CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	The short stories of Rita Kelly
Authors	Kelly, Rita
Publication date	2022-07
Original Citation	Kelly, R. 2022. The short stories of Rita Kelly. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
Rights	© 2022, Rita Kelly. - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Download date	2026-11-06 01:24:08
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/14055

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

The Short Stories of Rita Kelly

Dissertation submitted in candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, School of English, University College Cork, by

Rita Kelly

Under the supervision of Dr Éibhear Walshe

Head of the School of English: Professor Claire Connolly

July 2022

Dedication

for

Edel Connolly, my wife

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Declaration	3
Abstract	4
Introduction	5
“The Intruders”	10
“Soundtracks”	27
Conclusion	39
Works cited	41
Bibliography	42
Appendix 1 – Publications, Awards, Editor, Anthologies	43
Appendix 2 – Published Works in Magazines and Journals	48
Appendix 3 – Critical Commentary	50
Appendix 4 – Critical Responses	52

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Mary O'Donnell for her belief in me and in my work; for her support and encouragement over the last forty years.

I would like to thank Dr Éibhear Walshe as a fellow writer and an academic. It has been a pleasure to work with him. He has taken me along this process with patience, wisdom, a challenging engagement and an extraordinary generosity.

I would like to thank Danny Denton, as a fellow writer and academic for the professional, helpful and insightful engagement with the work.

My thanks to the Staff at the Boole Library, to Administrative Staff at the Graduate School and the Department of English. To the academic staff at the Department of Modern Irish; to fellow students and every person who brightened my time at University College Cork.

To the Librarian and staff at the Birr Library, Co Offaly.

A special mention of my friends and supporters in all my undertakings: Margaret & Tony Hogan, Brid McCarthy, Claire Meehan, Lesley O'Connor.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted is my own work and has not been submitted for another degree either at University College Cork or elsewhere.

Signed:



Rita Kelly

Date: 19 July 2022

Abstract

This thesis was submitted as part of a PhD by Prior Publication. It was based on a close analysis of representative short stories from my collection: *The Whispering Arch & Other Stories* published by Arlen House, Dublin, 1986. I looked at two very different stories from the collection. The main differences were matters of style and the use of language. One story, "Soundtracks", is an excellent example of my poetic, laconic, compressed style. The other story, "The Intruders", is shaped within an accessible and straightforward narrative style. This story also satirizes the Irish Revival movement as it was experienced in a convent secondary school, in Ireland, in the mid-1960s.

The thesis also looked at the place and importance of the publication of that collection within the early formation of my practice as a writer and poet. It particularly looked at my nascent interest in the Irish language as a mode of expression in my developing creative engagement. There is a discussion of the interrelationship between narrative structures and cultural forces at work within these short stories.

Introduction

In 1972, I met the well-established and respected writer, Eoghan Ó Tuairisc/Eugene Watters. After three weeks we decided to spend the rest of our lives together. We began that life in an old Lock House on the river Barrow, autumn, 1972. I was aged nineteen and he was aged fifty-three. We began our life of reading, writing and study. I felt that there was no need to get married, which I now understand showed a great confidence. I felt too that I could become a writer and that I could devote my life to the practice of writing. It was something that we could do together, every day, at the same desk. In retrospect, my assurance is amazing. However, we did get married, in December 1972, as Eugene, being a dramatist, felt that we should indeed objectively mark this new beginning in a public domain.

My first real publication of creative work was in *Innti* magazine, 1972. *Innti* was newly-established by Michael Davitt et al at UCC. It was a double bilingual suite of poems: Eoghan had written his poems in Irish, and I translated them into English. I wrote my set of poems in English and Eoghan translated them into Irish. The publication coincided with the beginning of our lives together and the nexus of our 'co-creative' output or 'comhdhán', as we termed it in Irish.

My first major work was in 1974, entitled: *Terms of Biology*, published by *Schools & Colleges*, Dublin, 1974, for my twenty-first birthday. It was a dictionary of biology for secondary schools, a direct result of Eugene teaching me classical Greek.

Certain poems began being accepted by *The Irish Press*, both by David Marcus and Seosamh Ó Duibhginn, Irish Editor, some in English, some in Irish with translations. Some examples

include the following poems: “A la Carte”, “Horoscope”, “Fáisnéis”, “Aonach/Fair”, “Theatre”, “Woman’s Plight upon the Planet”, “Tuiscint”, “Áine i mBéal Átha na Slua”, “Ag an gCrosaire”, “Taibhsiú”, “Líníocht”, “Breith”, *etc.*

The next huge event in my early career happened in 1976 when a humorous essay, entitled “Blast Off” won the Listowel Award. John B. Keane was the adjudicator and he presented me with the award. That was a huge boost of confidence; I was just twenty-three and John B. was not easily pleased as well as being a tremendous presence in Irish writing, particularly drama. These were all splendid accolades for a young writer, but there was yet more – the Listowel Players, under the direction of the talented Nora Relihan, had taken my “Blast Off” and adapted it for the stage. It was the opening act for that year’s festival, and I had no idea of this adaption until I saw it on stage.

I can see now that 1976 was a good year and therefore it is not surprising that I would concentrate on the short story because the shorter form appealed to me. It should be noted too that I was also having more work published in Irish, particularly in the magazine, *Feasta.* Some examples include: ″Ionad an Bhisigh”, “i mBaile Átha Cliath”, “I gCluain Tuaiscirt Dom”, “Gnáthláithreach, Muigh-Inis Mí Eanáir”. The reviews I wrote for *Feasta* include: “Fómhar na nGéanna”, by Conleth Ellis; “Lig Sinn i gCathú”, by Breandán Ó hEithir; “Cití”, le Siobhán Ní Shúilleabháin. They were publishing my Irish poetry and they were inviting me to review new books in Irish. The fees were less than *The Irish Press,* but I had far more space to develop my arguments.

“Trousseau”, a straight forward narrative of about 2,000 words, was written late October 1976. It was accepted for publication by Marcus on the 15th November 1976 and published in *The*

Irish Press, 19th March 1977. According to my records, "Soundtracks", was written next. This was a more challenging story, more poetic in style. It was returned, it failed at Listowel, it failed in other short story competitions. "En Famille", won a Maxwell House Award and was published in the anthology, *A Dream Recurring*, (Arlen House. Dublin 1980). The anthology was reviewed by Alan Titley in *The Sunday Tribune*, 1 February 1981:

> Apart from Máire Mhac an tSaoi's Preface, Rita E. Kelly's "En Famille" is by far the best written piece in the book. This is largely because she has a feel for words and enjoys herself at the expense of her characters, as all good writers should. This cynical streak brings itself to bear on the usual emptiness of a housewife's life, but she demonstrates that it does not have to be done in a correspondingly vapid way to be effective. The kind of parent who collects encyclopaedias "as if they were part of the equipment needed for having children" and who has the simple psychologist's (is there any other kind?) belief in educational toys is lovingly etched with gall. Apart from one factual error which I hope was made with irony, as when she puts into the mouth of one of her characters that "teacher training at present is learning to avoid the detritus of the pseudosciences", she hits the mark all over the place, which makes a change from the tame old stories told in the tame old way.

The Whispering Arch & Other Stories consists of ten short stories written from 1976 to 1980. The order is not quite chronological; it is more to do with placing different styles of narrative closer to each other. I felt that this placing might help the reader; they could become accustomed to the voice of the narrative and even unconsciously develop an awareness of my techniques of storytelling. Given that my style is more elliptical, a clustering of similar-styled stories might create a cumulative effect of ease. These styles are distinctive: "Soundtracks",

"The Whispering Arch", "The Conifers" have a more complex structure to the narrative. It could be termed 'poetic', as the use of language is short-circuited and challenges the reader to make leaps of time and leaps of association. There is a more definite use of assonance and alliteration; often these techniques are used to create a fraught atmosphere.

The other seven stories in the collection, including "The Intruders", belong to a style which is far more straightforward in its narrative ambition and execution. There is more character development, more dialogue, more sequential advance in the narration. There are fewer charged sentences, by that I mean sentences with high tension, sentences which might shock, as an electric fence might, not necessarily by their content, but more by their tone, e.g. '…lonesome and lost'; 'caught the exposed daffodil'; 'walking and sitting and mind-wandering'. The actual sentences are longer, flow more easily and are looser in their construction. Therefore, as stories, they are less demanding on the reader and they have a different impact on the reader.

"Trousseau" was published in *The Irish Press*, March 1977. "The Whispering Arch" was published in *The Irish Press*, December 1979. "The Intruders" was published in *The Irish Press*, June 1980. "Opening Night" was published in *The Literary Review* (Edinburgh), July 1981. "Midland" was published in *The Irish Times*, September 1984.

"The Intruders" was translated into German by Hans-Christian Oeser, published in *die Hoeren*, 1988. It was published in *Territories of the Voice*, an anthology of contemporary Irish women writers, Beacon Press, Boston, 1989. "The Cobweb Curtain" was published in the Syracuse Anthology of Irish Women Writers, 1989. "Midland" was translated into German, published

in *Irland Journal*, 1990. It was also published by the Educational Company, Dublin, 1990 as an apt story for the new Transition Year programme in English for secondary schools.

It is interesting to note that it was predominantly the 'straightforward' narrative style stories which were published. The more 'poetic' style stories were invariably returned by editors as being too challenging. An unforeseen outlet for some of these stories presented itself in those years – RTÉ Radio One had a programme, *The Story on One*, produced by Cathal Ó Gríofa. It was a short programme, the writer read their own stories on air, there was no competition involved, but the stories could only have about 2,000 words. Stories from this collection suited the length and requirements of this programme. The fee was generous, the experience was invaluable and the following stories from the collection were broadcast: "Midland", January 1981; "Conifers", June 1980. This collection, *The Whispering Arch & Other Stories*, was not published until 1986.

"The Intruders"

In approaching this short story for a close analysis, it falls into two distinct parts. These parts were not a conscious decision when I was writing the story; they seemed to arise from its narrative thrust. The first part of the story is comprised of the social commentary on, and comedy in, the teaching of Irish, particularly in a convent secondary school in the 1960s. In the second part of the story, I examine the erotic intrusion of the teacher, his uneasing and, to an extent, destabilizing interaction with the student.

This story is set in the late 1960s. Although not published until 1980 in *The Irish Press*, 21 June, it was written in 1976. It is set in a convent secondary school, Ballinasloe in fact, where I attended school myself 1966-1971. I draw heavily on my own experiences of school and of my experience of Irish as a subject. The story is not autobiographical in terms of the characters and what evolves between them, but the setting is very definite: the Nuns' Garden, the osiers by the river, the dormitories, the back of the school and the convent. These elements are carved in my memory as I spent my first year in that school as a boarder.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne in her novel, *The Dancers Dancing*, deals with the teaching and learning of Irish, in a Gaeltacht context and with teenage girls from the cities as the protagonists. Ní Dhuibhne does not satirise Irish; it seems from the work that she and her characters are comfortable within the culture. She is looking instead at the experience of the Gaeltacht from the young girls' perspective. They are very definitely city girls and much of the Gaeltacht experience is rather rural in an unsophisticated sense. There is a certain 'send up' of the teacher/director of the Course and his assistant; they fall into standard characterizations of such

people: very enthusiastic and rather limited in their thinking. Of course, given the ages of the girls, there is a great deal of eroticism and eroticizing of the experience.

There is an interesting passage in *The Dancers Dancing* which echoes the view shown in "The Intruders", of the way in which Irish is used and not used when it is an acquired language rather than a native language:

> …All in English of course. You couldn't, really, have this kind of completely enjoyable and intimate conversation in Irish. Irish was for quite other matters, mostly related to school. (Ní Dhuibhne, p. 134)

Irish was also an underlying matrix for the study of all other subjects; by that I mean that History, Geography, Maths, Latin, Science etc were taught through the medium of Irish. This was a very new experience for me, as in primary school even Irish was taught through English! The story deals with the realities of an Irish Revival attempt within the educational system outside of the Gaeltacht; Irish as a subject was compulsory – at that time it had to be studied as a subject, and if the student failed Irish in any of the State examinations, then they were deemed to have failed the entire examination. That statutory position did not change until April 1973 (RTE Archives) when it was no longer necessary to achieve a pass in Irish in order to pass these examinations.

I held a youthful anger and impatience towards the State which forced the Irish language on students in such a disastrous and cruel manner. There was anger too against the people who implemented these policies, namely the teachers of Irish and the personnel of Irish language organizations, vid. An tUasal Ó Riain, a character in the story. Though the policy had been in

place for almost fifty years, it was felt as a very unimaginative and authoritarian way of approaching the acquisition of language. The reality that a student could achieve top marks in all their examination subjects, yet if they failed Irish in that examination they were deemed to have failed the entire examination. This I felt was punitive and counter-productive.

The work that I am now doing on this story forces me to look at the complexities of the Irish language in my own immediate personal experience. I can see why I was angry, for example, I learned the *Prionsabal Archeméid* (Archimedes Principle), everything about it, all the words for the various objects involved in the experiment, e.g. *sorcóir chéimroinnte* (graduated cylinder). Until that moment in the laboratory, I never saw such an object before; so I learned what it could do as well as its function and above all, I learned its name. It was a delicate object, made of glass, with lines down along it, showing various measurements. Anytime I have seen this object or anytime I have had to refer to it, it is always a *sorcóir chéimroinnte* to me. I can never call it by any other name.

My personal history in relation to speaking Irish has a number of facets to it which coloured my personal view. Though my mother came from only thirty miles west of my father's homeplace, Ballinasloe, they were totally different in terms of language. He hardly had a single word of Irish and he had no particular feeling for or against it. The Irish language just did not enter his consciousness. He looked to Dublin, had spent time there as a young man, theatre, opera and books. My mother's spoken language was ostensibly English, but that English was peppered with Irish words, phrases and more particularly with direct translations from Irish through her English, which made it very unusual and undoubtedly colourful.

My grandmother lived close to Athenry, Co Galway. She was a native Irish speaker as Irish was common in that area during her time. She emigrated to Boston about 1896 and came home about 1910. It was very unusual for an emigrant to return during those years and later, mainly because the return was too expensive. Emigration was a permanent undertaking, that is the reason for the 'American Wake' which happened particularly in Galway and along the western seaboard. Emigration was viewed as a death.

My grandmother married the year of her return and my mother constantly reminded us that grandmother always said: 'My children will speak English from the moment they are born so that they will never suffer what I had to suffer in Boston because I couldn't speak English'. As a teenager, I could see the logic of my grandmother's view; as an adult and later, as a bilingual writer and poet, I have felt that part of my creative realisation has been to undo my grandmother's dictum.

Another aspect to my relationship to Irish at that time was the fact that my first cousins lived in Connemara and were native speakers of Irish. There were traces of awkwardness between us as they always spoke to me in English, because they could. I felt in those years that I could never measure up, that I could never have a conversation with them in Irish due to my lack of proficiency. Some of the anger I felt then was based on the reality that I had been learning Irish, in school, since the age of five, but I could not hold a conversation with my cousins by the age of seventeen.

This story, for the most part, mocks the attempts to revive Irish as a spoken or as a community language through the 'manipulation' of the education system. The characters and the writing exemplify how all these attempts at revival are not taken seriously by the students. The Irish

language becomes ‘Gaelic’ (cognate with *Gaeilge*) if we are forced to refer to it outside of Ireland or to people within Ireland who may wish to distance themselves from the language and from all its connotations.

My relationship with the Irish language changed a good deal after the setting of this story. By 1976, I was already writing and publishing in Irish. The main factor in that change was that in 1972, I married the poet and writer, Eugene Watters/Eoghan Ó Tuairisc. He seemed to have turned his back on Irish and Irish writing after the death of his first wife, Una, 1965, as if his particular form of grieving left no room for the practice of Irish. He had somehow linked his reality of Irish with Una and her life. However, my persistence in wanting to read his novels in Irish, out loud, by the fire, as we read other writers, succeeded. We began to read his novel, *L’Attaque.* I was enthralled not just by the story and how it was told, but by the charm and wonderful qualities of the actual Irish expressions, phrases, rhythms and cadences. It was at that point that I began to rid myself of my old stubborn and ill-informed ideas about Irish and really began the long process of acquiring Irish and to such an extent that I could confidently write in it. We read a great deal from modern Irish writing at that time; I learned so much and it all awakened in me a totally different aspect of my creative imagination. Once I got in tune, once I began to feel and think in Irish, so much of my work had an inevitable rightness about it. It was shaped and formed within the terms of the Irish language. Also, we spent a good deal of time in each Gaeltacht area, adjudicating at drama festivals, staying with local people, so that my conversations were many and very different to the classroom setting. I talked about so many topics, mostly with women, about love and loss, about death and custom about fashion and travel and about my own married life. It took about three to four years of interaction, concentrated study and constant reading to reach the point of being able to think in Irish as well as speak and particularly write in Irish.

It is probably true to say that the actual publication of Irish work was somewhat easier if only by the fact that there were fewer writers vying for the same space. For that same reason, the publication of Irish was, and still is, subsidised by successive governments. To acknowledge that fact sometimes felt like a betrayal, as we were only writing in Irish for the money and for the likelihood of speedy publication. In those years, I would never have thought of translating my work from Irish into English – though an interesting factor was the opportunity from the editor, Seosamh Ó Duibhginn, at *The Irish Press,* to publish an original poem in Irish with its corresponding translation. It was an enlightened policy as readers were afforded an easy access to the original through the help of the translation.

The other factor of my development in writing and publishing in Irish were the opportunities, given to me particularly by the magazine *Feasta,* then edited to great effect, by Aogán Ó Muircheartaigh. These reviews were critical essays because unlike my reviews in English for David Marcus at *The Irish Press,* I had far more space to develop my arguments and views in *Feasta.*

As a writer, I rather surprised myself by writing and publishing more work in Irish than I would have thought possible when writing this particular story. There was certainly a disconnect between what I was then thinking and what I was to become. Though, it might be true too that I had a confidence in Irish which allowed me to satirize it, make fun of it and the blatant ambiguities of the Revival Movement, which burdened the schools with the implementation of its aspirations while ignoring the realities of everyday life in Ireland outside of the Gaeltacht. But it may not be such a surprise, because I needed to concentrate, learn at a deep and extended level, as much of the language and literature as possible; having immersed myself then the natural outcome was to use the language as a creative instrument. I wrote poems and these

poems became longer, more narrative in their structure, e.g. “Muigh-Inis. Mí Eanáir” (published in *Feasta*, November 1976).

Undoubtedly, my life with Eoghan Ó Tuairisc influenced this development, he too was coming back to Irish, eventually in his final years and since his death, he is known for the Irish writer and poet that he was and far less known for the English writer and poet that he also was – the name Eugene Watters is overshadowed by Ó Tuairisc. We both had the same or similar views with regard to the Revival Movement and the politics of Irish.

I never felt, I still do not feel that my choice to write and publish in Irish is a ‘political act’ – but perhaps it is? Perhaps I have become an involuntary part of the Revival Movement, but I do not consciously feel it, I do not ‘proselytise’ on behalf of the Revival, and I do not feel myself on a mission. However, I do feel a very strong bond with the people who speak and who read Irish.

But at the time of the story, the religious were, for the most part, in charge of the delivery of education throughout Ireland; they were very clear and engaged in inculcating the kind of Ireland they felt should exist. In that role, there was a particular emphasis on devout Catholicism as well as a form of cultural nationalism which abhorred popular culture of any kind. The biggest threat to their pristine ideal was the flow of popular culture coming to Ireland from England, through the Beatles and pop music as well as Association Football, tabloid newspapers, promiscuous sex and any hint or expression of the demotic. It was necessary to fight these aberrations with as much strength and counterculture as possible. It is also true and relevant to “Soundtracks”*;* the Catholic education system informs that short story as well.

This story's opening sentence, which has only five words in it, has the word 'somewhat' embedded within it. It is a word which sets up doubt – was it or wasn't it? Perhaps Irish was only partially 'virginal' or a little, or to some extent, or moderately? It is a rather formal adverb and in the tight nexus of five words it forces a further consideration of the actual meaning and how it qualifies or modulates its subject, Irish. Can anything or anyone be partially virginal? Is it not a case of all or nothing. But that may be too literal an interpretation; the word 'virginal' gives a non-sexual overtone, a young nubile woman connotation, may even give a sense that something is there to be ravaged, plundered? Yet, by the echo of opposites, the very mention of 'virginal' sends the mind straight to genitalia; it is impossible not to carry the sexual connotation into the story, from the first sentence. There is the obvious connection to the Virgin Mary and the fact that a convent education was replete with a particularly strong devotion to the Mother of God. In that context the title deserves consideration – what is noteworthy is that "The Intruders" is plural. More than one person is intruding. Also, it is an intrusion, it is not a plundering or a ravaging; therefore it is a milder form of imposition.

'The confessional was ideally makeshift so that *An tAthair* could hold our hands or touch our cheeks, part of the perks, as well as an invaluable practice for our oral examinations and the more seemingly *outré* the sin the more contact afforded. It was all so innocuous.'

The story is built around two main characters, the unnamed female character, who tells the story, carries the narrative; finally the school girls meld into 'we'. The addressing as 'you' happens as the narrative takes a turn of 'intrusion', as if on the one hand, life itself is intruding, as the female character feels herself maturing, less satisfied with the giggling adolescence; on the other hand, she is about to intrude upon the visitor, the saviour of the play. He, Cóilín, is certainly aware of his power and her vulnerability and the fact that he is intruding upon her

innocence and upon her desire to have a more adult experience of the world. His intrusion is more obvious, more sexually charged. Her intrusion is more subtle; she wants him to provide her with a type of authentic language. She also wants him to provide her with an experience, of sex most likely, though it is not overtly stated. It is rather likely that Cóilín may get cast aside like 'the camogie boots' once it is found that he is no longer useful in acquiring Irish.

The list, as a device, appears again: 'Prayers, poems and Mass for St Patrick's Day'. The list is foreshortened, but it reduces the uses of Irish very quickly and very succinctly. The sentence places the linkage of Irish with Catholicism very strongly. There are poems too, which covers the cultural facet of the education in what very definitely is a convent school. The rites and the rituals. What is slipped in is the fact that it is 'Mass for St Patrick's Day', because it is noteworthy, (then it is assumed that all other Masses are not read or celebrated in Irish). Immediately, judgements are being made: this Irish language is a facet of the school life, but it does not hold a central part in that life. It is rather sporadic; it is there to be drawn upon when necessary and to fulfil the obligations of culture and perhaps even income – there may be grants for a minimum use of the language within the one hundred and sixty-seven days of the school year.

With amazing speed, the priest is at the convent gate, mobbed by the teenage girls, as if he were a pop star – now, we get the first mouthfuls of the language in the greetings. There is a grammar awareness from the outset, the vocative is used and spelt correctly. It is all 'sweet and mellifluous'; 'the dear little snakes' pose no fear and no threat at all, despite the association with a rather larger snake in the Garden of Eden. The language is 'sanctified' and belongs to St Patrick himself, as if he were the instigator of Irish in Ireland. He certainly brought Latin with him and presumably the Irish learned an alphabet from him and his followers, so that Irish

could be and was written down or became a literate language. There is a deal of commentary packed into the word ‘sanctified’; of course it refers primarily to St Patrick and all things holy. But it carries the sense that it has been ‘sanctified’ as a language, that all its racy, earthy, humane qualities have been banished rather like the snakes, as attributed to Patrick. The word ‘sanitised’ is not quite a homophone, but there is a half echo at least, suggesting that any life or any threat of life has been washed out of it. This is probably done by the State and by the Church.

The first paragraph undoes many of the sacred cows in Irish society at that time, late 1960s. For me to write this story in 1976 and publish it, 1980, it was quite a radical undertaking. I had not read Myles na gCopaleen; I was following my own path with my own emphases. It was radical to mock the nuns, the teachers, the figures involved in the promotion of Irish. Mockery was considered rather shocking in relation to these matters, but to eroticise the teaching and the experience of Irish, that was unforgiveable. At the time of writing and publication I was not aware of the shock or the unforgiveable reality of what I had done.

In terms of this story and the touching, fondling, done by the priest in ‘the makeshift confessional’; such behaviour is noted but the danger is not apparent because these young girls are not taking this priest very seriously, whether he is representing the Irish language or representing a forgiving God. The feeling is that these girls will not fall foul of an ‘innocuous’ priest. However, it does pre-empt and prefigure the scandals of child sexual abuse perpetrated by the clergy over decades, which would come to light later in the century.

The man with the *fáinne,* is mocked too, again bland and harmless. He works in the civil service, an arm of the State; the general view of the civil service is of a particular mentality,

determined to do its duty, follow the rules to the last letter, exert their limited power with great effect on those for whom the lack of power is an unfortunate reality at the moment of having to deal with such a person.

> '…the Man with the *Fáinne*…never said much anyway, his brand of Irish was like himself: meagre and balding. The nun showed pain as he slurred his r's, making a whore of the slender endings. He wore an outsize *Fáinne,* gold and glistening, we got little silver ones, the nun thought it would be a nice idea if he himself attached them to our gymslips when we had paid the money and said the necessary few words.' (Kelly, p. 70)

This kind of mockery of the civil service and of the Irish language, especially the autobiography of Tomás Ó Croimhthain's *An tOileánach,* first published 1929, was done by Myles na gCopaleen/Brian Ó Nualláin (himself a civil servant) in his satiric novel *An Béal Bocht* (published in Irish 1941 and first published in English 1973). But Myles had no influence on this short story in hand because the writer had not read either edition at that time. I did have a sense of his mockery, which had entered popular parlance, of repetitive speech moulds in Irish and their accompanying alliteration, which are overwrought, absurd and comic. But I forged my own comic twists within the terms of this story.

There is also a criticism of the *fáinne* itself. It was a movement begun in 1916 to show people that there were other people who were prepared and able to speak Irish. The first President was Piaras Beaslaí. I am still not enamoured of the *fáinne.* I am not particularly supportive of the idea of being marked out for any reason, least of all, for speaking Irish. The silver *fáinnes,* while less expensive than the gold ones, indicated that the wearer had a basic knowledge of

Irish as opposed to the gold one, which indicated that the wearer was a fluent Irish speaker. There is the reality of hierarchy within all things and organizations.

In this story I also mock the old script. The new Romanised script was part of all the changes of the 1960s; everything was changing, nothing stayed the same; of course nothing does, but it seemed that what had obtained for decades, if not centuries, was now found wanting and needed reform, rethinking and reshaping. It had cost a good deal of effort and energy to learn the old Celtic script; there was a certain sense that its use was another facet in being different and unique vis-à-vis anything with an Anglo-Saxon hint to it.

The direct translation of 'big the honour, not small the sorrow…' gives an added comic element to the story and the satire is maintained paragraph after paragraph, dance, camogie and the GAA generally, as they still insist on using Irish for their rule books as well as naming players with the Irish version of their names.

There is an aside about science versus the humanities, tongue-in-cheek, as the scientific mind is not overtly concerned with language. The school tour to the Gaeltacht, by an accident was actually a science or biology trip, if only because the Gaeltacht regions are now and have been since the end of the 19th Century marginalized on the Atlantic coast.

The theme is developed on this tour that it is an intrusion into a space not their own, and in the name of science they killed a starfish and dropped it in formalin for further study. There is the removal of shell fish and seaweed from the foreshore as if they have full rights to do so, (it is all about serving the pursuit of knowledge). Things 'virginal' and chaste are referred to again: 'no swimming, the bus driver had them in view, behind his newspaper'. It is a double-take, a

combination of innocence, vulnerability and street smarts or the acumen to know when there is a danger in sexual attention. Interesting too that the students go to 'wash their hands' having marched into the local convent, it is an euphemism for relieving themselves, going to the lavatory or the toilet – even those terms were changing at this time; the rear-guard made a case for 'lavatory' (from the Latin *lavatorium*, 'a place for washing'); while 'toilet' was some kind of new-fangled word from French (originally from Middle French, *toile/toilette, '*a cloth/a little piece of cloth'. It referred to a cloth put over the shoulders while dressing the hair or shaving.) It was used on television for the bowl into which you could urinate or defecate. The body and bodily functions are invariably a naming-challenge for a society which tends towards the puritan in its outlook and practice. It should be remembered too that electricity and running water, as well as indoor plumbing, were relatively new realities not just in rural Ireland but also in urban Ireland.

These facilities were rare enough in the urban reaches of the towns and cities from where young girls, in this instance, could now avail of a secondary education, free of charge, after the Act of 1966. But the euphemism points more to the prudish quality of that education and the asexual and desexualisation of all bodily matters and functions within a convent education. Even when dissecting a rat or a rabbit in the science laboratory, there was never any mention of the terms for the genitalia, as if they did not exist or had no scientific term assigned to them. We identified ovaries, Fallopian tubes and *vas deferens*, but these were all interior items. Ovulation and spermatogenesis were almost abstract concepts within that education.

Then there is a further comment on the idea of spending summer holidays in a Gaeltacht area or in France. It is at this point that the notion of middle-class may be realized. 'Those who could afford it', were the girls who went to France for the summer in order to improve their

French. Certainly, there was a view that the Gaeltacht lacked sophistication. It was somewhat ironic too that the teenagers of the Gaeltacht houses, in which the learners stayed, might have had to leave education early and emigrate, mostly to England.

'Then Cóilín came…' and all changed with the arrival of the main male character. His arrival happens only half-way through the narrative; all of the scene-setting re Irish and how it is viewed, how it is taught and experienced is taken care of before he arrives. The story plots and traces all the changes and the perception-changes which happen to the main female character and to the school play and to the school girls in general. There is just a very slight indication that things have changed, that most of the girls are aware and are involved in that change – 'With him, none of us flashed our secret tiger's yawn across the class, except one of the denser girls who was surprised when it was not returned'. It is also likely that the girl who was not in tune with the changed, and perhaps charged, atmosphere, was younger, less mature and late in coming to realizations of her own potential and her own intellectual and sexual energy.

There are excellent passages of correlation for the maturing girl: the romp in the dormitory suddenly becomes *de trop*, tiresome and childish, connected with ripe fruit and harvesting before the turn of the year. She is still awake, pensive, reflective, while the world/dormitory sleeps. Her voice pervades the passages, as it has from the beginning; but the pace and the tone change to mirror the change in circumstances and the arrival of a new force, an authentic force, who is taken seriously. Of course, he is fully aware of his male physical power, he plays upon it, and he certainly intrudes upon her space, her mentation and her youth. She experiences that tongue-tied reality in the other language, in particular when there are strong emotions involved. It is very well described by Eva Hoffman, a Polish-English bilingual, in her book *Lost in Translation,* fearing that the smallest transgressions could incur huge costs:

> …it takes all my will to impose any control on the words that emerge from me. I have to form entire sentences before uttering them; otherwise I too easily get lost in the middle. My speech, I sense, sounds monotonous, deliberate, heavy – an aural mask that doesn't become or express me at all …I become a very serious young person…I am enraged at the false persona I'm being stuffed into, as into some clumsy and overblown astronaut suit. (Hoffman, p. 118-119)

It seems too that girls experience more anxiety than boys when learning and speaking a foreign language – Jean-Marc Dewaele and his team at the University of London did research which shows that girls are anxious about 'goofy slips, silly errors, mortifying stumbling and mumbling that trigger sweating, shaking and palpitations and permanently tie our tongues'. (Grosjean, p. 41-63)

As the story proceeds there is an ambiguity, the writing itself becomes breathless and charged, both characters involve each other in the chase. Out over the stile, out from the formal, well-kept gardens and into the wilderness of the osiers where it is tangled, wild, wet and untamed. The flowering reed, or the blackamoor, is a very definite phallic symbol; it is used to effect here by exploding it over his head and beard. There is a sense that there has been a sexual encounter, but it remains ambiguous. Almost like the 'somewhat' of the opening, did they or didn't they have sexual intercourse? They certainly had something.

The main female character is changed indeed. Her life narrows. The town and the school, as seen from the back, appear 'shabby'. That to some degree echoes the word 'obscene' originally used in Greek Theatre to designate all that world behind the screen or the curtain. (Gk *ob skene,*

'behind the scene/curtain'), not at all a bad idea in and of itself, it took on that meaning from Latin and as used by Montaigne in medieval French writing (c.1592). Her experience with Cóilín in the wilderness of the osiers has changed her; the biggest change will be her reluctance to knuckle down and assume the position of student again. Because in many ways, that secondary education, rather passive by its nature, presupposes the willing suspension of maturity to take it all in and reproduce it again within the terms of a State examination. It is a kind of sleep, or at least a kind of cocooning, so that a wide variety of knowledge can be introduced and formed within the cortical sites of the brain. The story concludes with setting a question: all has become smaller, more distant, more impossible to take on. There is an artificiality in the learning milieu, very much at odds with the raging hormones of a young female body. The question is: does the main female character retake her place in the study hall in order to complete the process of her education or does this experience sabotage her so that she will be unable to take on the role again of being totally impressionable and unquestioning? Perhaps this story is in keeping with Saunders' view: 'the writer is not the person, the writer is a version of the person who makes a model of the world that may seem to advocate for certain virtues, virtues by which he may not be able to live… (Saunders p.218). He continues after considering the views of Kundera on the idea of a writer having a 'suprapersonal wisdom' by saying 'that "craft" is a way to open ourselves up to the suprapersonal wisdom within us' (ibid). The example given is Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, how Tolstoy changed his views of Anna, originally he drew her as 'a most unsympathetic woman, her tragic end was entirely deserved and justified'(ibid). Kundera does not believe that Tolstoy 'revised his moral ideas', but rather he was listening to what Kundera calls 'the wisdom of the novel'. He continues, 'Every true novelist listens for that suprapersonal wisdom, which explains why great novels are always a little more intelligent than their authors' (ibid). Perhaps this insight is true too for shorter

fiction. Our personal moral convictions are superseded and enriched by the ‘wisdom’ of the narrative itself.

"Soundtracks"

This story is set in Ballinasloe also. It was written in 1977 and it draws on memory of the railway station on the edge of town. I always felt that rural railway stations are rather poignant though sometimes they are places of joy. Yet that joy may be short lived as the going is often implicit in the arriving. Perhaps too it may be a West of Ireland phenomenon with the long reach of emigration. The station just sits there after all the emotions have passed, been evaporated, gone like the trains themselves. The station becomes a place of great silence.

This story is quite short and terse, (1,800 words), it represents the poetic style of some of the stories in this collection. It gains a tension from this laconic style as well as the innate tension of the plot itself. I choose it as an exemplar of this particular style but also because it is an early story. It is a very haunting story. I am pleased with its style and its tight narrative trajectory. I intend to do a close textual analysis of this story and to try to establish a degree of distinctness in what could be termed an 'iconic space'. Saunders has created that phrase (Saunders, p.1), to encompass an absolute distinctness and uniqueness or as he says: 'the place from which they [the writers] will write the stories only they could write…' (ibid).

This thinking and this approach highlight the fact that there is a voice and a style quite particular to the writer, but there is more than that. There is an actual space, which is to some degree a type of matrix in which an entire story is felt and adumbrated. This may be an interior space, where words are chosen, rejected, honed, thought over, combined with an investigation or preoccupation with the shaping of the story within an emotional reality. To an extent, the story is gestated within the apperceptive masses of the individual writer, until it finally emerges as the finished story. These apperceptive masses are made up of all the experiences – sensual,

physical, psychological etc – which an individual has heretofore and which an individual brings to the new experience. All previous experience colours and dictates how the new experience is *apperceived*. Apperceptive mass is a psychological term coined by Johann Herbart (1776-1841) to refer to a cluster of compatible ideas which attract similar ideas, in consciousness, and thereby form clusters. He believed that these ideas come from experience, that they are never destroyed or completely forgotten with the workings of the mind. (Online 'Glossary of Psychological Terms', 2022, Athabasca University). It should be possible to track and enumerate the many steps involved in the process of creating this particular story.

In writing this essay I have revisited some of my influences. I read D.H. Lawrence in my formative years with much enjoyment. Particularly, *Sons and Lovers, Women in Love.* These were amazingly attractive works to a teenager; I was taken into the narrative; it was relatively easy and accessible prose. For instance, when the characters Birkin, Ursula and Hermione meet in the classroom, ostensibly studying catkins in botany class, the entire scene is shot through with sexual energy and innuendo. (Lawrence p.50 foll.)

Other influences from the years prior to writing my own short stories were Mansfield, Woolf and Murdoch. Like Lawrence, they provided me with a way of thinking about writing. They provided me with many different styles and voices; their descriptive writing was engaging and impressionistic and at times challenging, particularly in the case of Woolf. I learned a great deal about creating atmosphere from all of them.

"Soundtracks" as a title is somewhat surprising because it is plural. Normally, it refers to a single object: 'it is a narrow strip running down a movie or film that carries the recorded sound in synchronization with the pictures'(OED). It could be referred to as the *score*, the *theme*, the

composition, the *music*, but it is always in relation to a film or movie. According to Saunders, when we as readers approach a short story, we have a set of expectations (Saunders p.9). Undoubtedly, the title will cause us to have a set or sets of expectations. These expectations will differ from reader to reader as they depend on our own sets of referents, our understanding of the word or words themselves. How clear or how vague that understanding in fact is – do we, in this instance, see a physical strip or track accompanying a film? Or do we vaguely hear a kind of undefined music because *sound* combined with *track* suggests music or songs or both. It also suggest needles going around in vinyl tracks to produce sounds. Nowadays, because of the revival of vinyl records and record players, this association is quite modern and not confined to a particular generation. Therefore, we might deduce from this title that there could be music or lyrics, or some track might be played again and again and that for some reason there is more than one track; all of these aspects are important because they are embedded within the title. It is a single word, which may be significant, perhaps there is no time to expand. The story replays itself; it may be continually replaying itself within the psyche of the main character, Ruth. Perhaps she is fated or destined to be at that railway station, haunted by herself and the various forms of herself; perhaps we are trapped within her mind for the short and intense period of the story?

The opening could hardly be more laconic. 'The heat, the vacuity.' The opening sentence is two words, set side by side and separated only by a comma. Therefore both words take on an inordinate emphasis and importance. Ruth is uncomfortable. The heat may even be oppressive. Then comes the comma and the next definite noun: 'the vacuity'. No verb, perhaps there is no time for the niceties of articulated expression. There is no conjunction either, which gives the sentence a very breathless quality. This opening immediately adds to our expectations and though these two nouns might be considered abstracts, they have very concrete aspects to them.

‘Vacuity’ is a surprise and unexpected; it is unexpected, particularly at that moment, because nothing has been established but the heat – now we are faced with the vacuity, all our responses are to a person, someone feather-brained, ‘vacuous’, there are many terms and phrases for that lack of ‘grey matter’, for having no great strength of intellectual capability, perhaps as a term to express a lack of intelligence. But there is no person in this story yet, no character, as such. Therefore we are nudged, encouraged, pointed in the direction of the secondary meaning: ‘an empty space’. As an abstract noun, it gains more power and more emphasis rather than using the adjective ‘vacuous’ in this opening.

Straight away, still breathless, the story starts with the list or the litany – that fundamental, that easily recognisable form, that catalogue of a series of items or events. All elements within the series gain extra weight by their contiguity to other items on the list. ‘Litany’ as a term has a definite liturgical basis, it is a prayer or a supplication. This list here is still rather breathless. There is a marked lack of connectives; it is as if the list becomes a visual representation of what someone is looking at, what they are experiencing, what their emotions are, which actually colour the detail and the emphasis of the list. It is a paragraph, it is a sentence, a rather long sentence, divided only by commas, there are no semicolons, presumably because there are no major digressions; all of our attention is focused on the sleepers. The shocking word in the list is ‘ooze’ as it implies a bleeding, a leakage of vital bodily fluids, of tree sap and other such life forces. It is slow, so there might be a sense that things could be saved, that the flow could be stopped. The word maintains all the qualities of itself as an active verb while in this sentence it is forced into being a noun. The nominal position gives it a quality close to permanence. The language of the story becomes tactile as if the story itself is contained within the ‘smeared sleepers…the ooze of broken stone’ and other objects of the external reality. The reader is enticed to taste the story, as it were, to see and feel it in words such as ‘smeared’, ‘ooze’, ‘a

screeching stop' and 'rust and the rotting timber'. This is a highly visual sentence: it could be drawn or painted. Once the word 'steel' occurs in the sentence it acquires a very strong aural element and the chosen words create and construct the train, the tracks, the terror.

There is a very sudden shift now, a voice cries out, the word is 'Attymon'. Attymon is a small railway station near Athenry on the Galway line. The echo is very powerful. After the levity, the banality and the fun of 'Chickens for Attymon' we smile, but the echo unnerves us. It causes time to pass from some state of being definite to a state of flexible possibility. When is all of this happening? Now? In some real or imagined past?

'A voice cries close to one.' This is a sentence which furthers the story, moves things along, though it may be a dream, a recollection or a total construction. The use of 'one' is interesting; normally it would date this writing and also it would point to a pedantic pretentiousness and a pompous attitude. It may not be the case here; perhaps there is another reason for choosing the pronoun, 'one'. It serves fundamentally to keep the 'speaker', the character, at a distance; it creates a neutral position, it is neither 'me' nor 'you'. 'He/him' and she/her' are not an option, it would seem. While not referring to any of the above, the use of 'one' would seem to include them all. At least they are all possible options. So this writer has it every way in order to meld time, not so much place, meld happenings and realities. It is just one small word, somewhat insignificant normally, but here in the alembic of pressurised and tense description, 'one' takes on a much greater significance and contributes a great deal of meaning to the story.

'No one.' 'Answering echoes only.' 'Nothing', … six words, separated from each other, at times there is a major close will a full-stop. At times it is just a comma providing the minor close. There are a series of half-tones within these words; the way they sound off each other

creates a tension and an audible reverberation along the railway lines, along the lines of memory and along the lines of narrative. All the open ‘o’ sounds lend themselves to creating a threnodic tone – a lamentation, a dirge. These echoes prepare us for something shocking; they unease us. We are in a time and perhaps a space, prior to some climactic event while simultaneously we are beyond it, past the event, while strangely, we may be, like the central voice, witnessing the event.

Then there is another shift: ‘the old placename’. It is a ‘comic name’ – why we wonder? We are not told what the name actually is, which adds to a mysterious sense, but it also releases us and it. We are not tied to anywhere definite as a result, it could be anywhere we want it to be. Or it could be a universal place, having the elements of a particular place without ever naming it, or limiting it to one specific place. The name itself, to the narrator, is uneasing, ‘grinning faces and laughter…’ as if someone is being mocked, ridiculed. ‘…some bitterness, transmuted in one’s mind into the sharp tang of elderblossom’.

So far, this story has been very visual and very aural, now we have the sense of taste combined with the sense of smell – elderblossom or more commonly, elderflower, has a distinct creamy, summery smell which is rather pleasant, but the elder itself, and its berries, has an unpleasant smell, rather like urine and musty. The combined word, ‘elderblossom’ combines these two smells in the one sensation; the taste is decidedly bitter. The elderblossom is a time-pointer, the elder has blossoms late May to mid-June. So the story is set in early summer, which may or may not be significant: it refers back to the opening ‘heat’.

It is noticeable that ‘one’ is now used to describe ‘one’s mind’ and later, ‘one sits’. After a further description of the railway station:

> '… back along the tracks losing themselves in a wilderness of furze. The interminable journeys, the grinding wheel. And forward there was no distinction, again the meticulous parallels melted into each other in the distance, a pseudo-distance, there is never anything but the isolated self.' (Kelly, p.18-19).

There is the furze and the elderblossom encroaching upon the precision of the railway station and its cut-stone construction. There is a tension between all of that efficient engineering and the wild reality of the countryside through which it cuts a track. The parallels of the tracks refer to Einstein and that mathematical side of Ruth, the main character: he posited that all parallels eventually meet, and she experiences that 'meeting of parallels' as she looks along the tracks and visually they melt into each other. It might be an analogy of her life, all strands of it melting into each other, becoming confused and mixed.

We note 'the little bits of glitter in the broken stone'; which is a detail of how the sun is hitting off the broken edges of the ballast stone. The presumption is that this stone is also limestone, similar to the 'cut limestone of the windowsills, walls and door-surrounds. Sensing the compacted skeletons, the powered calcium, the teeming life petrified; the joints, the frame of life only, and all a memory pulling at the mind.' (Kelly, p. 17).

Ruth is aware of her surroundings; she is present indeed and very observant. These attributes are enhanced by the fact that she knows exactly what constitutes sedimentary rock, of which limestone is a prime example. Her world, for the most part, concerns a context of objects, natural or constructed, in which she is very interested. Her world is without people.

Finally, we have a name, ‘Ruth’. Biblical, laconic and a stand-alone kind of name without any family name. But the four words following the name - ‘was accused of intelligence’ - are almost an extension of the name, Ruth; these four words are surprising and shocking. We are shocked by ‘accused’ and cojoining that with intelligence is an amazing jolt. We are suddenly focused, suddenly upright, because we might have been lulled and lured into the summer setting with ‘panicles of elderblossom pushing over the railings’, encouraging us to relax in the pen-picturing of a pleasant country scene. ‘Accused’ is a very strong term, has a definite meaning and usage within the legal system; here it is the simple past tense of ‘accuse’ and ironically, that past tense is ‘accused’ which is also the noun, representing an alleged criminal, either singly or in a group. It is in the passive voice and impersonal insofar as it is not specified who has done the accusing. It is a startling combination of words, it suggests that intelligence is a crime, at least that it can be viewed as a crime. That is an unexpected and strange assertion. But very quickly in the narrative we are back in the classroom, where perhaps the designation of ‘intelligent’ or indeed its opposite, is in common and constant usage in referring to students and their perceived abilities, how these abilities are measured, especially in their grasp of academic subjects.

The next movement of the story takes us back into the classroom. The list is used again as a stratagem for forwarding the narrative, deepening the tone, giving insight into the character of Ruth. There is a conscious juxtaposition within the list for comic effect as well as a variety of intricate detail of well-learned facts from a range of subjects.

From now on, as the story advances, there is a greater and more frequent use of ‘one’. It is a technique, or so it would seem, to advance the narrative. It feels dated now, almost forty years later, it gives the narrative an old-fashioned tone and confines it to a past of its own

construction. It is obvious that ‘one’ is being used to give a certain distance to the narration and the character; it is also obvious that the use of ‘one’ causes a fluidity, particularly of time as well as a fluidity of motion and experience. It allows an external view as well as an internal view of the life of Ruth. If the ‘one’ were replaced by ‘you’, there is an enormous change of tone. It becomes familiar and casual even, which might diminish the tight dynamic and tension of the story. If the sentence: ‘One could not befriend Ruth’ is replaced with ‘You could not befriend Ruth’ it changes the thrust. Suddenly it is all too familiar; Ruth is too close, too ordinary; it is as if Ruth has to be kept at a distance from the writer, has to be made somewhat ghostly while being firmly grounded in the minutiae of her school life and of her school day. Quite quickly afterwards, Ruth changes her mode of transport: ‘She abandoned her bicycle and travelled the six miles to school by train’. This allows us, as readers, an element of satisfaction because it takes us back, organically, to the railway station of the opening, but in a more relaxed way, there is less of the breathlessness about it as we are covering large passages of time in a short compass.

It seems that Ruth has an inordinate interest in the train station as she waits. Sensing the petrified life within the limestone, she knows and senses that limestone is calcium, it is chalk; she knows too that calcium constitutes our bones and teeth. Perhaps her intelligence draws her to these observations.

The compressed account of Ruth’s time at university is again somewhat heavy-handed; much is packed into little, but there is a built-in commentary, how Ruth went off the rails, living a life of drink and debauchery, failing her exams; but it is the barb for the so called ‘scatter-brained’ which is very serious, moralistic and judgemental. There are suggestions that all the sex led to pregnancies: ‘…and bore the fruits of it within the bounds of respectability’- but that

they married in order to keep face, fulfil the demands of society and religion. ‘Then Ruth disappeared’. Another laconic, simple sentence, which primarily gives the meaning that no one saw her or knew of her whereabouts. There might be a secondary meaning to this sentence: she might have vanished, almost in an absurd fashion, like what happens in an Aichinger short story, “Seegeister/Lake Ghosts”, (Steinhauer, p.299): ‘*Oder die Frau, die vergeht, sobald sie ihre Sonnenbrille abnimmt. Das war nicht immer so.*’ (‘Or the woman who vanishes as soon as she takes off her sunglasses. It wasn’t always so’). This is a kind of Gogol absurdity. “Soundtracks” is not absurd in an Aichinger or in a Gogol sense, but it creates a ghostly, telescopic timeframe where lines of demarcation become fluid: ‘…the meticulous parallels melted into each other in a distance, a pseudo-distance, there is never anything but the isolated self’.

As we move closer to the central truth and action of this story, the language is still taut, echoing biblical parallelism, as if the language of the story is in fact imitating the parallel lines of the railway. ‘Defunct purposes. Defunct pasts’ refer to the Victorian railway station and its fanciful cut stone and little turrets – ‘defunct’ is not simply ‘no longer used’; it can also be ‘no longer existing’. Disappeared, gone, never to be regained: that is rather like Ruth’s youth and years of her life, self-destructed, self-destroyed.

We are not told what happens in the intervening years. But there is a child, also called Ruth; but everything can be undone in an eyeblink and reduced to: ‘Rust and the rotting timber’. The alliteration is still biblical as well as being Anglo-Saxon. This story also uses the full stop almost as a caesura: ‘Defunct purposes. Defunct pasts.’ These techniques, not always deliberate or conscious, push this prose into the realms of poetry and in so doing garner yet more tension

and more tautness, which enhances the breathless, laconic quality of the story as it packs a complex lifetime into a very short story indeed.

There is a ‘mounting terror’, which has been there since the beginning, since the opening shots, almost from a machine gun - shocking, terrifying and deadly. Now, the ‘one’ becomes Ruth, or Ruth becomes the ‘one’ and Ruth is there, on the edge of the platform, with her own little girl, but Ruth, the seventeen-year-old is also there, as if that reality, that spent memory and image can never be erased.

The attempt to silence the past, to erase the image and the memory, causes the horrific death of the child. But that horror is confined and compressed into the final image, an image which resonates and is prepared for at the beginning of the story…’the ooze of broken stone …’, ‘looking down at the little teeth on the tracks’. It is a powerful and disturbing image, which serves to tell what has happened, though it has become rather like an analogy in the context, as that detail would hardly be an isolated detail in the aftermath of the train hitting the child. But we accept it, without overtly remembering that the limestone, broken and otherwise, is in fact made of calcium, like teeth.

Towards the end of the story, as all the past reappears for Ruth, there is a renewed emphasis on intelligence, even on genius, and the barbs appear again. This time, they are aimed at middle class women of a certain age, though Ruth’s class, while not specified, must also be middle class, or so it would seem. It is not clear if these barbs and innate criticisms weaken the story or not. They are part of the fabric which allows the story to move forward, but they are definitively the work of a young writer. A writer who is earnest about issues of class, education, access to education; who generalizes about the non-focused students, ‘the gin-and-scruffy set’

– that phrase is rather harsh, it is a blanket phrase of disapproval. It carries distain for the students, for their dissipation, for the squandering of their lives and talents, for the fact that they can afford to drink spirits and that they are not too concerned with personal hygiene. It is judgemental.

This story was written early 1977. Therefore I was much closer to my own experience of education; in fact education had been the most significant experience in my life to that point. I was then aged twenty-four, young in every sense and ready to make sweeping statements and generalized assumptions.

By the end of the story, the title is seen as apt, the voices are there again, they are from Ruth's time at school, mocking, encouraging, celebrating, applauding – but the sounds, the voices become nightmarish and may point to a breakdown, a schizophrenia, giving cause for the horrific action.

This may in fact, be a very fine short story, full of the exuberance of a youthful writer, who stretches language to do the things she wants it to do, with flourish, as if she has just been given a new paintbox and lots of blank paper.

Conclusion

I might now ask what is the cumulative effect of these short stories on the reader? I might also venture an answer as I am now become the reader. These stories, above all, create a definite atmosphere. It is a rural landscape, not just western in its delineation, but it is grounded in the limestone and peat plains of East Galway. There are linguistic brushstrokes, as it were: 'panicles of elderblossom'; 'the black earth coming through the meagre grass'; 'the fecundating boglands waiting to infiltrate, undo the precision' [of the railway station]. There are recognisable monastic sites and features of light and sky and the shifting seasons. These are all particular and local but mostly can be replicated throughout Ireland. That is done by a careful use of language, it is done from sentence to sentence so that the reader is engaged and then touched by the intensity of these stories. Each story lets the reader into a hermetically sealed world, very often the world of a young Irish girl's experience of a Catholic education.

The energy and engagement of this young writer is palpable. The expectation was within herself - and certainly within the forces of influence: critics, academics, editors, The Arts Council, et al, - that she would produce a novel. It was considered the logical sequence. It did not happen then, to a certain extent; I did not continue to write short stories, but I translated the methods of narrative which I had practiced in these stories – assonance, alliteration, echoes, complex threads of connection between character and landscape – to drama and to poetry. In a sense many of these elements already belonged to poetry, but I began to write a longer, more narrative poem, telling a story within the poem but trying to keep the necessary tension. I did that in Irish and in English.

I have concentrated on and published poetry, six collections to date with two more in preparation, in English and Irish since these stories. I have done very much what I wanted to do rather than what I ought to do in terms of development as a writer. That is an interesting position to strike, and I feel that I can do it with an authority which feeds back to my initial confidence and self-assurance as a young writer.

> In Rita Kelly's debut collection I'm glad to say that we have something which can, so to speak, proudly stand on its own two feet. Quite simply, it's one of the finest collections I've read in a long time.
>
> -John Dunne, "Good & Averagely Good" *Books Ireland.* September 1986

It is very heartening that these stories are seen as living stories, pertinent to today's readers and still fresh in the approach to narrative structuring and the mapping of cultural forces. Lilliput Press is considering a reissue of the collection.

Works Citied

Aichinger, I. ‘Seegeister/Lake Ghosts’ in H. Steinhauer, Ed., *German Stories/Deutsche Novellen*. New York, Bantam 1961

Derrida, Jacques and Alan Bass. *Writing and Difference*. London: Routledge, 2001

Dewaele, J-M et al. *Theory and Practice of Second Language Acquisition*. Do girls have all the fun? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *2 (1),* 41-63. 2016

Hoffman, E. *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language.* London/New York: Penguin Books, 1989

Grosjean, F. *Life as a Bilingual.* Cambridge University Press, 2021

Kelly, Rita. *Towards a Definition of the Creative Process*. MA Thesis. Waterford Institute of Technology, 2007

Kelly, Rita. *The Whispering Arch and Other Stories*. Dublin: Arlen House, 1986

Lawrence, D.H. *Women in Love.* London: Penguin Books, 1996

Liddell & Scott. *Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: University Press, 1858

Ní Dhuibhne, Éilís. *The Dancers Dancing.* Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999

Ó Riagáin, P. *Language policy and social reproduction: Ireland 1893-1993*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997

Ó Riagáin, P. Irish language production and reproduction 1981-1996. In Fishman, J. (ed.): ‘Can threatened languages be saved? (Multilingual Matters 116)’. *Clevedon: Multilingual Matters*, 195-214. 2001

Ó Riagáin, P. Relationships between attitudes to Irish, social class, religion and national identity in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. In: *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 10, 4, 369-393. 2007

Saunders, George. *A Swim in a Pond in the Rain*. London: Bloomsbury, 2021

Woodhouse, S.C. *Latin-English & English-Latin Dictionary*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961

Bibliography

A Dream Recurring & Other Stories & Poems. Maxwell House Winners 2. Arlen House, Dublin 1980.

Nordquist, R. *Parataxis* (Grammar & Prose style) ThoughtCo, February 16, 2021, thoughtco.com/parataxis-grammar-and-prose-style -1691574

O'Brien, Kate, *The Land of Spices.* Virago Press, London 1988.

Appendix 1

Publications by Rita Kelly

Terms of Biology. Dublin: Schools & Colleges, 1974.

Dialann sa Díseart (le hEoghan Ó Tuairisc*)*. Dublin: Coiscéim, 1981.

An Bealach Éadóigh. Dublin: Coiscéim, 1984.

The Whispering Arch & Other Stories. Dublin: Arlen House, 1986.

Farewell/Beir Beannacht. Dublin: Attic Press, 1990.

Travelling West. Dublin: Arlen House, 2000.

Kelly reads Bewick. Dublin: Arlen House, 2001.

The Pig is Unclean - Limited edition. California, 2006.

Turas go bun na Spéire. Conamara; Cló IarChonnachta, 2009

Further Thoughts in a Garden. Ennistymon: Salmon Poetry, 2013.

Le Gean - Marana ar Litreacha ó Mhairtín Ó Direáin. Dublin: Coiscéim, 2020.

*The Moving Point of Change – New Collection of Poetry***.** Ennistymon: Salmon Poetry, due 2023.

Ard na hAille - cnuasach nua filíochta. Dublin: Coiscéim, due 2023.

Awards granted to Rita Kelly

Irish Times/Merriman Poetry Award, 1976.

Listowel Writers' Week Award, 1976.

Arts Council National Writer's Workshop Award, moderator Anthony Cronin, 1977.

Arts Council National Writer's Workshop Award, moderator John McGahern, 1979.

Maxwell House Short Story Award, 1980.

Seán Ó Riordáin Memorial Poetry Prize at the Oireachtas, 1981.

Arts Council Bursary – 1986, 2000, 2006, 2011, 2018.

Samhain/Smurfit Poetry Award, 2011.

Patrick & Katherine Kavanagh Memorial Award 2012.

Heinrich Bőll Residency on Achill Island 2017.

Editor

Kelly, Rita and Conleth Ellis. *POETRY IRELAND REVIEW.* Issue 13, 1985

Kelly, Rita. *Carlow Writer's Anthology.* Carlow: 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988

Kelly, Rita. *From Here to the Horizon, Laois Writer's Anthology***.** Laois: 1999

Kelly, Rita. *Cavan Writer's Anthology*. Cavan: 2000

Kelly, Rita. *Kilkenny Broadsheet***.** Kilkenny: 2002

Anthologies – in which short stories and poems by Rita Kelly have been published

A Dream Recurring. Dublin: Arlen House, 1986.

Modern Irish Short Stories. ed C Walsh. Dublin: *The Irish Times*, 1986.

Tijdschrift voor Poezie. ed Eugène van Itterbeek. Amsterdam, 1986.

An Fhilíocht Chomhaimseartha. ed C Ó Coigligh. Dublin: Coiscéim, 1987.

Poets Abú. Cork, 1988.

die horen. Frankfurt, 1988.

Wildish Things. ed Ailbhe Smythe. Dublin: Attic Press, 1989.

Territories of the Voice. ed L DeSalvo et al. Boston: Beacon Press, 1989.

Sweeping Beauties. Dublin: Attic Press, 1989.

Signals. Dublin: Educational Company, 1990.

Five Irish Poets. Milan, 1990.

Irishe Frauen. Munich: DTV, 1990.

Stories by Contemporary Irish Women. ed D Casey. Syracuse: University Press Syracuse, 1990.

Irland Journal. Frankfurt, 1990.

Beziehunges-weise. Wiesbaden: Atna, 1991.

The Kilkenny Anthology. ed Macdara Woods. Kilkenny, 1991.

State of the Art. ed David Marcus. London: Sceptre, 1993.

Sruth na Maoile - Modern Gaelic Poetry of Scotland & Ireland. ed Michael Davitt & Iain Mac Dhòmhnaill. Dublin: Canongate/Coiscéim, 1993.

L'Encrier 53/54. ed Isabelle Poncet-Runand et al. Strasbourg, 1995.

*Krino***.** ed Gerald Dawe. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1996.

Irish Christmas Stories 11. ed David Marcus. London: Bloomsbury, 1997.

Poésie Europe. ed Karl-Heinz Knauff (49th Frankfurt Bookfair Ed) Frankfurt, 1997.

The Literary Review. (Irish issue). New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University, 1997.

Celtic Anthology of Poetry. Berlin, 1997

Éigse an Aeir. ed Cathal Poirtéir. Dublin: Coiscéim/RTÉ, 1998.

Or Volge L'Anno. ed Marco Sonzogni. Dublin: Dedalus,1998.

Out the Clara Road. ed Rita Ann Higgins. Offaly, 1999.

An Bhileog Bhán/The White Page. ed Joan McBreen. Ennistymon: Salmon Poetry, 1999.

The Anchor Book of New Irish Writing. eds J. Somer and JJ Daly. New York: Random House, 2000.

Departures Vol 4 2000. Special Tribute to Cyril Ó Céirín. Miltown Malbay, 2000.

The Clifden Anthology. ed Brendan Flynn, 2002.

Off the Wall. ed Niall McMonagle. Dublin: Marino, 2002.

*Field Day Anthology Vols. IV-V***.** Cork: Cork University Press, 2002.

An Guth 1. ed R Gorman. Dublin: Coiscéim, 2003.

Voices & Poetry of Ireland (*Book + CD).* London: HarperCollins, 2003.

Backyards of Heaven. eds John Ennis & Stephanie McKenzie. Newfoundland & Waterford: Scop and WIT, 2003.

An Guth 2. ed R Gorman. Dublin: Coiscéim, 2004.

P is for Poetry. ed Seamus Cashman. Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2004.

From Mairgy to Slieve Bloom. ed J O'Brien. Laois, 2005.

An Guth 4. ed R Gorman. Dublin: Coiscéim, BÁC, 2006.

NAE Trimestrale de Cultura 17. ed G Adamo. University of Cagliari, 2006.

The Echoing Years. eds J Ennis, et al. Newfoundland & Waterford: Scop and WIT,2007.

Gold. ed C Barry. Laois, 2008.

Filíocht Ghrá na Gaeilge. ed C Mac Murchaidh. Dublin: Cois Life, 2008.

Irish Pages. Vol 4 No 1. ed C Agee. Belfast: 2009.

The Irish Catullus/One Gentleman of Verona. ed R Sheehan. Dublin: AA Farmar, 2010.

To the Winds Our Sails: Irish Writers Translate Galician Poetry. eds Mary O'Donnell and Manuela Palacios. Ennistymon: Salmon Poetry, 2010.

Windows 20, eds H Brett & N Monahan. Cavan: 2012.

Chinesische Transvestiten & other Stories. ed G Haefs. Vienna: Songdog Verlag, 2014.

The Stony Thursday Book No. 14. ed M O' Donnell. Limerick, 2015.

Vierertreffen. eds G Haeffs & K Braun. Kiel: Editions Narrenflug, 2016.

Then There was Light. eds PJ Cunningham & J Kearney. Bray: Ballpoint Press, 2016.

Even the Daybreak: 35 Years of Salmon Poetry. ed J Lendennie. Ennistymon: Salmon Poetry, 2016.

An Linn Bhuí 23. eag P Ó Macháin & A Nic Dhonnchadha. An Rinn: 2019.

Gaillimh: Díolaim Cathrach. eag B Ó Conchubhair. Gaillimh: CIC, 2020.

Meascara ón Aer. eag M MacConghail. Dublin: Coicéim, 2020.

The Art of the Glimpse. ed Sinead Gleeson. London: Head of Zeus, 2020.

Appendix 2

Magazines, journals and newspapers which include the work of Rita Kelly – short stories, poems, reviews and critical articles

Innti, Nos. 3, 4, 9, 12.

Feasta, March 1976, May 1976, June 1976, July 1976, October 1976, March 1977, July 1977, March 1978, May 1978, June 1978

Comhar, July 1976, November 1977, June 1983, July 1984, October 1985, April 1987

The Irish Press, 5 January 1974, 16 March 1974, 25 May 1974, 15 June 1974, 27 July 1974, 1 February1975, 22 March 1975, 17 May 1975, 28 June 1975, 23 August 1975, 18 October 1975, 10 January 1976, 31 January 1976, 18 February 1976, 27 March 1976, 7 August 1976, 21 August 1976, 8 September 1976, 23 September 1976, 23 October 1976, 17 November 1976, 25 November 1976, 23 February 1977, 19 March 1977, 12 January 1980, 24 January 1980, 21 June 1980, 3 September 1981, 23 June 1983, 12 April 1984.

Broadsheet, ed Hayden Murphy. 27 March 1976, 7 August 1976, 21 August 1976, 8 September 1976, 23 September 1976

The Irish Times, 18 September 1975, 23 August 1975, 2 June 1976, 14 August 1984

Hibernia, 22 November 1974, 24 January 1975, 18 April 1975.

Books Ireland, 1980s, 1990s

The Literary Review, ed Anne Scott. July 1981, September 1981.

Gorey Details, ed James Liddy. 1982.

Scríobh 5, ed Seán Ó Mórdha. 1981.

The Belle, eds Maurice Scully & Kevin Kiely. 1978.

Poetry Ireland Review, Nos 11, 13, 21.

European Association for the Promotion of Poetry Review, Leuven, Vol. 3, No 4. 1984.

Riverine, ed Edward Power. 1987

Departures, ed John Doorty. 1988.

Women's Studies International Forum, ed Ailbhe Smyth. Pergamon Press, U.S. Vol 11, No. 4

Anois, 16 September 1984, 23 September 1984, 7 October 1984, 14 October 1984, 31 March 1985, 8 April 1985, 30 June 1985, 11 August 1985

die horen, eds B Freitag & H. Oeser. Vol. 33, no. 3. Germany.

Éigse Carlow, ed Rita Kelly 1979.

Appendix 3

Reviews, Critical Articles and Commentary on the work of Rita Kelly

Irish Times, 15 August 1975, 23 August 1975, 14 March 1986 (Caroline Walsh), 5 April 1986 (Mary Leland).

Irish Press, 2 June 1976, 21 January 1982 (Michael Davitt), 1980 (Lucille Redmond).

Comhar, September 1976 (Clíodhna Ó Snodaigh), December 1982 (Máirín Nic Eoin), May 1985 (Eoghan Ó hAnluain), July 1985 (Micheál Ó hUanacháin), August 1985 (Conleth Ellis).

Inniu, 17 September 1976; 20 August 1982 (Risteárd Ó Glaisne).

Feasta, August 1976 (Breandán Ó hEithir), February 1983 (Risteárd Ó Glaisne).

Anois, 6 January 1985 (Máirín Nic Eoin), 7 April 1985 (Peter Sirr & Gréagóir Ó Dúill), 19 May 1985 (Proinsias Ó Drisceoil).

Innti, 1985 (Louis de Paor).

Books Ireland, May 1985 (Douglas Sealy), May 1986 (Jeremy Addis), September 1986 (John Dunne), December 1986 (Jeremy Addis), February 1987 (Brighid Uí Éigeartaigh).

Sunday Tribune, 1 February 1981 (Alan Titley), 18 May 1986 (Nuala O'Faolain).

New Hibernia, May 1986 (Kate Robinson).

Irish Independent, 1980 (Kate Cruise O'Brien), 3 May 1986 (Gerry Colgan).

Sunday Independent, 15 June 1986 (John F. Deane).

Evening Herald, 10 April 1986 (Ferdia MacAnna).

Honest Ulsterman 93, 1992 (Medbh McGuckian).

Poetry 167, Nos 1-2, 1995 (Dennis O'Driscoll).

Unveiling Treasures. "Rita Kelly". Ann Owens Weekes. Dublin: Attic Press, 1993.

Irish Poetry since Kavanagh. “Innti and Onward: The New Poetry in Irish”. Alan Titley. Dublin: Four Courts, 1996.

Appendix 4

Some Critical responses to the work of Rita Kelly

Rita Kelly's debut collection I'm glad to say that we have something which can, so to speak, proudly stand on its own two feet. Quite simply, it's one of the finest collections I've read in a long time. - John Dunne. *Books Ireland*. September 1986.

…Some of the stories are almost, but not quite, a fairly conventional blend of narrative, dialogue, and interior monologue, but what sets them apart is the author's fierce refusal to resort to cliché or feeble sentimentality. – Ditto.

Intruders opens with an amusing satire on the teaching of Irish in our schools, and ends, quite unexpectedly, with a beautifully-handled fantasy scene. – Ditto.

Some stories are written in an elliptical, introspective and poetic style which demands full attention, and I found them, especially on second reading, even more impressive still. – Ditto.

The characterisation is perfect throughout …you know you are reading about real people and not the sort of disposable dummies which litter so much of the Irish literary landscape. – Ditto.

…she has expertly assimilated her influence and arrived at a bold, adventurous style of her own. – Ditto.

[With this collection] Rita Kelly has pushed out of the platitudes of the Irish short story form into a world more deeply inner, more freshly imaginative. - John F. Deane, *Sunday Independent,* 15 June 1986.

Her style is technically excellent, evocative and curiously understated; stories which implied much more than they stated, stories which stayed and haunted. - Kate Cruise O'Brien, *Irish Independent,* 4 June 1980.

Her tone and prose rhythms are so close to poetry that the reader has to make an unusual effort to tease out the compelling imagery and the short, tough, pulsing prose in order to get within the stories. - Mary Leland, *Irish Times,* 5 April 1986.

Her work is challenging because it captures the sense without ignoring the intellect. She also exposes a sense of humour of surprizing quality – probably by now it must be admitted that she is at least a distinctive writer. Later work may prove that she is unique. - Ditto.

…many of the stories have a preoccupation with light and shade, set against rather barren terrain, which would seem to owe almost as much to the European tradition of landscape painting than to Irish writing. - Ferdia MacAnna. *Evening Herald,* 10 April 1986.

She is a master poet in English. Her Irish poetry has a gritty individuality of content. She is a love-poet of great lyric power and beauty, but her range is much wider than that. Her startling capacity to transmute brutal experience into universal significance could hardly be better exemplified. - Máire Mhac an tSaoi. *Poetry Ireland Review,* No 30, 1990.

Rita Kelly's poetry is among the most interesting published in Irish today. Her art has an appropriate wordsmithiness. - Alan Titley, *Irish Poetry since Kavanagh.* Dublin: Four Courts, 1996.

Rita Kelly's poetry often touches on themes of brutality and tenderness in relations between family members as well as the range of emotions between lovers. She writes of the demands of loving and the loss of the beloved. She uses to great effect the resources and the resonances of the elegiac tradition. She is aware of death's shadow, and she is an elegist of considerable powers. - Joseph Heininger, *Irish Women's Writers, A- Z Guide,* ed A Gonzalez. Connecticut: Greenwood Publications, 2006.