

## “I’LL GO ON” – TERRY EAGLETON, WRITER

“SEGUIRÉ”: TERRY EAGLETON, ESCRITOR

Brian Coates

Retired Senior Lecturer, University of Limerick

[brian.coates@ul.ie](mailto:brian.coates@ul.ie)

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**Abstract:** This essay seeks to link Terry Eagleton’s work as a novelist and playwright with his work over many years in theory, philosophy and literary criticism. The several pieces discussed here shimmer with raw energy, innovative technique and a deep grasp of the tangled histories of England and Ireland. The ability to work in both critical and creative modes is rare and the constantly shifting boundaries of the work considered here indicates Eagleton’s desire to carve out a genre that incorporates an inclusive model of expression. The issue of Irish history and politics is an abiding concern for Eagleton; the painful and violent struggle for Irish independence is a constant theme in his work and makes a connection with his own Irish background. Ireland is also a shelter to Wittgenstein in *Saints and Scholars*, a work that shows Eagleton as also able to cut philosophy and narrative with a ready and effective humour.

**Keywords:** Humour; Ireland; Terry Eagleton’s novels; Terry Eagleton’s theater plays.

**Resumen:** El presente trabajo trata de vincular la obra novelística y teatral de Terry Eagleton a su trabajo teórico, filosófico y crítico. Las obras analizadas brillan gracias a su desbordante energía, su innovadora técnica y una profunda comprensión de las

historias entrelazadas de Inglaterra e Irlanda. La capacidad de operar tanto de modo crítico como creativo es poco habitual, y el constante cruce de fronteras de las obras analizadas son indicativas del deseo de Eagleton por delimitar un género que incorpore un modelo inclusivo de expresión. La cuestión de la historia y la política de Irlanda es una preocupación constante de Eagleton, mientras que la dolorosa y violenta lucha por la independencia de Irlanda constituye un tema constante en su obra, conectando así con sus propios orígenes irlandeses. Irlanda es también un refugio para Wittgenstein en *Saints and Scholars*, una obra que muestra a Eagleton también es capaz de penetrar en la filosofía y en la narrativa a través de su humor agudo y efectivo.

**Palabras clave:** Humor; Irlanda; obra novelística de Terry Eagleton; obra teatral de Terry Eagleton.

A founding moment of colonisation lies in the realisation of oppressed classes that they are subjected in language, in the ruler's tongue, even if, like Caliban, they scream in anguished rage, "The red plague rid you / For learning me your language" (Shakespeare 366-367).

It might be suggested that Irish writing in English is a lengthy, elaborate, creative and celebratory extension of this sentiment. Poetry might "make nothing happen" but "nothing" can, as in the case of Cordelia's response to Lear or the soundlessness of that Baskerville hound, testify to the power of those self-sacrificial, liberating agencies that lurk within established narratives of power.

The turn (re-turn) to Ireland in the work of Terry Eagleton is most clearly crystallised in his moves in the game of *écriture*, excavations in the shifting sands of criticism and creation, grammar and rhetoric, that mark a radical change in style. In this sense the novel, plays and film script that Eagleton has produced can be interpreted in a number of ways: as a summation of a certain ideological tendency that can be read back through his prose writing (a Hegelian reading); as a thing apart, a sportive sublime set at a distance from the grim sense-making conceptualising discourse of the academy (a Kantian reading); a series of games, tropes, figures and jokes that reveal the insubstantiality of all discourse (a Nietzschean reading). There is a further reading that seems to me more apposite. And it is found in Eagleton's book on Benjamin where a discussion of comedy is contextualised within a political agenda—"the catharsis of laughter is, inseparably, the birth of a new form of discourse" (*Walter Benjamin* 150).

Eagleton in *Saint Oscar* and *Saints and Scholars* harnesses the punning word-play characteristic of Irish writing, that "intense verbal self-consciousness" (*Saint Oscar* 3) to

the articulation of a dialectic that seeks to draw out the complex relation of Irish identities to the English language, a language which “as so often in Irish history, compensates for a history in which you are more determined than determining, more object than agent” (“Oscar and George” 333). Beside the “theatre of ideas” genre which this motif suggests, there is a strong personal pressure present in these texts which Eagleton discusses in his Introduction to *Saint Oscar*: “Writing *Saint Oscar* was an attempt to rediscover something of my own suppressed voice . . . something bred in the bone, as though what I had been trying for some time to do in theory had finally to culminate logically in art” (4).

*Saint Oscar*, first performed by Field Day Theatre Company in the Guildhall, Derry, on 25 September 1989, possesses what Seamus Heaney has termed a “ventriloquistic inventiveness” (86). In this respect Eagleton’s play is a high-risk script; aphorisms, witticisms and droll exchanges pile up on the stage. The staginess is a central part of the act; we witness the presentation of a recession of Wilde like a nest of matryoshka dolls as Eagleton essays the task of “reinventing him without, with a sole exception, actually quoting him” (*Saint Oscar* 3).

*Saint Oscar*, like *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*, opens with a choric ballad, the sentiments of which emphasise what Eagleton also refers to as the surrealistic nature of the setting of the dramas:

The moral of our tale it is plain for you to tell:  
Unnatural practices land you in hell  
If you’re quare and you’re Irish and wear a daft hat  
Don’t go screwing the son of an aristocrat (16).

Through song, epitome and epigram, the play draws upon the Brechtian tradition of epic theatre. Brecht’s combination of music/text works very well in both this text and in *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*. Here the Chorus begins the play and marks the end of each Act; the *Song of the Rent Boys* breaks up Act Two at a particularly tense moment. Brecht notes:

A good way of judging a piece of music with a text is to try out the different attitudes or gestures with which the performer ought to deliver the individual sections: . . . For this the most suitable gestures are as common, vulgar and banal as possible. In this way one can judge the political value of the musical score (105).

The fatuous bawdiness of the Rent Boys accomplishes these aims; anarchy and law are near ‘bedfellows’ as the Judge makes an appointment to meet these lads later at the close of their song.

Eagleton gives us the play in epitome following through another Brechtian axiom that, “subject-matter in itself is in a sense somewhat banal, featureless, empty and

self-sufficient. Only the social gest—criticism, craftiness, irony, propaganda, etc.—that breathes humanity into it” (Brecht 105). Dramatic means produce a moral lesson; entertainment and edification, the shape of both now known, will be presented in a genre that allows for the alienation necessary to make the whole enterprise worth doing.

From the outset the action is dominated by Oscar who uses Speranza, Lady Wilde, Edward Carson and Richard Wallace as sounding boards for demonstrations of his verbal wit and agility, an agility harnessed, particularly in Act Two, to an angry denunciation of authority. What begins as music-hall comedy shifts into the political register: the one-line laughter of this, for instance,

LADY WILDE. (Melodramatically) My son!

WILDE. She always had an excellent memory (19).

prefaces the “matter of Ireland”:

WILDE. The body of my country! Countries have bogs and bridges, mother, not bodies. They're made up of the same people living in the same place—or in the case of Ireland the same people trying to get out of the same place (24).

The arch frivolity of these exchanges is played off against a range of sincere socialist commitments that leak out, often indirectly, through the surface glitter. As Wilde comments,

I subvert their forms by obeying them so faithfully (31).

In “Oscar and George” Eagleton discusses this aesthetic paradox in political terms and provides a useful parallel reading of the dramatic form:

Wilde adopts an idealist language of authenticity, while being mightily suspicious of the whole idea. It is, in part, a conflict between the European Romanticism to which he was heir, and the self-ironizing consciousness of the colonial mimic man, for whom truth can only mean the wry knowledge of one's fictionality (337).

Elsewhere, Eagleton speaks of Wilde's “curious anticipation of some present-day theory” (*Saint Oscar* 3). The impossibility of self-evident presence, the premise of both deconstruction and postmodernism (albeit from very different perspectives) provides yet another point of linkage between Eagleton's theoretical interests and their imaginative presentation. Rather than remaining silent about the unspeakable (*pace* Wittgenstein), Wilde is garrulous, self-mocking, opinionated, highly politicised, a sophisticated comedian; the dedication of this play is to Trevor Griffiths (the play's first director) who has also written of the non-comic comic, the spotlit isolate who evokes a muffled, muted and uneasy laughter from a hackneyed phrase-making turn; the “catharsis of laughter” is also a peripeteia, a realization of the absurdity of existence. The Enlightenment belief

in progress is in our day upheld by Krapp sitting alone in his room talking us through the passages of a nondescript life, a comically absurd history that is deeply disturbing. And it is this darkly comic pirouette of philosophic hope, verbal dexterity, the authorities of inarticulate and pitiless, mechanized institutions, corporate greed and a vain yet all-too-knowing selfhood that is dramatised in *Saint Oscar*.

The fit of these themes with the Irish experience of British rule is made explicit in Wilde's long impassioned attack on Carson, the judge, and upon the frozen nature of Enlightenment reasoning in Act Two. Wilde's trial is here seen as symptomatic of judicial hypocrisy, inflexible thought and the thuggish brutality of the ruling-class: "You subjugate whole races, you condemn the mass of your own people to wretched toil, you have reduced my own nation to misery and despair, and all you can think about is which sexual organ goes in where" (46).

Wilde is sentenced and a rapid elision in the script allows us to pass directly to the chorus of prisoners and the visitation by Lord Alfred Douglas, "Bosie". The betrayal of Wilde shifts on to a personal humiliation and abandonment:

BOSIE. Get your hands off me! Do you think I'm going to spend the rest of my life tied to an old scumbag like you? You're finished, Oscar, washed up, can't you see? (53).

The drama moves on—a street scene in Paris, Richard Wallace who had reminded Wilde earlier that, "your cause and the workers' struggle are the same" (29) reappears—smarter in appearance, his politics now trimmed:

WILDE. And what about this alliance between the intellectuals and the working class?

WALLACE. I think you and your rent boys just about summed it up. The most we can hope for is a rather more humane form of capitalism (56).

The play concludes in a "carnavalesque" song and dance evocative of the Bakhtinian universe where all roles are reversed, an "as-if" world where anything could happen. It is pertinent to apply one of Eagleton's earlier insights to this moment in the text: "Through this crude cackling of an ambivalently destructive and liberatory laughter emerges the shape of an equally negative and positive phenomenon: utopia" (*Walter Benjamin* 145).

Utopia here truly "cackles" in a caricatured presentation of an ideal "united Ireland", an imaginative space where the laughter flows freely to the rhythms of a loping ballad: "In Maidenhead and Margate the kiddies in their school / Are taught to speak the Irish and learn Churchill was a fool" (63).

*The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*, performed in West Belfast in 1993, picks up the issues of identity and role that the Irish homosexual Wilde, aristocrat, dissident, nationalist and empire loyalist has deconstructed. The last days and execution of James

Connolly provide the scaffolding for a dark satire on bureaucratic inflexibility, the rationality of Enlightenment thinking raised to a terrifying and absurd *terminus ad quem*. Eagleton reminds us of the vivid historical moment that sparks such pained realisation: "Unable to stand for his execution, he was shot sitting in a chair" (66). The ballad is used again here to mark off the overt and flamboyant theatricality of the invention. The chorus patter out their tale in the style of the American folk ballad: "Big Jim, big Jim, big bold Jim". As the spoken song finishes, a penny whistle "pipes up chirpily with the first two lines of 'The Red Flag' moving directly into a quavering, tentative rendering of the first five notes of "The Soldier's Song" (70). Elsewhere Eagleton has spoken of nationalism as "the site of a class struggle" ("The Archaic Avant-Garde" 289). The linkage in *Saint Oscar* of Wilde's personal torment with the subjugation of his country is analogised and deepened here: Connolly's torture, the cause of Ireland and international socialism are sounded in harmony by the thin whistle. Later in the play, Connolly recalls a sound "pure and unfractured" (112) and talks of a space beyond language where we "go all the way through it and come out somewhere on the other side" (113).

The dramatic force of such scenes provides a further clue to Eagleton's use of the stage. For it is at such moments that the texture of sensory experience reminds us that the point of meaning-making is not point-scoring through a series of competitive language-games but a recognition that the human inhabits being, that choice and determination can live on common ground. The self-conscious split of Mind and Matter that taints post-Cartesian Western culture has spawned its Other, a supposedly carefree and irresponsible postmodernism. These plays suggest that Nietzsche's prison-house of language (the incarcerations of Wilde and Connolly acting as powerful aide-mémoires of the physicality of all metaphor) can also act as a liberating agent leading to "the other side". Writing "play"/playwriting is one way of showing this. Eagleton's referencing of Vladimir's and Estragon's respective closing phrases in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, "Yes, let's go" (*They do not move*) (54, 94) at the end of *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene* associates the play with the often tortuous post-existential, post-structuralist discussions of such matters.

The casual brutality of the guards, McDaid and Mather, bears a direct relation in the text to their inability to function as individuals. As mechanisms in the machinery of Empire, they witlessly parrot rules, blur into one another, sing from the same songbook. Eagleton's drama opens up the nightmarish horror of a world lacking moral anchorage; where philosophic discourse ponders the issue of whether dismemberment renders suspect the integrity of the subject in law. By provoking the hollow laughter of the absurdist tradition in theatre, the author reminds the audience

of their complicity, the all too human desire to complacently witness the turn of history into farce:

McDAID. A donkey's potentially dead but you can still ride it. A woman's potentially dust and ashes but you can still take her to the pictures.

MATHER. That doesn't follow.

McDAID. A baby's a potential wife but I wouldn't walk one down the aisle (75).

This element in the play is highlighted effectively by the entrance of Liam, the ventriloquist's dummy, towards the end of the play. Liam's stage Irish set-pieces spoof the Irish Revival style of J.M. Synge and his contemporaries. The bog and mountain mists and myths of Ancient Erin emerge as full-blown puffs for a Celtic carts and coaches tour:

LIAM. [A]nd him keening and pining for the sight of a heron in the harsh skies and the sweet talk of a woman and wouldn't he be giving a mountainy ram and a load of dung to be squatting by his own hearth (109-110).

The knockabout humour of these scenes heightens the grimness of Connolly's imprisonment. His one major speech (quoted from earlier) sets in context the sadism of the guards. Their constant urge to provoke a response demonstrates their unease in his presence; the word games they play indicate a frightening level of frustration. They are as Irish as Connolly but Irish identity is for them no more than a series of labels of the kind of which Liam the dummy possesses a plentiful abundance. For Connolly, there is a language outside the repetitive jargon of the other characters: "You just have to inflect it differently—find a way of speaking it which will get you beyond it" (113).

This motif reappears in *Disappearances*, produced at Salisbury Playhouse in 1997, a foray into the post-colonial legacy of civil war, corruption, "sellout", set in an unnamed country in Africa. Kaman, a cynical well-off exiled poet dominates the play which explores issues of personal and political morality, of passivity and action, of the role of art in the class struggle and of the peculiar sadness of the imagination in exile:

KAMAN. They cart me from hotel room to dinner party like a sack of spuds. There are times I'm not even sure what hemisphere I'm in. Not that it matters much: anywhere is everywhere these days (136).

A major contrast in the play concerns the lyrical strength of Kaman's poems (taken from *Selected Poems of Sŏ Chŏngju*) and his cynical self-interested rants: Kaman is a torn and tormented human being; it is left to his estranged wife, Mara, to explain his decline from hero of the radical front to clapped-out drunkard: "Mara . . . You turned yourself into words, and that's sad, but they're wonderful words, and they're what will survive you. You'll have left your mark" (156).

The echo of Auden's *In Memory of W. B. Yeats*' in this speech provides an ironic counterpoint in that Kaman keeps vainly trying to separate off his own cocooned world from the conflict present in his country. The revolutionary, Raan, and Kaman's daughter, Yana, press him to return. His poetry is famous; he could act as a figurehead for the opposition who are seeking to overthrow the dictator, Janda: *Raan*: The people worship you, Kaman. They'd strike against Janda for *you*; for us, well, we can't be sure (153).

Kaman's agent, Richard, boastful of his northern working-class credentials, and Blackwell, an ex-college acquaintance with MI6, press Kaman to avoid involvement. Blackwell indirectly suggests that Yana's prospects of a scholarship could be affected; Richard fears the Nobel Prize committee would be disenchanted.

Unsurprisingly Kaman does not go, though by the end of the play he is a changed man. The interaction and argument with those about him including his encounters with a tenderly regretful Mara alert him once more to those sounds 'beyond' which Connolly once heard:

KAMAN. [S]ome murmur of another world—something you could savour on your tongue like wine . . . There's a hunger to find it—a terrible remorseless hunger. And all we know of it again and again is our failure to pronounce it . . . sometimes I think I won't rest till it's settled on my tongue. Till it breaks upon us like a burst of sunlight (167).

*God's Locusts*, a play performed on BBC Radio 3 in 1995 has harsh points to make about the origin and administration of the Irish Famine or "The Distress" as the administrators prefer to term it. The rich metaphorical texture of the other plays is partly exchanged here for an angry and impassioned denunciation of a cruel self-deluding regime though that strong interest in unseating narrative through rhetorical playfulness is still present. While Eagleton's response to the Famine does utilize the same surreal banter and wit seen in the previous plays in order to get its points across, *God's Locusts* is grounded in the contrasting perspectives that the records of the day reveal. Or, as he comments in the "Introduction" to *Saint Oscar*, "the astounding shambles and callous inhumanity of key aspects of the British relief project" (9).

Hamish McClintock is the central character, "a transformed version of Sir Charles Trevelyan" (*Saint Oscar* 8). His sadistic administration is powered by a crude sexual appetite that is accompanied by declamations from the Old Testament. Battle-scenes, prohibitions and prophecy all appear to heighten his sexual desire for Molly Byrne, the Irish prostitute (who, true to Irish typecasting, has chosen that life instead of that of a nun). McClintock, the servant of Empire, a pathetic, inadequate yet dangerously divided character, unleashes suffering and destruction upon the Irish population as if to expiate a private guilt, a response all the more terrifying for its arbitrariness.



The Irish deputation of William Smith O'Brien, John Mitchel and Jane Elgee flounder in their cause (as the old Irish joke goes, "the first item on the agenda is the split") as a series of cynical and casuistical strategies emanate from the Civil Service office:

O'BRIEN. We are most concerned that the public works are not paying a living wage.

CREIGHTON. Ah, yes, the public works. Well, perhaps I can spare us some superfluous argument here. The public works are to be closed (205).

The play re-articulates arguments about the Famine that, in Eagleton's view, have not been heard sufficiently. The scapegoats of "food shortage" or "overpopulation" are firmly rebutted by John Mitchel. Even the old warhorse of market forces is shown to be a straw man position as British subsidies to regions in the North of England are quoted. Eagleton has to incorporate a number of didactic sequences into the text to deal with these arguments. At the same time he is presenting the psycho-sexual pathology of McClintock and a sub-plot in which Dainton, the Irish sympathiser working in the office is shown to be in love with Jane Elgee, Anglo-Irish nationalist.

The historical framework of the play presents a series of arguments that seek to redress the conventional explanatory narratives of the Famine. Ambitious and information-rich in this respect alone, the play takes on much other material. The character and relationship studies mentioned; a sly reference as in the Connolly play to Beckett; a surreal word-play of catchphrases from different decades mainly designed to illustrate the shallowness of the officials designated to deal with Ireland; and a spirited verbal energy that offsets the pointed moral that the play generates.

McClintock's elaborate speech (from which the play's title is taken) in Act Two is a case in point. The belief in predestination, in the Famine as an act of God, is one of the darkest moments of the play yet one embodied in a vivid and moving poetry: "The sword, the pestilence and famine are instruments of his discipline, the canker worm and the locust are his armies. Famine, my friend, is the last, the most dreadful of Nature's resources. It is, so to speak, God's locusts at work on the body itself. The vices of mankind often finish the work of depopulation themselves" (210-211). The same paradox that informs John Arden's *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* is present here. The devil, incarnated as a dangerously lucid paranoid, sings all the best tunes.

Ten years earlier, Eagleton experimented with the form of the novel. *Saints and Scholars* (1987), develops an interest which Eagleton raises in a previous article, "Wittgenstein's Friends" (1982). In "Wittgenstein's Friends" Eagleton discusses the odd conjunction and close friendship of Nikolai Bakhtin and Ludwig Wittgenstein in some detail.

Wittgenstein made few friends in England, but apparently enjoyed a close personal and professional relationship with this extraordinary Russian. Eagleton suggests, on the strength of Nikolai and Mikhail Bakhtin's shared "literary and intellectual context" (113) as children and as figures in the Petersburg University milieu that Wittgenstein's interest in material particularity is "indirectly related to the mainstream of Marxist aesthetics" (114).

In *Saints and Scholars*, Eagleton places this bizarre meeting in a context that does justice to its oddity. Fantasy, satire and parody rub up against the harshness of James Connolly's execution and the terrors of the First World War. A fluid energy spins through the text: events pile up, plot-lines appear like characters in a pop-up book animated for the moment by a linguistic conjuror. Nabokov is one reference as for example in the perpetual deferment of Connolly's execution: "Let us arrest those bullets in mid air, prise open a space in those close-packed events through which Jimmy may scamper, blast him out of the dreary continuum of history into a different place altogether" (*Saints and Scholars* 10).

This vanishing-trick (repeated at the end of *The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*) is, in a tradition which runs from Sterne to Salman Rushdie, a "baring of the device". As Eagleton suggests in another context, "One might define fiction as the kind of writing in which it is impossible to tell the truth and very hard to make a mistake" ("In the Company of Confrères" 31). The very dead Connolly remains alive on the page, and, more importantly, inscribed in the narrative of the emancipation of Ireland. In fiction, you really can have it both ways. There is also a sly dig at Derridean *différance*. Connolly is able to leap out as significant presence in the pages and plot of this novel because he is absent. In death is life, the oldest trope in the book and one that Connolly himself refers to later: "At the centre of the Christian faith is indeed a dead body, but one whose failure heralds resurrection . . . Comedy is what comes in the end" (*Saints and Scholars* 101).

The novel crackles along as Bakhtin and Wittgenstein shift home from Cambridge to the West of Ireland, an episode loosely connected to Wittgenstein's real-life retreat in the 1940s to a cottage at Rosro, Connemara. Both philosophy and "Irishness" are the butts of an extended series of knowing, jokey word-plays; snippets of Wittgenstein are appropriated for the comedy that undermine the lean puritanical aperçus and aphorisms familiar from other Eagleton works. A sub-plot concerns Donal Tierney, the larger-than-life Irish publican and villager whose chequered background is deftly inserted into the novel. His self-conscious use of the English stage coding of Irish vernacular is not rumbled until Connolly enters the scene. The contrived colour of his speech register conceals a shrewdness that enables him to turn a few bob from the legacy of Wittgenstein's sojourn a few years later.

Wittgenstein, haunted and “hunted” by the image of “dons”, painfully trying to stop writing “rigid with the effort . . . like a monk struggling to contain his seed” (*Saints and Scholars* 75), is obsessed with the imperfections of real-life language usage. His own aphorism finds its way into the text: “He had forgotten about friction. Back to the rough ground!” (42). This issue surfaces in serious discussion (though a missing “s” must qualify this judgment) later on when Wittgenstein takes on Connolly:

“Bollock,” said Wittgenstein. “The people live on in the simple self-evidence of their lives. It’s philosophers like yourself who would pitch them into a state of emergency”.

Connolly counters:

“An oppressed people knows that every moment is a state of emergency” (100).

The second main character, Bakhtin, also a philosopher, lectures on Hegel to the local pub crowd; between gargantuan feats of eating and drinking—“He took them briskly through subject and object, the negation of negation, the identity of identity and non-identity” (78). The tussle between fat Hegelian and emaciated mathematical logician is told through a series of hilarious vignettes brought to a climax by the appearance at the door of the “escaped” Connolly. Eagleton introduces him by way of a condensed account of the Easter Rising. On this account, the Rising is a shambolic, uncoordinated series of events most appropriately symbolised by its taking place, “not on the pure ice of the Winter Palace but on the rough ground of Jacob’s biscuit factory and Noblett’s sweet shop at 34 O’Connell Street” (89). Wittgenstein’s gnomic comment indicating the wavering balance of a mind caught between mathematics and materialism makes another appearance here—the rough ground turns out to be a place where history happens, whereas Auden put it, “dogs go on with their doggy life” (79). A further insight, after skirmishes with Connolly and confusion brought about by the sudden appearance of Leopold Bloom, bears direct connection with the Irish setting of the novel: as Wittgenstein and Bakhtin are taken away by a military car, Wittgenstein muses on Connolly’s responses:

What if he is right that crisis is common? The people will deride this folly, live on in the innocent self-evidence of their gestures. There is no resurrecting the dead. If the dead rise I am done for. I thought I had touched rough ground but there may be bog beneath (*Saints and Scholars* 145).

Connolly is brought to the execution chair with the last agonisingly optimistic words of Beckett’s *The Unnamable* (382) on his lips as if to confirm Wittgenstein’s doubt—“You must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on” (Eagleton, *Saints and Scholars* 145).

The bog beneath the rough ground reappears in the film script, *Wittgenstein*, writ-

ten in conjunction with Derek Jarman, commissioned originally by Tariq Ali for Channel 4. Wittgenstein responds to Melling, the don who has come to take him back to Cambridge from the Austrian monastery where he toils as a gardener:

You see this flowerbed?

...

It's just soil all the way down. You can't feel rockbottom. I thought I'd touched rockbottom (Jarman and Eagleton 19).

The tension between the rough ground where things are "battered and tarnished and ambiguous" (55) and a "world purged of imperfection and indeterminacy, like countless acres of gleaming ice" (55) (lines retained in Jarman's script), is encapsulated in a series of dramatic scenes that draw out the strange contradictions of this "monk, mystic and mechanic" (Eagleton, "Introduction" 7).

Eagleton suggests, in a thoughtful introduction, that the contrasting versions of Wittgenstein that emerge from his script and that of Derek Jarman present a composite image of a deeply divided man: a driven personality whose peculiar combination of strictness and insecurity testifies to "the clash of cultures, histories, sensibilities and styles of thought" (13) that mark out his distance from fellow-Viennese scholar, Freud.

The body of work discussed in this article does not lend itself to summary generalisation: continuing motifs such as rough ground/pure ice, the matter of Ireland, the play of personal and political and the pattern of accident, chance and meaning that inform movements of liberation can be found throughout. More significantly, the work offers its own inter-textual dimensions. Eagleton is too impassioned a critic not to keep up that watchful commitment to an open and just society which has been the central direction of his literary criticism and philosophic discussions. Discourse turns back on its own meta-linguistic ambitions in these texts; jokes leaven the pomposity and bombast of rhetorical gesturing; a critique of Wittgenstein turns into a tender affection; narrative twists and turns avoid the schematisation of generic demands. To effect a linkage with the great body of Eagleton's work as a critic would form the basis of another book, an epic text whose author would be wise to listen to Frank Eden's warning about Eagleton's criticism: "I'd like to cherish every line and dwell on each insight / But if I sang about the lot I'd have to sing all night" (209).

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