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## Ideology and Geography in Dermot Bolger's *The Journey Home*

Dermot Bolger published *The Journey Home*, his third novel, in 1990. It emerged in the midst of a period of extraordinary literary fecundity for its author. Bolger's earlier novels, *Nightshift* and *The Woman's Daughter*, had appeared in 1985 and 1987 respectively, and Bolger's plays, *The Lament for Arthur Cleary*, *The Tramway End* (which encompasses *In High Germany* and *The Holy Ground*) and *One Last White Horse*, were premiered in 1989, 1990 and 1991. *The Journey Home* won considerable acclaim, being nominated for the Irish Literature Prize in the Aer Lingus/*Irish Times* awards. In this light, to focus exclusively on *The Journey Home* may seem unduly narrow, but this novel is Bolger's major work to date, as it encompasses and sums up the plays and fictions that came before it. Its themes of emigration, poverty, drug addiction; of the return of the exile from Europe, of political corruption, of the repressiveness of the social order of the nineteen sixties and earlier, may all be found in relatively discrete form in the plays and novels that preceded it. Consequently, the burden of responsibility placed on Bolger's shoulders by the critic Fintan O'Toole becomes especially heavy in this novel. In an article published in 1985, O'Toole suggested that Bolger and Michael O'Loughlin would commence the elaboration of a "Utopian tradition" of Irish urban writing, "drawing its poetry from the future", unaffected by the provincialism and conservatism produced by the dominance of the rural over the urban in Irish writing.<sup>1</sup> This new "tradition", O'Toole later argued, would "contribute to a critique of the received values".<sup>2</sup> I wish to argue that, in fact, *The Journey Home* fails in this ideological mission, and that in its deployment of tropes of geography and place, it constitutes not an escape from what O'Toole, quoting Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, called "the poetry of the past", but in fact an unhelpful re-statement of it, albeit in a somewhat new guise.

*The Journey Home* is set in the nineteen eighties in the Republic, and incorporates specific political and cultural references to establish the narrative and affirm its realism: "moving" statues, Garda brutality, the instability of the minority Fianna Fáil administrations of Charles

1. Fintan O'Toole, "Going West: The Country versus the City in Irish Writing", *Crane Bag*, 9.2 (1985), p. 111.
2. Fintan O'Toole, "Island of Saints and Silicon: Literature and Social Change in Contemporary Ireland", in Michael Keneally (ed.), *Cultural Contexts and Literary Idioms* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988), p. 35.

Haughey and that party's invocation of traditional nationalist rhetoric. The novel is made up of three narratives. An omniscient realist narrative depicts the flight of Francis Hanrahan (Hano) and Katie to the wilds of Leitrim from the edge of Dublin. They are seeking to evade the authorities in the wake of their murder of Pascal Plunkett, a sadistic and corrupt gombeen entrepreneur who, we learn, has dogged Hano's life and sexually assaulted him. A second narrative, addressed by Hano to the sleeping Katie in the basement of the ruined "Big House" where they finally hide, tells Hano's autobiography up to the point at which their flight (and the novel) began. The third narrative, which is elliptical in form, reveals itself gradually to be the voice of the dead Shay, Hano's great friend and Katie's lover. Speaking from the grave, addressing Katie, Shay recounts episodes from her history — her move from Leitrim to Dublin, her alienation and drug addiction — and his death, murdered by the Plunkett dynasty. These three patterns are interwoven, cutting across each other, thereby giving the book as a whole an episodic character. The effect is one of circularity, as Hano's and Shay's narratives are extended flashbacks, and Hano's is dramatically located at the endpoint of the omniscient narrative. The result is a sense of stasis and repetition in a novel centrally concerned with movement and migration.

This restlessness, in a novel which tries to narrate the experience of a new Irish urban proletariat forming under conditions of "peripheral postindustrialisation", is both spiritual and literal.<sup>3</sup> Every character in *The Journey Home* is displaced: Hano's parents from Kerry; Shay from the inner city; Katie from Leitrim; the "old Protestant woman", whom Hano befriended on teenage hitch-hiking trips from Dublin and with whom he and Katie take refuge, has been driven from her home. Even the Plunketts, the visible face of power in the novel, are exiles from Mayo. Consequently, the great desire and nostalgia enunciated here is for "home", and for the sense of wholeness, authenticity and self-presence founded in a stable geographical location. Hano puts the problem thus:

I didn't understand it then, but I grew up in perpetual exile: from my parents when on the streets, from my own world when at home ... How can you learn self-respect if you're taught that where you live is not your real home?<sup>4</sup>

However, when Hano travelled, at the age of fourteen, into what he calls "my father's uncharted countryside", he discovered there a reality beyond his father's comprehension: "long-haired Germans in battered

3. I take the term "peripheral postindustrialisation" from John Kurt Jacobsen, *Chasing Progress in the Irish Republic: Ideology, Democracy and Dependent Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 10-17.

4. Dermot Bolger, *The Journey Home* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 8; further references in the text.

vans picking up hikers; skinheads battling outside chip shops in Athlone" (p. 8).

Terence Brown has suggested that the essence of Sean Lemass's success, from the end of the nineteen fifties onwards, was in his divorcing economic modernisation from Anglicisation, ideologically, and making of the former a viable national project, or ideological narrative.<sup>5</sup> Hano's father was of a generation that came to maturity around 1960, when the ruralist national culture of the de Valera period had yet actually to feel the effects of the modernisation project formulated by T.K. Whitaker in the White Paper *Economic Development* in 1958, and implemented by the Lemass government from 1959 on. On his deathbed, his father told Hano that the only way he had ever come to like the suburban house in which he raised his family was by transforming its garden into a replica, complete with chickens and potato beds, of the farm he had come from (pp. 126-27). But he had also breathed in the confidence of the Lemass era, hoping that with the new economic dispensation, his children might not be forced to emigrate as he and his siblings had been. The novel stands, in its movement between the generation of Hano's father and of the Plunketts, and that of Hano, Shay and Katie, as a narrative of the ambiguities and failures of that project. It is marked by an uneasy, ambivalent sense of solidarity and difference with the Lemass generation: fury and disgust at what Bolger sees as the hypocrisy and self-aggrandisement of the powerful of that generation; sympathy for those disenfranchised by it.

The novel is about journeys: journeys physical, cultural and metaphysical. The singular "journey" of the title suggests that in fact all the actual journeys undertaken by characters in the novel are variations on the theme of the search for "home". Edward Said has noted the spatial characteristics of the nineteenth-century realist novel. It is crucially concerned with the way the "novelistic hero and heroine exhibit the restlessness and energy of the enterprising bourgeoisie" and how "they are permitted adventures in which their experiences reveal to them the limits of what they can aspire to, where they can go, what they can become".<sup>6</sup> In other words, the nineteenth-century realist novel dramatises the bourgeois quest for identity in spatial terms, and this idea of space is both geographical and social. Bolger's social world is not, of course, that of the bourgeoisie, and he is writing at the end of the twentieth century, but his characters travel constantly in search of home and of themselves. *The Journey Home*, as I will argue in more detail later, is caught in the tension of trying to offer a recognisably "realistic" portrait of Irish society

5. Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History 1922-85* (London: Fontana, second edition 1985), pp. 246-47.
6. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), p. 84.

in the late twentieth century, and a sense that such a novelistic project may no longer be aesthetically viable or politically acceptable. The immediate point here, perhaps, is that Bolger's world *is* precisely that of the belated young post-Lemass Irish representatives of a post-war Western consumer society that succeeded, until the economic crises of the nineteen seventies, in making the bourgeois dream appear accessible to the masses. Thus Bolger's characters travel, but their journeys are all too often the sign of the re-insertion of the economy and the re-inscription of the culture into a world-economy of goods, capital and labour, of cultural images and social horizons, over which Ireland and its citizens have all too little control. So they share the bourgeois quest for identity, while suffering literal displacement. Hano travels into the country, as a boy; Shay travels to Europe in search of liberation, as one of the "young Europeans" so often referred to in the promotional literature of the Industrial Development Authority in the nineteen eighties; Hano and Katie flee to the country, in order to escape the rural forces that have taken over the city; Hano travels from boyhood to manhood.<sup>7</sup> But all these journeys fail. In Bolger's world, even the Irish representatives of the "enterprising bourgeoisie" turn out to be, in Roddy Doyle's words, "the niggers of Europe".<sup>8</sup> This is best illustrated in the case of Patrick Plunkett, the more polished but nevertheless equally corrupt politician brother of Pascal. Patrick is a TD and Junior Minister of Justice, given to using the Ministerial Mercedes for family business and the vote-catching attendance of funerals. For entertainment, he joins his brother picking up homeless men off the streets and coercing them into illegal bareknuckle fighting (pp. 162-67). Patrick's future may be as a European Commissioner (p. 292), but Shay meets him trawling sleazy gay bars in the Hague, a lonely and peripheral small player in European politics, an outsider at the heart of the continent. However, this only mirrors, on the psychic level, Shay's own experience of Europe as a *gastarbeiter*, suffering exploitative labour conditions, living in shacks. In other words, power does not compensate Patrick for his sense of alienation and homelessness (expressed in his perverse sexuality), though the latter may not affect him with the literal force that it does Shay. When Shay returns to Europe

7. For a succinct analysis of the IDA's promotional campaigns of the nineteen eighties, see Luke Gibbons, "Coming Out of Hibernation? The Myth of Modernity in Irish Culture", in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Across the Frontiers: Ireland in the 1990s* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), pp. 210-15. Gibbons's essay is reprinted in his *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day, 1996), pp. 82-93. The point is reinforced by an examination of the semiotic implications of the position on many of the IDA's posters of the slogan "We're the Young Europeans" over an inset photograph of four young Irish workers, whose garb is suggestive equally of employment as skilled industrial labour or as technologists.
8. Roddy Doyle, *The Barrytown Trilogy: The Commitments* (London: Minerva, 1993), p. 13.

later in the novel, he is betraying himself, and, as it turns out, Katie, by working for Justin Plunkett (son of Patrick and heir to the dynasty, a drugs "baron" and pimp) as a drugs courier.

Hano's narrative, then, is a *Bildungsroman*, but instead of describing a conventional bourgeois history of growing social confidence, stature and definition, achieved if necessary by migration, here all possibilities are thwarted. This blockage occurs in the city because, as O'Toole suggested, of its provinciality and domination by country people.<sup>9</sup> Hano is dogged by feelings of alienation from his country parents, and his feelings of guilt and betrayal in relation to what he perceives as the dominant ethos and culture, which are characterised as being obsessed with the rural past, nationalism and Anglophobia. It suits both Bolger's characters' existential quandaries, and his ideological purposes, to plunge them into the alternative subterranean world of flatland, dope, rock music and general cynicism since it offers them (and the ideal reader the novel seeks) some temporary relief, and the pleasure of debunking supposedly dominant cultural myths.

The discourse of the novel contains an ambivalent vision, contained within a Manichaeian framework. Ireland is divided between country and city; Dublin is split between rural colonisers and the "crazy, unofficial lives" (a phrase of Colm Tóibín's) of denizens like Shay and Hano; Europe is split between bureaucrats like the Irish Embassy official in the Hague who refuses to help the destitute Shay, and the Turkish migrant workers with whom he makes common cause in Germany (pp. 192, 205). But what is really offensive (in the novel's terms) is the co-existence of country and city: the idea, that is, of a rural bourgeoisie, or of alienated rural labour. This is best illustrated in Hano's description of a pub Shay takes him to in the Liberties:

The downstairs bar was thick with smoke, countrymen nursing pints, a figure with a black beard gesturing drunkenly in the centre of the floor. Two old women sang in a corner, one lifting her hand with perfect timing at regular intervals to straighten the man beside her who was tilting on his bar stool. Nobody there was under fifty, no one born in the city that was kept out by the steel door.

'Gas, isn't it?' Shay said. 'Knocknagow on a Friday evening.' He gazed in amusement, then headed downstairs to the cellar. Here the owner's son reigned, the father never coming closer than shouting down from the top step at closing time. Four women with sharp, hardened faces sat in one corner drinking shorts ... I began to suss how the locked door kept more than the industrial revolution out. The girl across from me was rolling a joint; the bloke beside Shay passing one in his hands ... Two of the women in the corner rose and ascended the stairs ...

9. See also Brown, pp. 318-19.

'The massaging hand never stops,' Shay said. 'Pauline there left her bag behind one night so I brought it over to her across the road in the Clean World Health Studio. She was clad in a leather outfit after skelping the arse off some businessman ...' (pp. 32-3)

The reference to the industrial revolution is crucial. In *The Journey Home*, industrial modernity is fatally compromised. Hano enjoys the liberation he experiences in Shay's company: "Home", he says, "like an old ocean liner, broke loose from its moorings and sailed in my mind ... I could see it retreating into the distance ... as I took each euphoric step ... towards ... the adventures of crossing the city through its reeling night-time streets" (p. 36). The horror arises at the blurring of boundaries that is a concomitant of the experience of modernity, or, more accurately, the particular co-habitation of tradition and modernity that characterises contemporary Ireland. In the upstairs/downstairs relationship described above, it is rural traditionalism that is upstairs and implicitly dominant, keeping both the liberatory potential of modernity (or of the "industrial revolution"), figured by youth and marijuana, and the perverse reification of modernity (prostitution and masochism) downstairs and hidden. It is even more of an affront that this is taking place in the city. Modernity here is both exhilarating and alienating, but the alienation derives from the persistence of the rural, its ability to co-exist with the modern. Thus, the ideological polemic of the novel is directed at the idea of a bourgeoisie *that has rural origins*. The anguish of modernity is attributable in *The Journey Home* to the domination of a rural culture that is reckoned to be finally monolithic. Rural Ireland has experienced deracination and trauma *in the past* — this is what brought Hano and his family to Dublin — but not in the present. In the present, Irish rural culture and ideology, as personified by the Plunketts, is consolidated, in the terms of the novel. The anguish and trauma of modernity may be experienced by the Plunketts in psychic terms — this is expressed in their perverse and sadistic homosexuality — but it does not affect their power, which is expressed in the totalising vision enunciated in the words of Hano's boss at the Voters' Register's Office. Mooney (from Monaghan) tells Hano ominously: "I see everything in this office" (p. 28). This panoptic power has great spatial reach, being expressed in Shay's finding that he cannot escape the 'bog Irish', even in Europe (p. 206). They are the invisible co-workers who beat him up when he supports wage equality for Turkish and European labourers, and they are present in Patrick Plunkett's horrific sexual assault on him. For Bolger, Ireland has become a totally administered society, where there is no escape from the circle of corrupt power.

The novel is based on a belief in the incompatibility of a political ideology that draws its inspiration from tradition, and an economic practice based on modernisation. What this thinking fails to account for

is that the construction of a cohesive nation-state has, historically, often been the precondition for the development of industrial capitalism in Europe. Moreover, Ireland's colonial status has meant that, as David Lloyd has pointed out, Irish nationalism has historically had to rely for its authenticating difference from the imperial centre (on which it has until very recently been dependent) on the invocation of a rural and Gaelic culture that has long been in decline.<sup>10</sup> This is not to deny the contradictory character of a modernising project that seeks its ideological legitimation in an appeal to the past, but to point out that until recently it had been a productive contradiction. But Bolger takes "traditional Ireland" at face value when he attributes such power to it as we see in *The Journey Home*. Luke Gibbons argues that the ideology of valorising rural Ireland was one produced by the Revival, that is, urban middle-class intellectuals for the most part, and he goes on to demonstrate that this image of rural Ireland was not a matter of *continuity* with the past but rather a *break* with the past.<sup>11</sup> Arcadian imagery conformed to the real experiences of country people no more than to those of city-dwellers. In fact, the imagery of a national pastoral idyll served the modernisers of the nineteen sixties very well, by masking the discontinuities that were to disadvantage country people further, and by inhibiting their potential resentment and resistance. The fact is that Bolger is closer to his Revival antagonists than he thinks.

Bolger proceeds from an assumption that nationalism and modernity are incompatible; so also did W.B. Yeats. To Yeats, modernity represented a levelling tendency in society, a social degeneracy and corrupt materialism that was not commensurate with the noble new nation he imagined. To Bolger, modernity should wash away the atavisms of sectarian nationalism. The problem is that nationalism is an aspect of modernity; it is a modernising ideology, and capitalist development has for much of its history been driven by the nation-state. Bolger forgets that, historically, capitalism has served to differentiate and fragment space as much as to homogenise it, and that the identity-politics of nationalism can thrive in such spaces. Bolger takes this vilification of nationalism to the extreme of comparing the victims of the Plunketts, especially Katie and her junkie companions, to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust (p. 246). Leaving aside the tasteless absurdity of this comparison, the polemical point is to suggest that modernity in the Republic has been betrayed by nationalism. This argument reductively forecloses any discussion of the nature of modernisation itself, or of the kind of modernising development initiated by Lemass. But this is typical of the

10. David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Movement* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1993), p. 93.

11. Gibbons, pp. 208-10.

novel, and of Bolger's work more generally, which tends to depict the condition of Irish modernity, without offering a sustained analysis of it.

On the formal level, the rural is the locus of Bolger's omniscient realist narrative (the account of Hano's and Katie's escape to Leitrim), whereas the urban, in its chaos, excitement and terror, can only be rendered subjectively, in Hano's and Shay's narratives. However, this formal split undermines the novel's polemical drive. Bolger is forced into two contradictory directions. The first is to produce a subjective narrative — Hano's autobiography — marked by an overmastering will to name, enumerate, tabulate, in almost obsessive empirical detail. This produces an account that is at once subjective and yet yearns for authority. But if we accept that realism is a narrative mode of stability and totality, dependent on the availability of an accepted and hence authoritative metalanguage, then for Bolger to produce an omniscient realist narrative of the city would be to collude or identify with the totalising ruralist discourse of Mooney. Bolger's difficulty is how to discuss the "state of the nation" in such a way as to evade or resist the incorporating stabilities of the state, which he believes is corrupt, and of the nation, which he believes no longer exists except in the degenerate rhetoric of Plunkett's party. Yet representational realism is precisely the narrative mode that Bolger adopts to describe the flight through the countryside. Bolger produces a narrative that while apparently critical of rural ideology manages to collude with the elisions made by precisely that ideology in its idealised representations of the country.

By this I mean that Bolger's description of the countryside, as compared to Dublin, is one which almost entirely suppresses *labour* as an element of rural life. Hano and Katie steal vegetables from a "tiny field", worked by an "old man ... his felt cap pulled down, oblivious to the weather" (p. 185). They even rest by a dolmen, at which point Bolger informs us, without a trace of irony, that "The only sign of man was the high-frequency wires strung out between humming pylons that bisected the sky. Otherwise the landscape looked the same as had greeted druids who tramped here to lay down their dead thousands of years ago" (p. 146).<sup>12</sup> Opposed to this primeval image are only the crude deprivations of short-term, irresponsible, cynically commercial exploitation, or the colonising presence of the German woman who now inhabits Katie's parents' cottage (pp. 95-107). From this one concludes that for Bolger the country would be acceptable if only it was devoid of its actual denizens. The rhetoric that is associated with the country is that of the Plunketts, one of power and material interests. Poverty, underemployment, emigration, alienation and labour — or its repression in the form

12. Gibbons notes the use of precisely this conjunction of the modern and the primitive in the promotional posters and advertisements of the IDA. See n. 7 above.

of the dole queue — become prerogatives of the city. Raymond Williams made the point admirably when he argued that the portrayal of a retreat from the hellish city to “country or coast”

... is ... a rentier’s vision: the cool country that is sought is not that of the working farmer but of the fortunate resident. The rural virtues are there but as a memory. ... What is idealised is not the rural economy, past or present, but a purchased freehold house in the country. ... This is not then a rural but a suburban or dormitory dream. And it is in direct reaction to the internal corruption of the city: the rise of the lawyer, merchant, general, pimp and procurer; the stink of place and of profit; the noise and danger of being crowded together.<sup>13</sup>

Bolger’s characters are not “fortunate residents”, of course, but the description holds nevertheless. Apart from the link with the Plunketts and their political party, *The Journey Home* fails to suggest the connections between rural and urban economies. It may be that the European core exploits peripheral Ireland: this is what is so offensive about the Germans, who accumulate wealth at the expense of the continent’s margins (Ireland, Turkey) and, on that basis, are able to buy out the landscape of the margins (Katie’s parents’ cottage) there to fulfil their variously post-apocalyptic and primitivist fantasies. But in Bolger’s Ireland, the capacity of the core to exploit the periphery is only to be measured by the extent that the country has succeeded in conquering the city. Thus, Bolger ends up producing a discourse of the countryside that is not so far from that of the Revivalists he seems to be turning away from so boldly.

Appropriately, then, in the Irish countryside that Hano and Katie traverse in the course of their escape from Dublin, it is visions of a modernising rural economy, of man’s domination of nature, that draw negative associations. Just before they reach the woods in Sligo owned by the “old Protestant woman”, Hano and Katie happen upon a political rally in a nearby village. It is a gathering to celebrate the victory of the local candidate of Plunkett’s party which has just won another general election. The exultation of the villagers, represented as an undifferentiated mass, is expressed in “animal roars” and screams that are “wild” and “inhuman” (pp. 231-32). A speaker reminds the villagers that “we have always looked after you and you have always looked after us”, and promises a new parish hall and sports complex (p. 233). What we have here is a negative caricature of Irish clientelist rural politics. Bolger’s point is not only to lodge his narrative in the immediate recognisable past, but also to depict the political face of modernisation in rural Ireland. Any opposition to it is dismissed as the irrelevant opinion of a “fucking

13. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Hogarth Press, 1993), pp. 46-7.

jackeen" (p. 183). Thus, Bolger castigates the rural bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie, in terms which paradoxically recall J.M. Synge's revulsion at their "rampant double-chinned vulgarity".<sup>14</sup> It is this rural middle-class which has ostracised and harassed the "old Protestant woman", who refuses to sell her remaining land to permit her neighbours to expand their holdings, and which is responsible for the ruthless and myopic despoiling of nature that the old woman tells Hano about.

It is in the company of the Protestant woman that the couple finally take refuge. It is at this point that we have circled back to Revivalist territory. The former mistress of the local "Big House", the old woman now lives in a caravan, a refugee on her own land (as Hano and Katie are internal exiles) while her home runs to ruin. However, unlike Hano, Katie and Shay, she has succeeded in making a relative virtue of her homelessness. She is the lodestone of the novel's moral geography, as well as its narrative endpoint. Formerly a landowner and therefore an agent of power in the countryside, she is now as outcast as the couple she takes in. It is with this woman that Hano and Katie find a redemptive space, or in Bolger's terms, "home". The old woman is a metaphor for many things: the fact that she is never named confers this status upon her. She stands for liberal enlightenment, for internationalism as against nationalism, for a non-sectarian spirituality. She is an updated and subversive version of Cathleen Ni Houlihan, except that she shelters her "son" rather than sending him out to fight for her "fourth green field". In fact, she has lost most of her fields, and they are no longer green, because of local industrial pollution (p. 180); this explains her advocacy of green politics. Of course, ecopolitics frequently cloaks itself in the discourse of Romantic anti-modernity, which was also an element of the Celtic Twilight. As Gibbons argues, this was an ideology produced chiefly by *urban* intellectuals, cut off by capitalist reification from the real material links between the city and its rural hinterland. In contrast to Hano's parents, who actively worked their garden plot in the city, the old woman keeps her woods for spiritual reasons only. In her "green" consciousness and somewhat "New Age" spirituality (she is given to hugging trees in moments of stress), she figures an authentic, because un-modern and un-capitalised, non-instrumental relationship to nature. At the novel's conclusion, she, with Hano and Katie, are held to have transcended the system, where they are simply marginal to it. Politically and existentially, the old woman is summed up thus:

One wall of the caravan held rows of pictures from her past: the house before the war; her family who were all dead; friends around the world; everyone from street traders in Morocco to political

14. Ann Saddlemyer (ed.), *Collected Letters of J.M. Synge* (2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983-84), 2, p. 117.

prisoners in Turkey. She fought a hundred causes from the caravan. The postman brought mail from The Kremlin, Chile, South Africa, and places Hano had never even heard of. The only government she had no correspondence with was her own ... it was as if she had withdrawn from her own land, knowing it was impossible to change the Plunketts who carved it up, and had concentrated on creating her own country within her caravan instead. (p. 178)

Clearly, Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation or "imagined community" as limited and sovereign does not apply here.<sup>15</sup> In the old woman, identity is denationalised and deterritorialised. In this she mirrors the Turkish *gastarbeiter* Shay meets in a worker's hostel, who suggests that "home" is more significant as a sense carried about in one's head than as a physical location (p. 65). But the old woman's transcendence of the social system is also her abandonment of hope in it, and is part of Bolger's overblown polemical linkage of Irish state-nationalism and totalitarianism, since change is possible in the Soviet Union and South Africa, but not in Ireland. This does not amount to O'Toole's "critique of the received values", but rather an evasion of such a project.

When the young couple take shelter in the basement of the "Big House" this act is preceded by a ritual laying-to-rest of the ghost of a former servant of the house who, wrongly accused of theft, had committed suicide. Leading Hano down the stairs, while reading from the Bible, Katie exorcises the ghost. Then she turns to Hano and says: "It's time you came home, Francis" (p. 280). Home, Hano announces in the last sentence of the novel, is the arms of Katie. Here, redemption (for the male hero, at least) comes in the love of a woman and the continuity implied in the son he is certain he has fathered upon her. It has also come in the reconciliation of the two social groups that were marginalised at the foundation of the Free State: the Protestant minority and the working-class.<sup>16</sup> This is implied in the exorcising of the servant's ghost, and his replacement by Hano and Katie. Thus the upstairs/downstairs relationship described earlier is reinscribed and located in an Ascendancy home again. O'Toole argued that the malign literary influence of the country over the city was to be found figured in the "pull of the past" and in the attraction of the "knowable community" where the individual knows his or her place. As examples, he cited the tenement dramas of O'Casey and Behan.<sup>17</sup> But this is what we find here in Bolger. After brutalising encounters with urban modernity, Katie and Hano flee to the country. There they make common cause with and shelter in the home of a member of the former Ascendancy. Cut off from their

15. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, revised edition, 1991), p. 7.

16. Brown, pp. 102-37.

17. O'Toole, "Going West", pp. 114-15.

immediate past by crime, internal exile and alienation, Hano and Katie retreat to a deeper past, with the "old Protestant woman", who, displaced from her home, is similarly cut off. The entire negative inventory of the old woman's Ascendancy patrimony is cancelled out by her poverty and exile. In the old woman's spiritual reconciliation with the ghost of the wrongly-accused servant, and her alliance with Hano and Katie, who, after all, are but peasants at one remove, we see a reinvention of what E.P. Thompson called the "moral economy", whereby the rural social system is ideologically understood in terms of paternalism and reciprocal dependency, as against exploitation.<sup>18</sup> The paradox in this is that, as F.S.L. Lyons and David Cairns and Shaun Richards make clear, albeit with differing emphases, the Ascendancy antiquarianism of the early nineteenth century and the Literary Revivalists of the turn of the century both projected idealised relationships between Ascendancy and peasantry that strategically bypassed the burgeoning Catholic middle-class that threatened the Ascendancy the most and constituted the main motive force of Irish nationalism.<sup>19</sup> Hano and Katie may not be the idealised peasantry imagined by Yeats, but they are the true dispossessed, the social detritus of nationalised modernity. In their condition of stripped-down, almost negative identity ("Just be your fucking self", Katie tells Hano early in the novel), the young couple have passed beyond class and beyond national identity. So also has the old woman, and their sense of community is predicated on an individualist, humanist subjectivity. Yet, as I have suggested above, this community is distinctly reminiscent of an earlier Yeatsian "organic" society. But the problem with the "golden age" is that, as Williams remarked, it is always already over.<sup>20</sup> The future is not positively imagined in the terms O'Toole projected, but only in the conservative dynastic or filiative sense implied by the son that Katie will bear Hano:

Woods like these have sheltered us for centuries. After each plantation this is where we came, watched the invader renaming our lands, made raids in the night on what had once been our home. Ribbonmen, Michael Dwyer's men, Croppies, Irregulars. Each century gave its name to those young men. What will they call us in the future, the tramps, the Gypsies, the enemies of the community that stays put?

I do not expect you to wait for me, Cait. Just don't leave, stand your ground. Tell him about me sometime; teach him the first lesson early on: there is no home, nowhere certain any more. And tell him

18. E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century", *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76-136; see also Lloyd, pp. 140-47.
19. See F.S.L. Lyons, *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 28; and David Cairns and Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 25-8.
20. Williams, pp. 9-12.

of Shay, like our parents told us the legends of old; tell him of the one who tried to return to what can never be reclaimed. Describe his face, Cait, the raven black hair, that smile before the car bore down and our new enslavement began.

... Sleep on, my love. Tomorrow or the next day they will come. I will keep on running till they kill or catch me. Then it will be your turn and the child inside you. Out there ... commentators [are] discussing the reaction of the nation [to the election results]. It doesn't matter to internal exiles like us. No, we're not exiles, because you are the only nation I give allegiance to now ... When you hold me, Cait, I have reached home. (pp. 293-94)

Here we find an implied narrative of victimhood as simplistic as any "Whig nationalist" story of eight centuries of national struggle; a narrative which homogenises disparate historic and social movements, and sets up an untenable and highly exaggerated parallel between the status of Bolger's internal exiles — Dublin's youthful poor — and agrarian and republican insurgent groups in the past.<sup>21</sup> This would matter less if it were not for the fact that the ambition of *The Journey Home* is so obviously to narrate the experience of an entire generation. Bolger's "outsiders" are not simply a small marginal group, but may even constitute a majority of the population. But in spite of this hyperbole, we still find a retreat from *Gesellschaft* to *Gemeinschaft*; in the place of the discredited and antiquated identity of nationhood, no affiliative order is possible other than the most conservative vision of the "organic society" figured by the dynastic patriarchal family reconstructed in the servants' quarters of the "Big House".<sup>22</sup> The paradox is that these tropes, which have been mobilised historically in the service of the project of nation-building that Bolger purports to reject and step beyond, are here reactivated in the narration of supposedly insurgent — at least on the cultural level — experience. Thus, rather than O'Toole's "critique of the received values", we find here a dismal shrinkage of the geography of hope, resistance and the imagined future community. *The Journey Home* narrates a return to putative origins that in its sentimentality, reconstructed traditionalism and attenuated historical vision is in fact a sorry shadow of the ideology and social system that Bolger sets himself to oppose.

21. For a useful and important discussion of "Whig nationalism" in Irish historiographic debate, see Brendan Bradshaw, "Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland", *Irish Historical Studies*, XXVI (1988-89), pp. 329-41; reprinted in Ciaran Brady (ed.), *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), pp. 191-216.
22. I owe the concepts of "filiation" and "affiliation" to Edward Said's essay "Secular Criticism", in his *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 1-30 (esp. pp. 16-25).