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## The Local is the Universal Without Walls :John McGahern and the Global Project

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VOLUME 5

Eamon Maher (ed.)

# CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON GLOBALISATION AND IRELAND



## Introduction

EAMON MAHER

It is a truism to state that in the space of a few decades Ireland became one of the most globalised societies in the Western world. The full ramifications of such a transformation for traditional Irish communities, religious practice, economic activity, literature and the arts, are as yet unknown. What we do know is that Ireland's unthinking embrace of globalisation has at times had negative consequences. Unlike some other European countries, France and Germany in particular, Ireland eagerly and sometimes recklessly grasped the opportunities for material advancement afforded by the global project. The French saw more clearly than most how globalisation (which they associated with the Americanisation or McDonaldisation of the universe) posed a threat to their cultural specificity. The fact that English became the *lingua franca* of commerce as well as the dominant language used in the ultimate globalising technology, the internet, made the French wary of what lay ahead for their language and culture. They spoke out vociferously against the pervasive use of English and the uniform acceptance of unbridled capitalist ideology. They put measures in place to support things like French literature and cinema and asserted their cultural uniqueness whenever the opportunity arose.

Their independent stance had broader ramifications when in 2003, on the eve of the outbreak of the war in Iraq, the then French Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dominique de Villepin, strongly questioned the wisdom of waging war without just cause at the Security Council of the United Nations. This opposition was a source of resentment in the United States for some time: they argued that they were engaged in a global war on terror



and that it was the duty of all 'civilised'<sup>1</sup> nations to support them. French wine and cheese products were subsequently boycotted in America, with disastrous consequences for these key industries, but the French held firm on their opposition to the war.

The Irish government, on the other hand, aware of the extent to which economic prosperity was strongly linked to the presence here of American multinationals like Intel, Dell and Hewlett Packard, who were attracted initially by a very favourable corporate tax regime, were quick to offer Shannon Airport for the refuelling of American aircraft on their way to Iraq or, some would argue, for the rendition of prisoners en route to Guantanamo Bay. This gesture, which was portrayed as a signal of goodwill to our 'special friend' and guarantor of our economic progress, did not prevent the loss of over 1,000 jobs in Dell in 2009 as the company moved its manufacturing operation from Limerick to low-wage Poland. Dell could do this because globalisation enables a swift setting up of new businesses and their equally rapid winding up when a better deal presents itself elsewhere. Multinationals are primarily interested in profit and are not controlled by national governments. Gratitude and loyalty do not feature prominently in their game plan in the way in which the Irish government believed.

Likewise, commentators who warned that Ireland's unhealthy dependency on foreign multinationals, the financial services, construction and the property boom – all manifestations of the effects of globalisation in Ireland – could ultimately lead to financial ruin, were treated like pariahs. They were accused of talking Ireland into a recession, of being kill-joys, and of having no concept of how a modern open economy works. Undoubtedly they would have preferred their predictions to have proved unfounded as the current recession has had negative consequences for everyone in the country, including the commentators. Writing in 2002, Peadar Kirby questioned the basis of the Irish economic miracle. At the heart of his critique was the conviction that it was the economic and political elites who were benefiting inordinately from the new-found prosperity:

1 This was the adjective used by President Bush during one of his speeches around this time.

The highly positive reading given these transformations can only be understood as deriving from a fundamental misunderstanding – namely that the interests of the whole of Irish society are equated with the interests of those elites who are benefiting from this newly invented Ireland. But this reading has also taken on a power in its own right, promoting economic growth as an end in itself and equating social success with the enrichment and conspicuous consumption of wealthy elites. This has the effect of dispossessing those who do not share in this success, and who are therefore redefined, not as citizens whose rights and needs can make justifiable claims on society, but as outside observers who can only look on in envy at the growing takeover of society by these elites.<sup>2</sup>

This is an insightful summation of what occurred in the years referred to as the Celtic Tiger. Statements to the effect that the enrichment of Irish society was undemocratic, with a small minority benefiting inordinately from greater access to capital and a regulatory system that relied on a light touch, were seriously frowned upon by the ruling elite and those to whom the criticism was attributed were excoriated. The last months of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 brought to light the existence of a 'cosy cartel' within corporate Ireland, where banks and other lending agencies vied with each other to offer sweet deals to property developers and other businesses. The result is a crippling amount of toxic debt that the government and tax payers have to underwrite. In spite of protestations to the effect that we are caught up in what is in effect a 'global problem', most people know deep down that unbridled greed and a lack of efficient regulation have meant that we are more exposed than our more prudent European partners. As corrective measures come hailing down, with a promise of more severe cut-backs to come, with unemployment having exceeded 10 per cent for the first time in a number of decades, the realisation is beginning to sink in that the boom years, instead of closing the gap between rich and poor, have only accentuated it.

An examination of why we were so enamoured with capitalism and its global manifestations must take into account the desire of many Irish men

2 Peadar Kirby, 'Contested Pedigrees of the Celtic Tiger', in Kirby, Gibbons and Cronin (eds), *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy* (London: Pluto, 2003), pp. 21–37, pp. 32–3.



and women to see the demise of what they viewed as a regressive, Church-dominated society which was viewed as a barrier to social and material advancement. Joe Cleary makes the following observation:

However one makes sense of the last century, it can hardly be disputed that most of the people on the island of Ireland now are materially better off and have more social rights and liberties than had their antecedents either when the two states were founded in the early 1920s or even in the early 1960s. This, surely, must be the definitive litmus test of the generally 'progressive' character of the modes of capitalist modernization supervised by the ruling classes in Northern and Southern Irish society in recent decades?<sup>3</sup>

While accepting that progress has been made on a number of fronts, Cleary does not impute the dawning of this new era to capitalist modernisation, but rather to 'radical movements from below.' To the defenders of capitalism who claim that the working classes are now better off than the lower middle class of former times, Cleary counters:

But this ignores the economic logic of late consumer capitalism, which requires a mode of production that generates not only affluence but also endemic frustration and dissatisfaction. Only by manufacturing a perpetually dissatisfied sense of want can consumer capitalism sustain the continual demand for the unlimited goods it needs to sell in order to reproduce itself.<sup>4</sup>

This 'dissatisfied sense of want' is what best characterises Irish society in the past number of years. The Church had been one of the main lobby groups to speak out against unbridled consumerism, but as its role as moral arbiter dissipated in the mists of the mishandling of child abuse scandals, there was no real powerful voice left to represent the plight of those whom the Celtic Tiger had passed by. In addition to the greatly diminished influence of the Catholic Church, the last two decades witnessed the election of the first female President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, the decriminalisation of homosexuality between consenting adults, the liberalisation of artificial

3 Joe Cleary, 'Introduction', in *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2007), p. 9.

4 Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune*, p. 11.

means of contraception, the legalisation of divorce, the emergence of a multicultural Ireland. The country has witnessed change on a scale never before witnessed in such a short period. The sociologist Tom Inglis sums up the transformation of Irish society very well when he notes:

What was crucial during the second half of the twentieth century was how, for some people, that sense of difference moved from a predominantly Catholic culture to one of commodity capitalism. Instead of realising ourselves through the language of the Church and its teachings and practices, we gradually switched to realising ourselves through the language of the market and its teachings and practices.<sup>5</sup>

As more and more money poured into the country, an inordinately large chunk of it came into the possession of a privileged few who made massive fortunes and were allowed generous tax exemptions on the premise that they were generating wealth and creating employment. Very few questioned what was really happening in Irish society: most were too busy indulging in an orgy of consumer spending to cast a nostalgic glance to what was being lost. Anthony Giddens argues that globalisation takes a hold so quickly that people fail to notice what is happening around them:

We live in a world of transformations, affecting almost every aspect of what we do. For better or worse, we are being propelled into a global order that no one fully understands, but which is making its effects felt upon all of us.<sup>6</sup>

The speed with which massive global financial transactions can now take place has no parallel in the past. The world has become a smaller place as technology becomes ever more sophisticated. Young people in Beijing are dressed similarly to those in Paris, London, New York or Dublin. They tend to listen to the same type of music on the same iPods and congregate in McDonald's or Kentucky Fried Chicken where they drink Coca Cola or Pepsi. A uniform global culture has taken hold and Ireland has been prominent in adopting its various manifestations.

5 Tom Inglis, *Global Ireland: Same Difference* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 27.

6 Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalisation is Reshaping our Lives* (London: Profile Books, 1999; 2nd edn, 2002), pp. 6–7.



This book, largely the fruit of two workshops organised under the auspices of the Humanities Institute of Ireland at University College Dublin and the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies at the Institute of Technology, Tallaght, explores how globalisation has affected Ireland and provides a unique cultural perspective on the phenomenon. Following the thought-provoking Foreword by Fintan O'Toole, Part I concerns itself with manifestations of globalisation in Irish society. Issues such as time and place, spirituality, religion, politics, cultural theory and the media are addressed with a view to assessing the path that has led Ireland to its current state. The need 'to analyse how being turned 'inside out' by changing relationships of time and space affects in profound ways the human capacity to dwell in any given place', is emphasised by Michael Cronin. The lens of the French print media is employed by Grace Neville to offer an external glance on the Irish engagement with globalising forces, with conclusions that show that the formerly close relationship between the Celtic cousins has changed significantly. The section concludes with Tom Inglis' discussion of how the global is also highly personal. Inglis underlines the necessity for our understanding of globalisation to 'move beyond the orthodoxy of seeing it primarily as an economic, political and social process. It is also fundamentally a cultural one.'

Part II discusses contemporary Irish literature's attempts to come to grips with a rapidly changing social context. Authors such as Roddy Doyle, Colum McCann, Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney, Conor McPherson, Seamus Deane, Patrick McCabe and John McGahern are evoked to telling effect. Willy Maley argues that 'we ought not be too hasty in our efforts to be done with the past' and urges that a note of caution be sounded in relation to 'an over-optimistic attitude to globalisation.' The writers mentioned are cognisant of the dangers and try to suggest new ways of envisioning existence through their art. Eamon Maher relates how the late John McGahern liked to quote the Portuguese writer Miguel Torga's comment that 'The universal is the local without walls' and shows how McGahern's concentration on the small area of Leitrim-Roscommon allowed him to make of one small place an everywhere. Irish fiction writers are clearly sensitive to the winds of change that have come with the advent of immigration (Anne Fogarty and Willy Maley touch on the work of Roddy Doyle, who deals



with this theme in some of his more recent work), the decline of organised religion, death, the importance of place (Friel, Heaney and McGahern are all dealt with in this context) and the various chapters reflect the concerns of writers on these matters.

I have not considered it necessary to summarise each individual contribution. It should be clear from the chapter headings which approaches have been adopted by the various authors. What I hope emerges from the collection is an enriching panoply of cultural perspectives on globalisation and Ireland. A sincere word of thanks to all the contributors for their unstinting cooperation during the elaboration of this project: they were really a pleasure to work with. Fintan O'Toole also deserves special mention for agreeing to write an illuminating Foreword to what I hope will be a worthwhile commentary on one of the most pressing issues in contemporary Irish society.





## II. 'The Universal is the Local without Walls': John McGahern and the Global Project

EAMON MAHER

John McGahern (1934–2006) has long been considered a writer who was rooted in a very specific place – the northwest midlands around Leitrim and Roscommon – as well as someone with a finely attuned understanding of the rural communities who inhabit this area. The idea of his work being included in a book on globalisation and culture might initially seem inappropriate. After all, he did not concern himself excessively with the emergence of the Celtic Tiger, other than to say that he thought the newly found prosperity was wonderful: instead of seeing generations leaving Ireland to seek work abroad, it was pleasant to know that there were ample opportunities for young people to stay and work in their country of birth. The spin-offs of globalisation such as immigration, the arrival of multinational companies, global capital flows, increased opportunities for travel, the internet, full employment, improved GNP and GDP, did not impact on his characters to any great extent, mainly because he wrote about communities who tended to live at a temporal and geographical remove from this sort of thing. Getting livestock to the fair, saving the hay, interacting with family and friends, attending Mass and religious services, facing up to the prospect of death, these are the main preoccupations of the characters we encounter in McGahern's novels and short stories.

What I will seek to demonstrate in the course of this chapter is that his concentration on the local did not prevent McGahern from achieving a global resonance, that it assisted him, in fact, to give a universal dimension to his work. In an interview in 2000, he quoted the Portuguese writer Miguel Torga, who in the sixth volume of *The Creation of the World* wrote:

'The universal is the local without walls.'<sup>1</sup> I consider this a good description of McGahern's main literary achievement: he managed to make of one small place an everywhere. Like a Renaissance painter, he was constantly perfecting his canvas with fine brush strokes, attaining near the end of his life something approaching perfection.

One thing that has often struck me is the extent to which McGahern tended to quote international writers when it came to citing influences. Yes, there were the Irish reference points like Joyce, Beckett, Tomás O'Crohan, Patrick Kavanagh, Ernie O'Malley, Kate O'Brien and Michael MacLaverty to name a few, but interspersed with these names was a host of internationally renowned figures such as Proust, Flaubert, Camus, Thomas Hardy, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Alisdair MacLeod, who all displayed qualities that McGahern was seeking to emulate in his own work. In this regard a comment by Jane Austen, another influence, is significant. In a letter she wrote describing the inspiration for her work, Austen spoke of 'the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour.'<sup>2</sup> This sums up McGahern's approach very well. He was painstaking in his attempts to evoke the right sounds, smells, colours and impressions connected with his 'little bit of Ivory.' He sculpted and re-sculpted his words until they captured the correct rhythm, the authentic voice, the exact image. Now that a few years have elapsed since his untimely death in 2006, critics are coming to terms with his legacy and discovering that he was essentially a writer with a keen sense of place, an appreciation of the glory of nature, a close identification with, and admiration for, local characters and their foibles. Ultimately, his great ability was to move seamlessly from the local to the global.

It is worth considering for a while the Ireland in which McGahern grew up and that he mined for his fictional creations. The 1930s and 1940s were

- 1 McGahern and Torga (who is referred to as Torja) are actually misquoted in the tape-script of the interview, which was published as 'Catholicism and National Identity in the Works of John McGahern', in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 90:357, Spring 2001, pp. 70-83, p. 81.
- 2 Deirdre Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 3rd edn, 1995). Earlier editions were edited by R.W. Chapman.



decades when the fledging Irish Free State, later to become a Republic, was attempting to come to terms with its newly found freedom from British rule as well as the aftermath of a bitter Civil War which had left deep scars and divisions. Emigration reached epidemic proportions during these years and McGahern saw many of the young men who attended his primary school having to leave Ireland in order to make a living in Britain or the United States. He wrote in the following manner about the 1950s:

There were two sectarian states in place in the 1950s, North and South, inward-looking and ostensibly secure, secretly content with one another, despite public claims and utterances. Each could point the other out in self-justification. [...] In the South individual speech and thought were equally discouraged. The moral climate can be glimpsed in the warning catchphrases: A shut mouth catches no flies; Whatever you say, say nothing; Think what you say, but don't say what you think; The less you say, the more you'll hear; Mind you, I have said nothing.<sup>3</sup>

The moral climate was obviously as depressing as the economic one south of the border, yet there were signs of a loosening of the absolute control exercised by the Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup> People did not live in Ireland at the time, according to McGahern. Rather, they lived in 'small, intense communities, and the communities could vary greatly in spirit and character, even over a distance of a few miles.'<sup>5</sup> Within these communities were mini-republics, where the real power lay – the families. McGahern understood the structures of the Irish society that moulded him. He disliked the repressive nature of authoritarian Catholicism and yet appreciated the beauty of its rituals. He resented the violence that characterised many family situations, the bullying fathers and the pious, accepting mothers,

3 John McGahern, 'Whatever you say, say nothing', in *The Irish Times*, 26 October 1999, p. 13.

4 While it may have appeared in 1951, with the resignation of Dr Noel Browne after his failure to secure party support for his controversial mother-and-child scheme, that the church was rarely more in the ascendant, there is a sense in which this event marked the beginning of the end of this type of successful church interference in state affairs.

5 McGahern, 'Whatever you say, say nothing'.

yet knew that the bonds of place and family were an essential part of the fabric that held society together. Irish emigrants, for example, could never look on their new abodes in London, Liverpool, Boston or New York as being real somehow and they resented the fact that they had been forced to uproot themselves from their homes in Ireland. There had been evidence of much transformation in the course of the decade, as McGahern notes at the end of his *Irish Times* article:

I think of the decade beginning with the lighting of the paraffin lamps as darkness came on, the polishing of the globe, the trimming of the wicks, the adjustment of the flame, as it had been done for generations. By the end of the decade every house had electricity. Most people had radios, very soon they would all have television. The world that had stayed closed and certain for so long would soon see nothing but change.<sup>6</sup>

When assessing the impact of globalisation on Irish society in recent decades, much is made of the negative effect it has had on the notion of belonging to a community, on religious practice or involvement in charitable organisations: in essence, it appeared to bring with it a blurring of national boundaries and identity, as Irish society came to resemble more closely the experience of the countries of mainland Europe. For McGahern and his generation, the fifteen-odd years of economic boom that began in the 1990s was not much more than the second playing of a drama that had occurred during the 1960s, another decade of seismic upheaval in Irish life. His own literary career began with the publication of *The Barracks* in 1963 and continued until his death in 2006. In effect, therefore, it coincided with two major periods of change and evolution. Air travel, the widespread availability of the motor car, television, building booms, sexual liberation, the Women's Rights movement, Ireland's entry to the EEC, the internet, political and clerical scandals, the legalisation of contraception and divorce – all these events and many more took place during McGahern's career. However, he is seen as a writer who, while being

6 McGahern, 'Whatever you say, say nothing.' I am not sure that McGahern's claim about every house having electricity at the end of the 1950s would stand up to scrutiny, but I think that the point he makes about change is valid.



aware of the transformations that were happening all around him, decided to concentrate on certain immutable truths, on situations where there was evidence of resistance to change, where, in fact, very little changed at all. Towards the end of *The Pornographer*, as he is driving back to Dublin after the funeral of his aunt, the nameless narrator's boss Maloney notes how his friend's uncle, who returns to work in his saw mill the day after his sister's funeral, is someone who has figured out the key to happiness: 'There's one man who knows he's going everywhere by staying put.'<sup>7</sup> As we now begin to assess some of McGahern's fiction in the light of what it brings to our understanding of his engagement with the global project, I think that Maloney's assessment is apposite. Knowledge is not merely dependent on education, travel or technology: it can also be achieved while living an uncomplicated life in a community that cares more for what is happening in its immediate environs than events, however momentous, taking place a mile down the road. David Pierce shows a genuine understanding of McGahern's literary goal when he observes that 'he [McGahern] relies for the most part on the iterative mode where things gather meaning with repetition and where the larger frame of ritual, or the seasons, or family history, informs or obtrudes.'<sup>8</sup>

McGahern was undoubtedly cognisant of the profound changes that took place in Ireland during his lifetime: how, for example, the International Financial Services Centre and Temple Bar became the symbols of a new vibrant Ireland during the 1990s and the early years of the new millennium. But his literary canvas was not composed of the fast-moving milieu of material prosperity, flash cars, casual sex, recreational drugs and plentiful money that these places came to represent. Rather, it was one in which change came into being in a much more leisurely and imperceptible manner. His fictions clearly do not reflect the Celtic Tiger era, which is not to say that he chose to ignore its existence: it was just a case of his knowing

7 John McGahern, *The Pornographer* (London: Faber, 1979), p. 250. All subsequent references will be to this edition, with page numbers in parentheses.

8 David Pierce, *Light, Freedom and Song: A Cultural History of Irish Writing* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 280.

that the people and places which best suited his particular esthetic were situated west of the Shannon and were sometimes gloriously unaware of what was going on in their capital city and elsewhere. Certain critics took issue with the rather depressing image of Ireland presented in his earlier fiction and others complained at how his last novel, *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, was too tranquil in its representation of an idealised rural Ireland. McGahern was no stranger to controversy in his early career. His second novel, *The Dark* (1965), courageously tackled taboo subjects like masturbation, sexual abuse and violence in the home – as well as hinting at clerical child abuse – a move which cost him his job as a primary-school teacher in Clontarf. Effecting social change was not how he saw his role as a writer, however. He stated in an interview (August 2002):

If a writer only sets out to reflect a particular society he will only be of interest to a historian or a sociologist. What is permanent is the spirit or personality in language, the style, and that's what lasts. A book that was written two hundred years ago can be as alive today as when it was first published, and last month's novel can be as dead in a year as a laboratory mouse. I do think that if a person gets his words right that he will reflect many things; but if he sets out deliberately to do it, he'll be writing journalism.<sup>9</sup>

McGahern could never be accused of writing journalism. His objective was not to instruct or be didactic: he just wanted to paint a realistic picture of the Ireland he knew and in so doing capture some universal truths. In the first example of his fiction to which we now turn, the short story 'A Country Funeral', we will see how the journey back to the place where they were forced to travel from Dublin to spend every summer on their uncle's farm evokes strange feelings in three brothers. The news that their uncle Peter has died means that Fonsie, Philly and John Ryan have to travel west in a hired Mercedes (Philly works on the oil rigs and makes good money, most of which he wastes buying drinks for people in their Dublin local during his visits home). As far as the invalided Fonsie is concerned, their uncle Peter was a horrible man who made them feel unwelcome in his home. Philly

9 'Interview with John McGahern', in Eamon Maher, *John McGahern: From the Local to the Universal* (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2003), pp. 143–61, p. 145.



and John, a married teacher, do not harbour the same degree of rancour as their brother. As they prepare to get into the car and head to the funeral, their mother warns: 'Everything you do down there will be watched and gone over. I'll be following poor Peter in my mind until you rest him with Father and Mother in Killeelan (cemetery).'<sup>10</sup>

What is strange about their journey is the extent to which the three men get sucked into the life of their uncle, for whom they had no great affection, as well as coming under the spell of the community to which he belonged. Because they are the only family he had, the brothers must look after the funeral arrangements and meet the people from the surrounding area. McGahern knew the significance of a funeral in rural Ireland. It is not simply a question of putting a corpse in a coffin and burying it. No, certain rituals must be obeyed: food and drink bought for the wake; a full discussion and appraisal of the man's life up until his death; the funeral Mass and the laying to rest of the body. The same rituals have been observed for centuries and must be strictly adhered to. There is a sense in which the landscape around Gloria Bog where their uncle lived is transforming the men without their realising it. The idea of journeying towards self-knowledge is strong in McGahern, for whom life was a never-ending quest. Note how it is important that the Ryans get out of Dublin before they can really discuss things:

Not until they got past Leixlip, and fields and trees and hedges started to be scattered between the new raw estates, did they begin to talk, and all their talk circled about the man they were going to bury, their mother's brother, their Uncle Peter McDermott. (p. 374)

Similarly, beyond Carrick-on-Shannon, they begin to remember certain sights from their youth: 'They were coming into country they knew. They had suffered here' (p. 377). The memories that come flooding back are not pleasant, especially for Fonsie: 'The man wasn't civilized. I always felt if he

10 John McGahern, 'The Country Funeral', in *Creatures of the Earth: New and Selected Stories* (London: Faber, 2006), pp. 373-4. All subsequent references will be to this edition, with page numbers in parentheses.

got a chance, he'd have put me in a bag with a stone and thrown me in a bog hole like that black whipper' (p. 378). When they arrive at Peter's house, they are greeted by his neighbour Jim Cullen and a few other people who stand up and offer their condolences. Their uncle is laid out on the bed and already Mrs Cullen has been busy making tea and sandwiches. Then the testimonies to the dead man's life and character begin:

'You couldn't have a better neighbour. If he saw you coming looking for help he'd drop whatever he was doing and swear black and blue that he was doing nothing at all', an old man said. (p. 379)

Jim Cullen discreetly shows them the bill for the food and drink he has bought and informs them of the wad of notes that was in Peter's wallet. Every effort is made to let the brothers know exactly what is expected of them. When it looks like all three are going to head to the village, it is suggested that it might be as well if one stayed in case of callers. Mrs Cullen then volunteers to sit with John, who is amenable to greeting visitors in the house but who would know very few of them. Fonsie is bursting with resentment as he and Philly drive to town. He senses that Philly, to whom he is close, is impressed at the way the locals support one another in their time of need. Fonsie says it is all 'barbaric, uncivilized, obscene', that they should not have come. He refuses to accompany his brother into Henry's bar-grocery, where the proprietor insists that Philly have a drink on the house. On their way back to their uncle's, the car laden with food and drink for the wake, Philly stops to look at Gloria Bog. Already the idea is taking shape that this could be the place for him to settle after he has finished on the rigs.

The three brothers are quite different in temperament. John is easy-going, full of charm and good manners. He refused the headship of the school where he was teaching, a fact that greatly displeased his ambitious wife. Philly is more extrovert, though perhaps not as natural a mixer. He accepts the condolences of the mourners and answers them with the customary phrases: 'Thank you for coming. You're very good.' Fonsie is a ball of fuming anger in his wheelchair, constantly ready to find fault with those coming to pay their respects. His hatred of his uncle cannot be assuaged,



even beyond the grave. Philly decides to spend the night of the removal in Peter's house, where he briefly looks through his affairs. There are thousands of pounds in his wallet, along with dollars and receipts – all remnants of a solitary life on a small farm. Peter had been fond of making animals out of matchsticks in the candlelight, an image that for Philly captures the pointlessness of his life:

Tomorrow he'd lie in the earth on the top of Killeelan Hill. A man is born. He dies. Where he himself stood now on the point between those two points could not be known. He felt as much like the child that came each summer years ago to this bog from the city as the rough unfinished man he knew himself to be in the eyes of others, but feelings had nothing to do with it. He must be already well out past halfway. (p. 395)

The winding path up to the cemetery (Killeelan) was treacherous for those carrying the coffin. From the car, Fonsie could see the torturous ascent of the cortege: 'he found the coffin and the small band of toiling mourners unbearably moving as it made its low stumbling climb up the hill, and this deepened further his irritation and the sense of complete uselessness' (p. 399). There is something poignant about Fonsie's disability, his dependency on Philly, his loathing of his infirmity. He knows that the funeral has changed Philly and he can see why. Nevertheless he remonstrates with him that it is not respect for the dead that inspires the people around Gloria Bog: 'Oh, it's easy to honour the dead. It doesn't cost anything and it gives them a chance to get out of their bloody houses before they start to eat each other within' (p. 404). He could endure the thought of Philly going to the oil rigs, safe in the knowledge that he would always return. But the announcement after the funeral that he intends to buy Peter's house and farm from their mother, who will inherit everything, fills Fonsie with dread. On their way home, Philly tells his brothers:

'I felt something I never felt when we left the coffin on the edge of the grave. A rabbit hopped out of the briars a few yards off. He sat there and looked at us as if he didn't know what was going on before he bolted off. You could see the bog and all the shut houses next to Peter's below us. There wasn't even a wisp of smoke coming from any of the houses. Everybody gathered round, and the priest started to speak of the dead and the Mystery and the Resurrection.' (p. 404)

What makes 'The Country Funeral' a masterpiece of short fiction writing is the subtle manner in which the customs and practices of a specific part of rural Ireland are conveyed. Centuries of respect for the dead, of gentle, supportive neighbourliness in times of distress, of remembering and commemorating a life just ended, are what render Gloria Bog and its inhabitants so precious in Philly's eyes. He is also aware that his own roots lie in this soil, perhaps because of his mother and their summer visits, through his uncle and those with whom he shared his frugal life. The decision to return here is not too shocking when considered in this context. In fact, Philly is one of a number of McGahern's characters who make their way back to what they think of as their primordial home. At the end of *The Pornographer*, the young protagonist similarly takes the decision to settle on the farm his parents left him in the west of Ireland after years of unbridled debauchery in Dublin. It is no coincidence that the nurse with whom he wishes to spend his life there is also from the country and he associates her with the smell of freshly cut hay. His friend Maloney is aghast at what he regards as a retrograde step. How could anyone bury himself in the country where religious bigotry and ignorance were rife?

'Look at today – isn't the whole country going around in its coffin! But show them a man and a woman making love – and worst of all enjoying it – and the streets are full of "Fathers of eleven", "Disgusted" and the rest of them. Haven't I been fighting it for years, and giving hacks like you employment into the bargain.' (p. 249)

Trapped in a loveless marriage, wealthy editor of pornographic publications, failed poet, Maloney is someone who needs to rail against what he views as a repressed Irish society governed by priests and pious politicians. Just as Fonsie fears losing Philly, Maloney does not want to lose his friend on account of this new vocation he senses in him after the burial of his aunt. McGahern, while remaining at a remove from the Catholicism in which he was reared, would always maintain respect for the positive aspects of Catholic rituals. Like the social rituals, the Church ceremonies have centuries of history behind them. Philly, a 'rough unfinished man', and the pornographer, who refuses to see the child he has fathered with a bank official and is described as a 'wastrel and a corrupter with a priest's



face' (p. 214) by Maloney, are both somehow better, more fulfilled men when placed among their own people. The pornographer's loving care of his aunt when she is dying contrasts sharply with his shabby treatment of Josephine, the mother of his child. His epiphany at the end of the novel is the result of his knowledge that true happiness is found in the security of loving and being loved. He can achieve that with the nurse, living in close proximity to his uncle and the land:

What I wanted to say was that I had a fierce need to pray, for myself, Maloney, my uncle, the girl, the whole shoot. The prayers could not be answered, but prayers that cannot be answered need to be more completely said, being their own beginning as well as end. (p. 252)

He has not suddenly found God, but he has achieved a type of self-knowledge that will help him to tackle the obstacles that are placed in his path and possibly to overcome them. He has experienced the freedom of sexual liberation, has tasted the forbidden fruit and paid the price. Now what he seeks is a peace that is not possible for him in Dublin. To realise his destiny, he needs to journey back to the well of knowledge, there since his youth, but invisible to his inexperienced eyes. (As McGahern wrote in his first novel, *The Barracks*: 'The road away becomes the road back.')11 His uncle knows that he doesn't need to travel to see the world – all existence is there in front of you if you have a will to see it. His aunt remarked in relation to the garden she kept so beautifully: 'I don't know. It's only after years that you get some shape on things, and then after all that you have to leave. It's comical. You want to go on and you can't.' (p. 144)

The reader may well be wondering what all this has to do with the issue of globalisation. Well, what I am attempting to demonstrate is how essential truths are contained in the apparently most mundane situations. The global and the local are inextricably linked, as McGahern memorably illustrated in his work. He once stated: 'I think that all good writing is local, and by local I don't differentiate between Ballyfermot and north Roscommon.

11 John McGahern, *The Barracks* (London: Faber, 1963), p. 158.

If the writer gets his words right, he'll make that local scene universal.<sup>12</sup> His two last novels, *Amongst Women* (1990) and *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002), with which we conclude this chapter, are perhaps the best illustrations of the merging of the local and the global.

*Amongst Women* is generally accepted as being McGahern's most accomplished work. It won the *Irish Times*/Aer Lingus Irish Fiction Prize, the *Sunday Independent*/Irish Life Arts Award and the Bank of Ireland and Hughes Award. It was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize. The writing is compact, the characterisation dexterous, and the level of emotion it aroused in people in many different countries bears witness to its global appeal. Fintan O'Toole wrote that the novel was 'completely Irish and highly universal.'<sup>13</sup> The story of Michael Moran, veteran of the Irish War of Independence, widowed father of five children, domineering and sometimes violent patriarch, farmer in the west of Ireland whose homestead is referred to as Great Meadow, definitely has a resonance that reaches out beyond national boundaries. So many people have known someone who resembles this disenchanted figure who, after waging a successful guerilla war campaign against the English forces, decides that he will transfer his full attention to the care (or military supervision) of his family. Eamonn Wall makes a pertinent claim in relation to the extent to which McGahern succeeded in encapsulating in a short, dense novel the evolution of a society:

*Amongst Women* is a mirror to the century – from the War of Independence to close to the present. Here is a work which functions both as a chronicle of the fortunes of the Moran family and also a chronicle of the fortunes of the nation in its progress through fifty years of change.<sup>14</sup>

- 12 'Catholicism and National Identity in the Works of John McGahern' (interview), p. 81.
- 13 Fintan O'Toole, 'Both Completely Irish and Universal', review of *Amongst Women* in *The Irish Times*, 15 September 1990.
- 14 Eamonn Wall, 'The Living Stream: John McGahern's *Amongst Women* and Irish Writing in the 1990s', in *Studies*, No. 88 (351), Autumn 1999, pp. 305–14, p. 305.



Moran's ultimate ambition, that of keeping his family together, handing on the farm to one of his two sons, thus ensuring some sort of continuity, is undone by what emerges from his heroics as a freedom fighter. The War of Independence has not led to the secure and egalitarian State that Moran and his idealistic fellow-revolutionaries had hoped for. Early on, he laments: 'What did we get for it? A country, if you'd believe them. Some of our own johnnies in the top jobs instead of a few Englishmen. More than half my own family work in England. The whole thing was a cod.'<sup>15</sup> This disillusionment is not shared by his former comrade-in-arms and junior officer, McQuaid, who visited him every year on Monaghan Day, the day in February when the fair took place in Mohill. The two would reminisce about the war while McQuaid drank whiskey and the daughters served up a splendid meal. This was an important occasion for everyone in Great Meadow and that is why the daughters, seeing that their father is beginning to slip into a dangerous lethargy, decide to resurrect it after a number of years in an effort to revive Moran's drooping spirits. What they fail to comprehend is that McQuaid and their father had had a major falling out the last time they met on Monaghan Day. Irritated at Moran's compulsion to be top dog at all costs, McQuaid broke the habit of years by announcing he would not be staying the night. Unlike Moran, his friend had done well in post-independence Ireland as a cattle dealer. He therefore no longer felt obliged to play a subordinate role. Getting into his Mercedes (a far less common sight in Ireland at that time than it is now), he uttered under his breath, but loudly enough to be heard: 'Some people just cannot bear to come in second' (p. 22). This is an obvious reference to the reversal of their fortunes since the war. Moran is aware that this heralds the end of an old and valued friendship but he will yield no ground because 'in a way he had always despised friendship; families were what mattered, more particularly that larger version of himself – *his* family; and while seated in the same scheming fury he saw each individual member slipping out of his reach' (p. 22).

15 John McGahern, *Amongst Women* (London: Faber, 1990), p. 5. All subsequent references will be to this edition, with page numbers in parentheses.

The daughters were unaware of this rift, just as they forgot the tension the day brought with it. In their mind, Monaghan Day 'had become large, heroic, blood-mystical, something from which the impossible could be snatched' (p. 2). The parallels with the ideals of the leaders of the 1916 leaders are not coincidental. The women in Moran's life (and these obviously include his second wife Rose whom he decided to marry soon after that fateful falling out with McQuaid) determinedly insist on excusing the tantrums and excesses of their father and husband. When the girls are questioned by Rose's mother about whether their father beats them, they immediately close ranks and say that they were punished in Great Meadow when they were bold, just like in any other house. The fact that their older brother Luke left home for London after a serious beating is conveniently forgotten or is explained by the fact that the son and father never got on. Moran assumes heroic qualities in the eyes of the adoring women in his life. However, soon after moving into Great Meadow, Rose notices the fear that sometimes takes hold of the girls:

Only when they dropped or rattled something, the startled way they would look towards Moran, did the nervous tension of what it took to glide about so silently show. [...] The violence Moran had turned on her (Rose) she chose to ignore, to let her own resentment drop and to join the girls as they stole about so that their presences would never challenge his. (p. 53)

When young Michael starts to mitch from school and travel around the country in a car with the returned emigrant Nell Morahan, whose father worked as a day labourer (a fact that makes the Morahans socially inferior to the Morans of Great Meadow), he is teeing up a confrontation with his father. Michael's escapades with this woman show the vast difference in moral values between father and son. Young Michael is grateful for Nell's expert sexual initiation but when Moran discovers that he has been skipping school to spend time with this woman, the scene is set for a showdown. At this stage, his three sisters have all left home and there is only Rose to protect the rebellious adolescent. What young Michael fails to grasp is his father's desire for the two of them to run the farm together:



He had forgotten how good two people could be working together. A man working alone was nothing. If the boy wanted to come in with him the two of them could do anything. They could run this place like clockwork. They could in time even take over other farms, a dream he had once had about his eldest son: together they could take over everything. (p. 108)

Moran's tragedy is to see all his dreams for a happy future dashed by the tides of time over which he has no control. Luke works in the property business (the prop that supported the latter years of the Celtic Tiger, before it finally brought it down) in London and can see no way of returning to live in Ireland, and certainly not with his father. Likewise, Michael makes a life for himself in London, where he meets and marries a woman a good few years older than he, and works as an accountant. The daughters are the ones with the fiercest loyalty, but, try as they may, they cannot run the farm with their father. Moran shares some obvious traits with McGahern's own father, another autocratic veteran of the War of Independence who was prone to inflicting sudden physical violence and verbal assaults on his children. But the essential difference lies in the detached manner in which the writer allows us to see some redeeming qualities in Moran – qualities that are sparse to the point of invisibility in the father figure in *Memoir*. As he approaches the end of his life, Moran spends much time contemplating the meadow at the back of the house, which prompts Mona to say to Rose: 'He must see something there' (p. 179). Her female intuition has led Mona to believe that her father's preoccupation with the meadow is linked to his imminent death. The tragedy is that Moran does actually *see* the splendour that is all around just as he arrives on the threshold of death:

To die was never to look at all this again. It would live in others' eyes but not in his. He had never realized when he was in the midst of confident life what an amazing glory he was part of. (p. 179)

As he is being led back to the house by his wife and daughters, he comments: 'I never knew how hard it is to die' (p. 179). Years of struggling with the land had caused him to miss out on its beauty, never to appreciate its 'amazing glory.' At this point, Moran achieves a hard-won epiphany. While he has the capacity to horrify and fascinate readers in equal measure because

of his obduracy and self-absorption, McGahern's character is also shown to have some redeeming qualities. He writes a letter to Luke in which he apologises for any hurt he may have caused him and he inspires huge love in Rose and his daughters. The human drama that is lived out within the confines of Great Meadow stands outside history to a certain extent. This aspect of the novel makes Fintan O'Toole's assessment profoundly valid:

You start off thinking that it [*Amongst Women*] is about Irish history, about a man that fought in the War of Independence and what happens to him afterwards. But you realize as you go on that it is about the *absence* of history, about the country that was *not* formed, the community that did *not* come into existence, the society that did *not* grow.<sup>16</sup>

Hence the gloomy vista at the end of the novel when 'a little man in a brown felt hat, old and stiff enough to have fought with Fionn and Oisín' removed and folded 'the worn flag' (p. 183) while two local politicians looked on the crowd assembled with 'undisguised contempt' (p. 183). Joe Cleary argues that while Moran's attitude is definitely one that 'refuses to acknowledge that anything at all positive emerged from the national struggle', and that there is 'no strong repudiation of Moran's assessment of either the national struggle or its outcome in the novel either.'<sup>17</sup> I am not sure that McGahern would have seen his role as a novelist as one that obliged him to present an evaluation of historical events or their legacy. It is true that the image of post-independence Ireland presented in the novel is negative and harrowing, but the novel is narrated through the eyes of someone whose hopes have been dashed. I would incline more towards the assessment of Declan Kiberd who says that McGahern 'manages to be utterly faithful to his immediate world of Roscommon/Leitrim, yet by keeping the references to that region vague and sparing, he can treat of it as an everywhere.'<sup>18</sup>

16 O'Toole, 'Both completely Irish and Universal'. Emphasis in the original.

17 Joe Cleary, *Outrageous Fortune: Capital and Culture in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Field Day Publications, 2007), p. 222.

18 Declan Kiberd, 'John McGahern's *Amongst Women*', in Maria Tymoczko and Colin Ireland (eds), *Language and Tradition in Ireland: Continuities and Displacements*



*That They May Face the Rising Sun*, McGahern's last novel, allows us intimate access to a period in the lives of a community living around a lake in a setting that has more than a passing resemblance to the residence where McGahern and his second wife, Madeline, made their home when the couple decided to settle in Leitrim in the 1970s. He explains the choice in *Memoir*: 'It was a time when we could have settled almost anywhere, and if she had not liked the place and the people we would have moved elsewhere. I, too, liked the place, but I was from these fields and my preference was less important.'<sup>19</sup> There are striking similarities between the setting and the characters presented and real life situations. But, as *Memoir* has revealed, facts, when recounted from memory, are always subject to artistic rearrangement. Certainly the returned emigrant Joe Rutledge and his artistic wife Kate remind one of McGahern and his wife, especially in terms of their rather unconventional farming techniques. The local handyman Patrick Ryan says of the Rutledges: 'There's an old Shorthorn they milk for the house that would nearly sit in an armchair and put specs on to read the *Observer*.'<sup>20</sup> There are also several examples of where fact and fiction diverge significantly. The mistakes made with the highly autobiographical *The Leavetaking*, where McGahern was too close to his subject and lacked that distance that is demanded of all good fiction, would not be repeated in his last novel. Having said that, I suspected from the nostalgic, gentle tone of the novel when it was first published that it would be McGahern's last work of fiction. I was thus less than surprised when it was followed a few years later by *Memoir*. Seamus Deane, in a review published in *The Guardian*, wrote:

The book is a strange and wonderful mixture of various genres of writing – narrative in the basic sense, but also a meditation, a memoir, a retrospect, an anthropological

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(Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), pp. 195–213, p. 199.

19 John McGahern, *Memoir* (London: Faber, 2005), p. 2

20 *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (London: Faber, 2002), p. 76. All subsequent references will be to this edition, with page numbers in parentheses.

study of a community ... a celebration of an Ireland that had formerly been the object of chill analysis as well as loving evocation.<sup>21</sup>

This novel recounts how a group of middle-aged to elderly people, living at a slight remove from the world all around them, exist in a sort of timeless zone where change is rare. Their support of one another is obvious in the way that the big-hearted Jamesie keeps a watchful eye on the Ruttledges' cow who is due to calve, or in how Patrick Ryan, a rough-tongued labourer, tells Joe that he will finish the shed that has been standing roofless for years. The death of his brother Edmund and close friend Johnny has shown Ryan that life is transient: 'We're going to finish that building. [...] It takes a hard jolt every now and again to learn us that we'll not be in it forever' (p. 297). The same man announced early in the novel: 'After us there'll be nothing but the water hen and the swan' (p. 45). Jamesie's wife Mary makes an analogous comment: 'We're not more than a puff of wind out on the lake' (p. 115). This elegiac tone is palpable throughout the novel as the community comes to terms with the fact that they are likely to be the last of their kind. Other people may well come to live in the area, but they will not be the same type of people; they will not share the same belief system, the same values. In terms of the impact of globalisation, it can be seen that the houses around the lake are not in a time warp when it comes to having access to modern domestic appliances like dishwashers and televisions, or up-to-date agricultural machinery like tractors and bailing machines. This does not change the essential ingredients of the people's lives, though. They are still committed to the traditional ideals, particularly neighbourliness. Scarcely a day goes by but Jamesie travels around the lake to visit the Ruttledges, sometimes just to chew the cud, at other times to help them out on the farm. When his vigilance saves the cow and her calf, Ruttledge describes him as 'an angel of the Lord' (p. 53). In return, Ruttledge drives over in his tractor to help his friend with turning and bailing the hay. He also assists him with writing to his brother Johnny, a long-time emigrant in England, who announces that he is thinking of returning to

21 Seamus Deane, 'A New Dawn', review of *That They May Face the Rising Sun* in *The Guardian*, 12 January 2002.



live in Ireland for his retirement. The thought of Johnny living with them on a permanent basis fills Jamesie and Mary with dread, but they are at a loss as to how to convey this to him:

They could not live with him and they could not be seen – in their own eyes and in the eyes of others – to refuse him shelter or turn him away. The timid, gentle manners, based on a fragile interdependence, dealt in avoidances and obfuscations. Edges were softened, ways found round harsh realities. What was unspoken was often far more important than the words that were said. (p. 186)

This scene is beautifully observed by a writer who understands his characters and what motivates them. Social convention would demand you never refuse a bed to a close relative and yet such a situation would be disastrous for all involved. In the end, Johnny decides to stay on in England and so the situation they so dreaded never arises, but their gratitude for Ruttledge's letter explaining their uneasiness about the proposed move is deep and long-lasting. Although Johnny is a relatively minor figure in the novel, arriving home for a few weeks' holiday at the beginning of every summer, being collected by his brother from the train station, visiting the same people to whom he says the same things, declaring everything to be 'alphabetical', his word for perfect, he is nonetheless central to some of the most important episodes in the book. After a day out with Ruttledge, where his prowess as a darts player gains huge admiration in a local pub, Johnny dies peacefully, probably as a result of a massive heart attack. In the absence of Patrick Ryan, who cannot be contacted, Ruttledge is asked to lay out his corpse. This act assumes a spiritual connotation:

The rectum absorbed almost all of the cotton wool. The act was as intimate and warm as the act of sex. The innate sacredness of each single life stood out more starkly in death than in the whole of natural life. To see him naked was also to know what his character and clothes had disguised – the wonderful physical specimen he had been. (p. 273)

As we have already noted in relation to 'A Country Funeral', McGa-hern's treatment of the rituals surrounding death is always surefooted and respectful. When describing later to Kate how he was affected by the incident, Ruttledge explains: 'It made death and the fear of death more natural'

(p. 279). Later, as they are digging Johnny's grave, Patrick Ryan tells Ruttledge that the head must lie facing the west for one simple reason: 'So that when he wakes he may face the rising sun. [...] We look to the resurrection of the dead' (p. 282). The Catholic and pagan are wonderfully fused in this description: the worship of the sun being combined with a belief in the resurrection of the dead. In a way, living as they do in such close proximity to nature, it is difficult for the inhabitants of this area to escape from its influence. There are several detailed depictions of the beauty of the landscape which a man like Ruttledge, living a more leisurely existence than Moran, has time to appreciate:

A pair of herons moved sluggishly through the air between the trees of the island and Gloria Bog. A light breeze was passing over the sea of pale sedge like a hand. The blue of the mountain was deeper and darker than the blue of the lake or the sky. Along the high banks at the edge of the water there were many little private lawns speckled with fish bones and blue crayfish shells where the otters fed and trained their young. (p. 42)

Passages like this cannot be faked. They require an experienced eye, as well as a sympathetic understanding of the workings of nature. Like Moran before him, Ruttledge knows that death means severing one's links with a material world that is mysterious and entrancing, with people who are on the whole decent and supportive, with a life whose seemingly repetitive and empty rhythms often reveal hidden meanings. For Denis Sampson, the myriad of references to the lake, the homes dotted around it and their inhabitants are there because 'at the centre of his [McGahern's] poetic interest here is the relationship between transient human habitations and the natural contours of the landscape in which they are situated.'<sup>22</sup> Towards the end of the novel, Jamesie states: 'I may not have travelled far but I know the whole world' (p. 296), a comment that echoes the observation by Maloney quoted earlier in relation to the pornographer's uncle. At the conclusion of the book, the telephone poles erected around the lake, occluding the view,

22 Denis Sampson, "'Open to the World': A Reading of *That They May Face the Rising Sun*", in the *Irish University Review* (special John McGahern issue), ed. John Brannigan, 35:1, Spring/Summer 2005, pp. 136-46, p. 138.



are a reminder that the community, just after burying one of their own, Johnny, face a precarious future. The sense of place, so strongly embedded in people like Ruttledge, his uncle 'The Shah', Jamesie, Mary, Patrick Ryan cannot resist the inroads of globalisation indefinitely. Like Heaney, McGahern was attuned to the musicality of place names: Aughawillan, Cootehall, Ardcarne, Dromod, Carrick-on-Shannon, Oakport assume a sort of incantatory quality similar to prayer in his work. Often, as characters make their way back to Dublin by train, they make a mental note of the towns they pass through as if in an effort to gauge the distance they are travelling from their roots. The naming of the trees, plants and wildlife of Leitrim in *Memoir* serves a similar purpose. In a period when the effects of globalisation assail us from every angle, McGahern's writings remind us that two or three hours away from the gridlock of Dublin traffic and the frenetic world of Temple Bar and what remains of the Celtic Tiger, there still exists a rural Ireland which has remained largely intact, although fragile. Even when it is not possible to physically live in such an environment, we can experience it by reading McGahern's recreation of what Heaney has referred to as a 'country of the mind.' It seems appropriate to end this collection with the words of the Nobel Laureate and close friend of McGahern:

Irrespective of your creeds or politics, irrespective of what culture or subculture may have coloured our individual sensibilities, our imaginations assent to the stimulus of the names, our sense of place is enhanced, our sense of ourselves as inhabitants not just of a geographical country but of a country of the mind is cemented.<sup>23</sup>

23 Seamus Heaney, 'The Sense of Place', in *Preoccupations: Selected prose 1968-78* (London: Faber, 1980), p. 132.