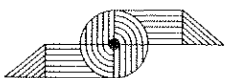

TRAVERSING THE IMAGINARY

Richard Kearney and the Postmodern Challenge

Edited by Peter Gratton and
John Panteleimon Manoussakis

Foreword by Richard Kearney

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6. In the aftermath of the election, DUP leader Ian Paisley stated that the results had seen the burial of the "so-called agreement." See "DUP Issues Warning at Westminster," BBC News Online, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/4535503.stm (accessed May 16, 2004).

7. The nineteenth amendment that introduced changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution of Ireland, as required by the 1998 Belfast Agreement, passed with a massive majority: 94.39 percent voted in favor of, with only 5.61 percent against, the proposed changes. The referendum in Northern Ireland to accept the Belfast Agreement also passed, but not with the same overwhelming majority: 71.12 percent voted in favor, while 28.88 percent voted against.

Traumatized Sovereignty

Anne O'Byrne

Richard Kearney is well known as the author of *The Wake of Imagination* and considerations of the various strands of European philosophy and dialogues with continental thinkers, but he has also long been engaged with the public life of Ireland. He edited *The Crane Bag Book of Irish Studies* (1982 and 1987), submitted a proposal on the "problem" of Northern Ireland to the New Ireland Forum at Dublin Castle in 1983, and submitted others to the Opsahl Commission in Belfast in 1993 and to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin Castle in 1995. He published *Myth and Motherland* in 1984, edited *The Irish Mind* (1985), published *Transitions: Narratives in Modern Irish Culture* (1988), edited *Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s* (1988), and published *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy* (1996).

The list is by no means exhaustive, but what it amounts to is Kearney's sustained phenomenology of Ireland. Those writings have included treatments of Irish philosophers (Berkeley, Toland, and Tyndall); detailed analyses of Irish writing, including fiction by Yeats and Joyce, to be sure, but also by Beckett, Flann O'Brien, and John Banville; drama by Tom Murphy and Brian Friel; and poetry by a list of Irish poets too long to give here. His writings include examinations of Irish cinema and painting, excursions into Irish history (e.g., the Easter Rising of 1916), interrogations of the institutions of Irish life (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church), and considerations of Irish political life. What is more, none of this work has been divorced from a personal intellectual involvement in that life. This is a personal practice, a lived and lively engagement with the phenomenon Ireland, a practice that is conducted both up close and in detail, from a distance and *en gros*.

The question he poses is this: what is Ireland? It is a question that, not long ago, would be answered with little hesitation in terms of nationhood, national territory, statehood, and national sovereignty; not long before that, it would be answered in terms of people and race. Now, thanks to the changing shape of Europe, thanks to the prosperity that has turned Ireland from a producer of emigrants to one with increasing numbers of

immigrants, thanks to recent shifts in the various positions that go to make up the Northern Ireland problem, but especially thanks to the work of engaged intellectuals like Kearney, a response in those well-worn terms is hardly possible. The question is as provocative as ever, and there are still those who feel compelled to reinforce (or enforce) their responses with bombs and gunfire; thankfully, though, their numbers have dwindled. It is plain to the rest of us, meanwhile, that this is a question that can only be answered with hesitation and perhaps with more questions, but always with the knowledge that each answer will itself be questionable, which is to say that each answer must return to the questioner as a question.

My specific question here is the following: In a phenomenology of Ireland, what role can the concept of sovereignty play? How can it help us see what Ireland is? And then, so what? (The "so what?" silently accompanies all philosophical questions, but I make it explicit here because Kearney's work refuses to allow it to remain silent.)

At the beginning of *Postnationalist Ireland,* Kearney presents a brief genealogy of the term *sovereignty.* In the beginning, as the Latin *superanus,* it meant "supreme power," the ultimate authority or overseer of order. In the sixteenth century, Bodin took it up as absolute sovereignty in which the sovereign king made the laws but was not himself subject to them, and this was further developed by Hobbes. Locke and Rousseau propelled the shift to popular sovereignty in the seventeenth century, with the French constitution of 1791 pinning down the concept further by adding the qualification *national,* yielding the term *national sovereignty.* In the nineteenth century, England saw the development of the concept of parliamentary sovereignty, while the United States established a principle of constitutional sovereignty. While each adhered more or less closely to Rousseau's dictum—"sovereignty is one, indivisible, unalienable, and imprescribable"—Kearney also sees in them evidence of an evolution of the concept that paved the way for a pluralist version (in which power is recognized as residing in several centers at once) and a dual version (in which power is shared between, for example, a single federal power and among many local powers). This eventually makes possible a radical undermining of Rousseau's claim and the entry of such terms as *pooled sovereignty* or *shared sovereignty* into our political vocabulary.

I will examine this concept of sovereignty in the light of the most sovereign of all rights; the right to wage war. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it in "War, Law, Sovereignty—Techne," this is the most sovereign right because it allows a sovereign to decide that another sovereign is the enemy and to set about conquering him, which is to say, destroying him, relieving him of his sovereignty.[1] Talk of war is indeed appropriate to Northern Ireland (albeit controversial). As Kearney puts it, "the twenty-five-year war in

Ulster epitomized the clash of irreconcilable territorial claims" (*PNI,* 2). I would add that these were also irreconcilable sovereign claims. But in Northern Ireland it is a matter of competing claims emerging within one political state, and this is the source of controversy over calling the troubles a war; to do so is to recognize the sovereignty of those (the nationalist paramilitaries) who have declared war on the established sovereign power.

I argue that what has happened in Ireland amounts to a trauma for the sovereign nationalist community. There has been personal trauma on all sides, but the phenomenon of a traumatized sovereignty is, though related, a different matter. I ask, in addition, if Kearney's recent work on narrative suggests a possible therapy for this trauma. Just as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up in the hope of bringing healing, what forum for the recounting of narratives might help heal the wounded sovereignty in Northern Ireland?

Trauma

In *Transitions* (1988) and again in *Postnationalist Ireland* (ten years later), Kearney deals in detail with this controversy over the sovereign stakes of the troubles as they came to a ghastly head in the early 1980s with the deaths of ten republican prisoners in Northern Ireland; they died as a result of their hunger strike for recognition as political prisoners or prisoners of war. He wisely begins his analysis yet earlier, however, with the Easter Rising of 1916. That was a time when the whole of Ireland was ruled directly from London, and a small group of Irish paramilitaries took over the general post office and a number of other buildings in Dublin and read a proclamation declaring Ireland a republic. On one level, it was a claim to sovereignty in Nancy's terms, a declaration of war on another sovereign. On another level, the insurgents could have no hope of destroying British sovereign claims to Ireland by force of arms. What they could achieve, they would achieve by suffering. Their triumph came when the British army brought a gunboat up the river Liffey and shelled the post office; it came when the group occupying Boland's Mills replied to the offer of surrender, "We came here to die, not to win"; it came a week later when the leaders of the rising were executed by firing squad, in prison.

I describe this insistence on suffering as a symptom of traumatized sovereignty. It was a sovereignty that, despite democracy, despite the speeches of the Irish parliamentarians in London, despite the deaths of Irish soldiers in the British army in Flanders or in the Dardanelles, could

not have its claim heard in any way other than the performance of suffering. In the same way, the traumatized psyche cannot express itself. It cannot tell its story; it can only undergo its trauma. Only by drawing this fire, only by suffering in this way, only by martyrdom could the claim find expression. The word *martyr,* after all, means "witness": by dying, they bore witness to their sovereign claims.

The hunger strikers of 1981 were the direct inheritors of this rhetoric. Sean MacBride put it most strikingly: the campaign by the hunger strikers for recognition of their political status relied "more on integrity and courage than on what politicians and lawyers term reason and common sense" (*TN,* 226). The formulation makes me queasy, since it is a short step from there to the standoff between Romanticism and Enlightenment, between a politics of land and people (*Land und Volk*), and a politics of the rights of man as if, whatever we did, we had to choose one or the other. Yet it does dramatize an important point: if we think of ourselves as having to choose and if we do choose the path of Enlightenment, rights, reason, equality, and democracy, we must be aware that it is not a choice without costs. Even as we embark on the process of telling our respective stories, filling our public space with an array of little narratives, there is no guarantee that all stories will be heard nor that all stories can be told. Put another way, although Northern Ireland is a democracy with a long democratic tradition, high levels of electoral participation (with voter turnout sometimes threatening to exceed a hundred percent), and, generally speaking, the conditions under which democracy is supposed to thrive, it managed to be a deeply unjust society because, at the same time, it was home to both a healthy, robust, even triumphal sovereignty and a traumatized, silenced sovereignty.

Kearney analyzes the hunger strikes in terms of a political (or military) logic that is eventually swapped for a mythic logic of suffering. Translated into the terms I have adopted here, the IRA was waging a war whose aim was the destruction of British sovereignty over Northern Ireland; its sovereign claim (on behalf of the nationalist community of the province) found its expression in acts of war. We must bear in mind that this is normal behavior for a sovereign. However, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, some ten years into the war, substantial numbers of activists were in prison as a result of their military activities, and public support was waning in the face of the civilian deaths that resulted from those very activities. It became clear that the acts of war were not being seen as such; instead, they were being branded terrorist or criminal acts and not expressions of sovereign right. It was not a matter of the nationalist community abandoning its desire to assert its sovereignty—surveys conducted at the time showed continuing support for the aim of a united (sovereign) Ireland—but rather of its balking at the price that violence exacts. The military campaign was failing as an exercise of sovereign right and as an expression of a claim to sovereignty. What was something forced outward (an expression) was now forced inward as the groups of IRA prisoners turned their violence on their own bodies.

Instead of the loud and vivid statements made by bombs, gunfire, and spilled blood, this was a statement by refusal (refusal to eat), a muted statement (one's voice literally weakens with hunger, and while the prisoners did write, their writings could only be smuggled out of the prison with great difficulty, to be published only later), a statement made by long suffering, and eventually a statement made in silence.

At the same time, we see symptoms of another trauma in another location. During the republican prisoners' hunger strike, some among them became candidates in the general election to the British parliament in Westminster, and Bobby Sands and Owen Carron were elected members of Parliament. Kearney assesses the phenomenon like this:

> IRA activists can be denounced for their campaign of bombing and killing by the majority of the nationalist community and yet acclaimed as martyrs by this same community once they are harassed by the British security forces, censored, tortured, imprisoned, and assassinated. (*TN,* 234)

The very people who rejected the activities of Bobby Sands the terrorist could vote for Bobby Sands the hunger striker. It is the doublethink of those who can bring themselves neither to renounce unequivocally their sovereign rights nor unequivocally to lay claim to them. To renounce them would be for the community to continue to suffer merely injustice, but unheroically, with no comforting thought that there is recompense to come, or that one is suffering to a end; to lay claim to them is to lay claim to the right to violence.[2] This is a sovereignty that can speak but that can only speak in contradictions, which is to say, in ways incomprehensible to reason.

This can be put in Lyotard's vocabulary, as Kearney invokes it in *Postnationalist Ireland.* For Lyotard, what postmodernity makes possible is the deposing of the grand narrative, leaving a space that is instead appropriately filled with little narratives. It is no longer a matter of the grand narrative giving the measure against which all others are to be judged; rather, little narratives can be judged only with reference to one another. Yet narrative (*récit*), the writing or recitation of events, the telling of stories, remains the sine qua non. My concern is this: What becomes of an event that cannot be captured by narrative? What becomes of a suffering whose story cannot be told in a way that makes sense? What becomes of a wound that resists healing? What becomes of a trauma that is never overcome?

In South Africa, in the aftermath of apartheid, it was just this concern that led to the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. What is most significant is that this was a political initiative, an attempt to provide a political solution to what was a political as well as a social and deeply personal problem. That is to say, it provided a public framework in which the work of recovery could begin. I will come back to this. Kearney, meanwhile, points to certain political developments that, though never designed to address the trauma of Northern Ireland, have contributed to a rethinking of sovereignty there, and thus, in their own ways, represent a political movement toward recovery.

Politics and Recovery

The narrative laid out in *Postnationalist Ireland* goes a long way toward reassuring us that Northern Ireland is no longer the home of a wounded or traumatized sovereignty. Kearney points out that even as its communities became ever more embroiled in the ancient business of wounding and being wounded, Britain and Ireland became engaged in Europe's great enlightenment project, a project for which Kant (in the spirit of the essay "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" [1795]) could have written the script. In 1973, both countries joined what was then known as the European Economic Community, and, with differing degrees of enthusiasm, have become ever more closely involved with their European neighbors. As this process progressed, the issue of sovereignty came to be explicitly addressed, particularly in the debate over the ratification of the Single European Act (SEA) in 1988 and again in the debates around the Nice Treaty referenda in 2001 and 2002. By ratifying the SEA, both Britain and the Republic of Ireland compromised their nation-state sovereignty, agreeing to a sharing of sovereignty with all the other members of the European Union.

In this, Kearney sees the beginnings of a redistribution of sovereignty that opens new ways of imagining the future of Northern Ireland. If sovereignty is being passed from the nation-state up to the level of the European Union, might it not also be passed down to the level of regions or provinces (or, as in the case of Scotland and Wales, countries)? Might this not finally be the way in which the various claims to sovereignty in Northern Ireland can be heard? As he points out:

> [Ian] Paisley and [John] Hume, while implacably at odds on the issue of national sovereignty, were almost invariably at one on the regional issues of agricultural policy, fishing quotas, social cohesion funding, etc. The lesson? That unionists and nationalists can agree at the regional and European level, but not on the national level. (*PNI*, 16)

How then to proceed? It would be necessary to diminish the significance of nation-states and to allow sovereignty to drain from there to these other levels. The two sovereign nation-states involved, Britain and Ireland, have been willing and eager to operate in these terms: Britain has already (in an independent process) devolved power from Westminster to Scotland and Wales; the Republic of Ireland has relinquished its constitutional claim to the territory of all the island of Ireland; neither government has quailed at setting up the intergovernmental councils and conferences specified by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. That is to say, the two nation-states involved have proved willing to shift emphasis and control down to the regional level. Those who have historically held sovereign right, and who have long been recognized as doing so are easily persuaded to pool and share sovereignty.

However, those who have had their claims to sovereign right denied or ignored are more attached than ever to the concept of the wholeness of sovereignty. In Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and, perhaps most deeply of all, in the Irish American communities of the United States, there are those who cannot relinquish the goal of a united, sovereign Ireland, and there are also those who will tolerate no dilution of British sovereignty there. In May 1999, Gerry Adams declared that "for Irish Republicans, the struggle for full independence and sovereignty is not over."[3] Rory Dougan of the dissident republican group, which is pointedly named the 32 County Sovereignty Movement, has said, "The Irish Problem is Britain's denial of Ireland's national sovereignty."[4] In January 2001, Geraldine Taylor of Republican Sinn Féin could tell a New York radio show host: "They surrendered the war: they surrendered to the British establishment."[5] Such talk is not easily dismissed, particularly since the elected assembly in Northern Ireland continues to have its activities suspended regularly, and, after much hopeful talk about the shifting, the construction (and de-construction and re-construction) of identities, the old traditional tribal lines come to be drawn again and again.

Narrative and Recovery

In the face of such statements, which I read as symptoms of an enduring trauma, Kearney's work does suggest another possible solution. In

On Stories, he endorses the "affirmative view of narrativity advanced by theorists like Ricoeur, Taylor, Rorty, Macintyre, or Nussbaum" and asserts that "every human existence is a life in search of a narrative" (*OS,* 129). The faith in narrative is great and the argument appealing. He writes, "We are born into an intersubjective historicity which we inherit along with our language, ancestry, and genetic code" (*OS,* 154). We are part of very many stories before we even know to start putting together our own narrative, and, as we begin to conduct our lives, each action can be understood as an episode in the unfolding of our particular life story. Yet if our lives always already have a plot, as Kearney claims, it can be a plot only in the most minimal sense that it has a beginning, middle, and end; the content of a life, including birth and death, is easily—and perhaps primarily—experienced as a jumble of contingent, inexplicable, disconnected events, and it is part of our life's work to find our plot.

My claim has been that there are circumstances in which that work is blocked, as in the event of trauma. In the concluding chapter of *On Stories,* Kearney examines this topic using the categories of Aristotle's *Poetics*—*mythos* (plot), *mimesis* (re-creation), *catharsis* (release), *phronēsis* (wisdom), and *ethos* (ethics)—and three elements of that analysis are particularly relevant for the question of traumatized sovereignty and the fate of Northern Ireland. First, under the heading of *catharsis,* he takes up the possibility of narrative helping to work through memory and providing an occasion for release. What is vital, however, is to decide what or whose memory is being worked out and how. Second, under the heading of *ethos,* he deals with the problem of fractured identity that is experienced, for example, by Holocaust survivors who find it all but impossible to tell their stories; it may be the case that, in Northern Ireland, the stories that need to emerge cannot be told because of the opposite problem, that is, the problem that identities have been too tightly woven and too firmly bound to monolithic social and religious identities. Third, he works through the relation of fictional and historical narratives and our capacity to tell the difference. I argue that in the absence of a formal tribunal, we must look for a framework that provides a public context for recovery in history and fiction, that is, in the works of Northern Ireland's novelists and filmmakers, poets and artists.

Therapy

When Aristotle speaks of *catharsis,* he is referring to the audience's experience of being purged thanks to the fear and pity evoked by the drama, but Kearney, in the example of the Armenian massacre survivor Michael Hagopian also wants to speak of the cathartic effect for one who was involved in an actual, historical horror. As a baby, Hagopian was hidden by his mother and as a result escaped the massacre of the inhabitants of his village in eastern Turkey by Turkish soldiers in the summer of 1915. It was part of a campaign of genocide that has yet to receive the world attention such deeds demand and that the Turkish government continues to deny. Eighty years after the fact, Hagopian produced a documentary film, *Voices from the Lake,* that was a tapestry of testimonies to the massacre and included long-hidden photographic evidence that in 1915 some ten thousand bodies were deposited in the lake near the village where he was born. Kearney writes, "In allowing these suppressed voices to speak at last after more than eighty years of silence, Hagopian permits a certain working-through of memory, if by no means a cure" (*OS,* 142). The example needs more attention than Kearney gives it, and it is important to try to be clear about what or whose memory is being worked through here. How does *catharsis* function in this case? First, the institutional memory of the Turkish national forces does not appear to have been worked through, because the institution remains silent or continues to deny. It apparently remains unconvinced or unmoved by such narratives. Second, since Aristotle speaks of *catharsis* as the experience of spectators, Kearney's treatment of the "working-through of memory" would seem to suggest that the audience's memory is involved. Yet the Western European or North American audience of the film is likely to have no memory or even knowledge of the event to work through—so absent has information on that genocide been from its cultural milieu—and in any case is hardly in need of a therapy or cure. Yet that audience, by spectating on the drama played out in the film, can experience both fear at the horror and also a pity that allows it to empathize with those who have suffered.

But, of course, the claim is more pointedly relevant when applied to those interviewed for Hagopian's film, people who, after very many years, were given the occasion to tell their stories. Telling is not itself enough; one must see that one's story is not falling on deaf ears or being met with further denial. These witnesses saw their accounts of events corroborated by others, saw photographic evidence made public, and had their narratives recognized. This might be Kearney's point: "Catharsis is a matter of recognition, not remedy" (*OS,* 142). As Aristotle would have it, the audience recognizes itself in the sense of seeing itself mirrored or revealed in the performance on stage. The case of the testimonial performance of the Armenian witnesses on film is a matter of personal rather than dramatic narrative concerning autobiographical and historical rather than fictional events. The recognition of the audience is also the recognition of

the suffering of those witnesses in the sense that at last their experience is acknowledged.

Kearney's warning is well noted: "[This is] by no means a cure" (*OS*, 142). Those who tell their stories in the aftermath of trauma, often after years of silence, do not automatically reap the therapeutic benefits, and such benefits may come only with time. South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established with the aim of encouraging disclosure (truth) as a means to facilitate healing (reconciliation), but it soon became clear that the experience of those who testified was not simply one of relief and recovery. Brandon Hamber writes, "The long-term ability of a once-off statement or public testimony to address the full psychological impact of the past is questionable. Some survivors and families of victims only began to experience a range of psychological problems months after their testimony."[6] What becomes necessary are trauma-recovery services for individuals, and the British government and indeed the European Union have made resources available for such services in Northern Ireland, though Marie Smyth argues that those resources still fall short of what is needed.[7] In any case, Brandon Hamber notes that this is one of the easiest political options; no one will object on political grounds to such services. What a public commission has done in South Africa, however, is provide a political framework in which victims "can begin to understand, integrate, and create new beginnings for themselves" (*DTH*, 134).

But Michael Ignatieff reminds us that it is a mistake to speak about the psyche of a nation as if it were the same as individual psyches. A victim's own work of recovery is surely hampered if she is given the additional burden of representing her community's victimhood and recovery. At the same time, it is important not to leap from the individual to the level of sovereignty, as though a sovereign nation or people were just like an individual, complete with a conscience, identity, and memory.[8] The figure of Michael Hagopian can help us think this through. He was too young to remember the massacre, though the implication is that he experienced its traumatic aftermath as an Armenian orphan and as a member of an ethnic group that, as such, was the victim of terrible and unacknowledged violence. He is not another victim telling his story. Instead, he is one who provides the framework in which his fellows tell their stories. His film provides the occasion for their narratives and, one hopes, the beginning of their recovery. This is the relevant model. The task of the political institution is to provide a public framework in which individual recovery work can begin to happen, in the full knowledge that the progress of those individuals is often "haphazard and slow" and will often lag behind the political demand to bury the past (*DTH*, 137).

Kearney argues that narrative must also have a moral function, since it i[s] through narrative, understood together with human agency, that we eac[h] come to construct an identify for ourselves. When that work is blocked o[r] bypassed, the result is what I call an unformed identity. Langer has argue[d] that many Holocaust witnesses can provide no account of the events the[y] experienced that fits with our usual theories of action and responsibilit[y] because such trauma victims are diminished selves, people whose ver[y] identities were shattered by the particularities of their experiences. I[n] Northern Ireland, the problem would seem to be the opposite. Rathe[r] than identities that are dangerously fractured, the issue is the phenomenon of identities that are dangerously complete. Growing up in a Catholic nationalist or a Protestant unionist community in Northern Ireland in the past forty years (and more), one quickly learned to identify onesel[f] primarily as belonging to one's political community. One received an identity rather than having the opportunity to build one. Kearney quotes Langer's argument that some survivors of the Holocaust cannot build a whole identity because they are "trying to come to terms with memories of the need to act and the simultaneous inability to do so that continue to haunt [them] today" (*OS*, 153). If this is acknowledged as an abnormal experience of identity, then those experiences in which identities are received as unquestionable and monolithic must also lie beyond normality.

Kearney is wary of any attempt to dissipate the subject, and he does not share the view that it must be surpassed under our new conditions of postmodernity. Rather, he sees his narrative model of selfhood as responding to "antihumanist suspicions of subjectivity while preserving a significant notion of the ethical-political subject" (*OS*, 152). He would agree, I believe, that any life narrative is a work in progress and will involve changes and retellings that allow for the development of an identity. I would argue that the very need for narrative is an indication of an originary disjunction, a necessary split in identity that makes it possible to stand apart from oneself and tell the story of oneself. A monolithic identity has covered over this gap, and the story that it tells is finally not one's own story but the one received, in the case of Northern Ireland, from one's historical community. This is one way of explaining why the Alliance Party, the one political party that refused to align itself along nationalist–unionist lines, was doomed to attract only a tiny following. Providing more hope, it has been one of the most striking features of political discourse in Northern Ireland since the beginning of the peace process that class and gender identities have become topics for debate.

Though this is not the case for everyone, there are those whose

sense of self remains unthinkingly complete, those for whom every challenge brings a more entrenched and assured sense of who they are. If there is an ethical question here, it is this: when might such a sense of identity become culpable? The inability to question it may spring from fear and from deep trauma, but such is the ethical quagmire of such wretched situations that a victim may also be a perpetrator. Langer argues that the narrative memories of the Holocaust have no moral function; such testimony occupies an amoral space. How many of us would be willing to say the same of those who continue to commit acts of violence?

Histories

Yet stories come in various forms, and history is just one form among many. Though never tempted to move to what he terms the extremes of postmodern irony, where history is regarded as nothing more than a series of fabulations (a few true facts with stories spun around them), Kearney is keenly aware that we cannot know the past with absolute certainty and that any account we give of past events will be presented according to the rules of storytelling. He acknowledges—indeed insists—that historical and fictional narratives are related, but he is careful to specify their relation: they both invoke a kind of narrative understanding that is best described using the Aristotelian term *phronēsis*. It is a form of understanding that is neither absolute nor relative but "something in between" (*OS*, 150). *Phronēsis* is what we use to follow a narrative and to know the difference between fiction and history and to appreciate both the fictional nature of history and the historical nature of fiction.

Yet Kearney refuses to confine its use to matters of epistemology. The controversy that rages between relativists and positivists over the relation of history and fiction centers on the question of which is most accurate, that is, which lies closer to how things "really were." Kearney reminds us that not only truth but also justice must be served: "We need to invoke as many solid criteria as possible—linguistic, scientific, and moral—if we are to be able to say that one historical account is more 'real' or 'true' or 'just' than another, that one particular revision of history is more legitimate than its contrary" (*OS*, 146). In the case of Northern Ireland, that is to say that every community must have its opportunity to tell its story, and it is for us and for the entire community to judge. Yet in order to make possible judgment according to "many solid criteria," the entrenched tradition of judging according to the single criterion of loyalty to one's religious and political community must be overcome. This overcoming is certainly

under way—the peace process would have been impossible without it—but, as I have argued here, it is by no means complete. It has not been undertaken in all sections of the community; it is unclear how successful it has been in any section, and it is inevitably a faltering endeavor that will never follow a continuous, progressive trajectory.

Art of Recovery

Northern Ireland does not and, I predict, will not have a truth and reconciliation commission. It may be possible to open public inquiries into particular incidents, as has happened in the case of the Saville Tribunal dealing with the events of Bloody Sunday, January 30, 1972, when British forces shot and killed fourteen civil rights marchers in Derry, but the conditions for a fully fledged commission are not in place. What are the requirements? The Bloomfield report (a document produced by Kenneth Bloomfield, Northern Ireland victims commissioner) stated that a commission is possible "only in the context of a wide-ranging political accord."[9] Reading such a statement in the heady days following the signing of the landmark Good Friday Agreement in 1998, one could imagine that such accord was in place, but the years that followed have shown that there is still a great deal of discord, and that such accord as there was never reached as far as necessary in the first place. Terence McCaughey provides a more detailed account of what would be needed for reconciliation. He argues that there must be (1) either the bloody-mindedness to choose to treat the troubles as either a religious or colonial or racial-linguistic or class conflict or, alternatively, a capacity to deal with it in all these terms; (2) a willingness to begin not with atrocities but with the spectrum of complicity that must include the Protestant and Catholic middle classes and the Catholic Church; (3) an independent ombudsman or victims' advocate; (4) an agreement to provide restoration and reparation; and (5) a forum for the unheard.[10] Marie Smyth adds the need for a change from an ingrained political culture of victimhood and the ability to provide incentives (such as the promise of amnesty) to encourage the armed parties to take part. Of these, none of the structural requirements has been fulfilled, and the conceptual requirements (such as McCaughey's initial choice) indeed seem unfulfillable in principle.

In the absence of an official, explicitly political forum for reconciliation, how can the overcoming of traditions of unthinking community loyalty be helped along its way? How can the work of troubling and reshaping identities in Northern Ireland be supported? How can the thera-

peutic work of telling stories be encouraged? How can a sovereign begin to overcome its persisting trauma? A large part of the work must fall to the arts, from the work of Northern Ireland's Nobel Prize–winning poet to the activities of local community arts groups, and it is work already under way. To properly support this claim would require differentiating the various tasks involved (as with the Hagopian documentary discussed previously, except in far greater detail and with attention to the particulars of any chosen examples). It would involve examining the structures within which the arts happen in Northern Ireland and would require attentive readings of particular works, bearing in mind all the questions around distinguishing between public and community and fine arts, along with the specific questions of the interplay of a public framework for recovery and the private work of healing.

The case of the visual arts is a particularly complex example that would reward deeper investigation. It has been a long time since Michael Farrell produced his *Madonna Irlanda: The Very First Real Irish Political Picture* in 1974 and, in comparison, contemporary art in Northern Ireland seems decidedly apolitical. Philip Dodd, selector for the Perspective 99 show at the Ormeau Baths Gallery in Belfast, commented that he had expected a great deal of political art to be submitted for the competition, but there was none. In response, Aidan Dunne writes,

> It is noticeable that the artists who gave the established image of contemporary Northern art its political edge have moved on in various ways. Certainly Willie Doherty is still there in Derry and still dealing with the same realities, but his work has become more complex in itself and more complex in terms of the frames of reference and, as it happens, this might be said to apply to the younger artists as well: their work is political but often obliquely so, and not so directly locked within the confines of the Northern problem.[11]

That is to say, visual arts in Northern Ireland have been through thirty years of intense and inevitable politicization, an apprenticeship that has produced both political and artistic sophistication.

In comparison, the ongoing work of the Derry community muralists known as the Bogside Artists, though explicitly focused on recovery, seem spurred by a particularly naive faith in the telling of history. The group writes,

> Our sympathies are with all of the people who have suffered in Northern Ireland whatever their class, creed, politics, or belief systems. We believe that only when both communities of Catholics and Protestants have confronted the wounds they have inflicted on each other, and on themselves, can there be the possibility of healing or forgiveness. To tell it like it is and was is vital to this catharsis. . . . It is the intention of the Bogside Artists to complete the project they embarked upon in 1994—to construct for the Bogside a panoramic history of the troubles on the gable-ends of an entire street. When finished in 2004 this will be an open-air gallery of unique significance in the world with a spectacular view of all twelve murals to be had from the city walls. The final painting of the series will be a Peace Mural, a fitting curtain on a long history of conflict.[12]

As Kearney's work on history and fiction has shown, having sympathy with all who suffered on the one hand may not be compatible with telling it like it is on the other. Artists must be and largely are more self-conscious about the very artfulness of art and the inevitable difference between "how it was" and any representation of those events. Indeed, perhaps the most powerful representation of the most traumatic event to happen to Derry in the course of the troubles is Paul Greengrass's 2002 film *Bloody Sunday*, which cannot avoid the consciousness of its place between fact and fiction, specifically because it is a dramatized documentary.

Where literature more broadly speaking is concerned, the title of young author Robert McLiam Wilson's acclaimed *Eureka Street: A Novel of Ireland Like No Other* might remind one of the title of Farrell's early political painting, but it may also signal something different: a far more complex relation to the political, a relation that includes a determination to eschew the political but at the same time an incapacity for doing so.[13] The same struggle has long been in play, though in very different ways, in the work of Seamus Heaney, from the collection *North* to "Crediting Poetry," his Nobel Prize–acceptance lecture.[14] Meanwhile, Paul Muldoon, in his book-length poem *Madoc*, deals with what he describes as the basically unethical situation in Northern Ireland by writing about the imagined exploits of eighteenth-century poet-explorers in the Susquehanna Valley.[15]

Finally (my comments about the Derry muralists notwithstanding), analyzing the role of the arts in Northern Ireland before the cease-fire, during the peace process, and today also means asking why community arts are more active and more widespread in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in the United Kingdom. Many local projects have already long operated as communal coping mechanisms, such as women's writing groups, and, more recently, have explicitly taken on the work of overcoming the legacy of the troubles. The New Belfast Community Arts Initiative, established since the cease-fire with the support of the Belfast city council, provides a platform for challenging traditional divisions and

community rivalries and addressing political, social, economic, and environmental problems.[16] It has produced, among other things, *The Belfast Wheel,* a cultural diversity mosaic in Belfast's Cathedral Quarter, and "Strangers Next Door," a project enabling local residents to express their experiences of living along Belfast's peace lines. As Helen Gould reports for the Netherlands-based European Platform for Conflict Resolution and Transformation,

> there have been some groundbreaking community theatre initiatives which have enabled the people of Belfast to review their history from different perspectives. "The Stone Chair," set in a Belfast graveyard, looked at the Troubles from the perspective of those who lay buried there. It inspired another group to investigate the history of their own predominantly Catholic area, Dock Ward, resulting in several productions which have made an enormous contribution to raising morale in the local community. One of the great, transformational experiences, it is said, is enabling Protestant people to play Catholics and vice versa.[17]

Conclusion

It has not been my argument that Northern Ireland is fated to remain on the brink of violence or that the trauma of a sovereign cannot be healed. I do claim that personal trauma is not the same as sovereign trauma, which in turn is not properly understood as the sum of many individual hurts. It is, rather, an essentially political phenomenon. It would seem to be important that the people of Northern Ireland find the space in which to tell their stories, and the arts are already providing some of the public, or at least social, framework in which the personal work of recovery can begin. Yet this is only a beginning. I have argued that the continued rumblings from dissident paramilitary groups indicate that it has long been, still is, and will continue to be dangerous to neglect the powerful role played in Northern Ireland by sovereignty.

This concept certainly cannot be absent from a phenomenological examination of Ireland. The population of the republic has voted to surrender parts of it; the government is engaged in pooling it; Northern republicans are struggling for it; intellectuals are arguing that it's time to go beyond it. Kearney's analysis is persuasive, and it does seem to be time to move beyond this notion, but doing so will remain impossible so long as we fail to acknowledge a limit. It is the limit beyond which fall those who

remain fiercely attached to the claim to sovereignty even when there are good grounds for believing that justice would best be attained by abandoning the concept; it is the limit beyond which fall those who cannot recount their stories; it is the limit beyond which fall those whose traumas ensure that their expressions of a claim to sovereignty still appear (if at all) in the form of contradiction, paradox, and nonsense.

So what? My consideration of sovereignty and narrative has traveled alongside Kearney's analysis, shifting away now and again to make room for the concept of traumatized sovereignty and approaching it again by attending to the narrative work (broadly speaking) of the arts. What does it add? How might it enrich a phenomenology of Ireland? What does it indicate regarding what is to be done, that is, the question of recovery? My hope is that the sketch that I have offered here can be refined and developed in order to shed light on the extent to which the arts can give the framework for healing and to serve as the reminder of a limit: a limit to the persuasiveness of Europe's enlightenment project for those embedded in a standoff like the one at Garvaghy Road, a limit to the appeal of prosperity through globalization to those whose aspirations remain determined by the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 or the Easter Rising in 1916, a limit to the work of reason alone, a limit to the possibilities of phenomenology, and a limit to our confidence in solutions.

Notes

1. Nancy, "War, Right, Sovereignty: Techne," in *Being Singular Plural,* trans. Robert Richardson and Anne O'Byrne (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 101–44.

2. I cannot pursue this here, but it is remarkable how the latter is facilitated by the instituting of military rituals in the life of nation-states, from the guard of honor to the military funeral for a head of state.

3. Adams, "Adams Stresses His Organisation's Main Themes Are Liberation, Emancipation, and Empowerment," *Irish Times,* May 10, 1999.

4. Gerry Moriarty, "Trimble's 'Obvious Compromise' Outlined as Means to End Logjam," *Irish Times,* October 19, 1999.

5. *Radio Free Eireann,* WBAI (New York), January 27, 2001.

6. Brandon Hamber, "Does the Truth Heal?" in *Burying the Past: Making Peace and Doing Justice After Civil Conflict,* ed. Nigel Biggar (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2000), 155–76. Henceforth cited as *DTH.* Quotation on page 135.

7. Marie Smyth, "Putting the Past in Its Place," in *Burying the Past,* 125–54.

8. Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998), 169.

9. Kenneth Bloomfield, *We Will Remember Them: The Report of the Northern Ireland Victims Commissioner* (Belfast: The Stationary Office, 1998), 37–38.

10. Terence McCaughey, "Northern Ireland: Burying the Hatchet, Not the Past," in *Burying the Past,* 261–65.

11. Aidan Dunne, "Art and Ignominy," *Circa* (Autumn 1999): C89.

12. William Kelly, Tom Kelly, and Kevin Hasson (Bogside Artists), "Conflict in Northern Ireland," Get Underground, http://www.getunderground.com/underground/galleries/gallery.cfm?Album_ID=69 (accessed January 8, 2003).

13. Robert McLiam Wilson, *Eureka Street: A Novel of Ireland Like No Other* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1999).

14. Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), and "Crediting Poetry," Nobel Institute, http://nobel.se/literature/laureates/1995/heaney.lecture.html (accessed January 8, 2003).

15. Paul Muldoon, *Madoc: A Mystery* (New York: Noonday Press, 1991).

16. See the policy page of the New Belfast Community Arts Initiative, http://www.newbelfastarts.org (accessed May 21, 2006).

17. Helen Gould, "The Arts' Contribution to Peace in Northern Ireland: Encouraging the Community to Have Fun," European Platform for Conflict Resolution and Transformation, http://www.gppac.net/documents/pbp/7/7_n_irel.htm (accessed May 21, 2006).

Imaginings, Narratives, and Otherness: On Diacritical Hermeneutics

John Rundell

In his trilogy, *Philosophy at the Limit,* and especially in its third volume, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters,* Richard Kearney has reflected on the ways that real or imagined people are turned into something to be vilified, subjected to hate, or exterminated.[1] What emerges from *Philosophy at the Limit* is a double-sided strategy that wishes to account for the way in which relations between the self and others take demonized or ethical forms. For Kearney, the imagination responds to others in ways that are either monstrous or empathetic. The imagination also opens onto the possibility of something ineluctable in terms of human experience. This chapter begins with the question of imagination before addressing Kearney's concern with the narrativity of otherness from the vital vantage points of closure and openness.

"The Very Edge of Hermeneutic Understanding"

Strangers, Gods, and Monsters represents a radicalization of Kearney's dialogic encounters with interpretations of the imagination that occurred in his earlier work.[2] In *The Wake of Imagination,* for example, the imagination was interpreted in a genealogical fashion in order to challenge the conventional view, stretching from Plato's *Republic* to the Enlightenment, which equated imagination with fiction, fantasy, and thus an essential untruth in relation to reality. *The Wake of Imagination* was a sustained attempt to view imagination, in the wake of Romantic and Heideggerian insights, as a core of the human condition, which our experience of time, politics, and ethics toward others cannot do without. In *Poetics of Imagining,* Kearney