

Eugene O'Brien

Winterwood: A Portrait of the Artist as a Postmodern Pariah

'*Winterwood: A Portrait of the Artist as a Postmodern Pariah*', in *Modernity and Postmodernity in a Franco-Irish Context - Studies in Franco-Irish Relations* Volume 2, edited by Grace Neville, Eamon Maher and Eugene O'Brien. New York: Peter Lang, pages 141-160

Eugene O'Brien

5 keywords

McCabe, Lyotard, postmodernity, Joyce, Jameson

Abstract

Postmodernism is often seen as following sequentially from modernism but I would agree with Lyotard's contention that postmodernism is actually 'a part of the modern.' Lyotard goes on to state that a work 'can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but the nascent state, and this state is constant.' So with these interlacings in mind, I would like to look at the two novels and begin with the issue of the speaking subject in each book – Stephen Dedalus and Redmond Hatch.

Writing about Kant in *The Truth in Painting*, Jacques Derrida made some telling points about the relationship between the frame (*parergon*) and the work itself (*ergon*). Derrida notes that:

The *parergon* stands out both from the *ergon* (the work) and from the milieu; it stands out first of all like a figure on a ground. But it does not stand out in the same way as the work. With respect to the work which can serve as a ground for it, it merges into the wall and then, gradually, into the general text. With respect to the background which the general text is, it merges into the work which stands out against the general background. There is always a form on a ground, but the *parergon* is a form which has as its traditional determination not that it stands out, but that it disappears, buries itself, effaces itself, melts away at the moment it deploys its greatest energy. The frame is

in no case a background in the way that the milieu or the work can be, but neither is its thickness as margin a figure.¹

Derrida's point is that the structuration of a work of art is predicated on a framing device which is both part of the work, and at the same time, part of the ground from which that work originates. In this context, he is examining the inter-relation between the frame which gives structure and specificity to a work of art, and that work itself. To extrapolate a little, the frame of any work of literary art involves the philosophical and epistemological context out of which that work derives, and towards which that work is addressed.

The title of this chapter suggests an articulation between James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*² and Patrick McCabe's *Winterwood*,³ and I will examine these books as synecdoches of the difference between a modernist and postmodernist paradigm of Irish cultural and aesthetic life. It is my contention that the *parergonal* context of both works sheds mutual light on their narrative structures, and on the broader cultural contexts. So, just as the *parergon* is necessary for a fuller understanding of the *ergon*, so the *ergon* can likewise develop our understanding of the *parergon*. Indeed, there is a strong connection here between the two. Later in the same book, playing upon a simple observation of a pair of shoes, Derrida introduces the term 'interlacing.' The movement of a lace goes from inside to outside, from outside to inside, from under to over and from over to under. By a law of stricture (which is hard and flexible at one and the same time), lacing gathers a shoe together: it ties it to one's ankle securely yet still allows enough flexibility for comfortable movement. The figure of trajectory of the lace 'a stricture by alternate and reversible passage from inside to outside, from under to over', articulates the structure of the frame and the work itself:⁴

1 Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*. Translated by Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.61.

2 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Edited by R.B. Kershner (Boston: Bedford Books of St Martin's Press, 1993). First published 1916. Abbreviated in the text as *P*.

3 Patrick McCabe, *Winterwood* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006). Abbreviated in the text as *W*.

4 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p.321.

By an invisible lace, which pierces the canvas (as the pointure 'pierces the paper'), passes into it and then out of it in order to sew it back onto its milieu, onto its internal and external worlds.⁵

It is the very interplay of 'opposites': inside and outside, intrinsic and extrinsic, subject and other, intelligible and sensible, thought and unthought, that connects the text and the context. Indeed, Derrida's work has made this very point in the seemingly contradictory declarations '*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*' (there is nothing outside the text)⁶ and '*Il n'y a pas de hors contexte*' (there is nothing outside of context).⁷ It is the very imbrication of the two that allows for growth and cultural progress as texts, interlaced with their contexts, are both shaped by, and creative of change in, those very contexts. This interlacing applies both to context and text and to the imbrication of different contexts. Postmodernism is often seen as following sequentially from modernism but I would agree with Lyotard's contention that postmodernism is actually 'a part of the modern.'⁸ Lyotard goes on to state that a work 'can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but the nascent state, and this state is constant.'⁹ So with these interlacings in mind, I would like to look at the two novels and begin with the issue of the speaking subject in each book – Stephen Dedalus and Redmond Hatch.

As Colin McCabe has noted, 'central to the discourse of literary criticism is the philosophical category of the subject',¹⁰ and in terms of Irish writing, the self-narrative of the subject of writing is a popular genre. The *Bildungsroman* (a narrative someone's growth from childhood to maturity), has long been a staple in Irish writing, across the genres of short story and poetry but especially in the case of the novel. A kind of subset of the *Bildungsroman* is the *Künstlerroman*, the story of an artist's growth to maturity, with Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*,

5 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p.304.

6 Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (London: Johns Hopkins Press, 1976), p.158.

7 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*. Translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p.136.

8 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Theory and History of Literature, Vol. 10). Translated by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1984), p.79.

9 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.79.

10 Colin MacCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word*. Language, Discourse, Society Series (London: Macmillan, 1978), p.4.

or Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*,¹¹ being famous examples. The expectation of the *Bildungsroman* is the revelation of some form of truth or of veracity. In a modernist context this was a tenable objective, and Colin McCabe's category of the subject provides a conceptual *parergon* underlying this genre. Thus, this genre both constructs a particular type of subjectivity, and addresses a particular type of subjectivity.

Jacques Lacan stresses this point in his *Écrits*, where he speaks about the intersubjective nature of language, noting that he will 'show that there is no speech without a reply, even if it is met only with silence, provided that it has an auditor: this is at the heart of its function in psychoanalysis.'¹² He goes further and suggests that the subject is actually constituted by this linguistic process: 'the allocution of the subject entails an allocutor – in other words that the locutor is constituted in it as intersubjectivity.'¹³ Lacan's use of the term the Other is specifically tailored to this intersubjective context of language, as he sees the Other as the place 'where is constituted the one which speaks with the one who listens.'¹⁴ And just as the *parergon* affects the *ergon*, so the epistemological *parergons* of modernism and postmodernism affect and shape how we see the subject. The speaking subject of modernism and the speaking subject of postmodernism are radically different, though there is a chiasmatic relationship between the two.

The term 'postmodernism' is especially associated with Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard. Lyotard understood modernity as a cultural condition characterized by constant change in the pursuit of progress, and postmodernity as representing the culmination of this process, where constant change has become a *status quo* and the notion of progress, obsolete. Following Wittgenstein's critique of the possibility of absolute and total knowledge, Lyotard also further argued that the various metanarratives of progress – such as positivist science, Marxism, and structuralism – were defunct as methods of achieving progress.

Most famously, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), he argued that our age (with its postmodern condition) is marked by an 'incredulity towards meta-narratives.'¹⁵ These meta-narratives – sometimes 'grand narratives' – are grand, large-scale the-

11 Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes* (London: Harper, 2005).

12 Jacques Lacan, *Écrits - A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock, 1977), p.40.

13 Lacan, *Écrits*, p.49.

14 Lacan, *Écrits*, p.57.

15 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.xxiv.

ories and philosophies of the world, such as the progress of history, the knowability of everything by science, and the possibility of absolute freedom. Lyotard argues that we have ceased to believe that narratives of this kind are adequate to represent and contain us all. We have become alert to difference, diversity, the incompatibility of our aspirations, beliefs and desires, and for that reason postmodernity is characterised by an abundance of micronarratives.

In Lyotard's works, the term 'language games', sometimes also called 'phrase regimens',¹⁶ denotes the multiplicity of communities of meaning, the innumerable and incommensurable separate systems in which meanings are produced and rules for their circulation are created. Lyotard, like Nietzsche, argues that all the grand narratives of Western civilization – such as Christianity, the Enlightenment or Marxism – have been demolished in the wake of postmodern scepticism towards great 'stories' or total explanations of human nature, freedom, 'progress', and history.¹⁷ Like Derrida and Nietzsche, though, Lyotard insists that the 'essentialist foundations of all these 'grand narratives' can no longer be accepted.'¹⁸ For Lyotard, the 'cycles consist of modernist total 'grand narratives' being continually repudiated by different forms of post-modern scepticism.'¹⁹ In this context Lyotard sees the modernist and postmodern paradigms as co-existing together. This is unlike many perspectives which see modernism as sequentially followed by postmodernism.

Lyotard discusses postmodernity in the context of a discussion of science, and yet the ramifications of his investigation reach far beyond empirical study. Lyotard uses the term 'modern' to:

designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to metadiscourse . . . making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectics of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.²⁰

Hence, Lyotard views the 'Enlightenment narrative' as assuming a 'consensus between the sender and addressee of a statement with truth-value .

16 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp.96, pp.178-180.

17 Dave Robinson, *Nietzsche and Postmodernism* (New York: Totem, 1999), pp.41-2.

18 Robinson, *Nietzsche and Postmodernism*, p.42.

19 Robinson, *Nietzsche and Postmodernism*, p.44.

20 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.xxiii.

. . . if it is cast in terms of a possible unanimity between rational minds.²¹ One project of modernity is said to have been the fostering of progress, which was thought to be achievable by incorporating principles of rationality and hierarchy into aspects of public and artistic life. In terms of modernist art, Frederic Jameson sees the art object as expressing something mysterious within which there was a secret to be disclosed, a truth to be revealed, or a history to uncover. It was as if something existed prior to the text and the text was a series of ciphers which needed to be probed until the extra-textual secret meaning is revealed.

For example, Jameson examines Vincent Van Gogh's *Peasant Shoes* as an instance of modernist art.²² Representing the 'age of anxiety,' *Peasant Shoes* claims to represent an actual social situation with certain social truths that the shoes held in relation to the peasant's life and social condition. Van Gogh's painting signifies a specific meaning of peasant life and this is possible only if, as a painting, it grasps the referent (that is the 'real' object of the peasant shoes) symbolically recreating the situation with all its attached meaning. The act of painting must epitomize within its very creation a conception of the viewer or audience on which the referent (the 'real' object) and signified (its meaning) rely. There is a singular extra-textual referent which has been transformed into art. Modern art, then, is seen as ideologically encumbered by a *parergon* which sees narrative as achieving some kind of truth-value. It takes the stuff of life and mimetically transforms it into a higher form of truth: as Joyce would have it, the artist 'as a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuting the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everliving life' (*P*, 248-249).

Hence the *Bildungsroman*, the story of someone's life, is seen as a developmental journey up towards some kind of singular fullness and teleology, and the expressive function of the aesthetic is a subset of this modernist paradigm. The narrative will reveal the unfolding of a single destiny. The now programmatic assertion at the end of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is a *locus classicus* of this type of modernist *parergon*, where the aesthetic is viewed very much in terms of transmuting the 'daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everlasting life' (*P*, 192). Here the *eregon* is very much conditioned by its *parergon*, in that all of the structural conditions of the frame are to be found in the

21 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.xxiii.

22 Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (New York and London: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1992), pp.6-10.

work. In the climactic final pages of this aesthetic *Bildungsroman*, Stephen again stresses the transformative imperative that drives his quest towards the artistic vocation:

Mother is putting my new secondhand clothes in order. She prays now, she says, that I may learn in my own life and away from home and friends what the heart is and what it feels. 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. (*P*, 218)

Declan Kiberd has analysed this piece in modernist terms, seeing the *Bildungsroman* an instrument to ‘investigate the Irish experience’, and makes the self-understanding ‘a discovery of the real Ireland of the present.’²³ However, from a postmodern perspective, the singular certainties of this passage – ‘*the heart ... life ... the reality of experience ... the smithy of my soul ... the uncreated conscience of my race*’ – are in need of unpacking, and postmodern notions of subjectivity are the most effective ways of achieving this.

Indeed, using a term like ‘postmodern’ is problematic for the very reason that postmodernism distrusts grand narratives, overarching labels, and any inherent connection between language and the world. According to Jameson, just as Van Gogh’s *Peasant Shoes* exemplifies modernist art, so Andy Warhol’s *Diamond Dust Shoes* exemplifies postmodern art. He argues that contemporary cultural production can be seen as mass production; postmodernism integrates any and all art completely as a part of commodity production. Art no longer holds any utility or instrumentality within the *intrinsic* value of painting. Rather, art is rearranged purely along the lines of a consumer logic so that the cultural object ‘by its transformation into a commodity, a thing of whatever type has been reduced to a means for its own consumption.’²⁴ On this view, postmodernism destroys the possibility of depth as it relies on an image divorced from a referent of any particular signification. In other words, postmodernism, what Jameson calls ‘the ultimate form of commodity reification,’ is a pure celebration of the signifier.²⁵ Postmodernity can be described as the society of the image. Jameson argues that *Diamond Dust Shoes* does not speak to us with a hidden reality that we must interpret. Rather this painting can be characterized by its depthlessness and flatness in that it

23 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p.336.

24 Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, p.11.

25 Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible*, pp.11-12.

does not translate any particular message or meaning other than perhaps the feeling that it has no hidden narrative. The meaning is plural and created – there is no core to be unveiled.

So I would conclude that while *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* can be seen as analogous to the *Peasant Shoes* in its attempt at a univocal unveiling of meaning, so *Winterwood* can be seen as analogous to *Diamond Dust Shoes* in its expression of a plurality of meaning. The *parergons* are very different. The *Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman* of Joyce's book follows a chronological and rational structure. The chapters take us from Stephen's childhood, through his schooldays, his sexual awakening, his religious awakening and ultimately to his aesthetic awakening, summarised so tellingly in the passage already quoted. Linguistically and cognitively, the narrative voice moves from the simple and the basic to the complex and the expressive – as symbolised by the baby-talk at the beginning and the internal diary monologue at the book's close. Temporally, spatially, sequentially, and cognitively, what we are offered here is the slow unveiling of a very singular subject position which is self-aware and self-expressing. There is an unveiling of truth in this novel, and the details about Clongowes and the streets of Dublin and UCD all add to the specificity of this vision. In other words, though Stephen changes and develops, it is always *Stephen* that develops – there is a cohesion and a teleology at work in the gradual progression from the baby talk of 'Baby Tuckoo' (*P*, 19) to the mature voice of the proleptic exile. The interlacing is very much controlled by the *parergon* here as the formal traits of the *Bildungsroman* are controlling the text: the *perergon* controls the *ergon*.

At a surface level, McCabe's *Bildungsroman* follows a similar pattern. The book is divided into a strict chronology, with broad sweeps like 'the eighties' and then 'mid nineties' and 'late nineties' and then with more particular focus like '1991' and '2006.' The dates are reminiscent of Joyce's late chronology in the diary sequences, but the focus narrows to encompass particular instances, and this uneven temporal framework is indicative of the postmodern *parergon*. The gradual unfolding of the postmodern twist in this novel comes through a series of hints and suggestions as the narrator tells us the story as if it is unfolding and then peppers the narrative with atemporal hints: 'I fell head over heels in love with Catherine Courtney. Telling her things I would never have told anyone. Which was regrettable, obviously, in the light of what happened' (*W*, 21).

In postmodern Ireland, where, as Lyotard would have it, the grand narratives have broken down, and where, as Baudrillard puts it, simulacra

have replaced reality and truth is now a construct, such certainty is no longer attainable. So postmodern novels must take account of the new symbolic order, to use Lacan's term, and respond accordingly. Baudrillard in *Simulations* asserts that:

when the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths of origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity...there is a panic-stricken production of the real and the referential, above and parallel to the panic of material production.²⁶

Winterwood is just such a novel. It transcends generic description. It is a love story, a mystery story, a crime novel, a social critique, and it deconstructs the pretensions of the realist novel towards truth. Formally it is not experimental, indeed it seems to adhere to the *parergon* of the confessional novel, but in effect is transforming it as it progresses. It is also a novel that deconstructs the conventions of the *Bildungsroman* and the *Künstlerroman* in that the narrator, Redmond Hatch lies all the time, and the reader is left unsure of many of the key points of the narrative. The growth from childhood is there but one finds the details of that childhood scattered spatially across the novel, and temporally scattered across his life, through unreliable and changeable narratives of memory. Childhood details are given analeptically, and in a fractured manner, so it is left to the reader to piece them together and even then, the pieces do not make a complete whole.

The construction of the narrator is part of this split subjectivity Redmond Hatch tells the story – it is his story though told in parallel with his fascination with an old country fiddler called Ned Strange. Hatch begins as a very normal voice – he is in love with, and married to, Catherine Courtney: ‘a flawless union. The sort of partnership people dream about’ (*W*, 20), and has a daughter Imogen on whom he dotes. He returns to his childhood home of Slievenageeha, an isolated mountain valley, to write about folklore in changing, early-1980s Ireland. He meets the wild, cabin-dwelling fiddler Ned Strange. Strange is popular: his music, stories and the children's ceilidhs he runs keep the past alive – and it is a seemingly benign and stable past.

But on poteen-soaked visits to the decrepit cabin, Redmond comes to know a different Strange, who perhaps murdered his wife for adultery;

26 Jean Baudrillard, *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader*. Edited by Douglas Kellner (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp.12-13.

who says that Redmond's father perhaps beat his mother into a brain haemorrhage and who hints that Redmond's Uncle Florian was not the angel he appeared. Redmond's planned memoir of Strange is not the only reason for his visits. Strange is repulsive but Redmond also finds him beguiling, enigmatic, charismatic. Then Redmond loses his job. He moves to London with his adored wife Catherine, and they have a baby, Imogen. But when Catherine commits adultery his world collapses. They separate (violence against Catherine is hinted at), Catherine and Imogen returning to Dublin. Redmond fakes his suicide and follows with a new identity.

The novel becomes darker. Redmond learns with disgust of Strange's sexual assault and murder of a Slievenageeha boy, and of his subsequent suicide. Strange's taunting, all too-solid ghost appears to the destitute Redmond. He leaves a photograph of Redmond as a child, taken in a pinewood by Florian. Traumatized, and rudderless without his family, Redmond begins drinking. He reaches breaking point – and the book its turning point – outside a Dublin church. A voice warns Redmond that if he chooses evil, he must accept the consequences. But he no longer cares and another voice comes. “Redmond,” I heard, softly whispered in the wind, ‘You know you can trust me. I’ll look after you. Till the very last pea is out of the pot, till the angels quit the hallowed halls of heaven’’ (W, 59).

McCabe, too good a writer to identify the voice's owner immediately, or to have Redmond suddenly turn bad, keeps us puzzling. At times Redmond rejects Strange's visitations as hallucinations, or reiterates his disgust of him, or reaches false dawns of hope. But when he sees Catherine with her new husband, he feels sympathy for the (perhaps) cuckolded Strange, and Redmond's descent has begun.

The narrative moves on subtly, building through clues and fragments, never tipping over into melodrama, skipping between the present and memories: Redmond's kidnap of Imogen, his taking her to the pinewood by Rohan's factory; his abuse by Florian as a child; his Faustian resurrection as a successful documentary maker with a glamorous wife and the final appearance of the now literally demonic Strange. The initial description of Strange harks back to Baudrillard's views on myths of origin:

On a platform in the square a slap-bass combo was banging away goodo with a whiskery old-timer sawing away at his fiddle, stomping out hornpipes to beat the band. He must have been close on seventy years of age, with a curly copper thatch and this great unruly rusty beard touched throughout with streaks of silver. (W, 3)

The myths of origins are clear in the preoccupation of the story with Hatch's meeting later with 'Auld Pappie' and the description of him by the barman:

Just be careful of them auld stories of his. You wouldn't know whether to believe them or not. He's an awful man once he gets going. Tells everyone he spent years in America. And sure the poor auld fucker – he's never once left the valley. Never set foot outside Slievenageeha. (*W*, 5)

Of course Ned adds to this uncertainty by telling him that:

—Of course the whole fucking lot could be a pack of lies, Redmond. Maybe I don't give a fuck about these stupid country songs. Maybe it is like my stories about America. Maybe I *did not* ever set foot beyond the mountain. That's a real possibility, is not it, Redmond? That I might never, in fact, have travelled an inch further than them fucking pines there standing outside. I might only have been as far as the town, never further. How do you know but there never was a sweetheart either? That Annamarie Gordon never even existed? Why, us rascally mountain mongrels, you couldn't trust our oath! (*W*, 99)

The idea of Ned as a liar is one that bears out the postmodern *parergon* as outlined by Baudrillard earlier – the notion that truth is plural and relative. The portrayal of the postmodern artist is very different from that of his Joycean precursor, but in a very real way McCabe also forges (in both senses of that word) the uncreated conscience of his race. This image of an old, isolated rural man is paralleled in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*:

April 14. John Alphonsus Mulrennan has just returned from the west of Ireland. European and Asiatic papers please copy. He told us he met an old man there in a mountain cabin. Old man had red eyes and short pipe. Old man spoke Irish. Mulrennan spoke Irish. Then old man and Mulrennan spoke English. Mulrennan spoke to him about universe and stars. Old man sat, listened, smoked, spat. Then said: -- Ah, there must be terrible queer creatures at the latter end of the world. I fear him. I fear his red-rimmed horny eyes. It is with him I must struggle all through this night till day come, till he or I lie dead, gripping him by the sinewy throat till. Till what? Till he yield to me? No. I mean no harm. (*P*, 289)

In Joyce's book, the old man is a nameless foil to the urban and bourgeois figure of the developing artist; in the modernist *Künstlerroman* he must be transcended by the modernist *parergon* of progress and urbanisation. In *Winterwood*, however, the *parergon* is deconstructed as the self is

interlaced with other aspects of selfhood – unconscious desires and repressed memories. Here the ideology of a teleological progress is imaginary – instead, subjective uncertainty is what is offered as the *parergon* of the *Bildungsroman* is deconstructed by the *ergon* of the text. Ned Strange will gradually take over Redmond Hatch's persona, and the latter will almost become the former, to such an extent that later in the book, Redmond will be referred to as 'Auld daddy Hatch' (W, 4), paralleling the 'Auld Pappie' image of Ned. Later in the book, as he is about to kill his wife Catherine, 'no one likes lifting their hand to their wife. Regardless of whether they are separated or not' (W, 180), he sees an image of himself in the rear-view mirror of the car he notes: 'it dawned on me how easily, how ridiculously easily, in the baseball cap, I could have passed for Ned Strange. You could see the copper-red curls showing from underneath the baseball cap. Why I literally could have been the man's twin I thought' (W, 180). Here we see the subjective dehiscence that is part of postmodern theory. As Lyotard puts it: 'let us wage a war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences.'²⁷ In other words, in a postmodern *Bildungsroman*, one should not expect subjective coherence – instead one should accept the difference that is at the core of identity.

However, the gradual invasion of Redmond's unconscious by Ned Strange – who, having been convicted of the rape and murder of a child, has been sent to prison and committed suicide – makes Redmond become strange (pardon the pun) as he loses control of his life, and the winning image becomes more and more malevolent:

Redmond Hatch, the poor man's Ned Strange. All I could say was, if he and I were twins, then I was the weak Ineffectual one. 'Combine with oneself in bold con-By.'" The idea was laughable. I would never be Ned Strange, simply wasn't up to the task. (W, 135)

Here there is an inter-subjective fusion of the old country man and the younger artistic narrator. Redmond Hatch is a writer, and a television reporter and producer – the postmodern equivalent of the artist. And whereas in the modernist *parergon*, the urban and bourgeois artist will eclipse and bypass the older rural embodiment of a past age, in this postmodernist *parergon*, there is no clear progression towards some kind of truth or artistic revelation. Indeed, the whole concept of the *Bildungs-*

27 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, p.82.

roman of McCabe's book, the apparently chronological and sequential narrative of Redmond Hatch and his journey from a seemingly happy life with his wife and daughter Imogen, gradually unravels. Because when he comes back to Ireland, Hatch takes a new name, wife, and job. He abducts his daughter, keeping her 'safe' among the secluded pines of 'Winterwood' (the imaginary kingdom of *My Little Pony*). Later, Catherine suffers the same fate so that their 'happy home' remains 'unspoiled.' So, not only does Hatch not develop to self-subjective maturity as the *Bildungsroman* would expect – instead he actually becomes another person, as at the end of the story, the narrative persona changes:

Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to allow Redmond Hatch to conclude his own story. Regrettably, however, that is impossible. There are times, it has to be acknowledged, when he will make the most valiant efforts. But somehow he never seems to transcend a certain point. When he finds himself in a certain hotel bathroom, standing mutely beside a torn shower curtain.

After that, I'm afraid, he appears to lose the power of speech, just sits there staring, uttering sounds which are quite indecipherable. Certainly making no sense. Poor fellow. It really is dreadful. It must have been quite an ordeal.

Which is why it must inevitably come to me to finish his story, me, his oldest friend and neighbour on the mountain. A task for which I hope I am adequately equipped. Which I ought to be, of course. Although, given my reputation, one runs the risk of certain liberties being taken with what, after all, is a straightforward narrative. Of my inserting certain 'flourishes' of a certain 'fanciful' nature perhaps. As us old mountain fiddlers have been known to do.

But not this time. For, after all, there is hardly any need. There being quite enough drama, one might suggest, in his private little 'melodrama' already. (W, 239)

So has the narrative persona of the *Bildungsroman* changed radically, or have the two characters merged in some way, or has Hatch been taken over by Strange, has he become strange? In Lacanian terms, the subject who is speaking is directly related to the subject who is listening. In this case, we can transpose speaking with writing, and it is well to remember the fact that Redmond Hatch is dead should not be a problem as Ned Strange is long since dead in the chronology of the novel. So here we see a further deconstruction of the *Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman*, as the dead are now speaking through plural voices, and the *ergon* has interlaced with the *parergon* to completely transform it. Indeed, one could see this novel as a synecdoche of the modernist/post-modernist dialectic as set out by Lyotard. The modernist certainty of personal and artistic subjective development, the subject as grand narrative, is undercut by post-

modern scepticism about that very possibility, as so many different 'selves' of Redmond Hatch are given voice in this novel. The grand narrative of self-subjective certainty is deconstructed by the postmodern interlacing little narratives or *petit-recits* of split subjectivity of the novel. The *ergon* has now interlaced with the *perergon* to create many sub-*parergons*.

To add a further layer of narrative dehiscence, there is a blurring between Ned Strange and Redmond Hatch's Uncle Florian – a paedophile who repeatedly rapes and molests the young Redmond, using the term 'fiddles with him' to describe the molestation. This again connects Florian with the fiddler, Ned Strange. Indeed, in parts of the novel, the reader is completely unsure as to whether Redmond Hatch is a figment of Ned Strange's imagination, or whether Ned is a figment of Redmond's imagination. The real location of this novel is in the unconscious of the narrators – and I use the plural deliberately here – and the amount of false information given in the novel is stunning. Indeed the style deconstructs the genre as attempting to give a plot summary is almost impossible given the twists and turns of the novel, and the dearth of basic factual information: 'Just be careful of them auld stories of his. You wouldn't know whether to believe them or not. Slievenageeha' (W, 5). Ned Strange drip-feeds Redmond stories of past abuse – we find out later that Redmond's mother has been killed by his father and much later that in an orphanage, Redmond has been repeatedly abused by his uncle Florian, another character who bears an uncanny resemblance to Ned Strange.

Indeed, in parts of the book, there is a blurring of all three characters as the subject suffers a dehiscence into multiple personality. In a manner redolent of postmodern theory, this is less a grand narrative than a series of intersecting and interlacing little narratives or *petit-recits*, where the information is given in an oblique way and the truth of the novel is less revealed than created. We do not know if Ned Strange and Uncle Florian are a composite figure. We do not know if Redmond hallucinates the images and voice of the long-dead Ned, or if he sees his ghost. We do not find out until later in the book, and it is all the more frightening for that, that Redmond has killed his daughter and that his visits to Winterwood, the place of her imagination, are to her corpse, and that it is to her corpse that he reads his stories of *Where the Wild Things Are*. With its major theme of childhood abuse, the novel faces up to one of the core issues facing contemporary Ireland but does so in an idiosyncratic manner which captures the 'imaginative truth' of such abuse in a more authentic way than documentary evidence could achieve.

Baudrillard describes the postmodern text as being devoid of meaning, because ‘meaning requires depth, and unseen yet stable and fixed substratum or foundation; in the postmodern world however, everything is visible, explicit and transparent, but highly unstable.’²⁸ For Baudrillard, the horizontal and vertical lines of symbolic signification discarded by the postmodern text give meaning some sense of a historical and natural ontological progression and authenticity. What we see in this book is that exchange and fluidity of signifiers of which Baudrillard speaks in terms of the core symbol of the postmodern. In *Hystericizing the Millennium*, he makes the telling point that:

To oppose this movement in both directions at once, there is the utterly improbable, and certainly unverifiable, hypotheses of a *poetic reversibility of events* and the only proof we have of it is the possibility of this in language. Poetic form is not far removed from chaotic form. Both of them disregard the law of cause and effect. If, in the theory of Chaos, we substitute sensitive reliance upon initial conditions for susceptible dependency upon final conditions, we enter upon the form of predestination, i.e., that of destiny. Poetic language itself abides in predestination, in the imminence of its own end, and thrives on the reversibility of the end in the beginning. In this sense, it is predestined – an unconditional event without any signification or consequence, one that flourishes singularly in the vertigo of its final resolution.²⁹

It is this reversibility of narrator and style and event and repetition that makes *Winterwood* so quintessentially postmodern. As Baudrillard has noted ‘my position is based on reversibility, which seems to me to be the true symbolic form’,³⁰ and this is also the structural and thematic core of *Winterwood*. Lies and deceit are the key to reversibility: ‘think you’re like me — a liar and a deceiver? Are you a bit crafty, do you think? Leave out the bits that’ll implicate and incriminate you?’ (*W*, 125). The simulation that is not connected to the real means that reversibility is possible. The simulation of *Winterwood* itself is a simulacrum, and the ultimate deconstruction of the *parergon* by the *ergon*. The sense of a *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman*, of the story of a subjectivity which is teleologically expressing itself through art, is now deconstructed through

28 Baudrillard, *A Critical Reader*, p.11.

29 Jean Baudrillard, *Hystericizing the Millennium*. Translated by Charles Dudas. *L’Illusion de la fin: ou La grève des événements* (Paris: Galilee, 1992) <http://www.uta.edu/english/apt/collab/texts/hystericizing.html>.

30 Jean Baudrillard, ‘Interview with *Le Journal des Psychologues*’ in *Baudrillard Live: Selected Interviews*. Edited by Mike Gane (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.177.

the story of a fractured subjectivity, of a split subjectivity between conscious and unconscious, life and death, truth and lies and of a sense of the unknowability of the self in a postmodern context. The interlacing has now allowed the text to change the context and the *ergon* to change the *parergon*, and this is especially clear in the attitudes to names in each text.

In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the individuality and singularity of Stephen's name serves as a synecdoche of his individual and developing subjectivity: 'you have a queer name, Dedalus' (*P*, 22) says Athy and as the novel develops, and as his sense of selfhood develops, the singularity of his name will signify for Stephen the singularity of his artistic vocation. Names are a signifier of his developing consciousness:

-- I am Stephen Dedalus. I am walking beside my father whose name is Simon Dedalus. We are in Cork, in Ireland. Cork is a city. Our room is in the Victoria Hotel. Victoria and Stephen and Simon. Simon and Stephen and Victoria. Names. (*P*, 105)

The individuality of names here is part of the modernist *parergon* which sees individuality and subjective coherence as givens. And as he moves in a teleological arc towards his artistic vocation, his name is again connected with that individual, coherent subjectivity. The archetype of Daedalus, the classical artist who soared above the waves and transcended his culture, is very much conflated with Stephen:

-- Stephanos Dedalos! Bous Stephanoumenos! Bous Stephaneforos!
Their banter was not new to him and now it flattered his mild proud sovereignty. Now, as never before, his strange name seemed to him a prophecy. So timeless seemed the grey warm air, so fluid and impersonal his own mood, that all ages were as one to him [...] Now, at the name of the fabulous artificer, he seemed to hear the noise of dim waves and to see a winged form flying above the waves and slowly climbing the air. What did it mean? Was it a quaint device opening a page of some medieval book of prophecies and symbols, a hawk-like man flying sunward above the sea, a prophecy of the end he had been born to serve and had been following through the mists of childhood and boyhood, a symbol of the artist forging anew in his workshop out of the sluggish matter of the earth a new soaring impalpable imperishable being? (*P*, 185-186)

He answers his own question in a ringing affirmation which is typical of the *parergonal* genre of which this book is so much a part:

His soul had arisen from the grave of boyhood, spurning her grave-clothes. Yes! Yes! Yes! He would create proudly out of the freedom and power of his soul, as the great artificer whose name he bore, a living thing, new and soaring and beautiful, impalpable, imperishable. (*P*, 187)

Here, the name serves as a synecdoche for the teleological outcome of the *Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman*: the name is fused to the subject – it serves as a signature to who Stephen has become. It is a metonym of his uniqueness and individuality, and a signifier of the teleological modernist certainty of subjective identity.

In *Winterwood*, however, the idea of a singular name is deconstructed at almost the structural centre of the book. In an intense and revelatory conversation, Ned Strange insists on a relationship with Hatch: ‘We’re all related! Every sonofabitch as was ever spawned on the slopes of this mountain! Don’t you see that? Well, don’t you, Red?’ (*W*, 128). And this blurring of identity proceeds apace as Hatch himself makes a Freudian slip: ‘Stay where you are’, I said, ‘Red! I mean Ned!’ (*W*, 128). Here, the name becomes blurred, and that static singularity of the modernist paradigm that was foregrounded at the conclusion of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is deconstructed as Redmond becomes Ned. This is further developed in the process of linguistic interlacing that Ned sets up. He asks Red: ‘how is your name Hatch?’, and Redmond’s reply elicits one of the most significant moments of postmodern plurality in the novel:

—It is just my name. It just happens to be Hatch.

—It just happens to be! It just happens to be! Did you ever happen, as you say, did you ever happen to look up what it actually means? What ‘hatch’ happens to mean in the Irish language? You’re not familiar with the Irish word *air*? You do know how to pronounce that word, don’t you, Redmond?

I did as a matter of fact. And was triumphant, at last, to be in a position to trump him.

—Yes, I replied cockily, it is pronounced ‘atch.’ It actually means ‘place.’

He stood there and waited, stroking his chin as he pondered, biding his time with enviable control. Then slowly his grin began to widen, stretching right across his face.

—Sure it does, he said. It means that all right. But it also means something else, you see.

I could bear it no longer.

—What does it mean! I snapped. What does it fucking mean?

—Easy, he cooed.

He flashed his incisors. I went cold all over. —It means ‘strange’, Little Redmond. That’s what it means. It means ‘strange’ [...] Maybe you’ll put that in your next article. I’m sure your readers would find it most interesting!

Red Strange from the mountain — sounds kind of familiar, you have to admit. (W, 129)

Thus the *parergon* of the *Bildungsroman*'s usual outcome, the enunciation of a coherent, self-aware subject, and that of the *Künstlerroman*, the enunciation of a coherent and self-aware artistic and creative subject, is deconstructed by this *ergon* – the postmodern blurring and uncertainty is epitomised by the questions raised about selfhood in this book. In response to the signature of Stephen, there are the countersignatures of Ned and Red and Florian. In *Winterwood*, therefore, the signature is subject to the same iterability that affects all language – as Derrida notes that for a signature to function, it must be both singular and iterable at the same time: 'in order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production.'³¹

And a postmodernist reading of Joyce can reveal the same interlaced process. In his essay 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce', Derrida highlights the iterability of Molly's final multiple 'yeses' at the conclusion of *Ulysses* and reads this as an interlacing between Joyce's signature – 'Trieste-Zurich-Paris,/1914-1921'³² – and Molly's countersignature, claiming, 'they call to each other across a *yes*, which always inaugurates a scene of call and request: it confirms and countersigns.'³³ This interlacing of the signature is elaborated on by Geoff Bennington, who notes that because a signature is repeatable, it can be repeated by someone else: 'the fact that my signature, if it is to be a signature, must be repeatable or imitable by myself entails just as necessarily the possibility that it can be imitated by another, for example a counterfeiter.'³⁴ If signatures are always iterable then they are conditioned by the possibility of a countersignature to come and this possibility disrupts the purity of the signature. And it is this disruption that partakes of Baudrillard's view of *poetic reversibility* and which makes *Winterwood*

31 Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc.* Edited by Gerald Graff. Translated by Alan Bass (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p.20.

32 James Joyce, *Ulysses*. Edited with an introduction and notes by Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). p.732.

33 Jacques Derrida, 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce', in *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.253-309, p.288.

34 Geoff Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Jacques Derrida*. Translated by Geoff Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p.162.

in many ways a postmodernist countersignature to the modernist certainties of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In its transformation of the conditions of its own production, in its transforming of the generic certainties of the *Bildungsroman* or *Künstlerroman*, this book enunciates a postmodernist portrait of an uncertain and divided self, whose unconscious is very much where the wild things are.

