Invisible People: Literary Expressions of Marginalisation from the Gaeltacht to the Ghetto in 20th-Century Literature

by

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken form the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledge within the text of my work.

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For Bob and my parents

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Abstract

The process of marginalisation is often a painful experience for groups pushed to and beyond the margins of society. While the isolation and exclusion can be devastatingly painful and negative, some groups and individuals use this state of emergency to forge a new sense of identity and cultural expression. Often, an alternative, positive group image of those from the margins manifests, challenging the accepted and, sometimes, stereotyped view of the group, harboured by mainstream society. This is true of the evolution of group identity in relation to Irish speakers and African Americans in the last century. Within both groups, new representations of identity emerged as writers challenged the accepted views of wider society. Writers from both traditions drew upon their similar experiences of marginalisation, as well as rich, oral traditions to construct new, positive identities and to give an accurate depiction of life from the margins. This thesis will draw upon theories unique to comparative literature, such as imagology and geocriticism, to assert that the sense of camaraderie that existed between the groups, coupled with similar experiences of subjugation, resulted in positive literary expressions of identity that achieved connecting and empowering two margianlised cultures on opposite sides of the Atlantic.

Chapter 1 - Emerging Identities in 20th-Century Gaelic and African-American Literatures

1.1 Introduction: Research Question

Marginalisation can be a painful and destructive process for those being forced beyond the parameters of general society. However, as Homi Bhabha would argue: 'the state of emergency is also always a state of emergence…' (2009, p.59), suggesting that, while suffering from a situation of colonial or social subjugation, oppressed groups can forge a new identity and, despite the cruelty of their plight, produce positive, cultural outcomes. This thesis will explore on the one hand, the process of marginalisation endured by Irish language and African American writers and, on the other, how from this destructive practice new and interesting manifestations of culture and identity have emerged. For both of these groups, marginalisation has been a major hindrance for centuries – and, to some extent, as we shall see, it still is. This thesis will examine the origins and effects of the marginality imposed on Irish speakers and African Americans, and establish that, while the groups do not share identical experiences, they have at times identified with and sought inspiration in each other, with the result that the development of their identities in the aftermath of subjugation is strikingly similar.

As its title suggests, this thesis will look at the manner in which members of Irish-speaking and African American communities were rendered invisible, respectively, by Irish and American societies in the last century. Their marginalisation happened in circumstances that reveal how Irish speakers and African Americans were perceived by mainstream Irish and American cultures and also how their marginal statuses were maintained and upheld by societal misconceptions centred on the notion of race. Both groups share similar experiences of being othered and Corbey and Leerssen argue that the construction of this painful process 'can be detected at the root of much injustice and suffering.' (1991, p. xvii) The racialization of both groups at various points, between the 14th and 19th centuries in the case of Irish speakers and

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from the 17th century onwards in the African American context has meant that the groups in question have experienced, what Corbey and Leerssen identify, as 'the construction of otherness' (Ibid.). The historical reasons as to why Irish speakers and African Americans were considered as other are crucial to our understanding of how and why they lived marginal existences. In both societies, the groups were openly discussed and dissected in social commentaries and in the literature produced by writers from within the privileged folds. Perceptions of Irish speakers and African Americans became hinged on misinformed as well as deliberately misleading social and literary propaganda that attempted to assert difference based on the notion of race. The legacy of this kind of abuse manifested itself in social norms and in the continuing proliferation of stereotypes that helped to maintain the marginality imposed on the groups.

In the Irish context, speakers of the indigenous tongue have, for generations, dwelt in some of the remotest parts of the country; a legacy of the Cromwellian campaign to push poor Irish Catholics beyond the Pale, towards Connacht during the latter half of the 17th century. This moment in history is discussed and explored at greater length in the chapter two in which the growth and development of Gaeltachtaí, zones inhabited by Irish speakers, is delineated in relation to the experience of marginalisation. The growth of Gaeltacht zones can, in this respect, be interpreted as areas that aided in the marginalisation of Irish speakers. The location of Gaeltachtaí along the western coast of Ireland has meant that for generations, Irish speakers have been physically cut-off from mainstream Irish life. As we shall see in the following chapter, the areas into which Gaelic Catholics were driven during the Cromwellian campaign have, since then, remained barren of the socio-economic developments enjoyed by the rest of the country. Consecutive Irish governments, from the establishment of the Free State in 1922 to the Republic in 1937 as well as present-day administrations have helped to impose a marginality upon Irish speakers that has affected how they are perceived by mainstream society – and also how they perceive themselves.

As will be outlined in chapter two, the situation of Irish speakers may appear as an anomaly when we consider their unique experience of being marginalised. Mainstream Irish society perceives Irish speakers as the champions and saviours of their ancestral tongue – which, whilst remaining a national language, is considered by some to be dying. Paradoxically, however, these champions of the Irish tongue live in

areas that have traditionally been excluded from mainstream society. Viewed more as Irish speakers than as Irish citizens, those living in Gaeltachtaí were, from the 18th century, essentially invisible and left by the wayside of life in Ireland. During Ireland's long history of colonialism, Irish speakers were viewed as contemptible by the ruling colonial forces, and this view eventually trickled down to the other native Irish. The language and its surrounding customs, such as story-telling, fell out of fashion and English-speaking native Irish populations strove to distance themselves from the indigenous tongue. While this is true of the 17th and 18th centuries, a change occurred in the national mind-set in the latter half of the 19th century, when cultural nationalism became popular amongst the masses. This transition is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, particularly in relation to how this shift in consciousness effected perceptions of Irish speakers in literature.

The change in perception that occurred at the close of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century is particularly interesting in relation to how Irish speakers were re-imagined. Following years of obscurity, having existed on the margins of life in Ireland, Irish speakers were suddenly catapulted into focus. Despite centuries of neglect and imposed marginality, they became instantly visible and were championed as the surviving bastions of traditional, Irish culture. There are numerous examples in literary offerings from Anglo-Irish writers in which the Irish-speaking Catholic from the Gaeltacht is depicted as a godly figure, the ideal model encapsulating the best of Ireland and a figure towards which all peoples on the island should strive. Daniel Corkery (1878-1964) was one of the most prolific in this regard. In his extensive study of Gaelic literature, Philip O'Leary lists Corkery as one of the most vehement critics of the direction of Irish literature in the 1930s. For Corkery, authentic Irish literature in English had to focus on 'the 'three great forces which, working so long in the Irish national being, have made it so different from the English national being' and O'Leary writes that these forces 'were, of course, 'The Religious Consciousness of the People… Irish Nationalism… and the Land' (2004, p. 414). The great many social commentaries of the era also champion the humble Irish speaker and his connection to the Gaeltacht as the ideal citizen of, then, modern Ireland. This view of the native Irish speaker continued after the cultural-revolution and remained popular. This created an unfortunate dichotomy for Irish speakers.

Having gone from a state of invisibility, Irish speakers became a point of focus for their fellow countrymen and women in the early 20th century. While they found

themselves suddenly elevated to a state of idealization, Irish speakers were still marginalised by those championing them. In the 20ᵗʰ century, Irish governments ignored the civil rights of their Irish-speaking citizens, and improvements experienced by the rest of society, such as rural electrification, access to healthcare and education, remained unavailable to Gaeltacht inhabitants until the demands of the Irish language civil rights movement were realised in the years following 1969, when the organisation was founded. This inequality was acutely felt by Irish speakers and it prompted the establishment of *Coiste Cearta Sibialta na Gaeilge*; the Gaelic civil rights group. This development affected how Irish speakers were perceived and also, how the group began to see itself. This evolution is to the fore of much of the literature produced in the last century when Irish language writers strove to work against the stereotypes embedded in social consciousness. The many ways Irish speakers were portrayed in literature and how they portrayed their own existence from the margins have been fluid and changeable. Irish language writers worked against positive, negative and misinformed, but well intentioned, portrayals of their group in an effort to give accurate insights into life from the margins. Of particular interest to this thesis, as its comparative element would suggest, is the manner in which Irish language writers and speakers aligned and identified themselves with other, marginalised groups. The relationship between Irish speakers and African Americans helped both groups to interpret their place in society and respectively, shape how they were to give literary representations of their groups based on reality. The drive from members of both groups at the turn of the last century to revolutionise representations of themselves resulted in manifold literary depictions that varied depending upon factors such as geographical location. This gave rise to interesting literature that challenged how mainstream society viewed those living in the border areas of life in Ireland and America.

For African Americans, the experience of being invisible has been more widespread and insidious. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha examines 'the narcissistic myths of negritude or white cultural supremacy' in relation to the work of Frantz Fanon and the processes of racial othering. Bhabha writes that:

The black presence runs the representative narrative of Western personhood; its past tethered to treacherous stereotypes of primitivism and degeneracy will no produce a history of civil progress […]. The white man's eyes break up the

black man's body and in that act of epistemic violence its own frame of reference is transgressed, its field of vision disturbed. (2009, p. 60)

What Bhabha describes in the above quote can be applied to the polarisation of whiteness and blackness in North America since the 17th century. Unlike their Irish-speaking counterparts, black American writers are not, and have never been, viewed in a positive light by the society that has pushed and continues to doggedly force their group towards the outermost margins of society. While Irish speakers were marginalised because of language, blacks brought to America were instantly visibly different because of skin colour. It was because this that difference was asserted and the notion of 'race' concocted. Similarly to how British colonial forces asserted that the Irish were of an inferior race, settled white Europeans in North America insisted that blacks were totally incompatible with civilised society. Because inferiority was imposed upon blacks on the basis of skin colour, there was little to no reprieve in the cruelty meted out to this group. To assume power over a group forcibly brought to the continent, it was necessary to maintain control, and slavery was used as the perfect panacea to the perceived threat of blacks mixing with whites.

In order to effectively and efficiently maintain the status quo of white supremacy, the perception that blacks were little more than work-beasts was spread amongst white populations in North America. As is delineated in chapter two of this thesis, the position of the black man in America was marginal from his introduction in the late 1600s. The colonial forces responsible for his transportation across the Atlantic, from the African continent, ensured that degradation and violence were central features in the treatment of black slaves. This soon developed into a sinister tradition and the perception prevailed that blacks needed to be controlled and treated in such a way became imbedded in the minds of white Americans. While the native Irish were viewed as less civilised than the British, white European Americans maintained that black slaves were devoid of humanity and were beast-like. This perception was enshrined in various laws and customs, and one striking example is the manner in which black slaves were listed as commodities, alongside cattle stocks, amongst others. As will be made clear in the next chapter, this view of blacks in America was slow to change and informed white opinions, even after the long-awaited and hard-earned abolition of slavery in 1865.

Upon the abolition of slavery, freed black men and women briefly experienced a relative improvement in their societal position; they were considered greater than beast, but still lesser beings than the ruling white class. The manner in which African Americans have, historically, been viewed as inferior to mainstream white society is traced in the next chapter which examines how this group's collective identity, as viewed by whites, resulted in their on-going marginalisation. While perceptions of Irish speakers evolved to become more positive, though ill-conceived, in the latter half of the 19th century, blacks in North America did not experience a similar kind of shift in perception. Following the so-called 'Three Fifths Compromise' set out in the American constitution, blacks were finally thought of as human rather than beast; but only three fifths so. (Alexander, 2010, p. 26) The Three Fifths Compromise helped to precipitate the notion in the 1800s that blacks were still inferior to whites, even in the years after 1865. This perception filtered through to many literary works during this era, and this, in turn, helped to reaffirm the misinformed social beliefs held by many whites, particularly in the south of the country.

Just as Irish language writers and speakers benefitted from a cultural revival and awakening at the beginning of the 20th century, so too, did African Americans. If white America's perception of the group remained largely unchanged, the same was not true of black men and women's own perception emerging from the wreckage of slavery. The group began to question white perceptions of African Americans, resulting in a fraught debate between various group leaders in relation to how the freedman should behave in white society. The heated debates that unfolded in all-black publications and in public forums can be interpreted as one of the earliest recorded indicators that black American identity was fluid, which is not how whites viewed the group. This debate also touched on African American literature and culture with writers, for example, arguing whether or not they should appease white perceptions of the group or totally work against them. Like some Irish language authors, there was a faction of African Americans who wanted to depict their group as God-fearing and meek subjects, while others demanded an overhaul of the group's identity, favouring accurate depictions of life from the margins.

In chapters three, four, five and six of this thesis Irish language and African American literature will be examined in light of the stereotypes against which these groups worked and how their literary offerings challenged ill-informed perceptions. In

The Nature and Context of Minority Discourse, quoted in Máirín Nic Eoin's *Trén bhFearann Breac*, Jan Mohamad and Lloyd, in relation to minority literature, note:

> Because the dominant culture occludes the minority discourse by making minority texts unavailable- either literally through publishers and libraries or, more subtly, through an implicit theoretical perspective that is structurally blind to minority concerns – one of the first tasks of a reemergent minority culture is to break out from such ideological encirclement. In such an endeavour, theoretical and archival work of minority culture must always be concurrent and mutually reinforcing: a sustained theoretical critique of the dominant culture's apparatus both eases the task of recovering and mediating marginalized work and permits us to elucidate the full significance of the specific modes of resistance – and celebration – those works contain. (Nic Eoin, 2005, p. 35)

Gaelic and black American authors have continued to strive to capture accurate depictions of their group in literature and to challenge the wider societies from which they were marginalised, to reconsider the stereotyped gaze. Black American writers worked against the perception that they were beastly and needed the guidance and control of white America in order to survive and when various writers began to question and challenge this belief, new and interesting manifestations of African American identity began to emerge. Writers moved away from portrayals of their group as down-trodden and accepting of their lot. Suddenly, in the middle of the last century, powerful fictional characters, like Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas, shattered the perception that African Americans were meek and ashamed of their difference and blackness. Wright's *Native Son* is acknowledged as one of the first to break away from the stunted literary depictions of African Americans that had, up until then, been popular with both white and black writers (see chapter four and Ellison's opinion on the influence of Wright). Bigger Thomas' killing of a white girl and disposal of her body was a violent departure from the traditional presence of the African American in literature. Following from Wright's critical success, other writers, like Claude Brown (1937-2002) (*Manchild in the Promised Land,* 1965) began to follow suit and were intent on portraying the reality of life from the margins; even if that reality was damaging to the group image.

Just as the concept of African American identity was fluid and subject to change in the beginning of the last century, contemporary interpretations of how the group is viewed as well as how it views itself are also changeable. Towards the end of the 20th century, African American culture and language became a popular sub-culture within the States. The predominance of African American forms of music, in particular, has altered the manner in which white America views the group. In the decades following the American civil rights' awakening, the relationship between African Americans and whites has been overshadowed by a form of tokenism. African American culture has been championed, to an extent, for the purposes of racial inclusion and this, arguably, has impinged upon relations between the two groups in recent times. In the next chapter, as well as in chapter six, focusing on modern interpretations of African American identity in the work of Randal Keenan, this development in how African Americans are perceived by mainstream society will be examined, particularly in light of how these perceptions challenged modern writers to fight against a new wave of stereotypes and misconceptions.

Throughout this thesis, the comparative study of Irish language and African American writing will be legitimised, based on a number of factors. The study of two such diverse groups, side by side, certainly warrants an explanation as to why these particular peoples were selected over others. In the following chapters, the comparative study of Gaelic and African American writers will be examined in a number of ways that illustrate that these two different literary traditions share certain core values; including the prevailing influence of folklore and oral storytelling in both cultures, their experiences of subjugation and resulting experiences of living marginalised existences. A shared history, understanding and acknowledgement of each other's respective plights will also help to establish the comparative study and this important link between Irish speakers and African Americans provides this study with a cultural context within which the groups may be examined. The connection between the groups was most significant in the 19th century, when the Irish in America campaigned for abolition and aligned it with Catholic Emancipation back in Ireland. Campaigners likened the oppression and restrictions experienced by blacks to the sectarian persecution endured by the Irish. This connection was strengthened in the last century when writers, like Ralph Ellison and Claude McKay compared their group's struggle to that of the Irish and modelled their literary renaissance on the Irish revival (see chapter two, Alain Locke). Both groups utilised these unique features of

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their respective cultures to create interesting manifestations of group identity; identities that worked against established perceptions of Irish speakers and African Americans to unearth accurate depictions of the experience of being marginalised. As a combative measure, the group images that appear in the literary offerings of these marginalised writers are quite similar in that there was a concerted effort by Irish language and African American writers to give a more rounded, realistic depiction of their respective groups, moving away from flat, two-dimensional stereotyped portrayals proffered by mainstream commentators. A connection to and affiliation with each other was an important element of the revised identities and the communication that existed between the two groups created a sense of community that traversed the Atlantic.

This thesis will show that the comparative study of Irish language and African American writers is not only original but also a legitimate and worthwhile endeavour through an examination of the group images presented in the literature of these groups. The stereotypes attributed to both groups are strikingly similar, as is the manner in which writers fought against such negative imagery. In both literary traditions, representations of Irish speakers and African Americans are not necessarily positive; rather, the temptation to portray their respective groups as godly and respectful is eschewed and, in its place, we find more realistic characters struggling to transgress the boundaries enforced by societies that fail to recognise their humanity. Examination of group stereotypes and identity constructs will be mainly based on close textual readings of literary works, though the historical and sociological contexts surrounding the literature will also be considered. This thesis will show that both African American and Irish language writers construct new group identities that are similar to each other and that this is a direct result of their experiences of marginalisation and the cultures that grew from this process. However, this is not to say that the group identities presented in the texts studied are either definitive or exhaustive of how Irish speakers and African Americans perceive themselves; rather, this thesis will show that identity is not a constant and fixed construct for those attempting to navigate life in the margins.

1.2   Thesis Outline

From within both groups, there are diverse and interesting literary representations that demystify life beyond the margins of society. Writers from both traditions worked to debunk discriminatory perceptions of their groups and to create truly representative group images. To effectively examine how Irish language and African American writers fought against established, negative perceptions of their groups, this thesis will closely examine representations of Irish speakers and black Americans in the work of four writers; two from each tradition. The novels and short stories of Seosamh MacGrianna (1900-1990), Mícheál Ó Conghaile (1962-), Ralph Ellison (1913-1994) and Randall Kenan (1963-) offer unique insight into living with imposed marginality, especially when considered in light of the literature produced by mainstream writers from Ireland and the States. Within the Irish context, there were many accomplished writers working at the beginning of the 20th century and writers like Pádraic Ó Conaire (1882-1928), for example, shattered perceptions of the Irish speaker as meek and God-fearing through his portrayals of the isolated and lonely immigrant. Others like Máirtín Ó Cadhain (1905-1970) captured Gaeltacht life with all its politics, jealousies and gripes. In order to conduct an in-depth examination of the fluidity of the identity of Irish language speakers, two writers were selected and their work studied closely in relation to how the group is perceived and how this affects how the group views itself. The work of Seosamh Mac Grianna is examined in close detail in chapter three of this thesis and can be considered to be representative of how Irish language writers viewed their own set in the first half of the last century. Of the Gaelic writers working in the 20th century, Mac Grianna was one of the first professionals, eking out a meagre living from his work. Relatively little is known of Mac Grianna's personal life, compared to his counterparts and his life-long battle with poor mental health led to a somewhat obscure existence. While there are many critical works on Máirtín Ó Cadhain, for example, there are far fewer on Mac Grianna.

Despite the dearth in critical interest, his work warrants close study because of the many rich representations found therein of life from the margins, as experienced by the Irish language speaker. During the first half of his life, Mac Grianna was an outspoken and vehement critic of the treatment of Gaels by the rest of Irish society. Testaments to this are the numerous letters he wrote bemoaning the status of Irish speakers as well as his critical writings on the work of his personal hero, Pádraic Ó Conaire. To give a true portrayal of life from the margins, Mac Grianna sacrificed

personal relationships as well as his professional standing. His literary works caused offence and much concern for the State's Irish language publisher, An Gúm. In essence, Mac Grianna effectively marginalised himself through his efforts to bring into national focus the marginality imposed on Irish speakers. Chapter three of this thesis will examine the representations of Irish language speakers presented in Mac Grianna's semi-autobiographical *Mo Bhealach Féin*. Throughout the text, Mac Grianna's vitriol is palpable and in the text we find manifold representations of the disgruntled Irish speaker living in the English-speaking world. Within *Mo Bhealach Féin* and *An Druma Mór*, Mac Grianna presents unique imaginings of the identity of the Gael in the first half of the 20th century and, as such, his work is worthy of inclusion in a study of literary expressions of marginalisation in the last century.

To delineate the progression and evolution of the self-identity of Irish language speakers, chapter five of this thesis will examine the work of Mícheál Ó Conghaile. A generation apart from Mac Grianna, Ó Conghaile is a living, modern Irish language writer and publisher. Just like his predecessors, Ó Conghaile's work is laden with interesting manifestations of identity and accounts of life from the margins. Ó Conghaile's short stories and novel capture the feelings of isolation and despair that often mark life for the marginalised. His stories, and more notably his novel, account for the struggles of coming to terms with homosexuality for young Irish-speaking males. The gay characters of his texts are doubly marginalised and feel at odds with the traditional way of life and views common in Gaeltacht areas. However, when these characters move beyond the Gaeltacht, they still experience a kind of alienation as members of English-speaking society never seem to connect in any meaningful way. While some queer theory will be applied to Ó Conghaile's texts, this thesis is concerned primarily with the identity of the Irish speaker and how group self-perceptions have evolved in a generation since Mac Grianna's *Mo Bhealach Féín*. However, the homosexuality of Ó Conghaile's protagonists often complicated the Gaelic group image as sexuality acts as a barrier between the gay individual and their heritage and cultural identity. In *Sna Fir* (1999), Ó Conghaile's young male protagonist Eoin Pól Mac Donncha (John Paul) lives two lives, almost: his life among family and friends in the Gaeltacht where his sexuality is never questioned, as well as an alternate existence in Dublin City's burgeoning gay scene. However, in both settings, John Paul is unable to express his true identity and feels at odds with both groups. He struggles to marry both aspects of his personality, and Ó Conghaile deftly

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portrays the feelings of isolation associated with a marginalised existence. In his short story collections *An Fear nach nDéanann Gáire* (2003) and *An Fear a Phléasc* (1997) Ó Conghaile explores the theme of isolation and marginality in an array of interesting characters. In stories like 'Ar Pinsean sa Leithreas' and 'Seacht gCéad Uaireadóir', the author presents characters that appear at odds with their environments. Ó Conghaile manipulates the concepts of time and space in these stories and exaggerates the experience of being marginalised. As contemporary representations of Irish speakers, Ó Conghaile's characters find themselves confined, not in Gaeltacht spaces, but trapped in toilets or in the timeless vacuum of a watch shop. In these spaces, his characters experience crises as they struggle to situate themselves in an alien environment. Just like John Paul in *Sna Fir*, the characters in these stories seem to occupy in-between spaces and they fail to assimilate into modern Irish society or the Irish-speaking world. Ó Conghaile's novel and short stories pick up where Mac Grianna left off in their modern representation of the marginalised Irish speaker at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century.

In the African American tradition, there are also many writers and texts that depict life from the margins. Just as Irish language writers became concerned with exploring concepts of identity towards the middle of the last century, so too did African Americans. Before writing his only complete novel, Ralph Ellison toyed with concepts of group identity during his critical career, working for a number of African American publications. Dismayed by lacklustre depictions of African Americans, both by black and white writers, Ellison worked hard to debunk the myths and misconceptions surrounding his group. Unlike his counterparts working at the time, Ellison's work was unapologetic and strove to break the boundaries of how blacks in the States were perceived. His *Invisible Man* is an epic exploration of the central character's development, and the text is packed with numerous re-imaginings of how African Americans view themselves and others. Like Mac Grianna, Ellison was critical of the marginality imposed on his group and spoke out against the poor treatment meted out to blacks in the States. Similarly to Mac Grianna, Ellison also managed to somewhat alienate himself from other prominent members of the African American community through his, sometimes, furious critiques of black American culture and group identity. Ellison's novel and, to a lesser extent, short stories are of particular interest when considering African American identity in the first half of the last century. As this thesis is concerned with examining literary explorations of

marginalisation, Ellison's works are perfect texts on which to base this study. *Invisible Man* opens in an underground location and the opening lines of the text confirm that Ellison's work has the struggle to assert identity from life on the margins at its core. The central character's movements in the text and his lives in the South and New York City illustrate the fluid nature of identity. In the novel, there is no single or uniform identity presented for African Americans and, although we never learn his name, the central character assumes various personas over the course of his journeys. The various renditions of the African American male presented in Ellison's text make it difficult to pinpoint typical group characteristics. His work built upon existing stereotypes and expectations placed on African Americans and marked a shift in how the group began expressing itself and its experience of being marginalised. Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is exemplary in its exploration of what encompassed African American identity in the first half of the last century

The final writer to be examined in light of evolving and emerging identities in the 20th century is Randall Kenan. Kenan deftly explores concepts of African American identity in his novel, *A Visitation of Spirits*, his short stories and also his critical works. The search for what exactly constitutes black identity in modern-day United States is at the centre of much of Kenan's work, most notably in his comprehensive *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. Written in the style of a travelogue*, Walking on Water* documents the author's journey across the States and his quest to unearth how blacks view themselves. Kenan's aim was, initially, to encompass a study of how African Americans identify themselves across all fifty states. However, the author never managed to complete his huge undertaking. Instead, he travelled to a smaller number of states, interviewing black Americans and quizzing them on their cultural identity and place in modern American society. From *Walking on Water*, it is clear that Kenan is beguiled by the concept of African American identity, which is why his work is central to a study on literary manifestations of marginalisation. Similarly to Ó Conghaile, Kenan represents a new generation of writers coming from a marginalised perspective. While many of his short stories and novel are concerned with coming to grips with homosexuality in the American south, this thesis is concerned with the author's literary representations of modern black American identity. *A Visitation of Spirits'* young, gay protagonist, Horace Cross, allows for Kenan to explore the themes of masculinity, identity and isolation in the colour-prejudiced southern states. Like

John Paul in *Sna Fir*, Horace Cross is at odds with the traditional expectations placed on him. His family and community have clear and longstanding ideas on how a young, black man should act and present himself. Cross attempts to fulfil these ideals but, ultimately, the burden of his sexuality becomes unbearable and Cross ends his life. His decision comes following his inability to transform into a bird; a nod to African American folklore which also acts as a metaphor for evolving black identities. The short stories in his collection *Let the Dead Bury their Dead* also carry these themes. In it Kenan mixes African American traditions, particularly folkloric traditions, with modern characters. He is an astute commentator on race relations between whites and blacks in the States, and his critical works illustrate his perceptive insights on African American identity towards the beginning of the 21st century. He builds upon the tradition, fortified by Ellison, of challenging perceptions of black identity both from the margins and within mainstream American society.

1.3   Methodology

As this thesis is concerned with literary expressions of marginalisation by Irish language and African American writers, the texts included are contextualised, to an extent by historical and sociological discourse within Ireland and North America. As such, Homi K. Bhabha's analysis in *The Location of Culture* in relation to the emergence of the 'other' in post-colonial societies is useful when establishing and contextualising the position of Irish language speakers and black Americans in their respective societies in the last century. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha explores the processes and effects of colonialism in great detail, outlining the struggle to maintain a sense of self endured by colonised people dominated by a system that refuses to recognise the individual; by a system in which 'the very nature of humanity becomes estranged'. (2009, p. 59) Of particular relevance to this thesis are Bhabha's essays 'Interrogating Identity', 'Of Mimicry and Men' as well as his concept of hybridity presented in 'Signs Taken for Wonders'.

The marginalisation endured by the latterly mentioned groups can be aligned to their difference in English-speaking Ireland and a United States ruled by white Europeans. In the Irish context, Bhabha's concept of mimicry is particularly helpful in deciphering the urgency that was placed on language learning and Irish speakers in the first half of the 20th century. Considering the country's colonial history, particularly

the manner in which English customs, laws, practices and, most notably, language were forced upon the native population in an effort to homogenise the new subjects, the need to establish a difference between the coloniser and the colonized was one keenly felt by both parties. Bhabha suggests that 'colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.' (1994, p. 122) When considered next to Irish-English relations, particularly towards the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the desire for difference between the Irish and English national identities can be understood, in terms of both the othered subject and the subjugating powers. For the English colonisers, the Irish were considered an uncivilized and barbarous group, despite their adopting the English language. Although the natives were compelled to abandon their native tongue, their persistence in maintaining the Irish language secretly for generations points to the group's need to cling to their own cultural identity while the colonial process worked to eradicate it. The reluctance of the Irish to relinquish their own language was a point of difference that simultaneously highlighted their savagery in the English perspective. The emphasis that was placed upon the Irish language, particularly in the first half of the 20th century can be considered in light of an attempt to break a tradition of mimicry on the island. However, mimicry can have positive outcomes, as argued by Bhabha, in challenging the accepted authority of the coloniser.

In *The Location of Culture*, the process of Anglicization is explored as an exercise in mimicry and while Bhabha refers mostly to the experience of English rule in India, the situation in Ireland can also be examined in a similar light. The popularity and acclaim achieved by Anglo-Irish writers at the turn of the 20th century can be considered a success in terms of appropriating the non-native, English language in expressing the experiences of the subjugated and rendering it strange and uncanny for English audiences; as Bhabha notes, 'mimicry is at once resemblance and menace.' (1992, p. 123) The use of the English language in representing Irish life under colonial rule, including all its hardships and brutalities, disrupts the colonial discourse and subverts the language of control and oppression. In relation to language and Irish literature, the concept of hybridity compliments that of mimicry and is most relevant to this thesis in relation to linguistic hybridity. The, oftentimes, unnerving closeness of the English and Irish languages, despite the dichotomy that existed between them, is explored in chapter five of this thesis in relation to the work of Mihceál Ó Conghaile. The mix of both languages that punctuates speech on the island points to the complex

history between Ireland and England, highlighting the fluid nature of language and its ability to challenge an accepted and established power. While the Anglo-Irish syntax and vocabulary of writers like Sean O'Casey and JM Synge are well known and studied examples of post-colonial hybridity, examples of Irish language dialects influenced by English are an emerging area of interest in Gaelic literary studies. The rejection of the English language by Gaelic writers can be interpreted as a challenge to the oppression of colonial rule. Similarly, as will be demonstrated in chapter five, the use of English in Irish language literature can be interpreted as a rebellion of sorts in itself; as a means of challenging the expectations placed upon Gaelic writers by language purists.

Bhabha's concept of mimicry is also pertinent in the African American context and, as outlined in chapter two, was an issue in the post-abolition years for many black Americans. The 'New Negro' debates that unfolded in that era often centred on how the black man should present himself in a society ruled by whites that, up until 1867, had owned many of them as slaves, as property. A consensus emerged amongst some freed men and women that if African Americans were to thrive, then they would have to imitate white mannerisms and to mimic their oppressors. Examples of this mimicry are found in pamphlets and the texts of talks given by black leaders at the turn of the 20th century and also, in some literature. An example of this is the scene in *Invisible Man*, outlined in detail in chapter four, where the protagonist's grandfather advises him to placate whites and to mimic their mannerisms in an attempt to win a share of the power in the relationship between the two groups. Thus, the mimicry of African Americans can be interpreted as an attempt to win back a sense of power, of agency in a society bolstered by injustices and prejudices. Thus, Bhabha's views on the subversive power of mimicry are particularly relevant: 'What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is a writing, a mode of representation, that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable. Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents* […]' (1992, p. 125)

Similar to the Irish context, Bhabha's views on hybridity are also helpful the study of African American literature and in unearthing the group's struggle to forge an identity in the last century. Just as the Irish under colonial control strove to create a voice that best represented their encounter with subjugation, African Americans forged a linguistic form of their own that captured the very essence of the group's

experience from slavery to freedom in a white supremacist society. A uniquely African American dialect, heavy with folkloric motifs and rhythms, punctuates many works by black writers in the last century, examples of which are examined in chapters four and six of this thesis. The use of this hybrid dialect demonstrates the group's drive to undermine the language of authority and destabilise the myth of white supremacy in the United States. As Bhabha notes: 'Hybridity represents the ambivalent 'turn' of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification- a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority.' (1992, p. 162)

Bhabha's post-colonial analysis is particularly relevant to this thesis and his examination of the discourse of the othered subject are referred to both in the introduction and conclusion of this thesis. While the act of segregation, direct or indirect, is undoubtedly negative, violent and conflict-laden, through the perseverance of those affected, positive outcomes can sometimes arise. Segregation creates unnatural settlements; unnatural in the sense that towns, suburbs and communities were not permitted to grow organically. The forced marginalisation of a subjugated people can create new, cultural spaces or zones of expression. It is from these spaces, of which Bhabha speaks in *The Location of Culture*, that unique forms of cultural expression can flourish, affording marginalised people an exceptional viewpoint from which to interpret their own societies and those from which they are excluded. The primary texts included in this thesis are examined in light of Bhabha's views, outlined above. In the African American context, the ideas expressed in 'Interrogating Identity' are particularly relevant to developing an understanding of the marginality imposed on black Americans. In this essay, Bhabha relates his ideas to the work of Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) and the concept of disturbing the colonial relationship between 'Black/White, Self/Other' and 'the narcissistic myth of negritude or white supremacy.' (1992, p. 58) The myth of white supremacy is to the fore of the literary analysis in later chapters, particularly in relation to the representation of the black male in American literature. The fear of the unknown, savage colonial subject is epitomised in, what Bhabha terms, 'the insatiable fear and desire for the Negro…the deep, cultural fear of the black figured in the psychic trembling of Western sexuality'. (1992, p. 59) This analysis is particularly relevant to chapter six of this thesis in relation to the representation of the African American male in 20th century society and literature.

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As suggested in its title, this thesis is driven by close textual readings of literature by Irish language and African American writers. These texts are contextualised, to an extent by historical and sociological discourses within Ireland and North American, respectively. Regarding literature as a plausible representation of the society in which it was written, the texts selected in this study, according to the main argument of this thesis, best represent the auto- and hetero- images presented in literary texts produced in light of the stereotypes inflicted on Irish speakers and the African American community in the 20th century. Imagology complements Bhabha's view that 'to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness' (1992, p. 63) in that the relationship between the auto- and hetero-image is symbiotic. The methodology outlined in Joep Leerssen's *Mere Irish and Fíor Ghael* in relation to auto- and hetero- images has been utilised throughout this thesis. Leerssen's methodology provides the framework necessary for demonstrating how Irish language and African American writers developed new group identities in the 20th century. As a branch of comparative literature, imagology has its own methodological approach based on the principles of a specific supranatural cultural neutrality (Dyserinck, 2003). In its most basic terms, imagology seeks to explain how national stereotypes emerge and to which extent they are determined by historical circumstance and cultural conventions. It is also concerned with 'the role of cultural perceptions and identity-constructs in international literary cultural traffic.' (Leerssen, 2005, p. 7) Imagology recognises that perceived group images can inform the literature of a given country and that national consciousness in relation to images and stereotypes can, in turn, be influenced by literary forms.

Even though imagology is primarily concerned with national stereotypes, its theoretical framework can be effectively applied to the study of ethnic or minority group images, which makes it useful to the understanding of the images of Irish language speakers and African Americans in literary texts.Leerssen's *Remembrance and imagination: patterns in the historical and literary representation of Ireland in the nineteenth century* (1997) also informed the historical and literary background of this thesis and his study of national self-image complimented the work of Kiberd and Nic Eoin, referred to in chapter two of this thesis. Other works dealing with imagology such as *Imagology: The Cultural Constructs and Literary Representations of National Characters: A Critical Survey* (2007) edited by Manfred Beller and Leerssen and *Imagology Revisited* (2010) by Waldemar Zacharasiewiez have also

been central to the methodological framework of this thesis, particularly the chapters 'Foreign Faces: Physiognomy and The Theory of Climate' and 'The Theory of Climate in North American Texts since 1776'. Both chapters were useful to framing the evolution of African American literary images in the 20th century literature examined in chapters four and six of this thesis.

The texts selected illustrate that the depiction of group identity by Gaelic and black writers is diverse, fluid and in constant flux. The writers selected for this study are representative of two distinct generations in both the Irish and Africa American contexts. The work of Seosamh Mac Grianna and of Ralph Ellison, examined in chapters three and four of this thesis, respectively, depict the auto-images that existed for Irish-speakers and African Americans in the first half of the 20th century. A generation later, the short stories and novels of Micheál Ó Conghaile and Randall Kenan portray the groups' image as the 20th century drew to a close. Although the four main writers selected are all male, that is not to say a similar comparative study could not be conducted of female Irish language and African American writers. The omission of women writers in the four chapters dealing with close textual analysis of literary texts was not a deliberate choice; rather it was felt that the writers selected best support the central argument of this thesis without repeating or replicating Jacqueline Fulmer's recent study on the connection between Irish and African American women writers in *Folk Women and Indirection in Morrison, Ní Dhuibhne, Hurston and Lavin* (2007).

While Fulmer's work deals with women writers and the folkloric influences in their work and 'the potentially disruptive qualities of those traditions to make them unusually appropriate for postmodern critical projects that see to out such creative disruption' (2007, p. 27), the methodology laid out in her text is similar to that of this thesis and Fulmer links the two cultures together similarly to how they are connected here. While Fulmer argues that folkloric indirection within both traditions have helped writers to disrupt colonial narratives in Ireland and America, this thesis will illustrate that the development of new auto-images in Irish language and African American literature occurred similarly in both groups. Like *Folk Women and Indirection*, this thesis is framed by post-colonial discourses and a close examination of the historical circumstances surrounding the suppression of culture in both contexts. A post-colonial approach in relation to how Irish language and African American writers were othered helps to illustrate the origins from which new and varied interpretations of identity

emerged in both traditions. Fulmer plays close attention to the use of language in both Irish and African American folkloric discourse and argues that comparable rhetorical strategies exist in both literatures. Her description of "indirection" is also useful to this study particularly when we consider the following description of indirection in light of the use of the Irish language:

> The term indirection represents the underlying commonality between oftentimes culturally specific rhetorical strategies: the goal of communicating while under threat of censorship or retribution. The rhetor may be trying to communicate within his or her cultural group, to an outside group or both at the same time. Some messages may be meant for perhaps even a subset within a rhetor's cultural group. (Ibid., p. 25)

In relation to the use of language, Fulmer notes its potential to disrupt the colonial narrative and she employs Bakhtin's theoretical framework from *The Dialogic Imagination*. She mentions Bakhtin as one of the critical theorists who has 'long described one vital subset of rhetorical indirection, indirect discourse, as "the representation of another's word, another's language […] a rich world of diverse forms" would "transmit, mimic and represent from various vantage points another's word, another's speech and language"' (Ibid., p. 29) The suggestion here that indirection gives writers the opportunity to alter the perception of language is also applicable to this study, although language is not the primary concern of this work. However, Fulmer's overall argument asserts that folklore enabled women writers to overcome the marginality and oppression imposed upon them by its ability to challenge the colonial narrative, similarly to how the challenging and demystifying of hetero-images and the creation of auto-images achieved in forging new representations of Irish and African American identity in the last century.

As mentioned above, this thesis is primarily concerned with the representation of auto- and hetero-images of Irish-speakers and African Americans. Each chapter of this thesis is driven by an imagological exploration of the texts. In chapter three, the image of the Irish speaker towards the middle of the last century is analysed in light of Leerssen's theory of imagology. Prevailing stereotypes of the Gaeltacht inhabitant are compared to literary representations of the group in the work of Seosamh Mac Grianna to illustrate the division between social interpretations of and how members

of the group actually perceived themselves. In chapter four, the same approach is taken in the analysis of Ralph Ellison's work and the images of African Americans that proliferate in *Invisible Man* and a selection of short stories. Imagological readings of Ellison and Mac Grianna's works will highlight the similarities in the manner in which identity is expressed and recreated by both groups in the middle of the 20th century. Again, in chapters five and six, imagology drives the exploration and reconstitution of Irish language speakers and African American's identities, respectively, with close attention paid to the marginalised position of characters in works by Mícheál Ó Conghaile and Randall Kenan. The literary and sociological writings of both men highlight new and emerging group identities of life from the margins and builds upon the ideas expressed a generation earlier, as outlined in the chapters on Mac Grianna and Ellison.

When studying Irish language and African American texts, many auto- and hetero-images surface and some of the relationships between these images are particularly powerful in shaping group identities. In relation to Irish language speakers, many auto- and hetero-images exist and these images are proliferative in the literature of Gaelic writers, as will be discussed in later chapters. For Irish speakers, there is more than one relationship between auto- and hetero- image. Firstly, there is the way non-Irish speakers view their countrymen from Irish speaking regions. This, in turn, informs the auto-image of Irish speakers as a reaction to this particular hetero-image. This relationship is quite a complex one and some of the images that emerge as a result point to a lack of understanding between the groups and suggest a level of ignorance with regard to the manner in which non-Irish speakers impose a patronising hetero-image upon Irish language speakers. The disparity between reality and the hetero-image of Gaels is clearly evident in many texts, and the auto-image of the Gael in relation to this hetero-image will be discussed in later chapters in the literary works of Seosamh Mac Grianna and Mícheál Ó Conghaile. Also considered in this thesis, is the representation of non-Irish speakers by Gaels in Mac Grianna's *Mo Bhealach Féin* and Ó Conghaile's *Sna Fir*. In both texts, the English-speaking Irish are presented and, to a certain extent, lampooned, subsequently revealing the auto-image of the Irish speaker. There also exists the auto-image of the Irish speaker, as defined by the hetero-image of the English. In his study of the Irish auto-image in *Mere Irish and Fíor Ghael*, Leerssen notes that is should be kept in mind that:

> The relationship between England and Ireland is 'asymmetrical' in one important aspect: namely, that there was a strong, encroaching English presence in Ireland without a corresponding Irish presence in England. As a result, Irish attitudes can sometimes give the impression of being more 'defensive' than English ones, pondering the effects of the English presence, themselves profoundly concerned with English attitudes; whereas on the other hand, English observations rarely go beyond the first physical impression […] and only seldom (an isolated instance being Spenser) attempt to obtain or even impart information concerning native culture and native attitudes. (2005, p. 254)

Leerssen's comments lead to the suggestion that the English gaze was superficial interested only in the outwardly "savage" nature of the Irish. The lack of understanding of Irish culture and attitudes can be considered similar to the relationship between white Europeans in North America and black slaves. In *Alterity, Identity, Image*, Corbey and Leerssen outline the dichotomy between "civility" and "otherness". They argue that 'Civility is articulated in a double sense: brought into being by having it assigned in varying degrees to different parts of the world or different spheres of society.' (Corbey, Leerssen, 1991, p. viii) They argue that this civility is defined by 'the treatment of natives in distant colonies […] of blacks' and that 'the history of social (inter)action can be seen in its underlying structures if we see it in terms of accompanying discourse, that of the articulation of civility and the exclusion of otherness.' (Ibid.) The dichotomy between civility and otherness can be applied to the historical treatment of blacks in North America and understood in light of the auto-image of the African American in relation to the hetero-image of the white European.

The diversity in the origins and ancestry of the African American population means that no definitive auto-image exists for the group, even though its members are perceived universally by the dominant hetero-image constructed and imposed by white society. As will be demonstrated through an analysis of Ralph Ellison's works, various representations of the African American auto-image emerge as his protagonists attempts to assert an identity in opposition to the misguided and racist stereotypes upheld by white society. Ellison's various portrayals of the black American auto-image are indicative of the social atmosphere and group feeling on the eve of the civil rights awakening in the middle of the last century. In Kenan's texts,

we find new and revitalised group identities that span across the various states. The auto-images he describes are defined against how blacks are perceived in a more tolerant United States, and also in contrast to some negative auto-images proliferated through music and media. Kenan's attempt to unearth the true identity of African Americans in *Walking on Water*, as we shall see, ultimately fails, leading to the suggestion that, as in the case of Irish speakers, no absolute or conclusive representation of black identity actually exists. What is also notable about Kenan's representation of the African American auto-image is his criticism of reckless depictions of the group, particularly in contemporary rap music and African American cinema. It is clear from his work that Kenan strives to accurately depict his group.

In the cases of both Irish language speakers and African Americans there is a definite connection between the groups' identities and geographical spaces. The link between identity and space is a crucial factor in the make-up of the auto- and hetero-images of the two groups. As such, an imagological study of the literature of Irish language and African American writers is complemented by a simultaneous geocritical study. Geocriticism builds upon earlier concepts of space in literature, such as Bakhtin's theory of the literary chronotrope; a fictional world made of time and space, as well as events, relationships between people and dialogues; and the concepts of space presented in the works of Gaston Bachelard and Maurice Blanchot, for example. Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopias is also worth consideration when conducting a geocritical study of the spaces in Irish language and African American literature. In 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', Michel Foucault describes heterotopias as spaces that are 'absolutely other with respect to all arrangements that they reflect' (1986, p. 24); they are spaces that are marginal because of their location in our societies and because of the people that inhabit these spaces. Heterotopias are grouped as places of crisis or places of deviance and, in relation to the latter, Foucault's theory of heterotopias is helpful to our understanding of African American ghettos and neighbourhoods.

If a heterotopia acts as a mirror for society, then the African American ghetto is indeed a perfect example of one. The ghetto is are expected to uphold the same values, laws and moral codes of wider American society, but to do so beyond the borders of white America, and as a result develops its own codes. As a heterotopia in its very essence, the ghetto is a place into which black Americans are forced because of their 'deviance' from white civility (as described above in relation to Corbey and

Leerssen), and this notion is propagated by the racialization of this group. Once African Americans enter the heterotopia of the ghetto, they are simultaneously excluded from wider American society. They are compelled to live in a geographical and social space that is dictated and created by the very societies from which they are excluded. Foucault also included colonial spaces in his theory of heterotopias because, according to him, they have:

> The function of forming another space, another real space, as perfect, meticulous, and well-arranged as ours is disordered, ill-conceived and in a sketchy state. This heterotopia is not one of illusion but of compensation, and I wonder if it is not somewhat in this manner that certain colonies have functioned. (Ibid., p. 27)

In relation to this form of heterotopia, he refers to Puritan colonies founded by the English in America and to Jesuit colonies in South America. The Irish Gaeltacht is similar to this kind of heterotopia. Originally intended as spaces of deviance by the British, the Gaeltacht later morphed into an idyllic space in relation to the rest of the island of Ireland. As outlined earlier, the Gaels of these heterotopias were imagined as pure and perfect examples of Irishness and they acted as antidotes to the 'real' Irish man. Gaeltachtaí were spaces of rural perfection and they had an effect upon the geography of Ireland. Building upon Foucault's 'Of Other Spaces', geocriticism provides a theoretical and methodological framework for the interpretation of heterotopias and other spaces in literature. In each chapter dealing with a specific writer, the construction of group identity is considered in light of geocriticism and the complementary pairing of this theory and imagology strengthens the comparisons being made between Irish language and African American literature.

Finally, as well as examining the texts in light of theories unique to comparative literature such as imagology and geocriticism, and post-colonial interpretations, each chapter will also consider the life of the authors and biographies in order to frame the study. While none of the primary texts selected are explicitly autobiographical, some of the short stories and novels do contain semi-autobiographical elements and undertones. Relevant biographical accounts of the life of each author will therefore complement the historical and social contextualisation of novels and short stories. To help fully understand where from auto- and hetero-images emerge, histories and social

commentaries from both Ireland and the United States are included, forming a context within which the literature can be considered. In the case of chapter six, an interview with the writer is also included in which Kenan's thoughts in relation to the auto-image of the African American and his approach towards that image in his own work.

1.4   Critical Review

As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, this thesis is a comparative study of Irish language and African American literature centred on the presentation of auto-images in short stories and novels. These auto-images are considered in light of the hetero-images of Irish-speakers and black Americans that were popularised and informed societal stereotypes of the groups in the last century. Because of the multi-disciplinary nature of this thesis, the range of secondary literature examined in light of the study is vast and includes texts from various disciplines and cultural perspectives. As this study is comparative, theories unique to the discipline of comparative literature have informed the framework of the chapters and have provided a methodology for the study of the proliferation of auto-images in Irish language and African American literature. In order to contextualise the emergence of auto-images and the hetero-images against which they were defined, this study has been informed by historical and sociological contexts. This includes historical texts, biographies, governmental pamphlets and journal articles. Texts specific to comparative literary studies and methodologies were also consulted and framed the close textual readings in chapters three, four, five and six. To date, no comparative study has been published on the little known link between African American and Irish language writers. Few works account for the historic connection between the two groups and any literary criticism that links the Irish to African Americans is limited only to Anglo-Irish literature and Irish works written in English. Although there is little critical analysis of this connection, a close comparative study of the Gaelic and black American tradition can lead to a better understanding of how imposed marginality can have positive outcomes for group identity and the creative output of marginalised writers. By acknowledging a connection between their group and other marginalised people, writers can develop a community and this experience of belonging is often lacking from life outside of mainstream society.

Because this thesis deals with the emergence of auto-images in Irish language and African American literature, a number of historical texts dealing with the separate traditions were consulted in order to delineate the evolution of the hetero-image in both contexts. In recent years, a number of Irish language publications have examined Irish identity in literary texts and of these, Máirín Nic Eoin's *Trén bhFearann Breac: An Dílaithriú Cultúir agus Nualitríocht na Gaeilge* (2005) has been one of the most influential to the debate. Nic Eoin's work examines the theme of displacement as a background and context to Irish language literature within a post-colonial context. In her critical text, Nic Eoin explores Irish language literature in light of post-colonial literary theory and applies the works of David Lloyd to her exploration of Gaelic literary identity. Lloyd's *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (1993) is referred to in Nic Eoin's text, as is his essay 'Colonial trauma/Postcolonial recovery?' (2000) and book chapter 'Ethnic cultures, minority discourse and the state' (1996) in relation to the effects of post-colonialism on Irish culture. Nic Eoin also uses the post-colonial theories employed by Bhabha, particularly the *The Location of Culture* (1994). Nic Eoin's analysis of the effects of cultural displacement on the Irish language writer builds upon the work of other Irish language literary critics, such as the work of Declan Kiberd in *Idir Dhá Chultúr* (1993). Kiberd's text breaks through the barrier that divides Anglo-Irish and Irish language literary criticism. In Kiberd's *Idir Dhá Chultúr*, the author works towards developing an understanding of Irish national identity by combining the literary representations of the same in both Gaelic and English language texts. Crucially to this study, Kiberd writes of the influence of the Irish language upon Anglo-Irish writers, such as Synge and Lady Augusta Gregory, as well as outlining the cultural vision of Gaelic writers such as Pádraic Ó Conaire, Ó Cadhain and Mac Grianna. The study of Gaelic and Anglo-Irish literature side by side is also featured in Philip O'Leary's *Gaelic Prose in the Irish Free State: 1922-1939* (2004). O'Leary's work is exhaustive in its breadth and the author charts the emergence of Gaelic literary identity and literary direction during the country's formative years of self-governance. O'Leary's mammoth text includes close readings of numerous newspaper articles, letters, pamphlets and manifestos related to Gaelic literature in the beginning of the 20th century. The text picks up where his previous publication *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival 1881-1921: Ideology and Innovation* (1994) left off. O'Leary's work is vital to any study concerned with Gaelic literature because of its

encyclopaedic breadth and his work has been essential to the construction of a historical, literary context for this thesis. The wide range of primary sources included in O'Leary's text has helped to frame the auto-images of Irish speakers in relation to the hetero-images that were popular in the first half of the last century, in chapters three and five of this study.

Brian Ó Conchubhair's recently published *Fin de Siècle na Gaeilge* (2009) also provides a historical context for Gaelic literature towards the close of the 20th century. Unlike O'Leary's work, however, Ó Conchubhair's text examines the state of the Irish language and its literature towards the end of the century in relation to emerging concepts of Darwinism and Eugenics. Ó Conchubhiar's work has been useful in asserting the central argument of this thesis as he examines the Irish language and perceptions of its speakers in light of the racialization of Africans in European thought in the 19th century. Ó Conchubhair refers to the relationship between the Irish and English, the dynamics of which are important to chapter two of this thesis, wherein the emergence of auto-images is explored in light of how Irish speakers were perceived by English-speaking Irish society as well as colonial Britain. His essays 'The Gaelic Front Controversy: The Gaelic League's (Post Colonial) Crux' (2003) and 'The Novel in Irish since 1950: From National Narrative to Counter-Narrative' (2005) have also been important to the framing of the central argument of this thesis in chapters two and five.

In the African American context, the work of Ira Berlin has provided the necessary historical background for the study of African American literary identity. Berlin's *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (1998) and *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves* (2003) provided this study with the historical context of slavery in North America and Berlin's work provides a timeline against which the evolution of attitudes towards black slaves can be examined. Berlin's work is also significant because it illustrates the positive group identity of black slaves and celebrates their culture and resilience. The recent work of Eddie Donoghue, *Black Breeding Machines* (2008) also provided necessary historical evidence in delineating the history of racialization of African bodies from the 16th century. Donoghue's work examines white, European attitudes towards slaves over the centuries and was vital to this study in asserting the process of de-humanising that slaves endured; a process that worked towards developing a stereotype of the African body as animalistic. The objectification of the black body

and the development of the stereotype of the black slave as savage and beastly is also explored in George Fredrickson's *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny 1817-1914* (1971). Just as Ó Conchubhair's text looks at the racialization of the Irish in the 19th century, Fredrickson's text explores how black slaves and, later, freedmen were perceived in white American society and how negative perceptions and the development of stereotypes purported as truth impacted upon black lives. Crucial to Fredrickson's central argument is the intellectual rationalization of racism that emerged at the time and maintained the country-wide practices of slavery.

Just as O'Leary's work helped in the contextualisation of the auto- and hetero-images of Irish language speakers, the collection *The New Negro: Readings on Race, Representation and African American Culture* (2007), edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Gene Jarrett has proved an invaluable resource of essays, manifestos and newspaper articles by both black and white writers from the late 19th century. *The New Negro* contains contributions from a number of African American poets and writers, such as Langston Hughes and Richard Wright and such essays have provided chapter two of this thesis with a context against which the representation of auto-images in the subsequent chapters can be examined. The earlier essays and articles included in the text have also provided an insight into the social conditions experienced by blacks in the immediate post-abolition years. Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* (2010) helped to frame the historical context of slavery and the effect it had upon white perceptions of black Americans in the post-abolition years. Alexander's work argues that the legacy of slavery and racial subjugation prevails in the States today and her text argues that the American justice system has been unfairly prejudiced since the abolition of slavery in the 1860s. This point is also made by Douglas Blackmon in *Slavery by Another Name* (2008). Blackmon's text looks at the historic incidences of forced labour amongst black prisoners in the American prison system and he argues that a correlation existed between surges in the arrests of African Americans and the need for cheap labour at certain points in the last century. Both Alexander's and Blackmon's texts have been helpful in illustrating the injustices against which African Americans defined their group's auto-image. Other useful texts to this study, relating to the restrictive laws put in place after abolition targeting black Americans, include David Quigley's and David Gellman's *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship* (2004) and William Cohen's *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility*

and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control 1861-1915 (1991). These texts contextualised the prevailing prejudices in American society that influenced how African Americans were viewed and, in turn, defined their own identity.

Because chapters three, four, five and six are driven by close textual readings, biographies on both Ellison and Mac Grianna helped to contextualise the socio-historic backdrops against which *Invisible Man* and *Mo Bhealach Féin*, respectively, were written. Pól Ó Muirí's *Míreanna Saoil* (2007) and *A Flight from Shadow* (1999) provided some necessary background information on Mac Grianna, to whom very little literary criticism is dedicated. Ó Muirí's most recent publication includes some rare anecdotes and personal details of Mac Grianna's life and his text moves towards developing a greater understanding of the enigmatic writer. Fionntán de Brún's *Seosamh Mac Grianna: An Mhéín Rúin* (2002) is another welcomed addition to the literary criticism of Mac Grianna's work and de Brún analyses Mac Grianna's literary output in relation to the writer's influences outside the Gaelic world. Mac Grianna's own work was also pertinent to establishing the historical background of his work, particularly his collection of essays *Pádraic Ó Conaire agus Aistí Eile* (1936). The collection illuminates Mac Grianna's views in relation to the direction of Irish language literature in the 20th century and the literary output of Pádraic Ó Conaire, namely the short story collection, *An Chéad Chloch* (1914) was a source of inspiration for Mac Grianna. In chapters five and six, interviews with the authors were the main sources of information available on Ó Conghaile and Kenan and helped to contextualise their work in relation to their backgrounds and thoughts regarding the direction of marginalised discourses. Pádraig Ó Siadhail's 'An Fear Aniar: An Interview with Micheál Ó Conghaile' (2005) and his article 'Odd Man Out: Micheál Ó Conghaile and Irish Language Queer Prose' (2010) were informative and the interview provided the chapter with the necessary biographical details. In chapter six, interviews with Kenan were essential in providing information on the author, particularly Charles Rowell's 'An Interview with Randall Kenan' (1998).

In chapter four of this thesis, Arnold Rampersad's biography of Ralph Ellison, *Ralph Ellison: A Biography* (2007) is one of the more exhaustive biographies on the author and helps, as is the case with the biographies of Mac Grianna, to illustrate the circumstances that influenced Ellison's life and work. Ellison's own essays presented in *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986) illuminated the author's personal views in relation to the identity of black American and its representation in

the American literary canon. The essays show that Ellison was acutely away of the prejudices and stereotypes he had to work against in his literature. They also reveal his interpretation of the African American auto-image and how that image should be presented in the literary output of black Americans.

As this thesis deals with two different groups, it was necessary to consult a number of texts dealing with the histories of Ireland and North America in order to frame the study within the necessary historical contexts. *A New History of Ireland Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534* (1987) and *A New History of Ireland Volume III: Early Modern Ireland 1534-1691* (1976) helped to outfit chapter two of the thesis with the relevant historical information on the various waves of colonial rule experienced on the island of Ireland from the 14th century onwards; events that helped to shape the auto- and hetero- images of the Irish in relation to the colonial experience. Edmund Curtis's 'The viceroyalty of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, in Ireland, 1361-1367' (1918) and Maureen Noonan's 'The Cruell Pressure of an Enraged, Barbarous People': Irish and English Identity in Seventeenth-Century Policy and Propaganda" (1998) were also helpful in establishing the historical context pertaining to colonial rule in Ireland between the 14th and 17th centuries. Classical texts were also consulted and examined in light of the auto- and hetero-images presented therein. In the Irish context, Edmund Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1633), written in 16th century and published posthumously, was a key text in the examination of English attitudes towards Ireland. Spenser's text was one of the first to racialize Irish Catholicism and the text set a precedent for later works on Ireland and was generally perceived as an authoritative voice on the Irish and their imagined ineptitudes. Other documents similar to that of Spenser's that acted as official guides to the country and its people included Sir John Temple's *The Irish Rebellion* (1646). Although Spenser's text is generally viewed as the first to vilify the Irish and to describe the group as beastly and uncivilized, Temple's text is noteworthy for the writer's vehemently anti-Catholic stance, highlighted by an almost sensationalised account of the Irish Rebellion of 1641.

In the African American context, a number of classical texts also helped to assert this thesis' central argument in relation to group images and identity and works like Edward Topsell's *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts* (1607) influenced racial thinking in later years. In the text, Topsell puts forth the view that a strong collar existed between the African and the ape and based his beliefs that Africans and apes

shared sexual yearnings. Crucially, the text also made the claim that the African and ape were similar physically and this belief informed similar views in later years, such as John Atkin's *Voyage to Guine, Brafil and the West Indies* (1734) in which a correlation was made between the black body and apes. The categorization of the black body or the African as sub-human, or as a different species was the premise of many works that attempted to intellectually rationalize schools of racist thought, particularly in the 19th century. During this time "scientific" arguments were made for the necessity of slavery, based on the inability of the African to become "civilized" and works such as George Morton's *Crania Americana*, published in three volumes between 1839 and 1849, claimed to have scientific evidence of that the African race was inferior to Caucasians. Texts such as this attempted to rationalize the need to maintain slavery in North America. Other studies like Charles Caldwell's *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race* (1830) offered "scientific" evidence for polygenesis. The so-called scientific works produced in the 19th century claimed to prove that the African was of a separate race to whites. Richard Hakluyt's *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589), while being of a colonial viewpoint, described a more congenial relationship between Anglo-Saxons and the Africans they encountered.

As this thesis is the first study to examine the relationship between Irish language and African American literature, there is no existing body of critical work documenting the literary connection between the Gael and the black American. However, recent publications relating to the cross-cultural connection between the groups have helped to establish an historical connection between the Irish and African Americans. *The Black and Green Atlantic* (2009) edited by Peter O'Neill has been useful in this regard. The collection of essays within the work document the connection between Irish immigrants, slaves and other groups that crossed the Atlantic over the centuries and explores the connection between the Irish and African Americans, based on their shared experiences of political exile and contact in relation to the cultural development of their people and their efforts to overcome a damning process of racialization that both groups experienced at one time or another. O'Neill and Lloyd's work includes some essays that focus on the literary traditions of the Irish and various African diaspora, with attention paid to how these cultures influenced one another. However, this collection does not include an in-depth study of any Irish language writers and their affiliation with the African diaspora, despite recognition of

such existing in some Irish language texts. Noel Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White* (1995) is another text which examines the historical connection between the Irish and African Americans. The text focuses primarily on the Irish in America and their experience of racialization. Ignatiev's study delineates the Irish experience and their sense of connection to and affiliation with African Americans in the 19th century. Ignatiev's work also explores the ruthless social climbing of some Irish as the 20th approached and their efforts to distance themselves from association with blacks. Ignatiev's work was important to establishing an historic connection to the groups, particularly the sections of the work that look at the connection between Catholic Emancipation and abolition. The friendship between Daniel O' Connell and Fredrick Douglass is also accounted for in the text and this relationship is a crucial one to the premise of this thesis. Douglass' visit to Ireland in 1846, documented in 'Fredrick Douglass in Ireland' (1923) provided this study with an insight into the affiliation between Douglass and O'Connell.

Jacqueline Fulmer's *Folk Women and Indirection* (2007) is another recent text examining the connection between Irish and African American writers. While Fulmer's work examines the relationship between the use of folklore in the writings of Irish women writers working in English and African American women writers, she does not focus on the correlation between Gaelic and African American literature. Nonetheless, Fulmer's text, as outlined in the methodology, has been helpful in establishing a working methodology for this thesis, even though the central argument of her text differs to that of this thesis. *Irish and African American Cinema: Identifying Others and Performing Identities* (2007) by Maria Pramaggiore links Irish and black American cinema in a similar methodology to that employed here and in Fulmer's work. While Pramaggiore's text is related to cinematic depictions of the groups, her premise is similar to that of this thesis and she argues that the onscreen depictions in Irish and African American cinema are representative of racial identity and the marginality endured by the two groups.

As space is also considered in this thesis in relation to the development of Gaelic and African American identity, some theories examining the representation of fictional spaces were also included in this study. *Geocritical Explorations Space Place and Mapping in Literary and Cultural Studies* (2011) edited by Robert Tally and Bertrand Westphal's *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces* (2011) examine the literary space and develop a methodology for the representation of spaces in literature.

Michel Foucault's 'Of Other Spaces and Heterotopias' (1967) was also referred to in relation to the literary representation of the Gaeltacht and the African American ghetto as spaces of otherness. As this thesis argued, to an extent, that the spaces of the Gaeltacht and the ghetto were influential to the Gaelic and black American group identity, studies dealing with these places directly, were also useful to this work. Ó Cadhain's *An Ghaeilge Bheo: Destined to Pass* (2002) in the Irish context and Arnold Hirsch's study of the African American ghetto, *Making the Second Ghetto: race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (1983), give historical and sociological accounts of life from within these zones of marginalisation and this has, to an extent shaped the group identities of Irish speakers and African Americans.

While there exists a large volume of critical texts that explore the histories of the Irish and African Americans, as well as numerous texts that examine the representations of identity in their respective literature, there are few works that examine the connection that exists between the two groups. The work of Fulmer, Pramaggiore, Ignatiev and *The Black and Green Atlantic* bridge the gap in critical studies that examines the relationship between both traditions. Like this thesis, the work of Fulmer, Pramaggiore and the essays in The Black and Green Atlantic argue for a connection between artistic representations of group identity based, on their similar experiences of racialization and the oppression of language and cultural expression in both traditions. The methodological framework outlined in imagological studies such as that of Leerssen's *Mere Irish and Fíor Ghael* are useful to studies, such as this, in linking the marginalised literature of Irish language and African American writers based upon how the groups have, historically, been perceived. This study is unique because, unlike the latterly mentioned critics and scholars, it explores a connection between Irish language writers, as opposed to Irish writers working in English. This thesis opens up the dialogue for future criticism of Gaelic literature and its relationship to that of African American writers, particularly in relation to the study of group images.

Chapter 2 - How Black sees Green and Green sees Black: The historic connection between the Gaelic and African American auto-images

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, it is not the intention of this thesis to argue that the experiences of Irish speakers and African Americans have been identical, that their experiences of subjugation are indistinguishable or, indeed, tied to each other. Neither does this thesis propose to argue that their fates haven been bound together historically. The purpose of this work is to offer a comparative analysis of the auto- and hetero-images, relating to both groups, as represented and recreated in Irish language and African American fiction. Through the examination of these images in the respective literatures, this thesis will assert that a connection does exist between the two groups based, on the one hand, upon how they represent themselves in literary texts and, on the other, how, at various points historically, they identified with each other. This work will also briefly explore the geographical implications for the literary production and reception for both groups and how space plays an important role in shaping group images. To do so, it is imperative to consider the historical factors that predicated the groups' respective identities, rather than give in-depth histories of Ireland and the United States. The specific aspects highlighted here seek to provide a background for the two literary traditions being discussed and to aid in illuminating how they became marginalised.

At this point, it is also important to underline that there are similarities between the groups that stem from historical experience, an experience that helps to contextualise the literature produced by various writers, and that this is one of the many points of comparison between the groups, thus validating the study of these groups side by side. Similar experiences of colonialism will be examined, including the suppression of religious beliefs, language and culture in both groups. The location of oppression will also be discussed and its impact on the identities of Irish speakers and African Americans. This will encompass a study of how Gaeltachtaí, in Ireland,

and African-American ghettos in the United States have impacted upon the landscape of these countries, leading to the suggestion that language, literature and cultural identity can make an impression upon a country's political geography and boundaries. This chapter will also outline how these two groups interacted with each other and acknowledged their similar experiences of cultural oppression. The groups' separate experiences of slavery and the 'racial' oppression endured by both Irish and blacks in the United States is also critical in asserting that a connection existed between them. Finally, in this chapter, the cultural, particularly literary similarities between the groups will be delineated, and these will be discussed in relation to the texts and authors selected.

2.1 The Origins of the Irish auto- and hetero-images

For centuries, Gaelic speakers have existed outside of mainstream Irish life and have been confined to small, rural communities along the western coast. For various reasons, as will be outlined in this chapter, the confinement of native speakers to certain areas, resulted in the marginalisation of the language and its associated culture, particularly in the 17th century and the advent of Cromwellian settlements and the Penal Laws. While Ireland experienced various waves of invasions from the 8th century onwards, the subsequent English conquering of the island had the most significant impact upon life on the island, culture and, especially, the language.[1] Up until the 14th century, the Norman settlers embraced all aspects of Irish culture, adopting the native tongue, cultural pursuits and inter-marriage, resulting in a, relatively, affable arrangement between the coloniser and the colonised. However, this came to an end with the arrival of the Duke of Clarence, who brought about an end to this assimilation with the signing into law of the Statutes of Kilkenny in November 1366.

Lionel of Antwerp, 1st Duke of Clarence, the son of King Edward III, had wanted to have a lasting legacy on the island of Ireland and, if not to bring an end to

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[1] Ireland experienced invasion, for the first time, in 795 AD and this had an effect upon the language of the country. This is noted by David Greene in his essay 'Irish as a Vernacular Before the Norman Invasion' and Green notes that 'The classical period of Old Irish was comparatively short, for in 795 the Viking raids began and soon the monasteries were being plundered and burned and many scholars were fleeing abroad.' (Greene, 1969, p. 18)

Irish customs, then to enforce English ones within the Pale and the surrounding counties, as well as English strongholds in Ulster. In his study of the 1st Duke of Clarence, Edmund Curtis (1918) describes the Duke's arrival to Ireland at length and the efforts undertaken to maintain English rule over the island. On the first of July 1361 'Lionel's commission as Lord Lieutenant was signed and proclamation was made that all crown lands, occupied by the Irish and all domains of non-residents were to be seized and granted to English subjects who would dwell upon them.' (Curtis, 1918, p. 66) The Duke of Clarence and his army arrived in Ireland in 1361 and set about a campaign to enact the proclamation to seize all crown lands occupied by the Irish. Curtis notes that Lionel's difficulties engaging with the existing Anglo-Irish population, a force that, according to Curtis, 'was probably reluctant to make war on the native race' (1918, p. 67) initially made his task a difficult one. However, after some successes, Lionel was compelled to return to Ireland from England and to summon the Parliament at Kilkenny after 'the dissensions of colonists and English born, the steady advance of the Irish, and other questions, made a general review of the state of Ireland necessary.' (Ibid., p. 69)[2] The result of that summons was the enactment of the Statutes of Kilkenny; an event that categorically set out, in no uncertain terms, the superiority of the English colonisers. The enactments stated that:

> Alliances by marriage, gossipred or fostering between English and Irish are forbidden. All Englishmen, and Irish living among them, must speak English, use English surnames derived from towns, trades, or colours, and follow English customs. The Brehon law, or that compound of Brehon and feudal law called March law, is not to be used by the English. Irishmen are not to be admitted into cathedrals, benefices, or religious houses. If any of the English, or Irish among the English, use the Irish language, he shall be attainted, and his lands go to his lord, until he under take to adopt and use English. The English are not to entertain or make gifts to Irish minstrels, rimers or storytellers. In order to make a joint resistance to the Irish, parleys or treatises with them must be made in common, and only by legal permission. The

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[2] In his study of Lionel of Antwerp, Curtis notes that 'Lionel personally fulfilled all the duties of his office. He lived much in Dublin, tried to make it a more worthy capital, and held those tourneys, sports and games that which were so loved by the chivalric class. The castles of Carlow, Trim, Athlone, Dublin, Balymohan were re-fortified.' (Curtis, 1918, p. 69)

colonists are to forsake hurleys and quoits and learn the use of the bow. There is to be but one peace and one war throughout the whole of the King's land of Ireland. (Ibid., p. 69)

Within the list of enactments, the Irish were dubbed 'Irish dogs' (Ibid., p. 70), signalling a distinct negative change in perception of the Irish at that time. In his article, Curtis writes that while the intent behind the Statutes of Kilkenny may not have been to declare war on the Gaelic natives, the enactments were intended to uphold and enforce English customs, laws and, importantly, the language.[3] However, despite the Duke of Clarence's insistence the Statutes were largely ignored and when they were re-enacted in 1494, the clause relating to the Irish language was dropped.[4]

Although the Statutes of Kilkenny were unsuccessful in enforcing English customs, they were significant as being representative of an intent to anglicise the island of Ireland.[5] For the colonisers, it was paramount that the Gaelic natives be assimilated into English culture, or at the very least, not to culturally corrupt English settlers to the island. The confiscation of lands based on language was also significant as, for the first time the landscape of the island was officially dictated by language. The Statutes also established a clear dichotomy between the coloniser and the colonised through the enforcement of English customs. In *A New History of Ireland II*, F.X. Martin writes of the division that prevailed on the island, signifying the ultimate failure of the endeavour to unite the English colonisers and their Irish subjects:

Instead of fusion, there came division. A recent authority has observed that 'the uncompleted and faltering nature of the conquest impeded the acceptance of an ethos of assimilation and perpetuated an outlook of confrontation. The English settlers in Ireland retained their links with England and paraded and exploited their Englishness as a badge of their uncertain superiority. The 'faithful English' opposed the 'Irish enemies'. (Martin, 1993, p. lvi)

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[3] See Curtis, 1918, p. 70.

[4] Curtis notes this amendment in his article, in relation to the dropping of the clauses relating to the Irish language and the Irish style of method of riding horse. (Ibid., p. 72)

[5] While the Statutes signalled a shift in how the Irish were perceived, 'The Gaelic polity had been shaken but not shattered. The authority of the English King, the lord of Ireland, exercised through his administrations at Dublin, never extended over the whole island.' (Martin, 1993, p. lx) The Irish proved a difficult group to subdue and this notion would later be popularised by Davis, who believed that the group could not be civilised.

This impacted upon the perception of the Irish and, although the enactments failed to have any real effect on the customs and traditions practiced on the island, the lack of compliance by the Irish (and some English settlers) would inform perceptions of the group in later years and, crucially, establish a difference between the Irish and the English. The native Irish population was dubbed 'the mere Irish' and were denied citizenship and protection under English law. Towards the end of the 14th century, they were also identified as 'the King's Irish Enemies'. This hostility created a two-tiered system on the island based upon the discrimination of the Irish. In 'The Anglo-Irish colony under strain, 1327-99', J. A. Watt describes at length how the Irish were perceived by the English colonisers and outlines the corrupting influence the group was believed to have had upon English settlers. Watt argues that the clauses in the Statutes of Kilkenny relating to language were intended to put an end to 'the phenomenon of Anglo-Irish colonists degenerating into Gaelic ways' (Watt, 1993, p. 387). The belief that the Irish possessed the power to corrupt their Anglo-Irish counterparts suggests that they were viewed as primitive. As Watt confirms:

> It was the use of Irish that was now identified as the hall-mark of degeneracy and on this was blamed the decline of the colony; 'through the use of this language our plains people [populous camperstris] of English stock [genus] have become for the most part Irish, to the manifest decline of our authority in the land of Ireland.' It was therefore forbidden, under pain of losing English liberty (that is, having only the status of the Gaelic Irish at English law) for anyone of English stock to speak Irish to another person of English stock. (Watt, 1993, p. 387)

In order to effectively discriminate against the Irish, it was necessary to create a difference between them and the British; a difference that would strip the Irish of dignity, subsequently fostering an unflattering and dastardly group image. Language was believed to be one of the ways in which the Irish and English could be viewed as distinct from one another. The other distinguishing feature between the two would be religion and this became most apparent in the 17th century.

In the 17th century, renewed efforts were made to attempt to fortify English colonial rule on the island. Unlike previous attempts, the Cromwellian campaign

would prove successful in curbing the influence of the Gaels over the Anglo-Irish and new settlers. While the military tactics of the English army were far superior than during previous attempts and the political policies more effectively geared towards tighter colonial control, it was the change in attitude towards the Irish that played a significant role in the control of the island. English attitudes at that time soured greatly towards the Irish and the anti-Irish propaganda of writers such as John Temple and Edmund Spenser, in particular, became popular. Published in 1633 (though written in 1596) Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* 'reflected attitudes held by those involved in the conquest of Ireland from the I560s and became a standard model for challenging royal policy in Ireland.' (Noonan, 1998, p. 153) While Spenser was more critical of failed English policies related to the control of the island than of the natives themselves, he nonetheless felt that the Irish were a people 'altogether stubborn and untamed.'(Spenser, 1633, p. 4) In her article, Kathleen Noonan discusses the popular view at the time in relation to Ireland and states that 'The mere Irish as opposed to the Old English, are portrayed as having since ancient times, possessed the elements necessary for civility but as having fallen short because of some unfortunate customs such as gavelkind and tanistry which work against culture and civilisation.' (Ibid., p. 154) In *Mere Irish and Fíor Ghael*, Joep Leerssen also suggests that pamphlets such as Spenser's had a common tendency 'to deny civility, be it in religious or in socio-cultural terms, to the natives – to the point of accusing them of cannibalism or incest or equating them with animals. As the sixteenth century passed, the charge of moral/religious laxity gradually merged into a religious polarity between Protestantism (English, moral, civilized) and Catholicism (Irish immoral, benighted). (2005, p. 39) Spenser and others like him publishing pamphlets on the Irish contributed to the growing stereotype of the Irish as ungodly beings.

According to Noonan, while Spenser's view of the Irish was unflattering, it was the work of John Temple that did the most damage to the hetero-image of Ireland and the Irish. Temple's *The Irish Rebellion* essentially dismissed Spenser's view in relation to England's failed policies in maintaining control over Ireland and, instead, placed the blame squarely upon an Irish population that was savage and treacherous. Temple upheld the belief that the failure of the English was 'not the fault of a rapacious and selfish gentry who refused to be agents of good government in Ireland, but resulted in the natural treachery of the Irish rooter in their racial identity.' (Noonan, 1998, p. 158) During the 1600s, particularly after the failed Irish rebellion of

1641, pamphlets were circulated decrying the viciousness and savagery of the murdering Irish, and Temple was particularly prominent during this era, writing of gruesome events and accounts of the Irish as barbarous. (Noonan, 1998, p. 161) Crucially, Temple's depiction of the Irish was so popular that his portrayal of the 'mongrel race', as Noonan comments, 'provided the vocabulary for an emerging Irish stereotype. Over the next two and a half centuries Temple's image of the Irish remained the dominant one.' (Noonan, 1998, p. 168) While Temple's portrayal of the Irish is notable for its strength of feeling, his work was also significant because it was one of the first to develop the stereotype of the Irish to include religion as one of the main distinguishing factors. In his investigation into the evolution of English stereotypes of Ireland, Leerssen acknowledges that 'Sir John Temple contributed his share with his vehemently anti-Catholic history in *The Irish Rebellion of 1647*-one of the few lengthier works on the subject in this period, and repeatedly reissued.' (2005, p. 58) The views expressed by Temple depicted the Irish as barbarous and Leerssen notes that this kind of 'extreme anti-Catholic point of view' would later help 'to fan anti-Catholic prejudice and political paranoia into renewed frenzy'. (2005, p. 58) In *Mere Irish and Fíor Ghael*, Leerssen also examines the hetero-images of Ireland that came after Temple and the stereotypes of the Irish popularised at the time. The depictions of the Irish as anti-English in their attitudes developed oppositional relationship between the two nations; one that Leerssen argues permeated through the literature of both groups.

As the Irish were to be considered an inferior, savage race, the treatment meted out to them seemed fitting and the brutality of the Cromwellian campaign was deemed an unfortunate necessity when dealing with such a troublesome group. The events that preceded the Cromwellian settlements were tumultuous, and the attempts by the Irish and Anglo-Irish to maintain their lands and religion were largely unsuccessful. In 1641, 59% of Ireland was owned by Catholics, but by 1660, this figure had dropped to 22%. The location of Catholic landownership had been countrywide save for Ulster and parts of Wicklow and Kilkenny. (Barnard, 1973, p. 32) However, this changed following the efforts of both Henry and Oliver Cromwell as their campaign of confiscation and transplantation meant that the bulk of Irish Catholic holdings 'was in the inhospitable western province of Connaught.' (Barnard, 1973, p. 32) The Cromwellian campaign was unprecedented and between 1649 and 1650, it 'put an end to nearly ten years of anarchy and reduced all the warring elements to submission.'

(Moody, 1991, p. xliv) The shift that occurred in Irish society was devastating and had long-lasting effects. Those pushed towards the western coast suffered economically, culturally and socially for many years thereafter. Areas in which colonial culture was most popular thrived because of the modern farming methods, whilst the exiled populations in Connacht endured great hardship.[6] In 1691, English rule was strengthened even further when more land was confiscated from the Catholics, effectively ensuring the whole and complete conquest of the island of Ireland by the English.

Of course, the Cromwellian campaign was a success in that it cemented England's control over Ireland, but it was also successful because of the manner in which the 'King's Irish enemy' was viewed thereafter. The lengths the English campaign went to in order to secure the conquest of the island was believed to be indicative of the inability of the Irish to govern themselves and also of their ignorance through their rejection of the colonial civilisation. The image of the Irish as backward and savage would prevail for centuries following the achievements of the 1600s, and this established a bitter divide between how the group viewed itself and how it, in turn, was viewed by the new colonial settlers and English society. Despite the rank poverty and injustices of the confiscation of lands and transplantation, the Irish Catholics banished to Connacht were determined to retain that which was not so easily taken: their cultural identity. In *A New History of Ireland III*, T. W. Moody acknowledges those forced westwards were determined to maintain their heritage:

> At the end of the seventeenth century the former [Gaels], mainly Irish-speaking and wholly Catholic, was strongest on the lower levels of society and in the infertile regions of the western seaboard. Rural, archaic and economically backward, stamped with defeat and loss of its leaders, it was nevertheless proud of its ancient lineage and the cultural heritage preserved in its literature and its oral tradition, as sustained and popularised by its poets and storytellers. Highly localised, it was also highly conscious of its Irish identity. (Moody, 1991, p. lii)

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[6] Moody notes the difference between the rest of the country and Connacht, stating: 'The most populous and prosperous regions were those in which the colonial culture was strongest and where tillage was a distinctive part of the farming patter, as in the counties of the former Pale, while the opposite extreme was exemplified by west Connacht.' (Moody, 1991, p. xlviii)

Despite being under English colonial control, the 'mere Irish' of Connacht enjoyed none of the benefits experienced by the rest of the island. However, in the areas they populated, the Irish language was the vernacular and Catholicism was the practiced religion, regardless of their respective illegal statuses. Today, the majority of Gaeltacht towns and villages to be found along the western coast are vestiges of the Cromwellian campaign. This indicates that the Irish landscape has, for centuries, been shaped by politics, but also language – more of which shall be discussed later. The unwillingness of the Irish to relinquish their grip on their language and culture aided in the racialization of the group. That they would reject the civilizing tongue of the English confirmed Spenser and Temple's negative perceptions of the group in the minds of the English colonisers and, later, after the birth of the Union in 1707, with British society.

2.2   The Dark Irish: The Racialization of the Irish and the English Hetero-Image

As will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, the easiest way by which African-Americans could be identified as different to white, European Americans was by racializing the colour of their skin, suggesting that blacks were totally different, in every aspect, even genetically, to whites. The difference in appearance enabled the white population in its de-humanising of the African American as the group's outwardly bodily features were described in beastly terms. While the Irish did not possess any obvious, physical difference from the English, difference was fabricated, and the notion that the Irish were of a separate race was popularised. Frequently, the Irish were depicted akin to Africans in popular British culture, and this was increasingly widespread during the 19th century; partly owing to the expansion of the British Empire on the African Continent. Political cartoons, such as *Punch* in Britain and *Puck* in America often published cartoons of the Irish, depicted similarly to their colonial counterparts. In *Fin de Siècle na Gaeilge*, Brian Ó Conchubhair discusses at length the racialization of the Irish in Victorian Britain, stating:

Ba ghné rialta in irisí na linne gurbh ionann na hÉireannaigh agus na ciníocha gorma agus an goraille. Thrácht an t-iriseoir Beilgeach Gustave de Molinari sa bhliain 1880 ar léargas na Sasanach ar an Éireannach mar 'une variété de nègres blancs. [It was a typical aspect of magazines at the time to portray the Irish and black races as gorillas. In 1880, the Belgian journalist Gustave de Molinari referred to the Irish as a variety of white Negroes in relation to the English insight of Ireland.] (Ó Conchubhair, 2009, p. 76)

The Irish were thought to be a savage, animalistic race, incapable of self-governance and, as explained by Sinéad Garrigan Mattar, 'The Irish were seen, as were other primitive people, not as an evolving national community but as a stark case of arrested development; a belated society stuck in a timewarp that made them human chimpanzees.' (2004, p. 11) The language also provided the British coloniser with a distinguishing factor, needed to aid in the racialization of the Irish; that the language was thought of as a degenerating influence for English settlers to the island was indicative of its being a marker of Irish savagery. The use of the language added to notion that the Irish were a babbling, incomprehensible people, helped to support the misguided notion that they were a different, sub-human, species to the British.[7] In William Hope Hodgson's *House on the Borderland* (1908) the Irish are viewed by visiting Englishmen as oddities. They appear to be grotesque and are even referred to as 'jabbering'.[8] Hodgson's tale is set in the west of Ireland and is populated by grotesque monsters and inarticulate locals. Even the title of the story reveals the author's views about the west of the country; to him, and many others, it is merely a borderland, rather than a place in its own right. The use of the term also suggests that the place and its inhabitants exist on the periphery. This idea was prevalent in colonial thought. That the language was a distinguishing feature of the Irish population's degeneracy as a race was not only a belief held by the English, but also by the Irish

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[7] In *Fin de Siècle na Gaeilge*, Ó Conchubhair writes of how language was referred to as a racial signifier of the Irish. From the examples he lists, Ó Conchubhair illustrates how both English and Irish became intermingled and how this added to the perception that the Irish were an unrefined and uncultured race: 'Tráchtar ar an teanga i dtéarmaí na fola agus an chros-síolraithe sna tagairtí seo a leanas: "mongrel jargon" […]' [Anglo-Saxon jibberish, 'English, that bastard of a hundred dialects […].' (Ó Conchubhair, 2007, p. 87)
[8] Hodgson's portrayal of the Irish as babbling and incomprehensible is evident in the lines: 'Then the man turned to a comrade and said something rapidly in a language that I did not understand; and, at once, the whole crowd of them fell to jabbering in what, after a few moments, I guessed to be pure Irish.' (Hodgson, 1908, http://www.gutenberg.org/files/10002/10002-8.txt [Accessed on 31/10/13]

people themselves, particularly in the 1800s when the Irish language became unpopular and the population adopted the English language.

2.3   The Change in Perception and the Decline of Irish

Despite English colonial efforts, the majority of the country's population continued to speak Irish in the years following the Cromwellian Campaign and during the 18th century, the number of speakers actually increased. However, as the 19th century approached, the Irish language slowly began to fall out of favour with the Irish population. In her essay 'The decline of the Irish Language', Maureen Wall charts the gradual decline of the language and she contends that this began as the Irish strove to enter political life on the island. Wall asserts that the drive of the Irish toward political life has been overlooked as a factor and argues that:

> […] before the nineteenth century began the Irish language had been banished from parliament, from the courts of the upper levels of commercial life. By 1800 Irish had ceased to be the language habitually spoken in the homes of all those who had already achieved success in the world, or who aspired to improve or even maintain their position politically, socially or economically. (Wall, 1969, p. 82)

As a result, English was thought of as the language of progress and this, in turn, led to the belief that Irish was the language of the unsuccessful, poor and illiterate.[9]

By 1835, the number of speakers was estimated at four million. However, this number experienced a steep decline as a result of the cataclysmic events of the Famine. Wall notes that: 'It has been estimated that one and a half million people died during the Famine and between 1846 and 1851, a million emigrated. It is not unreasonable to assume that a great proportion of these were Irish speakers.' (Wall, 1969, p. 87) The loss of native speakers had a grave impact upon the language and the dire economic state in the country in the post-Famine years meant that emigration

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[9] Wall acknowledges the change in perception towards Irish speakers towards the end of the 18th century: 'By the end of the eighteenth century Irish had very definitely come to be associated with the poor and the illiterate.' (1969, p. 85)

continued, particularly in the 'districts which were predominantly Irish-speaking.' (Wall, 1969, p. 87) For many families in the country, speaking English was seen as advantageous, particularly when faced with the prospect of emigration. As a result, there was a significant change in perception of Gaelic by her own speakers. In *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (1995), Declan Kiberd writes of the drive amongst Irish parents for their children to learn "the language of progress", was symbolised in the use of a tally-stick. Kiberd describes the scene that took place in a Galway schoolhouse in the 19th century:

> The man called the child to him, said nothing, but drawing forth from its dress a little stick, commonly called a scoreen or tally, which was suspended by a string around the neck, put an additional notch in it with his penknife. Upon enquiring into the cause of their proceeding, we were told that it was done to prevent the child speaking Irish; for every time he attempted to do so, a new nick was put in his tally, and when these amounted to a certain number, summary punishment was inflicted on him by the schoolmaster. (Kiberd, 1995, p. 143)

Kiberd notes that the tally-stick was an entirely Irish invention suggesting that the impetus for change during the 19th century was a mostly Irish endeavour. The language became unfashionable and was considered socially backwards, particularly amongst a growing middle-class Catholic population. In the middle of the 18th century, the relaxing of the Penal Laws granted greater economic freedom to Irish Catholics. This economic freedom saw the adoption of many middle-class, English practices, including the language. Indeed, many Irish Catholics adopted the English language and used the language in order to engage in trade and various other professions.[10] They viewed the English language as a type of social currency that would buy amnesty from their association with the poorer, lower classes and subsequently end their connection to the hetero-image of the poor, incomprehensible,

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[10] It is generally accepted that Irish Catholicism was influential in the decline of the language, particularly towards the close of the 18th century. Even though Irish had been the vernacular of Catholics in the years following the Cromwellian Campaign, the language did not survive as the language of Irish Catholics. (Garvin, 2005, p. 78) Wall notes that, after 1782, English was established as the language of the Catholic higher education when Catholic colleges could be opened legally. (Wall, 1969, p. 85)

Irish colonial subject. From then onwards, Irish was considered the language of the poor and this perception remained for many years. By the end of the 19th century, the number of Irish speakers had dropped to 680,000 and this, for many, seemed like the beginning of the end for the language.

2.4   The Gaelic Cultural Revival and Irish language literature

As the 19th century drew to a close, there was another change in how the native tongue was perceived by the Irish. With the near decimation of the language and the number of speakers reduced to a few hundred thousands, mostly along the west coast, interest in restoring the language became paramount to the nation's cultural identity. The Gaelic Cultural Revival was a nationwide, organised effort to reinvigorate Irish culture and preserve and revive dwindling or vanished traditions. At the time, a concerted effort was made to thwart the loss of Irish speakers and to prevent a calamitous outcome for the language and her literature. The founding of *Conradh na Gaeilge* in 1893 signalled a significant change in how the language and her speakers were perceived by Irish society. The reduction of speakers to a mere 680,000 awakened many to the possibility of a great cultural loss. *Conradh na Gaeilge* (The Gaelic League) was established in the hope of restoring one of the oldest and most longstanding vernaculars north of the Alps. The desire to maintain its status as a living language was great. By 1913, the League had become a mass movement and had over 100,000 members in 1,000 branches nationwide. Initially, the organisation was small-scale and devoid of political affiliations. In his history *Nationalist Revolutionaries in Ireland*, Tom Garvin notes that the League 'came out of a tradition of antiquarian research into Gaelic civilisation and was fundamentally similar to other nationalist movements in Europe dedicated to the rediscovery and perhaps revival of national pasts.' (Garvin, 2005, p. 79)

In its infancy, the League staunchly upheld its apolitical status to prevent an attack by the British government and to avoid the attentions of the police.[11] Initially,

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[11] Garvin attributes the League's success at avoiding detection to a lack of police interest and their underrating of the organisation's long-term political potential. He also notes that the League was successful because 'most of the League's branches around the country were run by 'officers and

the organisation was spurred on by prominent figures, particularly middle-class scholars and later, by many young political activists. Some of the revival's most prominent figures, such as Lady Gregory and Douglas Hyde were involved in the League's foundation and their participation heightened the profile of the organisation. Hyde, who would later become the Republic's first president, was elected as the league's president from its foundation up until 1915. The League offered free Irish classes and published material on Irish grammar and spelling. The founding of the league and her associated Irish language publications, notably *Fáinne an Lae* (1898) and *An Claidheamh Soluis* (1899) gave a voice and a public platform for the Irish speaker after generations of silence. The opportunity for Irish language writers and journalists to participate in a social dialogue during an era in which Irish society began reclaiming its national identity, helped to redefine the hetero-image of the Irish speaker as backwards and inarticulate. Because of the efforts of *Conradh na Gaeilge*, the language became a positive identifying factor and was viewed as a means of distinguishing the nation as separate from the British. In his essay 'The Gaelic Front Controversy: The Gaelic League's (Post Colonial) Crux', Brian Ó Conchubhair comments on the desire of Irish language writers to distance themselves, as much as possible, from English. Writing in reference to the debate that unfolded as to whether or not Irish texts should be published in the old Gaelic font, Ó Conchubhair notes the allure of its font for Irish language writers. Just as the spoken language sounded different to English:

> …the Gaelic font appeared different to the eye; both marked themselves as different, unique and un-English […]. This insistence on the Gaelic script as the written co-sign of the Irish language involves, not alone an assertion of a distinct Irish mode of thought and writing, but a formal rejection of the notion that English or any other linguistic system could successfully enclose or translate the Irish mode.' (*Irish University* 2003, p. 47)

Thus, the language grew in its importance as a signifier of Gaelic identity, subsequently altering the image of Irish speakers. The language that had once been

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secretaries who were largely National Teachers or Customs and Excise Officers', and as these men were forbidden by their terms of employment to engage in normal political activity, an openly political stance would have crippled the League at local level.' (Garvin, 2005, p. 80)

labelled as the backward and inelegant vernacular of the rural Irish speaker gained new significance in the urban sphere, particularly amongst those eager to annul the hetero-image colonial Britain had constructed.

As the language grew in its importance as the one of the main distinguishing factors between the Irish and the British, the language also grew to be associated with nationalist political activities. Many members of *Conradh na Gaeilge* were sympathetic to the cause of Irish nationalism and amongst the league's members were all of the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation. Increased political activities by the league and its members led to Douglas Hyde's stepping down from his role as president, signalling that the language movement had become synonymous with Republicanism. The language and her associated folklore were used to promote the nationalist cause and notable examples include the name of the Sinn Féin party and the adoption of the figure of Cú Chulainn as a nationalist symbol.[12] As Máirtín Ó Cadhain reminds us, speaking in relation to the 1916 Rising, 'Language and the gun became welded, not for the last time in our day.' (Ó Cadhain, 2002, p. 8) As the country moved from revival to rebellion and from rebellion to civil war, the language continued to be considered a feature of nationalism and Irishness, subsequently shaping the group image of Irish speakers. Following the years after the Civil War and the foundation of the Irish Free State, focus was directed, once again, onto the language. However, it is arguable that this time efforts were not focused on revitalising the national tongue for cultural purposes, rather the Irish language and culture were used as a crutch for the fledgling Irish Free State.

2.5   The Irish Free State and the Shackling of Free Literary Expression

At the beginning of the last century, *Conradh na Gaeilge*, recognising the need to create an Irish language readership to promote the language's literary status, published the majority of Irish language reading material. This was largely the case

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[12] Sinn Féin translates as 'we ourselves' or 'ourselves'. Cú Chulainn, the famous mythical figure from the Ulster Cycle was adopted as a symbol for both Nationalists and Unionists. As a figure from Irish mythology, Nationalists believe he was a perfect mascot, as did Unionists who viewed Cú Chulainn as an Ulsterman.

until the foundation of the Free State in 1922, after which the state took over the League's role. While the aims of *Conradh na Gaeilge* were never fully realised, in that Irish was never reinstated as the vernacular, the organisation was vital toward fostering a new, national interest in the preservation of the language and all that went with it. While Revivalists were concerned with the restoration of the Irish language as the spoken tongue, others noted the importance of literature and literary pursuits to any living, working language. For writers such as Pádraic Ó Conaire, Pádraig Pearse (1879-1916) and Thomas Flannery (1846-1916) it was essential that the language be a living one and representative of its speakers. The development of a literary consciousness in Irish language circles became the centre of many debates surrounding the language and often threatened to destroy already fragile relationships between revivalists.[13]

While the efforts of *Conradh na Gaeilge* were focused, primarily, on increasing the number of Irish speakers towards the end of the 19th century, attentions turned to developing a modern literature in the early 1900s. Revivalists and language enthusiasts were aware that English was the predominant medium through which the Irish nation expressed itself. This view is also acknowledged by Philip O'Leary when he notes that: 'Yeats, Synge, and later Joyce and O'Casey, were enjoying an international reputation and thereby validating English as a, if not the, legitimate voice of 'Irish' literature.' (O'Leary, 2004, p. 9) The success of these Anglo-Irish writers and others at the turn of the 20th century seemingly spurred creativity amongst Gaelic revivalists, and efforts to produce an alternative to English language literature became frenzied.

A debate exploded over issues facing Gaelic writers that was contentious at best, and at times bitter and personal. A proportion of revivalists were of the opinion that any literature intended to boost the profile of Irish language needed to be based wholly on '*caint na ndaoine*' (the language of the people). These revivalists believed that the language was best utilised in communicating rural life and telling tales by the fireside. Figures such as Douglas Hyde and an tAthair Peadar Ó Laoghaire (1839-1920) felt that Gaelic literature best served the language when it inspired the continuation of traditional Gaelic living and pursuits. Those intent on memorialising

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[13] One of the most prominent debates that took place in this period surrounded the introduction of the Roman alphabet. It was believed by some that the Roman alphabet would make the language more accessible to learners while others saw its introduction as a huge cultural loss.

this lifestyle and culture encouraged the re-telling of fireside tales in print format and advocated for a literature that captured the purity of rural Gaelic living. For these champions of Irish identity, literature was not a form of high art; rather it was a pragmatic tool which, when used effectively could 'repair national pride, protect and extend the language and function as a pedagogical aid for language learners of all ages, particularly, of course, the young.' (O'Leary, 2004, p. 10) Thus, for some, any literature produced would have to best portray the language rather than seek some sort of literary truth. As a result, simple pieces of prose, plays and children's stories became popular and were hailed as fine examples of literature that illustrated the richness of the language. While possibly well intentioned, this ethos was considered calamitous by critics like Pearse, and any work published in such a spirit was devoid of any real, literary worth. In fact, one reviewer in *Irisleabhar Muighe Nuadhat* even went so far as to say:

> Hitherto we would rarely get a novel in Irish that was worth calling a novel at all. At the very least, it must be admitted that there is a bit of childishness attached to some of them. They would not be read for the story in them, but only for the Irish to be learned from them. Hitherto the majority of the people did not care what was in a book if there was sweet and tasty pure Irish in it. (O'Leary, 2004, p. 104)

From this comment, it is clear that a real and legitimate fear surrounded the direction of Irish language literature in the years following the establishment of the Free State. Work published purely to appeal to the Irish learner resulted in a dearth of literary writers and, subsequently, literary readers. Pádraic Ó Conaire famously dubbed this malaise as the problem of 'an páisde dhá sgór bliadhan' (the forty year-old child) and he wrote of the 'tyranny of the schoolchild' (Ibid., p. 12).[14] For Ó Conaire, 'the schoolchild', or rather the texts published in the interest of language learning, had the potential to upend the advances made during the revival. Philip O'Leary discusses this issue extensively and observes: 'With a steady demand for Gaelic school texts and no real market for anything else in the language, it was understandable that publishers were reluctant to produce anything inappropriate for educational purposes.' (O'Leary, 2004, p. 13) For the Free State government, any

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[14]O'Leary quotes from an article by Ó Conaire in *Fáinne an Lae,* 12/05/1923

material that could potentially damage the image of Gaelic Ireland, texts that dealt with issues like depression, were considered inappropriate for the instruction of children. With the proliferation of simplistic publications, there was a fear that, even if something of literary worth were to be published, a readership for such work would not exist. In February 1930, the editor of *An Reult* (The Star), an Irish-language newspaper, surmised that:

> Is beag duine aca atá i dtaitighe leabhar Gaedhilge. Ar an ádhbhar san is saothar dochamhlach leo ceann aca do léigheamh. Is ar éigin atá céad duin in Éirinn go bhfuil sé 'na gcumas píosa Gaedhilge do léigheamh chomh tapaidh agus a léighfidís píosa Béarla… Is amhlaidh atá na daoine ag tabhairt faillighe ins an beagán leabahr Gaedhilge atá ann toisc go bhfágann a ghanna-chúise agus táid gach aoinne gan taithighe aige ar a leithéidí do léigheamh. [Few people have experience of Irish books. Indeed, it is a difficult task to read one. There are about 100 people in Ireland who have the ability to read a piece of Irish as quickly as a piece of English. It's no wonder people neglect the few books there are in Irish as their scarcity means that people are not used to reading them.] (O'Leary, 2004)

Even though the Free State made efforts to promote and encourage the language by making Irish a compulsory subject in all state schools, the state failed to make such a commitment to the development of a new, literary tradition. The large volume of texts published for language learning meant that a substantial portion of the literature available was superficial and failed to engage a literary audience. The Free State's agenda to uphold an idealised view of the language and Irish speakers in order to provide a source of appropriate material for the classroom came at a cost to a literature that worked towards giving a realistic depiction of life for the Gael.

2.6   Language and Irish National Identity

In the years that succeeded the Civil War (June 1922-May 1923), the need to re-unite the country and re-establish a sense of national cohesion was immense. For the victors of the Civil War, the Irish language was one means by which this could be achieved. It was felt that nationally, the language would bolster a sense of united

identity and internationally, an Irish-speaking state would show to the rest of the world that Ireland was capable of nurturing its own culture independently of the outside influences of other nations, particularly England and the United States. New measures were put in place to promote language learning, notably the re-introduction of the Irish language to the school system following over a century-long hiatus from national schools and the establishment of a new, national body responsible for the promotion of Irish language literature. An additional tactic employed was to preserve the areas in which the language was spoken daily, resulting in the creation of our modern-day Gaeltachtaí; a point which will be discussed in greater detail later. The emphasis placed on the relationship between schools and the language through the introduction of compulsory Irish had the effect of limiting the language to primary school learners, which in turn fed the problem discussed above in relation to the growth of a literary illiterate Irish-speaking readership. As outlined by Philip O'Leary: 'Writers in particular […] had a good deal to worry and complain about as their work was manipulated and marginalised to serve non-literary agendas, a process that resulted in the publication of far too much of the "trivial, worthless foolishness" Mac Liammóir had warned against in 1922.' (O'Leary, 2004, p. 21) Another, underlying factor was the decline in numbers interested in clubs such as *Conradh na Gaeilge* as it was generally felt that the government's intervention and efforts to restore the language would suffice.[15]

As mentioned earlier, the native tongue was seen as the last bastion of Irishness that would help bolster a new image of Ireland in the first half of the 20th century. Desperate to promote a unified national identity following the State's bloody conception, the successive governments of the Irish Free State, and later the Republic, championed the image of rural, Irish-speaking Catholics as the ideal for the entire nation.[16] The efforts of the state to shepherd the Irish people towards the belief that purity and the life of the rural Gael were to be admired, protected and replicated across the nation were greatly aided by strict censorship laws and guidance from members of the clergy of the Catholic Church. The relationship between Church and State was longstanding and affected most, if not all, areas of Irish society in the

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[15] An example of this can be gleaned from the decline in branch numbers across the country. In 1922, there were over 800 branches of *Conradh na Gaeilge* and that number fell dramatically to 139 within two years.

[16] The Irish Free State technically ended in December 1937 following the adoption of a new, Irish constitution voted for by the Irish people.

middle of the last century. The alliance between the Church and successive Irish governments meant that to be pure and Catholic were two of the main qualities demanded of the Irish public. During this time, the rural Gael was perceived as the ideal Irish citizen. Crucially, the language movement and the Catholic were linked. Tom Garvin notes the influence of Eoin MacNeill (1867-1945) in building the relationship between the Church and the Gaelic League and subsequently, the establishment of a long-lasting connection between Catholicism and Irish.[17] Garvin writes: 'As early as 1891, Mac Neill urged in the pages of the Irish Ecclesiastical Record that the Catholic priesthood take up the cause of the language on the grounds that it would help preserve an Irish identity and would defend Irish Catholicism against the inroads of English culture.' (Garvin, 2005, p. 81) This was a decisive moment in the perception of the language as Irish and her speakers were henceforth perceived as Catholic as well as Gaelic. Quoting Michael Cardinal Logue, Ó Conchubhair makes the case that language and religion become synonymous with Gaelic identity: 'It is a well-known fact that nowhere in Ireland is faith stronger, religious feeling deeper, innocence of life more conspicuous, than in those districts where the Irish language still lingers and is lovingly cherished […]. Wherever the Irish Language is spoken, the people are pure and innocent.' (Ó Conchubhair, 2007, p. 35) By living within the language, the Gael was advocated as the best example of the Irish citizenry because of the implicit suggestion of their upholding of the Catholic faith. Thus, the Irish language became crucial to upholding the idealised image of Irish identity, despite the fact that government policy failed to increase the number of speakers, leaving the majority of citizens monolingual.

2.7 The Great Gaeltacht Lie: The Space of Irish Nationalism, Poverty and Propaganda

As the majority of the nation did not communicate daily in Irish, those areas in which people did so were seen as heterotopias. The 'Gaeltacht' became a safe haven for Irish national identity, even though these areas were not officially recognised as

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[17] Mac Neill was founder of the Irish Volunteers and a key figure during the Gaelic Revival. His influence over the Catholic Church was significant and Garvin describes him as having a 'a reputation, unlike many patriots of being trusted by the Catholic clergy.' (Garvin, 2005, p. 81)

Gaeltachtaí until the then government, in 1925, set up 'a Commission of Inquiry into the Preservation of the Gaeltacht', in which the terms of reference stipulated that: 'the Irish people as a body recognise it to be a national duty, encumbered on their representatives and their government as on themselves, to uphold and foster the Irish language, the central and most distinctive factor of the tradition which is Irish nationality.' (Gaeltacht Commission, 1925, p. 7) Once again, however, the Free State would fail in its initiative to bolster the status of the Irish language beyond anything other than a secondary tongue. Dotted along the western seaboard, the majority of Gaeltacht zones were severely underprivileged and suffered from a dearth of economic support. While this reality was outlined in the report, the fact was played down by State-supported propaganda that glorified the frugal and sparse lifestyle endured by the rural Gael.[18] In 1927, for example, one contributor to *Gearrbhaile*, Séamus Mac Cuaige, wrote:

> Cé go bhfuil an chuid is mó de na daoinibh bocht sa gceantar sin, ní bhíonn gruaim ná buaidheart ariamh ortha…Sé mo bharamhail nach bhfuil dream daoine faoi luighe na gréine atá chomh sona sonassach leis na daoinibh bochta sin. [Even though the people in that area are poor, they are not depressed or worried ever. It is my opinion that there is not a group under the sun as happy as those poor people.] (O'Leary, 2004, p. 576)

Mac Cuaige's view of the Gaeltacht and its inhabitants is, at best naïve, but also ignorant of the realities that existed in these regions. His summary lacks insight into the daily struggles of Gaeltacht inhabitants and serves only to showcase the misguided, but often propagated identity of the ideal Irish citizen. Thus, as the Irish nation and her governments continued to assert its self-conceived notion of identity upon its people, the Gaeltacht and its inhabitants remained little more than tokens of 'Irishness'.

As the Irish literary debate moved on from the era of cultural revivalism, it seemed as though the new imaginings of the Gaelic auto-image were to be based on the false premise of the romanticised ideal of life in the Gaeltacht. From the first half

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[18] The report noted that 'These districts are known to coincide more or less with areas of rural Ireland which present an economic problem of the greatest difficulty and complexity.' (Gaeltacht Commission, 1925, p. 7)

of the 20th century, numerous commentaries were published on life in the Gaeltacht and the conditions that were endured there.[19] The few that account for the rank poverty and lack of resources that existed in these marginalised areas are patronising and give overly simplistic views, suggesting that those living in the Gaeltacht enjoyed life as it was and wanted nothing more. In *Gaelic Prose in the Irish Free State*, O'Leary quotes a story by the writer Mícheál Ó Gríobhtha in which the following statement is found: 'The poverty in this district is like a fortification around you to keep the evil of the world far away from you. Virtue is still here; the occasion of sin is not.' (O'Leary, 2004, p. 94) While the rest of the country was encouraged to view Irish speakers as bastions of 'Irishness', and the saviours of Irish cultural identity, Irish speakers, themselves, did not view their position so positively. The notion that Gaeltacht life was ideal, blissful and pure and the rhetoric surrounding it failed to take into consideration the plight of those living in these areas. Frugality and social isolation were championed as a means of saving the Irish language with little regard for those existing under such conditions. Not only were Gaeltachtaí the homesteads of cosy firesides, the Irish language and good Catholics, they were also economically deprived sites that isolated Irish speakers from the rest of Irish society. The dearth of employment and enterprise opportunities, difficulties in accessing public services, lacking healthcare and education were daily realities for those in the Gaeltachtaí that were rarely, if ever, mentioned by those promoting the Gaeltacht as a safe haven for the Irish language, culture and nationality as a whole. However, the disparity was addressed by a number of prominent Gaeltacht sons and daughters and they forced the realities of life beyond the margins of Irish society into mainstream media.

Writers such as Máirtín Ó Cadhain and Seosamh Mac Grianna forced the issues of the Gaeltacht upon the wider Irish audience and they wrote countless letters, articles and pamphlets on the issue, raising awareness of the dreadful poverty that trapped Gaeltacht inhabitants in a perpetual cycle of second-class citizenship. Máirtín Ó Cadhain was, one of the most active advocators of Gaeltacht rights. In *The Language Movement – A Movement Astray*, he wrote that 'the Gaelic population in the Gaeltachts make up a class that is the most abandoned and the most oppressed of the

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[19] The most noteworthy examples include the autobiographical works of Tomás Ó Criomhthain (1856-1937), Peig Sayers (1873-1958) and Muiris Ó Súilleabháin (1904-1950). In *An t-Oileánach* (1929), *Peig* (1936) and *Fiche Bliain ag Fás* (1933), respectively, detailed accounts of rural Gaeltacht life unfold, with poverty and the hardships associated with this life common features in all three texts.

Irish people.' (Ó Cadhain, 1970, p. 12) He was instrumental in the foundation of the first pressure group for the Gaeltacht, 'Muintir na Gaeltachta', founded between 1933 and 1934. The movement was entirely different in ethos from previous attempts to reinvigorate the language in that the organisation was run by Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht, themselves.[20] The group gained recognition outside of the Gaeltacht and was supported by many national newspapers such as *An tÉireannach*. The group campaigned for an end to poverty in the Gaeltacht and demanded that, at the very least, services in Irish should be made available to those living in the Gaeltachtaí. This basic demand, they argued, would feed into other goals such as providing employment in Gaeltacht towns and villages and that this, in turn, would keep populations strong in the remotest parts of Irish society.

The campaigning and efforts of *Muintir na Gaeltachta* resulted in gaining the attentions of the government and, as a result, officials were deployed to report on Gaeltacht affairs. However, government efforts were essentially thwarted, and the dated and outmoded approaches that were taken to tackle the issue failed to assuage the demands of the Gaeltacht pressure group. Amongst the problems that existed was the assigning of grants to families within Gaeltacht areas. This effort, as noted by Máirtín Ó Cadhain in *An Ghaeilge Bheo: Destined to Pass* was particularly flawed as corruption amongst officials was rife. In 'Cuid 2' (part 2) of the work, Ó Cadhain talks of the loopholes in the scheme that saw government funds flow in the wrong direction. He talks of cronyism and shrewdness of those who managed to divert monies away from the cause, for their own means.[21] Ó Cadhain, while a notoriously cantankerous and outspoken advocate of Gaeltacht rights, was not merely sounding off in *An Ghaeilge Bheo*; others shared his disappointment and lack of progress despite the promises made to aid Gaeltacht districts and help the people that were championed as protectors of the Irish language and, subsequently, of Irish identity.

In 1969, Ó Cadhain and others founded the *Coiste Cearta Sibialta na Gaeilge* [Gaeltacht Civil Rights Committee] (CCSG) in an effort to stem the flow of people from the Gaeltacht, subsequently maintaining the number of Irish speakers that

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[20] In *Language from Below*, Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin outlines the demands of Muintir na Gaedhealtacha and includes a quote from the Irish language newspaper *An tÉireannach*, describing one of the group's meetings: 'The most important thing about the "Muintir na Gaedhealtacha" meetings last Sunday is the fact that they were initiated and organised by the young men of the Gaeltacht who spoke at them.' [Translation by Ó Croidheáin] (Ó Croidheáin, 2006, p. 1880)

[21] See *An Ghaeilge Bheo: Destined to Pass*, p. 32- 33.

communicated in the language daily. The group demanded basic civil rights for Irish speakers and lobbied for economic stability. They wanted an elected assembly of their own with powers similar to those held by county councils and their members. The Irish Republican Army and Sinn Féin were implemental in the group's founding and as a result, some of the CCSG's activities were militant in style.[22] The CCSG demanded that Gaeltachtaí be recognised as legitimate regions in Ireland and this particular demand points to the fact that these districts were regarded as separate from the rest of the nation. The activities of the CCSG highlighted the reality that existed for those living in the Gaeltachtaí. By revealing the poverty and infrastructural barrenness of these areas, the CCSG and its members shattered mainstream Ireland's hetero-image of life for the Gael. The CCSG had some success and in the years following its efforts, *Radio na Gaeltachta* began broadcasting in 1972, delivering a national Irish language radio service across the country. In 1980, *Údarás na Gaeltachta* was founded to promote Gaeltacht economies, the language as one of industry (Irish language organisations such as *TG4* and *Radió na Gaeltachta* are based in the Gaeltacht) and Irish language culture. The organisations established in the wake of the activities of the CCSG were more focused on delivering a sustainable lifestyle to those in the Gaeltacht, through Irish, than the other initiatives in the years prior to the CCSG.

2.8   Modern Gaeltachtaí and Irish Tokenism

Currently, Gaeltachtaí are still characterised by the boundary lines that were drawn up in the 1950s following a second *Coimisiún na Gaeltachta*, though it is argued, often rightly, that these boundaries do not accurately reflect the use of the language today. The Gaeltacht Bill recently proposed by the Minister of State, Dinny McGinley, will see traditional Gaeltacht boundaries undergo a dramatic change as, for the first time, these areas will be defined by linguistic criterion as opposed to geographic ones. This is only the second-ever bill, and over fifty years have elapsed since the first one was introduced in 1956. The proposed amendments will effectively

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[22] One of the most infamous examples of this was the targeting of the then Taoiseach, Jack Lynch's car. Whilst campaigning in West Galway, nails were laid on the road and the tyres of the Taoiseach's car were punctured.

put an end to language-dictated boundary lines and should ensure that the new Gaeltacht areas accurately reflect the use of the language in 21st-century Ireland. This piece of legislation could, potentially, be controversial as, for the first time in generations, the Gaeltacht landscape may accurately reflect the number of daily Irish speakers therein. This, in turn, will almost certainly change our national understanding of these regions and also the geography of the country. The changing of boundaries could potentially reduce the physical marginality of the language and her speakers, or, perhaps, corral those who use Irish daily. It is also worth noting that the bill proposed the creation of a number of so-called 'Gaeltacht Networks'. The status of Gaeltacht Network would be granted to Irish-speaking communities outside of traditional Gaeltachtaí where services are provided in Irish. This measure, if implemented effectively, could conceivably reduce the language's marginal status, or rather marginalisation, and ensure that Irish speakers are no longer bound, solely, by such arbitrary distinctions as lines on a map.

Today, the Irish Government allocates the annual spending of over €80 million to the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht affairs. This budget, as ever, is hoped to increase, if not stabilise, the status of the Irish language and protect and promote its use. Figures on the actual number of those who use the language daily are contested and debates constantly arise in mainstream media regarding the social and monetary value of attempting to revive, what many view as, a dying language. The compulsion placed upon school children to learn the language is often viewed as misguided and the practice's detractors include Irish and English speakers alike. In relation to Irish language literature, huge subsidies are given to publishing houses that deal specifically in Irish. Despite this, however, book sales are extremely low and mainstream book shops are reluctant to stock a variety of Irish language literature. The problems surrounding distribution, marketing and sales of books written in Irish suggests that subsidies have resulted in tokenising Irish language literature; thousands of titles are published, though relatively few books are ever purchased. The fact that the Irish language has not been fully restored as the main spoken language of the country and that her associated cultural pursuits remain dwarfed by mainstream culture points to numerous failed government initiatives and countless wasted resources. Thus, as ever, Irish language speakers and the language itself remain marginalised in modern Ireland, with little hope of a radical overhaul in the near future.

2.9 Trauma and Transatlantic Travel: The Introduction of Black Labour to America

Just as the auto- and hetero- images of Irish speakers have evolved throughout the years, so too, have the images relating to African Americans. Years of oppression and marginalisation have shaped both how the group views itself and also how it is viewed by the wider American society. Since the arrival of the first African slaves to North America in 1619, many measures were put in place which ensured their marginalisation.[23] The traumatic manner in which African Americans were first forcibly brought to the country established what would be a long-lasting dichotomy between the black slave and the white slave-owner. The long history of oppression and forced labour was maintained by a tradition based on the notion that those of African descent were inferior and incapable of living as freedmen. This falsity even prevailed when slaves were freed in the late 19th century and the belief that African Americans were somehow subordinate to Europeans has been maintained in 20th century American society and arguably still persists in certain parts of U.S. society. The following historical background will first outline the arrival of African slaves to North America, and then focus on the aggressive process of racialization that occurred, particularly two centuries later as slavery was increasingly viewed as an unstable means of maintaining the American economy.

With the vast expansion of plantations during the 1600s came a substantial increase in the number of slaves brought to and traded in North America. In *Generations of Captivity: A History of African American Slaves*, Ira Berlin charts the

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[23] The arrival of the first African slaves to Jamestown, Virginia is accounted for in *The Birth of Black America: The First African Americans* and the Pursuit of Freedom at Jamestown (Hashaw, 2007). It is also worth noting that in *Generations of Captivity*, Ira Berlin notes that the first people of colour to arrive in North American were Creoles and that their arrival was simultaneous to that of Europeans to the continent. Berlin categorises this group as the 'charter generation' and writes that: 'Their knowledge of the larger Atlantic world, the fluidity with which they moved in it, and their chameleonlike ability to alter their identity moderated the force of chattel bondage, allowing a considerable proportion of these initial arrivals to gain their freedom and enjoy a modest prosperity.' (Berlin, 2003, p. 6)

history of slavery in the states by categorising the various "generations".[24] Berlin notes that American society was transformed in the 17th century by the seemingly insatiable demand for labour and that the planter class 'transformed societies with slaves into slave societies in mainland North America.' (Berlin, 2003, p. 54) The development of slave societies was a landmark shift in North America as it altered the land, the way goods were produced, and, importantly, how the various players were defined. Berlin argues:

> What distinguishes societies with slaves was the fact that slaves were marginal to the central productive process. In societies with slaves, slavery was just one form of labor among many. Slaveowners treated their slaves with extreme callousness and cruelty at times because this was the way they treated all subordinates, be they indentured servants, debtors, prisoners of war, pawns, peasants or perhaps simply poor folk. In societies with slaves, no one presumed the master-slave relationship to be the exemplar. In slave societies, by contrast, slavery stood at the centre of economic production […]. (Berlin, 2003, p. 9)

With the increase in demand, black slaves experienced greater degradation that accompanied the growth in the numbers of plantations. Berlin argues that the dependence of the economy upon the labour of slaves meant that there was a shift in race relations and that the societal transformation that occurred meant that planters 'redefined the meaning of race, investing in colour – white and black–with a far greater weight in defining status heretofore. Blackness and Whiteness took on new meaning.' (Berlin, 2003, p. 54)

2.10 Whiter than White: Racialization and the Emergence of White Supremacy

By the mid-1700s, there were over 600,000 black slaves in North America. The era of rapid expansion of plantations had meant that supply had to meet the

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[24] In the text, Berlin delineates the generations as follows: Charter Generation, Plantation Generation, Revolutionary Generation, Migration Generation and Freedom Generation.

demand for slavery as plantation owners sought to expand their operations. Berlin notes that the sharp increase in the trade of slaves greatly affected the working landscape as 'enslaved people of African descent became then the majority of the labouring class, sometimes the majority of the population.' (Berlin, 1998, p. 9) The predominance of black slave labour meant that other forms of labour and, crucially, white workers suffered economically. The other forms of labour that declined included 'family labour, indentured servitude, or wage labour' and these workers 'sometimes resisted violently.' (Berlin, 1998, p. 9) Thus, the planter class grew in power as disgruntled white workers migrated from slave societies. The emergence of a planter elite meant that, in some areas, where competition had been eradicated, slaves were the most populous group. This, in turn, signified the total and absolute power of the slave owner in an environment where he was in a minority yet was able to continue to oppress and subjugate the masses of black slaves. Certainly, a powerful image of white America was beginning to emerge, defined against the perceived inferiority of black slaves. However, the notion of white supremacy was developed when European Americans addressed their need for more land by confiscating Native American holdings.

The desire to expand meant that more and more land needed to be conquered, and this resulted in the displacement of Native American populations as the group was perceived to be a 'growing impediment to white European "progress".' (Alexander, 2010, p. 23) The displacement and violent targeting of Native Americans provided colonisers with the opportunity to cultivate a sense of ownership and superiority over other groups; a chance to experiment with the idea of race and racial differences between the white coloniser and brown native. The white colonisers engaged in an aggressive campaign that aimed to redefine the image of Native Americans as savage beings. Keith Kilty and Eric Swank have argued that depicting the Native Americans as savage as opposed to human beings solved the moral problem of eliminating the group. (Kilty, Swank, 1997) The process by which this was achieved was greatly aided by media campaigns that propagated the notion that Native Americans were subhuman. The portrayal of this group as barbaric pests in books, newspapers and magazines altered the group's image amongst settlers and achieved in establishing a notion that the group was of a different race to the colonisers. The stereotyped image of Native Americans depicted in cartoons and pamphlets as beastly and savage and the ruthless campaign that popularized this notion successfully brought about a significant

decline in the Native American population, and it can be considered as one of the first examples of a separation of races in North America and, subsequently, one of the earliest examples of the emerging concept of white supremacy. The perception that Native Americans were less than human prompts the question as to why this group was not enslaved, rather than import hundreds of thousands of black slaves. In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,* Michelle Alexander notes that: 'American Indians were considered unsuitable as slaves, largely because native tribes were clearly in a position to fight back. The fear of raids by Indian tribes led plantation owners to grasp for an alternative source of free labor.' (Alexander, 2010, p. 23) Immigrants travelling to the States from Europe were also a poor choice for slavery as it was feared that enslaving immigrants would stem the much needed flow of settlers to the colonies. Thus, Africans were seen to be the ideal candidates for slavery in the eyes of plantation owners. It is generally agreed that the rebellion led by Nathaniel Bacon, a white property owner in Virginia, was another important factor in the mass introduction of slavery across the colonies.

In 1675, the year of Bacon's Rebellion, the labour of black slaves was accompanied by that of indentured whites – a group that experienced conditions very similar to those of the black slaves. The planter class had increased its control of lands so much so that few options for land ownership existed for free, white workers. Alexander outlines the events surrounding Bacon's Rebellion and notes that when Nathaniel Bacon plotted to seize Native American lands, his plans were aided by an alliance of both black and white bond labourers following a refusal of the planter class to help him in his efforts to acquire land. (Alexander, 2010) Bacon's rebellion, while ultimately a failure, had one, longstanding and decisive consequence. Indentured white labourers were henceforth viewed as unreliable, and the possibility of an affinity existing between them and black workers was deemed perilous to the planter class. This resulted in the belief that it was wiser to depend solely upon the labour of imported black slaves, which gave rise to an increase in the trafficking of slaves. Another significant development following the rebellion was that 'the planter class took and additional precautionary step, a step that would later come to know as a "racial bribe". Deliberately and strategically, the planter class extended special privileges to poor whites in an effort to drive a wedge between them and black slaves.' (Alexander, 2010, p. 25) This had the effect of developing a new image of the white American. The extension of powers to poor white workers meant that the group had a

vested interest in the slavery of Africans. In *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander outlines that the privileges extended to poor whites included 'greater access to Native American lands, white servants were allowed to police slaves through slave patrols and militias, and barriers were created so that free labor would not be placed in competition with slave labor.' (Alexander, 2010, p. 25) Thus, white labourers were given an elevated status and the sense of superiority that went with it.

To ensure that no future alliances would take place between white workers and black slaves, the planter class favoured an increase in their intake of slaves from the African continent. Powerlessly brought to Northern America in the hulls of ships, Africans were disadvantaged from the very moment they reached America. While the act of forcibly trafficking people from one part of the globe to another was a heinous act in itself, the process of dehumanisation that followed was catastrophic and had long-lasting consequences. Newly imported African slaves were unable to communicate in English and this was considered an ideal solution to this problem because it ensured that newly imported slaves would be unable to communicate with poor, white labourers. These measures created a stark distinction between the white worker and the black slave and subsequently strengthened the notion of race and white superiority. While white labourers existed on meagre wages and were considered a lower class to plantation owners, they at least enjoyed a higher social position than black slaves. This brought about notions of white supremacy amongst the white labouring classes; a development that would prove instrumental to support of slavery and, later, racial segregation, discrimination and marginalisation.

2.11 Developing Race in the 19th Century

Slavery's impact upon American history and identity cannot be underestimated. For centuries, slavery shaped the country's economic policies, politics and even how white Americans defined themselves. Ira Berlin argues that the slavery was so influential that it even shaped the 'most deeply held beliefs' of white Americans. The vast amount of wealth generated by plantations' production of sugar, tobacco, rice and cotton sold internationally made 'some men extraordinarily wealthy. That great wealth allowed shareholding planters a large place in the federal government in 1787, as planters were quick to translate their economic power into

political power.' (Berlin, 2003, p. 13) Slavery was so widespread, as Berlin adds, that 'between the founding of the Republic and the Civil War, the majority of presidents […] were themselves slaveholders, and generally substantial slaveholders.' (Berlin, 2003, p. 14) As America evolved as a nation, the freedom cherished by and promised to all its citizens was defined against the backdrop of slavery. However, as the country developed into an egalitarian society in the 1800s, the need to justify slavery became paramount and the idea of race evolved into a series of rationalized arguments based on flawed scientific thinking.

Before the 1800s and the emergence of race as a scientific argument, slavery was justified on the basis that those of African descent were savage and beastly. For generations, black slaves were treated as commodities and were listed on farms and large plantations as property akin to livestock. By treating slaves as commodities, white slave masters refused to acknowledge their humanity, viewing them solely as property that could be traded. In *Black Breeding Machines*, Eddie Donoghue gives an historical overview of how African slaves were dehumanised for the purposes of maintaining an economy dependent upon slave labour. Referring to the works of Winthrop Jordan and Richard Hakluyt, Donoghue notes the growing image of the African as beastly in the 17th century, based upon studies of Africans at the time, such as *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts* (1607) in which the author, Edward Topsell 'posited that a strong collary existed between the animalistic characteristics of Africans and apes.' (Donoghue, 2008, p. 13)[25] Men from both groups were depicted as monkeys in magazines such as *Punch* and in cartoon images from America during the latter half of the 19th century. Donoghue's text deals with the predominance in European thought that slaves were animalistic and, as a result, were treated and examined as animals.[26] While Donoghue's work is principally concerned with the

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[25] In his book, Donoghue refers to Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nations* (1589-1600) and Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro: 1550-1821* (1968).

[26] In his study, Donoghue refers to the importance placed on the female reproductive organs and includes accounts from the 17th century of the treatment of black female slaves: 'During an auction of slaves in the Dutch port of Berbice, although the slaves were compelled to go through the usual physical examination, not all buyers were contented. 'One lady was not satisfied til she had forced a wench to stretch by squeezing her breast cruelly.' In general, the pinching of breasts and groins was an important part of the inspection process. As Atkins explained it, the examination was conducted in a manner English butchers did animals at the Smithfield market back in London. In this case, however, great care was taken to inspect the procreation organs of the beasts in human form.' (Donoghue, 2005, p. 15)

slave trade outside of North America, *Black Breeding Machines* speaks of the universal practices that maintained slavery:

> Significantly, the ideology of slavery and the ideology of racism as well as the ideology of religion were employed to justify the breeding of the Negro slave […], the dehumanization of the Negro slave in general, and the female in particular, contributed to the construction of a social reality by the master in which the slave woman was perceived as a procreation machine as well as an article of sexual pleasure in addition to her designated role as a factor in the means of production. (Donoghue, 2008, p. xviii)

The suggestion that slaves could be 'bred' was another means of reducing their humanity by, once again, linking the group to the treatment of livestock. The so-called breeding of slaves and the trade of offspring highlighted the determination of the slave owners to uphold their positions of power through the denigration of the slave. By breaking up families and separating children from parents through sales, slaves were denied the opportunity to maintain families. They were also denied the opportunity to marry as such measures would have, undoubtedly, reduced the planter class's sense of ownership. Despite these efforts to dehumanise and debase the group and the hetero-image of slaves as animal-like, slaves persevered and recognised unions, themselves, between men and women and acknowledged families ties, even though the threat of separation was ever present. In *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*, Ira Berlin notes that slaves defied the odds and held on to their own sense of humanity and worth. Berlin notes that 'Family, language and spirituality infused the patches of the tobacco and the fields of rice and indigo'. (Berlin, 2003, p. 5) A literary representation of this can be found in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). In the text, the hetero-image of the black slave takes many forms and although Stowe was an abolitionist, the well-intentioned representations of black slaves in the text became subsumed in the stereotyped discourse of white American society's view of blacks.[27] Berlin's work suggests that black American slaves had in fact a positive auto-image of themselves and that, despite the best efforts of the slave

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[27] Stowe's text is generally attributed with the change in attitudes towards slavery in North America. In his article 'Misdirected Sentiment: Conflicting Rhetorical Strategies in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*', Stephen Yarbrough notes the influence of Stowe's text on American society.

masters to disrupt personal and family life, slaves persevered and cultivated traditions and a culture.

In the 19th century, the beliefs such as those presented above, of slaves as animalistic were developed and scientifically rationalized by whites in America in an attempt to justify their way of life and barbarity of slavery. In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, George Fredrickson chronicles the evolution of racism in America as a system based on a false science. He argues that:

> For its full growth intellectual and ideological racism required a body of "scientific" and cultural thought which would give credence to the notion that the blacks were for unalterable reasons of race, morally and intellectually inferior to whites, and more importantly, it required a historical context which would make such an ideology seem necessary for the effective defence of Negro slavery and other forms of white supremacy. (Fredrickson, 1971, p. 2)

Towards the middle of the 19th century, racial ideologies emerged that were thought to prove that the African was of a different species to the Caucasian race, in an attempt to discredit abolitionists and those who defended the principals of environmentalism and to defend slavery.[28] Fredrickson notes that the view that Africans were of a different race became popular in the 1850s 'when the "American school of ethnology" emerged and affirmed on the basis of new data that the races of mankind had been separately created as distinct and unequal species.' (Fredrickson, 1971, p. 74) Fredrickson names Dr Samuel George Morton as the originator of the new scientific ethnology and refers to his work *Crania Americana* as the principal

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[28] The principals of environtmentailism, outlined by the Presbyterian minister Samuel Stanhope Smith (1751-1819) in *Essay on the Causes of the Variely of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (1787) suggested that differences between men could be attributed to different physical and social environments. In *The Black Image in the White Mind*, Fredrickson outlines Smith's theories, noting 'All the races of man, he argued, were members of the same species and had a common remote ancestry; differences in color, anatomy, intelligence, temperament and moralitycould be attributed to differing physical and social environemtns, especially climate and the contrasting habits of life produced by "savergry" and "civilization". Hence radical changes in environment of the kind experienced by the American Negro in being transplanted from Africa and of the kind that would occur if slaves were emancipated, could be relied on to eliminate in a relatively short time all the differences between the two races residing in the same territory and subjected to the same external influences.' (Fredrickson, 1971, p. 72) Although environmentalism asserted that all men were of the same species, most enviromentalisits were of the belief that whites remained equal.

document at the time alleging that whites, Indians and "Negroes" were fundamentally different based on his analysis of human skulls:

> [...] Morton became aware of the differences between white, Indian and Negro skulls and of the fact that the ancient crania from a given race did not seem to differ from those of their modern descendants. Morton concluded that the races had always had the same physical characteristics, and by implication, the same mental qualities. (Fredrickson, 1971, p. 74)

Morton collaborated with the Egyptologist George Gliddon who confirmed Morton's theory that the Egyptians and "Negroes" differed racially and that blacks had been 'relegated to the same servile position in ancient Egypt as in modern America.' (Fredrickson, 1971, p. 75) Morton's beliefs, presented as scientific fact, supported the institution of slavery based on the notion that blacks were, and always had been, inferior to whites and suited to servitude and subjugation. During the debate that unfolded in relation slavery, so-called Anti-Tom literature became popular. Texts such as William Gilmore Simms' *The Sword and the Distaff* and *The Planter's Northern Bride* by Caroline Lee Hentz portrayed the hetero-image of African Americans as slovenly and inferior in every way to their white masters.

The incomprehensible notion of abolition was also unpalatable for many Americans because of a fear that black slaves were a vengeful and degraded group that would viciously seek to avenge their masters if ever freed. There was also the belief that, if freed, the "Negro" would 'remain an alien and troublesome presence' (Fredrickson, 1971, p. 4) and never fully assimilate with white society. "Proof" that black slaves were inferior to white Americans was also compiled from anecdotal evidence of freed slaves in northern cities and towns. Accounts of 'the corrupted characters of the manumitted slaves' being 'fruitful in crime, but rarely productive in happiness' (Baldwin, Ebenezer, 1834, p. 41) added to the perception that, if freed, black slaves would fall victim to their own inadequacies at the risk to white society[29]. Other accounts describing freed slaves as 'Given to Idleness, Frolicking, Drunkenness and, in some cases Dishonesty' coupled with a damning report from the New York Manumission society on the 'looseness of manners and depravity of conduct in many Persons of Colour in this city' seemed to substantiate the claims of those in favour of

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[29] Quoted in Fredrickson, p. 4.

slavery that the "Negro" was a threat to American civility. While slavery was eventually abolished in 1861, the belief that African Americans were inferior lingered amongst America's white population, shaping the hetero-image of blacks for generations thereafter. This effect is studied in the works of Ellison and Kenan in chapters four and six.

2.12 Emancipation: Free but not Equal

In the second half of the 19th century, a pro-abolition stance became increasingly popular as Americans campaigned for and demanded an end to slavery. Following their success during the American Civil War, 1861-1865, the economies of the Southern States were decimated by the loss of the $4 billion dollar slave trade through emancipation. This created a divide between the southern and northern states, one which was particularly felt by black Americans. The perception among African Americans of the south as a hostile environment for the black American is outlined in greater detail in chapter four. Before 1865, there existed some 'free' people of colour and, although some blacks were freed or managed to buy their freedom or escape to the more liberal Northern states, they were still regarded as little more than slaves and often the status of freed blacks barely exceeded that of slaves. This did not change greatly, even after emancipation in the 1860s. Despite the defeat of the Confederate Army and the subsequent freeing of slaves, attitudes towards blacks remained fixedly negative and 'the idea of race lived on.' (Alexander, 2010, p. 26) It was a powerful and defining element of life in the United States for both blacks and whites. While slaves had been freed, black people were still regarded with the same contempt by many, the situation being particularly terse in the south of the country. The changed landscape of life for whites, both poor and rich was almost unbearable. Southern governments were financially broke following years of war and plantations and other industries had been destroyed. The release of slaves from bonded labour only aggravated the injured sensitivities of the ruling white class. It also created approximately four million refugees of slavery; freed slaves who, despite being free, suddenly found themselves homeless, without occupation and trapped in an impossible situation.

Before emancipation, responsibility for slaves fell to the slave owners who were compelled to provide food and shelter for their bonded workers, not only by law, but also as a measure to decrease the chance of rebellion and insurgence. The newly freed four million slaves with no possessions of their own faced destitution and poverty, and it was feared that this might result in an uprising of some sort. This new apprehension developed into active repulsion and black people, men in particular, were depicted as fearsome, beastly beings, intent on the destruction of whites. This perception has, to some extent, remained steadfast, and African-American men are often regarded as threatening today, as will be discussed in chapter six of this thesis. Thought of as slovenly nuisances, unwilling to work and, as noted by William Cohen in *Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest For Racial Control, 1861-1915*, blacks were the victims of the belief that 'they must be controlled in some way or white people cannot live among them.' (Cohen, 1991, p. 28) As a result, vagrancy laws were introduced in nine states. The laws made unemployment illegal and the laws were enforced with particular attention paid to blacks. Some states subsequently enacted convict laws which granted prisons the right to hire out its prisoners, thus reinstating forced labour amongst blacks. The seeming need to immediately introduce vagrancy laws to combat what was perceived as black degeneration reinforced the earlier perception of the black slave before emancipation.

During the Reconstruction Era (1865-1867), relative developments were made in terms of human rights and, in 1866, full citizenship was granted to all African-Americans (Alexander, 2010, p. 29). As such, states were forbidden to disregard the rights of African-Americans and, for the first time, blacks were given the right to vote, to access education and the threat of violence towards African-Americans was criminalised. Because of the progressive new laws and protection from Federal troops, African Americans were enabled to elect their own representatives and were given a voice in the political mechanisms of American life. The franchise guaranteed to black Americans, however, became encumbered by conditions intended as a means of reducing access to the ballot box, such as those stipulating that African Americans be literate and own property, rendering many ineligible to vote. Despite the gains made, the Reconstruction Era was fraught with corruption and, in the south in particular, there was an increasing dissatisfaction and anger brewing amongst white populations. The end of slavery had also meant that poor white workers lost their sense of superiority over blacks and the introduction of millions of African Americans to the

paid workforce where they competed with whites, most likely bruised the hetero-image of white supremacy. The Ku Klux Klan experienced a resurgence in popularity and engaged in terrorist campaigns known as "Redemption". (Alexander, 2010, p. 31) Funds made available to assist the new American citizens, such as those granted to the Freedmen's Bureau, were greatly decreased and vagrancy laws were zealously enforced. In *Slavery by Another Name* (2008) Douglas Blackmon recounts how blacks were specifically targeted and how the enforcement of the vagrancy laws and convictions for other arbitrary petty crimes resulted in the creation of a market for convict leasing. Blackmon outlines how convicts were left with court costs and fines and had to work in order to pay these off.[30] This was a solution to the problem that existed in the minds of the white population with regard to freed slaves. This early development in the interaction between whites and freed blacks, undoubtedly informed the perceived image of the black man in U.S. society and this sinister development still affects race relations in the States today.

2.13 African Americans and 'the New Negro'

In the years following emancipation and the Reconstruction Era, African-Americans and whites alike struggled to redefine one set group identity or image for black Americans. In the late 19th and early 20th century, debates raged amongst black communities regarding African-American identity and the place of blacks in American society – if indeed there was a place – and shortly after the Reconstruction Era, the concept of the 'New Negro' emerged. This so-called 'New Negro' was discussed and dissected constantly amongst leaders of the black community. For some, the 'New Negro' would have to be educated and a member of the Christian faith. In this respect, similar to the expectations imposed by the Irish nation on the Gaels, there was a sense of duty placed upon African-Americans to be pure in faith and learning, for fear that, otherwise, the social development of the entire group would be impeded. African Americans were burdened by an obligation to their group to dispel myths surrounding blacks, as Godless and easily given over to dishonesty and

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[30] Blackmon argues that the punishment of blacks via forced labour coincided with the need for a cheap workforce as opposed to spikes in crime rates. He notes that: 'Repeatedly, the timing and scale of surges in arrests appeared more attuned to rises and dips in the need for cheap labor than any demonstrable acts of crime.' (Blackmon, 2008, p. 7)

crime, even though the image of African-Americans and the stereotype associated with them were wholly white creations. In an essay included in *The American Missionary*, the Reverend W.E.C. Wright outlines the different images of African-Americans that existed for whites at the time:

In apologies for slavery, direct or indirect, the Negro appears as docile and happy, loyal to his master and to his master's family, kind in disposition, or a warm religious nature, and so trustworthy that his very vices leaned to virtue's side. Such idyllic pictures of the Negroes as the best labouring population in the world are to be found abundantly in the literature of the past and present generations […]. On the other hand, in criticism of the legislatures of the Reconstruction period and in excuses made for separate railway coaches, separated schools and churches, and the exclusion of all Negroes from all offices and from the ballot box, the Negro appears as ignorant, depraved, given over to all the vices, and incapable of cultivation in mind or in morals. (Wright, 1894, p. 8-12)

This in effect highlights two contradictory images of the African American; one as servile and loyal to his master and the other depicting the group as depraved and fearsome. In the body of his essay, the Reverend continues to make the case for the positive influence of Christianity upon the African-American and how this will help to form the group's identity in the new United States. The essay also contains some observations from white members of society and their reflections on how human-like and mannerly African-Americans can be. This is evident when the Reverend writes: 'It was a new Negro educated in a missionary school of whom one Southern white man said not long ago to another, "It was all I could do to keep from saying 'mister' to him." Wright is proud of the fact that an African-American educated in a missionary school can be seen as refined and mannerly and almost be addressed with the civility normally used among whites. In his essay, he focuses on, what he believes to be a Christian faith-led progress and not on the implied portrayal of white America; that the Southern white man still feels a sense of superiority over the African American is evident in his inability to address the black man as 'mister'. While the Reverend wants to empower the group by promoting a moral and ethical lifestyle, he in fact condones a two-tiered system based on race. His belief that the

'New Negro' must maintain the auto-image of blacks as good, honest citizens, yet still subordinate to their white counterparts was a popular one, particularly in the literary output of whites, as will be demonstrated in chapter six of this thesis in relation to *Uncle Remus his Songs* and his Sayings and *Sapphira and the Slave Girl*.

Immediately after emancipation there existed a sense that African-Americans should be thankful for their freedom and try to get on with their lives without unnecessarily aggravating the social order of white America. Granted freedom, it became their responsibility to find a 'place' for themselves within American society – as long as this place was below that of whites.[31] The desire to find a place in the history of the developing United States was likely born of a sense of not belonging to wider American society. From the very conception of the United States, and even before then, huge numbers of various nationalities travelled to and settled in the country. After emancipation, African Americans had to contend with other marginalised groups such as the Irish, Chinese and Italians, to name but a few, for space on the same rung of the social ladder. Unlike these groups, however, African Americans were American citizens, born in the country and having lived there all their lives. Despite this fact, they were not seen as true Americans for generations after slavery was abolished, as evident from the way they were systematically marginalised in all areas of American life.

2.14 Migration and New Cultural Spaces

The hostility towards blacks in the south after abolition and the subsequent migration of hundreds of thousands to the large cities of the north and east was also implemental in the development of African American identity in the beginning of the last century. The harshness with which blacks were treated in the south, such as the vigorously imposed vagrancy laws and other draconian measures, led to the belief that better opportunities existed for African Americans in the more liberal northern cities. Huge numbers migrated to cities like Chicago and New York and resided in places such as the south suburbs in Chicago and Harlem in Northern Manhattan. As Alain Locke noted:

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[31] See 'An Appeal to the King' (Bowen, W.E., 1895)

The wash and rush of this human tide on the beach line of northern city centres is to be explained primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toll, a chance for the improvement in conditions. (Quoted in Gates and Jarrett, 2007, p. 113-114)

The migration of so many to so few places resulted in the growth of large African American communities, and these communities became influential in the development of the group's identity. Within Harlem, Locke found 'the peasant, the student, the business man, the professional man, artist, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social out-cast.' (Gates, Jarrett, 2007, p. 114) This mixture of people concentrated in one area highlighted the diversity and fluidity of the African American identity less than fifty years after abolition. The emergence of the African American ghetto became a vital cultural space in the early 20th century. Harlem, for instance, saw the influx of hundreds of thousands of African Americans from different states, each bringing their own traditions, folklore and culture. For Locke, Harlem had the potential to be a cultural centre for the 'New Negro', just as Dublin was for Ireland.[32] In an essay entitled 'The New Negro', included in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African-American Literary Criticism for the Harlem Renaissance*, Locke talks about the importance of Harlem as one of the first melting pots of African-American culture in the States when he writes:

Here in Manhattan is not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life. It has attracted the African, the West Indian, the Negro American; has brought together the Negro of the North and the Negro of the South; the man from the city and the man from the village… Each group has come with its own separate motives and for its own special ends, but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another. Proscription and prejudice have thrown these dissimilar elements into a common area of contact and interaction. (Locke, 1994, p. 21-31)

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[32] 'Without pretence to their political significance, Harlem has the same role to play for the New Negro as Dublin has had for the New Ireland or Prague for the New Czechoslovakia.' (Gates, Jarrett, 2007, p. 114)

Locke's observations indicate why Harlem became one of the most influential sites of cultural growth within the United States in the early 1900s. The diversity of the area and its inhabitants and the experiences of various types of people made Harlem a unique spot of concentrated multiplicity in the African-American experience and the area became a haven for African-American expression. As we know, rhythm and blues and jazz flourished within Harlem's black communities, and these musical forms even became popular amongst the wider Manhattan society, subsequently identifying music and entertainment as one of the hallmarks of the African American identity. While musical experimentation was largely positive, in that it allowed for engagement with different heritages and interaction between the various communities, it also fuelled the stereotype of the black minstrel; that African-American music was a source of entertainment for wider American society, rather than cultural and artistic expressions in its own right.[33]

2.15 The Auto-Image of Black America in Literature:

With regard to this thesis, however, it was the rebirth of the African-American literary tradition during the first half of the last century that was most fundamental to the forging of black American identities in a white-dominated society. Writers and poets on the Harlem scene became some of the most vocal advocates of black heritage, culture and human rights. Writers like Alain Locke, Langston Hughes and Claude McKay, to name but a few, examined the marginalised position of the African American and they highlighted this perspective through their literary fiction and various critical essays. Like the pioneering Irish language writers mentioned earlier in this chapter, these writers sought to give an accurate depiction of life for the African American and they explored the various conceptions surrounding black life in the States. They did not shy away from the ugly realities of living in a multiracial

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[33] In *Jim Crow in New York* David Gellman and David Quigly outline the origins of the minstrel tradition: 'Pretend black minstrels also sang songs written for the stage in alleged imitation of real songs sung by real black slaves in the South and in certain districts of New York City. Some of these lyrics would become popular with Americans for generations, such as "Oh! Susannah" and "Old Folks at Home [Swanee River]." New York thus helped launch into the mainstream of American culture a popular form of entertainment and long-living racial stereotypes, including the unsophisticated black country bumpkin Jim Crow.' (Gellman, Quigley, 2004, p. 3)

American society, and the characters that inhabit their works are rounded, complex figures that best exemplify the difficulties that develop when attempting to assert any kind of identity that was not subservient despite the marginalisation suffered by African-Americans. Later chapters of this thesis will build upon the points made here in relation to the literature of Ralph Ellison and Randall Kenan and their exploration of African-American identity; of how blacks in the United States view themselves and how this view is influenced by and, also, influences the way in which white American society perceive African Americans.

In literature and critical essays, manifestations of the 'New Negro' appeared again and again, suggesting that it was not quite so easy for African-Americans to agree upon what, or rather who, the 'New Negro' was. One reason for this difficulty was the huge diversity in the ancestry of black Americans, including links to Africa, the West Indies and other Caribbean islands. Exploration of ancestry led to a move away from traditional Christian teachings amongst some black Americans and communities began to practise other religions such as Islam and Judaism. This, in turn, led to different perspectives on what it meant to be a black American. The diversity in experience, heritage and culture meant that there was no single auto-image of the African American and while contributors to the debate disagreed about how black identity should evolve, they were largely agreed upon what the 'New Negro' was not; the 'New Negro' was to be entirely different from the 'Old Negro' who 'respecting color more than qualification, is apologetic when dealing with white people. He acts as if he were always in the way, as if he had no right to be on the earth. One can hear the clank of the slave's chain in all he says and does […]. The Old Negro has a contempt for his own people.' (Rogers, 1927, p. 93-94)

As the 20th century progressed and African Americans grew in confidence about their cultural heritage, the group began to foster a more positive, realistic group identity based on their belief in equality and rejection of the dated notion of the black American "as less than a man, yet more than a brute".[34] The rejection of the 'Old Negro' signalled a shift in how the group perceived itself and a determination not to act as apologists for the crimes of slavery and racism perpetrated against them.[35] It

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[34] Washington, 1900, in *The New Negro*, p. 33.

[35] The suggestion that the Old Negro was an apologist for the subjugation and oppression of black Americans is presented by J. A. Rogers in 'Who is the New Negro and Why?' In this essay, Rogers contrasts the New with the Old Negro and notes, in relation to the latter: 'The Old Negro when insulted grins and apologizes […]. The Old submitted supinely to massacre as in the New York and

was also felt that if blacks were to be fully recognised by American society, then their story must also be part of the nation's history. If blacks were to be treated as equal to whites, then black poets, authors and historians would have to feature in the education of black children and white children, too. Hubert H. Harrison, one of the foremost black rights activists in the States, made the point that, if black Americans were to fully realise their identity (or identities, even), then, their education must encompass all aspects of the African American experience, beyond the one-dimensional depictions of the black slave in the hetero-narrative of white American history. In his essay 'Education and the Race' (1925), he made the point, in relation to African American children that: 'They know nothing of the stored-up knowledge and experience of the past and present generations of Negroes in their ancestral land and conclude there is no such store of knowledge and experience. They readily accept the assumption that Negroes have never been anything but slaves and that they never had a glorious past as other fallen peoples like the Greeks and Persians have.' (Gates, Jarrett, 2007, p. 110)

Harrison also criticised black colleges for their shortcomings in the area of "Negro" history and culture. He criticises their preponderance with Eurocentric learning instead of directing their students towards their cultural ancestry by offering course in 'Hausa and Arabic, for these are the living languages of millions of our brethren in modern Africa. Courses in "Negro" history and the culture of West African peoples, at least, should be given in every college that claims to be an institution of learning for Negroes.' (Gates, Jarrett, 2007, p. 110) One of the most famous, literary examples of this problem is found in Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and the all-black university run by Dr Bledsoe. Ellison depicts Bledsoe as a shrewd, self-serving man principally interested in preserving the reputation of the institution for the white trustees. This is discussed in detail in chapter four.

2.16 Civil Rights, Black Power and Conflicting Group Images

Philadelphia riots, and the Palestine, Springfield and East St. Louis ones.' (Gates, Jarrett, 2007, p. 129-130)

In the 1950s and 60s, the under-representation of African Americans in American history and society remained a concern for the black American community. As the group's self-awareness of its history and culture grew in a society that was still dictated by Jim Crow, so too, did the demand for civil rights. As African Americans embraced their own heritage and history, they began to demand that American society acknowledge their rights and, crucially that they be viewed as equal to whites. Education in the area of black history and ancestry, helped to shape a new comprehensive African American auto-image that celebrated the complexities of the group's identity. While both blacks and whites demanded that the rights of African Americans be recognised, the era of black activism was significant in the manner it shaped the community's auto-image. Even though black Americans demanded their civil rights, they were not represented as a whole and there were distinct differences in the demands of certain organisations, exemplifying the fluid nature of African American identity. While the fight for civil rights took place on many fronts within the United States, the emergence of and distinctions between the American Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power were striking because of the dichotomy they represented in the African American experience.

The era of civil rights activism is often dichotomised by comparing the peaceful, non-violent protest of the south and Martin Luther King Jnr's Southern Christian Leadership Conference with the violence of the so-called "prophets of rage" (Williams, 2008, p. 16), the Black Panther Party and the outspoken, anger-fuelled rhetoric of Malcolm X. While it is not the intention of this thesis to give an in-depth, biographical, historiographical account of King, Malcolm X or the Black Panther Party, their beliefs and actions illustrated to wider American society that the African American auto-image was diverse and that black Americans themselves would not always agree on political ideologies; even when their demands for civil rights were similar. In 1957, King, along with other non-violent activists established the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Atlanta (SCLCA).[36] The organisation was marked by its dedication to peaceful protest and non-violent disturbance and civil disobedience. The non-violent tactics of the SCLCA and organisations such as the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) included civil disobedience, boycotts and protests, and many of their efforts led to the end of

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[36] Other activists involved in the establishment of the SCLCA included Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth and Joseph Lowery.

segregation of blacks and whites and an ease in racial tensions across the States. While King's efforts were met with criticism by more radical activists, namely Malcolm X, King's SCLCA had some breakthroughs, particularly in the southern states where they organised sit-ins and peaceful demonstrations. The infamy surrounding the police response to the Birmingham demonstration in April 1963 resulted in highlighting the plight of King's SCLCA. His subsequent imprisonment focused national attention on the civil rights' issue, compelling white America to reconsider its relationship with blackness, bringing about a change in the group's hetero-image.[37] The articulate nature of King's speeches and letters won the movement greater support amongst whites and in his speeches:

> King stressed that his understanding of loving one's enemies implied a level of disinterested concern that was far from a sentimental attachment. To return love for violence and hatred required each protester to engage in the on-going intellectual and spiritual process of discerning the deepest causes of human suffering and the deepest cravings for peace (Allen, 2000, p. 102)

King's peaceful activism was starkly contrasted against the violence meted out to African Americans. It created a positive and powerful group image that empowered the group whilst simultaneously shattering white America's preconceptions, compelling the country's government to act on behalf of its black citizens. Testament to the popularity of the SCLCA and King's style of activism were King's being awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace and the dedication of the third Monday each January to his memory.

While King promoted a positive auto-image of African Americans as a peaceful, Christian group demanding equality in their own country, the auto-image of black America that emerged from the actions of more militant organisations and individuals gave a contrasting insight into African American identity. Often discussed alongside and compared to Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, a prominent member of the Nation of Islam, argued that blacks needed to empower themselves in the battle against white America, by any means possible. While King's Christian ethos made

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[37] On Good Friday, 1963, King was 'arrested and placed in solitary confinement, charged with defying an Alabama court injunction prohibiting protests and marches for racial equality in Birmingham.' (Allen, 2000, p.71)

him more palatable and relatable for white America, Malcolm X's activities within the Nation of Islam made him a more marginal figure.[38] Malcolm X was an advocate for Black Nationalism and his, sometimes, violent rhetoric drove a wedge between him and the more popular King.[39]   King disapproved of Malcolm X's beliefs and, as presented in *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr*, King stated:

> I have often wished that he would talk less of violence, because violence is not going to solve our problem. And in his litany of articulating the despair of the Negro without offering any positive, creative alternative, I feel that Malcolm has done himself and our people a great disservice. Fiery, demagogic oratory in the black ghettos, urging Negroes to arm themselves and prepare to engage in violence, as he has done, can reap nothing but grief (Carson, 1998, p. 265-266)

Malcolm X's views on Black Nationalism were more in-keeping with those of the Black Panther Party; a movement that started in California in 1966. The Panthers contributed to the African American auto-image by offering an alternative to King's peaceful and passive activism. Contrastingly, the Panthers advocated that the black community arm itself in its fight to improve the living conditions of African American ghettoes. The association between the Panthers and violence was not only cemented by comments from its leaders, but most notably the jailing of the organisation founder and leader, Huey Newton, for the murder of a police officer.[40]   The violence of the organisation clouded opinion and resulted in the group's policies being obscured and

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[38]In 'The Unfinished Dialogue of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X', Clayborne Carson notes that Malcolm X 'was an outsider who joined a religious group on the margins of African American life and found a new past for himself in the historical mythology of the Nation of Islam. King became a Baptist, the most popular religious affiliation for black Americans, and identified himself with the historical continuum of the African American freedom struggles'. (Carson, 2005, p. 23)

[39]Writing in relation to the popularity of King, Carson notes: A national survey of African Americans by Newsweek in the summer of 1963 found that 88 percent had positive opinions regarding Martin, while only 15 percent thought positively about Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm was not even deemed sufficiently prominent to be listed on the survey form (Carson, 2005, p. 24).

[40] In a study of the Black Panther Party, Williams examines the links between the BPP and violent ideology and notes that comments from the group's co-founder Bobby Seale complicated the situation. William's includes the following statements from Seals, taken from an interview in 1983 as evidence of the group's association with violence: "They wounded 60 odd of us," Seale explained, but "we wounded 32 of them" "I think the reason we killed less and wounded less" he continued was "because they had… more equipment.' (Williams, 2008, p. 18)

this is noted by Yohuru Williams: 'While a commitment to armed self-defence was certainly important to those who joined the ranks, the BPP's legacy goes beyond issues of violence.' (Williams, 2008, p. 19) While the Panthers aimed to empower the image of black Americans, their actions and rhetoric damaged the groups' perception by wider American society. The Panthers were viewed more as a terrorist organisation and their call to arms threatened the security of white America. That they were conceived as a threat is outlined by Williams who writes that 'In 1968, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover called the BPP the "single greatest threat to the internal security" of the United States.' Williams goes on to note that government officials had been impressed upon by the group and he gives an account of Congressman Richardson Preyer who 'made what at first blush appears to be an overly generous assessment of the influence of the BPP whom he proclaimed "fascinated the left, inflamed the police, terrified much of America, and had an extraordinary effect on the Black community.' (Williams, 2008, p. 19) The largely negative criticism of the group suggests that the Panthers did little to generate a positive hetero-image of the group. However, their outlook and the response of thousands of black Americans to the group suggests that the group added another, positive or rather, empowering element to African American identity.

2.17 The African American Group Image in the Post-Civil Rights Era

Since the Civil Rights Movement's activities in the 1960s, African-Americans have made some major gains in having their rights realised. While conditions have improved for the majority of black citizens since the 1960s, racial tensions still exist and marginalisation and racial discrimination still occur. As is discussed in greater detail in chapter six in relation to the work of Randall Kenan, African Americans still experience marginalisation in most American institutions and most devastatingly within the judicial system where the majority of the population comprises African American males. As noted by Gina Philogene in 'Introduction to Race as a Defining Feature of American Culture':

Recent improvements notwithstanding, race-based biases are still manifest everywhere. The country's judicial system, for instance, has condemned a disproportionately large number of black American males to prison and on death row. Our education system in which segregation and unequal treatment prevails remains as a result largely made up of two unequal tiers. In the housing market access to mortgage financing continues to be subject to race-based discrimination. The same can be said for access to health care through affordable insurance. (Philogene, 2004, p. 3)

Clearly, Philogene's assessment and that of Kenan, presented later in chapter six, illustrate the great imbalance that continues to impact upon the lives of African Americans. One of the most damaging contributing factors to this malaise, particularly in relation to the judicial system is the hetero-image of the African American male as a danger and menacing presence in the States. The killing of Trayvon Martin, a black teenager, in Florida in February 2012 initiated a nationwide debate in the States and highlighted the lingering problems of racism almost 150 years after the abolition of slavery. That Trayvon Martin was shot dead by an armed, self-appointed guard of a gated community in Florida, many believe, points to racist prejudice towards the young, black male.[41] In light of the killing, polls carried out in April of the same year highlight the difference in perception between whites and blacks regarding the case. In his study 'Racial Tragedies, Political Hope, and the Task of American Political Science', Michael Dawson refers to polls by Pew and Gallup and highlights results that suggest a divide still prevails between white and African Americans:

On April 5th Gallup Report illustrated the depth of this racial divide even more vividly. Gallup reported that 73 percent of blacks but only 31 percent of non-blacks believed that racial bias played a major role in the tragedy. A similarly huge gap was found in the public perception of racial fairness in the justice

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[41] In an article for the *Guardian* Gary Younge highlights the attitudes surrounding young, black males in the states and writes: 'Zimmerman's assumptions on seeing Martin may have been reprehensible but they were not illogical. Black men in America are more likely to be stopped, searched, arrested, convicted and executed than any other group. With almost one in 10 black men behind bars there are more of them in prison, on probation or on parole today than were enslaved in 1850. To assume that when you see a black man you see a criminal is rooted in the fact that black men have been systematically criminalised. That excuses nothing but explains a great deal.' (Younge, 21/03/2012)

system. Blacks overwhelming believed (73 percent) that Zimmerman would have been arrested if Martin had been white and not black, but only 19 percent of non-blacks agreed. (Dawson, 2012, p. 669)

Despite living in an era when a black president runs the White House, African Americans continue to experience marginalisation; or at the very least, feel as though they do. While much has happened in the generations after abolition to contribute to a positive auto-image, African Americans are still perceived as a threat. Despite the many achievements of the Civil Rights era and general improvements in attitudes towards blackness in the States, the hetero-image of the group is sometimes detrimental to the quality of life of African Americans, forcing a continued state of marginalisation in many cases.

2.18 'Smoked Irish and White Negros': Irish and African-American Connections

As this chapter has illustrated, historically, the Irish and African Americans have experienced marginalisation imposed by a subjugating power; the English and later British forces in Ireland and white American slave-owners in America. The imposed marginality of both groups was aided by a process of racialization that attempted to legitimise the treatment and subjugation of the groups by colonial forces. The damaging hetero-images attributed to both the Irish and African Americans, were similar in their depictions of members from both groups as beastly and ape-like. The quashing of religious beliefs, language and culture was also similar in both groups and despite the odds, both groups managed to retain aspects of their own, unique heritages. As far as the English were concerned, the Irish were "white negroes" (*The Black and Green Atlantic*, p. 10). By rendering the Irish 'black', the English were able to assert a difference between themselves and the savages and this aided the process of marginalisation, based on the pretence that the Irish needed controlling. This method was similar to the tactics of dehumanisation used in America with the black slaves. In the methodologies chapter, this process is discussed in greater detail in relation to both groups, focusing on how colonialism affected both groups and how the effects then trickled down to every facet of life for Gaels and African Americans, with attention

paid specifically to the literary ramifications. As the Irish and African Americans began to reclaim their freedom and cultural identity, they sometimes looked to each other and likened their respective plights and subsequently a sense of connection developed between the groups.

The connection between the Irish and Africans has been noted by a rather limited number of literary critics and the welcomed publication *The Black and Green Atlantic,* is compiled of a series of critical essays that discuss the link between the Irish migrating to America, those who fled from famine and poverty as well as the exiled Irish and Africans forced to traverse the Atlantic in the hulls of slave ships. This text is one of the few that examines how these two groups shared similar experiences, though their reasons for and consequences of traversing the Atlantic are utterly different. When discussing the relationship or connection between the Irish and African Americans, it is important to reiterate that there are fundamental differences between the groups, despite the similarities that existed in their experiences. While the Irish were not brought to North America as slaves, they were sold into slavery during the Cromwellian period in the 17th century. This is noted by Micheál Ó Siochrú in 'Shipped for Barbados' *Cromwell and Irish Migration to the Caribbean* and the author highlights that, from 1630:

> […] official accounts record the arrival of the Irish in the Caribbean, many of them kidnapped by press-gangs operating in the vicinity of the principal ports in Munster […]. The outbreak of the rebellion in 1641 temporarily disrupted the Atlantic trade, but transportations resumed after Cromwell's invasion in August 1649. The first shipment occurred towards the end of that year, when, after the storming of Drogheda, Oliver Cromwell ordered the few surviving members of the garrison to be sent to Barbados. Over the coming years, thousands of military prisoners were sold in perpetuity to plantation owners to work in the fields, effectively as slaves. (2008, p. 23)

This episode in Irish history was indicative of the hetero-image of the Irish as less than human and, subsequently, fit for a life of servitude alongside blacks in the Caribbean on English plantations. In the essay 'Ventriloquizing Blackness: Eugene O'Neill and Irish-American Racial Performance' Cedric J. Robinson discusses the role of the Irish in the West Indies and he notes:

In the New World, the "native Irish" (i.e. Catholics), increasingly dispossessed of land, became the largest single source of indentured servants in the West Indies. Some were voluntary immigrants but many were involuntary… On many of the islands their English masters subjected Irish indentured servants to "slave-like" conditions, policing them as the "enemy within". (*The Black and Green Atlantic*, p. 53)

However, the Irish experience of slavery was relatively short-lived and vastly different from that endured by blacks in North America. Nonetheless, this was a point of connection between the two groups in that both of them experienced slavery at some point, though to varying degrees. The experiences of the Irish in Barbados and their imposed marginality by English forces developed a sense of affinity between the Irish and other oppressed groups. An example of this is given in chapter three of this thesis in relation to the work of Seosamh Mac Grianna. As will be outlined in the next chapter, Mac Grianna believed that there existed a connection between the Irish and blacks, subsequently linking the auto-image of the Irish to that of other oppressed groups such as West-Indian blacks, for example.

Before Irish and African American writers developed a sense of connection between their groups, the hetero-images propagated by English and American society linked the Irish and blacks by, what they perceived, as the groups' degradation and savagery. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), for example, was particularly anti-Irish and his infamous rhetoric in 'Chartism' was shamelessly racist. Carlyle's sentiments dominated British thought and it was he who first labelled the Irish as "white negroes". Throughout the centuries of colonial rule, various attempts were made by the Irish to rebel against the British, though none were successful until the 20th century. However, Daniel O'Connell did achieve some success in gaining rights for Catholics and 'the Liberator', through his campaigns and peaceful demonstrations, managed to reverse some of the strict Penal Laws. O'Connell focused upon Catholic Emancipation and a repeal of the Act of Union which had amalgamated the Irish parliament with the British. To realise his goals, O'Connell set up one of the first and largest grassroots organisations and fundraised both amongst Catholics in Ireland and those abroad. When his attentions turned to the Irish in America, O'Connell linked the cause of the poor Irish Catholic to that of the black slave in North America. In 1841,

60,000 people issued an address to the Irish in America urging them to join forces with abolitionists. O'Connell signed off on this address that implored:

> Slavery is the most tremendous invasion of the natural inalienable rights of man,   and
> some of the noblest gifts of God, 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'…
> America   is cursed   by slavery!
> WE CALL UPON YOU TO UNITE WITH THE   ABOLITIONISTS…
> Irishmen and Irishwomen! Treat the colored people as your equals, as brethren. By your memories of Ireland continue to love liberty-hate slavery-CLING BY THE ABOLITIONISTS-and in America you will do honour to the name of Ireland. (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 13)

This was not the only instance of O'Connell's support of the "Negro" and writing in *The Journal of Negro History*, Fredrick Douglass wrote of, what he called 'the connection between the abolition of slavery in the United States and struggle of the Irish for freedom', citing the following passage from the Standard Union as proof of the sense of affinity between the two groups. When asked to vote against "Negro" emancipation in the British West Indies, Douglas notes the following response by O'Connell:

> […] There was a West Indian interest pledged to maintain Negro slavery and this interest captured twenty-seven votes in parliament. They came to O'Connell and offered him their twenty-seven votes to him on every Irish question if he would oppose Negro emancipation. "It was", said Wendell Phillips "a terrible temptation. How many a so-called statesman would have yielded!" O'Connell said: "Gentlemen, God knows I speak for the saddest nation the sun ever sees, but by my right hand forget its cunning and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if to serve Ireland, even Ireland, I forget the Negro one single hour." (Douglas, 1920, p. 102)

O'Connell's support of abolition and emancipation in these respective instances resulted in correspondence between him and the American Anti-Slavery Society. In 1840, O'Connell attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention that was held in

London, following which, a number of pro-abolitionists travelled to Ireland, including Charles Lenox Remond, a prominent African American abolitionist. Other abolitionists of repute, like William Garrison and Edmund Quincy, also linked the two causes with Quincy drawing a parallel 'between the struggle of Ireland for Repeal and the American War of Independence.' (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 10-11) Garrison related England's attitude towards Ireland to that of the slaveholder towards the slave. In 1845 Frederick Douglass travelled to Ireland and gave a series of lectures on behalf of the American-Anti-Slavery Society. He was even dubbed the "Black O'Connell", such was his popularity.

In the essay 'Beyond the Pale', Lee M. Jenkins also notes Douglass' good repute amongst his Irish audience and gives an account of Douglass' voyage to Ireland aboard the Cambria, in which he was 'forced to travel in steerage despite being in possession of a first class ticket.' (*Black and Green Atlantic*, p. 170) Douglass was almost thrown overboard on his journey by some pro-slavery passengers only to be saved by the Captain and an Irishman named Gough. In an interview with *The Limerick Reporter* in November of 1845, Gough pointed out that "not a man of the slaveholders wished to have Mr Douglass in Ireland, for they knew that he would get fair play there".[42] Douglass travelled to Cork and was received warmly, which was not surprising as Cork had a tradition of supporting the anti-slavery cause since the formation of the Cork Anti-Slavery Society, founded to protest and lobby against slavery in the West Indies. The relationship between the two men was a warm and friendly one and O'Connell dubbed Douglass his black counterpart. While the connection between the Irish and African Americans is worth noting and illustrates that there was a sense of affinity and friendship between the groups, it is important to stress, again, that their situations were not identical. Douglass himself noted this and used his own situation, that he was a slave, to make clear to the Irish that colonialism, not actual slavery, existed on the island of Ireland. Nevertheless, Douglass' time in Ireland is viewed by some as formative to the development of his thoughts on the condition of man and the call for abolition in America.[43]

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[42] *The Black and Green Atlantic*, p. 170.

[43] In a review of the TG4 documentary *Fredrick Douglass agus na Negroes Bána*, John Gibney refers to a point made throughout the documentary, 'that his experience of Ireland and the Irish played a fundamental role in his conception of human dignity and freedom. For those who might assume that descriptions of the poverty of the Irish in early nineteenth-century Ireland are exaggerated, it is sobering to note that Douglass compared the degraded living conditions of the Irish peasantry to that of slaves in

Frederick Douglass' trip to Ireland was not the only instance of interaction between the Irish and African Americans. In the 1920s, the African-American writer and activist, Claude McKay, wrote a series of essays linking the marginalisation of blacks to other oppressed groups. In 'How Black Sees Green and Red' he pays particular attention to the cause of Irish political and cultural freedom. McKay clearly identified with the Irish and this much is evident when he wrote: 'I suffer with the Irish. I think I understand the Irish. My belonging to a subject race entitles me to some understanding of them. And then I was born and reared a peasant; the peasant's passion for the soil possesses me, and it is one of the strongest passions in the Irish revolution'[44]. In this extract, it is clear why McKay was frequently referred to as 'Black Murphy' as his sense of understanding of the Irish situation is quite evident. From McKay's sentiments, we can see that some black Americans felt a deep affinity with others who experienced the oppression of their liberty and culture through colonial control and, while the experiences differed greatly between groups, there existed a feeling of profound understanding. McKay was just one of a group who believed that Harlem should look to the Irish Literary Revival as a blueprint for the Harlem Renaissance.[45]

McKay and his colleagues admired Irish literature and felt that its interaction with Irish culture, language and colonialism was a model to be followed in relation to the revival of African-American literature. Certainly, both literary revivals share marked similarities, notably renewed interests in folklore and folk traditions and experimentation with language. It is most likely that McKay had not read the work of Irish language writers whose work at the time was, arguably, more adventurous and revolutionary. While Anglo-Irish writers invoked the voice of the Irish Everyman through a unique blend of Anglo-Irish syntax, Irish language writers went a step further and made the political and literary decision to express the concerns of, the then

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the American South; equally, his descriptions of the poverty of Dublin's urban poor retain a shocking power. The lesson learned by Douglass was that poverty, suffering and the crushing of human dignity was not just the lot of the Southern slave: others around the world, even those with white skins, could also be forced to endure them. (Gibney, 2008, p. 51)

[44] Quoted in *The Passion of Claude McKay: Selected Poetry and Prose, 1912-1948* (Cooper, ed, 1973, p. 59)

[45] Others who believed that African Americans should look to Ireland for inspiration included Julia Peterkin (*The New Negro in Art: How Shall he be Portrayed*, Symposium, 1926), Alain Locke ('Negro Youth Speaks', 1925) and James Weldon Johnson ('Peace' from *The Book of American Negro Poetry,* 1922).

modern Ireland by writing wholly in Irish. Locke, McKay and Johnson were not the only Harlemites to recognise the connection between the Irish and black Americans. In some literary texts, the connection between the two groups is explicitly mentioned. In Richard Wright's *Native Son* this is seen in an interaction between the novel's protagonist, Bigger Thomas, and his co-worker, Peggy. While Peggy shows Bigger about the Dalton family home, she tells him "'I'm Irish, you know." [...] "My folks in the old country feel about England like the colored folks feel about this country."' (Wright, 1940, p. 88) In Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which is analysed in chapter four of this thesis, the Irish and African Americans are linked again and their respective struggles for political freedom and civil rights are compared.

Initially, in the early 19th century, it was easy for Irish immigrants to sympathise with the African slave in America. Like the Africans, the Irish were transported across the Atlantic in the hulls of ships and some of the 'coffin ships' used to transport the hundreds of thousands of Irish during the Famine years had 'seen service as slaving vessels'. (*The Black and Green Atlantic*, p. 173) When the dispossessed Irish arrived in the States they too, like the blacks, were viewed as a nuisance and were treated with indignity and even disdain. The influx of almost three million Irish to America was met with contempt and the Irish immigrants were considered lowly enough to be 'thrown together with black people on jobs and in neighbourhoods'. (*How the Irish became White* p. 40) Of these immigrants, over one third spoke Irish. The sharing of work and living spaces between the Irish and the blacks led to a growth in understanding and friendship between the two groups. In *How the Irish became White*, Noel Ignatiev documents this relationship and notes that in New York, for example, 'the majority of cases of "mixed" matings involved Irish women' (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 41) The interaction between the two groups encompassed other areas of life and one church in Philadelphia, presided over by a black minister, had baptismal records 'for the next twenty years suggest that one third of members were Irish.' (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 41) Ignatiev also notes that, during their initial years in America, the Irish were known widely as "niggers turned inside out" and that blacks were, in turn commonly known as "smoked Irish". A running joke at the time also referred to the concept of the Irish being as lowly as the blacks and this, too, is outlined in Ignatiev's book: "'My master is a great tyrant", said a Negro, according to a popular quip of the day. "He treats me as badly as if I was a common Irishman"' (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 42)

However, the treatment of the Irish and blacks as equals in the States was short lived. After some years, the Irish began to assimilate into mainstream American society. Obviously, it was easier for them to do so than African-Americans because of the most crucial difference between them; skin colour. In an effort to distance themselves from the blacks, some Irish gravitated towards the Republican Party and the party was dedicated to 'preserving the national unity through conciliation of the slaveholding South' (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 67) Despite the pro-abolition stance of prominent Irish, as mentioned above, some influential leaders of Irish immigrants in the States disagreed with O'Connell's stance. As noted by Ignatiev, the Bishop John J. Hughes, one of the foremost leaders of the Irish at the time, doubted the authenticity of O'Connell's calls and deemed that any discourse on slavery in the States and its abolition should be conducted by naturalised Irish and native-born Americans. In the *Catholic Diary*, those who demanded the abolition were 'zealots who would madly attempt to eradicate the evil by the destruction of our federal union.' (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 17) After some years in America, the Irish made concentrated efforts to distance themselves from the stigma associated with being linked to black Americans. To do so, many engaged in a process of ruthless racialization and attempted to further marginalise blacks whilst attempting to immerse themselves in white American society. The vying for work between the Irish and blacks in large northern cities was eventually beneficial to the Irish. As noted by Frederick Douglass, "Every hour sees us elbowed out of some employment to make room for some newly-arrived emigrant from the Emerald Isle, whose hunger and color entitle him to special favour."[46] Douglass's comments express a shift in the affiliation previously felt between the two groups.

The favouring of Irish labourers over black workers gave the Irish the much desired step-up from being associated with African Americans. The Irish continued to play the colour game and distance themselves from blacks. They had a majority in many unions and blacks were denied access to these groups. As noted by Ignatiev, they also took over the formerly black dominated dockyards and: 'In 1850, Irish laborers had struck, demanding the dismissal of a black labourer who was working alongside them.' (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 120) This is just one of the many examples of white Irish racism targeted at blacks during an era when both groups were considered in a similar light by the mainstream American society. To distance themselves from

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[46]Douglass, 2003, p. 214.

the social stigma attached to blackness, the Irish had to become whiter than white and one of the measures used to achieve this, as noted by Ignatiev was: 'To be acknowledged as white, it was not enough for the Irish to have a competitive advantage over Afro-Americans in the labor market; in order for them to avoid the taint of blackness it was necessary that no Negro be allowed to work in occupations where Irish were to be found.' (Ignatiev, 1995, p. 112) Some Irish even protested and rioted against Afro-American workers and interrupted black American demonstrations. The Irish in America seemingly had very different ideas of African American and Irish relations to those back home in Ireland. All of the anti-black Irish agitation made Daniel O'Connell's position very difficult, particularly when his fundraising efforts were aided by the money of slaveholders. This was, no doubt, embarrassing for the Liberator who had, as mentioned above, a close relationship with abolitionists in the States.

Despite the need felt by the Irish in America to distance their group from the connection between themselves and blacks, particularly in the antebellum era, generations later, prominent African American writers and activists would look to Ireland as a model for literary revival and celebration of a marginalised people and culture. The sense of connection between the groups is memorialised in various literary offerings and critical essays. As will be outlined in the later chapters, the development of auto-images in Gaelic and African American literature demonstrates that both groups engaged with their painful histories of marginality in similar ways. Writers from both groups considered their own marginalized positions in light of other oppressed groups and by doing so, Irish language and African American literature created a cultural community that traversed the Atlantic, overcoming imposed boundaries to share with and exchange one another's ideas and experiences.

Chapter 3 - Seosamh Mac Grianna: Rí-éigeas na nGael or Auld Butts? Seosamh Mac Grianna and 20th Century Irish Literary Identities

In the years following the Irish Cultural Revival and, later, the establishment of the Free State, there were fixed, stereotyped views among the wider public in relation to Irish national identity- an identity that was linked to that of those from within the Irish strongholds of the Gaeltachtaí. The stifling images of Gaeltacht inhabitants that expounded, poorly represented those living in these marginalised zones. For some Irish language writers, the misinformed perceptions of their lives were unacceptable and many of those disillusioned by mainstream society's misconceptions worked hard towards giving a more realistic portrayal of life beyond the margins; even at the expense of preserving the ideal of the Gaeltacht. Considered to be one of the best and foremost Irish-language writers of the last century, Seosamh Mac Grianna worked throughout his career at dispelling the myths surrounding the life of the Gael, instead, offering up insights into the realities of life beyond the margins. While his short stories and novels are held in wide regard, the body of criticism that exists in relation to this enigmatic literary figure is comparably small and rarely extends beyond Irish-language circles, but for a few exceptions. This may, in part, be due to the man's formidable and headstrong character, evident in his many critical essays, letters, pamphlets and literary works. Another contributing factor may be the mystery that shrouds Mac Grianna's personal life, making it difficult to piece together biographical information that may be helpful in deciphering complex works such as *Mo Bhealach Féin* and *An Druma Mór*. Mac Grianna was one of the Irish language's first, professional writers although his career was short lived and marred by mental illness. The thirty-one years Mac Grianna spent in St Connell's Psychiatric Hospital in Donegal meant that the writer was cut off from the creative Irish language community and it was not until the final years of his life that Mac Grianna re-entered public life as a writer, despite having been a dormant presence for over thirty years.

3.1 Biographical Background: From Donegal to Dublin

Mac Grianna's literary works are outstanding because of their realistic account of Irish life and culture during the first half of the 20th century. Mac Grianna was intent on giving a rounded view of Gaelic life and his work draws heavily upon his experiences in his efforts to give readers a true account of his version of Irish identity. The years following World War One and the Easter Rising of 1916 were tumultuous and violent ones on the island of Ireland. Born in 1900 in the Gaeltacht region of Rann na Feiriste in Donegal, Mac Grianna was an impressionable youth during the founding years of Irish republicanism. Mac Grianna was reared in a tightknit rural, Gaeltacht community and his family were held in high regard in the town. He was one of seven children and each, according to the opinions of locals from Rann na Feiriste, had individual talents with regards to music, storytelling and writing. In his study of the author *Seosamh Mac Grianna: An Mhéin Rúin,* (2002), Fionntán de Brún notes the illustrious reputation attributed to the family in their hometown of Rann na Feiriste.[47] The influence of his family's association with storytelling and poetry can be gleaned from Mac Grianna's work, as the author's in depth knowledge of folk and hero tales arises frequently in his texts. The Green family (the English translation of the family name Ó Grianna) had been living in Rann na Feiriste since 1736 when two brothers, Pádraig and Seán, settled there. As such, the family had a long and distinguished history in the area and were well liked and revered for their cultural, social and political contributions to the community. The family's strong connection to Rann na Feiriste certainly had an impact upon the author and his ties to and love of the rural community frequently arise in his works and will be discussed later in this chapter.

Perhaps the most influential aspect of Mac Grianna's childhood was the family's strong association with storytelling. According to his brother, Séamus, the men's father was the best 'scéalaí' in the area and locals still believe this to be true,

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[47] The family's reputation for storytelling in the area of Rann na Feiriste is accounted for as de Brún notes 'Bhí clú fada seanchais agus filíochta ar a mhuintir agus ba é a dheartháir ba shine, Séamus, a scríobhadh gearrscéalta agus úrscéalta faoin ainm cléite 'Máire'. (His people had a long reputation of storytelling and poetry and it was his eldest brother, Séamus, who wrote short stories and novels under the pen name 'Máire')
(de Brún, 2002, p. 7)

even today.[48] This most likely had an effect upon Mac Grianna as the writer's home would have been steeped in the oral culture of Rann na Feiriste.[49] The literary heritage intertwined with the Green family shines through most of Mac Grinanna's writings and his short stories and novels have distinct hints of the rich, oral storytelling traditions of rural Ireland. The influence of folkloric traditions in Mac Grianna's work and the manner in which they help shape Irish identity will be discussed at a later stage. Mac Grianna was also an avid reader and the influence of other writers, such as Joyce and Carlyle, in particular, had a profound effect upon him.[50] Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) added to and helped shape Mac Grianna's knowledge of the motif of the hero in literature and in oral tales and this much is evident from Mac Grianna's work on Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néill, to give but one example.[51] Séamus, Mac Grianna's brother, was also influenced by this unique upbringing and he, too, was a prolific writer during the 20th century. Séamus' literary career had a profound effect on Seosamh as the two brothers fiercely competed as writers. Séamus' presence was so great that Seosamh changed his name from Ó Grianna to Mac Grianna; one of his first, public attempts at creating a new identity for himself. The elder of the two, Séamus was recognised before Mac Grianna for his literary abilities and was achieving the kind of goals which his younger brother was

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[48] This reputation is noted in *Seosamh Mac Grianna: Míreanna Saoil* and the author quotes Séamus Ó Crianna: "M'athair an scéalaí b'fhearr a chuala mé riamh" and notes that 'chreid […] an t-iomrá sin air ar fud Rann na Feiriste go dtí an lá inniu ann.' [My father was the best storyteller I ever heard] and [this reputation is still maintained in Rann na Feiriste to this day.] (Ó Muirí, 2007, p. 34)

[49] Both Philip O'Leary (2004, p. 107) and Fionntán de Brún note the influence of his father's storytelling abilities on Mac Grianna, particularly from his foreword in his brother's collection of stories, learned from their father, *Micheál Ruadh*. De Brún notes that the foreword was 'Píosa an-tábhachtach é réamhrá Micheál Ruadh a thugann léargas dúinn ar an oidhreacht a fuari Seosamh Mac Grianna óna atahair agus ó chultúr na Gaeltachta agus ar an tuiscint a bhí aige air sin uilig.' [The foreword was a very important piece that gives us an insight into the legacy left to Seosamh Mac Grianna by his father and from the culture of the Gaeltacht and the understanding he had of all of that] (de Brún, 2002, p. 25)

[50] In *Seosamh Mac Grianna: An Mhéin Rúin*, Fionntán de Brún talks extensively of Mac Grianna's fondness for 19th century English literature (de Brún, 2002, p. 41-45). Amongst the list of inspirational writers for Mac Grianna, Thomas Carlyle is mentioned. This may seem rather strange, considering Carlyle's disdain for the Irish however, Mac Grianna nonetheless appreciated Carlyle's understanding of the motif of the hero in history. This, most likely, resonated with Mac Grianna who had a deep interest in Irish folklore and mythical stories, in which the hero motif frequently appears.

[51] Mac Grianna wrote a biographical, literary dedication to Eoghan Ruadh Ó Néíll, published in 1931 and was inspired by the themes of heroism in the history of Ó Néill. Memorialised in the poem *Lament for the Death of Eoghan Ruadh O'Neill* by Thomas Davis, Ó Néill was a 17th century soldier who fought in the Irish Confederate Wars.

working towards, while Seosamh was still a teenager. This, most likely, had an effect upon Seosamh and the rivalry between the brothers was often played-out publically.[52] However, the two brothers were distinctly different in the content, tone and style of their writings.

From a young age, Mac Grianna had wanted to be identified as a writer and nothing more. Despite growing up in a predominantly oral community, he was acutely aware of the increasing value of the written word in an era which saw the rapid decline of folk traditions and had desires to make a career for himself as a full time writer. According to Mac Grianna, folklore was dying off in rural communities:

> Bhí an litríocht ag briseadh agus ag meilt; ní raibh ag formhór na ndaoine ach giotaí de na laoithe agus de na hamhráin agus de na scéalta. Bhí corrdhuine a raibh siad go hiomlán aige, dálta mar bhíos corrchrann glas i gcoill a bhíos ag feo. Ach bhí na Gaeil ag cailleadh an bhéaloidis
>
> [Literature was breaking and grinding; most of the people only had bits of the hero stories and of the songs and of the stories. There was the odd person that fully had it, students that were like the odd green tree in a forest that was withering. But the Irish
>
> were losing folklore] (Ó Muirí, 2007, p. 40)

It seems that Mac Grianna understood this much from a young age as in July 1914, he won a prize for his writing in the Donegal Feis at the age of fourteen. This early achievement was testament to Mac Grianna's desire to be a writer, not a 'seanchaí' [storyteller] like his father. Later in life, Mac Grianna noted that from 1914 onward, there existed a desire within him to become a writer. This, perhaps, was his first rebellion against what was expected of him as a native of Rann na Feiriste.

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[52] An example of their strained relationship can be found in chapter nineteen of *Mo Bhealach Féin*. Mac Grianna talks about paying his brother a visit and goes on the say that: 'Níor fhan mé ach dhó nó trí laetha. Ní raibh comhrá ar bith le fáil agam ach corrfhocal fá cluichí liathróide; an comhrá a bhíos ag an Ghael a phós agas a shochair síos agus nár bhain agus nár chaill. D'aidmhigh Séamus dom nár léigh sé aon leabhar le bliain […] Bhí muid ag éirí tostach le chéile acah lá […] tá mé ag déanamh nach dtiocfadh linn a bheith ar an aon intinn fán aird a raibh an ghaoth ag séideadh aisti.' [I only stayed for two or three days. There was no conversation to be had except for the odd word about a ball game; the conversation of the married Gael who had married and settled down. Séamus admitted to me that he hadn't read a book in a year […] we were becoming more silent with each other every day […] We would never be of the same mind so long as the wind blows] (Mac Grianna, 1941, p. 165-166)

In 1916, Mac Grianna enrolled at St Eunan's College in Letterkenny. A college originally intended for those inclined towards the priesthood, St Eunan's was a haven for Mac Grianna that offered Irish as a subject under the stewardship of J.P. Craig; the man who founded the journal *An Crann* in 1916. *An Crann* was aimed at young Irish language writers and afforded them the opportunity to see their work published. The journal was dedicated to the pursuit of Irish as an intellectual and modern language; a concept that was highly unfashionable at the time. *An Crann* was an important publication as it provided writers in the county with access to each other and their works; it created a literary community for budding writers who may, otherwise, have felt a disconnect. For the first time, the young Seosamh would have been made aware of the literary activities of others in his area. After a year's schooling in Letterkenny, Mac Grinanna continued his studies in St Columbs' College in Derry. However, his time there was short lived and he was expelled in December 1917 for distributing republican documents throughout the college. This was an ironic twist as, in the months prior to Mac Grianna's enrolment in St Columbs, the young man had dabbled with the idea of joining the British Army to fight in the battle of the Somme. Between the years 1917 and 1919, little is known of how Mac Grianna spent his time. However, it is almost certain that he spent those years in Rann na Feiriste. In 1919, Mac Grianna received a scholarship to study education in St Patrick's College in Drumcondra. However, he was not suited to life as a teacher, something Mac Grianna learned at a later stage.

Mac Grianna's time in St Patrick's College was defining for the young man, not as a teacher, but as a writer and rebellious presence within Irish language circles. When Mac Grianna enrolled in St Patrick's, the country had entered into a fateful period in Irish history. In 1919, the first Dáil Éireann was established in January of that year and later that month, the Irish War of Independence began after the IRA killed James McDonnell and Patrick O'Connell, two members of the Royal Constabulary in Tipperary. The Irish government began to establish new, national institutions without the permission of the British Government and other unofficial governmental activities soon attracted the attentions of the British Army, initiating another bloody chapter in the history between Ireland and England. The introduction of 43,000 British soldiers to the country by December 1919 as well as the outlawing of Sinn Féin and the IRA forced the people of Ireland to consider if it was better to fight for independence, against the huge force of the British Army or remain part of

the Imperial Parliament in London. For Mac Grianna, the answer was an easy and apparent one. Both as a writer and Irishman, he would settle for nothing less than political and creative freedom. The impetus within Mac Grianna for political and creative rebellion is also noted by de Brún who states:

'Is cinnte fosta go raibh an tuiscint a bhí ag Mac Grianna ar a ról mar scríbhneoir náisiúnta ag brath go mór ar fhealsúntacht Davis agus ar thionscnamh liteartha náisiúnaíoch *Young Ireland.* Is ar an ábhar sin a shamlaigh Mac Grianna ról an scríbhneora le ról polaitiúl réabhlóideach agus a chuaigh téis liteartha Thomas Mac Donagh go mór i bhfeidhm air.'

[It is certain that Mac Grianna had an understanding that his role as a national writer depended on Davis' philosophy and on the national literary project Young Ireland. It was on this subject that Mac Grianna imagined the role of a writer to be akin to the political, revolutionary role and the literary work of Thomas Mac Donagh greatly influenced him.] (de Brún, 2002, p. 49)

Mac Grianna's pursuit of political and creative freedom had its roots in his upbringing in Rann na Feiriste and his family's deep affiliation with the Irish Republican Army (IRA). In *Seosamh Mac Grianna: Míreanna Saoil*, Ó Muirí also notes the author's associations with the IRA, the presence of flying columns and active IRA members living within Rann na Feiriste. Mac Grianna's brothers were members of the organisation and his brother Dónall was a local captain. His sisters were also involved in Republican activities and were members of *Cumann na mBan* (The Women's League). His family's circumstances, undoubtedly, had an impact upon Mac Grianna and Ó Muirí notes 'Ní hábhar iontais é gur treisíodh an nasc idir Mac Grianna agus cúis na poblacht an t-am seo.' [It is no surprise that the link between Mac Grianna and the republican cause strengthened at this time] (Ó Muirí, 2007, p. 66) During his training at St Patrick's College, Mac Grianna focused his attentions upon political and cultural affairs and wrote many pamphlets at the time.

In November 1920, Mac Grianna was present during the infamous attack on spectators in Croke Park. One of the many survivors, Mac Grianna, afterwards, intensified his dealings with the IRA and did so with ease due to the high number of members that attended St Patrick's. By the time Mac Grianna had finished his training in St Patrick's in the summer of 1921, the country was entrenched in warfare between

the IRA and the British Forces. Upon finishing his time in St Patrick's, Mac Grianna returned to Rann na Feiriste and was a member of an IRA column. Despite his involvement, little is known of Mac Grianna's time in the IRA during the War of Independence. However, the role he played during the Civil War from 1922 is better documented.

Mac Grianna's political affiliations provide us with a context to many of his works and we can glean an understanding of his motivations in texts such as *Mo Bhealach Féin.* Mac Grianna's time with the IRA during the Civil War was short lived as he was interned by the Free State Army in June 1922 for a period of 15 months. He was first interned in Letterkenny but was later moved to Buncrana and then to Newbridge in Kildare. His brothers Séamus, Dónall and Hiúdaí were also imprisoned during the Civil War. By the time Mac Grianna was released in 1924, he was greatly embittered and found himself on the losing side. This bitterness is certainly detected in his attitudes thereafter towards the Free State, particularly in *Mo Bhealach Féin*.

3.2   Pearse, Ó Conaire and Mac Grianna: Towards a New Irish Literary Identity

Considering Mac Grianna's background and political leanings, it is no surprise to find that his literary works were laden with new representations of the Irish language and Irish society at the time. As a writer, Mac Grianna fully subscribed to the same ideals set by Pearse and, most notably, Pádraic Ó Conaire. A true revolutionary, Pearse not only believed that Irish politics and society needed to be over-hauled, he felt that Irish culture, literature in particular, needed to measure up to international literary standards. As discussed in chapter two of this thesis, Pearse subscribed to and encouraged the mantra that the country needed a new literature to represent a new, Irish republic. Mac Grianna practised this in his writing.[53] While Pearse was hugely influential to many new and emerging Irish writers in the beginning of the 20th century, it was the work of Pádraic Ó Conaire that had the greatest effect upon the literary offerings of Mac Grianna. In fact, Mac Grianna was

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[53] Mac Grianna's revolutionary literary style is noted by O'Leary in relation to the author's incomplete novel *Dá mBíodh Ruball ar an Éan* (If the Bird Had a Tail) stating: '*Dá mBíodh ruball ar an Éan* is a characteristically original and provocative contribution to the evolution of Gaelic prose into a medium fully capable of expressing all of the concerns and nuances of contemporary life' (O'Leary, 2004, p. 233-234).

prompted to write in the marginalised Irish tongue following a reading of Ó Conaire's *An Chéad Chloch* (1914):

> 'Bunús ar scríobh mé ón am sin go raibh mé naoi mbliana déag, be i mBéarla a scríobh mé é. Ach ansin casadh an *An Chéad Chloch* orm. Ansin nuair a léigh mé an leabhar seo stad mé de chur focal Béarla le ceol m'aigne. Chreid mé go mb'fhéidir litríocht uasal fhiliúnta a scríobh i nGaeilge. Bhí blas ar an leabhar agam mar bheadh blas ar fhíon ag an té nach raibh fhois aige go dtí sin go raibh ar an tsaol ach uisce'
>
> [Initially, from the time I started writing at nineteen, it was in English that I wrote. Then I came across *An Chéad Chloch*. Then when I read that book I stopped putting English words to the music of my mind. I believed that a noble literature could be written in Irish. I had tasted that book as he who has tasted wine for the first time, believing that only water existed in life.] (Mac Grianna, 1936, p. 5)

Until his reading of *An Chéad Chloch*, Mac Grianna had not believed that modern, 20th century literature was possible in Irish. Mac Grianna was not alone in this view and the scarcity of Irish language literature at the time reinforced the opinion that little to no literature in Irish was being produced. Mac Grianna believed that the Irish language should be able to reflect the experiences of Irish people living in the 20th century. He believed that Irish writing should offer a true reflection upon Irish culture and society; that Irish language writers should use the language to articulate the thoughts and experiences of a new generation of Irish citizens. At the turn of the 20th century, this was not the case. As mentioned earlier in chapter one, the efforts to revive the language were strained and marred by controversy and debate. Initially, many felt that the ideals put forth by Pearse were dangerously revolutionary and that a move away from the language used at the firesides would be detrimental to the survival of Irish and her associated culture. The debate that unfolded between the late 19th and early 20th century regarding the Irish language divided opinion.

The core values of the Cultural Revival were to re-instate Irish traditions that were languishing across the country and to organise a reintroduction to national pastimes such as hurling and Irish football whilst simultaneously reviving Irish literary traditions. Following generations of decline through its illegalisation, the Irish language was finally gaining recognition outside of Gaeltacht areas. The emphasis

placed on the promotion of the Irish language across the country was greatly aided by the establishment of *Conradh na Gaeilge*. Founded in July of 1893 by Douglas Hyde (1860-1949), *Conradh na Gaeilge* aimed to re-establish the status of the Irish language and restore the number of Irish speakers across the state. The revival of the Irish language was one of the main areas of focus for Ireland's cultural renaissance, and as such, an unspoken responsibility was placed upon native speakers of the language to bolster the new image of 'Irishness' craved by the inhabitants of a nation striving for independence at the turn of the 20th century.

Following the establishment of *Conradh na Gaeilge*, there was a renewed interest in Gaeltacht communities. However, the intrigue was almost touristic and Gaelgoirí flocked to the small communities dotted along the Atlantic coast in search of an authentic 'Irish' experience. Despite the influx of language enthusiasts and tourists to the Gaeltachtaí, the Irish State invested little in the local economies of these areas until the very latter half of the 20th century. As a result, those charged with the responsibility of saving the Irish language and subsequently, Irish national identity, were left to languish, quite literally, on the periphery of mainstream Irish society.

As a native Irish speaker, Mac Grianna was aware of the disparity which existed between the ideals surrounding Gaeltacht life and the reality for those living in these areas. He was critical of the status of Gaeltacht inhabitants outside of these communities and the relationship that existed between this group of people and wider Irish society. His sense of disillusionment is apparent in much of his work, both literary and non-fiction. An astute observer of Irish life, Mac Grianna was aware of the challenges facing the identity of Irish language speakers and in a personal and professional capacity, he did much to dispel the myth of piety associated with the Irish speaker, as outlined in chapter two of this thesis. Mac Grianna was, perhaps, most vocal during the 1930s and some of his writing began to reveal his true opinions of Irish identity, particularly for those from Gaeltacht areas living amongst the Galltacht community. Written in the 1930s and published by An Gúm in 1940, Mac Grianna's *Mo Bhealach Féin* is an autobiographical, literary account of a period in the author's life. Written shortly before Mac Grianna was diagnosed with depressive psychosis, it charts the author's disillusionment with Irish society and gives great insight into the reality that existed for Irish speakers at the time; a reality far removed from the identity propagated by the Irish Free State.

Mac Grianna was an astute critic of modern Irish society in the late 1920s and 1930s. Having grown up in the Gaeltacth town of Rann na Feiriste, he later moved to Dublin and remained in the city for many years. He also travelled to England and Wales and spent some time hiking and walking throughout the Welsh countryside. This aspect of Mac Grianna's life afforded him the opportunity to reflect on life and home as well as the state of the Irish language. Mac Grianna spent much, if not all, of his life as an outsider and he failed to ever fully engage with wider Irish society. A fully qualified teacher, Mac Grianna never settled in the role, preferring instead to carve out a career as one of the first fulltime, professional Irish language writers. Mac Grianna's career was, undoubtedly, aided by An Gúm; a state publishing body that was established in 1926. However, the writer's relationship with An Gúm is almost legendary due to the unreserved disdain he exhibited towards the publisher, evident in some of his texts published by An Gúm itself. In 1929, A Gúm published a collection of short stories of Mac Grianna's and, in 1928, he began working for the publisher as a translator. Despite An Gúm employing Mac Grianna, the writer seldom relented in his criticism of the publisher and he frequently complained of the standard of literature being published at the time. His belief that modern Irish language literature should be a true reflection of Irish society and experiences meant that Mac Grianna's literary offerings would give an accurate insight into representations of Irish identity, bolstered by the language and the actual reality that existed for Irish speakers.

3.3   Mac Grianna, Gaels and the Galltacht

It is possible to unearth the true value of Mac Grianna's work as studies of Irish identity when we consider them in light of imagological theory. The study of national, ethnic and group stereotypes, imagology enables the study of identities and images as represented in literary texts. Oftentimes, a group's view of itself is determined by, or at the very least, somewhat shaped by how it is viewed by others. The distinction between hetero- and auto-image, as discussed in the methodology, allows us to identify the manner in which a group views itself as opposed to how it is viewed. In this respect, it is important to note that the development of a nation's image is not solely based on a polarity between auto- and hetero-image; but that the process is a threefold event that considers a dominant groups' hetero-image of a marginalised

group, implying the dominant group's auto-image, the marginalised group's auto-image compared to the dominants group's hetero image (as defined just now) and the marginalised group's auto-image compared to their own hetero image of the dominant group. The group images are ultimately dialogic, determined by their views of the group they define themselves against.

However, the study of group images is, perhaps, a little more complex when dealing with marginalised groups as opposed to nations. For some marginalised groups, the hetero-entity can exist in multiple forms. In Mac Grianna's texts, we find many, different hetero-and auto- images and, therefore, we are afforded a more rounded insight into Irish society. When analysing Mac Grianna's work in the context of 1930s Ireland, it is also worthwhile to consider the immanent and extra-textual spheres. By doing so, the perception of Irish-speakers during 1930s Ireland, for example, may be examined in a new light that accounts for their representation both in fiction and reality.

Written in the early 1930s and published by An Gúm in 1940, *Mo Bhealach Féin* is an autobiographical novel that accounts for a period of Mac Grianna's life, divided between Dublin, England and Wales. Often rejected as an autobiography, *Mo Bhealach Féin* gives a colourful account of life in modern Ireland, as Mac Grianna saw it.[54] The text is laden with references to Irish language literature and oral tradition as well as nods to European writers. In the text, Mac Grianna's attentions are focused on critiquing the state of modern Ireland and reflecting upon his role as a contemporary Irish writer and its associated responsibilities. In the opening pages of *Mo Bhealach Féin*, it becomes apparent that Mac Grianna does not fit with the stereotype of native Irish language speakers as protectors of Irish identity and morality. In fact, Mac Grianna is quite an ambivalant figure and exists in opposition to the expectations of Irish society at the beginning of the 20th century.

In the opening lines of *Mo Bhealach Féin*, Mac Grianna takes a well-known Irish proverb and turns it completely on its head. The line 'Deir siad go bhfuil an fhírinne searbh ach creid mise ní searbh atá sí ach garbh, agus sin an fáth a seachantar í'[They say that the truth is sharp, but I believe it is rough, not sharp, and that's why it's avoided] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 5) is telling of Mac Grianna's view of Irish society. This first statement illustrates that Mac Grianna has little faith in the ability of

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[54] The authenticity of events as described in *Mo Bhealach Féin* has been frequently debated and some believe Mac Grianna's poor mental health at the time makes the author an unreliable narrator.

others to give a true portrayal of Irish life during the 1930s and as such, suggests that Mac Grianna is one of the few in pursuit of real, modern Irish language literature. By including an Irish proverb in the opening lines of his work, Mac Grianna also references the rich, oral tradition he would have been accustomed to as a child, growing up in the Gaeltacht. The statement also blatantly offers a criticism of Christian Ireland and behaviour of this kind would not have been expected from a member of the group revered as the most pious in the land; Gaeltacht inhabitants. In the same chapter, Mac Grianna refers to himself as 'rí-éigeas na nGael'[King of the Poets (sages) of the Irish] and, subsequently, fortifies his status as a true advocate for the Irish language and her literature. By attributing himself this title, it is clear that Mac Grianna views himself as a representative of his group; the foremost authority on Gaelic literature.

From the opening chapters of *Mo Bhealach Féin*, it becomes clear that it can be difficult to identify one, true auto-image in the representation of Irish language speakers, or, rather, more than one auto-image exists in the text. *Mo Bhealach Féin* was written during Mac Grianna's time in Dublin. This was a particularly difficult time for the author as he existed as an outsider, far removed from any sense of community or belonging. Perhaps unwittingly, Mac Grianna, in his autobiography, gives us an insight into the complexities that exist when representing Irish language speakers in literature. Mac Grianna, as mentioned earlier, refers to himself as 'Rí-Éigeas na nGael', subsequently establishing himself as the voice of this group; their leader. Despite the position the author affords himself, as guardian of the 'Gael', Mac Grianna suffers from a solitary existence. He is a loner and languishes on the periphery of mainstream Irish society. His lonesome figure may be read as an alternative to the auto-image of the Irish language speaker as being of or belonging to a tightknit, rural community. He is far removed from the Gaeltacht of Donegal and its quaint firesides.

The romanticised view of Gaeltacht dwellers propagated during the 1930s does not fit with Mac Grianna's view of himself or of others from the Gaeltacht. In *Mo Bhealach Féin*, Mac Grianna, the native Irish speaker, gives an account, not of the quaint, rural Gaeltacht village from which he came, but an account of a marginalised individual struggling to survive in an alien city. It becomes immediately apparent that Mac Grianna is fully aware of his marginalised status within the urban sphere as he laments '…tá eagla orm nach dtuigtear an fhírinne má insím í'[I'm afraid that the truth

will not be understood if I tell it] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 5) Despite being a member of the community charged with preserving the language intended to save the country's national image, Mac Grianna clearly feels misunderstood and undervalued; sentiments expressed in both his literature and exchanges with An Gúm. In the opening chapters of *Mo Bhealach Féin*, Mac Grianna accounts for his time spent in Dublin and the writer masterfully illustrates his peripheral position in the capital city of his homeland. The isolation and sense of desertion outlined by Mac Grianna in *Mo Bhelach Féin* starkly illustrates the reality that existed for Irish speakers outside of Gaeltachtaí and shatters the perceived image and identity of individuals from these communities.

In the text, we see Mac Grianna destitute and struggling to keep lodgings in a guest house. The owner of the guesthouse is, undoubtedly, a member of the society to which Mac Grianna does not belong. The landlady and her son are representative of a hetero-image that exists in the text. They belong fully to the Galltacht community and as such, exist in opposition to Mac Grianna. For Mac Grianna, the landlady and her son embody the many social and cultural ills of the time. The son is a trainee priest and the landlady, he tells us, is a poet, but her work is fit for nothing more than ridicule. In the text, Mac Grianna struggles to translate her work from English to Irish, for fear her words may sully the language. A representative of the Galltacht, the landlady is described by the author as being tight-fisted and unnatural and he assumes that there is 'fuil Ghiúdach' [Jewish blood] in her.[55] The unfavourable characterisation of the landlady is quite telling of Mac Grianna's views in relation to a certain class of Dublin inhabitant. The landlady and her son help for Mac Grianna to establish the auto-image of Irish speakers as existing in opposition to the image presented of Galltacht inhabitants as greedy and uncultured.

In chapter two of the text, Mac Grianna wrongly thinks that he murdered the landlady's son following an abusive outburst over rent. Fearing for his safety, he flees the scene and disappears amongst the masses in Dublin City. Convinced he murdered a man Mac Grianna is plagued by delusions and believes that it is only a matter of time before he is convicted of a heinous crime. While the sense of paranoia in Chapter Two is acute, there is a prevailing sense of being watched over in the entire work. The palpable distrust in *Mo Bhealach Féin* may be viewed as indicative of the relationship between the Gaelic and English speaking populations in the text. Mac Grianna, for

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[55] Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 12.

example, constantly refers to the malevolent presence of a 'namhaid' [enemy] and this enemy takes many forms ranging from guesthouse owner to government officials in An Gúm; all of which represent the hetero-image of the dominant English speaking population in the text. The lack of understanding between the two groups culminated in upholding of stereotypes that soured the communication between the groups, both in reality and in Mac Grianna's textual world.

In the text, it seems that the author feels no remorse for his attack on the 'dodalán breac beannaithe' [theological, mottled slug] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 21) The use of the word 'breac' is telling of how Mac Grianna views those from the Galltacht; they are a mottled people, the result of mixed cultures without allegiance to any one group.[56] This, in Mac Grianna's view, is a systemic problem that culminated in a lack of authenticity within the image of the Irish nation.   For Mac Grianna, an ex-IRA member who felt deceived and disenfranchised by the Irish Free State, the landlady and her doted upon son can be viewed as representatives of the dominant power in Irish society. They care little for the plight of the struggling Gaelic writer and instead are concerned with promoting their own self-fulfilling agenda. The landlady of the guesthouse may be considered as the hetero-image existing for Irish speakers in 1930s Ireland and this image is far removed from the manner in which Irish speakers, as a group, perceived themselves, as evident from the manner in which characters perceive themselves in the works of Pádraic Ó Conaire and Máirtín Ó Cadhain, for example.

3.4   Auto-images of the Irish Language Speaker

The represented auto-image of Irish language speakers in Mac Grianna's text is, arguably, more favourable. As the only native speaker present(ed) in the majority of the text, Mac Grianna views himself as the one true and honest voice in Irish society. However, despite being the sole representative of an entire community, he is still unable to present a set, consistent image of the native Irish speaker. Readers learn as much in the second chapter when the protagonist changes his name (to Cathal Mac Giolla Ghunna) and his identity for the first of many times. The author seeks refuge in a 'teach gan ainm' [a house without a name] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 19) and the

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[56] The term 'breac' is commonly used in Irish language discourse to describe the English speaking Irish population. 'Breac', understood in this instance to be 'mottled' has been used by writers such as Hugo Hamilton and Máirín Nic Eoin.

lacking identity of the guesthouse enables Mac Grianna's transformation to a nomadic non-entity. The use of aliases is a common device used by Mac Grianna and he switches names and identities as easily, seemingly, as he changes his clothes.[57] The change of name and identity allows for Mac Grianna to move effortlessly around Dublin city, leaving bad debts in his wake. The freedom afforded to Mac Grianna by doing so contrasts with the title he affords himself as 'Rí Éigeas na nGael'. The title he invents carries the inherent suggestion of responsibility; a responsibility to artistically represent a marginalised group in Irish society. The changing name and identity of the author invariably confuses the auto-image of the Irish speaker and subsequently, raises questions in relation to the consistency of the marginalised groups' hetero-image of the dominant English speaking population.

For Mac Grianna, Dublin is a city built by childlike idiots.[58] Referred to by the author as 'the Pale', the city is the setting for, what Mac Grianna believes is, a corrupt parliament and numerous defunct and negligent government bodies and organisations. The descriptions of ugly Dublin streets, dilapidated buildings and crippling poverty add a sense of physicality and reality to the grimness of the situation for the marooned Mac Grianna. In various chapters, readers get an insight into the depression suffered by the author whilst in the city. In chapter three of the text, the author describes Ireland as a 'cúng' [narrow] and 'gortach' [starving] land and he conveys a sense of constant surveillance. He laments that the country is being selfishly watched over by a small, privileged minority. His bold remarks are, once again, indicative of the terse relationship that existed between the dominant social powers and those on the margins.

In Mac Grianna's view of Ireland, it seems that everything is for sale by the narrow minded and 'gortach' population; even writers. Crucial to Mac Grianna's auto-image of the Irish-speaker is the unwillingness to sell out or sell his artistic vision. To do so, the author tells us, is a kind of slavery.[59] Mac Grianna's determination not to buy into selling out in 1930s Ireland is a crucial component to the identity of the Irish speaker, particularly at a time when the country seemed starved of a united

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[57] 'Athróidh mé mo chuid éadaigh augs athróidh mé m'ainm arís' [I will change my clothes and I will change my name again] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 21)

[58] 'Dar liom riamh gur páistí a rinne an chathair, daoine beaga lagintinneacha […]' [I believe that children made the city, small, weak-minded people] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 20)

[59] 'Ní raibh mé indíolta. Ní dhíoltar ach sclábhaite. Chaithfinn mo ghreim a chur agus a bhaint.' [I was not for sale. Only slaves are sold] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 26)

nationhood. The Irish speaking population, as outlined earlier, were viewed as a solution to this problem. For Mac Grianna, the impassioned Gaelic writer, one of the most widespread examples of the exploitation of the language and her speakers existed in the expectation placed on native speakers to impart their knowledge of Irish onto members of the English speaking society. As discussed in chapter one of this thesis, there was a huge onus placed on Irish speakers as guardians of the language to teach the 'dying' tongue to others before it became too late. In chapter three of *Mo Bhealach Féin*, Mac Grianna distorts the image of Irish speakers as willing participants in the Free State's efforts to bolster Irish language instruction when he declares:

> 'Ba rud teagasc Gaeilge a raibh drochmheas agam air. Ní thuigfidh duine a tógadh le Bérala mé. Ach dá mbíodh an Béarla go maith aige, agus aige lena theagasc do dhaoine a raibh fíor-dhroch-Bhéarla acu, thuigfeadh sé mé. Dar liom riamh go raibh cloigne ar lucht foghlaim Gaeilge cosúil leis na lámha a bhíos ar oibríonna, anchuma orthu le cranraí agus le masla.'
>
> [I had no respect for the teaching of Irish. A person reared through English couldn't understand me. But, if he had good English and he had to teach English to those with terrible English, he would understand me. I've always thought that those learning Irish had heads that were like the hands of workers, knotted and damaged] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 26-27)

The author's unwillingness to teach the language is contrary to the prevailing suggestion at the time that the language should be shared out amongst the masses by her keepers. Mac Grianna's distaste for the task is palpable in the text and this surly, disgruntled aspect of his character inevitably contributes to, yet, another image of the native Irish speaker.

Sadly for Mac Grianna, the author was forced to renege on his self-imposed restriction and there is evidence of this in the third chapter of the work when he agrees to tutor the children of a 1916 martyr. For the cash-starved Mac Grianna, the tutelage of these children is necessary for two reasons; his depleting funds and a sense of obligation to the rebel who lost his life in the pursuit of an Irish Republic. Throughout the chapter, it seems that Mac Grianna gets little satisfaction from his role as tutor and the children, despite their association to a lauded hetero-image of Irish Republicanism,

have little academic talent, particularly in their learning of Irish. The bereaved family offers an interesting version of the hetero-image of English-speaking Irish citizens in the Free State as Mac Grianna describes the destitution and poverty they suffer as they survive on a widow's pension. The family's meagre lifestyle is stark in comparison to the richness of the rhetoric typically banded about during the 1930s and 1940s in relation to Irish Republicanism and a 'Free Ireland'; goals achieved through the efforts of those martyred in the second decade of the 20th century. Despite his dislike for the family, Mac Grianna is a charitable presence in their lives and offers financial assistance, even though he is ill-equipped to do so. His reason for offering his generosity is summed up rather simply, in a manner that is telling of how he views the Irish people:

> Nárbh i nádúir an Éireannaigh a bheith dlisteanach dá chúige féin, dá chontae féin, dá chreideamh féin? Agus ina dhiadh sin nár den teaghlach amháin an cine daonna uilig. Dá bhfeicinn fear a bháthada an mbeinn ag fanacht go n-aithnínn é? Bhí an lámh ag teacht amach agus an scilling léi an t-am seo.
>
> [Was it not in the nature of the Irish to be true to their own province, to their own county, to their faith? Are we not all part of the same family, the whole human race. If I see a man drowning do I wait to see if I know him before saving him? The hand was coming out with shillings in it this time.] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 35)

In chapters four, five and six of the text, Mac Grianna develops a series of auto- and hetero-images that enrich our understanding of the complex relationship between Irish language speakers and the rest of Irish society. Mac Grianna's literary style facilitates a constant shift between various topics and, perhaps, is indicative of the mental illness that marred the writer's personal and professional life. This may certainly be the case in relation to the many incarnations of the author's own self-image and, in particular, his intense sense of paranoia of others, especially State bodies. As mentioned above, Mac Grianna clearly views his own role within Irish language circles as a leading and crucial one. He views himself as a descendant of Gaelic royalty and, at one instance in the work, cites his address as 'Úir-Chill an

Chreagáin'(Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 22), nodding towards great Irish poets who have gone before him.[60]

In *Míreanna Saoil*, Pól Ó Muirí notes Mac Grianna's interaction with literary ancestors when he states: 'Bhí na seanfhondúirí faoi agallamh ag an Ghriannach agus eisean faoi agallamh acusan. Bhí comhrá idir scríobhneoirí ar siúl ó aois go haois, comhrá samhlaoíoch thar na céadta bliain.'[The old masters were being interviewed by Mac Grianna and he was being interviewed by them. There were conversations between writers lasting through the ages, imagined conversations that lasted hundreds of years] (Ó Muirí, 2007, p. 84) The imagined conversations between Mac Grianna and his literary ancestors throughout the text are indicative of the author's in-depth knowledge of and connection to Irish writers. This aspect of Mac Grianna's personality is crucial to his identity and self-image as a writer as having a deep understanding of the country's literary past was seen as essential to the development of the modern Irish writer in the last century.

At the beginning of the last century, debate exploded within Irish language literary circles regarding the direction and ethos of Gaelic literature within the context of a cultural and, later, a political revival. As discussed in the previous chapter, those involved in the debate were belonging to one of two rival groups. Mac Grianna was wholly convinced by the arguments and views put forth by Pádraig Pearse and his supporters that a new Irish literature should be fit for and represent the modern Irish citizen. The importance placed on the 'truth' in literature became a defining element of some Irish writers, including Mac Grianna. In *Mo Bhealach Féin*, the author's pursuit of 'truth' is evident, not only in his personal journey through the Welsh countryside, but also in his criticisms of Irish society. Mac Grianna clearly believed that he was an intellectual and protector of the truth. Despite the text's opening lines and the author's 'avoidance' of 'an fhírinne', Mac Grianna constantly attempts to explore and criticise all aspects of Irish society and to unearth the true identities of Irish speakers and Galltacht inhabitants. This much is clearly seen in chapter five during the course of a conversation between Mac Grianna and two others, Tomás Ó Ciaragáin and Mac Uí Neachtain. The three discuss matters of faith and how this impacts upon the personality of a person and a people. Speaking in relation to Communism and the Russians in particular, Mac Grianna takes a dangerous and

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[60] This could be a reference to the poem 'Úir-Chill an Chreagáin' by Art Mac Cumhaigh. The poem is characterised as an 'Aisling pholaitiúil' and is set in the village of an Chreagáin in Armagh.

defiant stance for an Irish-speaker in 1930s Catholic Ireland when he suggests that the Russians may have 'cuid den cheart' [some of it right].

> […] ach tá bunús an tsaoil mhóir á shéanadh san am i láthair, agus an chuid is mó atá ag cur i gcéill go bhfuil creideamh acu fosta. Ní hiontas ar bith nuair atáthar ag ionsaí creideamh bréige go bhfaigheann creideamh fírinneach corrbhuille. Mar a deir an seanfhocal, an neamhchoireach is dóiche a bheith thíos leis
>
> [but most of it is being negative at this time and the majority is pretending that they have faith, too. It's no wonder at all that when false belief is being attacked, true belief gets the odd beating. As the proverb goes it is often the innocent one who is the victim] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 45)

Mac Grianna believed that there was responsibility upon him to speak the truth and to give an accurate representation of the modern world, even when it did not fit in with the national image of the country. Again in chapter five this much is evident in Mac Grianna's assessment of Irish politics when he states: Tá drochdhóigh ar an tír," arsa mise. "Rinne muid dearmad den dóigh le curaíocht a dhéanamh agus níor lig Sasam dúinn riamh greim a fháil ar innealacha. Níl obair ar bith sa tír ach polaitíocht. ["The country's in a bad way" I said. We forgot how to till and England never ever let us adjust ourselves] His friend replies "Ní thaitníonn polataíocht liom", arsa Mac Uí Neachtain. "Níl i bpolaitíocht ach gaoth mhór"' ["I don't like politics" said Mac Uí Neachtain. There's nothing in politics but big wind.] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 50) The author's harsh criticism of the Irish political system and the state of the nation would have been in direct opposition to the image of a stable, Catholic nation that was touted at the time. His criticism continues for much of the text and in Chapter Nine, the author makes the damning statement when he writes 'Cuirtear míchlú ar achan duine a mbíonn baint aige le polaitíoncht.' [Everyone who has an association with politics has a bad reputation] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 82)

Ultimately, Mac Grianna depicts the dominant group in Irish society, the winners of the Civil War, as weak and ineffective. He continues with this criticism in chapter six of the text when he states "Tá daoine ag cailleadh cuimhne go raibh Éire riamh ag iarraidh Poblacta." [People are forgetting that Ireland once wanted to be a Republic] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 52) Mac Grianna's insight illustrates his frustration

with the administration in 1930s Ireland and his belief that political institutions were corrupt and driven by greed is reaffirmed later in the same chapter when he declares '"Tá mo luachsa chomh mór agus nach gceannaíonn aon duine mé" arsa mise. "Ní mheasaim go dtiocfaidh le polaitíocht mo cheannach"' ["My value is so great that nobody buys me" I said. "I don't think that politics can buy me."] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 53) Mac Grianna's repeated reference to his value as a writer and citizen of the state coupled with his unwillingness to sell-out reveals the truth surrounding one of the images of Gaels at the time; that Irish speakers were viewed as a cultural commodity. In the same breath, the author manages to discredit the political system once again, subsequently shattering its image as an institution dedicated to the protection of Irish culture.

3.5   Irish Identities Abroad

As Mac Grianna ventures away from Ireland in the text, we get yet another insight into the manner in which Irish speakers are perceived as well as how they, in turn perceive the hetero-image of the Galltacht. After deciding not to go to Algiers to fight with the French Army, Mac Grianna settles on travelling to London, enticed by the opportunity to view some of Turner's paintings. London and its grey landscape had an effect upon the writer and he slipped into another depressive state. Despite this, Mac Grianna still manages to reflect upon Irish identity, particularly when he encounters Roibeard Ó Muireadhaig from Glasgow. The encounter is telling of how the author views members of the public back in Ireland as well as how he views himself as a representative of the Gaelic community. Ó Muireadhaig's perception of Mac Grianna as someone with a 'cuma ionraice' [honest appearance] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 79) suggests that the author has a rather lofty opinion of himself; a conclusion that can be drawn when considered in light of the exclusively favourable descriptions Mac Grianna affords himself. The author's response of "Is é a bhfuil a fhois agam faoi sin" arsa mise "gur Dhúírt fear as mo chondae dhúchais le Francach aon uair amháin gur thóg Éire fear ionraice amháin ar scor ar bith nuair a thóg sí mise"' ["All I know about that" I said, "is that a man of French heritage from my county said to me once that Ireland only rears honest men since she bore me"] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 79) illustrates the image of Irish speakers (specifically, as Rann na Feiriste is a Gaeltacht zone) for those outside of Ireland, whilst also casting a flattering light on the author himself.

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In chapter ten of the text, the author travels to Liverpool, subsequently affording readers an insight into the hetero-image of the English as viewed in relation to the auto-image of Irish speakers and Irish citizens in general. The events of the chapter take place in a restaurant, not unlike the type the author frequented in Dublin. In the opening paragraphs of the chapter, Mac Grianna makes some observations of diners from France, Ireland and England. His observations give an insight into the characters of the various nationalities; the French are a sociable, outgoing group that talk lively, the Irish are more subdued but open to conversation and the British are totally silent, closed diners. His reasoning is backed by his belief that 'I ndiadh an méíd den domhan ar chuir sé smacht air tá an Sasanach faiteach, agus b'fhéidir nach locht sin air'. [After the amount of places in the world the English controlled they're fearful and maybe that's not a bad thing] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 85)   The hetero-image of the English Mac Grianna presents here is quite damning and the nation's colonial activities, according to the author, has shaped the character of an entire people. This is, perhaps, a rational conclusion seeing as the Irish auto-image is also shaped by English colonialism. Thus, the hetero and auto images of both nations are linked and even defined by the complex relationship between both countries. As the text progresses, the hetero-image of the English Mac Grianna presents later in the chapter is, perhaps, more flattering and an unlikely one for an Irish-man living in the Irish Free State. Mac Grianna describes the English population as being soft-spoken and kind. (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 85) This representation of English citizens is in direct contrast to the perception propagated by the Free State government and leading politicians and commentators at the time. Mac Grianna's multi-dimensional depiction of the English in the text gives yet another unique insight into Anglo-Irish relations in the first half of the last century.

Upon his arrival in Liverpool and later, in Wales, Mac Grianna further develops his exploration of national identities and their literary representations. The author develops and explores the perception of 'Irishness' and does so by noting the physical, emotional and cultural differences between the Irish auto-image and the hetero-image of the British. The author notes the physical differences that exist between the two nationalities, describing the Irish as stronger and brighter in appearance. The favourable description of the Irish in comparison to the English ensures that Mac Grianna's representation of auto and hetero images in the text is fluid and changeable and also, perhaps a little biased. His encounters with various members

of the Irish diaspora in Liverpool gives Mac Grianna a cause for reflection and his perception of the Irish people changes once again.

When questioned about the state of affairs back in Ireland, Mac Grianna gives the cryptic answer of 'Tá Éire suaimhneach go leor", arsa mise, "taobh amuigh de na páipéir." ['"Ireland is peaceful enough", I said, "outside of the papers"'] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 88) This response is telling of the auto-image of Ireland in relation to the hetero-image of the English. The perception of Ireland as a place of turmoil and unrest as propagated by the English press was, for generations, a decisive element in the constitution of the Irish auto-image in relation to the British hetero-image. Arguably, the most striking manner in which this was achieved was through the various political cartoons published in *Punch Magazine*, as discussed in some detail in the previous chapter. In chapter eleven of the text, we are afforded a greater insight, still, into the auto and hetero images that are proliferate in *Mo Bhealach Féin*. In this chapter, the author writes of his time in Wales; a place in which he felt a sense of home and belonging. Whilst in Caerdydd, Mac Grianna reflects upon the various nationalities he has met upon his journey, particularly those in the capital city. Cardiff, he believes, is a melting pot of cultures and nationalities and this allows for the author to cast certain aspersions upon auto and hetero images in relation to Irish speakers and the rest of the world. In the opening pages of the chapter, Mac Grianna declares:

Bhí daoine as ceithre hairde an domhain ina gcónaí sa chathair. Casadh orm an Sasanach daingean, dea-bhéasach agus an Breathnach tobann taodach, agus an tAlbanach teann bogchroíoch, agus an tÉireannach garbh dána; an Francach céíllí intleachtach, agus an tIodálach beo fiata, agus an Gréagach atá idir an dá chás; an fear buí mín dothuigthe agus an fear dubh sochmaí gruama. Bhí teampaill den uile chreideamh ann.

[There were people from every corner of the earth living in this area. I met the deep, well-mannered Englishman, the sudden, impulsive Welshman and the tight, soft-hearted Scotsman and the rough, bold Irishman; the rational, intellectual Frenchman and the lively, wild Italian and the Greek who is between two cases; the small yellow soft spoken incomprehensible man and the black, easy-going, gloomy man. There was a temple of every kind of belief there.] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 93)

3.6   Rí Bán na bhFear Dubh?[61]

Up until chapter eleven of the novel's twenty, Mac Grianna puts forth a complex illustration of Anglo-Irish, as well as Gaeltacht-Galltacht auto- and hetero-images. His reflections offer another understanding of how Irish society perceived itself, at the time, in relation to how it viewed the country's colonial relationship with Britain. The text also offers a distinctive representation of Gaeltacht auto-images in relation to the hetero-image of English speakers across the nation. In chapter eleven, however, we get a much more varied description of auto- and hetero- images as the author considers the Irish auto- and hetero- images in relation to many other nationalities and, most importantly, perhaps, other races[62]. In this chapter, Mac Grianna attends a religious meeting held in a small, public hall in Cardiff. At the meeting he encounters a black man from the West Indies. According to Mac Grianna, the two have an instant connection and his new acquaintance has an acute understanding of the author's character.[63] The unnamed man declares:

> Ní hioann tusa agus na daoine eile atá anseo anocht. Tá d'intinn are rudaí eile agus siúlann tú bealach eile. Tím siúl fada uaigneach romhat sula bhfága tú an tír
>
> ["You are not the same as any of the others here tonight. You mind is on other things and you walk your own path. I see a long, lonely walk in front of you before you leave this country"] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 95)

Following this assessment of Mac Grianna's personality, the two meet again for a night of deep, philosophical conversation. The 'fear dubh' is of mixed race and his mottled lineage, we learn, has caused much difficulty for him whilst simultaneously aiding in the formation of his auto-image in relation to the hetero

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[61] Translation: The White King of the Black Men? However, the Irish term generally used to describe a black person is 'duine gorm'.

[62] The term 'race' is used here to denote the black population although the validity of this term in defining the characterisation of white and black people is considered previously, in chapter two of this thesis.

[63] As we learn later in the text, their connection is based on their ancestors shared experience of colonialism. However, the connection is more meaningful when we consider the displacement of over 50,000 Irish to Barbados during the Cromwellian Campaign.

images of his parent's races.[64] After witnessing a fight during childhood between his father and another white man following a dispute over the, then, young boy's skin colour, the black man reached the conclusion 'Bhí mise dubh agus bhí siadsan bán agus d'fhág mé eatarthu féin é.' [I was black and they were white and I left it (the fight) between them] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 96) This first incident of racism experienced by the black man as a child, followed by a lifetime of discrimination, prompts his disbelief in God. (A highly blasphemous concept for conservative Free State Ireland) During their evening of discussion and debate, the black man tells Mac Grianna:

> Agus níl aon áit ar shiuil mé nach bhfuair mé mo dhaoine faoi smacht, agus drochmheas orthum agus gan a fhois againn cén fáth. Tá seandaoine sa bhaile ar chuimhin leo an t-am a dtiocfadh fear dubh a cheannach ar phigin. Níl mórán de luach go foil orainn.
>
> [And there is no place I have walked where I didn't find my people controlled and disrespected and we didn't know why. There are old people at home that remember a time when a black man could have been bought for a penny. There's not much more value on us now] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 97)

As the conversation continues, he questions whether or not the prejudiced masses realise that Egypt, a country populated by dark skinned people, is the oldest nation in the world or whether they remember the colour of Jesus' skin. The prejudices described by the black man give an acute image of the black auto-image in relation to the hetero-image of white people. His claim on culture and history (through his reference to Egypt) and on Christianity offer an alternative, marginalised history that is telling of the auto image of blacks in relation to the hetero image of whites. Mac Grianna's companion even offers an alternate view of World War One when he says 'Rinne muid ár gcuid den troid sa Chogadh Mhór. Dhoirt muid ár gcuid fola ina tuilteacha agus níl buíochas ar bith orainn dá thairbhe' [We did our share of the fighting in the Great War. We spilt our blood in floods and there is no thanks to us for our benefit.] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 97) Further instances of discrimination are also outlined when he talks of the pay discrepancies between white and black men. The

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[64] The word 'mottled' is used here in the same sense as the word 'breac' was used by the author, as described in a previous footnote.

disparity between the treatment of blacks in relation to their contribution, as outlined in this chapter, is telling of the auto-image of a race subjugated and disparaged by whites. The image presented of the downtrodden, marginalised black population in relation to the hetero-image of white supremacy strikes a chord with the author and Mac Grianna wholly identifies with his new acquaintance.

The author relates Ireland's colonial past to that endured by countless black populations across the globe when he states:

> Tháinig mise ó dhream daoine a dfhulaing seach gcéad bliain de chogadh agus de ghorta agus de ghéarleanúint ar son na saoirse, go dtí go bhfuair muid sa deireadh é nó go bhfuil sé ar shéala a bheith again. Bíonn trua againn don té atá i gcruachás.
>
> [I come from a group of people that suffered seven hundred years of war and famine and persecution on behalf of freedom until we got it in the end or until it was promised to us. We have pity for those in hardship.] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 97)

In this statement, Mac Grianna presents the auto-image of Ireland as a whole (as opposed to the auto-image of Irish speakers versus the hetero-image of English speakers) in relation to the hetero-image of England and its colonial rule over Ireland for centuries. Their similar experiences of subjugation by a dominant power results in a new friendship and connection between the people of Ireland and repressed black populations worldwide.

Following the insightful meeting, Mac Grianna engages in research into the discrimination and history of black people across the world. When he learns of the trade and slavery of blacks at the hands of white colonisers, he declares that he is ashamed of his own, white skin. (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 98) Even though Mac Grianna is a white man whose race is responsible for the slavery of generations of blacks, the author distances himself from this fact and continues to identify with the marginalised race based on his nationality and the injustices suffered by the Irish under colonial rule. In this chapter, Mac Grianna recounts the events of a day in 1600 when white, European colonisers landed in Africa and began the trade and enslavement of the indigenous people. The transportation of these people by boat and the images described by Mac Grianna of people 'sa mhullach ar a chéile i mbolg na long agus gheibheadh mórán acu bás ar an bhealach' [on top of each other in the belly

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of a ship and many of them died on the way] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 98) is similar to other descriptions of the so-called 'Coffin Ships' that transported millions of displaced Irish during the Famine, as outlined in chapter one of this thesis. Mac Grianna also gives an account of events on the colonialized island of Haiti surrounding the character of Jean Christophe or 'Naopleon Dubh' [Black Napoleon]. The author goes into some detail and recounts some of the tales that surrounded Naopleon Dubh and while he doubts the authenticity of events, he declares '…níl amhras ar bith ná bhí sé ar fhear chomh hiontach agu mhair riamh.' [there is no doubt that no man as great as him ever existed for them] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 100) Mac Grianna's championing of this historical character is indicative of his belief that black populations across the world need strong leadership, not because they are a directionless people that need to be guided, rather they need a leader in the battle against white oppression.

Mac Grianna has an acute understanding of the situation that existed and, arguably, still exits, for black communities across the world. Special mention is given in chapter eleven to those who were under the control of the British and black populations in the United States as well as Haiti. While he acknowledges their freedom from slavery, he notes that they are still bound and restricted by their race and he believes 'Lá saoirse ní bheidh acu go dtiontaí said ar an dream bhán…' [They will never have a free day until the revolt against the whites] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 99) Having studied and researched the marginalised history of blacks following his meeting with the East Indian, Mac Grianna attended a meeting with others interested in the cause for racial equality. The situation that arises in chapter eleven is quite strange and Mac Grianna is the only white man amongst others '…a raibh achan dath orthu ó dath an ghuail go dath dhuilliúr na Samhna…' [there was every colour on them from the colour of coal to the colour of the November foliage] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 100) Feeling a sense of kinship with the oppressed, Mac Grianna speaks to the crowd and praises the tenacity and bravery of their ancestors as well as their contribution to culture. He goes as far as to declare that they should drive the white man back to the '…dtíortha fuara a fágadh mar oidhreacht aige' [the cold countries they inherited] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 101) The situation in which Mac Grianna finds himself is rather bizarre; he is a white man addressing an ethnically diverse group of black men, encouraging them to overthrow their white oppressors. In his attempt to reverse the auto-image of subjugate and marginalised black populations in relation to the hetero-image of ruling whites, Mac Grianna stands before the group, enforcing the

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image of powerful white males controlling and impinging upon the freedom of black peoples. Ironically, he even declares '…dar liom an oíche sin mb'fhurast leo rí a dhéanamh díom dá mbá mhian liom é.' [I thought that night that it would be easy for them to make a king of me if I wished] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 101) Even though Mac Grianna is highly sympathetic to the cause and feels a sense of affinity with the oppression suffered by blacks, his seeming position of power and influence at the meeting in Cardiff is in direct opposition to his belief that black people should take power back from the whites. Following the meeting he attempts to fundraise so that a representative of the group can travel to the West Indies. That representative, he decides, should be him but he finds it difficult to find sponsorship for 'Rí Bán na bhFear Dubh.' [White King of the Black Men] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 102) The title he affords himself is in direct opposition to the notion of equality that he preached of and once again, Mac Grianna upholds, albeit in a benign fashion, racial stereotypes.

For the remainder of the text, Mac Grianna travels about the Welsh countryside, living a transient life, hiking and exploring the wilderness. The largely solitary experience gives him pause for reflection and the author is truly happy, for the first time in the entire biography. He enjoys the scenery, the Welsh language and has an, almost, mythical experience. He believes he is a heroic character and his small pocket knife is transformed into a sword with which he defeats imagined enemies.[65] The author is so content that he is inspired to compose his own poetry. In these later chapters, Mac Grianna's identity and being are shaped by time spent in a certain geographical space. Undoubtedly, his transformation from a disgruntled and cantankerous Irish language writer to a contented and blissful wandering poet is attributed to his connection to place. When the later chapters are compared with the earlier ones based in various cities, it becomes apparent that both social and geographical spaces are highly influential to the character of the author and, subsequently, his interpretation of group images and stereotypes are sometimes shaped by his location within space and time. By moving from Rann na Feiriste to Dublin and from Dublin to Liverpool and London and then to Wales, Mac Grianna

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[65] In chapter fifteen of the text, Mac Grianna attempts to cross a bridge and assumes a heroic personality in the process. The author even refers to himself in the third person in this extract. This episode in the text is an example of the influence of folklore in the text. As mentioned, the folkloric tradition is one of the many elements that inform the Irish speakers' auto-image. (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 139)

transcends geographical space and, also, the expectations placed upon Irish language writers.

3.7 Geocritical Explorations of the Gaeltacht and Galltacht

An imagological exploration of Mac Grianna's work undoubtedly sheds some light on the author's unique insight into Irish society and the people that populated the land in the middle of the last century. As mentioned earlier, this insight is further enriched when geocritical theories are applied in tandem with imagology. As outlined in an earlier chapter, imagology and geocriticism are theories that are complementary as a character's location in a certain geographical space often dictates their perception of the world and its people around them. In its most simple definition, geocriticism recognises that representations of space re-establish new relations to people. It also recognises that representations of space often cross the boundaries of established norms while also re-establishing new relations among people, places and things.

In *Mo Bhealach Féin*, the author represents space in a manner that re-establishes new relations to people; namely the relationship between Irish language speakers and the social spaces inhabited by English speakers in Ireland. As an Irish speaker, Mac Grianna felt a total disconnect to wider Irish society. He was of the view that Irish speakers were being left by the wayside of mainstream Irish society and this was artfully expressed in a letter written to *The Irish Press* in 1932. Mac Grianna felt as though Irish speakers existed as a diaspora outside of Gaeltacht regions:

> I am a Gael, born and reared in the Gaeltacht, and living now in Dublin. There are hundreds, thousands like me in the city. We have a language of our own, our own outlook and tradition. Here we are in exile, as much as a Palesman would be in Paris or Moscow. Rather cruel, is it not, ye men of the Pale, but add to it that we are exiles in our own land. (Nic Eoin, *Trén bhFearann Breac*, 2005, p. 134)

For Mac Grianna (and other Irish language writers) the landscape of Ireland is perceived in a totally different manner from English speakers.[66] The land of 'comely maidens' and Godly Gaels touted by de Valera and others was, in essence, a different world to that inhabited by Mac Grianna who felt an acute sense of isolation based upon his connection to a specific cultural space. In *Mo Bhealach Féin*, the author represents the Gaeltacht in a way that re-establishes definitions of these spaces. As discussed in chapter one, Gaeltachtaí were often elevated into a 'site of mandatory pilgrimage for those wishing to begin the long process of attaining authentic *Gaelachas.*' (O'Leary, 2004, p. 90) They were viewed by English speakers in a touristic fashion and as such, not as spaces inhabited by real people. Rather, they were like Gaelic playgrounds populated by token Gaels. This relationship between English speakers and these cultural spaces is deplored by the author and this relationship informs his opinion with regard to and relationship with the so-called 'men of the Pale'.

In *Mo Bhealach Féin*, Mac Grianna's account of the Gaeltacht is very different from perceived notions of the place at the time. His representation of the space certainly crosses the boundaries of established norms. The Gaeltacht is not represented as a holiday spot for Irish learners rather the author depicts these zones as the remote homelands of the detached Irish speaking population. Despite the claim laid upon the Gaeltacht by English speakers, Mac Grianna tells us that the Gaeltacht of Rann na Feiriste is actually a free landscape, ruled by no-one. His statement of 'Níor cuireadh sinne i nGaeltacht Thír Chonaill faoi smacht riamh dáiríre' [us in the Gaeltacht of Donegal were never truly under (colonial) rule] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 10) re-informs our understanding of this unique geographical space. While the rest of the island was reshaped and re-organised by colonialism, the landscape of Rann na Feiriste we are told was never encumbered by colonial rule. In this statement, Mac Grianna inverts our historical and, more importantly, geographical understanding of Ireland and manages to make the space of Rann na Feiriste new and unusual, although, as a Gaeltacht, many would have preconceptions of the place, part informed by the hetero-image of the Gael. Mac Grianna's hometown is a geographical zone that has a unique connection to literature and was initially established by the author's ancestors in 1736. That the land was developed by storytellers and poets insured that Gaeltacht referent

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[66] Ó Cadhain, for example, created an underground Gaeltacht beneath a graveyard in *Cré na Cille* and O'Brian inverted the map of Ireland and the world in *An Béal Bocht*.

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and its literary representation were never worlds apart, rather the creative inhabitants of Rann na Feiriste depicted the area and its literary counterparts in a realistic and becoming fashion.

One example of this can be found in Mac Grianna's *An Druma Mór* (1969). In this text the actual Gaeltacht of Rann na Feiriste acts as a referent for the fictional Ros Cuain. Even though the village is a fictional creation, the author locates it in Donegal. By doing so, the author creates a new, geographical space, but one that is tangible for those familiar with life in Gaeltacht villages. The author sets his Gaeltacht in a rural, picturesque space and the opening paragraph of the text gives a descriptive account of a location 'Eadar sliabh agus cladach, ó Iorras go Málainn Mhóir, atá Gaeltacht Thír Chonail, mar bheadh sí ag caismirt le fiántas na Farraige Móire' [Between a mountain and a beach, from Iorras to Málainn Mhóir is the Gaeltacht of Donegal, as though she's in conflict with the wildness of the Atlantic Ocean] (*An Druma Mór,* p. 1) By carefully describing the location of this Gaeltacht, Mac Grinna alters our understanding of the geography of Donegal and, in turn, creates an alternate Gaeltacht world and space, manipulating our perception of the county and its towns and villages. The wild landscape and desolate location of the Gaeltacht is telling of the kinds of communities that populated these regions; communities that were physically cut off from the rest of the country because of the harsh landscape and people that were further removed because of the language they used daily. The remote location is later recognised as a benefit when the narrator notes that because the place was 'scoite' [spread out] from the rest of the country, the dreaded '…Béarla agus an ghalltánacht' [English and Anglicization] are non-existent. This area, we are told, is where one would find 'glanGhaeilge' [clean Irish].

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, real Gaeltacht spaces are dotted along the westerly coast of Ireland as a result of the Ulster Plantations and the Cromwellian Invasion. Mac Grianna refers to this in his description of the fictional Galtacht when he writes:

> '[…] ní raibh cine daonna ach ag dul in abar sa chaorán, nó go dtáinig Plándáil Uladh agus gur brúdh isteach de réir a chéile anseo sluaite Gael mar bheadh an múr a thig le sruth líonta gach lá go dtí go mbíonn sé ar an chladach.'
>
> [human kind was wandering about in the mud of the bog until the Ulster Plantations came and pushed crowds of Gaels into the bog just as the clay goes downstream with the full stream towards the beach] (Mac Grianna, 1969, p. 2)

The description here of the movement of people in geographical terms is telling of the connection between Irish speakers and the geography of the country. As the text continues, Mac Grianna depicts life inside of this Gaeltacht and those who populate Ros Cuain suffer the same concerns and worries as actual Gaeltacht inhabitants. While the plot of the text is driven by a conflict between two groups over the eponymous drum, the setting of the text is important to our collective understanding of the auto-image of the Gaeltacht inhabitant in light of their relationship to this unique geographical and cultural space. While we get a truly literary and creative representation of the Gaeltacht in the depiction of Ros Cuain, we do not get a full account of the landscape of Rann na Feiriste in *Mo Bhealach Féin*. In *Mo Bhealach Féín*, Mac Grianna has transgressed the boundaries of the Gaeltacht zone and the only mention we hear of the place occurs when he compares and contrasts the landscape and the people of Rann na Feiriste to those in 'the Pale'.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the city of Dublin is described as a shambolic place, populated and developed by idiots. The landscape of the place is grey and miserable and this was a view frequently shared by many Irish language writers writing from a Gaeltacht perspective. In *Mo Bhealach Féin*, Mac Grianna transcends the established perceptions of the Irish language writer. As we know from the text and the, relatively, little information available on Mac Grianna's personal life, the author led a disillusioned existence and often a vagrant lifestyle. His nomadic movement about the country, between Rann na Feiriste, his beloved homeland, and Dublin was in opposition to the perceived image of the Irish language writer. During the years of the Irish Free State, writers like Mac Grianna were imagined as living blissfully in the idyllic Gaeltacht, drawing inspiration from the fireside. By transcending the accepted and established image of the Irish language writer and locating himself in Dublin City, Mac Grianna challenged the perceived auto-image whilst simultaneously forging a new relationship between the Irish language writer and a geographical space. Certainly, other Irish writers before Mac Grianna challenged the stereotyped view of Gaeltacht writers. For example, Pádraic Ó Conaire, Mac Grianna's literary hero moved beyond the Gaeltacht and lived in Dublin and London for some years. Some of Ó Conaire's work focuses upon the individual transplanted from the rural setting of the Gaeltacht to the city streets of London or Dublin. However, Mac Grianna's work is unique because of the first-hand account the

author gives of living as an Irish speaker in an English speaking world. Life in Dublin City was alienating for the author. He grappled daily with those he encountered and this struggle is accounted for throughout the text. His life and the manner in which he was perceived by others depended upon the geographical space in which Mac Grianna found himself in. From Ó Muirí's biography, for example, we learn that inhabitants of Clontarf in Dublin viewed Mac Grianna as bizarre and unhinged. It was the local children in Clontarf that christened him 'Aul Butts' because of the manner in which he scavenged for discarded cigarette butts. Certainly, this behaviour was odd but it was only one element of the author's personality that observers found unnerving. For those in the Galltacht, Mac Grianna was an oddity; a disgruntled Irish language writer who had no business wandering about the big city. Certainly, for the English speakers depicted in *Mo Bhealach Féin*, Mac Grianna was a nuisance. He rarely paid rent for lodgings on time and he was often rude, abrupt and at times violent.[67] Accounts from his hometown, however, tell of a, sometimes, troubled young man who was thought of as a great wit and noted for his literary prowess.[68]

Mac Grianna's move from the rural to the urban was, perhaps, ill advised, yet the move resulted in a new interpretation of the geographical spaces of the Gaeltacht of Rann na Feiriste and Dublin. As mentioned above, the writer's location in 'the Pale' was, in itself, an act of transgressing the geographical boundaries that tied Gaeltacht inhabitants to the remotest parts of the country. However, the very act of writing in Irish outside of the designated Irish speaking zones is a further example of how Mac Grianna established a new relationship to space in the text. *Mo Bhealach Féin* is written, as we know, in Irish. The act of writing in a marginalised tongue as discussed in the methodology deliberately sets the writer apart from those using the dominant language. Writing in Irish, however, has a unique connection to geographical space, especially when we consider Gaeltacht regions. As mentioned earlier, the Irish language had, and continues to have, a real and tangible effect upon the landscape of Ireland. By carving up the country based upon the predominance of one language over another in a specific geographical space, writing in Irish, subsequently, is always tied to questions of space.

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[67] We see this aspect of Mac Grianna's character in chapter two of the text when the author attacks the son of his landlady.

[68] In Míreanna Saoil, Ó Muirí outlines a series of accounts from locals of Ranna na Feiriste who knew Mac Grianna. In chapter one of the text, he is described as odd, funny and engaging. (Ó Muirí, 2007, p. 25-28)

Mo Bhealach Féin is written in a specific dialect and Mac Grianna's use of Northern Irish ensures that this text oversteps both geographical and linguistic boundaries. By writing in this dialect, the author describes the spaces of Dublin, Liverpool and London in an unusual manner. He renders the landscape unrecognisable to the English speaker native to these areas. This also achieves in reflecting how these urban spaces affected the author. The alienating atmosphere of the city made it difficult for Mac Grianna to engage with the English speaking world. Ultimately, a new relationship between the Gaeltacht inhabitant and the English speaking world is forged. For those in the Gaeltacht, life in the city is illuminated and described in their terms, in their language. The city of Dublin, for example, is revealed in a manner in which those living in the far removed Gaeltacht areas can better realize the capital city of the country to which they belong. The disconnect and feeling of isolation experienced by Irish speakers in the Gaeltacht, as outlined by Mac Grianna above, created a gulf between communities; a chasm that was often difficult to traverse and one that was based on language dictating geographical boundaries.

3.8 Conclusions: Revealing the Real Gael and Redefining the Relationship to Gaeltacht Spaces

Finally, when we consider its title, *Mo Bhealach Féin* can be read as a text that looks to overstep accepted boundaries both geographical and cultural. The title and one of the closing lines of the book 'Agus tá mo bhealach féin romham ar fad' [And my own way will be before me always] (Mac Grianna, 1940, p. 173) are telling of the author's intentions to forge his own path both in life and on the literary scene. The word 'bealach' in the title refers to a particular direction, and is, subsequently, a word that connects the writer to spaces. The suggestion presented earlier in this chapter, that the writer transgresses both geographical spaces and cultural expectations is also suggested in the title. The possessive 'mo' indicates that the author intends upon pleasing himself and pursuing certain pursuits at his own will. Even though there are expectations placed on Mac Grianna as an Irish language writer, he makes it clear from the very beginning of the text that he will pursue his own path and his own identity.

Seosamh Mac Grianna's account of life within Ireland gives a unique insight into the real and imagined auto- and hetero- images of Irish speakers in relation to English speakers in the middle of the last century. His literary offerings are full of rounded Gaeltacht characters that alter our understanding of the Gael and help shape new perceptions of those from the margins of Irish mainstream society. From just two of his many literary offerings, it is also clear that Mac Grianna had an unusual relationship with geographical space. A Gaeltacht inhabitant of the town of Rann na Feiriste, Mac Grianna struggled to interpret other spaces, specifically Dublin, when he found himself transplanted to the Pale. From *Mo Bhealach Féin*, it seems that the Gael struggles to maintain his or her identity in the Galltacht, thus rendering them beings wholly bound to the Gaeltacht. By transgressing Gaeltacht boundaries and locating himself first in Dublin and later in England and Wales, Mac Grianna alters our interpretation of space in relation to the Gael. In *Mo Bhealach Féin*, we find one of the most truthful accounts of life for the Irish speaker and writer during the fledgling years of Irish self-government. Mac Grianna's work represents the developing auto-image of Irish language speakers in light of their relationship to geographical space in the face of state propagated stereotypes that may have wholly informed our perception of this unique group and the places in which they lived, save for the few literary works that challenge the fallacy.

Chapter 4 - Ralph Ellison and the reimagining of black cultural identity in the first half of the 20th Century

In the generations following the abolition of slavery, African Americans across the country began to question their identity and what it meant to be black and free in an America ruled by white society. Despite having been granted their freedom, African Americans had to wait until the advent of the Civil Rights era before being recognised as equal and until then, an atmosphere of white supremacy shrouded the country and acted as a barrier to the realisation of black American culture. Writers worked against the perception that blacks were unequal to whites and in the shadow of racist and bigoted images of their group, propagated by wider American society, as outlined in chapter two. The Harlem Renaissance did much to bolster a positive, counter-image of African American identity and demonstrated that black Americans had a rich culture of their own; a culture grown up around a legacy of oppression and a mixed heritage that was at once, both Africanist and American. In the years following the Harlem Renaissance writers became increasingly aware of the need to give a realistic depiction of life for blacks on the margins of mainstream society and the urgency to create an accurate image of the African American. This task, however, was not straightforward and often, black writers like Oscar Micheaux,(1884-1951) for example and critical theorists, as outlined in chapter one, promoted the notion that the African American should be thankful for his freedom and quietly blend into the background of American society. Others, however, worked hard at presenting a more authentic African American voice and writers such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin, as well as poets like Langston Hughes and Alain Locke, produced work that challenged the status quo whilst empowering the group image.

Of the writers to challenge the auto-image of the humble and dim-witted, God-fearing "Negro" and the hetero-image propagated by whites, Ralph Ellison exploded the myths surrounding the African American towards the middle of the last century. Having made the move from the south to the north of the country, Ellison drew upon

his experiences from the margins of American life in his efforts to depict an African American auto-image that both southern and northern blacks could relate to. As evident in his critical work, Ellison was aware of the precarious position of the African American in a country dominated by white society that strove to identify itself as opposite to the negative stereotype of blacks it propagated. Ellison drew upon a wealth of black culture in his short stories and ground-breaking novel *Invisible Man*. He incorporated, with ease, folkloric references and motifs into his modern narrative that searched to unearth identity and reconcile personal identity with that of the African American community. In this chapter, Ellison's views on black identity will be examined in light of the auto- and hetero- images of African Americans that existed in the last century. His search to unearth that identity will also be examined, particularly in relation to his critical texts *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986). This chapter will also include an in-depth examination of identity and group image in Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and will highlight the mastery in his ability to create an identity that speaks to those on the margins without that identity being stunted or one dimensional.

~~Introduction of aims of chapter?~~4.1 Ellison: A Biography

Towards the middle of the last century, African American literature slowly began to emerge from beyond the borders of mainstream American culture and gain recognition as a legitimate art form. That Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* won the National Book Award in 1953, beating Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) showed that critics were finally beginning to read African American literature as literary works in their own right, rather than sociological tales based on places alien to most Americans, notably whites, within the American landscape. The win was a landmark one as Ellison became the first African American to take the award. This is not to say, however, that African Americans were henceforth accepted as being on an equal footing with white Americans; the second class status endured by African Americans remained intact, unaffected by this cultural development. Following the success of his win for the National Book Award, Ralph Ellison rose to prominence in both African American and white American literary circles. He became one of the most vocal and prolific of African American writers and, although he never completed

his second novel, he produced a large body of short stories and critical essays dedicated to his task of pioneering a new auto-image for blacks in literature. From Ellison's work, we can see how black literary identity began to evolve and in his work an acute awareness of relations between whites and African Americans is to the fore, as well as insight into the challenges facing the black writer when creating a new, modern auto-image.

Not unlike Mac Grianna, Ellison was a notable literary figure within his own group and not always the most popular. He often spoke out about the perceptions of African American writers, not only from white critics, but also from within black literary circles. As will be discussed later, his close working relationship with Richard Wright, and Wright's own prominence following the publication of *Native Son* (1940), helped to hone his attention towards developing a more realistic identity for African Americans through characters who fought against a lifetime of Jim Crow connotations and marginalisation. Like Wright, Ellison suffered some backlash from African Americans who riled against what they perceived to be disgraceful representations of the group that would only further damage their identity instead of bolstering it. Similarly to some of the Irish language writers at the beginning of the last century, Ellison felt that folklore was a powerful cultural element and this view informed much of his writing. He frequently borrowed from this abundant resource and often, his creations refer to folktales and characters in his short stories and novel. However, rather than retell folk stories or put those new stories into the mouths of porch dwellers as others had done, he weaved elements of the tales into the tapestries of his various works. From the discussion of his work that follows in this chapter, we will see that this gave his oeuvre a distinctive voice which unites traditional modes of story-telling with a more modern representation of African American identity. Ellison was also of the opinion that African American literature, if it was to hold its own, would need to as good as, if not better than what was considered within the American canon; that writers should search for the elusive literary truth and attempt to recreate worlds that held resonance for readers. Ralph Ellison led an interesting life and his experiences from the margins of American society, as well as his travels across the United States, added a depth and richness to fictional works that, although not autobiographical, accurately depicted the realities of life for African Americans.

Born in Oklahoma City in March 1913, Ellison was one of two children born to Lewis and Ida Ellison. When Ellison was just three years old, his father died of

surgical complications after requiring hospital admission when he suffered from a stomach ulcer.[69] The loss had a profound effect upon the family and set in motion a chain of formative events in the young Ellison's life. The most immediate effect, besides a deep sense of loss, was that the family was pushed to the brink of financial ruin. As blacks living in a white-dominated society, the Ellison family, especially Ida in the immediate aftermath of the patriarch's death, were compelled to take on any menial task that would allow for the family to eke out a living. This transition was a difficult one as the family had been relatively well off and some extended family members had even owned businesses. Lewis Ellison's parents were freed slaves and since emancipation, Ralph Ellison's grandfather had some success in various business ventures. The family, residing in Abbeville, Mississippi, lived a relatively comfortable life and enjoyed the respect of their peers and a sort of tolerance from whites in the town. The poverty endured by Ralph Ellison, his mother and brother meant that the family were forced to move about from rental property to rental property, ensuring that a sense of perpetual movement from one place to another was a prominent aspect of Ellison's young life. This was not uncommon for black families, particularly when Jim Crow dictated that blacks and whites should live separate lives, effectively corralling African American families into specific areas of limited resources and limited housing.

The family moved about Oklahoma City and, like so many others, were even sold on the idea that better opportunities existed for blacks in northern states and cities. Ellison acknowledged this when he noted; –'my brother and I would have a better chance of reaching manhood if we grew up in the north.' (Rampersad, 2007, p. 20-21) This resulted in the financially disastrous move to Gary, Indiana in 1921. Ida's ill-informed move to Gary, a city that flourished or floundered along with the steel industry, resulted in destitution for the family. Ellison's mother had sold virtually all of the family's belongings to facilitate the move and the sudden collapse of the steel industry left the Ellisons jobless and stranded. The family were essentially rescued by the Cooks, a black family that owned a travelling amusements business, as they returned from the north to Oklahoma. The journey back to Oklahoma was a surreal

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[69] The U.S. Census dates Ellison's birth year as 1913, though Ellison disputed this and offered 1914 as his actual birth year. This is noted by Arnold Rampersad in *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*. (Rampersand, 2007, p. 5)

and formative one for the young Ellison who would later recall oddities along the way such as:

> [...] a dead white bark-less tree which stood on what had been a river's bank which now writhed with snakes that climbed along its branches to escape the rising water. There was a smell of death in the air and buzzards circling the sky.[2] (Rampersad, 2007, p, 21)

The chilling images and sense of impending disaster over the course of that journey may have informed Ellison's later, famous odyssey, the one depicted in *Invisible Man* when the protagonist travels from the south of the country to the north. Although the move to Gary failed, the family moved from Oklahoma City again to the town of McAlester, but this also was unsuccessful and they returned once again to their home city. Thus, from an early age, with his father's death acting as a catalyst, Ralph Ellison experienced near continuous movement, from rental home to rental home and from city to city. This, undoubtedly, helped to inform his interpretation of place and, while his home life was arguably unstable because of the continuous and circular movement, he learned that the place of African Americans in the States, while dictated by Jim Crow, was not necessarily fixed.

As a teenager, Ellison attended the Fredrick Douglass School in Oklahoma City where he illustrated an aptitude for music. Following his graduation from the school in 1931, he worked in various jobs but did not attend university until 1933. After, 1933, he received a scholarship to study music in Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Though a gifted musician, Ellison was unable to complete his studies due to complications with his funding and he was forced to leave his place in the Institute in his third year. While Ellison struggled to pay tuition and living costs, and ultimately failed to complete his studies, Tuskegee was important to the development of the writer's character. At Tuskegee, Ellison was ensconced in African American culture and, more notably, a strong sense of racial pride. Founded by Booker T. Washington in 1881, the university had a strong African American ethos and, unlike other institutions, was staffed entirely with black lecturers. Like the college in *Invisible Man*, the institute was, however, heavily patronised by wealthy white philanthropists. At first, Ellison was impressed by the unshaken sense of pride in the university and the empowerment of African American culture and in Tuskegee, he encountered many

powerful figures such as Emmet ~~Soctt~~Scott of Howard University and Alain Locke; a most vital contact who, in turn, connected Ellison to Langston Hughes.[70] Ellison's time at Tuskegee was formative to his literary career as, for the first time, he had the opportunity to read works by poets like Elliot and novelists like Joyce and Hemingway. Ellison repeatedly referred to these writers, particularly the latter, as sources of inspiration for his work.

While his education at Tuskegee, particularly his extra-curricular reading, was crucial to the writer's future career, Ellison felt that his time at the institution was marred by Captin Alvin Neely, the university's unnerving dean and by, what he believed to be, an unhealthy attitude towards race. Initially, the transition from life in segregated Oklahoma to one of African American pride and empowerment in the all black university impressed Ellison. To be enrolled in Booker T. Washington's own institution was a meaningful experience for a black youth in the racially divided Alabama in the 1930s. However, Ellison soon found that the rhetoric of white supremacy he had escaped from was replaced by an equally virulent belief in black superiority. Having grown up alongside whites at various stages of his childhood, Ellison did not subscribe to the belief that all whites were universally evil. As a child, he had had an unusually close relationship with a white child he refers to only as Hoolie, and throughout his early career, the writer was sponsored by Ida Guggenheim; a white woman who took interest in Ellison when he first began writing and with whom he shared a life-long friendship. Despite having experienced white racism and prejudice, Ellison rejected the writing-off of all whites as bigoted and he was critical of extremist black supremacy movements. Ellison's beliefs in relation to black-white relations helped to inform his interpretation of African American auto- and hetero-images, as will be outlined in greater detail later in this chapter.

Despite the atmosphere of black empowerment and pride that prevailed at Tuskegee, Ellison felt that administrative attitudes towards students were not satisfactory. Even though the majority of African American youths came from

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[70] Scott worked for years as an aide and confidante to Booker T. Washington. Following Washington's death, he served in Woodrow Wilson's administration. He also wrote of the experience of blacks in the States during WW1 in reports entitled *The American Negro in the World War* (1919) and *Negro Migration during the World War* (1920). Locke, a writer and philosopher, was considered to have been the architect of the Harlem Renaissance. Locke was also a prolific commentator of African American and the group's place in society. He compiled the anthology *The New Negro: An Interpretation of Negro Life, a collection of essays*.

financially insecure families, the university discouraged access to financial aid. Ellison's application for a subsistence grant and the period of silence from the university he endured afterwards was only the first incident of, what Ellison interpreted as, contempt for students. Another example that resonated with the writer was the college's refusal to allow for a brief leave of absence. Ellison and his friend Walter Williams had decided that they would like to travel to Pensacola, but in order to travel so far away from the university, they required written permission from a parent and the dean. Although having received Ida Ellison's permission well in advance, the dean of Tuskegee, Neely, waited until the day of the students' expected departure to deny Ellison permission to take leave. The decision infuriated Ellison and he complained to his mother that the dean had threatened

'[…] that if I left he wouldn't give me work when school starts […] I know the cause of his acting in this manner. This is just some more of the mess I've mentioned before. I see nothing I can do about it. He is the biggest man here as far as the student is concerned and if I kick up a racket now I would never get a job when I graduated, this dump is too powerful […] the reputation that this place has and what it really is are two different things.'[2] (Rampersad, 2007 p, 66-67)

The sentiments expressed here, are striking as they shatter the illusion that life in an African American college was idyllic for black students. Ellison felt that Tuskegee was staffed by 'small- minded niggers who won't be satisfied unless they show how important they are.' (Rampersad, 2007, p, 67) The incident was obviously a significant one and although *Invisible Man* is not an autobiographical work, aspects of Ellison's run-in with Neely resound in the encounter between the protagonist of the text and Dr Blesdoe, the dean of the all-black university in the novel.

In 1936, Ellison decided that his time at Tuskegee had come to an end, albeit prematurely as he failed to complete his studies. His mother and brother's move from Oklahoma to Dayton meant that Ellison was no longer tied to his hometown. This new reality for the writer made his decision to travel to New York a little easier and in July of 1936, Ellison departed. Like the protagonist in *Invisible Man*, Ellison arrived in New York with a bundle of sealed letters of introduction and upon opening some he was dismayed to find that one in particular was negative and derisive in tone. It

seemed that Tuskegee was still intent on hindering Ellison. At first, Ellison stayed at the YMCA and, on the morning after his arrival, he inadvertently bumped into Alain Locke and Langston Hughes in the lobby. Meeting Hughes was extremely lucky. The poet educated Ellison in poetry and leftist politics.

Ellison's friendship with Langston Hughes continued and, between 1936 and 1938, Hughes schooled Ellison, encouraging him to join the Communist Party. The party had a strong influence upon the writer and he even desired to travel to Spain to fight in the Spanish Civil War. However, Ellison was unable to find a ship that would take him to Spain and, instead, he remained in New York. Like Seosamh Mac Grianna, Ellison had a deep sense of affiliation with the underdog in society and while his notion to fight in the Spanish Civil War, like Mac Grianna's wish to fight in Algeria, was an unrealistic one, this desire illustrated the writer's sympathies with other marginalised groups. Under the constant guidance of Hughes, Ellison was introduced to Richard Wright. An established writer and respected figure in Harlem, Wright gave Ellison his first, official work as a writer. Wright was an outspoken and sometimes ill-received critic of literature, particularly of African American writing. He believed that most African American literature produced at the time did a disservice to black American culture. In his 'Blueprint for Negro Writing', Wright accused black writers of being 'prim and decorous ambassadors […] who entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee pants of servility.'[71] (page?) Wright was a powerful figure in the black literary circle and he encouraged Ellison to write creative fiction. The two had an intense friendship that was both productive at times and at others, impeded by jealously and rivalry. Whilst working on short stories and contributing regularly to leftist publications such as *New Masses* and *New Challenge* (posts he obtained through his association with Wright), Ellison also secured a job working for the New York Writers' Project in 1938. He worked closely with Nicholas Wirth who headed the 'Living Lore' section of the project and he was responsible for documenting the folkloric influences in the speech of everyday life in Harlem. The songs and ditties he recorded would later become important to his craft as a writer.

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[71] Wright's original essay appeared in New Challenge (1937) and was reproduced in the journal *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present* (Mitchell, 1994, p. 97)

After his initial move to New York, Ellison lived a relatively comfortable life and he forged fortuitous friendships and ~~aquantineces~~acquaintances with some high profile members of the African American community. He settled into life in Harlem and married his first wife, Rose Pointdexter. However, Ellison later encountered crippling financial difficulties, particularly following his move away from leftist publications. After a short period of living with the ex-wife of Richard Wright, Ellison and his wife moved to their own, small apartment in a building in which Ellison worked as a caretaker. During this time, Ellison and Wright's personal friendship became strained and marred by jealously and the two drifted apart. Even though Ellison had little means, he continued to engage in Harlem intellectual life and through this, he shared an encounter with Sanora Babb; with whom he had an affair.[72] Despite his personal and financial strife, Ellison continued to produce short pieces of fiction and worked under a pseudonym for various publications, such as the *Daily Worker*. He also acted as the managing editor of the *Negro Quarterly*, a position that helped Ellison to gain recognition for his dedication to literature and African American culture. During the 1940s, Ellison developed a close relationship with the patron Ida Guggenheim, who became an important figure in both his personal and professional life, and her aid buoyed the writer's career, allowing him to continue to produce short pieces of fiction.

Ellison joined the U.S. Merchant Marines and, in December of 1943, he was certified for duty and worked as a cook and baker on The Liberty Ship SS *Sun Yat-Sen* which crossed the German U-Boat- ridden Atlantic and eventually docked in Swansea, Wales. Like Mac Grianna, Ellison thoroughly enjoyed his time amongst the Welsh people and found the sense of interracial peace that prevailed there refreshing. Speaking of the Welsh, Ellison declared '"I love them like my own people"' and he felt that '"hundreds of Negro boys are acquiring their first notions of real democracy among these people who, strangely, are culturally so similar"' (Rampersad, 2007, p. 171). Ellison's sense of affiliation with the Welsh, a people with their own distinct language and culture from the rest of England, is very similar to the sentiments expressed by Mac Grianna in *Mo Bhealach Féin*. It is also quite striking that both

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[72] In Chapter Six, 'Numbed and Seething', of Arnold Rampersad's ~~boigraph~~biography of Ellison, the biographer notes that 'In November, he had a brief but turbulent affair –they were together hardly more than a week- with a white woman, Sanora Babb.' (Rampersad, 2007, p. 147) The author then goes on to note that 'Ralph's marriage to Rose would never recover' (Rampersad, 2007 p. 150) following the affair.

writers developed a sense of racial understanding whilst interpreting their own groups' status as marginal in relation to that of others, during their respective stays in Wales. Just as Mac Grianna noted in his work, it seemed that in Wales, blacks were treated equally despite the persecution they endured in other places. Like Mac Grianna, Ellison found literary inspiration from his time in the most south-westerly part of the United Kingdom and produced two short stories, 'In a Strange Country' and 'A Storm of Blizzard Proportions' from the visit. During the return voyage to the States, Ellison became ill and upon landing in New York, he was declared unfit for the draft. With Ida Guggenheim's help, he secured an agent and his short stories began to appear in mainstream publications and the short story 'Flying Home' appeared in a collection alongside pieces by other writers like Hughes, Mailer and Miller.

The mid-1940s was a very productive period for Ellison and his short stories were met mostly with critical acclaim. This period was also significant for Ellison as he met and later married Fannie McConnell. McConnell was an important asset to Ellison's literary career as she helped to edit his work, particularly *Invisible Man*. McConnell was also responsible for the posthumous publication of some of his works and she collected and archived various correspondences between her husband and others and personal letters and notes that make up the large body of primary sources available on the life and work of Ralph Ellison. After a series of successes and gaining recognition for his fictional shorts, Ellison came to the attention of some editors of publishing houses. Frank Taylor, of Reynal and Hitchcok, and later of Random House, (the publishing house that eventually published *Invisible Man*), was interested in the idea of Ellison writing a novel and managed to convince the reluctant Ellison to agree to a schedule. However, Ellison's writing was interrupted when he was forced to return to the Merchant Marines in February aboard the Sea Nymph to France. Ellison was sickly again and was put ashore in Boston. Following his return to the States, Ellison began writing his first, and only complete, novel. According to the author, he penned the famous opening line "I am an invisible man" whilst sojourning in New England in 1945. For Ellison, it would take many years to finish the text. This, perhaps, was due to the high standards to which Ellison held all fiction, particularly African American works and the need he felt to relate a true experience through the, sometimes, surreal situations that plagued the protagonist of *Invisible Man*.

Much to the dismay of his editors at Random House, *Invisible Man* took over seven years to complete. However, the result was a great success for the publishing

house with the novel winning the National Book Award. *Invisible Man* certainly draws upon the experiences of Ellison, both in the south and, also, his time spent in Harlem. It was a unique undertaking by an African American writer during the middle of the 20th century. Unlike many works published by black writers in the early to mid-20th century, Ellison's novel is not a piece of social commentary on the hardship endured daily by blacks in the States, nor is it a sociologist's guide to the destitute and crime-ridden streets of Harlem. Rather, Ellison's text is widely considered as a classic piece of American fiction with a story narrated from the beyond of American society by an invisible man, someone who others refuse to see or acknowledge; a character whose humanity is not recognised by those in the fold of American life.

Before Ellison embarked upon the task of creating one of the most famous, yet anonymous characters of modern American fiction, he had set out stringent guidelines for the African American writer through his reviews of works of black fiction. As far as Ellison was concerned, there was an onus upon the African American writer to produce literature that was of an equal standard to that of their white American counterparts. It was Ellison's belief that the 'function of literature, all literature that's worthy of the name, is to remind us of our common humanity and the cost of that humanity.' (Ellison, 1986, p. 58) However, he acknowledged that this task had its own, unique difficulties for the black writer; difficulties that stemmed from the unwillingness of whites to recognise the aforesaid humanity of the African American. Speaking of the writing process and his education in American literary works, Ellison highlighted the irony that existed for the African American writing literary fiction when he noted in relation to his own work:

> I would have to master, or at least make myself familiar with, the major motives of American literature- *even written by people who philosophically would reject me as a member of the American community*. How would I do that without being, in my own eyes, something of a slave, something less than a man? (Ellison, 1986, p. 47)

For Ellison to compete with white writers and to create literary works worthy of inclusion in the American canon, he would first have to study the works of those with a negative or derogatory perception of African Americans. As a writer, he was acutely aware that if he were to create a new, daring auto-image of black America, he needed

to have an understanding of the hetero-image of the ruling white class and also, of how these images related to each other.

While tackling this sEllison soon learned that the American experience, even that of the white American was laden with African influences; influences that permeated through to the English language. Ellison believed that the influence ofthe folklore and the music of the African American speech there is not just one – do you mean cultures?was particularly evident in the speech of southerners and that these elements 'came through the interaction of the slave and the white man.' (Ellison, 1986, p. 48.) As will be discussed at a greater length later in this chapter, Ellison made great use of the unique dialects of African Americans, both in his portrayal of the southern black and the Harlem hipster, and this was one of the ways in which he managed to transcend the difficulties of creating a piece of American fiction in an era when the majority of white Americans rejected the idea of equality.

Well aware of the then all-powerful notion of white supremacy, Ellison was cautious not to promote a counter sense of black superiority. While some black activists and writers universally believed that all whites were the root of evil and that the black man would eventually emerge as superior, Ellison was careful not to buy into the rhetoric of black propaganda from groups like the Panthers and other extremist organisations. Although Ellison had been a contributor to a number of leftist magazines and had even acted as an apologist for the Stalinist show trials, he later abandoned his extreme Communist beliefs, feeling that they were too confining and stifling to any writer intent on the pursuit of literary truth.[73] As an African American writer, Ellison was aware of his responsibilities, particularly in representing a group that was so marginalised by white America. He believed that the writer had a 'triple responsibility- to himself, to his immediate group, and to his region.' (Ellison, 1986, p. 54) While Ellison took this responsibility seriously, he was critical of other African America writers who failed to responsibly relay the true experience of existing beyond the margins of American life.

Ellison believed that it was inherently wrong for blacks to be given favourable treatment as an apology for generations of slavery and prejudice; he felt that by doing

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[73] Rampersand outlines Ellison's unflinching belief in Stalin for a number of years and writes 'Ralph would remain something of a Stalinist for years to come. The Moscow show trials, he said, were a legitimate response by the government to "widespread sabotage and wrecking" as he wrote in April 1939 […]' (Rampersad, 2007, p. 123)(

so, African Americans only, achieved in highlighting the fallacy that blacks and whites were fundamentally different. This belief extended to his opinions relating to literature. Ellison was highly critical of black writers who refused to address~~doesn't seem to be the right term here, do you mean reversed or refused to address?~~ the cause for equality through a ~~through a?~~literature that was, largely, targeted at white audiences. Some writers, he felt, created characters that had minstrel qualities. According to Ellison, writers that fulfilled the needs of a white-only audience paid a disservice to African American identity and he was clear in this when he stated in an interview:

> Too many books by Negro writers are addressed to a white audience. By doing this the authors run the risk of limiting themselves to the audience's presumptions of what a Negro is or should be; the tendency is to become involved in polemics that plead the Negro's humanity.[74]

A firm believer in a humanity that was not divided along racial lines, Ellison felt that any writer who pandered to the false sensibilities of a white audience was a hindrance to Africa Americans. As far as he was concerned, he did not think that 'Negroes can afford to indulge in such a false issue' as the question of their humanity. Ellison desired to write literature that could be read by all audiences, but a literature based upon what he knew best and upon the people he could best serve. As mentioned earlier, he felt a sense of responsibility to his group and thus strove to best represent them in his literary works. Following the Harlem Renaissance and the golden age of Harlem, the largest African American community in the States became plagued by soaring crime rates and drug addiction. As a result, a large volume of African American novels and stories produced in the 1930s and early 1940s acted as sociological guides to the black ghetto, rather than pieces of literary fiction. Writers like Ellison, Wright and Hughes felt that some writers, by solely accounting for the hardships endured by African Americans in Jim Crow's America, did so at the expense of capturing some of the more positive elements. These elements included the fundamental humanity of blacks, a humanity that Ellison believed to be the root of all literature, folklore with all its ditties, songs and rich lilting qualities and the unique

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[74] Extract taken from 'An Interview: Ralph Ellison: The Art of Fiction', (Chester, Howard, Ellison, 1955) featured in *Shadow and Act* (Ellison, 1964, p. 170)

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language and dialogue of the ghetto that had assimilated into everyday American speech. Having worked as a highly critical reviewer of African American fiction, Ellison had made some weighty claims as to what direction black writers should take and so, when working on *Invisible Man* and his various short stories, he had to take great care not to succumb to the pitfalls that encumbered African American literature and culture.

As far as Ellison was concerned, the pursuit of identity was the mainstay of modern American fiction in the 20th century. Asked in an interview if he believed the search for identity was primarily an American theme, Ellison responded: 'It is *the* American theme.' In Ellison's texts, particularly *Invisible Man*, which will be discussed in detail below, it is clear that a search for identity, both for the individual and the African American group is at the core of the novel. The pursuit of identity for the African American writer was, and arguably still is, a particularly difficult task. As outlined in an earlier chapter, African Americans had an identity imposed upon them to facilitate the fallacy that they were a separate race to whites. Not only were they considered other, but also inferior. Thus, from their very arrival to the States, African Americans had an inferior identity imposed upon them. The notion that blacks were bestial and inhuman informed the hetero-image of African Americans in relation to wider white American society. The identity that was imposed upon African Americans was the first hurdle for black writers to overcome, and Ellison felt that this was one of his greatest challenges. This task was one that required a careful balancing act. He was wary of 'the Negro novelist who draws his blackness too tightly around him when he sits down to write' (Ellison, 1964, p. 170), suggesting that some black writers became blinkered by their race and the identity imposed upon them to create a literature that properly reflected their humanity. He also believed that any writer, black or white, who did or wrote what was expected of him had failed in the task of writing literature, a view repeatedly expressed by Ellison in *Shadow and Act* (1964.)

While Ellison believed that both black and white writers had to engage in the pursuit of a literary truth, a truth he saw as centred on the pursuit of identity, he also felt a sense of responsibility to his group and that there was an impetus to give a true reflection of African American culture. As such, Ellison made sure that his work incorporated some of the most dominant concerns shared by African Americans and that his short stories and, more notably, his novel made use of the wealth of cultural forms that black Americans had developed over generations. Although Ellison felt that

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black and white authors should hold themselves to the same standards and that, as mentioned above, the search for identity was the primary theme of all American literature he asserted that the search for identity was a completely different experience for a group that had had an identity imposed upon them. As an African American writer, Ellison was aware that there were certain expectations of what his literary output should be. He expressed this sentiment in his introduction to *Shadow and Act* in which he states:

> For I have found the greatest difficulty for a Negro writer was the problem of revealing what he truly felt, rather than serving up what negroes were supposed to feel and were encouraged to feel. And linked to this was the difficulty, based upon our long habit of deception and evasion, of depicting what really happened within our areas of American life, and putting down with honesty and without bowing to ideological expediencies the attitudes and values which give Negro American life its sense of wholeness and which render it bearable and human and, when measured by our own terms, desirable. (Ellison, 1964, p. xxi)

From this statement, it is clear that the poor representation of African Americans in literature is the fault, not only of whites, but, as Ellison believed of black authors also. That Ellison felt the representation of black Americans was hindered by the group itself is an element that sometimes manifests itself in his work. As a writer and activist in the years following the Harlem Renaissance, Ellison was keen to unearth the true identity of African Americans, or, at the very least, embark upon a search for that identity, rather than subscribe to the imposed group image of black Americans. The search for identity, the main theme in American literature, according to Ellison, is at the forefront of his greatest literary work. *Invisible Man* is a complex exploration of the elements that constitute African American identity towards the middle of the last century. In the text, we find an examination, almost, of the marginalised identity of African Americans; an identity established by the ruling white majority in the States at the time. Ellison's exploration of black identity and image is grounded in the relationship between African Americans and whites, suggesting that groups' identities are forged and defined in relation to each other. In

the text, as will be demonstrated later, there is an implication for identity constructs and representations based on geographical space, also.

That *Invisible Man* is a text based on the pursuit of identity is obvious from the title and the very first line of the novel. When Ellison wrote the provocative first line of 'I am an invisible man' (Ellison, 1952, p. 3) he had intended to challenge perceptions of African Americans, not only how they were perceived by whites, but also how members of the group perceived themselves. The protagonist of the text tells us 'people refuse to see me' (IM, p 3), suggesting that, although he is a 'man of substance, of flesh and bone, fibre and liquids' (Ellison, 1952, p. 3) where do you indicate/justify that, for a while, you won't use this "IM, p." system?he remains invisible to those who choose not to recognise his humanity; that is they refuse to acknowledge the various elements that comprise his identity as both an individual and an African America. Speaking from beyond even the most remote margins of society, Ellison's invisible man occupies a hole, a 'border area' and as such, is physically cut off from the rest of society. The novel is retrospective as the protagonist recalls the events in his life that led to his retreat to his underground refuge. That *Invisible Man* both begins and ends underground, in a hole, signals to readers that the protagonist is a marginalised figure, an entity that has been forced to the extremities of the social boundaries of acceptance. The location of his retreat is also telling of the group to which he belongs and throughout the novel, space and geography play a central role in the construction of African American identity as the different environments experienced by the text's central character shape his view, not only of himself as a young, black male, but also his view of the entire group.

In the text, there are three main sections that chronicle the life of the nameless protagonist and in each section the protagonist of the text has both a new identity and a redefined view on the identity of African Americans. These periods include the protagonist's retreat to his underground home, as outlined in the opening and closing chapters, the period of his education and, finally, his time with The Brotherhood, a leftist organisation led mostly by whites in New York. In each section, the growth and evolution of ideals and perceptions can be seen as the central character changes and redefines his perceptions of his own identity and that of other African Americans, based upon his interaction with whites and also, upon his movement from north to south. As in the study of Mac Grianna's *Mo Bhealach Féin*, an imagological framework informed, in part, by geographical space, allows for an in-depth analysis of

group images and how these images emerge in a society that forcibly marginalised one group over another.

4.2 The African American Auto-Image and Ellison's *Invisible Man*

Looking first to how African Americans perceive themselves Ellison's text explores many interpretations and understanding of black identity in the first half of the last century. As Ellison's protagonist makes his way from his unnamed hometown to New York City, he experiences many varied views on how African Americans should act, speak and interact with the country's white population. Ellison gives readers an insight into how the group viewed itself and also, to an extent, how some African Americans wished to be viewed. He presents many interpretations of the black American auto-image in *Invisible Man* in an attempt to unearth the essence of identity; a feature of much of his critical work, too.

One of the first examples found in the text of the African American auto-image harkens back to the views expressed by Reverend J.W.E. Bowen, as outlined and discussed in chapter two; that African Americans should present themselves as a meek and humble people longing for equality but accepting of any signs of social progression in relation to their dealings with the country's white population. We see this in the opening chapters, as Ellison's protagonist recalls his formative years, making it apparent that there are expectations placed upon him by his family and also by the African American community to which he belongs. In chapter one of the text, the protagonist recalls his emergence as a representative and orator on behalf of blacks in his home town in the South. A successful individual, he was asked to deliver a speech at his graduation and give the same talk, following its success, to a meeting of the town's leading white citizens.

The young man's success is remarkable as it is the first example we find, in the text, of his leadership and his role as a representative of his race. Remembering his grandfather's satirical deathbed advice of: "'Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or burst wide open.'" (Ellison, 1952, p. 16) he delivers a speech on humility as the essence of progress. Even though he does not believe his own oration, his views are welcomed by his own

community and also, by the whites of the town. The exchange between the young man and his grandfather is an example of the mimicry Bhabha speaks of in his essay 'Of Mimicry and Man', where the act is 'a sign of the inappropriate, however, a difference or a recalcitrance which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance and poses an immanent threat to both 'normailized' knowledges and disciplinary powers.' (1992, p. 123) By encouraging his grandson to act in accordance to what was expected of African Americans, the protagonist's grandfather acknowledges the irony inherent in the mymotic play beween whtes and blacks.This is also one of the first examples in the text of how African Americans view themselves and of how whites view blacks, based on the latter's perception. From the success of the protagonist's speech, an auto-image of the African American community emerges and it becomes apparent that the black population of the town views itself as humble and in need of advancement; essentially unequal in their own eyes to whites. The praise and rewards heaped on the protagonist by his own group suggests that, like his grandfather, blacks in the town believe that it is best to portray themselves as inferior in order to garner the approval and acceptance of whites. Later, the mild-mannered and courteous young man is invited to deliver his speech to a gathering of the town's most powerful white men. Again, it is clear that expectations are placed on the young man as an exemplary member of the group. He is held up as the group ideal, a figure capable of changing the fortunes of his community.

When the young man appears to deliver his speech to the town's wealthy white men, he is confronted with the true purpose of his invitation to the event. (Ellison, 1952, p. 22-33) Promised the opportunity to speak, he is coerced into participating in a humiliating series of events along with other black youths. However, he is later given the chance to to address the audience, having participated in a degrading battle royal. The protagonist delivers his talk with enthusiasm and passion, though his raucous audience essentially ignore him and continue with their merriment. It is not until he touches on social responsibility that the attention of the crowd is caught and they essentially mock him. Mistakenly, perhaps, he speaks of social equality and this proves to be a point of contention for the white audience. Suddenly attentive and silent, a member of the audience challenges the young black man and he corrects himself, much to the satisfaction of those in the room. By demanding equality, the text's protagonist would have disrupted the accepted auto-and hetero-image arrangement of the American south. As he corrected his slip of the tongue from 'social

equality' to 'social responsibility', equilibrium was restored and the superiority of the whites in the room is reasserted as they gave him the gift of a scholarship to an all-black college. Delighted to have been awarded the scholarship, the protagonist admits the naivety of his younger self as it becomes clear that at one stage in his life, he willingly played his part in the unequal relationship between blacks and whites, reinforcing white superiority by upholding the notion that African Americans should be humble and though free, not socially equal to whites.

During his time at the event, the main character is fixated on the power of speech his belief that it has the ability to transform his own marginalised identity. Proud to act as a representative of the black community, Ellison's character is happy to deliver a speech, fulfilling the expectations placed upon him as a mouthpiece of the black community in the town. Even though his humanity is challenged by the all-white audience during the battle royal, the protagonist continues to recite his speech in his mind, clinging to the possibilities associated with language, despite being silenced by the violent circumstances he finds himself in. For the teen, '…each word was as bright as a flame' and the power of the spoken word lifted his spirits even after the barbaric battle royal. As a youth, the protagonist believes wholly in the power of speech to lift the group image of African Americans. His being awarded a scholarship at the end of his speech affirms his belief that by merely speaking of 'social equality' and humility, blacks can advance in a white dominated society. However, this can only be achieved if whites take note and in the text, it appears that they refuse to take part in the relationship as the white male audience refuse to see or hear that protagonist as he gives his speech, essentially rendering him invisible.

Upholding the auto-image of the meek and humble African American, the all-black college attended by Ellison's young protagonist does little to bolster a more affirmative version of group identity. This is evident through the manner in which the college's dean, Dr Bledsoe panders to the whims of his institution's white trustees. Charging the young man with the task of chauffeuring one of the board members, Mr Norton, we get an insight into how the college views the group it represents. As he drives Mr Norton beyond the safe confines of the campus grounds, Ellison's character allows his mind to wander and as his passenger speaks, images framed on the library walls flash across his mind. The images are significant as the photographs of seemingly poor black people act as symbols or signs for the young man. He describes people 'who seemed almost without individuality, a black mob that seemed to be

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waiting, looking with blank faces…' (Ellison, 1952, p. p 39) These old photographs of the local black community before the establishment of the college represent a group that was directionless and almost primitive, particularly as they were photographed next to farm animals. Thinking of these images, the protagonist is dismissive and does not attempt to understand their significance despite acknowledging their symbolism. To him, they are a group that lacks its own individuality and they seem lost; an element of the composition that ties with the protagonist's own situation as he haphazardly drives Mr Norton about. The images are somehow quaint, and suggest that a division exists between those in the university and the subjects in the photographs, or, perhaps, that the university is a place of progression and those outside of its walls will be forever stuck in some kind of backward mire.

As the chapter continues, Ellison presents an example of the exact type of individual and image the college strives to distance itself from when the young man accidently ventures beyond the town limits and into the poorer black quarter. Norton notices the change in scenery immediately and compels the young man to interrupt their journey so that he can meet with the locals. Much to the humiliation of the novel's protagonist, they stop at the home of the Truebloods, a family marred by an incestuous indiscretion between the family's father and his daughter, resulting in her pregnancy.[75] Mr Norton strikes up a conversation with Trueblood and is left deeply affected by what he hears.

Trueblood is an interesting character in the text and he challenges the limitations of the young man's acceptance of members of his own, racial group. Although his actions were deplorable, Jim Trueblood exhibits some of the classic and revered African American cultural traditions, particularly through his gift for storytelling and even the young protagonist recognised him as 'one who told the old stories with a sense of humour and magic that made them come alive.' (Ellison, 1952, p. p 46) TruebloodTrueblood, like the central character, also acted as a representative for his group and was part of a singing quartet that were brought to the college to perform for whites. The officials labelled their songs as 'primitive spirituals' and this was a point of embarrassment for the other blacks who 'dared not to laugh at the

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[75] The name Trueblood can be interpreted as ironic, but also as telling and inkeeping with Jim's character. In one way, the name is ironic owing to the heinous crime committed by Jim following the rape of his daughter. However, Trueblood is also a man who unapologetically embraces his black identity and heritage. He enages in activities the rest of the African American community view as primitive.

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crude, high, plaintively animal sounds Jim Trueblood made as he led the quartet.' (Ellison, 1952, p. p 47) While the educated, higher class black community barely tolerated Jim and others like him, the entire black community banded together through their disgust at Jim's actions. Trueblood and other poor sharecroppers like him acted as a separate group, with poverty and ignorance as their main identifying characteristics. This, in turn, allowed for the African Americans in the college to identify themselves as separate to this, as opposite, sophisticated and more human than those who wished to drag the rest of the race down. Thus, from this it is apparent that more than one auto-image of African Americans can exist.

Following the rape of his daughter, Jim tells Mr Norton of Trueblood's ostracism from the local black community and how the officials at the college attempted to have the family removed from the town. While TurebloodTrueblood and his family were shunned by their own community, the whites in the town were keen to help the family. Trueblood's situation was met with surprise and curiosity but he believes that most whites in the town had sympathy and understanding for the family and gave generously to help their situation. Much to the annoyance of the protagonist, Mr Norton also helps the family and gives Trueblood $100. The seeming generosity of the whites of the town, in this instance is concerning and telling of how both groups interact with each other, subsequently informing their identities. As a result of the father's actions, the Trueblood family are shunned by the group in the town with the least social currency. They are essentially rendered as less than a group of people that are considered sub-human by the town's white and educated black populations. Desperately attempting to hold on to their humanity, the African American community has no real choice other than to exclude Trueblood in order to save their fragile group identity as human, though not equal to whites. For the whites, Trueblood is a convenient figure for the bolstering of white supremacy. He is interviewed and studied by the state university and the town's powerful white figures are intrigued and seemingly, a little entertained by his story. He acts, almost, as a testament to their belief that African Americans will never fully assimilate into civilized white society and that the group requires the moral guidance and control of whites. This strengthens the hetero-image of African Americans in relation to how whites view their own group image.

Ellison presents another, seemingly, unflattering auto-image later in the text when the young man secures a position at Liberty Paints when he arrives in New

York, following many rejections from various office buildings. Like many blacks at the time, he is brought in as a counter measure to union employees and this set-up replicates the reality that existed in the 1930s, when black workers were drafted in to fill the place of disgruntled union employees and this, in turn, soured the already tense relationship between blacks and other emigrant nationalities, as outlined in greater detail in chapter one. More striking than the background and implied racial tensions depicted by Ellison during the young man's time at the paint factory is the very pressing need that exists amongst the workers to produce pure, white paint.

All throughout his time at the factory there is a sense of urgency and reverence, almost, surrounding the production of the elusive white paint. As he enters the plant, he notices a sign that announces 'KEEP AMERICA PURE WITH LIBERTY PAINTS' (Ellison, 1952, p. 196). The notion of purity as being connect to white is prevalent in the factory and the young black man cannot escape the implication. His black skin contrasts with the vast whiteness of the factory and Ellison obliquely hints that the young man will never achieve what is expected of him in a white world through his failure in creating 'pure', white paint. His efforts to create a pure, white paint are disastrous and cause a sizable explosion, resulting in his injury and termination with the company. Also notable from his time with the company is his move downwards when is sent to work in the basement. This is the first incidence in the book where we see the main character forced below ground. In the basement, he is forced to work with Lucius Brockway, an elderly black man whom the protagonist believes to be an example of uneducated, backward black America. He even goes as far as to say 'I was so disgusted to find such a man in charge[…]' (Ellison, 1952, p. 208) Unlike the protagonist, Mr Brockway has never attended college and finds it unusual that the young man would study a liberal arts course over more practical subjects such as mechanics or a trade.

For the elderly black man, the young protagonist represents a new imagining of African American identity and he perceives the youth to be rude and narrow-minded based on the protagonist's standoffish presence and palpable sense of arrogance. The work's central character, in turn, believes that Brockway represents the worst kind of African American, a member of a sub-group intent on keeping African Americans stuck in the mire of racial subjugation, feeding white America's impression of blacks as socially inferior. Brockway is not particularly well spoken and his speech is heavily influenced by black folklore and it is pregnant with slang and a

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lilting disregard for syntax or grammar. Even though Mr Brockway is a backward figure in the eyes of the protagonist, he exhibits aspects of African American expression that Ellison found

['…] resounding with an alive language swirling with over three hundred years of American living, a mixture of the folk, the Biblical, the scientific and the political. Slangy in one instance, academic in another, loaded politically with imagery at one moment, mathematically bare of imagery in the next. (Ellison, 1964, p. 104), p 104.

Mr Brockway, in some way, is the city's equivalent of Trueblood. Certainly, Brockway, as far as we know, is not guilty of the same crime as Trueblood, however, he belongs to the same consort of African Americans, intent on impeding the group's growth and movement towards acceptance. The youth's hatred for this kind of African American manifests itself when the two become involved in an altercation. Having been a passive character during most of the text, the protagonist finally asserts himself and in doing so, suggest that he believes he is Brockway's superior. The argument with Brockway is physical and malicious. The young protagonist vents his frustration and draws upon an ugly repertoire of offensive, racial insults when he calls Brockway an 'old-fashioned, slavery-time, mammy-made, handkerchief-headed bastard…' (Ellison, 1952, p. 227) From this outburst, it is clear that the young man does not consider himself to be of the same group as Brockway and by hurling this abuse at the elderly man, he, in effect, re-enforces the white system of black inferiority and unwittingly, perhaps, highlights one version of the African American auto-image.

The origins of the young man's alternative outlook on African American identity is better understood when considered in light of his time at the black college. The formidable Dr Bledsoe has very definite ideas on how black Americans should interact with the white population. When the young man returns to the university following his journey through town with Norton, he is met with Bledsoe's fury for having digressed and damaging the college's reputation and potentially, its source of funding. Expecting the wrath of Bledsoe, the protagonist reluctantly goes to the dean's office, accompanied by the ominous sound of tolling bells. At the office, Bledsoe leaves no illusions as to the nature of black-white relations and how his group should present itself to white society. Disgusted by his young student's naivety, Bledsoe

questions why the protagonist would be so stupid as to follow the direct wishes of the white trustee at the expense of the college's reputation. Infuriated that the young student attempted to meet the wishes of Mr. Norton, Bledsoe thunders 'Why, the dumbest black bastard in the cotton patch knows that the only way to please a white man is to tell him a lie! What kind of education are you getting around here?' (Ellison, 1952, p. 139) From this statement, it is clear that Bledsoe has a very different, perhaps more realistic, view of race relations than the young, idealistic protagonist. He suggests that his group should lie in order to create a pleasing image of African Americans, even at the expense of giving an accurate representation. Bledsoe clearly expects his students to adhere to this lie rather than demand their right to equality. He wants to publicly uphold the longstanding image of blacks as, essentially, unequal to whites whilst secretly, amongst a chosen few, forge a new auto-image for African Americans as wily, outsmarting whites and undermining their hetero-image.

The idealistic young protagonist presents a threat to Bledsoe's system and he is expelled from the college with supposed letters of recommendation from the dean. The young man then travels to New York, fulfilling the destiny of many southern blacks during the first half of the last century. When he travels north, he is confronted by different images of African Americans and their relationship with whites and in the text it is obvious that group images are very much influenced by the geography of the country. Ellison was a firm believer in the differences that existed for black Americans, particularly the diversity between southern and northern blacks and he noted that

> ['…] our racial experience is diverse within itself and rendered more complex by the special relationship existing between my own group and the various regions in which Negro Americans find their existence…For despite the overall unity of black experience in the United States, the experience of Southern blacks differs in certain important aspects, both cultural and political, from that of Northern blacks […]' (Ellison, 1986, p. 42-43)

During his time in the city, the protagonist meets many interesting characters, many of whom share very different perceptions of African American identity. Ellison's central character is challenged to consider his own view on black identity, most notably, when he joins the Brotherhood; a development discussed in greater detail later in this

chapter. Everything the young man is told or taught by the organisation, particularly in relation to equality and the relationship between blacks and whites, is challenged and questioned when he encounters Ras the Exhorter; a notorious black nationalist who fights to uncover, what he believes to be, the true nature of black identity towards the middle of the last century. Ras, although black, does not identity with the African American members of the Brotherhood and even becomes embroiled in a physical altercation with Brother Clifton, a black member of the organisation, and the young man. The violence meted out to Ras at the hands of Brother Clifton is yet another instance in the text, whereby the Brotherhood and its members contradict their own values and teachings. Through his beating at the hands of Brother Clifton, Ras accuses the protagonist of a litany of crimes against blacks, namely of deserting his own kind and accepting the dirty money of those who enslaved their black ancestors.

For Ras, the image of white America is clear and he views white people as enslavers. In his tirade against the protagonist, we get an alternate view of the black auto-image as Ras views those in cahoots with the Brotherhood as defectors and guilty of the betrayal of their race. He riles at the irony of the black 'brothers' who preach of equality between blacks and whites when the founding principles of their school of thought were dictated by whites. In Ras' view, the empty rhetoric of racial equality spouted by the Brotherhood reinforces the old relationship between the auto- and hetero-images of blacks and whites in the States; a relationship wherein power and authority are stalwarts of the white group image. Ras' tirade is laden with the ironies that existed, and still exist, for blacks in the States and another example of this is evident when he declares:

> 'It's three hundred years of black blood to build this white man's civilization and whan't be wiped out in a minute…Ras recognizes the true issues and he is not afraid to be black. Nor is he a traitor for white men. Remember that: I am no black traitor to the black people for the white people. (Ellison, 1952, p. 376)[2]

In Ras's view, to fraternise with whites and to follow guidelines for racial equality upon their terms is tantamount to the greatest insult and challenge facing blacks in America. His views highlight the irony of the Brotherhood's teachings and the naivety of the protagonist as he blindly follows their teachings. Ras views himself as

predominantly African and argues that his poor command of the English language is a result of this. He views himself and other blacks as African and thus, chooses not to recognise his group's connection to the States. His alternate view from that of other blacks as presented in the text is one that exists even today, as will be discussed at greater length in relation to Randall Kenan's *Walking on Water*. That Ras views blacks in the States as African rather than American illustrates the perplexities that exist when dealing with group auto-images; particularly for a group as large and diverse as blacks living in the States following the abolition of slavery. Ras' name is an important marker of identity in the text and is striking in light of the invisibility of the main character and the other members of the Brotherhood. The protagonist has been renamed and re-invented by the organisation. Like the protagonist, others such as Brothers Clifton and Habro, are also stripped of their individual identity by the group's insistence on the use of 'Brother' and 'Sister' as prefixes to all names. Thus, the members are subsumed into the identity of the Brotherhood and consequently lose touch with their own personalities and, more importantly perhaps, lose touch with their group's identity. Ras, on the other hand, selected his own identity and we are told that '"Ras is a title of respect in the East"' (Ellison, 1952, p. 376), a nod to his Ethiopian heritage and ancestry.

The black nationalism of Ras the Exhorter and his conviction in his African identity exist in stark contrast to the politics and identity imposed upon the protagonist by the white led Brotherhood. The identity created for the young man takes hold of his personality and the rhetoric of the organisation punctuates his speech on all occasions. The identity created for him moves beyond his own control as his name began 'getting around' (Ellison, 1952, p. 379), and as he becomes idolised as a hero for the common black man in Harlem. The process through which the protagonist is transformed into a hero results in alienating him from his own identity and also that of black Americans. Even though he is lauded as a hero of the black masses, his alienation from the group, ironically, is intensified through his classification as a hero, as a unique and gifted representative of his race. His heroic identity, we know, is a product of the white leaders of the Brotherhood who insist on creating a synthetic hero and identifiable character to entice blacks to their school of thought; towards their version of white-black relations in the States. The creation of the protagonist's identity as a hero for Harlem and as an advocate of equality between blacks and whites is what, ultimately, leads to his expulsion from the organisation. His newly created character becomes so

great that the protagonist is singled out as the definitive authority on black issues and he becomes, quite literally, the poster boy for the black auto-image and the group's identity when he is pictured on the cover of a magazine. The views expressed by the protagonist in an interview fail to mention the Brotherhood or acknowledge their involvement in his political education. He is credited with their views on race, equality and dispossession despite the group having carefully crafted each view he expresses.

4.3   Black meets White and the Grey Areas of Group Identity in *Invisible Man*

Crucial to the Ellison's exploration of the African American identity is the relationship between the group's auto-image and how this is shaped by their view of whites as well as mainstream white America's perception of blacks. The relationship between the two groups, as viewed from the perception of the work's central African American characters is reflective of how these two populations interacted with each other in the first half of 20th century. Throughout the text there is an underlying tension stemming from an 'us versus them' mentality, as though both groups are constantly wary of one another and also, extremely closed when it comes to mixed-racial interactions. Ellison's young protagonist has his first close and meaningful encounter with a member of white society when he drives Mr Norton about town. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the excursion has disastrous results for the youth's academic career, but it also acts as an eye-opening experience. The traditional roles are upheld in this particular scene as the black youth works to serve the wealthy white man. It is clear that Mr Norton views his interaction with the young man as a conversation between two representatives of their respective groups, though really, Norton cannot help but to pontificate and philosophically discuss his own destiny in terms of race relations in modern American life.

The relationship between Norton and the text's central figure is remarkable as the white trustee acknowledges the interdependent nature of race relations. Norton quizzes the young black man and he makes a significant link between his group and African Americans when he notes the directionless confusion that ensued for both groups following the abolition of slavery. Ever since, it seems that Norton truly believes that the destiny of both groups are linked and he repeats this sentiment

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frequently during his journey. While Norton may seem a sympathetic figure, particularly as he attempts to develop some kind of rapport with his reluctant young driver and through his desire to understand the social geography of the town, he none the less upholds the hetero-image of the white male through his role as trustee to the African American college. Even though the institution is dedicated to the advancement of the black community through education, it is wholly dependent upon funding by rich whites. Mr Norton seems encouraged by the objectives of the college and he feels that his own self-worth is linked to the success of the place. As such, Mr Norton's philanthropy can, perhaps, be interpreted as representative of liberal, white guilt in the States in the years following abolition. The young man's attitude towards Norton and his race's relationship with whites is also telling of sentiments amongst some black communities during the last century. Rather than believe he has a right equal treatment, the young protagonist is happy to fulfil the role of recipient to Norton's charity and even states that blacks have to 'lift ourselves up' in order to achieve equality. Thus, through the relationship between Norton and the text's protagonist, the group image of blacks as subordinate and indebted to the powerful, white population is upheld.

His encounter with Norton can be viewed as representative of the relationship between African Americans and whites. Even though he sees himself and those in the college as separate from lower class blacks, particularly Trueblood and his family, African Americans are viewed by whites as an entire group, devoid of the sensitive distinctions that the protagonist and others like him hold dear. Interestingly, both whites and African Americans in the text strive to prove and demonstrate their humanity. For the whites in this section of the text, the hetero-image of blacks complements the white man's assertion of his humanity. The relationship between the two groups is clearly a dialogic one as members define their identity and image against that of others from the opposing group. For the whites of the town that help Trueblood, the heinous act the man committed reaffirms their humanity and superiority over a man that they view as more animal than human. For Mr Norton, his philanthropy, he believes, is his destiny; that his charity makes him humane. He is compelled to help a group that, typically, is viewed as less than human and this, in turn, elevates his own sense of decency. However, neither group succeeds and their efforts to assert an image of their own humanity result in rendering human beings to little more than figures or symbols of the opposite group. This is blatantly pointed out

by one of the veterans at the Golden Day, the black tavern. Astute and quick to identify these subtleties in the relationship between Norton and the young man, the vet declares:

> But seriously, you both fail to understand what is happening to you. You cannot see or hear or smell the truth of what you see- and you, looking for destiny! It's classic! And the boy, this automaton, he was made of the very mud of the region and sees far less than you. Poor stumblers, neither of you can see the other. To you he is a mark on the scorecard of your achievement, a thing and not a man; a child or even less- a black amorphous thing. And you, for all your power, are not a man to him, but a God, a force […] (Ellison, 1952, p. 95).

Naturally, neither the protagonist nor Norton take kindly to the veteran's interpretation of their relationship and the men leave shortly after, with the trustee having to be carried out following yet another fainting spell.

Before his encounter with Mr Norton, Ellison's central character gains insight into the relationship between blacks and whites when he is lured into participating in a battle royal. Perhaps the most infamous scene in Ellison's *Invisible Man*, the battle is a brutal realisation of the established auto-and hetero-images. The incident takes place on the evening the protagonist is invited to give a speech for the town's wealthy white men. The sophisticated evening is belied by the white men's thirst for violence and their desire to assert their dominance over a female dancer and the battling black high-school students. When he arrives at the event, he sees the town's leading white figures acting in a most base and depraved manner. The hetero-image of whites as perceived by a young black male is of animalistic individuals that revel in excess. The white males are described as 'wolfing down' buffet food, guzzling whisky and beer whilst a young woman dances for the men, naked. Observing her, the white men again take on animalistic tendencies and they are described in beastly terms by the text's main character as 'drooling' and 'hungrily' following the movements of the young woman. During her performance, she is chased and eventually manhandled before managing to escape. The hetero-image of the white male in relation to that of the young black man is strikingly unflattering and inverts earlier images of blacks as beastly and animalistic in relation to whites.

As a counter measure to this, ~~almost,~~ following the departure of the dancer, the young black men lured to the event are then goaded into a battle royal. The scene that unfolds as the text's protagonist is blindfolded and led into a ring is barbaric and nightmarish. The fighters, all black youths, stumble about the ring, attacking each other indiscriminately. Racial abuse is hurled at them as they are labelled 'coon' and 'nigger', suggesting that the white spectators view the fighters as little else. During the episode, Ellison's protagonist tells us that he 'had no dignity' (Ellison, 1952, p. 22) as he stumbled about the ring. The fight is prolonged by the anarchistic nature of the fighters, with each man looking out for his own interests. Reluctantly, the work's central figure picks off his opponents until he remains in the ring with one other fighter. As he fights, he experiences some confusion and feels compelled to fight harder to disprove his detractors. However, whilst doing so, he understands that he fulfils his destiny as a form of entertainment for the whites whilst also bolstering superiority at his own expense.

Despite being eventually knocked out, the torment continues for the narrator and his fellow fighters. Promised payment at the end of the battle, the fighters are further humiliated and degraded when they are told to collect the money owed to them from an electrified rug. Shocked and unable to collect the money they are owed, the black contestants haplessly try to pick up the money, egged on by orders barked by the white crowd. The relationship between blacks and whites is clear in this scene as the fighters submit to the demands of the white audience. The audience, in turn, adopts the old hetero-image of American white males as superior to African Americans, empowered by money and the subordination of blacks. Following the rug spectacle, the fighters are paid and dismissed and the text's protagonist fears that he won't have the opportunity to deliver his speech. The scene highlights the prominent auto- and hetero-images of whites and black during the first half of the last century. The black youths are stripped of their dignity and it is clear that they are viewed as objects of entertainment. The battle royal harkens back to similar slavery-era activities when black men were traded as fighters, suggesting that though the events of *Invisible Man* take place in the 1900s, old attitudes harboured by whites towards African Americans influenced how the group was viewed in the years following abolition.

4.4 The Brotherhood and the Sanitization and Erosion of Identity

When Ellison's protagonist moves to New York city, his chance encounter with the Brotherhood sets in motion a series of events that alter his perception of race relations in the north. Happening upon the eviction of an elderly black couple, the protagonist attracts the attention of the organisation when he speaks up for the couple as their belongings are strewn across the street outside their home. The image of two white men forcibly removing the elderly black couple from their home resonates deeply with the protagonist and the crowd. Even though the men, themselves, have no connection to the property or the couple, their presence personifies white power in the States, even in a predominately black neighbourhood. The couple, particularly the old woman, stir up a range of emotions within the young man and her face seems to appeal to him for some kind of help or action. The crowd, although angered and disgusted by the treatment of the couple, are crippled with a kind of inertia that stems from an inability to fight against white supremacy to their own detriment. With a lecture from Mary, the woman with whom he shares his lodgings, on social responsibility and the importance of assuming racial responsibility, even the diverse Harlem fresh on his mind, the young protagonist feels a sense of obligation to the couple, despite not knowing them. He is taken aback by the realisation that the crowd seems powerless and unable to help, asking incredulously "'You mean they're putting them out of their apartment?' I asked. "They can do that up *here*?"' (Ellison, 1952, p. 269) In this moment, the youth's illusions of Harlem and life in the north are shattered, despite the various obstacles that, up until this point, have hindered his chances of fulfilling the dream held by most southerners of a fairer, colour-blind life in the great northern cities. The contrasting auto-images of southern versus northern black Americans are no longer at odds as the protagonist realises that, when it comes to power struggles between black and white, all variations of the African American hetero-image are unified and identified as one whole, united group. Despite the men's entreaties that they are not personally responsible for the eviction, the crowd accepts the old woman's conviction that they are, based on their skin colour as she declares "'It's all the white folks, not just one. They all against us. Every stinking low-down one of them."' (Ellison, 1952, p. 270) Her statement and the crowds' belief that she is right highlights the tense relationship between black and white and outlines the 'them'

versus 'us' mentality that also informs the relationship between auto- and hetero-image.

> Even though the crowd is angered by the eviction, they fail to act until the protagonist, surprisingly, addresses the crowd. For a brief period before doing so, he seems to falter and wishes to be subsumed into the mass that has gathered. The sight of the couple's belongings flowing from the apartment resonates with the young man, particularly a ['…] fragile piece of paper, coming apart with age, written in black ink grown yellow. I read: FREE PAPERS. Be it known to all men that my negro Primus Provo, has been freed by me this sixth of August, 1859. Signed John Samuels. Macon.[….]² (Ellison, 1952, p. 272)

The papers of the freed slave remind the protagonist of the all too recent reality that blacks had been enslaved by white Americans. Initially, he even attempts to deny the authenticity of the documents, but is, ultimately, unable to lie to himself as he accepts that slavery and, subsequently, subordination, are linked to both, the auto- and hetero-image of African Americans.

That the crowd witnesses an act of dispossession of an elderly black couple deeply affects the young man and he is, eventually, spurred into action when the crowd becomes agitated and begins to fight against the white agents. Almost subconsciously, the protagonist finds himself addressing the crowd, pleading with them not to resort to violence. He creates an auto-image of blacks in Harlem on the spot, referring to the crowd as '"Black men! Brothers! Black Brothers! ...We're law-abiding people and a slow-to-anger people.'"(Ellison, 1952, p. 275) Whether or not he is prompted to speak out of a fear of mass violence or out of a sense of social responsibility, the protagonist has an almost out of body experience as he implores the crowd to use peaceful means of protest. He attempts to highlight the humanity of the elderly couple, their own, personal identity even as he attempts to render them symbolic of his race. The scattered possession that incensed the crowd are rendered by him to be remnants of a life of hardship and social inequality. When challenged by a voice from the crowd that the couple are being dispossessed, he makes the argument that it is virtually impossible to be dispossessed of anything if you have never had anything to begin with. He attempts to argue that, despite living frugally and working

hard for a lifetime, the elderly couple have nothing to show for their life and this, he believes, is ultimately down to the fact that they are black.

The presence of a marshal, dressed in blue and brandishing a pistol at the crowd aids in legitimising the protagonist's argument that blacks are a dispossessed group, powerless in the face of the juggernaut of white supremacy. The marshal personifies 'the law' at the scene and he clearly acts on behalf of the, more than likely, white landlord. Despite being vastly outnumbered by the large crowd, he is empowered by his skin colour and the unwillingness of the black crowd to overthrow or even dispute this power. Like black-white relations of the past in this instance the white man retains his dominance over the group by violent means, using a gun as a prop in this particular power play. Despite the best efforts of the youth to talk the crowd out of violent action, the jostling of the old woman by one of the white men stirs the group into a frenzy and they charge on the apartment, attacking the agents and marshal. The young man eventually manages to bring some order into proceedings and both he and the crowd decided to reclaim the apartment, returning its contents and occupants. As the youth continues to lead the crowd, a group of white people appears on the street and their presence at the scene is the protagonist's introduction to the Brotherhood.

The organisation's arrival at the scene is regarded as unusual for both blacks and the white police officers who arrive shortly afterwards. The young man is further perturbed by their presence when one of the young women of the white group approaches him and addresses him as 'brother'. Before he leaves the site of the eviction, the protagonist is invited back to the Brotherhood's headquarters. This interaction provides the text with yet another interesting background in which racial relations are explored and more diverse auto- and hetero-images of white and black America emerge. Initially the white members of the Brotherhood present a more congenial hetero-image of white America in relation to how whites in the novel, up until this point, are perceived by African Americans. In contrast to the powerful, rich Mr Norton, the cold, distant hospital staff who tended to the protagonist during a brief stay in hospital and the callous marshal charged with evicting poor, black tenants, the white members of the Brotherhood seem to view black people as equal but, perhaps a little recklessly, fail to recognise the differences between the black and white auto-images.

The protagonist is recruited by the Brotherhood to speak in the Harlem district; an area that seems to be less receptive to the Brotherhood and their practices. The conversation between a member and the youth in a café following the eviction scene reveals the manner in which the Brotherhood, led by white men, perceives life in Harlem and, more specifically, the problem of overcoming racial segregation. The white 'brother' perceives Harlem as a sleepy place where people exist without knowing how to properly engage in life beyond a system of racial segregation; implicit or otherwise. The young man argues with the 'brother' that no-one cares for the life of Harlem's occupants or their grievances, even if the hardships of life for African Americans are articulated.[76] When he speaks, the protagonist can barely contain his views on race relations and he expresses opinions that he never seems to harbour privately. Rhetoric takes over and the youth presents a group image of all black Americans as united, as brothers 'burned in the same oven.' (Ellison, 1952, p. 292)

The protagonist's insistence that he is bound to all African Americans because of his skin colour infuriates the white 'brother' and he explodes '"Why do you fellows always talk in terms of race!"' (Ellison, 1952, p. 292) Though the outburst is a quick and fleeting one, it, none the less, reveals the divide the 'brother' actually feels between whites and 'you fellows'. His statement makes a lie of the values he had, up until the point, steadfastly defended. Despite the differences between the young man's views and those as presented by the 'brother', he decides to accept the position of speaker as offered by the organisation. Following this, he is introduced to Brother Jack and Emma, both white and both with the same ideological views of the other 'brother'. When asked what, exactly, the Brotherhood stands for, the youth is told that its mission is simple:'"[…] we are working for a better world for all people. Too many have been dispossessed of their heritage and we have banded together in brotherhood so as to do something about it."' (Ellison, 1952, p. 304) The cause seems an admirable one and the protagonist is enthusiastic about the idea of uniting all those dispossessed across the city. Included amongst the dispossessed are the Irish and Ellison's reference to their plight, though brief, echoes Claude McKay's reflections on Irish and black relations, as outlined in greater detail earlier in chapter two. During his time with the Brotherhood, the young man recalls some of his college education, notably a literature

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[76] This situation is similar to that experienced by Gaeltacht inhabitants towards the middle of the 20th century, as outlined in greater detail in chapters two and three.

class in which Woodridge, the lecturer, quoted the work of Joyce, Yeats and O'Casey in an attempt to understand his own, black identity. The young man remembers Woodridge's careful words of '"We create the race by creating ourselves and then to our great astonishment we will have created something far more important: We will have created a culture."' (Ellison, 1952, p. 354) Woodridge's words weigh heavily upon the protagonist and the connection here between the racialization of the Irish and their subsequent attempts to create their own culture and that of black cultural and racial identity is an important one that illustrates a sense of connection between the dispossessed Irish and black Americans. We see the connection for a final time in the text when the protagonist describes a Brotherhood poster that depicts an Irish 'sister' as representative of those dispossessed presently.

While the organisation claims to value all members of the human race equally and its members argue that they want to improve the lives of all those who are dispossessed, they once again, contradict their own policies when they render the protagonist to little more than a stereotype. As soon as he enters their headquarters, the main character slowly begins to lose what little sense he had of his own self. They deploy the youth as a speaker and representative to Harlem, perhaps an obvious enough choice, given his skin colour. However, this act in itself reduces their argument of universality amongst all to little more than a farce. The protagonist is renamed and this is a further step away for the young man from his own, actual identity. This act illustrates the group's unwillingness to recognise his personal identity and it exhibits his willingness to be reinvented. They want him to become their generation's Booker T Washington. They assume that, based on his skin colour, the protagonist views Washington as the most important figure in American history and this assumption is based on how the white hetero-image views black Americans. The Brotherhood introduces the young man to other black members of the organisation and his movements within the group are closely watched and monitored. He is instructed on what to say and which books to read; in essence, the organisation attempts to instil their version of black America, history and culture within the mind of its black members. By re-inventing the more than willing protagonist, the movement exacts a false auto-image of black America in the mind of its black 'brothers', even if this version is flimsy and later crumbles as the protagonist realises the fallacy of the Brotherhood's teachings.

When the young man actually addresses black Americans as a member of the Brotherhood, he soon finds that a disconnect exists between the teachings of his speeches and the reality for blacks in Harlem. He is treated with aggression and dismissed by the very people the Brotherhood claims to represent. The more he learns, reads and speaks, the less able he becomes at communicating with his peers. Only when he speaks to crowds that voluntarily attend a meeting of the Brotherhood is he successful in giving an address. In chapter sixteen, the young man gives a rousing speech on the subject of equality and a shared experience of dispossession, during the course of which, he veers away from the script and strict teachings of the organisation. Despite gaining a good reception, the young man is reprimanded by the elder members of the Brotherhood for his deviance from their guidelines. Following the youth's speech, it is announced by Brother Jack that the young man is to '"undergo a period of intense study and indoctrination under the guidance of Brother Hambro"' (Ellison, 1952, p. 351). This development marks the beginning of the youth's disenchantment from the predominantly white led organisation that attempts to re-invent the manner in which black Americans perceive themselves.

4.5   Conclusions and Ellison's Black America

Throughout the entire text of *Invisible Man*, Ellison presents many versions of African American identity, with some images contradicting others. However, the author also provides some fleeting insights into what, potentially, may truly represent what it meant to be black in the States in the last century. Ellison's protagonist appears to blunder from one manifestation of group identity to another without ever fully understanding the circumstances surrounding each new identity. Despite the young man's best efforts to conform to each new way of life he undertakes, he is forced to confront aspects of his character that point to his real identity as an individual and, more importantly in relation to this study, his identity as an African American.

One of the most memorable scenes in relation to cultural identity is found in chapter thirteen. After being discharged from hospital, during one of his wanders through Harlem, the restless protagonist finds that he is suddenly hungry and at a wagon manned by someone selling yams. The smell of hot yams strikes a chord with the youth and he becomes overcome with memories of home. The vendor clearly meets the demands of displaced southerners in the city and offers a buttery, syrupy

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taste of home that appeals to the identity of his customers 'of the south'. Up until the moment the work's central character tastes the yams, he appears discontent but is relieved once he begins eating and declares, 'They're my birthmark… I yam what I yam!'(Ellison, 1952, p. 266) The yams become an identifying aspect of the protagonist's character; hinting to his connection with southern traditions, speech, folklore and all aspects of black life in the south. The feast is cathartic and suggests that a connection to food is central to the man's cultural identity by transporting the youth to the South and linking him with his homeplace. Even though he is many miles from home, he is still linked to this defining element of group image.

Just as food has the power to remind the protagonist of his cultural identity, so too, his recollection of folktales from his childhood. Ellison expertly links the cultural heritage of the youth to his personal identity in chapter twelve of the text when the young man recovers in hospital following an accident. With the protagonist in hospital, totally confused and slipping in and out of consciousness, Ellison uses this semi state of consciousness to explore the young man's relationship with folklore; an aspect of African American culture that the central character attempts to escape and move away from. As he slips between reality and memory, the protagonist recalls various lyrics and ditties from his childhood. Old folk songs and rhymes punctuate time and act as a counter measure, almost, to the inconsiderate, bumbling and harsh hospital staff. When he finally comes to, he is faced with the most challenging question as the doctors inquire 'WHAT IS YOUR NAME?' (Ellison, 1952, p. 239) This proves to be an impossible question for the young man who finds that he can no longer recall his own name, or that of his mother. Although his identity is never revealed in the text, this is the first incident in the text where the narrator struggles to identify himself, even by name. The questions become more profound as the hospital staff attempts to identify the young man and the question 'WHO…ARE…YOU?' (Ellison, 1952, p. 240) is posed. This question seems particularly absurd to the protagonist. He is then asked 'WHAT IS YOUR MOTHER'S NAME?' (Ellison, 1952, p. 240) and instead of being able to recall her existence, let alone merely her name, the youth is reminded of the dozens; a game of verbal warfare entered into, typically, by young black men. When the question is asked again, the protagonist can't help but engage in a quick game of playing the dozens and he turns the question back on the hospital worker, suggestively enquiring about his mother.

The hospital workers soon become frustrated with his seeming lack of interest in unearthing his own identity and one man asks the question 'WHO WAS BUCKEYE THE RABBIT?' (Ellison, 1952, p. 241) This particular question is a racially charged one and the man asking it makes assumptions, based on the patient's skin colour. Initially, the protagonist is offended and bemused but he then decides that he is Buckeye, a folkloric manifestation within African American communities, a character that poses as a trickster. By assuming Buckeye's identity, one he finds more familiar than his own, the protagonist embraces his African American identity and clings to it in the absence of anything else. The quizzical man asks the question again when the young man fails to answer him, but with the addition of 'BOY' before the question. The simple addition of three letters reaffirms and reinforces Jim Crow's presence in the New York City hospital. When the young man is bereft of recognition or knowledge of his own identity or name, he recalls characters from black folklore and seeks comfort in the familiar territory of black colloquialisms and oral tales and motifs. At a time when he is unable to recall his own identity, he identifies himself, instead, as African American first and foremost.

Even though Ellison's central character moves from the south to New York, the elements that constitute his identity as an African American transcend state lines and various other boundaries. Although he becomes increasingly removed from his original identity, the process simultaneously brings to light previously unknown or unrecognised elements of his personality; elements that also point to his identity as a black American. For Ellison, the experience of the African American is linked, vitally, to food and orality; to a sense of community fostered through shared experiences, expressed in marginalised folktales that artfully relate the reality of life for African Americans in the last century. Also crucial to the identity of the text's central character is his state of marginality and his invisibility, or rather, others' unwillingness to see the entirety of his being as a black American. Ellison's protagonist lives a life quite literally, beyond the margins and beyond the outside world. He lives off the grid, underground and can be interpreted as a manifestation of the marginality imposed on African Americans in the last century. His invisibility is central to his identity; that is the unwillingness of others to recognise his presence. Even when he lives in the south, or when he attends the all-black college he is rendered invisible through the repression of the elements that constitute his black identity. Even though he becomes highly visible as a member of The Brotherhood, he does so under an alias, an identity

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prescribed to him by the organisation's leaders. In the novel's closing pages, the protagonist assumes a responsibility to move back into the outside world and to challenge wider society to truly see him, for the first time.

He speaks of 'shaking off the old skin' and leaving it behind in the hole, noting that 'Even hibernations can be overdone.' (Ellison, 1952, p. 581) This suggests that it is time for him to assume his true identity and to realise the part he must play in advancing the identity and culture of his group. He then makes a most complex suggestion that 'there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play.' (Ellison, 1952, p. 581) Having fled the social responsibilities placed upon him by others, the protagonist is of the view that even those who are invisible and exist on the margins, beyond the reach of organisations like the Negro college and the Brotherhood, have a part to play in society; even if they are rendered invisible by those who would prefer not to acknowledge the existence of different and difficult individuals. Even though he has shaken off the responsibility of representing a positive auto-image of black America, as placed upon him by others, the protagonist suggests that he may still be relevant and an important representative for others. This is clearly expressed in the text's powerful closing line of 'Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?' (Ellison, 1952, p. 581) With this final question, the protagonist does not assume the task of speaking on behalf of others, rather, he seems to leave the decision up to those who empathise with and share in his experience of being marginalised and invisible. Unlike his previous roles as a representative for black communities, in this final offering, he does not attempt to define or impose a group identity upon those who may relate to him. In this manner, Ellison's work is remarkable as the author refuses to give readers a concrete and final determination of what, exactly constitutes the African American auto-image and even, perhaps, the image of any marginalised group. Instead, he achieves in highlighting just how fractured and complex group identity is.

Chapter 5 - Sna Fir Gaelach: Ó Conghaile and New Imaginings of the Gaelic Auto-Image

In the years since Mac Grianna's *Mo Bhealach Féin*, what constitutes Gaelic identity is as fluid as it was then and contemporary Irish language writers continue to forge new and interesting interpretations of group image. There exists a bounty of novelists, short story writers and poets breathing renewed life into the Irish language literary scene. Poets like Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill and Gabriel Rosenstock and writers such as Alex Hijmans and Pádraig Standún challenge perceptions, not only of how Irish speakers are perceived, but also our understanding of the language itself. Increasingly, Irish language writers are examining their own identities as a minority group and seeking out new ways of reconciling the traditions associated with the language and life in modern English-speaking Ireland. One of the most prolific figures amongst the new generation of Gaelic writers is Micheál Ó Conghaile. A playwright, novelist, short story writer and publisher, Ó Conghaile has heavily influenced the changing perceptions of Irish language literature and his work is an example of how modern Irish speakers have made the language their own, have added to its lexicon so that it can accurately represent the realities of 21st-century life in Gaeltachataí across the country.

5.1 Background

Having grown up on the small, sparsely populated Gaeltacht island of Inis Treabahir, off the coast of Galway, Ó Conghaile is a native speaker of the language and has lived most of his life in Gaeltachtaí where close ties to the community are often central to the lives of inhabitants. Life on Inis Treabhair was centred on tradition and the family led a simple, rustic existence without electricity. In an interview with Pádraig Ó Siadhail in the *Canadian Journal of Irish* studies, Ó Conghaile tells of his early love affair with literature and reading, particularly Irish translations of children's stories by An Gúm, prompting an early career as a writer following the publication of

some poems in his teenage years.[77] For Ó Conghaile, his life has, for the most part, been lived in Irish and he can recall a period of his life when he could only communicate in the native tongue. As an instinctive Irish speaker, Ó Conghaile naturally uses Irish to express himself and to communicate all aspects of the human experiences, even those for which there are no words or a limited vocabulary. His stories are often heavily peppered with English words and phrases to make up for the lack of expression in Irish for those experiences not typically associated with Gaeltacht life.

When Ó Conghaile published his first collection, *Mac an tSagairt* (1986), there was some criticism surrounding his use of English and an almost puritan fear that a young, contemporary Gaeltacht writer's use of the foreign tongue in expressing Gaeltacht life would do more damage than good.[78] His first published collection set a precedent for much of his work to come as the writer utilised a hybrid mix of Irish and English; an unholy union in the opinions of some critics and language purists. In the collection, Ó Conghaile writes, primarily in Irish, though he utilises some Enlgish words when a suitable term cannot be found in Irish or when English words would appear more natural in the mouth of the speaker. As outlined in Bhabha's 'Signs Taken for Wonders', hybridity, in this instance, has the effect of disrupting the rigid discourse of the Irish language and her associated baggage in relation to national identity. The publication of the collection was also steeped in controversy because of the themes tackled therein, most notably abortion and suicide. From his very first collection, Ó Conghaile challenged how Irish speakers are perceived. As a Gaeltacht native, his depiction of a less than idyllic life jarred with the notion that a Gaeltacht existence was a pure one, safe from the corrupting components that were seeping into wider Irish society. In an era when homosexuality and divorce were illegal and criminalised, Ó Conghaile's work explored taboo and sensitive issues that affected all Irish citizens and not just those in the Gaeltacht. Speaking in relation to the

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[77] In an interview with Pádraig Ó Siadhail, Ó Conghaile speaks of the early beginnings of his literary career, following the publication of his poetry in *Inniu*: In secondary school, when I was about 14 or 15, I wrote poems and sent them off to the weekly newspaper *Inniu* which had a column/ competition entitled 'Na Fill Oga.' (Ó Siadhail, Ó Conghaile, 2005, p. 55)

[78] Ó Siadhail mentions the controversy surrounding Ó Conghaile's first collection of stories noting: 'Your first collection of stories, *Mac an tSagairt* (1986), caused a bit of sensation at the time for its use of language- the everyday colloquial Irish of the young people, heavily laced with English syntax and vocabulary - plus controversial issues such as abortion and suicide.' (Ibid., p. 55)

controversy surrounding his work, Ó Conghaile recalled the outrage that certain parts of society expressed towards his work and the threats that existed including the public burning of his work. (Ó Siadhail, Ó Congahile, 2005) In a country that actively banned the publication of books thought to be corrupting and of indecent content, Ó Conghaile was relatively lucky, perhaps, to have had the opportunity to publish work at all.

While the content of the stories in *Mac an tSagairt* caused controversy, so too, did Ó Conghaile's innovative take on the Irish spoken in Gaeltachatí by young people. When his work is considered in light of the debate that unfolded at the turn of the century in relation to the language and its preservation, as discussed in chapter two, Ó Conghail's use of Irish could be considered a break from tradition. By his own admission, Ó Conghaile has a natural ear for the spoken language and he brings this talent to the pages of his stories and novel.[79] When giving a voice to his Gaeltacht characters, Ó Conghaile strives to ensure that voice is an authentic one and considers how he, or his father or neighbour would express the experiences of his characters. Ó Conghaile does not shy away from discussing the sensitive issue of the spreading influence of the English language in the nation's Gaeltachtaí and even goes so far as to put that language in the mouths of his characters as they narrate their lives from within the Gaelic stronghold. In the interview with Ó Siadhail, speaking in relation to his occasional use of English, Ó Conghaile notes:

> There are times in English when the word is a lot stronger than the word in Irish. It can hit a lot harder. If the English word is used in the Gaeltacht, it has a stronger register for me as a reader and writer than the Irish translation, which might not normally be used and might only be found in dictionaries or among learners of the language. If a writer can or has to go outside his own language to create something better, stronger, or more precise, a writer should do that, and will do that to try to reach that higher level of power in his writing. (2005, p. 56)

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[79] Ó Conghaile speaks of his ear for the spoken language in the interview with Ó Siadhail and admits that 'as a writer that is the best thing I brought with me from my own home and from being an Irish speaker. An ear for the spoken language...or I should say languages as there are different levels of the Irish language spoken in the Gaeltacht. (Ibid., p. 56)

From Ó Conghaile's comments, it is clear that his intention is to enrich the reader's understanding of Gaeltacht life, to give an authentic insight into how people in these small rural pockets actually express themselves and he does so at the expense of the idyllic, purist notion of the Gaeltacht. While Ó Conghaile uses English syntax and vocabulary from time to time in his texts, he is also conscious of the threat to the Irish language as young people in the Gaeltacht begin to lose the 'saibhreas' [richness] of the language; a trait he notices down through the generations, noting that 'Young people don't have the saibhreas or richness of the language that we have, and, of course, we don't have what our fathers had in the previous generation.' (Ó Conghaile, 2005, p. 59) This suggests then, that any inclusion of English vocabulary in his work is considered and included only for the enrichment of the reader's experience.

Another unusual aspect of Ó Conghaile's work is the settings and locations of his short stories and novel. While the majority of his characters are from the Gaeltacht and are fluent Irish speakers, a number of his stories are set in urban locations or split between the rural Gaeltacht setting and the city. By setting some of his work in the urban sphere, Ó Conghaile challenges our perception of both the location and the language. For readers, it can seem unusual or unfitting to find a wholly Gael creation navigating life in the city, particularly when the interaction between characters is accompanied by an Irish language dialogue. It seems at odds, almost, that a typically rural language is used to communicate life in an urban location. However, for Ó Conghaile, this is a reconcilable matter and the union between the urban setting and the Irish language is an easy, almost natural one, and is deftly handled in his collection *An Fear a Phléasc*. What is also notable is Ó Conghaile's use of the fantastic in some works where characters find themselves in peculiar surroundings or struggling to overcome or escape absurd situations and locations. Ó Conghaile obscures our understanding of space and, more pressingly perhaps, our understanding of the natural home for the Irish language as his characters transgress the boundaries of the Gaeltacht; the natural home for the Gael.

As a publisher, Ó Conghaile has, potentially, great influence over the direction of the group image of Irish language speakers for the new millennium. Founded by Ó Conghaile, Cló Iar-Chonnachta, is the largest private publishing company of Irish language texts in the country. However, from Ó Conghaile's own output, it is clear that the company does not have a conservative or narrow agenda on what should constitute Irish, or, rather, Gaelic identity or literature. Speaking of the company's

Comment [DCU3]: ?

intentions, Ó Conghaile is clear in his vision for the language and literature and takes pride in bringing new writers and 'people who would have been considered difficult to record or people who mightn't cooperate with others' (Ó Siadhail, 2005, p. 57) (speaking in relation to sean nós singers) to the fore. The company also translates the work of Irish language writers and poets and this, in itself, impacts upon the image of Irish speakers as a group by making the literature more accessible to non-Irish speaking audiences. Of the writers translated into English by the company, Ó Conghaile notes the success of Pádraic Ó Conaire's *Deoraíocht,* following its subsequent translation into a further six languages. In the same interview with Ó Siadhail, speaking in relation to the translation of Irish language literature, Ó Conghaile states: 'Our priority remains to publish contemporary Irish language writers but we try to spend some time promoting Irish language literature abroad.' (Ibid., p. 57) While the translational work undertaken by the company is secondary, it effectively impacts upon the group image of Irish speakers by making the group open for interpretation by audiences outside Ireland. Through his work at Cló Iar-Chonnachta, Ó Conghaile invites new understandings and interpretations of a group more typically closed off from wider society.

In Ó Conghaile's short stories and novel, the writer, like Kenan, draws upon his experiences of life from the margins to give a realistic and contemporary depiction of Irish speakers towards the close of the 20th century. Ó Conghaile focuses on the lives of Irish speakers, both in and outside of the Gaeltacht and he utilises a hybrid tongue comprised of Irish with smatterings of English to communicate the lives of his creations to the modern Gaelic reader. Ó Conghaile's stories are laden with the complexities of living between two worlds for the Irish speaker; that is the Gaelic world and wider, English-speaking society. The dual-reality of this life for Ó Conghaile's characters casts them into a strange state of existence and in some of his work, particularly his short stories, this confusion manifests in strange ways, leaving his characters struggling to comprehend the spaces they find themselves in. Ó Conghaile's use of space is of particular interest to this thesis as it impacts upon how the characters interpret and engage with the world around them. This, in turn, influences their sense of self and also, their sense of identity as Irish speakers. As always, the Irish language itself has a unique connection to space, particularly when we consider how the language is mostly spoken in small, rural pockets dotted, for the most part, along the western coast. In many of Ó Conghaile's texts, the language is

transposed and used in urban areas and cities. Also notable about Ó Conghaile's work are the stories that deal with the coming to terms with homosexuality for young, Gaeltacht men. The young gay men of his texts struggle to reconcile the traditional lifestyle of the Gaeltacht, and all that goes with it, with their need to accept and explore their sexuality. Ó Conghaile artfully adapts the language to communicate the experiences of these marginalised characters and in doing so creates a sense of connection for the young men to the traditional Gaeltacht life that they may, otherwise, would have felt at odds with.

Just as Mac Grianna challenged readers' perceptions of the Irish speaker through his biographical portrayal in *Mo Bhealach Féin*, Ó Conghaile also gives readers an alternative view of the life of Irish speakers. He draws upon a range of characters to illustrate the diverse identities that populate the Gaelic landscape and even some who do not, or cannot dwell amongst other Irish speakers. Of the many works produced by Ó Conghaile in recent years, some of his most interesting creations appear in short-story collections, *An Fear a Phléasc* [The Man Who Exploded] (1997) and *An Fear Nach nDéanann Gáire* [The Man Who Does Not Laugh] (2003), and in the novel *Sna Fir* [Among Men] (1999). In his short stories and novel Ó Conghaile places his characters in challenging situations and locations, forcing both them and the reader to consider how Irish speakers or Gaeltacht inhabitants should interact with wider Irish society and to think about what, exactly, constitutes the identity of those who instinctively speak the country's indigenous tongue.

In this chapter, Ó Conghaile's novel *Sna Fir* will be examined in light of the images presented in relation to the Gaeltacht inhabitant towards the end of the last century. In the novel, Ó Conghaile presents readers with a bounty of characters, though the characters of Seán Pól and Johnny Rua will be more closely examined than others. The text is rich with many different representations of the Gael and the fictional Gaeltacht town of Ceathrú na gCloch is home to sean nós singers, 'na leaids' and a young gay man, alike. Ó Conghaile challenges traditional perceptions of the Gaeltacht and its inhabitants by presenting readers with a disenchanted and disenfranchised young man who struggles to find his place in an Irish society divided by language, tradition and varying values. In the novel, the author also gives an alternate view of the life of the Irish language as the text's central action unfolds in the cities of Dublin and London. Although not the first to write about the homosexual experience, Ó Conghaile's novel is remarkable for its treatment of the topic and the

Comment [DCU5]: You use "note" and "notable" a lot. Why not "remarkable" here?

author takes great care in highlighting the difficulties faced by the young protagonist as he learns to accept his sexuality and also, as he takes tentative steps towards coming out.

This chapter will also examine the image of the Gael as presented in some short stories from the collections *An Fear a Phléasc* and *An Fear nach nDéanann Gáire*. Looking first to *An Fear a Phléasc*, this chapter will discuss the roles of characters in the short stories, 'Athair', 'Seacht gCéad Uaireadóir' and 'Ar Pinsean sa Leithreas'. In these stories, Ó Conghaile presents another array of colourful characters, all of whom struggle to understand their individual situations or to assimilate into their respective societies or expected roles. In some stories in the collection, such as 'Ar Pinsean sa Leithreas', Ó Conghaile blends the fantastic and the surreal to heighten the sense of crisis that exists for his central characters. In other stories, he centres the action (or inaction) around young gay men and their experiences. In 'Athair', the author depicts two opposing images of the Gaelthacht male in a story that centres on a young man's coming out to his father. That the story unfolds in the traditional setting of the kitchen in a family home is significant as Ó Conghaile provocatively challenges both the reader's and the young man's father's view of the traditional Gaeltacht lifestyle.

5.2   The Gay Gael in *Sna Fir*

In *Sna Fir*, Ó Conghaile gives readers an alternative view of Gaeltacht life and living. The novel's action is centred on the coming out of its protagonist, the nineteen year old John Paul Mac Donagh, as he struggles to realise his homosexual lifestyle in a community that he perceives to be close-minded and incapable of understanding his sexuality. Through the character of John Paul, Ó Conghaile presents a new, modern image of the Irish speaker and the difficulties surrounding his journey from the Gaeltacht to Dublin and also, of his journey towards his 'saol aerach' [gay life]. Readers are first introduced to John Paul when his curriculum vitae is presented on the novel's opening page. When filling out his marital status, John Paul is compelled to stall, question his current status and, more pressingly, his sexuality. He thinks to himself that this question will always evade him and he asks 'Cén pósadh a d'fhéadfadh a bheith orm ar aon nós.' [What kind of marriage could I have, anyways] (1999, p. 11). The opening of the novel is jarring almost and suggests that in John

> **Comment [DCU6]:** So far you have given the ref after the original in indented quotes but after the translation in body of text. Another thing to check, I'm afraid…

Paul's society, there is little room for anything else other than conventional, heteronormative relationships. Later in the text, when pressed on whether or not he has a girlfriend by his younger brothers Jason and Oisín, Ó Conghaile gives readers an insight into the pressures faced by John Paul to maintain a heteronormative image, as the young boys are certain that their brother's frequent trips to the capital are to visit some unknown girl. An exhausting and humerous exchange between the brothers concludes with Jason and Oisín's belief of 'Nach mbíonn *girlfriend* ag chuile dhuine?' [Doesn't everyone have a girlfriend?] (1999, p. 24)

The author's use of the curriculum vitae is a clever device that introduces the text's readers to the character of John Paul as we become privy to his inner monologues and ponderings on his situation from the novel's opening pages. John Paul, named after the Pope, is a complex creation of Ó Conghaile's and one that defies ease of categorisation. His being named after the Pope has great significance in the text, particularly in scenes depicting his night-time cruising excursions in Phoenix Park. While Catholicism and religion is not to the fore in this novel, there are moments in the text when religion dominates. One scene in particular in 'Cuid a Dó' [part two] of the text highlights John Paul's despair at having been named after the Pope. Standing at the Papal Cross in Phoenix Park, the spot where the Pope visited in 1979, John Paul feels stifled by his namesake and infuriated by the legacy left by Catholicism in twentieth century Ireland. He riles at the idea of having 'Ainm a d'fhág stampa, branda agus data orm' [A name that left a stamp, a brand and a date on me] (1999, p. 133), and he mocks the notion that a man who has never had or will never have the experience of physical love with another preached to the young people of the country about love. Although a religious driven belief that his sexuality is inherently wrong does not afflict John Paul, he encounters another figure, in the text, tormented by a fanatical belief that God will punish and hates those who engage in homosexual acts. While John Paul is rarely troubled by thoughts of religion in the text, he none the less fears that his sexuality will become known. This fear stems from a belief, perhaps, that he will be shunned by his community; a community that he perceives as traditional in lifestyle and belief systems. His family is well-known in the community and has a good standing with the locals through their running of the family's pub. As such, John Paul is at the centre of Gaeltacht life and is a highly visible member of the small town. He is viewed by both locals and his family as a 'normal' young man,

interested in football and girls and throughout the text, John Paul does his best to comply with this imagining of his identity.

Though not the first representation of homosexuality in Gaelic literature, Ó Conghaile's John Paul is an interesting figure, through which both the author and readers can contemplate and explore the notion of what constitutes identity for Gaeltacht inhabitants. While this thesis is not primarily concerned with the auto- and hetero-image of the gay man in Irish language literature, John Paul's sexuality allows for an interesting and fresh insight into the images of Irish speakers in contemporary Gaelic fiction. Ó Conghaile's texts illustrates the, sometimes, fractured nature of group identity. John Paul essentially experiences two lifestyles; that is the traditional lifestyle of the Connemara Gaeltacht and also the fast-paced one he experiences as a young gay man in Dublin city. Similarly to Mac Grianna's dual existence as an Irish speaker and a city dweller, John Paul also gains insight into life beyond the Gaeltacht when he spends any free time, when possible, in the city. When in Dublin, John Paul stays with his aunt Kate who gives him free reign to come and go as he pleases. The youth finds this newfound freedom refreshing, particularly in light of his situation back home. In a conversation with his aunt, John Paul reveals the dislike he has for his hometown of Ceathrú na gCloch when he speaks poorly of the locals when pushed by his aunt for news from the area. When he starts, his aunt is quick to stop him in his tracks when she says '"Anois, ná bí ag caint mar sin faoi mhuintir Cheathrú na gCloch. Tá 'fhois a'm nach bhfuil mórán *time* agat don áit, ach, 'sé do bhaile dúchais i gcónaí é."' [Now, don't be talking about the people of Ceathrú na gCloch. I know you don't have much time for the place, but it will always be your home] (1999, p. 26) John Paul's dislike, which sometimes veers on disdain, for his home place is unusual in Irish language literature as, more often than not, writers and characters living in the city often long to return to the Gaeltacht and to escape the desolation and loneliness of city life.

The connection to place is central to many Irish language writers, particularly those forced to migrate from the Gaeltacht. Though not exiled in the literal sense, many Gaelic writers were compelled to move from the economically barren Gaeltacht, particularly in the first half of the 20th century. These writers experienced a sense of exile and an overwhelming longing to connect with their surroundings or to reconnect with their home places. Said's explanation of exile as 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home' and

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that 'the essential sadness of the break can never be surmounted' (1984, p. 49-55) is fitting when considering the sense of longing in the work of poets such as Cathal Ó Searcaigh and Máirtín Ó Direáin.[80] John Paul, however, is different and his preference of city living over the Gaeltacht is indicative of his feeling disjointed and disengaged from the traditional life back home. His frequent trips to the city allow for him to escape the expectations placed on him by the locals and his family alike. The pressure experienced by John Paul to hide his sexuality and his family's expectations that he will, someday, achieve greatness, perhaps, or continue the family business are immense. Undoubtedly, he is expected, or feels as though he is, to comply with an image of the modern Gaeltacht man towards the close of the 20th century. Frequently in the text, he is reminded that his sexuality is a barrier to his being able to realise the life that is expected of him and, subsequently, his image as a member of the community.

Life in Dublin city offers John Paul some much coveted anonymity and a chance to redefine his identity. He seems to get a sense of enjoyment from being able to walk down the busy streets without being recognised. This, for John Paul, is refreshing and gives the young man scope to identify himself as a gay man without fear of admonishment. The juxtaposition between the freedom of the city and the community driven Ceathrú na gCloch is almost too much to bear for John Paul and his longing to be free of the Gaeltacht is strikingly evident in 'Cuid a hAon' [part one] of the novel when he asks: Cén fáth nach sa gcathair seo a rugadh mé nó nach ann faraoir atá mo chónaí a fhiafraím dom féin, mé ag breathnú timpeall ar shoilse lasta fáílteacha. Soilse agus daoine, go leor daoine i ngach áit. Céad slán le Ceathrú adhastrach chroimsiascach na gCloch' [Why wasn't I born in the city or, why unfortunately, don't I live here, I ask myself as I look around at the welcoming lights. Lights and people everywhere. A hundred goodbyes to Ceathrú tattered na gCloch...] (1999, p. 43)

In his article 'Odd Man Out: Micheál Ó Conghaile and Contemporary Irish language Queer Prose', Ó Siadhail connects John Paul's desire to live his life in the city to a rite of passage; a play on words of the novel's title. Ó Siadhail makes the point that 'in Ó Conghaile's novel *Sna Fir*, the rite of passage is not just the espousal of a life style which deviates from the community's perceived norm, but a fresh

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[80] ´The themes of longing and homecoming are present in some works from Ó Searcaigh's *An Bealach na Bhaile* (1993) and Ó Direáin's *Rogha Dánta* (1949).

understanding on the narrator's part that he moves into manhood, sna fir, to be true to himself he cannot and will not allow the community to dictate and control how he will lead his life.' (2010, p. 151) The experiences available to John Paul in Dublin give him the opportunity to create a life for himself beyond the gaze of the community of Ceathrú na gCloch.

The appeal of the city lies in John Paul's ability to transform himself from 'Eoin Pól Mac Donncha' of Ceathrú na gCloch, into a series of different personas. He revels in the opportunity to do so when socialising with other gay men and he frequently changes his name or uses variations of 'John'. John Paul takes advantage of his being unknown in the city when he goes to Phoenix Park 'ag crúsáil' [cruising] and when he goes to one of the city's gay saunas. However, city life comes with its own dangers and although John Paul relishes in city life because of the opportunity it gives him to explore his sexuality, he is often reminded of the stigma attached to the homosexual identity, even outside of the Gaeltacht. This threat manifests in the text when John Paul recalls the bad press given to Club 99, the gay sauna, in the tabloid newspapers and again, when a group of youths heckle men entering and leaving Phoenix Park in the middle of the night. Even though John Paul is attracted to city life because of the freedom it gives him to embrace his sexuality, he is also enticed by the sense of connection he feels to the gay community there. On the same night he witnesses the gang of youths verbally abusing men at the park gates, John Paul runs into some friends of his inside the park. Jó, Skeleton and Miss Cathedral are acquaintances of John Paul's and are part of the furniture, as it were, of the park. When he meets them, John Paul feels a deep sense of affiliation and connection to the three men and, although he only knows Jó well, he feels as though he can confide in the men as he would with family. This is clear when Ó Conghaile's young protagonist admits to himself that: 'D'fhéadfainn rud ar bith a rá leo agus bhí a fhois acu sin. B'in an sásamh mór a bhí agam anois agus mé ag coisíocht timpeall, an mothú sin go raibh mé I measc mo theaghlaigh ar mo theallach dhúchais féin.' [I could say anything to them and they knew it. This made me really happy as I walked about, feeling that I was among my family, at my hearth] (1999, p. 124)

John Paul is not the only character in the text that feels a sense of connection to a wider, gay family in the city, and this is clear when he encounters a young teacher, that same night in the park, despairing because of his sexuality. John Paul comforts the man, telling him that he is not alone, that there are others like him out

there; that a support network, of sorts, exists. John Paul puts a great deal of value in his Dublin-based network of friends and peers, so much so that he is willing to relinquish his long-established connection to his actual family and the local community of Ceathrú na gCloch. Like Kenan's Horace in *A Visitation of Spirits*, John Paul feels stifled by his hometown and the life that goes with it. However, unlike Horace, John Paul is eventually able to reconcile his identity as a gay man with his Gaelic heritage. This reconciliation occurs slowly, as the lifestyle Dublin city offers becomes empty, meaningless and a lonely one for John Paul. The process of disenchantment is propelled by the suicide of an ex-boyfriend and a HIV scare, events that leave the young man shaken and longing to return to his hometown and family. Although John Paul feels disconnect from the Gaeltacht, he identifies himself as being of the area and this is particularly apparent during his time in Dublin. While he repeatedly implies that Ceathrú na gCloch is a godforsaken, boring and backward place, he identifies strongly as a Connemara man. Despite himself, John Paul has an unshakable connection to and sense of affiliation with the culture and language of the Gaeltacht.

Even though John Paul struggles to come to terms with his identity as gay and Gaelic, the Irish language itself is vital to the young man's identity and, subsequently links him to his heritage and home-place. As noted by Máirín Nic Eoin in *Trén bhFearann Breac*, 'Is í an Ghaeilge teanga an dlúthchaidrimh, teanga an croí sa scéal.' [Irish is the language of intimacy, the language of the heart in the story.] (2005, p. 364) In the text, Ó Conghaile makes ample use of English words and phrases, particularly when the young Gaeltacht men converse with each other at the bar. However, despite the restricted expression for gay love in the Irish language, John Paul narrates all of his experiences of the latter in Irish. Nic Eoin refers to this common thread in John Paul's narration, suggesting that the language helps Ó Conghaile's protagonist bridge the gap between his identity as a gay man and his heritage as an Irish speaker:

Is í a labhraíonn John Paul lena ghaolta, lena sheanchairde ón mbaile, agus lena leannán Dónall […] Is í a labhraíonn sé freisin leis na seanfhondúirí homaighnéasacha […] tá an rogha teana anseo ag teacht le feidhm na Gaeilge mar theanga mhuintearais san úrscéal trí chéile. [It is Irish John Paul speaks with his family, with his old friends from home and with his lover Dónall […]. It is

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Irish he also speaks with the oldtimers in the park […] the choice of language here shows that Irish is coming into being as a language of belonging and friendship throughout the novel.] (Nic Eoin, 2005, p. 365)

That John Paul constantly complains about his hometown and does everything in his power to escape from his community, his reluctance to lose touch with the language is significant and clearly, being an Irish speaker is central to his own sense of identity. By narrating the most intimate and personal details of his life Ó Conghaile illustrates through John Paul that the language has bountiful potential to express life beyond the Gealtacht world.

While John Paul uses Irish to narrate all aspects of his life, even his experiences beyond the Gaeltacht and the lifestyle of the area, his relationship with the language is not always an easy one. In one scene from *Sna Fir*, John Paul meets a group of young men

called the 'GayLinns' in a Dublin bar. A pun on the name of the Irish language organisation 'Gael Linn', the group comprises of gay men attempting to converse with each other in Irish. John Paul makes himself known to the group and they are delighted to have a native speaker in their midst, they welcome him to the group, filling him in on their activities, including the 'Gay-lí' run by the group every Monday night. The hetero-image of the English-speaking Irish presented in the 'Gay-Linns' is not particularly flattering and John Paul considers the men to be foolish in their pursit. Noting the irony of attempting to escape his Gaelic life in order to live as a gay man in Dublin, John Paul notes '*By dad*, a dúirt mé liom féin, nach deacair éalú ón nGaeilge is ón dúchas cuma cá mbeifeá. Fiú i mbeár aerach i mBaile Átha Cliath.' [By dad, I said, isn't it difficult to escape Irish and my heritage no matter where I am.] (1999, p. 113) John Paul ultimately fails to enjoy his interaction with the group and vows not to socialise with them again. The main reason behind his dislike of the Gay-Linn stems from their use of Irish. For John Paul, the language spoken by the group members is: 'Teanga fhuar gan sú bá croí, spiorad ná anam.' [It's a cold, heartless language] (1999, p. 115) The excitement of hearing spoken Irish in a Dublin gay bar soon dissipates for John Paul and he realises that the Gaelic scene in Dublin offers little substance for a native speaker. Nic Eoin refers to the irony inherent in this scene and John Paul's inability to connect with the non-native Irish speaker in the city:

Níl sásamh ar bith le baint as comhludar na nGay-Linns, áfach, agus níl sa phictiúr díobh a fhaighimid sa deireadh ach léiriú eile ar cé chomh deacair is atá sé don homaighnéasach óg Gaeltachta pobal barántúil a thuigfidh dá chás a aimsiú sa chathair, in ainneoin gur ansin is fearr atá sé in ann saoirse phearsanta a bhaint amach.

[There's no satisfaction in the company of the Gay-linns, however, and the only picture we get from them is another illustration of how difficult it is for the young, gay Gaeltacht man to identify an authentic public in the city who would understand his case, despite the fact that he has greatest personal freedom in the city.] (2005, p. 364)

John Paul's difficulties with the language and culture are not confined to his experiences in the city. In his academic life as a student in Galway, John Paul feels as though the Irish language literature he studies does not fully represent him as a young gay man. During his second year summer exams, John Paul struggles to answer a question on the work of Pádraic Pearse. Asked to discuss 'An duine aonair i ngearrscéalata Phádraic Mhic Phiarias' [The Individual in the short stories of Padraig Pearse] (1999, p. 83) John Paul's mind wanders and he daydreams about the character of Sean-Mhaitias in Pearse's story 'Íosagán'. Forsaken by the parish priest in the story, Sean-Mhaitias' situation is expanded on by John Paul as he imagines the love affair responsible for Sean-Mahitias' rejection and exile from the Church. John Paul is even tempted to write an answer for the question based on the assumption of Sean Mhaitias' homosexuality. The idea of doing so induces feelings of affection for the literature and culture within John Paul:

Thuigfinn ansin gur bahin an litríocht liom féin go díreach, go mba chuid díom féin is de mo chúlra féin í, go mba dhaoine mar mé féin a bhí sna carachtair a mbeadh orm aistí a scríobh futhu. Gur roinn muid na mothúcháin chéanna i leith an ghrá…

[I understood then then that the literature was associated with myself directly, that it was part of me and my background, that those characters I would be writing essays about, were people like me. That we shared the same emotions regarding love] (1999, p. 84)

Although John Paul feels as though the literature belongs to him as an Irish speaker and as a person who identifies himself as Gaelic, he is also aware that much of Irish language literature and culture does not represent him as a gay man. As a student of Gaelic literature, he is unable to think of any stories, either modern or folkloric, with a central gay character destined for a happy ending with his loving partner. This is clear when he adds to the quote given above:

> […] Ach níor roinn. Cá raibh fáil agamsa i litríocht na Gaeilge ar bheirt fhear agus iad ag spallaíocht le chéíle ag tórramh nó óiche airneáin nó lá patrúin, ag titim i ngrá le chéíle agus ag gáire go hard. Nó ag dul amach le chéíle mar lánúin, fiú ar an gcúlráid, ní áirím ag caitheamhd saol fada sásta le chéíle […] Cá raibh said?
>
> [… Where would I find two men flirting with each other, or waking with each other or night-visiting or at a festival, falling in love with each other, laughing loudly. Or going out together as lovers, even in secret, besides spending their lives together… Where were they?] (1999, p. 84)

The lack of outwardly gay characters and couples in Irish language literature is a sticking point for John Paul, particularly when he thinks of all the heterosexual relationships memorialised in the literature. The dearth of relatable characters causes difficulties for John Paul as he attempts to come to terms with his dual identities as both gay and Gaelic. This issue arises once again, later, in the text when he meets with his tutor 'An tOllamh R.A.C.Ó Conaill' [Professor Ó Conaill] to discuss topics for his third year dissertation. When asked about his chosen topic, John Paul is tempted to offer 'Téama an ghrá homaighnéasaigh i nualitríocht na Gaeilge' [The theme of homosexual love in modern Gaelic Literature] as his answer, though he ultimately fails to do so and, instead, is given a subject matter by the professor. From Ó Conghaile's illumination of John Paul's inner-monologues, it is clear that the young protagonist is desperate to create a link between the Gaelic literary and cultural life and his sexual identity.

John Paul's meeting with an tOllamh Ó Conaill is, ultimately, an eventful one in his realisation of his identity as an Irish speaker and Gaeltacht inhabitant. Aware that John Paul is from the Gaeltacht, the professor sets him the task of collecting the songs of one of Ceathrú na gCloch's most renowned sean-nós singers, Seán Ó Flatharta.

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John Paul is both horrified and bemused by the suggestion that he should collect the songs of Seán Ó Fleatharta, or Johnny Rua as he is best known locally. An tOllamh Ó Conaill makes the assumption that John Paul is interested in the oral history of his hometown, and he views the young man as a passionate and engaged inhabitant of the Gaeltacht. To avoid the detection of his sexuality, by revealing his real research interest, and the effort of having to think of his own dissertation title, John Paul willingly subscribes to the professor's view of him as an engaged member of Ceathrú na gCloch; as a Gaeltacht inhabitant interested in folklore and local history. He accepts the identity imposed on him, just as Ellison's protagonist does so in *Invisible Man*. After his meeting with an tOllamh Ó Conaill, John Paul reflects on the task that lies ahead and his thoughts on having to complete a project on Johnny Rua are cynical and disdainful.

5.3 Johnny Rua, Deaideo and 'Athair': New Perspectives on the traditional Gaelic Auto-Image

Johnny Rua is, yet, another complex creation of Ó Conghaile's living in Ceathrú na gCloch. In *Sna Fir*, readers are presented with two contrasting images of Johnny Rua. When he is first introduced in John Paul's parents' bar, he is mocked by some of the other locals. He is told, unceremoniously, to '"Dún suas do chlab mór, maith an fear"' [Shut your big mouth, like a good man] and '"Suigh síos for *fuck's sake*"' [Sit down, for fuck's sake] (1999 p. 13) Johnny makes a nuisance of himself in the pub and harasses the other patrons with his sean-nós singing; something they more than likely have to endure regularly. The local 'leaids' [lads] continue with their baiting of Johnny Rua, imitating an imagined commentator for the Eurovision and awarding his performance '"*dou point*"' (1999, p. 14). For the locals at the bar, Johnny Rua is a mild annoyance and they act as though in awe at why anyone would be interested in hearing the esteemed 'Seán Ó Flatharta' sing. The college professor's view of Seán Ó Flatharta contrasts with how he is perceived by his own people. The singer is highly regarded, it seems, by those outside of the Gaeltacht of Ceathrú na gCloch and they view him as a link to a past, richer oral tradition. The sales of Johnny Rua's tapes in the conjoining shop of John Paul's parents' bar are testament to the lack of interest in his music locally. Having recorded a selection of his sean-nós songs, most likely with '"dream an raidió"' [the radio people] (1999, p. 14), only five of his

tapes sold; three of which he bought himself and two others sold to French tourists who made their purchase based purely on their enjoyment of the sound of the language and their desire to learn how to speak Irish.

Clearly, Johnny Rua is viewed favourably by those outside of the Gaeltacht. He fits the hetero-image of the Gaeltacht inhabitant as connected to a rich, oral tradition and as someone who maintains and adds to the region's culture and, subsequently, the country's collective interest in the language. In the text, there are few examples of how the Gaeltacht is actually viewed by outsiders, but an ex-girlfriend and friend of John Paul's, Nóirín Ní Mhurchú provides an insight into how some from the Galltacht view the region and her people. Nóirín cannot understand why John Paul hates his hometown and she repeatedly speaks of the beauty of the area and the kindness of the locals. When she is introduced to the text, she is described as: 'An Bleá Cliathach óg scaoilte amach agus ag súil chomh mór le blaiseadh de shaol dúchasach cultúrtha rómánsúil na Gaeltachta, mar a dúirt sí liom ina dhiaidh sin…' [The young Dubliner released out (into the Gaeltacht) hoping to get a taste of the traditional life and the romantic culture of the Gaeltacht] (1999, p. 51) Nóirín's views of the area, it would seem, are unrealistic, particularly when compared to John Paul's experiences and knowledge of the area. In relation to Johnny Rua, within the Gaeltacht community, the only members of the group to view him in a similar light are those tasked with promoting the language and her associated cultural activities. Johnny Rua's talents as a sean-nós singer with a bountiful knowledge of local history are acknowledged by "dream an raidió", presumably alluding to the national Irish language radio station and, also, by the Oireachtas na Gaeilge- an Irish language organisation that runs a yearly cultural competition. These organisations happily promote Johnny Rua and the image of Gaeltacht living he represents. In one conversation between John Paul and his Aunt Kate in Dublin, Kate makes reference to hearing Johnny Rua frequently on the radio, suggesting that his work is widely broadcast throughout the country. The auto-image of the Gaeltacht inhabitant propagated through the promotion of Johnny Rua's work suggest that those involved in the promotion of Gaeltacht life view him as sort of poster boy for the region; as someone who embodies the finest and most cherished aspects of cultural life in the Gaeltacht.

Later in the text, readers are left under no illusion of John Paul's true feelings towards Johnny Rua when he thinks of the old man following his conversation with

the college professor. The conversation leaves John Paul doubting an tOllamh Ó Conaill's credentials, finding it laughable, almost, that anyone, let alone a scholar of the Irish language, would put any value in a character such as Johnny Rua. This is evident when John Paul thinks:

> Seán uasal aosta Ó Flatharta, a dúirt mé liom féin […]. Ollamh mór le Gaeilge ag tabhairt 'an tuasal' air. [Johnny Rua] Nár mhór an t-ardú céime dó é. B'in ainm amháin nár tugadh i gCeathrú na gCloch ariamh air, agus nach dtabharfaí théis ar tugadh d'ainmneacha ar an mbastard.
>
> [The noble, sage Seán Ó Flatharta, I said to myself… A prominent Irish professor calling him 'Sir'. Wasn't it a big step up for him. That's one name that he was never called in Ceathrú na gCloch ever and that he wouldn't be called after that either, the bastard.] (1999, p. 93)

John Paul is astounded, almost, by the image of Johnny Rua held by others, particularly those who are well educated and, supposedly, clued in to matters relating to Gaelic culture. In the above quote, however, it is abundantly clear that those from within the Gaeltacht of Ceathrú na gCloch do not share the conviction that Johnny Rua is a local treasure and the auto-image of the man provided by John Paul overshadows an tOllamh Ó Conaill's perceptions.

John Paul comes to a devastatingly withering conclusion in relation to Johnny Rua's talents, noting that 'cheap madraí an bhaile nach raibh cuma ná caoi ar amhráín Johnny Rua, nárbh fhéidir dhá fhocal as a chéile a thuiscint uaidh ar aon nós') [the dogs of the town thought that Johnny Rua's songs were without shape, that you couldn't understand two words from him anyway] (1999, p. 93). He places no value in the older man's abilities and is instead, blinkered by his own image of Johnny Rua as a 'druncaera' [drunk] who was:

> bearáilte ar feadh deich mbliana ag Mamó geábh, go mbíodh sé ag fliuchadh a threabhsai ar an stól ard nuair a bhíodh an iomarca ólta aige, go gcaití é a iompar abhaile nuair a bhíodh sé ina chaora, go gcaithfeadh sé an samhradh ag súdaireacht deochanna ó na turasóirí trí bheith ag slabáil chainte leo ina Bhéarla briste…'

[He was barred for ten years by Granny because he'd wee his trousers and the high stool when he'd have too much drink taken that he'd have to be taken home when he'd fall asleep, that he'd spend the summer milking pints from the tourist by speaking to them in his Broken English…] (1999, p. 96)

The image of Johnny Rua, presented above, as a drunk who begs free pints from tourists and who wets himself when in a drunken stupor is greatly removed from the reverent image of the singer upheld by the college professor and Gaeltacht organisations. John Paul does not take his task seriously and finds the entire notion misguided and bizarrely humorous. When he approaches Johnny Rua about the project, the singer does little to improve John Paul's image of him when he demands payment for any contribution. Johnny Rua's demand of a four-hundred pound payment for access to his songs confirms John Paul's convictions that the old man is a fraud; a talentless hack whose real talent lies in extracting money out of others in the name of Gaelic culture. After much haggling between the two, Johnny Rua agrees to exchange his knowledge for free drinks, once again legitimising John Paul's unflattering image of the singer.

There's a sense from the text that John Paul is smug, almost, when Johnny Rua agrees to help with his college project in exchange for free drinks. However, later in the text, John Paul is humbled by Johnny Rua when he takes the old man home after a night of heavy drinking in his parent's bar. Having taken the third place prize in a singing competition earlier that night, Johnny Rua's stock appears to be falling with the cultural organisations that once promoted and encouraged his talents as a sean-nós signer. When John Paul goes into Johnny Rua's home, it is clear that the old man appears to live off a past glory that holds little currency in the progressive Gaeltacht landscape in the final years of the twentieth century. The home Johnny Rua shares with his two cats and three dogs harkens back to Gaeltacht living before conditions were improved and investments made in the area. The image of Johnny Rua presented in this section of the novel is similar to the poverty stricken characters of Irish language texts from an earlier era.[81] His home is testament to a life that once was. On

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[81] The dingy home of Johnny Rua is similar to depictions of poverty in other novels and short stories set in the Gaeltacht, particularly in the first half of the 20th century, as described in chapter two. The squalid conditions endured by many in the Gaeltacht at the turn of the 20th century is famously satirised in Myles na gCopaleen's *An Béal Bocht* in which the text's central family live amongst their pigs.

the wall hangs a yellowing photo of Johnny Rua holding an award and the only other adornment on the walls is a picture of the Sacred Heart. There is an overpowering smell of damp in the house and its floors are bare cement. John Paul is taken aback by the insight he gets into Johnny Rua's life and thinks 'Ba thruamhéalach an feic é. Brónach.' [It was a pitiful sight. Sad.] (1999, p. 211) Johnny Rua tells John Paul of his missed opportunity to marry and his situation acts as a cautionary tale for the young protagonist. The fear of loneliness and bachelorhood has a hold on John Paul and this feeling is intensified because of his apprehension to reveal his sexuality to his family and friends. The visit to Johnny Rua's is an important turning point in how John Paul views the older man and, ultimately, it impacts upon his connection to the music and culture of the area.

Later in the text, when Johnny Rua passes away, John Paul is deeply affected. After the suicide of his ex-boyfriend and an anxious wait for test results, Ó Conghaile's protagonist is devastated by the loss of Johnny Rua. Having dismissed the singer for years, John Paul realises his talents too late. In a conversation with his grandfather, John Paul reveals how much of an impact Johnny Rua had on him and, more importantly, his view of Gaeltacht culture. John Paul admits:

> "An bhfuil 'fhois a'd, a Dheaideo, ach gur maith liom go leor de na hamhráin sin anois. Ní chreidfidh tú mé ach is maith, théis go mbíodh an ghráin agam orth tráth mar gheall ar an bhfad atá i gcuid acu. Ach nuair a éisteann duine go minic leo…"
>
> ["Do you know Granddad, but I like a lot of those songs now. You wouldn't believe it but I do, even though I hated them before because of the length of some of them. But when a person listens to them often…"] (1999, p. 255)

The death is the catalyst for a change in John Paul's outlook. The young man is so shaken by the loss that he begins to open up to and confide in his grandfather and their conversation is a defining one in their relationship. The song 'A Dhónaill Óg' [Young Dónall] performed at Johnny Rua's funeral resonates with John Paul and he confides in his grandfather about the loss of his 'cara mór' [special friend] Dónall.[82] As their

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[82] In 'Odd Man Out', Ó Siadhail notes that Ó Conghaile inverts our understanding of the song Dónall Óg 'one of the most famous love songs in the Irish tradtion […] about a girl abandoned by her male lover, and repackages it as a lament by John Paul deserted by his same-sex lover.' (2010, p. 150)

conversation continues, he reveals his sexuality to his grandfather. John Paul is relieved by his grandfather's response and with the knowledge that his grandfather's opinion of him has not changed despite his being gay. Finally, John Paul is given the opportunity to reconcile his sexual identity with his Gaelic one. That John Paul comes out to his grandfather is significant. As the oldest member of his family and representative, in John Paul's mind, of the older generation of Gaeltacht inhabitant, Deaideo's tolerant attitude towards his grandson's sexuality is unexpected and welcomed. In this final scene from the novel, John Paul finds a kind of peace, that was never afforded to Kenan's Horace, and can now identify as both gay and Gaelic without having to sacrifice any one aspect of his identity.

The tender exchange between John Paul and his grandfather is similar to the conversation that takes place between a father and son in the story 'Athair' [Father], featured in the collection *An Fear a Phleásc* (1997). The short story is a heartfelt one and captures the delicacy surrounding the young man's coming out to his father. Ó Conghaile sets the action in a traditional, Gaeltacht home as the young man and his father sit in front of the fire. The young man's father is depicted as a strong, Catholic man with traditional values; typical of the long-established Gaeltacht identity. Recalling his mother's death and funeral in the silences that punctuate his conversation with his father, it seems as though Ó Conghaile's unnamed protagonist likens the devastation of his mother's passing to his current predicament. When the young man thinks back on his mother's funeral, he remembers the stoicism of his father. From his memories of that day nine months previous, he is certain that his father never once cried: 'Fiú nuair a maraíodh mo mháthair sa timpiste naoi mí roineh sin, deoir níor chaoin sé, go bhfios domsa.' [Even when my mother was killed in the accident nine months before that, he didn't shed a single tear, as far as I know] (1997, p. 147)

Like John Paul, the young man at the centre of 'Athair' represents a re-definition of the auto-image of the Gael. Even though he finds the exchange between himself and his father difficult, he is clearly comfortable with his sexuality, or at the very least, not ashamed to come out to his father. The conversation between father and son is an unusual one to take place in the Irish-speaking world created by Ó Conghaile. This can be interpreted by the father's inability to actually verbalise his son's sexuality. Any time he attempts to repeat what his son has told him, he is compelled to stop mid-sentence:

"Agus tá tú…" a deir sé, ag stopadh mar a dhéanfadh an focal staic stobarnailte ina scornach, at nó stad mar a bheadh an focal ag breathnú roimhe, féachaint an mbeadh sábháilte teacht amach- nó agus súil b'fhéidir go ndéarfainnise aríst é- an focal sin a rinne fuaim ghlugarnacah ina chluasa tamaillín roimhe sin, focal nach móide a múnlaíodh as a scornach tuaithe féin ariamh. Focal strainséartha… Focal nach raibh fiú nath measúil Gaeilge ann dó nó ma bhí, mí in aice láimhe… ["And you're…" he said, stopping as if the words caught in his throat like a stubborn stack or as if the words had stopped and looked before them to see if there was a safe way of coming out- or hoping that I would say it again, that word that made a gurgling, squelching sound in his ears a little while ago, a word that had not been moulded in his country throat ever before. Strange words… a word for which there wasn't a respectable expression in Irish or if they were, he couldn't think of them…] (1997, p. 184)

For the father, there are no words to describe what his son has just revealed. The language he has spoken his entire life, the language he thinks and feels in, fails him as he attempts to comprehend his son's words. The protagonist's father can be seen to represent a more traditional image of the Gael who finds the notion of homosexuality incomprehensible. The father repeatedly asks for God's help and his Catholic beliefs are detected when he utters phrases such as '"Go sábhála Dia sinn"' [May God save us] (1997, p. 148) and '"Beanancht Dé le hanamacha na marbh."'[The blessings of God on the souls of the Dead] (1997, p. 149) The religious iconography that adorns the kitchen's walls also highlights the importance of the Catholic faith in the home. During the entire conversation, the father is preoccupied with stoking the fire and maintaining the kitchen range. He attempts to look for clues to his son's sexuality as he recalls the young man's past relationships and confusedly questions his son's relationship with a local girl.

Despite the father's initial outpouring of emotion, confusion and concern for his son's health, he seems to reach a state of acceptance towards the end of the story. Just as John Paul was able to reconcile his sexuality with his life in the Gaeltacht, so too, can the young man at the centre of this story. After their conversation, the father prepares to leave the kitchen and to tend to the family's farm. As he leaves the kitchen, he asks his son: '"An seasfaidh tú roimh an mbó bhradach dom?" a deir sé,

"fad is a bheas mé á bleán… tá sine thinn i gcónaí aici…"' ["Will you stand in front of the braddy cow for me?" he said, "while I'm milking her… she still has a sore teat.] (1997, p. 156) Quoting Bríona Nic Dhiarmada, Ó Siadhail describes the story 'as "hardly a hip, faux-urban image but one true to the specificities of this story", the father signals finally that his love for his son is stronger than any disquiet and disappointment he may have about his son's sexual orientation. The father's request for help while milking the cow illustrates to his son that, although his coming out came as a shock, little has changed in the relationship between the two. While the young man's image as the son of a traditional, Gaeltacht family has changed, his new identity as a gay man is not irreconcilable with his identity as a Gael. His father is able to accept the change in his perception of his son and little changes between them.

5.4   Language, Identity, Space and the New Gael

The difficulties of reconciling the homosexual and Gaelic identities feature in a number of other stories by Ó Conghaile and in 'An Mercyfucker' and 'As Láimh a Chéile', Ó Conghaile recycles scenes from *Sna Fir* as short stories and included them in his collections *An Fear nach nDéanann Gáire* (2003) and *An Fear a Phléasc* (1997), respectively. While Ó Conghaile has written many short stories that deal with homosexuality, his work is not restricted to queer writing.[83] At the centre of many of Ó Conghaile's works are characters attempting to understand their own identity and oftentimes, his characters seem at sea in the world around them. This sense of bewilderment is also expressed through Ó Conghaile's innovative use of the language and the mix of Irish with English words and syntax helps to convey that the characters are torn, almost, between worlds; the Irish/English, rural/urban and real/metaphysical worlds.[84] By manipulating the worlds of his characters, Ó Conghaile redefines the

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[83] Other works that deal with homosexuality include 'Gabhal na gCloch' and the play Go dTaga do Ríocht. However, Pádraig Ó Siadhail suggests 'keeping in mind that Ó Conghaile is not primarily a queer writer' (2010, p. 148).

[84] Ó Conghaile's use of Irish and English in dealing with conflicting worlds is also examined by Nic Eoin who notes that his unique blend of the two languages in his work is creative and goes towards developing a new, modern style in Irish: '… léiríonn na leabhair sin ar fad a mhórchumas réimeanna éagsúla teanga a ionramháil go cliste agus suímh Ghaeltachta agus suíomh chathrach, comhludair Ghaeilge agus comhludair Bhéarla, éachtraí réalaíocha agus eachtraí de chuid fantaisíochta á gcur I láthair aige. As an meascán, tá stíl shuaitinseach sho-aitheanta forbartha aige atá inniúil ar dhomhan na réaltachta agus ar dhomhan na fantaisíochta a chruthú I nGaeilge atá saibhir, soléite agus, thar aon rud eile, nua-aimseartha.' [… and all of those books illustrate his ability to cleverly manipulate the varied

Gaelic auto-image as space and examines how place influences the identities of his creations.

In his essay 'The Novel in Irish since 1950: From National-Narrative to Counter-Narrative' (2005), Brian Ó Conchubhair includes Ó Conghaile in his study of Gaelic writers who have altered the narrative of Irish language literature in the years since the decline of the Free State novel. Just as Mac Grianna strove to disrupt the Free State imposed narrative that romanticised the Gael and the Gaeltacht, Ó Conghaile's fiction also strives to alter how the Irish language reading public views Gaelic identity towards the end of the last century. One of the ways Ó Conghaile does this is by manipulating how readers view the Gaeltacht space and challenging readers' expectations of the language itself. In many of Ó Conghaile's short stories, the writer challenges how the identity of the Gael is perceived through his distortion of language. Ó Conghaile's moulds the language to suit his purposes of depicting life for the Irish speaker, as he sees it, and not, necessarily, how wider, Irish society views life within the Gaeltacht. Ó Conghaile's hybrid use of an Irish pregnant with English syntax and vocabulary points to, what Ó Conchubhair describes as a 'multifaceted' identity and acts as a rejection of the expectations placed upon the language.[85] Ó Conchubhair notes that:

> For many authors the most subtle way of critiquing identity and society is not through detailed plot construction, but through language. For them codified Irish is impregnated with State control. A rejection of the language of the State is a radical challenge to control and gives power of language back to the margins at the expense of the centre. (2005, p. 220)

When we consider Mac Grianna's use of a Northern Irish dialect in *Mo Bhealach Féin* and Ó Conghaile's use of the language in his novel and short stories, it is clear that both writers have regained their control over the language used by them to

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registers of the language and to present Gaeltacht sites and city sites, Irish company and English (speaking) company, real events and fantastical events. Out of that mix, he has developed a distinctive, recognizable style and he competently creates the world of reality and the fantastical world in Irish that is rich, readable and, above anything else, modern.] (2005, p. 363)

[85] In relation to the idea of language being multifaceted, Ó Conchubhair writes: 'If one's language is impure, one's identity is also tainted, if one's language is hybrid, one's identity is multifaceted.' (2005, p. 221)

communicate all aspects of their lives. Their use of a specific dialect and a hybrid form of Irish and English, respectively, leads to a new understanding of the Gael in Irish society as a figure that exists independently of how those in 'the centre' view Gaeltacht life. In Ó Congahile's stories 'Ar Pinsean sa Leithreas' [Retired in the Toilet], 'Seacht gCeád Uaireadóir' [Seven Hundred Watches] and 'Caillte i gConamara' [Lost in Conamara], the author manipulates both space and the language, as well as their relationship to each other and subsequently creates a new imagining of Gaeltacht identity.

In 'Ar Pinsean sa Leithreas', Ó Conghaile's central character narrates his story from inside a toilet. The protagonist, a retired civil servant has decided to spend the rest of his life and retirement in the bathroom, believing that if he does, he will never die: '"Ní fhaigheann daoine bás istigh sa leithreas!"' [People don't die in the toilet!] (1997, p. 82) His decision comes at a cost to those around him and his wife, in particular, despairs at his decision. A priest and solicitor are invited by the man's wife to appeal to her husband and both are unceremoniously turned away. The man rejects the priest's wishes for him to come out of the toilet and, ultimately, rejects his religion by refusing to accept the sacrament of confession. The decision to retire to a toilet is surreal and the man's survival is exceptional considering his refusal to leave or admit visitors, even momentarily. What follows in the text brings to mind Xavier de Maistre's *Voyage Around My Room* (1825) as the protagonist tells readers of the freedom that has been afforded to him since his self-imposed exile. He declares: 'Ach is féidir liomsa saol iomlán cruthaitheach a chaitheamh sa leithreas.' [But I can live an entirely creative life in the toilet](Ibid., p. 80), suggesting that the confined space has opened up his imagination. The story's protagonist has to escape the Gaeltacht world in order to live creatively and he even goes so far as to suggest that he would have died long ago had he lived anywhere else.[86] His rejection of the wider, Gaelic world is significant as the protagonist feels that he cannot realise his creativity unless he exists in the solitude afforded to him by his retiring to the toilet.

His isolation gives the protagonist the opportunity to connect with his creative being and he feels a total sense of freedom since making his decision. Ó Conghaile distorts our concept of the confined space when the protagonist tells readers 'Ó ní bhíonn teorainn ar bith liom, ach mo chloigeann lán le smaointe i gcónaí.' [O, there

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[86] 'Bheinn féin básaithe- nó curtha chun báis agus i mo chréafóg fadó-dá mbeinn in áit ar bith beo eile.' [I would have died- been put to death or in the soil long agao- had I been anywhere else.] (1997, p. 80)

are no boundaries for me, my mind is full of thoughts always] (1997, p. 78) Unlike the Gaeltacht, an area defined by an arbitrary border, dictated by the language, his confinement in the bathroom provides the protagonist with limitless creative scope. The space afforded to him also allows for Ó Conghaile's central character to engage with a literary past and the protagonist declares: 'Bím ag rá amhrán agus rannta beaga filíochta, á dtarraingt aniar as cúiní dorcha i gcúl mo chin agus ag séideadh an dusta díobh.' [I do be singing songs and bits of poetry, reaching back to the dark parts at the back of my head and blowing the dust from them.] (1997, p. 78) By retreating to the toilet, the protagonist has changed his entire way of life by embracing his creativity. His life as a civil servant in, presumably, the Gaeltacht world, stifled his true identity as a creative figure. His association with a new, unusual space forges a connection between him and a literary tradition. Certainly, those existing in the world beyond his own, personal refuge view the protagonist as deranged and in a state of crisis, however, Ó Conghaile contrasts this by outfitting his central character with a steely reserve and clear intent.

Throughout the story, Ó Conghaile draws upon his unique style, incorporating a mix of Irish and English vocabulary. Just as his protagonist rejects the confines of world he has escaped, Ó Conghaile steers clear of, what Ó Conchubhair dubs, 'the language of the State.' Ó Conghaile's hybrid Irish allows for the author to create a Gaelic world that is truly representative of the lives of characters affected and influenced by the wider world, beyond the Gaeltacht and, also, by experiences not typically associated with life within the Gaelic sphere. 'Ar Pinsean sa Leithreas' is laden with influences from the English language and phrases like 'Bíonn *by dad. Big time*.' (1997, p. 82) and '*Ócé. Ócé!*' (1997, p. 85) are just some examples of the diversity that exists within Ó Conghaile's expression of Gaelic life. In the story's closing lines, Ó Conghaile illuminates the absurdity of the entire scenario of a man living in the toilet and uses English syntax to highlight the unnaturalness of the situation when the protagonist declares to his lawyer: "Beidh mé féin in ann mé féin a *flush*áil síos sa leithreas ansin nuair a thograím é- má thograím é." [I'll be able to flush myself down the toilet when I choose to- if I choose to] (1997, p. 85)

The conversation between the protagonist and his lawyer is absurd and this is highlighted through the lawyer's need to discuss the practical matters surrounding his client's retirement in the toilet. For the protagonist, the practical world no longer exists and to act as though it does seems a ridiculous concept to him. When confronted

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with the question of what should be done with his corpse when he dies, the protagonist finds the entire concept laughable and suggests that his lawyer keep some of his ashes to put in his egg-timer. He adds: "Is féidir leat é a úsáid gach maidin agus na gráinní a fheicáil ag sciorradh síos le fána." [You can use it [the egg-timer] every morning and watch the grains slipping away.] (1997, p. 85) His suggestion that the lawyer should use his ashes in an egg-timer is macabre and this humour is maintained in the final line of the story when the protagonist declares that he will flush himself down the toilet. Ó Conghaile pushes the boundaries of our understanding of the world around us in this text and by doing so, challenges how Irish language readers relate the language to a world beyond the Gaeltacht.

In 'Seacht gCeád Uaireadóir', Ó Conghaile sets another of his stories in an abstract setting, once again challenging the relationship between the language and space. In this story, the protagonist struggles to identify the space in which he exists and his connection to space and time is skewed. The opening lines of the text immediately plunge the reader into an unknown world and the narrator's uncertainty adds to the sense that the location of this story is almost otherworldly:

Tá siopa, más siopa é, in áit eicínt sa gcathair seo nach mbíonn oscailte ach lá amháin sa mbliain[…]. Ar ndóigh, níl a fhois ag mórán cá bhfuil an siopa áirid seo, agus maidir leis an dream úd a bhfuil an t-eolas acu, coinníonn go docht ag fanacht glan air.

[There's a shop, if it's a shop at all, some place in this city that doesn't be open except for one day a year […]. Of course, a lot of people don't know about this shop and those who do know of it, they steer clear of it.] (1997, p. 23)

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The protagonist narrates from inside the shop and there is a sense of perpetual waiting when he says: 'Istigh ann atá mise anois- i mo sheasamh anseo: ag fanacht leatsa…' [I'm in here now: waiting for you…] (1997, p. 23) That the protagonist is waiting, and will continue to wait suggests that both he and the shop exist outside of the Gaelic world; that they exist in an abstract state or perpetual waiting. As the protagonist recalls his journey to the shop, he gives a disorientating account of his time in the unnamed city. The city he describes is labyrinthine and the Irish speaker, not typically associated with city life, becomes consumed, almost, by the city streets and alleys. Not unlike the depiction of Dublin as a hostile place in *Mo Bhealach Féin*, the city,

presented briefly here, seems to conspire against the Gael and brings him to a location that ultimately stakes a claim on the man's time and ultimately, his life

The protagonist, intrigued by a nameless shop, wanders into a space filled with clocks of varying sizes, colours and times. The methodical ticking of the clocks jars with the confused assortment and the protagonist becomes increasingly enticed by the entire scene. The shop is manned by a grotesque figure, described in beastly terms by the protagonist. The shopkeeper is described as:

> Bhí sé tanaí feosaí, le cloigeann triantánach plucach, a chuid gruaige gorm a bhí teannadh siar chomh sliobarnach casta sin is go gceapfá gur le píce a cuireadh ar a mhullach í, a chuid malaí móra dubha ag fás amach díreach, fiáin beagnach, agus a éadan chomh rocach le craiceann seanainmhí. [He was skinny and stunted with a triangular, chubby head, his black hair pulled back so loosely and clumsily that you would think it was put there by a pike, his big black bags protruding, wildly almost and his forehead as corrugated as the skin of an old animal.] (1997, p. 25)

Comment [DCU21]:

The odd-looking shopkeeper fits in well with his surroundings and he spends his time 'ag windáil' [winding] the various clocks. The story's protagonist quickly becomes frustrated in the shop when the time on his own wristwatch stands still. He cannot get a straight answer from the shopkeeper when he asks for the time and instead, is given the cryptic response of 'Cén t-am atá uait?' [What time would you like it to be?] (1997, p. 27) The concept of time is distorted and rendered unrecognisable by Ó Conghaile in this story. Time is described by the shopkeeper as relating only to the person, that each person has their own, unique time. The protagonist's frustration gives way to intrigue and he is destined to remain in the shop for the rest of his life when the shopkeeper tells him: '"Éinnea thagann isteach, ní bhíonn am ná aidhm acua an áit a fhágáil go deo…"' ["Anyone who comes into this shop, they don't have the time or desire to leave it ever"] (1997, p. 33) Ó Conghaile disrupts the Irish speaker's relationship to time and place in this story and just as in 'Ar Pinsean sa Leithreas', he draws upon his unique brand of Irish to narrate the experiences of a character at odds with his surroundings. In other stories like 'An Fear a Phléasc' and 'Ag Ithe Daoine' [Eating People], from the collection *An Fear nach nDéanann Gáire*, Ó Conghaile blends the abstract with reality to give a surreal depiction of life for the Irish speaker.

In 'An Fear a Phléasc' for example, a man explodes in the centre of town. The story is told in the style of a conversation that occurs between two men, describing the circumstances surrounding the explosion. The man who exploded, we are told, was under pressure and a combination of societal expectations and strain overcame the victim. The story can be interpreted as a crisis of identity that ultimately claims the life of the man. When considered in light of the expectations placed upon the image of the Gael, the story, itself, with its innovative use of the language and the abstract plot, can be interpreted as exploding the conceit surrounding the identity of the modern Irish speaker.

While many of Ó Conghaile's stories are set in the urban sphere, some are located in rural areas, more traditionally associated with life in the Gaeltacht. The opening story in the collection *An Fear nach nDéanann Gáire*, 'Caillte I gConamara' is set in the more recognisable surrounding of the rural Gaeltacht. The story opens with the protagonist's admission of '… Bhí mé caillte i gConamara…' [… I was lost in Connemara…] (2003, p. 11); an unlikely predicament for a Gael in the familiar territory of the Gaeltacht. Unlike the stories set in urban locations, the pace of this offering is slower, almost, and the writer pays tribute to the natural beauty of the surroundings. An idyllic picture of the Gaeltacht is depicted with lines such as 'Bhí ciúnas forleathan seachas ceol bíogúil na n-éan a bhí ag ceilliúradh an lae dóibh féin.'[There was a enveloping silence except for the soft music of the birds that were celebrating the day for themselves] (2003, p. 11) and 'Ní fhaca mé aon áilleacht sa bhfraoch daite corcra a bhí go flúirseach chile thaobh díom. É mar a bheadh cairpéad ollmhór éagothrom ann le patrúin neamhrialta de bhláthanna.'[I didn't see any beauty in the purple heather that was plentiful beside me. It was like a great big uneven carpet with an irregular pattern of flowers] (2003, p. 12) While the scenery is described majestically, the narrator, we learn, struggles to find beauty in what he sees. Ó Conghaile's protagonist exists in opposition to the image of the Gael as someone in awe of their home-place. Rather than being enticed by the beauty of the place, the central character is drawn to the space because of its vastness and limitlessness. The space is described as:

Réim gan srian gan riail gan teorainn. Cimín oscailte gan chríoch. Gan fál. Gan mhúta. Gan draein. Gan wire. Gan cosán daonna. Ghabhfá amú ann go héasca. Go fonnmhar beagnach. Domhan mór príobháideach le spear phearsanta de do

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chuid féin, is cuma cén áit ann a seasann duine.[A range without restraint or borders. Open pastures without an end. Without fences. Without drains. Without wire. Without a footpath. You could get lost there easily. Willingly almost. A big private world with its own personal sky no matter where you stand.] (2003, p. 14-15)

Scenes depicting the beauty of the land feature heavily in the text and Ó Conghaile avoids his more experimental form of the language when describing the countryside, relying on more traditional modes of expression to convey the bog lands and their associated wildlife. The protagonist, although lost in Connemara, is also struggling to come to terms with a loss and he seems adrift in his own sense of grief.

Like 'Athair' and *Sna Fir*, this story also deals with homosexual love, though unlike these stories 'Caillte i gConamara' is not concerned with the coming to terms with sexuality. The character at the centre of this story is comfortable with and accepting of his sexuality and while he recalls a berating from the parish priest, he is not obsessive about the implications his sexual preference might have on his relationship to his Gaelic life. Despite his being comfortable with his sexuality, the 'seansagairtín' [old priest] who verbally attacked the protagonist clearly was not and through his rant, readers are afforded an insight into the auto-image of the Gaeltacht inhabitant. The protagonist recounts the episode, when the priest made a house call and interrupted the narrator and his partner, recalling:

É iompaithe ar an mBéarla agus ag caint tharam istach an doras scaití. Chomh maith agus nach mbeadh aon Ghaeilge ag an strainséara mar a thug sé air…Is náire shaolta sibh, a bhéic sé. Náire shaolta don bhaile, do Chonamara is don tír. Drochshampla don aos óg, do mhuintir na pharóiste, do theagasc Dé uilechumhachtaigh. Céard a déarfadh do thuismitheoirí bochta anois, beannacht dhílis Dé lena n-anam, dá mbeidís beo? Dá mbeadh fhois acu cén *carry-on* atá ar bun faoi chaolacha an tí inar thóg said sibh mar Críostaithe. [He had switched to English and talking above me in through the open door from time to time. As well as that, there's not Irish for that strangeness, as he called it…You're a disgrace, he screamed. An embarrassment to the town, to Connemara, to the country. A bad example to the youth, to the people of the parish, the teachings of almighty God. What would your poor parents say, if there were still alive,

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God bless their soul? If they knew of the carry-on going on in the house where they raised ye as Christians] (2003 p. 14)

The old priest represents a dated, conservative auto-image of Connemara life. To be gay, he felt, was to dishonour and tarnish the identity of the Gael. However, the protagonist mentions that a short while later, the priest was removed from the parish and put into some secluded monastery. The banishment of the priest from the parish suggests that his view of what should constitute the identity of the Gaeltacht inhabitant was out of kilter, not that of the protagonist or his partner.

For the protagonist, Connemara is more than a Gaeltacht space. For him, it was the setting of his great love, his great romance. His partner's love for the space transforms the wilds of Connemara for the protagonist and he feels a connection to the place, not because of the language, but because of his experiences there with his partner. When his partner dies of AIDS, the protagonist believes that his spirit or soul is taken away by the Connemara winds:

Tharraing mé siar na cuirtiní agus d'oscail amach an dá fhuinneog. Bhuail puth beag aeir mé as fuinneoig thiar an tí. Gaoth aniar a bhí ann, dá laige í mar leoithne […]. "Tugaigí libh é", a deirimse, le breacadh an lae.[I pulled back the curtains and opened out the window. A small puff of air hit me. A wind from the west, weaker than a breeze […]. "Take him with you", I said to the dawning day.] (2003, p. 18)

Ó Conghaile alters the perception of the traditional space of the Gaeltacht by making it the spiritual home of the homosexual couple. In this story, the landscape, typically romanticized in previous generations, as outlined in chapter two is boundless in its possibilities for the protagonist and his lover. The space is welcoming to the gay man and unlike his experiences with people in the area, the Gaeltacht terrain allows for him to connect with his identity as a Gaeltacht inhabitant and as a Connemara man in a meaningful and cathartic way.

5.5   Conclusions on Ó Conghaile's Representation of the Gaelic World

In Ó Conghaile's Gaeltacht world, it seems that the possibilities are endless. His novel and short stories are not restricted in theme or plot, nor are they hampered by the Irish language or any shortcomings of expression in that language to express life beyond the Gaeltacht. He rejects the expectations placed on him as an Irish language writer and does so by any means possible, even going so far as to create his own, unique hybrid form of Irish that does not shy away from outside influences. While he is not the first Irish language writer to narrate the experience of being gay and Gaelic, Ó Conghaile's depiction of the homosexual experience in the Gaeltacht is dynamic. Speaking in relation to Ó Conghaile's work, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill notes that his work expresses:

> … a gay identity in a way that is open and overt and that is rare in English. Colm Toibín is a very good example of a novelist in English who works on that theme a lot. But I don't think anyone in English has gone so overtly gay as Micheal Ó Conghaile has done in his last novel *Sna Fir* (In the Men) which would have as many entendres as you want. ('The Yeast in the Bread', cited in Ó Conchubhair, 2005, p. 228)

Ó Conghaile's treatment of gay love between Gaels invites new imaginings of Gaelic identity towards the close of the last century. What is also notable is the reaction of most other Gaeltacht bound characters when they learn of a family member or close friend's sexual orientation. Their accepting attitudes suggest that the Gael in Ó Conghaile's Gaeltacht world has evolved in the years since the Free State propagated its ideal of the Irish speaker towards the middle of the last century. As an Irish language writer, Ó Conghaile does not feel bound to or obliged to locate all his work in the rural, Gaeltacht sphere. He is not confined by the parameters of the Gaeltacht, and his fiction often spills over into the English speaking world. By not limiting his characters to the expected space, he frees them from the margins that Irish speakers are often confined by. He breeches the urban sphere in a way that few Irish language writers can, and his creations are equipped to deal with each new world by their ability to articulate themselves in 'Ó Conghaile speak'; a unique blend of Irish and English

perfect for navigating gay life in the Gaeltacht or life in the timeless vacuum of a nameless shop, in a nameless city.

Chapter 6 - 'Old Gods, New Demons' and the African American Image: Randall Kenan's Search for Identity and Belonging in 20th-Century Black America

For contemporary African American writers the task of accurately representing their group in modern American society and culture continues to be fraught with difficulty. In the years following the Civil Rights Movement, black Americans were still frequently perceived in a negative manner and today stereotypes continue to dominate and inform white America's perception of the group. In the States, there have been attempts made over the years to achieve a united and integrated society, through the use of quotas, for example.[87] However, most efforts have not made any significant change in race relations and, statistically, African Americans are more susceptible to marginalisation and subjugation. The high number of young, black men in state and federal prisons, as well as unrivalled levels of poverty in their neighbourhoods throughout the country is testament to the marginality that endures for blacks in the States.[88] The challenge of living in the purportedly colour-blind

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[87] In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson introduced affirmative action which required federal contractors to develop affirmative action policies. In 'Defence of Affirmative Action' (Beauchamp, 1997) discusses the imperative felt by American society to tackle the problem of racial discrimination through the use of affirmative action and quotas.

[88] There is much evidence of the disadvantage experienced by black communities in relation to poverty and crime. One particular essay dealing with this issue, 'Gender, Race and Urban Policing: The Experience of African American Youths' outlines the perception of black men in the states as the 'stereotypical offender' (Brunson and Miller, 2006, p. 532) and examines the perception of black youths in relation to their experience with policing. In another essay, 'Some Notes on Biased Statistics' (Nguyen, 2004), the author asserts that African Americans are not properly represented in national statistics and that this affects their political representation and the flow of Federal funding. Nguyen extensively lists the manner in which the group is misrepresented (including unemployment, crime and death figures) and comes to the ultimate conclusion that 'In all cases, the Black people depicted in this distorted picture are the losers.' (p. 257)

United States is at the centre of many contemporary African American texts, suggesting that things have not improved a great deal since Ellison's *Invisible Man* highlighted the effects of marginality upon the isolated individual in the middle of the last century.

Today, the fact remains that black communities continue to exist on the margins of American life. Despite the granting of civil rights and the slow loosening of Jim Crow's grip, blacks receive, on average, longer jail terms than whites and the number of African American children living at or below the poverty line continues to increase yearly.[89] While this thesis is not a sociological exploration of this phenomenon, it is near to impossible to conduct an in-depth study of contemporary African American literature without taking these depressing realities into consideration. That the majority of black Americans continue to exist on the peripheries of mainstream society is central to many modern texts by authors within the group. Blacks in the States live in a contradictory society that is ruled by the country's first African American president and one in which black rappers and musicians dominate American music culture, while over half the national prison population is comprised of black males, and black families, on average, pay higher mortgage rates. This contradictory situation brings into question what it means to be black in the States today, whether race matters at all and, if so, whether it is or should be the defining characteristic of a person or group. If race is crucial to the make-up of an individual or group, then how, exactly, can we categorize race? Some writers are beginning to question whether being black is about skin colour or if there is more at stake, generations after Ellison.

6.1   Background

Of contemporary writers, few are as concerned as Randall Kenan about what, exactly, it means to be black in modern-day United States. As an academic, novelist and social commentator on black lives, Kenan has dedicated many of his adult years in pursuit of what constitutes African American identity. In a dedication to his godson in the opening of *The Fire This Time* (2007), Kenan writes: 'I would come to devote many years to traveling and writing about African American lives and to a quest toward understanding the meaning of "blackness", a journey that continues for me.'

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[89] In *The Fire this Time* (p.63), Kenan lists the manifold ways in which African Americans are unfairly treated and questions if the group is still subject to disadvantage and discrimination.

(2007, p. 22) The fruits of his endeavours can be gleaned from his nuanced take on black American culture in his short stories, particularly his renowned collection *Let the Dead Bury their Dead* (1992) as well as his novel *A Visitation of Spirits* (1989). The majority of the characters in these fictional works suffer from a degree of isolation and some exist on the margins of the various groups and communities to which they belong, albeit barely in some cases. Kenan makes ample use of motifs, characters and references from African American folklore, and this gives some of his work a fantastical element that helps to free characters from the humdrum of life in the southern states as well as the limitations imposed upon them by wider society.

Comment [DCU22]: Should be p. everywhere.

Comment [DCU23]: It seems that he uses the term "magic realism" himself, which is also that attached to Garcia Marquez. See also one of his presentations on the subject: http://prezi.com/i-uta4gx2iyy/magical-realism-tuesday-draft/#share_embed

6.2   Growing up with Brother Rabbit and Brother Fox

Born to young, inexperienced parents in Brooklyn, New York, in 1963, Randall Kenan was 'sent for' by his paternal grandfather. Only six weeks old, he was brought to a small, rural community in North Carolina where he spent his childhood and adolescent years. Kenan was reared by his extended family in the town of Wallace, Duplin County, in a town that he describes as: 'then bustling like a little beehive, sprung up around a railroad depot, a warren of small tobacco warehouses and poultry plants, several stone's throws from Wilmington, mildly famous among certain history enthusiasts for a Revolutionary War scuffle' (Kenan, 2007, p. 44). Kenan's rural upbringing has heavily influenced his prose fiction, particularly works set in the fictional town of Tim's Creek. His novel and short stories capture scenes from his own childhood, in particular, life on the tobacco farm of Redden Hall, a lease holder on his great-aunt's land. The memory of harvesting tobacco is echoed in a scene from *A Visitation of Spirits* (1989), for example. Other pastoral scenes from Kenan's upbringing in North Carolina appear in his short stories and one of the most striking, perhaps, appears in the opening of the latterly mentioned novel, when the community of Tim's Creek gather together for a hog-killing.[90]

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[90] In the chapter 'White Sorcery', a hog-killing is described in great detail as an activity that brings an entire community together. A sense of anticipation surrounds the occasion and every member of the community has some role to play in the event. Children are described as excited and people as bustling about. However, there is a suggestion that hog-killings are a thing of the past, suggesting in the text that old customs and traditions in the community are becoming obsolete and must compete with modernity; a constant theme throughout *A Visitation of Spirits*.

Kenan attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and graduated in 1985 with a joint degree in English and Creative Writing. While Kenan completed an arts degree, he was initially enrolled as a physics student with an interest in writing science fiction. Under the guidance of Max Steele, an author and head of the Creative Writing programme in the university, Kenan was encouraged to write about black lives, particularly black folklore. Steele recognised the potential for Kenan to fill a niche in contemporary American literary production. In Steele, Kenan had a knowledgeable and encouraging mentor without whom he would never have realised the potential of African American folklore in the creation of literary texts. Speaking of Steele, Kenan notes:

> He knew what I did not know; that I came from a background, specifically, rural, black Southeastern North Carolina, that had not really been written about. North Carolina has many, many, many writers, and a long tradition of writers, but the absence of black folk writing in that tradition was conspicuous. (Rowell and Kenan, 1998, p. 139)

Following Steele's suggestion that he should capture the lore of North Carolina in his fiction, Kenan began to draw upon the rich resources that surrounded him, most notably his aging and elderly extended family. Kenan acknowledges that it took him some time to realise that he grew up in an oral tradition, that he grew up amongst people in their seventies and eighties; figures whom he describes as 'very loquacious'. Speaking of the wealth of folkloric knowledge that existed among his own family, Kenan, in an interview, describes how:

> Literally, in the 1960s and 1970s, I could touch my great-great-grand-Aunt and reach back into the middle of the 19th century. Think about it: when she was a girl, she had known people who were born at the turn of the 18th century! My life was structured by these oral narratives, and I took this all for granted, just like everybody else. It just seemed the most natural thing in the world to me. My kinfolk were not writers, but that fundamental impetus to create a story, whether it's on the page, or through your mouth, was the milieu in which I spent my first seventeen years. (Rowell and Kenan, 1998, p. 138)

From reading his novel and his short stories, it is clear that Kenan's own experience of the south's oral traditions informs that of his characters. His sense of connection to the past has enabled him to create the town of Tim's Creek, a place steeped in history; a history that Kenan effortlessly makes real for the reader, as will be analysed later in this chapter in relation to the short story 'Let the Dead Bury their Dead'. For example, the eponymous short story from the collection *Let the Dead Bury their Dead* (1992) gives a comprehensive background to the foundation of the town Tim's Creek and is narrated by Ezekiel Cross as he tells of the town's origins from his own memory. The oral histories that surface in Kenan's stories, though fantastical, complement the African American world created in his texts. They offer a unique narrative for a group that has, traditionally, had its own histories ignored by wider American society.[91]

While folklore and the oral histories of North Carolina are important in Kenan's work, so too is his desire to give an accurate depiction of life from the margins. As such, many of his texts' central characters are isolated individuals, or figures who struggle to reconcile contradicting aspects of their identity. Kenan deftly captures this kind of struggle and draws upon his own experiences as a gay black man to do so. As will be shown later, Kenan has examined the representation of the African American male in his non-fiction texts, *The Fire this Time* (2007) and *Walking on Water* (2000). In his prose fiction, Kenan frequently creates characters at odds with the auto- and hetero- images of the black male and he does so by creating characters that are outsiders, for different reasons including figures that struggle with coming to terms with their homosexuality. In his texts, the African American communities presented by Kenan are often traditional and conservative in their view of the wider world. As will be demonstrated later in the chapter, there exists a need in Kenan's fictional communities to preserve a certain type of male African American identity and one of the greatest threats to this identity, according to the group, is homosexuality. Often, these afflicted characters occupy important roles in their communities or are related to respected community figures, thus making their positions fraught with crippling secrecy and a kind of self-loathing. By his own admission, it is not Kenan's intention to write specifically about the experience of being gay in a rural African American community. He does, however, draw upon his

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[91] This reality was developed in the earlier chapter on Ralph Ellison.

> **Comment [DCU24]:** As will be analysed in this chapter? (otherwise it is only your opinion.)

own experiences to give his work a sense of authenticity. Speaking in relation to his portrayal of gay men in his fiction, Kenan states:

> For me, I approach my sexuality in my writing in the same way I would approach my being black. I think it is a choice one makes in terms of how broad and deep one wants to make his or her work. Where do you write from? Do you write out of being a black person? Do you write out of being gay? Or do you write out of your experience as a human being? For instance, take Ralph Ellison. *Invisible Man* – and he wrote extensively about this – was written from Ellison's vision as a human being. The book was deeply informed and sensitized by the fact that he was black, and by the fact that he was from Oklahoma and that he went to Tuskegee, and that he came to New York at a certain period in history. But those accumulative facts about his life did not stop him from writing a Bledsoe with great insight, nor did it stop him from writing about Reinhart with great sensitivity. I think that such ability comes from one's own ability to think of oneself as a human being, formed by this broader spectrum of other people. (Rowell and Kenan, 1998, p. 142)

Here, Kenan is clear in relation to his depiction of sexuality in his texts. Just as Ellison drew upon his experiences of marginality to fully realise the isolation and confused identity of his invisible man, Kenan dips into his experience as a gay man to give his young, male characters a realistic presence in his short stories and novel. The characters depicted in Kenan's texts are human beings, first and foremost; human beings affected by both their sexuality and their race. Because Kenan writes from his experience of being a human being, rather than his experience of being a gay black man (though this clearly evident in certain stories and characters), he is able to create not just short stories with an authentic voice, but an entire community of characters, each with their own concerns and private turmoil. The lonely widowers, spinsters, illegitimate and abandoned children and confused adolescents that make up the population of Tim's Creek clearly illustrate Kenan's artful ability to draw upon his own experience of being human in the creation of authentic characters that give readers a sense of life on the margins and, also, the sense that hope prevails despite their own individual hardships.

6.3 Kenan, Morrison and (Re)presenting the Black Body in American Literature

Under the guidance of Max Steele, Kenan was directed towards the works of Gabriel García Márquez, Toni Morrison and Yukio Mishima. Kenan found in these three writers his main sources of inspiration and, through them, he realised the power of the written word. For him Mishima's writing on same-sex love, for instance, was done with such lyrical quality that he then aimed to recreate such a quality in depicting life in North Carolina. In Márquez, Kenan studied the art of intertwining the fantastic with realism and in Morrison, he learnt the importance of folklore in modern black American fiction. Morrison's work was a huge source of inspiration for Kenan and speaking in relation to her text *The Bluest Eye* (1970), Kenan notes that Morrison wrote 'first as a human being, not only as a black person, even though the book is potent with a political vision, a social vision, and even a cultural vision.' (Rowell and Kenan, 1998, p. 144) Morrison's ability to capture the experience of being human first and foremost is certainly a source of inspiration for Kenan and can be seen clearly in the depiction of the grief-stricken Mr. John Edgar following the killing of his dog in 'Things of this World'.[92] Morrison also helped to secure Kenan's position at Random House and during his time working as an editor, he became familiar with the work of James Baldwin. Baldwin too would prove to be a huge source of inspiration for Kenan, particularly his writing on race, homosexuality and religion. The influence of Baldwin on Kenan's work is particularly evident in *A Visitation of Spirits*, and this connection is examined in greater detail later in this chapter in light of how both writers present the image of the black religious leader in their work.[93]

During the late 1980s and 1990s, Kenan had a steady output of work which included a novel, short stories as well as critical pieces. In this chapter, his social commentary in *The Fire this Time* (2007), an allusion to Baldwin's *The Fire the Next Time* (1963), will be examined in light of how the black population in the United States is viewed by wider society, and also how the group views itself in the post-Civil

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[92] 'Things of This World', (p. 24-48), *Let the Dead Bury thir Dead*, 1992

[93] That Kenan views Baldwin as an inspirational figure is also evident from the biography he wrote on the author *James Baldwin* (1994). Kenan's *The Fire This Time* is also evidence of Baldwin's influence. The text is similar in style to Baldwin's *The Fire the Next Time* in that it contains an address to Kenan's Godson (Baldwin addresses his nephew) and both texts are presented in the style of an essay. What is also striking is that the cover for Kenan's text mimics, exactly, that of Baldwin's and the font and colours are matched.

Rights era. Following an examination of Kenan's perceptions of his own group, some of his literary work will be explored in light of group identity and of the impact marginalisation has had upon individual characters. Of the large body of work by Kenan, the study will be narrowed to include his novel *A Visitation of Spirits* and the stories 'The Foundations of the Earth' and the final, title story in the collection from which all pieces are taken, 'Let the Dead Bury their Dead'. In each work, Kenan presents characters that are isolated or feel marginalised in some way or other and, through these individuals, he creates varied incarnations of the African American auto-image. Kenan's fictional works will be examined in light of his ethnographic travel book *Walking on Water*: *Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (2000) and his experiences of the African American auto- and hetero- image as he travelled across the States.

The limitations faced by African Americans are outlined at length in Kenan's critical works wherein the author traces the perceptions of his group, as presented in both white and black histories. In *The Fire this Time*, Kenan charts the change in the way African Americans have been perceived since the publication of *Uncle Remus* folktales in 1881.[94] In this text, he explores how the perception of blacks has evolved since Harris imposed his hetero-image of the group upon American society. While Kenan acknowledges that the intention behind Harris' work may have been well intentioned, he notes that along with D. W. Griffith's film, *Birth of a Nation* (1915), Uncle Remus perpetuates:

> […] the worst of the late nineteenth century's racist conceptions of black folk, yet both are indelible contributions of form and technique without which the American landscape would be the poorer. In fairness, Harris' racism may have been tempered by a genuine sense of humanity. But his brain was so ensnared by racist thought that even his most humane representation of black folk – exemplified by the character of Uncle Remus – is rank with condescension, a view of the Negro as inferior, avuncular at best. And Harris' sin is compounded by his "borrowing" of the stories he gathered from former slaves he interviewed and whose trove of African stories, their legacy marinated in

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[94] Harris, Joel, Chandler, 1881, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, [Online], Project Gutenberg Available from: http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1448549 [Accessed on 23 October 2013].

two centuries of bondage and toil, peppered with Native lore, European plots and the green landscape of the American South and its fauna. And Harris ransacked them with aplomb. (Kenan, 2007, p. 58-59)

Kenan views Harris' text as a landmark one that has shaped how the African American has been perceived by mainstream American society. In the years following abolition, Harris created a benign figure in Uncle Remus, palatable enough for white audiences, so as not to offend their sensibilities. Kenan goes on to note that 'Uncle Remus is an old black retainer of a plantation destined for ruin by the War of Northern Aggression. Salty. Wise. Sweet as sugarcane. In his humble cabin he spins yarns for the benefit of a little white boy' (Kenan, 2007, p. 59). Uncle Remus is a caricature of the ideal, servile black man in the post-slavery era. He is reminiscent of an extinct southern life and is viewed as being harmless enough to spend time with a white child. Remus is devoid of any meaningful power in the text and his is a minstrel-like role; present only for the entertainment of a white audience.

Toni Morrison's influence on Kenan as a writer is evident in his discussion of *Uncle Remus.*[95] His examination of the text and its influence upon the image of the African American is similar to Morrison's own study of the image of the black figure in American literature. In *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Morrison examines absence of African Americans in American literature and criticism. For Morrison, there is a certain irony implicit in the knowledge that 'traditional, canonical American literature is free of, uniformed, and unshaped by the four-hundred-year old presence of, at first Africans and then African Americans in the United Sates.' (Morrison, 1992, p. 5) because of the very manner in which white American culture and society has strove to identify itself as opposite to the African American identity. Morrison discusses how the silence and silencing of black characters is a feature of many literary texts, and she examines Poe's *Pym*, (1838) Willa Cather's *Sapphira and Slave Girl* (1940) and Hemingway's *To Have and To Have Not* (1937), amongst others, in light of their (dis)engagement with blackness

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[95] That Morrison has influenced Kenan's work is also evident from the title of his epic travelogue *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the turn of the Twenty-First Century*. In a tribute to Morrison, the author is quoted on the inside of the text: 'Black women have been walking on water for 300 years'.

and the African American. For Morrison, the lack of engagement with blackness in American literature and criticism is startling and she notes that:

> Black slavery enriched the country's creative possibilities. For in that construction of blackness and enslavement could be found not only the not-free but also, with the dramatic polarity created by skin colour, the projection of the not-me. The result was a playground for the imagination. What rose up out of collective needs to allay internal fears and to rationalize external exploitation was an American Africanism- a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm and desire that is uniquely American. (1992, p. 38)

In Morrison's view, the American literary canon could scarcely exist in its present state without the pervading presence, even a marginalised one, of a sense of danger and a threat to the freedom that so embodied the American Dream. Put simply, Morrison writes: 'Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery.' (1992, p. 38) The lack of engagement with the African American reader is another point of contention for Morrison, and she complains that 'no American text of the sort I am discussing was ever written *for* black people' (1992, p. 16). Instead, Morrison argues, the black persona written into the white literary consciousness was a reflexive exercise, 'an extraordinary meditation of the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the [white] writerly conscious.' (1992, p. 17) Kenan and Morrison are determined as writers, to right this wrong and in an interview with Charles Rowell, Kenan talks of his awareness of his predominant black, male audience[96]. Both Morrison and Kenan are similar in their views in relation to how white American culture has reduced the African American, in literature, to little more than a silent caricature, created to help in the definition of the white identity as opposite to the hetero-image of the black savage or the hetero-image of the passive, humble Uncle Remus.

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[96] When asked by Rowell about his audience and his approach to writing as a gay, black man, Kenan emphasised his approach as coming from the human perspective, but influenced by his experiences. Aware of his audience, he stated: 'I have to remember that some of my of my most important readers are probably going to be young black men and women.' (Rowell and Kenan, 1998, p. 143)

6.4 'Bling, bling, bitches' and Damaging the African American Auto-Image.[97]

Kenan is not only critical of white America, but also of how African Americans themselves have damaged their own cultural identity in the last century. Kenan turns his attention to black Americans in the first half of the 20th century and he shares the belief that they abandoned traditional culture in favour of developing a burgeoning black middle-class, particularly in the first generation following emancipation. In *The Fire This Time*, he builds upon the views of Frazier, a student of Du Bois' and accomplished African American sociologist and commentator in the 1930s. Both Frazier and Kenan believed that the failure of the African American middle-class to invest in any meaningful enterprise to the benefit of their people has had catastrophic results for the group. Frazier, Kenan tells us, 'comes down hard on a lack of seriousness among black business (not manufacturing anything of great worth; focusing on petty retail; scavenging the black community via funeral homes and insurance companies)' (2007, p. 53). Kenan notes that Frazier's thinking was, at the time, perceived as scathing and an attack on his own people. However, Kenan agrees that the black middle-class has done little, traditionally, to empower the less well-off in its own community. The views held by Kenan and Frazier bring to mind the disconnection between the college attendees in *Invisible Man* and the local community of the town, and also, the family of Milkman, depicted in Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1997).[98] However, Kenan acknowledges that the black middle-class has the most currency in the African American community and subsequently, the means to infiltrate positions of power typically dominated by white America. Noting that the black middle-class now represents fifty per cent of the overall African American population , Kenan questions whether this shift could, potentially, be of benefit to black Americans, suggesting that maybe the increase will mean that they 'cannot be so easily minimized, marginalized, and mistaken.' (2007, p. 54)

In *The Fire This Time*, Kenan also discusses the aspects of African American culture that inform how the group is perceived in American society. He focuses on the representation of black Americans in popular culture, particularly music, and how

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[97] Kenan, 2007, p 71.

[98] In Morrison's *Song of Solomon*, Milkman's father Macon Dead II extracts a living from his own people in his role as landlord. In the text, Macon is depicted as tight-fisted and has little empathy for those struggling to eke out a living in his community.

African Americans, rap singers especially, have committed a disservice to their group through their misguided depictions of black American life. Modern African American forms of music and musicians are of a particular interest for Kenan, particularly because of the manner in which hip-hop and rap have infiltrated the American music scene. However, Kenan's view of hip-hop is quite scathing and the author claims to distrust it: 'Not the music itself, but the ethos that has risen up around it and enveloped it in a shroud of bad attitude, rank disrespect, shallow boasting, superficial racial talk.' (2007, p. 71) This kind of music, Kenan infers, adds to the damaging hetero-image of African Americans, as perceived by those who most consume hip-hop: 'suburban white boys who've never come close to Compton or Harlem or the South Side of Chicago'. (2007, p. 72) The lifestyles portrayed in hip-hop reinforce older stereotypes of African Americans, particularly the black male, as a lazy, predatory, dangerous individual.

Negative African American stereotypes also catch Kenan's attention in *Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (2000). In the text, Kenan undertakes an in-depth and country-wide investigation into how African Americans perceive themselves and, crucially, how they identify with the rest of America. During the course of his journey, Kenan travelled across the country and interviewed almost two hundred African Americans from various states, backgrounds, classes, political ideologies and religions. The problem of representing the black individual in American culture, particularly film, is brought to Kenan's attention during his time in Los Angeles. In Kenan's opinion, the depiction of African Americans in film is limited and often reflects how white society views the group. According to Kenan, 'Blacks were minstrels or varmints, or whores or mammies - or they simply did not exist at all.' (2000, p. 355) Influenced by his extensive critique of film, Kenan quotes Baldwin from 'The Price of the Ticket', illustrating the writers' shared frustrations surrounding the misuse of the power of film to reflect real life: It is said that the camera cannot lie, but rarely do we allow it do anything else, since the camera sees what you point it at: the camera sees what you want it to see. The language of the camera is the language of our dreams (Kenan, 2000, p. 355).[99]

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[99] Kenan frequently refers to Baldwin, even anecdotally. During his time in Los Angeles, Baldwin's work on film criticism accompanies Kenan's own views in relation to the depiction of black bodies on film.

According to Kenan, the camera certainly lies when it is pointed at the African American, particularly in the first half of the last century. In Kenan's view, the camera depicts figures that 'increasingly became throwbacks of the minstrel era' and while 'cynical white dollars' (2000, p. 334) facilitated the distribution and financing of such films, those pointing the camera were often black filmmakers and directors, themselves. Oscar Micheaux is given special mention in Kenan's attack on black filmmakers and their damaging effect of the African American auto-image. Micheaux's filmmaking in the years following Griffith's racist and bigoted *Birth of a Nation* did little, in Kenan's view, to improve the image of the African American on camera or in his self-published literary works.[100] A damning auto-image is given when Kenan quotes from Micheaux' text *The Forged Note*, highlighting the class tensions, mentioned previously, that existed between African Americans in the post-abolition era: "'The Negroes in Effingham are niggers proper. They think nothing about reading and trying to learn something; they only care for dressing up and having a good time.'" (Micheaux, 1915, p. 121) The auto-image of the African American presented here in Kenan's view, was also present in Micheaux's onscreen productions, and in the 1920s, '30s and '40s, so-called 'race-films' enjoyed their heyday and 'Oscar Micheaux ruled.' (2000, p. 354) Micheaux' depiction of middle- and upper-class African Americans gave a stunted insight into the realities that existed for the majority of black Americans and in Kenan's mind, Micheaux' work added to the misconceptions surrounding the group. Kenan's critique of African American cinema also includes the advent of Blaxploitation films and he protests:

> To be sure, this movement began with the greater good of black people in mind. In the '40s, '50s, and '60s, the question had been twofold: either it was, to quote Douglas Turner Ward, "Where de Nigras at?" or was it a matter of Stepin Fetchit, Gone with the Wind's Prissy; liver-lipped, slow-witted, servile, pop-eyed train porters, waiters, butlers ("Yassah, Boss!"); or venal, murderous, soulless, oversexed criminals; or humble Old Man Rivers; or big-breasted Earth Mothers with a penchant for singing gospel; or high-yalla hussies looking for no good, and having a good time doing it. There were variations

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[100] While Kenan is critical of Micheaux' films and literary offerings, he is not altogether dismissive and notes: ' there are more things about Micheaux, filmmaker extraordinaire, that bother me more than impress me – though clearly he was an impressive man.' (2000, p. 352)

and riffs (and a few notable exceptions) but little deviation from that norm. (2000, p. 357)

Adhering to the views expressed in Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (1973, 1989), Kenan clearly believes that American cinema has not tried to address how mainstream American society views African Americans. Instead, he is adamant that film has had a negative effect, stereotyping rather than empowering the black character on film. Films considered within the genre of Blaxploitation aggravated the auto-image of African Americans in the 1970s. Instead of depicting black characters as servile, films like *Superfly* (1972) and *The Mack* (1973) championed the hardened hero of the American underworld. However, the auto-image presented in these films was largely negative and Kenan notes that such films 'emphasized the bad in badnigger, glorified drug-dealing, pimping and crime and violence in general; style over substance with the thin veneer of social worth by justifying any and all acts of defiance in the mane of black rage and railing against (and shooting at) the Man.' (2000, p. 358) The negative auto-image presented in Blaxploitation films is similar to that in modern rap-music, as outlined earlier in relation to *The Fire This Time.* The auto-image glorifying a life outside of the law and norms of wider American society does little to dispel negative hetero-images of the group and feeds the discriminatory notion of the dangerous black American male.

In *Walking on Water* Kenan deftly illustrates the reality for young African American males growing up in the shadow of the myth of the criminal, menacing black man. The issue of young, black men being perceived as dangerous arose when Kenan interviewed Paige Wadley-Bailey, a childcare worker in Plainfield, Vermont. During the course of their conversation, Paige talked at length about the perception of black children, particularly in relation to white couples adopting and fostering African American children. In Paige's view, skin colour is a pervasive problem for white families when they take in black boys, in particular:

But a lot of these kids- boys especially- run into a lot of trouble when they reach teenage. Then white mothers become afraid of them, because for all their liberal shit, they believe in the myth of the black rapist. And that's some heavy-duty shit. The kid is going through a whole lot of identity stuff and

growing stuff as it is. Because he's a male, he's more threatening. The teachers are more threatened by them, and harass them more than they do the little girls. (Kenan, 2000, p. 75)

In Paige's mind, the image of the black male is a corrupting influence on race relations in the States, even for 'liberal', white families intent on helping children in foster homes. The stereotype of the dangerous black male as menacing and sexually threatening prevails, generations after the depiction of the 'surly, drunken, murderous, raping Negroes of the Reconstruction' (Kenan, 2000, p. 353) in Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*.

The concept or notion of race is also considered in Kenan's critical work and, in *The Fire This Time*, he explores the use of race in the analysis of black literature and group identity. Race, Kenan believes, is 'an antique way of looking at the world, involving brain size, penis size, notions of the primitive, a vision cloaked in eugenics and faulty statistics.' (2007, p. 90) He talks of race as 'the definition of the Other' and of racism as the narrative that surrounds the assertion (2007, p. 90). Kenan writes of how this dangerous combination led to the white subjugators defining their identity by establishing the dichotomy between 'Us' and 'Them'; the latter being 'dim-witted, childlike creatures, at once sexually rapacious and lazy; a good cook but in desperate need of Jesus; a creature to be feared.' (2007, p. 90) From this dangerously ignorant image of black slaves grew the fear of miscegenation and from this, Kenan tells us, grew the 'mythical, irrational justification for racism' based on 'fear of some big, black, well-hung beast taking advantage of a pitiful white woman.' (2007, p. 90-91) The imagined threat of the black is scuppered by Kenan, not only in his non-fiction work, but also in his novel and short stories. The men at the heart of his prose fiction are sensitive figures that certainly do not comply with how the African American has, traditionally, been perceived. This will be illustrated later in this chapter, through an examination of the characters of Horace Cross and James Greene, in particular, and how, in these figures, Kenan chronicles the human experience for those beyond the margins.

6.5   What does it mean to be Black?'[101]

When Kenan set out on his journey to unearth the nature of African American identity, by his own admission, he naïvely thought that the process would encompass the mere collection of thoughts of African Americans on what it means to be black in modern-day United States. However, the task proved to be much more difficult, and exceeded all of his expectations. In the opening chapters of the *Walking on Water*, Kenan writes of the problems he encountered when posing the seemingly simple question of 'What does it mean to be black?' Before taking that question to the people, he found that it was next to impossible to initiate a debate on the issue without first addressing the terms 'race', 'African American' and 'black American'. In the book's prologue, Kenan tackles the issues of race and his interpretation of the term as 'an ideological construct and thus, above all, a historical product' (2000, p. 5) helps to unearth the falsity of the notion upon which centuries of oppression was built. By blending oral history with his critical examination of African American life in the twentieth century, Kenan highlights the importance of storytelling and folklore to a community historically left out of popular mainstream American culture. Also crucial to Kenan's study is geographical location; that geography can be a deciding factor in how blacks view themselves and whether they identify as black, African American or, simply, American.

In *Walking on Water*, Kenan writes of a chance encounter in Burlington, Vermont that altered, totally, his idea of what it meant to be black in the States. Kenan's first impression of Jack Guilles was none too favourable. When the author realised that the words: '"Yo, homie, what's up?"' (Kenan, 2000, p. 58) came from the mouth of a white man, Kenan was initially perturbed and taken aback. Jack addressed Kenan as a 'Yo', an identity Kenan and his friends believed meant: 'That to be a youngish and black man meant you spoke and identified with the slang of the street.' (2000, p. 58) Jack, though white, tells Kenan that he identifies as black, that his adoptive parents are black and members of the Nation of Islam. Having run away from home at the age of five, Jack had lived with his black parents, in a black neighbourhood in Brooklyn since. He even experienced prejudice growing up in the 'hood' and he told Kenan of 'being chased and even being shot when he was seven, and that sometime around the age of twelve, the people in the "hood" just accepted

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[101] Kenan, 2000, p. 638.

him, "forgot," and treated him like a black person.' (Kenan, 2000, p. 59) Kenan found it difficult, at first, to believe Jack's story, but he found that he could not

> […] shake this feeling that he spoke the truth. And his body language- which, for lack of a better word, I can only describe as black- was strangely well executed, seemingly effortless, a part of him, and perhaps most importantly, he really sounded like a "black person", which is not to say that only his vocabulary and sentence structure were African American; no, the very marrow of the sound, the timbre where the utterances emerged, how the color of the language married emotion and fluidity, had a depth of culture I had never encountered in one who looked like this man. If I had closed my eyes I would have sworn he was as dark as I. (Kenan, 2000, p. 59)

Kenan's introduction to Jack made him question what exactly it meant to be African American. If Jack identified as black and seemed authentically so, then did skin colour actually matter? Jack's whiteness meant that the African American identity had to encompass more than skin colour, in Kenan's mind. Jack broadened Kenan's understanding of his own group and brought the writer to the realisation that 'being an African American was larger and deeper than skin color, that the power of culture infects and takes hold; that the bond of solidarity depends on something greater than blood, something more than the human body, and more spiritual than words.' (2000, p. 72)

The task of capturing the essence of what it means to be black and American in the 20th century is at the forefront of most of Kenan's work. However, his task, first and foremost, he believes, is to capture what it means to be human, although his experiences, undoubtedly, have been shaped by an imposed marginality. That capturing the human experience is so pivotal to Kenan's work demonstrates the author's quest for integrity in his depictions of characters from the furthermost reaches of society. For Kenan, the portrayal of an individual's human experiences is more crucial than their sexuality or race, for example, though these factors also impact upon the lives of his creations. As a gay man growing up in the American south, Kenan himself existed on the margins of mainstream American society. His understanding of this marginalised existence shines through his novel and short-stories that deal with the awakening of sexuality in the young, African American male. While the coming to

terms with homosexuality is central to these texts, this thesis is primarily concerned with how this sexuality affects the auto-image of the African American male and also, how it impacts upon a character's marginality.

Despite the accomplishments of the Civil Rights era, African Americans are still marginalised in modern American society. In his work, Randall Kenan illustrates the feelings of isolation and, at times, despair, endured by black Americans. As well as this, Kenan creates characters that navigate life outside of mainstream society, forging a new, identifiable image for African Americans. Kenan's characters are sensitive beings, acutely aware of their outsider status. Typically, they struggle to fully connect with their own communities and his subjects are often gay men, widowed or unmarried individuals or single women. While these characters belong to well-established communities, they are treated with a degree of suspicion and sometimes, even contempt. For the gay men, in particular, there exists a state of double marginality. As members of the African American community, they are marginalised by mainstream American society, however, their sexuality acts as a barrier to their engagement with their own group, thus their marginalisation is twofold; similarly to the Irish Gaeltacht context. Kenan gives a literary voice to those who are rendered invisible by a community that has typically strived to assert its own cultural identity in a hostile, white-dominated society. While Kenan represents the marginalised individual in his texts, he also gives readers a strong impression of African American culture, most notably the importance of folklore, particularly for the older members of his fictional communities. The inhabitants of Kenan's fictional world are closely connected to their culture and incorporate their heritage into their daily lives. Oral histories inform their view of the world around them and suspicion handed down from generation to generation also dictates their actions from time to time.

Heavily influenced by his upbringing in Chinquapin, a small rural town in North Carolina, Kenan's novel and some short stories are set in the fictional town of Tim's Creek. The community of Tim's Creek is close-knit and all of the characters are well known to each other and have intimate knowledge of most of the town's citizens. Kenan successfully uses this fictional space to develop layers of history and shared experiences, creating a unique narrative that reproduces the reality of life in rural communities throughout the States. While the events of Kenan's first novel, *A Visitation of Spirits*, unfold in Tim's Creek, it was not until the publication of his

collection of stories, *Let the Dead Bury Their Dead,* that the author brought the town truly to life for readers. The final, eponymous story in this volume is presented in the style of an 'Annotated Oral History' (Kenan, 1992, p. 271). It is a convincing offering that traces the origins of Tim's Creek, from the original settlement of Snatchit and, later, its re-establishment as Tearshirt. The oral history documented in the story comes with its own introduction and is presented as a real and legitimate piece of history, complete with its own editor and introduction. The history is even preceded by quotes from Bakhtin and Zora Neale Hurston.[102] Kenan makes his presence felt through his naming of the text's fictional editor, Reginald Gregory Kain, or RK, which adds to the sense of realism that surrounds a text that, essentially, deals with a supernatural and otherworldly subject.

The history in 'Let the Dead Bury their Dead' is collected by 'the Right Reverend James Malachai Greene', one of the central characters from Kenan's earlier text, *A Visitation of Spirits*. However, in this story the Reverend is not directly involved in the events narrates and, instead, gives a voice to his interviewees and the people of Tim's Creek, in all its stages of development. In RK's introduction, we learn that Reverend Greene died in a car accident on March 12th 1998 and, up until that point, he had 'acted as the town's self-appointed historian, quietly chronicling the Tim's Creek of past and present, of public and private, of mythic and real, of virtue and vice.' (1992, p. 277) 'Let the Dead Bury their Dead' is a story presented as a real history of the town. In it, Ezekiel Thomas Cross tells Green of the town's origins as a slave settlement in the swamps of North Carolina. Cross tells Green that 'Slaves ran off from their masters, built up little towns and villages in the swamps so as the white folks couldn't find them. Live as free men.' (1992, p. 283) Cross' history sets the town of Tim's Creek up as a place that has always been populated by blacks, as a haven almost and a sanctuary from the violence that endured for most African Americans before abolition. Also notable from Cross' history are the townsmen who first settled in the area. Cross speaks of one slave in particular, Pharaoh, who was

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[102] Bakhtin's 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', from *The Dialogic Imagination* is quoted as is an extract from Hurston's *Of Mules and Men* (1975). The history that unfolds in 'Let the Dead Bury their Dead' is captured in a similar manner to the folktales re-told in Hurston's vital text. Like Hurston, Reverend Green sets about collecting the folklore of a rural, African American community and rather than transcribe the stories as pieces of fiction, Green's history is presented with accompanying notes and comments, much like Hurston's work. Evidently, Hurston's collecting of African American folklore was a source of inspiration for Kenan.

'brung here direct from African.' (1992, p. 294) Pharaoh, Cross tells us, was wily and the years he worked on the plantation of Owen Cross were spent 'plotting and plotting' (1992, p. 300) behind his master's back. Pharaoh was given unprecedented power and 'he could even give orders to the white overseers which didn't sit too well with them, you can magine.' (1992, p. 300) From Ezekiel Cross' history, it is clear that Pharaoh, the town's founder, did not conform to the servile hetero-image of the black slave. Instead, he was daring and clever and planned an escape that drove his ex-master to the point of distraction.[103]

Cross tells Green of a fantastic, gruesome episode from the town's past when the town's preacher and a group of local men gathered to exhume the body of Pharaoh from his grave and coffin 'made of persimmon wood. Hard wood, they say, shiny black, made for a coffin like stone.' (1992, p. 289-290) The men had gathered to take a book from Pharaoh's grave, a book the preacher said was dangerous – 'Said if the white man got his hands on it it'd be the end of time.' (1992, p. 287) However, the preacher believes that the book reveals the secret hiding place of riches and the exercise is driven by greed. The image of the preacher in Kenan's text is complicated and contradictory for a man of God to be consumed by greed to the point of disturbing the dead. The exhumation brings about an end-of-days scenario and awakens all of the town's dead. The black heterotopia is razed in the war that unfolds between the living and the dead. In his history of the town and surrounding area, Cross tells of the rebuilding and reimagining of the town over the years, and how Snatchit became Tearshirt and eventually Tim's Creek. The story is presented as fact based on the fantastic; as an exercise in folk history. Kenan's fictional Green comes across as a dedicated and thorough historian, intent on giving a group typically excluded from the American historical narrative a history of their own. The story comes complete with footnotes, referencing other work on folklore and black history. Green also presents the hetero-image of the black slave and included the diary entries of Owen Cross' wife from the 1850s.[104] The history told by Cross is one that gives the African American

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[103] Cross tells Green that Owen Cross, Pharaoh's master had 'everybody in the state, the country from Maine to Mississippi, looking for that treacherous nigger. They say ole Owen spent a fortune looking for the darky who made a fool out of him [...]. Ole Senator Owen Cross went to his grave still looking and mad.'(Kenan, 1992, p. 301-302)

[104] From the diary entries of Mrs Owen Cross, Green illustrates the hetero-image of the African American slave from phrases such as 'I renounce such a Barbarous, Wicked God who would let inferior Blacks wreak such Terror on Good WHITE CHRISTIAN PEOPLE' and 'Three Slaves, a Picanniny, a

community of Tim's Creek ownership of their town and crucially, their history and identity.

6.5   James Greene and Redefining the Image of the Black Preacher and African American Masculinity

James Greene, mentioned above as the Reverend of Tim's Creek and local historian, is an interesting character because of his duality. As Reverend, he has a position of power and respect within the community. However, as a native of the town, born to an unmarried mother and reared by his grandmother Jonnie Mae Cross, his personal business and, importantly, weaknesses, are public knowledge. This dual nature of his position is apparent through his interactions with more senior members of the community who, while respectful of his professional capacity as a man of the Church, occasionally treat him in a child-like manner. This is particularly striking in Reverend Greene's confessions presented in *A Visitation of Spirits*. In the novel, James Greene (mostly referred to as Jimmy) takes his elderly aunt and uncle on a long car journey to visit an infirm and hospitalised inhabitant of Tim's Creek. On the journey, the elderly pair bickers constantly, without regard for Jimmy's presence. Over the course of the trip, Jimmy Ruth appears to disregard the fact that her nephew is a grown man and Jimmy's reaction to her behaviour reinforces her dominance. He bows to her every demand and is even reluctant to listen to the radio in his own car, for fear of disturbing his aunt.The role of women in the text is also interesting as they too, like the young, gay men, are also doubly marginalised. They are depicted as either loose and disloyal or faith-abiding and severe. Kenan depicts Ruth, in particular, as ruthless, suggesting that her name is ironic. On names, it is also worth noting that 'Horace' may be seen as a combination of the words 'horror' and 'race', suggesting

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Negress and a Buck. Gone' (Kenan, 1992, p. 311) Green also included some personal letters written by Owen Cross' son, Phineas, who has a more favourable view of African Americans. From his letters, it is clear that Phineas abhors the cruelty his father metes out to his slaves. However, Phineas' perception of the slave is one that objectifies and attempts to reduce the image of the slave Pharaoh to little more than an exotic other: 'I have always looked on him with more than a little fondness, having found him so bewitching, virile and more than anything mysterious in that way that only Africans can be.' (1992, p. 324) When Phineas recalls an encounter with a group of escaped black men in the woods, they are described as ' tall, fine, healthy specimens of incandescent manhood, rippling mahogany and able-limbed, but their grim visages inspired within me, in truth, not so much lust as fear.' (1992, p. 323-324) Phineas views the men as consumable, almost and he eroticises their appearance, making them fearsome, othered objects.

that the young man is destined to suffer because of his skin colour, or that he will struggle to come to terms with his racial identity. The names Gideon and John Anthony, both young, gay men in the text, have Biblical connotations attached, pointing, perhaps to the importance of religion in the African American identity and, subsequently alluding to its hinderance for young, gay men.

Through James Green, Kenan explores an unusual representation of the African American male in literature. As a Reverend, he should command the respect of all his flock, but instead, he is meek and easily controlled by the powerful women in his life (see previous comment). This is evident in *A Visitation of Spirits* as Green recounts his relationship with his late wife, Anne Dubois, a light-skinned African American liberal and civil rights activist from New York. The 'high-minded, high-yalla, rich, militant-talking Northern girl with sweet poontang' (1989 p. 35) who arrives in Tim's Creek disturbs the established order of the town because of her dominance over the community's reverend. Upon her arrival to the town, she is treated with contempt and distrust and some of the community seem resentful that a Northern girl snagged the town's best and most promising member. From his diary entries and memories of Anne, we get a strong sense of her identity as a powerful and influential force in his life, particularly in terms of their sexual relationship. James is the opposite of the stereotype of the black male as aggressive sexual predator. Upon meeting Anne, he is too fearful to approach her in any meaningful way and it falls to her to approach James and initiate their first sexual encounter. The first time the two attempt to consummate their relationship, James is impotent and this certainly is not in-keeping with the perception of the African American male as a sexual and predatory aggressor. Kenan again shatters this misconception when James and Anne's relationship is marred by her infidelity. After a day of feeling ill, James returns home to find a man's jacket, not his own, on the back of a chair in his kitchen. When he makes his way to their bedroom, he finds Anne and her lover, post coital. James' response is totally passive and rather than challenge the stranger or his wife, he simply walks away and sits outside on his porch; the site, as we know, of much activity in the African American community. Guessing that his 'cuckolder' has left via the back door, James eventually goes back inside, without facing his wife, another example of his passivity. He is unable to speak and even though Anne is the party at fault, she becomes aggressive, branding him a 'Goddam pussy' (p. 180) while James remains silent. James is unable to respond and the entire scence makes him violently ill. His

inability to act or react suggests that he may be passive or weak; either way, he subverts the image of the African American male as aggressive and possessive.

We see the passive aspect of Green's personality again in his conversation with his great-uncle Ezekiel Thomas Cross and his great-aunt Ruth Davis Cross in the story 'Let the Dead Bury their Dead'. He documents all they say, even Ruth's rude interjections and his presence is only evident in the supplementary footnotes. The Reverend Green is a departure from other black religious figures in literary texts, such as the overbearing deacon Gabriel in Baldwin's *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1953). Indeed, his predecessor, Reverend Barden, mentioned in other stories, was an overbearing and detestable figure. Unlike Gabriel and Barden, James is a soft-spoken, approachable character and his confidence is trusted by the most vulnerable in the community. The character of Jimmy allows Kenan to explore the concept of a truly Christian Church leader, one who does not judge his congregation, and he even attempts to reassure a concerned youth that sexual curiosity is natural and not necessarily damning. Readers witness James' sensitivity when he is approached by the teenager Horace Cross in *A Visitation of Spirits*.

During an encounter between Horace and James after Sunday service, the young man feels sufficiently comfortable to come out to the Reverend; although Jimmy does not listen and attempts to sidestep the conversation. Horace quickly tells Jimmy: 'I think I'm a homosexual' (1989, p. 112), to which Jimmy responds: 'Horace, really I have reason to believe it's just a phase' (1989, p. 113). While seemingly understanding of Horace's predicament Jimmy becomes more and more agitated as Horace attempts to reveal his homosexuality. Horace looks for acceptance from the Reverend who cannot approve of the young man's sexuality, citing the Bible's teachings as the reason, rather than his own abhorrence. Even though Jimmy is a more approachable religious leader of the African American community, he still tows the line with his Church's teachings and cannot offer Horace the solace he seeks. By the same token, however, he does not ridicule the vulnerable youth, nor does he use offensive language when discussing the sensitive issue of sexuality. Horace's experience of a clergyman's attitudes towards homosexuality, up until this point, would have been more in-keeping with traditional perceptions, and Kenan highlights the differences between Greene and Barden when Horace recalls a sermon delivered by the latter. Barden's belief that homosexuality is abominable was explicitly evident when he declared:

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For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. (Kenan, 1989, p. 77)

Barden's beliefs were shared amongst a willing congregation with members that responded and encouraged the Reverend to continue in his damning of the Godless. Later, in the same sermon, Barden went on to tell of his horror of seeing homosexuals on daytime television, declaring them 'Unclean… Unclean…' (1989, p. 79) Signalling to, or perhaps demanding an end to, this narrow-minded outlook, Kenan has Barden beheaded at the pulpit by Horace before the young man continues on his night ramblings. Barden also features in some of the stories from *Let the Dead Bury their Dead* and his overbearing personality is particularly at the fore in the story 'The Foundations of the Earth'.

In this short story, set before James Greene's ordination, the Reverend Barden is presented as a meddling and judgemental nuisance. 'The Foundations of the Earth' explores the feelings of loss endured by a grandmother after the death of her grandson, Edward. Her mourning is confounded by the realisation that her grandson was gay and in a relationship with a live-in white boyfriend. The outing of Miss Maggie's grandson posthumously complicates her position in the community, particularly when Gabriel, Edward's boyfriend, comes to town. In a porch scene from the story, Maggie, Gabriel, Barden and a couple of others look on as a farmer leasing land from Maggie, Morton Henry, works on a Sunday. The self-important and arrogant Barden takes it upon himself to enlighten Morton Henry of the sin he unwittingly commits on Sunday afternoon. Though the land belongs to Maggie, Barden has a sense of entitlement when it comes to the private business of his congregation and does not consider Maggie's wishes or protestations. In part IV of the story, Maggie imagines '…] the good Reverend Barden as a toad-frog or an impotent bull. His rantings and ravings bored her, and his clumsy advances repelled her; and when he tried to impress her with his holiness and his goodness, well…' (1992, p. 61)

In the same scene, the Reverend's ignorance of the Bible is also ironically exposed when he fails to remember which section of the book admonishes a man for

ploughing a field on a Sunday. Barden is a figure of ridicule here and from Maggie's secret, undisclosed observations, it seems that he is held in low regard by some of the more senior members of his Church. In Barden, Kenan has a typical, out-of-touch Reverend, one who easily passes judgement and is unaware of how he is truly perceived. James Greene does not align himself with Barden's brand of bigotry, and while he does not reassure the young Horace, or give him his blessing, he holds his judgement and asks the young man to look to the Bible for answers. While this is of little comfort to Horace, Kenan's Reverend is a fresh take on the more traditional, conservative southern church leader.

6.6   Horace Cross, Gideon and the Double Marginality of Being Gay and Black

Each of Kenan's characters represent some aspect of the reimagined auto-image of the modern African American. Mentioned above in relation to his conversation with James, the young and troubled Horace Cross is a departure from more traditional representations of the black American male mentioned before. Horace is a sixteen-year old gay man, fearful of the implications his sexuality will have for his life in Tim's Creek, and indeed, being the grand-son of a dominant preacher, for his soul in the afterlife. Like Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Kenan's protagonist was thought of as the great hope for his family and community. An exemplary student, dedicated to his studies, 'He was Horace Cross, the Great Black Hope as his friend John Anthony had called him;' his cousin Ann confirmed as much, telling Horace: 'You the Chosen Nigger.' (1989, p. 13) The pressure placed upon Horace to succeed was immense, and expectations of greatness came not only from his family, but also the community. As he was reared by his grandparents and, following the death of his grandmother, his childless aunts, there were no other children in the family to share with him the pressure of expectation placed upon his generation.

From a young age Horace, we learn, was an unusual child. He was quieter than most and spent the majority of his efforts and time studying. His family dismissed his introverted nature, until he reached adolescence, when it was noticed that he acted differently to other boys, was uninterested in girls and did not conform to the accepted assumptions of what it meant to be male and black in Tim's Creek. To counteract

suspicion, Horace attempts to conform to the auto-image of the African American male by taking up with a group of boys, ridiculing the town's so-called 'sissy' Gideon and even attempting relationships with girls. He became

> […] obsessed with having a girlfriend. He had a feeling that if a girl saw something in him, perhaps the reflections of a man to be, perhaps irresistible cuteness or perhaps just the fact that somebody nice liked him, somebody outside his family or church members, then he would be whole. (1989, p. 96)

Horace's hoping to feel 'whole' is poignant and he tries hard to obey orthodox social expectations. Having been reared in a community that abhors any deviation from the traditional heterosexual relationship, he feels as though he does not comply with the community's imagining of the black male auto-image. Sadly, for Horace, the town's girls are also aware of his seeming shortcomings and have little to no interest in striking up any kind of romantic relationship with the young man. Initially, Horace is perplexed, and questions why the girls find him repellent. He happens upon the reason when he approaches Emma Dobson, a potential love interest. After pursuing Emma and one day, cornering her, Horace is disappointed and, devastated to learn that girls avoid him because he is perceived as 'just plain "weird."' (1989, p. 97) When asked why he is thought of as "weird", Emma tells him: '"You're just kind of… I don't know… kind of like Gideon"' (1989, p. 97) To be thought of in a similar light to Gideon, the town 'sissy' is for Horace 'the insult of insults' (1989, p. 97).

Gideon represents the exact opposite of the auto-image of the African American male in the community of Tim's Creek. He is the son of the town's only bootlegger and his family 'were labelled shameful backsliders' and 'them folks done forgot, if they ever knew, the way of the Lord.' (1989, p. 98) Gideon is ridiculed by both old and young in the community. The old men would say that he had 'sugar in his blood. But unlike decent folk, he was not reticent about it.' Gideon's so-called 'feminine air' was decidedly unacceptable and the feelings of disdain held by the older members of the town, trickled down to the youths of the community. This is clearly evident in a scene from the chapter 'Black Necromancy' when Horace recalls a baiting session between Gideon, himself and a group of boys from the town. The boys imitate the behaviour of older men and ridicule Gideon, asking him what it feels like to kiss a man or to wear make-up. Well used to being the subject of others' mirth,

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Gideon is able to handle the torment meted out to him and a dozen-like display unfolds when Gideon gets the better of his rivals. All of the boys participating in the 'queer-baiting' take their ribbing from Gideon well, except for Horace. Gideon's play-acting perturbs Horace to such an extent that he has an explosive, hurtful reaction telling Gideon: "'I think you're disgusting, Gideon Stone, I think you're low and… and…

unclean. An abomination!'" (1989, p. 100) Horace echoes Barden's teachings on hom osexu-ality and does as much as he possibly can to divert attention from his own sexuality. Reflecting on the scene, Horace, on the night of April 30th, realises that 'he was aware, even then, of his true mind. And mortified of considering what it meant' (1989, p. 100) Horace's sexuality is clearly presented as a burden for the young man who feels as though he is doubly marginalised.

Kenan captures the turmoil endured by Horace as the young man attempts to come to terms with accepting his sexuality, but equally, having to conceal it from those closest to him. Kenan uses a series of flashbacks to illuminate snippets from Horace's adolescence that are marred by uncertainty and fear of discovery. A serendipitous decision made by Horace's biology teacher, Miss Hedgeson, saw the young man paired with Gideon for a class project. Gideon, having matured over the course of a summer, had developed and was no longer considered to have 'sissified ways.' Instead, he was considered by the community to be intelligent and well mannered. Gideon's transformation was not lost on Horace and a sexual relationship developed between the teenagers as they worked on a class project based on the study of tropism in plants. Kenan uses the growth of pea plants as a metaphor for Horace's acceptance of his sexuality and his growth as a young, gay man by correlating the growth of the plants with the developing relationship with Gideon. Though his meetings with Gideon were infrequent and secret, Horace succumbed to and was forced to acknowledge his true feelings. However, having acted on his desires, Horace was quick to quell the intensifying relationship between himself and Gideon and to attempt to live up to the perceptions and expectations placed upon him as a young, black man; the great hope for the community.

To distance himself from any suspicion, Horace starts seeing Gracie Mae Mayfield and strikes up a friendship, of sorts, with the so-called 'beautiful people'. In a scene from the chapter 'Holy Science', Horace recalls the evening he rejected Gideon's advances in the school's gym. Hoping to rekindle their relationship, Gideon

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approaches Horace in the empty hall but is met with hostility and annoyance. Fearing eternal damnation and contempt and derision in his mortal lifetime, Horace lies to Gideon, telling him that he believes that what they did was 'wrong'. Unperturbed, Gideon continues to pursue Horace, eventually placing his arms around his unwilling ex-lover. Horace reacts violently, calling Gideon a 'faggot', knowing the effect of the slur upon Gideon to be hurtful. Horace then punches Gideon; a blow that decimates their relationship in one fell swoop as well as any hopes for reconciliation in the future. Disgusted by Horace, Gideon reveals the frightening truth to Horace telling him:

> I see what you think you're doing with your 'new' friends. But remember, black boy, you heard it here first: You're a faggot, Horace. You know? You can run, you can hide, but when shit comes down… you suck cock, you don't eat pussy. (1989, p. 164)

Gideon's language is deliberate and intended to offend Horace's sensibilities. Using Horace's own offensive term, Gideon holds a mirror up to Horace, forcing him to acknowledge his sexuality and, thus, true self. Horace's response is Bardenesque and he labels Gideon as 'sickening', to which Gideon replies "'I'm sickening. At least I know what I am.'" (1989, p. 164) The exchange is most devastating for Horace who has his true identity, or at the very least, his sexual identity, plainly exposed by Gideon's vulgarity and brutal honesty. Even though what Gideon says of Horace is true, he cannot face his true identity and, ironically, it is Gideon, the 'unclean', 'sickening' 'abomination' who triumphs (again) as he leaves the gym where Horace stays, literally, wrestling with his demons.

Having grown up in a small community like Tim's Creek, Kenan was acutely aware of the difficulties and problems endured by a young, black man attempting to navigate his sexuality in rural North Carolina. He brings his experience to the fore and creates a remarkable character through which he explores the depths of denial and, eventually, in an tragic ending, acceptance. The events of Horace's life chronicled in *A Visitation of Spirits*, are presented in a sporadic pattern, a retracing of the youth's life as he attempts to come to terms with his mistakes, particularly how he dealt with his relationships and sexuality. When readers first meet Horace, he appears as a calm and decisive individual; one who does not seem at odds with his personality or his

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identity. However, it is not long before this first impression dissolves and the panic of Horace's true situation is revealed. Longing to transform from his current body into something more transient and free, Horace turns to 'black necromancy'. The act of preparing for his transformation allows Horace to regain control over his chaotic routine of hiding his sexuality and conforming to the expectations placed on him by his family and friends. Before transforming, he has to decide what form he would like to take, what he would like to become. Of the animals and creatures he considered, included were a butterfly and a cat:

> Cats had a physical freedom he loved to watch, the svelte, smooth, sliding motion of the great cats of Africa, but he could not see transforming himself into anything that would not fit the swampy woodlands of Southeastern North Carolina. He had to stay here. (1989, p. 11)

Horace's choosing to stay in North Carolina points to Kenan's love of the place, a point he makes frequently in *Walking on Water*; a place rich in tradition and steeped in African American culture and folklore. There is also an irony implied in Horace's desire and compulsion to remain in North Carolina, a place where his true self can never be fully accepted or embraced by his community. Finally, he settles on transforming into a bird, the indigenous red-tailed hawk. By metamorphosing into a hawk, a bird native to the swamplands of North Carolina, Horace would finally belong or be tied to the place in which he never truly felt accepted. In order to fit in, he would have to change the very fibre of his being and embrace life as a bird of prey.

Horace's transformation enables Kenan to exhibit the conflicting traditions and faiths of the rural African American community. The people of Tim's Creek live their lives ruled by a combination of folkloric myth, superstition and Christianity. The Christian faith and teachings adhered to by the community are problematic for Horace as they abhor homosexuality. However, Horace is so desperate not to go against Church teachings that he undertakes the drastic decision to transform himself, so as to prevent him committing further sin and to save his soul. In order to do so, however, he turns to the black arts, to witchcraft. While Christianity and necromancy are concepts at odds with each other, the decision to transform into a bird also contradicts Horace's own personal belief in the rational and science. Kenan artfully explores the

contradictions that make up African American faith and this is seen when Horace questions his intended actions:

> Of course he was not crazy, he told himself; his was a very rational mind acquainted with science and mathematics. But he was also a believer in an unseen world full of archangels and prophets and folk rising from the dead, a world preached to him from the cradle on, and a world he was powerless not to believe in as firmly as he believed in gravity and the times table. The two contradicting worlds were not contradictions in his mind. (1989, p. 16)

The contradicting worlds described by Kenan in the above extract collide for Horace and cause a very worldly confusion and emotional and mental breakdown. Rising in the middle of the night to perform the mid-night ritual that will see his transformation into a bird, Horace makes his way out into the woods to cast the life-changing spell. Despite having consulted books such as Gray's *Index* to *the Bizarre and the Unusual* and *Demon Lore* and compiling the necessary facts for the perfect spell, Horace inevitably botched his efforts at practicing the black arts, being unable to find 'the ground tooth of a leviathan' or 'the body of a babe, no older than three years.' (1989, p. 19) The result was disastrous, and instead of being transformed into a graceful, powerful hawk, Horace remained in his human state, tormented by a host of demons and grotesque characters. Unable to transform, Horace is marooned in the very place and in the shape from which he had hoped to leave. While he fails to transform into a hawk, Horace does have a surreal and otherworldly experience and starts to hear a voice, a voice that speaks from both his worlds of faith. The voice that speaks to Horace instructs him to strip naked and to 'Come', thus beginning Horace's final journey through his hometown. For the rest of the night, Horace traipses about the town and country-side of Tim's Creek, trailed by his demons, who represent the physical manifestations of the parts of his personality with which he cannot reconcile.

Throughout the night of the 30th of April, Horace is taunted and baited by an aggressive host of imagined characters, including one in the form of a Maasai warrior.[105] The host of demons and creatures guide Horace through his most painful

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[105] The appearance of the Maasai warrior on the night of April 30th can be interpreted as significant and alluding to the suggestion of fighting for one's country, particularly as the date, April 30th is celebrated

memories from his time in Tim's Creek. They force him to re-examine his relationships and occasions in which he failed in revealing his true self and accepting his sexuality. The demons take him through his memories of Gideon, perhaps Horace's most painful experiences from his adolescence. They compel him to see the pain he inflicted upon Gideon and, also, upon himself. By thinking back on the various events, Horace realises that he had denied his sexuality and identity from an early age and that all subsequent events from his adolescence were impacted by his denial. Towards the end of the night, Horace experiences the most surreal vision, when he is led to the site of the Crosstown Theatre, where he worked one summer as a stage hand. Led to the theatre and guided about by a bison, Horace makes a decision without the interference of the demons and takes himself backstage. Once there, he comes across a vision so terrifying that 'of all the things he had seen this night, all the memories he had confronted, all the ghouls and ghosts and spectres, this shook him the most.' (1989, p. 219) The frightening vision before Horace was of someone putting on make-up in front of a mirror, dressed in the clothes of a harlequin. As Horace looked more closely upon the vision, he came to the slow realisation that the figure smearing its face with white greasepaint was his doppelganger.

The figure covers its face in white paint, painting over and obscuring Horace's features. Horace is unable to recognise 'the nose folks said to be just like his great-grandfather's, the lips rumoured to be like his grandmother's, his father's determined chin, his maternal grandmother's sad eyes…' (1989, p. 220) The apparition's rendering of Horace's face as unrecognisable is telling of the character's repeated denial and refusal to accept his identity. The scene can also be interpreted as an indictment of Horace's denial and shame of his own blackness. In earlier scenes, the sixteen year-old recalls the vacuous, empty friendships he initiated with local white boys, purely on the basis that they were better than his black counterparts, that they had more valuable social currency. His friendships with local white boys was the source of great upset and disappointment for the Cross family, who felt that Horace ignored the all too recent, painful relationship between blacks and whites in Tim's Creek and the surrounding area. Horace is terrified by the clownish figure and a sense of unease prevails as it approaches him, confronting him with a tube of the greasepaint, motioning for Horace to cover his face, too. Attempting to flee the scene,

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as the official end to the Vietnam War for Americans. That Horace embarks upon his journey on this date suggests that he is not connected to wider society.

Horace is thwarted by the apparition and it forces him to look into the mirror, and instead of seeing his own reflection, the mirror warps to depict a scene showing Horace engaged in sex with Antonio, an actor from the Crosstown Theatre.

Horace's time working at the theatre was self-destructive and debauched. He spent his entire time that summer, being used by older men and fooling himself into believing that he was in love and loved in return. He partied and drank with the mostly white cast, becoming increasingly removed from his family and life in the small, rural town. While his time at the theatre allowed for Horace to come out as gay to his co-workers, he was compelled to downplay and ignore other aspects of his identity; elements that prevented him from pursuing his feelings for Gideon or from confiding in his family. Even though Horace enjoyed a certain sexual freedom, the experience was draining and meaningless as his lovers used and took advantage of him:

> His loneliness led him into careless and loveless liaisons with men who cared only for his youth, and though he pretended not to care, he worried more and more for his soul, and his increasing confusion took on a harsher guilt and self-loathing. (1989, p. 240)

The feelings of hurt and embarrassment experienced by Horace for allowing himself to be treated in such a way haunted the young man. Of all the past experiences revisited by Horace and his demons, his time at the Crosstown Theatre left the young man feeling spent and longing for a life underground.

In *A Visitation of Spirits*, the sections chronicling the events of April 30th quite literally show Horace Cross grappling with his demons and attempting to escape from himself. During one particularly terrifying hallucination, Horace wrestles with a spirit manifesting itself as his doppelganger. He is chased by the apparition and even attempts to kill it, blasting it in the chest with the shotgun he picked up on his wanderings through Tim's Creek. As the night closes, Horace wanders into the town's graveyard and 'beneath a diseased long-leaf pine, he saw what he had led himself to see, the reason, the logic, the point.' (1989, p. 232) In this, one of the final scenes of the novel, Horace is confronted with the enormity of humanity and the Christian experience. He sees flashes of war, love, hate and redemption. In the moment, we are told that he clearly saw his place amongst the tumult; saw the chance for rebirth and renewal. However, 'Horace shook his head. No. he turned his heart away. No. This

had been Horace's redemption and Horace said no.' (1989, p. 234) Having revisited his most painful experiences and the 'sins' he committed, Kenan's sixteen-year old feels as though he has passed the point of no return and that he can never be assimilated into the community of Tim's Creek. For Horace, it had become impossible to live parallel lives, both as a young gay man and as a God-fearing male in a tight-knit rural community. The expectations placed on Horace, coupled with his own secret identity as a closeted gay man overpowered the youth and he essentially became lost as the contradicting aspects of his personality waged war, disguised as demons and otherworldly creatures.

Though we witness Horace emerge from the night and the darkness of fighting his demons, he ultimately succumbs to some kind of untimely death, presumably suicide; a death that is pieced together for readers from Greene's confessions. While Horace fails to reconcile the contradicting aspects of his identity, Kenan illustrates that, even though the process is fraught with difficulties, it is possible to live as a gay man in a small, African American community through the character of Gideon. As Horace grew increasingly distant and alienated himself from his family and community to explore his sexuality, his grades began to slip and his attitudes towards the future changed. Having accepted his sexuality and identity long before, Gideon is presented as a confident and self-assured character and reaps many benefits because of his secure sense of self. Confused to the point of distraction, Horace misses out on scholarships and awards as he is replaced by Gideon as the town's 'Great Black Hope'. Despite the relentless teasing and prejudice of the townsfolk, Gideon appears as comfortable with his sexuality and accepts this aspect of his identity, even when others do not. As he grows older, the community of Tim's Creek begin to respect Gideon and change their perception of him and he is viewed as being mannerly and confident. Through Gideon, Kenan is able to explore the possibility of being gay and black and accepted in a small, rural community. While not without hardships, Gideon's experience has a positive, aspiraational outcome, illustrating that homosexuality does not have to tarnish the positive auto-image of the African American male in contemporary society. In *A Visitation of Spirits* Kenan deftly explores variations of the auto-image for the African American male. Characters like Horace, Gideon, Reverend Barden and James Greene offer new and varied perspectives on how the black American male should be identified, similarly to how Ellison's protagonist shattered expectations in the middle of the last century.

6.7   Conclusions

As a storyteller, Kenan brings his experiences as a gay, black man to the fore of his work, both fiction and non-fiction. His fictional work challenges the African American community to embrace all of its members equally and to doubly marginalise its homosexual members. The suggestion that black men in Kenan's work are doubly marginalised is something which the author is conscious of and writes against.[106] As such, his work is imbued with a deep understanding of his group and its culture and history. Even though Kenan is adamant that his work is first and foremost an exercise in the experience of being human, his work is driven by his quest to unearth the true nature of African American identity. As a writer, Kenan feels a sense of obligation to create realistic and positive auto-images of African Americans and acknowledges his duty to debunk myths and stereotypes:

> I think, on a fundamental level, that all artists working within an established tradition – and recognizing that tradition – work to address, re-dress and update existing images. And for a tradition housed within a larger tradition this pressure is even greater. Though the artist has larger goals, it becomes unavoidable to take on misconceptions and stale, outdated ideas. How could an African American writer, writing about Black America, avoid images of black masculinity, black criminality, black matriarchy, black religiosity, and on and on? Such images are the stew in which we live. (Kenan, 2013, Appendix 1)

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[106]When asked about his experiences as a gay writers and the impact homosexuality has upon the auto-image of black America, Kenan replied: Homophobia/Heterosexism isn't unique to the African American community. In truth, at the moment, I can think of no nation that overwhelmingly embraces its queer citizens. As I have written before Black America is integral to the larger America, and sometimes the tens of millions within the African American communities distill and crystallize American attitudes and mores on a more potent scale than the hundreds of millions. When you consider the Black Church, received notions about black masculinity, poor education, the insecure position of black women in society, AIDS/HIV, and a host of other factors, you can see the marginality of gay and lesbian and transgender black folk as an extremely sensitive matter, and why many inside the whole of Black America could see therein a threat. But the momentum for change is real and growing.

This thought process is clearly seen throughout in Kenan's fictional and crictial work. As a gay, black writer, he is all too aware of the experience of marginality and evidence of this can be found in his fictional creations as they fight to overcome the confines of their situations. Because of his sexuality Kenan is aware of the marginal position of others in his society, particualarly African American women, and the elderly and in his short stories he gives a voice to these characters, challenging readers to consider another viewpoint. This has resulted in texts that are laden with rich, cultural references, narrated in a language that speaks of mixed origins and influences. Certainly, in Kenan's texts we find diverse imaginings of the African American identity and images that are as varied as the group itself.

Chapter 7 – Conclusions: Oceans Apart? Bridging the Gap between the Gaeltacht and the Ghetto

In the introduction to this thesis, Homi Bhabha was quoted from *The Location of Culture* regarding the state of emergence in relation to colonial subjects overcoming the cruelties of oppression. It is perhaps fitting then, to conclude with another reference to Bhabha and the outcomes of that state of emergence for the human subject moving out from the shadowlands of colonial societies. Bhabha writes that 'the very nature of humanity becomes estranged in the colonial condition and from that 'naked declivity' it emerges, not as an assertion of will nor as an evocation of freedom, but as an enigmatic questioning' (2009, p. 59-60) What he calls 'enigmatic questioning' can be seen in the tradition of Gaelic and African American literature, particularly in the 20th century as both groups began to question how they were perceived by the societies from which they were marginalised. They also questioned the nature of their own identity and to what extent that identity had been moulded by dominant forces in their respective countries. Questions bubbled and boiled over within Irish language and African American cultural circles and a new tradition of questioning became a feature of the groups' identities. Writers, poets and critics questioned what it meant to be Gaelic or black, they questioned how they had been portrayed historically and how they would like to be portrayed in future and they questioned whether their marginalised statuses would affect their new imaginings of identity or if they could ever be free of the past.

In this thesis, these questions have been closely examined and discussed. As has been outlined, the beginning of the 20th century was a formative time for both Irish language and African American writers. In the Irish context, the loosening grip of the British Empire over the country gave writers the opportunity to consider their identity beyond the dichotomy of Irish/English and to instead, consider their own cultural identity beyond this discourse. By writing in Irish, Gaelic writers had greater freedom to explore and question what it meant to be Irish and, more importantly, Irish-speaking. The long-threatened folkloric traditions of the Gael and the richness of

the mythical cycles meant that writers such as Mac Grianna, his brother Séamus and Pádraig Pearse could connect to and engage directly with Irish language culture in a way that other, English-speaking revivalists could not. This connection to an almost forgotten heritage gave Gaelic writers a unique style of questioning in the new century and the tenacity to modernise the literature when others were fearful of alienating language learners. As has been demonstrated in this thesis, Mac Grianna's *Mo Bhealach Féin* is a text that challenged the auto-image of the Gael in the last century and his work, even today, still challenges the reader to question what exactly constitutes Gaelic identity. In a review of Pól Ó Muirí's study of Mac Griann, *A Flight from Shadow* (1999), Alan Titley's description of Mac Grianna highlights enigmatic nature of Ireland's 'Unfavourite Son':

> He was a modernist who wanted to stay in a time-warp of the seventeenth century. He was a passionate romantic who teetered over into individualistic anarchism. He believed in state intervention in literary projects but hated An Gúm. He earned a lot of money from his writings but played the poor mouth. He was generous but cantankerous. He loved his own dialect but sought to expand and reinvent it. He was clearheaded and motivated but was as mad as the day is long. It is difficult to disentangle all these threads. Mac Grianna didn't make it easy for his critics. At his best his prose is wild and imaginative and thrilling, at his worst he just misses the mark and plays a plonker. (2000, p. 65)

Titley's tongue-in-cheek description of Mac Grianna suggests that there are many unanswered questions surrounding Mac Grianna and, subsequently, his work. The author defies definition and his unwillingness to conform to expectations or to follow any path other than his own has enriched the auto-image of the Irish speaker and paved the way for other writers to continue in the tradition of questioning and compelling others to question the nature of identity. As has been outlined in chapter three of this thesis, Mac Grianna reinvented the auto-image of Irish speakers in the first half of the 20th century, challenging readers to reconsider a life from beyond the margins.

In the African American context, a similar style of questioning dominated black American literary discourses in the years following abolition, towards the close

of the 19th century. The hard-won freedom of African Americans was bitter sweet as racial prejudices and Jim Crow continued to cloud the judgement of white America towards blacks. The 'New Negro' debates that dominated African American critical thinking in the early 20th century questioned how African Americans should identify themselves; if they should try to emulate white American culture, or assimilate into wider society or if they should create an identity the centred on their difference, their culture, their blackness. Like Mac Grianna, Ralph Ellison's literary and critical work questioned existing versions of his group's auto-image and challenged the literary cannon that perpetuated negative hetero-images of African Americans, excluding the group from any kind of meaningful presence in American literature. When Ellison's *Invisible Man* won the National Book Award for Fiction in 1953, beating Hemmingway, he prompted others to reconsider the African American auto-image and his work challenged the dominance of white writers on the American literary scene. As chapter four of this thesis has demonstrated, Ellison's work, like Mac Grianna's, posed more questions than it answered and *Invisible Man* is a novel that famously ambiguous closing line. Just as Mac Grianna worked towards developing a more realistic auto-image of the marginalised Gael, Ellison also worked to show that African American identity was a fluid concept, even though wider white American society refused to alter its understanding of the group during those first generations after slavery.

The experimental nature of Irish language and African American literature in exploring group representations and auto-images was continued in both contexts, as chapters five and six have demonstrated. Just as identity for both groups was fluid in the literature of the first generation of writers in the 20th century, Gaelic and black American auto-images are still in a continuous state of flux, changing as the writers consider their marginalised position in an increasing global world. In chapter five of this study, the work of Mícheál Ó Conghaile revealed several variations of the Gaelic auto-image, suggesting that the position of the marginalised Irish language writer is still a delicate one, particularly as the modern world and English language continues to encroach on Gaelic life in the Gaeltachtaí. Ó Conghaile's work shows that the language is fit to express all aspects of life, even those not typically associated with Gaeltachtaí. Ó Conghaile has challenged language critics and readers alike to reassess their understanding of the language and his work shows that Irish, like other living languages is porous and receptive to foreign influences, even the dreaded Béarla

[English]. His use of a hybrid tongue in expressing the life of young Irish speakers has often attracted criticism, but as Alan Titley notes:

> Ach is é nár thuig lucht a cháinte, b'fhéidir, ná gur d'aon ghnó a scríobh Micheál Ó Conghaile an saghas sin teanga chun fírinne na n-ógánach a bhí sa scéal a léiriú. Taitníodh sé linn nó ná taitníodh, tá cuid mhór den chinéail sin cainte ag dul timpeall i gceantair áirithe Gaeltachta agus seoda is measa ná iad, ach baineann an t-údar úsáid ealaíonta dheisbhéalach chóir as chun atmaisféar diamhair réadach an scéil a chruthú dúinn. [But those who lampooned him didn't understand, maybe, that Ó Conghaile used that kind of language for one reason, to truthfully depict the youth in that story. Like it or not, there's a lot of that kind of talk going about certain Gaeltacht areas and there are worse jewels than these, but the author is witty and artfully uses this to create an uncanny, real story for us] (Titley, 1987, p. 42)

Ó Conghaile also challenges perceptions of the Irish speaker, as we have seen, through his depiction of the young gay Gael, struggling to reconcile his identities as an Irish speaker and as a homosexual. The sexuality of some characters in Ó Conghaile has resulted in the creation of interesting auto-images and perspectives on Gaelic life from within the fold of the Gaeltacht. Initially, Ó Conghaile's creations struggle to accept their sexuality and, as shown in chapter five, it seems as though the young men's view of the Gaeltacht is clouded by the Galltacht hetero-image of the space as traditional and conservative.

A similar state of doubly marginality exists in the work of Randall Kenan and like Ó Conghaile's characters the young gay men that populate Kenan's texts also struggle to reconcile their sexuality with the traditions and values of conservative communities to which they belong. Kenan's depiction of the young gay black man in his novel and short stories challenges the auto-image of the African American male and, crucially the white hetero-image of the black male as a predatory threat towards white women. Chapter six of this thesis has shown that Kenan's work is dedicated to the pursuit of African American identity and central to this quest is the recurring question of 'what does it mean to be black'. Like Ellison, Kenan does not really answer any question surrounding black identity, rather, he illustrates that the African American auto-image is as changeable in contemporary American society as it was in

the generations after slavery. As the textual analysis of *The Fire this Time* and the interview conducted with the author shows, Kenan questions the responsibilities of the African American author in the proliferation of group auto-images. While he is conscious of giving a realistic depiction of life from the margins of American society, he is wary of the prevailing damning image of the African American male as a threat to white society, and as such, is critical of black culture that endorses this image. Crucially, the analysis of Kenan's work in this thesis has demonstrated that, despite some concessions made to and developments in black American life, African Americans are in a state of continuous marginalisation and as a writer, Kenan continues to question the nature of African American identity and white society's misinformed perceptions and he demands that other black writers and those shaping the group's auto-image do so, too.

The spirit of questioning life from the margins and the nature of identity is one of the uniting factors between Irish language and African American writers. As has been demonstrated throughout in this thesis, the groups in question share a meaningful connection and this has been demonstrated in the examination of their respective auto-images and the historical contexts from which stereotypes of the groups emerged. The similarities between the groups are also extended to their experiences of colonialism and their continued states of marginality towards the close of the 20th century. That a connection exists between the groups has been acknowledged by writers from both of traditions, effectively creating a sense of kinship, of community, between groups that have typically been excluded and historically marginalised. While the connection between the groups is relative unknown, critics and scholars are beginning to examine the relationship that exits between them. As outlined in chapter one, this is evident in the works of others such as Jacqueline Fulmer, Maria Pramaggiore and in the recent collection of essays in The Black and Green Atlantic. During the 2013 Irish language literary festival IMRAM, the connection between the groups was acknowledged in an evening entitled 'Dhúisíos ar Maidin: Tionscadal na nGormach'[I woke this Morning: The Black Project] Prominent Irish language poets took part in the evening, celebrating the unique cultures of both groups and their connection to each other.[107]

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[107] The festival program billed the event as follows: 'The blues takes many forms… It is variously a feeling, a mood, a nameless threat, a person, a lover, a boss man, a mob, and, of course, the Devil himself… it can be used as both hex and counter hex, poison and antidote, pain and relief. Most importantly, the blues is both the cause of song, and song itself.' So wrote Edward Comentale in Sweet Air: American Popular Song. Tonight IMRAM explores both blues poetry and song. Here are classic

While the central argument of this thesis was based on the development of auto- and hetero- images in relation to Irish language and African American writers, the significance of space to the identities of the groups was also alluded to. This thesis paves the way for other critical studies of Irish language and African American writers and the interplay between identity and space. Kenan's *Walking on Water*, for example demonstrates that space and a connection to place are central elements in the identity of African Americans. His text could also be examined in relation to what extent black Americans feel connected to the States, if they do at all. A similar study could also be conducted on the geocritical implications of the Gaeltacht and the Galltacht in Irish language literature, encompassing a study of the various dialects of the language and how they are also shaped by the lands in which they are spoken. While the work of Kenan and Ó Conghaile was examined primarily in terms of image studies, there is potential to develop the connection between the groups based on a study of queer literature and the sense of belonging in marginalised discourses. This study was primarily based on close textual analysis of short stories and novels and Irish language and African American poetry was largely excluded. Based on the connection established and legitimised between the groups in this thesis, an exploration of Gaelic and black American poetry could be developed. The significance of folklore and oral traditions in both contexts is central to the work of some poets in both groups and, as shown in chapter two, the idea of modelling an African American literary renaissance on the Irish revival was largely advocated by poets such as Locke and McKay. The evolution of modern Irish poetry from the 'caoineadh' [keen] and a similar development in African American poetry from the sorrow song could be incorporated into future studies of the groups. Finally, although women writers were not included in the chapters dealing with close textual readings, future work could remedy this through an examination of female auto-images in relation to the dominant male or colonial hetero-image both within the Irish and African American contexts. Future studies such as these would add to the limited criticism that exists in relation to the

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blues songs by Bessie Smith, John Lee Hooker, Blind Willie McTell and Bille Holiday; and poems by Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and others. Translated by poets Gearóid Mac Lochlainn, Liam Ó Muirthile and Gabriel Rosenstock, they will be performed by the poets themselves and by the Mary Ryan Blues Band, featuring Mark Braidner on guitar and vocals; Simon Templeton on piano; and Tim Creedon on percussion. This performance will feature screen projections by Margaret Lonerga. (IMRAM, 2013)

connection between Irish language and African American writers and work towards developing the connection between these two marginalised literary discourses.

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Appendix 1 – Interview with Randall Kenan

October 2013

Zara Blake	When you write, are you conscious of the image of black America, of how the group is perceived by wider American society? If so, do you hope to challenge these perceptions in your work?
Randall Kenan	Yes. I think it impossible to be a writer or an artist of any kind, having grown up in the margins of America – consuming the media from the cradle on – and not to be aware of images of Black America, and how the majority culture receives and understands Black America. And though it may seem a Don Quixote mission, challenging that status quo is baked into the cake of artistic expression for us.
Z.B.	In your writing, do you investigate whether the African American community itself is aware of these images and of how these images marginalise the group?
R.K.	I think I do this in fiction, and even more directly in nonfiction. My book, Walking on Water: Black American Lives at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century, directly inquires of all the 200 plus African Americans I interviewed about their notions of blackness and how they saw themselves. This exercise almost always involved the broader national views and the national concept of blackness.
Z.B.	What do you think is the role of the African American writer in demystifying old or dated auto-images/building future auto-images?
R.K.	I think, on a fundamental level, that all artists working within an established tradition – and recognizing that tradition – work to address, re-dress and update existing images. And for a tradition housed within a

larger tradition this pressure is even greater. Though the artist has larger goals, it becomes unavoidable to take on misconceptions and stale, outdated ideas. How could an African American writer, writing about Black America, avoid images of black masculinity, black criminality, black matriarchy, black religiosity, and on and on? Such images are the stew in which we live.

Z.B.   Do you feel a duty to denounce or challenge negative group images, even auto-images? (i.e. negative group images created by members of the African American community themselves) Or, do you think your role as a writer is to help readers to come to terms with negative auto-images that feed negative hetero-images?

R.K.   Yes, but such a challenge is a tricky matter. An artist should beware the urge to confront the windmills of society only. Is that the only message? The only thing you have to say? If so, such a message is polemical and fit only for the essay and truly polemical writing. Art is ultimately concerned with the human condition, not with rectifying wrongs or setting the record straight – though such matters can be a happy by-product. The artist's job is not to preach, but to witness. Or at least that is what I believe.

Z.B.   As a gay black writer do you feel that you are, essentially, doubly marginalised?

R.K.   Yes.

Z.B.   Does being gay affect the African American auto-image and the sense of connection to the African American community?

R.K.   Homophobia/Heterosexism isn't unique to the African American community. In truth, at the moment, I can think of no nation that overwhelmingly embraces its queer citizens. As I have written before Black America is integral to the larger America, and sometimes the tens

of millions within the African American communities distill and crystallize American attitudes and mores on a more potent scale than the hundreds of millions. When you consider the Black Church, received notions about black masculinity, poor education, the insecure position of black women in society, AIDS/HIV, and a host of other factors, you can see the marginality of gay and lesbian and transgender black folk as an extremely sensitive matter, and why many inside the whole of Black America could see therein a threat. But the momentum for change is real and growing.

Z.B. Finally, are you aware of any links to the Irish situation; of a connection between the Gaelic and African-American group images?

R.K. Oh yes. Not necessarily linguistically, but the connection primarily via a shared oppression from the English Empire, an ancient connection to the land, a particular view toward the importance of family – clannishness -- and a particular view of religion, make the Irish and the African American experiences resonate most profoundly. Joyce, Yeats, Synge, and so many others' writing rhyme with black America and us with them. (I think this is also true of the Russians as well.)