



Partners in Practice: Contemporary Irish Literature, World Literature and Digital Humanities

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Summary

This dissertation examines the opportunities and implications afforded Irish literary studies by developments in the newly emergent disciplines of world literature and the digital humanities. Employing the world literature theories of Wai Chee Dimock, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova in the critical analysis of works of contemporary Irish literature and Irish literary criticism produced in the period 1998-2010, it investigates how these theoretical approaches can generate new perspectives on Irish literature and argues that the real “problem” of world literature as it relates to Irish literary studies lies in establishing an interpretive method which enables considerations of the national within a global framework.

This problem serves as the entry point to the engagement with the digital humanities presented throughout the dissertation. Situated within debates surrounding modes of “close” and “distant reading” (Moretti 2000) as they are played out in both the fields of world literature and digital literary studies, this work proposes an alternative digital humanities approach to the study of world literature to the modes of “distant reading” endorsed by literary critic, Franco Moretti and digital humanists such as Alan Liu (Liu 2012). Through a series of interdisciplinary case studies combining national and international, close and distant and old and new modes of literary scholarship, it argues that, rather than being opposed to a nationally-orientated form of literary criticism, the digital humanities have the tools and the methodologies necessary to bring Irish literary scholarship into a productive dialogue with perspectives from elsewhere and thus, to engender a form of Irish literary scholarship that transcends while not denying the significance of the nation state. By illustrating the manner in which the digital humanities can be employed to

enhance and extend traditional approaches in Irish literary studies, this project demonstrates that Irish studies and the digital humanities can be “practicing partners” in a way that serves to advance work in both the fields of world literature and digital literary studies.

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Preface

Preface: Changing the Lens in Irish Literary Studies

In his 2007 essay, “Tiger, Theory, Technology: a meditation on the development of modern Irish cultural criticism” (2007), Irish cultural critic Gerry Smyth offers a reflection on developments in Irish cultural criticism, which traces a connection between the advent of Irish Studies as a discipline, the emergence of the Celtic Tiger and the increasing use of technology by scholars in the field of Irish Studies. In this brave, and rare, effort to link Irish Studies to current developments in ICT, Smyth sets out “to redress the marginalization of technological innovation as a crucial determinant on critical discourse” (127). The following diagnosis is especially suggestive:

So far as Irish cultural history is concerned the three [Theory ⇔ Tiger ⇔ Technology] are locked together in a paradoxical relationship that is both mutually supportive and mutually interrogative. Each term connotes particular practices that have undergone massive change in a relatively short period of time; together they provide the discursive matrix from which modern Irish Studies has emerged (Smyth 133).

According to Smyth, the arrival of large scale IT companies in Ireland played a vital role in instigating the country’s economic boom; hence he maintains that the Celtic Tiger and technology are intimately linked. His argument becomes less convincing, however, when he attempts to trace a link between technology and theory. Moving his focus from the tiger to theory, Smyth argues that “the changes which took place within the ‘information economy’ were themselves accompanied by—in some instances anticipated by—major changes in the fields of cultural and critical theory” (126). Referring to George P. Landow’s *Hypertext 2.0: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1997), Smyth calls attention to the earlier critic’s perceived correlation between hypertext and poststructuralist theory and points out that poststructuralist theory also had a significant impact on Irish Studies through

postcolonial theory. Hence, building on arguments made by Landow, Smyth proposes the following equation: “Ireland ⇔ IT: IT ⇔ Hypertext: Hypertext ⇔ Post-structuralism: Post-structuralism ⇔ Post-colonialism: Post-colonialism ⇔ Irish Studies” (127).

Having traced a correlation between theory and technology, Smyth goes on to point out how technology has not only had an impact on the fabric of Irish life - increasing employment, living standards, immigration and so forth - but has affected the way in which cultural critics comment on these changes, observing that “the very nature of criticism has been significantly altered in recent years as a result of technological changes in the media through which it is conducted and presented” (124). Reflecting on the history of his own academic training, Smyth outlines how his scholarly practices evolved from being hand written to being produced firstly on a typewriter and later on a personal computer. Among other things, he argues that the typeface “added gravitas to criticism” (130). He further notes the manner in which technology increased the speed at which scholarship could be produced. Most intriguing for Smyth, however, were the “PC-related phenomena” of the Internet and electronic mail, which “it was claimed, together would completely revolutionize academic discourse in all its different aspects” (133).

Argued largely through reflection on events in his own life relating to the Celtic Tiger, cultural theory and developments in technology, Smyth’s essay provides an engaging account of how scholarly practices have evolved as new technologies have become available. He also demonstrates how technology has impacted the field of Irish Studies by tracing a trajectory from changes in individual scholarly practices brought

about by new technologies, to developments in the field more generally. Less useful, however, is the elaborate equation: “Ireland ⇔ IT: IT ⇔ Hypertext: Hypertext ⇔ Post-structuralism: Post-structuralism ⇔ Post-colonialism: Post-colonialism ⇔ Irish Studies” (Smyth 127). The problem with this series of connections occurs in the centre of the chain, where the Post-structuralism ⇔ Post-colonialism combination becomes the link which holds the relationship between technology and Irish Studies together. Smyth’s formulation is thus grounded in what is a stretched theoretical reading of the relationship between Irish Studies and digital technology. As will be demonstrated throughout this dissertation, this equation detracts from the useful observations that Smyth makes in relation to how an actual engagement with technology has and will continue to affect the manner in which Irish Studies is conducted.

Since Smyth’s time of writing in 2007, both Irish society and the field of Irish Studies have experienced further significant transformations than those outlined in “Tiger, Theory and Technology”. In 2007, the Celtic Tiger began to make a hasty retreat from the island and it took with it a number of the big IT companies which Smyth saw as being vital elements in the chain linking Irish Studies and technology. Ironically, however, this mass exodus of multinational companies appears to have coincided with the rise of “humanities computing” or “digital humanities” within humanities scholarship in Ireland. The term “digital humanities”, the more recent term for what was formerly referred to as “humanities computing” is generally considered to have been coined by scholars present at an IATH (Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities) meeting in the late nineteen nineties, among them, John Unsworth, Johnanna Drucker and Jerome McGann (“How We Think” 43). As N. Katherine Hayles

points out, replacing “humanities computing” with “digital humanities” was “meant to signal that the field had emerged from the low-prestige status of a support service into a genuinely intellectual endeavor with its own professional practices, rigorous standards, and exciting theoretical explanations” (“How We Think” 43). Today, the digital humanities “encompass a range of practices and scholarly products, including linguistic corpora, interactive digital archives and editing projects” (Dalbello 481). Additionally, the field includes a discursive strand which considers the opportunities and implications afforded by developments in new media.

Although little recognized, in recent years a number of significant digital humanities projects have been developed by and for scholars in the field of Irish literary studies. In 2006, David Lloyd, in collaboration with Erik Loyer, worked on a project entitled “Mobile Figures” for the online and hypermedia journal *Vectors*. Between 2005 and 2007, Mary Luddy and Gerardine Meaney were the primary investigators on the Women in Modern Irish Database (WIMIC); between 2007 and 2010, Colin Graham was the PI on the Bibliography of Irish Literary Criticism (BILC) database; and in 2010 Charles Travis published the “Digital Literary Atlas of Ireland, 1922-1949”, a digital atlas providing literary, historical and cartographic perspectives on Ireland from 1922 to 1949 drawn from the works of fourteen Irish writers. Despite being works of significant literary scholarship, however, these projects have yet to receive any sustained critical attention from practitioners in the field of Irish literary studies. More generally, we find that the possibilities afforded to the field of Irish studies by digital technology and the implications that go therewith, have yet to be addressed.

It is important to note, however, that this relative lack of engagement by literary scholars with developments in the field of digital humanities is not exclusive to an Irish context. As has been well noted, generally speaking digital humanities projects still remain on the peripheries of the traditional humanities disciplines, and this is particularly true in the field of literary scholarship (see Schreibman, Mandell and Olsen 2011; Liu 2012). Consequently, the fascinating and valuable work being carried out by established literary scholars, such as Jerome McGann and Franco Moretti, who are both utilizing and engaging with digital technology, has yet to gain proper consideration or acknowledgement within their traditional fields.

Some recent scholarship has sought to address this apparent gap between the traditional humanities discipline and the digital humanities. In a recent article, “Where is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?” (2012), Alan Liu has argued that in recent years, literary scholars have been brought into closer proximity with the digital humanities through what he refers to as “an intrinsic methodological indicator,” namely, “the proximity of the digital humanities to the current ‘close reading’ versus ‘distant reading’ debate” (492). Coined by Franco Moretti in his controversial essay, “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000), distant reading, understood in opposition to “close reading”, is a method of analysis which “allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes –or genres and systems” (57). In tracing patterns as they occur across large corpora of texts, Moretti’s methodology, as will be discussed later in this study, is increasingly dependent on quantitative research methods and data visualization techniques. Owing to the close affinity between Moretti’s distant reading and these computational enabled methods, Liu

has suggested that “the digital humanities are now what may be called the *practicing partner* of distant reading” (emphasis in original)(492-3).

In the field of literary studies, the methodological debates regarding close and distant readings have also become inescapably intertwined with questions as to the relative status of national and world literatures respectively. Thus in “Conjectures on World Literature”, Moretti takes issue with the tendency in literary scholarship to study literature within national contexts only and to endorse practices of close reading which he describes as the “very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously” (57). Positioning his work in opposition to such limited approaches to the diverse and vast field of the world’s literature, Moretti maintains that the main goal of distance reading and of world literature is to provide a “thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures” (“Conjectures on World Literature” 68), and, in so doing, to comprehend the literary system as a whole rather than as it manifests in national contexts only. A key analytical framework for this dissertation is the extent to which, through the concept of distant reading, developments in digital humanities have come to intersect significantly with the newly emergent discipline of “world literature”.

World literature, like the digital humanities, has refused any easy definition. First coined by Goethe in 1827, the term *Weltliteratur* passed into currency after Eckermann published *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens* in 1835, three years after the poet’s death. Eckermann’s work informs us that Goethe expressed the hope that *Weltliterature* would promote productive social interaction among the world’s men of letters, and lead to greater mutual tolerance among the nations (Pizer 11). But as Stefan Hoesel-Uhlig has noted, Goethe never identifies a “set of texts” that constitute

world literature. Instead, Hoesel-Uhlig argues, “his proposals diagnose a dramatic increase and diversification of intellectual interest across cultures, but their abstract focus consistently ignores what concrete goods may be involved in this exchange” (31).

In a recent article, “The Crisis of Comparison and the World Literature Debates” (2011), David Porter noted that there are “[a]t least five distinct definitions of the phrase “world literature” that are in circulation at this juncture”:

Most broadly, it can refer to the universe of all written works in any language from any period. A significantly more manageable subset can be achieved by applying an evaluative filter to select the most significant masterpieces from a variety of traditions, giving us a world literature that resembles a globalized version of a great-books curriculum. The term has been used to refer to self-consciously postnational literature of the kind Goethe seemed to advocate [...]. Or it can refer not to a corpus of texts at all but rather to the conditions and consequences of their mobility across time and space. Finally, world literature can refer to an academic subject concerned with any of these things (246-7).

In its most recent deployment, “world literature” has been most frequently understood according to the last two definitions listed by Porter where the emphasis has been on modes of circulation and reception more so than on a particular canon of texts and this has become the defining factor of world literature as an academic subject.

Notably, in the field of Irish literary studies, which, as its name suggests, is predominantly concerned with the study of a national literature, world literature, like the digital humanities, has yet to receive any sustained critical attention from scholars in the field. Undoubtedly for a field whose primary purpose is to study the complexities of a specific national literature, to surrender the primacy of such nationally-orientated examinations in favour of more global approaches would be to go against the very purpose of the discipline. At the same time however, the object of study in Irish literary studies, Irish literature, has gone global to an unprecedented degree where contemporary Irish writers and their works are circulating far beyond the territorial, ideological and

fictional borders of the nation – a development which provides another key organizing framework and motivation for this dissertation.

The most apparent indicators of the international circulation of contemporary Irish literature are the number of works by Irish authors that have appeared on international best-sellers lists. In addition to the phenomenal market success that Irish “chick-lit” has had enjoyed on an international level, writers such as Maeve Binchy, Joseph O’Neill, Colum McCann, Alice McDermott and Emma Donoghue, among others, have made their way onto the New York Times bestsellers list. Other writers such as Sebastian Barry, Anne Enright and John Banville have fared exceptionally well in the UK and elsewhere. The international market success of Irish authors is further corroborated by their regular appearance on both the long and short lists for prestigious international book awards such as the Man Booker Prize and the IMPAC award. Irish authors including Colm Tóibín, John McGahern, Colum McCann, Sebastian Barry, John Banville and Anne Enright have been awarded with some of the world’s most lucrative and prestigious literary prizes. As journalist John Spain has noted, “[p]roportional to our population, the recent success of Irish writers in the big international literary competitions is hugely impressive, unmatched by any other country of similar size” (Spain 2010).

Not only do works of contemporary Irish literature circulate beyond national boundaries, but the writers themselves also write from various locations around the world, including, but by no means limited to, Ireland and the UK. Born in Ireland, Colum McCann resided in Japan for two years before moving to New York. Sebastian Barry spent time living in Paris before returning to settle in Co. Wicklow. The Wexford

born Colm Tóibín has travelled extensively between Spain, Argentina and America but holds a permanent place of residence in Ireland. Winner of the 2011 National Book Award, Emma Donoghue, was born in Dublin and now resides in Canada.

The internationality of contemporary Irish writing may also be attributed to the degree to which a number of works are situated outside of Ireland and address international themes. For example, Tóibín's *Brooklyn* (2009) and Barry's most recent novel, *On Cannnan's Side* (2011) both offer intimate portrayals of the experience of emigrating from Ireland to America. In *The Speckled People* (2003), and in his more recent novel, *Hand in the Fire* (2010), Hugo Hamilton provides accounts of the experience of being an immigrant in Ireland. The international scope of Colum McCann's work is highlighted on the author's website, where it is noted that "his topics have ranged from homeless people in the subway tunnels of New York, to the Troubles in Northern Ireland, to the effects of 9/11, to a poetic examination of the life and culture of the Roma in Europe" (<http://www.colummccann.com/about.html>).

We find, then, that contemporary Irish literature, is in many ways, global or "world" literature; but it is still also Irish literature. This ability to be both national and international, belonging to Ireland and elsewhere, is perhaps one of the most defining traits of contemporary Irish writing. But how, as literary critics, do we study Irish literature as it circulates both within and beyond both the geographical and ideological borders of the nation? How do we extend our perspective to include a global view without losing sight of the context from which the work came? What does Irish literature look like when it is read through a global as opposed to a national lens, and

how are these questions shaped and altered by the advent of new digital methodologies and technologies?

Focusing on works produced in the period 1998-2009, this dissertation investigates the significance of the national in the contemporary Irish novel. Employing the world literature theories of Wai Chee Dimock, David Damrosch, Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova in the critical analysis of works by Colm Tóibín, Sebastian Barry and Colum McCann, it examines both the opportunities and the implications afforded by these new theoretical approaches to the study of Irish literature. Situated within debates surrounding modes of “close” and “distant reading” (Moretti 2000) - the intersectional area between world literature and the digital humanities - this dissertation brings Irish literature, world literature theory and the digital humanities into a triangular configuration where the dynamic tension engendered by the combination of works of a national literature with world literature theories informs and drives the engagement with the digital humanities. Through this configuration, it examines how the tools and methodologies of the digital humanities can enable nuanced considerations of the continuing status of the national within a global framework.

While the above account contextualizes this dissertation within current work in the field of Irish studies, given the interdisciplinary nature of the research presented here, it is useful to contextualize the origins and development of this project at a personal level also. Holding a degree in Media Studies and English (NUI Maynooth) and a Masters in Comparative Literature (Dublin City University), this author’s first experience in working with the tools and methodologies of the digital humanities began in the first year of my doctoral research. As part of the one-year structured PhD

programme offered by An Foras Feasa, I received introductory training in various digital humanities tools and methodologies, including database design and XML text encoding. Additionally, I received lectures on the theoretical, institutional and infrastructural implications that attend digital humanities work. Over the past three years I have continued to develop my digital humanities skills by attending national and international workshops and seminars¹. Where I have learned most about the digital humanities – in terms of both theory and practice – is through the collaborative projects I have engaged in with humanities and ICT colleagues in An Foras Feasa. Both the challenges and the outcomes of this collaborative digital humanities work are outlined in detail in the case studies provided in Chapter 3 and Chapter 5 of this dissertation, and have shaped the approach to digital tools and methodologies taken throughout this work. In seeking to provide an engaged account of the relationship between the humanities and the digital humanities at personal, disciplinary and infrastructural levels, this project also seeks to improve understanding of the opportunities and implications of work of this kind, and, in so doing, to pave the way for future digital work in the field.

Dissertation Layout

To summarize, this dissertation is an attempt to address the increasingly global nature of Irish literature and the changing nature of Irish literary criticism in light of advances in digital technology. Retaining contemporary Irish literature as the object of analysis

¹ The workshops and summer schools I have attended here in Ireland have been hosted by either An Foras Feasa or the Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO) and have covered topics such as TEI, XML and the Semantic Web. Among the international workshops I have attended are the COSTA3 Spring School in Pisa on “Building Scholarly Communities on the Web” (March 22-28, 2010) and the pre-conference workshops provided at the Digital Humanities Conference, 2010, in London.

throughout, the approach endorsed here relies on and seeks to implement a convergence between world literature theories and digital humanities methodologies. Understanding world literature as a series of methodologies which facilitate considerations of “the conditions and consequences of [literary texts’] mobility across time and space” (Porter 247), my aim is to investigate the means by which works of contemporary Irish literature are seen to transcend the boundaries of a national literature. Following on from Chapter 1, which introduces both the world literature and digital humanities methodologies that will be employed throughout the dissertation, each subsequent chapter takes as its starting point the work of one world literature theorist: Chapter 2 – Wai Chee Dimock; Chapter 3 – David Damrosch; Chapter 4 – Franco Moretti; Chapter 5 – Pascale Casanova. Organizing the chapters this way usefully divides the dissertation into two sections so that the first half offers close readings of individual literary texts, while Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 utilize methodologies informed by world system theories to enable “distant readings” of the wider literary systems in which Irish literature is circulated, mediated and received. The reader will note, however, that Moretti’s work appears at various stages throughout each chapter. This is both due to and evidence of his centrality in current world literature debates and in the intersectional area between world literature and digital literary studies.

In the chapters where digital humanities tools and methodologies are employed or discussed, the software utilized and the tools generated serve as what Matthew G. Kirschenbaum has referred to as “vehicle[s] for applied theory” (Kirschenbaum 6). Rather than being ancillary to the overall research concerns of this dissertation, the digital humanities methodologies employed throughout are intimately intertwined with

the theoretical approach being endorsed. The reader will note that as the dissertation progresses, the engagement with the digital humanities intensifies - this is reflective of the manner in which the research here has evolved. While the project began with a specific literary research enquiry, through the processes of collaboration, experimentation and hands-on digital humanities work employed throughout various stages of this research project, theory and practice have become inextricably interrelated, where developments or challenges in one have driven or informed those in the other. As such, this dissertation aims to be not only a work of Irish literary scholarship, but additionally, an informed, self-reflexive account by an emergent digital humanities practitioner about what it means to do digital humanities and the opportunities and challenges engendered thereby.

Chapter 1 establishes the new modes of reading that have come about through the renewed engagement with world literature and the tools and methodologies of the digital humanities. The first section of the chapter provides an overview of current debates in world literature, and outlines the key theorists and their respective methodologies that will be addressed in the body of the dissertation. While genealogies for developments in the broader field of the Digital Humanities exist (Dalbello 2011; Hockey 2004), the account provided here examines developments in the field as they have related to literary studies specifically. Addressing these developments as they occur chronologically and focusing on those technologies and debates that are most pertinent to the tools and methodologies employed in this dissertation, the chapter is divided according into the following headings: Computational Text Analysis; Digital Humanities and the Literary; Thinking Beyond Print: The Professional Implications;

Digital Humanities and Literary Studies at the Present Moment. The second section of this chapter provides an overview of developments in the digital humanities in Ireland as they have evolved over the past two decades. Tracing what has been a predominantly institutional and infrastructural history of digital humanities, the section establishes the wider context from which this project has emerged.

Chapter 2 establishes the literary problematic that informs the engagement with the digital humanities in the subsequent chapters. In this chapter I employ Wai Chee Dimock's concepts of the prenational, the subnational and the transnational in a reading of Colm Tóibín's novels, *The Heather Blazing* (1992) and *Brooklyn* (2009). By demonstrating the continuing relevance of the the national alongside Dimock's framework of the prenational, the subnational and the transnational, Tóibín's fictional narratives afford a means of re-establishing the function of the national within these alternative forms of aggregation. In so doing, my reading of Tóibín partially endorses but also expands Dimock's proposed method. By employing Dimock's theoretical framework in the analysis of what have been unanimously claimed as "Irish" novels, the purpose of this chapter is to introduce the literary problematic that informs the rest of this dissertation, namely, the dynamic tensions that are generated by reading works of contemporary Irish literature according to world literature theories.

Chapter 3 engages with the world literature methodologies of David Damrosch and Franco Moretti as they relate to a reading of Sebastian Barry's 2008 novel, *The Secret Scripture*. In this chapter, I propose an alternative digital humanities approach to the study of world literature than that endorsed by Franco Moretti and the mode of "distant reading" which he advocates. Using appropriate digital humanities tools and

methodologies, namely, text encoding and data visualization, this chapter demonstrates: firstly, how practices of close reading can be enhanced through an engagement with digital tools; secondly, how digital technology can facilitate nuanced literary investigations of world literature which transcend traditional literary research practices.

Moving from the close readings of individual texts to a consideration of the manner in which Irish literature is mediated, Chapter 4 addresses the implications and opportunities afforded by subject specific digital databases for the field of Irish Studies. Employing Franco Moretti's theories concerning the evolution of literary genres as outlined in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005), the chapter begins by situating the database within the history of the literary collection more generally. Drawing on debates surrounding literary anthologies, it argues that similar theoretical issues attend the construction of their digital equivalents. In critiquing the *Bibliography of Irish Literary Criticism* (BILC) (2010), the chapter attempts, firstly, to call attention to the constructed nature of "database" as genre and in so doing to negate claims made by critics such as Wai Chee Dimock and Ed Folsom who consider database to be an undifferentiated flood of data. Secondly, it seeks to call attention to the important contributions made by the database to the field of Irish Studies. Thirdly, drawing on previous research concerning the usability and sustainability of digital resources, the chapter evaluates the BILC database as a digital tool and concludes by suggesting how the database might be developed further to the extent that it could have a notable impact on the field of Irish Studies.

Drawing on ideas postulated by Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters* (1999) concerning literary markets, "value" and consecration, Chapter 5

examines how the “value” of Colum McCann’s most recent novel, *Let the Great World Spin*, is constructed within what Casanova refers to as the “mediating space” of world literature. As Casanova’s methodology is founded on her analysis of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, my application necessarily expands her model to render it applicable to the complexities of contemporary book culture. Specifically, this involves the incorporation of a popular perspective through the critical analysis of reviews of the novel made available on the Amazon.com website. Given the digital nature and the volume of data made available on this site, I employ text analysis technologies to enable a form of “distant reading” of the reception of McCann’s novel across a spectrum of readers². While serving to provide a necessary move towards a sociology of Irish literature, it is further argued that the form of what Lev Manovich has referred to as “cultural analytics” (Manovich 2007) employed in this chapter points to the need for new inter-disciplinary partnerships in Irish literary studies.

Given that world literature theory provides the theoretical lens which informs the engagements with both Irish literature and the digital humanities throughout this dissertation, it is useful to outline briefly the key theorists and concepts that guide this project.

² The reader will also note two significant absences in this dissertation. Firstly, it does not address the complex processes of translation which are fundamental to the international circulation of literature. This omission was due to both the limited linguistic capabilities of the author and to the time available for the project. The second notable absence is a discussion of the work of any contemporary Irish female authors. As previously noted, Irish women writers are among the most successful and the most internationally circulated of the nation’s authors. The authors and texts chosen for analysis were those that were of particular relevance to the nature of this study and were of particular interest to the author. Hence, the absence of Irish female writers from this dissertation should not be interpreted as being reflective of this author’s views on the literary merit of their work. These two omissions are undoubtedly areas which merit further scholarly work but are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Current Debates in World Literature

In 1827, the German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, declared to his young disciple Johann Peter Eckermann that “National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach” (qtd. in *What is World Literature?* 2). History informs us, however, that Goethe was premature in his heralding of a new age of post-national literature, since as Wai Chee Dimock has rightly observed, there has been a persistent tendency in the field of literary scholarship to study literatures along national lines (*Through other Continents* 2-5). Yet in more recent decades, nations and, by extension, “national” literatures have come increasingly under threat in their sovereignty over all elements of human life due to the homogenizing and heterogenizing effects of globalization. Globalization is defined by Malcolm Waters as being “a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding” (Waters 3). It is not surprising, therefore, that in an age where national boundaries, both physical and imagined, are become increasingly insignificant and blurred, we find a renewed interest in Goethe’s concept of *Weltliteratur*.

Since the turn of the century, a proliferation of texts has addressed the concept of world literature. This body of literature can be characterized by a perceived need to expand the scope of literary studies: firstly beyond the parameters of national literatures and secondly beyond the canon of “great books”. However, the lack of a consensual understanding as to what constitutes “world literature” and how one is to go about studying it remain topics of heated debate: as David Porter rightly observes, “world

literature has become a hot spot for critical debate [...] [which] remains open to lively contestation” (247).

In two of the most recent and perhaps most comprehensive overviews of debates in the field, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen (*Mapping World Literature* 2008) and David Porter (“The Crisis of Comparison” 2011) identify the work of three literary critics as being central to discussions of world literature: Franco Moretti’s essay, “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000) and his later book, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005); David Damrosch’s *What is World Literature* (2003); and Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* (2004). While the aforementioned critics and their respective works have indeed been central to the current debates regarding world literature, more recently, American literary critic, Wai Chee Dimock has also made significant contributions to the field with, most notably with her work, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (2006). Though divergent and, at times, oppositional, the approaches endorsed by Moretti, Damrosch, Casanova and Dimock all share a common concern with developing new modes of reading that will facilitate considerations of literature on a global scale. The following section will briefly establish the key critical vocabulary emerging from these thinkers, in relation to its shaping influence on this study.

Franco Moretti, perhaps the most frequently evoked critic in world literature debates, is Professor of Comparative Literature and English in Stanford University, California. In the past ten years, he has become renowned for his world systems approach to the study of literature. While he began experimenting with systematic approaches to the study of

literature in his earlier works, *Modern Epic* (1996) and *Atlas of the European Novel 1800-1900* (1998), his essay “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000) most explicitly engages with Goethe’s *Weltliteratur*. In this controversial essay, Moretti first proposes his now oft-cited distinction between “close” and “distant” reading. According to Moretti, as practices of close reading depend on the “very solemn treatment of very few texts taken very seriously”(57), such approaches to literary scholarship “necessarily [depend] on an extremely small canon” (57). Moretti maintains that “if you want to look beyond the canon”, something which practitioners in the field of world literature will want to do, “close reading will not do it” as “it’s designed to do the opposite” (57).

In order to expand the breadth of literary scholarship beyond the parameters of the canon, Moretti proffers his now much-cited definition of “distant reading”, a mode of literary analysis which, he claims, “allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes –or genres and systems” (57). In so doing, such a focus enables the scholar to trace developments in literary history as they occur across time and space, and as such, to take into account the entire literary field. And if, Moretti adds, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, “it is one of those cases when one can justifiably say, less is more” (57).

Owing to the proliferation of texts made available via the Internet in recent years, Moretti maintains that the need for new modes of reading is now more pressing than ever. As he sees it,

larger and larger banks of data are becoming available, and we have absolutely no idea of how to deal with them. In just a few years, all the texts in existence will be online, and searchable. We really do not know how to pose useful questions to that mass of information (Moretti qtd. in McLemme 2006).

Anticipating the shortcomings of traditional scholarly practices in the face of the array of material being made available by new technology, Moretti accurately forecast as early as 2006 that, “in the very near future we shall have a vastly different field of materials but, really, no different frame of mind to do something with those materials” (ibid).

In *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005), Moretti proposes new modes of reading which he envisages will enable the literary scholar to read more. In this work, as elsewhere, the question driving Moretti’s investigations is not “‘What does [insert name of famous author or novel here] mean?’ but rather, ‘How has literature changed over time? And are there patterns to how it has changed?’” (McLemee 2006) In order to trace such developments in the literary field, Moretti combines the literary Darwinism employed in *Modern Epic*, with the literary geography approach that informed *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800-1900*, to trace the history of literary genres and devices as they develop across time and space. Dealing with quantitative data, Moretti employs various visualization techniques – graphs, maps and trees – to make visible developments in the literary field that cannot be grasped through the modes of close reading.

Since “Conjunctures” was first published in the *New Left Review* in 2000, Moretti’s dichotomy between “close” and “distant” reading has become the touchstone which participants in the world literature debate have either emulated or pitted themselves against. It is, however, the latter type of response that has been most common. Critics such as Jonathan Arac (2002), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2006), Katie Trumpener (2009) and Wai Chee Dimock (2006) have all taken issue with Moretti’s proposed approach to literary scholarship on account of what Dimock has

referred to as its “over-commitment to general rules and global postulates” (*Through other Continents* 79). For many, Moretti’s willingness to dispense with modes of close reading in favour of systematic approaches and quantitative results across large corpora of texts is an unsatisfactory solution to what he refers to as the “problem” of world literature (“Conjectures on World Literature” 55). Indeed, the fact that over a decade since distant reading was first proposed, close reading remains the dominant practice in the field of literary scholarship, emphasizes the extent to which Moretti’s solution to the problem of world literature is not the final say on this question. One of the driving concerns of this dissertation, therefore, is to examine the alternative approaches to the “problem” of world literature offered by other leading figures in the field and to consider their significance not only for debates in world literature but also in the field of digital literary studies.

One such alternative approach is offered by David Damrosch, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and former president of the American Comparative Literature Association. While Moretti sees world literature as a “problem” which requires a new critical method, (“Conjectures on World Literature” 55) for Damrosch, the term world literature refers to “all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language,” (*What is World Literature?* 4) where, as David Porter usefully summarizes, “a literary work is understood pragmatically as any work a given community of readers has regarded as such” (Porter 247).

At the outset of *What is World Literature?* (2003) – a key publication in the world literature debate – Damrosch states that his purpose in the book is to “clarify the

ways in which world literature can be best read” (5). Arguing largely by example, he devotes separate chapters to a range of closely studied cases including the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Aztec poetry, a little-known novel in French by the contemporary Zairean writer Mbwil a M. Ngal and various North American anthologies of world literature. In each of these case studies, Damrosch calls attention to the need for close reading when considering the various works of world literature in a global context. While Damrosch does pay attention to the circulation and reception-history of texts, he is especially interested in the interplay of processes of circulation and translation. He argues that “a work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin” (*What is World Literature?* 6).

In order to facilitate an examination of literary works across space and time, Damrosch proposes a threefold definition of “world literature” focused on the world, the text and the reader:

1. World literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures;
2. World literature is writing that gains in translation;
3. World literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time (*What is World Literature?* 281).

Throughout the various chapters, Damrosch employs these various understandings of world literature as he conducts close reading of a number of texts “ranging from the Sumerians to the Aztecs and from medieval mysticism to postmodern metafiction”.

While Moretti maintains that the practices of close reading are insufficient for the study of world literature, Damrosch’s method is grounded in readings of individual texts.

Rather than requiring the scholar of world literature to either read more or dispense with the practice of close reading altogether, Damrosch argues that we can get “a good first

grounding in world literature by attending to the issues that are presented by a reasonable number of works” (*How to Read World Literature* 5). Drawing on the prior knowledge gained from close readings of works from within a familiar culture, the scholar is then better equipped, in Damrosch’s view, to move their scope outwards to considerations of literature on a global scale.

Damrosch’s definitions of specialist and generalist are of particular relevance for the concerns of this project which considers Irish literature within a world literature framework. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 3, consideration of these terms from within the field of Irish studies brings us into a renewed consideration of what it means to be a “specialist” in a given national literature and the opportunities and implications afforded thereby. At the same time, it provides an opportunity to compare nationally based forms of literary scholarship with more global approaches. Moreover, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, in calling attention to the need for both specialist and generalist methodologies, Damrosch’s aspirations for a combination of the two approaches to world literature have particular resonance for work in the field of digital literary studies.

A differing approach to world literature is offered by French literary critic, Pascale Casanova. In her controversial work, *The World Republic of Letters* (1999) - published in France in 1999 and translated into English in 2004 - Casanova combines the world system approach of Moretti with the close readings endorsed by Damrosch. Proposing what she refers to as a form of “international literary criticism”, Casanova’s aim is to “provide a specifically literary, yet nonetheless historical, interpretation of texts” and in so doing,

to overcome the supposedly insuperable antinomy between internal criticism, which looks no further than the texts themselves in searching for their meaning, and external criticism, which describes the historical conditions under which texts are produced, without, however, accounting for their literary quality and singularity (4-5).

In order to achieve such a vantage point for literary criticism, Casanova argues that it is necessary to situate writers and their works in the “immense territory” that is “world literary space” – a space compiled of both a history and a geography beyond those of individual national literature. Borrowing from both Braudel’s concept of an “economy-world” and Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of “field,” Casanova’s central hypothesis is that “there exists a ‘literature-world’, a literary universe relatively independent of the everyday world and its political divisions, whose boundaries and operational laws are not reducible to those of ordinary political space” (xii). According to Casanova, this world literary space “has its own economy, which produces hierarchies and various forms of violence.” She further argues that the “geography” of the world republic of letters is produced by the outcome of these violent struggles “between a capital, on the one hand, and peripheral dependencies” (12).

While Moretti focuses on individual genres or textual features as they develop across large corpora of texts and Damrosch takes as his unit of analysis the individual literary text, Casanova is concerned with the mediating forces operating in the world literary system. As she sees it,

[t]he huge power of being able to say what is literary and what is not, of setting the limits of literary art, belongs exclusively to those who reserve for themselves, and are granted by others, the right to legislate in literary matters (*The World Republic of Letters* 23).

Hence she argues that struggles that take place in the world literary system are played out through the various forms of mediation a work undergoes as it circulates beyond a national literature. Building on ideas first postulated in *The World Republic of Letters*, in a later essay, “Literature as a World” (2005), Casanova proposes the conceptual tool of a

“mediating space” which she argues serves as “an instrument that might provide an account of the logic and history of literature” (“Literature as a World” 71-2). According to Casanova, the mediating space, or world literary space, is “a parallel territory, relatively autonomous from the political domain, and dedicated as a result to questions, debates, inventions of a specifically literary nature” (72). It is within this space that “struggles of all sorts [...] come to be refracted, diluted, deformed or transformed according to a literary logic, and in literary form” (72). By examining how the various forces operate within this space, Casanova argues that we can gain better insight into how literary works rise to fame in the world literary system.

This model is particularly suggestive for the study of contemporary Irish literature within a world literature framework. In a discipline that has been preoccupied with the role of the national literary critic and critical institutions, a consideration of other mediating forces responsible for the construction of the reputation of individual authors is now overdue. Casanova’s model thus requires a broadening of perspective on whom we consider to be the gatekeepers of Irish national literature currently. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 5, this approach to world literature also provides an opportunity to reconsider the use of computational text analysis tools in a manner other than simply endorsing Franco Moretti’s concept of distant reading.

Wai Chee Dimock, William Lampson Professor of English and American studies at Yale University, is one of the more recent players to enter the world literature debate and provides a welcome additional dimension by endorsing modes of close reading but within a universal as opposed to national context. In an early essay addressing issues relating to world literature, Dimock asks,

What is the appropriate scale for the study of culture and, in particular, the study of literature? How far back should we go to trace its roots and how wide a net should we cast to take stock of its extensions and translations? On what map should we break down this massive corpus into meaning-bearing contexts or units of analysis: the map of a locality, the map of the nation-state, or a map still larger—continental, hemispheric, even planetary in scope? (“Planetary Time and Global Translation” 488).

Dimock’s own conclusion is that literary studies “requires the largest possible scale, that its appropriate context or unit of analysis is nothing less than the full length and width of our human history and habitat (“Planetary Time and Global Translation” 489). In a series of essays including “Deep Time: American Literature and World History” (2001), “Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents” (2006) and “Scales of Aggregation: Prenational, Subnational, Transnational” (2006) and, most thoroughly, in her book, *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (2006) Dimock investigates the means by which American literature can be read at this larger scale.

What is particularly distinctive about Dimock’s approach to world literature approach, however, is the extent to which she seeks to displace the nation as the taxonomy which informs how we read and study literature. Like Moretti and Casanova, Dimock takes issue with the fact that thus far in literary studies, literatures have been predominantly studied along national lines, going so far as to suggest that it now appears “as if the borders of knowledge were simply the replica of national borders” (*Through other Continents* 3). As Dimock sees it,

As a set of spatial and temporal coordinates, the nation is not only too brief, too narrow, but also too predictable in its behaviour, its sovereignty is uppermost, its borders defended with force if necessary. It is a prefabricated box. Any literature crammed into it is bounded to appear more standardized than it is: smaller, tamer, duller, conforming rather than surprising (“Planetary Time and Global Translation” 439).

In adapting a global approach to world literature that stretches across time and place, Dimock seeks to displace the nation as the primary means through which literature is

read. In Chapter 2, I apply Dimock's proposed approach to the study of world literature to a reading of works of contemporary Irish literature, thus calling attention to the opportunities and implications afforded by her theoretical model.

While sharing with Franco Moretti a concern for enlarging the scope of literary scholarship beyond the parameters of the nation, significantly - and usefully for the concerns of this dissertation - unlike the aforementioned critic, Dimock argues against the dispensability of close reading:

There are any number of reasons I can name (such as the pleasure of reading), but probably the most pertinent one here is the fact that the literary field is still incomplete, its kinship network only partly actualized, with many members still to be added. Such a field needs to maintain an archive that is as broad-based as possible, as fine-grained as possible [...] if only to allow new permutations to come into being (*Through other Continents* 79).

Dimock's own approach to world literature depends on close textual study of individual texts read at scales both above and below the nation. As such, her methodology serves to disrupt the coupling of close reading with national literature and distant reading with world literature that are in danger of being consolidated in current literary studies.

As the relationship to national literatures is a defining feature of each of the world literature theories proposed by the critics addressed here and is of particular relevance to the concerns of this dissertation, in the following section I outline in detail how the various theorists approach the problem of national literatures and national literary scholarship.

National Literature and World Literature

In a useful overview of debates in the field of world literature, David Porter rightly notes that "[w]hat Damrosch, Moretti, and Casanova share most obviously is a conception of world literature that stresses the mobility of texts and the permeability of literary

traditions” (Porter 249). While a concern with the movement of texts within the world literary space underlies the approaches of all four theorists discussed above, where they most notably diverge is in their respective considerations of national literatures. In her recent edited collection, *Reading World Literature* (2011), Sarah Lawall calls attention to the fact that world literature is frequently understood in opposition to “national literatures” (Lawall 2). This is readily evident in the theoretical approaches proffered by Moretti and Dimock where both critics consider world literature vis-à-vis the study of national literatures. Conversely, however, Damrosch and Casanova consider national literatures to be an integral part of world literature, and their respective approaches retain considerations of the nation within their theoretical frameworks.

Of all the four critics, Franco Moretti places world literature most firmly in opposition to national literature: in his view, the purpose of world literature is to be “a thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures” (“Conjectures on World Literature” 68). Using two cognitive metaphors, the tree and the wave, Moretti argues that individual works can be studied by specialists as offshoots of a family tree, an exfoliating national system; by contrast, global comparativism, the method employed by “generalists”, should concentrate on wave patterns of transformations sweeping around the world (68). Thus, he maintains that “national literature [is] for people who see trees; world literature for people who see waves” (ibid). And according to Moretti’s understanding, there is no “middle road” between the two approaches (“Conjectures on World Literature” 68).

Rather than adapting an either /or stance, for David Damrosch, the study of national literatures is an intrinsic part of world literature. As he rightly notes, “with the

possible exception of a few irreducibly multinational works like *The Thousand and One Nights*, virtually all works are to this day, born within what we would now call a national literature” (*What is World Literature?* 283). He further notes that

[although] [t]he modern nation is [...] a relatively recent development, even older works were produced in local and ethnic configurations prior to the development of the modern nation, have been subsumed into the national traditions within which they are now preserved and transmitted. (*What is World Literature?* 283)

Rather than dispensing with the study of national literatures in favour of “world literature” approaches, Damrosch poses the useful and still relevant question: “what does the on-going vitality of national literatures mean for the study of world literature?” (ibid).

Understanding the term “national” broadly, Damrosch further argues that “we can say that works continue to bear the marks of their national origin even after they circulate into world literature, and yet these traces are increasingly diffused and become even more sharply refracted as a work travels further from home” (*What is World Literature?* 283). Thus, works become world literature by being received into the space of a foreign culture, a space which is defined in many ways by the host culture’s national tradition and the present need of its own writers. As noted earlier, Damrosch deploys a scientific metaphor to good effect here:

it is a double refraction, one that can be best described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone³ (*What is World Literature?* 283).

³ The *OED* defines refraction as “the making (a ray of light) change direction when it enters at an angle”. A double refraction is defined by the *Oxford Dictionary of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology* as “the property, possessed by certain crystals (notably calcite), of forming two refracted rays from a single incident ray. Damrosch clarifies that he advances the image of an elliptical refraction only as a “convenient metaphor”, but that he does not mean to imply “a scientific precision that the extremely varied phenomena of world literature would not support”, a point which we shall return to in the following chapters (*What is World Literature?* 283).

His work is therefore especially persuasive in requiring that, to adequately study a work of world literature, we must take into consideration both the context in which a work originates and the processes of its circulation and reception in foreign, host cultures. In Chapter 3, it will be argued that this approach is particularly useful for the reading of Sebastian Barry's novel, *The Secret Scripture* (2008). The chapter also provides a case study where digital humanities methodologies are employed to stage Damrosch's theoretical model.

The processes of circulation and reception are also central to Pascale Casanova's approach to world literature. However, while Damrosch reads these processes in largely positive terms, for Casanova, the border crossing of literary works comes laden with power struggles that drive the competition between literatures in the world literary space. According to Casanova, international reception, which Damrosch sees as being the defining feature of world literature, comes at a cost, where "a sort of *octroi* tax" is exacted on works that are universally circulated (*The World Republic of Letters* 154). As Casanova sees it,

The great consecrating nations reduce foreign works of literature to their own categories of perception, which they mistake for universal norms, while neglecting all the elements of historical, cultural, political, and especially literary context that make it possible to properly and fully appreciate such works (*The World Republic of Letters* 154).

Considered thus, world literature becomes less the celebrated liberating force freeing works from the confines of national literatures, but instead points to the cost of that universal circulation. According to Casanova, this in turn demands considerations of who dictates entry into the field of world literature and at what expense to both national literatures and to individual authors. Which is to say, a fuller study of the mediating forces operating within the world literary system which are notably absent from

Damrosch's theoretical paradigm. Taking impetus from Casanova's provocative model, in Chapter 5, I examine what forces are at play in the mediation and circulation of a work of contemporary Irish fiction and the manner in which developments in new media complicate traditional, hierarchical modes of consecration emanating from the academy.

For Wai Chee Dimock it is not universal circulation that exerts a cost or limits the way in which literature might be read, but, conversely, the nation. As she has repeatedly argued throughout her corpus of works relating to world literature, the study of "national" literatures is a "kind of scholarly unilateralism" which denies a consideration of the complex relations that exist between literatures across space and time. In "Scales of Aggregation" (2006), Dimock has called attention to the fact that "the reign of *homo nationalis* is less stringent in virtually every other academic field", pointing out that,

in most fields of science, the *homo* tends to be aggregated on platforms that bracket the nation-state altogether, generating scales of knowledge either very small or very large, either drastically above the threshold of national sovereignty (as in evolutionary biology) or drastically below that threshold (as in particle physics) (223).

Against such national contained modes of reading, Dimock proposes three alternative forms of aggregation that are at once much smaller and larger than the nation and which, she maintains, facilitate modes of literary scholarship that transcend the threshold of the nation: the "prenational", the "subnational" and the "transnational". In Chapter 2, I return to these three terms, asking along with Dimock, "[w]hat would literary studies look like if it were indeed to embrace this triangulation of terms: prenational, subnational, and transnational?", and also will examine the limits of such a triangular formation ("Scales of Aggregation" 226).

Irish Literature and World Literature

Despite the obvious resonance of many of the issues discussed above, practitioners in the field of Irish literary studies have been notably absent from the world literature debate. With the exception of Joe Cleary's review of Pascale Casanova's *The World Republic of Letters* published in the *Field Day Review* in 2006 ("World Systems: Atlas and Epitaph"), there has been little sustained engagement with how developments in the field of world literature relate to or are impacting upon Irish literary scholarship⁴. Yet as a discipline dedicated to the study of a national literature, the move towards world literature has significant implications and generates difficult questions for Irish literary studies. Such questions might include: to what extent is it useful to define literature produced by Irish writers according to the territorial jurisdiction of the nation? How do works of Irish literature manifest when they are received into foreign cultures? How do evolutions in literary genres affect our understanding of Irish literature? And what is the role of the national literary critic in the study of world literature?.

While demanding perhaps uncomfortable self-reflexive considerations, these questions also open up the field of Irish literature to fresh new perspectives that break with the insularity of which the discipline has so often been accused. In an early and influential critique of this sort, Edna Longley argued that "[t]o yoke modern Irish fiction to the Nation limits the ways in which it might be discussed" (*The Living Stream* 79). More recently Michael Brown (2007) has pithily noted "[t]o caricature the nature of Irish Studies as it is practiced in Ireland, it runs the danger of being considered insular,

⁴ In his recent essay, "Mapping Ireland in Early Modern Fiction" (2011), Ian Campbell-Ross signals towards the benefits that such an engagement with world literature theories can potentially hold out for work in the field of earlier periods of Irish writing.

monochrome and temporally unambitious” (Brown 59). In notable contrast, as David Porter rightly observes, recent work in the field of world literature - particularly that of David Damrosch, Franco Moretti and Pascale Casanova - has “[stressed] the mobility of texts and the permeability of literary traditions” (Porter 249). Considering Irish literature through the lens of world literature thus provides a welcome opportunity to examine our Ireland’s literature as it circulates beyond the geographical and ideological parameters of the nation.

Most significantly for the purpose of this dissertation, however, engagements with debates in the field of world literature also invite considerations of developments in the digital humanities that are pertinent to work in the field of literary studies. Most obviously, the close versus distant reading debate in the field of world literature has provided an intersectional space between literary studies and the digital humanities. An engagement with one thus engenders and facilitates an engagement with the other. Placing Irish literature in this intersectional area provides a unique opportunity to investigate what new version of “Irish” literary studies is emerging from electronic advances and how is it unfolding in a global context.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1. Digital Humanities and Literary Studies

Part One: Digital Humanities and the Literary

1.1. Computational Text Analysis

Humanities Computing or the Digital Humanities is generally considered to have begun in the late 1940s with Father Busa's efforts to produce a concordance¹ of the works of St Thomas Aquinas and related authors. In undertaking this "momentous task", Busa imagined that computer technology might be able to help him and approached Thomas J. Watson at IBM in the United States in search of support. As Susan Hockey notes, Busa

wanted to produce a "lemmatized" concordance where words are listed under their dictionary headings, not under their simple forms. His team attempted to write some computer software to deal with this and, eventually, the lemmatization of all 11 million words was completed in a semiautomatic way with human beings dealing with word forms that the program could not handle (Hockey 2004).

Following Hockey, Johanna Drucker maintains that Busa's initiation of the *Index Thomisticus*

marks the first intersection of corpus linguistics with the mechanical capabilities of a computer to manipulate symbolic information of which it had no semantic knowledge, thus making the important conceptual leap of connecting these applications to the humanities (Drucker 685).

Hence, Busa's concordance is generally considered to be the first significant instance of humanities computing².

Since the publication of Busa's concordance, many similar projects utilizing computational text analysis techniques have been produced. For example, in the 1960s, Stephen Parrish produced a concordance of the poems of Matthew Arnold and W.B. Yeats (Parrish 1962). In later projects, the technologies that were

¹ In publishing, a concordance refers to a list of words used in a body of work, with their immediate contexts. In linguistics, the term is used to describe a form of cross-reference between different parts of a sentence or phrase.

² See for example, Rockwell 2003; Schreibman et als. (eds.) 2004.

employed in formulating concordances were further developed to permit further statistical and stylistic studies of literary texts. In 1962, computer technology was first utilized in a disputed authorship study (Ellegård 1962). The following year, Andrew Morton employed quantitative approaches to style and authorship using computational technology (Morton 1965). The early years of humanities computing thus saw a primary concern with the development of tools that were concerned with producing quantitative analysis of texts.

Today, computational text analysis techniques are among the most prominent topics within the digital humanities community, evidenced, for example, by the volume of panels, papers and projects addressing these methods presented at recent Digital Humanities Conferences³. Panels and papers at the 2012 conference covered topics such as “Text Analysis Meets Text Encoding” (Bauman et als. 2012) and “Prosopographical Databases, Text-Mining, GIS and System Interoperability for Chinese History and Literature” (Bol, Hsiang, and Fong 2012) respectively, while pre-conference workshops included “Introduction to Distant Reading With Voyant Tools, Multilingual Edition” (Sinclair and Rockwell 2012) and an “Introduction to Stylomatic Analysis using R” (Eder and Rybicki 2012)⁴. Relatedly, the continued interest in computational text analysis may also be identified in the on-going development of tools which permit quantitative analysis of texts. For example, user-friendly software such as Voyant Tools (Sinclair), a web-based environment for exploring and analyzing digital texts, and the TAPoR Portal (Rockwell and Sinclair),

³ I am indebted to Marco Büchler and the eTRACES team in the University of Leipzig for their assistance in classifying the papers from DH2012 according to methodology.

⁴ In contrast, although there has been a steady increase in the number of panels and sessions on the digital humanities at the MLA Conference over the last number of years – increasing from 44 sessions in 2011 and 66 in 2013 – the focus has tended to be on either theoretical or infrastructural engagements with this emergent discipline (see <http://www.samplereality.com/2012/10/17/digital-humanities-at-mla-2013/> for a useful breakdown). Interestingly, less than 10 of the over 400 scholars who were present at DH2012 will give papers or workshops at the MLA conference.

a gateway to tools for sophisticated analysis and retrieval, along with representative texts for experimentation, have replaced early text analysis tools such as TACT, Word- Cruncher, OCP, or TuStep. In his early writing on text analysis tools for humanities scholarship, Geoffrey Rockwell observed that “[t]he challenge before us is [...] to forget the concordance and ask anew how we can analyse a text with a computer and whether such computer-assisted interpretations are interesting in and of themselves (“What is Text Analysis Really?” 213).

Although computational text analysis is, at present, a lively area of study and development within the field of digital humanities, the use of such technologies has yet to penetrate the core activity of literary studies, which, as Stephen Ramsay has noted, [...] remains mostly concerned with the interpretative analysis of written cultural artifacts” (*Reading Machines* 2). In a paper written almost twenty years ago, Roseanne G. Potter attributed this reluctance on the part of literary scholars to endorse computational text analysis techniques to two factors: “(1) the utter lack of training in, or appreciation of, scientific methods among mainstream literary critics, and (2) the almost universal tendency of computer analysts to get lost in the jargons of programming and statistics” (“Literary Criticism and Literary Computing” 91). Conversely, writing at the outset of the twenty-first century, Thomas Rommel has suggested that the reluctance to employ these new technologies in practices of literary scholarship may be grounded in more traditional literary debates. He points out that in demanding “attention to the text in its entirety” and with the “particular emphasis on minute analysis of isolated stylistic features”, the application of computational text analysis methodologies is sometimes “described as a return to the theoretical position of New Criticism and its theoretical and methodological tenets” (Rommel 2004). New Criticism is “widely regarded as a dated, if not inadequate

approach to texts and their location in a literary or cultural context”, Rommel argues that “the continuation of such methods proves difficult and invites criticism” (Rommel 2004).

In more recent discourse, the failure of computational analysis methods to become a prominent feature in literary scholarship more generally has been attributed to the underlying tension that exists between the process of machine reading and the traditional practices of close reading favoured in hermeneutic research (see for example Bradley 2008; Ramsay 2008; Ramsay 2011; Hayles 2012). More specifically, many literary scholars hold reservations regarding the use of such methods as they fear that they require a change in the nature of their scholarly activity and eliminate the possibilities of critical interpretation brought about through the processes of close reading. As Johanna Drucker has pointed out, “[c]orpus linguistics is one thing. Critical interpretation is quite another” (Drucker 685).

Drucker continues:

the intuitive bases of humanities interpretation, and the very nature of literary and aesthetic works, seem at odds with the disambiguating premises of stylometrics, attribution studies, and other “statistical methodologies”—as Hockey calls them (Drucker 687).

A similar point has been made by Ramsay who calls attention to the fact that literary interpretation is not just a qualitative matter but always “an insistently subjective manner of engagement” (Ramsay 2008) and hence appears at odds with the processes of machine reading. As the very nature of computational text analysis methodologies can appear antithetical to the traditional practices of literary scholars, it is perhaps not surprising that these new approaches to literary scholarship were slow in making an impact in the field of literary studies more generally.

While noting the limitations of computational text analysis methodologies for literary scholarship beyond the sphere of corpus linguistics, Drucker usefully suggests that, “what makes for productive dialogue” is the “provocation” that the

encounter between quantitative and qualitative approaches evokes (Drucker 687). This has been particularly evident in the recent debates evoked by work being carried out at the Literary Lab (2010) in Stanford University. Established by Franco Moretti, and the academic technology specialist, Matthew Jockers, the aim of the Lab is to produce and promote literary scholarship that is informed by the results yielded by computational methodologies. Researchers at the Literary Lab, consisting of scholars from both literary studies and ICT, have produced projects covering topics such as “Abstract Values in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel: Decline and Transformation of a Semantic Field”, “What Makes an Irish Novel Irish: Toward a Stylistic and Thematic Definition of the Nineteenth-Century Irish Novel” and “The Chapter as Structure in the Nineteenth-Century Novel”. As evidenced by the titles of these projects, the work at the Lab amalgamates the quantitative results yielded by computer-assisted textual analysis with traditional literary research into style and theme.

Moretti’s work utilizing and promoting the use of quantitative research methods in literary analysis has met with a mixed response from his colleagues in the field of literary studies. This was usefully captured in an issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (“Crunching Words in Great Number”, 3 June, 2010) wherein a number of academics including David Damrosch, Jerome McGann, Nancy Armstrong and N. Katherine Hayles commented on the impact that digitization and digital technology are having on literary studies. Though the contributors were asked to comment generally on “how ‘big data’ would change the humanities”, five of the eight respondents directly referred to Moretti’s work: McGann, Armstrong, Damrosch, Hayles and Steiner. Notably, all five are professors of English, thus

indicating the degree to which Moretti has become the face of computational text analysis methods in the literary scholarly community as it were.

More recently, the prominent and influential literary critic, Stanley Fish, has also entered the debate surrounding the use of quantitative research methods in literary scholarship. In the third of a series of blog posts relating to the Digital Humanities in his “Opinionator” blog on the *New York Times* website, Fish offers a critique of the digital humanities and how they affect traditional humanities research. His argument specifically focuses on computational text analysis methodologies and how they are applied in literary scholarship. As Fish sees it, such methods do not adhere to or support traditional practices in literary studies. Taking his own reading of Milton as an example of the traditional manner in which literary scholarship is conducted, he points out that he “began with a substantive interpretive proposition [...] and, within the guiding light, indeed searchlight, of that proposition I noticed a pattern that could, I thought be correlated with it. I then elaborated the correlation”. In the digital humanities, however, he argues that the “direction is the reverse”: “first you run the numbers, and then you see if they prompt an interpretive hypothesis”. As Fish sees it this “method, if it can be called that, is dictated by the capability of the tool” (“Mind Your P’s and B’s” 23 January 2012).

Fish’s account centres around his critique of the recent work of the young digital humanist and literary scholar, Matthew Wilkens, which utilizes quantitative and computational research methods in an analysis of canon formation in nineteenth-century American fiction (Wilkens 2012)⁵. By comparing what he considers to be the weakness of Wilkens’ methodology to the perceived soundness of his own traditional approach, Fish attempts to convey the dangers that attend the

⁵ It is interesting to note that Fish takes on Wilkens as the representative of promoters of quantitative and computational text analysis methods in literary scholarship despite the fact that the majority of literary scholars would consider Franco Moretti to be the main figure involved in work of this kind.

endorsement of digital humanities methodologies and, by extension, the superiority of close reading as a means of scholarly analysis. Having rendered the digital humanities synonymous with computational text analysis, Fish concludes his post by asserting that,

[the digital humanities] will have little place for the likes of me and for the kind of criticism I practice: a criticism that narrows meaning to the significances designed by an author, a criticism that generalizes from a text as small as half a line, a criticism that insists on the distinction between the true and the false, between what is relevant and what is noise, between what is serious and what is mere play (“Mind Your P’s and B’s” 23 January 2012)⁶.

Underlying Fish’s reservations towards the use of computational text analysis and, by extension, the Digital Humanities, is the fear that incorporating digital technologies into the practices of literary analysis will lessen the interpretational procedures that are central to work therein and thus reduce the value of the work being produced in the field. These are strikingly similar to the arguments that have been made against distant reading in its codex form (see for example Arac 2002) and suggests that a fear of the loss of critical insight yielded by close reading has deterred many literary scholars from actively engaging in either computational or codex based modes of distant reading.

Despite these reservations held towards distant reading, however, given the recent renewed interest in world literature and with the spread of Google Books, there has been a move within the literary community towards a realization of the need for approaches – both theoretical and technical – that combine close textual reading and the subjective processes of interpretation with wider collective efforts and beyond the scope of a small number of texts. As David Damrosch has argued,

⁶ Those familiar with Fish’s earlier work will undoubtedly be struck by the fact that his emphasis on the import of authorial intent stands in stark contrast to the arguments he made in his work on reader-response wherein he argued that meaning resided in the “experience of the utterance” (“Literature in the Reader” 131) rather than in the text or with the author. In claiming that his codex-based mode of analysis “narrows meaning to the significances designed by an author”, Fish attempts to demonstrate that his is a truer mode of literary analysis than that rendered by the use of computational text analysis.

the “true pay-off” of the endorsement of modes of distant reading will come when “a more solid middle-distance reading” than can be reached by either “close or distant reading alone” is established (qtd. in “Crunching Words in Great Number” June 3, 2010). Within the Digital Humanities community, N. Katherine Hayles has made a similar argument in favour of an amalgamation of modes of close and distant reading; she argues that what is needed is a “synergistic interaction” between “algorithmic analysis and hermeneutic close reading” where rather than one threatening the other, the scope of each can be “deepened and enriched by juxtaposing it with the other” (“How We Think” 48-9). Such observations mark an enormous step forward in the history of digital literary studies where computational text analysis techniques and traditional practices of close reading are no longer considered to be directly oppositional (despite conservative accounts offered by some scholars including Stanley Fish), but are seen as mutually benefiting from an engagement with the other.

Informed by these debates, the combination of modes of close and distant reading and traditional and digital methodologies in literary scholarship is the approach endorsed throughout this dissertation. Moreover, the reciprocal relationship between the digital and the literary employed here is driven by a specific literary research concern, namely the intersection between Irish literature and world literature. Subsequently, the digital humanities methodologies and debates discussed in the remainder of this chapter are those which are pertinent to the research concerns of this dissertation.

1.2. Digital Methodologies and the Literary

While debates regarding distant reading have tended to dominate recent accounts of the relationship between literary studies and the digital humanities, what has subsequently been overshadowed are the many other types of digital approaches and methodologies that are and have been employed by literary scholars elsewhere. Despite being one of the most productive areas of work of a digital nature within the literary community, neither the methodologies employed nor the valuable critical insights gleaned by practitioners working in the field of scholarly editing have been brought into consideration in the close versus distant reading debate as it has been played out with regards the digital humanities. Although the scholarly edition is not among the digital resources addressed within this dissertation⁷, the digital humanities methodologies utilized in the creation of such digital tools are employed at various stages throughout this work. Subsequently, what follows is not a full account of the developments in this area of the digital humanities, but rather an engagement with the technologies utilized in the creation of digital editions which are pertinent to the concerns of this dissertation.

Recent years have seen the publication of a number of significant digital editions and digital archives including; *The Emily Dickinson Archive* (Smith 1994); *The Rossetti Archive* (McGann 1996); *The William Blake Archive* (Eaves et als. 1997) and; *The Walt Whitman Archive* (Folsom and Price 1997). Understood from a literary perspective, the term “archive” seems ill-fitted to describing projects that are the products of scholarly editing: editing is not, after all, the same as archiving and an edition is an entirely different creature to an archive. However, as Kenneth Price usefully observes,

⁷ A consideration of the significance of digital scholarly editions for work in the field of world literature is an area meriting future critical attention.

archive in a digital context has come to suggest something that blends features of editing and archiving. To meld features of both — to have the care of treatment and annotation of an edition and the inclusiveness of an archive — is one of the tendencies of recent work in electronic editing. [...] in a digital context, the “edition” is only a piece of the “archive,” and, in contrast to print, “editions,” “resources,” and “tools” can be interdependent rather than independent (emphasis in original) (“Electronic Scholarly Editions” 2008) .

Considered thus, the production of scholarly editions or digital archives – the two being frequently “interdependent” as Price suggests – requires; firstly the careful annotation of individual textual artifacts and; secondly, the creation of suitable environments to store these annotated artifacts where they can be readily searched. In producing digital artifacts of this kind, two inter-related digital humanities methodologies are required – text encoding or markup and database generation. As both of these digital methodologies are employed in this dissertation – in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 respectively – it is useful to provide an overview of both.

Modelling and Markup

In scholarly editing, conducted in either print or digital form, the processes of close reading and interpretation are central to the production of the edition. The digital humanities methodology most commonly employed to facilitate such readings is “mark up” or “text encoding”. Mark up is “the use of embedded codes, known as tags, to describe a document’s structure, or to embed instructions that can be used by a layout processor or other document management tools” (Raymond et als. qtd. in Schmidt 338). More simply, it is “the practice of marking up text with tags that indicate a section of text should be interpreted or rendered in a particular way” (Welty and Ide 1999). Owing to its dependency on disambiguation and interpretation, encoding involves what Thomas Rommel has referred to as the “external intervention” of the encoder with the text being marked. Addressing the significance of text encoding for literary scholarship, Rommel observes the following:

[t]he importance of markup for literary studies of electronic texts cannot be overestimated, because the ambiguity of meaning in literature requires at least some interpretative process by the critic even prior to the analysis proper. Words as discrete strings of characters, sentences, lines, and paragraphs serve as “natural” but by no means value-free textual segments. Any other instance of disambiguation in the form of thematic markup is a direct result of a critic's reading of a text, which by definition influences the course of the analysis (Rommel 2004).

Given the subjective nature of text encoding, it is perhaps not surprising that this area of the digital humanities has been enlivened by vibrant debate regarding the formulation of an adequate markup language for humanities projects. This debate has been driven by the perceived need to establish a language that at once enables interoperability and the idiosyncracities of individual humanities projects. In the early years of text encoding, Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML), which provides a meta-language for developing specific tag sets, became the basis of most markup schemes intended for general use. SGML developed out of a perceived need within the digital humanities community for a standardized language that would allow for interoperability. Rather than defining a common markup vocabulary for the entire publishing industry, or even common vocabularies for portions of the industry, a standardized metalanguage for defining markup languages was decided upon which would improve the interoperability of computer applications and data (Rehear 2004).

SGML forms the basis of the most commonly used text encoding language within the field of humanities computing, TEI (Text Encoding Initiative) (Sperberg-McQueen 1994). The TEI was developed out of a recognized need for the creation of international standards for textual markup that resulted in a conference in Poughkeepsie, in November 1987. At the conference a set of guidelines was drawn up which would ensure a standardized format and encoding system for all digital scholarly projects, and in so doing would increase interoperability across all

disciplines included under digital humanities, and therefore form a TEI community (Cummings 2008)⁸.

While the TEI has remained the encoding language of choice in many digital humanities projects, the adequacy thereof for humanities projects has been the subject of on-going debate among practitioners in the digital humanities community. While not denying the usefulness of the TEI, Dino Buzzetti has called attention to the fact that according to this markup language, the “form of the text representation” and “the form of the content represented” are confused (Buzzetti 64). Put differently, the “expression” or “the logical structure of the document” and the document’s “content” (69) become indistinguishable according to the TEI tags. As TEI is built out of SGML (Standard Generalized Markup Language), Buzzetti suggests that,

[t]he responsibility of the confusion can be ascribed to the ambiguous definition of the text as an “ordered hierarchy of content objects”, or “OHCO” and to the hasty assumption that this definition was “the basic model of the text (Buzzetti 69).

An overview of the debates surrounding TEI suggests that the problem with this mark up language is that it is predominantly concerned with modelling, or re-presenting, the formal structures of a text. However, it is limited in the extent to which it can accommodate the modeling of a text’s content. As with issues relating to computational text analysis, this concern with the formalism of the text suggests a curious return to the methods of New Criticism, which, as has been previously established, have fallen out of favour among the wider community of literary scholars.

Partly in response to restricted nature of TEI, many digital humanities projects employ XML (Extensible Mark Up Language) as a more flexible alternative. XML is a metalanguage that allows users to define their own customized markup

⁸ For a comprehensive overview of the history of text encoding, see Allen H. Rehear’s chapter in *The Companion to Digital Humanities*, “Text Encoding”(Rehear 2004).

languages, especially in order to display documents on the World Wide Web, has proven considerably useful for scholars wishing to engage with texts (and indeed, other cultural objects) in digital environments in a manner which is appropriate to their individual scholarly interests or “use cases”. This is notably different from TEI which restricts the user to the use of pre-defined tags which may not be appropriate for a particular research question. Aja Teehan and John Keating (2010) have written forcefully on this subject; they point out that “[i]f a given project’s perspective on the documents and their uses are not encapsulated within TEI then it is not the most suitable tool for encoding in that project” (Teehan and Keating 385). Instead of adapting predefined markup language, they argue that “a custom designed tool would be beneficial as it encapsulates, and has been specifically adapted to, the particular needs of the encoder [...] along with the characteristics of his objective [...] and the source he is working with” (Teehan and Keating 385).

In their own scholarly work, Teehan and Keating, following the work of John Burrows and Willard McCarty, have employed XML as they view it as providing a greater degree of flexibility on the part of the user and thus, to be more formidable for the specificities of individual use cases. The flexibility of this language renders it particularly suitable for use in literary investigations as it can accommodate the subjective interpretations of scholars which are central to the production of works of literary scholarship (Ramsay 2008). Relatedly - as will be demonstrated in chapter 3 - it is also a suitable methodology for enabling modes of close reading. Given the subjectivity enabled by XML, Scifleet et al. observation that

Encoding text provides us not only with the key elements for structuring an electronic document it also serves as the method for transmitting our understanding of those elements, and as such, it is as much a commentary as it is a technical mechanism (Scifleet et al. 2009),

is of particular relevance in considerations of XML encoding. In Chapter 3, I will demonstrate the insights that can be yielded by considering “markup as a

commentary on the source” and the opportunities afforded thereby for work in the field of world literature.

Database

While the processes of markup are required in the preparation of texts for inclusion within digital archives, a database environment must be generated to store and enable access to the edited texts. Described at the most basic level, a database is a system that allows for the effective storage and retrieval of material: as Stephen Ramsay usefully summarizes, “[t]he purpose of a database is to store information about a particular domain (sometimes called the universe of discourse) and to allow one to ask questions about the state of that domain” (Ramsay 2004). Many resources of this kind are now used in the everyday activities of literary scholars. For example, current members of literary departments, ranging from undergraduates to professors, are experienced users of online databases such as *Jstor* and *Project Muse*. Many also utilize more specialized databases such as *The Shakespeare Database Project* or *The Emily Dickinson Archive* (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 4).

Owing to the familiarity of literary scholars with these types of digital resources, it is perhaps not surprising that of the various digital humanities tools and methodologies that have emerged in recent years, it is database technology that has received the most attention from practitioners within the literary community.

However, much of this commentary has tended to be speculative and aspirational, and in some cases, metaphorical and prematurely celebratory. The most notable example of metaphorical commentary on database technology has come from Ed Folsom in his account of *The Walt Whitman Archive*. In his controversial essay, “Database as Genre: the Epic Transformation of the Archives” (Folsom 2007),

published in a special issue of the *PMLA Journal* dedicated to the discussion of genre, Folsom argued that database technology provides a means of overcoming the linearity of narrative which is enforced by the codex form. In this article, Folsom draws heavily on ideas postulated by Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media*. He notes that, for Manovich, databases are “collections of individual items, with every item possessing the same significance as any other” (Manovich cited in Folsom 1574). This is a generally accepted understanding of the database form. However, Folsom goes further and not only refers to but agrees with Manovich’s controversial claim that “database and narrative are natural enemies” (Manovich qtd. in Folsom 1574) and suggests that, as such, the database is the most appropriate environment for storing Walt Whitman’s rhizomatic work which itself denies the constraints of linear narrative.

Folsom’s article has sparked varying responses among his peers in both the field of digital humanities and literary scholarship, five of which are published with the special edition of the *PMLA* journal alongside Folsom’s own. The respondents included renowned digital humanists such as Jerome McGann and N. Katherine Hayles as well as those from established literary scholars including Peter Stallybrass and Meredith L. McGill. Despite their differing reactions to Folsom’s celebration of database as the “new genre of the twenty-first century” (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 4), all of the contributors to the debate share a common concern with establishing a language within literary critical discourse suitable for analyzing new digital tools designed to advance literary scholarship. While some, such as Stallybrass, share with Folsom the desire to place database technology within the realm of literary criticism by either placing it within a print tradition or by applying literary theory to their understandings thereof, McGann attempts to highlight the

danger that attends Folsom's "loose way of thinking about our paper-based inheritance as well as about these new digital technologies". Referring to both Folsom and Manovich's discussions of databases in metaphorical terms, McGann argues that, "this kind of talk debases our understanding the matters being discussed" ("Database, Interface, and Archival Fever" 1589).

Published in one of the most established journals in the field of literary scholarship, the MLA debate of 2007 presented to the literary community the complex issues that attend the production of digital archives and the theoretical significance that the digital environment has on the textual artifacts contained therein. While some, particularly Folsom himself, celebrated database as a means of overcoming the linearity of narrative demanded by the codex form, McGann provides a more sobering account of the medium. He persuasively calls attention to the fact that no less than with the codex form, database technology requires processes of selection and the construction of narratives (Folsom 2007; McGann 2007; Hayles 2007).

1.3. Thinking Beyond Print: The Professional Implications

As evidenced from this brief account of the practical and theoretical issues that attend the construction of digital editions and archives, the moving of our literary and cultural heritage into digital environments has significant effects on the material being digitized. The debates that have emerged around such digital resources have been driven by a concern with establishing the most suitable digital methodologies for translating and storing our print-based inheritance in digital environments.

This migration of literary scholarship from print to the digital medium has also impacted upon the infrastructural procedures of the literary community, the

extent of which was made clear in the 2011 edition of *Profession*⁹. *Profession* is an annual publication of the MLA which contains essays and articles on “current intellectual, curricular, and institutional trends and issues and on relevant public-policy debates, essays that can be read with interest and profit by many, if not all, MLA members” (<http://www.mla.org/profession>). The aim of the publication is to “give a voice to MLA members working in diverse subject areas and situations”. In the 2011 edition, a number of the leading figures in the field of digital humanities including Susan Schreibman, Geoffrey Rockwell, Jerome McGann, provide accounts of the current status of digital humanities within the field of literary scholarship. Whereas the earlier MLA debate saw the contributors engage in a theoretical jousting over understandings of database technology and what it could and could not do, what it does and does not mean for literary studies, in *Profession 2011*, the contributors were predominantly concerned with issues of evaluation, accreditation and sustainability surrounding scholarly work in the digital medium.

In the introduction to the edition, Susan Schreibman, Laura Mandell and Stephen Olsen call attention to the growing recognition in the humanities of the volume of scholarly work that is now being produced in digital rather than codex form. Specifically, they refer to a number of moves made by the MLA which display the growing recognition of the value digital humanities projects and methodologies within the field. In the 2006 *Report of the MLA Task Force on Evaluating Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion*, the MLA “offered unequivocal support for digital scholarship” (Schreibman, Mandell and Olsen 127) and expressed a concern with establishing means for evaluating scholarly work in the digital medium. This was followed up by the release of a wiki, “The Evaluation of Digital Work” (based

⁹ In keeping with the desire among practitioners in the field of digital humanities for shared knowledge, the articles concerning the digital humanities were made freely available online, itself a decisive move forward in traditions in scholarly publishing in the field of literary scholarship.

on the work of Geoffrey Rockwell, who served as a member of the committee from 2005 to 2008 and who is also a contributor to this special section), by the MLA's Committee on Information Technology (CIT) which "provides a framework for departments to evaluate digital scholarship" (127).

While the guidelines signal a desire on the part of the literary community to establish means of assessing and evaluating scholarship in the digital medium, the field has not yet established sufficient protocols for digital humanities projects. Adding to the useful suggestions laid out in the guidelines, a number of the contributors to the 2011 edition of *Profession* address the various difficulties that those working in the field of digital humanities face when their work is considered according to the procedures of traditional humanities departments. For example, Bethany Nowviskie (Nowviskie 2011) discusses the difficulties that attend evaluating collaborative projects within traditional evaluative frameworks in the humanities. As the majority of digital humanities projects demand, by their very nature, collaborative work, Nowviskie highlights the need for guidelines for assessing and evaluating work of this kind. Kathleen Fitzpatrick calls attention to the limitations of the peer review system for evaluating works of digital scholarship and argues that there are many other means available to us for assessing the scholarly contribution of digital work, "many other forms of the independent expert assessment that we expect peer review to provide" (Fitzpatrick 197). The contributions by Steve Anderson and Tara McPherson (Anderson and McPherson 2011) and by Geoffrey Rockwell (Rockwell 2011) address the difficulties that attend evaluating multimedia projects as works of scholarship according to current procedures in humanities departments and argue that works of this kind need to be evaluated in a manner which respects the medium in which they were produced. In

keeping with his work elsewhere, McGann's article, "On Creating a Usable Future," "argues that it is imperative for the profession to be engaged with the creation of digital scholarship in all its manifestations—from tool and policy development to content creation" (Schreibman, Mandell and Olsen 132). Moreover, here as elsewhere, McGann calls attention to the issue of sustainability that attends the move from codex to digital modes of producing scholarly work. As Schreibman, Mandell and Olsen point out, collectively the articles contained within the issue "point out various ways forward" in establishing protocols for evaluating scholarly endeavors in digital form (133)¹⁰.

The MLA debate of 2007 and the 2011 edition of *Profession* thus provide what can be best described as meta considerations of the relationship between literary studies and the digital humanities. While the former was concerned with the manner in which digital technology alters the ways in which we encounter and study literary texts, the latter provides a consideration of the challenges in establishing and implementing infrastructural and institutional amendments necessary to accommodate scholarship in digital form. While calling attention to important institutional and infrastructural changes that were being brought about and required by the digital humanities, this special issue can at times read like a guest lecture by invited speakers from another field of study rather than an account from practitioners within the field of literary studies. More positively, the shift in the focus of the discourse between these two publications is indicative of the fact that in the space of four years, the digital humanities have grown from being something whose importance and potential usefulness were still in question, to becoming such an undeniable part of scholarship today that traditional procedures of evaluation must

¹⁰ As the edition of *Profession* was published less than twelve months before the time of writing, it remains to be seen whether the recommendations made in the articles will be put into practice within humanities departments.

now be amended to accommodate the many works that are now produced in the digital medium. Read alongside one another, these two publications usefully capture the change in attitude towards the digital humanities and their growing institutional recognition.

1.4. Digital Humanities and Literary Studies at the Present Moment

In the introduction to his recent edited collection, *Understanding Digital Humanities* (2012), David M. Berry has argued that changes in the digital humanities are most fruitfully considered in terms of “layers” or “moments” where “layers would indicate that their interaction and inter-relations are crucial to understanding the digital humanities” (Berry 4). Contrary to Stanley Fish’s provocative suggestion that the digital humanities aspire to bring about an “entirely new conception of what work in the humanities can and should be” (“Mind your P’s and B’s” 23 January 2012), the history of the interaction between the digital humanities and literary studies reveals that humanistic concerns have remained central to developments of work in the field and that what has evolved is, at its best, what N. Katherine Hayles has referred to as a “synergistic interaction” (“How We Think” 48) between traditional and more recent modes of conducting literary scholarship.

By tracing the history of digital literary studies from its origins in print concordances and the development of text analysis tools, to digital scholarly editions and archives, up to the present moment, it is evident that textual artifacts have been at the centre of work in the digital humanities since its foundation. What marks the present moment as notably different from previous stages in this genealogy is the extent to which the literary community has begun not only to engage in debates concerning the use of digital technology in their traditional scholarly practices, but

also to make significant infrastructural changes to accommodate scholarship being produced in digital form. While some have attributed this increased concern across the discipline to the fact that the digital humanities are now in vogue, (evidenced by the fact that they are frequently referred to as “sexy” and “cool”), a micro level analysis of the genealogy of the intersection between the two fields suggests that this is more than just a case of following a trend.

Considering the genealogy of digital literary studies at this micro scale, it becomes evident that the seemingly recent surge in interest in the digital humanities is in fact the result of an accumulation of years of interaction between textual artifacts and digital technology. What also emerges when we study the history of digital literary studies at this level is the realization that developments in humanities computing technologies and methodologies have not been entirely “other” from those that have occurred in the field of literary scholarship. For example, the emergence of computational text analysis techniques in the mid 1960s coincided with the hay-day of Formalist approaches in literary criticism. The interest in hypertext emerged at around the same time as Barthes’s post-structuralist theories advocating the disruption of grand narratives. More recently, as noted earlier, the renewed interest in computational text analysis has coincided with Franco Moretti’s work on world literature, specifically, his call for modes of “distant reading” (Moretti 2005). Within the literary community, Moretti’s work has evoked heated debates concerning the roles of both close and distant reading. These debates have been further fuelled by developments in the digital realm, such as the advent of Google Books and online digital libraries, which have made more material available than heretofore and have thus increased the intensity of the need to establish means of studying all the world’s literature.

While the spotlight has tended to focus on the debate between quantitative research methods and more traditional practices of literary scholarship and their respective champions, Moretti and to a lesser extent, Fish, a more detailed examination of the field uncovers more significant developments which reflect more accurately the complex relationship between the literary community and the digital humanities. A retrospective examination of the intersection between the two disciplines brings to light the importance of the work carried out by scholars working in the field of digital scholarly editing which has demonstrated that rather than demanding modes of distant reading, the use of digital tools and technology can bring the literary scholar into a more detailed engagement with the text under examination and thus contribute to rather than undermine the processes of close reading.

Part Two: The Digital Humanities in Ireland

1.5. The Digital Humanities in Ireland

To date the history of digital humanities in Ireland is largely an infrastructural and institutional history and it is thus useful to signal some key moments and episodes to date. While it is impossible to date precisely when the digital humanities began to take effect in the field of Irish studies, the first notable collaborative enterprise between humanities and ICT researchers on the island of Ireland was The Corpus of Electronic Texts (CELT) (1997) project - the online resource for contemporary and historical Irish documents in literature, history and politics in University College Cork - which grew out of the joint involvement of the Department of History and the Computer Centre over many years. In 2003, researchers in the Moore Institute in NUI Galway began hosting digital humanities projects such as the Thomas Moore

Hypermedia Archive, a multimedia electronic edition of the collected literary and musical works of the nineteenth-century Irish poet, and the TEXTE project (Transfer of Expertise in the Technologies of Editing), a digital humanities research and training programme¹¹. In 2006, An Foras Feasa: The Institute for Research in Irish Historical and Cultural Traditions - a consortium of four institutions, comprising staff from Humanities and Computer Science departments in NUIM, DCU, DKIT and SPCD - was formally established with the aim of “[applying] the most modern scholarly and technological resources available to the study of the historical and cultural traditions of this island, including relationships with Europe and with the wider world”. In the same year the Long Room Hub was established in Trinity College Dublin to “encourage and foster innovative interdisciplinary research across the entire spectrum of the arts and humanities at Trinity” and this has included a strong digital humanities strand.

Since their foundation, these centers have produced a number of significant digital humanities projects, many thereof being pertinent to work in the field of literary studies. In September 2005, researchers at the Moore institute began work on *The Thomas Moore Hypermedia Archive*. Dedicated to Irish poet, writer and songwriter Thomas Moore (1779-1852), the website was modeled on existing projects such as the Walt Whitman Archive (www.whitmanarchive.org) and the William Blake Archive (www.blakearchive.org). It contains digital scholarly editions of all of his works in poetry, prose, and music, downloadable recordings of Moore’s songs, a portrait and illustration gallery and other resources. In 2007,

¹¹ Prof. Sean Ryder (NUIG) successfully obtained over €1,027,000 under the EU 6th Framework Programme to direct a Marie Curie Transfer of Knowledge project TEXTE. This project has provided funding for six post-doctoral European researchers to work at NUI, Galway, creating electronic archives and editions of historical and literary texts using new technologies of imaging, text-encoding, editing, and hypermedia publication. Ryder’s efforts have thus been instrumental in fostering and promoting digital humanities work on the island of Ireland.

Professor Maria Luddy of the University of Warwick and Professor Gerardine Meaney of University College Dublin, published the *Women in Modern Irish Culture* (WIMIC) database, a fully searchable bibliographical database of Irish women writers, who wrote in both Irish and English, between 1800 and 2005. 2010 saw the publication of Charles Travis's *Digital Atlas of Ireland, 1922-1949* which provides literary, historical and cartographic perspectives on Ireland from 1922 to 1949 drawn from the works of fourteen Irish writers. This project is based in the Long Room Hub of Trinity College and provides visual and textual interactive features for academics and the public at large interested in the intersection of literary culture, local history and Irish geography. In 2010 also, the *Bibliography of Irish Criticism* (BILC), was published by humanities and ICT researchers at NUI Maynooth. BILC is a bibliographical database of Irish Literary Criticism covering the period from the Irish Literary Revival to the present day containing the bibliographical details of works by and on individual authors and critics.

Responding to and indicative of the growing number of digital projects being produced by scholars and researchers in Ireland, in 2008, the Digital Humanities Observatory (DHO) was established as a hub for activity pertaining to the digital humanities on the island. It forms a central component within the Humanities Serving Irish Society (HSIS) initiative¹² and was established under the auspices of the Royal Irish Academy to “manage and co-ordinate the increasingly complex e-resources created in the arts and humanities”. Since its launch in 2008, the DHO has established a number of online resources which bring together digital humanities projects being developed on the island of Ireland and pertinent to Irish Studies.

¹² The Humanities Serving Irish Society (HSIS) is an example of how several institutions across the country have come together to enable the humanities play their role in national development including in particular the use of the power of digital technology (National Strategy for Higher Education, 2011, 65).

DRAPier is “an interactive database of digital humanities projects created by third level institutions on the island of Ireland” (www.dho.ie). A similar resource is the Irish Resources in the Humanities (IRTH) database which “includes entries on a broad range of subjects and these are categorised under the rubrics of archaeology, architecture, art, biographical, film, geography, grants & fellowships, history, Irish language, literature and music”. In 2011, the DHO launched DHO:Discovery which provides a “gateway to Irish digital collections and resources, information and knowledge”. This most recent addition to the DHO hub aims to support “the interdisciplinary and inter-institutional sharing of knowledge throughout the HSIS (Humanities Serving Irish Society) consortium and digital research collections of Irish interest” (<http://discovery.dho.ie/>).

Initiatives such as the DHO and related projects like Discovery have been instrumental in foregrounding the presence of digital humanities work in Ireland. However, despite their importance for fostering and hosting work of this kind, these projects have already encountered difficulties, most significantly with regards to sustainability. Jennifer Edmond and Susan Schreibman have aptly described the situation facing the DHO thus:

like many digital humanities projects, the DHO was funded for three years without a clear business model or sustainability plan. There was the expectation that further rounds of PRTLTI would allow for repeat funding or that European monies would be made available to fund core activities. But PRTLTI is not designed to be a funding stream for the long term, and does not extend funding grants or give repeat funding to successful projects. Instead, projects are expected to have somehow become “sustainable” after a limited number of years’ core funding (“European Elephants” 9).

Yet as Schreibman and Edmond proceed to point out, “even for the sciences, this model is a pipe dream” - the reality being that many digital projects continue to survive through “piecemeal project funding” (10). And in Ireland’s current economic climate, such funding has become increasingly hard come by thus leaving the future of many digital projects, among them, the national platform, uncertain. In a hard-

hitting yet useful summation of the situation, Edmond and Schreibman argue that, “it is at best short sighted, and at worst irresponsible to fund national digital humanities platforms which have preservation mandates on uncertain funding streams” (10).

For Schreibman and Edmonds therefore, the current difficulties facing projects like the DHO are directly related to “demise of the Celtic Tiger in Ireland” (10). The practical engagement with digital projects and related infrastructure offered in “European Elephants” thus renders the relationship between Tiger and technology at once far more real and more worrying than the correlation Gerry Smyth traced between the two in 2007.

In addition to generating a large output of digital resources, the proliferation of digital humanities institutes and organizing bodies throughout Ireland in recent years has also given rise to a number of digital humanities courses in various institutions throughout the island. In 2008, having received funding from The Higher Education Authority’s Programme for Research in Third-Level Institutions Cycle 4 (PRTLII), An Foras Feasa awarded twelve three-year doctoral fellowships to students across the humanities disciplines working in the intersectional area between the humanities and the emerging area of the digital humanities¹³. In 2010, NUI Maynooth offered a masters programme in digital humanities, the first of its kind to be made available in an Irish institution. Similar programmes emerged shortly thereafter in Trinity College Dublin and most recently University College Cork. In 2011, the Digital Arts and Humanities (DAH) four-year inter-disciplinary structured PhD programme was launched. Funded by the Higher Education Authority under its Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions, Cycle 5, the PhD programme is co-ordinated with an all-Irish university consortium: National University of Ireland,

¹³ Seven of the fellowships were awarded to students in the National University of Ireland Maynooth, two in Dublin College University and three in St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

Galway; Trinity College Dublin; University College Cork; and National University of Ireland, Maynooth and includes additional teaching contributions by Queen's University Belfast; University of Ulster and the Royal Irish Academy and by its industrial partners, Google, IBM, and Intel. Like An Foras Feasa, DAH was designed to enable students to carry out research in the arts and humanities at the highest level using new media and computer technologies. While much of the convergences between the humanities and the digital humanities have taken place at the post-graduate level, in the last two years, a number of under-graduate modules have been introduced in universities across Ireland which introduce students to the tools, methods and debates in the digital humanities.

It is thus evident that the digital humanities are becoming an increasingly prevalent feature in humanities scholarship in Ireland. Surprisingly, however, the opportunities and implications afforded by this new intersectional area between the humanities and the computer sciences has received little critical attention from scholars in the field of Irish Studies. As Margaret Kelleher has observed,

While recent years have seen the availability of some truly innovative resources in Irish history, literature and culture, there is yet little or no investigation, reflection or critique by humanities scholars of the new forms of knowledge thus generated, or of the new scales and types of research made possible, or of the new kinds of intellectual brokerage which may be necessary to link digital and analogue resources ("Finding New Partners" 2012).

This absence is particularly striking in the field of Irish literary studies which, as a discipline has charged itself with the task of tracing developments in literature and culture¹⁴. As Kelleher has noted elsewhere, despite being "one of the more remarkable changes in how literary scholarship is circulated" ("From the Anthology

¹⁴ For example, Article 2 of the IASIL constitution states that, the purposes of the Association shall be to encourage study and research in Irish and Irish-Diaspora literatures and related fields of study. The Association shall concern itself [...] with periodical publication of papers and bulletins, relating particularly to the study and teaching of and research in, Irish literatures and culture; [...] and with the collection of information about the nature and location of source materials (<http://www.iasil.org/about/constitution.html>).

to the Database” 12), the opportunities and implications that attend the transporting of our print based inheritance into the electronic medium has received little scholarly attention from practitioners in the field of Irish literary studies.

While the digital humanities have, for the most part, been absent from debates in the field of Irish literary studies, one can, however, begin to trace a growing number of references to new media in work published in the last decade. In many instances, these fleeting references are made in the aspiration that digital technology will provide a means of overcoming many of the boundaries that the discipline of Irish Studies has imposed upon itself. Perhaps not surprisingly, such references have appeared most frequently in debates concerning the Irish literary canon and the vehicle through which it is most readily promulgated, the literary anthology. Commenting on the first three volumes of the *Field Day Anthology*, Claire Connolly argued that “[p]ublished in 1991, it was oddly out of touch with emerging technologies for arranging and retrieving data” (Connolly 303). Colin Graham has made a similar claim, arguing that “as books”, the *Field Day Anthology, Volumes I-V*, “are extraordinarily old fashioned ventures” (“Literary Historiography” 590). Writing in 2003, Margaret Kelleher looked forward to the “next stage” in the history of the Irish literary anthology, which she envisaged would include “electronic and lower cost dissemination” (“The Field Day Anthology” 92) that would serve to further the important retrieval work carried out by the editors of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Vols. IV and V*.

More recently, a number of critics in the field of Irish Studies have made reference to the potentialities of new media for the pedagogy of Irish Studies. Commenting on Irish Studies as it is practiced in the US and Ireland, Christina Hunt Mahony noted that, “the newest area of interest on both sides of the Atlantic, and one

with the greatest potential for expansion, is that of online Irish Studies ” (Hunt Mahony 22). In his discussion of Irish Studies in Ireland, Michael Brown argued that technology has a role to play in “supporting interdisciplinary investigations within the university” (Brown 66). Echoing Hunt Mahony, Brown further claimed that with the use of the Internet, “local dialogue can go global without the cost of travel” and in so doing can break down the “isolation of foreign-based Irish Studies scholars and the insularity of Irish based scholarship” (Brown 66).

While these accounts signal a growing interest in technological developments as they relate to work in the field of Irish Studies, it is important to note that they are speculative only. Few if any of the aforementioned critics support their speculations with close critical examinations of any one of the many online digital resources being developed by and for scholars in the field of literary studies. Subsequently, their accounts of developments in digital technology as they relate to work in the field of Irish Studies remain aspirational rather than critical.

This lack of informed critical engagement on the part of literary scholars with developments in the digital humanities is not exclusive to an Irish context. Indeed practitioners within literary studies more generally have only recently begun to acknowledge the growing significance of the digital humanities for work in the discipline. Writing from the field of the digital humanities, in a recent essay, “Where is the Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?” (2012), digital humanist and cultural critic, Alan Liu, addresses the current gap between the traditional humanities disciplines and the still emergent field of the digital humanities. As Liu sees it, the digital humanities have yet to be considered as “full partners of the humanities” (Liu 492). However, Liu further argues that the gap between the two fields is being narrowed by an “intrinsic methodological indicator: the proximity of the digital

humanities to the current ‘close reading’ versus ‘distant reading’ debate” (Liu 492). Owing to the close affinity between Franco Moretti’s distant reading and quantitative research methods and visualization techniques, Liu has suggested that the concept has brought the digital humanities into closer proximity with the traditional humanities discipline of literary studies: “the digital humanities are now what may be called the *practicing partner* of distant reading” (Liu 492-3).

Although Liu discusses the significance of this debate as it relates to developments in the digital humanities (to be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters), scholars in the literary studies community will recognize this debate as forming part of larger body of discourse generated by the revived interest in world literature. More specifically, in the field of literary studies, the methodological debates regarding close and distant readings have become inescapably intertwined with questions as to the relative status of national and world literatures respectively. Interestingly, however, few literary scholars have acknowledged or addressed the digital humanities methodologies underlying Moretti’s concept¹⁵. Similarly, few digital humanists consider distant reading within the context it was first proposed, namely, within the field of world literature. Subsequently we find that while members within both the literary and the digital humanities communities are purportedly addressing the same concept, they are doing so in quite different ways and from still divergent standpoints. What remains absent, therefore, is a detailed critical engagement with the intersection between world literature and the digital humanities, a gap which this dissertation seeks to remedy.

¹⁵ The work of Matt Wilkens is a notable exception to this (see Wilkens, “Canons, Close Reading and the Evolution of Method” 2012).

Chapter 2

**Chapter 2. Establishing the “Problem” of World Literature The Prenational,
the Subnational and the Transnational in Colm Tóibín’s *The Heather Blazing*
and *Brooklyn***

1. Introduction

1.1. “Who’s Irish?”

In a paper given at the IASIL Conference in Glasgow in 2009¹, provocatively entitled “Who’s Irish?: Henry James, Colm Tóibín, James Joyce, Gish Jen”, Wai Chee Dimock posed a series of questions relating to the use and application of the adjective “Irish”. In the opening sections of her paper, she asked:

First, [what] does Irishness have to do with geography, with where we are located? And, if location is key, is it more important as biographical antecedent, or as a current fact? [...] is Irishness something that inheres in us because of where we were born, or something that develops upon us because of the address that we now have? (“Who’s Irish?” 2009).

Focussing predominantly on Colm Tóibín’s depiction of Henry James in his award winning novel, *The Master* (2004), Dimock argues that the relationship between the two authors provides evidence of what she refers to as “a mobile Irishness, one that is symbolically transitive and commutable” (“Who’s Irish?” 2009), where Irishness is considered to be “a condition that can be arrived at” through the act of writing or through processes of mediation. Throughout the paper Dimock attempts to demonstrate that Irishness is “not as a secure taxonomic category [...] but a heuristic category, something to keep us guessing, and to generate more and more questions” (“Who’s Irish?” 2009).

The focus on an adjective intimately associated with a nation presented in “Who’s Irish?” gains particular significance when considered in light of Dimock’s

¹ This paper was also presented at conferences in Beijing in 2012 and in Boston in 2009. A slightly amended version was given in Wake Forest University 2011 under the title “Two-way Diaspora”. A version of the paper will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Critical Inquiry*, with the title “Weak Theory: Henry James, Colm Tóibín, W. B. Yeats”.

work relating to world literature. As noted in the preface to this dissertation, Dimock's work is characterized by a strong polemic against the study of national literatures. In the opening pages of *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (2006), she posed the following challenging question: "[w]hat assumptions enable us to take an adjective derived from a territorial jurisdiction and turn it into a mode of literary causality, making the latter reflexive of an indeed coincidental with the former?" (*Through Other Continents* 3). In an earlier essay, "Planetary Time and Global Translation: 'Context' in Literary Studies" (2003) Dimock argued that

[a]s a set of spatial and temporal coordinates, the nation is not only too brief, too narrow, but also too predictable in its behaviour, its sovereignty is uppermost, its borders defended with force if necessary. It is a prefabricated box. Any literature crammed into it is bound to appear more standardized than it is: smaller, tamer, duller, conforming rather than surprising ("Planetary Time and Global Translation" 439).

For Dimock, therefore, defining literature according an adjective associated with the nation limits the manner in which it can be read.

Taken together, Dimock's account of the adjective "Irish" and her critique of national literatures raise interesting questions regarding "Irish literature". According to Dimock's understanding, the word "Irish" can serve as a migrating signifier which can be applied to even the most unlikely of candidates, to the extent that in response to her question, "who's Irish", the answer could in fact be anyone or anything. Emptied of national significance, the account of Irishness offered in "Who's Irish?" is in many ways related to and supportive of arguments made by Dimock in her work on world literature: in both, she seeks to decouple the relationship between literature and the territorial jurisdiction of the nation. But in this post-national, global era, has Irishness been emptied of national significance to such an extent that it no longer attached to the nation of Ireland? Relatedly we might ask, is it useful any longer to consider works within or in relation to the cultural context from which they

originate? Applying Dimock's proposed methodology to a reading of the work of contemporary Irish author, Colm Tóibín, this chapter will assess the usefulness and viability of her proposed approach. In employing said methodology to the reading of texts that have been unanimously defined as "Irish", the chapter further seeks to investigate the extent to which Dimock's model facilitates nuanced readings of Tóibín's work within an international or transnational framework. Moreover, it will consider the extent to which the Irishness of Tóibín's work complicates Dimock's jettisoning of national literatures.

1.2. Dimock's Methodology: Prenational, Subnational, Transnational

Despite the move towards world literature in recent years, the focus on the national continues in many quarters of literary studies, a situation which Wai Chee Dimock seeks to redress with her proposed methodology for literary scholarship. In opposition to the unilateral and reductive perception of literature when bound to the nation state, she proposes instead that we remove literatures from the confines of national literatures and, instead, consider the literary field as consisting of a "complex tangle of relations", "a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures" (*Through Other Continents* 3). In her attempt to trace the tangled relations between national literatures, Dimock employs mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot's fractal geometry. As Dimock summarizes, Mandelbrot's geometry of the miniscule is matched by a geometry of the infinite, "of what keeps spinning out in endless spirals". Thus when literature is considered according to the principles of fractal geometry, we can trace the interconnectedness of national literatures through the "pits and pocks", or what Mandelbrot refers to as "fractal kin" (qtd. in *Through*

Other Continents 77), that exist among and between the world's literature. Dimock further notes that Mandelbrot's geometry of the minuscule, is matched by geometry of what gets "larger and larger without bound" since it is only when the scale gets smaller and the details get finer that "previously hidden dimensions come swirling out" (*Through Other Continents 77*). Scalar opposites here, Dimock maintains, generate a dialectic "that makes the global an effect of the grainy" (*ibid*). Or, in the words of Ed Folsom, "fractals push us not away from the particular and toward the universal [...] but rather toward a universality of particulars" ("Database as Genre" 1574).

As employed by Dimock, this form of geometry has particular resonance for the current close and distant reading debate in the field of world literature. Taking issue with Franco Moretti's call for the abandoning of close reading in favour of more distant approaches, Dimock notes that,

[i]f fractal geometry has anything to tell us, it is that the loss of detail is almost always unwarranted. There are any number of reasons I can name (such as the pleasure of reading), but probably the most pertinent one here is the fact that the literary field is still incomplete, its kinship network only partly actualized, with many new members still being added (*Through Other Continents 79*).

Hence she maintains that "[s]uch a field needs to maintain an archive that is as broad-based as possible, as fine-grained as possible [...] if only to allow new permutations to come into being" (*Through Other Continents 79*).

This move towards fractals is fundamental to Dimock's reconsideration of the modes of aggregation by which works of literature are defined, a topic which is most explicitly addressed in her essay, "Scales of Aggregation: Prenational, Subnational, Transnational" (2006). In this work, Dimock observes the following:

[a]ggregation [...] generates different kinds of filiations on different scales, opening up the question of what counts as an entity, the platform on which it emerges, the agency available to it, and the pressure that this scalar variety exerts on more conventional forms, such as the form of the nation ("Scales of Aggregation" 219).

Hence, Dimock introduces a triangulation of terms, *prenational*, *subnational*, and *transnational*, which she considers as offering alternatives to the common practice of examining works of literature along national lines. Dimock further argues that despite operating at alternate levels, these three modes of aggregation are all interlinked. Studied in accordance with the micro levels of the prenational and the subnational, the transnational becomes much more robust, since these subsidiary categories alone “can anchor it to everyday life, save it from being empty and wishful” (“Scales of Aggregation” 226). As the terms prenational, subnational and transnational are central to Dimock’s proposed methodology for the study of world literature, it is useful to outline in detail what the critic understands by each of the various modes of aggregation.

Within her body of work relating to world literature, the prenational is that which has received the most attention within Dimock’s triangulation. Beginning in her 2001 essay, “Deep Time: American Literature and World History”, and culminating in the publication of *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time* (2006), Dimock has called attention to the fact that in the field of literary studies, practitioners have tended to “[take][their] measure of time from the stipulated beginning of a territorial entity” (“Deep Time” 759). Re-stating this observation in *Through Other Continents*, Dimock argues that the concept of nationhood “assumes that there is a seamless correspondence between the spatial and temporal boundaries of the nation and the boundaries of all other successive domains” (*Through Other Continents* 3).

Dimock’s concept of the “pre-national” has thus emerged out of this larger concern with the relation between literature and world history. In an early essay on the subject, “Pre-National Time: Novel, Epic, Henry James” (2003), Dimock calls

attention to the “axis of time” running through literature, which she perceives as being its “unique strength” and what distinguishes it from other global entities such as NGOs. According to Dimock,

literature is an entity with thousands of years behind it, on hand throughout the entire length of human history. Among players otherwise synchronic, it alone has a *longue durée*, a long backward extension into a Pre-National past (“Pre-National Time” 216).

Dimock further argues that the arrow of time offered by the prenatal “disrupts the jurisdiction of the state not by looking ahead to an era when it ceases to exist, but by looking back to an era before it even came in to being” (“Pre-National Time” 216).

Considered within the context of world history as opposed to the temporal parameters of a national chronology, Dimock maintains that we can trace “the threads of relation” between works of national literatures and the world that “antedate these allegedly founding moments” of the national state (*Through Other Continents* 4).

No less than time, space according to Dimock also needs to be re-examined at a remove from the prefabricated box of the nation. Hence she proposes the term subnational, which, according to a most basic understanding, suggests a reconsideration of space at a level below the national territory. However, other than suggesting that the subnational points to “a scale on which territorial sovereignty does not register” (“Scales of Aggregation” 226), in her “Scales of Aggregation” article, little more detail is given as to what precisely Dimock means when she utilizes the term. Overall, of the three terms in Dimock’s triangulation, the subnational remains the most underdeveloped. For this reason, it is necessary to look to the critic’s earlier work to gain a better understanding as to what she proposes by her use of the term, in particular in relation to the challenge thus delivered to “fantasies of discreteness”.

Dimock indirectly broaches the subject of the subnational through her reference to “local colour” in a work preceding “Scales of Aggregation”, “Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights: Literature, Law, Science” (1998). In this earlier work Dimock draws on Einstein’s “nonabsolute space” to develop arguments that “ponder the meaning of spatial adjudication” both in relation to legal and ethical discourse and as it “informs conflicts between neighbours in fiction” (“Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights” 488). In Dimock’s understanding, Newtonian space and time are “absolute” because they are simply a given, a pre-assigned fact, something that has always been there and will always be there. They make up an “a priori grid of the world that guarantees that there would always be “true relations among things” that are neither “circumstantial nor negotiable” (491). Kantian moral law, Dimock maintains, shares with the Newtonian conception of absolute space an unconditionality, or an unbendability since it is pre-assigned and predetermined (494). Subsequently Dimock argues that rights are the inhabitants of “moral ‘absolute space’” (495).

Moving across disciplines, from law to literature, Dimock defines the genre of “local colour” as being a New England literary genre prominent in the nineteenth century, “dedicated to confining and contested spaces” (“Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights” 490). As such she suggests that it is a genre that is “especially mindful of non-absolute space – space described not only through one reference frame, but through the problem of disagreement between reference frames” (499). Furthermore, and most usefully for our concerns here, Dimock argues that this body of literature is “one of the most compelling correctives to the fantasy of discreteness that so often accompanies the claim of rights” (500).

By appealing to Einstein's non-absolute space, Dimock "ponder[s] the meaning of spatial adjudication, both as it informs claims to rights in legal and ethical discourse and as it informs conflicts between neighbours in fiction" ("Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights" 488). As rich and suggestive as it is, Dimock's argument would be further substantiated however, were she to offer a reading of the absolute space of the law as it helps maintain or dissolve absolute territorial spaces. For this reason, it is useful to read her essay in conjunction with Joep Leerssen's intriguing article, "Law and Border (how and where we draw the line)" (1999), wherein the latter critic examines the role of the law in defining "absolute" territorial spaces. According to Leerssen, the most important demarcation of a society is achieved by "the reach and application of the law" (Leerssen 2), which is to say that the absolute space of the law is used in order to confirm the absolute space of a territory. Hence, rather than merely comparing absolute space as it appears in law and non-absolute space as it appears in literature, drawing on Leerssen, we can conflate the two and thus examine the relationship between law, literature and space.

Through her concern with non-absolute space at the subnational level of the locale, Dimock considers the local colour genre as offering a corrective to the "fantasy of discreteness" of rights. Following Leerssen, we can further argue that the fantasy of discreteness in terms of rights and the law is not only analogous to, but in fact a pivotal aspect in demarcating the boundaries of a particular society. It is not surprising therefore, that a "fantasy of discreteness" is also, as Benedict Anderson has argued, paramount to the creation of the imagined community of the nation. The nation, Anderson maintains, "is imagined as limited because even the largest of them [...] has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation

imagines itself coterminous with mankind” (Anderson 7). Thus, it is as a correlative general to this “fantasy of discreteness” held by the nation that Dimock proposes the terms prenatal, subnational and transnational. More specifically, through their concern with non-absolute space, the traits of the local colour genre may be useful for questioning not only the absolute space of the law, but also that of the nation.

Opposing the view of the nation being a “discrete” form of human aggregation, Dimock maintains that “input channels, kinship networks, routes of transit, and forms of attachment” bind America, and indeed other nations, to the rest of the world (*Through Other Continents* 3). Like the “decaying village” in the New England literary genre of local colour therefore, the nation is also “relational” in that it too “is a web, a history of entanglement, a space-time continuum alternately registered as friction and kinship, endearment and encroachment” (“Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights” 500). However, the “fantasy of discreteness” upon which nations are founded denies such complexities of human interaction among their inhabitants. By reducing our focus to a level below the national, these frictions come to the fore.

As with the prenatal, through her concern with the subnational, Dimock attempts to remove literature from the prefabricated box of the national and to connect it to wider human networks and kinships. These networks, Dimock argues, serve to create “a globalized readership” that “undermines [the nation state] on both fronts” (“Literature for the Planet” 175). Moreover, through a reconsideration of national literatures at the levels of the prenatal and the subnational, Dimock maintains we can identify the “connective tissues” linking different times and places at a transnational level. This is in keeping with Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin’s assertion that “the production and consumption of literatures provides an excellent

model for the processes of local engagement with the global” (Ashcroft et al. (eds.), 462).

Central to Dimock’s purpose in introducing the scales of the prenational and the subnational is to demonstrate how the transnational “becomes much more robust” when considered at these alternative levels (“Scales of Aggregation” 226). While Dimock does not offer any precise definition as to what she means in her repeated use of the phrase “transnational”, in her account thereof, she explicitly sets out to disrupt the understanding among scholars such as Aih wa Ong, Etienne Balibar and Emily Apter, that the transnational is “always *symmetrical* to the national, a replay of its exclusionary form on spatially extended register” (emphasis in original)(“Scales of Aggregation” 221). Dimock deduces that for these scholars, “the transnational turns out to be an extension and projection of the nation, not a challenge to it, but its functional subset” (221). Against this understanding, she maintains that by substantiating the transnational with the prenational and the subnational, the symmetrical relationship between the national and the transnational is obstructed and challenged.

1.3. Suspending the Prefabricated Box: Colm Tóibín and Irish National

Literature

Colm Tóibín was born in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford in 1955, and was raised in a household and a community that cherished both Catholic and Fianna Fáil values. His father, Michael Tóibín, was a schoolteacher who was heavily involved with both the local history of Enniscorthy and with Fianna Fáil politics in the town. As a boy therefore, Tóibín’s relationship to history, religion and tradition were all closely entwined with his relationship with his father. When Tóibín was twelve years old,

his father died. Despite the author's amicable relationship with his father in life, in many ways, his relationship to his father's legacy is an oppositional one: in his roles as both cultural critic and as author, Tóibín continuously critiques his father's Republican and Catholic ideals. However, owing to his personal relationship with his father, Tóibín's critique is tempered by attachment.

In 1972, Tóibín moved to Dublin to study English and History at University College Dublin. On completion of his degree in 1975, he moved to Barcelona where he resided for three years before returning to Ireland to work as editor for the Irish current affairs magazine, *Magill*. Since settling in Ireland, Tóibín has continued to travel extensively all over the world. Yet despite this seemingly insatiable thirst for travel, Tóibín considers his house in Enniscorthy, the place to which he continuously returns, to be his home. Robert McCrum may have over-romanticised the matter in his 2009 interview with the writer when he stated that, prior to his father's death, Tóibín enjoyed "an idyllic upbringing in the little town of Enniscorthy", to which he attributes the author's decision to build a house there (McCrum 2009). More usefully however, McCrum notes that Tóibín's family lies in the graveyard in Enniscorthy: "father, grandfather, great-grandfather, generations of loyal republicans, some of whom fought in the Easter Rising of 1916" (McCrum 2009). Through this observation, McCrum attempts to highlight the roots, the history, the ties, which connect Tóibín to his place of origins.

But Tóibín's quasi-nomadic lifestyle has also endowed him with a unique perspective on his place of origin. It is one that is at once both critical of, yet attached to, the Irish nation and all the loyalties and traditions that attend this form of human aggregation. Hence Tóibín's view of his country of origin is not necessarily "idyllic", nor is it detached from the personal history associated therewith. Rather, as

Michael Böss argues, “feelings of social connectedness and personal affection temper his critique of tradition” (Böss 22). As such, Tóibín is not the “archetypal ‘revisionist’” who seeks to dismiss the history of the nation in favour of promoting a post-national, pluralist, and non-sectarian account of Ireland and her past (Böss 22). Unlike Dimock, Tóibín allows his own personal history to inform his engagement with the national throughout both his fictional and non-fictional work. Owing to his personal connections to the national, Tóibín’s work has been therefore chosen as a means of examining and testing in more detail the interplay between the nation and Dimock’s alternative forms of aggregation.

2. The Prenational

2.1. New Ways of Killing your Father: National Chronology and Father’s Time in *The Heather Blazing*

As has been established, Dimock’s literary revisionism seeks alternative ways of considering works of literature by momentarily displacing the prefabricated box of the nation and by suspending the national clock. No less than American history, the object of Dimock’s study, Irish history has also served to coincide with and support the nation’s territorial borders. In his highly acclaimed work, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of a Modern Nation* (1996), Declan Kiberd notes the willingness of large numbers of nationalists throughout the twentieth century “to countenance the notion of Irish exceptionalism” whereby they “preened themselves on some occasions to be ‘like no other people on earth’” (*Inventing Ireland* 642). Subsequently, Kiberd suggests,

they often failed to regard Irish experience as representative of human experience, and so they remained woefully innocent of the comparative method, which might have helped them more fully to possess the meaning of their lives (*Inventing Ireland* 642).

Against this “narcissistic fantasy” promulgated by a number of nationalists, in the 1960s a group of Irish historians emerged who sought to “invent a more ecumenical and inclusive definition of Irishness”, in Kiberd’s terms (642). Driven by the wish to “restore to each moment of history the openness it once had” (642), at the most basic level, these revisionists sought to reconsider the executive dates in the Irish national chronology, such as 1798 and 1916, in light of wider, global events.

While not denying the need for a more inclusive sense of Irish history than that allowed by the focus on key dates in the Irish nation’s brief history, Kiberd has argued that to remove a sense of linear causality from events in Irish history is to “deny oneself and one’s readers answers to fundamental questions” associated with such events (642). As we have previously noted, Dimock’s concept of the prenational allows for an interpretation of events pre-dating and pre-existing the national chronology. However, Dimock’s application of her method to date has failed to permit an engagement with the personal and political significance of the linearity of the national chronology in favour of a wider conception of time, thus denying, or at least, circumscribing potential “answers to fundamental questions”. As such, the concept of the prenational is weakened by Dimock’s lack of attention granted to the significance of said chronology. Conversely, while Colm Tóibín also seeks to open up the executive dates within the Irish national chronology to a reading which connects it to Dimock’s “deep time”, he simultaneously allows them to be read in accordance to the national narrative by engaging with the personal and political significance of “father’s time”.

In a review of Roy Foster’s book, *Paddy and Mr. Punch*, entitled “New Ways of Killing your Father” (1993), Tóibín recalls how when it first emerged in Irish discourse in the 1960s, ‘revisionism’ was “a term of abuse used about

historians who were pedaling anti-nationalist views of Irish history” (Tóibín 1993).

Speaking on his own experience as a revisionist writer he recalls how:

being an atheist or being gay in Ireland at that time seemed easier to deal with as transgressions than the idea that you could cease believing in the Great Events of Irish nationalist history. No Cromwell as cruel monster, say; the executions after 1916 as understandable in the circumstances; 1798 as a small outbreak of rural tribalism; partition as inevitable (“New Ways of Killing Your Father” 1993).

No less than the historians of his generation, therefore, Tóibín’s concern throughout his work had been with probing the nationalist interpretation of the Irish past, testing it for truth, seeking alternatives.

For Tóibín, embarking upon this bold approach to Irish history “seemed at that time a most subversive idea, a new way of killing your father, starting from scratch, creating a new self” (Tóibín 1993). Despite the fact that this somewhat ambiguous phrase reveals much of Tóibín’s revisionist ethos, it has received little detailed, critical attention to date, though much has been written about the father-son relationship in contemporary Irish fiction². While drawing on this pre-existing literary trope, the father to which Tóibín refers is also based heavily on his own father, Michael Tóibín. By actively promoting the Irish chronology in all spheres of his life, Tóibín’s father became for the author the embodiment of the nationalist conception of the past. As such, the conception of time favoured in nationalist history is very much for Tóibín what James Joyce referred to as “father’s time”.

But as we have established, as a revisionist writer, Tóibín is also concerned with seeking alternatives to the national chronology. As such, his purpose is akin to that of Dimock and her concepts of the prenational and of “deep time” remain useful for advancing our understanding of Tóibín’s revisionist critique. In her essay, “Non-Newtonian Time: Robert Lowell, Roman History, and the Vietnam War” (2002),

² In his essay, “Fathers in a Coma: Father-Son Relationships in Neil Jordan’s Fiction” (2008), Samuel Grassi for one refers to the common trend in Irish cultural debate “in which tradition is neither fully rejected, nor yet considered thoroughly reliable” which, he argues, is often played out through the father-son relationship (Grassi 101).

Dimock questions the “ontological given” that sees time divided up according to Newtonian time. Dimock maintains that because this numerical chronology “standardizes time into a sequence of equal units”, the location of any event and its proximity to any other is “fixed by this sequence” (“Non-Newtonian Time” 912). Furthermore, she argues that, defined in this way, contextualization is based almost exclusively on synchrony whereby events are deemed pertinent to one another only if they “fall within the same slice of time” (“Non-Newtonian Time” 912). As such, Dimock considers the Newtonian conception of time as preventing a view of the world that takes account of “deep time”.

In her search for a more inclusive means of considering time, Dimock refers to the work of the postcolonial critic, Homi Bhabha (“Non-Newtonian Time” 917). She notes that for Bhabha,

the breakdown of a single, enforceable chronology stands as one of the most powerful challenges to the unity of the nation-state, directly contradicting the regime of ‘simultaneity,’ which Benedict Anderson posits as the hallmark of the nation. Against that regime [...] Bhabha calls attention to many alternate temporalities: ‘disjunctive’ narratives, written at the margins of the nation and challenging its ability to standardize, to impose an official ordering of events (917).

Among the alternate temporalities to which Bhabha refers, Dimock briefly notes Julia Kristeva’s “Women’s Time”. Although little has been made of the connection between Kristeva and Dimock, the concept of “women’s time” resonates powerfully with Dimock’s “deep time”. And as will be discussed in more detail at a later stage, in *The Heather Blazing* it becomes apparent that the novel’s privileging of “women’s time” offers a useful means with which to connect the national, the prenatal and the transnational, thus further substantiating Dimock’s methodology.

In her much quoted essay, “Women’s Time” (1981), Kristeva distinguishes between two types of time: the time of linear history, or cursive time, and the time of another history, monumental time, which “englobes supranational, sociocultural

ensembles within even larger entities” (Kristeva 14)³. According to Kristeva, linear time is what history relies upon whereas monumental time is the concern of anthropology (Kristeva 14). Furthermore, Kristeva argues that “women’s time” is connected to both a cyclical and a monumental temporality since it “would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilization” (emphasis in original) (Kristeva 16). From this brief excerpt, it is evident that echoes of Kristeva’s “monumental time” resound in Dimock’s conception of “deep time”. Like Kristeva, Dimock considers “repetition” and “eternity” to be paramount to the disruption of the hegemony of a national chronology, or what Kristeva, quoting Joyce, refers to as “father’s time”.

While “women’s time” and “father’s time” can appear oppositional in critical thinking, these are opposites which are harnessed in Tóibín’s work. Having established that “women’s time” offers a means of connecting peoples, places and times which the linearity of “father’s time” can deny, it is not surprising that in a novel offering his most explicit interrogation of the Irish national chronology, Colm Tóibín simultaneously offers a profound psychological critique of the influence of the father figure. Set in late twentieth-century Ireland, Tóibín’s second novel, *The Heather Blazing* (1992) tells the story of Eamon Redmond, an Irish High Court Judge who struggles to adjust both personally and professionally to the changing nature of society in contemporary Ireland. Told in the third-person, the narrative moves back and forth between Eamon’s present and his recollections of his youth spent in Cush, Co. Wexford. Through these flashbacks we learn how the Catholicism and heartfelt Fianna Fáil values of his father overshadowed Eamon’s childhood and

³ It is interesting to note that in her essay, “Planetary Time and Global Translation” (2003), Dimock again echoes Kristeva by also referring to “supranational time” but without a nod to her fellow critic (“Planetary Time and Global Translation” 490).

continue to influence his adult life. Over all, as Roy Foster aptly notes in his essay “A Strange and Insistent Protagonist: Tóibín and Irish History” (2008), “hangs the memory of lived history in the form of the 1798 Rising, and the later Troubles of 1919-22, imbibed through the memories of his parents’ generation” (Foster 165).

While the subject matter of the novel is very much Eamon’s relationship to the linearity of “father’s time” propounded by Michael Redmond, Tóibín’s choice of narrative structure conversely supports a cyclical sense of time. The novel is divided into three parts, which interleave between Eamon’s past and present, linking the two and thus creating a sense of a cyclical time. This conception of time is further strengthened by the repetition of the opening lines in Part One and Part Three:

Eamon Redmond stood at the window looking down at the river which was deep brown after the days of rain. He watched the colour, the mixture of mud and water, and the small currents and pockets of movement within the flow (*The Heather Blazing* 3 and 175).

Despite Irish Republican history and ideology being a driving theme of the novel’s subplot, Tóibín’s primary concern lies with the relationship between history and lived human experience. Through his juxtaposition of the constructed linearity of nationalist history, and the natural, cyclical nature of human existence, of “father’s time” and “women’s time”, Tóibín exposes the “missing bits” in the Irish national chronology in the form of human experience⁴.

2.2. Filling in the Gaps: History, Memory and “Women’s Time”

Through the character of Michael Redmond, the protagonist’s father, Tóibín depicts a figure whose life is, as Liam Harte (2002) has noted, dedicated to the “preservation

⁴ In his recent play, *Testament* (2012), and his forthcoming novel, *The Testament of Mary* (to be published on 13 November, 2012 and not available at time of writing), Tóibín moves towards a more direct engagement with women’s time by offering an account of the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus following her son’s death. It is worth noting, in relation to the discussion above, that one of the claims for the novel, as detailed in the publishing blurb, is that Mary emerges as “a woman from history rendered now as fully human” (<http://www.penguin.co.uk/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9780670922093,00.html>).

and transmittance of a heavily nationalist interpretation of Wexford's revolutionary past in his work as a history teacher, a Fianna Fáil activist, and a writer of historical articles for the local newspaper" ("History, Text, and Society in Colm Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing*" 58). This same preservative impulse underpins his desire to convert Enniscorthy Castle, "the headquarters of the English down all the years" (*The Heather Blazing* 18), into a county museum. As Harte has noted, all of Michael Redmond's commemorative activity represents "a strategic attempt to memorialize the past by fixing its meaning to accord with a triumphalist contemporary nationalist agenda and, by implication, to elide those interpretations which do not fit with this agenda" ("History, Text, and Society in Colm Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing*" 58). In other words, Michael Redmond's efforts are all carried out in the attempt to ensure that the interpretation of events in Ireland's history support and strengthen the political agenda and the territorial boundaries of the Irish Republic.

As explored earlier, Dimock takes issue with this seemingly natural tie between history and the territorial unit of the nation, and seeks to actively defamiliarize the connection by drawing our attention to the fact that a given national chronology provides "a discrete, bounded unit of time coinciding with a discrete, bounded unit of space: a chronology coinciding with a territory" (*Through Other Continents* 28). Similarly, Tóibín also takes issue with the national interpretation of Ireland's past, to the extent that he wished to be "through with history", referring specifically to nationalist history. While Dimock argues for a movement away from the national meta-narrative, however, for Tóibín, as for Eamon Redmond, such a move is impossible owing to the personal connotations that the national narrative

holds for the author and his protagonist⁵. As noted earlier, the figure of Michael Redmond is based heavily on Tóibín's own father who was also a schoolteacher and a historian, and who was also heavily involved with the Fianna Fáil party in Enniscorthy. Just as Tóibín's own relationship to history is complicated by his father's association therewith, so too is that of his protagonist. Hence, we find that through its connection with their respective fathers, both author and protagonist possess a lingering attachment to history. This personal attachment, as Michael Böss rightly notes, tempers Tóibín and, we may add, Eamon's, critique of both history and tradition as resulting in ambivalences towards both.

Rather than killing his father either figuratively or literally, as one might expect in a revisionist novel of the post-national era, Eamon is, as Harte argues, "destined from birth to uphold traditional republican values" ("History, Text, and Society in Colm Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing*" 58) in both his public and personal roles as judge, husband and father. From an early age, Eamon is taught a version of history by his father that is centered entirely around the key dates in nationalist history. According to Eamon's father's teaching, every event in Irish history is attached to a serial number of Newtonian time. Eamon's sense of the history of Enniscorthy Castle, derived predominately from an article his father wrote about the building for the local paper, is associated with names and the attendant dates: "[...] the Normans, the English, Edmund Spenser, Cromwell, 1649, 1798, 1916" (*The Heather Blazing* 18). Again in his recollection of the Plantations, King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I, and the Treaty of Mellifont, all prominent events or figures in Irish history, they are all attended by a particular date (*The Heather Blazing* 104). By confining Irish history within what Dimock has called "the container of serial

⁵ In depicting the relationship Tóibín has revealed in an interview (Wiesenfarth 2009), "[Eamon's] childhood—some of it—is pure autobiography, but some of it is also my father's childhood mixed in with mine. And some of it is fiction" (Tóibín qtd. in Wiesenfarth 14).

numbers”, history to Eamon is a closed text, sealed within his father’s nationalist narrative, prevented from being read in accordance to “deep time”. Given that he “forgot nothing that his father said” (*The Heather Blazing* 104), either at home or in the classroom in relation to history, Eamon becomes the exemplary guardian of the national chronology.

In Michael Redmond, Tóibín thus creates a character who champions precisely those things with which Dimock takes issue: the privileging of a national chronology and the creation of a separatist national identity. Yet throughout the novel, the author consistently brings to the fore the narratives that do not make it into the history books, the museums, or the local paper. As the narrative is relayed through Eamon’s eyes, the engagement with the meta-narratives of Irish history are tempered by the personal attachment that make time, events and experiences meaningful for the protagonist, and, as such, are synonymous with what Dimock refers to as the “categories of experience” (*Through Other Continents* 5)⁶. This is perhaps most evident in the novel’s references to the 1798 Rebellion, one of the most prominent and complex events in Irish history. Despite the fact that its origins were rooted in universal and non-secular ideals, the meaning of the event has been hotly contested by subsequent generations. It has however, been the nationalist, and heavily biased, account of the meaning of the event that has reigned supreme. As Tóibín himself recalls,

From early childhood I knew certain things (I hesitate to say ‘facts’) about the Rising [...] But there was one place that I did not know had a connection with 1798 until I was in my twenties. It was Scullabogue. Even now, as I write the name, it has a strange resonance. In 1798 it was where ‘our side’ took a large number of Protestant men, women and children, put them in a barn and burned them to death (“New Ways of Killing Your Father” 1993).

⁶ According to Dimock, categories of experience, such as beauty and death, are “not entirely predicated on the temporal and spatial boundaries of the nation-state” (*Through Other Continents* 5).

As the embodiment of Irish nationalist ideology, the imposition of a nationalist interpretation on the events of 1798 was a crucial part of Eamon's father's mission. Through his roles as historian, teacher, and writer, he strives to ensure that the Irish nationalist account of the Rebellion is the one that is remembered, closing off this period in time to other more open and inclusive readings. However, while depicting Michael's relentless commemorative efforts in the novel, *Tóibín* simultaneously, but in his usual understated style, calls them into question.

Having accompanied his father to collect pikes left over from the Rebellion from an old couple in Oulart, Eamon recalls the story that the old woman tells on handing over the artefacts:

Our grandmother now on our mother's side [...] she was brought up here. It was the time of the evictions. Sure, they used to own from here out to the road, the whole way, including the two big barley fields. She knew about the men of Ninety-eight'. [...] She would have been too young to remember it, but they told her about it, or she heard about it, and it was she who always said that they came down this way and that was the end of them then. That's all I remember now (*The Heather Blazing* 23).

What is striking about this passage is that it is a tale told through women – from maternal grandmother to granddaughter (Costello-Sullivan 116-7). In “Absence and Presence: Mothers in Colm Tóibín's *The Heather Blazing*” (2009), Kate Costello-Sullivan argues that the woman's story “invok[es] a past in which she [the old woman] and other women were part of the national and political narrative” (Costello-Sullivan 116-7). According to Costello-Sullivan, while this narrative falls to a woman, as a member of the older generation, she is left in the present to pass the memory and history of these objects to men—Father Rossiter, Michael Redmond, and Eamon. Thus, by highlighting the openness of the woman's matrilineal past, *Tóibín* draws our attention to the “restrictive narrative of a present in which history has become almost solely for men's transmission and communication” (Costello-Sullivan 117).

This passage becomes particularly significant if read in accordance with Kristeva's premise that female subjectivity provides a "specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilization" (Kristeva 16). The woman's narrative is but one of the "missing bits" occluded from the nationalist metanarrative. By placing the recollection of 1798 within a female narrative (it is significant that the old woman and not the old man, recounts the story of the pikes to Michael Redmond and Father Rossiter), Tóibín opens up the container that is the serial number of the date to "women's time".

What is perhaps most notable about the woman's story concerning 1798 is that it is based on her own memories and those of her grandmother. It is natural and life born, connected to the real categories of experience of both the old woman and her grandmother. As such, by being placed within "women's time" the serial number associated with the Rebellion is opened up to a temporality that stretches backwards and forwards beyond the temporal segment, as the memory is passed from generation to generation. In comparison, Michael Redmond and Father Rossiter go to pains to conceal this natural memory and to construct a particular narrative around the pikes by placing them in a carefully selected place in the museum in Enniscorthy. The pikes are placed in the 1798 room, confining them and the narrative associated therewith to a physical setting, hence echoing their confinement in a temporal segment in the national chronology.

By bringing to the fore the presence of "women's time" latently present within Dimock's concept of "deep time", an enriched understanding of these critical concepts also provides a means of revealing the alternative axis of time to that propounded by the present in *The Heather Blazing*. Moreover, as evidenced from our

discussion of “father’s time”, Tóibín’s fictional narrative demonstrates how the prenational becomes most significant when read alongside the national and with an acknowledgement of the latter’s continuing emotional potency.

2.3. Coastal Erosion and “Deep Time”

The vast majority of (if not all) criticism that has been produced to date concerning *The Heather Blazing* has, in some way, addressed the significance of coastal erosion in the novel, which indicates a general consensus on the fact that this natural phenomenon plays an important role in Tóibín’s fiction, particularly in the “Wexford novels”. The significance thereof has been interpreted in a number of ways: Eve Patten (2006) reads it as standing for historical change (Patten 262), Andrew Lynch (2001) considers it to signify the loss of a unified consciousness or a unitary sense of identity (Lynch 2), whereas for Neil Corcoran (1997) it represents the gradual wearing down of collective belief structures and traditional belief practices (Corcoran 98).

What all of these interpretations have in common is that they all, in some way, link this environmental phenomenon to history and historical memory, and more specifically, to that of an Irish context. Which is to say that, generally speaking, critical studies of *The Heather Blazing* have operated at the “surface level” of the nation only. Subsequently, the criticism of the novel has arguably done more than the novel itself to confine it within the parameters of a “national literature”. But as has been established through our use of Dimock’s concept of the prenational, *The Heather Blazing* is a novel that seeks to open up the Irish national chronology to a *longue durée*. Therefore, by attempting to confine it within the national the aforementioned critics fail to do justice to Tóibín’s creative force. Hence, in keeping

with the author's concern with a time scale other than that of the national, it is more useful to consider the references to coastal erosion in light of a wider and longer human experience and "deep time".

Speaking on the concept of a world history, Dimock suggests that different investigative contexts might need different time frames, with "no single one serving as an all-purpose metric" ("Deep Time" 758). She forcefully argues that:

Some historical phenomena need large-scale analysis. They need hundreds, thousands, or even billions of years to be recognized as what they are: phenomena with an extended life, longer than the life span of any biological individual and diachronically interesting for just that reason ("Deep Time" 758).

Coastal erosion is one such phenomenon: not based on the duration of any nation, it is part of a *longue durée*, which stretches backwards and forwards beyond the existence of the nation. Given his desire to be "through with history" and his continual quest for alternatives to the national chronology, Tóibín utilizes the environmental occurrence of coastal erosion to capture the slow tempo of time with which life progresses. When Eamon Redmond returns to Cush one year during the court's summer break, he learns that one of the neighbouring houses had fallen into the sea. Taken aback by the occurrence, Eamon notes that,

[i]t had been so gradual, this erosion, a matter of time, lumps of clay, small boulders studded with stones becoming loose and falling away, the sea gnawing at the land. It was all so strange, year after year, the slow disappearance of one contour to be replaced by another, it was hard to notice anything had happened until something substantial, like Mike's house, fell down onto the strand (*The Heather Blazing* 32-3).

Unlike the national chronology that thrives on the "thrust of a few executive dates" such as 1798 and 1916, this natural phenomenon occurs slowly, repeatedly, and unnoticed, as it has done before the nation state ever came into existence. To repeat a phrase from Dimock previously cited, the arrow of time that takes account of the prenational, "disrupts the jurisdiction of the state not by looking ahead to an era when it ceases to exist, but by looking back to an era before it even came in to being" ("Planetary Time" 216). Hence, through his depiction of costal erosion,

Tóibín subtly demonstrates that while the “Great Events” in Ireland’s past are assigned to the container of their respective serial numbers within the national chronology, bound to a particular temporal segment, coastal erosion requires a measure of time that ties the prenational past to a future extending beyond the life of the nation.

Yet coastal erosion not only requires a time frame extending either side of the national chronology, it also requires a geometry that operates at a scale that goes both above and below the level of the national topography. Rather than producing a smooth outline of the national territory, coastal erosion produces an irregular shape made up of “pits and pocks”, which cannot be accounted for by Euclidian geometry. Such irregular shapes are what led the mathematician, Benoit Mandelbrot to develop what he called, “fractal geometry”, which, as observed earlier, Dimock draws heavily upon in her study of world literature⁷. In his celebrated chapter, “How Long is the Coast of Britain?” Mandelbrot points out that there is no single answer to this question since everything depends on the scale adapted and the degree of refinement it permits. As the scale “is made smaller and smaller, every one of the approximate lengths tends to become larger and larger without bound” (Mandelbrot qtd. in *Through Other Continents* 77). Hence, while fractal geometry is the geometry of the irregular and the microscopic, what gets lost in a big picture, it is matched by a geometry of what gets “larger and larger without bound” (*Through Other Continents* 77). It is only when the scale gets smaller and the details get finer that previously hidden dimensions come swirling out. As such, to repeat an earlier observation, Dimock argues that the scalar opposites evoked by fractal geometry generate a

⁷ In particular, Dimock draws on Mandelbrot’s fractal geometry in her study of genres (Dimock 2006; Dimock 2007).

dialect “that makes the global an effect of the grainy” (*Through Other Continents* 77).

It is useful to recall that Dimock evokes the phrase “deep time” to signal “temporal length joined with spatial width” in order to mark a time other than that of national chronology (“Planetary Time” 492). Through the continuous attention afforded to costal erosion in *The Heather Blazing*, Tóibín depicts an environmental phenomenon that requires both the temporal and the spatial expansions demanded by Dimock’s deep time. Hence, Tóibín’s use of a metaphor that operates on and fuses the prenational and the subnational helps us to alleviate the difficulty identified in Dimock’s methodology, of distinguishing between these two scales. As evidenced by Dimock’s reference to fractal geometry, however, the spatial width which costal erosion demands can only be realised if we reduce our scale.

3. The Subnational

3.1. Contesting Absolute Space in *The Heather Blazing*

Drawing on Mandelbrot’s fractal geometry, Dimock aspires to expand the spatial width of national territorial borders. According to Mandelbrot’s geometry, the finite is embedded in the infinite, and “can be released only when the former is broken down into fractional percentages” (*Through Other Continents* 77). Adopting this approach to her study of literature, Dimock proposes that by studying the very small in the form of the subnational we can bring to light the connections that exist between the levels below and above the national. However, as previously discussed, the subnational is the most underdeveloped of the three terms in Dimock’s triangulation of alternative forms of aggregation. Given that the subnational implies a focus on what occurs below the level of the nation, we can safely assume that it

suggests a consideration of “fractional percentages” in the form of more local means of human aggregation, such as the region, the town or the village. For this reason, Dimock’s work concerning the “local colour” genre is useful for enhancing our understanding of her concept of the subnational.

In her cross-disciplinary article, “Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights: Literature, Law, Science” (1998), Dimock maintains that the literary genre of “local colour” is one which is particularly mindful of space and which is especially mindful of “nonabsolute space” (499). As such, she argues that this body of literature offers “one of the most compelling correctives to the fantasy of discreteness that so often accompanies the claim of rights” (“Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights” 500). And in renouncing that fantasy, Dimock maintains that the local colour genre “also offers the best hope for a form of human habitation that, however uncertain in its spatial mappings, can nonetheless be said not to be a simple inversion of winners and losers” (500).

However, Joep Leerssen interestingly notes that in much literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, national self-images often took on board the local colour of particular regions (Beller and Leerssen 413). According to Leerssen, one’s place or area of origin was originally conceived of in small-scale terms, “often referring to nothing larger than a village” (412). It was only as states modernized and grew larger that one’s national identity and citizenship accordingly became more large-scale than one’s regional or local origin (ibid). While the notion of “Fatherland” was used to refer to the larger concept of the native country, one’s more local or regional place of origin was placed under the different terminology of “homeland”. Leerssen maintains that whereas attachment to the Fatherland was considered a political, civil virtue, attachment to one’s homeland was of a more

sentimental, moral nature and came to be thematised in literature in terms of a nostalgic home-longing (*Imagology* 412). As modern nation states developed, however, the absolute space of the nation claimed as its representative traits belonging to the contested space of the region. Yet the relationship between such subnational entities and the national is not as harmonious as suggested by Benedict Anderson's concept of the "imagined community" and it is only by reducing the scale of focus below the level of the national that the "pits and pocks", the bumpy surfaces that exist beneath the smooth contour of the nation can be seen.

From the very outset of *The Heather Blazing*, Tóibín begins narrowing the focus of his lens to a subnational level. Although the novel begins in Dublin, Ireland's capital city, Tóibín promptly moves his characters out of the cosmopolitan centre to Cush, a small town in Co. Wexford, and it is between here and the town of Enniscorthy that the majority of the novel's action takes place. However, as discussed earlier, Tóibín's choice of setting is far from innocent. So intimate is this relationship between this particular place and nationalist history that historian and politician, Martin Mansergh (1998), maintains that the events of the Rebellion are "woven into the landscape and into the people" (Mansergh 131). As Tóibín himself recalls, "the names and the towns and the villages around us were in the history books and the songs we learned at school. They were the places where battles were fought or atrocities committed" (*The Sign of the Cross* 239). We find, therefore, that the very subnational elements associated with life in Co. Wexford, such as "the towns and the villages", are frequently usurped for the purposes of the nationalist meta-narrative.

In spite of the attempts made by the national to appropriate the subnational entities under its homogenous banner, however, Tóibín has argued that, more so than

belonging to the nation, “people in Ireland belong to their own parish” (Tóibín qtd. in Delaney 3), thus highlighting the alternative, and sometimes competing, forms of belonging that are encompassed within the Irish nation. Usefully, Dimock’s use of fractal geometry in her study of literature alerts us to the fact that, as the scale is “made smaller and smaller, every one of the approximate lengths tends to become larger and larger without bound” (*Through Other Continents* 77). Which is to say that by reducing the scale to units smaller than the nation, Tóibín increases the parameters of the society that it demarcates beyond those originally outlined in the creation of the Irish nation. This tension between the expanded measurement and the smooth outline of a homogenous Irish society is fundamental to the particular narrative dynamics of *The Heather Blazing*.

3.2. “Lack of Fit”: Absolute Space, Territorial Transgression and Trespass

Drawing on the work of Mary Ann Glendon, Dimock maintains that every moral dispute is “traceable to a territorial transgression” whereby a space of sanctity is encroached by someone “overstepping a line, intruding into a place where he or she ought not to be” (“Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights” 488). The “space of sanctity” and the “discrete space designated by the law” (“Rethinking Space, Rethinking Rights” 489) that Eamon as judge must defend, is the Irish nation, the boundaries of which were established under the Irish Constitution, which is in itself a document bound up in Catholic and Republican ideology. In each of the cases Eamon presides over in the novel, the rights of the individual are weighed up against the state’s rights and duties as stipulated in the Constitution, and in all three of his judgements, Eamon comes down on the side which seeks to ensure that the fixed boundaries of the discrete space of the nation remain in place.

Harte summarises the novel's treatment of law as follows:

over time, Eamon sees the "word" of the "sacred text" become flawed and its authority undermined by a succession of cases that expose latent inconsistencies and ambiguities in this framework document, which in turn mirror hidden tensions in the received narratives of the nation, history, and the self ("History, Text, and Society" 59).

Which is to say that, through the cases he adjudicates over, Eamon becomes alert to what Dimock has referred to as the "lack of fit" between the measurements of Irish society as it really exists, and the parameters established by the idealized outline of the nation as defined in the Irish Constitution. But such observations for both Eamon and the reader only become visible when the scale of analysis is reduced to a level below that of the nation.

This is most evident in Eamon's judgement of a case concerning a sixteen-year old girl who is expelled from her Catholic school after she falls pregnant. Interestingly, we are given details as to the geographical location of the case; as Eamon notes, it happened in "one of the border towns" (*The Heather Blazing* 86). It is not happenstance that Tóibín locates the case in such an ambivalent geographical space. A town is defined by the *OED* as "an urban area that has a name, defined boundaries, and local government, and that is larger than a village and generally smaller than a city", which is to say that it is a "subnational" entity. As a space defined by its own boundaries, yet included within the boundaries of the nation, the town is a liminal space; it is part of both the subnational and the national. Indeed, the very phrase "border town" calls our attention to the liminality of this subnational entity. Unlike the North, which elsewhere, Eamon recommended be treated as "a place apart" (*The Heather Blazing* 176), on account of where it occurred, the case had to be treated as part of the Irish legal jurisdiction despite the fact that to do so would undoubtedly inflame public opinion "within its own borders" (*The Heather Blazing* 176). Hence, Tóibín's choice of setting for the case emphasises the fissures

or, to use Harte's phrase, the "hidden tensions", that exist at a geographical level, beneath the smooth contour of the national outline.

Through its implicit concern with borders, the geographical setting of the case also calls attention to the issue of inclusion and exclusion within the nation space and the tensions that this binary exerts on the nation as a means of aggregation. The spatial tensions evoked by the "border town" are echoed in those which arise in the duration of the case itself, where it is the nation's legal boundaries that are put under strain. Rather than being separate however, such spatial and legal boundaries prove to be intimately linked as the extent and spatial outlines of a community or a polity are, as Joep Leerssen (1999) has noted, "defined by the reaches of its laws" ("Law and Border" 1). As a High Court judge, Eamon Redmond acts as a guardian of the absolute space of the law. But as Tóibín subtly demonstrates, the law in Ireland is intimately linked to the boundaries of the nation state, the two being bound together by the "sacred text" that is *Bunreacht na hÉireann* (*The Heather Blazing* 89). Liam Harte has rightly noted that, owing to his Fianna Fáil and Catholic upbringing, Eamon "initially regards the constitution as a closed text of fixed meanings which posits a definitive narrative of Irish citizenship and identity" ("History, Text and Society" 59). Hence, Eamon's closed-reading of the constitution is indicative of his attempts to ensure the fixed boundaries of the absolute space of the law.

By attempting to solidify the semantic boundaries of the sacred text, Eamon also seeks to solidify the boundaries of the national territory by ensuring who is included within the nation space and who is not. Through her questioning of the ideals of the Irish state, namely by acting against a Catholic ethos and becoming pregnant out of wedlock, the pregnant girl becomes what Leerssen describes as an

“internal offender” (“Law and Border” 3) against the laws that outline the community that is the Irish Republic. Her transgression, therefore, may also be read as a form of trespass on the sacred space of the nation. Dimock usefully defines trespass as:

a phenomenon that arises not only from the spatial needs so clamorous in all of us, but also from the lack of fit between those needs and the world, the lack of fit between the discreteness of our claims and the failure of the world to honour that discreteness (“Rethinking Rights, Rethinking Space” 504).

In ruling against the schoolgirl and allowing the school to expel her on account of her pregnancy, Eamon seeks to ensure that the boundaries of the law are retained by confirming the rights of the state and the at the expense of those of the girl. Hence, despite being an Irish citizen, a member within the community, the young girl is left outside the shelter of the sacred space of Irish law; she is considered to be “trespassing” into a space where she actually belongs.

3.3. “Uncertain Terms”: The Family as Signifier

As well as detailing trespass with regards to rights and space, the case also raises the issue of semantic trespass. In a discussion of creole and ‘pidgin’ languages, Dimock points to the ability of language to disrupt national boundaries, suggesting that language and its landscape present “arcs of alternate geographies, alternate histories, bearing a more tangential relation to human rationality as we know it” (*Through Other Continents* 164). In *Through Other Continents* Dimock usefully illuminates the history and the traces of other cultures within American English in order to illustrate how languages connect people across continents and hence disrupts the boundaries of the nation state. In *The Heather Blazing* Tóibín also utilizes language to call into question the validity of national boundaries by offering a critique of the

signifying processes within Irish national discourse and revealing their inherent tensions.

Capitalizing on his protagonist's role as a judge, Tóibín provides a subtle interrogation of the term "the family" as it appears in the Irish Constitution, the document according to which the Irish state is run and its boundaries are set. While musing over the case of the pregnant schoolgirl before drafting his judgement, Eamon entertains the idea that were he to consider the girl and her child as a family, she would gain access to the security granted by the rights of this social entity guaranteed by the Constitution. As a High Court judge, it is within Eamon's judicial powers to interpret the Constitution as he sees fit, and thus to either break with or conform to the tradition in Irish law and discourse which continues to consider the family as it was conceived in 1937, when *Bunreacht na hÉireann* was first written.

Eamon notes that in the "sacred text", the family is defined as "a moral institution possessing inalienable rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law" (*The Heather Blazing* 89). According to the Constitution therefore, the family, as a social entity, has rights "greater than the rights of any institution", including those of both the courts and the nation (*The Heather Blazing* 89). But as Eamon observes on compiling his judgment, "the family", as intended when the Constitution was first written, referred to a husband, a wife, and their children; the semantic boundaries of the term, though not explicitly stated, were set at the time *Bunreacht na hÉireann* was composed.

These established boundaries, however, become all the more problematic given that under Article 41.1.1 of the Constitution, the family is also regarded as representing the "natural primary and fundamental unit group" of the nation. Indeed it is perhaps owing to this article, that the family has been so readily read as a

metaphor for the nation in Irish discourse. As Eamon's musings on the schoolgirl's case reveal, tied to a semantic meaning that is rooted in the past, the term "the family" becomes anachronistic and fails to accommodate the realities of life in modern Ireland. By depicting the presence of unorthodox families (such as the young girl and her unborn child, or Eamon's unmarried daughter, Niamh, and her son, Michael) within the national borders, in *The Heather Blazing* Tóibín extends the semantic relationship between the family and the nation to its limits, revealing the disconnect between the image and reality of the family in contemporary Irish society and, by extension, between the vehicle and the tenor of the metaphor⁸ prominent in Irish discourse that considers the family as representative of the nation. Hence, through a reconsideration of an archetypal signifier in Irish discourse from a subnational perspective, Tóibín provides a subtle account of the development of the term, "the family": how it inevitably develops its own complexities and re-trespasses upon the space which it was formerly used to define.

Alert to this semantic trespass, Linden Peach (2004) has noted that the future of the family as a "transcendental signifier" in Ireland and Irish literature in the post-national era, "depends on a redefinition of the family" (Peach 90). In *The Heather Blazing*, Tóibín does not seek to redefine the family but rather attempts to expose the irregularities inherent in this archetypal signifier. Despite Eamon's own uncertainties surrounding his judgment on the schoolgirl's case, within the space of the novel, his ruling is not appealed. Rather, it is allowed to stand in all its ambiguity. Hence, Tóibín allows the fissures between the world as imagined in the Constitution and the reality of contemporary Irish society to remain gaping and exposed.

⁸ Eve Patten's (2006) metaphor that considers familial relations to represent "the national community" (Patten 262).

In “Scales of Aggregation: Prenational, Subnational, Transnational”, Dimock speaks of the pressure that “scalar variety exerts on more conventional forms [of aggregation], such as the nation” (219). As evidenced from our discussion of *The Heather Blazing*, it is the complexities of human life as actually experienced, rather than as imagined in the Constitution, which serve to disrupt the smooth outline of the nation. Hence, by reducing his scale of analysis and operating at the level of the subnational, Tóibín reveals an “irregular beat or bump on the linear frequency” (*Through Other Continents* 77) of the nation. However, as Dimock rightly notes, according to Madlebrot’s fractal geometry:

such irregularities are not limited to just one scale; they are much more deeply transitive, and much more robustly self-propagating. They carry over tenaciously from one metric to another, spewing out countless copies of themselves on countless dimensions (*Through Other Continents* 77).

According to Dimock’s understanding therefore, “irregularities” serve to loop the very small with the very large. In order to ascertain the validity of Dimock’s claim concerning the relationship between these scales it is useful to turn our attention to Tóibín’s 2009 novel, *Brooklyn*, a novel which recounts the very large theme of emigration through a focus on the very small in the form of one girl’s experiences. As *Brooklyn* operates at levels both below and above the nation, while at the same time being intimately linked to Ireland, Irish history and Irish collective memory, it provides an interesting case study for assessing the usefulness of Dimock’s theoretical model.

4. Transnational

4.1. Literature for the Planet: *Brooklyn* and the Transnational

In *Through Other Continents*, Dimock identifies “categories of experience” such as beauty and death as phenomena which “are not entirely predicated on the temporal

and spatial boundaries of the nation-state” and hence, require “scale enlargement for their analysis” (*Through Other Continents* 5). Categories of experience, nevertheless, also operate on the level of the very small given that they originate with individuals. Hence, like the “irregularities” previously discussed, categories of experience merge the very small with the very large. As evidenced from our reading of *The Heather Blazing* in accordance to the subnational, Tóibín intimately connects the irregularities that occur beneath the smooth contour of the nation with the real categories of experience associated with the family. Hence, to repeat an earlier point, his fictional narrative serves as a means to explicate the connection between Dimock’s concepts of irregularities and categories of experience.

The duality of scales brought about by categories of experience is most vividly depicted in Dimock’s readings of Henry James’s novel, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881). Speaking about the individual suffering of Isabel Archer in James’s novel, Dimock notes that, “no major event on the national calendar is inscribed in [the] puny ruin of one woman’s happiness” (“Pre-National Time” 217). However, through James’s evocation of the time scale of “old Rome” Dimock maintains that Isabel’s suffering is rendered part of something much larger than the national chronology, namely to the two thousand years of human suffering. While read according to the enormity of the scale of the “large Roman Record”, Isabel’s suffering may appear as “utterly commonplace and unremarkable”; for Dimock, this scale makes the heroine’s anguish a “small entry [...] to a large fact” (“Pre-National Time” 217). Owing to its “novelistic subjectivity”, Dimock argues that,

[The novel’s] frame is [...] global, but the global here, articulated across the axis of time, enfolds rather than erases its scalar opposite. Isabel’s suffering, trivially unremarkable, is vividly before us because it is both smaller and larger than national chronology. The pre-national and the sub-national come together here to create an irregular beat, an above-and-below-threshold departure from the national timetable (“Pre-National Time” 217).

Hence, she argues, “scale enlargement here undoes human singularity and gathers it into a long continuum” (217), operating both above and below the scale of the nation.

This combination of micro and macro, the very small and the very large is a defining element of Dimock’s approach to world literature. As she sees, it this duality of scales substantiates global approaches to literary scholarship: “[t]he transnational becomes much more robust when it is broken down into these subsidiary categories, for they alone can anchor it to everyday life, save it being empty and wishful” (“Scales of Aggregation” 226). While Dimock adapts a nuanced approach to current understandings of the transnational, in her vigorous attempts to demonstrate that this larger form of aggregation is not symmetrical to the national, she subsequently avoids any engagement with the relationship between the two. As with her concepts of the prenational and the subnational, therefore, her understanding of the transnational is weakened by her failure to engage with the dynamic relationship that exists between it and the nation. Considered to be at once both a “prominent Irish writer” (Delaney 2008) and a “profoundly gifted world writer” (Barry qtd. in Hooker 2009), Colm Tóibín’s work also provides a useful case study for restoring to Dimock’s alternative form of aggregation, the manner in which the national and the transnational inflect upon each other.

Set in the 1950s, Tóibín’s most recent novel *Brooklyn* (2009), recounts the story of a young Irish girl, Eilis Lacey, as she leaves her hometown of Enniscorthy and emigrates to America. Although the action of the novel sees the novel’s protagonist move beyond the borders of the nation, according to Dimock’s criteria, this does not necessarily make it a transnational novel: for the critic, in order to be considered “transnational”, a text must either have a “prolonged life” or a “global

following” (“Literature for the Planet” 175). Published in March 2009, it is impossible to predict whether the novel will have a “prolonged life”. However, the availability of sales figures offer a useful guide in ascertaining the extent of a work’s “global following”. By the close of 2009, *Brooklyn* had achieved literary success both in Ireland and abroad with sales figures reaching 60000 for hardback copies in the US and 40000 in Ireland (figures cited in O’Toole, 2009). In addition to (and perhaps contributing to) these favourable sales figures, the wide acclaim that the novel has received in the media, both at home and abroad, would further suggest that *Brooklyn* has a “global following”. James Walton of *The Independent* described the novel thus:

Brooklyn goes about its business with such quiet readability that it takes a while to realize how powerfully subversive all of this is. The current preferred myth is that we are, or at least should be, or should want to be, in control of our own lives. By capturing the unspectacular arbitrariness of Eilis’s experiences so convincingly, Tóibín subjects this myth to a thorough and calmly intelligent kicking (Walton 2009).

In a glowing review, *The New Yorker* said of the novel: “Tóibín creates a narrative of remarkable power, writing with a spareness and intensity that give the minutest shades of feeling immense emotional impact” (“Books Briefly Noted” 2009). According to *The New York Times Magazine*, *Brooklyn* is “as elegant in its simplicity as it is complex in the emotions it evokes”. In *The Express*, Simon Edge described the novel as “a quiet masterpiece” (Edge 2009). John Spain, writing for *The Irish Independent*, stated that although *Brooklyn* “may seem like a simple story” it is a novel “with as much depth as Tóibín’s other more ‘literary’ books” (Spain 2009). And, in one of many such parallels drawn by reviewers, novelist Claire Messud, writing in the *New York Review of Books* (Messud 2009), compared Tóibín’s ‘quietly majestic’ achievement to that of James’s *Portrait of a Lady*.

However, although the novel has been much celebrated, the very traits that have been identified by many as making the novel a masterpiece (its simplicity in

both style and subject matter) have also been the cause of the negative criticism which it has received. While for Walton the “unspectacular arbitrariness” of Eilis’s experiences adds to the novel’s intensity, for many readers, this unspectacularity renders the novel as a whole unspectacular. A customer leaving feedback on Amazon’s UK website described the novel thus:

Brooklyn is flat and dull. [...] The principal problem is with characterisation. The characters are cardboard cut-out, lacking in complexity, unrealised and utterly unconvincing. The central character is so passive that it is scarcely believable [...]. Tóibín indulges in long descriptive passages telling us about his protagonist's state of mind, her intentions and reasons and her reflections on events (Flibertigibbit 2009)⁹.

Another reader lamented that in the novel:

not a great deal happens, and what does happen is not very interesting. The characterisation of the main protagonist feels a little thin, and the novel generally trudges through its plot. (Bookwonk 2010)

Interestingly, the negative criticism that *Brooklyn* has received echoes that which Henry James faced for his novel *The Portrait of a Lady* when it was first published in 1881. In a study of the early critical reception of James’s novel, Marion Richmond (1986) notes that in the two years following its publication, there was “considerable dissatisfaction with [the novel’s] characters” among both British and American critics (Richmond 159). However, what was initially considered to be one of the novel’s greatest weakness Dimock claims is its greatest strength. As previously established, for Dimock, it is the “novelistic subjectivity” (“Pre-National Time” 217) in *The Portrait of a Lady* that allows the author to depict such an intimate portrayal of Isabel’s experience. Moreover, Dimock maintains that through James’s adaption of a time scale that surpasses both that of the individual and of the

⁹ This reviewer also highlights a noteworthy issue in relation to the novel’s reception among readers and as it is depicted in the media:

I completely disagree with the reviewers in the British media and the *New York Times* who are falling over themselves to find the positives in this novel. One reviewer suggests that the novel is in some way deceptively simple and subversive. They are being hugely dishonest about all this - why, I do not know (Flibertigibbit 2009).

This divergence between reader reviews and professional commentary will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

nation, the particularization of Isabel's experience is rendered part of a totality. For Dimock therefore, James's focus on the individual experience of Isabel Archer pushes us toward what Ed Folsom (2007) has called "a universality of particulars" ("Database as Genre" 1574).

Dubbed "the Henry James of Enniscorthy" in 1999 by *The [London] Independent*, throughout his work Tóibín echoes James's focus on the subnational, sharing with his predecessor a concern with "human individuation" ("Pre-National Time" 218). Indeed, Tóibín has asserted that in writing *Brooklyn*, his concern was with depicting a "psychology rather than topography" (Tóibín qtd. in Witchell 2009), a person rather than a place. As with James, this concern with individuation permits Tóibín to offer accounts of the "categories of experience" that his protagonist, Eilis, enjoys and endures. In *Brooklyn*, Tóibín is specifically concerned with the categories of experience associated with the domestic home. Hence, the majority of the action in the novel takes place within the domestic rooms that Eilis occupies.

In this focus on interiors, Tóibín echoes another Jamesian characteristic. It is useful to note, however, that rather than merely providing artistic detail to his plots, James's depictions of interiors have been widely read as revealing the author's concern with the interplay between the psychological and the spatial (Hsu 2003; Buelens 2001). As Gail Marshal (2010) notes,

[f]or all the novel's transatlantic reach and its characters' restless travels, *Portrait's* most significant encounters take place—or are witnessed—within the home. It is within the interiors of houses that characters are most active and best realized (Marshal 266).

In *Brooklyn* Tóibín continues this Jamesian theme by aligning his concern with individual subjectivity with a focus on interior spaces. However, the domestic spaces depicted within Tóibín's novel are strikingly different to those of *The Portrait*. While James unfolds Isabel's experiences predominantly within the domestic space of the drawing rooms of grand country houses in both England and Italy, Tóibín

locates his heroine within the ordinary spaces of the unexceptional every-day home. This subsequently affects their respective treatments of the equation between interiority and subjectivity. The drawing room is a particularly social space within a house; it is the public part of a private space. Conversely, bedrooms and kitchens are the intimate rooms within a house; they are the spaces where the intimacies of living take place. Hence, while James's focus on interiors has been read as a means of reflecting the manner in which the external world shapes the internal¹⁰, Tóibín reverses this paradigm to demonstrate how the internal affects our understanding of the external. Subsequently, we find that Tóibín's interiors are more richly imbued with the "categories of experience" associated with the domestic home.

Although Tóibín's focus on the ordinary has been accused of rendering the novel "not very interesting", it is in fact pivotal to Tóibín's production of a work of "psychological realism" (O'Toole 5). Speaking on novelistic subjectivity in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novel, Ian Watt notes in a still useful observation that, "we got inside their minds as well as their houses" (Watt qtd. in Burgett 171). In *Brooklyn* however, Tóibín permits his reader to get inside Eilis's mind *by* getting inside the houses in which she resides. Thus, Tóibín not only continues, but also partly revises a Jamesian theme.

4.2. "Categories of Experience": A Planetary "Home" in a House on Friary Street

The concept of "home" has been widely disputed in much contemporary discourse. Even more hotly contested has been the relationship of this term with the architectural structure of the house. While, as Jeanne Moore has noted, the meaning

¹⁰ See, for example, the account in Homi K. Bhabha's, *The Location of Culture* (1994) (Bhabha 13).

of “home” is often considered to be an “abstract signifier of a wide set of associations and meanings” (Moore 208), when asked what “home” meant to him personally, Tóibín revealed that it “is a few rooms in Dublin and a few rooms in the house [he has] in Wexford” (*Bookgroup*). This understanding of “home” translates into *Brooklyn*, where for Eilis, as for Tóibín, the concept of “home” is intimately associated with the house in which she lives and the rooms that she occupies.

In order to comprehend the relevance of this equation of house and home to Dimock’s categories of experience, it is useful to draw on the work of Gaston Bachelard. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard argues that “a house that has been *experienced* is not an inert box” (emphasis added), but rather he maintains that the house as an “inhabited space” transcends “geometrical space” (Bachelard 47). Moreover, Bachelard argues that “a really inhabited space bears the essence and notion of *home*” (emphasis added) (Bachelard 5). Expanding on Bachelard’s work via Dimock, we can argue that what transforms a house from an inert box into a home, are the “categories of experience”, which make the space meaningful. According to this logic therefore, in order to solidify the signifying function of house as home, Tóibín must create the impression of Eilis’s house in Friary Street as a “really inhabited space” which requires that he depict the space as “experienced” by his protagonist.

A house recounted from an external point of view does not necessarily equate to home; such a description would describe a “geometrical space” as opposed to an “inhabited space”. In *Brooklyn*, Tóibín is acutely alert to the need for subjectivity in order to convey a convincing understanding of domestic space as home. Hence, he largely refuses description by an omniscient narrator and instead, internalizes the

perspective through his character's point of view utilizing a third-person narrative.

Speaking on his use of this technique, Tóibín explained in the following terms:

if you work in detail on a character in the third-person and see everything through their eyes [...] and the only thing that you are told in the book is what the person notices. [...] You as the reader become the protagonist because you see the world through the character [...](Tóibín qtd. in Wiesenfarth 15).

Thus, in *Brooklyn*, what we see of the world through Eilis's eyes is, for the most part, the seemingly unexceptional details of domestic space.

Owing to the subjectivity and interiority permitted by his chosen narrative technique, space, in the opening part of *Brooklyn*, is not recounted through a detailed focus on the materiality of particular rooms but is instead described through references to the details of the unexceptional comings and goings of Eilis's everyday life. As Kathy Mezei and Chiara Brigant (2002) argue, "domestic space implies the everyday, the rituals of domesticity in their cyclical, repetitive ordinariness" (Mezei and Brigant 842). We are told details of Eilis's bookkeeping class which "were almost at an end", as the protagonist sits "at the window of the upstairs living room in the house on Friary Street" (*Brooklyn* 3). We learn that Eilis's sister's golf clubs were located in the hall, which is further enriched with details concerning her sister's daily routine; "Eilis knew that someone would call for her and her sister would not return until the summer evening had faded" (*Brooklyn* 3). Rather than detracting from the narrative, however, these minor details serve to create the impression that the spaces depicted are "inhabited" spaces, and thus help solidify our understanding that the house in Friary Street is Eilis's home.

Of all the rooms addressed in the opening part of *Brooklyn*, it is in the kitchen that the vast majority of dialogue between Eilis and her mother and sister takes place. Moreover, each time the kitchen is referred to, it is associated with mealtimes: it is continuously introduced through the use of phrases such as, "The

following evening at tea” (*Brooklyn* 20), “one day at dinnertime” (*Brooklyn* 21), “over dinner at home that day” (*Brooklyn* 14). Although Tóibín’s repeated references to the family’s meals may appear seemingly insignificant, Fiese et al. (2006) argues that meal times “illustrate family identity and the creation of a sense of group membership”. In this regard, gathering together at the table over time reflects how family members come to represent or understand what it means to be a member of this particular group (Fiese et al. 68). Hence, by depicting the kitchen in the Lacey’s house on Friary Street through its associations with what Wolin and Bennet have referred to as the “family ritual” of meal times (Wolin and Bennett 2004), Tóibín infuses the room with the categories of experience associated therewith.

The sense of belonging confirmed by the mealtime ritual in domestic life is also dependant upon what Alfred Schuetz (1945) has defined as the “we-relations”, “the primary relations” equal to the concept of “home” (Schuetz 369). It is through these we-relations, Schuetz argues, that domestic space and life “at home” becomes emotionally significant to an individual. Hence, by depicting the rooms in the house on Friary Street through references to the people that live there, Tóibín carefully and subtly constructs the relationship between we-relations, the domestic home and a sense of belonging that the house embodies for Eilis. For example, when Fr Flood comes to the house with news confirming Eilis’s emigration, the protagonist intimately binds house, personal relations and memories into one:

Eilis felt like a child when the doctor would come to the house, her mother listening with cowed respect. It was Rose’s silence that was new to her [...] And then it occurred to her that she was already feeling that she would need to remember this room, her sister, this scene, as though from a distance (*Brooklyn* 23).

This scene brings to a climax the details concerning the ordinary, every-day living of the protagonist and the we-relations associated with her home. Owing to Tóibín’s delicate construction of the emotional significance of the house and the we-relations

that make that space meaningful for Eilis, we are not surprised to find that the scene also echoes that of a funeral or a wake. Tóibín has spoken repeatedly of what was known in Ireland as an “American wake”; a get together of family and neighbours in the house of a person who was emigrating to the US. Give the immense distance between the two countries, when an individual left Ireland for America, more often than not they never returned. Hence, like death, emigration to America was seen to mean a permanent break in the “we-relations” - the most significant of the categories of experience associated with home.

The significance of considering the novel in accordance to a domestic, and by extension, a subnational level of aggregation as opposed to that of the nation becomes most vividly realised when Eilis is struck with “homesickness” during her initial weeks in Brooklyn. Owing to his careful construction of the concept of “home” as being associated with the house and, by extension, with the intimate personal relations associated therewith in the early part of the novel, it is apparent that Eilis’s homesickness is not on account of “some overall idea of patriotism”, or a longing for “a large country, or even a small country” (Tóibín qtd. in Warwick Interview, 2010). Rather it is that felt for “very specific things” such as her family and the rooms in her house in Enniscorthy (Tóibín qtd. in Warwick Interview, 2010). Hence, it is a case that she longs for “family rather than Fatherland” (ibid).

In an article published in the *Irish Times Weekend Review*, Fintan O’Toole aptly captured the duality of scales at play in *Brooklyn* when he noted that “The narrative is indeed a kind of epic (a bi-continental and historical drama of exile and return) but it unfolds in tiny domestic details and through a humdrum, scarcely noticed life” (O’Toole 9). O’Toole interestingly echoes Ezra Pound’s observation of James’s work that for all his professions of smallness, “[James] does, nevertheless,

treat of major forces, even of epic forces” (Pound qtd in Dimock 218). Just as James connects Isabel Archer’s suffering to that of humanity through the categories of experience associated with the domestic home, Tóibín, through the focus on the subnational, connects Eilis’s story of migration to an “above-and below-threshold departure” (“Pre-National Time” 217) from the nation.

4.3. “Collective Experience”: Home and the Emigrant Narrative

While Dimock reads James’s association with the epic as a means of casting the novelist as a transnational writer, surprisingly, O’Toole’s primary critical concern in the aforementioned review is with why Tóibín’s *Brooklyn* has failed to transcend all international boundaries of readership. Responding to the novel’s limited success in Britain in comparison to that which it has enjoyed in Ireland and the US, O’Toole maintains that by addressing the theme of emigration, far from reaching out to a global readership, *Brooklyn* limits itself to a particular audience, namely to those who can relate to the “collective experience” of emigration (O’Toole, 2009). Rather than lamenting the “mutual incomprehension” that he considers to exist between Ireland and Britain, however, for O’Toole, the varying responses to *Brooklyn* provide evidence that “literary globalization [...] only goes so far. There is still such a thing as national taste, still a sense that responses to stories are shaped by collective experience” (O’Toole 2009).

According to O’Toole’s understanding “literary globalization” is therefore a negative thing; a homogenising force that attempts to make the same from the different. As previously established however, rather than demanding sameness, for Dimock, literary globalization allows for a greater “universalization of particulars” than permitted by national means of aggregation. Hence, while read according to

Dimock's understanding of "categories of experience", *Brooklyn* links the very small with the very large, and thus reaches out to a "global readership". Conversely, however, for O'Toole, because the "categories of experience" in question are intimately related to a "collective experience" of emigration, the novel cannot resound with an all-encompassing global audience.

As a national and an international writer, Tóibín is astutely aware of the dangers of confining his work to a particular audience only. He is equally aware of the need to "speak" to his national readership in order for his fiction to be consumed within his country of origins. As opposed to conforming to the traditional binary of idyllic homeland and corrupt host country prevalent in much Irish literature, however, Tóibín retains a subtle balance between the positive and negative aspects of both the Irish "home" left behind and the new life established abroad. This delicate balance between home and away, is masterfully achieved through the "doubleness" that Tóibín employs throughout the novel. As the author himself notes, in *Brooklyn*,

most things happen twice or happen with echoes of each other. There are two tall houses with stairs. There are two older women who run those houses. There are two bossy/ sisterly figures. There are two beaches. There are two men. There are two dance halls. There are two families (qtd. in Boland 2010).

Rather than contrasting Enniscorthy and Brooklyn therefore, Tóibín emphasises the connections between the two places by having certain characteristics of Eilis's life in Ireland echoed in her new home in America and in so doing, disrupts the traditional good / bad binary typical in emigrant narratives in Irish literature. The following are some textual examples of this narrative dynamic.

In keeping with the earlier section of the novel, which details Eilis's life in Enniscorthy, Parts 2 and 3, which are set in Brooklyn, also retain a focus on the interior spaces of the domestic realm. We first encounter Eilis in Brooklyn as she

wakes in her bed in a room she rents off her landlady, Mrs Kehoe (*Brooklyn* 53). In contrast to the initial descriptions of the house on Friary Street, which are recounted through their associations with the protagonist's family members, Eilis's first accounts of the room and the house in Brooklyn focus on their materiality:

Her room was at the back of the house and the bathroom was across the corridor. The floorboards creaked and the door, she thought was made of light material and the plumbing was loud so she could hear the other boarders if they went to the bathroom in the night or came back home late at the weekends (53).

The nature of this focus on the material reveals the lack of attachment associated with Eilis's new residence; in Bachelard's terms, it is a geometrical space, not an inhabited space. Hence, in her initial weeks in Brooklyn, Eilis feels as though "nothing meant anything" in Mrs Kehoe's house, in contrast to the familiarity and security of the rooms on Friary Street which "belonged to her" (67).

However, as time progresses and Eilis begins to settle into her life in America, we witness an evolution in her description of her new abode from one focussed solely on materiality, to one which depicts the space as an "inhabited space":

Eilis loved her room, loved putting her books on the table opposite the window when she came in at night and then getting into her pyjamas and the dressing gown she had bought in one of the sales and her warm slippers and spending an hour or more before she went to bed looking over the lecture notes and rereading the manuals on bookkeeping and accounting she had bought (*Brooklyn* 113).

As Eilis's time in Brooklyn progresses, the room becomes filled with associations with the routines and items from her new life in Brooklyn. Ever so subtly therefore, Tóibín carefully begins to construct the image of a new home, not in another nation, but in another domestic space.

Echoing traditions in typical emigrant narratives, in *Brooklyn*, the novel's protagonist suffers a bout of homesickness during her initial weeks in America. While it would be possible for Tóibín to utilize the homesickness Eilis experiences as an opportunity to idealize Ireland at the expense of the new location, he refuses to

do so. Instead we find, as Bernard O'Donoghue (2010) has noted, that the spirit throughout the novel is "attraction to the present location rather than nostalgia for the past one" (O'Donoghue 11). Hence, again in a form of doubling, Tóibín repeats the initial sense of estrangement and unfamiliarity that Eilis experiences on her first few weeks in Brooklyn when the protagonist returns to Ireland following her sister's death. Just as Eilis initially feels herself to be a "ghost" in her room in Mrs Kehoe's house in Brooklyn (*Brooklyn* 67), on entering her old room in the house in Friary Street, she finds it "empty of life" and is frightened by "how little it meant to her" now (204). Having longed for the familiarity of her room and home life, it had not occurred to her that she had established a home in Brooklyn and subsequently feels "strange and guilty" when she finds herself counting the days before she returned to America (205).

While Tóibín goes to pains to carefully construct an image of "home" in both Enniscorthy and in Brooklyn, the reader may still be left with the impression that the pull of her place of birth is stronger than that of her new life in America. Speaking on his own experiences of emigration and return, Tóibín maintains that when one returns home after being away for a period of time,

[e]verything that happened the day before becomes insubstantial [...] You create a world away from home and make new rooms for yourself. But when you arrive back home in your old rooms the world you've made for yourself ceases to be real. Everything seems to crumble (Tóibín qtd. in McCrum)¹¹.

Tony, Eilis's American fiancé, is astutely aware of the magnetic pull of one's place of origins and it is because of the strength of this allure that he feels that "were he to turn his head, [Eilis] might be gone" (*Brooklyn* 217). When Tony tells Eilis of the

¹¹ More so than any of his peers, Tóibín has commented extensively on his own work, either in interviews or in literary segments for respective newspapers. In this commentary, Toibin explicitly lays bare his intentions upon writing his fictional work. Although critical inquiries may not be "settled by consulting the oracle" (Wimsatt and Beardsely 1956), given the powerful effect by the media in shaping consumer activity, Tóibín may be directing the line of critical inquiry directed towards his work. This need of the author to direct the reception of his work as it circulates in the world literary space is itself worthy of comment.

plans that he and his father and brothers had to build houses on a plot of land they had purchased near Long Island, Eilis is aware that in relaying this information, her fiancé also proposes “the details of how they would live, the life that he could offer her” (167-8). Given the psychological and emotional significance of house as home, Bachelard argues that to build

[...] a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts—serious, sad thoughts—and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality (Bachelard 61).

Hence, we find that the very prospect of establishing a new permanent home and setting new roots leaves Eilis “almost in tears” (*Brooklyn* 167-8). To build a house that “stood in symmetrical relation” to that she was “born in”, would ultimately mean life in Brooklyn would become less of a “dream” and instead become firmly rooted in reality and would require the “loss” of her old home and her old life in Enniscorthy. Were this house to be built, it would mark a new beginning that could only be embarked upon following the acceptance of loss.

4.4. Literature for the Planet? *Brooklyn* and Literary Globalization.

In “Planetary Time and Global Translation” (2003), Dimock argues that as literature is a “global phenomenon”, its “appropriate context or unit of analysis is nothing less than the full length and width of our human history and habitat” (489). For Dimock, reading literary texts within a global or a transnational context does not lead to the homogenisation feared by many literary critics, but rather provides a means of surpassing the homogenising forces of the nation state. In her words,

[n]ot stuck in one national context - and saying predictable things in that context - a literary text becomes a new semantic template, a new form of the legible, each time it crosses a national border. Global transit extends, triangulates, and transforms its meaning. This fact alone challenges the power of the territorial as a determining force in literature (“Deep Time” 177).

Thus, in proposing that we study literature in a transnational context, Dimock's work, like that of Franco Moretti, explicitly promotes a more global approach to the study of literature. Although Dimock substantiates her form of "distance reading" through the use of the prenational and the subnational, like Moretti also, her work can understate the significance of boundaries that are ultimately intrinsic to the transnational and thus underestimate the complex relationship that exists between this global approach to the study of literature and the continued presence of the nation-state.

Conversely, in celebrating the "mutual incomprehension" between readers and particular stories in his commentary on *Brooklyn*, Fintan O'Toole rejoices in the continuing presence of borders in the face of "literary globalisation" (O'Toole 9). While Dimock suggests a ready assimilation of literary works into foreign cultures owing to literature's global scope, O'Toole's account of Tóibín's most recent novel attempts to highlight the fact that this is not always the case. By emphasizing the need for the reading of texts within particular national contexts, O'Toole could appear to be in a favor of what Moretti refers to as a "tree" approach to the study of literature. But to confine *Brooklyn* to an "Irish genre" or to the "prefabricated box" of a national literature only denies an adequate analysis of the work's circulation beyond the national literary space. Equally so, to examine the novel in a transnational context only, is to refuse an engagement with the dynamic interplay between the national and the transnational.

Timothy J. Reiss (2004) aptly captures the complexities involved in accounting for cultural specificity within a transnational context by usefully asking: "how are the spaces between cultural places to be bridged? How can one envision homes, places and times in their own peculiarities?" (Reiss 122). What is required, it

would appear, is a mode of analysis that permits both “connection and heterogeneity”. Usefully, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) outline these very elements as being the first and second principles of “rhizomes” (Deleuze and Guattari 7). Simply defined, a rhizome is “the root of a plant that travels laterally underground and proliferates unpredictably” (Rivkin and Ryan 378). Deleuze and Guattari first introduced the metaphor of the rhizome in critical discourse to depict a mode of social organization that favors an undoing of the orders and hierarchies of traditional tree-models of knowledge and power which have dominated Western thought. Given its concern with disrupting hierarchical models of social organization, subsequent critics have utilized the concept in fields such as postcolonial studies and migrant studies among numerous others.

In *Through Other Continents*, Dimock briefly refers to Deleuze and Guattari’s concept in her attempt to disrupt the totalitarian structure of national literatures by tracing the interconnection that exists between genres, stemming across time and space (74). Yet as Dimock moves promptly from the idea of rhizomes to Wittgenstein’s concept of “family resemblances”, the usefulness of Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphor for a reading of world literature is not fully realized. The theory behind the concept of rhizomes is, however, latently present throughout Dimock’s work on the transnational and it is useful to bring this element of her work to the fore in order to finally re-connect the transnational with the national.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, at “any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be”, for their survival relies on interconnectivity. This, they suggest, is very different from the tree or root, which “plots a point, fixes an order” (Deleuze and Guattari 7). However, although ultimately seeking to destabilize the fixed order of tree-models of thought, Deleuze

and Guattari also highlight the interconnectivity that exists even between trees, maintaining that, “there exist tree or root structures in rhizomes” while “a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari 16). Rather than denying the relationship between rhizomatic and tree-like types of organization, therefore, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that as the two are constantly shifting, they must be considered together as part of an “inseparable process” (Wake and Malpas 246). Hence they argue for the need to “connect the roots or trees back up with the rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari 15).

As evidenced from my reading of Tóibín’s *Brooklyn* in accordance to Dimock’s concept of the transnational, the “categories of experience” associated with the domestic home, serve to connect the novel to the rest of the world beyond the confines of a national literature. However, as previously discussed, Dimock reads these “connective tissues” (*Through Other Continents* 3) as a means of transcending the national and moving away from the fixed order of national literatures. Dimock’s methodology thus denies an adequate engagement with the complex relationship between the national and the transnational. In summary, her proposed approach to the study of literature in a transnational context cuts the rhizomatic roots away from the tree of a national literature.

By evaluating Dimock’s conceptual framework within the dynamics of the fictional narrative of *Brooklyn*, this disconnect between the two modes of social organisation becomes strikingly apparent. As Tóibín is committed to both “rootedness and cosmopolitanism” (Foster 26), evidenced by our previous discussion of both *Brooklyn* and *The Heather Blazing*, his work is derived from both a tree-model and from more rhizomatic forms of social organization. In contrast, Dimock’s

understanding of the transnational permits a reading of the novel in accordance to the “connective tissues” only. However, if we draw more readily from Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical model and consider the “categories of experience” that Dimock identifies as rhizomatic roots attached to a tree-model, we do not deny their relationship to the national, or retaining the botanical terminology, the original spot from which they stem. Such a move would permit us to connect the tree-model of the Irish “collective experience” of emigration identified by O’Toole back to the rhizomatic roots of the “categories of experience” associated with home. In so doing, it enables us to place Tóibín’s novel within a networked context, thus bringing to the fore “connective tissues” that bind a work of national literature to the rest of the world (*Through Other Continents* 3).

An enriched understanding of the transnational also affords a more nuanced reading of *Brooklyn*, which better serves Tóibín’s creative force. By distilling the emigrant narrative to the individual experiences of one girl’s attachment to home and to the significance of entities as small as houses and rooms, Tóibín strips this meta-narrative back to reveal the “categories of experience” inherent therein. By extension, through Eilis’s attachment to “home” Tóibín reveals something of the human condition, and thus, we can now suggest, brings to the fore the rhizomatic roots that such terms possess. This at once enriches the emigrant narrative within the national context while also allowing the work to circulate beyond national borders by opening it up beyond the confines of an Irish “collective experience” alone crucially not denying the significance thereof.

Conclusion: World Literature and National Context

Speaking on the “globality of world literature and the diminishing place of the nation-state in our times”, Jonathan Arac (2002) usefully questions what the future can hold “for a mode of critical performance that is losing its home base” (Arac 45). In reading Colm Tóibín’s novels through the lens of Dimock’s proposed methodology, this chapter has sought to establish, firstly, what a world literature can offer to our study of Irish literature, and secondly, how the study of Irish literature can deepen our understanding of the critical methods proposed for studying world literature. It has attempted to evaluate both Tóibín’s work and Dimock’s methodology by testing the critic’s proposed approach to the study of world literature as it operates within the dynamics of the Irish author’s fictional narrative.

By applying Dimock’s theory of the prenatal, the subnational and the transnational to our analysis of Tóibín’s work, we can consider it at a scale both above and below the scale of the nation, and thus, enable the author’s work to be read as “world literature”. Owing to Dimock’s concern with transcending the boundaries of the nation state, her method permits a reading of literary works that moves beyond the often limited and frequently narcissistic, indigenous literary criticism. Hence, it provides an alternative way of seeing literary texts beyond the borders of a nation-based form of criticism.

While Dimock’s approach to literary analysis permits a nuanced reading of the work of an Irish writer, by placing Tóibín’s work under the lens of Dimock’s methodology, we can also evaluate the three parts of the critic’s conceptual framework as they operate within the dynamics of a fictional narrative. As evidenced from our readings of *The Heather Blazing* and *Brooklyn*, it is only by engaging with the legacy and traditions of an Irish national literature that Tóibín can operate within

and beyond the constraints that the label of “Irish literature” place on his work. In applying Dimock’s methodology to a reading of Tóibín’s work, we thus reveal the failure thereof, as it has been utilized to date, to accommodate the complex relationship and continuing attachments that exist between the nation and the alternative forms of aggregation proposed by the critic.

However, although calling attention to the weaknesses inherent in Dimock’s conceptual framework, Tóibín’s work also provides a means of substantiating it. It is apparent that Dimock’s method “works” to a significant degree for a reading of Tóibín’s novels; through close textual reading, we have established that the author is, like the critic, concerned with the prenatal, the subnational and the transnational. However, by allowing for a consideration of the national within this framework, Tóibín’s fictional narratives afford a means of re-establishing the function of the national within the prenatal, the subnational and the transnational. In so doing, it both endorses and expands Dimock’s proposed method.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3. New Partnerships: Irish Literature, Close Reading and the Digital Humanities

“We have neglected the tiny sentences of life and now the big ones are beyond our reach” (*The Secret Scripture* 70).

1.1. National Literature, World Literature and Close Reading

As was established in the preceding chapters, debates in the field of world literature can be characterised in two ways; on the one hand, practitioners can be categorized according to their relation to national literatures, where one faction argues in favour of dispensing with the study thereof and the other continues to promote the necessity of studying literatures within their national context. Alternatively, critics engaging in the world literature debate may be differentiated according to their stance in relation to “close” and “distant” reading. While Wai Chee Dimock advocates the necessity of close reading in the study of world literature, she shares with Franco Moretti a desire to move away from the study of literature along national lines. But as was established in the previous chapter, by denying a consideration of the relationship between literature and the nation we miss much of the complexities informing works like *The Heather Blazing* and *Brooklyn* which are intimately connected to a national history and a national territory. Reading Tóibín’s novels through the lens of Dimock’s theoretical framework thus points to the value of national context even within a world literatures framework.

This observation is both supported and endorsed by the world literature approach offered by David Damrosch, professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and leading figure in the world literature debate. As Damrosch notes, “recognizing the ongoing, vital presence of the national within the life of world literature poses enormous problems for the study of world literature” (“World Literature, National Contexts” 514). No less than Dimock, Damrosch too is

concerned with examining literature in a global context. However, rather than jettisoning the study of national literatures in favour of more global approaches, in his important work, *What is World Literature?* (2003), Damrosch usefully asks, “[w]hat does the ongoing vitality of national literary traditions mean for the study of world literature?” (*What is World Literature?* 283). The dynamic tension that it is generated between the two modes of analysis is thus central to Damrosch’s approach to world literature.

Defining a work of world literature as a literary text that has “exceptional ability to transcend the boundaries of the culture that produces it” (*How to Read World Literature* 2), Damrosch approaches the “problem” of world literature by tracing the circulation and reception of individual literary works that move beyond their cultures of origin and are received into various “host” cultures. But as he points out, “circulation into a new national context does not require the work of world literature to be subjected to anything like an absolute disconnect from its culture of origin” (“World Literature, National Contexts” 521). Rather he argues that,

[u]nderstanding the term “national” broadly, we can say that works continue to bear the marks of their national origin even after they circulate into world literature, and yet these traces are increasingly diffused and become ever more sharply refracted as a work travels farther from home (*What is World Literature?* 283).

Hence, while sharing with Dimock a concern with literature’s ability to transcend national boundaries and to circulate among a global readership, for Damrosch, and in notable contrast to Dimock, world literature demands considerations of the manner in which a work manifests both within its context of origin and as it is received into various host cultures.

While asserting the need for considerations of national context in the study of world literature, another and related question driving Damrosch’s work is the following: “how to mediate between broad, but often reductive, overviews and

intensive, but often atomistic, close readings?" (*What is World Literature?* 26). In *What is World Literature?* (2003), Damrosch establishes the labels "specialist" and "generalist" readings to distinguish between national and global approaches to literary scholarship respectively. The term "specialist" refers to an approach or an individual concerned with studying literary works within their culture of origins and national literary tradition; practitioners endorsing specialist methodologies are characterized by a concern with close textual reading and the endorsement of modes of microcriticism. Conversely, "generalist" refers to approaches characterized by a "high level of cultural abstraction" ("Comparative Literature?" 329) and a refusal to engage with the specificities of individual literary works or their place within a specific national literature. In recent years, the generalist approach has become most readily identified with Franco Moretti's mode of "distant reading".

Notably, Damrosch's own approach to world literature, like that of Dimock, has developed – at least in part – in response to Franco Moretti's distant reading. In the early pages of *What is World Literature?*, Damrosch calls attention to the limitations of this approach by highlighting Moretti's own recognition thereof:

Going beyond a simple form-and-content account of the spread of the novel [...] Moretti argues for the importance of a third term, narrative voice—a primary feature of indigenous tradition that critically affects the interplay of content and form. As he says, however, we can't study narrative voice at a linguistic remove, in the way that we can trace patterns of book sales or broad movements of motifs (*What is World Literature?* 25-6).

For Damrosch, the inability of modes of distant reading to accommodate local narrative voice provides evidence that "systemic approaches" or generalist approaches need to be counter balanced with "close attention to particular languages and specific texts" (26). This observation provides the foundations for Damrosch's own approach to the problem of world literature and is a significant premise for the subject of this chapter.

Rather than adapting the role of either generalist or specialist in the study of world literature, Damrosch suggests it is more useful to endorse a both / and approach. He points out that when our purpose is not to delve into a culture in detail, “the reader and even the work itself may benefit from being spared the full force of our local knowledge”, and that the generalist “will find much of the specialist’s information about the work’s origins is no longer relevant and not only can be but should be set aside” (“World Literature, National Contexts” 517). Conversely, the specialist’s knowledge serves as the major safeguard against the generalist’s “own will to power over texts that otherwise become all too easily grist for the mill of a preformed historical argument or theoretical system” (ibid). For Damrosch, this combined approach will enable the generalist to understand the work effectively in its new cultural and theoretical context while at the same time having a fundamental comprehension of its relation to the source culture.

1.2. “Practicing Partners”: Distant Reading and the Digital Humanities

In a recent essay, “Where is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?” (2012), digital humanist and cultural critic, Alan Liu argued that the debate between close and distant reading which originated in the field of world literature, has brought the burgeoning field of the digital humanities into closer proximity with the traditional humanities disciplines (Liu 2012). Owing to Franco Moretti’s ongoing collaboration at Stanford with the digital humanist Matthew Jockers (to be discussed in detail in Chapter 5), Liu maintains that, “the digital humanities are now what may be called the *practicing partner* of distant reading” (emphasis in original) (492).

While Liu is correct in noting that the close versus distant reading debate has generated a point of intersection between the fields of the digital humanities and the

traditional humanities - specifically, literary studies - in his account thereof (to be discussed in more detail later), the digital humanities are considered as being relevant to one side of this debate only. Understood as the “practicing partner of distant reading”, the digital humanities appear by implication to be oppositional to modes of close reading that are central to work in the field of literary studies. Moreover, a point which has also received little critical attention from practitioners in either the literary studies or digital humanities communities is that, when aligned with Moretti’s mode of distant reading, which in its original deployment was intended to serve as “a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures” (“Conjectures on World Literature” 68), not only do digital humanities tools and methodologies appear to be opposed to modes of close reading but by association, their relation to and usefulness for the study of national literatures is also called into question.

Most significantly for the purposes of this chapter, however, is that although Moretti himself cedes the limits of distant reading, this is rarely remembered in how the term is deployed in digital humanities contexts. As was previously established, for Moretti, “local narrative voice” is the textual feature which makes “novels seem to be most unstable—most uneasy” (“Conjectures” 65) and which subsequently demands recourse to both specialist national knowledge and modes of close reading. This has significant, though as of yet unacknowledged, implications for Liu’s understanding of the relationship between literary studies and the digital humanities. If the partnership between the two disciplines is based upon modes of distant reading only, what becomes of this partnership when faced with the challenge of local narrative voice? Does it break down, forcing the two disciplines to go their separate

ways? Or, more positively, does it require and engender a re-consideration of the principles of which the partnership is founded?

This chapter argues that local narrative voice provides a welcome opportunity to reconsider the means by which the digital humanities have come to be associated with literary studies and, in so doing, to advance current understandings of the relationship between digital humanities and the literary practices of distant and close reading – the latter practice, it is argued, being too quickly jettisoned within recent studies. It is further argued that, considered in this light, Damrosch’s aspirations for a combined generalist/specialist methodology in the study of world literature have a particular, though as yet largely unacknowledged, relevance for newly emerging digital humanities literary methodologies.

Taking a work of contemporary Irish fiction, *The Secret Scripture* (Barry 2008), as a case study, the chapter describes the evolution and implementation of an innovative and inter-disciplinary research method and approach, incorporating digital humanities and traditional literary methodologies which enable an enhanced form of close reading of the novel within a world literature framework. Informed by David Damrosch’s world literature methodology and focusing on what Moretti has identified as the element of literary texts for which modes of distant reading are unable to account, “local narrative voice” (Moretti 2000), this chapter describes the development and implementation of a digital humanities tool and methodology which support a close reading of this particular textual feature within a comparative framework. In its second iteration, the software is expanded to include the input of multiple literary scholars as they engage with the text, thus moving the project beyond a comparison between novels to a comparison between interpretations

thereof. In concluding, it is argued that the inter-disciplinary and collaborative digital humanities approach endorsed in this case study shows that close reading and digital humanities can too be “practicing partners” (Liu 493) in a way that serves to advance work in both the fields of world literature and digital literary studies, and in the field of Irish literary studies.

2. World Literature and the Digital Humanities

2.1. Generalist Approaches and Distant Reading

While instigating lively debate in the field of literary studies, Franco Moretti’s “distant reading” has also had more far-reaching, cross-disciplinary effects. Since “Conjectures” was published in 2000, Moretti’s methodology has become increasingly dependent on quantitative research methods and data visualization techniques, most notable in *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (2005). In this work, Moretti provides an account of literary history using charts, maps, and time lines where the various visualizations are generated using quantitative research methods.

Liu’s previously cited essay, “Where is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities” (2012), and its claim that “the digital humanities are now what may be called the *practicing partner* of distant reading” (492-3), represents an influential but, in this author’s opinion, also contentious intervention in digital literary studies. Liu’s claim is corroborated by the fact that in recent years a growing number of works in digital literary studies have explicitly endorsed modes of distant reading (Clement 2008; Wilkens 2012). The most common strategy has been to analyze large corpora of texts in order to identify patterns as they occur within the wider literary field, and thus to move literary studies beyond the confines of literary canons (Moretti 2005;

Wilkens 2012; Heuser and Le Khac 2012). Conversely, Tanya Clement has employed text mining and data visualization techniques to enable a reading of an individual text, Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*, "from a distance" (Clement 361). In most instances, however, the formal features of the text or texts under examination are read at a remove from the cultural context in which they are either produced or read.

In his essay, Liu has termed the lack of engagement with cultural criticism as a key "deficit" for digital humanities. In this scenario, distant reading – understood as a "catch-all" for long-established "cultural-critical methods" – becomes the post cold war saviour and the means to break an earlier formalist-culturalist détente:

Sophisticated digital humanities methods that require explicit programmatic instructions and metadata schema now take the ground of elemental practice previously occupied by equally sophisticated but tacit close reading methods (493-4).

For Liu, the contrast in new practice is so "stark" as to change "the very nature of the ground being fought over: the text" (494).

Distant reading, in both its theoretical and digital manifestations, has clearly become increasingly removed from the core object of literary analysis – the literary text. Writing in "Conjectures", Moretti argued that if in the process of performing distant readings, "the text itself disappears, [...] it is one of those cases where one can justifiably say, less is more" (57). In his later works, such as *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005) and "Network Theory, Plot Analysis" (2011), we find that the text does in fact "disappear", having been reduced to "abstract models" ("Network Theory, Plot Analysis" 11). According to Liu, this shift from text to visualizations is indicative of the extent to which digital humanities are altering traditional practices in the field of literary scholarship where "block quotations serving as a middle ground for fluid movement between close and distant reading are disappearing from

view”, and are increasingly replaced as “objects of sustained focus” by “data visualizations of large patterns” (494).

While Liu’s arguments have a compelling and mobilizing force, his jettisoning of close reading and of block quotations as subjects of enquiry for both literary studies and digital humanities is premature. Despite being extensively cited since its publication in 2005, few literary scholars have embraced the methodologies proposed by Moretti in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* which, as has been noted, are dependent on quantitative analysis and data visualization. As the numerous critiques of Moretti’s work suggest, both close reading and the complexities of the individual literary text remain fundamental and indispensable to work in the field of literary studies. One could argue also that within the field of digital humanities itself, the text is far from disappearing. One only needs to consider the lively debates emerging from the area of digital scholarly editing (Buzzetti 2002; Eggert 2005; McGann 2010; Gabler 2010) to confirm the continuing importance of the text, even as it is being transported to a digital environment.

2.2. Digital Humanities and Close Readings

In the literary studies community, the limitations of modes of distant reading have been quite widely addressed. Critics such as Jonathan Arac, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Katie Trumpener, Christopher Prendergast and Wai Chee Dimock have all taken issue with Moretti’s proposed approach to literary scholarship on account of what Dimock has referred to as its “over-commitment to general rules and global postulates” (*Through Other Continents* 79). While the aforementioned critics provide sophisticated critiques of Moretti’s approach, they do so from a purely literary perspective and in relation to debates in the field of world literature. What

remains absent within the literary community, however, is a consideration of or an engagement with the digital humanities methodologies that Moretti employs in his literary analysis.

Some discussions of this sort have, however, emerged from practitioners in the field of digital humanities who have noted the manner in which quantitative and computational research methods seem unsuited to the traditional practices and research activities of literary scholars (Warwick 1999; Kirschenbaum 2008). For example, calling attention to the limitations of quantitative research methods for literary criticism, Claire Warwick has argued that while computational techniques may be useful for researchers interested in tracking cultural or historical patterns in large amounts of data, or charting textual variants, “most scholars still believe that the core activity of the literary critic in whatever language is critical analysis and close reading” (Warwick 2008). In attempting to define “close reading” Warwick maintains that, “it involves intangible concepts such as sensibility, originality, creativity and is predicated upon things that are nuanced and unprovable” (Warwick 2008). She further notes that while these characteristics can be comprehended by humans, “they are much more difficult to adapt to the right or wrong, on or off, world of logical hierarchies that are ideal for computer analysis” (Warwick 2008). Given the seemingly antithetical nature of close reading and modes of computer analysis, it is perhaps not surprising that it is modes of distant reading that have been more readily endorsed by the majority of digital humanities projects relating to literary enquiry.

However, alternative digital humanities methodologies currently available and utilized in a number of humanities projects are more amenable to and in keeping with practices of close reading. In the field of digital humanities more generally, text

encoding has been identified as the digital humanities methodology most suitable for accommodating the complex processes of interpretation (Warwick 1999; Buzzetti 2002; McCarty 2007; McGann 2004) and textual analysis.

In his important essay, “Text Encoding and Enrichment” (1991), Michael Sperberg-McQueen, co-editor of the TEI Guidelines, provides a succinct account of text encoding:

Before they can be studied with the aid of machines, texts must be encoded in a machine-readable form. Methods for this transcription are called, generically, “text encoding schemes”; such schemes must provide mechanisms for representing the characters of the text and its logical and physical structure [...] ancillary information achieved by analysis or interpretation [may be also added] (Sperberg-McQueen 1991).

As Aja Teehan and John Keating (2010) note, the encoding mechanism largely practiced within the humanities computing community is represented by the TEI (Text Encoding Initiative), which “seeks to provide a set of guidelines for encoding humanities documents” (Teehan and Keating 381). TEI is defined as,

an international and interdisciplinary standard that helps libraries, museums, publishers, and individual scholars represent all kinds of literary and linguistic texts for online research and teaching, using an encoding scheme that is maximally expressive and minimally obsolescent (<http://www.tei-c.org/>).

On the TEI website, the editors further state that “TEI defines in a precise way an elaborate set of textual information fields so that a computer can search and analyze the texts with respect to those predefined fields and extract the marked or ‘structured’ information” (ibid).

While TEI is the encoding language of choice for many digital humanities projects, Teehan and Keating have called attention to the limitations thereof. As they point out, “[i]f a given project’s perspective on the documents and their uses are not encapsulated within TEI then it is not the most suitable tool for encoding in that project” (Teehan and Keating 385). Instead of adapting predefined markup language, they suggest that,

a custom designed tool would be beneficial as it encapsulates, and has been specifically adapted to, the particular needs of the encoder [...] along with the characteristics of his objective [...] and the source he is working with [...] (Teehan and Keating 385).

In their own scholarly work, Teehan and Keating, following the work of John Bradley (Bradley 2005) and Willard McCarty (McCarty 2008), have employed another markup language, namely XML (Extensible Markup Language) that permits a greater degree of flexibility on the part of the user and is thus more formidable for the specificities of individual use cases. Hence it is particularly suitable for use in literary investigations where subjective interpretation is a central element to the production of works of literary scholarship (Ramsay 2008).

While this encoding method is particularly suitable for modelling subjective interpretation, it too has its limitations. For one, manual text encoding can often be a labour intensive and time consuming process, particularly if one wishes to mark up large portions of text. Additionally, given that one of the most appealing features of this encoding language is that it enables subjective interpretation, it is most usefully employed when the encoder and the humanities scholar are one and the same person. This requires that the humanities scholar have a working knowledge of the encoding language being used. While a number of user-friendly XML-editors are available, efficient use thereof requires hands-on experience over a period of time. Most significantly, for the concerns here however, XML can yield bespoke, yet idiosyncratic projects¹.

For the case study provided in this chapter, XML was employed. Owing to the flexibility of the language, it was considered the most suitable encoding language for enabling the types of close readings and interpretations that this author sought to

¹ The brief summaries of TEI or XML provided here are by no means full accounts of the complexities regarding each encoding language, nor the relationship between them. Such overviews have been provided elsewhere, for example, in Allen H. Renear's essay "Text Encoding" which appears in *A Companion to the Digital Humanities* (Schreibman et al. eds. 2004).

conduct. In order for the XML encoding to be specific to and reflective of this author's engagement with the texts under examination, the tags were designed to cater specifically to the research question being addressed. The segments of texts being analyzed in the study were then marked up manually (by this author) using the specified tags (see Appendix 1). While this hands on engagement with this specific digital humanities methodology engendered new forms of "close reading" which, unlike traditional practices, were visible and traceable, it rendered the project a work of a specialist in Irish literature and bound to an individual case study. A key challenge engendered by the digital humanities approach being endorsed here was thus to devise a means of situating this individual close reading of a work of national literature, facilitated through the use of XML, within a world literature framework.

The hands on engagement with XML facilitated by this case study thus revealed that, in keeping with David Damrosch's observations regarding debates in the field of world literature, the challenge facing those working in the digital literary studies is to establish a methodology which "mediates between broad, but often reductive overviews" as yielded by quantitative modes of analysis and "intensive, but often atomistic, close readings" facilitated by bespoke text encoding methodologies (*What is World Literature?* 26). Hence, Damrosch's recent observations as to the need for a "middle-distance" reading serve to point to a potential "third way": what Damrosch has referred to as "a more solid middle-distance reading than we can reach either by close or distant reading alone" (Damrosch qtd. in "Crunching Words in Greater Numbers"). While this reference to a middle distance remains for now quite underdeveloped – particularly in comparison to its close and distant counterparts – it suggests a form of reading that can also accommodate a key fault line in Moretti's argument – local narrative voice.

As previously noted, in “Conjectures on World Literature” (2000), Moretti specifies that the main goal of distant reading and world literature is to provide a “thorn in the side, a permanent intellectual challenge to national literatures” (68). However, even within Moretti’s arguments for extending analysis beyond the confines of national literature, the necessity for a specialist, local knowledge is occasionally acknowledged. In “Conjectures on World Literature”, Moretti concedes that “the narrator’s voice” is the “key variable element” that disrupts a distant or generalist approach to literature (65-6). As the embodiment of “local form” through “local narrative voice”, “the narrator is the pole of comment, of explanation, of evaluation” (66); when “foreign ‘formal patterns’ (or actual foreign presence, for that matter) make characters behave in strange ways [...] then of course comment becomes uneasy—garrulous, erratic, rudderless” (66). Tellingly, it is at this point – that of “local narrative voice” – that the generalist must yield to the specialist’s knowledge and methods of close reading in order to make sense of the “erratic” comment that the local narrator relays.

As narrative voice complicates Moretti’s form of distant reading, by extension, it also complicates attempts at performing the types of digital humanities methodologies that have become associated with this mode of reading. Taking this problematic as the impetus for our case study, we sought to develop and implement a digital humanities research method, based on close textual reading of blocks of selected text, paying particular attention to the interrelation of narrative voice and narrative theme, and, within the area of theme, to references to trauma and to cultural context with a view to elucidating not only the text’s “generalist” and “specialist” dimensions but, crucially, also their interrelationship. In so doing, we sought to investigate whether the digital humanities approach endorsed here could elucidate

the novel under examination and to shed light on some controversies regarding the novel's reception.

3. Case Study

3.1. "Local Narrative Voice" in *The Secret Scripture*

The Secret Scripture is set in present-day Ireland and tells the story of the 100-year old Roseanne Clear who was incarcerated in the Sligo Mental Asylum at some point during the mid-twentieth century. The story is relayed through a double narrative: the personal recollections of Roseanne relayed in her "Testimony of Herself" and the observations made by her psychiatrist, Dr. Grene, in his own investigation into Roseanne's admittance into the hospital, which are recorded in his "Commonplace Book". Although the novel shifts between the first-person narratives of Roseanne and Dr. Grene, Roseanne's voice is the more prominent of the two throughout the novel.

While *The Secret Scripture* has enjoyed a very positive reception and a number of literary awards, some divergence exists among critics in their evaluation of the efficacy of the narrative voice. For many critics and readers, Roseanne's voice is what renders the story being recounted so powerful. Writing for *The Daily Telegraph*, David Robson goes so far as to argue that in Roseanne Clear, Barry has "created one of the most memorable narrators in recent fiction" (Robson 2008). Robson's claim was echoed by Matthew Parris, chair of the 2008 Costa Book Award judging panel, who argues that in Roseanne, "Sebastian Barry has created one of the great narrative voices in contemporary fiction" (Parris qtd. in Robson 2008). However, curiously, and as recorded by the Independent Arts Correspondent on 28 January 2009, the judges awarded the prize to Barry in spite of their explicit

acknowledgement that the book was “flawed in many ways”. The strongest criticism was generated by the novel’s ending while another critique centred on the “voice” of Dr. Grene. For Parris, “it was the narrative strength of the central character, Roseanne, which helped Barry triumph [...] In Roseanne, a narrator had been created that is so transcendent that it redeems all of the structural weaknesses of the book” (Parris qtd. in Akbar 2009).

However, Barry’s use of Roseanne as first-person narrator has also generated strong critical scepticism regarding the credibility of her voice. Writer Adam Roberts takes issue with the plausibility of the prose allocated to Roseanne, arguing that

I’ve only known one 100-year, and she hardly spoke at all. Most centurions, I’d wager, limit themselves to “pardon?” and “the nurses are stealing my clothes”, and few if any are capable of eloquence like this: “There was a black river that flowed through the town, and if it had no grace for the mortal beings, it did for swans and many swans resorted there, and even rode the river like some kind of plunging animals, in floods” (Roberts 2008).

In *The New Statesman*, Robert Hanks also questions the success of the narrative voice on account of “Barry’s failure to give his two narrators sufficiently distinct voices” (Hanks 2008). According to Hanks,

Dr Grene was educated in England, and at one point says that nobody could mistake him for an Irishman, whereas he is at times almost stage Irish. The book is also marred by a self-consciously literary quality, manifested in Roseanne’s improbable attachment to Sir Thomas Browne’s *Religio Medici* and the predictable unreliability of the narrators (Hanks 2008).

A second and related significant thread within critical reception of the novel is its status as “national narrative”. While Roseanne’s narrative relays a subjective account of her own personal history, numerous critics have noted the conflation between personal history and Irish history that occurs in *The Secret Scripture*. Anna Leach calls attention to the fact that “as the country of Ireland, or Éire, is often represented as a woman, it is not difficult to see parallels between the plight of Roseanne, beautiful and abused, and the plight of the country” (Leach 2008). Writing for *The New York Times*, Art Winslow notes that in *The Secret Scripture*, “personal fate and

national fate are incestuously bound” (Winslow 2009). And according to the publishing blurb circulated by publisher Faber and Faber, “Roseanne’s story becomes an alternative, secret, history of Ireland” (faberandfaber.co.uk, 2008).

However, the extent, to which Barry has been successful in combining personal history with national history has also produced disagreement among critics and readers. For Leach, Roseanne’s story is at times “rendered more symbolic than human”, which she sees as ultimately weakening the credibility of Barry’s plot (Leach 2008). Similarly, Deborah Cameron, writing for ABC Sydney, also questions the degree to which Barry successfully portrays both a personal and a national narrative through Roseanne’s first-person narrative: she asks whether Roseanne “live[s] and breathe[s] as an independent character” or if she is “a puppet, jerked around to illustrate various events from Ireland’s past” (Cameron 2010). Underlying this particular issue is a suggestive and significant debate regarding the novel’s attempt to convey both a personal and national trauma, not only as a historical event but one of acute relevance to contemporary Ireland.

3.2. National Literature, Narrative Voice and the Digital Humanities

Owing to the debates surrounding narrative technique in *The Secret Scripture* and its status as a national novel, it therefore provides an especially interesting case study for examining how the formal feature of “narrative voice” employed by the author affects the content of the novel and its reception. This literary enquiry centrally informs our specialist approach and the construction of a related digital humanities methodology, informed by Damrosch’s theoretical framework for the study of world literature. The case study was a collaborative exercise which took place over a time period of approximately eighteen months, involving computer science researchers

and IT personnel (software engineer). The members of the interdisciplinary team who worked on the case study were: Sonia Howell, Dr. John Keating, Prof. Margaret Kelleher, Aja Teehan and Damien Gallagher. Sonia Howell was the literary scholar upon whose doctoral research the case study was based. Dr. John Keating, Aja Teehan and Damien Gallagher were the humanities computing researchers who brought the humanities computing and ICT skills to the project and Prof. Margaret Kelleher provided additional humanities expertise that the project required. While the team members were experts in either the field of literary scholarship or computer science, it is important to note that their input into the project was not limited to either of their respective disciplines. Rather, in this case study which employed a digital humanities or humanities computing approach, the ICT specialists became as involved in developments in the humanities research as the literary scholars. Equally so, the humanities scholars became intimately involved in the design and development of the digital software, frequently carrying out hands-on work during the design process.

Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the research team sought to establish in the first instance whether the tools and methodologies of digital humanities provide a means of staging Damrosch's theoretical framework and whether this combination of a literary methodology with digital humanities tools and methodologies would provide a means of bridging the divide between specialist and generalist modes of scholarship in the field of world literature, thus enhancing the study of national literatures in a world literature context. In early meetings between members of the research team, it was discovered that what is meant by the terms "generalist" and "specialist" in the field of world literature remain considerably vague in Damrosch's own work. Hence, before commencing work on the project, it

was necessary to establish what we understood by the terms. As applied in this case study, “specialist approach” was taken to denote a close textual reading of an individual literary work within its culture of origins. A “specialist” was understood to be a person who possesses an expert knowledge of the national literary context in which the work under examination was produced. Conversely, the term “generalist approach” as deployed here refers to modes of analysis which encompass more than one literary text. A “generalist” is understood to be an individual who analyzes a literary text outside of the national literary context in which it was produced through comparative analysis or other systemic approach.

In this interdisciplinary project, we sought to expand Damrosch’s theoretical methodology by conducting a case study that initially employed both specialist and generalist modes of analysis through a) a close reading of *The Secret Scripture*’s “narrative voice” and b) reading the text through a comparative analysis with Pat Barker’s *Regeneration* (1993), again through a focus on narrative voice. We chose the term “literary analyst” to differentiate between the research team that produced this paper and the individual literary scholar who performed the case study. As the doctoral research upon which this research project was based was concerned with an analysis of Irish literature within a world literature context, we were primarily concerned with addressing the implications for specialists. As such, the focus of this case study was on how the analyst’s specialist reading of an Irish novel is affected by the application of this particular world literature methodology and how it may be enhanced.

In order for the case study to illuminate a specialist approach, at least one of the texts utilized had to be derived from the literary analyst’s immediate sphere of expertise, namely, contemporary Irish writing. *The Secret Scripture* by Irish writer,

Sebastian Barry was the novel chosen. *The Secret Scripture* is set in present day Ireland and consists, as noted earlier, of a double narrative: the personal recollections of Roseanne Clear, who was incarcerated in a mental institution during the mid twentieth century, and the account by the psychiatrist, Dr. Grene of his own investigation into Roseanne's admittance into the hospital. The novel's content thus relays an account of an individual trauma that is intimately related to what is considered to be a "cultural trauma". As the narrative is relayed through the use of the first-person, the effect of narrative voice is a significant feature of the text. Focusing on the passages of dialogue between the patient and therapist in the novel, the analyst wished to investigate whether the use of narrative voice served to enhance or support the cultural specificity of the novel. Moreover, she also sought to determine the extent to which the cultural specificity impacted on the trauma being relayed.

Moving beyond the immediate sphere of her specialist expertise, the analyst also sought to study *The Secret Scripture* within a generalist framework by comparing the use of local narrative voice in the Irish novel to that in a work from another culture of origin, namely Pat Barker's *Regeneration*. By reading a text from a different culture of origin alongside one which was produced within her own home culture, the analyst sought to establish the consequences of different cultural contexts for textual readings. Set in Britain in the early twentieth century, *Regeneration* is based on the real-life experiences of British army officers being treated for shell shock during World War I at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh. Its narrative relays the treatment of soldiers suffering mental break down. It is shaped predominately around the discussions which the psychiatrist Dr. Rivers has with a number of patients within the asylum in which he works, most notably

those with the war poet, Siegfried Sassoon. This novel utilizes the narrative technique of “free-indirect discourse”, which shifts between various characters’ perspectives throughout. Thus, like *The Secret Scripture*, *Regeneration* provides an account of an individual trauma which is also intimately related to a cultural trauma of its culture of origins. As with *The Secret Scripture* also, “narrative voice” is a distinctive feature in Barker’s novel. Thus, in comparing the two texts, our “unit of analysis”, to use Moretti’s terminology, was “narrative voice”.

3.3. New Convergences: Digital Humanities Methodologies and Close Reading

In order for the digital humanities tool to be developed that was most in keeping with traditional scholarly practices in literary scholarship, it was necessary for the analyst on the research team to specify how she would approach the research question without the use of digital tools. As the research question was concerned with examining the use of narrative voice, for this evaluation, the analyst in this case study sought to conduct a narratological examination of both texts, with a specific focus on trauma and cultural context. Based upon the structuralist analysis of narrative put forth in the work of Claude Levi-Strauss (1957), the underlying thesis of narratology is that the same mode of analysis can be applied to any fictional work (Macey 265). It is thus a mode of metacriticism, or in Damrosch’s terminology, a generalist approach to literary analysis. However, recent work on narratology has called attention to the fact that narrative is context sensitive, and that the formal structures of narrative are inflected by cultural contexts (Nünning 2003; Helms 2003). Hence cultural narratology combines a mode of metacriticism in the form of formal analysis, with microcriticism in the form of close textual and contextual reading.

Having established that cultural and contextual narratology provides a theoretical framework that draws on both generalist and specialist modes of literary scholarship, this theoretical model could be applied to the analysis of the two novels under examination. Following an established methodology, a close textual reading of both texts was conducted, with particular attention to a) narrative structure, b) references to trauma and c) references to cultural context. Text that exemplified these indicators was highlighted in the passages of dialogue between the patient and therapist in the two texts. Commentary giving details of a particular decision could be recorded either in the form of annotations in the margins of the novels themselves, or through the addition of post-its. Finally, a record of the elements that had been selected was generated. Having carried out these processes for both texts, the analyst sought to compare the significant features of the two novels relevant to her research question.

Commenting on the process involved in literary scholarship, Stephen Ramsay (2003) notes that literary scholars “select”, “isolate” and “notice” a “small groups of sub-patterns from the infinity of patterns that make up the text”. Having done this, they then “re-articulate those patterns in narrative form as elucidations of the texts in which they occur”. According to Ramsay, these articulations are called “meanings”, and “we call the act of embedding them in a narrative framework ‘interpretation’” (“Towards an Algorithmic Criticism” 171). Ramsay’s overview of scholarly procedures in literary analysis is confirmed by the description of the literary approach to the case study discussed here.

However, Ramsay also calls attention to the fact that despite the significant ideological implications that are inherent in literary scholarship, little attention is

paid to the processes of selection and interpretation that attend work in the field.

Following Wittgenstein, he argues that:

Throwing away the ladder [...] has [...] been the consistent method of literary criticism, which, as a rhetorical practice, is indeed often concerned with finding ways to conceal these steps by making it seem as if the author went from the open possibilities of signification in Lear to the hidden significance of the Fool in a single bound (171).

That is to say, the subjective interpretations of literary scholars are often presented as final products, while the steps taken in producing them are discarded. We begin at A and end up at Z: what happens in between is not of concern.

Yet as the literary critic Raymond Williams observed as far back as 1973, “the relationship between the making of a work of art and its reception is always active, and subject to conventions, which in themselves are forms of (changing) social organization” (Williams 47). Essentially, literary criticism is a sophisticated form of reception. As such, Williams argues – somewhat prophetically for digital humanities – that for a correct and useful approach to literary studies, we must “discover the nature of its practice and then its conditions” as opposed to focusing solely on the text itself (Williams 47).

For the purpose of this case study, the attention to process was particularly significant as the analyst was concerned with comparing a generalist and specialist approach, and diverse specialist approaches, to a literary text. To base this comparison of these modes of analysis on findings alone would be to deny an engagement with the complex activities that are inherent therein, and which, as we shall discuss below, are as telling as the findings that are revealed from their application.

Once the traditional methodology was established, the software tools were designed to support the scholar/analyst in its application. The research aimed to investigate 1)

features of narrative structure, 2) indicators of trauma and 3) indicators of cultural context through first identifying these characteristics within the text, and then examining their relationship to one another. In so doing, the analyst sought to establish whether the cultural specificity of the content inflected upon the narrative structure and on the trauma being relayed. The technical development of the encoding schema and the digital software were carried out by Aja Teehan, John Keating, assisted by Damien Gallagher, and the following section is especially indebted to their work and expertise in this regard².

As we were dealing with a literary text as opposed to a factual account or report, the manner in which cultural specificity manifested itself within the novels under examination required human interpretation. Early design meetings called attention to the fact that permitting human interpretation, would be a vital user requirement of the software. In order to accommodate this, the encoding language of XML was used to enable the analyst to identify the characteristics within the text. As the analyst was also concerned with narrative structure, XML was also considered an appropriate markup language for this purpose. Building on the XML encodings of the narrative form and the content, a visualization tool was designed to manipulate the XML-encoded data model, and support the scholar's activities.

After much debate concerning the design of appropriate tags for the needs of the use case, we began by marking up the narrative structure of both *The Secret Scripture* and *Regeneration*, using the tags <narrator participant= "patient"> and <narrator participant= "therapist"> in the passages of dialogue between patient and therapist in both texts. As the analyst carried out the XML encodings herself, in carrying out this process she discovered that the initial two tags that had been

² Research for this section has been derived from a paper co-authored by the members of the research team which is currently under review with the *Digital Humanities Quarterly* Journal (Howell; Keating; Teehan; Kelleher, 2012).

designed for marking up the narrative structure were in fact overly simplified to accommodate the complexity of narrative technique in either of the novels under examination. Hence, in a reflexive and iterative process, the encoding scheme developed to include an activity attribute, which was introduced to record whether the narrator was “doing” (i.e. moving, looking away and so forth), “speaking”, “thinking” or “narrating”. The participant attribute was also altered to allow the value “omniscient_narrator”, which appeared sporadically throughout *Regeneration* but had not been considered in the initial design brief.

Similarly, in marking the indicators of cultural context, it was discovered that there were various types thereof within the passages. For example, within both novels there were direct references to specific place names, but there were also less explicit indicators such as the use of colloquialisms within the dialogue. When marking up indicators of trauma it was discovered that the trauma tag was also being applied to both overt and covert indicators of trauma. Using the original trauma tag, the differences between direct reference to the patient’s trauma and more implicit references (in the form of the patient’s refusal to answer when questioned about an area relating to the source of their trauma) could not be charted. In order to allow the encoder to specify the differences between these types of indicators, “implicit” and “explicit” descriptors were included. Given the subjective nature of this interpretive process, it was considered useful to capture the reasoning behind each mark-up decision. Hence, a “comment” attribute was added to the cultural context and trauma tags to record this.

Figure 1.

```

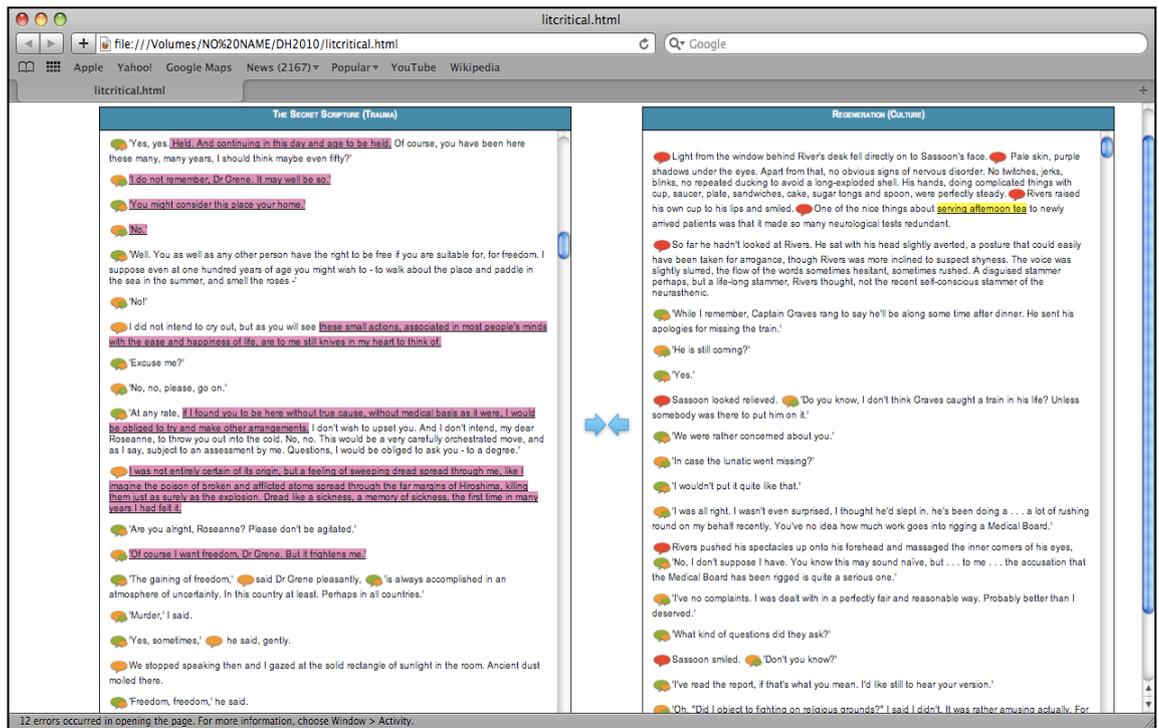
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking"><'At any rate,<trauma
indicator="implicit" comment="doctor broaching on sensitive ground for the patient">
if I found you to be here without true cause, without medical basis as it were, I
would be obliged to try and make other arrangements. </trauma> I don't wish to upset
you. And <trauma indicator="implicit" comment="suggests Roseanne's
institutionalization and lack of life outside of the hospital ">I don't intend, my
dear Roseanne, to throw you out into the cold </trauma>. No, no. This would be a very
carefully orchestrated move, and as I say, subject to an assessment by me. Questions,
I would be obliged to ask you - to a degree.'</narrator>|

```

Sample of XML encoding of trauma and narrator.

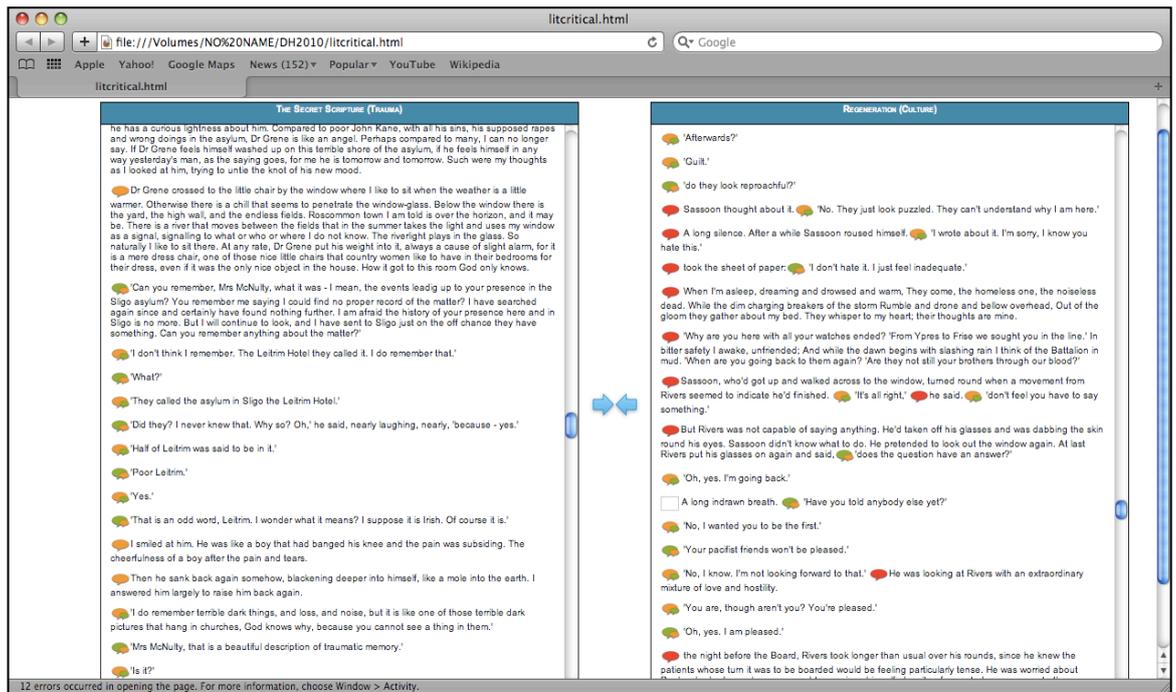
Building on the XML encodings, an appropriate front end was required to house the marked up texts. Moreover, based on the needs of the user for whom the software was being designed (in this case, the literary analyst), it was established that the software should not only enable data display but should also permit a degree of user interaction with the encoded information. Based on the user requirements, it was determined that the software that would house the encoded texts should be as conducive to conducting comparative analyses as possible. Hence it was proposed that the interface should be divided to contain two scroll panes. In these panes, the user could select which novels and which encodings (trauma or cultural context) they wished to compare (*Figure 2*).

Figure 2.



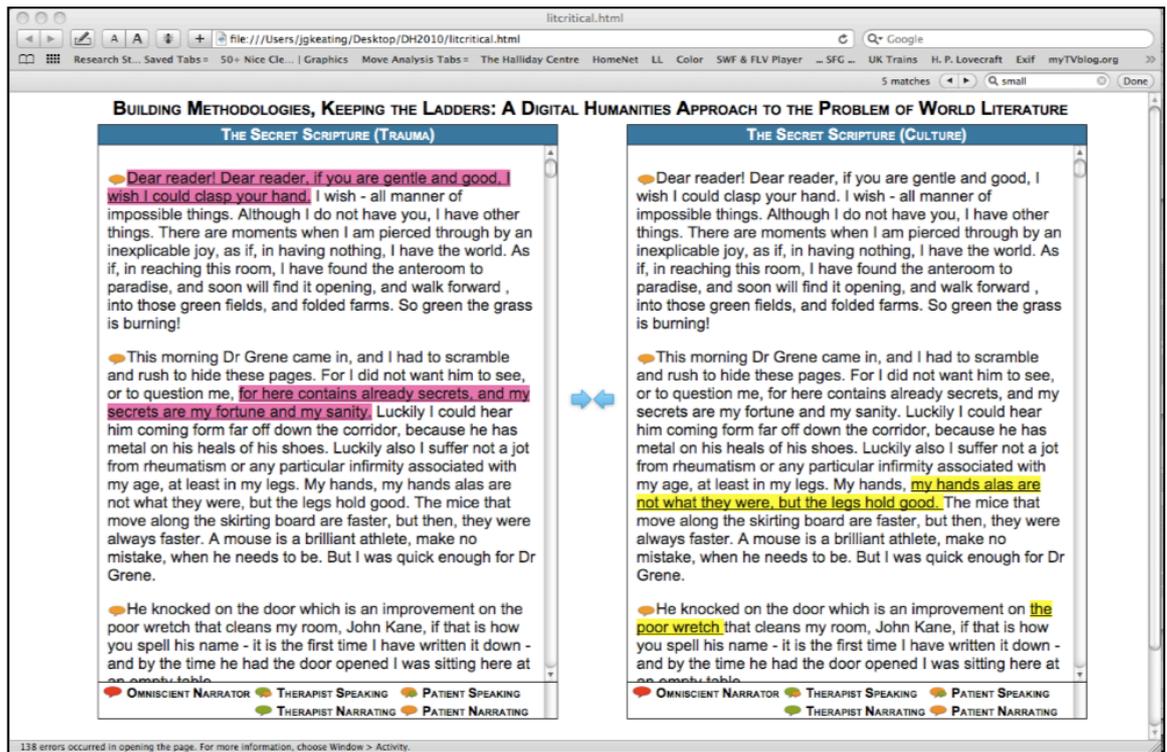
Coloured speech bubbles were employed to designate the various narrator participants: green was used for the therapists' speech, orange for the patients' and red for that of the omniscient narrator. When the narrator participants were engaged in dialogue, two overlapping speech bubbles were used to denote this, with the speech bubble of the character that was speaking being the larger of the two. While a user engaging with the software can shift between encodings of cultural context and trauma, the visualisation of the narrative structure in both novels remains permanent (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.



The segments of text that were marked up as indicators of cultural context and trauma appear as highlighted text. The sections of text marked as cultural context were highlighted in yellow, and those of cultural context in light purple. These colours were chosen since: a) they are easy on the eye; b) they allow the highlighted text to be easily read, and: c) when the two are overlapped, one colour does not dominate over the other (see *Figure 4*).

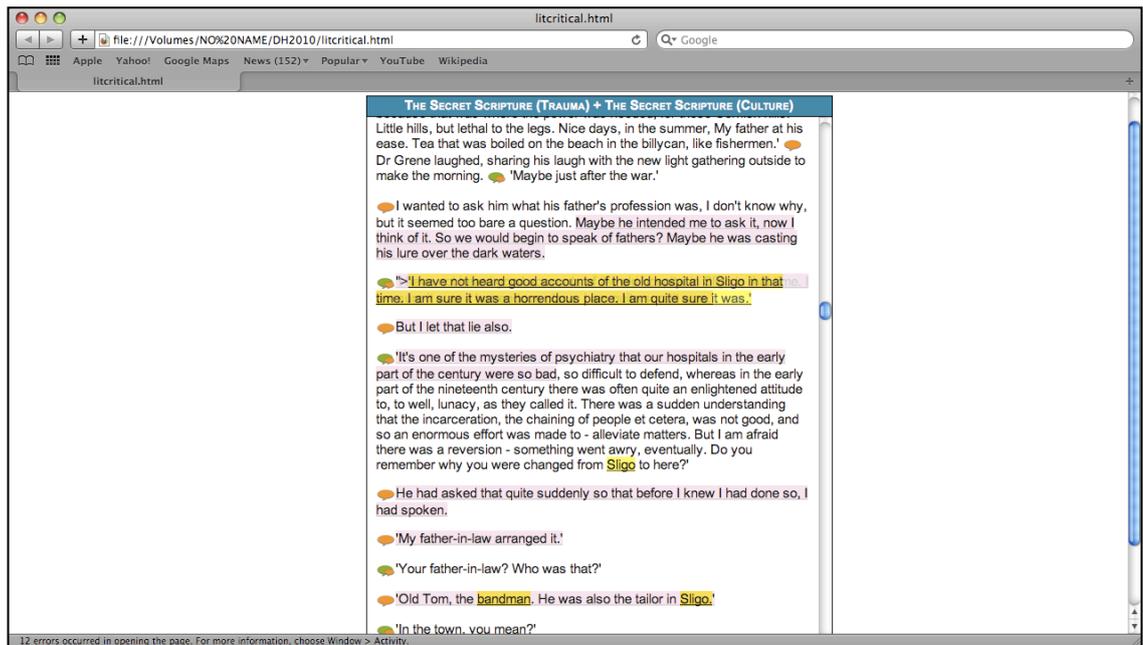
Figure 4.



A scroll function was also applied to the two panes to enable the user to scroll down through the texts in both panes to examine the respective encodings. Using the scroll function, the user could a) compare and contrast the degree to which cultural context and trauma appeared within the one text; or b) compare the extent to which markers of cultural context or trauma appeared in *The Secret Scripture* or *Regeneration*. The panes could also be set to scroll simultaneously to enable the user to examine the respective encodings on a line-by-line basis.

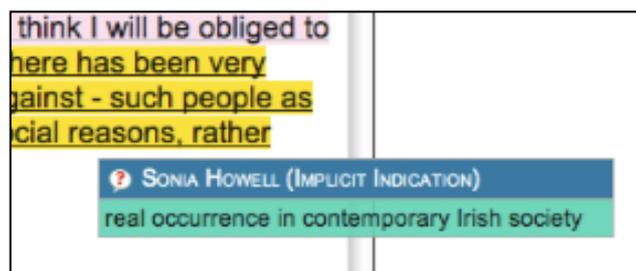
The overlap function was designed in order to permit the literary analyst to see where the various forms of encoding overlapped. For example, by setting both scroll panes to *The Secret Scripture*, the user could utilize the overlap function to see which segments of texts were marked as both indicators of cultural context and as trauma (Figure 5).

Figure 5.



The comments inserted by the encoder during the mark up process were visualised in a comment box, headed with the name of the user who had carried out the encoding (similar to the insert comment function in Microsoft Word). This box appeared when the person engaging with the software placed the cursor over any of the highlighted text in any of the encodings of trauma or cultural context in either *The Secret Scripture* or *Regeneration* (Figure 6).

Figure 6.



3.4. Narrative Voice and Cultural Specificity in *The Secret Scripture*

In this study, the analyst was specifically interested in the implications of “narrative voice”, as this was an element of the literary text which, as argued above, potentially mediates between generalist and specialist approaches. While an analysis of the respective narrative structures would be possible without the software, the visualization thereof enabled the user to compare more readily the various narrative techniques and, in this case study, some illuminating textual features emerged.

Before outlining the insights that were gained from an engagement with the software, it is useful to outline what the digital tool enabled the analyst to do. As the software was expanded to permit developments in the original research question, for clarity, the original version is referred to as Version 1 and the subsequent version as Version 2.

Version 1

1) The visualization of the markup of the narrative structure enables the analyst to:

- a) identify the degree to which the various characters dominate the dialogue.
- b) identify the degree to which the omniscient narrator is utilized in the passages of dialogue between patient and therapist.
- c) identify the degree to which the narrative is autodiegetic.

2) As the cultural context and trauma encodings are embedded within that of the narrative structure, the software enables the analyst to identify within whose narrative voice and how frequently the indicators of cultural context and trauma appear.

- 3) The overlap function enables the analyst to identify the segments of text where indicators of cultural context and trauma co-occur within either of the novels.
- 4) By setting the panes to either trauma or cultural context, the analyst can visually compare the degree to which they appear in either of the novels.
- 5) The visualization of the markup also permits the analyst to identify the elements of the text that were not marked as significant indicators of either cultural context or trauma.

The visualization of the narrative structure in both texts revealed that although the passages selected from the two novels were chosen on the basis that they contained dialogue between the patient and therapist, the amount of information that is relayed in conversation between the patient and therapist is notably less in *The Secret Scripture* than in *Regeneration*. This was somewhat surprising as, unlike *Regeneration*, an omniscient narrator does not feature in *The Secret Scripture*. However, the visualization of the encoding of the narrative structure also highlights the degree to which *The Secret Scripture* is autodiegetic, whereby Roseanne, the novel's protagonist, narrates the story in which she herself is a character. The degree to which Roseanne narrates her own story serves to support claims that she is indeed the "pole of comment" around which the narrative is based. As Roseanne is a character rooted in a culturally specific place, according to Moretti's understanding of "narrative voice", the specialist's knowledge is required in order to grasp the degree to which this subjectivity inflects upon the story being told.

By visualizing the encodings of cultural context and trauma within those of the novels' narrative structures, the software further enabled the analyst to examine visually how the formal features of narrative, or the "style", interact with the narratological "discourse", that is, with the story being told (see Shen 136-149).

Interestingly, in *Version 1* of the software, the segments of texts marked up as indicative of trauma in *The Secret Scripture* appear most frequently either in Dr. Grene's dialogue or within Roseanne's narration, not, as one might expect, in her response to the therapist who questions her on the very matter. The interaction of form and content thus emphasizes Roseanne's unwillingness to voice her trauma. As Roseanne's trauma was due in part to a patriarchal, Irish society denying her a voice with which to assert herself or her rights, the narrative structure supports the thematic content of the novel. More generally, it reflects the physical and social silencing of women in Ireland in the early to mid twentieth century and the difficulties in accessing their stories.

Conversely, in *Regeneration*, trauma indicators are distributed more evenly across the discourse between the patient and the therapist and the omniscient narration. However, on closer inspection, one notices that when omniscient narration is employed, it is focalized predominantly through the character of Dr. Rivers due to the author's use of free-indirect discourse. Thus, the indicators of trauma in *Regeneration* are presented more frequently through the therapist's perspective. Barker's use of narrative structure in turn supports the approach to psychotherapy actually employed by the historical Dr. Rivers. As Robert Hemmings has noted:

Rivers developed a therapeutic treatment based upon the principle of catharsis whereby the patient was encouraged to eschew repressive tendencies and give voice to the traumatic memories [...] without dwelling excessively upon them. Patient and physician would work together to construct from these painful memories a narrative that found some tolerable, or redeeming, even pleasant association for the trauma (Hemmings 114).

Utilizing the visualization aspect more extensively, the analyst overlapped the encodings for both novels in order to compare to what extent the traumas depicted in *Regeneration* and *The Secret Scripture* were culturally specific. As both novels are related to events that have caused a "cultural trauma" to the respective nations in which they are set, the analyst expected to discover a significant degree of

overlap between the encodings of trauma and cultural context. However, it emerged that the degree of overlap was relatively small. The lack thereof inspired the analyst to re-examine the segments of text marked as cultural context; this was an act of critical self-reflexivity that was made possible by the fact that her encodings had been captured and visualized by the software.

Of the two novels, the overlap occurred most frequently in *Regeneration*. On closer inspection, the analyst discovered that her criteria for marking cultural context were based predominantly on explicit indicators, such as place names, historical personage and colloquialisms. While both novels recount events that are intimately related to events in the histories of their respective cultures, *Regeneration* is the more overtly historical of the two whereby factual information is frequently utilized throughout the course of the narrative. This would account for the fact that the analyst marked more indicators of cultural context in Barker's novel than in the Irish text.

However, on returning to her markup of *The Secret Scripture*, the analyst noticed that she had failed to encode a number of significant elements of the text that were related to cultural context due to her limited definition of indicators of cultural context. More so than Barker, Sebastian Barry employs a prose style which is "full of gleaming images" (Gatti 2008) and it is through his creative use of images that he ties his novel to an Irish cultural context. For example, Roseanne's references to "salmon" evoke an image that is intimately bound not only to the Irish environment, but also to Irish mythology owing to its associations with stories relating to the Irish Fianna. Hence, upon engaging with her own encodings visualized in the software, the analyst became aware of her failure to account for significant features of the text that would have impacted significantly on their attempt to answer her original

research question. Consequently, the manner in which indicators of cultural context become manifest in *The Secret Scripture* also provides evidence as to why generalist approaches, such as distance reading, are not adequate in and of themselves for analyzing literary works as such approaches cannot engage with the specificities of the manner in which readings of individual texts emerge.

3.5. “The Ideal Reader”: Capturing Reader Response in the Process of Critical Interpretation

The software was first presented at the Digital Humanities Conference 2010 (Howell; Keating; Kelleher, June 2010) where the audience attending the event was made up of an eclectic mix of humanities researchers stemming from disciplines such as history, literary studies, music and media studies. Also in attendance were computer scientists, programmers, software developers, and interface designers. The papers presented at the conference reflected the eclectic mix of disciplines with papers covering topics ranging from the digitization of Beckett’s letters to the use of T-Tests and Zeta for the testing of authorship attribution. Some papers were the product of collaborative research between humanities scholars and ICT specialists; others were given by individuals who had taken it upon themselves to begin dabbling with either ICT or with humanities scholarship.

The feedback our project received following our presentation was extremely positive. Literary scholars in attendance were particularly encouraged by the idea that through engaged collaborative work, software could be designed to assist in literary research in a manner that was in keeping with traditional scholarly practices within the field. Those coming from computer science research area saw the iterative and collaborative design process as being beneficial to the production of a tool that

was of specific use to the humanities researcher. Scholars in both communities considered our software and our methodology to be a positive example of how digital resources can be developed and employed to assist with the investigation of a specific research problematic in literary scholarship.

During the questions and answers session, we received one enquiry regarding the usability of the software on texts other than those utilized in our case study and whether scholars other than the literary analyst in the case study could comment on the text. This later question was particularly timely, as at this point, we had determined that a useful further development of the software would be to enable the input of multiple markers. As previously established, Damrosch pays limited if any detailed attention to the reception of literary works when read within their own culture of origin. While Damrosch maintains that a work “manifests differently abroad than it does at home” (*What is World Literature?* 6), the analyst in this case study sought to utilize the software to examine whether there was conformity across the manner in which the Irish novel, *The Secret Scripture*, was received when read within its culture of origins. By capturing the specialist readings of one text we sought to provide the literary analyst with additional insight into the work when read within its culture of origins by diverse readers. Hence, to accommodate this evolved research concern, and shortly after its initial dissemination, the software was developed further to include the input of multiple scholars engaging with *The Secret Scripture*. Expanding the commenting functionality, we deployed contributions by ten literary scholars of various nationalities who were asked to mark up the same segment of text from *The Secret Scripture* (see Appendix 2) and to specify the reasoning behind their choice of markup. Having collected this data from the various participants, the analyst sought to utilize the software to investigate the degree to

which variation or conformity occurred among scholars considered to be specialists in the field of Irish literary studies as they engaged with the text under examination.

The selected participants for this exercise were chosen from the confirmed list of attendees who would be present at the IASIL³ Conference held in Maynooth in July 2010. In selecting participants from the IASIL attendee list, we consciously limited our sample to specialists in the field of Irish studies. The nationalities of the participants were as follows: Participants 1-4 were of Irish origins; Participants 5, 6 and 10 were from the United States; Participant 7 was from the Czech Republic; Participant 8 was Spanish and; Participant 9 was Canadian-Irish. Due to work commitments, Participant 10 could not partake in the exercise, thus leaving the ratio of national and international participants at 4:5. Within this small sample, we were interested in establishing how this specialist expertise differed within the interpretive community.

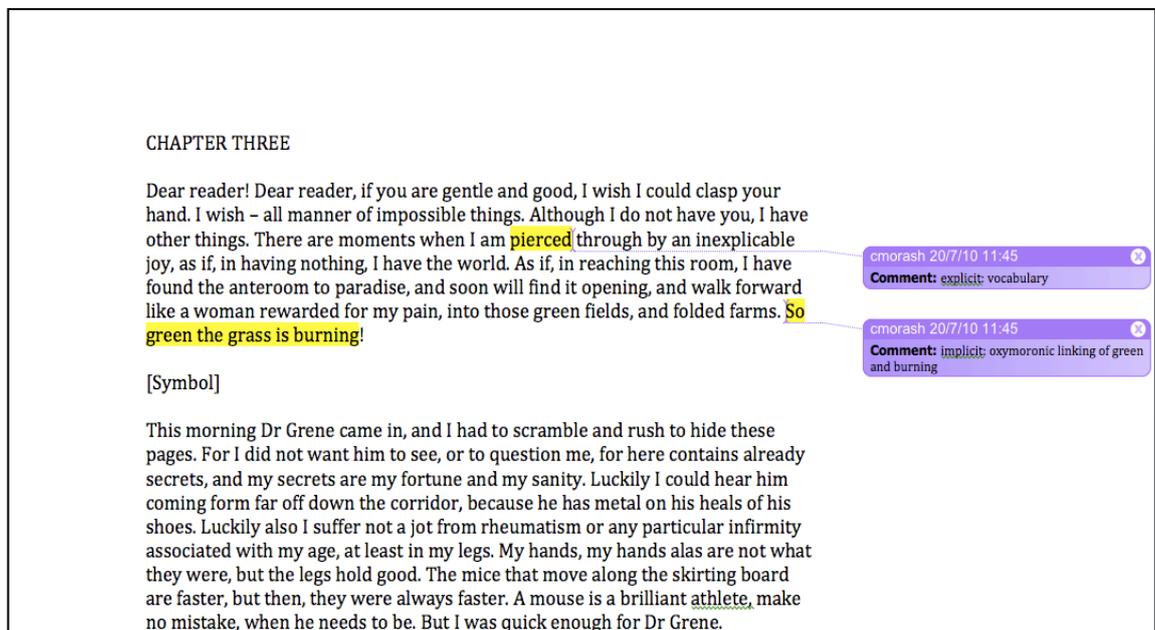
Each participant was sent three passages of dialogue between the patient and therapist in *The Secret Scripture* in two different files; one entitled Secret_Scripture_Trauma, the other Secret_Scripture_Cultural_Context. As *The Secret Scripture* was within copyright, it was not freely available in digital form. Hence, the analyst had to transcribe the selected passages from the novel into a Word file before any computation could be performed. In total, there were seven passages which contained the desired information which equated to 9,968 words when typed.

As the participants had limited, if any, experience in XML encoding, they were asked to conduct the exercise using Microsoft Word's highlighting and insert comment features: had we requested that they carry out the exercise in XML, it is unlikely that any of the contributors would have agreed to participate, due to lack of

³ The International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures.

familiarity with the encoding language and the time it would take in order to develop a working knowledge thereof. In the appropriate Word files, the participants were asked to highlight what they considered to be indicators of trauma by setting the highlighter to pink, and to yellow for those of cultural context. They were further asked to utilize the insert comment function on Microsoft Word to specify whether they thought the indicator of trauma or cultural context to be implicit and to provide a brief commentary on their reasoning behind their choice of markup (*Figure 7*).

Figure 7.



The completed exercises were marked up in separate XML files, with each participant having provided both a trauma and a cultural context file thereby allowing the encoded narrative to be visualised using the software tool. As with the encodings of the initial marker, the encodings of the ten participants were realized using yellow to indicate markup of cultural context and pink for that of trauma.

While the original version of the software was developed in order to enhance the comparison of generalist and specialist approaches to *The Secret Scripture*, the software as presented at IASIL was concerned with enabling the comparison of various responses by literary scholars to an individual literary work. An engagement with Version 2. of the software enables the analyst to do the following:

Version 2

- 1) Examine the response of an individual participant to the novel by setting the scroll panes to their encodings of trauma and cultural context.
- 2) The analyst may then:
 - a) compare either the cultural context or trauma encodings of various participants.
 - b) overlap the various encodings of the participants in order to identify where their respective markup overlaps.
- 3) The visualization of the commentary by the various encoders provides the analyst with additional information upon which to compare choice of markup.

In examining the encoded responses of the various participants in the *Secret Scripture* case study (*Version 2*), the analyst found that a significant consensus engaged across the participants of differing nationalities, particularly in relation to cultural context. This relative conformity may be partially attributed to the criteria set for the exercise. It may also be due in part to the fact that the contributors were all specialists in the field of Irish studies. While the revelation of consensus was in itself a research benefit, as it provided evidence as to the manner in which literary scholars engage with a text, the general conformity also served to make the differences all the more notable.

In the first paragraph, only two of the six Irish contributors marked any of the text as being indicative of cultural context, while all four of the international participants annotated either specific words or phrases. The majority of those who did mark some text in this paragraph marked “green fields” and “folded farms”, though their reasoning for doing so varied. An Irish contributor, Participant 4, marked “green field” as the phrase evoked “rural imagery”, though no further detail was given. Participant 2 marked the same phrase but stated that it could have been a “reference to either Flanders or to Ireland”; having not read the novel in its entirety he was uncertain as to where the scene was set. For Participant 8, the phrase was significant as “green usually echoes Ireland or Irish related-images”. Participant 6 made a similar comment in her account of why she marked this phrase. Participant 9 stated that the reference to “green fields” recalled W. B. Yeats’s account of “four green fields” in his play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.

Interestingly, Participant 6 was alone in marking “Dear reader! Dear reader”; she marked this segment of text as an “implicit” marker of cultural context, stating that she considered the opening to “recall [the] gothic of Poe or even Baudelaire”. The observation made by this American critic that the text has echoes of American and European gothic, illuminates an element of the text that appears not to have been evident to any of the other contributors and may likely be attributable to her own academic sphere of interest.

While the Irish scholars marked a limited amount of the passages as indicative of cultural context, those segments that they did mark were frequently substantiated by what could be considered to be their specialist knowledge of Irish history and culture. For example, one Irish scholar marked “the transmigration of the soul” as an implicit indicator of cultural context, commenting that:

Much is made of this idea in *Ulysses*: could possibly be an allusion to it. But equally possibly not. Certainly this passage has modernist echoes - the classical and the mundane.

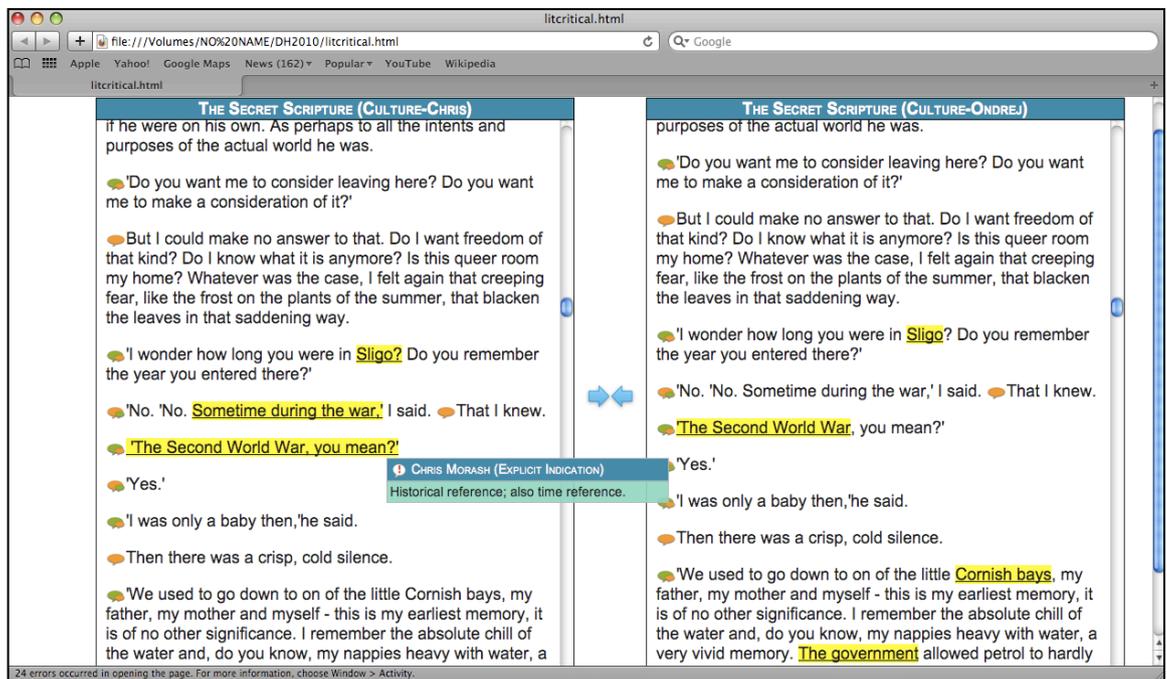
Although the scholar notes that the passage echoes modernist texts generally, he specifically refers to *Ulysses*, thus situating the passage, and hence the novel, within the literary tradition from which it stems. The suggestion that Barry's novel recalls that of James Joyce is for some literary scholars an interesting insight into the text, one which opens up a potential avenue for rich comparative analysis within an Irish context.

However, this detailed knowledge of an Irish national literary heritage was not exclusive to the mark up of the scholars who would perhaps be considered to be in closest proximity to the text on account of their nationality. As previously mentioned, Participant 9 also situated the text within an Irish literary and cultural tradition by tracing a connection between Sebastian Barry's novel and W. B. Yeats's play, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. This calls attention to the reality, contrary to Damrosch's model, that specialist knowledge exists among scholars studying a literary work that originates outside their own culture of origins; more interestingly perhaps, it also highlights the different interpretative emphases existing within a community of scholars.

An engagement with the encodings visualized by the software also revealed to the analyst that the majority of these contributors marked reference to World War Two as indicative of cultural context as they saw it as situating Barry's novel within a particular time frame (*Figure 8*). A number of the participants also stated that the reference situated the novel within an internationally "shared history". The visualization of the indicators of cultural context further highlights the fact that these markers of a shared historical reference appear in close proximity to the brief textual discussion of the struggle for liberation in Ireland which was also marked by the

majority of contributors as indicative of cultural context. The fact that Barry's text sets a national cultural context along side an international one within the narrative of an individual, is itself indicative of the author's entire oeuvre, which is concerned with re-claiming individual stories that have been omitted from the "book of life" in Irish history, and situating them within in a wider history of humanity. The conformity among the various markups of the participants points to the manner in which the author achieves this.

Figure 8.



An engagement with the software thus reveals that although *The Secret Scripture* provides an account of a specific cultural trauma, this trauma is relayed through references to wider, universal experiences of trauma such as World War Two to which all of the contributors related. This finding assists the analyst in establishing why *The Secret Scripture* enjoys a success beyond a national readership alone, despite its culturally specific subject matter. It thus provides an example of

how the text “transcend[s] the boundaries of the culture that produces it” (*How to Read World Literature 2*) by illuminating the processes through which specific readings emerge and enabling their comparison and interrogation. As such, an engagement with the visualization of various encodings within the software environment provides a means of testing Damrosch’s abstract assertions by exposing the details of reading and interpretative practices.

As evidenced by the discussion above, the information captured in the visualization of the responses of the various participants in the markup exercise is highly subjective and although there is a degree of conformity across the various markups, there is no basis for establishing any definitive facts based thereon. This called into question the degree to which the results could be classed as “findings”, as for those in the sciences, such a term is usual employed to refer to factual information derived from empirical validation and hypothesis testing. However, as Stephen Ramsay has noted, in literary scholarship, “the object is not to be right [...], but to be interesting [...]” (“Towards an Algorithmic Criticism” 173). Hence, for the literary scholars involved in the project, intertextual references such as the reference to *Ulysses* captured in the responses of the literary scholars, serve to enhance a scholarly reading of a literary text.

4. Conclusions: New Partners in Irish Literary Studies

As evidenced from the above discussion, the fusing of digital humanities with literary methodologies of close reading, which is a fundamental characteristic of our research project, yields significant findings with regard to a literary-critical analysis of the chosen case study: Sebastian Barry’s *The Secret Scripture*. The complex operations of “narrative voice” in the novel – whereby the most powerful indicators

of trauma are indirectly conveyed, and filtered through the therapist's perspective – can be elucidated and the subtlety of the authorial achievement therein brought to light through the practices of markup and annotation. Such a technique can in turn inform a wider literary pedagogy, illustrating in close detail how form and theme work together; this may be particularly useful in teaching undergraduate students for whom developing a nuanced understanding of narrative technique is often a difficulty encountered in their initial years in literary studies.

A further critically contested area with regard to Barry's novel – namely its status as “national narrative” – is also illuminated through the linked literary and digital techniques of annotation (recording individual interpretative practices) and comparative analysis (the overlap function). As shown above, the processes through which indicators of cultural context, implicit or explicit, operate in the novel are central to the novel's effect, not least through the varying ways in which those potential indicators are identified by readers. Here the reader's own interpretation of what constitutes a marker of cultural context becomes the key determinant, and the degree – or absence – of consensus among different readers a fruitful subject of study. Thus this case study demonstrates how digital methodologies can be deployed, not only to support “generalist” readings, but also to analyze how a novel may generate differing or shared “specialist” responses.

Its wider significance, within the still evolving field of digital literary analysis, is to argue for the value of interlinked textual and cultural analysis that delves into the specificities of texts; counter Liu, “block quotations” still retain value as the “objects of sustained focus” for digital humanities (Liu 494). It also demonstrates how a “middle distance” between modes of close and distant reading can be achieved using appropriate digital humanities methodologies.

Most significantly, however, our case study points to the rich results that can be yielded from collaborative, inter-disciplinary for the study of world literature and Irish literature and work in the field of digital humanities. The digital humanities objects, that is, the various visualization software, schema and XML encodings, have evolved in many stages through this iterative design process, and in step with the evolving research question; as a result, this chapter presents an evolutionary chronicle of the development of our schema and methods. In the concluding pages of *What is World Literature?*, Damrosch predicts that “those who work on world literature are increasingly going to find that a significant share of their work is best done in collaboration with other people” (286). Those “other people”, to whom Damrosch refers, now include colleagues in digital humanities and computer science, working in collaboration with colleagues in world literature and literary studies: the case study described here demonstrates the rich results that can be yielded for literary criticism by the collaborative work of an interdisciplinary humanities and computer science team whereby traditional literary methodologies can be re-activated and regenerated rather than abandoned.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4. “E-Evolutions” in Irish Literary Criticism: Genre, Anthology, Database

“the study of bibliographical machineries in all their networked complexity is never more urgent than at this moment, when we are trying to learn how to think about and use our new digital resources. If we want to develop strong online scholarship, we should begin by putting the study of book technologies at the center of our attention” (McGann, “The Future is Digital” 83).

1. Introduction

1.1 Methodology

While the world literature methodologies of Wai Chee Dimock and David Damrosch employed in Chapters 2 and 3 endorse modes of close reading within a global framework, this chapter stages a more detailed return to the “problem” of world literature as offered by Franco Moretti in his form of “distant reading” (“Conjectures on World Literature” 56). As Moretti sees it,

the trouble with close reading [...] is that it necessarily depends on an extremely small canon. This may have become an unconscious and invisible premiss by now, but it is an iron one nonetheless: you invest so much in individual texts only if you think that very few of them really matter. [...] And if you want to look beyond the canon (and of course, world literature will do so: it would be absurd if it didn't!) close reading will not do it. It's not designed to do it, it's designed to do the opposite” (“Conjectures on World Literature” 57).

Justifying his move from close to distance reading, Moretti argues in the now familiar formulation, that rather than yielding a less sophisticated form of analysis, “distance [...] is a condition *of knowledge*: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems” (“Conjectures on World Literature” 57). Elsewhere, Moretti further argues that, while “[t]exts are real objects” they are not “objects *of knowledge*”. Hence he maintains that “[i]f we want to explain the laws of literary history, we must move to a formal plane that lies beyond them: below or above; the device, or the genre (emphasis in original) (“The Slaughter House of Literature” 217).

Central to Moretti's methodology is the concept of a “law of literary evolution” (“Conjectures” 58) which he employs to trace developments in literary

history as they occur in various geographical spaces. Outlining his proposed methodology, Moretti states: “[y]ou define a unit of analysis [...] – and then follow its metamorphoses in a variety of environments – until, ideally, all of literary history becomes a long chain of related experiments” (“Conjunctures” 61-2). Wai Chee Dimock usefully summarizes Moretti’s approach to genre as follows:

drawing on the work of Immanuel Wallerstein and Frederic Jameson, [Moretti] puts genre at the center of a “world-system” [...]. He calls for a “comparative morphology,” one that takes as its starting point a distributive map, reflecting the circulation and evolution of literary forms, and operating on the same scale as the planet (*Through Other Continents* 78).

As Dimock sees it, what Moretti wants “is a developmental database, assembled along both the axis of space and the axis of time, and tracking not only existing forms but also emerging ones” (79). “This developmental database”, Dimock argues is “generalizable as a law, what [Moretti] calls a “law of literary evolution” (78).

Dimock’s use of a term so intimately related with the burgeoning field of the digital humanities to describe Moretti’s approach to world literature brings together the two driving concerns of this chapter: firstly, Moretti’s concept of “literary evolution” as it applies to literary genres and; secondly, the manner in which the term “database” has been deployed and considered by practitioners in the field of literary studies. Building on Moretti’s methodology, this chapter will provide an analysis of genre as it relates to the formation of an Irish national literature, by focusing on newly emergent modes of compilation, classification and relationality. Drawing in part from Margaret Kelleher’s analysis of the anthology and her suggestions as to its future directions (“From the Anthology to the Database” 2011), the chapter will examine the evolution of the literary anthology and other collective works from a print to a digital medium as developed in an Irish context.

Focusing on the online digital database, the *Bibliography of Irish Literary Criticism* (2010), the chapter considers the development of and aspirations for the

database as they relate to current debates in both the field of Irish literary studies and in the field of world literature. Informed by recent discussions in Irish studies regarding the ways in which the national literary anthology has been complicit in both mapping and solidifying the boundaries of an Irish national literature, I will consider and respond to claims made by Wai Chee Dimock and Ed Folsom that “unlike printed texts, coming to us prepackaged and deceptively contained within book covers, a database does away with the illusion of containment altogether” (Dimock 1378). Thus, by examining the BILC database from both theoretical and practical standpoints, the chapter investigates what new forms of knowledges are enabled by the literary collection as it moves from the print based anthology to the online digital database.

While providing a consideration of database technology as it relates to work in the field of Irish literary studies – a still undeveloped field of analysis – this chapter is also situated in and contributes to wider debates in the field of digital literary studies. Specifically, it responds to the metaphorical account of database provided by Ed Folsom in his discussion of the *Walt Whitman Archive* (2007) and the responses it evoked from practitioners in the field of literary studies. In so doing, it calls attention to the technical/metaphoric understandings of database that have emerged in recent years and the implications thereof for developments in digital humanities projects. Following Jerome McGann, it is argued that this “loose way of thinking about [...] about these new digital technologies” (“Database, Interface and Archival Fever” 1588) is both misleading and, by extension, detrimental to the manner in which we both approach and develop resources of this type.

In providing an informed critical examination of the BILC database, this chapter seeks, more generally, to demonstrate the necessity of critical engagement

with digital resources of this type. Proceeding with the premise that form and content are intimately related, the chapter further demonstrates how the materiality of the database – that is, its technical structure – is related to and impacts upon the theoretical nature of the resource. In so doing, the chapter moves beyond the aspirational considerations of database technology that have emerged from the literary community in recent years, to provide a sustained critical engagement therewith that serves to advance work in the field of Irish literary studies and in the area of digital literary studies.

1.2. Mapping Literature in a Digital Age: Genre, Database and the Anthology

As discussed in detail in chapter 2 of this dissertation, in her commentary on world literature, Wai Chee Dimock has called attention to the limitations of nationally inflected modes of reading. She argues that using the nation as an epithet “we limit ourselves [...] to an analytic domain foreclosed by definition” (*Through Other Continents* 2). According to Dimock,

As a set of spatial and temporal coordinates, the nation is not only too brief, too narrow, but also too predictable in its behaviour, its sovereignty is uppermost, its borders defended with force if necessary. It is a prefabricated box. Any literature crammed into it is bound to appear more standardized than it is: smaller, tamer, duller, conforming rather than surprising (“Planetary Time” 439).

Elsewhere, Dimock questions the modes of classification that divide up the field of literary studies more generally. She asks,

What would literary history look like if the field were divided, not into discrete periods, and not into discrete bodies of national literatures? What other organizing principles might come into play? And how would they affect the mapping of “literature” as an analytic object: the length and width of the field; its lines of filiation, lines of differentiation; the database needed in order to show significant continuity or significant transformation; and the bounds of knowledge delineated, the arguments as a result? (“Genre as World System” 85).

As Dimock sees it, the concept of genre offers a more suitable mode of categorization than either period or nation. While noting that genre, like the taxonomy of nation, has traditionally been seen “as a classifying principle, putting

the many subsets of literature under the rule of normative sets” (“Genre as World System” 85), Dimock argues that “[f]ar from being a neat catalog of what exists and what is to come, genres are a vexed attempt to deal with material that might or might not fit into that catalog” (“Genre as Fields of Knowledge” 1378). Subsequently, she argues that the membership of any genre is “an open rather than closed set, because there is always another instance, another empirical bit of evidence to be added” (“Genres as Fields of Knowledge” 1378).

In one of her most explicit commentaries on the subject of genre – in her introduction to a special edition of the *PMLA* (2007) dedicated to the study thereof (to be discussed in detail later in this chapter) – Dimock begins by questioning what is understood by the term. She asks:

What exactly are genres? Are they a classifying system matching the phenomenal world of objects, a sorting principle that separates oranges from apples? Or are they less than that, a taxonomy that never fully taxonomizes, labels that never quite keep things straight? What archives come with genres, what critical lexicons do they offer, and what maps do they yield? And how does the rise of digitization change these archives, lexicons, and maps? (“Genres as Fields of Knowledge” 1377).

What is particularly suggestive about Dimock’s series of questions here is her concern with how the “rise of digitization” affects the traditional categories associated with genre – in 2007, still an emerging topic of analysis.

Dimock’s question is clearly inspired by Ed Folsom’s controversial essay, “Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of the Archives” contained within the special edition along with a series of responses thereto. Also to be discussed later, like Dimock, Folsom takes issue with the classifying and categorizing impulses inherent in our attempts to “funnel artists into one or another genre” (Folsom 1571) and argues that the rigidity imposed on works by this system of classification is “a quality of our categorical systems, not of the writers or usually the works we put into those systems” (Folsom 1571).

While noting the limitations placed by the classification of literary works according to genre on our understandings of and engagements with the complex and diverse field of literature, Folsom argues, however, that the “new genre of the twenty-first century”, namely the online digital database, provides an environment where the boundaries of classification are rendered insubstantial. Owing to its “fluid” nature, the database environment, according to Folsom, denies any form of rigid categorization of its contents; it is, Folsom suggests, a genre that “spills over by design” (1575). As such, Folsom argues that the online digital database - considered as a new addition to the “family of technologies” that are genres - provides a new “tool” for “exploring the realms of verbal representation” (Folsom 1576). Hence he argues that the development of the new genre of database “may turn out to be the most significant effect computer culture will have on the literary world” (1576).

According to Stephen Ramsay, the most all encompassing definition of a database, is “a system that allows for the efficient storage and retrieval of information” (Ramsay 2004). As such, Ramsay argues that rather than being an entirely new venture in humanities scholarship, database technology forms part of the history of taxonomies and indexing systems that have formed a pivotal part of humanistic endeavor since the Middle Ages. He notes:

Whenever humanists have amassed enough information to make retrieval (or comprehensive understanding) cumbersome, technologists of whatever epoch have sought to put forth ideas about how to represent that information in some more tractable form (Ramsay 2004).

Hence he maintains that although “databases are an ubiquitous feature of life in the modern age”, as systems that allows for the efficient storage and retrieval of information, they “seem to belie that modernity” (Ramsay 2004). More recently, Marijea Dalbello (2010) has also placed the database within a longer history of taxonomic tools including “marginalia, common-placing, table of contents, and

scrapbooks in the history of indexing” (“A genealogy of digital humanities” 498). Considered thus, it becomes possible to place the database more naturally within earlier textual traditions.

In the field of literary scholarship, the challenge faced by representing large amounts of material has traditionally been met by the production of literary anthologies or literary collections. As Barbara Benedict has noted in her important work on the literary anthology, *The Making of the Modern Reader* (1996), since the eighteenth century, anthologies have served as important tools in the field of literary scholarship “by widely disseminating a vetted selection of texts” and “populariz[ing] editorial judgment as well as authorial invention” (Benedict 1). Benedict further notes that anthologies have helped “form and reform canons, confirm literary reputations, and establish taste and cultural literacy for generations of readers” (Benedict 1).

Owing to both of these processes, which are intrinsic to the formation of any type of taxonomy, much recent anthological criticism has concerned itself with the types of knowledges that have been generated by and through literary compilations. In particular, this criticism has tended to focus around the types of comprehensive overviews of particular domains or topics that are created by these “strategic weapons” (Mulhern cited in Kelleher 68) in literary scholarship. While the rubrics under which anthologies or literary collections are compiled can range from genre to theme, Theodore Mason has argued that, for the most part, “the anthologies that most readily come to our collective imagination depend for their existence on an idea of cultural difference” and that “the particular version of cultural difference that forms the basis for so many anthologies is the idea of nation” (192).

In his insightful essay, “The African-American Anthology: Mapping the Territory, Taking the National Census, Building the Museum” (1998), Mason addresses in detail the manner in which literary anthologies serve to map both a literary and a political terrain. Mason opens his essay with a quotation from Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, outlining the significant function that the census, the map and the museum have played in the colonial power’s desire to classify the subjects of its domain:

Interlinked with one another, then, the census, the map and the museum illuminated the late colonial state’s style of thinking about its domain. The “warp” of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state’s real or contemplated control: peoples, regions, religions, languages, products, monuments, and so forth. The effect of the grid was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there. It was bounded, determinate, and therefore—in principle—countable (Anderson qtd. in Mason 191).

As Mason proceeds to argue, the “classificatory grid” the colonial power uses to establish a taxonomy of control, “becomes reframed in the interest of the previously colonized and works toward similar aims” (191).

Extending this argument further, Mason subverts Anderson’s suggestion that three powerful institutions facilitating the sense of nation are the census, the map, and the museum to argue that *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* is “an oppositional version of those three critical institutions, as it depends on the capacity to identify who counts in the cultural whole” (Mason 193). According to Mason, “[t]he anthology represents and depends on the classificatory grid and represents this whole in a museum of the imagination, a museum dependent on literary representation”(193)¹. But as Mason proceeds to point out, attempts to

¹ Writing in an Irish context, Declan Kiberd has also drawn a correlation between the museum and the anthology. He argues that,

museums are as selective as literary anthologies, which in many respects they greatly resemble, precisely because they are often the result of a colonial encounter, and are based on the notion that a native culture need not be known whole and entire, but can be studied through representative examples or characteristic extracts (*The Irish Writer and the World* 224).

represent within the covers of the African-American anthology are themselves “fraught with difficulty” (193). Thus he argues that an anthology compiled under the rubric of “African-American” attempts to classify a body of literature that at once strives to represent both literary merit and a particular group of people, and thus calls into question “the coherence of the taxonomy and the conflicts among the hermeneutical and critical understandings that license the taxonomy in question” (194). Owing to the tensions that are subsequently generated within the walls of the museum that is the anthology, Mason argues that, “taken as a whole [an anthology] can make meaningless any intelligible critical rubric used to rationalize its choices” (195). In summary, Mason usefully points towards the limitations of the material container that is the printed anthology in its efforts to provide a coherent narrative of African- American literature.

1.3. The Irish Literary Anthology

In the past decade, lively and heated debate has emerged surrounding the nature and the function of Irish literary anthologies. The publication of the highly controversial three-volume *Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature* in 1991 aroused significant scholarly interest in the previously neglected genre of the literary collection. While the publication of the volumes, under general editorship of Seamus Deane, led to a flurry of critiques of the *Field Day Anthology* itself, it also prompted a number of critics to re-examine the history of the literary anthology as it has evolved in an Irish context.

One of the earliest attempts to provide an historical account of the evolution of the Irish literary anthology was Margaret Kelleher’s important commentary on the subject, “The Cabinet of Irish Literature” (2003). In this and other articles, Kelleher

provides an informed examination of the Irish anthology, from the publication of *The Cabinet of Irish Literature* (1879-1880) in the late nineteenth century, up to the publication of volumes IV and V of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* in 2002. In conducting a comparative reading of the two editions of the anthology, the first edited by Charles Anderson Read and T.P. O'Connor and the second, by the poet and novelist, Katharine Tynan (1902-3), Kelleher seeks to demonstrate that "Irish anthological representation is "neither straightforward in its evolution, nor necessarily progressive in its development" ("The Cabinet of Irish Literature" 89). Kelleher argues that as the anthology grew larger and its contents more numerous, the desire for ordering the material included within their pages "deepens in its conservative force" (89). Hence, she argues that developments in anthology construction and its historical evolution are not always progressive.

In a more recent essay, "Irish Literary Historiography 1890-2000", Colin Graham also addresses the significant role that anthologies have played in the field of Irish literature. Considering the anthology as a powerful and revelatory tool within Irish literary historiography, Graham calls attention to the "mania for the encyclopaedic" that has gripped practitioners in Irish literary criticism from the Revival up to the present day. Tracing the evolution of the genre across the twentieth century, he argues that the "anthologising urge" became strong during the period of the Revival where writers and critics sought to carve out "a kind of self-evident and undisputable literary history" by compiling and ordering the island's literary heritage within these print containers (573). Moving his critique to the present day, Graham notes that anthologies and dictionaries continue to abound in post-1960s Ireland (590).

Distinguishing between the role of the anthology in the respective periods, Graham argues that while “Revival anthologies and criticism [...] deal with the history of Irish writing by understanding it as a story which explains the moment of the Revival” (568), the most striking thing about the more recent anthology, signified by the sheer number, is that they “imagine a different kind of readership” (590). Responding to the increasing interest in Irish Studies at university level and to the subsequent professionalization of Irish literary studies, the contemporary anthology, Graham argues, reflects the “academy’s demands for ideological neatness and pedagogical standardization” (590). Graham further suggests that this “professionalization process” has meant that “particular kinds of literature are read in particular ways” (590) and although Graham suggests that “[i]t is not necessarily to be mourned that Irish literary studies should understand the recent and more distant history of Irish literature in this way”, he adds that “it is important to know that such shapings are taking place” (590).

As noted earlier, much of the criticism produced in the last decade concerning the role of the anthology in an Irish context has centred around the five *Field Day* volumes. An early and incisive critique came from Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, immediately after the publication of the first three volumes. Calling attention to the particular representation of Irish literature constructed by Deane’s editorial selections, Ní Chuilleanáin forcefully argued that,

by “defining”, that is excluding, [anthologies] create a false inclusiveness in which the invisible exiles somehow do not count. Every claim to comprehensiveness is thus a devaluing of difference and so of the reality of a literary culture, past or present [...]. It is not the wrong choices or the predominance of pressure groups over individual talents, or the sexism - all of which are so evident - but the turning away of attention from the ground where the action is happening to the figures of the international talent-spotters half-visible behind their glassed-in gallery (Ní Chuilleanáin qtd. in “The Cabinet of Irish Literature” 69).

Ní Chuilleanáin’s charge against Deane’s claim to comprehensiveness was followed by similar critiques from scholars such as Gerardine Meaney, Edna Longley and

Siobhán Kilfeather, all of whom considered the representation of Irish literature as presented by the *Field Day Anthology* to be too limited in scope to be an accurate portrayal of the rubric under which it was compiled.

In 2002, the preface to *Field Day* volumes 4 and 5 contained the following explanation of the emergence of two volumes from “what had originally been intended as a single volume of women’s writings, supplementing and interrogating the 1991 *Field Day Anthology*, and operating within similar parameters” (xxxiii). Here, the general editors defined their resource as “both encyclopaedic and kaleidoscopic, combining many hundreds of texts with dozens of ways of reading them” (Bourke et als. xxxii). The ensuing commentary surrounding volumes IV and V – much less detailed than that generated by volumes 1- 3 – has revolved around what Margaret Kelleher has termed as its “future shaping significance” on the field of Irish Studies (“*The Field Day Anthology*” 89). By expanding the classificatory grid of Irish writing to include genres and voices that had been excluded from the map of Irish literature drawn by Deane’s first three volumes of the *Field Day Anthology*, and by disrupting the basic organizational tenets inherent in the anthology form, volumes IV and V have been generally considered as welcome adjuncts. But as Gerardine Meaney, one of the general editors, notes, the selections in this anthology do “not complete any map of Irish writing” but “rather they seek to put existing maps into question” (*FDA* vol. 5, 771). And as Colin Graham sees it, volumes IV and V do just that by “expos[ing] the nature of canonicity and the lines that literary history likes to draw” (588).

With the benefit of hindsight, the publication of volumes of IV and V may be seen as a transitional moment, marking not simply a “new” type of anthology as some have argued (e.g. Kelleher 2003), but also the final instalment in an older

printed mode. Employing the language of new media to emphasize the anthology's newness, Anne Fogarty has argued that volumes IV and V are "far less an anthology [...] than a database that assembles a vast quantity of material and affords the possibility of multiple cross-connections" (2003 3). For many, however, the anthological system endorsed in the production of the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* is itself insufficient for accommodating the complex and diverse nature and history of Irish literature and its mode of publication already outmoded.

Commenting on the first three volumes of the *Field Day Anthology*, Claire Connolly argued that "[p]ublished in 1991, it was oddly out of touch with emerging technologies for arranging and retrieving data" ("Theorising Ireland" 303). Colin Graham has made a similar point with regard to all five volumes of the *Field Day Anthology*, stating that, "as books, they are extraordinarily old fashioned ventures" ("Literary Historiography" 590). These analyses have therefore both a material and ideological charge. For Edna Longley, the "urge to codify" in Irish Studies and the difficulties thrown up in attempting "to get Irish literature - and Ireland - between canonical covers" renders attempts to construct a national anthology futile. The result, she argues, is a "tension between systems of various kinds and texts or perspectives that spill over their boundaries" (Longley 2007).

Connolly, Graham and Longley all seem to suggest that the Irish literary anthology is a genre that has reached its limits and is no longer (if it ever was) capable of representing the complex and diverse field of Irish writing. Like Mason, they call attention to the limitations of the anthological medium – and its modes of publication – for representing texts and perspectives that are at once meant to be representative and inclusive.

2. Database in Literary Scholarship

2.1. The Evolution of the Literary Anthology: From the Anthology to the Database

In *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, Moretti addresses what he refers to as the “life-cycle” of genres (*Graphs, Maps, Trees* 17). According to Moretti,

A genre exhausts its potentialities – and the time comes to give a competing form a chance – when the inner form is no longer capable of representing the most significant aspects of contemporary reality (*Graphs, Maps, Trees* 17).

As Moretti sees it, a genre can either evolve to meet the needs of contemporary society, or it will disappear from the literary plane. The genres that survive are, as Scott McLemme usefully summarizes, “mutations that possess qualities that somehow permit them to adapt to changes in the social ecosystem” (McLemme 2006).

In his essay on the African-American anthology, cited earlier, Theodore Mason points to the manner in which the form of the literary anthology capitalizes on the possibilities afforded by technology to increase its functionality for contemporary society. Drawing on Anderson’s observations on the significant role of print technology in creating a sense of the nation, Mason argues that anthologies are “a direct function of print technology”, in that they rely on print technology’s “dependence upon and facilitation of an economy of exchange and distribution that implicates an entire set of economic, political, and ideological relations between authors, editors, and buyers” (196). Extending this argument further, he argues that, “[i]f an anthology is a synecdoche for a culturally integral group, then at the very least we would be right in observing that technology facilitates the idea of nation” (196).

Mason’s work moves the discussion from early print technologies to the compact disc – then an emergent technology; he suggests that “technology may

enable (rather than simply facilitate) the construction of nation, or at least enable the transcontinental, global, and historical scope we currently identify as being the signs of *nation* properly considered” (emphasis in original) (196). As Mason sees it, the compact disc that supplements the *Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* expands the potential frame of reference of the anthology itself by “enabling the sonic representations of black expressive culture” (Mason 196). Furthermore he argues that the CD also acts as a way of historicizing the anthology itself by “making preprint expressive forms available to the audience through a current day replication of performances” (196). Hence Mason argues that although the technological revolution seems to make the idea of “culture” more stable and concrete” through cultural products such as the anthology, the technology of sonic reproduction, encapsulated in the CD-ROM, “complicates the idea of nation by foregrounding the contingent and performative aspect of culture” (Mason 196).

By calling attention to the artificiality of culture, Mason argues that the use of new forms of technology “makes impossible and untenable any idea of culture dependent on transcendent notions of difference”. Subsequently, he suggests that while the technology “seems to affirm or make possible the very idea of integrity”, it also simultaneously “destabilizes the idea of integrity itself” (Mason 197). As such, Mason concludes that although *The Norton Anthology of African-American Literature* produces the appearance of cultural wholeness, “its governing critical ethos and the technology used to produce it call that wholeness into doubt” (Mason 197). For Mason therefore, the use of digital technology provides a means of enhancing the functionality of the genre of the literary anthology and provides the possibility of expanding the maps drawn by the genre past the limitations of the printed medium.

In more recent years, technological advances have accelerated at a phenomenal pace, to the extent that the CD-ROM itself now appears extremely old fashioned when compared with new media technologies. Just as the genre of the literary evolved to incorporate the earlier technology of the compact disc, an overview of developments within the genre suggest that the anthology is again evolving into a digital environment. This evolution of the genre from the codex to the new “containing space” (Ferry 24) of the digital database is most readily charted in the development of the work of the literary scholar and renowned digital humanist, Jerome McGann. Before embarking upon his active career in the digital humanities, McGann was involved in the editing of *The New Oxford Book of Modern Verse of the Romantic Period* (1993). As editor of this anthology, McGann utilized the opportunity to disrupt the prevalent trend in editorial practices of arranging anthologies according to authors, favouring instead the presentation of the works of various authors within a chronological framework. In presenting its contents in this manner, McGann argued that,

[a]n anthology of this kind necessarily constructs a literary history, but the historical synthesis is subordinated in the formalities of the collection. The anthology focuses one’s attention on local units of order – individual poems and groups of poems. As a consequence, these units tend to splinter the synthetic inertia of the work-as-a-whole into an interactive and dialogical scene. Possibilities of order appear at different scalar levels because the centre of the work is not so a much totalized form as a dynamically emergent set of constructible hypotheses of historical relations” (“Rethinking Romanticism” 745).

McGann does not deny that the anthology as a literary form is concerned with constructing a narrative, in this instance one of historical progression. However, by charting this progression based on individual poems as opposed to individual authors, McGann attempts to demonstrate that the appropriately constructed anthology may provide an activating dynamic force which transforms inertia into interaction.

Given McGann's intimate engagement with the digital humanities over the past twenty years, it is impossible not to be struck by the digital terminology that resounds in this brief excerpt from his early work. For example, McGann refers to the individual poems as "units" which he considers to operate within the "interactive" scene of the collection. Ultimately he conceives of the collection as a "dynamically emergent set of hypotheses of historical relations" ("Rethinking Romanticism" 743).

Having identified this latent concern with the defining traits of new media present in his early work, it is perhaps not surprising that shortly after the publication of the article just cited, McGann began work on *The Rossetti Archive*, "a hypermedia archive with a relational and object-orientated database" ("Imagining What you Don't Yet Know" 1997), dedicated to the work of the artist and writer, Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Faced with the limitations of the codex as a containing space, McGann sought a more appropriate container for Rossetti's multimedia works.

Commenting on *The Rossetti Archive*, McGann states that:

We were able to build a machine that organizes for complex study and analysis, for collation and critical comparison, the entire corpus of Rossetti's documentary materials, textual as well as pictorial. [...] With the Archive one can draw these materials into computable synthetic relations at macro as well as micro levels. In the process the Archive discloses the hypothetical character of its materials and their component parts as well as the relationships one discerns among these things. Though completely physical and measurable (in different ways and scales), neither the objects nor their parts are self-identical, all can be reshaped and transformed in the environment of the Archive ("From Text to Work" 2006).

Hence, in developing *The Rossetti Archive*, McGann sought to expand the possibilities provided by the codex anthology, not only by making available Rossetti's multimedia works, but by creating an online environment where the individual units stored therein could interact in a manner free from any dominant organising structure. As McGann notes, "[t]he underlying logic of *The Rossetti Archive* was designed so that scholars using it could make choices about their

platforms of critical attention, as well about the specific kinds of analyses they would choose to undertake” (“From Text to Work” 2006).

While McGann’s turn towards the use of database in his scholarly practices may be partly attributed to his recognition of the progression between the structure and purpose of anthologies and their digital equivalent, it is important to note that his critical work surrounding *The Rossetti Archive* is informed by his active involvement in the physical development of the digital resource and its accompanying digital infrastructures. Indeed McGann has repeatedly argued that it is only through such “hands-on” work that literary scholars will develop the knowledge required to enable them to critique these new digital tools in an informed and useful manner (“Culture and Technology” 71).

In his hard-hitting essay, “Culture and Technology: What is to be done?” (2005), McGann laid bare the consequences that a continuing illiteracy of humanities scholars in the languages of digital technology would have on the field of humanities scholarship. McGann rightly predicted that “in the coming decades [...] the entirety of our cultural inheritance will be transformed and re-edited in digital forms”. However, he questioned whether his colleagues in the humanities possess adequate knowledge to “understand what that means, what problems it brings, how they might be addressed”? Despite the fact that “theoretical as well as very practical discussions about these matters have been going on for years, and decisions are taken every day”, McGann argued that “digital illiteracy puts [humanities scholars] on the margin of conversations and actions that affect the center [*sic*] of our cultural interests (as citizens) and our professional interests (as scholars and educators)” (72).

The significance of this failure to understand (or tendency to ignore) the practicalities that are involved in the construction of digital collections was brought to the fore when Ed Folsom, co-editor of *The Walt Whitman Archive*, published his controversial essay, “Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of the Archives” (2007). As well as sparking a long over-due debate regarding the relationship between digital tools and literary scholarship, the responses to Folsom’s essay highlighted many of the different mindsets, expectations and, in some instances, idealizations of digital resources that exist among literary scholars. For this reason, it is worth outlining in detail the various contributions to this debate and the issues raised.

2.2. Metaphor and Matter: Ed Folsom and the MLA Debate

In his opening salvo, “Database as Genre: The Epic Transformation of the Archives”, Folsom draws on ideas postulated by Lev Manovich in *The Language of New Media*, to provide a theoretical account of the online digital resource, *The Walt Whitman Archive*, which he co-edited with Kenneth M. Price. As Folsom notes, Manovich describes databases as a “cultural form” which “represents the world as a list of items”. More significantly, and central to Folsom’s own argument, Manovich argues that in contrast to narrative, which “creates a cause-and-effect trajectory of seemingly unordered items (events)”, the database “refuses to order that list”. Moreover Manovich suggests that unlike the single, linear narrative expressed in print form, the narrative created by a database is an interactive “hypernarrative” (Manovich 2001) and as such, enables the user to trace multiple trajectories through its contents. According to Manovich’s understanding, therefore, database and narrative are “natural enemies”, as both seek to claim “exclusive right to make

meaning out of the world” (Manovich qtd. in Folsom 1574) but do so in opposing ways.

It is upon this understanding of database – database as permitting hyper-narratives rather than demanding a singular linear narrative – that Folsom bases his theoretical account of *The Walt Whitman Archive*. Having called attention to the rhizomatic nature of Whitman’s work, Folsom proceeds to ask

What happens, then, when we move Whitman’s rhizomorphous work into a database, put it online, allow for the webbed roots to zig and zag with everything the database incorporates? (1573) .

Extending the metaphor of the rhizome further, Folsom argues that “[n]ot only is Whitman’s work rhizomorphous, so also is a database” (ibid). Based on his own experience of working on the Whitman Archive, Folsom describes how the database “darts off in unexpected ways, and the search engine turns up unexpected connections, as if rhizomes were winding through that vast hidden web of circuits” (1573).

According to Folsom’s account, the rhizomatic nature of the medium, combined with the rhizomatic nature of the works themselves, disrupted the manner in which he and Price wanted to mediate the contents of the database. Despite having clear ideas about “the narratives [they] wanted to tell, the frames [they] wanted to construct”, the editors discovered that the details of the database “exceeded any narrative that [they] might try to frame the data with” (Folsom 1576). Emphasizing the rhizomatic nature of the database, Folsom describes how “little roots shot out every where and attached to particulars [they] could not have imagined” (1576). According to Folsom’s own understanding, in contrast to the printed book, the technical structure of the database permits rather than denies such unexpected relations between contents. Hence he argues that “*Leaves of Grass* as a database is a text very different from *Leaves of Grass* contained within covers” (1578).

Ultimately, Folsom suggests that the online digital database provides an environment which enhances rather than denies the rhizomatic nature of Whitman's work itself and, as such, he maintains that "Whitman's work - itself resisting categories - sits comfortably in a database" (Folsom 1575). In concluding, he makes the somewhat utopian prediction that, unconstrained by the boundaries of a printed text, the database will grow out "across national and linguistic boundaries", and that the "ragged and rhizomic structures" of Whitman's work will grow with it (1578), thus transcending any form of categorization that we may try to enforce upon the work.

Significantly for the purposes of this dissertation, in his account of genre and database, Folsom draws heavily on Wai Chee Dimock's work on world literature (discussed in detail in Chapter 2 of this dissertation), specifically that relating to genre. Extending on Dimock's deployment of Benoit Mandelbrot's "fractal geometry" in her analysis of genre, Folsom draws a correlation between Dimock's understanding of genre as consisting of fractals, and Lev Manovich's account of databases as consisting of an unordered list of items. As Folsom sees it, both Dimock's understanding of genre and Manovich's account of database point to the fluid, open-ended nature of both, rendering the two allies in the struggle against linearity, narrative and taxonomies.

Notably, Dimock herself provided the introduction to the special issue of the MLA in which Folsom's essay appeared. In her introduction, entitled "Genres as Fields of Knowledge", Dimock reiterates questions she had posed earlier relating to genre and world literature:

What would literary studies look like if it were organized by genres in this unfinished sense, with spillovers at front and center? What dividing lines could still be maintained? And what kinds of knowledge would be generated as a result, answering to what conception of the humanities? ("Genres as Fields of Knowledge" 1378)

Prefacing and building on claims made by Ed Folsom in his contribution to the special edition, Dimock argues that the emerging genre of database “restructures humanistic knowledge from the ground up, by liquefying the medium of storage, transmission, and retrieval” (ibid). Understanding database in largely metaphorical terms, Dimock describes these new technologies as “the sum of the not yet realized, with no actualized shape, a kind of general solvent out of which particular entities can acquire particular features” (“Genres as Fields of Knowledge” 1379). As Dimock sees it, “[u]nlike printed texts, coming to us prepackaged and deceptively contained within book covers” the new genre of database “is meant not only for storage but also for access, a flood of information that overflows any set frame of inquiry” (1378). Hence, she argues that database, “does away with the illusion of containment altogether” (1378).

While Dimock’s introduction provides a metaphorical and celebratory account of database in keeping with that offered by Ed Folsom, the five responses by members in the literary community provide accounts of database technology that are at once more practical and more critical than those offered by either of the aforementioned critics. For Peter Stallybrass, Professor of English and of Comparative Literature and Literary Theory in the University of Pennsylvania the most significant change that will be heralded by digital resources such as the *Walt Whitman Archive* is the change in the ownership of knowledge that will be yielded by the digital revolution (Stallybrass 1581). He usefully argues that “one of the most radical aspects of database is its power to separate knowledge from academic prestige partly through its privileged relation to the protection and retrieval of scarce resources” (1581). However, while freeing knowledge from “the secret horde of archive hunters”, Stallybrass calls attention to the ideological issues that attend the

storing of information in digital environments. Against Folsom's celebration of database as a means of transcending boundaries of categorization, Stallybrass argues that "databases are neither universal nor neutral, and they participate in the production of a monolingual, if not monocultural, global network" (1583).

The second response, by Jerome McGann, goes further to question and critique Folsom's very understanding of the database itself. According to McGann "the statement is seriously misleading – more accurately, it is metaphoric" ("Database, Interface and Archival Fever" 1588). Throughout his response, McGann attempts to highlight the danger that attends Folsom's "loose way of thinking about our paper-based inheritance as well as about these new digital technologies". He argues that Folsom's essay creates a double misunderstanding: firstly, of the implications that attend the creation and use of databases by speaking of them in metaphorical terms and; secondly, of the nature of physical archives. Quite persuasively, McGann flags the danger of considering databases as entities untainted by the human desire to present data in a narrativized form and points out that "the [Whitman] database—any database—represents an initial critical analysis of the content materials, and while its structure is not narrativized, it is severely constrained and organized" ("Database, Interface and Archival Fever" 1588).

McGann further takes issue with Folsom's celebration of databases as entities free from the rigidity of our categorical systems: as he points out, "databases and all digital instruments require the most severe kinds of categorical forms". The very power of database, like digital instruments in general, he proposes, "rests in its ability to draw sharp, disambiguated distinctions" ("Database, Interface and Archival Fever" 1590). Based on both his practical and theoretical understanding of the form, McGann asserts that a database is not the most appropriate environment for

Whitman's work. Rather, he maintains that markup systems such as TEI and XML are better in that they "model some of the key forms of order that are already imbedded in textual work like Whitman's" (1589). Moreover, McGann suggests that markup is more favourable to retaining the "democratic beauty" that Folsom celebrates in Whitman's work ("Database, Interface and Archival Fever" 1591).

While McGann takes issue with Folsom's misunderstanding of the digital tools which he describes, he is equally concerned with what he sees as his related misunderstanding of the nature of literary texts. McGann powerfully asserts that an appropriate understanding of how literary texts operate is vital if we are to develop digital tools and environments that are most suitable for assisting in the examination and preservation of archival materials. He argues that "we will not design and build effective digital tools and repositories [...] unless we work from an adequate understanding of our paper based inheritance" (1590). Thus McGann sees Folsom's metaphoric description of the database as denying an engagement with the real and important issues that attend migrating our cultural inheritance to digital environments and thus jeopardizing the understanding of the significance thereof among literary scholars.

While the responses by other scholars lack the force of refutation delivered by McGann, others similarly take issue with Folsom's celebration of the liberating possibilities of the database. In her response, "Remediating Whitman", Meredith L. McGill, a scholar whose research interests lie in the history of the printed book in American culture, questions whether the *Walt Whitman Archive* "delivers on the claims that Folsom makes for the digital database" ("Remediating Whitman" 1593). While acknowledging that the database does provide unprecedented access to Whitman's texts, she questions whether "the availability of these texts on a single

digital platform transforms our ways of reading, permitting readers to follow Whitman's writing as they 'zig and zag with everything'" (Folsom qtd. in McGill 1593). She notes that despite the promises of comprehensiveness Folsom accredits to the database, the content of the archive is organised around the six major American editions of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and does not consider "the numerous other free standing volumes that might otherwise be listed under the heading *Books*" (1593). While conceding that the limited scope of the database was partly due to financial constraints – designed not for profit, issues of funding limited the amount of material that could be included within the archive - McGill argues that the editors of *The Walt Whitman Archive* have "reproduced in the architecture of their site many of the constraints that Folsom claims in his essay to want to leave behind" (ibid). Hence she maintains that while the Archive gestures towards the world outside Whitman's writing, it "'zig zags' mostly within itself" (1594). McGill ends her response with a warning akin to that of McGann, that "if we misconstrue media shift as liberation, we are likely to settle for less than the new technology has to offer us" (1595).

While McGill expresses a concern with the exclusion of texts within Folsom's database, Jonathan Freedman, professor of English and American Literature at the University of Michigan, conversely calls attention to the "flood of data" that is heralded by the information age. Approaching the database in less technical terms, Freedman's response provides a consideration of the impact that the wealth of data made available by digital technology is having on literary scholarship. As Freedman sees it, the difficulty facing scholars, is how to negotiate all the information that is now available in a manner that is both useful and critical. He considers Folsom's "favouring of the medium itself" through his celebration of the

database as being a dangerous approach to the “information economy” (Freedman 1602). Against such utopian celebrations of new technology, Freedman argues that we must “neither sing and celebrate the new art of database nor turn our backs on the new ways of organizing and apprehending knowledge that it brings us” (1601). Reflecting his own interest in critical theory, he maintains that we must “affirm the heightened importance of a detached but engaged response to the information culture in which we live” (1601). Ultimately what Freedman is calling for is a detailed, informed and more sober critique of resources like digital archives.

Strategically placed last in the series of responses, N. Katherine Hayles, Hillis Professor of Literature and Distinguished Professor in the departments of English and design / media arts at the University of California, Los Angeles, dissects Folsom’s metaphoric accounts of database. In particular, she takes issue with Folsom’s rehearsing of Lev Manovich’s characterization of narrative and database as “natural enemies” (“Narrative and Database” 1603). For Hayles, the ability to construct relational juxtapositions is among the greatest attributes of the digital database and what distinguishes it most readily from the functions and capabilities of the printed medium. As she proceeds to point out, however, “because the database can construct relational juxtapositions but is helpless to interpret or explain them, it needs narrative to make its results meaningful” (1603). Given the computationally intensive culture of the new millennium, Hayles further maintains that narrative is equally dependant on database, needing it “to enhance its cultural authority and test the generality of its insight”. Hence, Hayles suggests that narrative and database are more appropriately seen as “natural symbionts” - “organs of different species that have a mutually beneficial relation” - rather than “natural enemies” (1603).

Read in relation to Folsom's account of the *Walt Whitman Archive* and Dimock's introductory essay to the special edition of the MLA journal, the responses by Stallybrass, McGann, McGill, Freedman and Hayles provide welcome and necessary correctives to the metaphoric and celebratory accounts of database provided by Folsom and Dimock. More significantly for the concerns of this chapter, the debate calls attention to the need for sustained critical engagement with digital databases such as the *Walt Whitman Archive* from both theoretical and practical standpoints, a dual focus which my later case study seeks to implement.

Summarising the MLA debate, Kenneth Price has usefully, but somewhat blandly, suggested what was most significant about the exchange was that it “made clear that people understand the term database in a variety of ways and attach different connotations to the word” (Price 2009). As Price argues, more suggestively,

These differences arise mainly from a distinction between 1) a strict definition of database — as a technical term in an electronic context database refers primarily to a collection of structured data that is managed by a database management system, most commonly based on a relational model; and 2) a looser use of database that employs the term on a more metaphorical level (Price 2009).

He points out that, as that Folsom's account of the *Walt Whitman Archive* indicates, “*database* can be a suggestive metaphor because it points to the re-configurable quality of our material”. However, he further adds that, “if we turn to more literal uses of the word database and think about the *Whitman Archive*, we see that it is “a complex composite structure that includes numerous databases and XML files”. Hence Price delicately suggests that “Folsom's description of the *Whitman Archive* as ‘a huge database’ is illuminating when taken metaphorically, though it is less helpful when taken literally” (Price 2009) since “the entirety of the *Whitman Archive* is not a single database any more than it is [...] merely XML files plus XSLT” (ibid).

Writing as he was in 2007, it is quite probable that Folsom's recourse to metaphor was an attempt to situate the new cultural form that is the digital database within traditional debates in the field of literary studies. As David E. Leary has argued,

time and time again, we are forced to construct and convey our understanding of things through the use of terms previously reserved for other things, on the basis of some perceived or conjectured similarity between them (Leary 267).

In this regard, the MLA debate provides a valuable instance of how literary scholars have attempted to make sense of the new digital technologies that are emerging and to absorb them into existing categories for literary study. As an overview of the MLA debate reveals, however, Folsom's metaphorical analysis of the database was neglectful of the actualities of the new technology and, subsequently, overly celebratory of the possibilities afforded by database to be entirely useful.

The "stricter" definition of database as a technical term has of course a longer genealogy than the MLA debate might suggest. Three years before the publication of Folsom's account of database, Ramsay called attention to the fact that as with all forms of compilation, categorization and classification, digital databases rely on processes of selection and ordering (Ramsay 2004). As Ramsay observed,

The inclusion of certain data (and the attendant exclusion of others), the mapping of relationships among entities, the often collaborative nature of dataset creation, and the eventual visualization of information patterns, all imply a hermeneutics and a set of possible methodologies that are themselves worthy objects for study and reflection ("Database" 177).

Hence, rather than seeing the digital database as a means of overcoming the restrictions of narrative formation in its refusal to categorize, to select or to order, Ramsay calls attention to the fact that no less than print-based modes of classification, the technical structure of the new digital containers renders them equally reliant on narrative as their print equivalents.

This insight has taken longer to gain currency in literary circles and it was not until 2009 that Ramsay's important observation was given any degree of sustained consideration. In a useful synthesis that refers back to the Folsom commentary, Kenneth Price usefully points out that,

A database is not an undifferentiated sea of information out of which structure emerges. Argument is always there from the beginning in how those constructing a database choose to categorize information — the initial understanding of the materials governs how more fine-grained views will appear because of the way the objects of attention are shaped by divisions and subdivisions within the database. The process of database creation is not neutral, nor should it be (Price 2009).

Echoing Ramsay, Price emphasizes the fact that while databases serve to liberate the material contained therein from the constraints of the codex form, the processes of selection, categorization and ordering that attend database creation make scholarship in the digital environment no less suspect or innocent of narrative formation.

The accounts of database provided by Ramsay and Price thus stand in stark contrast to those offered by Folsom and Dimock who have celebrated the fluidity of the digital medium and its denial of taxonomies. A fuller understanding of the database form also requires a reconsideration of the questions posed by Wai Chee Dimock in the opening pages of "Genres as Fields of Knowledge". Rather than asking, "what would literary studies look like" when organized in a database environment, the question is perhaps more usefully posed as what *does* it look like? Moving from speculation to actuality, and from a metaphoric to a material perspective, the question can be addressed in more concrete terms. This in turn, enriches Dimock's two adjoining questions: "What dividing lines [are] still [...] maintained? And what kinds of knowledge [are] generated as a result, answering to what conception of the humanities?" ("Genres a Fields of Knowledge" 1378).

3. *The Bibliography of Irish Literary Criticism*

3.1. Origins

Having established that firstly, the database may be considered as the most recent evolution of the genre of the literary anthology and secondly, that this shift from print to a digital medium does not overcome ideological issues of selection, categorization and narrative, Wai Chee Dimock's question regarding how "the rise of digitization change[s] these archives, lexicons, and maps" associated with genre" ("Genres as Fields of Knowledge" 1377) becomes at once more useful and more pressing. If the literary anthology has been complicit in shaping understandings of Irish literature, what new maps of Ireland's literary output are constructed in a digital environment?

As with the work of Jerome McGann, the evolution of the genre of the literary collection in an Irish context can also be traced in the work of individual critics. While there are a number of notable examples of this, for example, Prof. Maria Luddy and Prof. Gerardine Meaney's *Women in Modern Irish Culture* database (2007), the remainder of this chapter will focus on the *Bibliography of Irish Literary Criticism* (2010) - a bibliographical database of Irish literary criticism covering the period from the Irish Literary Revival to the present day, edited by Colin Graham. This choice has been made firstly because *BILC* is the most recently published database developed within the field of Irish Studies, but more significantly, because the research concerns underpinning the development of the database are directly relevant to the concern with the mediation and the subsequent mapping of Irish literature which have been discussed throughout this chapter. As such, examining how Graham's research concerns are played out in a digital

environment provides an interesting case study for assessing how debates in the field of Irish Studies are addressed and played out in a digital environment.

As previously established, Colin Graham's critical writings have been instrumental in charting developments (or the relative lack thereof) in the field of Irish literary criticism. His interest in this area of Irish Studies developed during his postgraduate work in Bristol, where Graham became aware of the strong sense of a history of literary criticism among English literary critics. As Graham saw it, English scholars could trace a "lineage" to the critical work that they were doing, and noted that no such history was available to Irish academics. He found that among Irish critics there was not much looking back at the history of Irish criticism. Rather, there was a persistent trend among Irish scholars to choose their texts selectively according to their particular agenda and with little or no sense of what preceded them (Graham, May 18, 2011).

A key influence for Graham was critic Richard Kirkland who began work of this sort in Belfast, uncovering the "hidden history" about these debates. Kirkland's work has informed Graham's own scholarly work published in printed form. In his seminal monograph, *Deconstructing Ireland: Identity, Theory, Culture* (2001), and his chapter in *The Cambridge History of Irish Literature* (2006), "Irish Literary Historiography 1890-2000", Graham has sought to critique and to chart the development of an Irish literary historiography. In the "Pillars of Cloud and Fire" chapter in *Deconstructing Ireland*, he posits "some of the schemata into which [Irish literary criticism] has repeatedly fallen" (*Deconstructing Ireland* 33). He clarifies, however, that the account provided in the chapter does not chart the exact development history of Irish literary criticism; that he, argues, is "a history still to be authoritatively written" (33). In his later essay, "Irish Literary Historiography 1890-

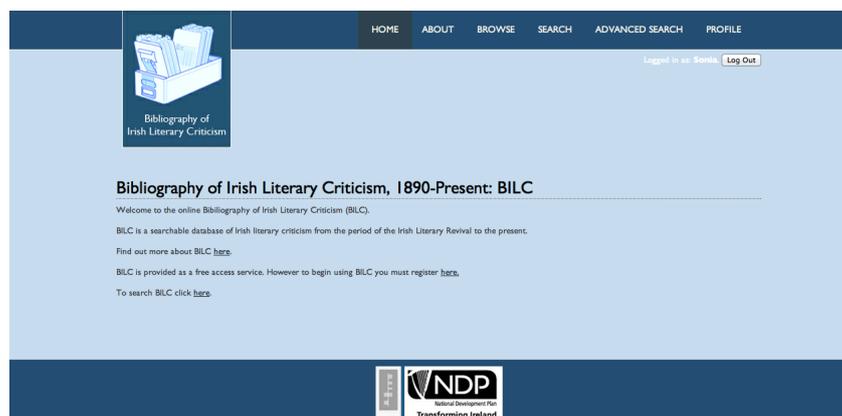
2000” (2006), Graham moves some way closer to writing a history of this sort wherein he traces “the major patterns of thought which have critically shaped ‘Irish writing’ since the Revival” (567). As Graham again accedes, however, “for reasons of space” the account provided in his essay is “by no means a fully comprehensive survey of every intervention in the field [of Irish literary history]” (563). What is provided is a macro consideration of developments in the field of Irish literary criticism that highlights the degree to which concerns with nation and identity have dominated the field.

In an attempt to provide a more micro level consideration of the genre of Irish literary criticism, in 2007, Graham embarked upon an inter-disciplinary archival project which sought to highlight the hybridity of Ireland’s literary history that had been overshadowed by the debate between nationalist and revisionist modes of literary criticism (Graham, May 18, 2011)². Although Graham had been entertaining the idea of a book of this sort for a number of years, it never manifested into reality (Graham, May 18, 2011). Graham’s reluctance to embark on this project in codex form is in itself telling. Most likely, this reluctance was due in part to the enormous undertaking that a project of this sort would be for an individual scholar. In his traditional scholarly practices, Graham demonstrated his commitment to close reading all the works produced by a literary critic or author before he felt sufficiently informed to produce a work of literary scholarship on or about the person of interest. For example, in writing about Ignatius Donnelly – a second generation Irish-American poet born in Philadelphia in 1831 - Graham felt the need to know not only all of the author’s work, but also about the field in which the author’s work is

² In an interview, Graham revealed that the entire BILC project was based on a “book that [he is] never going to write” (Graham 2011).

situated, in order to provide an informed commentary on the matter (Graham, May 18, 2011).

In developing the BILC project, the overall aim was thus to “construct a critical literary history that was not entirely hidden, but was unacknowledged” (Graham, May 18, 2011), thus closer to a distant reading approach. Building on Kirkland’s work and his own work in print form, one of Graham’s key objectives in developing the BILC project was to unearth this “unacknowledged history” of Irish literary criticism by making widely available the bibliographical records of previously “hard come by” material stored within physical archives. Another key objective was to enable these bibliographical records to be searched in a “flexible” way. As stated on BILC’s homepage the Bibliography “aims to be a flexible research tool” by providing entry points according to not only author and title but also by date, publisher and by subject keyword. By including records of Irish critics responding to literatures other than Irish, the project also sought to enhance “the international dialogues favoured by the Ireland of today”. Overall, in developing the BILC project, Graham sought to create a resource that would enable users to “trace fresh narratives of Irish literary criticism/history” (www.bilc.nuim.ie).



BILC Home Page

3.2. Humanities and IT

The BILC database is a project of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth and was funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS). The database was developed over the space of four years by the project's editor, Colin Graham, and the project post-doctoral researcher, Thomas Hubbard. At various stages in the project, ICT colleagues were employed to develop the technical structure of the database, with software engineering expertise and advisory input provided by Damien Gallagher, software engineer with An Foras Feasa, and John Keating, Associate Director, An Foras Feasa.

According to the project's editor, there were two reasons for embarking upon the project: funding and his own academic interests. Interestingly, Graham revealed that, "the funding opportunity was there before the idea" (Interview May 18, 2011). Undoubtedly therefore, the nature of the project was significantly shaped by the requirements of the funding body. The funding for the project came from the IRCHSS Thematic Research Grants 2005-2006. Graham submitted an application based on "Theme 1: Research infrastructures in the humanities and social sciences". The guidelines for applicants under this theme were as follows:

This priority will seek to respond to the challenges of creating a research infrastructure in the third-level system in Ireland, which will underwrite national capacity for top class research in the humanities and social sciences. Project Grants awarded within this rubric will support the creation and development of datasets, digitalisation of archives, surveys and methodologies (http://www.irchss.ie/awards/previous/2005_6.html).

As evident from this list of criteria, the funding body was particularly interested in projects with a digital aspect. Noting this particular concern, in drafting his proposal Graham stated that a "database" would be created which contained the digitized MARC records of works of Irish literary criticism from the Literary Revival to the present day.

Having successfully obtained the funding for the project, work began on building the BILC database. The technical structure of the BILC database was built in two phases. As the project had been initiated from an exclusively humanities environment, the original technological structure of the project reflected the limits of the experience with database technology that the editor and the cataloguer possessed. In the original database model developed for the project, a table of the large text files was created containing the MARC records that had been inserted by the cataloguer. As the project progressed, however, it became evident that this database structure did not enable the material to be searched in a manner which the project editor had envisaged. Subsequently ICT and software engineering expertise was introduced through AFF consultancy input and the recruitment of additional adjunct personnel.

Based on their previous experiences of developing databases for humanities researchers, software engineers Damien Gallagher and John Keating were aware that the original database model did not enable relations between the information stored within the table to be created and that such relations would be required to permit the types of searches that humanities scholars would wish to conduct³. While it would have been possible to create a new database model using XML, for the purpose of this project it was deemed an inappropriate use of time and resources, as a Relational Database Model (RDS) would provide the same results. Moreover, to do so would have required the cataloguer to re-enter all the data that had been previously uploaded into the old model. Given that the project had limited financial resources, it was determined that it would be more time and cost effective to work with what had been originally developed as opposed to starting an entirely new system. This reasoning is supported by the work of the digital humanist, John Bradley, who has

³ Information regarding the technical structure of the database and the manner in which it evolved were obtained from an interview with Damien Gallagher conducted on the June 9, 2011.

noted that “XML is well suited when project materials are ‘document oriented’ and involve marking up written text, whereas RDB is well suited when project materials are ‘data oriented’, i.e. looking at materials outside of a textual framework” (Bradley 134).

Subsequently, a new relational database was developed using PostgreSQL which imported the data that had already been entered into the original model. Simply defined, a relational database is a collection of data items organized as a set of formally described tables from which data can be accessed or reassembled in many different ways. In her account of database published in the MLA special issue, N. Katherine Hayles provides a description of relational databases which is worth quoting in its entirety as it highlights the extent to which this database model is dependent on a classificatory grid:

In a relational database, the data are parsed into tables, consisting of rows and columns, where the column heading, or attribute, indicates some aspect of the table’s topic. Ideally, each table containing only one “theme” or central data concept. One table, for example, might contain data about authors, where the attributes might be last name, first name, birth date, death date, book titles, and so on; another might have publishers’ data, also parsed according to attributes; another, books. Relations are constructed among data elements in the tables according to set-theoretic operations, such as “insert”, “delete”, “select”, and especially “join”, the command that allows data from different tables to be combined. Common elements allow correlations between tables to be made [...] Working through these correlations, set-theoretic operations also allow new tables to be constructed from existing ones (Hayles 1604).

Figure 1.

Hypothetical Relational Database Model

PubID	Publisher	PubAddress
03-4472822	Random House	123 4th Street, New York
04-7733903	Wiley and Sons	45 Lincoln Blvd, Chicago
03-4859223	O'Reilly Press	77 Boston Ave, Cambridge
03-3920886	City Lights Books	99 Market, San Francisco

AuthorID	AuthorName	AuthorBDay
345-28-2938	Haile Selassie	14-Aug-92
392-48-9965	Joe Blow	14-Mar-15
454-22-4012	Sally Hemmings	12-Sept-70
663-59-1254	Hannah Arendt	12-Mar-06

ISBN	AuthorID	PubID	Date	Title
1-34532-482-1	345-28-2938	03-4472822	1990	Cold Fusion for Dummies
1-38482-995-1	392-48-9965	04-7733903	1985	Macrame and Straw Tying
2-35921-499-4	454-22-4012	03-4859223	1952	Fluid Dynamics of Aquaducts
1-38278-293-4	663-59-1254	03-3920886	1967	Beads, Baskets & Revolution

Within the new model, Java software was employed to run the webpage that the users see when they access the database. Java Hibernate library⁴ was used to enable access to the information in the original database which was then re-presented in the new database environment. Through the combination of these tools, Gallagher broke down the singular table of the original model into a network of tables with relations between them. As John Bradley and Harold Short have argued, it is the ability of a relational database “to present its material linked, selected, and ordered in many ways” (Bradley and Short 11) that makes it particularly enticing for humanities computing projects.

In the BILC database, the data was catalogued according to the MARC record system used by librarians⁵. Separate tables were created under the following headings: Books, Authors/Editors, Publishers, Journal Details and Subject. These tables were automatically populated by extracting the appropriate data fields from the incoming MARC records. The structure of the new database enables the user to search the material stored therein according to author, title, date, publisher or by subject keyword. In only in a small number of instances are the links to the actual works recorded available (to be discussed in detail at a later stage)⁶.

While the categorization of information in the BILC database is particularly rigid, it is the interface which enables the materials listed to be linked in flexible ways. As McGann rightly notes, “[n]o database can function without a user interface, and in the case of cultural materials the interface is an especially crucial”

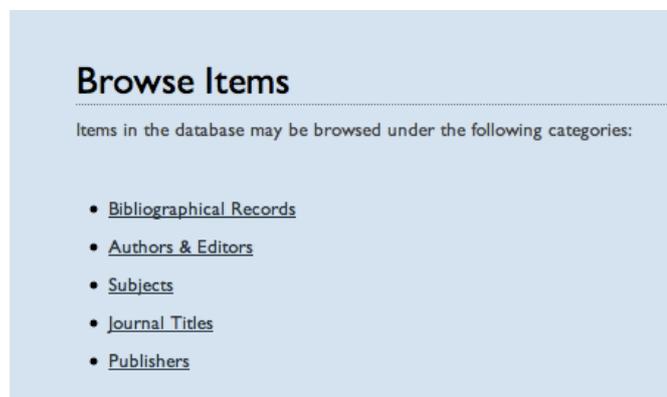
⁴ An overview is available <http://www.hibernate.org>

⁵ As noted by Gallagher, the Marc records system for structuring the data on BILC brought some difficulties and limitations. The Marc record system was designed for cataloguing books. However, as a number of the works listed on the database are journal entries, factors such as volume number or page numbers could not be listed in the Marc record system. As the MARC record system was an already-existing customisation in the initial version of the BILC database, Gallagher had to devise a solution for handling journal articles within the existing structure. Subsequently, the notes column was utilized to store this information. Had more time and resources been available a more appropriate solution for handling journal articles would have been implemented (Gallagher 2011).

⁶ I am indebted to Damien Gallagher for his helpful suggestions on the wording of this section.

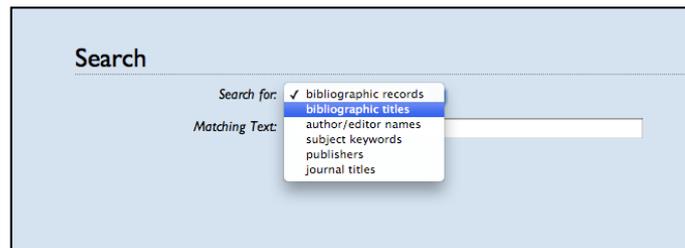
(“Database, Interface and Archival Fever” 1578). N. Katherine Hayles further argues that “[d]ifferent interfaces can be designed according to the particular needs of the user” (Hayles 1604). The interface of the BILC website was designed to permit “multiple entry points” to the materials listed in the database by enabling the user to search according to author, title, date, publisher and by subject keyword. It also provides the options of “browsing” (*Figure 2*), “searching” (*Figure 3*) or conducting an “advanced search” (*Figure 4*). Additionally, the BILC database enables users to browse or search by the 1,755 “subject keywords” assigned to the MARC records in the database. Chosen by the project research team, these keywords vary in scope and were designed to accommodate searches relating to basic authors but also searches reflecting the editorial aims of the project, such as its commitment to the wide geographical spread of critical writing in Ireland, or an interest in reception of continental writers in Ireland (Graham, email correspondence, May 21, 2012).

Figure 2.



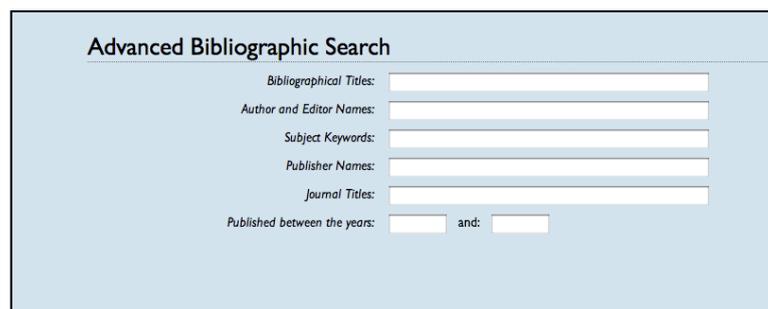
Browsing options on the BILC interface.

Figure 3.



Searching options on the BILC interface.

Figure 4.



Advanced searching options on the BILC interface.

In his comments on the genesis and development of the database, Graham has revealed that he considered the technical structure of the database as providing a more appropriate environment than a printed collection for what he was trying to achieve. By enabling the user to search according to author, title, date, publisher and by subject keyword, the database provides “multiple entry points” to its contents, and in so doing, seeks to render the database a “flexible research tool”. In presenting the user with various modes of accessing the material contained within the database, Graham imagined that scholars using BILC would be “afforded the possibility to re-formulate the canon but also to re-formulate the syllabus” (Interview 18 May, 2011). Moreover, by permitting the user to sift through the material in a number of ways as opposed to a particular linear narrative, Graham envisaged that the database would

serve to disrupt the “existing story” of Irish literary historiography. As such, Graham has suggested that, “the digital format may test the academic assumptions” made in the universities, and in so doing may “ultimately stretch them” (Graham, 18th May, 2011).

In expressing his aspirations for BILC, Graham’s formulations echo Ed Folsom’s earlier commentary on the *Walt Whitman Archive*. Like Folsom, Graham expressed a belief that the database environment would enable the user to overcome any grand-narrative that an editor or critic may attempt to place on the material listed in the database. Moreover, Graham also echoes Folsom’s belief that the multiple ways in which materials can be accessed and linked together in a database environment. As the responses to Folsom’s account of database inform us, however, such considerations are based more on metaphorical understandings of database and subsequently detract attention from the actual implications and opportunities that database technology affords the field of literary scholarship. It is, therefore, both useful and necessary to test the BILC database in order to determine to what extent it yields “fresh narratives” on Irish literary historiography, and by extension, on the field of Irish literature. For it is only through such an analysis that we can deduce what, if any, new maps of Irish literature the BILC database draws.

3.3 “Fresh Narratives”?: Mapping Irish Literature in BILC

One of the greatest benefits of the BILC database is that it enables the entries to be accessed by a number of different trajectories. If we recall the earlier debates surrounding anthological construction, chief among them was the manner in which the material was laid out or organized. While some favoured organizing the material according to author or genre, others arranged the material chronologically. All

choices of organization have met with critique in some form. Rather than having to choose one organizing principle, the BILC database can be sorted according to author, title, date, publisher or subject keyword, depending on the user's research concerns. Hence, the material is not restricted by the editor's choice of organizational tenets.

The most all-inclusive search option on the BILC interface is one conducted according to "bibliographical records". This enables the user to search for a particular word or phrase across the entire collection. For example, if we search "Colm Tóibín", the database brings back 35 results, where "Tóibín" features as an author, a subject key word or in the title of an entry (*Figure 5*). If a more specific focus is desired, the author's name can also be searched by "author/editor", "subject keyword" or "title" only.

As the works listed in the database all relate to Irish literary criticism in some way, searching a particular writer as an author provides an interesting insight into how Irish authors have not only produced the nation's literary corpus but have been actively involved in mediating the reception thereof. For example, if we search "Colm Tóibín" as author, we see that the author has published essays in the public media and elsewhere reviewing the work of other contemporary Irish writers as well as providing commentary on earlier writers such as Henry James and J. M. Synge (*Figure 6*). He has also provided more general commentary on topics such as "how to read a novel" and homosexuality in literature. The results of such a search serve to validate Graham's claim that "criticism is not separate [but] [...] intertwined with [Ireland's] literature" (Graham 2011) and open up interesting new avenues for investigation into Tóibín not only as writer, but as critic.

Figure 5.

Authors	Title	Year
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	The Belfast test [on Bernard MacLaverty] / Colm Toibin	1981
<input type="checkbox"/> Wallace, Arminta	In the shadow of a playwright [interview-article with Colm Toibin] / Arminta Wallace	1994
<input type="checkbox"/> Kelly, Shirley	[Interview with Colm Toibin] / Shirley Kelly	1994
<input type="checkbox"/> Harmon, Maurice (1930 -	[Review of Colm Toibin, The heather blazing] / Maurice Harmon	1994
<input type="checkbox"/> Whelan, G.V.	[Review of Colm Toibin, The sign of the cross: travels in Catholic Europe] / G.V. Whelan	1995
<input type="checkbox"/> Murphy, Hayden (1945 -	[Review of talk given by Colm Toibin at the 7th biennial Edinburgh Book Festival, September 1995] / Hayden Murphy	1995
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Introduction [to Francis Stuart, Black list, section H] / Colm Toibin	1996
<input type="checkbox"/> Dunne, John	[Review of Colm Toibin, The story of the night] / John Dunne	1996
<input type="checkbox"/> Eagleton, Terry (1943 -	[Review of Colm Toibin, The Blackwater lightship] / Terry Eagleton	1999
<input type="checkbox"/> Herron, Tom	Contamination: Patrick McCabe and Colm Toibin's pathologies of the Republic / Tom Herron	2000
<input type="checkbox"/> Kelly, Shirley	Colm Toibin reassessed the old lady of Coole [interview] / [Shirley Kelly]	2002
<input type="checkbox"/> Frazier, Adrian	The double life of a lady [review of Colm Toibin, Lady Gregory's toothbrush] / Adrian Frazier	2002
<input type="checkbox"/> Banville, John (1945 -	Homosexuality [review of Colm Toibin, Love in a dark time] / John Banville	2002
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Introduction [to L.P. Hartley, The go-between] / Colm Toibin	2002
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Love in a dark time and other explorations of gay lives in literature / Colm Toibin	2002
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	[Review of Vincent Banville, An end to flight] / Colm Toibin	2002
<input type="checkbox"/> Harmon, Maurice (1930 -	[Review of Colm Toibin, The master] / Maurice Harmon	2004
<input type="checkbox"/> Clark, Alex	Songs of experience [interview-article with Colm Toibin] / Alex Clark	2004
<input type="checkbox"/> Kenny, John	[Review of Colm Toibin, The master] / John Kenny	2005
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Synge: a celebration / edited by Colm Toibin	2005
<input type="checkbox"/> Sussler, Betsy	Chris Abani and Colm Toibin in conversation [interview-like format] / edited by Betsy Sussler	2006
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Henry James for Venice / Colm Toibin	2006
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Hinterland: the public becomes private / Colm Toibin	2006
<input type="checkbox"/> Walshe, Eibhear	The vanishing homoerotic: Colm Toibin's gay fictions / Eibhear Walshe	2006
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Single minded [a 'rereading' of Henry James, The lesson of the master] / Colm Toibin	2007
<input type="checkbox"/> Broderick, John (1927 - 1989)	Stimulus of sin: selected writings of John Broderick / edited by Madeline Kingston; with a foreword by Colm Toibin	2007
<input type="checkbox"/> Ryan, Matthew	Abstract homes: deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation in the work of Colm Toibin / Matthew Ryan	2008
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	How to read a novel / Colm Toibin	2008
<input type="checkbox"/> Delaney, Paul (1948 -	Reading Colm Toibin / edited by Paul Delaney	2008
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Selling Tara, buying Florida / Colm Toibin	2008

A selection of the results from a search of "Colm Toibin" under "bibliographical records"

Figure 6.

Authors	Title	Year
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	The Belfast test [on Bernard MacLaverty] / Colm Toibin	1981
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Henry James for Venice / Colm Toibin	2006
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Hinterland: the public becomes private / Colm Toibin	2006
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	How to read a novel / Colm Toibin	2008
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Introduction [to Francis Stuart, Black list, section H] / Colm Toibin	1996
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Introduction [to L.P. Hartley, The go-between] / Colm Toibin	2002
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	The living breath of things [review of Seamus Heaney, Human chain] / Colm Toibin	2010
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Love in a dark time and other explorations of gay lives in literature / Colm Toibin	2002
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	[Review of Vincent Banville, An end to flight] / Colm Toibin	2002
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Selling Tara, buying Florida / Colm Toibin	2008
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Single minded [a 'rereading' of Henry James, The lesson of the master] / Colm Toibin	2007
<input type="checkbox"/> Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Synge: a celebration / edited by Colm Toibin	2005

Results for searching "Colm Toibin" as "Author/Editor"

Alternatively, if we search for “Colm Tóibín” as subject, we discover the extent to which his own writing is mediated by critical commentary (*Figure 7*). Just as Tóibín has commented on the works of other contemporary Irish writers, Belinda Mckeon and John Banville have provided reviews of Tóibín’s novels. Commentary has also come from established academics such as Terry Eagleton, Tom Herron and Eve Patten. However, it is notable that commentary from academic publications does not feature prominently within the search results; further inspection reveals that the commentary listed is mostly that from journalistic sources. Undoubtedly this is partly, if not largely, due to the fact that the editors sought to give priority to “hard come by” and lesser-known material rather than to more well known works when selecting the material to be included in the database.

Figure 7.

<input type="checkbox"/>	Wallace, Arminta	In the shadow of a playwright [interview-article with Colm Toibin] / Arminta Wallace	1994
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kelly, Shirley	[Interview with Colm Toibin] / Shirley Kelly	1994
<input type="checkbox"/>	Harmon, Maurice (1930 -	[Review of Colm Toibin, The heather blazing] / Maurice Harmon	1994
<input type="checkbox"/>	Whelan, G.V.	[Review of Colm Toibin, The sign of the cross: travels in Catholic Europe] / G.V. Whelan	1995
<input type="checkbox"/>	Murphy, Hayden (1945 -	[Review of talk given by Colm Toibin at the 7th biennial Edinburgh Book Festival, September 1995] / Hayden Murphy	1995
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dunne, John	[Review of Colm Toibin, The story of the night] / John Dunne	1996
<input type="checkbox"/>	Eagleton, Terry (1943 -	[Review of Colm Toibin, The Blackwater lightship] / Terry Eagleton	1999
<input type="checkbox"/>	Herron, Tom	Contamination: Patrick McCabe and Colm Toibin's pathologies of the Republic / Tom Herron	2000
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kelly, Shirley	Colm Toibin reassessed the old lady of Coole [interview] / [Shirley Kelly]	2002
<input type="checkbox"/>	Frazier, Adrian	The double life of a lady [review of Colm Toibin, Lady Gregory's toothbrush] / Adrian Frazier	2002
<input type="checkbox"/>	Banville, John (1945 -	Homosexuality [review of Colm Toibin, Love in a dark time] / John Banville	2002
<input type="checkbox"/>	Harmon, Maurice (1930 -	[Review of Colm Toibin, The master] / Maurice Harmon	2004
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clark, Alex	Songs of experience [interview-article with Colm Toibin] / Alex Clark	2004
<input type="checkbox"/>	Kenny, John	[Review of Colm Toibin, The master] / John Kenny	2005
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sussler, Betsy	Chris Abani and Colm Toibin in conversation [interview-like format] / edited by Betsy Sussler	2006
<input type="checkbox"/>	Walshe, Eibhear	The vanishing homoerotic: Colm Toibin's gay fictions / Eibhear Walshe	2006
<input type="checkbox"/>	Toibin, Colm (1955 -	Single minded [a 'rereading' of Henry James, The lesson of the master] / Colm Toibin	2007
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ryan, Matthew	Abstract homes: deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation in the work of Colm Toibin / Matthew Ryan	2008
<input type="checkbox"/>	Delaney, Paul (1948 -	Reading Colm Toibin / edited by Paul Delaney	2008
<input type="checkbox"/>	Patten, Eve	The sign of the cross: travels in Colm Toibin Europe / Eve Patten	2008
<input type="checkbox"/>	McCarthy, Justine	Atlantic crossing [review of Colm Toibin, Brooklyn] / Justine McCarthy	2009
<input type="checkbox"/>	McKeon, Belinda	[Interview with Colm Toibin, marking the appearance of his new novel Brooklyn] / Belinda McKeon	2009
<input type="checkbox"/>	McCrum, Robert	You can take the man out of Ireland ... [interview with Colm Toibin, and on his new novel, Brooklyn] / Robert McCrum	2009

Results for searching “Colm Tóibín” as “subject”

As outlined on the database website, “while work by academic critics predominates in BILC, it has been [the editor’s] policy to include a wealth of non-academic criticism”. Hence materials from lesser-known regional journals such as *The Freeman’s Journal* are presented in the database, as are articles from more contemporary publications such as the *RTE Guide*. This inclusion of material published in sources other than academic journals within the database marks a key development in the history of the Irish literary criticism. Stored in the non-hierarchical structure of the BILC database, the user is granted access to a large number of hybrid perspectives on Ireland’s literary heritage. This feature becomes particularly useful when one is studying works by contemporary writers as the earliest instances of commentary surrounding their work appear in popular media, for example, *The Irish Times* or *The Weekend Review*. According to the results yielded from searching “Colm Tóibín” as “subject”, most of the critical commentary produced in the last decade on the author has appeared in the form of review or interview in publications such as *The Irish Times*. Eibhear Walshe’s essay, “The Vanishing Homoerotic: Colm Tóibín’s Gay Fictions” (2006), which appeared in the established literary journal, *New Hibernia Review*, and Paul Delaney’s edited collection of essays, *Reading Colm Tóibín* (2008), published by Liffey Press, are among the view results listed which are from “academic” sources. Writing outside of the academy, these journalistic commentaries provide perspectives that are arguably less likely to have been written according to dominant narratives within Irish Studies and thus may provide “fresh narratives” of Irish literary criticism.

It goes without saying, however, that neither the results yielded from searching Tóibín’s name as “author” or as “subject” include all the works of critical commentary produced either by the author himself or those concerning his own

work, and a critical consideration thereof highlights the processes of selection that have attended the construction of the database. McGann's observations with regards to the *Walt Whitman Archive* are equally applicable here; as he notes, any database "represents an initial critical analysis of the content materials" ("Database, Interface and Archival Fever" 1588). Rather than being an endless "flood of data", therefore, the database provides an account or a map of a particular domain, namely the body of works that make up an Irish literary historiography, rather than a complete reflection thereof. Hence, as with literary anthologies, we must question what narrative or understandings of Irish literary historiography are yielded from this particular and selective choice.

Tóibín is an extremely prolific writer, having published not only an extensive number of fictional works, but also an even larger number of journalistic pieces. Since the 1970s, he has worked as a journalist for *In Dublin, Hibernia* and *The Sunday Tribune*, and as features editor of *Magill*, Ireland's current affairs magazine. In more recent years, he has been a regular contributor to the *Dublin Review*, the *New York Review of Books* and the *London Review of Books*. Between 2007 and 2010, he was art critic for the UK edition of *Esquire Magazine*. Which is to say that the author has produced a wealth of critical commentary that is not listed in the BILC database. In his role as art critic for *Esquire Magazine*, for example, Tóibín has written essays on a number of international artists including Andy Warhol and Richard Long (<http://www.colmTóibín.com/essays>). Yet the international scope of Tóibín's work is not reflected in the results yield from a search of Tóibín as "author/editor" in the BILC database. With the exception of the essay on Henry James perhaps, the majority of the critical works that are listed as being authored by Tóibín are on topics relating to Ireland or Irish literature. Rather than enhancing

“international dialogues”, therefore, the selection of Colm Tóibín’s critical works included in the database regrettably may conceal the global scope of his oeuvre.

This limited representation of Tóibín’s critical writings in the results yielded is indicative of a continued dominance of commentaries and categorizations regarding the nation and a national literature within the BILC database. The majority of the critical works listed which address Colm Tóibín as subject attempt to situate his work under the rubric of Irish literature. For example, Robert McCrum’s interview with the author following the publication of his novel *Brooklyn* is tellingly entitled “You can take the man out of Ireland” (2009). In the article, McCrum situates Tóibín within an Irish literary heritage by comparing him to figures such as James Joyce, Flann O’Brien and John McGahern. Furthermore, McCrum, like many of the other critics whose commentaries on Tóibín are listed in the BILC database, reads the author’s work through a specifically Irish lens.

While such considerations are useful and serve to emphasize the degree to which Tóibín’s writing is connected to his nation of origins, within the BILC database, it is considerations of this sort that have gained predominance over other possible ways of reading the author’s work. This is particularly evident in the “keyword/subject” searches by which the user can access Tóibín’s work. Given Tóibín’s role as a prominent figure in the field of gay literature, and the commentaries by queer theorists on his work, one might expect that a subject keyword search according to “queer studies” would bring back works either by or on Tóibín. However, attempting such a search reveals that the term “queer studies” is not a listed term among the 1,755 subject keywords within the database. While a search of “gender” brings back results which are pertinent to queer studies, such a lumping together of these issues under the term gender is not desirable. Such a

search highlights the extent to which not all trajectories or modes of reading are permitted by the database, most especially, new trajectories in Irish literary history.

Given the international circulation of Tóibín's work, a scholar or student may also want to investigate the author's work in the light of theories of World Literature. They may also want to examine what other works by Irish writers are tagged as being of relevance to world literature. However, as with queer studies, "world literature" is a subject keyword which does not feature within the database. Despite Tóibín's important role as both critic and subject matter in this burgeoning area of literary criticism, the database in its current composition offers a limited account of these new trajectories in Irish literary historiography.

Conclusion: Ensuring our Digital Future

In concluding this critical analysis of BILC, it is worth returning to the questions posed by Wai Chee Dimock in "Genres as Fields of Knowledge" relating to database technology and literary scholarship. Re-posing the questions asked by Dimock in the context of Irish literature and world literature, we might ask: what does Irish literature look like when organized in a database environment? What dividing lines are still maintained? And what kinds of knowledge are or can be generated as a result? Situating the concerns of this chapter within debates in the wider field of the digital humanities, and drawing also from Dimock's understanding of database as genre and Moretti's concept of "literary evolution", we might ask; how do we ensure that the new genre of database – and the increasing volumes of cultural heritage they contain – survive beyond our immediate present?

In considering the BILC database as it relates to debates in the field of world literature, it is useful to read it vis-à-vis Wai Chee Dimock's aspirations for the

digital medium as a means of expanding literary scholarship beyond the borders of national literatures. As previously noted, according to Dimock's understanding, "unlike printed texts, coming to us prepackaged and deceptively contained within book covers, a database does away with the illusion of containment altogether" (1378). She further argues that, "a database is meant not only for storage but also for access, a flood of information that overflows any set frame of inquiry" (1378). Understood thus, the digital database appears like the ideal medium to deliver Dimock's vision for world literature which she describes as: "less a class of substantive objects than a conjunctural effect, the result of an accidental match between the coordinates of literary history and the distribution of human populations across the globe" (1379).

Undoubtedly, one of the main advantages of online digital databases like BILC for the study of world literature is the manner in which they greatly enhance distribution and accessibility. Existing in a freely available, online digital environment, BILC can be encountered – at least potentially – by users worldwide and, as such, overcomes restrictions of place. This allows the materials listed in the database, many of which have been recovered from archives, to be accessed by a wider global audience. By enabling users from places outside of Ireland to engage with the materials that make up an Irish literary historiography, the database has the potential to generate international perspectives on Irish literary reception.

Moreover, owing to its freely available online existence, BILC also makes its material available to users beyond the academic sphere who might not otherwise have access to the materials listed in the database. Hence, by not only opening up the archive, but by placing its contents in an online database, BILC frees the knowledge generated from the archival material from "the secret horde of archive haunters" and

in so doing, “has the power to separate knowledge from academic prestige” (Stallybrass 1581). As newly global and popular insights are brought to bear on Ireland’s literary history, an immense opportunity exists for “fresh narratives” to be generated.

However, if we consider the database in technical terms, we find that Dimock’s claims regarding the fluidity and openness of the digital medium, as a mode which denies any form of taxonomy, are significantly challenged. As previously noted, in her account of relational databases, N. Katherine Hayles calls attention to the structured nature thereof:

In a relational database, the data are parsed into tables, consisting of rows and columns, where the column heading, or attribute, indicates some aspect of the table’s topic. Ideally, each table containing only one “theme” or central data concept (Hayles 1604).

As has been established, databases are carefully constructed entities with set parameters that are both practical and theoretical. A critical analysis of BILC reveals that as a relational database, organized under the taxonomy of Irish literary criticism and containing few hyperlinks, in its current state, the database is limited in large part to a national domain. This theoretical insularity of the database is further compounded by its continuing relative anonymity among scholars both within and outside of Ireland: if the database remains largely unused, it clearly will not generate the “international dialogues” hoped for by its editor.

It is important to note, however, that while in its present state the database remains a predominantly national project, the technological architecture of the digital resource has been designed to permit the database to expand its parameters beyond its current domain. In designing BILC, the software developer, Damien Gallagher, made provisions in the software’s structure for the inclusion of a discussion forum at a later stage. The addition of such a feature would permit users of the database to comment on materials listed in the database as they engage therewith. This would

enable the database to go beyond being merely a catalogue, to becoming a site where more complex national and international dialogues can take place regarding the materials that make up an Irish literary historiography. Additionally, Gallagher also made technical provisions for the inclusion of URLs to the items listed in the database in future developments of the database. Such an addition would serve to bring references into touch with original context of citations and, in so doing, could, at least potentially, enable new considerations of the material listed in the database that are responsive to and reflexive of changing literary and critical reception.

While the analysis of BILC provided in this chapter serves as a rejoinder to Wai Chee Dimock's metaphoric and overly celebratory understanding of database as it relates to world literature and national literatures, the observations made within this case study have significance beyond the literary concerns of this dissertation. Building on earlier work by Dalbello, Rommel and McGann, this chapter has argued that databases such as BILC form part of larger history of the literary collection. Situated within a lineage of bibliographical tools, the similarities between the database and older forms of literary collections become more readily identifiable. Considered thus, it demonstrates how the theoretical debates surrounding anthologies and other literary collections can and should inform our engagement with databases such as BILC.

While drawing on previous knowledge developed in the study of literary collections provides a useful means of engaging with these new digital resources, as the most recent stage in what we might – borrowing McGann's term – refer to as the "e-volution" ("On Creating a Usable Future" 186) of the literary collection, the database requires considerations that are unique to the digital medium. At the risk of stating the obvious, the most significant difference between the print-based literary

collection and the database is the latter's existence in virtual rather than physical space. While the virtual nature of the database has been celebrated by critics such as Dimock and Folsom, a more critical consideration thereof reveals that this virtuality raises new challenges not presented by the codex form, chief among them, the issue of sustainability.

“Sustainability” as it applies to digital resources, “signals a broad set of concerns – they are both technical and institutional – about how to maintain and augment the increasingly large body of information that humanists are both creating and using” (McGann “Sustainability” 1). As the ESF report on “Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities” (September 2011) made clear, sustainability involves the “maintenance and preservation” of both the “content [and the] tools that scholars use to interrogate [digital] objects” (“Research Infrastructures” 21). Understood thus, the issue of sustainability is, it could be argued, a newly inflected concern in the history of the literary collection. For example, when an anthology is published, it does not require a continuing investment - be it financial or otherwise. Rather, following Moretti's logic of literary evolution, we might argue that the survival of the print based literary collection is dependent on its ability to cater to the needs of the society for whom it was produced. In contrast, the survival of a database depends additionally on continued financial and scholarly investment after publication. We find, therefore, that unlike the literary genres discussed by Moretti in his account of literary evolution, the fate of this new genre can be determined by actions taken (or not taken) at the present moment.

As increasing portions of our cultural heritage are being migrated into digital environments, chief among them, databases, what is at stake in ensuring the survival

of digital databases is not only the fate of an individual genre, but our entire cultural record. Take for example, the BILC database; if it were to disappear, it would take with it the retrieved records relating to an Irish literary historiography that it contains. Worse still, when the contents listed no longer exist in physical form and we are left only with their digital surrogates, if the databases which house these surrogates were to become extinct, so too would the artefacts from our literary history. Considered thus, sustainability is not only a technological concern but one which has significant implications for humanities scholarship.

Given what is at stake in ensuring the survival of digital resources, it is not surprising that within the digital humanities community, sizeable attention has been afforded to the issue of sustainability. Jerome McGann and Claire Warwick and her team on the LAIRAH⁷ project have provided the most explicit engagements with this subject. While McGann has been instrumental in demonstrating why and how sustainability concerns humanities scholars, Warwick et al. have compiled useful guidelines for ensuring the on-going existence of digital resources (Warwick et al. 2006; 2007). For Warwick et als. the survival of digital resources depends crucially on decisions and actions taken both before and after the development of such resources. Among the features they have identified as contributing to the success of digital resources are detailed user studies both before and during the development of digital projects and adequate dissemination of the project (Warwick et al. 2007)⁸. As both of these issues are pertinent to the BILC databases, in concluding, it is useful to consider to what extent this database adheres to the recommendations made by Warwick et al. In so doing we can assess the extent to which, based on current

⁷ Log Analysis of Internet Resources in the Arts and Humanities.

⁸ For a full account of recommendations made by Warwick et als., see “Evaluating Digital Humanities Resources: The LAIRAH Project Checklist and the Internet Shakespeare Editions Project” (Warwick et als. 2007).

evidence, BILC is likely to survive and, more usefully, what steps can be taken to ensure that it does.

In their previously cited paper, “Appropriate Use Case Modeling” 2010, John Keating and Aja Teehan call attention to the importance of the user in the context of humanities computing. Building on the work of renowned digital humanist, Willard McCarty, they argue that in order to ensure that a digital resource is successful (meaning, that it is used by the community it is designed for), it is preferable to ascertain user requirements and to perform Use Case analysis prior to commencing work on the project (Keating and Teehan 382). According to Keating and Teehan:

A Use Case acts as a blueprint for the system design and typically depicts the steps an actor takes while interacting with the software in order to achieve some meaningful goal or task, goal being higher level and task being lower level (382).

Hence, Keating and Teehan point to the need, firstly, to identify the user and, secondly, to ascertain the goals and the tasks that this user would like to achieve and conduct by interacting with the software.

While there are numerous types of Use Case models available, in a study of twenty-five digital projects developed for the humanities community in the UK, Warwick et al. found that the “designer as user model” was the most common approach taken in developing the projects (“The Master Builders”). According to this model, the Principal Investigators (PI) involved in the various projects believed that because of their “subject expertise” they “understood the needs of users and could infer user requirements from their own behaviour” (“The Master Builders”). As previously noted, in developing the BILC database, the project’s editor, Colin Graham, based his proposal for the database on his own research interests in uncovering the unacknowledged history of Irish literary criticism. No surveys or other forms of research were carried out to ascertain whether the proposed database would be required by its intended users. Hence, Graham himself became the user

around which the project was developed. The characteristics of the user based on the designer are thus: an individual accustomed to archival research; with expertise in the field of Irish literary studies; and an interest in a history of Irish literary criticism.

As an established scholar, Graham had extensive subject expertise in the field of Irish literary studies and owing to this expertise, he possessed a sound knowledge of the needs and requirements of a scholar working in the area. Drawing on the work of Ben Shneiderman and Catherine Plaisant (2005), however, Claire Warwick et al. argue that although this method may uncover some user needs, it is not advisable since it is only possible to truly to know what users may need by asking them (“The Master Builders”). In their own research, Warwick et al. found that in a number of the projects they surveyed, the projects’ audiences consisted of a much more diverse group of users than the academic subject experts that the developers had expected (“The Master Builders”). Based on their findings, Warwick and her team conclude that this design approach is not advisable “since it is difficult to design a resource based on the producer’s own patterns of use, as this can lead to unexpected difficulties for potential users and ultimately lead to its neglect” (ibid).

In the BILC database, the implications of the “designer as user” model are perhaps most evident in the user interface and the choice of subject keywords listed. The search functions of the interface were designed to enable the user to trace the development of an Irish literary historiography by author, title, place and subject keyword, thus reflective of and catering to Graham’s own objectives for the project as opposed to any formally identified need within the community. As previously established, the keywords were chosen by the project research team to accommodate searches relating to basic authors but also searches reflecting the editorial aims and emphases of the project, such as the wide geographical spread of critical writing in

Ireland, and an interest in the reception of continental writers in Ireland (Graham, email correspondence, May 21, 2012). While the searches permitted by the database are useful, particularly for scholars sharing Graham's own research concerns, they have not been designed based on identified needs within the Irish studies community. Hence, a key issue in ensuring BILC's on-going survival will be to expand the database beyond the "designer as user model" to incorporate developments in the field of Irish literary studies more generally enabling it to better serve the needs of the community for which it was designed.

Moving from recommendations made at the design stage in the life-cycle of a digital project to those concerning its dissemination post-publication, the LAIRAH checklist specifies that the ideal digital resource should:

- Have an attractive, usable interface, from which all material for the project may be accessed without the need to download further data or software;
- Maintain and actively update the interface, content and functionality of the resource, and not simply archive it with the AHDS⁹;
- Disseminate information about itself widely, both within its own subject domain and in digital humanities (LAIRAH Checklist 2008).

Although the user interface on the BILC website is quite basic in terms of appearance, it is easy to use and does not require the user to download any further data or software in order to access the material contained in the domain, thus significantly enhancing its usability. Hence, while no further efforts have been made to "maintain and actively update the interface, content and functionality of the resource" since its publication, the technical structure of the BILC database remains, at present, in good repair.

However, as the LAIRAH checklist makes clear, maintenance of digital resources applies to both their technical structure and to their contents. Tellingly, it is the content of the BILC database that has begun to show the signs of scholarly

⁹ Arts and Humanities Data Service.

neglect. Having received no further scholarly investment since its publication, the content of BILC has already begun to date, with an obvious detrimental effect on the functionality of the database. For example, on the BILC homepage, it is stated that the database provides works relating to Irish literary criticism from the “Revival to the present day”; however, the most recent entry listed in the database was published in 2011, thus indicating that the database has already begun to fall out of sync with recent developments in Irish literary criticism. A practical consideration of the BILC database thus highlights the fact that the future viability thereof is most endangered not by the lack of additional funding or technical obsolescence, but by the neglect of the resource by the community for whom it was designed. Undoubtedly, this situation has come about and been compounded by the absence of any clear, strategic plan for ensuring the upkeep of BILC after its publication. By extension, it is not likely to be resolved until responsibility is taken for maintaining the content of the database beyond the individual and personal level.

Perhaps the most striking, and more avoidable, weakness of the BILC project has been the relative absence of any sustained or systematic attempt to disseminate the project among its intended users. It has been well established by Warwick et al. that the use of digital resources relies heavily on dissemination of the project (“If You Build It Will They Come?” 2008). While this can be achieved in part by advertising in relevant scholarly channels of distribution, such as at conferences, or in scholarly publications, on appropriate websites and so forth, dissemination of digital resources can also be enhanced by a more institutional amendment, namely, the establishing of systematic procedures for citing digital resources. The *Reinventing Research?* report (Bulger et al. 2011) found that

A majority of our scholars are not consistent in citing the digital resources they use, because of concerns about the legitimacy of online resources, and about disappearing links. There is also a lack of agreed citation standards for long-term persistent referencing and easy access.

This is being addressed by the use of DOIs [Digital Objects Identifiers], but researchers are still not consistently using them (*Reinventing Research?* 2011).

As the act of citation serves as one of the most significant ways in which scholarship is disseminated, it follows that if databases such as BILC are cited they too will circulate more readily and, in so doing, ensure their continued existence. Hence, and perhaps ironically, by situating database within the older traditions of epistemology and knowledge generation we are more likely to ensure the survival of this new genre.

The observations and recommendations made here in relation to the BILC database are not exhaustive nor are they limited to this particular case study. Rather, they are intended to serve as suggestions for future developments of BILC database and other resources like it. What is perhaps most significant about the account provided here, however, is the manner in which the recommendations have been arrived at. By analyzing BILC through the interpretive lens of Franco Moretti's "literary evolution", this chapter has combined theoretical and practical engagements with the BILC database, and in so doing, has illustrated how the material aspects of database such as sustainability, accessibility and updating aren't separable from theoretical questions as to the future viability or usefulness of this "new genre". We find therefore, that this application of a world literature theory to a digital humanities resource brings literary scholars into an overdue engagement with what McGann has termed the "digital remediation of our cultural inheritance" ("The Future is Digital" 85) and the opportunities but perhaps more pressingly, the implications that this entails.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5. A “New Interpretive Method”: Text Analysis and the Sociology of Contemporary Irish Literature

“It was easy enough to write a programme that would collate the dead [...], but what he really wanted was a program that could make sense of the dying” (*Let the Great World Spin* 88)

1. Introduction

1.1. Methodology

In the previous chapter, a critique of one of the most commonly used digital resources by literary scholars, the online database, was provided. Focusing on a database designed by and for scholars working in the field of Irish studies, the *Bibliography of Irish Literary Criticism*, the chapter examined the ideological and practical implications surrounding the design and use of such digital resources. As such, the chapter is situated within a strand of the digital humanities which investigates the impact that digital tools are having on traditional humanities disciplines.

As the most widely used type of digital resources among practitioners within the field of literary studies, it is not surprising that of the growing body of digital tools being made available for use in humanities research, it is the database that has received the most critical attention (as evidenced by the MLA debate of 2007, for example). What remains absent, however, is an informed critical perspective from within the literary community regarding the use of the many kinds of text analysis tools that are being designed – at least purportedly – for use by practitioners in the field of literary studies. As Thomas N. Corns observed in his afterword to a special issue of *Literary and Linguistic Computing* journal in 2003, “I doubt that most literary scholars are aware how the current and traditional imperatives of their

scholarly activity could be facilitated by extant resources and techniques” (Corns 221).

Digital humanist and literary scholar, Stephen Ramsay, usefully summarizes computational text analysis thus:

in literary study, computational text analysis has been used to study problems related to style and authorship for nearly sixty years. As the field has matured, it has incorporated elements of some of the most advanced forms of technical endeavor, including natural language processing, statistical computing, corpus linguistics, and artificial intelligence (“Algorithmic Criticism”).

As such, Ramsay argues that, “[computational text analysis] is easily the most quantitative approach to the study of literature, the oldest form of digital literary study, and, in the opinion of many, the most scientific form of literary investigation”. Over the past ten years, a number of literary projects endorsing the use of such methodologies have been produced, including Franco Moretti’s, *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005); Tanya Clement’s study of Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans* (2008); Matthew Wilkens’ “Canons, Close Reading and the Evolution of a Method” (2012). In all the aforementioned projects, the critics, citing Moretti, employ computational text analysis tools to “not read” the literary works under consideration, substituting close reading with these computational approaches. As explored in detail in Chapter 3, the use of computational text analysis in literary scholarship has become so intimately aligned with Moretti’s form of distant reading, they may now be considered practicing partners (Liu 2012).

While Liu argues that this partnership has been instrumental in bringing the digital humanities to “the table” of humanities scholarship, a perspective from within the field of literary studies would reveal that the opposite has in fact been the case. As many literary scholars have rejected Moretti’s call for the abandonment of modes of close reading and the adoption of more distant, quantitative approaches to literary scholarship, by association, they have also rejected the use of computational tools.

One could argue, therefore, that the partnership with Moretti's distant reading has had a detrimental impact on the use of text analysis tools in the field of literary studies.

This chapter proposes an alternative use of computational text analysis methods in the study of world literature than that advocated by Franco Moretti. Uncoupling the link that has formed between Moretti's distant reading and computationally enabled forms of text analysis, it aligns the use of these tools with an alternative world literature methodology, specifically, that proposed by French sociologist, and leading figure in the world literature debate, Pascale Casanova. While Moretti is concerned with reading beyond the confines of the canon, Casanova's methodology focuses on the manner in which the canon is formed. In her controversial book, *The World Republic of Letters*, published in France in 1999 and translated into English in 2004, Casanova proposes a "systematic model for understanding the production, circulation, and valuing of literature worldwide" (Harvard University Press 2004). As James English usefully summarizes, Casanova's work forms part of a "sociological branch of literary study [...] [which] treats the history and logic of literary values and literary canon formation" ("Everywhere and Nowhere" ix).

In keeping with the overall concerns of this dissertation – the triangular configuration of world literature, digital humanities and Irish studies – this chapter investigates whether a combination of Casanova's theoretical methodology with appropriate digital humanities tools and methodologies can provide new insights on a work of contemporary Irish literature. Drawing on ideas postulated by Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters* (1998) concerning literary markets, "value" and consecration, it examines how the "value" of Colum McCann's most recent novel,

Let the Great World Spin (2009), is constructed within what Casanova refers to as the “mediating space” of world literature. In reading a work of Irish literature through the lens of Casanova’s proposed methodology for the study of world literature, the chapter contributes more generally to the as yet under-developed sociology of Irish literature.

As Casanova’s methodology is founded on her analysis of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this chapter necessarily expands her model to render it applicable to the complexities of contemporary book culture. Specifically, this involves the incorporation of a popular perspective through the critical analysis of reviews of the novel made available on the Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk websites. Given the nature and the volume of data made available on these sites, features which lead many to evade or dismiss its existence, it is useful to turn to the use of digital humanities methodologies to enable the literary scholar to convert this wealth of cultural data into knowledge useful for humanistic enquiries regarding McCann’s novel.

Through this combination of digital humanities tools, world literature theory and a work of Irish literature, this chapter seeks, in summary, to: firstly, propose an alternative use of computational text analysis tools in the study of world literature; secondly, demonstrate how a combination of Casanova’s world literature methodology and appropriate text analysis tools can provide new perspectives on a work of contemporary Irish literature and; thirdly, call attention to the pressing need for a sociology of Irish literature in light of changes in contemporary book culture.

1.2. The New Sociology of Literature: Pascale Casanova and *The World*

Republic of Letters

As noted in the publishing blurb for her controversial book, *The World Republic of Letters*, published in France in 1999 and translated into English in 2004, Casanova proposes a “systematic model for understanding the production, circulation, and valuing of literature worldwide” (Harvard University Press). In proposing a world-systems approach to literary scholarship, like Moretti, Casanova is concerned with establishing a methodology that enables us to examine writers and their works beyond the boundaries of national literatures. Following what she refers to as the “Herderian revolution” (*The World Republic of Letters* 105), Casanova maintains that all literatures were “declared national” and “sealed off from each other behind national boundaries” (105). Subsequently, national literary histories were composed and taught in such a way that they became closed in upon themselves, having nothing in common [...] with their neighbours” (105). According to Casanova, this preoccupation with the national has rendered us “blind to a certain number of transnational phenomena that have permitted a specifically literary world to gradually emerge over the past four centuries or so” (xi).

Arguing against a purely nationalist conception of literature, Casanova thus claims that “[l]iteratures are [...] not a pure emanation of national identity” but are in fact “constructed through literary rivalries, which are always denied, and struggles, which are always international” (36). Her argument is built on the premise that “[n]o national entity exists in and of itself” and that in fact, the national state is “constructed solely in relation to other states, and often in opposition to them” (36). Hence, she maintains that in order to comprehend the evolution of a national literary

space, it must be considered in relation to the development of the world literary system as a whole.

Borrowing from both Braudel's concept of an "economy-world" and Pierre Bourdieu's notion of "field", Casanova's central hypothesis is that "there exists a 'literature-world', a literary universe relatively independent of the everyday world and its political divisions, whose boundaries and operational laws are not reducible to those of ordinary political space" (xii). According to Casanova, this world literary space "has its own economy, which produces hierarchies and various forms of violence". She further argues that the "geography" of the world republic of letters is produced by the outcome of these violent struggles "between a capital, on the one hand, and peripheral dependencies" (*The World Republic of Letters* 12). However, as Casanova proceeds to point out,

According to the standard view, the world of letters is one of peaceful internationalism, a world of free and equal access in which literary recognition is available to all writers, an enchanted world that exists outside time and space and so escapes the mundane conflicts of human history (43).

Subsequently, the forms of "literary domination" that the literary centres of Paris, London and more recently, New York hold over "smaller" national literatures tend to go unnoticed.

Casanova's purpose in *The World Republic of Letters* is to trace the development of a world literary space through the very struggles which have been thus far ignored in considerations of the literary universe. In introducing her proposed methodology, which takes as its object of study the world literary space in its entirety, she states that:

The internationalization that I propose to describe here [...] signifies more or less the opposite of what is ordinarily understood by the neutralizing term 'globalization,' which suggests that the world political and economic system can be conceived as the generalization of a single and universally applicable model (40).

Conversely to this “ordinary understanding” she argues that “in the literary world [...] it is the competition among its members that defines and unifies the system while at the same time marking its limits” (40).

Building on Bourdieu’s concept of a literary economy, Casanova’s interpretation of the world-system is based on the idea that within the world literary space, there exists a “market” where “literary value”, the “sole value recognized by all participants [...] circulates and is traded” (*The World Republic of Letters* 13). Relatedly, Casanova argues that each national literature has a stock of literary capital and, in keeping with power relations in Capitalist society more generally, the greater a nation’s literary capital, the more powerful its role is in the world literary system. In *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova identifies three factors which add to the “wealth” of a nation’s literary stock: firstly, the age, and by extension the volume of a national literature; secondly, the existence of “a more or less extensive professional ‘milieu’, a restricted and cultivated public, and an interested aristocracy or enlightened bourgeoisie” (15) and; thirdly, values and judgments assigned by the great intermediaries in the world literary space to works from a national literature. Later in her work, Casanova further maintains that the value of an individual writer is also dependent on the national “literary heritage” to which they can lay claim.

Given the nature of the currency circulated in the world literary space, Casanova further argues that, “value in the literary world is directly related to belief”:

All participants [in the world literary space] have in common a belief in the value of its asset – an asset that not everyone possesses, or at least not to the same degree, and for the possession of which everyone is prepared to struggle (17).

Subsequently she maintains that the “literary value” of individual authors is highly dependent upon the belief in the fact that a writer has “earned his ‘name’” (16-7):

when a writer becomes known, when his name has acquired value in the literary, market – which is to say, once it is believed that what he has written has literary value, once he has gained acceptance as a writer – then credit is given to him (17).

According to Casanova's understanding, however, the value of a writer is only really achieved when his/her merit is believed and indeed promoted by the "consecrating authorities" located in the literary centres of the world literary space.

This key term "consecrating authorities", is employed by Casanova to denote "the class of critics, translators, publishers, academics, and other institutions that jointly are responsible for conferring literary prestige and reputation" (*The World Republic of Letters* 358). As both translation and criticism are "process[es] of establishing value" (23), Casanova argues that those who carry them out hold an "immense power of consecration" within the world literary space. Moreover the authority over consecration held by international critics is consolidated "[b]y virtue of the fact that the competence of critics is acknowledged by all members of the literary world" (22).

While Casanova considers translation and criticism to be the main forms of consecration in the world literary space, she also refers to the role that literary prizes play in assigning value to literary works. Despite being "the least literary form of literary consecration" (146), Casanova accedes that literary prizes function "as the most apparent of the mechanisms of consecration" and as such, they represent a sort of "confirmation for the benefit of the general public" (146-7). Hence she argues that literary prizes "are responsible mainly for making the verdicts of sanctioning organs of the Republic of Letters known beyond its borders" (146).

To summarize, in her account of the world literary systems of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, Casanova sees the processes of establishing literary merit and value as being the exclusive right of the great intermediaries in the world literary space. Thus she observes:

[T]he huge power of being able to say what is literary and what is not, of setting the limits of literary art, belongs exclusively to those who reserve for themselves, and are granted by others, the right to legislate in literary matters (*The World Republic of Letters* 23).

However, in her brief inter-chapter addressing the contemporary literary system, “From Internationalism to Globalization”, Casanova also concedes that, in today’s world literary space, the role of the international critic has been challenged by the “appearance and consolidation of an increasingly powerful ‘commercial pole’” (*The World Republic of Letters* 169). According to Casanova, the emergence of the commercial pole “has profoundly altered publishing strategies, affecting not only patterns of distribution but also the selection of books and even their content” (*The World Republic of Letters* 169). Subsequently, she argues that the role of the “intellectual international” now “stands in danger of being fatally undermined by the imperatives of commercial expansion” (172). Which is to say that the weight of the decisions made by the traditional mediating forces in the world literary space is beginning to wane.

Usefully for the purposes of this dissertation, Casanova dedicates substantial time in *The World Republic of Letters* to discussing the manner in which a number of twentieth-century Irish writers rose to prominence as either national or international writers. Reading the works of Yeats, Synge, O’Casey, Shaw, Joyce and Beckett beyond the “unique experience of a particular history but with the general design of a nearly universal literary structure” (305), Casanova attempts to demonstrate the manner in which writers from “small literatures” struggle to achieve autonomy *for* their national literatures within the world literary space, but also *from* the political concerns of their national literatures (emphasis added).

To a large extent, Casanova’s account of the development of the careers of a number of Irish authors is structured around her attempts to place these writers in relation to the two poles within the world literary space of the twentieth century; the

first is the “autonomous pole” which is the purely literary pole, concerned with advancing art for art’s sake; the second is the “national” or “political pole” which sees literature intimately tied to the politics of a particular territorial space. In Casanova’s understanding, the “great heroes” of the world literary space are those who serve to advance the autonomy of literature rather than those who align literature with political interests. By extension, it is the latter types of writers who are most readily consecrated by international intellectuals operating in the world literary space.

1.3. Mediating Irish Literature

In a review of *The World Republic of Letters* published in the *Field Day Review* (“The World Literary System” 2006), Irish literary critic Joe Cleary identifies what he perceives to be three general failings in Casanova’s work: firstly, he calls attention to the fact that she does not take into consideration or provide any commentary on the literary capitals of the Communist world (209-10); secondly, Cleary points to the notable absence of any account of losses incurred in the world literary economy (12) and; thirdly, he takes issue with Casanova’s failure to account for “the role of the critic and literary criticism in her elaboration of the world-literary system” (213). While all three of these identified weaknesses merit further attention, the absence of a consideration of the role of “nationalized literary criticism in shaping the emergence of the modern world–system” (213) in Casanova’s account of the formulation of the world republic of letters is of specific concern to the argument being made here.

According to Cleary, “[a]s *The World Republic of Letters* has it, [the] world-system is almost entirely generated by the strategic resourcefulness of writers and by

publishing industries and literary award-systems” (213). Subsequently, Cleary argues that, in Casanova’s account of struggles in the world literary space, “literary criticism is treated as a largely incidental or passive adjunct to all this” to the extent that “*The World Republic of Letters* attaches almost no importance to the discipline as serious arbitrating variable in its own right” (213). While acknowledging Casanova’s reference “now and then to the consecrating authority of the literary criticism of writers such as du Bellay, Larbaud or Sartre” and her lengthier discussions of critics such as Herder and Brandes, Cleary points out that,

when she assesses the prestige enjoyed by certain metropolitan literatures or contemplates the foundations of a new national literatures on the edges of the world-system, she never stops to consider the relative strength or the different dispositions of nationalized literary critical establishments or university systems (213).

Extending this critique to his reading of “The Irish Paradigm” chapter of Casanova’s book – the only chapter dedicated to the study of an individual national literature - Cleary maintains that despite the pivotal role that literary critics and academic institutions have played in constructing the literary reputations of the most celebrated of Irish writers, Casanova “has nothing substantive to say about the role of Irish cultural critics” (216). Taking especial issue with Casanova’s failure to account for the role of the critic in the formulation of the world literary space, Cleary usefully asks:

do nationalized literary critical establishments simply play a choric role by merely commenting on literary trends dictated by publishers and markets or by academics and literary award-systems? Or do critical institutions function as serious arbiters of cultural capital and as relatively autonomous players in nationalized cultural contests? (213-4).

Given what he considers to be the import of the role of the critic and critical establishments in the world literary space, Cleary further questions:

Can one really write a serious history of the modern literary world system without at least a chapter on the role of the major modern critics and arbiters of taste, from Diderot or de Stael to Auerbach or Jameson? Or one that does not weigh the role in history of the French, German, English, US, Soviet, Chinese or Latin American national university systems in establishing the contours of modern literary space? (214).

For Cleary, the role of the critic - particularly, the national literary critic - merits a “fuller and livelier debate” than Casanova provides (216) and, in his view, Casanova’s theoretical system would have been greatly strengthened “were it properly to recognize the role of literary criticism and the university system as arbitrating institutions in their own right” (214)¹.

While Cleary usefully points to a significant absence in Casanova’s analysis of the mediating space of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, his own understanding of the “serious arbiters of cultural capital” is itself limited, and, more significantly for the purposes of this dissertation, out of sync with other current developments in literary culture. According to Cleary’s understanding, national institutions of literary criticism - made up of individual critics and university systems - play a decisive role in the consecration of literary works. It is clear from Cleary’s account of the “critic” that he understands the term to refer to the academic operating within the university system. His understanding of “critical institutions” is equally conservative, where he uses the phrase to refer to university systems. But are academics the only type of “critics” operating within the world literary system? And are universities (and associated academic coteries) the only type of “critical institutions” deciding over the evaluation and consecration of literary works?

Usefully, in *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova gestures, albeit briefly, towards an area where Irish literary studies has yet to afford sustained critical attention – the sociology of contemporary literature. As previously noted, in her account of the world literary systems of the nineteenth and the early twentieth

¹ As was established in Chapter 4, Colin Graham has carried out important work in tracing the symbiotic relationship that has existed between Irish literature and Irish literary criticism in the period 1800-2000. As Graham points out, Irish literary criticism has played an instrumental role in the making of a national literature. Thus, Graham’s work usefully corroborates Cleary’s claim relating to the powerful role played by national literary critics in the mediation of literature.

centuries, Casanova sees the processes of establishing literary merit and value as being the exclusive right of the great intermediaries in the world literary space. In her words,

[T]he huge power of being able to say what is literary and what is not, of setting the limits of literary art, belongs exclusively to those who reserve for themselves, and are granted by others, the right to legislate in literary matters (*The World Republic of Letters* 23).

However, in focusing on the institutional forms of consecration only, Casanova fails to take into consideration the complex processes of literary reception as they occur at the level of general readers.

This absence in her theoretical methodology gains increased significance when we seek to apply it to an analysis of the processes of consecration in the contemporary world literary system which has been significantly altered by the advent of the Internet and Web 2.0. As Alex Wright (2009) rightly observes,

books now come to market in an increasingly open, networked environment where their fates are determined not by newspaper reviewers alone, but also by the collective judgment of readers on Amazon and social networking sites such as GoodReads, LibraryThing, and Shelfari, where visitors upload and share lists of books in their libraries, post reviews and ratings, and find like-minded readers, all in a vast Borgesian labyrinth of visible hyperlinks (Wright 63).

These new channels of dialogue identified by Wright, are fundamentally altering how literature is mediated and received where online customer reviews have become one of the most powerful mediating forces in the consumer market. But as Grant Blank points out in his book *Critics, Ratings and Society* (2007), reviews are important not just because they influence success and failure of products, they also make or break reputations and careers, and often play a critical role in stratification, power, and status: like literary prizes, reviews “are a mechanism through which social status is made publicly visible” (Blank 1). In other words, that in a literary context, they are instrumental in establishing the “value” of a literary work.

Blank usefully compares the role of traditional “gatekeepers” with that of reviews and observes that, “[a] key characteristic of gatekeepers is that they occupy

a position of formal authority in an organization or process” (Blank 4). Unlike reviews, “they are not sought out for information; they give permission” (Blank 4). Furthermore, while gatekeepers may explain their decisions, “they don’t have to convince authors that their decisions are correct” (Blank 4). Conversely, “reviewers must convince” as they have no formal authority and the decision to follow a reviewer’s advice is strictly *voluntary*” (emphasis in original) (Blank 4). Echoing Casanova’s emphasis on the importance of “belief” for consecration in the world literary space, Blank argues that “[t]he mechanisms of credibility [...] are central” (Blank 3) to the power of reviews. They hold weight because they are considered to be unbiased accounts or evaluations, and therefore more credible than those of established gatekeepers who may be motivated by institutional or commercial interests.

With the rise of online shopping and social media sites such as Amazon, eBay, Facebook and Twitter, the volume and weight held by reviews has escalated to such a degree that voices operating outside of the academy and other institutions responsible for the conferring of value and prestige have significantly altered the processes of mediation a work undergoes as it circulates in the literary space. As Ed Finn has noted, with the rise of sites such as Amazon and Librarything, “millions of cultural consumers are now empowered to participate in previously closed literary conversations and to express forms of taste through their purchases and reviews of books” (“Becoming Yourself” 1). In a similar vein, David Berry has observed that technology enables the “disregarding and bypassing [of] the traditional gatekeepers of knowledge in the state, the universities and the market” (Berry 8).

We find, therefore, that Internet technology, in particular Web 2.0., and the proliferation of social media have rendered the mediating space of today’s world

literary system considerably more diverse than that described by Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters*. By enabling general readers to engage in previously closed literary debates, the Internet has altered the role of the powerful intermediaries in the world literary space, among them, the national literary critic and critical institutions, which Joe Cleary identified as being decisive forces in the world-literary system. Subsequently, questions regarding literary consecration and evaluation have become more complex than hitherto.

2. Text Analysis and Literary Scholarship

2.1. Computational Text Analysis and World Literature

While there has been much debate about how the emergence of “big data”² brought about by the Internet will affect the field of literary scholarship, this debate has tended to focus on the volume of literary works that have been made available by digital libraries such as Google Books and the HathiTrust (to be discussed in due course). Moreover, this debate has tended to revolve, once again, primarily around the work of Franco Moretti. Commenting on the significance of Google Books for literary scholarship, in an interview with *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Moretti stated that, “[i]t’s like the invention of the telescope [...] [a]ll of a sudden, an enormous amount of matter becomes visible” (Moretti qtd. in Parry 2010). Having this wealth of data at our disposal, Moretti argues, “just puts out of work most of the tools that we have developed in, what, 150 years of literary theory and criticism”, and, in keeping with arguments he has made elsewhere, he maintains that “[w]e have to replace them with something else” (ibid). According to Moretti, what we should replace them with are computational research methods.

² According to FX Diebold, “‘big data’ refers to the explosion in the quantity (and sometimes, quality) of available and potentially relevant data, largely the result of recent and unprecedented advancements in data recording and storage technology (Diebold 2003).”

Despite the seemingly antithetical relationship between modes of computational text analysis and traditional practices of literary scholarship (discussed in Chapter 3), in recent years, a number of projects have emerged within the field of digital humanities, which employ digital tools in order to conduct literary enquiries. Broadly speaking, these projects can be divided into two categories, both of which endorse forms of distant reading of literary texts. The first category adheres most readily to Moretti's own understanding of distant reading wherein text analysis tools are employed to facilitate distant readings of large corpora of texts, containing hundreds, even thousands of literary works. Examples of projects of this kind are Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005), Martin Mueller's work on Shakespeare using WordHoard (2008) and Matthew Wilkens' "Canons, Close Reading and the Evolution of a Method" (2012). The second branch utilizes similar text analysis techniques, but to analyze smaller corpora focussed on specific authors, or, in many case, to study individual literary works. Particularly notable examples of work of this kind are: John Burrow's pioneering work on Jane Austen's novels using TACT (1987); Plaissant et al's. exploration of erotics in the work and correspondence of Emily Dickinson using NORA (2006) and Tanya Clement's analysis of Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* also using NORA (Clement 2008).

Although these projects have yielded interesting results with regard to word frequencies, text patterns, co-occurrences, and so forth, they have not - with the exception of Martin Mueller's work on Shakespeare, perhaps - had a significant impact on work being carried out in the field of literary studies. And while Franco Moretti's *Graphs, Maps, Tress* has been cited well over 290 times (according to Google Scholar), the impact of his work on practices in literary studies remains

notably minimal. In many ways, this has been due to the disjuncture between the types of “results” yielded by the respective projects and the kind of work that is considered useful by scholars in the field of literary studies has evoked criticism from some of the discipline’s leading scholars. For example, in a critique of Moretti’s quantitative approach to the study of the evolution of the novel genre, Katie Trumpener argued that, as utilized by Moretti, “statistical analysis [is] a relatively blunt hermeneutic instrument” (“Critical Response 1” 171). More recently, and as noted earlier, taking issue with Matthew Wilkens’ use of computational analysis in conducting literary criticism, Stanley Fish pointed out that, “frequency is not an argument” (“The Digital Humanities and Interpretation” 2011).

The ongoing disjuncture between computational methods and literary scholarship points to the pressing need for a critical engagement with the manner in which these tools are being designed, developed and employed. Is the literary scholarship driving the development and use of the digital tools, or is it a case that merely because they exist, scholars are using them? From where is digital humanities or humanities computing expertise derived? To what extent are the tools being developed with the needs of the wider literary community in mind? How can these processes be traced in/through the development of tools? What is available to the wider community as a result? And of what use are such tools and technologies to work in the field of literary scholarship?

2.2. The Stanford Literary Lab

As mentioned earlier, the close affinity between distant reading and computational text analysis tools and methodologies has been emblemized by the ongoing collaboration between Moretti and the Academic Technology Specialist, Matthew

Jockers, in the Stanford Literary Lab. Since it was established in 2010, the Stanford Literary Lab has become the centre of quantitative literary research, where researchers and scholars discuss, design and pursue “literary research of a digital and quantitative nature” (<http://litlab.stanford.edu/>). To date, the Lab has published four pamphlets outlining some of the projects being carried out by its researchers; “Quantitative Formalism: An Experiment” (Allison et al. 2011); “Network Theory, Plot Analysis” (Moretti 2011); “Becoming Yourself: The Afterlife of Reception” (Finn 2011) and “A Quantitative Literary History of 2,958 Nineteenth-Century British Novels: The Semantic Cohort Method” (Heuser and Le-Khac 2012). As research in the lab has evolved in parallel with debates in the field of digital humanities, an overview of these pamphlets enables us to trace the changing manner in which text analysis tools are being employed and developed for literary enquiry.

The first pamphlet, “Quantitative Formalism: An Experiment”, by Allison et al. describes their experimentation with quantitative research tools for literary classification, specifically, a text tagging device known as Docuscope (Hope and Witmore 2004) and the “dist” and “hclust” functions in the open-source “R” statistics application. As the authors state, they had turned to use of these digital tools “[b]ecause we were looking for an explicit, quantifiable way to assign texts to this or that genre” (24). But as the research team discovered, these tools revealed little that scholars did not already know or could not identify through processes of close reading. In concluding, the authors state that, “at the end of it all, the great challenge of experimental work [remains] the construction of hypotheses and models capable of explaining the data” (25)³. One could argue, therefore, that in many ways,

³ This approach to the data derived from the project substantiates Stanley Fish’s critique of digital humanities approaches to literary scholarship. As Fish points out, in traditional literary practices, the critic “begins with an interpretive hypothesis and then the formal pattern, which attains the status of noticeability only because an interpretation already in place is picking it out”. Fish goes on to argue

this early project was driven by the digital tools rather than by a specific literary enquiry.

In the second pamphlet, “Network Theory, Plot Analysis”, Franco Moretti employs network analysis to investigate the structure of plot in Shakespearean plays. The idea behind Moretti’s study is that “network theory could offer a way to quantify plot, thus providing an essential piece that was still missing from computational analyses of literature” (11). Lacking the technical competence of other researchers in the lab, Moretti clarifies early on that “the networks in this study were all made by hand” (2), from which one can assume that he employed a basic chart application on a programme such as Microsoft Word. Summarizing his use of network theory, Moretti reports:

Basically, I used (or mis-used) [network] theory in the same way I had used cartography in the *Atlas of the European Novel*, and charts in *Graphs, Maps, Trees*: as a way of arranging literary data that presupposed a principle of order – but not a full conceptual architecture (11).

Acknowledging the limited scope of the networks he provides, Moretti suggests that “they’re like the childhood of network theory for literature; a brief happiness, before the stern adulthood of statistics” (3). In concluding however, he points to the work of Matthew Jockers who had begun to approach the same problematic – could plot be quantified – using algorithmically driven computational text analysis tools.

While the aforementioned pamphlets can be summarized as investigations into what findings or insights can be gleaned from the intersection between quantitative digital tools and literary works, the Lab’s two most recent publications, “Becoming Yourself” and “A Quantitative Literary History of 2,958 Nineteenth-Century British Novels: The Semantic Cohort Method” provide more confident and engaged forms of digital literary studies. In “Becoming Yourself”, Finn employs

that “[t]he direction is the reverse in the digital humanities: first you run the numbers, and then you see if they prompt an interpretive hypothesis” (“The Digital Humanities and Interpretation” 2011).

“network analysis methodologies and ‘distant reading’ of book reviews, recommendations, and other digital traces of cultural distinction” (“Becoming Yourself” 2) to trace the literary networks built around the American author, David Wallace. Using a combination of Perl scripts (to gather and groom the data), a MySQL database (to store it), and the visualization tool yEd (to create the graphs depicting the findings) (“Becoming Yourself” 3), Finn extracted, sorted and visualized data from the Amazon website relating to Wallace’s work. He then used this data in his account of Wallace’s literary reputation⁴.

Finn’s use of quantitative research methods differs from the two earlier projects in two significant ways: firstly, as the argument outlined in “Becoming Yourself” is derived from Finn’s doctoral dissertation which explores how changing models of literary production are blurring or erasing the divisions between authors, critics and readers (“The Social Lives of Books” 2011), his analysis of literary networks is rooted in a literary research project, driven by a sophisticated literary problematic centred around individual writers and texts. Secondly, and relatedly, the types of texts which Finn employs in his quantitative studies are not novels, but reviews. As Finn’s project demonstrates, the use of quantitative tools enables him to trace networks as they are formulated by readers through their reviews and customer choices on the Amazon website, and in so doing, to glean new insights in to the sociology of literature in the twenty-first century.

⁴ At the 2010 and 2011 Digital Humanities conferences, Finn presented various elements of his doctoral research. In the paper given at the 2010 conference in King’s College London, “The Social Lives of Books: Mapping the Ideational Networks of Toni Morrison”, Finn described his use of network analysis techniques in his exploration of the communities of readership that have emerged around Morrison’s work and the literary company in which her readers and reviewers perceive her (<http://dh2010.cch.kcl.ac.uk/academic-programme/abstracts/papers/html/ab-824.html>). At the 2012 conference, Finn presented a paper entitled “Reading Writing and Reputation: Literary Networks in Contemporary American Fiction” which discussed many of the issues addressed in his pamphlet published as part of the Literary Lab series (<http://dh2011abstracts.stanford.edu/xtf/view?docId=tei/ab-265.xml;query=ed%20finn;brand=default>).

In the most recent pamphlet, Heuser and Le-Khac provide a report on a long-term experiment tracing macroscopic changes in the British novel during the nineteenth century. While grounded in a humanistic enquiry, the authors point out that “the project was simultaneously an experiment in developing quantitative and computational methods for tracing changes in literary language” (1). As the authors point out, “the macroscopic study of cultural history, is a field that is still constructing itself. The right methods and tools are not yet certain, which makes for the excitement and difficulty of the research” (1). Taking their impetus from Raymond Williams’s highly important work, *Culture and Society*, which studies historical semantics in a period of unprecedented change for Britain, Heuser and Le-Khac “set out [...] to build on Williams’s impulse by applying computational methods across a very large corpus to track deep changes in language and culture” (2). Spanning over 45 pages (excluding the post-script), this pamphlet describes their complex, iterative digital humanities approach to this research question, outlining in detail the sophisticated technical tools that were designed⁵ and implemented and the challenges that the researchers encountered during the process⁶.

In the post-script – perhaps the most intriguing section of the pamphlet for literary scholars – Heuser and Le-Khac provide an honest and reflexive account of their quantitative approach to literary enquiry. While the use of the various digital tools employed throughout – most specifically, Correlator – revealed interesting numbers regarding word co-occurrences and frequencies, the authors confess that “[h]ow to move from this kind of [quantitative] evidence and object to qualitative arguments and insights about humanistic subjects— culture, literature, art, etc.—is

⁵ For the purpose of their project, the authors custom-built Correlator (Heuser and Le-Khac 2010), a tool which enabled them to compute the degree of correlation of every word in their corpus with every other word.

⁶ For a detailed account of the development of digital humanities tools for the project, see Heuser and Le-Khac, 6.

not clear” (46). In concluding, Heuser and Le Khac point out that “[t]he digital humanities and those looking on as this emergent research develops can see this central tension as a problem. And too often this problem revolves around ugly issues of disciplinary turf and encroachment”. Against such dualisms, they propose the following strategy:

to us it seems far better to try to get past such issues and, in the modest spirit of a field still figuring things out, take criticisms from both scientists and humanists as legitimate concerns, opportunities to learn to do what we do better. To do so, to strive to integrate the rich resources of both worlds is to explore the ways in which this tension, more than anything, can be productive and full of possibility (49-50).

An overview of the four pamphlets thus indicates a notable maturation in the manner in which quantitative tools are being utilized in literary enquiries. Although Alison et al. and Moretti state that their projects are investigations into what literary insights or discoveries can be gleaned from the use of quantitative tools, in both cases the results from their respective studies are neither particularly revelatory or new. However, the limited nature of the results yielded is not necessarily due to the capabilities of the tools employed, but to the manner in which they are applied and the research question which the researchers seek to address in using them. In Allison et al. pamphlet, the issue driving the use of the quantitative tools was that of literary classification. But as has been demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the question of literary classification is highly complex, to the extent that there is a general consensus that no work can be simplified as belonging to any one category. It is thus not surprising that the quantitative tools employed by Allison et al. failed to establish the precise criteria that make up a specific genre. Similarly, one has to question the validity of Moretti’s objective in employing network analysis – the quantification of plot. Thankfully, Moretti does not succeed in reducing the complexities of *Hamlet* to a number, due in part to his limited technical skills but

more fundamentally to the play itself. And while he does generate some interesting “models” charting the relation between characters in a number of Shakespeare plays, they fail to reveal any new knowledges of the plays that a well-trained close reader would not identify through traditional practices of reading.

Ed Finn’s pamphlet marks a welcome departure from the earlier two projects in that his use of quantitative tools is directly related to his literary research question regarding the formulation of literary prestige in contemporary society. Unlike the earlier projects, the tools that he employs are selected on the basis of their usefulness for his task at hand, rather than vice versa. The shift from text to extra-text in Finn’s work also signals an important development in the use of quantitative research methods in the field of digital literary studies. As Bob Nicholson has recently observed, in projects pertinent to literary studies, “quantitative forms of distant reading have been applied almost exclusively to the study and interrogation of literature” (Nicholson 241). Notably, Finn uses the quantitative data yielded by the digital tools he employs to inform his qualitative analysis of Wallace’s work. And while the close readings of the texts which he provides are somewhat underdeveloped (as Finn concedes himself), Finn does demonstrate how the findings from quantitative research enable nuanced perspectives on the study of Wallace’s work.

While Heuser and Le-Khac’s pamphlet sees the authors return to the study of large volumes of literary texts, the manner in which they approach their sizeable corpora is enhanced by a more sophisticated literary enquiry and a more flexible and iterative approach to the use of digital tools. Perhaps the most useful observations made in this most recent pamphlet for the concerns of this project are those relating to the use of data in humanistic enquiry. As previously noted, Heuser and Le-Khac

call attention to the fact that one of the most pressing challenges brought about by the use of quantitative tools in literary scholarship is “[h]ow to move from [...] [quantitative] evidence [...] to qualitative arguments and insights about humanistic subjects” (Heuser and Le-Khac 46). In an earlier article, “English Literature, Electronic Text and Computer Analysis” (1999), Claire Warwick usefully speculates that “[in the field of literary studies] we may need to accept that computational methods may leave some areas of the discipline changed and others untouched” (“English literature, electronic text and computer analysis”). As demonstrated by Ed Finn in “Becoming Yourself”, one area where the use of quantitative research methods may be usefully employed is in studies relating to the sociology of literature - a field, as observed earlier, conspicuously underdeveloped in Irish Studies to date⁷.

2.3. New Convergences of World Literature and Text Analysis: Casanova and Cultural Analytics

As was established earlier, the theoretical approach to world literature proffered by Pascale Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters* is grounded in a sociology of literature which traces the effects of the consecrating forces operating in the world literary system. In his concern with literary reception, mediation and consecration, Finn’s work bears many similarities to the theoretical approach to world literature proposed by Casanova. Surprisingly, however, despite sharing with Casanova many similar theoretical concerns, particularly those derived from Bourdieu’s concept of a cultural economy, Finn makes no reference to the established critic’s work. From the overview of both Casanova and Finn’s work provided here, it is evident that there is

⁷ I am indebted to faculty members in the School of English, Media and Theatre Studies, NUI Maynooth, particularly Prof. Joe Cleary, for this useful observation, made during my department review in 2011.

a rich potential correlation between the world literature theory proposed by Casanova and the digital humanities approach endorsed by Finn. Hence a combined reading of their respective works provides an example of how digital humanities can usefully dialogue with world literature theories other than that of Franco Moretti, where each field can be enhanced by an engagement with the other.

While Casanova takes as her field of study the entire international literary space, Finn limits the parameters of his research to an American literary landscape: unlike the French critic's global approach to the study of literature, Finn's work seeks to establish the place of the authors of his study within a national literary space. For example, the sources of his professional reviews are American "nationally prestigious newspapers and magazines" ("Becoming Yourself" 3), thus limiting the professional perspective to those operating with an American cultural space. One can assume also that his customer reviews and recommendations are drawn from the Amazon.com site, which is to say, the American site. As will be discussed at a later stage, given the wealth of data which Finn's methodology incorporates, this narrowing of focus to a particular context – in this instance, American – was necessary in order to render his project feasible.

If Casanova's geographical scope is notably broader than that of Finn, the temporal parameters of the latter critic's research are more useful for those concerned with the study of reception and authorial fame in the contemporary literary space. Whereas, as noted above, Casanova's study focuses on the development of literary space in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Finn examines the construction of literary reputation in the contemporary literary space. Specifically, he is concerned with examining "the changing nature of literary culture in the digital era" ("Becoming Yourself" 2). In order to facilitate such a study, Finn

examines the “digital traces” left online by readers and consumers. In employing this type of digital, extra-textual data into his study of literary prestige, Finn introduces a new and significant dimension to the study of literary reception that is notably absent from Casanova’s methodology.

This turn towards the types of data being made available online is not unique to Finn’s work; rather, it forms part of a larger body of work in the digital humanities, known as “cultural analytics”. Pioneered by the digital humanist and cultural critic, Lev Manovich, the term “cultural analytics” was coined to refer to “a new paradigm for the study, teaching and public presentation of cultural artifacts, dynamics, and flows” (“Cultural Analytics: Visualizing Cultural Patterns in the Era of ‘More Media’” 2009). Writing in 2007, Manovich called attention to the fact that, as a result of the digitization efforts by museums, libraries, and companies over the last ten years, such as large-scale book scanning by Google and Amazon, and the explosive growth of newly available cultural content on the web, large data sets of cultural material are now available (“Cultural Analytics: Analysis and Visualization of Large Cultural Data Sets” 2007). Owing to this proliferation of information relating to culture, Manovich has proposed that,

the ground has been set to start thinking of culture as data (including media content and people’s creative and social activities around this content) that can be mined and visualized. [...] if data analysis, data mining, and visualization have been adopted by scientists, businesses, and government agencies as a new way to generate knowledge, let us apply the same approach to understanding culture (Manovich 2007).

Notwithstanding their obvious similarities to the sociological approaches to literature currently being endorsed in the field of world literature, Liu has argued that recent digital humanities approaches such as cultural analytics “will not even be in the same league as Moretti, Casanova, and others unless we can move seamlessly between text analysis and cultural analysis” (Liu 495). While digital humanists have

the tools and the data, in Liu's view, what they continue to lack is the in-depth cultural analysis required to makes sense of the material with which they are dealing. Rather than moving "seamlessly between text analysis and cultural analysis", however, it is more useful to consider the two as being intimately, but complicatedly, intertwined. By employing forms of cultural analytics, Casanova's theoretical model can be expanded to include nuanced considerations of the formulation of literary prestige in the contemporary literary space. At the same time, the combination which is proposed in the following case study serves to ground cultural analytics in a form of cultural criticism identified by Liu as being regrettably absent in the digital humanities.

3. Spinning in a Digital World: Case Study

3.1. "One of the Best Novels in the World": *Let the Great World Spin*

Set in 1974, New York, and centered around Philip Petit's tight rope walk between the Twin Towers, Colum McCann's most recent novel, *Let the Great World Spin* (2009), seems far removed from the world of digital technology. On numerous occasions throughout the novel, however, McCann anticipates the coming of the Internet and the impact it would have – or, more correctly, is having - on human experience. In an early chapter of the novel, Claire Soderberg, a Park Avenue wife and a bereaved mother, recounts her deceased son Joshua's predictions of how computer technology would alter human interaction. As Claire recalls, he believed that "[o]ne day the computer would bring all the great minds together" (*Let the Great World Spin* 88). In the "Etherwest" chapter, McCann engages more explicitly with the context out of which the Internet evolved. Narrated by Sam, a young computer programmer and phone-phreaker, the chapter recounts how

communications technologies enabled the narrator and his fellow hackers to “experience” Petit’s walk between the Twin Towers in New York, despite being located in a room in Silicon Valley in California. The narrator imagines the day when technology would be so advanced “we wouldn’t even have to think of phone lines” (187).

In an interview with Colum McCann following his winning of the IMPAC book award in 2011, Niall MacMonagle made reference to the extent to which the novel *Let the Great World Spin* itself now circulates in the virtual, online world which its characters imagined, by pointing out that “this novel in 0.10 seconds produces 4, 260,000 references on Google”. As MacMonagle sees it, the number of references yielded by searching “Let the Great World Spin” is “testimony to the huge interest in it” (MacMonagle 2011). MacMonagle’s observation calls attention to two things that are of concern to this research project: firstly, the volume of information concerning the novel currently available on the Internet and; secondly, the extent to which this wealth of data is indicative of its popular success.

Although Colum McCann’s earlier works have gained the writer acclaim in Ireland, the US and elsewhere, his status as a successful Irish, American and international writer was confirmed by the reception of this, his most recent novel⁸. *Let the Great World Spin* is made up of the narratives of eleven different narrators of different genders, nationalities and social class; with the divergent narrators and the various strands of the narrative brought together by Petit’s daring act. Given its American setting and the centrality of the now highly symbolic, Twin Towers in the narrative, *Let the Great World Spin* has been referred to as a “New York novel”

⁸ McCann’s forthcoming novel, *Transatlantic* (to be published by Random House in the Summer/ Fall of 2013) moves between Ireland and the US, charting events that bind the histories of the two nations together in ways which have received little attention in the dominant meta-narratives of either country. For a brief summary of *Transatlantic*, see <http://www.colummccann.com/books.php>.

(*Financial Times*), a “9/11 novel” (*Esquire*) and an “American novel” (Random House Inc.). Despite its “American” setting and theme however, the novel has also been claimed as part of an Irish national literature, due in part to the origins of the author, but also to the presence of Irish characters within the novel and the particular resonance of their stories with Irish cultural experiences (Cusatis 2011; Flannery 2011).

While there has been a significant divergence of critical opinions with regard to the place of the novel, there has been general “national” consensus on its literary merit. On its publication, the novel received wide media acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic. Writing for *The Independent*, Douglas Kennedy (Kennedy 2009) described *Let the Great World Spin* as a “highly original and wondrous novel”. In *The Literary Review*, Micahel Arditti notes that while “[t]he book has received enormous – and well-deserved – praise in America for its depiction of New York, [...] its achievement is far greater” (Arditti 2009). In a review published in *The Times*, Kate Saunders has gone so far as to suggest that the novel has been “weighed down with praise from other New York scribblers” (Saunders 2009), but justifiably so. The novel has also enjoyed huge success among readers, having been translated into thirty languages, it became a best-seller on four continents and held a position on the *New York Times* best-sellers list for a number of consecutive weeks. *Let the Great World Spin* has received further acclaim in the form of literary prizes. On November 18, 2009, the novel won the National Book Award in America, making McCann the first Irish writer to win the award. On June 15, 2011, *Let the Great World Spin* was awarded the IMPAC book award, which McCann received in his native Dublin. In his interview with McCann following his winning of the IMPAC award, journalist

for the *Irish Times*, Niall MacMonagle went so far as to claim that, “the novel [was] not only the best novel of 2009, but [is] one of the best in the world” (June 16, 2011).

When read according to Pascale Casanova’s conceptual model of the mediating space of world literature, we find that *Let the Great World Spin* meets her required criteria for a successful work of world literature: it has been consecrated by the “international intermediaries”, it has been translated into a number of languages and it has won numerous literary prizes. Yet as has been previously established, the contemporary mediating space of world literature is considerably more complex than those of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries where the traditional gatekeepers of literary consecration now share the power of judgment and evaluation with the choices and opinions of everyday readers. As has been previously established also, much of the traces of popular reception now exist in online environments on sites such as Amazon.com.

As a large body of academic commentary on *Let the Great World Spin* has yet to be produced (though undoubtedly, the coming years will see an extensive amount of work of this sort), reception of the novel, as of yet, remains relatively uninfluenced by forms of mediation stemming from national critics or national critical institutions⁹. As such, reader reviews surrounding the novel can be considered as “raw data”, in the figurative sense of the term, in so far as they are responses which have not been mediated through forms of literary criticism. In the more literal sense, the reviews can provide the raw cultural data for studies of the

⁹ At the time of writing, there were three notable critical works on the novel available; John Cusatis’s chapter “Let the Great World Spin” included in his book, *Understanding Colum McCann* (Cusatis 2012); Eóin Flannery’s, “ ‘Burning From the Inside Out’: Let the Great World Spin” which appears in *Colum McCann and the Aesthetics of Redemption* (Flannery 2012) and; Anne Fogarty’s essay, “ ‘An Instance of Concurrency’: Transnational Environments in Zoli and Let the Great World Spin”, included in Susan Cahill and Eóin Flannery’s edited collection, *This Side of Brightness: Essays on the Fiction of Colum McCann* (Cahill and Flannery 2012)

reception of McCann's novel using computational text analysis tools.

As was established through the discussion of the types of projects conducted by researchers in the Stanford Literary Lab provided earlier, text analysis tools are most usefully employed in humanities research when driven by a specific research question or literary enquiry. While there are innumerable questions we can ask of the cultural data surrounding *Let the Great World Spin*, in keeping with the overall concerns of this chapter and this dissertation, this case study sought to employ appropriate text analysis tools to trace national identifiers – words which place the novel within a geographical place or literary tradition – as they appear across a corpora of reviews. As in the case study discussed in Chapter 3, Dr. John Keating provided the humanities computing and technical expertise required in the project discussed here.

In its concern with cultural context, in many ways, this is similar to the research question that drove the text encodings in the software discussed in Chapter 3. Through the manual text encoding and a small amount of data, the digital humanities approach endorsed in the earlier chapter permitted the subjective interpretation of the text under examination by numerous scholars, and in so doing, provided a multiplicity of variations on what were considered to be indicators of cultural context. In contrast, in this case study we were concerned with tracing national identifiers as they appear across a large corpus of reviews. Given the volume of the data we are dealing with, to manually encode each review would be extremely time consuming and labour intensive. As text analysis tools enable the automatic extraction of details from large volumes of data, they provide a potentially useful, quantitative alternative to the qualitative processes of text encoding.

Responding to the differing ways in which *Let the Great World Spin* has

been placed by professional reviewers – as a “New York Novel”, a “9/11 novel”, and “Irish novel” – using appropriate text analysis tool and methodologies, we can investigate how every day readers situate the novel. By employing appropriate text analysis tools, we can examine which adjectives relating to place occur throughout the reviews and where they are most frequently applied in relation to characters, to the novel and to the author himself. Using these tools, we can also investigate the relevance of Casanova’s claim that literary prizes are “responsible [...] for making the verdicts of the sanctioning organs of the republic of letters known beyond its borders” (*The World Republic of Letters* 146) in contemporary book culture. By asking these questions of the reviews, we can provide (a) a case-study of how Irish literature is mediated in the contemporary and popular literary space and (b) a conceptual model of contemporary and popular reception that is at once more complex and relevant than those provided by either practitioners in the field of Irish studies, or by Casanova in *The World Republic of Letters*.

3.2. Mediating the Mediation: Methodology

In Chapter 3, a bespoke – that is, custom made – digital tool was developed to facilitate the investigation of a specific research question pertinent to the concerns of this dissertation. While both the process of developing the software and the insights gleaned from an engagement therewith were richly rewarding (as outlined in detail in the chapter), in this case study it was decided to utilize already existing text analysis tools to facilitate the study of the reception of *Let the Great World Spin*. The reasoning for this choice was two fold: firstly, as there are a number of text analysis tools analysis freely available to the wider humanities computing community, it was not necessary to build a new tool. Secondly, as text analysis tools and methodologies

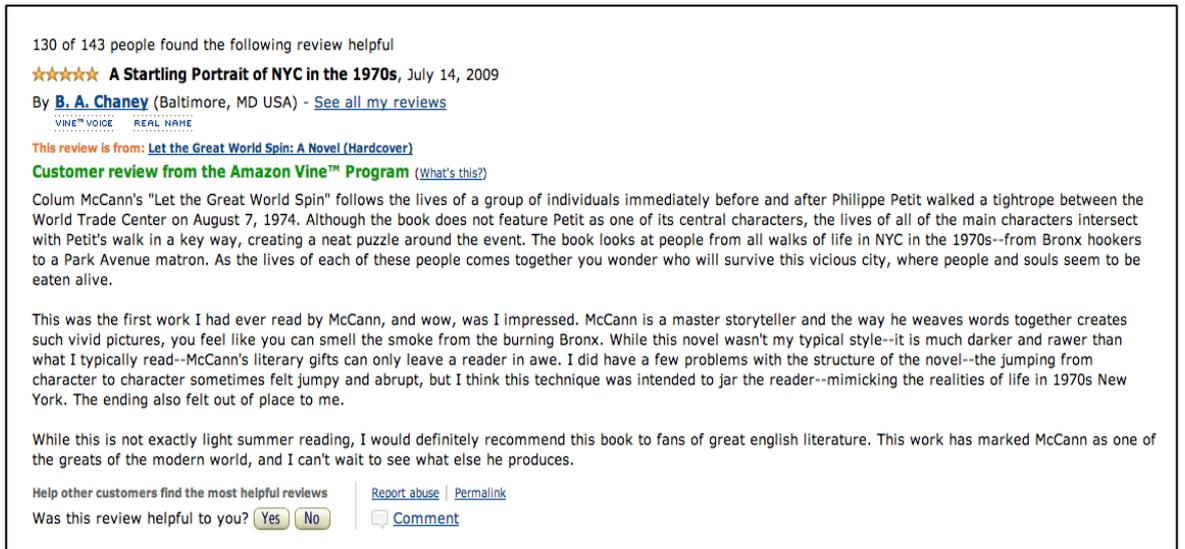
are, at present, among those most frequently employed for use in digital literary studies (as discussed earlier in this chapter), this case study sought to assess whether they could provide nuanced considerations of the research concerns of this chapter.

In order to facilitate the research concerns of this case study, a corpus of popular commentary was compiled¹⁰ consisting of reviews of the novel published on the Amazon.com website¹¹. By limiting our corpus to an American reviews only, we consciously omitted reviews from readers reading *Let the Great World Spin* in translation. Given that the research question driving the project was concerned with the reception of the novel in Ireland and the US, this omission was considered acceptable. In order for each review to be analyzed separately as well as part of the larger corpus, each entry had to be copied individually from the Amazon websites (see *Figure 1*) and pasted into separate text files. Having created the individual files for each of the reviews, they were then stored in a folder entitled “LGWS_Amazon.com”. When all 398 reviews had been gathered and sorted accordingly, they then had to be converted to plain text in order to render them computational (see *Figure 2*) (see Appendix 3 for sample of reviews).

¹⁰ As creating an algorithm that could automatically extract the necessary reviews was beyond the capabilities of this author, the corpus was compiled manually, that is, using the copy and paste function on a standard word processing programme.

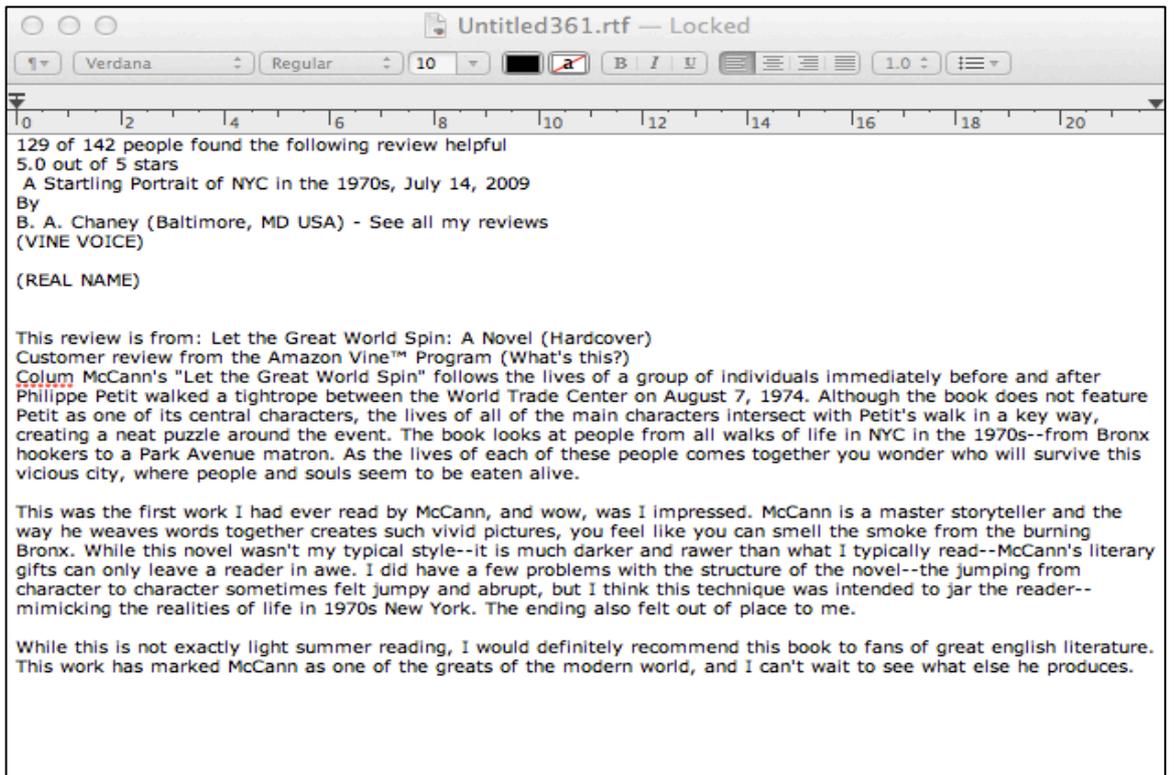
¹¹ Initially, it was intended that this case study would include the 5,000+ reviews of *Let the Great World Spin* available on the Goodreads website. However, given the number of reviews listed, to extract each one manually and convert them to plain text was beyond the capacities of this project. It was also intended that reviews from the Amazon.co.uk site would also be included in the case study. However, given time constraints, the project focuses on the Amazon.com reviews only. In future extensions of the research presented here, it would be useful and informative to examine reviews on Amazon sites other than that in the US, as such a study would enable a comparison of collective reception as it occurs internationally.

Figure 1.



A review as it appears on the Amazon.com website.

Figure 2.



An Amazon review converted to a plain text file.

As each individual review contains a star rating, a date of publication and commentary on the novel, a corpus of 398 reviews provides a rich source of data pertaining to the reception of McCann's novel. How this data is analyzed is determined by the questions that the researcher seeks to ask of it, that is, by the use case driving the study, a primary aim of which was to consider the reviews according to rating and by date published. In so doing, it sought to investigate whether any patterns emerge with regard to positive evaluations of the novel. Moreover, the case study sought to examine whether there is evidence of a correlation between the institutional acts of consecration identified by Pascale Casanova and the popular reception of the novel. Additionally, given the discrepancies that appear among professional reviewers regarding the nationality of *Let the Great World Spin*, it aimed to investigate the manner in which "national identifiers" appear within the reviews and whether they are used in reference to characters, author or place. As applied in this case study, the term "national identifiers" refers to adjectives, adverbs and nouns relating to place. A list of national identifiers was compiled based on those which were identified through the close reading of professional reviews of *Let the Great World Spin* that appeared within national and international high-brow media publications.

Translated into computational terms, the task was to compute the number of occurrences of selected terms in every review. While the Stanford Parts-of-Speech Tagger – a freely available text-analysis tool – has been designed to enable the identification of various parts of speech that occur within a text such as adjectives, adverbs, nouns and so forth, in this case study the use thereof would have required further parsing of the data to render the results specific to the research concern being addressed. It was determined, therefore, that given the specificity of the research

query, a more detailed form of data parsing and extraction was required and that Perl was the most suitable tool for the task at hand. Perl is an acronym for practical extraction and report language. It is a scripting language for scanning text files, extracting information, and printing reports (*Oxford Dictionary of Computing* 2012). While Perl was employed as the means of parsing and extracting the data, the approach of the Stanford POS informed the manner in which we chose to tag the data in the corpora of reviews – that is, by identifying various parts of speech such as adjectives and adverbs.

Using the Perl script, the following information was identified and extracted: the star rating; the date of the reviews; the number of occurrences of each of the predefined national identifiers and of the names of individual characters. In order to extract the relevant data, Perl first tags the required attributes in the texts contained within the directory under examination. Unlike other software programmes, in Perl tagging is based on matching rather than linguistics where attributes are identified by their resemblance to a specified pattern. For example, given the consistent formatting of dates in the Amazon review structure – month day, year – it is possible to write a segment of code that would extract all information matching this format (see *Figure 3*). Similarly, the manner in which the star rating is presented in the reviews is also consistent, appearing in a $n.0$ out of 5 stars where n is a value between 1 and 5. The extraction of national identifiers and the character names was also achieved based on pattern, but in this instance it was achieved by listing the terms to be extracted within the Perl script (see *Figure 3*). By specifying, that is, tagging, what constitutes a “national identifier” or a “character” within the Perl script, we extracted the occurrences of each from the individual files within the directory.

Figure 3.

```

AMAZON REVIEW: Untitled10.txt **** 4 June, 2012

NATIONAL INDICATORS:
MATCH 1 Irish.
MATCH 1 American.
MATCH Ireland.
MATCH Irishman.
MATCH Dublin.
MATCH Bronx.
MATCH 1 New York.
MATCH New Yorker.
MATCH Irish-American.
TOTAL: 3

CHARACTER NAMES:
MATCH Ciaran.
MATCH Corrigan.
MATCH Tilly.
MATCH Tillie.
MATCH Jazzlyn.
MATCH Jaslyn.
MATCH Claire.
MATCH Solomon.
MATCH Joshua.
MATCH Gloria.
MATCH Blaine.
MATCH Lara.
MATCH Colum.
MATCH McCann.
MATCH Philippe.
MATCH Petit.
TOTAL: 0

AMAZON REVIEW: Untitled100.txt * 29 December, 2010

NATIONAL INDICATORS:
MATCH Irish.
MATCH American.
MATCH Ireland.
MATCH Irishman.
MATCH Dublin.
MATCH Bronx.
MATCH New York.
MATCH New Yorker.
MATCH Irish-American.
TOTAL: 0

```

Sample of full analysis of reviews according to date, star rating, national identifiers and characters.

3.3 Analyzing the Data

Having gathered the desired data, it was then possible to begin conducting forms of analyses – both computational and interpretive. While the use of Perl enabled the extraction of the relevant data, it presents this data in list form (see *Figure 4*).

Presented thus, it is difficult to identify any type of trend or pattern occurring across the corpus of reviews. For this reason, additional forms of visualization were employed to better serve the forms of analysis the researcher sought to perform. As previously stated, a primary objective of this case study was to consider the reviews

according to rating and by date published and in so doing, identify patterns concerning evaluation as they occur across time. In order to enable such a consideration of the data, a chart was generated where the Amazon ratings and the review dates made up the x and y axes respectively.

Figure 4.

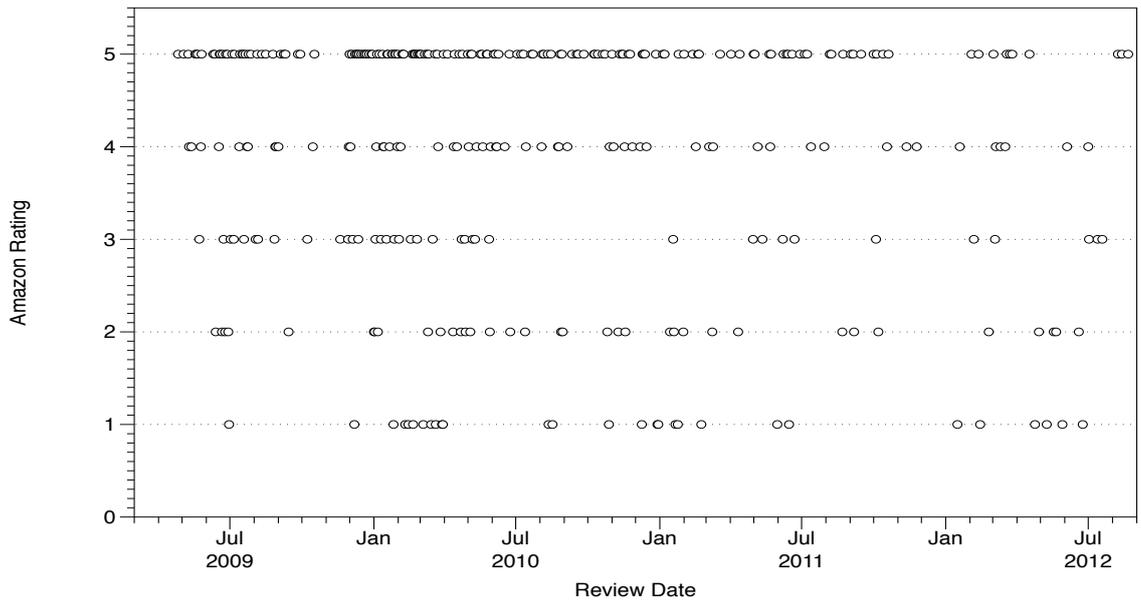
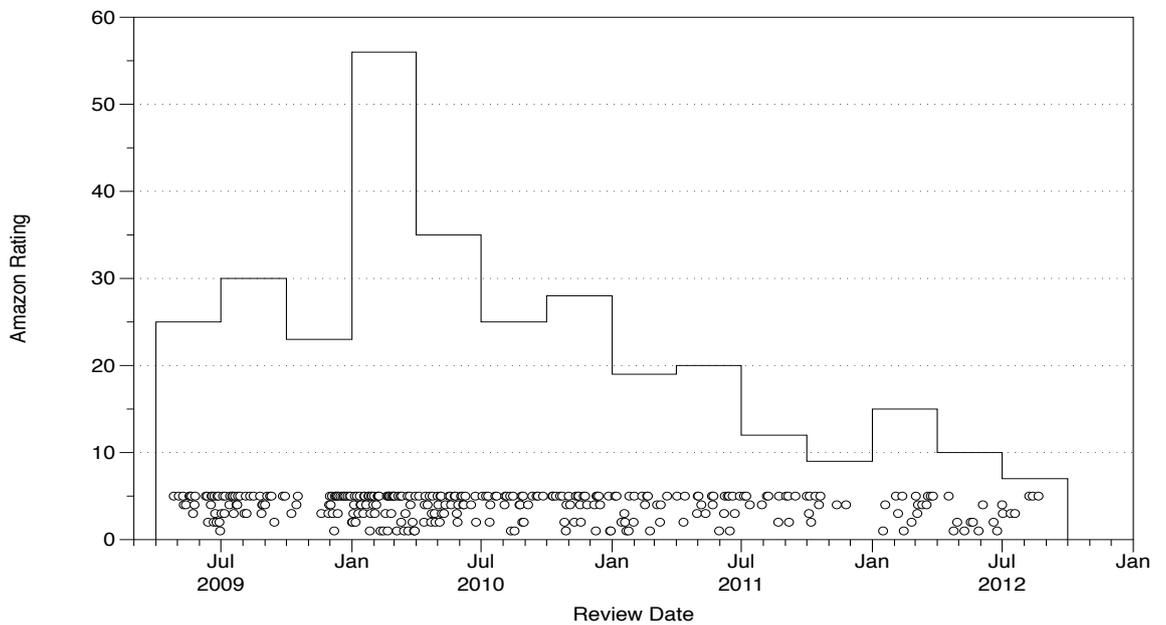


Figure 5.



Visualized thus, some significant patterns emerge not identifiable when the data appeared in list form. Most notable is the volume of positive reviews that appear between the end of November 2009 and March 2010. This in itself does not tell us anything about the reception of *Let the Great World Spin* other than that there was a surge in reviewing activity in the aforementioned period and the reviews were predominantly positive. Hence, while the data can identify a pattern, it cannot make sense of this pattern in a meaningful way, that is, it cannot convert this information into knowledge about the novel. Human interpretation is therefore required to ascertain the cause and significance of the trend revealed. Presented thus, the data inspires the researcher to dig deeper and to further investigate the cause of this proliferation in positive reviews in this period.

Undoubtedly the most significant event that occurred in the lifecycle of McCann's novel around this period was that it won the National Book in America (Nov 18, 2009). Given the correlation between the date of the award and the increase in positive reviews, in considering this data, it is useful to recall Pascale Casanova's claim that "[l]iterary prizes [...] are responsible mainly for making the verdicts of the sanctioning organs of the republic of letters known beyond its borders" (*The World Republic of Letters* 146). The pattern revealed in Figures 1 and 2 would support Casanova's claim: if the Book Award functions as a means of informing the general public that this is a book of literary merit, the proliferation of 5 star reviews would suggest that the judge's verdict has influenced the evaluation of the novel by everyday readers. Moreover, as increases in the number of positive reviews appear around significant dates in the literary prize game, such as the announcement of the longlist of the IMPAC award in November 2011, this would also serve to support Casanova's claim regarding the power of literary awards.

Interestingly, however, if we examine the individual reviews that appear around this period, there are few direct references to the Book Award itself. Indeed, in the entire corpus of the 398 Amazon reviews there are only 21 files in which “award” appear. Moreover, in those reviews where it does appear, the reviewer may evoke the award merely to disagree with the judges’ verdict. For example, having given the novel a 3 star rating, Richard A. Jenkins wrote:

The National Book Award panel seems to reward unusual narrative styles; unfortunately, in this case, they’ve rewarded a clumsy attempt at novel length short story fiction. Despite its unevenness, I did manage to finish the book, but it wasn’t as satisfying as many far less ambitious and gimmick-ridden novels (“Some parts work, some don’t”, November 29, 2009).

Conversely, in her review entitled “The Courage to be Found in Ordinary Lives”, “Rhoda ‘in Pittsburg’s” refers to the Book Award for an entirely different purpose. This review consists mainly of an appraisal of McCann’s characters, where Rhoda claims that “[h]is characters have depth and are permanently imprinted on the reader’s heart”. What is particularly striking about this review is its concluding paragraph:

The characters live in New York City and their lives intersect and bang into each other in surprising ways. It’s richly textured and I wanted it to go on and on. It won the National Book Award in 2009 (“The Courage to be Found in Ordinary Lives”, November 24, 2010).

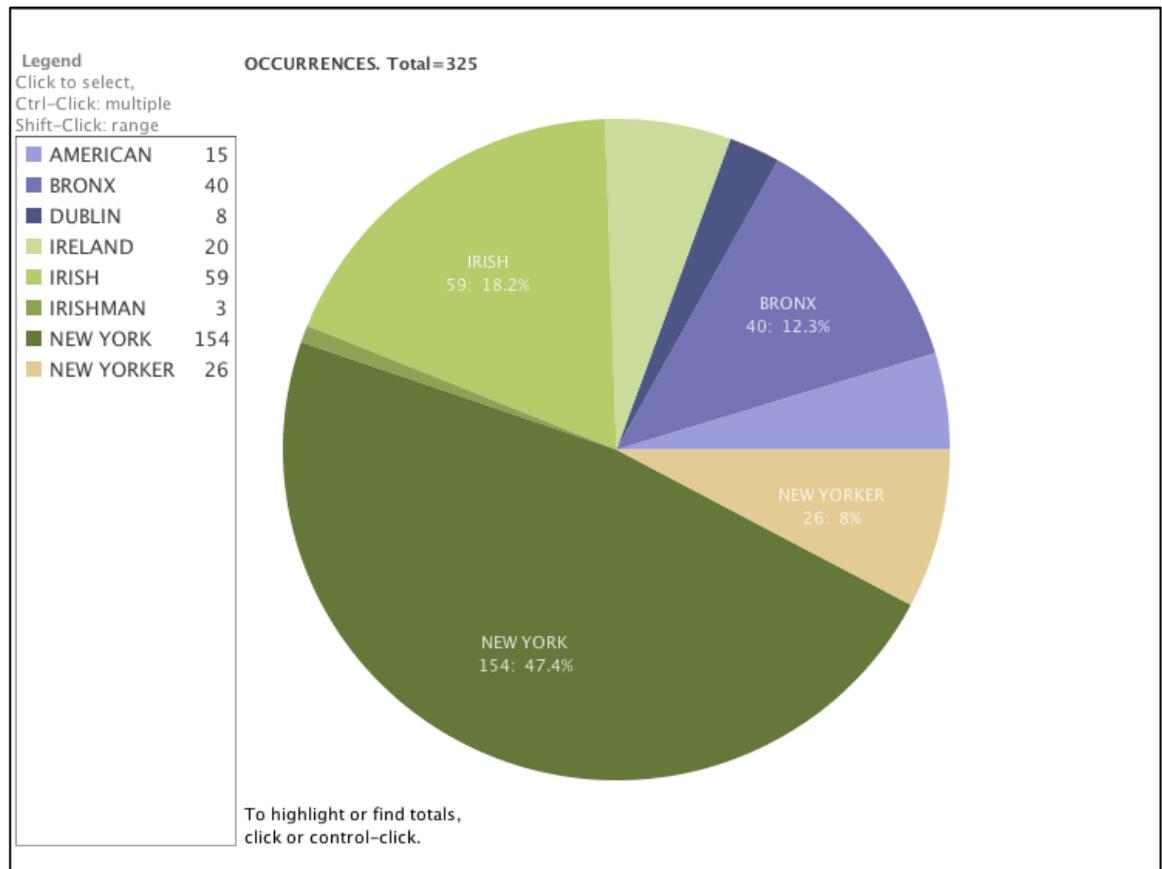
Placed in the last sentence of the review, the reference to the Book Award appears only as a means of supporting the verdict given by the reviewer.

We find therefore, that while a close reading of the individual reviews would appear to suggest that this form of literary consecration has little notable effect on the popular reception of the novel, a close reading of the visualization generated by the computational analysis of the reviews would suggest a pattern of possible influence. A further observation that can be made from the visualizations provided above is the significant, yet ephemeral, effect that literary prizes have on literary reception. The dramatic decline in the number and ratings of the novel after March

2010 suggests that the National Book Award has a notable influence on reader reception for only a short period of time. The plateau would suggest that the award has an effect for a period of approximately four months. Moreover, based on the correlation between the other plateaus that appears in the visualization and significant dates surrounding the book awards, this can be extended to include judges' verdicts as they are expressed in the announcement of long and short lists for literary prizes. For example, after the steady decline in the number of 5 star reviews from March 2010, there is a notable increase thereof in October / November of the same year which corresponds with the announcement of the longlist for the IMPAC book award on November 14, 2010, which included *Let the Great World Spin*. As with the Book Award, this significant date in the literary prize game gives rise to a plateau which lasts for approximately four months. This trend would suggest that the winning of literary prizes is not necessarily a guarantee of on-going literary credibility, but rather a temporal indicator thereof. While the contemporaneousness of *Let the Great World Spin* combined within the short temporal scope of this case study render it impossible to make any deductions as to whether the novel will enjoy a lasting place as a consecrated work of world literature, this analysis certainly invites continued consideration.

As previously noted, a second concern in this case study was to identify where a predefined list of national identifiers appear within the corpus of reviews and the context in which they are deployed. As with the dates and ratings of the reviews, when extracted using the Perl script, the data was organized in list form. Through additional analysis we calculated the number of occurrences of each of the predefined national identifiers. In order to highlight the significance of the individual terms in relation to each other, the data was visualized in a pie chart (*Figure 7*).

Figure 7.



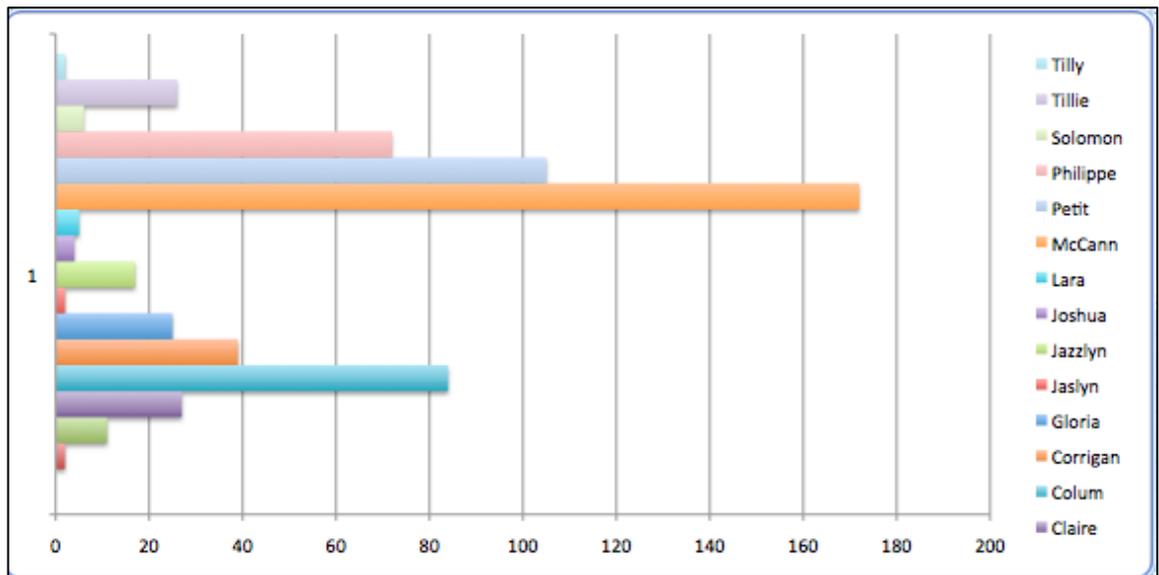
A pie chart generated using Many Eyes demonstrating the break down of the appearance of national identifiers.

As the pie chart illustrates, “New York” is the national identifier which appears most frequently in the corpus, taking up 47.4% of the total 325 occurrences of the predefined terms. Interesting also is the fact that “Irish” takes up 18.2% of the total. In contrast, there are only 15 occurrences of “American” within the corpus and “Irish- American”, which was also included in the list of national identifiers, does not appear at all. While the pie chart makes readily visible the significance of both “New York” and “Irish” within the corpus of reviews, further analysis is required to render this pattern meaningful to the analysis of the reception of McCann’s novel being addressed here.

A logical next step in the process of analyzing the data was to consider these key words in context. Further computational analysis using Perl script enabled the extraction of the dyads and triads in which both “New York” and “Irish” appear (Appendix 4). Interestingly, “New York” appears not in association with either author or characters, but exists as entity in and of itself, enjoying a greater presence than any of the individual narrators within the novel. As one reviewer put it, “[t]his novel is [...] a portrait of New York City” (“Elegant, Profound, Beautiful”, May 25, 2010). In contrast, “Irish” appears most frequently in association with a specific character, namely, Corrigan, the “Irish monk”. In and of itself, this seems a bland observation – it does not take computational techniques to deduce that Irish is going to appear frequently in descriptions of an Irish character. However, the observation gains increased significance when considered in relation to the number of occurrences of character names in the corpus of reviews.

Figure 8 demonstrates the number of references to characters as they appear throughout the 398 reviews. Notably, “McCann” is by far the most frequently occurring name, appearing 172 times. “Petit” is the second most common proper noun with 105 references, and, after Petit, Corrigan is the character which appears most frequently with 39 references. As character references appear minimal in comparison to those of author, it places increased significance on the fact that “Irish” appears most frequently in relation to Corrigan as opposed to McCann himself. Such a finding would suggest that for everyday readers, while the author’s nationality is of minimal concern, it is considered to be a definitive trait of the most commented upon character.

Figure 8.



A visualization of character occurrences generated using the chart function on Xcel

The attention afforded to Corrigan is particularly notable when considered in light of the fact that unlike the majority of other characters which appear in the novel, he never narrates but is instead described by and in relation to others. Moreover, Corrigan dies half way through *Let the Great World Spin*, which would imply that his significance to the overall novel is, or should be, less than that of those who survive from beginning to end, such as Claire, for example. Despite his curtailed presence within the novel, however, a close reading of the reviews in which “Corrigan” appears reveals that a number of reviewers identify Corrigan as being the point around which “[t]he plot loosely revolves” (“Let the Great World Spin”, May 3, 2009). While some have enjoyed Corrigan’s position “at the centre of this book” (“A Moving Novel” January 31, 2010), another reviewer laments McCann’s focus on the Irish character, arguing that the writer “spends far too little time on Petit and far too much time on characters like Corrigan and his narrator brother” (“It Spins, It Sputters, It Stops Just Short of Great”, March 4, 2012).

Assessing whether “Irish” is most frequently employed in either positive or negative evaluations of the novel was beyond the scope of this case study. In theoretical terms, this would have required an examination of occurrences of “Irish” as they correlate with review ratings. In technical terms, however, such a consideration would have required further parsing of the data which in turn would have necessitated additional Perl script. While such additional forms of analysis were not permissible in the time available for this project, such an extension of the research presented here would be a worthwhile venture for future research, as it would enable considerations of the “value” that this particular national identifier holds among everyday readers.

The number of positive reviews the novel has received provides evidence that readers, like the judges on the National Book Award and the IMPAC judging panels, consider *Let the Great World Spin* to be a work of literary merit. What is particularly striking, however, is the extent to which the positive reviews appear to increase in number around significant dates in the literary award calendar, thus suggesting that consecration in the form of popular reception is in some way related to if not influenced by the institutional form of consecration that is the literary prize. But as the data also shows, while there may be an initial response to the verdicts made by the literary authorities, the effect thereof is short lived, lasting on average, for a period of approximately four months.

Summarizing the visualizations of the national identifiers and character occurrences we might say that *Let the Great Spin* is a novel that is set in New York and that this setting is perceived as being a defining feature of the text. Corrigan, one of two Irish characters in the novel, is seen as having a central part in the novel. Moreover we might suggest that the nationality of the author is of little overt

significance. What are notably absent among the reviews, however, are references to either “America” or “Ireland”, that is, to the territorial jurisdictions of nations. While there is a certain appeal to both New York and to Irishness, neither term is considered in relation to the nation which it is associated with. It would appear, therefore, that as *Let the Great World Spin* is received by this body of readers, a form of what Casnaova has referred to as “denationalization” (*The World Republic of Letters* 133) does indeed take place, but in a more organic way than is suggested in *The World Republic of Letters*. It is not a case that Corrigan’s Irishness is denied, but is instead situated in the wider context of the novel, where it blends into the melting pot that is New York City. And while none of the data presented here leads to proof regarding either the value or the nationality of the novel, as this case study demonstrates, it does lead to what Thomas N. Corns has referred to as new “interpretive insights” (Corns 223).

4. Conclusion: Challenges of a New Interpretive Method

In a recent article, “Trending: The Promises and the Challenges of Big Social Data” (2011), Manovich “address[es] some of the theoretical and practical issues raised by the possibility of using massive amounts of such social and cultural data in humanities and social sciences” (1). For Manovich, the emergence of big social data and the development of sophisticated digital tools have enabled a “new approach for the study of human beings and society” (3). While noting here, as elsewhere, the “promises” offered by such an approach, in this essay, Manovich makes two important practical observations regarding the implementation of this approach in humanities scholarship: firstly, he calls attention to the restrictions that exist regarding access to social data and; secondly, he highlights the extent to which this

new approach depends on a degree of technical competence. Tellingly, both of these challenges were raised in the duration of the case study provided here.

In examining the popular reception of *Let the Great World Spin*, it was originally intended that the 5,000+ reviews of the novel that appear on the Goodreads websites would be incorporated in the corpus of reviews. In some instance, as Manovich notes, a researcher can obtain data of this sort through APIs¹² provided by some social media services and largest media online retailers. Given the volume of reviews listed in the Goodreads website, it was not feasible to gather each individual entry manually (as was done for the Amazon reviews). As access to the API would have enabled the automated extraction of the data required for the case study described here, an application was sent to Goodreads requesting a developer API, specifying that the API would be used for the individual research purposes of this project. However, while the Goodreads personnel responded favourably initially by seeking further details of the intended use of the API, this further correspondence to Goodreads did not receive a response and, in consequence, the API was not available in the timeframe of the project or by the time of writing. This serves to corroborate Manovich's observation that, "only social media companies have access to really large social data" ("Trending" 5) and, by extension, that the use of social data in cultural analytics is impeded, at least at present, by issues of accessibility.

The second, but equally pressing, challenge identified by Manovich and supported by the findings from this case study concerns technical competency. In "Trending", Manovich calls attention to "the large gap between what can be done with the right software tools, right data, and no knowledge of computer science and

¹² An API (Application Programming Interface) is a set of commands that can be used by a user program to retrieve the data stored in a company's databases ("Trending" 5).

advanced statistics - and what can only be done if you do have this knowledge” (12). As Manovich rightly observes, while the software necessary for conducting complex forms of cultural analytics is “free and readily available [...] you need the right training (at least some classes in computer science and statistics) and p[r]ior practical experience which uses this training to get meaningful results” (13).

Again, this observation was supported by findings from the case study discussed here. While it would have been possible to utilize a freely available and user-friendly text analysis suite such as *Voyant* to analyze the corpus of reviews gathered from the Amazon website, the results yielded thereby would have required further computational analysis to render them specific to the research concern of the case study. *Figure 9* provides an overview of the results yielded by uploading the corpus of Amazon reviews into the *Voyant* suite. As the reader will note, the suite is, as its developers intended to be, more “user-friendly”, both in terms of appearance and ease of use than the Perl script employed in our case study. The word cloud, situated at the top left hand corner is perhaps the most attractive pane in the suit, owing both to its pleasant aesthetic appearance and, the author assumes, to the reader’s familiarity with this form of data visualization. According to the word cloud, “characters” is the word which appears most frequently in the corpus of reviews. However, as our case study reveals, a consideration of characters in light of the research question being addressed requires a much finer level of analysis than is permitted by the *Voyant* tool. Hence, Perl was employed instead.

the report points out, “[g]iven that modern-day technology is impacting [on] every aspect of scholarly life, it is becoming increasingly necessary that scholars wishing to avail of such research outputs [...] [are] able to avail of appropriate training” (“Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities” 36). Hence, the report calls attention to the “urgency that must be given to developing educational and training programmes in the area of computing and the Humanities” (35). The case study described here corroborates these findings.

Interestingly and significantly for my project, Manovich further emphasizes the fact that neither access to data nor technical competence are in themselves capable of making sense of the wealth of cultural material that has been generated by the advent of Web 2.0. Rather, he argues, this new approach also requires an “open[ness] to asking new types [o]f questions about human beings, their social life and their cultural expressions and experiences (“Trending” 13). Hence, while scholars wishing to engage in forms of cultural analytics face challenges relating to accessibility and technical competence, this new approach to humanities scholarship also demands changes of a theoretical kind. In the field of literary studies, it both requires and engenders a shift in what is considered as material worthy for consideration. Incorporating cultural data into work in the field of literary scholarship means expanding the purview of our discipline to include texts that are not themselves literary, but are reflective of a sociology of literature. Such an expansion will necessitate not only the types of digital humanities partnerships addressed here, but those with practitioners in fields such as sociology, legal studies, marketing and advertising which will in turn enrich and enliven the field of Irish literary studies.

Conclusion

Conclusion: Up Close and Digital

In his seminal work on the relationship between literary studies and the digital humanities, *Radiant Textuality* (2001), Jerome McGann declared that:

the general field of humanities education and scholarship will not take the use of digital technology seriously until one demonstrates how its tools improve the ways we explore and explain aesthetic works—until, that is, they expand our interpretational procedures (*Radiant Textuality* xii).

More recently, but in a similar vein, Alan Liu has argued that “[w]hile digital humanists have the practical tools and data, they will never be in the same league as Moretti, Casanova, and others unless they can move seamlessly between text analysis and cultural analysis” (Liu 495). Despite the ten years gap between the two accounts, McGann and Liu’s respective overviews reveal a shared concern with the disjuncture between digital humanities methodologies and traditional practices in the humanities scholarship. Responding to this disjuncture, both theorists have called for an approach to digital humanities which combines theory and technology in a manner which is in keeping with and, at the same time, enhances traditional practices in humanities scholarship. Writing from the intersectional area of Irish literary studies and world literature, this dissertation offers a response to this call.

The engagement with the digital humanities presented throughout this dissertation was instigated in part by a consideration of the close and distant reading debate as it has been played out in the field of literary scholarship. A key objective of this project was to undo the close-and-national and distant-and-global couplings introduced by Moretti in “Conjectures on World Literature” and solidified by the critic elsewhere. The engagement with Wai Chee Dimock’s proposed approach to study of world literature offered in Chapter 2 demonstrates how, contrary to Moretti’s understanding, modes of close reading can be employed to enable global

approaches to literary scholarship. As was established throughout the chapter, Dimock's global or "transnational" approach to literary scholarship depends on the close reading of individual texts. However, as was established also, while endorsing modes of close reading in her approach to world literature, Dimock shares with Moretti a desire to jettison the study of literatures within national contexts. This, as the chapter demonstrates, has significant implications for the study of works which are intimately connected to their nation of origin. By analyzing Colm Tóibín's novels *The Heather Blazing* and *Brooklyn* through the theoretical lens of Dimock's world literature methodology, this chapter reveals that her willingness to dispense with considerations of the national is, like that of Moretti, premature. At the same time, however, it also points to the interesting and nuanced considerations of Tóibín's work that can be brought about through a combination of national and global modes of critical analysis. Chapter 2 thus establishes the real "problem" of world literature as it relates to the study of contemporary Irish writing: how to enable considerations of the national in literary texts while simultaneously situating them within a global framework.

Extending on observations made in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 employs David Damrosch's proposed approach to the study of world literature in the analysis of a contemporary Irish novel. Of the four world literature theorists addressed in this dissertation, Damrosch most readily emphasizes the need for both the study of national literatures and close reading when considering literature on a global scale. Investigating the viability of Damrosch's call for an approach to world literature that combines "specialist" and "generalist" approaches modes of analysis, this chapter has employed Damrosch's methodology in a critical analysis of Sebastian Barry's internationally successful novel, *The Secret Scripture*. Focussing on "local narrative

voice” – a textual feature which, as Franco Moretti has acceded, demands specialist knowledge – the chapter combines Damrosch’s world literature methodology with appropriate digital humanities tools and methodologies to provide a focussed account of the manner in which form and content operate within Barry’s novel. As this combination of interpretive lenses enables considerations of a particularly national feature of the novel within a global framework, the methodology proposed here provides a means of staging Damrosch’s proposed theoretical approach to the study of world literature.

While demonstrating its usefulness for considerations of the novel under examination, the approach endorsed in this chapter has significance beyond the immediate literary problematic being addressed. By offering a digital humanities methodology which is informed by Damrosch’s aspirations for a combined generalist/specialist methodology rather than Moretti’s mode of distant reading, the chapter shows that contrary to Liu’s understanding, close reading and digital humanities can too be “practicing partners” (Liu 493) in a way that serves to advance work in both the fields of world literature and digital literary studies. In so doing it provides a necessary corrective to understandings of the digital humanities as being tied in an exclusive partnership with distant reading. It is hoped that this observation will have the dual affect of encouraging a greater number of literary scholars to engage with the digital humanities while at the same time prompting work in the digital humanities that is driven by the practices of close reading. In so doing, a key objective is that this case study will serve to bring the two fields closer together in both theory and practice.

Commenting on the development of the *Rossetti Archive*, Jerome McGann - whose own work has been informed by his theoretical and practical considerations of

the digital humanities - stated that “[by][t]aking the developmental process as [a] primary subject, we hoped to learn more about how the scholarly educational interests of traditional humanists might use and benefit from digital tools” (“The Future is Digital” 85). In a similar vein, by offering a self-reflexive commentary on the development of a digital humanities tool and methodology, Chapter 3 also provides an account of the processes, challenges and rewards engendered by collaborative, digital humanities work. As outlined in the chapter, the software produced was the product of the type of “hands-on collaborative interdisciplinary work” McGann called for in 2005 (“Culture and Technology” 71). Of especial significance for both the project and for this author, the case study demanded a hands-on engagement on the part of the author with XML encoding. With the support of ICT colleagues in An Foras Feasa, the writer became sufficiently proficient in the use of XML to carry out the encodings herself. Significantly, and corroborating points previously made, this hands on engagement with this specific digital humanities methodology engendered new forms of “close reading” which, unlike traditional practices, were transparent and traceable. This new form of close reading subsequently became the point around which the case study developed. The act of encoding enabled self-reflexive critique on the part of the literary scholar which, in turn, gave rise to the research question that informs Chapter 4, namely, the extent to which literary works are newly mediated by acts of digital literary criticism and the significance thereof for the study of Irish literature. Moreover, the encoding of the responses of ten additional scholars in the second iteration of the software highlighted the extent to which new considerations of collaborative as well as individual literary reception could be enabled by an engagement with the digital humanities. This observation was picked up and extended in Chapter 5.

While the encodings for this case study were carried out by the author, it is important to note that the production of the sophisticated digital humanities tool and methodology described in this chapter would not have been possible without the expertise of the ICT specialists engaged in the project, thus further highlighting the necessity of collaborative work in the digital humanities. Thus, the inter-disciplinary collaborative work which has informed and produced the case study described in Chapter 3 both adheres to and extends on that which David Damrosch urges for in the concluding chapter of *What is World Literature?* According to Damrosch, “collaborative work can help bridge the divide between amateurism and specialization” (*What is World Literature?* 286), and although speaking from a purely literary perspective, his claim has a particular resonance for work in the burgeoning field of digital literary studies. As few literary scholars possess, as of yet, the skills necessary to design and build complex programmes necessary for the types of humanities inquiries they wish to conduct using digital technology, for the present moment at least, digital humanities work will be the product of collaborative endeavors

Although the value of collaborative work has been universally lauded, there is, however, a lack of general understanding among humanities practitioners as to what work of this kind entails. The hands on engagement with inter-disciplinary work described in Chapter 3 has provided this author with the experience necessary to provide an informed account of what collaborative work actually entails. While Chapter 3 describes the fruitful and innovative results that can be generated by collaborative engagements are it is important to note, that while richly rewarding, collaborative work can too have its difficulties. One such challenge that arose in the duration of this project is what Dana Sculley and Brad Pasanek have referred to as

the “mutual-incomprehension” (Sculley and Pasanek 2007) between scholars from the different disciplines. Commenting on the inter-disciplinary collaborations between scholars working in language and literature and those in the computer sciences, Sculley and Pasanek note that, given the differing approaches endorsed in the two fields, “it is unlikely that the assumptions of one field are held as tenets of the other” (“Meaning and Mining” 410). For example, as was discovered in engaging in this project, what is considered as a “finding” in literary scholarship can be very different to what is understood by the term in the field of computer science. A key challenge facing those engaging in collaborative work, therefore, is to establish an inter-disciplinary vernacular which accommodates and is respectful of the traditions and practices of both fields.

The challenges and difficulties that attend the formulation of a language that can operate in both the field of literary scholarship and the computer sciences are addressed in detail in Chapter 4. Focusing on the Bibliography of Irish Literary Criticism, the chapter provides a critique of what Ed Folsom has referred to as the “new genre” of database. In so doing, it necessarily responds to earlier accounts of the significance of database technology for literary scholarship. As the chapter points out, the early accounts thereof have been characterized by a metaphoric understanding of the new medium which has subsequently detracted from considerations of the real issues raised by database technology. As was established also, the tendency among some scholars to discuss database in solely metaphorical terms is indicative of a field attempting to formulate a lexicon for considering this new cultural artifacts.

This chapter demonstrates that the recourse to metaphor is neither useful or necessary in the theoretical accounts of database. Rather, as the chapter makes clear,

the skills required to analyze digital resources such as BILC draw upon the pre-existing ones that literary scholars already possess. As McGann has argued,

the study of bibliographical machineries in all their networked complexity is never more urgent than at this moment, when we are trying to learn how to think about and use our new digital resources. If we want to develop strong online scholarship, we should begin by putting the study of book technologies at the center of our attention (“The Future is Digital” 83).

Considered as what Margaret Kelleher terms the “next stage” in the Irish literary collection, it becomes apparent that not only do we as literary scholars have the skills necessary to assess and critique these digital tools, but perhaps now more than ever these skills are, or should be, called upon as modes of literary scholarship move from the print to the digital medium. The questions we have asked of literary anthologies for the past decade now must be asked and updated in relation to their digital equivalents. Asking these questions of the *Bibliography of Irish Literary Criticism*, we discover that while existing in an online environment, the database, like its print based equivalents, is in many ways still a nationally orientated project, carefully constructed to provide a singular, if oppositional, overview of an Irish literary historiography. Considering the database as a material object, thus enables us to move beyond the metaphorical, celebratory and occasionally naïve accounts of the new medium promulgated by Wai Chee Dimock and Ed Foslom, to provide critiques that are more actual than aspirational, and though more somber, potentially, far more useful.

By considering the database as both a material object and as the next stage in the history of the literary collection the chapter demonstrates how Franco Moretti’s concept of “literary evolution” provides a useful theoretical framework for considering digital resources such as the online digital database. The benefits of such an enterprise are twofold: firstly, it demonstrates how the disciplinary vernacular employed in the field of literary scholarship can be employed in the analysis of

databases without the detrimental recourse to metaphor and; secondly, and significantly, employing Moretti's concept of literary evolution also brings to the fore the question of survival, which, when considered in light of digital resources, demands a consideration of issues of sustainability - the "elephant in the room" among digital humanists (McGann 2010; Schreibman and Edmonds 2011). Now that an increasing number of works of Irish literary scholarship are appearing in digital form, the ground on which our discipline operates is shifting under our feet. As our cultural record moves out of archives and out of books and into digital repositories, digital databases and online digital journals, the question of sustainability is of great concern to humanities scholars. However, sustainability is an issue which has yet to receive any sustained scholarly attention from practitioners within the field of Irish literary studies. The recently established Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI) has charged itself with the task of ensuring the sustainability of digital resources on the island of Ireland¹. It is paramount that literary scholars not only keep abreast of but are engaged in developments in this area. This will not only engender a renewed engagement with the materiality of our cultural inheritance but will ensure that our cultural record is preserved in a manner that is at once respectful of and useful for the types of scholarship we wish to conduct, while at the same time guaranteeing its survival.

By employing Moretti's concept of literary evolution in the critical analysis of BILC, Chapter 4 thus seeks to insert a form of cultural criticism into the digital humanities that at once accommodates considerations of the database within a literary tradition while simultaneously calling attention to the new implications that are engendered by the digital medium. In so doing it combines traditional practices

¹ For a full overview of the aims and objectives of the DRI, see <http://www.dri.ie>.

in humanities scholarship with developments in the digital humanities, thus providing a case study of the types of digital humanities practice called for by Jerome McGann and Alan Liu.

While Chapter 4 provides an example of how Franco Moretti's world literature methodology can be employed to allow the scholar to "move seamlessly", to use Liu's term, between digital humanities tools and methodologies and cultural analysis, Chapter 5 demonstrates how Pascale's Casanova's theories can be employed in a similar way. Drawing on ideas postulated in *The World Republic of Letters*, the chapter engages with the sociology of Irish literature in the contemporary literary space. While there has been a tendency in Irish literary criticism to focus primarily on the role of the critic and critical institutions (evidenced by Joe Cleary's critique of *The World Republic of Letters*), a consideration of the reception of Colum McCann's recent novel, *Let the Great World Spin*, calls attention to the myriad of forces operating in the world literary space which serve to mediate the novel. Moving beyond traditional understandings of the critic and critical institutions, the analysis shows how that these forces span across a spectrum of authorities including literary prizes, professional reviewers and, increasingly since the advent of Web 2.0 and social media, everyday readers and consumers. Chapter 5 thus picks up and extends on an issue that runs latently throughout the preceding chapters – the place and function of Irish literary criticism in the world literary space.

As *Let the Great World Spin* was published in 2009, a large body of academic commentary on the novel has yet to be produced (though undoubtedly, the coming years will see an extensive amount of work of this sort). The gap between the publication of the novel and its reception among critics in the field of Irish literary studies thus provides a useful space in which to examine how the novel has

been mediated by consecrating forces other than the national critic or critical institutions identified by Cleary. Such a consideration necessarily draws us into an area that has remained notably absent in the field of Irish literary studies – the sociology of literature.

As in Chapters 3 and 4, the world literature theory addressed in this chapter informs the engagement with and use of the digital humanities tools and methodologies discussed and employed. Specifically, this chapter offers a consideration of text analysis tools. Through an analytical overview of the work being carried out by researchers and ICT specialists in the Stanford Literary Lab, a more detailed consideration as to why these tools and methodologies have received bad press, both literally and figuratively, among literary scholars. As the overview reveals, the problem lies not with the tools but in the manner in which they have been applied and the nature of the questions which they have been used to address. While calling attention to some weaknesses inherent in the first two pamphlets produced by the lab, the chapter argues that Ed Finn’s “Becoming Yourself” provides an account of a digital humanities approach which is more in keeping with that called for by McGann and Liu. It is further argued that Finn’s pamphlet offers a useful departure from previous work conducted at the lab in that it employs text analysis tools to analyze social data as opposed to the literary text(s) under examination.

Extending on the observations made from the engagement with the Stanford pamphlets, this chapter argues that text analysis tools and methodologies are most fruitfully employed when they are utilized in the analysis of data surrounding a literary work, rather than the work itself. The case study provided in Chapter 5 combines Finn’s use of text analysis tools with Casanova’s theoretical methodology

to facilitate an innovative consideration of literary reception and consecration of a work of contemporary Irish literature. Through this combined approach of digital humanities tools and a world literature methodology, the case study demonstrates how the cultural data extracted from Amazon reviews can be utilized to provide more complex insights into the processes of literary consecration than provided for by either Casanova or Cleary in their respective accounts thereof.

As in earlier chapters, the insights yielded from the engagement with the digital humanities extend beyond the immediate concerns of the research question being discussed. In conducting this case study, two observations were yielded that are reflective of wider issues currently facing work in the digital humanities: firstly, restrictions on access to cultural data and; secondly, issues relating to technical competency. For example, the inability to obtain the APIs from the Goodreads - which would have enabled the inclusion of the 5,000+ reviews listed on the website in the corpora of popular reviews - calls attention to the fact that cultural data is not accessible to all and solidifies Lev Manovich's claim that "only social media companies have access to really large social data" ("Trending" 2011).

The second, but equally pressing, issue concerns technical competency. While various text analysis tools and methodologies exist, those most useful for complex literary queries require a degree of technical expertise. Hence, given the specificity of the research concern driving this case study, Perl was utilized to analyze the corpus of Amazon reviews rather than a more user-friendly text analysis suits such as Voyant. While this author had recourse to the invaluable technical expertise and advice of ICT specialists in An Foras Feasa, such resources are not available to the majority of humanities scholars. As with access to data, this observation calls attention to the more general concern facing the field of digital

humanities, namely, the need for adequate education and training in the tools and methodologies required for digital humanities work. As the 2011 ESF report on “Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities” points out, “[g]iven that modern-day technology is impacting [on] every aspect of scholarly life, it is becoming increasingly necessary that scholars wishing to avail of such research outputs [...] [are] able to avail of appropriate training” (“Research Infrastructures in the Digital Humanities” 36). Hence, the report calls attention to the “urgency that must be given to developing educational and training programmes in the area of computing and the Humanities” (35). The case study described here corroborates these findings.

In the concluding pages of *The World Republic of Letters*, Casanova states that her “new method for interpreting literary texts [...] requires the critic to continually shift perspective, to change lenses, as it were” (*The World Republic of Letters* 351). Rather than changing lenses, this dissertation has combined the lenses of Irish literary studies, world literature and the digital humanities to provide innovative considerations of the texts under examination. Through this combination of national and international, close and distant and old and new modes of literary scholarship, this dissertation demonstrates that rather than being opposed to a nationally orientated form of literary criticism, the digital humanities have the tools and the methodologies to “[break] down the [...] insularity of Irish based scholarship” (Brown 66), and in so doing can bring Irish literary scholarship into a productive dialogue with perspectives from elsewhere, thus engendering a form of Irish literary scholarship that transcends while not denying the significance of the nation state. For this to happen, however, a material rather than metaphoric, and a critical rather than

Conclusion

aspirational, engagement with and consideration of the digital humanities is required. By extension, it requires considerations at the institutional and infrastructural levels where issues of sustainability, up-skilling and the fostering of interdisciplinary partnerships need to be addressed. The challenges are great, but as the dissertation demonstrates, the potential rewards are even greater. By forming new partnerships with the digital humanities, practitioners in the field of Irish literary studies can move towards and help to realise the form of transnational and trans-disciplinary literary scholarship aspired for by Wai Chee Dimock, one which is neither “empty” nor “wishful” (“Scales of Aggregation” 226).

Appendices

Appendix 1.

```
<narrator participant="patient" activity="speaking">He is still coming?</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'Yes.'</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="omniscient_narrator"> Sassoon looked relieved. </narrator> <narrator participant="patient" activity="speaking">'Do you know, I don't think Grav
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'We were rather concerned about you.'</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="speaking">'In case the <trauma type="explicit" comment="a term associated with one suffering form mental illness but frequ
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'I wouldn't put it quite like that.'</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="speaking">'I was all right. I wasn't even surprised, I thought he'd slept in. he's been doing a . . . a lot of rushing round
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="omniscient_narrator">Rivers pushed his spectacles up onto his forehead and massaged the inner corners of his eyes, </narrator><narrator particip
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="speaking">'I've no complaints. I was dealt with in a perfectly fair and reasonable way. Probably better than I deserved.'</r
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'What kind of questions did they ask?'</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="omniscient_narrator"> Sassoon smiled. </narrator><narrator participant="patient" activity="speaking">'Don't you know?' </narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'I've read the report, if that's what you mean. I'd like still to hear your version.'</narrator>
</p>
</p>
1 1 XML Unicode (UTF-8) Unix (LF) 139,028 / 19,572 / 1,595
```

Encoding as it appears in Text Wrangler

```
<narrator participant="patient" activity="speaking">'Of course I want freedom, Dr Grene. But it frightens me.'</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'The gaining of freedom,' </narrator><narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating">said Dr Grene pleasantly, </narrator><narrator
participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'is always accomplished in an atmosphere of uncertainty. <cultural context="explicit" comment="direct reference to Ireland.">In this country at least. </cultural>
Perhaps in all countries.'</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="speaking">'Murder,' I said. </narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'Yes, sometimes,' </narrator><narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating"> he said, gently.</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating">We stopped speaking then and I gazed at the solid rectangle of sunlight in the room. Ancient dust milled there.</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'Freedom, freedom,' he said. </narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating">Somewhere in his dusty voice there was the vague bell of longing. I know nothing of his life outside, of his family. Does he have a wife and children?
Mrs Grene somewhere? I don't know. Or do I? He is a brilliant man. He looks like a farret, but no matter. Any man that can talk about the old Greeks and Romans is a man after my father's heart. I like Dr Grene
despite his dusty despair because he brings to me always an echo of my father's line of talk, filled out of Sir Thomas Browne and John Donne.</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'But, we won't begin today. No, no,' </narrator><narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating"> he said, rising.</narrator><narrator
participant="therapist" activity="speaking"> 'Certainly not. But it is my duty to set out the facts before you.' </narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating">And he crossed again with a sort of infinite medical patience to the door. </narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'You deserve no less, <cultural context="explicit" comment="Irish surname">Mrs McNulty.</cultural>'</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating">I nodded.</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating"><cultural context="explicit" comment="Irish surname">Mrs McNulty.</cultural> </narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating">I always think of Tom's mother when I hear that name. I was once also a Mrs McNulty, but never as supremely as she. Never. As she made quite clear a
hundred times. Furthermore, why did I give my name ever since as McNulty, when those great efforts were made by everybody to take the name away? I do not know.</narrator>
</p>
<p>
<narrator participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'I was at the zoo last week,' </narrator><narrator participant="patient" activity="narrating">he said suddenly, </narrator><narrator
participant="therapist" activity="speaking">'with friend and his son. I was up in <cultural context="explicit" comment="actual place in Ireland.">Dublin </cultural> to collect some books for my wife. About
ross. My friend's son is called William, which as you know is my name also.'</narrator>
</p>
</p>
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Encoding as it appears in Text Edit

Appendix 2.

CHAPTER THREE (pp.23-29)

Dear reader! Dear reader, if you are gentle and good, I wish I could clasp your hand. I wish – all manner of impossible things. Although I do not have you, I have other things. There are moments when I am pierced through by an inexplicable joy, as if, in having nothing, I have the world. As if, in reaching this room, I have found the anteroom to paradise, and soon will find it opening, and walk forward like a woman rewarded for my pain, into those green fields, and folded farms. So green the grass is burning!

[Symbol]

This morning Dr Grene came in, and I had to scramble and rush to hide these p.s. For I did not want him to see, or to question me, for here contains already secrets, and my secrets are my fortune and my sanity. Luckily I could hear him coming from far off down the corridor, because he has metal on his heels of his shoes. Luckily also I suffer not a jot from rheumatism or any particular infirmity associated with my age, at least in my legs. My hands, my hands alas are not what they were, but the legs hold good. The mice that move along the skirting board are faster, but then, they were always faster. A mouse is a brilliant athlete, make no mistake, when he needs to be. But I was quick enough for Dr Grene.

He knocked on the door which is an improvement on the poor wretch that cleans my room, John Kane, if that is how you spell his name – it is the first time I have written it down – and by the time he had the door opened I was sitting here at an empty table. [end of p.23]

As I do not consider Dr Grene an evil man, I was smiling.

It was a morning of considerable cold and there was a rheum of frost over everything in the room. Everything was glimmering. Myself I was dressed in all my four dresses, and I was snug enough.

‘Hmm, hmm,’ he said. ‘Roseanne. Hmm. How are you, Mrs McNulty?’

‘I am very well, Dr Grene,’ I said. ‘It’s very kind of you to visit me.’

‘It’s my job to visit you,’ he said. ‘Has this room been cleaned today?’

‘It has not,’ I said. ‘But surely John will be here soon.’

‘I suppose he will,’ said Dr Grene.

Then he crossed in front of me to the window and looked out.

‘This is the coldest day of the year so far,’ he said.

‘So far,’ I said.

‘And do you have everything you need?’

‘I do, in the main,’ I said.

Then he sat on my bed as if it were the cleanest bed in Christendom, which I dare say it is not, and stretched out his legs, and gazed down at his shoes. His long whitening beard was as sharp as an iron axe. It was very hedgelike, saintlike. On the bed beside him was a plate, still with the smeared remains of beans from the night before.

Pythagoras,’ he said, ‘believed in the transmigration of the soul, and cautioned us to be careful when we ate beans, in case we were eating the soul of our grandmother.’

‘Oh,’ I said.

‘This we read in Horace,’ he said.

‘Batchelors Beans?’

‘I suppose not.’

Dr Grene answered my question with his usual solemn face. The beauty of Dr Grene is that he is entirely humourless, [end of p.24] which makes him actually quite humorous. Believe me, this is a quality to be treasured in this place.

‘So,’ he said, ‘you are quite well?’

‘I am.’

‘What age are you now, Roseanne?’

‘I suppose I am a hundred.’

‘Don’t you think it very remarkable to be so well at a hundred?’ he said, as if in some way he had contributed to this fact, as perhaps he had. After all, I had been in his care for thirty old years, maybe more. He himself was growing old, but not as old as myself.

‘I think it very remarkable. But, Doctor, I find so many things remarkable. I find the mice remarkable, I find the funny green sunlight that climbs in that window remarkable. I find you visiting me today remarkable.’

‘I am sorry to hear you still have mice.’

‘There will always be mice here.’

‘But doesn’t John put down traps?’

‘He does, but he won’t set them delicately enough, and the mice eat the cheese with no trouble, and get away, like Jesse James and his brother Frank.’

Now Dr Grene took his eyebrows between two fingers of his right hand, and massaged them there for a few moments. He rubbed his nose then and groaned. In that groan was all the years he had spent in this institution, all the mornings of his life here, all the useless talk of mice and cures and age.

‘You know, Roseanne,’ he said, ‘as I have been obliged recently to look at the legal position of all our inmates, as this has been so much in the public discourse, I was looking back over your admittance papers, and I must confess – ‘

He said all this in the most easy-going voice imaginable.

‘Confess?’ I said, prompting him. I knew his mind had a habit of drifting off silently into a private thought.

‘Oh, yes – excuse me. Hmm, yes, I was wanting to ask you, [end of p.25] Roseanne, if you remember by any chance the particulars of your admittance here, which would be most helpful – if you did. I will tell you why in a minute – if I have to.’

Dr Grene smiled and I had a suspicion he meant this last remark as jest, but the humour of it escaped me, especially as, as I said, he never usually attempted humour. So I surmised something unusual was stirring here.

Then, as bad as himself, I forgot to answer him.

‘You remember anything about it?’

‘Coming here, you mean, Dr Grene?’

‘Yes, I think that’s what I mean.’

‘No,’ I said, a foul and utter lie being the best answer.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘unfortunately a great swathe of our archive in the basement has been used, not surprisingly, by generations of mice for bedding, and it is all quite ruined and unreadable. Your own file such as it is has been attacked in the most interesting fashion. It would not shame an Egyptian tomb. It seems to fall apart at the touch of a hand.’

There was a long silence then. I smiled and smiled. I tried to think of what I looked like to him. A face so creased and old, so lost in age.

‘Of course, I know you very well. We have talked often over the years. I wish now I had made more notes. These do not come to many p.s, you will not be surprised to learn. I am a reluctant taker of notes, perhaps not admirable in my job. It is sometimes said that we do no good, that we do nothing for anyone. But I hope we have done our best for you, despite my culpable lack of notes. I do. I’m glad you say you are well. I would like to think you are happy here.’

I smiled at him my oldest old-woman smile, as if I did not quite understand.

‘God knows,’ he said then, with a certain elegance of mind, ‘no one could be happy here.’

‘I am happy,’ I said. [end of p.26]

‘Do you know,’ he said, ‘I do believe you. I think you are the happiest person I know. But I think I will be obliged to re-access you, Roseanne, because there has been very much an outcry in the newspapers against – such people as were incarcerated shall we say for social reasons, rather than medical – being, being ...’

‘Held?’

‘Yes, yes. Held. And continuing in this day and age to be held. Of course, you have been here these many, many years, I should think maybe even fifty?’

‘I do not remember, Dr Grene. It may well be so.’

‘You might consider this place your home.’

‘No.’

‘Well. You as well as any other person have the right to be free if you are suitable for, for freedom. I suppose even at one hundred years of age you might wish to – to walk about the place and paddle in the sea in the summer, and smell the roses –’

‘No!’

I did not intend to cry out, but as you will see these small actions, associated in most people’s minds with the ease and happiness of life, are to me still knives in my heart to think of.

‘Excuse me?’

‘No, no, please, go on.’

‘At any rate, if I found you to be here without true cause, without medical basis as it were, I would be obliged to try and make other arrangements. I don’t wish to upset you. And I don’t intend, my dear Roseanne, to throw you out into the cold. No, no. This would be a very carefully orchestrated move, and as I say, subject to an assessment by me. Questions, I would be obliged to ask you – to a degree.’

I was not entirely certain of its origin, but a feeling of sweeping dread spread through me, like I imagine the poison of broken and afflicted atoms spread through the far margins of Hiroshima, killing them just as surely as the [end of p.27] explosion. Dread like a sickness, a memory of sickness, the first time in many years I had felt it.

‘Are you alright, Roseanne? Please don’t be agitated.’

‘Of course I want freedom, Dr Grene. But it frightens me.’

‘The gaining of freedom,’ said Dr Grene pleasantly, ‘is always accomplished in an atmosphere of uncertainty. In this country at least. Perhaps in all countries.’

‘Murder,’ I said.

‘Yes, sometimes,’ he said, gently.

We stopped speaking then and I gazed at the solid rectangle of sunlight in the room. Ancient dust moiled there.

‘Freedom, freedom,’ he said.

Somewhere in his dusty voice there was the vague bell of longing. I know nothing of his life outside, of his family. Does he have a wife and children? Mrs Grene somewhere? I don’t know. Or do I? He is a brilliant man. He looks like a ferret, but no matter. Any man that can talk about the old Greeks and Romans is a man after my father’s heart. I like Dr Grene despite his dusty despair because he brings to me always an echo of my father’s line of talk, filleted out of Sir Thomas Browne and John Donne.

‘But, we won’t begin today. No, no,’ he said, rising. ‘Certainly not. But it is my duty to set out the facts before you.’

And he crossed again with a sort of infinite medical patience to the door.

‘You deserve no less, Mrs McNulty.’

I nodded.

Mrs McNulty.

I always think of Tom’s mother when I hear that name. I was once also a Mrs McNulty, but never as supremely as she. Never. As she made quite clear a hundred times. Furthermore, why did I give my name ever since as McNulty, when those great efforts were made by everybody to take the name away? I do not know.

‘I was at the zoo last week,’ he said suddenly, ‘with friend and his son. I was up in Dublin to collect some books for my wife. About roses. My friend’s son is called William, which as you know is my name also.’

I did not know about this!

‘We came to the house of the giraffes. William was very pleased with them, two big, long lady giraffes they were, with soft, long legs, very, very beautiful animals. I think an animal so beautiful I have never seen.’

Then in the glimmering room I fancied I saw something strange, a tear rising from the corner of his eye, slipping to his cheek and tumbling quickly down, a sort of dark, private crying.

‘So beautiful, so beautiful,’ he said.

His talk had locked me in silence, I know not why. It was not opening, easy, happy, talk like my father’s, after all. I wanted to listen to him, but I did not want to answer now. That strange responsibility we feel towards others when they speak, to offer them the solace of any answer. Poor humans! And anyway he had not asked a question. He was merely floating there in the room, insubstantial, a living man in the midst of life, dying imperceptibly on his feet, like all of us. [end of p.29]

CHAPTER EIGHT (pp.76-80)

Perhaps we should have spoken. I suppose I could have, betraying him like those children of German’s when Hitler asked them to sniff out the loyalty of their parents in the late war. But I never would have spoken.

[SYMBOL]

Well, all speaking is difficult, whether peril attends it or not. Sometimes peril to the body, sometimes a more intimate, miniature, invisible peril to the soul. When to speak at all is a betrayal of something, perhaps a something not even identified, hiding inside the chambers of the body like a scares refugee in the site of war.

Which is to say, Dr Grene came back today, with his questions at the ready.

My husband Tom fished as a boy for ten years in Lough Gill for salmon, Most of that time, he stood by the lake, watching the dark waters. If he saw a salmon jumping, he went home. If you see a salmon, you will never catch one that day. But the art of not seeing a salmon is very dark too, you must stare and stare at the known sections where salmon are sometimes got, and imagine them down there, feel them there, sense them with some seventh sense. My husband Tom fished for ten years for salmon in that way. As a matter of record he never caught a salmon. So if you saw a salmon it seems you would not catch one, and if you did not see a salmon you would not catch one. So how would you catch one? By some third mystery of luck and instinct, that Tom did not have.

But that was how Dr Grene struck me today, as he sat in [end of p.76] silence in my little quarters, his neat form stretched out in the chair, saying nothing, not exactly watching me with his eyes, but watching me with his luck and instincts, like a fisherman beside dark water. Oh, yes, like a salmon I felt, right enough, and stilled myself in the deep water, very conscious of him, and his rod, and his fly, and his hook.

‘Well, Roseanne,’ he said at last, ‘hmm, I think it’s true that – you came here about – how many years ago?’

‘It’s a long while.’

‘Yes. And you came here I believe from Sligo Mental Hospital.’

‘Lunatic Asylum.’

‘Yes, yes. An interesting old phrase. The second word after all quite – reassuring. The first a very old word, but it’s meaning a little dubious and not a nice word any more. Though, for myself, when the moon is full, I often wonder, do I feel – a little strange?’

I looked at Dr Grene and tried to imagine him altered by the moon, more whisky, a werewolf possibly.

‘Such enormous forces,’ he said. ‘The tides being pulled from shore to shore. Yes, the moon. A very considerable object.’

He stood up now and went to my window. It was so early in this winter day that indeed the moon was the prince of all outside. Its light lay in a solemn glister in the windowpanes. Dr Grene nodded as solemnly to himself, looking out onto the yard below, where John Kane and others banged the bins betimes and all the other clocklike actions of the hospital – the asylum. The lunatic asylum. The place subject to the forces of the moon.

Dr Grene is one of those men that now and then seem to stroke the phantom cravats, or some other item of clothing from some other time. Certainly he might have stroked his beard but he did not. Did he possess some fancy scarf or suchlike at his neck years ago in his youth I think he might have. Anyway he stroked this phantom object now, running the fingers of his [end of p.78] right hand an inch or two above his mere purple tie, the knot thick like a young rose.

‘Oh,’ he said, in a strange exclamation. It was a noise that spoke of utter weariness, but I do not think he was weary. It was an early-morning sound, made in my room as if he were on his own. As perhaps to all the intents and purposes of the actual world he was.

‘Do you want me to consider leaving here? Do you want me to make a consideration of it?’

But I could make no answer to that. Do I want freedom of that kind? Do I know what it is anymore? Is this queer room my home? Whatever was the case, I felt

again that creeping fear, like the frost on the plants of the summer, that blacken the leaves in that saddening way.

‘I wonder how long you were in Sligo? Do you remember the year you entered there?’

‘No. Sometime during the war,’ I said. That I knew.

‘The Second World War, you mean?’

‘Yes.’

‘I was only a baby then,’ he said.

Then there was a crisp, cold silence.

‘We used to go down to on of the little Cornish bays, my father, my mother and myself – this is my earliest memory, it is of no other significance. I remember the absolute chill of the water and, do you know, my nappies heavy with water, a very vivid memory. The government allowed petrol to hardly anyone, so my father built one of those tandem bikes, welding together two different machines. He took the back position because that was where the power was needed, for those Cornish hills. Little hills, but lethal to the legs. Nice days, in the summer, my father at his ease. Tea that was boiled on the beach in the billycan, like fishermen.’ Dr Grene laughed, sharing his laugh with the new light gathering outside to make the morning. ‘Maybe just after the war.’ [end of p.78]

I wanted to ask him what his father’s profession was, I don’t know why, but it seemed too bare a question. Maybe he intended me to ask it, now I think of it. So we would begin to speak of fathers? Maybe he was casting his lure over the dark waters.

‘I have not heard good accounts of the old hospital in Sligo in that time. I am sure it was a horrendous place. I am quite sure it was.’

But I let that lie also.

‘It’s one of the mysteries of psychiatry that our hospitals in the early part of the century were so bad, so difficult to defend, whereas in the early part of the nineteenth century there was often quite an enlightened attitude to, to well, lunacy, as they called it. There was a sudden understanding that the incarceration, the chaining of people et cetera, was not good, and so an enormous effort was made to - alleviate matters. But I am afraid there was a reversion – something went awry, eventually. Do you remember why you were changed from Sligo to here?’

He had asked that quite suddenly so that before I knew I had done so, I had spoken.

‘My father-in-law arranged it.’

‘Your father-in-law? Who was that?’

‘Old Tom, the bandman. He was also the tailor in Sligo.’

‘In the town, you mean?’

‘No, in the asylum itself.’

‘You were in the asylum then where your father-in-law worked?’

‘Yes.’

‘I see.’

‘I think my mother was there also, I can’t remember.’

‘Working there?’

‘No.’

‘A patient?’

‘I can’t remember. I honestly can’t.’

Oh, I knew he was longing to ask me more, but to give [end of p.79] him his due, he did not. Too good a fisherman maybe. When you see the salmon leaping, you will not catch one. Might as well go home.

‘I certainly don’t want you to be fearful,’ he said, a little out of the blue. ‘No, no. That is not my intention. I must say, Roseanne, we hold you in some regard here, we do.’

‘I don’t think that is merited,’ I said, blushing and suddenly ashamed. Violently ashamed. It was as if some wood and leaves were suddenly cleared from a spring, and the head of water blossomed up. Painful, painful shame.

‘Oh, yes,’ he said, not aware I think of my distress. He was perhaps *plamasing* me, flannelling me, as my father would have said. To enter me into some subject, where he could begin. A door into whatever he needed to understand. A part of me yearned to help him. Give him welcome. But. The rats of shame bursting through the wall I have constructed with infinite care over the years and milling about in my lap, was what it felt like. That was my job to hide it then, hide those wretched rats.

Why did I feel that dark shame after all these years? Why still in me, that dark shame?

[SYMBOL]

Appendix 3.

4 of 6 people found the following review helpful

2.0 out of 5 stars

“Good facts are essential to good fiction”, June 19, 2012

By Paul Reese (Niceville, Florida)

Irish writer Colum McCann has a nice ‘James Joyce-ian’ stream of consciousness style to his writing. An early scene, weaving the car rides of two brothers through New York City streets, was engaging.

Unfortunately, as a veteran who has friends that served in Vietnam, I stopped reading when Mr. McCann introduced a character who was supposedly stationed in country by orders of the president to get accurate number counts for our dead by computer hacking. US fighting forces have a history dating back to the Civil War that we don't leave our dead behind. That tradition, along with payroll records, pretty much gives a good number count for our casualties. Additionally, McCann has his character take frequent trips outside to cool off from working on the computer equipment room. Having worked for a mainframe computer company in the ‘70’s, and subsequently installed and maintained control equipment for decades, the one place a body can be sure to cool off is the equipment room. There, temperatures are kept cool and brisk to prevent equipment from overheating! Here’s one last fine point, the Communications people in Vietnam usually maintained equipment in special truck convoys -- to keep mobile and to control the temperature with aux generators.

Great works of fiction are great because real people can relate to the environment and circumstances of the story. It would seem as if Mr. McCann didn’t bother to check with a Vietnam vet with regards to the circumstances of that character's situation. Too bad, there are still a lot of them kicking around.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful

5.0 out of 5 stars

“Tales of the city”, January 31, 2010

By A. T. A. Oliveira “A. T. A. Oliveira” (Sao Paulo-- Brazil) - See all my reviews

Amazon Verified Purchase (What’s this?)

This review is from: *Let the Great World Spin: A Novel* (Paperback)

In *Let the world spin*, Colum McCann says in his Author’s notes that the title of the novel comes from Alfred, Lord Tennyson poem “Locksley Hall”, that was heavily influenced by “Mu'allaqt”, or the “Suspended Poems” - Arabic poems written in the sixth century. At some point, the poems ask if “is there any hope that this desolation can bring me solace?”. That is exactly the main point in this beautiful, polyphonic novel: the solace that comes from desolation.

Set in the 1970’s the narrative echoes the past into the present. It hardly mentions the events of 9/11, but, at the same time, that tragedy is always present throughout the

story shaping how past turns into present. One of the main events of “Let the great world spin” is about French Philippe Petite and his walk between the twin towers of World Trade Center in 1974. This action has been the center of books and movies - specially a documentary called “Man on Wire” - but here is used in a fictional way. Many characters and their actions are related to this event in a loose way.

McCann - who happens to be Irish - asks how connected lives change one another. But what seems to be more interesting is the way that characters aren't aware of the thread that ties them to one another. Everything is connected. The various stories in this novels at some point converge. What doesn't mean that the narratives are plastered to a pattern - the connection may occur in the most subtle way - and, many times, only the reader is aware of it. A car crash is at the center of the collision - real and metaphorical ones. When two worlds collide both of them are about to change their route.

Routes will be drastically modified in the course of “Let the great world spin”. What McCann shows is that the world spins no matter how we care or not about it. Like the course of lives that are always moving forward adding, however, the past. There are many narratives in this novel that prove so. Most of them begins somehow with Petite's walk. Like a spider web the author slowly develops a net of relationships, cause and effects.

The character development is strong - especially when it comes to emotional resonance. Some parts are told in first person, other ones in third person - these different techniques of narrative allow the reader to be closer to some characters than others. It feels like some of them are more open to show their inner emotions - therefore tell their own stories.

McCann, a very gifted writer, has developed a powerful elegiac novel about the world we live, the causes and consequences - most of them impossible to be understood - that affect our lives. In another reading, this is the best novel about the New York post 9/11. It is as powerful as sad as one expects it to be. In the end, the redemption, if it ever comes, it sure is stronger and more beautiful than it was supposed to be, because we have read about so many tales of the city - of this one or any other one.

4.0 out of 5 stars

“The Irish in New York”, April 13, 2010

By

JFlah (Chicago) - See all my reviews

Amazon Verified Purchase (What's this?)

This review is from: Let the Great World Spin: A Novel (Paperback)

This is a great book about a city. McCann shows us so many of its characters, and he weaves their lives, their heartbreak, their happiness into a single narrative about a place and a people. The main thread of the story is the tight-rope incident, and it works well to hold the book together. I loved the main narratives of the two Irish brothers and mother-daughter pair, but the minor characters intrigued me just as

much: the tagger, the judge, the computer programmers. How do you tell the story of a whole city, an entire country, in one book? Colum McCann comes pretty close.

22 of 35 people found the following review helpful

1.0 out of 5 stars

“Gave Up On Page 55”, March 21, 2010

By NorthShoreCanary (New York) - See all my reviews

Amazon Verified Purchase (What's this?)

This review is from: Let the Great World Spin: A Novel (Paperback)

I hate this book and those boring Irish brothers. The author was trying way too hard to create eccentric characters but I found the whole thing to be totally ridiculous and the characters to be so annoying I never want to encounter any of them again. I wanted to stop out of the gate but there were so many great reviews I persevered assuming I was missing something that would soon reveal itself. I know that “persevere” seems like a strong word to use given I only made it to page 55 but it took sheer will to do so - then I set it aside hoping to gain the strength for a second round but that's not going to happen. Dave Eggers, whose writing I respect, gives a glowing review on the cover of Let The Great World Spin. How is it possible? I've considered never buying another Eggers book on principle. This is among the worst books I've ever almost read.

Appendix 4.

Dyads and Triads: New York

new york and all	2
new york and am	1
new york and finds	1
new york and live	1
new york and of	1
new york and their	1
new york as the	2
new york at the	1
new york august day	1
new york back in	1
new york better is	1
new york can be	1
new york city 1974	1
new york city and	4
new york city around	2
new york city as	4
new york city at	1
new york city better	2
new york city between	1
new york city circa	1
new york city down	1
new york city during	1
new york city from	1
new york city hookers	1
new york city in	15
new york city is	1
new york city landscape	1
new york city of	2
new york city on	3
new york city pavement	1
new york city residents	1
new york city seem	1
new york city setting	1
new york city streets	1
new york city that	1
new york city to	1
new york city when	1
new york city whose	1
new york city with	2
new york collectively looks	1
new york deeper than	1
new york described in	1
new york dialogue down	1
new york during the	1
new york for ya	1

new york from the	1
new york had a	1
new york had everything	1
new york has climbed	1
new york in 1974	4
new york in every	1
new york in one	1
new york in the	5
new york is built	2
new york is exuberant	1
new york is that	1
new york is there	1
new york just isn	1
new york kept going	1
new york kind of	2
new york landscape and	1
new york life in	1
new york looking for	1
new york monuments that	1
new york of the	3
new york on a	1
new york panoply that	1
new york post 9	1
new york setting with	1
new york state as	1
new york stories meets	1
new york that is	2
new york that the	2
new york that witness	1
new york their father	1
new york times book	2
new york trying almost	1
new york very accurately	1
new york was breathtaking	1
new york was like	1
new york was presented	1
new york when it	2
new york where the	1
new york with such	1

Dyads and Triads: Irish

irish angst designed	1
irish authors and	1
irish brother helped	1
irish brother tries	1
irish brothers and	2
irish brothers in	1
irish brothers living	2
irish brothers the	1
irish brothers were	1
irish brothers who	1
irish catholic monk	1
irish celibate living	1
irish covert priest	1
irish immigrant attempting	1
irish immigrant brothers	1
irish in new	1
irish jesuit priest	1
irish man looking	1
irish monk and	1
irish monk living	2
irish monk named	1
irish monk to	1
irish monk who	4
irish novel about	1
irish origins promise	1
irish priest and	1
irish priest who	1
irish religious man	1
irish social worker	1
irish storyteller to	1
irish woe and	1
irish writer colum	1

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