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**Misery and Madness?:
The Irish Face in Modern Irish Drama**

**Submitted for Honors
In English Literature
By Rob Mawyer, '98**

Preface

I would like to begin by thanking Dr. McGowan for his hard work in helping me write this paper, and most particularly for making the May Term trip to Ireland such a rewarding experience. This paper is borne from a single image sustained in my imagination for nearly two years, and it has matured into a deeply personal project. More than anything, what you have in front of you is an imaginative interpretation of several modern Irish plays, with a five-second image of a facial expression serving as the backdrop. As you might expect, especially after reading this paper, Tom MacIntyre's demonstration of the Irish face struck a chord with me that absolutely refused to be forgotten, despite the numerous distractions in Dublin, Ireland and Bloomington, Illinois. This, I think, is one of the things that the liberal arts education at Illinois Wesleyan University has done right. If, after reading this paper, you can close your eyes and imagine an expression that encompasses both the misery of life and the strength to survive no matter what the circumstances, I feel I will have succeeded in the task I set myself. Thank you and enjoy.

Introduction

“For the strangled impulse there is no redemption.”

(*The Great Hunger*, 9)

In May 1995, Irish poet and playwright Tom MacIntyre spoke to a group of American students in Allihies, County Cork, Ireland. The subject of that particular class session was *The Great Hunger* by Patrick Kavanagh and MacIntyre's stage adaptation of the poem. In the midst of his discussion, he turned to Ireland itself, to the essence of being Irish. He spoke of the “Irish face”: a hopeless, wandering, near-crazed expression. I remember him seated near a window of the schoolhouse in which the class met, demonstrating this face. He stared out into the distance, misery and desperation etched over his features. The effect was haunting and captivating.

The focus of the class being Modern Irish Drama, I began thinking of the Irish face in terms of the plays we were reading. The result of this initial exploration revealed that characters in virtually all of these plays possessed qualities described by MacIntyre.

The primary point of this paper is to examine the Irish face as it is seen in these dramas, analyzing how it functions as a symbol of the

identity of Irish manhood. On one level, the Irish face reflects the traditional stereotype of the Irish hero: pathetic, drunken, crazy. It incorporates everything that is detestable about being Irish. However, it is also a shield, representing a strength that is not initially apparent. The Irish face establishes a distance from the misery and emptiness of life, a distance that underscores both the isolation of the character and the inner strength that allows him to persevere. In this sense, the Irish face works as both face and mask--loyally representing the awful, the pathetic qualities of the character while obscuring something deeper, harder, more admirable underneath.

Patrick Kavanagh and Tom MacIntyre

If the idea of the Irish face began with a discussion of the *The Great Hunger*, it is only fitting that this analysis begins with a look at the poem and the play adapted from it. In order to understand how the Irish face works in the following dramas, it is useful to establish a model by which other examples might be compared. According to Vincent Hurley's essay "*The Great Hunger: A Reading*," Kavanagh's poem is "about stagnation, enervation, and the slow, painful death of any hope of joy or fulfillment in the life of its central character, Patrick Maguire" (73). Kavanagh depicts

Maguire as an ultimately pathetic figure. The poem begins by describing him and his men as “mechanised scare-crows” (3), devoid of the basic elements that make a human. Thus, as the poem opens, it has already reduced its main character to a level less than man, less than human. This corresponds to the opening scene in MacIntyre’s stage version when Maguire is described “wandering the space, bent forward slightly, arms folded across his chest, hands beating his shoulders” (35). The image here is of man who is lost, alone, miserable. Thus, both poem and play begin by devaluing the main character. This theme continues when the reader discovers in the poem that Maguire is emasculated: “His face in a mist/And two stones in his fist/And an impotent worm on his thigh” (6). This is significant in that the tone here suggests just how pathetic, how miserable of a character he truly is. Far from being just physically impotent, Maguire is spiritually impotent as well. He is a man “whose spirit/Is a wet sack flapping about the knees of time” (4), who has nothing except his barren fields. Indeed, he is lost and helpless, physically as well as spiritually.

The text of the poem presents the reader with two basic questions: first it asks that if “we watch them [Maguire and his men] an hour is there anything we can prove/Of life as it is broken-backed over the Book of Death?”; second, it questions if there is “some light of Imagination in these wet clods” (3). With its focus on “these wet clods,” on the peasant

farmers, the poem sets itself a greater task than simply outlining the death of all hope in Maguire's life. Instead, Kavanagh puts the center of *The Great Hunger* on the life of the Irish peasant and tacitly on the essence of being Irish. Maguire, then comes to the foreground as the embodiment of this vision of an Irishman. Kavanagh writes that "[w]ith all miseries/He is one" (7), suggesting that Maguire is more than just a peasant or a man. Rather, he represents the miserable life of an Irishman. This misery becomes apparent in passages such as this:

But his passion became a plague
For he grew feeble bringing the vague
Women of his mind to lust nearness,
Once a week flesh must make an appearance. (6)

This passage demonstrates how completely unfulfilled Maguire's life truly is. The imagined women here, and the implicit reference to masturbation, represent the complete lack of fulfillment, of satisfaction in Maguire's life. He has nothing real with which to fill this void. Instead, he is left to tend to his fields and to lie in ditches watching the clouds go by.

Maguire's Irish face, then, is lost, hopeless, wandering, unsatisfied, and it is tempting to simply leave it at that. Kavanagh, however, opens the door for further examination. When the text presents those questions at the beginning, setting the poem's task, the first stanza ends with a qualifying question: "Or why do we stand here shivering?" (3). The

implicit message here is that there is something deeper than misery and hopelessness in these characters, that there might actually be “some light of imagination in these wet clods” (3). This is reinforced at the conclusion of the poem when the narrator states that “Patrick Maguire, the old peasant, can neither be damned nor glorified” (25). In other words, Kavanagh makes room for a facet in Maguire’s character that will not let the reader disregard him as a pitiful, crazy Irishman. It is in the analysis of this other facet of Maguire that the reader discovers the second feature of the Irish face--that which distances him from suffering, that which belies a kind of inner strength. The most explicit example of this is in Section VIII which describes Maguire wasting time:

Sitting alone on a wooden gate

All, all alone

He sang and laughed

Like a man quite daft,

Or like a man on a channel raft

He fantasied forth his groan.

Sitting on a wooden gate,

Sitting on a wooden gate,

Sitting on a wooden gate

He rode in day-dream cars.

He locked his knees

When the gate swung too much in the breeze.

But while he caught high ecstasies

Life slipped between the bars. (13)

Here in his reverie, Maguire is relatively safe from his miseries. Riding in "day-dream cars," he disregards his cares, his "groans," for his fantasies. Here, the Irish face suggests madness--Maguire is a "man quite daft"--and the result is that he is protected, however tenuously, from the dangers and troubles in his life. MacIntyre's stage adaptation of this scene reinforces this point. The stage directions describe Maguire's giddy madness: he fires "imaginary missiles at the sky," and flattens "himself upside down on the upstage side of the gate, face on view through the lower bars, legs a V from the top" (57). In other words, Maguire, sitting on a wooden gate, sits upside down in MacIntyre's play. Again, this implies madness, yet this same condition is described earlier as Maguire's "delight in being" (57). Thus, this same scene in poem and play implies that for a time, at least, Maguire is safe, relatively content in his near-madness. While the poem explicitly states that there is no hope for him, that the "hungry fiend/Screams the apocalypse of clay/In every corner of this land" (13), Maguire's life is not simply misery after misery. While unable to actually change the course of his seemingly meaningless existence, Maguire is strong enough to construct a shield that helps him persevere.

The Great Hunger acts as a model for the Irish face, demonstrating its birth, evolution, and devolution. Maguire, as an Irish man, proves lost, wandering, half-mad. No hope for fulfillment, for satisfaction, he takes refuge in his madness, hides in it, searching for some vague joy in an otherwise pathetic existence. Thus, the Irish face is at once an accurate, loyal representation of the miserable qualities of Irish life and a place of refuge, of resistance, against this misery.

J.M. Synge:

The Playboy of the Western World

The Playboy of the Western World is the story of Christy Mahon, a young Irishman who wanders to a village on the coast of Mayo. Taking refuge in a public-house, Christy recounts to the locals, including the proprietor and his daughter, Pegeen Mike, the story of how he murdered his father to escape his domineering ways. Instead of branding him an outlaw or wholeheartedly ostracizing him as a madman, the people of the village and the surrounding areas are taken with the stranger's charm and charisma. By virtue of these characteristics, Christy becomes a hero in the community until his father arrives, proving his outlandish tale of patricide false. Immediately denounced as an idiot and a liar, Christy

attempts to regain his former, short-lived prestige, especially in the eyes of Pegeen Mike, by trying to murder his father a second time. At the conclusion of the play, Christy and his father leave the village, and Pegeen Mike laments the loss of her “playboy of the western world.”

Of the characters in *Playboy*, Christy wears what most closely resembles the Irish face. Despite occupying the mantle of hero throughout most of the play, Christy reveals at certain points in the play just how truly miserable his life had been. For example, in Act I Christy describes to Pegeen Mike living on his father’s farm. Enthralled by her mysterious guest, Pegeen Mike comments that Christy must have lived like a king. He responds:

The like of a king, is it? And I after toiling,
moiling, digging, dodging from the dawn till dusk
with never a sight of joy or sport saving only when
I’d be abroad in the dark night poaching rabbits on
hills. (84)

The reader becomes aware here of just how empty and meaningless Christy’s life must have been before he escaped. Like Paddy Maguire’s, it is a life of constant and unfulfilling work, interspersed with exceedingly rare moments of enjoyment. Even these instances of recreation, though, are empty--Christy must chase rabbits in the dark in order to fleetingly escape the doldrums of life. Christy’s past, therefore, reflects exactly

the kind of dull, miserable existence common to the Irish face.

The elder Mahon's description of his son when he arrives to the village, though fueled by anger at nearly being killed, corroborates this element of Christy's character. Mahon describes his son as idle and pathetic--Christy is "a liar on walls, a talker of fancy" (98), and in regards to women he is the "laughing joke of every female woman where four baronies meet" (99). In addition, Mahon characterizes Christy as the type of man "you'd see stretched half of the day in the brown ferns with his belly to the sun" (98-9). These images and descriptions recall Paddy Maguire, who is seen lying in a ditch watching the clouds roll by, who is a laughing joke to women, who is also a talker of fancy. The particular scene in Kavanagh's poem depicting Maguire in the ditch suggests both the emptiness of his life--that he is forced to watch the clouds go by as a form of escape--and a sort of peaceful dementia. Although not as powerful an image in *Playboy*, the parallel is still provocative. Thus, it can be asserted that before coming to the village, Christy led a life similar to Paddy's Maguire's desperate, pitiful existence.

Even his initial arrival at the village evokes images of a madman, or of one who is wandering and hopeless. In the opening scene of the play Shawn Keogh, Pegeen Mike's intended husband, describes a man he has seen lying in a ditch, groaning in the night "like a maddening dog" (75). He notes that he "heard him groaning out, and breaking his heart," and that it

“should have been a young man from his words speaking” (75). Here Christy, though not yet introduced as a character, is a young man babbling in the dark, near-crazed, something even to be feared. Though for a time he has escaped his former life, the first impression of Christy that the reader is offered is that of a madman. Thus, the image of Christy’s wandering, empty, hopeless Irish face is reinforced.

What is interesting about Christy Mahon, and what perhaps separates him from Paddy Maguire, is that for a short time he is offered an escape.¹ Given the visions of his life offered by the text, it is no wonder that he might take an opportunity, even that of striking down his own father, for a chance at freedom. Liberated from the nets of his existence, he has, for one day, the chance to fly, to shine. He is accepted by the locals and wins them over. He prevails in the games of skill and chance in the village. He gains the affection of Pegeen Mike. He becomes, briefly, a hero. The significance of this is that beneath the Irish face, beneath the mask of grief and hardship, lies a kind of strength that allows the character to persevere. The difference, though, is that most of the characters discussed here are not heroic in the literal sense that Christy is throughout *Playboy*. Each one, however, has a certain immutable quality that redeems him as a character, that sends him beyond the confines of circumstance. Christy is, indeed, the playboy of the western world. He revels in his opportunity to prove his own worth, and his actions

throughout the play demonstrate that he will do anything, even kill his own father, to keep this taste of a better life.

What cannot be ignored, however, is that Christy's chance to shed the Irish face is short-lived. When it is revealed that Christy did not kill his father, that the story is false, the villagers do not hesitate to humiliate him, to denounce him as an idiot and a liar, thus forcing him back into his former role. This echoes another key characteristic of the Irish face--the inability to escape, the impotence to change the direction of one's life. At the end of the play, Christy is forced to leave the village, nearly driven mad by the reversals of fortune. He calls farewell to the crowd:

The thousand blessings upon all that's here, for
you've turned me into a likely gaffer in the end of
all, the way I'll go romancing through a romping
lifetime from this hour to the dawning of the
judgment day. (117)

This passage promises hope for Christy's future, that he will lead a "romping lifetime" filled with adventure. The fact that he leaves with his father, though, suggests that Christy has ultimately proved unable to break free. The promise, then, seems empty in that he is forced to return to a life in which he is nobody's champion, in which he cannot shine. Although he aggressively grasps a role superior to his father, and although

Pegeen Mike reaffirms his status as the playboy of the western world, the reader must ask what he has to look forward to. He must, presumably, occupy a position in a world that has already proven empty.

Sean O'Casey:
Juno and the Paycock

The primary character in *Juno and the Paycock* to wear the Irish face is Captain Boyle, a drunken, irresponsible blow-hard who runs his family into ruin at the conclusion of the play. In fact, his negative traits are so prominent that it is extremely difficult to find anything redeeming in his character whatsoever. For example, Boyle is so lazy, so averse to performing any kind of labor to earn money for his family, that he invents ailments to escape responsibility. When his friend Joxer congratulates him for getting a job in Act I, Boyle berates him for believing that it is good news:

Boyle: How is it good news? I wondher if you were in my condition, would you call it good news?

Joxer: I thought...

Boyle: You thought! You think too sudden

sometimes, Joxer. D'ye know, I'm hardly able to crawl with the pains in my legs!

Joxer: Yis, yis; I forgot the pains in your legs. I know you can do nothin' while they're at you.

Boyle: You forgot; I don't think any of you realize the state I'm in with the pains in my legs. What ud happen if I had to carry a bag o' cement?

Joxer: Ah, any man havin' the like of them pains id be down an' out, down an' out. (21)

Boyle has the chance to work at several junctures in Act I, yet these same pains conveniently inhibit him from doing so. In fact, Juno comments on this fact when she says that it is "miraculous that whenever he scents a job in front of him, his legs begin to fail him" (16). Instead of trying to help support his family, he spends his days lounging about with Joxer drinking and telling stories. In fact, the stories that he tells prove that in addition to being lazy, Boyle is also a liar. For example, Boyle has adopted the nickname "Captain," and he tells Joxer grand stories of sailing "from the Gulf o' Mexico to the Antanartic Ocean" (22). He recounts:

I seen things, I seen things, Joxer, that no mortal man should speak about that knows his Catechism. Ofen, an' ofen, when I was fixed to the wheel with a marlin-spike, an' the win's blowin' fierce an' the

waves lashin' an' lashin', till you'd think every minute was goin' to be your last, an' it blowed, an' blowed--blew is the right word, Joxer, but blowed is what the sailors use. (23)

The significance here is that Boyle builds his reputation as a man of action who has stared death in the face, as a man who is both educated (he knows that "blew" is the proper word choice) and in touch with the common worker (he identifies with the sailors by using "blowed"). However, the reader questions whether or not Boyle has actually been on a boat before in his life. Given the nature of the story, and the exaggerated terms in which he tells it, it becomes clear that this is just a fiction that might bolster his reputation. Perhaps this point that Boyle is a liar is made most clearly in Act III by Joxer when he remarks to Boyle that "you can't believe a word that comes out o' your mouth" (59). Thus, Boyle, through his laziness, irresponsibility, and lying, reveals himself as a man who would rather lie and feign injury than help provide for his family.

These negative qualities are, perhaps, almost forgivable, until one considers the ultimate consequences of his behavior.² Although Boyle does not seem to mean any harm, the reality of the situation is that he ruins the family by incurring an extreme debt borrowed against an inheritance that he never receives.³ This demonstrates that Boyle is not simply a harmless, comic character, but rather a pathetic, dangerous man.

Here is a man who, upon discovering that the inheritance is not coming, continues to borrow money, who continues to let people believe that he is rich, and who, ultimately, ruins his family for the sake of appearances and a taste of the good life. Thus, as a character Boyle, with his laziness and irresponsibility, proves to be both harmlessly flawed and dangerously pathetic.

It is significant to note, however, that based on what the reader discovers of Boyle's life and personality, the decision to go deeper into debt despite the missing inheritance is understandable (though perhaps not forgivable). Before the promise of a fortune, Boyle sees his life as restricting, demanding, and, ultimately, devoid of satisfaction. For example, he rebels against what he perceives as Juno usurping his freedom when he announces to Joxer that "there's goin' to be issued a proclamation be me, establishin' an independent Republic, and Juno'll have to take an oath of allegiance" (24). In other words, Boyle believes that he does not have enough freedom and must therefore declare his rights as a man. To give his life meaning, to make himself feel important, he fabricates stories of his life on the sea or his important role in fighting for Ireland's independence in order to gain respect from his peers (72-3). This retreat into a constructed reality as a means of escape is strikingly similar to Paddy Maguire's near-madness in *The Great Hunger*. Whereas Maguire has no immediate means of changing his life, and must therefore lapse into

fantasy to assign meaning to his life throughout the poem, Boyle is given an escape in the form of the inheritance. After the promise of fortune, Boyle no longer needs to lie to Juno about how he spends his time, or to create stories about his heroic past. Suddenly rich, he is free--he is a hero in the community, and he can lounge about his house smoking a pipe free of recrimination (31). Given this elevated position, this newfound freedom, it is logical that Boyle might continue the lifestyle rather than relinquish it once the inheritance proves false. His decision to keep incurring debt, while selfish and reprehensible, is on one level understandable.

The earlier comparison of Boyle to Maguire is important in that it reveals the strength, however contrived and tenuous, that comprises the second characteristic of the Irish face--that which allows to character to keep living despite his circumstances. Like Maguire, Boyle retreats into a constructed reality in order to find meaning and fulfillment. Outside of his home where he is a failure as husband and provider, out in the community and the pubs, he is the Captain, a man who has led a life of adventure and meaning. He is, in many ways, a hero to them. Even after he has taken advantage of his friends by borrowing their money, even after he has spent his last penny on alcohol, he can still construct a past in which he fought for his country on Easter Week and have Joxer tell him that it is "a darlin' story" (73). It becomes clear, then, that by retreating into

fantasy, by constructing a reality in which he is important, Boyle finds satisfaction in an otherwise meaningless life.

I imagine Boyle making the Irish face at the end of the play when, falling-down drunk, there is a hint of realization that the world *is* in a state of "chassis," and that perhaps *he* has caused some of it. Boyle cannot, however, escape his own inflated perception of his actions, and therefore takes up his place within the world of chaos. The reader is left at the end of the play with an image of the Irish face, and the knowledge that Boyle is a ruined man. He will always, presumably, have his constructed reality in which he might retreat, but his life will never be satisfying or meaningful--he will always be left lamenting the state of the world, never strong enough to change his own place within it.

Brian Friel:

Translations

Brian Friel's contemporary play *Translations* deals with the ways in which both the public and private spheres in Ireland have been compromised by the British imperial presence. Set in 1833, it relates the

stories of several inhabitants of a small village called Baile Beag as British soldiers swarm the countryside in an attempt to anglicize and formalize the names of landmarks, geographic features, and communities. It also conveys the personal battles that must be fought as old traditions give way and new lifestyles and roles must be negotiated.

Of the several male characters in *Translations*, the schoolmaster Hugh wears what most closely resembles the Irish face. His drunkenness throughout the play, as well as his wordy, overblown speeches, begin to make the reader question his grip on reality--if he is, as he seems, just a drunk old codger. By the end, however, it becomes clear that he is completely sane, that he fully understands what is happening to Ireland and to his community. It is in this realization that his seemingly tenuous grip on reality becomes understandable.

One of the first things to understand about Hugh's character is that in the space of the hedge school, among his own kind, he is the master. He is, presumably, the most learned man in the community. He commands a mastery of several languages, as well as a seemingly inexhaustible knowledge of classical poets such as Ovid and Homer. Among his own students, most of them adults, he is unquestionably in command and undoubtedly respected. This is seen most specifically when he is introduced in Act I. The class, most of whom are gossiping or shirking their duties, begin to work diligently when they hear of his imminent

arrival. And when he arrives, drunk though he may appear, he naturally slides into the role of the superior, holding court by quizzing them and by flaunting his intellect (711). Thus, the reader's first impression of Hugh is that of a command figure, a man who is obviously proud of his role of superiority over his peers.

This role, however, is in stark contrast to his behavior when the British soldiers Lancey and Yolland appear. His sphere of power and control compromised, Hugh falls back into a more subordinate role:

Hugh: What about a drop, sir?

Lancey: A what?

Hugh: Perhaps a modest refreshment? A little
sampling of our *aqua vitae*?

Lancey: No, no.

Hugh: Later perhaps when--

Lancey: I'll say what I have to say, if I may, and as
briefly as possible. (718)

The significance of this exchange is that Lancey, addressing a group of people he has just met, immediately takes the dominant role, refusing hospitality and interrupting the obvious "leader" of the group. Hugh, of course, does nothing to assert his previous role of master. This is reinforced later in the scene when Hugh stops Jimmy Jack's attempt at testing Lancey's command of Latin (711). No longer the master of his own

space, Hugh adopts the role of servant to the British authority.⁴ As Lancey explains to the villagers his duties in the region, specifically making maps and anglicizing the names of the landmarks, Hugh agrees that this indeed is a “worthy enterprise” (712). Implicit in this is the understanding that any dignity that Hugh now possesses is a dignity that the British presence in the area allows him to have. It is clear that they are in control, and that Hugh, as well as the others, is powerless to stop them.

Whereas Paddy Maguire’s source of frustration is the meaninglessness of everyday life, Hugh’s is the understanding that in a space occupied by the British, in a space that has been compromised, he is no longer superior. In this way, his identity is lost, has been renamed, as the existing landmarks have been renamed. Paddy Maguire’s identity is empty--he is merely a shell of a man, powerless to change his life in any real, meaningful way. Hugh’s has been stolen, forcibly ripped away, and he is every bit as impotent as Maguire to stop it or change it. The events of the play accentuate this notion--he loses his job at the national school, and at the end of the play he is left master of a hedge school that will soon be rendered obsolete. Indeed, the British have gone so far as to threaten to evict the entire parish and burn it to the ground.

The conclusion, however, warrants a more careful discussion because it is at this point that more characteristics of the Irish face

become apparent. Hugh's comfortable, known existence crumbling before him, Hugh arrives in the final scene roaring drunk, having just come from an infant's wake. The significance here is that Hugh offers insight into the source of his madness which is a key element of the Irish face.

Quoting Ovid, he rages, "I am a barbarian in this place because I am not understood by anyone" (748, from the footnote offered for translation).

The reason that he is not understood is the same reason that he used to feel superior to his peers--his intellect is so much greater than anyone else's. To reinforce this point, Hugh warns Owen that to "remember everything is a form of madness" (751). Thus, Hugh indicates that his learnedness, his ability to remember everything, the comprehension it implies, that which alienates him from his peers, is what ultimately drives him to a resignation in defeat from which he never truly escapes.

Maguire's madness is a product of the lack of any kind of fulfillment in his life, and at first glance this appears to be a far cry from Hugh's situation. However, it is his very learnedness which now makes it impossible for Hugh to achieve fulfillment and meaning. In other words, the erosion of his former way of life renders his learnedness an empty facility. Possessing it only accentuates the loss--of status, of the land, of Ireland itself--and this precludes the chance of Hugh finding fulfillment. As a result, Hugh is deeply affected by the awareness of his loss.

It is just this learnedness, however, that proves to be Hugh's greatest strength. As indicated earlier, Hugh knows exactly what is happening, both to his community and to Ireland, and he does not try to fool himself otherwise. Just as his role in the community has changed, he also realizes that the old way of life is changing, and that they must all adapt to it. He points out to Owen that it is the "images of the past embodied in language" that shape a culture, not the literal facts of history (750). Further, he remarks that "we must never cease renewing those images; because once we do [cease], we fossilize" (750). In other words, Hugh sees that Ireland's language, its culture, the face of the land, its very essence, is being compromised by foreign presence, and that they must adapt or fossilize. Up to this point, Hugh has been a man of three imaginative and linguistic worlds: the Irish, the classical, and the English.⁵ As the British begin to supplant the Irish way of life, Hugh is left with only the English, the least rich of the three. And yet, he realizes that to survive, he must adapt to the new presence. Thus, he agrees at the end of the play to teach Maire English (751). In this regard, then, it appears as if Hugh, while left seemingly without hope at the end of the play, is actually better equipped to handle the future than any of the other characters.

Thus, Hugh possesses many of the qualities of the Irish face--a life left empty and meaningless, the inability to change the conditions of his

life, and finally a strength that allows him to persevere through it all. I envision Hugh wearing the Irish face at the end of the play, as he rambles drunkenly and his memory fails him--a tortured, lost look. Although Hugh and Paddy Maguire have a decidedly different feel about them--Hugh is not nearly as pathetic as Maguire--it does not take a great imaginative leap to see that if he does not adapt to this new life, Hugh is well on his way to leading Maguire's kind of empty existence, with drunkenness the only recourse to break the monotony.

In addition to Hugh, Jimmy Jack also embodies some of the madness associated with the Irish face. Similar to his teacher and friend, he too is a learned man, but this quality does not suggest the same sort of redemptive survival that Hugh's does. At the end of the play, he is left ranting about his betrothal to the goddess Athene, and whether he is adequately immortal or if she is adequately mortal to appease both her people and his. Indeed, it is Jimmy Jack's insistence on the reality of this betrothal that prompts Hugh to make the aforementioned comment that the old ways must be abandoned in order for them to survive. The significance of this is that Jimmy Jack continues to grasp tightly to those things--the language, the classical works--which mean nothing to the British soldiers. As a result, he is maddened, delusional, lost. He takes refuge in the same type of constructed reality as Maguire and Captain Boyle in *Juno and the Paycock*. The point here, though, is that there is a distinct

difference between Hugh's Irish face and Jimmy Jack's madness. Indeed, this difference is explained by Hugh at the end of the play when he notes that Jimmy Jack has, in essence, fossilized by failing to renew the images of the past (750). In other words, Jimmy Jack does not comprehend the full import of what is happening. He is not equipped to adapt to the new way of life. This is an important point of departure between the two characters: whereas Hugh's Irish face indicates an awareness of his conditions, Jimmy Jack's only implies madness. The notion of awareness as an inherent characteristic of the Irish face will be taken up later in this paper, but for the moment it serves as a useful distinction between a madness that is detrimental and a "madness" (in terms of the Irish face) that distances the character from the harshness of his life.

John P. Keane:

The Field

In *The Field* John P. Keane tells the story of lives that are tied to the land, of lives for whom the land means life-and-death survival. The main character is Bull McCabe, a ruthless farmer intent on purchasing a field that would give passage to water, thus providing insurance for the survival of his family. When a stranger to the village comes with a higher offer, though, Bull finds himself in a position to lose the field. To make

sure that this does not happen, he beats the man to death and defies Father Murphy and Sergeant Leahy, who personify the spiritual and temporal forces in his life, in order to get what he feels he deserves. The play ends with Bull rationalizing his crime, proving himself strong enough to deny the forces that would try to interfere with his plans for his family's future.

On one level, and obviously a very significant one, Bull McCabe is an evil man. He threatens and intimidates nearly every character in the play; he lies, bribes, and blackmails; he is dangerously, ruthlessly violent. In light of such a reprehensible character, it is difficult to determine that hidden quality that protects him, that in some way allows him to escape the banality or misery of his life. Indeed, as is the case with Paddy Maguire, it is easy to overlook the positive aspects at all. However, as seen in each of the characters discussed here, both facets of the Irish face occur in tandem, and it is only with the negative qualities as a backdrop that the positive qualities can be fully appreciated.

Throughout the play, Bull McCabe is without a doubt reprehensible. He uses whatever means necessary to intimidate, threaten, or gain some kind of power over those who are not as aggressive as he. On the day the field is auctioned, for example, when Maggie Butler, the old proprietor, leaves to go home, Bull unashamedly tries to scare her by reminding her that she lives alone without anyone to protect her (130). In addition, he

utilizes a number of different methods to keep everyone silent regarding his plan to “steal” the land. For example, he tacitly blackmails Mamie into complicity:

There will be real trouble if you don't swear to keep your trap shut. I know enough about you to cause a right plateful of trouble. Your husband might be blind but the Bull McCabe knows your comings and goings like the back of his hand. (137)

By using this knowledge of Mamie's actions over her, he ensures his own protection when he vows to give William a beating to scare him away from buying the field. During this same exchange, Bull uses his leverage over Mamie to keep Leamy, her son, quiet. He asks, “You don't want your mother to be hurt, do you?” (137). Further, Bull makes the most of his family and his connections within the community by threatening Mick with the possibility of a boycott on his pub if he reveals the truth behind Bull's actions (110). To further convince him, he offers Mick a bribe of forty pounds (110). Thus, Bull engages in intimidation, blackmail, and bribery to implicate all of these characters into the web of deceit that he constructs.

In addition to being deceitful, Bull is also a ruthlessly violent man. For the sake of the possessing property, he beats and kills a man whose only transgression is submitting a bid for the same piece of land (146).

This, too, is demonstrative of his deceitfulness--he is so unwilling to abide by the laws of the auction that he murders a man who proposed a higher bid. Bull's violent nature is seen later in the play when he discusses the nature of his marriage. He describes to his son Tadhg a night in which he, drunk and angry, beat his wife for allowing a pony to graze in the field. He admits that he "walloped her more" than he meant and reveals that the two have neither spoken nor had sex in eighteen years (141). For the sake of the land, Bull not only kills a man, but beats his wife so severely that she refuses to speak to him or to share his bed. Given the importance of good land and the presumed patriarchy in a rural Irish household, these acts of violence are, to a certain degree, understandable.⁶ What is not so understandable, however, is the indication of a sadistic pleasure that Bull derives from some acts of violence, specifically when he executes the donkey and pony that grazed in the field. Evidence of this comes not from the fact that he kills the animals, but from the way in which they are killed. The donkey, finally cornered by Bull and Tadhg, is not simply shot, but rather beaten for a solid hour (108). The pony on the other hand, is shot, but not humanely. Bull recounts:

I went out and looked at the pony. He had one eye, a sightful right eye. I shot him through the two eyes, the blind and the good...a barrel at a time. (141)

In each case, the animal is killed in the most sickening manner. The donkey, beaten with fists and weapons, is tortured for an hour. The pony, on the other hand, is not simply shot through the head, but rather through each eye, one after the other. The fact that Bull, a farmer who presumably deals with animals every day of his life, engages in such torturous methods to dispose of troublesome beasts suggests that he does, on some level, derive some sort of pleasure from the violence. The common link between his assaults on the animals and on humans is that each is done in the name of the land, proving that Bull is willing to harm and to kill in order to maintain his possessions.

Thus, Bull McCabe is a man who is ruthless and violent, seemingly nothing but evil. There is, however, a pathetic quality to his character that is reminiscent of Paddy Maguire. For example, Bull is a farmer performing perhaps the same mundane duties in the field as Maguire. The most striking similarity, however, is their common lack of sexual fulfillment. Maguire has a sterile, unfulfilling sex life: there are images of his impotence, as well as the “women of his mind” that offer his only sexual outlet (*The Great Hunger* 6). As noted before, this is a significant source of frustration for him. While there is no explicit suggestion that Bull is impotent, he has not had sex with his wife for eighteen years. He admits to his son, “I seen some lonesome nights, Tadhg, lonesome nights” (141). Similar to Maguire, this is a source of frustration. Whereas

Maguire compensates by drinking, daydreaming, and conjuring imaginary women to “lust nearness” (6), Bull, emasculated by his wife’s refusal to have sex, compensates by exerting as much power as possible over the people around him. Denied, as he feels, one of the most basic elements of manhood, Bull demonstrates to his peers just how powerful a man he really is. This, in addition to his need for the land, leads to his deceitfulness and violence in the play.

The importance of the land in Bull’s life cannot be understated. Bull’s every action is fixed toward the goal of acquiring and maintaining the land. It is in this focus that the second characteristic of the Irish face--that which protects, that which redeems--is apparent. At first glance, Bull’s violent and manipulative methods to acquire the land seem completely reprehensible. However, the impetus behind this, the true driving force behind his need for the land is his responsibility to his family. Central to this is the idea of paternity--that Bull, as father and head of the household, must provide a future for his son and thereby preserve the family name. His ability to provide for his family is contingent upon his ownership of the field. As the play progresses, and as the relationship between Bull and Tadgh is developed, it becomes evident that Bull has genuine affection for his son. It is not until the final scene, however, that the reader becomes aware of the importance of this relationship. In this scene, it becomes clear that the true motivation for

beating and killing William is to insure Tadhg's future:

When you'll be gone, Father, to be a Canon
somewhere and the Sergeant gets a wallet of notes
and is going to be a Superintendant, Tadhg's
children will be milking cows and keeping donkey's
away from our ditches. That's what we have to
think about and if there's no grass, that's the end of
me and mine. (166)

In this passage, Bull makes the point that Father Murphy and Sergeant Leahy are not tied to the land, that they do not live and die by the land. Because of this fact, they do not have the same responsibilities, nor do they understand the land's power over a man such as Bull. He believes that it is his duty to make certain that his children and grandchildren have a means of survival, and he does whatever he has to in order to meet this responsibility.

The importance of the land, then, and Bull's notions of paternity offer a different perspective on the violence and deceit. Given these influences, Bull is able to rationalize the savage beating of his wife and murder of another human being. Based on the hints of regret that he shows, such as the gestures he makes to apologize to his wife (141) or whispering the act of contrition to the man he has just killed (146), the reader discovers that the path Bull chooses is not an easy one, that Bull is

not *simply* a heedlessly violent man, that he is not without remorse. In moments such as these, the text offers a glimpse into the real strength of Bull's character. He is trying to provide for his family. By obtaining the field, he is trying to make sure that Tadhg does not have to endure the limitations that he has. Bull wants to give his son the opportunity to prosper in a way that he never could. That Bull takes such desperate measures, that he defies the religious and social influences that would ultimately deny him the ability to provide for his family in this way, suggests an immeasurable strength in his character which casts his actions in a different light. The acts of violence and his other negative qualities are not forgivable, but it is clear that Bull has an inner core of strength that provides him with a means to rise above his circumstance.

In this way, Bull is different from many of the characters discussed here. Unlike Christy Mahon and Captain Boyle, two other characters who escape for a time, there is every indication that Bull's escape is permanent. The reason for this is that Bull is not powerless to change his life like so many other characters who wear the Irish face. Rather, he aggressively exerts his own force. He is no Hugh from *Translations*, merely adapting to his situation; he works to change his situation. Therefore, Bull distinguishes himself from the other bearers of the Irish face. This does not, however, save him from the suffering shared by all of those who have the Irish face. Indeed, as with the other characters, I envision

Bull wearing the Irish face at the end of the play as he indicates that he cannot forget the man he has killed. He announces that the “grass won’t be green over his grave when he’ll be forgot by all...forgot by all except me!” (167). The implication here is that Bull is fully aware of the price that he has paid for the field, and that he will always remember this cost. Nevertheless, by play’s end, there is very little doubt that Bull’s future is more secure, that his existence will prove more fulfilling than the other characters discussed in this paper.

The Irish Face in Other Literary Forms

It is important to note that that Irish face is not simply limited to drama, but rather surfaces across the breadth of Irish literature since the turn of the century. In fiction, for instance, I envision both Stephen Dedalus (from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*) and Cal McCluskey (from Bernard MacLaverty’s *Cal*) as characters who, at some point, wear the Irish face. MacLaverty’s Cal Mc Cluskey is a nineteen-year-old young man who finds himself tangled in the Troubles of contemporary Ireland. Cal feels the pull of several forces that would try to define his life, and he resists them. Two of the more significant forces at work on Cal are political and religious influences which, it becomes clear as the text progresses, are closely tied together. Living in the

predominately Protestant Belfast, Cal and his father are the only Catholics living in a Protestant neighborhood. The prejudice that they face in this circumstance results in a life pervaded by fear--fear of the almost pedestrian threats, to fear of something as deadly as the bombing of their home. To complicate matters, Cal is also subject to the influence of the IRA, in the form of Skeffington, a school teacher and political mastermind. At one point in the novel, Skeffington tells Cal that not to act "*is to act*" and that by not doing anything to advance the cause, Cal is "helping to keep the Brits here" (65). Thus, it becomes clear that Cal's life is one in which various appeals are being made--living in Belfast as a Catholic, he is constantly at the mercy of the loyalist, Protestant majority, while on the same token he is subject to the republican appeal to his religion and to his political sensibility. Religion and politics here cannot be separated, and one cannot ignore the powerful influence that they have in Cal's life.

It is in response to this life and the forces at work upon it that Cal wears the Irish face. First, he is burdened and troubled by guilt at his complicity in an IRA murder of a Protestant policeman. He refers to himself as "*merde*" and then transforms that word into "Merderer" (14). The significance of this is that even on the level of language, Cal's guilt is so pervasive that he would, in the same gesture, refer to himself in terms of the murder and as shit. The reader sees this guilt working in other

ways, as well, when Cal is haunted by his dreams, when he is “attacked from within his own head” (106). These dreams reflect the society of violence of which Cal is a part, and they also mirror the act of violence that stays with him throughout the novel. At times they are filled with “screaming and shattering glass” (34), and at others he sees the dripping of “blood-drops like the start of a thunderstorm” (106). Nearly all of these dreams conclude with Cal screaming until he wakes (106, 152). These dreams are direct manifestations of Cal’s guilt, and it is such a pervasive force in his life that it haunts him throughout the novel.

Like so many of the other characters discussed here, Cal is also impotent to change the course of his life. This is seen most explicitly when Cal expresses a desire to be honest with Marcella and reveal his part in the death of her husband. The text notes that he wants to “explain how the events of his life were never what he wanted, how he seemed unable to influence what was going on around him” (152). Cal does, however, make an attempt to change his life by fleeing the city for the countryside--like Bull McCabe, like Christy Mahon, and, to some degree, like Stephen Dedalus--but he proves unable to escape the forces at work on his life.

The strength that Cal possess, though, cannot be ignored. Despite all of the influences that Cal faces, he ultimately chooses his own path, breaking free from the grip of Skeffington and the IRA and depending on his love for Marcella. To this end, he informs the police of Skeffington

and Crilly's plan to bomb the library, presumably weakening the republican position in Belfast (151). This break from the religious and political forces in his life signifies a strength of will that cannot be measured, a strength similar to Bull McCabe's in *The Field*. In that play, Bull resists the influences of religion and the law in order to secure his family's future. In *Cal*, Cal resists certain influences to take steps to do the right thing, despite the obvious threat to his own safety. In addition, it becomes clear at the end of the book that Cal, like Hugh in *Translations*, also finds a degree of protection in the realization that his own life is irrevocably altered:

She [Marcella] was what he wanted and if he couldn't be near her, he might as well be in prison. If he was ever caught--and there was an impending sense that it wouldn't be long now that Crilly and Skeffington were lifted--he would write to her and try to tell it as it was. (154)

The sense of resignation and realization offered in this passage emphasizes two key ideas in understanding Cal's strength. First, it recalls Hugh's resignation at his own life and awareness that he must find some way to persevere. Second, it highlights Cal's ultimate gesture to do the right thing despite his own safety--by endangering Skeffington and Crilly, it is nearly certain that he too will be implicated. Thus, Cal also

demonstrates a tremendous amount of strength by resisting the forces that would try to define his life.

I envision Cal physically making the face demonstrated by Tom MacIntyre at the end of the book, when the police capture him. This proves to be a very abrupt and moving conclusion:

The next morning, Christmas Eve, almost as if he expected it, the police arrived to arrest him and he stood in a dead man's Y-fronts listening to the charge, grateful that at last someone was going to beat him to within an inch of his life. (154)

This passage touches on several issues vital to understanding the Irish face: the invitation to ruin seen in so many of these characters, the guilt that is so powerful it allows him to be grateful for punishment, the sense of madness that such a gratitude might suggest, and the strength that allows him to persevere. When I imagine Cal dragged away by the police at the end of this book, I see a wandering, haunted look, made all the more disturbing by the hint of a smile that might suggest madness. It is the same face worn at some point by each of the characters discussed in this paper.

Another character in modern Irish literature who, I believe, wears the Irish face is Stephen Dedalus from James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. Stephen broods in *Portrait* about his

life and the limitations that he perceives upon it: "When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets" (203). Here, the reader discovers that Stephen is deeply disturbed at the extent to which he does not control his own life, and this is a realization that never quite leaves him. The reader must note the similarity between Stephen and Hugh from *Translations*, who is completely aware of the way in which his life is being compromised and yet is powerless to change it. For all Stephen's bold proclamations that as an artist he will transmute "the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life" (221), the expression of art with which the reader is left at the end of *Portrait* is nothing but a self-referential diary that fails to fly free from the nets, that does not achieve what his art should. In addition, it also becomes evident that Stephen is maddened like so many of the other characters discussed here, haunted by the ghost of his dead mother:

Silently, in a dream she had come to him after her death, her wasted body within its loose brown graveclothes giving off an odour of wax and rosewood, her breath, that had bent upon him, mute, reproachful, a faint odour of wetted ashes....A bowl of white china had

stood beside her deathbed holding sluggish
bile which she had torn up from her rotting
liver by fits of loud groaning vomiting.

(*Ulysses*, 5)

Obviously, the circumstances differ, but given the context of this discussion, one cannot help but recall the madness of Paddy Maguire lying in a ditch or of Jimmy Jack in *Translations* haunted by the past. Maguire and Jimmy Jack prove to be impotent to change the course of their lives, and so too *Ulysses* provides indications that Stephen is powerless in the same ways. For example, the narrative continually returns to the Stephen's guilt at not being able to save his mother:

He saved men from drowning and you shake at a
cur's yelping....Would you do what he did?....The
truth, spit it out. I would want to. I would try. I
am not a strong swimmer. Water cold soft. When I
put my face into it in the basin at Clongowes. Can't
see! Who's behind me? Out quickly, quickly!....If I
had land under my feet. I want his life still to be
his, mine to be mine. A drowning man. His human
eyes scream to me out of horror of his death.
I...With him together down...I could not save her.

(38)

The “he” at the beginning of this passage refers to Buck Mulligan, Stephen’s roommate, who, before the text begins, saves a drowning man. Here Stephen asks himself if, given the opportunity, he could do the same. The answer that he gives himself is that he would not be able to. This indication of his own weakness then transforms at the end of the passage to the statement that he “could not save *her*” (38, italics mine), referring to his own mother. Thus, the text assigns to Stephen a certain impotence which the reader sees in Stephen’s inability to make his art transcend the limitations that he perceives and in the guilt that he feels over his mother’s death.

Yet, in Stephen’s character is a certain strength or resistance that allows him to persevere through the problems in his life and his guilt. The source of this strength, like Friel’s character Hugh, is Stephen’s vast intelligence and learnedness. He understands the extent to which his life has been compromised by external influences, and he wishes to fly past them. This is seen at the end of *Portrait* when he writes in his journal, “Old father, old artificer, stand me now and ever in good stead” (253). By evoking the image of Dedalus, the old artificer who escapes, Stephen demonstrates his desire to free himself from the nets cast about his soul. And while he is never able to fly past those nets, Stephen’s defiance cannot be ignored.

The Nightmare of History

--History, Stephen said, is a nightmare
from which I am trying to awake."

(Ulysses 28)

In this analysis of the Irish face and the characters who wear it, several basic elements have been established. First, there is the pathetic, nearly miserable life that each one leads. It is, either explicitly or implicitly, an empty life, devoid of real meaning or satisfaction. These are characters who are fixed, stuck, static: whether they are trapped tending to fields each day, or they waste their time away in a pub drinking, or both, they are not truly satisfied. Second, they prove, in most cases, unable to change their lives, to break free from the nets cast over them. This is emphasized in the images of impotence or emasculation associated with many of these characters. The significance of this is that it reinforces the dismal circumstances under which each must negotiate his life. Third, there is the indication of a quality that ultimately protects and sustains the character: a place of refuge, a personal "strength" that enables him to persevere. This quality takes on a variety of subtle forms, but upon first glance it might be interpreted as a "madness." Taken together, these characteristics comprise the haunting features of the Irish face.

This discussion of the Irish face would not be complete, though, without asking certain questions, without exploring the roots. Why are these lives so miserable? What is it about being Irish that has led to such a rendering of its heroes? I believe that the answers to these questions lead back to the nets to which Stephen Dedalus refers--the nets flung about the soul of a man that keep him from flight. In *Portrait*, Stephen specifically refers to the nets of nationality, language, and religion, but I think that it goes beyond just these. It extends to the entire idea of history as a powerful influence on the Irish. In " 'History, All That': Revival Historiography and Literary Strategy in the 'Cyclops' Episode in *Ulysses*" Andrew Gibson remarks that history "emerges repeatedly as a crucial if sometimes buried concern" at several points in *Ulysses* (53). While Gibson's aim is to delineate Joyce's focus on history as it occurs specifically in the "Cyclops" chapter, the point is well taken--that history is a crucial theme in *Ulysses*. Indeed, I believe that history is also crucial to understanding the characters discussed in this paper. However, I do not wish to focus on the history of Ireland, per se, but rather the histories that are unique to each of these characters.⁷ When Stephen remarks in *Ulysses* that history is a nightmare from which he is trying to awake, it is significant because it evokes the system of forces, the "histories," with and against which he must negotiate his life. In much the same way, each of the characters discussed in this paper is trying to

awake from the nightmare of his own personal history. The Irish face, that lost and seemingly hopeless expression, reflects the tension between the nightmare of history and the desire to awake from it.

In *Portrait* Stephen Dedalus identifies nationality, language, and religion as influences on his life, but there are other forces which motivate these characters and which, most importantly, bring about the hopeless, pathetic, or wandering element of the Irish face. For example, to men such as Paddy Maguire, Christy Mahon, and Bull McCabe, the land acts as a powerful driving force. These are men whose lives and whose well-being depend on the crops they farm, the fields that feed their livestock, and the turf they use for fuel. Of course, the influence plays out in different ways, but it is always present. Maguire does not derive any personal satisfaction from farming, but it is evident that he *must* in order to make a living. There is no indication that he can simply walk away from his life to start anew. Similarly, Christy Mahon finds no pleasure in the “toiling” and “moiling” of life on his father’s farm. When he does leave, the “history” of his past, in the form of his father, comes back to reclaim him. For Bull, the need for the field and its passage to water drives him to kill a man and to deny the authority of religion and the law, personified in Father Murphy and the Sergeant. The ultimate result of this act, as noted before, is the legacy with which Bull must live at the conclusion of the play: the memory of the man he has murdered and

the realization of the true price he has paid for the field. Thus, the “history” of the land acts as a powerful force in the lives of these men, and it is reflected in the expressions of misery or guilt in their faces.

Similarly, social and familial forces in Captain Boyle’s life influence his behavior and the decisions that he makes. Indeed, the negotiation between these two forces ultimately leads to the downfall of his family and to the drunken realization that the world is in a state of chaos. The social forces are personified in Boyle’s sidekick Joxer and the other pub-goers who listen to and accept “The Captain’s” inflated, overblown stories. As previously noted, Boyle is an important man among these people, and it is understandable that he wishes to spend his time in their company. Working against this influence is Juno, who urges Boyle to get a job and to meet his responsibilities to the family. Of course, Boyle would rather spend his time in the pubs, demonstrated by the imaginary ailments that prevent him from working. When the inheritance makes it possible for him to provide for his family *and* maintain his perceived status in the community, Boyle finally finds an acceptable means of reconciling these two seemingly opposing forces. His decision to maintain the illusion of prosperity despite the knowledge that the money will never come signifies the power of the forces at work on his life. Being rich, the burden of his familial obligations eases, and his status in the community grows. By the conclusion, however, it is evident that Boyle’s efforts to

maintain the fragile reconciliation between his social and familial obligations have failed, and the result is the miserable or pathetic countenance that is the Irish face.

The "histories" at work on Hugh's life are the images to which he refers at the end of the play--images that have shaped him as a man--and the British presence that threatens those images. As noted earlier, Hugh must relinquish everything he knows and appreciates in life because of the British hegemony. He is no longer the learned, superior schoolmaster. The Irish and the classical works of literature that he loves take a role subordinate to the English tradition that is, to Hugh, perhaps lusterless and insipid. Even Hugh's language is taken from him. What problematizes the situation even more is that Hugh completely understands what is happening to him and to Ireland. Hugh's awareness, as noted before, accentuates his loss: the fact that he knows the consequences of the British presences only heightens the atrocity of the experience. In this way, then, Hugh is torn between the "history" of all that he holds dear in life, and the realization that his life is being compromised in a terrible and tragic way.

So far, the discussion has been confined to the ways in which each of these characters negotiates his life in terms of or against the "nightmare of history." It has been seen that the forces at work on these

characters result in the first characteristic of the Irish face that reflects the miserable, empty, or pathetic quality of their lives. However, this does not account for the second aspect which allows them to persevere through the hardships that they encounter. This second quality of the Irish face signifies the desire to awake from the nightmare of history. It is a personal space of safety constructed to protect them from the forces previously mentioned. For example, the “madness” associated with Paddy Maguire actually protects him from the drab, meaningless monotony of his life. Or, Captain Boyle’s meaningful place in his community, in truth built upon falsehoods, shields him from the obligations to his wife and children. Similarly, the element of strength discussed with regard to each character is in truth a place of safety each one constructs.

The question arises, though: *How* is this place created? What is the nature of it? In his introduction to *^{italics}Tropics of Discourse*, Hayden White notes that

discourse itself mediates between our
apprehension of those aspects of experience still
‘strange’ to us and those aspects of it which we
‘understand’ because we have found an order of
words adequate to its domestication. (21)

In other words, language controls one’s apprehension of his/her surroundings or place within them. Those things in life that are

understandable are only so because there exists the language or vocabulary to make it so. When this vocabulary does not exist, when experiences cannot be domesticated, then aspects of life are "strange." White focuses on this concept as it relates to historiography, yet there seems to be in this passage a connection to the characters who possess the Irish face. The connection lies in the difference between the "strange" and the "understandable." In each of the plays, the reader ultimately encounters a man who has discovered the "strange"--those nets flung about the soul of a man--invading the "understandable" facts of life. For example, Bull McCabe, who knows that land is an important part of his life, begins to understand just *how* important it is when it becomes evident that he might lose the field. Indeed, the land is so important that he does everything in his considerable power to keep it. In *Translations*, Hugh finds the British encroaching on everything that he has ever known: his hedge school, the land, the very name of his village. As a result, he finds he must give up the past in favor of a culture that has been suddenly redefined. Captain Boyle, caught between obligations to his family and the "glory" of being an important man in the community, ruins his family and acknowledges the chaos in his life. Finally, Christy Mahon escapes the misery of life on his father's farm and finds that he can be a hero. When his father comes to reclaim him, when the forces of the past and the land return, he loses his heroic status and leaves the village. Thus, each of the

characters who wear the Irish face have encountered circumstances in which the “strange” clashes with what has been previously “understood.”

At the beginning of the passage, though, White notes that discourse mediates between the apprehension of the strange and the understood. It is evident that on some level, these characters have been forced to establish this discourse, to try to reconcile those nets to which Stephen Dedalus refers with the more pedestrian aspects of their lives. Put simply, to a certain degree each one acknowledges the extent to which the “histories” have influenced his life. This leads Bull McCabe to admit that the man he has killed will “be forgot by all...forgot by all except me” (167), signifying that he fully understands the price that he has paid for the land. Further, when Hugh tells Owen at the end of *Translations* that they must renew the old images or risk fossilizing, it is significant because it entails adapting to the British presence. In *Juno and the Paycock*, Captain Boyle’s acknowledgement that “th’ whole worl’s...in a terr...ible state o’...chassis” takes on a whole new meaning, underscoring the recognition that he has brought about his family’s financial ruin (254). And in *The Playboy of the Western World*, Christy Mahon tells his father, “I’ll see you from this day stewing my oatmeal and washing my spuds, for I’m master of all fights from now,” indicating that despite his superiority over his father, he must return to an otherwise unfulfilling life on the farm (117). Thus, the events in these plays force the characters to begin

finding the means to reconcile the “histories” acting on their lives and the more unexceptional aspects of their experience. In other words, the men who have the Irish face are forced, per White, to begin finding the discourse that mediates between that which is “strange” and that which is “understood.”

This is an important point because it helps explicate the element of the Irish face that indicates strength or a means of persevering. Again, White provides a useful way of discussing this. He notes in the introduction to *Tropics of Discourse* that since history is grounded in an arbitrary system of language, “it is not a matter of choosing between objectivity and distortion, but rather between different strategies for constituting ‘reality’ in thought so as to deal with it in different ways” (22). By “distortion,” White means a version of history that is incomplete or supposedly not objective. His overall aim, though, is to refute the notion of an objective reality, replacing it with a “‘reality’ in thought” constructed individually. This is certainly applicable to a discussion of the second aspect of the Irish face because it is comprised, in essence, of a reality constructed by each character. This is seen most specifically in Paddy Maguire and Captain Boyle, who fall back into worlds of fantasy for protection: for Maguire, it is the world of madness; for Boyle, it is a reality built upon lies that make him, to a certain degree, an important man. Bull McCabe finds protection by being the strongest, most capable

man in his reality. In it, he is free from the authority of law and religion. He acts with confidence, knowing that he can do what he wants when he wants. Christy Mahon announces that he will "go romancing through a romping lifetime," when in fact he will simply go back to life on his father's farm (117). In Hugh, however, this notion is perhaps more difficult to see. The reality that he constructs, though, is one that adapts to the culture that has been compromised. He agrees to teach Maire English because it is what they will need to survive. Thus, the characteristic of the Irish face that implies a strength in these men actually signifies the strength to construct a reality that is safer for them. It does not allow them to escape the nets cast over their lives, but it enables them to at least survive despite limitation.

Thinking back to Tom MacIntyre sitting on a stool, looking out the window of the schoolhouse, I see in him not just Paddy Maguire, but each of the men discussed here. He is Hugh from *Translations*, a learned man forced to confront and adapt to a life that has been compromised; he is Captain Boyle from *Juno and the Paycock*, a lazy, drunken fool who runs his family to ruin; he is Christy Mahon, trapped in an empty, unsatisfying life; he is Bull McCabe, confronting his crime of murder, determined to provide for his family at any cost. He is sitting on a stool, staring out of the window with a piercing recognition of his own existence, staring through

desperate eyes. Indeed, his face reflects the misery of his life, but it suggests a sustaining quality, a strength that cannot be ignored.

End Notes

1. This particular notion will be seen time after time with these characters who wear the Irish face--Captain Boyle in *Juno and Paycock* and Bull McCabe in *The Field* both go to desperate lengths to try to provide for a better life.
2. One cannot ignore the almost endearing quality of Boyle's character--despite the negative attributes, he is certainly comic and, perhaps, almost lovable. The point, though, is clear: Boyle's family is ruined, and he is at least partly to blame.
3. Johnny summarizes Boyle's affront to the family when he says, "An' you let us run into debt, an' you borreyed money from everybody to fill yourself with beer!" (63).
4. This notion of the Irishman playing the servant to the British master is a common theme in Irish literature of the twentieth century. Perhaps one of the most of these characters is Buck Mulligan in *Ulysses*, identified by Stephen Dedalus as the "usurper" (19). In *Translations*, the true servant is Owen who only at the conclusion of the play begins to realize the damage being done.
5. This entire line of reasoning (the three imaginative and linguistic worlds) was suggested to me by Dr. McGowan. Just thought I should give credit where credit is due.

6. Obviously, I am not arguing that Bull's domestic violence is forgivable. Rather, I believe that given the patriarchy, the desperate dependence on the land, and, ultimately, Bull's own character, I *understand* his reaction. Indeed, it makes sense to me that *Bull* might react so violently to that situation.

7. It is important to consider the overall social and cultural history of Ireland because each of these characters, as Irishman, are necessarily influenced by it. Indeed, this is a study of the *Irish* face. However, I believe that it is more important to study these men in terms of their experiences, not necessarily the history of Ireland.

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