H500 Literature and Communication Dissertation

Reclaiming the Raven:

Irish-Australian Memory in the Post Modern Moment

By

John Peter Luke Saunders,
(B910828K)

Supervisor:
Dr Horst Ruthrof

This thesis is presented for the degree of Master of Arts, Literature and Communication
I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution

..........................................................
Copyright Licence/Restriction

Masters Thesis

Permission to copy all or parts of this thesis for study and research purposes only is hereby

Granted  ✔

Not Granted  □

Title of Thesis: Reclaiming the Raven; Irish-Australian Memory in the Post Modern Moment

Author: JOHN PETER LUKE SAUNDERS

Signature: ____________________ Date: ____________
Abstract

This thesis looks at the processes of memory, imagination and cultural development in a single family of Irish extraction. The line in question derives from a western Irish sept known as the Ui Fiachrach, whose symbol was that of the raven.

The first chapter deals with the origins of the Ui Fiachrach and the impossibility of reaching an “Ur text”. It also critiques the notion of culture, noting that cultural difference (often defined on terms such as ‘blood’) can be a source of conflict. Finally, the problematic nature of the term ‘authenticity’ was explored.

The second chapter is concerned with the politics of ethnographic representation and the uses of English and Gaelic as representational tools.

The third chapter focuses on the differend that existed up till the later part of the 20th century against oral cultures (including Irish culture) and the imagination, as opposed to the realist/positivist/social Darwinist paradigm.

The fourth chapter takes into account the notions of alterity and ambivalence: a brief history of prejudice against the Irish and the dilemma of preserving one’s culture versus fitting in.

The fifth chapter examined the source material gained from research which represents a core sample of my family’s collective memory. The limits of storytelling were delineated, and the motifs classified into themes.

The sixth chapter showed how there is considerable scope and play in the symbol of the raven, in stark contrast to stereotypes typified by Poe’s Raven. In such play is the potential to reclaim the raven as a positive symbol.

The seventh chapter looked at the common characteristics between the visual Irish imagination and the modern genre of magic realism. It also examined the internal dynamics of, and the potential for, continued cultural development into the 3rd millennium.
For my late grandfather Francis William Duddy –

A master story teller

Who gave the stories to all of us.
Acknowledgements

This thesis could never have been written without the moral support, wisdom and guidance from the following people. My thanks -

First and foremost, to Dr Horst Ruthrof, my supervisor, for taking on board one of the mad Irish. May the luck of the Irish be with you always.

To Phillip Pound, Rona Burnett and Ms Stewart, my high school teachers in Literature, for inspiring me in the subject early on.

To Daniel Thomas and Darren de Mello, good friends for many, many years for reading all my email, and for being there, at any time, no matter what.

To Sarah Courtis, for her outstanding dedication to study group, for deep conversations and quiet wisdom, for always being the guide to a quiet calm place, no matter how stormy the world and for her help by proof reading this thesis.

To Natalie Boyd, for her kindness, encouragement and support, for always bringing light, life and a smile, for empathy unmatched, for understanding what it was I was trying to say, for writing letters, and for being there when it really counted.

To Alison “Sianna” Wallace, for her sense of humour, her patience and for always being willing to listen.

To Anne Greenshields and Marilyn Boyle, for taking an interest and for their support.

To Ian Buchanan, Cecily Scutt and Anne Surma, for being three of the best tutors I ever had.

To Grant Stone, Jenny Smith, Margaret Solosy, Helen Gibson and Merrilee Albatis, for teaching me research skills.

To Great Aunt Mary, for telling me stories last Christmas.

And last but certainly not least – to my cousin Helen Louise for never forgetting what is important to remember.
Table of Contents

Chapter 1: The Coming of the Raven 1

Chapter 2: The Politics and Problematics of Ethnographic Representation - or, Who has the write to speak? 10

Chapter 3: Diaspora and Differend 18

Chapter 4: Alterity and Ambivalence 26

Chapter 5: The Voice of the Raven 33
  • The Limits of Storytelling 33
  • Methodology 34
  • Problematics of Interpretation 36
  • The Context of Connaught 38
  • Examination of the Motifs And classification by Thematic Stream 39
  • Commentary on the Memories 60

Chapter 6: (Re)(trans)lating the Raven 61

Chapter 7: Re theorising the Ui Fiachrach, Reclaiming the Raven 69
  • Characteristics of the Oral Tradition 69
  • Contextualisation of the Oral Traditions within the Realms of the Spoken and Unspoken 69
  • Oral Tradition, Magic Realism and the Visual Irish Imagination 70
  • Magic Realism and the Irish Fairy Legend 77
  • The Post Modern Markers of the Oral Tradition 80
  • Rereading the Oral Tradition 83
  • Implications and Possibilities for the Third Millennium 89
  • Conclusion 99

Appendix 1: Tales of Fiachra 102

Appendix 2: The Ui Fiachrach in the “Annals of the Four Masters” 103

Appendix 3: Notes from “The Genealogies, Tribes and Customs of Hy-Fiachrach” 106

References 110