Irish Laments and the Structure of Collective Emotion

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Artikkelini aiheena on englantilaisiin 1700-luvun arkkiveisuihin sisältyvät monet irlantilaisten itkuvirsien (caointe) fragmentit. Pyrin osoittamaan, miten ne toimivat merkittävinä varhaisina ilmentyminä englantilaisen kulttuurikriitikon Raymond Williamsin (1977) tunnerakenne-käsitteestä, ja että ne muodollisesti vastaavat Roman Jakobsonin (1987) määrittelemää tunteen ilmaisemista. Antiikin Kreikassa perinteisiin retoriikan välineisiin kuuluivat tunteelliset ilmaisut surevia kohtaan (paramythia) ja heidän lohduttamisensa menetyksen vuoksi. Sigmund Freud (1917) erotti toisistaan alakulon ja suremisen reaktiona kuolemaan. Alakuloa hän piti patologisena keinona käsitellä kuolemaa, sureminen oli voimaannuttava reaktio. Ainutlaatuiset itkuvirsifragmentit voi täten nähdä osana paranemista ja sen kautta menetyksen kohtaamista.

Keywords: lament (*caointe*), structure of feeling, macaronic, keening, emotive utterance

1 Introduction: the language of feeling

In classical Greece, emotional appeals to those who grieve (*paramythia*), consoling them for their loss, were part of the apparatus of traditional rhetoric. However, emotion and feeling have often been specifically excluded from later European philosophical discourse. The nineteenth-century Utilitarians Jeremy Bentham and James Mill (father of the philosopher John Stuart Mill), for example, artificially set up emotion as the antithesis of intellect, a position that was defended by the logical positivist Bertrand Russell (1965: 743, 788) as late as 1940. Instead sustained analysis was left to novelists and poets, such as William Wordsworth's early defence of the morally educative role of emotion in his famous 1798 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (Hutchinson 1965: 734-41).

It is only since feminist philosophers have exposed the gendered nature of the emotion/intellect antithesis that psychologists, sociolinguists and now linguists have turned their attention neutrally to the subject. The concept of the language of *collective emotion* has been much less studied, but it too has begun to receive attention in recent years, with studies of chanting during riots and demonstrations (Bell and Porter 2008), the singing of football anthems, and the interaction between crowd and performer in stadium rock concerts, and in the graphic sphere, student graffiti at the Sorbonne (Paris) in

1968 and community murals such as those in Belfast and Derry during the Northern Ireland "Troubles" of 1968−1998 (Brown 1998; *No Copyright* 1998). Because of the simple lack of early data, such studies have concentrated on recent history. Attempts to recover the verbal expression of earlier times have often relied on obviously mediated accounts in novels or newspapers, such as Charles Dickens's extensive recreation of the speech milieu of the Gordon riots of 1780 in his novel *Barnaby Rudge* (1841). This paper foregrounds some of the incidental representations of Irish speech in English popular printed texts dealing with the suppression of the rebellion in Ireland in the years following the English Revolution (1642−1648, 1688), and suggests that they should be regarded as important linguistic evidence of the "lost voices" of feeling. Since there is very little oral testimony from the Irish side (history is written by the victors), I have read many of the English sources in the neo-Gramscian way "against the grain," meaning that cultural texts are not inscribed with permanent meanings, but that these meanings are revealed and negotiated in a response to power, an act which Stuart Hall has called "articulation" (Slack 1996: 112−127).

The cultural critic Raymond Williams uses the term "structure of feeling" in several of his writings to describe 'the lived experience of the quality of life at a particular time and place . . . shared by a particular generation' (quoted in Payne 2005: 518). Following the French structuralist Lucien Goldmann, he describes this as an attempt to move away from "fixed forms" to the perceptions and values shared by the subject in a dynamic and interrelated community. Such structures, he maintains, are pre-ideological both in a diachronic and a conceptual sense (Williams 2005: 22−27). In terms of the relation between language and emotion, Williams suggests that the structure of feeling is not individually but collectively created as part of a historical process: "We are talking about . . . specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, even isolating, but which . . .

has its emergent, connecting and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies" (1977: 132; original emphasis).

Using Hall's concept of articulation, I would like to relate Williams's claim to unique historical records which document, in the gloating language of the victor, the verbal response of a conquered people to the moment of their defeat and humiliation. That moment is the war in Ireland from 1689 to 1692 led by the English king William to extend and perpetuate the power of the Protestant landowners there. Ten years after England's victory in that campaign, described by a leading historian as "a masterstroke of folly" (Trevelyan 1959: 361), three-quarters of Ireland was in the hands of English and Scottish landlords (Porter 2001: 125). This led to three hundred years of sectarian conflict which is only now coming to an end. The annual July 12 marches to commemorate the climax of that campaign, the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, and the familiar slogan "Remember the Boyne" on Belfast walls during the recent conflict in Northern Ireland, confirm that the period 1689−1691 was a defining historical moment.

2 Early representation of Irish speech in the broadsides

There are about 74 surviving printed song sheets, known as broadsides or street ballads, which take this campaign for their subject. They functioned as the mass media of the time in the absence of regular newspapers. They were a part of the English war propaganda machine, centred on London, where most of the printers of broadsides were located in the late seventeenth century: there was only one part-time printer of broadsides in Ireland, a Protestant. To further strengthen the power of the centre (London), there was an effective system of licensing, and this accounts for the uniformly hostile position of the broadsides towards the Irish. The broadsides relating to the Irish campaign were the subject of an earlier study by the present writer (Porter 2001), suggesting that they should be seen not only as the voice of dominion in the moment of victory but as part of a real uncertainty about English identity following the ideological turbulence of the English Revolution (the Civil War of the 1640s). For this reason, the popular press of which these broadsides formed a part was creating a mythology surrounding the (Protestant) House of Orange which King William had extended from the Netherlands

to England. The victories in the Irish campaign played an important part in this: these iconic moments in the campaign include the Siege of Limerick, the subject of six ballads, the battle of the Boyne (six examples) and above all, the relief of the siege of "Londonderry" (Derry; eleven examples). In addition to these ballads giving fairly circumstantial accounts of the events and the main participants, there are numerous passing references in other ballads praising the House of Orange and what was known as the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

About half the sheets attempt to reproduce the distinctness of Irish speech. The Irish were given a collective identity. This was achieved in several ways: religion, name and speech. The Irish were Catholics, so the ballads have the paraphernalia of cardinals, vestments and, above all, St. Patrick. Naming brings with it not only power but also an intensified sense of difference, so where they were identified, most Irish were referred to as "Teague", a corruption of *Tadhg* which is still a popular first name in Ireland and features in about half of the broadsides as a contemptuous generic term. "Tory" (from Irish *toiridhe*, pursuer; today used in a party political context; 15 examples), meaning someone who opposed the exclusion of Catholics from the throne; and "bog-trotter" (Day 1987a: 289; 1987b: 54). All three words had insulting connotations at the time.

In general, the representation of speech is coarse and rough, mainly because the Irish are shown as speaking English, at that time spoken by only about 2 % of the population. In most cases they confine themselves to a number of Catholic exclamations, repeated from ballad to ballad, such as "be Chreest [Christ]" (nine examples) and "by my shoul [soul]" (seven examples). However, a substantial proportion of them, fourteen (c. 20 %) include extended dialogues featuring parodies of Irish pronunciation of English (a further four include extended parodies of the French, who also took part in the campaign, but they will not be considered here). One example from the fourteen sheets which feature extended speech is the London broadside "The Irish-mens Prayers to St Patrick", which not only characterizes the Irish as naively dreaming of large grants of land on winning the war but also represents the Irish way of speaking English in a coarse and demeaning way, as in "The Irish-mens prayers to St. Patrick to make their Peace with K.

William", where they complain that the French army ran away at the first whiff of battle:

(1) De Boggs [*Irish*] dey vill signify little to us,
For being so Loyal to Second Yeamus [*King James II, a Catholic*],
Although dat our Priests and our Shesuits [*Jesuits*] swore,
Dat ve should have Lands and Livings Gillore [*galore, plenty*]
Not only in Ireland but Ingaland too,
Dat makes us in shorrow look pitiful blue,
Because by der Cannons dose Slats [?] *from us flew* [ran away],
Vuod the Tivel [I wish the Devil] *had had all dose Jesuit crew.*
(Day 1987b: 69; original italics).

Although there was no agreed way of representing speech phonetically at the time, the similarity to contemporary comic representations of Welsh man and women suggests that it is a constructed generic model for Celtic speech in general (Porter 2001: 101−135), related to "stage Irish", a manufactured speech that stood in for the real thing, and constructed a nation exclaiming "begorrah!" and "top o' the morning" for the amusement of theatre audiences from Elizabethan to Victorian times (Bliss 1976: 550−552). The dialect passages thus feature in these London texts as parody, part of the triumphalism that followed King William's victory. Even as the Irish are given a voice, they are spoken for.

3 Keening

Given this hostility, the lack of contact between Protestant and Catholic, Celt and English, it is therefore surprising to find a diversity of Irish words in these broadsides that were printed in London. In the corpus of 74 song texts, nearly a third include Irish words, including *clabbor* (mud), *usquebeagh* (*uisce beatha* 'whiskey') and the insult *pogue the hone* (*póg mo thóin* 'kiss my arse').

A very high proportion of these Irish expressions, about 90 %, are affective, expressing emotion in some way. One broadside, for example, a dialogue between two Irishmen about the progress of the war, opens:

(2) O Broder Teague, and Teague my Roon [*á run,* 'darling']
Arra ['my dear'] vat shall ve do full quickly and soon.
(Day 1987b: 69)

In addition, there are numerous examples of the Irish practice known as keening (Irish caoineadh), spontaneous but structured laments when mourning the dead. Although the broadsides are part of a printed, not an oral, record, and are without exception hostile to the Irish, the examples of keening are unusually varied and vivid. I suggest that, if read contextually, they represent one of the earliest oral examples of Raymond Williams's concept of the structure of feeling that can be documented.

Sigmund Freud (1917) distinguished between these two responses to loss, melancholia and mourning: the former he sees as a pathological reaction to loss involving identification with the lost object, while the latter is a healthy condition of coming to terms with it (1959: 152−170). Keening, performed in the presence of the dead, was the immediate response to a death. It was a tradition quite distinct from the more formal lament (*caointe*), a more structured song which was sung on other occasions than funerals, even at weddings. Keening spontaneously expressed *cumha* or grief and provided a measure of release (Ó Laoire 2005: 176, 215). Mourning of this kind would often be accompanied by "keening games" (*cluichí caointe*), in which people would run about in the cemetery, jumping over the grave (Ó Laoire 2005: 260), a practice which obviously recalls the often riotous nature of the funeral wake. Such behaviour was considered by the English to be quite inappropriate to the presence of death: in Roy Foster's words, "the Irish affected to dwell in a different abstract world" (1988: 94). It was often alluded to mockingly, as in the songs studied here. In this way it could function as an act of healing, a return to the time before the moment of loss. In Bakhtinian terms, humour makes grief easier to live with; in Freudian terms, it makes it whole and healthy.

4 Representations of Irish keening in the broadsides

About a third of the broadsides (25 out of 73) refer to the general grieving in Ireland that followed the defeat. In some cases the Irish are represented howling uncontrollably like wild savages, humiliated not only by the English but even by their own allies, the French:

(3) Hubobbobo they cry'd,
We are shut and outside
This day to be sl-a-a-a-a-ain helter-skelter,
While dis plaguy Monsieur
Who has rubbd [?] us here
Hath the City of Limerick for his shelter.
('The Triumph of Ireland, or the Surrender of Limerick'. Day 1987a: 298).

Their cries seem an admission of a lack of agency ('what shall we do?'):

(4) Many of the Teagues cry'd bitterly,
Hub bub a boo, what shall we do,
They will kill [us] and take our Nation too. ('The Protestant Victory'. Day 1987a: 361).

An English soldier boasts of what he will do to their religious symbols:

(5) For we'll pull down all their Alters,
And burn their *Virgins Psalters,*
Hub bub bub bow, what can they doe
To escape the Hempen-Halter.
('England's Glory, or the Irish-Man's Lamentation'. Day 1987a: 289; original italics).

In "Linguistics and Poetics" (1960), Roman Jakobson discusses the *emotive* or *expressive* function of an utterance. Unlike the *conative* (impulsive or volitional) utterance, directed towards an addressee, or the *referential*, indicating some third person, the emotive utterance centres on the addresser him or herself: it is an example of the emotive function in its pure form, like "Tut! Tut!" (1987: 66–67). Claims that the cries (like *Hub bub bub bow*) embedded in these English popular texts are close and contextual representations of Irish keening must be weighed carefully. There is no contemporary empirical evidence that keening sounded like this: its grotesque form in these songs, and its inappropriateness to written discourse when repeated, suggests that it was chosen for its degrading qualities and then copied by other songwriters (it occurs eleven times in the 70 broadsides that survive from the campaign). However, Hall's principle of articulation offers a different reading: the keeners are voicing consternation, anger and sorrow, in the way Arab women used their shrill ululation to express resistance to the French during the anticolonial struggle in Algeria in the 1950s (Savolainen 2009: 113).

In the most extensive case, that of *O hone, ochone, ah hone* etc. [Irish *ochón* 'alas'], the words of the keening are quite accurately reproduced. Ironically describing genuine scenes of grief which followed the defeat, they anticipate all too accurately the loss of

Irish freedom. The following macaronic (bilingual) stanza, with its chorus of '*O hone'*, was sung to "a new tune" of the same name. Once again, the theme is that of the French army deserting and leaving the Irish to fight alone:

(6) De Frenchmen all are fled,
O hone, O hone,
And left us almost dead,
O hone, O hone,
We are opprest with fear,
Forsaken by Mounsieur,
King William now draws near,
O hone, O hone.
("Teague and Monsieur's lamentation one to another."
Day 1987b: 73; original italics)

The triumphalism of the humour lies in the parodic use of a deeply serious cultural practice. Thus the English songwriter Thomas D'Urfey incorporates keening into a dialogue between an Irish couple included in a 1690 song book which was still being reprinted thirty years later:

(7) Ho my dear Joy, now what dost thou think?
Hoop by my shoul [*soul*] our Country-men stink;
To *Ireland* they can never return,
The Hereticks there our houses will burn:
Ah hone, ah hone, ah hone a cree [Alas! Alas! Alas my love!]
(D'Urfey 1719b: 250; original italics)

Here, and in all the sixteen broadsides where this interjection is used, *O hone, O hone* clearly fulfils Jakobson's emotive function: it is the immediate language of grief. However, its role in examples (6) and (7) as the chorus of the song also gives it an instrumental role: it has been appropriated and given a comic connotation as part of the discourse of victory. In short, these 73 surviving songs give important early evidence of the range and function of Jakobson's emotive utterance.

5 Conclusions

Reading these keens today, mediated through the London broadside market, detached from the culture that produced them and embedded in a deeply hostile context, the exultant atmosphere of the first months after victory, they are submerged in the frame text. However, what if these laments, more than thirty of them in the 74 songs surviving from the Irish campaign, are articulated, read against the grain, not addressed to the

London literati in their moment of victory, but, as Jakobson suggests, as instrumental utterances directed back for the consolation of the speaker?

To do so would be to restore the honourable tradition of the keen, since these popular songs traduce the keening ritual in several ways: firstly, not only in Ireland but in many other parts of Europe, including Ingria and Karelia, keening was historically practised overwhelmingly by women (Crosson 2008: 159; Martinengo-Cesaresco [1914]: 271; Honko et al. 1993: 570−71). This in itself might account for the hostility of the church establishment to the practice, as a challenge to the patriarchal authority of the priesthood. However, in these broadsides the keeners are not women but the defeated Irish soldiers.

Secondly, while a lament, like the elegy, was often composed and performed much later, keening never took place except directly after a death, in the presence of the body. There are many cases where women have refused to perform keens for song collectors armed with recording equipment because the occasion was not authentic (Ó Laoire 2005: 273). The ballads quoted above all feature keening which is *anticipating* the slaughter to come:

> We are shut . . . outside
> This day to be sl-a-a-a-a-ain helter-skelter (example 3)
>
> *Hub bub a boo*, what shall we do,
> They will kill [us] and take our Nation too (example 4)
>
> *Hub bub bub bow*, what can they doe
> To escape the Hempen-Halter (example 5)
>
> We are opprest with fear, . . .
> King William now draws near (example 6)
>
> The Hereticks there our houses will burn (example 7)

For this reason, because in every case they precede rather than follow a death, these keens cannot be regarded as *contextually* authentic. Nevertheless, it is notable that Irish voices are heard in every one of these ballads. In postcolonial discourse, the subjected (or subordinate) has become the subject. In those terms they correspond not only to Lillis Ó Laoire's description of keening as "a formal, organized way in which pent-up

grief (*racht*) might be expressed with dignity" (2005: 251) but also to another agenda: grieving in Ireland was symbolically associated not only with identity but also with the spirit of nation, in this case, the destruction of an achieved civilization..

These keens represent a collective lamenting which corresponds closely to the "structure of feeling" to which Williams referred. As such, they seem to burn a hole in the paper. Broadsides stand at the interface of oral and literary production. Theorizing the concept of affect involves undercutting the opposition between the assumed irrationality of emotion and the assumed rationality of signification and ideology. Lawrence Grossberg maintains that the oppositional quality of affective struggles like the keening of the Irish in defeat is constituted, "not in a negative dialectics, but by a project of or struggle over empowerment, an empowerment which energizes and connects specific social moments and subject-positions" (1996: 168). This reading of the broadsides suggests that they can also be seen today in oppositional terms as an assertion of collective identity. Although they cannot yet be conceptualized in terms of resistance, the recovered voices of the Irish assert continuing survival in the face of defeat.

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