

Writing *the*
IRISH WEST

ECOLOGIES AND TRADITIONS

Eamonn Wall

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PREFACE

It was late one afternoon in eastern Colorado. I was traveling with my family along the highway westward toward Denver when the decisive prod that got me started on the research and writing that culminated in this book was delivered—unexpectedly. We had been in the car for most of the day and were all looking forward to spending the night in a motel in one of the small towns where we habitually stopped on those Western sojourns. Given that we were westbound on Interstate 76, it was likely that we would stop for the night in Sterling though, if we pushed it, we might make it as far as Fort Morgan. We were all getting tired; however, we had been somewhat energized by the hour gained when we crossed the invisible line from Central to Mountain Time. Also, the gradual change in landscape brought on by the rising elevation—from Nebraska to Colorado—was for us, then living in Nebraska, a harbinger of holidays and adventures. We had entered the West.

How much longer could we hold out before stopping? Not much, I thought, when I looked at my companions in the car. They had faded into silence and had even turned off the radio, a sure sign of the kind of epic fatigue that sets in toward the end of long days on American interstates. Picking up on their mood, I began to think of how pleasant it would be to find myself in a simple roadside motel for the night, one with an outdoor pool, and close by a good local restaurant featuring hearty Western

dishes: meat, potatoes, salads, apple pie and ice cream. Wouldn't a beer be nice! As these thoughts grew stronger, I decided not to drive all the way to Fort Morgan; Sterling would be good enough. It was only another thirty miles. I looked out at the dry grasslands of eastern Colorado and sang my way onward.

That evening, it occurred to me that I had spent much more time in the American West than I had ever spent in its Irish equivalent. Arriving in the States as an immigrant and then living and working in Nebraska for eight years had opened up a new world for me, and it was one that I embraced eagerly. Whenever the opportunity presented itself, I had headed into the West. On these journeys, I was fortunate to have my wife, Dru, with me; she had traveled many of these roads previously and knew a great deal about their lore and histories. She had also read the books and understood the language of the land. My children were able to teach me the basic facts of American history and topography and provided all these trips with purpose—they were learning the language of their land. Over time, my knowledge of the American West deepened and broadened, and the more I witnessed it in person, the more I wanted to read about it when I got home from these road trips. Call it fate, luck, or accident, but I had managed to acquire some decent, firsthand knowledge of the American West. All the while, time passed quickly, happily, and, because I was a parent, unconsciously. On a deeper level, the American West had become part of my inner life: I loved it, thought about it, dreamed about it.

My engagement with the physical landscape of the West of Ireland, it occurred to me as I was singing toward Sterling that summer evening, was minimal when contrasted with my time spent in its American equivalent. In the Ireland I grew up in of the 1950s and 1960s, my family did not travel far afield: our given routes took us to the homes of relatives in County Wexford and, on occasion, to Dublin, to attend the Spring Show at the RDS and hurling matches in Croke Park. We did not know many people from the West of Ireland; indeed, Westport, for example, was as remote to us as Gdansk. Even though I had visited the Irish West several times before emigrating to the United

States in the early 1980s, my most telling encounters with it had been in the form of the books that I had read. On that late summer evening in Colorado, I pledged to myself to make an effort to understand the American West more thoroughly by reading deeply of its literature, while, at the same time, engaging with the landscape of the Irish West by sojourning there. Again, fate intervened. A change of job meant that I would be required to stay some part of each year in Galway and, simultaneously, my brother and his wife had moved from Dublin to Sligo, to settle near my sister-in-law's family, and they invited us to come visit them. Now, I had family in the West and, as a result, a sense of belonging.

This comparative study has grown out of my engagements with two Wests—the Irish and the American—and the “Western-ness” that they share. However, I have never tried to push comparisons beyond what is logical because, in some important respects, these Wests are quite distinct. What I have done is place texts side by side for analysis when warranted and reasonable. I have found that West of Ireland writers share much with their American counterparts. Moreover, it is clear to me that some of the theoretical approaches that have been developed for the study of the literature of the American West will be of great use to scholars of the literature of the West of Ireland. In writing this book, I have made extensive use of some of these theories and approaches, in addition to the more familiar sources from the field of Irish Studies. In a sense, my critical landscape is regional and international rather than national. I am interested in exploring connections between parts of different countries rather than between nations. Both writing and ecology, as will be evident here, are local activities that are internationally dispersed.

Because, to a great degree, the writers under consideration here are exploring landscape and place—in the largest sense—this study is frequently underlined by scholarship in the areas of ecocriticism and ecofeminism, particularly in the chapters on the work of Richard Murphy and Moya Cannon. In the chapter on Tim Robinson, William Least-Heat Moon's *PrairyErth*, Robin Jarvis's *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel*, and William J. Smyth's *Map-making, Landscapes*

and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland, c. 1530–1750 have served as both guides and totems in my exploration of Robinson's mapping of Árainn or Inishmore. Research on the poetry of Mary O'Malley led to an examination of the explosive growth of Western cities (Phoenix and Galway) and how this has influenced writers. In my discussion of the role that violence plays in the works of John McGahern and Martin McDonagh, I have been guided by the historical work of Richard Slotkin and Richard White. The chapter on Seán Lysaght's work, on the other hand, probes connections between poetry and science, another area where ecology and writing go in tandem. Occasionally, this research has allowed me to pair writers profitably: John McGahern and Owen Wister, Martin McDonagh and Sam Peckinpah, Richard Murphy and Gary Snyder, for example. But, more than anything, ecocriticism is at the heart of this study because ecological visions are at the heart of Western writing, both in the United States and in Ireland. For each writer under consideration here, being from, or associated with, the West is important and singular, though how this West is defined changes from one writer to the next, or from one book to the next, within an author's work. These seven creative writers are more concerned with showing the West than with defining it. At the same time, each one is involved in a dialogue with his/her literary tradition and is writing an ecological response to Western space.

In the United States, the West is defined geographically, at least by some, as all of those states situated west of the Mississippi River. Others will argue that it begins when one crosses the Missouri River, while a minority will provide other limits. And a few, dyspeptically, will claim that California is not a Western state at all! In Ireland, some will see the West as being synonymous with the boundaries of the province of Connacht, while others will include Donegal, Kerry, Clare, and Limerick. Of course, as writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa remind us, borderlands are often pressure points of creativity. In Ireland, the work of John McGahern might be claimed by both the Midlands and the West. For the purposes of this study, however, I have concentrated on the work of writers from Connacht. I have done so in the interests of an efficient completion of the project, though I am certain that, for

example, writers such as Brian Friel and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill do belong to the West.

In both America and Ireland, the Western regions are spaces of great beauty that share complex histories, and the works written by the seven authors under consideration here, from various perspectives and in multiple genres, arise from those parts of the physical and psychic landscapes where fissures have emerged. Literary and moral imaginations have been formed by interactions with place, space, and a natural world that exists in free play with the human. In both Wests, ecology is one of the roots of creativity. Today, in the United States, scholars write of the New West, defined, for example, by the growth of such cities as Las Vegas and Phoenix, and by such industries as the software design and computer manufacturing that have replaced agriculture and gold mining. Ireland also possesses a New West in which cities and towns have expanded enormously (Galway, Castlebar), and where old industries have been replaced by the new. These New Wests are explored by writers in both places.

The contemporary Western author, in both the United States and Ireland, writes in the shadow of giants—in the former, Owen Wister and Mary Austin; and, in the latter, Lady Augusta Gregory, W. B. Yeats, and J. M. Synge. In regard to the American West, Richard White has noted that “late-nineteenth-century Americans imagined the West—that most modern of American sections—as the pre-modern world that they had lost. In it, life was primitive but also simple, real, and basic. Every action in this world mattered, and the fundamental decisions of everyday life supposedly involved clear moral choices. Life in the West could restore authenticity, moral order, and masculinity” (619). In Ireland, during that same period, as Declan Kiberd has pointed out, a similar dynamic was at play:

The tramp or wanderer in Yeats’s poems is one who knows “the exorbitant dreams of beggary,” the relation between imaginative sumptuousness and material destitution. If Augusta Gregory was impressed on her visits to Galway workhouses by the contrasts between the poverty and the splendor of their tales, Yeats could see in these deracinated figures an image of Anglo-Ireland on the skids.

So did Synge, who signed his love letters to Molly Allgood “Your Old Tramp.” (*Irish Classics* 444)

Just as Gregory, Yeats, and Synge associated the poverty of local Westerners with creativity and (enforced) antimaterialism, so, too, did American writers make similar claims about indigenous Western Americans, “Hemingway’s appropriations of Indianness served to define and revitalize white manliness, a gesture whose genealogy can be traced, at least in part, to his western antecedent. . . . Like Hemingway, Mary Austin associated Indianness with authenticity and health, echoing Wister’s desire to infuse white American identity with ‘native’ status” (Tuttle 106). For Yeats’s beggar, we can substitute Hemingway’s Indian. Also, when Wister decries, in his 1895 essay “The Evolution of a Cow-Puncher,” “‘the encroaching alien vermin’ that infested the country and threatened to ‘degrade our commonwealth from a nation into something half pawn-shop, half-broker’s office,’” we are reminded of Revivalist ideology (Scharnhorst 116). As I demonstrate throughout this study, contemporary writers are engaged directly in intense dialogues with Revival writers, in part to debunk what seems unreal; though, more important to their shared purpose, are needs to define personal literary spaces that are in tune with their time in history.

Writing on the difference between local and national representations of the American West, White has noted:

The creation of an imagined West by those who lived in a place and sought to bond themselves to it seems readily understandable, but the creation of an imagined West by those who lived outside the West and have few or no ties to the place itself is more mysterious. Yet it is the critical issue, for the nationally imagined West has been far more powerful than the locally imagined West. It has, when necessary, put local traditions to its own uses and shaped local myths in its own image. (619–20)

In the Irish context, we can add international to national and agree that White’s thesis holds true. Perhaps no West of Ireland work has

been as widely disseminated or as influential in defining the region for audiences as John Ford's film, *The Quiet Man*. This same issue reappears in any discussion of Martin McDonagh's plays: his imagined West is the most powerful in terms of its popularity, though he is, of the seven writers considered in this study, the one who has spent the least time on the ground in the West. And, to muddy the waters a little more, Tim Robinson, who knows his area of the West better than anyone, is an Englishman. Unfortunately, essentialism has always played a role in literary discourse.

The men and women whose work is addressed here represent a mere sampling. Such has been the quality of important work produced in the West of Ireland in recent times that it would be a simple task to come up with alternative lists of writers for study, not to mention those who spend seasons in the West—summers, usually—and who have left us a wealth of distinguished material. In some instances, the conclusions reached might be similar; in others, they might be quite different. All the while, new writers are emerging throughout the West and insisting that their voices be heard. Absent from this study are the Irish-language writers who continue to occupy a prominent place. I had thought of including them; however, I found that my long absence from Ireland had degraded my ability to examine their work with confidence—my own Irish-language skills were not equal to the task. But, throughout this study, I have explored the role played by the Irish language in English-language texts. In addition to texts/authors directly quoted from or alluded to, the bibliography found at the end of this volume includes the works of other scholars whose books and articles have helped me to develop my own arguments.

Overall, my hope is that this study will persuade readers to think of the West of Ireland as a unique literary territory, where writers explore landscape and language and the human and nonhuman worlds with eyes fixed, simultaneously, on both the active world outside their windows and the inner world where tradition resides. The West is integral to Ireland, though also separate from the more abstract nation. The Western writer is always a Western writer first.

One

ADEQUATE STEPS

Tim Robinson's *Stones of Aran*

Tim Robinson's Aran Islands volumes, *Stones of Aran: Pilgrimage* (1986) and *Stones of Aran: Labyrinth* (1995), are two of the most celebrated texts to emerge from Ireland in recent decades and they have found favor and garnered influence across disciplines and readerships. Taken together, these companion volumes amount to an extraordinary and encyclopedic survey of Árainn, the largest of the Aran Islands, or Inishmore, as it is more popularly known. So wide-ranging are Robinson's objectives and interests that the reader will find multiple open doors to walk through from which he/she can begin a detailed analysis of the works themselves, and of Robinson's myriad achievements as an author. For the purposes of this essay, the following aspects present in *Stones of Aran* will be examined: the use of walking as an enabling and framing device; the issues that arise from Robinson's tangled relationships with cartography, various geographies, and debates over colonization and decolonization; the literariness of Robinson's texts and their engagements with the work of other writers who have also responded to Inishmore; the place that *Stones of Aran* occupies among writings produced by English contemporaries of Robinson who have also traveled overseas to

examine community lives in distant places; and Robinson's placing of *Stones of Aran* within the organic whole of his own life as a visual and verbal artist. Also, an attempt will be made to describe the overall shape and attitude present in his work. Central here will be issues of form and genre that *Stones of Aran* bring to light, and the many linkages forged between map-making and mapping, and writing. In *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara*, Robinson makes the following distinction: "accumulating impressions in a diary, I became a writer; and then, noting placenames and routes and locations on paper, a cartographer" (212). This is a guiding trope of his work. In addition, this discussion will range widely into the Anglophone world and beyond to address Robinson's achievements in relation to those of his contemporaries.

Inspired by Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1932), Robinson first came to Aran in the summer of 1972 and later lived full-time on Inishmore with his partner for a number of years, learning Irish, and becoming part of island society. At the suggestion of the postmistress of Cill Mhuirbhígh, who had noticed his "hand for the drawing, an ear for placenames and legs for the boreens," Robinson set about drawing maps of the island that would be useful to visitors (*Pilgrimage* 11). Before his arrival in Ireland, Robinson, who was born and raised in Yorkshire, had studied Mathematics at Cambridge and worked as a visual artist and teacher in Istanbul, Vienna, and London. Published in 1975, Robinson's first map found favor with islanders and tourists alike and brought him into contact with various experts who visited Inishmore and sought him out as a guide. From these experts and from his own readings, Robinson developed a deep understanding of the complexity of the topography of the island, and the various ways it had been layered by the passing of time. These contacts drew him deeper into its *dinnsenachas*, or lore of place. The more he learned, the more complex the island grew for him, and the more he doubted the simple tropes that underlined the functional maps he had drawn; clearly, there was more to a place than its roads, buildings, hills, and so on. Each road, for example, was nuanced and detailed, not merely a line drawn between settlements, Robinson discovered; and landscapes, as he points

out, “cannot themselves be shown or named,” for the minimal language of maps, not to mention the problematic nature of language, is never quite pliable enough to convey the ineffable spirit of place (*Pilgrimage* 11). He found, as Melville had before him, that maps can conceal more than they reveal: “It’s not down in any map; true places never are” (Smyth 54). To map Inishmore, or to *deepmap* it, to borrow William Least Heat-Moon’s term, would require a larger narrative structure than could be provided by “simple” cartography.

Throughout his work, Robinson is engaged in various negotiations with the principles of map-making (cartography) and mapping (geography) as intense as those already taking place within these disciplines themselves. From the outset, as a result of his training in the postmodern visual arts, and even before he knows better, Robinson is prepared to dispute received practice across a variety of disciplines. In this respect, his discovery of the limits of maps is similar to that articulated by the American writer Barry Lopez in *Desert Notes*: “Your confidence in these finely etched maps is understandable, for at first glance they seem excellent, the best a man is capable of; but your confidence is misplaced. Throw them out. They are the wrong sort of map. They are too thin. They are not the sort of map that can be followed by a man who knows what he is doing—the coyote, even the crow, would regard them with suspicion” (Least Heat-Moon 4).

Looking back, Robinson understood that his early maps were “preliminary storings and sortings of material for another art, the world-hungry art of words” (*Pilgrimage* 11). Like *PrairieEarth*, Least Heat-Moon’s account of the landscape of the Flint Hills of Kansas, Robinson’s *deepmap* of Inishmore is a prose narrative composed from disparate parts—a kind of bricolage—that looks toward literary rather than cartographic models for its form. Literary language, for all of its limitations, is the mode best suited to an intense examination that reaches for the totality of place. For Robinson, as for N. Scott Momaday in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, the writer, in order to succeed at the task, would have to devote all of his learned faculties to the landscape under review, and to listen to its many resonant voices. Here is Momaday’s injunction:

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk. (Least Heat-Moon 4)

To achieve his objective, Robinson first found it necessary to unlearn many aspects of his own cultural inheritance in order to hear the resonant, deep murmurings of place. Later, however, looking back, he would note the extent to which his Aran explorations had had their roots both in his own childhood and in aspects of the adult life he had led before arriving in Ireland. Also, like his American contemporary Least Heat-Moon, he would have to find an original narrative form for his *deepmap*, one that could somehow fuse together elements drawn from cartography, the various sciences, and literature. He would practice three arts on Inishmore — map-making, mapping, and writing, all three informed by his earlier years as a visual artist.

At the same time, Robinson must have felt singularly unprepared to perform the tasks at hand. Certainly, he was possessed of boundless enthusiasm and a sound education. However, he did not know the Irish language, nor was he conversant in the various disciplines that the job required: anthropologist, historian, folklorist, geologist, natural scientist. Also, how could an outsider — an Englishman, no less — find a way to penetrate Inishmore's oral culture where its maps are written the deepest? It seemed unlikely that one man could successfully duplicate the work of many, that Robinson could, in effect, become a one-man Clare Island survey transposed to late-twentieth-century Inishmore. Had not T. S. Eliot persuaded us that the Renaissance man, with his well-rounded store of knowledge, had disappeared in the early part of the seventeenth century? It was no longer possible, given specialization and the emergence of the various sciences, for one person to know everything required to comprehensively describe a place and its people,

and all that was connected to their history, however small or large that place happened to be. There is also an inherent element in the Robinsons' arrival on Inishmore of the 1960s hippie clarion call to get away from it all, of the naive departure from the anarchic and competitive city for the more wholesome and community-oriented remote island. Indeed, it is one thing to go to West Cork to make organic cheese, but quite another to travel unprepared to Inishmore to recreate the many-sided consciousness that the island has accrued from its pre-history to its present. It looked possible for Robinson to reinvent himself as a skillful map-maker; however, it seemed highly unlikely that he would be able to pull off his foolhardy mapping project. Yet, succeed he did, and magnificently so, on both fronts.

In recent decades, a good deal has been written in regard to the connection between walking and writing, with much of the primary focus being on the work of the Romantics, and on Dorothy and William Wordsworth, in particular. Most scholars have noted the shift that took place in the late eighteenth century when the perception of walking changed from a physical activity associated with poverty and toil to one connected with leisure and creativity. Morris Marples has pointed out that “poetry and pedestrianism seem very often to have gone hand in hand during the years when the influence of Wordsworth was supreme. They parted company as the nineteenth century advanced, and have only in a few special instances, such as that of Edward Thomas, been united again since those days” (67). And the Victorians, Marples points out, were prodigious walkers: “[Thomas] De Quincy calculated that by the age of sixty-five Wordsworth must have covered from 175,000 to 180,000 miles: he still had fifteen years of walking before him” (37). In America, we learn that two of Thoreau's most popular public lectures had walking as their subjects, talks that were eventually fused together into “Walking,” an essay published in *The Atlantic Monthly* just after his death in 1862. Thoreau wrote: “I think I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements” (294). In the twentieth century in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Walter Benjamin

reminds us of the extent to which the walker was also an urban figure, as does Raymond Williams in *The Country and the City*. Nowadays, in a practice rooted in Romantic ideology, walking forms part of the ecological consciousness and imperative—a good example of this being Gary Snyder’s essay, “Blue Mountains Constantly Walking” (Snyder 200–213). However, for the purposes of exploring the role played by walking in Robinson’s Aran books, the major supporting texts will be Rebecca Solnit’s *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (2000) and Robin Jarvis’s *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (1997).

In *The View from the Horizon* (1997), a backward look at his career, Robinson focuses on the “good step” and the “adequate step” as his guiding markers. He has articulated this at length:

But the notion of the adequate step, a momentary congruence between the culture one bears and the ground that bears one, eventually shatters against reality into uncountable fragments, the endless variety of steps that are more or less good enough for one or two aspects of the here and now. These splinters might be put together into a more serviceable whole by paying more heed to their cumulative nature, to the steps’ repeatability, variability, reversibility and expendability. The step, so mobile, so labile, so nimbly coupling place and person, mood and matter, occasion and purpose, begins to emerge as a metaphor of a certain way of living on this earth. It is a momentary proposition put by the individual to the non-individual, an instant of trust which may not be well-founded, a not-quite-infallible catching of oneself in the art of falling. Stateless, the step claims a foot-long nationality every second. Having endlessly variable grounds, it needs no faith. The idea of freedom is associated in dozens of turns of phrase with that of the step. To the footloose all boundaries, whether academic or national, are mere administrative imperinences. With this freebooter’s license there goes every likelihood of superficiality, restlessness, fickleness and transgression—and so, by contraries, goes the possibility of recurrency, of frequentation, of a deep, and even-deeper, dwelling in and on a place, a sum of whims and fancies totaling a constancy as of stone. (27–28)

From the outset, walking is the activity and trope that will frame the work. Instinctively, given his unpreparedness for his ambitious mapping project, Robinson has chosen the right approach, as Solnit reminds us: “The history of walking is an amateur history, just as walking is an amateur art. To use a walking metaphor, it trespasses through everybody else’s field—through anatomy, anthropology, architecture, gardening, geography, political and cultural history, literature, sexuality, religious studies—and doesn’t step in any of them on its long route” (4). Also, Solnit points out, “one aspect of the history of walking is the history of thinking made concrete—for the motions of the mind cannot be traced, but those of the feet can” (6).

Practically, walking was the only possible way for Robinson to examine the island in detail, to get to know it at the slowest possible pace, though, as Solnit reminds us, it was also the entryway for the amateur, his accidental method of transgression into the experts’ discrete spaces. In addition, walking immediately connected the process of discovery to that of writing—the literary work being formed, at its most basic level, by the space and the foot. In his thinking, Robinson found himself in distinguished company. Edmund Husserl, according to Solnit, “described walking as an experience by which we understand our body in relationship to the world,” something that dovetailed perfectly with Robinson’s ambition to replicate the seals’ engagement with their environment (27). And writing of Rousseau, Solnit argues:

A solitary walker is in the world, but apart from it, with the detachment of the traveler rather than the ties of the worker, the dweller, the member of the group. Walking seems to have become Rousseau’s chosen mode of being because within a walk he is able to live in thought and reverie, to be self-sufficient, and thus to survive the world he feels has betrayed him. It provides him with a literal position from which to speak. As a literary structure, the recounted walk encourages digression and association, in contrast to the stricter form of discourse or the chronological progression of a biographical or historical narrative. (21)

Even though Robinson does not, unlike Rousseau, believe that the world has betrayed him, he is, at the same time, a man who fled to Inishmore in 1972 from a London art scene in which he felt isolated. Inishmore provided him with a subject, and walking, with a mode. *Stones of Aran* is both chronological and associative: the geologic steps, for instance, are examples of the former, whereas the random nature of the landscape often calls for the latter. Like Joyce's *Ulysses*, to borrow Karen Lawrence's theory, *Stones of Aran* is another of those works that embarks on a formal and stylistic odyssey to be better able to respond to the imperatives of a changing and unpredictable landscape. In great part, *Ulysses* is shaped by Dublin; so, as the city turns, so does the novel. A similar dynamic is present in *Stones of Aran* and, because of this, Robinson, like Joyce before him, inherits an organic, though rudimentary form. Robinson's solitariness allows him to encounter place intensely, without interruption, while his detachment makes it possible for him to see these same spaces objectively—both as a scientist and as a writer interested in literary form.

Also, walking implies a faith in slowness, and it comes with a lack of ostentation: it is the ideal mode of progress—walking before running—for the beginner. It was also well-suited to Robinson's own temperament, innate abilities, and admitted weaknesses: "I cannot dance, perhaps because dancing takes place on the flat, on a surface that suggests no rhythms and leaves my will floundering in self-consciousness; instead I aspire to a compensating gift of walking, not in a way that overcomes the land but in one that commends every accident and essence of it to my bodily balance and understanding" (*Setting Foot* 5). Evident here is the connection between the physical body and the literary work, which illumines Robinson's prose and brings his reader into close contact with Inishmore. Also, we can trace a connection between walking and form. Just as walking across the landscape requires a series of realignments between the body and the terrain, so, too, must the literary form be aligned to account for the recorder's progress and discoveries. In this regard, *Stones of Aran* can also be profitably read in the light of Charles Olson's "Projective Verse," as both are focused on notions of space and accident. The more one thinks about *Stones of Aran*, the more clearly one can note its sophisti-

cation of purpose and execution and its alignment with Anglophone writing of the highest caliber. As is the case with *Ulysses*, *Stones of Aran* is another of those works informed and turned by random encounters with people.

Except for the recordings of personal epiphanies, Robinson's prose is plain and to the point:

I start at the eastern end of the island. The road from Cill Rónáin through Cill Éinne continues past the last village, Iaráirne, and then makes a sharp turn north to a little bay; there is a stile in the wall at that turn from which a faint field-path continues the line of the road eastward, across smooth turf in which hosts of rabbits are digging sandpits, to the exact spot I have in mind. Here one can sit among the wild pansies and Lady's bedstraw with the low rocky shore at one's feet, and get one's bearings. Behind and to the left is level ground of sandy fields, and dunes in the distance. To the right the land rises in stony slopes to the ruins of an ancient watchtower on the skyline. A mile and half ahead across the sound is Inish Meáin; the third island, Inis Oírr, is hidden behind it, but the hills of the Burren in County Clare appear beyond, a dozen miles away. Since the three islands and that north-western corner of Clare were once continuous—before the millions of years of weathering, the glaciers of the Ice Ages and the inexhaustible waves cut the sea-ways between them—the land forms visible out there, a little abstracted as they are by distance, can be seen as images of Árainn itself in the context of its geological past, and it is valuable to read them thus before going out on a clamber among the details and complexities of the way ahead, so that an otherwise inchoate mass of impressions may find an ordering and a clarification. (*Pilgrimage* 17)

Sentence structures are as variable as the seen world—short and compact at the outset, “I start at the eastern end of the island,” to longer and more meandering ones governed by semicolons and dashes, when the lens is widened to record a panorama. At the same time, Robinson's is a transgressive text—a walk across the garden of literary genres—that can play fast and loose with tradition, though for these turnings,

given his training as a visual artist, Robinson came well-prepared. At its most basic level, walking is the primary building block of Robinson's methodology and underlines his style. At the levels of form, diction, and syntax, his work exhibits what Jarvis finds will occur when walking and writing are aligned: "Beyond this, there are other formal characteristics of walking—irregularity of line, seriality and progression, non-synthesizability, and so forth—that one might expect would have aesthetic repercussions in some of the most sophisticated versions of peripatetic" (70). Even though Jarvis's analysis is supported primarily by his readings of the Romantic poets, Coleridge in particular, his conclusions are certainly applicable to Robinson's work.

Writing of William Hazlitt, Jarvis notes the degree to which, for him, walking was liberating: "for Hazlitt, walking unhinges the socially constructed and maintained self, places it in suspension, allowing the mind to become a screen on which the passing image is momentarily projected, overdubbed with ideas and memories generated according to associationist principles" (193). Similarly, Robinson is allowed a similar type of suspension, a *tabula rasa* on which to record his Inishmore engagement, and a formula to make it work: "I had a formula to guide me and whip me on through the thickets of difficulties I encountered: while walking the land, I am the pen on the paper; while drawing this map, my pen is myself walking the land. The purpose of this identification was to short circuit the polarities of objectivity and subjectivity, and help me keep faith with reality" (*Setting Foot* 77).

At a deep level, he felt it necessary to erase huge parts of his inherited worldview to arrive at the blank slate that would be the starting point for his Aran adventure. To some degree, as Robinson points out, this choice was made for him: "If so drastic a step as abandoning a career and a home, each of them close to a sort of cultural centrality, for an unknown language, an untried art and 'a wet rock in the Atlantic' is not sufficient to shake one's deepest vocabulary, then where is there a possibility of self-transcendence?" (*The View from the Horizon* 16). Starting out, he had no sense that his work would ever be published. Attached to this, whether intentional or not, is a definite Zen consciousness. Think of Japhy Ryder in *Dharma Bums*—"The

closer you get to real matter, rock air fire wood, boy, the more spiritual the world is”—and of Gary Snyder, the real Japhy, in another context—“This is Zen. To give a hundred percent and know it does not matter” (Solnit 146). Robinson knew that his work might never find a readership, but he was undeterred because, at the very least, it promised him the possibility of forging for himself a more intense engagement with Inishmore, its past and its present. *Stones of Aran* is process- rather than end-driven, concerned with establishing a fine attentiveness, facilitated by walking, and with drawing the reader into the objects of the landscape in which its spirits reside.

It is an epiphany, that most literary of inventions, that sets Robinson on his journey. One summer’s day on Inishmore, he saw two or three dolphins cavorting close to shore, so he waded out among them “until they were passing and repassing within a few yards of me” (*Pilgrimage* 12). Robinson noted the ease with which the dolphins inhabited their world: “Yet their unity with their background was no jellyfish-like dalliance with dissolution; their mode of being was an intensification of their medium into alert, reactive self-awareness; they were wave made flesh, with minds solely to ensure the moment-by-moment reintegration of body and world” (*Pilgrimage* 12). At first, the dolphins’ grace and connectedness to their world left Robinson feeling despondent: he thought that he could never experience such an intense degree of engagement with *his* world. Then, thinking of language as a vehicle for delivering to others our knowledge of the world, he realized that it might be possible for a man on Inishmore to replicate some parts of his own sense of belonging to a place: “A dolphin may be its own poem, but we have to find our rhymes elsewhere, between words in literature, between things in science, and our way back to the world involves us in an endless proliferation of detours” (*Pilgrimage* 12).

Thus persuaded, Robinson set out to create his *deepmap* of Inishmore, and his search for an overarching form is similar to what Least Heat-Moon searched for, and found, for *PrairyErth*:

I am standing on Roniger Hill to test the shape of what I’m going to write about this prairie place. For thirty months, maybe more,

I've come and gone here and have found stories to tell, but, until last week, I had not discovered the way to tell them. My searches and researches, like my days, grew more randomly than otherwise, and every form I tried contorted them, and each time I began to press things into cohesion, I edged not so much toward fiction as toward distortion, when what I wanted was accuracy; even when I got a detail down accurately, I couldn't hook to the next without concocting theories. It was connections that deviled me. I was hunting a fact or image and not a thesis to hold my details together, and so I arrived at this question: should I just gather up items like creek pebbles into a bag and then let them tumble into their own pattern? Did I really want the reality of randomness? Answer: only if it would yield a landscape with figures, one that would unroll like a Chinese scroll painting or a bison-skin drawing where both beginnings and ends of an event are at once present in the conflated time of the American Indian. The least I hoped for was a topographic map of words that would open inch by inch to show its long miles. (15)

Least Heat-Moon's area is larger than Robinson's—Kansas's Chase County is thirty miles long north to south, twenty-six miles east to west on the south border, and a mile shorter on the north, whereas Inishmore is similar in size to the island of Manhattan, and Robinson's work is shaped differently. *PrairyErth* is formed and shaped by alternating chapters in which the author's narratives are preceded and followed by excerpts from various texts—literary, historical, folk, scientific, governmental, and so on. The reader is guided through these chapters and asked to forge his/her own connections. Unlike Robinson in *Stones of Aran*, Least Heat-Moon in *PrairyErth* does not seek an encyclopedic view of the place under examination; however, he does suggest, persuasively and quite beautifully, that the Flint Hills are so complex that such a view could be easily entertained. Throughout, both men touch on and explore what is on and under the landscape, literally as well as metaphorically. The deep-rooted circular motion that Robinson describes is also important to Least Heat-Moon. *Pilgrimage*, the first part of *Stones of Aran*, is a procession around the perimeter of Inishmore, that pays homage to ancient and enduring traditions:

The circuit that blesses is clockwise, or, since the belief is thousands of years older than the clock, sunwise. It is the way the fireworshipper's swastika turns, and its Christianized descendent St. Bridget's cross. Visitors to holy wells make their "rounds" so, seven times with prayers. This book makes just one round of Árainn, though seven could not do justice to the place, and with eyes raised to this world rather than lowered in prayer. On Easter Fridays in past centuries the Aran folk used to walk around the island keeping as close to the coast as possible, and although nothing has been recorded on the question it is inconceivable that they should have made the circuit other than in the right-handed sense. This writing will lead in their footsteps, not at their penitential trudge but at an inquiring, digressive and wondering pace. (*Pilgrimage* 17)

Least Heat-Moon finds in *Black Elk Speaks* the following adage: "The Power of the World works in circles, and everything tries to be round" (215). The circular notion of time is explored by Peter Matthiessen in *The Snow Leopard*, another of the texts quoted by Least Heat-Moon: "Since concepts of Karma and circular time are taken for granted by almost all American Indian traditions, time as space and death as becoming are implicit in the earth-view of the Hopi, who avoid all linear constructions, knowing as well as any Buddhist that everything is Right Here Now. As in the great religions of the East, the American Indian makes small distinction between religious activity and the acts of everyday; the religious ceremony is life itself" (Least Heat-Moon 604).

For the Aran Islanders, who have fused the pagan and Christian together psychically and ceremonially, the circular motion of the walk around the island is a living link to their ancient past, where the circular was a privileged pattern, while the transubstantiation underlying the Catholic Mass is both ceremony and life itself. Walking combines the practical and the sacred; in fact, often one cannot exist without the other. For Robinson's purposes, given the nature of Inishmore's topography, walking was the necessary mode of discovery (he often bicycled to the point where his walking began), but it was also a mode that allowed him to step, quietly and reverently, onto the

body of the island where he could listen to all that had accrued in its resonant heart. In *Pilgrimage*, he meanders around the coast recording and interpreting what he finds. In *Labyrinth*, he attempts the even more complex task of mapping the interior. For Robinson, Inishmore will not only be surveyed in its own right, but it will also serve as “*the exemplary terrain*” that informs our knowledge of the world as a whole, the little informing the large, the micro the macro, and vice versa (*The View from the Horizon* 25–26).

By laying down specific markers, such as the six ways that walkers experience landscape, Jarvis is able to draw connections between the act of walking and its role in the creation of literary works. He notes that the pedestrian’s experience of landscape “is a *participatory* rather than a disinterested one”; that his/her “experience of the world is a slowly but continuously changing field of appearances”; that “the volitional character of walking” can clear the mind of the detritus of everyday life; that the walker will “at best feel equal, and often unequal, to his/her surroundings” though never their master, as a motorist might; that as a result of his/her walking pace, the “pedestrian is more alert to the multiplicity of appearances and the particularity of actual landscapes”; and that the walker’s “dominant mental state is towards . . . the ‘progressional ordering of reality’” (67–70). Clearly, all of these generalizations can be seen as underlying elements that make *Stones of Aran* succeed as a literary work. Also, they form Robinson’s attitude toward Inishmore. He is intensely involved in his work while, at the same time, he maintains a level of detachment to ensure that the primary focus is on place rather than on its recorder, and what he encounters is as constantly changing as the ground under his feet. What is written follows the chosen order of the walk; therefore, it is modest in attitude but detailed in its bulk, a record of one man’s fine-tuned attentiveness. Walking also serves, as Jarvis has pointed out, to clear the mind of what has been problematic and painful; in Robinson’s case, his dissatisfaction with the London art scene. We can say, therefore, that *Stones of Aran* is concerned with both walking and walking away.

In a detailed examination of a passage from Coleridge’s prose, recounting his Harz mountains tour of 1799, Jarvis notes the lack of

“separation here of mind and body” and observes his “body [responding] to the altering health of the mind, visual and aesthetic stimuli apparently bringing revitalization of the walker’s battered ‘frame,’” a mode of action and recognition that is also present in Robinson’s work (132–33). Also, both Coleridge and Robinson use various geometric figures, such as cones, to account for the variability of their respective landscapes. Moreover, Robinson, formerly a mathematician and visual artist, draws such figures and includes them throughout his work. As already noted, he prefers walking on uneven ground to dancing on a level surface, the former suiting the rhythms of his body, and this is also true of Coleridge, who preferred “‘walking over uneven ground’ . . . a landscape that offered resistance to the body-in-motion” (Jarvis 134). Coleridge, often the most troubled of men, “found this infinity of perceptions exaggerated by the sensuous experience of pedestrian travel, and seems to have found it exciting and therapeutic, a temporary escape from the ‘unrelieved pain’ of existential isolation,” which corresponds to what Robinson has written about his removal from London (Jarvis 135). For both men, as Jarvis points out in regard to Coleridge, walking in a new place was liberating:

Annihilating the present tense is also to remove the ground of stable selfhood, suspending the subject between difference and deferral, memory and anticipation. However much Coleridge may have yearned for secure anchorage in his personal life, there was a parallel and contrary need to remove himself from all localizing, defining associations and commitments, to re-experience what he calls (in reflecting on his passion for solitary travel) “a sort of *bottom-wind*, that blows to no point of the compass, & comes from I know not whence, but agitates the whole of me.” (Jarvis 135)

There is a similar dualism in Robinson’s life, though it does not present itself as a dichotomy in the manner of Coleridge’s. For Robinson, it was the secure anchorage of his personal life — his relationship with his Irish-born partner Máiréad, who is constantly extolled in his books and with whom he also shares a business partnership in the Folding Landscapes publishing house — that brought him to Ireland. At the

same time, it is equally clear from *Stones of Aran* that Robinson is, in large part, a solitary man who has spent long periods of time wandering alone through the Irish West. For both Robinson and Coleridge, walking must be as solitary as writing. For Coleridge, walking was a means of separating himself from society; for Robinson, walking has remained a mode of entering into a new society, a way of connecting with another set of individuals and the place they have marked and defined with their lives and traditions. It should be noted, however, that his most recent book, *Connemara: The Last Pool of Darkness* (2008), a journey from Killary Harbour to Slyne Head, is the most sociable work that he has published to date.

It would be unwise, as Jarvis reminds us, “to expect that all these qualities of ‘the mind of the walker’ will be comprehensively encoded in every piece of walking literature from the Romantic period onwards,” and it would be even more foolish to claim that *Stones of Aran* is a book *about* walking Inishmore—it is not (70). For Robinson, it is a means to an end, one governed by necessity: going on foot was the only method of progress available to him. At the same time, Jarvis presents a great deal of compelling evidence, from such prosodic theorists as David Abercrombie, R. H. Stetson, and others, to show the extent to which the writing of prose is connected to, and even derived from, the movement of the body. Equally, Robinson’s notion of the “adequate step” (24) is a metaphor, but it is also the literal connector between methodology, body, and prose. Instinctively, he certainly knew where he was going.

When his career is taken as a whole, Robinson will be seen as both a map-maker and a mapper. Generally speaking, his narrative volumes comprise the latter, with his work published by Folding Landscapes accounting for the former. In *Stones of Aran*, maps of Inishmore, the Aran Islands, Galway, and Clare are included at the end of each volume as part of the scholarly apparatus, seeming to carry a weight equal to the volumes’ index, acknowledgments, and references. From this secondary positioning, they do not appear to be central to Robinson’s explorations; instead, their presence is intended as a guide to orient the reader. The maps seem, as Robinson has articu-

lated, inadequate when contrasted with his complex text and, perhaps ironically, even highlight the issues of omission that the text seeks to address. But both text and maps are interdependent: one cannot be read without the other. It would not have been possible for Robinson to proceed without the work that already had been undertaken by the Ordnance Survey, and this dependence drew him into the mire of colonial history, into issues and principles raised and contested within the disciplines of cartography and historical and cultural geography.

As has been already suggested, *Stones of Aran* is a transgressive text, and no more so than in respect to the inroads it makes into various academic territories. It should become clear, however, from an examination of some of the major contemporary debates taking place within the disciplines of map-making and mapping, that *Stones of Aran*, the contribution of an outsider, has been a prescient and timely work, and that Inishmore is an exemplary space for the laying out of often contending theories and approaches. As he crossed the landscape/space of Inishmore, Robinson not only walked its roads, paths, and fields but also crossed headlong into the centers of many raging debates in the field of geography. At the same time, it will become evident that Robinson's practice intersects with those of other geographers (cartographers, and cultural and human geographers in particular), such as Brian Harley, John Mannion, William J. Smyth, John Szegö, and Kevin Whelan, many of whom are also his contemporaries. *Stones of Aran* is a meeting text where contending views are subliminally aired and where Robinson achieves the sage synthesis that is at the heart of his work.

In *Mapping: Ways of Representing the World*, Daniel Dorling and David Fairbairn note that "the discipline of geography has had a long association with colonization and empire building, but it is also possible to argue that cartography has had an even deeper involvement than this. The writer who has opened up this field more than any other, Brian Harley, saw maps as weapons of imperialism which were at least the equal of guns and warships" (73). Like Robinson, Harley was the product of an English grammar-school education who went on to university and helped to redefine many aspects of the field

in which he worked. As is the case in literary studies, where sharp divisions between scholars allow texts to be read in often mutually exclusive ways, so, too, do geographers respond to various geographic phenomena differently, with many of these newer modes of interpretation emerging in recent decades and having their roots in like ideologies:

Beyond mere description, post-war geographers up to the 1960s attempted to discern order and establish rules governing spatial behaviour. Such universal laws were to be obtained by scientific investigation and to be rendered using mathematical and geometric language in a positivist manner. The neutrality of the observations undertaken by such “spatial scientists” relied on the notion of closed geographical systems within which humans operated, and the constrained nature of the map sheet and its stylized representation of reality proved the ideal source for initiating and conforming hypotheses. Of course, this view was forcibly challenged by Marxist geographers and others from the 1960s onwards who argued that such contextual issues and modifiers as social, economic, and political must be introduced and be part of the process of creating maps. These scholars reminded us that the making of maps is a subjective process and that the cartographer must carry with him an active store of received knowledge, or even bias, which will invariably find its way on his map. (Dorling and Fairbairn 2)

As Dorling and Fairbairn point out, this process has continued without pause; and we have now arrived at a point where, with the addition of feminist, social theoretical, structuralist, and other viewpoints, it is no longer possible to argue for the “prevalence of one particular paradigm” (2). In this respect, the recent history of cartography and geography mirrors that of literary studies where a similar reaction to literary formalism, called the New Criticism, erupted around the same time and was quickly challenged by even newer theoretical approaches to textual analysis. In both disciplines, it seems no longer possible to arrive at consensus. At the same time, there are aspects of the study of geography on which scholars do agree:

This lack of coherence in geography masks a fundamental observation that, although maps are viewed differently by different geographers, mapping is a vital geographic technique of study and maps are a primary tool. Some geographers (notably Hartshorne) have, in the past, considered that maps define the very nature of geography. All schools of geographic thought call attention to mapping as a geographic method. Indeed, it is so important to geography that mapping as a technique and the map as a tool are often the most critically analysed features when paradigm shifts occur in geography. (Dorling and Fairbairn 2)

Indeed, as Dorling and Fairbairn remind us: “Just as societies and civilizations vary enormously in their essential characteristics, so [do] their map representations vary—in purpose, scale, content and conceptions of accuracy. The physical creation of maps which embody the ‘world-view’ of such societies is the process of *map-making*. This can be distinguished from the mental interpretation of the world which is termed *mapping*” (3).

This distinction is not unlike the paradigm in literary studies, where the strict formalist, for example, will direct the reader to focus exclusively on the poem’s inner workings, while his/her opposite will claim that no work can be read in this way because all works depend on their contexts (political, social, gender, etc.), and these contexts must underline any discussion of a work’s value. However, just as map-makers and mappers depend on, and must begin with, the map, so, too, must literary scholars begin with the text. It is a prerequisite for scholars in both fields to be able readers of maps or poems in order to progress in any direction. Ideally, it would seem to me, the scholar should be able to read on multiple levels while remaining doctrine-neutral to all of them, because this will encourage an open mind. However, to those with horses in these various academic races, such a view will be considered naive, at best. Coming from outside the academy and lacking the strict training and sense of demarcation that it imposes on the professional student as a kind of article of faith, Robinson was able to blaze an original, though risky, path. He was entering the temple to lecture to the elders.

Robinson's relationship to map-making is complex, though it intersects with current cartographic theories in various ways. Taking a backward glance at his completed work in *Setting Foot on the Shores of Connemara*, he noted that "the making of a map, I soon found out, is many things as well as a work of art, and among others it is a political, or more exactly an ideological, act" (3). Following Harley, Robinson sees his own work in its political-postcolonial context: "the project I thought of as political, in that it aimed to undo some of the damage of colonialism and to uphold the local and vernacular against the leveling metropolitan culture of our times. But inevitably it was also a rescue-archaeology of a shallowly buried sacred landscape" (*My Time in Space* 95). He quickly understood the colonial push of the nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey, as clearly as Brian Friel had in *Translations*: "I am acutely aware of the fact that cartography has historically been associated with conquest, colonization, control. The Ordnance Survey was a function of the army. Therefore I have taken care that the mapping I have been essaying for the last quarter-century or so in the West of Ireland be one that returns the territory mapped to itself, to its inhabitants, and that I hope is not subject to the reproach of Éirú" (*My Time in Space* 99).

At the same time, like all map-makers and mappers, he has recognized and is thankful for the work produced by the Ordnance Survey, not least for the additional labor that it spared him from having to undertake:

But I have not set myself up as a regional rival to the official map-makers, the Ordnance Survey, and this for two reasons. First, I need the Ordnance Survey's topographical accuracy as a basis for my own constructions of these landscapes; I do not want to spend my life remeasuring the toothy perimeters of these tiny fractions of geography, and my net is spread to catch other features of the world, including the otherworld itself as it shows itself through folklore and legend in this one. And secondly, the usual conventions of map-symbolism—the precise-looking smoothly sweeping contours, the generalized colour-coding of areas for height or vegetation cover,

the hard-and-fast line of high water mark, to mention but a few, all useful in particular contexts—add up to a spurious claim of universality and objectivity, and I am ready to trade in some of this scientific legibility for a measure of freedom of expression, for room to doubt. (*Setting Foot* 212)

He, too, like his academic colleagues, stresses the interdependence that must bind together those men and women in the discipline. But Robinson also admits that “although [I have] been making maps for a dozen years now, cartography, in the sense of a general desire and competence to make maps, remains alien to [me]” (*Setting Foot* 75). For him, a map is also “a sustained attempt upon an unattainable goal, the complete comprehension by an individual of a tract of space that will be individualized in a place by that attempt” (77). Nor is he much interested in maps from a technical perspective: “I’m not very interested in maps from the technical point of view, so I will be brief on how I went about producing this one, and move on to the more interesting questions of what it is like to make a map—insofar as I can untangle my memories of the process—and why maps are, finally, so unsatisfactory. For if cartography is not necessarily more helpless than other modes of representation in the face of the world, it has its own characteristic failings, which the blanks on a map, essential to its legibility as they are, reveal with disconcerting candour” (*Setting Foot* 78).

Despite a facility for drawing and his continuing work as a map-maker, Robinson understood that the large scale of his endeavor—“a rescue-archaeology of a shallowly buried sacred landscape”—could not be achieved by means of map-making alone. To work toward his ambitious end, he would need to resort to extended narrative; maps, however, could provide a series of useful signposts and starting points. In order for him to challenge the veracity of maps, he had to first understand how they worked, and this he accomplished by making them. His views, and how he went about his *deepmapping* of Inishmore, echo the sentiments of Doug Aberley, the western Canadian geographer, who believes that “the making of maps has become dominated by specialists who wield satellites and other complex machinery. The result

is that although we have great access to maps, we have also lost the ability ourselves to conceptualize, make and use images of space—skills which our ancestors honed over thousands of years. In return for this surrendered knowledge, maps have been appropriated for uses which are more and more sinister” (Dorling and Fairbairn 141). By walking Inishmore and recording its presences, ancient and modern, Robinson seeks, as Aberley enjoins us, “to conceptualize, make and use images of space” (Dorling and Fairbairn 141). For Robinson, the term “space” recurs in his life and work—in the title of his autobiography, *My Time in Space*; and in his area of activity: “‘landscape’ has during the last decade become a key term in several disciplines; but I would prefer this body of work to be read in the light of ‘Space’” (*Setting Foot* vi).

It was not until 1973 that the International Court of Justice eliminated the legality of the “concept of *terra nullius*, which was used to justify the westwards expansion of the United States of America, the settlement of Australia and the colonization of Africa,” itself a theory of space similar to that faced by the writer and artist (Dorling and Fairbairn 88). Quickly, Robinson learned how full of signs and symbols was this empty space. In his visual art and writing, the canvas or page facing Robinson is only superficially blank—it is quickly encoded by the artist’s/author’s personality. The landscape of Inishmore—or its space, as Robinson would prefer—had already been heavily encoded by colonization, and it was one of the purposes of his *deepmapping* to give voice to those elements that had been removed.

In addition, the direction of Robinson’s work reflects the principles set out by Common Ground, an organization founded in London in 1983 and facilitated by Harley’s work, whose motto was “Know Your Place—Make a Map of It.” This successful initiative placed non-experts at the center of map-making, devolving the discipline in interesting ways. Further, Robinson’s work as a cartographer and his general thinking as a geographer can be seen to dovetail in various ways with those of such Swedish scholars as Szegö, Torsten Hägerstrand, and Gunner Olsson. Szegö’s humanist geography focuses on issues of space; Hägerstrand brings a variety of narrative forms into his work, such as short stories; and Olsson declares that “geography is a form of

imagination,” thereby placing cartography at the intersection of map-making, mapping, and the literary and visual arts (Olsson iii). Throughout the debate within geography, one notes many theories of those same scholars whose work has been central to contemporary literary studies, Michel Foucault and Berthold Auerbach in particular. Given that issues of power, representation, and language are important in both disciplines, this is hardly surprising.

An endlessly fascinating and quite beautiful recent work of academic scholarship in the discipline of geography is William J. Smyth's *Map-making, Landscapes and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland, c. 1530–1750*, and it is instructive to place this work alongside Robinson's Aran volumes in order to compare the academic and “amateur” visions of map-making and mapping. From the outset, it is clear that for Smyth, as for the Swedish school, and for Robinson, the work of the geographer should be an interdisciplinary art with the interdependence of the visual and narrative spaces constantly stressed. As Smyth indicates, disciplines cross and intrude on one another in illuminating ways: “Since the task of the historical geographer is to track, map and interpret patterns and processes of geographical change, a central concern of this study involves the geographical construction of Ireland, its societies and regions before New English plantation and colonization, and a geographic exploration of the nature and varying effects of such intrusive processes on existing Irish societies and landscapes” (xix).

Like Robinson, Smyth begins with the age of the land and reminds us that “the ideology and, indeed, central values of the culture were wrapped up in the landscape — its occupation, its use, its names, stories and legends” (3). For both authors, the land/landscape/space is seen not just as being body-like, but as indeed being a body, though hardly the gendered version of more recent nationalist vintage. In common with the human body, the landscape of Ireland is a densely layered and complexly encoded space to which the map can only serve as a guide, an imperfect doorway leading into a narrative text. Smyth reminds us that, prior to the Elizabethan period, “as far as we know, the Irish did not use maps; measuring/overseeing with the eye (*do reir sultombuis*) and walking the land may have been the critical skills for

assessing the size of the small areal units and their land-use potential" (74). Central to the Gaelic sense of mapping was memory (oral) rather than the map (drawn), and "this land memory involved not only a recognition of the history and landholding patterns amongst families but also knowledge over the middle and long term of how the names of places are actually changed to reflect these oscillations in kin-group power" (75). When Robinson's work is examined in this context, we can conclude that what he has achieved is a re-reading of the landscape that privileges an ancient Irish methodology over the imperial one introduced by the English in the sixteenth century. On a surface level, our sense of space remains defined by Renaissance models, whereas emotionally, psychologically, and mythically, it is governed by deeper, more convoluted, and less definable models. We should not assume, however, that ancient cartography everywhere was like that found in Ireland, that all cultures always favored mapping over map-making to define their sense of space. The advances in cartography during the Renaissance, made necessary by the "Discoveries" and created to facilitate inventories of lands gained, was influenced by the new knowledge that had entered from China, where for much of its history cartography had been entwined with Chinese political culture: "One of the major accomplishments of the Qin dynasty (221–207 B.C.) was the establishment of a centralized bureaucracy, setting a pattern for subsequent dynasties. One of the distinguishing features of the bureaucratic state was its emphasis on documentation, which played a key role in maintaining communication and control over a large territory. Maps were part of this documentary system of administration, whose philosophical foundations were laid during the Zhanguo period" (Lee 71–74).

Both written and oral cartography had co-existed separately in disparate parts of the world, all reconnected by the "Discoveries" that made the Renaissance possible. As Smyth points out, "in the early decades of the seventeenth century, therefore, the Irish brand of 'mapping' and territorial organization was being made redundant" (83). This model was primarily literary and verbal, not graphic- and perspective-based, and it is this latter process that *Stones of Aran* seeks to revive

(83). The redundancy that Smyth refers to reflects the official status of Gaelic mapping; nevertheless, the native mode retained a strong presence in the long reach of oral culture and was a resource that Robinson was easily able to tap into centuries later. Another recent study that has much in common with Robinson's and Smyth's work is Lillis Ó Laoire's *On a Rock in the Middle of the Ocean: Songs and Singers in Tory Island, Ireland*, a "book . . . specifically about this contextualized world, constituting a study of songs as they function in one community and centering upon the importance of song as an integral element of that community's culture" (xi). Furthermore, as Smyth points out, tracing was, and remains still, a vital element in the way that the Irish understand their world. It unites people with place (in the widest sense) and generations of people and families who have inhabited specific places: "'Tracing' is an ancient Irish pastime—the tracing of kinsmen and women and their land-histories. 'Tracing' the outlines of Ireland and its constituent parts via key landmarks was also part of this vital oral tradition" (83).

The map-making introduced by the English continues to serve as the foundation of official and academic cartography and is "the 'outsider' view of the perspective map that links Ptolemy, Mercator, Bartlett, Raven and Petty [and that] created a very different Ireland. It was this 'outsider' perspective—backed by innovative surveying instruments—that completed the mapping of plantation Ireland in the seventeenth century" (Smyth 84). A similar process was taking place in America (Smyth 412–50). The tool used to make these early modern maps was the chain, a good example of the meeting point of practicality and metaphor: "Henceforth the laying on of the chain was like a mystical rite, the agrarian equivalent of baptism or coming-of-age, which gave binding force (almost literally at the moment of survey, metaphorically forever) to the process of perambulation and which put the seal on one Irish townland after another as ready to be owned, occupied and civilized" (84–85).

Robinson's walking and mapping is a decolonizing act that returns landscape/space to its native mode of reckoning. The Ordnance Survey is not supplanted; however, its invincibility is questioned, its