduate Research Programmes and PhD offerings, NicGhabhann also refers to M.A. and M.Phil courses in art history in Universities and Institutes of Technology, the development of the Irish Association of Art Historians and its journal, *Artefact*, the foundation of the National Irish Visual Arts Library (NIVAL) at the National College of Art and Design, and TRIARC, the Irish Art Research Centre at Trinity College Dublin in 2003. (NicGhabhann, 2011, p.3)

There is a clear acknowledgement in NicGhabhann's 2013 paper of the interdisciplinary nature of the task of Irish art history and how the various strands of discourse intersect; research needs to encompass, not just the visual dimension of Irish Studies, art history and cultural theory, but aspects of modernism and postmodernism. This study, therefore, will examine the literary and imaginative philosophical underpinnings of creativity in Ireland in the twentieth century and consider how they could be used as additional evidence for the relaxation of the disciplinary boundaries to enable the compilation of a history of imagination. NicGhabhann (2013) includes a consideration of the nature and 'density of intertextuality' as elucidated by Julia Kristeva, together with Michel Foucault's definition of 'residual existence', which point to the interconnectivity of all statements by groups, consciously or unconsciously, "even if these groups do not share the same, or even adjacent, fields; even if they do not possess the same formal level; even if they are not the locus of assignable exchanges." (Foucault cited

NicGhabhann, 2013, p.2) NicGhabhann describes this as a “dazzlingly, and possibly dishearteningly, ambitious methodological standard”; but she acknowledges that it needs to be kept “at the heart of critical or reflexive historiographical writing.” (NicGhabhann, 2013, p.2) While it can be argued that opening the floodgates to every text could be ultimately chaotic, the argument for inclusion of literary writing in Irish art writing discourses, part of the purpose of this thesis, is bolstered by these considerations of the permeability of discipline boundaries within an interdisciplinary framework.

Niamh NicGhabhann also addresses questions surrounding how we assess value and the formation of canons of art history. Anna Brzyski is quoted as questioning, “How and where canons are formed, by whom and why, how they function under particular circumstances, how they are maintained, and why they undergo change?” (Brzyski, 2007, p.3 cited NicGhabhrann, 2013, p.4) NicGhabhrann relates this to an Irish context where “inherited or inherent value systems” can influence practice, but where “This kind of historiographical reflexivity does have a value in its potential to investigate and highlight influential, but often unexamined , assumptions or value judgements around art and art history.” (NicGhabhann, 2013, p.4) This research seeks to address such observations, not just in relation to Irish art history writing, but by making the case for including in the discourse an examination of Irish literary writing, where many of these assumptions are also inherent. It can be argued, too, that such assumptions are often more creatively and daringly challenged in an imaginative environment, unencumbered by the constraints of ‘objectivity’.

The focus of the historiography dimension of this thesis will be on the ‘literary turn’ in particular and there have been a number of historians who have put the emphasis of their research on this dimension. Hayden White’s work on the ‘literary turn’ will

be considered in more detail in a later section (1.6) and art historians like James Elkins, who is also examined in more detail in the next section (1.5), have always emphasised that art history consists of many stories told by many people and that "art history has always been inseparable from nationalism and from anxieties about the kind of life people want to live and the values they hold most closely." (Elkins, 2002, p.86) The corollary of this, however, is that such narratives will often be skewed and biased, but then, as there can never be a totally objective historical account, there can at least be an attempt to understand its imaginative sources.

There were many questions posed about the nature of history in literary writing in the twentieth century, and perhaps, in the spirit of Estragon in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) where he suggests, "You can start from anything", (Beckett, 1953, 1994, p.63) it might be useful to examine how history is considered in that play. When Vladimir demands to know what happened yesterday, Estragon replies that history is "Another of your nightmares", and, when Vladimir struggles to find a starting point, Estragon interrupts by stating: "I'm not a historian." Beckett is depicting two very different impulses here; whereas Vladimir needs a past to give him a sense of who he is, Estragon dismisses it as an invented, unreliable thing.

These opposing strands of interpretation had been threaded through the political and cultural history of Ireland up to the time of the writing of the play (1953), and, indeed, continue to the present, but Beckett was making the point that it is almost impossible to separate the events of history from how the story is told. At the end Vladimir reflects on the events of the play, namely that he and Estragon had waited for Godot, and that Pozzo had passed and spoken to them, but he concludes with the question that should concern all writers and historians, "But in all that, what truth will there be?" (Beckett, 1953, 1994, p.90) This is at the heart of the dilemma which

faces all writers, and will always be present in the background of this research. It is, in other words, a question of what can be regarded as 'truth' and where it can be found in the open-endedness of interpretation. Perhaps, however, the 'truth' should not be the objective, as it will inevitably be an unobtainable, imagined thing and different for everyone.

2.5 James Elkins and art history as writing

In making the argument that some of the literature in Ireland in the twentieth century should be included in the historiography of art writing, the work of James Elkins[29] has been influential. Although he writes about art history as writing, and makes the case that art historians should be more aware of the creative, or imaginative, nature of their work, it is important that this argument is clearly made before moving to the corollary of that position as set out in chapter five, namely, that some creative writing should be considered as part of the historiography of art writing.

In his book, *Our Beautiful, Dry, and Distant Texts* (2000), Elkins puts forward his case for art history as writing, and in his preface he makes his purpose explicit by stating that he is more interested in moving beyond the usual subjects that art historians write about, namely, art and artists, and consider historiography and methods of interpretation. He regards art historical writing to be, not just about deciding what constitutes art historical writing, "but also as a kind of expressive fiction - as a novel, or a diary." (Elkins, 2000, p. xi), and this brings his focus nearer to the nature of this research, albeit from the point of view of an art historian.

[29] James Elkins is an American art historian and critic. He is E.C. Chadbourne Professor of art history, theory, and criticism at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He was Head of History of Art at University College, Cork from 2003-2006 and has written about the state of art history in Ireland.

Art historians often, he writes, have an impulse "to capture art objects in words, and an unrequited love for science and its dryness." (Elkins, 2000, p. xi) Elkins believes, however, that as writers they should be more aware of the Socratic claim, "...that we should try to see that we do not know what we claim to know about ourselves." (Elkins, 2000, p. xi) In other words, the whole process of art writing frequently does not acknowledge its subjective and imaginative nature, just, as will be illustrated later, fiction often contains more truth than is usually acknowledged. Elkins also underscores the idea that the boundaries of art historical writing are just as fluid as they are in other disciplines, even in philosophy.

In his *CIRCA* article "The State of Irish Art History" (2003), Elkins argues that Irish art history departments in its universities have an advantage over larger universities who have to cater for separate departments for film and media studies, various strands of digital visual media, and burgeoning varieties of visual theory. In smaller institutions, such as exist in Ireland, the art history department could be re-imagined as a looser department of visual studies across other areas. "Even conversations on painting would be transformed from talk about patronage, symbolism, and quality to talk about literature, semiotics, and science." (Elkins, 2003, p.57) This is in keeping with the spirit of this study and its exploration of a possible aligning of imaginative ideas in literature with Irish art writing.

2.6 Hayden White and the Linguistic Turn

As part of the focus of this study, namely the consideration of literary writing as valuable evidence to be encompassed within the imaginative underpinnings of Irish art writing in the twentieth century, the obvious reverse of this - the creative side of history writing - needs to be considered too. This may help reveal common concerns and, at the very least, provide evidence that the enterprise is worthy of attention. In

other words, if there is fiction in the history, why can we not uncover the history in the fiction? Hayden White was one of the earliest writers to espouse 'the linguistic turn' in historical writing. This asserted that our historical knowledge is conveyed to readers through a structure that is essentially expressive and, therefore, subjective. History writing, White suggests, needs a special kind of awareness and "requires a particular kind of structuring through interpretative participation", (White, 1973, cited Budd, 2009, p. 344) and this strategy chimes with the interpretative nature of this study in relation to Irish art writing.

Hayden White has stated that, although there are many different ways in which historians have sought to articulate explanations of history, they are essentially choosing strategies to explain data and research. It is at this level, White believes, that they are essentially performing a *poetic* act in that they are *pre*figuring the historical field to shape a platform for their particular interpretation of what really happened. Apart from identifying historical consciousness, White chooses to put more emphasis on "the uniquely *poetic* elements in historiography and philosophy of history in whatever age they were practiced." (White, 1973, p.x) The validity of interpretation in art writing is always under scrutiny; historical contexts are speculated upon and there are debates about whether art is a product of particular environments and influences, or whether it is a reaction to it. In essence, however, the aspect of art writing of relevance to this study concerns not just ekphrasis, the written descriptions of works of art, and biography, but works of literature, which address pervasive anxieties about the nature of imagination and creativity.

In his seminal essay White argues that historians, like creative writers, adopt narrative styles which are in turn interpreted in the same way as other writing, helping to shape our historical knowledge. If, however, as most historians suggest,

there is an historical consciousness that exists beyond fiction, then White is drawing attention to the fact that we are investing a huge amount of faith in the ability of that consciousness to transcend the linguist structures in historical writing. He does not suggest that the writing is erroneous, or that historians invent history; indeed, he always retains respect for the scholarly ability of historians to uncover the past in an intellectually rigorous way. Rather, as Adam Budd[30] suggests, White is concerned with the recognition of the task of historical writing as being "truly imaginative and artistic, along with all the associations to literary conventions and rhetorical styles that point requires." (Budd, 2009, p. 344)

In an interesting footnote to his introduction, Adam Budd draws attention to the fact that some American Professors of English Literature had become concerned about the training in methods of literary interpretation that their students were receiving, and believed that they were turning into "amateur historians, abandoning those skills at which they had tended to excel." (Budd, 2009, p.344) It is clear, however, that White and other advocates of the literary turn did not regard themselves as historians, but as literary critics who believed they were making a contribution to history, especially history writing. The fact that historical writing and its related scholarship had come under scrutiny in the early 1970's make it an important point in evaluations of "the linguistic turn" and mark a period in which all historians, in art and in other disciplines, paused to reflect on the creative and imaginative aspects of their writing.

[30] Adam Budd directs the historical methods courses at the University of Edinburgh and teaches historiography, bibliography, and eighteenth century literary history.

There was a mood of challenge in the air at that time too and institutions and authorities were being challenged from outside their cosy enclaves. These challenges involved a questioning of the structures of knowledge and how they are expressed. The interrogation also included a more rigorous examination of how historical knowledge is understood and represented by historians. White asserted that we need awareness in contemplating history, and a special kind of structuring through what he called "interpretative participation." (Budd, 2009, p.344) In other words, historians, like novelists, poets, playwrights, and other creative writers, need to use certain narrative styles and these need interpretation which will, in turn, affect and mould our knowledge of history. If historical consciousness is something that exists beyond fiction, White's argument continues, are we not putting too much faith in the transparency of linguistic structures? In fact these structures are actually reflections of an interpretative standpoint.

White entitled his article "The Historical Text As Literary Artefact" and this reflects his view that historians were, in reality, literary authors, using literary devices such as emplotment[31]to create narratives of historical events. It is important to be aware, however, that White regards himself more as a literary critic rather than an historian, and he sees his purpose as enriching the study of history. He was heavily influenced by the philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), whose contributions to postmodern debates about history revolved around questions of interpretation, and this is an essential element of this study in exploring the interconnections of creative writing and Irish art history writing. White's contention that historical writing is, by its nature, "essentially

[31] Emplotment is a narrative device which White asserts is more usually used by writers of fiction but which is also employed by historians to express their ideas through recognisable narrative structures.

provisional and contingent" (White, 1978, p.352) leaves room for the possibility of reviewing Irish art historical accounts within a framework of evidence revealed by close readings of Irish literature.

There is, however, a potential paradox in White's approach and it requires further exploration and comparison with Paul Ricoeur's methodology to try to resolve it. Because White believed that descriptions of the past depend upon how they are imaginatively interpreted and that historians are continually dealing in three distinct modes – what they meant, what they said, and what actually occurred. White even described historical narratives as "verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found".(White, 1978, p. 352) They are, after all, tied to certain formal traditions and interpretations of those traditions, and this poses problems about their authority and the value assigned to it.

The paradox lies in the clash of expectation that historical knowledge is supposed to be about reality and truth, and not about imaginative interpretation. The 'truth', in other words, is regarded as absolute and beyond interpretation, transcending its expression; the more is known about it, however, the harder it is to be definitive. But, since historians use language to convey their knowledge of the past, they have to rely on their interpretation and, of course, the interpretation of others. The linguistic turn, then, questions the authoritative status of historians' claims by highlighting the weaknesses in using language in both understanding and communicating knowledge. It also facilitates more consciousness of the nature of language in attempts to understand history.

White refers to the assertion by R.G. Collingwood[32] (1889-1943) that historians were essentially story tellers and that their function was to draw together fragmentary and incomplete historical records to make a plausible story out of them. Historians use what Collingwood called "the constructive imagination" (White, 1973, p.353) which functions in the same way that Immanuel Kant's *a priori* imagination works, namely, that though, for example, we cannot perceive both sides of a table at one time we can conceive one side from the existence of the other. Likewise Collingwood speculated that historians derive evidence with knowledge of the possible forms that human situations can take. He called this sense the 'nose' for the real story hidden in the apparent story. (Collingwood, cited White, 1973, p.353)

White argues, however, that no set of given historical events can, by themselves, provide a story; they can only supply some story elements and these in turn are subjected to various processes, such as emphasis or suppression, to serve devices similar to those found in the emplotment of a play or novel. (White, 1978) In reality historical events are value-neutral, and it is the historian's decision to form them as tragic or comic according to the plot structure decided upon to make a coherent story. In other words, all events are subjected to interpretation and can have a multitude of meanings. (White, 1978)

It could be argued that White and Collingwood are considering the possible fictionalization of history, whereas this study is more concerned with the value of fiction to the art historical record. There is little doubt that the stories

[32] Robert George Collingwood was an English philosopher; archaeologist and historian whose best known works include *The Principles of Art* (1938) and, posthumously, *The Idea of History* (1946).

told by historians are a creative way of considering the past but where is the history in works of fiction? To enable historians to plot events in a particular way, say as tragic or romantic, they need an awareness that this approach exists in the readership and this groundwork has already been laid by fiction writers. People are, in other words, primed to accept these formulations by the established traditions of fiction writing and narratology.

Using fictional writing as a source of historical understanding of a particular period is a kind of repayment of historical indebtedness to literature and its devices. Sense can be made of exotic and unfamiliar historical events by having them presented in forms that are familiar. The details may still be strange but they are presented within known configurations that are comprehensible. Before examining further how creative writing and art historical writing could be integrated, it might be valuable to consider ongoing debates on the efficacy, or otherwise, of words over images. The word/image debate has a long history and will be considered further in the next section.

2.7 W.J.T. Mitchell and the word/image debate

W.J.T. (Tom) Mitchell[33] (born 1942) is an important contributor to the word/image debate which he regards as "a shorthand way of dividing, mapping, and organising the field of representation." (Mitchell, 1994, p.3) It is, however, a much more problematic division as this section will demonstrate. Television and film use words, sounds, and images in a continuous interplay and books have always had illustrations, undermining the simple text/image classification. Yet the text/image

[33] W. J. T. Mitchell is the Gaylord Donnelly Distinguished Service Professor of English and Art History at the University of Chicago. He is the editor of *Critical Inquiry* and a contributor to the journal *October*. His books *Iconology* (1986) and *Picture Theory* (1994) relate to media theory and visual culture while his collection of essays *What do Pictures Want?* (2005) won the Modern Language Association's prestigious James Russell Lowell prize.

binary serves as a basis for exchanging ideas about the way society regards this division. Put simply, the book is perceived as representing the cultural past while the image is perceived as dominating our future culture. The question of image versus text is, of course, much more complex than mere interplay and overlap. How should the electronic reader be regarded where we are often actually reading images of the pages of a book? These arguments can spiral into endless complexity but there is a need to return to the nature and scope of this thesis by considering how Mitchell regards the various methodologies in the study of texts and images.[34]

In his chapter "Beyond Comparison: Picture, Text, and Method" in his book *Picture Theory* (1994) Mitchell analyses how the verbal and visual disciplines intersect. He speculates on whether the term "word and image" is an unsatisfactory description of "an unstable dialectic that constantly shifts its location in representational practices, breaking both pictorial and discursive frames." (Mitchell, 1994, p.83) If this is the case then the purpose of 'theoretical pictures' would only be useful in exercises which broke the boundaries of the disciplines and reformulated the traditions from which they came. In other words, Mitchell believes that the composite term 'image/text' may only be regarded as a symptom of the impossibility of a 'theory of pictures' or a 'science of representation'. Mitchell regards this as something which comes up every time an attempt is made to devise a way of unifying the fields of representation and discourse. The traditional approach in the American academic tradition has been, he believes, the comparative method. "The tradition of 'Sister Arts' criticism, and the pedagogy of 'literature and the visual arts,' has been the

[34] I met Tom Mitchell after he gave the keynote lecture on *Word/Image* at Ulster University on 5th June 2010 and, as he had expressed an interest in visiting Derry, I offered to take him the following day and he accepted. We had a very enjoyable tour of the city during which he made many valuable suggestions on the subject of my thesis.

dominant model for the interdisciplinary study of verbal and visual representation." (Mitchell, 1994, p.84)

This study, however, does not aim at a model of representation but makes the argument that both creative writing and critical art writing should be regarded as legitimate sources of Irish art writing. It is not intended to enter too deeply into the value or otherwise of the image/text dichotomy, rather it is to make the case for the consideration of imaginative texts as part of art writing. In other words this study is not making an argument for integrating text and image within art discourse but argues instead for a wider inclusion of texts on the basis of their common imaginative roots within the umbrella term 'art writing'.

2.8 Creative writing and art history

The question of how creative writing and art history intersect has been given more attention in recent years and, before making the case that literary writing could be regarded as part of that history, some examples of creative art writing will be examined. In her introductory essay to *Creative Writing and Art History* (2012), the editor, Catherine Grant, sets out her views on writing art history creatively and provides a survey of the topics covered in the book. The intriguing title to her essay, "A narrative of what wishes what it wishes to be", is borrowed from a modernist essay by Gertrude Stein (1874-1946), 'Regular Regularly in Narrative' (1929), where the materiality of the writing and its connection to the visual is emphasised, with repetitions across pages creating an experimental but poetic effect.

First, though, Grant cites a number of strategies that can be employed in approaching creative writing and art history. For example, she points out that Michael Ann Holly (born 1944) focused on the art historian's intentions in her essay 'The melancholy

art' (2007). Holly speculates that all art history has an element of melancholy in it as it tries to resuscitate an art object from the past. She writes. "I take it as axiomatic that all written histories are histories of desire, full of [...] needs that exceed the professional mandate to find out what happened and when." (Holly 2007, p. 8) These desires or feelings are often put aside in the writing of art history, but can be recaptured by an evocation of the writer's body in the act of looking or writing.

Grant also points out that there can be challenges to the conventions of art-historical writing; one does not have to assume that there is only one way to be a 'proper' art historian and all that the word implies. As an example of an 'improper' art historian she describes the working practices of the art historian Adrian Rifkin, who tired of using the organised archive of historical records and decided to simply make things up. Rifkin justified his decision by explaining that he had found that the assumptions of art historical scholarship were conventions as opposed to necessities (Grant, 2008, p. 12) and he went on to produce richer, more varied art writing.

His method also served to create more tension between the art, the writer, and the reader. Rifkin writes in the essayist style and his work is disseminated from his own website, enabling him to bypass academic scrutiny. Grant has commented that this questioning of conventional methods is essential in the creation of new narratives and acts "as a reflection on what occurs in the writing of a history". (Grant, 2008, p.12) This type of experimentation chimes with the argument of this thesis in that it aspires to move beyond the accepted parameters of art history.

Another example of the process of going beyond the traditions of art historical writing concerns the artist Griselda Pollock (born 1949) whose book *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (2007) involves stepping outside the conventions of the art historical book format to imagine a museum with images gathered from a range

of places and times. Pollock's inspiration came from a series of postcards of Canova's *The Three Graces* (1817) she discovered in a museum gift shop. She took the images and charted feminist readings of them, circumventing the traditional boundaries of art historical categorisation such as "nation, period, medium, artist, genre." (Pollock, 2007, p.17) The term 'virtual feminist museum' is used by Pollock ironically as it is not intended in a digital sense but will exist only in the imagination. The writing becomes in effect a virtual space, a museum, where the text is just one aspect of the process of interpretation.

Catherine Clark also refers to the work of T. J. Clark (born 1947) as a further example of the reconfiguring of the art historian's relationship to the objects of study. In Clark's work *The Sight of Death* (2006) his daily encounters with two Poussin paintings at the Getty Institute enabled him to construct narratives about the act of looking. He incorporates looking, writing and interpreting into the body of the text alongside diary entries, poetry, and formal discussions. Clark experiments with different writing styles and interpretations as he lays bare the uncertainty involved in the process of looking at images and writing about them; he also manages to expose the dominance of the verbal, even in visual culture. Grant believes that these examples reveal the current creative anxiety about how art histories are constructed. (Grant, 2012) Perhaps more interdisciplinary engagement with literature as a source of art writing, as this thesis proposes, would be one way to relieve some of that anxiety.

CHAPTER THREE: PHILOSOPHY, IMAGINATION AND IRISH ART WRITING

3.1 Introduction

Having considered some of the historiography of Irish art writing in the twentieth century, this chapter will examine a range of philosophical theories and approaches which are relevant to the role of imagination in Irish art writing in that period. The chapter will begin with definitions of imagination before considering some twentieth century philosophical perspectives on Irish art writing. This will be followed by a discussion of the sublime and its importance in the word/image debate and an examination of Richard Kearney's contribution to debates on the role of imagination, particularly his work on the hermeneutic, or interpretative, imagination. The chapter will end with an examination of a speculative theory of imagination which could be useful in constructing a 'history of imagination'.

3.2 Definitions of imagination

In order to reinforce the case for poetic and narrative interpretation as a source of value in formulating a history of imagination in Irish art writing, it will be necessary to examine recent work in philosophy as a justification for such an approach. A range of philosophical stances that could be described as 'postmodern' will be considered, in that they challenged the pre-existing emphasis on analytic reasoning and the rational. While the work of earlier philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) were concerned with formulating structures of ethics and reason, in order to create a system of concepts that could be universally applied, this approach has in recent times been considered an unsustainable objective. In the light of new interdisciplinary approaches, however, which this thesis advocates, it may be more

acceptable to treat concepts as less definitive to facilitate easier knowledge transfer between disciplines.

It is worth acknowledging, however, the importance of some of Kant's work in relation to how we perceive imagination, especially the definition of imagination as a more general, universal capacity of humankind and not the more specific aesthetic, specialised judgements of 'artists'. In other words, the 'aesthetic' can be defined as 'things perceived by the senses', as in the original Greek word, or what Terry Eagleton (born 1943) described as "the whole region of human perception and sensation, in contrast to the more rarefied domain of conceptual thought." (Eagleton, 1990, p.13) The more accepted current use of the term 'the aesthetic' refers to matters of taste in a narrower sense, and not the more sweeping generalisation relating to all sensual experience and perception.

Imagination also has variations of meaning; in a more general sense it can refer to the ability to reach beyond what is immediately perceived to construct an interpretation of it. There is no template for this process and it does not involve any pre-set memories or experiences being deployed in fixed ways. Memories and experiences can be recombined in a multiplicity of forms and even events that never actually happened can be created. We can manipulate, speculate, and reclassify at will, in order to help make sense of our engagement with the world, and make generalisations from specific experiences. There are even richer expansions in engaging with all forms of storytelling and fiction as Kendall Walton (born 1939) has described it, "the principles of make-believe guide the imaginings that inform one's perceptual experience" (Walton, 1990, p.302) and in the ever expanding virtual reality environments of today there is even more freedom and autonomy to make new worlds, tell new stories and formulate individual aesthetic experiences.

3.3 Twentieth century philosophical perspectives and Irish art writing

Most of the approaches examined in this study are underpinned by the basic tenets of Continental Philosophy, which has as its guiding principle an opposition to the reductionist tendencies of Anglo-American thinking. Continental philosophers believe that logic and fact, the basis of the 'positivist' methodology of the natural sciences, espoused by thinkers like Karl Popper (1902-1994), are inadequate in explaining the meaning underlying verifiable facts and findings. Positivism in much of science had reduced the world to a mere object and our consciousness of it became a detached subject. There is a need to look beyond these surface findings, and the approaches advocated by continental philosophers can be categorised into three major movements, namely, phenomenology, critical theory, and structuralism.

The phenomenological method owes much to the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and his influence on 'disciples', such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) who was inspired by the notion that we could eliminate prejudice by suspending attitudes, which were taken for granted, and learn to see the world in all its 'concrete richness'. (Sartre in Kearney, 1994, p.14) Sartre wrote that his "generation no longer had anything to do with the culture which created us, a hackneyed positivism which was tired of itself" (Sartre in Kearney, 1994, p.15). Husserl had a very impassioned belief in the value of philosophy and that it should not be the privileged concern of a minority of academics.

For the purposes of this study it is Husserl's pioneering work on imagination that is relevant. He discusses three 'modes of intentionality' in the sixth of his *Logical Investigations* (Husserl, 1990, cited Kearney, 1994, p.25), namely, perception, imagination, signification, and gives an explanation of each. Perception 'intends' the literal presence of an object, it is literally there as an object, whereas to imagine

something is to present it to consciousness as an unreal presence, a symbolic representation, as if it were there. (Husserl, 1990, cited Kearney, 1994, p.25) This ability to imagine exists in all aspects of life and enables recollection of the past or anticipation of the future; in other words we can conjure up in our consciousness something that is not present now, but which existed in the past, or will exist in the future.

Husserl's last mode of intentionality is signification. This treats consciousness as an empty intention awaiting fulfilment by an image or a perception, most notably the ways in which language signs allow us to conceptualise an abstraction.(Husserl, 1990, cited Kearney, 1994, p.25) For Husserl all three modes of intentionality are mutually interdependent; if there is no imagination and signification there can only be literal perception. Likewise, if there is only signification and no imagination or perception, there would only be a mass of empty abstractions and, with no signification or perception, imagination would be a maze of fantasies. (Husserl, 1990, cited Kearney, 1994, p.25)

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is the next link in the chain which takes the examination of imagination to Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) and their hermeneutic theory, then to Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) and deconstruction. Heidegger's positioning of existentialism within phenomenology also inspired many more thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), but it was Heidegger's 'turn' from descriptions of *Dasein*, 'being in the world', to considerations of the phenomenology of language that would be influential. It is, however, Heidegger's views on interpretation, and, more particularly, his work on the interpretation of texts, which has most pertinence for this study.

In *Being and Time* (1927) Heidegger exposed some of the weaknesses in interpretation of the world. Interpretation is always founded on a conceptualisation of an object that is already there, or of which there is a pre-conceived interpretation. In other words, there are embedded ideas of which there is often no awareness and this will affect interpretation of anything. But Heidegger argued that these pre-conceptions should not be viewed as a limitation, but as essential to comprehension of the world. If pre-conceptions are regarded as given in all interpretations then the real task is to identify them and evaluate them, yet these evaluations themselves are subject to pre-conceptions, and there is circularity. Heidegger's answer to this conundrum was to postulate that, "What is decisive is not to get out of the circle but to come into it in the right way."(Heidegger, cited Mulhall, 1996, p.25) By recognising that the 'circle of understanding' is not just a place where any kind of knowledge moves, but "is the essential *fore-structure* of Dasein itself [...], in the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing". (Mulhall, 1996, p.29)

There is no likelihood, therefore, of interpretation that is free from pre-conceptions, but it would be impossible to grasp any meaning without some orientation, however tentative, to attempt an interpretation. This is not to say either that pre-conception should be equated with prejudice as pre-conceptions can be subjected to forensic evaluation, but, of course, there are good and bad interpretations, provided one can tell the difference. In relation to this last point it is worth noting that Richard Rorty (1931-2007) criticised Heidegger's work on precisely these grounds, namely that *Dasein* was based on a myth which was largely conservative in nature and became closely connected to the Romantic dimension of National Socialism. One of the aims of this study is to consider whether some of these 'primordial kinds of knowing'

could be equated with imagination and, if so, how can they be incorporated into evaluations of a history of imagination in Irish art writing?

3.4 The sublime in the word/image debate

This section will examine some of the underpinnings of the notion of 'the sublime' in philosophy and its effect on artistic expression. It is an important element of any discussion relating to the dialogue between images and language and will be considered here because of the interdisciplinary proposal of this thesis that many more texts should be included within the term 'art writing'. Definitions of the sublime and its functions also touch directly on many of the issues raised in debates surrounding imagination and these intersections are what make it worthy of acknowledgement in relation to the subject matter of this study. Put more directly, imagination is suffused with notions of the image while the sublime and its literary heritage concern the power of words. It is not just a curious historical idea either; there are twentieth century poststructuralist theorists of the sublime who can be referenced.

The first known manifestation of the concept of the sublime appeared in a first century treatise called *Peri Hypsous* or *On Sublimity* (1554) accredited to the Greek critic, Dionysius Longinus, but it was only in later editions, translations and commentaries that it became more widely known. It is not the concern of this thesis, however, to carry out an historical analysis of the development of the concept of the sublime but a summary of its history has been set out by Philip Shaw (2006). Shaw has stated that the sublime "has stood, variously, for the effect of grandeur in speech and poetry; for a sense of the divine; for the contrast between the limitations of human perception and the overwhelming majesty of nature; as proof of the triumph

of reason over nature and imagination; and, most recently, as a signifier for that which exceeds the grasp of reason." (Shaw, 2006, p.4)

In considering twentieth century approaches to the sublime, Shaw (2006) has drawn attention to the work of poststructuralist theorists of the sublime such as Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-François Lyotard who believed that in Emmanuel Kant's text the analysis of the sublime "reveals the failure point of idealism, highlighting the dependency of consciousness on the transformational power of language." (Shaw, 2006, p.7) Despite this scepticism, however, they continue to work within the parameters of Kant's system and, while the post-modern sublime is less positive towards the idea of the transcendental significance of the sublime, its structures and meanings are still informed by its past. (Shaw, 2006, p.7) The American abstract painter Barnett Baruch Newman (1905-1970), for example, showed how transcendental yearning can be set against an acknowledgement of the impossibility of such a desire. "The sublime emerges in Newman only as an instant of creative intensity, derived not from God, nature, or indeed from mind, but rather from the event of artistic creation." (Shaw, 2006, p.7) A sense of the beyond is, therefore, nothing but an effect of oil on canvas. (Shaw, 2006, p.7)

In the work of the post-modern architect Daniel Liebeskind (1946-) there is a sense of the impossibility of representation. The enormity of human experience is conveyed in the broken corridors and sealed spaces of the Berlin Jewish Museum and in the controversial designs for the Twin Towers Memorial in New York. (Shaw, 2006, p. 7) For Liebeskind "the sublime emerges in moments of blockage and frustration; it is an architecture that gestures towards the absence of something much greater." (Shaw, 2006, p.7) The post-modern sublime is, therefore, defined not by its intimations of transcendence but by its confirmation of immanence, a sense that the

higher things are nothing more than an illusion and a misperception of reality. (Shaw, 2006, p.3)

The postmodern theorist Slavoj Žižek expresses it as follows, “in art the spiritual and material spheres are intertwined; the spiritual emerges when we become aware of the material inertia, the dysfunctional bare essence, of the objects around us.” (Žižek, 2006, cited Shaw, 2006, p.3) Perhaps, therefore, the significance of the sublime is in its continuity as many of its elements are still being debated and reconfigured today and are important in word/image discourse.

3.5 Richard Kearney on imagination

The purpose of this section is to introduce and evaluate Richard Kearney’s contribution to the field of imagination, in particular his championing of the connection between narrative imagination and philosophy, and his work on the hermeneutic imagination. Kearney’s work on imagination covers its very early historical origins, and, while it may be useful to reflect on these for a more comprehensive survey, there will be more emphasis in this study on recent developments. Kearney has distilled his *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to post-Modern* (1998) down to three key questions: (1) In relation to epistemology, how does imagining relate to *truth?* (2) In relation to ontology, how does imagining relate to *being*? (3) With respect to the ethical, how does imagining relate to the *other*? (Kearney, 1998, p.9) It is, however, his application of hermeneutics to works of fiction and creativity in general which will be of most value to this research.

Kearney places imagination within the historical framework to enable its origins to be traced and to help understand what is meant by it now. He postulates that imagination passed through a series of stages that were *paradigmatic* in nature. It

was not a linear process of evolution, but one of sudden significant turns in the understanding of imagination, constituting what is now known as ‘paradigm shifts’, after Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970). Kearney breaks these into three distinct phases, namely, the premodern paradigm, the modern paradigm, and the postmodern paradigm.

In discussing literature and the plastic arts in general Kearney believes that, “the paradigmatic method actually facilitates this practice of cross-cultural reference.” (Kearney, 1988, p.18) as it enables us to identify parallel movements in literature and philosophy. For example, the theories of Derrida, Barthes, and Foucault can be traced in Beckett’s work and examples of crossover can be discerned in the concerns of literature and art writing; this is a keystone in the interdisciplinary framework of this research.

In considering imagination as occurring in phases, however, there is a difficulty. This is essentially a modernist notion, which viewed culture as a linear sequence, but this was no longer the case with post-modernism, which did not believe in the idea of a progressive mainstream. “What then”, Kearney asks, “is the role of the creative imagination in a postmodern age apparently devoid of a project of emancipation?” (Kearney, 1988, p.25) How can it retain its energy when there seems to be no sense of evolution – no sense of having to compare anything with the past or even possible futures? Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998) called this process ‘involution’, as opposed to ‘evolution’, to emphasise its complexity and intricacy, without the usual reference points of past and future. (Lyotard, 1985, pp. 34-35)

The lack of any notion of ‘periodisation’, or linearity, in postmodernist strategies does, of course, challenge accepted ideas of teleology, and an unfolding future, but it

does not require a rejection of history. It can be seen rather as worthy of re-examination as a possible source of the richness of the traditions which contributed to its formation, and lead to a fuller comprehension of the current dilemma with history. The cycles being escaped from will only properly be abandoned when there is a realisation that humankind may not be the 'noble' centre of everything, and this may permit some 'other' to emerge, with no classifications of 'new' or 'old'.

Lyotard, in referring to postmodernism, commented, " 'Post' should not be understood, therefore, in the sense of a 'period which follows', but rather as a dynamism which allows us to go further than modernity in order to retrieve it in a kind of 'twist' or 'loop' ". (Lyotard, cited Kearney, 1988, p.27) Modernity, Lyotard argues, is all too easily absorbed by the future, with all its emphasis on progression, whereas postmodernism implies a "capacity to listen openly to what is hidden within the happenings of today. Postmodernism is deeply reflective". (Lyotard, cited Kearney, 1988, p.27)

This loss of a sense of historical development has serious implications for research, however, which involves any re-evaluation or re-interpretation of past creativity, let alone any expectation that it can inform us of strategies for the future. Kearney has a possible solution to this conundrum, however, by considering whether postmodernism should be considered, not as a step beyond modernity but as a "critical reworking of the 'unconscious' crisis within modernity itself." (Kearney, 1988, p.27) This strategy enables an escape from the linearity and 'progression' dilemma to delve deeper into work that would have been previously regarded as historical, and thus irrelevant. This becomes a liberating strategy where there is no longer certainty about anything; there is no presumption of knowledge or judgement of value in the present, nor is there a need to compare it with some possible future or

even to decide whether what is happening in the present is a progression from the past.

The task, however, of dealing with the crisis of modernity could easily have consigned postmodernism to being a mere adjunct to modernity, but it is actually the task of the postmodern imagination to foresee the end of modernity as an opportunity for a new start. However, there are cherished things about modernity which are hard to abandon, especially the humanist values of progress, emancipation, and commitment to a more just society. These are values that have occupied the thinking of many Continental philosophers, such as Michel Foucault (1926-1984), who challenged the assumptions of the anthropocentric philosophies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which proposed that human consciousness was the original subject in the historical record. Foucault's rebuttal to this central belief of humanism is formulated around the 'positive unconscious' of language from which the concept of human kind is assumed as central to history, and is the privileged starting place of meaning. (Kearney, 1988, p.29)

In relation to the purposes of this study, and its application to creativity and narrative identity, Kearney seeks to preserve them by including them in a model of a 'poetical-ethical' imagination appropriate to a postmodern age. This reinterpretation would be an alternative to the anti-humanist element of postmodernism, and would seek to move the postmodern imagination beyond humanism while preserving its basic humanitarian objectives. It would also be able to counteract the mistakes of the pre-modern period, which sought to play down creativity in the individual, and it could counter the modern tendency to see the autonomous individual as the sole source of meaning. (Kearney, 1988, p.33)

3.6 The hermeneutic imagination

The argument so far leads to a consideration of Kearney's application of the hermeneutic, or interpretative, imagination, a useful methodological approach in any interdisciplinary study, but which needs further explanation. Kearney proposed, in his writings on modernism and postmodernism, that there could be ways out of some of the anxieties inherent in these theories by using a strategy of reinterpretation and it is this approach which led him to a deeper investigation of the hermeneutic imagination. Originally, however, Kearney sought to address the twin crises that had arisen in debates about modernity and postmodernism, namely, how the crisis of value (ethics) was related to the crisis of imagination (poetics) and how Continental philosophy could respond to this.

In his book, *Poetics of Modernity: Towards a Hermeneutic Imagination* (1995), Kearney considered the work of thinkers such as Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), Paul Ricœur (1913-2005), Jacques Derrida (1930-2004), and others, in an attempt to understand how the individual imagination sought to negotiate the disintegration of concepts such as 'truth' and 'good'. In addition to the tensions between modernity and postmodernity, Kearney also explored the conflicts which had arisen in the social imagination, such as those between myth and critique, tradition and reason, and ideology and utopia. It is Kearney's application of these philosophical discourses to literature, politics, and painting which inspired some of the research in this study, in that it opened up a possible methodology for re-examining a greater range of Irish art writing, most specifically from literary heritage, in the context of some of the issues he raises.

Kearney has argued that if poiesis (creative production) brings forth meaning to action (praxis), then it is accountable to action. If it did not have this obligation then it would simply function as something that only reproduces the image the producer intended and this would create a world of sameness, leading to what Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976) feared would be a nightmare where "man might become a lord of the earth" who "everywhere encounters only himself." (Heisenberg in Kearney, 1995, p. xv) This can only be prevented when poiesis recognises "its bond to ethics and acknowledges its origin and end in the world of action, then, far from being a threat to responsibility, poiesis becomes its guarantor." (Kearney, 1995, p.xv)

Kearney also believes that this is what Paul Ricœur meant when he argued that the *configuring* act of poetics, implemented by imagination in the text, is *prefigured* by our experience of the world; it is then *refigured* "whereby textual narratives return us to a world of action," (Kearney, 1995, p. xv) and we are transformed, however slightly. To put it in Ricœur's words, "The labour of imagination is not born from nothing. It is bound in one way or another to the tradition's paradigms." (Ricœur, 1984, p.68) This return to action is central to Kearney's theme of the narrative imagination and, as an element of this study will be on the *prefiguring* dimension of experience, as formed by imagination, it will be part of the research that will unfold within the literary case studies selected for a possible history of imagination.

This attention to considering imagination and language, as opposed to the visual, is a significant change. In early phenomenological studies related to imagination the emphasis was on the visual model with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) writing about imagining in terms of modes of seeing. The shift, however, from description to

interpretation puts more stress on imagination as the key to meaning through language, what Paul Ricœur called "semantic innovation". (Ricœur ,cited Kearney, 1998, p.142) This opened up new territory where the function of imagination could be considered in linguistic terms, rather than in the usual visual context, and this will be considered in more detail later in this study where a range of case studies in literary writing will be considered in an attempt to have them re-evaluated within the body of Irish art writing.

As an example of these possible connections between literature, art writing and the power of imagination, Stan Smith,[35] in his book, *Irish Poetry and the Construction of Modern Identity* (2005) points out that Austin Clarke's opening description in his poem "Pilgrimage" from his 1929 collection *Pilgrimage and other Poems*, begins with "a perception of an historic landscape which slips quietly, through metaphor, into language." (Smith, 2005, p. 41) There is, Smith suggests, a reworking here of the old idea of the Book of Nature and it is appropriate for envisioning the ancient world. It suggests, too, that there "is no such thing as a 'clean' perception of things, that all our awareness is pre-structured by the history that has deposited us here, in this evanescent moment." (Smith, 2005, p.41)

This notion of pre-structured perceptions has been at the core of this chapter and it is interesting to consider Stan Smith's reference to Beckett's questions, "What have I said?" and "What shall I say?" in relation to how things are interpreted. Smith writes, "We are both historians and magicians, audiences and actors, collaborators in the storied histories we produce and reproduce." (Smith, 2005, p.42) These interconnections are the special focus of this study and will be examined more fully in the chapters to follow.

[35]Stan Smith is Research Professor of Literary Studies at Nottingham Trent University.

3.7 Towards a theory of imagination

In line with the model of travelling concepts discussed earlier in this thesis by Mieke Bal in which she proposed broader classifications to enable interdisciplinary work to proceed, it would be valuable to consider the possibility of a theory of imagination which could be applicable to the argument of this thesis, namely, that it might be possible to posit a history of imagination in relation to Irish art writing. Following earlier work on the moral imagination and on how we live by the use of metaphors, Mark Johnson[36] has proposed such a theory of imagination in his book, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason,* (1987) which will now be considered.

Johnson acknowledges that, following his analysis of Kant's work, that "an adequate account of meaning and rationality, (as well as of understanding and communication) awaits a comprehensive theory of imagination." (Johnson, 1987, p.171) He believes that a theory of imagination would help with theories of conceptualisation, propositional content, and speech acts. Broadly speaking, it could provide an account of structure in both human experience and cognition but before setting out his theory of imagination he summarises Immanuel Kant's view of imagination and how he "showed *why* and *how* it is that there could be *no* meaningful experience without the operation of imagination in its many functions." (Johnson, 1987, p. 165) Kant understood that imagination was an ability to organise mental representations into meaningful unities that could be easily comprehended. "Imagination generates much of the connecting structure by which we have coherent, significant experience,

[36] Mark Johnson is Professor in and head of the University of Oregon's Department of Philosophy.

cognition, and language."(Johnson, 1987, p. 165) Johnson summarises Kant's four related functions of imagination as follows:

Reproductive. This gives unified representations in time, and unified, coherent experiences over time, so that experience is not random and chaotic. In other words, it allows us to grasp a series of perceptual inputs in such a way that we experience objects that persist over time. (Johnson, 1987, p. 166)

Productive. This function constitutes the unity of consciousness through time and imposes structure on all the experiences that one can be aware of. To be an object of experience it must satisfy certain conditions established by the nature of consciousness and these conditions of organisation make up the structures of imagination. (Johnson, 1987, p. 166)

Schematising. This function allows imagination to mediate between abstract concepts and the contents of sensation, allowing us to conceptualise what we receive through sense perception. Imagination is able to make this connection because it is both formal and tied to sensation. While it is, however, a more abstract organising structure than, for example, rich images, it is not a totally abstract proposition or concept. (Johnson, 1987, p. 166)

Creative. This function of imagination is a free, non-rule governed activity, which makes it possible to make new structures of experiences and recast them in different ways to generate new meanings. Creative structuring can be both symbolic presentation and metaphorical projection and operates through the entire system of meaning, language, and understanding. Creative imagination is not, however, an algorithm or a proposition and is not a process determined by rules or concepts. (Johnson, 1987, p. 166)

In the end though Johnson concedes that he is unable to find a completely unified theory of imagination in the writings of Kant and recognises the gap between the creative function, on one hand, and the reproductive, productive, and schematising functions, on the other. Nonetheless, they are connected in that they all involve a structured ordering of mental representations into understandable unities within our experience; but the freedom of the creative imagination, namely the production of novelty, cannot be explained solely in terms of automatic and orderly reproductive and productive functions. Kant, in other words, is unable to bridge this gap within his system, as Johnson expresses it, "He *describes* the operation of creative imagination, but does not *explain* it." (Johnson, 1987, p. 166) It was, however, the genius of Kant "to grasp the scope, pervasiveness, and the importance of imagination for human experience" (Johnson, 1987, p. 166) even though it was the very theoretical framework that gave him this insight which also made it impossible for him to give a satisfactory explanation of how the imagination worked.

Johnson proposes moving beyond Kant by acknowledging that, although his great contribution to our understanding of meaning and rationality was his work on imagination, and despite his own system forcing him to separate imagination from reason and understanding, we do not have to accept the dichotomies (metaphysical and epistemological) presupposed by his system as absolute and rigid. Johnson suggests that they could be regarded as poles on a continuum of cognitive structure. "By taking imagination as central, I see its structures as a massive embodied complex of meaning upon which conceptualisation and propositional judgements depend."(Johnson, 1987, p. 170) These structures and their interweaving nature and intricacy will be considered later in this thesis in a metaphorical way.

Having addressed the salient dimensions of imaginative structures of understanding, Johnson proposes that an adequate theory of imagination would consist of the following components:

1. *Categorisation*. This would not be what classical theorists would regard as fixed categories, but would be broken up in ways that relate human experience as comprehensible *kinds*. In other words, they are not categories which set out necessary and sufficient conditions. (Johnson, 1987, p. 170)

2. *Schemata*. There is a need for a more encompassing theory of schemata, not just in relation to image schemata, but as general knowledge or event structures. Basic kinds of schemata could be developed metaphorically so that their complex interrelations and connections with propositional structures could be explored. (Johnson, 1987, p. 170)

3. *Metaphorical projections*. Metaphor is taken as the main strategy to project structure across different categories to enable new connections and meanings to develop and extend image schemata. The important thing here would be to try to prevent them becoming arbitrary. (Johnson, 1987, p. 170)

4. *Metonymy*. This form of projection would also assist in the development of meaning and would include both synecdoche (part-for-whole) and metonymy proper (salient or related attribute-for-whole). (Johnson, 1987, p. 170)

5. *Narrative structure*. To explain human experience in comprehensible ways there needs to be “narrative unity” while avoiding arbitrariness. (Johnson, 1987, p. 170)

Johnson believes that the necessary basis for a comprehensive theory of imagination that is sensitive to the workings of human understanding will require further

investigation of the relations between these five components, and others that may emerge. He acknowledges that these five areas are currently being explored by researchers working in psychology, philosophy, linguistics, mathematics, and computer science, but many of them would not regard themselves as investigating imagination. (Johnson, 1987, p. 172)

While much of this 'theory of imagination' is propositional, it demonstrates how human meaning and rationality is dependent on structures of imagination. Meaning does not reside in propositions only; "...it permeates our embodied, spatial, temporal, culturally formed, and value laden understanding." (Johnson, 1987, p. 172) In relation to this study, the contribution of Johnson's research on imagination is valuable in that it is at the heart of how we seek to understand one another and communicate within communities and with other communities. It also highlights the importance of looking, not just at histories, but at how imagination and its structures have helped to form them.

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL ART WRITING AND IMAGINATION. PART ONE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter and chapter five will consider a range of critical art writing by authors, poets, artists, and commentators about art and art making in general in Ireland throughout the twentieth century. Chapter four will cover the earlier part of the century while chapter five will cover the second half of the century. These chapters concern critical art writing only, not the writing of the history of art in Ireland and they are intended to be a reflective selection of writing in keeping with the interdisciplinary approach of this thesis, especially in relation to imagination. The selections have not been restricted to art writers and art commentators but have been drawn from a broader spectrum; the only criteria being their curiosity about art making and imagination.

In the early part of the century it was mostly poets and writers who wrestled with the roots and forms of their work but as the century unfolded visual artists, curators, professional art critics, philosophers, journalists and cultural commentators also began to make significant contributions to art writing.

This chapter will begin with a consideration of how W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) and James Joyce (1882-1941) considered imagination. This is followed by a section on George Russell (Æ) to give a broader range of views of imagination in an Irish context. This is followed by section on Mainie Jellett and Thomas MacGreevy to reflect their consciousness of the need for a more modernist perspective. The chapter will end with a section on Samuel Beckett and imagination in writing.

4.2 W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, and imagination

W.B. Yeats is central to any consideration of imagination and art writing in the early part of the twentieth century and it is worth recalling that in the epilogue to his play, *The Island of Statues*,(1884) Yeats had reflected on the idea that words and dreams could be closely related. In his biography, *Yeats: The Man and his Masks* (1948) Richard Ellmann (1918-1987) comments on the curious irresolution of the poem. Yeats posits two forms of truth: the "grey truth" of scientific knowledge and the truth in "thine own heart" (Yeats, 1884 cited Ellmann, 1948, p.39) which Ellmann reads as a clear distinction and indicates that the preference is for the truth of the heart.

Ellmann then proceeds to argue, however, that Yeats's warning that to hunger after "grey truth" could breed "new dreams" (Yeats, 1884 cited Ellmann, 1948, p.39) suggests that there are two kinds of dreams, and this becomes more puzzling when the poem goes on to suggest that words and dreams may be the same and that the world itself may be, "only a sudden flaming word". (Yeats, 1884 cited Ellmann, 1948, p. 40) Ellmann suggests that if, for the poet, "the dusty deeds" he derides partake of the word as much as dreams do then his declaration that "words alone are certain good" is contradictory. (Yeats, 1884 cited Ellmann, 1948, p. 40) Yeats retreats to the land of the lotus-eaters by the end of the epilogue when he states that poetry and dreaming are pleasant and soporific, but Ellmann highlights the prescience of Yeats's musings on "the relation between words, dreams, and the world – or, to put it more abstractly, between language, imagination and reality" (Ellmann, 1948, p. 40) – sentiments which are central to the thinking behind the notion of 'histories of imagination' in this study.

In his book, *Poetics of Modernity* (1995), Richard Kearney offers insights into how competing interpretations of myth and imagination played out in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century in the contrasting approaches of literary figures of the time. The task of trying to establish a distinct cultural identity occupied the minds of many in Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century and it could be argued that it was the prime motivation behind the Literary Revival. (Kearney 1995) Róisín Kennedy (2006) has also pointed out how writers like George Russell and Douglas Hyde (1860-1949), along with W.B. Yeats, were intent on forging a separate national cultural identity as a counterbalance to the powerful forces of centralising cosmopolitanism. They would harness the narratives of Celtic mythology to give distinctiveness to Irish literature. (Kennedy 2006) Kennedy quotes from Russell's 1899 essay, '*Nationality and Cosmopolitanism'* in which he describes the Celtic poets' ability to abstract from their view of the land another Ireland "through which they wandered in dream". Russell describes this "mystical view of nature" as a "national characteristic," (Russell, 1899, pp. 44-47) and it will be explored in more detail in the next section in this chapter.

There is evidence in Yeats's own writing of his consciousness of the artificiality of the construct of nationhood and in his *Autobiography* (1938, 1965) he wrote about the need for a model of the idea of nationhood in the mind of the people. This was not just the simple icon of, for example, "Cathleen ni Houlihan", but "a complex mass of images, something like an architect's model". (Yeats 1938, 1965, pp.334-335) These aspirations of the revival project were not, however, universally shared; there were others who had a very different view and regarded the ideas behind the revival as regressive and stultifying.

Richard Kearney points out that James Joyce had little time for the Celtic revivalists' dream of a pure and unifying mythology and he challenged Yeats over his concern with folklore and politics, describing them as "the fading out of inspiration". (Joyce cited Kearney, 1990, p. 873) For the revivalists, however, mythology was the frame around which a unifying consensus could be constructed, but Joyce would use mythology for parody. There was a sense, too, that there was an absence of intellectual depth in the Celtic revival, as Seán O'Faoláin (1900-1991) observed, "This absence of a deep-cutting critical objectivity was, I think, the great weakness of the so-called Irish Literary Movement. It made it [...] a movement of feeling rather than of thought." (O'Faoláin 1962, p.94) It would be wrong, however, to assume that Joyce's attack on the abuses of mythology was confined to an Irish context. It is clear from *Finnegans Wake* that he also had little regard for the ethnocentric imperialism of the British context. In other words, Joyce believed that the idea of a national consensus, Irish, English, or in any nationality, was itself a myth, and *Finnegan's Wake* was formed out of more diverse sources than had been attempted in any other literary work of the period.

Kearney emphasises the importance of language in Joyce's endeavour to carry out a "linguistic psychoanalysis of the repressed poetics of mythology" (Kearney, 1995, p. 183) and, by demolishing the convention of the time that meaning was a "transparent representation of some mental intention", (Kearney, 1995, p. 183) Joyce was ahead of his time in showing that myth was structured like the unconscious and therefore ambivalent. In *Finnegans Wake* he contrasts the night-time consciousness, which allows for "two thinks at a time" (Joyce, 1939, p.583.07) to the formal logic of daytime consciousness, and revealed how the unconscious formation of myth was like a play of "inter-misunderstanding minds" (Joyce, 1939, p.118.25)) – a phrase

which, incidentally, neatly sums up the idea of hermeneutics while holding out the hope of ambiguity as something desirable.

It is clear then that a deep schism was opening up between Yeats and Joyce in their imaginative positions and that this would extend beyond their own times. There is a danger, however, that the seemingly opposing imaginative outlooks of Yeats and Joyce are read as a stark contrast between a definitive, mythical Irishness and modernism. Colin Graham[37] has drawn attention to the simplistic, binary nature of these debates. In *Deconstructing Ireland* (2001) he refers to a range of writings that supposedly address issues of aesthetics, but are actually driven by opposing sides in Irish cultural criticism, when "aesthetics are naturally politicised, politics aestheticized, as a result."(Graham, 2001, p.52)

This, Graham argues, means that the "unstated metadiscourses of Irish criticism work their repetitious patterns at the end of the century, just as they did at the beginning", (Graham, 2001, p.52) but he also indicates that in the work of Marjorie Howes (1996) and Elizabeth Butler Cullingford (1993) on Yeats, and Suzette A. Henke (1990) and Vincent J. Cheng (1995) on Joyce, there has emerged a challenge to the supremacy of the constantly recurring debate between definitive Irishness and modernism that permeate discussions about Yeats and Joyce. This may clear the way, Graham argues, for a reassessment of the archive of Irish writing, "...which has been accumulated through the radical fulfilments and disappointments of the nation-narrative and through the tensions which have arisen between the nation and its literature." (Graham, 2001, p.55) Perhaps there is no better example of this tension

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than James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and it is for this reason that it was chosen as a case study for an exploration of imagination and memory in Irish art writing in chapter five.

4.3 George Russell (Æ) and the Irish imagination

In order to understand the cultural context of the 1920's and 1930's, and to get a wider perception beyond modernist considerations, it would be useful to consider some of the writing of George Russell (Æ), in particular his preface to Frank O'Connor's translations of poems from Gaelic verse, *The Wild Bird's Nest: Poems from the Irish* (1932). Russell was heavily influenced by Standish James O'Grady (1846-1928) but the passage is especially relevant to perceptions of the Irish imagination which are under scrutiny in this study as part of a history of imagination. Russell begins his essay by stating that he does not think that the character of the Irish was ever understood properly, and he attributes this to the fact that Ireland was never part of the Roman Empire. He argues that, as the Romans were great destroyers of what had previously existed in cultures, Ireland had escaped this fate, and one of the things which had survived the Latin 'domination' was "the primeval culture of imagination...which was the culture of the world before the Greeks came with the beginnings of philosophy and science." (Russell, in Preface to O'Connor, 1932) Russell believed that this ancient world before philosophy was one in which people simply imagined their gods and filled the unknown heavens with them. This use of imagination became part of inherited culture and he writes, "How dark would nature seem to us, how arid our literature and art, but for the imagination of our Graeco-Latin ancestors." (Russell in O'Connor, 1932)

He then lists the numerous mythical characters from ancient Celtic times and argues that they are just as attractive to the artistic mind as any from other

cultures. He also argues that any truth which lay in these imaginative creations was poetic or spiritual – "a relation of myth to deep inner being." He contrasts this with the culture of nature begun by Aristotle (384-322 BC) from which science developed and culminated in a place "where truth is a relation of our thought to what is perceived by the senses." (Russell in O'Connor, 1932) This, of course, forms the basis of much of our philosophy today, and Russell shows a quite modern awareness of phenomenology in his speculations.

This absence of philosophy and science, Russell argues, created a situation where there was never any attempt by the Irish to rationalise their many otherworldly quests and visions. They did, however, have two opposing approaches in their literature and Russell sees it reflected in O'Connor's translations of some of the early poems. On one hand, the vision rises towards the other world, while on the other there is a cold dispassionate sense of realism and brooding. In early Irish literature there is a passion which exists by itself, but little introspection or distillation of knowledge.

The vision of the moment, as it appears and fades in the imagination of the seer, is paramount, and there is no consolation in philosophical introspection. The bleakness, and moodiness, lives and dies in the poem, even in the love poetry, where there is a sense of impermanence. Russell saw parallels in some of the Anglo-Irish literature of his own time but also saw that there may be great potential in a fusing of the Irish sensibility with European thinking. He could see this potential, at the time of writing, in the latest poetry by W. B. Yeats.

In his concluding comments Russell gets very excited by what he regards as the quickening and stimulus to the imagination provided by earlier scholars of the

almost forgotten Gaelic literature as he wrote, “The early sagas as raw material for the imaginative artist are, I think, equal to anything in Greek mythology.” (Russell, in O’Connor, 1932) This may seem a very overblown claim, very much of its time, until we consider some of the work of recent writers, in particular Seamus Heaney, who, quite unselfconsciously, was inspired, not just by some of the ancient Irish translations, but by a much more eclectic range of European myths and sagas, his translation of *Beowulf* (2000) being a significant example.

4.4 Mainie Jellett and Thomas Mac Greevy

Mainie Jellett (1897-1944) was born in Dublin, the daughter of William Morgan Jellett, a barrister and later Member of Parliament, and Janet McKenzie Stokes; they were an Anglo-Irish family and devout Anglicans. Jellett studied initially at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin and later at the Westminster Technical Institute in London under Walter Sickert (1860-1942. She was a talented artist and, with her friend, Evie Hone (1894-1955) moved to Paris where they studied Cubism under André Lhote (1885-1962) and Albert Gleizes (1881-1953). Jellett is an important figure in Irish art history, both as a proponent of abstract art and as a champion of modernism. She was often attacked critically but her writings and lectures in defence of her art make her an important figure in considering the climate of the time, particularly in relation to her attempts to develop a more positive attitude to art at a time of isolation and political instability in Ireland. It is noteworthy that she lectured in Dublin, London and Paris long before abstract artists like Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth were recognised.

In relation to the subject matter of this thesis, it is of note that Jellett chose as her mentors artists who were known as much for their writings as for their art. Róisín Kennedy in her thesis (2006) relates that Jellett, in a lecture given in 1940, told her

audience “a curious situation had arisen with the growth and development of modernism in which artists were forced to express their ideas in words as well as in paint.” (Kennedy, 2006, Vol. 2, p.17) Jellett had been defending her art since 1926, and her opposition to academic art identified her in the public mind with the antithesis of academic art, namely, modernist art.

She had learned from Lhote that the modernist artist needed to develop a personal philosophy to enable them to combine their experience with a knowledge and understanding of the historical tradition of art and she set about the task of establishing an intellectual basis for her art practice. She selected her teachers as much for their theoretical approaches as for their artistic interests and she believed that the Cubist movement was developed from the art of the past rather than being concerned with the sensations of modern life. (Kennedy, 2006)

It was, however, Albert Gleizes who had more influence on Jellett’s critical views on art. In Cubist circles he was well respected and closely associated with an abstract version of the movement; he also held an ethical view of the artist which was contrary to the contemporary emphasis on the commercialisation of the artwork. Both Jellett and Hone were to play an important role in the development of Gleizes’ theories; they had been taught by him in 1921 and 1922 and this helped to clarify his thinking on abstraction and get his ideas down in writing. Jellett and Hone had arrived at an important juncture in Gleizes’ development as an artist and he acknowledged this in 1958. (Kennedy, 2006)

The central principle in Gleizes’ theory was the idea of Translation-Rotation which proposed that there were two elements in the construction of a painting. In Translation the artist employs colour and form to reinforce the physical dimensions

of the art object and eliminate the imitation of realistic space. In Rotation the static element is then manipulated to create a sense of dynamism, movement, and time. The underlying idea behind these rules was to create an art which was timeless and it was employed by Jellett in all her abstract work from the 1920s. (Kennedy, 2006)

This sense of timelessness fed into the cyclical view of history shared by Jellett, Hone and Gleizes, and indeed by many intellectual at the time, and is relevant to the consideration of how important imaginative mindsets can be in art historical writing and in informing a possible history of imagination. There was a belief that from the Renaissance to the late 19th century there was a decline in Western civilisation, with a move away from spiritualism to materialism, accompanied by more emphasis on the external world in the use of linear perspective and realism in painting. Jellett and Gleizes argued that Cubism and modernist art could uncover eternal laws of colour and proportion and provide alternatives to the superficiality of daily experience. (Kennedy 2006)

Jellett's frequent references to Celtic art, or as she preferred, 'Early Christian art', were invoked by her as examples of the kind of abstract art she was trying to make and this, of course, had a certain appeal within Irish cultural nationalism; essentially, though, it was religious art, in keeping with Jellett's own devout Anglican background and her belief that great art was fundamentally spiritual. In addition, the Celtic period for Jellett represented a time in Ireland when it was unified in its Christianity, unencumbered with the sectarian and political divisions which were to come later. As the daughter of a Unionist MP, Jellett was acutely aware of the political realities of her times and she was careful to avoid references to contentious contemporary events, preferring to situate her comments on modernist art within a universal context. (Kennedy 2006)

Lucy Cotter (2005) has written that Jellett was realistic in her vision of a modernist Irish art and was aware that her project to establish a national visual art would take time and that she needed to lay the foundations for it by advocating an art which could blend Celtic and religious sources with a European modernist style of painting. Cotter, however, has also pointed out that it was probably too soon after the establishment of national independence and a national school of painting and that Jellett's "intervention (as a Protestant Anglo-Irish foreign trained artist) was an unwelcome one, reflecting the exclusionary function of the 'nation' (Ireland) until contemporary times." (Cotter, 2005, p.584) Jellett was not the only person to champion modernism in this period and one of her early defenders was Thomas MacGreevy who will be considered next.

Thomas MacGreevy (1893 - 1967) was an art critic and art historian in Dublin and London in the 1920s before he moved to Paris to teach at the École Normale. His work is of interest to this study, not only because he spanned the first third of the twentieth century, but because he was consciously international and modernist in his imaginative approach. He was a close friend of Samuel Beckett and was appointed Director of the National Gallery in Dublin in 1950. MacGreevy had served in the First World War with the Royal Field Artillery and it was the aesthetic which allowed him to put distance between him and his experience and liberated him from the weight of history. He was a champion of modernist art and a supporter of the abstract work of Mainie Jellett , locating her within a Celtic, non-figurative tradition.(Cullen, 2000, p.252)

It is worth noting, too, that MacGreevy wrote for the Dublin-based magazine *Klaxon*, a quarterly International magazine covering art, music, and literature in all nations. In his article, "Picasso, Mainie Jellett and Dublin Criticism" (1923), he

noted that, while the standard of literary criticism in Ireland had improved, he also observed “our desolate condition in the matter of serious art criticism” (Cullen, 2000, p.252) and the perplexed anger of some critics of Mainie Jellett’s work “was not at all flattering to the standard of our education in modern art”. (Cullen, 2000, p.253) Shane Cullen argues that MacGreevy “displays a Catholic sensibility which merges with a nationalist bias.” (Cullen, 2000, p.252) Yet he contributed much to the slowly changing climate.

He supported and encouraged modernist art in Ireland and in his poetry he used the modernist idiom. In his book, *Irish Poetry and the Construction of Modern Identity* (2005), Stan Smith explores the origins of literary modernism in Ireland. He believes that Ireland turned its back on the challenges of modernism after its establishment as an independent state. The initial flush of modernism in Yeats and Joyce was, he believed, followed by a period of insularity and parochialism when the writers of the 1930s, including MacGreevy, formed part of the second generation of Irish modernists who struggled against the inwardly turned and sectarian Ireland of the time. (Smith, 2005)

MacGreevy's contribution to modernism must, therefore, be seen against a background of slowly developing modernism in Ireland. In the 1930s MacGreevy, heavily influenced by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, had written some poems which Samuel Beckett and Wallace Stevens had admired and written about, but Beckett was later to disagree with MacGreevy’s thesis in his monograph on Jack Yeats that Yeats had painted “the Ireland that matters.” (MacGreevy, 1945, p.5) It is, however, his poetry in the modernist idiom which ran against the prevailing climate but is of value in considering modernism in the Ireland of that time. Austin Clarke had

commented on MacGreevy's *Poems* of 1934 "that the modernist revolt has at last reached the Irish Free State." (Clarke, cited Schriebman,1991, p. xxxii)

As this thesis is concerned with how prevailing imaginations at work when artists and writers were producing their work could form part of a history of imagination, it is worth noting that at the time MacGreevy was writing he was considered to be marginal because he was more influenced by modern European sensibility, while native Irish writers were more concerned with being identified with versions of their Irish past. This charge could not, however, be levelled against Samuel Beckett who will be considered in the next section.

4.5 Samuel Beckett on imagination and art writing

In this section the connection between Samuel Beckett and art, and his influence on art writing and criticism, will be explored. In chapter one, section 1.4 of this study Beckett's characters in *Waiting for Godot* were cited as articulating the problematic nature of history, but in this section some of his work will be examined in relation to his abandonment of belief in the value of critical art writing in his later work. Beckett also attempted to break free from what he regarded as the romantic notion of imagination.

His earlier engagements with painting and artists were important in terms of the wider experience it gave him of the problems of human expression which, ultimately for Beckett, he came to see as a near impossibility. Beckett's skirmishes with the problems of inexpressibility in painting were influential in his own writing, as were his friendships with artists and writers, most notably Jack Yeats and Thomas Mac Greevy. Beckett did not believe, however, that good art needed any critical

commentary and was reluctant even to go into too much detail about the work he was writing about.

Beckett's concern with failure in human communication was evident in all his thinking and Lois Oppenheim[38] has commented that Beckett's criticism was often "a pretext to articulate a rather extraordinary logic: visual art, he reasoned, could not be written about as there really is no such thing, generically speaking, as visual art." (Oppenheim, in Croke, 2006, p.77) The individuality of each work of art defies, in Beckett's judgement, any objective reference frame and, in his *La peinture des van Velde* (1945) he writes, "There is no painting. There are only paintings." (Beckett, cited Oppenheim, 2006 p.77) We can only say that they approximate something deep and personal within the artist, and this, in Beckett's view, only hinders the task of criticism. (Oppenheim, 2006)

This failure of the ability of the artist to depict reality, or the condition of 'being in the world', Becket described as "the issueless predicament of existence." (Beckett, cited Oppenheim, 2006, p.78) He found evidence for this too in the paintings of Jack Yeats, which he saw as hovering on the brink of failure. Peggy Phelan[39] (born 1948) has also written that Beckett's greatest achievement in *Waiting for Godot* was to dramatise what she described as the "rhythm of looking, a rhythm with which many artists are familiar. It oscillates between seeing and blindness, between figuration and abstraction, between the void at the centre of sight and the contour of the slender ridge that brooks it." (Phelan, 2004, p.1280) These observations pose interesting

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[39] Peggy Phelan is an American feminist scholar and a founder of Performance Studies International. She authored the survey in *Art and Feminism*, edited by Helena Reckitt (2012)

challenges to all commentaries on creative activity, and some of them will be explored further in examples of Beckett's writing in chapter five.

The dilemma which Beckett faced in his own writing was his agonising crusade to move beyond words. In referring to Beethoven's seventh symphony he wrote to an acquaintance asking "Is there any reason why that terrible materiality of the word surface should not be capable of being dissolved, like, for example, the sound surface...so that through whole pages we can perceive nothing but a path of sounds suspended in giddy heights, linking unfathomable abysses of silence?" (Beckett in Oppenheim, 2006, p. 78)

Beckett's philosophy on art, and art writing, was, therefore, predicated on the belief that it was not really relevant to visual art and even undermined it. What was more important was the perception of the viewer and the ensuing dialogue which animated the work and took it beyond its meaninglessness as an object into the realm of the interplay of the visible and the invisible. There is, however, a contradiction in the very fact that Beckett wrote about the irrelevance of art criticism and interpretation in that they actually succeed in enlightening the process of painting and the artist's continual struggle with the problem of inexpressibility.

Beckett carried forward the project of literary modernism in Ireland which, it could be argued, had such an important influence on Irish art writing, and, inevitably, on postmodernism. The fact that Beckett had, in his earlier career, such a keen interest in art, gives his work particular relevance in any discussion of Irish art writing in the twentieth century. It is worthy of note, however, that by 1950 Beckett had moved away from art criticism and the personal responses to art that he had seemed to enjoy

earlier in his career. He had written from Dublin to Georges Duthuit[40] (1891-1936) in 1950, stating that he had visited the National Gallery with Thomas MacGreevy, and commented, "Saw a couple of old friends again, from the time when I thought I loved painting." (Beckett, quoted in Croke, 2006, p.18) It is the challenge which Beckett presented to the Irish state's view of itself, however, which was probably his greatest contribution to subsequent changes in attitude.

Diarmaid Ferriter (born 1973) has pointed out that "much of the Irish revolution's rhetoric had been utterly aspirational – there was no grand inclusive programme for Irish development" (Ferriter, 2004, p.24) and that this was reflected in the work of Beckett, who described the company of 'Gaels' in *Murphy* (1938) as "irksome beyond endurance". (Beckett, cited Ferriter, 2004, p. 432) Ferriter believes that Beckett "saw Irish society as a mere pastiche with no overall purpose and his response was to put despair and futility on stage for people to laugh at." (Ferriter, 2004, p.24) This counter narrative was a necessary corrective to the Ireland of that time and there were other voices engaged in the same critical process.

The social and educational background of literary and artistic output at this time is interesting and Ferriter has drawn attention to writers like Patrick Kavanagh (1904-1967) who believed that Irish society "froze for want of Europe." (Kavanagh, cited Ferriter, 2004, p.432) There was evidence in the educational system, too, of a climate of rigidity and bias, as reflected in the Irish Department of Education's notes to teachers that they should use, "sublime examples of patriotism in order to refute the calumnies of Ireland's enemies." (Travers, 1996, pp. 13-16) This was an example of the mood of the time which some artists and writers had difficulty negotiating.

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[40] Georges Duthuit was a French writer, art critic and historian. Some of the letters he exchanged with Samuel Beckett on the subject of contemporary art form the text *Three Dialogues* published in the literary journal *transition*, edited by the poet Eugene Jolas (1894- 1952)

The exhibition, *Samuel Beckett: A Passion for Paintings* (2006) brought attention to connections between the art which Beckett was familiar with and his writing. For example, Fionnuala Croke, the catalogue editor, notes the similarity between Jack Yeats's painting *Two Travellers* (1942) and a passage in Beckett's *Molloy* (1959) ... "they did not pass each other by, but halted, face to face, as in the country, of an evening, on a deserted road, two wayfaring strangers..." (Beckett, 1959, P.9)

Marilyn Gaddis Rose (1930-1915)[41] has also written about the exchanges between Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* (1954) as follows, "The overall effect is not unlike that of a verbal equivalent of a Yeats painting where a form resides within the deceptive display of colour and texture." (Rose, 1972, p.46) Other examples include speculation about Casper David Friedrich's *Two Men Contemplating the Moon* (1819/20) and *Waiting for Godot*. (1954). James Knowlson[42] uses the term 'recognition' here (Knowlson, cited Croke, 2006, p.18) and it is clear that Beckett's familiarity with painting had some influence on his writing.

The more interesting aspect of these connections, however, with regard to this study, is to attempt to determine how his imagination was evolving, and in particular how he came to believe that art writing, in the sense of trying to record personal responses to particular works of art, was ultimately inadequate. This will entail looking at a much wider range of influences and asking questions about how Beckett's change of view about the value of visual art was accompanied by a belief that words were a more effective medium for transcribing the deeper roots of the human condition.

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[42] James Knowlson is Emeritus Professor of French, and founder of the Beckett International Foundation at the University of Reading.

Although, ultimately, words too would seem inadequate to Beckett and he switched his focus to the inadequacy of imagination itself in his writing, some of which will be discussed in chapter six.

CHAPTER FIVE: CRITICAL IRISH ART WRITING AND IMAGINATION. PART TWO

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine a range of critical art writing from the second half of the twentieth century, a period in which more specialised art writing emerged and consequently the emphasis of the study shifts towards more 'professional' critical art writing and away from a reliance on creative writers. As an appropriate marker of this change, the *Rosc67* exhibition was selected on the basis that it focused on the connection between literature and art, a very important aspect of this thesis. The section includes the opinions of the artist and art critic Brian O'Doherty with particular reference to his essay "The Literary Tradition and the Visual Response", in the catalogue for the exhibition *The Irish Imagination 1959-71*in association with Rosc '71.

This is important to the subject matter of this thesis in that it reveals views on the connections between Ireland's literary tradition and its art. Section three reviews Róisín Kennedy's critical essay, "The Irish Imagination 1971 - Stereotype or Strategy?" This is followed in section four by an in depth consideration of the work of Louis le Brocquy and how it relates to the intersections between literature, art and imagination, with contributions from Richard Kearney, Dorothy Walker and others. A contribution from Tom Duddy then follows in section five where he considers Irish art criticism and the charge of provincialism made against it; he also focuses on the imaginative stances of Irish artists and asks if their emphasis on the rural landscape made them more conservative and less inclined to be influenced by international trends. The next section on Richard Kearney and *Transitions* concerns

the crisis in culture which emerged in twentieth century Ireland around tensions between traditional aspirations and modern realism. The final section will consider critical views from Lucy Cotter and Gavin Murphy in relation to the uncertainties concerning the trajectory of Irish cultural debates at the end of the twentieth century.

5.2 *Rosc* and the interplay between Irish literature and art

The *Rosc* exhibitions spanned the period from 1967 to 1988 and came at a time when the Irish art establishment were seeking validation from the wider critical circles in international art. It was to be consciously modernist with Michael Scott (1905-1989) and the Irish American curator James Johnson Sweeney (1900-1986) prime movers in the enterprise. The fact that the word 'Rosc', meaning 'poetry of vision', was selected for these exhibitions displayed an awareness of the connection between literature and art writing – especially in an Irish context – but this will be addressed in a separate section after the motivation and impact of the exhibitions has been considered.

As will be discussed in the section on Louis le Brocquy and the influence of James Joyce, *Rosc* consciously reached back to the past to draw parallels between abstraction, the art of the 1960s, and ancient Celtic art, but it was not unaffected by a politically driven desire – exactly contrary to the apolitical motivation of modernism. This is evident in the words of the chairman of the committee, Michael Scott (1905-1989) who stated in his introduction to the *Rosc 67* catalogue that "Cultural forces have united Ireland in the past, and it is hoped that future *Rosc* exhibitions, to be held every four years, will further enhance Ireland's cultural unity." (Scott, 1967, cited Cullen, 2000, p.262) To be fair, however, Scott saw this aspiration as part of a wider effort which would lead to the establishment of "world cultural heritage, and thereby to the unity of nations". (Scott, 1967, cited Cullen, 2000 p.262) This is further

evidence, too, of how culture and the harnessing of imagination were beginning to be seen as power players in the drive for globalisation.

The contribution of the artist and critic, Brian O'Doherty (born 1928), also known as Patrick Ireland, was an interesting intervention in Irish art writing in the early 1970s and in his catalogue contributions to the exhibition, "The Irish Imagination" (1971) he asks key questions about why Ireland did not seem to have any desire to take up the types of modern art in vogue in London, Paris, and New York at the time of writing. He concluded that the refusal of Irish artists to blandly mimic current trends had to be analysed more closely.

He also cited the sense of isolation experienced in Ireland during the Second World War and the "spiritual powers of tradition and the secular power of the Church" (O'Doherty, 1971 p.10) as the main agencies of oppression. O'Doherty, nonetheless, believed that some new thinking had been introduced before the war and that, in the absence of international influences, these had time to be assimilated and adapted to local needs and temperaments. O'Doherty credits Mainie Jellett (already considered in more detail in section four of chapter three) and her example and enthusiasm in setting up the "Irish Exhibition of Living Art" in 1943 as one of the more important sources for new ideas. (O'Doherty, 1971 p.10)

The fact that these developments took place outside the 'official' art world of Dublin, represented by the Royal Hibernian Academy who controlled the only art school, the National College of Art, resulted in artists like Patrick Scott not being able to teach. It is not surprising, therefore, that developing artists had little opportunity or encouragement to challenge the prevalent romanticism in Irish art. This explains, O'Doherty believed, why artists like Mainie Jellett did not succeed in

establishing “a firm Cubist underpinning” (O’Doherty, 1971 p.10) and this, together with the isolation engendered by the Second World War, created a stronger pull of landscape with its “atmospheric complexion.” (O’Doherty, 1971 p.11) Artists were painting, not for an external audience, but for a home audience, hungry for a local art which asserted their sense of identity. O’Doherty names a number of artists who worked in this “atmospheric mode” such as Nano Reid (1900-1981), Patrick Collins (1911-1984), Camille Souter (born 1929), and Noel Sheridan (1936-2006), who evolved in this ‘poetic’ mode, mixing landscape and light, the soft twilights and creating a sense of evasiveness and elusiveness. This, O’Doherty maintained, explained the whole national outlook in Ireland in the nineteen forties and nineteen fifties when there was a sense of introspection and a reluctance to respond to anything that did not apply, not to Irish art, but to the Irish experience. (O’Doherty, 1971 p.11)

Although it has been mentioned elsewhere in this study it is worth recalling at this point the fact that the National College of Art in Dublin did not have a library at this time and this may help to explain the slow spread of new thinking in art from abroad. This lack of exposure to dynamic innovative ideas was bound to have contributed to a sense of paralysis and stagnation in the art world in Ireland at that time, with the old ways of doing things continuously recycled. It can, of course, be argued that students had access to books outside the art college but resources were very limited at the time.

In terms of this research this explication by O’Doherty could be regarded as a very significant example of the influence of imagination, not just on individual artistic endeavour, but on a national consciousness. The fact that the dominance of painterly illusionism resisted any interference with the painted surface well into the nineteen

sixties is testament to the power of collective imagination. O'Doherty believed that this also explained why artists of such international renown as Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) had no purchase on the Irish imagination. "The technological rhetoric" (O'Doherty, 1971 p.11) of op art, too, with its perceptual challenges had little influence on Irish art. Aside from Louis le Brocquy (1916-2012), who surrounded his work in an 'atmospheric mode', O'Doherty also cites artists such as Cecil King (1921-1986) and Patrick Scott (1921-2014) who experimented with hard edged painting and were more innovative – especially Scott whom he saw as embracing more international ideas. It is O'Doherty's emphasis on the idea of taste, however, that marks out his writing on art as essentially formalist in nature, but this is only one of the issues considered in the critical response of Róisín Kennedy to O'Doherty's contribution which will be examined in the next section.

5.3 Róisín Kennedy and *The Irish Imagination 1971 - Stereotype or Strategy?*

Róisín Kennedy's paper, *The Irish Imagination 1971 - Stereotype or Strategy?* (2013) focuses on the catalogue text of the Arts Council of Ireland sponsored exhibition the *Irish Imagination 1959-1971*[43] and critiques Brian O'Doherty's four short introductory essays where he outlines many of the fissures in art writing of the period, particularly in relation to how Modernism defined aesthetic value in art, and the charges of elitism which these attitudes triggered. Dorothy Walker was an admirer of O'Doherty's work and supported him in his advocacy of Patrick Scott's art, describing him as "an artist of unerring, absolute taste, which, while encasing the extra-sensitive core of his art, externalises that core by means of a superb and exact order". (Walker, cited by Kennedy, 2013 p.4) This style of writing, with its implied

[43] *Irish Imagination 1959-1971* was one of a number of satellite exhibitions held as part of *Rosc'71*.

notion that only certain classes in society, usually with a privileged educational background, could access this type of criticism without the need to explain such judgements of taste, would trigger many debates.

Kennedy argues that O'Doherty's use of the term 'atmospheric mode' was, he believed, the crucial feature of art in Ireland in the mid twentieth century, focusing as it did on the mythical, rather than the historical, and conveying a sense of vagueness which epitomised the relationship of the artists to their country. Formalism allowed O'Doherty, in other words, to avoid biographical detail and historical narrative and comment only on the physical aspects of the art. This formalist approach, was, however, challenged by post-modern critics who claimed that there was an overriding assumption that certain visual forms could convey to the viewer ideas which resonated with the artist's subconscious intentions. O'Doherty's references to 'taste' and 'quality' in his catalogue essay suggest that the works chosen for the exhibition were selected on the basis that they "possessed inherently positive qualities of the type closely associated with a Modernist definition of aesthetic value." (Kennedy, 2013 p.4)

Róisín Kennedy also argues that the question of taste is assumed to be shared between critic and reader through common educational and social backgrounds and that there was, therefore, no need to explain their judgements. This was in sharp contrast to the approach of writers such as Thomas MacGreevy (1893-1963) and Mainie Jellet (1897-1944) whose judgements were based on political and moral perspectives. MacGreevy believed that it was only by developing an understanding of the past that we could properly interpret the art of the present and explain its purpose to the Irish people.

Kennedy makes the case that O'Doherty was using nationalistic rhetoric, albeit in an understated way; indistinctness and concern for mythical time were characteristics which were a reflection of the country's climate and the sensibilities of those who lived there. This is also evidence of common imagination concerns between literature and art, in that the poetry and song of 18th and 19th century nationalist Ireland used vague allusion rather than outright political statement. This, Kennedy argues, is what O'Doherty was doing in his essay, relying on a "similar strategy of indirect statement, hinting at the potential of art to be subversive and to express dislocation and introspection, while at the same time highlighting the unique stylistic nature of modern Irish painting". (Kennedy, 2013 p.5)

Overall, however, O'Doherty's essay had shown how Modernist Irish art had come to prominence, citing the Second World War as instrumental in Ireland's intellectual and social isolation. This climate allowed artists like Mainie Jellet and Evie Hone to have more influence with the establishment of the Irish Exhibition of Living Art in 1942 and was aided by the failure of the Royal Hibernian Academy to influence younger artists. This context formed part of the general mood when O'Doherty had written his catalogue essays for the *Irish Imagination 1959-1971* exhibition which was intended to be a vehicle for the promotion of a specific cultural agenda.

Róisín Kennedy has argued that O'Doherty's essay had a disproportionate influence on public perceptions of Irish art at the time, partly because there were no other outlets for the discussion of contemporary art in Ireland, and partly because of the general acceptance of artists as autonomous, independent agents who acted outside the usual economic and social influences of society. Yet there was a growing trend for commerce and the visual arts to cooperate more closely for their mutual benefit. This was evident in the 1960s and 1970s when the government established the

Cultural Relations Committee and Arts Council of Ireland to boost the role of the corporate sector in the development of contemporary Irish art and this revealed a significant shift in imagination between what was perceived as the 'old' world of traditional nationalist concerns and the modern, forward looking 'new' world of internationalism which the then Taoiseach, Sean Lemass, was attempting to establish.

This was an important juncture in Irish cultural life and, for the purposes of this study, a good example of how changes in imagination can either occur naturally, or be engineered by powerful agencies. Some young Irish artists, for example, were aware of the establishment's desire for a more internationalist approach which preferred a type of abstract art, particularly as it related to landscape. This was a type of art, in Róisín Kennedy's words, "associated with American post-war Modernism and by extension a kind of imperialism," (Kennedy, 2013 p.8) and rejected an approach which recognised the local, national, or European context in allowing artists to express their relationship with local concerns.

This resulted, however, in their exclusion from the canon of Modernist Irish art and from officially inspired exhibitions such as the *Irish Imagination* exhibition. It is notable too, and reflective of the schism that existed between the essentially humanist imaginative position of the Independent Artists, who had been trained in the National College of Art, and the Modernist imagination position of Louis le Brocquy, Patrick Scott, and Patrick Collins who had received little formal training in art but were included in official exhibitions. One of these artists, Louis le Brocquy, will be considered next in relation to the interconnections between the literary and the visual in his work.

5.4 Brian O'Doherty and Richard Kearney on Louis le Brocquy

Brian O'Doherty's remark that "Irish artists occupy the gate lodge to the literary Big House" (O'Doherty, 1971 p.24) has already been referred to earlier in this study but this section will place the remark within the context of his comments on the relationship of some artists to the greats of Irish literature, especially the reconstructed heads of Joyce and Beckett by Louis le Brocquy. Richard Kearney has also written about these heads in his philosophical consideration of the hermeneutic imagination and these will be considered alongside O'Doherty's writing. O'Doherty makes the point that there is a "subtle tyranny" (O'Doherty, 1971 p.24) in the fact that the Irish writer can command an international audience based on the myth of the poetic Irish, but that there is an unacknowledged sense of betrayal of the material among visual artists, a sense that they have "been a little 'had' by the literary renaissance." (O'Doherty, 1971 p.24) Wider issues relating to how modernism and its treatment of aesthetic value, and the divisions which opened up in art writing of this period, will also be considered later.

How artists respond to literary heritage interested O'Doherty and "The Irish Imagination" exhibition presented an opportunity to explore the challenge of confronting and representing myths surrounding literary figures and their work. O'Doherty regarded Louis le Brocquy as the most responsive artist to the heroic status of Joyce and Beckett; his reconstructed heads barely survive the painting process and reveal, in the indistinct nature of their backgrounds, a reverberation of projected emotion that "both resolve and summon the myth of the man and his work" (O'Doherty, 1971 p.24) Overall, though, le Brocquy retains a great personal respect for his subjects.

Richard Kearney's writings on the heads of W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, and other Irish writers by le Brocquy provide an interesting example of the interplay between imagination, art writing, and cultural influences. In adding a painterly perspective to the philosophical debates Kearney believes that le Brocquy's "commitment to the exploration of visual *inwardness* may be seen as a disclosure of an aesthetic dimension which refuses the misery of exploitation and manipulation." (Kearney, 1988 p.199) In other words, Le Brocquy strives hard to maintain a distance between the interiority of his art and the pressures of society.

Kearney notes that Herbert Marcuse[44](1898-1979), when discussing whether art could change the world, warned that the tension between art and radical praxis could flatten out, leaving art devoid of its ability to change anything.. Inwardness, however, could act as a protection against an all controlling society and "Inwardness and subjectivity may well become the inner and outer space for the subversion of experience, for the emergence of another universe." (Marcuse, 1978, pp.35-39) Le Brocquy equates the aesthetic experience of *inwardness* and *otherness* with a "kind of personal archaeology" where he digs for something which can turn out to be remarkable, "something apparently *outside* oneself, which one has found in fact *inside* oneself." (le Brocquy cited Kearney, 1988b p.199) By this philosophy he is striving for an interiority of meaning which he regards as "the inner reality of the human presence beyond its merely external appearance." (le Brocquy cited Kearney, 1988b p.199)

This should not be regarded, however, as an affirmation by le Brocquy of the romantic notion of the supremacy of the individual will. He has always maintained

[44] Herbert Marcuse was a German-American philosopher, sociologist, and political theorist associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory.

that his painting is not about self-expression, but about his search for the "interior dimension of otherness" (le Brocquy, cited Kearney, 1988b p.199) which is always challenging personal identity and "suspends our controlling will." (le Brocquy cited Kearney,1988b p.199) Kearney compares this scenario to that which Beckett described in his essay on Proust as the revelation of "involuntary imagination" (Beckett, cited Kearney, 1988b p.199) and which will be expanded later in relation to Beckett's writing.

For le Brocquy this subjective state is like an "interior, invisible world" (le Brocquy cited Walker, 1981 p.139) which transcends the personality of the individual and is an "autonomous disseminated consciousness surpassing individual personality". (le Brocquy cited Walker, 1981 p.139) But given what has been revealed in this study of imagination and the influences of preconceptions on creative consciousness it is difficult to go all the way with le Brocquy on this point and to believe, as he does, in the almost autonomous nature of images which emerge on the canvas. He argues that these images are more discoveries than inventions and that the artist has to strive consciously to overcome their belief systems and allow things to be revealed and uncovered in the process. The problematic nature of this contention is, however, counterbalanced by Kearney's citing of Seamus Heaney as a writer who would go some way with le Brocquy in his belief in an archaeology of painting as the emergence of the other through the dissolving of the controlling self. "Yet that hand does not seek to express its own personality. It is obedient rather than dominant, subdivided into process as it awaits a discovery." (Heaney, cited Kearney 1988b p.200)

This still presents difficulties in accepting such a proposition. Artists have always been aware that accidents in the process of creativity, whether in paint or any other

medium, can lead to important discoveries, but they have to be transformed in accordance with the will of the artist. They could be regarded as no more autonomous than the spiritualists' claims for automatic writing, so to seek some explanation of such artistic freedoms we must look to le Brocquy's own background.

Although he was born and brought up in Ireland he claims not to have been conscious of being particularly Irish. "None seemed to me less manifestly Irish than that small family whose name I bore". (le Brocquy, 1981 pp. 24-26) Yet when he left Ireland at the age of twenty one to study painting in London, Paris, Venice, and Geneva he became aware of his Irish identity and was attached to it for the rest of his life. He resisted the dangers of what he saw as self-conscious nationalism and believed that "art betrays itself as soon as it subscribes to cultural insularism". He also opposed "the manipulative uses of a self-righteous national identity". (le Brocquy, 1981 pp.24-26)

Dorothy Walker[45] (1929-2002) has, however, pointed out the possible cultural roots of le Brocquy's heads series with their cyclical structures, borrowed directly from Celtic visual motifs. These new reinterpreted forms, combined with le Brocquy's modernist stance, counteract classical notions of realism and linear perspective. (Walker, 1981) He was ahead of his time, too, in realising that art was moving away from a *perceptual*, outward looking art, to an inward, *conceptual* art which sought to rediscover meaning. Le Brocquy provides a very concrete example of how literature can influence artists in a very direct and tangible way and is further evidence for the interdisciplinary widening of art writing to include the literary dimension.

[45] Dorothy Walker was an Irish art critic who championed abstract modernism in Ireland. She was a co-founder of the *Rosc* exhibitions and a board member and interim director of the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

It is evident too that James Joyce regarded the perceptual approach, where surface was the key focus of artists from the Renaissance period to the end of the nineteenth century, was changing to an awareness of conceptual approaches and Richard Kearney is very clear on this Joycean influence on le Brocquy when he states, "It was Joyce's enthusiasm for this counter-Renaissance tendency that accounts for his profound interest in the Medieval and Celtic universes of nightmare consciousness". (Kearney, 1988b p.201) It represents, in other words, a different, revived, imagination mindset which profoundly influenced Joyce. In le Brocquy's case he states that the plural identity of his images of Joyce represent a more Medieval or Celtic viewpoint, tending to the cyclic as opposed to the linear, "repetitive yet simultaneous, and, above all, inconclusive." (Kearney, 1988b p.201)

In le Brocquy's fragmented, shimmering images of Joyce he is mirroring many of the motifs of *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake* in their ambivalences about space, time, emotion, and memory. An interiority of consciousness, for le Brocquy, can challenge the usual sense of linearity of time, where there are beginnings and endings, "to a circular concept returning upon itself, as in *Finnegan's Wake*." (le Brocquy cited Kearney, 1988b p.201) and he expands this notion further by explaining that, as a painter, he has witnessed how paint can perform the double task of being at once the image and then the paint. "I myself have learned from the canvas that emergence and immergence – twin phenomena of time – are ambivalent," and this coexistence, he believes, "dissolves the normal sense of time, producing a characteristic *stillness.*" (le Brocquy cited Kearney, 1988b p.201) This, Kearney states, is an accurate description of "that enigmatic confluence of presencing and absencing" (Kearney, 1988b p.201) which is conveyed by le Brocquy's head studies.

From the point of view of this research, however, it is interesting to note how close le Brocquy's painting comes to extending Joyce's literary purpose; they both offer clues to the emphasis on ambivalences in Irish culture, both in the past and in the present. It is also worth noting that the similarities between Joyce and le Broquy on the question of the Celtic prototype is not some comforting and smug sense of continuity of identity, but a more unsettling, bleaker narrative of modern dispossession. Any sense of a common cultural identity, therefore, has to be continuously reinterpreted and challenged by each succeeding artist and the tension between modernism and revivalism makes for a healthier, more dynamic challenge.

Overall, however, from the perspective of this study, these reflections offer a very fruitful example of a case study where the imagination of a literary figure like Joyce can have a very influential bearing on art making, and serves to validate the study of literature as art writing; they can, therefore, be described more in terms of intersections, rather than as boundary crossings.

5.5 Tom Duddy and Irish art criticism

In his article *Irish Art Criticism – a provincialism of the Right* (1987) in *Circa* art magazine Tom Duddy[46] (1950-2012) gave his assessment of Irish art criticism but many of his comments were concerned with the imaginative stance of Irish artists and is, therefore, of value to this research. It is important too, in that Duddy was a philosopher, not a 'specialist art writer', and consequently gives another perspective on art writing. Tom Duddy begins his article by stating that when many art critics are asked about what makes Irish art distinctively Irish they usually reply that it is to do

[46] Tom Duddy was a senior lecturer in the department of philosophy at the National University of Ireland, Galway. He was also a published poet and short story writer but his books on philosophy are more relevant to this study. In 1995 he published *Mind, Self and Interiority*, based on his PhD. This was followed by *A History of Irish Thought* in 2002 and *A Dictionary of Irish Philosophers* in 2004. He also edited two anthologies of Irish writing on philosophical questions, *Irish Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century* in 2002 and *The Irish Response to Darwinism* in 2003.

with geography, landscape, or the weather, rather than history, economics, or politics. He quotes Frances Ruane[47] who maintained that it was the focus on the rural landscape which made Irish art different from the international mainstream. (Ruane, 1980) He summarises her argument that Irish artists are different because of their rootedness in remote landscapes and that they prefer organic shapes to inorganic. Even when they do use abstraction they are still influenced by the landscape, not by international artists. (Duddy, 1987)

This inevitably leads, Duddy states, to "a sensibility that is conservative because it is shaped and sustained by a natural – i.e., rural – environment." (Duddy, 1987 pp. 14-18) Duddy goes on, however, to quote other critics who were prepared to counter these criticisms. Brian Fallon[48] (born 1933) is someone who does not believe in attempts to read national characteristics in artistic output but, even so, he regards place as an important influence on artists. In the chapter on place and imagination in this study this theme has been developed further and extends the influence of place as operating on all levels of creativity – especially on modernist literature. What would *Ulysses* be without Dublin?

In dealing with the charge of provincialism in Irish art Fallon also states that submitting oneself to international influences is actually a clear sign of a provincial culture and it would be wrong to argue that a rejection of provincialism implies a need to reject the local. Fallon also quotes Peter Lanyon (1918-1964)[49] – a "born internationalist" as someone who distinguished between parochialism and "being

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[47] Frances Ruane is an Irish academic economist and former director of the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in Ireland. She was named as chair of the board at the Abbey Theatre in 2017.

[48] Brian Fallon is one of Ireland's foremost art critics. He lectures frequently on art topics and has published many books on Irish art. He was Chief Critic of *The Irish Times* for 35 years and its Literary Editor for 11 years.

[49] Peter Lanyon was a Cornish abstract landscape painter and one of the most significant post war artists.

local and rooted." (Fallon, cited Duddy in Cullen, 2000 p.92) The problem here, of course, is in definition. Clearly, for Lanyon, rootedness in an international mindset does not qualify as provincialism but if rootedness and the local are the criteria for a 'provincial' tag then it will be so. (Lanyon, cited Duddy in Cullen, 2000 p. 92) But it is clear that this is a very sensitive area for artists in particular who often see their role as neutral observers, seeing beyond local circumstances. Charges of romanticism and provincialism, therefore, are a real challenge to their perceptions of themselves.

Duddy also quotes the international art critic, Dorothy Walker, who was considered in the previous section, as maintaining that there was "an underlying structural basis in Irish art which has persisted since prehistoric times", (Walker, cited Duddy in Cullen p. 92) "a paradoxically informal formalism which can be seen as far back as the great carvings at Newgrange." (Walker, cited Duddy in Cullen p.92) The vexed question of provincialism and regionalism, however, is addressed in more detail in section four of chapter six on place.

5.6 Richard Kearney, *Transitions*

In his book *Transitions* (1988) Richard Kearney writes about the crisis in culture which emerged during the twentieth century in Ireland. Kearney recognised that this crisis was largely due to the tension between traditional aspirations and modern realism and he regarded the transition between these two as the most problematic. He examines the work of poets, authors, dramatists, painters and film makers in an effort to illuminate the mechanics of this transition. His work helps to illustrate the subject of this study in that it deals with a range of artists involved with imaginative creation, reinforcing the proposition behind this research that there are common

imaginative themes to be discerned in all of these efforts which could form part of a history of imagination.

In his preface Kearney argues that the real strength of Irish culture lies, not in its uniformity, but in its plurality. (Kearney, 1988) Some of the earlier roots have already been examined and the historical background has been considered in an exploration of the intellectual traditions of the early part of the century. Kearney's focus in *Transitions*, however, is on the modern period when the traditional strategies rub up against the modern. Kearney suggests that it is through a postmodern perspective that we can "reassess the rival claims of tradition and modernity." (Kearney, 1988 p.7)

His relevance to this present study, above all, is to be found in the range of work which he examines. His purpose is not to give a social history or an aesthetic assessment which was so common earlier in the century but to deliver a "philosophical analysis of culture". This broader approach allows for a wider selection and "investigates how creative minds have grappled with the specific circumstances and complexities of Irish culture." (Kearney, 1988 p.7) This methodology very clearly militates against the idea of considering culture as a closed, homogenous national construction and opens up a more questioning approach. In considering such a wide range of headings - literary, visual, and ideological - Kearney sees a common thread in that they are all narratives which seek to interrogate specific texts, images and symbols which "tell the story of modern Irish culture as it makes and remakes history." (Kearney, 1988 p.7) They constitute, in other words, what could be argued as 'histories of imagination' and worthy of a place within the historiography of Irish art writing.

5.7 Lucy Cotter and Gavin Murphy

At the end of the twentieth century there was a questioning mood among some observers about the trajectory of Irish art culture. In her article, *Globalisation, Cultural Baggage and the Critical Direction of Irish Art Practice* (2004) Lucy Cotter (born 1973)[50] questions whether the cultural sector in the Republic of Ireland had jettisoned the past in favour of an uneasy foothold in the present and she quotes Peadar Kirby's observation that he believed that contemporary Irish identity had "been sanitised and made remarkably accommodating to the dominant elitist project of subservient assimilation into multinational capitalism; robbed of reference points from a rich and subversive history". (Kirby et al, 2002 p.27) Cotter points out this tension between economic development and the everyday lived experience of Irish culture is not a new phenomenon.

As far back as the post-Famine era a certain pattern was created of forgetting the difficult past to facilitate the pursuit of economic improvement. Modernisation was prioritised, but the unresolved relationship between historical heritage and the construction of a national cultural identity was lost sight of among more pressing agendas. Things have been changing, however, and there has been a recognition by the state that support for the arts has economic benefits, aligning goals for state activity, business activity and cultural activity closer towards an eventual collapse of boundaries between culture, society and the economy. The recession of recent times has, however, slowed this process considerably in the face of more pressing needs, and the arguments put forward by arts organisations in support of the arts as an economic driver have been contentious.

[50] Lucy Cotter is an art critic, art historian and artist based in Amsterdam where she lectures in art theory at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie.

In his text, *'Tongue-tied Sons of Bastards' Ghosts' Postconceptual and Postcolonial Appraisals of the work of James Coleman* (2005), Gavin Murphy[51] also examines the nature of the art critical discourse in Ireland and how it relates to Irish artworks and the wider international context. He identifies two strands, one that argues for the uniqueness of Irish art, and the other that wants local art to become established on the international stage; he writes that "The idea was to identify art that articulates the cultural and historical complexities of local circumstance as a means to invigorate wider art discourse on matters of place, identity, and conflict." (Murphy, 2005 p.499)

Murphy argues that both these strands are rooted in colonial and postcolonial discourse, in that there is a desire to defend a latent Celtic mythology to resist colonial and metropolitan attitudes, which, it is argued, would leave art in Ireland marginalized forever. He believes, however, that these two strands of criticism have always been read in opposition to each other and that this has obscured what they actually have in common.

Both critical stances share a common recognition that the discourse of 'Irishness' continues to dominate the evaluation of art that is deemed significant, and both strands assume that it is the people who have an intimate knowledge of Ireland who are the best judges of art concerning the local. This implies that it is the Irish art critics, with their superior inside knowledge of the local subtleties, who are able to resist the standard modes of evaluation that emanate from metropolitan centres of power. But he does acknowledge that, "the more robust strands of art criticism in Ireland are infused with the wider circuits of knowledge". (Murphy, 2005 p.499)

[51] Gavin Murphy is a lecturer in Art History and Critical Theory at Galway–Mayo Institute of Technology

This offered hope for the emerging century in that at last the old charge of insularity was being replaced by an opening up to “the wider circuits”. (Murphy, 2005 p.499)

The critical reflections of Lucy Cotter and Gavin Murphy were included here to reflect the mood of introspection among cultural commentators at the cusp of the twenty-first century. Yet the influence of modernist writers from the early part of the twentieth century were still strong at the end of that century and will be considered next.

CHAPTER SIX: CREATIVE WRITING, IMAGINATION, AND IRISH ART WRITING IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will consider examples of modernist writing from the earlier part of the twentieth century. In her thesis on contemporary art writing in Ireland Emma Dwan O'Reilly[52] (2005) discusses the instability of definitions of art writing and the need for reinvention. She advocates "...using the writing practices of Irish literary modernists such as Joyce, Beckett and O'Brien, and their experimental methodologies and less traditional approaches... as a legacy from which to grow the practice of writing on art in Ireland..." (O'Reilly, 2005, p.207) It was with this in mind that some of the texts from these writers were chosen for this chapter to illustrate how creative, mostly modernist, writing could be considered as an important element of art writing.

Modernist writings from the early twentieth century are also worthy surrogates in the absence of any substantial radical or critical art writing at the time. They are also intended to be representative examples of how some of the canon of Irish literature could be brought within the scope of Irish art writing to bolster the case for considering a 'history of imagination'. The chapter begins with James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) which demonstrates interconnections between memory, history, time and imagination and how these themes could be regarded as relevant contributions to Irish art writing. Some of the work of Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien will also be covered in this chapter as it represents how one writer dealt with the very peculiar cultural climate of his time. It is a worthy example of art writing in the way in which he interweaves history and writing with dark and subtle humour.

[52] Emma Dwan O'Reilly is a writer and researcher based in Tipperary. She is assistant editor of the Irish Journal of Arts Management and Cultural Policy and one of the founding editors of *Allotrope*.

Samuel Beckett's work, *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965) has been selected for the next text as it deals directly with issues of imagination and reveals Beckett's view of the postmodern imagination and his efforts to avoid the romantic notion of imagination. It is a short piece of writing where he articulates the essence of the dilemma in contemplating the nature of imagination, namely, that imagination is not able to escape its condition; it can only imagine such a situation and this seems an unanswerable riddle. The chapter will end with an analysis of one of Brian Friel's language plays, *Faith Healer* (1979) which confronts the process of creative writing itself and has been selected for its relevance to this study. First, however, the cultural climate in Ireland in the early part of the twentieth century will be considered.

After the political turmoil at the beginning of the century Ireland was a place where there was a sense of reflection and introspection among writers and artists; society was starting to come to terms with its revolutionary past and cautiously adjusting to its new post-colonial status. Old established patterns of behaviour were changing, and there was a sense of guardedness about the new situation. Indeed it is the sense of circumspection that is striking about the early work of writers like Sean O'Faoláin (1900-1991) and Patrick Kavanagh (1904-1967) in this period. Their sense of wariness was in contrast to Joyce's writing about a society unburdened by the responsibilities of government in the pre independence period, when the citizens did not have to carry the sense of failure and disillusionment that the following generation felt as the state struggled to establish sovereignty and stability.

The formation of pro and anti-treaty political parties ensured that the shadow of civil war would loom over society for many years to come, but there was also an uncomfortable sense of questioning in the artistic community around the nature of the new 'Free State' and what freedoms had actually been gained. There was

censorship, with five hundred books banned between 1929 and 1936 (O'Faoláin, 1936, p. 60), a ban on divorce, increasing involvement of the church in matters of state, and the position of women in society had not improved. Indeed the campaigner Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington had written in 1936 that the position of women was "much worse at all points" than it had been in 1916. (Sheehy-Skeffington, 1936, p.4) This atmosphere would prove challenging for writers and artists of the period, and the tensions which they negotiated had an impact on all forms of creativity.

Among writers and artists there was an acknowledgement of a lack of creativity and invention in the country. In a lecture to the Irish Society in London in 1934, Thomas MacGreevy (1893-1967) remarked that there was "no Irish cultural republic; no republic of the Irish mind". (MacGreevy, cited Ferriter, 2004, p.359) Introspection and an inward looking, some would say, blinkered, conservative attitude was prevalent in politics, society, and the arts. The policy of neutrality during World War Two also increased this sense of isolation, especially in cultural terms, as intellectuals were out of touch with ideas developing in the wider world. The sense of unreality was reinforced by the colloquial use of the understated term, 'the Emergency', to describe the Second World War.

6.2 James Joyce, *Ulysses*, imagination and cultural memory

As this study is concerned with the connections between histories, imagination, memory, and literature as art writing and how and how they could be regarded as part of a history of imagination, it is of particular interest to note that James Joyce considered memory to be one of the most important faculties. He probably based this

idea on the insight of the philosopher Giambattista Vico [53] (1668-1744) that imagination "is nothing but the springing up again of reminiscences, and ingenuity or invention is nothing but the working over of what is remembered." (Vico, 1984, p.264) In fact, Joyce once remarked to the English artist, Frank Budgen[54] (1882-1971) that "imagination *was* memory" (Budgen, 1970, p.187) and he regarded it as essential, not just to writing, but as a connecting device, a "mnemotechnic" (Joyce, 1922, cited Gabler, 1986, 15. 2383-2385) enabling social and personal cultural pasts to be remembered and preserved in the text. Joyce's *Ulysses* can be seen, in John S. Rickard's [55] words, as a "book of memory" (Rickard, 1998) connecting the medieval, modern, and postmodern worlds through the device of involuntary, spontaneous recollection.

Rickard chooses to examine *Ulysses* through the lens of memory and this enables him to make connections between memory and subjectivity. He also looks at the ways in which memory forms the individual lives of Leopold and Molly Bloom and Stephen Dedalus as they are revealed to the reader. (Rickard, 1998, p.14) He explores the various strategies which Joyce employs to depict various types of memory. For example, habit and nostalgia can serve to delay the final atonement or fulfilment that the reader desires, while metapersonal and dynamic memories hint at the involuntary modes of memory at work under the surface of the text that promise deliverance from the past for some of the characters.(Rickard, 1998, p.14) . Rickard examines these involuntary metapersonal modes of memory, both shared and

[53] Giambattista Vico was an Italian Philosopher in the Age of Enlightenment. His most influential book was *Scienza Nuova* (New Science) published in 1725 which attempted to organise the humanities into a single science that recorded and explained the historical cycles of society.
[54] Frank Budgen was an English painter and writer who knew James Joyce. They were both in Zurich during the First World War and moved in the same literary and artistic circles. In his memoir *James Joyce and the making of Ulysses* (1932) he recounts many of the discussions he had with Joyce about his work. He wrote a further memoir, *Myselves When Young* (1970) and was the guest of honour at the first James Joyce Symposium in Dublin in 1967.
[55] John S. Rickard is Associate Professor of English at Bucknell University.

universal, and mixes them with the operations of "...Joyce's own textual memory, through which the text itself seems to mimic the operation of a human mind by developing a textual and intertextual memory accessible to both characters' and readers' minds..." (Rickard, 1998, p.14)

To illustrate how the reader can feel when dealing with the diversity of the text of *Ulysses*, with its frequent and extensive allusions to a wide range of other texts and traditions, Rickard uses one striking quote from Leopold Bloom as he muses while eating his lunch, "Never know whose thoughts you're chewing." (Gabler, pp.717-718) This could also be an apt subtext for the idea of a history of imagination.

It will first be necessary, however, to explore the terms of the framework within which we can regard Joyce's *Ulysses* as one of the most significant repositories of cultural memory in twentieth century literature, and, therefore, of importance to the historiography of Irish art writing. There are, of course, many other aspects of Joyce's work which have had a significant influence on visual artists throughout the twentieth century and this has been well documented by Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes in her book *Joyce in Art* (2004) which details Joyce's "commanding presence in the history of art from the Modernist period onwards..." (Lerm Hayes, 2004, p. 322)

Lerm Hayes believes that, while it would be wrong to claim that Joyce dominated the work of major artists or the course of art history, it would be true to say that without him things would have been different. "Arguably, no Modernist writer has been as fruitful a whetstone and quarry, an intellectual measure and annoyance as Joyce..." (Lerm Hayes, 2004, p. 322) She also highlights the diversity of materials and approaches used in Joyce-inspired art, concluding, "It makes for complex,

rewarding artworks that sustain the fascination of this topic. James Joyce is clearly an artists' writer." (Lerm Hayes, 2004, p. 322)

The multiplicity of styles and viewpoints in *Ulysses,* and its inspiration to artists who were seeking a counter to the anti-literary stance of Greenbergian high modernism and formalism also made Joyce a champion of those who sought common ground between all the arts. This cross disciplinary approach is also what makes the evidence of this particular part of the thesis of such importance to the overall argument for considering the concept of a history of imagination. In art writing the main focus was traditionally on images, and how they are written about, but it is one of the purposes of this study to make the case for literature as an important site of memory which could enhance a history of imagination. This summarises the intention of this study in that a consideration of literature in twentieth century Ireland is not proposed as an alternative to institutionalised art historiography but as an enrichment of it.

Until the 1920s it was only the inner, personal, or neuro-mental level of memory which was considered, but it is now thought that, on the social level, memory plays a vital role in social interaction and communication. It was the French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs[56] (1877-1945) who, in his book *On Collective Memory* (1925), demonstrated that memory depends on the ability to communicate and socialise; this "social and communicative memory" (Halbwachs, 1925) enables people to live in communities and build collective memories. In the same period Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung were formulating theories of collective memory, but these were not based

[56] Maurice Halbwachs was a French philosopher and sociologist who developed the concept of collective memory.

on social communication, but on the inner, personal level, the unconscious depths of the mind, which, they believed, were biologically based.

It was Halbwachs, together with Aby Warburg[57], who shifted the debate about collective memory away from biological explanations to cultural frameworks; it was socialisation and custom which were the keys to understanding collective memory. It was Warburg who also effectively addressed the third level of memory, the cultural level, by being the first to consider images as carriers of memory. He originally used the term 'social memory' when addressing the cultural level of memory and, as an art historian, he was interested in what he termed 'iconic memory', but it was not until recent times that the term 'cultural memory' has been developed as an element of a whole new conceptual framework which connects time, identity, and memory.

The frequency of acts of remembering in *Ulysses* renders the process of cultural memory formation observable in many ways. Not only does it produce cultural memory but it allows insights into how memory operates at the individual level and at the collective level. Literature, therefore, can be regarded as a 'mimesis' of memory where, at the individual level, as in Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1871-1922), it can be regarded as a form of discourse on the observation of memory formation, such as we would find in psychology or philosophy. A mimesis of cultural memory in literature can yield insights into collective memory formation which could be helpful to historians in widening the range of possible interpretations of the past.

[57] Aby Warburg was a German art historian and cultural theorist who founded the Warburg Institute, London.

Apart from memory there are some general misconceptions about themes in Joyce which need to be addressed and Emer Nolan (2004), for example, has cautioned that Joyce's anti colonial stance should not be confused with nationalism and Seamus Deane[58] has written that Joyce had disentangled the usual connections between history and narrative but was still able to relate "...the terrible burden of Irish historical experience by displaying the failures of nationalist imaginings." (Deane, cited Nolan, 1995, p.57)

There is, however, a more direct way in which *Ulysses* can be considered as having importance in a consideration of art writing in the twentieth century, and that is in the way it reflected a modernist stance in art production of the period. David Attridge (2004) comments on how Joyce managed to break the traditional connection between author and the authority of the literary text by introducing a variety of rhetorics and styles which are, at least nominally, independent of the author. (Attridge, 2004) The breaking of this critical relation to society, which had been previously expressed by the author as narrator, now yielded to the evocation of a particular consciousness within the text itself. This freed modernists to establish what Attridge called "the aesthetic autonomy of the experimental work". (Attridge, 2004, p. 80) The significance of *Ulysses*, therefore, is in the use of multiple points of view; the fragmentation of word and image, the inconclusiveness of narrative, and the use of parody and pastiche, are now familiar in all of the arts, and make it a worthy exemplar of art writing, not just within Ireland but in its international reach.

[58] Seamus Deane is an Irish poet, novelist, critic, and intellectual historian. Until 1993 he was Professor of Modern English and American Literature at University College, Dublin and is currently Keough Professor of Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana. He is a member of the Royal Irish Academy and a founding director of the Field Day Theatre Company.

Finally, Richard Kearney at the conclusion of his book, *Traversing the Imaginary* (2007) compares the epiphanies of Joyce in *Ulysses* and Proust in his *À la recherche du temps perdu*. In Proust's ultimate epiphany, Marcel meets Mlle de Saint Loup, the daughter of his former lover, and Kearney argues that she is to Marcel what Molly (via Bloom) was to Stephen. Both appear at the end of the stories and lead the author-artists back to the real world. Marcel's new vision of life is of a large web where times past and times remembered crisscross in a network of memories. He also recalls the housemaid François who always pointed Marcel away from 'literature for literature' to 'literature for life' and he vows to labour as she did, stitching, weaving, and sewing from different pieces of cloth.

François, like Molly in *Ulysses* is the reincarnation of Penelope, the legendary weaver who returns everybody to the intricate weft and warp of ordinary life. For Kearney this embrace of writing as weaving, a stitching of webs, tapestries, textures, and texts leads him to conclude that this is what happens to the reader in traversing the Joycean and Proustian epiphanies "... Something about our own sensibilities as readers is more finely attuned, just as something about our imaginations is more enhanced and amplified, graciously opened to new possibilities of being." (Kearney, 2007, p.204)

6.3 Brian O'Nolan / Flann O'Brien

The work of Brian O'Nolan (1911-1966), writing as Flann O'Brien, Myles na gCopaleen, and sundry other aliases, should be considered in the context of the period in which he wrote; he uses a cautious and subtly layered approach in his complex interweaving of writing and history. It is not just the biting dark humour and inventiveness of O'Nolan's work, but the numerous ways in which he negotiated

the relationship between Britain and Ireland and their perceptions of one another, their languages, and social conventions that provide such rich commentary.

O'Nolan was brought up using Irish as his first language, and only learned English later, giving him a unique insight into the cultural dynamics of language in Ireland's exchanges with Britain. As a student he had written comic satirical pieces for various magazines, where he honed his facility for wordplay and parody, which he deployed later in his newspaper articles, lampooning inept bureaucrats and politicians. O'Nolan also had some interesting views on imagination and memory which make his work very relevant to this study, and these will also be examined. Under the pseudonym of Flann O'Brien, O'Nolan wrote three important works, namely, *At Swim Two Birds* (1939), *An Béal Bocht* (*The Poor Mouth*) (1941), and *The Third Policeman* (1967). His column in *The Irish Times*, Cruiskeen Lawn, was also an important contribution to Irish twentieth century literature, but it is *At Swim Two Birds* which will be considered in more detail in this study because of its modern, even postmodern, style, and the recurring multilayered concerns with identity and imagination which run through the novel.

When O'Brien published *At Swim Two Birds* in 1939 it was considered to be a very experimental work in that it was not plotted in the conventional way, and had an anarchic quality. The narrator is a student at University College Dublin who is living with his uncle and constructing a story about a writer called Trellis who is assembling a cast of characters, taken from Irish folklore in the literary revival and popular comic book style fiction. The shambolic, unconventional, style of the book is clearly signposted in the first paragraph, "One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with", (O'Brien, 1939, p.9) and the student declares

further that he believes that these characters are all entitled to "a private life, self-determination and a decent standard of living". (O'Brien, 1939, p.25)

The characters eventually conspire, however, to take over the book and put Trellis, the supposed author, on trial for their mistreatment, a trial from which he is eventually spared by the accidental destruction of the manuscript. The swift changes in narrative points of view create a sense of chaos and disorientation, reinforcing the metafictional nature of the book by setting the text free on itself. The use of fragmented, multiple voices mirrors Joyce's style, but, unlike Joyce's dialogic use of the technique, O'Brien uses it to create mayhem by giving layer after layer of diverse points of view which ultimately undermine each other.

At Swim Two Birds did not sell many copies on its first publication in 1939, the same year in which *Finnegans Wake* was published, and it was not until 1966 that it was successfully re-published. In the collection of essays by John McGahern (1934-2006), *Love of the World* (2009) he offers a possible explanation for the initial failure of *At Swim Two Birds,* apart from its unfortunate timing at the outbreak of the Second World War. McGahern describes Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as a place where, "We have left the world of letters and reached impure sound", (McGahern, 2009, p.185) and he quotes T S Eliot as also saying that it was a work of genius, "but of such a kind that one such is enough." (McGahern, 2009, p.185) So, perhaps, for the public at that time, Flann O'Brien was one genius too many.

O'Brien's work was never banned by the 1929 Censorship of Publications Act, but the shadow of it is there in O'Brien's reluctance to discuss sexuality. There is a clear challenge, however, to the state's postcolonial attitudes in his use of icons of the Literary Revival in modern contexts. For example, Finn Mac Cool, the iconic figure

of Irish mythology, shares a house with the American western comic character, Shanahan, and this creates a thrillingly absurd comic atmosphere. All the characters in the book are bored by Finn Mac Cool's long and rambling sagas in The Red Swan, while it is the Ringsend cowboy, Shanahan, who is one of the heroes in the revolt against Trellis.

Ultimately, of course, all of the characters are destroyed by ridicule, and this strategy enables O'Brien to avoid revealing any overt political position. By mixing pulp fiction and mythology in this way O'Brien sought, however, to give a wider range of voices to the culture of his time, and attempted to crack open the prevalent insular nationalism which had such a stultifying effect on all forms of artistic expression.

6.4 Samuel Beckett and *Imagine Dead Imagine*

In considering the value of imagination and its connections between art writing and literature in this study, Samuel Beckett's *Imagination Dead Imagine* (1965) has been chosen, not just because of its subject matter, but because it contains Beckett's verdict on the future of the postmodern imagination and his attempts to circumvent what he regarded as the romantic notion of imagination. *Imagination Dead Imagine* is a short work and in the title Beckett is articulating the essence of the conundrum of imagination, namely that there is really no way in which imagination can escape from its own condition. It can only imagine such a situation, and this initiates a self-referring loop of impossibility.

The text takes the form of a monologue where a narrator describes a rotunda-shaped skull which can only perceive the outside world as a pulsing white hot light, with no colour, and expressing nothing; there is no longer any boundary between the real and

the imagined. The two colourless automatons slowly dying at the centre of the dome/rotunda are doubles, lying back to back, head to tail, suspended between life and death. They are difficult to interpret as human but the narrator also tells us that the left eyes occasionally "suddenly open wide and gaze in unblinking exposure long beyond what is humanly possible", and their faces seem "to want nothing essential'. (Beckett, 1965, in Nixon, 2010, p.89) It represents a bleak, nightmarish vision but it reflects Beckett's attempt to take the human perspective from the heart of the writing process and uncover the dissonance in how we attempt to communicate. There is a breakdown of the object in Beckett's view and an emptying out of the existence of the author. This may give us the freedom, Beckett believed, to move on from the restrictions of imagination.

Beckett also attempts to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary memory. He believed that involuntary memory reveals reality but voluntary memory, assisted by imagination, then distorts it. Beckett had commented on voluntary memory in his essay on Proust in 1931, stating that it "is of no value as an instrument of evocation and provides an image as far removed from the real as the myth of imagination". (Beckett, 1931, 1969, p.50) The logic of this attack on imagination is that no amount of imagination can recreate an authentic experience and humans will always impose patterns and prejudices on it. Beckett described voluntary imagination as the "inevitable gangrene of romanticism... Reality remains a surface, hermetic. Imagination, applied *a priori* to what is absent, is exercised *in vacuo* and cannot tolerate the limits of the real." (Beckett, 1931, 1969, p.56) The paradox of writing, and the inescapable use of imagination in its creation, was an irresolvable one for Beckett, but his work still challenges many fundamental assumptions of the human condition and the futility of expressing it.

6.5 Brian Friel and *Faith Healer*

Brian Friel wrote a trilogy of plays about language – *Faith Healer* (1979), *Translations* (1980), and *The Communication Cord* (1982) which attempted to stimulate a conversation about our attitude to language. Friel had an obsession with words and this is why one of these language plays was selected as part of the material for this study. In his play *Faith Healer* Friel explores the power of language and its ability to interrogate and recreate reality. Roy Foster (2007) has described *Faith Healer* as "Friel's greatest play" as it "...is neither political nor obviously historical, though it deals...with displacement and loss against an abandoned Irish background." (Foster, 2007 p.171)

The play is focused on a faith healer and how he performs his craft, but is really an examination of writing itself. It is, "some kind of metaphor for the art, the craft of writing.... and the great confusion we all have about it ..." (Friel, cited Kearney, 1988 p.127) It is relevant to this study in that it questions the process of writing itself; it is, as Friel explains, "an exploration of that element of the charlatan that exists in all creative work." (Friel, cited Kearney, 1988 p.127) This widening of the definition to "all creative work" also allows for a greater inclusion of all imaginative work, including art writing.

In *Faith Healer* the character of Frank Hardy comes to represent the medium, not just of healing and the need for his audiences to believe in it, but the art of language and imagination itself. Richard Kearney describes Hardy as "the high priest of his own imagination" (Kearney, 1988 p.129) and it is easy to transfer this sentiment to all creative artists. In the play Hardy describes his faith healing as a "craft without an apprenticeship, a ministry without responsibility, a vocation without a ministry".

(Kearney, 1988 p.128) Hardy reflects the need of his audience to be transformed and made whole again; yet he is filled with doubt about his craft. Does he challenge some power in himself or does he trigger the audience's faith in themselves? The answer, according to Hardy, is that, in the case of faith healing, there is a mutual need. The audience and Hardy himself have a need to be made "whole and perfect" (Kearney, 1988 p.128)

The drive is, therefore, to be transformed in some way, to "be released from what they *are* into what they *might* be" (Kearney, 1988 p.128) Hardy's equivocations about his powers swing between a belief that he himself has the power to heal, to believing that he bestows the power on people to heal themselves. In ontological terms Kearney writes that Hardy (or Friel?) is asking the fundamental questions about writing. "Am I the manipulative master or the obedient servant of the healing word?" (Kearney, 1988 p.128)

The four acts of the play take the form of monologues delivered by Frank Hardy and his two companions – his mistress, Grace, and his stage manager, Teddy. Grace recalls her own painful memories of her life with Frank which differs from his narrative. They had lost a child but she relates how Frank had chosen to obliterate the event from his mind because it did not fit the story of his healing powers. In fact he had chosen to manipulate all the people in his life and mould them to accommodate his own accepted version of history. In Teddy's monologue we witness his loyalty to Hardy, not as a healer, but as a showman who is ultimately incapable of separating art from life.

The purpose of all these differing accounts in the end serve to underscore Friel's intention to demonstrate how three people who share a common past diverge so

greatly in recalling it. Yet their purpose in manipulating the truth so blatantly is to survive psychologically. The device of the monologue serves to isolate each character in their solitary confinement. They can no longer communicate with each other so they have to resort to a private confessional to unburden themselves. In Kearney's view this technique is in the modernist theatre tradition of Sartre, Beckett and others, "the performer can never be released from his performance and his very existence as a player of roles depends on both author and audience keeping faith with his fiction."(Kearney, 1988 p.130) This also serves to confirm theatre as an act of mediation and, therefore, of interpretation. This is best summarised in the closing lines of Grace's monologue where she seems to be addressing not only Frank but Friel and his audience – "O, My God, I'm one of his fictions too, but I need him to sustain me in that experience." (Kearney, 1988 p.130) In his final summary of *Faith Healer* Kearney makes reference to how the play could be represented as a challenge to Friel's own creative profession, in that it retains "its primary function as a metaphor for the self-destructive impulses of the creative artist over-obsessed with his own art." (Kearney, 1988 p.132)

CONCLUSION

Before considering the motivation and purpose of this research and reviewing the research outcomes and possible applications of the findings, now and in the future, it might be useful to recall my starting point as a practitioner and what I had hoped to achieve in this research. My preface and introduction explained the nature of my art practice and how it had focussed on the manifestation of imagination in art making and writing. So, when the opportunity presented itself to research art writing and its historiography in the twentieth century in Ireland, I decided to attempt to make it more inclusive by examining the imaginative dimensions of a wide range of art writing - art historical, critical, creative and experimental. This approach was designed to emphasise the two-way flow of imagination in art writing; there is the imaginative effort behind the artworks and the imagination involved in describing and interpreting them. Hence the reflexive headline title of the thesis, “Histories of Imagination”.

There were, however, many things which had to be considered first. What time period would it span? What material would be considered in the research? How could it be broken down into manageable sections? How would the term ‘art writing’ be defined? What role could the concept of imagination play in making an argument for inclusion in the study when it means so many different things to so many different people? All of these elements needed to be sorted into a coherent narrative that would help to build a case for the concept of a ‘history of imagination’.

The time period of the twentieth century in Ireland was chosen because of the range of political, social and economic events it encompassed and the fact that art and art writing had changed so much in that period, together with emerging and diverging

philosophical approaches to the concept of imagination. The material for the study was comprised of a range of critical art writing, some creative writing and some philosophical writing related to imagination. The decision not to include specific artworks and artists was deliberate because art writing, its historiography, and how they are imbued with imagination, was the main focus of the study. There are many artists such as Frances Hegarty, Andrew Stones and Gerard Byrne whose subject matter is close to the themes in this research but in drawing attention to writing as a source of ideas which have a strong resonance with artists, I was trying to break down the traditional disciplinary boundaries between art writing and literature and bring about an awareness of their common roots and purposes within a putative 'history of imagination'.

The focus of the study, therefore, was to attempt to make an original contribution to knowledge about the historiography of Irish art writing in the twentieth century by considering a wider range of writing which could be regarded as a part of that historiography and by putting more emphasis on the role of imagination by exploring the possibility of creating a history of imagination. In keeping with Mieke Bal's idea of 'travelling concepts' within an interdisciplinary approach, the more open concept of a 'history of imagination' was devised as a broad framework within which many areas of art writing could be incorporated. This enabled the structure of the thesis to be broken down into distinct areas but still be clustered around the central theme of imagination. But before considering the practical applications of the research and the possible implications for art practitioners and Irish art writing in the future, the findings will be briefly summarised together with the outcomes of the four research objectives of the study which were set out in the introduction.

The introduction mapped out the various areas to be addressed in the study, beginning with the need to bring some clarity to the term ‘art writing’ and sketching out the case for considering imagination as an inherent part of writing art histories, critical writing and, of course, in experimental art writing and fiction writing. Some of the existing research in relation to the role of creativity in various forms of art writing, as in the work of James Elkins, Hayden White and Richard Kearney, were referenced to indicate that others have believed there is merit in this approach. The introduction also explained why the focus of the study would be on twentieth century Irish art writing and the unique interaction with literature in that period. Research objectives were also set out in the introduction, together with an explanation of the interdisciplinary methodology adopted and an explanation of the main title and subtitle of the thesis. This was followed by definitions of modernism in art history and in literature and the introduction ended with the general argument for considering creative writing as a source of art writing and an important dimension of a possible history of imagination.

Chapter one reviewed place, imagination, and Irish art writing in the twentieth century with a view to making the case that its strong relation to imagination would make it an essential component of any history of imagination in that period. It dealt with ideas of identity, statehood and how individuals and societies chose to imagine themselves in twentieth century Ireland. Place, and its imagination foundations, had an important influence, not just on cultural memory, but on much of the creative output in Ireland in the twentieth century - in critical and creative writing, theatre, music, dance, and visual art.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the Irish Revival asserted new versions of an Irish sense of place in an attempt to establish a cultural basis for independence

and this illustrated the political nature of imagination and how it would be contested throughout the century. This was why the beginning of the chapter attempted to create a more universal view of place and its importance to societies throughout the world. Some of the research cited in the chapter introduction illustrated the artificiality of ideas of statehood and identity and were included to make the point that imagination was often used to create a national consciousness and a sense of belonging in many countries.

The definitions of place in chapter one were also selected on the basis that they had universal application and would provide a global context for the more detailed study of imagination and place in Ireland. The global backdrop was also important to the study in that it helped to make the important point that the deployment of imagination in relation to place in Ireland is not a uniquely Irish phenomenon.

In relation to the first research objective, "to review the writing on place in Ireland in the twentieth century with a view to making the case that its strong relation to imagination would make it an essential component of any history of imagination in that period", this was addressed in chapter one and was an attempt to set up the general case that, although there are many formulations of place in creative writing and cultural criticism, they are all imaginative constructions which feed into the proposition of this thesis, namely, that they are really 'histories of imagination' which are always provisional and inherently unstable.

The purpose in considering place before examining the historiography of art writing and critical and creative art writing was to bring the reader to a more familiar application of imagination first. People are intuitively aware that imagination is implicated in how places are perceived by different groups and often their personal

experience of the influence of imagination can be discomforting. Indeed there is a feeling that our cultural backgrounds can make us all, to various degrees, victims of imagination. This sense of unease was intended to be carried forward to the core of the research on imagination and art writing.

Only a few aspects relating to place and identity were considered in Irish art discourse but they were intended to underscore the sense that the real 'place' of Ireland is always culturally determined and it is useful as art practitioners and art writers to be mindful of this. Hopefully, however, that sense of place will be open and outward looking – not defensive, self-centred or exclusionary in nature; places do not have an inherent identity, they are constructed by human behaviour and imagination.

The second research objective was to, "define the term 'art writing' and how it will be used in the thesis. Review the historiography of art writing in Ireland in the twentieth century and consider whether there is a case for expanding the historiography to include more experimental and creative approaches." To meet this objective chapter two reviewed the historiography of Irish art writing in the twentieth century while chapter six surveyed some modernist creative writing in the early part of the century which could be considered to be examples of art writing.

Chapter two began with an attempt to clarify definitions of 'art writing' and then set out the background to the historiography of Irish art writing in the twentieth century and reviewed how Irish art histories were written. This was followed by an examination of the work of several specialists in art history writing, particularly in relation to how they viewed the writing process as imaginative constructions. The chapter ended with a discussion of the intersections between creative writing and art

history and demonstrated the breadth of contemporary interest in the subject of creative art writing. In her introductory essay to *Creative Writing and Art History* (2012), the editor, Catherine Grant, set out her views on writing art history creatively and greatly strengthened the argument of this thesis that creative writing and art history intersect and that there needs to be more interdisciplinary engagement with literature as a source of art writing. In this sense the second research objective was achieved.

The third research objective set out in the introduction, namely, to "Review the philosophical dimension of imagination and its importance in interpretation and art writing in twentieth century Ireland, with the aim of postulating the notion of a 'history of imagination' within a speculative theory of imagination ," was addressed in chapter three, which examined a range of philosophical theories and approaches which were relevant to the role of imagination in Irish art writing in the twentieth century. The chapter began with definitions of imagination and considered some twentieth century philosophical perspectives on Irish art writing. This was followed by a discussion of the sublime and its importance in the word/image debate and an examination of Richard Kearney's contribution to debates on the role of imagination, particularly his work on the hermeneutic, or interpretative, imagination. The chapter ended with an examination of a speculative theory of imagination which might be useful in constructing a 'history of imagination'.

Chapter four was the first part of a review of critical art writing and imagination in Ireland in the twentieth century and started with a sample of writers (Yeats, Joyce and Russell) from the early part of the century to illustrate their contrasting views on imagination. This was followed by a section on Mainie Jellett and Thomas MacGreevy and an assessment of their attempts to promote modernism in Ireland.

The chapter ended with a section on Samuel Beckett and his continuing influence on contemporary art practice and criticism.

Chapter five was the second part of a review of critical art writing and imagination in Ireland in the twentieth century and began with a review of the significance of the *Rosc* exhibitions between 1967 and 1988 and the contribution of the artist and critic Brian O'Doherty to the debate on the Irish imagination. The section following this covered the critical response of Róisín Kennedy to O'Doherty's essay and this was followed by the critical reactions of Brian O'Doherty and Richard Kearney to Louis le Brocquy's reconstructed heads of literary figures. The chapter also included an assessment of Tom Duddy's essay on Irish art criticism and ended with a section on Richard Kearney's *Transitions* (1988b) which addressed the crisis in Irish culture which emerged during the twentieth century.

Chapters four and five reviewed a sample of critical art writing in Ireland in the twentieth century, while chapter six was made up of a selection of modernist work by James Joyce, Brian O'Nolan/Flann O'Brien, Samuel Beckett and Brian Friel. These three chapters addressed the fourth research objective set out in the introduction to, "Consider integrating a range of modernist writing from the early part of the century with art historical and critical writing and assess how these could be read as part of the history of Irish art writing in the twentieth century." The sample of creative writing chosen to address this research objective was necessarily selective and it followed the suggestion made by Emma Dwan O'Reilly (2013) in her thesis on contemporary art writing in Ireland where she advocated "...using the writing practices of Irish literary modernists such as Joyce, Beckett and O'Brien, and their experimental methodologies and less traditional approaches... as a legacy from which to grow the practice of writing on art in Ireland..." (O'Reilly, 2013, p.207) It

was with this in mind that the work of some of these writers was chosen for this chapter as it illustrated how creative, mostly modernist, writing could be considered as part of a history of imagination and an important element in art writing practices in the future.

The practical implications and limitations of the research findings will now be considered and the first thing to be noted is the quantity of critical and creative literature that exists on art writing in the twentieth century in Ireland. Obviously art critical writing was scarcer at the beginning of the century, and this was why the work of some creative writers was chosen in this period. But, as the century evolved, the quantity of art writing accelerated and now constitutes a vast body of work. Selection was, therefore, crucially important and there are many other works that would have been worthy of inclusion but I used the criterion of works that addressed imagination as it enabled a narrower, more manageable, selection to be made.

In broad philosophical terms one could say that there were two strands to be considered in examining how the historiography of Irish art writing was formed in the twentieth century. Strand one could be considered as analytical and strand two as continental, with more concern for meaning. The analytical approach encompassed analysis of form and art history while the strand two approach, with its concern with meaning, allowed a consideration of the creative literature of the period as part of the source material; aspects such as imagination, fiction, iconology and intuition were within this wider remit. The argument of this study was that these seemingly looser terms are as valuable, perhaps more valuable, than the analytic approach because they are more closely related to the processes of creativity in general. Intuition about the human condition is a more appropriate approach because of its acknowledgement

that there can be no definitive answers to questions of being. Analytical approaches and, apparently quantifiable, measurable answers may give a comforting sense of control and resolution to some human dilemmas, but they are often illusions of scientific certainty.

This is why this study put more emphasis on the dominant literary culture in Ireland in the twentieth century, not as an alternative to analytic or formalist approaches, but as an important adjunct to it. The idea that word and image are interdependent was a starting point in this approach, and this was why it was considered in some detail in the study, but it extended beyond the dissolving of this binary to an evaluation of imagination and its role in addressing some of the deeper common roots of all acts of creativity at particular stages in our history.

It could be argued that Irish art writing is in a permanent condition of doubt, influenced by local and international uncertainties, but this thesis did not seek to offer any certainty of approach or assuage doubts. No matter how aspects of perceived reality and truth are disassembled they are always subject to reinterpretation in an endless variety of ways, but the interweaving of works of imagination with the interpretive imaginations of writers on Irish art, within a fluid concept of a history of imagination, could be a useful contribution to this continuity of questioning.

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