The Poetics and Politics of Late Modernism:

A Comparative Study of Derek Mahon and Arun Kolatkar

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of PhD is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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For my mentors, especially

Dr Kit Fryatt *and* ***Professor Udaya Kumar***

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Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations

Derek Mahon

LI *Lives*
SP *The Snow Party*
CD *Courtyards in Delft*
HL *Harbour Lights*
THL *The Hudson Letter*
LE *Life on Earth*
AW *An Autumn Wind*

Arun Kolatkar

JE *Jejuri*
SS *Sarpa Satra*
KG *Kala Ghoda Poems*
TB *The Boatride*

List of Images

Abstract

Tapasya Narang

The Poetics and Politics of Late Modernism: A Comparative Study of Derek Mahon and Arun Kolatkar

The thesis studies the works of Arun Kolatkar and Derek Mahon — from India and Ireland — who wrote from 1950s to 2000s and from 1960s to 2020, respectively. Their works respond to social and political issues, which unfolded during these periods, including but not limited to sectarian violence in Ireland, religious and linguistic conflicts in India, neo-imperialism and late capitalism.

The thesis begins by studying the poets' early contributions to the international phenomenon of the 'little magazine', which allowed them to forge their distinctive styles, and assesses how the cultural milieu of the 1960s and 70s fostered experimentation with modernist and avant-gardist forms. It then explores the poets' works published in the contexts of sectarian conflicts in Ireland and growing Hindu religious conservatism in India. Mahon's *Lives*, *The Snow Party* and *Courtyards in Delft* and Kolatkar's *Jejuri* experiment with modes of address and perspectives to address these political developments both directly and obliquely.

To study the poets' late-career responses to neo-imperialism and late capitalism, the thesis assesses the politics behind allusions to classical and mythological models in their works. Such autumnal stock-taking tendencies are present in Mahon's *Harbour Lights*, *The Hudson Letter*, *Life on Earth* and *An Autumn Wind* and Kolatkar's *Kala Ghoda Poems* and *Sarpa Satra*. It then investigates the poets' employment of play and irony which allows them to deliver an acerbic critique of limit conditions — such as sectarian and communal violence, economic disparities — without assuming a moralistic stance.

The thesis examines ways in which Mahon and Kolatkar refurbish received forms and themes: their negotiation of publishing contexts, experimentation with perspectives, adaptations of classical and mythical texts, as well as ironic underpinnings. All of these establish the poets' particular position within the Irish and Indian canons.

INTRODUCTION

What is history? While reading it one doesn't know. It's a floating situation, a nagging quest. It's difficult to arrive at any certainties. What you get is versions of history, with nothing final about them.

-Arun Kolatkar

Arun Kolatkar (1932-2004) joined the literary scene in India in the 1950s. Along with his contemporaries, Dilip Chitre (1938- 2009), Adil Jussawalla (1940-) and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra (1947-), he reshaped the Indian English literary canon.[1] As is evident in the epigraph, he avoided imagining history in a linear fashion with conceptions of progress attached to it. His poetry rejected romanticised ideas of the past, transcended the nation, and questioned monolithic ideas of 'progress' and 'development'.[2] In the work of Kolatkar and his contemporaries, there is a modernist sense of immediacy coming out of an unsentimental engagement with the postcolonial polity. They challenge hostility against writing in English and triumphalist narratives of the Global South.

A generation of poets in Ireland, who wrote most of their collections in the context of what is euphemistically called the Troubles, also exhibited scepticism towards monolithic conceptions of historic narratives and the rhetoric of the Unionists and the Republicans that perpetuated violence in Northern Ireland. Derek Mahon (1941-2020), Seamus Heaney (1939-2013) and Michael Longley (1939-), like the Indian poets, implant visions—assessing history with irony, satire, black humour and prophetic intercessions—to defy intellectual stagnancy fostered by conservative political discourses.

[1] For a thorough history of Indian English poetry, consult *Modern Indian Poetry* in English by Bruce King and Rosinka Chaudhuri's anthology, *A History of Indian Poetry in English*.
[2] These ideas will be developed throughout the thesis.

According to Bruce King, Indian English-language poetry is one of many 'new literatures' which began to appear at the end of the Second World War (1). In King's words, the poets 'faced a challenge from older nationalist intellectuals and from regionalists who demanded a renaissance of the culture of the pre-colonial languages of India' (1). The poets opposed the assumption that they were inauthentic because they wrote in English; they refused to engage with the past nostalgically. Mehrotra's seminal essay, 'The Emperor Has No Clothes', aligns himself and Kolatkar with authors who experienced 'The sensation that words sometimes fail to embody the quality—the 'what-ness'—of individual experience' (182). In his list of authors who experienced similar sensations, he mentions '[Hugo von] Hofmannsthal, [Paul] Valery, and [Franz] Kafka' ('The Emperor Has No Clothes' 182). Kolatkar expresses similar inability concerning words and languages as he states in his manifesto (written in the form of a poem), 'Some of the finest poetry in India, or indeed the world, has come from a/ sensation of alienation' (*TB* 223). While drawing inspiration from modernists and their predecessors, the poets enact the failure of language while addressing late twentieth century experience of life in India and elsewhere.

While Kolatkar and his contemporaries' work is identified as modernist, Mahon's work and that of his immediate contemporaries, Heaney and Longley, is often considered humanist in its search for formal poetic unities in the face of conflict. Edna Longley's celebration of form in Northern Irish poetry in her early criticism and her insistence on the separation of poetry and politics predisposes the poets' work to be categorised as anti-modernist. She writes, 'Poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated' (*Poetry in the Wars* 185). John Goodby states, 'For all their differences, Heaney, Mahon and Michael Longley can be viewed as products of the 1947 Education Act, the British Welfare State and of a stable postwar society who regarded the events after 1968/69 as fundamentally abnormal' (8). Goodby's analysis might address certain poetic moments

in Mahon, Heaney and Longley's works; however, it does not consider the experimentation with perspectives, conscious and astute historical awareness in their works and a departure from the themes of Irish lyric poetry, like Yeats's high style and Kavanagh's rural particularity. The thesis re-reads Mahon's work to challenge such critical assumptions that he excluded politics from poetry. It identifies Mahon's self-conscious departure from humanist and Leavisite ideas of the separation of art and the world. By studying Irish modernist poets alongside Indian English modernists, I will assess how these two specific generations responded to socio-historical circumstances within their countries and beyond.

The thesis compares Mahon and Kolatkar's works because of their commitment to history and their sustained resistance to social injustices. Although the poets wrote from their specific positions in the Global North and the Global South, their works represent curious similarities in responses to historical phenomena, such as perpetuation of sectarian and religious divides, economic inequalities, twentieth century genocides and perpetuation of social injustices. They provide significant models of critique and resistance. They also exhibit thematic and stylistic similarities. For instance, Mahon's *Lives* critiques aspects of existence in urban Ireland, during the Troubles from a position of liminality, characterised by homecoming and departure; Kolatkar's *Jejuri* also uses the perspective of a disillusioned visitor whose arrival from elsewhere draws attention to aspects of existence in rural Maharashtra. Mahon and Kolatkar are provided primary attention in the thesis due to their notable ability to transcend their immediate circumstances and address transnational concerns while paying attention to the minutiae of contemporary life. For instance, in poems in *Lives* and *Snow Party*, Mahon draws inspiration from the everyday—'A thousand mushrooms crowd[ing] to a keyhole'—to reflect on the lives of 'Lost people of Treblinka and Pompeii!' (*LI* 36-7); Kolatkar, while representing a the everyday scene of a Jewish woman eating her breakfast, reminds his

readers of the bombed streets of Gora Kalvaria, Poland, during the Nazi aggression (*KG* 82). The chapterisation in the thesis is motivated by the formal and stylistic stance dominant in both poets' works; they invest in the paratextuality of texts, obliquity of vision, allusive quality of language and ironic underpinnings in works. As discussed further, each of these aspects has been studied in independent chapters.

Although the two generation of poets, assessed in the thesis, present commitment to socio-historical circumstances, Mahon and Kolatkar emphatically use the polyphonic qualities of poetry (as discussed in the thesis) to evoke criticism of regressive political ideologies in twentieth and twenty first century. Kolatkar's work gains primary attention to the exclusion of his contemporaries, Moraes, Jussawalla, Mehrotra and Chitre, because of the depth and nature of critique that his works evoke. Kolatkar's commitment to social injustices—such as economic inequalities in South Asia and perpetuation of political conflict and violence—is unique and unparalleled. In addition, his works provide a fine example of aesthetic and politics of modernism that emphatically critique certain socio-historical circumstances in twentieth century and early twenty first century. Although there is published evidence, and information, collected during personal interviews, that testify that Mehrotra and Jussawalla read Northern Irish Poetry,[3] the presence of Heaney's books in Kolatkar's collection, donated to Bhandarkar Oriental Research institute, reveals his familiarity with Northern Irish poetry too.[4] Moreover, Ashok Shahane, Kolatkar's publisher, in a personal interview, spoke about Kolatkar's concerns with civil strife in Northern Ireland; he shared that Kolatkar kept newspaper clippings of Troubles related news.[5] While the thesis's selection of Kolatkar is driven by the thematic

[3] Jussawalla, in 'Breathing Freely', articulates solidarity with Northern Irish poets who wrote during accentuating circumstances and Mehrotra spoke about his interest in Norther Irish writing during a personal interview conducted on 17th December 2018 in the poet's house in Dehradun.

[4] Kolatkar's collection has been donated to Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 812, Chiplunkar Road, Shivajinagar, Pune, Maharashtra.

[5] The information was acquired from Ashok Shahane, during a personal interview, conducted on 13th December 2018.

and formal range in his work, his connections with Northern Ireland and his recognisable solidarities with victims of violence from across the world bolsters the motivation to compare his work with Northern Irish poetry.

Like Kolatkar, Mahon struggled to rise above his preoccupations with Northern Irish Troubles and aimed to seek solidarities with marginalised individuals and communities across the world. In the thesis, Mahon's work is prioritised over the poetry of his contemporaries because of his unique ability to draw attention to economic inequalities and social injustices in Ireland and beyond. His work harbours pronounced ideological commitment to widen the relevance of his work beyond the Global North. For instance, Mahon's *An Autumn Wind* and *Raw Material* critique South Asian States' overwhelming emphasis on economic progress and development that has led to displacement of tribes, residing in South Asian forests (See 'A Child of the Forest' *AW* 67). Mahon's interest in Indian authors is evident in his early criticism of Dom Moraes that was published in *Icarus*; his interest in Indian poetry is revisited in *An Autumn Wind* and *Raw Material*. Certain themes (and poems' titles) in the collections betray intriguing similarities with the work of Kolatkar; for instance, Mahon's 'Recycling Song' bears echoes of Kolatkar's 'A Note on the Reproductive Cycle of Rubbish' (*AW* 75, *KG* 35). Both poets chose rubbish as their 'raw material' (*AW*). The thematic and ideological similarities in the works of the two poets provide an opportunity to draw significant parallels and comparisons between two distinct yet contemporaneously established oeuvres.

Kolatkar and Mahon have both gained great critical acclaim. In his study, *Modern Indian Poetry in English*, Bruce King identifies Kolatkar, along with Chitre, as a modernist experimentalist who 'was evolving towards a conscious styleless poetry using (like Tukaram and the saint poets) colloquial, common speech' (164). While King's criticism identifies significant connections with modernist and avant-gardist trends in

Kolatkar's works, it categorises the work as styleless, nihilistic and concerned with the poet's mind over 'empirical reality' (162-182). Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's essay, 'Death of a Poet', provides an account of life and works of Kolatkar. Mehrotra traces various influences on Kolatkar's works, identifying associations with Andy Warhol and John Cage. Even though Kolatkar might not have directly engaged with Warhol and Cage, Mehrotra claims, he embodied 'the spirit of the age' (22). In 'What is an Indian Poem', Mehrotra yet again stresses how Kolatkar drew from 'a multiplicity of literary traditions'; his Indianness was defined not by exclusivity but by an ability to navigate different traditions (273-4). King and Mehrotra both identify the experimentation and multiplicitous influences in Kolatkar's work. For King, the source of Kolatkar's experimentalism is his alienation from reality. Mehrotra locates Kolatkar in world literary traditions, with an ability to transcend limitations imposed by geography or (national) identity-related-rhetoric.[6] They both identify Kolatkar's unique and significant space in the Indian English literary canon, inviting further criticism of his works.

Laetitia Zecchini's book-length study, *Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism in India: Moving Lines*, explores the significant intersection of modernism and postcolonialism in Kolatkar's work. Although Zecchini provides an astute reading of Kolatkar's poetry, her work hastily represents Kolatkar's postcolonialism as 'interstitial paradigm of in-betweenness, which challenges fixed identities and locations, signals both a 'beyond' and an itinerary' (*Arun Kolatkar and Literary Modernism* 3-4). Her criticism is sometimes derived from authors' self-aggrandising or self-flagellating narratives and is not always grounded in close reading; for instance, Zecchini's essay, 'Translation as Literary Activism: On Invisibility and Exposure, Arun Kolatkar and the Little Magazine

[6] Also see Mehrotra's 'The Writer as Tramp: Arun Kolatkar', 'On Poetic Imagination' and 'A Kolatkar Notebook'. In these essays Mehrotra associates Kolatkar's work's transgressive potential with authors from across the world, including a nineteenth century Italian poet, Gioachino Raimondo Belli, Ted Hughes, Thom Gunn, an Australian author, Gerald Murnane, among others.

‘Conspiracy’’, associates fiction writing with visibility and poetry with ‘anonymity’; she calls Kolatkar and his contemporaries’ work as part of a little magazine ‘conspiracy’ where they carried out ‘anti-commercial, underground creativity’ (n.p.). Zecchini over-stresses the rhetoric of the postcolonial author as the subject who is writing back and operating in underground networks. Emma Bird’s analysis of Kolatkar’s *Jejuri* also situates the collection in the anti-interpretive category as she explains that ‘Kolatkar’s use of form and language compels the reader to renegotiate his or her position in relation to the text’ (‘Re-reading Postcolonial Poetry’ 232). Zecchini and Bird’s analysis of Kolatkar’s works identify his significant position of liminality but do not assess specific social and historical circumstances that lead to Kolatkar’s hybrid expressions.

In contrast to Zecchini and Bird, Rajeev S. Patke’s study exhibits closer awareness of the political and ideological underpinnings in Kolatkar’s poetry. Patke traces how Kolatkar ‘deploys a surreal politics to grapple with an internalised disenchantment with tradition’ (*Postcolonial Poetry in English* 197). Patke associates Kolatkar’s adaptation of modernism, or what he identifies as his postmodernism, with his intention to oppose internalised colonialism which manifests in Brahmanical practices. Anjali Nerlekar’s study of Kolatkar does an equally thorough job of retrieving the ideological aspects of Kolatkar and his contemporaries’ poetry that prompt their modernist experimentation. Her work builds significant connections between Indian modernist poetry and other cultural movements unfolding in India, including the global little magazine and Dalit realism; she assesses how the modernist authors ‘wove the social and historical moment into the literary content and form of *sathottari* literature’ (*Bombay Modern* 35). Nerlekar’s recent article, ‘The LCD (Lowest Common Denominator) of Language: The Materialist Poetry of Arun Kolatkar and R.K. Joshi (2020)’, identifies the means through which the poets (Kolatkar and Joshi) express their intention of inserting the colloquial in Marathi language poetry and resist the accepted standard Marathi. Following Patke and

Nerlekar's example, the thesis examines the political connotations attached to specific formal and thematic aspects of Kolatkar's poetry.

Mahon, like Kolatkar, has occupied a significant position in the canon. Edna Longley's New Criticism, as mentioned earlier, ascribes him a place outside the political. In *Poetry in the Wars*, Longley identifies adherence to form and an anti-utilitarian stance in the poetry of Northern Irish writers (170-1). However, Longley's position eventually alters; in her 2005 essay, 'Altering the Past': Northern Irish Poetry and Modern Canons', she writes, 'Poetry is itself political' (1) and identifies Mahon and Longley's poetry as 'a fragile stay against modern and human confusions' (6). Fran Brearton gives an account of Mahon, Michael Longley and Douglas Dunn's friendship which fostered 'a competitive and critical dialogue that help[ed] bring the mature poetic voice into being' in the 1960s and 70s. By assessing the exchanges between the poets, Brearton traces a shared 'metaphysical unease in which all poetry of lasting value has its source' (265). Along the same lines as Edna Longley, Brearton identifies a concern in Mahon and his contemporaries with 'poetic and not national identities' which could 'cut across large-scale solidarities to become emblematic of future possibility' (268). Longley and Brearton's observation of Mahon and Longley's tendencies to not be subsumed by nationalist narratives and create transnational poetic identities provide a significant impetus to the thesis.

Stephen Enniss's book-length biography of Mahon provides a thorough account of Mahon's life events and how they translate in his poetry; the book invited negative reviews from reviewers for representing his life in a negative light.[7] However, the biography rigorously traces how loss and suffering in Mahon's life influence his art. Enniss identifies Mahon's poetry as a means of self-healing: 'Mahon's best poems are

[7] See 'After the Titanic: A Life of Derek Mahon: Poet's Life Forcibly Framed' by John McAuliffe.

those that put suffering to constructive use, those that probe his past of fracture and of loss while working through that human condition towards some longed-for recovery.' (5). Enniss's study exaggerates the rhetoric of 'suffering leads to art' and does not pay enough attention to the critique and clarity of vision in Mahon's work. In comparison, Hugh Haughton's book-length criticism, published in 2006, provides a very comprehensive analysis of the themes, allusions and formal elements in Mahon's works. Haughton's book maps Mahon's 'intellectual journey from his first to [then] most recent book' (1). Haughton observes the resistance to violence and expressions of exile and homecoming in Mahon's work.

While Mahon and Koltakar's works have been individually studied, a comparative work linking the poets with other postcolonial poets has not been done. The thesis studies under-researched aspects of their poetry—paratextual and contextual networks, visions and perspectives, mythical reworkings, ironic and humorous underpinnings—that oppose colonialism and neo-colonialism in their respective countries, environmental degradation and other socio-historical developments. Unlike Zecchini and Bird, the thesis does not merely categorise Kolatkar's writing as 'postcolonial', exhibiting 'hybridity', but studies emphatic expressions of opposing social injustices.[8] Although Mahon's work has been identified as 'apolitical' and humanist in nature, the thesis foregrounds transgressive elements in his works that have often been overlooked. While Haughton's analysis has highlighted essential means through which Mahon's work poses resistance to regressive political ideologies, the thesis studies neglected thematic and formal aspects of Mahon's poetry that engage with history and alterity. In addition, by juxtaposing Indian and Irish cultural and historical contexts, I highlight the similarities in the poets' aspirations from the Global South and the Global North.

[8] The definition of Postcolonialism, as propounded by Homi Bhabha, which provides theoretical support to Bird and Zechinni's analysis has been questioned and reimagined; see also, Chapter-2.

I employ theoretical frames borrowed from New Historicist and Cultural Materialist critics. In exploring the relationship between literature and history, I acknowledge that literature is not merely a medium for reflecting historical knowledge, but that literature and history are intertwined; in the words of Jean Howard, 'literature is an agent in constructing a culture's sense of reality'(25). Taking a New Historicist stance, the thesis retrieves the ideological leanings of the authors and the political manoeuvres undertaken in the text. It also adopts a Cultural Materialist approach that identifies texts as performing 'a material function within contemporary power structures' (Brannigan 9). The poetic texts' resistance to power structures, therefore, is studied through the study of paratextual (visuality of texts and the architecture of the page) and contextual codes (indices, acknowledgements and prefaces). This provides a deeper understanding of how texts interact with socio-historical contexts.[9] The primary emphasis of the thesis is on identifying the texts' postcolonial politics where texts emphatically counter regressive politics, perpetuation of inequalities and social injustices. In the final chapters of the thesis, the focus has remained on retrieving texts' transgressions and intentions to critique aspects of twentieth and twenty-first-century history through the use of highly intertextual and allusive poetics as well as through humorous undermining of regressive belief systems.

The central aim of the thesis is to retrieve modernist thematic and formal elements and assess their transgressive potential in response to mid to late twentieth century and twenty first century historical reality in India, Ireland and beyond. As David Ayers writes, modernist themes include 'nature of selfhood and consciousness, the autonomy of language, the role of the art and of the artist, the nature of the industrial world, and the alienation of gendered existence from a set of concerns which manifest themselves across

[9] The thesis has taken the cultural materialist approach taken by textual theorists like Jerome J. McGann in *The Textual Condition* and by George Bornstein in *Material Modernism*. For a detailed description of textual theory, used in the thesis, see Chapter-2.

a range of works and authors' (x). These broad modernist themes are adopted and adapted in the poets' works. In addition, owing to the plurality of material in what constitutes modernism, there are certain continuities of romanticist themes, such as representation of the sublime and artists' alienation, as exemplified in Chapter-3. The nomenclature, 'late modernism', is deemed appropriate to categorise the poets' works because of the temporally belated return to the modernist themes as well as ideological revision of modernist stance, evident in self-conscious departure from regressive belief systems sometimes harboured by the modernists; for instance, in 'Alien Nation' in Hudson Letter, Mahon criticises Pound and his association of usury and greed with individuals from the 'third world', whom Napoleon, as quoted by Pound, called the 'Fifth element; mud' (*THL* 62). Despite such regressive tendencies witnessed in the works of their modernist predecessors, transgressive elements of their works are revived; these include the focus on the now, reinterpretation and rewriting of the past, occupation of liminal positions. Their late modernist poetics and politics, I argue, support their postcolonial commitment to address regressive politics and economic inequalities in India, Ireland and elsewhere.

In defining the early bearings in the poets' works, I use the term 'postmodernism', strictly in the Lyotardian sense, who observes an unyielding search for modes of address in certain works, despite the acknowledgement of the inability to completely comprehend reality. In Lyotard's conception, postmodernism refers to formal dynamics that operate in specific authors' works. According to Lyotard, while modernists are preoccupied with the 'powerlessness of the faculty of presentation', postmodernists focus on the 'power of faculty to conceive' the 'inhumanity' of contemporary existence (81). The poets' early works are marked by a modernist unease that is actively addressed through their experimental poetics and vantage points. Nevertheless, 'late modernism' is the term more actively employed due to the temporal and ideological connotations attached to it, as discussed above.

Chapter-1 studies the early works of Mahon and Kolatkar, which appeared in little magazines, and understands how they struggled to establish their poetic identities in the literary scenes in Dublin and Bombay,[10] respectively. The chapter argues that the poets, searching for correct modes of expression, negotiate and revamp the literary space provided by small presses in Ireland and India. It assesses how the physical infrastructure of magazines and the cultural context inhibited or supported the poets' ideological aims to represent and critique certain regressive elements in the literary world and beyond. It provides a new and historical study of poets' early works and how they were conceived as results of active interaction with the cultural contexts of the 1960s and 70s Bombay and Dublin.

Chapter-2 assesses visions and perspectives in Mahon's *Lives* (1972), *The Snow Party* (1975) and *Courtyards in Delft* (1981) and Kolatkar's *Jejuri* (1974). It focuses on the collections written after violent conflicts in Ireland and after the beginnings of language and religious-based antagonism in India. I argue that the poets respond to violent histories of nation-making in their respective countries by conceiving similar poetic perspectives. I assess how the poets' works construct a sense of immediacy and nowness and how they oppose linear, genealogical and monolithic accounts of history. The chapter studies how the poets defamiliarise the present to ethically engage the readers in the process of criticising specific historical phenomena; for instance, Kolatkar's alienated individuals' perspective on rural caste hierarchies allow readers to identify the absurdity in perpetuation of caste-based inequalities and Mahon's disinterested viewers' perspective on the Troubles and sectarian violence in *Lives* lead to a significant critique

[10] I have used 'Bombay' instead of Mumbai in the thesis because of my own belief that there should be an acceptance of place names that were retained for several decades after the country's independence. The desire to look for 'authentic' and native alternatives to former colonial city names is, in my opinion, dangerous and incognizant of the cultural diversity in India. Imposition of any language identity or dialect will isolate other language groups; for instance, the intention to impose Marathi identity in Bombay led to the renaming of the city. In this new scenario, Anglophone communities, like Parsis and Anglo-Indians, are subject to marginalisation.

of civil strife, emerging from speaker's blunt recognition of atavism and regressive beliefs.

Chapter-3 studies allusion and intertextuality in the late collections of Mahon and Kolatkar—*The Hudson Letter* (1995), *Harbour Lights* (2005), *Life on Earth* (2008), *An Autumn Wind* (2010), *Kala Ghoda Poems* (2004) and *Sarpa Satra* (2004). It begins by assessing the poets' early translations in little magazines to understand the poets' relationship with pre-existing literary works. I argue that the poets, while translating, seek inspiration from those aspects of the authors' works that support their own poetic ideologies; for instance, Kolatkar draws on Tukaram's ability to astonish, and Mahon borrows Charles Baudelaire's psychedelic sensibility while addressing the modern cosmopolis. I further assess the poets' use of intertextuality. Instead of celebrating the 'plurality' in the poets' works, I argue that the poets domesticate specific formal influences and mythological elements from pre-existent oral and written cultures to create an emphatic critique of the late twentieth and early twenty-first-century phenomena of capitalist determinism, neo-imperialism, and the perpetuation violence against specific communities.

The final chapter focuses on play and irony in the poets' entire oeuvre. It assesses how the poets employ elements of play—'rhythmical or symmetrical arrangements of language, the hitting of the mark by rhyme or assonance, the deliberate disguising of the sense, the artificial and artful construction of phrases'—to engage the readers in their postcolonial critique of social injustices prevalent in their countries and beyond (Huizinga 132). It understands how the poets employ irony in intellectually stimulating ways and allow their readers to identify regressive tendencies, such as narcissism and lack of empathy, that perpetuate conflicts within societies. It also assesses the poets' use of personas—Gopal Singh (Mahon) and Jaratkaru (Kolatkar), while ironising aspects of

history, that allows them to gain new perspectives and overcome the limitations of their own subjectivity.

CHAPTER ONE

Establishing Identities: Reading Early Published Poems of Mahon and Kolatkar

Stephen Dedalus famously acknowledged that the shortest way to Tara was via Holyhead, implying that to reach the core of the Irish experience, one needs to go elsewhere. Although the claim primarily refers to the existence of Irish diaspora and Joyce's own feeling of permanent expatriation, Seamus Heaney, in 'The Impact of Translation', draws inspiration from this statement to lay out a path for Anglophone modernisms: he explains that in order to question 'the insular, vernacular, British imagination' and identify 'the efficacy of poetry as a necessary and fundamental human act', British modernists needed to draw inspiration from 'Warsaw and Prague' (40-41). Meanwhile, in India, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra stresses the significance of visiting other places while also portraying his immediate surroundings. He states, in the introduction to his recent collection of poems, 'My subjects didn't lie in England, France, or the United States, but I had to make a detour to those places, through their literatures, to realise, first, that my subjects lay nearer home, if not at home, and, second, to find a language in which to write about them'('Author's Note' xix). Behind Heaney's intent to draw inspiration from Eastern European literary traditions and Mehrotra's need to travel elsewhere, there is a desire to break away from the dominant literary trends in the cultures that the poets supposedly belong to. Heaney acknowledges Eastern European cultures as a way of escaping the shadow cast on him and his contemporaries by the British canon and the cultural trends from the Republic of Ireland.[11] At the same time, the Indian English late modernist poets also went elsewhere—'England, France, United States'—to not be subsumed by the orthodoxies of the preceding generation of poets ('Author's Note' xix).

[11] The idea has been expressed by several Irish literary studies critics. Heather Clark in her study of the Ulster renaissance, spanning from 1962 to 1972 articulates this idea (12).

Derek Mahon and Arun Kolatkar, like other poets of their generation, built a literary stature in the respective presence of more dominant British literary culture and Indian nationalist literary currents.[12] The poems that I intend to study have elements of what Jean Francois Lyotard would call postmodern literature in their portrayal of contemporaneity. According to Lyotard, in the face of capitalism, objects are automatically derialised and, instead of returning to realism, writers should strive to represent their dissociative reality. In Lyotard's conception, postmodernism is not posterior to modernism; unlike in modernism, the emphasis in postmodernist works is not placed upon the 'powerlessness of the faculty of presentation' but on the 'power of faculty to conceive' the 'inhumanity' of contemporary existence. In Lyotard's words:

> The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (81)

The denial of 'the solace of good forms' to the audience would facilitate their radical participation in meaning delineation. Although linguists have suggested that the nature of all interactions, especially those using figurative language, is dialogic, post-modernist authors create more aggressive possibilities for readers' participation by more urgently and emphatically revising the existing modes of address. Seamus Heaney's constant enactments of his evasions in the portrayal of violence, Derek Mahon's appropriation of

[12] As Bruce King explains, certain regional writers in post-independence India 'demanded renaissance of the cultures of pre-colonial languages of India' (1). Mehrotra, in his essay, 'The Emperor Has No Clothes', criticises the likes of R. Parthasarthy who ask for a genealogical model in inheritance of languages implying that languages are inherited from birth. However, according to Mehrotra, in order to delineate one's experience in a language, the author need not have inherited it from his predecessors. Each iteration is an act of translation of the feeling and, therefore, it is not appropriate to idealise articulation in regional languages over articulation in English language.

Swiftian dialectics while addressing reality, Arun Kolatkar's assortment of the sublimity of everyday objects and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's portrayal of 'the sense of being in transit' by challenging tense and pronoun consistency exemplify explicit departures from particularly prescriptive language and movement towards the conception of a more dialogic poetics. In their works, one witnesses a refusal to use familiar categories to make sense of the existing reality and the intent to search for rules and conventions without any prior knowledge of the ends (as desired by the scientific method or by the realists).

Lyotard, concerning literary techniques, states that a postmodern artist is 'in the position of a philosopher' and does not adhere to pre-established rules but works 'without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*' (81). The rules that regulate the creation of poetics are not prescriptive but are conceived alongside the event of creation of poetry. The writing aims to develop techniques or means for the representation of contemporaneity that would challenge the existent grand narratives. Heaney's desire to rejuvenate the language by visiting Warsaw and Prague and Mehrotra's intent to draw inspiration from elsewhere come from the recognition of incongruence between the existing reality and the modes available for its representation; the heterogeneity in the techniques appropriated by Heaney and his contemporaries as well as Mehrotra and his contemporaries exude the struggle to look for modes of representation for their social and political contexts.

The Irish and Indian late modernists often associated themselves with poetic movements, but in the quest to create unorthodox poetics, they evolved their idiosyncratic styles. Although Mahon has been associated with the Northern Irish Renaissance or the Ulster Renaissance, he first appeared on the literary scene of the 1960s Bohemian Dublin. Mahon writes of that period, 'what we had then— Brendan, Rudi, Michael 'n' Edna, Deborah de Vere White and the late, still unappreciated Ronnie Wathen— was time and leisure to make our first mistakes and perhaps to learn from them. Our four undergraduate

years [...] developed in us a slower pace of thought (too slow perhaps), a respect for reverie and the *long durée*, which is one of the luxuries of artistic life' ('A Ghostly Rumble Among the Drums' 239-40). The influence of those who wrote with him, some of whom he mentions above— Brendan Kennelly, Rudi Holzapfel, Michael Longley, Edna Longley, and de Vere White— are apparent in his work. He also connected with his literary predecessors — Patrick Kavanagh, Austin Clarke and Thomas Kinsella — whose presence in the Dublin literary scene was perceptible on his arrival.[13] The scene gave him the freedom to explore literary forms, but Mahon was conscious of the need to resist the expectations of, for example, Rudi Holzapfel, that he would adhere to Irish lyric traditions.[14] Mahon's association with the Ulster Renaissance and the 'Group' formed by Philip Hobsbaum was not deep-rooted either. Mahon regularly contributed to the Group's literary magazine, *The Honest Ulsterman*, and tapped into its publishing networks,[15] but he resisted complete association with it. In a letter to the *Irish Times* in 1982, Mahon wrote that he went to one meeting of the Ulster Group and 'found the atmosphere disagreeably combative and never went again' (Haughton 21). In India, while getting published, Kolatkar associated with Indian English poets and Bombay poets— Chitre, Mehrotra and Jussawalla.[16] He mirrored aspects of their style but also looked for inspiration from indigenous and transnational poetic trends.[17] In an interview with Eunice de Souza, Kolatkar said, 'I've never stopped myself to ask myself whether I am an Indian

[13] The chapter will assess how the conversations with Mahon's contemporaries and predecessors shaped his style.
[14] This shall be elaborated upon later. Rudi Holzapfel's edited issue of *Icarus* aimed to define a literary movement that derived from the Irish lyric tradition but Mahon's own work did not subsume to those expectations.
[15] The idea has been developed by Heather Clark in her book *The Ulster Renaissance: Poetry in Belfast 1962-1972* (2). She explains how belonging to the Ulster group provided the poets access to publishers in London.
[16] Kolatkar was a member of Clearing House, a poet's cooperative publishing venture. The other main members of the collective were Adil Jussawalla, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and Gieve Patel. For further information on Clearing House, see Jerry Pinto's 'The Blue Rexine Archive: A Short History of Clearing House, A Poets' Cooperative of the 1970s'.
[17] This idea is further developed in the third chapter.

poet or not. [...] You could call me a Brahmin poet, or a graphic artist who is also a poet, or an advertising man who is a poet. [...] I see no particular way in which I learn something about myself in being categorized in any of these ways' (de Souza 22). It is evident that Kolatkar and Mahon, upholding their postmodern stance, did not allow established criteria to define their works but took several detours to address the immediate reality in their respective countries.

In order to account for the heterodoxy of Mahon and Kolatkar's early works, I shall study how the poets occupied and negotiated the literary contexts and publishing cultures of the poetic movements surrounding them in the early stages of their poetic careers. I will employ the methods postulated by book theorists such as Jerome J. McGann and George Bornstein.[18] McGann explains that philology and hermeneutic studies of literature have analysed only the verbal elements of the works, which form one level of text, and do not account for the acts of reception of literary works. Such analysis is lacking because, according to McGann, texts gain materiality only when they are received and enter the 'textual condition'(3).[19] Most reception theorists, like Paul De Man and Stanley Fish, identify that texts are subject to *aporias* of reading but often uphold 'the solitary 'reader', whose pursuit of meaning involves an activity of ceaseless metaphoric production' (McGann 6). There is a lack of acknowledgement of socio-historical events; McGann explains:

> Every text enters the world under determinate sociohistorical conditions, and while these conditions may and should be variously defined and imagined, they establish the horizon within which the life histories of different texts can play themselves out. (9)

[18] The theoretical framework from Bornstein and McGann has been employed by Anjali Nerlekar in her monograph on Kolatkar, Bombay Modern.

[19] McGann borrows this proposition from Jacques Derrida. Derrida suggested that the readings of texts are structurally and materially actuated as writings. Therefore, the socio-historical circumstances of the reader play a significant role in relegating materiality to the texts (quoted in McGann 8).

The ‘sociohistorical conditions’ in which texts are received have a significant role in determining the meaning of the texts. The texts’, especially poetic texts’, possible interpretations and their adherence or resistance to sociohistorical conditions can be properly understood by accounting for the levels of meaning contained in their verbal and non-verbal elements. The poetic language and visual appeal of Mahon’s and Kolatkar’s works evoked discomfort in their readers; these elements are designed based on their awareness of readers’ socio-historical circumstances. The authors re-examine the texts’ conventional thematic, formal and physical features to challenge specific sociohistorical circumstances, such as the perpetuation of violence and censorship, which might limit the readers to nihilism or intellectual stagnancy.

McGann postulates the framework where typographic, visual and contextual readings modulate and deepen the ‘textual condition’ and uncover the multifarious meanings manifest in a text. In a similar vein, George Bornstein states, ‘a literary text consists not only of words (its linguistic code) but also of semantic features of its material instantiations (its bibliographic code)’ (*Material Modernism* 6). The bibliographic code, according to Bornstein, includes ‘cover design, page layout or spacing’ and ‘prefaces, notes, dedications’ (*Material Modernism* 6). In addition to the bibliographic code, Bornstein explains that poets, through careful publishing decisions, strive to place their poetry in particular circulation networks, which would further allow for a particular reception of their works. Bornstein’s study of Jewish, African-American and Irish books in the 1920s shows that connections between the canon and minority cultures are lost when publication history is not taken into account. Therefore, one must consider what Bornstein calls the ‘contextual code’ of texts (*Material Modernism* 40). [20]

[20] Contextual code includes the names contained in the indices of the books. Bornstein explains that the contextual code is both paratextual, as it influences the composition of the book, but it is also linguistic, as it is composed of verbal elements. It would help retrieve the texts’ relationships with lesser-known authors and individuals from minority communities.

In this chapter, I will study the early publications of Kolatkar (and his contemporaries) and Mahon (and his contemporaries) for an exhaustive understanding of how the poets negotiated with the existing infrastructure of publishing and literary contexts to create more radical poetics, which would respond to the socio-historic events in their respective countries and beyond. The earliest publications are not the original or authentic versions of the poems (as suggested earlier, there is no authentic version of a text and a text is realised in the act of reading). However, editorial changes in subsequent productions of the texts create a possibility of significantly diminishing the text's connections with prevailing popular and ethnic cultural trends (Bernstein 9). As Bornstein explains:

> [...] much poetry originated in non-print form, most often as manuscript or oral performance, and that the material page is always already a translation of that act, one whose constructedness we should remember. And finally, the earlier material contexts remind us of the original political meaning of the poem in a way that is hard to recover merely from the linguistic code but that is very apparent from the bibliographic and material codes instead. (*Material Modernism* 23)

Bornstein acknowledges that each publication provides a version of the text, but at the same time, there is a need to register the 'continually shifting physicality of its texts and transmissions' (*Material Modernism* 1). Each transmission is what Bernstein defines as the 'performative event', and visiting the site and registering the social and contextual code of the text would facilitate the analysis of the transgressive potential of the works and their relationship with specific incidents in history (9).

As suggested earlier, all interaction is dialogic, and the meanings contained in verbal and non-verbal elements also gain materiality in the act of reception by the readers. However, just as certain verbal elements more emphatically create possibilities of interaction with the readers, specific bibliographic and publishing structures also create

possibilities for readers' critical participation. I shall study the poets' small press publications to understand how the poets adapt editing conventions, use distinct lineation, visuality and tactile appeal, and circulate their works across transnational networks (as opposed to enclosed nationalist networks) to ensure more engaged reception of their works. In order to assess the impact of the contextual code in facilitating or inhibiting conversations, I shall study the nature of literature that surrounded their works in the magazines. The poets often align with their literary predecessors and contemporaries but also evolve their individual modes of poetic address by opposing certain regressive trends upheld by some of those who inhabit the same literary context. It will become clear that this process undertaken by the poets was postmodern, in the Lyotardian sense, as the poets intended to emphatically challenge the societies' choices which found comfort in conventional poetic creations (lyrical, coherent and monolithic).

Socialising of the Texts: Mahon's Presence in Dublin

In their literary-critical and journalistic works, two Indian late modernist poets—Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and Adil Jussawalla—have identified a lack of English language presses in India and have expressed the intent to break away from dominant literary trends. In his 1981 essay 'Six Authors in Search of a Reader', while reflecting on his correspondences with Indian writers initiated since the mid 1960s, Jussawalla states that the writers 'have to depend on themselves or on one another to get their work published' (3). He identifies a common search for an audience in 'hostile, anti-literary, anti-intellectual surroundings' where 'a writer may succumb to despair or exaggerate the futility of his best efforts, if only to force himself to continue, to try harder' (8). In his essay, 'Kill That Nonsense Term', Jussawalla expresses his dissatisfaction with the term Indo-Anglian that attaches colonial legacy to individuals writing in English; he states, 'the English language press in India is deeply philistine and for more than a century has

snorted like a bull at the thought of English being used as anything 'artistic' (229). Despite his sarcasm, Jussawalla captures the hostility towards English language writers in India in the second half of the twentieth century. In 'The Emperor Has No Clothes' (1980), Mehrotra identifies the lack of existence of an actual literary tradition and states: 'We are not large or small, tough or brittle parts of a single, and what might have been unique literature; just a handful of writers with little except a peninsular location in common' (150). As the writers indicate, there is a constant submission to amnesia that mars Indian cultures, and the onus of archiving memory and publishing literary texts has often fallen to the Indian English writers themselves.

Although the Irish late modernist writers have not had to face neglect or anonymity, they have often had to confront the hegemonic influence of the British canon. Reflecting on the reception and publishing trends in the contemporary British culture, Richard Caddel and Peter Quartermain state that in mainstream literature, 'each poem is a closed, monolineal utterance, demanding little of the reader but passive consumption'; this literature, they state, includes 'a linear line of poets from Philip Larkin to Craig Raine and Simon Armitage, and encompassing their attendant 'collectives' (Movement, Martians, New Generation)' (xv). The Northern Irish writers have often existed in close proximity to this literature but have, nevertheless, resisted its hegemonic influence. Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon and Stewart Parker appeared as the 'New Voices' of the Penguin anthology by Lucie-Smit, *British Poetry Since 1945* (1970). Heaney, Mahon and Longley were also included in the anthology by Jeremy Robson, *Young British Poets*, which was published in 1971. Heaney was one of the poets in Michael Schmidt's *Eleven British Poets* from 1980. However, the writers are not only geographically apart from English writers, but the social orientation of their works also differentiates them from the insular British canon.

In the 1960s, 'a small press movement' began to emerge across the world. These small presses were often poets' or short story writers' privately owned ventures and produced little magazines and chapbooks.[21] When compared to established cultural centres like Paris, London and New York, Dublin and Bombay both had inchoate publishing cultures, with which Mahon and Kolatkar had to engage in seeking to disseminate their work. I shall briefly trace the history of 1960s and 70s small press productions that supported Mahon's and Kolatkar's early works. I intend to particularly assess how these productions struggle to publish novel and diverse content and employ visual and architectural elements of the books, along with language, to communicate with the readers. I further study how the magazines contain literary currents and counter-currents, which either facilitate or inhibit the poets' ideological intentions to engage with the phenomena of history and alterity. A study of Mahon's and Kolatkar's works that were conceived outside mainstream publishing will help uncover the struggle undertaken by the poets to challenge orthodoxies existing in cultures and societies.

It is significant to trace the history of small little magazines because they became a stage upon which literary dialogues were performed. Charles Bernstein's comments that poetry has been 'oddly romanticised as the activity of isolated individuals writing monologic lyrics' but is 'among the most social and socially responsive—dialogic—of contemporary art forms' (23) are relevant here. Bernstein maintains that poetry performance is helpful in 'bringing poets into contact with one another, in forming generational and cross-generational, cultural and cross-cultural, links, affinities, alliances, communities, scenes, networks, exchanges and the like' (22). The publications of the littles, like performance events, capture the moments of associations and discords in which poets' identities emerged. By studying how the texts were produced, one can,

[21] For more information on little magazines, see Eric Bulson's *Little Magazines: World Form*.

to an extent, approximate the intent of the poet in adapting particular forms and themes to the exclusion of others. The worldliness of the magazines, their openness towards including 'fledglings' and established authors, minimal editorial interventions and their ephemeral quality provided ground for the fruition of modernist and postmodernist poets' talents.[22]

Parallel to the little magazine movements, in Dublin in the 1960s, there were significant changes in the social and economic domain in Ireland — modernisation of the economy under Seán Lemass, inward foreign investment, initiation of educational and social policy reform and the expanding influence of television and visual media. Terence Brown explains that Irish literary modernisation was driven by the emergence of a new Irish reality during the 1960s, which was 'ambiguous, transitional, increasingly urban or suburban' and averse to sentimentality. In response to these changes, Brown suggests that the poet 'sought significance in immediacy of the self rather than in mediated political and historical experience or in any kind of coherent philosophy' (303). As recorded by Hugh Haughton, 'People had a sense that the long-delayed modernization of Ireland was under way, as, after the culturally insular middle of the century, the country began to open up to outside forces' (21-2). One expression of this new openness was the 1967 Rosc exhibition of Modern Art, described by Dorothy Walker as the 'first major onslaught of international art on an unsuspecting Irish republic' (qtd. in Haughton 22).

The changing social context of the 1960s provided new possibilities to poets and novelists as well as editors and publishers; Brown writes, 'a burgeoning publishing industry provided opportunities to Irish writers which even ten years earlier had not existed' (302). In Dublin, the attempts to modernise were evident in the format and content of little magazines, many of which appeared or were re-established in the 1960s.

[22] This idea will be developed in the second and third sections of the chapter.

The Dublin Magazine, founded in 1923 by Seumas O'Sullivan, reappeared as *The Dubliner* in 1961, edited by an American, Donald Carroll. The Trinity College magazine, *Icarus*, which was founded in 1950, gained a rather original fervour in the 1960s.[23] *Poetry Ireland* was also reborn in 1962 under the editorship of John Jordan. Ireland's literary magazines mirrored some of the conventions of the small press movements, which gained global momentum in the 1960s. Mahon engaged in the publishing scene by contributing his poems and critical works to these magazines; I shall study how Mahon's postmodernism evolved as he responded to literary currents and counter-currents in these magazines—aestheticism versus worldliness and Irish lyricism versus literary experimentation. His works found an apt platform in small press publications, which were relatively free from the censorship imposed by the gatekeepers of the larger publishing houses.

Mahon's earliest works appeared in *Icarus* and *The Dubliner*, which were aiming to produce topical content by responding to cultural developments elsewhere in the world. *Icarus* occasionally provided platforms to the Dublin literati and welcomed contributions from writers worldwide.[24] Its primary aim was to support undergraduate writing in Trinity College Dublin. The demographics of the University's undergraduates (in the 1950s, the University attracted students from across the world) allowed diverse cultures to find expression on the pages of *Icarus*.[25] *The Dubliner*, while giving a platform for expression

[23] Bruce Arnold's editorial and Alec Reid's essay 'One Man's Icarus' in the March 1960 edition of Icarus, reflected on the quality of writing included in Icarus in the previous decade. They declared their resolve to savour the ambitiousness in the magazine's content. Reid upheld the magazine's capability of 'modification and development'. See Bruce Arnold's 'Editorial' and Alec Reid's 'One Man's Icarus' in Icarus 30 (March 1960), 1-2 and 10-13. This declaration to modify and improvise the content of the magazine to create 'better value for money' was broadly followed by inclusion of more cerebral works; these included poems by now acclaimed writers like Mahon and Michael Longley, some of these will be further discussed in the paper.

[24] This observation is based on the study of 'List of Contributors' and the biographies provided in the final pages of Icarus's 1960s issues. For instance, the December, 1962 issue of Icarus's 'Notes on Contributors' page highlighted the geographical range of the list of contributors: 'Richard Eckersley: […] studies typography and design in London […] Michael Gilmour: […] now resident in England […] Ranald Graham: The first Scottish hipster […] Tracy Thompson […] lives in San Francisco.' See 'Notes on Contributors', Icarus 38.

[25] This observation is also based on the 'List of Contributors' of *Icarus*, studied from the 1960s to 1980s.

to the literary personnel in the city, also intended to widen the scope of Irish literature. The first editorial announced the magazine's aim, which was to achieve 'a certain *continuity* based on the simultaneous presentation of the work of Irish, British and American writers and critics' (Nov.-Dec. 1961 2). The magazine aimed to bring awareness in relation to the literary developments in all English speaking countries. In its July-August 1962 editorial, *The Dubliner,* then edited by Bruce Arnold, aligned with other little magazines stating that it intended to provide 'a gymnasium for creative impulse' among writers and young poets and also serve as 'a bridgehead between Ireland and the world'. It declared its intent to take further the project of most littles, which remained attached to a fledgling concept, and act as 'a Janus to Irish writing' (4). John Jordan, who edited *Poetry Ireland*'s eight issues, beginning in 1962, declared that although the magazine was 'concerned with the publication of the best available verse by Irish poets or of special Irish interest', but also wished to 'include verse outside these categories including translation' (Editorial, Autumn 1962 3). Adhering to the aims, *Poetry Ireland* included very diverse poetic content, juxtaposing works by established poets such as Kavanagh and Clarke with works by then emerging poets such as Mahon and Longley.

By connecting with cultures elsewhere in the world, little magazines struggled to reinvigorate Irish writing; Mahon's literary-critical writing echoed this sentiment; he expressed the desire to make literature more historically responsive. He often alluded to the Indian modernist poet Dom Moraes.[26] In the editorial of the December 1962 issue of *Icarus*, Mahon wrote that when faced with the threat of a nuclear war, Moraes chose to 'remain uncommitted, exploring first principles of experience' (1). In contrast, Mahon explains, Christopher Logue 'align[ed] his talents with a militant political ideology (in

[26] Mahon's introduction to Dom Moraes must have been through *Penguin Modern Poets* 2, published in 1962. The anthology featured Kingsley Amis, Dom Moraes and Peter Porter.

effect, the Left), opposing the mounting probability (so Bertrand Russell would contend) of nuclear war' (1). Mahon synthesised Moraes and Logue's position to imagine composition of literary works that would prefer 'the application of such rigorous standards [purist aestheticism] that [Robert] Graves has set himself, and the absorption of such material as the H bomb and the East-West ideological conflict' (3). Further, in the editorial, similar to Heaney's comment about rejuvenating Anglophone poetry, Mahon stated that revolution could not be sustained in English speaking cultures because of the nature of English reader, who is scared of words such as 'oppression', 'slum', 'bomb' or 'freedom'; whereas, Brecht or the French Communists of the Resistance managed to conceive revolutionary literature (2). Mahon's editorial seemed to harbour specific influences from Dom Moraes, like some other Indian late modernists, who explored the 'first principles' and often hailed sensory experiences while addressing reality. At the same time, he envisioned a revolutionary ethos in English language poetry and, in his editorial, he proposed that *Icarus*'s contributors pioneer the rebellion.

The little magazines not only diversified the poetic content but also contained reflections on the general cultural ethos of Dublin. Instead of the Irish literary canon, *The Dubliner* dedicated itself to Dublin as a cultural entity that was taking a modern and eclectic turn in the 1960s. The magazine's cover featured images of Irish architectural structures; the Spring 1964 (Figure 1) issue contained a line drawing of the Irish Customs House; the Autumn 1964 edition, and several issues published after that, displayed line-drawings of sculptures of personification of River Liffey from the Customs House in Dublin.

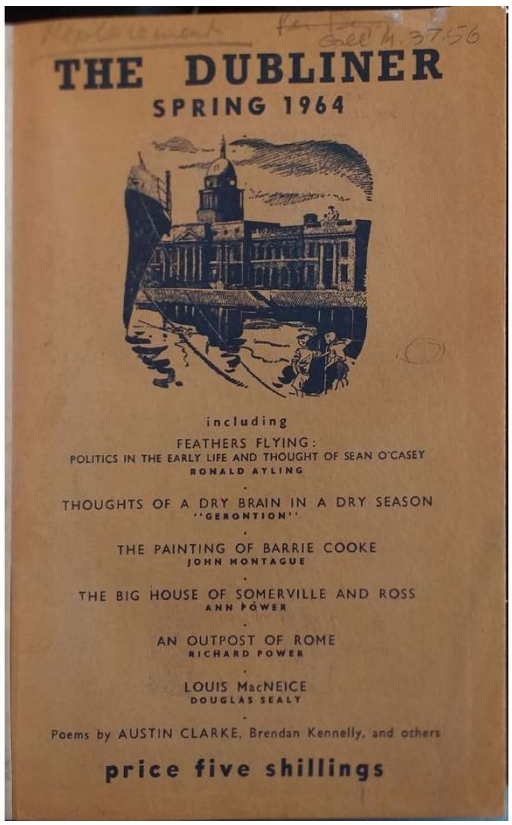


Image 1: Cover page of *The Dubliner*, Spring 1964 issue

The magazine carried works and criticism of contemporary Irish artists like Derek Hill, Michael Jacob[27] and Jack B Yeats[28]. Arnold explains:

> It is insufficient, living in Dublin, to be insular: one is at the bridgehead between Ireland and the world. Nor may one be too cosmopolitan. There is only one standard of excellence of which we are sometimes painfully and sometimes, as in the case of Irish painting, jubilantly aware. To reach it our writers must see themselves and be seen, against the harshest, the universal light. For this reason we direct ourselves both ways: to England, America, Canada, France, Australia, to present for appreciation and criticism of Irish writing; inwards, to keep a standard of writing

[27] Michael Jacob was a Dublin artist whose portfolio of photographs was published in the Summer 1963 issue of *the Dubliner*. The portfolio combined the regular portraits of Dublin dwellers with the writings about the city by James Stephens, James Joyce and Louis MacNeice.

[28] Instead of writing about Jack B. Yeats's fine art, which most of the critics did, the magazine's Summer 1963 issue carried an article on Jack B. Yeats's rather lesser-known illustration work. The piece was written by Ian Dunlop.

> in Ireland as we are able within the limitations imposed by our material and our wealth. (*sic* Editorial July-August 1962 4)

Arnold esteemed Dublin's nascent cosmopolitanism of the 1960s and its burgeoning art scene and, by drawing inspiration from other countries, 'England, America, Canada, France, Australia', he intended to widen the scope of Irish writing. The magazine's dedication to other modern arts, along with literature, allowed for a consolidation of visual and verbal elements in archiving the moments of modernity. While some of the Irish artists would have directly influenced Mahon's style, like Derek Hill, who portrayed 'stark simplicities of Ireland', the general movement beyond the mere verbal and literary in the magazines allowed him to reimagine the visual elements of poetry (Gibbon 40).

The Dubliner, with its focus on theatre, architecture and literary criticism, created an ideal platform to explore the interconnectedness of arts while addressing 1960s society. The magazine struggled to archive the contemporary literary and cultural milieu of the city. Its first issue's editor, Carroll was an American; in order to avoid 'immediate extinction', Carroll aimed to 'broaden [...] the scope of the magazine to include especial quality of each of as many other magazines as possible' (Nov.- Dec. 1961 2). Carroll's successor, Bruce Arnold (who began editing the journal from its second issue), while intending to maintain the eclectic outlook of the magazine, decided to give 'primary attention to Irish writing and Irish art' (Editorial March 1962 6). Arnold brought a sense of worldliness to the magazine by engaging with the immediate context in which it was produced. Under his editorship, the magazine included content with political impetus, like Frank O' Connor's speech on censorship which, initially delivered in Trinity College, Dublin, on February 14th, 1962, argued in favour of allowing the power of judgement of the morality of literature to rest with its audience; he proposed the motion that 'Irish censorship is insulting to Irish intelligence' (March 1962 39-40). The magazine also began to include a regular column titled, 'Plays and Controversies', which critiqued

Dublin's theatre scene and assessed the trends in Arts Council expenditure, which according to one of the critical pieces in the magazine 'prefer[ed] opera and ballet' to poetry (Mahon, 'Patrick Kavanagh' 8).[29] Such reflections on contemporary socio-political and artistic trends were quintessential features of little magazines. While the magazine's general intent to address topical issues urged a sense of historical awareness in the works of the contributors, its eclecticism allowed for various cultural influences to be incorporated in the writings.

While often little magazines in Ireland and elsewhere employed an editor, they flourished on the idea of minimal editorial intervention. *Icarus* employed a chairperson, but the editorship was circulated among the writers then contributing to the magazine in the university. This created possibilities for the adaptation and evolution of its conduct. The changing outlook of the magazine is sketched in its prefaces and annotations. It was formed with a rather nebulous remit: the epigraph of the first issue by Alec Reid and the title of the magazine reflected upon its ambition and its resolve to survive on minimal resources:

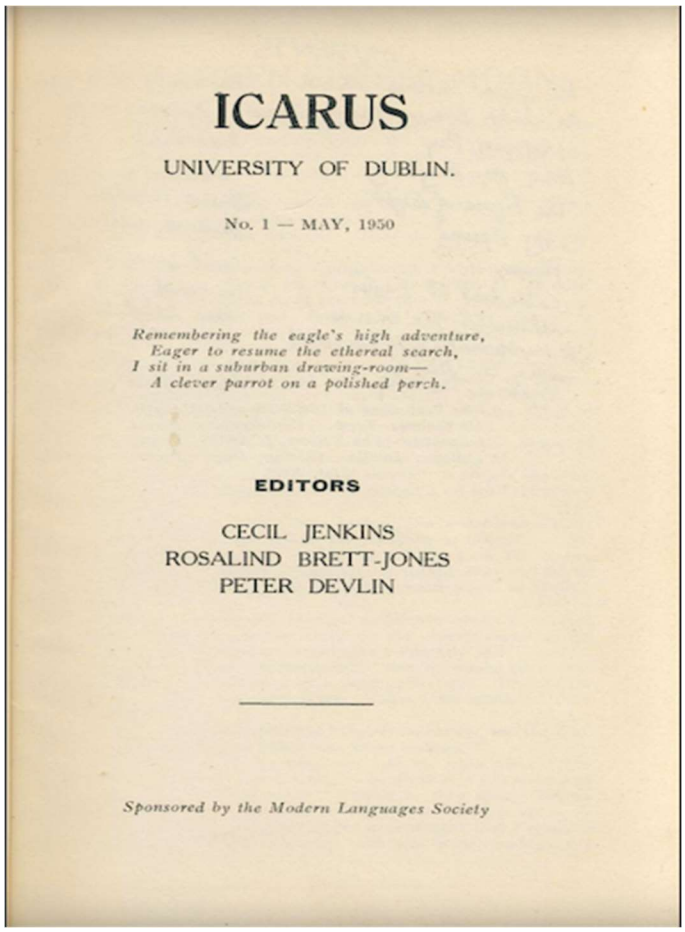
> Remembering the eagle's high adventure
> Eager to resume the ethereal search
> I sit in the suburban drawing room—
> A clever parrot on a polished perch. (May 1950)

[29] Despite the fact that the insufficiency of funds were often alluded to in the editorials and critical pieces of the magazine, and Arts Council's neglect referred to, the funds for *The Dubliner,* later *the Dublin Magazine,* often came from An Chomhairle Ealaion (The Arts Council).

While reflecting on the nature of the magazine's ambition, these also give a sense that literary culture in Dublin was still embryonic. This feeling of lack continued to exist for another decade in Dublin. The epigraph remained relevant in the 1960s; Stephen Enniss records that Reid read it out in his first lecture Mahon attended around 1960 (31). Bruce Arnold, in the editorial of *Icarus*'s March 1960 issue (Figure 2), also echoed Reid's expressions of uncertainty and the need to self-reflect:

> Dublin does not contain an intellectual intelligentsia; it is far too natural. Paris, London and New York all do, and these cities have been hothouses for the literary junk that will shortly be replaced by another generation, and another loose code of artistic values and fashions. But if Dublin is natural it is also robust; and literary robustness calls for stories that are such, and poetry that is neither a weak copy of a current mode, nor the uncontrolled outpourings of a tortured spirit. (1-2)

While Arnold recognised a dearth of erudition in submissions to *Icarus*, he celebrated the pioneering spirit and vigour in undergraduate writing. His assessment of writing in the magazine identified a lack of reliance on ongoing literary modality or mere presentation of 'uncontrolled outpourings of a tortured spirit'. He did not acknowledge the influence of established editors (of whom he was one) and of the institutional prestige of Trinity College upon the likely formal direction of the magazine but identified 'literary robustness' in undergraduate writing. Such connotations of a fledgling robustness and vigour attached (by editors like Arnold) to the magazine's content likely encouraged its contributors to reflect upon their literary styles rather than prescribing any particular school of literary thought.



ICARUS

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN.

No. 1 — MAY, 1950

Remembering the eagle's high adventure,
Eager to resume the ethereal search,
I sit in a suburban drawing-room—
A clever parrot on a polished perch.

EDITORS

CECIL JENKINS
ROSALIND BRETT-JONES
PETER DEVLIN

Sponsored by the Modern Languages Society

Image 2: Cover Page of *Icarus*, May 1950 issue.
(Reproduced with the permission of *Icarus*'s editors)

While Mahon mirrored the literary ideologies of some contributors, he also often dialectically conversed with them. In *Icarus*, in the 1960s, he confronted a conversation happening between the practitioners of the Irish lyric tradition, who bracketed out history and propaganda, and relatively undefined aesthetics which, according to the editors, categorised the undergraduate writing. In the March 1961 issue's editorial, Rudi Holzapfel, aimed to define an Irish lyric movement that was sprouting in Ireland. He stated:

Too much time has been spent raping the wrong end of the barren English muse (her effect on poetry in the last 20 years has been almost disastrous [...] (all one can

> possibly say here is that REALITY, about which the poet should, of course, be ultimately concerned is what you make it… why not make it good, beautiful?) [...] the 'new movement' [...] is a group of us concerned with love, society, nature and philosophy. (1)

Although Holzapfel's language, which declares independence from the British tradition, is misogynistic, it is also a spoof on the nationalist (originally Jacobite) tradition of seeing Ireland as the victim of rapist Britain. The desire in this editorial to counter the hegemonic influence of the British idiom is then manifested in the person's urge to 'realize certain philosophical necessities (one of which is God, or a God)' (*Icarus* March 1961 2). Other contributors to *Icarus* did not support the aestheticism, connected to spirituality, that Holzapfel intended to bolster. In the following editorial, Michael Longley supported Holzapfel's intent to promote new writings but critically addressed the beliefs of his predecessor on lyric unities. He protests, 'the poets who had no say in the matter may object to the imposition of such a straight [*sic*] jacket' and that it was 'premature and restrictive rather than liberating' for the writers to be associated with a Movement, with a 'capital M' (*Icarus* June 1961 1). The dialogues between the significance of inheritance and the establishment of individual talent, lyricism and historically aware poetics, formality and robustness provided the context for Mahon's emerging work.

Mahon's stance concerning aesthetics and politics becomes explicit in his editorial to the magazine's December 1962 issue. Written in the context of the Cuban crisis, the editorial states:

> There is something unexciting about a poet who is so unresponsive to the human climate of his time that he fails to absorb into his writing mind and nervous system the sensations— fear, suicidal exhilaration or simple complacency— of those around him. Conversely, we are not going to succumb unreservedly to a poem that is designed merely as a plectrum for the strings of nervous tensions. Rather, the

> poem should be the note, however discordant, struck by the spectrum of the medium on the sounding board of the poet's consciousness. (1)

Mahon defines an aesthetic that would be cognizant of history, and his poem in the edition, 'An Unborn Child', imagines himself in his mother's womb where 'certain mysteries are relayed' to him (19-20). His pre-maturity and disembodied existence prevent him from assuming the position of complete authority. In the same vein, Mahon kept looking for liminality throughout his career to address history and ensure that he captures what strikes his 'poetic consciousness' without making art completely propagandist.

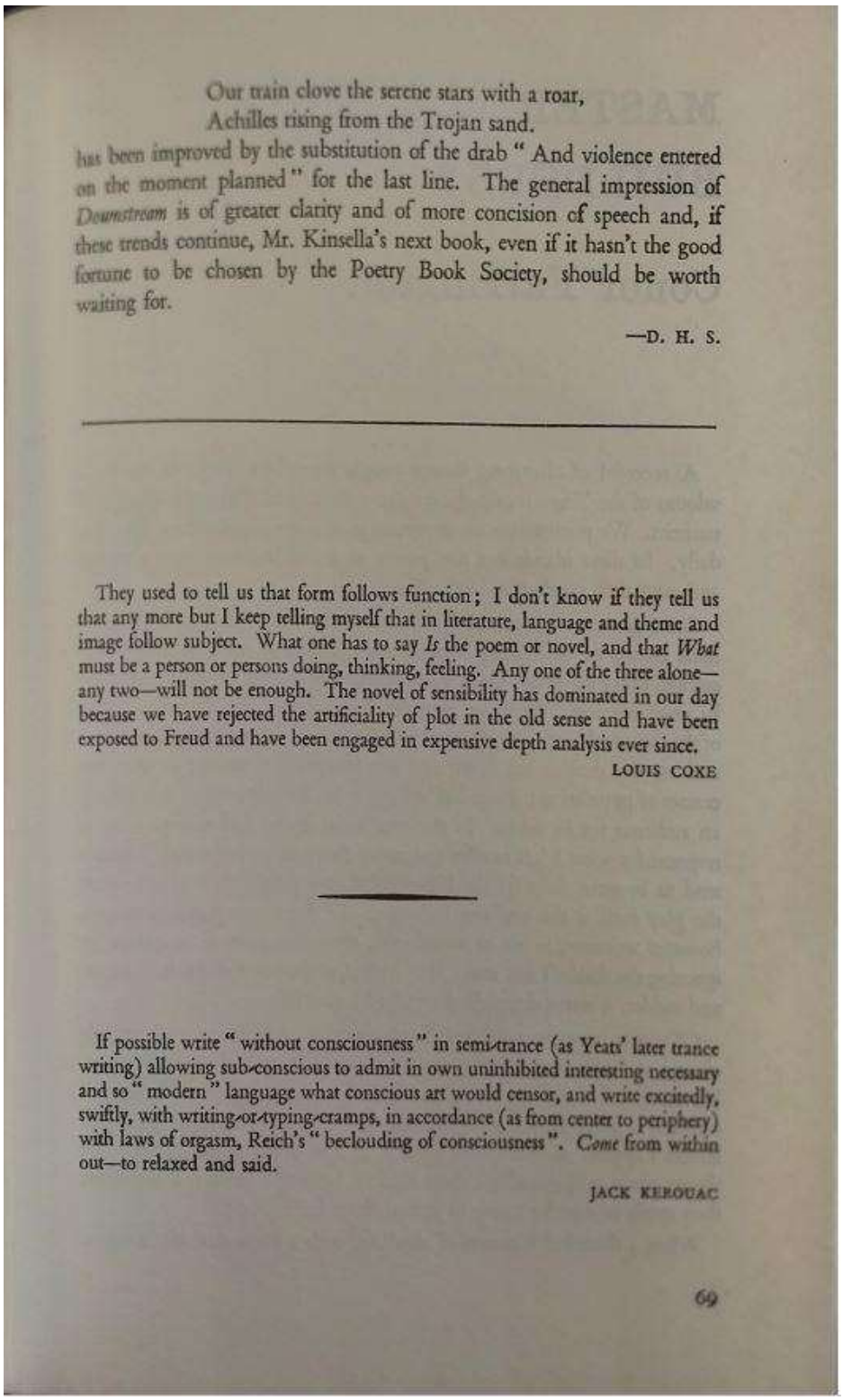
Reading Mahon's work in the context of the Cold War, along with his critical reflections, highlights the struggle he underwent in addressing international historical events and outgrowing the necessity to serve a lyric tradition. *Icarus* often contained moments of such transgression; its December 1960 edition, edited by Brendan Kennelly, printed a letter by Sean O'Casey to Victor Blease during the 'paper strike'. The letter stated:

> About your society; and all University lads and lasses, golden lads and lasses of the Community—why the hell do you all (and the English lads and lasses, too) keep peeping out from behind the bastions of your Universities? Come out in the streets to meet and get to know the workers. These are they who form the spearhead of Socialism' (17).

Mahon's intention to engage with politics and history was complemented by some other contributors' desire to allow immediate socio-political issues to be addressed in literary space.

The Dubliner (later *The Dublin Magazine*), like *Icarus*, held debates in relation to the revival of harmonious aesthetic values versus experimentation. River Carews and Timothy Brownlow's editorial in the Summer 1966 issue complained, 'the distortion we

are getting in much modern literature is the particularly objectionable one of concentrating on the darkness to the exclusion of the light' (6). The editorial further called for writings which would redeem modern individuals by providing 'the harmony of art' (6). However, Carews and Brownlow's predecessor, Bruce Arnold, was less prescriptive in relation to fostering harmonious aesthetic values and urged the contributors to address socio-political developments in Ireland. He expressed his scepticism towards simply restoring Irish values and idealising predecessors such as Yeats, claiming that 'Yeats is a great poet [...] at times he was a foolish man and at times wrote very bad poetry'. He wanted the literary critical works to appeal to the geographic context: 'Any criticism levelled at Yeats should find a more immediate renunciation, if there is one, here in his own city among his own people' (Editorial March 1962 5). In addition, as an editor of the Spring 1963 issue, Arnold implicitly advocated for avant-gardist experimentation with literary forms through a manoeuvre typical of the little magazines. He included two quotations by Louis Coxe and Jack Kerouac, both of which argued for the radical recreation of literary forms. Coxe's quote observed the growing domination of the 'novel of sensibility' after Freudianism exposed the artificiality of conventional plots. Jack Kerouac argued for writing ''without consciousness' in semi-trance [...] with laws of orgasm' (69). *The Dubliner* encompassed competing trends and, as stated in the first editorial of the magazine, the role of the editor, instead of promoting a school or an ideology, was to work towards 'configurations' which would reflect contemporary literary currents (November-December 1961 2).



Our train clove the serene stars with a roar,
Achilles rising from the Trojan sand.

has been improved by the substitution of the drab " And violence entered on the moment planned " for the last line. The general impression of *Downstream* is of greater clarity and of more concision of speech and, if these trends continue, Mr. Kinsella's next book, even if it hasn't the good fortune to be chosen by the Poetry Book Society, should be worth waiting for.

—D. H. S.

They used to tell us that form follows function; I don't know if they tell us that any more but I keep telling myself that in literature, language and theme and image follow subject. What one has to say *Is* the poem or novel, and that *What* must be a person or persons doing, thinking, feeling. Any one of the three alone—any two—will not be enough. The novel of sensibility has dominated in our day because we have rejected the artificiality of plot in the old sense and have been exposed to Freud and have been engaged in expensive depth analysis ever since.

LOUIS COXE

If possible write " without consciousness " in semi-trance (as Yeats' later trance writing) allowing sub-conscious to admit in own uninhibited interesting necessary and so " modern " language what conscious art would censor, and write excitedly, swiftly, with writing-or-typing-cramps, in accordance (as from center to periphery) with laws of orgasm, Reich's " beclouding of consciousness ". *Come* from within out—to relaxed and said.

JACK KEROUAC

69

Image 3: Page 69 of *The Dubliner*, spring 1963 issue

In his search for modes of poetic address, Mahon also drew inspiration from previous generations whose presence, instead of evoking the 'anxiety of influence', allowed attainment of an identity that was committed to the Irish landscape. In *The Dublin Magazine*, Mahon wrote in an article dedicated to Kavanagh, 'Kavanagh's world, [...] the kitchen houses of Belfast, the hills of Antrim and the faces of those I knew, became part of my mental furniture' ('Patrick Kavanagh' 6). Kavanagh's dedication to the immediate world in a Joycean sense, where the distance between life and word is reduced, his 'delicate rhythm and humorous pathos' influenced Mahon's style and thematic. Greatly impressed by his use of the subversive potential of poetic language; Mahon writes:

> [Language] is solipsistic and imprecise, and poetry trades on this fact. Abandoning rational inquiry, the poet approaches life with his own kind of directness, which to others seem obliquity. His power is potentially as great as that of evangelical religion or physical love, for there is no arguing with it. No wonder it is considered subversive and amoral. No wonder policemen hate it and Arts Councils prefer opera and ballet. ('Patrick Kavanagh' 8)

Mahon recognised that language is connotative and not denotative, and that poetry operates upon the suggestive power of language; he upheld poets' reliance on their 'subversive and amoral' perspective and not scientific precision. In order to create a stirring and subversive experience, Mahon, like Kavanagh, aimed to compose poetry that challenged mainstream narratives.

The editors of *Icarus* also showed an awareness of the potential of communication through the effective use of visual and physical elements of the page. In the June 1962 edition, the editor, Richard Eckersley stated:

> Other aspects of book production— cover design, typography and layout, are more consciously promoted than ever before. This is particularly true of magazine design, very largely through the influence of America. [...] typography and layout

> are more than aids to digestion. They are a visual extension of a writer's vocabulary just as illustrations may be. (Editorial 3)

This editorial, in emphasising the commitment of *Icarus* to the visual arts, rejected an understanding of illustration as subordinate to text: 'good illustration must stress generally applicable aspects of the particular.' The editor of the issue upheld illustrating as a tool that would not 'simplify' the text but become extended manifestations of literary pieces (2).

Mahon's own edited issue (December 1962) was significantly invested in the making of the magazine. He used glossy paper in the issue and invited the designer of a popular magazine, the *Observer*, to design its cover. While revisiting the issue in his article, 'Icarus in the Ignorance Age', Mahon states that the issue was 'So shiny, so trendy, so phoney' (242). He seemed to have sought to build connections with the popular productions during the 60s (such as the *Observer*) to oppose the insular nature of some of the productions and stated that 'its politics were only a gesture' (242). These radically different looking editions of *Icarus*, it becomes evident, aimed to appropriate the visual appeal of American magazines and build connections with publishing outside the university and in other parts of the world. Eckersley stated in the editorial of June 1962, such issues required the employment of 'two differing sensibilities' to 'demand double effort from the readers' (2). Mahon occupied the space provided by *Icarus* and *The Dubliner;* while certain conventions of lyric and physical compositions influenced (perhaps inhibited) his style, the relative autonomy given to the contributors and minimal editorial determination of undergraduate writing helped in conception of aesthetics that strove to engage the readers' senses using verbal and visual codes.

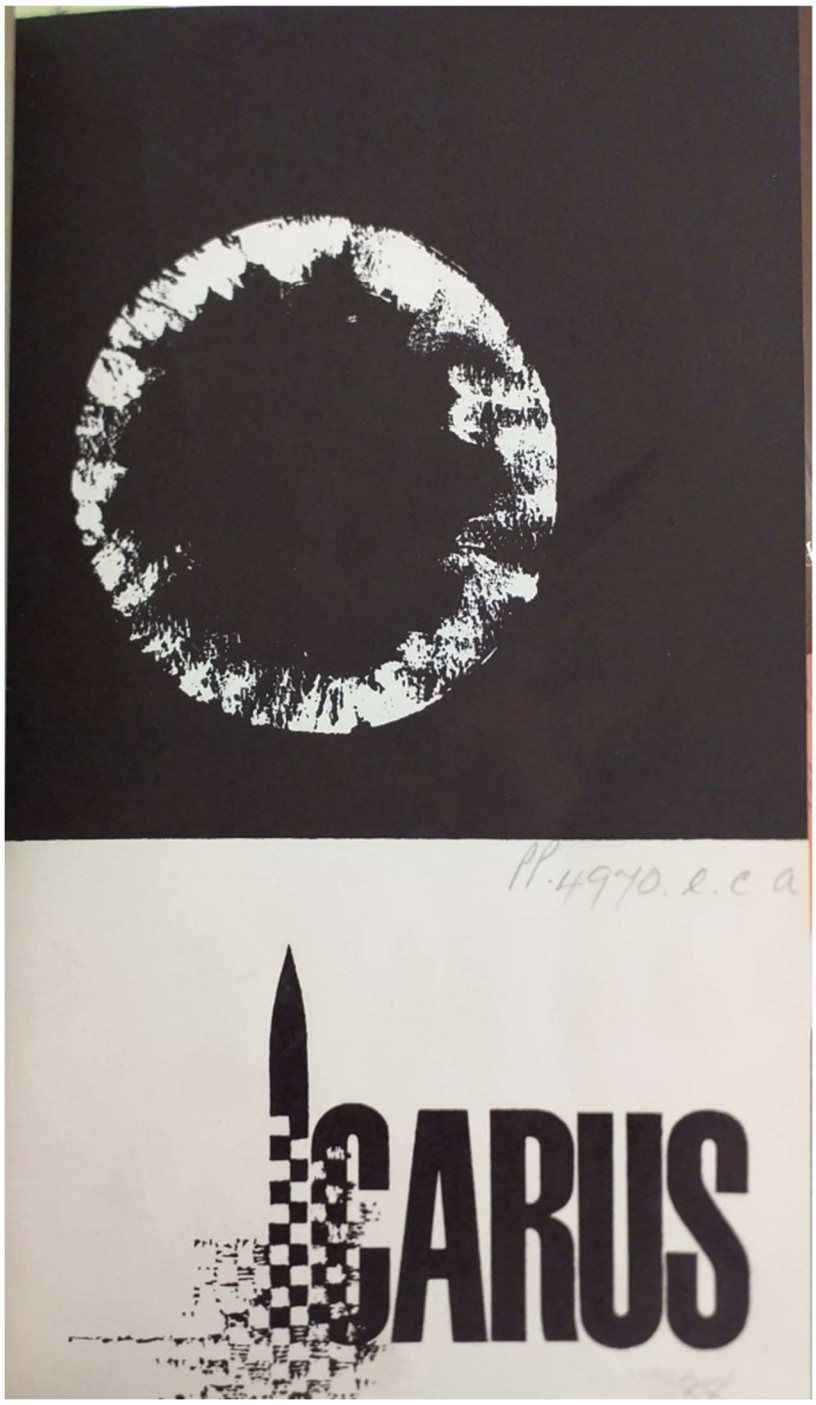


Image 4: Cover page of *Icarus*, December 1962 issue, edited by Derek Mahon
(Reproduced with the permission of *Icarus*'s editors)

Kolatkar's Presence in Small Press Movement in India

When Kolatkar and his contemporaries, Dilip Chitre, Adil Jussawalla, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, and Gieve Patel arrived in the literary scene in India in the 1960s, there were very few platforms available for literary dissemination. The *Illustrated Weekly of*

India, the *Times of India* supplement began publishing poetry in English in 1950 with C.R. Mandy, an Irishman, as its editor. As Bruce King writes, Mandy transformed the *Illustrated* from a 'typical colonial family production to one more appropriate to the newly independent India' (12). Indian PEN (Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists, Novelists), which was established in 1934 by Sophia Wadia, specialised in providing a newsletter on the developments in the literary field and began publishing more poetry after coming into contact with the little magazine movement in the late 1960s and 70s.[30] Keshav Malik started publishing *Thought* in 1948 in Calcutta which continued to exist until 1975. From 1955 to 1977, Ezekiel edited *Quest*, which was modelled on *Encounter,* published in London. P. Lal established a publishing house, Writer's Workshop,[31] in 1955, and began editing a bimonthly journal, *Miscellany*, in 1960. While *Indian PEN*, *Quest* and the *Times of India*'s headquarters were located in Bombay, the Writer's Workshop was located in Calcutta. As noted by King, in the 1960s, Indian English poetry fell into two groups, 'those associated with Ezekiel, centred in Bombay, and those associated with Lal, centred in Calcutta' but 'the groups were not obvious; a mutual interest in promoting the new poetry and themselves kept the writers together' (17). Beginning from the mid-1950s to 1980s, the Bombay poets and their allies established several little magazines, which were relatively short-lived but literarily robust—e*zra*, *damn you*, *Blunt*, *Bombay Duck*, *Vrishchik*, *Dionysius*, *Opinion Literary Quarterly, Poetry India*, *Fulcrum*, *Keynote*, *Kavi* and *The Bombay Literary Review*—in the city of Bombay and elsewhere. These gave expression to new poetic voices in the city.

While magazines like *The Indian PEN* and *The Illustrated Weekly of India* used established publishing infrastructure, little magazines, like *damn you*, *ezra*, *Tornado*, *Aso,*

[30] The idea has been presented by Emma Bird in her essay, 'A Platform for Poetry: The PEN All India Centre and a Bombay Poetry Scene'.

[31] Writer's Workshop was a publication house founded by Indian and foreigners living in Calcutta—P.Lal, Anita Desai, Deb Kumar Das, David McCutchion, Kewlian Sio, Jai Ratan and David Crane—in 1958. It began publishing poems in the year 1959 (King 17).

Shabda and *Vrishchik*, were conceived in small presses owned by the poets or their allies (editors, critics and translators). Kolatkar, as a bilingual poet, engaged in Marathi as well as English little magazine publications. Kolatkar contributed his poem, 'The Renunciation of the Dog' to the inaugural issue of *Quest* (August 1955) and 'The Dual' to one of its early editions ('Notes' Mehrotra 241-2). Along with Ramesh Samarth, Dilip Chitre and Bandu Waze, Kolatkar edited the pioneering Marathi little magazine, *Shabda* (word); the magazine published in mimeographed form 1955 to 1960 (Zecchini *Historicizing Modernism* 11). Ashok Shahane, an editor and small press owner, published Kolatkar's translation of Allen Ginsberg's 'Kaddish' and a sequence of found poems, 'Three Cups of Tea', which recorded conversations overheard by him in the street dialect of Hindi, in his edited magazine, *Aso* (so be it) (Nerlekar 100). He often contributed his translations of *bhakti*[32] poets to the magazines; a special edition of *Vrishchik* was dedicated to Kolatkar, Mehrotra and Gieve Patel's translations of bhakti poets from Marathi, Hindi and Gujarati, respectively. Kolatkar's long poem, 'the boatride', was first published in Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Amit Rai and Alok Rai's *damn you* and his poem sequence, which eventually came out as a single volume, *Jejuri,* appeared in Gauri Deshpande's edited *Opinion Literary Quarterly*.

As mentioned earlier, Kolatkar and his contemporaries responded to the lack of interest that greeted their work by forming new networks of literary dissemination; they had to evade the censorship and orthodoxies of mainstream publishing in India. In his introduction to his collection of poems, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra writes, 'Memory is like a mirror. You blow on it then mist forms, then disappears. You have to keep blowing' ('Author's Note' xv). Mehrotra and the other poets intended to archive their literary

[32] *Bhakti* is a subversive movement in Hinduism which flourished in the medieval era. Although it could be argued that the inception of *bhakti* tradition dates back to as early as the eighth century, it began flourishing in the eleventh century. It is considered to have reached its zenith in the fifteenth century with the appearance of poets like Nanak.

works, which, as Jussawalla states, were liable to be forgotten in the absence of conventional production networks.[33] Although editors and poets in Dublin complained about the absence of an established publishing industry, free of censorship, the Indian poets were subject to many more challenges. Anjum Hasan, a literary editor, in an interview states:

> [...] the first edition, in 1957, of the Sahitya Akademi's journal *Indian Literature*, which featured, along with the Indian stuff, articles on Yugoslavian, American, Japanese literature, an interestingly wild mix. This was a Nehruvian idea of the Indian—informed by a patrician cosmopolitanism.
>
> Then there were magazines such as Nissim Ezekiel's *Quest* until the mid-1970s, which came out of the political imperative to cultivate free thought, and which therefore made space for individual voices, for personality, even idiosyncrasy. (qtd in Sinha)

Hasan's practitioner's perspective aptly captures the currents and counter-currents in the Indian literary productions. As opposed to the tokenistic involvement of several cultures in state-supported publishing, Indian modernist poets, like Nissim Ezekiel, conceived literary magazines with intentions to cultivate free thought. The conventions under which these magazines operated, such as minimum editorial intervention, ensured that the memory of personal and public events was not substantially distorted or rebuilt in the processes of material production. The connotations of free thought attached to literary magazines gave a political fervour to the content.

While Mahon gained from his location in Dublin, Indian English modernists benefited greatly from their location in the multicultural city of Bombay in the 1960s and 70s. Indian PEN's journal, through its transnational composition, influenced the works

[33] There were not many presses in India dedicated to literary production in English apart from Writer's Workshop in the 1960s until the 1980s (King 29).

of the Indian English poets (and regional language poets) who were often directly (by editing—like Ezekiel) or indirectly associated with it (by contributing to it—like Santan Rodrigues). As recorded by Emma Bird, the Indian PEN, where the newsletter was conceived, was one of the left-leaning cultural institutions located in Bombay that influenced its literary currents by providing its writers 'intellectual and artistic resources' ('The PEN All India Centre' 208) and the editor, Sophia Wadia, a woman of Colombian descent, participated 'in the spirit of the city which [...] was marked by cosmopolitanism, internationalism and opportunities for intellectual mobility' ('The PEN All India Centre' 209). This cosmopolitanism, combined with intellectual enthusiasm, was reflected in the criticism contained in the magazine, which framed the late modernist movement. In the 60s, it began to contain scholarly articles on various modernist cultures, which would provide exemplars to the Indian late modernists. 'Fragmented Vision: Dilemmas of the Indian Writer' by U.R. Ananthamurthy aimed to define Indian modern literature; instead of surrendering to the nostalgic evocation of the past, writers should expose themselves to 'dilemma' and 'accept ambivalence as a condition of life' (3). The search for a modern idiom also took the contributors to seek inspiration from other cultures. The magazine's August 1964 edition contained an essay titled, 'Louis MacNeice: Poet of Simple Sensibility' by Prema Nandakumar. It celebrated MacNeice's 'immediacy of perception' in its representation of India (241) and hailed his poetry as 'characteristic of the modern age' (240) because it reflected the human sensibility which had been altered by 'Hitler's gas chambers' (241-2). The criticism in the magazine, which aimed to define modernity and explore the modern idiom in Indian writing, provided context to Kolatkar's work (however, he did not contribute to the *Indian PEN*). Kolatkar and his contemporaries addressed modernity and broke from the tradition of nostalgically evoking the past, as suggested by Ananthamurthy. Kolatkar's style especially bears a strong resemblance to MacNeice's attention to immediate experiences, suggesting that Irish modernism could

have possibly reached him. Several such connections were forged because of the collection of cultures in platforms like the *Indian PEN.*

Specific small press publications were especially receptive to the socio-political ethos in India. Ezekiel in his edited works often juxtaposed literary and journalistic content. He joined the Indian PEN in 1955 and was also responsible for editing the journal, *Quest* (1955-76), from its establishment in 1955 until mid-1957. He remained the literary advisor for the magazine until it ceased publication during the Emergency in June 1976. *Quest* was not a literary magazine but 'a general intellectual review, associated with liberal democratic politics' and was sponsored by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (King 15). Emma Bird has shown that, in comparison with Sophia Wadia, Ezekiel was concerned with 'creating more immediate forums of cultural and critical exchange' ('The PEN All India Centre' 214) in *Quest* and in the *Indian PEN*. *Quest*'s subtitle, 'A Quarterly of Inquiry, Criticism and Ideas', denoted its commitment to the general advancement of intellectual rigour in the Indian society and its first subsection, 'Articles', contained literary-critical, political theoretical, anthropological, and theological pieces. Along with articles and poetry, it contained sections on 'Current Affairs', 'Short Stories', 'Discussions' of issues pertaining to socio-political and cultural issues, 'Book Reviews' and 'Correspondences'. The coexistence of literary and socio-political content in the magazine allowed the cultural field to come into proximity with Indian society. The editor and the poets who contributed to the magazine likely felt a deep sense of responsibility towards literature's role in society.

Although Ezekiel was considered a representative of relatively mainstream cultural trends in the imagination of the late modernist poets, his poetry recurrently portrayed modernist alienation and expressed a post-colonial angst that served as an inspiration for

the poets.[34] While he primarily connected with British writers, he also extended avenues of expression by introducing new tonalities and themes in Indian English poetry. For instance, his collection, *A Time to Change* (1952), is a fine example of modernist writing that enacts his aspirations of self-fulfilment and hindrances caused by his mind's corruptions and temptations. As Mehrotra records, 'he was the first modern poet to come up with 'memorable lines' like 'My backward place is where I am' from 'Background, Casually'' ('We Were Like Cartographers' 197). The possibility of leaving the audience in awe by defamiliarising reality, present in Ezekiel's work, left an abiding impact on Mehrotra, Jussawalla and perhaps Kolatkar. Ezekiel's editorship carefully selected works that looked for modes to address contemporary India; *Poetry India* published Mehrotra's extremely transgressive 'Bharatmata' along with Kolatkar's contemporary adaptations of Tukaram.

Like the little magazine movement in Ireland, the little magazine movement in India forged significant links with small press movements across the world. It was closely associated with American anti-mainstream publishing trends with regards to its intent to experiment, renew the existing infrastructure of publishing and defy censorship. In 1962, Allen Ginsberg visited Bombay and met Kolatkar and Ashok Shahane, the editor of *Aso,* whom he sent copies of Bengali little magazines (Nerlekar, 'We Were Unheeding in Those Days' 113). The connections with the editors and contributors of American littles are also reflected in these magazines' indices; Dave Cunliffe and Tina Morris's *Poetmeat*, for example, catalogued Mehrotra's ezra fakir press (2). In 1967, inviting contributions from Mehrotra, Doug Blazeg, owner of Open Skull Press, wrote, 'anything goes-- wild,

[34] Adil Jussawalla states that his politics differed from Ezekiel's but that they had 'a similar sense of humour and similar ideas about what language and poetry should be' ("Perhaps I'm Happier Being on the Sidelines" 222). Mehrotra states in an interview that the Bombay poets 'all had a different relationship with [Nissim] Ezekiel [...] for me Nissim was someone to rebel against' ('We Were Like Cartographers' 197). In the same interview, he confesses that Ezekiel was 'breaking out of the dead end that Sri Aurobindo and Sarojini Naidu had got Indian poetry in English into' (197).

serious, provocative, irreverent, caustic, whatever-- no crap or sentimental or dry turd stuff tho' and their aim had been to publish 'material that is not generally acceptable to the masses or even to the fairly advanced literary follower simply because it is out of tune w/what is taught to be fashionable or good or acceptable' (*sic*) (Blazek Box 2, Folder 4). He further sought solidarity with Mehrotra, as a fellow creator of the littles, and wrote:

> We are the outsiders, the unacceptable ones, the outcasts, the lone wolfs, we are of the underground who are trying to sabotage blank, steril, worthless, brainwashed minds into thinking more profoundly, more fecundly, more intelligently, more wildly, more gently, more creatively' (*sic*) (Blazek Box 2, Folder 4).

Indian English poets, like their American counterparts, intended to challenge aesthetic conventions and, more importantly, challenge readers' comfortable ways of reception of literature. Mehrotra modelled *damn you* on Ed Sanders's *fuck you;* he aimed to find an alternative to British English and to look for transgressive poetic forms; this took him to the American Beats and Black speech traditions.[35] *Damn you* featured a self-designed cover, a call for submissions, a statement from Mehrotra, literary pieces, such as poems, short stories, journal entries, and ruminations on art and aesthetics, along with an international catalogue of contemporary little magazines, albeit one dominated by American publications (Blazek Box 2, Folder 4). Although the magazines' issues were co-edited by Mehrotra and his contemporaries, Alok Rai and Amit Rai, they carried the common label 'fathered by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra' (*damn you*). By giving this anthropomorphic quality to the magazines, the poet intends to operate against the stasis that surrounds the activity of reading.

To evoke sensual responses from the readers, the little magazines used abstract, shocking images, often from popular culture and everyday reality, to challenge the

[35] Another magazine that influenced Mehrotra was the *Village Voice* ('Partial Recall' 68).

accepted aesthetic conventions. Mehrotra suggested that the rebellion which was manifested in his magazines, *damn you* and *ezra,* had sources in his exposure to avant-gardist counter-culture:

> Our attitude of rebellion was shaped by our reading, just as much as it was reflected in the books we read. The word 'phoney' had entered our vocabulary through *The Catcher in the Rye*, and when we were not trying to speak like Holden Caufield, we recited passages from *Penguin Modern Poets 5*, where for the first time, we had come across poems that were funny, clever, sad, easy as breathing, left us in a state of euphoria—Gregory Corso's 'Marriage', Lawrence Ferlinghetti's 'Underwear', and Allen Ginsberg's 'America.'[36] ('Partial Recall' 59)

The accessibility of the works of writers from different parts of the world in paperback in the 1960s not only allowed Mehrotra to appropriate a language which moved away from British idiom, but also inspired him to borrow the experimentalism and 'misdemeanour' of emerging avant-gardism. Following the example of avant gardist visual artists like Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, Mehrotra used animal masks from toy shops as the covers of the magazines. Pavan Kumar Jain, the maker of *Tornado*, another little magazine, used human hair to illustrate people's pubic hair in a sketch (Jyotindra Jain n.pag.). The magazines archived the sensuousness of the everyday, and published works which would challenge the conventional aesthetic sublimity and bring the words and architecture of the page closer to ordinary experiences in South Asia.

Mehrotra's little magazines—*damn you* and *ezra*—which published Kolatkar's 'the boatride' and an untitled poem, drew in the readers and aimed to make literature accessible. The inexpensive nature of the material and the magazines complimented their

[36] Apart from these, Mehrotra explains that he acquired specific conventions from *Contemporary American Poetry* anthology ('Partial Recall' 61).

themes of accessibility. *damn you*'s first preface or 'statement', as the author called it, read:

> what about? long term policy? gene-
> ral objectives? That's not even fun-
> ny. besides, we wouldn't know.
> the basic point is that all of us
> write- more or less- and would li-
> ke being read. (*damn you* no. 1 1)

He was aware of the ephemeral quality of his productions—he made 25 to 150 copies on Air Mail paper which was extremely fragile—but nevertheless persisted in creating texts that did not aim for posterity but to compulsively and aesthetically render the immediate surroundings. Recently, when I asked Mehrotra about the intent behind creating the magazines, he said, 'What do you do when you are young and write poetry? These days people share their work on Facebook... ' (17 Dec. 2020). This implies that, in the pre-internet era, Mehrotra's creative impulse identified the magazines to be the most apt avenue for expression. The experimentalism that the works fashioned required a platform that could initiate dialogue with the audience. *ezra* began its journey with a subtitle, 'an imagiste magazine'; then became 'neo-imagiste' and ended up without any descriptive title. The magazine underwent the change after Eric Oatman, editor of another little magazine, *Manhattan Review*, criticised the use of the word 'imagiste' as 'outmoded' and the intent behind its usage 'to 'bring back' the glorious days of the early 20th Cent. poetry—a rather reactionary move'. Mehrotra compiled this with other readers' reviews and expressed his agreement with Oatman's statement and, in the same issue, changed the name of the magazine (*ezra* No. 3 n.d. n.pag). It becomes evident that readers' reviews and maker's reflections on them led to the evolution of the magazine. The reproductions of readers' reviews, comments and artistic contributions composed a significant section

of these magazines; one notices the intent to democratise literature where the reader could participate in literary productions.

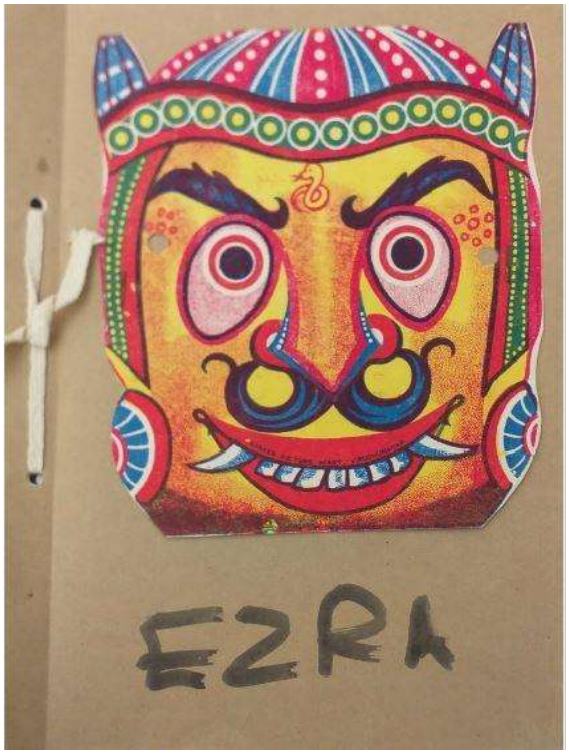


Image 5: Cover page of *ezra*, designed by Mehrotra

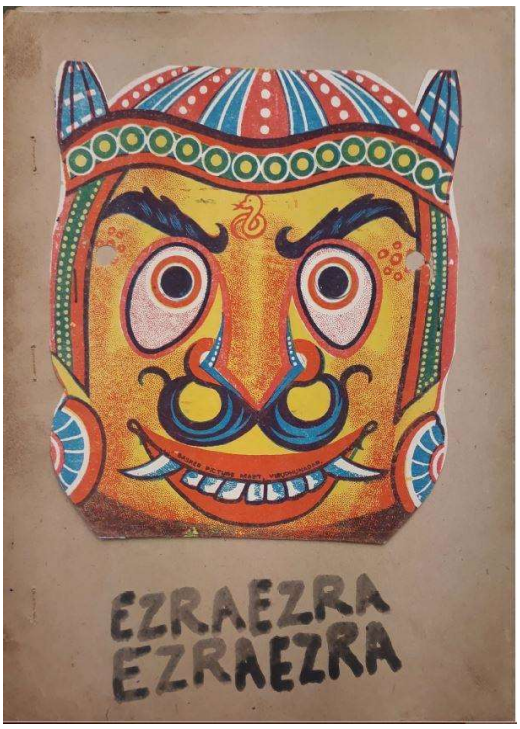


Image 6: Cover page of *ezra*, designed by Mehrotra

Image 7: Cover page of *Tornado*, edited by Pavankumar Jain

Like the Dublin littles, the little magazines in India and other channels of production in which the Indian late modernist poets published their works often engaged with the political and social climate of the 60s and 70s. During the Cold War, the magazines actively responded to the political scenario. The February 1970 issue of *Vrishchik* contained a 'Greek Story' by 'Erato',[37] which talked about the sufferings of people in times of war and a poem, 'The Sad Supper' (in English translation) by Cesare Pavese. While the story and the poem talked about the general sufferings of humanity in the face of conflict and moral decadence, conveying a feeling of pathos, a note by the editor stated:

> Horror surmounts our body of existence in these days of dogs, either in the streets of Vietnam or bushes of Biafra. Vrishchik publishes bloody stains on Acropolis through a Greek story, which is far from fiction. While the military regime in Greece has exiled its best poets and musicians to unknown islands and Russia has added few more names in the condemnation of its intelligentia, the apathetic Indiana is busy gestating its own saliva.
>
> Horror is the word. As in the blanched, untimely aging streets of Hellas or in the inverted desire of solitude and un-expectation of Cesare Pavese. Anastasi (Rise). (February 1970 back cover)

The editors purposefully curated works that would emphatically address historical events, especially as they produced magazines under the threat of another world war. The editorial process pushed the scope of literary journals to include texts which would defy literature's traditional generic categories. The April 1970 issue of *Vrishchik* (Khakhar and Sheikh) published the letters written by unnamed American GIs to their parents. The life narratives of the soldiers conveyed the pathos, trauma and helplessness that the

[37] There is no further information given on the author; the name 'Erato' is presumably the pen name of the author.

recruits, as well as the civilians in Vietnam, witnessed. In the face of conflict, instead of being perceived redundant, literature in the littles, with the connotations of transgression and protest attached, became more actively engaged with socio-historical circumstances. Such literary and cultural trends influenced Kolatkar's works and he directly addressed his readers, often evoking their sensual responses and appealing to their sense of 'alienation' while perceiving the inhumanity of violence and authoritarian control.

Unlike the established presses, most small presses and poet's small publishing ventures opposed language chauvinism and the unilingualism associated with it. *Vrishchik* published translations from Gujarati into English and Gujarati texts along with English poems and translations from other languages into English. The magazine's special issue dedicated to Mehrotra's poems addressed the Anglicist and nativist claims that English is not an Indian language and that Indian English writers are inauthentic for writing in English. While the magazine contained Mehrotra's eloquent and experimental verse which used the English language to address the Indian landscape, the 'Epilogues' contained Yeats' quote, along with the quotes from writers who seemed to have inspired Mehrotra:

> Damn Tagore. We got out three good books, Sturge Moore and I, and then because he thought it more important to see and know English than to be a great poet, he brought out sentimental rubbish and wrecked his reputation. Tagore does not know English, no Indian knows English. Nobody can write with music and style in a language not learned in childhood and ever since the language of this thought. (*Vrishchik* April/ May 1970 n.pag.)

The edition of the magazine juxtaposes Yeats' quote with the English language poems. Instead of theorising on the English language aptitude of Indians, with this juxtaposition, Mehrotra more vehemently challenges the colonialist claims over language. Kolatkar had similar views and in a poem titled, 'Making love to a poem', he wrote, 'For an Indian

robbed of his mother tongue/ who has been robbed disinherited/ by his education family background cheated out of his inheritance/ there may be no alternative to writing in the only/ language he knows English' (*TB* 231). While Kolatkar was cognizant of colonial impositions of language and the inability to inherit a coherent language's tradition, he maintained that English, as the language of communication, could be used to express his experiences of existence and alienation in modern India. To compose his truly transnational and bilingual poetics, he used the platforms provided by small presses, which often operated beyond national borders.

In addition to language chauvinism, the late modernist poets also addressed the audience's expectations from Indian writers to adhere to indigenous cultures. While writers like Kolatkar embraced indigenous influences, they expressed them in transnational forms: for instance, Kolatkar rendered his translations of *bhakti* poets (Muktabai, Janabai and Namdeo) in an American idiom (*Vrishchik* September/ October 1970 n.pag.). By opposing indigenous and more internationalist influences, he blurred the binary distinctions between them. Many other English language magazines presented translated works. Ezekiel's short-lived but versatile *Poetry India*'s first edition, apart from Kolatkar's translations of Tukaram, included translations of vedic hymns, Tamil Classic love lyrics and other language works translated into English. Instead of aspiring for an 'authentic' portrayal of Indian culture, the magazines allowed the ancient and indegenous literary models to be adapted to address contemporary concerns. Kolatkar's reworkings of the religious models from *bhakti* poets allowed their radical elements to emerge. For instance, in translations of Tukaram, he portrayed the persona of the saint often as a heretic who questions mainstream Hindu religious practices and struggled to deal with metaphysical issues related to existence.

The small presses, with which Kolatkar was associated, were run by the poets and their allies who worked as critics, graphic designers, fledgling painters and editors.

Rosinka Chaudhuri states, 'Just as the Progressive Artists' Group turned impatiently away from the pioneers in the Bengal school of Art, the poets too, often personal friends with the 'progressive artists', began a conversation with American and European poets, with regional and Dalit poets' (3). In this case, different levels of meaning contained in the magazines' verbal, visual and tactile dimensions created a unified effect of transgressing aesthetic conventions. Unlike Mahon, who occupied pre-existent structures with established publishing norms, the publishers/poets in India could use the indices, page layout and architecture, font styles, along with linguistic elements, in a consolidated manner to delineate meaning. *Vrishchik*, produced by the modernist painters Gulam Sheikh and Bhupen Khakhar in Baroda, provided a platform for Kolatkar and Mehrotra's early works. Mehrotra stated in an interview,

> Vrishchik brought poets, painters, translators, art critics into a common platform but we were there as young rebellious individuals interested in similar things rather than as members of a group. The similarity, I think, had a lot to do with our reverence for the unnoticed and the overlooked, the commonplace and the kitschy [...] We were like cartographers mapping the city, just like Google maps does. ('We were like Cartographers' 198-9)

Mehrotra's testimony highlights that the publishing platform became a context where poets and artists socialised and reflected on the role of aesthetics. The collaborative efforts allowed for concrete experimentation and illustration of literary content in a way that images and the written word could complement each other. The magazine's ideological, cultural and professional diversity allowed Kolatkar, like Mahon, to create a very affective poetics that evoked readers' visceral responses.

Specific editions of little magazines used juxtaposition of artistic content and poetry as well as images and poems with the intent to make the entire architecture, make and verbal content of the magazine an extension of literary work. The editions of

Vrishchik (1969-71), a magazine conceived in Baroda, by Sheikh and Khakar and those of *ezra* and *damn you* by Mehrotra specialised in that. *Vrishchik*'s second issue published the work of a Gujarati poet, Ravji Patel, in translation:

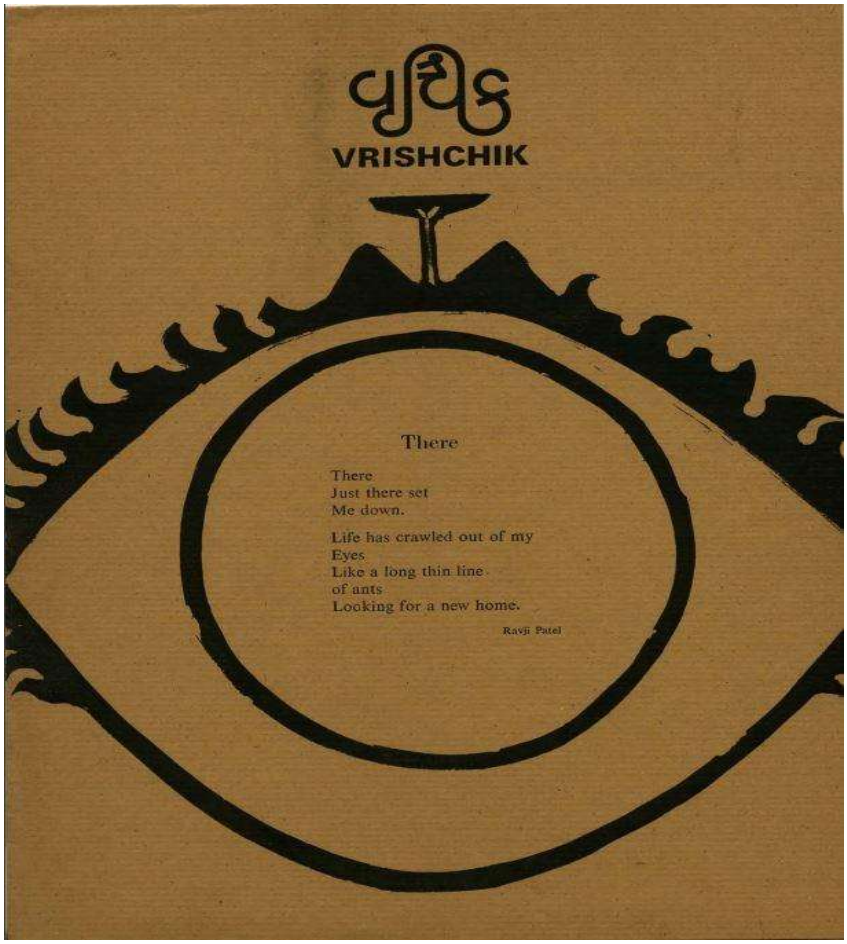


Image 8: Cover page of *Vrishchik*'s December 1969 issue

Patel's poem, which represented life crawling out of his eyes 'Like a long thin line/ of ants/ Looking for a new home' is printed in an eye (see Image 6). The imagery the poet uses, ants crawling in a thin line, is extremely commonplace in Indian environs; moreover, this everyday imagery not only draws the readers' complete attention but is also elevated by comparing it to the slow draining of life from the poet's eyes. While Patel's verse intended to draw attention to the everyday and the unnoticed, the visual also, through minimalism and revival of folk art forms (the illustration's shades seem to have been inspired by Madhubani painting), remained an ode to the commonplace (December

1969 n.pag.). Kolatkar's verses in *Vrishchik*'s subsequent issues adapted works of *bhakti* poets to address modernity, and the corresponding visuals adapted folk forms. Both visual and verbal elements reinterpreted indigenous folk or classical models to convey meaning.

Mahon and Kolatkar's works were shaped among competing aesthetic and political currents that marked Irish and Indian literary movements of the 1960s. The journals in Dublin and little magazines in Bombay and other cities in India in the 60s and 70s not only provided platforms for spontaneous literary expressions but also harboured transgressive literary productions that defied generic and thematic categories. While certain aspects of the literary movement influenced their writing, certain regressive currents made them look elsewhere for inspiration. The struggle undertaken to adapt the poetic forms to modernity is evident in their early publications. A closer analysis of the poems' material manifestation in the next section would throw light on the poets' Lyotardian postmodernist search fqor literary techniques to address the disarray of modernity.

Poems, Visuality and the Architecture of the Page

Mahon drew strength from the thriving literary culture of 1960s Dublin. His early writing, as Haughton states, resembled 'trying on different styles and voices like hats' (25). Haughton explains: 'It was his exposure to the heady, creative and alcoholic ferment of the Irish capital, immersion in French literature, and travels in North America that established his persona as dandified *poète maudit*, an Irish Cavafy 'at a slight angle' to the universe' (21). To find a voice, he used an eclectic range of references. His early maverick spirit led him to vigorously create possibilities of readers' participation in processes of meaning delineation. He communicated through aural, visual and concrete images. In a 1991 interview, Mahon said, 'Poetry I often think is a visual art among other things. I am interested in the appearance of a poem on the page, the density of a letter in

the paper. The principle of the ideogram, I suppose' (Scammel 6). In *Icarus* and other journals, along with the words, Mahon manages to pay attention to the density of words on paper while engaging with the social and historical climate of Ireland and elsewhere. Further in the section, I will read Mahon's poems to assess his postmodern search for linguistic and visual codes while establishing his identity in Dublin in the 1960s.

Like Mahon, Arun Kolatkar also searched for forms to create a stirring aesthetic experience. His poems in little magazines drew inspiration from transnational cultures to address his immediate South Asian environment. Kolatkar, like Mahon, does not intend to create prescriptive poetry which would be propagandist in nature but looks for modes that would persuade the readers to experience the dissatisfaction and alienation that the poet feels in the face of twentieth-century reality. To convey this sense of alienation, along with language, he uses the visual and physical dimensions of the poems and the avant-gardist and transgressive connotations associated with the magazines in which he published his poems— *Quest*, *damn you*, *ezra*, *Vrishchik*, *Dionysius*, *Poetry India*, and *Opinion Literary Quarterly*.

In his early works placed in Irish landscapes, Mahon constantly addresses the value of his art while representing his subjects. Mahon's first poem, 'Subsidy Bungalows', appeared in the December 1960 edition of *Icarus.* The poem is set in the landscape of Belfast, and his view of the city as caught in infinite everydayness (later developed in his poems about Belfast like 'Ecclesiastes' *LI* 3) is introduced here: 'Here where the city and country are as one, / Caught in the light year of procreation'. Mahon presents his own distance from the phenomenon of living in the bungalows as a bourgeois individual and further portrays the detachment that the sight invokes in him: 'And yet this landscape is rectilinear/ As ever, but more militantly so/ Does not repel the practised eye, nor does/ Its dame shape even, show in crude relief' ('Subsidy Bungalows' 22). In the second stanza, Mahon metaphorically associates his art to the building of the landscapes: 'They

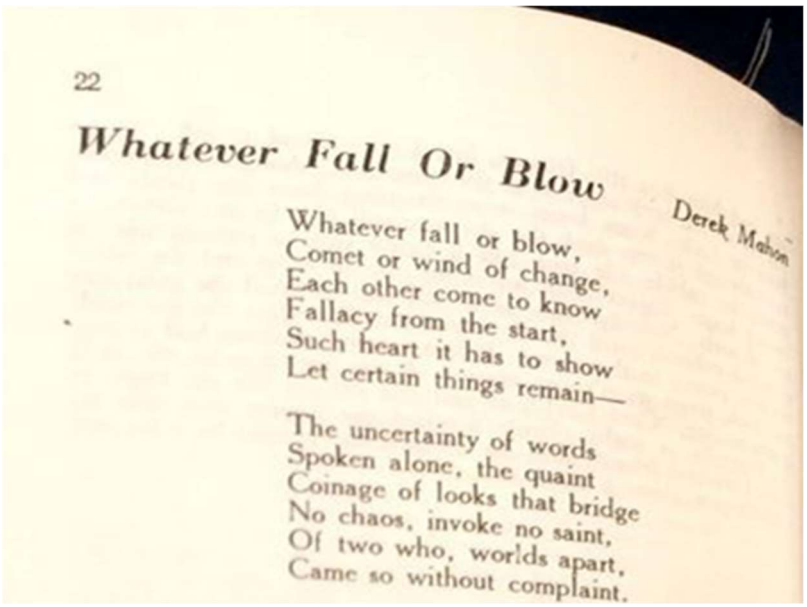
are building subsidy bungalows/ With things a poet mentions out of mischief' (22), and in the final stanza, the landscape's amorphous relationship with Mahon's art becomes clear:

> And so the hillside holds a new harvest,
> With new methods of spring cleaning. And I
> Knowing that this is not the last word, trust
> Five other senses to the flowering sky
> That dimly blooms around me and snows
> Rain, rain presageless, on the open earth
> Where they are building subsidy bungalows,
> And on the hillside heaving before birth. (22)

The 'new harvest' refers to the poet's writing, and even though the landscape has already evoked negative emotions, inspiration seems to be coming at the site but not in the conventional sense; the landscape lends to 'flowering sky', 'snow', 'rain presageless' and 'hillside heaving before birth'. Mahon draws attention to the craft, which is still nascent—the final 'heaving' of words and 'birth' of the poem coincide with its physical ending. He highlights the inadequacy of his words in delineating the critique; resultantly, the incomprehensibility of the phenomenon of welfare projects and the alienation they create is furthered. He manages to express his dissatisfaction with the state welfare projects while remaining self-consciously aware about his distance from the subject.

Mahon's self-reflective style in the early stages of his career often mirrors the self-conscious and nebulous nature of *Icarus*; he is acutely aware of his own subjectivity and biases. Several of his poems in *Icarus* refer to the myth of Icarus and reflect upon the magnitude of his ambition as an artist. 'The Fall of Icarus' in No. 34 imagines Icarus falling on a beach and then rising from the sand: 'Out of the sands will spring/ Out of the

scorching sands/ Wings formed of stronger glue/ To take the ironical sun/ Into their own hands' (2). It metaphorically acknowledges the magazine's contributors' failure to create good art but also declares their resolve to continue trying. Mahon enacts his own writing's ambition and its inadequacy more emphatically in his abstract poem, 'Whatever Fall or Blow':



22

Whatever Fall Or Blow

Derek Mahon

Whatever fall or blow,
Comet or wind of change,
Each other come to know
Fallacy from the start,
Such heart it has to show
Let certain things remain—

The uncertainty of words
Spoken alone, the quaint
Coinage of looks that bridge
No chaos, invoke no saint,
Of two who, worlds apart,
Came so without complaint.

Image 9: *Icarus* No. 33, Mahon's poem, 'Whatever Fall or Blow' with kind permission of *Icarus*'s editors and Derek Mahon c/o The Gallery Press

'Whatever Fall or Blow' conveys an undertone of romantic or physical union, which appears as marked by uncertainty ('Fallacy from the start'). It constantly repeats the phrase, 'let the uncertainty remain', and palimpsestically alludes to uncertainties in different arenas— the poet's love life, his artistic ventures and in the larger geographic and historic landscape. The first stanza (represented in Image 9) ends with the desire, 'Let certain uncertainties remain'. While it seemingly concludes the thoughts in the stanza with a declarative statement, through the use of the em dash, it invites the reader to the ideas in the following stanza. The blank space between the stanzas emphasises the uncertainty that the poem itself embodies. In the following line, the poet draws attention

to his art's inadequacy, 'The uncertainty of words/ Spoken along'. Further on, he alludes to another site of ambiguity, his native city Belfast, where the uncertainty of words exchanged between Catholics and Protestants has often translated into apathy and othering, 'Parallel streets that say/ Although the earth is square/ Our histories never meet' (22). While the poet acknowledges the inevitability of the existence of ambiguity and uncertainty of language, by drawing attention to unfulfilled love and divides in communities, he also, to an extent, subjects himself and other sites where uncertainties exist to interrogation. In these early poems, Mahon enacts his failure to assuredly represent reality while addressing important themes such as sectarian divides. The amorphous and self-critical voice in his early poems aligns with the general ethos of *Icarus*, which, as evident in editorials, initiates reflections upon authors' styles and ideologies.

To undermine his authorial power, Mahon often assumed personas, aligning with artisans and men of letters; this strategy would later materialise in a more austere form in his poems in *Raw Material*. His poems, 'An Irishman in London', 'The Forger', and 'Gypsies' assumed different personas. 'An Irishman in London' describes the predicament of the Irishman who is unwilling to return to his 'backward land', which can be reached if he lurches 'back seawards'. He resists the return as it 'would wreck a dream' and instead aligns with 'Pint-hungry labourers off a building site' who are 'Slaves to the pyramid they sweat to build' (6). The author distances himself from the speaker or the monologue writer, the Irishman. Nevertheless, some of the poet's desires are dramatised and satirised; he cannot return home and lives like an exile to find 'repose'. Mahon does not retain his typical close attention to form in the poem and often slips into free verse to convey the confusion; he dissects the sentence, 'The darkness deepens… I have come too far to take', with an ellipsis and ends the paragraph mid-sentence, giving an abrupt pause before declaring his resolve to continue his journey out of 'noise and fear' (7). Similar

engagement with the writing process is seen in 'The Forger', where Mahon writes about Han Van Meegeran's selling of the fake Vermeer to Goering. He evokes the audience's sympathy towards the forger by rendering a confessional tone and his expressions of starvation and reflects on his own art by relaying a vision where technique and reiteration are as significant as conceiving something anew:

> Now, nothing but claptrap
> About mere technique and true vision,
> As if there were a distinction—
> Their way of playing it down.
> But my genius will live on,
> For even at one remove
> The thing I meant was love— [...]
>
> And I too have suffered
> Obscurity and derision,
> And sheltered in my heart of hearts
> A light to transform the world. (14)

Although not completely sympathetic, Mahon, through Meegeren, builds an artist's persona who labours to reiterate moments of artistic accomplishments. He underplays the distinction between 'mere technique' and true vision and ascribed equal significance to both activities. He suggests that, despite being a forger, the artist's intentions have been good ('The thing I meant was love—', 'Sheltered in my heart of hearts/ A light to transform the world') (14). Mahon's highly intertextual and allusive writing style, introduced in 'The Forger', would eventually define his writing. In rendering the artist's personas in both poems, Mahon enacts his own distance and disillusionment from his place of birth, reliance on pre-existing artistic models and desire to survive as an artist.

While certain poems, like ‘Whatever Fall or Blow’, use an open form, certain other poems from little magazines slip into the usage of canonical stereotypes. In his poem ‘Gipsies’, an adaptation of Philippe Jacottet’s work, Mahon recreates the image of the artist as *bohémien,* originally meaning a Romani person in French. The use of the term to identify artistic unconventionality in Henri Muger’s *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (Murger et al.) erases the history of struggles undergone by the traveller community and instead romanticises the artist as an outsider. Mahon’s poem recreates the stereotype:

> We are all gipsies now—
> Pea-pickers, procrastinators,
> Wanderers in the salt dunes,
> Tellers of strange fortunes,
> Bathers in cold waters—
> Sleeping like John Clare,
> With our feet to the pole star (‘Gipsies’ 24).

The poem evokes John Clare and the spectre of Matthew Arnold, whose poem, ‘The Scholar Gypsy’, romanticises the image of the scholar as a wandering recluse. Although in the subsequent reworkings of the poem, Mahon rewrote it to make it more cognizant of the struggles undertaken by the travelling community, his earliest translation reworked the Victorian stereotype of the community. This testifies that while the magazines allowed uncensored content to be published, their production in prejudiced society of the 1960s often allowed unfiltered content to surface, which could reinstate stereotypes. Nevertheless, Mahon’s and his contemporaries’ frantic desire to invent a language and form that would address contemporaneity allowed them to use a range of styles and modes of address.

In the issue edited by him, Mahon’s poems ‘Before Migrating’ and ‘An Unborn Child’ materialise his intent to capture the discordant note struck by reality on the

'sounding board of a poet's consciousness' (Mahon 'Editorial' *Icarus* 2). In 'Before Migrating', although the place remains unnamed, Mahon portrays the images of 'Aerials, clothes-lines and simple wire fences', which are usually associated with Belfast in his poetic universe. He comments on the emigration of young people from 'Across the capes' and away from a landscape that 'abolished heat and lechery' (16). In 'An Unborn Child' also Mahon portrays a departure, but it emerges as a more violent one; the poem is delivered from the perspective of an unborn child who faces threats from the world which he intends to enter:

> Certain mysteries are relayed to me
> [...] I know the twisted
> Kitten that lies there sunning himself
> Under the bare bulb, the clouds
> Of goldfish mooning around upon the shelf.
> In me these data are already vested—
>
> I feel them in my bones, and they embrace
> Nothing, for I am completely egocentric.
> Such pandemonium of encumbrances
> As will absorb me, mind and senses—' (19)

The embryonic persona that Mahon assumes in the poem metaphorically captures the elemental threats existing in the world because of nuclear bombs; his personal experiences are exaggerated to comment on the impending crisis. The jarring aural and tactile images ('pandemonium of encumbrances') delineate the visceral experiences triggered by the horrors of the times. The embryo prepares himself for the birth ('battering at the concavity of my caul') and ultimately pronounces his protest in block letters, 'I

WANT TO LIVE' (20). Mahon's poem represents the awareness of the threats of a world war[38] by registering the sensory messages striking the child.

In 'An Unborn Child', Mahon alludes to MacNeice's poem, 'Prayer Before Birth', which also conveys the voice of a foetus dreading his arrival into the world. However, instead of simply imitating MacNeice and evoking universality, Mahon's poem self-consciously depicts the unborn child's complicity in perpetuating violence. Unlike MacNeice's speaker, who seems completely victimised, Mahon portrays a speaker in whom the 'data are already vested' and who claims to be 'completely egocentric' ('An Unborn Child' 19). Mahon furthers MacNeice's project by providing a more nuanced vision of reality in which the speaker is domesticated into the ways of the world and protests through much more focused and visceral participation ('I want to see, hear, touch and taste/ These things to which I am to be encumbered') ('An Unborn Child' 20). Mahon's poem aims to address history, but he also remains aware of his own subjectivity.

Mahon's poems in *The Dubliner* experiment with the poetic voice and enact the fracture of the speaker's consciousness. Eavan Boland, in her 1964 poem in *The Dubliner*, 'Belfast *v.* Dublin', dedicated to Mahon, addresses attitudinal and ideological differences between Mahon and herself. In the poem, she suggests that they should part ways, 'We have had time to talk, and strongly/ Disagree about the living out/ Of life' and stated, 'Let us then cavalierly fork/ Our ways, since we [...] Have called into question one another's own' ('Belfast *v*. Dublin' 5). Boland embraces a more classical idiom borrowed from the Irish lyric tradition, whereas Mahon exhibits 'clever discontent' towards a mere revival of the classics ('Belfast *v*. Dublin' 5). In his poems, 'All Such Terrors' and 'The Day We Drove to Donegal', Mahon experiments with the poetic perspective by delineating nightmares with eerie resemblances to the everyday world, metaphorically associating

[38] Mahon's editorial of the issue has already laid the context. The editorial was incited by the Cuban Crisis and a threat of the third world war.

the inverted reality of dreams with modern existence. ‘All Such Terrors’ imagines the poet and his lover descending into ‘a hell for lovers’, where in a graveyard-like world, fluttering hysterical birds are witnessed being kept as captives in cages made of ribs, watched by ‘squat crows who were the free ones now’. He describes the terror evoked by the helplessness of his lover in the dream as, ‘Not lonely terror, but a terror shared/ With terrible cripples and foul dribbling whores’. Mahon affectingly delineates the corporeal threats that, in his fantastical creation, collective humanity seems subject to. Eventually, after waking up, although he finds the lover asleep next to him, he does not feel completely relieved of the terror; he states: ‘And we knew we had lost monopoly of love/ And all such terrors as we planned to keep’ (29). The fantastical and the real permeate one another in the poem. The poet’s voice becomes fictional and factual at the same time, more profoundly conveying the sense of being exposed to the elements of mass destruction such as nuclear weapons.

In the poem, ‘The Day We Drove to Donegal’, Mahon again descends into his dream landscape to juxtapose it with a commonplace Irish landscape. In the poem, when he goes to run errands in Donegal (‘there were urgent things to be done—/ Clothes to be picked up, people to be seen’), the poet imagines the ‘systematic genocide’ of fish coming from the sea, ‘Herring and whiting, flopping about the deck/ In attitudes of agony and heartbreak’. The vulnerability that he feels exposed to, like in ‘All Such Terrors’, begins to make itself perceptible in the dream but would eventually permeate actuality:

> Give me a ring, goodnight and so to bed…
>
> That night the slow sea washed against my head,
>
> Performing its immeasurable erosions;
>
> Spilling into the skull, marbling the stones
>
> That spine the very harbour wall;

At dawn I was alone, far out at sea

Without skill or reassurance—nobody

To show me how, no earnest rescue—

Cursing my mindless failure to take due

Forethought for this; contriving vain

Overtures to the mindless wind and rain. ('The Day We Drove to Donegal' 34)

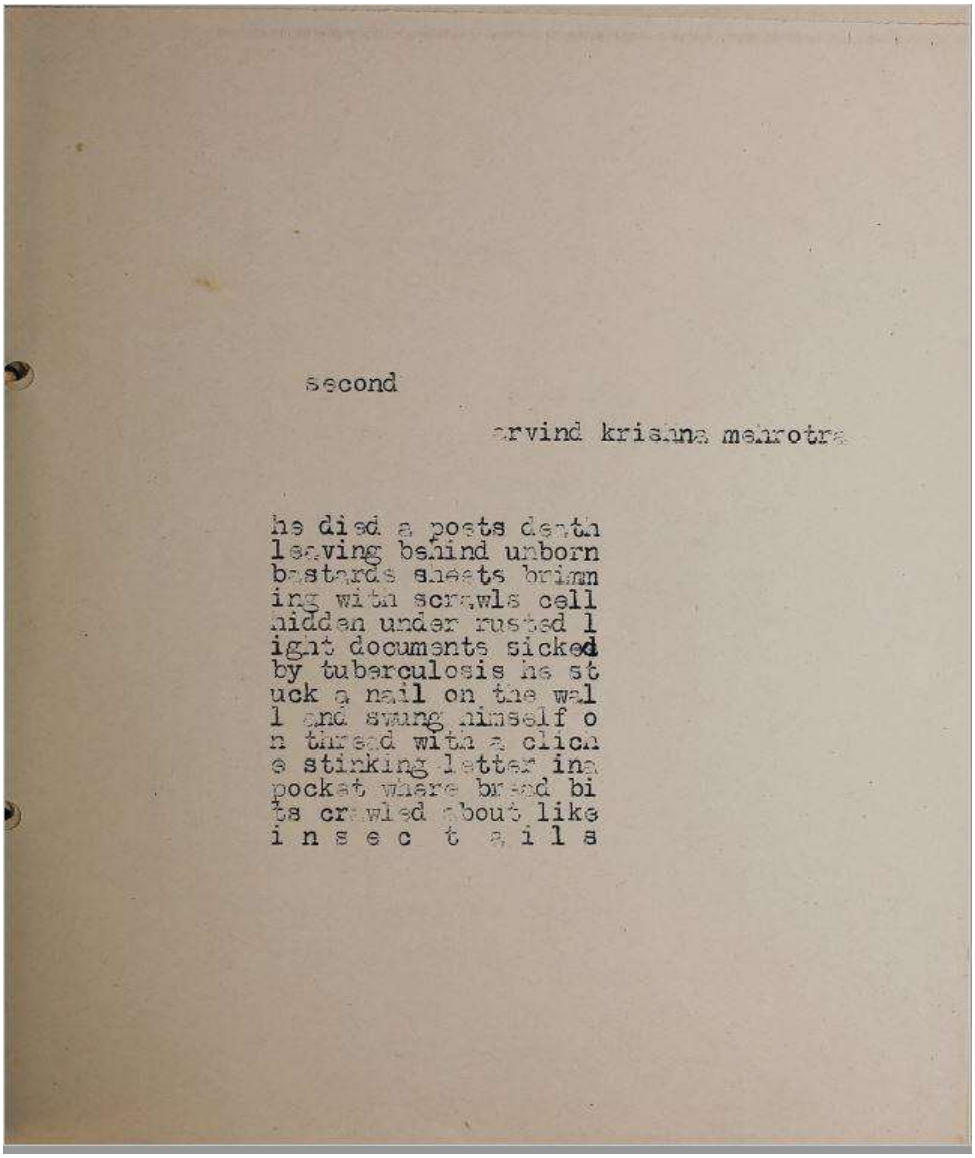
Mahon intertwines his mundane narrative of a visit to the town of Donegal with unnerving images of 'immeasurable erosions' and sea 'Spilling into the skull', and the poem ends in confusion, individual chaos and corporeal exposure. The helplessness of the poet to influence history translates into his own failure to write meaningfully: 'contriving vain/ Overtures to the mindless wind and rain'. The end of the poem is marked by irresolution and the influence of chaotic violence against people (alluded to in the use of the word 'genocide') on writing. His poem's non-linear trajectory and harrowing images and language expose the poet's mental uncertainties and inability to comprehend and make peace with reality.

Like Mahon, Mehrotra, Kolatkar, Gulam Mohammed Sheikh and other individuals associated with Indian late modernism were also concerned about the cold war and other events that marked the second half of the twentieth century. The authors/ publishers used the small publishing platform for literary expression to widen the scope of Indian English poetry and bring it into proximity with socio-historic and political events. Their postmodernist experimentation, aimed to address the historical and cultural context of the 1960s, can be retrieved through a close assessment of the thematic, formal, visual and architectural elements of their poems.

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, the maker/ editor/ contributor of *damn you,* a magazine to which Kolatkar also contributed, used its pages to create works that defied generic

categories and dealt directly with the audience, with an objective to shock. Mehrotra addresses the intellectual stagnancy among his readers by enacting the death of the poet:

he died a poets death
leaving behind unborn
bastard sheets brimm
ing with scrawl cell
hidden under rusted l
ight documents sicked
by tuberculosis he st
uck a nail on the wal
l and swung himself o
n a thread with a clich
e stinking letter ina
pocket where bread bi
ts crawled like
insect tails (3)



second

arvind krishna mehrotra

he died a poets death
leaving behind unborn
bastards sheets brimm
ing with scrawls cell
hidden under rusted l
ight documents sicked
by tuberculosis he st
uck a nail on the wal
l and swung himself o
n thread with a clich
e stinking letter ina
pocket where bread bi
ts crawled about like
i n s e c t a i l s

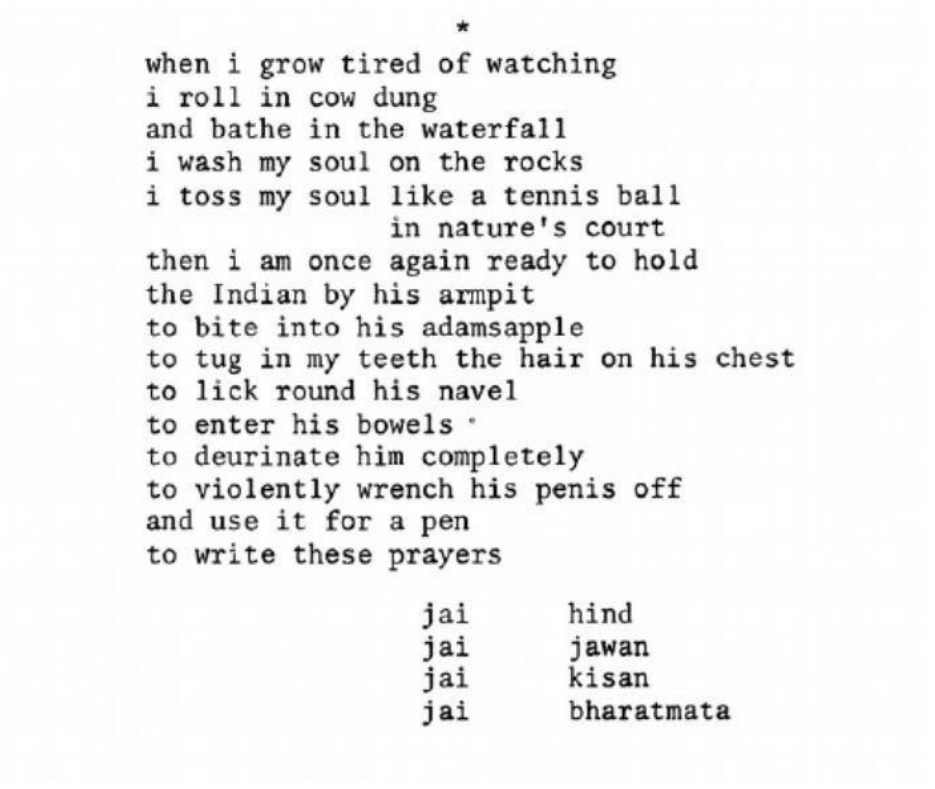
Image 10: A piece from *damn you*

Mehrotra's piece does not adhere to literary conventions. Despite its visual presentation as a poem, it contains a prosaic sentence. The author announces the demise of a poet. The pathos and the silences inflicted on the poet in the face of apathy from the audience are delineated through the blocking of sentences in a restricted space on the paper. The poem captures the general ethos of *damn you* that supported experimental works and provided a platform to challenge readers' expectations from poetry.

Mehrotra's early poem, 'Bharatmata', published in *damn you*, appropriates styles and themes from French surrealists, Beat poets and Indian devotional poets to address

contemporary Indian history. The poet calls India 'in the world's slum/ the lavatory'. The poem, composed in 1966, written in confessional mode and modelled on Allen Ginsberg's 'Howl', satirises various aspects of post-colonial life in India, including urbanisation, malnutrition among people, state corruption, large investments in hydroelectric projects and institutionalised support for certain canonical pieces of art. The poem ends with a caricatured reverence to the nation:

when i grow tired of watching
i roll in cow dung
and bathe in the waterfall
i wash my soul on the rocks
i toss my soul like a tennis ball
in nature's court
then i am once again ready to hold
the Indian by his armpit
to bite into his adamsapple
to tug in my teeth the hair on his chest
to lick round his navel
to enter his bowels
to deurinate him completely
to violently wrench his penis off
and use it for a pen
to write these prayers
jai hind
jai jawan
jai kisan
jai bharatmata ('Bharatmata' 22)



*

when i grow tired of watching
i roll in cow dung
and bathe in the waterfall
i wash my soul on the rocks
i toss my soul like a tennis ball
in nature's court
then i am once again ready to hold
the Indian by his armpit
to bite into his adamsapple
to tug in my teeth the hair on his chest
to lick round his navel
to enter his bowels
to deurinate him completely
to violently wrench his penis off
and use it for a pen
to write these prayers

jai hind
jai jawan
jai kisan
jai bharatmata

Image 11: An Extract from Mehrotra's *Bharatmata*

Through this juxtaposition of the venerational and the profane, Mehrotra intends to undermine the separation between the two and create a sense of unease among his audience. While the critique of the ritualistic performance of nationalist reverence is provided by exaggerated cataloguing of Hindu nationalist activities—rolling in cow dung and bathing in a waterfall—the poet's own engagement with the Indian man is bodily and sexual. The paratextual features of the poem—its typewritten font, absence of capitalisation, its lineation, the depletion and slow disappearance of words in the end—accentuate his defiance expressed in the words of the poem. In the search for forms to address the post-independence ethos, Mehrotra, in a similar vein to Mahon, uses sensory images and the ruminations on the personal and the bodily as equivalent to grand historical events and draws his readers to identify with the alienation that those events inflict on him.

Kolatkar, as a late modernist, also sources inspiration from the 'alienation' experienced in the face of modernity (de Souza 22). To convey his disarray, Kolatkar also attends to language and adapts the existing poetic forms. However, unlike Mahon, who often pronounces the inadequacy of language, Kolatkar uses minimalism and exploits the blank spaces on the page to convey his disillusionment with words. His struggle to look for forms is visible in the lineation, tonality as well as subject matter that he brings by adopting elements from the transnational ethos of the 1960s. Kolatkar's poem, 'the boatride' found a fitting home in Mehrotra's magazine, *damn you*: mimeographed by Mehrotra, the publication sold less than 100 copies, aptly illustrating its themes of transient, fleeting existence and defiance of literary conventions.

'the boatride', which appears in *damn you*'s sixth issue, catalogues seemingly insignificant details of a boatride from an island near Bombay to the coast near the Gateway of India; the poem opens with Joycean realism as it talks about the poles on which the boats are anchored: 'the long hooked poles/ know nooks and crannies/ find flaws in stonework/ or grappling with granite/ ignite a flutter/ of unexpected pigeons' (1). In extremely detailed expressions of visuals, Kolatkar captures the lives of individuals, mostly underprivileged:

frozen in a suit the foreman

self-conscious beside

his more self-conscious spouse

finds illegible the palm that opens

demandingly before him

the mould of his hand

broken about his right knee

he reaches for a plastic wallet

and pays the fares

along the rim of the boat

lightly the man rests his arm

without brushing his woman's shoulder (3)

Through the use of similar, extremely realistic images, in the subsequent stanzas, Kolatkar continues to capture the most minute details of the people on the boat, often hyperbolically raising them to fantastical statues. As the boat reaches the shore, Kolatkar's gaze begins to take in history but continues to resist the assumption of authoritative voice, maintaining his flaneur's stance while depicting the scene on the shore:

familiar perspectives

reoccupy

a cleanlier eye

sad as a century

the gateway of india

struggles back to its feet

wobbly but sober enough

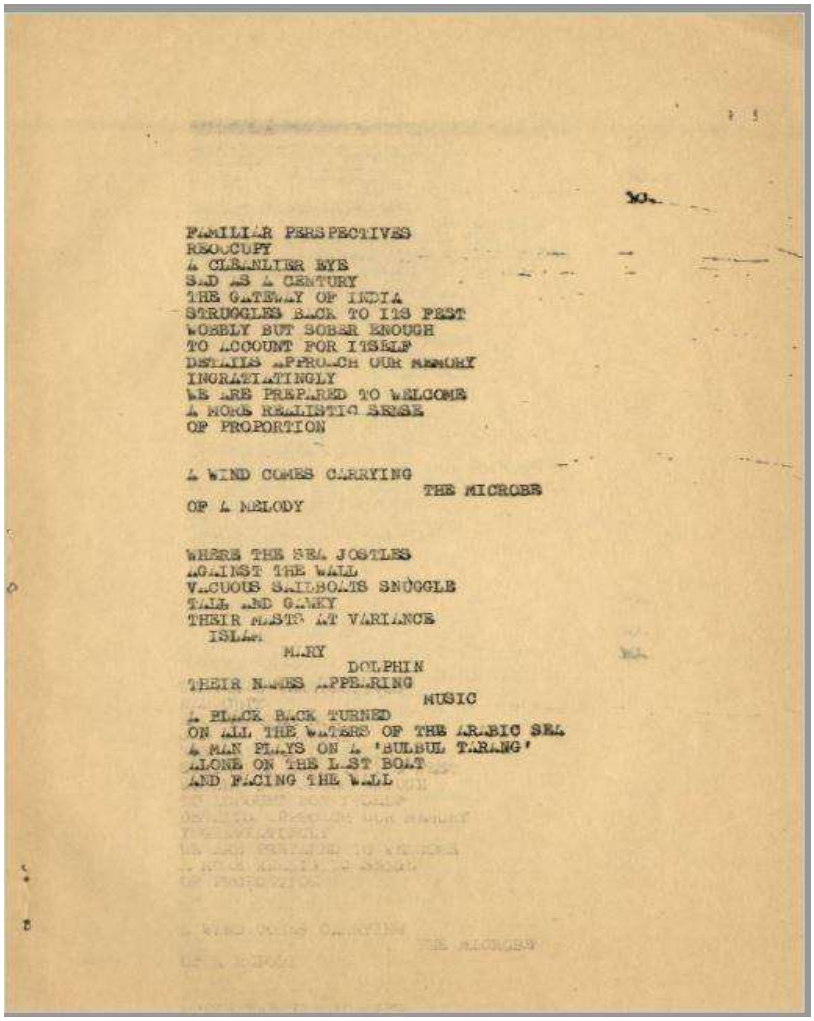
to account for itself

details approach our memory

ingratiatingly (10)

‘The Gateway of India’, a colonial symbol built to commemorate the landing of King-Emperor George V and Queen-Empress Mary in 1911, appears to the poet ‘sad as a century’. The image of the monument’s ‘struggl[ing] back to its feet’ refers to the post-colonial state of India. The poem prioritises neither of the symbolic values associated with the monument but, as the boat approaches India’s juridical territory, the landscape ‘ingratiatingly’ asks for acknowledgement in the boatriders’ memories. Kolatkar’s poem experiments with the position of address by placing the poet observer on the boat, and its unstable position takes away the grandeur from the nation’s monument. The poem, by prioritising the fleeting reality, minimalism of language and sensory experiences, conveys its apathy towards the bid for posterity manifested in nationalist narratives and their symbolic structures.

Kolatkar chose to publish his poem in *damn you*, which, as written in the magazine’s statement, was listed by the Directory of Little Magazines as ‘The first and only international avant garde mag out from India’ (1). In addition to providing ideological support and an international network for circulation to Kolatkar’s poem, the magazine’s layout and architecture also complemented it. *damn you* paid significant attention to the visuality and physicality of poems. ‘the boatride’ uses concrete experimentation to convey the significance of words. Moreover, instead of punctuation and capitalisation, the poem uses line breaks and blank spaces to create pauses.



FAMILIAR PERSPECTIVES
REOCCUPY
A CLEANLIER EYE
SAD AS A CENTURY
THE GATEWAY OF INDIA
STRUGGLES BACK TO ITS FEET
WOBBLY BUT SOBER ENOUGH
TO ACCOUNT FOR ITSELF
DETAILS APPROACH OUR MEMORY
INGRATIATINGLY
WE ARE PREPARED TO WELCOME
A MORE REALISTIC SENSE
OF PROPORTION

A WIND COMES CARRYING
THE MICROBE
OF A MELODY

WHERE THE SEA JOSTLES
AGAINST THE WALL
VACUOUS SAILBOATS SNUGGLE
TALL AND GAWKY
THEIR MASTS AT VARIANCE
ISLAM
MARY
DOLPHIN
THEIR NAMES APPEARING
MUSIC
A BLACK BACK TURNED
ON ALL THE WATERS OF THE ARABIC SEA
A MAN PLAYS ON A 'SULBUL TARANG'
ALONE ON THE LAST BOAT
AND FACING THE WALL

Image 12: An extract from Kolatkar's 'the boatride'

While the landscape of mainland India is shown asking for recognition in one stanza, 'a wind comes carrying/ the microbe/ of a melody' is spread across the page in a celebratory manner. The melody is made through the names on the boats' hulks, and Kolatkar seems to be composing a found poem by writing them on the page and making them appear as if they are floating in the water, 'islam/ mary/ dolphin' (10). 'the boatride', a poem about visual experiences, also aims to give the readers a multi-sensory experience and uses the physical space provided by *damn you* to serve the purpose.

Kolatkar's style also came to fruition in the short-lived *Dionysius*. The magazine's August 1965 edition, edited by Shrinivas Pradhan and Abraham Benjamin, had a cover designed by Kolatkar. The cover mirrored the magazine's theme: the title's typeface

resembled scribbles, and the cover image used broad brush strokes faintly representing a face (Image 7).

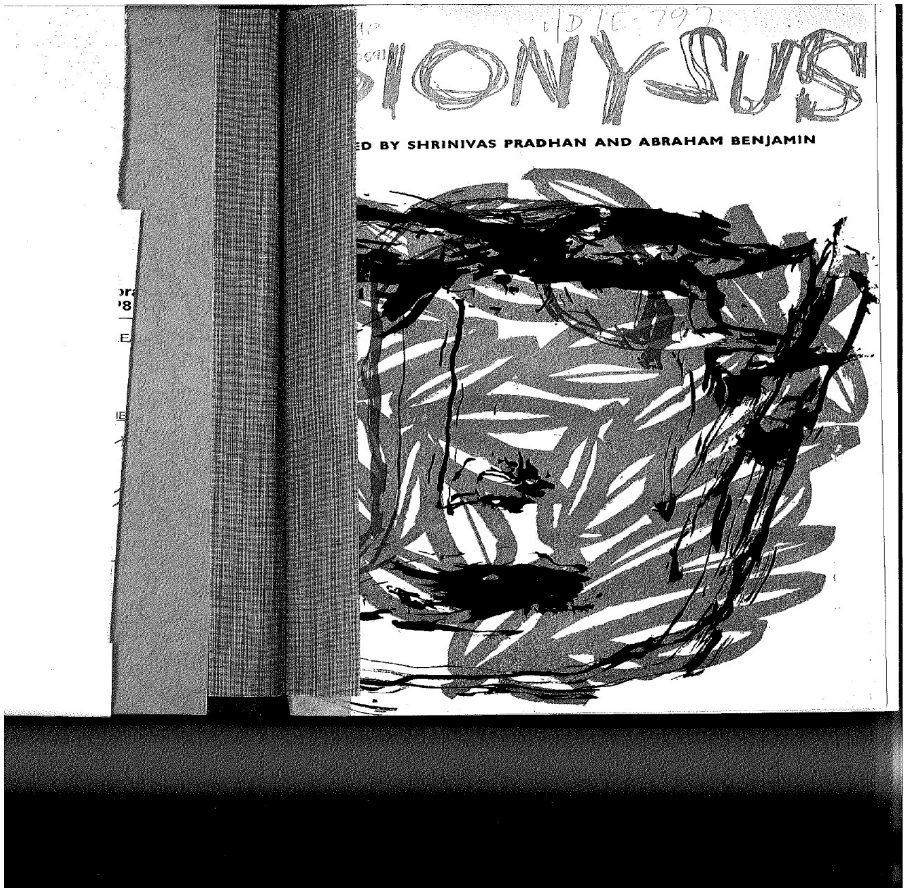


Image 13: Cover image of *Dionysus*, No. 1

As explained in the editorial, the magazine's aim was to challenge the values of sexual and bodily restraints promoted by postcolonial Indian society. The editorial states:

> Logic, language, form, morality, religion, etc., are all indeed necessary and to be striven for but they are all constructions—at times individual constructions dependent on the concrete situations—constructions after the event so to speak. At the level of creativity all constructions are possible. (3)

Dionysius's editorial blurred the distinction between fiction and fact as they are believed to be both constructed with the assistance of people's imaginations. It asked the contributors to widen the imaginative potential of creative works to create a stirring aesthetic experience. Its aim was to persuade the writers to work beyond the accepted

conventions of writing. Due to the magazine's transgressive nature and what were considered 'obscene' expressions in its editorial statements, the magazine's combined second and third number was confiscated by the police (King 23). Kolatkar's 'Teeth' and 'The Hag' appeared in the magazine's first issue and complemented its aim of widening the imaginative potential to hone the conventional subject matter of Indian English poetry.

The magazine and Kolatkar's poem in it, 'The Teeth', visit mythological models to narrate the momentary exposure of an individual's corporeal reality. While adopting a mythical model, the poem uses the imaginative potential provided by it to create a stirring image of sexual arousal. The speaker represents the Dionysian chaos as he reaches his moment of revelation:

Lord I am revealed
How my teeth gleam
[...] I have unlocked
Like a monstrous
Pomegranate. Do not
Touch me God do not
Come near me, for all
Is grist to my grinding.

My loin has bared its teeth,
My thighs open like iron
Maidens. Guts whip out.
My nose crawls over me
Like a prehistoric
Lizard come back to life.

My throat nibbles at my

Tonsils. And I grin

Having chewed off my lips. (9)

While Kolatkar aims to approximate the moment of Dionysian arousal, he also visits the poetics of *bhakti* saints like Tukaram, who expressed religious veneration in terms of corporeal exposure. Kolatkar secularises it to describe a moment of revelation that could be interpreted as representing artistic inspiration or spiritual realisation or sexual lustfulness. He uses the American idiom but his images, 'monstrous/ Pomegranate', 'grist to my grinding', 'prehistoric/ Lizard', are primarily borrowed from the local South Asian landscape.

In 'The Hag', Kolatkar uses stark images while representing a seemingly simple and prosaic image of an aged woman eating her food. He imagines her crushing death's abstractions pinned to her: 'She devours oranges/ in self-defense [...] She paws./ She claws [...] Her entire face/ converges in a featureless fury rushes to the battle's/ toothless centre' (10). By using fourteen lines, the poem recalls the European literary tradition of sonnet writing; at the same time, it carefully renders the local textures of Indian life. Kolatkar radically revises the form in order to create a poetics relevant to his immediate surroundings. In both poems, Kolatkar adds poignance to ordinary moments and radically defamiliarises the immediate surroundings to imaginatively engage his audience in the processes of meaning acquisition. While 'the boatride' more emphatically engages with aspects of South Asian reality, 'The Hag' and 'The Teeth' are posited against the pieties of what is considered a respectable language for public forums. Through their irreverent poetics, Kolatkar and Mehrotra obliquely engage with the post-colonial South Asian reality; they further their models of engagement with corporeal reality that archive aspects of history excluded from the mainstream historical discourse.

Conclusion

In the 1960s, when Derek Mahon and Arun Kolatkar came to the literary scene, they both confronted inchoate publishing cultures and lack of intellectual and creative fervour within the literary intelligentsia. The perception of nuclear threat was particularly acute and their respective countries were going through slow processes of nation building amidst sectarian and religious divides. The poets looked for modes of address which would help them make sense of the disarray of modernity and were astutely aware of the historical events taking place in their countries as well as elsewhere in the world. Instead of creating prescriptive work, they struggled to find ways to address reality. Not only the formal and stylistic elements borrowed from British and Indian English poetry but the materiality of production and distribution also needed to be refurbished. Therefore, they found their platform in unsteady yet robust modes of dissemination, which complemented their intent to experiment with the conventional modes of addressing reality. The struggle that they underwent in identifying the appropriate modes to address history is evident in the bibliographic and contextual code of their small publications which provided a larger scope for un-censored expressions. These publications, in the words of a contributor, were themselves extensions of literary creation and 'intended to harmonise conflicting elements [...] not by prosaic compulsion as by poetic fusion'.

CHAPTER TWO

The Significance of Dialogues: Analysing Visions and Perspectives in Poetry from the 1970s and 80s

Derek Mahon and Arun Kolatkar, after their search for a voice during the little magazine movement, began focussing on addressing the post-colonial landscapes in their respective countries and beyond. While there are differences in their responses, owing to differences in aspects of history, politics and cultural legacies of their respective countries, the poets fashion considerable similarities in their adoption of aspects of modernism. They revisit modernist modes of address with a conscious awareness of twentieth-century reality. In this chapter, I shall study how their poetry poses resistance to identitarian politics that creates divides among sectarian groups in Ireland and both religious and linguistic groups in India. I shall specifically study how their poetic visions and perspectives counter aspects of the social and historical phenomenon in the 1970s and 80s.

Mahon was born and raised in Northern Ireland, which witnessed severe armed conflicts in the two decades that followed the outbreak of the Troubles in 1969. The Loyalist paramilitaries, Republican paramilitaries and the British security and armed forces caused more than 3,000 deaths in the region. The violence was perpetrated not only due to the aspirations of the militant groups—the Irish Nationalists aspiring to immediately or eventually merge with the Republic of Ireland and the Unionists considering themselves as subsets of the United Kingdom's civil society—but also due to the brutal measures implemented by the British security forces. Between 1971 and 1975, hundreds of civilians were interned and detained, based on suspicion, without trial and in 1972, thirteen unarmed citizens were killed by the Parachute regiment on 'Bloody Sunday' and several low scale war operations were conducted in the 1970s and 80s (O'

Leary and McGarry 9). According to Brendan O' Leary and John McGarry, the per capita death toll in Northern Ireland made the UK the most violent liberal democracy in the world between 1948 and 77 (16). However, the death toll does not convey the influence of the war on the community; the victims were disproportionately working-class individuals. As Jonathan Bardon points out, the events that marked Northern Ireland's descent into the most continuously disturbed region in Europe—'the Battle of the Bogside, the burning of Bombay street and the deployment of the British Army'—all occurred in urban, working-class neighbourhoods (quoted in Hugh Haughton). Essentially, the trauma witnessed by the community cannot be rendered through empirical reports; the Northern Irish artistic currents, therefore, have to creatively address it in literary, cinematic and theatrical forms.

Meanwhile, while struggling to establish independent governance after colonial rule, post-independence India (1947-present) also witnessed several communal and linguistic conflicts. According to Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal, 'The overlapping dialectics of centralism and regionalism as well as nationalism and religious assertion (both of communitarian and sectarian varieties) continued to mould the historical experiences of India […] after independence' (167). Looking at the post-colonial history, it is evident that although the Indian National Congress-led dispensation[39] (after independence from the British rule) managed to frame a constitution and establish a parliamentary democratic system over diverse provinces and partially independent princely states in India, the process of enforcing a central governmental authority relied on non-elected and autocratic bodies such as bureaucracy, the military and the police.

[39] The Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 and led the first modern Nationalist struggle in the subcontinent. Post-independence, the constituent assembly for the formation of the constitution was predominantly Congress dominated. The Congress party, after independence remained in power for more than three decades after independence.

The government led by Jawaharlal Nehru[40] did not keep the promise of establishing a federal state based on state borders drawn on linguistic lines instead of retaining the arbitrary borders drawn by the colonialist forces; this caused several secessionist groups to resist the central government's authority. In the 1950s, certain language groups posed demands for secession, and violent civil conflicts among linguistic communities broke out in some parts of the country.

The states' reorganization committee, set in India in 1953, refused to accept the demands for the division of Bombay and Punjab. The refusal to divide the former led to tensions between Gujarati-speaking and Marathi-speaking groups in Bombay, and the state witnessed violent linguistic riots in 1960. Although the division of the state was subsequently done based on language identities, the animosity among the linguistic groups continued; the hatred also eventually consolidated in the form of antagonism towards the English language. Among all of this, there was widespread poverty, disease, unemployment and illiteracy. The focus of the Nehruvian government on developing a heavy industrial base to prevent capital-goods-led-import did not help curb the situation.

The lasting impact of conflicts initiated in British colonial periods to further their authoritative control haunt the post-colonial realities of both Ireland and India.[41] Although the nature of the conflicts in India was considerably different from the nature of conflict in Northern Ireland—such that the former did not witness a civil war and the conflicts were not continuous—yet the physical and psychological injuries caused by identitarian antagonism influenced the literature of both countries in similar ways. The evocation of memory and history played a significant role in instigating conflicts in both

[40] Jawaharlal Nehru was the first Prime Minister of independent India, affiliated to the Indian National Congress. He remained in power from the country's independence in 1947 until his death in 1964. He supported establishment of heavy industries and propagated a mixed economy where the private and public sector would co-exist.

[41] The Plantation of Ulster violently separated the custodians of British culture from the Irish Catholics. In India, the states were drawn to facilitate administrative ease and did not consider the cultural dispositions of various communities in India.

regions. As O'Leary and McGarry suggest, the sectarian groups in Northern Ireland continued to garner support through the rhetoric of self-aggrandisement and recalling of the injustices done to their people. The Irish Nationalists, for example, refer to the first Norman invasions in 1169 and the English brutality of the imperial era; whereas, the Unionists talk about the resilience of the Protestants of British descent who struggled against what they saw as an uncivilised country. In India, the linguistic and religious identitarian groups evoked their rich cultural heritage to differentiate themselves from the other groups, and English continued to be seen as harbouring the colonial legacy. This language in both countries is creatively deflected in particular literary works through counter and heterodox visions of reality.

Mahon and Kolatkar were quite sensitive to the conservative and exclusivist political discourse that perpetuated violence and antagonism in their communities. As indicated earlier, in his early collections, Mahon takes inspiration from the historic events confronted by the Irish yet prefers to locate himself on the larger literary map and remains sceptical of terms such as 'Ulster writer'. Kolatkar refuses to identify exclusively with the Marathi speaking groups but embraces bilingualism to address modernity in India. Both of their poetics challenge the very language in which chauvinistic and exclusivist political treatise is communicated. They assume visions and perspectives that would undermine the conventional rhetoric of the politicians who interpret history from a self-serving polemical lens. In this chapter, I shall look at Mahon's works written during the 70s and the 80s, *Lives*, *Courtyards in Delft* and *Snow Party*, along with Arun Kolatkar's *Jejuri*, first published in 1976.[42] I shall specifically analyse the vantage points employed by the poets to deflect violence and intellectual stagnancy in times of civil unrest and political conflicts. I shall study how Mahon and Kolatkar, like some of their other

[42] *Jejuri*'s Marathi translation by the poet was published by Pras Prakashan in 2011. The discussion in the chapter is limited to Kolatkar's English collection.

contemporaries, create a sense of immediacy for their readers and compose poetics that oppose monolithic representations of reality. I shall reflect on the similarities and differences in the perspectives in both poets' works.

Mahon, Heaney and Longley published extensively during the Northern Irish Troubles. Heaney upheld that an Irish writer needed to maintain a 'drastic kind of distance' to reflect on the Northern Irish crisis (Haughton 62). Remaining faithful to that assertion, Mahon does not directly address the historical events that unfolded during the Troubles; his works obliquely engage with violence and often enact his own privilege in relation to the communities subject to violence. Although he remains committed to the present moment, he evokes imagined and mythical worlds which defamiliarise the present moment. In his early collections (*Lives*, *The Snow Party* and *Courtyards in Delft*), he wanders in unpeopled landscapes and gazes at the insignificance, impermanence and vulnerability of human civilisations that are formed at the expense of great violence against specific individuals and landscapes. To evoke criticism of violent events, he widens his perspective and imagines his immediate surroundings in the larger reality of existence in the world. The poems, set in the aftermath of traumatic events during the Troubles, oscillate between fatalism and miraculous hope.

Arun Kolatkar opposes the chauvinism that surfaces in various religious, caste and linguistic groups and questions fixed ideas of identity—that led to numerous linguistic conflicts in India—by representing the diversity that forms an inherent part of the South Asian landscapes. By challenging nationalist conceptions of history and time with linearity and conceptions of progress, he rebels against the exclusivist nationalism and post-colonial pieties that defined the politics of post-independence India. Therefore, unlike traditional poetry in English, Kolatkar and other modernist poets discard the romantic nostalgia associated with poetic subjects and compose their works based on visceral engagements with the geographic contexts.

Further in the chapter, I shall elucidate how, much like Kolatkar, Mahon's sceptical and observant poetic persona, in his early collections, concerns himself with the modernist *now*. The poet often elevates himself and represents his immediate reality as a minuscule moment in the larger history of the natural world. His poetic perspective, which is set in the present but represents the continuation of the past into the present and is revelatory, reflects Mahon's and his cultural predecessors' beliefs in time and poetic perspectives and visions. From his position within the mundane and everyday reality, Mahon's poetic voice obliquely comments on the self-perpetuating sufferings that his Northern Irish community continues to experience. In Mahon's vision, the sense of awareness of history and the ability to evoke myths allows his poetry to assume a prophetic voice.

Mahon's ideas of revelation achieved within art are similar to Martin Heidegger's conceptions of 'becoming and happening of truth' within art (69). As Heidegger attempts to understand what is 'at work' in the creation of art, he recognizes a setting up that leads to the disclosure or the unconcealedness of being; the Greek equivalent of this 'unconcealedness of being' is *aletheia* (49).[43] There is not a static giving away of true knowledge in this process, but there is an ongoing happening of truth. According to Heidegger, there is a certain setting forth in the work of art. In this setting forth, he explains further, there are dual forces at work; on the one hand, there is an establishment of truth, and on the other, there is a dynamic force witnessed in the coming of being into unconcealedness. The nature of unconcealing is such that it is accompanied in art with certain grounding and denial. He explains this 'working':

> Truth, as the clearing and concealing of what is, happens in being composed, as a poet composes a poem. *All art*, as the letting happen of the advent of what is, is,

[43] In one of the interpretations of the etymology of *aletheia*, John D. Caputo explains that the word is composed of a prefix 'a' (not) attached with the word lethe (the river of forgetfulness). *Aletheia* then denotes undoing of forgetfulness or unconcealment (24).

> as such, *essentially poetry*. The nature of art, on which both the art work and the artist depend, is the setting-itself-into-work of truth […] It lies in change, happening from out of the work, of the unconcealedness of what is, and it means, of Being. (70)

The concealing coincides with truth because of the nature of the truth where 'One being places itself in front of another being, the one helps to hide the other, the former obscures the latter' (52). In other words, truth is by nature established through the denial of the other. In art, however, there is a constant battle unleashed in what is concealed and what is put forth. The use of verbs should be noted in the definition of the essence of art; art is called here as the 'letting happen of the advent of what is' and also as a 'setting' into work. In contrast to the technological functioning that human beings dedicate themselves to, which makes individuals' success cyclical, art has dynamism. The imparting of knowledge and revelation that Heidegger aims to realize is attained through constant dialogue between the visible and the invisible, the stated and the unstated, limitation and delimitation, extension and contraction. Mahon constantly aspires to build such revelatory moments in his poetry where there is a dialectical conversation between two opposing forces, leading to the setting forth of truth.

In his essay, 'About Time', Mahon writes about P.J. Kavanagh's understanding of time which approximates his own:

> … as it is for Eliot ('Burnt Norton'), Kavanagh's time is eternally present. Creation, said Scotus heretically, is continuous; Genesis is a metaphor. We create the world as we go along. Life is creation, artistic creation to some extent; we live *poetically* to this earth (Hölderlin) and living in time, we pause (Eliot again) at the… intersection of eternity and temporal experience. ('About Time' 69)

In 'Burnt Norton', Eliot claims that time is 'eternally present' and is 'unredeemable' (175). In the essay 'Hamlet', he defines the term 'objective correlative' in which human

beings can experience timelessness (145); this is a temporal moment but, in Eliot, intersected by transcendence. Mahon's exploration of this transcendental moment is also connected to quotidian reality. The revelatory moment is full of potential because it allows the poet to put forth what Heidegger calls 'unconcealedness of [...] Being'. Mahon delivers the sublimity that he experiences while witnessing minuscule moments in civilisational history.

Mahon upholds P.J. Kavanagh as his inspiration—revels in the fact that he 'looked from his window and breathed his air'—who witnessed combat with the Royal Ulster Rifles in Korea ('About Time' 67). Mahon explains that Kavanagh 'stood apart from conventional expectations' and did not belong to a literary school ('About Time' 65). Like Kavanagh, Mahon appropriates a position of flux, unease and liminality and addresses contemporaneity. There is an intent in their poetry to position the poetic persona in concrete geographical locations from where they might witness the dynamism of their immediate surroundings. Moreover, his references to Kavanagh's connections with the Korean war also point towards Mahon's intent to register the effects of violence in a rather peculiar way—'a global view reflected, contained in a raindrop' ('About Time' 68).

Mahon's collection, *Lives,* was published at the height of the Troubles in 1972. As Haughton documents, *Lives* was conceived in 1970 and published in parts in pamphlets and magazines during the period when Mahon returned to Northern Ireland and taught at Belfast High School, Newtownabbey, and when he moved to Dublin, where he worked as a lecturer of English at the Language Centre of Ireland. The poems are located in European landscapes, primarily in Dublin, and the violence unfolding in Northern Ireland is a forbidding presence. Although the collection largely addresses Mahon's personal life, he seems to be constantly reverting to the reality of the Troubles through metaphors, images and allusions. Mahon builds an intense portrait of old age and the burden of loss

borne by people and societies in the collection. Striving for the ideal vantage point to address the violence, he assumes a liminal voice, casting an oblique glance on the historical events that surface in his ruminations. He often allows revelatory moments to appear in his poems about Ireland and elsewhere.

In 'After Cavafy', Mahon shows that, while witnessing the degeneration of culture, the poet indulges in 'The frantic anthropologisms/ And lazarous ironies' (*LI 24*). Hugh Haughton and Declan Kiberd assess Mahon's adoption of an anthropologist's view, which constantly assesses the impact of the past on the present and future of individuals and societies. Kiberd perceives the anthropologist's standpoint as a response to the criticism furthered by critics like Vincent Buckley who detected 'the old Celticist idea of a people foredoomed by landscape and character to an ineffable melancholy' in Northern Irish poetry. Kiberd explains that Mahon, like an anthropologist, looked for 'the persistence of the person' while other Irish writers historicised geography. (599) According to Kiberd, there was no final 'evasion of responsibility' in Mahon's work: 'rather a widened embrace which has room for the dead people of earlier holocausts' (600). Haughton explains how Mahon's viewpoint allowed him to reflect on the cultural denigration of the society and helped him express 'the crisis of self-identification and knowledge' associated with the experience of modernity (61). I shall argue that this anthropological standpoint is interspersed with modernist experimentation, which allows his view to be less stereotyping and prescriptive. While delivering the modernist sublime, he allows multifarious and reverberating voices from the history of his country and beyond. Mahon emerges as a Janus-faced poet whose engagement with contemporaneity acknowledges the historical layers that define the present; however, instead of providing encyclopedic knowledge, Mahon, inspired by impressionism, imagism and other types of modernist experimentation, only provides minuscule moments while representing events after ruminating on the past and the present of communities and landscapes.

The tone of *Lives* is set in the eponymous poem, where Mahon adopts the idea of metempsychosis to express how the speaker lived several lives before becoming an anthropologist. The speaker ruminates on the previous lives that he has led as 'a torc of gold', 'oar/ But stuck in the shore', 'a bump of clay/ In a Navaho rug', 'a stone in Tibet' and 'A tongue of bark/ At the heart of Africa' (*LI* 14). The torc of gold refers, as Haughton explains, to one of the Celtic ornaments and allows the poet to associate himself with Europe, Navaho rug takes him to North America, the Tibetan stone to Asia and the tongue of bark to Africa. Mahon moves beyond mere recognition of the interconnectedness of human races and the presence of common ancestry for individuals; effectively, the reminiscences of physical aspects of past lives are embraced by the poets in the spirit of composing transnational poetics. While the references to the historic objects allow Mahon to demonstrate how different cultural artefacts have become parts of his poetics, his most recent incarnation brings him closer to the contemporary reality. He humorously counterbalances the ubiquitous image he builds for himself:

I know too much
To be anything any more—
And if in the distant

Future someone
Thinks he has once been me
As I am today,

Let him revise
His insolent ontology
Or teach himself to pray. (*LI* 15-16)

The poet is aware of the limitations of his perspective and mocks the pretense to knowledge that his anthropologist's standpoint allows him to appropriate. He acknowledges his vulnerability, manifest in its imminent mortality. The plea to a future interpreter to 'teach himself to pray' exposes the complaining attitude that custodians of 'authentic' culture might have concerning the decadence of values in the society. Mahon also casts a glance on Protestant values and on his own religious upbringing in Belfast; he seems to be implicated in the perpetuation of sufferings because of his own fixation on the necessity to 'pray'. In the anthropologists' perspective that Mahon intends to appropriate, despite the knowledge of human civilisations, there is an awareness of his subjectivity and an 'insolent' desire to reach for ontological meanings.

Further experimenting with vantage points, Mahon places his highly ironic and self-critical voice after annihilatory events to recapitulate what emerge as repetitive patterns within history. While this approach gives poignancy to his agonies in response to violence, it also sharpens his critique of the general passivity surrounding conflicts. In 'Deaths', a parallel poem to 'Lives', the narrator articulates several queries about the nature of existence after some sort of carnage. The objects from the past whose deaths Mahon envisions ('nails, key-rings/ Sword hilts and lunulae/Rose hash, bog paper') (*LI* 17) imagine a post-apocalyptic Beckettian landscape. The narrator asks a series of rhetorical questions:

> Who crowd our oxygen tents.
> What should we fear
> Who never lost by dying?
> What should we not as
>
> Gunsmiths, botanists, having
> Taken the measures of

Life, death, we comb our

Bright souls for

Whatever the past holds? (*LI* 17)

The acknowledgement of mutability and a desperate resistance to complete erasure that Mahon portrayed in 'Lives' reappears here. The reference to gunsmiths makes the readers aware of the human induced violence and the helplessness that one witnesses in the face of technological determinism. The Beckettian post-apocalyptic landscape allows him to rise above the immediate landscape of Northern Irish Troubles and address the carnage that people across centuries have been subjected to, beginning from the violent deaths of those preserved as bog bodies in Scandinavia. The fatalistic and predatory nature of the group represented by the pronoun 'we', reappears in 'Entropy' (*LI* 30-31). The self-infliction of suffering is identified and the poet considers himself as implicated in the actions. The portrait of the collective that Mahon draws is as much affected by exogenous factors as it is by its own passivity; the group lives like 'Anemones' and awaits 'Whatever/ Nourishment the wash/ Of the waves may bring' (*LI* 31). Mahon creates a harrowing portrait of humanity caught due to its own actions of the past.

Revisiting *Lives*, Ciaran Carson, in his review of *Raw Material*, aligns his poetics with Mahon's and articulates a desire to engage in the manual activity of making things rather than merely indulging oneself with words. Carson suggests that there 'are parameters to all these activities, dictated by the material; but our 'own' poems set their own parameters, which are unknown until they are written' (101). He states that the poets (Mahon and himself) want the medium to be more tangible than language (101). For Carson, the speaker in 'Lives' who traces the lives previously led emerges as also a metaphor for the journey that the poetic content has made; Mahon's poetry is strewn with references to pre-existent works that get an 'afterlife' through adaptation in his work (100). Mahon and Carson, who have embraced modernist legacies, constantly adapt pre-

existent tangible works of art or writing to address the contemporaneity; this is especially evident in Mahon's several works of ekphrasis and translations. In the context of *Lives*, the chaos of the violent conflicts seems to have subjected the poet to ekphrastic treatments of timeless objects that would allow him to be anchored to a certain sense of order in the face of war. However, Mahon constantly destabilises the sense of orderliness that resultantly emerges. While *Lives* is full of images of Beckettian waiting and a weighty sense of stillness, he intends to prolong the moment and impregnate it with voices emanating from history to help his readers experience the flux that defines the events in the North and general existence in conflictual societies. Therefore, the lesson he provides is not of nihilism or passivity but of critical reflection and adaptation of inherited cultural values to a dynamic world.

Mahon remembers Wallace Stevens in 'Rage for Order' by borrowing the poem's title from his 'The Idea of Order at Key West', and to an extent, challenges the aestheticism fashioned by Stevens's poem. The poem begins on a very confident note as the person—who resembles a Romantic bard because of his hermetic nature and his intent to prolong echoes of a dying culture—is shown as detached from the chaos. His position of repose allows him to engage with the events that are unfolding objectively:

> He is far
> From his people,
> And the fitful glare
> Of his high window is as
> Nothing to our scattered glass. (*LI* 22)

Instead of being shattered, the glass in Mahon's poem is scattered. The aloof poet of Mahon's imagination has a vision that is far from the chaotic and order-less perspectives of people who become victims and perpetrators of violence and whose glasses are 'scattered'. However, the ironic undertones in the poem undermine his aesthetic stance:

‘His posture is /Grandiloquent and/ Depreciating, like this,/ His diet ashes/ His talk of justice and his mother’ (*LI* 22). The collection’s anthropological view—aimed at excavating the past to reflect on the present and future—is juxtaposed to the imagination of the romantic bardic stance. Mahon further casts a critical eye on Stevens, who idealised ‘The maker’s rage to order words of the sea’ by acknowledging that his ‘Is a dying art, an eddy of semantic scruple/ In an unstructurable sea’(*LI* 22). Nevertheless, Mahon imagines a need to borrow ‘Germinal ironies’ from the grandiloquent poet; these ironic and sardonic inheritances are intended to support his task of representing chaotic events. He searches for ways of representation, often ironic and comic, which would allow him to express the absurdity of violent actions that unfolded in his community in Northern Ireland.

While describing the process of poetic address, Mahon draws his artistic inspiration from Heraclitus. Heraclitus’ surviving doctrine, translated by Charles K. Kahn, describes the process of poetic creation and reception:

> L
>
> As they step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow upon them.
>
> LI
>
> [[One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in stable condition, but it scatters and again gathers; it forms and dissolves, approached and departs.]] (53)

In Heraclitus’s imagination, the poet locates himself within the flux of contemporary events and then captures the voices that stream around him; while the artist is arrested and poised, the waters around him change. The poet captures a minuscule moment when he is affected by the happenings around him. In *Lives*, the persona poetic persona—despite looking from an elevated window—manages to bring forth several dismembered and forgotten voices whose narratives are forgotten. In the poem ‘The Archaeologist’, a

‘stone age figure’ is seen to be ‘heavily gesticulating’ and condemning the archaeologists to ‘hell fires’ (*LI* 12). In ‘A Dying Art’, he remembers ‘the native Manx speakers’ who crafted bone knives (*LI* 2). Mahon’s poetic persona allows his narrative to be affected by the narratives around him.

In ‘Homecoming’, Mahon’s sublime moment is aroused through the exhaustion and debilitation of his body. The poem begins at a rather dispirited note when the poet arrives in Dublin after finishing an exhausting journey from Boston. The bodily exhaustion and his own unkemptness are then transposed onto the decadent world that he witnesses around himself. After he enters a bar, he affixes his gaze on an evening star. Mahon then captures this revelatory moment and the sublimity of thoughts that follow: ‘Skies change but not/ souls change; behold/ this is the way/ the world grows old’ (*LI* 1). The change that Mahon aspires to see is impossible to achieve because it must undo the damage done to his community and himself: 'Scientists, birds,/ we cannot start at this late date/ with a pure heart,/ or having seen/ the pictures plain/ be ever in-/ nocent again' (*LI* 1). The pictures that the poet refers to might be of the effects of war that were being printed in the newspapers during the Troubles, or they might be pictures of the Vietnam war that were also being printed during the 70s. It seems impossible for the poet to un-see them. The representation of the body, which is almost sluggish, expresses the predicament of the poet inhabiting this society. The poem’s effect is especially disconcerting as the state of lethargy and apathy with which it opens is juxtaposed to the sudden revelation of the observer’s disappointment with internationally pervasive violence and the impossibility of witnessing any change. This passive yet powerful revelation evokes the kind of modernist sublimity that the poem attempts to achieve.

Mahon reiterates the significance of corporeal reception in 'In the Aran Island'. The speaker after stepping out of a pub hears a gull: ‘Circling now with a hoarse inchoate/ Screaming the boned fields of its vision’ (*LI* 5). The incipient nature of the creaking noise

becomes the subject of the poem, and Mahon claims: 'that was the way to do it/ Hand-clasping, echo-prolonging poet'(*LI* 5). Mahon's poem yet again focuses on a minute moment that allows a sudden journey of imagination 'Down light-years' (*LI* 5). The poet needs to remain attuned to the reverberations and the unresolved lurking voices in the background which might facilitate a critique of the perpetuation of violence. The poem ends with an awe-inspiring image of the waves:

A crack-voiced rock marauder, scavenger, fierce

Friend to no slant fields, or the sea either,

Folds back over the forming waters. (*LI* 5)

Although the image might signal a descent into mysticism, the violence to which the rocks and the existent scenery is subject could remind the readers of civil war. As evident in his constant engagements with conflict, Mahon does not completely deny history to render the epiphanic moment; his poems, despite their distance from violence, are quite perceptive of it.

Mahon's awareness of the problems that have instigated violence are more emphatically addressed in 'Ecclesiastes' and 'As It Should Be'. Mahon abandons his modernist form of narration and appropriates a grandiose voice to mock the timelessness of prescriptive institutions that maintain antagonism. 'Ecclesiastes' provides an ironic and sharp critique of the orthodoxies of Northern Irish society. The evocation of the books of Ecclesiastes and the Old Testament is a comment on Northern Protestant people as people of the Book, resorting to old scriptures and requiring customs to govern their lives:

for all your smiles and wiles, you are (the

dank churches, the empty streets,

the shipyard silence, the tied up swings) and

Shelter your cold heart from the heat

Of the world, from women inquisition, from the bright

Eyes of children. (*LI* 3)

Mahon draws a striking contrast between what he perceives as the cold climes and emotional aridity of Northern Irish Protestantism and the warmth that he aspires for in an ideal society. Although the poem predominantly refers to the doctrinal nature of the Protestants in Northern Ireland, the final lines of the poem seem to refer to both a Protestant preacher and a poet's actions: 'stand on a corner stiff/ with rhetoric, promising nothing under the sun' (*LI* 3). While criticising the actions of the Protestants, Mahon foregrounds his complicity in the continuation of orthodoxies.[44]

In 'As It Should Be', Mahon builds an ironic soliloquy where after the hunting 'the mad bastard', the speaker revels in the fact that the children would 'thank us for it when they grow up/ To a world with method in it' (*LI* 25). The absurdity of the aggressive measures taken in establishing peace are starkly highlighted in the poem. Although the crisis of Northern Ireland remains unnamed, Mahon elevates himself to comment on the general conditions under which sectarian violence operates. The intent to form homogenous groups is what Mahon identifies as the obsession here and his elevated voice, through its bird's eye view critiques such intents; Mahon's imaginative renditions of other cultures again resists that viewpoint.

In *Snow Party* (1975), Mahon attempts to give voice to mute and silenced people, communities and entities. He constantly imagines their perpetuating presence and afterlives. The collection uses several forms such as concrete poetry and poetic prose in order to recover lost and suppressed voices through different measures. In the collection, he repeatedly draws attention to reverberating sounds; for example, in 'Afterlives', he hears 'the soft roar of the world' and 'guns/ Go off in a back street' (*SP* 1) and in 'Leaves', he perceives 'dead leaves [...] Rustling and sighing' (*SP* 3). He stages the inadequacy of

[44] The poem ironically comments on Mahon's inaction and reliance on religion and this is discussed in Chapter 4.

language in expressing the stories of those individuals in 'feverish forms' and subject to the violence of traumatising events, including the holocaust (*SP* 37). There is an awareness in Mahon's poetry of his own limited perspective and privileged position as a person who departed from Belfast, also enacted in his gestures of 'leavetaking and homecoming' in this collection.[45] The sense of occupying liminal spaces is heightened in the collection as he responds to the contemporary reality of the Troubles.

In 'Afterlives' the weighty sense of awareness about the contemporary events is again borne by the speaker, and at the same time, the awareness of larger civilizational history and oppression of the poor is present. The poem opens in the London flat as the poet 'draw[s] the curtain' and witnesses a 'Rain-fresh' morning (*SP* 1). He then reflects on his own position of privilege:

> What middle-class cunts we are
> To imagine for one second
> That our privileged ideals
> Are divine wisdom, and the dim
> Forms that kneel at noon
> In the city not ourselves. (*SP* 1)

Mahon's self-flagellation in these lines comes from his acknowledgement of economic inequalities and his own education and class privileges that facilitated an escape from the war torn city of Belfast. Further, as the poem relates his journey into Belfast through sea; the stasis on the sea where 'a gull/Dreams' and 'Somebody thumbs a guitar' is juxtaposed to a city 'scarcely recogniz[able]' because of 'five years of war'(*SP* 2). In the memoir-like quality of the poem, the sense of hurt and mourning is emphatically dramatised. By yet again placing the poem on the peripheries of the city, where the poet debarks, Mahon

[45] Homecoming is enacted in 'Afterlives' where Mahon returns to Belfast changed by the five years of war (*SP* 2). In 'Cavafy' he speaks of leaving and returning, although from the perspective of Cavafy (*SP*18-19).

maintains his distance from violent actions and acknowledges his infancy and inability to deal with the truth ('Perhaps if I'd stayed back/ And lived it bomb by bomb/ I might have grown up at last/ And learnt what is meant by home') (*SP* 2).

Apart from recognizing his own sense of privilege, in *The Snow Party*, the poet also imagines the suffering of other Northern Irish lives. Mahon associates the sounds that dominate Irish landscapes with the impairment that centuries of generations in Ireland have endured due to centuries of internal and external conflict. In 'Leaves', the poet describes the 'Rustling and sighing' of the dead leaves which would have an afterlife in heavens (*SP* 3). In 'The chair squeaks…', Mahon portrays inanimate objects yearning to be elsewhere: 'The kettle yearns for the/ Mountain, the soap for the sea' and then states: 'On a desolate headland/A lost tribe is singing abide with me' (*SP* 22). Similarly, in 'The Gipsies', he portrays low voices speaking from 'the fringes of the cities' (*SP* 24). Although the locations of the poems is unspecified, Mahon, composing his poems in the wake of violence, draws attention to those voices that would not be archived in larger historical narratives. Mahon's awareness of class and racial divides that exist in Ireland is evident. He is aware of the limitations of his perspective and ability to address the war, yet his representations of the peripheries unsettle the readers.

In 'The Snow Party' and the 'Last of the Fire Kings', violent barbarity is more clearly portrayed; yet it is still through the myth that he approaches violence. In 'The Snow Party', the stillness of 'houses of Nagoya and/ And the hills of Ise' are seen as peaceful while 'Elsewhere' thousands die 'In the service/ Of barbarous kings' (*SP* 8). 'Last of the Fire Kings' portrays the exhaustion of the king to continue the cycle of violence. In his soliloquy, the Fire King renounces the desire to engage in bloodshed. 'Last of the Fire Kings' represents the conscience of an everyman ruler who identifies the futility of war. The desire to distance himself and be objective is constantly expressed;

however, at the same time, the poet represents the King's inability to end war. He allows a dialectical conversation to emerge between the two forces:

I want to be

[...] the man

Who drops at night

From a moving train

And strikes out over the fields

Where fireflies glow

Not knowing a word of the language.

Either way, I am

Through with history—

Who lives by the sword

But the fire-loving

People, rightly perhaps,

Will not countenance this (*SP* 9-10)

The Fire King pronounces his resignation and intends to be 'Through with history'; however, he believes his people will not accept his actions. Here, like in many other poems reflecting on human history, Mahon highlights how individuals and societies are caught in the cycle of violence as they offer unquestioning subservience to dictators. By giving voice to the king's desire to be away from language, Mahon converges his own persona with the king's; his subject is violence and people perpetuating violence. He self-consciously depicts the reluctance to detach from their roles and, at the same time, a desire to break away from violence.

In *Courtyards in Delft*, Mahon shows the destruction that the war caused. The poems are composed by a less detached speaker, compared to the speakers of *Lives* and *The Snow Party.* He wanders in landscapes after trauma. From his position in the moment after violence, he reflects on the finitude of human history and intersects it with the timelessness of natural forces and latent objects. He observes cyclical patterns which mar the pasts of human societies. The dynamism of nature is held against the stagnancy of human lives. From the standpoint of which he composes his works, the contemporaneity is a minuscule yet awe evoking part of the larger history of the world. He shows how the brunt of violence is endured by communities with whom he identifies. Mahon is opposed to any limitations imposed by a monolithic concept of heritage; he rather appropriates an internationalist persona that would widen the scope of his poetry.

The first poem in *Courtyards in Delft*, 'Derry Morning', recounts the losses suffered by Derry immediately after the trauma of Northern Irish civil strife. The revolutionary aspirations of the city—which had been 'a boom-town wild/ With expectations'—are superseded by absolute silence. In this moment of repose, Mahon provides a poised view of the 'rubbled city', Derry. He identifies the dreams of the rebellious fighters dying down—its '*aisling* falter in the breeze'. Mahon integrates the immediate and the universal as he states:

> A strangely pastoral silence rules
> The shining roofs and murmuring schools;
> For this is how the centuries work—
> Two steps forward, one step back. (*CD* 9)

Mahon's narrative disengages itself from the specificities of the events. He identifies the human insecurity and fear that caused the disaster. He delivers his critique of Derry's past as well as larger human histories which seem to be oblivious to the individual lives led in the city. His (seemingly) grandiose narrative in the poem is juxtaposed with realistic

observations that convey vulnerability as well as possibilities of change. To counterpose the sense of fatalism, Mahon allows mourning, awareness of loss and vitality of nature to appear in the poem as ‘smoke from a thousand chimneys strains’ and ‘the returning rains […] shroud the bomb sites’ (*CD* 9). Mahon often appropriates a Swiftian dialectic that mocks or counterbalances his own partisan voice. By providing contradictory perspectives to his readers, Mahon engages them in the process of meaning making.

Mahon opposes similar forces of dominance and violence while reflecting upon tranquillity in absence of life in ‘Rathlin Island’. The speaker captures noises and silences: ‘A long time since the last scream cut short—/Then an unnatural silence; and then/ A natural silence slowly broken/ By the shearwater…’ (*CD* 12). Yet again, he maintains his distance from violent incidents by evoking aural instead of visual images. The speaker observes the 'bombs doze in the housing estates’ but maintains that here 'they are through with history' because the island seems secluded to him (*CD* 12). The speaker imagines the abandoned island as a representation of existence before the birth of humanity where the only disturbance is from the outboard motor that ‘spray[s]-blind’. He challenges the linear and progressive imagination of history by portraying awe inspiring life which was there before violent outbreaks; he states:

> We leave here the infancy of the race,
>
> Unsure among the pitching surfaces
>
> Whether the future lies before us or behind. (*CD* 12)

His rhetorical question then, ‘Whether the future lies before us or behind’, idealises existence without people but more emphatically challenges the human pioneering spirit that advocates that development and progression happen with human interventions in the natural world. Although the ponderance over the past, intentions to return to nature and be through with history seem to indicate a conservative humanist position, Mahon’s natural worlds are not representations of an innocent state but remind the reader of

forgotten communities, often subject to 'metaphysical pain', this position becomes clearer in, 'North Wind' (*CD* 10-11).

'North Wind', set in Portrush, portrays the harsh climatic conditions of Northern Ireland which also stand for the suffering and solitude of the town's residents. The personified North Wind appears as the lear spirit eternally condemned to wander in agony. Mahon identifies with the wind:

… the climate is here to stay.

So best prepare for the worst
That chaos and old night
Can do to us. Were we not
Raised on such expectations,
Our hearts starred with frost
Through countless generations? (*CD* 11)

Here, instead of setting his poem in the silence after trauma, Mahon sets it in the event-lessness and hardships of everyday existence in Northern Ireland. Yet, this existence is also represented as marked by loss, mourning, 'metaphysical pain' and a perpetual sense of suffering which remind the readers of violence that has been perpetuated in his country. Far from being voyeuristic, the poet represents violence as an all-pervasive and hysterical force in his society. Mahon's representation of trauma is extremely poignant because it penetrates the mundane. His disinterested perspective emerges as a powerful tool for depicting loss.

Mahon's elevated visions on human history also appear in his poems about North Carolina in *Courtyards in Delft*. In 'The Globe in North Carolina', the speaker enjoying a leisurely moment describes his perspective, which is that of 'bland panoptic eye' cast on America; he writes:

America is its own night sky,

Its own celestial fruit, on which
Sidereal forms appear, their rich
Clusters and vague attenuations
Miming galactic dispositions.
Hesperus is a lighthouse, Mars
An air-force base; molecular cars
Arrowing the turnpikes become
Lost meteorites in search of home. (*CD* 28)

The image of America on the globe is presented as wrapped in mystery even for America itself. Mahon superimposes the representation of the Universe over the representation of America and finds it momentarily enamouring. However, he does not idealize the celestial image that the country has managed to build for itself; Mahon addresses 'the Great mother' (perhaps, the personification of the earth) and states: 'We throw ourselves upon your grace/ Inverting the procedures which/ Knelt us to things beyond our reach' (*CD* 28). The scientific inventions alluded to in the above stanza appear minuscule compared to the counterpoised existential questions posed by the poet. Mahon's dissatisfaction with scientific discoveries is persuasive and challenges the scientific zeal in the poem. Mahon is vehemently opposed to the rhetoric of progress and development, fostered by America, as well as the politicians of his own nation, Ireland. Therefore, he constantly, from the repose of his own position post-trauma, questions the linear progression of history.

Arun Kolatkar engages in similar visceral engagements with history in his writings composed in the second half of the twentieth century and the beginning of twenty first century. It is possible that Kolatkar, like his contemporaries Adil Jussawalla and Arvind

Krishna Mehrotra,[46] would have read the Northern Irish poets; but even if he did not, his responses to Indian contemporaneity are similar to Mahon's poetic responses. Like Mahon, he exhibits eclecticism, internationalism, experimentation with poetic forms and adoption of Modernist inheritance. Kolatkar and his contemporaries' works are comparable with Irish writers as they were also conceived in conflictual circumstances and looked for ways to imaginatively respond to the social and political ethos in India and beyond. Adil Jussawalla aligns himself with Northern Irish writers and alludes to Heaney's statement, 'the shortest way to Whitby, the monastery where Caedmon sang the first Anglo-Saxon verses, is via Warsaw and Prague' ('Breathing Freely' 223); Heaney appreciates Eastern European writers and, while carving British modernism, upholds them perhaps because of the brilliance of their artistic achievements in the face of atrocities. Jussawalla explains that for Heaney, the roots of 'a native British modernism' is 'more communal in nature—communal in the best, most 'binding' nature of the term—more politically motivated, born out of a sense of shared loss, the loss of language and history' ('Breathing Freely' 224). Jussawalla considers Heaney, as well as Mahon and Longley, to be contributing to the vitality of anglophone modernist poetry; their responses to modernity seem to be resonating with him. Jussawalla and other Indian poets, who wrote in post-independence India, like Northern Irish poets, embrace imaginative vitality and binding communal poetics required to deal with historical abominations of the early post-colonisation era. Kolatkar's early works juxtaposed with Mahon's early works will not only highlight the shared aesthetic ideals that facilitate critiques of identitarian politics and violent processes of nation formation but will also,

[46] In the interview that I conducted with Adil Jussawalla on 12th December 2018, he stated that his interest in Irish poetry has been abiding; however, he was not sure if Mehrotra had read any of the Northern Irish poets. He said, 'Kolatkar was a man of few words and would not divulge much information.' I interviewed Arvind Krishna Mehrotra on 17th December 2018 and he showed several editions of Derek Mahon's works that he possessed.

through recognition of differences, highlight the material and cultural differences inherent in the communities which the poets inhabit.

As explained in Chapter-1, English was considered the language of the colonisers and, therefore, English language writers had to confront antagonism from the custodians of regional languages in India. Indian English writers, nevertheless, adopted the language and its popular poetic forms to address the experiences of Indian communities. Kolatkar opposes the exclusivism of campaigners of regional languages and embraces bilingualism that allows his poetry to be infused by the influences of different cultures in which his languages of literary production—English and Marathi—evolved and became colloquialised; Kolatkar's poetry is as much influenced by jazz music, blues and black American speech as by Marathi *bhakti* poetry. In the same vein, Thomas Kinsella states: 'Every writer in the modern world—since he can't be in all literary traditions at once—is the inheritor of gapped, discontinuous, polyglot tradition [...] Nevertheless, if the function of tradition is to link us living to the significant past, this is done as well by a broken tradition as by a whole one' ('Irish Literature' 116). Kolatkar and Kinsella's stands testify that evolution and hybridisation of cultures is not mourned by them but is actively embraced. I refer to 'hybridity' as theorised by Amar Acheraiou;[47] he redefines 'hybridity' in cultural and other spheres and proposes that it be associated with 'emancipated diction and bold *ideological* and ethical commitment to the world' (188) and should not simply denote heterogeneity. In my opinion, Mahon and Kolatkar's works are hybrid not merely because they embrace diversity and criticise the colonial past,

[47] Amar Acheraiou in *Questioning Hybridity, Post-Colonialism and Globalisation* criticises Homi Bhabha's definition of hybridity as occupying a third space. According to Acheraiou, in Bhabha's theorisation the concept of hybridity stands for 'inclusiveness, dialogism, subversion and contestation of grand narratives' and does not engage exclusively with contexts of neo-colonialism and imperialism. He proposes a diachronic study that would engage with material globality, reconnect with anti-colonial struggles and and critically deal with resurgent imperialism. The post-colonial characteristics identified by Acheraiou, in my opinion are manifest in the contemporary poetics from Ireland and India that I am studying; it is evident that these works do not merely compile cultural influences but radically consider 'global solidarity, responsibility and ethical intention' (197).

which deprived them of a coherent culture, but because they indulge in dialogue with dominating structure of power and actively align with the dispossessed across the globe.

Despite being rooted within specific locations, Kolatkar and Mahon's dialogic verses, through intertextuality, allow the reader to conceive multiple perspectives on contemporary reality. Mehrotra reflects on the reason for experimentation with modes of address in poetry composed in the modern era; he states that the experience of modernity is marked by a breach of contract between the word and the world; modernists confront staggering experiences and fail to find corresponding expressions in language ('The Emperor Has No Clothes' 184). The poets then capture the awe following this experience by demonstrating the fracture of language in their poetic narratives. Kolatkar's experimentation with poetic modes allows him to express the modernist amazement with global history.

Kolatkar's work particularly uses minimalism and condenses sentences to delineate reality poetically. Mehrotra suggests that Kolatkar had the gift 'of making completely impersonal the scene he was imaginatively engaging with while at the same time, eschewing all isms and ideologies, identifying closely with each part' ('Death of a Poet' 95). Kolatkar dedicates himself to ordinary reality which, in the words of Mehrotra, emerges as 'enchanting'. The 'isms and ideologies', which Mehrotra considers to be bracketed out of Kolatkar's works are not absent, but are, to an extent, inherent in the approach that Kolatkar takes; while writing his Marathi collection, *Bhijki Vahi* (The Tear Stained Notebook), Kolatkar said that he decided to not narrate the story of Heloise because he could not get a way into the story which would make it different from a retelling (Mehrotra 30). Kolatkar strives to bring in new perspectives on existent myths and tales and quits writing about a subject if he cannot defamiliarise it. In his collection, *Jejuri*, Kolatkar, like Mahon, through his dedication to minuscule moments that are impregnated with modernist sublimity, brings novel perspectives on specific phenomena

which preoccupy modern existence in India and beyond; like Mahon, he also enacts the limitations of his perspective as a bourgeois.

The intentions of foregrounding the repressed narratives of history are present in both poets' works; however, they also find ways to rise above the specificities of events that provoked them to write and widen the scope of their poetry. Mahon and Kolatkar both in their seminal poems responded to violence through the evocation of mythic and fantastical events. In his celebrated poem, 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford', Mahon imagines mushrooms, representing the repressed voices of global history, crowding to a keyhole and asking for deliverance from a constant state of waiting and decadence (*SP* 36-38). Although the poem begins its ruminations from Ireland it elevates and addresses larger human-induced and natural disasters, in the final stanzas, by remembering 'Lost people of Treblinka and Pompeii' (*SP* 37). The loss of memory and absence of acknowledgement of injustices committed through history, which appear in the poem, are recurring thoughts in the works of both Mahon and Kolatkar. Kolatkar, in *Sarpa Satra* (2004), revisits the Holocaust, the Vietnam war, and more immediate atrocities caused by terrorism in India by re-imagining a myth from *Mahabharata* in which the mythic hero Arjuna and the Hindu God, Krishna, burnt a forest, which escalated a cycle of revenge. The myth states that Arjuna and Krishna caused the death of several snakes and forest dwellers; then the snakes took revenge on Arjuna's grandson for the actions of his grandfather by stinging him. Arjuna's great-grandson, Janamejaya, bothered by his father's death, then decided to seek revenge from the entire species of snakes by bewitching them and summoning them to die in the holy fire. The narrative of the second section of the long poem, *Sarpa Satra*, is provided by Jaratkaru, a mythic snake, while being bewitched to die in a snake sacrifice conducted by Janamejaya. Although Jarakatu's plea in the poem is to end the cycle of violence, she tragically remembers the original act of violence conducted by Arjuna for sport—

Not just the trees, birds, insects and animals
(herds upon herds
of elephants, gazelles, antelopes)

but people, Aastika,
people as well.
Simple folk,

children of the forest
who had lived there happily for generations,
since time began.

They've gone without a trace.
With their language
that sounded like burbling of a brook (*SS* 44)

The poet's focus on the myth acts as a catalyst to draw attention to several violent events in the ancient and the modern history, those justified by the narrative of seeking vengeance, and the cyclical violence that is escalated after the outbreak of conflicts. Both Mahon and Kolatkar refer to histories of genocidal violence and chronicle how innocent people have been subjected to violent conflicts. In both poets' recollections, the memories of people's suffering are eventually lost; Kolatkar, especially focuses on the loss of language. While Mahon refers to 'Treblinka and Pompeii', Kolatkar, by calling the snake sacrifice in *Sarpa Satra* as the 'holocaust', remembers the sufferings of European Jews during World War II. By alluding to incidents in modern history, the poets criticise the continuing nature of political violence. They both manage to rise above the concerns of their specific communities by adopting surreal or mythical frames; nevertheless, the poets

do not escape history but avail the power of allusion to address transnational concerns. They both manage to evoke staggering experiences by using the imaginative power of oral cultures and adapting them for their own secular critiques of history.

The intent to deflect popular narratives and modes of historicising (or erasing history), upheld by Kolatkar, also appears in Adil Jussawalla's *Missing Person* (1976). Jussawalla extended professional (through publishing) and personal (in the form of literary advice) support to other poets of the generation, including Kolatkar. During the composition of *Missing Person*, he inhabited India during the emergency which was a period of twenty-one months, during which the fundamental rights of Indian citizens were suspended by Indira Gandhi (1975-76). The collection captures the voices of rioting individuals, student protestors, famines, floods and war-stricken people from the Indian subcontinent ('Blood crawls from a crack […] There is trouble outside:/ crowds, stammering guns') (13). The poet, as a bourgeois, instead of agonizing on the behalf of individuals, addresses contemporary history from the standpoint of liminality or absence from the challenges experienced by working individuals. In the first two sections of the collection, Jussawalla composes long verses divided into sub-sections. The subdivisions prevent the author from presenting a holistic narrative but help him build an assortment of images of violence. The poet presents the visual images as through a movie lens. The collection begins with the words, 'House Full. It's a shocker. Keep Still' (13), and continually draws attention to the staged quality of the action ('jump cuts here/ from mother to mistress and back' 13). The poem does not maintain pronoun consistency and constantly enacts its failure in representing reality. The poetic persona's own nihilism enacted through visceral images of his involvement in contemporary decadence persuasively draws the middle class readers' attention to their own passivity: 'A mill of tubercular children/ is what he wears […] Blood tumbles down sleeves/ hung upside down/ to dry/ in his flat' (19); 'touches his prick/ from time to time/ for moral support

(31). It emerges as an exemplar of late modernist experimentation as it, through allusions to Eliot, Pound as well as Marx and Fanon,[48] addresses the violence that defined Indian modernity without denying the privileged position inhabited by the poet.

Kolatkar's work exhibited similar experimentation with perspectives to draw attention to aspects of post-independence Indian society. He often foregrounds the perspective of the flaneur who can capture the fleeting reality. This perspective is developed at length in *Jejuri* but is introduced in his early poems. In ''Irani Restaurant Bombay', Kolatkar writes from the perspective of a *loafer,*[49] a purposeless individual drifting through the city, who, like the Parisian flaneur, casts an observant eye on the city. As Mehrotra points out, it is highly unlikely that Kolatkar in the 1960s would have read Baudelaire or Walter Benjamin, but his vision is quite similar to the French poet's imagination of the seemingly purposeless observer ('Death of a Poet' 93). It is more likely that Walt Whitman's reference to himself as 'loafe', in 'Song of Myself'(Whitman 7), would have reached Kolatkar. The poem exhibits interesting similarities with Whitman and Mahon's works, as it depicts the artist's persona as an observant individual but a misfit in society. The *loafer* is imagined as casting his gaze on a tablecloth with a stain which becomes the subject of his poem after that 'sticky tea print' grabs his attention as 'a verse from the blank testament of the table'. Kolatkar portrays the observer's actions after that observation:

> … his cigarette
>
> lit, the loafer, affecting the exactitude of a pedagogue,
>
> places the burnt matchstick in the tea circle [...]

[48] Jussawalla uses high-modernist powers of suggestion to speak about certain very significant issues concerning urban India. He refers to the statement of Franz Fanon, in his epigraph to the second section, titled 'Points of View' which spoke about the absence of an established bourgeois society in underdeveloped countries (28).

[49] *Loafer,* in several South Asian languages, is a person who avoids work.

the burnt matchstick with a tea circle makes a rude

compass, the heretic needle jabs a black star.

tables chairs mirrors are night that need to be sewed

and cashier is where at seams it comes apart. (*TB* 53)

The observer in the stanza is sewing the narratives through his sharp glances over each detail of the restaurant's interiors. The stain, called a 'tea print', turns into a compass when the *loafer* places his burnt matchstick over it; the shadows and the furniture inside the restaurant turn into pieces that would be sewn together. The sewing metaphor is significant and highlights Kolatkar's approach; he intends to archive a very tactile universe with multiple dimensions in his poetry; the stains, textures, depth allow for a reimagining of the spaces. Kolatkar's subject is an Irani restaurant[50] representing a minority group that has formed an important part of the landscape of the city of Bombay. Kolatkar provides only a minuscule aspect of that landscape, yet the realism with which he does so is remarkable. Nevertheless, he accepts the inability to capture it at great length and states, 'cashier is where at seams it comes apart'. Kolatkar's poetics, like Mahon's, intends to overcome the state of mere engagement with language that poetry is subject to and aspire to engage the audience sensually.

In 1967, Kolatkar wrote 'The Turnaround', which also provides reality in a condensed manner but, nevertheless, captures the historic, geographical and cultural heritage of Maharashtra. Each moment that the poet captures in the poem is impregnated with meaning and within his rather mundane observations, there are layers of anthropological and historical meanings placed:

I could smell molasses boiling in a field.

[50] Mehrotra in his notes to *Boatride and Other Poems* explains that the poem was based on several Irani restaurants that Kolatkar visited. These restaurants are managed by the Irani migrants who settled in Bombay and are another example of the cultural diversity that the city represents. However, their business threatened by rapidly establishing chain-restaurants, they might slowly disappear from the commercial scene.

I asked for some sugarcane to eat.

I shat on vishnukranta

and wiped my arse with neem leaves

I found a beedi lying on the ground

and put it in my pocket.

It was walk walk walk and walk all the way.

It was a year of famine.

I saw a dead bullock.

I crossed a hill.

I picked up a small coin

from a temple on top of the hill.

Kopargaon is a big town.

That's where I read that Stalin was dead.

Kopargaon is a big town

where it seemed shameful to beg.

And I had to knock on five doors

To get half a handful of rice.

Dust in my beard, dust in my hair.

The sun like a hammer on the head.

An itching arse.

A night spent on flagstones.

My tinshod hegira

Was hotting up. (*TB* 74-75)

Kolatkar through his seemingly insignificant details captures the texture of spaces that people in villages and small towns in India inhabit—the smell of molasses is a common feature in rural India; *vishnukranta* is a flower grown all across the country, its English name is dwarf morning glory; the *neem* tree is also another feature of Indian landscapes. Although the poem captures the mundane details of Kolatkar's trip through Maharashtra, the subject of his poem is elevated by references to larger historic events— this journey coincides with Stalin's death and the famine that brought great distress to rural Maharashtra. As Kolatkar explained to his friend, Mehrotra, on his deathbed, 'tinshod hegira' is a reference to a practice followed by Nana Patil's government called the horseshoe government; Patil, a revolutionary who established a government alternate to the British government, punished dissenters by ordaining horseshoes to be nailed to their feet ('Death of a Poet' 85-86). In describing his own distress, through metaphoric references, the poet foregrounds the history of the place, especially aspects of the past that are captured primarily in oral narratives. He represents the places he visits by focussing on specificities and blends them with universal events and concerns; the mundane nature of his subjects create immediacy with the readers and, despite being focused on minuscule and banal moments, the poem astounds the reader into acknowledging the layers of Indian contemporaneity.

Kolatkar's seminal work, *Jejuri* (published in 1976) uses a condensed technique while representing reality. The collection provides observations of an unnamed secular viewer visiting a religious landscape; *Jejuri* is a comprehensive assessment of both religious fanaticism and decadence of morals in the public sphere in contemporary India. The history of folk and Brahmanical traditions is alluded to in order to reflect on the reminiscences of past violence in post-independence society. The reflections on the surroundings of Jejuri from a sceptical urban individual provide a novel perspective to study religiosity; his observations also provide insights into the contemporary public

sphere and its corruptions (more emphatically in the final section when the speaker visits the railway station). Moreover, the collection, through its modernist preoccupation with 'nowness', its para-textual and visual accessibility evokes an emphatic sense of proximity with the readers and defies nationalist pride and related ideas of linear and progressive history and temporality.

Like in the works of Mahon, the banality is intersected by epiphanic moments. Everyday objects exist as a source of artistic inspiration and become surreal and elevated in magic realist ways. Nerlekar explains that Kolatkar and his contemporaries garner influences of 'socialist realism', a technique 'that depicts the material conditions of the lived world in a forthright manner'. In addition, Nerlekar explains, they use 'dalit realism [...] that combines the social realism with a linguistic directness that was shocking for the readers' (*Bombay Modern* 17). By aligning themselves with cultures dedicated to ordinary lives and drawing strategies from them, the poets persuade the readers to engage with the lived sense of reality in South Asia. By intersecting everyday reality with modernist sublimity, Kolatkar provides an intimate portrait of the society and allows the narratives to rise from their specific contexts and create an added sense of urgency for its readers.

Jejuri begins with the speaker's journey to Jejuri, in Pune district and exhibits the downbeat attitude also present in several poems by Mahon. Instead of evoking sublimity in its treatment of the sacred, the collection identifies ruin and economic decadence. Through the stark evocation of images of bestial desires, hunger and corrosion, it achieves sensual proximity with its readers. The apparently mundane details are rendered enamouring through the use of metaphors and hyperbole. The poet describes the priest waiting for a bus of pilgrims, whose arrival would ensure his day's income:

An offering of heel and haunch
on the cold altar of the culvert wall

the priest waits.

Is the bus a little late?

The priest wonders.

Will there be a puran poli in his plate?

With a quick intake of testicles

at the touch of the rough cut, dew drenched stone

he turns his head in the sun (*JE* 4)

The poet, with his aim to capture the actuality of existence in post-independence India, carves his own aesthetics where the moment being addressed is elongated and impregnated with the multifariousness of reality. The sacred is interspersed with the economic; Jejuri is depicted as a town with an extremely fragile economy and the thoughts of those associated with religion are often preoccupied with procuring food and livelihood for themselves. The poet points to the proximity of 'worship and venality' (Mc Cord 54) associated with religion. In other poems, such as 'A Song for A Vaghya' and 'A Song for Murli', the economic intersects the religious in quite pragmatic ways where questions of survival and sustenance, which seem to depend on religious practices, come to the fore. Kolatkar does not call for judgements on the individuals; the priest performs the ritualistic sacrifice and waits for the day's pilgrims so he can have 'puran poli', sweet bread. The everydayness—which constitutes the thoughts of a priest on his existence—becomes the sole subject of the poem. The intent is to create democratic art, preoccupied with bare reality, that actually belongs to the people and represents them.

In another poem, 'An Old Woman', the speaker delineates a moment of encounter with a beggar woman. The woman articulates what the reader might have conjectured through the reading of the collection's poems—Jejuri is a town with not enough opportunities for people to earn; she states, 'What else can an old woman do/on hills as

wretched as these?' The moment is revelatory for the speaker who looks at the woman's face and states:

> You look right at the sky.
> Clear through the bullet holes
> she has for her eyes.
>
> And as you look on
> the cracks that begin around her eyes
> Spread beyond her skin.
> And the hill crack.
> And the temples crack.
> And the sky falls
>
> with a plateglass clatter
> around the shatter proof crone
> who stands alone. (*JE* 16)

The speaker does not ruminate on the permanence of the sky but views its reflection in the women's eyes. He exalts the woman's life without inventing any histories; he depicts the decay that her body has undergone, like everything else exposed to the sun. Kolatkar's intent in the depiction of this fleeting scene is to refrain from providing complete narratives which would appropriate the poetic subject's voice but capture the reality of being alive. He builds the revelatory or epiphanic movement. As the beggar woman's skin cracks spread into the cracks of the landscape, both considered to be weathered and invincible; the astounding moment is presented. It is the mere survival in the face of the earth that the poet extols. Through such compositions, Kolatkar succeeds in arresting the reader's attention within his poetics dedicated to the dispossessed.

Kolatkar uses familiar modes and renders them extremely flexible to delineate his sly observation/ critique of the world saturated with inequalities and violence. He uses the devotional prayer but the devotees delivering the monologue instead of praising the presiding deity of Jejuri, Khandoba, reflect on the deterministic nature of social practices in India. Vaghya and Murli, the traditional followers of Khandoba are introduced in the poems, 'A Song for a Vaghya' and 'A Song for Murli'. In the former, a Vaghya ('a class of male devotees who conceive of themselves as dogs accompanying the hunt' McCord 56) narrates his story stating, '…I can't beg/ I'll have to steal/ Is that a deal?' The tone of the monologue turns critical in the final stanza as the Vaghya states:

God is the word
and I know it backwards.
I know it as fangs
inside my flanks.
But I also know it
as a lamb
between my teeth,
as a taste of blood
upon my tongue.
And this is the only song
I've always sung. (*JE* 27)

By evoking the images of food and hunger, the speaker seems to suggest that he also has an appetite that requires feeding, and mere deification of his image is not sufficient. His reason for devotion to the deity is to ensure survival by satiating his hunger and that is what makes him sing praises to Khandoba. In the latter, Murli, the female devotee, who becomes a sex-worker, is shown transacting with a customer: 'keep your hands off Khandoba's woman/ you old lecher/ let's see the colour of the money first' (*JE* 28). In

the poem, ‘Between Jejuri and Railway Station’, poet returns to the character of Murli where she is referred to as temple dancer; the poet states:

> You pass the sixtyfourth house of the temple dancer
>
> who owes her prosperity to another skill.
>
> A skill the priest's son would rather not talk about. (*JE* 43)

Vaghya and Murli are the groups of individuals, who are forced to become devotees of Khandoba when childless couples who appeal to Khandoba for children beget a child; the child they give birth to is given away to serve the deity. The seemingly devotional song of Vaghya and the song of Murli, both bring forward the prosaic realities of the lives of these people who are reduced to beggary, stealing or sex work. The economic is an undeniable aspect of existence and those reliant on the fragile economy of religious towns undergo extreme hardships; by capturing their voices and their desperate prayers for food, Kolatkar manages to draw the readers to acknowledge the economic reality of the country.

While presenting his observations of the present, the poet casts his sceptical eye on the effects of the past on the present. The legends that form parts of the history of the place reflect on economic and class disparities, violence against self and community. In the poem, ‘A Kind of a Cross’, the poetic protagonist notices the instrument used for mortification rites. As described in the notes, it was used for the swinging of devotees, hooked in their flesh, as a part of a ritual to be performed in the worship of Khandoba (Chaudhuri 57). The speaker responds after looking at the object, ‘It’s a kind of a cross with two cross bars/ you lie between and come apart’ (*JE* 35). The practice, as the speaker states, has been discontinued but it nevertheless highlights the insanity of religious fanaticism.

‘A Kind of A Cross’, presents a very intimate depiction of violence; Kolatkar locates such moments where violence is self-inflicted and has been to an extent

normalised by society. There is a recurrence of involved observations of the individuals as well as communities. Like Mahon, he also manages to highlight how the past extends into the present and alludes to the fact that societies refuse to incorporate the lessons furthered by violent histories. Mehrotra observes, 'Though Kolatkar is an unbeliever and does not hide it, the tone, bemused, seemingly offhand, is far from mocking. On the contrary, he is divinely rapt by everything he sees' ('Death of A Poet' 76). He casts a wonderer's eye on the mundane to charge that landscape with significance. Though the poet concerns himself with addressing the contemporary situation, the spectator's vision succeeds in engaging with the accumulated history which he can access by looking at the landscape. The objects that he approaches provide him with insights into the past: the class biases of that society and the violence and bloodshed perpetuated by civilizations.

Kolatkar, in *Jejuri*, strives to critically address religious narratives accepted by Indian society. Like Mahon, he does it through obliquely addressing and caricaturing existent myths. The legends, as the speaker observes, are attached to everything visible in the landscape; everything seems to be accorded mythic attributes ('scratch a rock/ and a legend springs') (*JE* 22). The speaker observes and relates stories about his ordinary surroundings in a manner that draws the reader's attention to their fabricated yet oppressive nature. In 'A Scratch' the viewer re-phrases a legend:

that giant hunk of rock

the size of a bedroom

is Khandoba's wife turned to stone

the crack that run across

is the scar from his broadsword

he struck her down with (*JE* 22)

The story of this stone is closely linked to another such myth from the poem, 'Yeshwant Rao' who is 'only a second class god/ and his place is just outside the temple… As if he belonged/ among the tradesmen and the lepers' (*JE* 38). Yeshwant Rao, according to the legend, was a member of an 'untouchable' caste who sacrificed his life for Khandoba and was rewarded by being made the gatekeeper.

One may distinguish a humorous quality to the lines as the speaker plainly draws attention to the fact that there are hierarchies among deities, beautiful things are accorded more reverence and associated with gods like Khandoba while the ordinary stones and rocks are used to satisfy the sentiments of the marginalized. The speaker draws the readers' attention to how legends are made; women and untouchables are provided with representation in this legendary world but based on their positions in society. Myths are formulated to serve the interests of the powerful and one may observe the continuities of such tradition in the contemporary world.

After depicting the present moment and history's repetitive reflections in the section representing the village, Kolatkar narrativises by significantly reimagining time and space in the final section where the speaker visits the railway station. In order to represent the subject where rationality and reason are not operating, Kolatkar's poetry uses surreal images to reflect on the cyclical nature of events performed in public infrastructure n India. Mocking the colonial lineage on the society, Kolatkar depicts a surreal landscape where time has absolutely stagnated and any scope for change in the ways is impossible to imagine. The speaker states in the poem 'station dog':

the spirit of the place
lives inside the mangy body
of the station dog

doing penance for the last

three hundred years under

the tree of arrivals and departures (*JE* 46)

The dog is ready to give up the ghost just like the railway station's infrastructure but is unable to reach its end and continues to exist. The railway station is symbolic of colonial inheritance in the society and despite the inapplicability of those inherited practices, they exist in phantasmal ways.

Further in the collection, the speaker mocks the functioning of bureaucracy and administration in India which requires absurd reverence. Time is seen to be moving cyclically and ritualistically and any cognition is missing from the functioning of the station; the poet states:

the booking clerk believes in the doctrine

of the next train

when conversation turns to time

he takes his tongue

hands it to you across the counter

and directs you to a superior

intelligence

the two headed station master

belongs to a sect

that rejects every timetable

not published in the year the track was laid

as apocryphal

but interprets the first timetable

with the freedom that allows him to read

every subsequent timetable between

the lines of its text (*JE* 48)

Railway time is also a colonial inheritance and it starkly differs from the time that dictates the semi-rural community of Jejuri. It restricts imagination. The station-master, who is forced to follow it, is obsessed with archetypes and lacks any discretion that would allow him to envision any change in the ongoing practices. It is a stark satire on public institutions in India where the administration is extremely corrupt and self-idealising. It can only work based on absurd scriptural guidelines that are often interpreted to dismiss any kind of questioning. The collection ends with the depiction of converging lines of the railway station that resemble the prophetic lines on the palms of people that, according to Hindu mythology, have supposedly predestined the events. Poet critiques the fatalism and lack of imagination that exists in the public sphere.

The apocalyptic stagnancy in the final section of the collection is juxtaposed to another instance where the poet observes a butterfly. The poet hails the butterfly that, according to him, has taken 'these [Jejuri's] wretched hills/ under its wings'. The transience, vitality, and poignancy of the butterfly is opposed to the social and bureaucratic rituals in post-independence India. Kolatkar writes:

There is no story behind it.

It is split like a second.

It hinges around itself.

It has no future.

It is pinned to no past.

It's a pun on the present. (*JE* 21)

The poem celebrates the fleeting reality of the butterfly; the transience is also mirrored in the architecture of the poem and the unfinished sentence: 'and it closes before it o'. Although not particularly interested in natural beauty, Kolatkar uses it figuratively; the

butterfly emerges as the antithesis to the station dog which represents the mangled body of colonial administration. It signifies the vitality of indomitable lives led in Jejuri. Kolatkar's modernist aesthetics contained not only in the linguistic code (juxtaposition, assortment of images) but also in the visuality of the poem (concrete experimentation), create an extremely heterodox portrayal of Indian society.

Public life in India, post-independence, has been marked by a sense of inefficiency and corruption, where there is a sense of paternal reverence attached to the government officials who as he mocks, will work when you bathe them in milk or 'promise you will give a solid gold toy train' (*JE* 50). Kolatkar, through his realistic depiction of religious and transportation networks in *Jejuri*, focuses on the larger sociological reality in India which makes him not completely discard religion as something like 'the opium of the masses' or bureaucracy as reminiscences of British colonial rule but allows him to cast a critical eye on religion's victimization of marginalized individuals and its establishment and perpetuation of disparities in the society. Rajeev S. Patke in 'Poetry Since Independence' in *An Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English* writes that *Jejuri* is 'best read as a glass-poem: what you think you see through the glass is the place, what you actually see is your own reflection trying to look through' (257-8). The quote seems to be conveying that *Jejuri* delivers a universalist message where, in a modernizing world, viewers project their fragmented thoughts onto the surroundings leading to a distorted perception of the world. However, I have argued that although the universal is an important aspect of Kolatkar's work, its projection on concrete physical objects, allows a socially and historically aware aesthetics to emerge.

Mahon and Kolatkar's work stands opposed to propagandist modes of narrativising that invent histories and aspire for abiding popularity; the poets are constantly seen to be reimagining the ways of representation as to not polemically delineate reality. Mahon's

speaker ironically undercuts his own partisanship. Kolatkar, through the use of minimalism, conveys his disillusionment with language itself; he makes the readers often confront blank spaces and deprives his poetry of any ostentation. Employing different tools, the poets, nevertheless, manage to create polysemic poetics that would foreground the multifariousness of reality of existence in contemporary Ireland and India.Although the poets borrow visions and perspectives from high-modernists, their work does not bracket out aspects of history and alterity in their countries and beyond. They not only address the sectarian forces (in case of Mahon) and religious extremists and corrupt polity (in case of Kolatkar) but they also engage with, what Acheraiou would call, 'the global peripheries' (195). They manifest an ideological commitment to foreground overlooked and repressed voices in their respective societies and beyond.

CHAPTER THREE

Translations and Intertextuality in Mahon and Kolatkar's Late Works

[In the 1960s[51] India, specifically Bombay]...the idea of the modern came to be redefined. There is no such thing as a singular modern or a monolithic modern. There are multiple modernisms and modernities. We all have to define our own modern. So for instance, if we take something from western art, or use free verse in poetry, we reinvent the idea of the modern. We try to find a space for it in our own culture [...] these ideas [...] enter into a process of interaction, with the result that the idea of the modern undergoes a change, and can become the "Indian modern" [...] or, in the case of an individual poet, his or her "modern".

-Gulammohammed Sheikh, 'More than one world'

Derek Mahon and Arun Kolatkar are both poets who appreciate and acknowledge cultural heritage; the modernist delineation of a disarrayed self, in the case of Mahon, and, of the sublime modern moment, in the case of Kolatkar, often allude to Anglophone and other literary canons. Although Mahon invokes the statement by Raymond Chandler, 'No art without the resistance of the medium' (Interview with William Scammell 5), in his work, he does not just revisit and adapt the materiality of the form but purposefully uses it to come to terms with modernity. Similarly, Kolatkar uses pre-existing literary forms and rewrites and aligns them with his poetic style and ideologies. Talking about the eclecticism of references in his Marathi collection, *Bhijki Vahi*, Kolatkar states in an interview:

[51] In his interview titled, 'More than one world', Gulammohammed Sheikh responds to Laetitia Zecchini's question about his perception of modernity, if it was associated with freedom or with 'the feeling of being 'crushed' by modern western 'masters'. Sheikh here responds by explaining how the idea of modernity came to be identified in the 1960s.

> I want to reclaim everything I consider my tradition [...] I'm using Mukayakka in a series of poems I am writing in Marathi. They are a series of laments using the voices of at least fifty different people. Sometimes I am talking to them. Many of the characters are women— Rabia, a Sufi Isis mourning Osiris, Kannagi, a character from a Tamil epic mourning for her husband killed by treachery. [...] There was Hypatia, a neo-platonist philosopher and a very popular lecturer who was killed by a mob of monks at the instigation of Cyril [...] The crusades are interesting from the point of view of what is happening in India. (Interview with De' Souza 20)

Kolatkar's account of his sources of inspiration not only highlights the diversity of his interests but also point towards his search for models relevant to what was 'happening in India'; for instance, he revives Mukayakka, a traditional Kannada poetic form used for laments and monologues, among others. In Gulammohammed Sheikh's words (see the epigraph), late modernist poets 'reinvent the idea of the modern' by adapting the literary forms which precede their works.

Edna Longley argues that the Northern Irish poets acquire their distinctive voice by working in tandem or by dialectically conversing with traditional or intra-generational poetic influences. Longley records that in the 1960s, the Irish tradition became 'a multiplicitous tradition among traditions' and it kept being rewritten by 'intergenerational dialectics about form: about model, rhyme, line, and language; about language, syntactical, and symbolic structures' ('Altering the Past' 7). The radicalism of Irish rewriting, as Longley demonstrates through her survey of the literary criticism of Northern Ireland, has been underrated as a result of the equation of formalism with Ulster unionism, by for example John Goodby.[52] According to Longley, a multiplicitous

[52] Goodby's reading of Edna Longley's early criticism and Mahon and Longley's work categorises them as products of a post-war stable society (see the 'Introduction', p. 2). However, Longley's late criticism

Northern Irish tradition 'dramatises the protean nature of form as it remakes tradition' ('Altering the Past' 16). She demonstrates that for Mahon (and Michael Longley) a lot depends upon the 'poem's own performance as a fragile stay against modern and human confusions' ('Altering the Past' 6). The 'modern and human confusions' in the case of the so-called traditionalists, like Mahon and Longley, are not completely bracketed out but are slyly deflected.

In Indian English literary tradition, too, the past has been revisited. Instead of reaching for a coherent Indian or South Asian tradition, the writers, like Irish late modernists, draw inspiration from various South Asian as well as transnational literary models and mythologies. Kolatkar studied ancient mythic and cultural models and paid attention to the materiality of the historic moments before rendering them through the medium of poetry. Kolatkar's collection, which he gifted to The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune, has collections of Celtic, Roman and Greek mythologies along with several books about history of writing, life narratives and histories of objects and civilisations. Kolatkar's proximity to cultural histories and ancient myths makes his work strongly informed by global literary and cultural heritage.

'Intertextuality', a term coined by Julia Kristeva (37), has its origins in Ferdinand de Saussure's study of language that suggests that in language, signs convey meaning not through their relationship with the referent but through their combinatory and associative nature correspondence with other signs (8-11). Texts, therefore, owing to their use of a complex system of signs, are inherently intertextual. Roland Barthes celebrates texts' intertextuality to challenge the assumption that the author produces and determines the meaning of the text. According to Barthes, the meaning of any text cannot be entirely determined by the reader because texts refer to other texts; he writes, 'text is not a line of

identifies Mahon and Longley's writing as political. She assesses how the poets evolve the form and not only recreate it.

words releasing a single theological meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash' (146-7). The structuralist recognition of inherent intertextuality in texts and the authors' constant engagement with pre-existing writings to convey meanings is noteworthy. However, I do not merely acknowledge the plurality of texts or yield to Harold Bloom's treatise on the 'anxiety of influence' which does not properly consider the modernist and postcolonial traditions of rewriting forms and themes to address socio-historical contexts. I study how and why Mahon and Kolatkar rewrite canonical texts and myths and, through their rewriting, align aspects of texts with their own poetic ideologies. The thesis is based on the premise that texts are produced under determinate socio-historical conditions and authors design elements of texts, including their intertextuality and paratextuality, to establish a range of possible interpretations for their readers. The poets' works are studied as exhibiting 'a critical edge and a role as an anti-hegemonic political agency' and their intertextuality is studied as 'historically informed, multi-rooted ethics of resistance' (Acheraiou 195-197). I assess how authors critically engage with colonial and postcolonial literary texts and rewrite them with a commitment to their own ideologies to address social injustices.

Kolatkar and his contemporaries' intertextuality has not received enough critical attention. Laetitia Zecchini's study of Indian modernist traditions in the context of the cold war identifies the poets work as ingrained in certain underground networks of exchanges of literary influence:

> Many Indian writers also 'used' the cold war (and the worldliness it gave rise to), struggled for the means of political, cultural and literary independence, and defined themselves against the bi-polarisation of the world. Bypassing official circles and dictates, they strove to clear alternative spaces for themselves, to

> invent their own signature of modernism and define in their own terms the many meanings and forms of 'freedom'. ('What Filters Through the Curtain' 172-3)

Although Zecchini's analysis is significant in identifying a nascent infrastructure of publishing, transnational exchange and translational culture, it over-emphasises the rhetoric of seeking cultural and literary independence and transnational cultural exchanges without closely assessing the poetic ideologies which seek intercultural references. In a more focused study, Peter D. McDonald assesses Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's 'experiments in borrowing' ('Interplay of Languages' 274). McDonald assesses Mehrotra's multilinguality as his attempts to counter '*Angrezihatao* Hindi mob' that focused on the imposition of Hindi as India's national language ('Interplay of Languages' 271). In the same fashion as McDonald's assessment of ideologically committed nature of allusions in the poets' works, the chapter will assess the significance of aligning the selected models to address socio-historic issues, such as economic inequalities and perpetuation of violent conflicts. Kolatkar revisits *Mahabharata* in *Sarpa Satra* and carefully renders its specific tales in different western literary forms, such as the sonnets or Blues inspired tercets. He also retains South Asian influences on rhythm and tonality. As the epigraph states, the intention of late modernist poets is to bring the ideas 'into a process of interaction' and conceive a novel idea of the modern.

The chapter aims to understand how Derek Mahon and Arun Kolatkar translate and adapt pre-existing literary models or myths to address the late twentieth and early twenty-first century reality in Ireland and India, respectively. Adaptation of existent myths, when coupled with unsentimental engagement about the materiality of modern existence, allows the poets to imagine and evoke universal concerns for modern existence in Ireland, India and beyond. I shall challenge the association of traditional thematic and form with a conservative worldview in the works of Mahon by critically assessing his rewritings of classical literary models and myths. I shall also provide an in-depth analysis of Kolatkar's

intertextual references. A study of Mahon and Kolatkar's 1960s and 70s work, in Chapter-1, uncovers the struggle undertaken by them in conceiving a late modernist idiom. A study of their reworkings of existent literary models and myths in his late twentieth and early twenty-first century works—*The Hudson Letter*, *Harbour Lights*, *Life on Earth*, *An Autumn Wind*, *Kala Ghoda Poems* and *Sarpa Satra*—will further reflect on their ethical commitments to address social injustices.

Mahon and Kolatkar's Early Translations

Indian and Irish late modernist poets, in the acts of revisiting literature, radically reiterate it. The task of translation equates with the process of poetic creation. Mehrotra, while reflecting on the work of established Indian translators, states, 'when it comes to the labour required of you, the two roles of poet and translator are indistinguishable from each other' ('Author's Note' xxi). Kolatkar's example demonstrates that he translates poems by *bhakti* poets not only to make their work accessible in a language with a larger audience, but to revive transgressive elements from original works.

In the Irish context, in his review of Mahon's *An Autumn Wind*, Carson equates the value of the poet's work to ekphrastic creation, an act similar to translation and characterised by drawing inspiration from an existing work of art (100). In Greek and Roman literature, ekphrasis is a device that 'should try to represent [...] the visible features of a work [of art]' (Becker 9). Carson states, if the definition of ekphrasis be extended from visual arts to other writings and other writers then we can see Mahon's writing littered with numerous 'traces of literature'; Carson explains the reason for such recurrences in Mahon's poetry:

> …we[poets] want our medium to be more tangible than language. We want more entanglement with things [...] but we are doomed to handle the immateriality of mere words, whose resistance lies in their remaining always beyond us, yet to be

> discovered, not known until written; and our best poems are those that seem to come from nowhere, spoken to us by Another. (101)

Poets of his generation, Carson claims, constantly engage with pre-existing forms and often revisit writings when they experience poet's block (99). Mahon's engagement with the past is driven as much by his appreciation of those artistic works, as it is by his intent to create something meaningful, relevant and on par with modernity. Like Kolatkar, he seeks solidarities with disparate literary traditions that solicits a renaissance, owing to their transgressive potential; these include works by Ovid, T'ang era writers and Indian authors.

Mahon and Kolatkar, while constantly assessing the need for translating texts and gauging their relevance to modern contexts, also express a sense of confidence in their ability to recreate certain aspects of aesthetic experiences from another text. Mahon's stance in relation to reiteration and adaptation is explicit in his 1967 poem published in *The Dublin Magazine*, 'The Forger'. The poem is a monologue written from the perspective of a twentieth century art forger, Han van Meegeran, who sold fake Vermeers. In his semi-autobiographical account, the speaker states, 'The experts were good value, though,/ When they went to work on my studio— / Not I, but they were the frauds./ I revolutionised their methods' and he further explains, 'For even at one remove/ The thing I meant was love' (14). The artistic persona that Mahon builds appears ambitious and dedicated in translating/ adapting/ forging. Similarly, Kolatkar's stance which aspires for ownership is visible in his poem, 'Making love to a poem'; he writes, 'I can't translate a poem until I've got the feeling that I possess it/ I must take possession of a poem before I can translate it' (223). Kolatkar betrays a sense of confidence in his ability to rewrite specific works. Moreover, as a bilingual poet, he possesses marked ability to translate his own and other poets' works; throughout his poetic career, he translated his poems from Marathi to English and vice versa. Each iteration of the poem possesses a specific

ideological message that is conveyed emphatically through the employment of figures of speech and formal elements derived from the poetic tradition of the operating language.

Both poets' earliest translations appeared in the little magazines that were published in the 1960s and 70s. Kolatkar's translations of the *bhakti* saint, Tukaram, appeared in the 1962 issue of *Poetry India*; his translations of other saints, Muktabai, Namdeo, along with Tukaram, appeared in the 1970 issue of *Vrishchik*. Mahon's translations of Baudelaire, along with other French authors like Philippe Jaccottet, appeared in Dublin little magazines in the 1960s. His experiences of encounters with the modern cosmopolis are rendered through Baudelaire. Further in this section, I shall argue that Mahon's translations of Baudelaire allow him to express his disillusionment with the cosmopolis and pronounce his existential thoughts. Similarly, Kolatkar's translations of Tukaram give voice to his existential quest and alienation experienced in the face of religious orthodoxy. In these early translations, which set the tone for their highly allusive works, the poets retain elements of the original texts which speak to the modern contexts they inhabit and aspire to delineate aesthetically. The poets channel the philosophical complexity of original poems to address their modernist alienation.

Mahon's aim to represent the city drew him to French symbolists and existentialists; he spent a year in the Latin Quarter in Paris where he immersed himself in the work of Camus, Sartre's study of Baudelaire and later nineteenth century French poets (Haughton 30-31). He translated two out of six translations of Baudelaire that appeared under the title, 'Six Translations from Baudelaire' in *The Dubliner*. These were 'Élévation', which talks about the poet's power of imagination, and a love sonnet, 'De Profundis Clamavi'. In both translations, Mahon retains the formal rigour of Baudelaire's poem. In 'Élévation', through almost literally identical translation, Mahon echoes Baudelaire's romance as well as his pathos and dissatisfaction with human civilization:

Beyond the landscapes of perennial care

That circumscribe our fog-bound human race,

They are indeed happy who prefer

To make for that serene, that luminous place—

Whose thoughts, like birds, invade the morning sky

To hover there on unencumbered wings

High over life—who know intuitively

The speech of flowers and inarticulate things. (17)

Mahon embraces the paradoxes that Baudelaire articulated; although he intends to rise above language by aligning with inarticulate things ('like birds, invade the morning sky'), he is forced to work within it; he expresses chaotic imagination but in neat iambic pentameters. He juxtaposes metaphysical and extra-terrestrial images to the minuscule human race whose deterministic intent bothered him, as it bothered Baudelaire. In 'De Profundis Clamavi', Mahon rewrites Baudelaire's sonnet to acknowledge the existence of 'empty world' and 'leaden-grey horizon', which he intends to escape by uniting with his lover (19). Mahon would continue to develop Baudelaire's flaneuristic perspective to reflect on cities. His early translations draw inspiration from Baudelaire's imaginative rigour, nascent modernism (evident in the display of paradoxes) and psychedelic sensibility.

Like Mahon, who derives his inspiration from the French symbolists, Kolatkar and his contemporaries also look towards French symbolists, existentialists, and twentieth century French surrealists. Kolatkar's translation of thirteenth century saints and of seventeenth century poets is delivered in modernist and Anglo-American idiom. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's oeuvre includes translations of poems from the first century CE, fifteenth century *bhakti* poets and contemporary Indian poets, like Shakti Chattopadhyay (Bengali) and Pavankumar Jain (Gujarati). Both Mehrotra and Kolatkar

look for precursors which echo their transgressive tendencies. Mehrotra writes, 'those who do the telling seldom speak in whispers. To hear them on human sexuality or human folly is to hear our own voices, voices that we keep hidden from ourselves, finding them either too blunt or too cruel or too unfeeling. That's where the poets come in' ('Author's Note' xxi). Kolatkar, in a manifesto written in the form of a poem, addresses a few lines to Tukaram:

> 14
>
> Like it or not
>
> I'll make you world famous [...]
>
> You got to have some English Tuka
>
> if you want to get ahead in the world [...]
>
> I'm not gonna pan off your poems as mine [...]
>
> I'll try to pass of mine as yours
>
> I will create such confusion
>
> that nobody can be sure about what you wrote and what I did
>
> 15
>
> You are a lot of words
>
> if I take the away
>
> and replace them with others / substitute my own
>
> what remains of Tuka
>
> but the spaces between them (*TB* 234)

Kolatkar stresses the importance of the translator's work and taking ownership of the texts; the original work appears in the interstices of his translations. He states that he translates Tukaram's work into English to help him 'get ahead in the world' (*TB* 234). Kolatkar intends to deliver the poem to an international audience. However, as it becomes evident in the translations, English language is not merely a medium to reach out to a

different audience. Kolatkar is much aware of the connotations attached to different poetic idioms in English and uses their history to render his own observations of the world. This is evident in his rewriting of 'Jack and Jill'; in an untitled poem, written in a letter to his first wife, he writes, 'Vaze and Ambadas went up a hill' (Qtd in Mehrotra 'Say Yes Darshan' 143). Interpreting the rewriting of the rhyme, Mehrotra writes, 'by the simple act of substituting the two proper names in the English nursery rhyme with those of two of his Maharashtrian friends, he did more than superficially indigenise the English language; he made it into his personal instrument' ('Say Yes Darshan' 143). In his translations of Tukaram, by using Anglo American idiom, Kolatkar foregrounds the colloquial and transgressive elements of *bhakti* verses. Among other formal and stylistic interventions, the minimalism of Kolatkar's translations would allow the classical cultural appeal to be reinvented for a modern society. By translating the poes, Kolatkar brings literature from a period of reformation (challenging Hindu religious orthodoxies and caste-hierarchies) into 'a process of interaction' with the issues which concern him, such as perpetuating caste and income inequalities and his existential angst, experienced in the face of modernity (Sheikh 79).

Kolatkar delineates his alienation from oppressions and inequalities in society by excavating the experimental and subversive tendencies from Tukaram's work. In his translations, Kolatkar captures the juxtapositions between epiphanic and commonplace, venerational and irreverent, as well as humorous and profound elements present in the original text. He also strives to capture the colloquial element of *bhakti* verses. Shedding light on the history of evolution of *bhakti*, Dilip Chitre explains that practitioners of *bhakti* in Maharashtra, who were perturbed by caste hierarchies in India, provided a middle way between 'the extremes of Brahmanism[53] on the one hand and folk-religion

[53] Brahmanism is a practice within the caste hierarchical system which divides the society into sections based on people's birth and establishes the superiority of the brahmin caste.

on the other' by moving towards a more fluid colloquial idiom (xxxii-xxxiii). To effectively delineate the vibrant colloquialism of *bhakti* in another language, Kolatkar finds equivalents in American English and Black speech. Other than drawing inspiration from radicalism of the content and immediate appeal of colloquial language, Kolatkar hones his style by revisiting the practice of *bhakti* where the writers do not take complete ownership of their work but allude to the song writers and poets who came before them, joining a stream of Marathi oral literary tradition. Traditionally, *bhakti* verses were recited to an audience which often joined the poet singers in the chorus, creating a communal as opposed to individualistic idea of artistic creation. Through the repetition of the phrase, 'says Tuka', he makes the creator's work impersonal ('Tukaram' 21-9). In his adaptation of Namdeo, he pronounces, 'i, visnudas nama/ unlock the ant with my guru' ('Namdeo' n. p.).

Kolatkar draws political and aesthetic influences from Tukaram. His translation of Tukaram's devotional song in nine parts, which appeared in the first volume of *Poetry India*, narrates the saint's doubts, fears and insecurities as a poet and a devotee of Vithal (Hindu deity whom Tukaram worshipped). He retains the confessional form of the lyric and archives Tukaram's transgressive expressions, like his skepticism of language (narrated in third person):

> Tuka is stark raving mad
>
> He talks too much
>
> His vocabulary:
>
> Ram Krishna Govind Hari [...]
>
> He expects revelation
>
> At any time, from any one
>
> Words on him are wasted
>
> He dances before God, naked. ('Tukaram' 24)

Kolatkar, like Tukaram, celebrates the visceral and the bodily dancing over words and language. In Dilip Chitre's words, 'Kolatkar concentrates on the dramatic, the quick and the abrupt, the startling and the cryptic element in Tukaram's idiom' (xxxi). Such formal and stylistic elements, using minimal words, complement Kolatkar's theme that pronounces scepticism towards language's ability to communicate complicated thoughts.

In addition to Tukaram's belief in language's inadequacy, Kolatkar foregrounds the most radical ideas of Tukaram; he does not revere the defied image of God upheld by institutionalised religion but associates God with metaphysical void. This void is not only articulated but is also equated to artistic creation in the body of the poem:

Without a word
I've spoken
I've presented what
At best was absent

The poem occurs,
Says Tuka,
Unknown
To my ears. ('Tukaram' 27)

Tukaram's devotional poem for God, as translated by Kolatkar, embraces the void, uncertainty, and nothingness. Instead of aspiring to attach coherent meaning to the universe, Tukaram, whose influence is present throughout Kolatkar's work, acknowledges the absence of a unified God and imagines a harmonious existence where everyone 'lose[s] in love' and is 'bejewelled, bespangled' and sparkles 'Like a jewel on the other' ('Tukaram' 29).

As late modernists, both Mahon and Kolatkar revise and reimagine existing literary models and align them with their own poetic ideologies and style. While Baudelaire

provides Mahon with the appropriate voice to address the cosmopolis, Kolatkar expresses his existential uncertainties through his translations of Tukaram. He also draws on oral traditions' ability to forge connections with literary predecessors; this allows him to identify specific issues that concerned poets, within the Hindu tradition, from the medieval era to the present. Further in the chapter, I will assess their late twentieth and twenty-first century works set in modern cities; in these works, the poet assess the relevance of pre-existing literary models in addressing their contemporary realities. Mahon's *The Hudson Letter* mainly draws its inspiration from the nineteenth century romantic poets; his *Harbour Lights* revisits French symbolists; *Life on Earth* revises Greek and Roman myths; and *An Autumn Wind* looks at the T'ang era and Indian literary works, among other models. Kolatkar alludes to Sanskritik and folk traditions in *Kala Ghoda Poems* (2004) and *Sarpa Satra* (2004). This allows the poets to creatively represent modern cities and certain shared experiences across temporal and geographic boundaries.

Intertextuality in Mahon and Kolatkar's Late Works

Mahon and Kolatkar's works have several references to writing and the apparatus used to compose poetry. Mahon often begins his long poems by talking about writing, artistic creation and his connections with the readers. In 'Resistance Days', a verse letter addressed to a friend, Mahon begins the poem by talking about his 'pre-*informatique*' method of typing on an 'old machine' (*HL*13). Through the evocation of physical imagery, Mahon reminds his readers of material aspects of written works—the image of a poem on the paper, tactile characteristics of printed form and the book's presence as an object. The moment of creation is primal and evokes solidarities with artists across traditions; in 'Resistance Days', while writing from a room near rue de Seine, Mahon remembers 'Old existentialists, old beats, old punks' (*HL* 13).

Like Mahon, Kolatkar and Jussawalla also draw attention to material aspects of poetry and ruminate on the materiality of the paraphernalia of writing and publication. An unpublished poem from Kolatkar, translated from Marathi by Anjali Nerlekar, talks about the experience of holding and reading a book:

> still to caress our favorite book to run our hands over it
> we will find an excuse to fondle
> and like the prelude foreword
> or foreplay it is as important
> i must think so too
> the touch of the hands before sex
> it is as important as the foreword (Nerlekar 25).

Kolatkar draws attention to the book's materiality and uses the metaphor of sexual pleasure to describe its reception by the reader, relegating almost primaeval status to the act of literary reception. He refers to Walt Whitman's 'Whoever you are Holding Me Now in Hand' which emblematically addresses the seductive power of writing by, in a similar vein as Whitman ('let go your hand from my/ shoulders'), representing a sexual act between the book and the reader. By focusing on how writing sensuously engages its readers, Kolatkar enacts the desire of every writer to gain proximity with the readers. Kolatkar and Mahon evoke the viscerality of the moment of creation and reception of works, perhaps with an aim to align with scribes, typists, etchers and artists, who actively participated in the medium of their art.

Mahon and Kolatkar explicitly acknowledge the contributions of received forms and thematic to their novel literary iterations. In both poets' twenty-first century works, connections with preceding generations of Anglophone and other language writers are developed through direct allusion, adaptations of tonality or stanzaic formations, or direct references to content. The reminiscences of the past reverberate in Mahon and Kolatkar's

writing and, instead of aspiring to excavate 'authentic' traditions, the poets create a palimpsest in which pre-existent models are cited and written over. I shall further study how particular models are revisited, not merely from a chronicler's perspective but from the perspective of creative artists, who are aware of the materiality and history of their medium and its force to imaginatively address the social and political contexts that they inhabit. Further in this section of the chapter, I will study Mahon's *The Hudson Letter* and *Harbour Lights* and Kolatkar's *Kala Ghoda Poems* to critically assess the political and ideological connotations attached to various intertextual references in the poems.

In *The Hudson Letter*, Mahon alternates between narrating his own experience of exile and the experiences of individuals who have been victimised by injustices in America and portrays a strong sense of disaffection in their anecdotes and monologues. While the sublimity of violence is considered overwhelming, the ability of art to deflect that violence is also recognised. The collection constantly juxtaposes what Mahon (in the voice of Sappho) refers to as statements 'against a cult of contention' and the song of 'the reed-voiced nightingale' (*THL* 63). Mahon delivers critique of modernity by alluding to the works of several of his predecessors who had a pronounced impact in defining the literary canons that they inhabited. He revisits Ovid, Sappho, John Keats, Oscar Wilde, Virginia Woolf, Elizabeth Bishop, Samuel Beckett, W.H. Auden, Iris Murdoch, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, among others, while delineating his experiences of living in lower Manhattan. An assessment of the poems in the collection will reveal Mahon's commitment to challenge socio-historical phenomena, such as late-capitalism, homelessness in American cities and perpetuation of masculinist violence. I shall further study how allusions to canonical authors, like Sappho and Peter Quinn, help the poet in underlining the significance of overcoming economic disparities in contemporary America. I shall also highlight how specific belief systems are revisited and undermined, like Pound's imperialist thought system, to express solidarities with groups marginalised

by those beliefs. Mahon's Ovidian reworkings shall be assessed to illumisnate his beliefs with regards to artistic creation and desire for posterity. Overall, I shall highlight how Mahon provides gravity to his critique of social injustices through his highly intertextual poetics.

The Hudson Letter self-consciously deals with the theme of rewriting, revisiting and reimagining. While specific literary models help poet celebrate and foreground marginalised lives in the cities, others are ingrained in histories of oppression. The opening poem, 'Noon at St. Michael's', is addressed to a woman and imagines her 're-reading Yeats in a feminist light' (*THL* 12). He states that the woman belongs to 'history/ or '*her* story', that mystery' (*THL*12). At the very outset, Mahon foregrounds the ubiquitous antithesis to a thesis, manifested in 'her story'. The collection aims to excavate sub-texts and hidden meanings in literary works and social and political treatises. The collection delves into moments of forgotten history and records voices of individuals whose narratives are not archived in institutional or formal accounts. He then aligns those voices with individuals inhabiting modern cities who face oppression from late capitalist infrastructure.

In the XII poem, 'Alien Nation' of the set, 'The Hudson Letter', Mahon portrays the experience of the homeless in America. He writes an epigraph to the poem from a 1991 book, *What You Can Do to Help the Homeless*, that talks about the predicament of homeless people: 'These chronic homeless [...] have given up seeking help because they feel that the 'system' has given up on them and is largely unresponsive to their needs' (*THL* 61). In contrast, Mahon's poem does not reiterate the hardships faced by the homeless but, through several intertextual references, provides a dramatic portrait of their lives, ironising the social inequalities and elevating their stature. Mahon begins by portraying the almost apathetic view of the onlooker:

We come upon them in the restless dark [...]

and think how sensible the alternate polity

beneath the ostensible, pharaonic city

glimpsed through rain or dust from an expressway (*THL* 61)

In a sort of Conradian wry and distant stance, Mahon comments on the disparity between the homeless and the lives of those (including himself) who look from the expressway; he casually addresses the facades hiding the truth of the 'pharaonic city'. The homeless people's world is presented as the 'alternate polity' hidden behind the facade of commercial success maintained by American cities.

To further portray and satirise the systemic otherness and discrimination experienced by the homeless, 'Alien Nation' alludes to several moments from popular media as well as classical and canonical literature. In the title, Mahon refers to the movie *Alien Nation*, which portrayed the settlement of an alien species and inspired several fictional works, including comics, novels and television series. By associating the homeless with aliens, he identifies an uneasy ostracisation experienced by the homeless, a 'population growing by the week' (*THL* 61). He then remembers the oppression of African Americans and other dispossessed communities during the American Civil War by alluding to Peter Quinn's *Banished Children of Eve*. This novel captures the war from the perspectives of several of New York's underprivileged residents. The allusions do not merely create an effect of pastiche but an emphatic portrait of the dispossessed living in New York. Mahon also connects the homeless people's oppression to past violence and historically existing inequalities. He remembers Ezra Pound's Canto LI, where Pound quotes Napoleon to identify the overwhelming presence of 'usury' and human greed: 'Fifth element; mud; said Napoleon' (166). By sarcastically referring to the homeless individuals as 'the fourth world of Napolean's 'fifth element', mud', Mahon links the homeless people's oppression with a colonising spirit, upheld by Pound (*THL* 62). He also mocks the colonial tendency of associating poverty with greediness. This reference

conjures the disturbing spectre of Pound and his fascist and anti-semitic politics; it foregrounds the continuing silencing that the dispossessed experience from fascist regimes and their supporters.

Mahon's rewriting acknowledges the failure of mainstream literature at representing the experiences of underprivileged sections of the society but, nevertheless, strives to represent their predicament. He overturns the structure of romantic and modernist poems, which usually progress from specific observations to more generalised experiences; the poem begins from a distant perspective and with an ellipsis—'...We come upon them in the restless dark/ in the moon-shadow of the World Trade Centre'—and moves towards the expression of personal experiences—'Clutching our bits and pieces, arrogant in dereliction,/ we are all 'out there', filling the parks and streets/ with our harsh demand: 'Sleep faster, we need the sheets!''(*THL* 62). Mahon switches to a more engaged first and second person voices for the homeless: 'we are all survivors in this rough terrain [...] I have no problem calling you my brothers/ for I too have been homeless and in detox/ with baad niggas 'n' crack hoes on the rocks' (*THL* 62). Although his assumption of this persona might seem unrealistically ambitious because of his (practical) distance from the experiences of living as a homeless person from a marginalised ethnic community, he, nevertheless, strives to articulate a persuasive statement against the oppression of those individuals. By flipping the conventional structure of the poem in this piece, he undermines its authority; he begins by dramatising his bourgeois privileges and the elevated position bestowed on him by the society and then challenges it by (superficially) dissipating the gaps between himself and the homeless. Mahon creates an experience of inversion and caricaturing of the poetic subject and poet's persona and, at the same time, engages in the (partly successful) pursuit of identifying the deeply entrenched injustices through the evocation of several moments of history.

While certain connotations attached to the metaphors in the poem allow the readers to identify the perpetuation of inequalities, other allusions enhance the stature of the homeless and working-class individuals. Mahon ends the poem with an affirming image: 'a Haitian driver, riffing like Racine,/ whisks me up Hudson St. in a thunderstorm' (*THL* 62). He juxtaposes the oppressive models portrayed in the poem with a romanticised image of regeneration and hope. He reimagines received forms and labours to bring them in conversation with the reality of existence in contemporary America.

Mahon revives specific cultural models to assess and challenge the continual oppression faced by the homeless. Similarly, throughout *The Hudson Letter*, he explores the efficacy of 'the resilience of our lyric appetite' and imaginative rigour to oppose the contemporary history of 'the insane scramble for global power' and violence (*THL* 37 31). Certain aspects of the lyric appetite, past wisdom, myths and anecdotes (especially from women's standpoints) act as fragile yet important means to resist chaos witnessed by modern civilisations. Mahon imagines Sappho in an American bookstore denouncing Homer's heroic verse and upholding her love for women: 'A corps of men, a list of ships? Give me instead/ my non-violent girls—Cydro, Gongula—and particularly/ our glamorous Anactoria [...] whose eyes' mischievous sparkle remains to me/a finer sight than Homeric bronze (*THL* 63). She acknowledges suffering and ponders briefly on the importance of her subject:

> Sure I've been down to the dead kingdom to hear
> the grim statistics, and seen with my own eyes
> women and children in their extremities
> —'cholera, typhus, croup, diphtheria'—
> but, beyond speech and the most inclusive song,
> my theme is love and love's *daimonic* character. (*THL* 64)

Mahon's Sappho registers the suffering of the individuals but also upholds the importance of her love song. The portrait of Sappho is also part parodic of Mahon's intentions as he also often confronts the horrors of history—epidemics, wars, violence—but desires to compose poems. Nevertheless, the poem does not create an overall impression that amorous verse precludes the possibility of engagement with history but (cautiously) upholds the ability to challenge dark forces through appeals of love and empathy; Sappho imagines Anactoria as 'she hears/ the wind among the reeds, and calls, so the soft-petal'd ears/ of darkness hear her' (*THL*63). The Yeatsian title, 'the wind among the reeds', to describe Sappho's reception of love messages, also connects the poem with the Irish tradition of writing love poems. Further in the poem, Sappho opposes her writings to those that celebrate Homeric masculinity. While recounting her own success, she records that her fame 'exceeds' compared to Alcaeus, who wrote about 'politics and wine' (*THL*64). Through the portrait of Sappho in modern America and reference to Yeatsian love tradition, Mahon celebrates the forces of love and erotic desires which stand opposed to the masculine drives of the Homeric past and metaphorically challenge the 'exigent world' that is America (*THL* 43).

In Mahon's adaptations of Ovidian tales, he retains the imaginative rigour of the tales; he rewrites them to create possibilities of personal expression, exploration of the private sphere and human emotions and passions, such as infatuation and possessiveness. Ovid's writing allows Mahon to assess the value of art and words; Mahon explains in poem VIII of *The Hudson Letter* that his rewriting of Ovid is about 'art/ and the encoded mysteries of the human heart' (*THL* 52). In 'Pygmalion and Galatea', Mahon assesses the questions of the seductive power of ideal art and art's posterity. In book X of *Metamorphoses*, Ovid writes about the sculptor Pygmalion, who could not find a woman deserving of his admiration and fell in love with his creation (277-9). Mahon, in the rewriting, minimises Pygmalion's misogyny represented by Ovid but amplifies his

vulnerability and susceptibility to strong emotions as an artist. He captures how Pygmalion becomes a victim of the seductive power of ideal art as his sculpture's sensuous presentation deceives him: 'Alive she seemed, and apt to move/ if modesty did not prevent—/ so did his art conceal his art' (*THL* 13). Pygmalion created a sculpture so perfect that he grew obsessively fond of it, and his awareness of reality was blurred. Mahon writes the poem in tetrameter to complement the dramatic unravelling of Ovid's tales. In addition, he rigorously maintains his allegiance to form in the poem; the sculptor's art's austerity allegorises Mahon's adherence to formalism. The poem ends on another moment of creation:

> The goddess, with her genial presence,
> sanctioned the union and in time
> a girl, Paphos, was born to them—
> from whom the city takes its name. (*THL* 14-15)

This final image of the goddess sanctioning the union and eventual naming of a city after Pygmalion and Galatea's child aims to confer immortality on the tale; this moment is emblematic of Mahon's artistic conception and delineation of lyricism. While Mahon revives and celebrates classical art's values, he carefully adapts the classical elements to tie it to his oeuvre, which remains self-consciously aware of the artist's authority, and his desire to create ideal art in the face of any ordeals.

In poem IX of 'The Hudson Letter', Mahon adapts Ovid from his position in the modern world to address his sufferings and dystopian imagination. He captures a highly poignant scene of Philomela and Procne's revenge on King Tereus, who served him his son Itys for dinner and then metamorphosed into birds ('swallow and nightingale'), flying before the furies from hell could grasp them (*THL* 53). Mahon juxtaposes Ovid's dramatic narrative of King Tereus to his observations about the immediate surroundings: ('When his wronged wife Procne sat him down to eat [...] Afternoon now, some silence in the

street/ till released children dash to bus and swing') (*THL* 51). Like T.S. Eliot, in 'Sweeney Among the Nightingales', Mahon reimagines the nightingales in modernity; however, unlike Eliot, Mahon does not use the tale of King Tereus and the nightingales to speak of the degeneration of modern masculinity but rewrites it to explore his psychic difficulties. Hugh Haughton observes, 'in addressing his children Rory and Kate as 'Uneaten' in the next poem (IX, *CP* 200), the poet sets up a subliminal parallel between the classical myth and his broken marriage' (241). Mahon's equation of the ravisher with himself and the murderer of her children with his wife, creates a very disturbing parallel. The poem acknowledges a dystopian possibility that could reflect certain aspects of the poet's psyche, his deeply entrenched fears and (self) destructive tendencies. He ends the poem by stating:

> … Never mind the hidden agenda, the sub-text;
> it's not really about male arrogance, 'rough sex'
> or vengeful sisterhood, but about art
> and the encoded mysteries of the human heart. (*THL* 52)

It is not possible to eliminate the possibility that Mahon's poem is not about 'rough sex' and 'vengeful sisterhood' because, in the rewriting, he does not include the graphic descriptions of Tereus's sexual violence and instead focusses on his sufferings to provide narrative justice by rewriting the oft-adapted myth. By delineating the misery of Tereus, instead of his sexually violent actions, he shifts the focus of the story to the powerful vengeance sought by the sisters. In addition, as he explains, Mahon rewrites the story to explore aspects of Ovid's art that resonate with him—the cynical observations of Ovid about mankind and the imaginative potential of his tales allow him to address the destructive thoughts in his psyche, triggered from his anguish and emotions from a broken marriage.

While Mahon revisits the classics in *The Hudson Letter*, he does not remain bound to high art; he purposely visits writers whose imaginative fervour allows him to address his personal emotional turmoil. He conveys his sense of loneliness and 'metaphysical pain' through the translation of Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill's 'An Orphan on the Door'. The poem creates a sublime and poignant image of an orphan waiting outside an unnamed person's house: 'As fragile as a shell/ cast up on a rocky shore' (*THL* 16). The orphan embodies suffering witnessed by someone who is an outcast and is experiencing perpetual waiting:

> The kitchen radio howls
> rock music and, for a moment,
> I feel a surge of hope before
> I realize it is only there
> to deter the thieves, and a long
> wait lies before me
> with no sound of your step. (*THL* 16)

Although the reason for waiting remains unexplained, the poem's language connotes marital love within the home from which the orphan has been excluded. The poem associates the apathy of the house's dwellers with the indifference of the Greek gods; when speaking of the house dweller's lover's postcard 'Over the drawing-room fireplace', the speaker states, 'There is a reference [...] to *hieros gamos,* the marriage/ made in heaven' (*THL* 17). The marital life in the house also performs its reverence to Christianity: 'When the bell peals inside/ like the Angelus, do I really/ expect the sky to open and a dove/ to descend upon me from above?' (*THL* 17). There are overlaps between the house dwellers' indifference and the detachment of larger institutional structures towards the orphaned/ exiled person's affliction. While reminding the reader of the homeless and other underprivileged individuals and communities in the collection, the

poem also conveys Mahon's ordeals relating to an unhappy marriage, migrant's experiences and religious disbelief.

Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill's translated images are like Mahon's images used to describe Irish landscapes, 'an icy wind blows through the cold porches/ of the farthest pavilions' (*THL* 17). The waiting of the orphan also reminds the readers of the 'A thousand mushrooms crowd[ing] to a keyhole' and 'waiting [...] since civil war days' from his oft-quoted poem, 'A Disused Shed in Co. Wexford' (*SP* 36). Through the autumnal revisiting to his poem, which speaks of civil-war-stricken Irish people, Mahon yet again alludes to the suffering of individuals and communities owing to prolonged isolation inflicted by state and religious infrastructures. By translating Ni Dhomhnaill's poem, set in an Irish landscape, Mahon revives certain connotations to the images (experience of being forgotten, abandoned) to revisit his feelings of alienation induced by the apathy of marital and religious institutions.

Mahon redefines the connotations attached to extant literary forms and recurrent themes to delineate his experiences of migration and life in modern cities. He revisits the romanticist ideals of Keats in *The Hudson Letter*, and the set of poems, 'The Hudson Letter', uses an epigraph from Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'. It selects the stanzas from 'An Ode to a Nightingale', which applauds the bird's immortality: 'Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! No hungry generations tread thee down' (*THL* 35). While the nightingale's song might seem to symbolise beauty and immortality, Mahon's reworking associates it with sublime art, and romantic ideals, as opposed to the capitalist-dominated modern life. The bird forms a motif in *The Hudson Letter*; he remembers the caged birds in the city and endangered species. In the sixth poem of 'The Hudson Letter', he imagines an Inca tern and Andean gull sitting on a ledge after escaping their 'storm wrecked cage in the Bronx zoo'; instead of Keats's Ruth 'among the alien corn', the poet finds the birds themselves staring at the 'alien corn of Radio City, Broadway and Times Square' (*THL*

47). They are casting their vision on the city by which they are, 'intrigued, baffled and finally bored stiff' (*THL* 47). These birds, that represent natural forces, seem disappointed by the cities' environmental degradation and lack of aesthetic appeal. In the first poem of 'The Hudson Letter', to break the 'autistic slammer' engulfing his existence, he hails the Muse, who appears in the form of the radio playing 'The Nightingale' from the Italian composer Resphigi's 'The Birds' (*THL* 37). Finally, the collection ends with a disturbing yet hopeful vision of New York and Dublin; his final poem, written to capture the 'harsh blues of the rowdy and unfortunate,/ wolf-howl of the dispossessed, the outcaste and the alone' yet again turns to Keats remembering mortality, '*Now more than ever it seems rich to die*' and ultimately reflects on the sufferings of the homeless alongside the echoes of the bird: 'I think of the homeless, no rm. at the inn; far off, [...] the secret voice of nightingale and dolphin' (*THL* 77).

While Mahon maintains aspects of Keats's romanticism, which raises the stature of the nightingale's song and renders it sublime, he also extends its scope to include the songs of endangered species and dispossessed individuals. He records the 'harsh blues' and 'wolf howls' of the dispossessed corresponding to and contrasting with the nightingale's voice (*THL* 76). While unfortunately, the bird is caged or endangered, and the city's cacophony of noises overpowers its music, the poet derives hope from the resilience of individuals' desires to appreciate and be moved by lyricism and art. The ubiquitous presence of Keats reminds the reader of modernist investment in his idea of 'negative capability' (60). Keats defines negative capability as an artist's ability to remain content with 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (60). As a late modernist, Jussawalla draws on Keats's definition of negative capability; he explains, 'It's that feeling we have that seems to exist at a convergence where two things meet, both the desire to be seen, but also the desire not to be mistakenly seen' ('Perhaps I'm Happier Being on the Sidelines' 226). Mahon also derives his

understanding of the artist's role in *The Hudson Letter* from Keats's definition; he pursues his portrait of American society by combining often dialectical or synthetic thoughts and images without assuming authority. He does not intend to advocate an uncritical acceptance of his work. In his poem, 'Chinatown', written by a father (who compares himself to Keats in his youth) to his son, the father states, 'disbelieve/ the cynic who tries to tell you how to behave/ for, as Confucius said, fine words are seldom humane' (*THL* 60). While Mahon aims to be aesthetically pleasing, he does not want to negate the sufferings of the dispossessed city dwellers. He asks the readers to be critical of his reassuring thoughts. In his rewriting of Keats, he relays the artist's self-evasive thoughts and yet strives to foreground 'uncertainties, mysteries, doubts' that dominate his psyche.

In *Harbour Lights*, published in 2005, Mahon more closely assesses the phenomena of neo-colonialism, commodity fetishism and soft power exerted by Western nations and the inability of the artist to completely fathom these phenomena. He also focuses on environmental degradation connected to 'global scramble for power' (*HL* 31). In 'Resistance Days', the opening poem of *Harbour Lights*, Mahon expresses his resolution to 'study weather, clouds and their formation' (*HL* 17). In the poems that follow, he studies the weather and natural world and reflects upon the nature of civilisation's damage to the natural world. He visits philosophers and authors—the French surrealists, Lucretius, Homer, and Basho—to assess the historical events that prompted them to compose art or philosophise; simultaneously, he assesses the repeating patterns in history and the significance of reviving the voices of those writers. Mahon metaphorically associates shadows with allusions from the past, which amplify the colours of the present, as opposed to the blinding brightness of corporate culture: he intends to resist 'the generative darkness hid from sight/ in an earth strung with deterministic light' (*THL* 16). Further in the section, I shall study *Harbour Lights* to assess the significance of Mahon's revisiting of art conceived during the world wars and periods of socio-economic

transformation; I shall argue that humanistic photography and poetics from the likes of Paul Valery provide Mahon the vocabulary to engage with late capitalistic commodity culture. Mahon's preoccupations with the past are not accompanied by his awareness of sentimentality and nostalgia; he counters that nostalgia with his self-flagellating humour.

In 'Resistance Days', a verse letter addressed to the photographer, John Minihan, Mahon revisits twentieth-century photographers, surrealist poets and existentialists whose perspectives inspire his attention. He identifies as a '*flâneur* in the dense galaxy of text', and his poem unfolds as he browses through the books of his predecessors (*HL* 15). The poem records his appreciation of photographic art from humanist photographers like Robert Doisneau and André Kertész. He writes:

> 'No art without the resistance of the medium':
> our own resistance to the murderous tedium
> of business culture lays claims to the real
> as product, no, but as its own ideal—
> live seizures in the flux, fortuitous archetypes,
> an art as fugitive as the life it snaps' (*HL* 17).

Photographic art can build its ideal by snapping moments of resistance to capitalist 'tedium'. Mahon enacts a similar desire to turn away from the 'murderous tedium of business culture' and attempts to appreciate art that looks for reality's ideal formation, as done by the humanist photographers mentioned in the poem. However, his fascination with the simulacrum of photography is not without cognisance of his nostalgia art forms from the past. Reflecting upon photography, he describes it as 'an art as fugitive as the life it snaps' (*HL* 17). Nevertheless, he explores the potential of photography as a medium and some photographers' intent to combat violence and capitalist determinism.

Throughout 'Resistance Days', Mahon lays parallels between the Second World War and the immediate reality. In the epigraph, he remembers Paul Eulard's lines in the

epigraph which were written during the Second World War, 'we will love each other and our children will laugh or mourn the dark past in solitude' (*HL* 13). He ends the poem with a similar prophecy:

> our children laugh
> at the gruff bloke snuffling in the epigraph
> and in the window-frame a persistent fly
> buzzes with furious life which will never die. (*HL* 18)

Mahon appears to believe in the resilience of humanity and its ability to resist through aesthetic pleasure; however, these aesthetic models often dialectically converse with 'the *ersatz*, the cold,/ the s*chrecklichkeit* of the post-modern world' (*HL* 17). In the poem, Mahon juxtaposes such literary models with the bare reality of modern existence. He envisions imaginative resistance to certain aspects of twenty-first century history, all the while remaining self-consciously aware of his nostalgic preoccupations with the past (in 'Resistance Days', he appears as a recluse who intends to escape 'the critic and the invasive tourist') (*HL* 17). He revisits realist and humanist photographic art forms but within the medium of French surrealist-inspired poetry, which allows for various contradictions to co-exist. Instead of composing a linear and informative poem, Mahon allows readers to connect past violence with images of twenty first century capitalistic flamboyance. This aligns with his late-modernist style, which requires active participation from the readers in meaning-making, but constantly provides images from conflictual worlds to help them identify the continuing existence of social injustices.

In 'During the War', Mahon evokes war-stricken London and draws parallels with contemporary London's 'global scramble for power' (*HL* 31). Mahon culls the accounts of the war from his reading of Elizabeth Bowen ('I'm reading Bowen again in mysterious Kôr/ and picturing the black-out in Regent's Park') and blurs the gap between then and now by highlighting similar sights dominating the landscape ('Red buses and black taxis

then as now/ in thundering London') (*HL* 31). Moreover, the reference to Iraq highlights the continuing violent pursuits of power in parts of the world. The speaker states:

> This is nothing, this is the triumph of time,
> waste products mixing in the history's bin,
> rain ringing with a harsh, deliberate chime
> on scrap iron, plastic and depleted tin,
> its grim persistence from the rush hour sky
> a nuisance to the retail trade. Andrei
> on his back, wounded, during his own war
> 'I never really saw the clouds before...' (*HL* 31)

Mahon recalls Algernon Charles Swinburne's 'The Triumph of Time'; however, unlike Swinburne, his theme is not unrequited love but the degradation of the environment and the inability of civilisations to stop their 'scramble for global power' (*HL* 31). He alludes to Swinburne's expression of a person's helplessness in the face of his lover's apathy and reimagines it to express his helplessness with neo-liberal politics and economics. Mahon's evocation of Swinburne's very personal poem highlights how politics impacts his intimate self. He further emphasises the effects of economic and political structures on an individual's private life by portraying a retail trader, bruised by the consumer-capitalist world; he associates the retailer with Tolstoy's wounded prince, Andrei, from *War and Peace* (1869), experiencing an epiphany during the Battle of Austerlitz while gazing at the sky (299). Mahon depicts contemporary Soho through thick intertextual references which heighten the sense of immediacy of concern about environmental degradation and neo-imperialism and global domination; by alluding to his predecessors' poignant depictions of individuals' discontent in response to violent events, he foregrounds moments of literary expression that challenged violence, war and other

regressive social phenomena. These voices provide depth to Mahon's expressions of discontent with the economic aspects of twenty-first-century London.

Harbour Lights ends with a translation of Paul Valéry's 'Le Cimetière Marin'. According to Mahon, the poem, set in Valery's hometown Sete, composed in 1917 and 1920, was Valery's response to the time when 'much change was taking place in Europe' ('Poetry in Translation' 49). Instead of adapting the poem, as in his Ovidian work, Mahon provides almost a word for word translation. In his essay, 'Poetry in Translation', he explains, 'the likes of Corbière and Laforgue still speak to us clearly and companionably as contemporaries, perhaps because they were naturalised in English by Eliot and others—or rather because there was already something Anglophone in their tones of voice just waiting to be noticed' (50). The celebration of French nineteenth and twentieth-century verses by Anglophone modernists inspires Mahon to translate the verse; certain features of the poem—formal rigour accompanied by paradoxes in the subject matter, Ovidian metamorphic action (reflected in fruit's demise in the 5th stanza) and expression of artistic pathos—connect it to Mahon's oeuvre. He revisits Valery's themes of disappointment and withdrawal from certain civilisational phenomena. The poem begins by describing the sea with its paradoxes ('A tranquil surface… a shifting sea;) (*HL* 71); then portrays his existential thoughts as well as the 'imperious disdain' of the landscape; followed by an upward inflection of emotions: he bursts 'with new power' and gives himself to the 'brilliant spaces' (*HL* 72). Mahon's translation, like the original, then proceeds to address the dead and contemplates upon the poet's desire for posterity: 'everything flows, ourselves the most;/ the hunger for eternity also dies' (*HL*74). Mahon, like Valery, strives to verbalise the pathos (reflected in inconsistent thoughts and emotions) while acknowledging the limitations of language and the artist's perspective. At the same time, he modernises the poem's language to provide it with an immediate appeal. Paul Valery writes:

Beau ciel, vrai ciel, regarde-moi qui change !

Après tant d'orgueil, après tant d'étrange

Oisiveté, mais pleine de pouvoir,

Je m'abandonne à ce brillant espace,

Sur les maisons des morts mon ombre passe

Qui m'apprivoise à son frêle mouvoir (98).[54]

Mahon visits Valery's constructions to render them in his anglophone medium and amplifies the estrangement which the original aspired to create:

Under this clear sky it is I who change—

after so much conceit, after such strange

decadence, but bursting with new power,

I give myself to these brilliant spaces;

on the mansions of the dead my shadow passes

reminding me of its own ephemeral hour. (*HL* 72)

Mahon's poem does not personify the sky and removes the action undertaken by the shadow in the original poem; he instead articulates how specific thoughts are triggered when he looks at his own shadow. Mahon provides Valery's language with a modern appeal and reworks the expression of horror and sublimity to express his solidarity with the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century artists who responded to violent conflicts in Europe. Mahon's rewriting channels Valery's vivid imagery and thoughts (registration of disappointment with epochal history, acceptance of one's own mortality and

[54] Brilliant sky, true sky, it is I who changes!
After so much pride, after so much strange
Idleness, but bursting with new power,
I surrender to this brilliant space,
Over the houses of dead my shadow passes
Which tames me to its frail moment. (Translation mine)

limitations) to underline his response to the rapidness of consumer capitalism and his own ageing body.

Kolatkar's work exhibits strong influences of modernist narrativisation, social realism and Dalit realism, allowing him to obtain a critical perspective on the subject matter, as elucidated in Chapter 1. In his late work, *Kala Ghoda Poems*, published in 2004, he maintains the obliquity of viewpoint while representing ordinary lives in Bombay. He represents twenty-first-century cityscapes of India, marked by striking gaps between the rich and the poor, apathy towards the poor and continual subjection to a colonial past. In Arundhati Subramaniam's words, 'It is an impoverished, unjust, embattled world, subsisting not on hope, but on something more primal—perhaps the regenerative power of life itself' (23). To provide depth and significance to his representation, he visits classical and popular cultures and revives and challenges them. Kolatkar, in the late stages of his life, uses 'an identifiable cultural form with a crucial cultural prominence', which is epic, while addressing the issues concerning late twentieth and early twenty-first-century India (Innes 1). In the collection, his radical reiteration and adaptation of literary and cultural models, from different parts of the world, allow him to draw attention to his subject and help him compare experiences of existence from diverse communities across geographic and temporal divides.

In *Kala Ghoda Poems*, Kolatkar alludes to South Asian classical epics and folk traditions of *bhakti* poetry while representing the lives of individuals and objects in a neighbourhood in Bombay. While specific allusions to received literary forms allow him to present his subjects arrestingly, others identify the regressive ideologies received from existing literature that continue to impact people's perception of the world. Through my reading of *Kala Ghoda Poems*, I shall assess how Kolatkar rewrites the epic form and classical literary mores and uses their connotations of sublimity to celebrate his subjects. I shall further assess how Kolatkar alludes to other transgressive literary cultures—

twentieth century avant gardists, the Blues and Jazz musicians—to conceive more democratic aesthetics that would represent the resilience ordinary individuals living in the street. I shall argue that, by drawing inspiration from world literary cultures, Kolatkar identifies commonality of aspirations among marginalised individuals across geographical divides.

In the same vein as Mahon—who draws attention to antithesis to a thesis in *Harbour Lights*—Kolatkar also focuses on various interpretive possibilities of writings. These interpretive possibilities are based on the history of evolution of the language. Kolatkar represents the pi-dog of Kala Ghoda assessing the meaning of his name:

I answer to the name Ugh.
No,
not the exclamation of disgust;

but the U pronounced as in Upanishad,
and gh not silent
but as in ghost, ghoul or gherkin.

It's short for Ughekalikadu,
Siddharamayya's
famous dog that I was named after (*KG* 20)

Kolatkar evokes contemporary denotations and historic connotations attached to the word 'Ugh'. The dog's pondering over the source of the name, incorporated in the text, enacts the practice of establishing connections with the *Vedas* (religious scriptures) while naming people in South Asia. By associating itself with the mythic dog, the pi-dog derives a particular significance of stature and demonstrates how allusion provides depth and significance to narratives. In a meta-textual manner, through the evocation of sounds, like

'Ugh', from the *vedas*, Kolatkar draws attention to the significance of linguistic inheritances from the past in describing and defining the present and (implicitly) influencing the content and form of poetry. However, he does not remain reverent to the inheritance. The scriptural references are not entirely irrelevant to contemporary reality—for instance, they are essential in self-definition and identification with inherited cultures, as in the case of the dog—but are deprived of reverence and are often juxtaposed or reiterated to represent ordinary scenes in Bombay. While the association of pi-dog with the mythical dog elevates its stature (and animals) and remind us of the value accorded to dogs by Hindu mythology, the contemporary references—like dog's 'hugging the ground' and lying on 'black-and-white concrete blocks' at a trisland—remind the readers of the socio-economic reality of modern India (*KG* 17). Kolatkar is aware of traditions that led to the evolution of the present but identifies the need to rewrite them to provide representations to aspirations of individuals excluded by those traditions.

Kala Ghoda Poems has been regarded as 'mock heroic', because Kolatkar 'aggrandizes everyday people, elevates insignificant things, and makes merry of the incongruence that follows' (Nerlekar 'Kala Ghoda Poems' 98). However, he does not draw much inspiration from the mock-heroic traditions by Alexander Pope and John Dryden, who use epic devices to caricature the subject matter and evoke ridicule. Instead, he uses the epic devices to underline his concerns with the modern South Asian cosmopolis. Paul Innes discusses how the epic form in Derek Walcott's *Omeros* allows the author to deal with 'imperial antecedents from the perspective of post-colonialism' and how Margaret Atwood in *The Penelopiad* (2018) uses the epic form to foreground the marginalisation of women's voices in several epics (150). Like Walcott and Atwood, Kolatkar does not interrogate his subject matter but questions the form of the epic itself, which furthers Brahmanical and caste-based values. By using the epic's devices, like narrativising history and excessive dramatisation of action, Kolatkar provides depth to

the experiences of his subjects. While representing the chosen neighbourhood in Bombay, Kolatkar realistically portrays people, and objects. The descriptions often cast light on imperial history and post-independence subjugation of specific communities and individuals. The collection begins with the representation of a pi-dog who is introduced in South Asian epic style that traces its characters' lineage:

I like to trace my descent [...]

matrilineally,
to the only bitch that proved
tough enough to have survived,

first, the long voyage,
and then the wretched weather here
—a combination

that killed the rest of the pack
of thirty foxhounds,
imported all the way from England

by Sir Bartle Frere
in eighteen hundred and sixty-four,
with the crazy idea

of introducing fox-hunting to Bombay.
Just the sort of thing
he felt the city badly needed. (*KG* 17)

Like in the epic form, instead of delineating the story linearly, the pi-dog narrates the action of the 'only bitch' surviving the battle against the long voyage and then describes the historical context where a pack of foxhounds were imported from England. Although Kolatkar uses the epic device of describing lineage, the details reveal his ideological intent. He draws attention to how the post-colonial landscape continues to be influenced by specific cultural legacies of imperialist forces—the dogs were imported for the leisure of the British and continue to roam in packs in neighbourhoods in India. In addition, like in the case of magic realist fiction, there is an intersection of the historical and the fantastical—Kolatkar converges the reality of colonial imports of dogs with the fantastical tale of the dog tracing his lineage from the only surviving fox-hound. The reality effect surrounding the fantastical story is such that the dog's voice is given validity through the layering of details ('survived [...] the long voyage', 'in eighteen hundred and sixty four' so on) (*KG* 17). Kolatkar adapts the epic form and intersects it with different world-literary and indigenous literary models, like magic realism, to foreground repressed voices in modern India.

Kolatkar's modern epic offers a sly representation of modernity. The epic battle is humorously represented in 'Breakfast Time at Kala Ghoda' where people are running, 'zipping/ and hurtling' to get their breakfast from the lady who dishes out idlis on almonds' leaves (*KG* 102). Parallel to the representation of the breakfast in the Bombay locale, Kolatkar compiles images of people leading their lives elsewhere in the world—a man, eating breakfast in the state penitentiary of Texas, a woman cooking on llama dung fire in Southern Peru, someone hanging reindeer meat in a smokehouse in Alaska among several others (*KG* 81). He then represents a poignant image of the only Jewish woman living in an apartment near Warsaw who survived the Holocaust — she is portrayed dreaming about the blowing of her father's factory before waking up and staring at 'the matzos on the table,/ freckled/ like her own 90- year-old skin' and

wondering ‘what happened to everybody’(*KG* 82). Through the revision of epic structure and devices, Kolatkar widens his perspective and represents people eating their meals in different parts of the world to allow his readers to reflect on experiences borne by individuals who are culturally, linguistically and physically apart yet are leading similar lives owing to shared instinctual desires and similar socio-historical circumstances.

While Kolatkar draws inspiration from high art, he often uses it to draw attention to the significance of assumedly ordinary individuals. In a similar vein as avant-gardist artists, like Andy Warhol and Marcel Duchamp, he juxtaposes high art and ephemera; he translates those intentions of high art to poetry by dedicating his ekphrasis to the rubbish left outside on the streetside:

When most art critics are still in bed,
sleeping off
the effects of last night’s free drinks [...]

a fresh new series of installations
goes on display
in front of the Jehangir Art Gallery

[...] and consisting of dry leaves, scraps of paper,

prawn shells, onion skins, potato peels,
castoff condoms, dead flowers
-mostly gulmohar and copper-pod.

The installations might as well have been
titled ‘Homage to Bombay, one’,

'Homage to Bombay, two' and so on. (*KG* 28)

Rekha Shahane, in a personal interview, highlighted that, despite setting the collection in an opulent art district, Kolatkar concerned himself with people on the street. He begins by challenging the dichotomies between the art exhibited in Jehangir Art Gallery and the expressions of art by ordinary people. Eventually, he bridges the gaps between the artefacts in the city and the western canonical high art. He celebrates commonplace city scenes by alluding to Euclid, Demosthenes, Purcell, Beethoven, Boccherini, Trotsky and Van Gogh. The poem, 'The Potato Peelers', exhibits similarities with Van Gogh's *Potato Eaters*; like Van Gogh's potato eaters, Kolatkar's figures also bear darkness, as they are 'Backlit' and 'hunched over potatoes' (*KG* 132). He recreates the image in the second part of the poem by creating a fantastic scene where 'the three sided silence/ of the potato peelers' refracts the thought of the 'bakery boy' and creates an 'illicit rainbow' and touches the mind of a woman sleeping under a banyan tree (*KG* 133). Kolatkar excavates inspiration from several canonical sources and combines it with his allegiance to depicting and celebrating ordinary life, creating an enigmatic and fanciful portrait of modern existence in a microcosm. Through transnational references, he expands the implied meanings as well as the scope of his poetry.

Some intertextual references in *Kala Ghoda Poems* mock specific traditions and literary forms that support regressive ideologies; they are refined to provide a rather empathetic portrait of the city. The pi-dog describes itself as symbolising Bombay; the dog equates itself to 'a seventeenth century map of Bombay' drawn 'with a pirate's/ rather than a cartographer's regard/ for accuracy'. The dog describes how the seven islands of Bombay are distributed over its 'forehead [...], croup [...] brisket, withers, saddle and loin' (*KG* 16). Using the tattered physiognomy of the dog to represent Bombay, Kolatkar draws attention to the history of the city formed through land reclamation. The representation of a geographic location by metaphorically equating it to the physiognomy of a living

being parodies the nationalist tendency to represent the Indian nation in the guise of Mother India.[55] Mehrotra used a similar manoeuvre in his long poem, *bharatmata*, discussed in Chapter 1. By removing the sublimity from the symbols (by equating the national persona to a pi-dog and a lavatory), the poets effectively evolve the trope and challenge the idealising nature of nationalistic discourse. In the field of fine arts, Amrita Shergil, whose work also has been a source of inspiration for Mehrotra because of its rebellious nature,[56] challenged Abanindranath Tagore's nationalist representation of Mother India, by presenting Mother India as a beggar woman. Shergil's painting depicts a woman living in penury to draw attention to the material reality of existence in South Asia; similarly, Kolatkar's representation of Bombay parodies nationalist imagery and draws images from ordinary lives led on the street to provide an astute representation of modern India, bearing the legacies of the colonial rule.

Kolatkar alludes to various folk and mythic tales while portraying people and objects inhabiting the streetside; he identifies women by amplifying specific characteristics ('The Ogress', 'The Barefoot Queen of Crossroads', 'the pregnant queen of tarts' and 'Our Lady of Dead Flowers'). Kolatkar's Meera, a municipal cleaning worker, is associated with Meerabai (the sixteenth-century mystic poet and devotee of Krishna) owing to her dedication to the city's cleanliness. Meerabai's *bhakti* poetry presents complete and unconditional devotion to Krishna and disregard for social norms associated with womanhood. She also emerged as a nationalist icon during the colonial era. Akshaya Kumar, while studying the adaptations and representation of Meerabai, explains that Meerabai was 'one of the preferred icons of the non-violent nationalist imagination' as she emerged as 'an appropriate embodiment of non-masculine effeminate

[55] The Irish poets witnessed a similar tradition of representing the nation's spirit as an old crone (see, for instance, Yeats' Cathleen Ni Houlihan) or sovereignty goddess (in Medieval Celtic tales). Mahon mocks the aisling tradition in 'Derry Morning', as discussed in detail in Chapter-4, pp. 213-4.

[56] Mehrotra speaks about the monumentality in Shergil's work, first discovered by Rabindranath Deb ('Sunday Painter Revisited' 224).

(yet very much patriarchal) nationalism, championed and practised by Gandhi' (Kumar 176 180). Kolatkar radically reimagines devotion and veneration as represented in Meerabai's poetry. He also reevaluates the iconic image associated with the figure presented by nationalist discourses that superimpose the nation's image on the supposedly pure devotion of Meera. After eulogising everything associated with Meera—the coconut frond that she uses to sweep the street, the garbage trolley which Euclid would have appreciated—he slowly (over six pages) builds towards the portrayal of the bearer of those objects:

she climbs to the top

and begins to dance
within the narrow compass
of the wicker bin

like a Meera before her Lord,
a Meera
with a broomstick for a lute;

shifting her weight
from one foot to the other,
she turns around herself

by slow degrees,
giving her toes
enough time

to genuflect and offer

obeisance

to all cardinal points

to each of

the thirty-two compass points,

in turn. (*KG* 32)

Kolatkar pays tribute to Meera by retaining the representation of dramatic and ecstatic movements in Meerabai's poetry; 'dance', 'Meera before her Lord', 'lute', offering 'obeisance' remind the reader of her poetry and help evoke *srngara rasa*[57] or erotic sentiment. However, the movements are not merely aesthetic and leisurely; they aim to compress the rubbish in the wicker bin to make space for more. In doing so, Kolatkar yet again converses with nationalist traditions, which position Meerabai as the nation's representative. As he recreates Meera in the guise of a dispossessed woman, she emerges as a nationalistic icon who collects the central element of the city, filth, and creates it ('a good bit of the city stands/ on sweepings') (*KG* 28). Kolatkar produces a counter-canonical representation of Meera; specific influences of post-impressionistic works, by the likes of Van Gogh, also surface as he persuasively helps the readers visualise the experiences borne by the bodies of working-class individuals. Kolatkar radically reimagines nationalistic imagery and its appropriation of *bhakti* traditions to challenge the nation's foundational narratives, which associate the nation with the supposedly serene representation of womanhood. Kolatkar channels the reverence and aestheticism associated with the icon to celebrate the sinews and movements of working women.

[57] *Srngara* rasa, as defined in *Nāṭyaśāstra*, is one of the eight dominant sentiments in drama. It is translated as erotic sentiment and it proceeds from 'the Dominant State of love' (108).

While depicting streetside dwellers' lives in *Kala Ghoda Poems*, Kolatkar draws inspiration from modernists like William Carlos Williams as well as from a colloquial African American idiom. In his poem, 'Meera', while describing the garbage trolley which the municipal worker uses, he seems to allude to Williams's 'Red Wheelbarrow'. Just like Williams, who emphasises upon the conception of poetry from social conditions and engagement with cultural contexts, Kolatkar also represents social conditions by depicting objects of everyday use in the language of daily usage (which he finds in the American modernist idiom) (Neumann 17). Kolatkar describes the garbage trolley:

Euclid would've loved it
—that rickety looking rattletrap,
that garbage trolley.

The honey cart,
that looks like a theorem picked
clean of proof,

has all the starkness
And simplicity of a child's drawing
done in black crayon. (*KG* 30)

Like Williams in 'The Red Wheelbarrow' ('a lot depends/upon'), Kolatkar begins his poem with an abstraction ('Euclid would've loved it', 'When it is full', 'It may not look like much') and then provides an immediate perception of the object (*KG* 30-35). In the poem, the abstraction allows the readers to widen their imagination as they are allowed to think of various things/ concepts Euclid could have loved before narrowing the focus on 'the rickety looking rattletrap,/ that garbage trolley' (*KG* 30). Kolatkar further adds images of the rickety trolley over sixteen stanzas (three of which are reproduced above).

This poem uses the significance accorded to Euclid's admiration for geometric figures to give substance to the representation of ordinary objects on the streetside. Kolatkar manages to conceive a Williamsesque poem which not only challenges the expectations of readers from poetry but also provides a compelling portrait of the social context of modern Bombay.

Certain aspects of Williams's work further Kolatkar's purpose; however, in comparison with Williams, Kolatkar more emphatically aspires to search for rhythms and linguistic usages that will allow him to recreate the sensory experiences of living in the streets in *Kala Ghoda Poems*. Critics of Williams have recognised his inability to thoroughly understand the dynamics of blues and jazz poetry, despite certain historical connections with the movement.[58] In contrast, Kolatkar manages to domesticate rhythmic and stylistic dynamics of blues and jazz poetry much more effectively. Kolatkar's set of poems, included in 'Words of Music', in *The Boatride & Other Poems*, mainly composed in the 1970s, are 'found songs' based on the blues (*TB* 131-153). The early connections with the blues are explored by Mehrotra and identified as forming a 'blue-bhakti tradition'; he explains that *bhakti* and blues exhibit similarities as, 'Each draws its images from a common pool, each limits itself to a small number of themes that it keeps returning to, and each speaks of the idiom of the street.' ('Death of a Poet' *BR* 26). In *Kala Ghoda Poems*, Kolatkar revisits the blues by writing in three-line stanzas and explores the similarities of intent between the blues and oral traditions as well as the street dialects in Bombay. In 'The Boomtown Lepers' Band', he translates the sounds of the lepers' band into verbal equivalents in the poem; the lyrics seem to indicate a composition of a found song, aiming to record the experiences of the dispossessed:

Trrrap a boom chaka

[58] See Steven C. Tracy's 'William Carlos Williams and 'Blues: A Magazine of New Rhythms.'

shh chaka boom trap

Whack.

Let the city see its lion face

in the flaky mirror of our flesh.

Slap a tambourine (thwack),

let cymbals clash.

Come on, let the coins shake rattle and roll

in our battered aluminium bowl -

As our noseless singer

lets out a half-hearted howl

to belt out a tuneless song

for a city without a soul. (*KG* 124)

The images that Kolatkar compiles—'Trrrap a boom chaka', 'let cymbals clash', 'battered aluminium bowl', 'noseless singer'—are unconventional in the Indian English literary canon. Kolatkar domesticates influences from the authors of Blues and jazz poetry, such as Langston Hughes, who combine candid imagery, familiar rhythms, and noises in poetry to help readers visually and aurally experience lives led on the street. Further developing the trope introduced in pi-dog, he represents city life brazenly in a microcosm, elevating the experience of a group of beggars, suffering from leprosy, as one of the primary elements of existence in the city ('Let the city see its lion face/ in the flaky mirror of our flesh') (*KG* 124). Kolatkar builds this epic simile, continually comparing the subject of the collection—modernity in Bombay—with dilapidated objects or afflicted individuals. However, he does not express disgust, but elevates them as bearing the marks of history, celebrating their resilience, skillfulness and contributions to the Indian landscape. Kolatkar's poetry, like that of the blues, is dedicated to repressed and unheard voices and histories in India and beyond. Through his allusions to other oral

traditions, Kolatkar seeks solidarities with literary expressions from cultures that provide expressions to marginalised individuals.

Aspiring to create an epic dedicated to the times, Kolatkar's work does not only represent South Asian urban infrastructure, but it also aspires to conceive truly transnational poetics, borrowing influences from modernist, classical as well as popular cultures from India and beyond. Similarly, Mahon aims to reinvigorate conventional forms by alluding to the form and content of texts conceived outside the English literary canon. While, for Kolatkar, effects of the twenty-first-century socio-historical phenomena are witnessed in the microcosms of lives of individuals in Bombay, Mahon foregrounds his feelings of alienation and displacement evoked in response to the contemporary history of capitalist society's determinism and economic inequalities. I shall further assess how the poets use myths in their late collections to reflect upon the commonality of concerns across cultural and geographical boundaries in the twenty-first century.

Mythological Reworkings in Mahon and Kolatkar's Works

Mahon and Kolatkar often rewrite myths that allow them to address the local and universal issues at the same time. Mahon's *The Hudson Letter* and *Harbour Lights* adapt classical and canonical literary models to address power struggles and social and economic inequalities in late capitalist contexts. In *Life on Earth*, *An Autumn Wind* and *Echo's Grove*, he further adapts classical models to engage with certain foundational myths from European as well as Asian cultures. In a similar vein, Kolatkar's *Kala Ghoda Poems* recreates significant South Asian myths to creatively engage with modern existence; in *Sarpa Satra* (translated as snake sacrifice), Kolatkar challenges the very essence of certain myths to criticise genocidal tendencies and violence in the twenty-first

century in different parts of the world. Their reiteration and radical revision of myths counter morally regressive political beliefs and orthodoxies in the contemporary world.

Mahon begins *Life on Earth* with Latin and Greek myths and ends with references to Indian mythology. He probes into the questions of existence, solitude, vulnerability, and environmental deterioration by revisiting received literary models and myths. Mahon's eco-critical perspective comes to the fore as he widens his perspective and reflects upon the global south and the global north's ecosystems. In *An Autumn Wind,* first published in 2010, Mahon comments on the commonality of challenges faced by various underprivileged communities in the global north and the global south and specifically deals with the questions of imperialism, relocation of natives, capitalist exploitation of individuals and resources, as well as American dominance. The mythology of the places he visits widens his poetry's imaginative range and hones his satire of the world. He also engages with violence and orthodoxy that has been an essential part of traditional and religious discourses. By visiting those models and narratives from a neutral and distant perspective, and depriving those cultural symbols of any sublimity, he succeeds in directing them towards his topical concerns and his secular critique. I shall assess Mahon's intentions to rewrite myths, evident in his Ovidian retellings. His recreation of Greek myth of Gaia and certain principles from Hinduism, in his late works, I shall demonstrate, allow him to provide a sense of urgency to issues of environmental degradation and capitalist determinism.

Mahon channels the dramatic nature of Ovid's work to build a persuasive monologue in the opening poem of *Life on Earth*, titled 'Ariadne on Naxos'. He relates a monologue by Ariadne from Ovid's *The Heroides,* X, which speaks about her abandonment by her husband, Theseus. Ariadne, despite her poignant and clear articulation, urges for speech and retelling: '[Theseus], when you get home, famous, [...]/ tell them the story of the Cretan cave/ include the love your Ariadne gave/ Before you

left her on this bare rock.' (*LE* 12). In 'Circe and Sirens', Mahon retells the Homeric myth about the hindrances caused in the journey of Odysseus by Circe and Sirens. It begins by indicating that Homer's narrative was constructed to serve the purpose of aggrandising Odysseus ('Homer was right to break the story up…' *LE* 27); Mahon's rewriting of the myth then imagines an alternate reality where, instead of continuing his colonising journey, Odysseus would be seduced by Sirens and 'retire, sea music in his ears [...] and spend his old age in sublime disgrace' (*LE* 28). Mahon emphasises rewriting and foregrounds sub-textual elements of the tales which envision alternate histories, those devoid of violence.

Mahon composes a set of futuristic poems in *Life on Earth*, titled 'Homage to Gaia,' which engage with the Greek myth of Gaia; the myth upholds that we all belong to nature. He also cites Hinduism's tenet, *tat tvam asi*, literally meaning 'the essence are you' and implying that all animate and inanimate things are connected to the absolute. Referring both to Greek mythology about the primordial personification of Earth and James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis,[59] Mahon evokes the responsibility of individuals towards the Earth:

> You've done so much for us
>
> and what do we give back?
>
> Suspension bridges, yes,
>
> and columns of black smoke. (*LE* 46)

Although Mahon reiterates the romantic idea where deterioration of the planet is linked to the deterioration of humanity, his poems are not resigned and despondent. After acknowledging the environmental degradation caused by human beings, he provides futuristic visions. In 'Its Radiant Energies', he humorously refers to a world inhabited by

[59] For an understanding of James Lovelock's gaia hypothesis, read Lee R. Kump's 'A Second Opinion for Our Planet.'

'yoghurt-weavers' who 'drive/ on gin and margarine' and creates an image of veneration where photovoltaic panels are imagined as worshipping the sun (*LE* 46).

In 'Homage to Gaia', while Mahon evokes several mythological and literary images which provide reverence to the earth and its elements, he revises the myths to appeal to his twenty-first-century audience. In 'Wind and Wave', further looking for sustainable measures of energy generation, he relates how Coleridge caught wind in his Aeolian harp and celebrates wind as a regenerative power:

> this is the wind that drives
> the dark waves below
> to light our homely lives
> with an unearthly glow. (*LE* 48)

While the personification of earth and wind as feminine, dark, destructive and regenerative might seem to reiterate certain stereotypes about femininity and reinforce the phallocentric nature of Greek myths, Mahon manages to modernise them. In his 'Ode to Björk', he enacts his part incomprehensibility of Björk's music:

> Dark bird of ice, dark swan
> of snow, your bright gamine
> teardrop Inuit eyes
> peep from a magazine
>
> as if to say 'Fuck off
> And get my new release;
> you don't know *me*, I am
> the dark swan of ice
>
> and secrecy, the seagull,

The unhinged plover, not

Something to tame and stroke.' (*LE* 54)

Mahon alludes to the swan dress and Björk's work which experiments with various genres—classical, electronic, pop, avant-garde—and includes several micro-sounds, such as cracking ice. Her proximity to changing Arctic climates is expressed in her work and her speech remains adamant and irreverent (as recreated by Mahon in the poem). Mahon's references to solitude, celebrate Bjork's idiosyncrasy and uniqueness of voice, which resists being subdued to 'the expectations of corporate brainwash rock' (*LE* 54). In 'Homage to Gaia', Mahon's veneration of feminine force does not stay limited to feminine abstractions but alludes to female artists, like Björk, who connect to the regenerative force by artistically delineating environmental degradation.

In the final poems of *Life on Earth*, set in Goa, Mahon rewrites Indian mythology to seek inspiration from aspects of Indian culture and emphasise the significance of environmental conservation. 'Indian Garden', also from the sequence 'Homage to Gaia', describes clusters of coconuts on trees; the poet relates how 'A well aimed/ machete stroke' breaks the coconut and 'the brainy skull is its own cup' (*LE* 58). He further explains how, over geological time, the substance becomes coal and oil and relates it to the tenet of Hinduism, which envisages the perennial existence of elements that change forms:

It rots in sandy soil

here at the ocean rim,

changing to coal and oil

through geological time. (*LE* 58)

The poem, written in ballad stanzas, creates a soothing aural effect and aims to find an equivalent to the lyrical quality of Indian regional language verse. In his essay, 'Indian Ink', Mahon ironically states, 'The West loves the sublime, the East the beautiful: how's

that for a generalisation?' (278). To understand the Indian musical and poetic forms, he quotes Forster's description of Godbole's song from *A Passage to India*, '[...] At times there seemed rhythm, at times there was an illusion of a Western melody. But the ear, baffled repeatedly, soon lost any clue, and wandered in the maze of noises, none harsh or unpleasant, none unintelligible. It was the song of an unknown bird [...]' ('Indian Ink' 278). While translating originally written myths and narratives in what he calls, beautiful yet 'unintelligible' rhythmic patterns, Mahon explores various Western forms, including ballad. Although he does not strive to render the variations in rhythms and the alliterative quality of Sanskritik verse, in 'Indian Garden' and other poems in 'Homage to Gaia', he finds lyric equivalents in English poetic forms which will convey the 'beauty' of Indian myths and landscapes. By juxtaposing Greek and Hindu myths, Mahon allows for exchanges between two language cultures without establishing hierarchies in either language. This juxtaposition underlines the commonality of challenges and shared visions for the future in different cultures.

In 'Turtle Beach' and 'Homage to Goa', Mahon further presents the Goan landscape as both pristine and endangered by the city's tourism and other commercial activities. In his prose piece, 'Indian Ink', he writes, 'Here in India you're closer to the heart of the natural world. The very dust of the road is alive with intimations' (Mahon 270). He alludes to how the natural world invades the domestic life in India and, therefore, seeks inspiration from Goan landscapes while articulating his futuristic vision of the coexistence of humanity and other elements of the natural world. In 'Turtle Beach', he observes how 'turtles once a year/ head for nest-sites up the beach' unperturbed by 'parties, thong and song' (*LE* 59). In 'Homage to Goa', to enact his lack of complete comprehensibility of Indian landscapes, he compiles abstract aural and visual images. Without completely narrativising his concerns, he compiles images that shed some light on socio-economical realities in India:

It's snowing in Kashmir, but here in Goa

we already have spring temperatures. Anandu

waters the earth and brushes up the sand.

Banana leaves and plantains in a daze

trade oxygen for tar; *tat tvam asi*.

Already a heavy mango strikes the ground. (*LE* 60)

Mahon's understanding of the Indian landscape recognises the over-exploitation of resources because of neo-imperialism. He approaches the Indian landscape with his idiosyncratic poetic style, which aims to delineate meaning by juxtaposing images and initiating dialectical conversations between often opposing thoughts. The everyday images of 'snowing in Kashmir', 'spring temperatures' and Anandu's work are juxtaposed to the image of banana plantations and alludes to the deforestation caused by them in South Asia. In the same vein, as he borrows certain phrases from French while representing French landscapes, he reproduces the Sanskritik saying from the *Upanishads*, '*tat tvam asi*'. Mahon represents the material history and reality of the global south through the adaptation of cultural elements from there. However, to interrupt the rhythmic unity, Mahon resorts to a loose iambic pentameter and eleven-line stanzas in 'Homage to Goa' (unlike the ballad stanzas in 'Homage to Gaia'). Moreover, he uses ordinary images which complement his loose adherence to the iamb: "Kareena Kapoor in Hot New Avatar'/ A gecko snaps a spider from a window' (*LE* 61).

In *An Autumn Wind*, like in *Life on Earth*, Mahon argues in favour of environmental conservation by evoking mythology; however, his representation of South Asia and East Asia, along with European and American landscapes, allows him to reflect upon the commonality of challenges experienced by individuals in different parts of the world. In an unequivocally political portrayal of the global north and the global south in *An Autumn Wind*, Mahon identifies American hegemonic control and neo-imperialism. He further

composes poems that borrow from the Greek mythological concept of Gaia, T'ang era poets and Hindi poetry. The poems, 'The Thunder Shower', 'Growth', 'The Seasons', 'After the Storm', 'Beached Whale', present the influence of climate change and over-exploitation of resources on the natural world; he revisits Rimbaud and Baudelaire and brings the imaginative flair required to counterpose the 'crescendo of a cascading world economy' (*AW* 19). The T'ang poems in 'River of Stars' allow him to reflect on a topography that is untouched by human influence. Finally, he visits Indian landscapes in 'Raw Material' to reflect upon the interdependence of ecologies of different parts of the world. The similarity of themes allows for links in the subject of poems in the three sections of the collections; for instance, 'Ash and Aspen' represents trees' 'dream of flight' and their ultimate turning into furniture (*AW* 24). 'Plant Life', in 'Raw Material', also presents anthropomorphic trees 'remembering the clear/ spring meadows of Kashmir/ and the lost horizons of Tibet' (*AW* 70). While the personified Irish trees are imagined as expressing an intent to be free of the fate of being shrunk into furniture, Indian sub-continental trees reflect on the fate of those geographic locations where freedom of individuals is curtailed because of the totalitarian control of the Indian and Chinese governments. Mahon continues the juxtaposition of several poems which express social, cultural, ecological and political aspirations of the global north and south in his collections of translations, *Adaptations* (2006), *Raw Material* (2011) and *Echo's Grove* (2013); this helps foreground the commonality of challenges and emphatic statements from artists in often binarised parts of the world. I shall further study Mahon's allusion to pre-existing literary models in *An Autumn Wind* to assess how he adapts them to address twenty-first century society: J.M. Synge and James Simmons hold especial relevance as he counters continuing inter-community animosity in the twenty first century; Brechtian critique of capitalism allows him to reflect upon late capitalism; the poignance of T'ang era works deepen his critique of totalitarian states' control and his

radical revisions of Hindu mythology in the Gopal Singh sequence aim to critique caste-based and economic inequalities in India and beyond.

In *An Autumn Wind*, in an autumnal stance of stock-taking, Mahon revisits the sources from which he drew inspiration throughout his career and revives themes and formal and stylistic elements from the past. While elegies and reflection upon artists' deaths seem to convey an obsession with mortality, Mahon maintains his obliquity of perspective and draws inspiration from their lives to build his statement on contemporaneity. The collection astutely reflects upon translating and inheriting the legacy left by authors after death; in his first section, Mahon includes posthumous tributes to Synge and Simmons. In 'Synge Dying', he writes about his experience of archiving 'folklore and traditional song' of 'Kerry and Connemara'; while he questions his authority to write about the tales set in rural Ireland ('I was in two minds/ about my right to be there'), he celebrates the sensory experiences of discovering the tales: 'But there is words I found/ the living world I couldn't share' (*AW* 36). Mahon commemorates Synge by conveying the untranslatability and poignance of his tales. His elegy for James Simmons, whom he treats as a contemporary, allows him to reflect on his own life and work. He celebrates the bluntness of Simmons's work by stating, 'you chose / reality over art and prose' and states that such writing does not aspire for fame but 'thrives/ in the night silence of words' (*AW* 44). He uses the pronoun 'we' while ruminating upon Simmons's life and works:

> [...] We two
> both wanted to help dissipate
> the 'guilt and infantile self-hate',
> each in his way, and find a voice
> for the strange place bequeathed to us. (*AW* 45)

Mahon celebrates the uniqueness of Synge's work and political awareness and bluntness of Simmons (which he also adopts in his works). He also relates with the poets and reflects upon his own and Simmons's Protestant heritage which burdened them with guilt. Recollecting the memories of living in Belfast, he states that they [Simmons and himself] occupied a 'strange place' and envisioned that the paramilitaries 'renounced the gun' (*AW* 45). To an extent mournful about the impending death, he nevertheless insists on the significance of the intervention of art in reality (their mutual dependence reflected in the title 'Art and Reality') (*AW* 43). He rejoices the fact that certain resonances of powerful artworks remain. In addition, he states that resistant art continues to remain relevant because of the continual existence of animosity in the society: 'we get around our psychic pain/ by picking on the immigrant crowd' (*AW* 45).

In 'Blueprint', set in Manhattan, Mahon channels Bertolt Brecht's dissatisfaction with advanced capitalism in America; he alludes to the poem, 'The Babylonian Confusion' where, in the context of the 1929 Wall Street crash, Brecht expressed the inability of the forefathers to speak to future generations, as the blueprints they left were 'crisscrossed/ Five times over with new marks, illegible' (327). Mahon draws parallels between Brecht's observations in relation to the stock market's control over people's nutrition needs and the American state's continuing militaristic dominance over the world, which Harold Pinter referred to in his 2005 Nobel Prize acceptance speech as 'full spectrum dominance'. The Brechtian dissatisfaction with the inability to communicate ancestral knowledge due to inadequacy of one particular language and convoluted ways of describing governance strategies by certain totalitarian states remains relevant in the twenty-first century. Mahon cites the 'failed agenda' of the United States' initiation of a war with Iraq to solve the domestic problems of homelessness and unemployment. Mahon combines Brechtian Marxism with his own wry detached, humorous and wry

tone, which is further amplified in ‘World Trade Talks’. He finds himself face to face with the divisors of various economic and political policies from the developed world.

A Hindu growth rate,
hedges against the winds
of double edged finance; organic crops
and comely maidens, is it too late
to push for these demands
and pious hopes? (*AW* 23)

The speaker mocks the rhetoric used by the economists associated with the IMF and the World Bank, who constantly complain about the lack of positive responses from countries like India towards the acceptance of economic strategies introduced by the USA. The poem refers to such rhetoric as ‘the dirty tricks and genocidal mischief/ inflicted upon the weak’ (*AW* 23). However, ‘World Trade Talks’ ends on an optimistic note, as the poet invokes the spirit of the hare, which symbolises the survival of the crops according to Scottish mythology and presents it as scared yet persistent despite genetic modifications that crops undergo. Mahon’s images defying capitalist dominance and language in ‘Blueprint’ and ‘World Trade Talks’—‘give the Algonquin back/ the shiny vein of ore we struck/ and watch him re-enchant the world’ and ‘let [... new crop] not be genetically modified/ but such as the ancients sowed/ in the old days’—come across as naively optimistic; however, they exhibit influences of the theory of epic theatre delineated by Brecht (*AW* 23).

The second part of *An Autumn Wind* includes translations of the T’ang dynasty poets who reflect upon life, death and the relevance of art. The collection draws its title from the translated poem of Tu Fu, ‘Autumn Fields’, where the poet ruminates upon autumnal landscapes and anticipates winter while living through old age and exile. The poem preceding ‘Autumn Fields’, ‘Thinking of Li Po’, ends on a mournful note: ‘eternal

fame/ is a poor consolation when life is done' (*AW* 62). In 'Autumn Fields', the imagery continues to suggest the inability to live to his full potential while ageing: 'It's easy to understand the flow of life/ where everything fulfils its own nature [...] at my age I'm resigned to failing powers' (*AW* 63). Mahon draws the solitude and repose from the T'ang dynasty poets as well as the poignance of images to reflect upon his personal experiences of living in exile, being separated from his children:

> The upland paths are blocked by strewn rubble
> and timber; immense clouds obscure the sun.
> My children chatter in the local tongue
> and I can't see them prospering in Chang-an. (*AW* 64)

The constrictions due to old age and political unrest between the T'ang dynasty and various regional powers, which Tu Fu expresses in the poem, resonate with Mahon as he identifies his helplessness in continuing global power scramble. While relatively unperturbed landscapes, represented in 'River of Stars', seem antithetical to the deteriorated cityscapes that Mahon represents in Part One, both exhibit commonalities in their criticism of violent conflicts and the representation of personal solitude in the face of post-conflict existence.

A sense of awareness and responsibility towards world affairs is explicit in Mahon's critique of the idiosyncratic commercial interests of developed nations and in his engagements with the American, European and Chinese landscapes. This sense of responsibility is carried forward by actually placing the poetic persona in South Asia. He introduces the author of 'Raw Material':

> *The fictitious Hindi poet Gopal Singh was born in Kashmir in 1959 and lives in Delhi, where for many years he was Arts Editor of the monthly* New India [...] *Singh's is a densely inter-textual poetry which frequently references the work of others — Bengalis, Tamils — with the result that it almost reads like a telescopic*

anthology of the contemporary Indian canon [...] *I would like to thank him for his help and forbearance (much has been lost in translation)….* (*AW* 66)

The phrase used to describe the collection—'a telescopic anthology of the contemporary canon'—denotes a conscious desire to appropriate devices from Indian literature, with such an adherence that an original work reads like an anthology of pieces from a pre-existing canon. Although the poet's appropriation of authority by assuming the persona of an Indian might align him with Orientalist tradition, he distinguishes himself from the othering tendencies of the Orientalist discourse. He conveys his distance from the subject through an acknowledgement of the difficulties experienced in translations. Moreover, he portrays a very empathetic picture of lives led in India, all the while acknowledging the impact of neo-imperialism on individuals and communities in South Asia. As the collection progresses, Gopal Singh sceptically reflects on the climate and the city infrastructure of India and speaks by composing monologues of different individuals from the landscape, who perceive threats from the chaos that is not only elemental (symbolized by floods and wilderness) but, more significantly, man-made (pollution, depleting of life-sustaining resources). Gopal Singh's allusions to Indian mythology provide immediacy and depth to the subject matter and allow mythological tales, which support caste hierarchies and gender discrimination, to be rewritten from a secular and critical perspective.

In 'Raw Material,' the raw material the speaker refers to is what is seen as waste or refuse, with a perceived presence of the potential to regenerate. The poem begins with reflections upon the importance of recycling: 'The recycling of old shoes/ as raw material/ makes artwork/ of the contingent real' (*AW* 69). The poet, talking about the scientific process where waste material takes the form of new products, alludes to the message from the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Only material forms die

says the *Gita*,

the dusty souls within alone survives

even as we discard

one body for another. (*AW* 69)

The allusion in the given lines is to Canto 22 of Chapter II in the *Gita*, where Krishna states to Arjuna that the soul discards its body to assume another form just as human beings discard their worn-out clothes (94). The next canto in the *Gita* states that one shall not mourn the loss of material forms because death is inevitable, and after death, there is an afterlife (96). The poet also reassures his readers that 'there is life to come/ when we rejoin the dust/ or drift downstream/ and sink into the sand like foam' (*AW* 69). The lines seem to provide spiritual alleviation to the soul and solace to modern individuals, yet one should not miss the ironical undertones of the poem. In a similar vein, in 'Recycling Song', the poet imagines an afterlife and presents *Gita*'s tenet as a forewarning; 'The Gita/ warns us that we never die' (*AW* 75). The speaker juxtaposes the immediate concerns related to environmental degradation with the spiritual and focuses on the lasting nature of material forms, thus stressing the significance of efficient waste management. The value of recycling is also reflected in the adjective used for Mahon's poem, 'Recycling Song'; the poem itself is considered a reiteration of pre-existing literature and archiving the ephemeral infrastructure of modernity—a trope meticulously also developed by Kolatkar in *Kala Ghoda Poems*.

In the poem 'The Great Wave,' the rubble left after the tsunami appears as the raw material; the calamity and the overwhelming presence of the debris become the inspiration for Mahon's poetry. He explores possibilities in this disaster, a disaster that jeopardizes objects and landscapes. 'The Great Wave', set in Madurai, India, connects to the poem 'After the Storm' in Part I of *An Autumn Wind*, which represents the devastation caused by River Lee's flooding in Cork. It provides a source of imagery for Mahon's

poetics, and he states: ‘If 'waste is the new raw material' as they say/ our resources are infinite’. (‘Raw material’ here can be seen to represent poetic inspiration) (*AW* 77). The poems (‘Raw Material,’ ‘Recycling Song’, ‘The Great Wave’ and ‘After the Storm’) choose for their subjects the most prosaic object, *filth*. This throws some light on the understanding of poetic subjects by Mahon and some of the late-modernist contemporaries. They embark on the project of translating modern reality into poetry for the audience, and because this reality is deprived of any grandeur, the subject of the art also deals with what is deprived of grandiosity. In the instances demonstrated above, his poems allude to the message of the *Gita*, bringing forth philosophical questions about human existence, mortality and immortality; at the same time, they engage with elemental details, preventing the reader from escaping contemporary reality marked by industrialization, exhaustion of natural resources, and climate change across the world.

Mahon’s reworking of mythology and his formal experiments seem to be ensuing from his need to persuade the readers to approach the East in ways that discourage stereotyping and employment of preconceived notions. Apart from these mythological reworkings, Mahon’s work in the Indian section also takes humorous turns, levelling a critique of certain cultural practices in sarcastically charged ways. He observes profit-oriented engagement in religious activities in ‘Dharma Bums’ (*AW* 71). The poet assumes the tone of a preacher to highlight the absurdities of religious rhetoric. The character that the speaker presents complains about young individuals wasting time on the streets while, according to the speaker, they should be:

> Advertising the benefits
>
> Of our spirituality—
>
> Ganesh the god of profit,
>
> Saraswati the celebrant of it,
>
> Rama of many dominions

and Krishna, 'brighter than a thousand suns'. (*AW* 71)

In his sly representation of India, Mahon, like Kolatkar in *Jejuri*, identifies the links between 'venality and spirituality' in the country; the speaker's use of the word 'Advertising,' concerning spirituality, suggests how preachers have been commodifying the spiritual. The tone seems starkly ironic when one notices that the attributes attached to each deity are either mercenary or related to power and control. The title also mocks the writers like Allen Ginsberg and the Beats, who came to India seeking spirituality from gurus (*Dharma Bums* is the title of Jack Kerouac's famous novel about his engagement with Buddhism). The collection succeeds in assessing Indian mythology's relevance while seeking literary inspiration; at the same time, it exhibits an awareness that it inhibits individuals' progressive ideologies when accepted uncritically. This is most evidently visible in 'Up at the Palace.'

In 'Up at the Palace,' the poetic persona is portrayed as belonging to the more privileged section of Indian society and is staying amidst the 'packed streets of Jaipur' (*AW* 78). The poet argues that, even though a 'bomb went off, the individuals go on 'having their being' (*AW* 78). The speaker belongs to a class that revels in the luxuries provided to them; while 'up at the palace,' he visits the 'concert [which] has been laid for the visitors' and has 'ragas and Rameau under climbing stars' being performed (*AW* 78). At the concert, as stated in the second stanza, the speaker engages in talks about the environmental decadence and the moral depravity of people, but the listeners do not concern themselves with the poets' persuasions. In the poem's third stanza, the speaker observes that the 'boy putting up posters for pittance/and Dalit girl-child scratching at Toyota/ windows for spare change'(*AW* 78) are excluded from the extravagant lifestyle that the speaker has been leading. In the fourth stanza, the speaker reiterates what traditionally has been mythologized to justify the hierarchies: 'The curse of karma keeps them in their places…terrible things you must have done'(*AW* 78). However, the poet

negates the possibility that the dispossessed must have done 'terrible things' but states, in the final stanza:

> No, you did nothing of the kind of course
> but you were born into a dream of shame
> whose violent colours filled the universe
> and left you silent, each with a secret name,
> listening to the music of other spheres.
> You too will sip champagne one of these years
> despite the old, self perpetuating pantheon;
> but what do we worship now the gods have gone? (*AW* 79)

In the last stanza of the poem (quoted above), the poet states that it is mere arbitrariness of birth because of which individuals belong to certain classes or castes. The speaker discards the rhetoric that justifies the perpetuation of the sufferings of the poor and the lower castes in terms of the karma cycle, which has been upheld by various Hindu communities, justified in texts like *Manu Smriti*, and held sacred by the practitioners of Hinduism. It is recognized that this rhetoric maintains the edifice of caste systems in society, alienating the lower castes and the dispossessed by perceiving and representing them as sinners.

The passivity of the rich has already been brought to the audience's attention in the previous stanzas; they are implicated in the process of the perpetuation of economic disparities and are held to be responsible for the 'dream of shame.' The speaker has already discarded the metaphysical justification; he believes that the poor may as well break out of the cycle of poverty and also revel in luxuries, 'drink champagne.' However, in the poem's final lines, the speaker himself questions the possibility of the absolute separation of spiritual thoughts from life and seems to acknowledge the human impulse that seeks for a level above the material that continues to justify suffering. Mahon's poem

seems to lament the state of the human psyche that requires reliance on metaphysics, making individuals' suffering and inhibitions in the face of orthodoxies as much self-imposed as they are externally generated.

The poet's concerns in *An Autumn Wind* expand from his place in Ireland to different nations in the world and then towards the human psyche, where each individual seeks comfort in metaphysical narratives and therefore prevents an absolute eviction of the edifices of religion and spirituality. One may perceive an attempt here to reflect on human life's essential condition and particular events. His constant references to ancient writings and contemporary chaos reinvest an imaginative rigour into his work, helping in 'extending the range and idiom of Irish poetry' (Kennedy-Andrews 5). However, although Mahon has inherited tradition, he casts a sceptical eye on it and thoroughly reworks it to further his critique of political and cultural phenomena. The renewed formal elements in his poetry persuade the reader to cast aside inherited ways of reading, exoticizing, nostalgically lamenting, or blindly valorising the venerable heritage of older civilizations; readers are invited to derive their meanings through reading. He distances himself from any collusion with his poetic voice. Mahon is twice removed from the narrative; he speaks through the voice of Gopal Singh, and Singh's own voice is not collapsed into the voices in the narrative. Mahon builds a sly and cunning but absolutely clear indictment of the modern world, even as he is full of wonderment about what will happen 'now the gods have gone'.

Kala Ghoda Poems redefines the epic form, revisits *bhakti*, high modernism, Blues, and other literary movements to depict the city's infrastructure; in addition, Kolatkar makes several sub-textual references that envision redefining and reimagination of foundational Hindu myths. Like Mahon, he briefly alludes to the tenets of *the Gita,* imagining life after death, and ruminates upon its all-pervasive presence in the city. In a remarkable similarity with Mahon, Kolatkar elevates rubbish as an essential element of

contemporary urban landscapes and upholds it as a source of poetic inspiration. While in the case of Mahon, rubbish as his muse is quite pronounced ('If 'waste is the new raw material' as they say/ our resources are infinite'), in the case of Kolatkar, it is his poetry's primary subject. I shall assess aspects of *Kala Ghoda Poems* and *Sarpa Satra* to identify the ways in which Kolatkar adapts myth to pronounce his critique of specific traditions and superstitious beliefs that perpetuate violence and inequalities. I shall further reflect on the ways in which mythology allows Kolatkar to provide depth to his critique of various twenty first century phenomena, including presence of some totalitarian states and late capitalist determinism.

In 'A Note on the Reproductive Cycle of Rubbish' in *Kala Ghoda Poems*, Kolatkar provides a fantastic, realistic, and futuristic vision of rubbish accumulated in cities. He portrays rubbish ovulating in the landfill site and 'releasing pheromones/ during the period of its fertility' (*KG* 35). He envisions seductive and regenerative capacity in rubbish as its pheromones drive 'speculators in rut' wild who then bid money on it; ultimately, rubbish 'copulates with the winner' (*KG* 35). After spending prolonged periods in exile, rubbish is portrayed as copulating. In 'Song of Rubbish', Kolatkar gives voice to rubbish and imagines its presence in the landfill site as its time in exile before it could regenerate:

> Grapes,
> as vineyard wenches crush them underfoot,
> aspire to a greater glory
>
> after more penance,
> and a period of silence and seclusion
> in a dark cellar [...]

We too

have our own tryst with destiny, and feel

the birth-pangs of a new

city, (*KG* 34)

When describing rubbish, Kolatkar creates allegorical relationships in different stanzas. The parallels drawn between grapes in the cellar and rubbish in landfills and other objects, that lead glorious afterlives, allow Kolatkar to underline the longevity of rubbish and possibilities to regenerate. He also reiterates that the city of Bombay was formed through land reclamation and waste played a vital role in the formation of the modern city. As in Mahon's works, concepts of metempsychosis and afterlives are evoked in a secular sense and amalgamated with modern themes. These mythic elements in the portraiture of rubbish allow him to accentuate the dominance of waste and envision universality in the phenomenon. Unlike Mahon, he does not pronounce the message in the poem ('recycle/ the vilest rubbish') (*AW* 75). However, through mythological, allegorical undertones and humour, he persuades his readers to recognise the decadence and possibilities to regenerate, present in the urban landscape.

In *Sarpa Satra*, Kolatkar revisits the Indian Sanskritik epic, *Mahabharata*. *Mahabharata* relates the conflict between cousins, Kauravas and Pandavas, which culminates in a war; the central theme of the epic is 'the passing of the heroic age and the obliteration of the warrior race' (Minkowski 403). *Mahabharata's* 'Sarpa Satra' relates the story where king Janamejaya seeks revenge for the death of his grandfather, Parikshit, from a snake by commanding the extermination of the entire species of snakes. The Satra advances the theme of the obliteration of the warrior race as Astika, who intervenes in the extermination of snakes, saves Takshaka, who was the snake who killed Parikshit. By presenting the tragic predicament of the warrior race, the epic focuses on heroism and

decline of the warrior clans, excluding other perspectives. In his rewriting, Kolatkar questions the epic's form, thematic, constructions of plot, and dominant perspectives. He challenges the intentionality of wars and foregrounds the loss that violence inflicts on the environment and humanity.

Mahabharata's primary story, which is the tale of Bharatas, is embedded in frame narratives, one of which includes Janamejaya conducting the snake sacrifice and being narrated the story of Bharatas by Vaisampayana, the author Vyasa's pupil. Kolatkar's collection rewrites the *Satra* in the form of two monologues—by Janamejaya, the perpetrator of violence, and by Jaratkaru, a snake-woman advocating for peace—and a concluding section, 'The Ritual Bath', which speaks of how different genocides ended. The rendering of the myth in a contemporary idiom underlines the perpetuation of violent conflicts until the present era. By highlighting the everydayness in the language of narration, it foregrounds general apathy with which knowledge about violence is received.

Kolatkar redefines the perspective from which the battle of *Mahabharata* is narrated. He delineates the inner thoughts and self-appeasing and flawed justification of the perpetrator of the snake sacrifice. In his *Sarpa Satra*, Kolatkar provides imaginative reconstruction of the thoughts of the recipient of the long narrative of violence in *Mahabharata*, Janamajeya, who feels obliged to seek revenge for the death of his grandfather. Despite the brevity with which Kolatkar constructs Janamejaya's monologue, he persuasively delineates aspects of his psyche. Janamejaya is portrayed as extremely disturbed by the actions of 'a scheming snake [...who] used/ all the cunning of its kind [and…] assassin[ated]' his grandfather (*SS* 19). Janamejaya's narration is appealing because of the embellishment in his language; the potency of the snake's venom is rendered through a compelling image: 'that [venom] could, with a single drop,/

turn a full grown banyan tree/ in a flash into a crackling cloud of ash' (*SS* 19). The persuasion and motivation behind Janamejaya's actions are then pronounced:

> my guardians had to wait patiently
> for me to come of age
> to lay this terrible piece of knowledge on me.
>
> But now that I know [...]
> My vengeance will be swift and terrible.
> I will not rest
> until I've exterminated them all.
>
> They'll discover
> That no hole is deep enough
> To hide from Janamejaya. (*SS* 21)

Janamejaya's declaration to avenge a distant misdeed committed by a snake by wiping out all snakes comes across as misguided. His self-fashioning and ill-defined rhetoric set the tone of Kolatkar's collection, which aims to caricature the self-serving rationales and hubris of perpetrators of genocides. Kolartkar further criticises the heroism and pride which mandate seeking vengeance by providing a voice to Jaratkaru, a snake woman who persuades her son, Astika, to intervene and stop the snake sacrifice.

Kolatkar challenges the rhetoric and eloquence used to justify violent actions in *Mahabharata* by juxtaposing Janamejaya's and Jaratkaru's narratives. While Janamejaya's speech in the first section of *Sarpa Satra* uses metaphors and hyperboles, Jaratkaru's speech is more conversational and colloquial. Janamejaya's stylised declaration of violence against the snakes, 'no hole is deep enough/ To hide from Janamejaya' is followed by Jaratkaru's nuanced voice:

What would your reaction be
if someone were to come up to you
and say,

My father died of snakebite
When? Oh, I was too young then.
I don't even remember,

but I'm going to avenge his death
by killing
every single snake that lives [...]

you may look at him closely, perhaps,
trying to remember the name of a good shrink. (*SS* 28)

Jaratkaru highlights the absurdity in the voice of Janamejaya; the use of phrases like, 'trying to remember the name of a good shrink', modernises the language and evokes a sense of urgency in the need to respond to the totalitarian and genocidal intentions of 'a king of a sizable country' (*SS* 29). Her reflections on actions are unsentimental, and she constantly punctuates her speech using rhetorical questions and contemplative phrases: 'And I don't mean [...] But I mean [...] One wonders' (*SS* 29-31). Jarakatu not only criticises Janamejaya's actions, her reflections upon narrative and ability to weigh various perspectives oppose the monolithic structure of his language.

In the voice of Jaratkaru, a minor character in *Mahabharata* and a passive recipient of consequences of violent actions in the epic, Kolatkar challenges the narrative's protagonist and villain's actions. Although Takshaka, the snake, sought revenge from Janamejaya's father for the burning of an entire rainforest by his great grandfather, which

then led Janamejaya to conduct the snake sacrifice, Jaratkaru does not allow the sympathies to lie with either of the vengeful individuals, regardless of their stature or extent of the loss. Jaratkaru states that she does not forgive Takshaka and explains, 'To say that he was an extremist/ is not to make excuses for him' (*SS* 39). Further, she emphatically draws attention to the actions of the intelligentsia in supporting the genocide and finding justifications for the actions of the ruling elite; 'all the great/ sages' and 'his cronies and councillors [...] applaud and encourage him' (*SS* 30-31). In the inversion of the narrative, Kolatkar challenges not only the sanctity of the epic's protagonists but also challenges the stereotypical notions which associate educated individuals with moral uprightness. By providing an extended voice to Jaratkaru, innocent victim of Janmejaya's actions, Kolatkar allegorically foregrounds the perspective of the civilians in power-struggle.

By using the snake sacrifice as a metaphor for genocides and perpetuation of violence against the powerless Kolatkar in *Sarpa Satra* provides an acerbic critique of hubris of wielders of power; at the same time, in the voice of Jaratkaru, Kolatkar questions the authors who eulogise violence and heroism to seek acclaim.

[...]Vyasa himself

looks upon the event,
essentially,
a not-to-be-missed opportunity

to unleash his self-indulgent epic
on an unsuspecting world
— way too long if you ask me.

I mean 24000 verses, Lord have mercy!

what it badly needs

is a good editor (*SS* 35-36)

Mahabharata is the longest written poem, and, yet, Jaratkaru remains unimpressed ('I mean 24000 verses, Lord have mercy!'). The eloquence of the author and the characterisation and narrative have received great critical acclaim but Jaratkaru is critical of it and asks for 'a good editor'. The author's participates in the action—Vyasa supports the warrior clan in its perpetuation by impregnating the mother of the kings, Dhritrashtra and Pandu, whose sons go at war and, as a seer, also prophesies its annihilation—are not appreciated by Jaratkaru either. Vyasa, as an author, accords a significant status to himself in his narrative. Kolatkar, through Jaratkaru, criticises the self-aggrandising and voyeuristic engagement by the author in violent actions. She calls the epic 'self-indulgent' because Vyasa narrates the tale of his descendants' heroism and martyrdom as they die performing their duty of expansion of their kingdoms. Jaratkaru's voice is antithetical to the voice of Vyasa: not only does she constantly assesses the authority and validity of her narration, her style is also devoid of any ostentations and forces the readers to confront the bare facts ('a whole nation destroyed itself') (*SS* 36).

Kolatkar overturns the anthropocentric nature of the myth by understanding the narrative from the perspective of the snake woman who intends to halt the violence. He also recounts the tale of the burning of Khandava forest where animals were killed for the mere pleasure of the warriors (which then propelled the snake, Takshaka, to seek revenge from the warrior clan; the act which was then avenged in the form of the sacrifice). He further extends his allegiance to the natural world, in the voice of Jaratkaru, by highlighting the nature of damage to the nature caused by violence against the snake species:

[...] rivers of snakefat

sputter, sizzle and flow ceaselessly

and the sickening smell of burning snakeflesh
— strong enough to make you gag —
continues to spread throughout the land.

It has, by now, become so
pervasive,
so much a part of the air we breathe

that soon we'll start thinking of fresh air
as something unindian, alien
and antinational. (*SS* 61)

Jaratkaru's voice delivers harrowing images of the consequences of the mass sacrifice: 'snakefat/ sputter, sizzle and flow ceaselessly', 'smell of snakeflesh [...] continues to spread through the land'. By using the terms' antiindian' 'antinational' in relation to resisting the genocide's effect on the ecosystem, she further highlights how nations, to create a sense of integrity for themselves, silence dissenting voices and perpetuate violence against ecosystems and other communities.

In the final section, 'The Ritual Bath', Kolatkar presents the end of the genocide as 'the officiating priests,/ honoured guests, vedic wizards/ and other/ intellectual superstars of the show/ go back to their respective homes' (*SS* 79). He presents people's attention moving from 'the latest episode of the Mahabharata' and 'daily statistics of death' to 'simple pleasures' like flying kites and making love (*SS* 82). Kolatkar draws the images from everyday South Asian reality. While reference to the snake sacrifice as 'holocaust' indicates Kolatkar's evocation of Nazi violence against the Jews, his representation of

commonplace South Asian scenes of the aftermath of violence reminds the readers of the history of the unfolding of violence in the sub-continent. As Mehrotra stated in his personal interview with me, the memories of the Gujarat riots, following the demolition of the mosque, were alive during the composition of *Sarpa Satra*. The commitment of a genocide to avenge the death of one individual also reminds the readers of Sikh pogrom of 1984. As recorded by Karuna Madan, there were 'a series of organised pogroms' against members of the Sikh community across India by anti-Sikh mobs in response to the assassination of then prime minister (PM) Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards at her residence. Kolatkar allegorically recreates the absurdity of events in history by rewriting the influential form of the epic from his secular perspective.

Conclusion

As evident in their early translations, Mahon and Kolatkar assess the relevance and appeal of the original work before translating them. They take ownership of the works they translate, and instead of merely imparting them in English, they use the original texts to delineate themes such as modernist alienation, which dominate their oeuvre. While conceiving their works, Mahon and Kolatkar continue to draw inspiration from the English canonical models and other world literary models. Mahon alludes to Sappho, Ovid, Paul Valery, Keats and Pound, and Kolatkar refers to bhakti texts, Blues, Williams, Euclid and Beethoven, to mention a few. These allusions allow the poets to expand the imaginative appeal of their work as the readers can approach the subjects through rich connotative formal and thematic elements borrowed from different traditions. While certain revisiting allow the poets to strengthen the appeal of their poetry while addressing phenomena such as cosmopolitanism and economic inequalities, specific mythic tales and narratives are criticised and rewritten by the poets. They recognise the significance of critical reception and rewriting of dominating narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR

'Clever Discontent': Play and Irony in the Works of Mahon and Kolatkar

There are connotations of playfulness attached to metaphoric, rhythmic and metonymic phrases in poetry. Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* asserts that in the creation of language, there is continually 'a 'sparking' between matter and mind' and the nominative faculty undertakes a play and unfolds a 'poetic world alongside the world of nature'(4). Poesis, Huizinga explains, is a 'play function' that 'originates in the play-ground of the mind' (119). Huizinga studies the 'social and liturgical' function of archaic poetic traditions, including poetic traditions from Central Buru (*Inga fuka*), Japanese *haikai* and 15th-century French *débats*, and observes that these poetic forms flourished in altercations between different parties, in prophesying/sorcery or in 'expressing and perhaps solving, the tricky problem of life' (126). He further explains that although these poetic traditions have not exclusively aesthetic but social functions, such as expressions of competing thoughts or satirising life; they share the characteristic of 'gay abandon, mirth and jollity' (122). He writes:

> The definition [...] of play might serve as a definition of poetry. The rhythmical or symmetrical arrangements of language, the hitting of the mark by rhyme or assonance, the deliberate disguising of the sense, the artificial and artful construction of phrases—all might be so many utterances of play spirit. To call poetry, as Paul Valery has done, a playing with words and language is no metaphor; it is the precise and literal truth. (132)

The play elements recognised by Huizinga in what he calls archaic poetry—including the use of puns, conveying triviality or significance of certain messages through the use of rhyme or assonance, and delineating intriguing parallels between subjects and images

from literary predecessors or the ordinary world—are inherited and adapted by twentieth-century modernist authors.[60] The dialectical quality of play and its ability to actively engage the readers in the process of meaning delineation makes it conducive for adaptation by late modernist poets' projects. This chapter focuses on the use of play and irony by Mahon and Kolatkar; it assesses how playful and ironic elements are used by the authors and aligned with their own idiosyncratic styles, which aim to be dialogic and not didactic.

Theorists have frequently commented on the defiant humour and irony of Irish literary traditions.[61] Vivian Mercier, in his 1962 study *The Irish Comic Tradition*, identifies continuities in the proverbial satires and parodies of early Irish traditions (dating back to the ninth century) and Anglo-Irish writing by Jonathan Swift and later James Joyce. Mercier explains that the 'traditional obligation to comment, often satirically, on current events' has been inherited by modern Anglo-Irish writers from bards who were 'journalists of Gaelic society' (207). Mercier acknowledges that Swift did not know Gaelic but could have inherited macabre and grotesque humour from the Gaelic bards whom he encountered in translations.[62] According to Mercier, Joyce borrowed his Irish humour from Swift. He also identifies the influences of Gaelic poetry and Swift in the works of twentieth-century authors like Patrick Kavanagh and Austin Clarke (208). In Joyce and Beckett's writings, Adrienne Janus identifies laughter as 'a

[60] This idea has been articulated by Linda Hutcheon and shall be elaborated upon later in the chapter. See *A Theory of Parody: The Teaching of Twentieth Century Art Forms*. Hutcheon explains that the critical tool of modern episteme is to parody the forms and themes from the classics with 'modern interrogation of the nature of self-reference and legitimacy' (2).

[61] While I state that Irish and Indian traditions use aspects of play and irony, I do not intend to state that these traditions are synonymous with humour. These traditions are marked by multiple differentiation and playful and ironic is a minor yet forceful element of literature produced in India and Ireland.

[62] Although Mercier fails to establish a direct connection between Swift and Gaelic comic tradition, he cites a few incidents of Swift's contact with Gaelic tradition; for instance, he speculates that Swift's Gaelic student could have provided him with a literal translation of *Aidheadh Fhearghusa*, on which he based his 'Description of an Irish Feast' (188). While Mercier's historicising does not sufficiently demonstrate continual exchanges between Irish writers across generations, he provides enough examples to demonstrate the presence of continuities in the tradition of responding to social and historic context through the use of humour.

vocalised bodily response to limit conditions'; the limit conditions identified by Janus include Ireland's political unrest and provincialism, the authors' relationship with the English language and, most significantly, 'liminal occasions fundamental to human existence as such, namely birth and death' (174). Mahon's work draws from the humoristic tendency within Irish literary traditions, identified by Mercier and Janus. It delineates creative responses to social and historical circumstances through ironic and satirical inversions of reality.

In Indian literary tradition[63] (what Janus calls) limit conditions are also recurrently addressed by privileging wit and humour over helplessness and sorrow. Sussane Reichl and Mark Stein identify the significance of comedy in postcolonial literary traditions: 'laughter is a central element, humor a key feature, disrespect a vital textual strategy of postcolonial practice' (1). Laughter is an important tool in postcolonial contexts, but at the same time, postcolonial writers oppose the understanding of laughter as 'a cultural attribute of a specific postcolonial space or a marker of inherent Otherness' (Reichl and Stein 1).[64] Instead of a 'laughing back' hypothesis based on Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's *The Empire Writes Back*, where the postcolonial subjects register their disdain against the authority through laughter[65] or Bakhtin's understanding of humour as a force against official traditions, recent postcolonial studies focus on the conciliatory or intellectually stimulating intentions of humorous texts. For instance, Ulrike Erichsen identifies how humour can be used to narrow the gap between the self and the other. Her

[63] Although there is no consolidated study of Indian English humour, the inspiration to study Kolatkar's ironic portraits has been drawn from the studies in ironical, humorous and irreverent postures in postcolonial studies. These include works included in the edited collection, *Cheeky Fictions* and doctoral work of some scholars, Aruni Mahapatra and Padmanabhan M. Chatterjee.

[64] *Cheeky Fictions* is an anthology of essays that assess use of humour by various postcolonial authors and challenge the otherness and humoristic reversals imposed on the 'Orient' (the quote is written by the editors, Susanne Reichl and Mark Stein). Other studies include John Clement Ball's *Satire and the Postcolonial Novel*.

[65] *The Empire Writes Back* registers the protest of the colonial subject but maintains a model whereby the coloniser is at the centre and the empire is imagined to be writing from the peripheries. However, criticism from scholars such as Aijaz Ahmad emphasises that the subject might not necessarily be writing back to the coloniser; see 'The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality'.

reading of postcolonial authors' representations of culturally disparate groups suggests that humour helps overcome conflict by representing it in specific contexts and makes readers aware of cultural barriers and the need to overcome them. Kolatkar's work presents another model of such productive and conciliatory humour as it goes beyond critiquing any particular social group and presents diversity in specific South Asian contexts.

This chapter does not focus on physiological or intellectual responses to irony but on the operation of irony within texts; as this is a study of poetry, I shall specifically look at certain elements of play in poetry identified by Huizinga ('rhythmical or symmetrical arrangements of language, [...] rhyme or assonance, [...] the artificial and artful construction of phrases') (132). I shall also assess ironic portrayals of limit conditions in Indian and Irish late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century contexts. Irony, as conceptualised by Linda Hutcheon, has evolved from its 'antiphrastic' role, where it is used to merely highlight the follies of the subject, to an act containing a more critical function, where there is an interaction 'not only between ironist and interpreter but between different meanings, where both the said and unsaid must play off against each other' ('The Complex Functions of Irony' 220). The chapter shall assess how these elements in Mahon and Kolatkar's poetry are used with a rather self-conscious critical edge to deflect limit conditions — such as regressive political ideologies, political violence, sectarian and religious conflicts , neo-imperialism and late-capitalism. Their ironic stance is extremely self-aware and foregrounds the authors' own subjective positions while addressing socio-historical phenomena. Their ironic inversions are not monolithic but rather cognizant of competing ideologies that give birth to conflict, and they use irony to persuasively delineate their vision. The poets make attempts to assume other personas and personalities in the process of ironising socio-historical phenomena in their countries and beyond.

Play in Early Works

Chapter-1 explores how Mahon and Kolatkar establish their poetic identities during the development of small-press movements of the 1960s and 70s; it identifies the poets' search for novel thematic and formal elements that allow them to forge their poetic identities. The research points to the poets' defiance of pre-existing literary conventions as reflected in the form and thematics of their early work. In this section, I assess how the poets in their early works from the 1960s and 70s use self-directed irony to undermine their own authority as poets. Further, I will point out how the poets use dramatic comparisons and exceptional juxtapositions along with other elements of play in their poems, such as repetitions, listicles and puns, to create not only playful but incisive poetics. While Mahon, borrowing from the Irish tradition, uses ironic comparisons and unusual juxtapositions in his early works to more persuasively delineate his inadequacy as a poet, Kolatkar uses play to defamiliarise reality and engage the readers in the process of meaning making. Mahon's caricatured self and Kolatkar's caricatured reality aim to evoke novel perspectives on their subjects, instead of completely undermining them.

In his early works, Mahon often subjects the poet persona to irony. He presents several mythical and historical figures, like Icarus, Han van Meegeren, the Irishman in London, and the general figure of an agonised artist (who appears in '*Poete Maudit'*, 'Whatever Fall or Blow', 'The Poets Lie Where They Fell', and 'In Belfast', among other poems). These dramatic personas, which reflect aspects of Mahon's own personality, initiate dialogues between personal aspirations and social and moral restraints imposed on individuals. Mahon's artistic portraits are read by Michael Allen as a plea from the poet for differential treatment as he has been a 'gifted victim of artistic temperament' (101). Such representations of self undermine the artistic authority and also allow the poet to distance himself from his subjects. In his sonnet '*Poete Maudit',* he writes:

It will mean living in a slum, always

Drinking spirit, even when I want tea,

Wasting money in brothels, throwing out

The one girl who ever really loves me,

Hunting in transference the perfect mother [...]

Sleeping on prison mattresses and, worst

Of all, perhaps, letting it get about

That I have a slight homosexual tendency…

Yet it will be my only source of comfort

To know myself irrevocably accursed. (38)

While the first fourteen lines of the poem could have been summarised in a sentence (being a poet will mean being poverty stricken and sexually defiant), Mahon reinforces the reader's perception of eccentric artists by enlisting various stereotypes—'living in a slum', 'Drinking spirits', 'Wasting money in brothels' and so on. He then uses the couplet to provide the counter argument and conclusively ends the sonnet by upholding the profession's hazards as ultimately comforting. Because sonnets typically expound an argument, enclosing opposing perspectives within the form, Mahon's ultimate admiration of artistic defiance comes across as rhetorically forceful.[66] He seems to merely appeal to the pleasure that *homo ludens* seek and, therefore, enclose possibilities of critique; however, certain facts about the artist that are sourced from his own life—inability to love, 'Hunting in transference the perfect mother'—point to his genuine complicity in causing his own misery. Nancy Walker argues that self-flagellating irony often 'allows the speaker to participate in the humorous process without alienating the member of the majority' (Qtd. in Hutcheon 225). Hutcheon responds by arguing that self-flagellating irony could also be used to undermine the author's authority ('The Complex Functions

[66] The idea is based on the study of the history of sonnets by Stephan Regan. His assessment of sonnets suggests that they emerged during the Renaissance when the concept of the explorable-self became prevalent. As self-fashioning figures, the sonneteers presented an enclosed argument (4-12).

of Irony' 225). Close reading of Mahon's poem foregrounds his vulnerabilities, which are self-consciously delineated as misfits in a regressive and stereotyping society.

A similarly self-flagellating, albeit less biographical, portrait of an Irish artist is relayed in Mahon's 'The Poets Lie Where They Fell' and Seamus Heaney's 'The Indomitable Irishry'. Their failed desire to participate in social change translates into humoristic caricatures of self. In 'The Poets Lie Where They Fell', Mahon imagines falls in other people's apartments and the inability to rise again. A similar fall is presented in Heaney's 'The Indomitable Irishry' where he uses the Yeatsian phrase 'the indomitable Irishry' and responds to Yeats' plea to 'Sing [...] Porter drinkers' randy laughter' ('Under Ben Bulben'):

> Slept (with a boast) on the parquet floor beneath
> A liquor-lurched couch at a Hampstead Heath
> Party. Confirmed to the blarney-bloated
> Image, blasphemed against bishops, quoted
> The Proclamation. Court cases never disturbed
> And critics were answered when Guinness burped.
> Reduced rebellion to slapsticks and slick cracks —
> Played to full houses, came out in paperbacks. ('The Indomitable Irishry' 104)

By referring to Yeats in the title and with further evocation of Irish themes in the poem, Heaney locates himself in a post-Yeatsian tradition of highly self-conscious commentary on Irish themes. The poet's awareness of his own naivety is delineated through light-hearted playfulness with language, use of scatalogical imagery, alliterative phrases, and rhyming couplets. Heaney's irony is directed towards the society that imposes a 'blarney bloated/ Image' on the artist and prohibits 'blasphem[y] against bishops' but, at the same time, is aware that the poet's own rebellion is reduced to 'slapsticks and slick cracks'; he mocks his own diminishing rebellion and inability to convey something meaningful.

Mahon and Heaney, aspiring to create dialogic and conversational poems, in their early works, diminish the authority of the poet speaker but also urge it to be registered as a peculiar voice capable of satire and delineating oblique visions on reality.

Mahon's playfulness is evident in the humorous and fantastic parallels; his incapacity to love is a recurrent theme that is conveyed through the retelling of classical tales of unrequited love. In 'Never Otherwise', the poet refers to mythic tales of misled lovers to describe his neighbour's and his own acts of lovemaking. He describes his neighbour's sexual intercourse through the use of an unfitting metaphor of driving: 'My neighbour steers his woman like a truck/ Down the clear highway of his bed, / Shaking the cities with his cyclone breath'. A sexist male perspective[67] derived from male-heroic legends dominates his representation of his neighbour's experience whose partner, the evil queen, 'denies the accepted code, / Love's lay-bys and the roundabouts of death' ('Never Otherwise' 12). Alongside his neighbour's powerful yet helpless engagement in love affairs, he expresses his own resolve to avoid infidelity and other extremities of emotional expression. Nevertheless, his love life is marked by worse incapacity as he and his lover are distracted by 'attendant shapes that tempt/ Our fantasy'. While his neighbour manages to form a union with his lover, the poet has to contend with short-lived moments of connection because of his adulterous desires. The poem does not end with an ultimate union but with the promise to keep the 'window fast against the encroaching cold' ('Never Otherwise' 12). Mahon presents a playful caricature of two relationships where men's journeys or drives down a highway are affected by the powers of seductive mythical figures. The overlaying of men's ineptitude and lovelessness onto the myth of a journey's hardships ironically amplifies the poet's doubts and incapacities as an author and lover that marked his early life.

[67] The political incorrectness of jokes shall be addressed further in the chapter.

Michael Allen explains that in Mahon and his contemporaries' early style, the poem was a 'site of meaning' rather than a source of meaning (102). Mahon often executes this through silence or refusal to communicate in response to the subjects being ironised; instead of pronouncing his dissatisfactions, he dramatises the alienation of his poet personas in response to their circumstances; degeneration of critical ability among listeners is a recurrent theme. Mahon's use of this self-dramatising technique becomes apparent in his poem 'Tragic Hero of Our Times'; the poem presents a modern day Hamlet who does not mourn 'a murdered king/ Or a clown's powdery skull' but aspires to have his meaning conveyed:

> Somebody love me, somebody who,
>
> Because, having studied each critical text,
>
> He speaks with silences, may undo
>
> In silence, this ghosted reverie, faustian aspect. ('Tragic Hero' 48)

Mahon dramatises the poet persona as a suffering hero whose agonies are unsaid and are to be interpreted by the listener. He is unable to convey meaning and yearns for a listener who would interpret his meanings through his/her understanding of critical texts. Although the authority of the speaker is questioned, he pronounces his idealist desire: 'prepare with me/ A far, far better world in the last act/ Without benefit or relief or pity' ('Tragic Hero' 48). The vision of working for a better future through abandonment of egotistical emotions, albeit partly gullible, is pronounced through the tragic hero's psyche in the poem, and the reader is expected to read the romance and idealism in the poem before making any inferences.

In their early works, Mahon and Heaney create a case for the artist who requires special treatment as a gifted individual. Mahon celebrates the deviant characteristics of an artist and dramatises his incapacity. The dramatisation of self as a maverick individual often betrays sexism and reclusiveness, yet the expressions do not lack self-awareness

and portrayals of vulnerability. The figures of speech—alliteration, (particularly scatalogical) metaphors and listicles—create the effect required to heighten the sense of self-flagellation in the poems. The expressions of inadequacy in the poet's love life and his inability to delineate aesthetically pleasing verses for the reader—as demonstrated in chapter one, in his early years, Mahon was opposed to the poet who was 'completely unresponsive to the human climate'—agonisingly oppose the conventional societal expectations from the poet's masculinity and aesthetics. Through representations of his inadequacy, Mahon subtly satirises the society. Further analysis in this chapter will uncover Mahon's more explicit critique of orthodox ideologies upheld by his Northern Irish society and communities elsewhere.

Kolatkar's playful early idiom, like Mahon's, often displays self-flagellation and experimentation with unconventional themes and parallels. In 'My Name is Arun Kolatkar', he writes:

My Name is Arun Kolatkar

I had a little matchbox

I lost it

then I found it

I kept it

in my right hand pocket

It is still there (*TB* 61)

The poem, by conveying seemingly insignificant biographical details of the poet, defies the presumption that a poem should convey something substantial. Its repetition of phrase structures ('I lost it/ [...] I found it/ I kept it') creates a humorous effect and its ordinariness opposes the expectation of eloquence in Indian English poetry.

'My Name is Arun Kolatkar' provides further insights into Kolatkar's early poetic style; he undermines his authority as a poet by representing himself as an ordinary erring

individual. In his other poems, Kolatkar represents his persona as receptive to the social and historical milieu; the poet is presented as either alienated by industrial modernity or someone who is radically transformed as he interacts with the reality of ordinary people. In 'Make Way Poet', Kolatkar presents an authoritative voice which dismisses the poet for being dishevelled, idle and proud: 'your breath/ smelling of words, you'll sprawl/ on a timeside pavement/—a dumbstruck hairy stall' (*TB* 49). Even though the poet is presented as incompetent, idle and loathsome (reflected in the description 'star-lice/ based in your hair'), the voice of the moralist comes across as prudish and destructive:

> make way poet, jaywalking,
> for evolution's automobile
> or in its homicidal headlights
> wither with a smile. (*TB* 49)

The voice of the moralist is utilitarian while the poet is idle and jaywalks. Kolatkar's ironic style counterposes the automobile's speed and the repose and idleness of the poet—'make way poet, jaywalking,/ for evolution's automobile'—and allows the readers to derive their own understanding. Despite the fact that audiences' sympathies are clearly drawn towards the poet (as the moralist's machinery is murderous), like Mahon, Kolatkar's self-effacement and withdrawal is not aimed solely at society but is also meant to draw attention to his subjectivity.

Kolatkar's early ironic works set the tone for his entire oeuvre. The colloquialism in Kolatkar's language compliments his aims of archiving everyday reality; he creates fantastical and imaginative parallels that allow the ordinary experiences to gain depth. In 'The Hag', he uses the sonnet form to describe an old woman's face while 'she devours oranges'; while the first sestet describes the woman and her surroundings as debilitating; the second sestet and the envoi describe her face as initiating a battle:

> [...] She liked them baggy. She paws.

She claws. An orange isn't peeled. It's torn. Each
fruit a vapid debacle. An invalid pose

In tattered filigree. The hag incites her mandibles
to mob and maul a piece. Her entire face
converges in a featureless fury rushes to the battle's

toothless centre. Eyes. Like a dead horse
on a battlefield her eyes deny the avid face. (*TB* 50)

The alliterations in 'mob and maul', 'featureless fury' and the assonance between 'featureless fury' and 'toothless centre' create a playful effect accentuating the aging yet peculiar movements of the facial features of the woman. 'The Hag' bears comparison to the Irish allegorical mode in which the nation is eulogised as an old woman, the sean bhean bhocht. Indeed, there may be evidence of direct influence: Kolatkar's works often contain references to Gaelic and Welsh myth; here he reimagines the old-woman poem to celebrate the everyday reality of an aging woman in South Asia. His ironic juxtapositions of the sean bhean bhocht mode and the everyday experience of observing a woman do not mock the woman but defamiliarise the image to draw the reader's attention to it. Mahon's 'Derry Morning' also evokes the trope in an ironic manner to defamiliarise aspects of Northern Irish reality: the cavities/ Glow black in the rubbled city's/ Broken mouth. An early crone,/ Muse of a burnt out revolution' (*CD* 9). Both the poets, as I shall further demonstrate, manage to use irony in an intellectually stimulating rather than simply antiphrastic manner.

Kolatkar's minutely descriptive representations of his subjects create oblique (following Joycean realism or caricature; also evident in 'The Hag') portraits that defamiliarise and ironise aspects of existence in South Asia. Kolatkar has written a set of

journey poems that describe his experiences of walking through Maharashtra (a state in the Western part of India). In 'The Turnaround', he captures aspects of life in inland Maharashtra as it marks his own corporeality:

I could smell molasses boiling in a field.
I asked for some sugarcane to eat.
I shat on vishnukranta
and wiped my arse with neem leaves.
I found a beedi lying on the road
and put it in my pocket.[...]

Dust in my beard, dust in my hair,
The sun like a hammer on the head.
An itching arse.
A night spent on flagstones.
My tinshod hegira
was hotting up (*TB* 74-75)

While archiving realistic aspects of a South Asian landscape—'molasses boiling in a field', 'sugarcane to eat', 'beedi lying on the road', 'sun like a hammer'—Kolatkar primarily foregrounds what strikes his senses and narrows the focus of the poem by prioritising his personal perspective. The discord between the precision of the botanical observations in 'vishnukranta ' and 'neem leaves' and the dismissive implication of shitting on or wiping the arse with them convey a sense of play. The capturing of scatalogical images while travelling through Maharashtra—'shat on vishnukranta', 'itchy arse'—ironise aspects of existence including lack of hygiene and unavailability of public toilets. Nevertheless, his irony is not scornful; the implication of disrespect in defecating on flowers becomes instead a de-hierarchising of the human with regard to the non-

sentient world. His descriptions are often without judgement, and he is often a participant in the common South Asian landscapes, as evident in 'My Name is Arun Kolatkar' and 'Make Way Poet'.

As archived by Mehrotra in 'Death of a Poet', Kolatkar described 'The Turnaround' the poem as capturing 'an inner journey' and a 'personal crisis' (15). The revelatory moment is captured:

I looked at the old man.

The goodly beard.

The contentment that showed in his eyes.

The cut up can of kerosene

that lay prostrate before him

[...] I knew already

that it was time to turn around. (*TB* 76)

The poet relays the transformative experience that the repose in the old man's visage facilitates: 'I knew already/ that it was time to turn around.' Kolatkar's modernist sublime, as also discussed in Chapter-1, delineates the stirring experience that his subjects evoke in him; by narrowing attention to the minutiae of the present and its elevation to a fantastical stature (in 'The contentment that showed in his eyes/ The cut up can of kerosene/ that lay prostate over him') Kolatkar evokes a powerful response to an ordinary sight. In 'The Turnaround' and other journey poems, the playful fantastical and unusual comparisons are not intended as disdainful but are also aimed at revealing aspects of the existence of ordinary individuals whose depths of personality remain undocumented.

Noticeably, Kolatkar's dramatic comparison and irony are not exclusively corrective but thought-provoking and dialogic. The ironic parallels between the subject and the image often go beyond the corrective function of humorous satire and instead challenge the expectations of the readers from the modes in which he presents his work.

In ‘Dual’, a poem written in English and Marathi, he presents a man and a woman entrapped while ‘spectacled leopard, the highbrow camel/ And the high heeled deer’ throw crumbs at them. In their confinement, human beings are presented as turning ‘blunt and smooth/ like the fat palm of an infant cactus’ and ‘insensate as a cactus, piteously bristled/ and opposing the light’ (*TB* 47). The force of the image, with human beings degenerating in confinement, creates an indicative rather than definite satire of people’s possible loss of critical abilities and cognitive engagement with the world. The poem presents a penetrating image that could be subjected to several interpretations—the poet presents people living listlessly because of their intellectual stagnancy or there is irreverence towards the human to allude to the damage caused by them to the environment or the poet is envisioning an apocalyptic possibility where the humans will evolve into a spectacle for other species.

Mahon and Kolatkar’s irony is not merely aimed at evoking pleasure or highlighting the follies of society. They both exhibit similar self-conscious refusal to assume authority. Mahon often adapts figures of speech and literary forms in unconventional ways to draw attention to his inadequacy as poet and his own biased subjectivity. Kolatkar’s ironic portraits create parallels that are suggestive rather than descriptive and evoke the active involvement of the reader in meaning delineation; this is evident in Kolatkar’s portrayal of the spectators in ‘The Dual’ where the image defamiliarises aspects of human nature. Both poets manage to use irony in intellectually stimulating ways. This early playfulness eventually translates into a rather austere style that ironically addresses social and historical phenomena.

Ironical Portraitures in Early Collections

Mahon and Kolatkar’s early poems used play and irony to avoid creating prescriptive poetics. This aspect of their writing is retained in their mature works and is

combined with an awareness of history. Their works composed in the contexts of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the early years of the nation-building process in India are satirical and critical of regressive ideologies. In *Lives*, *The Snow Party* and *Courtyards in Delft*, Mahon obliquely represents and often caricatures the conservative stances and ideologies that have caused strife in his country. Kolatkar's *Jejuri* satirically critiques economic fragility, colonial inheritance and religiosity in rural India from the viewpoint of a self-conscious observer whose subjective position as a privileged individual distant from the hardships of life in rural India influences his perspective. Both Mahon and Kolatkar's self-aware perspectives, instead of diluting meaning by undermining the authority of the speaker, foreground the speaker's complicity in socio-historic developments to ironise limit conditions such as self-perpetuating violence (in the case of Mahon) and economic inequalities (in the case of Kolatkar). The poets prioritise this self-reflexivity; in Mahon's own words, he refuses to 'trade self knowledge for/ a prelapsarian metaphor' and 'love-play of the ironic consciousness for/ a prescriptive innocence?' (*LI* 34).

Mahon and Kolatkar's obliquity and use of analogies that prioritise the imaginative yet minute perspective of the poet are employed in order to avoid 'prescriptive innocence'. Their irony avoids the didactic function of corrective satire and operates closer to the manner hypothesised by Hutcheon. She writes:

> Irony would be a mixture of the pragmatic (in semiotic terms) and the semantic, where the semantic space is a space 'in between', comprising both the spoken *and* the unspoken. Such a space, however, would be affectively charged, it would never be without its evaluative 'edge.' In other words, in spite of certain structural similarities, irony would not be the same as metaphor, allegory or even lying, and one major difference would lie in this critical edge. ('The Complex Functions of Irony' 220)

Hutcheon argues that irony's semantics are such that the meaning is not didactically pronounced but is affective and employed in the text with the author's motives of critically engaging with the subject and the context; the critical function, according to her, sets irony apart from metaphor, allegory or lying. 'Ironic consciousness' in Mahon and Kolatkar's works, by affectively charging the semantics of the text, provides a narrow yet acerbic critique of the context in which their works are composed.

As Haughton observes, *Lives* was written during the beginning of a period in Mahon's life 'marked by an increasing awareness of Ireland in his work' that 'helped shape his distinctive sense of precariousness of culture, the persistence of historical violence, and the desperation of the poet's 'rage for order'' (57). In order to delineate the awareness of such phenomena, Mahon particularly prioritises the use of irony. In *Lives*, he caricatures the Northern Irish landscape and his community without naming the place in 'Ecclesiastes', 'An Image from Beckett', 'A Dark Country', 'As it Should Be' and 'What Will Remain'. Yet again, instead of being conventionally semantic, Mahon uses ironic faculties to convey the precariousness he experiences while writing in the context of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. In the poems, he represents the violence by distancing himself and portraying catastrophic and post-apocalyptic landscapes, and, as Haughton observes, by writing 'from the vantage point of the remote past or the distant future' (77). I shall argue that Mahon's bird's-eye view and his ironist's analogies in *Lives* and also *Courtyards in Delft* defy propaganda and aim to uncover the systemic problems, such as nihilism and human egocentrism, which cause conflicts.

Mahon, as a satirist and ironist, instead of describing violence, uses parallels from abandoned and wrecked geographical spaces that have catastrophic effects on their visitors and inhabitants. In 'A Dark Country', Mahon depicts a ship entering the dockyard of an unnamed 'dark country' and caricatures its predicament as the topography of Belfast affects it. Mahon begins the poem by playfully depicting the slow movements of the ship:

STARTING again

After a long patience,

A long absence, is a slow

Riding of undertow (*LI* 18)

The repetition of 'A [...] a [...] a', even in the grammatically unusual phrase 'A long patience', creates a stutter through which the ship, as well as Mahon's poetic perspective, approach the city. In the second, third and fourth lines, each phrase re-emphasises the previous one: 'a long patience [...] A long absence'; moreover, the full rhyme in 'slow' and 'undertow' creates a cyclical effect underlining the reluctance and restraint with which the ship approaches the city. Instead of describing his opinion on the city's violence, Mahon presents an individual or his own caricatured self visiting the city. This person is destined to remain unchanged and innocent while approaching 'A Dark Country' ('You will go as you came, a twist of spring/ Water through ferns as febrile and as wintry') (*LI* 18). He depicts the paralysing, mind-numbing and constricting qualities to which the city subjects its visitor. His irony is tactfully contained in the exaggerated portrayal of the pain and pathos elicited by the visitor's encounter with a city stricken with violent conflicts.

In his attempts to ironically employ defamiliarising analogies and parallels, Mahon also borrows from Beckett. While echoes of Beckett's work are present in the experiments with temporality and ironic portraits of the human predicament in *Lives*, 'An Image from Beckett' directly engages with the playwright. Martin Mooney explains that 'Beckett's 'existential lyric' mode helps articulate a dissociation from place, from family, and from history'; a further look at Mahon's poem suggests that Mahon adopted more than just his existential mode but also his ability to attain distance and ironise. In 'An Image from Beckett', Mahon's speaker is situated in an unnamed 'northern Irish landscape' past the 'biblical span' and yet finds himself 'haunted/ By [...] The soft-rush

of its winds,/ The uprightness of its/ Utilities and schoolchildren' (*LI* 9). The discord between the distanced time and the accuracy of specific details ('uprightness of its [...] schoolchildren'; 'flicker of gulls'; 'washing hung to dry'), allows Mahon to exaggerate and criticise the general sense of decadence that the Northern Irish landscape has undergone (*LI* 9). The 'image from Beckett', observed by Vladimir—'Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps'—is used by Mahon to evoke an impersonal yet pervasive image that he associates with Northern Irish decline (118).[68] He then uses Beckettian monologic verse to reflect the decline of the culture and his own inability to assume authority:

> Oh, I might have proved
>
> So many heroes!
> Sorel, perhaps, or
> Kröger, given the time.
>
> For in that instant
> I was struck by the sweetness and light,
> The sweetness and light (*LI* 8-9)

While Sorel and Kröger represent artists who enlightened the speaker ('I was struck by the sweetness and light'), his own poetry is endangered by declining reception ('This, I have left my will/ I hope they [schoolchildren] had time, and light/ Enough, to read it'). Through his close reading, Haughton deduces that by using 'unrhymed staccato triplets', it 'expands and reframes the *Godot* image, while condensing subliminal memories of

[68] In an interview with Willie Murphy, titled 'Each Poem for Me is a New Beginning', Mahon explains that he was always struck by the line in *Waiting for Godot*, 'They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it's night once more', and Vladimir's expression 'Down in the hole, lingeringly, the gravedigger puts on the forceps'. He says that the line seemed like 'a remote secular echo of the Church of Ireland liturgy with which I grew up' (11).

Beckett's fractured prose monologues, with their quick way with dead idioms' (65). Moreover, the repetitions—'sweetness and light [...] sweetness and light', which are a recurrent feature of the poem—further amplify the fractured nature of the speaker's verse and his consciousness. Mahon channels Beckett's ironic style and tonality, along with his thematic, to express his strong disdain for events in the North; these feelings most certainly engage the reader affectively, a prerequisite for the more complicated functioning of irony as defined by Hutcheon.

In his 1979 poem 'Derry Morning', published in *Courtyards in Delft,* a short collection that more explicitly engages with the Northern Irish crisis, Mahon yet again ironises the city from the vantage points of arrival and departure. He imagines 'cavities/ Glow black in the rubbled city's/ Broken mouth' (*CD* 9). The poem presents a darkly comic vision of the city where, in the aftermath of violence, the results of the revolution do not match what was initially envisioned:

> [...] An early crone,
> Muse of a burnt-out revolution
> Wasted by the fray, she sees
> Her *aisling* falter in the breeze,
> Her oak-grove vision hesitate
> By empty wharf and city gate. (*CD* 9)

The stillness after the violence is revisited by Mahon to study the reminiscences of violence and the cyclical nature of history in Derry, which has led to a 'burnt-out revolution'. The image conflates two related allegorical modes—the Sean Bhean Bhocht and the aisling; instead of the male poet encountering the allegorical female figure of the muse, an 'early crone', who is the personification of Ireland, is witnessing her own '*aisling* falter in the breeze' (*CD* 9). Mahon irreverently personifies a city associated with rebellion in images of decline, stasis and exhaustion. He uses tetrameter, often associated

with Swiftian satire and follows the example of Thomas Kinsella, who self-consciously used it in his long satire, *Butcher's Dozen*, for instance. Noticeably, his critique is not towards any particular community or group but towards the city's inability to learn from its history; he concludes the poem by stating that 'the fog /Of time receives the ideologue' and imagines a 'Russian freighter' mourning 'to the city in its gloom' (*CD* 9). Mahon primarily criticises the acceptance of the 'ideologue' and expects the conflicting sects to be aware of the misleading rhetoric that perpetuates violence.

In ironising regressive ideologies or people's nihilism in relation to politics and history, in his works written in the late 1960s and 1970s, Mahon often caricatures and mocks his poetic persona. As evident in 'A Dark Country' and 'An Image from Beckett', he draws attention to his cultural inheritance from Northern Irish society. In 'Ecclesiastes', he provides an exaggerated and self-flagellating second-person portrayal of his poetic sensibility; as Stephen Enniss explains, certain images in the poem ('Bury that/ red bandana and stick') are references to his return to Belfast (86). Through the portrayal of a preacher in the poem, whose speech is 'stiff/ with rhetoric' and who speaks to a 'credulous people', he acknowledges the deep-seated nature of his religious puritanism and associates it with a bleakness of imagination in his community:

> GOD, you could grow to love it, God-fearing, God-
> chosen purist little puritan that,
> for all your wiles and smiles, you are (the
> dank churches, the empty streets,
> the shipyard silence, the tied-up swings) and
> shelter your cold heart from the heat
> of the world, from women-inquisition, from the
> bright eyes of children. (*LI* 3)

The contrasting combination of repeating syllable lengths, internal rhymes (as in 'wiles and smiles') and conversational idiom underline the humorous sensibility that Mahon uses to describe his own stasis and his inability to outgrow his Protestant heritage. Haughton explains that the poem equates the 'bible-based Protestantism of 'fierce zeal' nourished on 'wild locusts and honey' with the Sabbatarian industrial landscape of his native Belfast, complete with its 'shipyard silence' and 'tied-up swings''(63). Mahon amalgamates his portrayal of Belfast Sunday and its religious rituals, with his own personal self ('for all your wiles and smiles, you [...] shelter your cold heart from the heat/ of the world') (*LI* 3). This exaggerated self-flagellation does not merely perform the role of avoiding the isolation of the majority or simply undermining the authority of the poet, which Hutcheon identifies in comic writings; but, by presenting the specific case of his own compromised self, he satirises his penetrative puritan imagination that perpetuates often uncritical acceptance of rituals and self-effacement.

Mahon mocks the artist in 'Rage for Order'. Instead of presenting a helpless rhetorician, he characterises the poet as engaged in a naive 'rage for order'. Even though the place in the poem remains unnamed, the image—'beyond/ The scorched gable end/ And the burnt out/ Buses'—seems to suggest that the poet protagonist (addressed in second person) is located in the Troubles-stricken Belfast (*LI* 22). The persona is withdrawn from society, pursuing his 'dying art', described as 'An eddy of semantic scruple/ In an unstructurable sea' (*LI* 22). The poet's redundancy is not meant to last, as he acknowledges: 'cannot be/ Long until I have need of his/ Germinal ironies' (*Lives* 23). Although Mahon maintains a distance from this persona, his compulsion to engage in the 'eddy of semantic scruple' relates him to Mahon's own need for form. By satirising the predicament of the poet who is not completely innocent but struggles to address society, Mahon enacts a sort of pantomime of the encounters between the poet and society; he does not uphold any particular ideology (of the scrupulous poet or those living with

'scattered glass') but initiates a dialectic between them in an ironic manner, in accordance with his aim of not didactically upholding one particular belief and instead facilitating participative reception.

The reading of the opening stanzas of 'A Dark Country' highlights Mahon's irreverence towards the city that prevents his growth; however, in a similar way to 'Ecclesiastes', he counters his critique of the city with the criticism of his own withdrawal. In his oft-quoted lines from a later poem 'Afterlives', Mahon wrote, 'if I'd stayed behind/ And lived it bomb by bomb/ I might have grown up at last' (*SP* 1). In 'Dark Country', he envisions a certain possibility of reconciliation through a change in habits:

> Among these
> Signs, these wild declivities
> That have in the past
> Betrayed you to a waste
> Of rage, self-pity bordering on self-hate,
> A blind man without comfort at the gate; [...]
> With practice you might decipher the whole thing
> Or enough to suffer the relief and the pity. (*LI* 18)

Mahon's satire of the city and its ability to damage one's psyche ('Betrayed you to a waste/ Of rage, self-pity bordering on self-hate') is extremely critical and denies direct engagement with events in the city; nevertheless, through a partly satirical portrait that condemns his own withdrawal, Mahon upholds a possibility of reconciliation through persistence and return. In the above-quoted stanza, he eases the line length that is accompanied by his movement from paralysis to consistent struggle. Even though the Northern Irish conflict has often been portrayed as one in which recognition and

understanding is impossible, Mahon pleads for 'practice' and empathy required to reach reconciliation.

Mahon does not merely direct his critique towards one particular subject but playfully depicts two stances, in line with the theory of irony proposed by Hutcheon. Several of his early poems from the outbreak of the Troubles criticise and ironise the crisis but counter it with forces such as empathy, persistence and compassion for the natural world that could contain violence. Mahon's ironic stance is rarely antagonistic towards a particular place but aims to highlight the systemic issues that perpetuate violence. In 'What Will Remain', yet again, Mahon ironises the crisis from the vantage point of distant time and caricatures the egocentrism of humanity. In the poem, he imagines what will remain after 'The twilight of metals,/ The flowers of fire' and fantasises about the state of 'blank nature before/ Whiskey, before scripture'; in such circumstance, he anticipates harmony in natural forces, 'without ideas, they [a hare and a dog] too/ Moved in a slow dance/ Of the purest energy' (*LI* 26-27). Mahon imagines a landscape in the absence of human intervention as antithetical to the strife-stricken country described in his other poems.

Kolatkar's work, which is inspired by his vision as a graphic designer, is also marked by caricatures and humorous portraits of his subjects. Amit Chaudhuri records that he found the poet 'a mixture of unassumingness, reticence, mischief, and recalcitrance' (ix). Chaudhuri identifies a similar attitude in Kolatkar's observers'/ narrators' persona in *Jejuri*, whom he describes as 'laid-back, dead-pan incarnations' (xii). Mehrotra also notes Kolatkar's tramp-like persona: : 'Kolatkar, in faded T-shirt, five-pocket jeans that he'd keep pulling up, and shod in a sturdy pair of unpolished shoes, retained about him the air of a tramp, albeit a stylish one' ('The Writer as Tramp' 178). Rajeev Patke describes Kolatkar as 'genteel in upbringing but subaltern in affiliation [...] reticent in company but gregarious among books' and explains that his work is in peace

with the personality as it is 'casual in manner yet serious in intent, demotic in register yet abstruse in reference' (284). Chaudhuri's comments about the expressionlessness of the observer, Mehrotra's observations of Kolatkar's carelessness and Patke's more involved assessment of Kolatkar's personality as well as literary output, which combine seemingly opposing traits such as dissociation and involvement, astutely describe his personality and his humorous consciousness. Kolatkar connects venality and religiosity, profanity and sacrality, irreverence of language and sublimity of images to underline his ironic stance in *Jejuri*. However, through association of opposing themes and forms, he does not simply ridicule society but provides a persuasive portrait of life in rural India. I shall further assess how Kolatkar in *Jejuri,* through his defamiliarising and harrowingly ironic portraits of a pilgrimage site, satirises economic depravity, colonial inheritance and caste and class disparities in rural India.

Like Mahon, who seeks parallels between aspects of the present moment and distant time and post-apocalyptic landscapes, Kolatkar also ironically portrays his subjects by creating unusual parallels. In several poems in *Jejuri* and elsewhere, instead of presenting an anthropomorphic vision of the animals, as is often done in children's literature, Kolatkar uses an inverted technique and presents the human world through parallels with the animal world. As in 'The Hag', in which Kolatkar portrays an old woman eating oranges like an animal, in 'The Priest', from *Jejuri*, Kolatkar draws attention to the nutritional needs of the priest by presenting his bestial hunger as his primal desire. As the priest waits for the bus with pilgrims to arrive, who will provide him the offering to satiate his hunger, his demeanour is presented like that of an animal on its hunt: 'the priest awaits [...] With a quick intake of testicles [...] and under his lazy lizard stare/ it [the bus] begins to grow'(*Jejuri* 4). In the representation of the priest's animalistic desires, Kolatkar does not demean the priest but lays emphasis upon the economic precariousness and the rural community's resilience. His irony functions in the way defined by Hutcheon. Kolatkar's

representation of the priest's hunger is capable of evoking sensuous responses and pathos in the audience. The image of the priest's desperate wait is astounding and does not further the readers' stereotypical imagination of the economically disadvantaged as perpetuating their own suffering. It draws the readers to cognitively engage with the image; by enacting the discrepancy between the image and the parallel that the text does not pronounce—human fundamental right to food, clothing and shelter—Kolatkar's text yields a very critical stance towards economic deprivation in the country.

Kolatkar further ironically and acerbically represents the hunger of people in *Jejuri* through evocations of animal imagery in 'A Song for Vaghya'; the poem is written in the form of a confession or monologue from the speaker who belongs to a class of male devotees who 'conceive of themselves as dogs accompanying the god's hunt' (Chaudhuri 54), and vividly speaks of the devotees' predicament. The speaker confesses to the necessity of begging; he carries an instrument, scratches it to call the pilgrims to provide him with a livelihood and recites a song with the word 'God'; he further explains:

> God is the word [in the song]
> and I know it backwards.
> I know it as fangs
> inside my flanks.
> But I also know it as a lamb
> between my teeth,
> as a taste of blood
> upon my tongue.
> And this is the only song
> I've always sung. (*JE* 27)

In an exaggerated way, the speaker explains how his entire life is embroiled in making a living through practicing religious activities; the all-pervasive nature of the vocation is

imagined as also manifested in the physiognomic skeleton of the devotee. In addition, the nature of the speaker's confession affects his language; corporeal imagery is manifest in the minimalist structure of the poem ('fangs/ inside my flanks', 'a taste of blood/ upon my tongue'), which underlines the speaker's complete absorption in perpetuating his existence. Kolatkar's representation of the male devotee through animalistic imagery yet again caricatures the harrowing dependence of certain communities of village dwellers on begging for food.

Kolatkar uses irony and humour to provoke a close and engaged understanding of the rural community, in the way identified by Hutcheon, who argues that irony can be used to emphasise a point ('The Complex Function of Irony' 222). He critiques aspects of material existence in South Asia by producing caricatures with certain exaggerated dimensions (as evident in the vivid sketching of hunger pangs). Kolatkar uses anthropomorphic imagery while representing aspects of rural life in a pilgrim town. In 'Water Supply', the speaker depicts a dry water tap, and despite its lifelessness, captures it as possessing certain momentum: 'a conduit pipe/ runs with a plinth [...] shoots straight up/ keeps close to the wall/ doubles back/ twists around' (*Jejuri* 8). The poem further depicts a still scene from the landscape:

> [the conduit pipe] comes to an abrupt halt
> a brass mouse with a broken neck
>
> without ever learning
> what chain of circumstances
> can bring an able bodied millstone
> to spend the rest of his life
> under a dry water tap (*Jejuri* 8)

Kolatkar captures seemingly mundane images from rural India—the 'brass mouse' and 'able bodied millstones'. He plays on the added value we ascribe to anthropomorphic forms. In 'The Door', Kolatkar imagines the door as 'A prophet half brought down/ from the cross' and 'A dangling martyr' and compares the impressions left by the door on the 'high threshold' with 'memory that gets sharper with time' (*Jejuri* 9). In 'The Door', Kolatkar uses an ordinary image and connects it with a philosophically charged reflection upon certain memories sharpening with time. As Nerlekar explains, Indian English modernist poets 'combined disparate elements of their lived worlds into their poetry, but they all tried to reflect the palpability of that experience and the materiality of their world through a linguistically violent wrenching of poetic convention to suit their content' (*Bombay Modern* 18). Nerlekar identifies the gap between the immediacy of the experiences described by the poets and the poetic forms chosen by them. This convention of retaining incongruence between content and form is used by Kolatkar particularly to humorously and persuasively provoke his reader's recognition of the philosophical depth and insights present in the lived experiences of rural India.

To further satirise aspects of existence in rural India, Kolatkar foregrounds the absurdity of beliefs held by the rural community. In 'Yeshwant Rao, he writes a blatantly superstitious (found) account of a 'second class god' who belongs 'among the tradesmen and the lepers'; by writing from the perspective of a believer in the poem, he appeals to the judgement of the reader to identify the irrationality manifest in certain mythologies:

> Of course he's only a second class god
> and his place is just outside the main temple.
> Outside even of the outer wall [...]
>
> Yeshwant Rao
> does nothing spectacular.

He doesn't promise you the earth

or book your seat on the next rocket to heaven.

But if any bones are broken,

you know he'll mend them.

He'll make you whole in your body

and hope your spirit will look after itself. (*JE* 39)

Through the objective, humorous and sacrilegious treatment of the legend of Yeshwant Rao, Kolatkar highlights the reality as well as the absurdity of the legend. He parodies the prohibition upon entering temples associated with the lower-caste individuals. He also mocks the basis of the caste system that prescribes professions to individuals based on their birth; brahmins are expected to perform intellectual activities, and those belonging to the lower castes are supposed to perform manual labour. By showing how the legend associates soul cleansing and ascent to heaven with higher deities and preparation for manual labour with Yeshwant Rao, Kolatkar reminds the readers of the hierarchies in Indian caste-based society. As in Swiftian satire, the speaker's voice repels the reader instead of invoking empathy with those who are discriminated against under the caste system.

While 'Yeshwant Rao' operates on the dialectics between the blatancy of viewpoint in the text and the reader's judgement, in several other poems, Kolatkar's irony is manifest in the dialectics between differing viewpoints presented within the text. 'Ajamil and the Tigers' parodies political dynamics that formed in the post-1960s Maharashtra by providing two opposing factions. Gyan Prakash, in his historic study of Bombay, provides an account of the political landscape following the gain of political power by Bal Thackrey and his party, Shiv Sena: mass mobilisation to establish a separate state based on Marathi linguistic identity was used by Shiv Sena to garner militant populism and anti-communist sentiment; Prakash further explains:

> Expressing the discontent of the unemployed in the nativist terms, and channeling their frustrations into a torrent of ethnic grievances, required a populist turn. Of course, a Samyukta Maharashtra movement [the movement to demand a separate Marathi state] had mobilized Marathi speakers as a political entity, but it was Thackrey who successfully deployed it as an anti-immigrant, populist force. (*Mumbai Fables* 231)

The populist leader, Prakash explains, initially managed to gain control by counting unemployment in ethnic terms to garner support, followed by provoking of the anti-Muslim sentiment in the 1980s, when it finally established itself as a Hindutva party. The mascot of the party was a tiger, and Kolatkar in 'Ajamil and the Tigers' alludes to Bal Thackrey's Shiv Sena through the representation of the tiger people who lack morality. He rewrites the oral tale about the failed efforts of the tigers to hunt Ajamil's sheep because of the protection provided by his brave guard dog to mock the failures of the Shiv Sena members. In order to hide their defeat and falsely intimidate Ajamil, the tigers resort to lying:

> 'Nice dog you got there, Ajamil,'
>
> said the tiger king. [...]
>
> 'But there's been a bit of misunderstanding.
>
> We could've wiped out your herd in one clean sweep.
>
> But we were not trying to creep up on your sheep.
>
> We feel that means are more important than ends.
>
> We were coming to see you as friends.
>
> And that is the truth' (*JE* 24)

Kolatkar represents the tiger people as cowardly, duplicitous, incompetent and willing to jeopardise the ecosystem by killing all the sheep for their greed. Like Shiv Sena's empty rhetoric, which lacked empirical, socioeconomic or cultural evidence when they

fashioned themselves as the people's army, working to safeguard the agenda of the Marathi people, the tigers also egocentrically describe their actions as benevolent. Kolatkar's caricature of the political dynamics represents the tiger people's existence left to the mercy of Ajamil, who pretends to believe the tiger king's narrative because of his understanding 'that even tigers have got to eat sometime' (*JE* 25). Ajamil's intent to maintain the balance in the food cycle by offering some sheep to the tigers and keeping peace might align him with community-oriented groups in the city, which included communist and factory workers' organisations in Bombay. In 1972, Kolatkar managed to astutely highlight the falsehoods in the actions of an emerging political phenomenon associated with Shiv Sena, which deceptively represented the gain of a particular community as the 'common good'. Although in Kolatkar's idealist universe, Ajamil remains victorious, historically after the 1980s, through mobilisation of anti-Muslim sentiments, Shiv Sena continued to establish itself as an intimidating force in Maharashtra and remains the populist party in power.

Kolatkar's humour in *Jejuri* is also displayed in the discrepancy between the sacredness of the subject and the sacrilegious treatment from the speaker. Kolatkar's speaker humorously reflects upon the connection of legends to the visuality and physicality of the objects and venues in *Jejuri*. In 'A Scratch', he writes: 'what is god/ and what is stone/ the dividing line / if it exists is/ very thin/ at jejuri/ and every other stone/ is god or his cousin' (*JE* 22). In 'The Horseshoe Shrine' he explains how the shrine was formed because the presiding deity of Jejuri, Khandoba's 'hoof/ struck' in the rock (*JE* 13). In 'Heart of Ruin', he describes how in the temple 'A mongrel bitch has found a place/ for herself and her puppies' (*JE* 6). In 'Manohar', the visitor, Manohar, finds out that the place that he is visiting 'isn't another temple [but…] just a cowshed'(*JE* 14). Kolatkar's irony is not directed in one direction; while highlighting all-pervasiveness of religion in rural India, he also often foregrounds the erring nature of the viewer.

Kolatkar's humorous and ironic observations of Jejuri are sublime and engaged; while 'Water Supply' and 'The Door' allow for a persuasive engagement with the rural community, the found tales, as in 'Ajamil and the Tigers' and 'Yeshwant Rao', allow him to reflect upon the larger social and political reality. Noticeably, Kolatkar does not assume decisive authority over his subjects; while aspects of modernist form, as discussed in Chapter 2, allow for a conception of dialogic poetics, the self-conscious and (often) self-flagellating humour further undermine the poet's authority over the subject. The observer persona recurrently appears in *Jejuri*; as Chaudhuri records, 'He [Kolatkar] first went there in 1963, with his brother Makarand and his friend the Marathi novelist Manohar Oak, both of whom, indeed, make appearances in the poem, in laid back, dead-pan incarnations that are variations of the narrator' (xii). The encounters between the rural community and the narrator's 'incarnations' are humorous and ironic due to the discord between the religiosity of the location and the visitors' apathy and secularity. While Kolatkar presents the viewpoint of a self-conscious observer whose subjective position as a privileged individual is distant from the hardships of life in rural India, he also traces the transformations that the speaker undergoes as he engages with the rural community. The irony presented in the poem then is not only directed towards the rural landscape but also towards the speaker, delineating a rather nuanced, albeit minute (owing to the acknowledgements of the speaker's limitations) reflections of the pilgrim town.

The speaker's authority is questioned because of his apathy and uninterested nature; however, his self-undermining irony is not aimed at appeasing the majority; his tramp-like nature is aimed at providing a defamiliarising and uncommon perspective on the subject. In the opening poem itself, set inside the bus en route to Jejuri, the narrator closely describes the journey of his gaze and his inability to intuitively read a fellow traveller's thoughts:

Your own divided face in a pair of glasses

On an old man's nose

is all the countryside you get to see.

You seem to move continually forward

towards a destination

just beyond the caste mark between his eyebrows [...]

At the end of the bumpy ride

with your own face on either side

when you get off the bus

you don't step inside the old man's head. (*JE* 3)

Kolatkar draws attention to the speaker's aspirations to read people's thoughts, but his own reflection in the person's glasses sets the limit on his cognition rather low; at the same time, the fellow pilgrim, despite his opacity of personality, allows the speaker to look at his reflection. At the very outset, Kolatkar sets the tone for the collection; the detached and irreverent vision of the viewer does not align with his subject, yet there is an exchange of meaning in which the speaker himself often undergoes transformation.

Kolatkar's speaker's irreverence and the religiosity of the subject are seemingly discordant and, therefore, humorous, but his engagement with the subject does not merely remain antiphrastic. In *Jejuri's* 'A Low Temple', 'Manohar' and 'Makarand', incarnations of the speaker appear who embody scepticism and aloofness. In 'A Low Temple', the speaker becomes uninterested as the priest calls the idol in the temple with eighteen arms, 'The eight arm goddess'; he 'come[s] out in the sun and light[s] a charminar' (*JE* 11) and in 'Makarand', the speaker refuses to 'do pooja' (prayer), asks for a matchbox and expresses his intent to stay in the courtyard to smoke (*JE* 32). The

speaker in the poems is portrayed smoking a *charminar,* which, according to Mehrotra, is often associated with artistic temperament. It seems to stand as the icon associated with the poet in the collection; Kolatkar recurrently uses the suggestive power of the image of the *beedi* to evoke the artist's genius and his irreverence. In 'Manohar', there is a similar sacrilegious engagement with the place as Manohar visits a shed that happens to be not 'another temple' but 'just a cowshed' (*JE* 14). Despite the artist's ironic, irreverent and often sacrilegious presence, he is not disengaged with his subject but is mystically rapt by aspects of the subject and provides careful observations of it, as evident in 'The Priest' and 'Water Supply'.

The dialectical exchange between the landscape and the narrator is enacted in the poem, 'An Old Woman'; the speaker's apathy towards the subject undergoes a change when he is confronted with the brazen reality of existence in the rural inlands of Maharashtra. He is followed by a beggar woman whom he wants to avoid, but his encounter with her leaves him enraptured by her appearance:

> When you hear her say,
> 'What else can an old woman do
> on hills as wretched at these?'
>
> You look right at the sky.
> Clear through the bullet holes
> she has for her eyes.
>
> And as you look on
> the cracks that begin around her eyes
> spread beyond her skin.

And the hill crack.

And the temples crack.

And the sky falls (*JE* 15-16)

The speaker's argument that the woman should be earning instead of begging is lost as soon as she explains that she has nothing to do. His tendency to stereotype is challenged, and he is able to perceive her connections with the landscape when he looks at it reflected in her eyes; moreover, in the speaker's imagination, the marks of aging in her face align her with the timeworn landscape that she inhabits. The sight for the speaker enacts a transition, represented in the image of the sky falling. In 'The Priest's Son' and 'The Blue Horse', the speaker portrays similar fascination with the minutiae in the landscape and portrays himself as mystically rapt by people in Jejuri. Nerlekar explains, '*Jejuri* features the journey of the poetic speaker through the various shrines of Jejuri and his increasing alienation from the urban dystopia and rural traditionalism and hypocrisy' (*Bombay Modern* 171). While aspects of rural reality seem dystopian and solicit acerbic critique from the speaker, the journey also encourages him to acknowledge his own apathy, distance and privilege. The portrait that emerges then exhibits an engaged understanding of the subject; it is a feat achieved by intersecting irony and self-criticism.

Mahon approaches violence using his 'ironic consciousness' and struggles to appropriate oblique vantage points to provide a novel and critically engaging approach towards the socio-historical circumstances in which he places his works. Similarly, Kolatkar exploits irony, with its chasm between the subject and the exaggerated imagery in his poetry, to draw attention to aspects of reality in postcolonial India. While the poets critically address their subjects, they also draw attention to the poetic consciousness and speakers' personalities; while Mahon's poetic persona is considered complicit in the self-perpetuating suffering of Northern Irish individuals because of his puritan heritage and nihilism, Kolatkar's speaker, despite his apathy, possesses the artist's eccentricity and

astuteness to move beyond self-flagellation to providing revelatory experiences. Both poets use irony and humour in productive and not just antiphrastic ways; irony creates a peculiar, caustic and nuanced portrayal of the societies that the poets inhabited/visited/revisited.

Personas and Vantage Points

Irony often raises concerns about the propriety of certain imagery. Often, in readers' minds, the poets' speakers' views are indistinguishably tied to the poets' own perspectives or ideologies. Moreover, the poets' characters are sometimes manifestations of aspects of their own personalities. Although Mahon strives to distance himself from the speaker by building fictional characters and presenting their monologues, the characters are often perceived by the readers as expressing the poet's beliefs. For instance, although Mahon's '*Poete Maudit*' and 'The Forger' provide viewpoints of characters through monologues, Mahon's desires to create art defiant of cultural norms are manifest in these monologues. In '*Poete Maudit*', the speaker associates artistic temperament with 'letting it get about/ That I have a slight homosexual tendency'; this raises concerns about Mahon's homophobia, betrayed in his self-flagellation as an artist (38).

While *Jejuri* introduces a speaker who undergoes transformation after encountering the rural landscape, he most often treats the subject with irreverence and apathy. As argued earlier, the poets constantly strive to challenge the authority of the speaker and prevent stereotypes by providing varying perspectives on the subject. Further, in the interests of considering varying perspectives and ironising reality, Mahon and Kolatkar imagine and assume personas with identities different from their own. This allows for a refreshing satire on certain social and cultural phenomena that the poets witness.

In *An Autumn Wind*'s Part 2, 'River of Stars', Mahon rewrites and adapts poems from T'ang poets; in 'Raw Material' (Part-3 of *AW*), *Echo's Grove* and *Raw Material*, he assumes the persona of an Indian poet, Gopal Singh, to overcome the limitations of his own subjectivity and to think from the perspective of a person from the global south. While Kolatkar's late work, *Kala Ghoda Poems*, uses a flaneur's perspective to address the reality of the cosmopolis, his *Sarpa Satra*, written during the same time, foregrounds the voice of a snake woman, Jaratkaru, and the emperor, Janamajeya, from *Mahabharata*. The theatrical quality of both poets' work (evident in presentation of characters and their viewpoints) further aligns with the elements of play as defined by Huizinga and Mercier—juxtaposition of thesis and antithesis and irreverence towards elements of history. In these works, the poets strive to overcome the preoccupations with their own individuality (as in the case of the early confessional works) and align with other voices in the society.

In *Autumn Wind*, there is a more pronounced awareness of the subjectivity of the ironist. In 'A Quiet Spot' in *An Autumn Wind*, Mahon states:

> It's time now to go back at last
> beyond irony and slick depreciation,
> past hedge and fencing to a clearer vision,
> time to create a future from the past, (*AW* 17)

While he states his resolve to go 'beyond irony and slick depreciation', he only moves beyond a particular function of irony—affective or depreciating—and directs it towards a complicated role of evaluating particular social or historical phenomena. He engages the audience in meaning-making by initiating dialectics between opposing images or views. Mahon assumes the persona of Gopal Singh, whom he describes as 'a fictitious Hindi poet [...] who was born in Kashmir in 1959 and lives in New Delhi' (*AW* 66). Mahon's Gopal Singh then speaks in the voice of people inhabiting the Indian

landscape—'A Child of the Forest', survivors of natural disasters, a preacher and so on—and, subsequently, makes the poems twice removed from the poet's personal expressions. Mahon's South Asian ironist is not only able to draw images from Indian regional language and mythical sources because of his array of experiences, but, by providing a different vantage point, manages to effectively re-emphasise and complicate Mahon's poetic voice (which appeared in the first part) in the collection.

Mahon's own poetic persona in the first part of *An Autumn Wind* satirises the rhetoric of neo-imperialist nations. In 'World Trade Talks', the poet presents the big talk of 'the Chicago Boys, the World Bank and the IMF' who intend to realise their 'pious hopes' such as 'double-edged finance, organic crops/ and comely maidens' and are bothered because their plans are hindered by 'A 'Hindu' growth rate' (*AW* 23). Mahon foregrounds the absurdity in the rationale given by certain imperialist forces by presenting their assumption of unjustified victimhood; however, his observations of unfair treatment are not his own but derived from Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine*. In 'Air India', Mahon presents the flaneur's image of Delhi as he travels from Delhi to Heathrow; he creates a collage of images, which, although enlightening of coexistence of modernity and wilderness in India, provides a distanced view of the landscape: 'a holy cow chewing a cardboard box,/ sand-thudding fruit, a dusty star [...] the new office blocks [...] weed-trailing yard of wood and brick [...] a quick monkey, rhesus or macaque,/ clinging for dear life to a water pipe' (*AW* 22). In this representation, there is a juxtaposition of images but an absence of commentary on the social phenomena. Nevertheless, a paradox might be inferred from the holy cow's eating of trash and the coexistence of wilderness and modernity in Indian landscapes. Mahon is aware of his position as an outsider and, therefore, in 'World Trade Talks', alludes to the theories propounded by Klein and, in 'Air India', provides a bird's-eye view of the Indian landscape.

The juxtaposition of references to images encountered in India, in some poems in *An Autumn Wind*'s Part 1, pave the way for historically aware and often scathingly satirical accounts by Gopal Singh in Part 2 of the collection. The irony that results is nuanced and enlightening and not simply antiphrastic or aesthetic. 'A Child of the Forest', written in the persona of Gopal Singh, is voiced by a child who commemorates its lost home and contemplates the feeling of exile. The opening line uncovers the tragic incongruence in the child's aspirations and reality: 'A child of the forest, I roam city slums' (*AW* 67). The child further reflects on its predicament:

A shack in the woods and a few
bamboo sticks would do
but I keep coming
back to life
whose blaze darkens the stars.

Tata. Maruti. IndiCom. Indigo.
Bavinder Ready Cash. Dubai
Is Closer than You Know. (*AW* 67)

The child juxtaposes dreams of a bamboo shack with the catalogue of names of advertised products from the city billboards. The image in the poem, driving home during 'the cow-dust hour', collides with the advertised labels and 'forests of billboards' (*AW* 67). The irony is contained in the incongruence between the child's imagined world and reality. Through this affecting juxtaposition, Mahon, through Singh, foregrounds the injustice of exile and alienation that the child is experiencing. The depletion of the natural world and resultant disarray in imagining an altered reality is also portrayed in 'A New Earth'; this poem is voiced by a collective, using the pronoun 'we', who have experienced a natural disaster that causes them to hide 'till the worst was over' (*AW* 72). In partly ironic ways,

the people reflect on the aftermath and offer a possibility of renewal ('the wasted fields' are imagined as metamorphosing into 'bright gardens of winged dreams') (*AW* 72). While imagining environmental deterioration and attendant forced migration in late capitalism, Mahon constantly juxtaposes the dreams and aspirations of people with their reality; he approaches these issues in the guise of Gopal Singh, an imaginary poet who writes monologues of people inhabiting the South Asian landscape, to extend the scope of his irony.

Apart from the evocative juxtapositions and use of incisively sarcastic language, Mahon-as-Singh uses irony to foreground and archive the importance of working class individuals and the effect of environmental change on them; like Kolatkar, he often ironises the everyday scenes to capture the enigma that the image evokes. In 'Water', he writes:

> If everything is water as the Greek said
> the woman at the dhobi ghat
> flapping laundry by dawn light
> knows more than most
> of future, past,
> the living and the dead.
>
> Hers is the articulate flute
> of thaw water that runs downstream
> with twigs and leaves, dead cows
> and recent contamination
> —E.coli, cryptosporidium— (*AW* 73)

The poet describes a humorous yet powerful image of a woman flapping clothes at a *dhobi ghat*, an area where washers do laundry, as he eulogises her secret knowledge,

despite the fact that the water she sits beside is contaminated. By evoking Hindu mythology, which believes in the doctrine of the omnipresence of God, he irreverently imagines God within the contaminated water; the washerwoman is considered all-knowing as she is in close proximity with water. Through the apposition of the mythic and scientific significance of water and the acknowledgment of the contamination of water, the speaker satirises the negligence which causes resources in developing nations to be contaminated. However, his empathy extends especially to the washerwoman; the discord between the complexity of critique and the woman's rendering of it in her song sung to her reflection is not meant to caricature the woman but is meant to draw the reader's attention to her proximity to natural elements. Through his assumption of the persona of Singh, Mahon attempts to outgrow a Eurocentric lens that might overwhelmingly archive the absurdities, discords and suffering in South Asian existence; he strives to approach narratives that might remain unseen from the perspective of a European visitor and acknowledges the minutiae of experiences in South Asia.

In 'River of Stars', Mahon compiles several translations from T'ang era poets and preserves the word play and witticism of the original texts to create evocative poems that speak of experiences of exile and migration. The poets that Mahon translates in 'River of Stars', Li T'ai-Po, Ch'iu Wei and TuFu, respond to a militaristic regime and the regulations of literary expressions.[69] In 'The Long Road to Sichuan', Mahon translates the poet Li T'ai-Po's account of his journey to his homeland. He repeatedly uses the comparison 'The long road to Sichuan, so steep and high,/ is harder to climb than the road to heaven' (*AW* 57). Despite the hardships related in the poem ('Many died; they built/ tracks and bridges in a continuous change'), it exhibits a melodious and playful aspect that provides a reinvigorating perspective on journeying towards home from exile. In 'A

[69] For more information, see Arthur Cooper's 'Introduction' to *Li Po and Tu Fu: Poems*.

Kettle of Wine', Mahon yet again locates the T'ang era poets' ability to deflect hardships through the use of humour:

> Sitting among flowers with a kettle of wine
>
> I lift my cup and drink to the bright moon.
>
> A party of three: the moon, my shadow and me [...]
>
> Sober, we are content here in a group;
>
> when we get drunk, my shadow and I break up.
>
> To pledge eternal amity we gather
>
> In cloud depths and in a river of stars. (*AW* 59)

Mahon channels Li T'ai-Po's ironic and humorous deflection of the sense of isolation through playful imagery. In order to underline the sense of isolation, the poet states that in a drunken reverie, his shadow also abandons him. The speaker exaggerates certain aspects of his suffering and caricatures them to derive hope; while Mahon's play and irony might romanticise suffering, they also offer visions to deflect the political events that inflict isolation and exile in the case of Li T'ai-Po's poem.

While the metaphoric and hyperbolic expressions through which the poets express their dissatisfaction with political circumstances might sound naive and excessively embellished, Mahon uses the suggestive quality of the poems to evoke reflections on experiences of dissatisfaction with politics and exile shared by individuals from across the world. In 'Thinking of Li Po', the speaker writes about being separated from his banished friend: 'Severance caused by death is an end of life/ but the lost living are a persistent grief' (*AW* 62). The poem reflects the message in 'Plant Life', included in the third part, 'Raw Material', where the plants are seemingly living in exile and remembering the politically disturbed regions from where millions have been displaced and incarcerated: 'remembering the clear spring meadows of Kashmir/ and the lost horizons of Tibet' (*AW* 70). Although often romantic and idealistic, while channelling

other voices, Mahon foregrounds shared visions across communities; the irony, humour and exaggerations in texts, instead of remaining limited to his own concerns, move beyond his subjectivity and archive the comic tragedies of other communities' poets.

Like Mahon, Kolatkar also ironises from the perspective of other individuals, especially those oppressed throughout history. His Marathi language collection, *Bhijki Vahi*, compiles poems 'named after women from India and all over the world, from the past and the present, and from legend, religion, history and daily news' ('Lowest Common Denominator', Nerlekar 19). [70] In the collection, Kolatkar, like Mahon, often presents monologues from women speaking of their plight. While *Bhijki Vahi* delineates poignant narratives that express suffering and pain from a confessional perspective, *Sarpa Satra* satirises from the perspective of a snake woman, Jaratkaru, who condemns and caricatures authoritarian control and perpetuation of violence. In the previous chapter, I have argued that Kolatkar alludes to *Mahabharata* in order to rewrite and condemn authoritarian and brahmanical ideologies perpetuated by the epic. I shall further highlight how ironic underpinnings in the voice of Jaratkaru provide a persuasive critique of some foundational myths and the violence underlying several civilisational histories; moreover, I shall highlight that the assumption of a liminal voice allows Kolatkar to overcome the limitations that mark his more commonly used flaneur's mode, as in *Kala Ghoda Poems*.

Jaratkaru's monologue begins with careful analogies that mock Janamejaya's intention to exterminate snakes because a snake killed his father; she asks the question with certain candour: 'What would your reaction be/ if someone were to come up to you/ and say,/ My father died of snakebite [...] I'm going to avenge his death/ by killing/ every single snake that lives' (*SS* 27). As Mercier explains, satire relies upon the assumption of

[70] I have not assessed *Bhijki Vahi* because I have restricted the readings in this chapter to works in English. Furthermore, *Sarpa Satra* provides a very astute view on foundational myths from a voice that does not share the author's privileges as an upper-caste poet.

what constitutes good values as held by the audience, and Jaratkaru appeals to the audience (Astika, to whom the monologue is addressed, as well as the larger audience who will receive the narrative) and urges them to identify the absurdity in the actions undertaken by the king:

> You'd naturally assume first
>
> that the man was joking
>
> And after you realise he is not [...]
>
> you may look at him closely, perhaps,
>
> trying to remember the name of a good shrink. (*SS* 28)

Jaratkaru approaches her audience and appeals to a sense of rationality to criticise the actions of Janamejaya. She playfully uses analogy to appeal to the imaginative quality of her audience: 'tell him about your plan/ to cleanse the earth of all ants/ because one bit your mum' (*Sarpa Satra* 28). Instead of providing a mournful tone to the bestial feminine voice of the victim of genocide, he allows it to be satirical, rational, conversational and nuanced.

Jaratkaru's ironic narrative, as set out by Kolatkar, has several meta-textual references; as she opposes the ritualised vedic and brahmanical practices, the poet's own privilege as a brahmin, the caste category that includes readers of scriptures, is undermined. Kolatkar dramatises Jaratkaru's disillusionment with the learned class as Uttanka, a brahmin advisor to the king, is seen ready to 'feed this fire now/ with rivers of molten butter' (*SS* 189). Jaratkaru explains that the yajna in question is not a ritual traditionally performed because there are no precedents for certain vedic rituals being performed to exterminate a species. It is, therefore, an invented form for genocide; she further asks:

> What will they think of next? [...]
>
> Vedic ceremony for the thread ceremony

of a hyena's son? (*SS* 31)

The brahmins are presented as greedy for money and gifts received in return for appeasement of the dictator, and their obsessive performance of rituals is identified as redundant and treated with a sense of irreverence that challenges authority. Kolatkar was conscious of his status as a brahmin and aimed to overcome it. He said in an interview with Eunice de' Souza, 'You could call me a Brahmin poet, or a graphic designer who is also a poet [...] A number of categories are possible. But I see no particular way in which I learn anything about myself by being categorised in any of these ways' (22). Although spoken in resistance to being categorised within certain groups, Kolatkar's mention of brahmanism and intent to not be reduced to it is notable. Kolatkar's representation of Jaratkaru is antithetical to the brahmins who are advising the king; their ritualised performances and eloquence (evident in Jaratkaru's criticism of the convoluted epic, *Mahabharata*) are juxtaposed with Jaratkaru's colloquial language and wisdom at renouncing ritual. Kolatkar's humour, delineated through the snake woman, highlights the absurdity of caste differences and ritualistic performances and, at the same time, offers visions of empathy and rationale embodied by the speaker that seek to end the violence.

Kolatkar's humour is postcolonial in the manner defined by Ulrike Erichsen, as it does not remain monolithically opposed to authority or a particular ideology; instead, it acknowledges and identifies the phenomena that perpetuate conflicts. She explains that humour can 'function as a means to alert the reader to cultural barriers that need to be overcome in order to fully understand the text, and thus can encourage intercultural communication and understanding' (30). Jaratkaru, as portrayed by Kolatkar, as an ironist, has a similar approach towards certain identities that individuals in *Mahabharata* identify with. After criticising the actions of the Hindu God, Krishna, and demigod, Arjuna, who destroyed the habitat of animals, Khandava forest, and killed people and

animals living in it to test their weapons, she also criticises Takshaka's act of seeking revenge against Arjuna's grandson:

> To say that he was always an extremist
> is not to make excuses for him.
> He deserves the harshest punishment in the book.
>
> And I certainly do not approve
> of the way he is hiding now
> behind Indira's throne to save his skin [...]
>
> It only shows what cowards
> all terrorists are
> behind their snarling ferocious masks. (*SS* 39)

Jaratkaru subjects Takshaka to similarly flagrant critique and ridicule as she did Krishna, Arjuna, Janamejaya and the brahmins; while the subject of genocide receives censure, the acts of violence against innocent people to avenge murders are also condemned. She briefly sympathises with Takshaka ('Takshaka has never been quite himself/ since his wife died') before embarking on graphic, evocative descriptions of the war's influence on animal life and people (*SS* 40). Kolatkar's Jaratkaru gives a stirring account of certain mythical happenings, which is particularly chilling because of its similarities with genocides and terrorist acts committed within recent history; nevertheless, she manages to provide a vision of pacifism emerging from the recognition of absurdity and irrationality often manifest within acts of revenge and violence. She does not simply attack particular identity groups but draws attention to the ideologies that perpetuate violence, making them metonymic of several incidents in history.

Mahon and Kolatkar's assumptions of personas while ridiculing and ironising aspects of history provide novel vantage points on subjects that cannot properly be addressed solely from the perspective of privileged individuals. While Mahon's Gopal Singh and T'ang persona revisit his themes and provide forms and myths from the global south to critique environmental degradation and late capitalism, Kolatkar's Jaratkaru reaches for the perspective of a non-human to comment on the epochal histories and recurrences of violence in India and elsewhere. While pretending to translate from South Asian languages, as Singh, Mahon manages to excavate certain mythic and ironical trends from South Asian cultural landscapes and engage with specific South Asian experiences. The poets overcome the limitations of perspectives in confessional and flaneuresque forms and acknowledge the limitations of perspective imposed by the poets' subjectivity. By translating the T'ang poets, Mahon not only seeks international solidarities for concerns such as political suppression of dissent in communities across the world, but also channels the playful and allusive quality of their works to satirise social injustices. Kolatkar's Jaratkaru also helps overcome the limitations of his flaneuresque perspective from her non-human and liminal viewpoint, she identifies the unjust stratifications of a brahmanical society and encourages a reading that will allow the readers to acknowledge the absurdity manifest in aspects of identitarian rhetoric. The theatricality and playfulness that comes with the assumption of these particular personas support the author's objectives of drawing readers' sympathetic yet critical attention to divisive ideologies and stereotypes connected with certain cultural identities.

Conclusion

As a dialogic form, conversation involves an interpreter in the process of creating meaning; moreover, all expressions require the involvement of faculties through which ironic underpinnings are assessed. Conventionally, ironic and humorous portraits, despite

their operation upon the incongruence between the subject and the language representing it, are considered to be subtly coercing the audience into particular interpretations that are antithetical to certain subjects. Aspects of Mahon and Kolatkar's ironic works are antiphrastic and antithetical to certain ideologies, such as the satire of Shiv Sena in 'Ajamil and the Tigers' and Mahon's criticism of religious orthodoxies. However, Mahon and Kolatar's irony more often than not acknowledges characteristics of history without further perpetuating stereotypes. Instead of hiding the satirist's persona, the poets constantly implicate themselves in the perpetuation of regressive ideologies, violence and conflict. Their assumptions of persona are able to detach the poet and speaker's ideologies; this enables them to explore different vantage points while ironising twenty-first century history.

CONCLUSION

Somewhere [...]

there is a poet

[...] it cannot be

Long now till I have need of his

Germinal ironies. (*LI* 22-23)

The thesis identifies the transgressive potential of Mahon and Kolatkar's poetry and assesses their critique of aspects of social and political phenomena in Ireland, India and beyond. It focuses on under-researched aspects of their poetry, such as contextual codes, paratextuality, poetic perspectives, intertextuality and irony, to draw attention to the poets' ideological commitment to oppose regressive politics and the perpetuation of violence, among other phenomena in the twentieth and twenty-first century. The thesis foregrounds Mahon's early commitment to experimentation, Kolatkar's intertextuality and humorous underpinnings in both of their works. The re-readings here are focused on elements that made poetry socially responsive; restoring Mahon's reputation as a politically-committed poet and bolstering the claim that Kolatkar's poems exhibit a strong commitment to the global peripheries, as he foregrounds the voices of the oppressed.

The poets' postmodern search for forms and thematic is evident in their early works composed during the heyday of the small press movement. I have retrieved a history of the poets' engagement with cultural contexts that could have remained undocumented in a solely thematic study. In doing so, I have drawn upon Zecchini's criticism, which retrieves aspects of the small press movement and its engagement with the cold war era ('What Filters Through the Curtain'). Meanwhile, Nerlekar's work records transnational

connections and traces 'regional/ vernacular links within the English and Marathi poetry of Bombay' (*Bombay Modern* 12). Following a similar methodology, I have assessed the infrastructure of the page and literary contexts, along with the verbal elements of the poems. However, I have maintained a special focus on Kolatkar's use of visuality, thematic and forms that charge his poetry with transgressive potential and help him create stirring experiences for his readers; I have also closely read the bibliographic code surrounding the poems.

Enniss traces the biographical aspects of Mahon's early years in Dublin and Haughton briefly refers to his early poems to document his connections with French literature and how the period inspired his first collection, *Night Crossing*, but otherwise, Mahon's early poems in Dublin literary magazines have received less attention. This reading of them is all the more important because of the poet's many exclusions and revisions of work from his later publications.

The study of the poets' presence in the small press movements foregrounds stylistic elements in their works that have not been previously noticed; the early connections formed by the poets in the 1960s, will continue to substantially define their oeuvre. Mahon's Swiftian dialectics, his representation of a disarrayed self, his humorous inversions are seen to have multiple connections with the Dublin renaissance. While he was 'scrawling immortal verse in every lavatory', he was exposed to several literary modes that would have a lasting impact on his writing ('*Poete Maudit*' 38). Similarly, Kolatkar's modernism and realism, ironic tone and intent to maintain proximity with readers have links with the small press movement of the 1960s and 70s.

In his 1968 article, Mahon claims: '[Language] is solipsistic and imprecise, and poetry trades on this fact. Abandoning rational inquiry, the poet approaches life with his own kind of directness, which to others seem obliquity' ('Patrick Kavanagh' 8). This early belief in poetry's potential to benefit from the uncertainties of meaning in language

has a lasting impact on his writing. The thesis assesses the solipsism, imprecisions and 'obliquity' in his writing to understand the poet's engagement with violence that took place during the civil strife in Northern Ireland. Kolatkar engages with the subjects in a similar manner, by foregrounding the ellipses that mark one's knowledge. His uncertainty, or what he calls alienation, has been a significant source of inspiration. In his poetic manifesto 'Making Love to a Poem', he writes:

> Some of the finest poetry in India, or indeed the whole world, has come from a sense of alienation
>
> It is the central experience of a lot of bhakti poetry for instance
>
> it's at the bottom of a lot of Dalit poetry
>
> it has given us poems like 'Cold Mountain'
>
> folk poetry where women sing about their lot (*TB* 223)

The 'obliquity' that Mahon identifies and the expression of alienation in Kolatkar's perception is allusive; however, remaining focused on identifying how the texts establish a horizon of possible meanings to elicit desired responses from the readers,[71] I highlight the ways in which the poets use oblique perspectives and alienated sensibilities to challenge propagandist rhetoric in their countries and beyond. Mahon and Kolatkar also exhibit an unspoken yet noticeable propensity to outgrow the closed forms of the mainstream English poem, a tendency noticed by Quartermain and Caddel in 'a linear line of poets from Philip Larkin to Craig Raine and Simon Armitage' (xv). Therefore, they provide extremely conducive models to study transgressive aesthetics in poetry.

The poets' mature works have been studied in the thesis through a focus on allusion and intertextuality, especially because Mahon's late collections, beginning from *The Yellow Book* and until *Washing Up*, often took an autumnal stance and reflected upon

[71] This theoretical frame, as explained in Chapter 1 is borrowed from Jerome J. McGann. He challenges reception theorists' understanding of the reader as subject to endless *aporia* of meaning (9).

existing literary models. Kolatkar's *Sarpa Satra* and *Kala Ghoda Poems* are also inclined towards rewriting specific existing texts and modes—especially epic—from a postcolonial stance. The poets emphasise rewriting and revisiting—for instance, Mahon questions Homeric celebration of heroism by allowing Sappho to reflect upon war poetry in 'Sappho in Judith's Room' and Kolatkar questions the violent narratives of Pandavas by giving voice to Jaratkaru. In the late stages of their careers, both poets visit classical texts with an aim to rewrite them. They bring novel perspectives to foreground the voices that are bracketed out of grand narratives.

Mahon and Kolatkar have their own peculiar ironic voices; this is the first sustained account of the employment of play and irony in their work. While certain aspects, like investment in intertextuality, dominated particular stages of their writing careers, irony and play mark the entire oeuvres of the poets. As discussed in Chapter 4, humour can act as a possible tool to evade responsibility and authors might use self-flagellation as means of not alienating an audience. However, Mahon and Kolatkar use humour invested with an ideological commitment to identify absurdities of political phenomena, limitations of self and irrational aspects of certain social norms.

By juxtaposing Irish and Indian contexts, instead of identifying influences of one cultural context on another, this study has consciously blurred the hierarchies between specific literary voices from the global north and the global south. The mutual exchange of thematic, style and ideologies has been identified by studying the bibliographic context of the little magazines, to which the poets contributed their works. While studying intertextuality in the poets' late works, the thesis has foregrounded a common regard for literary predecessors from the Anglophone world and beyond. Instead of prioritising any particular cultural context, in intertextual references, it has identified the necessity to rewrite and adapt literary models in the service of the liberating vision.

The poets continue to rise to the challenge of addressing historical developments. In one of his final poems 'A Fox in Grafton Street', Mahon speaks of a fox video-graphed running in Grafton Street which reminds him of the resilience of nature; he assures his readers that the pandemic is a mere 'enforced parenthesis' (*Washing Up* 74). Mehrotra writes, 'The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, formed after the nuclear accident in 1986, will be unfit for human habitation for 24,000 years, but boars, wolves, bison, white-tailed eagles and grey cranes have already returned to it.' ('Like a Herd Dying'). By taking an eco-critical turn in the face of an environmental atrocity, the poets have yet again demonstrated their ability to critique baffling events. The steadfastness of poetry by their generations of poets is best described in Jussawalla's words: their poetry is in 'affirmating freedom amidst the worst of horrors' ('Breathing Freely' 225).

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