Alternate Irelands: Emigration and the Epistemology of Irish Identity.

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5 words

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Abstract

This essay begins by deconstructing the logo of the Centre for Migration studies as a way of outlining a differential perspective on Irish identity. Eschewing the traditional view of identity as sameness, this article posits an Irish identity which focuses on difference. The essay makes use of works by Joyce and Heaney.

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Introduction: The Scattering

In 1998, a conference was held in University College Cork, under the auspices of the *Irish Centre for Migration Studies*, dealing with emigration and the Irish Diaspora. The title of this conference was '*The Scattering*', a term that will prove important for our analysis of the imbrication of emigration and notions of the epistemology of Irishness. The term 'scattering' has etymological connections with the verb 'to shatter', and semantically, both share a common line of signification. Both derive from the Middle English *schater* (*en*), and both denote a spreading out from the centre, a breaking of some kind of unity into diverse bits and pieces. Given our preferences for wholeness, harmony and unity (a Heideggerian *Versammlung*), the idea of scattering, allied as it is to a notion of shattering, is

tinged with negative connotations. In the present context, a spreading out of Irish people over different areas of the earth's surface has similar ramifications. Given that much of the causes of emigration stemmed from economic necessity at best, and grinding poverty and starvation at worst, it is hardly surprising that emigration is a subject which touches a national nerve.

However, the aspect of emigration that is the subject of this paper is not the experiential Diaspora, or its consequences. Instead I will focus on the notion of emigration as a literary and theoretical trope which allows for the creation of an alternative epistemological perspective in terms of defining Irishness. Rather than talk about the historical fact of emigration, I will focus on the tropical aspect of emigration in literature, notably in the writings of James Joyce and Seamus Heaney, where the notion of the emigrant creates a space for an epistemological position from which the essentialist notions of Irish identity can be subjected to transformation.

The emigrant as historical figure allows for a pluralization of identity, for an '*other*' to be added to Irishness, be it Irish-American, Irish-Australian or Irish-English; the emigrant as trope allows for the internalization of this historical pluralism, and for a consequent critique of essentialist notions of Irishness. These fixed notions of Irishness are the centre from which the scattering itself took place, and it is my contention that emigration as trope will help to problematize the relationship between the scatterings and that centre, and indeed, to raise important questions about the very construction of that centre itself.

The Centre Cannot Hold

In this context, the epistemology of centrality in terms of identity needs to be clarified. Two resonant lines from Yeats immediately spring to mind when notions of centrality are invoked:

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. (211)

In these famous lines from *The Second Coming*, the concept of centrality is used as a signifier of order, structure and coherence. Because the 'centre' is unable to hold, the world must brace itself for the loosing of anarchy and chaos. The epistemology which underlies this view of centrality is pervasive. The centre is the locus of control; it is that point from which all else proceeds; it is that point from which all circles and arcs initiate, and through which they are defined. In diagrammatic terms, a circle is defined in terms of its radius: that is its distance from the centre. Any point on the circumference is not part of the centre, yet is defined in terms of that centre. The distance between centre and circumference is uniform.

The logo of the *Irish Centre for Migration Studies* is itself both mimetic of this relationship, and at the same time disruptive of it, with the letters of the word 'migration' deliberately breaking the circumferential frame around the image of the globe. Visually, emigration is seen as shattering that circumference (we are back to the etymological relationship between 'scatter' and 'shatter' again), and by extension, the relationship with the centre. I have reproduced the logo on the next page, in order to demonstrate the irruptive effect that emigration can be seen to have on notions of a fixed relationship between a culture and its own definitions of identity. [1]

This diagram demonstrates the different vectors of movement in terms of a circle: the centripetal and the centrifugal, and by extension, the different identificatory relationships that a culture can exhibit. The scattered letters of '*migration*' can be seen either as being pulled back to, or pulling away from, the centre of the globe. The centripetal is a movement which is always focused on the centre. Symbolically, such a perspective sees the centre as the point of origin, fixed, foundationalist, essential and beyond any form of change. It is that which shapes us, and that to which we must constantly look for definition. In terms of offering some form of epistemology of Irishness, such a centre-seeking focus can have dangerous consequences. If that centre is historically and ideologically fixed, then it can limit the future developments of Irishness through becoming the focal point of a socio-political *imaginaire*, wherein the essences of identity are stored, and from where they exercise some form of veto on the socio-cultural development of the society in question through the reification of myths and narratives of identity.

Every culture defines itself through a process of narrative imagination, a re-telling of stories about its own past which reaffirm the ritual unities of the culture in question. For example, Irish people remember the 1916 rebellion as a nodal point in the political and cultural reaffirmation of Irishness

per se. Around this period, the major political parties were founded; the Gaelic, Celtic, Irish and Irish Literary revivals were set in motion. The Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association were set up, and the gradual adequation between the nationalist movement, both political and cultural, and the Catholic church came into being. This period of colonial upheaval – with the almost standard attendant processes of nationalist consciousness-raising, independence movement, armed rebellion, war of independence/liberation and an ensuing civil war – became part of the process of a national imaginary, defining Irishness as it emerged from the colonial shadow of Britain. This whole period, or more correctly, the narrative enculturation of this period, became a *terminus a quo* from which particular notions of Irishness were traced.

Such a process is necessary for cultural definition, but there is always a danger that such culturally sanctioned categories may become reified into some form of epistemological orthodoxy which forms a hypostasized centre of identity. As Richard Kearney has noted, such a process of 'ideological recollection of sacred foundational acts often serves to integrate and legitimate a social order' (1998, 166). However, he goes on to cite a warning note sounded by Paul Ricoeur, who points out that that such a process of reaffirmation can be perverted: 'into a mystificatory discourse which serves to uncritically vindicate or glorify the established political powers'. Ricoeur's point is essentially that in such instances the symbols of a community become fixed and fetishized; they serve as lies' (1973, 29). It is in order to combat such centripetal tendencies that emigration as trope, as synecdochic of the movement away from such fetishized notions of centrality, allows for different perspectives on these ideological recollections. Such a process of distanciation is vital if alternate notions of Irishness are to come into being.

It is my contention that emigration as trope is a movement away from such central constructions of identity. It allows for change, growth and possible alternatives in terms of Irishness, which are not forever focused on a narrow centre, but instead look outward towards other cultures. Such a

perspective – what might be termed cognitive or intellectual emigration – brought the original notions of republicanism to Ireland, as the United Irishmen applied American and French Enlightenment political theory to an Irish context. The centrifugal nature of the epistemology of the United Irishmen is further foregrounded by the nature of the following passage from the United Irish Catechism, retrieved from Cork, in 1797:

What is that in your hand?	It is a branch
Of what?	Of the Tree of Liberty
Where did it first grow?	In America
Where does it bloom?	In France
Where did the seeds fall?	In Ireland. (Whelan 1996, 57)

Here, Irish identity is being defined in terms of an ongoing revolutionary and Enlightenment movement which is not culture-specific. Ireland is seen as a secular entity which, rather than looking inward for self-definition, is instead part of a transformative movement which connects its proleptic revolution with that of America in 1776 and France in 1789.

In terms of the experience of emigration, this distance can be measured along both a temporal and spatial axis. One can be two thousand miles away from Ireland, or two or three generations away from having been born in Ireland. In either case, it is the altered relationship with the centre that is the defining factor of the emigrant experience. One can be 'Irish American', 'Irish Australian' *et al* with the proper adjective '*Irish*' being changed and pluralized through this new relationship another culture and with the centre. Indeed, such a process involves a redefinition of the notion of identity *per se*, as in contradistinction to the usual criteria of similarity what is at work here is an opening up of Irishness to embrace new possibilities and cultural transformations in a manner analogous to that of the United Irishmen.

I would argue that emigration as trope allows for the enunciation of such a critical position. Emigration allows for the creation of alternate Irelands, which are permeated by otherness in terms of space, time and culture. Emigration creates a dialectical interaction between notions of belonging to a culture and notions of being separated from that culture, an interaction dramatically enacted by the circle of words in the logo of the 'Irish Centre for Migration Studies' where one is unsure, and unable to ascertain, whether the scattered pattern of the word 'migration', especially the iconic '*A*', is moving centripetally or centrifugally. In terms of the circle of words, are they still part of the circle, or have they broken the form of that particular structure? In either case, what is at work here, diagrammatically and epistemologically, is a redefinition of the role of centrality *qua* centrality, as well as a redefinition of the relationship between centrality and circumference.

Epistemologically, emigration allows for an Irishness that is at the same time different from itself, while ethically notions of alterity are included within this negative definition of Irishness. Hence, emigration can be seen, in ethical terms, as defining identity in terms of a community that is both present and absent; emigration allows for the irrepressible desire for a community to form 'but also for it to know its limit – and for its limit to be its *opening*' (Derrida 1995, 355). So, the scattered word 'migration' is itself emblematic of an 'opening' of Irishness to otherness, to other influences, to other possibilities, as well as being a mimetic representation of the scattering (shattering, according to some more conservative perspectives) effect that such an 'opening' will have on our cognitive, societal and identificatory world views.

The relationship of the emigrant to fixed notions of identity is that of a spectral or ghostly presence, hovering above this hypostasized centre, and containing within himself or herself, the possibility of decentring this very centre, as the capital '*A*' does in the logo of the *Irish Centre for Migration Studies*. The relationship of the emigrant as trope to those essences is spectral in that it is related to,

but not existing within, those essential epistemological mindsets. The Gaelic, Catholic, nationalist ethos already described is relevant in terms of the lived experience of Irishness. However, it is not, nor should it be seen to be, the *only* criterion of Irishness; it should be seen as haunted by others, which may not have the same strength of voice, but which are still, in some way, present as part of the scatterings (shatterings) that are brought about by history. It may well provide a starting point, but to see it as central, to the exclusion of all other types of Irishness, is to leave oneself open to the internecine violence that has riven three generations in Northern Ireland. The interrogation of identificatory centrality is of major importance in any analysis of Irish identity, and of the literary works that are constituent factors of that identity.

Jacques Derrida has discussed the concept of centrality in 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences' (1978, 278-293). He makes the point that the centre of any structure functions by limiting the 'play' of the structure. His point is that in any structure, the centre is the point which organizes and controls (one need only refer back to Yeats's lines to illustrate this) the system. The level of play is in the system or structure is limited by virtue of the centre. Derrida postulates that the history of any process of meaning or signification is always predicated on some 'centre', some validating point seen as a 'full presence which is beyond play' (279). One can again look at Yeats's lines to see this process in action. 'Things fall apart' in *The Second Coming* because 'the centre cannot hold'. Derrida's critique suggests that such notions of centrality can never 'hold':

> Thus, it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which, while governing the structure, escapes structurality...the center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its center elsewhere*....The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. (1978, 279)

In the context of our present discussion, the view of Irishness as predefined and outside the play of history and process is clearly false. The processes of history – emigration, invasion, colonization, intermarriage, urbanization – ensure that the putative centre, the 'fundamental ground' of Irishness is subject to a series of transformations and decentrings which in turn pluralize that centre and ground. The centre in this context is no longer be thought of as a form of self-presence, existing anterior to the structure in question; it now becomes a function in which 'an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play', and this process of sign-substitutions, which can be called 'discourse', becomes the constituent factor in the existence of the 'central signified, the original or transcendental signified' which is never absolutely present 'outside a system of differences' (1978, 280).

If there can be more than one centre, and if the whole notion of a centre is dependent on the different influences in the cultural discourse of a culture and a society, then there can be more than one set of identificatory parameters, and the stage is set for the emergence of alternative notions of Irishness, of alternate Irelands. Emigration, by broadening the scope of that cultural discourse, stands as an important symbol of this plurality, as the physical *Weltanschauung* of Irishness is widened through the experience of a new culture, with all the ensuing transformational effects. Perhaps the most interesting example of this epistemology of emigration is to be found in the case of a famous fictional (and later failed emigrant), one Stephen Daedalus, whose Irishness is refracted through such alternative notions of identity.

A Portrait of the Artist as an Epistemological Emigrant[2]

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, essentialist and alternative notions of Irishness are dramatized. It is a mistake to see Stephen's emigration as a flight from Ireland and from all things Irish. In the final chapter of the book, he explains his reasons for leaving Ireland to his friend Davin 'a young fenian'. In the course of their conversation, Stephen is asked the purpose of his planned

journey. His reply is interesting: '[t]old him the shortest way to Tara was *via* Holyhead' (Joyce, 216), as it gestures towards the epistemological position of emigration as trope.

Tara is the mythical centre of Ireland, and seat of the high-kings of Ireland. As such, it is a type of transcendental signifier which is commonly featured in the Celtic, heroic tales of the revival. Symbolically, Tara signifies the epicentre of an Ur-Ireland, a place of pre-invasion purity, where Irish language and culture were the norm. Holyhead, a Welsh port has long been the traditional point of arrival of Irish emigrants in Britain. Joyce's point here is that Stephen is not leaving Ireland because he is in some way renouncing Irishness; he is leaving so that he can discover new forms of Irishness (what I have termed alternate Ireland[s]), and express them, as he famously puts it, at the end of the novel:

> Amen. So be it. Welcome, O life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race. (Joyce, 218)

What is enunciated here is an epistemological notion of emigration; he is stressing the need to acquire a form of critical distance which will allow him to perform some form of critique of essentialist formulations of Irishness.[3] In expressing this, it is significant that the *locus* of his new-found destination is not a foreign country, but his 'soul'. Hence, I would argue, his notion of emigration is epistemological in that it is symbolic of a different way of knowing Irishness in terms of identity. Emigration is a type of psychic trope which will allow his 'soul' to achieve perspectival distance from narrow expressions of identity – Tara will now be refraced through the lens of Holyhead. Through this tropical use of emigration, he will transcend insular and essentialist Irishness, which he equates with the 'nets' of 'nationality, language, religion' (Joyce, 177).

These essentialist criteria, broadly coterminous with notions of Irishness as nationalist, Gaelic and Catholic, are those constituting 'nets' which are cast when: 'the soul of a man is born in this country'

(Joyce, 177). One can see such essentialist formulations as positions of fixity which refuse to allow for any development of definitions of Irishness, as well as being instrumental in seeing Irishness as ethnically validated. Such centripetal identifications of a place focus on those stories which have been fixed at the centre, and then refuse to allow anything outside of that centre. It is through such a process, as Jean Francois Lyotard has noted in *The Differend*, that the '*Volk* shuts itself up in the *Heim* and identifies itself through narratives attached to names' (218). I would argue that emigration will allow for these socio-cultural limits of the Irish community to form 'but also for it to know its limit – and for its limit to be its *opening*' (Derrida 1995, 355)

What he is trying to do is create alternate formulations of Irishness which as yet have not been expressed. The centralities of identity, as espoused in Davin's question, 'why don't you learn Irish?' (Joyce, 176), are precisely what Stephen is trying to redefine. Davin, who sees himself as 'an Irish nationalist first and foremost', asks Stephen if he is 'Irish at all?' (Joyce, 176). Clearly for this Irish nationalist, to be Irish is to learn the Irish language. This hypostasized view of race, religion and language as criteria for Irish identity, is one against which Joyce issues his *non serviam*. Here, narrative imagination has become fetishized, in Ricoeur's terms, as myth and reality have become confused. The notion that Irishness *qua* Irishness is necessarily imbricated with the learning of Irish is to map a two-dimensional definition of identity onto a three-dimensional real-world, historical situation. It is precisely this type of singular Irishness that Stephen is hoping to deconstruct and transform through the notion of emigration as trope.

Joyce uses the notion of narrative imagination as well, but I would argue that, through his placement of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* under the rubric of the Greek myth of Daedalus, and by structuring *Ulysses* in terms analogous to Homer's *Odyssey*, he is attempting to place alternate perspectives of Irishness within a broader European constellation through the ghostly presence of

these classics of the western canon, and this European dimension will be an important constituent of his alternate Ireland.

Such notions of spectrality are another way of imagining the difference that is at the heart of notions of identity. As Jacques Derrida has observed identity, in the case of culture, person, nation, or language is 'a self-differentiating identity, an identity different from itself, having an opening or gap within itself' (1997, 14). In this sense, he is distinguishing between 'an airtight, impermeable, homogeneous, self-identical identity' as against a 'porous and heterogeneous identity that differs with itself' (1997, 114). Similarly Joyce is attempting to define the culture of Irishness in a way which is 'to be not identical to itself' but rather to be 'different *with itself* ' (1992, 9-10). This is achieved by the placement of Irishness within a European context, as symbolized by the Greek banter of his friends 'Stephanos Dedalos! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!' and by the image of a 'ghost of the ancient kingdom of the Danes had looked forth through the vesture of the hazewrapped City' (149). I would further suggest that the transformations undergone here by Stephen's name parallel those cultural transformations which an openness towards Europe and the world can bring to Irishness, through the creation of alternate Irelands.

Significantly, it is a ghostly figure of the Danish past of Ireland who leads Stephen, with his 'strange name' to his own destiny. This ghostly Dane, himself an emigrant, points towards the plurality of Ireland's history, as the Danes can be seen as among the first foreign invaders of Ireland, a point made more recently in Seamus Heaney's *North*, where their 'ocean deafened voices' are used as spectral presences to warn the poet and to voice forms of 'epiphany', itself a Joycean connection (19).

Just as the '*A*' in the logo of 'The Scattering' can be seen as haunting the very edges of the name, and just as the shattered circularity of the logo seems haunted by an ideal circularity, so the alternate

notions of Irishness in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, are symbolized by ghosts. On April 16th, Stephen's entry speaks of the 'spell of arms and voices…the white arms of roads…the black arms of tall ships'. These voices call to him: 'Come.' They also tell him that they are his 'kinsmen' (218). Here, emigration is symbolised as almost a dematerialization of the body, as a preparation for the flight of the soul, as an opening to a different form of alterity.

Stephen's ghosts are figures of possibility; they call him to a new vantage point which will allow him to define the 'uncreated conscience' of his race. In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida discusses what he terms *hauntology*, seeing ghostly hauntings as traces of possible meanings. Derrida's spectrality involves acknowledging the other that haunts the self; it involves acknowledging the possibility that the 'h' in *hauntology* is a hovering presence over the certainties of ontology, analogous to the equally hauntological '*A*' in 'migration' which haunts notions of essentialist identity.

The notion of emigration as trope, then, allows for a perspective from whence to ponder the difficulties of identity. Just as the literary imagination can sanction essentialist identities, so it can also liberate them. Literature as genre is capable of dismantling aesthetically sanctioned visions of home, by providing scope for new meanings, plural meanings which underscore the place of difference, as opposed to the focus on forms of unity already adverted to. Ricoeur has noted that imagination can function as two opposite poles. At one pole is the confusion of myth with reality brought about by a 'non-critical consciousness' which conflates the two into a societal 'given' At the other end of the axis, where 'critical distance is fully conscious of itself' 'imagination is the very instrument of the critique of reality' because it enables 'consciousness to posit something at a distance from the real and thus produce the alterity at the very heart of existence' (Kearney 1998, 147).[4] This critical consciousness is symbolized, I would maintain by this notion of emigration as trope – as opposed to the historical and actual movement of emigration. I would like to conclude this discussion with an example of that trope, namely Seamus Heaney's notion of being an 'inner émigré'

Inner Émigré(tion) and alternate Irelands

In 'Kinship' a poem in Part 1 of his collection *North*, Seamus Heaney provides a reworking of Yeats's lines on the necessity of a centre to hold, Seamus Heaney has observed that:

> This centre holds
> and spreads (43)

He obviously has a different notion of centrality in mind to that of Yeats, as the 'holding' of this centre is dependent on its 'spreading', a notion which is similarly disruptive of the already discussed relationship between centre and circumference. If a centre spreads, it clearly loses the qualities of singularity that made it a centre in the first place: logically, a spreading centre is another small circle. As in our earlier example, there is a causal connection between such a disruption of centrality and emigration. In his poem 'Exposure', the final section of 'Singing School' in *North*, he espouses the notion of emigration as an epistemological position, a position from which the centripetal pull of race and place can be viewed in perspective.   In this poem, he is discussing his relationship to contemporary notions of Irishness, and to a view of a committed form of art as a 'slingstone / Whirled for the desperate'. However, he goes on to see his position as far less essentialistic and far more complex in that he is unwilling to adopt a monocular perspective from within his tribe. He imagines his particular position as one which is connected with his tribe, but which is not *of* it:

> I am neither internee nor informer;
> An inner émigré, grown long-haired
> And thoughtful; a wood-kerne
>
> Escaped from the massacre,
> Taking protective colouring
> From bole and bark, feeling
> Every wind that blows. (73)

Here, inner emigration is seen as a thoughtful response to the stresses of the times. He is neither internee (internment was a policy initiated by the British Government in August 1971, where 'known' republican and loyalist paramilitaries were imprisoned without trial in an attempt to stem the violence) nor informer. He wishes to select a different perspective from where he can ponder the complexities of the situation. Heaney has seen the dangers of what Ricoeur has termed the fetishization of narrative imagination, and he is describing a culture where Lyotard's notion of the '*Volk*' shutting itself up in the '*Heim*' and identifying itself 'through narratives attached to names' is a way of life.

In 'Whatever You Say Say Nothing', also in *North*, Heaney captures this binary differential definition in terms of self and other in a stanza which delineates how even the choice of Christian name is seen as pointing to one's politico-religious identity:

> Manoeuvrings to find out name and school,
> Subtle discrimination by addresses
> With hardly an exception to the rule
>
> That Norman, Ken and Sidney signalled Prod
> And Seamus (call me Sean) was sure-fire Pape. (59)

This binary pattern of definition by opposition is similar to that analyzed by the Cardiff Text Analysis Group in their study of political speeches. In the following quotation, the referents are the USA and the USSR; however, the referents could just as well be the traditions of Catholic-Nationalism and Protestant-Unionism. Writing about political issues (specifically nuclear issues in the original), the point is made that such issues are never independent of cultural or linguistic practices. Indeed, they make the valid point that the binary pattern of confrontation that is a feature of must multi-party political systems seems to be constituted by the oppositional form that language seems to prescribe. They could be writing about Northern Ireland as they posit a definition of positional identity with each position/tradition defining itself by opposing the other, by 'fixing difference as opposition'.

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Thus each tradition 'unifies its subjects in a relation of antithesis which appears as a condition of meaning', and the unity and coherence of one tradition depends, not on any essentialist qualities of past or present, but on its polar relationship to the other: 'position becomes an effect of opposition' (1988, 381).

Hence, Heaney's awareness of the centripetal pull back to tribal, ethnic and essentialist origins, what he terms 'the appetites of gravity' (1975, 43), and his further awareness that such essentialism – 'the tight gag of place (1975, 59) – delimits debate, discussion and the voice of the other. Faced with these atavistic associations of home and home-place, Heaney attempts to achieve a broader perspective through his notion of being an 'inner émigré'.

 The notion of 'inner émigration' further destabilises the essentialism of identity in that it foregrounds the hybrid and multi-cultural identities that are a fact of modern culture and society. The notion of identity as a Heideggerian *Versammlung*, focused around central transcendental signifieds has been consigned to the past, and instead, the interactions of different identities, alternate notions of Irishness, alternate Irelands, has been ushered into being. In Derrida's terms, this notion participates in one of literature's primary responsibilities, namely that their 'concept is linked to the to-come [*à-venir*, *cf. avenir*, future], to the experience of a promise engaged, that is always an endless promise' (1992, 38). One could see this as analogous to Derrida's *hauntology* in that a form of cognitive or metaphysical exile or distance is seen as pluralizing, and scattering (shattering) tribal identity.

While an adequation of the thought of Heaney and Derrida may seem unusual at first glance, in the context of our discussion of Irishness and identity, I think there are major similarities to be noted. Heaney's career has demonstrated the pluralities of identity that are inherent in all cultures, with Ireland being no exception. Writing in *Among Schoolchildren*, Heaney stresses the complexity of his own notions of alternate Irishnesses. From learning about Jane Austen, Tennyson and Lawrence and

from attending sherry parties at the house of a professor in Queens University who hailed from Oxford,[5] to acting with the Bellaghy Dramatic Society, (1983, 7), we see someone who is being influenced by both the Irish and English aspects of Ulster culture.

In many cases, such binarisms were expressed in antagonistic tones of self and other, or us and them. For Heaney, as he puts it, the exposure to aspects of both cultures, brought about an uncertainty in terms of cultural and ideological identification. He asks:

> Was I two persons or one? Was I extending myself or breaking myself apart? Was I being led out or led away? Was I failing to live up to the aspiring literary intellectual effort when I was at home, was I betraying the culture of the parish when I was at the university. (1983, 8)

The effect of such different centres of identity on the individual is an important *leitmotif* in all of Heaney's work. Such a perspective informs statements, such as this one from *Preoccupations*, which see the poet as being 'displaced from a confidence in a single position by his disposition to be affected by all positions, negatively rather than positively capable' (1985, 8).

Physically, of course, Heaney moved from Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland in November 1976, and has spent time at Oxford University and at Harvard. He has often been viewed asnot sufficiently committed to the Catholic, nationalist position, and this provided the context of his notions of 'exposure' to the demands that he speak for his own group – a demand graphically highlighted in a later poem 'Flight Path' in *The Spirit Level*, where he is asked by an interlocutor: 'When, for fuck's sake, are you going to write / Something for us' (25). Heaney's answer is significant: 'If I do write something / Whatever it is, I'll be writing for myself' (25). The comparison with the conversation between Stephen and Davin in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is striking. Both writers are unwilling to become part of what Lyotard has termed the motivated fusion of *Volk* and *Heim* through 'narratives attached to names', or of what Ricoeur has seen as the fusion of the symbolic with the real. Both Joyce and Heaney adhere to the second pole of Ricoeur's definition

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of imagination, as for both, critical distance, as symbolized by emigration as trope, is of central importance.

The fact that Heaney is disposed to be 'affected by all positions' means that his notion of identity, of an '*us*' is gradually opened and broadened so as to include the voices and identities of alterity, a process analogous to the diagrammatic scattering of the opening section, and Joyce's *hauntological* imbrication of Tara and Holyhead in the second section. Of course, this is precisely the process that he has outlined in his image of the centre holding and spreading in 'Exposure'.

These lines from 'Exposure', then are a *locus classicus* of Ricoeur's notion of imagination as the very instrument of the critique of reality as Heaney, feeling 'every wind that blows' and being 'affected by all positions', is able to posit something at a distance from the real and thus produce the 'alterity at the very heart of existence'. In the context of our discussion, the use of emigration as a trope is the connecting thread here. It is through being an 'inner émigré' that Heaney is able to achieve this epistemological broadness of perspective, and a Derridean sense of an opening to the other positions and ideas of identity. It is also of interest that he uses a notion of displacement when he speaks about being affected by all positions: '*displaced* from a confidence in a single position' [*my italics*]. Clearly the ideas of movement, displacement and decentring are important if the reified centralities of ethnic and cultural identification are to be scattered so as to produce alternate Irelands: the 'inner émigré' is related to the real emigrant.

Such notions of displacement and emigration are important in terms of Derrida's notion of selfhood, living in Algeria, but speaking French, and, as the following passage will indicate, this constitutes a further connection between the thought of both of these writers. In *Points*, Derrida speaks of similar notions of being pulled in two directions, namely those of place and those of culture.[6] While living in the midst of an Arabic culture, Derrida was raised in a monolingual (French) *milieu*. Hence, French

was his only language. However, in the 'culture of the French in Algeria and in the Jewish community of the French in Algeria', he points out, that 'France was not Algeria…the authority of the French language was elsewhere'. He goes on:

> And in a certain manner, confusedly, we learned it. I learned it as the language of the other–even though I could only refer to one language as being mine, you see! And this is why I say that it is not a question of language, but of culture, literature, history, history of French literature, what I was learning at school. I was totally immersed, I had no other reference, I had no other culture, but at the same time I sensed clearly that all of this came from a history and a milieu that were not in a simple and primitive way mine. (1995, 120)

The similarity with Heaney's earlier points about being part of a culture and yet not part of it are marked. Derrida's notions of *différance*, and his breaking down of seeming unities and totalities, has much in common with Heaney's view of poetry as the articulation of different forces within some form of structure which can reveal more aspects of the self to the self. In this sense, Heaney's cultural hybridity has definite similarities with that of Derrida. In the passage just cited, Derrida tells of how, despite speaking French, and being immersed in French literature and culture, 'the Frenchman of France was an other' (1995, 204). Much of his writing stresses this feeling of being at home, and yet not at home, in French culture. In *The Other Heading*, he speaks of himself as someone 'not quite European by birth' who now considers himself to be 'a sort of over-acculturated, over-colonized European hybrid' (1992, 7). He sees his cultural identity as 'not only European, it is not identical to itself' (1992, 82-83), and this would have cognitive similarities with the notions of emigration as a scattering of the fixities of identity.

In a passage that is remarkably similar, Heaney too speaks of feelings of strangeness and alienation in connection with place and language. Writing in *Preoccupations* he points out that he has maintained a notion of himself 'as Irish in a province that insists it is British' (1980, 35), and goes on to further underscore his sense of difference in the following statement:

> I speak and write in English, but do not altogether share the preoccupations and perspectives of an Englishman. I teach English literature, I publish in London, but the English tradition is not ultimately home. I live off another hump as well. (1980, 34)

Here, we see the similar sense of the *Unheimlich* invading the seeming certainties of the *Heimlich*. Both writers inhabit a liminal space which allows them to see difference, rather than sameness, as a criterion of definition in terms of notions of singular and communal identity. The centre of identity holds, but only through being 'spread' so as to include the voices of alterity. Heaney's notion of Irishness, of '*us*' has spread in order to include '*them*', and this is the paradigm of identity that is the subject of this paper. As he puts it in 'Tollund':

> …we stood footloose, at home beyond the tribe,
>
> More scouts than strangers, ghosts who'd walked abroad
> Unfazed by light, to make a new beginning. (1996, 69)

Here, the centralities of essentialist identity are transcended, as alternate notions of identity, associated with travel, notions of emigration, and traces of Derrida's *hauntology*, are posited.

Conclusion: alternate Irelands

Joyce and Heaney have both demonstrated the decentring and disruptive power of language and symbols to disrupt and dislocate fixed images of identity. In common with the deconstructive writings of Derrida, these writers have transformed notions of identity, and gestured towards alternate Irelands, where plurality and difference are no longer excluded from the centre. Emigration as trope looks for interstitial passages between 'fixed identifications' that, in the words of Homi Bhabha, 'opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy' (4). It should allow us to:

> think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between'

spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood - singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (1-2)

In *Wintering Out*, Heaney's poem, *Traditions*, connects with Joyce in terms of identity.   Heaney is speaking about MacMorris, in Shakespeare's *Henry V*, who 'whinged / to courtier and groundling: that famous question as to what was his nation:

> And sensibly, though so much
> Later, the wandering Bloom
> Replied, 'Ireland,' said Bloom,
> 'I was born here. Ireland.' (1972; 32)

The point here is that notions of Ireland must be sufficiently open so as to include within them a Hungarian Jew.   In these lines, the alternate Irelands of Joyce and Heaney (with *hauntological* assistance from Jacques Derrida) are enunciated, and yet again, emigration has been their resonant symbol.

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1   This conference was organized by the *Irish Centre for Migration Studies* (*Ionad na hImirce*), based in University College Cork. It was convened by Piaras Mac Éinrí, and I gratefully acknowledge his permission to make use of the logo of the centre in this paper. As a diagrammatical representation of alternate paradigms of Irishness, it underscores my point, and my paper would be the weaker without it.

2   Aspects of this discussion have appeared in my recent book *The Question of Irish Identity in the Writings of William Butler Yeats and James Joyce*. Lampeter: Mellen Press, 1998.

3   It is important to note, at this point, that I am in no way denying the validity of what I have termed essentialist or foundational formulations of Irishness. To be Gaelic, catholic and nationalist does have relevance to the lived experience of many Irish people, past and present. However, what I am offering to critique is the notion that such qualities in some way transcend the societal, cultural and historical processes of change and development that are common to all cultures.

4   I have taken this quote from Richard Kearney's translation of 'L'imagination dans le discours et dans l'action'. I can think of no better introduction to the work of Ricoeur than Kearney's *Modern Movements in European*

Philosophy(Manchester University Press, 1994). Two of Kearney's other books, *Poetics of Modernity* and *Poetics of Imagination* contain excellent discussions of Ricoeur's work, as well as contextual placements of that work in terms of contemporary critical debate.

5   This professor, Heaney notes, is alleged to have confessed to being the first of his family to 'have gone into trade' (1983a, 7).

6   This interview, 'There is no One Narcissism' (Autobiophotographies), can be found in *Points*, 196-215. The original interview, with Didier Cahen, was first broadcast on radio in March 22, 1986, and later published, with the title 'Entretien avec Jacques Derrida' in *Digraphe* 42 (December 1987).