

'Transgressing into poetry': Nationality, Gender and Sexuality in Sonnets from Scotland *by Edwin Morgan (1984) and* The Price of Stone *by Richard Murphy (1985)*

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Author Biography

Tara Stubbs is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature at Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education, and an Official Fellow of Kellogg College Oxford. Her two monographs to date are *American Literature and Irish Culture, 1910–1955: the politics of enchantment* (2013) and *The Modern Irish Sonnet: Revision and Rebellion* (2020). The present pamphlet was informed by a term spent at IASH as a Nominated Fellow in autumn 2021, where she spent time working on Scottish poetry and poetics. Her new project, funded by a British Academy Innovation Fellowship, looks at poetry and the reading public - and will inform a website (entitled 'Demystifying Poetry'), a podcast, and a third monograph with the working title *Poetry and Us: poetry and everyday life*.

‘Transgressing into poetry’: Nationality, Gender and Sexuality in *Sonnets from Scotland* by Edwin Morgan (1984) and *The Price of Stone* by Richard Murphy (1985)

Both Scottish poet Edwin Morgan and (Anglo-)Irish poet Richard Murphy adopted complicated perspectives regarding their respective literary traditions, and both expressed these perspectives in terms of transgression. Murphy described the writing process behind his 50-sonnet sequence *The Price of Stone* (1985) as ‘Transgressing into Poetry’ in a series of notes published in *Poetry Ireland Review* (2012, 2013b), while Morgan titled a paper given at the ‘Non-Metropolitan Sexualities’ conference in Aberystwyth ‘Transgression in Glasgow: A Poet Coming to Terms’ (1997). For both poets, ‘transgression’ was something that they observed, investigated, and incorporated into their work – and their poetic ‘transgressions’ were formal, linguistic, political, gendered, and sexual.

Of the two poets, Morgan was certainly more central to his tradition: Scotland's 'first official Makar in modern times' (Scottish Poetry Library), he has been described as 'a foundational figure for contemporary Scottish poets' (Stafford, 2007, p.232). However, his disagreements with Scottish 'language poets' such as Hugh McDiarmid, and his tendency to question the assumptions underpinning Scottish poetry, often singled him out. Most famously, Morgan engaged in a 'heated discussion' in the *Glasgow Herald* in 1946 about whether poets should use Scots or English, advocating what Hugh Magennis describes as a 'permissive attitude rather than the kind of dogmatic approach insisted upon by Hugh MacDiarmid and others' (2011, p.148), and positing that Scottish poets should be free to choose their language of expression. Eleanor Bell views Morgan as 'one of the few writers both to respect Scottish literary tradition and to interrogate its function', adopting 'an interstitial position between the literary canon and its critique' (2011, p.238). But Ian Gregson goes further, contending that what 'sets [Morgan] apart is his apparent refusal to forge a settled poetic identity and this despite the fact that he has material at his disposal which could have been used that way' (1996, p.149): Morgan therefore chooses to scrutinise, and even destabilise, the same tradition that he appears to be central to.

Though more of an outsider than Morgan, Murphy adopted a position that similarly undermined the assumption of a 'settled poetic identity' within Irish poetry, using his work to question his own relationship to Irish tradition. As Ben Keatinge summarises, Murphy's 'exploration into his dual Irish and Anglo-Irish identity serves to interrogate the wider historical fabric of Irish identity' (2008, p.19). But Murphy's explorations did not always win him plaudits. For instance, Seamus Heaney worried that Murphy's preoccupation with the 'shaping of his inheritance into a poetic theme' betrayed a 'symptomatic unease between the manner and the matter of the poetry' (1977, pp.25–26), while quoting Edna Longley's comment on Murphy's *The Battle of Aughrim* (1968) that

'something programmatic' in the 'design and designs' of the poem 'stands in the way of total subjection of the offered experience' (1975, p.130). For Heaney and Longley, the apparent irresolution between the content and form of Murphy's poetry comes, in an echo of W. B. Yeats's famous definition of poetry, from 'his quarrel with himself' as a poet straddling Anglo-Irish and 'native' Irish traditions (Heaney, 1977, p.25). Yet for both Murphy and Morgan, such 'quarrels' become central to their poetry, enacted at the level of word, line, and form.

Ray Ryan notes that Ireland and Scotland share 'the assumption that literature and culture have a central political significance' and claims that, for writers, 'all positions are formally learned and all beliefs must be exposed to considered scrutiny' (2000, p.2, p.8). However, when a poet challenges or even foregrounds this 'scrutiny', the contrivances of such 'formal learning' are exposed. Though there has been an increase in comparative writing on Scottish and Irish literature in recent years – an approach that, according to Longley, 'change[s] the critical axis' by 'unsettl[ing] categories like "the English lyric" or "Anglo-American modernism"' (Longley, 2011, p.1) – the poems of Morgan and Murphy have not been read comparatively in any detail. By reading the two poets together, and by discussing two sonnet sequences in particular – Morgan's *Sonnets from Scotland* (1984) and Murphy's *The Price of Stone* (1985) – we can see how their work answers Ryan's call to shake off an 'oppressive relation to the English literary tradition', and its attendant 'mystique of Irishness and Scottishness', instead offering alternative models that dispense with 'a single notion of identity' (2000, p.10). Critics and readers will need to approach these models with 'alternative analyses and comparisons' (Ryan, 2000, pp.10–11).

The present essay offers one such comparative analysis, focusing on what Ryan describes as 'the critical rehabilitation of territory as an imaginative component of Irish and Scottish writing' (2000, p.24). The chosen sequences become a point of focus not only due to their thematic overlaps but also because the works are

contemporaneous, published just one year apart. Keatinge describes how Murphy has incorporated into his poetry 'a set of diverse experiences, his own and those of others, along with incidents from the wider panorama of history and geography, in ways which show the poet seeking definition of himself through others' (Keatinge, 2019, p.2). This analysis also offers a useful starting point for a discussion of Morgan's method in his poetry, which is avowedly sympathetic to 'alien' voices; indeed, in his Preface to his 1952 translation of *Beowulf*, Morgan professed to a 'secret and passionate sympathy with the alien poet' (2002, p.ix). In the case of *Sonnets from Scotland*, published some 30 years later than his *Beowulf*, Morgan literalises the metaphor by placing extra-terrestrials in the position of poet-narrator.

Through adopting a literally 'alien' perspective in *Sonnets from Scotland*, which records 'Scotland' from an outsider viewpoint, and through speaking though the buildings of *The Price of Stone*, Morgan and Murphy perform feats of poetic ventriloquism. Murphy even described *The Price of Stone* as 'ventriloquised autobiography' in his notes for the sequence (2012, p.26). In carrying out such acts of ventriloquism, the poets create imaginative territorial spaces – demarcated by their sonnet sequences – which shift and broaden narrative perspectives, therefore submitting to 'considered scrutiny' the assumptions that have tended to underpin the work of their Scottish and Irish contemporaries.

English poetry and the English language

Morgan and Murphy's intimate relationships with English literature and the English language could sometimes set them apart. Born in Glasgow in 1920, Morgan was a lecturer in English at Glasgow University, and continued to publish poetry well into his retirement in the 1980s; he died in 2010, just a few months after his 90th birthday, which he had marked by publishing *Dreams and Other Nightmares: New and Uncollected Poems,*

1954–2009 (Edwin Morgan Archive, 2015). During an equally long life, Murphy – who also died, aged 90 (in 2018) – had led a more peripatetic lifestyle, having lived on the west coast of Ireland, in Dublin, and in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka); and having been educated mainly in England, at Canterbury Cathedral Choir School, at King's School, Canterbury, at Wellington College, Berkshire, and finally at Magdalen College, Oxford (Campbell, 2019, p.112). In fact, what Murphy described as the division within himself 'between an almost entirely English education, an English mind and Irish feeling' would preoccupy his poetry and autobiographical writing (Schull, 1973, p.12). Englishness, and the study of English literature, were imprinted in both writers' lives.

Old English offers a particularly intriguing congruence. Keatinge notes how, in an interview with the *Irish Times*, Murphy acknowledged that '[p]ieces of *Beowulf* and the *Aeneid* are still visible in his work', a souvenir of his Oxford education. Keatinge adds how the 'heavily alliterative style' of Murphy's 1955 poem 'Sailing to an Island' is 'indebted to Anglo-Saxon models' (2019, p.5). Meanwhile, Tom Walker has contended that Murphy's 1963 poem 'The Cleggan Disaster', with its 'extensive use of assonance', reveals a 'line that clearly draws on Old English stress patterns' (2019, p.102). Both poems riff on Irish locations and Irish history, but Murphy chooses to relate the stories by drawing on Old English models; this approach reflects in microcosm what I have described elsewhere as Murphy's 'decisive Anglicising of Irish subjects' (Stubbs, 2019, p.208).

Morgan went a step further than Murphy, publishing a translation of *Beowulf*, subtitled *A Verse Translation into Modern English* (1952) – a project he had begun following the completion of his undergraduate studies in 1947 (Magennis, 2011, p.147). It was not a faithful adaptation, 'rejecting archaic diction and syllabic metres' in a display of 'a deep understanding of both modern poetry and Old English' (Stafford, 2007, p.233). Magennis has noted of Morgan's *Beowulf* that he 'looks out beyond his immediate context, writing for a wider audience and not striving for a self-

consciously Scottish inflection in the language of his poetry' (2011, p.147). In fact, Magennis stresses that in 'appropriating a great monument from the edifice of literary history', and by translating the whole poem into English, not Scots – though he did translate one passage of *Beowulf* into Scots in 1953 – Morgan 'appropriated it [...] on behalf of modern English poetry rather than for a more local constituency, though in doing so he was making a statement to that constituency' (2011, p.147).

As Magennis points out, Morgan's introduction to *Beowulf* is 'polemical' because of its bold attempt to relate his translation to 'living modern poetry in English'; this link with English-language poetry is underscored by the fact that the 'blend of exclamation and reflectiveness' in Morgan's translation 'sets the writing firmly in a Standard English mode' (2011, p.147, p.148). Morgan displayed an intriguingly complex attitude towards England and Englishness. In a famous article, entitled 'The Beatnik in the Kailyard' (1962), Morgan summarised the problematic relationship between Scotland and England:

> Although Englishmen do not have to worry about their relation and attitude to Scotland, the Scots have, and have long had, to worry about their relation and attitude to England, or to the English-speaking world. No country, which has once been independent, and is then overshadowed in union with a more powerful partner, can develop naturally and happily. Its political history is officially closed, but emotionally it remains unfinished.
>
> (Morgan, 1974, p.74)

Therefore, Morgan's *Beowulf* might not tell the whole story. A Scottish nationalist, Morgan could express concern about Scotland's relations with England; indeed, *Sonnets from Scotland* dwells on some of the ironies he outlines, particularly in the sequence's use of language and in its sense of incompletion. However, Morgan is certainly comfortable writing in the English

language, and English is the main (though far from the only) language he uses in his poetry; meanwhile, he accepted an O.B.E. (in 1982) and received the Queen's Medal for Poetry in 2000 (Morgan, 2020, n.p.). His relationship with English and Englishness is far more complex, then, than contemporaries such as Heaney or MacDiarmid might have allowed.

Offering an intriguing link back to Murphy, Heaney weighed into similar debates with his own version of *Beowulf*, subtitled *A New Verse Translation*, in 1999. Magennis tells us that by 'writing in English Morgan sought to avoid the shackles of a position that would limit him artistically', in a way that 'he did not see as compromising his Scottishness' (2011, pp.152–3). Yet Heaney did not feel the same; this might be because '[a]s a Scot, Morgan could relate to the Old English language as an older form of his own language, in a way that Heaney would profess that he could not' (Magennis, 2011, p.152). Comparatively, Heaney critiqued both the extent to which a troubled 'Englishness' became a necessary part of Murphy's poetry, and the fact that Murphy 'remained in closer contact with English writing, whatever [his] other affinities and affiliations', in Longley's formulation (1975, p.121). Interestingly, Heaney begins his article 'The Poetry of Richard Murphy' by comparing Murphy's poetry to that of 'the Orcadian poet George Mackay Brown', claiming that both poets 'manage a language that is objective and concrete, shaped and sided' and close 'to the stress of Anglo-Saxon poetry' (1977, p.18). Therefore, the absorption of an Anglo-Saxon hardness seems, in Heaney's mind, to be more familiar in Scottish than in Irish poetry.

In his introduction to his collection *The Pleasure Ground*, Murphy contrasts his own attraction to a broadly 'English' culture with his concern that such an attraction makes him an outsider in his native Ireland. He describes how when at home in County Mayo he'd study 'Xenophon and Virgil or Shakespeare and William Blake' (2013a, p.14), but also notes his feelings when he would meet the locals with 'rough manners' whose 'Irish songs had tones that clashed with our Anglican cathedral harmonies' (2013a, p.15).

Though Murphy is more ill at ease with his 'English' inheritance than his Scottish contemporary, both poets make use of what Heaney describes in his essay on Murphy as 'the poetic resources of the English language' (1977, p.29). Bernard O'Donoghue – an Irish poet and scholar of Old and Middle English – has noted that '[t]he home key throughout Murphy's writing career [...] is the established poetic language of the English tradition' (2019, p.47).Yet while Heaney advocates in the use of such resources a process whereby each poet must 'discover ourselves and our directions, the bounds of our outer and inner space' (1977, p.29), Morgan and Murphy's poetry is so embedded in the English language that the process is more instinctive than performative – and therefore inherently subversive.

Poets and contemporaries

I could find no record within their own letters and autobiographies of a meeting between Morgan and Murphy; however, they were direct contemporaries and had acquaintances in common. Morgan's *Sonnets from Scotland* (part of his *Selected Poems*) and Murphy's *The Price of Stone* (part of a collection with the same title) were reviewed in a longer piece, 'Ten Poets', by Denis Donoghue, in the *London Review of Books* (1985). Though Donoghue reviews each collection in turn – the other poets he discusses are Donald Davie, Allen Ginsberg, D. J. Enright, Jeffrey Wainwright, Gillian Clarke, Iain Crichton Smith, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and James Simmons – we nevertheless find some intriguing overlaps in the types of critiques that he levels at Morgan and Murphy.

Donoghue gives Morgan less attention than some of the other poets, damning with faint praise – as when he describes Morgan's 'flamboyance' and notes that '[h]is poems imagine things you wouldn't think it necessary to imagine except to demonstrate what the mind can do, given half a chance'. Though 'his excess has method in it, however outlandish', and though '[t]he force of

Morgan's imagination is its variousness', Donoghue adds: 'I can't imagine a life needing such virtuosity, such opportunistic skill, but presumably it's good to have more than you need'. When he turns to Murphy, initially the criticisms seem to contradict those he levels at Morgan. Though 'these are good poems', in Donoghue's opinion, they are 'unvaryingly phrased': Donoghue notes, 'Murphy's style has every merit, starting with dignity, but I wish it would allow itself to change, indulge itself in moods, be fractious on occasion'. Morgan's maddening 'variousness' is opposed to Murphy's lack of variousness; Morgan's 'virtuosity' to Murphy's unchanging dignity.

Yet, Donoghue notes both poets' humanity: while 'Morgan's imagination thrives [...] upon motifs which in another man would be morbid but in him are converted opportunities, no harm left in them', Murphy's 'relation' to the 'themes and symbols' of *The Price of Stone* is 'unfailingly humane'. Meanwhile, what Donoghue describes as Morgan's 'opportunistic skill' shares resonances with the apparent accident that governs Murphy's use of the sonnet form: '[h]e implies that he happened to be in the right place at the right time, and that the form of the sonnet was available to note the conjunction'. Moreover, the different 'sonnet-houses' of *The Price of Stone*, as Murphy terms them (Murphy 2013a, p.176), with their varied locations and voices, suggest that 'we are meant to leap from one assessment to the next', pointing to a 'variousness' in design to counter Donoghue's claims elsewhere (Donoghue, 1985). However, what Donoghue does not discuss in detail is the poets' comparable use of the sonnet sequence – this is particularly surprising considering that the sequences are nearly identical in length (*Sonnets from Scotland*'s 51 sonnets to *The Price of Stone*'s 50); that they probe similar questions and use similar imagery; and that they both extend the possibilities of the sonnet form and the sonnet sequence itself.

As poets, Morgan and Murphy were brought into close connection through their links with Heaney. Both poets met Heaney, and their works were often published alongside his. The editor and poet

Harry Chambers published a 'Poets' Worksheets' edition of the magazine *Phoenix* in 1975 (Chambers, 1975), a double issue featuring works by Morgan, Heaney, Fleur Adcock, Michael Longley and others; Morgan sent Chambers the workings for a handful of his *Glasgow Sonnets* for the issue (McGonigal and Coyle, 2015, pp.293–4). Morgan also met Heaney through his academic work. In a letter to the publisher, poet and critic Michael Schmidt in March 1982, he describes his weekend ahead: 'Friday to Sunday, Joyce conference at Leeds University (reading paper on Joyce and MacDiarmid), imbibling [sic] Guinness reception, hobnobbing with Seamus Heaney' (McGonigal and Coyle, 2015, p.345). Morgan authored a pamphlet on Joyce and MacDiarmid that same year (1982).

Heaney makes several appearances in Murphy's memoir *The Kick*. The first anecdote sees Heaney chairing a poetry reading of Murphy's *The Battle of Aughrim* at Queen's University Belfast. Murphy tells us that, 'Seamus pleased me in his courteous words at the end by describing the poem as "relevant"' (Murphy, 2017, p.237); 'relevant' and 'courteous' certainly hint at a polite dispassion on Heaney's part. Later in *The Kick* Murphy meets Heaney during a literary festival in Kilkenny, where Heaney provides a 'graceful introduction' to Murphy's reading. A few pages later Murphy asks, '[w]hat happy person writes good poetry apart from Seamus, and who knows whether he is as happy as he appears?' (Murphy, 2017, p.283, p.287). Murphy implies not only that he can't play the part of the 'happy' poet nearly as well as Heaney, but also that Heaney might not be as 'good' a poet as he seems. Murphy's professional dissatisfaction is central to his persona – and consequently, he implies, to the quality of his own poetry.

'Constricted space': sonnets and sonnet sequences

Heaney, himself a consummate sonneteer, notes in his essay on Murphy that '[t]he constricted space he moves in and writes out of

is a march between his Anglo-Irish Protestant background and his Irish Catholic surroundings', a space Heaney describes as both 'neutral and torn' (1977, p.19). But while Murphy's 'space' is arguably much more complex than Heaney's description, and while his 'surroundings' are not just 'Irish Catholic', the idea of a 'constricted space' is helpful for thinking through Murphy's use of the sonnet form, as it enables him to explore what Philip Keel Geheber has described as Murphy's 'geographic sense', which is 'neither explicitly Anglo-Irish nor explicitly Catholic or Gaelic Irish, but always in flux' (2019, p.79). A similarly complex 'geographic sense' suffuses Morgan's poetry, while his sonnets explore in particular the idea of 'constricted space'.

The phrase 'constricted space' recalls prolific sonneteer William Wordsworth's 'Prefatory Sonnet' to a collection of sonnets published in 1807, which begins, 'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room' (2008, p.286). Joseph Phelan, writing on the nineteenth-century sonnet, notes: '[t]he phrase "narrow room" is one which Wordsworth employs repeatedly in connection with the sonnets', because '[e]ntering the "narrow room" of the sonnet represents a way of sealing himself off from potentially corrupting influences'. According to Phelan, Wordsworth 'comes to like the "narrow room" of the sonnet too much to ever want to leave it' (2005, pp.13–14). That Wordsworth enjoyed such confines is underscored by the fact that he had completed some 500 sonnets by his death in 1850 (Burt and Mikics, 2010, p.17). Whether offering a 'constricted space' or a 'narrow room', the confines of the form might provide the poet with a surprisingly fertile opportunity.

Both Murphy and Morgan had written sonnets prior to *Sonnets from Scotland* and *The Price of Stone*, though Morgan was a more experienced sonneteer. Murphy's *The Price of Stone* is the only sonnet sequence in *The Pleasure Ground: Poems, 1952–2012*, but individual sonnets do appear, including three that were written in the ten years before *The Price of Stone*: the loose sonnets 'Shelter' and 'Niches' (2013a, p.152, p.155), and the more formal 'Altar', which appears to flirt with Petrarchan and Shakespearean form

through its use of a thematic *volta* (or 'turn') between lines 8 and 9, through its closing couplet, and through its playful rhyme scheme (abbc deec effe gg) (2013a, p.171). With their preoccupation with structures and what lies within them, all three poems prefigure *The Price of Stone*. Murphy discussed his scheme for the sequence in his introduction to *The Price of Stone*: '[e]ach sonnet, except "Natural Son" [the last sonnet], speaks as a different persona emanating from a building associated with my life' – hence 'the different voices of the "sonnet-houses"' (2013a, p.176). But we can see these ideas begin to take shape in the earlier sonnets. 'Altar' in particular, with its story of trying to roll away a 'grey granite boulder' in an evocation of Jesus's tomb, adopts a similar lexicon to *The Price of Stone*, with its focus on 'stone', 'rock', 'wall', 'granite' and 'house' (Murphy, 2013a, p.171). The three sonnets show the form hardening in parallel with Murphy's focus on obdurate materials, as if moving willingly towards a constricted and obstructed space. Harmon notes that the 'actuality' of Murphy's 'appreciation of wood, stone and good craftmanship is confirmed by his belief in the disciplined form of the sonnet' (2019, p.31): the sonnet's rigour is part of its appeal.

Morgan's engagement with the sonnet seems, initially at least, to be more playful than Murphy's. We know that Morgan was fascinated with the sonnet from at least the early 1970s, as his translations of Petrarch's sonnets date from this time (1996, pp.164–166). By the time he published *Sonnets from Scotland* in 1984, he had already enjoyed success with his *Glasgow Sonnets* (1973), a sequence that was 'written fairly swiftly, under strong pressure of feeling, in about a week' – as Morgan told Harry Chambers (McGonigal and Coyle, 2015, p.294). In comparison with the 51 sonnets of *Sonnets from Scotland*, *Glasgow Sonnets* seems brief, consisting of 10 sonnets following a broadly Petrarchan rhyme scheme (abbaabbacdcdcd), written as blocks of 14 lines, and following a loose iambic pentameter. This relatively conservative scheme is perhaps surprising for a poet who produces concrete poetry, such as the visually unclear 'Message

Clear' (Morgan, 2020, pp.6–7). However, critics have drawn parallels between Morgan's concrete poetry and his sonnets: writing about Morgan's *Glasgow Sonnets*, Robyn Marsack notes that, 'just as much as the concrete poetry', they 'had a rigid form that nevertheless allowed the expression of explosive emotions' (2015, p.110). Yet Morgan's use of the sonnet form is not always governed by rigidity: consider for example his experimental sonnet 'Opening the Cage', subtitled '14 variations on 14 words', which is made up of 14 words per line and only uses 14 different words in total (2020, p.12). Discussing another sonnet of Morgan's, 'A Home in Space' (2020, p.113), David Kinloch notes that though it is a sonnet, 'it is typical of Morgan's playfulness that this realisation is more gradual than immediate', suggesting that the sonnet might be mistaken for a ghazal, a poem consisting of seven couplets that emphasises rhyme and repetition (2020, p.63). For Morgan the sonnet form, whether used rigidly or extended until it was hardly recognisable, offered, in Kinloch's formulation, 'a form or forms that [would] exteriorise and communicate an experience of the contemporary world' (2020, p.64).

When Morgan finds himself describing locations in the 'contemporary world' – and, specifically, the buildings and spaces within these – he often makes use of the sonnet form to consider the relationship between architectural and poetic structures. For example, the loose sonnet 'Glasgow October 1972' is set 'At the Old Ship Bank Pub in Saltmarket' (2020, p.48); while the 'stone tombs' and 'foul crumbling stairwell[s]' of the *Glasgow Sonnets* see the speaker mourning the 'fake architecture' of Glasgow, a space in which 'Each monolith stands patient' (2020, pp.75–79). Marsack tells us that the *Glasgow Sonnets* 'catalogued the problems that could not be solved by buildings, and in many places were exacerbated by the new architecture' of the city (2015, p.109); it is unsurprising, then, that Morgan would draw on the 'old architecture' of the sonnet to make his point formally. Extending the architectural metaphor, Slawomir Wacior has described

Morgan's playful use of the rhyming pattern of the sonnet as 'flamboyantly composite' (2013, p.55): 'composite' has its origins in classical architecture, referring to 'the name of the fifth of the classical orders', and with its etymology in the Latin 'compositus', the past participle of the verb 'componere': 'to 'put together' (OED, 2023). This hint of an architectural foundation reaches its zenith in the imagery of Morgan's *Sonnets from Scotland*; consider, for instance, the titles of the opening sonnets, 'Slate', 'Carboniferous', 'Post-Glacial' (Morgan, 2020, pp.138–140), and the first line of the fifth sonnet, 'The Ring of Brodgar', referring to the stone circle and henge in Orkney: '"If those stones could speak –" Do not wish too loud' (Morgan, 2020, p.140, l.1). In a later sonnet, too, 'Lady Grange on St. Kilda', the titular 'Lady' describes: 'when the winter raves along / the bay and howls through my stone hut' (Morgan, 2020, p.145, ll.2–3), as if the 'hut' itself is howling. These metaphors call to mind the 'sonnet-houses' of *The Price of Stone*, several of which refer to buildings – like the opening sonnets 'Folly', 'Lead Mine Chimney', 'Portico' (Murphy, 2013a, pp.177–179), and the later sonnet 'Hexagon', which describes 'Six random walls' of a 'hilltop sundial cell' (Murphy, 2013a, p.215, l.5, l.3).

The stone-like metaphors, and the descriptions of edifices, contained within both sequences have further symbolic potential, thanks to their suggestions of uncompromising solidity. Discussing Morgan's sequence, Cairns Craig notes how 'Morgan found a form' that could entertain both 'his resistance to Scotland as a non-entity [and] his commitment to Scotland as an entity' (2015, p.86). Meanwhile, Murphy's *The Price of Stone* reveals the ambiguities and hypocrisies in Irish culture's often monolithic focus on Catholicism, nationalism, and heterosexuality; and it reflects a wider challenge for Murphy, to probe and poeticise what Keatinge calls 'the fact of his Anglo-Irish background, a background which forms the agon of his poetry' (2019, p.2). Such challenges necessitate a theme – and a form – that can stand up to scrutiny while suggesting both resistance and flexibility; though the

buildings, or the rocks, seem unshakeable, the narrative is various, yielding.

Both sequences adopt a playful, though relatively rigid, formal structure. In *The Price of Stone*, as published in *The Pleasure Ground*, each of the fifty sonnets is given its own page; in *Sonnets from Scotland*, as published in Morgan's *Centenary Selected Poems*, the first of the 51 sonnets is set by itself but the remaining 50 are two to a page. Wacior notes how in *Sonnets from Scotland* 'the grouping is Petrarchan but the rhyming range (abcdefg) is clearly Shakespearean' (2013, p.55): this is reflected in the fact that the usual rhyme scheme of the sonnets is abbacddcefgefg to the Petrarchan abba abba cde cde (or variations thereof), meaning that the overall shape is Petrarchan, but the range of rhymes (usually seven in total) borrows from Shakespeare, whose typical rhyme scheme is abab cdcd efef gg. Although a handful of sonnets, such as 'Thomas Young, M. A.' (2020, p.145), 'Peter Guthrie Tait, Topologist' (2020, p.147), 'Matt McGinn' (2020, p.152), and 'The Target' (2020, p.157), deviate slightly from this rhyme scheme, the overall effect is one of controlled experiment; meanwhile, the blockish nature of the sonnets themselves, all written as one stanza, adds to the sense of solidity. While most of Morgan's sonnets appear to build on the Petrarchan model either by adopting a clear *volta* (or 'turn') between lines 8 and 9, or by developing a rhetorical argument as each sonnet progresses, Murphy's are more Shakespearean in flavour – with each sonnet finishing in a rhyming couplet, and with the poems set out in three quatrains and one couplet. However, though the rhyme scheme of *The Price of Stone* is largely Shakespearean, there are variations; even the first sonnet, 'Folly' (Murphy, 2013a p.177), seems to reference its title with its playful return in the second quatrain to the first established rhyme, so that the rhyme scheme is, loosely at least, abab cdac efef gg. This leaves one end-word ('rich') without a partner, almost as if building a 'folly' is the 'folly' of the solitary 'rich' man. Though Murphy's sonnets lack the blockish appearance of Morgan's, their relatively even lengths – with a (sometimes very

loose) iambic pentameter in the background – give a similar illusion, on the page, of order and consistency.

While some of these interpretations might seem a stretch, we can take our cue from the poets themselves, who thought carefully about the spatial arrangement of their poems on the page. Murphy describes in his Introduction to *The Price of Stone* how he wrote 'on the centimetre-squared pages of a small French notebook, which seemed to provide a better-than-blank worksheet for metrical poetry' (Murphy 2013a, p.176), while Morgan argues that 'even if the poem is only lying on the printed page it should give you a consciousness of its spatial rather than its linear existence' (1968, p.55). Morgan's idea of the 'spatial' rather than the 'linear' is of course complicated by the sonnet sequence, which precludes our being able to view the poem 'as a unit, rather than as something that has no meaning unless it is read consecutively from beginning to end' (Morgan, 1968, p.55): in the case of *Sonnets from Scotland*, for example, is the individual sonnet 'the unit' or the sequence?

The potentialities and limitations of the sonnet sequence seemed to preoccupy Morgan. In an essay on Japanese poetry, Morgan claimed that 'focused contemplation is as important as linear progression' (1964, p.117), and Kinloch extends this idea to describe *Sonnets from Scotland* as 'pictures sent out from Scotland' (2020, p.74). We can see how the uniqueness of the individual sonnet combines (and even contrasts) with the sequence's narrative propulsion so that 'contemplation' and 'progression' can be considered together. Morgan gave a lecture in 1995 entitled 'Long Poems – But How Long?'. During the lecture, Morgan contends that 'the long poem [...] presents a series of problems to its author', through its need for narrative propulsions and 'transitions' (1995, p.232, p.235). But Morgan seems to contrast the meandering disorder of the 'long poem' with the sequence, where 'by definition, something has to follow something else, but how far should there be a connection, or the opposite, disjunction?' (1995, p.248). Therefore, the sonnet sequence occupies an intriguing, but

possibly frustrating, space between the 'long poem' and the individual poem, not necessarily moving forward nor completely standing still.

In a similar way, the 'sonnet-houses' of Murphy's *The Price of Stone* speak together and apart, suggesting both continuity and discontinuity. Murphy explains his process as 'rain on a moor filling streams that converge at a rock to produce a waterfall' (2013a, p.176): an effort that is both individual and concerted. Harmon expands upon this idea, arguing that at times in Murphy's sequence, '[i]nstead of progression we encounter unexpected halts where the eye of the poet is trained on particulars', and where 'the reflective process is slowed for close inspection' (2019, p.25). Joseph Sendry goes further, to contend that while '[t]he concision of the sonnet enabled [Murphy] to concentrate on selected issues at selected moments', the 'expansiveness of the sequence freed him to engage an array of subjects not possible in a unitary poem' (2019, p.144). Therefore, both the individual sonnets and the longer sonnet sequences allow Morgan and Murphy to explore, and move through, 'constricted' spaces in ways that question the very idea of progress.

Gender and sexuality

The publication of Murphy's memoir *The Kick* (2017) confirmed for some readers their theories that Murphy's sexuality was complicated – and there is now some consensus that Murphy was bisexual. Harmon suggests that Murphy's own 'divided' sexuality, which 'makes women attractive but men desired', is reflected in a poetry which is 'deeply sexual' but where 'the sexuality is often disguised' (2019, p.11, pp.19–20). Harmon shows how *The Kick* is revealing both of Murphy's sexual desires and his shame about such desires, for example when:

> [Murphy] relates the incident in Piccadilly when, young and unemployed, he was trapped by a blackmailer pretending to be a policeman who

> accused him of being 'homosexual', a word he dreaded being applied to himself and even more for the repercussions for his family should his name appear in a newspaper. The internal division was indelible: he was a split personality compelled to live a double life, to seek furtive loves, to be other than he seemed, to pursue his own vocation and seek salvation in words.
>
> (Harmon, 2019, p.34)

Though Harmon's readings might be slightly overwrought, the notion of a 'split personality' is useful for working through the various 'personalities' of the 'sonnet-houses' of *The Price of Stone*; yet, as we shall see, the sexual politics of that sequence go beyond bisexuality to suggest that sexuality and gender intersect, and that sexuality is multi-faceted. *The Price of Stone* offers Murphy a poetic technique that channels what he describes in 'Transgressing into Poetry' as 'indirect or ventriloquised autobiography compressed into fourteen lines of rhyming or off-rhyming verse', which allows him 'to avoid embarrassment, for myself and for readers, of overtly confessional poetry' (Murphy, 2012, p.26). For Murphy, 'transgressing' is not so much blatant as apologetic, reflecting the hidden nature of his own sexuality and sexual encounters – and contrasting with the unapologetic tone of Morgan's 'Transgression in Glasgow' paper, which is more flamboyant and joyful.

Just as Morgan is arguably more comfortable with his 'English' inheritances than his (Anglo-)Irish counterpart, he appears to have less embarrassment concerning his sexuality than Murphy. In his 'Transgression in Glasgow' paper, Morgan likens the 'anarchic' spirit of Glasgow, where he lives, to a sexually liberal society, where he feels at 'home':

> There is something very Glaswegian about this constructively anarchic spirit. In a place with this spirit, poets can certainly live, gay poets among them.

> A place of many unexpectednesses, a place of street and the drama of the streets, a place of much tolerance despite its history of violence, a place of undogmatic bisexuality, which gives it a special flavour – these are all characteristics that I feel at home with.
>
> (Morgan, 1997, pp.380–381)

While the spaces of *Sonnets from Scotland* extend far beyond Glasgow – although it is a location for some of the sonnets, such as those that imagine Poe, De Quincey and G. M. Hopkins in the city (Morgan, 2020, pp.146–148) – the idea of a 'constructively anarchic spirit' is useful. We can consider the sequence as a whole as 'constructively anarchic', its eccentricity offset by its structural underpinnings. With characteristic optimism, Morgan even turns the 'violence' of the city into an ingredient giving Glasgow its 'special flavour' – so that 'undogmatic bisexuality' becomes part of the maelstrom, not through acceptance but because of multifariousness, or what Morgan calls 'unexpectednesses'. Morgan even suggests, through slightly ambiguous punctuation, that he feels just 'at home' with the 'violence' as with the 'bisexuality'. This ability to draw energy from even the most forbidding of scenarios recalls Donoghue's critique of Morgan's tendency to explore 'converted opportunities' in his sonnet sequence (Donoghue, 1985).

When we consider the sequences together, we realise that they have more overlaps than the apparently contrasting attitudes of Murphy and Morgan towards (bi-)sexuality would at first suggest. The constricted spaces and ventriloquistic models of the sequences allow for an exploration of ideas that call for a kind of concealed restraint. Harmon has argued of Murphy's *The Price of Stone* that '[v]entriloquism has a dual purpose in the sonnets. Buildings speak in their own voices but what they say expresses what the poet wants them to say; their objectivity is masked' (2019, p.27). In a linked claim, Gerald Dawe has contended that *The Price of Stone* almost literally holds its poet up, with the

sonnets 'form[ing] themselves into an architecture of love and imagined survival that withstands the inevitable ravages of time' (Dawe, 2019, p.53). Both Dawe and Harmon suggest that the structural endeavours of the sonnet sequence allow for an exploration of revelation and concealment, so that the sense of a confessional is really coming from the poet himself; as a result, the poems are 'obliquely confessional' (Johnston and Batten, 2006, p.373). In essence, they see the poet speaking back to himself; introducing *The Price of Stone*, Murphy tells us: '[w]hile examining my life, I tried to circumvent inhibition and embarrassment by addressing "myself" as "you"' (2013a, p.176). In this way, as Sendry argues, '[a]s the one who is spoken to, the poet in a literal sense objectifies himself, though he deals with states of intense subjectivity' (1985, p.48): subjectivity and objectivity therefore co-exist.

This scenario shares similarities with Morgan's narrative method in *Sonnets from Scotland*, which critics have seen as either dizzyingly brilliant or needlessly confusing. Douglas Dunn, for example, has argued that, the 'occasional uncertainty of the narrative technique', which veers between using first person singular and plural, and often 'speaks' also in third person, 'contributes to the slippery and sometimes puzzling nature of the sequence as a whole' (Dunn, pp.79–80). It is not an easy sequence to get to grips with, though Alan Riach provides a very helpful plot summary:

> Interstellar travellers arrive to explore Scotland, past present, future, actual, imaginary, ruined, razed, dystopian or illuminated, festive, self-determined, awakened from sleep by the call of a far horn over a land that lies still, there, present, waiting. At the end of the sequence they depart, but there is no ending any more than there was a beginning. It is all in process.
>
> (Riach, 2015, p.9)

If *Sonnets from Scotland* takes place in a temporal 'process', how does this affect our reading of its content? In a series of notes from Morgan's long-term editor Hamish Whyte to J. H. Alexander, Whyte challenges a suggestion that the 'content' of *Sonnets from Scotland* is 'hypothetical', giving as an example the sonnet 'The Poet in the City' (Morgan, 2020, p.155), which 'describes an actual meeting between the time travellers and "the poet" who is recognisably Edwin Morgan – a living, present poet – and who is of course their creator and "real" narrator' (Whyte, 1993). Whyte adds, 'the narrators need not be the same in each poem – there is no need to make everything fit into the "time-traveller" theme – the narrator could even be Edwin Morgan himself!' (1993). This sense of shifting narrative and poetic identities – moving between the 'time travellers' and 'Edwin Morgan himself' – builds within a sequence in which nothing is stable, and everything is in flux.

Returning to *The Price of Stone*, Murphy manipulates a similarly uncertain narrative method to explore ideas of 'love' as alternately familial and sexual, procreative and hedonistic; and to consider fidelity, honesty, loyalty, desire and shame. The various identities of the 'sonnet-houses' facilitate multiple responses to these topics. As Harmon points out, *The Price of Stone* was published against the backdrop of the AIDS epidemic (2019, p.29), a factor that is also true of *Sonnets from Scotland*. The concealments and revelations of the sonnet, within a longer sequence that can consider sexuality from various angles, make it an ideal form to explore 'sexual ambivalence' (Harmon, 2019, p.25). While critics have disagreed about what 'sexual ambivalence' might mean in *The Price of Stone*, what they do share is an acknowledgement of the complexities of the sequence's treatment of sexuality and gender. For instance, James B. Kelley discusses the 'cruising sonnets' 'Portico' and 'Gym' (Murphy, 2013a, p.197, p.183), noting that these sonnets, which appear early on, focus 'on the marginal spaces in which men cruise for anonymous sex with other men' (Kelley, 2019, p.225). These sonnets appear initially to be contrasted with the final two

sonnets, ‘Beehive Cell’ and ‘Natural Son’ (Murphy, 2013a, p. 225, p.226), which ‘extol heterosexual reproductivity’ (Kelley, 2019, p.225). ‘Natural Son’, the concluding poem, and the only one not to be voiced through a ‘sonnet-house’, discusses the birth of the poet’s son, and turns the ‘you’ from Murphy to the baby himself, dismissing even the ‘houses’ of the sequence as insufficient and adopting a first-person plural pronoun that appears to endorse heterosexual procreation. ‘No house we build could hope to satisfy / Every small need’, the speaker argues; ‘This day you crave so little, we so much’ (2013a, p.225, ll.9–10, l.13). The round end-rhymes of the poem (‘ward’ / ‘restored’; ‘womb’ / ‘room’; ‘much’/ ‘touch’) seem to strike a direct contrast with the more uncertain couplings of the ‘cruising sonnets’. For example, a particularly unpleasant rhyme is forced between ‘sauna steam’ and ‘jism’ in ‘Gym’, a sonnet that concludes in a stark couplet that rhymes ‘AIDS’ with ‘skin-deep masquerades’ (Murphy, 2013a, p.183), resounding in its hollowness.

Yet though *The Price of Stone* might be read as ‘tracing the development of the poetic self from sterility to fertility and from isolation to intimacy’ (Kelley, 2019, p.225), Kelley notes that it is actually complicated by a mid-sequence poem, ‘Convenience’, which poeticises the episode in Piccadilly recounted by Murphy in *The Kick* and discussed by Harmon (2019, p.34), when Murphy was blackmailed by a man masquerading as a policeman. In the sonnet, the ‘Convenience’ introduces itself as ‘The public servant of men’s private parts’ (Murphy, 2013a, p.207, l.1), so that, as Kelley puts it, ‘[t]he poem is left to speak for itself, and it does so only in a hesitant and ultimately cryptic manner’ (2019, p.233). Therefore ‘Convenience’ acts as counterbalance to both the furtive sexuality of the earlier ‘cruising sonnets’ and the procreative contemplations of the later ‘Natural Son’. ‘Convenience’ raises questions about the ‘tension and negotiations between extremes, among them the public and the private, the sense of innocence and of guilt, and the competing goals of exposure and concealment, self-expression and self-

restraint' (Kelley, 2019, p.225). In so doing, this particular sonnet, Kelley argues, acts as a metonym for the sequence as a whole, which might be seen 'as an extended meditation [...] on the tensions and negotiations of a self between multiple and conflicting needs, desires and ideals' (2019, p.237). Kelley's conclusion underscores the impossibility of reading the sonnet sequence as being, or meaning, just one thing, and stresses instead its multivocal equivalence.

A further critic, Ben Keatinge, has discussed *The Price of Stone* in terms of sexuality and gender, arguing that the two are intimately connected. Keatinge contends that there are overlaps between Murphy's Anglo-Irishness and his treatment of sexuality in *The Price of Stone*: though 'Murphy's dual identity intersects with his exploration of both hetero and homosexual identities in his poems', this 'exploration' includes 'other dimensions' that 'complicate this dualistic model' (2008, p.19). For example, while Keatinge notes how the 'early poems' of *The Price of Stone* describe episodes of 'casual homosexual encounter using a series of phallic monuments to emphasise sterility and a lack of issue', these episodes are complicated by the 'ambiguous gendering' of the 'sonnet-houses' themselves (2008, p.24, p.25). Discussing the first sonnet 'Folly' (Murphy, 2013a, p.177), Keatinge notes: '[t]he structure seems strangely de-sexualised, as if Murphy is fastidiously observing sexual identities rather than participating in them, a perspective which vies with his autobiographical investment in the (homo)sexual subject matter of these sonnets' (2008, p.25). Though Keatinge remarks that 'another side' to the sequence 'celebrates heterosexual love and rejoices in sensuality' (2008, p.25), the 'strangely neuter' quality of the poems lingers throughout, due to the ventriloquising of the (largely dispassionate) 'sonnet-houses'.

This 'strangely neuter' quality is shared by the discerning, poetic, but largely detached alien-narrators of Morgan's *Sonnets from Scotland*, who observe the activities of humans and animals from a distance, noting events that Hamish Whyte claims could take

place in the 'past, present or future or some point in between' (1993). Though unlike *The Price of Stone*, *Sonnets from Scotland* is not obviously sexual, in that it does not (clearly) depict human sexual activity, it does raise questions about gender, sexuality, and love. It is often difficult to make things out. Human figures are often alone, or in single-gender groups, recalling the suggestions of 'sterility' that have also marked readings of Murphy's sequence. Disasters happen, the world (possibly) recovers, humanity (possibly) moves on. The 'interstellar travellers' who witness it all are both supremely knowing and curiously innocent, narrating in English, Scots dialect, Latin and French – but doing so with an interested detachment. They too, like Murphy's 'sonnet-houses', are either gender neutral or do not prescribe to such anthropocentric norms.

Yet sex happens, often in unlikely places. For example, in 'Carboniferous', the second sonnet, the narrators, while out diving, witness sharks copulating:

> All we saw was the unsinister
> ferocious tenderness of mating shapes,
> a raking love that scoured their skin to shreds
> (Morgan, 2020, p.139, ll.9–11)

Here, the aliens' witnessing of the sharks' love-raking leads to a larger contemplation of human and animal love, the 'force' of which fills them with fear. The 'All we saw' reflects a bathetical attitude to events, which characterises the sequence as a whole – as if, in the wider context of the whole of universal existence, even apocalypse is something to note rather than to worry about too much. A later sonnet, 'Memento', adopts a panoptic vision – during which the travellers witness 'the pheasant's tryst / above the pines' – to couple copulation with the experience of time passing and moving on, 'over the hills and far away' (Morgan,

2020, p.143, ll. 4–5, l.13). The observations of animal copulation share similarities with Murphy's sonnet 'Rectory' in *The Price of Stone*, which describes how 'Bitches on heat can make mixed marriages' (2013a, p.296, l.10). Both Morgan and Murphy appear to anthropomorphise animal sexual activity to consider what Keatinge has described as the 'savage, Darwinian side of sexuality' in Murphy's nature poems; this enables a further exploration of the 'darker, primitive side of sexual experience' (2018, p.29, p.30).

Although both sonnet sequences appear to explore a variety of sexual encounters and experiences, a point of direct comparison between *Sonnets from Scotland* and *The Price of Stone* occurs in its single sonnets dedicated to male friendship – 'After a Death' (Morgan, 2020, p.153), and 'Tony White's Cottage' (Murphy, 2013a, p. 212) – both of which explore homosocial relationships. Murphy's 'Tony White's Cottage' uses the 'sonnet-house' of the cottage itself to reflect upon a friendship that was hugely important to Murphy, and which he commemorates in two longer poems, 'Tony White (1930–1976)', and 'Tony White at Inishbofin' (2013a, p.160, p.161). In 'Tony White (1930–1976)', it is White who is compared with a building, his solidity bespeaking his generosity and warmth: 'His granite chimney breast / Warmed friend or stranger at its open fire' (2013a, p.160, ll.7–8). In 'Tony White's Cottage' from *The Price of Stone*, the 'he' is White himself, as the cottage itself muses that 'Never to be finished was the work he'd planned' (2013a, p.212, l.1). This opening line is echoed in the final couplet, which repeats the idea but turns it onto Murphy himself: 'Never to be finished was the life you'd planned / To spend near him' (2013a, p.212, ll.13–14). This hint of homosocial proximity is gently transgressive, finding commonalities with Morgan's sonnet 'After a Death' (2020, p.153) from *Sonnets from Scotland*, which although critical of the friend left behind, similarly contemplates what might have been:

Five years ago he lost his friend, without
him he struggles through a different fable.
(Morgan, 2020, p.153, ll.3–4)

Both sonnets, then, contemplate the intimacy of male friendship, and the cruelty of the ending of that friendship – but in ways that tell such 'fables' anew, whether through the knowing intimacy of the 'cottage' in Murphy's poem, or through the more complicated perspective of Morgan's sonnet, which castigates the 'poet' of the poem for not having been a better friend, and for only now contemplating the significance of their friendship, once 'love lies in earth in cold Carluke' (2020, p.153, l.14). In some ways, these sonnets are even braver than the more obviously sexual sonnets, as they explore the intimacies that can arise from male friendship. In both sonnet sequences, Murphy and Morgan use varying narrative perspectives and identities to explore the multifariousness of sexuality and sociality, suggesting that no story is ever straightforward. As a result, in various ways, the sequences become sometimes gently, sometimes flamboyantly, transgressive.

Conclusion: beyond national poetics

That Donoghue's 1985 review of 'Ten Poets' did not remark upon the similarities between *Sonnets from Scotland* and *The Price of Stone*, despite its commentary on each sequence individually, arguably points to a larger issue: a tendency to read Irish and Scottish poets solely within their own traditions. Though more comparative readings of Scottish and Irish poetry have emerged in recent years, the choice of subjects for such comparisons has sometimes been confined to canonical or historical figures. For example, Richard Barlow's recent monograph *Modern Irish and Scottish Literature: Connections, Contrasts, Celticisms* makes excellent strides forwards in offering comparative readings, but its emphasis on 'Celtic' overlaps and shared histories means its choice

of subjects is necessarily limited, focusing on the influence of Ossian on Irish writers Owenson, Yeats, Joyce and Beckett; on Celticism in the works of Gregory and Macleod; on Joyce and Scott; on MacDiarmid and MacLean; and on Heaney, the North and Scotland (Barlow, 2023).

A less recent essay collection, Mackay, Longley and Brearton's *Modern Irish and Scottish Poetry*, is much broader in scope, encompassing Gaelic poetry, the poetics of Irish and Scottish place names, and Irish and Scottish poetry magazines, among many other topics (2011). In so doing, the collection tries to correct the fact that 'connections or disconnections between modern Irish and Scottish poetry have been more assumed than analysed' (Longley, 2011, p.4), but it is also concerned with the fact that 'poetry, however revisionist in implication, still shoulders the national burden' (Longley, 2011, p.7). Longley suggests that '[i]deally, Irish-Scottish comparisons' should 'shake up the aesthetic landscape. They may offer clarity where nationality has poetic meaning, and where it obscures other kinds of meaning' (2011, p.16). This essay has explored two sequences by two poets where the 'national' element often imposed on, and shouldered by, their verse has led to constrictive and ideological readings – readings that have 'obscured' the ways in which their poetry extends the 'nation' as a concept and as a boundary.

One hindrance to a comparative reading is the outsider status of Richard Murphy, a status which is often maintained by critics. Until recently, Murphy was rarely brought into comparison with other poets. Keatinge's edited collection *Making Integral* counters this trend by including essays that identify connections between Murphy and his contemporaries; therefore, the collection includes Mark Wormald's piece on Murphy and Ted Hughes (Keatinge, 2019, pp.163–182), and Eve Cobain's essay on 'Richard Murphy's America', which discusses Robert Lowell and Theodore Roethke in particular (Cobain, 2019). Keatinge's own essay from the collection stresses the global parameters of Murphy's work, with its focus on Murphy's Sri Lankan poems in relation to Irish postcolonial studies

(2019, pp.238–252). Yet, as Moir points out, 'Murphy's Anglo-Irish background is [still] sometimes used to explain away the relative lack of critical attention his work receives' (Moir, 2019, p.149), reflecting claims such as those made by Johnston and Batten, that Murphy's 'poems enforce the sense that he is an isolated figure, the last Anglo-Irish poet of the planter caste whose poems focus from a controlled distance' (2006, p.149). Eve Cobain reads beyond these biographical parameters, noting that the transnational nature of *The Price of Stone* – moving from Ireland, to England and beyond, and particularly in a journey back again to Ireland via a ship as described in his sonnet 'Liner', (2013a, p.193) – means that 'the sonnets, along with their related commentary, represent a widening in Murphy's perspective' (2019, p.198). This 'widening' perspective is further strengthened by Murphy's poems set in Sri Lanka between 1985 and 2021 (Murphy 2013a, pp.229–241). Cobain concludes that 'throughout his career Murphy was intent on establishing a transnational conversation' (2019, p.202), therefore using his own experiences as a global traveller to mediate between Ireland and the rest of the world.

Turning to Morgan, we can see how *Sonnets from Scotland* urges its readers to reconfigure the idea of the 'national' in relation to Scotland, while considering Scotland's global possibilities. The sequence encourages a perspective that looks beyond the realities of Scotland in 1984 and considers it instead as a place, and space, of potential. We might think particularly of 'The Coin' from *Sonnets from Scotland*; here, the interstellar traveller picks up a coin that has 'Scotland' on one side and 'Republica Scotorum' on the other: the narrators tell us that 'the shock of Latin [...] sent across / such ages as we guessed but never found' (Morgan, 2020, p.160, ll.7–8). What does the Latin tell us about the 'Scottish Republic' that is mentioned on the coin? Has such a 'Republic' come and gone? Are we in a place of possibility or one of post-apocalyptic uncertainty? The poem ends with characteristic optimism, arguing that 'Yet nothing seemed ill-starred. / And least of all the realm the coin contained' (p.160,

ll.13–14). We are in a space, then, which is all potential, the 'realm' following its own course according to the prevarications of history. In so doing, the poem seems to answer, in microcosm, Cairns Craig's claim that:

> In *Sonnets from Scotland*, Morgan found a form in which his resistance to Scotland as a non-entity, his commitment to Scotland as an entity, could, through many metamorphoses, reveal Scotland as a nation full of potential awaiting realisation, rather than a nation in apparently terminal decline.
>
> (2015, p.86)

This striving beyond the realities of the now – this view of Scotland as 'full of potential' – does not leave the 'nation' behind but instead refigures its possibilities, seeking to 'free Scotland from the weight of nominalisation', in Kinloch's formulation (2020, p.74). Morgan is broadening our understanding of what 'Scotland' might mean, and seeking new definitions.

As a poet who was more central to tradition than Murphy, Morgan did not encounter the 'outsider' readings that Murphy faced; nevertheless, he experienced the kinds of ideological readings of his poetry that confronted all Scottish poets. Such readings were generated by rather narrow opinions of what 'Scottish' poetry should look like, what its politics should be, and what language it should use. A new approach to reading Morgan was underscored by Alan Riach's 2015 edited collection *The International Companion to Edwin Morgan*, which both highlighted the international importance of Morgan's work and suggested that by expanding our understanding of what Scottish poetry might look like Morgan's work 'opened up new possibilities': as Riach puts it, 'for Morgan, the most essential motivation is exploration' (2015, p.xiv, p.1). This 'exploration' might be ideological, poetic, or even literally universal, as in the case of the interstellar travellers of *Sonnets from Scotland*. To strengthen Riach's argument, Craig contends that the tendency to read Morgan as anti-Scottish

thanks to his use of English (and other languages), his interest in other cultures, and his arguments with the 'language poets', (dis)misses the fact that Morgan sees the international 'not as an escape from Scottishness but its fulfilment', therefore 'fold[ing] internationalism back into the national' (2015, p.69). Even in his translation work, Craig argues, Morgan was not carrying out 'the verbal equivalent of exile' but instead 'infusing the national territory, the national psyche, with virtues, with literary opportunities that it might not have had' (2015, p.75). We might consider how, in *Sonnets from Scotland*, Morgan almost literalises his admittance of a 'secret and passionate sympathy with the alien poet' (2002, p.ix), as the 'aliens' themselves become the poet-figures, observing, translating and recording Scotland for us – so that we can view Scotland anew.

In *Sonnets from Scotland* and *The Price of Stone*, Morgan and Murphy confront the challenges of national ideology, and their attendant political and cultural expectations, to create sonnet sequences that are both superficially conformist – in their use of traditional forms – and profoundly transgressive, undermining, questioning but also suggesting new ways of looking at their respective national traditions. Both poets advocate, through these sequences, a reconsideration of what 'national' poetics might mean, and therefore embrace the possibilities of the transnational and the international. In reading the works together, we can see how they answer Longley's challenge to find 'other kinds of meaning' within Irish and Scottish poetry (2011, p.16); but we can also see how these sequences extend beyond the parameters of their 'national' traditions.

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Both Scottish poet Edwin Morgan and (Anglo-)Irish poet Richard Murphy transgressed poetic norms: contradicting the self-declared 'nationalist' poets of their respective traditions, making playful use of English language, and treating gender and sexuality in daring ways. These topics (and more) are analysed creatively in their sonnet sequences *Sonnets from Scotland* (1984) and *The Price of Stone* (1985). In *Sonnets from Scotland*, Morgan uses the figure of the alien-as-narrator to comment on Scotland – past, present and future – as a national and even post-national entity. Meanwhile, Murphy's *The Price of Stone*, published a year later, reveals the ambiguities and hypocrisies in Irish culture's often monolithic focus on Catholicism, nationalism, and heterosexuality. In both sequences, the poets use ventriloquism to vocalize multiple perspectives: whereas Morgan channels the viewpoints of aliens newly arrived in Scotland, Murphy speaks 'through' the houses and structures of *The Price of Stone*. Although both sequences have received critical treatment, they have not been analysed in tandem. By pivoting away from dominant critical narratives that have tended to read their poetry according to their respective national identities, and by offering a comparative, transnational reading of the sequences instead, this paper offers fresh readings of the poems – and the poets – which open up the critical discourse.

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