

Mother to be Grafted : Shadows of Mad Sweeney in Dermot Bolger's *A Second Life*

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Summary *A Second Life* (1994/2010) by the Irish writer Dermot Bolger (1959-) raises the question of the potential of a dialogue with the past, which seems to have no meaning to the present. The main plot centres around the life of Sean Blake, who was adopted at the age of six weeks and was not allowed to know anything about his birth mother, Lizzy Sweeney. Sean's adoption was mediated by religious institutions called the Magdalene Laundries run by Roman Catholic orders. In most cases, single mothers and their children born in institutions could never see each other again after being separated.

The novel resonates with the renowned legend in Old Irish, *Buile Suibhne* (*The Frenzy of Sweeney*), the story of King Sweeney's madness and exile. This paper is based on part of my research project which aims to locate the Sweeney legend in Irish literary imagination in a comprehensive way. The primary purpose of the following pages is to explore echoes from the legend in Bolger's novel and to examine their possible implications. Sean's birth mother, Lizzy, has something crucial to share not only with Mad Sweeney but also with a woman symbolic of Ireland and the fate of the Irish language. An in-depth examination of the text should draw special attention to the fact that Sean's ambivalent quest for his lost life seems to resonate with the author's tentative approach toward the Irish language tradition.

Introduction

A Second Life, written by the Irish writer Dermot Bolger, circulates around the life story of the photographer in his mid-thirties, Sean Blake, who was adopted at the age of six weeks and raised with no memory of his birth mother, Lizzy Sweeney.¹⁾ Lizzy became a single mother at the age of nineteen, and had no option left but to sign away her child, whom she named Francis Sweeney.²⁾ Their reunion seemed nearly realized, but it failed, despite a deep longing for an encounter on both sides in the last few months before the death of Lizzy.

The surname of the two main characters, Sweeney, hints at their association with Mad Sweeney in the

legendary story in Old Irish, *Buile Suibhne* (*The Frenzy of Sweeney*).³⁾ Madness and exile are at the heart of the story. Cursed by a Christian saint Ronan, Sweeney, a pagan king in seventh-century Ireland, lost his sanity during the battle. Sweeney fled to the woods, half believing himself to be a bird. The main part of the legend consists of his wanderings all over Ireland. After encountering St. Moling, Sweeney's reconciliation with Christianity began. The story ends with Sweeney's burial as a Christian.

The author's note to the revised edition of *A Second Life* (2010) has no mention of the ancient King Sweeney, while it intends to reveal the main theme and an initial inspiration for the novel. Nevertheless, echoes from the legend are clearly heard, as the following pages will fully demonstrate.⁴⁾ The novel

can be counted among Bolger's few creative writings marked by the effective use of literature originally produced in Irish. The Irish language and its tradition as a whole hold an ambiguous position in the mind of Bolger, who is called 'post-nationalist', due to his deliberate distance from nationalist preoccupation with tradition, historical roots, and ethnic or national differences.⁵⁾ His stance seems particularly relevant and common in present-day Ireland which has become home to immigrants of various cultural backgrounds. Then, we might ask why the Sweeney story needs to be incorporated into *A Second Life*. A careful examination of the novel shall draw special attention to the fact that the central character Sean's ambivalent quest of his lost life can resonate with Bolger's tentative approach toward that which is supposed to be his native tradition. Both cases attest to the rich potential of the dialogue with the past, even though it has been lost and seems to have no meaning to the present.

I. Mad Sweeney's 'second life'

According to Bolger, the genesis of the novel was a real story of an 'out-of-body experience' that he heard from one actor, who was nearly killed in a car accident (viii). This typically involves a surreal sensation of flying. *A Second Life* opens with Sean's internal monologue following a car crash. While clinically dead for a few moments, he 'drifted high above the gates of the Botanic Gardens' and saw 'gnarled trees' below him (2). The experience recurred when he had a panic attack and hyperventilated (50). A similar thing happened to the ancient king of Ulster, Sweeney. It seemed to the king that he flew all over Ireland in a day, after being struck by a fit of madness, facing the danger of death during a battle. The king came to believe in his rebirth as a bird. That which King Sweeney and Sean have in common is a sense of being given 'a second life' after having the near-death experience.

Another significant point of connection between the Sweeney legend and *A Second Life* is the oppressive

power of religious authority that dominates the Ireland of each different period. The spread of Christianity in seventh century Ireland lies behind the pagan King Sweeney's fate of exile. The king's blasphemous attitude toward the Christian God is the direct cause of his expulsion from the human world. *A Second Life* is set in post-independent Ireland, where the Catholic Church was the dominant power to regulate the lives of Irish citizens. The Church plays an indirect but central role in the tragedy of Sean and Lizzy. Sean's adoption, which probably took place around the 1960s, was mediated by religious institutions called the Magdalene Laundries run by Roman Catholic orders. Approximately 30,000 unmarried women were confined there and engaged in free labour. The last laundry was closed in 1996. Before remembering anything about their mothers, many children were arranged to be adopted. Because all the records related to adoption were kept secret, a mother and her child could not see each other again in most cases. Violation of human rights that went unchecked in the Laundries was among various scandals involving the Catholic Church that have been uncovered in Irish society in recent years. Adoption became the chief theme of the novel, partly because the process of its evolution coincided or synchronized with the surfacing of various tragic cases related to the Magdalene Laundries in the early 1990s (vii).

The puritanical, or extremely rigid Catholic values that prevailed in Irish society of the time affected Lizzy more directly than Sean. Her life resembles that of King Sweeney exiled from Christianized Ireland. She was born and bred in a small village in County Laois, but after giving birth to her son in a convent, she could no longer return there. She went to London, met an English man, and married. Her husband demanded her to change her name from Lizzy to Elizabeth. She started her second life as if she had lost her previous life in Ireland. While her husband loved 'her lack of history', Lizzy was haunted by her son's memory, even after having three daughters (18). Lizzy's yearning to see her son was enhanced in a state of complete iso-

lation. She was well aware of her manic state (109). When her daughter Sharon said, 'Mummy, it's like we're losing you, like you're in a world of your own where nothing else matters...', Lizzy replied, '... I feel that I'll go mad if I don't go out. Maybe I'm going mad anyway: everything feels odd these days...' (112). With her same old coat, Lizzy went out for hours seeking her son, like Mad Sweeney, who kept wandering, occasionally being plagued by memories of his previous life.

Christian faith in itself has little meaning both for Sean and Lizzy, while the pagan king's conversion to Christianity is at the heart of the Sweeney legend. A difference between the king and Lizzy can be noted in the meanings of the prayer. Mad Sweeney suffering in exile prays to God, hoping that his sin against Him will be forgiven. Lizzy prays to Jesus to give her a chance to see her son:

Oh Sweet Jesus, Lizzy prayed, allow me one sign that he is well. Strike me down; let me die the most terrible of deaths, but just spare my son any suffering. . . There was a brooch in her handbag, she took it out. I offer you up this pain, Jesus, for just one glimpse of my son. She inhaled deeply, as the brooch pin ripped into her palm. Her teeth were clenched. *I offer up this suffering.* (110–11)

Probably, it does not make much difference for Lizzy whether she sacrifices herself for Jesus or someone else. Her complex feelings toward Catholicism can be noted now and then. It is said that she remains Catholic in England, but she does not publicly practise her religion. She even refuses to allow a priest to come near her deathbed for whatever reason, contrary to Mad Sweeney, who is grateful for receiving the body of Christ in the face of death.⁶⁾

A Second Life highlights a belated but necessary change in the absolute position of Catholicism in Irish society. It is not the Church but Sean, a self-proclaimed atheist, who is entitled to decide whether to

forgive or punish. He is ready to confront Church-related people whom he considers most responsible for his birth mother's afflictions. The first person whom he wants to accuse is Sister Theresa, who was in the position of supervising Lizzy. When he meets the dying Sister, however, she does not seem to doubt that Sean has come to thank her. In a sense, the Institutions served as a shelter for children born out of wedlock, and the Sister simply fulfilled her obligation. Sean finds it difficult to draw a clear line between right and wrong (206–7).

Finally, Sean finds Lizzy's brother Tom, who became a priest after betraying his sister, according to Lizzy's older sister Ellen. In a chapel located in a place called Kilnagowna somewhere around Sligo, Sean has a long dialogue with Tom, who has been leading a life of agony with no chance to forget a sense of guilt of forsaking his sister. He has been thinking that he will never tell anyone about his sin, but he at last reveals his tormenting mind to Sean, bitterly confessing, 'No matter how much you hate me for what I did to your mother, it will always be less than how much I hate myself' (225). In the end, for the sake of dead Lizzy, Sean and Tom stand together at the graveyard where the Sweeney family rest in peace. The development of mutual friendship between King Sweeney and St. Moling seems to resonate here, although *A Second Life* suggests the possibility of reconciliation, not in a religious sense but on an individual level.

II. Mother and tongue

Bolger adapted the Sweeney story in such a way as to make it relevant to his contemporary Ireland. Notably, the misogynistic monastic view explicit in the legend is replaced by the celebration of women who loved and supported Sean. While King Sweeney's wife Eorann soon married another king after Sweeney's going mad,⁷⁾ Sean's wife Geraldine patiently endured the sense of being estranged from her transformed husband. Their intimate relationship was

restored following Sean's confession of his adopted state. Furthermore, while King Sweeney sadly confesses that his mother 'had cooled in love' of him,⁸⁾ *A Second Life* is deeply concerned with ideal images of motherhood; the virtue of unlimited love is attributed to both Sean's birth mother and foster mother.

Excessive idealization of women or mothers has its own problem, even if the derogatory view of women in the Sweeney myth is worth subverting. Romantic images of a suffering woman are central to a version of the national myth deeply seated in the Irish tradition. Of note is the way Bolger presents Sean's birth mother, as it can hint at the author's ambiguous view about the traditional stories centering around a symbolic woman. Two chapters are devoted to the tragic life story of Lizzy Sweeney, which has much in common with typical narratives about Ireland as a female victim of colonial oppression. In addition to echoing the fate of Mad Sweeney, the image of Lizzy overlaps with Ireland as a mother mourning over her ill-fated children who represent Irish people persecuted or exiled.⁹⁾ After leaving Ireland, Lizzy offered herself to an Englishman, as Ireland is forced to marry foreigners instead of the prince, who is supposed to be her 'true husband'.¹⁰⁾ An anonymous Irish man who could be Lizzy's 'true husband' is too much degraded to be a typical false lover, who may have promised marriage, but evaded responsibility. Lizzy also inherits a 'Celtic' image, which is characterized by a dreamy and imaginative nature in sharp contrast to Anglo-Saxon rationality.¹¹⁾ Her fanciful character can be noted in her daydream of having one day off with her lost son (109), as well as in her brother Tom's testimony of 'a special magic about her' (221).

Lizzy's rural Catholic background is a feature integral to the nationalist definition of Irishness. In the first version of *A Second Life*, the memory of the Irish language is part of Lizzy's lost identity. Her new life in England finds her 'stroking her daughter's hair, softly singing that old song in Irish which she would never translate for them [her British daughters]'.¹²⁾ That 'old song in Irish' is symbolic of Lizzy's past

which will never be revealed to her family.

Lizzy, as a locus for Sean's lost identity, is analogous to the Irish language which has been officially and symbolically placed at the core of Irish identity. In the poem 'Caoineadh [Lament]' by Cathal O'Searcaigh, which Bolger included in the anthology of poetry that he edited, his dying mother is overlapped with Irish.¹³⁾ Some assumed a mythical link between the native Irish and the Irish language on an instinctive, unconscious level. The link can parallel the invisible spiritual tie between Lizzy and Sean, which might explain Lizzy's uncanny telepathic power; she could hear 'the crash' the moment Sean had the accident (4).

The sudden awakening of Sean's craving for his birth mother went hand in hand with the surfacing of his memory before his birth. After having a near-death experience, Sean was occasionally haunted by a 'surlly young man' in his dreams, whom he took to be his former self, as he caught a glimpse of the man while being out of his body. Fragments of the memory of his past life, which were marked by extreme hunger and poverty, seemed to be stored deep inside Sean. Accordingly, he began to live with a 'new sense of having lived in a past life' (51). Findings of his research nearly convinced him that he had lived another life about 150 years ago around the time of the Great Famine (165).

It is noteworthy that Sean's previous life was set at the time of the Famine. It was arguably the most traumatic incident as well as a crucial turning point in modern Irish history. What followed was the irretrievable loss on a national scale. Approximately one million people died from starvation or famine-related diseases. The Famine also prompted mass immigration, which was almost a final blow to the decline of the Irish language. The loss of Irish as the main language has been regarded as greatly damaging to Ireland from a nationalist perspective. The desire to retrieve the loss, which is supposed to be inherent in the Irish psyche, resonates with Sean's preoccupation with the past, his inexplicable longing for his lost

identity and history marked by the absence of his birth mother. Ireland's troubled history and Sean's tragic past are conflated with each other, and the now nearly lost mother tongue and his lost mother overlap.

In spite of the special role that Lizzy plays in this novel, it must be admitted that she has long been a mere shadowy figure in Sean's life. Her role in connecting his previous and present lives is surely significant but has had no visible influence on his daily life. Moreover, Sean's narrative reveals the process of gradually nurturing his irreplaceable bond with his foster parents. Compared to their devoted care for their adopted son, Lizzy's manic longing for her 'Francis' is practically nothing. Sean had a clear idea of what he 'inherited' from his foster mother (69–70), but he had no idea what he and his birth mother shared.

It is no wonder that Sean was far from eager to see his birth mother. In his childhood, Sean was afraid of her abrupt appearance, since she might take him away from his foster parents (43). He 'had rarely allowed' himself to think about her (43). He recalls, '[i]t was simpler to file her away in my mind as an invisible woman who had long since forgotten about me' (44). Sean did not believe in the myth of maternal love, since it may be that his birth mother had abandoned him willingly. He could not negate the possibility that his birth mother might reject him again when he appeared in front of her (44, 158). Sean hesitated to take the straight and most efficient way to find her. This was in part responsible for the delay in locating her. Lizzy died of cancer ten weeks before his letter reached her house. It was her sister Ellen, who found Sean's letter, contacted him, and told him all she could about Lizzy.

The position of Lizzy in Sean's life to a certain extent parallels that of the Irish-language tradition in Irish society and Bolger's mind; Bolger was far from mythologizing and romanticizing the native language and tradition that prevailed before the Famine.¹⁴ In 1986, he clarified why he was feeling detached from Irish:

The question could be asked as to why I was not a reader of Irish anyway, the answer to which would have go to [sic]¹⁵ back to the way that Irish was taught and used by politicians and others when I was growing up. Irish was seen as a language of officialdom and oppression by much of my generation in the same way as English appeared to children a century before. It was also a language of tokenism — people began and finished speeches and announcements with standard Irish phrases when we frequently knew they couldn't continue in that tongue. What we rebelled against mainly wasn't so much the actual language, as the way it was used to try and hem us within an idea of nationhood which simply could not contain the Ireland of concrete and dual-carriageways (which is as Irish as turf and boreens) that was the reality before our eyes.¹⁶

Bolger's view can largely represent the general view of the Irish language and its heritage among the Irish people.

In the Irish constitution, Irish is the first official language, but in reality, English is the daily language for most people. Irish is most vehemently resented when it is forced. The first version of *A Second Life* contains Sean's brief mention of the Irish-language poet Máirtín Ó Direáin, who was confronted with an outright enmity:

I remember the story which a shy giant of a Gaelic poet I was photographing had once told me about himself: Máirtín Ó Direáin as an old man being brought to the operating theatre by a young nurse who leaned over as he was blacking out and said, 'My sister failed her Leaving Cert because you were on the course'.¹⁷

For those with no positive memories and feelings about Irish, with no need to use it in daily life, no meaning can be found in the education system which forces them to learn it in order to keep it alive. Practically,

Sean, too, did not have any reason to feel attachment to his birth mother, feeling little need for her. In a sense, he was compelled to start searching for her, which was prompted by the shock of the car accident.

An image of Irish as a virtually dead language may find resonance in, or accidentally coincide with the invisible presence of the dead Lizzy in the very last scene of the novel. After having been led to the world of the dead by the 'surly young man', Lizzy finds herself on earth, observing Sean and some others approaching Dunross Graveyard to scatter her ashes, according to her wish. While Sean stands with an empty pot, feeling 'drained and forlorn', he is surprised to find old women in the village, who seem to have identified Sean as one of the Sweeneys, making an unexpected move :

Then I heard footsteps approaching. I did not look up. I knew that the local men would still be standing awkwardly in their places watching as their wives placed their arms gently about me. I leaned my head forward. It touched some old woman's cheek which was damp with tears. I nodded in understanding, feeling the arms of the women pressing against me, each one taking away my pain with a mother's quiet and certain caress. (246-47)

This is the end of the novel. No comment is heard from Lizzy. The reader may find it a relief to see Sean being consoled by the motherly care of strangers. Besides, it seems certain that the death of his birth mother would not be a great loss in his life, since she was absent from the beginning. Likewise, one might say that there is no need to lament or worry that Irish is dying or already dead, as English has already been taking roots in Ireland, and the death of Irish will not make a considerable change to Ireland.

The same scene at the graveyard also involves a seemingly less remarkable but memorable moment, as Sean's internal monologue reveals :

And the funny thing was that it seemed like I could almost feel my mother's presence there, for the first time in my life, as we left the gravel path and began to make our way carefully among the graves. (245)

Sean is right in feeling Lizzy close to him, even though it is not exactly in the graveyard that she stands. This marks a tenuous but undeniable progress in the development of their relationship.

III. Grafting the lost past

Lizzy's most intense memory in her life was the time spent with her first baby in an extremely isolated state. He never left her mind. However, the problem Sean faced was the lack of memory. He had no clue to recall his birth mother or himself as her child. Even while trying to reach his real origin, he was tempted to think that his identity after adoption is real (102) ; he felt like hearing two conflicting voices inside himself ; '[o]ne part of me is desperate to find out who I really am . . . Another part of me keeps saying that the person I really am is Sean Blake' (94).¹⁸⁾ He could not help asking, 'I already had a name and a life, so why did I need to superimpose a second life onto it?' (135). Considering that the encounter with his birth mother might only bring confusion to his present life, he questioned himself, 'Did I ever really want to find her? Did I need to have the complications of another life grafted onto mine?' (81). Despite his apprehension, however, his choice of the word 'graft' rightly anticipated that his exploration of the past, his yearning for memory, would not go fruitless.

All Sean could do to nurture a relationship with his birth mother was to imagine it. The first thing he was urged to do was to envision and relive her life in his imagination. When Sean visited places associated with his birth mother, they seemed to enliven scant pieces information he had about her. He felt obscure images of the past coming into life when he visited County Laois, where his birth mother might have lived.

He used to drive around the area as fast as possible, but he was different after the car crash; his obsessive interest in the area can be noted in his attention to every place name he passed, such as Naas, Portlaoise, Mountrath, and those of other small villages (80–81). He thought of ‘taking the high road up into those hills that would drop [him] down into Kinnitty and then Birr’, considering that his birth mother ‘might have often walked’ there as a girl. Sean stopped the car and observed the street market, imagining, ‘My real mother might have run around the stalls here as a child’ (82). Sean finally found the grave of the Sweeney family, where his birth mother might have stood for her dead mother who had died soon after she had left for a convent with Sean in her womb. He mused on the possibility that he and his birth mother had been ‘the one flesh’ on the exact spot (106–107).¹⁹⁾ His spontaneous imagination inside his mother marked the moment when her essence was planted in his mind to grow there.

Sean’s desire to reclaim the loss, or to fill the absence of memory, became even more desperate after he came to know Lizzy’s only wish on her deathbed was to have a glimpse of her only son. Tracing her footsteps, he drove to the convent, St. Martha’s, where he was born (186). He defined his car journey as ‘a pilgrimage’ as well as a ‘futile act of atonement’ (192) to assuage his remorse of not having started a serious search sooner. In his frenzied driving, he had to make sure where he was, probably not to get lost, as he passed Cloghan, Ballinasloe, Boyle, Tullsk, Ballyroddy, Rattallen Cross Roads, Curlew Mountains, Lough Arrow, and Ballinafad (192–93).²⁰⁾ The journey made him acutely aware that he had passed the same parts of the country in Lizzy’s womb. Sean’s fierce regret compelled him to create a story for himself and Lizzy only. Saying to himself, ‘Lizzy Sweeney would be aware that I was making our journey again’ (192), he imagined his nineteen-year-old mother as ‘a girl with a bruised face carrying [him] across this landscape’, and two of them as a pair ‘like prisoners handcuffed together’ (193). Young

Lizzy was imaginatively revived and merged with Sean’s here and now, to be given a new lease of life.

The significance of Sean’s journey also lies in its being a reimagined modern version of Mad Sweeney’s journey through Ireland. The Sweeney legend is known for a catalogue of names of places where the mad king had passed while travelling all over Ireland as a pilgrim repenting his sin of going against God.²¹⁾ Destined not to stay in one place, Sweeney kept moving all over Ireland. Sean’s driving into his unknown past across the country resonates with Bolger’s attempt to tap into the Irish past through the ancient legend of the exiled king.

Underneath *A Second Life* lies the question as to which part of the past needs to be confronted, clarified, and remembered, and for what reason. The reader might ask what was the point of Sean’s research in the library to investigate his previous life. It was abruptly ended, when Sean felt a voice from the dead saying, ‘*The dead can take care of ourselves. . . find the living while you still can*’ (167). He decided to set aside intriguing clues to his past life that he uncovered so far, calling them ‘[c]oincidences’ (165). He should have given up the research earlier, considering that he made his wife suffer by leaving her alone with small children without any explanation. It was also part of the distractions that prevented him from finding Lizzy while she was still alive. In that Sean’s curiosity toward his previous life turned his eyes away from other more urgent matters, it overlaps with nationalistic nostalgia for the Irish past, which post-nationalists would consider as meaningless, even harmful, especially when it prevents one from confronting more immediate problems. What distinguishes Sean’s case is that no sentimental idealization of the past is involved.

Sean’s private quest led him to realize the need for more public attention to the veiled history of the Magdalene asylums to which he and his mother once belonged. Sean was greatly disturbed to find that St Martha’s convent had transformed itself into ‘the first Interdenominational school run by the Catholic

Church' (196). There, he met young nuns who seemed to be keen to 'bury the past sins' of the place that served to confine women branded as sinful (203). He was indignant to think that what happened in the institutions would be subject to 'collective amnesia'.

Sean's engagement with his past finally led him to a deeper, full appreciation of his present state. Having overcome a 'sense of dislocation' (29) that plagued him after the car crash, Sean returned to the life with his wife and children with a renewed spirit, ready to concentrate on each moment :

These last months had taught me to treasure every sleepy caress, every elbow against my back, had taught me to appreciate being able to reach out and know that your child is there and nobody can take him or her away. (234)

By this time, Sean was able to tell his son of his having 'two mothers' (231).

Sean's ambivalent approach to his lost mother loosely parallels Bolger's gradual approach to Irish, which could have been his mother tongue if the history were different. His negative images of Irish underwent notable changes, since as a writer, editor, and publisher, he began to realize significant literary achievements in Irish by his contemporary writers. Bolger's newly awakened faith in the worth of embracing both English and Irish traditions manifests itself in his introduction to *The Bright Wave : An Tonn Gheal* (1986), an anthology in bilingual format featuring poems originally written in Irish by various poets :

It seems to me that with these developments, the two discourses of writing in Irish and English in this country have never been closer together, and deserve to be regarded and studied together. . . It is fair to say that there are good writers today in both languages, sharing the same concerns and confronting the same issues in their own different but linked manner. The aim of this anthology is

to bring many of the best of them together.²²⁾

Attempts to fill the gap between the Irish-language and English-language worlds were followed by an unexpected setback highlighting the gap. The leading Irish-language poet, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, was shocked to find that her *Selected Poems*, issued by Bolger's Raven Arts Press in 1986, included only Michael Hartnett's English translation. Bolger knew that only the translation was going to be printed.²³⁾ The incident was a reminder of the marginal status of Irish in the Irish society of the 1980s; English translations could be printed without their Irish originals. Ní Dhomhnaill admitted that 'people at that time didn't realize that Irish had the right to be there on its own'. Bolger promised the publication of a bilingual edition, which was realized in 1988.²⁴⁾ Its reprint in the following year was a hopeful sign for the future of Irish.

It was for several years after the troubled event that Bolger's commitment to Irish was the most active. His drama *The Lament for Arthur Cleary*, which was first staged in 1989, instantly reminds the audience of one of the most renowned poems in the Gaelic language, 'Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire [The Lament for Art O'Leary]'.²⁵⁾ *The Holy Ground*, first performed in 1990, ends with the line 'you had stolen my Christ away from me', which resonates with the last line, 'great is my fear that you have taken God himself from me', in the acclaimed folk song in Irish, 'Dónail Óg [Young Donald]'.²⁶⁾ In 1993, a year before the publication of *A Second Life*, Bolger published *Rogha Dánta : Selected Poems* by Padraic Pearse, which includes Pearse's poems in Irish.²⁷⁾ It may be that Bolger was in part driven by regret, unconsciously trying to compensate for the dismissal of the original Irish text by Ní Dhomhnaill.

Bolger's idea is that 'good fiction is about throwing yourself into the mindset of people who are unlike you, although you always bring or discover surprising parts of yourself on that journey' (vii). It happens that Bolger's ambivalent approach to the Irish-language

literature to some extent parallels Sean's quest for his birth mother. While Sean's imaginative journey tracing his birth mother's footsteps helped him forge a link with her, Bolger's tapping into the Sweeney legend marks a significant step forward in his approach to his Irish heritage. Nevertheless, it is likely that Bolger found no particular need to stress his having Sweeney in his mind while writing the novel, since his central concern was not to provide a new contemporary version of the Sweeney story. He was much keener on delving into real stories concerning the Magdalene Laundries that had been told after a long silence.

Conclusion

The hallmark of *A Second Life* is the overwhelming presence of that which is submerged deep below visible reality; an image of Francis Sweeney that Lizzy kept envisioning and feeling so close to her; the memory of Sean's previous life which surfaced and brought him intense physical sensation; secret lives of stigmatized mothers incarcerated in the Magdalene institutions. One such mother, Lizzy, who remained an invisible figure throughout Sean's life, has much to share with the Irish language, which has been seen as a hapless mother on the verge of death, marginalized in English-speaking Ireland. Besides bringing Lizzy's hidden life to the fore, Bolger offers an intriguing treatment of the Sweeney legend, though he has some reservations about the centrality of the birth mother as well as that of the Irish-language tradition. The extensive and meaningful revision of the legend can be seen as part of the outcome of Bolger's attempt at grafting the Irish-language heritage onto his work to make it part of his second life. His creative interaction with the Sweeney story is as significant as the spiritual contact between Lizzy and Sean, as well as the time which each of the two imagined to have shared between them.

Notes

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- 1) *A Second Life* was published by Viking in 1994, and reprinted in Penguin Books in 1995. The second version was issued in 2010 as *A Second Life: A Renewed Novel* (Dublin: New Island, 2010). In the following discussion, quotations from *A Second Life* are taken from the 2010 version unless otherwise stated, and page numbers shall be inserted in the main text.
- 2) The baby was named 'Paudi' not 'Francis' in the first version. *A Second Life* (London: Penguin, 1995), 19.
- 3) J. G. O'Keeffe, *Buile Suibhne (The Frenzy of Suibhne): Being the Adventures of Suibhne Geilt: A Middle Irish Romance* (London: The Irish Texts Society, 1913).
- 4) For cursory references to the Sweeney legend in *A Second Life*, see chapter 3 section 5 'Sweeney, Shelbourne, and the place of post-nationalism', in Ray Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland: Literature and Culture, State and Nation, 1966-2000*, Kindle ed., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), Conor McCarthy, *Seamus Heaney and Medieval Poetry* (Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2009), 15.
- 5) According to Ryan, 'Bolger formulates a tradition whose main feature is the lack of an underlying tradition' (Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland*, 145) and for him 'the difference which makes the difference is no longer ethnic or national but a difference from what has gone before, differences within and between the concept of "the Irish" themselves' (Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland*, 152).
- 6) Seamus Heaney, *Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 72.
- 7) Heaney, *Sweeney Astray*, 22, 54.
- 8) Heaney, *Sweeney Astray*, 27.
- 9) Michael Hartnett, *O Rathaille* (Meath: Gallery Press, 1998), 45.
- 10) Brian O'Rourke, 'The Long Walk of a Queen: The Representation of Ireland as a Woman in the Irish Literary Tradition', *Chiba Review* 6 (1984), 23-24.
- 11) According to W. B. Yeats, 'Matthew Arnold, in *The Study of Celtic Literature*, has accepted this passion for Nature, this imaginativeness, this melancholy, as Celtic characteristics.' W. B. Yeats, *Writings on Irish Folklore, Legend and Myth* (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 189.
- 12) Bolger, *A Second Life*, 1995, 146.
- 13) Dermot Bolger, ed., *The Bright Wave/An Tonn Gheal: Poetry in Irish Now* (Dublin: Raven Arts, 1986), 182-83.
- 14) Bolger's refusal of romanticizing and idealizing the Irish past and rural Ireland is reflected onto Sean, who is fed up with ' clichéd image of Ireland' on post cards (Bolger, *A Second Life*, 31).
- 15) It seems that 'would have go to' should be 'would

- have to go’.
- 16) Bolger, *The Bright Wave*, 9–10.
 - 17) Bolger, *A Second Life*, 1995, 5. In Ireland, a Leaving Cert (Leaving Certificate) is a document listing the subjects one studied in the final two years of secondary school. The grades obtained are an integral part of the university entry requirements, and they will determine the courses one can take in University. The Irish language is among the necessary subjects, while there are those who apply for Irish exemptions. <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/irish-exemptions-will-change-spell-the-end-of-compulsory-irish-1.3987395>, accessed 14 March 2021.
 - 18) King Sweeney, too, was torn between two selves, but in a way different from Sean; Sweeney had his former self to recall, and the memory of his lost life as a king returned and plagued him again and again.
 - 19) On one level, the scene may be among sentimental and melodramatic scenes to be criticized. Jason Cowley, ‘A raft of love goes sailing off: A second life — Dermot Bolger’, *Independent* (28 May 1994). <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/book-review-a-raft-of-love-goes-sailing-off-a-second-life-dermot-bolger-viking-pounds-15-1439041.html>, accessed 25 January 2021.
 - 20) According to Ryan, these ‘transitory place names contain no mythic significance’. Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland*, 190–91.
 - 21) The legend is reputed to be in the tradition of ‘Dindseanbhachas’, the lore of places which explains the origin of place names. Ciaran Carson, ‘Sweeney Astray: Escaping from Limbo’, in Toy Curtis, ed., *The Art of Seamus Heaney* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1982), 142–43.
 - 22) Bolger, *The Bright Wave*, 10.
 - 23) Bolger, *The Bright Wave*, 10.
 - 24) Niall Hartnett, *Notes From His Contemporaries: A Tribute to Michael Hartnett*, Photographs by Niall Hartnett (USA: Lulu, 2009), 49. *Reading the Future: Irish Writers in Conversation with Mike Murphy*, ed. Clíodhna Ní Anluain (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2000), 199–200.
 - 25) Dermot Bolger, *Plays 1* (London: Methuen 2000), 1–68.
 - 26) Bolger, *Plays 1*, 125. *Filíocht Ghrá na Gaeilge: Love Poems in Irish*, ed. Ciarán Mac Murchaídh (Dublin: Cois Life, 2008), 172.
 - 27) Padraic Pearse, *Rogha Dánta: Selected Poems*, ed. Dermot Bolger (Dublin: New Island Books, 1993), 80.

母を接ぎ木する —— ダーモット・ボルジャーの『セカンド・ライフ』における 狂気のスウィーニーの影

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要旨 アイルランド人作家ダーモット・ボルジャーの小説『セカンド・ライフ』の根底には、失った過去との対話が何をもたらしうるかという問いかけがある。主人公ショーン・ブレイクは生後6週間で実母リズィ・スウィーニーから引き離されて養子となり、生母を知らずに30代半ばを迎えた男である。カトリック教会の管理下にあった母子保護施設を仲介とした不当な養子縁組の実態がこの小説の下敷きになっている。

『セカンド・ライフ』には、7世紀アイルランドに実在したとされる王、スウィーニーのエグザイルの物語の翻案と呼ぶべき側面もある。本論文は、この伝説の現代アイルランド文学における再生の軌跡を辿ることを目的とした研究の成果の一部に基づいている。「スウィーニー伝説」はなぜ『セカンド・ライフ』に組み込まれる必要があったのだろうか。スウィーニーの運命はショーンとリズィの悲劇と二重写しにされながら再構築されている。さらに注目したいのは、生母の行方を探るショーンの葛藤に、作者ボルジャーのアイルランド語の伝統への複雑な思いがこだましていることである。アイルランド語はアイルランドの第一公用語ではあるが、ボルジャーを含む多くのアイルランド人にとっての母語は英語であるという現実がある。ショーンが生母との間に築こうとした絆、ボルジャーが模索したアイルランド語との関係、本稿ではこれらのパラレル関係を浮き彫りにする。