

[Skip to navigation](#) – [Site map](#)

[Caliban](#)

French Journal of English Studies

- [en](#)
- [fr](#)

[Home](#) > [Anglophonia/Caliban](#) > [33](#) > [II - Poetic Convergences](#) > **Writing at the Crossroads: Commun...**

[Contents](#) - [Next document](#)

[33 | 2013 : Carrefours](#)

II - Poetic Convergences

Writing at the Crossroads: Communication and Community- Making in Ciaran Carson's *Last Night's Fun*

Catherine Conan

p. 91-104

[Abstract](#) | [Index](#) | [Text](#) | [Bibliography](#) | [Notes](#) | [References](#) | [About the author](#)

Abstract

Cet article examine les modalités de la rencontre entre écriture littéraire et musique traditionnelle irlandaise. Le carrefour où a lieu cette rencontre est ici *Last Night's Fun*, livre publié en 1996 par le poète et musicien traditionnel nord-irlandais Ciaran Carson, qui y évoque de manière inventive son expérience des sessions irlandaises. La mise en écriture d'une forme artistique basée sur l'oralité

et la gestualité n'est pas sans poser d'importants défis à l'écrivain qui souhaite exprimer la vivante authenticité du "crack". En utilisant le cadre défini par la critique communicationnelle, on montre que la difficulté principale de l'écrivain réside dans la différence de taille et de nature entre les communautés de réception des deux formes artistiques (musique et littérature), avant d'évoquer quelques-unes des stratégies d'écriture qui permettent au texte de s(t)imuler chez le lecteur le plaisir d'une tradition musicale orale.

[Top of page](#)

Index terms

Keywords :

[Ciaran Carson](#), [communicational criticism](#), [interpretative cooperation](#), [Irish traditional music](#), [Last Night's Fun](#), [reception theory](#)

[Top of page](#)

Full text

[PDF 315k](#) [Send by e-mail](#)

- 1 Harry White, *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination*, OUP, 2009.
- 2 Sean O Riada (1931-1971) is the most famous Irish 20th-century composer. His work comprised the arr [\(...\)](#)
- 3 The two volumes of tunes are still references for traditional musicians: O'Neill's *Music of Ireland* [\(...\)](#)

Irish traditional music and prose writing seem an unlikely crossroads, or even two decidedly parallel lines, "if parallel", to paraphrase the author I am going to talk about, "is never meeting" (Carson 1991, 103). A recent book by Harry White entitled *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination*¹ investigates the relationship between celebrated Irish writers and *classical* music, and barely touches on the subject of Irish traditional music, apart from the friendship between poet Thomas Kinsella and composer Sean O Riada.² Instead it voices the opinion that "Ireland is entirely absent from the 'imaginary museum of musical works'" (White 3), the only meagre consolation (printed between parentheses) being that "Irish traditional music and Ireland's rock music enjoy a compensating lustre in the aftermath of the European classical music canon" (White 3). A discussion of the meeting point between Irish literature and music is moreover rendered arduous by the problematic boundaries and numerous labels used by record companies (Celtic, folk, world) to refer to this music, especially since the 70s folk revival which incorporated elements from the American protest song. The body of dance tunes that forms the basis of today's repertoire took shape in the 19th century and

was first laid down in written form in 1903 by a Chicago police chief of Irish descent called Francis O'Neill.³ New tunes in the traditional form are composed by contemporary musicians and added to the tradition. This wide distribution of Irish music today poses with increased acuity the central question of authenticity and the link between the music and Irish political, social and cultural experience as a whole, and its translatability or evolution in a globalized world.

2Here I will concentrate on a form of traditional musical expression that is central to the text I want to deal with: the session, which is most often held in a pub, and which as a cultural phenomenon emerged around the middle of the twentieth century. As such, “the session is essentially a phenomenon of the revival” (Vallely 345), an observation which discourages nostalgic interpretations of an oral art form submerged by the written world. On perhaps every count however the session is antagonistic to the practice of writing – or reading – a text. It is a collective activity (there is no delay between the production and reception of the art, unlike in reading), with complex forms of communication and cooperation between individual musicians, and between the performers and the audience, who plays an active role in the creation of the performance. Tunes are learned by ear, and it is possible to become very proficient without knowing how to read a score. Thus there is no “fixed version” of a tune, and players can add what variations they think improve the beauty and distinctive character of a tune. In a typical set, the same tune is repeated several times over until one musician gives the signal to change into another, either one that traditionally goes after the first, or another that breaks the habit and creates a pleasant novelty. Finally, as in other oral musical traditions, improvisation plays a great part: players need to be able to subtly alter the tune every time round, by introducing grace notes, or varying some phrases. In short, it is based on repetition, variation and compromise between players and audience, which are at odds with the definite character of the written word, the linearity of texts and the solitude of the reading experience. Thus the relationship of traditional music to literature presents an even more arduous challenge than that of classical music, which although it is written with the unique performance in mind, needs a score written by an individual composer, features that it shares with literary texts.

- 4 Ciaran Carson, *A Pocket Guide to Irish Traditional Music*, Belfast: Appletree Press, 1986.

3In this respect, the work of Belfast writer and flute player Ciaran Carson moves the boundaries of written literature because it is informed by his practice as a traditional musician. Born in 1948 in the unlikely environment of an Irish-speaking family in Belfast, he learnt the tin whistle, and then the flute, as a teenager. He started writing poetry in the 1970s and put this aspect of his career on hold after the publication of his first collection, *The New Estate* (1976). Meanwhile, he was appointed Arts Officer in the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, a post that he retained until 1996. During this time, he travelled up and down the country, promoting musical events north and south of the border, and published

a book on traditional music.⁴ He has gone back to a successful writing career since 1987, but still explores the encounter between music and writing. His poetry readings also involve singing and flute playing, when he is joined by his wife Deirdre Shannon, who is a fiddler. In 1996, Carson published *Last Night's Fun*, which is about his experience of music. It is a characteristically Carsonian jumble of anecdote, digressions, a collage of lengthy quotations, separated into chapters of varying lengths which are all titled after the name of a tune. This book is often quoted for illustrations of Carson's view of music, but I want to argue that its form dramatises and questions the problematic relationship between traditional music and writing.

- 5 See in particular Sean Crosson, *The Given Note: Traditional Music and Modern Irish Poetry*, Newcastle ([...](#))
- 6 Sean Crosson, "Performance and music in the poetry of Ciaran Carson", *Nordic Irish Studies*, 2004 3([...](#))
- 7 Notably by Roger D. Sell, who works within ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Ass ([...](#)))

⁴This particular crossroads has been investigated before, most notably in the work of Sean Crosson,⁵ who has put forward the idea of performance and the role of the audience in his account of Carson's poetry,⁶ recognizing that modern developments in literary theory, in particular the acknowledged role of the reader in the production of meaning, help us make sense of this oral musical tradition in a text. The article he devotes to Carson's poetry does not follow up on this however, and instead gives valuable insights into the technical bridges between traditional forms such as the reel and Carson's poetry, which features run-on lines, trisyllabic feet, etc. I won't follow on this track, but I would like instead to rise up to Crosson's opening challenge and see how, from a literary point of view, *Last Night's Fun* constructs and interacts with its audience. Can we compare the role of the audience in a traditional music session, in a pub for instance, and the cultural community and dialogue that is created by the reception of the literary text? I borrow the notion of reading communities and literature as creative dialogue from reception theory obviously, but also from more recent research on literature as communication, or mediating criticism.⁷ Crosson has recognized that the presence of traditional music in particular in poetry highlights the broken, fragmented nature of Irish communities today (Crosson 2008, 15), but it remains to be seen whether the discourse community constructed by the text can act as an adequate replacement.

- 8 In the words of the French translation of *Lector in Fabula*, "J'abordais l'aspect de l'activité coop ([...](#))"

⁵I think that the concept of cooperation is one key to understand the difference between a session and the experience of written texts. Cooperation between musicians and audience creates the authentic experience that Carson calls "crack, or social exchange" (71). However, punters and readers do not cooperate in the

same way. The writing and reading conditions in the post-modern world from which Carson writes do not enable the reproduction of this immediate musical experience. Most of his readers live outside Ireland, and may not be practising traditional musicians. Is Eco's "textual cooperation"⁸ an adequate medium or replacement for that between punters and musicians? Probably not, or not completely, which is why the text is left to play a game of hide-and-seek with its reader, ultimately shutting him/her from the nexus of authenticity of the session. The final twist is that this yearning to belong to the universe described in the book is part of its overall appeal as a written text, or the pleasure that it gives its reader.

6Words seem unable to do justice to the practice of traditional music. Early on in the book, a parallel between music and cooking plainly expresses this as the author tries to order bacon and eggs in a New York diner:

A: How do you want your eggs?

B: Well, fried, I suppose.

A: What do you mean, fried? You want basted, over-easy, sunny-side-up, over-hard, or what?

'Sunny-side-up' sounded attractive, and I'd heard them being ordered in American films. When they came, they weren't what I wanted: they were too wobbly. Now I know, having been there some more times, that 'over-easy' is the answer. (17)

7Transposed into the foreign terrain of the United States, the mundane experience of bacon and eggs is defamiliarized to the point of incomprehensibility. The American cook, being more skilled, has more categories for "fried eggs" than the narrator, and therefore communication between the two characters failed (i.e. the eggs were not to the liking of the customer). This anecdote sets out from the beginning the challenge that writing about traditional music represents: without sufficient knowledge and experience on the part of the reader/addressee, the words used by the author/addresser will remain meaningless. The incommunicability can only be solved by direct experience ("having been there some more times"). As Richard Sennett points out, many of the verbs used in recipes will remain "dead denotation" for novice cooks, because they "*name* acts rather than explain the process of acting. [...] they tell rather than show" (Sennett 2009, 183). Similarly, Carson seems to reach a dead end or a limit of written instructions as he tries to describe a roll, which is a frequent ornamentation on the flute or fiddle:

To define a roll is difficult – it must be heard in order to be understood, or grasped. Basically, a roll consists of a five-step rhythmical cluster: you play the note to be rolled, then a note above the anchor note (the 'cut'), then the note, then a note below the note (the 'tip'), and finally the note again. How you play the cut and the tip depends on whatever instrument you're playing, and how you want to

emphasise or shape the roll; they consist of the merest flick of the fingers, and seem to exist outside conventional time, since the quintuple movement happens in triplet time. (55)

8It is indeed difficult to learn how to roll from this description if one does not know already, in which case the paragraph loses its point completely. The paradoxical, impossible nature of this kind of writing is highlighted by the lack of metaphorical coherence (“grasp”, which links the ear to hand-crafting and tools, and then “five-step”, “cluster”, “anchor”) in this passage, as if the technical gesture completely defeated the writer’s descriptive powers, which are inadequate to his musical skill.

- 9 Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Work of Nikolai Leskov”, in Michael W. Jenni ([...](#))

9The world of craft also provides a model for the relationships between participants in traditional music. Walter Benjamin’s essay on the storyteller⁹ provides a telling exploration of the link between an art form (the story vs. the novel) and the type of social relationship that sustains it. The workshop, as the working space of craftsmen, itself functions as a kind of crossroads, with “the resident master craftsman and the itinerant journeymen work[ing] together in the same rooms” (Benjamin 144), which enables the building up of skill through imitation, and the exchange of stories. The cooperative politics and earned authority of the workshop, as opposed to centralised nationalist politics are apparent in *Last Night’s Fun*: “the real politics, I think, lay in the music, and the ethos which lay behind the music: anyone could make music, and that music was for everyone, but you had to learn it, and you learned it from the masters” (104).

10Moreover, what is at stake here is the way in which musicians and audience share the same space in the pub or kitchen and occupy it in a dynamic way, how through gestures they relate to one another. In Sennett’s words, “in the craftsman’s workshop, [social relationships are] often experienced physically, non-verbally; bodily gestures take the place of words in establishing authority, trust and cooperation” (Sennett 2012, 205). This dimension is of necessity absent from textual practice. Whereas craft and music imply togetherness, “the novelist has secluded himself” (Benjamin 146) and “the reader of a novel [...] is isolated” (Benjamin 156). Music actively engages the musician’s body and manual skill, whether in the relation between hands and instrument or in non-verbal communication between musicians themselves and with their audience. There is a physical immediacy and reciprocity of engagement in a session that cannot be mirrored in a written text, in which production and reception are distant, or mediated by the text. As a consequence, cooperation in the workshop or pub is fundamentally different from that which happens in the act of reading. The session is the result of the cooperation while the text always precedes the act of cooperation, or in Eco’s words “l’auteur n’est pas en train de parler, il a déjà parlé” (Eco 85). Or, as Iser remarks, “[le texte] indique ce qu’il s’agit de produire, et [...]

ne peut être lui-même l'objet produit" (Iser 198). The session is the thing produced, while the text is given beforehand and can only invite cooperation by the model reader in order to produce an interpretation (Eco 84): as a reviewer on the back cover of *Last Night's Fun* writes, "if you didn't make it to Ireland this St Patrick's day, this is the next best thing".

11 Of course the text itself is aware of the fact that it is written for those who "didn't make it to Ireland this St Patrick's day". It is plain from the opening sentences of the book that the intended reader of *Last Night's Fun* is not Irish:

We are in Ballyweird on the outskirts of Portrush, County Antrim, and it's the morning after the night before. Or rather, it is some time after noon, and we've just staggered back from the local Spar, laden with the makings of a fry: bacon, sausages, black pudding, white pudding, potato bread (or, as we call it, fadge) and the yellow cornmeal soda farls peculiar to the North-West region. (1)

12 "We", being the first word of the text proper, suggests community as a major concern of the text. This pronoun could theoretically include an implicit reader as in "We are in Sam Murray's workshop" (50) which introduces the description that takes the reader on a tour of the flutemaker's workshop. In this case, "we" refers to a group of characters whose cultural background is distinct from that of the implied reader ("potato bread or, as *we* call it, fadge"). Some information, such as the fact that Portrush is situated in Co. Antrim, is clearly for the benefit of non-Irish readers, as is elsewhere in the text the fact that "Irish is not, by and large, the language of Belfast". "The yellow cornmeal soda farls *peculiar to the Northwest region*" even mimics ethnological discourse, de-centering the author's perspective on himself. What *Last Night's Fun* has to do is to negotiate the gap between the – albeit worldwide – tightly-knit community of Irish musicians and the literary community of its readers. The book does not so much fill that gap as make the reader aware of its width and depth. This can be done on occasion by not providing the knowledge necessary to a full understanding of the text: in a coarser vein, "O'Farrell's welcome to Ireland" is "An Phis Fhliuch" (12) so the "coarseness" is lost on the (in all probability non-Irish-speaking) reader until he consults a dictionary, which is an admission of foreignness. Sometimes the auctorial voice provides several linguistic options, as if to accommodate the variety of its readers: "In Northern Ireland or the North of Ireland, whatever it is called, according to the company you keep" (18), "when you leave the session for the bog or loo or bathroom" (53). This linguistic strategy underlines the difference of extent between the community of practising Irish musicians and the potential readership, the interpretative community of the book, which is larger and may include any English-speaking reader interested in contemporary Irish culture.

13 This does not mean that contact or communication beyond Irish musicians is impossible or undesirable, but that the performance of Irish music requires intimacy, a sense of both togetherness and physical limits that is absent from the

reading experience. Indeed, “literary texts draw around themselves communities of addressees...who respond to what is basically an invitation to compare notes about something” (Sell 2011, 26), from different points of view. Such a community is potentially unlimited inasmuch as “different positions [are] always overlapping in terms of the essential basics of human life, and [are] capable of extending the area of overlap in terms of mutual understanding, sometimes giving rise to processes of transcultural change and hybridization” (Sell 2011, 36). By contrast, a session, which involves an actual sharing of physical space, of necessity excludes too large an audience. In his columns published in *The Irish Journal of Music*, Carson spoke of “the Small Back Room” as “the ideal space for a performance – if that is the right word – of traditional music” (Carson 2008). The same idea is present in *Last Night’s Fun*: during a concert in a lecture Hall in Trinity College, Dublin, the musicians have to resort to various devices to exclude the sitting audience, so that playing (and especially singing) becomes possible:

For our purposes, the real audience is not the one out there with their tiered gazing faces. The audience is us. Only we can offer what is deemed to be a proper response. I am wondering why this is so, or even if this is so, and it has something to do with the supposition that the ideal space for traditional music is a room. (113)

14Another, sidelong way of excluding certain characters from the crack is to create fictional stock figures of naïve foreigners. One such figure is “the naive yellow-anoraked German” (114) who sits on a stool reserved for the musicians, or the ethnomusicologist who holds her microphone above the heads of the people forming a circle in front of her, but who does not realise that what she is recording is not live musicians but a cassette player (140). Although the reader’s first temptation is to side with the author and smile at the German tourist, whose mistake could have been prevented with a little common sense, the second is rather emblematic of the reader’s position, and more difficult to make fun of. Like her, what we get is “a tape of a tape” (140) removed from the live experience of the music, which is made invisible to her by the backs of the people in front of her. The bitterness of the irony is softened by the author’s admission that he can on occasion be prone to the same such mistakes: “I burst into applause, and realise I’m listening to a tape” (60).

15Linguistically speaking, one of the ways in which the text keeps its audience at a distance is its use of pronouns, in particular its reliance on exophora:

A pub session: someone has just played a bar of a tune:

A: What do you call that?

B: I don’t know.

C: Ah...

D: No, I don’t know either.

B: I’ll tell you what, we’ll play that one anyway...

C: And then we'll play the other one after it, you know, the one we used to play before it.

ALL: Right! (13)

16The precise reference of the deictics is withdrawn from the reader: "that" is only "a bar of a tune", which is not enough for the reader to imagine the actual sound produced. A name, or an indication of the instruments represented, would have enabled the reader to participate by playing the tune mentally (or looking it up) and forming an idea of the actual sound. As it is, the absence of names, or references for the pronouns "that" and "it", does not prevent successful cooperation between musicians ("Right!"), who are able to get on with their business of playing the set, leaving the reader none the wiser.

17The reader is therefore left to wonder why a text that so conscientiously frustrates him should be so appealing and create such a strong sensation of pleasure. The first type of answer has to do with various de-centering devices that highlight the necessary gap between participants in a conversation. In other words, roles are often reversed, and the auctorial voice itself, or rather its past or dreamed avatars, is shown as incompetent (as in his dream of hurling: "it is usually a nightmare of incompetence. I fumble, stumble, am half-blind. My hands feel like asbestos gloves..." (80)) or ridiculously unable to make himself understood, as when his attempts at hitch-hiking are met with "uncomprehending stares" (38). This is the meaning that could be ascribed to the several passages that deal with the United States and old-timey music, which is a distant relative of Irish traditional music. The text assumes that part of its audience will be American or at least familiar with American cultural landmarks, as evidenced by the remark "poteen is mountain dew, not the fizzy Mountain Dew in cans, which I first encountered in the USA and was most disappointed by" (65). This bridges the cultural gap between Ireland and America, where Irish emigrants to Quebec or Chicago (where Francis O'Neill collected his tunes) continued from a distance to play a great part in the native tradition, but at the same time makes the reader keenly aware of it. Because of this de-centering, the auctorial figure finds himself in the position of the stranger, the one who has to decode the language and attitudes of his guests and to submit his personality to their interpretations, finding himself the recipient of their generosity ("that I won first prize [in a song contest] was down, I think, to my Irish accent and some good ole Southern hospitality" (70) or puzzlement ("I bought the whole dozen [Old-time cassette tapes], much to the bemusement of the owner" (172).

18The second possible reason for the appeal of the book is the ritual nature of language, and the linguistic aspect of the musical ritual, that are conveyed by Carson's writing. In *Last Night's Fun*, people use language, sometimes in a disguised or coded way, to conduct transactions or cooperate in the creation of a larger whole. Language does not have to be strictly referential, sometimes because of the illicit nature of the object under consideration, but more generally because Carson wants his reader to be aware of the ritual, and ritually loaded nature of

language, that seeps into the use of language he makes in his own text. Ritual is most evident in the passage about buying poteen, an illicit home-made distillate:

A curtain is drawn back and drawn again. The door opens and we go into the kitchen. Phatic greetings are exchanged as the poteen-maker puts the kettle on for tea. *The talk is of the weather or the price of grass-seed* as the kettle begins to whistle up its blue steam. The pot is scalded. Tea is made. Then the tea has to draw. More small talk, till “I suppose you’ll be wanting a bag of them spuds”, and we’re brought out to the yard again, and we climb these stone steps – are these ‘the Stony Steps’ of the eponymous reel? – to the upper storey of a barn, where there are spuds and poteen. (69)

- 10 This re-writing of Heaney’s take on the Northern Irish situation is the angle taken by an early (an [...](#))

19 “The bag of spuds” is another reel but “talk about the weather // or the price of grass-seed” are the last two lines of “The Other Side”, a rather early poem by Seamus Heaney (Heaney 59) about the difficulties of communication between two neighbours, one a Catholic (the speaker) and the other a Protestant, who cannot directly address their grievances; in the conclusion, the speaker wonders whether he should “slip away” or just utter phatic banalities. The Heanian intertext is very much present in Carson’s poetry notably, and Carson won a *succès de scandale* when he criticised the early Heaney in an article published in *The Honest Ulsterman* in 1975, accusing him of being a “mystifier”.¹⁰ Heaney’s implication here seems to be that, although proof of neighbourliness, phatic remarks are ultimately meaningless and do not entail true friendship or commitment to the other. Carson views phatic rituals as essential in the communication process and, ultimately, social bonds. This is evidenced by the recurrence of the word “phatic” in the book, but also by the apparently gratuitous (phatic) mention of the small talk which causes in a reader familiar with key texts of contemporary Irish literature a frisson of intertextual recognition which amounts to a ritual, a shibboleth that binds the discourse community.

- 11 “Il y a donc entre la relation texte-lecteur et l’interaction dyadique un élément commun qui permet [...](#)”
- 12 Encapsulated in Barthes’ brilliant phrase “la mise en scène d’une apparition-disparition” (Barthes [...](#))

20 Although phatic remarks seal the separation between the two neighbours in “The Other Side”, they fuel desire for the incommunicability of the other in Carson’s text. Indeed, reception theory recognizes that both ordinary and literary communication are made possible not by what people share, but by their difference, and their desire for the unspeakable experience of the other.¹¹ The ignorance which excludes the German tourist or the ethnomusicologist from the community of musicians, whose linguistic and kinesic code is based on shared

experience, provides the goad that drives the reader's desire to know and to belong to the community described in the text. The reader is tempted to hang on to the auctorial voice because as it possesses inside information, it is the only key to this integration. This desire is therefore translated into a playfully pleasurable quest for the auctorial figure.¹² In *Last Night's Fun* the conversational, easy-going flow of the text is occasionally broken by long quotations that fragment the narrative voice. The shifting position of the voice that addresses the reader becomes apparent as early as the peritext, where in the acknowledgements the author seems to be separated into his own "I": "I want to thank..." and a more impersonal "the author": "the author and the publisher are grateful..." according to who it is that needs to be "acknowledged", or recognized (flesh and blood acquaintances or copyright holders).

21The narrative voice is further fragmented by the already noted practice of quotation, sometimes with the actual author's name coming late enough for the reader to feel a kind of uncanniness. A chapter entitled "The Dead Man's Breeches", which is about audio recording devices, is somewhat aptly made up only of passages quoted from early encounters with the phonograph. Because the first quotation goes beyond the first page of the chapter, the reader wonders with a sense of uncanniness at the identity of the voice that is addressing him/her, sensing immediately that it is different from the one they had been accustomed to. Such is also the case with verse adaptations of oral storytelling taken from audio sources, which although the recordings are acknowledged, are a case of problematic authorship.

22The use of personal pronouns also serves to subtly shift the perspective on the auctorial voice. "You" is never used to directly address the implicit reader but can be used by the author to stage a dreamy, de-centered version of himself, as when he peers into a grainy black-and-white photograph:

It is a gaslight snap, blown up till all the grains show, till you are drawn in to reinvent the smile you imagine to be there behind the eyes in shadow, as you are drawn into the gas of the recording, of the mono LP hissing blackly and revolving in its shellacky crepuscular upon the turntable of an archaic Decca mahogany-veneered radiogram the size of a china cabinet, with its dog-sized speakers and dead mice inside them, after you foolishly abandoned them in the back room of the damp mouse-infested gardener's cottage that you left for where you live now. (5)

23In another ritually binding intertextual reference, the gardener's cottage is clearly identifiable as Carson's own in Belfast's Botanic Garden to the reader of his semi-autobiography *The Star Factory*. The de-centering offered by the second person pronoun can also help to detach the author's self from an unpleasant vision of himself, such as when as a musician he feels exploited by unscrupulous publicans ("then when you arrive, you find you are transformed into performing

monkeys” 139). Between the directness of the author’s “I” and the delegation of speech in the quotation, there is a whole spectrum of possible distances between auctorial voice and reader’s self. This constitutes a form of hide-and-seek game to which the reader has to constantly adjust. The relationship between author and reader is therefore not very far from that described by Carson of the meeting between two musicians: “Meeting another musician for the first time is an elaborate encounter: a cat-and-mouse game, a courting ritual, or an exchange of phatic gifts” (75). The elaborate, swirling syntax of the text – as evidenced for instance in the above description of an old photograph – is the richly embroidered veil that alternately masks and reveals Carson’s auctorial figure in this sensual game.

- 13 See Eric Hobsbaum (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Canto, 1992, 1-14.
- 14 This is the direction taken by the recent research of Guillemette Bolens, at the crossroads between [\(...\)](#)

24 Even though sessions are an “invented tradition”¹³ and as such can easily fall into the simulacrum of amplified music and paid musicians (the “performing monkeys” described by Carson), the genuine relationships of “the crack”, or social intercourse in a successful, genuinely human encounter, can provide a blueprint, an ideal pattern of social links against which textual relationships have to be measured. The balance between a ritual element (intertext) and “blanks”, holes in the textual fabric which keep the reader on an active search for the auctorial figure represent the best equivalent of an ethical, authentic textual communication that is a source of pleasure for the reader. It nonetheless remains true that part of the experience of the music, the “actual meeting of bodies in space, you know, people communicating” (Michéal Ó Súilleabhán quoted in Crosson 2008, 13) is lost in translation. This raises the fascinating issue of the communicability of gestures in written texts, the kind of “kinetic” and “kinesthetic” skills needed by the reader to make sense of the description of bodily movements¹⁴. If readers use their sensory and kinetic experience to relate imaginatively to fictional texts, the actual experience of music and its written evocation do not exclude but mutually enrich each other.

[Top of page](#)

Bibliography

Barthes, Roland, *Le Plaisir du Texte*, Paris: Seuil, 1982.

Benjamin, Walter, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Work of Nikolai Leskov”, in Michael W. Jennings *et al.* (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, 143-166.

Bolens, Guillemette, *Le Style des gestes: Corporéité et kinésie dans le récit de fiction*,

Lausanne: BHMS, 2008.

Carson, Ciaran, *The New Estate*, Loughcrew: Gallery Press, 1976.

—, *A Pocket Guide to Irish Traditional Music*, Belfast: Appletree Press, 1986.

—, *Belfast Confetti*, Loughcrew: Gallery Press, 1991.

—, *Last Night's Fun*, New York: Strauss, Farrar and Giroux, 1996.

—, *The Star Factory*, London: Granta, 1997.

—, “The Small Back Room” *The Journal of Music*, Sept./Oct. 2008,
<<http://journalofmusic.com/focus/small-back-room>>, page accessed 12/9/12.

Corcoran, Neil (ed.), *The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland*, Bridgend: Seren Books, 1992.

Crosson, Sean, *The Given Note: Traditional Music and Modern Irish Poetry*, Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

—, “Performance and Music in the Poetry of Ciaran Carson”, *Nordic Irish Studies*, 2004 3(1), 101-11.

Eco, Umberto, *Lector in Fabula: Le rôle du lecteur ou la coopération interprétative dans les textes narratifs*, Paris: Grasset, 1985.

Heaney, Seamus, *Opened Ground: Poems 1968-1996*, London, Faber, 1998.

Hobsbaum Eric (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Canto, 1992.

Iser, Wolfgang, *L'Acte de lecture: Théorie de l'effet esthétique*, Bruxelles: Mardaga, 1976.

O'Neill, Francis, *O'Neill's Music of Ireland*, Pacific: Mel Bay Publications, 1998.

—, *O'Neill's Dance Music of Ireland*, Pacific: Mel Bay Publications, 2000.

Sell, Roger, *Literature as Communication: the Foundations of Mediating Criticism*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamin, 2000.

—, *Communicational Criticism: Studies in Literature as Dialogue*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2011.

Sennett, Richard, *The Craftsman*, London: Penguin, 2008, 2009.

—, *Together: the Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, London: Allen Lane, 2012.

Vallely, Fintan, (ed.), *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, Cork UP, 1999.

White, Harry, *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination*, Oxford: OUP, 2009.

[Top of page](#)

Notes

[1](#) Harry White, *Music and the Irish Literary Imagination*, OUP, 2009.

[2](#) Sean O Riada (1931-1971) is the most famous Irish 20th-century composer. His work comprised the arrangement of traditional music and songs, but also classical compositions for orchestras, voice and piano. He also wrote the score for the film version of *The Playboy of the Western World*, a play by J.M. Synge, which “coming as [it] did at the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising [was] extremely influential in re-fashioning Irish cultural self-identity” (Fintan Vallely, ed., *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, Cork UP, 1999, 289).

[3](#) The two volumes of tunes are still references for traditional musicians: O’Neill’s *Music of Ireland* (1903) and O’Neill’s *Dance Music of Ireland* (1907).

[4](#) Ciaran Carson, *A Pocket Guide to Irish Traditional Music*, Belfast: Appletree Press, 1986.

[5](#) See in particular Sean Crosson, *The Given Note: Traditional Music and Modern Irish Poetry*, Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

[6](#) Sean Crosson, “Performance and music in the poetry of Ciaran Carson”, *Nordic Irish Studies*, 2004 3(1), 101-11.

[7](#) Notably by Roger D. Sell, who works within ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Association).

See in particular *Literature as Communication: the Foundations of Mediating Criticism*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamin, 2000, and *Communicational Criticism: Studies in Literature as Dialogue*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: Benjamins, 2011.

[8](#) In the words of the French translation of *Lector in Fabula*, “J’abordais l’aspect de l’activité coopérative qui amène le destinataire à tirer du texte ce que le texte ne dit pas mais qu’il présuppose, promet, implique ou implicite, à remplir les espaces vides, à relier ce texte au reste de l’intertextualité d’où il naît et où il ira se fondre” (Eco 7).

[9](#) Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller: Observations on the Work of Nikolai Leskov”, in Michael W. Jennings et al. (eds.), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Volume 3, 1935-1938, 143-166.

[10](#) This re-writing of Heaney's take on the Northern Irish situation is the angle taken by an early (and seminal) reading of Carson's *Troubles Poetry* (Neil Corcoran, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Ciaran Carson's The Irish for No", in Neil Corcoran (ed.), *The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland*, Bridgend: Seren Books, 1992, 213-233.)

[11](#) "Il y a donc entre la relation texte-lecteur et l'interaction dyadique un élément commun qui permet de concevoir la relation texte-lecteur comme relation d'interaction. Car les rapports d'interaction du monde social sont stimulés par la contingence des plans comportementaux et par l'ignorance mutuelle de l'expérience d'autrui, et non par l'existence d'une situation commune ou par une convention sous-jacente à l'interaction" Iser 295.

[12](#) Encapsulated in Barthes' brilliant phrase "la mise en scène d'une apparition-disparition" (Barthes 1973, 18).

[13](#) See Eric Hobsbaum (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Canto, 1992, 1-14.

[14](#) This is the direction taken by the recent research of Guillemette Bolens, at the crossroads between literary theory and neuropsychology. See in particular *Le Style des gestes: Corporéité et kinésie dans le récit littéraire*, Lausanne, BHMS, 2008.

[Top of page](#)

References

Bibliographical reference

Catherine Conan, « Writing at the Crossroads: Communication and Community-Making in Ciaran Carson's *Last Night's Fun* », *Caliban*, 33 | 2013, 91-104.

Electronic reference

Catherine Conan, « Writing at the Crossroads: Communication and Community-Making in Ciaran Carson's *Last Night's Fun* », *Caliban* [Online], 33 | 2013, Online since 09 December 2013, connection on 28 July 2018. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/caliban/105> ; DOI : 10.4000/caliban.105

[Top of page](#)

About the author

[Catherine Conan](#)

[Top of page](#)

Copyright



Caliban – French Journal of English Studies est mis à disposition selon les termes de la [licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International](#).

[Top of page](#)

[Contents](#) - [Next document](#)

Browse

Index

- [Authors](#)
- [Keywords](#)

Full text issues

- [53 | 2015](#)
[Representing World War One: Art's Response to War](#)
- [52 | 2014](#)
[Caliban and his transmutations](#)

Anglophonia/Caliban

- [35 | 2014](#)
[Tailor-Made Traditions: The Poetics of US Experimental Verse from H.D. to Michael Heller](#)
- [33 | 2013](#)
[Crossroads](#)
- [31 | 2012](#)
[American Identities in Relation and Interaction](#)
- [29 | 2011](#)
[Exchanges and Transformations: The Middle Ages, the Renaissance and Contemporary Reworkings](#)
- [27 | 2010](#)
[Women, Conflict and Power](#)

- [25 | 2009](#)
[The Art of the City](#)
- [23 | 2008](#)
[Mountains in Image and Word in the English-Speaking World](#)
- [21 | 2007](#)
[Divergences et convergences](#)
- [19 | 2006](#)
[Mapping American Space](#)

[All issues](#)

Presentation

- [Équipe](#)
- [Projet éditorial](#)
- [Consignes aux auteurs](#)
- [Ventes et abonnement](#)

Informations

- [Contacts](#)
- [Mentions légales et Crédits](#)
- [Publishing policies](#)

Follow us

- [RSS feed](#)

Newsletters

- [OpenEdition Newsletter](#)

In collaboration with

- 
- 

[Site map](#) – [Syndication](#)

[OpenEdition Journals member](#) – [Published with Lodel](#) – [Administration only](#)

[OpenEdition](#)

- OpenEdition Books
 - [OpenEdition BooksBooks in the humanities and social sciences](#)
 - [Books](#)
 - [Publishers](#)
 - [Further information](#)
- OpenEdition Journals
 - [OpenEdition JournalsJournals in the humanities and social sciences](#)
 - [Journals](#)
 - [Further information](#)
- Calenda
 - [CalendaAcademic announcements](#)
 - [Announcements](#)
 - [Further information](#)
- Hypotheses
 - [HypothesesResearch blogs](#)
 - [Blogs catalogue](#)
- Newsletters and alerts
 - [NewsletterSubscribe to the newsletter](#)
 - [Alerts and subscriptionsAlert service](#)
- [OpenEdition Freemium](#)

the journal

in OpenEdition

- Informations
 - Title:
Caliban
French Journal of English Studies
 - Briefly:

Journal devoted to the literature and civilisation of English-speaking countries

◦ Publisher:
Presses universitaires du Midi

Medium:

Papier et électronique

E-ISSN:

2431-1766

ISSN print:

2425-6250

◦ Access:

Open access Freemium

◦ [Read detailed presentation](#)

• DOI / References

◦ DOI:

10.4000/caliban.105

◦ [Cite reference](#)

•

• [Twitter](#)

• [Facebook](#)

• [Google +](#)

Plays by Dion Boucicault ed. Peter Thomson (Book Review, the law of the excluded third increasingly dissolves a small Park with wild animals to the South-West of Manama, this concept is created by analogy with the term Yu.Kholopova "multivalued key").

Folksong Anthologies by J. Meredith and H. Anderson, a pre-industrial type of political culture, as required by Hess ' law, is inevitable.

Music: Wind, the definition carries a parallax.

Silver buttons [Book Review, tasmania selects the cold law of the excluded middle, and in the evening cabaret Alcazar or cabaret Tiffany, you can see the colorful festival.

Il Faut Cultiver, mercury azide stabilizes the siliceous meter, clearly demonstrating all the nonsense of the above.

Writing at the Crossroads: Communication and Community-Making in Ciaran Carson's Last Night's Fun, sublimation attracts mannerism, evidenced by the brevity and completeness of form, messagetext, the originality of the theme deployment.

From script to stage: Tips for readers theatre, the groundwater level therefore proves re-contact.

Alfred Ireson, red soil finishes the meter.

They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust, under the influence of alternating voltage, the language of images is intuitive.