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Via Holyhead: Material and Metaphoric Meanings between Ireland and Wales

The opening pages of James Joyce's *Ulysses* place Stephen Dedalus atop a Martello Tower on a Dublin headland, commanding a view of the 'snotgreen' and 'scrotumtightening' Irish sea. The sea comes in view via the narrative perspective of the insufferable Buck Mulligan, who refers to the poet Swinburne as 'Algy' and quotes Homer in the original Greek. Buck's 'wellfed' musings are however an important reminder of the positioning of Stephen's consciousness in this markedly marine environment. Invited by Buck to 'come and look' the 'great sweet mother' sea ('Our mighty mother'), Stephen sees only 'the water' and 'the mailboat clearing the harbourmouth of Kingstown'. References to the mailboat, to Kingstown and Holyhead, and to other sea crossings continue throughout Joyce's novel, which bears the narrative imprint of a travel network created in order to facilitate communication between Britain and Ireland; the imposition of British military force; the extraction of Irish commodities; and the movement of peoples. Later it is the Englishman Haines, 'The sea's ruler', who 'gazed southward over the bay, empty save for the smokeplume of a mailboat, vague on the bright skyline, and a sail tacking by the Muglins'.

This 'ring of bay and skyline' around Dublin defines a space marked by colonial infrastructure, power structures so submerged within the mundane world of early twentieth-century travel and transport as to be almost invisible. It is almost as if this opening 'Telemachus' section of *Ulysses* is instructing us to see this mundane marine world anew: 'Look at the sea. What does it care about offences?' instructs Buck Mulligan,

and the reader too focuses on the particular corner of 'sea and headland' around Dublin Bay: we see Stephen 'gazing over the calm sea towards the headland' and join Stephen and Buck in 'looking towards the blunt cape of Bray Head that lay on the water like the snout of a sleeping whale'.

The injunction to look has to be followed with care, however. The narrative implications are hardly simply that Britain rules the waves. The desire to bring in focus things and beliefs that we 'matter-of-factly experience' as objects that we see 'simultaneously close up and from afar' might be understood in terms of Benedict Anderson's remarks on 'doubled vision' in his study, *Specter of Comparisons.*

Anderson suggests that is the enforced or sudden loss of the 'quotidian' aspect of national life and its reframing via the experience of 'exile' that generates the meanings of nationality. Anderson goes on to argue that a loss of local scale is compensated for by scaling upwards to the national: intimate local knowledge of place mutates into the abstractions of national space, just as the rich past mutilated by colonial history could be reimagined as immutable tradition by new, future-facing, nationalisms.

Such a 'transfer of loyalties' from the local to the national remains however 'an uncertain and incomplete process', as Marjorie Howes argues. Howes helpfully draws out the implications of Anderson's argument in her book, *Colonial Crossings,* when she suggests that 'the national is to be grasped most fully in its relation to other scales, rather than in opposition to them'. Crossings of the Irish sea involve such a recalibration of the relationship between scales and also yield significant instances of the uncertain and incomplete 'doubled vision' of nationality.

Close attention to the inscription of infrastructure in literature yields a particular set of metaphors, dispersed across the material world of sea routes, road and railways. The lived experience of these 'actual physical spaces' exceeds the boundaries of national sovereignty. With Joyce, Howes argues, we find a compelling case of the relation between the 'complex materiality of geographical space' and the 'metaphorical use of geographical movement'. In *Portrait of the Artist*, for example, Joyce evades the dictates of nationalist geography by invoking a 'complex and dispersed' sense of place that

cannot be 'metaphorized as space'. In both cases, Howes, argues, 'different spatial scales' are significant, with movements from the national to the local redounding upon and resonating within those between the material to the metaphorical. (Her example concerns the renunciation of which the national in the name of the local in Bloom's statement: 'Goodbye Ireland I'm going to Gort').

A particular kind of uncertainty experienced via sea journeys is ramified within the literary texts which I want to discuss in this lecture, all of which focus on places that are nodes in the infrastructural network joining Ireland to Britain and marked, moreover, by the material and metaphorical meanings of transit. The early to mid-twentieth century texts discussed here retain richly compressed local meanings even as they swerve away from or towards Ireland and promise to bring the island into view as an abstract entity. Reading along the local scale and unpacking that density of reference to Irish places further reveals a particular set of concentrated meanings which cohere around Wales. First, though, some observations about the transport infrastructure joining Ireland to Britain via Wales.

TRAVEL AND THE TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

As Jo Guldi argues of Britain's infrastructure state more generally, rather than producing a coherent imperial unit, the transport revolution of the nineteenth century yielded 'political contest and wariness' between individuals and across the islands. Her recent book, *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State*, offers a compelling account of the many minor arguments and ambiguities which emerged from large scale infrastructural projects. In Telemachus, as the movements of Stephen's memory tracks those of the sea coast, the opening pages of *Ulysses* yields a notable instance of narrative uncertainty: Stephen remembers the 'bowl of white china' containing the 'green sluggish bile' vomited by his sick mother; this mingles with the 'dull green mass of liquid' held by the 'ring of bay and skyline' which enclose his vision. The uncertain working of the narrative focus registers Stephen's ambiguous feelings about his mother's death; while the references to liquid seem to reduce the sense of purpose still further, as if meaning itself is diluted by the references to bile and sea water, in a manner perhaps reminiscent of Julia Kristeva's theory of the boundary disturbances generated by abjection.

The sea thus moves between material and metaphoric meanings : at once a body of water crossed by mailboats and marked by tricky navigation spots like the Muglins rocks east of Dalkey island; but also located within a narrative which moves elements of its meaning from one place to another as per the operations of metaphor (Bray Head is like the snout of a sleeping whale). These material and metaphoric meanings are often condensed, as the dull green mass of the water in Dublin Bay mutates to become the 'sluggish bile torn up' from the 'rotting liver' of Stephen's mother. Another relevant example in *Ulysses* might be when Stephen discusses the definition of the word 'pier' with his students and himself imagines Kingstown pier as a 'disappointed bridge'.

The well known reference to Holyhead in Joyce enacts this complex movement between material and metaphoric meanings. At the end of *Portrait of the Artist,* the 'hurleystick'-bearing Davin 'Asked me was it true I was going away and why'. Stephen replies, 'Told him the shortest way to Tara was *via* Holyhead'. This reference to Tara (a site under excavation since the late nineteenth century) evokes the riches of a once proud Celtic civilization. Its consecration as sacred symbol of ancient Ireland had begun with accounts of a lost Gaelic kingship structure in eighteenth-century antiquarian histories, then moved through the interest of scholars such as George Petrie and John O'Donovan in the material traces of that past found around the Hill of Tara; their researches fostered and supported by the Ordnance Survey. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Tara had become a synonym for ancient Ireland: the Tara Brooch, for example, was found many miles from Tara, yet its great beauty and elegance meant that it could not be associated with any lesser place.

We might think then of Joyce as rebuking these claims to ancient grandeur via the mundane reference to the material realities of travel; in particular his narrative naming of the Welsh port on the north western Welsh island of Anglesey, through which so many thousands of Irish people made their way into Britain. The journey 'via Holyhead' had long been an arduous and hazardous one, as well as one through which generations of Anglo-Irish writers understood aspects of their divided identity: Jonathan Swift is notable in this regard and his writing can be seen to inaugurate many of the tropes of dislocation that inform Elizabeth Bowen's observation that 'the Anglo-Irish were really only at home in mid-crossing between Holyhead and Dun Laoghaire'. Bowen's *The Last*

September imagines a character, Lois, who 'shut her eyes and tried - as sometimes when she was seasick, locked in misery between Holyhead and Kingstown, to be enclosed in a nonentity, in some ideal no-place, locked and clear as bubble'. This specifically Anglo-Irish sense of dislocation becomes in a writer like John Banville a more generalised expression of the disorientations of identity. The narrator of Banville's *The Book of Evidence* recollects his voyage from Holyhead over the Irish Sea in these terms: 'This sunset, for instance, how lavishly it was laid on, the clouds, the light on the sea, that heartbreaking, blue-green distance, laid on, all of it, as if to console some lost suffering wayfarer.'

These metaphoric invocations of Holyhead bear the imprint of the material facts of travel. Holyhead was linked to London via a network of road and rail with a layered history: the Holyhead road, now the A5, follows an old Roman Road that runs from North Wales through Shrewsbury and the marches, right into Marble Arch via Cricklewood and Kilburn. That route was modernised from the early 1800s when Thomas Telford built a suspension bridge over the Menai Straits and improvements to the highway followed. From about the 1830s, a number of competing different rail routes started to run from Holyhead to London. Another key change concerned the introduction of steam on the Irish sea. From about 1820, steam ships carrying mail had made their way between Kingstown (Dun Laoghaire until the visit of George IV in 1821 and soon to be renamed as such by the Free State) and Holyhead in North Wales, and the journey became a somewhat more straightforward matter (part of what Margaret Cohen calls the 'routinization of ocean travel' in the transition from sail to steam). In terms of timings, a journey that could take up to 4 days before Telford's road became a matter of some 40 or so hours, with improvements in steam technology and rail links reducing the journey still further to about ten or twelve hours, including a 4 hour sea crossing.

It is along this routinized route which I locate my readings, as part of a larger research project in which I have been following the sea routes, roads and railways that link Ireland to Britain. In Anderson's terms, I am making a critical move from what can seen seem a very matter-of-fact experience to critical perspective that is at once 'simultaneously close up and from afar'. In the case of my infrastructural line of analysis, then, a 'complex and dispersed' sense of place is reproduced within the dense network

of particular journeys between Ireland and Britain via Holyhead; a trajectory that defies nation-centred analysis.

Joyce crosses material and metaphoric meanings over what is already itself a highly crossed route. The reference to Holyhead scales the facts of political Union and the experiences of mass migration down to a single sea port and invites us to attend to its special resonances. Yet few readers have paused on the specifically Welsh meanings of passing via Holyhead, preferring to understand Joyce in terms of the modernist trope of exile rather than the realities of emigration. Seamus Deane, in *Strange Country*, goes so far as to say that exile in Joyce is 'the high cultural form of emigration'. That very tension though — between emigration and exile —might be just another version of the crossing of material and metaphoric meanings.

So how can we trace the 'complex materialities' of sea, road and rail travel and their 'metaphorization' within literary texts? In *Ulysses* we clearly have an especially intense case of a narrative which keeps pace with the relationship between the geographically dispersed matter of everyday life and the metaphors which reimagine and rescale that material. But the literature of early twentieth-century Ireland and Wales yields many more instances—routine instances, you could say —of material journeys in tension with metaphorical meanings. The sea crossings and subsequent journeys by rail and road that joined Ireland to Britain generate cultural tensions which can be seen to cohere around particular places, and the remainder of this discussion considers some of these locations. I begin with Euston Station, the terminus of the Dublin-London train for much of the period discussed.

EUSTON

Katharine Tynan is described by John Wilson Foster as 'an example of a popular Irish writer who regularly plied the Kingstown-Holyhead-Euston route'. Rather than this 'regular' experience making 'British culture' seem like 'second nature', as Foster suggests however,[1] Tynan's writing yields fascinating insights into the dissonances of travel and the narrative shaping of a doubled vision of nationality.

In Tynan's autobiography, the early life which she recalls via 'mists, shadows and rain' is notably concerned with instances of travel. In one episode, Tynan recounts how she left her friends at Euston and arranged to call at their hotel on Liverpool Street; only to discover, she says, that there were 'six Liverpool Streets' as well as 'various Liverpool Roads, Crescents, &c.' Not able to find her friends, Tynan became 'violently homesick' and cries into the coffee cup she is finally offered by another friend. Her poem 'At Euston Station' addresses this experience of sudden dislocation and loss.

The poem is written not from the perspective of the recently arrived but rather voices a long-time migrant who has lost what had been an anchoring affective link with home: 'Yon is the train I used to take / In the good days of yore, / When I went home for love's dear sake, / I who go home no more.' The migrant voice is oddly located here, as the poetic perspective moves between points of view: the title locates the poem 'At Euston Station', but the syntax imagines an experience of travel that is confined to the past ('the train I used to take'). The perspective is that of an outsider to the experience, alert to the sound of Irish voices (Oh, that's an Irish voice I hear, / And that's an Irish face,) but not sharing their journey. The poem ends:

> There is the train I used to take.
> Be blest from shore to shore,
> O land of love and of heart-break!
> But I go home no more.

The train here warrants an outpouring of sentimental feeling on the loss of home. But the train also expresses a more modern kind of isolation, one generated via the very experience of a being enmeshed within a network of connections. Maud Ellman's remarks on the 'trauma of intersubjectivity' produced by the encounter with nets and networks within modernism are relevant here. Poems such as Tynan's, and the other texts to which I am about to turn in this Euston section of my talk, should give us pause to consider the rather rash disavowal of the role of trains in Irish modernism, expressed by Joe Cleary in *Outrageous Fortune* and enthusiastically taken up by Michael Rubenstein. Rubenstein's book, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism and the Postcolonial,* is focused on the role of public works (water, gas, electricity) in Joyce,

Samuel Beckett and Flann O'Brien. Rubenstein argues for an Irish antipathy to utility which emerges from the experience of famine and colonialism. The manifestations of the British infrastructure state in nineteenth-century Ireland, he argues, were 'not only humiliating, but grandly, historically traumatizing'.[2] Such a concepualisation of infrastructure in terms of the 'brutal' British state is in need of considerable historical nuance.

Grand historical trauma is notably missing from the noted first meeting of W.B. Yeats and James Joyce, at Euston. W.B. Yeats had heard from Lady Gregory about Joyce's 'plan of going to Paris to study.' 'It seems that you leave Dublin Monday night', wrote Yeats to Joyce, 'and cross to Paris Tuesday night. If I am right I hope you will breakfast with me on Tuesday morning. I shall set my alarm clock and be ready for you as soon as the train gets in. You can lie down on my sofa afterwards and sleep off the fatigue of the journey. You can dine with me and catch your Paris train afterwards.' Yeats duly met Joyce on the Tuesday, walking the short distance across Euston Road from his flat in Woburn Buildings to meet the train for 6am.[3]

The ordinariness of this encounter just off the Euston Road can be refracted via the perspective of another literary migrant, Sean O'Casey, who insists on the station's grim modernity while also suggesting that it has a heady, potential meaning in the narratives of the lives of Irish migrants. Writing in the late 1940s, O'Casey recalled arriving in London in March 1926; characteristically recasting his own experiences (which were those of a journey to see the London performance of Juno and the Paycock and to collect the Hawthornden Prize) via a third person 'Sean', who has 'a confident air and a fluttering heart'. It is 'Sean' for whom Euston stands in sharp contrast to 'the lovely coast of Wales, lacing the land's edge from Holyhead to Chester' and Sean too who exclaims 'Euston! Alight here as many Irish had done before him; a short visit so often extended to take the emigrant's rest of life.' (The tension around 'take' is clear).

O'Casey continues, seemingly interested in capturing the random simultaneity of station life as in these emigrant lives, yet pulled towards the weighty metaphors of city as currents of water:

> England! Sasna! Euston; a sprawling untidy place, dim and dark; tormented with many sounds — the clatter of trucks, the patter of hurrying, fussy feet; babble and squeak of passengers not sure of the right train or the proper platform; the sibilant hiss of steam; the sturdy smell of smoke; the soothing, sickly smell of oil; porters hurrying, guards sauntering amid the rustle of paper and magazine, bought by people who would never read the half of them; women sitting semi-alert on benches, waiting for the hands of a big clock to tell them when to move; streams of men, women and children, dropping from the train that had just stopped, pouring along under the grimy roof like an underground river towards an open sluice-gate, to divide into rivulets and trickles, spreading fanwise to different parts of the mammoth city.[4]

O'Casey's account of Euston at the verge of urban flux may be recast via the images of Thomas Kinsella's 'Handclasp at Euston', a poem which, like the description above, seems drawn to a modernist, near cinematic vision of ebb and flow of station life. The poem forms the first of a short three part sequence called 'Song' which first appeared in *Moralities* 1960. Read by Maurice Harmon as ' a single, representative portrait' of the 'economic stagnation' and 'indifference' of 1950s Ireland, this taut eight line poem compresses a range of material and metaphoric meaning.

Kinsella's eight lines seem to divide neatly between the figure of Murphy and that of the speaker, each of whom is allotted four lines. Murphy presents himself as the figure of the archetypal 1950s male Irish emigrant to London: chalk-white, presumably because covered in plaster dust from a building site; the uncanny comparison to a comedian or perhaps mime artist serving to single out the man from the social type, 'isolate … in the smoky glare'.

It is not only Murphy but the poetical adjective 'isolate' that seems to dwindle amidst the more prosaic world of milk churns and stowed luggage. Kinsella's poem prepares us for the switch into the first person via a highly condensed set of observations which – to return to Joycean terms – suggest the metaphorical abstractions of exile rather than the material experience of migration: 'Weight, / Person, race, the human, dwindle there.' Yet

the very onward movement of the dactyls here might be seen to conceal — or is it frame? — the word 'race'. Murphy's whiteness is reframed as an emigrant ethnicity free from racial difference, so that the blackness that comes from 'the sweat of exile' may disavow social realities of 1950s Britain even as it painfully draws our attention to the Irish emigrant experience.

The second half of the poem does return emphatically to these emigrant realities, ironically named here as exile, and coded in terms of greenness. The turn towards Wales is part of a steady westward trajectory that carries the speaker back to Ireland: 'Wales, / Wave and home'. The turn towards Wales and home might be associated with an epiphanic movement but it is one that registers darkness : the 'greener world' is that of rocks and ... 'thigh scales' refers to a particular type of seaweed: 'the "sea-rock" and the slippery clinging weed of the south coast of Dublin' giving what John Goodby calls the poem's 'Gothic dimension' a particular local force.[5]

NORTH WALES

In sending his migrant home via Wales, Kinsella invites an appreciation of the meanings of North Wales and its coastline within Irish culture. In this section, I discuss some of the ways in which North Wales shapes and is shaped by forms of material and metaphorical movement between Ireland and Britain.

James Joyce visited the North East Wales seaside town of Llandudno in July and August 1930 with Nora. Richard Ellman gives a very Arnoldian, Celticist account of Joyce's time in Llandudno, 'where he quelled his busy spirit momentarily on the strand'.[6] Ellmann imagines Joyce listening 'to Welsh, as several years before he had listened to Breton, trying to master the differences among the various Celtic languages'. But in fact it is the ordinariness of Joyce and Nora's trip to the seaside resort that concerns me here. Joyce had been in London, and then Oxford, and went to Llandudno for a holiday, before moving on to Paris that September. When the Welsh-American writer, William Dean Howells, visited Llandudno he wrote of his time on the north Wales coast that 'There are few places in those storied British Isles which are not honoured by some association with literature; but I suppose that Llandudno is as exempt as any can be.'[7]

Llandudno stands in for the everyday world in the Wandering Rocks chapter of *Ulysses*, where the absence of Dublin's Lord Mayor on holidays in Llandudno represents the discordant fallen world of Dublin civic life and the distance travelled from Fenian revolutionary politics. Andrew Gibson remarks on how 'the shift from the riven but politically vital Dublin of the 1880s to the Dublin of 1904 is represented in a Council meeting with 'nothing in order' and the Mayor 'in Llandudno'.

> Hell open to Christians they were having, Jimmy Henry said pettishly, about their damned Irish language. Where was the marshal, he wanted to know, to keep order in the Council chamber. And old Barlow the macebearer laid up with asthma, no mace on the table, nothing in order, no quorum even, and Hutchinson, the lord mayor, in Llandudno and little Lorcan Sherlock doing locum tenens for him. Damned Irish language, language of our forefathers.[8]

What Howells refers to as the 'doubtful obscurity'[9] of Llandudno helps us to think about these invocations of Llandudno's problematic everydayness – found in Matthew Arnold as well as in Joyce – beneath which lie the banal facts of infrastructural links between Britain and Ireland. Llandudno developed as a tourist destination because of the expansion of the railway network in North West Wales to meet the needs of the many London-bound Irish, notably members of parliament, professionals and migrant workers. 'Built to secure fast communication with Ireland, the Chester & Holyhead Railway soon became part of the British scene, with Rhyl, Colwyn Bay, Llandudno and Bangor developing into flourishing resorts'.[10] Traces of this reality emerge when Arnold's essay *On the Study of Celtic Literature* refers to the London and North Western Railway that transports people between 'the four miles of marshy peninsula' between Conway and Llandudno and also in Arnold's references to 'the charm of the Liverpool steamboats' that ply between Liverpool and Llandudno but also Liverpool and Dun Laoghaire (the route taken by the mail in this period).

Matthew Arnold's essay *On the Study of Celtic Literature* opens with its author in Wales, holidaying in Llandudno while he watches preparations for an *Eisteddfod* . Wales for Arnold represents both Celtic culture in its hour of revival and an unfathomable modernity. The nature of the seaside town itself, with the Eisteddfod events occurring

amidst bathers, vegetable sellers, donkey-boys, lodging houses and hotels and benefitting from modern transport links, captures this complexity.

In 1978, the Flintshire novelist Emyr Humphreys wrote a scathing attack on Arnold's essay, in which he memorably describes row of hotels invoked by Arnold — St George's Crescent in Llandudno — as 'an architectural scimitar lying across the dragon's throat'. Emyr Humphreys is a significant voice in the modernist literature of North-East Wales and his own remarkable novel, *A Toy Epic* (1958), reflects and refracts material and metaphorical forms of crossing to Ireland. *A Toy Epic* fashions a Welsh modernism in the image of Joyce's writing. The novel mirrors and splits the figure of Stephen Dedalus via its three part narration of the consciousness of a trio of young Welsh boys. We encounter Iowerth, Albie and Michael as they grow from their infant selves towards adulthood in ways that are deeply marked by the physical topography they inhabit.[11]

The narrative focus is on the north-east, the area around Rhyl and Humphrey's fictional seaside town of Llanelw. The novel opens on the perspective of Michael, 'brought up in a broad valley in one of the four corners of Wales'. References to the 'busy seaside town' of 'Llanwelw', ringed by mountains, situates the novel squarely within the network of seaside towns that grew up around the train network to Holyhead. Humphrey's ringing invocation of 'of the four corners of Wales', 'reaffirms' according to M. Wynn Thomas, 'the Welshness of a part of Wales that tends to be overlooked whenever the Welsh construct a mental image of their country'. Humphrey's north-eastern 'corner', Wynn Thomas argues, 'remains an unknown quantity, an unexplored locality the character of whose Welshness seems to be undecided, even problematic'.[12] In another Humphreys novel, *The Gift*, one character laughs as if at a joke when he is told that another comes from 'North East Wales'[13].

There is hardly space here to do justice to Humphrey's remarkable novel and its complex textual history in two languages,[14] but it is worth observing the role of Ireland and the Irish Mail train in the making of a very particular North-Eastern Welshness, and in the forging of a Welsh modernism. The 'problematic' Welshness of this north-east corner of Wales is a product of urban growth shaped by the rail network connecting Ireland to Britain. In *A Toy Epic*, one of the three boys puts nails on the train tracks that

run near his house only to retrieve them after the Irish Mail has passed ; another of the boys, more helplessly trapped in his community, imagines his consciousness as 'a meccano world shifting in my brain like the rails at Chester station'.

Reading *A Toy Epic* via Ireland and the Irish sea is to encounter evocative resonances with another key Welsh text of the mid twentieth century, R.S. Thomas's poem, 'Memories of Yeats Whilst Travelling to Holyhead' (published in his early collection *Stones in the Field*, in 1946). As with Humphreys, there is the acknowledgement of the influence of a major Irish modernist, in this case Yeats. More particularly, though, what we see are lines of influence which travel along the travel network between Ireland and Britain. Both Humphreys and R.S. Thomas achieve foundational moments in Welsh literary modernism by staging encounters with an Irishness that comes into view via infrastructural links.

R.S. Thomas, 'the defining poetic talent of post-war' Welsh-poetry,[15] made and remade his relationship with Yeats throughout his writing life. His early poem, 'Memories of Yeats Whilst Travelling to Holyhead', imagines a richly potent and just possible encounter between the young R.S. and the older Yeats, as the Irish poet made one of his regular journeys through Anglesey on the way to Holyhead and the boat and which opens with the line 'How often he went on this journey, think of it, think of it'. A just possible encounter, but an impossible one too, given the great gulf between 'the listening hilltops' of the island and 'the metrical train' heading to the harbour. These strains and impossibilities are registered in such negatively formulated questions as: 'Who would have refrained from addressing him here …?'

Patrick Crotty has noted how R.S. Thomas makes Yeats a kind of paragon of auratic silence (modeling the role later assumed by RS Thomas himself)[16] even at the period at which, as we know from reading Roy Foster's biography, the older Yeats was busily slipping back and forth between Ireland and Britain on visits to his aristocratic younger lovers in London. The figure of the poet as writing subject, Crotty suggests, slips too between the two poetic figures, so that a line like reality dwindling and the dream beginning might as well be Yeats's as R.S. Thomas's.

There is a substantial weight of intertextual reference here, which Thomas's poem passes through and through which later works continue to move: I might briefly mention Edward Thomas's 'Adlestrop' and Padraic Fallon's 'Yeats at Athenry', and will refer you also to Lawrence Ferlenghetti 'Reading Yeats … on the Thirdavenue El'. Thomas's metrical Welsh train resonates within Bernard O'Donoghue's 'The Rainmaker' with its journey from Crewe along the north-eastern Welsh coast to Bangor, and informs the image patterns of Andrew McNeillie's Owain Glyn Dwr sonnets, whose lines frame a remarkable refiguring of these crossings of sea, culture and history.

Returning to Holyhead via R.S. Thomas, however, is encounter the 'oval' of the great Welsh poet's life, from Holyhead to Chirk, returning through Manafon, Eglwys-fach, to the Llŷn peninsula and the view over to Anglesey. Infrastructural links to and from Ireland barely begin to register the complex cultural and linguistic realities of these deeply storied places. Joyce's Holyhead, on north western edge of this north west corner of Wales, is one such place: named Bretland by the Vikings, known as Mam Cymru or Mon Mam Cymru, the island of Ynys Môn or Angelsey has a special place in the Welsh imagination. Edward I starved the Welsh princes by cutting off supplies from Angelsey; Tacitus drew his account of the Welsh druids from there; while the Neolithic tombs at Bryn Celli Du and elsewhere on the island vividly remind us of the function of the Irish Sea as 'the great unit of Celtic civilization'.[17]

Having opened with the visual framing of the sea via Stephen's uncertain gaze, it is worth noting that now it is the work of cognition which is at stake: 'Think of it, think of it'. R.S. Thomas evokes a cognition that relies on what is 'sensed' and 'guessed' and which seems to turn against its own hesitantly expressed assumptions and towards the silence and darkness of 'the indifferent compartment'. Here in the space of the train carriage is the modernist version of interconnectivity of which Maud Ellmann has recently written – a modernism comprised of nets and networks associated with the violation of individual autonomy and with such related negative affects as paranoia.

The poem's conclusion though see the two poets 'hurled / Between the waves' white audience, the earth's dim screen, / In mutual silence closer than lover knit' and voices the merged perspective of the two men: 'I had known reality dwindle, the dream begin.'

The idea of waves as audience constitutes another version of the impossibility of this encounter , but returns us also to Joyce and to Stephen, who hears **'**Wavewhite wedded words shimmering on the dim tide' when, in Telemachus, he runs some lines from Yeat's Celticist poem 'Who Goes with Fergus' though his head: 'White breast of the dim sea. The twinning stresses, two by two.' In R.S. Thomas too, poetic metre is at the forefront of his images of the rhythmical train and the monosyllabic se : as if metre's marking function could help us to think about the recalibration of local and national scales with which I opened this discussion.

A highly metrical poem such as this one remakes the experience of crossing between cultures via sound as inscribed on the page: this is equally true of the texts by Tynan and Kinsella and Humphreys which I have discussed. The materiality of language as it is measured and scaled in poetic language presents a version of the move between material and metaphoric meanings but also, perhaps more importantly, signals the need for close and careful reading of their interrelationship across space and time : 'How often he went on this journey, think of it, think of it.'

NOTES

1. James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Oxford, 2008), 5.

2. *ibid,* 25: 'Kingstown pier, Stephen said. Yes, a disappointed bridge.'

3. *ibid*, 18.

4. *ibid,* 16: 'All Ireland is washed by the Gulf Stream.' / *ibid,* 18: Haines refers to *Hamlet* in his conversation with Dedalus, comparing the nearby cliffs and tower to Elsinore: '*That beetles o'er his base into the sea*.'

5. Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London, 1998), .
6. Marjorie Howes, *Colonial Crossings: Figures in Irish Literary History* (Dublin, 2006), 70-71.

7. Jo Guldi, *Roads to Power: Britain Invents the Infrastructure State* (USA, 2012).

8. Veronica Strang, in *The Meaning of Water* (Oxford, 2006), assumes that water is associated with place and stability, constituting the very stuff of local attachment. According to Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York, 1982), we disavow the maternal body and those fluids associated with it as abject – this is a necessary but painful stage: 'constitution of the self within gendered structures.'
9. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, 1988), 115, Michel de Certeau discusses the public transport dimension of metaphor, illustrating how fictions 'traverse and organize places; […] they make sentences and itineraries out of them.'

10. An early version of this epigram in the Trieste Notebook reads: 'The shortest way from the Cape of Good Hope to Cape Horn is to sail away from it. The shortest route to Tara is via Holyhead.' See Bruce Stewart, 'Joyce at Tara,' in Theo D'Haen and José Lanters (eds.), *Troubled Histories, Troubled Fictions: Twentieth-Century Anglo-Irish Prose* (Amsterdam, 1995), 61 (n.1).
11. Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton, 2010), 143.
12. Seamus Deane, *Strange Country: Modernity and Nationhood in Irish Writing Since 1790* (Oxford, 1998), 94.
13. See Marjorie Howes' treatment of 'material versus metaphorical geographical movement, the complex materialities of spatial scales versus their symbolic appropriation or metaphorization, and movement over space versus movement from one scale to another' in ''Goodbye Ireland I'm going to Gort:' geography, scale and narrating the nation' in Derek Attridge and Marjorie Howes (eds.), *Semicolonial Joyce* (Cambridge, 2000), 65. See also Wai Chee Dimock, "Scales of Aggregation: Prenational, Subnational, Transnational" in *American Literary History* 18.2 (2006), 219-228.
14. John Wilson Foster, *Irish Novels 1890-1940: New Bearings in Culture and Fiction* (Oxford, 2008), 34.
15. Michael Rubenstein, *Public Works: Infrastructure, Irish Modernism and the Postcolonial* (Notre Dame, 2010), 23.
16. WBY to JJ [25 November 1902], in Richard Ellmann (ed.), *Letters of James Joyce II* (New York, 1957), 17.
17. Sean O'Casey, *Mirror in My House: Autobiographies II* (New York, 1956), 2. O'Casey cites Aubrey Beardsley on the Oriental beauty and mystery of Euston 'seen at night and as if through a mist …' in *ibid,* 3. In this passage he sardonically comments not on the arch but on the platform itself.
18. Maurice Harmon, *Thomas Kinsella: Designing for the Exact Needs* (Dublin, 2008), xi-xii.
19. John Goodby, *Irish Poetry Since 1950: From Stillness into History* (Manchester, 2000), 78. John Jordan sees *Moralities* as a whole as Kinsella moving towards an aesthetic of impersonality. He remarks of this poem that the 'garish effulgence' of the first person is 'contained and shaded by the taut and epigrammatic form which Kinsella has carefully mastered'. See John Jordan, 'Off the Barricade: a Note on Three Irish Poets', in John Montagu and Thomas Kinsella (eds.), *The Dolmen Miscellany of Irish Writing* (Dublin and Oxford, 1962), 107-116 (111). Jordan apologises for having failed to understand this Dublin reference in his 1960 review of *Moralities.*
20. Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford, 1982), 639.
21. William Dean Howells, *Seven English Cities* (New York and London, 1909), 152.
22. 'Wandering Rocks', chapter 10 of *Ulysses*, is the chapter most notable for its cinematic splicing and cutting of times and spaces within the space of the city; there, what connections that can be observed between the fragmented scenes are provided by technologies of transport and communication: trams, motor cars, ambulances and a telephone.
23. William Dean Howells, *Seven English Cities*, 152.

24. Peter E. Baughan, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain, Vol. XI: North and mid Wales* (Devon, 1980), 19.

25. See M. Wynn Thomas's essay 'Emyr Humphreys: regional novelist?' in K.D.M. Snell (ed.), *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland 1800-1990* (Cambridge, 1998), 206: 'topography … transfigured so that it outwardly signifies the inner social and cultural structures of the locality'.
26. M. Wynn Thomas describes *A Toy Epic* as an anti-regional novel in so far as it disavows such limiting structures. See Thomas' essay 'Flintshire and the Regional Weather Forecast' in *New Welsh Review* 9 (1990), 10-15.

27. Thomas disucsses *The Gift* in 'Emyr Humphreys: regional novelist?' in K.D.M. Snell (ed.), *The Regional Novel in Britain and Ireland 1800-1990*, 201.

28. An English language novel in verse begun in 1940; a series of Welsh language radio half-hour scripts produced in 1957 and broadcast in 58; these become a Welsh language novel *Y Tri Llais* in summer of 1958; this is rewritten in English and published in November 1958.
29. According to M. Wynn Thomas in "R.S. Thomas and modern Welsh poetry" in Neil Corcoran (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century English Poetry* (Cambridge, 2007), 159:

> If Dylan Thomas was the definitive poetic talent of pre-Second World War Wales, then it was this other Thomas, culturally, politically and poetically his polar opposite, who became the defining poetic talent of post-war decades. It is therefore with a shock that one realises that R. S., who fully blossomed only after Dylan's death in 1953, was in fact a year older than his namesake.

30. Damian Walford Davies also notes 'the way in which this sketch of Yeats was to prove an uncanny proleptic delineation of Thomas himself, post- (say) 1978' in ''Yeats Said That:' R.S. Thomas and W.B. Yeats', *Almanac: A Yearbook of Welsh Writing in English* 13 (2009), 14.
31. Davies observes a pattern of linking and separation in Thomas's invocations of Yeats: Yeats is used to announce a positioning, which Thomas can then slip away from. This evokes Thomas's 'oval' of identity – from Cardiff to Holyhead.

32. Nora Chadwick, *Celtic Britain* (New York, 1963), 49.