

H500 Literature and Communication Dissertation

Reclaiming the Raven:

Irish-Australian Memory in the Post Modern Moment

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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

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Title of Thesis: Reclaiming the Raven:
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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.

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