

## The potent wayfarer

“Some man that wayfaring was stood by housedoor at night’s oncoming. Of Israel’s folk was that man that on earth wandering far had fared” (James Joyce, *Ulysses* [1922], ed. Hans Walter Gabler, New York, Garland, 1984, 14:71–3).

In chapter 14 of *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom visits Mina Purefoy, a woman in labour at the National Maternity Hospital, Holles Street. Over the course of the chapter the various stages of pregnancy are evoked and a version of the evolution of what is claimed as English Literature is replicated in the succession of parodies of various styles of prose. English nationalism drew upon this glorious heritage to claim purity and perfection for the English language and by extension for the English people and English nation. Joyce would have none of this. His choice of models for English literature included very many who were Irish by birth or residence but also styles based on French, Latin, Scots, and the slang of African Americans. This English literature was anything but. And this, of course, is what fertility requires. For Bloom is the foreign body, the wayfarer, who, entering the womb provokes a germination.

Language is made in communication, across the interface between two cultures as much as ever within it. Fertility is all about porosity, an opening to the world. The port is a portal. The eye is an opening into the soul and Shakespeare equates love with contagion when in *Romeo and Juliet* he has Benvolio give Romeo the advice that he cure himself of his love for the unattainable Verona by turning his attention elsewhere: “Take thou some new infection to thy eye, | And the rank poison of the old will die” (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1:2, 49-50). To be available for love, is to be vulnerable to another and, implies Shakespeare, to risk intimate comingling that even has the character of a sickness. To set oneself against sharing, is to choose sterility. The nation inviolate is a stale and rank people. And so, we welcome the wayfaring artist.

In “Notes Towards a Politics of Location” (1984), Adrienne Rich wrote that “a place on a map is also a place in history.” We share, then, this place, our home, with these travelled artists. We share with them the legacies of a colonialism which once looked upon the people of this territory as, in the words of one of those colonial masters, ‘barbarous’, ‘wandering and idle’ (John Dymmok, *A Treatise of Ireland* [1599], ed. Richard Butler, in *Tracts relating to Ireland*, volume 2, Dublin, University Press, 1843, pp 1–85). Castigating poor people for not being rooted to wage labouring in one place was a common trope of colonialism and was used to justify taking land from natives and then impressing them to work now as proletariat where once they had been master-less farmers; now refugees in their own land.

And into this historical place we welcome the newly uprooted; but this time we acknowledge ours as a place of perpetrators. It is we who burn the oil and fuel the revenues that curse so many countries with corruption by petrodollars. We who have burned the oil and coal (and peat) that warmed the air, that heats the waters, that now swell up over the coastlands and islands of the shallows of the Global South. We who have given at Shannon a landing strip and convenient pause for refuelling and refreshment for the crews and soldiers of the torture taxis and military airlifts that pummel the people of the lands cursed to have the oil we want. Sharing our home is the least we can do. The creativity, vitality and insight

of our neighbours, these wayfaring artists, is a joy and benefit we can hardly deserve but can only relish and marvel at.