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Poetry, Money, and the Public: Subsidy and Accountability in Northern Irish Literature

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Abstract

This paper considers the relationship between Northern Irish literature, especially poetry, and its public funding, focusing on two periods of time; before 1971 and after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. The official regular support for literature via the Arts Council of Northern Ireland began in fiscal year 1970. As the arts subsidy has developed, there has been greater demand for accountability for the use of public money in art, corresponding with the emergence and spread of the logic that measures the value of art in economic terms. This paper discusses how writers have articulated the relationship between literature and society through an analysis of their accounts explaining the need for subsidy, and for subsidised literary activities involving the public, such as poetry reading tours and community arts activities.

1. Introduction

In 1996, the Northern Ireland Economic Council published a commissioned research report entitled *The Arts and the Northern Ireland Economy*. The chairman's foreword, beginning with a celebration of Seamus Heaney's winning of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995, continues as follows:

> The contribution of this achievement to our cultural and artistic life is immeasurable. What is perhaps easier to quantify, though still difficult, is the contribution that the arts make to the economy. [. . .] Rather than viewing the arts purely in terms of their aesthetic value, it is now useful to complement this with an important economic perspective (Myerschough, 1996, n.peg).

This kind of logic, whereby the value of art is measured in economic terms, began to spread in Britain under the Thatcher government in the 1980s. A series of research papers asserted that the arts constitute 'cultural industries' which contribute to a nation's economy and society. The Arts Council of Great Britain, for example, published a pamphlet called *Partnership: Making Arts Money Work Harder* in 1987, which claims that the arts have an economic effect. The interesting argument of this pamphlet is that the arts require more financial support because they contribute to the economy of a nation. Behind this arts and economy discourse was the threat that the Council budget might be trimmed. For Thatcher, the essentially Keynesian Arts Council, along with the BBC, was an inefficient elitist organization that needed fiscal austerity for more efficient administration. This was at the time when economic difficulties required that the arts show 'accountability' -- a vogue word then (Sinclair, 1995, pp.247-310). In the following year a major research report in the

field, completed with government support, was published as *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* by John Myerscough and his group.[1] Northern Ireland belatedly followed the trend and asked Myerscough to undertake a major study in 1993. The result was the above-mentioned *The Arts and the Northern Ireland Economy*.[2]

How did the economic performance of Northern Irish literature turn out? Although the research refers to the recent 'flowering of literary talent' and tourism potential of the John Hewitt Summer School and the William Carleton Summer School, literature takes up only a tiny space in this study, which finds that writers, among other creative artists, cannot support themselves from the sale of their work and must be supported by public funding (excluding Heaney, of course). Myerschough describes book publishing as one of the cultural industries, but he finds Northern Ireland to be 'not a major centre of book publishing', with only about ten small presses employing about thirty-five people. The average per unit, with a turnover of £136,000 and 3.3 staff, is disappointingly small in comparison with the case of small presses in Glasgow, whose average per unit is a turnover of £246,000 and 8 staff. Again, several of the publishers receive grant aid from public sources (Myerschough, 1996, p.137).

Some, however, suggest that this smallness of economic scale turns out to be an advantage for literature. The director of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI) stated in the early 1970s, when Northern Ireland suffered severely from the oil crisis and the Troubles:

> In a sense the lone artist comes off best – the writer, the painter, the traditional artist are least affected by what has become known as 'the economic dilemma of the performing arts'[3] – a dilemma accentuated in this period of inexorable inflation. It is, perhaps, not surprising that in cultural matters Ulster is best known abroad for her poets (ACNI, 1974, p.15).

The poet Michael Longley, the literature officer of ACNI at that time, agrees:

> Over the past few years this [i.e. the literature section] has been almost the only section of the Annual Report in which it has not been so necessary to register the effects, in practical terms, of the continuing unrest. The solitary trade of the writer and the discreet dissemination of books and magazines seemed less threatened than those activities of the Council which depend on theatres, galleries and concert halls (ACNI, 1974, p.27).

The writer here is described as proudly uninvolved in economic turmoil. How can we take this, what could be called a 'non-economic pride' of literature, in relation to the fact that literary activities receive constant subsidy, if much smaller than that for the performing arts. What justifies the use of public money in literature, or is it even necessary to justify it? These questions have been little asked thus far. Numerous essays and books on Northern Irish literature directly and indirectly express why or how it matters, but few deal with the mechanism of justification. One of the few exceptions is Richard Kirkland's *Literature and Culture in Northern Ireland since 1965*, where the author rightly suggests that poetry was proclaimed by the writers and critics of Northern Irish literature as a dissident discourse against the violence in order to maintain its humanistic value,

[1] The research report basically supports public spending on the arts.

[2] Around the same period, the Arts Council of the Republic of Ireland (An Chomhairle Ealaíon) commissioned similar research reports: *The Performing Arts and the Public Purse* (Dublin: An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 1987) and *The Economics of the Arts in Ireland* (Dublin: An Chomhairle Ealaíon, 1994) are examples.

[3] An influential study, *Performing Arts, The Economic Dilemma: A Study of Problems Common to Theatre, Opera, Music, and Dance* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1966) by W. Baumol and W. G. Brown must have been in mind of the director.

while this opposition concealed the reason why poetry was supposed to be central to humanity, and the fact that this distinction of poetry is a bourgeois ideology. Yet his main argument is not in terms of subsidy, although he refers to it when he discusses the ACNI in the 1970s, the Field Day Theatre of the 1980s, and the Cultural Traditions Group of the late 1980s to early 1990s.

This paper discusses the relationship between Northern Irish literature and subsidy in two main periods of time; before 1971 and after the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. This periodic limitation is mainly due to a lack of space allowed, but it accords with my intention to offer an alternative view of Northern Irish literature to other Troubles-centred discussions (which include Kirkland's study above) or their antithesis of aesthetic-centred arguments. To consider the problem of public money will also help explore my general interest in how poetry takes its place in a society, or the relationship between literature and the public.

Subsidy to the arts is offered by sundry funders from the city council to the EU. In Northern Ireland, it is the ACNI which plays the major role in distributing public money to various artistic activities. This organisation, therefore, is the main object of discussion in this paper. The ACNI's history goes back to the formation of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) in Britain in 1940, formed with the intention to continue artistic activities during the difficult time of the war. After the war it was reorganised through the efforts of John Maynard Keynes, who had been the CEMA Chairman since 1942, as the Arts Council of Great Britain. Northern Ireland, following Britain, set up CEMA Northern Ireland in 1943, changing its name to ACNI in 1963.

2. Towards subsidy for literature: Hewitt and Rodgers

It was not until 1970 that the ACNI initiated systematic support for literature. There had, though, been an inside voice continuously demanding it. The poet John Hewitt, who had worked for Northern Ireland CEMA since its inception as member of the arts committee, first proposed that the Council support literature in 1948 (McIntosh, 2001, p.48). The Board, however, declined the idea 'partly because there were few Ulster writers who were professional in the full sense of the word, but mainly because it was felt to be wiser to confine CEMA's limited resources to the three channels (art, drama and music)' (CEMA, 1951, p.8). In 1950 Hewitt again appealed for support, pointing out the virtual absence of local literary journals except for *Rann* and *The Readers' Magazine* and the lack of an income source for writers apart from BBC Northern Ireland. He also pointed out that the Arts Council of Great Britain had recently set up a Poetry Panel. Meanwhile, in *The Arts in Ulster*, a total assessment of the arts in the region, which CEMA undertook on the occasion of the Festival of Britain in 1951, Sam Hanna Bell pointed out the scarcity of outlets for writers and J. N. Brown complained about the situation where younger writers had been 'handicapped by the absence of the means to bring their work before the public' with the exception of the work of the BBC (Bell, Robb and Hewitt, 1951, pp.20, 140). There is a contrast here between this recognition and the mainstream CEMA way of thinking. While Brown insisted on public encouragement for emerging talents, the Board was focused more on the 'professional', as CEMA's policy focused on 'art exhibitions of first-class work and dramatic and musical performances of the highest standard by professional and semi-professional artists' (CEMA, 1944, p.2). This time, however, the Board decided to set up a sub-committee, consisting of Hewitt, R. H. Semple and Nesca Robb to examine the matter. Although a small number of poetry recitals and short story readings were organised thereafter, the situation did not improve much. After Hewitt left CEMA for his new post as Director of the Herbert Art Gallery in Coventry in 1957, the issue of literature seems to have been forgotten by the Council.

The next move had to wait until W. R. Rodgers joined the ACNI early in 1965. The ACNI requested him to make recommendations for methods of supporting literature. After consulting Hewitt, he produced a memorandum to the Board, in which he suggested a number of support schemes including bursaries, residency schemes, travel grants, grants for publishers, reading programmes and so on (McIntosh, 2001, p.48). He insisted that:

> The health of a country's language is to be measured not by the quality of its major writers (of whom there can be only a few) but by the quality of its minor writers; it is the general level of achievement rather than the peaks that matters to society (McIntosh, 2001, p.49).

This again ran against the grain of the Council's policy as still claimed in 1963 when CEMA became ACNI: to provide the people of Northern Ireland with the 'best', and with 'high standard' visual art, drama and (classical) music (ACNI, 1963, p.2). While the relation between the arts and society implied in this policy is that arts are offered to society in a top-down manner, Rodgers's recognition is that literature is at the bottom of society:

> Language is fundamental to society: words, spoken or written, are a unique means of communication. Because they can express concepts and ideas, and can precisely give us past, present and future tenses (as music, painting, sculpture, cannot) they are the basis of social activity, the vehicle of our history (ACNI, 1965, p.10).

Having said that, Rodgers could not but recognise the distance between the writer and the public:

> [. . .] the position of poets and novelists is pretty bad in Northern Ireland. The public is hardly aware of them, yet Ulster has produced and still produces good novelists, and continues to breed promising poets like Seamus Heaney, or Michael Longley and Derek Mahon who lately got premier Gregory awards in London. How to bring them to the public notice? (ACNI, 1965, p.10)

The poetry situation in Northern Ireland at the time was difficult but interesting. There were no 'major writers' or 'peaks'. Poets such as Roy McFadden, John Hewitt and Rodgers himself had not published a poetry collection for a long time: McFadden since 1947 (*The Hearts' Townland*), Hewitt since 1948 (*No Rebel Word*) and Rodgers since 1952 (*Europa and the Bull*). Hewitt was in Coventry anyway and was not to return to Belfast until 1972. John Montague lived in the Republic, where poetry flourished with Montague, Thomas Kinsella and Richard Murphy collaborating with the enthusiastic Dolmen Press. But a younger generation, although they had not published their first collections yet, was emerging. James Simmons, Mahon, Longley and Heaney were writing seriously. Simmons won an Eric Gregory Award in 1962 (though he left the North in 1963 to teach at a university in Nigeria). Longley and Mahon won the same awards in 1965, and Heaney in 1966. Philip Hobsbaum had started a writers' group (later labelled the 'Belfast Group') in 1963, where a number of writers (including Heaney and Longley; Mahon attended only once; Simmons was among the founder members) presented and discussed their works.

Rodgers's contention is thus that the ACNI's role should be to encourage the publicity of these 'minor' writers and their works, and by doing so to make the public aware of the fundamental nature of literature, poetry in particular, in society. Rodgers's plea sounds like a protest by 'low culture' against 'high culture' such as classical music and painting that the ACNI had promoted. However, is

poetry, so estranged from the public, really a 'people's art'? Rodgers goes on to say, 'Poets, who are the caretakers of words, are not less needed but more needed in this age of expanding literacy and mass media' (ACNI, 1965, p.10). This may fall into a typically elitist argument: the poet is different from the 'mass'; he/she knows the truth; thus he/she is to guide the 'mass' to the right way. In the same plea, Rodgers meaningfully describes poetry as the 'Cinderella' of the Arts, by which he means poetry is treated unfairly. The name well represents the dual claim of poetry: it is lowly but it has a true, high nature.

Britain, on the other hand, had seen a new development in the relationship between poetry and the public by the mid-1960s. Poetry readings and little magazines proliferated, while the lyrics of popular songs were recognised as a sort of poetry.[4] Merging with pop culture and shifting from something written on the page to performances, poetry gained a new, mass audience. The phenomenon culminated in the International Poetry Incarnation at the Albert Hall in June 1965, and developed thereafter. In the meantime, another type of institution aimed at the mass audience, the BBC's Features Department, which positively supported poets, and for which Rodgers himself worked, was closed in 1964. The significance of this comparison is that poetry was being democratised from the hands of a limited number of 'caretakers'. A union of Poetry, Pop and the mass audience was, however, a far cry from the situation in Northern Ireland at that time (Simmons, who had been exploring a fusion of poetry and folk songs, was not there). Rodgers's job was thus in the first place to realise a public recognition of poetry. His agenda was closer to that of the BBC rather than to that of the Liverpool Poets (although it has something in common with the Liverpool Poets in the encouragement of provincial pride).

As 'Cinderella' is a story, so is the belief in the 'high' nature of poetry. But the Board, who regarded themselves as the caretakers of the arts, seem to have liked the story. Rodgers's plea was answered. A section headed 'Literature', which quotes this memorandum by Rodgers, appears in the ACNI's annual report for the year 1964/65. It admits that the ACNI 'has done virtually nothing to foster and encourage the written word' because of, it says, a lack of funding (ACNI, 1965, p.10). The annual report for the following year officially announces the establishment of a 'Poetry and Literature Panel' with a small budget 'poached' from other sections of the ACNI (ACNI, 1966, p.12). It was spent on supporting the periodicals *Northern Review* (£1,000) and *Threshold* (£150), and the poetry pamphlets published by the Festival Society (£50). Although the money spent on literature was only 1.2% of ACNI's total budget of £100,882, this was a remarkable achievement. *Threshold* was a steady biannual literary magazine of quality which began in 1957 (and was to continue to be published until 1990). Though, as its title indicates, it was originally for the promotion of drama, the magazine included many articles, reviews and creative writings of other genres. *Northern Review* was the product of Hobsbaum's 'Belfast Group'. Although it was short-lived (three issues in 1965-67), it published poems, short stories and articles not only by members of the Group but by many others (Clyde, 2003, pp.244-245). The publication of poetry pamphlets was also important. They were produced by Michael Emmerson, who launched the Belfast Festival at Queen's in the early 1960s, and which was to become a major annual cultural event in Northern Ireland. In 1965 he planned the promotion of new local poets by publishing a series of monthly pamphlets. These began with Longley in October, then Heaney in November and Mahon in December. The poets received media recognition when the *Observer* covered the Festival (Parker, 1993, pp.58-59). The ACNI's financial help, in Rodgers's words, 'brought them to the public notice' and prepared the way for their first collections (Heaney's *Death of a Naturalist* in 1966, Mahon's *Night Crossing* in 1968 and Longley's *No Continuing City* in 1969). It is worth noting that this pre-dates the Troubles; although

[4] 'During the 1960s it became standard practice to print the words of the lyrics on record sleeves' (Raban, 1971, p. 84).

it is frequently assumed that publicity for the Northern poets came with the Troubles, the media interest in 1965 complicates this picture. The Festival Publication scheme ceased three years later when Emmerson left Northern Ireland (Longley, 2003). However, the three series of pamphlets from 1965 to 1968 featured a number of poets,[5] many of whom were members of the Group, and a similar project was to take its place with the pamphlet series from the *Honest Ulsterman*, founded in 1968 by Simmons, who had now returned to Northern Ireland.

Despite this success, Rodgers resigned from the ACNI and left Ireland in 1966 to take up a residence post at a university in California. The ACNI's expenditure on literature in the year 1966/67 decreased to £1,048, then to £198 in the following year (out of the much-increased total expenditure of £202,336).

3. Circulation of poetry: reading tours

In 1968, however, the then deputy director of the ACNI, Kenneth Jamison, organised an uplifting poetry-reading tour. This entertainment, entitled 'Room to Rhyme', consisting of poems by Heaney and Longley and ballads by David Hammond, turned out to be successful, attracting an average of over 100 people in each of five venues in the North. They also put on five performances to approximately 250 school children in each centre. The tour was held again in the following year and this time included Dublin among the venues. Joined by James Simmons and Derek Mahon, they also performed in Manchester. This was the moment of the Northern Irish version of Poetry and Pop. However, while poetry performances in Britain often featured political messages, the programme (which was published after the tour) does not show any political agenda on display, even though the political situation in Northern Ireland (and elsewhere) was unstable in 1968. The programme consists of poems and songs under themes of 'love', 'heroes', 'birth', 'seasons', 'going away', 'animals', 'death', 'loneliness' and 'work'. Although the programme was a combination of Protestant and Catholic poets and a Protestant singer of Irish folk songs (whose sources are as diverse as English, Scottish and Irish), it does not appear to have been intended to promote the particularity of each tradition. There are no poems or songs with overt political implications on the programme. The exceptional political edge of Heaney's 'Requiem for the Croppies' is blunted by being classified under the theme of 'seasons'. Longley's 'Remembrance Day' is not countered by the Easter Rising or the Civil War. The difference between Longley and Heaney is not between the two religions, but rather between (sub)urban and country characters: the theme 'work', for example, features Longley's 'Elegy for Fats Waller' and Heaney's 'Churning Day'. The programme appears to emphasise how they share the fundamental human conditions signified in the themes, and how the poetry and folk songs complement each other in this articulation of humanity. It is the realisation of a mythic unity of poetry and people (or the public) for which Rodgers craved. On another level, however, when contextualised in the time of political crisis, a dissimilar value of humanity may implicitly emerge; that is, a message against the sectarian, divisive politics at that time. Hammond looks back in 1982: the three 'set out not really knowing what we were doing, going into these places with our songs and poems. I suppose it was some kind of opening at a time when everything was closing' (Parker, 1993, p.77).

For this tour, the literature expenditure for the year 1968/69 expanded to £1,288 (out of a total

[5] The first series (1965-66): Michael Longley, Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Arthur Terry, Joan Watton (later Newmann), Philip Hobsbaum, Stewart Parker, James Simmons, Seamus Deane. The second series (1966-67): Laurence Lerner, John Montague, Norman Buller, John Hewitt, Arthur Terry, Norman Dugdale. The third series (1967-68): James Simmons, Stewart Parker, George Mackay Brown.

of £201,416). The following financial year, however, saw the unbelievably low expenditure of £91. The Council admitted this poor performance in the report for the year, noting that 'the Arts Council has done virtually nothing in the past to assist writers' (ACNI, 1970, p.22). An important decision was made in that they acknowledged 'the fact that the Council has not before now been able to assign a specialist member of its staff to look after the affairs of this field of creative activity [i.e. literature]' (ACNI, 1970, p.22) and appointed Michael Longley to the job.

It should be noted that this was a time when the ACNI was viewed from some Southern perspectives as a Unionist and philistine institution. The Dublin magazine *Hibernia* ran an article that regarded the recent appointment of a Literature Officer as 'an ominous sign' because literature might be degraded to something that money could buy (Orr, 1971, p.13).[6] This view, which disregarded the fact that An Chomhairle Ealaíon had occasionally assisted literature, if on a small scale, since its inception in 1951 (and it was to establish a literature office in 1973), is another interesting case which reflects a belief in literature's non-economic pride.

Longley himself advocates the ACNI's support for literature in *Causeway: the Arts in Ulster*, a survey of the art situation in the North he edited as soon as he joined the ACNI, as follows: 'Official recognition [. . .] helps to ensure that the labours of solitude percolate through to the public, and encourages the Muse to prolong her stay'. He also writes, after Cyril Connolly, that arts are to the community what certain glands are to the body: though they are small and seemingly unimportant, the body will die if they are removed (Longley, 1971, pp.8, 97). His belief in literature and public support for literature can be regarded as basically the same as that of Rodgers.

With this conviction, Longley energetically proceeded with his job. Steadily increasing the budget for literature, he realised the proposals that Rodgers had wished to carry out. Beside bursary and grant schemes for writers, publishers and magazines, the ACNI organised a number of interesting projects such as interdisciplinary programmes of poetry readings in combination with music and drama, and poetry posters by photographers and painters. Writers' involvement in educational institutions was also encouraged. They were sent to schools to hold readings and workshops, and commissioned to edit anthologies of children's poems. Writer-in-residence posts at Queen's University and the University of Ulster, jointly funded by the Universities and the ACNI, were established in 1976. Also, the literature section of the ACNI initiated collaboration with An Chomhairle Ealaíon as early as 1971, publishing anthologies of new Irish writers, both North and South.

Although Longley had various, interesting achievements in the 1970s, let us focus here on one programme: a poetry reading tour in 1970-71 by John Hewitt and John Montague, entitled 'The Planter and the Gael'. How does poetry become connected with society in this type of subsidised reading tour addressing the public audience.

'The Planter and the Gael', according to the accompanying booklet, was 'an anthology of their work carefully selected to define the two main strands of Ulster culture which each poet represents and to illustrate how complementary and mutually enriching these can be' (Hewitt and Montague, 1971, n.peg). Unlike the 'Room to Rhyme' tour, the two traditions were thus overtly advertised here, and there is an obvious political tone to the event. Hewitt and Montague are, in this context, chosen as the representatives of the two main cultures in Northern Ireland, which could easily be seen to approximate to the two main religio-political groups. Then, to counter the current political situation, their performance was intended to disprove the exclusiveness of each culture. It was a paradigm to show that the two cultures are distinctive, but could get on well with each other; and it was poetry that was the paradigm. Here is an aspiration that poets should be representative of their communities,

[6] Kenneth Jamison, then the new director of the ACNI, quickly refuted this view (Jamison, 1971, p. 11).

and an aspiration that poetry (or culture) should be empowered as an alternative to the existing politics.

This is the same ambition later to be found in the Cultural Traditions Group that emerged in the late 1980s. (There is no space here to discuss further this interesting movement in which Longley involved himself. Suffice it to summarise that it was a movement which aimed, on a basis of multiculturalism, to reconsider stereotyped traditions and cultures.) Let us be reminded here that Roy Foster, at his inaugural lecture for the 'Varieties of Irishness' conference organised by the group in 1989, praised 'The Planter and the Gael' tour as 'a landmark affirmation of creative cultural diversity', because Hewitt 'articulated that quintessential combination of Protestant scepticism and commitment, linked with a sense of place that was absolutely Irish' (Crozier, 1989, pp.22-23).

David Hammond, on the other hand, looking back in 1990, regards the mode in which the tour was promoted as 'a great mistake': 'I think that's reinforcing some kind of crippled vision of what Ireland was [. . .]. As if [. . .] half of the people remained truly Gaelic and part of the people remained truly Planter. [. . .] It's to do with the feeling that all Celts are Catholic and all Planters are Protestant' (Richtarik, 1995, p.103). Another member of the 'Room to Rhyme' tour, Seamus Heaney, comments on the tour as follows in a 1988 essay 'Nero, Chekov's Cognac and a Knocker':

> [. . .] the fact that it was an Arts Council tour and yet bore that particular title did represent a certain amelioration of local conditions. The monosyllable, Gael, was an admission in the official language of Unionist Ulster that there was a Gaelic dimension to Ulsterness [. . .]. Indeed, that programme was itself symptomatic of a general attempt being made at the time to bring the solvent of concepts like 'heritage', 'traditions' and 'history' into play in the foreclosed arenas of culture and politics. It was a palliative, true in its way, but as everybody including the poets knew, it was not the whole truth (Heaney, 1989, p.xxi).

In Heaney's view, the recognition of dichotomy itself was at that time a remarkable achievement countering the Unionist's monopoly of Stormont, which was yet to fall. Hammond's criticism of the crude dichotomy sounds quite reasonable with hindsight. It is, however, arguable that Hammond's criticism has validity only because the many years of the development of the 'two traditions' approach paved the way for such criticism to emerge.

Yet, as Heaney continues, the 'truth' was that outside this alleviating moment and place was a harsh reality of prevailing sectarianism. What frustrated one member of the audience, and probably many others, was just this point. The tour was reviewed anonymously in the Belfast magazine of culture and politics *Fortnight* in 1970, as follows:

> Perhaps what is most disturbing about this Arts Council enterprise is its safety, its lack of danger. The two bodies of work do indeed complement each other – both poets are content, despite their concern for Ireland's plight, to distance themselves from what they can only describe and not affect: Montague by interposing the individual and personal, Hewitt by interposing the universal. [. . .] What, in times of trouble, we need: greatness – the courage to be unsentimental, to puncture absurdities, to portray reality today, to forecast the future with poetic vision. But perhaps this doesn't fit the Arts Council's view of itself, of the times . . [sic] or of us (Anon, 1970, p.10).

Put simply, the tour was not political enough: poetry resided in the private and the universal spheres, and could not positively work on the actuality. Heaney's contention is different. He says in the same essay that 'the poets knew the score', but they 'did not feel the need to address themselves

to the specifics of politics because they assumed that the tolerances and subtleties of their art were precisely what they had to set against the repetitive intolerance of public life' (Heaney, 1989, p.xxi). According to his logic, poetry is not or should not be political in a narrow sense, but has validity in its very difference from the political mind-set.

The validity of the poetry tour is thus variously debated. In my view, however, what the arguments above miss is the significance of this type of tour itself; in other words, a large scale circulation of poetry. In spite of disagreement, the commentators all seem to share a belief in the efficacy of poetry. Even the *Fortnight* reviewer believes in the force of poetry, which he thought should have been directed otherwise. They seem to agree that poetry, in the midst of crisis, can be a force against sectarian politics. The problem is, I think, the scope of the first person plural 'we' used above. The commentators above fail to address the fact that 'we' poetry followers are still a tiny minority. In this sense, the tour – the November 1970 tour was so successful that it re-ran in April 1971 – should be appreciated as a positive dissemination of poetry which encouraged a sense of poetry/literary community and, hopefully, its enlargement. If this sense of solidarity leads to a formation of a critical mass, it will then, and only then, have an actual political significance. Indeed the Cultural Traditions Group, a follow-on from 'The Planter and the Gael' tour, became an influential movement with a budget from the government, and its idea of cultural diversity has attained general currency.

4. Poetry in motion: the poetry community after the Good Friday Agreement

Let us jump to Northern Ireland after the Good Friday Agreement to see how the circulation of poetry in society has developed with the help of subsidy.

In 2001, an organisation called the New Belfast Community Arts' (later with no apostrophe) Initiative led to success one of their projects, 'Poetry in Motion.' They asked poets, politicians and the public for poems which looked back over the thirty years of the Troubles and looked ahead into the future. Out of more than 1500 poems sent to the Initiative, 142 were selected (30 by established poets, 10 by politicians, and 102 by the public) to be published in an anthology *You Can't Eat Flags for Breakfast: Poets, Politicians, and Public Reflect on the Troubles*. They also made artistic posters and T-shirts using those poems to be scattered throughout Belfast, on public transportation and billboards in the street, for example (the posters were later sold in the format of a postcard booklet). The Initiative is a consortium of several community arts projects formed in 1999 to apply for an EU peace fund that preferred a citywide consortium of groups. Its main funders also include the ACNI, Belfast City Council, and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. 'Poetry in Motion' is one of the ongoing projects of the Initiative, and the above programme was the first one of their schemes to promote poetry.

The playwright Martin Lynch says in the foreword to the anthology, 'Within these pages you will see – literally – a community in dialogue with itself. Poems instead of bullets. Metaphors instead of insults. Hopes instead of hatred' (Sheehy and Schultz, 2001, p.xi). The word 'community' summons up two images of society. One is, of course, the two religio-political communities of Northern Ireland. The main purpose of this project and the grant for it was reconciliation of them, and the singular 'a community' above implies their rapport. Yet another, more interesting kind of community formation is by an interaction between established and amateur poets. Let us consider, for instance, Michael Longley's well-known 'Ceasefire' (Sheehy and Schultz, 2001, p.17) and a poem called 'The Ceasefire' (Sheehy and Schultz, 2001, p.54) in the public section of the anthology.

The former was first published in the *Irish Times* in 1994. Longley wrote the poem after he

heard a well-authenticated rumour that the IRA would announce a definitive ceasefire, and sent it to the *Irish Times*. After a while, the newspaper published the poem with the news of the IRA ceasefire. Longley contributed this poem to the 'Poetry in Motion' scheme as one still appropriate in 2001. The poem, which features one scene from the *Iliad*, ends with the couplet: '"I get down on my knees and do what must be done / And kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son."' This ceasefire, however, is not the conclusion of the Trojan War but a part of it: the war resumes to lead to the fall of Troy. The IRA ceasefire, too, was broken once, and the peace process did not go smoothly at all. The poem, therefore, is not an optimistic view of a political solution. Still, Longley proposes again and again the vision of enemies admiring each other 'as lovers might'.

The other ceasefire poem sings of rapprochement of the two sides, but it sounds somehow almost empty:

> So peace now forever,
> For ever all more.
> For I have forgiven.
> Like so does the shore.
> Choosing no side of people,
> Washes all through and through.
> The sea knows no evil,
> One people all more.

These banal phrases and images are followed by the mysterious last stanza, 'Mem-or-ies of today, / Seems so far away. / Those of years ago, / So near today'. Although this poem does not have a Classic reference as in Longley's, two other poems by the same author in the anthology can help us understand the poem better. The narrator of one poem, 'Why' (Sheehy and Schultz, 2001, p.55), is apparently a Republican. In the other poem, 'Tell Me Why' (Sheehy and Schultz, 2001, p.56), the narrator is imprisoned for his paramilitary involvement and released in 1999, thanks to the peace-process, but has no job. He asks what peace means for him: 'By God I stand, / And ask him why. / No answer got, / Just passed me by.' Unlike Longley's poem where peace is almost sensual, the peace in Cullen's poems is impalpable. Ceasefire, for some, can be vain and disorienting.

Inclusion of both texts in the anthology shows the complicated nature of the ceasefire, and the diversity of 'a community' of the anthology. One should also note that the diversity is not only of political views or of life styles, but also of perceptions of poetry – how one expresses what in the form of poetry. The word 'community' has been used to represent one or the other religio-political stand in Northern Ireland, where the 'Community Relations Committee' for reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics was set up as early as 1969. Against this current, the anthology seems to offer an opportunity for building a different type of community – be it a 'poetry community' or a 'writing community'.

5. Community arts and literature

Community arts activities in Northern Ireland thus give an interesting perspective for considering the relationship between literature, society and public money. Let us review their development here.

Community arts are activities which encourage people and places so far unfamiliar with the arts to express something in the form of art, so that it will empower them. Although these kinds of

practices have been seen in many times and places, it was in the Britain of the 1960s that these practices, under the name of 'community arts', developed into a movement. Behind the movement was the demand of working class communities, undermined by changes in the industrial world, for their voice to be heard, which was met with the counterculture of the middle-classes who were unsatisfied with established galleries and theatres. Influenced by British cases, the community arts movement surfaced in Ireland (both in the Republic and in the North) in the 1970s. It gradually gained recognition, to be subsidised by public organisations such as Arts Councils, since grants are important in these non-commercial art activities. In the Republic, however, public funding has waned since 1993. Funders' expectations are also problematic, for they look much more for poverty and crime reduction and learning of job skills than for artistic pleasure itself (Fitzgerald, 2004, pp.64-79).

The ACNI officially began to support community arts in 1978, when the British government gave it £100,000 to set up a community arts fund (Fitzgerald, 2004, p.58). On one level the ACNI acknowledged 'a fiercely felt sense of community identity that might be positively channelled if it could be stripped of its concomitants of fear and aggression' (ACNI, 1978, pp.9-10); on another it was cautious about the possibility that community arts might become a platform for political ideology in one 'community' or the other:

> Community development in the arts is often taken to imply the expression of commonly held views through a kind of do-it-yourself-arts-kit which enable communities to achieve cultural articulacy. It is in this that the greatest difficulty arises. For an Arts Council, support from public funds for political polemic in any art form raises serious questions. 19th century political cartooning, for example, was privately financed. Yet, as a genre, it produced some of the finest works of the period. Articulacy is no guarantee of veracity (ACNI, 1978, p.10).

In spite of this scepticism, for which the ACNI set up a 'Community Development' section rather than use the words 'community arts', official support was initiated, and later flourished from the late 1980s onwards. ACNI's five-year plan for 2001-2006 places support for community arts as one of seven main strategic objectives (ACNI, 2001, p.15), and subsidy to community arts in the fiscal year 2007 surpassed 10% of the total subsidy for all arts activities (ACNI, 2008, p.35).

The majority of the activities have been collective endeavours such as drama and dance, and group work on visual arts. ACNI's first community arts project in terms of literature is the 'Artists-in-the-Community' scheme, begun in 1989. It was a Longley-led initiative: four young artists from different fields were sent to small towns outside Belfast to help the communities carry out art activities through workshops for three years. The scheme was not entirely for the communities' sake, but also for that of the young artists. They were granted a secure income for three years to produce their own work while organising community activities. In the field of literature, Glenn Patterson, then an emerging novelist, was chosen.

He ran writers' groups in Craigavon, Lisburn, Lurgan and Portadown (his father is from Lisburn and he has a family connection with Portadown), organised readings and other literary events, which enabled local people to enjoy meeting with writers whom they could only have met in Belfast. Unlike certain types of community arts activities, an articulation of a collective voice was not on the agenda for Patterson's writing groups. Rather, the value of the writing groups for him was to give participants an opportunity 'to develop yourself as a writer, to learn to discover ways [. . .] of uncovering something more in your writing' and also to '[articulate] something [. . .] that you have not been able to articulate before to yourself, to other people' (Patterson, 2003).

In Longley's words, the Council's belief behind the scheme is that 'the regular interaction

between artist and community provides points of growth, new sources of creative energy, opportunities for communal self-examination, self-definition and self-expression' (ACNI, 1990, p.36). This negotiation of 'communal' and 'self' seems to illustrate the relationship between individual and communal spaces that the ACNI's literature department seeks to develop. The scheme first aims for an encounter between the individual space which a (semi-)professional writer occupies in his/her solitary work of writing, and the communal space of 'people' who are not professional writers. Through this encounter, then, each of the people who attend the workshop learns the solitary work of writing. As a result, they will form, with the writer, a writing community – a new community, larger and more inclusive than, yet sharing the same belief in the value of writing with, the existing, established literary community. And this writing community, hopefully, will not advocate a homogenising ideology which, in the name of 'community', disregards the individual self.

However, the Artists-in-Community scheme was discontinued after the first term due to the financial problem caused by the IRA bomb that damaged the Grand Opera House in December 1992. Yet this setback cannot deny the fact that numerous writing groups were at work beside the ACNI's rather top-down community arts scheme. Although the exact conditions cannot be known, ACNI annual reports record an increasing number of writing groups obtaining grants. Patterson says there had already been a writing group in Lisburn before he went there, while a spin-off group, whose members were exclusively women, came out of his workshop after he left (Patterson, 2003). The late 1980s saw in the ACNI's support for literature a shift from 'top-down' to 'bottom-up,' which foresaw the current situation where it is not the ACNI that demonstrates initiative, but people outside it.

6. Towards a new community

According to *BT 1*, an amateur poets' anthology published in 2005, there were more than thirty creative writing groups in Belfast and its suburbs alone. *BT 1* is one of the outcomes of the above-mentioned New Belfast Community Arts Initiative's 'Poetry in Motion' project. The project has published a poetry anthology every year since 2001, with different styles from year to year. It has also held workshops at schools and published anthologies of children's poems. According to the director of the Initiative, they decided at one time to produce a free poetry paper, because these anthologies in the book form had not sold well, and had thus not reached an audience. 5,000 copies (jumping up from 1500 copies of the previous, book-format anthology) of this free anthology, *BT 1*, were printed off and disseminated throughout Belfast and neighbouring areas (Shields, 2006). The free paper format contained 130 poems plus a full list of creative writing classes and groups and regular poetry readings as well as other useful information. The standard of the poems is considered higher than that of the amateur poems in the *You Can't Eat Flags for Breakfast* anthology of 2001.

The editor, Mark Madden, writes in the introduction:

> [. . .] this anthology evidences a deep sense of community among our contributors. These voices, coming from seasoned poets and first time poets, from children and pensioners alike, come together in this collection to give a sense of locality and currency to the poems which, though disparate in style and content, together create a coherent whole. This is central to the purpose of this, and our previous, anthologies. They are a vital culmination of the participant governed workshops we facilitate. Poetry is about finding ways of making that voice heard by a wider community. This is the difference between creating a sense of empowerment and

empowerment itself (Madden, 2005, n.peg).[7]

Unlike the 2001 anthology, the Troubles are not an issue here. This 'community' is not a political or religious sect, but a group of people from various backgrounds connected to each other in the act of writing poetry. Its hope to influence others by forming a communal space with a diversity of individual voices is basically the same as that of the 1989 'Artists-in-the-Community' programme, and also of Rodgers's plea.

Let us examine one poem from the anthology which exemplifies the formation of a new community. James Meredith's 'Community Relations' (Madden, 2005, p.5):

Our next-door neighbour
cries herself to sleep every night.
We don't know why.

The walls are thin
in these houses.
I'm sure she can hear us
when we make love.

We see her on the street
sometimes, on her way home
with the shopping.

She lives alone.
As far as we know, no-one
ever visits.
Not since we moved in, anyway.

She introduced herself
the day we arrived –
Josey is her name.

She knocked on our door,
told us her name, and said that
if there was anything we
ever needed,

anything at all,
to just let her know, to
just give her a shout.

Apart from the crying she doesn't
make much noise.
She hoovers in the

[7] Madden, who is a poet himself, has contributed much to the Belfast poetry scene through, for example, organising open-mike poetry readings and poetry slams.

evenings, every

evening. And sometimes,
late at night, she moves the
furniture in her bedroom around.

We don't mind too much.
She gives us something to
talk about
before we go to sleep.

The title 'Community Relations' is, as mentioned above, a political term with the objective of reconciling the two religio-political communities. The poem puts up this political term yet shifts it to a personal level. The 'community' in this poem is not based on religion or politics, nor on other frameworks of race or sexuality. 'Josey' in the poem is, at the first meeting, a typical Irish lady with hospitality and friendliness. Her mysterious side is, however, gradually revealed through her daily life. The narrator nevertheless does not try to uncover the mystery, but portrays it in an unattached yet effective way that enables us to feel we know her better. This is his interpretation of a 'community' and their 'community relation'.

7. Conclusion

Why is subsidy for the arts necessary? The ACNI tackled this issue anew towards the budgetary process by the restored Northern Irish government in 2007. 'The Time for the Arts', a statement asking the government for more money for the arts, eagerly and variously advocates arts' contribution to the economy ('every £1 currently invested by the Arts Council returns over £3.60 into the local economy'), to education ('75,000 school children enjoyed arts workshops last year'), to welfare ('88% of people surveyed at the Mater Hospital, Belfast said that arts activity was beneficial'), and to communities ('two thirds of arts activity supports cross community participation') (ACNI, 2007c).

On the level of taxpayers' attitudes, however, things seem to be much simpler. ACNI's 2007 survey on public attitudes towards the arts reveals that 78% of respondents agree that there should be public funding of arts and cultural projects (6% disagree); when 76% of adults attend at least one arts or cultural event in a year, their major reason is as a 'social event' (33%); and 22% participated in arts/cultural activity mostly for 'enjoyment/pleasure' (78%) (ACNI, 2007a). In contrast to political or administrative language for accountability in art, arts here in ordinary people's language are simply for pleasure, and use of public money for the pleasure is mostly accepted.

What about, then, the language of literature? This essay has examined two types of literary discourse: one is literary text (poems, in other words) and the other, more focused on in this paper, is language arguing about literature. Let us add yet another example of the latter. ACNI's funding policy for literature (2007-2012) goes as follows: 'Writing, story-telling and reading are activities at the core of a society's creative life'; 'Skill in the written and the spoken word fosters self-confidence in individuals and groups, bolsters cultural self-esteem, broadcasts self-expression, binds communities'; and 'Whether as audiences or as readers, people with an investment in literature help create an economy within which writers flourish' (ACNI, 2007b). Although no name is attached to these sentences as the writer, they are most certainly by the poet/playwright Damian

Smyth, literature officer in 2007. He seems to be struggling to articulate literature's accountability for public funding by using words with current value such as 'community', 'skill', 'investment' and 'economy'. Yet the idea that language activity is at the centre of society has not been changed since Rodgers's plea, while one should note the subject of those activities has now widened from a minority of (semi-)professional writers to various levels of communities.

The situation of literary activity in Northern Ireland has been diversified in recent years. The number of writing groups has increased, while in higher education once-marginalised creative writing has now been institutionalised as undergraduate and graduate courses.[8] Recent projects that have applied for ACNI grants, according to Smyth, include genres of fantasy, sci-fi, manga and performance poetry, sometimes using the media of CD and DVD, as well as novels and poetry of traditional style and format (Smyth, 2006). Networking in these individual attempts has been more active than before. Besides the Initiative, organisations such as the Creative Writers Network, which has an office in Belfast city centre, and the Verbal Arts Centre in Derry, help create writing communities, offering various media from the Internet and magazines, to actual spaces where people can gather. Going back to the 2007 attitude survey, however, it was revealed that the writing community is still a tiny minority; those who had been to a poetry reading or storytelling event within the previous 12 months turned out to be only 4%, and those who practiced creative writing were 3%. Networking is especially important for this minor business.

As the value of poetry (or literature) cannot be measured in absolute ways, it is often evaluated in relation to its situation. In this sense, the Troubles have asserted too great a presence on the situation surrounding Northern Irish literature. The faculties of poetry such as diversity, ambiguity, complexity yet harmony, have been valued against the dichotomy of the political climate, or questioned as to whether they have such validity. Even years after the Good Friday Agreement, the presence of the Troubles has not yet gone, as is made obvious by the situation where one can still be persuaded by the logic that the arts need more public funding because they help reconcile the communities. One of the terrible aspects of the Troubles is that they have become an institution which immobilises such logic. Yet one should note that the same thing can be said for the increasing economic demands on Northern Ireland in the peace process. Normalisation of the North does not only mean disarmament but also eliminating overdependence on grant-in-aid from Westminster. Thus the logic that the arts are good for the economy has emerged and prevailed in the late- and post-Troubles North. If the power of literature is its ambiguity and complexity, it should be against such a simple institutionalisation as an economic agenda.

This paper is a case study on the relationship between Northern Irish literature and public funding. Yet it will hopefully provide suggestions to the general problem of how literature commits itself to various kinds of institutions in a society, and how it finds its place in the public.

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