

Shine Brighter Première

Snapfile 3, Divided Ireland, shared identity

Document 4 p.42 – Roman *Bog Child* , Siobhan DOWD, 2008

Crossing the border

In the 1980s, Fergus McCann and his uncle Tally cross the western border of Northern Ireland to dig for peat¹.

They approached the border checkpoint and the van slowed. The soldier by the hut stood with a rifle but did not move. He was young-looking and pale, with freckles. He waved them on, tipping the butt of the gun, and they drove past without having to stop. Uncle Tally laughed. “I could have a truckload of Semtex² for all that wee squaddie³ cares,” he said. [...]

“Only you’d be going in the wrong direction. We’re leaving the Troubles, Unk, not joining them.”

Uncle Tally thumped the wheel. “So we are. We’re in the free state now. Free as a bloody bog⁴-frog.” They both laughed like clowns. Going over the border always had that effect. Without your knowing it, your jaw-bone would stiffen and adrenalin pump

¹ *tourbe*

² explosive substance

³ soldier

⁴ *marécage*

through your veins as the checkpoint approached. Then, when you were through, hilarity would erupt at the relief.

The van turned up onto a steep road with grass growing up the middle. The gorse⁵ got yellower as they climbed, the sky brighter. “The border. Even a nun would be nervous crossing it,” suggested Fergus.

“And we’ll be crossing back over it at the top.”

“Will we?”

“If you look at the map. You can see.”

Fergus opened the map and saw the dotted grey line, almost invisible, meandering across Ireland’s north, but leaving a thin tract of land to the west that was Donegal.

“The most northern bit of Ireland’s in the south,” he quoted.

“One day, one day...” Uncle Tally muttered like a mantra.

“One day what?”

“One day the only border will be the sea and the only thing guarding it the dunes and the only people living in it Republicans. One day, Fergus.”

“Where will the Unionists go, so?”

“They’ll be beamed⁶ to outer space, warp factor five⁷.” Uncle Tally drove round a loop of road, heading back to where the light was growing on the horizon.

“Lucky them. Now, here’s the spot to park, Fergus.”

Siobhan DOWD, *Bog Child*, 2008

⁵ a plant

⁶ transported

⁷ moving faster than the speed of light

Whole

I thought I'd have to saw¹ myself in half to stand in two countries at once, says the
wean²,

jumping state ropes on the border backroad.

But I'm still whole.

Arms outstretched as if tied to a rack³, she says

We're holding hands. Me, Donegal and Derry.

There's no here or there for her

yet.

No euro, sterling,

foreigner, citizen,

trouble, peace,

president, queen,

ally, enemy.

She is the flock⁴ of Brent Geese

breaking for Inch.

Should I have pointed out the invisible line? Told her

to imagine a fat, sleeping snake

only old people can see,

¹ cut with a tool

² child (Northern Ireland, Scotland)

³ medieval torture device

⁴ a group of birds

three-hundred-and-ten miles from forked tongue
to rattling tail,
belly harrowing
through water, concrete⁵,
grass, stone,
hearts, brains,
danger-houses,
homes?
Should I pretend this snake no longer bites?
All borders draw blood.
The pen is
the master
of the sword.
One too-young day
she will be old
enough to see
that walls are only necessary
until imaginations harden.
By then
she'll have sawn herself
in halves, quarters, acres
a thousand times over, yet she will still be whole.

Abby OLIVEIRA, "*Whole*", 2022

⁵ *béton*

Évaluation de la compréhension de l'écrit – Guide pédagogique

How Brexit hardened attitudes about the Irish border – and why things might be changing

Though it has had a fragile peace since the Belfast/Good Friday agreement, Northern Ireland remains a divided society. Brexit reignited tensions over Northern Ireland's future, leading to social and political unrest.

Research, including our own, shows that when people feel threatened, they often experience a “rally around the flag” effect. Brexit created real fears on both sides, strengthening both Unionist and Nationalist sentiments. Given this, the attitude change reflected in the new polling is all the more remarkable.

Social and political attitudes have always been at the heart of the conflict in Northern Ireland. Since the partition of Ireland in 1922, people have defined their national and political identity based on their attitudes to the border.

For Unionists in Northern Ireland, who are often culturally Protestant, the border affirms their British identity, retaining their connection to the UK and entitlement to claim Britishness.

For Nationalists, most of whom are culturally Catholic, the border was a divide imposed illegitimately by the British. The border undermined their claim to Irishness. The prolonged conflict in Northern Ireland, known as The Troubles, was driven as much by sentiment and symbolic identity concerns as by political realities.

Today, Unionists and Nationalists continue to hold opposing views on Northern Ireland's future. However, evidence of attitude convergence suggests the

extreme identity positions and polarisation⁶ associated with the Brexit result may have receded.

Now that the immediate threats surrounding Brexit have ebbed away⁷, it would seem a more inclusive and constructive conversation about the island's future may be possible.

Catriona Shelly and Orla Muldoon, *The Conversation*, 17 April 2025

⁶ a sharp division into two opposing groups

⁷ have gradually diminished