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Note: The designation of the painting *The Turf Diggers* by Paul Henry should read, *The Potato Diggers*.

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Faculty of Fine Art

Department of Painting

Body, Place and Identity in Ireland

By

Maria Doyle

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Introduction

In this thesis, I'm going to look at some aspects of construction of place and of female identity made by the Irish post-colonial state. These constructions were designed to reflect the values of the new state. The west of Ireland, and the inhabitants of this region, especially the women, became centres from which the new government hung their fantasies and fears. The identities imposed were extremely fixed, rigid and simplified versions of women's lives and experiences. The identities created such as the old woman or the virginal colleen were designed to act as models for Irish women. The patriarchal government and institutions wished to control women's sexuality because it proved a threat to them. Paul Henry's paintings were used by the cultural nationalists in the making of these constructs.

I want to argue that women's identity cannot be fixed. That identities are fluid and open to continual change. There are many layers to one person's life, which are complex and subject to a variety of factors. One cannot reduce women or inhabitants of the west of Ireland down to one essence because this diminishes their experiences.

In the first chapter, I will discuss Paul Henry, and the sort of context within which he circulated. Henry had an obsession with painting Achill Island and its inhabitants. I will examine how Henry's paintings were used by cultural nationalists to promote certain values and how Henry became a victim of his own success.

In the second chapter, I will analyse why Henry's work fitted into the agenda of cultural nationalism. What were the motivations behind these myths? I will examine how place became a metaphor for the female, and how the female body became a signifier of passivity, sexuality or virginity. This was embedded in a whole set of attitudes towards women at that time, of a denial of their sexuality and political strength.

I will discuss in the third chapter some of the reasons why the female body has been used and controlled like a political football, and also the way it has been taken out of the realities and experiences of women by the media beauty industry and other institutions.

In this discussion, I will explore the work of three contemporary Irish artists: Kathy Prendergast, Mary Duffy and Alanna O'Kelly.

The last chapter will deal with the possibility of a reconciliation between the idea of place and women. How place can have many interpretations, and that place can be seen as something open and multiple. Kathy Prendergast's map helps to illustrate this point. She uses the map to question and she also uses it as an object that can be turned upside down, painted or written on. It is there to be re-inscribed. Since the map is a symbol of re-organisation, it becomes even a more powerful motif when its negativity is called into question, shattered and rebuilt as something creative. What is interesting about O'Kelly, Duffy and Prendergast is the way they disrupt old stories and moulds, and begins to see the possibilities of redrawing experiences and identities, opening up the viewer to change and reinscription.

Chapter One

Paul Henry was born into a Protestant family in Belfast in 1876. He studied at the Belfast Government School of Art. From there he travelled to Paris and established himself in a studio. It was here that he became acquainted with and was influenced by the work of Millet, Van Gogh and Whistler whom he studied under. Henry remained in Paris for two years, but by 1900, he left for London, to secure employment as an illustrator and he got a few commissions designing book jackets, etc.

Henry continued painting and began to associate with what was known as the Fitzroy Street group, which was formed around 1907. This was a group sympathetic to avant garde painting and, included in the group, was the "progressive" painter, Walter Sickert. From this group, a number of artists, including Henry, formed the Allied Artists Association (1908). It was to be an alternative venue from which artists could exhibit work that didn't fit into the mainstream art galleries.

At the first exhibition of the group, Henry himself exhibited three paintings, *The Shower*, *Stone Clouds* and *West Wind*. Two Irish art representatives who attended the exhibition in London invited Henry to exhibit at the Royal Hibernian Academy. It was around this time that Henry had become intrigued by Achill Island, off the west coast of Ireland. His friends had visited there for a holiday.

Henry and his wife, Grace, arrived in Achill in 1910. He became so infatuated by the island that he decided to move there and commence a series of paintings of the surrounding landscape and its inhabitants. For the next ten years Henry became obsessed with painting Achill.

Here one can see the influence of Millet and Van Gogh, who also painted peasant imagery, and his approach to how he viewed the islanders was tinged with the writings of Synge. Synge documented the islander's lives and was responsible for contributing to the notion of an Irish ideal of a "simple", "honest" and "hardworking" people. A sort of culture of romanticism spawned from these writings about the islands.

The paintings of Henry are to me an attempt to record the inhabitants' daily tasks. He painted people gathering turf, harvesting sea-weed and fishing, for example, *Turf Diggers* (see ill. 1, 1912). This painting shows two women in red skirts collecting turf, against a background of magnificent clouds.

Henry has stated that, "he wanted to know the people, their intimate lives, the time of the seed and harvest," (City Library and Arts Centre, Sunderland, 1995). From looking at his paintings of the inhabitants, I think that there is a genuine wish to communicate their daily tasks, for example *A Boy on a Donkey going for Turf* (1910-13) and *Launching the Currach* (1910-11).

These paintings do in a way, depict the inhabitants' work, although they are done in a very romantic manner, for example, the way that the boy and donkey are almost blended into the landscape through the use of his paint. Also, the viewer does not get any sense of the harshness or barrenness of the land, or the poverty of the people living on the island.

The paintings are very capable in their execution but they are largely about atmosphere, light and mood and do not really show any concrete interaction between people and land. However, certain atmospheres can be present in a landscape, which is more of a personal interpretation between landscape and the viewer. Fintan O'Toole - who is a contemporary Irish political and social commentator - discusses a "strangeness" and a "sacredness" in relation to landscape. O'Toole describes how there can be a great sense of unfamiliarity and novelty of feelings when a person is within certain environments. I think that Henry was genuinely attempting to capture a certain atmosphere. However, this is just one aspect of the landscape, Henry failed to deal with the other aspects such as poverty and subsistence. I do not accept S P Kennedy's analysis of Henry's paintings as being redolent of the "harsh life".

In Henry's depictions of Ireland the poverty of the people, as of the landscape too, and the harshness of the life there, are not hidden, rather we are made acutely aware of them and of the universal, ceaseless tool of uneven struggle between man and nature.
(Kennedy, S B, 1991, p.8)

What way is Kennedy looking at these paintings? He is buying in into the idea of essences, with his use of the words "universal,...struggle", which immediately obliterates particular circumstances of the situation, and ultimately patronises the inhabitants by reducing them to essences.



Paul Henry *Turf Diggers*

Henry returned to Dublin in 1919 to try to promote modern painting "in the face of hostility from officialdom" (Kennedy, 1991, p.29). He, along with other painters such as his wife, Grace Mitchell, Jack B Yeats, Mary Swanzy and Lelita Hamilton formed the Society of Dublin Painters in June 1920. It was geared towards encouraging young, progressive artists:

From the beginning of the Society of Dublin Painters became synonymous with the best of avant garde painting in Ireland. (S B Kennedy, 1991, p.20)

It is interesting to see how committed Henry was to new ideas and differences within art. He found the Dublin art world to be very conservative and reactionary:

It is difficult to realise how deep rooted was the ignorance and prejudice which existed at that time against any form of art which savoured, even remotely, of modernism. (Henry, S B Kennedy, 1991, p.20)

It is ironic that Henry was thought of as someone who had progressive intentions and ideas, yet, he managed to let his work slip into a very conservative structure. Henry was a victim of his own success. He painted pictures of the landscape and of turf-diggers, etc., that were seen as quintessentially Irish. The political climate at that time was very intense, in that the government was constantly searching for a "national identity", and many literary figures were involved, through their writing, in establishing this sense of "Irishness".

S B Kennedy writes that although the members of the Society of Dublin Painters were relatively unconcerned with national identity, they would have felt a certain pressure concerning it. Brian Fallon has stated that although Henry had nationalist tendencies, he had no desire to be a "national artist" or create a distinct national art school, unlike Sean Keating. However, his paintings, such as *Dawn, Killary Harbour* (see ill. 2, 1922-3) and *Low Tide*, were easily assimilated into the thinking of post-independence Ireland. (I will discuss this more thoroughly in the next chapter). Suffice it to say at the moment that his work has to be seen in the context of the society Ireland was, at that time. The aspirations, of the political heads of state, which for example, De Valera set in motion, was a sort of cultural train that would create a "purely Irish" society.

Henry's work began to be massively reproduced for promotional purposes. Two paintings, *Connemara* and *A View of Lough Erne*, were the first of several of his paintings to be used. They were seen in Europe and the USA from the mid 1920's. Henry was running short of money at this time and had domestic difficulties also. Perhaps he felt he had to let his work be reproduced like this in order to get by.



Paul Henry *Dawn, Killary Harbour*



Typically, when this phase petered out finally after World War II, Henry was made the scapegoat for an attitude which he had not originated and for an alleged escapism which is not inherent in his best or most typical pictures. He cannot be blamed for the sentimentalities and insipidity of his would be followers and imitators, even if he did end up painting rather like them. (Fallon, 1994, p.99)

Maybe his work appealed to the viewer who persisted/persists in thinking of Irish art as somehow "natural" or rooted in some ancient craft. (Duddy, 1987, p.15)

I am disappointed that Henry didn't make more of an effort to go beyond his imagery or abstract it as his wife, Grace Mitchell did. I think it is too self-indulgent. He was supposed to be involved in promoting progressive art, so he must have been aware of the developments elsewhere.

Chapter Two

As I have indicated in the last chapter, Henry's paintings easily fitted into the agenda of the cultural nationalists and were taken on board as being representative of the sort of society that post-independent nationalists wanted. I will examine further why this was. His work was very optimistic in that it presented a place that was unique and pure, idyllic and removed from urbanity. The paintings helped recover certain qualities such as tranquillity and a sense of belonging to the land which were unstable due to colonisation and its aftermath.

In Henry's paintings one could see all those attributes that one would desire in their environment. For example in *Dawn, Killary Harbour* there is purity, spaciousness and solitude. It invokes pride in "place". There was such an obsessive need to repossess land, not just physically, but imaginatively also. It was as if the Irish state was trying to affirm this possibility for invention.

Through his work a symbolic environment was created. His paintings epitomised the desired values of the new state. These values centred on the landscape and the Irish female. The landscape of the west, and in particular Connemara particularly was used in this construction. Unsurprisingly the model was built in direct opposition to the supposedly English conception of place. It was as if Ireland formed itself in whatever the cultural nationalists believed England was lacking. Landscape was used to define "us" and also the "other", or to define the "good us" and the "bad other". English landscape was characterised as having quaint villages and charming rolling landscape, something cultivated. Irish landscape, by contrast, was described as wild and unsophisticated. It supposedly represented "pure Irishness" as far beyond the pale as possible, where future generations of "true" Irish men and women would be born.

This desire to create an identification with place is important for a new nation to experience. Franz Fanon is cited as stating that it is crucial to imagine ourselves at the outset, as a "defence mechanism" (Quoted by Amuta in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1995, p.159), but that it is essential to move beyond this imagery stage, to take responsibility of problems, to stop perpetuating myths that are ultimately damaging for a new state.

Fanon was sufficiently realistic to admit the legitimacy and historical necessity of this phase in the consciousness of the native, but he equally cautioned cultural affirmation and nostalgic romanticism as a permanent stance would amount to a false consciousness totally dysfunctional and is the task of national liberation. (Amuta, 1995, p. 159).

By bombarding the country with images such as Henry's, a false consciousness penetrated the state, a distorted and superficial view of place was created. If one examines the painting *Lakeside Cottages* (see ill. 3, 1923-32) one can see the sentimentality in the depiction of the rugged thatch cottages. It was representative of the type of society that post-colonial Ireland wanted: a return to very strong traditional family values. The women were to reside there and bear children. The Irish hung onto this symbol of the cottage because it was "symbolic of Irish social organisation", once again returning to the polarisation of "them" and "us"; this "social organisation" was seen in direct "opposition to English culture". (Nash, 1993)

The images promoted, carefully bypassed any of the social, political or economic issues and problems of that time. The question of land ownership, who benefited from the land and also who were most at a disadvantage, was occluded.

John Berger discussed the representation of land ownership with reference to the famous painting of *Mr and Mrs Andrews* by Gainsborough. It may be interpreted as an innocent painting of a couple who were enjoying their surroundings. However, Berger analyses their expressions, deportment and clothes. He suggests that all was not so innocent, or natural about their postures. The couple were owners of the land and were able to enjoy the surroundings because of a whole range of economic structures.

One has to ask questions about the images put forward by the new Irish state. Was it all of innocence? Why all these false constructions of place? Why such an emphasis on uniqueness? As I have indicated earlier, it was necessary to imagine ourselves, but it is regressive if it becomes so fixated about trying to be different from its former colonisers. Subsequently, Ireland's identity would also be whatever England was not. The nation would never grow up and start examining itself and disentangling itself from a web of regressive myths.

Roland Barthes writes that the most powerful thing about mythologies is how insidious they are. The manner in which they are presented to us, renders them as something that is natural, "the naturalisation of the concept" (Barthes, 1993, p.131). The image's symbols and signifiers give the appearance of being totally "right", and so the viewer begins to think "yes" that is the way it is.



Paul Henry *Lakeside Cottages*



Henry's paintings seduce the viewer into believing that the whole set-up is natural and proper. The paintings appeal to our sentimentality.

I think that these feelings of it being "right" and "proper", in what the viewer experiences when presented with the painting *Turf Diggers*. We as the viewer are seduced into thinking that there is some kind of inherent relationship between these women and their surroundings. But it is a distortion of reality.

It is important to find out the context in which these myths were placed, the sort of political climate and, in particular, the contemporary attitudes towards women. How was the viewer encouraged to pick up on the significance of the women? What were the motivations of these cultural nationalists?

The women in the *Turf Diggers* were encouraged to be seen as symbols of sacrifice and purity. They were held up as models which Irish women should follow. And Irish people were urged to view these women as being at one with their environment, of having an instinctual feeling toward nature.

However, this primitivising of the Irish female, held an element of danger for the new state because, associated with primitivism, is the idea of instinctual and unconscious sexuality. And, that is certainly not the sort of message the new state wanted to send out. So, it was vital to remove this element, by desexualising the image. By portraying her as passive and self-sacrificing, it must be said that Henry's imagery was just one part of a whole wave of thinking that was circulating at that time, e.g. notions within travel writing of the Irish peasant woman and also wider issues such as racial purity, regeneration and evolution, etc. So, I think society would have been ripe to pick up these signifiers in a certain way.

Cultural nationalists wanted to get rid of sexual young women from visual representation; it would have indicated something that was too risqué. Instead, nationalists promoted the idea of the virginal young colleen, or the old woman with her four green fields, waiting at home for her sons to rescue her. There was a denial and rejection of imagery that was sexual because, in reality, that is what patriarchy wished to suppress. This was linked to control of sexuality by the church and also to economic conditions such as inheritance of the farm. "With the perceived threat of an autonomous female sexuality to this social order, the counterpart of the gaelic male, had to be the desexualised mother figure." (Nash, 1993). Women's political, social and economic independence posed a threat to patriarchy's power.

Woman became the allegorical figure of the land. It was fashioned in such a way that a very "masculinist relationship to place" (Nash, 1993) developed. The female became "landscapes of control" (Nash, 1993) open to manipulation and alteration; the domain of the masculine. Nash gives an example from post-colonial literature, written by Daniel Figgis, entitled *Children of the Earth* (Nash, 1993, p.105).

One of the characters, Eoghan, is very close to Nature (which is unusual in that it is mostly women who are seen as having strong contact with nature, because of their biology). Yet as Nash points out, Eoghan has a relationship with Earth that is sexual. He sees Earth as "a strong masterful shape, woman-like in face and roundness of limb, dark red hue, with great round eyes, dark and deep into which he had perforce to look", and "a dark face with dark skin's dark eyes over full breasts" (Nash, 1993, p106).

Here we see nature through the eyes of the male. The gaze is one of desire, objectification and covetousness. Earth is constructed as female and there to be dominated. It is an interesting example because of the way it contradicts other more prevalent examples of how women were encouraged to be seen as old and asexual. Yet, this novel is about sexuality and encourages us to view earth/woman as sexual. However, it is ultimately just as damaging to women; it is the image of the cold woman because the way she is positioned within the relationship it is one of inequality. He is subject and she, object.

Forced onto the female body were all these fears and fantasies. Equally, in the painting, *Turf Diggers*, politics was being played out over dress. The red skirts were symbols of national costume and cultural nationalists were keen to create a national costume, using women as moulds for creating their essential Irish woman.

Ethnic dress became interchanged with tradition and essentials and the female body enters an unstable arena of scrutiny and meaning. (Kanneth, 1995, p.347).

It is interesting to learn how a myth was also created about the type of dress that the Aran Islander's wore. It was/is imagined that the islander's Aran jumpers contain a romantic story regarding the stitches. For example, each jumper that was supposedly worn by the local fisherman had personalised stitches so that, if he drowned, he could be properly identified by examining the stitches. Again, this was a myth created by the woollen industry to help market the product. Yet, islanders didn't wear Aran jumpers as part of their daily costume, (O'Dowd, Ann, in conversation with the author).

One can see how a false identity was built around these islanders. In a way, it has parallels with the way a false identity was fabricated about the west of Ireland and Irish women in particular.

In representing the female as the embodiment of land, this diminishes women and ultimately recolonises them.

Where the land is understood as a natural category, so are the people. The outstanding objection to this is that human beings identified with their environment are not free agents; they are being recolonised. (Brett, 1989, p.14).

Barthes discusses how myths have this ability to reduce peoples to essences or types. The motivation behind the projection of the essential women on the essential dress was to reduce these people to ideals and thus taking them out of their realities and simplifying their lives.

In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically; it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics. (Barthes, 1993, p.143).

The perpetuation of the idea of the "primitive", makes the object simultaneously unsophisticated and inferior. Colonisers believed the Irish to be a feminised, primitive race; poetic, romantic, wild and instinctual. The inheritors of the state mimicked this colonial thinking and adjusted it to suit their own needs. The new state objectified women to further their own power. This was not some powerful conspiracy, but a set of attitudes and acts. For, as Adrienne Rich has written, you will never find patriarchy in a pure form (Rich, 1987, p.218). The question must be asked, why did the political power simplify and fix women's identity?

Irish women were very involved in the nationalist struggle for independence and had demonstrated that they were just as active and politically engaged as men. Women were much more involved in land agitation movements, during the Fenian movement and up until the War of Independence. Carol Coulter writes that, "women on the whole were more radical and more socially concerned than, at least, some of the men" (Coulter, 1993, p.21). From the outset of independence many government heads were merely concerned with having a veneer of social, political and economic change. There were huge differences of concerns between men and women at that time. Women tended to be more interested in obtaining the vote for women, as well as community issues, such as welfare and poverty.

The new state did not think that women had any role to play outside the home and it did its utmost to limit women's power in the public arena. De Valera was more interested in seeing "comely maidens dancing at the cross-roads". Women were supposedly relegated to passive and caring roles. The constitution of 1937 proved the case in point. However, women still managed to develop and exercise control outside the public arena, for example, in community organisations and ironically in the family unit also.

Chapter Three

Hilary Robinson in her article *Irish/Woman/Artwork*, states that many Irish female artists return to the body as a centre for their work, because of the way the Irish female body has been a "place" where a lot of political games have been enacted (Robinson, 1995, p.104).

We have seen in the second chapter how representations of Irish women were of a limited and fixed nature. It became the post colonial state's agenda to control female sexuality and political, social and economic independence. The 1937 constitution crystallised these attitudes towards women. Also, the Catholic Church had a massive influence on the government concerning women and their sexuality.

One can see similar patriarchal desires for women to live out their lives within certain parameters, and I think that these wishes go deeper and go beyond the Catholic Church's influence and thinking. The Church is highly patriarchal but I think that attacking the Catholic Church solely, deflects attention away from a more general mistrust of women. When discussing patriarchy I do not mean that it is all men that are to blame and that all women are guiltless, for women can contribute to patriarchy also. It can be advantageous for many women to buttress patriarchal systems.

Hilary Robinson has written that the female body has become the site of some of the "fiercest of Ireland's political battles" (Robinson, 1995, p.104). The womb has become something that has to be continually guarded, monitored and legislated for, with abortion laws imposing very strict restrictions on the body of women. Not allowing a woman to make a choice about what they want to do with their bodies seems to be like not giving them responsibility over their lives. Prevention of abortion could be seen as tightening the reins on women, of denying that women may not wish to enter into motherhood at a particular time. I don't want to put it across that women would just make a decision flippantly, or not be anguished about it. And not wanting to enter motherhood can be because of a wide variety of reasons and circumstances.

Society is not comfortable with the ambiguity of pregnancy. Even the whole way of describing the foetus within the womb is shrouded in controversy and uncertainty. Sometimes, the foetus is perceived as being neither one thing or another, seen as not fully human and yet not inanimate. Notions of fear of the "object" come into play when confronted by pregnancy and birth.

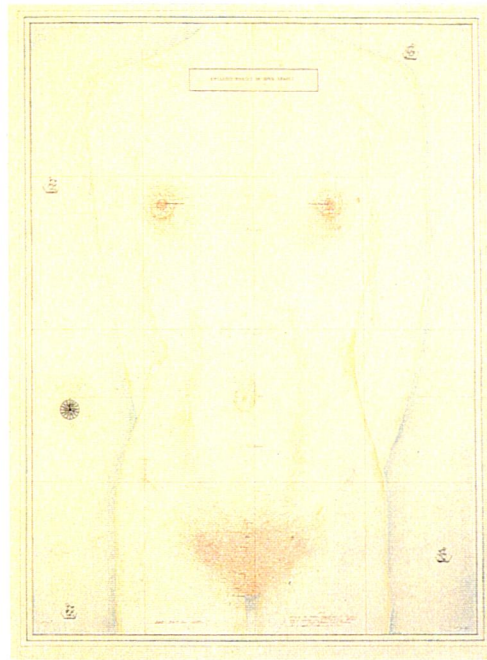
It is interesting to read an article on Mary Duffy by Mary Cummins, (Irish Times, 11-5-92), and how Mary Duffy as a disabled person has been drawn into the issue of abortion and how people with disability are used by both sides of the fence. Certain feminists make the argument for late abortion if the foetus is disabled, thus invalidating Duffy's existence and on the other side she is used as an example of the loss that society would have experienced if abortion had been available when she was born.

Julia Kristeva writes that there is no such thing as an overall and complete definition of woman, that it is impossible to represent "women". I think Kristeva is saying that there is not just one archetypal woman, "In 'woman', I see something that cannot be represented, something that is not said, something above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies" (In Marks and de Courtrivons - (Eds), 1981).

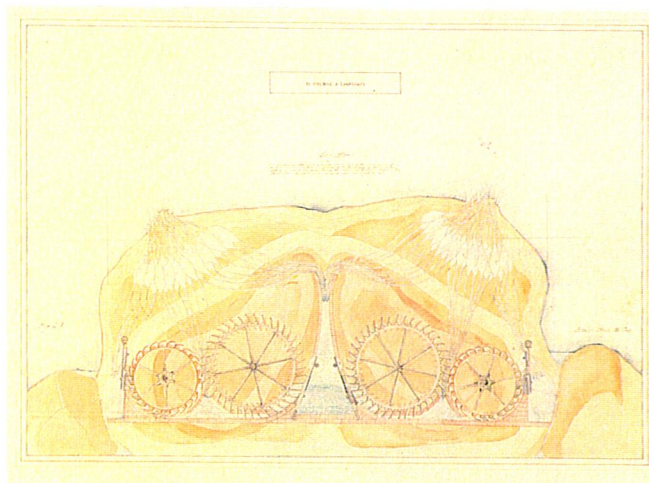
It is interesting to see how "place" can take on a different meaning at this stage. It translates as "spaces" or occupations such as motherhood. Ailbhe Smyth discusses this issue of what is the "proper place" for women in contemporary Ireland (A Smyth, 1991, p.46). Subsequently, women need not be solely identified with land or soil. One can begin to discuss women and place in terms of social and political space, "between the space allotted to us and the space we claim as ours by right?" (A Smyth, 1991, p.48) where there are certain places deemed only suitable for women.

This need to place boundaries around the female body and the ambiguity of woman's body, could be interpreted in the work of both Prendergast and Duffy. Kathy Prendergast has no wish to be aligned to any particular ideology. She sees her works as a "personal geography" (Nash, 1993). The pieces that I have chosen are her body map series:

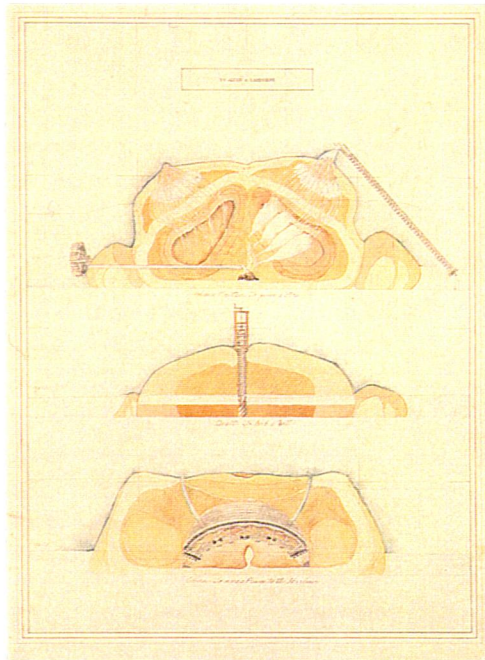
- Enclosed World in Open Spaces (see ill. 4, 1983)
- To Control a Landscape, Irrigation (see ill. 5, 1983)
- To Alter a Landscape (see ill. 6, 1983)
- To Control a landscape - Oasis (see ill. 7, 1983)
- And
- The "Land" Piece (see ill. 8, 1983)



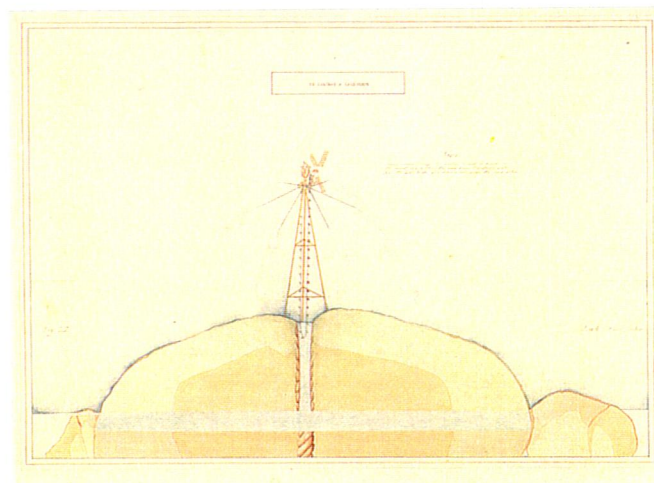
Kathy Prendergast *Enclosed World in Open Spaces*



Kathy Prendergast *To Control a Landscape - Irrigation*



Kathy Prendergast *To Alter a Landscape*



Kathy Prendergast *To Control a Landscape - Oasis*





Kathy Prendergast *Land*



Kathy Prendergast's drawings are very much couched in ambiguity; she juxtaposes land and body and we see breasts as volcanoes or vice versa. Her work subverts the way one normally views maps or anatomical drawings. They look very subtle, calm and sophisticated, but on closer inspection look so clinical, reminding me of some awful experiments on the body and yet they are intimate. It is difficult to define them, there are so many layers of meanings. And this is why I think her work is particularly relevant when discussing the female body. They are complex, ambiguous and full of grey zone areas. Her drawings encourage us to view the female body as having a variety of meanings and as something highly personal, private and intimate, yet very public.

Prendergast's work prevents the viewer viewing the female body as something that is simplified. She subverts the way we are still conditioned to see woman as a place, e.g., Anna Livia statue, Dublin, or the female turf gatherer on the cover of the "Ireland of the Welcomes" magazine.

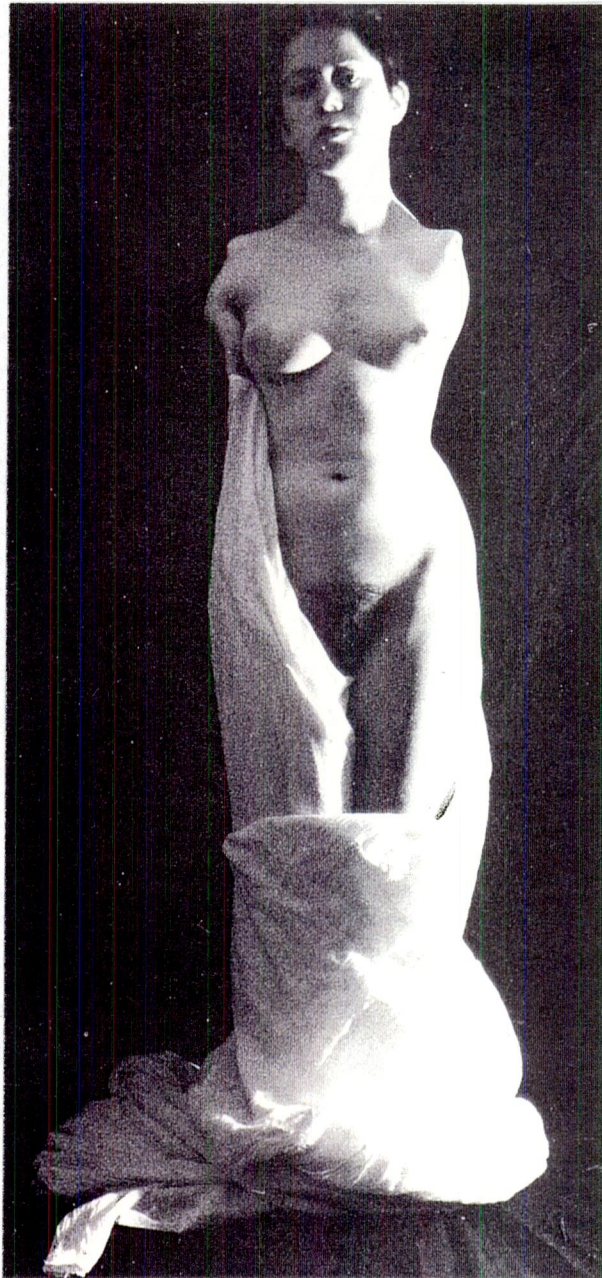
Issues of ambiguity and difference are very much in evidence in Mary Duffy's work also. Mary Duffy has a disability which is central to her work. She has no arms due to the drug, thalidomide, that her mother took during her pregnancy. She uses photography and performance which she deliberately chose to counteract a lot of "charity" imagery concerning disability.

In *Touches and Changes* she explores her birth. She tries to "recreate" her birth, with the sound of a heartbeat. She tries to communicate the feelings that surrounded her birth; humiliation, pain and anger, coupled with feelings of delight and love. "*Touches and Changes* allowed the artist to explore the idea of her birth as a tragedy" (Pauline Cummins, 1991, p.27)

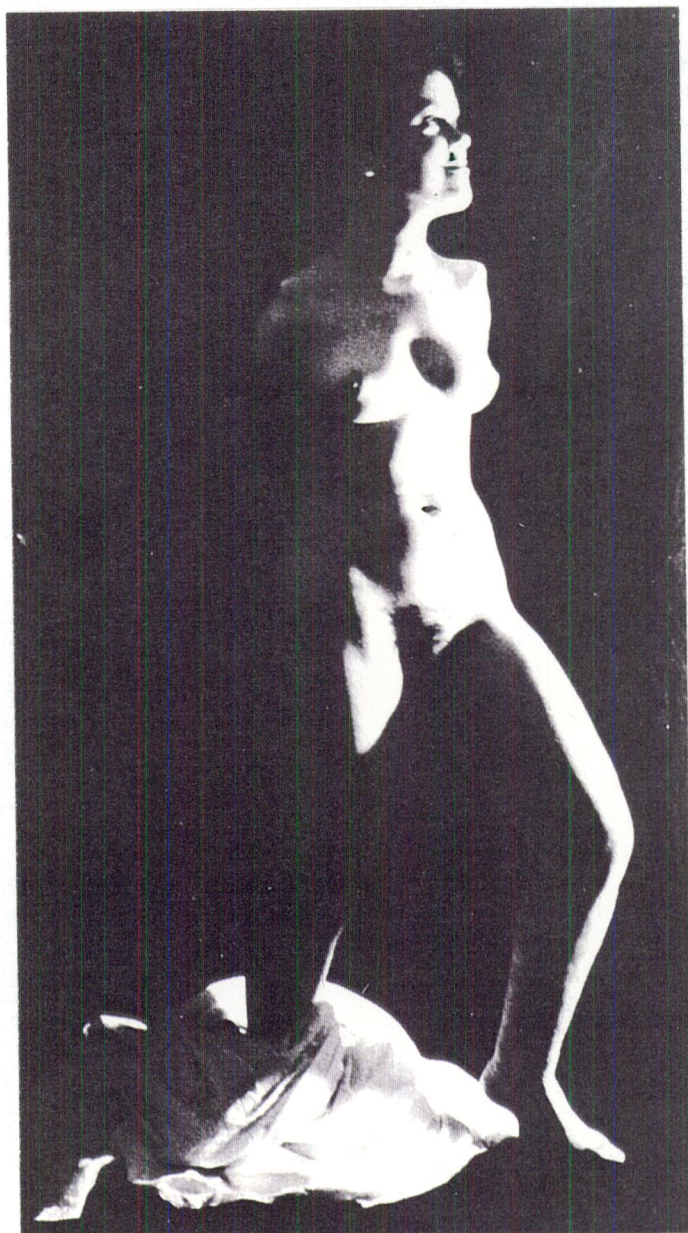
Whole describes her grandmother's acceptance of her as a complete person and not as something that one would want to "repair" or "fix". The piece *Cutting the Ties that Bind* (see ill. 9, 1991) consists of eight photographs accompanied by text. It was part of an exhibition that travelled around schools in Ireland. The first photograph in the series shows Duffy shrouded in white material. As the photographs progress, Duffy begins to shake off the clothes. Duffy emerges from the wrappings naked and strides away from the discarded material. It is a metaphor rejecting categorisation and rejecting accepted norms. In a live performance piece entitled *Stories of a Body* (see ill. 10, 1991) Duffy projected linear shapes onto her body as a metaphor for protection; protecting herself against the eyes of the medical profession and society in general. In her work, we are confronted by her naked body with no arms.



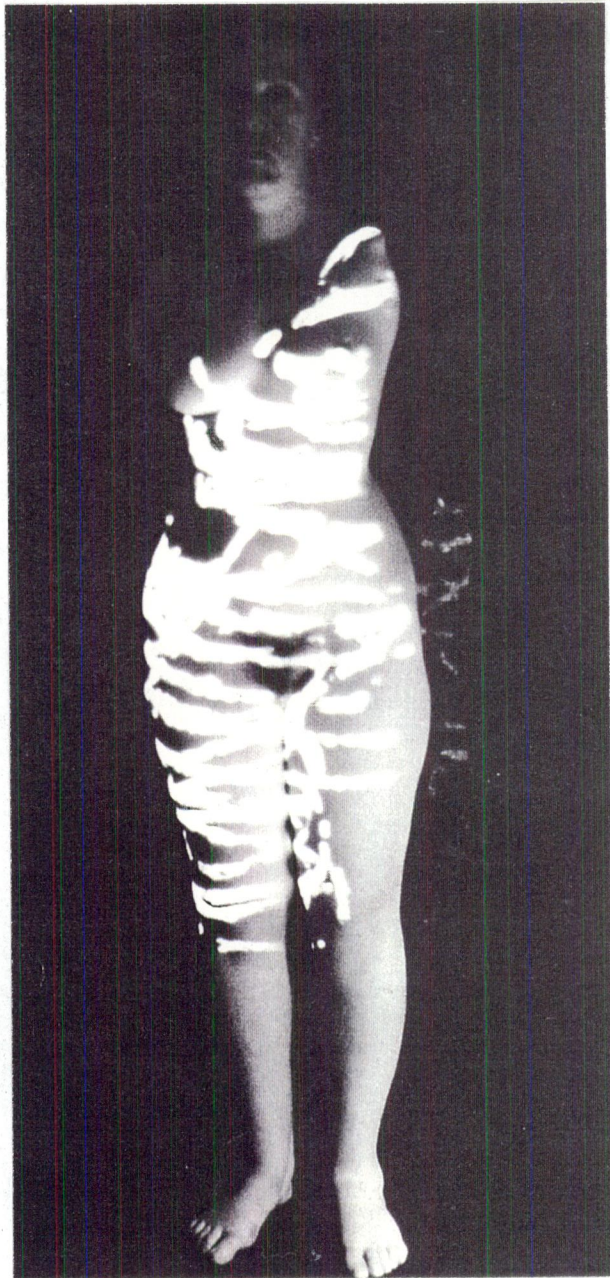
Mary Duffy *Cutting the Ties that Bind*



Mary Duffy *Cutting the Ties that Bind*



Mary Duffy *Cutting the Ties that Bind*



Mary Duffy *Stories of a Body*



It's hard for us to cope with this physical difference because she exposes some of our worst fears, the fear that our bodies could break down somehow, of disintegration and of us losing control of our bodies. Duffy, like the late Jo Spence (who also documented her body) discusses how:

When talking about racism or sexism, there is no fear if one is white of waking up black tomorrow, so there is room for disassociation - with disability however, one could easily go to bed able-bodied and wake up with a disability (Duffy, 1987, p.31).

The term ambiguous could apply to Mary Duffy's body (without sounding too clinical) because I believe that when people are confronted with physical disability, they are trying to grope around, trying almost to "classify" the person. With able-bodied people, we unconsciously "classify" them as white, male, etc. Do we avert our eyes, talk at them or down to them? Is the person fully a "human" or some kind of "freak"? I don't think people in general are patronising or whatever towards people with physical differences, it is just that society has been conditioned to categorise or fix people.

Society is used to acknowledging certain representations of women. Duffy's work challenges this need of ours to "repair" the fragments, of trying to pin-point something. Vulnerability and strength are simultaneously presented to the viewer. Her work is ambivalent, opposing feelings co-exist, an exploration of "defiance, death, deformity, distrust, dismay and also of delight, wonder, variety, inventiveness, creativity, and uniqueness." (Duffy, 1987, p.30) The softness and roundness of her body is visible yet at the same time, we feel threatened.

Her work is moving in and out of various feelings, which gives the work and consequently her body a great sense of fluidity, which I think makes the viewer realise that there are very complex processes going on around this particular body. Mary Duffy uses her body as a metaphor, as a way of confronting her image and gradually subverting it and to introduce difference and change. It's interesting to compare this particular metaphor and the one explored in the second chapter, where women were used as a metaphor for land.

It is ironic that although Duffy is making the viewer aware of how disturbing difference can be for us, she is simultaneously, asserting the fact that she has a different identity from others. She refuses to have a certain identity forced upon her, that she is a passive victim which is an image that is prevalent within charity imagery, etc. She sees herself as "whole, complete and self-bounded" (Nead, 1992, p.79). She has redrawn her own body not as an apologetic fragment but as someone self-sufficient.

I think that Mary Duffy is a good example of how the owner's relationship with her body and the outsider's relationship plays a huge part in the construction of their identity. How a disability can have a large influence on one's situation in society and how that affects how you may see yourself.

Jo Spence, who had breast cancer, explored how the disability of illness can come to be one's identity. Just as the cultural nationalist sought to impose a fixed identity on women, society and the medics tried to impose a fixed identity onto Spence and Duffy.

Taking on board all these signifiers that are associated with illness and disability, instead of having different undercurrents and identities moving in and out of her life, Spence was reduced to one identity.

Cancer is not the major thing in my life, but when you get caught up in the medical machine, you become categorised and cancer becomes your life, your identity. (Spence, BBC)

Like Duffy, Spence uses her body as a metaphor for all forms of struggle. The medical profession, and society in general, were saying to her "you have cancer, it is now your life" and in that way she felt that an identity had been forced upon her, that all her other experiences had become obsolete. It's strange to see how the body is used as an instrument to fix people and again, putting them in a certain "place".

Alanna O'Kelly uses the body when exploring the relationship between mother and child. She uses a personal experience such as breast-feeding her child. Around that time she read an account of a woman in one of the recent famines in Ethiopia, which told of the woman holding her dead child in her arms. The woman explained that the reason it had died was because the milk in her breasts had dried up. (Sunday Press, 4 October 1992).

Mirella Buckley in her article "Patterns of Experience", discusses how the Irish body was objectified during the famine of 1845-1847 and was seen as being lazy, greedy and lacking in initiative. And as being both sexually submissive and subversive. Buckley makes the argument that because of the way the Irish body was polarised during the famine, e.g., both greedy and hungry, spawning and over-fertile, that Irish society inherited these polarisations. "In Ireland today, we still strike paradigms to police and repress each other's politics, fertility and sexuality" (Buckley, 1995, p.23). It is a very interesting article of how we have mimicked colonisers methods in measuring groups. I think that recent commemoration of the famine was an attempt to bridge a gap between the past and the present. To discuss and analyse and to let people tell stories about it, to come to terms with it and how it affected our country, etc.

Alanna O'Kelly grew up in Ballgarrett, County Wexford. Her interests seem to be centred on the environment and she has used natural materials such as flax and sally sticks. When she was working in London in the 1980s, she began to research the Great Famine, work which has been refined as installation pieces.

The piece *No Colour Can Deepen the Darkness of Truth* (see ill. 11, 1993) is a three-part video. This is a collection of images, single and also superimposed onto each other: mountains, eyes, hands. A big part of O'Kelly's work is sound, such as keening. They are like unconscious sounds and cries. With this video piece, she had large photographs of hands, covered in lime dust, which refers to the time of famine relief, when people were employed to build roads, etc. in exchange for food.

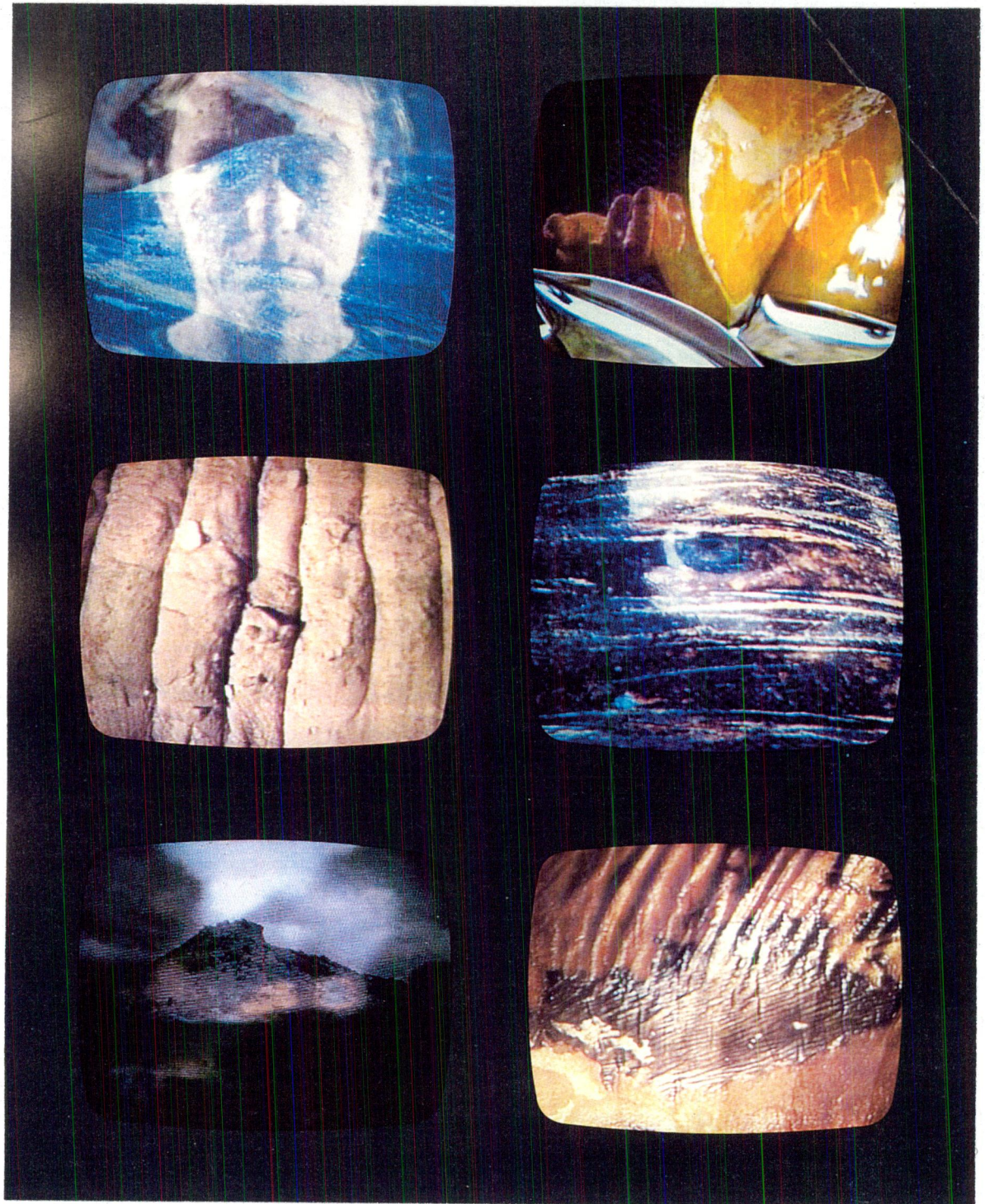
An earlier piece, *The Country Blooms, a Garden and a Grave* (see ill. 12, 1990) are colour photographs overlaid with texts describing some of the awful scenes of the famine. In *No Colour can Darken the Deepness of Truth* she examines how language and history are very much embedded in place.

Language and sound are a very important part of communities because of various cadences, story telling/oral history and rituals such as keening. It is of great significance for a post-colonial country like Ireland, which has virtually lost its native language. A loss of this kind must have had a huge effect upon the country's identity, because language plays a large role in constructing place.

O'Kelly doesn't articulate conventional words and in doing this, she goes beyond or goes under representation. Her sounds are of keening and sound as if they are from the unconscious. She avoids naming or the controlling and patriarchal power of language, "because the unconscious, that other limitless country, is a place where the repressed manage to survive" (Cixious in Marks and de Courtrivon (Eds), 1981).

It is similar to the way Prendergast mixes names around, not defining or conclusive. I think it significant that O'Kelly does not use conventional language in this context, because other artists such as Seamus Heaney have used the study of language to feminise place and place names.

Heaney writes about how the coloniser's descriptions of place is almost masculine and harsh in their use of language; "staked out in consonant", whereas the "Irish feminine language is soft 'guttural'" (Nash, 1993), sensual and rich in vowel sound, when describing their place names.



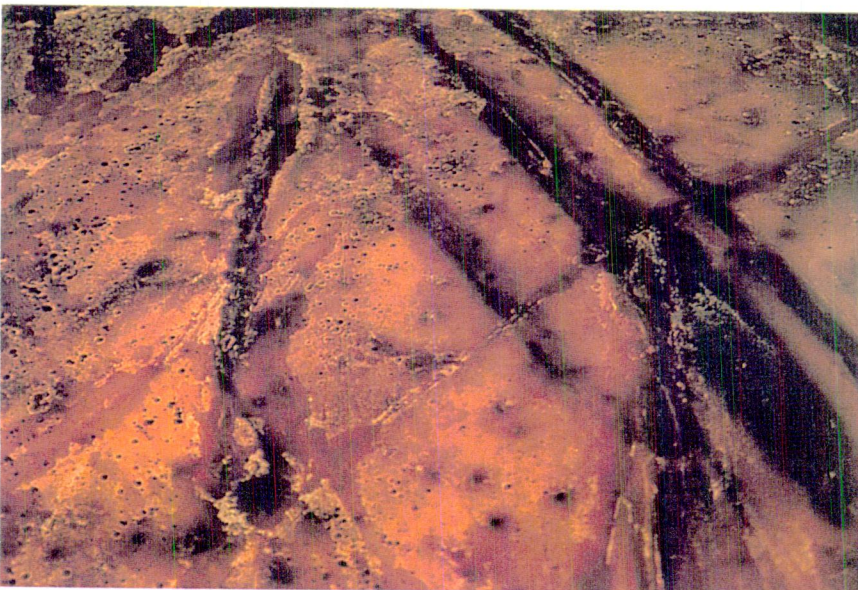
Alanna O'Kelly *No Colour Can Deepen the Darkness of Truth*





The soil of Gibraltar grows no corn,
 The soil of Cork does.
 Such is the admirable working of the Union
 Of Ireland and England.
 The garrison and citizens of Gibraltar
 Live well, feed abundantly
 They are no more for the potato rot,
 Than they do a deficient date crop in Arabia.
 While in County Cork, in Skibbereen, whole families
 Of men, women and children
 Are lying in heaps, in the corners of hovels
 Some dead, some alive.
 Skibbereen starves, and raves, and dies,
 That Gibraltar, St. Helena, and the rest of them,
 Be kept in good condition.

1846 - '48



In Belmullet, County Cork, a starving woman
 Lay next to her dead three year old child,
 Waiting for her husband to return with food.
 Night fell, he failed to return.
 Unable to move, she lay by her son,
 Imagining her husband too
 Unable to move from the hunger.
 Lying beside those of her kind,
 She clenched his hand,
 Made one last effort to stay alive,
 Closing her eyes from his face
 And to his bare feet.
 She proceeded to eat them.
 Her husband returned home. He buried their child.
 That night he was caught stealing food.
 At his trial,
 The magistrate noted these circumstances.
 After investigation, he was released.
 He returned home.

1848



A kind of quietism —
 Hundreds, Thousands, nay Millions
 A slumbering volcano.
 Men, women, their children
 They no longer spoke; much less cried
 They just stared.
 A gaunt unmeaning vacancy
 A kind of insanity
 A stupid despairing look
 That asked for nothing,
 Expected nothing,
 Received nothing.

1846 - '48

Alanna O'Kelly *The Country Blooms, a Garden & a Grave*

Yet, the Irish language, because of the way it was suppressed and devalued, offers an interesting place from which to explore issues concerning women. Also, oral history has been neglected at the expense of written history. Introducing voice, helps us to be aware of the relationship of language and place.

It is very difficult to try to deal with the tragedies of the famine visually. There is a risk of failing to deal with the economic intricacies of that time. Also, the fact that it wasn't just a polarised situation between Irish victims and the English.

O'Kelly does try to explore the relationship between land and people. In an earlier piece, *The Country Bloom, a Garden and a Grave* there are photographs of the potato fields and she focuses on the marks made on the land. She superimposes text onto the colour photographs. The text describes the starvation and desperation of the famine in one particular area; Skibereen, County Cork.

Whole families of men and children are lying in heaps in the corners of hovels, some dead, some alive, Skibereen starves, raves and dies, that Gibraltar, St Helena and the rest of them be kept in good condition (1846-1848)

I think that O'Kelly, by dealing with the famine, is trying to pay homage to the pain and humiliation, which a lot of artists have avoided. Her use of keening (a mourning ritual), brings home the magnitude of that tragedy. In a way, O'Kelly has helped to reinscribe a part of history that until recently was very unpopular with many historians and areas of the media. And, especially, the suffering of the famine was played down and derided by many of the academic establishment.

For many decades the tragedy and significance of the famine have been minimalised, sanitised and marginalised by leading revisionist historian (Kinealy, 1995, p.33)

From examining the histories of place and land and female. I think that we cannot view landscape and the idea of place in the same way that we have before. Seeing it as romantic, feminine or whatever is just an escape from confronting the fact that land is owned - it is also belittling for women if they are seen as somehow close to nature. By not remembering why the "landscape" is so desolate is forgetting the tragedy of the famine. I'm not saying that land/place should not be enjoyed but that we should be aware of all that baggage and begin to examine other ways of constructing place.

Chapter Four

The motif of the map "raises connections between landscape and the female body, between political control of the landscape and the control of female sexuality" (Nash, 1993)

In the second chapter we could see the way there were constructions of "place" and female identity, the way women were fixed. In the previous chapter, I discussed how female sexuality is controlled. There has been a thread of control through this history, how internal colonisation hasn't stopped but has developed under different guises.

In certain aspects of the media one can see the male cultural gaze, that has helped to formulate an ideal woman, which has led to a type of "body fascism" (Nead, 1992, p.77), where there is only one type of body that is correct. Duffy felt that she was judged because she didn't live up to the standards of the beauty industry. She has stated that during all her life she has been surrounded by images that values perfect physical beauty and anything falling below this is deemed to be inadequate.

The female body is constantly subjected to the judgmental gaze. Whether it is the gaze of the media who defines the body as healthy or diseased, or the connoisseur who defines it as beautiful or ugly, the female is caught in a perpetual cycle of judgement and categorisation (Nead, 1992, p.81)

Duffy challenges the media's gaze and the male gaze in the way that she sets up an image and then shatters it. She uses strong light and warm colours, which are suggestive of how glamour and portrait photographs are done (Robinson, 1995, p.102) It is as if she is trapping our expectations. But our expectations of conventional physical beauty are disrupted. It's like déjà vu, because we are so accustomed to viewing the female in such ways in the media but suddenly we are forced to reconsider our ways of looking.

I wish to make another point on the issue of control: that it is not just the media, laws on abortion and other areas of gender and sexuality, that have a restrictive effect on women. There are other huge issues that would need to be taken in consideration such as poverty, violence and crime against women. I wish to acknowledge that control is not just defined within areas of female sexuality and personal choice.

The metaphor of the map can be used as a way of dislodging, criticising and of trying to imagine new possibilities of identity. I think that it is a strong symbol of reclaiming something, reworking it, turning it upside-down and making it one's own. Prendergast's *Land* piece is a good example of how she subverts the authority of the map. As I have stated in the third chapter, it is a canvas tent. She has painted the colours and lines of a conventional map onto it. The map becomes the object itself. It becomes something that could be added to, turned upside-down, walked around, looked at from different angles. It goes upwards, almost "takes flight", (Nash, 1993). It is open to change and can be seen as a palimpsest: a kind of parchment where stories can be written or rewritten.

The map is open and connectable in all its dimensions, it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by an individual, group or social formation. It can be drawn on the wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or a meditation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, quoted by Hugon in Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffins, 1995, p.405)

Landscapes of Control (Nash, 1993), can be broken, ripped and sewn back together differently. Here the symbol of the map is seen as open and fluid, as opposed to it being closed and fixed. It invites us to view land/place as being open to multiple identities. Nash also points out that the body can also be read as a text or a palimpsest that is continually open to change, reinscription and can be self-marked and self-represented in alternative ways (Nash, 1993)

Duffy, O'Kelly and Prendergast have engaged in telling their own stories and give representation to their own identities. It is no coincidence that these artists, when trying to deal with identity and redrawing it, have returned to the body, because it has been consistently taken from the realms of their own experiences and is projected out of their realities or else into places of guilt and confusion.

To write. An act which will not only 'realise' the decensored relation of women to sexuality, to her womanly being, giving access to her native strength, it will give her back her goods, her pleasure, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal, it will tear her away from the super-egoised structure in which she has always accepted the place reserved for the guilty (Cixious, in Marks and de Courtrivon (Eds), 1981)

In this process of telling one's story, old myths are shattered and new ones created. This gives tremendous power and opportunity to show what it is like to be a certain woman in a certain place. It has the potential to break silences and the idea of the monolithic woman. It gives us insight into the complexity and difference within each identity.

And, I think, that by there being a wide variety and difference in each of the stories, that it can inform us about a wider identity such as the community. What individuals are experiencing and how they deal with issues affecting a particular community/place. Maybe, this is biography or autobiography, but it helps us to come to terms with one's environment or place, to make sense of things. It disrupts the notion of just one authoritative voice, or one significant identity and adds so many layers to the value of place.

Stories also link individual islands of activity and meaning together...this is not a secure world, it only lasts as long as the story is remembered and every time it is retold the world is created anew. But it is a certain world because it is based on the narrative process by which we describe the world to ourselves in our own terms to our own satisfaction, enabling us to manipulate that world and move around it (Revill, 1984, pp.122-130)

Adrienne Rich in her article "Notes Towards a Politics of Location", discusses the idea of "geography of the body". (A Rich, 1987, p.212) Rich uses her body as a spring board from which to explore her identity. She believes that her body is the best place to begin to piece together where she comes from and what makes her the way she is. To let the different marks and disfigurements of her body tell a story about herself. To explore the origins of her body and how this has effected her position in society, that she is a white, Jewish, middle-class lesbian woman from a particular region in the USA. She uses a number of examples, one of which she describes the consequences of the colour of her skin and the places that it has got her. And also, her religion and how this related to her geographic location.

She was four years old when the Third Reich began. Rich is aware that her life would have been different if she had been born in Europe rather than Baltimore, USA.

To locate myself in my body means more than understanding what it has meant to me to have a vulva, clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognising that white skin, the places it has taken, the places it has not let me go. (A Rich, 1987, p.215)

Jo Spence (BBC), talks about how class effected her body and consequently her identity. She was a working-class woman who carried with her a lot of attitudes from her background, for example, in her family, there was a passivity when it came to dealing with doctors, that somehow the family was inferior and so didn't question the doctors' methods. This became an issue when Spence herself became ill. Also, the economic reality of not having the availability of a wider variety of medicines on the NHS, such as Chinese healing treatments.

Also, Spence talks about how in her background there were many negative attitudes towards their individual bodies, of not bothering to care for the body, such as diet or exercise.

Prendergast, Duffy and O'Kelly are trying to recreate their own stories, to rebuild their own identity using the body. Offering us different and imaginative ways of looking at body, identity and place.

I think that Prendergast's and O'Kelly's work give us insight into the idea of place. I think that Prendergast gives women, especially, a reason to want to believe again in the idea of establishing a relationship and identification with land and place, because of the way that she disrupts the fixed idea of land and body, through her use of the map.

One can see the difficulty for women of reconciling themselves to the idea of place and land, because of the raw deal that women have got in relation to place, how this may spill over into how "Irishness" is viewed. Ailbhe Smyth reckons that women are not equally placed when it comes to national myths, identity building or the lived experience of being Irish:

Idealised out of our realities, Irish women have had no place as speaking subjects within the discourse of Irishness.
(Smyth, 1991, p.146)

The imagining process in which we have been engaged since independence has not enabled Ireland to develop in any constructive way, especially for Irish women. There has to be a more radical way from which we can re-imagine ourselves. I realise that there are various levels in the meaning and construction of place, the idea of nation or imagined community. I still think it worthwhile to return, rewrite and insert the experience of it. I don't mean in the sense of revisionism, negating and rejecting chunks of history, but for women to meet history on their own terms.

Eavan Boland discusses how it is easy for a woman to turn away from the concept of nation as its history, because of how it wilfully ignored women. Boland accepts that the concept is "flawed" (Boland, 1994, p.87), but somehow she felt that she was a part of that history. And as history is a continual and open-ended process, she could re-enter it by telling of her own experiences, what she feels may mirror others. "In some subterranean way I felt myself to be a part of that ordeal; the fragmentations extended into mine." (Boland, 1994, p. 87)

Like the other artists, Boland has sought to redefine her own image of "Irishness" by dealing with her own experiences in relation to being Irish and female.

She began to make parallels between her complexity as a woman and a poet living a complex life and letting that be a mirror of her nation. Boland sees a connection between the "defeats of womanhood" and the "suffering of a nation". And that she need only reveal the first in order to reveal the second. The fact that Boland writes herself, her experiences, is an act of entering history. It is what women give to it, it is what women chose to insert, to construct, making it theirs, be it a good or a bad experiences.

Boland writes about a particular woman in Achill Island whom she met whilst staying there as a young woman. This islander had a strong impact on Boland because of the way she described the effects the famine had on the island. This woman had carried with her all that sadness. Boland thought that this woman's memories and stories were what nation was/is.

Richard Kearney discusses the idea of narrative and myth. He describes myth in the words of Liam de Paor as, "A society tells itself about itself in order to describe itself to itself and to others" (Kearney, 1988, p.270). Kearney reckons that it is important, in the process of deconstructing myths or traditions, to also engage in reconstructing and to creatively make a bridge between past and present. I think that it is easy to rubbish certain histories, and ideologies and to smash things into so many fragments, tat nothing symbolic is left of our cultural heritage. It is important to criticise history but also to use it as an instrument in discovering aspects of it that have been previously concealed: to subtract, but also to add.

By creatively reinterpreting the past, narrative can serve to release new and hitherto concealed, possibilities of understanding one's history and by critically scrutinising the past it can wrest tradition away from the conformism that is always threatening to overpower it. (Kearney, 1988, p.272)

Conclusion

From writing this thesis, I think that the cultural nationalists were engaged in distorting reality. I respect the political difficulties of that time, that the country was just emerging from a bitter civil war and the huge consequences of partition. The government had to inject some semblance of confidence and equanimity into the system. Also, the Irish government was extremely conscious of trying to create a very distinctive and unique identity. This is where the government began to delude itself and others. Clearly, they sought to construct an identity that was in direct opposition to a supposedly English identity. However, this was just a veneer, of trying to say, "Yes, we have our own separate identity and political structures".

The new state perpetuated the same colonial political institutions and structures. These colonial structures that the state inherited were highly rigid and patriarchal. The cycle continued. I understand that a new state must build confidence and try to re-invent itself. That is not the problem. The problem is the way certain groups were at the receiving end of a lot of these.

Paul Henry's work, unfortunately for him, fitted into the agenda of the state. The paintings communicated these values because of the arrangement of the paintings, and more importantly, because of the context that the pieces were presented to us. The magnificent mountains, the clouds and rivers, all help to build up an impression of purity and distinctiveness. Also, the women in the painting *The Turf Diggers* act as signifiers to the viewer. Henry didn't paint them to be so, but the viewers were encouraged to be seen in a certain way, to reflect the ideal woman, that the state wanted; passive, pure, virginal or asexual, mother and carer of the home. Moral messages were pinned onto Henry's work. The underlying motivation of this was control, control of women's sexuality and political power. This has carried on into recent history and politics, transforming itself into many guises. It would be interesting to investigate these patriarchal systems of wanting to control and underpin identities have a strong link with the colonial structures that Ireland had to live with. Its strange to see how women were targeted when decisions about power was made.

After independence there were real opportunities to bring about changes for women; issues which affected them such as poverty and welfare. However, it is encouraging to see that although women were eventually pushed out of the public arena, they didn't become invisible. Women began to build networks with the family unit and in community organisations. Although women have been subjected to much simplification and fixing of their identities, for example being seen as a metaphor for land/place, or being seen in terms of the ideal beauty, many women are in control of the shaping of their identities, in exercising control, by inserting their life experiences and identities. I think that many women chose not to be victims of mythologies and deliberately react to false and simplified myths, by pushing forward on their own realities.

I think that it could be argued that Mary Robinson's influence has helped to focus women's attention on this re-inventing process. She urges people to listen to the experiences of women, which I think is similar to what Eavan Boland is saying, that the experience of being Irish, need not be some huge heroic act or some abstract concept or epic, but can be many experiences and identities which can mirror "nation".

In the case of women who lived their lives long ago in centuries when disease and prejudice and repression blocked the advancement of women, it can seem that - with some exception - we are listening to nothing more than their suffering. But this is not the case. We are also listening to their survival, their achievement of courage, to their tenacity. M. Robinson (Quoted by Coulter, 1993, p.52).

That women have opportunities and do take them, to tell their own stories and various identities, I am attracted to the contemporary artists which I've discussed because of the way they try to redraw the structures, to re-inscribe and re-route.

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