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Images of Ireland: Gender, Post-Colonialism
and the Neo-Celtic Revival

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Ireland has long been regarded as a ‘feminine’ nation and this paper examines the way in which images of Ireland’s ‘femininity’ are re-presented in an award-winning advertisement for Caffrey’s Irish Ale. Informed by post-colonial literary theory, it argues that Caffrey’s neo-Celtic commercial may be helping redefine the nature of late-twentieth century ‘Irishness’, but it relies upon regrettably androcentric iconography of Irish womanhood. Caffrey’s depicts women as ‘elsewhere’, as the silent Other who cannot speak for themselves. Thus by representing a brand of male bonding, the brand reinforces the bondage of Irish women.

INTRODUCTION

Ireland is a text written by men, for men. Like nation states in general and ‘colonial’ states in particular (Britannia, La Semeuse, Mother Africa etc.), the emerald isle has traditionally been portrayed as a woman (Kibert 1996). Although variations on this female archetype date from the very dawn of civilisation – Earth Goddess figurines were uncovered in the earliest city states of the neolithic Near East (Cotterell 1988) – the Irish equivalents were articulated, codified and popularised during the Celtic Revival of the late nineteenth century (Regan 1995). A cultural efflorescence that not only complemented but cemented the political-cum-economic struggle to break the Anglo-Irish imperial connection, the Celtic Revival was shaped by men. And that shape was woman. Women, admittedly, played a prominent part in the struggle for Irish independence. Maud Gonne, Constance Markievicz and Hanna Sheffy-Skeffington are just some of the better-known activists. Yet, as Yeats’ timeless play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, perfectly demonstrates, women were written into the text of Irish nationalism; they did not write the text itself (Cairns and Richards 1988).

The purpose of the present paper is to offer a post-colonial reading of this gender-nationality dialectic as inscribed in a television advertisement for Caffrey’s Irish Ale. It commences with a lightning sketch of the often fraught relationship between gender and Irishness; continues with a summary of literary theory, post-colonialism and the reading process; culminates in a post-colonial feminist interpretation of Caffrey’s (award-winning) andro-Celtic advertising text; and concludes with a brief discussion of gender, post-colonialism and what we term the neo-Celtic revival. This paper, it must be stressed, does not aim to rescue Irish womanhood from the coils of crass commercialism, it simply strives, in keeping with post-colonial discourse, to give voice to the hitherto excluded, occluded and marginalised; to temporarily reclaim the occupied textual territory that is Erin; to provide insights into the peace-processed project of re-reading and re-writing Irish identity; and, by raising consciousness of the androcentrism that inheres in the neo-Celtic revival, to create conditions conducive to the possibility of change.
THE QUIET WOMAN

As noted in the introduction, ‘it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of the idea of land and sovereignty conceived in the form of a woman’ (Cullingford 1993: 57). And Ireland has long been regarded by its imperial masters as feminine, as the ‘other’, as an object of study, a body of knowledge, assembled and given shape by men (Boehmer 1995). From the very outset, the colonised Irish nation was defined in opposition to eighteenth century Enlightenment perceptions of rational man. Ireland was a weak, ineffectual woman (country) that needed to be controlled by a strong, resolute man (Britain). The Irish were defined in ‘feminine’ terms by numerous commentators of the period, notably Matthew Arnold and Ernest Renan, who pronounced that the Celts were an essentially feminine race. When the Celtic race was described in affirmative terms, for example, when their sensitivity, their ethereal qualities, their affinity with nature, their otherworldliness, were extolled, these merely served to emphasise their impractical, feminine nature, and, worse, their emotional and mental instability, their unfitness to govern themselves, and their revolutionary potential (Cairns and Richards 1988).

As Irish nationalism emerged in the late-nineteenth century, moreover, the identification of Ireland with the ‘feminine’ continued, and indeed was embedded in the cultural narrative of Irish nationalism, but this was problematic for the makers of the new Ireland. On the one hand Celticism was viewed in affirmative terms as a powerful means of asserting difference from its colonial oppressors. But being a Celt clearly had a negative side, given its identification with the feminine, and this was deemed inappropriate for an oppositional discourse that needed to be suggestive of masculine domination, agency and power (Cairns and Richards 1988). Just as British imperialist discourse described Ireland as feminine and therefore inferior, dependent and weak, so too Irish nationalists took up a compensatory and exaggerated masculinity - albeit a feminised masculinity - and were unsure whether to worship or revile those women who espoused the cause of Irish nationalism. Although the complex interpenetration of Irish femininity and masculinity produced some bizarre juxtapositions, such as the Molly Maguires, a band of freedom fighters who dressed as women, Kiberd (1996) argues that the colonial projection of despised ‘feminine’ qualities on the Irish race ultimately led to a diminishment of womanhood at home. Despite the political fervour of the Inghinidhe na hÉireann (‘Daughters of Erin’), The Cumann na mBhan (‘The Society of Women’) and the personal charisma of individual female activists, Irish nationalists were often unnerved by their ‘manly’ and ‘martial’ rhetoric and demeanour (Kiberd 1996: 398). After the Civil war and particularly with the rise to power of Fianna Fail in the 1930s, women were no longer considered relevant to the project of shaping the new nation, and Irish womanhood was again consigned to ‘the other’, as ‘site of contest rather than agent of her own desire’ (Kiberd 1996: 407).

The tensions between nationhood and gender are played out most vividly perhaps in cultural representations of Ireland and Irishness, many of which portray Ireland in Romantic, ‘feminine’ terms. For example, W.B. Yeats, in his role as leader of the nineteenth-century Celtic Revival, regarded the Irish nation as manifestly feminine, albeit his earliest Celtic writings challenged the negative connotations of the identification of Irishness with the feminine, the inferior and the subordinate. Drawing on Irish myths, legends and folklore he reinvented Celtic Irishness (the feminine) in oppositional terms to the Anglo-Saxon (the masculine) and in a wholly positive way. For him the Celtic nation represented sensitivity, brilliance and turbulence, springing from an excess of culture and civilisation, not a lack of it. (Howes 1996; Welch 1993).
Seamus Heaney's work also illustrates how gender and nationality are inextricably entwined. 'The feminine element' he wrote, 'involves the matter of Ireland' (Cairns and Richards 1988: 144). Heaney genders and sexualises the creative process itself, his skills as a male poet being used to shape and master the fluid, bog-like protean darkness of his creative urges. Woman is nature, the earth goddess, to be brought to heel by art and culture. She is a facilitator, a muse, to be shaped and formed by men's creative actions. In both colonial and postcolonial terms, she remains a territory to be possessed (Lillington 1995).

_The Quiet Man_ is yet another obvious example, of course, with its evocation of Romantic primitiveness, rural simplicity, Celtic passion and humour, and its archetypal Irish colleen. Idyllic images of Ireland's Edenic primitiveness, which had been used to justify colonial oppression, thus came to be embraced by the Irish themselves and indeed appropriated by both those within and those outside of Ireland engaged in a discourse to re-define Irish cultural and national identity. Romantic cultural nationalism remains, therefore, an important aspect of Ireland's post-colonial identity-constructon (McLoone 1995) and, as Caffrey's arresting television advertisement amply testifies, it continues to resonate. The romanticisation of Ireland goes hand in hand with the romanticisation of Irish womanhood, of Irish nationhood, an on-going cultural project to define both, which merely serves to reinforce the gender dichotomy which continues to persist in Ireland's cultural fabric.

**LITERARY THEORY, POST-COLONIALISM AND THE READING PROCESS**

A decade on from Stern's (1988a,b) pioneering endeavours, literary criticism has established itself as an integral part of the postmodern 'turn' in marketing and consumer research (Sherry 1991, Belk 1995). Manifold schools of literary theory, ranging from New Criticism to Reader Response (Scott 1994; Stern 1989), have been applied to manifold marketing artefacts, from new product development to advertising and promotion (Heilbrunn 1996; Mick and Buhl 1992). Invaluable though these and countless other analyses have proved, there remains ample scope for additional research. Apart from the pressing need to apply lit-crit concepts to the marketing literature itself, several items of literary criticism have yet to be appended to the consumer research agenda (see Brown 1997, 1998). Tabling such suggestions, admittedly, raises the spectre of postmodern dilettantism — our task is simply to work our way through the lit-crit inventory — but post-colonialism occupies a particularly prominent place in the contemporary critical pantheon and simply cannot be ignored. Indeed, at a time when consumer researchers are increasingly cognisant of multi-cultural concerns (e.g. Costa and Bamossy 1995; Joy and Wallendorf 1996; Shultz _et al_ 1994), it is nothing short of astonishing that post-colonial literary theory has yet to be embraced by the academic marketing community. This reticence may well reflect the hegemony of American marketing discourse - our field remains somewhat reluctant to attend to the journals, texts and voices of those outside the US academic system - but the silence speaks volumes about the very marginalisation process that post-colonial criticism strives to foreground.

Recently described as one of 'the most popular of the new literary approaches' (Eagleton 1996: 204), post-colonialism involves questioning the universalist claims made on behalf of the western intellectual tradition (Barry 1995; Newton 1997). It contends, in effect, that western standards are not timeless, nor absolute, nor incontrovertible but an instantiation of imperialism (often inadvertent imperialism, but imperialism none the less). At the same time, it celebrates the indigenous approaches, perspectives and traditions suppressed or marginalised by the colonial power. Epitomised by the critical endeavours of Edward Said
post-colonialism is as much a reaction to as a rejection of the colonial inheritance. On the one hand, it involves the reclamation of local, regional and national forms of expression, combined with a critique of canonical caricatures of the ‘native’, the ‘oriental’, the ‘exotic’. On the ‘other’ hand, post-colonial discourse does not constitute a complete break, since it invariably employs (or, rather, deploys) the ‘mother’ tongue, comprises a conversation with the ‘centre’ and, by its very existence, forces the colonisers to reflect on, and possibly foreshadow, their own colonialism (Boehmer 1995).

Although post-colonial criticism is primarily concerned with what could be termed ‘the white man’s literary burden’ - that is, the textual intercourse of imperial powers and their alien retainers - it has also been applied in less canonical contexts (Ashcroft et al 1989; Bennett and Royle 1995). Examples include the US ‘colonies’ as literary subaltern, the miscegenated texts of African-Americans and, as shall be discussed in detail below, Anglo-Irish discursive co-dependency. Striking parallels between post-colonial and feminist literary criticism have also been observed – metaphors of the core/periphery, dominance/dominated, coloniser/colonised stripe are all too readily transferable – and various hybrid positions have started to emerge. Consider, for instance, the ‘doubly silenced’ dilemma of post-colonial women, gays, subcultures and so on. As Williams and Chrisman (1993) make clear, any discussion of nationality or ethnicity is also (since women are the ‘biological carriers’ of the race) a discussion of gender and sexuality.

The essential point about these parallels, alliances and incipient creolisations is that they all comprise situated critical positions. Post-colonial critics do not speak with a single voice; single voices speak post-colonial criticism. Hence, our interpretation of Caffrey’s award-winning commercial valorises the voice of someone who is simultaneously an Irishwoman, a feminist, a worker, a mother. An Irish feminist working mother. Clearly, such single-voicedness can prove somewhat unsettling for marketing and consumer researchers, as it privileges the interpretation of an individual critic (producer) over those of the readership (consumer), and carries connotations of the controversial subjective personal introspection procedure, for good measure (Gould 1991, 1995; Holbrook 1995; Wallendorf and Brucks 1993). However, this approach is very much in keeping with lit-crit tradition, which has long favoured the feuilletonist (the rise of reader-response theory notwithstanding), and indeed continues to do so in the shape of autobiographical or confessional criticism (Simpson 1995; Veeseer 1996; Webster 1996).

CAFFEY’S IRISH ALE: STRONG WORDS, SOFTLY SPOKEN

Product Background and Promotional Campaign

Launched on St Patrick’s Day 1994, Caffrey’s Irish Ale has proved to be an outstanding commercial success. By combining the best features of lager (light, cool, refreshing) and more traditional Irish beers (mellow flavour, creamy head, slow to settle), the product not only melds old and new in a strikingly original manner but it has completely reinvented and revitalised the moribund British-Irish ale market. Sales quickly rose to more than £1 million per month (so rapidly, in fact, that the dedicated brew-house couldn’t cope with the demand); the number of public houses selling Caffrey’s on draft increased from 1,300 to 15,000 in three short years; it has been launched in several international markets including South Africa and Australia; and, thanks to innovative widget technology, canned Caffrey’s is proving equally popular in the competitive take-home sector. Caffrey’s, admittedly, has not succeeded in repulsing the invading beerbarian hordes – expensive imported lagers like
Miller, Bud and Molson's - yet, despite a plethora of me-too product launches by rival brewers, it remains the market leader in the UK's rapidly growing 'premium ale' segment.

Alongside its remarkable product attributes, Caffrey's has been supported by an extensive, expensive, brilliantly executed promotional campaign. Encapsulated in its evocative strapline, 'Strong Words, Softly Spoken', the brand's identity is predicated upon authentic, traditional, fin de siècle Irishness of the Celtic Revival. Naturally, this is an entirely ersatz Irishness, since it is a completely new product (albeit the Caffrey's brand name dates from 1897 and there was indeed a local brewer called Thomas R. Caffrey). As the original Celtic Revival was no less ersatz, however, Caffrey's can hardly be criticised for expropriating the always already expropriated (though it's neo-Celtic androcentric iconography is an entirely different matter).

Caffrey's promotional campaign extends across the entire media spectrum from billboards and magazine ads to money-off vouchers and a range of tie-in merchandise (sweat-shirts, cardigans, bomber jackets etc). More importantly for our present purposes, the centrepiece of the campaign is a seventy second television and cinema commercial, entitled New York. Made by a leading British advertising agency, with cinema-quality production values evident in every frame, it consists of a series of fleeting, fragmented, highly allusive images of four young Irishmen depositing themselves in a pub, an Irish pub, in contemporary New York City. When the leader of this pack utters the magic words 'give us a pint of Caffrey's there, please', he is transported back to the emerald isle of the Irish imaginary - an all too brief pastoral interlude of lakes, mountains, bogs, boats, horses, dogs, dads, mothers and flame-haired colleens - before being re-deposited in the bottle bank (the bankers draught?), of the Big Apple. As our post-colonial reading reveals, however, this undeniably arresting but hopelessly O'Topian advertising text, regurgitates extant gender stereotypes and re-inscribes the subordination of Irish women.

[video insert]

Strong Words, Softly Spoken

The funky opening chords of that American classic, 'The Harlem Shuffle', set the scene: yellow tax cabs, four young men walking alongside one another down a city street, looking around them, laughing, masters of all they survey, like a rock band, modern day heroes, slightly wild, slightly dangerous, the journeying questers of male mythology (Cullingford 1993). One looks like Che Guevara, one wears dark glasses, one has dark, flowing locks; the fourth is not yet visible to us. There are flashes of unpeopled cityscape, of tall buildings, then we're in a crowded bar and see the barman, fat, pasty-faced, middle-aged, cigarette behind his ear, calling out orders, an American. We see a plump, middle-aged bar-woman, improbably dark hair swept up off her forehead in a lacquered roll, saying 'we need ice baby', in a drawling American twang.

The first glimpse of Caffrey's on draught. One of the young men leads his friends through the crowded bar. He is a vision of long, dark hair, fine, sensitive features, a dark Adonis, a Byronic hero, moving slowly, dreamily, through the mass of people. The music has by now become a driving, repetitive, rhythmic beat. In contrast to this vision of male perfection we encounter an ageing glamour puss: blonde bouffant, diamanté earrings and necklace, leopard-skin print coat, black elbow-length gloves, saying 'so I could make my point'. Then we see a morose elderly man in profile, beside him a flash of cleavage. The
individuals we see, their age, their harsh accents, their ordinariness verging on ugliness, contrast with the fine young men moving amongst them, dreamlike, different, together.

Our first close up of the hero follows, playing pool. He’s lean-faced, with a long, stubbled chin; brown haired, of melancholy demeanour, an Irish wolfhound in human form. He wears a brown leather jacket and speaks in a soft Irish brogue, his voice lilting, pleasing to the ear, in contrast to the harsh American accents around him: ‘12 ball all the way down there’. He’s serious, intent. Despite the noise, the jostling bodies, he’s focused on the pool table, about to demonstrate his talent. A fat elderly man with moribund features sits against the wall, shirt buttons fit to burst as they strain over a beer-belly. The ageing glamour girl complains: ‘it was 12 o’clock at night!’. Meanwhile the Irish wolfhound, our Celtic dreamboat, prepares to hit the ball. Clearly a man with a mission this, who takes his pool seriously, unlike one of his friends, weak-chinned, coarse-mouthed, ordinary-looking, who is staring transfixed, mouth agape, at an attractive, smiling game show hostess on a TV screen; ‘the power of television is a fascinating thing’ he drawls in a deadpan American voice.

Our hero strikes the ball. We have a quick flash of a young attractive, unsmiling, pony-tailed barmaid, then a black man says ‘Othello is behind the curtain’, another fragment of conversation to add to the eclectic mix. Our hero strikes the ball again. Byron stands beside the scoreboard, saying ‘you cheat, I cheat’, matter-of-factly. Snatches of conversation, glimpses of faces, talking heads, jostling bodies - the scenes are clearly framed within an anti-urban discourse of alienation, materialism and disharmony (Williams 1973). We return to the pretty barmaid and glasses being washed. The plain one, clearly the buffoon, the joker in the pack, says something amusing to Che. Our Celtic hero, a suggestion of a smile on his face, says in slightly reprimanding tones, ‘we’re trying to play pool here boys!’ Such dedication, such concentration; clearly this man is oblivious to the clour, the noise, the shenanigans, the urban grotesquerie all around him. The tousle-haired barmaid has now inexplicably livened up and is gyrating, arms aloft, in time to the driving beat. The joker, open-mouthed yet again, watches her strut her stuff and can’t take his eyes off her. Nor can the other men lined up along the bar, who by now are rocking backwards and forwards in time to the music, egging her on, enjoying the show. Shake, shake, shake, shake your tail feathers baby.

Except our Celtic hero, of course. As the jester sips from a fresh pint of Caffrey’s, the hero’s Caffery’s, we presume, he comes alongside him and looks at him in disgust: ‘thanks a bunch’. This guy is clearly on a different plane from the mere mortal men around him, immune to the obvious charms of loose women displaying themselves, above the lusts of ordinary men; all he is interested in is his pool and his pint. The joker, somewhat abashed, beer foam dripping from his upper lip, shuts his mouth, as our hero calls ‘Give a Caffrey’s here please!’ The last word rings out, echoes, and the music changes to the melodic, evocative strains of romantic, haunting music, music that evokes Ireland and Irishness. A pint of Caffrey’s Irish Ale fills the screen, in shades of brown and cream, slowly settling, and then the camera circles round from the profile of our hero to full-face and behind him are the green fields of Erin.

We see an old boat, abandoned in a field; a dimly lit, rural pub, apparently deserted except for an old man in a cloth cap, his greyhound standing in front of him, who slowly turns his head to look out the window. Perhaps he’s thinking about the world beyond his world - the world beyond his pint, his drinking companion, his dog. Still lifes of rural Ireland, calm and gentle images of peace and quiet. In time-lapse motion now we see the sunlight
flitting between scudding clouds, dappling the Irish landscape, almost surreal, yet recognisably of Ireland.

And then a very different image of womanhood from the ones we’ve seen up to now appears before us, flickering images recalling stills from an old cinecamera reel, emerging out of the mists of time and coming into focus. She materialises before us, a beautiful young woman, standing alone in the midst of an Irish bog, a romantic image that traditionally represents Ireland and the desire for a free nation (Howes 1996). She has long, untamed, auburn hair; brown clothing; a long, loose coat flapping about her, cloak-like. A woman born of Ireland, clothed in its colours, the earth, the land, our land, Ireland. She is Maeve, goddess of the land, symbol of nationhood, of Ireland’s struggle of shake off the yolk of its colonial oppressors (Cullingford 1993). We see her face, her pale skin, then she is walking away, but she turns to look at us, pale, strands of hair falling across her face as she does so, her expression sad, perhaps reproachful. Is this the girl he left behind him? Is this his spéirbhean, at once desirable and chaste, waiting for her lover to return to her?

We’re in the dark pub again and see a very different face, an old man’s time-worn, solemn face, and then both old men are revealed to be sitting together on the wooden pub bench, silent, the only movement being the hand of the first man as he strokes his greyhound’s back. We see an Irish village street, deserted, except for a race horse running down it, saddle-less, a vision of freedom, escape, of masculine energy, purpose and potency; a symbol of the adventurous male perhaps, the quester, an absent son. We see a middle-aged woman with wild black hair and fine features, beauty still discernible on her face, a shawl about her shoulders. She watches from her doorstep, the threshold of her world, as the horse with its elegant flanks and carefully clipped, gleaming body races past her. Is this our hero’s mother? She stands, forever fixed, forever stable, Mother Ireland herself, the motherland, that symbol of the integrity of the past, that icon of national values, that custodian of tradition (Boehmer 1995).

We’re transported back to our Celtic dreamer in the bar, a slight hint of a smile on his long, brooding face. He casts his eyes down to break the spell and return from his reveries, but the dreamlike mood continues. We observe his friends, two standing still, Byron passing behind them in slow motion, watching them, silent. Our hero raises his pint, mutely, intently. Finally we see the Celtic dreamer’s three friends, pints of Caffrey’s Irish Ale in hand, standing together but apart, wordless, facing us. Our hero’s Caffrey’s-induced epiphany has transformed his friends - nay, his brothers - into strong silent types, icons of ’90s masculinity, sensitive but sure, bound together by this rite of male bonding, this shared love of Caffrey’s Irish Ale. In many ways the scene seems to recall the triumph of the Celtic warriors of ancient times, whose strength depended on their separation, their going away from women, from their homeland; the Cult of the Mother in Ireland, the cult that worships woman, the land, nature, yet fears her power, the curse of the Goddess Macha, the Great Mother Goddess (Condren 1989). Our protagonist is clearly on a heroic quest for personal and cultural identity, a quest that is always away from his motherland, but one which forever takes him back, nostalgically, to the past (Boehmer 1995). He may not have his mammy, his da, his fair colleen, but what he has got is better: he’s got his personal quest, his brothers-in-arms, and he’s got his Caffrey’s Irish Ale. The latter has the power to summon up his loved ones to him, a Caffrey’s-induced return of the native to his mother country, dear ould Ireland, beautifully captured in the romantic images of ‘soft primitiveness’ which we see, images which deny the material of existence and instead seek to capture ‘an idealised essence’ (McLoone
1995), images which ideally suit the nostalgic mood that now prevails, a mood that captures the very essence of Irish cultural nationalism itself (Hutchinson 1987).

Yes, this is an Irish man's world, and women are where Irish men's women are so often found: at once adored and ignored, consigned to non-existence (Kennelly 1993). They are in our hero's head and in their place; forever separate, different, fearsome; untouched, untouchable; symbols as pure as the blessed virgin Mary herself; to be conjured up when the Celtic mood takes him and then put away again, forever enshrined in his Irish heart. An Irish colleen, alone on a desolate moor, calls his name, waiting patiently, as the women of Ireland have waited from time immemorial, for their men to come home, his long-suffering spéirbhean, whose narrative of suffering evokes Ireland's cultural narrative of suffering, of Irish nationhood itself (Cairns and Richards 1988; Howes 1996; Hutchinson 1987).

And what can bring the two very different worlds we see portrayed, the old, rural, romantised world of Ireland and the new, urban, materialistic world of America together? How can our Celtic hero recapture the essence of his motherland and revisit it in spirit, if not in flesh? Why, with a decent pint, of course, that archetypal symbol of Irish masculinity, of male blood brotherhood and bonding. With that and a few kindred spirits a man can recall his past; he can get in touch with his inner nature, the poet, the dreamer, the lover, the son. He's a creation of the discourse of Celticism after all, a man born into a country conceived in colonial discourses as feminine, a Celticism taken up and later abandoned by Yeats because it was effeminate, blurred and melancholy (Howes 1996), but which persists into present times, bound up as it is with notions of cultural and national identity. Yes, he's strong; he's an Celtic warrior; but he's born of a feminine race, with a tear ever ready to glisten behind his smile (Cairns and Richards 1988). He's got a soft Irish heart that can be opened by Caffrey's Irish Ale. Strong words, softly spoken.

DISCUSSION: SHOW ME THE HEGEMONY

By any reckoning, Caffrey's New York is a brilliantly made television advertisement. Cinematic production values, arresting visuals, evocative music and compelling strap line, interlarded with images from the primordial Irish stew of saints, scholars, myths and legends, combine to create a commercial of extraordinary power and award-winning effectiveness. Yet, in its depiction of gender, the ad reactives, reanimates, rearticulates and ultimately reinforces anachronistic androcentric archetypes of Irish womanhood, albeit within the broader cultural stereotype of Ireland as an inherently feminine nation. True, not every reader of Caffrey's New York would necessarily endorse the above interpretation - not least the primary target market - but the whole purpose of post-colonial criticism is to read au rebors (against the grain), to offer antithetical insights into literary (and non-literary) texts, to enfranchise the voices of the disenfranchised, to press the oppressed into self-serving service (Newman 1997). For feminist critics, furthermore, it is not enough to highlight the gender issues embedded in a text, and how we respond to it. The point, rather, is to change the world. It is in the activity of reading that literature is realised as praxis. 'Literature,' as Schweickart (1986: 39) expresses it, 'acts on the world by acting on others'.

Many, of course, might argue that Caffrey's New York is 'only' a commercial and not worth bothering about. However, as O'Guinn and Shrum (1997: 289) observe, 'what people watch on television appears to influence their perceptions of what the material world is like'. More to the point, perhaps, it is an award-winning commercial for a best-selling
brand that is frequently – indeed, incessantly – broadcast. It is targeted at young men, the future leaders, fathers, ambassadors and advertising executives of the nation, who will be responsible, in due course, for further dissemination of cultural, national and gender stereotypes. Most importantly perhaps, it is the sheer innovativeness of the ad that makes its reactionary representation of gender so disquieting. It is at once contemporary and nostalgic. It is effective and evocative. It is the acme of Baudrillardian simulacra (simulacme?), his image-matron writ large. It is also deeply and irredeemably misogynistic.

The staggering international success of Caffrey’s – an Irish brand, developed in Ireland by Irish marketing men (albeit refracted through the lens of a leading British advertising agency) – is emblematic of what may be termed the neo-Celtic revival, an economic, social and cultural efflorescence that is comparable to the Celtic Revival of the late nineteenth century. True, the ‘production orientation’ of the original revival (anti-commercial, non-materialistic, predominantly agrarian) stands in marked contrast to the ‘marketing orientation’ of the current recrudescence, where sales figures, merchandising receipts and commercial success comprise the most ‘authentic’ measure of national identity (O’Grada 1997; Waters 1997). Nevertheless, it is fair to infer that Caffrey’s, like Riverdance, Roddy Doyle or Van Morrison in propinquitous cultural spheres, both represents and is representative of late-twentieth century Irishness. It is helping create a new national baseline against which ‘Irishness’ is measured and which will doubtless be ‘debased’ in the fullness of time. As our post-colonial interroga­tion has shown, however, Caffrey’s portrayal of gender is predicated upon unregenerate, not to say neanderthal, notions of Celtic femininity: the antiquated dualisms of Madonna/Medusa, virgin/whore, venus/virago and sacred/profane, which are themselves situated within the broader dialectics of passive (female)/active (male), home (female)/away (male), urban (male)/rural (female), materialism (male)/spirituality (female), America (male)/Ireland (female). While women once again play a leading role in the neo-Celtic revival (female presidents, Enya, Moya Doherty, The Women’s Party and so on), they are expressed within, and enunciated by, a predominantly androcentric discourse. Their voce.s are sotto, their positions subservient and, like Ireland itself in the late-nineteenth century, they are still the colonised rather than the colonisers. Those exemplars of Irish masculinity, Pat Riauchy and Phil O’Centric, continue to strut across the Hibernian stage, albeit in ill-fitting New Man costumes.

If they weren’t so pervasive and long-established, the stereotyped grotesques in Caffrey’s New York could be dismissed as the primal dreams of overpaid, under-suckled advertising executives and yeast-infected, hop-a-long beer barons. Table 1, which comprises a counter-interpretation of our interpretation of the commercial, perfectly illustrates this particular perspective. (Incidentally, this reading of the reading is very much in keeping with post-colonial discourse, which emphasises multivocality, double-voicedness and what Said (1993) terms ‘contrapuntal criticism’.) However, the importance - in fact, the inirradiability - of such stereotypes inheres in their essentially hegemonic character. As Gramsci (1971, 1985, 1995) observes, it is necessary to distinguish between ‘civil’ and ‘political’ society, in so far as the former is composed of non-coercive units such as families, schools and works of literature, whereas the latter comprises potentially repressive state institutions like the police and judiciary. Cultural stereotyping operates largely in the civil domain; it is self-imposed and policed; and, by juxtaposing ‘us’ against ‘them’, it is transmitted by consent rather than domination (see Holub 1992). Compelling though Caffrey’s New York undoubtedly is, it perpetuates the hegemony of Irish masculinity, albeit a feminised masculinity, and reinforces the continuing subordination of Irish women. And it does so by stealth. Strong words softly spoken, indeed.
I agree very much with this insightful and descriptive interpretation which pinpoints the heroic and personal quest of our Caffrey’s hero as the core message behind this advertisement. Yes, in this respect it appears to be the Irish equivalent of a spaghetti western, updated for the nineties man, of course: strong, silent, handsome (but now clean shaven) heroes with a dash of enigma thrown in for good measure and ample amounts of (self)-control. And this is where I feel the interpretation is just a little bit overgenerous to the 25+ male creative director who almost certainly dreamed up the ‘plot’ for this ad, whilst sipping his sambucco in one hand, a mobile phone in the other. Basically it is the issues surrounding this implied self-control that I feel require a deeper analysis to better unravel the gendered notions that are conveyed through this advertisement’s message.

When you consider and analyse the way that the women are portrayed in the script, it becomes apparent that the ad itself is less about self-control for our hero and more about control of the feminine and, in turn, the female. Think for a moment of all the women and how they are portrayed. There is a sharp division in the way these images come across: American versus Irish. The American women are immediately held up to ridicule, the bar woman’s drawl and lacquered roll, the ageing glamour puss with her one-sided conversation, the vacuous game show hostess, the barmaid’s inexplicable gyrations. Transatlantic transience is juxtaposed against timeless tradition to illustrate the shrines within our Celtic hero’s heart, the strength of this roots (and of course, the strength of his character). The images of Ireland’s women stand starkly apart from the previously displayed triteness and trivia. Yes, silent (and silenced) the lover and mother, idealised, romanticised, haunting images of womanhood and, in turn, Ireland. But there’s something else important here, these are powerless figures; effigies that wait patiently, forever consigned to the past in our hero’s memory but always available, on tap even (like a Caffrey’s pint) to swirl through the mists of time, to reinforce our hero in his hour of need. This Celtic new man of the nineties, acknowledges his ‘feminine’ roots but keeps them firmly under his control, in his new life, his American life; a life where women aren’t quite so easy to control. This is the unreason that Aristotle attributed to women, this is the untameable wild side, nature out of control. And an Irish man, even a nineties one, only loses control for his drink not his women. So the message here is very much about bond branding, as opposed to brand bonding. It is about male blood brotherhood, all guys together, ‘recapturing’ the female essence: the appropriation of the feminine and its subjugation to the masculine. I see the strap lines from a slightly different perspective. The feminine medium of words has become masculinised, strengthened (strong words) its feminine essence redefined in male terms (softly spoken). This new nineties Irish man is most definitely a ‘wolfhound’ in sheep’s clothing. The subtext here, as our hero bonds with his fellow New Yorkers, is: “Listen guys and I’ll tell you how we Celts manage (without) our women”.

Caffrey’s, the drink for the man with the women who know their place.

CONCLUSION

Until comparatively recently, Ireland was a text written by men. Not only was it written by men, but Ireland was perceived in colonial and postcolonial discourse as ‘feminine’. Of late, however, Irish women have become increasingly active in re-reading and re-writing Ireland, and they are now part of the fragmented, unfinished process of Irish identity creation (Kiberd 1996). Writers such as Eavan Boland (1995:3) articulate the female voice to ‘strengthen by subversion’ how Ireland and Irishness is rewritten, and to ‘open a window on those silences, those false pastorals, those ornamental reductions’ that have confined women. As part of this on-going project, we have offered a post-colonial
feminist reading of an award-winning cinema and television advertisement for Caffrey’s Irish Ale. Conceived by men and targeting young men in Ireland, Britain and beyond, the ad appropriates androcentric iconography and, by offering a brand of male bonding, the brand reinforces the bondage of Irish women. It is not easy, admittedly, to shake of the shackles of hoary stereotype, but just as the Gaeltacht is a region of Ireland where Irish is spoken, so too a gyno-tacht, where women’s voices are spoken and attended to, is a laudable post-colonial aspiration. It would be arrogant to suggest that this paper has succeeded in establishing the gyno-tacht but, at a time of excessive neo-Celtic euphoria, it draws attention to the complexity of gender roles and identity formation in a post-colonial context.

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