Frank McGuinness, Michael Longley and the Reimagining of Northern Irish Unionist Particiaption in World War I

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will focus on Frank McGuinness's play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* alongside Michael Longley's poems 'Wounds', 'In Memoriam' and 'Ceasefire' and examine how the two authors describe and critique the Irish Unionist identity during Ireland's important historical periods.

The play and the poems will be analysed and compared in terms of how the authors approach the tragic events of World War I through the Unionist perspective and how that perspective continues to materialize in the form of the Irish Troubles, all the while focusing on the humanity of the fallen Unionist soldiers.

Key words: Frank McGuinness, Michael Longley, Unionism, Northern Ireland, The Troubles, World War I, Ulster, humanity

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INTRODUCTION

Ireland has been and continues to be haunted by the ghosts of its past centuries. Frank McGuinness and Michael Longley offer a different view of Irish history, in particular of Ulster Unionist identity, and examine how it reverberates in the late-twentieth-century Irish culture. Rather than turning the fallen soldiers into the historical loyal heroes of Ulster, they choose to portray their humanity through their emotions, actions and reluctance to break away from that Unionist identity, even when faced with their deaths. The fictional characters of George Anderson, Nat Mcllwaine, John Millen, William Moore, Cristopher Roulston, Martin Crawford, David Craig and Kenneth Pyper in McGuinness's play *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* change before the eyes of the audience, turning from the hardened Unionists loyal to the Crown into the sensitized soldiers who are willingly placing their lives in the hands of fate, ultimately dying with, and for, their comrades. Whereas McGuinness focuses on the effect of bonding in his play, Longley's poems 'Wounds' , 'In Memoriam' and 'Ceasefire' pay attention to soldiers' youth and explore the relationship between a father and a son. Longley's father had been one of the soldiers who had fought in World War I and whose old wounds from the battlefield awoke in the form of a cancer and, in Longley's work, in the form of the Irish Troubles. He depicts the narrative through his own, the soldiers' and his father's point of view from the stories he had heard from him, reshaping and reimagining them to honour his father and other fallen Irish soldiers. Both authors also show how these events translate today, the way this history of fighting in the World Wars has moulded the shape of Northern Ireland - a country divided between Catholics and Protestants, Unionists and Nationalists.

THE HISTORY OF NORTHERN IRELAND – 17th – 20th century

In the 17th century, a powerful figure in the province of Ulster, in the north of Ireland, Hugh O'Neill, led a Catholic uprising against the English rule of the Tudors in Ireland, the Nine Years' War, which was ultimately unsuccessful. This failure marked the beginning of the Plantation of Ulster, and O'Neill and other Ulster chiefs fled the country in 1607 in the event known as the Flight of the Earls. In their stead, thousands of Protestant English and Presbyterian Scottish were sent to those lands in Ulster while at the same time thousands of Irish farmers were sent away from Ulster. This changed the province from Catholic and Gaelic to mainly English Scottish and Protestant.[1] It was a way of England maintaining order and power in Ireland. However, the choice of Presbyterian Scottish settlers was interesting. Many of the Scottish were sent to Ulster because as Presbyterians they were certain not to fraternize with the local Catholic Irish, and so they would serve to quell future Catholic rebellions. Presbyterianism is branch of Protestantism that originated in Switzerland and was most accepted in Scotland. It is a confessional Church also affiliated with Calvinism. They differ from Catholics in a way that they do not recognize a church hierarchy, as they believe they are all equal and the only one above them is God.[2] As such, they do not recognize the Pope either which makes the Presbyterian Scottish clash with the Irish Catholics whom they find to be irredeemable and tainted by sin because of their loyalty to the Pope. [3]

Another event worth noting is the Williamite War during which James II, the Catholic king, clashed with William III (William of Orange), the Protestant king and his forces. The most remarkable moment of this war was the siege of the Derry during which James' forces, the Jacobites, laid siege to the town which was eventually relieved by William's army. Another important event is the Battle of Boyne which is mentioned in McGuinness' play. The defeat of James II in this battle by William III signalled the victory of a Protestant ruler over an openly

[1] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Hugh O'Neill, 2nd Earl of Tyrone | Irish Rebel." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 July 1998, www.britannica.com/biography/Hugh-ONeill-2nd-Earl-of-Tyrone

[2] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Presbyterian | Church Government." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 July 1998, www.britannica.com/topic/presbyterian.

[3] Bottigheimer, Karl S., Arthur H. Aughey. And The Editors of Enyclopaedia Britannica "Northern Ireland - Early Modern Ulster." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/place/Northern-Ireland/Early-modern-Ulster.

Catholic ruler. This is where the symbolism of Orange sashes and the Orange order originates from. [4]

With the emergence of the French Revolution, an organization called the United Irishmen was founded in the 1790s with the goal of eliminating British rule in Ireland. They started an Irish Rebellion in 1798 which ultimately failed. An Act of Union soon followed in 1800/1 after which England and Scotland were united in Great Britain while Ireland became part of the United Kingdom with London as its administrative centre rather than Dublin. [5]

In the 19th century there were many attempts made to improve the social status of the majority Catholic population in Ireland and remove the anti-Catholic laws with Daniel O'Connell and Charles Parnell being the most prominent political figures in this matter. The Penal Laws which were introduced by Cromwell in the 16th and 17th century stated that Roman Catholics were not allowed to participate in the running of Ireland and that a lot of their basic social rights are to be denied. Many of them were impoverished with the land ownership belonging largely to the minority Protestant population. The desire to fight against English rule further intensified after The Great Famine mid 19th century. It also prompted the establishment of the Fenian movement and the IRB which sought to violently remove English rule from Ireland. [6]

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[4] Edwards, Robert Walter Dudley, et al. "Ireland - The Restoration Period and the Jacobite War." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/place/Ireland/The-Restoration-period-and-the-Jacobite-war.

Hudson, Myles. "Battle of the Boyne | Facts, History, & Significance." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 3 Sept. 2020, www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-the-Boyne.

The Editors of Encycloapedia Britannica. "Londonderry | History & Name." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 July 1998, www.britannica.com/place/Londonderry-city-and-district-Northern-Ireland.

[5] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Act of Union | Great Britain [1707]." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 July 1998, www.britannica.com/event/Act-of-Union-Great-Britain-1707.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Irish Rebellion | Irish History [1798]." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 July 1998, www.britannica.com/event/Irish-Rebellion-Irish-history-1798.

[6] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Penal Laws | British and Irish History." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 July 1998, www.britannica.com/event/Penal-Laws.

The Home Rule Bills

Another important period in the pre-history of Northern Ireland is the year of 1870 when Stewart Parnell formed a political group, the Home Rule League, which brought forth the idea of Home Rule that would allow Ireland to have its own local government. However, it was rejected by the Parliament in 1886 while the second Home Rule Bill introduced by William Gladstone was defeated in the House of Lords in 1893. At the same time, there were other forces in Irish nationalism that looked to form an entirely independent Gaelic Ireland, and this took on political form with the establishment of the Sinn Féin movement in 1905. The matter became particularly pressing by the beginning of the 20th century, when the Third Home Rule Bill was introduced, which was going to be accepted as law due to the rule of the veto expiring after three years, in 1914. In fact, the third bill finally did become law on the 18th of September 1914, but was postponed due to the outbreak of World War I.

The Home Rule Crisis

However, the Protestant North of Ireland was not supportive of the Home Rule movement. Not only because they were British and Scottish colonists who kept their century-long customs, but because of financial reasons too. The Unionists had no reason to part with Britain since the development of industry in Northern Ireland benefited from the union greatly. However, the more pressing issue was the one of religion. The rest of Ireland, the one which demanded Home Rule, was Catholic and if Home Rule was passed as law, the Irish Nationalists would become the dominant majority. According to the Unionists, "Home Rule is Rome Rule" meaning that the passage of such law would result in Catholicism and Papal authority prevailing in Ireland.

Ulster Unionist opposition to Home Rule was led by Edward Carson along with James Craig and they organised a Solemn League and Convent, which was signed by almost half a million people in protest against the Third Home Rule Bill being passed. They also formed a resistance army, Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a Protestant paramilitary group; in response, Irish nationalists formed the Irish Volunteer Force in March of 1913. The initial goal of the Ulster Volunteers was to reject Home Rule altogether but they eventually settled on only Ulster being excluded from it. However, due to the growing unrest in Ireland and the danger of World War I fast approaching in Europe which preoccupied the attention of Britain, the British government decided that the Home Rule Bill would not be enacted and the crisis in Ireland was put on

hold.[7]

Ireland during World War I

With the start of the Great war, many Irish volunteers, both unionists and nationalists, joined the Allied Forces to fight in the war. John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Party, called for the Irish volunteers "to go wherever the firing line extends in defence of right, of freedom and of religion in this war"[8] and protect their country. National Volunteers (150,000 of them) supported this idea under Redmond's leadership while 10,000 Irish Volunteers linked to the Irish Republican Brotherhood did not agree with the option of Ireland going to war to support the Allies and instead planned a revolution which became known as Easter Rising. On the very day of Easter Monday in 1916 only around a thousand people were engaged with the insurrection. Unionists, on the other hand, took this opportunity to demonstrate their loyalty to the British crown. They formed the 36th Ulster division after which the nationalists were also allowed to form their own brigade, the 16th Irish division.

McGuinness's play and Longley's poems focus on the Unionist identities of Irish soldiers who fought in the Great War, offering their perspective on what it means to be willing to give up their lives for Ulster. They humanize them and approach the history from a different standpoint, making the audience see them as more than just pawns of history. Both authors question the past, making the audience and readers wonder how the present nurtures past events and whether or not it should continue to do so.

After the unsuccessful Easter Rising, in 1919, Irish republicans set up a provisional government called the Irish Assembly or Dáil Éireann in Dublin, an act that precipitated the Anglo-Irish War or the Irish War of Independence. The goal was to get Britain to recognize the newly established Irish government. In 1920, the (British) Government of Ireland Act split Ireland into Northern Ireland, consisting of six counties (Antrim, Down, Armagh, Derry, Fermanagh and Tyrone) in which the Protestant Unionist were a majority, and Southern Ireland, consisting of the remaining twenty six counties. The guerrilla war lasted for two years and ended with the Anglo-Irish treaty signed on the 6th of December in 1921 by the prime minister of United Kingdom at the time, David Lloyd George and the Irish Republic representatives, Arthur

[7] Edwards, Robert Walter Dudley, et al. "Ireland - The 20th-Century Crisis." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/place/Ireland/The-20th-century-crisis.

[8] John Redmond, September 21st 1914, Woodenbridge

Griffith and Michael Collins. This treaty gave Northern Ireland the option of opting out of the newly established Irish Free State compromised with all 26 counties of Southern Ireland and so Northern Ireland remained within the United Kingdom, but it had its own parliament and a devolved government. Southern Ireland was not pleased with this outcome, arguing that the Catholic minority in the new Northern Ireland would be oppressed by the Protestant majority. The remains of the IRA wished to disband both Northern Ireland as well as the Irish Free State in order to unify Ireland by any means necessary. Once again, as an opposing organization to the IRA, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was formed with a goal of preserving the union between Northern Ireland and Britain. The UVF was committed to killing the members of the IRA as well as Roman Catholics, Protestants and other rival paramilitary groups. The Catholics in Northern Ireland however accepted their second-class status and did not protest much against it. This would all change in the 1960s with the emergence of educated young Catholics who started protesting for civil rights, inspired by the protests around the world due to the widespread news of the tragedies happening during the Vietnam war.

Post-war Ireland – The Irish Troubles

The Northern Ireland conflict or The Troubles is a three decade (from about 1968 until 1998) long conflict between the Protestant Unionists or loyalists who wished to preserve their ties with the United Kingdom and the Roman Catholic nationalists or republicans, whose goal was to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. Around 3,600 people were killed in the conflict and more than 30,000 were wounded.

The creation of the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland only continued the problems between the nationalists and the Unionists. Northern Ireland became a self-governing region within the UK in 1922 with the majority of the population being Protestant (around one million people) while the Catholic population was a minority but not a very small one, counting approximately 500,000 people. The oppression of the Catholics in Northern Ireland is indisputable. They were segregated in terms of education, housing and even intermarriage between Protestants and Catholics was a rare occurrence. Protestants also got the best jobs while Catholic families would often have unemployed members in their households. Police harassment of Catholics was not unusual either. The divide between the two groups had become almost entirely political and cultural. Sinn Féin, the Irish republican party, was banned from Northern Ireland, Irish language and history was not taught in schools and it had become illegal to fly the flag of the

Irish Republic in Northern Ireland. Protestants did everything in their power to supress the Irish culture in order to preserve their British roots.[9]

With the passage of the Education Act in 1947 the educational opportunities for Catholics increased and the new generation of students caught wind of political activism movements in Europe during May in 1968. Following the example of Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia and the Civil rights movement in the USA, Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was formed in Northern Ireland. The most notable activists included Bernadette Devlin and John Hume.

NICRA protested against discrimination and political gerrymandering (the practice of drawing the boundaries of electoral districts in a way that gives one political party an unfair advantage over its rivals) on October 5th, 1968 in Derry by organizing a march which had been violently attacked by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Another march was organized by loyalists in Londonderry on August 12th, 1969. The conflict between nationalists and RUC erupted and the two-day riot became known as the Battle of Bogside. The British army was sent to Belfast to restore peace, but to no avail. The IRA got involved as well and supported the nationalists. Especially interested in the conflict were the Provos (Provisional Irish Republican Army), a radical group which split from the IRA and sought to unify Ireland using force. The period of Irish history known as The Troubles had begun. [10]

Unionists responded to the Provos when they armed themselves. The Ulster Volunteer Force, the name taken after the Unionist force organized in 1912 during the Home Rule crisis, and Ulster Defence Association was formed. [11]

The government of Northern Ireland responded to the growing unrest by detaining rioters without a trial with the majority of the arrested being none other than nationalists. Despite this, riots continued and were most common in Derry and Belfast. Violent street conflicts and bombings of public places were some of the actions taken during those riots. British soldiers even attempted to separate Catholics from Protestants by building peace walls. The conflict

[9] Wallenfeldt, Jeff. "The Troubles | Summary, Causes, & Facts." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 14 May 2021, www.britannica.com/event/The-Troubles-Northern-Ireland-history.

[10] Wallenfeldt, Jeff. "The Troubles - Civil Rights Activism, the Battle of Bogside, and the Arrival of the British Army." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/event/The-Troubles-Northern-Ireland-history/Civil-rights-activism-the-Battle-of-Bogside-and-the-arrival-of-the-British-army

[11] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Ulster Volunteer Force | Northern Ireland Military Organization [1966]." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 20 July 1998, www.britannica.com/topic/Ulster-Volunteer-Force-Northern-Ireland-1966.

reached its peak on January 30th, 1972 when British soldiers opened fire on Catholic civil rights demonstrators in Derry. The controversial event became known as "Bloody Sunday", with 13 demonstrators dead and 14 injured. This year was the deadliest year in The Troubles, when there were more than 100 casualties in the British Army as well as the deaths of nine people and many injured during "Bloody Friday" on July 21st when the Provos detonated around twenty bombs in Belfast. The British government decided to suspend the Northern Ireland Parliament and directly rule Northern Ireland from Westminster in order to come to a solution.[12]

The Sunningdale Agreement was agreed in 1973 which created a new Northern Ireland Assembly with equal representation of all parties and a Council of Ireland which was meant to deal with the Irish affairs in Northern Ireland. However, this was rejected by Unionists and violence persisted in Ireland. In October 1984, the IRA detonated a bomb at a Conservative Party Conference in Brighton, killing five people and endangering Margaret Thatcher's life, the Prime Minister at that time. Along with Garret FitzGerald, she signed the Anglo-Irish Agreement which promised to give back the power to the government of Northern Ireland if Unionists and nationalists shared some level of power. The loyalists declined the offer at first, but as the IRA bombings and violent acts continued they decided to negotiate after all. Sinn Féin joined in negotiations with the SDLP, the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland, and the UUP. An agreement was reached on April 10th, 1998, which became known as the Good Friday Agreement, and which was signed by all the major parties in the North except the Democratic Unionist Party. The agreement was all about power-sharing between the communities in Northern Ireland and, to a very limited degree, between it and the Republic of Ireland, and it got approved by 94 percent of those who lived in the Republic and 71 percent of those in Northern Ireland. This brought The Troubles period to a closure. [13]

[12] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Bloody Sunday | Summary, Date, & Facts." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 26 Aug. 2004, www.britannica.com/event/Bloody-Sunday-Northern-Ireland-1972.

[13] The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Good Friday Agreement | British-Irish History." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 5 June 2008, www.britannica.com/topic/Good-Friday-Agreement.

QUEERING IRISH HISTORY – Frank McGuinness's Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme

Frank McGuinness's *Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme* takes us into to the trenches of World War I and introduces to the fictional soldiers of the 36th Ulster division, allowing its readers and audience a glimpse into their thoughts and conversations as they prepare to enter the reimagined deadly battle of the Somme, which would prove to be their last. The play was first performed in Dublin in 1985, receiving some criticism due to the way McGuinness portrays Ulster and its soldiers' loyalty at a crucial moment in Northern Ireland's history. McGuinness makes no attempt to sugar-coat anything and instead, using these Unionist soldiers, characterizes the Unionist identity in a way that makes the audience constantly wonder whether it truly offered them the motivation and willingness to die for Ulster. Or perhaps there could be something else that pushed them to go over the top that day – a sense of belonging, community, and bonding. In this play, McGuinness questions history through imaginative scenarios of an actual tragedy that took place in World War I. It is necessary to point out that the play does not focus on the importance of historical details, nor is it an accurate retelling of a historical event. Instead, it reimagines the history through a different perspective on Ulster unionism. The way McGuiness deals with the topics of religion, patriotism, queerness and homosocial relations between the soldiers in this play paints a different picture of Irish Unionism and humanizes the soldiers who have fought and died for Ulster in the Great War. McGuinness takes inspiration from the thought that "the lowest ranks of fighting men represented the very embodiment of the blasted hopes and lost innocence – hallmark of the war, Somme in particular."[14] which is probably why he decided to choose to narrate through the perspective of Northern Irish volunteers.[15] He focuses on human loss rather than the importance of historical events.[16] McGuinness reimagines the motivation behind the soldiers' enlistment and provides us with their contrasting worldviews and values, all ultimately more or less Protestant in the beginning.

The focal point of this play is the Unionist identity and the way it influences nearly everything – the soldiers' opinions, actions and it even dictates their own lives. The most prominent feature

[14] Hill, p 5
[15] Hill, pp. 1–5
[16] Price, 2014, pp. 3-4

of Unionism is its anti-feminist, anti-Catholic and anti-republican attitude. The Unionists soldiers, particularly Anderson and Mcllwaine, display this stereotypical behavior tied to the Unionist identity most clearly in the beginning of the play. Each soldier has a different reason for joining the cause. For instance, Millen confirms to Pyper that he is here as a volunteer fighting for his king and empire. Both him and Moore are Carson's men and they already have army experience as well as a strong sense of loyalty towards the Unionist cause. They tell the story of how they "beat sense" into a sixteen year old boy who spray painted a tricolor, a symbol of the Irish republican efforts, on an orange lodge. By doing this McGuinness portrays them as bullies determined to uphold their Unionist point of view at the expanse of anyone who tries to challenge that view and identity. Besides their anti-republican stance, in the following sentence they also exhibit their intolerance towards the Catholics as well as overall misogyny, referring to the boy's mother as a "decent enough creature for a Papist."[17]

Then we have Anderson and Mcllwaine, who are particularly an interesting pair clearly motivated by their fiery Protestantism. The very moment they enter the room, before we are even introduced to them, the first thing they say is "No cause for panic, ladies. The men are here."[18] These crude misogynistic remarks continue throughout the conversation, often said in a playful yet derogatory manner clearly meant to provoke. Through the two of them, McGuinness represents the prevalent anti-Catholicism among Unionists, apparent in the way they attacked Crawford because Anderson suspected, or literally "smelled", Catholicism in him. This example of attacking one of their own comrades shows just how deep the roots of religious hatred and intolerance truly are.

The far less extreme examples of Unionists include Craig, Roulston and Crawford. While they have all joined for the same reasons as the previously mentioned soldiers, they are not bullies. Roulston enlisted to serve the king when his heavenly and earthly father failed him while Crawford did not volunteer for his religion or his country, the only thing he fought for were his comrades. The element of religion and Unionism is what the soldiers identify with, what gives them stability, but paradoxically it is also what later makes them question their motives for fighting in the war when it is something that should be clear and never second-guessed. They are not nearly as aggressive as Anderson and Mcllwaine, but they all share a common goal. However, there is one soldier who stands apart from the rest.

[17] McGuinness, Initiation, p 17
[18] McGuinness, Initiation, p 23

The character of Kenneth Pyper is not bound by the ideals of Unionism nor is he a typical soldier figure, which is one of the reasons why he stands out from the rest right away. The moment they meet him, Anderson and Mcllwaine find him odd and even call him a "milksop"[19], clearly stating that he has no business being in the army. Pyper, however, does not shy away from confrontation. He challenges the soldiers, saying how it really does not matter why they joined because they will all die anyway.

Pyper displays such an "unusual" behavior that his comrades are quick to classify him as crazy. Not because he cuts himself while peeling an apple or because he hates the sight of blood (although that may be a part of the internalized anti-feminine and masculine nature of Unionism), but because he already sees them all with one foot in their grave and makes no effort to hide this. It is unclear whether soldiers ostracize Pyper in the beginning because of his morbid statements, the way he provocatively challenges their beliefs or because they begin to realize that he is "a milksop" and therefore feel a sense of aversion that comes with the social rejection of Pyper's otherness stemming from their masculine Unionist brotherhood. For instance, when Craig tries to downplay the accidental cut on Pyper's thumb; "It's only a cut, man. You're not in your grave." Pyper replies "You're making yours. … Kiss it better, will you?"[20] In a way, perhaps it is a combination of all three. However, more than anything, they are unnerved with the way Pyper talks as if he had already buried them all. To them, this is just as offensive as it is frightening. He strips them of the security of their Unionist identities, forces them to face the fact that their final moments will be spent fighting alongside one another, dying for nobody else but themselves and their comrades. The reality of their imminent death is something soldiers are most likely already aware of - Pyper is only bringing this awareness to the surface and it is this that is causing them to feel uncomfortable and uneasy around him, the embodiment of their fast approaching death. It is immediately apparent that Pyper will be the one to shake the foundations of their Unionist beliefs.

David Craig was the first fellow solider Pyper talked to and throughout their conversation he drops plenty of hints in regards to his sexuality, giving a phallic description of an apple "Beautiful. Hard. White." for instance. Pyper then also remarks how he has "unusually soft skin" which is mostly considered a feminine attribute. By assigning this characteristic to him, Pyper inverses the normative structure of gender roles, a stark contrast to the misogynistic nature of Anderson and Mcllwaine. When Craig inquires whether Pyper finds men or women

[19] McGuinnes, Inititation, p 25
[20] McGuinness, Pairing, p 2

beautiful, he responds nonchalantly with a counter question, asking "What's the difference?"[21] This duality implies that he does not care for gender roles and he himself seems to be, by the social construct of patriarchy, a blur of the two. Pyper's queerness is immediately established, distancing him from the rest of the Unionist soldiers who have a very masculine, anti-feminine identity. They consider him to be "crazy", "mad", someone who does not belong in society and whose identity is built on uncertainty, which makes them uncomfortable since it differs from their black and white worldview. Through his cynicism, Pyper openly challenges the identities of his comrades, even Craig's. "Did you not join up to die for me?"[22]

Pyper will plant the seed of doubt into his comrades' minds, but his own won't be left unscathed either. He will be the instrument that alters not only the soldiers' view of history and Unionism, but ours as well. McGuinness does this by establishing bonds between the soldiers, the first one being between Pyper and Craig. They are paired up, both as comrades who will later become lovers and stay together until the day of the battle where they will fight together and where Craig will be the only one of the two who will die. The audience is then introduced to the other three pairs of soldiers; John Millen and William Moore, Cristopher Roulston and Martin Crawford and George Anderson and Nat Mcllwaine. The play consists of four parts: Remembrance, Initiation, Pairing and finally, Bonding. All of the soldiers will develop a deep homosocial bond which will make them question their initial reasons for joining the army. Even Pyper, the one who seemed more aware than anyone else in the play, starts having doubts about his perspective.

Now in pairs, soldiers have meaningful discussions amongst each other in a variety of symbolic locations during their leave, slowly unraveling themselves to each other and to the audience.

Crawford and Roulston are in a church where they discuss the matter of faith and religion. Roulston questions his own beliefs while Crawford completely devalues them and refuses to give any meaning to Christ or to the British king. He also reveals that his mother was Catholic, confirming that Andreson's and Mcllwaine's assumption at the beginning of the play was correct. Roulston seems to struggle to make sense of where he stands when it comes to faith and has decided to enlist in the army to fight for the king, rather than God. However, the everlasting lack of faith he has within him is discouraging him. Crawford rejects the idea of finding comfort in religion, as his experience of being between religions in Ulster was hardly

[21] McGuinness, Initiation, p 21
[22] McGuinness, Initiation, p 4

comforting and finds Roulston's lack of faith frustrating, because Crawford trusts him with his life on the battlefield. Here, religion comes second to comradeship. Crawford is the voice of reason that pulls Roulston from the depths of despair, making him rely on something that is certain and stable – their comradeship rather than religion.

At the same time, Pyper and Craig are having a conversation on the island of Boa. As Roulston tells Crawford the story of his childhood, Pyper reveals to Craig the death of his late Catholic wife, who had committed suicide. Pyper also tells him that he did not initially want to go to war, he resisted the call of "Protestant gods" [23]. He had escaped "Carson's dance" [24] because he wished to create, not destroy but in the end the urge to kill, fight and die for Ulster prevailed, as if it was a part of him he was unable to silence. He claims that this was the reason he joined the army, because he loved Ulster, but that love was soon replaced with his love for Craig, his comrade. Pyper now no longer wishes to die for Ulster, but he wishes to live for Ulster instead. The line between desire and identification is blurred further when Craig states in his reply "I'm not like you, I am you" [25]. Craig has a feeling that he is not going to survive this war. Both of them are about to "dance in the temple of the Lord" [26] with Protestant Gods, Carson and the King watching over them. It is an allegory of their final march, their dance of death.[27]

Moore and Millen are on the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge that spans a vertiginous drop, and which, like the other sites – Boa Island, the Church and the Field at Finaghy – is a noted Northern Irish landmark. Moore seems to have suffered psychological trauma to some degree on the battlefield, as he is unable to cross the bridge, telling Millen that he hears the guns still and that he does not wish to go on. Moore is trying to help him cross. Even Anderson, while speaking to Mcllwaine at the Field at Finaghy, asks him "When was the last time you heard Moore laugh?" [28] The realization that he is not going to make it out alive, that he is going to die in battle has taken its toll on Moore the most. At this point, his character had almost become a personification of the internal panic everyone else is feeling and represents an element of disturbance, an omen of what is to come. He was no longer in control of his life, no longer in power. Despite attacking the sixteen year old Republican back at home, the idea of fighting

[23] McGuinness, Pairing, p 19
[24] McGuinness, Pairing, p 19
[25] McGuinness, Pairing, p 19
[26] McGuinness, Pairing, p 20
[27] Lapointe, pp. 272 – 273
[28] McGuinness, Pairing, p 7

and dying for Ulster was no longer pushing him forward. It is Millen instead, his urging, that gets him across the bridge.

Anderson and Mcllwaine are lying on ground next to a lambeg drum in the Field at Finaghy, an important symbol and site connected with the anti-Catholic Orange Order. They have a moment of reckoning. Mcllwaine kicks the drum, saying it reminds him of the sound of the sinking Titanic – the most famous product of the Belfast shipyards, places marked by anti-Catholicism. They begin to realize that they are the passengers of Titanic, a sinking ship, and they're the ones about to drown in this "cursed war"[29]. Their anti-Catholic attitude now seems to have been redirected. Now it has different connotations to it. It is no longer about fighting Catholics, it is about the regret of having to fight them, the reality that they're really going to die because of this religious conflict begins to sink in. Mcllwaine curses the "papists" because if it weren't for them, they wouldn't have been here, at death's door. "Damn the Pope. Let me die damning him."[30] In this part, it becomes apparent that Mcllwaine is beginning to realize that war is pointless, agreeing with Pyper that they are sacrificing themselves for nothing. "We're all going mad. Some of us, like Pyper, were mad before going. Others are getting that way, look at Moore. He won't be back. He'll be in a home for the rest of his life. Where I'll be too. Crawford's turning into a machine and I'm going lunatic."[31]

Mcllwaine then searches for the last bit of purpose in the reason why he initially volunteered. For Ulster, he attempts to remind himself. "I think I've been asleep for years. I want the sound of this boy to rouse me. If it doesn't, I can't go back there."[32] He urges Anderson to give a speech, most likely in a way to motivate him.

> We will not recognize this republic. We will fight this republic. We will fight as we have fought in other centuries to answer out king's call. To answer God's call. We will draw our men from the farms, from the townlands and commerce of our province, our beloved Ulster. And our men will follow that call to freedom. They will fight for it. They will kill for it. They will die for it.[33]

Saying those words out loud, a contra-effect happens. Rather than the spoken words making them remember their motivation for volunteering, Anderson is hit with a stark realization.

[29] McGuinness, Pairing, p 13
[30] McGuinness, Pairing, p 13
[31] McGuinness, Pairing, p 14
[32] McGuinness, Pairing, p 15
[33] McGuinness, Pairing, p 21

"Pyper the bastard was right. It's all lies. We're going to die. It's all lies. We're going to die for nothing."[34] Finally, even Anderson and Mcllwaine, the most stereotypically portrayed Unionist soldiers, are beginning to have a change of heart, their once firm Unionist ideology starts to crumble somewhat.

The third part of the play bears the name "Pairing" in which the audience connects with the soldiers more as they are beginning to come to terms with their deaths. Because coming to terms with death is an aspect of one's humanity—the uber-nationalist (and unionism is nationalism) constructs death as glorious and beneficial to the land. This is what is being changed in the play—the shift from the characters as stereotypes to humans. They were no longer simply soldiers willing to die for Ulster. What pushes them over the top isn't patriotism or religion, it is the trust in their comrades, the belief that they are fighting for each other. McGuinness's play focuses on this homosocial aspect of his reimagined history as well as on the soldiers' humanity. Whereas in the beginning of the play they were the loyal subjects of the Loyalist cause, they are now questioning that same cause which gave them purpose. By exchanging their thoughts and life stories, they are preparing for the final stage of their bonding, the climax through the dance of death which will ultimately lead them over the top. The final part of the play depicts exactly that.

To keep themselves occupied while waiting for the order, they re-enact the Battle of the Boyne, or rather, the Bottle of Scarva as there are only six of them. In this mock play within the play, Crawford plays as king William while Pyper acts as his horse. As noted in the Introduction, King William was Protestant and his opponent, King James II played by Moore on Millen's shoulders as his horse, was a Catholic monarch. In the midst of this, Pyper trips and Crawford falls from his shoulders. "I fell. / Not the best of signs." [35] The symbolism behind this fall could be in the soldiers' reluctance to die and in their fear of getting beaten at the battle of Somme about to commence. It is also foreshadowing of what is to soon follow. History is once again inverted here because it does not favor the Protestants. McGuinness considers a different outcome of that battle, the one in which the Protestant King loses. However, it is the Protestants who are supposed to be successful, their victory is supposed to be inevitable. The soldiers are supposed to bring this victory to their country, even if it means losing their lives, but the

[34] McGuinness, Pairing, p 21
[35] McGuinness, Bonding, p 10

internalized doubt seems to manifest itself everywhere. The unusual smell is lingering in the air, the smell of fear and death, the smell of Somme and home.[36]

One last time, they are divided into pairs and they bid each other final goodbyes. They all exchange Orange sashes, including Pyper who was given one by Anderson. This act meant that Pyper was no longer an outsider Craig had previously stated him to be. The bond he had developed with his comrades was stronger than his reluctance to embrace Unionism. He wanted to believe in the idea solely because of his comrades even though he had not enlisted for the same reason as them. By accepting the Orange sash, Pyper accepted his ancestry and his fate which he now shared with the rest of the soldiers.[37] Through his prayer before the battle he affirms this newly established bond and acceptance by turning to God and asking him for the protection of his homeland, his comrades and himself. "Observe the sons of Ulster marching towards the Somme. I love their lives. I love my own life. I love my home. I love my Ulster."[38] He loves Ulster, he will fight for Ulster. All of the soldiers are seemingly dying for Ulster when in reality, they are dying for one another.

Ironically, Pyper was the only one of his comrades who survived. However, a part of him died with them that day. "You were right, David. The last battle. I died that day with you."[39] While their sacrifice helped create Northern Ireland, it did not bring peace to Ulster. The conflict between the Unionists and Republicans was only truly beginning; the war might have been over for the rest of the world, but it was not over for the Irish. The knowledge of this is tearing Pyper apart even more than the day they all went over the top and advanced forward, only to be shot and killed. "Ulster lies in rubble at our feet. Save it. Save me. Take me out of this war alive."[40]

The burden of those memories haunts him, just like their ever-present ghosts. "I miss you. Each day that increases. Is that because I'm coming closer to you? Am I at last leaving earth for air?"[41] Elderly Pyper senses or wishes to sense that his own death is near, so that he may be reunited with them. The army days for him were not something horrible. It is something he still clings to even in his elderly days.

[36] Hill, p 4
[37] Lapointe, p 280
[38] McGuinness, Bonding, p 19
[39] McGuinness, Remembrance, p 2
[40] McGuinness, Remembrance, p 2
[41] McGuinness, Remembrance , p 2

> Answer me why we did it. Why we let ourselves be led into extermination? In the end, we were not led, we led ourselves. We claimed we would die for each other in battle. To fulfill that claim we marched into the battle that killed us all.[42]

We could argue that war by itself is homosocial because men vow to die for one another, rather than for their country, their religion or their political beliefs. Pyper's question "Did you not join up to die for me?"[43] feels out of place at first, but it in fact shows Pyper's awareness of the situation they are all in.

Comrades forming tight bonds was not anything out of the ordinary during the Great War as it provided a sense of comfort, belonging and purpose to the soldiers stranded far away from their home. Soldiers fighting for one another rather often proved to be much more motivating than the initial cause of protecting their homeland, and this drove them into their enemy's gunfire in No Man's Land. Homosociality and homosexuality among soldiers was also not that uncommon. One of the earliest records of homosexuality among soldiers comes from the ancient Greeks who even used this as a war tactic. The Sacred Band of Thebes consisted of soldiers who were all paired with their lovers. The idea behind the construction of this army was that soldiers would fight harder if they were also fighting for the survival of their significant other. This theory proved to be very fruitful, as the troops consisted of very driven warriors who were only defeated when they clashed with Philip II of Macedonia.[44] However, it is important to note that there is a difference between The Sacred Band of Thebes and the soldiers of World War I. While the men of Thebes were selectively hand-picked, the homosexuality among the World War I soldiers was a spontaneous product of the incredibly stressful environment as well as the isolation from civilized society. So it should come as no surprise that in the moment they were preparing to go over the top, it wasn't the willingness to die for Ulster that motivated the soldiers in McGuinness's play; it was a much stronger bond they had developed among each other that made them willing to die.

Through Pyper, McGuiness criticizes the Unionist loyalty. Pyper does not even recognize it as loyalty, he sees it as a curse, a hatred that the soldiers had towards themselves. The younger Pyper's speeches and actions highlight the disabling aspects of this deeply ingrained way of thinking. However, the older Pyper clings on to this identity because if he were to let go of it, his comrades would have had died for nothing. It is a paradox, in which he at the same time

[42] McGuinness, Remembrance, p 2
[43] McGuinness, Initiation, p 4
[44] "Sacred Band | Theban Military Corps." Encyclopedia Britannica, www.britannica.com/topic/Sacred-Band

wishes for the banging of the drum to both stop and persist as The Troubles gather pace so their sacrifice isn't forgotten, so the lives they had given up weren't in vain.. "Must I remember? Yes, I remember. I remember details."[45] Once deconstructed, however, it all becomes apparent. The anti-war message of this play is clear and Pyper is the messenger who lived to tell the tale, forever haunted by the ghosts of his comrades, clinging on to the ideals they had willingly given up their lives for despite knowing it's problematic. His Unionist identity persists because he feels compelled to identify with it, for the sake of honoring his fallen comrades and the bond they shared.

[45] McGuinness, Remembrance, p 1

CONCLUSION - Michael Longley's Reviewing of the 'Troubles' through the World Wars in 'In Memoriam', 'Wounds', 'Ceasefire'

The link between McGuinness's and Longley's poems, 'In memoriam' and 'Wounds', lies not only in the fact that they both depict World War I, but also in the way they depict it. They are not so much concerned with the historical record, but rather with the emotions, intimacy and humanity of those that participated in these events. At the heart of these texts is an exploration of Northern Irish Unionism and the way it has impacted Irish politics, history and society. Longley's poems speak of the tragedy of war and contrast destruction with creation, life with death, hate with love. This kind of duality is present in McGuinness's play too, as a queer character of Pyper struggles to find his place in his Protestant comrades' hardened, rigid idea of masculinity and loyalty. The play shows how he and his comrades come to a form of accommodation with each other, and he rejects his cynicism in order to go over the top with them, in order to die for them: what gave him purpose, destroyed him at the same time. The No Man's Land they entered at the drama's conclusion could be seen as a manifestation of this duality: it is where soldiers lose their lives, but it is also where ceasefire agreements are made; it is a space between life and death. In Longley's case, this symbolic duality—this life-in-death—is his survival from an untimely death before birth when his father suffered a testicle injury in World War I.[46]

Frank McGuinness was born in Dublin into a Catholic family, and so his play can be seen as an attempt by someone from the 'other' side to understand Unionism and the forces that drive it. He depicts the soldiers' loyalist beliefs for what they are and does not ridicule them, but instead critiques and questions them, and through the always-ambiguous character of Pyper, the audience sees how the human events of the Somme find resonance in Unionist attitudes in the times of The Troubles.

In contrast, Michael Longley was born in Belfast to English parents and has stated that he feels like he belongs to neither England nor Ireland: "I'm neither English nor Irish completely, and I'd like to think that is a healthy condition."[47] While he might see himself as a citizen of a No

[46] Brearton, 1998, pp. 59-62
[47] McIlroy, pp. 59-61

Man's Land, in truth, he's very much a Northern Irish Protestant writer, and his family background is entrenched in the World Wars.

His two poems, 'Wounds' and 'In Memoriam', which were published at the beginning of The Troubles, explore the themes of Protestant identity through the prism of the World Wars, The Troubles and his father, who had fought in the Great War. His poem 'Wounds' begins where McGuinness's play ends, with the Ulster Division going over the top, screaming "Fuck the pope!"[48], "No surrender!"[49] as they march to their deaths. 'In Memoriam' is an explicit act of commemoration of his father and his fallen comrades, as it gives voice to his father's stories about his time in the army: "These words I write in memory. Let yours / And other heartbreaks play into my hands."[50] He describes the way his father had "accidentally" joined the London Scottish at nineteen years old and how he had partially wasted his youth. He even nearly lost his very own son before he had gotten a chance to be born when his testicle was sliced with a shrapnel shard. "That instant I, your most unlikely son / In No Man's Land was surely left for dead".[51] The things his father had seen on the battlefield had aged him prematurely; "You, looking death and nightmare in the face … / Grow older in a flash, but none the wiser"[52] After war was over, he sought comfort in women, but despite surviving the war the wounds he received there many years later "woke as cancer".[53] As his father's condition worsened, Longley imaginatively summoned his past lovers to stand before him and bring him comfort once more. They then escort him to the Underworld, his father's eyes closing behind their skirts as he dies peacefully.

In 'Wounds', Longley describes his father as a "belated casualty" of war. On his death bed, sick and weary, he states "I am dying for King and Country, slowly"[54], referring to the everlasting psychological damage war has done to him which is slowly killing him. His comrades had died instantly while he stayed alive but continued to slowly wither away for his King and Ulster through sickness., just as old Pyper slowly let survivor's guilt completely take him over in McGuinness's play. Longley starts to shift from the Protestant identity in the second stanza and instead focuses on the humanity of the soldiers who have given up their lives

[48] Longley, Wounds
[49] Longley, Wounds
[50] Longley, In Memoriam
[51] Longley, In Memoriam
[52] Longley, In Memoriam
[53] Longley, In Memoriam
[54] Longley, Wounds

for/in Ulster. Where McGuinness's play ends, Longley's poems continue, describing the still open war wounds that have been awaken during the period of The Troubles.

The relationship between Longley and his father plays a crucial role in Longley's poetry, as most of it was influenced by his father's stories from the battlefield. His father had admired the men who so bravely fought at the Somme, and Longley looks to give the soldiers a more human personality, despite having never been there himself. When Longley is burying his father, beside him he imagines; "Three teenage soldiers", who had been killed in The Troubles, with their "bellies full of / Bullets and Irish beer"[55]. By specifying the young age of the soldiers and the mundane details of their lives and death, Longley invokes sympathy. The reader can not help but feel grief for these young men whose lives have ended prematurely, "Paralysed as heavy guns put out / The night-light in a nursery for ever"[56]. One might wonder whether the teenage boys even knew what they were truly sacrificing themselves for, as indicated by the mention of "nursery" which could represent their innocent, still childlike personalities despite it all.

This is further amplified through the sudden image of a bus-conductor being shot in the head by the gun of "a shivering boy" [57] in The Troubles. It is noteworthy that Longley did not choose a cold-blooded adult man as the killer, but a young boy instead who is frightened by his own actions. It is not clear which one of the two is Catholic and which is Protestant: the message Longley is conveying here is that the reader should not bother with it. Instead, the reader is supposed to take in the abrupt, sudden way the man has died and the shocking after-affect it had on his own assailant.[58] The poem ends in an unforgiving decrescendo, with the boy apologizing to a wife he had just made a widow. "I think 'Sorry Missus' was what he said." [59]

> It seems to me important… to imagine how one can be so brain washed or so angry or in a sense perhaps even innocent that one can drive in a car and go into somebody's house and shoot the person stone dead. [60]

The wounds that the Great War has left are not yet healed, they have reopened in the form of 'Troubles'. His father is the belated casualty of World War I, his wounds reopened as cancer,

[55] Longley, Wounds
[56] Longley, Wounds
[57] Longley, Wounds
[58] O'Malley, forthcoming, 2021, n.p.
[59] Longley, Wounds
[60] Brearton, 1998, p 64

but also with the beginning of 'Troubles'.[61] The Irish soldiers with "bellies full of beer" are buried while the new soldiers rise, ready to pick up the fight where they left off, sometimes not even realizing the damage that will inflict. Longley and McGuinness evoke the 36th Ulster Division in their work, describing one of the World War I's greatest tragedies and then tie it with the period of Irish Troubles which continues the struggle for the Irish, making it unable for the wounds to start healing.[62]

In 'Ceasefire' Longley once again explores the theme of a father and a son. In this poem, however, it is the son who is dead and the father is the one mourning him. This poem was written before the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and talks of forgiveness, the act of submission and a sense of duty: "I get down on my knees and do what must be done / And kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son."[63] In order to fully come to terms with the death of Hector, Priam has to make peace with his son's killer, Achilles, and submissively kiss his hand. The last line of this poem could be compared to Pyper coming to terms with the fact that he too is supposed to make peace with his initial cynicism and embrace the ideas his comrades fought and died for. It's something that "must be done" in order for Pyper to reassure himself and the ghosts of his comrades that they hadn't sacrificed themselves in vain, that their deaths had counted for something, despite the faults those ideas hold. When young Pyper goes over the top, chanting "Ulster, Ulster, Ulster" he believes in the Unionist ideology because of his comrades marching alongside him to their deaths; not because they themselves truly believe in this ideology, but because they *want* to die believing in it. The idea behind the last line in Longley's poem is that in order for the conflict to truly stop it is necessary to make that step towards reconciliation and and understand and recognise the motivations of the other side.

Longley's poem 'Ceasefire' illustrates the importance of what should be done in order for the conflict to stop. "I get on my knees and do what must be done / And kiss Achilles' hand, the killer of my son."[64]A peace treaty has to be signed. Through the character of Priam, who had lost his son Hector, Longley portrays the strength of a father's forgiveness by kissing the hand of his son's murderer. The significance of symbolic forgiveness in this poem, published just before the Good Friday Agreement, will be particularly important for future generations because there were really only two options left – either for the conflict to continue or for the armistice to take place. In the Iliad, even after Priam gets Hector's body back, Troy falls and

[61] Brearton, 1998, pp. 63-64
[62] Brearton, 1950 – 2000, pp. 234-235
[63] Longley, Ceasefire
[64] Longley, Ceasefire

the war continues.[65] Using this parallel, Longley almost predicts the state of Ireland in the near future.

A thirty-years-long conflict over various social and political aspects simply could not be solved with just one document. Despite the Good Friday Agreement, the tensions in Northern Ireland are still present, and have been greatly exacerbated recently by the process of Brexit. Nonetheless, thanks to writers such as McGuinness and Longley, there is a greater awareness throughout the island of Ireland of how Unionists view their history and place in the country. Criticizing such a dominant identity that prides itself on many historical victories is challenging even when done through literature, but it is something that has to be done. It is important to recognize the faults of Unionism in order to prevent further potential casualties and work on establishing better tolerance among the Unionists and Republicans for the benefit of society and the future of Ireland.

[65] Broom, pp. 94-112

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