ABSTRACT

"What Saves Us Is Ceremony": Ritual and Communal Identity
in Regional British and Irish Literature

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This study examines the role of ritual in enabling regional communities in twentieth-century British and Irish literature to articulate and sustain communal identity. Literary studies on the topic of ritual and community have rarely integrated the two fields, and yet, as but anthropological and theological studies indicate, ritual is an integral component of group identity and community narrative. Drawing upon the phenomenology of Paul Ricoeur, the liturgical theology of Aidan Kavanagh and Graham Hughes, and the philosophical history of Charles Taylor, I argue that the four authors under consideration—Anglo-Catholic poet T. S. Eliot, Orcadian Scots poet and novelist George Mackay Brown, Irish playwright Brian Friel, and Welsh poet Gillian Clarke—employ ritual in their texts as a strategy for articulating and preserving communal identity in order to resist the homogenizing pressures of late capitalism and

philosophical modernity. The work of all four authors demonstrates the need for community to retain a local history of itself that does not suppress but rather incorporates a variety of voices for greater truth and accuracy; furthermore, the community cannot strive to remain static and unchanging, but must be dynamic and responsive to the pressures and questions with which its members wrestle. Furthermore, by choosing to write for a distinctive local community, these writers are able to explore within a microcosm issues that concern people from a wide range of communities and contexts. I conclude that this careful attention to the local produces a dynamic regionalism that avoids sectarianism and nationalism and offers readers strategies for preserving local history and communal memory through the corporate unity and narrative strategies for interpretation that ritual affords.

"What Saves Us Is Ceremony": Ritual and Communal Identity
in Regional British and Irish Literature

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

T. S. Eliot

CC	*Christianity and Culture*
CP	*Collected Poems 1909-1962*
MC	*Murder in the Cathedral*
OPP	*On Poetry and Poets*
SP	*Selected Prose*

George Mackay Brown

CP	*Collected Poems*
SGC	*Spell for Green Corn*
SGC MS	*Spell for Green Corn* Manuscript

Brian Friel

BFC	*Brian Friel in Conversation*
BF: EDI	*Brian Friel: Essays, Diaries, and Interviews*
DL MS	*Dancing at Lughnasa* Manuscript
FH MS	*Faith Healer* Manuscript
P2	*Plays 2*
SP	*Selected Plays*

Gillian Clarke

LFC	*Letter from a Far Country*
LR	*Letting in the Rumour*
KBD	*The King of Britain's Daughter*
MBD	*Making Beds for the Dead*
SP	*Selected Poems*
YS	*A Year at the Source*

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background

This study was born out of a years-long attraction to ritual, a fascination that took root over the course of a year of study-abroad at the University of Aberdeen. During this year, I discovered that many of the great cathedrals of England and Ireland charged admission for a visit—unless, of course, you were entering in order to attend a religious service such as evensong or midday prayers. After an upbringing in a charismatic evangelical church with little interest in history or tradition, a church in which "ritual" was close to a dirty word, these tastes of liturgy with all their attendant history felt like a revelation. Concurrently with these experiences, I discovered liturgically-influenced poetry such as R. S. Thomas's "Mass for Hard Times" and Denise Levertov's "Mass for the Day of St. Thomas Didymus." This attraction took new form during a graduate course at Regent College called "Food: Creation, Community, and Communion" that considered the role that place and fellowship play in binding people together, and culminated in the contemplation of the Eucharist, an act poised at the intersection of ritual and community. This intersection was

particularly pronounced in the work of writers from cultural subgroups, often located in rural areas, who felt their history and distinctive, place-bound identity were under constant pressure to conform to a dominant culture. In particular, I was drawn to the ways in which writers from these communities borrowed, repurposed, or reinvented religious ritual in order to offer their communities a meaningful articulation of their identity—even more striking was the way in which these identities were not fencing off change or reinforcing a static view of the community, but as a way of negotiating with larger, external pressures. As a result, their works appealed to audiences far beyond their local contexts.

Eventually, this project came to focus on the work of four writers: the Anglo-American T. S. Eliot, whose reimagining of ritual demonstrated the creative possibilities of engaging with ritual and liturgical language for the sake of both the individual and the community; the Scottish, and more particularly Orcadian, poet and novelist George Mackay Brown; Irish playwright Brian Friel; and Welsh poet Gillian Clarke. Each of these writers had extensive experience with a liturgical tradition and felt bound to a particular locale and community that had experienced tremendous social change over the course of the tumultuous twentieth century.

The pressures that these writers seek to resist through their ritualistic works can be summed up as those of philosophical modernity. As philosopher

Louis Dupré succinctly observes, in our modern context, we tend to equate "the real with the objectifiable, progress with technological advances, and liberty of thought and action with detachment from tradition and social bonds" (*Passage to Modernity* 1). This is a breakdown of an earlier "onto-theological synthesis" which included the relationship of the human to the natural world, the understanding of the self within a social world, and the link between the anthropic and divine components of reality (3-4). As theologian Graham Hughes observes, "The savage irony that attends our civilization is the now nearly universally acknowledged fact that in our modern 'emancipation from age-old dependences' meaning has become, if not quite lost, at least severely debilitated" (74); with this diminishing of meaning more broadly, key constituent elements of a community, such as memory and history, become degraded as well. And yet, Dupré goes on to note, "If significant cultural changes affect the very heart of the real, the past retains a permanent meaning in the present" (7). In the works of these four authors, it becomes clear that ritual is the key method by which the past continues to maintain a foothold in the present-day life of the community.

In order to continue this discussion, some definition, particularly of the terms ritual and community, is required. Admittedly, the question of question of what constitutes a community in literature has never been fully resolved. It is tempting at times to define it just as Leopold Bloom, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, defines a

nation, which is "the same people living in the same place" (271). As inclusive as this definition may be, it is decidedly vague as well. To say that writers' communities are quite simply their readers (a group of people who reading the same text) neglects that the writer speaks out of and into certain contexts that are often necessary to define before scrutinizing a work more closely, or in order to understand the work at all. Joseph McCann notes wryly that a 1955 survey on the subject of community produced ninety-four definitions, whose only universal trait was the inclusion of people (360). However, he notes that community, in the eyes of many people, involves "geographical area, common ties, and social interaction," or "Common Location, Common Interests, and Common Participation," in addition to a sense of "Community Identity." These contexts, taken together, comprise a community of meaning which can "mediate between the state with its collective and potentially totalitarian thrust, and individuals with their potentially mutually conflicting interests" (360-361). For all four of the writers in this survey, McCann's definition suffices quite well; each writer might clarify, as well, that community does involve a nexus of personal relationships which, like identity, are brought into focus by the features of location, interests, and participation.

Ritual, as well, is a term that has become fairly nebulous and degraded over time, often used to stand in for any manner of repeated action. Yet those

actions are more often accurately described as habits, repeated actions that can be accomplished by any individual on his or her own, which point to no narrative or meaning outside the performance of the act itself. Anthropological definitions of ritual, however, tend to neglect the transcendent element that most rituals seek to invoke. This study will draw upon liturgical theologian Aidan Kavanagh's criteria for an act of liturgy; the four authors under discussion were all deeply influenced by liturgical Christian traditions and borrowed those ideas and structures for their own texts. Kavanagh provides four ideal criteria for an act of liturgy, which can pertain to ritual more broadly as well: first, a ritual is occasional, meaning that "it is a special sort of event no matter how often or seldom it happens"; second, it is formal, meaning it has rules and an order which participants are expected to follow which all members of the group heavily sanction; it is "filled with repetition and that organization of repetition called rhythm," characteristics which are inherently unifying when performed by a group; finally, and perhaps most crucially, an event of this nature is "an effective symbol of social survival," in other words, it aims at some sort of ultimate destiny or eschatological purpose for the group as a whole. These rituals are also often narrative in nature, involving what Hughes calls "a taking of bearings and a finding of identity" through its orientation to a particular narrative or history of the community (74-5).

The four writers in this study use rituals of this nature to speak simultaneously to their own communities as well as the broader, more far-flung communities of readers who are seeking ways to anchor meaning and identity in the communities that they themselves come from. All four writers are aware that they cannot reverse the changes they see as so damaging to the communities they write from and to the readers to whom they speak. But they do not resign themselves to passively recording or idealizing a bygone way of life, nor do they accept these changes as something final and complete, which would render their rituals static repetitions of the past, the actions of ghosts rather than the living. They accept, instead, the dynamic flux of life under the pressure of modernity, as industry seeks to replace a more agrarian way of life, rationality edges religion to the side, and the rootless citizen of the world replaces the person anchored by the bonds of home and place. They negotiate this flux through ritual. Ritual provides a means of negotiating with the demands of the present and vitally reimagining the gifts of the past in order to create possibilities for the future that will be more bearable than a rootless, sterile existence that admits no ties or allegiances to anything outside the individual. Thus, by enacting specific rituals within their texts, each author can offer their respective community a way of drawing upon the knowledge of its history, reconnecting with some external transcendent power, recovering or healing individual and collective memory, and thus

reestablishing social cohesion. As a result, both members of the community and the broader audience of readers are equipped with strategies for facing a future that appears increasingly complex, disordered, or even hostile to human existence.

Social and Cultural Contexts

In the wake of World War II, the United Kingdom and Ireland underwent significant social changes with the establishment of the welfare state and the continued migation of rural populations to major metropolitan centers. England had already completed its transition to an industrialized economy and society well before this period, with profound and irreversible changes to social structures such as the village and the parish. While the 1901 census demonstrated firmly that England had become a decidedly urban and industrial nation, some regions still had a sizable minority of the male labor force working in agriculture in 1931: Norfolk with forty-four percent or Devon with twenty-nine percent saw these numbers fall forty years later to thirteen percent and nine percent, respectively (Howkins 164-5). T. S. Eliot remarked of these changes, "The parish is certainly in decay, from several causes," chiefly "urbanisation—in which I am including also *sub*-urbanisation, and all the causes and effects of urbanisation" (*CC* 23). Not only the social life of the parish had been affected, but also the religious life; Eliot went on to remark that "Christendom has remained

fixed at the stage of development suitable to a simple agricultural and piscatorial society, and that modern material organisation—or if 'organisation' sounds too complimentary, we will say 'complication'—has produced a world for which Christian social forms are imperfectly adapted" (25). Urban social change and the decline of the church in England were, for Eliot, inextricably linked factors, and any revivification of the church would require a deep engagement with the new structures of English society.

While Scotland's major cities had industrialized and urbanized in lockstep with England, drawing many workers away from rural agricultural life, it had a greater share in the accompanying woes than in the economic benefits, as its most vulnerable citizens faced higher levels of economic deprivation than their English counterparts, a condition that George Mackay Brown's poetry and fiction often highlights. Murray G. H. Pittock points out that nearly a quarter of those born in Scotland between 1911 and 1980 left, a testimony to "voluntary emigration as a sign of economic decline" (291); the economy has also grown more slowly, and since 1974, "the Scottish economy has steadily underperformed its UK counterpart" (292). Victorian-era urbanization left Scottish housing in a poor state, with forty-four percent of the housing consisting of only one or two rooms, whereas England and Wales boasted rates of under five percent each (Cameron 627). This condition required massive public-sector housing projects

that stretched up to Orkney as well, with the building of new council flats that Brown himself eventually moved into (Fergusson 203). In Orkney, agricultural output plummeted during the twentieth century, as did most economic sectors outside of the service industry, a condition which Brown mourns repeatedly; unemployment spiked in the 1970s, and population growth was stagnant or negative for most of the post-War period ("Orkney Islands District Through Time"), reflecting population trends in Scotland as a whole (McCrone 674). In religious terms, even the uniting of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church (itself a faction of the Free Church of Scotland) did not heal the breach caused by the Disruption of 1843, and, as Pittock observes, unity would not restore the prominent influence of Presbyterianism in post-war Scottish society. Mass media, again, was reshaping the culture, and the Church of Scotland was also wary of the growth of Catholicism (Pittock 293).

Ireland, however, experienced a very different narrative of social and economic change in the twentieth century. As Tom Garvin observes, in 1922, ninety-five percent of the population were practicing Catholics, and some sixty percent were directly engaged in agriculture, with many of the rest working in services or industries that linked directly or indirectly to agriculture (165). The Ballybeg setting of many of Brian Friel's plays mirrors this social reality. By 2006, however, only seven percent worked on the land, and "Ireland went from being

a peasant society to being a suburban information technology country with no intervening stage of smokestack industry" (165). While "agriculture" is often a marker of economy or industry, Hilary Tovey notes that it is also a matter of place, and that "being 'rural' primarily means living in a distinct social world," one which has changed considerably in Ireland over the course of the twentieth century (284), as the course of Friel's Ballybeg plays demonstrate with the shifts between the strictly rural village of *Translations* and the more distinctively modern world of *Molly Sweeney*. Even as people now move into these rural regions, the patterns of settlement and development indicate neither rural redevelopment nor urbanization, but rather, as Tovey argues, a pattern of "surburbanisation" linked to "the outward spread of Dublin and other large cities" (284). The decline of agriculture coincided with the rise of secularization, too. Although, as Tom Inglis observes, the Catholic Church is "still the largest interest group in Irish society" with close to ninety percent of the population as members (68), Garvin observes that by 2006, fifty percent of the population rarely or never attended religious services (165). Tom Inglis attributes this shift primarily to the rise of "a new urban Catholic bourgeoisie" who, upon seizing political control, "opened the castle doors and let the tide of materialism, consumerism, and individualism sweep into the country. In doing so, it lifted the standard of living and welfare of most Irish boats, but torpedoed the Catholic

battleship" (76), a move hastened by the intrusion of mass media through television and radio. Garvin similarly traces the change to the rise of an educated middle class, albeit in less pejorative terms. He notes that although education certainly affected attitudes towards the church, "in the long run—and we do live in Keynes's long run—democracy eats away at authoritarian institutions and habits of behavior" (164). Friel's plays highlight the autocratic or ineffectual nature of the local church, as with the cruel indifference the Mundy sisters experience in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, and thus some of the reasons behind the disintegration of the power of the Irish church.

Wales, meanwhile, presents a case somewhere between that of Scotland and Ireland and the opposing example of Ireland. The region remained more agricultural than England and Scotland, as the rural character of much of Gillian Clarke's poetry illustrates, yet did not develop the same information economy as Ireland in the late twentieth century. Gareth Elwyn Jones observes that the collapse of the coal and steel industries affected the economy considerably, and the increasing mechanization of rural Wales reduced available jobs even as farms were relatively prosperous (191). The area experienced fairly stagnant or even negative population growth between the 1920s and the 1970s; more troubling has been the fact that young people with qualifications tended to leave, whereas older people, often retirees, were the largest group moving to Wales (182-3), a

population shift that was not only economically undesirable but also disrupted the continuity of local communities, as seen in poems such as Clarke's "Letter from a Far Country," in which the bustle and activity of the parish has dwindled badly. By 1966, twenty percent of the population were not of Welsh origin, and proximity to England as well as mass media such as television and radio were perceived as profound threats to local language and culture (218), though Clarke, as the daughter of a BBC radio engineer, saw how radio could both open horizons as well as diminish local perspectives. Religious participation also steadily dwindled; Welsh nonconformist churches had often derived their cultural force from their opposition to the Church of England and anglicizing forces more generally. But in the wake of both wars, religious participation dwindled as part of a broader movement of secularization as well as the increasing non-Welsh-speaking population in the region and the successful reorganization of the Anglican Church in Wales. Many of the large nonconformist chapels and theological schools closed in the 1950s and 1960s (282). These key elements of the social fabric of Wales could no longer be depended upon to preserve and sustain identity.

These social changes were profound in their own right, but certain scholars would argue they came in the wake of—and were only compounded by—other cultural shifts in Western society more broadly. Charles Taylor's

narrative of secularization, *The Secular Age*, traces these changes to cultural shifts arising in the late medieval and Renaissance periods, as the individual became increasingly bracketed off from the group, and humanity itself increasingly bracketed off from creation. The social upheaval manifested in these demographic and economic changes only further fed what Taylor calls "The Great Disembedding." Whereas once humankind was "embedded in society, society in the cosmos, and the cosmos incorporates the divine" (152), the individual becomes buffered and separated into a new "social existence, one which gave an unprecedented primacy to the individual" (146). Not only did this involve "disidentification" from the broader social group, but also a shift in religious practice to "personal devotion and discipline" rather than a broader moral order in which the individual and society were enclosed. Society itself is no longer seen as embedded in the cosmos, intimately linked to local place and affected by powers other than those of the natural world and culture itself (150); the universe itself is a place of orderly natural laws and, frequently, a distant, impersonal God, rather than a cosmos that is interpenetrated by the transcendent and enfolded within eternity (152). Religion ceases to operate as a means of making contact with the transcendent and reordering life according to its principles; instead, individuals become increasingly likely to perceive it as a set of rules by which individuals regulate their lives.

This fundamental disorientation, exacerbated by demographic and economic shifts that leave people without stable communities or histories, can lead in turn to nostalgia, particularly for a time when rural life was the backbone of society and village life seemed to provide a stable core. Raymond Williams's landmark study *The Country and the City* explored the lengthy history of this kind of nostalgia, observing that every era demonstrates a keen longing for a simpler, often rustic, past in which communal ties were stronger and relationships to the land were less vexed. This longing continues to manifest itself in contemporary literature, and Williams argues both that this agrarian past is impossible to recover, but also that the nostalgia oversimplifies the issues in rural England that make such a return impossible, namely the rise of agrarian capitalism that cemented class distinctions and enabled the exploitation of the land, damaging any possibility of mutuality of striving and relationship between individuals or between humankind and the natural world (Williams 209). The nostalgia for pastoral life in contemporary fiction and poetry demonstrates both the source and impossibility of this longing: a need for a secure foundation and embeddedness in community that seems perpetually out of reach.

Both Taylor and Williams acknowledge the role art serves in both perpetuating this nostalgia while also trying to feed the root causes that prompted the nostalgia in the first place. Taylor credits this hunger to the

broader cosmological disembedding that results in individual feelings of rootlessness and disconnection. Williams responds to this disembedding by calling for realist fiction in which, the depiction of a fictional individual's person history "reflects and embodies…the large-scale social change of which the character is to a considerable degree the victim" (Miller 6-7). This approach focuses on what remains in the wholly immanent world, namely, the traces of community and some effort to be re-embedded in a community of meaning that pushes back against the pressures of capitalism and late modernity that might otherwise commodify and exploit the individual. Williams demonstrates no interest in the transcendent, as a glance at his compelling *Keywords* suggests: while he has a lengthy entry on "community," there is none for "religion," which is instead loosely grouped under the explanation of "myth." While art in this cultural model remains somewhat representational or mimetic, claiming to present life as it truly is, the world represented is one that is wholly immanent and evacuated of the transcendent.

Taylor, meanwhile, traces a second trajectory that art takes in the post-Romantic period, the move from art as *mimesis* to art as *poeisis*, in which art ceases to represent the world or imitate nature and instead makes its own reality. Taylor argues that once art was embroiled in other spheres of life, such as politics or religion, making it fundamentally liturgical in purpose. In essence, art was

fundamentally participatory, enmeshed rather than separated from other spheres of human activity. This argument parallels that of Nicholas Wolterstorff in his study *Art in Action,* in which he argues that the marketplace has replaced the church as "artistic unifier" in the sense of producing the "art of the tribe," and that the high art that remains is intended for personal contemplation rather than any communal purpose (23-4). Art is moved into museums, music is moved out of churches, poems and stories shift out of a communal context into a private aesthetic experience, and rather than being woven into the fabric of everyday experience, art is reserved primarily for consumption during leisure time (Wolterstorff 26). The high art that remains seeks to produce old responses of awe or wonder without necessarily having the object of that awe or wonder present (Taylor 355).[1] For those who feel a certain loss or absence in the present day, an awareness of some transcendent element that is missing, this later art can restore some sense of "our deep nature, of a current running through all things, which also resonates in us; the experience of being opened up to something deeper and fuller by contact with Nature; the sense of an intra-cosmic mystery" (350). Art thus carves out an immanent space for trying to satisfy these old

[1] Wolterstorff and Taylor's claims regarding art are very broad and have been contested. For instance, Frank Brown Burch criticizes the lack of sacramentalism in Wolterstorff's view of the arts (Brown 206); Taylor, meanwhile, certainly doesn't adhere to Wolterstorff's more broadly functional understanding of art in human life when he claims all art is inherently liturgical. Lambert Zuidervaart raises concerns about the general dismissal of "low art" and the general lack of definition of what constitutes a "work of art" in Wolterstorff's discussion, a critique that is relevant as well to Taylor's admittedly briefer discussion (89).

longings for the transcendent that lie underneath the rootlessness demonstrated by our mobility, our lack of history created by the social circumstances described above. James K. A. Smith sums up the resulting tension in post-Romantic art in this way:

> On the one hand, one might simply claim that we're still haunted because we're still too close to the time when we *used* to believe in ghosts; on the other hand (and one gets the sense this is Taylor's position), we might be haunted because, well, there's a Ghost there… Who's to adjudicate between these two options? From where? Aware of that ambiguity, Taylor's phenomenology speaks into that contested space and simply says, "Try this account on for size. Does it make sense of something you've *felt*?" (Smith 76)

Art thus has the capacity both to expand unbelief, but also, potentially, to attempt some measure of reenchantment within a disenchanted world. But how might artists attempt to at least draw attention to this gap between the longing and its transcendent object, or even begin to bridge that gap?

Ritual and Community

In this study, I propose that the four writers under discussion push back against the disintegration of community described above by appealing to the transcendent through ritual, thus reasserting and sustaining the identity of that community. Both ritual and community have been topics of discussion in literary studies, but only recently have critics begun to join them together in an effort to discern how ritual plays a part in the construction of an entire group's identity.

Past discussion of ritual in literature have not often focused on the liturgical act itself. Richard Hardin noted in 1983 that discussions of ritual in literature had been primarily associated with myth criticism (846); recent studies have often focused on the ideas of sacrifice and the scapegoat laid out in the works of philosopher René Girard. Indeed, these ideas often overwhelm other models and, as Patrick Query observes, these discussions "tend to metaphorize ritual, making it possible to see ritual in all manner of human activities," and thus diminishing some of the richer impact that ritual can and does continue to impart (15). Significant studies include Thomas Cousineau's *Ritual Unbound: Reading Sacrifice in Modern Fiction*, which does highlight the ethical impact that the inclusion of ritual—particularly Girardian sacrifice—can import to a modernist narrative; William Johnsen's *Violence and Modernism: Ibsen, Joyce, and Woolf* is another key study of ritual in modernism, although through a Girardian lens, with a focus on issues of desire, drawing out the Freudian elements of Girard's original work in relation to Johnsen's chosen modernist texts. These studies, however, focus heavily on prose fiction and drama, an understandable choice given that Girard's ideas are directed towards narratives. However, their approach to ritual follows Girard's anthropological and psychoanalytic models, and does little to consider other roles that ritual might play beyond interpreting and regulating desire or violence within a society. Discussions of ritual in poetry

have been limited, and until the 1970s, still tended to focus on the influence of texts such as James Frazer's *Golden Bough*, rather than the actual rituals that writers may have grown up practicing and woven into their works (Korg 128). Regina Schwartz's recent study *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism*, however, capably tackles the debts that lyric poetry owes to the religious tradition, and she argues, "The art of language is to point beyond itself, swelling toward significance beyond what is strictly signified," using the Eucharist as a key example of how "the impulse that informs the ritual could govern the poetry" (8).

The discussion of community in literature similarly continues to unfold in a variety of different ways. Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, as discussed above, not only treats the subject of nostalgia but also issues of representation and class in the communities depicted in literature over the course of several centuries, and it remains one of the most influential texts on the subject. Williams notes that in the wake of changes such as urbanization, the growing complexity and division of labor, as well as shifting relations between social classes, "any assumption of a knowable community—a whole community, wholly knowable—became harder and harder to sustain," fueling a nostalgia for the apparent "direct relationships" of a country community, "of face to face contacts within which we can find and value the real substance of personal

relationships," even if the reality of social life in the countryside became increasingly more complex (165). His exploration of communities in literature continues to shape the discussion today, continuing to J. Hillis Miller's recent books *The Conflagration of Community* (2011) and *Communities in Fiction* (2014), both of which are pessimistic about the possibility of true community; as Miller writes in the latter, "I fear that real communities are more like the communities of self-destructive autoimmunity that Derrida describes" (*Communities in Fiction* 17), a statement which applies equally well to the former, which supposes that the breakdown of community is a fundamental symptom of modernity. Meanwhile, Jessica Berman argues in *Cosmopolitan Communities* that modernist fiction provided "meaningful alternative models of community" in part through its effort to resist "totalitarian models of national community" that arose in the first three decades of the twentieth century (3), an effort that the four writers in my study participate in as models of national identity continue to exert an oppressive power that erases difference.

None of these studies, however, incorporate ritual into their discussions: these two facets of identity are most often explored separately. The philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy comes closest to combining community and ritual; in his essay "The Inoperative Community," he notes that the "true consciousness of the loss of community is Christian," which in which community "is understood as

communion," taking place in the ritual of the Eucharist (10), though ultimately he finds community to be a retroactive construction that arises from something much like Williams's nostalgia (11).

Discussions of community at times overlap with conversations on literary regionalism. This conversation is hardly a new one; in 1936, B. A. Botkin published an article titled "Regionalism: Cult or Culture?" in which he looked with suspicion upon blend of "localism, provincialism, and sectionalism" that rendered regionalism too narrow, protective, and cultish in its perspectives to be truly regarded as art. In the mid- to late-twentieth century, however, writers and critics alike increasingly came to see regionalism as a valuable anchor to ground an author's aesthetic and broader concerns in order to effectively communicate to both local and broader audiences As Gillian Tindall explains in her 1991 study *Countries of the Mind*, in regional writing, "a local habitation and a name are given to perennial human preoccupations, and it is in the peculiar tension between the timeless and the specific that much of the force of the novel lies" (10). Increasingly, regionalism is seen not as a narrow, bounded element of a writer's aesthetic, but as a method of personal anchoring that enables a writer to address the broader world. Fiona Stafford explores the artistic possibilities of the local for nineteenth-century writers in her study *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry*; recent developments include studies of regionalism in a single author's

corpus, such as Richard Russell's *Seamus Heaney's Regions*. Regionalism has also been perceived as a method of resistance against broader national or global cultures, as in Cheryl Temple Herr's study *Critical Regionalism and Cultural Studies: From Ireland to the American Midwest* (13-4).

When the discussions of ritual and community meet, it is most often in liturgical theology rather than literary studies, suggesting that, in this regard, theologians are often keenly aware of what literary critics are just beginning to grasp; moreover, many of them are aware of the artistic or literary elements of the endeavor. Kavanagh's 1992 study *On Liturgical Theology* makes this point explicit when he states, "Liturgy happens only in the rough and tumbled landscape of spaces and times which people discover and quarry for meaning in their lives. This is an *artistic* enterprise…. A liturgical scholar who is illiterate in the several human arts can never know his or her subject adequately" (139). Graham Hughes echoes this point, and draws attention in particular to the role of language in the liturgical or ritual act, nothing that "the subject matter of such language will inevitably be more nearly poetic or imagistic than prosaic"—in other words, artistic, and precisely for the purpose of reorienting the material world and its inhabitants to the transcendent or the divine (37).

This beautiful and elevated language serves two purposes. First, it is distinctly different from the language of the everyday, and thus reorients people

to the divine, or to what is, as Hughes says, "Wholly Other" (39); it seeks to accomplish the "formidable task…of saying how ideal meaning can relate to a material world" (40). Second, this distinctive language of ritual also reaffirms the identity of the community. Kavanagh notes that "the patterns by which we communicate lock us into social traditions which in turn endow us with identity and perspective" (97). To speak in the language of liturgy is to be sealed into the identity and worldview that the liturgy espouses. Furthermore, liturgical worship is based upon the social relationship of "many to many," and events which involve this sort of social relationship have key components, as discussed above: they are occasional, they are formal, they involve repetition and rhythm, and they focus on the ultimate survival of the community, in that its deep structures contain an eschatological dimension (137, 142). Liturgy provides, as Hughes observes, a narrative identity for both the individual and the community that re-embeds the individual within the community, and at the least gestures towards the community's human destiny in God's creation. Thus, even the social elements of the rite, which affirm and bind together identity, still point towards the eternal or the transcendent in some way, orienting members of the community to one another in their shared relationships while also orienting those relationships towards the transcendent.

This understanding of ritual's role in shaping and reinforcing communal identity has begun to seep into literary scholarship as well. A key example of this is Patrick Query's 2012 study *Ritual and the Idea of Europe in Interwar Writing*. Query argues that the three ritual forms he focuses on—the verse drama, the bullfight, the Mass—offered writers "meaningful tools in the formation and articulation of modern European cultural identity" and "retained their attractiveness as symbolic frameworks onto which new meanings might be overlain" (18-19). In particular, these rituals "participated in the subtle work of mediating between (though not always reconciling) European parts and wholes, individuals and communities, inside and outside, maintaining tradition through present innovation" (22). While the four writers on this study do often weave quotidian, daily action into their rituals, in opposition to the "essentially collective action" which "maintain[s[a special location" as emphasized in Query's work, they do nonetheless focus on ritual as action, often performed in a "sacred space" in an effort to reinforce "collective identity building" (Query 17) in a manner consistent with Query's focus. Their willingness to embrace the quotidian, however, indicates how their rituals navigate a more intimate form of identity, that of the local community rather than that of the nation in relation to a larger, multinational concept of identity.

Chapter Outline

All four of the writers under consideration on this study directly explore the uses of ritual and how it serves the needs of their respective communities, most of which are small and rural, and all of which fall outside the cultural mainstream of mid- to late-twentieth century Britain. They recognize, of course, that ritual holds no magic cure for the ills that have befallen their communities: it cannot create jobs, alleviate poverty, or restore a vanished past. Nor will these rituals automatically bind up the wounds of the community, neither the individual nor the shared losses and pains. Yet the way in which ritual shapes both the form of the texts as well as their content indicates the power it holds over their artistic imagination as well as the sense in which it is the only appropriate way in which to approach the problems each of them identifies in their respective communities. In its dynamism and responsiveness to current circumstances, ritual becomes a way of drawing together the past, present, and future: it preserves, rearticulates, and interprets the history and memory of both individuals and the community during the present moment of enactment in order to prepare them for and link them to the future, and to mediate between the pull of local culture and the inexorable pressure of the broader national or even global culture that threatens to intrude upon the local context.

The second chapter addresses T. S. Eliot's use of the liturgy in his late poetry, focusing particularly on his final poetic work, *The Four Quartets* (1943). While religious references in *East Coker* and *Little Gidding* in particular have been noted in the past, there has been relatively little discussion about whether these references are part of a broader liturgical cycle that Eliot weaves into the work as a whole. This discussion examines his later work, particularly *Ash-Wednesday* (1930), *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), and *The Four Quartets* for Eliot's use of the liturgical calendar and Anglican liturgy as a means of reinterpreting his own painful past through the redemptive lens of the Paschal narrative. This broader Easter liturgy, stretching from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost Sunday, forms a framework of renunciation, redemption, and reintegration into community through which Eliot offers his Anglo-Catholic community—itself a distinct minority within the waning Church of England—a means of reinterpreting its own corporate character through a liturgical lens as well as offering suggestions for how liturgy can enable the reexamination and redemption of one's own personal experiences. As personal as this poem cycle is, its connections to prior works such as *Murder in the Cathedral*, which is itself deeply linked to the liturgical calendar through its Advent and Christmas setting, indicate how the *Quartets* are rooted in community and a liturgical history that prevents the

speaker, despite his anguish, from being cut off from the rest of humanity, and offers a road to personal and communal restoration.

Liturgy informs both structure and content in the works of George Mackay Brown, as examined in Chapter Three. Brown, in three works in three genres—the play *A Spell for Green Corn* (1970), the poetry collection *Fishermen with Ploughs* (1971), and the novel *Greenvoe* (1972)—not only incorporates rituals into the texts themselves, but imposes a six-part ritual structure upon each text as a way of giving readers a quasi-liturgical experience in the process of reading. For Brown, the rituals within the texts are a means of recovering an Orcadian-Scots history that he perceives as having been fractured or lost through Scotland's religious and political upheavals, and he draws upon Catholic sacramentalism, pagan agricultural rites, and a Reformational priesthood of believers to draw together fragmented local history and restore a proper relationship with the land, which is itself a repository of memory. The structure of the texts themselves, meanwhile, correspond to Brown's fascination with the holiness of the number seven, and its correspondence to the structure of the week, which always opens onto the celebration of resurrection upon every Sabbath. By relying upon this six-part structure that opens into a future (but unwritten) seventh day, Brown guides his readers through desolation and towards a Sunday renewal and redemption. Notably, however, Brown toys with

the possibility that this ritual may, in fact, fail, if exploitation and abuse of both nature and other people overshadows any attempt to return to a position of responsible stewardship of the land and mutual responsibility towards other members of the community.

The potential failure of ritual becomes even more prominent in Chapter Four, which focuses on three plays by Irish playwright Brian Friel: *Living Quarters* (1977), *Faith Healer* (1979), and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1994). Friel's dramas often demonstrate the effort made through ritual to restore a sense of transcendence to a particular community, and his repeated returns to his fictional village of Ballybeg allow him to build a record of these successes and failures and indicate the way in which they can mark or scar a place and its inhabitants, even if they are unaware of the forces that have exerted such influence upon them. The failure of ritual in *Living Quarters* and *Faith Healer* leads to repetitions that do not restore the community to wholeness or elevate the reenactment itself into the *kairotic* embrace of divine time, but instead turn into ghostly repetitions of a corrosive, failed rite. By contrast, Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa* demonstrates the qualified success of a ritual, often mediated through the pagan past, that reaches for the transcendent in order to commemorate the dead and correct an otherwise narrow and patriarchal history through the revival of otherwise repressed voices.

Finally, in Chapter Five, Welsh poet Gillian Clarke offers a distinctive look on what it means to be a woman in the domain of ritual and ceremony, a role traditionally appropriated by men, particularly in her context of rural Wales. In her early poetry, however, Clarke makes the claim that women's work is in itself a kind of ritual practice that knits the community together and keeps it alive, and that women, even more than men, are the gatekeepers of both language and communal wholeness. Furthermore, she draws upon her deep attentiveness to the natural world that encloses the community in order to recover traces of women's effaced histories and bring them to bear on the present, allowing both subjugated nature and subjugated women to disrupt the dominance—however benevolently intended—of a patriarchal community. Once she has claimed the authority to act as celebrant, however, Clarke turns her attention to how best to use this authority. In her late sequence *Making Beds for the Dead*, Clarke uses her past work on ritual to recast the 2001 foot and mouth epidemic as well as the horror of September 11 in terms of a global inheritance in suffering. This web of relationship, rooted in the world's fallen nature, allows her poetry to remain planted in the local, ministering to her community in the county of Ceredigion, while also offering readers elsewhere in the world a religious framework through which to interpret their own suffering.

CHAPTER TWO

The Paschal Liturgy of Eliot's *Four Quartets*

Background

Eliot's poems, both pre- and post-conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, are marked by the recurrence of rituals. Although consideration of ritual most often focuses on the later poetry, the early poetry, such as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," finds its speakers trapped in the repetition of personal and social rituals that offer structure and routine without meaning and reassurance. Indeed, the speaker of "Prufrock" shies away from a search for meaning almost immediately, pleading, "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?' / Let us go and make our visit," even as he chafes against the empty predictability of his life:

> For I have known them already, known them all--
> Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
> I have measured out my life with coffee spoons. (*CP* 5-6)

These rituals, of tea and cakes in tastefully appointed rooms, do not offer Prufrock the consolation for his empty past or the courage to face his equally empty future. Rather, he is hypnotized or tranquilized, "Till human voices wake us, and we drown" (*CP* 7). Similarly, in *The Waste Land*, the speaker finds no comfort in the annual awakening that comes in spring, noting only "A heap of

broken images, where the sun beats, / And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief" (*CP* 53). Yet the despondency expressed by the speakers in these poems comes not from a belief that ritual offers no relief from the pressures of modernity, but rather from the failure to find rituals that are, in fact, freighted with meaning, capable of doing more than simply ordering days into empty weeks and months into useless years.

These poetic speakers manifest the malaise that Graham Hughes observed in his 2005 study *Worship As Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity*. The meaningfulness of any ritual, he points out, depends on how it helps the participant to make sense of lived experience, particularly the discordant parts of that experience, or how it helps them to better understand the human condition in general and their own personal condition specifically (13). Prufrock's "evenings, mornings, afternoons" have not helped him understand his premature fears of aging and irrelevance, and the speakers of *The Waste Land* fail utterly to make sense of the discord that surrounds them. Even the most chilling and otherworldly moments in *The Waste Land,* such as the upside-down towers in "What the Thunder Said," are ultimately linked only to "empty cisterns and exhausted wells" (*CP* 68). Hughes points out that a culture can only make meaning from the stock of meanings already available to it, and Eliot's early poetic speakers find themselves struggling in a culture whose available

meanings are badly depleted. Eliot's Unitarian upbringing offered little support in this regard; Hughes notes that rather than resist modernity's evacuation of meaning, liberal Protestantism often accepted it as a given, embracing the values of new humanism: "a moral imperative to reduce suffering, a positive evaluation of ordinary life, the ideals of universal benevolence and access to justice, and the freedom of the individual," a list which notably excludes anything transcendent or divine (Hughes 55). And when even these secular values cannot be enacted, and the modern narrative of progress fails, Eliot's speakers are haunted only by themselves. The speaker of "Gerontion" grimly notes, "I have no ghosts," and "I have lost my passion"; he is left at last with only "Thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season" (*CP* 30-31). These desiccated lives are symptomatic of a broader cultural emptiness to which Eliot was acutely alert, and which exaggerated the sense of "spiritual dispossession" that haunts *The Waste Land*.[1]

Hughes metaphorizes the experience of modernity as a life lived upon a platform: what holds the platform up is unknown, and what exists beyond the platform's edges is unknowable. Encounters with mysterious, unbounded reality beyond the platform's edge offer "limit" or "edge experiences" which offer a stern reminder of humanity's bounded, limited existence, experiences which are

[1] See Ronald Schuchard, *Eliot's Dark Angel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) for more on young Eliot's spiritual yearning and ascetic tendencies. Schuchard suggests that Eliot, like many contemporaries, sought meaning in a form of passive suffering arising from "the conflicts of desire and beatitude, body and soul, flesh and Absolute" (9).

sometimes courted, and at other times force themselves upon the consciousness without warning or invitation. Eliot's early speakers wrestle with their own edge experiences, inadvertent or otherwise. They are particularly haunted by their encounters with what Hughes calls "a vertigo which overtakes us when we apprehend that, at a certain point, meaning ceases and we are confronted by that which is not of our own making, not under our control" (74). More particularly, they encounter this vertigo precisely because modernity has worked hard to conceal the "inherent boundedness" of the human condition, and their limit experiences thus present a shock that they cannot assimilate into the rest of their civilized modern lives (74). Take, for instance, Prufrock's awareness that, "I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker / And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker, / And in short, I was afraid" (CP 6). Prufrock's profound anxiety may seem incongruous with his age, but, like a good modern, he reels with queasy horror when reminded that his capacities might not be infinite or that his desires might not come to fruition. His following dejection certainly aligns with Hughes's account of modernity's vertiginous quality when the mind confronts limits that humanist values often insist do not exist.

Eliot's later, post-conversion poetry, however, demonstrates access to a fresh stock of meanings, even as Eliot continues to work with many of the same influences as before, such as Dante, French Symbolists, and the Elizabethan

poets. His conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, however, opened up a fresh store of meanings and available symbols, and new ways of encountering and assimilating the edge experiences that brought on such dread or horror in the early poems. These experiences could still be occasions for terror, but the fear itself is transformed, colored by awe. The dry bones of 1930's *Ash-Wednesday* are strikingly different from those in the graveyard of *The Waste Land*, arriving near the poem's beginning and singing a hymn of praise that metamorphoses into a prayer of supplication by the poem's end.

Similarly, the rituals of Eliot's post-conversion poetry are transformed into experiences where encounters with genuine meaning, or perhaps even a transcendent presence, are envisioned as simultaneously possible and unironic. *Ash-Wednesday* marks a clear and unequivocal beginning for this turn, and it continues through dramatic works such as *Murder in the Cathedral* and onward into Eliot's final poetic achievement, *The Four Quartets*. I suggest that the role of ritual in the *Quartets*, particularly liturgical ritual, is even more important than past critical studies have indicated. Liturgical experience was of primary importance to Eliot in the wake of his 1927 conversion to Anglo-Catholicism, and these rituals not only represent what Hughes would call "advertent" edge experiences in which Eliot's speaker re-experiences his own finitude and mortality through encounter with the divine, but also, these rituals help him

assimilate the painful experiences which are at the heart of the speaker's continued struggle to accept that personal finitude and still find life meaningful. In particular, Eliot incorporates a Paschal narrative, broadly conceived as the time stretching from the beginning of Lent to Pentecost Sunday, into the sequence: *Burnt Norton* corresponds to the season of Lent, *East Coker* to Good Friday, *The Dry Salvages* to Easter Sunday, and *Little Gidding* to Pentecost. These liturgical borrowings undergird a poetic narrative that seeks to find its way from the isolated suffering of the individual to forgiveness and life in a communal context. Graham Hughes's liturgical theology as well as the Paul Ricoeur's phenomenological work in *Memory, History, Forgetting* illuminate how Eliot crafts a narrative that enables his speaker to move from a barren renunciation of a painful past towards reintegration in the communities to which he belongs, whether these are small circles of intimates or the faith communities from which certain images and ideas are drawn. Moreover, Eliot's use of this narrative opens to his readers this progression from pain and doubt to hope and inclusion, replenishing the store of meanings available to his audience.

The recurrence of words such as "pattern," "motion," and "stillness" throughout the complex and enigmatic *Quartets* ensures that critics take heed of the repeated words and actions in each part, and they have expended considerable energy dissecting what Eliot means with his patterns and cycles of

renunciation and with his musical motifs. These readings of *Four Quartets* have focused on a range of possible interpretations, most of which devote themselves either to a biographical reading or a reading focused on time and eternity. Helen Gardner prioritizes the biographical reading in her study *The Composition of the Four Quartets*, stating, "The poems are poems of experience and are not built upon literary sources. There is a certain amount of direct quotation… But literary echoes and allusions are less fundamental as sources than places, times, and seasons, and, above all, the circumstances in which the *Quartets* were written" (30-31). Similarly, Ronald Schuchard's biographical criticism suggests that the *Four Quartets,* together with *Ash-Wednesday*, form "a great love poem, of human love lived beyond desire," a modern-day *Vita Nuova* prompted by Eliot's restoration of contact and subsequent emotional affair with his former sweetheart, Emily Hale (161). At the same time, the sequence forms a kind of spiritual ascent, a quest toward the divine and away from a youthful poetic legacy of "the torture of the soul by the body" (Schuchard 9). Denis Donoghue notes similarly that the *Quartets* sketch out "[h]ow to convert the low dream of desire into the high dream of love," though he otherwise eschews the biographical for a more impersonal reading of the poem (*Words Alone* 268).

Other readers have focused on even more impersonal readings of the poem cycle, focusing particularly on the treatment of time, or the musical motifs.

Grover Smith suggests, in keeping with numerous other critics, that "The symbolism of the four seasons and of the elemental quaternion, earth, water, air, and fire, maintains the subject of cyclical change in time, against which Eliot posed the idea of a stable eternity" (254).[2] Hugh Kenner diverges from both schools by arguing that the poem's structure rests in a repeated opposition of two terms which are opposed, falsely reconciled in a third term, and then reconciled in a fourth term.[3] Donoghue's own reading draws heavily upon Kenner's, though he seems the poem as using the "camouflage of different voices…each charged with the evacuation of one area, until nothing is left but 'prayer, observance, discipline, thought, and action'" (230). This dialectical approach to the *Quartets* has continued to exert considerable influence over critical readings.

However, some critics—particularly Eliot's contemporaries—read the *Quartets* as an intensely religious work whose emphasis on time and eternity was not the poem's major preoccupation, but rather an issue of deep religious concern and a search for genuine meaning. F. R. Leavis wrote in 1942, upon the publication of *The Dry Salvages*, that Eliot's poetry from *Ash-Wednesday* onwards "is a searching of experience, a spiritual discipline, a technique for sincerity—for

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[2] Kramer's *Redeeming Time: T. S. Eliot's "Four Quartets"* follows a similar reading.

[3] Kenner 300. See also F. O. Matthiessen, "Eliot's *Quartets*" in *Kenyon Review* 5.2 (1943), 163.

giving 'sincerity' a meaning" (447). Leavis also caught the liturgical leanings of Eliot's late poetry, remarking that "the religious bent has so pronounced a liturgical expression," which he found "remarkable for the insistent and subtle scrupulousness of the concern manifested to guard against the possibilities of temptation, self-deception, and confusion that attend on the aim and the method" (448). Delmore Schwartz similarly read it as a deeply religious poem cycle that argued "that the only meaningful event in history is the Incarnation, and all else… [is] illusory, deceptive, empty, vain, and without meaning except in relation to the Incarnation" (481). But he recoiled from what he saw as "the poet's hatred and rejection of this life" which failed to adequately address "the moral disillusionment of our time and the present war" (481).[4] Other discussions of the religious bent of the cycle have tended to focus on Eliot's use of medieval mystics such as St. John of the Cross, such as William Moynihan's study "Character and Action in the *Four Quartets*," which relates the five sections in each quartet with the five stages of the mystic way.

More recent explorations of the religious or liturgical bent of the *Quartets* have been more positive or more expansive, as in Thomas Howard's 2006 commentary *The Dove Descending*. Still, no explicitly liturgical reading has been

[4] Schwartz's concern is shared by other contemporaries, such as Paul Goodman, who reads the risk for this rejection in the *Quartets*, but ultimately sees Eliot has coming down on the side of hope and celebration of the "theatre of creation, of creative acts, virtues and miracles, given by grace" (*Contemporary Reviews* 483).

advanced, although one critic has suggested the possibility. John Boyd suggests that the themes and structure of the *Quartets* are best understood in light of Christ's Paschal Action, or the role that redemption plays in each *Quartet*. The Paschal Action allows for the "essentially paradoxical…coexistence of two realities, of the divine and the human, of nature and grace," contrasted against tragic and comedic action, in which the "expectation of one reality [is] replaced by another" (179). Yet Boyd's reading of this Paschal action is brief, and reads the death and resurrection into each quartet, rather than considering Eliot's use of the broader Paschal narrative or the influence that liturgy and the Paschal Action had played in Eliot's preceding works, such as *Ash-Wednesday* and *Murder in the Cathedral*.[5] Nonetheless, Boyd glimpses the vital role that liturgy played in Eliot's life, as well as how he wove liturgical ritual into the text itself, and expanding this reading helps to illuminate the deep influence liturgical ritual exerted over Eliot's later poetic imagination. The "religious bent" that Leavis traced back to *Ash-Wednesday* only deepened over time for Eliot because of both personal upheaval and a strengthening religious commitment in the wake of his conversion. Liturgy's consolations informed Eliot's later work, and particularly the *Quartets*, in three major ways: liturgy offered order and coherence in an

[5] Other critics have provided liturgically-inflected readings of other Eliot works. Barry Spurr includes a chapter on *Ash-Wednesday, The Rock,* and *Murder in the Cathedral*. Karen T. Romer considers Eliot's use of liturgical language more broadly in "T. S. Eliot and the Language of Liturgy."

increasingly chaotic world; its corporate nature collapsed divisions between people and brought them together into known communities; and finally, liturgy provided relief from personal disappointment and tragedy through its larger teleological emphasis. Before embarking on a liturgical reading of the *Quartets*, these forms of consolation must be considered more closely.

As seen in Eliot's early poems, his quest for order in a chaotic world began well before his formal conversion in 1927. Lectures he delivered in 1916 linked classicism with a belief in original sin and the Catholic church; at the same time, he was reading Christian apologist Paul Elmer More's *The Drift of Romanticism* and *Aristocracy and Justice* (Crawford 256-7). As early as 1917, he glimpsed this order in religious ritual. Barry Spurr notes that Eliot perceived "ancient religious ceremony as a source of classical order in what he perceived to be the chaotic, post-Romantic world" (41). His understanding of the world as "chaotic" and "post-Romantic" rose in part from his readings of T. E. Hulme, who critiqued the humanistic ideal that humanity is "fundamentally good and of unlimited powers"; instead, Hulme proposed a philosophical model of "Original Sin," which he deemed "the conviction that man is by nature bad or limited, and can consequently only accomplish anything of value by disciplines, ethical, heroic, or political" (Schuchard 62). Hulme thus argues against what he saw as the romantic failure to adequately separate human and divine things, similar to what

Hughes describes as "the ancient mythic intimations of the uncanny, the limit, the otherness which confronts us when we turn from our (modern) obsession with our selves" (Schuchard 63; Hughes 74). But Hulme goes farther in arguing ultimately for the "futility and tragic significance of life," insisting that a regeneration of society could only stem from a pessimistic conception of humankind (Schuchard 63). This tragic outlook clearly influences *The Waste Land*, with its images of decay and the Fisher King's unanswered question, "Shall I at least set my lands in order?" But as that poem suggests, while regeneration is a possibility, it is by no means a certainty, and futility may win out over regeneration.

For Eliot, then, Anglo-Catholicism and its liturgy built upon Hulme's foundation. It insisted upon the reality of original sin, supporting a view of humankind as intrinsically limited, and the human and divine as fundamentally separate categories of existence. As Catherine Pickstock explains, creaturely existence is "suspended between its nothingness outside God and its optimum realization in God. Thus creatures have no ground in themselves, but perpetually receive themselves from the infinity of God"; essence is possible "only through the Being from which it always remains distinct" (128-9). Yet liturgy, particularly its culmination in the Eucharist also provides a line of mediation through the Incarnation between Hulme's pessimistic conception of humankind

and the possibility of redemption, and between the distinct and separate categories of human and divine when the human creature partakes of the divine substance (Pickstock 133). In catechetical terms, the Incarnation is "the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it," and furthermore, that Christ "became truly man while remaining truly God," rather than "a confused mixture of the divine and the human" (*Catechism* 130). The Incarnation is thus a point of intersection between otherwise separate forms of existence, and that includes not only the divine and the human, but also "the timeless with time," which Spurr notes is also "seminally expressed in the event of the Incarnation, which is extended in sacramental religion and, therefore, in the Mass," ideas which are as central to the *Four Quartets* as to Eliot's religious practice (99). In the liturgy, Eliot also found a way of keeping what Hughes defines as "identity" (human existence) and "difference" (divine alterity) separate while also experiencing how they meet. Sacramental religion and liturgy also offered him a concrete form of the discipline that Hulme perceived as necessary for human accomplishment. Spurr notes that Eliot was particularly drawn to the sacrament of penance and "regarded Mary Magdalene, the penitent, as his particular saint" given the priority he placed on penitence and "the humbling process of facing-up to one's sins and shortcomings" (134). Eliot's regular mass attendance and particular attention to the season of Lent emphasize

his commitment to the order and discipline he found in the rigorous practice of sacramental religion.

This sense of order and discipline also depended upon the corporate nature of Anglo-Catholicism. Eliot valued the role that the parish played in English religion as a community that was both religious and social, in which all social classes might be equally invested and concerned (*CC* 24). The original rural parish, as he wrote in "The Idea of a Christian Society," represented "the idea of a small and mostly self-contained group attached to the soil and having its interests centred in a particular place, with a kind of unity which may be designed, but which also has to grow throughout generations" (*CC* 25). This unity would manifest in the *Quartets* as places like Little Gidding, where "prayer has been valid" through the long practice of the faith by a local community over the course of centuries. While Eliot acknowledged that this ideal was vastly over-simplified for a modern urban culture, the principle of people who were tied together by place and religious commitment appealed to him, and London's many parish churches made this ideal tangible and present to Eliot. He not only admired these structures for their aesthetic beauty or their historical value, but also for their resonance as places of communal worship. And this admiration awakened early in him; by 1921 he criticized in *The Dial* a proposal to tear down nineteen of these smaller churches (Spurr 35-36). A physical church building

represented a community, religious as well as social: Mass was celebrated there, but churches often were hubs of a community's social order, a third space linked to but independent of the domestic nor the commercial spheres.

The corporate nature of Anglo-Catholicism depended not only upon these physical structures that were available to all within the parish, but also upon the corporate language that was used in those spaces to draw the community together, creating what James Matthew Wilson calls "a meaningful community of interpretation" (51). As Graham Hughes notes, "we owe it to each other" to make sense of our shared history and culture as best we can, for "Wittgenstein's dictum about language, 'There is no private language,' applies no less to meanings: meanings are made in community" (70). The communal nature of meaning brings about an imperative "to be as clear and truthful in our meaning-making as we can, both personally and communally" (71). Liturgy, as Hughes notes, not only has the power to gather people together in a particular physical space, but to cause them to "*be* gathered into a corporate entity" (157). In the Anglo-Catholic liturgy that Eliot knew, this gathering was accomplished spatially through the use of phrases and responses that the congregation would perform together. Yet the gathering has a temporal element as well, since the liturgy has been performed with minimal variation by countless congregations across time, and throughout all of England, and Eliot treasured this spatial and

temporal unity. As he would write in his essay "Literature in the Modern World," membership in community provided both solace and moral order that individualistic humanism could not:

> There are moments, perhaps not known to everyone, when a man may be nearly crushed by the terrible awareness of his isolation from every other human being; and I pity him if he finds himself only alone with himself and his meanness and futility, alone without God. It is after these moments, alone *with* God and aware of our worthiness, but for Grace, of nothing but damnation, that we turn with most thankfulness and appreciation to the awareness of our *membership*: for we appreciate and are thankful for nothing until we see where it begins and where it ends. (qtd in Schuchard 120)

And as Eric Sigg points out, neither individuality nor membership was sufficient for Eliot without God as a line of mediation between the social self and the central self (108). Liturgy's express purpose was to accomplish that mediation through the Incarnation.

Finally, this need for meaningful ritual also sprang from the troubled circumstances of Eliot's personal life, particularly in his turbulent marriage to Vivien Haigh-Wood.[6] The unhappy circumstances of the marriage prompted Eliot to reestablish correspondence with his former sweetheart, Emily Hale, and by the time Eliot composed *Burnt Norton*, he was a confirmed Anglo-Catholic, but also a man engaged in an emotional affair, haunted by regrets at certain

[6] For more on this, see Schuchard's *Eliot's Dark Angel*, Lyndall Gordon's *T. S. Eliot: An Imperfect Life*, and Robert Crawford's *Young Eliot: From St. Louis to The Waste Land*.

outcomes of his life: his marriage to Vivien, his lack of children, middle-aged fear of failure to leave any kind of legacy behind that would outlast his own life—in 1950, he would fret at being regarded as a celebrity rather than a poet (Gordon 437). The liturgy and the sacraments, however, reminded him that "only in humility, charity and purity—and most perhaps humility—can we be prepared to receive the grace of God without which human operations are in vain" (Manning-Foster 76). This fear of the ultimate vanity or futility of all human endeavor is resolved only when the individual recollects his or her membership in a larger community, as well as the ends to which all efforts are aimed: perfecting the union between God's will and one's own, and thus matching one's efforts to God's own will at work in the world.

These conditions (a chaotic world in which people find themselves lacking meaningful community and common language, and are left without necessary supports or tools to process personal tragedy and disappointment) parallel the concerns that Paul Ricoeur addresses in his 2004 book *Memory, History, Forgetting*. In this work, Ricoeur explores the "historical condition" in which humankind must live, which Hayden White summarizes as

> an existential situation in which human beings are caught a complex interplay of three modes (called "extases" in Ricoeur's earlier work) of temporality: present, future, and past, in which historical knowledge (the knowledge of historians) has the function of obscuring and repressing recognition of that 'being towards death' which is the ultimate cause of human anxiety, melancholy,

> despair and the principal impediment to the achievement of the kind of love that would make a creative "forgiveness" (of oneself as well as others) possible. (237)

Ricoeur suggests both memory, whether personal or collective, and history, at any of its stages of inscription, can be either "remedy or poison" for both the individual and for the broader society (139). A manipulated or inaccurate history cannot provide the "large-scale orientations" from whcih "the present receives a meaningful place in history as a whole" (157). On the other end of the scale of intimacy, "wounded" or "sick" personal memory "obliterates the future" when the past overwhelms the present, resulting in the compulsion to repeat the painful memory again and again, or, alternatively, the compulsion to resist memory (79). Private memory, moreover, risks turning hallucinatory without the memory or testimony of others the errors brought on by the imagination's work in bringing memories to to the fore once again. Thus, both history and personal memory require a healthy collective memory for corrective balance. This kind of collective memory does not override or overwrite the individual, even when the individual's memory or testimony threatens official versions of history; on the other hand, it gives the individual access to other accounts, which act as supports against the fragility of memory.

While Ricoeur acknowledges that the rise of "a frankly egological mode of subjectivity" in the twentieth century has eroded "any attribution to a collective

subject," he insists upon both the existence and necessity of collective memory (94). Personal memory is inevitably linked to something more public, he argues, because memory "enters into the region of language…the common language, most often in the mother tongue, which, it must be said, is the language of others" (129). When memory is somehow wounded, the intervention of a third party is often necessary to bring the troubled memory "to language in an effort to reconstruct a comprehensible mnemonic chain" (129). Thus, he notes, the collective subject is a lived experience, a matter of "practical faith":

> We believe in the existence of others because we act with them and on them and are affected by their actions. The phenomenology of the social world, in this way, penetrates directly into the order of life in common, of living-together in which acting and suffering subjects are from the outset members of a community or collectivity. (130)

And while these relations seem spatial, with the individual's memory linked to the effort to tell it to other people in proximity, Ricoeur points out that this shared subjectivity exists across time, too, for "[t]he shared experience of the world rests upon a community of time as well as space… The worlds of predecessors and successors extend in the two directions of the past and the future, of memory and of expectation, those remarkable features of living together" (130). These meditations lead to a vital question: "Does there not exist an intermediate level of reference between the poles of individual memory and collective memory, where concrete exchanges operate between the living

memory of individual persons and the public memory of the communities to which we belong?" (131).

For Ricoeur, this intermediate level is that of close relations, "these people who count for us and for whom we count" (131); for Eliot, the answer is the parish, a level of relation that is more exact and, in ways, more difficult. Ricoeur's "close relations" can exclude those whom the individual person dislikes, whereas the parish demands some recognition of collective belonging with those whom the individual person might dislike. In order to bring this spatial community into relationship with the broader temporal community, the parish relies upon the language of liturgy. This language embeds the community within a larger narrative with an "obvious" public structure; in short, the narrative becomes a history. Vitally, the collective language and public narrative of liturgy do not obliterate personal memory or subsume the narrative of the individual life. Instead, they provide an interpretive lens through which to view memory or to interpret experience. Furthermore, this narrative culminates every time in redemption through Eucharist, a tangible reminder of Christ's incarnation. The wounded individual memory can draw upon this narrative either to heal the compulsion to fruitlessly repeat a memory, or to allow the painful experience to be remembered in the first place. In both cases, the painful experiences are fitted into a framework of suffering, repentance and redemption.

Liturgical Framework of Quartets

For Eliot this narrative framework is writ large in the sequence of the liturgical calendar that begins with Ash Wednesday and concludes with Pentecost, containing within itself the renunciations of Lent, the desolation of Good Friday, and the renewal of Easter. Therefore, the liturgy is the cycle that best unites both past readings of the *Quartets* (cyclical; preoccupied with time and eternity; a latter-day *Vita Nuova*) as well as Eliot's own preoccupation with ritual throughout his poetic, prose, and dramatic works. Other critics have suggested the liturgical calendar as an influence on the *Quartets* before. James P. Sexton observes what he calls "Christian calendar" references in the mention of the Annunciation in *The Dry Salvages*, Good Friday in *East Coker*, Pentecost in *Little Gidding*, and an apparent allusion to the Ascension in *Burnt Norton*. He suggests the are coordinates that lead in different directions—up, down, forward, and back—from the "still point" that poems reference, forming a cross, but the link between the spatial and temporal elements of the poem is not solidified, and Sexton's treatment parallels the search for structure patterns in the seasonal and elemental motifs that other critics have observed. John Boyd, in turn, glimpses on the "Paschal action" of the *Four Quartets*, but his discussion deals primarily with *Little Gidding*, giving little indication of how the Paschal action affects the composition or structure of the three preceding *Quartets*.

I argue instead that the liturgical year, particularly the time stretching from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost, offers the connective tissue that links works such as *Ash-Wednesday*, which Schuchard and others see as inextricably linked to the *Quartets*, and *Murder in the Cathedral*, from which *Burnt Norton's* earliest lines originate. Furthermore, I posit that it provides the major thematic link that ties together the *Four Quartets* themselves as well as Ricoeur's "intermediate frame of reference" between personal and communal memory and identity. In *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Ash-Wednesday*, it is possible to see how the two major penitential seasons of the liturgical year, Advent and Lent, suggest the framework that would ultimately connect these works as well as the *Four Quartets*. Theologically, this progression is only logical; as Bruce T. Morrill explains, Lent and its renunciations are not "a discrete period of self-discipline, but rather, as the first (major) movement of the massive Easter cycle, whose climactic Easter Triduum, with its 'mother of all vigils,' opens into the fifty-days-long Easter Season," ending with Pentecost (62). As a result, the liturgical year—which in the *Quartets* focuses particularly on the broader Easter season of Lent, the Passion, and Pentecost—provides a clear narrative by which to interpret the *Quartets*, one which complements the cycles of repetition that other critics have observed and yet also sheds new light on the biographical material as well as the structure of the sequence as a whole. This liturgical narrative clarifies the move

from renunciation or the *via negativa* in the first quartets to the embrace of affirmation or the *via positiva* in "Little Gidding" because Lent's penances and renunciations, anchored in personal and communal memory and history, must ultimately lead to Easter and Pentecost's future-oriented fulfillments in order to find individual forgiveness as well as hope for a collective future.

The Advent season of *Murder in the Cathedral* gave Eliot an opportunity to explore his preoccupation with time as well as how the past haunts the choices an individual makes in the present.[7] The first half of the 1935 play on the martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket follows the saint as various friends and tempters visit him, offering him ways to avoid the conflict with the king that will seal his fate; Thomas resists, and in his climactic sermon at the interlude he insists upon perfecting one's will in ultimate obedience to God, a decision which leads to his martyrdom in the play's second half. Textually, the play is the closest cousin of the *Four Quartets*; the opening thirteen lines of *Burnt Norton* were originally a speech given by the Second Priest after the Second Tempter exits (Gardner 39). This tempter has wooed Thomas with promises of temporal power and "glory, / Life lasting, a permanent possession," in an effort to convince Thomas to revise his past by taking up an old political pot (*MC* 27). The priest's

[7] *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935) was published after *Ash-Wednesday* (1927); however, since *Ash-Wednesday* is often treated as a forerunner to the *Quartets*, I discuss *Murder in the Cathedral* and its links to the *Quartets* first.

deleted speech is thus an immediate response to this temptation to revisit the past: while the words acknowledge that past, present, and future are tangled in one another, they insist as well that "What might have been is an abstraction / Remaining a perpetual possibility / Only in a world of speculation" (*CP* 175). These preoccupations with time are linked to the recurring image of the turning wheel in the play, referenced by Thomas, the Third Priest, and the Fourth Tempter alike, an image which receives its echo in the *Quartets'* evocation of the "still point of the turning world" (*CP* 177).[8] And the clearest textual link between the *Murder in the Cathedral* and the *Quartets* comes in Thomas's admonition to the Chorus that "Human kind cannot bear very much reality" (*MC* 69), which reappears word for word near the end of Part I in *Burnt Norton*, spoken by the figure of the bird.

These textual influences and borrowings aside, though, *Murder in the Cathedral*'s use of its penitential season as a time for temptation and reflection carries over into the *Quartets*. The poem's setting in Advent, culminating in

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[8] THIRD PRIEST: "For good or ill, let the wheel turn" (*MC* 18)
THOMAS: "Only / The fool, fixed in his foy, may think / He can turn the wheel on which he turns" (*MC* 25)
FOURTH TEMPTER: "You have also thought, sometimes at your prayers, / Sometimes hesitating at the angles of stairs, / … That nothing lasts, but the wheel turns…" (*MC* 38).
The wheel imagery in *MC* also has clear links to the medieval trope of fortune's wheel, and Christopher Innes notes that it is drawn from Dante, and that the play's structure itself is a wheel, with the motif repeated in the choreography of Thomas's murder (391). While there are echoes of the wheel image in *Four Quartets*, the medieval association is considerably softened in favor of Eliot's interest in patterns and cycles, although the appearance of Thomas Elyot's book in *East Coker* suggests it lingers.

Thomas's Christmas morning sermon at the Interlude, echoes the Lenten and Paschal liturgical concerns of the *Quartets*: the need to perfect the will, the push for freedom from selfish human desire, the paradox of the simultaneous celebrations of life and death woven into Christianity's highest holidays. And not only does Eliot anchor the play in the liturgical significance of the season, in which "at the same moment we rejoice in His coming for the salvation of men, and offer again to God His Body and Blood in sacrifice," but also, he reminds his audience that Thomas's choices and actions are woven into the fabric of his community. At his martyrdom, the Chorus mourns that this is no "private catastrophe," but an event that seems to make the entire world "wholly foul" (77-78). Thomas's struggles with temptation in Part I are necessary not only for his individual peace and salvation but also so that the Chorus, at the end of Part II, can praise God and plead for corporate forgiveness:

> Forgive us, O Lord, we acknowledge ourselves as type of the common man,
> Of the men and women who shut the door and sit by the fire . . .
> We acknowledge our trespass, our weakness, our fault; we acknowledge
> That the sin of the world is upon our heads. . . (87-88)

Finding this forgiveness, however, required Eliot to move past seasons of penitence and into the culminations of Easter and Pentecost.

While *Murder in the Cathedral* gave Eliot themes and lines as well as the use of the liturgical calendar, in *Ash-Wednesday,* the liturgical borrowings stem

not only from the time of year, but also from the liturgical language itself. Although *Ash Wednesday* preceded *Murder in the Cathedral* by eight years and *Burnt Norton* by nine, it is often regarded as closer kin to the first *Quartet* than Eliot's play. The symmetry between the two rests in their Lenten references, th renunciative tone of *Burnt Norton,* and the connection of both poems to Emily Hale. While it is a *Vita Nuova*-like ode to Emily Hale, is nonetheless clearly linked to the penitential season of Lent not only through its title, but also through its borrowing of the Anglican Ash Wednesday liturgy, formally known as the Office of Commitation, particularly its closing quotation of the Office, as well as its multivalent use of the word "turn."[9] Schuchard points out that the opening line of *Ash-Wednesday*, "Because I do not hope to turn again" closely resembles Cavalcanti's opening from "Ballata: *In Exile at Sarzana*": "Because I think not ever to return" (Schuchard 149). Yet the language of turning and returning, which marks so much of *Ash-Wednesday*, echoes throughout several liturgical forms, from Anglo-Catholic adoration of the Virgin to the Anglican Ash Wendesday liturgy. To "turn" and "return" recurs throughout the Office of Commination, as when the minister declares, "Turn ye from your wickedness… Turn ye then, and

[9] The liturgical observance of Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a forty-day period (excluding Sundays) of penance, usually observed through a voluntary fast or abstinence from something enjoyed in everyday life, or the taking on of an additional discipline. Eliot participated in both forms of observance; Spurr observes that his fasts included giving up gin (except on Wednesdays) and the playing of solitary before breakfast; he also increased attendance at services (140-141).

ye shall live" (*Book of Common Prayer* 348). More notably, in the corporate prayer, the congregation prays, "Turn thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned" (*Book of Common Prayer* 351). Renunciation is a movement that the liturgy suggests cannot be completed wholly of one's own volition, and this movement is echoed in Part III, with the turnings of the stairs. This image links directly to the "figure of the ten stairs" in *Burnt Norton* and, as Gardner observes, the "ladder of love" from St. John of the Cross's *The Dark Night of the Soul* (89). At the turning of the first stair, one encounters:

> The same shape twisted on the banister
> Under the vapour in the fetid air
> Struggling with the devil of the stairs who wears
> The deceitful face of hope and despair.

After the first turning, the way of ascent on the second stair is "dark, / Damp, jagged, like an old man's mouth driveling." This fear of age is then replaced on the third stair by reminders of desire through the flute music and the "sweet, brown hair over the mouth blown" until the speaker moves finally to a "strength beyond hope and despair / Climbing the third stair" (*CP* 89). In harmony with the liturgical plea to be turned by God even as one strives to turn, as the the speaker paraphrases Matthew 8:8,

Lord, I am not worthy,
Lord, I am not worthy
but speak the word only.[10] (*CP* 89)

Finally, the poem's complex use of a Marian female figure deepens the link to this language of turning. In Part I, Eliot expressly invokes the Ave Maria in the lines "Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death / Pray for us now and at the hour of our death" (*CP* 86). In Part IV, the speaker describes the "silent sister" who wears "blue of larkspur, blue of Mary's color," before breaking off in a halting partial quotation of Dante: "Sovegna vos" (*CP* 90). In Part VI, "let my cry come unto thee" echoes the liturgical, "let our cry come unto thee" while also suggesting the Salve Regina's "to thee we cry… *Turn* then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy towards us" (emphasis mine). Thus, the language of turning brings into focus a liturgical intertext. It gradually works its act of renunciation until the turn from Cavalcanti's love poem at the opening is completed by the closing two lines: the catechetical "Suffer me not to be separated," followed by the Office of Commination's "And let my cry come unto thee."[11] The extremely personal nature of this renunciation, however, is denoted by Eliot's changing of the pronouns from the plural "us" and "our" to the

[10] Matthew 8:8: The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. (KJV) All Biblical quotations are taken from the King James Version, whose language and poetry Eliot greatly preferred (see Spurr 204) and whose language is used exactly in this instance.

[11] "Suffer us not to be separated" is a line appearing in catechisms of both the Reformed Church as well as the Unitarian church in which Eliot is raised.

individual "me" and "my." In this way, he brings corporate practices to bear on the anguish of personal life.

Both *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Ash-Wednesday* allowed Eliot to explore the stability of the liturgical framework as a narrative structure for interrogating his past and present. Had he ceased work on the *Quartets* after *Burnt Norton*, which was published in 1936 as a stand-alone poem, the decision to linger in the renunciative Lenten season would have made a certain melancholy sense, and the broader support and power of the liturgy would never have come into play. But the desire to wrestle with what lay beyond *Burnt Norton's* "waste sad time," and indeed, to redeem that time, necessitated a narrative movement beyond the limited penitential scope of Lent, completing the exploration of liturgical time begun by *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Ash-Wednesday*. Thus, beyond the Lent of *Burnt Norton* is the Good Friday of *East Coker*, the Easter Sunday of *The Dry Salvages*, and the Pentecost of *Little Gidding* with its final redemption of time and personal history.

The Four Quartets

Like *Ash-Wednesday*, *Burnt Norton* is riddled with evidence of what Ricoeur calls "wounded" memory, suffering in this case from what he called "too much memory" and thus the compulsion to repeat the remembered scene (Eliot and Emily Hale's 1934 visit to Burnt Norton) over and over again. In Part I, the

"abstraction" which remains "a perpetual possibility / Only in a world of speculation" is not immediately revealed, though it is clear from the repeated use of the word "echo" and from the speaker's reminder of things undone ("Down the passage which we did not take / Towards the door we never opened") that these unfulfilled possibilities haunt him. The past, however, is not the only "perpetual possibility" haunting the speaker: twice he repeats the lines, "What might have been and what has been / Point to one end, which is always present," first in the poem's opening thirteen lines, and again as the closing of Part I. Edward S. Casey, in his own study of remembering, suggests that the "present" (which puns on the word's meaning of both *here* and *now*) refers not only to the speaker's *now*, but also to a future that depends upon the speaker's actions (278). The speaker's present is haunted not only by what might have been, but also by "expanding eventualities that *might* happen," or worse, might not, given that the speaker's paralysis (the fact that he "cannot bear very much reality") pushes him to await the future, as Casey notes, rather than making it happen (277-8). Helen Gardner elucidates this sense of paralysis when she deems *Burnt Norton* a "land-locked poem" whose "whole feeling is enclosed" (159). Ricoeur suggests that this sense of enclosure in both time and space is linked to corporeality, for "the body constitutes the primordial place, the here in relation to which all other places are there" and in relation to which all other times become past and future (143).

"Here and now," he observes, "constitute absolute places and dates" which are ultimately inescapable (Ricoeur 43). The speaker attempts to resist the absolute place and date that the body imposes, but the result is a disembodied space in which the unhappy past and unfulfilled future collide with each other. As a result, "all time is eternally present / All time is unredeemable" (*CP* 175), and the speaker can neither heal the wounds of the past nor ease his fears about the future. Instead, both weigh heavily upon the present, a condition of desperate constraint that Eliot draws out with his closing:

> Time past and time future
> What might have been and what has been
> Points to one end, which is always present. (*CP* 176)

What this perpetual present means in his diminished condition, though, is ominously uncertain.

Accordingly, Part II seeks to escape from this stifling, enclosed condition, and does so by positioning the speaker between a flood of contraries or oppositions. Grover Smith suggests that the puzzling juxtaposition of "Garlic and sapphires" in the first line introduces this antimony with the contrast of vegetable and mineral, the rankly alive with the dispassionate inanimate, both of which "Clot the bedded axle-tree," an image which some critics read as a

reference to the cross (261).[12] This points immediately to the place the speaker is attempting to reach, "the still point of the turning world" where "the dance is" and "Where past and future are gathered" (*CP* 177). Here, the penitential ideas of Lent come to the foreground: the speaker is seeking

> The inner freedom from the practical desire,
> The release from action and suffering, release from the inner
> And the outer compulsion, yet surrounded
> By a sense of grace, a white light still and moving… (177)

The speaker is entranced by this glimpse of the eternal: a point free from movement, but animating the movement around it, a place where all time is gathered together, free from the distress of life lived within the temporal flow. But the reminder of the speaker's timebound corporeal body, through which, as Michael Crawford notes, both perception and thought happen, draws him back into awareness of his physical and temporal location (Crawford 51). And although this move deprives him of the fullness of consciousness so briefly tasted, he recognizes that time encloses the vivid memories he cherishes and the dynamic interaction between the corporeal self and the physical world that constitute these memories and also constitute the experience of liturgy and the reach towards the eternal. Outside of time, the memories are no longer "involved

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[12] Grover Smith suggests a link to George Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (*T. S. Eliot's Poems and Plays* 261). It may more likely be linked to the anonymous Anglo-Saxon poem "The Dream of the Rood," which is about the cross. Albert S. Cook's 1905 treatise on the poem includes several nineteenth-century translations of "*eaxlgespanne*" as "axle-span." See *The Dream of the Rood: An Old English Poem Attributed to Cynewulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 47-48, 52.

with past and future," and he cannot even imagine how they would be remembered. The pleasures of memory itself, in which the imagination helps to bring the past into being once again, or suggests how the past might live on into the future, must exist within time: "Only through time is time conquered," he concludes at the end of Part II.

This return back to the physical, temporal world is not wholly welcome, though. The speaker has yet to experience the revelations that will put him at ease with the lost opportunities of Part I, and thus Part III begins with "a place of disaffection / Time before and time after / In a dim light" (*CP* 178). But the reader quickly realizes the speaker experiences neither the *via negativa* nor the *via positiva* here: this place has "neither daylight / Investing form with lucid stillness" nor "darkness to purify the soul": "neither plenitude nor vacancy" (178). Instead, there is only "tumid apathy with no concentration," and the scene, "whirled by a cold wind," echoes Dante's second circle of hell, where the lustful are trapped, linking the speaker's unfulfilled passion (and resultant obsession) with that of such archetypal lovers as Paolo and Francesca.[13] This place, "empty of meaning," where inhabitants of London (in an echo of Eliot's earlier masterpiece, *The Waste Land*) are "Driven on the wind that sweeps the gloomy hills of London," is not the condition of renunciation that marks Lent, but rather

[13] *Inferno* Canto V, particularly ll. 31-45.

the spiritual barrenness that Lent's renunciations should address. Indeed, the image of the anonymous crowds driven through London by the wind reflects the speaker's ultimate isolation. He has no access at this point to the testimony of others to balance or correct his surfeit of guilty memory. As Ricoeur notes, drawing from Maurice Halbwachs, "to remember, we need others" (120). No one else is present in *Burnt Norton*, not even the absent beloved, leaving the speaker bereft of "the special opportunity of setting oneself mentally back in this or that group" through the testimony of others who shared the experience in question (the moment in the rose garden), which reconstructs the memory while also requiring a vital shift in viewpoint. The presence of other voices and memories could jar the speaker out of the solipsism brought on by his excessive repetition of the remembered event and rehearsal of lost possibilities; bereft of it, he must turn to the *via negativa* and its renunciations to break this spiritually barren cycle.

In order to access the *via negativa*, the speaker must "Descend lower, descend only" (*CP* 179). There is a recognition here that there are two directions to this movement: one furthers the condition of spiritual barrenness by leading to

> Internal darkness, deprivation
> And destitution of all property,
> Desiccation of the world of sense,
> Evacuation of the world of fancy,
> Inoperancy of the world of spirit;
> This is one way… (*CP* 179)

While "the other / Is the same," it is not in its movement toward total nullification, but in its abstention from movement which holds at a distance all the "appetency," or longings and desires, of the world. To abstain, the speaker realizes, is not the same as to reject.

The Lenten parallel becomes most explicit in Part V, when the speaker observes that "The Word in the desert / Is most attacked by the voices of temptation" in reference to Christ's forty day fast in the wilderness when he was tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:1-11); Lent and its penitential renunciations or abstentions are patterned after this narrative. And this reference is bracketed by the speaker's struggle with how to access the liberation from desire that he glimpsed in Part II. In Part V's opening, he wrestles with the truth that all things that move only in time, such as words and music, "Can only die" (*CP* 180). "Only by form, the pattern / Can words or music reach / The stillness," he observes (180), but what constitutes the form or pattern is left unclear. Here, the liturgical parallels illuminate the meaning: liturgy itself is a form or pattern, constructed with words and music, and yet transcending both words and music to point at something timeless which has been rendered comprehensible through countless repetitions. Within the liturgy

> ...the end precedes the beginning,
> And the end and the beginning were always there
> Before the beginning and after the end.
> And all is always now. (180)

This structure restrains the words that would otherwise "Crack and sometimes break… / Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place, / Will not stay still" (180), and creates the kind of movement that allows for ascent toward the divine and is not swayed by the errant impulses of desire. Instead, liturgy's words and music allow one to encounter love, in its "unmoving," "Timeless, and undesiring" form to be glimpsed, even if it is limited by being caught within time. The corporate structure and language of liturgy also gives the speaker a doorway into community, however lonely his journey along the *via negativa* might seem. Others, after all, are tracing their own Lenten journey, and as Eliot knew from his readings of medieval mystics such as St. John of the Cross and the anonymous writer of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, many others have also followed the *via negativa*.

Yet temptation continues to stir for the speaker in Part V, just as it came to Christ in the desert. The sunlight and dust might imitate to him the drift of movement caught in the light in the transcendent moment "At the still point of the turning world," but at the same time:

> There rises the hidden laughter
> Of children in the foliage
> Quick now, here, now, always—
> Ridiculous the waste sad time
> Stretching before and after. (181)

The reappearance of the children indicates how the speaker remains tangled in past and future at *Burnt Norton's* close, the "before and after" or "time past and time future" that have riddled every section of the poem except Part IV standing as the final words. He remains unable to escape his preoccupation with a future that will not come to be and with potential pasts that did not come to pass. Yet this does not mark a failure of the *via negativa* of Lent; instead, it is a reminder that Lent is a time of spiritual progress within a broader religious narrative, and it does not require fulfillment at its close. As Grover Smith observes, *Burnt Norton* covers "three stages in the mystical sequence: awakening, illumination, and aridity ('dessication') in darkness. They all belong to the same progress" (265). Fittingly, the progress does not conclude with *Burnt Norton*. Instead, the soul, caught in aridity, approaches the darkness of death confronted on Good Friday, and remains far from the fulfillment of Easter and Pentecost's promise of reconciliation.

This move towards Good Friday begins in *East Coker* when the speaker begins to turn from his solipsistic preoccupation with his personal past by opening his perspective to the broader sweep of history. The poem's opening line, "In my beginning is my end" (*CP* 182), is repeated throughout the first section, and while it may seem a continuation of his earlier self-obsession, an assortment of ends and beginnings, including births and deaths, shapes the

trajectory of this quartet, linking it to the imagery of Good Friday even before Eliot makes the link explicit in Part IV. Indeed, the link between these dichotomies, particularly within the Christian tradition, had fascinated Eliot for years, and is best encapsulated in his 1927 poem "Journey of the Magi." Even before the poem's climactic closing meditations, Eliot begins to link the Incarnation with the Passion, for when the magi arrive in Bethlehem, they see in a tavern "Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver," an allusion both to Judas's betrayal and to the casting of lots for Christ's clothing. But in the closing, the link becomes explicit:

> And I would do it again, but set down
> This set down
> This: were we led all that way for
> Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
> We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
> But had thought they were different; this Birth was
> Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death. (*CP* 100)

Thus, when the speaker in *East Coker* references beginnings and ends, the parallel is already freighted with meaning, though his turn is initially to his own family history, rather than the deeper history of the Paschal mystery. Smith points out that this links the discussion of time in *East Coker* to history rather than eternity: "the way down, not the way up" (268). The hint of determinism, or even fatalism, suggest the darkness toward which the poem is directed.

East Coker is the village from which Eliot's family originated, and the speaker imaginatively brings his ancestors back to life by quoting from Sir Thomas Elyot's book *The Boke Named the Governour*:

> The association of man and woman
> In daunsinge, signifying matrimonie—
> A dignified and commodious sacrament.
> Two by two, necessarye coniunction,
> Holding eche other by the hand or arm
> Which betokeneth concorde. (*CP* 183)

The harmonious, orderly cycles promised by the ancestor's observations are woven into Eliot's Ecclesiastical language, the litany of "time for" and "time of" statements that help create the pattern of generation, life, and death with which the speaker is trying to orient himself. But in Part II, the speaker realizes that his own life is failing to conform to these orderly cycles: instead, he finds his "late November" troubled by "the disturbance of the spring / And creatures of the summer heat" (*CP* 184).[14] Although old age had seemed to promise peace and wisdom, the speaker finds that peace is merely "hebetude" and "wisdom only the knowledge of dead secrets" that "falsifies" the patterns and cycles explored in Part I (*CP* 184-5). The speaker realizes that "The only wisdom we can hope to acquire / Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless."

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[14] W. B. Yeats is a hovering presence throughout the *Quartets* (though discussion is usually limited to the compound ghost of *Little Gidding*), and this description can be held up against Yeats's image in "Sailing to Byzantium" of "The young / In one another's arms, birds in the trees / —Those dying generations—at their song / … Whatever is begotten, born, and dies" (84).

Having come to this realization, the speaker finally embarks in Part III on the voyage of renunciation he has been casting for all this time. Rather than apathy or disaffection, he reaches for stillness: "I said to my soul, be still, and let the dark come upon you / Which shall be the darkness of God" (*CP* 186). He continues,

> I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
> For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
> For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
> But the faith and love and the hope are all in the waiting.

Even when the "laughter in the garden" from *Burnt Norton* recurs, the speaker can hold to his stillness and resist the temptation to revisit the past. He closes the section with a riddling series of renunciations, giving up ecstasy, knowledge, and possession, which prepare him for the liturgical moment of ultimate renunciation: the darkness of Good Friday, when the Birth and Death from "Journey of the Magi" finally meet.

Eliot makes no effort to hide the Good Friday parallels in Part IV, but he even goes so far as to embed them in the section's structure, with its five five-line stanzas that serve as clear symbolic reminders of the crucifixion, reminding readers of the five wounds of Christ. Thus, references to the "bleeding hands" of

the "wounded surgeon," the sickness of "Adam's curse,"[15] which invoke the work of the atonement, are meant to culminate in the final stanza:

> The dripping blood our only drink,
> The bloody flesh our only food:
> In spite of which we like to think
> That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood—
> Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good. (*CP* 188)

The crucifixion references and the eucharistic imagery combine to place the speaker squarely in the liturgical setting of Good Friday, with its total desolation, rooted in death.

Freed from vanity by his renunciative experiences, the speaker can begin Part V with a frank and informal, "So here I am, in the middle way," as he reflects upon the ultimate failure of all his efforts, each of which leads only to "a different kind of failure" and then "a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate" in which nothing truly new is ever created. "There is only the fight to recover what has been lost," the speaker realizes; as a result, "For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business" (*CP* 188-189). But his journey along the *via negativa* is not yet done: Good Friday is the climax, but not the conclusion, of the Lenten season's renunciations and desolations. And thus Eliot closes *East Coker* by observing that

> We must be still and still moving
> Into another intensity

[15] Potentially an echo of Yeats's poem of the same name.

> For a further union, a deeper communion
> Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
> The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
> Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is my beginning.

The signal phrase of Part I, "In my beginning is my end," is rendered as a chiasmus with this inversion. While the speaker at the beginning seemed anxious to stave off the end that he saw in his own origins, he now perceives that Good Friday's insistence upon death and loss fulfills the goal of the *via negativa,* as the accretions of the past have been stripped away. The linked beginnings and endings, the desire to do away with spiritual apathy, and the intensified emotion that lead to deeper communion also connect *East Coker* to another of Eliot's middle poems, "The Cultivation of Christmas Trees."[16] In both poems, a penitential season (Advent, instead of Lent) clears the way for spiritual renewal and an experience of the divine which mixes awe with terror, and which draws one back to beginnings even as it points towards a teleological end. In *East Coker*, though, the joy of this experience remains unfulfilled, and a time of mourning must pass before joy can arrive.

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[16] At that poem's close, Eliot hopes that

> The accumulated memories of annual emotion
> May be concentrated into a great joy
> Which shall be also a great fear, as on the occasion
> When fear came upon every soul:
> Because the beginning shall remind us of the end
> And the first coming of the second coming. (*CP* 108)

This time of mourning, introduced by the complete negations of the *via negativa* on Good Friday, strands the reader in the spiritually ambiguous in-between time of Holy, or Black, Saturday in the opening of *The Dry Salvages*. This quartet itself stands as an anomaly, too: its namesake location, as Eliot's headnote explains, is a grouping of rocks with a beacon off the New England coast, rather than a site in England. The geographical reference reaches further back into Eliot's personal past than any of the other quartets, suggesting the frequent visits to Massachusetts throughout his childhood and early adult years; this link is tightened by early lines such as "His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom," drawing the reader back to childhood. Some critics pair this singularity with a critique of the quartet's quality. Denis Donoghue, for instance, considers it the worst of the *Quartets*, and commented dryly, "There is a great deal in 'The Dry Salvages' that requires explanation or apology" (246).

However dissatisfying the opening of this quartet might seem, however, it is in keeping with the uneasy, liminal time of Holy Saturday, where the losses of Good Friday are complete and the renewal of Easter Sunday has yet to come. The quartet opens with the image of the Mississippi River of Eliot's youth, characterized as "a strong brown god" who is "implacable, / … destroyer, reminder / Of what men choose to forget" (*CP* 191). The river god is Eliot's own image of the natural forces of the world that can remind humankind of their

limitation and mortality as well as an image from childhood called into the present. Modernity may claim those forces have been tamed or overcome by those such as "the builder of bridges," but the river's "seasons and rages" can bring about what Hughes's inadvertent edge experiences, the involuntary and vertiginous encounters with the ineffable that shake one's sense of safety (191). As the poem continues, this link to loss and brokenness (and thus to finitude and mortality) becomes clearer: the sea "tosses / Its hints of earlier and other creation" onto the beaches, and casts into the tidepool "The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar / And the gear of foreign dead men" (*CP* 191-2). In Part I of *The Dry Salvages*, Eliot also includes shattered fragments of his own past work: the "foreign dead men" recall drowned Phlebas from *The Waste Land*; the fog in the fir trees, the "granite teeth" of the rocks, and the sea wind that "whine[s] in the rigging" recall "Marina" from the *Ariel Poems*; the discussion of time, bracketed by references to the bell, take the reader back to the phrase "Time and the bell have buried the day" from *Burnt Norton* Part IV (179). "The anxious worried women" who fret about time, "Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel / And piece together the past and the future" recall not only the historical wives of sailors out on the ocean or mythical Penelope, but also the women who figure so prominently in the narrative of the Passion and the Resurrection.[17] And the

[17] See, for instance, the Resurrection narrative of Matthew 28:1-7, in which the two Marys

despondent state of mind in which these women wait, "when the past is all deception, / The future futureless" (192) reflects the liturgical setting, when the temporary triumph of Palm Sunday seems rendered meaningless by the cross, and redemption appears impossible. The force of the passage is unmistakable; Kenner has called it "the most powerfully articulated passage [Eliot] has ever published" through "its attempts to mediate between recurrent illumination and pervasive failure" (314-315).

To emphasize the spiritual paralysis of the time between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, Eliot moves in Part II of *The Dry Salvages* to a modified sestina that is haunted by the question of when this terrible barrenness and waiting will end. While Kenner considers the preceding passage the most powerful, Tahita Fulkerson argues that Eliot's use and placement of the sestina creates one of the most striking moments of the *Quartets*. "Its very form conveys restriction," she observes, "thereby symbolizing the restriction of men who allow their lives to be controlled by the pattern of history" (280). The strict repetitions emphasize a sense of fate, leading to "isolation, separation, and finally inactivity," stemming from profound despair (280).[18] Eliot's language relentlessly pursues this point.

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discover the empty tomb.

[18] In contrast, Denis Donoghue loathes the sestina, remarking, "The first stanza of part 2 is beautiful. But Eliot's determination to add five stanzas and to make each line-end rhyme with its counterpart in the other stanzas was disastrous…. The whole passage is so contorted, so alien to the character of the English language, that while reading it I wonder whether F W. Bateson

"Where is there an end of it?" he asks in the first line, and again at the start of the fourth stanza, "Where is the end of them?" Twice he decides, "There is no end" (193-4). Notably, the sestina is marked by the language of negation; every third line includes a word suffixed by "less," and "no" and "not" and the prefix "un" are littered throughout the stanzas. Taken in the context of Good Saturday, the fishermen referenced in the fourth stanza are, like the women of Part I, not just the historical residents of Massachusetts, but also players in the biblical story: this time, echoing the fisherman origin of several of Christ's disciples, who find that there is no end to their own grief. They are filled with "the soundless wailing" that knows no end, and face "Years of living among the breakage," unable to imagine "a future that is not liable / Like the past, to have no destination" (193). The modified structure of the sestina echoes the destinationless condition of the fishermen; whereas a sestina's end words should change their order from stanza to stanza, Eliot's sestina repeats its rhymes in the same order in each stanza. Fittingly, there is no envoi that provides a conclusion. Instead, the poem breaks into a thirty-nine line digression that some critics find prosaic, in stark contrast to the tight repetitions of the sestina.[19] Here, too, the

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wasn't right, after all, in saying that the American T. S. Eliot never wrote English as a native speaker" (248-249).

[19] Kenner remarks, "There is nothing in the last three-quarters of *The Dry Salvages*… that is beyond the scope of a sensible prose essayist" and "The poem leads us *out of* poetry" into the mundane register of the typical human life (315). Donoghue goes further, rejecting Kenner's

flatness of the language and the long, conversational lines fit the content, in which the speaker frets that, in moments of happiness, "We had the experience but missed the meaning" (194).

The discrepancy between experience and meaning grounds the rest of the passage, which, for Eliot, explains the need for liturgy. When meaning is missed, returning to seek it "restores the experience / In a different form" (194). The result is something that looks very much like liturgical ritual:

> That the past experience revived in the meaning
> Is not the experience of one life only
> But of many generations—not forgetting
> Something that is probably quite ineffable… (194)

Eliot suggests here something close to his friend Charles Williams's idea of substituted love or coinherence, the giving and taking of others' burdens, which Williams argues can occur across time: "The past and the future are subject to interchange, as the present with both, the dead with the living, the living with the dead" (Williams 92). In this way, the experience of one generation, such as suffering, could be revived in another, though Williams indicates this is not a flippant or idle. Instead, if one is to carry another's suffering, "he must be willing to do it to the full," knowing it may conflict with other duties (Williams 90). The liturgical rituals of the Easter Triduum, particularly that of Good Friday, suggest

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suggestion of intentional false reconciliation and Donald Davie's claim for parody, stating baldly, "If 'The Dry Salvages' is mostly bad it is bad because it fails to be good, not because Eliot meant it to sound 'bad' in a sophisticated way" (247).

a framework for taking up the suffering found in the experience of another. As Eliot explains, "For our own past is covered by the currents of action, / But the torment of others remains an experience / Unqualified, unworn by subsequent attrition" (195). The crucifixion is thus like "the ragged rock in the restless waters," which is sometimes a monument, sometimes "a seamark / To lay a course by: but in the sombre season / Or the sudden fury, is what it always was": while it might seem simply a memorial, or a guiding symbol for one's life, it is also a raw and shocking record of pain that communicates the reality of loss and suffering clearly in both a liturgical setting and in the sudden crises of life.

Thus oriented, the speaker can pause to consider the future in Part III, and in a very different way than from the haunting considerations of *Burnt Norton*, where thwarted possible futures weighed heavily upon him. Now he can observe that "the future is a faded song… / Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret" (*CP* 196). Furthermore, he realizes, the future is tied to change and is constantly in flux, and his past imaginings of it relied upon the notion of both himself and his beloved remaining the same people they were on that day in the rose garden. But they "are not the same people who left that station / Or who will arrive at any terminus," and thus the future must be held lightly, and given up in the same manner (196). Gardner notes that the use of Krishna and Arjuna reminds the reader that "Man must not look for the fruits of

action; he must live as if there were no future, as if every moment were the moment of death" (173). She links this to Eliot's insistence from *The Rock* to "take no thought of the harvest / But only of proper sowing" (*CP* 149). This marks a perfection of the will that finds its expression in the following prayer.

The prayer to Mary in Part IV of *The Dry Salvages* marks a turning point, moving away from the contemplations of the first three sections and the speaker's effort to to move from distress into the calm of resignation. This appeal to the Virgin Mary begins much like Part II of *Ash-Wednesday*, with its solemn invocation of "Lady" (197), though rather than obsessing over his own deeds like the speaker of that poem, the speaker of *The Dry Salvages* has turned his attention outwards. His prayer is not for himself, but for the sailors upon the water, the women who have lost sons or husbands on the water, and for the lost themselves. Eliot's Anglo-Catholic practice would have made him aware that Mary on Holy Saturday is acknowledged particularly for sharing in humanity's experience of grief; she is honored as "Our Lady of Solitude," with Holy Saturday as one of her Seven Sorrows.[20] Helen Gardner links this side of Mary as Mater Dolorosa to her role as "'Stella Maris' to whom the fishermen and their wives pray" (174).

[20] See Ann Ball, *Encyclopedia of Catholic Devotions and Practices* (South Bend: Our Sunday Visitor, 2003), 524.

In Part V, the tone of the quartet completes its move from anguish and waiting to hope and renewal. The speaker first rejects other means developed over time to fend off pain or explain the confusion of temporal life, and reaches instead, as has been the case throughout all three *Quartets* thus far, toward the "still point of the turning world," which he describes now as "The point of intersection of the timeless / With time" (198). But he has reached a new epiphany about the still point, too, namely that it is "something given / And taken, in a lifetime's death in love, / Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender" which is accomplished only by the saints (198). People like himself catch it only in "the unattended / Moment," in "hints and guesses, / Hints followed by guesses" (199). These moments and hints, however, point at the renewed hope of Easter Sunday, where "The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation" (199). While the resurrection itself is not mentioned directly, the Incarnation's link with the Crucifixion has been made clear in Eliot's entanglement of ends and beginnings in *East Coker* as well as his link between both events in "Journey of the Magi." The hope the speaker expresses at the quartet's close suggests the renewal of Easter, and he is

> content at the last
> If our temporal reversion nourish
> (Not too far from the yew-tree)
> The life of significant soil.

The conditions of *Burnt Norton* have finally been reversed. The speaker can address a present community rather than an absent beloved; past and future are "conquered, and reconciled" and cease to haunt him; he has realized his grasp of the "still point" will only ever be temporary and partial, and is at peace with that thought. And yet the *Four Quartets* do not close on this moment of fragile if meaningful peace. While the speaker has found personal relief, a strictly individual solace cannot be the place where a story ends if "the natural end of man" truly is "virtue and well-being in community," as Eliot suggests in his essay "The Idea of a Christian Society" (*CC* 27).

Accordingly, once the speaker finds solace in *The Dry Salvages*, his attention moves from his solipsistic anguish to the spiritual health of the broader community in the final quartet, *Little Gidding.* The icy day of "midwinter spring" depicted in the opening lines is charged with a "glow more intense than blaze of branch, or brazier" which "stirs the dumb spirit: no wind, but pentecostal fire / In the dark time of the year" (*CP* 200). This is the first explicit reference to a liturgical season, and while the winter imagery suggests a different calendar time than the actual observance of Pentecost, the recurrent fire imagery pushes the comparison: "The brief sun flames on the ice," a "windless cold" is "the heart's heat" (200).[21]

[21] Pentecost is a spring holiday, arriving fifty days after the observance of Easter.

The speaker then insists throughout the second stanza that "if you came this way" at any time, or under any conditions, "it would be the same": "Either you had no purpose / Or the purpose is beyond the end you figured / And is altered in fulfillment" (201). The place, of course, is the Little Gidding of the poem's title, the site of a religious community led by Nicholas Farrar and known to devotional poet and Anglican priest George Herbert, and visited several times by Charles I, the "broken king" who "came by night" (Eliot 201; Kenner 319). Whatever these or other pilgrims sought in this place for their own sake would be "only a shell" (Eliot 201). Instead, the speaker suggests,

> You are not here to verify
> Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
> Or carry report. You are here to kneel
> Where prayer has been valid. (201)

In *Little Gidding,* Eliot's idealistic understanding of a literary and spiritual tradition as a support to the individual crystallizes at last. As R. P. Blackmur wrote, tradition is not merely a slogan for Eliot, but "a real word and a real thing, too...the weapon and resource of individual talent" (143). As Eliot notes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," the essay Blackmur references, he notes that the historical sense that arises from engagement with the tradition "is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together," and "makes a writer most acutely conscious of his own place in time, of his own contemporaneity" (*SP* 38). Blackmur echoes this idea and the

speaker's struggle to arrive at this place when he observes, "It is the hardest work to find out what is already there. It is also, when we have it, our means of protection against what we are not. It is what is impersonal in the personality, and it is the materials of which we make the form—the mask—of personality" (143). Charles Altieri elaborates further, explaining that the "principles of impersonality" that Blackmur links to tradition "would force people to see themselves from the outside, and hence to recognize both the limits of their imaginary projections about themselves and the structural forces binding them to those projections" (193-4). In this posture of humility and renunciation, a person has access to the true richness of tradition. In *Little Gidding,* Eliot embodies this tradition in the voices of the dead, who can now speak truths they could not articulate when they lived. The fires of Pentecost cross time for Eliot much like the experience of suffering in *The Dry Salvages*, and as a result, "the communication / Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living" (201).

Eliot vividly renders this pentecostal speech of the dead in Part II, when the speaker meets a "familiar compound ghost" with "the sudden look of some dead master" (203), a figure which has been linked to both Dante and Yeats

(Schuchard 189).[22] The ghost brings with him warnings about the "gifts of age," which sound more like curses: the "expiring sense" which offers only the "bitter tastelessness of shadow fruit"; "the conscious impotence of rage / At human folly"; and finally, "the rending pain of re-enactment" and "the same / Of motives late revealed" (204). Combined, these supposed gifts send the aging, "exasperated spirit" reeling "From wrong to wrong...unless restored by that refining fire / Where you must move in measure, like a dancer" (205). This passage reminds the speaker of where he has already been, mired in his repetition of memory in *Burnt Norton* and the struggle to find meaning in the past in *East Coker*. Schuchard notes, furthermore, that the compound ghost forcefully reminds him of a truth he has been slow to realize, that "art offers no protection from sin and error, no possible means of redemption, and all suffer remorse for their intellectual pride" (190). Now, though, the bonfire and dancers of *East Coker* are transformed from temporal, earthbound images into reflections of something eternal: the refining fire tied to Pentecost as well as Biblical imagery, and a dancer who moves in the steps of an ordained pattern.

In Part III, the speaker begins to explore the implications of this Pentecostal experience, realizing that the proper use of memory is for a form of

[22] The setting of this encounter is based on Eliot's experiences as a fire warden during the Blitz of WWII, and, as Eliot explained in *To Criticize the Critic*, deliberately invoked Dante's *Purgatorio* and the scene of an air raid (128).

liberation which does not reduce or deny love, but instead causes the "expanding / Of love beyond desire, and so liberation / From the future as well as the past" (205). This freedom from crushing burden of past and future experienced in *Burnt Norton* extends to a renewed understanding of place. Whereas in *Burnt Norton*, the speaker's corporeality served as an unwelcome reminder of his actual place in time, in *Little Gidding* it becomes an "attachment to our own field of action" which can lead to a more expansive form of love. This epiphany is informed not only by the recognition of the "life of significant soil" that closed *The Dry Salvages*, but also by the stern admonition of the ghost. Thus the speaker does not recoil from the idea that his own field of action "is of little importance"; important or not, the action is "never indifferent" (205). In addition to realizing the limits of his action, he also realizes his very love for the "faces and places" of the past has been, at best, incomplete, if sincere, and with this realization, he can release all this personal history "[t]o become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern," one which transcends history without denying history. Donoghue reads this as a disavowal of nostalgia that argues instead that one should "consider the end, the idea, the ideal form of whatever claims your attention" (284). The speaker tests this as he reflects upon the history of Little Gidding and all those who have come to the site over the years, particularly during times of strife; he comes to realize that "These men, and those who opposed them / And

those whom they opposed / ...are folded in a single party," that of the dead who do not haunt this poem but nonetheless inform it (206).

Notably, these observations are bracketed by the quotation of Julian of Norwich's famous phrase, "All shall be well, and / All manner of thing shall be well," a promise that the speaker anchors in "the purification of the motive / In the ground of our beseeching" (206-7). History and its dead do not haunt *Little Gidding* (the poem or the place itself) because kneeling in a place where prayer has been valid has purified all things, transfigured them in another pattern. The speaker finds himself similarly purified, and can now approach the past with wonder instead of pain. This affirmation owes much to Julian: Barbara Newman notes that among Eliot's many "spiritual masters" in the *Four Quartets*, Julian alone "held no previous place in Eliot's well-furnished pantheon, nor is there evidence that he paid her any regard after *Little Gidding*" (Newman 430). Newman persuasively links the presence of Julian to Charles Williams, and particularly his long essay *The Forgiveness of Sins*, which was published in 1942, not long before *Little Gidding.* Williams's theological essay is densely packed with references to Julian of Norwich, and, characteristically, Williams defines the essay in terms of the transforming work of the "Holy Ghost," the figure of the

Trinity most closely linked to Pentecost.[23] Williams's model also offers Eliot a way to resist what Donoghue calls "a Manichean force within himself": Williams does not argue, "as the Manichaeans [sic] do vainly talk, [for] a putting off of the natural body" but rather that the "natural body" of society "is becoming accustomed to a whole new set of laws--at first as commands, then as habits, last as instincts" (172). As a result, renunciation must eventually yield to affirmation: the speaker's renunciation leads not to detachment but a transfiguration of his attachment to persons and places, his "natural body" and natural affections now governed by a new set of laws that emphasize community and reconciliation over selfish personal satisfaction.

Eliot, like both Williams and Ricoeur, is concerned in *Little Gidding* with forgiveness and reconciliation, which are vital not only for the peace of the individual soul, but also for any genuine union or communion between those who make up a community. Eliot's obsessive engagement with memory and the failures of the past is aan example of an engagement with what Ricoeur recognizes as the way in which "reflective thinking" bares "the place of moral accusation...imputability, that place where agents bind themselves to their actions and recognize themselves as accountable" (458). The "avowal of fault" in

[23] Pentecost serves as a defining event for Williams's theology, marking even the title of his theological interpretation of Christian history, *The Descent of the Dove* (Longmans Green, 1939).

this place is necessary in order to move to a second kind of speech act, that which "celebrates love and joy. There is forgiveness, this voice says" (458). Much of the epilogue of *Memory, History, Forgetting* wrestles with the "tension between the avowal and the hymn," and Williams's essay reflects a similar tension. He claims first, "Everything that has ever happened is an act of love or an act against love. Acts of love unite the City; acts against love disunite it" (171). Hence, Eliot calls not to "revive old factions" or "restore old policies / Or follow an antique drum" that would continue to deepen human divisions. But Williams alights upon something much like Ricoeur's imputability when he goes on to observe, "But of this disunity it is necessary that we should not be too quickly aware. The Lady Julian laid down a great maxim when she said: 'here was I learned that I should see my own sin, and not other men's sins'" (171). Ricoeur, too, recognizes that the difficulty of forgiveness stems from "rupturing the human bond" (464), and furthermore,

> human action is forever submitted to the experience of fault. Even if the guilt is not originary, it is forever radical. It is this adherence of guilt to the human condition that renders it not only unforgivable in fact, but unforgivable by right. Stripping the guilt from our existence would, it seems, destroy that existence completely. (466)

Eliot, however, realizes that while strife cannot be healed by blame, it also cannot be mended by excessive guilt, and his invocation of tradition, of all the warring parties now folded into one unity, is a reminder of exactly how little his guilt will

count, in the end, given "the purification of the motive / In the ground of our beseeching" (*CP* 207).

In Part IV, Eliot engages directly with this experience of fault and the means of transforming it, and these two rhymed stanzas with their clear pentecostal imagery demonstrate the tension Ricoeur would later identify between the avowal of fault and the hymn of forgiveness. Here, the "dove descending" brings with it "flame of incandescent terror" (207), images of both Pentecost and purgation. Eliot does not settle for rehearsing the biblical story of Pentecost, but instead examines its implications: that humanity has been given "the choice of pyre or pyre— / To be redeemed from fire by fire" (207). The fire of Pentecost offers a hope that stands in stark contrast to the other, more infernal fire that Eliot references, but the hope remains double-edged in the second stanza, as he acknowledges that it is "Love" who "devised the torment" offered by this choice, "The intolerable shirt of flame / Which human power cannot remove" (207). And as bleak as it may sound that "We only live, only suspire / Consumed by either fire or fire" (207), these lines draw one back to the other fires that dot the landscape of *Little Gidding*, from the conflagrations of the Blitz to the "refining fire" mentioned by the ghost of the dead master (205). One of these

fires consumes utterly; the other "stirs the dumb spirit" and then refines it (200).[24] For Williams in *The Forgiveness of Sins*, one fire is that of pardon and the other that of punishment, but the goal of both is to preserve the soul; this, he suggests, is what prompts Julian to make her claim that "All shall be well" (Williams 175).

Building upon the Pentecostal meditations of Part IV, Part V of *Little Gidding* takes up the teleological arc that is finally embedded in liturgy and explains to humanity its purposes and ends. Notably, Part V begins by taking us back to the ends and beginnings that mark *East Coker*, though no longer does the speaker obsess over whether his ends are in his beginnings or the other way around. Now, he acknowledges that human conceptions of time are often innately flawed, musing that "What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end is to make a beginning. / The end is where we start from" (207). As befits a poet, the speaker imagines this in terms of words and language, a structure in which "every word is at home… / neither diffident nor ostentatious" (207). The discussion of language could be applied to liturgy itself, in which one finds "The common word exact without vulgarity, / The formal word precise but not pedantic, / The complete consort dancing together," though the speaker brings it back to poetry, observing that in this model, "Every poem [is] an

[24] See also Thomas Howard, *The Dove Desccending*: "Here we come to that flat statement of simple fact: we are going to be consumed by fire in any event. That much is patent. The dread dignity with which we mortals are crowned, namely, the dignity of freedom, places the calamitous choice in our hands. The white and blissful heat of Beatitude or the sulphurous inferno of hell" (142).

epitaph" (208).[25] Critically, though, the dead and the living are irrevocably linked: as the dead depart, the living go with them, and yet the dead are also born, returning and bringing the living with them. The imagery here is distinctly sacramental: baptismal in its linking of death and life even as Eliot embeds it in the midst of Pentecost, where the past overcomes all barriers of time and language to speak into the present.

The result, in the poem's final stanza, is that the speaker declares his intention not to "cease from exploration," but is now aware that exploration's goal is "to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time" (208). And indeed, he does: the garden of *Burnt Norton* is evoked again with "the children in the apple tree" who are "heard, half-heard, in the stillness / Between two waves of the sea" (209). The bird's call of "Quick now, here, now, always" appears again, but now it is no longer a marker of desperate anguish. Instead, it reminds the speaker of "A condition of complete simplicity / (Costing not less than everything)" (209). The dark and difficult road of the *via negativa*, found and trod throughout the previous three quartets, releases the speaker into the ultimate culmination of Pentecost, where he can declare with confidence that

> ...all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well

[25] This passage also echoes Yeats, this time the final stanza of "Among School Children": "O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer, / Are you the leaf, the blossom, or the bole? / O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?" (105).

When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

At last, the longing and desire represented by the rose unites with the refining fire of Pentecost. The speaker accordingly finds himself re-embedded within community: the "you" and "I" of *Burnt Norton* is replaced throughout *Little Gidding* with the recurrence of "I" and "we." The speaker loses none of his individuality or particularity, but can see himself and his lost beloved, Emily Hale, as part of a larger and more significant story than their own failed hopes or desires, gathered together by the power of divine love.[26]

The purgative experience of the *Four Quartets* together allows Eliot's speaker to both retain his imputability while also attaining the kind of "happy forgetting" that Ricoeur longs for, yet ultimately cannot reach in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, in order to restore and transfigure social bonds. While both Ricoeur and Williams acknowledge that love and forgiveness are intimately linked, as Eliot's final figure of the rose and fire suggest, Williams explains how a happy forgiveness might work, anchored as it is for both himself and Eliot in the Atonement, remarking that "the lofty (but not unfleshed) diagram of redemption should not detain us too long. Its value to us is that it restores us again to facts

[26] Donogue observes, "A further reference is to the passage in *Paradiso*, Canto 33, where Dante sees the divine vision as scattered leaves of the universe, in-gathered now by love in one mass" (287).

and not what we feel about facts: it is to acts that we must return, for it is in acts that the Glory of God exists among us" (188). For Eliot, too, redemption is about the present moment and present deeds, speaking in such a way that "every word is at home, / Taking its place to support the others" (207), and the exploration of memory will lead to the deepest roots of being where regret is not forgotten "because not looked for / But heard, half-heard, in the stillness / Between two waves of the sea" (209). Ricoeur's happy forgetting here is not simply a willed amnesia of past wrongs. The knowledge of the past remains; both history and memory continue to exist, as they must for any community to continue to exist in any coherent or co-inhering form. As Williams acknowledges, "The union of all citizens of the City is not to leave out any facts. Everything that has happened is to be a part of it, so far as men are strong enough to bear it; the holier the stronger" (171). But as Eliot demonstrates in *Little Gidding*, the crushing weight of guilt, desire, or nostalgia is lifted. The day in the rose garden remains, and the voices of the children in the trees still echo through the air. The truth of these past desires and longings can be acknowledged as formative in the life of the soul, but the pentecostal fire, the fire-tongued speech of the dead, helps to strip them of their anguish. *Little Gidding* aptly illustrates what Williams's essay suggests, and what Ricoeur gropes for: that what is forgotten is the pain revealed

by the hard truth of the *via negativa*, and it is replaced by the "bliss by love" that comes from a more affirmative path (Willliams 185-6).

The Pentecostal turn of *Little Gidding* also makes the *Quartets* a work of communal as well as personal wholeness. The scattered rose petals of *Burnt Norton* are now part of the rose that is one with the refining fire, and the speaker similarly sees himself as restored to a community of a specific time and place that also stretches beyond this time and place. Having attained something close to Ricoeur's happy forgetting, he can at the same time remember without pain, and add his own memories to that of the great cloud of witnesses who preceded him, contributing something to those who will come after. The role of liturgical ritual here cannot be overlooked. By mapping his own experiences of loss, disappointment, and failure (his failed marriage, his affair with Emily Hale) onto a broader narrative that frankly acknowledged and even embraced the reality of those experiences, the speaker was able to attain the transfigured wholeness to which that narrative eventually leads. And the poem itself reflects this wholeness. Others have noted that Eliot first used the five-part structure of the *Quartets* in *The Wasteland*, but the fragments and ruins of that early masterpiece are, like the rest of Eliot's corpus, folded into a final unity at the end of the *Quartets*.

Of course, this ending makes for a very tidy and satisfying denouement, especially since Eliot never wrote another major poem after the *Quartets*. But did he intend as anything more than a personal closing poetic statement? Again, the liturgical, ritual qualities of the work suggest so. Liturgy is, inevitably, communal, and Eliot's speaker realizes over the course of the poem that his own struggles, which seemed to him so unique and so all-consuming, are both more universal and less significant than he supposed. What he experienced happens "Never and always," as he notes at the close of *Little Gidding* Part I; the compound ghost of Part II sternly reinforces this point. And to repurpose the language and structures of the liturgy is to offer audiences the opportunity to enter a highly compressed, intense linguistic and emotional experience that is itself almost liturgical in nature. Thus, in the process of finding relief from personal disappointment through liturgy's teleological trajectory, Eliot also collapses differences and reminds his community of their inherent unity and provides a fresh vision of order and coherence in a world that otherwise might seem on the verge of breakdown.

But furthermore, Eliot's own prose writings indicate a broader goal than a poem composed merely for himself, or a circle of literary sympathizers, or even those of corresponding religious belief. In his essay "The Idea of a Christian Society," he observes that the Church "maintains the paradox that while we are

each responsible for our own souls, we are all responsible for all other souls, who are, like us, on their way to a future state of heaven or hell" (*CC* 73). And although the Anglican Church, and particularly its Anglo-Catholic minority, might have represented a distinctly marginal example of English culture, Eliot saw no obvious impediment in that. As he wrote in "Notes towards the Definition of Culture," England needed not "to restore, or to revive a vanishing culture under modern conditions which make it impossible, but to grow a contemporary culture from the old roots" (*CC* 127). And if the old roots of English culture, as represented by Anglo-Catholicism, constituted a minority of the English population, that did not trouble him either, for "the satellite culture exercises a considerable influence upon the stronger culture; and so plays a larger part in the world at large than it could in isolation" (128). Even if Eliot did not succeed in a project of broader cultural regeneration, English culture and Anglophone writing continues to have the "great advantage" of being "constantly influenced" by the ideas, language, and concerns of his poetry, and particularly of the *Four Quartets*. Church congregations and individuals around the globe continue to engage with the *Quartets*, particularly around Easter; most prominently, in 2015, King's College in Cambridge launched its Easter Festival with Eliot's *Four Quartets*, with readers including the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, and artwork by noted artist Makoto Fujimara that

was inspired by the poetry. The poems continue to exert a quiet but powerful influence over culture through their submission to the timebound yet eternal nature of liturgical forms.

CHAPTER THREE

George Mackay Brown's Agricultural Rituals

Background

While Eliot struggled in the *Four Quartets* with a surfeit of memory and how to regulate it by subordinating it to a healthy communal identity, Orcadian writer George Mackay Brown, writing some thirty years later, faced a very different set of problems. In sharp contrast to Eliot, Brown's works rarely come across as an effort to come to terms with personal affliction or tormented memory, although certainly his biography indicates personal struggles with alcoholism, poverty, and isolation. Indeed, Brown often flatly denied a personal or autobiographical element in many of his works, although characters such as Colm Sinclair in the short story "The Tarn and the Rosary," Magnus Olafson in "Sealskin," and Thorfinn Ragnarson in *Beside the Ocean of Time* certainly correspond to parts of Brown's own biography, and at times seem very much like thinly-veiled authorial stand-ins.[1]

[1] Rowena Murray and Brian Murray note several examples, including Thorfinn from *Beside the Ocean of Time*, which Brown dismissed in a 1994 interview (254), and Colm in "The Tarn and the Rosary" (162), whose father's reading habits even echo those of Brown's father. They also note his use of local personalities in novels such as *Greenvoe*, which Brown admitted in 1995 (131).

More often, Brown devotes himself to regionalism, either in a historical or a contemporary mode—or, at times, blending these two approaches, as in his final novel *Beside the Ocean of Time*, where a boy in contemporary Orkney persistently imagines himself into Orkney's historical or legendary past. Yet, as Elizabeth Huberman points out, he is not a regional writer in a narrow, pejorative sense. For Brown, Orcadian communities served as a microcosm of humanity; he "uses the isolation of these island people and the relative simplicity and timelessness of their ways to clarify and intensify the essential human problems which are his real subject" (Huberman 33-4). Thus, while Brown saw himself writing particularly to and for Orkney and Orcadians, his close study of the local and immediate nonetheless speaks to more universal preoccupations with issues of memory, identity, and ecological estrangement that haunted twentieth-century audiences throughout the United Kingdom and beyond.[2]

Nostalgia for a simpler, purer way of life in in which cultural identity is clearer and relationship to the land lingers has marked cosmopolitan attitudes towards regional literature for a long time, which risks branding it with a naïve idealism or primitivism that the writers themselves might chafe at. While John Crowe Ransom, in his 1934 essay "The Aesthetics of Regionalism," called

[2] Despite the deep local roots of Brown's work, he was not always popular among his fellow Orcadians. Ron Ferguson's *George Mackay Brown: The Wound and the Gift* records stories from Stewart Conn and Christopher Rush about early hostility to Brown's often-unvarnished portrayals of island life (192-3).

regionalism "as reasonable as non-regionalism, whatever the latter may be called: cosmopolitanism, progressivism" and so forth, he added that it was in fact "more reasonable, for it is more natural, and whatever is natural is persistent and must be rationalized" (293-4). A regional economy, he claimed, "has always worked and never broken down (295) and their art exhibits a "natural piety" in harmony with the natural surroundings (297). Roberto Dainatto points out that the terms of nineteenth-century national discourse, such as "authenticity, autonomy, ethnic and cultural unity, natural identity," are often the same terms raised in relation to regionalism (488). Yet Brown's regionalism, *contra* Ransom, grapples with a struggling local economy and an aesthetic under constant revision and mutation. Like Dainatto, Brown is suspicious of notions of local cultural unity that could evolve into new expressions of narrow nationalism or impose standards of purity that exclude all external influence. The regional literature with which Brown can be identified is, as Richard Russell suggests, "astonishingly plural and cosmopolitan" in its deep exploration of local history and indigenous practice that also incorporates, rather than rejects, a history of external influence ("Heaney's Regionalism" 49). For Brown, Orkney is indeed a landscape which "functions as a repository of cultural and religious signifiers that must be read closely to determine how regionalism has powerful and

potentially liberating effects on cultural consciousness" ("Heaney's Regionalism" 62).

The importance of memory embedded in place undergirded the Scottish and specifically Orcadian context which Brown saw himself as addressing. Rather than Eliot's excess of memory, however, Brown and many other Scottish writers found themselves working with a dearth of communal or historical memory. Cairns Craig suggests that Scottish writers have long struggled with a sense that Scottish culture is a series of erasures in which "each stage of development—or degradation—wipes out what went before it and destroys the very possibility of continuity upon which tradition is founded" (18). Events such as the Reformation, in which Calvinism came to Scotland through John Knox, as well as the Disruption of the Church of Scotland of 1843, are not mere turning-points in history, but places in which history breaks in two without a bridge of continuity to join the halves (Craig 18).[3] The result is what Ricoeur would characterize as "too little memory," and thus a compulsion to avoid remembering (79). This aversion to remembering can open the community to "manipulated memory" whereby the ideology of an institutional power, such as

[3] John Knox and John Calvin met during Knox's sojourn in Geneva from 1554-1556. The Disruption of 1843 was a conflict within the Scottish Presbyterian church over whether wealthy patrons had the right to appoint ministers, or whether a congregation had the right to reject a minister appointed by a patron. The ministers and elders who left the Church of Scotland formed the Free Church of Scotland. The two branches reunited in 1929. For more information, see J. H. S. Burleigh's *A Church History of Scotland* (1988).

the Scottish Reformed Church, appropriates the narrative through which a country or a people once constructed their identity. While ideology can be "the guardian of identity, offering a symbolic response to the causes affecting the fragility of this identity," it can also impose a history that overwrites or overrides what a more local community remembers or how its members perceive their own identity (79); as Ricoeur observes, this involves "a strategy of forgetting as much as…a strategy of remembering" (85). Craig reads a similar sequence of events into the cultural history of Scotland, and certainly Brown is concerned that his fellow islanders have forgotten their own history and thus their identity, too.[4]

In this chapter, I will focus particularly on three consecutive works from the early 1970s: the play *A Spell for Green Corn* (1970), and the poetry collection *Fishermen with Ploughs* (1971), and the novel *Greenvoe* (1972). These three texts are rarely studied in relation to one another, but when read together, a structural and thematic pattern emerges. In each text, Brown focuses on agricultural ritual, but in addition, he turns the text itself into a ritual experience for the reader by giving it a six-part structure intended to open onto a contemplative, sacramental experience. This six-part ritual structure aims to restore his audience's memory

[4] This interpretation of Scottish literary history, which Brown absorbed from his mentor Edwin Muir, has been appropriately contested by critics such as Douglas Gifford, who notes that this narrative is part of a broader habit of editing out or ignoring Scottish achievement by writers with personal axes to grind (28-9).

of their own identity and to soften the divide between the natural and human modes of existence, an effort reinforced by the agricultural rituals contained within each text, through which the characters themselves are ideally restored to relationship with the land. When this six-part ritual structure opens into what Brown calls at one point "the silence of the seventh syllable" (*SGC* MS) the ritual is successful, and synthesizes the Catholic, Protestant, and pagan character of the islands; but when the ritual closes with no promise of a seventh day, it may be read as having failed, with no integration of past or future.

For Brown, the agricultural cycles that bind humanity and the earth are the locus where this history and this identity meet. Agriculture, as Gavin Miller observes, is also closely linked to religious practice. Miller argues that Brown's Catholicism "is a twentieth-century response to a narrative of progress that Christianity, in all its various sects, helped to compose" (478); Brown sees this especially in the work of the Reformation, which "set Scotland on course, with an already Protestant England, towards a future in which 'fruitfulness' will be wring out of the British Empire" (Miller 475). As Miller notes, Halcrow (the protagonist of Brown's story "Master Halcrow, Priest") fears the Reformation because he fears "the loss of the Host, the Catholic Church's expression of the 'ritual of corn' which symbolically binds men and women to the agricultural

cycle" (474). Many of Brown's works contain at least a passing meditation on the sacrament, but in his second novel, *Magnus*, he made this link explicit:

> Out of the earth darkness men set the bread on their everyday tables. It is the seal and substance of all their work; their very nature is kneaded into the substance of the bread; it is, in an ultimate sense, their life. They bring a tithe of this earth-gold to the holy table. At the moment of consecration, the bread—that is to say, man and work, his pains, his joys, and his hopes—is utterly suffused and irradiated with the divine. *Hic est enim corpus meum.* (159)

The abolishing of time in the Eucharistic ritual is thus also a moment in which the barriers between humankind and the rest of creation are dropped, or rather, when humanity and creation merge in an offering to God and also simultaneously participate in the divine. Brown's work thus often seeks to recover the loss of the host for the sake of both Protestant and Catholic Orcadians, a gesture he roots in their shared pagan, agricultural past.

This merging of man and creation in the Eucharistic act is vital not only for identity, but also for the restoration of justice and order into the created world, as Brown would understand it. He often contrasts work of agriculture in his writing to the work of industry, particularly industry that is masterminded by outside forces who care nothing for the identity of Orcadians or the social fabric of their local community. Agriculture, as practiced on the island, brings its adherents into close relationship with the both the local landscape and with local history, as farms might remain in the same family for generations, and also is the

key to a pre-Christian ethic that saw humanity in relationship with the land. In a world that appears constantly on the verge of breakdown, as it seemed to appear for Brown, this vision of local justice through agricultural practice was deeply appealing. While Miller focuses closely on three of Brown's short stories, a survey of Brown's fiction, poetry, and drama reveals that agriculture assumed a primary importance for both religious practice and cultural memory as Brown reached artistic maturity.

And although Brown's connection between agriculture, the Eucharist, and a vision of a redeemed world is in some ways idiosyncratic, the social ecology of American political theoretician Murray Bookchin has parallel's to Brown's own ideas. Like Brown, Bookchin responded to the crises of his day in a similar way to others preoccupied with similar issues of justice and the local. In his 1982 book *The Ecology of Freedom*, Bookchin predicted the "starkly conflicting prospects of a harmonized world with an ecological sensibility based on a rich commitment to community, mutual aid, and new technologies, on the one hand, and the terrifying prospect…of an apocalypse that may well end humanity's tenure on the planet" (18). These two poles of possibility dominate the three texts by Brown that are under discussion in this chapter, and the likelihood of either coming to pass depends upon both the success of the rituals within the text as well as the text's own structure.

Like Brown before him, Bookchin traces this pivotal moment of crisis to a decay in both institutions and cultural values, leading to both social and ecological breakdown. The injustice and alienation that marks Western culture extends into the exploitation of the natural environment (19), and Bookchin suggests that environmentalism only furthers that exploitation by perceiving nature as "a passive habitat composed of 'objects' such as animals, plants, minerals, and the like that must merely be rendered more serviceable for human use" (21). In contrast, ecology explores the "dynamic balance of nature, with the interdependence of living and nonliving things" (22). Moreover, human culture is not separate from ecology or the natural world; rather, culture evolved out of nature, and remains inextricably entwined with it. However, as Hubert Zapf notes, this link often is overlooked or denied due to "the deep-rooted self-alienation of human beings within the civilizatory project of modernity which, in its anthropocentric illusion of autonomy, has tried to cut itself off from and erase its roots in the natural world" (52). Because nature "is as much a precondition for the development of society-not merely its emergence-as technics, labor, language, and mind," human culture cannot break from nature, but is "the very 'knowingness' of nature, the embodiment of nature's evolution into intellect, mind and self-reflexivity" (33, 38). However, Bookchin suggests, the development of hierarchies built upon power and dominance disrupted loving

communal ties between human beings by introducing a struggle for separation from others to attain individuality. This struggle for, rather than against, separation also introduced a dynamic of dominance in humanity's relationship with nature. Bookchin argues that "[s]ince the Renaissance, the idea that knowledge lies locked within a mind closeted by its own supranatural limitations and insights has been the foundation for all our doubts about the very existence of a coherent constellation that can even be called nature" (38). No longer were humans in a relationship of mutual beneficial influence with the natural world as part of a dynamic ecosystem.

Both Bookchin and Brown perceive social and ecological problems as linked, and perceive ritual as integral to the healing of the divide between humanity and nature as well as the divisions within human society itself. Bookchin writes of "ecological ceremonials," or rituals that directly involve or invoke the natural world, and thus

> validate the "citizenship" nature acquires as part of the human environment. "The People" (to use the name that many preliterate communities give to themselves) do not disappear into nature or nature into "the People." But nature is not merely a habitat; it is a participant that advises the community with its omens, secures it with its camouflage…nourishes it with a largesse of plants and animals, and in its countless functions and counsels is absorbed into the community's nexus of rights and duties. (47)

In summary, Bookchin claims, the ecological ceremonial, or a ritual that brings humans and nature into relationship, can "socialize the natural world and complete the involvement of society with nature" (48).

For Brown, the Eucharist verges on being such an ecological ceremonial; even in his earliest collections, he suggests nature not only provides the materials for the Eucharistic elements, but participates in it. In "December Day, Hoy Sound," from his 1959 collection *Loaves and Fishes*, he suggests

> The creatures of earth
> Have seasons and stations, under the quartered sun
> Ploughshare and cornstalk, millwheel and grinning rags.
> The December seed kneels at his frosty vigil,
> Sword by his side for the long crusade to the light
> In trumpeting March, with the legion of lamb and leaf. (*CP* 19)

Similarly, in "Chapel between Cornfield and Shore," a poem best known for its sharp critique of Knox in the opening stanza, Brown suggests that it is from "the thrawn acre" that "new ceremonies" will come to replace those lost in the Reformation. The bell of the chapel mingles its sound with the crashing of the waves, blessing the work of farmer and fisherman alike (*CP* 35). This participatory vision of religious work involves the human world and the natural world equally: the wave's crashing serves a purpose equivalent to that of the bell, and the seed in the ground holds vigil much like farmers who wait equally for spring and for Easter. As anthropomorphic as the image may be, the parallels remain deeply meaningful for Brown, indicating a mutual experience shared

between the human and the natural world. Furthermore, because nature can and has participated in this sacramental act, it can act as a source of memory and recovery when the human community has been separated from its own memory, as with the ruined chapel. Cairns Craig acknowledges this recovery might be possible through some kind of mythic turn, noting that the possibility "haunts the historyless environment" of Scottish literature: "against the destructive powers of progress [Scottish literature] sets a knowledge more ancient than civilisation, one which is inscribed in and maintained by the particular qualities of its landscape" (150). While the Reformation takes over the Scottish Church, "it is less successful in suppressing the sacred rituals of agriculture" (Miller 474) than those of Catholicism, but the threat is posed nonetheless, and industrial progress appears poised in Brown's work to destroy the agricultural rituals that the Reformation let stand. Furthermore, the Reformed Church seemed ill-equipped, in Brown's view, to combat these depredations; he described it in a letter as "the pale watery Calvinism of present-day Orkney" (qtd in Bicket 172). But if the nature itself participates in and thus retains the history and memory from which those rituals came, reuniting with it offers Brown's poetic speakers and fictional characters a way to accomplish their return to history through a renewed participation in the ineffable in tandem with nature.

And although Brown and Bookchin differ significantly in key ways—Bookchin would consider Brown's pagan-tempered Catholicism complicit in oppressive hierarchies, rather than a way out of them[5]—both ultimately turn to ritual as a key method for healing the breaches in history that sundered humanity and nature, and Brown turns in particularly to rituals filtered through the sacramental lens acquired in his conversion to Catholicism. Ritual has this power because it is linked not only to the virtues but also to the past from which the practice of those virtues came. And this past is not only the historical past, but also Ricoeur's "suprahistorical" mode, which "directs the gaze away from the future and carries it toward the eternity-dispensing powers of art and religion" (292). Louis Dupré's 1992 essay "Ritual: The Divine Play of Time" illuminates how ritual can be "eternity-dispensing," rejuvenating a community through suprahistorical means. One of the most unsettling features of modernity, Dupré suggests, is that "temporality [is] conceived as being exclusively oriented toward the future," and the past is regarded as inaccessible and unrepeatable (206). As a result, life becomes "mostly functional, directed by the goal to be obtained, rather than by intrinsic meaning," and "[n]o place, no occupation, no relation provides the security of lastingness" (207). Ritual is necessary because it preserves both the "sense of a reversible past" and "the sense of a meaningful

[5] See Bookchin's conflation of patriarchal cultural structures and the "domineering, jealous God" in the chapter "Justice—Equal and Exact" in *The Ecology of Freedom*.

present" (207) because it can resist "the shifts and changes of the restless narrative" (200).

For Dupré, ritual abolishes "profane, chronological time," much as the suprahistorical directs people towards the eternal for Ricoeur. The time of ritual is "privileged" and expresses "a transcendent dimension in existence" not by staying with the present, but by recalling the past, and particularly the "founding events" of the past that are reenacted in rituals. This process is not a historical reenactment that simply repeats the past. Instead, these events are "re-presented," and as a result, all the other events that are connected to it are also evoked, and "attain a new potential to be retrieved from the past" (204). Dupré sees this in Christian ritual as a promise that "all of history becomes present…no part of the past is lost" (205). That promise creates a sense of permanence in fleeting individual existences, and ritual allows for "retrieving the important stages of existence from the passing flow of time" (199). The future remains important in this narrative, but it also allows for a meaningful experience of the present and enables the past to remain in dialogue with both. Moreover, the sacred time of ritual is not permanent: the past is retrievable, but must eventually recede in order to allow life in the present moment to carry on. But that present moment contains a capacity for transformation or critical dialogue that reshapes and stabilizes everyday life.

For Brown, the Eucharist exemplified this entry into sacred time, and his texts themselves became ritual performances with a Eucharistic rite, often with Reformed and at times pagan inflections, at its climax. The Eucharist's agricultural link, as discussed above, was a key component of its eternity-dispensing powers: the cycles of the seasons, of sowing and harvest, linked practitioners to those who had toiled before them as well as to those who would do the same work in the years ahead. Also, because people often worked the same land as their ancestors, it was a rich depository of memory, memory which could be retrieved at each stage in the agricultural process, particularly in the climactic moment in which the goods of the harvest were offered up as the sacraments. So vital was this to Brown that he appropriated commonly-available symbolism to adapt to his own ideological and artistic ends, seen most particularly in the symbolism that accrues around the number seven in his work. His frequent use of sets of seven in his work was a way of gesturing toward this sacred ritual and its power to bridge the gaps in history, and in *A Spell for Green Corn, Greenvoe*, and *Fishermen with Ploughs*, the ritual structure of the text, with a ritual performance embedded at the climax, enabled Brown to experiment with new ways to use ritual in his work to bring humankind and nature closer together through his Eucharistic harvest rites.

A Spell for Green Corn

In Brown's early works of the 1970s, beginning with *A Spell for Green Corn*, he began to draw these ideas together in art, namely seven-part texts centering around an agricultural ritual that called a community back to its true nature and into its relationships with the divine and creation. *A Spell for Green Corn* was published first of these three works, appearing in 1970, though Brown indicates that he was working on all three during the mid- to late-Sixties, and *Spell* was first performed on BBC's Radio Three in 1967 (*Spell* 8). This broadcast drama, which contains six parts, opens in medieval period, "the age of saints and fish and miracles." This first episode is when the fishermen first become farmers, establishing a sacred tie to the land that Brown emphasizes by having a priest command the starving fishermen to till the fields; until the first crops him, he feeds them with miracles. In the middle four episodes of the play, the action leaps forward to the seventeenth century, when the Reformation is firmly in place and it is "a time of witches and ploughs and kirk sessions" (16). The crops are failing, and a young woman, Sigrid, realizes that the "holy fire" of the midsummer bonfire which "feeds the island" requires a sacrifice—and she herself, after spending a night in the cornfields with fiddler Storm Kolson, is that sacrifice. Their union brings forth a child, but also leads to Sigrid's execution as a witch. In the final episode, titled "Resurrection," the action leaps forward to the

"age of machines and numbers and official forms," when Storm and Sigrid meet again as Freya and the Blind Fiddler; once they reconcile, Storm prepares himself to "break the machines" that represent an impersonal, mechanistic world order that has once again severed humanity's sacred tie with agriculture. The print version of the play, published in 1970, contained a seventh section, an appendix of fictional documents, including the protagonist's journal, that further clarify the meaning of the play.

This play, which Brown reworked off and on over the course of fifteen years, marks one of the first occasions when he explores his notion that agriculture is can serve as a sacred rite that preserves memory and binds together the community. As Sabine Schmid observes, Brown's "welding together of the Christian sacrifice and the Christian church with northern versions of pagan and agricultural sacrifice is unique," and in many of his works, he explores how "the unending ritual of harvest is seen as a synthesis of Christ's crucifixion and the miracle of transubstantiation which is repeated in the making of bread and ale" (97). As Brown himself wrote in a letter to BBC producer Stewart Conn, "it's a <u>religious</u> play (not moral, of course, anything but)…the relationship between man and nature and supernatural powers" (Letter to Stewart Conn 1). Indeed, Brown acknowledges moral issues such as sexual mores or drunkenness only to dismiss them as secondary to what he sees as

deeper issues, such as the dissolution of humanity's relationship with God and creation, and the emphasis on the letter of the law over its spirit, seen most clearly in the trials endured by Sigrid.

Yet the miracle of agriculture falters in the second episode because, as Malcolm Mackenzie Ross notes:

> Calvinism annihilated the Catholic Eucharistic symbols and destroyed the analogical awareness of the simultaneous presence of the mystical and historical body and blood of Christ in the bread and the wine on the altar. It also destroyed the corporate sense of participation in the redemptive sacrificial act. (82)[6]

Brown more simply observes that in the second episode, "all ritual, mystery, symbolism were actively discouraged by the church, and they have to be carried out surreptitiously" (Conn letter). This is why Storm's fiddle is appropriated, he writes, and why Sigrid's decision to save it is both vital and transgressive: she flouts the austere Calvinism of the community in favor of "ritual, mystery, symbolism." Unlike the other people of Hellya, Sigrid is sensitive to the holiness

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[6] This view of the Eucharist, while associated with Calvinism, does run strongly counter to Calvin's own view of the sacrament. While rejecting the doctrine of transubstantiation, Calvin disagreed flatly with those who argued that communicants partook only of spirit instead of flesh and blood. In the *Institutes* he wrote, "Therefore, what our mind does not comprehend let faith conceive—viz. that the Spirit truly unites things separated by space. That sacred communion of flesh and blood by which Christ transfuses his life into us, just as if it penetrated our bones and marrow, he testifies and seals in the Supper, and that not by presenting a vain or empty sign, but by there exerting an efficacy of the Spirit by which he fulfills what he promises." He went on to add, "I hold then…that the sacred mystery of the Supper consists of two things—the corporeal signs, which presented to the eye, represent invisible things in a manner adapted to our weak capacity, and the spiritual truth, which is at once figured and exhibited by the signs" (563-4). This interpretation does not flatly eliminate the simultaneous presence that Ross describes, or destroy a corporate sense of participation—Calvin is clear on the unity which the sacrament should bring to the congregation, too. (600).

of the agricultural ritual; in an early draft, she laments to the lord's factor, that the "green word" was not spoken over the ploughs, the seed, or the harrows in the spring (*SGC* MS).

By saving Storm's fiddle, Sigrid preserves the historical memory of the village as well as their harvest; her sacred memory combines with Storm's sacred music to preserve Hellya. The villagers were at risk of forgetting the rites that accompany the bonfire, but Sigrid's sacrifice of her virginity (and thus her social standing and then her life) overcomes the gap in history and restores the harvest and right relations with the land.[7] In the end, her execution is a "ceremony" (49), and the burning of her body is deemed necessary because "the fire must be lit, or the Dance of the Harvesters will be ruined. The girl must burn" (52). But, as the Musician/Storm notes, the villagers will not burn her with proper "ceremony," hence the dire circumstances encountered when the play leaps forward into the twentieth century.[8] The failure of the people to recognize Sigrid's own sacrificial

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[7] Brown does not make it clear why this is necessary. Presumably Sigrid's fecundity is symbolically linked to the fertility of the fields, and it contributes to the accusations of witchcraft against her in the fourth episode, "The Wrong Word," but like many other things in the play, this is left implicit rather than explicit. The parallels to Alice Voar in *Greenvoe*, another woman known for her nonmarital sexual relationships are clear, but Brown's many drafts (none of which are dated) demonstrate how he struggles to balance Sigrid's importance, and the pagan overtones of her spiritual intuition, against the otherwise feckless Storm's importance as the all-healing, word-bearing artist.

[8] In some drafts, the sixth episode verges upon dystopia, with loudspeakers blaring promises such as "THEY'RE COMING. THE SHAPES OF THE FUTURE ARE HERE. THE NEW IMAGES ARE ON YOUR STREETS" and "MILLIONS NOW LIVING WILL NEVER DIE," clear appropriations of biblical promises phrased in nearly Orwellian style (*SGC* MS).

act, apparently blessed and sanctioned by her fertility and the child that results from it, causes them to debase her ceremonial work at the end of the seventeenth-century section of the play. Storm, as the Blind Fiddler, must complete the work, aided by his long memory and his precious fiddle.

When performed as a play, *A Spell for Green Corn* contained only the six numbered episodes found in the printed version, which end with some ambiguity when the Blind Fiddler's hopeful decides to create a music that will break the machines—the machines of bureaucracy perhaps even more than the machines of industry. However, this printed version contains a seventh part, an appendix of sorts titled "Some seventeenth century records from the island of Hellya, Orkney, concerning a witch trial." The excerpted pieces in question purport to be fragments of letters, court records, and manuscripts, not to mention the notebook of main character Storm Kolson; however, Hellya is a wholly fictional island, and the prose and poetry fragments in the appendix are in turn fabricated by Brown, indicating that Brown transformed his six-part play into a seven-part dramatic novel.[9] This seventh section may seem unnecessary, and certainly it causes the reader some perplexity at first, trying to imagine how these disparate fragments might be staged. A skeptical reader might argue that the

[9] Brown's letter to Stewart Conn makes it clear that the radio drama had only six parts. Storm's notebook is mentioned in an early draft of the play, when a preacher in the final section dismisses it as the ravings of a corrupted mind, but the seventh episode itself is not included in the drafts.

final section is printed to make up for a lack in the original text, where Brown's characteristic terseness is at times more opaque than enigmatic and his inexperience with stagecraft interferes with the effectiveness of his plot. But the added chapter allows Brown to expand the world he can barely hint at in the text itself and clarify the petty jealousies of the community as well as the broader issue of cultural amnesia and ecological estrangement that plagues the people of Hellya.

Furthermore, the seventh section illuminates the structure of the whole work. Here, Brown suggests the significance of his original structure in the fragments from Storm Kolson's notebook where the character writes, "Six syllables of the seven-syllabled word created the world and all that is in it. We go into the silence of the seventh syllable." In earlier drafts, Brown wrestled with how to include this idea of the "seventh syllable." In one version, he drafted a speech in which a character in the final episode declared:

> The first syllable of that word called forth the light. The sixth syllable called forth man himself. But I'm telling you here and now, dear brethren, that only in the seventh syllable of Sabbath will the full meaning of the divine word be made manifest to all. The Word and the Bread… (*SGC* MS)

In another early draft, Sigrid and Storm's union is given priestly overtones when Brown writes, "At midnight the poet and witch—word and fire—have raised hands of blessing over the sick corn, and now they go their separate ways into

the stillness of the seventh syllable, to the cinder, to the fragrant shape on the table…" (*SGC* MS). It is as though their union, which takes place in the fields, is itself a sacramental rite and they are the celebrants, given the allusion to bread. In the play, as well as in works like *Fishermen with Ploughs* and *Greenvoe*, Brown invites his audience into the silence of that seventh syllable, a contemplative Sabbath that provides a respite from generative speech; the six parts or syllables that led into that seventh suggest the trajectory of whatever speech is to follow, whether it is to be creative or destructive.

Brown's need to emphasize the seventh part of *A Spell for Green Corn* is telling, however, as though he did not trust his audience to understand the silence of the seventh syllable unless he articulated it. In that appendix, though, he (through Storm Kolson) offers a note of explanation:

> The Word was imprisoned between the black boards, and chained and padlocked, in the pulpit of the kirk—impossible for it to get free among the ploughs and the nets, that season of famine. Therefore the lesser word, the fiddle, the poem, the rune, must work the miracle of bread. (90-91)

The people of Hellya have lost their close connection with the land, having lost their close relationship with the divine Word that drew humanity and nature together. As a result, they suffer the famines and crop failures that Sigrid manages to divert by remembering the importance of an eternity-dispensing power that is now found only in Storm's fiddle-playing. The poem, as a lesser

word, cannot indulge in the same silence as the perfect divine word, and is accordingly made more explicit. As Brown notes in the very next line, the poet therefore "no more troubled the pool of silence" until he was alone, and "His cold stare / returned to its true mask, interrogation of silence" (91). But what the audience requires may not be the poet's solitary interrogation, and the play is therefore "the music for controlling the Machines" that have taken possession of the island and threaten the relationship between the land and its human inhabitants.

The play itself is less successful than the works that followed it, including *Fishermen with Ploughs* and *Greenvoe.* In part, it struggles because although the spiritual heritage of Hellya's agricultural past is made clear, the ritual itself remains frustratingly vague. The dance around the bonfire is critical, but Brown cannot clarify why it matters or what significance it holds to the events that open the play, or exactly how Sigrid and Storm's transgressive tryst in the fields helps to prompt the regeneration of the harvest—although given Sigrid's subsequent fecundity, their actions were clearly an important part. Clearly the ritual represents the kind of ecological ceremonial that Bookchin calls for, but its Eucharistic ties are weak and its link to Hellya's history remains unclear. Moreover, Brown needs the seventh section to explain Storm's disappearance,

which is a puzzling element of the plot.[10] While the final sharing of bread and wine between the Blind Fiddler/Storm, Freya/Sigrid, and the tinkers is clearly a Eucharistic moment, these disparate pieces of rituals (dancing, the bonfire, harvest, the Eucharistic sharing) do not mesh into a harmonious, much less repeatable, whole.[11] Brown's hostility to the Reformation only compounds the failure to create a synthesis of the islanders' history and memory through this ritual and this play.

In the end, Brown's characters gesture towards ritual action rather than completing it, and the elevation of chronological time into ritual time cannot be completed, though Brown clearly intends the play to be read hopefully. It does gesture towards the communal identity he wishes to create and reinforce: that of a people tied to both the land and the divine through the Eucharist itself, as he indicates by suggesting the Word has become trapped in the Reformation church. Brown's frustration with the historical forgetfulness brought on by the Reformation is on display again here with a flash of luminous clarity. Because

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[10] The earlier drafts, titled *The Magic Fiddle*, hold a clearer explanation, in which trows or trolls living under the hill kidnap Storm, luring him away with promises immortality and worldwide fame, in archetypal fairyland fashion. Peter Maxwell Davies picks up on this in his composition based on Brown's text; Brown, however, excises the trows from the final version of the play, leaving the audience bewildered by Storm's vanishing.

[11] In part, this may be due to the play's lengthy process of revision. Early drafts indicate Brown's fascination in the tension between religion and art, as the Saint of Part I carries on a debate with an equally archetypal Poet. Sigrid's role expands or contracts depending on what purpose Brown is pursuing in any given iteration of the play. The final product contains both fossils from earlier drafts (Storm's disappearance, for instance) as well as gaps from revisions (explanations of Sigrid's intuition or broader role, or the function of the agricultural ritual).

Brown perceived the Reformers as failing to value the way in which the Eucharist served as a meeting place of God, humanity, and creation, the health of both the land and the people suffered, and art was forced to take that place. But this array of number symbolism, religious themes, and ritual gestures overwhelm the narrow bounds of the text, and Brown ends up exploring them and the structure he introduces in *Spell for Green Corn* more effectively in the more familiar genres of poetry and prose in his next two works, *Fishermen with Ploughs* and his debut novel, *Greenvoe*.

Fishermen With Ploughs

Fishermen with Ploughs was Brown's fifth volume of poetry, and together with Brown's play *A Spell for Green Corn* and his novel *Greenvoe*, it delves deep into Brown's concern for how a community might be regenerated after experiencing ruin—or whether it can be regenerated at all. The destruction wreaked by the Dragon, an image that hovers over the narrative's beginning and end, can only be counteracted with fruitfulness in the form of a sacramental agriculture, but the collection suggest the profound fragility of those restorative rites. Reading this enigmatic poetic narrative through the lens of the sacred rituals of agriculture and the forces that seek to disrupt or break them reveals the often-sublimated currents of conflict and joy that bind the whole together. The poems form an impressionistic narrative of life in the Orkney community of

Rackwick over the course of the centuries, from first settlement to destruction and scattering in the wake of a hypothetical nuclear apocalypse. Brown described it in a letter to Ernest Marwick as a "Rackwick Anthology," alluding to Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology,* adding that it was "a collection of poems, mostly very brief, illustrating life in the valley from the beginning. Of course it's all imagination" (qtd in Murray & Murray 149). The poem cycle follows the people of Rackwick from their origins in Norway during a time of crisis. As Brown explains in his opening note, "Their god, the beautiful Balder, is dead. They are in flight from starvation, pestilence, turbulent neighbors… But also they are compelled west by the promise of a new way of life: agriculture" (*CP* 89). Brown follows this community through conversion to Christianity, the reign of the Scottish earls, the beginning of the modern era, and then a nuclear winter or "Black Pentecost" that forces the remnant of the community to flee again. In the poem's sixth and final section, "The Return of the Women," which details the suffering of the survivors after their return to Rackwick, when "the wheel has been wrenched from the axle-tree," and they must try to "begin all over again" by going "very far back, beyond the oxen and millstones and bronze throats of agriculture" (89-90).

Despite positive reviews upon initial publication, the collection has received little scholarly attention since then. Its subject matter—the

disintegration of a community and its possible regeneration—runs too close to the preoccupations of *Greenvoe*, published a year later, as well as those of *Spell*, published the year before. Its style is intentionally highly varied, too varied for easy summary judgements about the style and technique on display in the collection as a whole. Because there are few identifiable characters outside of Part One and Part Six, it is also difficult to treat *Fishermen with Ploughs* as a poetic narrative. Rowena Murray and Brian Murray provide one of the few critical assessments in their literary biography of Brown, where they observe that the work brings together for Brown "the long-standing influence of Hopkins, his preoccupations with saga style, and, perhaps, linguistic experiments of the day" in which words from different Scots dialects are brought together regardless of origin, feinting at a modern Scots dialogue that can encompass its many traditions (150).[12] Yet this assessment rarely treat the entire sweep of the collection, particularly the relationship between humanity and creation as epitomized in the sacred rituals of agriculture.

This sacramental relationship to agriculture is established in Part One, the section which Murray and Murray judge the least successful of the collection. They deem the language of the collection's first part "not adequate for the

[12] Despite the lack of critical attention for the book Brown wrote in *For the Islands I Sing* that he thought this collection contained some of his best poetry. He acknowledged, though that having the villagers return to the island in the final section might have been a mistake (90).

concept. Ellipsis, inversion, and excessive alliteration smother the meaning," and critique some of the alliteration as "Gerard Manley Hopkins pastiche" (149). Although the tripping rhythms of Part One can feel Hopkinsesque, Brown is here more clearly imitating the poetic styles of Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse poetry, which relied upon alliteration instead of rhyme and different metrical patterns from later English verse. The lyrics of Part One contain strong, end-stopped lines rife with alliteration; kennings and vivid metaphors are scattered throughout. The style offers Brown one way to reach back into the cultural memory and excavate the past; his poetic style in the opening section is terse, pruned of all extraneous words, though without the accompanying opaqueness that marred *Spell.*

The form, meanwhile, gives him another bridge back into the past through its ecological associations; this is Brown's first sustained use of what he would later call his "salt mathematics," an innovation he explained in a short story from 1971 (Murray & Murray 222), but had clearly devised sooner. By "salt mathematics"

> he meant that he set out the lines of his poems to echo the rhythm of the waves of the sea… When he wrote the seven stanzas, he gave each one a number of lines from one to seven: the first stanza has four lines, the next has six, the next seven, the next two, and so on. (222-3)

This effort to imitate the rhythms of the natural world in his poetry was a fruitful method of linking the form and content of the collection's first poems. Each of the nine poems of Part One follows these "salt mathematics": the first, "Building the Ship," progresses in a linear form from a one-line first stanza to a seven-line seventh stanza. The remaining poems vary the ordering, but follow the mathematics faithfully. The result is something erratic yet rhythmic, irregular but bounded. It calls the reader's attention to the community's dependence, at this point in time, to the ocean, and their lack of the sacramental ceremonies that will be represented by agriculture; at the same time, though, they are still deeply, intimately linked to nature, patterning their lives on its rhythms and their beliefs on nature's stern demands. Throughout the cycle, the number seven recurs, drawing attention not only to the Christian number symbolism and the days of the week,[13] but also to the link Brown has forged between this number and the sea, which stresses the pagan, pre-Christian, pre-sacramental nature of their community. But the necessity of the sacred relationship with agriculture is seeded throughout Part One, too. The blind helmsman reminds the new chief that "Lust, bread kissed, becomes love," and that Gudrun, his future bride, "must be a mother of harvesters" (*CP* 94). Gudrun sees her own fecundity in

[13] Calendar poems are a mainstay in Brown's poetry, whether they follow the days of the week or the months of the year. Time forms a pattern that ritual simultaneously reinforces and transcends, both regulating and elevating daily life. *Fishermen with Ploughs* itself contains several calendar poems, such as "A Child's Calendar," "Beachcomber," and "Sabbath."

light of the rites of agriculture: she rejects her father's claim that once a woman's "honey" has been drunk, "*Men use her then for oil and salt and brine*" (96). Instead, Njal calls her a "*sweet grain jar*," and Gudrun declares that her womb "will come to a full fragrant barley girth" (97). The sacramental nature of marriage itself is heightened by this link to agriculture.

As the agrarian ritual becomes more prominent, the use of Brown's sacred number seven shifts, too. The "salt mathematics" of the first part give way to sevens littered through the imagery of the later poems, such as the poem "Shroud" from Part III, which suggests the balance and harmony that constitutes life, properly ordered, through the seven threads of the shroud:

> The white thread,
> A green corn thread,
> A blue fish thread,
> A red stitch, rut and rieving and wrath,
> A gray thread
> (All winter failing hand falleth on wheel)
> The black thread,
> And a thread too bright for the eye. (*CP* 104-5)

The final thread suggests the divine that weaves itself through the fabric of everyday life when the community is most whole. But the community will struggle to maintain the balance represented by these seven strands of life. Further in, the deeply tender "Sabbath" in Part V compresses an entire life down into the seven days of the week. The speaker and her beloved, "two scripture doves" in the twilight of their life, have a marriage that is "rootings of good seed

on a gaunt acre," emphasizing the sacramental agriculture again within a seven-part framework. In the poem "The Night of the Fishermen's Funeral," cut from the final collection, "seven new widows" mourn their drowned husbands. But the wholeness suggested by these groupings of seven begin to fade toward the end of Part V, just as the relationship between the community and the land also reaches its breaking point.

The sacramental relationship with the land exhibits a recurring ebb and flow throughout the collection. In places, such as "The Statue in the Hills" in Part Two, this relationship is balanced and harmonious. All the members of the community offer their prayers to Mary; the croft women beseech her as "Our Lady of Cornstalks," the fishermen as "Our Lady of the Boat," the vagabond tinkers as "Our Lady of Fishbone and Crust," and the washer women ask, "As we scrub shirts for the ploughmen, / Make clean our hearts, Lady" (*CP* 99-100). At other times, the community is tempted or pushed away from the land, threatening its agrarian and spiritual fruitfulness. Sometimes this straying is involuntary, as when the press-gangs visit Rackwick for seven recruits that the laird owes to the Navy in "Buonaparte, the Laird, and the Volunteers" (*CP* 105-6). At other times, temptation intrudes; the farmers are tempted away from their fields when an easy bounty from the sea presents itself in "Whales." This departure further fractures their relationship with the land, and the villagers

forget that it is the field and not the sea that provides the richness of "Loaf, honey-comb, fleece, ale-jar, fiddle" (*CP* 118). Loaves, honey, and jars have been images of plenitude throughout the cycle, the fiddle an emblem of rightful celebration. This poem suggests the end of a time of harmony and patient unity to the "wheel of bread" Brown referenced in his opening note (*CP* 89).

Ideology also threatens the virtues of the community, perhaps clearest in the poem "Girl" in Part V, where the generous virtues of the past and their agricultural roots are literally squeezed between the cold order of modernity and the stern rules of Calvinist Presbyterianism. The virtues are represented as "older knowledge, a kinder spell" in which residents welcome in neighbors and strangers alike to share the fruits of their labors. This model of charity (in its richest sense) and hospitality is compressed between the "number and word / And the ordered names" taught in the village school, an image which opens the poem, and the warning of the church elder and minister for the girl to "*Be as cold as snow*" in response to "*the flames / Of April lust*" (*CP* 124). Fidelity or chastity is not presented in light of the ecological images of plenitude associated with Gudrun in Part One, the "*sweet grain jar*" who would come to "a full fragrant barley girth" in pregnancy. The girl's icy abstinence is not associated with this life-giving abundance. Instead, she is linked to death: "You must enter the halls of the kingdom, / Persephone, / Of passionate dust" (124). The association

between her and a life-giving earth is discarded, offering her few visions of human flourishing.

"Passionate dust," of course, reads as a bitter oxymoron, and while life in Rackwick is not portrayed strictly as decay and death in Part Five, the sacred rituals of agriculture are increasingly threatened. Machinery comes between man and land in "Hill Runes," when "The horsemen are red in the stable / With whisky and wrath" as the tractor (which Brown describes, in a nice touch of continuity, with the kenning "petrol-drinker") is in the hills, taking away the human relationship with the land (*CP* 128). In "The Drowning Brothers," the images of the crofter and the women bringing in the harvest is ultimately replaced by the vehicle, which "throbbed with one urgent image, bread" (129). Meanwhile, the images of honey and jars that marked the first four parts have disappeared, signifying the extent to which the old agricultural rituals and rhythms have been disrupted and old virtues have turned to dry rules. The residents of Rackwick have shops, radios, and refined sugar, but far less sweetness or plenitude in their lives; they are divorced from nature, and cannot remember the relationship well enough to notice its loss. They face a bleak future even before disaster arrives in the final poem of Part Five.

"Dead Fires" demonstrates how the crisis comes all at once, and suddenly, with no warning, "At Burnmouth the door hangs from a broken hinge / And the

fire is out" (130). The poem moves from house to house in Rackwick, each suddenly abandoned and falling to ruin. In the end, the speaker observes:

> The poor and the good fires are all quenched.
> Now, cold angel, keep the valley
> From the bedlam and cinders of A Black Pentecost. (131)

The true nature of the catastrophe is made clear in Part VI, "The Return of the Women," a sequence of prose poems in the voices of seven surviving women of Rackwick. In "Landfall," they describe the calamity, which they have come to name "The Black Flame." Its fiery devastation and the subsequent struggles to survive suggest a nuclear detonation. The consequences of it, as Natasha notes, have been dire: "In a few days these educated people have broken back into the narrow circle of the beasts. The antics of life are performed openly" (132). While this devolution might sound like a return to nature, there ae no elements of the ceremonial around it to indicate a renewal of relationship; instead, humans are rejecting their evolved difference, working on opposition to both the natural world and their own intrinsic natures.

This catastrophe was clearly not caused by the people of Rackwick, but Brown still wrestles with his sense that the Reformation fractured the possibility of divine union of the Host, and progress has turned them away from a sanctified relationship with the land, completing the suppression of sacred agricultural rites that Reformation began, as Miller suggests (474). As a result, the

villagers are left utterly incapable of coping with the changes wrought by the nuclear fallout, and Brown indicates that they carry with them the same seeds of division and cruelty that spawned the Black Pentecost in the first place. The small group of survivors that returns to Rackwick arrives, like the first settlers, with a sack of corn for planting, but it quickly becomes clear that they lack the sense of order and ecological relationships that the first Norse settles from Part I had. Saul the Skipper quickly sets himself up as a petty tyrant who sexually enslaves the women, seeing them as "nothing but walking wombs, seed jars," a perverse return to the life-giving portrayal of Gudrun from Part One (143). In the final scene of the poem, the survivors sit around a table, "imprisoned in their own night and weather and death" after the crop has failed (145). Their link to the land and their own past has been irreparably severed, and they return to the condition of their ancestors, dependent upon the sea for their sustenance, with no god to protect them and no ritual to link them to more meaningful ways of existence. The single meager jar of ale they have produced is dashed to the ground rather than shared among the company, rejecting the possibility of a return to an ordered, ceremonial existence in harmony with nature. The poem's closing is grim:

> We sit quiet in the midst of an enormous jerking masquerade. In silence and frenzy the shadows feast on us. They hollow out our skulls. We have returned, uncaring, into the keeping of the Dragon. (147)

The possibility of regeneration through rites that bring about a relationship with the land is not ruled out, but it is anything but certain; the community has failed to rebind themselves to the "ritual of corn," and the way back to any kind of prosperity or flourishing is not immediately discernable.

The very bleakness of *Fishermen with Ploughs*, lacking the optimism of both *Spell and Greenvoe*, may be what puts off readers and critics. The dire warning that concludes *Fishermen with Ploughs* is both dark and polemical, expressing not only Brown's suspicion towards progress as well as his loathing for war.[14] Timothy Baker's observations on the failure of community in *Greenvoe* are far more applicable here: "the community is left as impossible: the disaster is forever imminent and always present" (55). Far more than *Greenvoe*, *Fishermen with Ploughs* is an "expression of modern despair, a despair that in his age Brown would attempt to mollify, but here presents only as crisis" (55). The crisis of the community, however, is a symptom of the crisis of ritual, which is the true cause of dissolution. The loss of both the Catholic rite and the ritual of agriculture have divorced the people of Rackwick from the past and completed their ecological estrangement, and the Black Pentecost of nuclear war has rendered the future meaningless. Trapped in an ahistorical present, there is little left for them to do

[14] Expressed in a number of places, but pursued at length in Brown's 1984 novel *Time in a Red Coat*, which Stephen Bann described as "a sustained denunciation of the recurrent ravages of war" as well as one of Brown's top prose achievements.

but wait to die, unless they can somehow work their way back to a form of ritual that can resurrect the lost past, as Dupré suggests true ritual is meant to do, and as happens in *Greenvoe*. But the collection's structure suggests that this is unlikely. Notably, *Fishermen with Ploughs* contains only six sections, unlike the seven of *Spell*. Brown intended for this to be ambiguous, allowing the reader to determine whether the community would perish or regenerate (*Islands* 90). But even though Brown had the confidence to leave the "seventh syllable" of this text silent in a way he couldn't for *Spell*, it seems clear that the stillness of this seventh syllable is that of death rather than holy peace. Not only is the sacramental imagery of the earlier parts gone, but the characters seem to have no sense anymore of the divine with which those sacraments linked them, or of the sacredness of their toils on the land. It seems more likely that there is no utterance of the silent seventh syllable at this collection's end because the degraded land of the island can no longer provide its people with memory or identity to sustain them through the dark age ahead.

Greenvoe

If *Fishermen with Ploughs* offers an unambiguously bleak look at the failure of ritual and regeneration, *Greenvoe* gives audiences a more optimistic take, albeit one that still can be profoundly harrowing. The novel, published in 1972, may not be Brown's most immediately successful work (*The Golden Bird* won the

James Tait Black Memorial prize in 1987, and *Beside the Ocean of Time* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1994), but it has commanded the lion's share of critical attention for its lovingly intimate, yet quietly critical, portrait of the community of the fictional village of Greenvoe. The six—possibly seven—part structure, the inclusion of outsiders such as Johnny Singh, as well as its prescient awareness of the industrial depredations that would be visited upon Orkney demonstrate fresh growth in Brown's depictions of Orkney communities. These features, as well as the enigmatic ritual of the Horsemen, provide the novel with an ending more optimistic than that of *Fishermen with Ploughs*.

The novel, Brown's first, follows the course of a week in Greenvoe, although that timeframe telescopes outward in the final section to span ten years; over the course of those first six days, and the six chapters that comprise the book's ritual structure, readers are plunged into the thick of the island community and its web of relationships, resentments, and economic struggle. Originally, Brown had intended it as a comic work, and certainly the interactions of the villagers retain some of this early tone, such as their wonder over Miss Fortin-Bell's aristocratic inflections, which make her sound "as if she were shouting into a gale" (*Greenvoe* 7). Yet a more somber note crept in, anchored by personal suffering as well as communal collapse, keenly exemplified in the private agony of old Mrs. McKee, rehearsing all her sins, and the failure of her

alcoholic son, Simon, as the island's Presbyterian minister. The sacred makes an appearance, too: Samuel Whaness washes his hands at the day's end "as though it was a sacramental act" (17); his wife Rachel reminds him that "The miracle of the loaves and fishes is never finished" (18); the Skarf describes the island's pre-settlement history as "a ritual of darkness" (18); and even the games of the children are performed "ritually" (13). But the ritual of the Horsemen is the most important ritual of the book. Although it initially seems a simple induction into some provincial take on the Freemasons or similar society, the group's ecological ceremonial is truly ritualistic in the manner that Dupré has described: it removes its participants from ordinary, chronological time into the space of sacred time in which all of the past is made present. It is also, vitally, connected to sacred rite of agriculture; Mansie Anderson, the farmer who presides over the group, has the ceremonial title of "The Lord of the Harvest" (23).

While the other rituals that mark the book are key to the character of the community, it is the ritual of the Horsemen in the end which offers the hope of true regeneration for Greenvoe, and which also defines the ritual structure of the book that readers experience. But in order to understand the importance of the ritual of the Horsemen both within the text and upon the structure of the text, it is first essential to look at the other rituals, both positive and negative, that recur throughout the pages of *Greenvoe*—the Skarf's history-writing, Mrs. McKee's

assize, and the visit of Johnny Singh—as well as the desecrations performed by the anti-ritualistic labors of Project Black Star. Each of these rituals either supports the memory-preserving, regenerative work of the Horsemen or fights against it by poisoning memory or denying it altogether.

There is no ritual more personally poisonous than Mrs. McKee's assize. She is another victim of what Ricoeur calls excess of memory. This excess demands endless revisiting, and she cannot extricate herself from the circumstances, such as her son Simon's alcoholic relapses, that bring on the assize. These relapses trigger her own self-recriminations, the fear that she is the one who awoke his addiction by giving him tonic wine when he was ill as a boy. Brown himself was exceedingly fond of Mrs. McKee as a character, although the Skarf and Johnny Singh are far closer to authorial stand-ins, and this fondness for her as well as the sympathetic depiction of staunch Calvinists such as the Whanesses, suggests softening of Brown's previous anti-Reformation attitudes. Although some critics have suggested that she appears to occupy an outsized portion of the book, more than the significance of her story warrants, her suffering is significant, and the ritual that she imposes on herself is the cruelest to be found in the book. Timothy Baker suggests that her "board of imaginary inquisitors" constitute a community of her own making, one supported by a

private mythology and a ritual every bit as exacting as that of the Horsemen, "with its own particular and secret rules of conduct" (46).

The chief problem with Mrs. McKee's ritual is that it does not end, as the Eucharist does, in absolution or reintegration to the community. And because most of her life was conducted on mainland Scotland, no one in Greenvoe has shared memories of the experiences that so torment her. Robbed of a collective memory that would correct her faulty perceptions, she is trapped in a cycle of suffering that greatly resembles Cairns Craig's description of the hellish cycles of industry or progress (135). In a draft, Johnny Singh, the visiting silk peddler, tries to draw this to her attention, noting she cannot sit among her shadows, but "needs must make entrance into another womb, in order to rid oneself of these old griefs, for a rebirth. The wheel will turn again. New shadows will gather" (*Greenvoe* MS). Although Johnny refers to reincarnation, his sentiment echoes Brown's more orthodox understanding of cycles of renewal and healing. Mrs. McKee needs a ritual that can bring about a spiritual rebirth so that, as Johnny says, "At last the soul, loving both God and man, will be free" (*Greenvoe* MS). But Mrs. McKee, trapped in her guilt, cannot fathom this renewal, and retreats to remain with her ghosts.

These individual rituals cover local history as well as personal memory, as seen in the Skarf's daily period of composition. His writings fall somewhere

between the inventive work of the novelist and the interpretive work of the chronicler, as described above by Benjamin. At the novel's opening, he is engaged in writing a history of the island, which opens with the successive waves of settlers over the first centuries of human habitation. The Skarf's chronicle reflects Brown's view of the island by rejecting the notion of Orcadian racial or ethnic purity. He acknowledges first the Stone Age settlers whose only remaining traces were "the mighty rents" that they paid "to the kingdom of death" in the form of graves excavated by later archaeologists (18-19). After them came settlers from the Mediterranean, who establish the agricultural covenant with the land much like the settlers of *Fishermen with Ploughs* when their most powerful swimmer bears ashore "with reverence the jar of seed corn" (20). The next wave of invaders were the Norwegians, "a tall blond people, in beautiful curving ships with dragon-prows" whose "anabasis, domination, and settlement" eventually yields the saga stories of the *Orkneyinga*, and, although the Marxist-socialist Skarf elides it, the conversion of the islanders to Christianity, completing the move to a sacramental culture (21). Having established his history, the Skarf proceeds to embroider the bare facts in the saga with elaborate stories of his own devising. Each night, he goes to the inn to share his day's labors with others and drink.

However, the validity of the Skarf's ritual of writing and reading is called into question by Johnny Singh, who notes that his story "bore as much resemblance to the truth as a cinder to a diamond: for the flame of prejudice had shriveled it" (70). The risk of the chronicler's interpretive work is incorrect interpretation, and because the Skarf is preoccupied with material injustice, such as the inefficacy of the church in Thorvald Happy-Harvest's story, or the cruelty of the Scottish earls, his ritual only re-presents history's sufferings, rather than transcendent moments of life-giving permanence. The Skarf's story is ultimately one of decline, as his final tale, the story of Mansie Hellyaman who breaks "the crude lamp of feudalism" and becomes a "capitalist" suggests. The Skarf's ritual is based in a certain truth of the past, but not a truth that can speak in a meaningful way to the future, and he fundamentally misinterprets the nature of the future that rapidly approaches. On the fifth night of the week, he refuses to read, saying,

> Not tonight. Never again. I've written all I know. What's coming to this island is beyond prose. It will be poetry and music. The Song of the Children of the Sun. We'll all be dead, I expect. But the folk of Hellya will know it when they experience it. (202)

His romantic—and highly biased—reading of history is insufficient to the needs of Greenvoe and Hellya as a whole. And the insufficiency of his historical view is made clear when he even goes to work for Black Star. When his supervisor

expresses regret that "the whole life and economy of the island should be so abruptly and radically altered," the Skarf responds:

> But no…they were not to look at it in that way. Industrial man, bureaucratic man, was a superior creature to agricultural man; he could bear a greater infusion of the light; just as the farmer's cycle was a stage beyond the dark blunderings and intuitions of the hunter. Hellya was a microcosm; this was how it must happen, inevitably, all over the universe. (221)

Although one might be tempted to read the Skarf's claims as ironic or subversive, the narrative indicates he is not simply satirizing the islanders or Project Black Star. When Black Star discards him, realizing that he is "a Marxist-Leninist-Maoist…[whose] ideas [are] much tinged with mysticism," the Skarf chooses to kill himself, loading his pockets with stones and taking his leaky boat, the *Engels*, out onto the water, where it is swept into the ocean, in a gesture that is simultaneously poignant and symbolically on-the-nose, given the failure of his ideology.

Johnny Singh, Indian silk peddler and Ph.D. student in English at Edinburgh University, encounters both Mrs. McKee and the Skarf's rituals during his annual visit to the island, which is a ritual in its own right. The whole of Chapter Three is given over to Johnny's narration of his visit in a letter to his uncle, and Johnny's sensitivity manifests immediately. His narration reveals that he is intimately familiar with the island and the personal lives of its residents, and he extends a deep kindness to many of them. He is kind to the

"impecunious" Tommy (59), and gentle to each of Alice Voar's children whom he encounters. Even more important, he sees the experiences of the residents in clear, exact terms. When he meets Mrs. McKee, he recognizes instantly that "[h]er face is an assize of suffering," using the precise word Mrs. McKee herself uses to describe her self-imposed trial (73). He realizes, too, that "what is needed is some pure blessed ritual to rid this old woman of her ghosts," and he despairs slightly when he realizes his kindly conversation cannot accomplish the task (74-75). Even more touching, he is heartbroken by the state of the Manson farm, and has longed to see Sandy Manson remarry and give his sweet if simple son a loving new mother (87-88). Johnny's sensitivity manifests not only in empathy, but in his accurate readings of people. When Ivan Westray and Inga Fortin-Bell cross paths, Johnny perceives "a quickening in the air between them. I imagine a rose straining to open in an evil summer: fog, rot, tempest," predicting accurately the foggy ferry crossing during which Ivan will rape Inga two days later (64). He sees the emptiness at the heart of the Skarf's chronicle. And crucially, when he encounters the representative of Project Black Star, Johnny correctly surmises, "He is a bureaucrat. He is Western Man arrived at a foreseen inevitable end. I see it now. He rules the world with an index card file" (79).

Although the Skarf might seem like Brown's authorial stand-in with his days spent writing and his nights drinking, Johnny comes much closer. Like

Brown, he studies literature at Edinburgh University, and is especially fond of the sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who was the subject of Brown's on postgraduate work. His peek into each of the homes and businesses of Greenvoe resemble Brown's youthful experiences delivering milk to the homes of Stromness.[15] Johnny, however, is even more of an outsider than Brown could be, and as a result his perceptions are even more astute. Yet while he is an outsider by birth and culture, he is privileged as an insider in spirit, as seen in his encounter with the Anderson family at the Bu, where he is warmly welcomed and feels deeply at ease—a critical tell, since Mansie Anderson is the Lord of the Harvest in the ritual of the Horsemen. The mutual warmth between the Andersons and Johnny suggest that while Johnny's ritual does not have the same close link to the land as Mansie's, he would intuit the positive value of the Horsemen's work, and as an outsider, he can speak truths, such as his admonition to the Skarf, that an insider might shy from. This evidence, and the sheer amount of space that Brown allots to Johnny's narratorial voice, indicates that Johnny, rather than the Skarf, is the true chronicler of *Greenvoe*, the one who successfully insists upon the equal privilege of all events, great and small, to be saved and remembered. As Elizabeth Huberman observes, "in every word he

[15] "George was responsible for pouring milk from the churn into a zinc can which he carried into kitchens, where jugs were waiting to be filled. The job gave him entry into most of the houses in town, offering him glimpses of the quirks and secrets lying beneath the surface of a small community—glimpses he would later draw on in his fiction, particularly in *Greenvoe*" (Murray & Murray 30).

writes he asserts an affirmation of life that is a countermovement to the downward rush which more and more makes itself felt through the four basically similar sections" (38). This affirmation reaches its peak when Johnny visits Alice Voar at the letter's end, with their liaison resulting in the birth of "a tiny sun-kissed idol" the next year (211). Thus, when Johnny and his uncle briefly reappear in Chapter Six, their decision not to visit the deeply altered Hellya is especially poignant; even their affirmations have limited power against the sheer force of Project Black Star, and their ritual can strengthen but not preserve Greenvoe. For this, the work of insiders—namely, the ritual of the Horsemen—is required.

But the sacred rites and the historical memory of the island are threatened by the arrival of Project Black Star, though the community begins turning in on itself well before Black Star makes its intentions known. Progress has made its inroads in ways which have cleared the road somewhat for Black Star, whether in the sterilizing power of standardized education, addiction, or the weakness of the Church. The village school exemplifies all that Brown hated the most about his own primary education, which he characterized as "the huge gray unimaginative machine," a Victorian relic with notions of "stern duty, self-help, and the sacredness of possessions" rather than "gateways of delight" (*As I Remember* 19). And he wreaks some narratorial vengeance on Miss Inverary, the

schoolmistress, who conducts a surreptitious affair with the ferryman, Ivan Westray—an event that is less than a triumph, given that Ivan also rapes the daughter of the local laird, Inga Fortin-Bell, on his boat, and works willingly for Project Black Star. The weakness of what charity the community has is seen in Timmy Folster, who is addicted to methylated spirits, and whose small home has crumbled into a hovel. The people of Greenvoe take care of him, in their fashion, but Tommy serves as a reminder that the outside world carries blessings in one hand—in the form of the social welfare that supports him—and curses in the other, such as the methylated spirits. Even the children are not spared: the fragile Gino Manson is tormented and shoved in the mud by his schoolmates, and goes home to the house that has been desolate since his mother died, a place that sees no comfort from others. But perhaps most corrosive is the weakness of the local church. The alcoholism of Simon McKee, the minister, is an open secret, and he was sent to Greenvoe so that his addiction would be rendered invisible and, given the smallness of the parish, inconsequential, albeit only to the broader world; Simon's ineffectiveness as a spiritual leader is highly visible to the villagers, who gossip openly about his addiction.

Black Star's representative creeps into this vulnerable community and the novel almost unnoticed, and his presence sends ripples through the village, though only Johnny Singh is immediately sensitive to the dehumanizing eye that

its nameless representative casts over the community. Whereas a local like Rachel Whaness might regard even the neighbors she resents, such as Alice Voar[16], as participants in an extension of the miracle of loaves and fishes, the Black Star representative is quietly cataloguing them all on index cards with their identifying marks and temperaments, finishing with an estimate of their "Black Star potential," rated on a scale of zero to ten. Black Star, like the Black Pentecost of *Fishermen with Ploughs*, represents the inexorable march of progress, and while the project's goal is never clearly articulated in the novel, the threat it poses to the community is clear. And in Chapter Six, Project Black Star appears to win decisively over the agrarian traditions of the community. Alice Voar, *Greenvoe*'s symbol of loving (if transgressive) fertility flees to Hamnavoe when workers mistake her for a prostitute and terrorize her family; Timothy Folster is institutionalized; the McKees go back to Edinburgh; and in the most violent moment of the episode, Mansie Anderson and his family are evicted from the Bu, and nearly a thousand years of residence on the spot are razed in a few hours. Outsiders and insiders to the community alike face a similar sense of displacement and loss.

Hellya itself is left grossly transformed. The demolition of the farmhouses and the laird's manor leave it bereft of its human history. The loss of the Bu

[16] The Whanesses are notably childless, but Alice has born Samuel's illegitimate child, a poignant detail that Brown planned in his first notes on the residents of Greenvoe (*Greenvoe* MS).

seems the most devastating, but Blinkbonny, Sandy Mason's home, had also provided its "faithful" reflection in the surface of the loch for five hundred years, and all that is left of the baronial hall after three days of destruction is "a standstone shield" with the family crest and motto, "WE FALL TO RISE," which, within a season or two, is weathered into a "black shard" (237). Even the Viking-era relics that the demolitions uncover—a "Viking sword and shield and helmet—a death hoard"—are taken away from the island and end up "coffined in a museum case, far from Hellya" (233). The natural environment suffers similarly. The loch which had reflected Blinkbonny for five centuries is drained a month after Blinkbonny is demolished, an event which Brown likens to the smashing of a mirror (234). Rather than being linked to the land and agricultural cultivation, this ritual deliberately destroys and eradicates all evidence of positive human connection to the land.

Black Star must eradicate history, for as Cairns Craig observes, "History is governed not by the laws of economic and political progress but by those mythic forces," whether those forces are benevolent or diabolical (143). Because history cannot be controlled, and is linked to myth and ritual, Black Star must disrupt those links and supplant Greenvoe's original rites with its own "pure rite of science," which has no history behind it, and whose only mythic underpinnings are "*the security of the western world*" (*Greenvoe* 236). The Orwellian overtones of

this new myth suggests, as Craig argues, that "in a society which has plunged into industrialisation and urbanisation, the suspension of history consigns its inhabitants to endure a world which is a living hell" (130).[17] Johnny Singh predicts this outcome more poetically in his own reflection after meeting the Black Star representative: "For our worship is erected now, all over the world, in place of the Word, the number. And the belly is filled with uniform increasingly tasteless bread, the hands cannot have enough of possessing, face by face comes from the same precise mould and gazes" (80). Ultimately Greenvoe, and all of Hellya, put on the altar of progress as a sacrifice to Project Black Star, which its representatives describe to Mansie Anderson as "*most secret, most beautiful—a pure rite of science*" (236), and which Brown even characterizes in mystic terms: "The black star exploded slowly under the hills and at last drew the whole of Hellya into its mystery and passion," a chilly and sacrilegious description that demonstrates the brutal blasphemy at the heart of the project's ideology (233). The warmth of domestic human life is sacrificed to this cold, uncaring "rite of science," and the purpose of it, unlike the rites that the Horsemen observe, never become clear.

[17] The Orwellian overtones of the Project are even stronger in the early drafts, when the computer collates the information on the residents and proceeds to blurt out all their secrets, particularly who or what each person loves most (Gen 1885/5).

Unsurprisingly, these cold, sterile rites of science prove to be self-consuming. Fifteenth months after Project Black Star began, it ends. The work ceases, and evacuation moves quickly: people and machinery alike are removed with efficient haste. The inessentials linger: telephones, a dartboard, crockery, a hymnal (238). Here, the descriptive language moves from the mystic to the martial: "It was as if an armistice had been declared"; "H.Q….remained a truncated battlement"; the patches of concrete are "scabs of blindness"; and "another invasion…a temporary holding operation" comes in the spring" when Hellya is finally sealed off from the world (238-239). The language reveals what an alert audience already knows, that what happened on Hellya was not a "pure rite" but a war, and, as at the end of any war, "the only people left were the dead in the kirkyard" (239). The vision of national security, divorced from the tangible realities of the earth and too mired in fear to successfully imagine a future worth living into, withers and dies.

The only thing that can overcome the dark rites of Black Star, which leaves only "disturbed dust in a seedless island," is the agrarian ritual that had woven its bright thread through all the rest of the book, and thus, ten years on, the Horsemen return to their origins to finish their ritual, led by Mansie Anderson, and joined by new members, including the now-grown Gino Manson (241). Although this ritual is a thread that runs through the entire novel, its stages

marking the end of each day on the island, its presentation (in dramatic, rather than narrative, form) and significance has provoked considerable critical debate. By far the most negative readings of the ritual are provided by Timothy Baker and Cairns Craig, who both read it as a failure, albeit for different reasons. While Baker acknowledges that the ritual of the Horsemen "undoubtedly" provides "the first appearance in the novel of a successful community," he finds a hopeful reading of this moment to be "an insufficient explanation of what occurs at the end of the novel" (44). Craig, meanwhile, is similarly pessimistic, observing that the "descent into the mythic is violence and destruction, but it is a descent made inevitable by reason's rejection of the enduring powers of the mythic," though he concedes that the mythic "may be the prologue to the recovery of a more profound form of understanding" that is rooted in the geographic particulars of the landscape (146, 150). Bernard Schoene reads the ritual as irrelevant and "strongly indicative of [Greenvoe's] deterioration"; it is "tacked on to what is relevant and worthy of narrating," and cannot bring about the ritual atemporality that would give it power (234). However, this reading neglects the ways in which the ritual, in which the novice is lead toward a symbolic death, mirrors the disintegration of Greenvoe itself over the course of the week. Elizabeth Huberman, by contrast, suggests that the ritual completes the braiding together of the novel's different genres. In her view, the dramatic sections, and

particularly their placement at the end of each chapter, form a refrain that gives the book as a whole a poetic structure, and accordingly she reads it as relevant and powerful all the way through the novel.[18]

The clue to the ritual's efficacy appears first in Brown's notes on the Horsemen. For each character in the book, Brown had made notes as to what should happen on each day, and the Horsemen collectively received their due as well, with Brown noting seven parts to their ritual at top of the page: "Ploughing—Sowing—Harrowing—Reaping—Threshing—Milling—Bread & Ale" (*Greenvoe* MS). The final part of the ritual is clearly Eucharistic, and the agricultural terms such as "sowing" and "harrowing" link to biblical stories (Matthew 13's Parable of the Sower) or theological events (Christ's Harrowing of Hell) that build up to the Eucharistic renewal. This renewal only comes after acknowledging futility and despair; when night last falls in the narrative, it falls on the dead in the kirkyard, and Mansie, as Lord of the Harvest, says to the novice: "Thou hast come to thy kingdom. It is the kingdom of the dead. Thy heart is a few grains of cold dust" (*Greenvoe* 241). The longstanding phrases of the ritual can encompass the horror of the past. But its hope for the future and its regenerative power rest partly in the willingness of the Horsemen to yield, in the

[18] Russell suggests that the poetic form of the novel is more akin to a sonnet (the form favored by Gerard Manley Hopkins, a profound influence on Brown) rather than verses with a refrain: "Instead, the six chapters of the book, up until the very short last section of the sixth chapter, together can be likened to the octave of a Petrarchan sonnet, while its last few pages function as a sort of sestet for that form" ("'There Lives the Dearest Freshness'" 62).

moment, to the novice, who speaks the words of hope that he holds in the dust of his heart: "Rain. Share. Yoke. Sun" (241). The four simple words gesture toward the holy rites of agriculture that Gavin Miller identifies, and which mark the development of *Fishermen with Ploughs*. The rain and sun are the necessary, non-human elements that support those rites; the yoke is the physical labor of man and oxen. "Share" is perhaps the most evocative: it is the one abstract word in the litany, and it indicates that the agrarian ritual is also vitally communal, involving the combined labor of humans and animals, but particularly people working with one another. But these words are still relics of the past, as the Lord of the Harvest points out: "He was looking for a word. Unless he has found the word we ourselves are locked in the stone. We belong to the kingdom of death" (242). The word that the novice finds is "*Resurrection*," uttered just before the rising of the sun (242). In celebration of this word, the Horsemen celebrate with a Eucharistic sharing of whisky and bread. Wine, of course, is the traditional sacramental element to accompany the bread, but Brown's revision here suits both his setting and his symbolism: the climate of Orkney is not conducive to vineyards, making whisky the appropriate local spirit, and whisky is derived from grain, which links both elements of his sacramental rite to agricultural and the "ritual of corn" (Miller 474).

Unlike the supposedly pure rite of Black Star, the ritual of the Horsemen contains the power of regeneration and resurrection. Despite, or rather because of its connection to the earth, it attains a purity of intention and outcome that Project Black Star cannot. While not instantly successful—the fields of Hellya are still "imprisoned" behind the fence (243)—the rite represents the restoration of a relationship with the land that had been suspended and nearly abolished. It is also the reclamation of an identity both within the ritual context and a more everyday context; these men and their families will always maintain a relationship with the natural world, whether they remain farmers or not. As Schoene observes, their ritual is performed "for the sake of an identity-bearing mythic authenticity," and its agricultural roots provide the authenticity that might create space for meaningful renewal (270)

Still, critics have not reached consensus as to whether this rite should ultimately be read as successful. A comparison of its structure and language to *A Spell for Green Corn* and *Fishermen with Ploughs* helps the reader grapple with this question, which Brown deliberately does not fully resolve. Failing to take these elements into account can mislead the reader, as when Timothy Baker reads the ending quite grimly, calling *Greenvoe* "a novel of despair…the despair of the possibility of community after the death of God" (53). With Greenvoe still in ruins and little likelihood that these men are moving back to Hellya for good, the

"myth of community" that Brown is creating seems to Baker like "a community that comes at the expense of its individual constituent members" (44). Baker's practical concerns have strong basis in Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy of community, but ultimately, he ignores the literary clues provided by the novel itself. At first glance, the novel's structure, when compared to that of the highly similar *Fishermen with Ploughs* (from the farming and fishing community down to the technological disaster), seems to support this reading. *Fishermen with Ploughs* has six parts, and ends in devastation and desecration; *Greenvoe* has six chapters, which might seem to correspond with the bleak trajectory of its poetic predecessor. Yet the sixth chapter introduces ambiguity: the timeline speeds up, for instance, with whole years passing in a matter of paragraphs, and in contrast to previous chapters, which each covered a single day on the island. Furthermore, after the Bu and the baronial hall are demolished, asterisks divide the last few pages of the book from what came before. Richard Russell suggests that "Either the future, imagined community of Hellya is a proleptic chapter seven, or, more likely, the seventh day Mackay Brown portrays is the final, future dramatic ceremony in the last pages of the novel" ("There Lives the Dearest Freshness" 60). Brown originally intended the novel "to have the heptahedron form: the seven days of the week," which the distinctive character of each day being indicated. The very word "resurrection" (*Greenvoe* 242) is a far

more natural fit with Sunday, the seventh day of the novel's week, than with the desolate Saturday that precedes. At the very least, the sunrise that marks the novel's ending suggests the dawn of the seventh day, a resurrection Sunday, and a step into the "silence of the seventh syllable" that Brown first introduced in *Spell*.

However, the Lord of the Harvest's closing words preserve ambiguity about this resurrection's success: "We have brought light and blessing to the kingdom of winter…however long it endures, that kingdom, a night or a season or a thousand ages. The word has been found" (243). The former residents of Greenvoe are unlikely to return anytime soon, not least because Brown has shown readers already the extent to which these characters have resisted or succumbed to the history-erasing losses of Project Black Star. Rather than bring about the immediate resettlement of Hellya, the Horsemen bring agrarian, Eucharistic ritual back into the world: they restore the sacramental relationship with the land that Black Star has disrupted, and with it, a connection to a mythic history that Black Star sought to erase. While Baker is dubious about the efficacy of this mythic return, Bookchin's explanation of the role of the ecological ceremonial provides a more hopeful possibility:

> What the ecological ceremonial does, in effect, is socialize the natural world and complete the involvement of society with nature. Here, the ceremonial, despite its naively fictive content, speaks more truthfully to the richly articulated interface between society

> and nature than concepts that deal with the natural world as a "matrix,' 'background," or worse, "precondition" for the social world. (47-8)

Thus, what Brown has provided in *Greenvoe*'s ending is this prologue to a genuine recovery of the proper human relationship with the land and environment. Craig ultimately reads this moment as "a denial of the history which makes the novel itself necessary" (162), which has some parallels in Baker's assertion, drawn from Jean-Luc Nancy, that "modern humanity is kept separate from myth… What remains of myth and of community is not experience, but desire and will" (45). Accordingly, for the Horsemen to believe in myth and mythic restorations is to believe in a fallacy, but Dupré's sense of ritual time offers an explanation that affirms myth without denying history. While both Baker and Craig accept modernity's view of time, in which the past is closed off and only the future remains, Dupré and Brown insist that ritual not only "enables the accompanying myth to reenter, across the lapse of time, into the actuality of the present" (200), but it also transforms history itself, calling it back into the present along with the founding deed or the myth of the ritual. Brown accomplishes this subtly by continuing the rite as though it has had no interruption, although the young man being inducted now is not Hector Anderson, as it was initially (*Greenvoe* 23), but "young Skarf," the son of Alice Voar and the Skarf (241). The gap of the intervening years and changing

members has done nothing to diminish the efficacy of the Horsemen's rite; this moment is presented as though in perfect continuity with the rites of the preceding chapters of the novel, and Brown calls so little attention to the differences that an unwary reader may not even realize how much the composition of the group has changed. Thus, as Project Black Star recedes into memory and history, the community need not attempt to erase those years; instead, even the ten-year lacuna will be summoned into the present and included as part of the group's history, an integral part of the community's story of its own survival.

The question that trails in the wake of these three highly ritualized, mythmaking texts is whether or not their myths are relevant to the community and offer genuine structures for communal identity in the modern age. Critics such as Craig and Baker suggest not. Craig suggests this turn to the mythic is a collapse into hellish repetitions; instead of Dupré's model, in which the mythic repetitions of ritual ensure the survival of the past, including a people's history, Craig sees the lapse into myth as the erasure of the past as a more primal and primitive reality reasserts itself in the void left by the failure of reason and history's progressive narrative (146). He allows a glimmer of optimism in acknowledging that the novel, a form which is so often yoked to historical narratives, has the power to preserve and reimagine "what history cannot allow

itself to remember—the myths by which it is driven, which underlie it and which will survive it" (157), particularly through the regional novel, which links the mythic structures to the reassuring "associations of place" (159). But to fall back upon the power of place is still to deny history by insisting upon a return to a lost golden age. Craig reads the ritual of the Horsemen as

> a ritual which enacts the mythic pattern, the fable, which underlies the story of the lives on the island, a fable which cannot be reached through the story but must be gestured to as continuing to exist beyond it, in a drama whose mythic content emphasises the cyclic return that denies the forward trajectory of the furrow of history. (161)

In this reading, myth is static rather than regenerative, and cannot be a means of interpreting history or offer meaningful ways of structuring society.

For Craig, a novel like *Greenvoe* rests upon a "fundamental paradox" in which "the forms of history that it charts in its narratives are what it seeks to negate through its creation of narrative forms which will defy and deny the primacy of the historical as the mode in which we should comprehend the nature of human experience" (166). The historical is the "progressive force" that deserves priority over "a world of eternal truths untouchable by history's passage" (166). Of course, Craig's priorities and language here clash sharply with the more expansive vision of Christianity that Brown presents in the novel, which hinges upon the power of "eternal truths untouchable by history's passage" to shape and inform modern-day experience. Also, the dichotomy that

Craig insists upon between myth and history matches neither the outlook of Brown nor Muir, whose language of "Story" and "Fable" are borrowed by both Brown and Craig.

As Brown would explicitly write in *Magnus*, just two years after the publication of *Greenvoe*, during the ritual of the mass "[a]ll time was gathered up…the entire history of mankind, as well as the events that have not happened yet as the things recorded in chronicles and sagas. That is to say, history both repeats itself and does not repeat itself' (129). The ritual draws attention to commonalities that allow, ideally, for a participant to "direct his purified will into the future for the alleviation of the pain of the future" as well as perhaps that "the pain of all history might be touched with healing by a right action in the present" (130-131). The mythic or ritual approach to the past is not history-denying, in Brown's understanding, but instead deeply empathetic, seeking in ritual a deeper understanding of what has come before in order to prepare for what is yet to come. Yet the risk of failure still hovers over the whole endeavor; The ideological structures within which Brown situates his ceremonial are those of which Bookchin is deeply skeptical, implicated as they are in the "barbarous objectification of human beings into means of production and targets of domination—an objectification we have projected upon the entire world of life" (316). Bookchin's desire is for the ecological ceremonial to erase hierarchies that

are based upon arbitrary allocations of power that retain the potential for oppression, and benevolent as the Horsemen are, threats loom from without in the form of the continued existence of entities like Black Star as well as potential risks from within, as it is impossible to forget the group contains no women, who have taken an at-least equal share in Greenvoe's suffering as the men invested with this power. Optimism about the ritual's success, given the persistence of institutional powers, must be measured.

This empathetic use of ritual, in Brown's view, should also influence how one conceives of communal identity. Ritual is corporate in nature, and yet does not erase the individuality of its participants; similarly, as Schoene notes, Brown's stories and novels incorporate a wide array of characters, with minor ones often receiving equal or greater attention than supposed protagonists. Schoene suggests that Brown believes that "only if all the stories of all the…conceivable members of a community have been told in all possible ways and examined from all possible perspectives will the communal myth of their identity be complete" (139-140). While Craig's understands myth as a force which suspends or defies history and subsumes the individual into a primordial, archetypal story, Brown sees it as capable of holding—and not erasing—an array of "idiosyncrasies of all kinds which are in no way perceived as detrimental, or even inimical, to the cohesion and distinctiveness of the community as a whole"

(Schoene 172). The use of his "heptahedral" structure in these three works allows for what Schoene calls the "dialectic interplay" of the individual and the community. The Horsemen of *Greenvoe* do not suspend their identities as individuals, but rather unite them to the myths—or, in Brown and Muir's term, the fable—that corresponds to their individual nature and role in the community, and their role in the ritual further informs their actions in the story. Mansie Anderson's place as the Lord of the Horsemen fits his role as a clear figure of authority within the community, one whose home represents historical continuity, close relationship with the land, and also rich sense of hospitality, as Johnny Singh experiences. Even in *Fishermen with Ploughs*, a work that leans heavily on myth and archetype, Brown takes care to name a tremendous number of the characters, from crofters to lairds, a loving act of preservation.

And while the agricultural ritual is what grounds Brown's communities in all three texts, his effort to gather together the vast array of individual lives in a community reinforces the fact that he has no expectation or even desire that all his characters should become farmers, but instead, desires them to understand how a proper relationship with the land supports and upholds their individual lives. Hellya—and the real, historical communities of Orkney—needs its shopkeepers and innkeepers, blacksmiths and preachers, not to mention its artists, and ritual allows them not to struggle *for* separation from the communal

order but *against* separation that would tear them out of a setting in which care, cooperation, and love are practiced, as Bookchin argues is the purpose of ritual (317).

Each of these three texts, with its ritual structure and ordering, calls people from these different vocations to consider their own lives in relation to the agricultural rituals that Brown prizes, and to understand their own lives and experiences in terms of a relationship to a specific place, and, in particular, to the life-giving power of the land. Because a place such as Rackwick has been continuously in a harmonious agricultural relationship with its inhabitants, it serves as a repository of communal and personal memory. Rituals such as the dance in *A Spell for Green Corn* or the ritual of the Horsemen in *Greenvoe* create means of accessing those memories through that agricultural relationship. As Schoene observes, these moments reveal "the entwinement of the ordinary with the divine," and by weaving the dramatic form of ritual into the narrative form of a novel, "the ritual becomes the saviour of the communal text, re-investing it with…identity-bearing significance" (Schoene 185). The time-spanning ritual of *Greenvoe* accomplishes this with particular grace, weaving together the island's pagan past in the form of the society itself and its mythic, mysterious name, "The Horsemen"; it incorporates, too, the island's Reformation heritage by placing sacral power in the hands of men of the community rather than a priest from a

strictly religious order; and at the same time its strongly sacramental character in the breaking of bread and the sharing of whiskey as a celebration of resurrection retains elements of the Eucharistic rite that Brown treasured. The disparate parts of Orkney's identity are lovingly gathered together as a means of ultimate survival rather than existing in conflict.

Brown did turn away from his "heptahedron" structure, for the most part, after the publication of *Greenvoe*, and his next novel, *Magnus*, had an eight-episode structure. But he did return to the form in individual lyrics throughout his career, such as "An Old Man in July" in *Northern Lights* (1999) and "Mhari," an elegy for his mother in "Travellers" (2001), and he branched out, too, exploring other ways in which ritual could shape the structure as well as the content of his work. He continued to write calendrical poems and poems that focused on high ritual holidays such as Christmas Day and the feast day of St. Magnus. Even as his structure and form varied, the meaningful ordering of the Eucharistic ritual and its power to link together the earthly and the divine, particularly in Orkney itself, never faded; indeed, much of Brown's work can be read as variations on this theme. The message is less that Brown believed the essential identity of Orcadians was rooted in tilling the soil, but more rather that identity was located in the union among God, humanity, and creation, which found a very distinct fulfillment in both the cultivation of the earth and the

celebration of the Eucharist. This identity calls Orcadians to a relationship with both the divine and created orders, whether they are in Orkney or not, offering an identity that can survive geographic dislocations, the gaps of history, and the relentless forward march of modernity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Formative and Deformative Rituals in Brian Friel's Ballybeg

Background

While Brown only sporadically returns to his fictional island of Hellya, Brian Friel has built an entire history around his invented village of Ballybeg in County Donegal, in the northwestern of Ireland, near the site of his own upbringing. Many of Friel's most beloved and influential plays are set in Ballybeg, including his early breakthrough *Philadelphia! Here I Come* (1964) and the politically-charged *Translations* (1980). These plays not only span much of Friel's career from the late 1960s onward, but also much of Ireland's recent history, from the 1833 Ordnance Survey in *Translations* to the more personal search for fulfillment in the late twentieth century in *Molly Sweeney* (1994). While George O'Brien takes this variation in time and thematic concern as evidence that "Ballybeg is as much a condition as a location, a site at which inner and outer worlds collide, a name which instead of designating a place signifies a framework within which outcomes fall through" (91), other critics have read the fictional village as significant in its own right, rather than a cipher onto which Friel projects his most recent dramatic preoccupations. Csilla Bertha observes that "Friel, over the course of four decades, has developed Ballybeg into a place

at once well-defined, concrete and spiritualized, a 'Fifth Province'—the nonphysical center of Ireland above borders, political, cultural, sectarian divisions" (158). The intersection of Friel's artistic, political, and ideological concerns has turned Ballybeg into a fictional location with the same depth and history as well-developed fictional places as Faulkner's Yoknaptawpha County,[1] with its own rituals that mark its history, particularly noticeable in *Living Quarters* (1977), *Faith Healer* (1979), and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990).

Friel's insistence upon returning to Ballybeg in so many of his plays suggests that he is keenly sensitive to what Matthew Crawford describes as "the ways our environment *constitutes* the self, rather than compromises it"—the ways in which an "extended" or "embedded" self is entwined with its environment, never independent from it (25, 34). Under this perspective, both "individuals and communities are caught up into an entanglement in their pasts, which is an entanglement in reimagined, or invented, origins and sources" (Corcoran 15); in other words, Ballybeg as a place is just as entangled as any of Friel's characters in a tension between tradition and modernity, in which qualities such as "loyal[ty] to ancestry, authenticity, recognition of where true value lies," as Christopher Murray deems it, struggle against forces of dissolution, economic struggle, and institutional failure (*Theatre of Brian Friel*

[1] Mel Gussow notes that this is a comparison that Friel himself denies (*BFC* 204).

191). This struggle, however, plays out in the events of individual lives in Ballybeg, rather than on a broad communal scale in Ballybeg, particularly when ritual and its repetitions seize control of those lives.[2] As a result, the consequences of failure, which in Friel's drama is more frequent than success, are presented as distinct, personal stories. However, the corporate form of ritual and the inclusion of or allusion to other members of the community indicate how these personal trials illustrate broader communal suffering in a distinct site with its own history and personality. For readers or audience members who are familiar with Friel's work, the invocation of Ballybeg in these plays may not suggest a multiplicity of sites that go by the name Ballybeg, nor does it suggest a village that regenerates and re-presents itself in accordance with the changing dramatic demands of each new play. Like an actual village in County Donegal, Ballybeg becomes the repository of an entire fictional history, and associations from Friel's forty years of plays are invoked each time its name is mentioned on the stage.

Accordingly, Ballybeg reflects not only the way place affects the lives of individuals through the accretion of local history and the way it holds individual histories, but also it demonstrates the way place itself can have a dramatic

[2] In the more overtly political plays, such as *Translations* (1980) and *The Home Place* (2005), the struggles do involve much more of the community, and the stakes are inherently communal. Friel still provides a fairly intimate focus in these dramas; the political tensions of the Ordnance Survey is anchored by the tensions and desires of Hugh's family, and in *The Home Place*, the action all takes place at The Lodge and is anchored by the Gore family.

function much like an actual character, possessing history and memory, motives and desires that *constitute* its inhabitants even as it is constitutive of those inhabitants, modifying them and being modified in turn, as Edward Casey suggests ("Space to Place" 19). Indeed, Ballybeg is Friel's one recurring character with its own needs and desires that exert considerable influence upon other characters, and sometimes working to advance or thwart the desires of its human visitors or inhabitants as they mutually mold one another across time. Ballybeg's essential, distinctive identity is often expressed through the performance of ritual, particularly place-specific, often pagan-derived rituals that Friel saw as essential in light of the institutional failures that left local people starved for authenticity and meaning in everyday life. In a 1970 interview, Friel expressed his dismay over the "complete stagnation of the hierarchy and the clergy" of the church (*CBF* 29). But the institutional failures extended beyond the church, as he indicated in his concern that Ireland had bifurcated into two societies, "Dublin society" and "the rest," the former "literally wilting away" and the latter "forging ahead without this very necessary balance" between the rural and the urban (27). Yet he insisted that Ireland "can never go back to the old culture, but [the old culture] could extend to the present day" (27). The recurrence of ritual in his work suggests that it would provide the means of resolving the conflict "between the world of the flesh and the world of the spirit" that he identifies in

his essay 1967 essay "The Theatre of Hope and Despair" (*BF* 24). Ritual, by "disrupting civility," pushes back against what Murray identifies as "a universal situation, acutely felt as modern, whereby the individual consciousness is irretrievably cut off from others and thrown back on his or her own resources. It refers to the essential isolation of the individual, an evil in the sense that it involves suffering" (*Theatre of Brian Friel* 32). The institutional stagnation and fractured society that Friel perceived certainly could result in this kind of suffering via isolation, and calls for a remedy that restores community. Ritual's corporate nature and its focus on a reality that extends beyond the individual can break down barriers between individuals and restore a sense of connection both to the past and to one's place in the present; in addition, it draws an audience into the ritual of theater-going as active participants rather than passive spectators. Ballybeg's condition across the years demonstrate how much ordinary places and ordinary people need the positive disruptions of ritual.

But ritual in Friel is not always a healthy or restorative event which enables characters to overcome this sense of isolation or heal suffering. In some of the Ballybeg plays, ritual has a distinctly negative effect, crippling rather than formative, and characters are left in cycles of hellish repetitions without progress or change, an outcome which O'Brien suggests is almost a "theatre of stasis" (91). These repetitions wound not only the characters but also Ballybeg itself, and the

traumas of these failed or deforming rituals are inherited by other characters and impressed upon the collective memory of Ballybeg. But Friel's view of ritual is not unfailingly grim; his embrace of the theatre stems in part from his desire to create a positive, potentially transformative communal experience, and characters as well as audiences can experience this kind of ritual renewal. Ritual in the Ballybeg plays thus functions in two major ways, depending upon how the rituals in question approach the transcendent, value the social bond, and acknowledge sacred or kairotic time. Deforming rituals deny transcendence and further, fail to create sacred time, and heighten the isolation of the individual and the dissolution of Ballybeg itself, usually by enforcing an institutional narrative and evacuating transcendent meaning. Often this deformation is accomplished while denying the validity of individual counter-narratives, as seen in this chapter's focus on plays such as *Living Quarters* and particularly Friel's masterpiece, *Faith Healer*. However, in ritual's second and more positive mode, seen in *Dancing at Lughnasa*, it can work to counteract this isolation and dissolution by challenging an oppressive metanarrative by affirming the experiences of oppressed individuals, partly by reintroducing some element of the transcendent and entering into sacred time, which begins to heal dissolution, reduce brutality, and offer an alternative way forward.

Philosopher Charles Taylor's exhaustive account of secularism, *The Secular Age*, provides a valuable lens through which to view the rituals and conflicts that mark many of Friel's Ballybeg plays, particularly the loss of the transcendent, the decay of the social fabric, and the disappearance of sacred or kairotic time. For Taylor, these three changes, along with the exchange of the cosmos for the universe, mark the secularization of the modern world, or what others might loosely characterize as modernity.[3] The loss of the transcendent is the most critical change, from which all others flow, and in his explanation, it stems from secularization, in which religious belief becomes only one option among many, and, more crucially, in which the broader culture has accepted a division between the transcendent and the immanent. This change in the conditions of belief corresponds with an increasing difficulty in believing in the possibility of some place of fullness outside the immanent human experience (14-15). In sum, to be human in a premodern understanding is to be "essentially vulnerable…essentially *open* to an outside (whether benevolent or malevolent),

[3] For Taylor, the cosmos is hierarchical and ordered and "has at its apex and centre God," which provides clear bounds and limits; in contrast, the universe appears limitless, in which origins and future alike are lost to time, and is not ordered according to human meaning (60). Friel appears to take this perception of existence for granted as a condition of contemporary human life, and while his plays certainly touch upon the implications of this shift, the contrast between life in the embedded cosmos versus life in the disembedded universe is not of the same primary significance in the immediate, daily life of Ballybeg's residents.

open to blessing or curse, possession or grace" (Smith 29; emphasis original).[4] The transcendent, that outside power, exists neither strictly within nor without the self, but in "a zone of power of exogenous meaning" which can include or penetrate the individual self; as Taylor explains, the boundary between the self and that outside power is not fixed but porous (35).

This porous boundary between the self and the transcendent results in an understanding of the social bond itself as enchanted or sacred, and chronological or secular time as something which could be transcended by sacred or "higher" time. Taylor notes that "Living in the enchanted, porous world of our ancestors was inherently living socially," seeking a collective good anchored in the social rituals of the community (Taylor 30). The community's rites and devotions, as Louis Dupré suggests, allow it to enter into kairotic moments, which are not strictly chronological (204). Instead, kairotic moments can link together events that are far apart in chronological time, pointing toward what Taylor calls "higher time," or moments that touch upon the eternal by demonstrating their inherently similar identity (Taylor 55). Yet in Friel's Ballybeg plays, these transcendent moments are often few and far between, in part because the community is no longer linked through meaningful rituals, though their rarity

[4] James K. A. Smith's *How (Not) to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* is a valuable companion work to Taylor's *The Secular Age,* and Smith provides helpful, concise descriptions or summaries of the concepts Taylor draws out in more detail.

gives them a central, privileged place in Friel's drama. As a result, Friel's protagonists are dissociated from one another, existing as atomized individuals rather than interlinked members of a community. Gar O'Donnell from *Philadelphia! Here I Come* is perhaps the clearest example, but the fractured Butler family of *Living Quarters* or the characters of *Molly Sweeney*, who are on stage together but never interact, also demonstrate the isolation of the individual adrift in the immanent world.

Modernity replaces all of these ideas by locating meaning particularly in the mind, which is itself a bounded, inward space, which Taylor deems the "buffered self" that is insulated by the fact that it is inner and mental rather than exterior and other. This self exists in a world that has been "divested of the transcendent," giving the immediate, perceivable world "ultimacy and meaning" rather than understanding the world as pointing to some other fullness or fulfillment (Smith 48). No longer is there a higher good that exists beyond the perceivable, material world; meaning is immanent, found without that world, to which Taylor links the rise of capitalism as well as the emphasis upon reason (Taylor 221-2). Mystery fades as the world becomes wholly immanent and potentially knowable, and with mystery goes the miraculous; finally, the belief in the possibility of an ultimate transformation from human life to divine destiny fades as well (223-4). As human possibility narrows from transformation to mere

discipline and obedience, the hope for meaningful human flourishing in the form of some eschatological purpose fades, too.(222)

Friel's particular use of ritual and memory suggests his insight into a cultural shift occurring far beyond Ballybeg, while simultaneously affecting his fictional village and its real-world counterparts deeply. Friel described the Irish manifestation of this cultural shift in a 1970 interview about a "complete stagnation of the hierarchy and clergy"; ten years later, he discussed how "inherited images," often disseminated by stagnating institutions, "control and rule our lives so much more profoundly than the historical truth of what happened" (*EDI* 29, 87). As a result, Friel suggests what is needed is some kind of counter-ritual in order to overcome the power of inherited images and reclaim the truth of what has truly happened. As he observed in an interview with John Lahr:

> I think there's a need for the pagan in life…I don't think of it as disrupting Christianity. I think of it as disrupting civility. If too much obeisance is offered to manners, then in some way we lose or suppress the grumbling and dangerous beast that's underneath the ground. This denial is what causes the conflict (*CBF* 214)

The "grumbling and dangerous beast that's underneath the ground," whose disappearance would be a significant loss, suggests Friel's yearning for something transcendent, and his awareness that even the villages of Ireland are caught in what Taylor calls "cross pressures, between the draw of the narratives

of closed immanence on one side, and the sense of their inadequacy on the other, strengthened by encounter with existing milieux of religious practice, or just by some intimations of the transcendent" (595). "Civility" becomes a means of "taming raw nature" in Taylor's framework, an effort to manage the passions of both personal and communal life, often in the name of social control rather than some more transcendent *telos* (Taylor 112). The disruption of civility allows the transcendent to threaten not only personal self-control but also broader societal order—but Friel appropriately questions whether this disruption is strictly negative.

Friel's insistence on "disrupting civility" and letting out the "grumbling and dangerous beast" is thus a stab at transcendence, albeit a tentative one whose affects manifest in ways that are limited and partial at best, and destructive at worst. In the premodern worldview, the "grumbling and dangerous beast" did not have to live underneath the ground; its transcendent nature, its meaning, was located neither strictly within nor strictly without the self, but "[r]ather it is in a kind of interspace which straddles what for us is a clear boundary. Or the boundary is…porous" (Taylor 35). In this condition, people live in constant awareness of Graham Hughes's edge experiences, as discussed in Chapter 1. The modern, "buffered" self, however, has drawn boundaries, which Friel characterizes as "civility," and these boundaries have

pushed the grumbling and dangerous beast underground. The modern self can be forced into encounters with the beast, but as Taylor notes, the self can meet these manipulated circumstances with "counter-manipulation: I avoid distressing or tempting experiences, I don't shoot up the wrong substances, etc" (38). And not only do the buffered self's boundaries push back the transcendent, but those boundaries also can weaken social bonds; individual flourishing is no longer seen as caught up in a more collective experience. Disrupting civility also means disrupting the barriers of politeness, collapsing the distance between public and private in order to allow for meaningful human connection. This collapse of public and private is thwarted in moments such as the emotional climax of *Philadelphia* or in the conversations between the Butlers in *Living Quarters*, and yet the desire is vivid and real to both the characters and the observing audience, who yearn for the moment of connection that would offer some hope and perhaps a fresh outcome for the story.

Thus, an efficacious ritual in Friel's Ballybeg plays is one that disrupts civility, allowing in some sliver of transcendence that binds the characters together, however briefly; furthermore, the narrative preserved in these rituals privileges rather than suppresses the experiences of vulnerable members of the community. The success of these rituals is rarely more than temporary, but the result is nonetheless positive, at least pointing toward some other reality to

which the characters can aspire and expanding rather than contracting communal memory. These positive rituals make the work of Ricoeur and Dupré, discussed in Chapters Two and Three, still very valuable, particularly since all three Friel plays under discussion—*Living Quarters, Faith Healer*, and *Dancing at Lughnasa*—involve interesting uses or manipulations of time and memory. A number of critical explorations of Friel's plays, particularly *Faith Healer* and *Dancing at Lughnasa*, examine these uses of ritual and memory very well. Robert Tracy notes that the ritualization of memory in plays such as *Faith Healer* gives those memories permanence through their reenactment; Joan Robbins similarly identifies a desire in Friel's characters for transcendence, and their ritual actions often give them some power to transcend or manipulate reality, sometimes out of a genuine spiritual impulse and sometimes out of a simple desire to escapism. Laurie Brands Gagné suggests *Dancing at Lughnasa's* Michael functions as a contemporary *fili*, a poet or seer "whose purpose was not to convey literal facts, but rather, what was 'amusing,' 'beautiful,' or 'enchanted' about some past time" in order to rekindle "some luminous spark in the present," an act of re-enchantment and entry into sacred time (120). Moreover, as Richard Rankin Russell observes, these moments of transcendence are linked to the interrelationship between people and the land, and the ongoing condition of flux experienced by people in those places (7, 11).

Yet however much Friel's characters desire transcendence, sometimes their enacted rituals fail to reach it—indeed, sometimes their rituals do more to smother this dangerous and grumbling beast than to bring it to the surface. These rituals are often essentially deformative, and they often enforce a dominant power structure that is inherently oppressive or corrupt, as postcolonial readers of Friel's work have observed. However, some readers sometimes ignore or misinterpret the rituals that define the plays. Marianne McDonald, for instance, characterizes *Living Quarters* as a dream play, doing little to engage the implications that the Butlers have enacted the events of the play more than once. David Krause reads *Dancing at Lughnasa* as a sentimentalized "quest" for to recover a moment of past happiness, a quest which fails upon meeting "the harsh realities of the present" which Friel's "inability to create a vital and resilient language cannot overcome" (360-1).[5] Often the social or political elements of the plays—the immanent side, in other words—takes priority over the transcendent elements often lurking just below the surface.

French philosopher René Girard's work on ritual and sacrifice helps bridge the gap between the anthropological and religious in a way that opens up

[5] It is worth noting that Krause's view falls well outside the consensus of other critics on *Dancing at Lughnasa*, who may be divided in their opinions on the success of Michael's action, but generally concur that the play itself is a successful dramatic work.

fresh meaning in the Ballybeg plays, bringing the immanent and the transcendent elements of the plays into contact with one another.[6] Not only is ritual, with its civility-disrupting power, a key component of many of Friel's plays, but sacrifice is often a central part of these rituals. This sacrifice, which is often of a scapegoated individual, is essential for restoring stability and peace to the community (*I See Satan Fall* 25). In terms of Friel's drama, a positive ritual has the power to release a transcendent force and bring participants into contact with external sources of meaning, briefly reenchanting the world. However, a more sinister form of ritual lets the transcendent out only briefly, and only in order to restore the peace and status quo of the community once again, and the reenchantment is illusory rather than transformative.

Girard's work explains why these toxic forms of ritual might fail. The human capacity for imitation extends to desire, and that this mimetic desire leads to rivalries that grow increasingly toxic or intense until "hatred for a common enemy" accomplishes "what desire for the same object can never accomplish" (*Sacrifice* 25). He goes on to explain, "Two, then three, then four antagonists form an alliance against a fifth and, little by little, mimeticism mounts….In the end, the entire system tips over into unanimity against a single adversary, a scapegoat

[6] The link between Girard and Friel has been suggested before by critics such as Jose Lanters, who explores sacrifice in *The Gentle Island* and *Wonderful Tennessee*, and Richard Rankin Russell, who considers Girard's sacrificial model in relation to *Faith Healer*. Girard's ideas have not been brought into conversation with *Dancing at Lughnasa*, a play where the theme of sacrifice is less explicit.

chosen by mimeticism itself' (25). The death of the scapegoat restores peace, therefore:

> The miracle of sacrifice is the formidable "economy" of violence that it realizes. It directs against a single victim the violence that, a moment before, menaced the entire community. This liberation appears all the more miraculous for intervening in extremis, at the very moment when all seems lost. Each time a community is saved by the scapegoat mechanism it rejoices, but it is soon alarmed to find that the effects of the founding murder are temporary, and that it risks falling back into rivalries it has only just managed to escape. (27)

These sacrifices, Girard suggests, inevitably fail because the anger for which the scapegoat dies is always misplaced: "Sacrifice is an attempt to outwit the desire for violence by pretending, as far as possible, that the more dangerous and therefore more fascinating victim is the one being sacrificed rather than the enemy with whom we are obsessed in everyday life" (57). The chosen victim is one who *can* be punished, whereas the true culprit is often a force that eludes justice.

In the rituals that occur throughout time in Friel's Ballybeg, the deeper suffering of the community is pinned, repeatedly, upon a single individual or small group whose suffering offers a distraction from the deeper sources of anguish that scar the community, institutional forces that are immune to the reprisals of the frustrated, wounded citizens of the village. These rituals represent a yearning for a transcendent power that would overcome the

"civility" that Friel observes as so stifling and offer Ballybeg some alternative path toward the future. However, because the victims are not the true culprits, their sacrifices cannot offer healing. Precisely because these rituals fail, they are enacted repeatedly, the victims returning as revenants making thwarted stabs at transcendence, sinking Ballybeg further into stagnation. Only when the ritual rehabilitates the victims and honors their stories can the transcendent actually be invited onto the space of the stage and some degree of healing be brought to wounded Ballybeg.

Living Quarters

Friel imported these themes to Ballybeg with the 1977 production of *Living Quarters*, a play modeled after Euripides's *Hippolytus* which marked his first return to Ballybeg and continued his experiments with form.[7] Commandant Frank Butler returns from an overseas posting and is rewarded with a long-desired promotion to Dublin; however, on the night of his celebration, he discovers his young wife has had an affair with her stepson, Ben. Devastated by the betrayal, Frank shoots himself. Yet the structure and staging, rather than the basic outlines of the plot, provide the oppressive narrative with its power against which the characters struggle, as well as the hellish ritual that they are doomed

[7] Christopher Murray links this text to Pirandello's technical experiments, particularly as *Six Characters in Search of an Author* as the characters seek an external source of authority, partly to absolve them from culpability in the play's central tragedy (71).

to endlessly repeat. The audience quickly realizes that they are not watching the characters reenact this story for the first time. The enigmatic Sir directs them through this particular iteration, as it is suggested he has with other iterations before the audience turned up to observe. Sir is the one who commands the other characters to reenact the events of that terrible night exactly as they are set down in his ledger, as though he and his book are replacements for the Greek gods of the original play or a manifestation of fate. The ledger is a source of frequent distress to the characters, first in how they are described. Father Tom Carty, a family friend and alcoholic priest, chafes at being set down as a cliché, and later protests to Sir, "You can't just label a man a cliché and write him off." Sir coolly replies, "The assessment isn't mine" (*Selected Plays* 198). Sir has the anonymity and authority of the official man, or, if the play is a ritual, the officiant, the person whose identity is subsumed by his role, and who receives his power from an invisible, outside source. He adheres to the ledger as a government official might to a set of rules and regulations, or as a priest might follow a missal.

But the real anguish of the ledger is how the ritualized reenactment of its contents enforces civility in the form of the proper ordering of events, denies the possibility of sacred time, and enshrines the shredded social bonds between characters. Sir ensures that the characters adhere to the order of the ledger, despite their protests, and as Michael Lloyd notes, as the play progresses, the

characters often fall into obedience without prompting (248). When Anna attempts to defy the sequence of events and tell the truth about her affair with Ben before it is meant to happen, Sir warns her that the other characters will not hear her. Even as she blurts out her secret to the rest of the Butler family, they carry on, oblivious to her presence. When she tries, afterwards, to explain her actions to Sir, he insists still upon proper order:

> SIR: You'll tell us later.
> ANNA: It wasn't even loneliness—
> SIR: Later—later—you'll do it *later* exactly as it's here. Now go back to your room.
> ANNA: I'm sorry.
> SIR: No harm done.
> ANNA: Did I miss it all up?
> SIR: You shuffled the pages a bit—that's all. But nothing's changed. (*SP* 203)

Even the other characters comment upon the hellish, Beckettian repetitions that the play has trapped them in, while ostensibly remarking upon past errors or mistakes. Ben notes miserably that regret cannot take back betrayal, for "then it's too late, too late—the thing's preserved in perpetuity" (212). This perpetuity, however, does not point toward some ultimate *telos* or a deeper purpose to the repetitions. The ledger exists to perpetuate the events in the ledger: nothing more, nothing less. It does not allow these events to be connected to other points in history, nor does it allow for profane, chronological time to be disrupted or sanctified. Instead, it represents authority without meaning, like the moral rules

that Taylor observes take the place of belief in transformation and a divine human destiny.

Instead, the ledger with its brutal authority brings about a desecration of holy time by insisting upon the chronological repetition of these events, with no one repetition even connecting to any other, except perhaps to the original, founding act of self-murder that the Butlers all wish to forget. Furthermore, this desecration of holy time seems essential to Sir. As he explains to Anna near the end of the first half, when she pleads to skip to climax of this bleak ritual, "the point of no return,"

> SIR: Well, of course we can do that. But if we do, we're bypassing that period when different decisions *might* have been made… And at this point it did occur to many of you to say certain things or to omit saying certain things. And it is the memory of those lost possibilities that has exercised you endlessly since and has kept bringing you back here, isn't that so? (*SP* 206)

Sir casts the other characters as reluctant but consenting participants in this purgatorial family drama, summoned out of their later lives by their own guilt and desire to rewrite the past, even as he forces and reinforces the truth that the past cannot be changed, and that they are subject always to the tyranny of the ledger, which records the hard facts rather than the emotions and longings that the characters express every time they attempt to break away from the script. Even if the ledger and its authority remain ultimately inadequate, as Anthony Roche observes, its control is unyielding (125). As a result, the social bonds

between them, strained from the play's beginning, have no hope of ever mending.

Ritual, in this instance, is not just insufficient, but actively harmful: it does not allow the characters to integrate their emotions and memories with the brutal facts of what has happened; it only forces them to repeat endlessly the one day they cannot move beyond, no matter where their later lives take them. This utterly non-transcendent version of Ballybeg, instead of hope, offers them only the opportunity to unhappily rehearse the past, again and again, unable to integrate it into their personal narratives, or move past it into a more meaningful life, as Anna discovers when Sir reveals her future:

> SIR: "Mrs. Butler, Anna, emigrated to America… She shares an apartment with an English girl and they go on holidays together. She owns a car and is thinking f buying an apartment of her own. She has never returned to Ireland." And that's it.
> Anna: That's all? (246)

When pressed, she admits that nothing is missing: "Not a single thing." And yet clearly something is profoundly missing: Ben's company, a child, a partner, some indication of love or purpose beyond the flat facts on the page. Anna submits, instead, to the reality of the ledger: there is only what is set down, in the order in which it is set down; the comfort of social ties is meaningless, leaving only the individual pursuit of satisfaction; and the transcendent elements that all the

characters have longed to bring into the story goes forsaken in this iteration of the story, as it will also in all the iterations to come.[8]

Living Quarters was Friel's first return to Ballybeg in 1977 after the success of his 1964 breakout, *Philadelphia! Here I Come*, and the return to familiar ground in such a strikingly different work suggests Ballybeg's importance as a returning character. The Butler family are not the only people haunted by Frank Butler's suicide; his death suggests instead that these rituals also have an effect upon the environment itself, contributing to Ballybeg's broader history of trauma, as suggested by Chu He, who notes that trauma "can happen within the range of human experience and as an accumulated effect; what happens is not as important as how people react to it" (123). The Butlers, and the residents of Ballybeg more generally, suffer through a "hidden struggle with a past that is forever present…a recurring, open wound that refuses to be closed and forgotten so as to bear faithful witness to the unspeakable and the unknown" (He 124). The Ballybeg that Gar O'Donnell flees in *Philadelphia* is a fictional village haunted by ghosts, whether they are the more innocent but still anguished phantoms of Gar's memory or the tormented spirits of the Butler family, forever repeating the night of his death. Ballybeg is shaped by the suffering of its inhabitants, and

[8] The tyranny of the ledger reflects Friel's broader suspicion of the ways in which official, written texts can be used to erase or flatten identity, or further an official story that elides the truth. Other examples include the Ordinance Survey in *Translations*, the judicial inquiry in *Freedom of the City*, or the phrenological text in *The Home Place*.

perhaps even suffers along with its inhabitants, and in turn, the village visits that pain upon other characters who turn up in other stories, notably never aware of their predecessors, whether in time or in Friel's other plays. That many of Friel's plays share a setting but not a plot does not indicate that Ballybeg is a cipher onto which an idea as projected or upon which a dramatic technique is tested, but instead emphasizes the fundamental estrangement of his characters from their predecessors as well as from those with whom they share the stage. Their lives are small and cruelly bounded, with no escape into sacred time: immanence run amok.

Faith Healer

Ballybeg's immanence and its capacity to be haunted takes perhaps its cruelest toll upon the characters of Friel's 1979 play *Faith Healer,* and particularly Frank Hardy, the eponymous faith healer who is among Friel's characters the most haunted, and most poisoned, by the struggle to believe in something transcendent. His struggle engulfs those who are closest to him: his wife, Grace, and his manager, Teddy. Like the Butlers, these three characters enact their own hellishly repetitive ritual of memory, a ritual that also ends in catastrophe in Ballybeg. The story unfolds over the course of three monologues: the small company's itinerant life in the villages of Scotland and Wales, where Frank sometimes attempts to perform his gift, and the toll this takes upon them all as

Frank descends into alcoholism, Grace miscarries her baby, and Teddy is forgotten or effaced from the stories told by the other two characters. The three accounts differ sharply, in troubling ways, but in one event all three come together: when they return at last to Ireland, to a pub near Ballybeg, Frank's gift fails him for the last time, and he is murdered in a frenzy of violence that Russell reads as an act of sacrifice, though Frank differs from Friel's past victims in that he genuinely wishes to die (Russell 115).

While the play was criticized by some upon its first performances for its lack of dramatic action, it is now regarded as one of Friel's masterpieces.[9] Nonetheless, critical opinions of the action of the play, and particularly Frank's death or self-sacrifice at the end, remain varied and at times highly contested. Many critical interpretations rely upon the notion that Frank Hardy is a stand-in for the artist, a view which Friel nudged along in contemporary interviews; Mel Gussow, in a 1991 profile of Friel, calls it "an eloquent metaphorical study of the artist's life-and-death struggle" (*BFC* 207), and Friel, in a 1982 interview with Fintan O'Toole, made a vague remark that the play "was some kind of metaphor for the art, the craft of writing, or whatever it is…it's also a pursuit that, of necessity, has to be very introspective, and as a consequence it leads to great

[9] As Ronan Farren notes in the headnote of his 1980 interview with Friel, Richard Eder of the *New York Times* called *Faith Healer* "staggering and tedious," and Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* declared, "Pretentiousness carves its own tombstone" (*BFC* 123). Not all critics were so disdainful; John Simon of the *New Yorker* said that although the play was "as full of holes as Swiss cheese…Flaws be damned, *Faith Healer* is well worth experiencing" (Apr 23 1979, p. 70).

selfishness" (173). Russell notes that elsewhere, however, Friel acknowledges that his works, including plays such as *Faith Healer*, have inevitable "political resonances" approached through "analogy, myth, and symbolism" (Russell 110). Friel's composition notes bear this out, as when he remarks that while Frank's renunciation of chance is his "artistic death," it was "NOT exclusively artistic—the renunciation of chance is everyone's death" (MS 37,075/1). And this renunciation is what brings about the corrosive, ritual repetitions of the play as a whole.

The religious or spiritual element was prominent in *Faith Healer* from its inception. And while Friel reminded himself in early notes that the play's tone should not be funereal, the struggle with the loss of the transcendent was always intended to be vivid. As he wrote in those early notes:

> Christ's cures—of withered hands, leprosy etc.—were of no importance and he knew it: free lollipops before the real business. He had no interest in healing; only in selling his philosophy. But he knew that the physical benefit & incontestable evidence. And that a cure, for the patient and his family, would be the most memorable event in a life: endlessly talked over.
> [Frank] is aware of this. And the absence of a philosophy, the follow through, makes him feel empty and a bit absurd. This curing is a suspended gift, drawing from what, leading to what—an irrational accident. And unlike Christ, his power is erratic: he can neither summon nor control it. To an extent he is its victim. (*FH* MS)

Frank is the bearer of a transcendent gift in a wholly immanent world, and as a result, finds himself haunted by the lack of meaning in the gift which appears

bestowed upon him by happenstance. As he tells the audience in his first monologue, faith healing is "A craft without an apprenticeship, a ministry without responsibility, a vocation without a ministry" (*SP* 333).

As Frank's statement suggests, his practice of his gift is socially disconnected, with no sense of allegiance to a force outside himself, and his success judged almost wholly by how the practice of his craft makes him *feel*:

> [T]hose were nights of exultation, of consummation—no, not that I was doing good, nothing at all to do with that; but because the questions that undermined my life then became meaningless and because I knew for those few hours I had become whole in myself, and perfect in myself… (333)

His ritual of healing, then, cannot be formative; it is more akin to the work of a drug. In a scrap of unattributed dialogue from Friel's early notes, a character asks, "Why didn't he just assume the talent or whatever it was & get on with it? Why did he keep questioning—almost fighting it? Why didn't he just <u>obey</u> it & so be perfectly himself?" (MS 37,075/1). Yet Frank's buffered self, unfettered by the recognition of others' claims upon him, or even their own reality, does not allow him to obey something potentially from outside himself that would threaten his ability to define himself from within.

Frank does struggle toward the transcendent; as Robert Tracy observes: "Frank's repeated ceremony of healing, his use of chapels and church halls, and the litany he uses beforehand as a kind of invocation of his powers, grounds the

play in rituals and settings intended to bring about the conditions for the miraculous to happen" (402). He is aware of the power of ritual trappings, Christian and pagan alike—for those churches and chapels often have a "a withered sheaf of wheat from a harvest thanksgiving of years ago or a fragment of a Christmas decoration across a window—relicts of abandoned rituals" (332). Teddy, too, is aware of it; in a draft, he recollects someone saying Frank's banner looks "like a medieval French ecclesiastical tapestry. I knew what he meant, too: the texture of the material and the way the lettering's beginning to fade—kind of sacred—yes, I'd agree with that" (MS 37,076/1). Everything about Frank's presentation suggests he is hungry for the sacred, even more so than the people he attempts to heal; yet although Frank longs for the transcendent to break through into his world, he cannot be sure whether it will. As he asks in his litany of questions, "Could my healing be effected without faith? But faith in what?—in me?—in the possibility?—faith in faith?" (334). The questions suggest how Frank, like many of Friel's characters, is embroiled in a search for his "undiscoverable origin," as Neil Corcoran describes it (18), a search that is doomed to fail, or at least, never to be resolved. His search takes him through these forgotten villages, but in their desolation, they are precursors to Ballybeg itself, where the people are "beyond that kind of celebration," and the dangerous and grumbling beast of transcendence has not stirred for years (332). The lack of certainty or resolution

as to whether or not his transcendent gift will meet him in his ritual wears away at him over the years until he has to deny the beast utterly, in a Ballybeg that has turned hostile to any stirrings of the transcendent.

Both Grace and Teddy have partial intimations of Frank's struggle against the transcendent. Frank has a habit, which Grace observes, of recreating people in order to build a world that suits his needs, rather than responding to the world with which he is presented. As she notes,

> [I]t was some compulsion he had to adjust, to refashion, to recreate everything around him. It was as if—and I'm groping at this—but it seemed to me that he kept remaking people according to some private standard of excellence of his own, and as his standards changed, so did the person. But I'm sure it was always an excellence, a perfection, that was the cause of his restlessness and the focus of it. (*SP* 345-6)

Frank cannot accept the world in its given state, Grace realizes. He cannot even accept Grace herself in her given state, but constantly changes her surname, her place of origin, how they had met, and even whether or not they are married, and he does the same when describing his own father, according to Grace (345).[10] Grace's understanding of this trait ranges from resentful to tender; when first describing how Frank rewrote her own origins, she accuses him of trying to "humiliate" her (345), but at the close of that reminiscence, she has recast it as a

[10] There is always the possibility that Frank is telling the truth about Grace being English and not actually married to him, but Teddy and Grace both appear to agree that Grace is Irish, and Frank's wife, not mistress. See *SP* 347, 354, 360, 367.

desire for perfection or excellence. In both cases, she is partly correct; Frank is dissatisfied with the world before him and the individuals who people it, and unconcerned about the cruelty of forcing a new identity upon them if it can make him feel more stable and secure against the invasions of the transcendent brought about by his own gift. Moreover, she has demonstrated her own capacity for rewriting Frank and their shared history in order to suit her present needs, attempting to bring him up to "some private standard of excellence" that will allow her to carry on without him or bring her back in touch with the transcendent power that brushed her life while Frank was still alive.

Teddy, meanwhile, understands the insecurity that the exercise of Frank's transcendent gift brings about. His monologue opens with a lengthy discourse on what makes an artist great, which he sums up as "not one of them has two brains to rub together… They know they have something fantastic, sure… But what they have, how they do it, how it works, what that sensational talent is, what it all means-belief me, they don't know and they don't care" (355). It's a cynical gloss on what might otherwise be characterized as an openness to something unknown and outside the self, a willingness to be possessed by one's gift. Frank lacks the ability to be vulnerable in that way, or, as Teddy puts it, he has "brains?—brains!—that's all the stupid bastard had was brains! …And what did they do for him, I ask you, those bloody brains? They bloody castrated

him…bloody knackered him" (357). In an early draft, Friel allows Teddy to expound on this at length, comparing Frank to a greyhound in the racing trap who suddenly asks himself:

> Why do greyhounds race? Why don't pussycats race? What's the philosophical meaning of racing? Maybe it's all an illusion. Could it be that you don't move at all—fact you're standing still—and the punters they're doing the running?" And you're outside, leaning over the rail, your bloody stomach frozen with nerves. And the six traps fly open. And five fools leap out. And there's Three Million sitting inside, scratching his bloody head. Or drunk. Or defiant. Or staring at you with those eyes of his that are asking you to just leave him alone, please, Teddy, please, please. (*FH* MS)

The gift that threatens Frank's stable understanding of himself and his world, not to mention the sheer unreliability of its effectiveness, ultimately proves his downfall. Frank simply cannot open himself unquestioningly to its power, but even worse, he cannot abide when it deserts him. And his inability to know whether it will come or not, his incessant second-guessing, produces the crippled artist that Teddy describes, simultaneously craving and recoiling from the transcendent. At last, the instinct to recoil is the one that wins, a renunciation of chance that Friel observes is not just artistic death, but everyone's death: a final refusal of the gift of transcendence. Frank is not the only one who chooses this refusal, either; Grace kills herself, and Teddy retires from his itinerant life of managing artists.

In part, these decisions stem from the disintegration of the social bond that accompanies the loss of the transcendent, as Taylor has observed. Frank's lack of a stable community in which to practice his gift has not often been discussed in the criticism, even though this is one of the few Ballybeg plays that features rootless drifters like the Hardys and Teddy. Shaun Richards, who has written an excellent post-colonial exploration of *Translations, Dancing at Lughnasa,* and *Wonderful Tennessee*, leaves *Faith Healer* out of his discussion of place and placelessness, though Frank's rootlessness has the dual effect of heightening the anxiety of his questioning and depriving him of people who might challenge his tendency to rewrite the world according to his own desires. As Stuart Hall observes, in a modern culture that has become "relentlessly material" (Taylor might insist on "immanent") or transnational, discounting stories of origin, points of attachment—"communities, localities, territories, languages, religions, or cultures"—are a means of establishing one's position, "co-ordinates" which serve as a reminder "that everybody comes from some place" as a means of resisting cultural narratives that strip away the importance of the local in shaping and preserving identity (Hall 236). However, Frank's peripatetic life and his habit of rewriting the world to suit his needs strips these coordinates from his life as well as the lives of Grace and Teddy. As a result, Frank's ritual healings, and the larger ritual of the play itself, fail to bring together the main characters or

those who brush against their lives in any meaningful way: they all remain hopelessly separate from one another. The faith healings, when successful, do seem like beneficial acts. But as Frank himself observes, he did not particularly care that he was "doing good, giving relief, spreading joy," although he also refuses to entertain the belief that he might be a con man—or rather, denies the notion each time it comes bubbling up to the surface. His actions do not stabilize relationships or build community, except perhaps on the level of audience.

This lack of stable community plays out between the three main characters, too, on the levels of both action and language. Certainly all three of the characters wound and fatally misunderstand one another. After the successful night in Llanbethian, where Frank healed ten people, he and Grace abandon Teddy without a thought, spending the money they were given by a grateful farmer on a weekend of high life in Cardiff. Grace and Frank, notably, gloss over Teddy entirely in their telling of the story. Teddy, however, notes that they were "Just like kids, you know. Thoughtless; no thought for tomorrow. And no cruelty intended—oh no, no cruelty. But at a time like that a bit thoughtless…. Just a bit thoughtless—that's all" (360). Repetition in *Faith Healer* often indicates a truth that one is trying to conceal from oneself; in this case, Teddy attempts to excuse the Hardys' behavior, ostensibly to the audience, but more clearly to himself. A similar rupture centers around the Grace's stillborn child, delivered in

Kinlochbervie. Frank avoids all mention of the incident himself, and Grace chooses to remember that Frank was there with her. But Teddy offers another story: Frank walked away, and Teddy was with Grace when she delivered the baby, he dug the grave and said a prayer over it, not Frank. Frank's refusal to remember the incident, Grace's decidedly Frank-like decision to rewrite it to suit her own needs, and Teddy's repeated effacement from significant moments indicates the fragility of the bond between the three characters, who cannot even form a stable community amongst themselves.

These rewritings and misrememberings highlight the lack of stable community between the three characters on the level of plot, but also highlight the difficulties Friel perceives on the level of language, demonstrated through the "violent rhetoric" of the three main characters, which "suggests that we murder each other every day with our words" (Russell 129). A good ritual requires its participants to voluntarily choose to speak the same language and perform the same actions, and when it is appropriately dynamic, as Eliot's *Quartets* or Brown's *Greenvoe* show, the ritual can be adapted or reapplied to suit specific needs and circumstances in the lives of the participants. Here, however, the characters cannot agree on the narrative, and their accounts conflict to such a high degree that the audience can only guess as to which accounts are most probable, rather than ferret out the truth of what actually happened. The

presentation of multiple narratives might, at first blush, seem nearly positive, since Friel is suspicious of a master narrative that drowns out any alternative voices, but the lack of stable community between the three characters means that each poses his or her own master narrative, which cannot be modified or corrected by the recollections of the other two. As Nicholas Grene observes, "The play may look at first like a dramatization of the distortions of memory, each unreliable narrator reshaping the past to suit his or her emotional needs" (57). The characters themselves are like "conflicting witnesses, each of whom gives testimony alone in the witness box unaware of the others' evidence" (54-5). As Clare Gleitman points out, their "separate and irreconciliable subjectivities" become an obstacle which prevents them from fulfilling their individual needs (96).[11] As Ricoeur observes, "[T]o remember, we need others…when we no longer belong to the group in the memory of which a given recollection is preserved, our own memory is weakened for lack of external supports" (120-1). This lack of collective memory is devastating to each character's unity of self. Teddy intuits a fragment of this when he observes that, even if all that mattered to Frank was his work, and all that mattered to Grace was Frank, "when you put

[11] As critics, particularly Grene, have noted, the truth of some incidents can be pieced together by the audience when two of the three characters corroborate each others' stories (Grene 55). Yet there are anecdotes that become impossible to confirm when all two characters present conflicting stories and the third does not address the incident at all, or when all three present different tales, as occurs with the explanation of how "The Way You Look Tonight" became Frank's opening music.

the two propositions together like that—I don't know—somehow they both become only half-truths, you know" (360). The characters desperately need a story that can encompass and explain both propositions, and yet that is precisely what is lacking. Indeed, Grene suggests that Frank's habit of constructing fictions even actively undermines the search for truth; rather than being a person who misremembers the past, "he is a compulsive, even professional maker of fictions" (56). This condition of crippled memory is what they bring to bear on Ballybeg: their rootlessness, their inability to even find a coherent narrative of the past, their struggle to create and sustain meaningful encounters with the transcendent.

The return to Ballybeg, a decision for which no character takes responsibility, can thus be cast as an attempt to find this larger story which would make sense of the twelve years of exile and wandering.[12] Each character agrees that for a moment, it seemed as though the return might do exactly that. Grace remembers that Frank had hoped "Ireland might somehow recharge him, maybe even restore him" after losing touch with his gift, and on that night in Ballybeg, she notes, "I remember watching him and thinking: Yes, his sense was true, he *is* going to be restored here—he was so easy and so relaxed and so charming," even referring to Grace as his wife instead of mistress (351-2). Teddy recollects Frank and Grace sitting "[s]ide by side. Together in Ireland. At home in

[12] Declan Kiberd reads this return, and several other features of the story, as evidence that Friel is appropriating the Deirdre legend for modern Ireland.

Ireland. Easy; relaxed; chatting; laughing" (367). And while Frank claims that at first he had "no sense of homecoming," when they meet the wedding party, he claims that the carousing does indeed make him feel, briefly, as though he has returned home. (338-9). Yet Ballybeg has no internal coherence of its own to offer them. There are few treatments of Ballybeg's role in *Faith Healer,* so glancing and incidental does its inclusion seem. Yet it is notable that Ballybeg is the place where Friel decides Frank Hardy must end (and, in an early draft, where he also began).[13] At the time of writing in the late 1970s, Ballybeg is almost exclusively a site of disappointment or tragedy from which Friel's characters ultimately flee, as the Butler family realizes in *Living Quarters* and Gar O'Donnell in *Philadelphia*. If Gar O'Donnell's friends are taken as types for the young men in the wedding party that the Hardys and Teddy encounter, they are, as Murray remarks, "youth frustrated rather than angry, youth confused and unable to reconcile desire and reality," distressed "less from circumstantial than from ontological causes," with a cruel streak that matches their confusion. (*Theatre* 16). Gar O'Donnell is not himself a violent man, but a reader can easily imagine his desperation and longing, when frustrated too long, curdling into something more overtly hostile than the private mockery he heaps upon his father and the parish priest. Russell

[13] In several early drafts of the play, Frank mentions Ballybeg as his hometown, and his return and death there gave the play a circular movement that Friel eventually discarded (*FH* MS).

notes that these young men in the wedding party embody the "profound spiritual deprivation" of their community as well as modern Ireland and the modern world more broadly (123).

Frank teases these young men with hope when he singles out one of them—or is singled out by one of them, depending on whose account an audience member trusts—and they are not prepared for the transcendent to break into their lives, due to their spiritual deprivation. Partly this is because they, like the speaking characters of the play, are buffered selves trapped in their own minds and experiences, in a world stripped of the transcendent. They are robbed of a social cohesion that would ease their frustration and ontological distress, and, as a result, they—like Frank—no longer believe in or experience the fullness of kairotic or higher time. As Taylor notes, kairotic time consists of moments lifted out of the flow of chronological time, usually because of some penetration by the transcendent. This elevation from profane to higher time causes the events to become not only linked but simultaneous. Friel deliberately gestures toward this kind of sacred time with the oblique references to harvest festivals throughout the play, which culminate in Frank's self-sacrifice, an event at which the young men appear to stand in for priests, accompanied by harvest implements such as the axe and hay-fork, as well as more brutal instruments such as the crowbar and mallet (Russell 114). Frank enters this moment as the

sacrificial victim, believing, as Russell suggests, that his self-sacrifice will bring some kind of healing to Grace, Teddy, and these young men. Yet despite the hypnotic effect of his final monologue, his sacrifice appears to fall short of the entry into Taylor's "higher time." Instead, his death reads more as Girard's "founding murder," in which antagonists formerly struggling with each other join forces against a common enemy who is only retroactively sanctified—but who lacks both the guilt and the divinity for his sacrifice to produce lasting effects (*Sacrifice* 21). As a result, the ritual's appeasing effect inevitably wanes, and it must be repeated, hence Frank's ghostly return every time the audience enters the theatre.

Or rather, if Frank's ritual self-sacrifice *is* effective and does produce a kind of "higher time," in which disparate events are linked together and made simultaneous (rather than simply being Girard's "founding murder"), the disparate events which are linked to his sacrificial death are the ritualistic repetitions of the play itself. And instead of pointing Frank, Grace, or Teddy at eternity or some transcendent fullness of time, each iteration of the story's retelling points them only at Frank's death, which they relive in memory again and again. The ritual does not lay ghosts to rest or allow for the integration of past trauma, but instead calls up the unquiet spirits of the Hardys and puts Teddy back through the emotional wringer of that night in Ballybeg. Because the

transcendent is not recognized by any of the characters, and because they cannot mesh their varying accounts into an accurate, all-encompassing whole, and lastly, because they cannot conceive of a kairotic moment to which Frank's death corresponds, there is no rest or peace in this ritual, only further suffering and deformation. Rather than rendering its participants whole, as Frank's faith healings once did, this ritual cripples them further.

There is reason to think the other, nonspeaking participants in this ritual were left similarly scarred. The young men who murdered Frank seem unlikely to have found any wholeness in the episode, their savagery perhaps temporarily abated, but certainly not forever banished. Frank exits their lives just as he exited the lives of all the other people whom he healed or disappointed over the years, without a thought as to what would become of them. The communal identity that generated, and may perpetuate, this violence is a toxic one: the landlord describes the young men as "savage bloody men," a description they more than live up to; the landlord's own pub is now marked as a site of violence just as past incidents, such as Frank Butler's suicide, have marked other places in Ballybeg. Tony Corbett has observed that *Faith Healer* is a play about "the creative power of the Word…almost a return to the idea of Logos," or the Word incarnate, the highest expression of the creative power; however, in *Faith Healer*, "the creative power is used to deceive" (132). Corbett frames this charitably as part of each

character's effort "to reconstruct and to negotiate selfhood," but the effect is more insidious and toxic, turning the creative power to the purpose of decreation. McGrath notes Friel's familiarity with the work of George Steiner, the philosopher who observed that a human is "the mammal who can bear false witness" and has "the power to unsay the world; to image and speak it otherwise" (McGrath 7). This ritual, which deals out death and brings a revenant rather than a resurrection, belongs far more to the power of Steiner's unsaying man, rather than the creative force of the Logos. The question that lingers, as Richard Pine suggests, is whether Frank's "killer instinct" has been "mitigated or even transformed, partly by the seduction of the poetry and partly by the inherent finesse of the gesture itself" (320). If so, the sacrifice is successful; if not, the audience must consider whether Frank's self-sacrifice, rather than bringing a blessing to Grace, Teddy, and Ballybeg, instead seals a curse, extending the spiritual deprivation of its residents, and doing nothing to lift the stagnation under which they live.

If on some level the ritual succeeds, it succeeds for the audience, for as Grene observes, *Faith Healer* is a theatrical rite enacted for its audience" (62), who might recognize the stabs at transcendent, and who, as observed above, attempt to create for themselves (never with perfect certainty) the master narrative that encompasses the three conflicting narratives of the play. Anthony Roche

observes that "the audience has a crucial role to play in relation to the interwoven, damaged lives of its three protagonists. They are telling their life histories to us, and each of their monologues is shaped rhetorically and emotionally by this directed appeal" (159). It is the audience, too, who are caught up in some kind of fullness of time; even if they do not recognize a gesture towards the eternal in the play, the realization that Frank and Grace narrate their stories from beyond the grave pushes them toward the edge of their own experiences, demand at least a brief acknowledgement of chilly mortality. As Russell observes, "Even if we recoil from the destructive power and revel in Frank's healing power, realizing their presence in our world leads us to appreciate how ritual, collective ceremonies….suggest our continued need to return to spirituality through the sacral present offered to us by drama" (143). Furthermore, their experience of the play can attain a kind of ritual simultaneity with the experiences of past audiences: even if this iteration is different, with different actors, modified stagings, varied line readings, the text itself links all these instances. Furthermore, it is only in the audience's spiritual need for him that Frank continues to exist. His sense of his final performance is that "we had ceased to be physical, and existed only in spirit, only in the need we had for each other" (376), and it is the audience's need that summons him forth on each subsequent evening as he repeats his story, the cessation of their need that sends

him away again. And the audience, like the audiences that attended Frank all those years ago, leave every time, perhaps transported and perhaps not, but most likely never to return. And yet the audience remains the only site where hope can be located: as Murray observes of both Frank Butler in *Living Quarters* and Frank Hardy in *Faith Healer*, "his death is meaningless unless it conveys the seeds of new awareness in the audience" (*Theatre* 78); unlike Frank, however, Friel does not renounce chance. The ritual of the play itself remains vulnerable to success or failure, with no certainty of either, each time it is performed.

Dancing at Lughnasa

Dancing at Lughnasa stands as one of the few Ballybeg plays whose ritual performance appears successful, although the extent of its success is arguable. The play is set in Ballybeg in the 1930s, with all the action unfolding in the house or garden of the five unmarried Mundy sisters. Their older brother, Father Jack, has returned from twenty-five years of service in a Ugandan leper colony. Michael, the son of the youngest of the five sisters, narrates the events of the play as an adult who is looking back to Ballybeg of his childhood, a place he left as soon as he was able. The play's action is anchored in the harvest season and, as the title suggests, is anchored around the holiday of Lughnasa, an Irish harvest festival named for the Celtic god Lugh. Despite the golden glow of nostalgia that hangs over the play (a glow that the lighting directions insist upon), the tone is

distinctly melancholy: Michael's father Gerry has returned to Ballybeg, but does not marry Christina, Michael's mother, since he already has a wife and family in his native Wales; Father Jack has lost his Catholic faith and was sent home to die; Kate, the matriarch of the family, loses her job in the village school due to Father Jack's apostasy; and the only other sisters with an income, Rose and Agnes, lose their knitting jobs to a textile factory that opens up in Ballybeg, leading to their decision to leave Ballybeg and ultimately die as vagabonds in London. And yet Michael's ritual of reminiscence seems positive, perhaps even successful. In this instance, Friel does not use ritual to instantiate the tragedy of the Mundy family's last autumn together, but instead employs ritual as an ultimately redemptive gesture, albeit one tempered by the acknowledgement of loss.

Dancing at Lughnasa was Friel's most immediately successful play, opening at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin to glowing reviews, and ultimately adapted into a film starring Meryl Streep. The hazy glow of nostalgia, or rather, what is mistaken for nostalgia, is no doubt partly responsible for this broad success.[14] Yet as many critics note, and as the play itself makes quite clear, the events of the story are anything but nostalgic; were it not for Michael's narration and the stage and lighting design, it would feel very much like a domestic

[14] The film version exaggerates this nostalgia, partly through interpretive choices that render poignant or melancholy moments more straightforwardly happy, and also by significantly altering Michael's role. See also Lonergan 45.

tragedy in which progress brutally and disinterestedly tears apart the lives of these five women, all of whom are more complicated than their surfaces make them seem.[15] Laurie Brands Gagné gives one of the most optimistic readings of the play, calling the play's ceremonial dances and Michael's memories of them "precisely calibrated liturgical ceremonies" that bring about a "movement…toward a depth of heart that is transcendent" (122). Russell reads it as a depiction of a "vanishing culture of rural life in Ireland" balanced "somewhere on this knife's edge of hope and despair" (198); William Pratt finds it similarly melancholy, a journey that briefly makes the past seem like an accessible place once again, although the deaths and dissolution of the Mundy family are the reality (447). A bleaker reading is certainly understandable. Friel's past Ballybeg plays have more often been bleak or tragic in scope; in addition to the painful ritual reenactments in *Living Quarters* and *Faith Healer*, the initial hope of *Translations* gives way to imperialist domination and personal loss, and the titular character of *Molly Sweeney* descends into madness. *Aristocrats* and *The Home Place* have their own dark streaks. Fintan O'Toole notes that *Lughnasa* takes the "failures" that have been preoccupations in past plays and "takes [them] for

[15] Helen Lojek argues persuasively that this play, while set in the 1930s, also comments upon the condition of women in the 1980s, exploring the "unfinished revolution in the lives of Irish women" by critiquing the injustice of the Mundy sisters' experiences (79).

granted and looks instead towards making them enjoyable for at least the duration of the play" (212).

Certainly *Dancing at Lughnasa* represents no unqualified success of ritual. The melancholy of the play is certainly genuine; Friel's composition notes indicate he was concerned that the tone would be *too* bleak, rather than not bleak enough. "All these people are spirited—even fiery—full of light," he wrote in the early notes (*DL* MS), adding that the play should grow in joyousness as characters "suddenly find the opportunity and the means to escape from imperial colonialism (of religion, politics, domesticity)" before the forces that enclose them reassert their dominance at the end (*DL* MS). Michael, whose narration helps create both the aura of nostalgia and the full awareness of the losses that befall the sisters, wasn't even a certain inclusion in the play, though his monologues are central and provoke some of the more enduring questions of the play, and the staging of his child self is one of Friel's most striking late innovations.[16] But Friel was nonetheless certain of several things from the start: the play was about the inadequacy of language, the way in which dance stepped in when language failed, and the necessity of paganism for resisting repressive

[16] Prapassaree Kramer observes that Michael is notably absent from many of the most important scenes of the play, calling into question things that occur on stage that he did not witness, and how he may be softening judgments against his relatives or assuaging his own guilt over abandoning them by filling in the blanks in a positive light. Of course, not all these blanks *are* positive—for instance, the scene which suggests Danny Bradley's sexual impropriety (if not assault) with Rose, or the sisters' alarm at Jack's decline and paganism—but Kramer's broader point about the essentially reconstructive nature of memory is valid.

forces in society. Once again, Friel's "grumbling beast" has come up from underground, but this time, its disturbances hold out the possibility of healing. Friel was also intent on ritual playing a significant role in the play; possible titles for the work included "Ceremonies at Lughnasa" and "Rituals at Lughnasa" in addition to "Dancing for Lugh" (*DL* MS)

Despite the play's melancholy tone, the ceremonies or rituals of *Dancing at Lughnasa* are ultimately transformative while remaining faithful to the Ballybeg plays that precede it. The village still has the capacity to be pitiless to outsiders, which the unmarried Mundy sisters, their apostate priest brother, and the deceiving Welshman Gerry Evans certainly are, and certainly there are dreams that have been abandoned or forsaken, or are soon to be destroyed. And Ballybeg's pagan past still rumbles below its calm surface, waiting to break through tense civility that governs the lives of the characters and give them access to deeper, more vivid truths about their existence. Yet the rituals contained within the two acts of the play ultimately work towards healing and redemption, and not only because, as Victor Turner suggests, language is "emancipated by means of other symbols—images, music, and dance."[17] In addition to this, the success is due to Michael's insistence on memorializing his

[17] *Lughnasa* notably contains all three: visual symbolism comes through Michael's kites and the facelike exterior of the wireless set; music permeates the play and was an integral part of the work; and the play is marked with three distinct episodes of dance.

family, which corrects a cultural tendency to erase stories that might trouble an institutional narrative of pristine nuclear families, untroubled Catholic faith, and the unblemished benevolence of progress. This act of memorializing, which balances the personal and the communal, demonstrates Helen Lojak's observation of Friel's "almost postmodernist conviction that personal and cultural memories both require revisitation and perhaps transfiguration" (80). By returning to his memories of this summer again and again, Michael transfigures the pain of the past into something more beautiful, gives voice to people who have been sacrificed on the altar of progress, and insists upon a more complicated and more nuanced understanding of what it means to be Irish, and, more specifically, a citizen of Ballybeg.

If Michael's overall ritual of remembrance is positive, the rituals contained *within* his broader ritual, particularly the three instances of dance are more ambiguous in nature.[18] Friel's notes make the link between dance and ritual clear, but it is explicit in the play, as well. Father Jack makes the connection clear when he struggles to remember the word "ceremony": "You have a ritual killing. You offer up sacrifice. You have dancing and incantations" (*P2* 62). He makes explicit

[18] These three instances are not the only occasions of dance: Father Jack briefly dances near the end, but it is a private, solitary gesture; in addition, Anthony Roche points out that Maggie's recollection of the dance competition she went to at age sixteen with her friend Bernie O'Donnell and two boys almost constitutes another dance in itself. Since this episode is narrated, rather than enacted within the harvest time of the play, I have chosen not to treat it as one of the key episodes of ritual, though it certainly reinforces the themes of dance, ritual, and disappointment that are woven throughout the work.

the link that is implicit in Rose's recounting of what happens in the annual Lughnasa celebrations in the back hills: "First they light the bonfire beside a spring well. Then they dance round it. Then they drive their cattle through the flames to banish the devil out of them" (29). Father Jack's paganism, absorbed from the Ugandan people he ministered to, and Rose's awareness of the homegrown paganism in the back hills, are not without their ominous sheen, the former involving "a ritual killing," which usually spells disaster in Friel, and the latter accompanied by story of the Sweeney boy's injuries, accrued when jumping through the flames of the Lughnasa bonfire. Most rituals, Friel suggests, involve some kind of sacrificial victim.

Girard's concept of the scapegoat is more often considered in relation to Frank Hardy in *Faith Healer*, but in light of Frank's failed self-sacrifice, and the way in which he appears to the audience not as a consecrated victim but as a revenant, I suggest that the Mundy sisters are instead Ballybeg's clearest sacrificial scapegoats, and their dances, throughout the play, are indications of their own desire for the transcendent to disrupt the stagnant civility of their lives, though instead it comes to claim them. Nonetheless, their ritual dances allow the pagan or transcendent forces that Ballybeg's residents often ignore to penetrate the everyday, and ultimately allow Michael to continue to access that sense of the pagan or transcendent even after leaving Ballybeg and craft it into an alternative

ritual that offers Ballybeg a new way forward. Yet ultimately, the sisters are sacrificed to the forces that govern Ballybeg: the Catholic church that resents Father Jack's apostasy, the social order that victimizes unmarried women, and the industrialization that brings only the most limited forms of opportunity to the village. However, Michael's act of retelling the story of his family undermines the communal narrative of the guilt of the scapegoat and also exposes the hypocrisy of the retroactive perfection attributed to the sacrificial victim. Instead, he allows the transcendent to enter by insisting upon the imperfect but innocent goodness of his family, allowing them to return not as tormented revenants but as voices from a past that Ballybeg should embrace rather than suppress.

The very existence of the Mundy sisters stands as a rebuke or a challenge to the conservative Catholic values of 1930s Ballybeg. As five unmarried women, one with an illegitimate child, they challenge both the patriarchal and religious structures of the village. Furthermore, Kate was once sufficiently independent and assertive enough to take an active role in the Irish struggle for independence, as Michael mentions almost off-handedly.[19] Now, however, she attempts to hold

[19] In an early draft, Maggie was also involved in the struggle for independence; Friel eventually revised it so that only Kate had been involved. The character descriptions indicate both women would have been of an appropriate age (early twenties) for involvement; it is possible that by limiting the independence struggle to Kate alone, the clash between her early activism and mature conservatism is stronger, though few critics comment on this detail either

her sisters to their "appropriate" roles as impoverished, unmarried spinsters. When Agnes attempts to encourage her sisters to go to the annual harvest dance, it's Kate who quashes the idea: "Do you want the whole countryside to be laughing at us?—women of our years—mature women, *dancing?* What's come over you all? And this is Father Jack's home—we must never forget that—ever. No, no, we're going to no harvest dance" (*P2* 25). And in the first ritualistic dance of the play, Kate holds out the longest before joining in, though when she does, it is with ferocity; the stage directions observe that "*Kate dances alone, totally concentrated, totally private; a movement that is simultaneously controlled and frantic…a pattern of action that is out of character and at the same time ominous of some deep and true emotion"* (36). Her explosive display of emotion, in the kind of ritualistic dance that Friel, in *Faith Healer*, called a debauching of ritual, comes as a rebuke to a culture which devalues her and to the men who threaten her livelihood. She cannot sustain the protest for long; propriety asserts itself over her defiant display, and she is the first of her sisters to stop dancing and reenter ordinary time. The moment is nearly Bakhtinian in nature, a carnivalesque release of pressure. But this first dance demonstrates the inadequacy of carnival in a genuinely oppressive environment. The release of pressure is meaningless of

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way. Certainly the involvement of Kate and Maggie is a reminder that women like them and Constance Markievicz played key roles in the struggle for independence.

the conditions for everyday life remain inadequate once the status quo reasserts itself.

Yet the dance is necessary because, as Friel observes in his notes, language is inadequate to express the needs and desires of these women.[20] Music and dance often stands in for language in moments of high emotion in Friel's work; as he remarks in his essay "Seven Notes for a Festival Program," "the purpose was to explode theatrically the stifling rituals and discretion of family life. And since words didn't seem to be up to the job it was necessary to supply the characters with a new language" (*BF:EDI* 177). The first dance between the sisters demonstrates this need for a new language. The play's opening pages remind them all of past disappointments and thwarted desires, and when the ceili music comes on, Maggie—the last to become emotionally wound up—is the first to explode into dance, expressing the raw, primal state of her emotions by wiping flour into her face for "an instant mask" (*P2* 35). Her sisters join in one after another, and if the disquieting nature of the dance was not immediately clear, Chris's decision to throw Jack's surplice over her head before joining in emphasizes the way in which the sisters are protesting against the society that

[20] In his notes, Friel reminds himself, "In the life of each character explore/touch on how language has betrayed" (MS 3706….)

has constricted their lives (36).[21] The protest is clearly not joyful: Friel describes it as "grotesque" and "parodic," and writes, "*there is a sense of order being consciously subverted, of the women consciously and crudely caricaturing themselves, indeed of near-hysteria being induced*" (36-7). Kate provides one of the clearest examples of why dance is needed. She cannot bring herself to put her anger and frustration into words. Consciously vocalizing her objections to her treatment would also require betraying symbols she once cherished enough to fight for: Ireland and church and family. Indeed, the first thing Kate criticizes after dancing is Christina's swearing: "No need for corner-boy language, Christina" (37). Notably, Rose then cannot resist repeating Chris's oath throughout the argument that follows, deliberately violating Kate's expectation of propriety as well as indicating her own sublimated desires, so often denied due to her cognitive disabilities. Father Jack's struggles with language recur throughout the entire play as he struggles to return to using English after years spent speaking Swahili; notably, he, too, resorts to dance at key moments in the play to express truths too deep for words.

Language's failure is also on display in the next sequence of dances in the play, more formal and more intimate dances between Chris and Gerry Evans, the father of Chris's son. Dance is vital for the pair because language would

[21] Helen Lojek also reads Chris wearing the surplice as a suggestion of "priestly femininity" (84). However, it is worth noting that the actual enactment of the ritual in this text is still ultimately performed by Michael, not one of the sisters, making this priestly femininity a glancing and limited instance.

inevitably betray them, failing to invoke the transcendent in a way that would sustain their affection. Language's instability first manifests in the fact that Gerry is an endless talker and, as he admits, a bit of a liar. His lying first appears in a significant form when he assures Chris that "Wales isn't my home anymore. My home is here—well, Ireland," even though after his disastrous adventures in the International Brigade, he returns to Wales to live out his days there (50, 93). Certainly dance becomes a vital point of connection between Chris and Gerry, and Gagné reads their dance in Act Two as a shining, positive moment between them, an "enactment of complete self-surrender" akin to marriage, offering the gift of the self to the other, and accepting the other in turn (127). Gagné continues:

> Beauty attracts; it opens one's heart to the other, but the going oneself, which is simultaneously an embrace of the other, occurs in response to mystery. Chrissie enters the rhythm of loving and being loved with apparent effortlessness, as if it were the expression of her true nature… (127)

In Gagné's reading, this waltz between Chris and Gerry has all the transcendent power of ritual. Yet dance, as a ritual, has mixed success with Gerry as its practitioner, precisely because the everyday stuff of life is what he is trying to escape, rather than what he wants to sanctify. He cannot actually reciprocate Chris's gesture of self-surrender, precisely because language has stopped him from telling her the truth about his other life in Wales, the one with a wife and

another son named Michael. Yet Gagné is halfway correct: Chris's genuine moment of self-surrender temporarily bolsters her. In their brief dances, Gerry and Chris connect in a way that seems positive, even healing; as Michael observes, when Gerry leaves again and does not come back, Chris doesn't lapse into depression, but manages to carry on, as though upheld not only by the duty to support her son, but also by the memory of the ritual act of dancing itself.

Yet dance cannot save Chris and Gerry because language's betrayals still permeate their brief, sweet moments of wordless union. As sweet as their dances are, equally important is all that Gerry fails to say: for instance, that he has a wife and children in Wales preventing him from every making good on his promises to stay with Chris and help raise Michael. He only admits such things tacitly: "Give Evans a Big Cause and he won't let you down. It's only everyday stuff he's not successful at" (51). But the failure at the "everyday stuff" is precisely what has made life in Ballybeg so smothering and oppressive for the sisters, and Gerry's inability to share or ease that load deepens their pain, despite the brief pleasure of seeing him again. Furthermore, Gerry's dialogue reveals the extent to which language serves as a deceptive mode of communication; in Act Two, when explaining his decision to go to Spain, he admits, "And there's bound to be *something* right about the cause, isn't there? And it's somewhere to go—isn't it? Maybe that's the important thing for a man: a *named* destination—democracy,

Ballybeg, heaven" (78). Gerry's language here gestures towards a crucial reductionism that flattens the identity of Ballybeg and its residents alike. While "a *named* destination" seems initially like a positive thing, the destinations that Gerry groups with Ballybeg are hardly clear and definite things. "Democracy" and "heaven" are concepts that are juxtaposed with difficulty in this play, particularly given the bizarre irony of Gerry signing up for the International Brigade at a meeting held in a Catholic Church—forces that in Spain itself would be pitted against each other with brutality.

The juxtaposition suggests the incoherence within Gerry himself, a man torn apart by causes to which he cannot commit, and thus unable to access the kind of kairotic time that ritual should provide. Instead, he remains mired in *chronos* even as Chris briefly escapes into *kairos*; unable to satisfy his needs with either his own family or with Chris, he even flirts with Agnes, who has carried a torch for Gerry for years, as the text suggests. Chris glimpses Agnes's infatuation and Gerry's tacit encouragement when Gerry dances Agnes down the garden and, at the end of their quiet conversation at the garden's far end, kisses Agnes on the forehead (98). When Gerry comes back to dance with Maggie, Chris abruptly switches off the wireless, suggesting her rejection of the dancing and Gerry's affection, and foreshadowing her decision to spend "the rest of her life in the knitting factory" that puts Agnes and Rose out of work, even though she

"hated every day of it" (107). Grim civility ultimately wins out over the false flickers of transcendence offered by Gerry's love and his dancing.

If any of the dances in this play mark the genuine reappearance of the transcendent over the stifling powers of civility, it is the final dance at the end, in which the cast regathers in positions similar to those they held at the play's opening, and sways softly back and forth as Michael speaks and the air is "nostalgic with the music of the thirties" (107). Their swaying is a suggestion of the kind of dancing that Michael describes as his memory of that entire summer:

> When I remember it, I think of it as dancing. Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell. Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement—as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony, was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness. Dancing as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms and in those silent and hypnotic movements. Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary… (107-8)

This memorializing ritual has not always been read as successful. Prapassaree Kramer interprets Michael's retelling of the story as, in part, a "need to 'legitimize' himself as a 'love-child'" and "expiate guilt" over abandoning his family at the first opportunity. Anthony Roche reads the ritual more positively, but notes that, "What is so striking in any viewing of *Dancing at Lughnasa* is the extent to which these memories elude their narrator, possessing a range and meaning beyond his conscious control" (172). The ritual perhaps attains its

power from the very fact that it seems partly beyond Michael's control, a suggestion that he has briefly tapped into something more timeless an ineffable than mere memory expressed through language.

Yet there are two key reasons why Michael's retelling of the events of this summer should be read as a ritual, and furthermore as a successful one. First, he succeeds in reconstructing and celebrating a narrative of feminine experience and existence that is otherwise neglected and lost. And while the Mundy sisters' narrative is mediated through a male speaker, Michael does little to appropriate it as a story that explains himself or his own life. Indeed, adult Michael remains largely a cipher; the audience knows that he ends up leaving Ballybeg as quickly as he can, and that this decision leaves him with lingering guilt, but his mother and aunts' lives are depicted as valuable on their own terms, not for the role they played in making Michael the verbal artist he appears to be by the story's end. Even if the most poignant or affecting moments of the women's lives are ones that Michael could not have experienced, and even if he renders them in a way that might soften judgments levelled upon them, he also ultimately sides with his much-afflicted family by choosing, as Joan Robbins suggests, the "transcendent, mythopoeic" worldview versus the "empirical, logocentric" approach that has so devalued the lives of the sisters and Father Jack. But more vitally, Michael's ritual transcends ordinary, profane time and defies the

stranglehold of civility that would deny his family's complicated, uncomfortable story.

In addition, Michael's ritual should be read as a success because he manages, however briefly, to overcome the failures of language that Friel indicates as haunting the lives of the entire Mundy family. If Michael's memories are, in fact, a linguistic construction, he has at least put language to work *for* his family, rather than against them, as has commonly been their experience, and he has done so in order to articulate their desires, their fears, and their hopes, rather than to reiterate the judgments leveled against them. In addition, his ritual embraces all of Ballybeg's complicated, contradicting elements, particularly its blend of Catholicism and paganism. Michael doesn't shy away from the pagan elements of his story, whether it manifests in the dancing of his aunts, the background echoes of the Lughnasa festival, or in the gift-exchange ceremony that Father Jack performs with Gerry.

Above all, as Girard might suggest, Michael's ritual is successful because it rejects both the guilt that the community might pin upon his family in order to make them into sacrificial victims, as well as the retroactive perfection they would be credited with in order to make their sacrifice successful. The kind of violence that is visited upon the Mundy family is slow and grinding, rather than the hysterical mob violence that Girard describes, but nonetheless, a form of

"unanimous violence has reconciled the community" (*I See Satan Fall* 66), even if the community scorns the notion of "adoring" the scapegoats once they are "calm and reconciled" once again (66) Michael breaks through this numbing indifference in the way that Girard suggests the Gospel texts do, by rejecting the narrative of the mob and rehabilitating the scapegoat, demonstrating the innocence of the victim. Yet Michael does this without veering into hagiography: his aunts are depicted as flawed people who quarrel and bicker and respond to the disappointments and strain of their lives with occasional unkindness to one another. Yet they are undeniably innocent ones who cannot be blamed for the toll that progress and cultural upheaval are taking on Ballybeg, even if their unmarried, transgressive lives seem to represent those changes rather than having been caused by them. Their daily lives are marked by affection and love as well as impatience and worry: Maggie's jokes, Agnes's insistence on making tea, Kate's financial provision, are all signs of care and loyalty that Michael belatedly recognizes as the foundation of his life, virtues that render his aunts undeserving of being sacrificed upon the altar of progress, of being discarded so that the community need no longer worry about them, whether through self-chosen exile, the loss of a respectable job, or being respectably trapped in a knitting factory.

Furthermore, while the ritual is successful within the context of the play, it, like *Faith Healer*, also works on the level of the audience. The audience serve as witnesses to Michael's act of memorialization, and it is to the audience that Michael narrates the events and makes the case for their significance. His act of narration makes the audience fellow memory-keepers, ensuring that this story lives on outside Michael's own private realm of memory. This perspective is a far cry from the "mob" that is "more receptive to intellectual concepts" that Friel described in a 1970 interview (*BF:EDI* 32), and comes closer to the "single receiving and perceptive unit" that Friel describes in a 1986 interview (125-6). Michael's effort to push the audience past the bounds of language into a unit that can receive and retain the complex story of his family is also an act of communication, "a voice on the stage saying 'Come together and listen to me and I will forge you into one entity and I can talk to you then almost as an individual'" (126). As Lonergan notes, Friel also requires the audience to be a *thinking* unit, filling in gaps in the narrative for themselves when information about a characters' inner life, such as that of Agnes or Rose, is left out (40). In addition, while the Mundy sisters, unlike Frank Hardy, are not summoned back into existence by mutual need between themselves and the audience, Friel, through Michael, makes the case that the audience has need of these women and the way in which their story might rewrite understandings of the past and allow

the some measure of transcendence or eternity to suffuse the work of recollection. As Murray observes, "This is the central motive of Friel's drama: he works to put *us* in touch with that otherness" ("Recording Tremors" 38). In *Dancing at Lughnasa*, this is accomplished through a harmony between what is happening on the stage and what is experienced by the audience, a joint participation in the successful summoning of the ineffable.

Thus, it is in the final dance that the ritual is completed, all the characters finally drawn into its embrace, and wholeheartedly so. The same unstable language that has so often turned against Michael's family here exalts them, even if Michael must use language to ultimately suggest that language has been transcended. Here, though, both dance and language unite in a beautiful vision that breaks the credibility of the myth of the scapegoat; and while blame for Ballybeg's smothering, frustrating culture is placed now on the correct sources (the local priest, Danny Bradley, the knitting factory), celebration and not blame are the goal of Michael's ritual. The suppressed narrative of his family has been recaptured and brought back into the light, and the monolithic institutional narratives of Ballybeg are complicated for the better each time he repeats this memorializing ritual, refusing to let this very particular story sink into communal forgetting.

Michael also offers a new mode of being for the people of Ballybeg, particularly those of its children who, like him, have drifted away. His ritual of remembrance suggests that leaving does not require severing oneself from one's roots, but instead that it is possible to remain a child of Ballybeg by deliberately making these returns through memory, criticizing what was cruel or unjust about the place while also honoring what was sweet and joyful about one's sojourn there. The two are not incompatible: as Pine notes, "coming to terms with Friel's 'versions' of the truth" does not require the audience "to seek for an accommodation between 'reality' and the 'perception of reality,' but to accept whatever version is offered at the time" (322). As a result, "audiences leave Friel's theatre not wondering, but knowing that a statement, however intangible, has been made, that a finality of sorts, however brief, has been reached, and that it somehow concerns and affect them deeply" (329). In this case, the finality is that of Michael's commemorative act, and it concerns and affects audiences so deeply because, if they dig under the golden glow of that final scene, they realize that they, too, are confronted with the choices Michael has made about how best to remember the places and people that have shaped them, and whether they will keep the past alive in memory in a way that honors it, or whether they will walk away to let it perish, or worse, to return as tormented ghosts like the revenants of *Faith Healer* or *Living Quarters*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Gillian Clarke's Integrative Feminine Ritual and Religious Narratives

Background

Until now, the role of women has been largely absent from this discussion of ritual. Certainly women have haunted the preceding texts, at times even played active roles; Emily Hale and Vivian Eliot lurk between the lines of Eliot's poetry; Mrs. McKee's assize almost dominates Brown's *Greenvoe*, and Brown tenderly depicts women like Rachel Whaness and Alice Voar; nuanced, compelling women populated many of Friel's plays, nowhere more so than in the dazzling *Dancing at Lughnasa*. But these experiences remain consistently filtered through a male sensibility, or framed by male experience: even the Mundy sisters of *Lughnasa* come to us reconstructed though Michael's narration and imagination, as preoccupied by love affairs as economic anxieties. Direct access of a woman's experience can be hard to find, and fleeting when it is found. Yet the representation of that experience carries deeper ramifications: certainly women have never stepped into the rituals of the above texts in the role of priest or celebrant. As Eavan Boland has said, that "[w]ho the poet is, what he or she nominates as a proper theme for poetry, what selves poets discover and confirm through subject matter—all of this involves an ethical choice… Poetic ethics are

evident and urgent in any culture where tensions between a poet and his or her birthplace are inherited or established" (127). The tension inherited by writers such as Boland or Gillian Clarke, the subject of this chapter, is between a vision of nation and community that one group of (primarily male) authors have sought to restore after years of suppression at the hands of a majority culture, but one which also tends to marginalize women's lives and contributions to that community (Say 4). The effacement of women from the literary, and particularly the poetic, tradition has exacted its own cost in terms of women's stories and experiences being lost to time, as well as the lack of artistic models for women seeking to shed the role of artistic object and step into the role of artistic subject.

Welsh poet Gillian Clarke was certainly faced with these obstacles when she began writing poetry as a young mother in rural Wales. Born in 1937, Clarke has stated she never supposed she would grow up to be a poet, or "anything" ("Interview" *Common Ground* 144). Clarke says of her early work that she tossed it out because she "was unaware they were poems…I hadn't read anything in print like what I was writing. I think we all need models, and I was both Welsh and a woman. The world wasn't very interested in either" ("Interview" *Common Ground* 145). Her first husband was the one who first found her writing and convinced her it was poetry, and moreover, that it was worth sending off for publication ("Interview" *Urgency* 29). Her first book, *The Sundial*, was published

in 1978, followed by *Letter from a Far Country* in 1982. Reviews of her early work were largely warm; Martin Haslehurst writes of her 1985 *Selected Poems* that her writing is neither "complacent or narrow…It is a voice that can command a great range and variety of expression within its deceptively relaxed forms" (119). K. E. Smith notes that those "relaxed forms" of Clarke's concealed a "half-conscious" attentiveness to traditional Welsh forms, particularly "the seven-syllable line and…*cynghanedd's* alliteration and vowel-music" as a way of adding richness to a line (272). In recent years, she has received considerable acclaim for her work, establishing her as a major contemporary poet: she was named the National Poet of Wales in 2008; she was the second ever Welsh poet to receive the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry; in 2012 she was made a member of the Gorsedd; her 2012 collection *Ice* was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize.

Clarke's local, rural Welsh context dominates her early poetry and also remains a constant presence throughout her later work. Jeremy Hooker notes that this is a continuity in Anglo-Welsh poetry in general; as Emyr Humphreys comments, in a world where exile is no longer a very meaningful choice due to the increasing interconnectedness of the world, the stronger artistic position is "standing in the one spot, exploring in depth what you have within the square mile" (*Toy Epic* 17). Hooker notes that Clarke does as Humphreys suggests and "grounds herself imaginatively upon her home, Blaen Cwrt, in the countryside of

west Wales…But from Blaen Cwrt she visits the outer world, and listens to it," making an outward turn that represents one of her most significant contributions to Anglo-Welsh poetry (48-9). Smith, meanwhile, characterizes Clarke's devotion to the local as "a search for connection between the human and non-human worlds which involve a search for an authentic personal language" (268).

Less discussed, however, is the importance of ritual in Clarke's work. Jeremy Hooker is one of the few critics to have observed it, noting in a 2010 article, "The priestly role of women [in her poetry] relates to, but does not wholly account for, the prevalence in her poetry of the images and terminology of sacramental Christianity…which, displaced from Catholicism, are transferred to nature" (19). Hooker goes on to observe that this imagery serves as a "form of ritual, recalling the sacramentalisation of nature and human love…and as an order imposed upon the fierce destructive energy" that is a constant undercurrent in her poetry. He continues, "[T]he displacement [of religious imagery] usually occurs in places where religion itself formerly established a whole order binding together the domestic with the natural and the sacred, and thus supports the desire of Gillian Clarke's poetry to recover a lost integration" (19). Hooker glimpses the vital role ritual plays in the recovery of women's narratives and identity from a history that has largely effaced them; like Brown, Clarke finds herself in a context of too little memory, rather than too much, given

that women's histories are so often effaced. Ritual is for her, too, a means of bridging the gap between the poet's present day and the elusive mysteries of the past. Hooker goes on to note in his study *Imagining Wales* that Clarke comes by this sacramental aesthetic directly; she was educated at a convent school from 1948-1955, and converted to Catholicism in 1956 while a student at university (*Imagining Wales* 149). Ritual, he suggests, is a way of affirming an ultimately orderly universe, or perhaps uncovering the true order of the universe, one in which women's roles are no longer invisible (150)

Indeed, for Clarke, ritual not only serves the purpose of recovering the past and reintegrating it with the present, or of uniting the domestic and natural with the sacred. Ritual is also a means of asserting a woman's right to participate in the priestly rituals of artistic creation as an enactor and not merely an observer; furthermore, ritual anchors local identity to an extent that the poet can then turn her regard out to the wider world, expanding her poetic vision beyond the vital microcosm of the local. As Aidan Kavanagh suggests, ritual—particularly in this liturgical form—enacts the function of reintegrating all aspects of human existence, enabling "individuals to relate, cohere, become one within a totality of presences which is greater than its parts" (137). Clarke's poetry enacts this sweeping shift over the course of her artistic career, as her poetic eye turns gradually from the past and her work of recuperation, to her

community in the present, to the broader web of human life in which she finds herself enmeshed as a citizen of the twenty-first century. In long poem sequences such as "Letter from a Far Country" and "Making Beds for the Dead," as well as shorter lyrics from her middle collections, Clarke uses ritual and religious narrative to disrupt old understandings of local identity to bring about a fresh articulation of that identity which honors all citizens of a community and preserves their stories; this movement then extends outwards to the global community in hopes of surviving catastrophes, including the foot-and-mouth epidemic and September 11, that threaten to destroy both communities and individuals and all of the hard work of recovery that they have accomplished.

Both narrative theology and feminist phenomenology help to clarify Clarke's initial project as well as the expansion it ultimately undergoes. Theologian Elizabeth Say explains that narrative theory (be it theological, ethical, or literary) acknowledges the importance of both tradition and the past, particularly the fact that "Meaning-giving is essential to the creation and continuity of civilization, and meaning devolves from tradition" (112). Yet women in many cultures have historically been excluded from the process of recording and interpreting history or art. As a result, "the tradition could not be anything other than a distorted view of reality, yet it claimed universality" (112). While Say focuses particularly on the novel, the narrative tradition in many

cultures was for a long time enveloped in the poetic tradition, which retains many of the problematic qualities that Say identifies, such as the "ability of narrative to mediate not only questions of *how* we ground the issue of truth, but also *who* may be part of this discussion" (116). As both Clarke and Eavan Boland point out, the question of *who* in their respective literary traditions was often almost exclusively male, with women's roles being restricted to the object position; often women were figured as passive symbols of national identity or voiceless objects of desire, and their writing must confront and at times subvert those tropes, as in Boland's "Mise Eire," which tackles the passive Mother Ireland figure (*Outside History* 78-9), or Clarke's "Dyddgur Replies to Dafydd," in which the medieval Welsh poet's silent object of desire is finally given a voice to answer him (*SP* 22-3).

Thus, the decision of women to write at all challenges the patriarchal tradition, but also, potentially, offers to heal it. As Michael Goldberg points out, the challenge to the tradition offered by women's stories is not simply about offering an alternative; instead, it questions the tradition's normative claims, claims which have often been used in the continued suppression of women's voices and narratives (201). Say goes on to point out that "the fact that men were the definers of our literary tradition meant that, for the most part, they could ignore or trivialize women's narratives because they were not congruent with

men's experience" (119). Clarke's poetry addresses this quandary in numerous ways, though one of the most poignant is the genealogy she writes for herself at the end of her lyric sequence "Cofiant." Her efforts to recover the stories of both her male and female ancestors culminates in the only litany of heritage that her community finds legitimate, and she records herself as

> Daughter of Penri Williams, wireless engineer of Carmarthenshire and Ceinwen Evans of Denbighshire
> son of William Williams, railwayman and Annie of Carmarthenshire
> son of Daniel Williams, railwayman of Llangynog and Sara [...]
> son of Cynfyn and Angharad
> son of Gwerystan and Nest
> son of Gwaethfoed of Cibwr in Gwent and Morfudd, d. of Ynyr Ddu (*LR* 79)

The discrepancy quickly becomes apparent, even in this brief excerpt of genealogy's beginning and end: Clarke is the only "daughter" named in this otherwise straightforward litany of sons. But smaller discrepancies are apparent, too. Only the men have occupations given; in parts of the lineage, the names of wives aren't even recorded, but have been lost to time. The normative character of this genealogy is the record of the men and their occupations, and women are included or excluded only in the role of wife or mother. No other narrative is available to them, or to Clarke, their descendent.

In order to resist this totalizing and patriarchal conception of history, feminist phenomenologist Victoria Browne pushes back against perspectives of

history and time that might treat the past as a "closed story" or part of a "master narrative" that "denies contingency, and blocks out alternative ways of thinking about or reading the past" (17). This leads to a resistance to allowing the past to surprise or interrupt one's actions in the present and, she argues, a "closedness to the future, as it encourages us to think that the identified direction will necessarily continue," preventing people from considering the future in terms of a "range of possibilities" (17). It prevents, too, any recovery of knowledge from the past. Browne argues instead for a phenomenological treatment of time, an approach that acknowledges that the experience of time is fundamentally relational—something akin to the experience Clarke's speaker has in the poem "Lunchtime Lecture," in which she experiences some kind of ineffable encounter when confronted by the skeleton of a prehistoric woman in a museum. She recognizes in the "Purity, the light and shade beauty" of her bones some kind of double of herself, which draws the deceased woman into the present while the speaker imaginatively enters the past (*SP* 21). This poem suggests, similar to Brown's argument, that the lived experience of time consists not of successive, isolated moments of past, present, and future, but is instead a "complex blend of presence and absence, retention and protention, recollection and expectation" (28). As a result, communication is "ultimately about creating shared time," or, as she argues, historical time is fundamentally a matter of temporal relations (39-

40). Browne calls this "complex coevalness," an acknowledgement of the active occupation or sharing of time (44). She elaborates:

> In other words, *there would be no historical time without temporal relations*, without the practice of sharing time, even indirectly or diachronically "through" or "across" time. This is essentially a reversal of the idea that being "in" a homogenous historical time is what makes the sharing of time possible. Instead, sharing time, or forging temporal connections, is what makes the idea of historical time itself possible. (44; emphasis original)

Whereas an approach to historical time that treats the past as a collection of raw facts (as is the case with the documents and artifacts of the archive), this relational approach to time goes beyond what has been preserved in the archives and the "empirical traces" of the past which they contain (63).[1]

Instead, Browne argues, the historical past is kept alive not only in the documents and archives, in a "complete sum of unmediated raw facts" that simply await correct scholarly interpretation (59). Drawing on Ricoeur's theories of time, she suggests that the reality of the historical past "emerges in the interplay between the fragmentary and indeterminate traces of past happenings that spill over into the present, and the 'work of configuration' that keeps those traces, and thus the reality of the historical past, in play" (65). If historical reality is thus comprised not of a static, fixed set of facts—the "complete sum" that Brown describes—it must instead be something dynamic: it is constantly under

[1] Browne draws heavily on Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative* vol. 3 for this idea.

reconstruction and contemplation, and as such is continually affecting the present. Brown describes this as "two-way temporality, as the historical past is constituted through a 'backwards-forwards' movement between present and past" (66). The past thus retains the ability to meaningfully and significantly affect the present, while in the present, people are continuously reinterpreting and reconstructing those fragmentary remains of the past which survive.

This practice is, as Browne notes, particularly important when dealing with the histories of women, which are often fragmentary at best, or even constructed out of the absences and silences in the records. But even these absences are traces, available to interpretation and capable of influencing the present moment still. Poems such as Clarke's *Cofiant*, itself a feminist reclamation of a Welsh ritual practice of remembrance, demonstrate this practice well, as Clarke resurrects some of the silent women of her family through the pieces of them that remain in the records, such as "Jennet," the widow who married into Clarke's family line in the eighteenth century (*LR* 74). Clarke models the kind of receptivity that Browne calls for, the willingness to be "transformed or surprised" by encounters with the past, which then enables the past to move into the present (Browne 71). Clarke manifests this willingness to let the past transform the present not only in her art, but in her relationship with the land itself; her farm is part of Tir Gofal, a government scheme to promote biodiversity

through grants to property owners (*YS* 124). As a result, Clarke's community retains links to the past as experienced through creation as well as through social ties, and the past continues to influence the present in material ways.

Vitally, Browne's phenomenology also allows for the expansion of concern beyond the immediate sphere of one's life and relations in her description of "generational time." This kind of time is, she notes, "relational time, enabling sociocultural and political transmission between people of different ages and eras" (119). Browne worries that the "linear, reproductive logic of generational thinking thereby fosters a patrimonial understanding of the past's products as 'property' that is not shared but 'endowed' upon the next generation" (121), and calls for a more flexible, dynamic model of kinship that is less bound up in "linear reproductive arrangements" (134). While the family is too central a construction for Clarke to give up, and indeed, lines of lineage define her work in places, elsewhere a reader can see her seeking a model of kinship that allows her to forge connections with people of other ages and contexts, whether it is in a shared identity as an artist or a farmer. Again, her work as a farmer provides for her a crucial model for this web of relationships that defies easy understanding; in *At the Source*, she reflects on the predatory stoat that, as R. S. Thomas wrote, "'sips at the brimmed rabbit.' With one word, 'sips,' the poet turns the rabbit into a vessel of blood. So, in turn, the kite sips the

stoat. A holy communion" (*YS* 124). The image is both eerie and ecological, looping back around, as Clarke often does, to religion and faith, even if her own Catholicism is decidedly lapsed. Ritual, for Clarke, often provides the key to this new model of generational time, linking people through common words and actions across time and space, creating a complex web of relationship rather than a linear model.

Letter from a Far Country

Letter from a Far Country, Clarke's second collection, was published in 1982, and was greeted with particular interest. Denis Donogue wrote of the title poem that "much is said by leaving the rest unsaid," and that on the whole, Clarke was "as secure among her themes as Seamus Heaney," with "an elemental respect for conditions—of work and time and setting" ("Ten Poets"*).* As M. Wynn Thomas notes, it also marks the beginning of Clarke's efforts to "relocate the sources of poetry in the traditional domain of the female," in order that "being a woman and being Welsh are inescapably expressed in the art of poetry" ("Staying" 44-5). Certainly both the Welsh landscape and feminine experience are caught up and braided together throughout this collection, as is the recuperation of history. But moreover, as Jeremy Hooker observes, Clarke has "a strong sense of disorder in the modern world" that is counteracted by "the sacramental role of the woman poet/priest, a perception of an essentially ordered

universe" that is restored through acts of ritual ("A Big Sea" 19). In particular, these acts of ritual restore the histories of both women and nature that have been effaced by patriarchal narratives and, as Elizabeth Say suggests, often have been advanced through narrow readings and applications of religious scripture and ritual. Restoring these narratives becomes a means of restoring the "essentially ordered universe" that Clarke perceives even in the suffering and disorder of her local world.

These acts of anchoring and rediscovery are grounded in the title poem that opens the collection, and individual lyrics that spin off from the themes established there further elucidate Clarke's ideas. Poems such as "The Water Diviner" and "Llyr" root Clarke's language in a Welsh setting and in a woman's hands. While Clarke's earliest work, collected in her volume *The Sundial*, announced her presence on the scene of poetry, it was also decidedly domestic poetry, focused on relationships, her roles as a wife, a mother, a homemaker. In her next collection, however, Clarke would go further in establishing her own authority as a poet, an authority that came not in spite of her femininity but through it, as she would suggest repeatedly that language is, in fact, the natural birthright and domain of the female speaker, something which men owe to the women who first taught them language.

In *Letter from a Far Country*, Clarke begins to make full use of what Thomas calls her attraction to "mythopoeic descriptions" with their "devastating power to re-form reality" ("Staying" 54). Critics often overlook the mythopoeic lyrics in the collection in favor of the longer title poem, or "Llyr," Clarke's reclamation of Shakespeare in a Welsh context, but Clarke combines both ritual and feminine power throughout the collection. In two poems in particular, "Sheila na Gig at Kilpeck" and "The Water Diviner," Clarke demonstrates her ability to draw out the effaced histories of both women and nature.

She accomplishes this recovery most vividly in "Sheila na Gig at Kilpeck."[2] The poem focuses on the female carving, an image of fertility and a warding against evil on a church, which "burns in the long, hot afternoon" amongst the other grotesques on the church, for whom "Pain's a cup of honey in the pelvis" (*LFC* 44). She represents a "perpetual calendar," around which the labor of the women and men alike "distantly revolve." And while the sheela-na-gig is sometimes interpreted as a mocking depiction of female lust, Clarke sees in her "Not lust but long laboring…mother of the ripening / barley that swells and frets at its walls." The women of the community are linked to her:

> …We share
> premonitions, are governed by moons

[2] The sheela-na-gig is an carving, an architectural grotesque, of a naked female figure displaying an exaggerated vulva; they are most common in Ireland and are said to ward off death and evil.

and novenas, sisters cooling our wrists
in the stump of a Celtic water stoop. (44)

The sheela-na-gig, a figure who at first glance borders on profane, becomes instead a primal guardian of the community, who watches over the work of "Men in the fields" and catches in her "waterfalling energy" all of the rhythms of the community, turning "their little gold cogs." The image is one of heat and ripeness, fertility and protection, but also at its heart a "restlessness" that sends the speaker straying from her work. Held in the heart of the collection, this image suggests both the tension of the speaker of the collection's eponymous poem as well as the regard for women's work not merely as the building of relationships or honoring of female roles on display in *The Sundial*, but a vehicle of genuine power upon which the community relies. It is both holy and chthonic, a recovery of feminine power as well as a primal knowledge that is rooted in nature itself.

But language, also, is something she strives to reclaim in this collection, and finds it in the sublimated voice of nature in her poem "The Water-Diviner."[3] The landscape and language become tightly entwined as the diviner searches for water and "hears its voice" even "through fifty feet of rock / on an afternoon dumb with drought" (*LFC* 33). His act of finding water also becomes a recovery

[3] "The Water-Diviner" can be read in parallel to Heaney's "The Diviner," from *The Death of a Naturalist*, as Clarke has admitted Heaney was a significant influence on her own poetic development. The parallels continue with her poem "Lunchtime Lecture," which M. Wynn Thomas has also noted has significant parallels to Heaney's poems "Punishment" and "Bog Queen."

of language in a land where the native tongue nearly died out; in response to his work, "suddenly the water answers" in "a thorough bass too deep / for the naked ear." The poetic importance of his work manifests in the description of what the water says: "a word we could not say, or spell, or remember, / something like dŵr… dŵr." The landscape becomes a repository for forgotten language, such as the Welsh for *water*, the word rising to the surface along with the thing itself. And being able to put words to things is vital, as her lyric "Llyr" suggests. Upon seeing Shakespeare's *King Lear* for the first time at age ten, the speaker wonders:

> Who taught the significance of little words?
> All. Nothing. Fond. Ingratitude. Words
> To keep me scared, awake at night. That old
> Man's vanity and a daughter's 'Nothing',
> Ran like a nursery rhyme in my head. (*LFC* 27)

At the poem's close, she reflects on how she realized, then, "That nothing is until it has a word" (28). Language brings things into being, but even here, it is cradled within place, "cadences shaped / By the long coast of the peninsula, / The continuous pentameter of the sea" teaching the poet her craft (28). Place becomes language's partner in of defying the ravages of time and the disorder of human life.

All of these ideas spin outward from the collection's title poem which, unlike the long sequences that anchor other books, such as "Making Beds for the

Dead" or "The King of Britain's Daughter," appears first in the volume, as if it were a manifesto for the volume as a whole. The sequence, Clarke has called "an epic poem of housework" (*Common Ground* 195), does not develop its themes systematically; as befits the daily round of care and domestic chores, it moves between the past and present, the small sphere of the home and the landscape that surrounds it, the personal and the communal. As K. E. Smith observes, it is organized "into a cumulative pattern rather than a logical sequence" (273); Clarke's own description suggests this was part of the process of composition, because "I couldn't do anything at a long stretch because I had so many duties, so many things that broke up my day, because of working in a house" (*Common Ground* 195). The speaker argues, consistently and patiently, from within the confines of her own life, and yet sees her cares and struggles and loves mirrored in the lives of other women, living and dead. The speech arises from the quiet of a break in the speaker's round of daily work in which she contemplates leaving and reflects upon what has driven her to that thought (labor gone unnoticed and unappreciated, desires thwarted and denied) as well as all that keeps her in place (tenderness for the family, the patriarchal expectations of the community). Her story, she knows, could be that of any woman: "Any farm. Any chapel. / Father and minister, on guard, / close the white gates to hold her" (*LFC* 8). It is a manifesto made of lists, interrupted by brief declarations of purpose, flashes of

the past rendered as sharply as photographs; the language is deceptively simple, allowing the poem to range freely between its many concerns while remaining tethered to the simple speech of a home place. Its sweeping character stems from Clarke's sense that "If the work of raising the generations is not epic, what is?" (*Common Ground* 195).

Above all, throughout the poem, Clarke's speaker makes a case—occasionally circuitous and indirect—that the work of rural Welsh women holds both the family and the community together as surely as rites performed in the village church. In opposition to the father and minister of the opening, she offers a female celebrant whose ceremonies are those of laundry and canning, work that makes "the house as sweet as a honeycomb" (8); she connects her own work to past iterations of these rituals, such as her grandmother "standing / in the great silence before the Wars, / hanging the washing between trees," or "My mother's laundry list, ready / on Mondays when the van called" (10). This creative reconstruction of their work, and the sense of how it then reaches forward into the present to shape the speaker's own life, offers an example of Browne's dynamic model of two-way temporality in action. In addition, this ritual has not gone unrecorded for future celebrants, as she notes in an aside:

> (In the airing cupboard you'll see
> a map, numbering and placing
> every towel, every sheet.
> I have charted all your needs.) (10)

The records women leave behind are, as both Browne and Say have observed, partial and fragmentary at best, but they do nonetheless exist and offer later generations a means for constructing new narratives of the past that embrace this kind of tender labor. Elsewhere in "Letter," the comparison is even more explicit: she notes, for instance, that the "recipe for my best bread… / is copied out in the small black book," a statement immediately followed by the observation that

> In the black book of this parish
> a hundred years ago
> you will find the unsupported
> woman had "pauper" against her name. (13)

The juxtaposition suggests the bitter irony that a woman whose work went unnoticed was recorded only in light of an economic status she could not control, even though she was likely a celebrant of the same rites as the speaker. But through these traces, fragmentary as they are, Clarke engages in the kinds of temporal relations described by Browne, bringing the past forward to speak into the present through these shared rituals, and even through the book of the parish.

This work, the speaker suggests, is often unheralded and unpraised. She observes, "The gulls grieve at our contentment. / It is a masculine question. / 'Where' they call 'are your great works?'" (11). Clarke responds by turning the stuff of household labor into ritual of great aesthetic beauty: "crisp lists" of chores or inventory as a missal, "immaculate linen" appearing like vestments or

altar cloths. "Perfect preserves" line the cupboards, produced in ritual fashion at specific times of the year: "Seville orange marmalade / annually staining gold / the snows of January" (11); "a white spring distilled" into elderflower cordial, "a loving, late, sunburning / day of October in syrups" of rosehips and sloe (12). The actions offer a material demonstration of the power of ritual described earlier to lift one moment out of time and link it with both past and future, harvests come and gone. Clarke drives the point home:

> It is easy to make of love
> these ceremonials. As priests
> we fold cloth, break bread, share wine,
> hope there's enough to go round. (12)

Women's work, the speaker insists through the triadic verb structure, mirrors that of the priest, and even goes beyond it in the concern they must devote to the question of whether there is "enough to go round." Indeed, the deliberate repurposing of ritual, even sacramental imagery demonstrates Hooker's observation that Clarke displaces religious imagery from the church "in places where religion itself formerly established a whole order binding together the domestic with the natural and the sacred" as part of her desire "to recover a lost integration" (19).

What makes both these rituals and their recovery from the unrecorded past possible, rather than lost forever? Clarke turns, in essence, to the two-way temporality as described by Browne, and anchors it particularly in the Welsh

landscape. By carefully exploring the square mile, as Emyr Humphreys suggested above, she is able to retrieve the vanished past from a landscape that never released it, going beyond the archive and the written record to find fragments of women's history in the natural world. As Clarke noted in a 1985 interview, "Going into the past, going deeper, going down through the layers became important to me. I was mining my own memory, my family's memory and Welsh memory as far as I could…because the past informs what we are now" (*Common Ground* 197). Thus, learning to interpret the traces in the Welsh landscape through the rituals of a life set within it gives Clarke another way to recover the past in order to better understand the present. Not even the song of the birds is lost to time here:

> All their old conversations
> collected carefully, faded
> and difficult to read, yet held
> forever as voices in a well. (*LFC* 9)

It is not merely the two-way temporality created by ritual itself that Clarke's text draws upon, but the landscape's own power to retain language and memory, the idea she would explore with more focus in "The Water-Diviner," placed later in the same collection. This possibility is one she returns to later, when musing on the mysterious suicide of a woman in the community. The story, she intimates, might be recovered, and certainly the tragic tale of this woman will never be entirely lost, because

> The people have always talked.
> The landscape collects conversations
> as carefully as a bucket,
> gives them back in concert
> with a wood of birdsong. (15-16)

Just as the water is capable of holding language and memory in "The Water Diviner," so too does the local landscape retain the past in itself; as Hooker observes, there is a tendency in Welsh poetry to regard the land as "a kind of material memory in which the dead still live" (*Imagining Wales* 25). Similarly, Matthew Crawford observes that "We think through the body" and its interactions with the world; remembering, too, happens through the body and physical interactions (51). Clarke's own embodied experience and connection to the land gives her ways to retrieve and interpret the traces returned back to her through experiences of the landscape.

Yet, as Clarke observes, this effort to recover the past and acknowledge women's vocations and voices is often resisted. Even at its best, the vocation is bittersweet, and the dead grandmothers

> haul at the taut silk cords;
> set us to fetching eggs, feeding hens
> mixing rage with the family bread,
> lock us to the elbows in soap suds.
> Their sculleries and kitchens fill
> with steam, sweetnesses, goosefeathers. (*LFC* 17)

The tasks that are a joy become, instead, a shackle. Women are like "hawks trained to return / to the lure from the circle's / far circumference" (18); they are

shackled to the home, not allowed "To be out with the men, at work," granted "the male right to the field" (13). Even their gravestones do not record the work they have done to make the community whole and healthy. Only for the men do the stones

> record each one's importance.
> Diaconydd. Trysorydd.[4]
> Pillars of their society.
> They are in league with the moon
> but as silently stony
> as the simple names of their women. (17-18)

Clarke will explore this issue of what is preserved and remembered at length in "Cofiant," but here it is the silence that matters, what is recorded on the stones versus what is given back by the landscape. As Matthew Jarvis notes, "In the record of the gravestones, the social dominance of masculine achievement is dug into the Welsh environment itself" (47)—a landscape that Clarke herself explicitly characterizes as "feminine" near the poem's beginning (8), suggesting the extent to which male actions have been literally carved out of female bodies and territory.

But because the ritual work of women has gone unrecognized and their priestly role in holding the community together and preserving its identity has gone neglected, the speaker suggests they may one day simply leave and force the community to reckon with their necessity through their absence. Love, she

[4] Diaconydd: deacon; Trysorydd: treasurer.

suggests, is not always enough, particularly when it binds like a fetter instead of "a loop of gold / …loose as water; as the love / we should bear one another" (16). This love does not tighten around a woman in order to chain her in place, but acknowledges her work as a choice, and responds to it with charity and hospitality rather than obligation. The possibility hovers over "Letter from a Far Country" from its second stanza, where the speaker declares to the "husbands, fathers, forefathers" that the poem is her "apologia," a "letter home from the future," which implies her looming departure. (7). The longing to depart is signposted throughout, as when she notes that the "stony track" that winds between the hedges "makes the heart restless / like the boy in the rhyme, his stick / and cotton bundle on his shoulder" in contrast to the girl who must stay "To mind things. / She must keep. And wait. And pass time" (8). The mention of the two suicides, too, suggests how this community has failed to hold onto its women before. Now, the speaker suggests,

> The women are leaving.
> They are paying their taxes
> and dues. Filling in their passports.
> They are paying to Caesar
> what is Caesar's, to God what is God's.
> To Woman what is Man's. (17)[5]

[5] In the version of the poem from the 1982 collection *Letter from a Far Country*, "woman" is uncapitalized; Clarke corrected this in the version published in the 1985 version in *Selected Poems*, and I have followed that text in this instance.

The image is one of reclamation; the women are paying to their fellow women what they have so long yielded up to the men. And although the speaker in this instance ultimately leaves the letter "unsigned, / unfinished, unposted," the possibility of her departure remains; one day, she promises in the closing lines "I will post it from a far country" (18). Notably, the version of the poem that is published in the 1985 *Selected Poems* contains three additional stanzas whose singsong rhymes almost conceal the ominous nature of the questions she poses. They begin with the domestic: "*Who will rock the cradle…/ Who'll be home when you come in for tea?*" (*SP* 64). Quickly, though, they turn to something deeper: "*Who'll catch the nightmares and ride them away / If we put to sea and we sail away?*" The final stanza asks:

> *Will the men grow tender and the children strong?*
> *Who'll teach the Mam iaith and sing them songs?*
> *If we adventure for more than a day*
> *Who will do the loving while we're away?* (64)

The rituals of the women, these final stanzas suggest, are not just about keeping the men and children fed and clothed, sheltered in a house whose warmth and order also equates to safety: as Clarke's mention of the "*Mam iaith*" (the mother tongue) indicates, their work makes them the gatekeepers of language whose love binds all together. If the women are to leave, the speaker indicates, the breakdowns in the community will extend to deep questions of language and identity, for the work of women and their teaching of history and language

makes them the memory-keepers of their community, stewards of identity. The poems that follow "Letter from a Far Country" in the *Selected Poems* venture out under the shadow of these powerful questions, which will not be wholly answered, but rather continuously explored. Even in the collections that follow, such as *The King of Britain's Daughter* and *Letting in the Rumour*, Clarke continues to turn to ritual as a means of seeking the integration of all facets of life under the constant, heavy shadow of disintegration that threatens both community and nature from within and without.

Middle Lyrics

The longer poem sequences that anchor the collections subsequent to *Letter from a Far Country* have received the bulk of the critical attention focused on Clarke's work of the Eighties and Nineties. Certainly both *Cofiant* and "The King of Britain's Daughter," the respective major sequences of *Letting in the Rumour* (1989) and *The King of Britain's Daughter* (1993) have dominated the critical discussion of Clarke's middle period. Yet the attention lavished upon these works results in limited engagement with the shorter lyrics. Exceptions are made for of a handful of poems, particularly those that nod to her influences, such as "Fires on Llŷn" or "Neighbours," which demonstrate her debt to R. S. Thomas or her burgeoning engagement with the world beyond Wales, or "Marged," which continues Clarke's interest in the experiences that bind women

across generations and social class. This lack of attention to the individual lyrics allows for such misstatements as Sam Adams's claim that "the consolation of religion is absent" in Clarke's work, neglecting the heavy imprint of religious language and ritual throughout her corpus (Adams 184).

In the shorter lyrics from these collections, ritual and sacramental images and language are most apparent in Clarke's treatment of nature, demonstrating Jeremy Hooker's argument that her displacement of religious symbols and rituals into the realm of nature "usually occurs in places where religion itself formerly established a whole order binding together the domestic with the natural and the sacred" (19). The cross, for instance, looms large in both "Gannet" and "In January" from *Letting in the Rumour*. In the former, the reference is glancing, the bird's shadow against the dazzling surface of the sea described as "the sign of the cross" (45). "In January," however, does gesture towards the fracture between humanity and nature that Clarke senses even in a place as rural as the county of Ceredigion, as "A day of wings" is first interrupted by "a jet from Aberporth," where a missile and aircraft testing site is located, whose noise "breaks the day." She separates this quatrain from the next two, in which Clarke's speaker, accompanied by her dog, observes, buzzards, crows, "clouds of glossy insect wings" (47). Yet natural imagery links all three, as the plane is compared in the first quatrain to a "glittering dragonfly," indicating

the extent to which rural Ceredigion and modern military technology are uneasily entangled. The speaker notes in the closing quatrain that the "cities" are spared these reminders of "all the world's wars." Instead, "It's we / out on the open hill who see / the day crack under the shadow of the cross" (47). The image is one Clarke has drawn from her artistic predecessor, R. S. Thomas.[6] Yet she does more than simply recycle this image of the cross; in "All Soul's Night," first published in the 1985 *Selected Poems*, the natural world seems to echo the somber remembrance of the holiday until the end, when

> At a touch my bare ash tree rings,
> leafed, shaken…
>
> the frozen ash
> become a burning bush. (*SP* 103)

In a world that had seemed grimly silent and barren on a night that commemorates the dead, nature briefly flares to life with a sign of a divine presence, gesturing towards the transcendent when human agents cannot do so on their own.

But in other lyrics, Clarke shifts from simply seeing nature as some allegorical or analogous representation of religious truth; she turns to two different strategies for drawing nature and ritual together. In one strategy, she

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[6] See, for example, the "[They set up their decoy]" in Thomas's 1990 collection *Counterpoint*, which combines images of wings, shadows, and the cross (40), or the "Benedictus" in the poem sequence "Mass for Hard Times": "Blessed be the far side of the cross and the back / of the mirror, that they are concealed from us" (*Mass for Hard Times* 14).

gathers nature under the same protection of religious ritual as the rest of the human community would receive, as in the lyric "Lament" from *The King of Britain's Daughter*. The poem is a litany of those for whom the speaker laments, with humanity—in the form of refugees and soldiers—nested in between other victims of modern violence: turtles, dolphins, cormorants, "the ocean's lap with its mortal stain" (*KBD* 42). The final stanza expands outwards, encompassing all creation in the lament: "For the burnt earth and the sun put out, / the scalded ocean and the blazing well. / For vengeance, and the ashes of language" (42). Here, again, Clarke depicts humanity as caught up in a vital web of relationships, rather than constricted to the immediate sphere of kinship or place, even if kinship comes from being caught in the same net of suffering, a net which wounds not only the whole "burnt earth" but the very language humankind uses to name it.

Yet in her other strategy, Clarke relinquishes the role of celebrant and allows the created order to enact the religious rituals that ground the lyrics. In "Tawny Owl," from *Letting in the Rumour,* the owl's cry is characterized as "plainsong" between the "cruciform / shadows of hunting" (60). The forest is described as a "tabernacle" through which the owl moves in an almost holy silence, and even the candles of a church find an echo in the "flame" that "floats on oil // in her amber eye." Her movements and her cry are "Compline. Vigil. /

Stations of the dark"; her call becomes an echo of the liturgy with its "Kyrie. Kyrie" (60). Once again, nature is not depicted as being divine in and of itself, but as fellow creatures reaching towards the divine, with the whole of earthly creation figured as a temple. This model of common striving towards God by both humankind and the natural world echoes Gerard Manley Hopkins's own depictions of nature in sonnets such as "As Kingfishers Catch Fire" or "God's Grandeur," in which creation joins in the act of worship.

In "Mass for the Birds," humankind and the natural world join in the work of ritual, and more specifically, memorialization.[7] The gathering that the poem depicts is explicitly secular, comprising as it does "The lapsed, the doubting, those / here for the first time, others / regular at named churches," and yet also profoundly religious:

> Rough table. Circle of chairs.
> A heel of granary loaf.
> Wine over from last night's supper.
> A leather book. Luke. Romans.
> Corinthians. Silences.
> A congregation of eight. (89)

This gathered group shares "the meaning of breaking bread, / of sipping from one glass, / of naming you" (89). But as the halting diction of the stanza above

[7] The "Frances" mentioned in the first line of "Mass of the Birds" is Frances Horovitz, a fellow Welsh poet to whom Clarke also dedicated the poem "The Hare," first published in *Selected Poems* and again in *Letting in the Rumour*. Horovitz died of cancer in 1983 at a relatively young age. See Anne Stevenson's "Frances Horovitz: An Appreciation" in *The Poetry Review* (Jan. 1984).

suggests, language is a struggle for this grieving congregation. But when language fails for them, nature steps in: "Mass of the birds. A blackbird calls, / a wren responds, calling, answering / what we can only feel" (89). Nature even offers the oblation, as the sun "raises its wafer too brilliant / to look at or understand." The reintegration of human life that the party seeks becomes visible in the natural world, as the elder tree that was nearly dying the year before offers the emblem of hope and regeneration that they need: "This year / it flourishes, grows green / supports the rose" (90). This movement towards nature's participation in ritual is still early and tentative, but it begins to demonstrate the vital way in which nature will participate in reenacting biblical narratives in Clarke's 2004 collection *Making Beds for the Dead* as not just a symbol or analogy but as vital agents in an ongoing story.

Making Beds for the Dead

Continued interest in *Cofiant* and "The King of Britain's Daughter" means that even recent criticism of Clarke's work tends to focus on her poems from the Nineties and earlier. Her 2004 collection *Making Beds for the Dead* and its climactic title sequence on the intersection of the foot-and-mouth epidemic and September 11 has received little critical attention, even though this collection, while occasionally uneven in quality, constitutes her most ambitious in scope and in some ways her most tightly constructed work thus far. In this collection, Clarke

plants herself firmly in the local "square mile," and from there lets her vision telescope outwards and away from Wales, while never losing sight of how the global affects the local. Hooker remarks of Clarke's openness to the world beyond Wales, "There is something new here…. Both in the Christian and socialist traditions, Welsh poets have felt compassionately or angrily for the hardships of other peoples, as well as their own. What is new, though, is this sense of a vulnerable global democracy, as distinct from a utopian universalism" (*Imagining Wales* 48-9). The interconnectedness and universal scope of Clarke's poetry in *Making Beds for the Dead* is particularly marked by fragility, as well as suffering, and its global scope sets it apart from her earlier collections while still remaining powerfully local.

This collection also contains some of her most powerful engagements with religion and ritual since poems such as "Mass for the Birds" in *Letting in the Rumour*, as well as a sense that the poet no longer needs to argue for her right to use the language or to act in a priestly capacity: her position as a guardian of language and an authoritative spiritual voice is now taken as fact, a position of vital necessity as her poetry moves to grapple with present evil and suffering at a deeper level than ever before. And while the devastating title sequence understandably captured the attention of most reviewers, its power also rests on some of the lyrics that come before it; as David Morley noted in his review, the

collection has "an individual architecture in selection and order, one that requires her readers to grasp the book as a conceptual, even a musical whole," a "macro-architecture" that "resists easygoing extraction" (Morley). Indeed, a close consideration of the whole collection will reveal that Clarke's use of religious language and ritual has evolved into the reimagining of biblical narrative as a way of grappling with the increasingly troubling disorder she sees in both Wales and the broader world, connecting both local and global issues.

Although several critics were severe on some of the commissioned poems included in the volume, particularly the lyrics grouped in "The Middleton Poems,"[8] the opening ten poems, which focus primarily on art and artists, offer a powerful backbone to the sequence that is to follow, and frame it in terms of biblical imagery and ideas. The first poem, "In the Beginning," draws upon Clarke's facility with sacramental imagery and emotive physical images: in this instance, the King James Bible the speaker received, as the epigraph notes, "*on her 7th birthday*" (*Making Beds* 11). In the midst of the detailed reminiscences of the object itself—the "soft black leather cover, / tissue pages edged in gold," with

[8] Belinda Cooke comments in her *Poetry Ireland* review that the "Stone Poems" and the "Middleton Poems" are "driven too much by narrative and research, their descriptions less 'sparky'. Ultimately they lacked what for me are the two most important characteristics of a poem, the ability to be memorable and convey emotion, qualities very much in evidence in the work that follows." Richard Poole similarly wrote in *The New Welsh Review* that "These are poems for whose material the poet has gone quarrying, and they wear their research on their sleeve. Not infrequently I felt that I was being fed information, even structured in a quasi-pedagogical manner, and I recalled Keats' [sic] dislike of poems that have designs upon us."

its maps and photographs—the poet remembers falling in love with the language:

> …That's it. Words
> from another language, a narrative of spells
> in difficult columns on those moth-thin pages,
> words to thrill the heart with a strange music,
> words like flail, and wilderness,
> and in the beginning. (11)

It seems an optimistic opening, filled with a child's naïve joy in language. But Clarke has used religious imagery and language too much and for too long for this to be wholly naïve and innocent. The King James Bible is beautiful language wrapped around its share of hard, bitter stories, and the early lyrics of art and geological origins will make way for a harder, more complicated world later in her collection in which innocent creatures will die. She briefly hints at this coming darkness with the reminder of "a desert land at war," a shadow at the heart of the child's delight in language (11). This appropriation of religious imagery and language becomes a means of authorizing and contextualizing Clarke's particular setting of the story, from an artistic Genesis to a strange and difficult Passion story in the collection's title sequence and a fragile renewal of the world at the collection's end.

Clarke deepens the religious resonance of the collection throughout the opening lyrics; after "In the Beginning," "A Woman Sleeping at a Table" imagines the moments after the woman in Vermeer's painting awakens, takes an

apple from the table and slices into it. "The apple has fallen / from the tree in Eden," Clarke writes, and yet at the same time, "They are mapping the round earth, / discovering geography, astronomy, / She holds the world in her hand" (*Making Beds* 12). The apple in the woman's hand carries echoes of Julian of Norwich's vision of the world as hazelnut in God's hand, though the image here is one of a vulnerable, postlapsarian world now cradled in human hands, eager to discover, as the woman peels the apple, "slices to the star-heart / for the four quarters of the moon" (12). Richard Poole notes that this imagery returns readers to "the mid-seventeenth century, [when] science and exploration are opening up the world. Humanity has lost its innocence, and Clarke imagines the woman waking and peeling an apple, symbol of the Fall" (Poole). The world of *Making Beds for the Dead* exists only after a fall. Its nonhuman subjects are constantly depicted as vulnerable to the whims of the human occupants, whether it is the apple in "A Woman Sleeping at a Table" or, on the facing page, the image in "Mother Tongue" of an unborn chick of a seabird in its egg, whose mother wheels frantically overhead when the speaker and her companion venture too close to her nest, where the "warm brown pebble" of her egg "with its cargo of blood and hunger, / where the future believes in itself," is left alone and undefended (13).

In these opening poems, Clarke sees the human condition repeatedly mirrored in the non-human world, as when she imagines the sea's rhythmic churning as

> the pulse of a blind
> helmeted embryo afloat
> in the twilight of the egg,
> learning the language. (13)

But the integration between human and non-human that her earlier poems strove for is troubled and upended by reminders of how humankind leaves its own marks upon the nonhuman sphere. The language that the chick is learning is, in part, the mother bird's "desperate cries" as she circles in the air above the speaker. This alienation between the human and nonhuman recurs throughout. In an inversion of Eden in the poem "Adders," found further on in the collection, a nest of young snakes "asleep in the hedge in a golden knot" are eradicated by young men trimming the hedges, the mother snake "stopped, smashed in the road, / stiffening in the sun" (41). The mother snake, whose "quicksilver tongue" and body like a "river" links her to the natural world, has all her fluidity and life robbed of her, her place in the natural world stripped away, as in death she becomes "a shoelace" (41). Despite the young workers' pride in discovering and eradicating this nest of poisonous snakes, the speaker is grieved by the loss of life, seeing in it the way in which humanity and creation are at odds with one another.

As something of a counterbalance, these opening poems, many of which are inspired by works of art (Vermeer's painting, a composition by Erik Satie) or are dedicated to other artists (Anne Stevenson, Ted Hughes, R. S. Thomas) posit some responsible, meaningful role for the artist in this troubled world.[9] In both "The Poet's Ear" and "The Fisherman," Clarke articulates a model of careful attention, an inward turn which poetry is generated. In one of these models, she spirals inward to the depths of the mind and sheds the distractions of the material world, from the trains and traffic to the cathedral bells and the cries of birds:

> It is football. Breath. The heart
> listening for the line's perfect pitch.
> It's not Bach, not Schumann,
> but the mind's 'cello sounding
> the depths of the page. [sic] (14)

In this poem, the inward turn of sounding the depths is the primary focus, but in "The Fisherman," the poet's work is akin to that of luring the salmon: he is a fisherman "on the shore of the white page," and "It's all ears / for the singing line out-reeled from his touch / till the word rises with its fin of fire" (15). This time, sounding the depths creates connections, and "the line that arcs from air to shore is art." In this instance, the poet's effort to sound the depths brings something back and makes a bridge between the world and those creative

[9] The works of art include the painting by Vermeer and a composition by Erik Satie; other lyrics are dedicate to Anne Stevenson, Ted Hughes, and R. S. Thomas.

depths. Whereas "The Poet's Ear" sheds the material world to move toward a pure, abstract concept, "The Fisherman" rematerializes the artistic endeavor, suggesting the possibility of integration which has seemed so fragile in the earlier poems. Art and its material correspondences also take on biblical resonance; a piano in "The Flood Diary" becomes both "an ark of rosewood" in flooded southern England as well as the promise of the flood's end, when it is stranded in "fields that remember / becoming the sky" as just "the carcass and white teeth of a piano" (20). It becomes both a portent of death and some covenantal image of art's survival. In each case, there is a profound intimacy to the poem, a retreat to something beyond even the local in an effort to understand the poetic self and the vocation before looking outward once again.

But the collection does look outward once again, once it progresses past the commissioned sequences "The Stone Poems" and "The Middleton Poems," which do respectively offer some suggestion of the non-human world's permanence in the geological sequence and the accommodations made between the human and the nonhuman in the poems written for the National Botanic Gardens of Wales. In the later poems, the relationship between the human and the nonhuman world turns darker. Indeed, the relationships between humans themselves are depicted as often fraught and broken, and art's role and ability to redeem is called into question. In "Perfecting the Art," the art in question is that

of killing, as the varyingly beautiful and bleak images of everyday life—a woman shopping for her family, a man contemplating suicide, young people showering the sea salt from their skin and hair—are punctuated by

> …men
> parking a car
> in a holiday street,
> their hearts fired with dreaming,
> their brains mechanical,
> ticking. (50)

The syntax itself becomes less flowing and more measured as this stanza progresses to its end, suggesting the way in which violence transforms the ebb and flow of ordinary life and introduces a new form of order that ultimately leads to chaos.

Language itself begins to break down in the troubled world of *Making Beds for the Dead*; in "Front Page," the poet pleads against the tasteful moment of silence in response to tragedy, suggests, "standing together, eyes closed, / we should throw back our heads / for a one-minute howl" (45). This cry of anguish beyond language defies the factual report of the newspaper that prompts the poem, and poses the question as to whether any of our rituals are sufficient anymore to provide solace or comfort in a world of constant tragedy and atrocity. Similarly, in "The Night War Broke," war results in

> a scrambled language
> between lunatic tongue

and the moonstruck
listening in the dark (51)

Notably, the poem eschews both capitalization and punctuation and turns to a terser diction than Clarke's usual flowing lines, indicating before the agonized closing that the poet's own language begins to break down in the face of horror. The artist's ability to listen deeply and order the world begins to be called into question in a way that the opening lyrics did not wholly foreshadow, except in their biblical imagery which suggests a trajectory of descent and lament, as follows Eden or the great flood in the text to which they allude.

The title sequence, "Making Beds for the Dead," comes once the tension in the opening lyrics between art's ordering capacity and the broken disorder of the world has built to a breaking point, and it offers the collection's deepest exploration of the tension between the human and the nonhuman world, between art's power to soothe and humanity's power to destroy. Clarke plants her speaker firmly in that "square mile" of the home place in the opening lyric, "Ewe: March 2003," in which she and a partner attend a lambing, a moment of "continuum" between "birth and baptismal," in a continuance of the religious imagery she has borrowed throughout the collection. The keeping of the flock is not, she notes, a matter of profit: "No money in it," but just these moments that seem to have their own sacredness, and demonstrate the integration between the human and nonhuman spheres of existence (53). The next two lyrics complicate

this hobby of animal-raising, though, as the speaker first acknowledges the reality that many of these sheep, who each winter "grow tame" and call "for hay at the gate," will eventually be led to slaughter at age two or three. It's a humane slaughter, she suggests,

> Quicker done,
> one by one,
> than the rabbit
> in the cat's jaws,
> than the long going out
> of our bedridden suffering old. (54)

But these quick, hygienic deaths are contrasted in "Sheep and Goats" to the slaughter of a goat in "Crete, the week of Easter," when the speaker and her companion "saw a man in the courtyard of his house / butchering a goat, spreadeagled in a tree / like a crucifixion" (54). In both this poem and "Ewe: March 2003," the livestock appear to stand in for Christ, with the landmark events of birth, baptism, and death transferred to them and the reference to Easter heightening the Passion parallels. Clark transfers the prophetic imagery of Christ as the lamb back into the nonhuman world, onto, once again, a literal lamb who is, in some way, also an Agnus Dei.

She continues to frame the advent of the foot-and-mouth epidemic through this religious imagery, though now it does not provide the same comforting integration of the human and the natural world that her earlier work, or the poems that opened the collection, afforded. The virus "breeds in secret" in

the back alleys of a "northern city" celebrating "the holy feasts of winter," a juxtaposition of the sacred and the corrupted (55). "Where did it start?" she asks. "Somewhere hot and far away / where they don't fill in forms / to take a sheep to market" (56). While some have read this as a slightly xenophobic dig—Jarvis calls her tone here "suspicious" (50)—the following lines undercut that notion: Clarke observes that in that place, the animal taken to market is not called "a product, / a commodity" (56); in other words, it is not an object but a living creature. It is the religious imagery in the next stanza that is more disquieting, suggesting a world in which Christ's promises have been forgotten and unfulfilled:

> Where they kill a lamb with a knife at its throat,
> and God who loves the lilies of the field
> and the one lamb which is lost
> forgot this one with her little,
> clicking, cloven, high-heeled hooves,
> the horizon in her golden eye. (56)

The subversion of the parables in the lamb's depiction foreshadows the horror that is to come, in the form of the virus she might harbor in her own body, where even God, who seems here benign but impotent, cannot see it.

The virus comes to Wales in the next lyric, "Silence: February 2001," and when it does, language breaks down. Surprisingly, the failure of communication doesn't begin with people. Instead:

> First the animals lost their voices,
> then the people.
> 'We couldn't speak.
> We could only hold each other.' (57)

The words are "drowned" by the "howl of wind," echoed by "the howl of a man in a hollow barn"; language is "shredded" and "dissolved," and "lost in the squalor" of animals growing sick in their sheds. Language is eventually "Lost in the mountain talk / of ewe and lamb" and then in a farm that no longer bustles with life, as "strangers dressed to kill" call at a farmhouse, and it ultimately disintegrates "in the whine of a dog / in the empty yard, / in the words on the weasel's tongue" (57). Notably, Clarke's phrases are reduced to mere fragments, often in lists, rather than flowing sentences, and unlike the lists in early works such as "Letter from a Far Country," these ones do not shine with the imagery of domestic life or the natural world. The silence that results is "unnatural," devoid even of birdsong, so tangible that people can feel it resting on them "*like snow*" (Clarke 57); strikingly, it is an absence that has been made palpable, instead of a presence. The relationship between city and countryside widens, as the one goes unaffected whereas the farmers face horror never imagined. "And every day," Clarke writes, "the cities, suburbs, towns, / seem further off, their distance greatening" (61).

The fractures created by the epidemic extend well beyond the division between the human and the natural. Human society begins to show its cracks

and fissures; because of the highly communicable nature of the virus, "public footpaths / are closed for fear of it," and children are forced to play "indoors, alone" (58-9). A delivery man refuses to step down from his lorry, handing off the cargo and driving away "having never set foot in Ceredigion" (61). Clarke records the kind of suspicious whispers that circulated among those most affected:

> '*It's the market.*
> *It's the ministry.*
> *It's the NFU.*
> *It's the government.'* (62)

Old gossip from the last epidemic is even revived, as one man relates the tale of "*A lazy farmer… Neglected his animals*" back in the Sixties, as though the current plague is the result of his cattle, who exhibited the symptoms but appeared to recover, "*no harm done*" (63). An organic farmer faces off against the government men who have come to cull his pigs whose "health nakedness in the open air / [is] a flaunt, an affront to men from the ministry," and yet must be killed because of a neighbor's infected cattle (65). The close-knit rural communities of Ceredigion have begun to unravel under the burden of grief and suspicion that grip the individual farmers.

Instead, the disease becomes the force that defines communal ties. A new lamb is born "under stars as numerous / as spores of the virus, as atoms of bone, / as particles of blood on the wind" that disperse after the firing of an unknown

gun—particles of blood that may relate to a distant war, as many other poems in the collection have, or may refer to the slaughter of an animal and the way in which its blood on the wind spreads the virus even further (60). This web of connections was previously invisible to most, but the farmers now realize it: "*I sold my sheep in Shrewbury market. / I had no idea they traveled so far*" (58). Even innocent nature is implicated in this poisonous web, as a fox that has gorged itself on the carcass of a dead sheep hoards some of the meat for later, then drinks from a puddle on another farm, "leaving cells to multiply / in the soup of a hoof print" (67). The next day, the cattle sip from the same water, and the virus spreads further, despite all the fellowship-breaking precautions that have been put in place at the farms.

The result is a world that resembles a scene out of hell, a warzone in the green and pleasant fields of Britain. Clarke depicts the horror in "Plague: Spring 2001," which opens with the image of "On television, corpses are piled on carts, / on distant farms with strangers at their gates" (61). But these aren't the corpses of war dead; instead, they are culled animals whose bodies are being burned like "old furniture on a bonfire" (61). Clarke's use of horror, so rare in her past volumes, is here factual and yet brutally effective, in part because she avoids asserting the emotional costs of the events that are unfolding, but presents her images with a patience and deliberation that allows the pain to sink in: "A

pedigree Holstein with a fancy name // hangs, grotesque from the JCB hook / against an inferno of flame and smoke" (61). Places where the speaker used to stop with her children are now "a theatre of death" where "The slaughtermen work / into the night by floodlamps" (64).

Perhaps no image is more painful than the portrait Clarke crafts in "The Vet." The poem's epigraph is a statement from a veterinarian who says, "*I worked from six in the morning until gone midnight. One night I slept in my truck. I'm used to death. I had to put down eighty baby lambs by humane injection. I couldn't talk about it for a month or so*" (66). In the poem that follows, Clarke embellishes the vet's statement with flashes of aesthetic beauty, the newborn lamb who "smells of the sea, the umbilical / a wet tendril against his hand, her hooves wave-washed pebbles… / Her ears are leaves between his fingers" (66). Yet this only makes the moment when the vet injects the lamb even more painful, the deaths more agonizing as his duty to cure is subverted in service to the cull. Clarke broadens her scope in the poem's second half, acknowledging, "It was like this many times over, / grief for the many and the few," and that many of the culled animals were deeply precious to their owners. And yet the result was the same for all of them:

> The sick, the healthy,
> the rag-tag, the beautiful,
>
> stood for the gun, one by one.
> Some shuddered as they fell.

> Some stood still, surprised,
> and folded in a river of blood. (66)

Their owners can only watch them die, "beasts thrown to the flames / like sinners consumed," an image that consummates the hellish landscape that the epidemic has conjured out of peaceful rural Wales (67).

Yet it turns out that this horror is all preface, in the end, to an even worse calamity as Clarke's reimagined Passion narrative reaches its nadir. The sequence's outward turn comes in a poem simply titled "September 2001," which is divided into two halves: *before the 11th day* and *after the 11th day,* in which the livestock epidemic intersects with the tragedy which unfolds on that day in America. Clarke's decision to write the poem entirely in fragmentary testimony enables her to avoid the pitfall of aestheticizing horror, or appropriating an atrocity for aesthetic purposes. Crucially, too, the poem borrows religious language in order to adequately frame the depth of the horror. The foot-and-mouth epidemic is described in the first part of the poem as "*Biblical. Like a terrible warning*" (68). In the second half, though, the traumatized people reel from the even greater horror they have watched unfold on their screens. "*How could we know there was worse to come?"* one witness asks. "*The world has changed forever*" (68). The "terrible warning" from the first part of the poem seems to have been fulfilled, but, painfully, it comes as the obsession with the virus seemed to have been waning, "*the end in sight*." Instead, now, as the final voice in the poem

observes, "*It's not just us weeping now, / but everyone weeping / and the world black as sin*" (68). The suffering on both sides of the Atlantic appears to mark some irrevocable loss of grace.

The appropriation of religious language (*punish, sin, warning, Biblical*) enables Clarke to expand her focus from the local "square mile" to the rest of the world, without diluting either the trauma experienced in rural Wales or making connections to September 11 that victims elsewhere might find inappropriate. The world as a whole, Clarke suggests, is implicated in a bitter fall from grace. All its peoples have a share in suffering, whether it is the highly localized pain of the foot and mouth epidemic in Wales (which she cements through the use of the Welsh name, *Traed a genau*) or the realization of a kind of sea change in the world in the wake of an atrocity that struck at human beings who have been burned like the Welsh cattle, as one witness observes. To see a connection between these kinds of suffering is not to belittle or diminish either, but to recognize a common and modern-day inheritance in the fall, in some experience of original sin as suggested in the collection's opening lyrics, that enacts itself with brutal particularly again and again around the world. Clarke has carefully built to this moment through the nods and glances to other corners of the world throughout the poem, even as the speaker's gaze was firmly rooted in and persistently returned to rural Wales. This move also illustrates the non-linear genealogy that

Victoria Browne calls for but cannot entirely model in her phenomenology: the common inheritance of suffering in a world "black as sin" links all humanity in a web of kinship that no longer depends upon strict lines of heritage. This model, drawn from biblical narrative, manages like its source to be entirely local while also looking outward to address more universal issues of suffering and sin.

Clarke stresses this point in the next poem, whose title, "The Fall," draws further on the biblical paradigms that have shaped the collection thus far. The poem's opening captures the strange blend of beauty and horror that arose from the images of September 11, captured visually in photographs such as Richard Drew's "Falling Man." But rather than linger on the visual, Clarke turns immediately to the emotions awakened by the sight, a longing to

> lend them flight
> as if God would extend a hand
> and set them down on the pavement
> into safe hands. (69)

Just because the onlookers are "too far to hear their screams" does not strip away the awareness of the atrocity, and the helpless anguish echoes the despair of the Passion Week's Good Friday, when all hope seems lost. Clarke furthermore sees this moment already compressed into history, using the metaphor of a geological stratum, although now, it seems to her, it is as though history has come to an end:

> The slow evolution of the world is over,
> and never, never again
> will retina or memory or soul be free
> of our second fall from grace
> or be washed clean of that stain. (69)

Admittedly, a common inheritance of the cost of sin is not the most joyous foundation upon which to build a common heritage in which all humankind can participate. But for Clarke, this inheritance is not just human: it reunites humanity to the natural world and the order of suffering in which all creation participates. Humankind's estrangement from the natural world, the sequences suggests, stems in part because it has come to see pain and suffering as experiences of lower orders of creation. The foot and mouth epidemic in Wales initially reinforced this view; however, the devastation of September 11th bound humankind and creation together on the wheel of suffering.

Clarke does not, however, offer a certain path forward after this revelation of shared inheritance in pain. In the sequence's penultimate lyric, "Three Minutes," she explores the implications of this shared pain in the days afterwards, particularly the fresh awareness that "every human hand / holds a bowl of dust," or that "every habitation on the earth / fills up with ashes / blown by an old wind" (70) in a parallel of Holy Saturday. The imagery of destruction prevails, even as the speaker helps her daughter to unpack in "her new house, still filled / with the crated rubble of the old one," in which every item is

wrapped in "crumbled newspapers / blurred with words from before we knew / that a cup could be a chalice of blood." They pause to join in the three minutes of commemorative silence "in the world's company" as all Europe does the same,

> before, like everywhere, we turn
> wordless to the ordinary,
> unwrapping, washing, drying, stowing
> one cup of gall at a time. (70)

In the final poem, the final note struck appears to be one of resignation: the moment of bleak epiphany reached, people simply settle into acceptance of the bleak world in which they live, in which the shadow of war looms ceaselessly over even the most bucolic scenes, such as the jet that "chases the day" over the field in which a shepherd and his dog make their daily rounds. The appearance of the jet serves only

> …to remind him
> that the world turns,
>
> that going home is a prayer,
> that even war draws breath. (71)

Rather than a new way forward, all that anyone can hope for is a pause in the hostilities, the silence that settles again after the jet goes by; this is the world with its "cups of gall" from which everyone must drink.

But the collection must be taken as a whole, and even if "Making Beds for the Dead" is its most powerful sequence, it isn't where Clarke chooses to end, and the religious imagery she has borrowed, the quasi-biblical narrative

structure of the collection, should suggest that she will not end her Passion narrative on Holy Saturday. The resurrection she offers is, at best, muted, but it arrives nonetheless. "Blackface: March, 2002" is not part of "Making Beds for the Dead," but the date in the title indicates the kinship between the sequence and the separate lyric, suggesting that "Blackface" stands as an epilogue to the devastation of "Making Beds for the Dead." In this stand-alone lyric, the sheep that has died has been killed not by a virus, but by violence from a gang of rams on the loose. The moment when the ewe is buried, "like the millions they threw on the pyres / in the days of the virus" is rendered more poignant by "that tender glimpse / like a sanctuary lamp / at the door of the vulva, / and the lamb dead in the boat of her body" (72). It seems an ultimate refusal of new life and new beginnings, but in the closing stanza, the speaker brings in a new ewe with her lamb, and, despite the warning against naming them, starts to dream up a new name for this ewe: "the pretty one with the white face / scattered with freckles, / like a flower. Flowerface. Maybe" (73). As new beginnings go, this one is no more than provisional, the closing "Maybe" undercutting any finality of hope. Yet it is also the moment of resurrection when she briefly glimpses the possibility of a future for herself and, potentially, the rest of the world. The hope of a new beginning is at last dangled in front of the readers again, the flock coming back to life and the human commitment to the non-human demonstrated through the

speaker's act of naming. The poem is once again intensely local and personal in both its sorrow and its hope, a retreat back to the square mile in which Clarke has long planted herself, and it makes sense, in the end, that she must return there in order to glimpse a way forward. But that "Maybe" that she offers spirals out from that square mile to the others whose distant lives have also been touched by the tragedies inscribed in this collection tragedies that she continues to observe in the following lyrics such as "Birthday" and, particularly, "Aftermath."

In this latter poem, the moon looks down at the sleeping world, an observer of every detail, down to the "peeled skull / of a frog" in a pond, "like the husk of a planet," a harkening back to the peeled and quartered image of the earth in "A Woman Sleeping at a Table" at the collection's beginning. If this poem seems to have a godlike perspective, this god is chilly and remote, and Clarke offers an image that is more like a cataclysm than a regeneration. If her post-resurrection world seems bleaker than the one Eliot posits at the end of the *Quartets*, it is in part because Clarke exists in a bleaker world, one marked by genocide, nuclear holocaust, and a creation that appears more profoundly desecrated than ever before.

However, Clarke closes not on that chilly image, like something from science fiction, but instead returns to the color gold in the final poem, "Flood."

She writes, "if civilisation drowns / the last colour to go / will be gold," a reminder of the gilt edging on the pages of the Bible in the opening lyric, "In the Beginning," and a reminder, too, of the piano in "Flood Diary" as she imagines "a rosewood piano / as silence engulfs it" (77). But the quiet cataclysm Clarke imagines is not the final word: the poem is one long sentence, but it is broken into two stanzas, ending and renewal. She has drawn on biblical themes and structures throughout the collection, and accordingly, she knows that if the world ends, it is only in the name of its birth and renewal. Thus, in the second stanza, the latter half of her long sentence, gold is also "first to return / to a waterlogged world" like "one dip from Bellini's brush, / feathers of angels, / *Cinquecento* nativities" (77). The imagery is that of renewal and return, that if the world ends, it is only to begin again with a kind of hope that seemed almost lost, looking forward to, as Clarke writes in the final line, "all that follows," trusting that something, indeed, will follow for both her own community and the rest of the world.

Clarke's work moves gradually from a reclamation of authority and memory for both women and the natural world through the use of ritual and religious narrative in an effort to reclaim a broader understanding of what it means to be Welsh in her rural context, overturning patriarchal narratives. But when that authority becomes natural, and when other poets coming in her wake

can take the right to speak for granted and their right to revise the narratives of the community as a given, Clarke's attention moves to broader themes. Yet she remains grounded in the local and avoids utopian thinking, using religious narrative not as a facile panacea for complicated woe, but as a means of interpreting suffering and using it not to fracture the world further, but to find a profound interconnectedness that stretches across both geography and time, suggesting new modes of kinship that offer a fragile bridge forward into a future that may, perhaps, be less disordered than its painful past. And through her use of this narrative, and the way in which she draws in all creation, she demonstrates the continued value of these reimagined stories—whose reinterpretations begin to become rituals in their own right—for healing her own community as well as the square miles in which her far-flung readers live.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

As Patrick Query observes, the "necessary ambiguity that inheres in the process of writing ritual is a unique benefit, rather than a hindrance," to writers seeking to articulate some nuanced picture of identity, whether that is membership in complex multinational Europe or within the smaller, more precisely bounded confines of an Irish village or an English parish (226). Ritual enables a "richer, stranger imaginative identification" that enriches ordinary material life and anchors it in some spiritual reality (Query 226). While writers may push its verbal forms nearly to the brink in their texts, their trust in the capacity of an occasional, formal, unifying structure to bind people together in a manner that softens difference without erasing identity does, in these texts, appear warranted: Eliot uses it to encompass all of history; Brown to maintain ties for a community scattered to the winds; Friel to recoup and honor lost narratives without bitter condemnation; and Clarke to include women and then expand her scope to bind the community into the fabric of the broader world without losing any of its identity. Notably, these authors are wary of making claims of authenticity or imposing tests of purity; community's power rests in its connection to tradition and the past, but also in its care and consideration for the

future, and it exists for the yet-to-be-born as much as it does for the dead. Under this model, as Graham Hughes indicates, "meaning is not to be some sort of monolithic abstraction," but rather "something fastened together in a collaborative work between those who propose meanings and those who appropriate them and—to this extent—bring them to completion" (300). In other words, the task remains one of complex negotiation and collaboration among author, audience, and tradition, always with one hand on the past and the other reaching hopefully towards the future.

The question of ritual's power in articulating and sustaining the integrity of a community's identity continues to be a pressing matter for a number of authors working today, as the development of Gillian Clarke's work into the twenty-first century suggests. The selection of these four authors does limit the scope of the study, and several areas remain fruitful domains for discussion going forward. For instance, Clarke offers only one model of feminine recovery of priestly or liturgical roles, and Irish poet Eavan Boland or Canadian poet Margaret Avison would round out the discussion more thoroughly. The use of ritual by authors in postcolonial contexts, such as Derek Walcott or Sujata Bhatt, would also add further depth and nuance to the discussion, as would the inclusion of rituals influenced by ritual traditions other than Christianity. Literary interpretations and reinvigorations of ritual for the sake of negotiating

identity in a complex, difficult twenty-first century remain vital to many writers; as George Mackay Brown wrote in "The Tarn and the Rosary":

> It is ceremony that makes bearable for us the terrors and ecstasies that lie deep in the earth and in our earth-nourished human nature. Only the saints can encounter those "realities." What saves us is ceremony. By means of ceremony we keep our foothold in the estate of man, and remain good citizens of the kingdom of the ear of corn. Ceremony makes everything bearable and beautiful for us. Transfigured by ceremony, the truths we could not otherwise endure come to us. (*Hawkfall* 190)

The work of making life both beautiful and bearable remains an ongoing task in many corners of the earth as writers find ways to help their local communities, and by extension their far-flung communities of readers, continue to retain their foothold in the estate of humankind.

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