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Parochialism – a defence

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Abstract

I present a defence of parochialism against the claims of cosmopolitanism and in the context of debates about the relational accounts of place. Against normative claims that local attachments and territorial sense of belonging lead to exclusion and cultural atrophy, the paper suggests that the local, its cultures and its solidarities are a moral starting point and a locus of ecological concern in all human societies and at all moments of history. I explore this idea by reference to art and literature, especially poetry. This analysis suggests that local identities should be understood contextually; there is no necessary relation between local forms of identity and practices of exclusion. The paper shows how the virtue of parochialism is expressed in art with a universal appeal. I conclude, therefore, that we need more detailed studies of real local identities, which avoid a presumption of disdain.

Keywords

cosmopolitanism, identity, literature, local, parochialism, regional

I Attachments and belongings

> Parochialism, n. 1. Parochial character or tendency; *esp.* confinement of one's interests to the local sphere; lack of global perspective; narrowness of view; petty provincialism. 2. Absorption in parish duties. *Obs. rare*. (*Oxford English Dictionary*, third edition, June 2005)

> Parochialism and provincialism are opposites. The provincial has no mind of his own, he does not trust what his eyes see until he has heard what the great metropolis towards which his eyes are ever turned has to say on any subject. This runs through all his activities. The parochial mentality on the other hand is never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his own parish. All great civilizations are based on parochialism: Greek, Israelite, English. Parochialism is a universal and deals with fundamentals. (Kavanagh, 2003 [1952]: 237)

Why do we form attachments to place and develop a sense of local identification and belonging? How are these attachments expressed? What is the moral content of these relationships and their cultural and political implications? Humanistic geographers, such as Tuan, claim that 'attachment to the homeland appears to be a worldwide phenomenon', expressed in all cultures and economies, wherein:

> The city or land is viewed as mother, and it nourishes; place is an archive of fond memories and splendid achievements that inspire the present; place is permanent and hence reassuring to man, who sees frailty in himself and chance and flux everywhere. (Tuan, 1977: 154)

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Others object to this characterization, preferring to see place as a 'spatio-temporal event', and see local attachments as containing tendencies to essentialism, 'romanticization' and reactionary politics (Massey, 1991, 2009). These claims underpin a call for a cosmopolitan ethic to replace national and local attachments as the foundation for political and cultural community (Amin, 2004; Nussbaum, 1996). This paper addresses these questions in the context of recent debates about the nature of place, 'the local' and 'regionality'. I review the main perspectives in this debate and conclude that none offers a satisfactory account of the *formation* and *content* of local identification, attachment and belonging, nor of their roles in the matter of *dwelling*. I outline why a more convincing treatment of this issue is important and suggest how we might begin this task.

I seek to rescue local attachments and a sense of belonging from the condescension of the cosmopolites and, instead, to present a defence of *parochialism* as a mode of dwelling. Cosmopolitanism is a kind of provincialism, in Patrick Kavanagh's sense of the term; it doubts the social and artistic value of the parish. A parochial outlook values the local, its culture and solidarities, as a moral starting point and locus of ecological concern and a site for the development of virtues including commitment, fidelity, civility and nurture. I aim to substantiate these claims by reference to the 'art of the local' – that is, by examining how a sense of place and local attachment and belonging are manifest in poetry and literature. I am interested in how poets and novelists, among others, are able to reconcile the role of the universal and the particular in human life in ways that might provide inspiration for social scientists (Saunders, 2010). Some poets, novelists and other artists, I suggest, mark the cultural and ecological bounds of their regions, but in ways that express an imaginative rather than a proprietorial interest in belonging (Bate, 2000: 280). In English-speaking literature, I find this quality in works that emerge from the English Romantic tradition, and especially attempts by those 20th-century English writers and artists – such as Paul Nash, John and Myfanwy Piper, and Virginia Woolf, the 'Romantic Moderns (Harris, 2010; Haycock, 2010) and the poet Basil Bunting (Tomaney, 2007) – to reconcile tradition and modernity, topography and topology, home and world. I find it also in much 20th-century Irish literature – notably Joyce, Kavanagh and Heaney (see Tomaney, 2010b) – which seeks to reconcile the parish and the universe. In addition, it can be discovered in the 20th-century American poetic tradition that is deeply rooted in place and ecological concerns, which includes the Black Mountain poets, Gary Snyder and beyond them Walt Whitman (Rasula, 2002), although of course it exists in many other cultures (see Tomaney, 2010a, for a treatment of some of these issues in Chinese culture).

In *The Republic*, Plato attributes the opening words in 'the ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry' to Socrates. In *Poetic Justice,* Martha Nussbaum finds value in the novel as an instrument for generating social sympathy – a means of seeing the world from other perspectives: 'good literature is disturbing in a way that history and social science writing frequently are not' (Nussbaum, 1997: 5). Richard Rorty argues that cultural and political debates should draw upon 'inspirational value of great works of literature' (Rorty, 1998: 137). The use of literary sources in social science debates is well established. For instance, Shakespeare's history plays have been analysed by political scientists and others for the light they shed on timeless questions of the multi-faceted and contradictory motivations of citizens and leaders in different cultural and institutional contexts, whether in Rome or the Plantagenet court (Lupton, 2011; Murley and Sutton, 2006). There seems no reason not to apply this method to the study of the local. The value of novels and poetry in relation to debates about the local lies in the subtle ways that they can shed light on the

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uncertainties and possibilities associated with human attachments and ask us to think imaginatively about them (see Saunders, 2010).

II Cosmopolitanism versus localism

There are currently two predominant understandings of the local and regional in geographical literature (see Entrikin, 2011; Jonas, 2012; Pike, 2007). In the first, regions are understood as open and discontinuous spaces, constituted by social relationships and material, discursive and symbolic forms stretched across and through places, localities and regions. It adopts a topological rather than topographical approach to space, and ultimately rejects the notion that regions are territorially bounded. 'Regions' are defined by their momentary place in global networks and by their relationship within and beyond predefined territorial boundaries. Regions are 'unbound' (Amin, 2004). Ideas of stable and clearly demarcated hierarchies of scale are eschewed in this perspective in favour of ideas of a 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2005), 'regional assemblage' or 'multi-actor topological geometry' (Allen and Cochrane, 2007) in which places are produced by relational processes and 'rhizomatic networks' (Painter, 2008), 'an imbroglio of heterogeneous and more or less expansive hybrids' (Thrift, 1999: 317), or even superseded by 'site-based ontologies' (Marston et al., 2005). According to this perspective, the formation of local and regional attachments is a kind of modernist fetish reflecting the influence of Cartesian notions of bounded totalities which are essential to western social science and find their expression in the 'cartographic anxiety' – i.e. the desire spatially to define and contain social and political processes. This is presented as deeply problematic and particularly associated with the contradictions of the European Enlightenment (Painter, 2008).[1] (If we take this argument further, and reject completely any notion of scale and spatial hierarchy in favour of a flat ontology, as do Marston et al., 2005, questions of local attachment and belonging are redundant.) For cosmopolitan critics, local identification expresses 'a tendency to essentialize regional culture, attributing to [regions] a new sort of organic unity' and represents 'the hankering for some model of lasting identity', in which the 'the region presents itself as a trope of a "purer" value – immutable and "persistent identity"' (Dainotto, 1996: 487, 494, 502).

A second perspective abjures the 'discursive erasure of place' (Escobar, 2001: 141) and claims concerning a 'dramatically delocalized world' (Appadurai, 1995: 204). Instead (shifting) geographies, boundaries and multiple scales – and the identities associated with them – continue to matter 'as expressions of social practice, discourse and power' (Paasi, 2004: 541). Boundaries may be porous, but abstract notions of globalization, founded on globally networked forms of social life, neglect the complex ways in which people continue to live locally, albeit in altered ways (Appadurai, 1995; Escobar, 2001). Moreover, 'despite the apparent post-modern fragmentation of identity, discourses of belonging constructed around place remain important' (Graham, 2000: 95). Local attachments that emphasize belonging involve the search for practical solidarities, which emerge 'from the shared ways of life and experiences in place and territory that give individuals a sense of being part of a collective' (Claval and Entrikin, 2004: 44).

A concern with the territoriality of human life acknowledges the persistence of 'scalar ontologies' (Jones and McLeod, 2004: 448) and 'the process whereby a space achieves a distinct *identity* as a place', albeit a place understood as 'an imagined state or moral location' (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992: 8, 10; see also Entrikin, 1999), rather than simply as a physically or administratively bounded territory. In this context, globalization does not annihilate space by time, but reconstitutes it so that 'People

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continue to *construct* some sort of boundaries around their places, however permeable, and to be grounded in local socio-natural practices, no matter how changing and hybridized those grounds and practices might turn out to be' (Escobar, 2001: 147). Places are directly experienced phenomena of the lived-world and hence are full with meanings, with real objects, ongoing activities and intensions (Relph, 1976: 141). Thus, even in the global era, our attention must focus on *dwelling* as well as *movement* (Burawoy, 2000) in the production of human order. The formation of local attachments, however, is a complex process drawing on diverse – and at times contradictory – influences, including 'ideas of nature, landscape, the built environment, culture/ethnicity, dialects, economic success/recession, periphery/centre relations, marginalization, stereotypic images of a people/community, both of "us" and "them", actual/invented histories, utopias and diverging arguments on the identification of people' (Paasi, 2003: 477).

With some notable exceptions (such as the work of Anssi Paasi), recent contributions to the debate about 'the local', on investigation, turn out to contain few systematic analyses or detailed empirical studies of the production of local identities and attachments and modes of local belonging. Despite claims about the importance of 'scalar ontologies', there are very few efforts to specify their formation and content. On the other hand, the literature on the 'relational' region builds strongly on a normative commitment to cosmopolitan values in which 'the basic rhetorical opposition between the liberal cosmopolitan and the illiberal local remains influential' (Calhoun, 2003: 532). The working assumption of the cosmopolitan literature is that local attachments produce 'a politics hooked around the myth of a regionalized identity' (Amin, 2004: 37), although there are few empirical studies of this process on which to found such claims.

The assumption here is that local particularisms and attachments are inherently exclusionary. Events such as the break-up of the USSR, the Yugoslav war of the 1990s and tribalism and regionalism in Africa and Asia are offered as evidence (Massey, 2005: 5–8). Cresswell notes how this understanding has come to predominate in human geography:

> the humanistic conception of place, which has been the predominant understanding of place since the 1970s, is simply too fixed, too bounded and too rooted in the distant past. As a consequence of these notions of fixity, boundedness, and rootedness, place too often becomes the locus of exclusionary practices. People connect a place with a particular identity and proceed to defend it against the threatening outside with its different identities. (Cresswell, 2009: 176)

This new approach has 'problematized the notion of local belonging' (Massey, 2006: 35). Amin goes further and proposes 'a new politics of place' free of fixity and boundedness (Amin, 2004). Much of this argument rests on general claims about the porosity of territories in the face of intensifying material and cultural flows ('globalization'), so that places are understood as 'spatio-temporal events' characterized by 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2005: 130, 140). In the face of such processes, Amin advocates a 'heterotopic sense of place' which 'assumes no local cultural or economic coherence' (Amin, 2004: 40). In this view local cultural attachments underpin 'a politics of local regard and local defence' and 'a conservationist regional identity that can be profoundly closed and exclusionary' (Amin, 2004: 37, 35). Although Amin professes a desire 'not to diminish the validity of a politics of place or to deny place attachment' (Amin, 2004: 37), in practice he has nothing positive to say about the content of such attachments. Instead, local attachments are treated as a foil against which to measure his progressive cosmopolitanism: 'Many threads are woven in narrating a coherent regional community, from stories of colonization and common external enemy, to stories of heroism

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and resistance, as well as the scripting of a regional folk culture' (p. 37).

However, it is possible to think of examples of the representation of the local which do not correspond to this caricature – for instance, we might point to cases of intense local attachments which have produced great art with universal appeal, such as Hardy's Wessex novels, Vermeer's paintings of Delft or the Aboriginal art of Emily Kame Kngwarreye. Yet, from a cosmopolitan perspective, local cultural attachments are inevitably constraining, while a universal outlook is inherently liberating. Rootedness is essentially problematic. Dainotto contends, for instance, that regionalist literature bequeaths us 'only idyllic regions and their perfect communities' (Dainotto, 2000: 17). He goes so far as to suggest that regionalism is part of a continuum with fascism, which seeks to present societies as unproblematically unified and identifies 'the reactionary trait of the literature of place: it tries to take the question away from the space of politics' (p. 33). Amin 'rejects an idea of the region as a place of reminiscence and cultural preservation' and offers a politics beyond local attachments, proffering 'a cosmopolitan ethos of solidarity and rights . . . as a form of local response to global poverty, ethnic intolerance and Empire' (Amin, 2004: 42). Echoing the Stoic Diogenes, the cosmopolitans offer a world away from the 'comfort of local truths' (quoted in Nussbaum, 1996: 15). Nussbaum acknowledges that, culturally, cosmopolitanism may seem dry and abstract because 'it offers only reason and the love of humanity, which may seem at times less colorful than other sources of belonging' (p. 15), but it is nevertheless morally superior to the supposed *Sturm und Drang* of local attachments.

One of the problems of judging the efficacy of the critique of the local and its appeal is that little evidence is brought to bear in support of it. Moreover, epistemologically it operates in relation to binaries that it affects to disavow. Amin (2004) makes a contrast, for instance, between the claims of English regionalism (insular/bad) and Scottish nationalism (cosmopolitan/good), although he does not offer any evidential support. (Are local identities in Manchester more closed than those in Glasgow? How do we measure this and what might this mean?) Moreover, there are few clues to as to how this new politics of place can be enacted, despite its apparent abstract appeal.

There is an explicit rejection of its cultural and political value in much writing about the local. Massey (2009) acknowledges the role of the local in the construction of the global, but seeks to represent the local as constituted by 'wider processes', while worrying that a local sense of place ends up as 'almost necessarily reactionary' (Massey, 1991: 27). Her account of cosmopolitan Kilburn in inner northwest London presents it as exhibiting a 'global sense of place' characterized by complete cultural openness, a function of its multi-ethnic character (Massey, 1991). Underlying this account, however, is an implicit acknowledgement that, although Kilburn is constituted by global flows and constantly being refashioned, nevertheless it exhibits a distinctive character (see also Massey, 2009). It makes sense to think of the local as embodying a distinctive identity – otherwise how could we speak of it? Once we think of Kilburn as a distinctive place, we have bounded it imaginatively, albeit notwithstanding the porousness of the boundaries. Moreover, it makes just as much sense to imagine that its residents could develop attachments to it. Implicit in Massey's own analysis, then, is a kind of imaginative boundary-making. It is not my purpose to argue in favour of a 'removal of the local from any implication in wider processes' (Massey, 2009: 412), rather it is to emphasize the way that imaginative boundary-making can take place within the context of these wider process and that this need not be 'inherently reactionary'. Indeed, local identities may provide the conditions for a 'progressive' mode of dwelling within these wider processes. This possibility

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is either overlooked or rejected by the cosmopolitans, but it is the form and content of this mode of dwelling which interests me and which, I believe, has been given insufficient attention in these debates to date.

As Calhoun (2003) notes, cosmopolitanism generally regards particular attachments as a sort of intellectual error that educated people will move beyond. Local solidarities are seen as inherently sectional, while defence of community and place is seen as irrational, backward-looking and reactionary, even if people are being beckoned to futures that are uncertain or threatening. Indeed, as Dirlik (1999: 53) complains, 'To speak of places is to invite suspicions of parochialism, reaction and backwardness'. But local communities and institutions are social achievements created collectively in face of conflict, and roots in 'traditional culture' and 'community' may provide a basis for collective resistance to inequitable social change (Harvey, 1996: 19–45; 2009). Cosmopolitan accounts permit, at best, 'a thin appreciation of the sociological character of group formation and membership, including changes in "belonging" and efforts to transcend particular solidarities', while such accounts fail to grasp 'the reasons why "thick attachments" to particular solidarities still matter – whether in the forms of nations, ethnicities, local communities, or religions' (Calhoun, 2003: 532; see also Barber, 1996; Bok, 1996; McConnell, 1996).

Our modes of reasoning and our forms of cultural and political actions are rooted in particular moral communities and historical traditions as well as in our wider engagements. The cosmopolitan perspective tells us little about why and how attachments are formed, only that that they are misguided and reactionary. Yet there are dangers in preferring a politics 'abstracted from the material world of experience in particular places', an approach which, according to David Harvey, through its promotion of universal considerations 'drove out sensitivity to the particularities of environment, milieu, collective memory, community, myth, built forms' (Harvey, 1996: 314).[2] Moreover, according to Popke (2007: 514), 'Far from instilling a responsibility across distance, a one-size-fits-all cosmopolitan sensibility can be a hindrance to the development of a context-specific ethics'.

Raymond Williams' political and academic writings pointed to a form of politics based on 'militant particularism' that grew out of ordinary culture (Williams, 1988), but his views about the local were best expressed in his novel *Border Country* (Williams, 1962). The local here is imbued with external influences, connections and relationships, but nevertheless retains a cultural distinctiveness and moral particularity, which is the basis for wider engagements. This is another version of the cosmopolitan ethos of solidarity, then, but one in which 'the struggle for place in the concrete is a struggle against power and the hegemony of abstractions' (Dirlik, 2001: 23).

Featherstone (2005), however, worries about the 'prisonhouse of particularism', which arises when we fail to realize that political struggles must be unbounded. As evidence, Featherstone proffers the case of the 'Newcastle Port Strike of 1768', attributing its relative success in achieving its objective to the relationships that Tyneside workers developed with their fellows on the Thames. The strike is understood as a 'place-located event' through which unbounded political identities and agencies were constructed, but the events described by Featherstone can be interpreted with a different emphasis. The strike of 1768 is more commonly known as the Keelmen's Strike. The keelmen were a tightly knit, mutually supportive and self-reliant group of militant workers who operated the keels – flat-bottomed boats that transferred coal downriver from staithes to waiting colliers for export (Fewster, 2011). The keelmen inhabited the warren of chares in Sandgate in Newcastle upon Tyne. The strike of 1768 was one of many through the 17th, 18th and 19th

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centuries which emerged from this tradition of local militancy and were directed at the Company of Hostmen who monopolized the Tyne coal trade. The 1768 strike was certainly significant because it was linked to wider conflicts, although more so perhaps because, for the first time, the keelmen employed a lawyer and sought statutory redress to longstanding grievances. Industrialization, the introduction of steam tugs and the dredging and embanking of the River Tyne ultimately undermined the position of the keelmen. But their legacy lingers locally and beyond, not least in their contribution to Tyneside song. (The most famous of these was 'Weel may the keel row', which ended up as a British Army marching tune.[3]) In short, a fuller explanation of the 1768 strike needs merely to situate it in wider networks, but also to embed it in an account of *local history*.

The attempt to situate the local in wider processes contains its own dangers, mainly failing to account for the persistence of local attachments and neglecting their potential value. We are left with the question of how to arrive at a fuller conception of local commitment and belonging as a basis for culture, politics and dwelling, which recognizes 'the interrelationships between place, self and community' (Entrikin, 1997) and 'the possibility of a world where respect for the validity of every tradition will issue in the creation and maintenance of a salubrious political space' (Heaney, 1995: no page).

III Belonging

Humanistic geographers note that local attachments are persistent and universal. The cosmopolitan critics tell us that these attachments are wrong, but not why they endure. The 'lure of the local', as Lippard (1997) notes, is an enormously powerful cultural and even spiritual force that deserves more than condescension ('scripting of folk culture'). As Seamus Heaney notes, 'We are dwellers, we are namers, we are lovers, we make homes and search for histories' (Heaney, 1981: 148–149). Phenomenological insights stress how our relationship with place determines our identity as human beings (Heidegger, 1891 [1934], 1971; Merleau-Ponty, 1962), so that:

> it is not merely human identity that is tied to place or locality, but the very possibility of being the sort of creature that can engage with a world (and, more particularly, with the objects and events within it), that can think about that world, and can find itself in the world. (Malpas, 1999: 8)

Belonging is a *task* that requires an individual working to maintain a sense of unity or integrity while engaged in ongoing, dynamic and developing interactions within the physical, historical and social landscape of their being. Belonging, therefore, is not something that is given as a right or bestowed as a privilege or tied to land ownership or length of residency (Miller, 2003: 415–416). Belonging can affect commitment rather than possession, and is a means of nurturing 'our capacity for awareness of the myriad histories that constitute a place, and from these rich materials draw inspiration to shape our sense of self and community' (Bunting, 2009: 275). According to bell hooks, reflecting on her identity as a black Kentuckian woman, a sense of belonging concerns 'seeking a fidelity to place' and 'a vital sense of covenant and commitment' (hooks, 2008: 65), what Tuan (1976) calls 'geopiety'. An ethics of the local may be founded on a recognition of politics of 'becoming' (Gibson-Graham, 2003), but that must also include a process of 'becoming native' to place (Jackson, 1996); uprooting and planting must go hand in hand (Bate, 2000: 275).

An ecological concern is generally absent from discussions of the new politics of place (Dirlik, 2001) – it is barely mentioned by Amin (2004). But, in identifying a 'sense of place', Heaney notes that 'It is to the stable element, the land itself, that we must look for continuity'

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(1981: 149). A 'place-based imagination' must be 'grounded' in topography and, as a consequence, in recognition of the persistence of boundaries and boundary-making (Dirlik, 2001). For Massey, in such thinking lies the danger of a romanticization of 'the eternity of the hills' (2005: 140), which she associates with strong attachments to place. She considers Skiddaw, a mountain in the English Lake District, and asks how its monumental presence can be reconciled with the notion of place as a 'spatio-temporal event' (Massey, 2005, 2006). She notes that the mountains of the Lake District were laid down 500 million years ago 'and floated about the planet as the continents rearranged themselves' (2005: 134). According to Massey, the land is not a stable element – 'the rocks of Skiddaw are immigrant rocks, just passing through' (2005: 137); the Cumbrian massif as evanescence. Even if we find value in this formulation, it does not explain why the mountains contribute to the sense of a bounded place on the part of the people who live (or have lived) beside them. Instead, moving mountains form part of the normative objection to 'groundedness'.

While Nussbaum worries that her abstract cosmopolitanism lacks local colour, Massey insists that the idea of the Lake District as an 'event' should not preclude a sense of wonder; Cumbria, she observes, straddled the Equator in the Ordovician age when Skiddaw was formed. So, we can only wonder at the transience of Skiddaw; to romanticize it is to flirt with the notion of places having timeless qualities, and this is a slippery slope to a politics of exclusion. Wordsworth, however, saw the mountain differently:

> What was the great Parnassus' self to Thee
> Mount Skiddaw? In his natural sovereignty
> Our British Hill is nobler far; he shrouds
> His double front among Atlantic clouds,
> And pours forth streams more sweet than Castaly
> ('Pelion and Ossa flourish side by side').[4]

IV Art of the local

For Wordsworth, Skiddaw is not ephemeral; it is monumental. It is a looming presence shaping lives and cultures. Wordsworth's Lake District is a physical and imaginative world in which he sought to dwell and define a 'scalar ontology':

> A blended holiness of earth and sky,
> Something that makes this individual spot,
> This small abiding-place of many men,
> A termination, and a last retreat,
> A centre, come from wheresoe'er you will,
> A whole without dependence or defect,
> Made for itself, and happy in itself,
> Perfect contentment, Unity entire.
> ('Home at Grasmere' or Book I of
> 'The Recluse', lines 110–151)

Wordsworth then offers a provocation to the 'new politics of space'.[5] In his essay 'Sense of Place', Heaney identifies how, for Wordsworth, 'the Westmoreland mountains were so much more than a picturesque backdrop', they were rather companionable and influential affecting the psyche of those who lived with and beside them and how any 'temperate understanding of the relationship between a person and his place' requires an awareness of 'the way the surface of the earth can be accepted into and be a steadying influence upon the quiet depths of the mind' (Heaney, 1981: 145). For Wordsworth:

> Those fields, those hills – what could they less – had laid
> Strong hold on his affections, were to him
> A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
> The pleasure which there is in life itself.
> ('Michael')

Malpas notes that:

> the same basic idea of human life as essentially a life of location, of self-identity as a matter of identity found in place, and of places themselves as somehow suffused with the 'human', is common to the work of poets and novelists

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> from all parts of the globe and in relation to all manner of landscapes and localities. (Malpas, 1999: 6)

Poets, novelists and artists typically have shown a sustained interest in questions of local belonging and attachment to place. They deal with these questions with subtlety and depth, avoiding caricature, and seem well equipped to grasp their ambiguities, contradictions, absurdities and comedy, as well as their appeal and potential. Specifically, poetry provides a peculiar articulation of the relationship between history and nature and people and place, 'because it is experiential, not descriptive. Whereas the biologist, the geographer and the Green activist have *narratives* of dwelling, a poem may be a *revelation* of dwelling' (Bate, 2000: 266). Bate coins the term 'ecopoetics' to express this phenomenon: 'Ecopoetics asks in what respects a poem may be a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling-place – the prefix eco- is derived from Greek *oikos*, "the home or place of dwelling"' (Bate, 2000: 75). Ecopoetry (and other forms of the 'art of the local') contributes critically to defining the 'proprieties of place' (Sanders, 1993: 116).

Often it is an intense engagement with the local than allows the artist to develop insights into the question of how we should live. According to the English novelist Graham Swift, the cosmopolitan ethos tends to produce poor art and little acumen:

> Writers are always trying to touch, to grasp the universal. And the way not to do this, it seems to me, is to write the avowedly universal, global, cosmopolitan book – the sort of book that ought to be written in Esperanto. The key to the universal is always the local, if only because ... all experience is and must be local, all experience is placed. If I read a book set in China or Peru, or indeed Nice, a great many local references may pass me by, but that doesn't matter, it even helps, because through them I nonetheless sense the true, the genuinely local texture of life as it's really lived. (Swift, 2009: 310–311)

Ralph Vaughan Williams, the English composer, concurs with this view: 'I believe that it is better to be vitally parochial than to be an emasculate cosmopolitan. The great names in music were at first local and the greatest of all, John Sebastian Bach remained a local musician all his life' (Vaughan Williams, 2007: 81). Vaughan Williams (1963) also notes that Bach scarcely left Leipzig during his musical career.

Nineteenth-century romantics such as Wordsworth were concerned with a poetic emplacement in search of 'harmony/Home-felt, and Home created' ('Written at Evening') in the face of unsettling urbanization and industrialization. But great modernist writers also saw the local (albeit urban rather than pastoral) as the moral starting point. As Kavanagh noted, James Joyce was a great parishioner and *Ulysses*, among many other things, is a book about life in Dublin. Joyce's attitude to his Irish and Dublin identity was complex and changed over time (Gillespie, 2001; Kiberd, 1996, 2009) but he was perennially concerned with 'the complex and mutually dependent relationship between the universal and the particular' (Cheng, 2001: 14). Joyce knew his Irishness – for better or worse – was inescapable:

> 'What do you want to write?' [James] Joyce asked [of Arthur Power[6]]. 'Something on the model of the French satirists.' 'You will never do it', said Joyce decisively, 'You are an Irishman and you must write in your own tradition. Borrowed styles are not good. You must write what is in your blood and not what is in your brain.' Power objected, as Joyce might once have done, that he was tired of nationality and wanted to be international, like all great writers. 'They were national first', Joyce contended, 'and it was the intensity of their own nationalism which made them international in the end, as in the case of Turgenev. You remember his *Sportsman's Notebook*, how local it was – and yet out of that germ he became a great international writer. For myself, I always write about Dublin, because if I can get to the heart of Dublin I can get to the

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> heart of all cities of the world. In the particular is contained the universal. 'But how do you feel about being Irish?' asked Power. Joyce responded, 'I regret it for the temperament it has given me'. (Ellmann, 1983: 505)

The tensile relationship between the local and the universal is a recurring theme in modern Irish letters. T.S. Eliot claimed that for W.B. Yeats the intensity of his Irishness was critical to the universal appeal of his greatest work (Eliot, 1975: 251–252). Kavanagh, Heaney and John McGahern have all explored the relationship directly. According to McGahern, 'Everything interesting begins with one person in one place . . . The universal is the local, but with the walls taken away. Out of the particular we come on what is general' (McGahern, 2009: 11). McGahern's Leitrim-set novels (especially *Amongst Women* and *That They May Face the Rising Sun*) – with their themes of love and betrayal, family discord, history and myth, home and exile in the context of a deep engagement with the ordinary culture of a particular place – bear witness to his axiom.

If great poets and novelists see the local as the starting point for understanding the world and embed their work in the particularities of place, this does not imply a static or timeless view. Wendell Berry's novels and poetry emerge from intense engagement with his Kentucky home-world, but in his poem 'The Sycamore' the tree stands as a metaphor for a place that is far from timeless or idyllic, but nevertheless exhibits a kind of coherence:

> In the place that is my own place, whose earth
> I am shaped in and must bear, there is an old tree growing,
> a great sycamore that is a wondrous healer of itself.
> Fences have been tied to it, nails driven into it,
> hacks and whittles cut in it, the lightning has burned it.
> There is no year it has flourished in
> that has not harmed it. There is a hollow in it
> that is its death, though its living brims whitely
> at the lip of the darkness and flows outward.
> Over all its scars has come the seamless white
> of the bark. It bears the gnarls of its history
> healed over. It has risen to a strange perfection
> in the warp and bending of its long growth.
> It has gathered all accidents into its purpose.
> It has become the intention and radiance of its dark fate.
> It is a fact, sublime, mystical and unassailable.
> In all the country there is no other like it
> I recognize in it a principle, an indwelling
> the same as itself, and greater, that I would be ruled by.
> I see that it stands in its place, and feeds upon it,
> and is fed upon, and is native, and maker.
> ('The Sycamore', Berry, 1987)

It is the intensity of the gaze according to Berry that reveals the distinctiveness of place. Accordingly, 'The better I know my place, the less it looks like other places and the more it looks like itself. It is imagination, and only imagination, that can give standing to these distinctions' (Berry, 2007a: 599). In turn, this places weight on the writer as a guardian of place:

> Without a complex knowledge of one's place, and without the faithfulness to one's place on which such knowledge depends, it is inevitable that the place will be used carelessly, and eventually destroyed . . . And so I look upon the sort of regionalism that I am talking about not just as a recurrent literary phenomenon, but as a necessity of civilization and of survival. (Berry, 2007b: 39)

Poetry itself becomes part of the place-making activity: ecopoetics. Berry's poetry is dedicated to this task and invests places with a sacral quality born of devotion:

> There are no unsacred places;
> there are only sacred places
> and desecrated places.
> ('How to be a Poet', Berry, 2006)

Like his fellow Kentuckian bell hooks (2008), Berry's relationship with place rests on a call for fidelity:

> Having once put his hand into the ground
> seeding there what he hopes will outlast him,

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> a man has made a marriage with his place,
> and if he leaves it his flesh will ache to go back.
> ('The Current', Berry, 2006)

A fidelity to place need not lead to romanticization or introversion. Places are characterized by disputes which act as a simulacrum of larger conflicts. In his (ironically) titled 'Epic', Kavanagh, the arch parishioner, captures the petty quarrel between the Duffys and the McCabes over the march (or field boundary) in County Monaghan, but, in truth, asks the poem, is it any different from the larger disputes that history and art judge important? Homer's ghost disturbs the poet: 'He said: I made the Iliad from such/A local row' ('Epic', Kavanagh, 2005; see Tomaney, 2010b, for a fuller analysis of Kavanagh's outlook and his place in Irish culture). Similarly, emplacement is the basis for engagement with the world:

> If you are not yourself placed, then you wander the world like a sightseer with no gauge for measuring what you see. Local knowledge is the grounding for global knowledge ... those who have no parish, those who navigate ceaselessly among the postal zones and area codes ... are a danger not just to their parish, but to the planet. (Sanders, 1993: 114)

V Provincialism and parochialism

> Mr Daedalus was himself a renegade from the Nationalist ranks: he professed cosmopolitanism. But a man that was of all countries was of no country – you must first have a nation before you have art. (James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, quoted in Rickard, 2001: 87)

Parochialism speaks of care for one's parish, including 'the resident alien, settled foreigners and non-native sojourners'. Parochialism is not an end state but one of becoming; we are always becoming native. The poets crucially test the ground between the local and the universal, the particular and the cosmopolitan, in ways that social scientists often struggle to do. Parochialism does not then concern an inherent 'lack of global perspective' or an inevitable disregard for the other. Rather like religious faith, parochialism persists because 'it encodes needs and longings which will not simply evaporate at the touch of tough-minded analysis' (Eagleton, 2009: 90). It provides a means of living in the world and transcending the 'grossly reductive binary opposition between atavistic traditionalism and a liberal, pluralist, enlightened world order on the other' (Eagleton, 1997: 7; see also Gidwani, 2006). Poets and novelists allow us imaginatively to inhabit local worlds through the use of tropes and narrative forms that plausibly thread together complex and particularistic interrelationships among space, place and environment (Entrikin, 1997), so that:

> there is no necessary contradiction between the ideas of the 'universal' and the 'local' or the 'national', but that, on the contrary, there are *only* local universalisms (and for that matter, only 'local cosmopolitanisms', where 'cosmopolitan' is taken to describe a particular way of registering selfhood in a particular time and place). (Lazarus, 2011: 133–134)

This has implications for local politics. Poet-politician Václav Havel provides a good reckoning:

> our country is where it is, its landscape is beautiful in certain ways and devastated in others, its natural resources are structured in such-and-such a way, we speak the languages we speak, we have our own historical traditions and customs, the political right and left are the way they are here and not the way they are elsewhere, and no matter how much we might want to, we can scarcely hope to change these things entirely. Why not accept all this as fact? Why not try to understand the inner content of this fact, the potential, the problems and hopes connected with it? And why not deal with it in the most appropriate and adequate way? (Havel, 1992: 125)

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The cosmopolites offer a world beyond belonging, shaped by global cultural and material flows. However well-intentioned, cosmopolitan appeals typically devalue the ways in which people depend on local solidarities to solve practical problems in their lives (Calhoun, 2007). The obstacles to achieving larger solidarities are formidable and, ultimately, require the generation of abstractions that connect and explain distinctive local experiences but, as Kavanagh reminds us, that process must begin from an appreciation of the social and artistic value of the parish.

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Notes

1. For a critique of the notion of regionality as 'Eurocentric', using evidence from Chinese culture, see Tomaney (2010a).
2. Harvey is concerned with developing a spatialized Marxism founded on an awareness of the place of 'local' politics. Marx himself maintained that the aim of the Working Men's International Association was to be a 'bond of union rather than a controlling force', stating that 'In each part of the world, some special aspect of the problem presents itself, and the workmen there address themselves to its consideration in their own way. Combinations among workmen cannot be absolutely identical in Newcastle and in Barcelona, in London and in Berlin' (Marx, 1871: no page).
3. 'As I came thro' Sandgate/Thro' Sandgate, thro' Sandgate/As I came thro' Sandgate/I heard a lassie sing:/'O weel may the keel row/The keel row, the keel row/O weel may the keel row/That my laddie's in" (Thompson et al., 1827: 5).
4. All quotations are from Wordsworth (2000). Of course Wordsworth also had a global outlook exemplified in poems such as 'French Revolution' ('Not favoured spots alone, but the whole earth') or 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture' ('a breathing of the common wind'). This tension between the universal and particular in the Romantic imagination can be identified as an ongoing one in English letters (Tomaney, 2007).
5. See Bate (2000), Cooper (2008) and Kerrigan (1985) for detailed critical studies of Wordsworth's treatment of place. Wordsworth created poetic boundaries around the Lake District. These in turn were challenged by later Cumbrian poets, such as Norman Nicholson, who sought to recast these imaginative limits. This experience is common and provides evidence for McIntyre's contention that membership of communities does not entail self-acceptance of the moral limitations of the particularity of those forms of community. Indeed, 'rebellion against my identity is always one possible mode of expressing it' (McIntyre, 2007: 221).
6. Arthur Power (1891–1984), Irish writer and journalist.

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