

Contemporary Irish Republican Prison Writing

New Directions in Irish and Irish American Literature

Contemporary Irish Republican Prison Writing: Writing and Resistance
By Lachlan Whalen

*Contemporary Irish Republican
Prison Writing*

Writing and Resistance

Lachlan Whalen

palgrave
macmillan



CONTEMPORARY IRISH REPUBLICAN PRISON WRITING

Copyright © Lachlan Whalen, 2007.

Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 2007 978-1-4039-8193-6

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

First published in 2007 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN™

175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS

Companies and representatives throughout the world.

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN is the global academic imprint of the Palgrave Macmillan division of St. Martin's Press, LLC and of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. Macmillan® is a registered trademark in the United States, United Kingdom and other countries. Palgrave is a registered trademark in the European Union and other countries.

ISBN 978-1-349-53887-4

ISBN 978-0-230-61006-4 (eBook)

DOI 10.1057/9780230610064

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Contemporary Irish Republican prison writing : writing and resistance /
by Lachlan Whalen.

p. cm. — (New directions in Irish and Irish American literature)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-349-53887-4

1. Political prisoners' writings, Irish. 2. Republicanism—Northern
Ireland—History—20th century. 3. Political prisoners—Northern Ireland—
History—20th century. I. Whalen, Lachlan, 1969—

DA990.U46C674 2007

820.9'206927—dc22

2007010216

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: December 2007

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

*An té nach bhfuil láidir, ní foláir dhó bheith glic.
Seanfhocal*

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix	
<i>Permissions</i>	xi	
One	Introduction: <i>Taoibh Amuigh agus Faoi Ghlas</i> : The Counter-aesthetics of Republican Prison Writing	1
Two	“Our Barbed Wire Ivory Tower”: The Cages of Long Kesh	15
Three	“Comrades in the Dark”: Writing in the H Blocks, 1976–1981	55
Four	“Silence or Cell?": Women Writing in Armagh, Maghaberry, and Durham	107
Five	“Captive Voices”: Post-1981 Republican Prison Writing	141
Six	Postscript: “You Look Like Jesus Christ”: Images of Republican POWs in Contemporary Cinema	171
<i>Notes</i>	185	
<i>Bibliography</i>	223	
<i>Index</i>	235	

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without the help of many individuals and organizations. First and foremost, *go raibh míle maith agaibh* to all of the Republican ex-POWs who shared their stories and writings with me and who assisted in innumerable ways. This is especially true of Dr. Laurence McKeown, who provided invaluable aid throughout. For allowing me to include three of her poems and for her other insights into Armagh Gaol, Roseleen Walsh was more generous than I can say. I am extremely grateful to Martin Gough for the use of his art for the book cover, an image drawn while incarcerated in the H Blocks. Rosena Brown, Brian Campbell, Síle Darragh, Eileen Hillen, Gerry Kelly, Chrissy McAuley, and several poets who will remain anonymous also contributed much by sharing their time, experiences, and texts. As author, interviewee, and secretary of the Bobby Sands Trust, Danny Morrison provided crucial assistance. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to everyone at Coiste na n-Iarchimí for their work in coordinating interviews, especially Mike Ritchie. Thanks also to Dominic Adams and Irene Sherry for helping me get permissions for some of the women's writing included in this book. Whatever errors or mischaracterizations that may be contained in this book are mine alone, not any of the people mentioned above.

Others in Ireland also aided this project in important ways as well. Thanks to those in the permissions department at Mercier Press and Brandon Books. The staff at the Northern Ireland Political Collection of Linenhall Library were always helpful, and I am particularly thankful to Alastair Gordon and Yvonne Murphy for going above and beyond the call of duty on a number of occasions. A very belated thanks to the Gunning family for putting up with me for a summer in the earliest stages of this project, and to E. Gillespie and family for their hospitality. The McCaul family also took in this foundling on a number of occasions, for which I remain indebted. Art Hughes's patience with a struggling learner of Irish many years ago earns him a place in these acknowledgments, as have Pat Beag and Noel Lenaghan for the seisiúns. Buzz Ó Briain deserved a better pupil on the uilleann pipes, but he could not find one more thankful.

Archival research was assisted by funding from a West Virginia Humanities Council Fellowship. The Marshall University Research

Committee provided additional resources through Summer Research Awards, as did the Marshall University College of Liberal Arts Faculty Development Award and the Marshall University Graduate School Faculty Development Award. Dr. Christina Murphy provided much appreciated funding at critical points in the manuscript's composition.

I am blessed with a wonderful and supportive family both biological and adopted, who helped me in more ways than I can count, including by having patience with my excesses of silence: Frank and June Vesterman, Bill, Linda, and Kate Hunter, and E.J. Whelan (who despite it all I still must number in this song). Amongst the North Dakota/ Minnesota *tiyospaye*, Wm. Ambrose and Aileen Anna Littleghost, Ron and Loretta Leith, Anne Graham and family, and everyone at Red Lake (including Chris Leith and family, the Donnell family, and the Johnson family), all taught me more things of real importance than I ever learned in graduate school: *wopila tanka mitakuyapi/ migwitch*. Rex Bluestone, Blaise Mybeck, and especially Dave Villarreal contributed to my survival with music and friendship while studying and writing on the prairie. Michael Beard, Michael Berthold, Ursula Hovet, and Hugh Ormsby-Lennon provided much-appreciated mentoring and assistance in my years in graduate school.

In West Virginia, thanks to Marshall University English Department chair David Hatfield who scheduled a heavy teaching load as best as possible to accommodate my research. Kellie Bean, Mary Moore, Katharine Rodier, Sherri Smith, and John Young all offered valuable critical insights on what eventually would become the second chapter in this book. Much gratitude to Jason, Amber, and all the folks at Java Joint for offering a place of refuge and creating a center of culture that Huntington cannot do without. Janet Badia would deserve praise simply for putting up with me throughout the process of composition but did much more, something I always recognized and for which I continue to be appreciative even if I have failed to express it adequately—in particular I am thankful for her periodic reminders that there is more to life than the writing of books. And finally, I am grateful to Emma and MK for just being bad every day of their lives.

Permissions

I am very grateful to acknowledge permission to reprint copyright material from the following:

The Bobby Sands Trust (in addition to the overlapping permissions for work by Bobby Sands published by Mercier Press): unpublished poetry by Bobby Sands quoted in Denis O’Hearn, *Nothing but an Unfinished Song* (New York: Nation, 2006) 333–334; pamphlet version of the hunger strike diary *The Diary of Bobby Sands* (Dublin: Sinn Féin Publicity Department, June 1981) 19, 42; the poem “An Mhaidin” from *Faoi Ghlas ag Gaill* (Belfast: Gaeil Bheal Feirste in Eadan H-Bloc agus Ard Mhacha, 1981); excerpts from Danny Morrison’s introduction to *Prison Poems* (Dublin: Sinn Féin Publicity Department, October 1981) 10; Editorial commentary introducing “The Writings of Bobby Sands” *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 21 March 1981: 6–7; 2 passages from Gerry Adams’s introduction to the first version of the pamphlet *The Writings of Bobby Sands* (Belfast?: Sinn Féin, March? 1981) no pagination; Gerry Adams’s introduction to the pamphlet *The Writings of Bobby Sands* (Dublin: Sinn Féin POW Department, April 1981) 5–6; portion of “The Battle for Survival” 83.

Brandon Books: From Gerry Adams’s *Cage Eleven* (Dingle: Brandon, 1990): passage from “Only Joking,” 141; passage from “Frank Stagg,” 117, 119–120, 124; passage from “An Árd [*sic*] Fheis,” 76; two passages from “Christians for Freedom,” 100, 102; passage from “Screws” 27; two passages from “The Fire” 37, 46.

Martin Gough for use of his artwork as the cover illustration.

Laurence McKeown, permissions to photograph and use text of *teachtaireachtaí*.

Mercier Press: From *Skylark Sing Your Lonely Song* (Cork and Dublin: Mercier, 1982): eight lines from “Trilogy,” 57–58; excerpts from “I Once Had a Life,” *Skylark Sing Your Lonely Song* 19–20; the final three lines from “Christmas Eve,” 99; four passages from “The Harvest Britain Has Sown,” 26–27; three lines from “Teach Your Children,” 113; brief passage from “A Thought in the Night,” 23; three brief passages from “The Lark and the Freedom Fighter,” 15;

the final three paragraphs of the hunger strike diary, 172; the editor's translation of these three paragraphs, 172–173; two sentences from the second diary entry, 154; A portion of one sentence from the first entry of the hunger strike diary, 153; One word from Sands's final diary entry and its English translation, 171 & 172; two lines from “Nuair a thigeann ar [*sic*] lá,” 167–8.

Mercier Press: From *One Day in My Life* (Cork and Dublin: Mercier, 1983): the first paragraph in its entirety, 25; the final 187 words, 117–118.

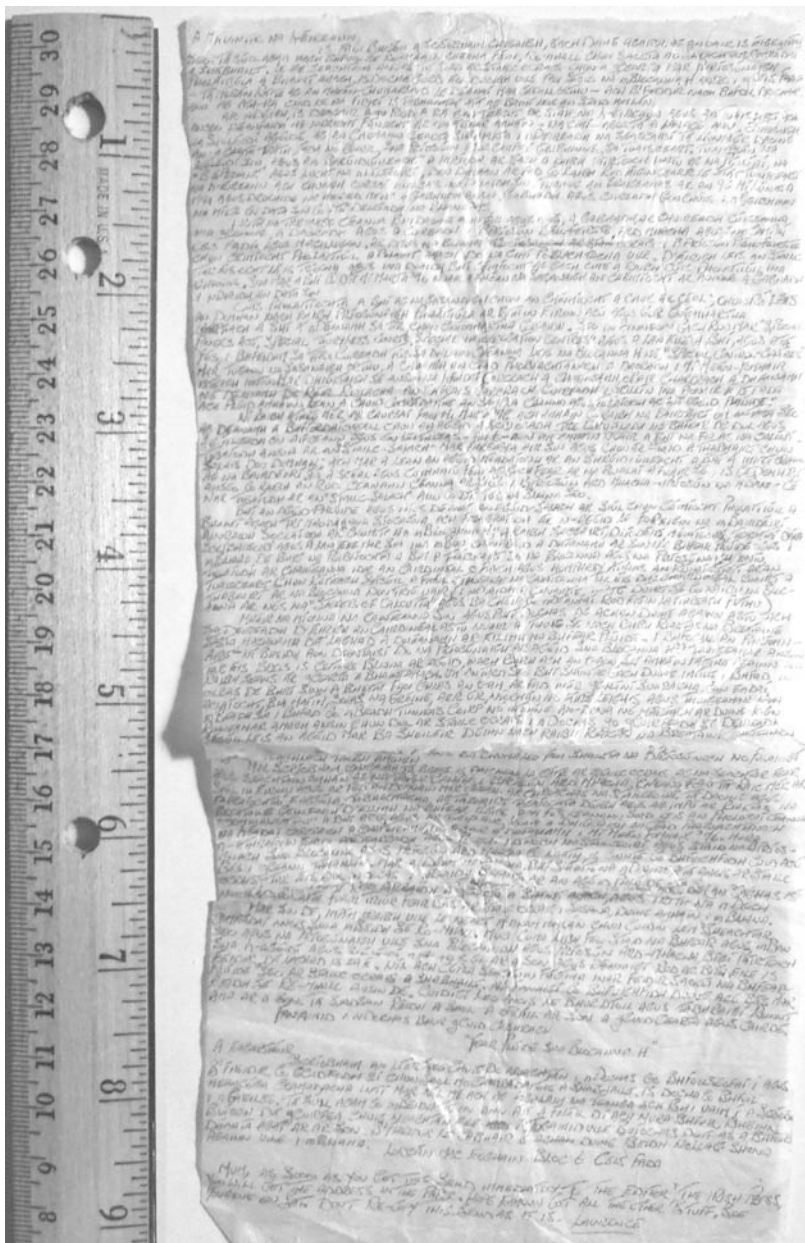
New Hibernia Review/ Iris Éireannach Nua for the reprint of portions of my article “‘Our Barbed Wire Ivory Tower’: The Prison Writings of Gerry Adams,” published in *New Hibernia Review/ Iris Éireannach Nua* 10.2 (Summer 2006) 123–139.

Nua: Studies in Contemporary Irish Writing “‘You Look Like Jesus Christ’: The Troubled Cinematic Iconography of Irish Republican Prisoners,” forthcoming in *Nua* 6.2 (Spring 2007).

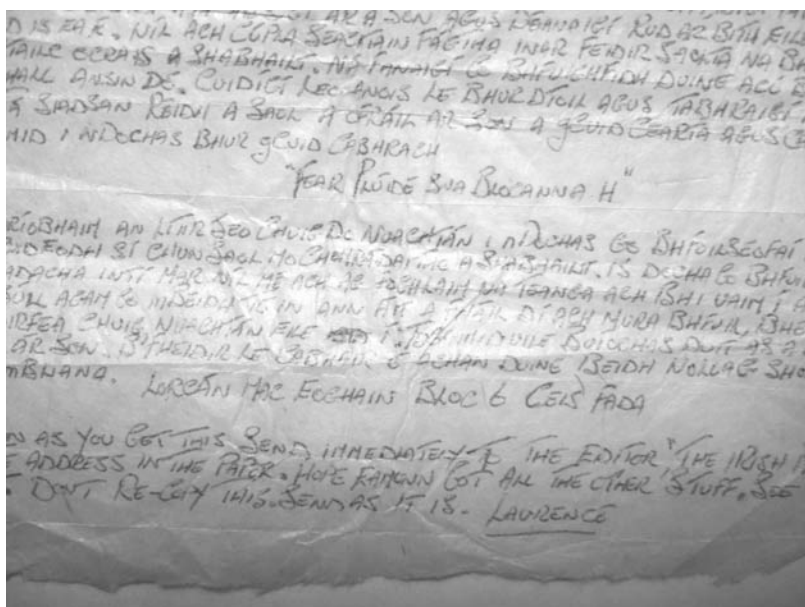
An Phoblacht/Republican News: From “Inside Story,” *Republican News* 16 August 1975: 6; excerpts from “Out There on the Motorway,” *Republican News* 23 August 1975: 7; excerpts from “Screws,” *Republican News* 10 April 1976: 7–8; passage from Gerry Adams's review of *Prison Poems*: “Real poetry,” *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 17 December 1981: 9; editorial commentary introducing “The Writings of Bobby Sands,” *An Phoblacht/Republican News* 21 March 1981: 6–7.

Irene Sherry/ Sinn Féin's Women's Department: the full text of “Alone” and “From Eve,” in *Voices Against Oppression*, (Dublin: Sinn Féin's Women's Department, 1991) 5, 11.

Roseleen Walsh: the full text of “To Aine,” “Imprisoned Lovers,” and “To My Silent Church,” in *Aiming Higher* (Belfast: Glandore, 1999) 32, 33, 37.



Teachtaireacht by Laurence McKeown on toilet paper, 1980 (a letter to the Irish Press). Photo by L. Whalen.



Close-up of *teachtaireacht* (a letter to the Irish Press). McKeown signs it in three different ways: “Fear Plúide Sna Blocanna H” (A Blanket Man in the H Blocks); “Lorcán Mac Eoghain Bloc 6 Ceis Fada” (Laurence McKeown Block 6 Long Kesh); and “Laurence.” Photo by L. Whalen.

